

Betty W, born 1927

An edited version of an interview made on 4 June 2008

Interviewer: Christine Wilson

We lived on Henderson Road and we used to come to the park as children and bring our tea. We had jam sandwiches and we used to make a bottle of lemonade with the powder, lemonade powder you dipped your finger in and Jack High was the foreman and Reggie was the park-keeper and he used to go round with a bell 15 minutes before he shut the gates. They were shut every night and one night we got stuck in the park when the snow was on the ground [*laughs*] and we had to climb over the gate up near the yacht pond, we'd all been playing in the snow.

Going back, there was a German plane which was shot down, [the plane was shot down near Duxford and brought to Eaton Park] and then there was a barrage balloon stationed up there during the war. For the coronation [1953] they had a big fête up here, and there were stalls and dancing to celebrate the coronation. During the Wimbledon tennis they used to make a mini Wimbledon up here, they had all the tennis courts and had a tournament. The children's playground on the opposite side was caged off, you couldn't get in there. There was the cricket and the hockey. They were the people who were the elite. You know, really big teams played in there from other clubs.

Down the bottom here, that was all waste ground, all rough ground, and then the circus came down there after the war. We had Bertram Mills Circus and the elephants used to walk down South Park Avenue. They came up from Thorpe station. We all watched the elephants. Saturday afternoons the park was full. All the football pitches were taken up and they played hockey, lacrosse, that was really good up here Saturday afternoons. There was something all the way round the park. My husband actually played football for the YMCA. I suppose that was the late '40s, beginning '50s I should think.

*After Reggie the park-keeper, do you remember other park-keepers because there are only part-time ones now?* There were gardeners. My brother was a gardener here. Charlie Youngs lived in the little bungalow as you come in the gate. They had a lovely rose garden. When you first came in the big gates right at the top there was the fountain and the lovely rose garden and that's what they used to tend. They weren't part-time gardeners. They were up here all the time, you know, and the bowling greens and they used to look after, you see. That was a lot of work in the park.