

# A childhood at Staines in the 1950's

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## Introduction

The Taylor Woodrow development of some 300 houses off the Kingston Road at Shortwood Common, Staines, was built in 1934 – 35. This comprised Fenton Avenue, Kenilworth Gardens, Strode's Crescent, Petersfield Road and Warwick Avenue, and formed a relatively self-contained community with its small shopping parade and dairy, and the new redbrick Christchurch.

Only the pub, the "Jolly Butcher" on the main road opposite the top of Fenton Avenue (pictured in 1997) predated the development; it was originally built to serve travellers from London and until then was surrounded by green fields.

The houses comprised two main types, 3-bedroom semis and 2-bedroom terraced houses. Fenton Avenue and Kenilworth Gardens were mainly the latter, in blocks of four, with the semis on the corner plots only. The other roads comprised mainly just the semis.



## Our Staines House

When Dad's employers, the insurance brokers Norman Frizzell & Partners, were evacuated from their City of London offices to Staines upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, Mum & Dad also moved home from their native Walthamstow to Staines, initially taking a flat above the women's wear shop, "Lesley" in the Broadway, further along Kingston Road towards Staines. However, they were soon able to rent one of the Taylor Woodrow terraced houses, at 20 Fenton Avenue. While their husbands were away on war service, Mum lived here together with her sister Vera. After the war, as a result of the owner defaulting on his mortgage payments, my parents were given the option to purchase the house outright for £432, in 1946. They were to remain there until Frizzells moved away from the London area altogether, to Bournemouth, Dorset in April 1970. The picture was taken in October 1962.....

I was born in October 1947 and lived in this house until leaving for university at Bangor, North Wales in October 1966. It was thus entirely due to the activities of Mr. Hitler that I entered the world some five or six years later than might otherwise have been the case, and at Staines rather than Walthamstow!



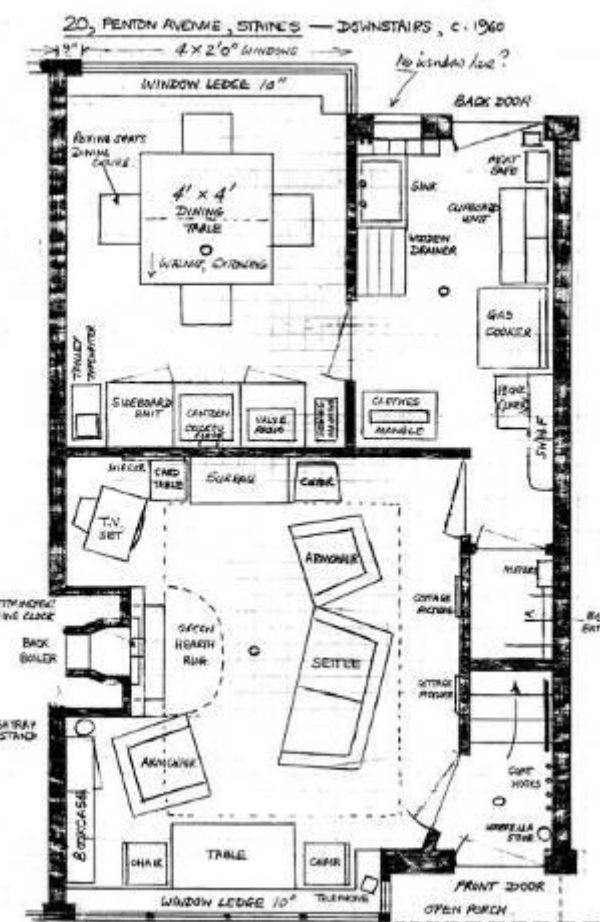
Our house layout and furnishing, and the gardens are shown in the plans below, as they would have been circa 1960. The kitchen was extensively modernised about that time, and is shown in its previous state,

more or less “as-built”, likewise the bathroom. The lounge suite dated from 1940 and comprised rather boxy seats covered in brown “Rexine” material. These were replaced by a more modern suite at this time. Some of the items and general décor are seen in the photos following.

Our first television set was obtained in 1955, a “Bush” model with heavy wooden case and a tiny 9” screen – black and white only of course. It cost the enormous sum of £52, about a month’s wages then. One or two of the neighbours had bought a set a few years earlier, specifically for the Coronation, but we chose instead to brave the crowds in London for the occasion, and ended up seeing very little. The event that prompted our (and many others’) purchase was the start-up of the second channel, ITV, complete with adverts for the first time.

Most of the best programmes were however on “the BBC”, the afternoon children’s shows Andy Pandy, The Flowerpot Men, Harry Corbett with “Sooty” and “Sweep”. On Saturday evenings, the “6.5 special” music show, “Dixon of Dock Green” and “Hancock’s Half Hour”. “Quatermass and the Pit” gave all us kids nightmares, but we still watched it avidly!

“Railway Roundabout” was an excellent speciality programme, never bettered since, and I also enjoyed the

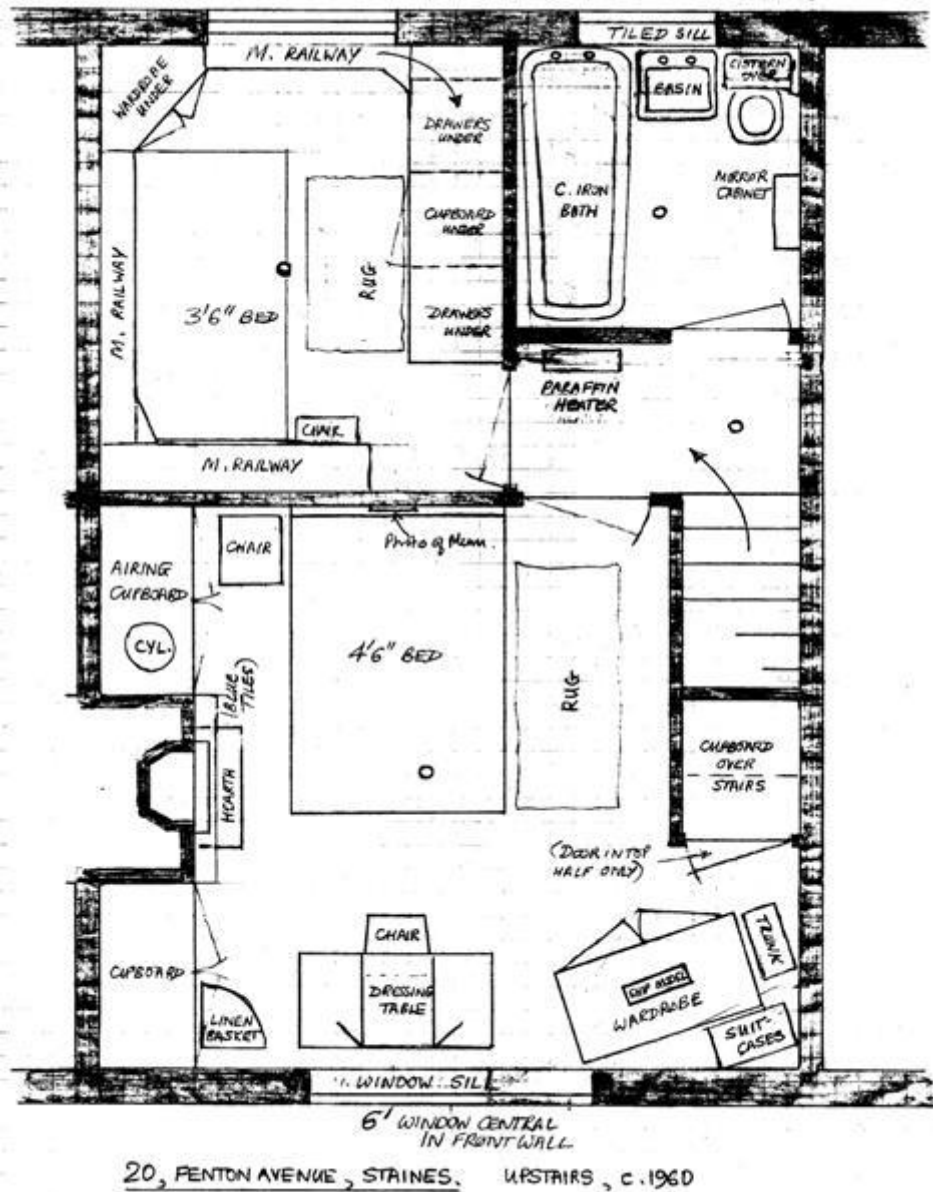


original “Railway Children” series. For all their high cost, television sets did not last very long in those days; the vacuum tube went soft. These pictures, taken around 1962, show that our original set had by then been replaced by a much more modern looking one.



Mum used to work at home doing accounts and letters for Frizzells and various local firms, and her big black Remington typewriter was kept on the tea trolley in the dining room when not in use. There was also a valve radio, which Mum listened to while doing the housework in the mornings, she had a fine voice, and sang along to the hits of the day on “Housewives Choice” hosted by Jimmy Young on the Light Programme, amongst others I particularly recall “Wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen” as one of her favourites. There was also the “Archers” of course, then as now just after seven every evening, about the time Dad arrived home from work. This was on the other main radio channel, the Home Service. And on Saturday evening around teatime the monotonous drone of the football results, with Dad carefully checking his Littlewood’s pools coupon entry on the green baize folding card table. Other popular radio programmes were “The Clitheroe Kid”, the Goon Show, and “Uncle Mac” for us children on Saturday mornings.

Out in the garden shed were several other old valve radio sets, which no longer worked well, if at all. I spent many happy hours dismantling and cleaning these in the workshop, testing and changing the valves, which probably did more than anything to awaken my subsequent interest in Electronics as a career. The genuine Swiss cuckoo clock in the dining room, also a wedding present, kept good time well into the 1960's, although the cuckoo himself failed to perform as intended latterly.



