

WHG John Stewart 17 September 2016 Recording A Wivenhoe

Born 24 February 1947

I was born in Colchester Maternity Hospital (*Lexden Road*) my Mum told me she couldn't get out of hospital because the snow was so bad. It took 3 days to get from the hospital to Manor Road where they lived and it's only a quarter of a mile away. They couldn't get out, it was just, the weather was horrendous.... Manor Road off Crouch Street...I think they only stayed there for 3 years. I don't remember much about it but my Dad got a job here down at The Nook. He was head gardener so we moved to Wivenhoe. So we came here in '51 I think it was. I had an older brother, a step brother and a sister.... there were 3 of us... I think the only reason we moved here (*Wivenhoe*) was my Dad tried to repair the roof on the house in Manor Road...when it rained it was just black rain coming through. So we moved to Alma Street number 9... the first thing I remember about Alma Street was that the bells were ringing on a Sunday morning but that was lovely that was a lovely street full of kids.... we could always play in the road nobody owned a car. Never saw a car on Alma Street. We were there 5 or 6 years no maybe a little bit more than that...

I had another sister... then another brother...so it was like 3 beds in a bedroom it was two up two down but it had another bedroom over the passage.... built over the passage, but it got too small and my Dad said, oh Tiff Glozier has got a house for sale in Anglesey Road, so we all marched up Anglesey Road and old Mrs Rutland (?) had just died.... and that was Anglesey Villa. It was marvellous. It was huge. I was at primary school I reckon about 1960. I reckon he paid £4000 for it. My Mum done all that work because she was one of the secretaries at the Sparling Benham and Brough solicitors in Colchester. They must have thought a lot of her because when they got married old Mr Benham said if you want to get a house just leave it with me I'll go to the auction.... don't worry about a mortgage just pay me back once a month there won't be any interest.... I mean he must of thought a lot of her. So she always looked after housing. All the houses were bought. Mum would never rent anywhere. Mr Benham, Gurney Benham, anyway the one who wrote all the sailing books. When she died we cleared the house out. She had all these certificates. She had Pitman shorthand, 140 words a minute. She had City and Guilds in piano playing.

Mother's family

She was a bit unfortunate...when I was doing the family history and I traced me Mum and me Mums Mum, me grandmother, she married Alf Lee down at Walton on the Naze and when me Mum was about 4 she died. So me grandad remarried Daisy Trip from St Pauls up in London and she said I'm taking one girl but I'm not taking the other one, I've got a family of me own. So my poor old Mum was shipped out to live with great aunt List and they had a hat shop in St Botolphs. It got bombed out during the War any way she went to live with them up Straight Road but she said anytime anyone came round she was shut in a room on her own. They didn't want them to know she was living with them so she had a bit of a hard old life but she done well. She went to a primary school, a junior school in Straight Road and then she went to High School. She done very very well and then when she left school she went to work for Sparling Benham and Brough. She done extremely well. I think she already had me brother me step brother. Me Dad had an allotment on Circular Road and she used to go past with me brother Andy in the pram and every morning they got talking and they end up getting married.

Father's family

Dad was born in about 1920 I think. His father, my grandfather was born in 1845 but all the family and me grandads wife's family were all from up north. They were all army people but me grandad he

decided he was going to be a medic so any way off he goes. He started off in London Territorials. He was born in Shoreditch cause I always thought the Stewarts were Scottish so I got a bit of a shock when I found out we were bloomin' cockneys. Any way he joined up in 1885 and in 1900 he was shipped out to South Africa in the Boer War where he got his medals with Johannesburg and ? berg all them sort of places he was. He got all of them. He's got one with a star and silver rosette on the ribbon so we don't know what he got that for. After the Boer War he was in the Reserves and then he joined up again or was called up and went to Ypres and he served out his time there and I think in 1916 /1917, he was aged 45, the Kings regulations said you had to leave the army at that age. His name was John Wilson Stewart but there's a story to that....

