

IN THE SUMMER OF 1926 ...

BY

David Welsh

David Welsh, a member of the Society (not to be confused with Vice-President David Welch), came to live in Hale Lane in 1925 – later moving to Harrogate. He sent this article to the Society in 1979 and it was published in Newsletter Issue 4.

“My first recollection is of walking with my parents from Edgware Station on what was then called the ‘Hampstead and Highgate Line’. The station itself was almost new, the line having very recently been extended from Golders Green. We walked along Penshurst Gardens, Edgware. The houses along there finished about half way along: thereafter we walked through fields, though we did note the signs that stated that the building would be continuing further along.

We dipped down to a little wooden foot-bridge over the Dean Brook and just to our right was the ‘Splash’ or little ford over which Hale Lane passed. On our right was the old Hale Farm and we joined Hale Lane which was very narrow with elm trees and hawthorn hedges on either side. Our objective was the house which is now no.134. There were just three houses on the corner of what was to become Elmgate Gardens and the pair of semi-detached which we had come to view. The price was £1,100 – quite a lot of money for a semi in those days when you could get them for £600 - £700. There was not a lot of money around and builders were glad to get rid of their houses. The house was, in any case, rather better than the run of houses we had been looking at so I imagine was worth the money. (I wonder what it would cost to buy a similar house new today.)

After looking around the house with the builder, a Mr Gerald Williams, we went on to have tea at the ‘Green Man’. This was a really lovely old-fashioned country Inn with a thatched roof. What it was like inside, I, being only six years old at the time, had no opportunity of finding out: but I often wonder, with the modern love of ‘Olde worlde’ pubs, whether Taylor Walkers don’t now regret bitterly having pulled it down as they did only a year or two later. Tea was served in the garden and there was a small band playing. It was all delightful.

On the opposite side of the road was the Upper Hale Farm. The Farm house was on the opposite side of Deans Lane but, where the shops are now, there were barns and outbuildings almost up to opposite no.134.

The bus route from Mill Hill to Edgware went via Deans Lane as the Splash and the narrow road was not negotiable by buses. They were single-deckers (No.104). The single deck was needed as otherwise they could not have got it under the railway bridge at Mill Hill Broadway.

Later that year, I started school at Langley Park School the junior part of which was in the road of that name - that was just across from the then L N E R station. The following term I moved to the senior part of the school which was in Goodwin Avenue. I can

remember little about the school except taking part in a production of 'Hiawatha' as a brave, my first and last appearance on stage.

In the summer of 1926, a Major Browne visited my parents and told them that he was starting a Preparatory School at the top of Lawrence Street, to be called 'Highwood Preparatory School'. In spite of making a remark about 'Soccer being a cad's game' to my father who had been a keen soccer player and who had played for Doncaster Rovers as an amateur, he impressed my parents and I became one of eight founder members of the school (Highwood Preparatory School). There were two classes to start with, the Seniors taken by Major Browne and the younger boys taken by an elderly man called Mr. Hazlewood. As the school grew, a third master came. We played cricket and rugby, at first in Mill Hill Park, but soon a field was made available to us. It was a field off a little Lane which was itself off Highwood Hill and a good field it was. Occasionally a party of us was piled into the Headmaster's car and taken to Hampstead Swimming Baths. I imagine that in those days they were the nearest ones available.

The grounds round the school were ideal for boys, being full of trees and undergrowth to play in. Most boys travelled by bus to the 'Three Hammers' (the days of cars for all were yet to come) and walked down past Belmont and the Convent which always appeared rather mysterious and foreboding with its big door with a 'peep-hole' and grille over it. At the end of the school day we were escorted down Lawrence Street, generally by Mr Hazlewood who had a cottage at the bottom of the road. From there we dispersed to our homes ...

I can remember that we had to go to Mill Hill for all our shopping, there being no shops at The Hale. The newspapers were delivered from Notley's whose shop was on the left just past the junction of The Hale and Bunns Lane. The cake shop, 'Billy's' was another regular stop, where our dog would get his usual sponge cake as we passed.

It was not long after we moved in that the contractors started to pull down the elm trees to widen Hale Lane. It was not long before the old country atmosphere had gone. Stoneyfields Lane was about the last to go and, for some time, there was a delightful little pond on the side of the road with fields still on both sides.

Other events which remain in one's mind are the annual Hendon Air Display, with planes looping the loop and giving off smoke trails, making sky writing, and the building of John Keble Church, looked upon then as a daring piece of modern architecture.

One knows that change has to be: but I cannot help but feel that the area lost a great deal through thoughtless planning and development and was left as a rather impersonal and characterless suburb ..."

Following the publication of Mr Welsh's article MHPS received contributions of some further interest. The first from Mr Colin Byatt of Sylvan Avenue, who wrote ...

"...I was particularly interested to read what Mr Welsh had to say about his arrival Mill Hill in 1925. I think on one small point, however, he may have been mistaken. I believe I am correct in saying 'The Green Man' wasn't thatched. In Clive Smith's book, 'Mill Hill As It Was', which I persuaded him to compile, there is a photograph of the 'Green Man c.1900' without a thatch and I have at home a large photograph looking along Hale Lane with the 'Railway Tavern' on the other. This is pre-1920 and yet again, there is no thatch, so, if a thatch did exist, it appeared only a few years before the pub was pulled down ... My own recollections of Mill Hill do not go back that far. I arrived in 1939 and began school at Deansbrook Infants in January 1940. It was a mile and a quarter to walk from our flat in Laleham Avenue, and there being no school meals at that time, we five-year-olds had to cover that journey four times daily. In dry weather, we used to walk across the fields to the Barnet By-Pass (then obviously not a dual carriageway) and the lower end of Fernside Avenue and the whole of the Fairway were unmade roads."

The second contribution was brought to our attention by Mrs Audrey Goossens. It is taken from the 'Daily Mail', December 10th 1929 and confirms the rate of expansion experienced at that time ...

"... The spreading of London over districts which a few years ago were as completely rural as villages a hundred miles from the metropolis has nowhere been more astonishingly transformative than at Edgware. Here, in the space of three or four years, a hamlet with the peace of centuries upon it has experienced the metamorphosis of a caterpillar – albeit a pretty caterpillar – into a butterfly.

Where the Underground station now stands and the imposing lines of busy shops stretch before, and beside it, the wide fields lay in 1923 bounded by a quiet country lane. Towards the end of 1924 the station appeared and the country lane began with almost magical rapidity, to grow into a fine shopping thoroughfare. Before the underground thrust out from Golders Green, Edgware had a population of about 2,000. Now there are more than 8,000 living there (1929).

One Man Sells 120 Houses: Thousand of houses have been built: for nearly twenty estates have been established, and the development of some of them has been completed. Notable progress has been made with others. One builder has sold 120 houses this year, and currently the old Edgware High Street is undergoing a transformation.



We have included the images of the Green Man taken from our web site. If you would like to see more pictures and maps of old Mill Hill – then check out the links on the History page.