

ERIC CARRINGTON SMITH

Eric Carrington Smith is John Newell's uncle

I can clearly remember my younger brother being born on 14/05/1925 and have vague recollections of events before that - Wembley exhibition is one.

I started school at the end of August 1926 when I was just turned four. Of the fifty plus pupils in the class I was the youngest. Of course this followed right through my school career and when I finally left at the 'nominal' age of sixteen I was in fact fifteen years and eleven months old. My school days started at Winns Avenue Infants School in Fleeming Rd. My teacher was a young lady Miss Scott We took our mid-morning lunch to school and it had to have our name on the bag. Before lessons started the bags all went into a wicker waste paper basket and were handed out at lunchtime.



We learned the alphabet by copying from a blackboard onto our slates which made a horrible screeching noise when written on.

Winns Avenue School about 1928 Eric is third boy from right against wall, if you look carefully on the wall you can see the bold bad fox!

We recited the letters of the alphabet 'A' says A, 'B' says B and so on and progressed to C,A,T. spells cat, M,A,T, spells mat etc. and then on to sentences, ' The cat sat on the mat ' The next step was reading from small coloured cards (postcard size). The cards told little stories and we progressed from one card to the next probably without realising they were becoming more difficult.

At Christmas a conjurer entertained us and one of his tricks was to burn a piece of coloured tissue paper in his hand producing a silk handkerchief from the ashes. I remember getting a piece of tissue paper and running to the house and telling my mother to burn it so that we could have a handkerchief. Despite being told it was a trick and that ' the quickness of the hand deceives the eye'. I implored my mother to set fire to the paper and was greatly disillusioned when it turned to ashes.

I lived only about two hundred yards from the school gate and could walk home on my own. I can remember walking to my house holding hands with a girl called Ethel White who lived further away. It was not a lasting relationship and years later when I was at grammar school and she was at the girls high school we acted like strangers such is the fickleness of young love.

Other subjects were physical exercises and handwork, handwork usually meant modelling with second-hand Plasticine which was a rather dark grey colour and often had bits of hair in it- not at all like the coloured sticks we got for Christmas.

Sometimes we were given shapes of coloured paper and had to make patterns by pasting them on to a sheet of paper. The paste was dispensed from a glass pot of 'Gloy' on to a piece of paper and had a rather pleasant almond smell.

In the area where we lived there were very few cars. Horse and cart made all the deliveries other than milk and bread by handcart. The milk cart had a large metal churn on it and the milkman had three measures hanging from the handles, half-pint, pint and quart. He used these measures to dispense milk from the churns to the customer's milk pans which they usually had hanging by their front doors or on a shelf where the cats could not reach them. The cans were elliptical with brass hinges and lids and had handles to hang them by. Some customers used jugs as well.

Bread was delivered from a covered handcart and the roundsman would bring the bread to the door in a large wicker basket.

We didn't have bread delivered as my father was a baker and always brought home bread each morning. He always brought a small Hovis loaf for me and it had a hole in the top which made it special. Nobody else in the family liked Hovis neither did they like the crusts off the ends of the loaves which were my favourites. So I was all right as far as bread was concerned.

Both bread and milk deliveries were on six days a week.

On Saturdays the dustcart came. This was a steam engine, which had the earliest traffic indicators I can recall. They were wooden arms with fingers painted a flesh colour and operated by the driver pulling a cord. The dustmen wore leather hats with deep flaps hanging down their backs. This presumably was to prevent them from getting down their collars, as most of the contents of the bins would be coal ash from the fire. Most houses had coal-fired ranges as well as gas cookers. The ranges had hobs, ovens and hot water boilers. There was no electricity and all lighting was by gas, oil-lamps and candles.

The local oil shop Custances was on the corner of Brookdale Rd and Forest Rd. This was a shop full of fascination to me, it had a range of aromas such as from the tarred string with which the bundles of firewood were tied and stacked in a neat wall along the front of the counter. The blocks of soap, carbolic and washday varieties and the large drums of paraffin and lamp oil which stood at the end of the shop.

The floor in the oil section must have been a real fire hazard and bearing in mind that smoking was a normal habit it is a wonder that there was never a disaster. There was no HSE in those days but people were more aware of such dangers.

I liked to go there at Christmas time because it was one of the few shops locally that had coloured fairy lights all round the windows.

Tramcars were the main form of transport and within the district of Walthamstow, they were owned and operated by Walthamstow Urban District Council (WUDC). They were chocolate brown and cream and the main routes were from the River Lea at the Ferry Boat public house running east to the Napier Arms public house on the edge of Epping Forest. From our nearest stop at the top of Badlis Rd the fare for the journey in either direction to the terminus was a penny or a halfpenny if you were under fourteen.

