

My own Recollections of Walthamstow – Part 2

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At the age of 11 it was all change again as the Mission Grove Annex children were packed off to Willowfield School in Clifton Ave. There we mixed with Stonydown, Winns Ave and some St Patricks pupils. Mr Foster was the head teacher & his wife was the music teacher. Miss Molyneux was in charge of home economics, Mrs Horne – needlework, Mrs Betts my first form teacher was also a science teacher, Mr Simpson – maths, Miss Rose – PE, Mrs Richardson – History, Mr & Mrs Baker – Woodwork & Science respectively. Miss Archer who became Mrs Lambert was another of my form teachers. She became a leading light in the Green Party. I also remember Mrs Webster the French teacher. She always reminded me of Bonnie Tyler for some reason. But my favourite teacher was Mr Viv Gwynne. As an English teacher he always directed the end of year show and introduced me to some brilliant literature. As I was always a voracious reader it was no effort at all to read the books & plays he recommended. One of the plays was “The matchmaker” by Thornton Wilder. Some years later I realised that the film “Hello Dolly” with Barbra Streisand was the matchmaker play made into a musical. Wow! Still I made it to become a prefect and more importantly a librarian which suited this bookish kid an absolute treat.



*The Willowfield 3rd year prefects circa 1976 with Mr & Mrs Foster
I'm on the back row, 3rd from the left with Coral Vallance on my right.*

My pals at Willowfield were Lynda Brown, Michele Haydon, Jill Barnes, Oya Emirali, Marlene Payne, Jackie Laidley, Barbara Heward, Karen & Suzanne Brooks. I also remember Angela Limerick, Brenda Naughton, Steve Hunnibal, Peter Barclay, Edwin Littlechild, Steve Holbrook, Claud Smith, Nicola Hodges, Gabrielle Jenkinson, Chris Hill whose dad had a greengrocers stall outside Argos, Lorna Batchelor, Kay Vasili, Ray Lewis who went on to become a member of the clergy, Coral Vallance and Wendy & Darren Hounslow.

My lunchtimes were either spent having school dinners or going out of school into Forest Road for a cheese roll and an iced bun from List's the bakers on the corner of Farnborough Ave. Else, if any of us were really flush, we would go to Rodi's cafe opposite the Standard for a sausage sandwich and a hot cup of tea to wash it down. According to Google Earth Rodi's is still around and I notice that H.C Briggs the camping shop is still at the corner of Forest Road & Pretoria Ave.

It was during these years that I worked on Saturdays in the High Street. Firstly on a cosmetic stall run by Mrs Evans which was opposite what is now the Town Square. Then I joined my pal Jill Barnes working for Irving Shelsky on a denim stall outside Downtown Cutters hairdressers which was nearly opposite Mission Grove. I remember Percy Ingalls bakery being on one corner of Mission Grove, and J Davis on the other. At Christmas the Salvation Army brass band would play Christmas carols in the mouth of the turning right opposite the Hot Dog stall. Oh the tales I have of the market – but I guess that's another story.

Our summer school holidays were mostly spent at Larkwood Lido. Lynda, Beverley Hale, Sharon & Jackie Sands who also lived in Warner Road, and I would walk up to the "central" and get the Chingford bus and then we would walk along New Road to the lido. Once we had changed into our bikinis and slathered ourselves with Ambre Solare oil or Cooltan cream, we would fry ourselves in an attempt to gain the all important summer glow. Occasionally we would take a dip in the freezing water of the Lido which always seemed to have dead bugs floating on its surface. Yuk.....

Of course the High Street was a favourite. Rossi's at the bottom end (next to the old Sainsbury & the Offal Shop) for an ice cream cone or chocolate ice lolly. Or the branch next to the Chequers. Woolworths, that had moved to brand new premises at the corner of Palmerston Road for a mooch around and maybe some Miner's or Outdoor Girl cosmetics; Then across the road to Alf's for the latest vinyl 45 record. Janet's, a ladies fashion shop which was located in the "old fire station" opposite the Chequers was also good for browsing. But for me the biggest pull was the Library at the top end of the market. Being a bookish kid, I could spend hours in there browsing books and perusing the old map of Walthamstow that hung in the main hall of the Library.

