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compiled by the late Brian Joyce.

Memories

by Hazel Wright

(Pictured on right aged 15)



I have at last got my thought together for a trip down memory lane during my childhood at Wheathampstead.

My parents **Fred and Beatrice Hicks** moved to the area from London after the 1st War and later bought a property on Lower Luton Road that bordered the river Lea. They had 4 sons and 2 daughters, **Gwen, Fred, Cyri, Ronnie, Lionel** and myself **Hazel** though everyone called me **Blossom**. We all went to **St Helens school** and I also went to a private Convent school at Marford for a short time. My brothers all worked locally until the 2nd War and they were then all called up and happily survived the war.

I was born in **1930** at Hemel Hempstead hospital and had a wonderfully free childhood roaming the fields and swimming in the river at **Newbridge**, watercress grew there then. I used to do some work at **Bury farm** where Mr Hill used to let me ride on the milk float and ride the horse to pick up the milk churns, back to the dairy and put the milk through the cooler and bottle it up for delivery.



I also have fond memories of the Westwood family especially **Harry Westwood** (shown on the left) and his sons **Alf** and **Jim** at the forge. I used to spend hours there watching them work and I still have some items that they gave me as a child. In later years my husband and family lived at Necton Road in Marford across the road from Harry Westwood and his daughter Dorothy who looked after him in his old age. My husband took some photos of them and I still have them. Picture of

Grace Westwood shown on right.



I remember seeing Badgers in the spinney by the River Lea at **Smiths Bridge** and leaving bread and milk out for the hedgehogs. I did used to play with some Gypsy children who camped in the fields close by and once was given some cooked hedgehog to eat. I didn't know it at the time I thought it was chicken !! We always had a lot of tramps who used to call for bread and cheese and my mother was always generous to them. They used to put a mark on the gate to let others know it was a good place to come. They were always polite as I remember although they used to frighten me sometimes. They would never harm anyone and just used to go on their ways when the time came.

The War Years (1939-1945)

The incidents that really stick in my mind was one Sunday morning early when a doodlebug fell in the spinney behind Bury farm. We lived at Lower Luton road but it blew us all out of bed and all the windows shattered covering us with glass. I remember hearing my mother calling out to my father " Fred come quick I think I'm dead" thankfully no-one was really hurt just shocked and bruised. Another fright was when we were sheltering in the fishpond that doubled for our air raid shelter. There were only sheets of tin over us and all around us were falling incendiary bombs it was like bonfire night. Our house was made mainly of wood and my father used to paint it with creosote every year. Luckily not one bomb fell on the house as it would have gone up so quickly. I also remember the land mine that exploded near to New Bridge. We used to call the field Madam Robins's and we always used to walk that way to Gustard Wood common. It made quite a crater. The planes used to drop their bombs when they were being chased rather than actually targeting the area.



With my brother Lionel just after he enlisted in 1944. He put his age up to 19 but in this photo he was actually only

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A lot of my memories of the wartime concerned food as most peoples did. I remember always eating bread and cheese berries on the way to school and knawing on a manglewurzle stolen from the horses. My favourites was the molasses cubes and the salt lick for the cows. My mother was a good cook and made a lot of jams and preserves so for the first couple of years we were lucky to have a few treats, but after a while there was nothing to have. My brother Lionel was a big boy and he was always desperate for something to eat. Mum used to hide the cheese and milk rations from him although they were only a mouthful anyway. We also did what errands we could for people and they would give us a toffee or a withered apple. Sweet rations were very prized and I would save mine up either dolly mixtures or some strip toffee. Usually I ended up giving it to my brother. Strangely we still did cooking at school but it was terrible things like turnip pudding made with water and marmite and a suet crust that turned out like lead. My mother said that it was a waste of good ingredients and wouldn't let me take any more. Most children became very

good at scrumping and getting potatoes from underneath the plants and there wasn't a berry or wild nut that was wasted.

We had a company of prisoners of war that worked on the farm close to us and I made friends with one young German boy. I would sometimes take him a bit of cake or a cigarette that I had stolen from my fathers tin. He was only a boy really and so sad. My mother was terrified of them and she would ask the farmer to count them again to make sure he had them all.

The war years were a quiet time really for my family and the years after weren't really much better for a long time. Thankfully all my brothers survived and returned to marry and settle in other parts of the county.

I haven't been back to the area since 1971 and so much of what I knew would have gone. I saw some photos of Ash Grove on the website and I couldn't believe that it was covered with housing. There was nothing there as I remember it just a wonderful play area on the way to school.

I'll say goodbye for now and hope I've not rambled too much for you.

Regards Hazel Wright. *April 2004*

After a short illness Hazel died in July 2006.