



LOTTERY FUNDED A past member of the church, Katie Avagh in her own words...

I read your 'history' and realised my brothers and sisters would have attended Church in what you now use as a hall.

My parents, Grace & Robert Owen, were re-housed from the East End as part of the slum clearance in 1926. They were given a two bedroom 'cottage' home in Brittain Road; they had one child, Grace, born in 1925. The following year Bobby was born; followed by Ivy, Ronnie and Dolly; then I was born in 1935. The Council then decided we needed to be re-housed in a larger house and moved us to Downing Road.

At that time in order to have one of these homes on the Becontree Estate you needed to be of good character, be in work, be solvent and not have a criminal record. Most of the men would return to London for their work; for the wives it could be a very lonely time away from family and friends. My mum told us that there were few shops, and outside the shops there were the 'rings' to tie your horse and cart to. On Romford Market day they would walk into Romford, with their prams and toddlers, to shop. Romford Market was then also a cattle and sheep market; you could also purchase puppies and pet rabbits.

Grace and Bobby started Sunday School and she said that they loved going, and if they missed the Vicar would come round in the week to ask if anything was wrong. She remembered summer picnics and Christmas parties; one in particular. She and Bobby were leaving for the party and little sister Ivy began to play-up, she wanted to go also. Mum said they had to take her, or they couldn't go! Father Christmas duly arrived with his sack of toys. Someone had donated a baby doll, Ivy being the youngest, Ivy who shouldn't be there because she was too young for Sunday School, Ivy was given the prize gift. Grace and Bobby, like all the other children, returned home with their colouring book and crayons. I don't think she ever forgave her little sister!

Then in the early 30's like everyone else, the family was hit by the Depression; dad lost his job, they had four children and mum was expecting her fifth baby that February. The church was giving the children in the area a free midday meal, so mum told the three older children to go along. They were quietly queuing when dad came along; he dragged them out of the queue and ordered them home, telling the Vicar and his church – 'He would feed his children, they didn't need charity.' So they enjoyed yet another hungry day. On another occasion mum 'heard' they were giving away food parcels at the church and Grace & Bobby should go along. They arrived, hotfoot, to be told – 'No, we are not giving away food, we are collecting it to give to the hungry in London.' Grace had a wonderful expression - "Poverty, people today don't know how to spell it!"

Grace would also relate the following story of when Queen Mary came to open the St. George's clinic in Valence Avenue. All the local children from round about, rather scruffy and unkempt I imagine, crowded around. Grace as usual was upfront, right next to the Queen. Suddenly Queen Mary, using her walking stick, rapped the ankles of the offending children. I don't think Grace ever forgave her!

Another story she told was of one of their trips to Romford. The four older ones had baby Dolly in the pram, mum was not with them; maybe she was pregnant with me. They had a good day exploring the Market and were coming back home along the lane from Romford. Suddenly they realised, pounding and snorting towards them was a very large bull, apparently it had escaped the pens in the Market. Quick thinking, they pushed the pram with baby into the ditch alongside the lane, then all jumped in. The bull continued down the lane and was, hopefully, eventually caught. They retrieved the pram and a very distressed and crying baby from the ditch and carried on their merry way home. Here it was discovered that baby Dolly had a broken nose, and to this day still has a 'crook' in her nose.

As mentioned earlier, with my arrival in 1935, bringing the count to six children and two adults,, in a two bedroom 'cottage', the Council decided we were a tad overcrowded.

Some five or so years back, my grandson, Ben moved with his family into Boulton Road, which backs onto Brittain Road. He brought the boys to church for a while; I believe the Vicar then was Ron Herbert. When they first arrived Ben was unable to find work and did some gardening for the Vicar. After a couple of years they moved to Dagenham East.