

'That's the last time I'm fixing your bike!'

Last summer James Smith and Lucy Maple revealed what they got up to as teenagers in and around New House Lane during the long school holidays, taking care not to give too much away — they may now be grown-ups in their late twenties, but they're not too old for a telling-off from their mums and dads. They

needn't have worried too much, though, as the previous generation clearly had more to hide from their own parents.

Here, James' dad Colin reveals what he and *his* gang got up to around Hilltop in the fifties when they were kids ... *(Someone should've kept a closer eye on them!)*

THE YEAR always started with snow, which brought all the Gang out on to the piste, namely the larger of the two hills in Merton Lane. A fleet of sledges all lined up to see who could go the furthest that developed into the Formula 1 of sledging, with two sledges lashed together making a formidable articulated machine loaded with as many passengers as possible. Didn't it go! Usually depositing the occupants unceremoniously at the bottom of the hill. There were the occasional infiltrators from Cossington Road, sparking off major conflicts settled with WMS (wet moulded snow, otherwise known as snowballs). Who won? Must have been the Gang of '56.

Could the kids do it now? Unfortunately not—too many cars, too dangerous and remembering the intensity of the snowball fights, everyone would end up with ASBOs.

THE EASTER period heralded Mother's Day where a trip to Mr Hoare's smallholding was essential to buy field-grown daffodils for mum. Buying as many as you could carry for very little money made you mum's favourite for days. What a result?

We did not have to cycle to the Bon-Bon for sweets as we had our very own village store, a bit like Ike's store in *The Walton's*. The downside here was rationing—we were, after all, the War Time Babies. But what excitement when rationing was abandoned and Wagon Wheels appeared. Kids, they were enormous!

British Bulldog and Man Hunt are just buzzwords. The real game was for two teams - one to defend the area around the telephone box the other to attack it by getting to it undetected or caught. It took in the field above, on the corner of Iffin and NHL, Lovers Walk (how many of you can identify this walk?), banks, trees etc. Health and Safety—what Health and Safety? On reflection it *was* dangerous, however we never lost anyone, perhaps more by luck than judgement.

The woods at the top of the Lane had to be explored, bomb craters to be found, trees to climb, trial courses to be ridden on bikes, often resulting in a damaged machine. My Dad, saying

4



With a little help from his old friend Lucy Maple, James Smith

(left), now a 25 year-old public relations executive living in London, reveals what he and the other local kids got up to in the long summer holidays and offers some top tips for today's teenagers...



Keeping an eye out for parents on the warpath. Members of the timeless gang: James Smith (bottom right) with Kelly Allen and Matt Sweet and, on the roof, Lucy Maple with David Ansley and visiting friend Kevin.

10 ways to have fun this summer (if you're 16 or under)

THE LONG HOT days of summer in New House Lane - a child's paradise? Or a desperately tedious routine of sitting around waiting for something to happen.

We were lucky, we talked from the vintage years of '45-'49 and with a little imagination and good friends, summer could always be a lot of fun. The first day of the holidays was a time to celebrate: school work could be forgotten until September, new adventures were just around the corner, routines of summers gone-by reappeared and friendships rekindled. Indeed, the romantic relations of New House Lane were more like something out of East Enders.

So, if you're young and you find yourself stuck for something to do this summer, here's our top ten list:

Explore the countryside: Rumour has it that there's more to Kent than Thanington Without. Highlights include the fords of Bridge, hills of Petham, bike trails of Chartham Hatch and the slopes of Tankerton.

British Bull Dog: What better use of the front

Combine harvesters: Great fun! Never get too close, but the hay bales provide countless opportunities for inventions of new games (just don't let the farmer catch you!).

Rounders: The corn has been harvested - you have a whole new playing surface!

Romantic liaisons: With six weeks to spend in each other's pockets it's bound to happen to one or two of your friends. The trouble starts when one of those friends ends up preferring another friend and decides to swap halfway through the summer.

Video, sleepover nights: It's every parent's duty to host (and fund) a summer video night. Whether they have a decision in choosing what you watch is down to your own negotiating skills.

