

## My Memories of Sawtry by Marilyn Townsend

I was born at no 4 Fen Lane. One of the cream painted houses on the right hand side as you come up Fen Lane from Bill Hall Way. My parents, my grandmother and my brother Gordon, moved there when their cottage at the top of Conington Lane was knocked down to make way for the Great North Road in 1936. My earliest memories are of my grandmother Polly Rowell giving me a dolls pram in the front room of the house on Fen Lane and her sewing machine was sitting there. I was probably only about three and a half as she died in December 1953 and I was born in April 1950. She left me her sewing machine. We lived next door to the Barnard family on one side. George Barnard was one of the volunteer firemen in Sawtry. That is probably why my brother became a fireman as George would tell him lots of stories about the fires and being a fireman. When I was little, there were green fields opposite our house which is where Ermine Road now is, and kids from Fen Lane would go across the fields to the Primary School on School Hill (now the Old School Hall). We had big gardens as everyone then grew their own vegetables. This was before they built the bungalows in between the houses on Fen Lane. On the other side of us lived the Masons. My Dad grew loads of daffodils on the large front garden. I can remember my Mum & I picking some daffodils from my dad's garden and laying them on the Mason's front step when Astrid Mason gave birth to their daughter Lynne. After my grandmother's death and another of my sister Valerie in 1955, my family decided it was time to move. So we moved to the Prefabs at Park Road which was off Church Street. I loved that house and lived there until I was about 20 when we moved to Moyne Road. The Prefabs were built in 1947, as post war housing and they came from Canada. There were so many cupboards in the whole house and a fitted kitchen along one wall with a fridge built under the counter, long before fitted kitchens were a thing! Wally Moss lived on one side of us, Herbert Moss's brother. Wally's daughter Jackie and I would go to Ramsey Gaiety on a Saturday night when we were teenagers, there used to be live shows with lots of well known groups and musicians. Our dads used to take turns driving us. If my dad took us, Wally would pick us up afterwards and the next time we went Wally would take us and Dad would pick us up. That was part of the community spirit of the Prefabs. Ramsey Gaiety later became a Cinema. It is now closed I believe.

Behind Wally lived Les Colbert and his family who were related to us. On the other side lived Arthur Howard and behind him, lived his brother Reuben Howard. The Howards were descendants of a publican who ran the Bell public house also named Reuben Howard. Behind us lived George and Maud Hubbard. The Hubbard family came from Conington originally. I spent many happy hours playing monopoly with Denise Hubbard in their kitchen. I can remember most of the families who lived in the Prefabs. The Barbers, Chapmans, Yates, Kents, Wilsons, Marshalls, Ketteringhams and Dave and Jenny Morgan who lived in the last Prefab on the left, at the bottom of the cul de sac next to the field where Park Pond was, which is how Park Road got its name. The field belonged to Huntings of the Manor House on the corner of Tinkers Lane and the Green, the field itself backed onto Tinkers Lane. There are lots of houses in that field now. I used to go fishing at the Pond. I also loved growing up in the Community that was then Park Road which is very different to the Park Road of today. Because of the way the surface of Park Road street was laid in large concrete sections like squares which had natural corners, they made a perfect rounders pitch with each of the four corners as the bases which we had to run round. So armed with a tennis racket and ball and 4 sticks one stuck in each corner, the kids of Park Road spent many hours in the summer months sometimes until it was nearly dark playing rounders but our parents always knew where we were. They only had to look in the street out in the front of the houses. Next to Park Road was a patch of ground, we called the Rubble which is where some old cottages were demolished. As kids we claimed that ground as our playground. There were trees to climb and it stood unused for many years. It is where Annesley Close now stands. All the Prefab kids would collect rubbish and build a huge bonfire on Nov 5<sup>th</sup>. We would also pool our fireworks and our fathers would get together and let them off for us and supervise the bonfire. With our mums help, the kids also used to get together and put on plays at the local Church Schoolroom just across the road from the Prefabs and the money collected went towards building the first Swimming Pool at Sawtry Village College. I personally spent a lot of time roller skating up and down the Church Schoolroom path as the concrete was particularly smooth. We spent a lot of time at Dora Garrett's sweet shop at the top of Church Street and at Audrey Wright's shop. I can remember when I was

