

## **My Childhood in South Woodford – 1940-1957** by Doreen Sims

I was born in Thorpe Combe in 1940, the second child of Fred and Freda Allard. My father was in the RAF stationed in Northolt and posted to Malta. My mother believed that his experiences there changed him. He had no interest in his family and his mother, who lived in Walthamstow, encouraged him to go there, leaving Mother in married quarters alone. She decided to come to Woodford to be near family members, and this enabled us also to keep in contact with my father. Mother packed our few belongings into the pram and made the journey. My aunt offered a small bedroom in Elmhurst Drive, but after a month or two, Mother's jewellery was stolen. My grandmother let us stay in a third floor room with a gas mantle as the only light in Buckingham Road. There began the most miserable 13 years of our lives.

My grandparents had come to England in 1931 when Grandad retired from life on the railway in India. He put a deposit on a house in Forest Approach – on sale at £500!! but, due to a bad investment, lost all his pension and was forced to rent Buckingham Road from Frederick Worley. He left India because my grandmother was having a series of affairs. Mother told me later she'd, "seen her 'kissing the Viceroy's men behind the servants' quarters". She hated England, was very bitter even after the oldest son was killed serving in Cairo in 1941 aged 21, in the RAF.

Times were bad for everyone with rationing. Mother would queue for hours for anything she could get, although heavily pregnant. She came home after one of these marathons to find sister Thelma dead on my grandmother's lap.

My Uncle Vic still lived at home, he had any food that seemed to be available. Brother Michael and I would stand either side of him hoping for a leftover potato. If we asked for food, we were sent down to the cellar as punishment, sometimes for three or four hours – dark, cobwebs and mice. If we were very unlucky the coal would be delivered through a manhole in the doorstep. To this day, I can't bear curtains shut. We were seven and four.

1947 was one of the coldest winters ever, brother Trevor was born with terrible crippled legs. Mother had fallen over a trolley in George Lane. She took him to Great Ormond Street, where he was stripped naked for student doctors to inspect his disabilities. As she looked on, the baby was turning blue with cold. He died two days later with pneumonia. I remember Mother crying in our little room and asking, 'Where is baby going to sleep' only to be told that Trevor had died.

Grandma told me on no account to go into the living room. Tell a curious seven year old, of course in I went to see Trevor lying in a drawer waiting to be buried. I can still see his face to this day.

There was only one place I could be happy and that was Churchfields. I loved learning and remember a hush in the class when I scored 98 in English! The teachers I remembered were Mr Walford (of the glass eye fame), Mr Harding, Miss Phillips, Mr Potter and Mrs Smee. It was such a happy place after my home life. Most of the class passed the 11+. I was so excited until Mother said she couldn't afford the uniform. Anyway, I went on to St Barnabas and was equally happy and keen on learning.

Our health was dire. My grandmother kept at least six cats. We suffered fleas, worms, lice and impetigo. Of course, these cats were having kittens very frequently. Mother was ordered to drown them. Out would come the enamel pail. I used to beg her to do this while I was at school.

I have memories of a school friend who lived in the bungalow on the corner. Her father was a builder and they kept chickens. Her mother used to send her dresses for me for which I was very grateful. Footwear consisted of Wellingtons round until about May. (By then they rubbed rings around the legs.) Then, oh Heaven, a new pair of plimsolls from Woolworths. Even as I grew up, I'd pick them up to smell the newness!

I've always been an avid reader. A kind spinster neighbour took me to Grove Road Evangelical Church (Rev. White), which I loved. There were also outings to Shoeburyness and Southend. Because of my Sunday School attendance, I was awarded *Five Go Adventuring Again* as a prize.



There was no proper light in our room, but somewhere I found an oil lamp and one night I fell asleep, setting light to my pillow and mattress. Thankfully, Mum smelled burning and raced up three flights of stairs to get the sash window open and burning bed linen out of the window.

