

Vic Goddard - Memories of New House Lane

Moving to New House Lane

I moved to New House Lane, to what would later become Number 46 although the houses did not have numbers in those days, with my father, mother, older brother and younger sister in June 1950. We came to Canterbury from the East End of London so that my father Frank could take up a teaching position at Wincheap School, having trained as a teacher after being "demobbed" from the army at the end of WW2. The move itself seems scarcely credible today; my mother and sister sat in the front of the removal van with the driver whilst my father, brother and myself sat on the furniture in the back with the driver's mate, looking out over the tail-gate. (No issues of "Health and Safety" or "Liability Insurance" in those days!) Even though only 5 years of age, I recall the refreshment stops on the old A2, this being many years before motorways.

There was some drama when we arrived at the house when it was discovered that the double-bed would not go upstairs, due to Number 46 then having a very tight bend on the stairs near the top. My father resolved this (to accompanying verbal sound effects no doubt) by sawing the bed-frame in two and then re-assembling it upstairs later.

People from the Lane were very welcoming and came to say "hello" as we were in the process of unloading. As Londoners, we were probably something of a curiosity and I recall then and for some time afterwards how funny the other kids thought it was that I had never seen a sheep before!

How were things different then?

Those of you who have lived in New House Lane in recent times will be familiar with changes about which I know nothing, so I will mention a few things from 1950, some of which persisted for some time afterwards.

- The Hall did not exist
- There was a busy village shop (run at that time by Mr & Mrs Goldup) at Number 34, initially in a shed-like structure close to the road but later in a purpose-built extension on the side of the house (on the left, as viewed from the roadway). Some shop supplies were kept in a former air-raid shelter under a rockery in the back garden.
- There were no houses between what are now Numbers 38 and 43, this being a rough field owned by a Mr Beardmore and containing a derelict garage building and quite a number of what I now realise were aircraft long-range fuel-tanks.
- There were no houses between Numbers 47 and 50, this being a small field.

The farmer of the land opposite (New House Farm), a Mr Lilleywhite, in many ways illustrates the way things were. He used to tour his farm riding on a white horse and he was one of the last farmers in the area to plough with traction engines and to till with horse-drawn machinery, very late into the 1950s and long after everyone else had moved to tractors.

So few people had cars in those days that we (certainly the lads) knew the registration numbers of any vehicle we were likely to see, whether it was from The Lane or from one of the surrounding villages and just passing through on its way to Canterbury. Cars from 'out of the area' were cause for great interest and/or suspicion.

Building of The Hall

I recall that Jack Boughton was the site manager of the Hall build. Many other men from the Lane pitched in to help in any way they could. We children also 'helped', although I don't know if the men would have agreed with that description! Mostly we did odd jobs of a 'fetching and carrying' variety and I also recall rolling putty for the windows as the building neared completion.

Once an altar had been established inside the finished building (initially closed-off behind hinged panels when not required, though these were later replaced by railed curtains) there

was a need for a set of altar dressings. These were made by my uncle (also named Vic) who lived in London and was employed as a printer at the famous, but now defunct, glossy periodical Illustrated London News. After RAF training in Canada he had earlier been a Lancaster bomber pilot. I recall that he hand-made three sets of altar cloths, one predominantly white/cream which was the set most regularly used, the other two sets being green and red respectively. I think that he was present for the 'unveiling', but I can't be sure.

Hall activities

The Hall was central to many of the celebrations for the Queen's Coronation in 1953 and I particularly remember a television set being brought in so that everyone could try to watch the proceedings. This would have been a small black and white screen; I think it was probably the first time that I saw a television. (Ten years later I was working for the BBC as a technician at the newly-opened Television Centre in London's White City.) There was a Sports Day as part of the overall celebrations, but that was held in one of Mr Lilleywhite's nearby fields, not at the Hall.

The Hall was used for regular church worship in the early days, with hymns accompanied by Mrs Boughton on the harmonium. But over the years the activities I most recall because of their frequency and attendance were:- Billiards/Snooker Club, Youth Club, Whist Drives, Beetle Drives, Country Dancing, Saturday Night Dances, Harvest Suppers and Coffee Mornings. For many years my father operated a library, under the auspices of the Kent County Library. We also should not forget the Guy Fawkes Bonfire Nights which took place for many years immediately behind the Hall. It seemed that the bonfire was always larger than the one the year before and sometimes the embers were still smouldering two days later.

Life around The Lane

As mentioned earlier, very few people owned cars in the 1950s and this had a major affect on daily life. A great deal of shopping (which took place more frequently than today, because no-one had a fridge or freezer either) came up from Wincheap or Canterbury by hand, or on the handlebars of a bike. Some businesses made deliveries of groceries etc and most notably Mr Scrivener was still making Saturday morning deliveries with a horse and cart from his hardware shop in Wincheap until the mid-50s, at which time he became motorised. (His son Anthony is today a very famous QC.)

As children we went everywhere by bike; to school and for all our leisure activities. Our place for 'hanging around' to do nothing, or to decide what to do, was the footpath stile which used to exist opposite Number 38. It was quite common to cycle to Tankerton or Herne Bay to swim. We might be gone from early morning until late at night and our parents were only vaguely aware of where we were and certainly couldn't contact us (no mobile phones in those days!) If we went 'inland', that might be to Wye or Hastingleigh. (There was a particularly steep, grassy valley at Wye that we used to 'toboggan' down.) On the way there we used to visit the Post Office/store at Waltham to buy lemonade and biscuits. We had noticed that the owner (Mr Phipps?) kept all the biscuits in a great stack of tins, standing on the floor. We would go in individually (without letting on that there were others outside), quickly note which biscuits were at the bottom of the stack and ask for those. Once he had it all back in place the next one would go in, and so on. You had to make your own entertainment in those days! Occasionally there were exchange visits with Youth Clubs in Lower Hardres or Petham; even then many of us went by bike.

We always had a pretty good time in the snow too, although that wasn't too good on a bike. Just as well there wasn't much traffic about. Activity often had to suddenly stop to make way for Police cars on their way to and from the garages which were then located at Nackington. It was particularly hairy in the dark, which was our favourite time to go sledging!

As we grew older, a number of us started doing holiday jobs on local farms. I worked for Tom Keeble at Upper Horton Farm (as well as working on farms further away) during school and

college vacations; as a result I could drive tractors and Land Rovers long before I was legally entitled to drive cars on the road!

Leaving New House Lane

Now, to tie up the loose ends. I basically left New House Lane in 1967 (after university) and have been a very infrequent visitor in recent times. By then the family had grown, so that I now had two brothers and two sisters. All have gradually moved away and made their homes in different parts of the country. My father (Frank) died in 1980, shortly after taking early retirement. My mother (Sybil to most, Gwen to some) remained in the same house (Number 46) for almost 40 years until going into care in the mid-90s. She died in 1997.

In conclusion

If you have stuck with me by reading this far, I hope that you have found something to interest you. Best Wishes to you all from me Vic Goddard.