

Walthamstow! What do I remember of it?

by Stephen Read, March 2014 [[email](#)]

Well, I don't remember this first bit but imagine it happened something like this...

2nd June 1949 & Ada Read (nee France) gave birth to Steve Read in Thorpe Coombe Maternity hospital. Maybe Ada's husband, Sid was in attendance, but I doubt it.

The nursing staff were not too impressed with Steve. Born premature, they told her they did not think he would live. If that were true, we could stop right here. But it did not happen, so the delighted parents left the hospital, walked (no car in those days) on to Forest Road & turned left on to Shernhall street. Passing the actual Shern Hall on the left, with a up-ended cannon cemented either side of the gates. Across the road would have been the lovely, leafy Drive where many future school mates of Steve were already or soon to live.

Tony Walton (now deceased) will live in the flats at the bottom as will the Kempleys, Geof & John.

On the Drive will be Pam Stevens, Susan Cousins, Tony Smith & Mickey Paine. The Gibson beauties, Lesley & young sister Sarah, brother Freddy in their really lovely house.

Among others.

Up beyond the end of the Drive would be Pete Everett & his sister Rosemary. And Howard Road right, at the end where Dave Grosvenor lived & Mr Knowles, teacher of Wood street school fame.

The proud parents would have continued their walk, passing the high walls of the convent, across Wyatt's lane & the little shop on the corner of Havant Road. Maybe Ada's friend Ivy Trigg (nee ?) came up from her house on Havant to say hello to the new born. She would have know Ada had been pregnant, but would not have known of the birth - no phones yet. Others were surprised Ada had even been pregnant as she stayed so small.

Over on the right is Prospect Hill where there are some more flats. Kathy Carney, Edna Whitfield & Susan Makepeace will live here.

On the left are the prefabs where Dave Grosvenor lived before moving to Howard Road. Further up is Robin & Michael Titterton & a sister Across the road from the prefabs were Dave & Michael Beezley.

The couple will now pass the rather out of place house on the corner of Turner, & maybe the Murrell's who had the Off License on the other corner.

Down Turner, they went to number 6 to be greeted by Gran - Bertha France, Nee Pleasants & 2 year old sister Gwen.

Gwen would not throw Steve out of the pram just yet. That would be a few years down the line.

No doubt all the neighbours would get to see the baby at some point:

The Jackson brood at #4 Jack & Mrs with Michael, Daphne, Mavis & ??.

The old Normans at #8.

The young Normans ?? & Doris at # 1 with only son Barry. Only son until a daughter appeared many years later.

Marion Feary & her folks at #3.

The Woods with daughter Linda at 5.

The Rosebridges, Pauline & Michael and their parents, Maud & ?? at #7

Across the road at #10 the Baldreys, # 12 the Greenwoods, #14 Sylvie Burns.

Also on Turner were The Rafell family. The Bates family. Cliff ? & his sister Pauline maybe.

Moms friend Em & Johnny Lathwell... Em died - John in Florida last I heard.

Bobby Trustler down by the alley. The 2 Griffiths boys & the Whiters Jennifer & brother, John? on the corner with Havant.

I think life would have been fairly peaceful for young Steve as he grew up.

I know by his 4th Birthday he could run like the wind. 2nd June 1953. Coronation day. He was in a foot race, up Turner, right on Shernhall, right on Havant (pass Margaret Damsel, no time for girls yet) right on Turner, pass the little alley & a right again, with the finish tape stretched out across the street in front.

Dad had said "run for the tape" .

The crowd were going crazy.

Steve was half a street in front of one of the Rafells.

People screaming, SCREAMING at him.

CROSS THE TAPE.

But - Steve would not break that tape. No one said anything about breaking a tape.

Ian came up, ran through the tape & he WON!

Sid was annoyed!

60 years ago & I can still feel the wind in my hair as I flashed round that course.

Playing in the street was no problem in those days. No cars parked nose to bumper.

Games of tip & run with a tree as a wicket. Football with tennis balls. Knock down Ginger. Hop Scotch. Many games over many hours. Being the youngest on that end of the street, Steve got everything his own way - probably.

After a few years he would venture further afield. Down to the bottom of Turner, passing Nutty Turners rag & bone yard, hidden up a side way, just before the small shop & then through the alley & there was the wonder of wonders. A park with swings & a roundabout & a shed & space to roller-skate. Gwen would break her arm here later. Steve would get lots of scrapes.