Origins of his Stewart name

Every first male descendant of the Stewart clan had to be called John Wilson and we thought ah that's the Scottish connection.... Stewart.... Wilson.... got to be Scottish but it turns out that me great grandfather his father's name was John Wilson. Well that's where it all came from. He was a customs agent and then he became an import export agent in London but I couldn't work out where the Stewart name came from and it turns out that my great granny was Elizabeth Stewart me great grandad was John Wilson they never got married then they had me grandfather she was 25 and he was 73. It wasn't until a month ago that I got a notification on Ancestry that someone was looking for me. It turns out this John Wilson, he sired my grandfather, was already married had got 2 children and his 2 children obviously grown up and they had children. Very complicated, anyway they sent a note to say, hi cousin. I thought, who's this Loder person apparently that was their grandmothers name. Something happened and they changed the name from Wilson to Loder and they tracked me through Ancestry because I was looking. My father should have been Reginald John Wilson Stewart but my Mum said he got so fed up with filling in the forms that he decided to drop the Wilson. I should be John Wilson Stewart. I've got a cousin who is Geoffrey Wilson Stewart. He doesn't actually use Wilson but we are actually Wilsons we're not Stewarts.

More on Mother's family

Joan Winifred Adelaide Lee was her maiden name and I've traced her family back to 1680's now, but they came from Mickfield up in Stowmarket. They must have moved down here in the agricultural depression. They went to work at Warner's Foundry at Walton on the Naze, that's why they came down here. My Mums family well my grandad Frank Lee he was on Walton Lifeboat for 38 years. He come over from the ? one day and he walked over to the kitchen and there was a little black cat with him. His wife said, "What you doing with that Frank". He said, "I had to row back to that damn steam ship on the Gunfleet that went aground." They got all the crew off and they were just about to leave and they saw this cat and kitten on the bulwark. He said, "We can't leave them out there they'll drown". Any way they went back there and got the cats off and one crew member had the mother and he had this other little cat, a little black one. Do you know what, when he used to go up the shop to get his baccie and paper this cat would never leave his side. That cat would have to go with him, walk along at his side like a dog and they called it Peregrine cause the steamship that got wrecked was the SS Peregrine. It's on the plaque on the lifeboat wall at Walton. I thought that was amazing.

Alma Street

It had an outside loo. It had a standpipe in the yard and it had a box round it filled with ? to stop it freezing up and it had a stone sink in the kitchen. There wasn't any taps because you got it out the standpipes. There was no hot water. All the hot water was boiled on the stove. I remember they had an outhouse.... I don't know what you call them but outside the backdoor there was a brick shed and it had this enormous big copper and gas copper and everything was boiled up in it and Friday night

was the only night you was allowed to have a bath because the tin bath was hanging on the wall at the back and that was there when we moved in. Friday nights I think because really in them days in the '50s everybody who lived down the bottom end, over the bridge, the downstreeters, we all had tin baths and only the rich had a bath 2 or 3 times a week but everybody else Friday night was bath night. So the oldest went in first and the smallest, the last one, had a bath in the dirty water. You only got one lot of water. It took so long to heat it up, especially in the winter, so you used to have it in front of the fire in the kitchen.

My Mum... as soon as you got married you stopped work so I can only remember her doing all the work. Cooking dinners is about all I can remember, oh no I remember now she used to go to work in the summer. She used to go to Thorrington and pick apples peas and later on potatoes but I remember her vividly telling me one day.... I remember her coming home must have been my dad wasn't out at work because she wouldn't have gone out and left us but she came up.... November time I think, but she had tears in her eyes. "I can't do this anymore", and she'd been picking sprouts because in November in them days you always got the frost and the only way you pick sprouts is you pick with your thumb, pull them off the stalk, and her thumb was out here like this all wrapped up and when she took the cloth off it was glowing bright red. Cause that hurt so much when she got it in the warm and of course we didn't have central heating it was just the fire. Until the '60s when they brought out... do you remember them those funny shaped well big round paraffin heaters no a bit before your time.... big paraffin container at the bottom and a big highly polished reflector. Well you lifted the lid off, lit the wick and put it back on again. You trimmed it so it burnt nice and blue and that's what gave you heat.... that's all we had. It was in the back room.