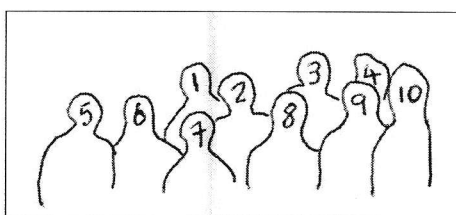
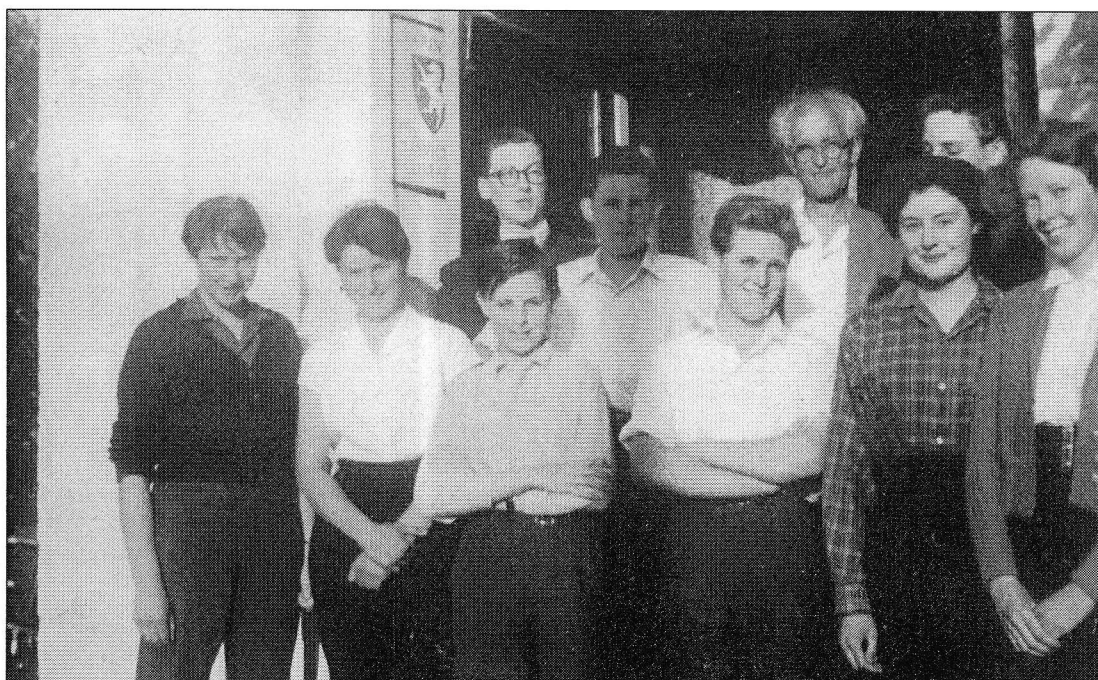
Misadventures: This one comes with a heavy health warning and usually doesn't involve any real

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every time 'this is the last time I'm fixing your bike!'. But he always did.

SPRING INTO SUMMER - the meadow opposite the Hall became our recreation ground with the sheep taking off to the other side. Memorable cricket matches were played out often with dads joining in. I can't recall any ball tampering, perhaps we had standards. The first stile on the path to Cockering became our meeting point where we would plan the next adventure. The Gang of '56 Think Tank had no boundaries.

Summer holidays called for serious planning, particularly



'Summer holidays called for serious planning'....
back row: Keith Goddards (1), Tony Knife (2),
Mr Boughton (3) Colin Smith (4); front row: Jill
Garvin (5), Jenny Clements (6), Vic (Rolston)
Goddards (7), Martin (Bunny) Bundock (8),
Ann Knife (9), Pam Keen (10).

the adventure to the Devils Drinking Trough on the Wye Downs. Off we would go on our bikes with a vast sum of money to buy some biscuits and a bottle of Bing with a flip action top, 3d (that's 1.1/4p) back on the empty. Bing was never the same when production shifted from Canterbury and went to a plastic bottle.

The purchases were made at Waltham Post Office and we would go in one by one to buy our bottle of Bing and select biscuits always from the bottom of the stack. For the younger amongst you, biscuits were loose in tins—they did not always come in wrappings that you can't open without breaking the biscuits. The Post Master knew we were having a joke with him but never showed it, but then he must have liked us - he smiled taking our money.

AUTUMN and Guy Fawkes kept us going as the days turned dark and cold and November the 5th was an important date in the diary. We started collecting all the unwanted combustible materials around the neighbourhood to build a giant of a bonfire. There were rivals in the road, but the one at the Haven was always the biggest. We collected for weeks and built a triumph of art and engineering, only for my father to pull it all down and build it more safely.

Pocket money was saved for fireworks, which were purchased from Manklows paper shop in Wincheap, sadly no

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longer there. These were bought weekly and built into a fantastic collection. These fireworks were the business and didn't the bangers then go BANG! On the night, the dads lit the bonfire and managed the fireworks and mums would bake potatoes in the ashes, each a memorable occasion.

DECEMBER AND CHRISTMAS - even more excitement kicking off with Pam Keens' (33 NHL) birthday [redacted] and a kids traditional party with games and excellent food, even though times were austere. What a wonderful start to the season.

All the above comes with a health warning. There were only about 10 or 12 regular vehicles using the roads and four of them were the butcher (Mr. Hills) the milkman (Hambrook's) the baker (Ron Evans of Hoppers) and Buttons (now Bookers) delivering to the store. The ironmongers (Goodman's) sold cleaning materials and paraffin that were delivered by horse and cart; and Wincheap farm still had a horse and cart operated by Mr. Sexton, known to us as Baggy Trousers.

Laws and times were different then and awareness of danger different also. I presume our parents knew the risks but were prepared to take them. And appeared, most of the time at least, to trust us. I'm not sure I would have!