

A Carlton Childhood: Walking down memory lane - quite literally

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L: Off to School, looking west down Main St., 1968. (No houses on the N. side!) R: Carlton Bridge.

“Where does that lane go then?” I casually asked Mum one day when we were out on a bike ride around the neighbouring villages of Congerstone and Barton in the Beans. I can still hear her shocked answer: “Your local geography really is appalling!”

It was the 1970s and I would have been in my early teens. And it was probably true that I didn’t know where things fitted into a ‘proper’ map of my local area. I had no need of maps: I’d roamed the woods and little fields near our home (no-one seemed to mind then) and knew them like the back of my hand.

My little Carlton world consisted of:

- The Spinney (beyond Dobson’s field at the end of our garden);
- The Pond;
- The Woods (‘Bottleneck Wood’);
- Stoney Brook;
- Main Street, eventually leading to the railway and canal bridges and then Congerstone, where our great friend ‘Auntie’ Joan Kirby lived;
- The road to Bosworth.

Like many children, I was tuned in to the world on a more close-up, detailed level. I think my childhood freedom allowed me to develop a deep love and appreciation of nature and, later, a delight in local exploration.

I spent all my childhood and teenage years (from 1960-1980) in Carlton. I then moved away to go to college. My ties with the village were severed shortly afterwards by my parents moving up to Wensleydale, Yorkshire to retire there. Mum had always wanted to return to the Dales, where she grew up – but had nevertheless grown very fond of Carlton and kept in touch with several of our village friends.

Now, after 40 years away, I’m back living in Leicestershire (Loughborough to be exact) and I’ve been able to ‘re-connect’ with childhood places through a favourite activity – walking. I’ve made up for my teenage deficiencies and my local geography of the area where I grew up isn’t ‘appalling’ any more. The feeling of familiarity I have when walking in this landscape has also made me realise that I must have made deep connections with it all those years ago.

So, in July 2020, on my first 'Carlton Walk' since moving back to Leicestershire, it was very nice to speak to a total stranger who remembered the name Holubecki; and even nicer to chance upon one of our neighbours, Barbara Cooper, with her son Michael and his children in the churchyard. And, after this, to take the footpath away from the church and meet Tania and Bill Sharp in their garden. All after 40 years!

My Carlton Landmarks

I'll start my walk down Memory Lane – perhaps it should be called Memory Main Street – at the **post box** on Barton Road. I can't pass it without thinking of all the yellow envelopes of Kodachrome film I must have put in it for Mum, addressed to a mysterious PO Box in Hemel Hempstead. (Kodachrome doesn't fade as fast as other films, which is probably why our family photos from the 1960s and 70s look so fresh to this day.) It was always so exciting when the box of processed slides, with their as yet unseen images, plopped onto the doormat a couple of weeks later. Quite unlike today's 'instant' digital photography.



Left, L to R: Me, Jackie Weager – my Carlton School friend – and my little sister Mary (1967).
Right: Mary and me skiing in our garden on Dad's home-made skis (1970).

The **Gate Hangs Well Pub** on Barton Road brings to mind a story Mum used to tell about her great friend, our Vicar Bill Quinney, a keen game bird shooter. He once turned up at the pub wearing a gun belt full of cartridges, toting an (unloaded) shotgun – and told the astonished lunchtime drinkers that he was “just rounding up his flock!”

Orton's Garage on Main Street is now 'Orton Close'. Apart from buying petrol from 'Young Mr Orton', we had another reason for going there: during the summer, we bought all our tomatoes from 'Old Mr Orton'. We would follow him into his greenhouses to fill brown paper bags, which were then taken back to his kitchen to be weighed. The smell of tomatoes 'on the vine' still takes me right back to Mr Orton's greenhouse.

At **Red Roofs** (still called that, I think) lived our next-door neighbours, 'Uncle' Fred and 'Auntie' Mabel Burnham. Their house was built at the same time as ours. They had two grown-up children called Harry and Ruth. Fred was the Headmaster of Congerstone Junior School and, on his way to work, sometimes used to give me a lift to Carlton School at the other end of the village. Mabel worked at Leicester Forest East Services on the M1 and drove there every day in her little blue mini.



Above Left: Me with Fred and Mabel at Red Roofs, Main Street in 1961. (Note - no houses opposite!)
 Right: Seen from the rear, our house (L) and Red Roofs (R) in 1966.

We lived at '**Ellerkin**'. My parents bought the house 'off-plan' and moved in shortly after they married in 1959. (Mum named the house after her favourite hill in her beloved Wensleydale!)

