



Gloria Morris

Interviewed

by

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75 Cambridge Road

Fleetville Diaries Oral History Project

Interviewee: Gloria Morris

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Gloria – I was born in Camp View Road, St Albans, in September 1935. I was one of five children and lived in Cambridge Road from 1962 to 1968.

Moving to Cambridge Road

My husband to be and I were getting married; we were in our mid 20s, so we didn't want to live with our parents by then. I had been living with my parents in a council house on the Cottonmill Estate, and if one of your family married and the partner moved in, they upped your rent. My husband to be lived with his parents in a tied cottage in Kings Road, so if he'd lost his job, we'd have been out. We were engaged, but the Council wouldn't put us on their list for a house. They did offer us a mortgage, but theirs was over 15 years, while the Halifax was for 25 years.

We hunted around and we saw Cambridge Road coming up; it was a period old cottage. It had to be an old place because of the mortgage. You had to find a fifth of the asking price as a deposit. 75 Cambridge Road was going at £2,500, and my wages were £8.00 a week and my husband to be was earning about £12.00, but we managed between us to have £500.00, which was a fifth. The building society also had a regulation that one month's mortgage must not be more than a quarter of your income, because you had other bills to pay. The estate agent phoned me at work after he had talked to the Halifax manager and asked if we could view the house the next day. So we did, and then we did a bit of negotiating and we got it.

I was told it had gone on the market because a couple and their daughter had been there; then the husband died and the tenancy went to the mother; she then died, but the landlord wouldn't pass the tenancy to a third member of the family. So the poor daughter had to be relocated and it went on the market. Then a builder bought it and he later sold it to the person we bought it from.

We had looked at houses beyond the area, but we couldn't afford that because if we had a cheaper house we'd have had to pay more for travelling. I don't drive, so we needed something that was within walking distance for me. My husband was working for Handley Pages and had to go to Radlett and Colney Street and other places. I was hairdressing; I started hairdressing in 1951. I worked in a hairdresser's at 69 Hatfield Road, on the corner of Laurel Road. In those days people didn't think of that area as Fleetville – Fleetville started at the cemetery gates. You weren't in Fleetville; you were still in St Albans!

75 Cambridge Road in the 1960s

We moved in in the middle of May 1962 and spent the next few months renovating it. My husband redecorated it; when you stripped the walls in the little sitting room it was like going back in time – we went through everything from the ivy leaf to the rose patterns. He stripped that, built cupboards upstairs and did all sorts of things.

The house was – and is - an end of terrace; I think it had originally been the last house in the street, but by the time we moved in, the other houses (built in the 1920s and 30s) were all there. But Ashley Road was still all potholes when I used to cycle though there; the Post Office sorting places and car sales places weren't there, but the businesses on this side were there. I used to have one of the first Moulton bikes and I got used to manoeuvring round the potholes. I liked it because they had designed it so a child sat on a saddle between your arms.

You went straight in to our house and your stairs went across ways, with a cupboard under them. Then you came into a little sitting room that went into a little kitchen that had originally been the scullery and had just the sink mounted on. My husband had to slope everything and he built a sink unit. Then there was a

partition; it was L-shaped when you went out, so when you went outside there was the toilet and then the open bit which should have been where the dustbin and the coal went. But what the builder had done who bought it was kept the kitchen and just by the draining board, which was why everything had to slope, was a little lobby which would have been part of the outside loo. There was a ventilated space and then another door that led to the toilet, which had been outside, but was swung round to make it inside. Then there was another door that opened into the bathroom, just the width of a bath and a basin. The regulations were that you had to have a two door space between a kitchen and a toilet.

Along the other side of the kitchen was a cooker point and then a chimney which was originally the fire copper. We thought of keeping that, but the lady next door dropped the hint that when they occasionally lit the fire in their copper it smoked. So we got the builder next door to my mother to take away the old fire copper and my husband built cupboards in it which were never finished until we put the house up for sale! We also had new sash windows and a new front door, paid for from my earnings as an Avon lady.

