

Recollections of the Green Path area

I grew up on Portland Street in the 1950's. I was at Dallas Road School and to get to the school games field we had to walk down Cromwell Road. Until I was about 8 the gate at the bottom of Cromwell Road was a rather rickety wooden gate, it wasn't a metal gate that people will remember, and the ramp down from the road to the field was an old wooden ramp as well. When I was about 9 or 10 the corrugated iron gate appeared; they'd put a concrete ramp in by then; not the one you see now but the old concrete one.

The games field wasn't as marshy as it is today; nowhere near. That's where we played football, and cricket in the summer believe it or not. We actually played on a slightly higher bit; we went down Cromwell Road, through the gate, then we'd go up more or less as far as the footpath goes before it makes a left turn, after that that's the area there where we would be playing on. What you have to bear in mind is it wasn't all fenced off of course, so this was all one field; that land now belongs to the Girls Grammar school. So we used to be playing football a bit higher up, so it was dryer. But if there had been a lot of rain it would get really muddy. The grass was kept short by grazing, because when we went to play football if the kids weren't careful they'd walk in a cow pat or something. We used to often get covered in cow dung playing on the field. Then we had to go back to school covered in that. It wasn't very flat, it was bumpy, there was a flattish bit but it was a bit hilly and a bit bumpy certainly not the ideal place to play football. There were goal posts up there. As it wasn't a very flat field it was a challenge to throw a cricket ball in a straight line, if you batted, the bounce! but nevertheless yes we played football and cricket on there. Also school sports days were held there.

There was an old barn, at the bottom, parallel to the houses on Aldcliffe Road, very close to Lucy brook. We never changed in the barn, we would walk down to the field in our football kit, but we would walk down in our shoes and carry our football boots and then sit down on the grass, take our shoes off, put our football boots on then when we had finished change back again into our shoes. But it definitely wasn't a changing room. I only ever went in it once; it was during the school sports I think we had done what we had to do, it started chucking it down and a few of the kids, without the teachers, just made a beeline for the barn and we all went in this barn, I'd never been in it before. It was quite dry in the barn, a bit rickety but it was dry. About 10 of us went in the barn and we just stayed in there for about 20 minutes until the rain had passed over and then emerged again.

The field that the Lads Club played on was opposite where Haverbreaks Bridge comes out there is a tiny little lane, you used to go down there and through that gate and there was a football field behind the last house. I was aware that the Lads Club played down there but that was probably only until the mid 1950's. That was also boggy. I went in there if the gate was open, I used to go in there sometimes and maybe hang around for 10, 15 minutes when a match was on.

As a boy I never went in Pony Wood. I was aware that there was a clump of trees there but I didn't even know that it was called Pony Wood.

I often came down the Long Pads path. When I was about 8, 9, 10 I often used to go along there. There was a big no cycling sign put up by the Local Authority but we used to go down there on our bikes despite the no cycling sign. Once you get past the top end, which has been altered a lot, widened out, once you actually get on to the path proper it's changed very little. The hedges have obviously grown; they weren't cut back very often. A lot of the path hasn't changed an awful lot;

still narrow, on the bike you had to be a bit careful if you met anybody you had to get off the bike, but as kids do, it didn't stop us going down there. We used to get to where Lucy brook goes under the path, as a child I didn't realise it was still Lucy brook at that point; we used to stop and cup our hands and have a drink out of the brook. It's a wonder we didn't poison ourselves.

My mother was quite keen on blackberrying so we used to blackberry all around the lanes and down there as well. But usually my mother would be with us then, 'cause it was her that wanted to do the blackberrying and she wanted a bit of assistance. But yes we used to go blackberrying down there.

Also we used to go on nature walks with school. Arthur Briggs, our teacher in the top class, used to take us on nature walks to show us birds nesting and we had to all stand quietly, wait for little cheeping sounds and then carefully look into the hedges. Arthur Briggs was very good; he taught us to observe birds and look for birds' nests but without disturbing them too much. He taught us how to observe nature without disturbing it too much, just observing it but without destroying it. How to respect wildlife; he installed in the children that there is nothing wrong with observing wildlife but there was a lot wrong in destroying it, like disturbing nests and that sort of thing, taking nests, taking eggs or even vandalising an area where birds were nesting; he taught us to respect wildlife. That is a lesson that did stick, not so much what the birds were but how to respect the wildlife.

There was no orchard down there then; it was a meadow, I didn't go in the meadow that was there then.

