MY MEMORIES OF THE HEATH. 4.1.2023

1.

My name is Jennifer Burnside, I am seventy-five years old. I was born at brought up at The Heath, living there until 1969. My maiden name is Parker. I lived at 9 Bagworth Road, a double fronted detached house. It's named Belle Vue, French for Beautiful View. It was built in 1914 at a cost of four hundred pounds by Samuel and Maggie Bridgett. My Mam and Dad, Harry and Doris Parker bought it from them around 1933 for six hundred pounds. The last time it was sold was in 2014 for £245, 000.

The house was mortgaged to Hinckley and Leicester Building Society, who had a local agent. Roland Statham at number 11 Bagworth Road, next door to us. Every month my dad put a ten bob note in the mortgage book and one of us took it round to Roland, who signed receipt of it with his signature written in red ink.

When I was born in March 1947, I was told that the snow was so high that The Heath was cut off from the village and no deliveries were able to get through. The men from The Heath cut a road through and went to the village to buy bread, carrying it back in bolster cases [double pillowcases] over their shoulders to supply The Heath.

Locally it was known as Gorby Knob or Nob, and if anyone asked my dad where he lived, he would answer as such.

My dad's Aunt Flo kept the George and Dragon, an Everards House. Tony Everard travelled by helicopter when he visited his pubs. If my dad was at home and saw it, he was straight on his bike and down to the Dragon, as it was always drinks on the house when he came.

Starting from The Heath Turn, on the right-hand side was Finney's Woodyard, later to become Verdon Sawmills.

Further down on the left was a farm owned by the Fox family, who were what I would describe as Gentleman farmers. Mrs Fox was a quiet refined lady who did needlework. Mr Fox dressed in tweeds and carried a bone hooked handle walking stick. They had one son David. Mr Fox let the local children bottle feed his lambs, who had lost or been rejected by the ewe.

I remember boys from Desford Boys School, a reformatory for young offenders, working in Fox's field opposite our house. They all wore blue boiler suits and dug the ditches out to keep them clear. The school was opposite the Flying Horse, just before Desford crossroads.

The farm sold later to Fred Chadwick a builder from the village. He didn't farm the land. I remember him coming in his dark green Jaguar Mark 10, the first one I had ever seen.

Opposite was Wilkinson's coal yard and next to that a huge galvanised structure housing coal and delivery lorries.

Then the first house on the right, Number 5 was where one of the Wilkinson family lived. Len and Kath. They had three children Mary, Janet and John. Len was a partner in The Wilkinson's businesses. One of them being Coal Merchants.

My Dad was a coal miner, so we always had good fires. Kath used to come round for a warm.' Harry lad' she would say 'I am perished 'and stood with her back to our kitchen fire, with her skirt lifted until her legs became mottled red. I thought nothing of it as a child, but later in life saw the irony of it.

A family named Smith lived in the next house No 7. When they moved Eleanor and Frank Statham bought it. His nickname was Docket. They had no family. Frank was a bricklayer and Eleanor, known as Nellie, cleaned locally. Nellies maiden name was Haines, she was related to The Haines family in the village, who ran a taxi service. Having no family of their own, I was invited many times to Sunday lunch with them. The first course was always Yorkshire Pudding and Burdalls gravy salt.

Second course roast beef, spuds and veg. I'm told that the Yorkshire pudding was to fill one up, so there was enough for a cold cut the following day. Nellie and Frank had a pig sty down their garden. One day Nellie and I made the pig swill, she was wearing her Hessian apron. We carried it down in galvanised buckets and opened the sty door when one pig ran at Nellie and commenced to rip her apron off and eat it. The buckets went up in the air and I ran home as fast as my legs would carry me. Frank often gave me money to get him Fox's Glacier Mints from the shop. At that time, they were unwrapped and in tall screw topped jars. To make the exact weight Mrs Clarke, the shopkeeper, kept a toffee hammer and smashed a sweet into pieces. Never a gram over.

Then us The Parker family at number nine. I had two older sisters, Rosemary and Carole.

The double fronted detached house had six fireplaces, one in each bedroom upstairs and three downstairs. The black lead fire grate in the kitchen had an oven attached to the side of it. For the first few years of my life, we had no bathroom, and were bathed in a tin bath which was brought in from the outhouse.

We had a brick lined soft water well, which my dad put his ladder down every year to clean out. This fed to a hand pump in the outhouse and was used for washing. On the back yard stood a tall wooden cased long handled pump, fed by another hard water well. The water from this was used for watering the garden and swilling the yard and paths.

There was a hug Monkey Puzzle tree in the front garden, which was used as a clue in Treasure hunts. In the early sixties cars pulled up outside and stared at it, before speeding off.

The garden at the back was large and split into three areas. The first a lawn for us children with a swing, second the left-hand side, my Mams flower garden and the right and third side my dad's vegetable garden. We had an Almond Nut tree, a Conference Pear tree and a Cherry tree. Back then food was still rationed but my Dad kept hens, from which we had eggs and chicken dinners. We also had a sty with two pigs, so along with the' home grown meat', and every vegetable being home grown , we were well fed .