The other main routes ran north and south from Chingford Mount to the Docks, a destination shrouded in mystery which seemed to have foreign connotations.

The other north south route was from Markhouse Rd and Lea Bridge Rd to Blackhorse Rd, this as a route serving the factory area of Blackhorse Rd, until the early 1930's most of London's buses were made there by AEC (Associated Equipment Company) The Company then moved to Southall and every morning and evening special buses transported workers across London to and from the new factory and continued to do so to my knowledge right up to the war.

Most of the people in the area worked in the local factories and a wide range of industries existed in those days including some well known names. One of the factories, Micanite, made insulated components for electrical equipment and the plastic smell carried over a wide area. The workers were easily identified if they travelled on the trams by the smell, which clung to their clothes.

Despite being an industrial area Walthamstow of the 1920's and early 30's was still semi-rural and the remnants of farms were still to be seen even after the second world war around the northern side.

Before housing development took off in the 1930's Chingford was a small country town adjoining Walthamstow and my first recollections of it were of picnics in the meadows at the top of Chingford Mount.

My father was fond of walking at weekends. Although born and brought up on the Essex, Suffolk border he always regarded himself as a Londoner. He knew his way round London and took me to many interesting places. Unfortunately it was always on Sundays and in those days most public buildings would be closed. I suppose it was an advantage that it was not so crowded then.

Sometimes we would travel by bus, sometimes by tram and occasionally by train from Hoe Street station to Liverpool Street. Bus and tram tickets were much more interesting in those days. Apart from being a different colour for each fare they had the fare stage printed on the back of them and provided

ed the traveller with an itinerary which could be studied during the journey. Most of the names of stops on route were of pubs, churches and other prominent landmarks.

In 1929 Walthamstow achieved Borough status and was granted its charter. All the schoolchildren were given a holiday and the main roads along which the mayoral procession was to pass were decorated with bunting. Schoolchildren lined the route and I remember standing at the edge of Forest Road near the Cenotaph watching carriages of dignitaries wearing funny shaped hats decorated with white plumes pass by. We all received a china beaker bearing the new coat of arms plus a box of sandwiches and an orange.

Today when shopping in Sainsburys supermarket often wonder how two people in their late 70's can take away a fully laden trolley containing about £100 worth of provisions and then repeat the exercise again week after week.

I am constantly reminded of the days when my mother took me shopping (my brother and sister never seemed to involve themselves in this essential task)

The weekly shopping for non perishable foods, including some vegetables such as potatoes was done in the High Street which was and I believe still is one of London's largest street markets.

I can recall carrying the shopping bag with 14lbs of potatoes plus other items while my mother carried the groceries. It was a mile from one end of the High Street to the other and we would take the tram from St. James' Street buying transfer tickets and changing at The Black Horse for the journey along Forest Rd.

There were five of us in the family and the shopping bags would not have half filled a supermarket trolley. Of course we did in addition buy our meat, fish and dairy produce such as required during the week. Nobody had refrigerators or freezers in those days.

I have not mentioned buses. These fell into two categories, the self regulated scheduled service provided by The London General Omnibus Company which were known as 'Generals' and the 'Pirates' which were operated by entrepreneurs. The 'Pirates' would generally try to steal passengers from the scheduled 'Generals' by arriving at the bus stops just before the scheduled time. The poor old 'Generals' had to keep to the timetables as they had regulators booking their times at key points along the routes as well as time recording machines where the conductors had to punch a time card.

Many of the buses had open staircases and some even had solid tyres, they were replaced in the 1930's by closed back buses. The main routes were the 38 running from Victoria to Chingford Royal Forest Hotel (in the summer this was extended to The Wake Arms, Epping Forest) and the 511 which as far as I recall ran from Stratford to Chingford Mount. The 35 bus ran from Clapham Common to Highams Park Station via. The Bakers Arms.

During the 30's two new services started to operate, the Green Line which ran from Ongar to Windsor and the City bus which went from Wood Green to Southend-on-Sea.

In 1935/36 London Passenger Transport Board took over the whole bus and tram system. Trolleybuses replaced the trams and the tramlines were dug up. The tram depot in Chingford Road became the home of the new trolleybuses and the graveyard of the trams, which were dismantled and burned, a sad sight.

Time to return to school again.

The second class I went into was run by a middle aged lady who had her hair plaited and wound round her head like a laurel wreath. She taught us History, all about Ancient Britons, Celts, Romans and Saxons.