In the 1960s and 70s, the Holubecki family (Mum, Dad, my little sister Mary and me) stuck out among Carlton's Alcocks, Breams, Dobsons, Oldacres, Ortons and Prices. The vast majority of Poles who, like my father, had settled in the UK after the war, lived in towns and cities. However, my mother, being from a Yorkshire farming family, wanted to raise her children in the countryside.



The garden that came with the house was already a good size, but an opportunity to buy a piece of the adjoining field came up, courtesy of Mr Dobson, one of Carlton's dairy farmers. (It was 'ridge and furrow' - a remnant of the medieval open field system. Playing tennis on it was tricky!)

Mum wanted more room for fruit and vegetables. My Research Engineer father had other ideas: he built a miniature railway around the extra plot! 'Carlton Light Railway' is probably one reason why my parents, Ann and Bish (short for Zbigniew), are still remembered in the village to this day. The other is that my mum was extremely involved with the village community, particularly with the PCC (Parochial Church Council) and village events – and also started the 1st Carlton Brownies, becoming their first Brown Owl.



Friends in the garden, 1967 and 1970 (Btm Right).

Top Left, L to R: Paul Cooper, me, Susan Hunt (Driver), Cousin Liz, Mary, Cousin Jonathan Cooper.

Top Right, L to R: Cousin Liz, Paul & Jonathan Cooper, me, Cousin Jane, Mary, Susan Hunt.

Btm Left, L to R: Paul Cooper, me, Jane, Liz, Mary, Jonathan Cooper, Auntie José, Susan Hunt.

Btm Right, back L to R: Cousin Liz, Anthony Faulknall, Paul Cooper, Cousin William. Front: Mary & me.

I'm not sure I ever knew our Main Street house number. In the 1960s, there were as many gaps as houses. But, as I grew up, the gaps gradually became new houses. A big field pond in the gap nearest to us was, sadly, filled in to prepare for development. That summer, we found we had a newly-evicted moorhen and her chicks nesting in our prickliest rose bush. Someone who lived further down the village came to our front door carrying a jet black chick with bright red beak, found wandering in the road. "I think this is yours!" he said. I've never worked out how he knew where it had come from. (Unless he just thought we were eccentric and therefore the most likely suspects.)

Neighbours opposite, in houses built in the 1970s, included the Liddington and Harris families. Jan Harris was a 'puppy walker' for Guide Dogs for the Blind and, wanting to become at least partly self-sufficient, had rabbits and chickens, too. We didn't have pets, so I loved going over there. One very rainy night, Jan turned up on our front doorstep with a chicken so that Mum – with her farming background – could show her how to humanely wring its neck!

Our other next-door neighbours were '**Uncle**' **David** and '**Auntie**' **Kathleen Price**. Their magnificent garden with its pristine lawns and vegetable beds was much tidier than ours. Uncle David was a miner: at election time, the Prices put up a small red poster in their porch window and my parents put up an almost identical blue one in ours. Nothing was ever said. After the election, both posters quickly disappeared. David kept in touch with Mum until she died in 2013 and sent her the 'Aspect' magazine every month. David and Kathleen's house has recently been demolished to make way for a new one.



Me with David and Kathleen, when I visited Carlton in 2010.

We always bought our eggs from **Edmunds' Farm**. Robert Edmunds (who was about ten years older than me) once held a sale of his old toys from a horse box in the farmyard! I bought some of his 'Britains' farm animals to add to my collection.

My sister and I went with Dad to the little Catholic church in Market Bosworth - while Mum went to **St Andrew's Church** in the village. However, we all went down to St Andrew's for things like harvest festivals and carol services. Around the age of six, I remember singing a solo in 'Away in a Manger'.

Harvest Festival coincided with 'conker' time. While Mum and her friends were busy getting the church ready, we kids would be collecting conkers from the big horse chestnut tree that used to tower over the graveyard. We also liked collecting the decorative green glass chippings from the graves - until we were told, in no uncertain terms, to put them back!

One school day, aged about seven and on my way home for lunch, I saw there was a funeral about to take place at the church. The coffin was being carried from the hearse. It was, quite simply, THE BEST THING I HAD EVER SEEN and I stood, open-mouthed with awe, on the pavement opposite. The mourners kept giving me sideways glances as they followed the coffin up the path to the church door. I eventually got home - far too late to eat - and Mum demanded to know where I'd been. When I excitedly told her I'd been watching a funeral, Mum was horrified because she knew everyone there would know whose child I was.