There was a front room, a back room, a kitchen sort of extension bit on the back, it was part of the house it wasn't an extension as such and then there was the scullery where the copper was and then there was a coal shed and then the outside loo near the churchyard wall. I can't remember us ever using the front room but we must have done. There was no televisions in Alma Street in the early '50s. No I tell a lie in '53/ '54 there was one person had a little black and white 12 inch telly, in the cut where Dr Dean's surgery was. There was Dr Deans surgery and then the public toilets were next door to him and there's a couple of little cottages and a boy lived there and his mum and dad.... had a good job.... they had a black and white telly. They were 12 inch then. Only saw it very occasionally when you got invited round. Happy days those, they were lovely. Back room was used for everything. Had all your meals in there it was a little old place but when we moved up to Anglesey Villa that was like we'd moved into a palace.

House in Anglesea Road

When he said we were going to move we thought not another horrible 2 up 2 down. When we walked up to Anglesey Road, because it was a rough unmade road we kept looking at all the ones on the left hand side. We said, "Which one is it, they're no better then what we've left." "It's not them" he said, "It's that one over there." Anglesey Villa.... It was huge I think it was like 4 bedroom or something. We had a big front room, a middle room, a kitchen, then you went down some steps a scullery, and then there was a toilet. What he said was, "We'll do away with that scullery and we'll have a bathroom. We'll a have a bath and what we'll do we'll get a heater and put a geezer in." Put in there hot water and it had this great big 5 bar gate and this huge orchard and the marshes were beyond that and the shipyard. Because this was a weekend we went there and when we got indoors... this old girl.... old Miss Raddon had died and the house was just full of junk so we spent about 2 weeks dumping everything on Cooks dump which is probably worth a fortune now. The new housing estates built on it but everybody dumped rubbish on it, because that was used for infill to

extend the yard. I can remember living there. They must have got the carrier round we used to have an old carrier, can't remember his name, from Elmstead. I remember "Carter" and he had this great big old van with a flappy thing at the back like an Army lorry, ex army lorry, so he used that quite a lot because he (*Johns dad*) used to keep chickens and rabbits and things and he used to send them up market every so often. You used to put a big "C" on a piece of card in your front window so when he came into Wivenhoe and done his round you got a C in the window he knew you wanted to call. That's probably how they moved all the furniture up.... no other way they could of done it.

It was superb it was just such a lovely place. It was huge.... well it seemed huge at the time. Every time I walk past now I think hmm it's not as big as I thought it was. 8 of us living there. Then he (*Johns dad*) knocked this old scullery about and he put a bath in there and Wivenhoe Gas Company came round and fitted this gas geezer. We had hot water on tap never seen anything like it before. We had 2 taps in the kitchen, hot and cold. My mum was in seventh heaven. She loved it and it was a huge kitchen. Pretty big kitchen in them days for the '60s. Didn't get any easier for her because there were more of us. The washing, well she used to do it all in the sink and then when we moved to Anglesey Road it all changed. Me Dad got one of those Hoover washing machines where you got the spinner and the wash separate. She liked it down there she did. I don't think she'd wanted to move.

Fathers work

As far as I can remember he always worked at The Nook when they moved to Wivenhoe. He was head gardener. It was a market garden right down to The Brook... bottom of Dene Park. It was 5 ½ acres and I can remember one field had potatoes another half a field had strawberries, massive orchards in Park Road all the way down Bellevue Road to the bottom. Complete mixed garden. It had a south facing walled garden with apples pears apricots all sorts of things cherries. It was just a lovely place. The chaps name was Corbin. In the early days it belonged to old Mr Rice didn't it? Then the Corbin's moved away and me Dad had to get another job. He went to work for Colchester Tractors and he liked it there and he stayed there until he died. He died when he was 53 I think so didn't have that long a working life. I can remember when he won the football pools. My poor old mother scrimped and saved all her life and he won the pools and he went down to Masons where the estate agents are next to the paper shop (*now closed*), an electrical shop and he said, "I think I'll buy your mother a food mixer." So he bought this food mixer and took it home and she went ballistic she said, "A complete waste of money. I can mix things with a fork quicker than I can getting that thing out the cupboard", so she said "You ought to have bought the kids some decent shoes and clothes instead of wasting it on a food mixer." So you can't win can you?

