

Personal memories of David Culley, a former Thorpe resident.



*David Culley at Whitlingham station on his way to Cromer about 1949.*

We lived in St Andrews Avenue when it was a stony road with dirt footways each side separated from the road by rough grass. Part way up there was a particular flinty outcrop always negotiated with care whether on a bike or after 1953 in our first post war car. There were two large trees which intruded into the road just past No 19. They had been part of a field boundary before the road was made. Just over the brow of the hill the houses stopped and there was a corn field stretching to Gargle Hill plantation, simply known to us as The Woods. I recall an old faded pink threshing machine driven by a belt from a tractor in the corner of that field and the clatter the iron wheels made as it was at last driven down the hill to the Yarmouth Road over those stones.

The path followed the edge of the field just below the bank marking the edge of the School playing field. Then as now it went up the side of the woods to the Rec. There was no road to cross, but the council housing was being built down the side of the hill west of The Woods.

From the south east corner of the Rec on a clear day you could just make out the chimney of the "new" power station at Yarmouth. Crossing the Rec was a wearisome expedition when I was small but there was the attraction of swings and a slide on the far side. Then it was turn right along Laundry Lane, another stony track with few if any houses and no school, to Pound Lane where a right turn took us to the Yarmouth Road. In those days Pound Lane was entirely rural north of Primrose Crescent. The narrow road ran between two high banks with mature trees all the way to the Plumstead Road. There were no footpaths but traffic was never a problem.

Across the Yarmouth Road was Dunhams shop. A general grocer. Sometimes we would have an errand there but usually a cardboard box of supplies was brought to the house by a boy with a delivery bike. Our return route was through Primrose Crescent. Then as now it was quiet with many privet hedges. In fact apart from a new coat of paler paint, this is one of the least changed parts of the walk. In those days Primrose Crescent was separated from St Andrews Close by an earth bank with straggling elder you had to push through. This was not to stop traffic using

St Andrews Close as a through route as there were very few cars in 1950. I never saw any of the “rough boys” my sister feared we might meet on this part of the walk. The two roads line up perfectly but there is still today a formal separation. St Andrews Close, a private development, still had many empty plots on both sides. The family at the first white house on the left as you leave Primrose Crescent kept hens. I was often taken to see them and learnt about pullets, broodies and chicks. The eggs had been traded with neighbours throughout the war. Near the top of St Andrew’s Close on the south side was another space with rough grass and on the far side a tall fir tree where once a swarm of bees had hung from a low branch. Near the road was a straggly broken elder where we used to scramble. Back then down St Andrew’s Avenue and home. Yes it’s changed but I can still see it as it was in the 1950s. In several cases I can see too the folk who lived there and I know what they might say. It surprised me though to see how much their houses have shrunk. Our house backed onto the school playground and there was a gate in the chestnut fencing at the bottom of our garden allowing me easy access for the 5 years I was there. It was a very happy time.



*Miss Groom. Teacher at Hillside Avenue School 1952*

The all female teachers were in retrospect, outstandingly competent with classes of over 50.

In winter, in the huts, there was a coke fire the teacher stoked and the milk crate next to it. On one occasion in the second year I was assured by other pupils that my house was on fire. You could see the smoke billowing from a chimney fire and firemen on the roof. They just wouldn’t have it that it was the neighbour’s house. I used to look at that neighbour’s chimney with fascination. My mother told me how during the war a four engined plane returning from a daylight mission with 2 engines dead had wiggled its wings to get between our house and the neighbours. If it was as she said, I fear the crew will not have survived their desperate plight.



*Hillside Avenue. 1952? P2. Mrs Grimble.*

Forkes the bakers delivered our bread and a wet fish man called each week. He filleted the fish in the back of his van. But on Wednesdays mother got the 79 bus to Norwich. The stop was, as it is today, by the cemetery wall. Passing traffic included corgis and lorry chassis (or were they buses?) with the engine exposed and just one seat with the driver sitting wrapped up wearing goggles and of course there were sugar beet lorries going to Cantley.

I liked to sit on the high seat over the back wheels near the platform and if I was lucky and the ticket roll produced the red line showing it was near the end, the conductor might give me the remainder. I was easily pleased, I liked the way the conductor shouted the names of stops "Redan!" The market in those days was largely fruit and veg, fish poultry and flowers and a van selling Aldous ice creams. I saw horses with their noses in feed bags on The Walk where they had delivered the morning's supplies. There were as far as I recall few if any of the stalls selling food and drink which abound today. I was dragged round Garlands and Buntings sometimes getting lost around island displays, but my worst fear was of mother meeting someone. I recall one such meeting outside Chamberlins beautiful shop front which delayed our progress by what seemed hours. Those were the days of craters where buildings had been blitzed where now willow herb and nettles grew. There was one such gaping hole on Castle Meadow to the east of Davey Place steps and of course the huge hole where Debenhams (once Curls) now stands.

Embarrassingly I recall the discomfort I must have caused my mother when I saw my first gentleman of colour. Mummy look! A black man! We were near the International Stores opposite Bullens the jewellers where for many years there would be a man with a fat face in a hat and an old mac selling the Eastern Evening News. I can hear his call "Parp! Parp! Par-por".

When I was 10 the school ran out of space. I had to cycle to an annex at St Williams Way School where again we were housed in huts. 54 of us. It was brilliant. I learnt craft skills I could repeat today. How to make a wax motor with a slice of candle, a cotton reel a rubber band and a match. But at the end of that year we left Thorpe for a new house in Cringleford and the day we moved was my first day at secondary school. It was not a happy time but that's another story.