My back bedroom is shown just after dad had installed his home-built low-level units, with model railway on top, fully described with pictures etc elsewhere. Mum often had difficulty getting us all together for a meal, as I would be engrossed up here, and Dad usually out in his workshop in the back garden shed. So we rigged up a bell system, with two bell pushes mounted in an old tobacco tin on the wall above the butler sink in the kitchen, and ordinary household doorbells to summon us to lunch or tea!

There was no central heating until a basic system was installed in the mid-1960's. Just the open hearths for coal fires in the lounge (which we always referred to as the "front room") and the main bedroom. When I was off school unwell in the depths of winter, I would sleep in the front bedroom during the daytime as it was much more cosy in here than in my room.

When it was really cold, the paraffin heater on the landing was kept going day and night, mainly to try to prevent the plumbing freezing up, and stank the place out. Even so, I often had ice on the inside of my bedroom window in the mornings.

In the front bedroom, the built-in cupboard over the stairs was to me a treasure-trove when young. My parents kept a lot of wartime stuff in here for some years, including Dad's RAF uniform and some very smelly black rubber gas masks; I dreaded that the day should come when we might have to use these! Also, all his cigarette card and stamp collections, and photograph albums with pictures of Calcutta and the Himalayan mountains in wartime, and a complete set of the heavy "War Illustrated" encyclopaedias. The Christmas coloured lights and the tinsel decorations were carefully stowed away in boxes, to be brought out each year to decorate the small fir tree in a tub, and the lounge picture rails. I made up yards of "paper chains" each year, from bits of various pastel coloured sticky paper, both for home and for our school classroom.

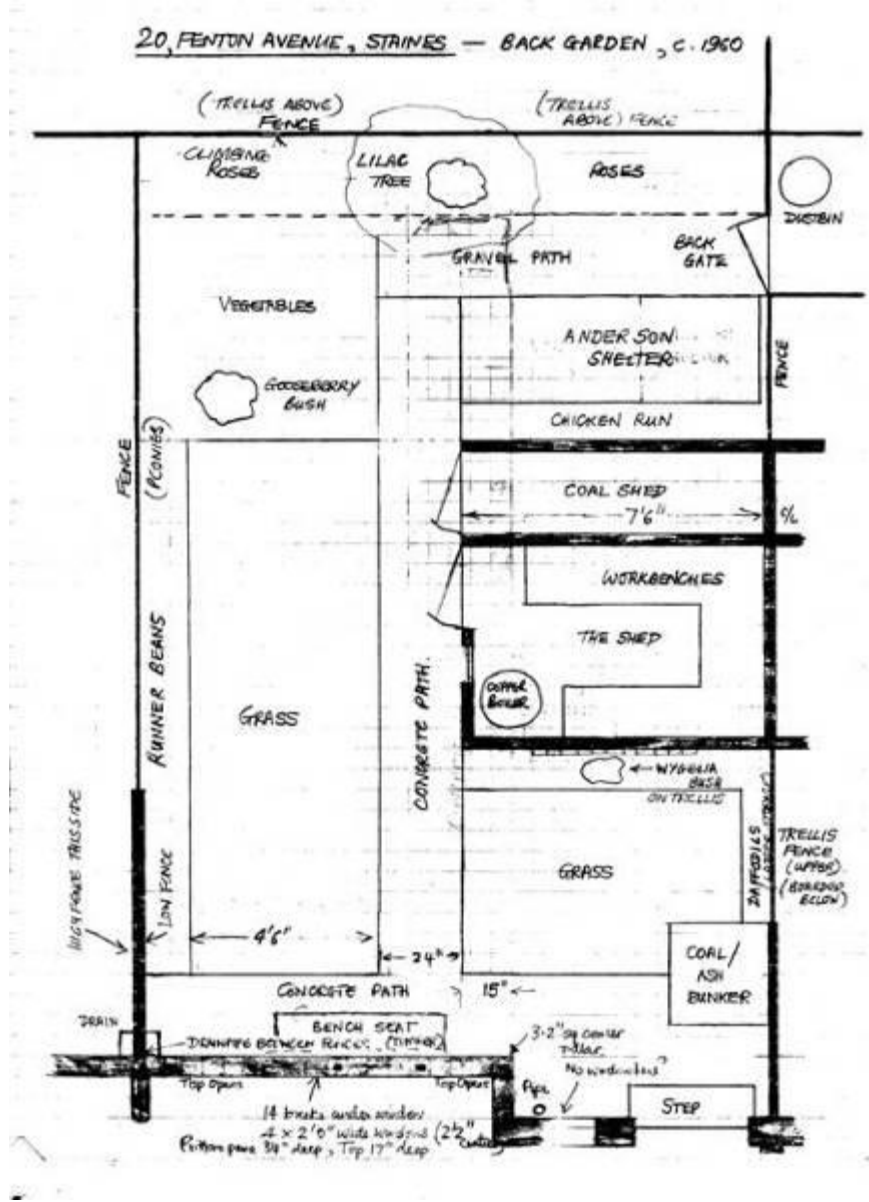
Behind the wardrobe were kept the large wooden trunk and holiday cases, also the black tin trunk which accompanied dad throughout his wartime travels, and still exuded sand from the desert around Tel Aviv from its hinges and joints. The ship model, the “Golden Hind” was about 18” long and 15” high, hand-built by Cecil Powley and given to Mum & Dad as a wedding present. It included fully detailed rigging and many miniature turned brass cannon. As Mum always used to say, “a nightmare to dust”

The bathroom suite was original to the house, comprising freestanding white enamelled bath, white china washbasin and lavatory, the latter with wooden seat and overhead cast-iron cistern with pull-chain. The racket this thing made when flushing used to fill me with terror, but later I was fascinated by the mechanics of it, and climbed somewhat precariously up onto the window shelf to get a better look. The pipe work was all exposed, that for the bath taps disappearing through holes in the floorboards. Mum lost a ring down here during the war, and despite careful searching this was never found, even when the bathroom suite was replaced and the opportunity taken to lift the floor boards all around. It is probably still down there somewhere now!

Monday morning, as in nearly every other house in the land, was washday. Before breakfast, Dad would fill the “gas copper” in the shed with cold water, add soap flakes and light the gas burner underneath. It would take an hour or so to heat the water sufficiently, whereupon the weeks washing was loaded and agitated by hand using a wooden “dolly tub”. As soon as I was old enough to reach into the top of the copper safely, this was my job during the school holidays.

Afterwards, all the items were removed using wooden tongs, dripping hot soapy water everywhere, into bowls then taken to the kitchen sink for rinsing. Shirt collars and cuffs were scrubbed on the corrugated washboard at the kitchen sink. Dad still used shirts with detachable collars, fastened by studs, at this time, but my school uniform grey ones had integral collars. Being this boring colour meant that they showed the dirt less, I suppose. The “copper” was emptied through the tap at the bottom into a bucket, requiring several trips to the nearest drain to empty, an eternity while the last few inches of water drained out before the inside could be wiped clean and dry. Meanwhile, the mangle was used to get all but the most fragile items of laundry as dry as possible – my job to turn the heavy cast-iron handle. And then there was still the ironing to do!

Immediately outside the back door was another household necessity, the “coal bunker”. Though we had a large “coal hole” next to the workshop, enough was brought out in one go to last about a week and kept in this stout wooden box with its heavy lifting lid, from where the “indoor” coal scuttle could be filled easily



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and cleanly as required. Ash and any unburnt coal for re-use were also stored in here. There were two small areas of grass, which required only the small push-along hand mower to keep it in trim.

Over by the shed wall was a large Wygelia bush, trained up trellising. On the long fence down the north side Dad always grew runner beans, which did very well here facing the sun. Lower down were peonies, a gooseberry bush in the centre that fruited well, a small vegetable patch, and a pretty lilac tree. Down here we let off a few fireworks on the night of November 5<sup>th</sup> (never on any other day!), as did most families with children, as there were no “community events” then. The Catherine Wheel was nailed to the trunk of the lilac tree, a small bonfire on the vegetable patch got rid of the year’s garden rubbish, and I waved sparklers around gleefully.

Two items from the war remained on the patch of muddy ground behind the coal shed. Dad kept 3 or 4 chickens in wooden coop and wire netted run until well into the 1950’s, as did most other households. I went out in the early morning to look for the eggs and bring them in, a useful food supplement as rationing continued until as late as 1952. Then there was the rusty iron Anderson shelter, with earth and turf on top, which took a great deal of effort to dig out and break up; the metal sheets were taken away by the “Rag & Bone Man” who still came down our road once a week or so with his horse and cart. His distinctive shout, at frequent intervals, was probably meant to be “Old Iron” but with the monotony of repetition day in day out over many years sounded more like “Whoaaaaaargh”. He hated kids, would shout and wave his stick at us, and wouldn’t let anyone near his horse.

