



A Century of Food in Waltham Forest

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Forest Oral History Workshop

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Walthamstow. 1905

Rather than scheme + ~~scrape~~ scrape all the year round, to have have a week's holiday at Southend, my parents decided to move to the country, where we could have a holiday every day. So they moved to the end of the ^{2nd} old houses at the bottom of Fulbourne Road. Hitchmans Farm was just across the ~~field~~ Lane which ran from the Billet up to Sky Reals + Forest. It was not unusual for my mother to come face to face with a cow as she opened the street door also cows looking over the bottom of the ^{back} garden fence. As there was no transport to Wood St Station one had to do that journey in all weathers and in pouring rain, fog + snow, on foot. Coats + Boots were left in front of the fire or a guard to dry out by the morning ^(+ weeding) no mias in those days. Well, we moved to Roberts Road to be near the School. "Chapel End" ~~the~~ again well, as we looked to the end of the road we saw the huge cornfield + St Johns Church just stood in the corner. Along the edge of the Chingford Road where the Monrose now stands was 3 ~~wooden~~ cottages thatched cottages where the farmers lived. ~~It was~~ N

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Mrs Charlotte Finch, born 1900, interviewed 1984

Family Business



Do you remember, in Wood Street, any particular interesting characters?

Most of them were my family! Because when I was young there was four stalls along Wood Street. One was Jim Bunyan - Jim and Rose Bunyan - they had a greengrocery stall on the corner of Linford - of Brandon Road. Then the next one was a man called Jimmy Lloyd, who was married to one of my mum's cousins, they had the fruit stall, and every time you walked past he used to always pick an apple up and rub it on the collar of his coat, and give it to you, give it a polish before he'd give it to you. Next to that come Flossie Purkis, who had a salad stall, she only sold lettuce and cucumbers and things like that. And her mum ran the family egg shop over the road, with the rabbits, which was the old cottage. They lived there. And next to that was her brother, who was Bert, he had the greengrocer's stall at the bottom of Linford Road. Then across the road was my uncle John had the fish, it was a fish and chip shop and a wet fish shop. So there was all Purkises there.

Walter Purkis, fishmonger, born 1947, interviewed 2014

Low Hall Farm

That would be in Low Hall Farm

Low Hall Farm, when it was a farm, you know. Oh, yes, I can remember cattle being driven down the street here.

And what other sort of animals did they have?

Oh they had everything, pigs, sheep, cows. It sort of came under the council. All the council dustcarts used to go down there, you see. And the old sewage works was just down the bottom there – that was terrible. *Why? Did it smell?* Oh yeah.

And when it was still being used as a farm, did they grow crops there as well as keeping animals?

Yes, they used to grow a rare lot of cabbages, and they used to flood them with some of this sewage water, the fields, and used to get some smashing cabbages. There used to be a big greengrocer's in James Street, Tibbings, they used to supply all theirs, besides other people.

Joe Young, born 1900, interviewed 1977

Family business



We had several butcher's shops. And most of all we used to have a family called Purkis. Purkis. And they used to, at weekends someone used to sell rabbits - you know, wild rabbits, and there was a little cottage by the Duke's Head, and there was a cottage there and they used to sell the rabbits almost from their front parlour, sort of thing, you know, and, all the family had like fruit stalls and vegetable stalls and everything that you could need, like.

Mrs De Courcy, interviewed 1984

W.Claré fish shop in Walthamstow High Street



Personal communication and family photograph from Walter Purkis

My Grandfather's name was Walter Ely Clow, but he worked for a fishmonger whose name was Walter Clare at 20, Station Road, Walthamstow. Because my grandfather eventually took the business over, he became known as Walter or Wally Clare. He owned the shop in Station Road until 1903 and also had stalls in Walthamstow High St. In around 1904 my Grandfather took the business into Walthamstow High Street, still trading as Walter Clare. The name Clare became the name by which the whole family was known. The shop remained in the family until the 1970's.

Family business



Jones the Butchers, Wood Street

From Vestry House Museum's Photograph Collection

The shop has been in existence since the 1700s and was a butcher's shop for almost 200 years. It is now a wholefood store.

German bakers

The two World Wars of this century affected the bakeries in many ways. In the 1914-8 war the hostility of the general public was focused on German people and not on the leader and his regime as in 1939-45. There were many bakeries and shops owned by immigrant German families and their names were emblazoned above their shop windows.