We also learned to join up our letters into handwriting and started to learn multiplication tables. For me this was when real learning started and I enjoyed school.

I remember that each class had an attendance board on the wall and each week on Friday afternoon the class with the best attendance was awarded the banner, which was kept for the following week. Sweets were also given out as a further and more tangible reward.

Strangely, I don't recall in such detail the other classes I was in afterwards, this is probably because

they were just consolidating what we had already learnt.

At some stage I went up into the junior school, I think it was when I was seven. By this time the entrepreneurs of the school were beginning to emerge and during break time I remember some would have little pitches along the wall where they set up cigarette cards and invited the punters to flick cards at them. If you knocked down a card you won it and got your card back, if you failed to knock a card down you lost yours. Thereby the entrepreneur soon built up a fortune in cigarette cards.

Wireless came in at about the time I was born but not many had receivers. Firstly there weren't any manufactured sets to begin with, one had to obtain a blueprint and build one's own set. Also the licence fee was ten shillings, which at that time was quite a lot of money.

We had our first wireless about 1928. I say 'we had' but in fact it started as an extension speaker from our neighbours set. It must have been about a year later that our neighbours moved and my parents bought a second-hand set which was a home made affair and came with an assortment of interchangeable coils which allowed one to move to another waveband. In due course proprietary receivers were made available and names such as Mullard, Koster-Brand, Ekco and Lissen were advertised.

In the early days all sets were battery driven. This meant three batteries, a high tension HT usually between 80 and 120 volts, a grid bias battery usually 9 volts and an accumulator or wet battery which was 4.5 volts and supplied power to the valve filaments or heaters. Accumulators had to be treated with respect as they were made of heavy glass and contained sulphuric acid. Generally they had to be recharged weekly, this meant a trip to the battery recharging shop (some of the newly emerging radio dealers provided this service) or one of the stereotype practices which sprang up in the back of shop premises.

An interesting point, since moving to Dartford in the 1980's I enquired about an electrical component I needed and was directed to a firm called DBS behind an old cinema, which is now a Bingo hall. When I eventually located it I found a large wooden hut where the proprietor was repairing video recorder. I felt I had stepped back 50 years for I was standing on a floor that must have been saturated in acid and the smell was instantly recognisable. It was then that the name DBS became clear, it stood for Dartford Battery Service. I suppose it is still there and there must be hundreds of similar places throughout the country, relics of a bygone age.

Some of the battery charging businesses employed men on box tricycles like the ones the ice cream vendors used to use to deliver and collect the accumulators.

By the late 30's radio technology had advanced and straight tuned circuit sets were superseded by the superhetrodyne receiver (superhet) which usually had five valves instead of three and gave better quality reception without all the whistling noises when tuning into a station.

Up until the outbreak of the second world war in 1939 there were only two BBC programmes the Regional and the National. The National was based at Daventry, which transmitted, on a wavelength of 1500 metres. This later moved to Droitwich and is still one of the most powerful stations. One can usually receive it halfway into France on the Autoroute du Sol. The regional stations were lower powered and as the name implies covered a smaller radius much as today's medium wave AM stations.

In the early 30's Walthamstow Borough Council extended their electricity supply into the area and we bought a battery eliminator which did away with all the need for HT and grid bias batteries although the accumulator was still required. Later it was possible to buy mains driven sets and the need for accumulators gradually disappeared as people bought the new sets.

Back to school again and my main recollection of Winns Avenue Junior Mixed School was the headmaster Mr. Frank Oglesby, a man much respected and a typical schoolmaster of the times. He was also the chairman of the local allotment society. Many of Mr. Oglesby's former pupils owe an enormous amount to him and I include myself in their number.

Each year he would contact the parents of pupils he regarded as promising material and offer to provide extra curricular coaching mainly in the form of homework to prepare the pupils for the open scholarship examination. Both my sister Gladys and I passed the exam. She going to the Walthamstow County High School for Girls in 1932 and myself the following year to Sir George Monoux Grammar School for Boys.

Sir George Monoux, a former merchant in the City of London and one time Lord Mayor founded the first grammar school in Walthamstow in the year 1527. Apart from some extensive restoration after being bombed in 1940 it still stands to the north of the parish church of St. Mary's. It later was converted to almshouses. In 1827 the school moved to the High Street and the premises later became the public library opposite what was the truant school next to Gillards pickle and sausage factory.

The school moved again in 1927 to the site where it now stands. I believe it is now a comprehensive school so the name may have changed.