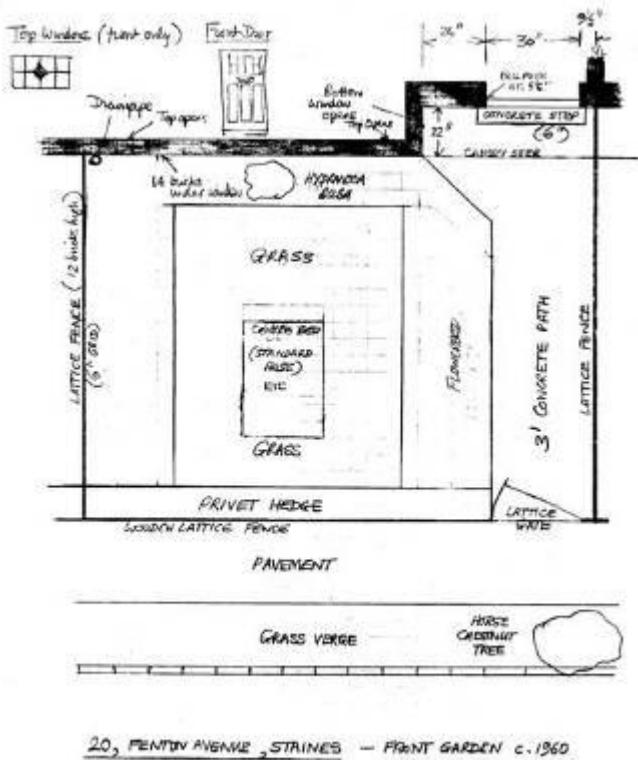
At the bottom of the garden a wooden gate led into the “back alley”, a useful route for the coal man to make his deliveries, and to trundle the lawnmower round to the front garden in the summer, keeping the grass pathway in trim on the way. A whole winter’s supply of coal was ordered in the summer months as it was much cheaper then, and delivered in 1cwt black hessian sacks from Fear Brothers’ flatbed lorry. The weight of each bag was checked on a set of portable scales, to the customer’s satisfaction. They were then hoisted aloft the coalman’s brawny shoulders (which were protected by a sort of leather apron) and lugged round to the coal shed.

All the houses had these back alleyways, but in order to get to that serving my friend Keith Wright’s house in the school holidays, I had to climb over the fence by our gate and nip across the bottom of the garden owned by an elderly lady who rarely ventured out, and through her gate on the far side. This irritated her intensely, and she complained to Dad on at least one occasion. Dad then put up trellising and prickly climbing roses on our bottom fence as a deterrent.....



However, about this time Dad also arranged to take on the bottom part of the garden of a Kenilworth Gardens house adjacent to our alley to work as a vegetable allotment, and by using their gate I could now get across to the Wright’s alley on that side. There was still a fence to climb over on the far side, but this was far quicker than going all round by the roads out the front.

In the front garden was another small patch of grass, with a centre bed containing a standard rose, a very common feature at that time. There was a large Hydrangea bush under the windows, and flowerbeds with a good display of colour in summer, mainly Wallflowers and Antirrhinums which did very well on the sandy soil. We had lots of centipedes in the garden at a certain time every year; they fascinated me.



The fencing to all the houses as built was a standard wooden lattice, with matching front gate. Along the pavement side was a well-tended privet hedge which had completely engulfed the fence. About 1961, Dad and our new neighbour at no. 22 built a fine new solid brick wall along the front; he then made a heavy oak garden gate to replace the old one which had by now almost collapsed. The front garden was shaded in summer by a small horse chestnut tree in the grass verge beyond the pavement, where I used to stand on an old chair and reach up to try and get the conkers down.

There then followed the ritual of carefully piercing with a meat skewer and threading of string, ready to challenge all comers to a "conker fight".

Sadly, the tree got too big, the roots started to wreck the pavement, so the council men came along and cut it down, also putting tarmac where the grass had been, ready for the explosion of car ownership

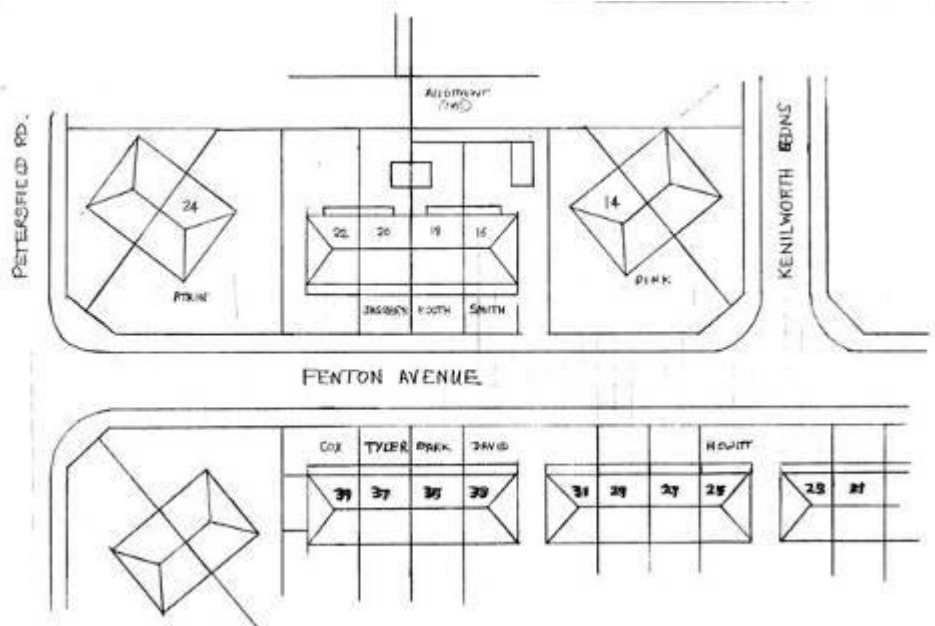


that was to take place during the 1960's.....

By 1967 we were a "2-car" family. Here is my £50 ex GPO Telephones Morris Minor van (800cc, 1959 vintage), freshly repainted in GWR carriage livery! Behind it is dad's £100 Minor saloon 300KCG (1100cc, 1964):

## Neighbours

Next door to us at no. 22 was "The Old Lady". Presumably she had a name (from memory, I thought Mrs Grey, but the Electoral Registers now preserved at the London Metropolitan Archives show that she was in fact Ellen Rea) but to us she was always known thus. I frequently ran errands up to the Victoria Parade or Broadway shops, and took things in to her during the school holidays. I think she had lost her husband during the First World War and like many others never remarried. After she passed on (the civil records show, in the Spring of 1954 aged 83), a family called Smith apparently moved in, but they are not recalled at all so presumably kept themselves very much to themselves. They stayed only for a few years, and about 1960 a





young couple with a baby moved in (the Mitchell's); the husband's hobby was breeding ferrets, which would occasionally escape and cause mayhem.

On the other side at 18 were the Booths. Joe Booth would house-sit for my parents when they went out to Frizzells annual dinner-dance in London; the picture shows them all dressed up and ready to go in 1962.....

Joe's passion in life was "Harry Lime" on the television, and he was constantly humming the theme tune. Later came the Walkers, an older couple whose children had left home.

At 16 were more Smiths, much more friendly this time, with two older boys. Both Mr and Mrs Smith worked appropriately behind the counters at W. H. Smith's newsagent & booksellers in Staines High Street, and for some time I thought that they actually owned the business!

In the corner semi-detached, no 14, were the Pinks, very quiet and somewhat mysterious. Around the corner at the first terraced house, no.3 Kenilworth Gardens Linda Parker lived with her mother. Linda was a year or so older than me, and also an only child; I don't know what had happened to her father. She often came across into our back garden to play, though I suspect she was not supposed to, and had a delightful trait of dropping her knickers and squatting down for a pee behind our Anderson shelter. Obviously an act of utter rebellion against her very strict upbringing!

In the other corner house no.24, somewhat larger than the rest were the Atkin family from Scotland, with two younger boys who were the grateful recipients of many of my old Dinky Toys etc when I had outgrown them.



This 1962 picture looks from our front garden towards Petersfield Road. The original fence survives between the gardens, but dad and Mr. Mitchell at 22 have just completed their new brick wall to the road. Only one car, a Ford Prefect, is in view – how different is the scene today! Presumably the children are local – anyone recognise themselves?

Across the road at the end-terrace house 39 were an elderly couple, the Cox's. Mrs Cox was confined to a wheelchair for many years.

Alfred Cox was one of the very few in our road to own a motor car, and he just had room for a small garage to keep it in alongside the house. After his wife passed away in the Spring of 1957 (the registers show her as Marion Cox, and that she was in fact aged only 64) Dad helped him to draw up a new will, and acted as one of the witnesses. I was also thus enabled to learn how such things worked and how careful one had to be with all the details.

At no 35 were the Darke's, another mysterious couple we knew very little about, and were not often seen out. Even more mysterious were those at no 37, I cannot recall anything about them at all! (the registers show that they were called Tyler, and I do remember that name now)

At 33 were the David's (Donald and Margaret), from South Wales. Their son Trevor was around the same age as me (though strangely we did not go to the same schools), and Owen a couple of years younger. I stayed at their house during the daytime for a couple of weeks while Dad was in Ashford Hospital being treated for his stomach ulcer, and Mum had to make the tedious trek by two buses each way to visit him. Mrs David was very keen to administer the dreaded Cod Liver Oil to me and her two boys, and she also always seemed to have a quantity of the white "National Dried Milk" cans lined up ready for use on the dresser in the front room. I went to Trevor's large and very boisterous birthday party one afternoon, in

which we were all supposed to do a party trick, sing a song, recite a poem or some such. Being very shy, I was duly terrified at the prospect, and avoided my turn by hiding away until I was sure this bit was all over and we could get started on the food.

The only other neighbours I knew at all were those who had children the about same age as me, and so going to school together. At no 25 was a pretty but very quiet girl, Helen Hewitt. One of the mothers at another house along here became the subject of all the street gossip for a few days when she allegedly bought a refrigerator on the H.P. (Hire-Purchase, or the “Never-Never” as it was commonly called, a loan system paid back in small regular instalments to a door-step collector). This was quite unheard of amongst the proud, upright general populace, and regarded as an act of the utmost shamefulness!

