

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN HOLTHAM BY OLIVER NATELSON ON 28 AUGUST 2004

ON:: I am in the home of John Holtham at 36 Thurlestone Avenue, N12

ON: John, we're going to talk about the Halliwick Estate and its environs. Did you move into the house or were you born here?

JH: I was born in Muswell Hill but I came here straight afterwards.

ON: All your recollections of living anywhere are what?

JF: I have only ever lived here.

ON: Roughly when that have been?

JH: 1946

ON: Your earliest recollections would have been I suppose about 1950-51

JH: The earliest thing that I can put a date to that I remember is watching the Coronation on somebody else's television. I know when that was, and I know where I saw it.

ON: Right. That may or not have been on this estate.

JH: No, it was just up the road at my aunt and uncle's place at number 22.

ON: So your recollections are really. You must have known some changes on this estate – what comes to mind?

JH: When I first started here all the houses matched, which they don't anymore. Three are only one or two on the estate that are original.

ON: That's true yes.

JH: Most have loft extensions done or new windows and massive changes to the gardens.

ON: You say massive changes to the gardens, what do you remember of the original gardens?

JH: They were not the same, but I think people took more interest in their gardens then. Most of the houses have got nothing in the front gardens now as they are used for parking.

ON: What did they have in their front gardens then in the 1950s?

JH: One of the old stagers in this road is number 7. Their front garden is like they used to be. They take trouble with it and it's a lovely garden.

ON: Who lives at number 7?

JH: John Paine. His father was a builder on the estate and did a lot of painting and decorating.

ON: Yes, I know he did some for us. So that's the gardens, did they have hedges ?

- JH: A lot more had hedges than have hedges now.
- ON: Were they the same kind of hedge?
- JH: A lot of privet hedge like ours, which is about the only survivor in the road now. here was one opposite, which was grubbed out just a few weeks ago, which was one of the last in the area.
- ON: That's quite interesting because those hedges are probably as old as the houses.
- JH: Certainly older than me!
- ON; They were probably all original hedges.
- JH: It was there definitely in 1943, it was there when my parents moved in. And it's still there.
- ON: Hedges are more than 70 years old. You mentioned one of the people who has lived here a long time, do you know any others who have lived here a long time?
- JH: No I don't because all the people at this end of the road are all fairly new. John Paine is a good person if you can gey him because his family have lived here since the house was built in 1933. Our family did not move in until 1943 so it was 10 years when we moved in.
- ON: Are there any changes that you can think of in this house?
- JH: No, very little.
- ON: It's nice that you've got a lot of original features.
- JH: We had to have the windows changed at the back because the old ones rotted away. We had the kitchen done 7 or 8 years ago.
- ON: Of course, your back bedroom windows are south facing and get the sun and the rain. I think the design is bad, but it is ubiquitous.
- JH: There was no gutter on this bay.
- ON: That's right, there were no gutters on the original back bedroom bays.
- JH: So the water just trickled down on the window sills and it spread up the vertical bits and the whole frame just disintegrated. This is all new.
- ON: Is it double glazed or not?
- JH: It is double-glazed but I did ask them top make it look like the original, so we have leaded lights at the top
- ON: Yes, very good, we tried to do that as well, but it is very difficult to get that kind of glass now. Can you talk about some if the highlights that you can recall, such as this flooding that that started in Woodleigh Avenue.
- JH: It started with water probably from Woodhouse Road and Summers Lane. It flowed down Summers Row (the old people call it Dunger Place) and piled up behind the houses at the bottom of Woodleigh Avenue. Eventually, the person whose house was at the bottom of the dip, his door collapsed and unleashed a torrent of water which flowed across Woodleigh Avenue, between the houses in Ferncroft and Thurlestone

through the gardens and emerged with considerable force between 35 and 37 Thurlestone Avenue. It was probably a foot deep coming down their sideway.

ON: My goodness, and that's after a bit of dissipation en route, it must have been a mountain of water.

JH: It was. It came roaring down the sideway, turned left and went down to the corner with Lyndhurst, turned right and disappeared off. We didn't look to see where it went!

