

Memories from Angella Rodgers ne Streluk

In 1963 I moved into 11 Ninefoot Lane. This was my grandmother's house; Amelia Allen who lived there since they were first built in 1937. All the houses up to number 23 were built in 1937. The houses on Ashleigh Drive were built during the 1960s and I remember getting stuck in the mud there, while they were preparing the site, and had to be pulled out.

What I noticed about growing up in the area was the good sense of community. People living in Ninefoot in the 60s included the Streluk and Higgins families and also Mrs Corley. The families used to be quite competitive and would often rise to a challenge; though it wasn't too serious and all done in the name of good fun. Challenges included things like - who could build the biggest bonfire and who could make the best Guy for Nov 5th. Grandma had left a load of old coats and hats behind when she moved to Blackpool and these were great for making Guys.

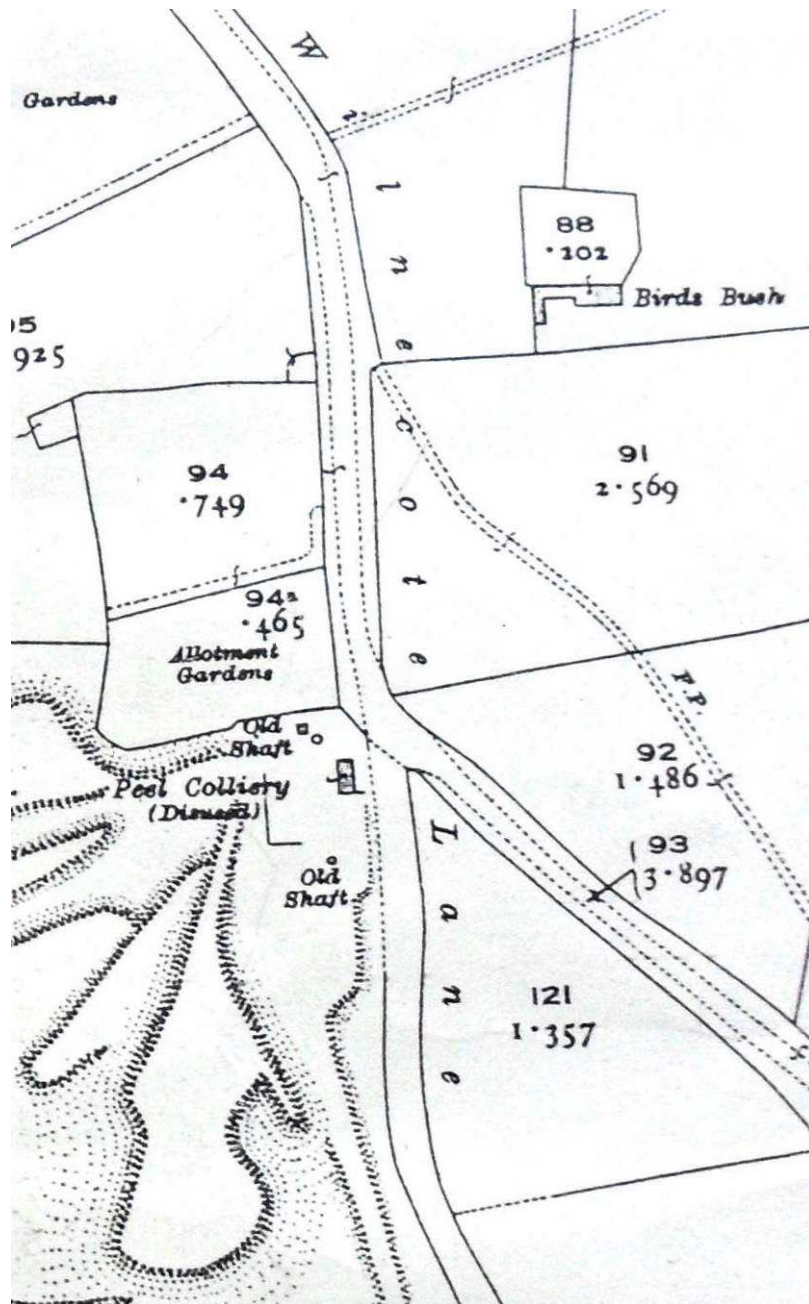
People used to help each other out in those days, sharing things with others when people were short and this still happens a bit today. Anyone could go to my grandma for help and I used to do my bit by tending the gardens of older residents.