Mrs Dockree remembers:

There used to be Stoles, the German bakers, round the back here - it used to be opposite Harrow Green. The bakers is still there, but it was German people then, but during the First World War they smashed all the windows if they were Germans. They used to have lovely bread there. The ol' lady, she was quite a nice German ... they bashed the place up terrible ... they smashed all their windows up. I think at one place they threw the piano out from the top of the shop. I suppose the ruffians ... some of them ... hated Germans because we were at war with them.

More unhappiness was caused as it was not possible to know whether a family was German just from the name.

from COTTAGE LOAVES AND PLAIN BRICKS - Memories of
bread and baking in Waltham Forest
c. 1913 – 1950

Available free from <http://www.wforalhistory.org.uk/>

Delivered to your door (1)



Everything was bought daily. One of my early jobs, as a youngster, was to run errands for people in the street. Because every day they - the milkman came round every day with a big churn, and they bought milk from the churn and put it into a jug - well, didn't have milk bottles - and then greengrocers came round with their horse and cart. Or, meat and things like that, they used to buy straight from the shop each day.

Was the milk local? Did it come from somewhere local?

Yes, there was a Radbourne's Dairy, um, if I remember rightly, at the corner of Fulbourne Road and Forest Road. I think, from what I can remember, we didn't have a milkman - no, I think, we used to buy milk from the churn. And it was poured into a jug, with a pint or half-pint measure, I suppose. No litres in those days!

Sidney Revell, born 1922, interviewed 2014. As a child, Mr Revell lived in Linford Road, off Wood Street

Delivered to your door (2)

The baker used to come round and deliver bread. I can remember them coming to the door with a basket and the loaf and I think sometimes some buns or something and then we used to have the milkman.

Down Wadham Road there was a farm, and as a great treat mother would take me, we'd walk down Selwyn Avenue and across the fields and you'd come to the farm and you could go and look at the cows. But he used to have one of those carts, the horse and the milk churn on the back and you could see them step on and off, and they used to deliver at six in the morning, about eleven o'clock for pudding milk and about three in the afternoon for the tea. And of course, you took your jug to the door and he had a metal container with a lid and the measures, and you'd want half a pint so he'd dip it in and pour it into your jug and mother would say, "If it's the man you had better get a pint, if it's the boy you'd better get half a pint" because the boy would give you the measure and over, but the milkman was rather mean. That was Hitchmans, and, of course, there used to be Radbournes and Hitchmans, and I think something else, they were all private people and of course, milk was milk, not the horrible bottled stuff you have now...

Miss Macropoulos, born 1903, interviewed 1977; lived in Hale End Road

Keeping the pot boiling (1)

Food tasted different then. I don't know why, but it did, and we used to have a big saucepan on the hob, used to have soup in there all the time, everything used to go in there, you had a bit left over and it used to go in there, greenstuff, egg, eggshells, bits of meat, and then you used to strain all the lot through a strainer and then put it back again, hot it up, used to be lovely.

Mr Jones, born 1904, interviewed 1984

Keeping the pot boiling (2)



We always had some kind of a stewpot on the stove, on the hob, cooking. And from what I can remember, even leftovers went back into that stewpot. Because you had no means of keeping things in those days, the nearest we had to a fridge even was a wooden box with a zinc - perforated zinc front. And anything went in there to keep the flies away, really.

So what was in the stews?

Ah, everything, really. Mostly bones. One of my jobs was to go - I say one of my jobs, one of the children's jobs - was to go to the butcher's and get a ha'porth of bones. Now, a ha'porth of bones doesn't sound ... but you got a bag, quite a bag of bones. Usually they were the rib bones that the butcher had, you know, cut out, and people didn't want to buy a bone when they bought their meat, like, and they came home and they were boiled up as stock. And it was very rich, too, I mean - and of course dumplings went into it as well, veg was always in it as well, and potato, and all sorts of things like that. Carrots went into it, and we used to have cabbage. Yes, always cabbage, never cauliflower or anything, always cabbage. It was wholesome, I'll say that.

Sidney Revell b1922, interviewed 2014

Treats



Then there was the sweet shop in - because I went to Markhouse Road School and there was Strutt's the sweet shop that used to make all their own sweets and they used to make great sheets of plain toffee. It was so thin you could see through it. But you used to get a great big sheet for a halfpenny, you know. So, we thought we were doing well and every now and then you'd find a farthing in the corner, that was a winner. So you used to get your piece of toffee and a farthing.

