

LIVING DOWN THE YARD



ROSE YARD, ABOUT 1910

A REPORT

*Compiled and Produced by John Wyer
November 2001*

ROSE YARD ANTHEM

Rose Yard in common with many other yards of the time had it's own Anthem. This was sung at outings and trips and occasionally at sing songs in some of the pubs. It went like this, with changes for who was singing, male or female.

We are the Rose Yard boys
We are the Rose Yard boys
We know our manners
We spend our tanners
We are respected wherever we go
Walking down St. Augustine's
Doors and windows opened wide
We are the boys who come your way
We are the boys who are here to play
We are the Rose Yard boys

[The word tanner was a common name for a silver coin and very popular at the time, and valued at 6 pennies old money]

LIVING DOWN THE YARD



A Fishing Trip From The Rose Pub

A Report on the People of ROSE YARD, how they lived
as remembered by me during my life living in the yard.

John Wyer.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

SO, WHAT WAS A YARD ?.

Before, and just after the Second War Norwich had within it's housing stock a large number of residential yards. These were plots of land of varying sizes where there were built 2,3, and even 4 storied terraced houses. It was the practice to build as many of these houses as was possible in the size of land available. This resulted in many of these houses being built back to back, and in many cases hardly any room from front door to front door.

These yards were owned and rented out to people by Landlords, and it must be said that there were good and bad Landlords involved in this. The rents charged for these dwellings were usually a few shillings per week [that was of course in pre decimal money]. The rents were usually collected by the landlord himself, or in many cases by his agent. Arrears were not tolerated for very long, and it was people's constant worry to have the rent there when it was due. Unemployment was very high most of the time, and with the tendency to have large families it was a constant struggle to make ends meet.

There were not the various benefits about as today, such as rent rebates and family allowances. It was very much a case of if you can't pay the rent, then you will have to get out. It was not uncommon in those days for some people to have to pawn some item of value to find the rent money, and this process could be repeated week after week during a bad spell. Many of the landlords were very reluctant to carry out any repairs to the properties, resulting in many properties falling into slums long before they needed to.

By today's standards many of these houses lacked the essential services we now take for granted. Very few had inside water supplies, and it was not uncommon for 2 or 3 families to have to share an outside water tap. This meant that all water used within the household had to be carried in, and of course had to be emptied out again when finished. You can imagine the hardship during bad winters, and it seemed those days winters were often very bad. During such times it was a constant struggle to keep the tap from freezing up. Again toilet facilities were very poor, and again it was not uncommon for 2 or 3 families to share one outside toilet. To be fair they were for the most part kept very clean. A rota was usually kept to for this purpose, and woe betide anybody missing their turn.

Heating for many of these houses was mainly by coal fires, although wood was also used as was coke. Coke was a by product of the local gas works. It was usually the job of the elder boys and sometimes girls to collect this. It was usually sold on a Saturday morning at the gas works, costing about 10p [old] money for a large sack. You had to supply the sack, also provide the means of carrying it home. It was a sight to behold on a Saturday to see all the various home made barrows, old prams etc for this purpose. In times of heavy snow falls out, would come the home made sledges to help.

Lighting was also mainly by gas mantles although candles and oil lamps were still in common use. Street lighting was also mainly by gas, with the official lamp lighter to see that all was well. Electricity supply was only available generally from the late 20s or early 30s.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

Health, for the most part of the people living in these yards was reasonably good in spite of the somewhat cramped and harsh sanitary conditions. There were of course the usual colds and coughs and the children's complaints. These tended to go through the household mainly because of somewhat cramped conditions. There were of course the more serious illnesses, such as T.B., Consumption, Diphtheria, and Scarlet Fever, and of course Cancer was still about. In those days Cancer was not discussed openly as today, nor was the treatment as advanced as today.

Health care was supplied by the chosen panel doctor. He would collect payment through his agent on a weekly basis. The cost was about 3 pence for adults and 1 penny for each child, [this in old money]. For that you would receive treatment either at home or at the surgery. Many of the doctors would not only treat patients but also dispense their own medicines at their surgeries. Hospital treatment was also there for the more serious cases, but admissions were subject to strict rules as to conduct and visiting times. So you can see the idea of paying for medical treatment was there even in those days.

Likewise sickness benefit was also available, but this was subject to strict rules as to entitlement and length of time available. The doctor would supply a medical certificate on a weekly basis which had to be sent to the medical board to get any money. The same principle applied to unemployment benefit, again strict rules applied for entitlement. This included reporting to the employment office 3 times each week to show you were willing and available to do any work. Failure to do this could and sometimes did result in loss of benefit, not that it was very much to start with. All this changed when the D.H.S.S. was formed around about the early 40s.

