

The Times They Are A-Changing

by Mary Willis

I was born in the Second World War, but I don't remember it. My early life was all Religion, Rules and Rationing but also love and respect. My garden was a huge vegetable patch with fruit trees at the bottom. Everything was hand-made and all food was home-cooked. Goods and services were delivered mostly by horse and cart. When my mother bought dress material she chose it and then a boy on a bike brought it home, but slowly without being aware of when exactly, they all became motorized in one way or another. The rag and bone man was the last to have a horse. He had a great big tank full of goldfish. How I longed for a fish when we gave him our sack full of scraps of material, but no such luck, the pennies had to go in the "Waifs and Strays" box (The Children's Society as it is more politely called now) that stood in the hall next to the telephone. Lots of people made or received calls at our house, hence the box.

One of my earliest memories is hospital visiting at Harts Hospital which is now a BUPA care home but was then a run-down TB hospital with a long glass verandah extending out from the wards. Part of the treatment was sunshine and fresh air. The air quality must have been very good because of all the beautiful trees but I don't remember the sunshine, just the cold.

The entrance to the hospital was at the far end of Warner's Path. The modern entrance was only made when the Fire Station sold part of their land to the developers of the housing estate that now surrounds the old hospital building.

My Aunt and I would walk back along Warner's Path and admire the beautiful flowers and vegetables that grew in the old house (now demolished) next to the Fire Station and then up the last part of what is now called Snakes Lane to a lovely tea shop on the High Road opposite Johnston Road pond - my treat for being good at the hospital.

So many things changed as I grew up. The old stone horse troughs were broken up. The blue police boxes went. My parents bought a television for the Coronation in 1953 and we all had to stand up for the National Anthem at the end of the days broadcasting.

Suddenly I was in a world of technology and Rock and Roll. The quietude was the loving cosiness of family life and the solidarity of everything in its place. The strict rules of respect and obedience all seemed to have been swept away by the 1960's. We had a new Queen and progress was moving fast.

When my husband and I moved to Vernon Avenue, a small road of just 16 houses between Broadmead Road and Grosvenor Gardens, in 1968 the motorways M11 and M25 had not been built and in the bad weather the lorries used to grind up the hill and make all the ground shake.

I was a young bride full of modern ideas. I was a working girl, earning good money. I had a car (a Ford Anglia). I didn't want coal fired boilers or open hearths, or washing tubs.

We had gas fired central heating installed. Bought an automatic washing machine and many more modern things just as soon as we could afford them. By today's standards our wants were modest and bought slowly. We still thought credit (the never, never) was bad.

My children are now grown with children of their own and to them and us things don't change in Woodford, but of course they do.

Snakes Lane has altered out of all recognition. In about 1975 they replaced four or five large houses with over 200 town houses. I remember the day they started clearing the site. The sky was black with birds, poor things, flying round and round as they cut down most of the trees, and we all stood and watched when they cleared an old garage in Grosvenor Gardens to make an access road onto the estate and they pulled out an old car from the piles of rubbish. It must have been forgotten from the war time. The builders gave the children rides up the road. The engine still worked, although there was lots of smoke.

That was the end of Sainsbury's (queue at every counter) and the start of the Supermarket. The end of cash, the end of pay packets. The start of electronic accounting, the credit card, the computer.

The first computer I used occupied a whole room and changed the life of a secretary for ever.

Now everything is so small. The mobile phone, the computer in all its many guises, micro chips. My son has just had one inserted into the flesh of his cat for security.

It won't be long before we are all micro-chipped.