ON: Did it do any damage to any of the properties?

JH: It flooded the basement of number 37 Thurlestone Avenue.

ON: They've got a basement?

JH: Like we have, the void under the floor. It filled up with water because the water level outside was higher than the airbricks. It poured through the airbricks but by the time the fire brigade arrived to pump it out it had gone, it soaked away so they did not have to do anything. The fire brigade obviously had a lot of other jobs to do and they did not get here for a long time.

ON: So did it cause any damage to gardens - plants must have been washed away, damages to fences?

JH: I don't know because I didn't see any of their gardens. I was outside in the front. I do know people were desperately knocking holes in boundary walls to let the water in their gardens into the garden next door.

ON: Do you recall when this happened?

JH: No, I don't know exactly when it was, I know it was after a tremendous thunderstorm because I was coming home from work. The thunderstorm must have been at about 5 o'clock at night. I took shelter in Friern Barnet Library, I was already soaked but it got so bad that I waited in there for half an hour.

ON: Was that in the 50s, 60s or 70s?

JH: I was coming home from STC New Southgate, so I was definitely working. It was in the 70s or 80s rather than earlier than that.

ON: So, when did you start working?

JH: 1968.

ON: So it was after 1968. Can you remember anything else about this flood?

JH: Not really, we just came back indoors and had our tea, there was not anything we could do. The funny thing was after I came out of sheltering in the library when the rain had stopped it was really quiet, the traffic had all been stopped by flooded roads. There was nothing untoward when I got home and we started having our tea. It was during our tea that we heard all the pandemonium outside and went outside to see what was happening. Of course, everybody was outside with Wellingtons on with buckets and so on trying to sort out this stream of muddy water that was pouring down the road.

ON: So did you see this cascade of water?

JH: Oh, yes it was just opposite.

- ON: So what time would that have been?
- JH: It must have been about 6 o'clock because we were halfway through our tea.
- ON: So as it was light it must have been in the summer rather than winter
- JH: Oh, yes it was a summer thunderstorm. As a result of that they put in a new relief drain down the middle of our road
- ON: I vaguely remember large concrete pipes. Are there any other things you can think of?
- JH: Something happened that is funny, there is still evidence of it if you look in the right place. The old Ascot water heaters were infamously lethal. In one of the houses in Lyndhurst Avenue, opposite the end of Thurlestone Avenue, they had one of these heaters and one day it went wrong. It went through the ceiling and roof and landed in the road. The different coloured slates can still be seen where the hole in the roof was patched up.
- ON: That's amazing, a house on this side?
- JH: No, in Lyndhurst Avenue opposite this road. I was not very old when this happened so that would have been in the 1950s.
- ON: I remember those old Ascots. A house I lived in in Clapton, yes it was a geyser, we had to light it very carefully. We turned the gas on and held a match there with trembling fingers and waited and then there was a whoof and the chances are that the gas blew the match out, so you had to light another one and start again.
- JH: I don't know how they got away with that. A friend of mine lived in Alexandra Park Road and they had one of those primitive things there, I had been using it to do some washing up and when I had finished with it I just turned the water off. Just a fraction before there was an urgent shout from the other room saying: "Don't just turn the water off!", which I had just done. After a few seconds there was a colossal bang from inside this thing. I don't know what happened, but it was really frightening.
- ON: Yes they were frightening, there was a sort of a knack but it was frightening.
- JH: When the gas did not light you never quite knew what to do. The pilot light was alight, you could hear the gas hissing into the void inside, but it didn't light. You did not know whether to turn the water off or hope for the best and fan it a bit and hope the gas would catch or just run.
- ON: How did anyone get away with designing a thing like that and putting it on the market? I don't know. Gas had been around for a long time, people had been using gas for about eighty years at least. Anyway, do you remember anything about the street lighting?
- JH: It was gas light.
- ON: You remember the gas light?
- JH: Yes
- ON: So, any idea when there was a change over to electric?
- JH: I don't know when that was. I remember they changed it because they put electric fittings on to the old gas lamp posts to start with. I've got a vague feeling that we had a man come round and light them originally but this may not be true, it may be

imagination or hearing somebody else talking about it. I know they had what we call 'gas clocks' to turn on the main flow.

