

NO THROUGH ROAD

Let me tell you about the street in which I lived as a child. Our street, which had no name in my day but is now called Caroline Street, was on the left as you headed out of Oxford toward London. Our area of the city was called Jericho; then a deprived working class shambles; today, a thriving yuppie district with wine bars and the very houses I knew priced at nearly one million pound!

Made up of two facing terraces of cottages built in the early 1800s, the rustic-coloured house bricks, kilned some ten miles away at Calvert, were as coarse as my life. The so-called dreamy spires that shadow may seem idyllic, but for me living in No Through Road could be as harsh as London's east-end. We lived at number three. Eight families lived in our street. Six suffered from bereavement caused by the Great War or flu pandemic. My elder brother died at the Somme. My mother and sister died from flu. I was only saved by being sent away to the clean air of Islip.

The pub, The Port Mahon, on the London road, was full of thieves, black shirts, and air thick with choking smoke. At the eastern end of Jericho was Headington Park; and, at its western edge, Magdalen Bridge - the great boundaries of the social classes. I was told by my parents never to cross Magdalen Bridge as I would end up as a dogsbody. Never cross into Headington Park as I would end up as a corpse!

As you looked down No Through Road, the street was squared off at the end by a large high wall built using those same rustic house bricks. We boys would chalk goalposts on to the wall and play football. My sister Emily preferred hopscotch on the pavement. Sometimes a washing line would be strung from one side of the street to the other and everyone would hang out their garments. We had no running water in those days, so father and I used to have to fetch the water from Cherwell spring.

Dressed in our Sunday finest, we would attend the Christadelphian Church and my father occasionally sang psalms. *Jesus's Blood Never Failed Me Yet* echoes in my mind.

On special days like Coronation or Jubilee, that same washing line was doubled or tripled for bunting, and we would lay out wooden trestle tables for a street party. I was five when George V was crowned in 1911; and thirty with a family of my own when we celebrated his silver jubilee. My mother made her famous Simnel cake for the coronation, even though it was June, and my wife did the same for the jubilee in 1935. The goalposts on the end street wall would be covered over with a large union flag.

When war came again, Jericho was spared by the Luftwaffe.

That end wall has gone now, and new houses have been erected on the drained marsh land.

There is no place for children to play.