I was also fascinated with the Vestry House Museum and would often trot up Church Hill past the Electric board to the village. After a mooch around and invariably carrying a book purchased from the museum, I would return home to Warner Road via Orford and St Mary's road's and Selborne Park (complete with bowling green's – and the busses turning in a loop near to the top of Colebrook Road) and the High Street. This foray was mostly taken on my own (you could in those days) as my pals weren't quite so enthused.

A few evenings a week we would go to "Marsh Street" youth club which was housed on the top floor of an old school between Linden Road and Willow Walk. The ground floor used to be the Children's Library which had been re-located to the main library further up the High Street. Sainsbury and the Buxton club now have this site. Because I was in a year below Lynda & Michelle I had to lie about my age to gain entry to the senior's nights. I'm sure that the staff knew, but turned a blind eye as long as we behaved. Wally Keyes was one of the staff at the club who became a good family friend.

Laurie was another of the staff and I also remember "Herbie (Herbert Sylvester?)" who I used to help run the disco session using a double deck affair that was made by Newham Audio. I think that our Nights were Tuesdays & Thursdays. We had some fabulous times at the club, making up floats for the Carnival and visiting other clubs such as the Wittington in Higham Hill, as well as being taken to Leyton cricket ground pavilion to hear popular agony aunt Anna Raeburn give a one –off talk. Marsh Street also took us Ice Skating at Silver Blades in Streatham. That was a late Saturday night/early Sunday morning session and many times I would get home about 2 am only to get up again at 6 to get the train to Liverpool St to work on Irv's stall in Petticoat Lane Market.

The LBWF education department sure loved to have a swop around in the 1970's as it was all change again in 1977 when the Willowfield 3rd years were dispatched to Mc Entee in Billet Road to complete their education. The journey was awful, walk to Blackhorse Road to catch

the bus (232?) to Billet Road, or walk along Palmerston, down South Countess Road, through Priory Court into North Countess Road and then onto Billet Road. I have to say we must have been fit as proverbial fleas because we were all darn good walkers in those days. I asked if I could go to William Morris in Gainsford Road as it was nearer to Warner Road and my mum had also attended there. (She was ex-Mc Guffie as well). I was duly told that I was in the wrong catchment. So Mc Entee it was to be.

1977 the Queens Silver Jubilee year was a transitional year for me. My mum moved my dad and I from Warner Road into a house in Walpole Road, purchased for the princely sum of £18,000 - and Mc Entee dawned. I was glad that Mc Entee was only for the final 2 years of my schooling as I hated the place! It was just a melting pot. Desks would be regularly thrown out of classroom windows, and some teachers just could not cope and hid in cupboards (one in particular was often lured into a cupboard by the pupils and then duly locked in until the end of the lesson - no teacher names mentioned here). I went from being a fairly reasonable student with good prospects who quite liked school to a "when will this all end / this is something to be endured" student. Don't get me wrong, I didn't play truant and my homework was always on time but the impetus and hunger for knowledge that I had at Willowfield just hadn't accompanied me up Billet Road .

It was whilst at Mc Entee that I took to smoking cigarettes and at lunchtime I would regularly go pop across Billet Road into to Ardleigh Road for a quick smoke, coming back by way of cafe on the corner for a cheese roll and a cuppa. Nobody challenged us in those days, especially if your school uniform was hidden quite well under a big coat. The only teachers I can recall were Mrs Boulstridge who was a fabulous French teacher, Mrs Glazebrook who signed my leaving testimonial. Brian Morris, who was my history teacher and subsequently became my next door neighbour when he and his family moved into Walpole Road and Mr King my Biology teacher, the others I have completely erased from memory.

I notice now that Mc Entee has now been rebranded as the Walthamstow Academy; I would loved to have been able to tell both the DFES & LBWF that it was a failing school even way back then - so thanks for the educational opportunity.

Therefore I left school in 1979 with mediocre exam results to embark on my adult working life where my education continued.