Beyond the boundary of our back garden was an allotment, where we had gooseberry, raspberry and blackcurrant bushes. The allotment was subject to an annual rent, collected on Lady Day by a lady called Grace Bell.

There were a lot of children on the Heath. We all played out together in the road, skipping through a rope washing line, whip and top and taking car numbers. We only saw coal wagons on a regular basis and sat for hours on end awaiting a car. The pencil I had, had to be licked and when wet wrote in purple. The lads made bogies from old pram wheels, scraps of wood and a bit of twine to steer it with.

My dad was a coal miner for forty-eight years. Most of them working underground at Bagworth, and Merrrylees, but most for them and latterly at Desford. As a working miner, he received a ton of concessionary coal every month. Well, nineteen hundredweight was delivered, and one hundred weight went to the retired miners fund. The coal was delivered from a National Coal Board waggon and tipped on to the pavement outside the house. When my dad was on day shift, it fell to my mam and us children to shovel and barrow it round to the bottom of the garden, where my dad's two coal sheds were. Then filling and carrying buckets and buckets of water and swilling the pavement clean. Years later it was delivered in bags, and one of us had to count the bags, to make sure we got eleven hundredweight.

The Heath was subject to mining subsidence. In the late fifties our house leaned to one side and great cracks appeared in the walls and ceilings. The drains were affected too. We sat in the house and counted the time between shots being fired beneath us from the mine. Eventually we had to move out, whilst the foundations were underpinned, and repair work was done to make it habitable.

When my dad retired, following many accidents down the pit, he received a certificate from Lord Robens who was the Chairman of The National Coal Board at the time. It reads 'For long and meritorious service'.

Next to us was a row of terraced houses, five in all and known as 'The five row '.

Roland Statham, the agent for Hinckley and Leicester Building Society lived in the first one. He had a Black ford car the number plate beginning with the letters EZ. Roland made dandelion wine and had the children from the Heath picking dandelions for him.

Next to him were the Coy Family. Mrs Coy, Cecil her husband and their children. Two of them were Margaret and Dulcie.

Next door was another Statham family. Grace and her husband known as Merkin .

I can't recall the other two houses' occupants.

The detached house after the five row was owned by Freddie Archer. He was a mobile trader, selling hardware from the back of his van, which he kept in a prefabricated garage next to the house. He had one son Michael.

Round the corner on Merrylees Road were several wooden garages and then the shop.

Mrs Clarke, Violet, was short stout lady. She wore John Lennon style glasses and was always dressed in brown draping clothing and black Glace leather shoes with a strap across and fastened with a button. She sold everything from paraffin, chopped wood, groceries, to sweets in glass jars and cigarettes.

At that time, late fifties, she would sell a single cigarette, as I know by pretending that it was a Woodbine for my dad.

Then there was the red phone box. A lifeline to me when I was a teenager. But getting to use it was another matter, as there could be a queue of us waiting for a call from friend.

Further up was yet another Statham family. Clem, his wife Grace and their children. He was pigeon fancier and had a coop down the garden.

Going up, there were the Bell family, Fred, his wife who everyone called Fan and children June, Colin and Lynda.

I remember many families further on, but not the order in which they lived.

After the last bungalow, on the right, there was a stile which led through the allotments and down a field, which we used as a short cut. It brought us out on the main road just past Bosworth turn.

The first farm past there was Chater House. Mr and Mrs Bates were lovely people who let the children play in their fields. At that time there were hundreds of rabbits, playing games between the cows, waiting to be milked. Then myxomatosis wiped the rabbits out.

Coming back toward the Heath was Orchard Farm, owned by a family called Archer. They had a daughter Christine and an adopted son Michael.

Then a row of terraced houses, Prospect Villas, known as the Six row. My Grandma Hannah lived there with her second husband Charles Orton.

The first house after that, a detached lived Grace and Charles Barsby. He was an undertaker. They had two sons, David and Kenneth, who went on to run a Funeral Business in Hinckley.

Then a pair of semidetached. The Holt family lived in the first on with their daughter Shirley. His name was Horace, but always known as Nunc. Shirley had a Dansette record player and that is where I first heard Bill Hayley sing Rock Around the Clock. Next door was the Poole family with two daughters Janice and Josie.

Then Wilkinson's Heath Garage. I worked there in the office when I left school. Derek was what I would describe as the Office manager over the Coal and Garage side of the business. My wage was three pounds a week. That was in 1962. There were several strands to the business. The garage, car maintenance and repairs, petrol sales. The Wilkinson's had at that time Harold the father, Len [from no 5 Bagworth Road] and Harold's three sons Young Len, Derek and Rex all working in the business. Rex worked in the garage alongside Colin Bell, Brian Moore and Jimmy Garnham. The garage staff all wore brown overalls.