All my other school contemporaries lived in Petersfield Road or Strode’s Crescent. A girl named Carol (Rudge, I think) lived in one of the terraced houses in the short stub section of Petersfield that continued west of Fenton Avenue. Just past her house was an extremely ugly black-tarred corrugated iron fence about 12 feet high, extending right across the road, and blocking off access to the very posh large Edwardian houses in Acacia Road beyond. It seems that when our estate was built, the residents here took a very dim view of the new development, and had this erected to ensure that their peace and tranquillity could not be intruded upon by the common hoard. This remarkable feature remained in place for the whole time we lived in Staines, and maybe is still there even now! It also explains why the house numbers in Petersfield Road started at 31, rather than 1; clearly the road was originally intended as a straight continuation of Acacia.

My other friends lived in the semis fronting onto the “Green”, a thoughtfully provided, pleasant and safe grassy recreational area between Petersfield Road and Strode’s Crescent.....



Keith Wright had a younger brother Alan; they lived at 58 Petersfield, and we used to pool our extensive “Meccano” sets to construct and play with very elaborate working models there in the school holidays. Jacqueline Austin and (somewhat later) Janice Carter lived across the way in the main part of Strode’s Crescent; Jacqueline’s father was I think a motor mechanic working at “Staines Garage”, on the far side of Kingston Road quite near to the top of Fenton Avenue. He had a large old green van, and on days when the weather was really foul, we would all pile into the back of this (about 10 of us) to be taken round to Wyatt Road school, a journey of about a mile.

On all other days (except for the very first one when we started, when our mothers took us) we were expected to walk to and from, even during the “Great Smog” which started on the evening of Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1952 and lasted for 4 days. On the Monday and Tuesday mornings it was impossible to see more than a few feet in front of our faces or to breathe normally without coughing. We all set off for school as normal, wearing handkerchiefs soaked in cold water and tied firmly around our mouths and noses! (some 4000 people in London alone died as a result of this “smog”, which led to the introduction of the “Clean Air Act” a few years later, and these foul wintertime episodes gradually became a thing of the past). I think the Austin’s moved away soon after this, as I cannot recall Jacqueline going up to primary school with the rest of us.

The winter of 1962-3 was also memorable; here are two views after around 15” of snow had fallen overnight – and this was by no means the worst.....





The big freeze went on for so long that for the first time in living memory we were able to skate safely on the frozen River Thames near Staines Bridge – see later.

Though I went to North Wales to study at University College, Bangor in October 1966, my parents stayed at 20 Fenton Avenue until April 1970, when they moved to Bournemouth. Here is Moving Day, with their trusty Morris Minor....



## School

I started at Wyatt Road infant school in October 1952, on or just after my fifth birthday. This grim Victorian institution was, as the plaque just inside the front gate still shows, built in 1896, but I only found out very recently that it was in fact converted then from the St Peters Church Mission Hall erected some 25 years earlier, which explains the huge size of the main room. I seemed to be the only child starting on that day, for some reason having to wait until after my birthday instead of starting at the beginning of the school year in early September.



Mum took me in on that first day, maybe about 9.30 in the morning when classes were already under way. The formalities of initial registration were carried out in that tiny little room accessed only by an outside door just to the left of the front gate, which acted as the Headmistress's office.

I was then led into the main hall where about 4 classes were in progress, one in each corner, with the children sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor, and was settled at the back of the one in the NE corner. Having already been well versed in the “3 R’s” at home, I was delighted to find that the simple arithmetic exercises were a doddle; I was really going to enjoy this long-dreaded thing called School after all. Unfortunately this was not to last; after about an hour I was transferred to another class at the other end of the hall where things instantly seemed much more challenging, and remained that way ever after. So much so that I decided I had had enough by going-home time at 3.30pm, and had to be really strongly persuaded that evening of the need to go back in the following day and so on.

Evidently I settled after a few days, and the ensuing three years at Wyatt Road are recalled as being, mostly, very enjoyable. Our classes were then mainly held in one of the side classrooms off the back of the hall, a light airy room with some modern furniture, though a lot of the iron-framed wooden lift-up desks were very old, and we still had to use their very messy ink-pots when graduating from the initial pencils only regime to the brass-nibbed, wooden handled writing pens. Some remembered activities involved much reciting of the alphabet, and having to write out neatly our full names and addresses over and over again on a sheet of paper, presumably so that if all else failed, we should have embossed in our minds who we were and where we belonged.

I recall only a few half-hearted attempts being made to “correct” my left-handedness, as such was now beginning to be accepted as a harmless trait; not very many years previously it would have been forcibly dealt with. Arithmetic in the first year comprised learning and reciting our times tables (up to x12) by rote, from a range of differently coloured cards which were passed around. And we had to read passages

aloud from our books in turn as we were called. Music lessons were held in an old wooden hut situated apart from the main school building, across the playground on the south side. These comprised lessons on the inevitable black Bakelite recorders, and attempts at singing in tune in which I for one failed miserably and was declared by our teacher to be “Tone Deaf”.

We had to sing of course, also in the School Assembly first thing every morning, held in the main hall with all 200 or so pupils and all the teachers present, the music mistress pounding away on the ancient piano. The repertoire of hymns seemed somewhat limited; those I will always associate specifically with Wyatt Road were (according to season) “All Things Bright and Beautiful”, “We Plough the Fields and Scatter”, “There is a Green Hill Far Away”. We had to stand still without fidgeting through all this, then prayers and the inevitable lecture about general behaviour and specific misdeeds committed which followed. Girls (always girls) frequently fainted, and had to be sat down in a corner and resuscitated.



My favourite lessons, possibly since they were the only ones to tolerate (if not exactly encourage) some degree of individual creativity, were Drawing and “Handwork” (Handicrafts). In the former I delighted in creating all manner of “Heath Robinson” contraptions, with all parts neatly labelled, and the latter produced an endless supply of wastepaper bins and plant-pot holders woven in cane and raffia, to be proudly taken home and put to good use. Amazingly, some of these lasted for many years afterwards. In the final year I became a “Book Monitor”, collecting up and stowing them away tidily in the cupboards at the end of every lesson. There were also “Milk Monitors”, responsible for dishing out those special, 1/3-pint bottles at our mid-morning break, which we all had to drink up to make us big and strong, then presumably to collect up the empties afterwards.

At lunchtime, whatever the weather, we would troop out along Wyatt Road in file, two-by-two, turning right into Edgell Road, then into the green corrugated-iron clad mission hall on the corner of Budebury Road for our meal. Rissoles, Mince or Spam fritters (my favourite) were served up, complemented by smelly cabbage and those lovely scoops of watery mashed potato with lumps in. We sat at long wooden forms either side of trestle tables, and heaven help any child who did not by then know how to use a knife and fork properly. We queued in line again for maybe bread-and-butter pudding, spotted dick and a dollop of thick lumpy custard, lurid red jelly with a brick of vanilla ice cream, or that strange frothy pink blancmange-custard.

Back to school and twenty minutes or so freedom in the playground before the afternoon classes. As well as the playground for the juniors fronting onto Langley Road (and the iron gates by which we normally entered and left the premises) there was another tarmac play area with slide, swings and wooden roundabout, beyond the very primitive roofless toilet block, hemmed in between house gardens on all sides by high brick walls topped by wire netting.

As mentioned earlier, we nearly always walked to and from school, alone or in small groups, right from age 5. For me and our neighbours, this would be along Kingston Road, crossing with the “Lollipop Lady” at the Cottage Hospital, then down Gresham Road past the station, turning into Budebury Road by the little stream bridge. We might linger on the way at the little shop just past the station footbridge which sold tasty sherbet dips for a farthing. I was very put out when these tiny coins with the wren on were phased out, and the price doubled to a halfpenny! There was a cobbler’s workshop next door where dad would often drop off a pair of shoes for re-heeling on his way to work and collect them the same evening.

More usually though, in all but the very depths of winter darkness, our walk to school involved joining the banks of the stream by one of the footpaths leading off Worple Road or Knowle Park Avenue, past fields and a small wooded area, over a little footbridge then through well-tended allotments across to Langley Road, with the school spire and tall chimneys visible from afar. In the allotments were fearsome scarecrows, and two or three ancient cast-iron water pumps fed from boreholes. We often tried working the handles of these but the mechanisms squealed alarmingly and remained rusty and bone-dry.

The stream as it meandered past the fields and trees was a favourite play place, and the usual venue for our “Nature Study” lessons (I was dismayed to find on my first visit back to the area in many years in 1993 that all of this, as well as the allotments, is now completely covered in houses). We fished in the stream pools with little nets, putting minnows and sticklebacks into large jam jars to take home. We played marbles on the flat expanses of baked mud on the banks in the summer months. Rabbits abounded, also the occasional squirrel, and we once saw a hedgehog scampering along then curling up into a tight ball when we got too inquisitive poking around in the undergrowth with sticks. Many were the nettle-stings to unprotected arms and legs, a major drawback of the then universal boys’ short trousers. And the trees were just made for climbing, we could get up quite high into the branches, and then, being completely hidden by the dense foliage, would take great delight in peeing on any unsuspecting fellow school kids (especially those junior to us) as they passed beneath!

Occasionally the stream would flood over the path, so we turned back for home; “can’t go to school today, mum, the path is flooded”. “So why not go round by the road?”. Oh dear – never thought of that – and back we were sent, now kitted out in wellington boots just in case, to arrive at school about an hour late – “sorry miss, the road was flooded”

I left Wyatt Road School in July 1955, and my final (or maybe only) “Report” from there does not make very good reading. “Conduct:- Poor”. “Manners:- Poor, but never disrespectful to his teachers”. Presumably



giving everyone else hell, then? The schoolwork was not too bad though, and I somehow even got a “good” for P.E, which I absolutely hated. The report notes that my last class teacher was “M. Jones” and the headmistress W. Williams.

