



Joe and Caroline Sobieraj

Interviewed

by

Liz Bloom & Romyne Hutchison

August 2015



105 Cambridge Road

Interviewees: Joe and Caroline Sobieraj

Interviewers: Liz Bloom and Romaine Hutchison

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Joe - I was born on 7th January 1927 in Poland. When I came to St Albans I worked as a Precision Instrument Assembler for 35 years for a firm in Sutton Road.

Caroline - I am now 80. I worked for many years as an Invoice Clerk for Harris Pencils Ltd who sold pencils and later other types of stationery.

We came to 105 Cambridge Road in 1962.

Moving to Cambridge Road

Joe – Before we moved here we used to live in a caravan in Colney Heath, but the children started growing and the caravan was getting too small. There were vacancies in houses in this area and this happened to be one of them. It fitted our purposes; we are Roman Catholic and there were several Catholic schools in the area. The other reason was that it was for sale and the price was right - £3,010. That was in 1962. So we've been in this house for over 50 years! But I don't like that oak tree nearby – it causes cracks, so with hindsight I shouldn't have bought this house!

There were people living across from us here who bought their house in the 1930s and they were the first tenants. There were four identical houses across the road; they were all built by one builder. They've got extensions, but we haven't. All we've done is plastic guttering, central heating, a chair lift (which is broken) and apart from that it's the same.

Cambridge Road in the 1960s and 70s

Joe - It seemed so quiet then; it was the end of the road. Ashley Road was a country lane when we came, a dirt track between Oakdene Way and Camp Road, with potholes and everything. But they said there was going to be a road connecting those two points for which unfortunately we had to pay. The council notified us before I bought the house. When the road was built it stopped being nice and quiet. Across Ashley Road were eight cottages which belonged to an estate that wasn't to do with us. Before Brick Knoll Park was built it was all fields. There were two businesses; one was civil engineering, and from Ashley Road you could see Colney Heath. I still saw the train going over there; the passenger trains had stopped by the time we came here, but the goods trains still went; they used to go slowly. I don't remember whether we could hear them. There were fields, nothing, there was a footpath from the end of Cambridge Road to the gate of Hill End Hospital, but when they built the estate they had to pull everything out. The people in the cottages refused to move, so there were headlines in the newspapers; they were forced out. There was a clerk dealing with complaints like that. The cottages were pulled down and everything was brand new.

Caroline - When we first came there was an elderly couple next door; when they passed away a young couple came in; they used to do clog dancing when we had the Carnival; they practised in their kitchen. After them came another couple, then another – they did the extension to next door – then they moved and another couple moved in who had two children. They moved to Marshalswick and now we've got another couple with a baby boy. There were two women opposite; when one died the other moved to Wellington Road and then out of the area. The people next door to them turned that house into two flats.

There was also an Italian couple opposite (no 110) who used to make their own wine; they used to go first thing in the morning to Covent Garden when it was still a vegetable and fruit market and buy the grapes and make their own wine. There was a tradition amongst Italian people in Fleetville as to who made the best wine. Another neighbour used to make dandelion wine; he and his wife moved in when they married and stayed there until they passed away. Now it's one house with the house next door to it.

Joe – when we first moved here we were the only people with small children. Other people moved here from outside St Albans to live here during the Depression and settled here. Now I'm probably the oldest man here at 88! There was another man who was older than me, but he died two or three years ago.

Caroline - On the corner when we moved in there were sloe trees on both sides of the road; earlier there was also a bomb shelter on the corner of where Ashley Road is. I think it was like a stone building; we didn't see it as it had gone well before we got here. Someone didn't want it and he got permission to build a garage. They built a red telephone box on the other corner; that corner was quite green; there was a green space behind there until they built the little houses towards Ashley Close. Joe used to go and play football there with our little boy and when his friends came they would play ball there. Now of course it's not like that at all. I can't remember when the phone box went.