Arnold's on the corner & the old shop owed by Mrs Purkis that had 'Rabbits Eggs' written on the front. The Dukes Head on the other corner

Then it would be time for school. Age what? 4? 5? Wood Street Infants school. A hundred mikes away. Right on Havant from Turner. Pass St' Gabriel's church. Pull a left where the Old Chestnut tree was dropping conkers onto Wood Street, with the White Swan on the right.

Past Tellfords, the toy shop without a second glance. Well, maybe just time for a peek.

Still a hundred miles to go. A policeman acting as school crossing person helps us across the road. And still not there yet. A little farther on the right there is an alley way between the school & library. Up the alley and finally at school. Whew!! Steve must have done this with his mom & sister but in my mind I was always on my own. There was one day when I had to return a library book & somehow sat unnoticed in the library for a long time before someone pointed me to school. Late, Oh no!

Steve learned to tie his shoe laces in the infants. Terry Plant taught him. There was a test with ink splodges. There was a field over by Forest road where we would play with bean bags or lay quiet on the grass. I only remember Reg Newton & a boy named Robert? Fage from the Infants. I can picture a girl or two too but no names come to mind.

That's about all I remember from the infants until it came time to go into the Juniors. We all picked up our little chairs from class & walked with them through the gate & into our new class in the juniors. Presumably this was meant to bring some familiarity to the new class. Who Knows?

I do know that I sat next to Pam Stevens in that first year of junior school. At the back of the class. Geoff Richards sculpted an Elephant or maybe a Dinosaur from Plasticine & impressed the life out of impressionable Steve. The very scary Bolts & Whites were around. Reg was around as he was my entire life it seems. A sweet female teacher had us sit with our head on the desk; listening to classical music.

In the 2nd year (7 years old?) with Miss (or Mrs) Rance I accidentally (honest) shook a tambourine & she sent me back to class. My one & only brush with a musical instrument. Music was never a good thing for me. Miss Rance has a lot to answer for.

I seem to remember Jean Rooke helping me with Papier Mache from this year & Geoff Smith, Jeff Law. Howard Dover & Andrew Payling too. Getting kind of messy.

Somewhere along the way Steve had learned to swim. Since neither of his parents could (or maybe, did) swim, it must have been Gwen who helped him learn. At Whipps X Lido & the High street baths. Somewhere around this time, Gwen had her broken arm but still swam in the swimming gala. Came last of course but got a great cheer. Steve got his 25 yard swimming certificate presented in assembly. The Head master, Mr Head, called his name but kept looking towards the kids at the older end of the room. Steve stood in mortification waiting to be noticed. There is a bit of a pattern developing about being invisible. It continues to this day. I should have been a spy.

Third year (maybe 8 years old by now) it was Mr Henderson as teacher. He had a chart on the wall where we had to mark off every time we managed to recite a new times table. I never got past the three times table. I was sweet on Pauline Leverett, the first person I knew who went abroad. Spain I think she went. Spent a lot of time with Dave Rushton & an atlas. We would each

name a place on the map & the other had to find it. Trying to find all those places now for real.

Fourth year & it is the very, very scary Mrs Whip.

Classmates included. Jean Rooke, Susan Cousins, Linda Brazier, Carol Rodd (who married the drummer of Status Quo) Someone Shapiro (not Helen or maybe it was), Dave Grosvenor, Johnny Grimwood, Howard Dover, Andrew Payling, Dave Rushton, Tony Collins. Pam Stevens (now a Head teacher herself, or thereabouts)

Dave, Reg & I got in trouble with the Head, Mr. Head for putting Tony against a wall & pelting him with custard powder packets. We got let off as I was Head Boy at the time.

One fine day, Steve, bare chested for some reason is chasing Kathy Howard down the freshly tarred & gravelled Turner Road, when he slips & slides on his bare chest down the street. Another lesson learned, but not in school.

While convalescing, Steve has a visit from a kid from school to say he had been elected Head Boy of the school. This for a kid who could not stomach attention. He liked the winning, but not standing out. By this time he had also won the diving competition in the Town Gala. And was 1st or second for 5 years at that. On the first occasion he arrived home where Gwen told her dad Steve had won but had not picked up his medal. Back to the Old Baths on the High Street to get it.

Lots of Football & cricket played in the playground & behind the Town Hall. Played a blinder at cricket in the playground with the elder brother of Susan Scott, but failed to impress her. Too bad.

Running, rounders & bean bag relays. What a lot of games.

Four years in the Juniors & a couple in the infants had not taught him much & Head Boy or no, he did not pass the 11 plus. Not surprising as he crossed out some original answers in an attempt to not pass.

On to Warwick secondary school although it may have still been called Barrett Road school at that time. Around 1960.

And that's enough for now.

Stephen Read [[email](#)]