In spite of all the hardships it was common for people to have large families, and it was not uncommon for there to be 4, 5 or even more children in one family. No family allowances in those days, somehow they all managed to get by, mainly through the sheer hard work of the mothers. They scrimped and scraped with the small amount of money given to them by the bread winner, usually the husbands. It is perhaps appropriate at this point to give an example of a typical house hold budget to show how tight it was

	£	s	d
Rent		10	0
Coal		4	6
Gas		3	6
Insurances		4	6
Clothes Club		3	0
Food	1	10	0
Sundries		1	0
Husbands Expenses		3	0

Total	3	0	0

The above example given in old money, was a typical wage for many workers, not much room for any leeway, and anything to interrupt this income would cause many problems.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

Although living conditions in these yards were somewhat Spartan, and in most cases money was tight, there existed within these yards a strong community spirit. Everybody looked out for each other, what little people had, they were willing to share with each other. In times of illness help was readily at hand, be it shopping, looking after children, cooking meals, nothing was too much trouble. If somebody was really down on their luck then help would be at hand, be it food or any other practical help, it was provided.

In many of these yards parties were organised at Christmas and on other special occasions such as Royal Occasions. Everybody would be invited with special care to invite the old folk. Everybody chipped in to provide the food etc. and all helped to get everything ready. I personally have attended many of these gatherings and always enjoyed them, as I am sure did many others.

I always felt safe living in such a yard, doors etc were really only locked at night. I have known my own mother go out shopping and not bothering to lock up. The idea of stealing from each other was unheard of, and what rare times it did happen, then God help the person responsible. Justice was swift and handed out without mercy

Many of these old yards had some very colourful names, such as Barthouse Yard, Peels Yard, Cock Yard, Cow Yard, Jolly Butchers Yard, Old Barge Yard, Pipe Burners Yard, Ship Yard, to name a few. Many of these old yards are no longer there, many were destroyed by enemy bombing raids in the blitz on Norwich. Many were also pulled down through the post war slum clearance programme. The people were re housed on the new council housing estates that were being built. Estates such as Mile Cross Estate, North and West Earlham Estates and Heartsease Estate. I wonder what the people made out of their new houses, complete with indoor plumbing, proper bathrooms, proper toilets, and the large gardens provided.

This, I hope will give you some idea what living down a yard meant. I would however like to go on to describe what it meant to me personally to live in such a yard. This yard where I was born in, spent all my childhood in, and a great deal of my teen years in before my call up for military service in the early 40s. I was married from there, and even today hold fond memories of my life there. Yes, things were tough, but I suppose in one way it did prepare us for the tough times that many of us were to experience during the conflict.

The yard I refer to is **ROSE YARD**

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

ST. AUGUSTINE'S STREET

Before I go on to describe ROSE YARD itself, I feel a mention must be made of this wonderful old street. It played an important part of the everyday life of not only the people living in the yard, but of the wider community as well. The street itself was dominated at one end by St. Augustine's Church. At the other end was St. Augustine's Infant and Primary School. In between on either side of the street were an abundance of shops of every trade and calling. It was said that you could be catered for from the cradle to the grave. These shops were very well supported by not only the inhabitants of Rose Yard, but by the wider community as well.

There were 3 butcher shops, 2 bakery shops, [lovely smell of fresh baked bread and cakes], 2 hairdressing salons, 2 sweet shops 2 clothing shops, 1 fish shop and 2 cafes.. There were also 2 chemist shops, a monumental masons with an undertakers business attached. 2 greengrocers shops, a post office, 2 shoe shops, a corn and seed merchants. We must not leave out the 7 or 8 pubs that were in the street. It is sad to note that one of these popular pubs is now used as a sex shop. I wonder what the old people would think today, probably set fire to it I would imagine.

These shops were, as I have said were very well supported by the local community. They would provide goods in small amounts, for that was how most people tended to shop. I suppose it was the fact that money was spent sparingly, coupled with the fact that the ladies liked to go shopping daily. This was the chance to catch up on all the latest gossip and news. I know for a fact that my mother and her neighbour and best friend used to do just that.

There were one or two real characters that kept some of the shops. Two that spring to mind were Trapper Easton, he kept a newsagents cum florists and greengrocery shop. He originated from Canada, and always wore a fur Canadian trappers cap summer and winter. I always went there to buy my comics, he was always obliging. The other people who spring to mind were the two elderly spinster sisters who kept a lovely sweet shop. They had an enormous variety of sweets and chocolates on offer and would go out of their way to be helpful. I am sorry to say that us boys would play them up a little, nothing malicious of course, just boys being boys. We dared not go too far or they would report us to our parents, then it would be all hell to pay.

