



A long life in Becontree! Memories of 2 long standing church members!

It is hard to believe sitting in the sitting room of John and Pam's semi-detached house today, that this house was once home to a couple with eight children, the walls literally bursting at the seams with family life! . Pam Brookes was born in the house and was baptised in 1927 in what is now St. Mary's hall, which at the time was the only church in the area, serving the new estate- a purpose built mission hall.

At this time there still existed the railway line in Becontree, which was built especially to bring building materials to the fast growing estate. Pam's earliest memory connected to the church is that of the Women's Fellowship for St. Mary's meeting at her mum's house, who was disabled, and not able to walk to the church. She particularly remembers a lady called Nan Gosling, who was the driving force of the time of this group of women and a group of women that tried to meet the need of the increasing number of families in the area, A group of evangelical woman who held strong beliefs and had strong belief in family life.

Family life was happy and secure, though there was very little money about and there was a big emphasis on being out with your friends, and the church played a big role which was crucial in shaping the lives of those young people who attended the groups they ran.

Pam's home had a large garden, and her father grew many vegetables, which fed the family, and were used for bartering for other goods, particularly during war and early post war years of rationing. Her father had a motorbike, which was unusual for the time as most families didn't have their own transportation and relied on walking everywhere or the scant public transport service that operated at the time.

The women's fellowship looked out for particularly mothers and their families and tried to help out wherever they could.

As a child Pam remembers at Sunday school there were nine classes. Those were the days when the East Ender parents who had moved out to the Becontree estate, were used to sending their children to the church for Sunday school back in the east end. Sunday school was separate from the church services, and were often the only time, that the parents got anytime to their selves. Later on in her life, Pam herself became a Sunday school teacher, and there were very strict regulations about what was taught, and how you delivered lessons and indeed how you should present yourself as a role model.

Every Tuesday night was the night that the curate of the parish instructed the Sunday school teachers and the helpers as to what was taught on the following Sunday. Pam tells a story of when she and a friend had decided to miss one of these Tuesday night training sessions to play tennis, however they were 'caught' by the curate on the park and had to go to the session anyway!

Most of the families living on the estate were from the east end of London, but as those families grew older, and the children had their own partners, there was no accommodation on the estate for these newly married couples to move on to, and they often stayed in their parents' home. In future years this generation were moved out to Basildon and Harlow and this enabled them to establish their own family homes.

Valence Park was where all the children gravitated, and in later years the park boasted an outdoor swimming pool and a playground, and playing fields. Children would go to the park unaccompanied, and spend most of their days on the park with all their friends. Although children were allowed to play in the street, no ball games were allowed on the green spaces, between the houses.

Pam remembers the vicar and his team of curates visiting in the parish with the support of the women's fellowship. The church was always evangelical and very active in the community.

Pam met the love of her life in 1950, by which time she was well established as a Sunday school teacher, and very active in other areas of the church. At the time there was a very large 18-s to 30-s group led by the church team, who were mostly married couples, and role models to the younger age group. The youth groups were the important part of the society as they provided the younger generations with safe and wholesome activities and a safe place to meet and socialise, also within the church, there was a group of married ladies who invited large groups of youths to their homes to encourage friendships. Both John and Pam speak warmly of role models, often young married couples who encouraged and befriended the younger generation in the church and who were the catalyst for much of the social life available in the area at that time.

John and Pam courted for over four years, and finally married in 1956, shortly after John had turned twenty one and there was no need for his parents to sign consent for the marriage. Though their life together the church has always been so important to them and the family and has always been as source of inspiration and security for the both. Both are still very active in the church, have worshipped both in St Mary's and at Hartley Brook Church and could not imagine life without the church. Over the years they have served people both in the church in the community and have been an inspiration to those around them.

