

MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LOCAL HISTORY NOTES – 35

Memories of Morden between the Wars

Betty Whittick

My father's parents, William and Nora Sullings, moved to Morden from Wimbledon Park before the Great War and had a house built in Garth Road. At the time there were two blocks of cottages towards the London Road end. There was space between the blocks and after the second block for their allotments, where most people grew their own vegetables.

Opposite there were fields as far as you could see. Further down Garth Road past the Pyl Brook there was a block of cottages called Briar Cottages. They were built in 1900 and had long back gardens – I think now a lot of these have been left to grow wild. These cottages are still all standing. Next door was a house called Rose Cottage and a family called Potter lived there.

My grandparents' house was next to Rose Cottage, and was called Garth Villa. There was a lot of ground behind the house where grandfather kept pigs which he slaughtered for meat. William and Nora had seven children, three boys and four girls. My father John was the second son, and he was taken prisoner in the Great War. He told great stories about his time in the prison camps. My grandmother used to send him parcels which he shared with his mates. When he came home, he married his childhood sweetheart. He bought the ground next to his parents and had a bungalow built, which he called The Cot. While they waited for the bungalow to be built they rented two rooms in Briar Cottages from a sweet old lady called Granny Baxter.



*Garth Villa, later No. 141
Garth Road, now the Garth
House factory site*

*Uncle Jim and his assistant at
work in the slaughterhouse*





*My mother and eldest sister at the gate of The Cot, later No. 165 Garth Road.
The site is now the Burge & Gunson premises.*

That was where my eldest sister Joan was born. Beryl and I were born in the bungalow. There were fields next to the bungalow right down to the cemetery. Some of it was common land, and the gipsies would come with their painted wagons and camp on the common. On the corner opposite the cemetery was a large pond where we would fish for tiddlers and tadpoles and put them in a jar.



My sisters with one of our cows

On the side of Garth Road opposite my grandparents' house were fields where my grandfather would graze cows and horses – this land was between the present Mondial House (No.190) and Hayden Court. The Oaks brothers had a breezeblock works from the end of the field to two old cottages. From Hayden Court down to Salcombe Drive there was an orchard which was owned by Mr Walters, who had a son called Reggie. If you were caught scrumping in the orchard you were in trouble.

At the bottom of Garth Road by the Beverley there were fields. My father rented the ground from, I think, Battersea Council, and grazed cattle there. He also had cattle in Morden Park.

My older sisters Joan and Beryl went to Morden School opposite St Lawrence's Church (over a mile from our house). They walked to school along London Road and met up with the other children along the way, jumping ditches and having a great time; it was safe in those days. As there was no room to eat their sandwiches at school, and they lived too far to go home for dinner, they sat amongst the coats in the cloakroom and ate their lunch. The toilets were across the playground – not good when it was raining or snowing – the pipes often froze. I only went to Morden School for a short time. My sisters took me on the first day. When I got home I said, 'I've seen what school is like and I won't be going again'. Of course I had to go back. When Ridge School (in Ridge Road) was built in about 1930 as a temporary school built of wood I started there – it was much nearer.