There was one man from Newbold, Enoch Davies, who came in one day to pay his car repair bill and handed me a tin full of silver sixpenny bits in payment. They took some counting!

The Garage closed for lunch, so I also served petrol. In those days there was a fluid called Red X, a petrol additive. So, three and three shots were three gallons of petrol and three shots of Red X.

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Another strand was coal haulage and deliveries. There were two fellows I remember doing coal deliveries Walter Gibson, known as Fender and his mate also called Walter. They hauled the coal from a local mine and stored it beside the waggon shed on Bagworth Road. As the orders came in, most were regular repeat orders, as everyone had a coal fire then, they weighed and bagged it up for delivery. All the payment were in cash. The system of knowing who had paid or not paid for a delivery were on the delivery sheet, marked in pencil as P OR NP.

One of my jobs was counting the leather coal money bags, and as you may imagine was a dirty hands job. Another job was calculating how many pound notes, ten bob notes, half-crowns etc Derek need to draw from the bank weekly for me to make the wages up. The wages were made up in brown packets with a cut out in the top , so that the notes could be counted and a transparent window for the rest , so the change could be seen and counted . They were paid weekly on a Friday.

The other strand to the business at that time was delivery of Bibby's animal feed to farms and collection of straw from various places, I remember a regular run being to Skeffington. The straw and animal feed were then delivered to local farms.

It was sometime later about 1963, when they built a car showroom opposite the garage and became agents for new car sales. Young Len managed most of that side of their various businesses.

When I was sixteen someone traded in a Pink Bubble car for a new Ford. Len asked me if I wanted it for free. YES please. But sadly, my mam wouldn't let me have it.

So, their business must have been profitable keeping Harold and his wife with their two sons still at home, Len Senior and his family, Young Len and his wife Sheila and their family .

Young Len and his wife Sheila lived in the detached house adjacent to Bagworth Road. They had three children, Michael, Lorraine and Lyndsey their youngest daughter, who lives in the house now .

Harold Wilkinson, his wife Nell and their two sons Derek and Rex lived in the first detached house on the right, going up Bagworth Road. Then Mrs Pegg , who lived in the next detached house.

Then Reg and Connie Statham, with their children Rosemary, Ann and David. The Frearson family, Alf and Eileen lived in the last house. He was always known as Alf Dot.

Coming back down, on the opposite side was Freemans Farm. Their nickname was Broggie . They had three children, Rosemary, Gilbert and Robert.

The Heath was made up from a mixed stock of Victorian terraces, early nineteen hundred semis and new builds. Except of course, Chater House, mentioned in The Doomsday Book.

Although most wives didn't work, I never remember anyone leaving for rent or mortgage arrears. There were no rich or poor, we all counted the same. No class distinction.

The children from the Heath went to Newbold Verdon School and walked there. In winter when high snow drifted, we hung on to each other's coat belts and if one fell in, we all fell over. We must have looked like a troop of Elephants. At that time the school consisted of four classrooms.

6.

Home delivered food wasn't invented by Asda nor Tesco.

The Co-op in Newbold did a weekly delivery. Jim Herriman came on his bike and delivered groceries and took the following weeks order.They also had a bread and confectionary delivery service . The van came from Coalville, with a chap swinging a huge wicker basket on one arm, full of different kinds of bread and cakes.

Alf Gilliver, who had a chemist shop on the corner of Main Street and Desford Road, came from the village, on a bike delivering medicines.

Even beer and soft drinks were delivered to the door by Davenports Beer at Home

Meat came by a delivery service from Brotherhood's of Barlestone.

Milk straight from the churn, from Bate's farm, by horse drawn cart. It was taking your own milk jug and choose from a pint or a quart.

There was no Doctors' surgery nearby. We had Dr Segerdal or Dr Drobinski from Coalville. In those days the Doctor came to the house, carrying a black bag. Following diagnosis, he delved into his bag and pulled out pills. If he didn't have the required medicine, a prescription was made out and Alf Gilliver delivered it.

When the Doctor came it was like a religious ceremony. The best china cup and saucer came out and my mam called for one of us to fetch her 'good 'frock to put on.

If the complaint you had wasn't serious enough to call the Doctor out, Nurse Greaves trundled up on her trusty bike. Later to be replaced by Nurse Mc Stocker, from Newbold, who drove a Triumph Herald.

Bus services were Browns Blue, which ran from Hinckley to Coalville and Gibson's which ran from Market Bosworth to Leicester. Happy days, remembering Lynda Bell and myself running to the Heath turn, waving our arms to alert the bus driver that we wanted to get on and willing him to stop. In those days busses had a 'clippie'. When you got on and paid your money the clippie twizzled a machine which produced a ticket, as your proof of payment.

They were happy, uncomplicated days. Ones where a child could play out day and night in safety. Everyone knew one another and looked out for each other. I can look back now and think how lucky I was to grow up on The Heath.