If those amount of shops did not satisfy the peoples need, just at the bottom of St. Augustine's Street was Pitt Street and Botolph Street. In those streets were more shops, more pubs, so you can see the community was well catered for. Many of the traders lived above their shops and they kept the front of their shops very clean indeed. If we had a very bad winter with plenty of snow, some of us boys would earn a penny or two to clear the snow from the shop fronts. We had strict orders from our parents not to take any money from the sweet shop sisters, but they always gave us some sweets. They were well liked and respected by all.

So there you have it, but I would like to say a little more about St. Augustine's Church and St. Augustine's School. They both played such an important part of the lives of us all, both in Rose Yard and the nearby community.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

ST. AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH

This church as I have previously mentioned, played an important part of the lives of all who lived in the vicinity. I myself was christened, attended church and went to Sunday school there. I was married there, our daughter was christened there and sadly both of my parents had their funeral services there. This involvement with the Church applied to many of the inhabitants of the yard, as it also did to many others. I suppose we in Rose Yard had a bigger affinity with the Church, as the son of Mrs Bridges, one of the residents of the yard became the well loved minister of the Church. I refer to the late Revd. Harry Bridges a lovely man. His nephew went on to become Cannon Maurice Burrell, now holding high office in the Cathedral. Harry would have been so very proud of him.

As I have said before, although many of the local inhabitants were not all that religious, they did treat the Church with great respect. There was no vandalism as you hear of today, in fact the Church was open all day long for meditation and rest. Sadly the Church has fallen into disrepair and is at present no longer used for worship. I did have occasion to pass there recently, and the Church is encased in scaffolding, so perhaps repairs have at last started. The railings that surrounded the Church gardens were all taken down and used for salvage during the early days of the Second World War.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S SCHOOL

St. Augustine's School was at the top end of St .Augustine's Street, bordering Alysham Road and Angel Road. It was in two parts, Infants, and Primary, again sadly it is no longer there. It suffered a great deal of damage during enemy air raids, and after the war a swimming pool was built on the site. This now has gone and the site is due to be redeveloped for housing etc. Most of the children from the yard started at the school at about the age of 5. They went on to progress to the primary section, and to finally sit exams to determine as to whether they went on to grammar school or to the local secondary schools. I passed the exam to go to a grammar school, but I had to forgo this because my parents could not afford the uniform which was compulsory to have those days. There were some free scholarships about of course where everything would be paid for. Unfortunately I was not lucky enough to be allocated one of those. St. Augustine's School was a lovely old school with lovely teachers who did their best for us. I still recall my very first teacher, a Miss Gay, she was a lovely lady and a good teacher.

Two things stand out in my mind about my time at the school. One, was the sight of children coming to school without any shoes. They were allowed to wear a pair of the schools plimsolls while at school but they had to return them before going home. I thought that this was very sad, and that we had a lot to be grateful for. I am also pleased that none of the children living in the yard were as bad off as those children. The second thing that stands out in my mind was the sight of a little girl running out of the school gates, not looking where she was going. She was run over by a bus and was killed instantly. All this happened before my eyes and it left a lasting impression on me for a very long time. It was made worse by the fact I knew her and her family very well.

Continued on page 6

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

I have had occasion recently to walk down the old street, and what a sorry sight everything looks. A large number of the shops are empty and boarded up, the whole street looks very run down and neglected. I suppose it was inevitable with many of the people who were the life blood of the shops moving out. Then with the coming of the supermarkets it was the final death blow. Sadly it is the passing of an era, one I was privileged and glad to have lived through. I will now go on to describe in more detail ROSE YARD.



ST. AUGUSTINE'S STREET, c. 1912

Looking north-west down St. Augustine's Street, photographed near the junction with Pitt Street and Botolph Street, with St. Augustine's churchyard on the left.

St. Augustine's Church, out of view, was built in Decorated and Perpendicular styles on the site of an earlier church in 1726.

The premises on the right include: The Rose Inn; the entrance to Rose Yard (see page 59); and No. 3 – Dawson's drapery shop.

The street appears to have plenty of activity with pony and traps and hand carts in view.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

This additional view of St. Augustine's showing more shops. If you look very carefully you can just see the school spire. Of course this photo was taken around the period 1910, but it had not changed much during the time I recall growing up there.



ST. AUGUSTINE'S STREET

Published by Wood & Co of Eye Bridge, this postcard shows a continuation of St. Augustine's Street, photographed near the junction with Esdelle Street.

