
The following document grouped under the title "Old Courts and Slums of Abingdon" was written by the late Ron Chung and is reproduced here with the support and permission of his family. The papers are notes for a book that was unfortunately not published. They contain information about the families and the various courts that they lived in and the new houses on Saxton Road.

The Chung family, though might be considered ordinary, was exceptional. Fong, known as Harry Chung came from China as part of the importation of labour during WWI. Most worked in France where many died but some worked in England. Harry worked at the Milton Depot, perhaps because he spoke English. In 1918 he married Lily Painton and settled locally though most of his compatriots were repatriated after the war. They had a number of children including Ron Chung. During WWII Ron was in 12 Commando and was part of the demolition team on the St Nazaire raid where he was captured. He was very proud of living in Abingdon and took a great interest in our town and its history.

10 Stonehill Road

Abingdon Oxon

OX14 5QH

Dear Sir,

Archives Department

Would you please kindly help me ? Yesterday I visited the Abbey House Abingdon which is the HQ of the Local Council Offices and asked the following question:

What year was the Slum Clearance Act ? 1931 – 2 – 3 ?

They could not tell me. One referred me to you as they said anything before 1974 was sent to the Archives Department Reading.

The reason for me asking is that I am putting together 'The Old Courts and Slums of Abingdon'

The second question is: Why was the O'day Road name changed to Wilsham Road ? Who was Wilsham ?

I would be very pleased if you could give me an answer.

Yours faithfully,

Ron Chung

Born Abingdon 31-3-1919

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(a) Where Were They – The Slums and Courts of Abingdon 1931

Slum: House unfit for habitation

Overcrowded and squalid district in a town inhabited by very poor people.

Court: A yard surrounded by houses with entry from the street.

More than 275 slums 189 courts 31 WCs.

Slum and Court Act 1930 which was passed as an amendment to the Housing Act of 1925.

(To make further and better provision with respect to the clearance or improvement of healthy areas, the repair or demolition of insanitary houses and the housing of persons of working classes.)

Abingdon Council took this very serious and arranged to have a new estate, namely Saxton Road.

(This was named by the Council in memory of Sir Charles Saxton, who was the Town Recorder in 1809-10).

It provided new houses to replace the courts and slums that were in Abingdon.

When Saxton Road was started it was in fact in the Parish of Sutton Courtney and was taken over by Abingdon Council when the boundary was extended, before this the boundary was Caldecott Road.

A.E. Tombs was mayor at this time and was mayor for three years and his plaque is in the first block in Saxton Road dated 1933. Later he was decorated by The King OBE.

To us locals he was known as 'Rasher'.

He ran a very successful grocery business in and around the district.

(b) The Council in those days were generally good businessmen and were regarded as good Councilors, when they had the town at heart.

As mentioned before Saxton Road was started in 1933.

The whole estate included:

Saxton Road Blacknall Road Golafre Road John Morris Road

All of which took a few years to build. All this was called by the locals: Hollywood

Altogether 243 houses.

There was some good planning when this was built as some had three – four and five bedrooms, and all had a shed supplied and front and rear gardens.

You would not believe the joy of the new residents when they moved in, as against what they left. (More later on what they left).

Generally the rent was about 5/9 per week. NO POLL TAX

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This included house, garden, shed, water, rates.

No garage, no car, no buses. Some had bykes.

The first part of Saxton was not completed as the contractor went 'broke'. I have no details but No 1 to No 15 was not completed by this contractor.

All the same when we moved to No 12 in 1936 it is very good.

It is not generally known that when we moved to Saxton all our bedding went to Coxeter's and put in an oven and 'baked' (to get rid of fleas etc) when they came out all the leather buttons on the matteress were off but we managed.

(c) Moving to Saxton was a great thing. 4 bedrooms. It comprised of:

Living room with 2 windows, iron grate picture rail kitchen.

Coal-cellar, sink draining board and cold running water. A copper for washing and for heating water for a bath. (not herd of in the courts or slums).

Hall staircase landing

In the hall was a larder with shelves

Bathroom and WC

Bath with running cold water (no basin or hot water)

We filled the bath for hot water from the copper in the kitchen by bucket. (what joy).

What a joy – 4 bedrooms

(1) Mother and father (2) 2 girls (3) 3 boys (4) 2 boys

Head to toe again.

But it was a long way to go to school then nearly a mile.

No school meals

Those days was very hard work for our mothers very much more to do as was in the Old House.

