

A PART OF SOUTH WOODFORD

by John Ellis

The following are my recollections of the area of South Woodford I knew as a boy and as a young man. The two main thoroughfares were Chigwell Road from Hermon Hill down to Charlie Brown's Roundabout and what is generally known as the lower part of George Lane from the station down to the crossroads joining Hermon Hill, Chigwell Road and Southview Drive.

The area to the north of this part of Chigwell Road was developed as a residential area at the beginning of the twentieth century and included Cowslip Road School (now Oakdale) and some light industry. The area to the south was developed in the 1930s.

There were fewer cars about then but there was a saw mill close by which made quite a loud grating sound and an engineering works, maybe in Beechcroft Road. There were occasionally a few metal turnings on the pavement outside.

Holy Trinity Church dominated the scene at the bottom of George Lane. My first association with the church was joining the Wolf Cubs and attending Sunday School. The minister just after the war was Mr. Holtby, who, I was given to understand, was the brother of Winifrid Holtby, author of *East Riding*. He was followed by Mr. Burling and then Frank Bayley.

The church had a thriving Sunday school, a dramatic society, and a badminton club and a cub pack and scout troop. The troop had a scout hall, the Wilkerson Hall, named after a former troop member David Wilkerson, an RAF pilot who was killed in the second world war. As far as I know these organisations no longer exist.

The shops largely determine the character of an area. On the corner opposite the church, number 1 Chigwell Road was a hardware shop which in the 1940s traded under the name of Tomkins then Vosper and then my father, Dick Ellis, continued the hardware tradition. The shop continued under the name of 'Ellis' under new owners until Willis Plant Hire bought the business, but only recently it again became a hardware/DIY store.

Next door at number 3 was a sweet shop known as Evans. Just after the war ice cream was on sale again but only on Mondays. Children queued to buy an ice-cream once a week!

At number 5 was a wool shop run by two sisters, the Misses Dominy. There was an optician, Hamblin and a greengrocer for a while Bumand and Haward and a barber's shop.

Going down on the right past Cadogan and then Onslow Gardens, the premises on the corners were Dr. Harcourt's practice and on the other corner, Ye Olde Oak Lights where one could watch the men making the lights from the street. The owner, Mr. Bromwich, went into groceries later. The business then became Ronsons a second-hand car dealer and it now trades in tyres and motor spares.

During the war there was a shop known as The Candy Box, presumably a sweet shop but my memory of it is where we children picked up our gas masks.

There was a watchmaker and jewellers and a greengrocers. Shops in that parade seemed to change hands regularly.

Further on the right going down where the block of flats Old Mill Court is now situated was hut and dugout, Post 28, which was the headquarters of the local ARP during the war. Further down was Bamikel a cycle shop and then some very old houses which were condemned shortly after the war and have been replaced by trees.

During the war between Post 28 and the river Roding was what would now be described as a land-fill site. The result of this was an increase in the number of house flies, crickets and rats particularly in Onslow Gardens. In the circumstances the local council did their best to overcome the problem.

At the end of the war the land-fill was completed and top soil was put in place. Southbridge Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club soon established itself on the site. It was not the ideal spot for a cricket table but the dedication and hard work of some of the members in erecting the pavilion and maintaining the ground must be admired.

Their first match after the war was also the re-opening of the club and was attended by the Mayor, Alderman Fox. The opposition was Baldwins, a team from Loughton. Southbridge batted first and were all out for 36 which was not a winning score and then it rained. I played cricket for Southbridge for several seasons and then moved on, but my cricketing heart is still there.

During the fifties club cricket had a great local following nationally which has sadly declined. How club cricket has changed over the years. Many small clubs including Southbridge no longer exist, although the tennis club amalgamated with a club in Wanstead. Some local firms and businesses ran cricket teams. Public interest in local cricket has dwindled.

On the corner of Chigwell Road was the Mill Garage, a local filling station and motor spares. The owner was Dick Jacobs who was also a car rally driver. He was incorrectly reported in the press as being killed in a motor rally.

This brings us to Charlie Brown's Roundabout. I remember the public house The Roundabout on the other side of the roundabout in which there were some cases of stuffed animals.

About turn at the bottom of Chigwell Road and cross over and proceed in a westerly direction towards Hermon Hill. On your right was a market garden and then the United Dairies. In the 1940s and early 1950s milk was delivered on an almost daily basis by horse and dray. Some kindly housewives would often give a horse an apple. However this caused problems because the horses remembered the house from whence the apple came and refused to move on until the apple was forthcoming.

On the corner of Granville Road was a greengrocer, next to Baulch's a newsagent. Coming up the slope to the bottom of George Lane were some older properties some of which have been demolished and replaced by flats.

Turning right up George Lane there were some older properties. About the third house up a little dark-haired girl waved to me from her front window of her house most mornings in the 1970s. There was a nursery on the right, Leonard Kinns, then a garage and repair shop and various shops up to Barber's a greengrocer on the corner with Cowslip Road which became Woodford Scooters and more recently deals in motor cycles.

Possibly one of the longest surviving family businesses in South Woodford is Woods fried fish shop. The launderette has been there for some years, as has the sweet shop which has changed hands a number of times. The shop was Wilshers in the first post-war years. Then there was a shoe shop named Pierson's and Mavers the barbers. I believe a Mr. Mavers founded it and it was passed on to his sons George and Sid, who retired recently.

There was a grocer Freeland's where was a most pleasant grocer's shop odour.

The Cash Domestic Stores was a sort of mini-market with assistants behind a counter.

Norwood's, the butcher had two shops in George Lane. You bought your meat and then paid at the desk to Miss Collins whose nonagenarian nephew Jack still lives in the area.

Then on the corner of George Lane and Maybank Road the Railway Bell public house. During the 60s and 70s a trio (usually a pianist, percussion and mandolin) gave some most delightful evenings of light music occasionally joined by 'guest artists'.

The level-crossing in George Lane was replaced by the subway. I enjoyed sliding down the banisters as did several of us, a practice which was frowned on by the authorities.

The shops on the left hand side coming down from the station. Adjacent to the station was a shoe repairer, then Horace Starke the barber, Purkis's the wet-fish shop. Bonanza, a toy shop and stationer run by Dolly Wingar who ran the Sunday school at Holy Trinity Church during and after the war.

In the same parade was Millers Cafe which was very popular with local people, Edwards the grocer and Israels a greengrocer.

Crossing Pulteney Road there were a couple of shops. On the corner was a cycle shop and next door a newsagent. Along George Lane were some terraced houses, the Baptist Church which had a very active Boys' Brigade Company and then more terraced houses.

During the years after the war one could catch a bus on a Christmas morning. Groups from local organisations sang carols and collected for charity. There were more butchers shops, grocers, greengrocers whose trade has been largely taken over by supermarkets. Such is the price of progress!