Cambridge Road shops

Caroline - There used to be a little grocer's on the corner of Maxwell Road and Cambridge Road. Opposite there was another shop – I think that was a grocer's shop too, or possibly a butcher's. There was also the Co-op butcher's shop at the corner of Camp View Road and I think there was one at the corner of Ely Road. There was a sweet shop opposite the butchers; they used to make little decorations with almonds for wedding cakes. They didn't sell sweets in jars, just decorations. I always remember it as closed; I suppose you had to go and knock on the door to go in. I have no idea who ran it. Because we live at this end of Cambridge Road we don't really know anyone at that end of the road, although Joe knew the Chinese man who owned the fish and chip shop. His son was one of Joe's cub scouts. At this end of Cambridge Road there weren't any shops; the first one was the one on the corner of Maxwell Road. The other side was all houses except the one shop which was the butcher's, which I think was opposite Maxwell Road. I don't know who ran that.

Cambridge Road and the St Albans Carnival

Caroline - I think the Carnival started after 1976; I can't remember exactly when it started, but it must have been the Queen's Jubilee, because people also had street parties then. Once they started it carried on for several years until they stopped it. Cambridge Road decided that they couldn't build whatever it was on the back of the lorry so it all fell to pieces and I think the main one in St Albans stopped. We always used to wait on August Bank Holiday Monday for the Carnival float to come up the road to watch it go round the corner. It went to Bernards Heath; they all had to gather on Bernards Heath so they all went this way, past here. It stopped because there was no-one to build the float and it was difficult to find a lorry and people willing to work on it.

Joe - There was a plaque on one of the houses on the corner of Ely Road because we won it and they said 'who's going to keep it?' but I think it's gone now. It said 'First place in Carnival'. It was all people at the other end of the road who did the float. They also had a street party; there was only one, but we didn't get involved in that; I think it was for the Jubilee or May Day. Our children were probably older so they didn't go for that; I don't remember whether we were asked or not. They closed the road at the other end because they couldn't have traffic coming up with tables and chairs and everyone out having afternoon tea!

Family life in the early days

Caroline – I think there were – and are - more children at that end of the road than there are this end. We had two children and there wasn't really anyone to play with here. Then one or two other families with children moved in and there are one or two now, but that's all. Our son was nearly five when we moved here so he made friends at school; when he was eight he joined the cubs so he made friends with them and did different things with them. Our daughter had made friends with different people at school, so they would come home with her.

Our son used sometimes to play out on the grassy area at the corner of Camp Road and if he had a friend round they might go and play there. He had a pogo stick for his fifth birthday and got his sister to show him how to pogo, so he did it up and down the path. We had an old oak tree in the garden with a seat round it and he used to stand up there with a sort of telescope and look over the fence to see what he could see! He had a tricycle and I suppose he used to ride that up and down, but they didn't really go and play in the road; it was just something we didn't really think was right to go and play in the road because there weren't any other children to play with.

We had two guinea pigs; one was gold with a paler band round his middle. We called him by the same name as one of the animals on the Magic Roundabout. We had another one as well; unfortunately in the summer holidays we'd gone away and the gentleman who had given us the guinea pigs kept them in his

house while we went away and when we came back he said 'I'm sorry, but I have a sad tale to tell; one of the guinea pigs has died, but I can give you another one'. So we had a black one, called Napoleon. We used to have a run in the garden; we had a hutch to keep them in and in the daytime they used to go out to the run in the garden.

We had a swing in the garden. One day our daughter was walking with us in the market and saw some money lying in the gutter, so she picked it up – it was a £20.00 note. We said we'd better take it to the police station and when we passed it to the policeman and he opened it there was another £20.00 note inside, so £40.00. And he said that if nobody claimed it in a month's time she could have it – so she did, and she bought a swing for the garden. She used to hang upside down there – and Joe used to hang upside down too, by his feet! One time I hung on the side bars and they pushed me over – I didn't know whether I was coming or going!

Today our daughter lives nearby with her family and our son and his family live in Nottingham. Our grandchildren are all growing up now.

Some other local events

Caroline - Peter and Rita used to have a bonfire party on November 5th; they no longer do that. He used to do them in their garden. They have two houses next door to each other which they have made into one. It causes a lot of amusement with people delivering leaflets because there is no letterbox on one house!

One morning, when we hadn't been here long, about 1963 or 1964, a policeman turned up on the doorstep; He said 'did you hear anything in the night?' and we said 'no'. He said there was a building at the back of us that I think built agricultural items and somebody blew the safe, made a hole in the ceiling of the factory, but the sound went over the house and we didn't hear anything, though our neighbours did. We never heard a sound!