

# **My own Recollections of Walthamstow – Part 1**

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I was born at Thorpe Coombe Hospital in 1962. My birth certificate states that I was born in South West Essex. Thus making me a fully paid up and card carrying Essex Girl. My mother was born in Walthamstow in 1920 and comes from a line of Walthamstow people on her maternal side. Our home was 97 Warner Road, where my mother had been born & raised and lived after my grandparent's demise until meeting & marrying my father.

My earliest memories are of the coalman delivering coal. As the coal bunker was in the rear garden of Warner Road the "Coalie" had to lug the sacks up the front stairs, through the flat and back down the rear steps to the garden. I can also remember "Hitchmans" delivering milk and the Walthamstow UDC carts that had the lift able side doors, collecting the refuse. My playground was the gateway and street outside our front door where both my mother and I knew that I would be safe as the neighbours always looked out for each other and the children. Home front doors were seldom locked and the street was a sociable place. Sometimes too sociable as us children could never really get up to any mischief as we would be "grassed up" to our parents by the adults !!!!

My world changed when my mother decided that I ought to attend kindergarten at Low Hall Farm.

This would have been around 1966 as I have a lovely picture of me trussed up to the nines complete with woolly hat and scarf, holding my Andy Pandy in one hand and a "world cup willy" in the other. I only attended for a few sessions because I informed my mother that I wasn't going back to kindergarten because it was full of "babies!!!! Hence I stayed at home until I was dispatched to school circa 1967.

My first school was Mission Grove infants. I remember meeting lots of children that lived in the vicinity of the market. Our playground stretched right from Palmerston Road down to Apsley Road. Mr Rixon was the caretaker and he lived in Apsley Road. His daughter Aileen attended the school but wasn't in my class. However, the school friends in my year that I can remember were Ruth Bennett (and her brother Stephen who was in an older class), Denise Arckle, Jamie Withy, Raymond Smith, Jennifer Parr, Jayne Spiers, Nicholas Drew, Christine Bunch, Melanie Relton, Linda Jeffries, Karen Morris, David Nunn, David Payne, Paul Ayton, Jackie Marks, Ian Donaldson, Malcolm Mc Glone, Paula Malby, Alison Pitkin, Vernie Riley, Maureen Phillips, Michael Yannakou, Ian Hunter, Deborah Taylor, Sajid Mirza, Perry Welch, Oya Emirali & Michael Guloutu. We were a very cosmopolitan bunch.

One of our class teachers was Mrs Souter and the head teacher was Mrs May. In the school office was Mrs Alibone who used to take dinner money and administer the Savings books. We took in our money and were rewarded with a stamp to stick in our books. Because I could read particularly well I used to be taken into the staff room which was a room just off of a stairwell to read from books from the junior school. Janet & John & ladybird books for infants were well behind me !! I remember that I was picked to play Mary in the annual nativity play but all the photographs that my mother cherished and stuck in a scrap book were lost when my father threw them in the dustbin with the old newspapers by mistake. A hasty trip to the dump in south access road was undertaken but they were never located. My mother never forgave him for that.

Once we joined the junior school (upstairs) we were allocated to Mrs Smith's class. Her husband was a teacher at Greenleaf Road School and occasionally they would swop schools. I remember Mrs Smith being a huge "Arsenal" fan and she always had pictures of the team including Charlie George on the wall above the classroom sink. The Head teacher was Mr Tollett and the deputy head was Miss Jones. She terrified us children with her stentorian voice and dare I say it "crusty knees" that shone through her hosiery!

Other teachers I remember are Mr Fuller, Miss Breeden, Mrs Brown (her daughter Nicola was at the school) and Miss Walton (who subsequently became Mrs Dawe). I hated PE but quite liked Music & Movement where a record would be put on and we had to move to the music. Sometimes during assembly we listened to "Peter & the Wolf" on the record player. We also had a weekly radio story broadcast by the BBC that was a story with songs that we would sing and follow using an accompanying handbook. The one I really remember was a parody of the nutcracker and the songs were Mr Punchinello & Hush little baby. Again, I'm afraid to say I still remember the lyrics. I also undertook violin lessons whilst at Mission Grove with a teacher called Miss Cumber. I could knock a tune out on the darn thing but my biggest problem was that I couldn't read music. I still can't... I've called my problem music dyslexia because those dots just to not translate via my brain to my fingers. But I can still play the recorder, and harmonica and even the piano (albeit one handed) by ear.

Mission Grove School was a really happy time for me. However it was soon to be upended as some of the pupils had to be moved to an Annex at the bottom of Warner Road because the school was over crowded. All of us that lived south of Palmerston Road, in the Northcote, Carisbrook, Warner & Pretoria ave/road vicinity were re-located. The school main school gate was right next to "Tom's paper shop" which was opposite Longfield Avenue. Miss Walton came with us, but we lost contact with a lot of our regular classmates.

However we had to attend the "main school" each Friday for assembly so we had an opportunity to see them. However, by then our early friendships were broken. I wonder if the education board had realised that. Our route was Pretoria Avenue, turning left into Northcote Road where Bonners chippy and Smiths sweet shop were on the corner, right into Carisbrook Road, Left into Parkhurst Road where the cobblers and tailoring shop on the corner of Parkhurst & Carisbrook was called "cendemere". Then right again into Buxton Road going past Pope's sweet shop, Left into Apsley Road and through the gates into the rear playground. Can you imagine what this snake of children walking through the streets of Walthamstow must have looked like circa 1971?

The annex was great for me as it was only at the end of my road so the journey to school was shortened considerably. But I missed the sounds of the market wafting up into the classrooms on summer days and foggy autumn & winter walks to and from school along Palmerston road. At the Annex and across the playground, beyond the toilet block (yes it was outside loos in those days) and the coal shed (we had a coal burner in one of the classrooms that fed the radiators in the school) was the Joseph Clarke School. We used to talk to the pupils through the gates during playtimes; however some of them were profoundly deaf so communication was limited to lip reading and hand signals.

The school site also housed the council kitchens & stores for the borough school dinners so there was always a delicious waft of food into the school. Our teachers were Mr Jackson, Miss McCabe, Mrs Dawe (was Miss Walton) and Miss Wallis, Mr Holister and Mr Hungerford. We spent days learning the usual curriculum, decimalisation, metric measurement which was interspersed with Scottish reel dancing with Miss Wallis, and learning Beatle songs with Miss McCabe. I can't remember if that was for the annual Christmas show or not. But I can still sing "Lucy in the sky with diamonds & Penny Lane" word perfect.

The Joseph Clark School moved out after a year or so of us turning up, and I understand now that their old building is now a disability centre. Alas, the Annex is also no longer (thanks to Google Earth pictures and Carole Morrad, nee West with whom I'm in contact with and who lived opposite the school) and my old playground at Mission Grove is now a road. However the tree that we used to play in is still there. Just in front of Palmerston court flats. It had a split in the trunk that we used to hide in when playing hide 'n' seek.

*(to be continued...)*