On the right, the Catherine Wheel public house can be seen on the right-hand side of the street, in the centre of the picture. Also on the right, are A. W. Hall, stonemason, and in the foreground, Brock Bros., tailors, hatters and breeches maker.

Notice the advertising sign on one of the first-floor windows: "Trousers to measure - 10/6d per pair".

(See also Volume 1, page 82 for a view of the left-hand side of St. Augustine's Street).

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

ROSE YARD

Rose Yard was the largest of a number of yards leading off from the main St. Augustine's Street. It was entered through an arch in between the Rose public house and De'Carles chemist shop. The arch is still there today, as are the pub and chemist shop buildings. They are both used for different purposes now, and changed somewhat in appearances. This part of the yard was known to the residents of the yard as the top of the yard. The other end of the yard led out to Esdelle Street, and in between were some 42 two and three storied houses. They were built in the usual fashion of these yards, some back to back and facing each other. It must be said however, that in the case of the main part of the yard the houses were separated by a wide stretch of paving. This doubled up as a main thoroughfare and a playing area, it was perfectly safe, as the only vehicles allowed down there were the emergency and some selected trade carts.

The Esdelle Street end of the yard was known as the bottom of the yard and at that end were some further terraced houses on a lower level. These were reached by a flight of steps at each end, and these were known to us as down the steps, logic I suppose. To get back to the top of the yard, as I have said, it was entered through an archway. This old archway was very interesting, as in the early days of my childhood I used to watch Mr. Hanner manoeuvre his waggonette through there. This was no mean feat as there was just enough height and breath of the archway for this. With not much room for error, of course the passengers had to embark and disembark on the St. Augustine's side. The waggonette was used to take passengers on short trips to the country side. It has to be remembered that the countryside was only a short distance from the city centre in those days. A good job really, for the poor old horses sake. Mr Hanner doubled up as our local coal merchant and he kept his horses, carts and waggonette in buildings at the back of the Rose pub.

The Rose pub played an important part of life of the yard, not only was it the favourite drinking place of many of the yard's inhabitants, it was a focal point for many other events. In the days I most recall it was kept then by the Weeds family, and they used to allow the large upstairs room to be used for Christmas parties and many other functions. Rose yard itself was a typical yard of the times, most of the houses had no indoor water supply or indoor toilets. Sharing these basic facilities were common, 2 or more families had to share. Speaking for my own family, we did share an outside tap with 2 other families, but we did have our own loo. The only drawback to this was, the loos were at the bottom of a large back garden, a bit of a bind if needed on a winter's night. Funny enough our back garden was the largest in the yard, and of course it was a shared garden. It was handy however to hold our annual bonfire and firework celebrations.

We were lucky however to have 2 shops in the yard, the one at the top end was owned by a Mrs. Bridges. She sold a great variety of goods, sold most things in small amounts, kept open for long hours, and most important for many people would give a little weekly credit. She was a lovely lady, as was all the Bridges family, in fact she was my Sunday school teacher for several years. There was another shop at the bottom end of the yard, this was owned by a Mr. Mason, an ex policeman. Again he sold a great variety of goods, so you can see we were well off for shopping facilities.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

The yard itself was a typical one of the time. As I have said, it was comprised of some 42 terraced houses built back to back and adjacent to one another. My own house a 3 storied house was next to a passage known to us as the black passage. There was another passage further up the row, this was known as the pink passage. I never did quite know why they were known as such, maybe it was because they were painted in those colours, and always were, logic I suppose. These passages led to some further rows of houses and they were always known as the back way. At one end of these rows of houses was a communal wash house, this would be used by several families for their clothes washing. It was a grim sort of place, with a copper for boiling clothes and a long bench to stand the washing tub on. It was in constant use during the weekdays, but I am afraid it was used sometimes on a Sunday afternoon for some of the older boys for card games. Playing cards for money was strictly illegal in those days, and a lookout had to be kept.

Also near the washhouse was a communal toilet with several families having to share the 2 or 3 cubicles. There was also a communal rubbish bin, where several families had to dump their rubbish. This had to be emptied by the local council bin men each week, and by hand, shovelling the rubbish into baskets and carried to the rubbish cart. This cart was one of the few vehicles allowed down the yard. You can gather from this that life living in the yard was far from easy, but folk carried on their lives as best they could.