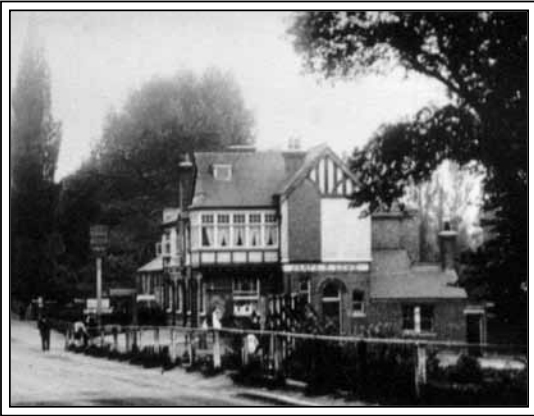


My sister on her tricycle

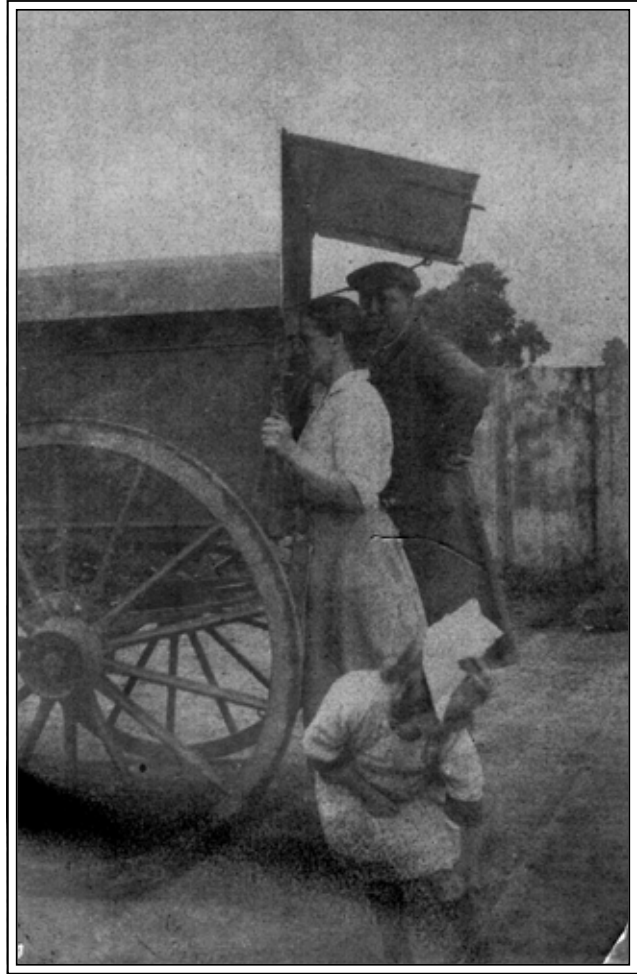
*Morden schools, London Road:
an early postcard*



They were happy carefree days. All sorts of people called at the door selling their wares – milk, bread, meat, groceries, wine and spirits and paraffin. Mr Mares was a grumpy old man who owned a shop by the *Lord Nelson* pub in London Road. You could buy groceries and sweets from him, and there was also a tea room there. He had a lovely lady called Ethel working for him; she came round on her bike with a basket on the front to get the orders, and then delivered them back from her basket. I don't know how she managed that heavy old bike. No Sainsbury's or Tesco in those days.