Monday : all day washing (no washing machine)

Tuesday: Ironing if dry

Weds: bedrooms

Thurs: Ground Floor

Fri: General

Sat: shopping ?? (men did not get paid until 12noon on Saturday).

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Shops opened until 9 pm on Saturdays when we could get cheap meat, veg etc as there were no 'fridges' It was not uncommon to go to a shop and get three pennyworth of 'bits', on a Saturday night and often receiving.....to last all week !

(d) Talking of three penny worth of bits, wages were not very good at this time as mentioned men received their pay at Saturday 12 pm (noon). This did not go very far as building tradesmen were receiving about 1/1d per hour say 50/- per week less insurance money, which was about 1/11 per week. This included unemployment pay.

Cheer Up: It was not all Bad

Many men had an allotment which helped with the food, such as veg and many had chickens, rabbits and some had pigs. This all helped in the house.

Talking of gardens, when Saxton was completed the Council ran a front garden competition and of course each tenant competed for the best kept garden and included the paths, which made it all appear to be in good order.

No garages No cars No buses Most had bykes

(e) Court 7 West St Helen's Street or old name: Westeynthelene

To us locals: Back Street

Name of our court: Zion Place

As a family we lived at No 4 but you NOT find us in the Abg Directory until 1932 as our mother and father could not vote until after my father was nationalized 1931. The directory only includes people who are on the voting list.

This court contained 12 houses and all shared the same cold water tap, which was in centre of the court. NO kitchens them days. Many men and boys stripped to the waste to have a wash at the tap.

The ladies always had a hot pot of water on the iron self actor grate, for washing and cleaning, and all waste water was carried in a bucket to the only drain under the tap.

We had four toilets at the top of the court and that was between us all.

The 'pan' was 'boxed-in' but we had flushing cisterns.

NO toilet paper them days. Newspaper cut up

NO lights

The ladies of the court cleaned out the toilets on a basis of 'week about'. Three houses to one toilet.

Most of the houses had three rooms only: living room – bedroom – attic or garret.

Living room contained: coal-cellar under the staircase – one built in cupboard

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One iron self actor grate.

No Larder No Fridges.

(f) Bedroom 1 built in cupboard mother and father

Attic 7 children.

To say it was 'cramped' was an understatement and we children slept 'head to toe'.

Do NOT forget the slop-bucket for night use

NO lighting

Lighting was by paraffin lamp only in the living room. 1 candle bedroom and attic.

Good News with the gas lighting installed but only in the living room and bedroom in 1932.

(1d in meter)

There were no such things as a shed.

Bykes were put in the living room at night.

NOT many bykes then as most people walk every where again. No cars or buses. There were one or two cars mostly by the doctors.

We had a few buses to Oxford but at cost of 1/- return but many could not afford this amount.

Sometimes I wonder how many people in Abg remember these things ??

CHANGE: we had five schools in Abg at this time namely:

Royse School for the educated boys

St Helens ' ' ' ' ' girls

Council School: Ock St mixed

Bury St School Bury St mixed

St Edmunds School Oxford Rd mixed

As a family we all went to Bury St a mixed school with boys upstairs and the girls downstairs and it turned out a large number of boys and girls who went on to Further Education at Roysses and St Helens.

Many of those children became good citizens of the town and 'Done Well'.

(2) Schools: We all started at the age of 5 yrs and left at 14 yrs.

NO Nursery School

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To most of us it was very pleasant and enjoyable to be at school, most of us taken in those things which the teacher told us and it helped the teacher that taught us. We had a large amount of subjects to go through, most of all as the three 'R's.

General it was a good time for most of us, as we had PT games, football, etc and once a week we went to the Bathing Place during the Summer.

NO pools or warm water.

As the river flowed so we swam.

We started school at 8.45 with a church lesson and went to our classes and each one varied, at 10.15 to 11.00 a break 11.00 to 12.00 class. 12.00 to 1.00 dinner break going back home for lunch perhaps 2 slices of bread and jam not much more.

NO school meals

1.00 to 4.00 more classes then home again.

On Monday for our main meal was usually that was left over from Sunday. Bubble and Squeak as it was washing day.

Somehow we all managed to eat our fill.

We also had cake which was 'cooked' on Sunday afternoon when the grate was not in use. This would last all week.

At school there was the use of the can or a 'flip' around the ear and of course a 'hundred lines' after school. This was given to the boys and girls.

