



# John Compton

Interviewed by  
Liz Bloom & Romaine Hutchison

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**FLEETVILLE DIARIES ORAL HISTORIES**

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My name is John Compton and I was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1924 in the village of Newton Burgoland in North West Leicestershire.

Our family arrived at 19 Cambridge Road on the 30<sup>th</sup> October, I think it was, in 1974. When we came looking for somewhere to live, we found this house was for sale but we didn't get inside it at that time. We had a list of houses in Cambridge Road from a house agent which was just on the western side of the railway station on the bridge at the end of Victoria Street. Anyway, we saw this and thought it might be worth looking at so we decided that the best thing to do would be to ring up the house agents to ask them. So we went into the corner shop (a general grocer's) on the corner of Maxwell and Cambridge Roads and asked them if we could use their phone but they said we couldn't. But there was a public phone at the top of the road at the junction with Ashley Road so we talked to the agents from there and they rang the people who lived here and by the time we got back to this house, there was somebody in who showed us as much of the house that she wanted to and we said we would buy it.

Before moving here, I had been an accountant for the church in Kampala, Uganda, for nearly twenty years, followed by a further year in Khartoum. I had got a job as a computer programmer in Luton. When we arrived, Elizabeth was old enough for the first year at STAGS and the twins were a year younger so they went to Cunningham Hill Junior School. Then Peter went to St Albans School and Naomi went to STAGS.

I think that the best thing I can do with this is to start at the beginning of Cambridge Road and work up as far as I can. I'll start at a house that is not numbered at all in Cambridge Road; the chip shop on the corner of Sutton Road. Number 1 Cambridge Road is the house next to it. There was a building opposite on the corner of Camp View Road which had been a Co-operative Society shop which had closed before we arrived. By the time we came, it was a sort of general grocer's run by an Asian family. A funny thing happened one day: my younger daughter had been very used to walking around with bare feet when we were living in Kampala and she went down to the shop there and they thought she was obviously from a very poor family and they gave her an extra bag of potatoes!

At the corner of Ely Road was a row of buildings which have now gone. In fact I think most of it was covered by a rather ramshackle building which was a jobbing printers and later it was taken over by the firm that did the (new) buildings there. So that's why part of that row is in Cambridge Road and part of it in Ely Road.

Returning to the north side of Cambridge Road; there were two houses next to the yard of the chip shop and one of those, at least, was occupied by an Italian couple. Numbers 1 to 7 are of a type. Number 9 is a house by itself and I don't know anything about it! Then there's number 11 up to my house at number 19 which was built in 1909; if you look at the pattern of the

brickwork round the door, you will see that it is very similar to the pattern of the brickwork round the doors on 1 and 2 Maxwell Road. I think those were possibly built by the same man.

There is a terrace of houses opposite here with a wide garden belonging to the last house which was later built over. I remember that one because I wrote to the planning office, whoever they were, and complained that if they built in line with the existing houses, it would cut out the sunshine in our front room. I don't know how many people wrote about it but I was certainly one of them. The house next to it, number 20, was at that time occupied by an old man and his daughter.

The corner shop that I mentioned earlier (Maxwell/Cambridge) was later taken over by a clothes hire shop. If we were going out to something special, we could go in there and hire a suitable dress. The shop didn't last long. For many years after that, it was occupied by a dental mechanic who made and repaired dentures. The dental technician who made my new set this year remembered him. He said that when he came up to Cambridge Road, he would look out for that man. I suppose it's three or four years since he closed.

There was a shop on the corner of Royston Road which I think sold wholesale tobacco.

One of the things you have to remember about the houses at the top of Cambridge Road, and especially the streets off, is that many of them were hospital houses for staff at Hill End. I suppose they rented them. The parents of the lady who lives next door here at number 17 were on the staff at Hill End and so was my wife. From the time we came to St Albans until she retired, she was on the staff at Hill End; she was a doctor. When we were working overseas, she said that when she came back to England, she wanted to do some training in mental work because she'd realised how much the people she saw who were fresh from England needed it; many of them. So when we'd been living here a month, I suppose it was, she looked in the British Medical Journal and found an advertisement for a locum at Hill End and she took the job on for a month or two and finished by staying there until she retired in the late 1980s!

I can remember that a jeweller lived up at number 73. I knew them through St Luke's church.

When my wife died last November, the girls agreed that they would provide a monthly visit to me. One of them lives in the county of Durham and the other lives in North Derbyshire. Peter is in the oil business and lives in Cameroon; he's an accountant.