In the main, heating of the houses was mainly by coal and wood and sometimes by coke. Chimneys had to be kept very clean, and the local chimney sweep was kept very busy. There was however, the occasional chimney fire. Lighting was mainly by gas mantles, some people still used oil lamps and also candles. Cooking was mainly by gas, although the fireplace hob was often used to boil the odd kettle or saucepan on. Electricity supply to the homes did not begin until the late 20s or early 30s. It was welcomed warmly by most of the people, but some of the very old inhabitants had to be convinced that it was safe to use. I well remember the Electricity Board laying the cables for the supply. The work was mostly by hand, pick and shovel work then. It seemed to take forever with plenty of mess, but everybody knew it was for their benefit in the end.

In spite of all cramped conditions and somewhat harsh living conditions, people tended to have large families. Rose Yard was no exception, there were some large families living there. There were two families of Bridges, one at each end of the yard. Both had 6 or 7 children each, [no relation to each other], then next to me there lived the Kiddell family, they had some 7 children. At one time or another they all lived in a 2 up and 2 down terraced house. Over the years one after the other they left home to get married, but it was a tight squeeze at times. Several of the other families had 2, 3, 4, children as a norm.

I often look back and think how hard the mothers worked to keep their families as well fed and clean as they did. The resources that they had to work with were not very plentiful, but they managed somehow. I recall how hard my own mother worked to keep us as well fed as she could. The sheer hard graft to keep our clothes clean, and the house clean, very few labour saving items about those days.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

Rose yard had it's share of characters living there and I will recall some of the things they got up to. Strangely enough two of them came from the same family, they were two members of the Kiddell family living next door to me. First of all there was Grandfather Kiddell. He lived in the kitchen of the house having refused to live with his wife Granny Kiddell after a bad row. He was an old soldier and he kept us boys enthralled with his tales of his life in the army. No doubt that not all he told us was true, but to be fair to him he did have an impressive array of medals to show. We would run errands for him, as he rarely went out. His youngest grandson was my best friend so we spent a lot of time listening to all Grandfather Kiddell had to say. Some people said he was a bit mad, but he always treated us ok, and I was never afraid of him. I must say that he and Granny Kiddell had some right old ding dongs, and at times his son and daughter-in-law had to intervene. They lived next door in a rather complicated arrangement of housing, nothing new about that, just a typical yard layout.

Lily Kiddell, the daughter-in-law I have just mentioned, was the other real character of the yard. She was the mother of my friend Kenny and his many brothers and sisters. She was also my mother's best friend and they spent a lot of time together shopping and chatting. Nothing seemed to worry her for long, a proper happy go lucky kind of person, with a heart of gold. Although she would do anything for anybody, as far as her own house was concerned she did things in her own time, and when she thought best. If there was one thing that made my father angry with her was her habit of for ever borrowing things. Be it a cup of sugar, some milk or tea, she would come at the most inconvenient times, usually meal times. But I suppose what made my father the most angry was when he wanted to use the wood chopper or such thing, only to find that Lily had borrowed it again, and not returned it. It was not much good telling her off, she would just laugh, it was hard to fall out with her.

Her true worth came to the fore, when I was taken very ill with Rheumatic Fever. My mother was also ill at the same time, but there was Lily helping out with shopping, cleaning, or what ever needed doing. When my mother protested that she was neglecting her own family, her typical answer was, bugger them, they are big enough to look after themselves. She was truly a lovely lady, and a true friend and neighbour. On many occasions Lily and my mother would go round collecting for some person that had lived in the yard who had died. They would always manage to get enough to buy that person possibly a nice marble vase and flowers. It would be Lily who would haggle with the local stonemasons for the best deal. That was a typical example of what made most of the people tick who lived in the yard. Great respect was shown to one another, help was there when needed, it was truly a lovely community to be a part of. This was shown particularly when street parties were held on special occasions, such as Silver Jubille of George V and Coronation of George VI, not to mention the Christmas parties, everybody mucked in providing sandwiches, cakes, jellies, etc, everything needed to make it a great time. Such was the make up of the people of the yard, we all had our ups and downs but we were all in the same situation. What little people had they were more than willing to share.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD



Pictures showing street party in progress on the occasion of the Coronation of George 6th and the present Queen Mother. Note how everybody pitched in to help.



LIVING DOWN THE YARD

LEISURE TIME IN THE YARD

For those lucky enough to have regular jobs, the work was both very hard and long hours were worked. In many cases it meant an early start, often 5am or 6am start, working through until 7pm or even 8pm. This would include a walk to the place of work, and back home. This was done to save money on transport to and from work. A six day working week was fairly common, so Sunday was well and truly a day of rest.