I cannot honestly recall being more than averagely naughty or rebellious; the “slipper” (a gym shoe, or “plimsoll”) was administered maybe several times over the 3 years for various misdemeanours, but I can recall only one. This was for the heinous crime of “Racing” up and down the long strip of playground on the west side of the school building, an area protected from the weather by a long open veranda. Why this should have been such a sin I cannot fathom, but just possibly we may have been livening up the proceedings by wagering our hard-earned pocket-money pennies on the outcome, which entrepreneurial behaviour would most certainly have been frowned upon. I was mighty peeved at being the one who was caught and punished – as well as the slipper I also had some treasured drawings confiscated, that I had wanted to take home proudly to show to Dad. So much so that after school I lie in wait for my friend and fellow conspirator David Walker, then beat him up in the lavatories and confiscated *his* drawings. I suppose I was very lucky not to get caught and punished a second time!

I started at “big school” – Kingston Road primary – on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1955, together with nearly all of my Wyatt Road classmates, and many new ones from other areas of Staines. Whereas Wyatt Road had a total roll of about 200; an intake of 60-65 in two classes of around 30-33 each per year, Kingston Road had around 460, or about 120 per year, in 3 somewhat larger classes of 40-44. What we did not appreciate at the time was that from when it was built in 1903 until a year or two before we went there, Kingston Road had been strictly segregated into Girls’ and Boys’ schools, with even a high wooden fence separating the two areas of the playgrounds at front and back so that never the two should meet. Here are two views (front and back) at or just after completion.....



The main entrances indeed still had “Boys” and “Girls” incised in the stone arch above the doors but we thought this was a relic of prehistory and ignored by everyone. They remained thus right up until the school was sadly closed and subsequently demolished around 1997. One consequence of the recent segregation was that there was no main hall capable of accommodating all of the new combined roll, and I cannot now recall how our morning assemblies were conducted – presumably we would still have had them.

School life went on much as previously, though study of English, Maths and Science obviously gradually became more thorough and serious. We were also offered about ½ hour of basic French occasionally. Music lessons, under the formidable Miss Rae, were again held in a separate wooden hut classroom across the far side of the back playground, next to the wartime air-raid shelters which were out of bounds at all times. Music always seemed to be set apart thus – at grammar school later it was just the same – presumably so that the noise emanating would not disturb other lessons! The hut was raised up from the ground on brick piers, and there were rumours of adders nesting underneath, so we would never linger long in the vicinity.

At the other end of the air raid shelters, in the shadow of the high yellow-brick wall of the old brewery, were the outside loos – roofless and just as primitive as those at Wyatt Road. Separate blocks for the Girls and Boys, of course, each being strictly out of bounds to the others. The Girls’ block was haunted – so they said – they were always making these things up though, probably just as an excuse to get out when we chased them in there and then laid siege to the building!

In handicrafts we graduated to basic woodwork, making among other things, sets of coat hooks, and model boats, detailed with cardboard cut from Corn Flakes packets, under the close scrutiny of Mr. Plum.

My friend Christopher Clements was very keen on the model boats, and I would sometimes walk to his home in Ruskin Road with him carrying our models, to work on them further for a short while there. At that time, Mum was doing part-time accounts work at Craig's Garage on the Laleham Road nearby, so I would go there to meet her as she finished around five o'clock, then walk home together via Commercial Road, then a very muddy and pot-holed track, through to Worple Road. On a return visit to Staines in the 1990s I was amazed to find that this establishment had hardly changed at all since the 1950s.....

On other days I would go straight home as normal, and amuse myself playing in the garden until she arrived back there.



One somewhat unusual new school activity was country-dancing lessons, presumably only since the end of segregation. Because of the lack of suitable facilities at Kingston Road, we were taken by one of Harry Beach's older petrol-engined Bedford coaches to the newly completed Matthew Arnold secondary school very close to my home, for these. Surprisingly, none of us boys seemed to be at all embarrassed by this group dancing, which was greatly enjoyed by all, boys and girls alike. I only had a very short walk home afterwards, and arriving before I would normally have left school.

My class teacher in the first year (class 11) was Mr. Ofield, a genial and gentle man much loved by all; reports were now taken home annually, and mine shows that my conduct has miraculously improved; it was now deemed "Very Good"! (only to suffer a temporary relapse the following year). This was class 8, under Miss (?) P.R. Beard. Classes 5 and then 1 following were with the same teacher, Miss Kathleen Best.

Throughout the four years I was at Kingston Road, the Headmaster was R.W. Robson. The form teachers took most of the lessons themselves, but we had separate specialized teachers for scripture (PRS), music (LBR = Miss Rae) and Physical Training (RP; and now more appropriately deemed "weak"), and later for History (CC). Most of these are identified only by their initials in my reports, as I cannot now recall any names.

Most of the teaching staff had been at Kingston Road for many years and there were few changes, but we had one newcomer whose name also escapes me, an enthusiastic young graduate whom we were told came to us from the prestigious public school of Bradfield, and got rather upset when with our limited knowledge of Geography we would persistently confuse this with Bradford. Once a year or so we all had to line up for a health inspection, carried out by visitors no doubt from the Council Health dept. Including of course "Nitty Nora" inspecting thoroughly for head lice; I don't know whether she ever found any, but one of the girls in our class was often referred to very unkindly thereafter as "Fleabag"

Although others continued to have school dinners, I normally took a packed lunch to Kingston Road, and ate together with some classmates in the long covered shelter running alongside Matthew's Lane, except when the weather was very bad when we would stay inside. By the final year, we would often stay in our classroom in any case, and also play chess at lunchtime. Lunch could be supplemented by sweets from Dowler's little shop on the corner of Richmond Terrace as and when the pocket money pennies allowed, but at this busy time we were only allowed in in two's or three's, and had to form an orderly queue by the school gate. It was much easier just to slip in before or after school, the latter often being a free-for-all scrummage with the elderly owner struggling to keep control.

We had to wear uniform at all times, light grey shirts with dark grey trousers, maroon blazers and matching caps with the school name and badge sewn on. One September morning, kitted out in brand new items ready for the start of term (they rarely lasted more than one school year before needing replacement, often much less) I went over the fields at Knowle Green to do a bit of train spotting. Just as I was thinking

about going home for lunch, the heavens opened unexpectedly and I was totally drenched. Worse, by the time I arrived home, the deep maroon dye of the blazer had all run and stained my nice crisp grey shirt a fetching shade of maroon, also my underwear. Mother was of course very annoyed; though the blazer was still just about presentable, the shirt was totally ruined and she had to rush out specially to buy another. This picture, taken in 1996 from Matthew's Lane just before the school's closure shows that the blazers have largely gone, but there are now maroon pullovers instead!....



School contemporary Jacqui Schmidt (nee Tydeman) very kindly sent me this final picture of the school being demolished a few months later. Taken from the main road side, it's probably not how most of us would like to remember it though!.....



We still walked to school every day, with those smelly plastic Macs to protect the precious blazer from further disasters in the rain. On sunny days we would still detour down by the stream and woods; by this time the old house (later a private school) called "Ellerslie" where my parents had worked during the war had been demolished, together with "St Ronan's" next door, and we could explore through their overgrown gardens en route to the fields behind Knowle Green.

On the other side of Kingston Road, Knowle Green House itself was derelict, and this also was fun to explore, we found extensive remains of a home-built model railway layout in the garage outbuildings. This was soon all demolished, to be replaced by the "United Glass" office block. The latter did not seem to be a very substantial construction, and I was amused to note recently, has itself been replaced by yet another new building!

Equally surprising to me, the old farm further along next to the railway bridge, then still survived exactly as we remembered it, together with the brick steps and wooden handrail down to "Sykes' path" from the top of the bridge where I spent many happy hours watching the steam trains. Over the other side, the old Leacroft Smithy was another frequent cause of delay when walking to school; they still did some re-shoeing of horses then, and it was fascinating to stand and watch this being carried out.

I thought that the top part of Leacroft Road, past the "Red Lion" inn, together with the lane across Knowle Green now leading to the cottages at Manor Place and then into the Sykes works on the other side of the railway would perhaps have been the original route of the main road before the line was built in 1848, but have never been able to confirm this.

### **School friends – a footnote**

Just a few days after typing up the above from a few years worth of accumulated scribbled notes, I was inspired at last to join the "Friends Reunited" website. I was not expecting anyone to mention either Wyatt Road or Kingston Road that far back, but was surprised to find around 10 fellow class mates already listed. Even more amazingly there were several photographs posted that were of interest, most notably one of around 30 members of my class taking part in a school play in 1958-59, including myself, and almost all were identified!