ON: Oh, where were they?

JH: In the lamp, there was a pilot light that was on all the time and a clockwork mechanism that turned on the main gas valve. When the gas valve came on the gas would light the element. I've got a 'gas lock' in the loft, it's a clockwork motor with a 24 hour clock that opens and closes a valve.

ON: If it's mechanical that means it needs winding up.

JH: Correct, a man had to come round and wind it up once a week. After that we had the 60 watt incandescent light bulb with reflectors to shine the light down.

ON: There's virtually no illumination from them.

JH: No, they were reasonable, they were as good as the gas light, not as good as the modern high pressure sodium light. They were more reliable and easier to use.

ON: And, of course, easier to service.

JH: I think we went straight from that to low pressure sodium lamps.

ON: And then it must have been about five years ago or so that they changed to the present ones. Very bright ones.

JH: Don't know, couldn't put a date on that.

ON: It might have been ten years ago, About the early 1900s.

JH: I know I had to modify the light switch in the hall because the old low pressure sodium lamps had a very good spread of light which meant that our front door was illuminated by the street light. When they put in the new lights they are much more focussed and only really light the road so our front door was then pitch black. That meant when we went out into the hall at night, rather than having an orange glow it was too dark to see anything. So I fitted a neon into the light switch so that we could see the light switch in the dark, Before that we were feeling our way down the hall to find the light switch.

ON: Yes, I know what you mean.

JH: It was about ten years ago that was done. It was definitely after the house was rewired.

ON: So there have been four changes of lamp from gas to incandescent then low pressure sodium and now high pressure sodium. I knew in the early days it was gas but I didn't realise it lasted until the 1950s.

JH: I can definitely remember seeing gas lights. I can also remember the old fire station telephone thing.

ON: Where was that?

JH: It was on the corner of Ferncroft Avenue and Lyndhurst Avenue. It was a kind of red post. I can't remember if it had a red telephone in it or a break glass pull the handle thing. I obviously never used it but it was clearly marked that if you wanted to call the fire brigade you operated this machine it called the fore brigade. In those days very few people had telephones. Now everybody's got a telephone so the things are redundant.

ON: Right yes. I remember in the early days, up until possibly 1970 we had a shared line with someone else in Hollickwood Avenue.

JH: Yes, they were common until a few years ago. Now everyone's got exclusives so that's all right.

ON: Yes, because you picked up the phone to make a call and you would hear voices at the other end and have to put the phone down. Although when we made phone calls the little girl who lived in the house that shared our line she would lift it up and listen to our conversations.

JH: You could tell though.

ON: You could tell, yes.

JH: That was because there weren't enough cables and there wasn't enough equipment. It must have been in 1976, the year of the drought, there were a lot of road works done in this road. I don't know quite what they were doing but there had been a lot of digging and after the first rain the telephone went completely on the blink and you couldn't do anything about it. It was tinkling, sometimes it would work, sometimes it wouldn't. Sometimes it would ring and there was nothing there, it was completely haywire. What happened is this coincided with my parents going on holiday and they were anticipating phoning up every night to see that I was alright. Of course, they got all sorts of funny tones because sometimes they would hear ringing but no one would ever answer so they would panic and weird things were happening, they couldn't understand. They were worried about me and I could not contact them initially, so what happened, when they eventually did make contact with me I arranged for them to phone somebody else who I would contact regularly to say I was alright so that we had means of communication. What had happened, when they did the road works they had damaged the telephone cable and when it rained it got water in it so it short circuited and all sort of things.

ON: I don't know why but we attributed it to water on the North Circular Road. Where there is the junction with Station Road, Bounds Green Road and the North Circular because that used to flood, get water right across it.

JH: Do you remember the pea soupers?

ON: That was in the early 1950s.

JH: It was about 1952 that I started school. I can remember going to school when it was so thick that I could not see the ground.