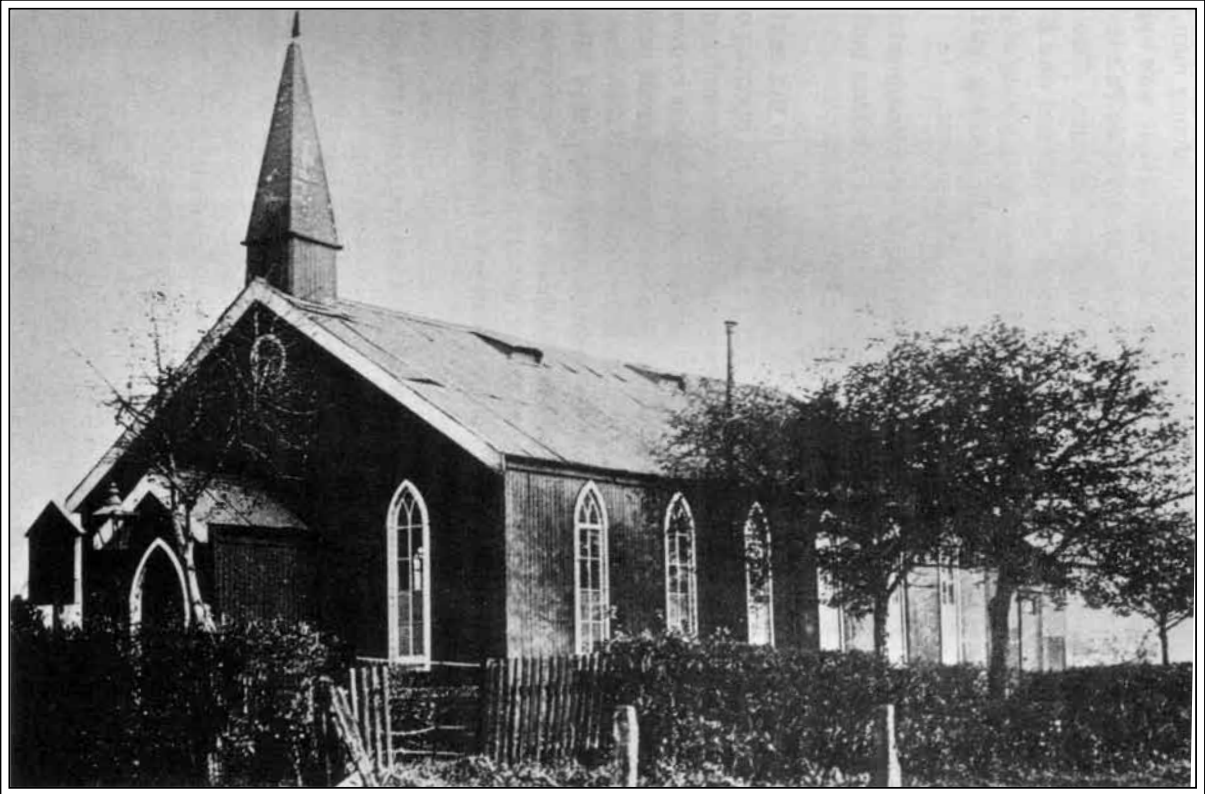


Postcard views of the Lord Nelson pub (above) and the adjoining shop (below)



My mother and eldest sister at the butcher's mobile shop





North Cheam Baptist iron chapel, Ridge Road

My mother Lizzie was a lovely lady. She was a member of North Cheam Baptist Church, which was a tin building on the corner of Ridge Road where the Van Hire place is now. As children we went to Sunday school and the Band of Hope and Brownies and Guides. Dad didn't go to church but made sure we went and would always be willing to help us with anything to do with the church or Sunday school. He did not let us play ball, skip, knit or sew on Sundays.

Only the two ends of Garth Road were made up – I don't know why the middle was left with big puddles and lots of mud. When we wanted to go out we wore wellingtons till we got to the cottages at the top of the road. We then changed into our shoes and left our boots at the cottages – everyone knew us and they were pleased to help so we could go on our way with clean shoes.

In 1935 some land between the brook and Briar Cottages was sold for building, and the house where I now live was built. It was bought for £5 deposit and £3-1-11 a month repayments.



Garth Road

I always remember when I was 14 my Grandmother died. It was my first funeral – it was horses and it was so bumpy and uncomfortable. When the coffin was lowered into the grave Mr Atkins the verger leaned across and said to my uncle, 'There is room for one more'. I was disgusted. Twenty years later my uncle was that one more.

My grandparents and three of their children have a grave in the churchyard at St Lawrence's. The cross is near the new entrance, but I think the grave is in the foyer of the new extension. Paul and Christine Howard from St Lawrence's kindly keep the grave tidy for us, and we are very grateful to them.