There are many names from my childhood in the graveyard now. As it says on their memorial, the Alcock family ran **Carlton Shop and Post Office** for almost 100 years. I remember the three sisters, Dolly, Gerty and Cissie Alcock. They were easy to tell apart. Two of them had dark hair but, while one was a very slender lady, her sister was the complete opposite.

With her white hair in a neat bun, Dolly seemed the oldest of the three sisters. She wore callipers on her legs, due (Mum said) to a childhood illness. Dolly was usually the one serving customers. She would let us get sweets from the 'Penny Drawer' behind the counter. Sometimes the Fruit Salad and Black Jack chews were more soft than chewy - but these were the days before sell-by dates!

I went to **Carlton School** when I was four. The Victorian schoolroom had two solid fuel stoves – one at each end. The toilets were outside the main building – and chemical! Our ‘dinner lady’ – Mrs Price – came in to heat up lunches for those who’d brought such things as baked beans to have on toast.

There were up to twenty pupils, aged four to eleven, all in the one room. When the time came for the oldest children to sit their Eleven Plus exam, a folding screen – the wheeled sort you see in hospitals – was put round them while the rest of us just carried on making our usual din.

Mrs Dunnicliffe had been teaching at a much larger school, but was approaching the end of her working life. Carlton School was at the end of its 120-year working life and she was to be the last of its teachers – there for the final 12 years.



Below, Mrs Dunnicliffe's Retirement Presentation. L to R: Stephen Peel, John Earp, Paul Cooper, Marilyn Cope, Mrs Dunnicliffe, me, Jackie Weager.

Above (from memory!) back row L to R: Alison Jones, Marilyn Cope, Sandra Bream, Alison Rogers, Mrs Dunnicliffe, Brenda Maslin, Christopher Bream, Anthony Faulknall. Front row L to R: John Earp, Matthias Johnson, me, Jackie Weager, Paul Cooper, Stephen Peel, another Johnson?, David Jones.



I loved school. Mrs Dunnicliffe was a wonderful teacher and made us ‘little ones’ hand sewn workbooks with covers made of wallpaper offcuts and, inside, her own hand-drawn illustrations for us to copy, label and colour in. Our play times – and sometimes even lessons – spilled out beyond the school’s tiny yard and schoolroom into the surrounding countryside.

Mrs Dunncliffe often had a lunchtime nap in her Triumph Herald, parked on the road outside the school. She left the 'Prefects' (who were just the older girls) in charge. During one particularly 'lively' lunchtime, I was alleged to have bitten a Prefect and from then on had to walk home for my lunch - hence the spectacle of the funeral.

We were busy learning about gills, chains, furlongs, pounds, shillings and pence when, one day, a lorry arrived from County Hall - bringing decimal learning aids! It was 1968; there were big changes ahead - and not just in the way we measured and paid for things. A brand new junior school had been built in Market Bosworth - and this was to be where Carlton children would be educated in future.

Carlton school was converted to a house many years ago, but when I walk past now, it's hard not to imagine faint, childish voices still singing 'Morning Has Broken'.

The Coleman family lived at **Bank Farm**. They generously hosted village fetes and - most memorable of all - the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977. There were sports and games, followed by a barn dance in the evening. To get the party started, we all paraded down Main Street towards the farm in fancy dress. I'd decided to be Paddington Bear, in a duffel coat - which was rather silly of me, given that it was a hot summer's day.

In the 1960s, on the right just before the railway bridge, there were **water meadows** with a stream meandering through. In spring they were yellow with cowslips. If you see a yellow field today, it will either be rape or, at best, buttercups. Wildflower species such as cowslips went into a steep decline as traditional, old meadows like these were drained for arable use. (We have now lost 97% of our wildflower meadows.)

There also used to be a thick hedge - containing many species - along this part of the lane. Ancient hedgerows like this were ripped out to make the fields bigger and to accommodate the larger, new machinery. But, in the 1970s, Carlton farmers were merely following a trend as, all across Britain, these agricultural 'improvements' were being made in the name of increased productivity.

Mum hated to see these changes in the landscape and said so. She thought it was a terrible idea to farm in such a way as to cause harm to wildlife. She didn't use the word 'environment' because no-one did in those days. But she was still ahead of her time.

When we were little, we used to walk down to the **railway bridge** with Dad, who was attracted to anything to do with trains. It was only much later, when the 'Battlefield Line' was re-opened, that trains ran over it once more. But we still thought there was something magical about the redundant bridge and used to like making echoes as we walked under it. When I walk under the railway bridge now, I shout and listen for the echo, perhaps hoping I might hear Dad's voice booming back at me.

