

COMING HOME 1

I arrived at Brigstock as a sleepy, bewildered child of three with my mother and two young cousins, away from the horrors and bombings of London. It was 1944. My father was a Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Navy and had been taken prisoner of war just before I was born. We had come to stay with my mother's uncle in School Lane. He was in the army and lived with his wife, Doll Jones, and her son Roger. Their house was next to the school. After the war my cousins returned to London, my father came home and I saw him for the first time.

My parents decided to settle here, and my two sisters were born in School Lane. I remember Gert and Dora Flecknor had to fetch water from the brook for the nurse to boil when Hilary was born, and she was often referred to as 'the green baby' owing to the colour of the water obtained. I also recall living in 'The Lane' where Albert and Alice Bland and their daughter Mary, Mary Wise, Min Wills, and Mrs Nan Howlett (who was a real character, especially on polling days), Mr and Mrs Hart and many others. 'The Lane' as it was called, could fill many volumes with stories, characters and lifestyles.

I was allowed to start school at the age of four and a half. My teacher was Mrs Palmer and the headmaster was Mr Tomlinson. The school dinner lady, Win Mayes, managed to serve us culinary delights, in spite of food shortages after the war. In the winter she used to warm our milk upon the open stove which also served as a classroom heater.

When he was well enough my father returned to the navy. Mr T. Ellis had been very kind in providing my mother with nourishing food for him during his long convalescence, as the period he had spent as a prisoner of war had left him ill. He was working at the War Office so once again we were without father for long periods of time.

School was going down very well. The 'coke pile' was a great source of dirt and play. The school dentist came to the staffroom where he inspected, filled and extracted our teeth. The 'nit nurse' was a regular visitor too. Father Adey came on Fridays to preach and admonish those boys whose ears Mr Maddison (the village policeman) had had cause to threaten to box. A favourite punishment then was for the bigger boys to have to dig 'Tommy's' garden and I suspect that Mr Tomlinson had the best turned garden in Brigstock.

About 1946/47 we rented a cottage in Bellamy's Row (now no longer exists except for two modernised houses opposite the factory). At the top of the Row lived Olive and Edgar Hill. Olive played the piano and Brenda Swan would often sing while she played. Next to them were Alf and Maud Wright, and then old Mr Butcher who always seemed ancient to us children and used to walk miles and miles. He also had a wind-up gramophone, which was a pure delight to us, in spite of the fact that he only had one record. Gramp and Liza Wills sported a lovely rose trellis around their house, and often Gramp would sneak me one of the boiled big potatoes he fed to his chickens at the back of Braybrook's Row.

Sam and Connie Brown lived in the corner house next to Mr and Mrs Green. Ivor and Percy Marshall and Cis Swan completed the row at the bottom.

By this time, the late 1940s, my father had left the navy and was working as a gardener for Mr and Mrs Beeby of Park Walk. He occasionally took me with him and the gardens, summerhouse, pigs, animals and outbuildings were a child's joy. We seemed to enjoy our lives although accommodation was limited. We managed with a bath in front of the fire. Each house had its allotted day to use the copper house at the top of the yard so each day it was in use except, of course, Sundays.

The bakehouse cooked the Sunday joint. Mr Mayes from Hall Hill brought our milk in a churn, Mr Chaplin delivered fruit and vegetables. Near our yard was a hairdresser and next door to that was George Bowden's paper shop. These have since been demolished or altered, but they were between Stoa House and the New Inn. 'Von' Brown and I used to plague poor Mrs Sturgess, who kept the shop and who, it seemed, had to go upstairs for every purchase.

We seemed to have a lot to do even without a television. There were cricket matches, football matches, gymkhanas, the Silver Band, and even a swimming pool for a while, until it was closed down after a polio epidemic. At school we had two new teachers - a Miss Sevante and a Miss Wicksteed. The latter came from Geddington and who, I remember, always wore such lovely plaid skirts. She was very young and pretty. I wonder where she is now.

I recall the winter of 1947/48 very well when my father and Alf Wright had to climb out of the bedroom windows to clear the snow from our doors. Alfie used to bring the wood or you took your turn in the queue on Wednesday mornings when it was the day for fetching wood. The Festival of Britain in 1951 was celebrated with great to-do. There was fancy dress, bands, dancing, and so on and so on. We even chose a Festival Queen, Francis Chaplin, and her twin sisters were her attendants.

I was about ten when we were allocated one of those 'posh' new council houses in Lyveden Road. We were still very much children and our non-school days were spent playing in the meadow, the fields, Merry's Hovel, the Flesh Hovel and the out-of-bounds sandpit. The men who used to work there passed our house every day. We could still stretch a skipping rope across the road at any time of the day in safety. The first man to own a car in our street was Mr John Pybus. By now Mr Tomlinson had retired and Mr Payne was the new headmaster. Instead of leaving school at fourteen from Brigstock, we had to go to school at Corby at the age of eleven. This was a very big step for all of us as many of us had never been to Corby, as Kettering and Thrapston were the main stopping centres and on the bus routes. We had to catch the bus outside the Co-op, which had a lovely big window and you could press your nose against it and do a 'Harry Worth'.

Our mis-spent youth seemed to fly. We met at the bridge, on the corner, played in more new houses that were being built on the Lyveden Road, film shows at the village hall. Chapel socials, Thrapston pictures, auctions and jumble sales, and

various youth organisations were being organised, such as dancing classes and so on. We eventually graduated to dances at the village hall and going into town.

I then married and moved to London for a short while, but soon returned home. Where was home? Bellamy's Row and who lived at the top now, and who at the bottom? Why Mr and Mrs Hill and Mr and Mrs Swan of course. We later moved to Lyveden Road where I found my life had completed a circle since arriving at Brigstock as a sleepy child. It has been over thirty-six years since that day. I have six brothers and sisters all born here, two out of three sons, and my father loved and served the village well until his death in 1974. Fortunately my husband, who is a 'foreigner' from London, feels the same as I do: WE ARE HOME. Brigstock has changed immensely in my comparatively short time here, and I suppose I will always be a 'foreigner' but my family will, hopefully, one day rear their families here and they will become true Brigstockians and will care as much about the history, traditions and survival of Brigstock as I do.

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