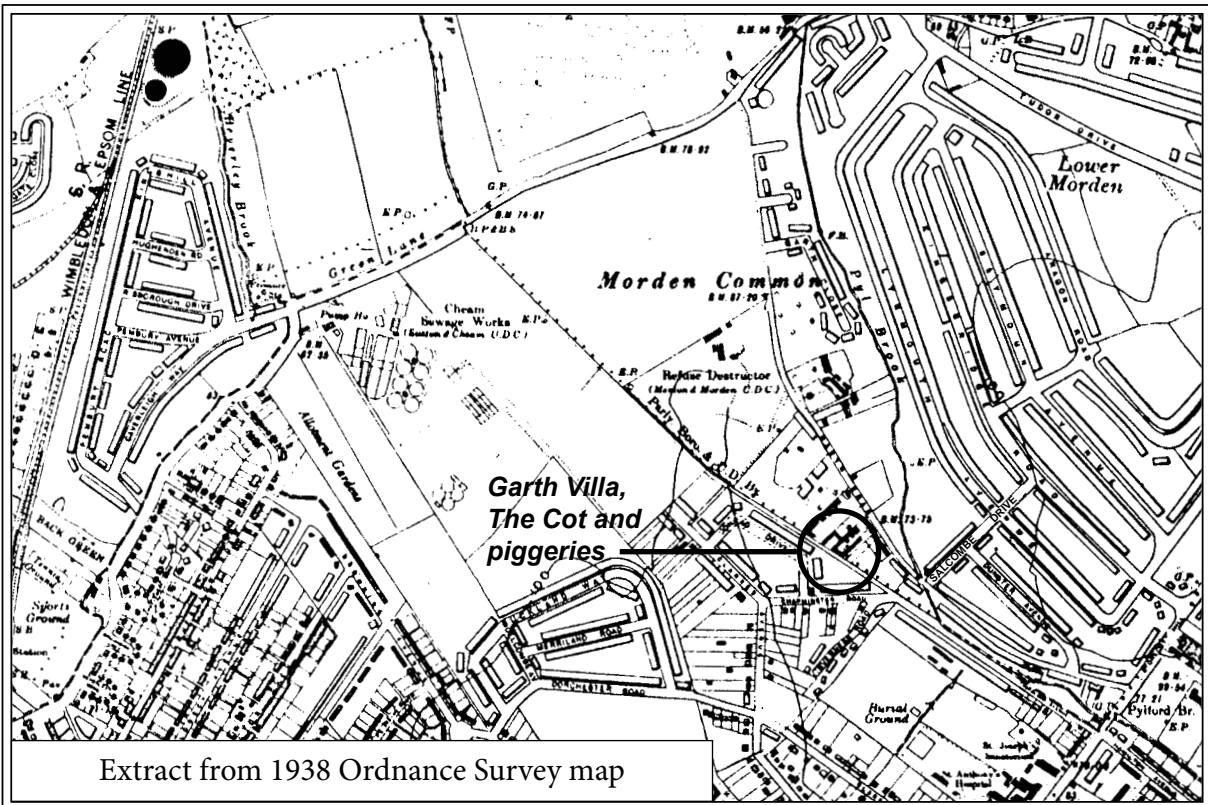
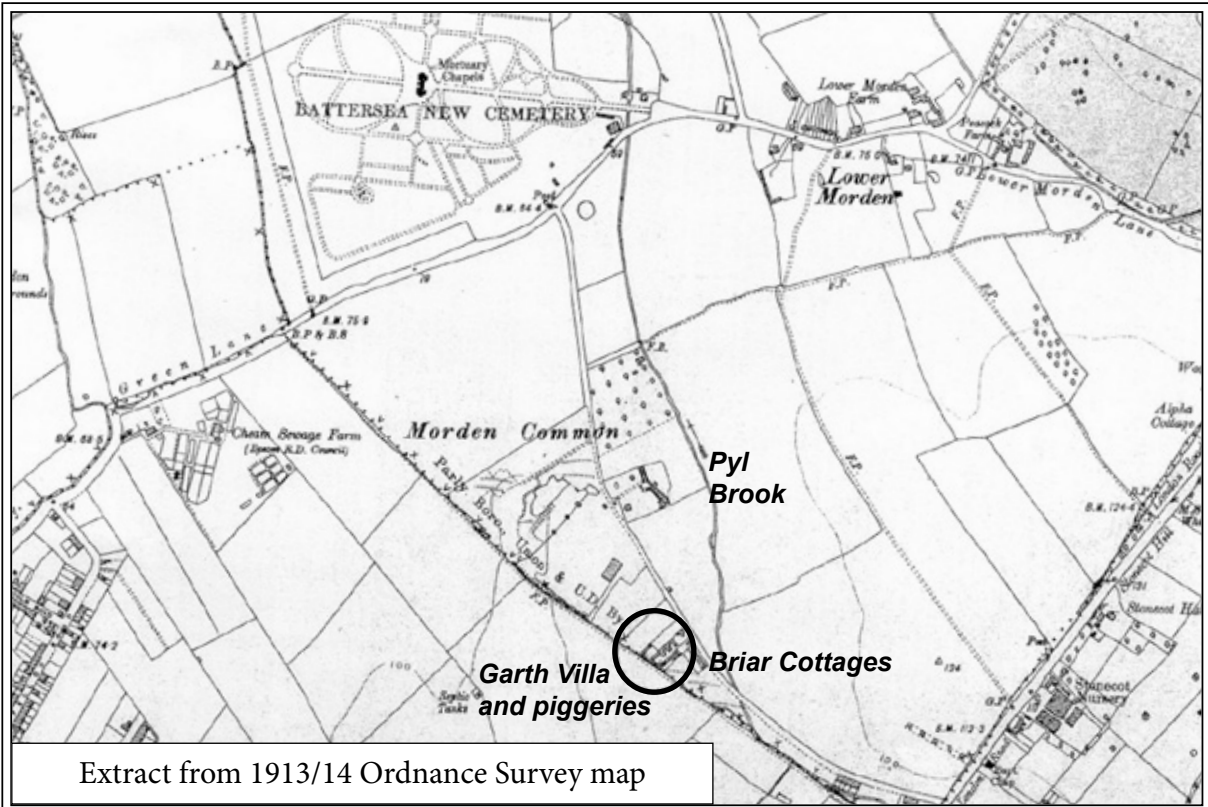
I have seen a lot of changes in Garth Road, from a muddy lane to a very busy road. I wouldn't buy a house in Garth Road now, but I won't be moving either. I think it must be a record – I was born in Garth Road in 1926, married and moved down the road in 1950, and still live there now.



The Sullings family grave in St Lawrence's churchyard



Briar Cottages in 2012, looking towards the factories on the sites of Garth Villa and The Cot



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