I particularly remember a family who I think lived in Malmesbury Road. Their daughter always had a birthday party. It was magic for us with tiny fish paste sandwiches, a pink blancmange rabbit on a plate of green jelly and games like 'pin the tail on the donkey' and 'squeak piggy squeak'.

I also remember two sisters who lived on the Grove Road end, who would invite us to see Muffin the Mule on their tiny television, then the repeat at about 4.00pm. We also created a play area in Stanley Road, where three or four houses were flattened by a bomb. We'd spend hours digging in the debris, inventing stories around finding an old bone, which must be Hitler's. What imaginations!

Despite the horrors of the house, we were so lucky to be near The Forest, Mill Plain with stone tank traps to jump between and a look out near the road – very useful when it rained. The freedom of The Forest was wonderful – fishing, making dens, walking to Highams Park or nearly to Chingford. I'd always hoped my children had that freedom.

I enjoyed my time at St Barnabas and left in 1955. The careers officer looked at my books and decided I would be suitable for a job in the Civil Service, with a whole £5 a week to start.

I had started to go out a bit with a friend. Her stepmother sang at St George's in Shernhall Street in a social club. There was a dance every Sunday evening and there I met my first love in 1957. He was Catholic and there was quite a thing about marrying out of the faith. We stayed together until 1961, when we went our separate ways. I still hear from him.

Then began a better chapter in our lives. I missed the 623 bus to the Napier Arms and when I got home, I was locked out. (I was two minutes late.) The only place I could think of was that of Mother's youngest brother who lived in Debden. I started the long walk and arrived there at 1.30am. They took me in and then began Mother's onslaught on the Council, as I was, at 17, under her care until I was 18. There were Council Offices in the High Road and Mother went every day and Saturday mornings for about six months until, one day, she came to meet me to say we'd been given a new council flat in Woodford Bridge, Purleigh Avenue. After 13 years of misery, we had our own home at last. There was a downside. I, at 17, was the only wage earner. I'd pay the rent and with my fares to London didn't have much left. Michael was 13, Gillian 4. Getting our own home really spurred Mother on. At 47, she was out of her mother's dominance. By word of mouth, she got a job at Barnardo's where she could take my sister along. Then, when Gilly started school, she had a succession of different jobs, including at Claybury, several local hospitals, school cleaning – she really blossomed. Between us, we got a three-piece suite, a mat and small television. Her last job was as the tea lady in the Frank Theak and Roskilly tie factory in Woodford Bridge near The White Hart. She wasn't bitter about her past and said she felt reborn. My grandmother went to live in Elmhurst Drive with my aunt. I don't remember when she died, only that I wore a bright blue dress to the funeral.

My dear mother, who lived on a diet of bread and dripping to give us what she could, died aged 97.