ON: That's right, December 1952. I remember that. I lived in Clapton, I could see the ground but it was like walking with a goldfish bowl on your head. You could see that kerb and the immediate pavement around me to a distance of two feet or so but I couldn't see the other side of the road and it wasn't wide road.

JH: This was horrendous because I was taken to school and thinking about it afterwards it was obviously stupid, what happened. Mt mum was taking me to school and we had to cross Woodhouse \Road and I remember she held me up to look at the traffic lights to see if it was red or not which was obviously pretty stupid because if I could not see what it was neither could the drivers, but you couldn't see the colour of the traffic lights from the ground. Visibility was around 6 to 7 feet , 2 metres.

ON: Yes, I think that's what it was in Clapton. If you crossed the main road it was too wide to see the other side so you went across...

- JH: And finished up back where you had come from.
- ON: You liked to set off at a right angle to the kerb and wandered at an angle. I went across the park, Although I had been going through the park for a year or two I got completely lost, I had wandered at an incredible angle right across the width of the park instead of going along the length. It was most strange.
- JH: My father was working at North Acton and he came back by Underground to Bounds Green and he came out of Bounds Green station and there were a load of people in the station milling about and they said to him: "Don't go out there mate, you'll never get anywhere". But dad was made from sterner stuff and he said: "I'm going to get home". He said he came out of the station and walked straight towards the road, found the road, and walked all the way from Bounds Green station to the North Circular Road with one foot in the gutter. That was the only way you could tell where you were. He crossed Bounds Green Road at the traffic lights with the North Circular and he said it was a bit thinner there and you could see across the road under the bridge. For some reason it was not so thick and he was able to get across the North Circular under the railway bridge and then carried on and eventually got home. But it was horrendous and it was actually quite foggy indoors and you could see it in the air.
- ON: I think it was 5 December, something like that.
- JH: It lasted some days.
- ON: But there was one day it was particularly bad. And that ushered in the Clean Air Act in 1956. Typically it took Parliament for years to put that Act down. And after that you weren't allowed to burn coal, people burned smokeless fuel.
- JH: Coalite, we had all our fires converted to Coalite but coal is easier to get going.
- ON: Coalite came in large pellets but I don't think I have ever handled it, it's a bit like coke because coke is very difficult to get alight.
- JH: No, it's not as difficult as coke, you can light it with wood and paper but it's not as much fun as coal. You don't get these great boiling pats of tar with flame jetting out of it.
- ON: I'm sure we'll never see a coal fire again in our lives.
- JH: Do you remember stones in coal?
- ON: No. What happened?"
- JH: They would explode and would ricochet round the room, frightened the life out of you when that happened. You don't actually see it move, it comes out of the fire so fast that you didn't actually see anything.
- ON: It could kill you!
- JH: You just heard a bang and a ping from somewhere else in the room.
- ON: Well, I never knew about that, we got the occasional bangs and splutters but I put that down to water, like in coal and trapped and just turns to steam and explodes. And of course, you used the coal fire to heat the water.
- JH: Yes. The fire had a boiler at the back.