The farthing was in the toffee was it?

In the toffee. She used to put so many farthings back in the toffee. 'Course, we could get a farthing's worth of sweets, you know, like tiger nuts or Spanish wood or stuff like that. They were only a farthing. You wouldn't know anything about them sort of things would you?



Christmas, we always used to have chickens. We never had a turkey. We always had three chickens and that was a treat, that was a rare treat because chickens were more expensive than meat, you know. But now everybody has chicken any time don't they?

Miss Judd (married name unknown), born 1913, interviewed 1984

Sunday



Of course, we used to have a muffin man, as somebody said the other day come round every Sunday with a box on his head, ringing his bell, and then we used to go down and buy some crumpets for tea; that was great, they were very nice crumpets too. Oh, it was a great day. Of course, that's all disappeared, there's nothing interesting now, is there?

Miss Macropoulos

We always had butter on Sundays. Marge in the week, and butter on Sundays. And we always had a high tea of Sundays, you know, all laid out. And that's another thing that used to come round, the man with the winkles and shrimps, Sunday morning. And the man with the muffins, ringing his bell. He had a tray of muffins on his head. That's the sort of things we'd get for Sunday tea and that was a treat.

Miss Judd

Sharing the load

My mother used to go shopping ten o'clock Saturday night for the weekly shopping in the market, and she used to get a joint of meat what she called off the 'accident board' because they used to auctioneer it and we used to get it so cheap. We used to get thirteen eggs for a shilling and of course, vegetables were very cheap and my mother used to send up sometimes to Lewis Evans for the extra stale bread and we used to get a bagful and with that she would make a huge bread pudding and the kids in the street used to come and knock and ask for a piece and she used to give it all round to them, you know. (Miss Judd)

We used to cook those [*pigs' trotters*] on a Saturday night. People used to line up for them. Threepence each, fourpence each. And I don't suppose you like pigs' trotters, but I loved them. And the liquor on the Monday morning was solid. It had to be cut out because it was all solid jelly. And my mother used to put in split peas, all vegetables all cut up, and she used to make a big cauldron of soup, pea soup, and that was given away to the people. Instead of coming in for a pint of beer and a jug they used to come in for a jug of soup, and all given free. They was very poor people round there. (Mrs 'Bill' Belverstone, born in 1911. Her family ran the Ringwood Castle pub in Gosport Road (now demolished))

A change of diet



How about food?

Well when I come here you couldn't get West Indian food, so you had to do with the potatoes, which I didn't like much, but there was nothing more for you to eat, so you had to do the best with what you could get. You could get a few West Indian food, but not very much as what you can get now, or very far and scarce. The rice was most - more or less, um, rice pudding rice, soft rice, it was rice that you make rice pudding with, you know these English people make rice pudding with, but we try our best, and we make the best ... it was a starving, we couldn't eat, get enough to eat.

Could you eat some English food as well?

Well the only English food is the potato, really. You could get meat, and you could get fish, and chicken.

So that wasn't really a problem?

No, that was no problem really, because even now you get who - there's a lot of West Indian people who don't like West Indian food they rather have all the potato.

Mrs Sarah Smellie, born 1925 in Jamaica, interviewed 1994

Catering for new tastes 📢

How has it changed [*since the late '70s*] ? Back then I was selling mainly the traditional English fish, but obviously in the area at the time we had quite a good population of Afro-Caribbeans, which were very very good fish buyers, fish eaters, they liked their fish. So we had quite a good business serving them the type of fish that they required, which was a lot of imported fish, you know, snappers, red mullet, mainly imported fish, trevally jacks - trevally jacks, they're from New Zealand. Again, there was an Asian community that was just starting to make inroads in the community in the Walthamstow side, so they were, they were quite good buyers of fish, but it was basically, it was, what we call traditional white English trade, was making up around about sixty, seventy percent of the business then. But we like to cater for most tastes.

Stephen Davies, born 1955, interviewed 2012. He took over his fish shop at 494 Hoe Street in 1978. His son Daniel is now the fifth generation of his family in the fish trade.

📢 Supermarkets and independent traders 📢



Second Nature wholefood shop in Wood Street, once Jones the Butcher's.
Comments from Steve Davies and Bob Clark of Second Nature.



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