So, how did folk spend what leisure time they did have?. Entertainment was mainly centred in the home. In the early days that consisted of playing cards and the various board games, the more clever ones played chess. Wind up gramophones were very popular until the first battery wireless sets came about. These were very basic compared to today's radios, but they gave much pleasure at the time. They would broadcast news items, comedy sit-coms, and children's programmes. They were powered mainly by battery or accumulators, the latter having to be recharged every so often. To receive good reception you had to have a tall aerial with a long aerial wire. To be fair, the quality of the programmes were fairly good, and good dance music became very popular. Good dance bands were heard very often with such names as Billy Cotton, Geraldo, Oscar Rabin, Victor Sylvester, to name a few. There were also popular singers with these bands such as Anne Shelton, Alma Coogan, sadly no longer with us, but their songs can still be heard today on rare occasions on request shows.

Another source of entertainment was of course the pub, that very much depended on how much money there was available for this. But a lot of people managed a Saturday night out with a pint or two and a singsong.

The cinema was also very popular, and it was a fairly cheap form of entertainment. It was possible to buy a decent seat, have an ice cream, or a bar of chocolate, and still have enough for a bag of chips on the way home. All this for about sixpence [old money]. Performances were mainly continuous, and you could stay as long as you liked in most cases. I myself have on many occasions have gone in at about 6 pm and stayed until the national anthem was played.

Another form of entertainment was of course reading. The local lending library was widely used, where you could borrow books free of charge if you returned them before the expiry date. I personally joined the library at an early age, and I am still a member some 69 years along the line.

I suppose for the ladies there was always plenty of sewing to do to keep clothes etc in good repair. A lot of the ladies knitted, and I remember my mother making rugs out of pieces of old material and a canvas backing. Nothing was really wasted if it could be put to some use. By and large people made the best of what they had and somehow they seemed far more content with their lot than now.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

For those who were garden minded there were garden allotments to be rented for a modest sum. These were mainly run by the City Council and situated near the city outskirts. My father had one of these, and he grew vegetables and some soft fruits, he also kept rabbits and a few chickens. These items were a welcome addition to our food supply. Although these plots were often left un-attended for long periods, theft and vandal attacks were very rare. It seemed that in those days people had more respect for other people's property and possessions.

Another popular pastime was fishing, this took place during the fishing season. The local rivers and broads were a popular venue for this. Many pubs and places of work had fishing clubs and would stage regular matches between them selves and would usually have one or two fishing outings. My next door neighbour Mr. Kiddell was an expert pike fisher, and he caught some fine specimens. I recall one day seeing a huge pike laying on the table that he had just caught. He was waiting for it to be collected to be stuffed and mounted. It was unusual really, as what he normally caught was cleaned and cooked, to be eaten by the family. My father was also a keen fisherman, he specialised in eels, my mother loved them, I can't say that I was all that keen on them.

Lawn bowls was another popular summer pastime. There was a lovely green near Rose Yard adjoining the Gildencroft play ground. This was the home green for the Rose pub team, and was supported very well. When us boys became older, we would ask to be taken on as bowl wipers. If you were lucky to get picked you could earn a few shillings during the season. I was lucky enough to be picked one season, and had several seasons after that wiping for one or two clubs. In those days the game was only played during the summer season, but now, not only is it played outside in the summer, but is played on in door rinks all the year round.

In the old days most sport was male dominated, but now ladies are taking up most sports and doing well at it, not least in the sport of bowls. I feel this change came about after the second world war, when women were called upon to do things previously un heard of.

We did have a little bit of excitement in the family one time when I was fairly young. One of my aunts won a fashion competition run by the News of the World paper. You had to successfully put the fashions in order of appearance. My aunt won the competition one week, and the prize was a £50 clothing voucher and a £50 cash amount. The prize had to be collected in London and the voucher spent in Selfridges store. She asked my mother to accompany her, and they had a magical day out, I don't think either of them had ever been to London before. I recall my aunt brought me back a large tip up lorry, I kept it for many years, I wonder what it would be worth today.

So, that is a brief account of how the adults spent their leisure time, as you can see it was mostly self making. A lot depended on how much cash they had to spare, most of the time, not a lot. However I do think that they made the best of what they had at the time.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

THE YARD CHILDREN AT PLAY

The seasons of the year governed our activities for the year. It seemed that in those days the seasons were more in order. Summer was summer, Winter was winter, not the topsy-turvy weather conditions we have today. As I am writing this report in the weeks approaching Christmas, and in my opinion Christmas was the climax of our year, I will begin our year with that well loved season.

Once the firework and bonfire celebrations were over, thoughts began to turn to Christmas. Not that there was much yet to be seen that this was on the way. The shops did not start to show their wares as early as they do today, but there were other signs that Christmas was indeed on the way. Mothers started to get together various items for their Christmas cakes and puddings, a little something or other was bought each week until they were ready to start making the cakes and puddings they had planned to. My mother usually started making her cakes and puddings about 2 weeks before the actual Christmas day.