Georgina born 1938 – died 3 months

Doreen born 1940

Thelman born 1942 – died 3 months

Michael born 1944

Trevor born 1947 – died 3 months  
Gillian born 1952

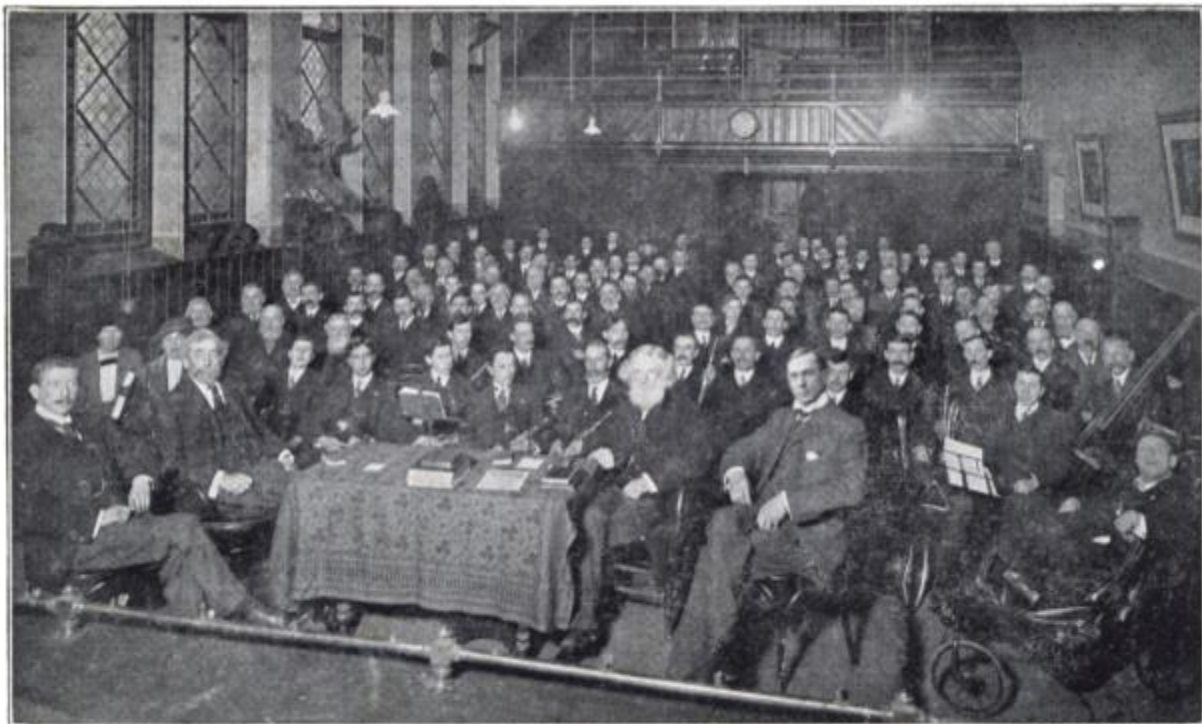
I married in 1963 – three children, Maria 52, Antony 50, Leigh 45 (as at 2015). Still living in Waverley Road since 1963.

I remember:

- being a Water Sprite on stage at the Memorial Hall in about 1950
- Playing with a French girl who came to stay opposite us in 'Chapel le Frith' with her relatives
- Trying to wash my hair under a cold tap in the scullery with Surf soap powder. My grandmother pushed me out of the way and my hair became so stiff I couldn't go to work for two days. She was more spiteful, as she realised I was blooming into a young lady
- Seeing Mother in our back yard lying on the ground when a doodlebug cut out over the house
- Spending nights in the damp air raid shelter with lots of woodlice scuttling about and many hours in the George Lane shelter opposite Woolworths
- Being banned from the Primrose League after innocently saying, "My mum votes Labour."

Doreen Sims, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016

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**THE WOODFORD MEN'S OWN BROTHERHOOD**

WILFRED LAWSON, LARGE HALL.

SUNDAYS 3-15 TO 4-15.

**The Brotherhood of Men** by John Lovell with input from Gerard Greene of Redbridge Council's Museum and Heritage Service

The Brotherhood of Men in Woodford had no Masonic links! I recently acquired a photograph of a meeting of the Brotherhood of Men in the Main Hall of the Wilfrid Lawson Hotel. In seeking more information, I swapped a copy of my image with one of the Charter of the South Woodford Brotherhood and Sisterhood held by Redbridge Council's Museum and Heritage Service.

The South Woodford Brotherhood and Sisterhood, having adopted the Covenant of the Brotherhood Movement, was granted the Charter of Society Membership in October 1912 – ‘One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are Brethren’. The certificate dates from 1948 although South Woodford joined in 1912 as this date is also on the certificate. Gerard Greene of our local Museum Service tells me that The Charter in the Redbridge’s collection was possibly given to the Congregational Church, George Lane in South Woodford (now the site of Marks & Spencer).

The London Federation of Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods was part of the Brotherhood Movement whose covenant was

1. To win the people for Jesus Christ
2. To give ourselves to the faith and service of Christian Brotherhood
3. To promote the practical expression of Religion
4. To encourage the exercise of Christian Citizenship
5. To assist the spirit of co-operation and goodwill in Industry
6. To promote International Peace and the fellowship of Nations

### Background

John Blackham (1834-1923) was born in West Bromwich. He started work apprenticed to Mr Eld, a linen draper in West Bromwich and, in his early 20s, he went into partnership with his former employer, trading as Eld and Blackham. During the following years, the business expanded.