Problems with Anglesey Road House

The right hand side of Anglesey road when you're looking up the hill, the Captains Row was on the left, the little row of terraced cottages. For some unknown reason the ground on the right hand side was a different make up. It was clay and on the left hand side it was obviously sand and ballast because on the right hand side we had problems with subsidence and a great big crack appeared in the wall. So they decided they were going to sell and get somewhere else rather than staying because my brother had moved away and my sister had, so it just left me, Peter and Chrissie there and Elaine the youngest one. So they moved to Bellevue Road. It was on the corner near The Nook I know the Kennedy's were living there when we bought it. As you turn the corner, top of Bellevue Road you turn right and about 100 yards up the road on the right are a pair of cottages. I lived there only for a little while then when I left home when I was 20. I moved back down to Alma Street.

Alma Street and Nyanza Cottages

Best time of my life. I rented a little cottage number 1 Alma Street off Charlie Schofield and he said... "Yes Boy you can have it but I will have to put the rent up because I need to put a new water heater in", and I thought oh no here we go. He said it was £8 a week but, "I've had to put it up to £10 a week", and I lived there for about 5 years and it was lovely. Things had improved (*since last lived there*) there was hot and cold water, a proper bathroom and I've never had central heating in me life I wouldn't know how to operate it now.

Then I moved up The Cross, Nyanza Cottages. They're old.... built 1841. Moved up there in the 80s when this negative equity happened. You paid £80000 for this 2 up 2 down and I then found out it just wasn't worth it and the house prices dropped like a stone and this (*Nyanza, current home*) was going for £25000 so I thought it was just as easy to buy instead of keep renting so I bought it when they were at their lowest and it was a good investment. Best thing I ever done. Kids today will never do it because prices will never drop to that level again.

School days

My Mum said I went to a school in North Street Colchester for about a year. It wasn't until a few years ago.... I always remember the name of my school teacher at North Street that was Miss Blackwood and wasn't until I got to Wivenhoe and talked to Joyce Blackwood and I said did you ever teach at North Street School.... yes she said. Obviously she couldn't remember me. I came to Wivenhoe and then it was juniors but it was lovely there.... loved it there. I hated North Street. Everyone went to Philip Road until you were 11 and then you went to Brightlingsea Secondary Modern or The Grammar or East Ward.... or some of the girls went to Clacton High School. There weren't many from Wivenhoe that went to grammar school. We were told we had a choice we could either go to East Ward or Brightlingsea. I remember the first day we all got off a bus and filed into Brightlingsea school to an Assembly and the headmistress said "Right you're at Brightlingsea now and we do things properly here, I see we've got some here from Wivenhoe", and she said "The only reason you're here is either you're not good enough to get to The Grammar or East Ward didn't want you so we've got stuck with you." Actually Brightlingsea or The Colne it was called turned out some fantastic people. The majority went on to be all self-employed. Not a bad thing.

Phillip Road School

I remember Mrs Dann, she was the music teacher. Etta Dann or Etta Chamberlain as she was and her father Philip Chamberlain was the local boot and shoe maker. He made all the Deck Shoes for the fishermen and those that worked on the big yachts. She was interesting and our form teacher Mr Grundy I think he was Australian. Mr Scott was the headmaster. Mrs Terry was the secretary and they lived up in Rectory Road. I don't remember much about learning anything but I did come top of the class in Rural Studies. It was gardening. I won a book, all about bugs and beetles and things.

Brightlingsea secondary modern

When I went to Brightlingsea. I done that again (*Rural Studies*) and I got another book but when I left Brightlingsea and you got your school report and I remember taking it home. Just before I retired from work I was working for Royal Mail they sent me to Mistletoe for a couple of weeks and I had this letter to deliver up this stony lane addressed to Mr Horlock and I recognized the name but not him because he was an old man by then and I asked if he'd taught at Brightlingsea secondary modern and he said, "Yes I was head of Rural Science." He asked where I was from and I said Wivenhoe, "Oh God", he said, "I remember something about Wivenhoe they was all the same.... a pest in the class

and a pest in the garden”, and that’s what he’d written on my school report when we left Brightlingsea.