There were no fences between the gardens like nowadays, just paths. The top part of the gardens usually had a small lawn and some flowers. The rest of the long gardens were used for vegetables, fruit trees and some people kept livestock as well. We kept chickens and Mrs Corley kept a pig which she used to ride down the garden. Most of the gardens had a couple of sheds.

There were two air raid shelters left over from WWII, one at each end of the row of houses. My brother used to play on the roof of one of them, which was made of concrete. There was a long, very high and overgrown raised area we called "the Mount", which was the spoils from Peel Colliery and other mine workings. It was a great place to play and pick blackberries. Peel Colliery closed down a long time ago; an old map dated 1923 shows it as disused.

*Remnant spoils of
Peel Colliery beyond
the hedge in 2016
Ninefoot Lane &
Wilnecote Lane junction*





Extract from 1923 map - Ninefoot Lane & Wilnecote Lane junction

The spoils stretched from near where Morrison's supermarket roundabout now is, all the way to the end of Marlborough Way at the Watling Street roundabout. Before the roundabout was built, it was the location of another pit which we called chapel pit. It got its name from the old Methodist chapel located nearby, which was demolished when the roundabout was built.

There were many old mines and clay pits around the area. I think there was an old shaft on the island at Belgrave Lakes; it was capped off in concrete when I last saw it. Before the lakes were built, it was just Kettle Brook, which was a popular place to paddle for youngsters. There was also the blue waters, which was an old clay pit which had filled with water, but we were told not to go there and I'd heard some people were drowned.

I remember a pump house and the foundation can still be seen today by the lake at Belgrave, not far from the Dance Studio building off Birds Bush Road. This used to pump water from the Brook to Doulton Works, as ceramic production needed a lot of water. There is another pool located between Cringlebrook and Lyon Drive, which I believe was an old clay slip pool.



*Location of old pump house
Belgrave Lakes 2016*

My dad Joachim “Jack” Streluk was originally from the Ukraine and worked at both Skeys and Doulton Works. At Skeys, he made parts for chemical processes at the works. He worked in buildings opposite to where Wilnecote Station is and we sometimes used to go there and watch men working through the window. After many years and working in different jobs around Tamworth, he returned to Doulton Insulators who had taken over from Skeys. He worked as a fitter and welder and carried out repairs on all sorts of things around the site such as machinery and metal walkways. I went to one of their open days and was awestruck by the building they called “the cathedral”. This is where they tested the electrical insulators made at the works and when a test was being carried out, it was like seeing a lightening bolt and the whole building shook.

The nearest school in the area was Wilnecote Infant’s School in New Road, which I first went to at the age of 4. People from Belgrave used to walk up Ninefoot Lane in small groups to get there. I remember that there were a lot of mice in the building and we would look at the traps to see if any had been caught. The Headteacher was Mrs Hare. When Wilnecote High School was built in the 1960s, the nearby secondary school in New Road moved there and we then moved into the old secondary school. The rooms had sliding wood partitions which could be opened to make a large space. Our Teacher was Mrs Power and she lived in the Belgrave side of Wilnecote Lane. The Junior school was located in three very long rectangular prefab concrete blocks, which were left over from the war. They were stepped down the hill from Hockley Road towards Smithy Lane. They were served by outside toilet blocks which were not a great experience in cold weather.

At the age of about 9, I was a Sunday school teacher along with Edward Chetwynd and Sheila Crowhurst at Belgrave Mission Hall. This was located next to 388 Wilnecote Lane and is sadly now demolished.