On careful study I recalled the names of some 20 of these, and even recognised many of the faces, together with another 8 - 10 in the other photos. The others were probably in one of the other two classes in our year. Some years ago I had attempted to recall as many names as possible, and comparing this list with the new one certainly showed how memory can distort the truth. Many were nearly right, but I had put the wrong first names with the surnames in many cases. So here (and subject to further modification in future) is a list of my classmates at Kingston Road:-

Michael Cherrill	86a Gresham Road	Keith Wright	58 Petersfield Road
Christopher Clements	36 Ruskin Road	Barry Dix	65 Grosvenor Road
Nigel Walters	63 Grosvenor Road	Douglas Watts	52 Edgell Road
Keith Wright	58 Petersfield Road		

Lesley Allebone	(a shop flat at 12 The Broadway)	Geoffrey Bedser	(241 London Road)
Rosemary (Rosie) Bennett		Geoffrey Bowen	(Fairfield Terrace)
Christine Blaker		Christopher Carr	
Ruth Bovington		Brian Goodyear	
Catherine Bradley			
Daphne Castle	(Westbrook Lodge, 86 Kingston Road)		
Christina Gascoyne	(129 Petersfield Road)	David Graham	
Margaret Gautrey	(Meadway Close)	George Hanson	
Mary Glenister	(London Road)	Barry Herbert	
Margaret May	(Arnold Road)	Paul Jarvis	(Brookside Avenue)
June Miller			
Monica Pauling		Stuart McInley	(after c 1958 only)
Elaine Poole		Robert McIntyre	
Linda Salmon			
Jacqueline Tydeman	(192 Kingston Road)		
Brenda Ward	(50 Church Street)		
Julia Yaxton			(total 34 including self)

Others recalled but not entirely certain (some of these may have been at Wyatt Road but not Kingston Road; instead maybe going to Ashford, or vice versa? Or had moved away by c. 1958?):-

Carol (Rudge?)	36 Petersfield Road
Janice Carter	79 Strode's Crescent (from around 1957)
Jacqueline Austin	Strode's Crescent (moved away around 1953-54?)
Edwin Oliver	Leacroft, then George Street
David Walker	66, Kingston Road
Noel Simpson	a flat near Penton Hook Lock / Craig's Garage
Elaine Osborn	
Barry Chesney	from Ashford; he was <i>not</i> George Chesney's son though
Brian Tucker	Staines West station house
David Hopkins	

I was hoping that some at least of the school roll lists and/or registers might survive at the County Record Offices, but it appears not so. However, the local electoral rolls for most years in the 1950's are at LMA, as mentioned earlier, and they also have the baptismal registers from the Staines Anglican churches and those of the surrounding villages; these records between them helped to confirm much of the above detail. Surprisingly though, only about 10 of our class of over 40 appear to have been baptised locally, in infancy. About the same number again no doubt were, but outside of the area, only moving to Staines somewhat later.

In September 1959 I started at Strode's School, Egham, a three mile bus ride from home. Here is the splendid 1904 main building, which survives as a sixth-form college, with girls admitted also since the 1980s....



The right-hand picture shows the former almshouses on the west side of the frontage, part of a previous school on the same site. The room to the right was used for music lessons in the 1960s; the part to the left was the caretaker's store; he lived with his wife in the identical range of buildings on the east side, just visible in the left-hand view. The room nearest the school on this side was in use as a sixth-form common room by the middle 1960s. The two air-raid shelter entrances are seen, either side of the main doors; steps led down to the extensive basement cellars, which we used for storing materials and equipment in connection with the school printing club, the Caxton Club run by Rev. L.A. Preston. The front entrance doors to the main building were never used apart from by important visitors; the room to the right of them was the headmaster Mr "Jock" Brady's office, and that to the left was used by the school secretary.

## Health

As well as at school, our well-being was attended to in a variety of places. GP Dr Elven's surgery was in a private house on the south side of Kingston Road between the garage and the Broadway. This was for the inevitable coughs and colds, hopefully minimised by ritual inhalation of the Balsamic vapours at the first sign of infection in the family, head under a towel, breathing from a pudding basin full of the foul liquor on the dining-room table. For anything more serious the doctor would come to the house with his large black bag (and you were expected to be snugly tucked up in bed and looking suitably wan when he arrived).

His waiting room was the upstairs front bedroom, with lino-clad floor and green-painted walls; completely bare except for upright wooden chairs lining all four sides, and a small table for a pile of tatty magazines in the centre. There was no appointments system, you just noted very carefully how many people were in the room before you, and counted them off as they went in to see the doctor. The next patient was summonsed by means of a loud buzzer above the door, and sometimes two or three people got up at once, so it was a good idea to move to a seat nearest the door as soon as possible. Dr Elven was a long-serving and popular GP, but I managed to upset him one evening after school when I bravely went there alone to have my ears syringed – which I really hated (no gently-pulsating warm water then, just an enormous stainless steel implement thrust into each ear in turn, and the contents discharged without fuss while we were held down by the nurse). When I got home my ear started to bleed, so Dad took me back in the evening to queue up again. I was dismissed abruptly without further treatment, and my father was told the bleeding was my fault because I had been in such a hurry to get out – too right I was!

Also on the way to school was the “Grange” clinic, on the sharp corner of Gresham Road just before the station, and formerly a farm. Here we went for the novel Polio jab (and no doubt many others), more ear-syringing, and to see the fearsome Ear, Nose & Throat specialist, a very short and very tubby man who always wore a crisp white coat, a monocle and that strange large shiny metal disc thing attached to an elastic headband. He peered into every orifice and poked about down our throats with a large wooden spatula. All visits there were dreaded for days beforehand.

Not quite so bad was my one trip to the little Cottage Hospital, just before Worple Road, now alas long-gone. I had been knocked down by a car near the top end of Fenton Avenue when setting out to walk to school. My fault again, of course! Fortunately there was no physical damage apart from a grazed knee, but after being treated very kindly I was pronounced to be suffering from “shock”, which I had never heard of and hadn’t a clue what it meant, and sent home to be plied with plenty of rest and warm drinks. I felt absolutely fine, and spent my unexpected day off school playing with the Meccano, an excellent cure.

There was a long trek by bus to Hampton Hospital for the routine Adenoids removal, postponed at least once due to the fact that I had a cold; this fortuitously saving me from being kept in over Christmas, which was definitely not on. A years or so later, at around age 6 and then again at 7, I had a couple of week-long spells in the main Ashford Hospital (the old Workhouse!), for what I never knew, but it seemed totally painless and probably just involved further investigation of my hearing problems, for which nothing could be done in the end. At the time, I really wanted a scooter like all the other kids had, and repeatedly told the matron this, but she dismissed the idea by saying I was far too grown up for one of those. In reality, it was deemed to be too dangerous, and I was also banned from taking part in school swimming lessons and attempting to learn to ride a “proper” bike for the same reason. Such is life!

And lastly, the dreaded Dentist! Ours was Mr. Scantlebury, another fearsome man living and working in one of the grand old Edwardian villas on Kingston Road, almost opposite Kingston Road School. The horrible ancient hard black adjustable chair, the row of gas bottles, the rubber apron, the smelly black rubber gas mask administered with great glee, entirely smothering face. The huge pincers, the blood. My fear of this place was in no way diminished when having been revived after one such ordeal, I promptly collapsed again in the hallway as we were leaving. Some minor panic ensued, staff swarmed around, and I was kept there for an hour or two longer when all I wanted was to get out into the fresh air and well away from that place. The next time, I could not be got in there even dragged kicking and screaming, so it was eventually agreed I could have the alternative “adult” cocaine injection, drill and fill treatment instead. The big needle, the slowly grinding drill, the mouthful of assorted ironmongery, the prodding and poking.....but anything was better than that dreaded gas mask.

## Sport

This should be a very short section. Much to Dad’s disappointment I never managed to share the same enthusiasm that he had for football, cricket or table tennis.

I do not recall anything in the way of organised sport at Wyatt Road School. My first exposure to football thus came in the early days at Kingston Road, when one already-fanatical boy set himself up as goalkeeper, and invited several others of us to challenge his skills. The goalposts were defined by two of the poles supporting the veranda along the west end of the back playground, and we were each invited to try to get five shots past him. Though generally regarded as timid, I was quite tall for my age and had a powerful left kick, as one or two potential aggressors discovered to their cost. I got three of my first four shots cleanly in, and the last one floored him! He complained that he was unable to read my intentions, but this was probably due to my total lack of co-ordination between eye and foot. But where further does one go with football after this? Time to move on already.

Unfortunately there remained an element of compulsion. In the winter months we had to play in the school rear playground. I was always the last to be picked when the teams were chosen, and naturally occupied a backmost back position. I must somehow have got in the stronger team, as very little ever happened down my end. I once got so bored and completely engrossed in my own little dream world, and wandered right round behind the opposite goal without realising. All the others thought this very funny, but frankly I could not have cared less, and it showed.



Come the spring, we were marched on foot down Leacroft to a rough grassy field on Shortwood Common to play. It was difficult enough to dodge the cowpats when just walking, never mind concentrating on the tactics of football. I preferred to slope off quietly and watch the trains over by the fence, or disappear altogether for a leisurely walk in the countryside until it was time to wander homewards. I don't think I was ever missed!

Exposure to the much more civilised game of cricket came early, as Dad was a member of the Chase of Chertsey team (his then employers), a strong side playing in the Surrey League. Their home ground was at Abbey Fields, Chertsey. On Saturday afternoons I often went there with him, in Len Fielder's little Austin saloon (pictured outside the home pavilion) or in the back of George Chesney's pick-up truck.



There was plenty of scope for imaginative play with the other children, in the semi-derelict old barns behind the pavilion, and the cream teas were eagerly awaited. I learned the rudiments of scoring, and enjoyed changing the heavy metal plates on the scoreboard. However, any potential interest in the actual mechanics of playing was totally destroyed when Dad was hit by a fast ball and suffered a broken nose, requiring hospital treatment. With my lack of co-ordination, I thought it inevitable this would happen to me, and was not willing to take the risk. He carried on playing though, after a couple of weeks, as though nothing had happened.

I didn't always go with him to away games, as some of the venues were at quite a distance involving an all-day trip. Instead, I went with Mum to the Lammas recreation fields, by the river at the far end of Church Street in Staines. Here were slides and swings, a paddling pool, tennis courts, a putting green, the bandstand; plus of course ice creams from the kiosk. I was amazed to see on a recent visit that all this has hardly changed at all in the last 50 years or so, except that the old houseboats on the river backwater, and the little chain ferry across to the island have now gone.....



Dad was also a keen committee member of the Staines & District Table Tennis League for many years. The highlight of their year was the League Championship weekend, held in the main sports hall of Petter's Ltd (below), the marine diesel-engine manufacturers out along the Causeway towards Egham. This was the former Lagonda car factory, now all demolished and replaced by the Sainsbury superstore. Here I helped with the large paper score sheets and even made announcements over the loudspeakers on occasion, but again could not get the hang of the co-ordination needed to play successfully (or at all).