Upstairs there were three bedrooms. There was a long corridor; there was the big bedroom with sash windows at the front, then a smaller room and then the corridor went right down. If you opened the wardrobe in the main bedroom it opened straight into the second bedroom, so my husband built a series of wardrobes and a back to that wardrobe, so whether it had been interconnected I don't know. You went down this long corridor and you had a 7 foot wide, 14 foot long room at the back, above the bathroom and kitchen. It had another big window. The electric boiler was in there.

If you came out the back door you had a 13 foot wide, 45 foot long garden. When we moved in, my mother commented on the soil. St Albans soil is clay, but Cambridge Road was black; my mother said that must have been topsoil that was put on top of a tip which was filled in with rubbish from London. That was why we were forever digging up bones – not human bones! In Victorian times the road was still a tip and in 1905 the land was used for developing. Before that it was the boundary of St Albans.

You had the gateway at the back which led to the right of way. So unless you were the one at the end you had people going past; you couldn't shut it off. It went right across the houses. I notice they've gated it off now. We shared the maintenance. I don't think all the houses in that terrace were built by the same builder; I think ours may have been built by Giffens. In the deeds it says it was built in 1905; this and two other houses were not to be in excess of £150 (for the three)! That was quite expensive in those days.

There was a clause in the deeds that said you weren't to extend the building within five feet of the boundary line. I don't know if that's changed now. And we couldn't build over because we already had three bedrooms.

The only trouble with it was there were no parking facilities except in the road. And the surface of the road had gradually come up over the years; having been originally the last house, when Ashley Road was gravel pits, the surface had come up when more houses were built. So we'd have had to have a new damp course put in, which would have been quite a big expense. We weighed things up and decided that by the time we retired we'd be left with a very old house, so we decided that rather than spend a lot of money on the house we'd put it on the market, take a bigger mortgage and buy a more modern house. My husband was saying 'do I work overtime to save the money or do I not do the overtime and do I work on the house?'

My daughter was born in 1964 and we moved in 1968 to Marshalswick, just before she was due to start school.

Cambridge Road neighbours

The lady next door was born in number 73; her sister married my father's brother. She had one daughter and her mother lived there too. Next door to them (no 71) was a woman who had come from Guernsey and married a local man. He died in his 50s and she moved to Royston Road. Next door to them were, I think, the Martins and then the Coopers.

One family of neighbours was a mix of Spanish and Italian. I got on well with them. They were very correct and considerate when my husband was working nights; the husband said that if there was any problem I was

to ring him. But another neighbour complained because they laughed a lot and they had their door open! Noise used to travel up the hill, so we could hear noise that came up, but not the other way. So when my daughter was born the neighbours at number 73 were surprised because they couldn't hear a baby cry. But we could hear them sometimes!

My daughter was born at home; there were three of us near neighbours pregnant at about the same time, but one of the other neighbour's baby only lived a day and another had a disability, so I felt bad about being the only one with a surviving healthy child.

A lot of the houses the other side of the road from us, and in the side roads like Beresford Road, were owned by Hill End and Cell Barnes hospitals and their staff lived in them. A lot of Irish people came and worked as nurses in those hospitals. In the 1980s, well after we'd left Cambridge Road, I worked as an OT technician at Hill End. And there were people who worked in Ballitos, Nicholsons, Marconi, Grimaldis and so on. It was a busy area, with quite a bit of work.

When we lived there it was slightly more 'sedate' than it was later, with more of the original families, with children. There were mostly people who had lived there a long time and had been born in St Albans. Then there were people who had moved from London and elsewhere, soldiers who had married widows from Scotland etc. So there were the St Albans people and the newcomers and it tended to be a little bit 'them and us' – in Cambridge Road and elsewhere in St Albans.

The road was quite 'proper', with people who grew up in the 30s, and was slightly more upmarket than some parts of St Albans. Several people had bought their houses. It was a bit more upmarket because everyone was working. People didn't really mix much unless you had children – you all had your little terraced house and garden. And your children didn't go to nurseries unless you had some sort of problem.

