

Living in Hatfield Road

By Rita Cobb (1940s)

We lived at the beginning of the 'Council Houses' by Chennells' field. We were in the second house along.

I left St Helen's in July 1945 to go to Grammar School. It was all my idea. I will tell you the tale - it was the New Year 1945, the teacher said to the class 'This is your last chance to say if you want to go in for the scholarship'. I hated that school, so I put my hand up. 'Anything is better than this' thought I. I was then told off for not saying so before and was sent immediately up to the Senior School. The other children had gone up the term before. When I got home I asked my Mum. Her answer was 'If you like, dear'. It was out of the frying pan into the fire. I guess I just do not like schools.

During the War there were quite a few children in the Council Houses including Evacuees.

The far end there were Maurice who we knew as Moggy (Hayes), Digger Hunt (Leonard) and two families of Ellises. Then as the houses were placed forward, there were the Crawleys, the Sherricks, the Dears, the Trebells, the Mears, the Webbs, the Tomlins, Mr and Mrs Smith and their niece as an evacuee. Then there were the Pattens, the Mansfields (evacuees) and us. What a list.

On the whole boys and girls played separately. There were occasions when we played together. Outside of the Dears' about halfway down, we played 'British Bulldog' a rough game. Two teams faced each other in two lines on the wide bank in front of the houses. We had to push past each other to get to the other side. If one was caught one was roughly bumped.

Another time a whole large group of us was in the Dyke. It was dusk and we were playing 'Hide and Seek'. Another girls' and boys' game was Chalk Chase. There is plenty of chalk in Wheathampstead.

Also we played up the Back Fields (Tudor Road) One day we were being shown how to play Cricket, as a boy had a bat a ball and some stumps. This was until the boy went home. Tin-Can-kettle was another game played there.

It was great to play in the Dyke usually Hide-and-Seek. Sometimes we were Robin Hood's Merry Men; we could hide at the top of the bank and watch the adults walk along the central low path.

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We girls had several set traditional games we played including ring games, skipping. There were other games I could describe them but I do not know the collective name. We also played on-going stories that we made up as we went along. When the grass was cut by the council and in Chennells' field (Swedish houses) for hay we made the outlines of houses. Down the River. Usually we went with Mum for a picnic along the Meadow in the summer. Other times we were with friends just wandering. February meant new Wellingtons. These would be tested in the river by paddling. You could walk for miles. I cannot remember ever being by myself on these excursions. It was always a group of children.

When I was about 9 Barbara D. came along pushing a pram. She was taking a neighbour's baby for a walk. From then on several of us would take babies out. This was great fun.

One day there were a lot of soldiers up the back fields. They were on manoeuvres. They dug trenches in various places. One soldier was not pleased to see us children so we went where we were welcome. A group of soldiers welcomed us in front of the Tudor houses (The only houses in Tudor Road) they offered us Hardtack biscuits. We would eat anything. When we went home there were several officers talking to Mum. They were after fresh water for tea. Mum said while they were talking a soldier came in reporting casualties. The officers quickly told Mum no-one was actually hurt. After a few days the soldiers went.

Soldiers would go by in lorries and sometimes tanks. The latter churned up the road. We would wave to them all. Later on we would wave to Italian and German POWs in their lorries.