As well as being a successful businessman, John Blackham was also a member of the Ebenezer Congregational Church and, at the age of 29, was made a Deacon and then Senior Deacon, a post which he held until his death.

The father of the late comedian, Kenneth Horne, was a well-known Congregational Minister, the Reverend Silvester Horne. He once said of John Blackham, that “He discovered the Sunday afternoon! There were many people who never discovered it; they had always slept through it! But on Sunday afternoons the whole manhood of the country was at liberty, and therefore it was the time to do good work for humanity.”

In 1870, John Blackham founded the first Adult School in the area outside Birmingham and was responsible for forming the Home Mission. In 1875, he was locked out of a Moody and Sankey Sunday Afternoon meeting in Birmingham Town Hall and, after asking about where there was another Young Men’s meeting, he went to the Steelhouse Lane Congregational Church, where he joined with 30 other young men in a church that could hold 1,000 people. This fired his imagination. Together with the 30 and friends, he persuaded young men in West Bromwich to attend a meeting the following Sunday afternoon at Ebenezer Church. 120 men attended and shortly the meeting grew to such an extent that they had to move from the school room to the church itself.

John Blackham found that many people had nothing against the Bible, but thought that the church itself was dull and this inspired him to name his movement ‘The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Movement’. His meetings became popular among other Methodist and Baptist Churches. By 1905 a National Brotherhood Council had been formed. In 1906 a National Brotherhood Movement was set up and in 1912 a Women’s Movement was established. In 1906 the Movement had 600,000 members and by 1914 this had grown to 1,300,000, of which more than half were women. This figure compared with 1,000,000 members of the Labour Party in 1906.

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**Redbridge Museum’s summer exhibition ‘Ship Ahoy!’** runs from 23<sup>rd</sup> July – 3<sup>rd</sup> September during the Museum’s usual opening hours: Tuesday - Friday 10 – 5. Saturday 10 - 4. This provides educational activities and family fun about rivers, ship and seas with a varied programme of activities throughout August.

For more details of events and activities visit [www.redbridge.gov.uk/museum](http://www.redbridge.gov.uk/museum)

## **Woodford Apprentices at Cuckney Mill** by Georgina Green

In 1723 an Act of Parliament empowered parishes to establish buildings to house and give work to their poor (hence the term 'workhouse') and this was often back-breaking and soul-destroying tasks like breaking up stones and picking oakum. This involved picking tar from old ropes and untwisting them which made the fingers very sore. In about 1793 inmates of the Woodford workhouse, at the top of Monkham's Lane, were either employed picking oakum or at spinning.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of factories in the north of England rapidly increased and factory owners had difficulty in obtaining sufficient child labour. So agents were sent to London and the south to 'apprentice' children from the workhouses and take them to work in the north. Hard soul-destroying work among friends was one thing, however, it was quite another matter to take children hundreds of miles away from their home village to do work which was monotonous and dangerous. After seven years apprenticeship the children were qualified for very little and some became crippled. Many never returned home.

In 1993 the Historical Association published a teaching guide *Bound Apprentice : Essex Children in the eighteenth-century Textile Industry* by Harry Carmichael and I obtained a copy at that time. It looks at the fate of children from Chelmsford and Woodford, using Vestry records held at the Essex Record Office. It explains that in 1788 the Woodford authorities sent eight children, aged between 8 - 13, to work in a textile mill at Cuckney near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire and more followed, but none were sent unless their parents agreed. However, the parish officers seemed to have been more caring than some. Once their apprenticeship had finished the children were helped to find a new life, either in Nottinghamshire or back home at Woodford.