There was a woman in our terrace of six houses who used to put a tea towel over the washing that was nearest to her house. It was to cover up her underwear! You didn't put your underwear on the line; and you didn't put washing out on a Sunday.

We didn't really know people the other side of the road nearer Camp View Road; we very seldom went that way – we'd have gone down to Maxwell Road and cut through there. Or if you wanted to go to Camp Road you went up Beresford Road and down that way.

I didn't socialise much and I was quite happy to do a bit of hairdressing in the evenings after my daughter was born and when my husband was at work. And I had one or two friends nearby with children. People didn't socialise much then because you didn't have a car and people couldn't afford babysitters. You might occasionally do a swap, for example for a bit of hairdressing.

It was quite a nice time, but it depends what you make of it. One lady over the road who came from, I think, the Midlands, asked me 'how do you get on with the locals?' I didn't let on straightaway that I was a local; she said 'I can't understand what they are saying; how do you understand them?' It was a combination of people from London and other places, and people coming to work at the hospital, so there were mixed accents. But local – if you've been here 50 years you're still a foreigner!

Shops and other businesses

There was a little general store on the corner of Maxwell Road that is now a dental surgery or technicians; then there was the bakery (which could actually have been in Sutton Road) and the chip shop where it is now. There used to be a butchers on the corner of one of the side roads and I think there was another shop. The butcher seemed to be a local one and he would cut things up for you. There was a hairdressers further down, possibly opposite where Brampton Interiors is now, so maybe technically in Camp View Road. I think it was part of Fleetville Saloons; they had several salons around the area. But they gradually closed them down.

There was a little sweet shop on the corner of Ely Road; you can still see where it was – it's got the frontage. I think it was run by Mrs Kerr, who I think was Scottish.

Some of the people who owned the businesses lived in those two more upmarket semis. I knew that because they were clients of the hairdressers I worked in.

Women didn't work so much in those days, but there was always someone who took in washing, did ironing, or would alter your clothes, or a man who would make things, but I don't remember much of that in Cambridge Road because I was working full-time and out during the day; later I worked freelance as a mobile hairdresser and people came to me.

Other local events

There had been a Carnival in St Albans since the 1930s, held down by 'the lake' as we called it (in Verulamium Park). I think it was originally a hospital fete or pageant. But Cambridge Road didn't have a float until the Residents Association started after we left. I think the people who had the sweet shop after the Kerrs left were involved in starting that up. I used to go and watch it though. There also used to be boot fairs, but that was after we left.

I remember once going down the road to the shop on the corner of Maxwell Road and someone had left a baby in a buggy outside the shop. As I was coming down the hill I could see the buggy moving and there was a vehicle coming up. I've never moved so fast in my life! I managed to get to the buggy and grab it just as the front wheels went over the kerb. Children weren't strapped in then. When I got back home I was breathless!

There was one very bad winter when we were first there (1963/4) when they couldn't even dig the coal to deliver it; that was from the coal yard with coal that came off the trains up near where the bridge was in Sutton Road. My boss brought us a bag of coal to make sure we didn't run out. We didn't freeze up because all the water pipes were underneath the houses; there were no external pipes. My husband always used to park outside – he had a small Mini – and I remember saying to him that he should park the other side of the road. We looked on to the garden of the people in Beresford Road; it went longways. When we walked out in the morning there was two foot high of snow – our immediate neighbours didn't have cars – and there was my husband's Mini, the other side of the road, absolutely clear of snow. It had gone across and all piled up on our side. Everybody opened their doors and more or less tunnelled their way out.

I was more worried about slates coming off; that happened once when I was at work and my husband was on nights. I came home to find that we had a new lock on the front door; he'd been doing night work and been asleep and the snow had fallen off the roof. He rushed out to see if everything was all right and the door had slammed. There he was with his trousers pulled on over his pyjamas and he had to get in the door!