Cheer Up – it was not all bad

We had music lessons and had very good choir, talking of choirs, many joined the church choirs and on Christmas Eve St Helens Church choir sang from the parapet, half way up the church and this attracted very many people into East and West St Helens Street.

NO loud speakers

(3) This was stopped because it was unsafe to go there.

To play after school it was hopscotch, rounders, tops, iron rings, and marbles. When we were not allowed to play football, a friend and I went to the farmer who ran the sewage work and asked for a field in which to play, this was given as he knew me. (As my mother worked for him in 1917, Land girl). And to us boys it was called the 'Reck' and we then could play football. After a while we had 2 football pitches, hockey, rugby and a running track (Abg Harriers), High Jump, Skat Putting and long jump.

Good Days for Boys and Girls

We also had a large wooden shed in which to change.

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No Water No Lights No toilet (only round the back !)

This did us a lot of good, fitness and good health and stood us in good stead in later years.

On Thursdays it was early closing for shops and thereby a Thursday football league was arranged.

No Pay

They had to pay for their own strip and balls (eighteen pound leather balls with inner tube).

November 5th we wanted a 'Bonfire' so I asked the farmer to dump all the collected rubbish from the shops to be dumped in the 'Reck' for this which he carried out providing we kept it tidy and a great fire we had. (Remember all this was collected by horse and cart).

No Lorries

(g) Still at School

Many boys of the age of 12 did paper rounds and many girls also found work to do.

The boys I joined at 12 started at 6.30 pm to collect papers and delivered them to all parts of the town. The rate then was 2/6d per week and on Saturdays we collected the money after we delivered the papers and if you were 'short' of what you should have collected it was 'stopped' out of your 2/6d.

NOT many mistakes, which made you a good collector.

Apart from this I started work at the age of 10 yrs helping father two ways, decorating and delivering his 'plant' to various parts of the town. Two, making out his Bills (accounts) for the week he carried out as while he understood English and spoke it, he could not 'write' it, so it was down to me!! Good Training!!

On reaching the age of 14 yrs we left school and there was plenty of work for boys and girls unless you went to Grammar School when the leaving age was much higher.

The general work for school leavers was very varied. Building, factories, shops, river, all routes. My brother and I took to building and proved very good. I must point out that were in Saxton Road and most of us had bykes by then. You could get 2nd hand bykes for about 12/6d and we did all the repairs ourselves to save money.

For boys starting in the building trade it was about 7/6d per week some of the factories paid about £2.5.0 and of course this varied depending on the hours worked.

(h) For all the men there were a great number of firms to work for, as we did not have very much unemployment during 1931-1936 onwards.

A short list including:

Buildings, MG Motors, Pavlova Skin Factory, Milton Depot (Air Ministry) Didcot (Depot (Army), sewage, land, Railway, Gravel Pits, Gas works, (It was possible to buy coke from the gas works) Coal merchants (some also sold lump salt).

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Clarkes (clothing factory, this employed many women as part-timers sewing by candle-light) Shops, river (boats etc) not forgetting the Brewery and the very many pubs (which employed a large number of people).

Thats Work !!

The other side for both men and boys, Boxing, weight lifting, running, football, rugby, scouts, cubs, Boys' Brigade, we were kept busy if you like this sort of thing and made us good citizens of the future and many started their own businesses.

Some fell by the 'wayside' and it still goes on.

Back to School: Bury St School was a C of E school and we always had a church service when we started and we always enjoyed this before school started.

(i) All the foregoing is my personal account of the town with the help of Abg Library with regards to the places of the courts and slums, as I knew most of these places from my childhood days.

There may be a few mistakes and I hope you will be kind to me and not take it as personal.

Many things have been written about Abg and I have read many of them but I think that this is the first time the courts and slums have been mentioned.

I would like to add the following:

(1) There were only 2 streets without a pub: Edward Street and New Street

(2) No street names this centenary.