The head mistress on the last day, they’d brought a piano out into the playground and the wheels got stuck in the tarmac and the afternoon we left we got all in the hall for main assembly and she got this big pile of school reports and she said, “You lot from Wivenhoe” and she threw the whole lot across the floor and said...”I hope you don’t come back here anymore” and I thought there’s no fear of that. The little one which was me, they used to hang over the back (*of the bus stairs*) with a load of bus tickets and my job was to put them on top of the bus conductor’s hat and then they’d pull me up and give me a light. They’d hang me over with a box of matches to set light to the bus tickets on top of the conductor’s hat.... See how much smoke we could get from the top of his hat.

Crab and Winkle railway line

I remember once when the bus was on strike and we had to go by steam train to Brightlingsea on the Crab and Winkle. The line went alongside the sea wall so it was right next to the river. As you got to Brightlingsea you could see East Mersea. It was lovely brings back a lot of memories.

Just back from Wivenhoe station there was a sidings and the Brightlingsea train came from St Botolphs and it sat in the sidings until the main line train from London to Clacton came past. Then the people from Brightlingsea got off the Clacton one and then when the Clacton train had gone the Brightlingsea train would come out the sidings and pick up everybody and then off it would go to Brightlingsea. Then that was replaced by Diesel.

There is a story that because of the weight limit on the bridge all trains, steam or Diesel, had to go at walking pace so it didn’t damage the bridge and the width of the carriages were just under the width of the bridge so you couldn’t get a train through and somebody standing..... and one winter night there was an old boy come back from London and he’d fallen asleep when he got on the train to Brightlingsea and when it got to the bridge it had slowed right down to walking pace and the old boy thought he was at Brightlingsea. He opened the handle and stepped out off the train straight into Alresford Creek. They had to send a search party. Anyway they got him. A bit muddy but he was lucky the tide wasn’t in. There’s lots of stories about the Crab and Winkle.

Old boy’s tale!

Another one was that the old boys used to go ferreting after rabbits. They devised this system where one of them would get a bucket of fairly big crabs out the rocks during the day time and at night they went over the marsh where all these thousands of rabbits were and they’d pick a fairly big crab out.... and in their pockets they’d have like birthday candles and they’d melt the wax and stick the candle on the back of the crab.... light it and send it down a burrow and the idea was it would frighten the rabbits and apparently this worked for a fair amount of time. Then one day they were doing it and nothing happened so they put two candles on. Still rabbits wouldn’t come out and this old boy said.... I know what the problem is.... when them crabs are walking down if the rabbits in the burrow and you put a ferret down the rabbit will either run or get up on a shelf so when the crabs are going down and the rabbits are on the shelf...they would blow the candles out.....

Dad’s rabbits

My Dad kept rabbits and before we went to school we were given a big sack and we’d have to go to collect dandelions and mallow... cabbage leaves from peoples gardens. That was his beer money or bacci money. He started off in Alma Street with cages in the concrete back yard but when we moved

up Anglesea Road we had rabbits, ducks, bantams, chickens, ferrets. Then my brother got into wildfowl because we all messed about on the river and we got a little boat.

Shooting ducks

We used to spend all the summer holidays on the river and then one of the old boys gave my brother a little book on sporting things like nets and guns and traps so he thought he could build a punt and we could go after ducks. So we built the punt from planks of wood from old Jack Mallets shop. It was Deal with all these bloomin' knots in it. We built it and painted it all up and we was rowing down the river one day and there was this gurgling noise and there was this knot had come out of this wooden plank in the bottom and the punt was filling up with water and it sunk with all the guns and cartridges.

We sent away for the guns somewhere up in Spalding. You went down the road to the Post Office and bought a shotgun license for 10 bob and as long as the gun was broken open you didn't have to have a cover on it, you could walk down the road with it. We used to walk down the Wall and over Boweses marsh. We were only shooting ducks or rabbits. You had to be 18 for a shotgun I think. We used to row down to the Geedons.... the salt marsh near the bird sanctuary (*Fingringhoe*). It goes on for miles and miles. But I always remember one morning we were down there.... we were always down there mucking about.... it was first light.... we were sat in the punt hoping that something would fly over and we saw the sun come up over in the East. That just made it all worthwhile. It was a bright sunny frosty morning. We did it for years and then we just gave it up.