The local baker would loan her baking tins for her cakes and would bake them for her for a small fee. Many ladies took up this offer as the cakes cooked better in a professional oven. It was anxious time for the ladies when they went to collect their cakes from the baker to see if they turned out ok. The baker my mother used would often tease her and say "sorry Elsie I'm afraid they were burned, or that they had sunk in the middle." But in all the times that I went with her to collect them they always turned out ok. We always had a taster of the smaller one but the others were put away until Christmas Day

Many of the ladies put what they could afford on a Christmas Club at the local butchers for meat for Christmas dinner. We were rather lucky in our family as we had relations living in the country who supplied us with a large chicken for the occasion. In those days you only had chicken at Christmas or some special occasion, not like today, when chicken is eaten daily if needed.

The same thing applied to us children, we would save what we could afford on a Christmas club card. Mrs Bridges was very good about this, she would let us save and order what we wanted and it would be there ready for us on the big day. I recall chocolate selection boxes were very popular at the time. You would get several types of chocolate for your money, and in many cases a board game on the back of the box. I believe that they still do them today. The Christmas dinner would mostly be had at home with all the family, sometimes there would be a visit from relations or we would go to them for tea. All in all it was rather a family occasion. Somehow or other something extra special to drink would appear, but I always had a lovely time at Christmas. There were not the elaborate gifts given like today, you had to be content with what your parents could afford. In this respect I was somewhat lucky having some of my uncles living at home. For some years they put the money together to buy me one good present. They started to buy me meccanno construction kits and over some years we built up a good kit. They would provide many hours of pleasure on long winter nights.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

There was a party each year for the children and old folk. This was held in the upstairs club room of the Rose pub. Everybody helped to prepare it, and my mum and Mrs Kiddell would ask the local traders for donations of food or whatever, another case of everybody pulling together. Some of the children had parties of their own, these would be modest affairs, just a few close friends to tea and to play a few party games. I normally had mine on my birthday which fell just after Christmas.

There was an annual Christmas party held each year for poor and disadvantaged children. This would be held each year in the old Agricultural Hall now the home of Anglia Television. The local schools would allocate places, rather a tricky situation when there was more than one child in the family. After a rather bad year of unemployment with my father, I was allocated a place. Although it was a good party I was glad that I did not need that again. It is strange that even in these modern affluent times they still hold Christmas Day open days for homeless and poor people, we don't seem to have come very far in that respect.

With all the Christmas festivities over things settled down again, although if we had been lucky enough to have had a good snowfall it was out with the sledges for some fun. As I recall we always seemed to get a good snowfall either just before or just after Christmas, and on many occasions at Christmas itself.

I have omitted to mention another treat we all looked forward to, both young and those not so young. It was of course the annual fair held at Christmas and Easter. It was held on the old cattle market, and spread to the area now the site of the Castle Mall shopping complex. It also occupied the old Agricultural Hall now the home of Anglia T.V. studios. We would always save some of our pennies for this and spent many happy hours there. The fair was very well attended by all age groups, and people from the surrounding areas would also attend in large numbers. Sadly there is now no permanent site for the fair, and does not take place as regularly as it did, it seems as though another old tradition is fast disappearing.

Valentine's Day in February was the next event in our year, and it was very well celebrated in those days. I am afraid some of us boys got up to some tricks then. On occasions we would tie together as many door handles as we could, then knock on all the doors, hiding out of sight. As all the doors opened inwards it would cause quite a commotion. The trick was to try and not get caught, but I am afraid we sometimes did then we had to face the music.

By now the evenings were getting lighter, so we were able to play out longer, and before you knew it Easter was upon us. Again there was the fair to look forward to, also there was the chance to earn a little pocket money. Just before Good Friday Kenny and I would go round getting orders for selling hot cross buns. The local baker would sell us the buns on Good Friday morning at cost price and we would take them round to the people who had ordered them.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

The profit from the selling of the hot cross buns made a welcome addition to our pocket money. This was due to the fact that most of our customers were very generous. We now had some money to spend on the fair or what ever we liked. I wonder how many of the young people would do that today

With Easter now gone, and the weather getting much better we would be getting out more. There were always things to do such as getting in a bit of early fishing or a trip to gather bluebells or primroses in the woods nearby. It was good to get out and about again after the winter months.