- ON: And that was just in one room was it?
- JH: Yes, in the back room. One boiler is actually still there but now we've got a gas fire it does not do anything
- ON: When we had our kitchen conversion done a year ago, we kept the boiler, a small quite heavy copper box. About a foot by six inches, something like that.
- JH: Never very successful it wasn't, we had all sorts of fun and games with ours. The pipes from that boiler to the hot water storage tank are quite long and they rumble about and you get air locks in it because the air comes out of the water and gets trapped in the pipes. And eventually you get a blockage in the pipe so the water stops circulating, the water in the boiler behind the fire starts boiling and making awful horrible noises so what we had to do was turn on one of the hot taps, that relieved the pressure. Normally that relief of pressure would allow the steam and boiling water to force the air out of the pipes there would be an almighty gurgling and rumbling and everything would sort itself out.
- ON: Would it come out of the hot water tap very hot?
- JH: No, the 'hot' water came out cold, the steam came out of the expansion pipe into the tank in the loft.
- ON: AH! Right. But it must have still come out pretty hot out of the hot water tap.
- JH: That depends how hot the water is in the copper tank.
- ON: Yes but you said it was boiling.
- JH: It could be boiling in the boiler behind the fire without any hot water being in the storage tank. Ther circulation did not work properly. So you got boiling water in the boiler and cold water in the tank and when you took the pressure of it the sudden drop in pressure would allow the steam to force the air out of the pipes. It would work all right for a little while then.
- ON: Yes, because now I can tell you that in fact the lead pipes that feed and the exit pipe were almost vertically up the chimney and then almost horizontally thereafter across the back bedroom. They are lead pipes they are heavy, and they sag.
- JH: You are bound to get high points where the air that comes out of the water when you heat it gets trapped. It's a very small orifice in these lead pipes.
- ON: Very small bore and of course in a hard water area the lime is likely to deposit constricting the bore even more. So, that's the hot water system.
- JH: It was completely uncontrollable. You have in in some cold weather on some days we had the whole hot water tank full of boiling water, there was no thermostat on it. If you had a big fire all day you could finish up with boiling water everywhere. We had to vent off boiling water because everything was boiling. You can't turn the fire out.
- ON: There was a little thing at the front, a little 'T' shaped thing.
- JH: That used to make the draught go round the back of the boiler more. That would give you better heating abilities,
- ON: But then what happened if you turned it the other way, did that reduce the heat?

- JH: If you had it shut, for want of a better word, no hot fumes under the tank, they all went up the chimney as you would expect. When you opened that thing some of the heat from the fire was sucked backwards and went underneath the boiler. I don't know why it worked, but it did. But, of course, you lost heat in the room because heat was not coming in the room, it was going backwards under the boiler. So, if you had it open you did not get as much heat from the fire. The flames would all disappear and go roaring down the back.
- ON: But surely the grate on which the coal sat that formed a box of fire brick so where would the flames have gone, unless there was some kind of airbrick ventilation at the back.
- JH: There was a big hole at the back, underneath the boiler. When you opened this vent the flames and things, instead of going up the chimney they would go backwards. I don't know why they went that way, why there was so much draught, but it did work, it did produce quite a draught backwards.
- ON: It was a contraption that did not seem to work very well.
- JH: It did work! It did what it was supposed to do but obviously you can't heat the water without losing heat from the room. You don't get anything for nothing. What we did notice is that our front room fire, which hasn't got a boiler behind it gave out far more heat than the back room fire which has. And that was really noticeable. If you think about it because the boiler is behind the fire that area behind the fire cannot get much more than 100 degrees centigrade because it's got water in it. Whereas the front room one, without that, the back firebrick behind the fire got red hot. So, you got much more heat radiated into a room. Behind the back room fire, the back of it was always relatively cold because it had water behind it.
- ON: I see.
- JH: When we had our Christmas Day fire...
- ON: Did you ever use the fireplaces upstairs?
- JH: I used the one in the back bedroom as a fume chamber when I was doing chemistry. To my knowledge they've never had fires in them. Not proper fires anyway.
- ON: I don't ever remember fires in our upstairs fireplaces.
- JH: We've still got all the paraphernalia, we've still got the grate and the fire brick and the bits that go in front.
- ON: That regulates the air flow beneath the grate and through the burning coals.
- JH: We've got all this, we could have a fire in our back bedroom.
- ON: Perhaps Christmas time you could get the local history society round here for something. What services have we still got to do? Oh, television. It's got to do with electricity.
- JH: We didn't get a television until 1957, I know the name because we got it during the holiday before I started secondary school, that was 1957 and the first one we got was a Bush TV63. It lasted many years. Like all valve equipment it gradually deteriorated and there are various tweaks that you can do with valve equipment to squeeze a bit more life out of them. At the time we had it I was interested in electricity and electrical things and I used to tamper with it and one of the things I did to it was to change the voltage

setting from 230 to 210, I basically overran it. It made it work for a bit longer. I also had a Variac so that when we had ‘brown outs’, which were quite common during the winter in those times I could increase the voltage. I had a voltmeter connected to the mains and I could adjust the voltage going to the television. The mains voltage dropped, I measured our mains voltage to below 200 volts on some nights.

