

## Memories of Whitehall

I first saw Whitehall about 1949 from the window of a W.V.S. van as we went by on the way to Archers Wood Farm.

It looked very much an imposing building and has hardly changed over the years. With a lovely garden and tall brick chimneys.

What was I doing in a W.V.S. van? Well the family our family the Woodbridges were bombed out in London and we lost everything. So that when heard there were P.O.W. huts at Sawtry Way we came up and squatted in a prefab like hut on the camp as many others did. But we were not allowed to stay as the hut had been allocated to another family (the last hut on the camp).

So my brother Bernard took a farm labourers job on Mr Sam Coles farm just up the road from Whitehall. This allowed us to stay in the old thatched cottage at Archers Wood in what they called a tied cottage.

We got to know the Fitton Family at Whitehall very well. Colonel Fitton was a real nice old gentleman a product of the 1<sup>st</sup> world war and his wife a real lady. They had three children two boys and a girl, Michael, Richard who was called 'Tony' his middle name and Elizabeth also called by her middle name of Diane. The two boys were a bit wild and I can remember when Mike drove his sports car from London with a broken fan belt and the car blew up just down the road from home. The other lad Richard loved going into Archers Wood and built a tree house at the end of the main riding. Diane the daughter loved horses and you would always see her riding around the fields and woods. Mrs Fitton believed in health, walking and every day walked up past Archers Wood farm to the bottom of the steep hill which led up to Coles Farm and then back again.

Whitehall Farm had a collection of out buildings and two semi-detached cottages in them lived the gardener and his wife and children and a sister Mary.(Who worked at Chivers in

Huntingdon). In the other cottage lived a P.O.W. with an English girl I think he was called Hans, he looked after the livestock and milked the cows and did farm work. The gardener Mr. Ron Adams kept a very good garden and even grew tobacco (rare in those days). When he left to join the Hunt's Police Force he was able to work his way up to a high position in the police force. Mr. Fitton loved dogs and had a pet bulldog who often ran out the front gate and barked at anyone going by, the dog bit my sister on the ankle as she walked home past the gate, the next day Mr. Fitton sent a large box of chocolates up to our house with an apology all for my sister. The garden in front of the house at Whitehall had many nice trees in those days, some of them being firs, in these trees were many birds' nests some being round moss balls, I would think it would be hard to see this sort of thing again.

I was very surprised when Mr. & Mrs. Fitton were divorced, Mrs. Fitton went to live near Cambridge and Mr. Fitton hung on for a few years before he died in 1970. Later Diane went to live with her mother at Cambridge. I can only assume that death duties broke up the estate and Mike Fitton opened an antique centre in the old stables, I often saw him at local antique auctions he was often in the Royal Oak public house having a pint before it was knocked down to make way for the A1 Motorway which also ruined the Toll Bar area.

At the time one of the Hickey lads that lived on the old P.O.W. camp bought a little thatched cottage at the Toll Bar, he invited me along with Austin & Walter Hickey and Roy Green to paint the rooms inside I can remember the traffic whizzing by on the old A1 and would not wish to live there because of the noise. But I have been inside Whitehall and I must admit the traffic noise from the motorway is not a problem.

In the area just across the road was a farm run by the Dubberie family, just up the Great North Road on the left going towards London was Tophams Lodge Farm and next to this was the famous racing driver Buster Yeomans who lived with his wife

and daughter June. Further up at the bottom of Stagnate Hill on the right lived the Allen Family and I played with Peter & Dennis Allen. Going towards Sawtry was the local garage on the left, run by a Mr. Snitch with a posh restaurant run by a captain whose surname eludes me, and of course further down was the Toll Bar with the local bobby's house and Ray Lockhead the constable. I knew many of the locals as I went to Sawtry School (But that's another story).

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