Empire Day was another big occasion for us, there would always be a pageant held at school. More often than not the Lord Mayor would attend, and more often than not we would be granted a half day off from school. By now the days were getting lighter and warmer and it was time to get out a lot more. There would be fishing to think about, or perhaps a roam on Mousehold to explore, or perhaps a visit to the dear old Gildencroft playing field. To my mind there was always plenty of things to do.

When it really became warm enough for outside swimming there was always the open air swimming pool at wensum park. There was an area for boys and an area for girls. Both areas were supervised by park keepers who stood no nonsense from anybody. Many children learned to swim in these pools, it was ideal for that.

Going away for a holiday like today was very rare, the most you could expect was a Bank Holiday trip to either Yarmouth, Lowestoft, or Cromer for the day. Even this short trip was eagerly looked forward to, more so as it was taken on one of the lovely old steam trains. I was lucky in that I often spent a week with my cousins who lived in the country just outside the city limits those days. To my mind there was always things to do during the long summer holidays and the expression "I'm bored" was rarely heard. The time to restart school again after the long summer break was dreaded.

Back at school again with Autumn approaching it was time to think about a trip to the nearby woods to gather some sweet chestnuts, also to collect some elderberry branches to make pop guns with. Acorns were also collected for ammunition. The last of the blackberries were still to be had, and more often than not we would bring home all three.

Bonfire and firework night was the next milestone along the way, we usually had a bonfire in our backyard attended by a lot of the nearby children. Once that was over there was Christmas to think about. So we have come full circle in the events that kept us occupied during the year. As you can see, most of our enjoyment was self made, we had no choice. I do feel that children were far more contented than they are today. I do know from my own experience that I enjoyed my own childhood living down the yard. It was a time I look back with affection and glad that I was part of it.

LIVING DOWN THE YARD

CONCLUSION

In compiling this report, I have tried to give the reader some idea of how the people lived their lives down the yard. In spite of the somewhat basic living conditions, people managed their lives fairly well. Money was always tight, but I feel that people lived mainly within their means. To get into serious debt was most people's nightmare, to be avoided at all costs. There was a strong community spirit about those days, and if anybody was in genuine need then people would rally round and help.

I lived in the yard all my childhood and early adult life until my call up for military service in 1942. I only returned to live there for short periods during my leaves until I was married in 1944. I then went to live with my in-laws. On my release from the Army I went to help my parents to move to their new council flat. By now the old yard looked terrible, what damage the bombing had done was finished by the demolition gangs.

From this state of affairs arose a rather amusing tale. One evening whilst out having a drink at the lovely old Cherry Tree pub, my mother was complaining of how she was fed up with all the dust etc. while demolition was taking place all round. A friend of hers, a solicitor, by profession said "cheer up Elsie think of all the rent you are saving." When my mother replied that she was still paying rent, her friend said "more fool you, those properties have been bought by the council for demolition". "You should not be paying any rent while that is going on." I went down to support her on the next rent day, and when the landlord appeared she asked him what he wanted.

"You know what today is," he replied "rent day." "You will not get anymore rent from me for this place, my mother replied in fact you shouldn't be collecting any rents for these houses at all." He became very angry, more so when I told him we had told the rest of the people affected and nobody was paying anything anymore. Of course he threatened us with court action, but when I told him we had been advised by a solicitor, and that he was possibly breaking the law he cleared off. A small victory for some of the people of the yard to compensate a little for all that they had to put up with.

So, there you have it the end of an era. I have on one or two occasions passed the spot where the old yard stood. I have thought about all the times spent in the yard, and marvel how all those houses fitted into the space now there. How we survived in the living conditions I shall always wonder. I do feel however that perhaps it equipped us to face what a lot of us were called on to face in the war years. Some of the lads of the yard had to endure bad conditions in prison or war camps, and for one of Mrs Bridge's sons reported missing never to be heard of again. He was a lovely lad was Victor, I don't think Mrs. Bridges ever got over it.

Speaking for myself, I feel that the experience of living in the yard made me better equipped for my Army service and for the ups and downs of civilian life when it was all over.

END OF REPORT

LIVING DOWN THE YARD



ROSE YARD, c. 1910

Rose Yard is one of several yards which back on to Augustine's Street. At the time of this photograph, which is towards St. Augustine's Church, the entrance to Rose Yard was at the side of Rose Tavern (now occupied by a shop). Access is still possible from St. Augustine's Street and today, there is also a footpath to Rose Yard from Edward Street. Notice the dress of the people posed for the photograph, the gas lamps and the small shop on the right, which sold everything from lamp oil, Lambert's tea and Hudson's soap. The advertising signs on the wall would certainly be collected as items today.

A REPORT

*Compiled and Produced by John Wyer
November 2001*