

## **LYE VALLEY and ROCK EDGE remembered**

To give an idea of my time line, I will outline where I lived until leaving home. I was born in February 1933 into 7 Dene Road, Headington. My brother was born in January 1937. The back bedroom, which I occupied, overlooked Southfield Golf Course.

I remember watching the Fairview Estate being built from my bedroom window, over to the right. I remember watching the chap breaking stones for the basis of the road into the Estate behind our house. Before that, it was just a muddy track. This was before WW2.

Father was called up for service in the Second World War and left home on 2 September 1939. It was planned that my mother would take my brother, my cousins and me to the USA to live with my Aunt in Yonkers, NY, so our house was rented out to a family named Flood for the duration of the war. In 1940, we went to live with my grandmother in Morrell Avenue until we left for the USA. Unfortunately, a liner carrying many children travelling to USA was sunk by a German submarine, the result of which was that the number of children on any one ship was restricted to ten. This meant that we would probably get a voyage in about 1950.

As a result, we were without a home and my grandmother's house was not big enough to house us all – my mother and we two boys had one bedroom. So, in 1941, we went to live in Rock Edge, Headington, with my Aunt, my Mother's sister, and her daughter, the same age as my brother.

We returned to Dene Road in 1945 where I lived until getting married in 1959.

Before leaving in 1940, my friends and I used to go across the Southfield Golf Course into Lye Valley. We just knew it as the "bog". I seem to remember that the water in the brook was more or less level with the ground and the ground was very wet and there were many water-filled holes. This was the area below the estate as I don't think we went as far as the present peat fen. I am convinced that the area we played in dried out later on as a result of the building of the Fairview Estate. I also seem to remember that the area was very open and when in the bottom of the "bog", we could see the estate houses. So pretty well all of the trees and scrub have grown up since the 1930s. The "bog" was quite deep and I regularly went home with my wellingtons full of muddy water. I think we also caught newts and frogs and took them home. Remembering that I was only five or six years old, I seem to remember that the valley was quite wide. And then, in the late forties and fifties, I didn't go into the "bog" but saw it from the road and there were few trees and the occupants of the houses on the road "Lye Valley" had made gardens going down to the "bog".

After the war, during the winter when there was snow, we used to go to the slope on the Golf Course next to Barracks Lane and sledge down the slope. The problem was that there was the brook at the bottom and we needed to sledge across the bridge. It was OK if we

were in single file but if two of us came down together, one of us landed in the brook, going home rather wet and cold.

During the war, when living at 9 Rock Edge, we used the rock edge as a playground, climbing on the rock face, collecting fossils etc. We frequently went up onto Shotover where we understood that it was a beach at one time. Several times, I took fossils into school.

I recently tried to find where I used to play. But it has changed completely with the tree growth. Even the bottom end of the Golf Course has been overgrown and I couldn't find my route. Furthermore, there is a great footbridge over the brook which is now three to four foot deep whereas back in the thirties and early forties, the water was level with the ground and really flowing through the bog.

I have no idea what plants were growing in those days as I was a little too young to be interested in plants and flowers.

My brother is now living in California. I have spoken to him and he well remembers playing in the "bog". He says that, at the time, it was quite open and the brook was level with the ground. One thing he reminded me was that we use to "tread" golf balls into the mud and retrieve them later. They were then sold to other golfers for some additional pocket money. I don't think that today there is any chance that a golf ball could reach our play area. I further asked him about Rock Edge. He, like me, was amazed that another play area of ours was a special area. He did not remember the Municipal Restaurant but remembers Italian prisoners of war being camped in the area in front of the rock edge in about 1945.

So the valley has changed out of all recognition.

I have spoken to my cousin who now lives near Cheltenham. Like my brother and me, she was amazed that Rock Edge, our playground, has been classed as a SSSI. She confirmed that it was quite open and we could see the face from the house. She also thought that she could see the Municipal Restaurant from her room in the Nurses' Home at the Wingfield Hospital, now the NOC, after she started there in 1954.

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