about thirteen Les Colbert's daughter Pat, my cousin and I decided to try smoking a cigarette. She made me go and buy ten cigarettes from Dora Garretts and when I came running out of the shop who should I run into but my mother Ena Townsend, going by on her bike. Of course she saw the cigarettes in my hand. "What have you got there" she said, and after a few stuttering moments she took them away from me. Pat and I did eventually get our hands on a cigarette which we went up The Jitty to smoke and we hated it! (the Jitty, later renamed Jubilee Walk in 1977, was between Wellside surgery and the Manor House opposite Mellors Court) I never did become a smoker. I remember the Jitty would take you out into Belgrave Square and the fields up Gidding Road behind the Working Mens Club where the Housing Estate now is. There was a walnut tree at the end of the Jitty which grew over from the Manor House.

In 1963 we had a really bad winter with lots of snow and when the snow melted Sawtry was flooded. Sawtry was notorious for flooding in lots of areas of the village before the drainage system was updated. I remember it was flooded at the entrance to Park Road and it went all the way to Tinkers Lane which always flooded as the land rises going up Church Causeway to the Church. The rest of Tinkers Lane was also flooded all the way to the Green. Someone turned up with a rowboat and it was deep enough that we rowed from Church Causeway to the Green. Looking back on it there must have been an underground stream there that fed the well that was next to the Manor House on the Green which was where most of Sawtry village got their water before drainage was laid. It probably also fed Park Pond as it was always fresh and not stagnant. The stream, in turn, was probably linked to Sawtry Brook that once fed the old Moat behind All Saints Church and it was the Brook that ran alongside the Great North Road (probably connected to Alconbury Brook) and had three bridges over it. One at Stangate Hill, one at the bottom of Fen Lane and one at Conington Turn. I think the Brook was filled in when the A1 was built as the moat used to be fresher when I was a girl.

The highlight of most of the kids growing up in Sawtry then was the Fair on the Green which came every year for Sawtry Feast. On Feast Sunday we would all march behind the parade, dressed in our finery, and

after the parade marched back again where everyone would congregate on the Green and listen to the Brass Band.

My best friends growing up were Susan Gibbons and Joan Milford. Susan and Joan were in the same class as me at school and sadly now have both passed away. I remember once my dad gave me a small tent and Joan and I decided we would have a picnic in the tent, however we didn't have posts to hold the tent up or ropes to tether it so we improvised. I raided my dad's shed and found some dark grey metal poles that looked as if they would work to hold the tent up. We took some bricks from the garden to hold the corners of the tent. We piled everything into my Dolls Pram and pushed it up Church Street to the fields just past where the Co-op now stands. We put the tent up in the field and I remember there was a pond in the corner of the field. We were sitting in the tent when we heard a lot of mooing and came out to find us completely surrounded by cows who had come up to drink from the pond. They had been in another field that led in to the field we were in so we hadn't seen them. We managed to grab my dolls pram and the tent but as we pulled it down, the metal poles flew into the pond. We left the field watching the cows eating our bag of sandwiches. When I got home and told my dad what had happened I found out that the metal poles, which were now languishing in the pond on Glatton Road were part of our TV aerial that had blown off during a recent storm, which Dad hadn't got round to putting back on, and, as you can imagine it didn't go down well at all. Looking back that was a silly thing to do. The cows could have trampled us. Much of my childhood was spent in the fields around Sawtry, looking for mushrooms or picking blackberries, a freedom which children nowadays can't enjoy as much we did due to the changing world we live in. The old Sawtry was a very different place where I had a wonderful, happy childhood growing up and many lasting memories of which I treasure.

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