## Sex

This should be a short section too, bearing in mind the moral strictures of the times, but one particular incident serves to liven things up. No pictures in this bit!

We had, of course, no form of sex education whatsoever then, not even the most basic Biology lessons. Also being an only child did not help; others at least would often have younger siblings around the house, or older ones to help explain things. Around the age of five, I had somehow got the idea in my head that babies came from the newsagent's shop opposite the main bus stops in Clarence Street! This is very possibly because of the response my exasperated parents had given me to a loud and embarrassing demand for an explanation, while we were waiting in the queue for a bus home after Saturday afternoon at the shops.

It was not until 3 or 4 years later that things became somewhat clearer, as when it was very hot in the early summer of 1958, a group of us went over the Knowle Green fields after school and indulged in what is now known as "skinny-dipping" in the deeper pools of the stream to cool off. At least some of the more brazen ones did, both girls and boys alike. There was a lot of larking about, and it became apparent that at least one of the girls was far more enlightened than the rest of us, and not at all embarrassed about explaining all.

Practice had to wait of course many years longer. We were still not told much, except the very helpful advice that "we should keep away from girls at all costs, until we were sixteen". On pain of ending up in the Borstal, or "Reform School", a very serious threat only one step short of prison. And then, at eleven years of age, I was sent away to the stifling all-male confines of Strode's Grammar School for the duration, when what with all the travelling and endless homework, most opportunities for contact with the fairer sex just evaporated anyway.

Eventually, one pleasant sunny morning in the school summer holidays of 1963, I was busily painting our front door in Fenton Avenue to help Dad, when two lovely young women stopped by the garden gate for a chat. I recognised them as girls I had gone to school with at Kingston Road, who had in the intervening years matured very nicely, thank you. They wanted to know "was I sixteen yet?" We were of course, all brought up to answer truthfully and innocently, so I said, "no, not until October", and that was that. However just before my birthday I was accosted by the same giggling pair, at the "Jolly Butcher" bus stop, and a sealed note was furtively slipped into my hand. This was to the effect that I was to participate in a little joint birthday celebration a few days later, in the form of a milk shake or two at the National Milk Bar in town. We kids really knew how to party!!

Having invited another school friend to balance the numbers, and obtained parental clearance for the proposed celebration, with latest time of return home clearly specified, all 4 of us headed for town just as it was getting dark on the appointed evening. Things became a little bit heated in the gloomier recesses of Station Path, just by our old school playground in fact, and we were not after all destined to reach the bright lights of the milk bar nightspot! Every evening about this time, a Southern Electric train came into the siding here for overnight stabling after the evening rush-hour; the driver turned off all the lights and climbed down from his cab to walk back to the station and go off duty. We had an idea, and there was a convenient gap in the fence railings just behind the Guides' hut where they had been bent apart just far enough to squeeze through. A well-defined path in the grass up the bank showed we were by no means the first to do this, and probably not the last either. And so we clambered up and opened the door to one of the carriage compartments, dark, warm, secluded and even with very comfortable seats.

The next half-hour or so was spent on savouring long-awaited preliminaries, but just before the supposed big moment, disaster struck – the train brake compressor sprang into life, and before we could even think about how to get out, the train started moving! Now this was *never* supposed to happen, except of course to us; presumably the crew had been called back to help cover for a breakdown elsewhere on the line. We remained in darkness, and also without precedent, the train did not stop at Staines, instead proceeding post-haste directly up to London Waterloo. Our companions turned instantly from sophisticated, cheeky and confident young women, into two very frightened schoolgirls. Upon arrival in London, the lights came on and passengers started to board. A quick check on the headcode number fortunately meant the train was going back through Staines, and we hurriedly went right to the backmost carriage, again in a non-corridor compartment so that we would not be bothered about such trivialities as tickets, by the guard or anyone else.

Half-an-hour later we were back at Staines, decanted onto the far end of the curving station platform, then as soon as the train restarted and the guard had closed his door, went to hide in the bushes at the back, so that the ticket collector at the other end would see just a deserted platform. He did, but we also unfortunately observed that he closed and locked his barrier gate before retiring to the mess room for tea, so there was no way out for us. It was far too dangerous to attempt to cross the live rails in the dark and so get out through the goods yard. So nothing for it but to creep down the platform ramp and along close by the wooden fence, hoping we would not be seen by the signalman. When we got almost up to the road bridge, it was fairly easy to escape through the wire fence out onto Gresham Road, thence a brisk walk home to arrive just on the appointed hour. We never did get our milk shakes, or anything much else for that matter!

We did not see any of the local girls for weeks afterwards (wonder why?). Most of them in any case would be leaving school as they reached 16, getting jobs and a whole new different and no doubt exciting way of life. During the Christmas school holidays, I made discrete enquiries about the one I had really taken a fancy to after our little nighttime adventure, only to be told that she had run away with a young French seaman! And I never saw her again. Such is life (continued).

## Shopping

We had a multitude of local shops in Staines in the 1950's, to cater for our every need. They tended of course to be far more specialised than nowadays, when most seem to be trying very hard to sell almost everything. Some of the best-remembered are recalled.....

At our "Top of the Road" was a group of six or so useful shops, "Victoria Parade". On the corner of Fenton Avenue, the newsagents, tobacconist & sweetshop R. Cornwall, with its entrance then on the corner itself, up a couple of steps. Behind it was the entrance to the dairy yard, where the battery electric milk delivery floats were kept overnight and charged up. These still had to be operated and steered by the milkman walking ahead in the road, holding the control tiller, rather than being "ride-on", but were extremely quiet. The Job's Dairy shop itself was next door to Cornwall's. Beyond that was the "Co-op", for all basic household requisites. Mum being a bit of a snob was very reluctant to be seen shopping there, and often sent me instead! She certainly would never consider becoming involved in the "Divi" scheme, involving collecting stamps in a book for a small reward every so often. One thing I occasionally bought from there was a solid block of household salt, about 3" square and 9" long. I then had lots of fun carving an intricate network of holes and channels in the block with an old blunt knife, while generating enough granules to fill the table salt cellar and for a week's cooking.

Beyond the Co-op were one or two more shops, not now recalled, but most probably a butchers (Reeves?) and a greengrocers (Salmon's?), and on the far end, a cycle shop displaying many of its wares outside during the daytime. The picture was taken in the 1990s





looking westward and the shop fronts have of course changed considerably. The newsagent's entrance used to be on the angled corner, but the old name "R. Cornwall" is still clearly visible just above the large poster (below the side window).

Going westwards towards the town Kingston Road became residential again, firstly with a large and mysterious garden to the first house in Glebe Road, where I would peer through the knot-holes of the high wooden fence when passing, to see how the wealthy occupants lived. All the residents along here seemed to have noisy dogs, including many of the strange-looking Airedale terriers which were then popular. Another memory is that the pavements seemed to be infested with hundreds of busy ants in the early evenings in the spring and summer.

At the Broadway was another useful array of shops, this time in an elegant 1920's red-brick parade on the south side (with 2-storey flats above), and a smaller group on the other side, both set well back from the main road. At the eastern end, opposite the cottage hospital, a betting shop (after they became legal in 1961) and the Spring Grove laundry faced on to Worple Road. At the corner itself were the Ladies wear shop "Lesley" and Salmon's the greengrocers. Further along that delightful ironmonger's emporium, C.A. Noble, who seemed to stock virtually everything, but you always had to ask, as only the shopkeeper knew



where to find anything. I was amazed to see when I revisited in 1993, this shop was not only still in business here (towards the right in this picture) but both its frontage and interior were almost completely unchanged from the 1950's, the only one so remaining.

Further along again was Stack's, a double-fronted newsagent – sweetshop – tobacconist also selling some toys. So I often would peer longingly into their window on the way to school. One day about 1953 a lovely shiny silver racing car particularly took my fancy. Normally our week's school dinner money (one shilling) was collected from us on Monday mornings, at class registration, but for some reason that week, the teacher forgot all about it. Thus on returning in the afternoon, I spent the nice shiny silver 1/- piece which seemed to be surplus to requirements on the nice shiny silver car instead. I realised I had to keep my new treasured possession well hidden from authority, and of course the shilling was duly requested the following morning. So I had to lie that I had lost it, and the car was soon discovered too; I got a beating and a lecture both at home and at school and had to pay several times over for that silly car in lost pocket money in the coming weeks.

Next door to Stack's was the Barber's shop. Attendance for the clip and trim was compulsory about every other Saturday morning then from an early age. Dad was always peeved that I got "junior rate" for attending to my veritable thatch, whereas he had to pay full price for his few wisps! A few years later, when I went on my own, the barber took great delight in accosting me with his loud call of "something for the weekend, sir?" (such items not then being sold over the counter in Boots the Chemist, or in machines in pub loos) as I turned to leave, followed by gales of laughter when he saw my embarrassment.

On the end of the south parade was Loose's wine shop, a much quieter and genteel establishment, full of interesting aromas, where dad would go routinely to place our festive order a few weeks before Christmas. Business here was conducted in appropriately hushed tones of gentle recommendation from the seemingly vast range of products on show.

The north side, between the two arms of Stainash Crescent, was much smaller. There was a pet shop at the west end, also a record shop in later years at least, and a haberdashery shop where mum often went for buttons, thread and the like.

