

Hello to all Fleetville Diaries members and friends. Another sprinkling of east end bits and pieces to see you through June. Perhaps much the same is being published in localities all over the UK. There are just under 50,000 cities, towns and villages; if only half are re-inventing exciting ways of telling parts of the story of their community history, what an enriching resource that must be.

TEMPORARY CHANGE TO HATFIELD ROAD

It may have come as a complete surprise that a temporary widening of the footpath has been arranged for Hatfield Road to make it possible for pedestrians to walk along the north side while keeping to social distancing rules. Apart from occasional road works it is thought there has only been one previous occasion when such an extensive blockage of the road has occurred without warning and with serious intent. In 1940 road blocks were installed a short distance along four of the five roads forming The Crown junction, as well as those around the St Peter's roundabout, and the Smallford crossroads. The concrete blocks effectively narrowed the road to a single lane to negotiate the space between the blocks. The Hatfield Road blocks were at Albion Road and Granville Road. No photos have been found but it is thought they, and their guards (billeted at the Crown Hotel), remained in place for three years. Let's hope today's restrictions remain for a rather shorter period.



Example road blocks at Farnham.



The road blocks were at the foot of the hill.



COURTESY PETER SPARY

EARLY FLEETVILLE DISSERTATION TRANSCRIBED

David has transcribed a dissertation prepared by former Woodland Drive resident Barbara Clements from 1939 to recently. Barbara taught widely in St Albans, and was Head of Bernards Heath Infants; even returning in retirement to assist at nearby Oakwood School in its early days. Barbara explored a number of the local industries for her training dissertation, one of them at Cotsmoor, part of the W O Peake combine opposite Clarence Park. Because it features another former resident of Woodland Drive we include this quote: *"if there are a lot of coats of one style, they are cut with a band knife. This is a knife operated by electricity, it is about two inches broad and is a continuous belt of metal which revolves around. The material to be cut is*

laid up against the knife. This is very skilled work and very dangerous, therefore the man who operates it is highly insured." Ron Spary was an experienced employee of the firm and he is shown working at this potentially dangerous machine at some time in the 1950s. No automation, little health & safety, and clearly no distancing (technical, social or otherwise) between man and machine!



PREFABS MOVED!

Last month we showed a delightful picture, taken in 1953, of a row of prefab homes, courtesy Marconi Instruments Heritage Collection. It was labelled Hill End Lane, and a lot of time was spent on locating the site; the most likely being the former siding at the station.

Alex provided conclusive evidence that the sidings were still in use when the mature gardens in front of the prefabs would have been laid out. So we sought other locations, and two sprang to mind. One is Cottonmill, a few of whose prefabs are still in situ and occupied. Another estate arrived in 1947 on both sides of Valley Road. By referring to maps and aerial photographs of the early post-war period we have been able to establish that this group of prefabs had been along the eastern arm of Lectern Lane, Cottonmill. One of the photos also showed an early post-war house built by the council in Holyrood Crescent. Fortunately there were only two



COURTESY MARCONI INSTRUMENTS HERITAGE COLLECTION

locations where prefabs were arranged in detached lines, others being semi-detached or in terraces. So the location appears to be conclusively identified, as shown in the 1963 map (left). Nevertheless we are sending details to Sopwell Residents' Association to compare what we have with its records. Since the photo is in the Marconi Instruments Heritage Collection we assume the company has an interest in the site, and therefore a number of its employees were housed in at least some of the prefabs along Lectern Lane and close by.

DUVET HOME

As we walk along our local roads we come across renovation work such as this and wonder what is going on. The homes in much of Woodland Drive were built in the 1930s by AA Welch, who had a house built for his family in Beaumont Avenue. These homes had solid external walls – that is, no cavity between an inner and outer wall, a method which was growing in popularity at the time. As current occupiers will appreciate it takes a lot more energy to keep them warm in winter.

In this example, a lot of extension seems to be taking place, mainly at the rear, while retaining the existing frontage design (I hope). What is not covered by new extension, insulation and new external walls are being added to the exterior. When the “Meccano” framework is removed at the end of the project it is hoped the new version will blend in with the existing Welch streetscape. Another tiny step towards our carbon neutral 2050 deadline.



ANOTHER PARTY

At an appropriate time another street party picture has emerged. Woodland Drive has a history of such events, and this one (left) was the very first, in 1945. The road was developed in two halves, and although a few homes in the northern section were complete by 1940, the street party was held in the finished southern half. A member of the Goodey family lived in one of the houses shown, and it looks very much as if the company of bakers and caterers kindly supplied the folding tables and chairs normally used for its commercial events.

There were certainly plenty of children already for what was a new street, which promised well for Mike's future friends list! Although at this scale identification is not easy, Mike and his mum are certainly present. Not quite two years old and already making appearances!

THE OAKLANDS WAY

Ever since Oaklands Mansion ceased to be a private residence subtle changes have taken place occasionally for its various occupiers. The large site was used for military training and prisoner accommodation during WW1, Herts County Council then acquired the property for the Agricultural and Horticultural Institute. During this lengthy occupancy came improvements to the infrastructure, land and equipment, but only slowly and modestly. Those of us on the outside delighted in visits to its open days; some even remember undertaking occasional Saturday work bagging spuds or removing stones. The Rose Society arrived for a few years to establish its trials process before transferring to a new location at Chiswell Green.



With changes to tertiary education provision smaller colleges amalgamated on multiple sites. Oaklands became one of the sites for a new college called, er, Oaklands! Much confusion abounded about the location of the multi-campus establishment, and the agricultural college campus was addressed Smallford, even though it remains at Oaklands – someone will probably tell you why. In a bid to finally update the facilities and move the city campus to Oaklands, permission and funding was provided, but then withdrawn when work was partly complete. This is the reason for new houses being completed at the Sandpit Lane side of the campus. Finally the appearance of new buildings and sports facilities is the latest upgrade to a site which has a history extending back to at least the fourteenth century when it wasn't called Oaklands at all, but Three Houses. At least we think that one is a little more obvious to work out.

REMEMBER THIS?

We are, of course, disappointed not to be able to hold our garden party at Terry's house this year, but we have our memories to fall back on, and some pictures. This sample photo was taken on a glorious afternoon in July 2015. The garden must have been approaching capacity; conversation, music, food, drink, not to mention the generosity and hospitality of Helen and Terry and their family, made this and other events at number 35 most memorable.

YOUR TURN?

Ideas for items, pictures, comments – all are welcome. Meanwhile, enjoy sunny June and the prospect of another newsletter at the start of July. How time flies!

mikeneighbour@mac.com