As a boy I used to play on the playground at Fairfield. When I first used to go it was just about 3 or 4 swings and a seesaw. And then when I was about 8 or 9 the American Jockey arrived. It was like a long bench, metal, suspended, a bit like an old fashioned swing boat, you couldn't have it now health and safety wise, it was like a guillotine; where it was hinged at the bottom it was all exposed and when it closed two metal parts came together, it could have taken kid's fingers off if they put their fingers in the wrong place, it would have just whipped your finger off just like that. It was there for quite a number of years. The play equipment was in the same place as it is now because down below there was a big grass area and when I was about 10 or 11 (mid 1950's) the local kids dug a massive pit, a massive big trench about half the size of this room (about 2 metres long). They spent their whole summer holidays doing it; it must have been about 6 or 8 feet deep. Then they got scraps of corrugated iron and made a roof over the top of it and made it into this most superb den. Then they grassed it all over, you couldn't even tell it was there. But I think the parents got a bit worried, because it was deep, probably about 6 feet deep and if the walls had caved in the kids would have all got buried alive. So at the end of the summer holidays the parents went and collapsed it and filled it all in. last time I went up there, about 5 or 6 years ago, there were still signs of it. Even now if you look down there today there is a bit of an undulation and that's where it was.

I remember the garages being there, on Wingate Saul Road, there were the houses then the lane and then a row of garages.

I remember the allotments being there, I used to go up there with a neighbour and friend to help her dad in the early 1950's.

I can never remember when the Girls Grammar School playing field wasn't there. The footpath beside it was narrower then.

We used to get our milk delivered but not from Mr Loxam, who farmed Ripley farm, and lived next door but one. When I was too young for me to remember the milk didn't come in a bottle the milk man poured into a jug. Milk was on ration; if the milk man had a bit extra he would say to my parents 'always leave your jug inside the house not outside, leave your front door open, leave it on the latch we'll open the front door we'll fill your jug, but no one will be able to see how much goes in it because we'll do it in the house' and they used to do that for people with children. They weren't profiteering at all but they were black marketing. But they got caught and they got fined quite heavily for black marketing. They didn't get a prison sentence 'cause they'd never been caught before but they got heavily fined and told if they were caught again they would go to prison. Obviously some of the neighbours without children twigged that the people with kids were getting a bit of extra and there was a lot of jealousy in those days about people having anything they shouldn't have so they obviously reported it. I think they were just delivering, didn't have their own herd, but can't be certain.

When I was older it was a different milkman and delivered in bottles. But if we ever ran out I used to go down to the farm [Carr House] and hope that I wouldn't meet old grandad Loxam. He lived in a house on Carr House Lane. He wore clogs and he used to walk down to the farm in his clogs. He wore a farmer's smock, covered in cow muck and had a very gruff temperament. If they were milking he'd never use the electric milking machine, he'd milk by hand, even if Tommy (his son) was using the machine he'd have another cow he'd be milking by hand. If ever I asked the Carr House grandfather Loxam for a pint of milk he groused and it was a long time in coming before he bothered himself to go and sort it out so you always hoped that you would meet Tommy Loxam instead 'cause Tommy Loxam was fine about it.

Grandad Loxam was the brother of the Mr Loxam who lived next door but one to us who had Ripley farm. They looked very alike but the Mr Loxam on Portland street was just the opposite temperament, when I was young I was always a bit wary of old men but I used to love Mr Loxam because he was always so cheerful and kind to me. He was a lovely guy. That was Hedrick's dad. Hedrick had two brothers; Ronald and Norman.

What Carr House farm used to be like was, under the railway bridge was a little bit of pathway up to a couple of gate posts, there was never a gate on, and the yard was all cobbles. As you walked into the farmyard, on the right hand side, were 3 or 4 buildings and they were pig sties with pigs in and on the left as you'd gone through the farm gateway there was a building which was their milking parlour; it was quite small. The moment you went in the farm yard gateway you walked past the end of the milking parlour and then turned slightly left and there was the doorway into the milking parlour and they had the cooling machine and everything. Or if you carried straight on you walked up to the farm house. I knew the Loxam's much better than my sister did because David and Robin are much closer to my age; I knew the Loxam's a lot better than the Wilkinson's.

When I first met my wife she was a teacher at Dallas Road School. I took a photo of her, Miss Jean Robinson, with her class by the gates to the meadow (now the Orchard) on the Long Pads. She often used to take the children for nature walks down round there. The photo was taken in the summer term of 1970, it's the '69/70 class, the trees are coming into leaf so I would guess it was probably taken about the beginning of May.

The only thing that I had any impact on was Edenbreck farm. My sister Marilyn was very friendly with the Wilkinson's (who lived there). One day she came home and she was a bit distraught because the Wilkinson's were very worried that they were going to get turfed out and there was talk about demolishing it. I think the Council for one reason or another had intended to demolish it. At this time I was newly married and living in an old cottage in Arkholme which was Grade 2 listed and I had the Notice of Listing in the house; it had the name and address of the authority that does the Listing. So I wrote to them to try to get Edenbreck listed. I went and had a look at Edenbreck farm, there was a date on it somewhere, I can't remember now, but I quoted that. I know I went to the library and I researched what I could and I supported my petition with what I could find, which is so long ago now that I have forgotten. I gave as much history as I could about Edenbreck at the time. I concocted a letter; as a result of that Edenbreck was listed. It would have been about 1972 when I wrote and got it listed. It would have made it a lot more difficult for the Council to demolish it; it put a bit obstacle in the way; that was the whole idea.

Reg Stoddon