(1) ABINGDON SLUMS WHERE THEY WERE 1931

ABBEY	GAOL YARD	NEW STREET
<p>1-7 VACANT 8 Langstone Mrs Eliza 9 Keates Mrs Alice 10 Aitken William Ed 11 Bond William 12 Williams Mrs Eliza 13 Allum Mrs M 14 Cooper Miss Rose Ann 15 Thomas Mrs Ada 16 Giles Cyril Albert 17 Newitt John</p>	<p>1 Cook Joseph 2 Ferris William Henry 3 Howe Henry 4 Tombs Mrs Christine 5 James Mrs Harriett 6 Davy Percy 7 Trinder James 8 Keates George H 9 Elderfield William 10 Thomas, Christopher 11 Brogden Mrs Ellen 12 Turner John 13 Brown George W 14 James MrsMary 15 Wilkin Alfred W 16 Comley Francis W 17 Berry Frederick</p>	<p>1 Whale Albert 2 Day Ernest James 3 Mills William A 4 Vacant 5 Vacant 6 Mooring Mrs Mary 7 Skelcher Mrs Rose 8 Vasey Richard 9-10 Castleton James 11 Downes John 14 Lawrence Mrs Louisa 15 James Arthur 16 Bowler Richard 17 Hartwell Mrs Jane</p>
<p>East St Helens Street ESTSENTHELENSTREET To us locals FORE Street</p>	<p>OCK St Court 10</p>	<p>OCK STREET</p>
<p>IVY Cottages 1 Rance William John 2 Payton Alfred P 3 Dipper Joshua Geo</p>	<p>1 Heredge Mrs Martha 2 Green Mrs Lydia 3 Harris Miss Sarah Ann 4 Thatcher Walter 5 Webb Mrs Llaura 6 Washington Thomas 7 How Miss Rosa 8 Long Edward 9 Nettle Miss Mary 10 Smith Miss Kate 11 Martin Herbert 12 Franklin Miss Ellen 13 Johnson John Fred</p>	<p>Court 16 1 2 Andrews Charles 3 Richards Lewis T 4 Snuggs Edward 5 Viner Albert P 6 Giles James 7 Beckett Arthur T 8 Short Arthur TY 9 Smith Henry</p>
<p>ABBEY Court 1 1 Bewer Reginald 2 Thomas Arthur 3 McCartney Thomas G</p>	<p>Court 12</p>	<p>Court 18 1 2 3 4 Bint Mrs Louise B 5 Thomas George 6 Charters William H 7 Welch Walter E 8 Batts Freed</p>
<p>Bury St Court 1 1 Hudson Harry 2 Tyler Albert Ed 3 Buckle Arthur Ed 4 Goodenough George</p>	<p>1 Barker Elizabeth 2 Giles Henry 3 Wellman Andrew T 4 Mott Albert Peter 5 Hayward Reginald Al 6 Hills Charles 7 Mundy Sarah 8 Stacey Alfred M</p>	<p>Court 20 1 Harris William 2 Bennett Albert 3 Hart Mrs Ellen 4 Warrick Albert 5 Butler Ernest 6 Rollinson John W 7 Belcher Mrs Phebe</p>
<p>Ock Street Court 2 not known</p>	<p>Court 14</p>	<p>Court 22</p>
<p>Court 4 1 Elderfield William 2 Brett Ernest</p>	<p>1 Giles William A 2 Alder Bert 3 Darling Edward</p>	<p>1 Bennett Mrs Ellen 2 Welsh Frank P</p>
<p>Court 6 2 Willshaw Harold Geo 3 Batten Albert Joseph</p>		
<p>Court 8 1 Stanley Mrs Emma 2 Alder George</p>		
<p>OCK STREET 53 – 57 SLUMS</p>		