ON: Good gracious!

JH: Everything got pretty dim, very noticeably.

ON: And what happened to the TV picture?

JH: It vanished! What tended to just happen with this particular television was that as the voltage dropped the television picture got bigger and less bright. There was not enough power to converge it properly so the picture just got fainter and bigger. You obviously tweak the voltage a bit to get it to come back. We finished up, because valve sets don’t die suddenly like modern ones, they just fade away, we had optimum settings of the brightness and contrast controls that would allow us to see anything. Eventually it got so bad hat we just gave up and bought another one. I think by this time BBC2 had started so we got a dual standard one.

ON: So I presume the same sort of thing happened with other people’s television sets. The pictures just got larger and dimmer.

JH: I don’t know what happened to anyone else’s. Weren’t bothered about them.

ON: If you had gone to a friend on this estate and watched telly together. I think that covers all the services. Except sewage.

JH: In the early days of electricity, for some reason that nobody could understand there were different types of electricity delivered to this house. We had electricity called ‘lighting’ and electricity called ‘power’. We had a separate meter for each type of electricity, five amp for lighting and fifteen amp for power. For some reason the ‘lighting’ electricity was more expensive than the ‘power’ electricity. There is no logic to this, it’s just nationalized industries gone mad. As a result, because the ‘lighting’ was very expensive we had a lot of standard lamps and plug-in lamps. Nearly all our lighting ran on the ‘power’. Eventually the powers that be decided that this wasn’t a sensible system so they simplified it. They came round and took one of the meters away and connected everything to the same meter. Unfortunately, they took away the wrong meter, we had the five amp meter that used to run the lighting with everything connected to it. We didn’t realise this to start with and we were sitting one day with the immersion heater on and other things on and we could hear this high pitched whining noise coming from under the stairs and had a look to see what it was and this meter was going round like a turbine under the stairs. A five amp meter with twenty amps going through it. It says a lot for the way they engineered it that it didn’t actually catch fire. We told the company about it and they came and changed it.

ON: What about sewage? Any stories, anecdotes?

JH: The two houses have a common outflow to the sewer, either side of the sideway and the people who lived opposite us, the guy who lived there, he was Irish and he had that kind of rural view about things, a little bit simple in some respects. Anyway, they decorated a room and he decided to flush the old wallpaper down the toilet. Eventually all the drains were all blocked up so that caused a bit of a problem. My father was outside trying to rod this wallpaper and it got sorted in the end.

- ON: A similar thing happened with our kid's disposable nappies which went down the loo, you know we very rarely used them. No it was nappy liners, the disposable nappies were rarely used and they went in a plastic bag in the rubbish bin, but it's the nappy liners to keep the nappy clean, its just a tissue but it's not soft tissue, quite hard and occasionally it would unfold, that went down the loo, it was like a piece of toilet paper only it's tougher. Occasionally it would go down the loo and then open out across the pipe and then just block it and then sewage would start to smell and start to seep out from the manhole covers. And I used to rod it.
- JH: We've been pretty lucky really with that sort of thing.
- ON: Yes, it's a rather strange thing that on this estate the surface water drainage and the sewerage are combined.
- JH: All joined together. That's not supposed to happen.
- ON: As long as it does not go into a water course it's alright except that a hell of rainwater goes into the sewage works from our estate.
- JH: Yes, we found out a long time ago that that was happening, there's nothing we could do about it.
- ON: But it's strange that it starts being separate and all the pipes go together. It's a crazy system and then of course the main sewage pipe for your side of the street goes underneath your front garden. Did you know that? Certainly, in our drive there is a big rectangular cover, well there are two, there's one further back outside the kitchen and one forward of the porch. I don't know whether you've got one.
- JH: We've got two manhole covers, there's one roughly level with the down pipe from the WC and another one about halfway between the pavement and the porch.
- ON: If you lift that one up you will discover that it's part of the sewage pipe that goes underneath everyone's front garden. It's like a collection point for the sewage down your side of the street.
- JH: I didn't think it did but I won't argue because I've only ever seen it once.
- ON: Yes, I've seen down it once and marvelled at it. It's brick lined all the way down. The depth depends where you are on the slope of our estate. It goes down about ten feet.
- JH: Ours doesn't.
- ON: You are near the bottom of the slope so yours will be fairly shallow.
- JH: I got the feeling there's a pipe comes down from the direction you would expect from our toilet and drains and there's a pipe coming in from up the road which I assumed was coming from the drain between the two houses, the rainwater pipe from the two houses.
- ON: But it's more forward than that.
- JH: And I thought there was a pipe going towards the road.
- ON: I don't think there are any sewage pipes....although you do see actually large circular manhole covers in the road. It's something to explore then. Get your helmet and wellies on.

