

Memories of Basildon

Author: Ron
Date Range: 1950-1960's

Came to Basildon aged eight from the original Albert Square in London. They saw the Coronation in Albert Square in June and were in Basildon by November. The family was given the 1000th house built. It was in Denys Drive. Ernest Marple came to hand over the key. There was an article in the Echo with a photograph of Ron's younger sibling sitting on Mr Marple's knee. Mother was very angry because people assumed that they were given all sorts of furniture and other gifts, she told everyone that the only thing they had been given was the cook book that came with the stove.

Father had come to Basildon with 'Rotary Hoe', and Ron's mother worked for Marconi's until the early 70's. His mother was initially very pleased to have a house but then became disenchanted. The only shop was the Co-op in Pendle Drive run by Alf Dove, or at Stacey's Corner. At the Jolly Friars in Whitmore Way was 'Lings', 'The Home and Colonial', 'Gable's Nursery', a butcher, then 'Pollards'. Ron had to go to school in Thundersley as there was no room in Burnt Mills school, and they could not take him in. Later he went to Craylands, which he walked to.

Ron's first job was at Acadex for £2 per week, an electrical engineering firm in Honeywood Road. Then Bonallack's, then Carrera's, opposite Marconi's, who were one of the biggest employers and came from Croydon. Paycocke Road to Christopher Martin Road was all Marconi's. There was only one industrial area then. Later came Pipp's Hill and Southfield, then Burnt Mills Industrial Site. Cranes Farm Road was then no more than a country lane. His first paper round was from the Post Office in Gardiners Lane.

'Carsons' had a lovely orchard, with apples, plums and pears. There was still a lot of green around, especially at the bottom of Whitmore Way. Sometimes there was smog because of the many ponds and marshes. They used to walk from Briscoes along Whitmore Way to Pitsea. Craylands was cornfields with a few small bungalows in between.

The doctor's was in Whitmore Way. Theydon Crescent had Dr Kifford and there was another in Timberlog Lane. From Broadmayne, Timberlog went down to the A13. There was the Bull at Vange with the bus depot behind it. The nearest pub was the Bull at Vange and the Gun.

The family sometimes went to the Southend Kursaal, 6d return on the train. They also went to Battlesbridge to open air swim, or the Basildon swimming pool which was better. The market was thought lovely, now it isn't. Old Pitsea market was wonderful. At Wickford market, Ron's father used to sell wood he picked up from the derelict sites, it used to have a cattle market and have auction rooms. Pitsea market was good when it was under the domes but now he felt that it has lost its character as had Basildon market.

Ron left school in the 60's, Basildon was still being built. There was a store selling cheap food, no frills, stacked high in boxes. Southernhay went right through town. Sombreros was the first coffee shop, in Southernhay.

'Charterhouse' in Laindon had an orchard, a verandah, gas light, a well and a bucket and chuck it for a toilet.

There was no railway station, just a little bridge where the one at the bottom of Clayhill Road is now, you go under that, up to One Tree Hill. It was fun growing up, you could walk and play for miles, come in at ten at night and your mum would say 'Where have you been?'

There was a milk farm at the top of the hill in Burnt Mills Road, the road on the left with a shop on the corner, then a garage, turn left opposite Rectory Road. Nevendon Bushes had big houses at the top, then down to the A13 by Rectory Road. Stanwood Radio in Rectory Road, a few shops. A sweet shop on the corner of the road. A garage on the right-hand side (where the new block is now), Campbell's bus service, then a shop where the roundabout is, a little police station, then Howards Park. At the corner of Wickford Avenue and Rectory Road stood Howards Dairies. The higher up Brackendale Avenue you go the older the houses.

The Five Bells was a nice walk through Vange on the old road. At the bottom of Timberlog Lane the church hall, and there was a garage round the corner in London Road and a lot of old shops. Vange wharf swimming pool had a club house of sorts where skiffle bands would play. You had to go through the wood yard to get there, down Wharf Lane. The first boy scouts were in Holden Road.