Crimble's Garage lay past the Railway Station entrance, just before arriving at Kingston Road school, and I recall the "No petrol today" signboard placed out on the pavement during the Suez Crisis of 1956, together with even less vehicular traffic than normal on the main Kingston Road as a result. Beyond, on the far side were the old main Co-op buildings, then the police station on the corner of London Road. On the roof of this was mounted the wartime air-raid siren for the whole district, which they often contrived to test about 10 o'clock on weekday mornings, just as Mum & I were walking past going into town, its loud wailing used to terrify me (and this was only the "all-clear"; the warning signal itself would have terrified everyone!)

At the top of Station Path, by the Iron Bridge, was a little wool shop, with the "Bridge Fisheries" next door. This was a completely open-fronted shop, which would surely not be allowed nowadays. In the post-war rationing days up to 1952 it was often difficult to get good fish, so mum often bought Tripe here instead, which seemed to be plentiful. The way she cooked it, it was very tasty too, at least until I found out what it really was! Just back down the High Street towards the police station was Russell Floyd's ironmongery shop. He was a stalwart member of the Table Tennis League team with Dad, so we often popped in there for a chat if not actually to buy anything.

Hereabouts we encountered a minor bit of excitement on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1966 (a freezing day with late snowfall) when this huge marine boiler got stuck under the railway bridge. The fish shop is just visible behind it on the left, and a red RF bus passes by on LT route 216. The High Street was still 2-way traffic then, and the old "Empire" cinema building can just be seen beneath the bridge. The obstruction was removed some time later by the simple expedient of letting some of the tyres down on the transporter!



In the main part of the High Street, Perring's furniture shop had a very intriguing pneumatic tube system; when you paid for something, the money and an invoice slip were put into a canister, which was placed in the tube and whisked up to the well-fortified cashiers office. A minute or two later it came back with the change and receipt. Wonderful if the shop was not too busy! Cunningham's drapers was nearby then, also the chemist, Timothy White's

Staines' first "supermarket" was opened by Waitrose in 1957, in a large new purpose-built shop almost opposite the Thames St junction. Shopping this way was of course completely novel then, and we took to it easily, much appreciating the extra choice of products. Particularly remembered at that time are the cereal boxes with very realistic printed card model kits of Southern Railway locomotives and "Pullman" carriages on the back, we had to get through an awful lot of "Weetabix" to collect the set!

In Church Street there was a very good artists' materials shop, where amongst many other things, we could buy "percussion caps" in strips to make our toy guns sound realistic when fired. Imagine that being



allowed today! Almost opposite there was a decorating and wallpaper shop. In those days, all the wallpaper rolls had to be trimmed on both edges at point of sale, and there was a special machine for doing this. I'm not sure why this was, or when they started to become available ready-trimmed?

The picture shows the little shops at the other end of Church Street, near the GWR station, in 1962.

“Kennards” department store (then part of, and later called “Debenhams”) was until the mid 1960’s housed in a rambling collection of small buildings all joined together inside, with uneven and creaky floors. These extended a good way down Thames Street from the High St junction. Rebuilding into the present very fine premises took several years to complete, gradually from the south end. Hereabouts was a very good model shop, where we awaited the arrival of the then new finely detailed “Kitmaster” and “Airfix” plastic kits avidly.

On the other Thames St corner were also a number of small shops, including Boots the Chemist and Johnson & Clarke, then a small but useful ironmongers. About 1955 the latter concern, presumably as owners of the whole site, demolished everything and erected a fine new 3-floor department store, whereupon Boots at least had to move elsewhere. In the far corner of the top floor of the new Johnson & Clarke’s was their toy department, with a vast and colourful array of “Meccano”, Hornby Trains, Dinky & Matchbox cars and lorries, and the “Bayko” building kits amongst many other things. In the centre they had a large model railway layout, but the one train operating was left to run round and round the same track for hours on end unattended, until it derailed or fell to bits due to mechanical wear-out. This seemed a shame, so at the age of 8 or 9 I wrote to the store manager asking if I could help out for a couple of hours on Saturday afternoons by operating it more imaginatively, as was surely intended by its builders. He was receptive to the idea, so I duly started “work”.

The demonstration of many different models in turn attracted a largish crowd, whereas before hardly anyone had given the layout more than a glance in passing. So I was most disappointed that I could not come back and do it again the following week, as I had assumed this would be welcomed. It seemed they thought they were doing me a favour by allowing me the privilege of “playing” with their wonderful layout; whereas I thought I was doing them a favour by livening it up a bit. How to lose a good customer (and all his friends). I was most surprised to see recently that this fine modern building has already been demolished, and replaced once more with several smaller shops, and Johnson & Clarke appear to have gone right back to their “Ironmongery” roots!

## A few other memories

These odds & ends do not really fit in elsewhere above!

The wartime Army “Bailey Bridge” used as a footbridge spanning the Thames just upstream of the stone bridge. I think it was demolished around 1959, when the footways on the main bridge were widened?

Skating on the frozen river hereabouts during the very harsh winter, February 1963.....



The top left image includes the old wooden ship serving as a Navy cadet training school (I think?) – can’t remember its name



though. It is moored approximately under where the old Bailey Bridge crossed. The bulk of the old Regal cinema looms over the bridge. The main picture taken from the bridge looking west shows the familiar large gas-holders, with the villas of Church Island to the right. Bottom left is the view from the south bank looking east, across to the Lammas playing fields and the other end of Church Island.

The regular fairs on Shortwood Common, over the far side towards the London Road by the “Crooked Billet”, before the bypass road was built. All the usual fairground stuff, pink candy floss, goldfish etc, but particularly recalling the mighty showmen’s steam traction engines, all polished brass and gilding, whose generators supplied not only all the electricity for the site, but also for the rows of bright coloured lights with which they themselves were decorated. Also the circus – Billy Smart’s – with all sorts of real animals as well as the clowns and acrobats, before such fell out of favour.



Here are the memorial gardens beside the old Town Hall in 1962, leading down to the steamer landing stage on the river. The gardens, with bandstand, iron seats and curvy flower borders largely unaltered to this day, but the “Salter’s Steamers” calling on their long summer afternoon pleasure trips from Oxford or Windsor down to Hampton Court long since gone. In my formative teenage years I was warned by a very good school friend never to take a girl down to the shadowy seclusion of this landing stage in the dark evenings, as apparently gangs of youths often lurked in the bushes and ensured anyone foolish enough to do this got a ducking in the murky Thames – or maybe worse!

In this 1962 picture from Staines Bridge looking downstream, the landing stage is on the left bank, just beyond the old timber (Morgan & Sons) and corn warehouses behind the town hall.

The office of one of the boatyards is visible on the right, with the towpath crossing its dock entrance by a flimsy iron foot bridge.



At around 5 or 6, hammering along the pavements in the vicinity of home on my little maroon tricycle, whose large rear pannier box had a very rattly lid. I could even go on the main Kingston Road, keeping to the north side, as far as the “New River” aqueduct bridge marking the boundary with Ashford, as the footway was very wide all along here. After a year or two of this, the chain annoyingly kept coming off, usually just when I was furthest from home, and eventually the whole thing shook itself to bits.

At age 8, my parents decided I had to have more of a social life, and so tried to introduce me to the Cub Scouts. The meetings were held in the old St Peters Mission Hall in Budeberry Road, that very same place

where we used to have school dinners so recently at Wyatt Road Infants, and I thought I had seen the last of the place. I managed to sit through just two sessions then refused point-blank to go any more, as I just could not stand all that silly “Dib-dib-dibbing”! (Sorry)

The old library, at the corner of Clarence Street and Bridge Street. Apparently it was built in 1835 as a Literary Institute, but by 1933 had become an antique shop. It was only in use as a library from 1950 to 1979, and had awkward narrow doors. Hereabouts, the famous “Staines Smell” was often at its strongest; a potent combination of the Courage Simmonds Brewery effluent and that of Linseed Oil from the Linoleum works.

The boatyards, Tom Taylor & Sons at Riverside Works, and Biffens. The huge Gasometers along the Causeway, a landmark for miles around. The Harry Gardam engineering works along Church Street, which reportedly still used large steam traction engines to move heavy boilers and other such items around by road well into the 1950's, but I never saw them out, and the factory premises themselves were like an impenetrable fortress. The derelict old Georgian houses in Church Street with their front doors straight off the pavement, where we often used to explore having quietly skipped off school games afternoons, until it was time to go home.

The old road-repair gang, with their steamroller, the green-painted mess hut on wheels which it towed around, and coal-fired brazier, especially in the depths of winter. The distinctive aroma of their hot tarmac, apparently very healthy as the men so employed rarely became ill despite being out in all weathers.

The monkey-puzzle trees outside the Edwardian villas with their grand cast-iron and glass verandas, in Thames Street near the top of Richmond Road. The 4 or 5 pairs of even bigger and more elegant villas on Gresham Road just opposite the station platforms, all but one pair now demolished.

The “Majestic” cinema on the north side of High Street just east of the Iron Bridge, with its fantastic interior decoration and ornate ceiling, built 1929 but alas demolished as early as 1961. The elegant Post Office building next door was more or less contemporary with it (1931). There was another very small cinema, the “Empire” on the other side of the Iron Bridge, until around 1960, when it became Gamley's toy store, now also alas gone. The “Empire” was known to us as the “Fleapit” (every town used to have one), and the picture wobbled on the screen every time a train went past. The very old “White Lion” coaching inn opposite, and the Mumford & Lobb furniture store, both of which jutted out somewhat into the street here, and so both also long gone, in the name of relieving road congestion.

So that left the “Regal”, latterly the town's only cinema, a very ugly building erected around 1938 on this prime site on the river bank right next to the bridge. We went there quite a lot in the 1960's, after the other two had closed, for example queuing for ages with hundreds of other teenagers to see the Beatles film “A Hard Day's Night”. Next door in Clarence Street was a large old house, “Colne Lodge”, secluded by trees, but this was demolished by 1966.

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