- JH: No, that's going to stay as untouched as I can manage that manhole cover.
- ON: We've touched on most things haven't we, what about water supplies? Drinking water supplies. Drinking water supplies, any problems with that?
- JH: It dried up a little while ago, but that was when there was a big burst down Brent Cross way. We lost a lot of water pressure.
- ON: It must have been about three years ago. I think it was winter and it was top of Woodleigh Avenue, right on the corner and it was a mains burst. It took days for them to come and there was this fountain going up. It was sort of level with the facia boarding of the shop, the one on the corner that does floor boarding. It was mains pressure and the kids were playing in it, in that cold water, they must have been freezing.
- JH: Bit of fun for them I suppose.
- ON: There's one more thing that I've been meaning to ask and that was the development pf the Co-op and the flats there. I can't put a date on it, it's definitely post war, probably 1960s. Do you have any recollection?
- JH: I can remember it not being there. It was when I was old enough to get about on my own, I was beyond a toddler, I was probably about eight or nine, I was allowed out because I used to go about with a mate who lived up there and we used to go scrumping for goosgogs on the allotments where those flats and the Co-op are.
- ON: Oh, excellent that you have a good memory, not that you were scrumping somebody else's goosgogs.
- JH: I think they were abandoned allotments actually, but there were a lot of gooseberry bushes and things were just rampant there. I've got a feeling that at the time they were unoccupied. I was about 1955ish I would guess.
- ON: Do you remember Summers Lane, The Triumph is on your left and walking down the hill as Summers Lane goes into a dip, do you remember the chapel, the old iron church?
- JH: No, I don't remember for sure but there is some new building been done in that area, just opposite Short Way where they have built some new flats. I've got a feeling that Summers Lane was a bit of a 'no go' area.
- ON: Yes, it was.
- JH: So, I don't venture down there much but I remember that there was an area that was sort of derelict which might well have been where that place was. I can't say I remember what it was but I remember that there was an area that was more 'no go' than the rest of it. So, I suspect that was probably what you mean. Like a shed or something there.
- ON: The council houses would have been there, certainly from the 1930s.
- JH: It's not the council houses I'm talking about, the new bit that's been built just before you get to Short Way.
- ON: That's right, that's where the chapel or church was, I'm trying to find a description of it.
- JH: I can remember when there were proper shops opposite, where the North London Catering thing is now. There used to be a Fish and Chip shop there, and a grocer's shop I think as well. I used to go to the fish and chip shop.