I wrote about this publication in the Woodford Historical Society newsletter for Spring 1995 but have never forgotten the story as I knew my own ancestors were cotton spinners at a mill in Bollington (north of Macclesfield) for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I recently visited Quarry Bank Mill at Styal, (north of Wilmslow and about 8 miles from Bollington) which is now run by the National Trust. They have costumed experts and other staff to show the development from spinning and weaving as a cottage industry, through the various stages to full mechanisation. I wanted to find out more about how my ancestors lived and thought it might be of interest to pass on some of what I learned in relation to the apprentices.

The ending of the American War of Independence in 1783 enabled merchants to obtain cotton from the plantations and the patent taken out by Arkwright on his waterframe expired in the same year. Both Cuckney and Quarry Bank Mills were started at about this time. Both mills had an Apprentice House and that at Quarry Bank is open to the public. The Greg family who owned and managed the mill were caring in comparison with many mill owners and Mrs Greg took an interest in the welfare of the children. They preferred girls to boys as they were less likely to cause trouble. The girls slept two to a wooden bed, with straw mattresses, up to 40 girls in one big dormitory. They were locked in at night and sanitation was by potty! The boys were housed in smaller rooms. Their diet was largely porridge, but served with vegetables in the evening. On Friday and Sunday evenings the children had meat. They had a garden with an orchard where they tended the vegetables which they ate. Mrs Greg employed teachers for the children although the lessons were most likely after their 12-hour day or on a Sunday, after church. The children did not receive any wages for the normal hours but received free board and lodging. The Gregs did not approve of physical abuse and most misdemeanours were punished by working extra hours, or by locking the child up.

Over the years more and more regulations were introduced and it became law that no child under 9 should be employed. Many of the children at Quarry Bank did not know when they were born. So their age was confirmed by examining their teeth to ensure all milk teeth had gone and by asking the child to raise his or her arm over the top of his or her head to touch the ear at the other side. It was considered that the forearm was not sufficiently developed to do this until about 9 years of age.



The work the children were expected to do was dangerous in more ways than one. They were expected to go under the machinery and to tend to the threads while it was still running. There were no protective guards and loss of fingers or limbs was a frequent occurrence. If they survived without serious injury to the end of their apprenticeship, they could be taken on as paid workers and given their own home. However, the fine white 'dust' from the cotton filled the air and caused many lung diseases as the workers got older. High humidity was essential so with no ventilation it was very hot. The noise would have been deafening, as was evident to me when just three machines were turned on. In full production there would have been 40 or so running.

Apart from the work, the conditions were probably better than those they would have experienced had they lived in back-to-back cottages in mill towns with their own families. A recent television programme about the Brontë sisters explained that Haworth in 1845 was a bustling mill town. It had three mills but the infrastructure could not keep up with the growing population. There was no domestic running water and in some cases an earth privy served 24 houses. 40% of children died before the age of six and the average age of death was 25 or 26. What a far cry from leafy Woodford! Taking the first 312 entries in the 1851 census for South Woodford, the average age was 26. There were 78 children aged 10 or under and 20 people aged 61 or over. The oldest was 87.



The schoolroom of the Apprentice House at Quarry Bank Mill (photos Georgina Green)

At Cuckney, the mill building is currently in use as a primary school. Apparently, if you go into the ground floor rooms of the school you can see the heavy wooden beam from which the water wheel was suspended. The waterwheel at Quarry Bank is a feature of the mill tour. The school website (<http://www.cuckneyprimaryschool.co.uk/page/?pid=7>) also says that 'Opposite the school we see the Apprentices' House (now School Cottages) where orphan boys and girls were housed. They were as young as six and brought from the Foundling Hospital in London. During the working life of the mill (1786 – 1805) in total, 780 foundling children were recorded in the apprentice's register as having worked there.'

Cuckney Mill closed on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1844 but Quarry Bank continued to be run by the Greg family for several generations, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I would thoroughly recommend a visit.

**Barnardo's Homes** - extract from '**Memories of a Lifetime in Woodford 1931-2010**' by Arthur C Gatum, which he has kindly donated to the Society's archives

Gwynne House in Manor Road opposite the village pond in Woodford Bridge was built on the site of the medieval 'Gwynes' Manor House. The house was built in 1816 by architect JB Papworth for a Henry Burmester.