I can remember going to sit the examination. I was completely overwhelmed by the splendour of the school and the exam had no terrors for me. There were many candidates as I recall and they

must have come from all over southwest Essex. I think there was an afternoon as well as a morning session and I can't remember what my feelings were at the end of it as I had never taken such an exam before. About two months later my parents were notified that I had gained a free entry into one of the finest schools in the County.

In July 1933 I left Winns Avenue School and my parents kitted me out with new uniform and sports gear ready for the new term. This started in the first week in September. (One of the privileges of secondary school was six weeks summer holidays instead of the four weeks of the elementary schools)

Having started at grammar school I fell ill with diphtheria after one week and was admitted to the isolation hospital in Hall Road Chingford where I stayed until just before Christmas. At that time there were no immunisation programmes for the then common and often fatal diseases such as diphtheria, scarlet fever and tuberculosis and the green fever ambulance was a common sight as was the green van which took away the bedding for fumigation. The patient's bedroom was sealed and fumigated by burning sulphur candles. Other children were kept in quarantine. This meant that they could neither attend school nor visit public places such as cinemas for two weeks. As outbreaks generally affected more than one family in a road the quarantined children played together and often new friendships were formed.

At this time of one's life a year is an unimaginably long time and summer holidays, even when they were four weeks seemed to go on forever. Many happy hours, even days were spent in Lloyds Park, which was only a hundred yards away from where we lived.

It was and probably still is divided into two distinct parts by a fenced pathway.

On one side the ornamental gardens were full of mature trees and shrubs with formal gardens leading up to the house, which I believe is called Water House. This was once the home of William Morris and a fine building of the Georgian era, which also holds much less pleasant memories as for some of us as it was the schools dental clinic. At the north side of the gardens there was a pavilion on an island surrounded by a moat.

In the summer brass band concerts were held in the pavilion which was more like a semi open air theatre. Bands came from all over the country to compete in the annual contest including some of the famous ones of the time. Generally the island was out of bounds and apart from the pavilion it remained a mystery. It was no doubt a haven for wild life.

The other half of the Park was recreational and was sub divided into various sections with two areas of tennis courts a tea room and a children's play area with swings and a merry go round. There were two playing fields, which were used for cricket and school sports. A roadway ran from North to South connecting to another entrance in Brettenham Road. As children we would spend our time playing cricket or tennis on the field as we didn't have the right equipment or money to play on the courts.

In those days the seasonal games were still played and the dates I suppose were partly governed by tradition and partly by the need to keep warm. Tops, skipping marbles, five stones or gobs all came round in turn. During the holidays we could always find plenty of interesting things to do and a group of us would sometimes visit Hatherley Mews off Hoe Street near the Granada. Here there was a blacksmiths workshop and the coal merchants and other tradesmen would bring their horses to be re-shod. It was quite a serious offence for the driver of a horse drawn vehicle to be stopped because his horse was lame as a consequence of the shoe being worn down.

When the blacksmith was not shoeing horses he would sometimes be fitting new steel 'tyres' to cart-wheels or repairing all manner of tools or ornamental ironwork.

Further on there was a slaughter house where we could watch as animals were being killed and butchered. Next door was a joinery shop where doors and windows were made.

On the main rd Hoe Street was Whites the undertakers and the shop window had a large marble angel on either side and flower vases on marble plinths and in the centre would be a brass plate bearing the engraved name of the latest client.

Inside the shop the joiners would be making the coffins by hand in solid wood lining them and fitting the handles etc.

At the top of the High Street near the library we would stand and watch Dr.Brown and his two brothers who were there on Saturdays. Dr.Brown had the typical gravel voice of the street trader who spends his time talking to a crowd in all types of weathers and atmospheric pollution. His patter was illustrated by a demonstration of how dangerous self administered medicine can be. 'What do you do when you get a cough?' he would wheeze.' You gets your sugar' picking up a piece of thin wood broken from the side of an orange box and pouring a small mound of granulated sugar on it.' You then pours on the glycerine' he then proceeds to pour on a colourless fluid from a bottle ' then you puts on the lemon juice'. At this moment one of his brothers, who have both been standing watching the same routine they have seen thousands of times before, passes him half of a lemon which the Doctor then squeezes onto the sugar and glycerine. In a matter of seconds smoke rises from the mixture and it then quickly bursts into flame. Having made his point he and his brothers proceed to sell their famous cough candy.

We often wondered what the sugar was. We suspected it was weed killer.

All along the High Street were showmen selling all sorts of cures and miracle products which would restore an oily old piece of carpet to new condition or would chromium plate every piece of metal in the house, all for sixpence! They all had samples to prove that the products worked.

In the summer we would go by tram to Epping Forest taking a bottle of cold tea and some sandwiches.

To be continued ...