- ON: What do you remember about it? Awful fish. Do you remember the chap there?
- JH: Not really, no. I can remember that it had a stainless steel kind of counter that at the time was taller than me.
- ON: Yes, it was pretty high up. I can remember the guy very well and all of a sudden it closed. He always used to smile in a pathetic sort of way, sort of a sad smile.
- JH: I used to hate going there as a child, I was sometimes sent up there to get our fish and chips. And I suppose I was eleven or twelve and for some reason I hated the shop, I can't put my finger on it.
- ON: Do you remember the shops in Halliwick Court Parade?
- JH: There was one, Carpenters was it, along opposite the Town Hall that was a proper hardware shop, like Faulkners used to be, and that was one of the last ones to die out around this way. Do you remember Faulkners up by Wilton Road?
- ON: Yes, but that's gone now.
- JH: It had this sort of strange smell of paraffin, mothballs, methylated spirit as you went in. They used to sell paraffin on draught, took your own can up and they would give you a gallon of paraffin.
- ON: That was a very common form of heating in the 1950s. it was very cheap to run.
- JH: At the time it was cheap and da was against us having gas fires, he insisted that we had Coalite, we had a solid fuel fire that took about an hour to get going and you couldn't really leave it unattended so when you we weren't using it we had a paraffin heater downstairs.
- ON: Yes we had paraffin heaters and it was either red or blue
- JH: Esso was blue and Aladdin was pink. I don't think there was any difference, we just used what was available. We still use a paraffin heater in the bathroom, we haven't electrified the bathroom. It's only used when people are having a bath, so it's not used that much. We used to use prodigious amounts of paraffin but eventually it got more and more difficult to get. You can't get it anywhere now other than in prepacks in garden centres. In a four litre plastic container from Homebase.
- ON: You could get it from Palmsville garage, they used to have a machine that sold it.
- JH: But it gradually died out as people went electric or gas. We did seriously consider getting one of those heaters fuelled by a propane cylinder. And I vetoed that straightaway as there was only one source locally and I said if they stop selling propane we are going to be stuffed. That was at the filling station at the corner of Summers Lane and Woodhouse Road, what is now BEM Electrical wholesalers. Eventually we finished up getting a gas fire fitted, which we haven't regretted.
- ON: Do you remember those garages, the commercial garages now owned by Dudrich, the ones in the alleyway. Do you know the ones I mean?
- JH: I know the ones you mean. They weren't always there because they were fairly new and being looked after when I first got a car which was about 1969-70. I was encouraged to put my car in it but I decided not to. At that time they were being properly looked after and they were relatively clean and tidy. They got neglected because I don't think

anybody took them seriously as garages. I think they were too far away from the people that might have wanted to use them. It is quite a long way from these roads to the garages and if it is pouring rain and you want your car you don't really want to walk a quarter of a mile to get to it.

ON: I know what you mean although in recent years people in Colney Hatch Lane used them. Some were used by local restaurants to store food. That was awful.

JH: I can remember the old Coppetts Road when it used to be a turning off of Colney Hatch Lane.

ON: I don't remember it, but people have described it to me. What was there at the entrance?

JH: It was just a turning but it's all changed dramatically when they put the flyover in and they did a tremendous amount of earth moving so it's a job to be sure where anything was now but it was further down where the car showroom is now. There was this turning that used to go parallel with the North Circular Road before that was made a dual carriageway. And it had been cut off by the North Circular, I don't think you could get on to the North Circular from it, there was a barrier. It lined up with the Coppetts Road that comes down from Muswell Hill. It used to go across the North Circular and then there was a sharp bend and it joined onto Colney Hatch Lane.

ON: It was around 1974 I think.

JH: No it was earlier than that when they put the flyover in because I didn't do too much driving before they did away with that suicide roundabout. I started driving about 1970. 1973 it would have been, thereabouts.

ON: We went abroad in 1973 and we were away until 1976 and when we came back it had all changed.

JH: At the time the North Circular was not a dual carriageway, but it was a very busy road. My father had had an allotment at where the football pitches are now. We used to go down there a lot and it got pretty interesting getting across the North Circular because the traffic was hurtling round the roundabout. It had kind of triangular islands both sides. For some reason we always crossed on the east side of this roundabout, the gasworks side of it. I don't ever remember going round the west side, it was probably to do with where the Coppetts Road came out because there was an area of rough ground between the old Coppetts Road where it came into Colney Hatch Lane and the North Circular.

At this point a map was produced by John showing that Coppetts Road did indeed join Colney Hatch Lane and confirming the name of the piece of the road between Colney Hatch Lane and the North Circular as Coppetts Road.

At this time the tape ran out and the interview was concluded.

Transcribed by David Berguer
Friern Barnet and District Local History Society
July 202