In 1910, Gwynne House and 39 acres of land were purchased by Dr Barnardo's Homes for £6,000. The site was to be known as 'The Boys' Garden City'. Thirteen houses were originally built, each house had a House Mother with an assistant. In 1913 three more houses were added, with a further three in 1921. There were 34 boys to each house.

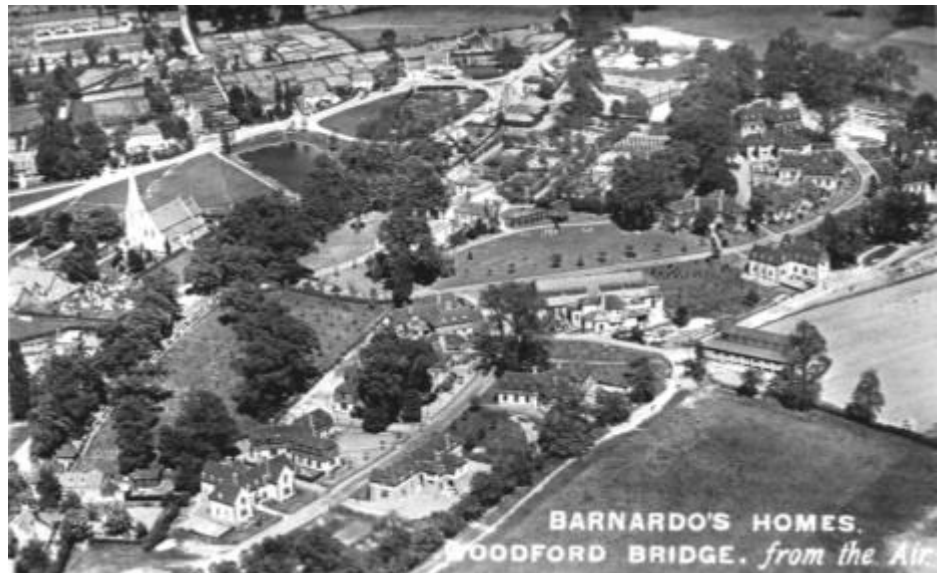
HRH Duchess of Albany opened the 'Boys' Garden City' on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1912.

The site had a school with a playground, a sanatorium and an isolation hospital. In 1932 a small chapel was added. The boys were expected to grow vegetables, make their own beds and repair their own boots.

In 1946 the 'Boys' Garden City' became mixed for the first time and two years later any child up to fifteen years of age was welcome.

The Dr Barnardo's Homes at Woodford Bridge finally closed their doors in September 1977.

The land was developed by Roger Malcolm Limited for new housing. Each property was purchased from Malcolm's and each plot of land purchased from Dr Barnardo's. This housing development is now known as Gwynne Park.



Gwynne House and the Chapel were sold to property developers who transformed the interior of the house as a hotel. The Chapel was joined to Gwynne House to become bedrooms of what is now the Prince Regent Hotel.

WHS Collection

**Barnardo's Boys in 1916** by Clause Chester Dymoke Seggins in a letter to Reginald Fowkes written in 1989

Each day a collection of perhaps some 50 boys, I believe, three abreast, set off to school from their Woodford Bridge homes. Part of the group would stop off to attend Snakes Lane School whilst the rest, presumably the older ones, would proceed to Woodford Green School. About the middle of the section two boys carried a wicker basket which contained their 'dinner' – a couple of slices of bread for each boy – I understood it to be. Regrettably, some of the boys would go hungry through bartering their rations for marbles or cigarette cards.

*In our Winter Programme, the Society is marking the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dr Barnardo's with a talk entitled 'Barnardo's – Believe in Children 150 Years and Always' on Monday 20 February 2016, to be presented by a former 'Barnardo's Girl' from Barkingside, Linda Bowley. **Editor***