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<p>PIG ROW</p> <p>20 Ackling Miss Martha 22 Ruddock William 24 Povey John James 26 Hudson Albert 28 Branson George R</p> <p>10 Way Richard 12 Hudson James 14 Tubb Miss Nellie 16 Church Misses 18 Trinder Miss Martha</p> <p>200 (?) Winterbourne William Winterbourne William 202 Drew Harold Goe 204 Wiblin 206 Saunders Francis 208 Baxter Edwin 210 Simmons George H 212 Becket Albert</p> <p>OCK STREET</p> <p>Court 24</p> <p>1-9 Unknown 10 Povey James 11 Belcher Albert 12 Hudson George 13 Barrett Cecil S 14 Cox Mrs Emily 15 Cox William 16 King Charles</p> <p>OCK ST right hand side from The Square</p> <p>Court 1</p> <p>1 Wiggins Miss 2 Boshier Mrs Jane 3 Townsend Mrs Jane 4 Evans William</p> <p>Court 3</p> <p>1 Warrick Albert Ed 2 Clack Christopher</p> <p>Court 5 WILLOWPLACE</p> <p>1-5 Unknown 6 Parry Ernest</p>	<p>215 Gardner Albert 216 Wiblin George A 218 Wiblin George 220 Gerring William H 222 Wiggins Mrs Elizabeth Ann 224 Willis Miss Ellen 226 Aldworth George 228 Gerring Mrs Eliza 230 Badcock George 232 Silvester Fred Ch 234 Barns Albert Ed 236 Bond George Th 238 Holloway Thomas.</p> <p>Court 7</p> <p>1 Lovelock Victor H 2 Barlett Mrs Edith M 3 Enock Thomas W</p> <p>Court 9</p> <p>1 Buckingham Mrs Mary 2 Taylor George 3 Spokes William</p> <p>Court 11 – 13? Missing</p> <p>Court 15</p> <p>1 EGGIS COTTAGES</p> <p>1 Ridge Mrs Mary Agnes 2 Grimsdale John H 3 Bowles Rupert J 4 Hemmings Percival 5 Buckle Henry</p> <p>STERT STREET</p> <p>Court 1</p> <p>1 Steptoe George 2 Harris Mrs Mary</p> <p>ST EDMUND'SLANE</p> <p>To us locals: BACK LANE</p> <p>1 Carter Mrs Blanche 2 Wake George H 3 Lewis Lawson H 4 Pearce Ambrose J 5 Hacket William A</p>	<p>THAMES STREET</p> <p>Court 1</p> <p>1 Boulter Walter 2 Gerring Mrs Louisa 3 Pitson Jack 4 Darling William 5 McIntyre Robert 6 Sleep Mrs Minnie 7 James Alfred 8 Thomas Mrs Sarah 9 Kirby John 10 Grimes Walter 11 Thomas Ernest</p> <p>VINEYARD</p> <p>Court 1 and 3 slums</p> <p>Court 4</p> <p>1 Hook Christopher 2 Whale Thomas</p> <p>Court 5</p> <p>1 Wiblin Miss Annie 1a Steptoe Miss Sarah 2 Tranter Joseph E 3 Clack Mrs Alice 4 5 Darling Fred</p> <p>TURNAGAIN LANE</p> <p>1 Webb Sidney Geo 2 McIntyre Arthur 3 Turner Alfred 4 Austin Frederick 5 Berry Arthur Ed 6 Smith Alfred Ed 7 Humphries Geo</p> <p>3 houses remain 1993.</p> <p>Court 3 PARADISE SQUARE</p> <p>To us locals: THE GATEWAY</p> <p>1. Carter Frank 2 Horne Thomas 3 Turner William Geo 4 Anderson Edwin 5 Stone James</p>
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<p>7 Wilkins Edwin J 8 Bolton William H 9 Stone George 10 Parry Ernest W 12 Pead William A 13 Watts William</p> <p>QUEEN STREET</p> <p>Windsor Cottages</p> <p>1 Carter Mrs Louise M 2 McIntyre Henry 3 McIntyre Harry Geo 4 McIntyre Robert 5 Carter Charles 6 White William</p> <p>VINEYARD</p> <p>Malthouse Cottages</p> <p>1 Owen Henry 2 Wheeler John 3 Franklin Harry 4 Barnes Mrs Mary 5 Alder Hebert Geo 6 Willis John 7 Wheeler Geo Ed 8 Holifield William H</p> <p>WEST ST HELENS STREET Old name WESTEYNTHELENE To us locals BACK STREET</p> <p>Court 2</p> <p>1 Mott William G 2 Arnold John 3 Gregory Charles 4 Whitehead Edward 5 Potter Mrs Sarah 6 Lovelock Mrs Esther</p> <p>Court 4</p> <p>1 Lord Albert 2 Watts Walter 3 Porter Thomas 5 Coles James Eds 6 Louch Frank 7-8 Simmons Ethel M 9 Thompson Henry 10 McIntyre Edward S</p>	<p>BACK STREET</p> <p>Court 5 – vacant</p> <p>ZION PLACE</p> <p>1 Bevis Henry L 2 Smith John Ed 3 Mercer William 4 Chung Fong (Harry) 5 Boulter Mrs Ellis 6 James Oliver 7 Bond Joseph 8 Richards Harold 9 Thatcher Charles 10 Wiblin George 11 Legg Mrs Ellen Grace 12 Carter Mrs Louisa S</p> <p>Court 8</p> <p>1 Belcher William 2 Forbes Alexander 3 Lester Mrs Susan E</p> <p>Court 10</p> <p>1 Pickett Joseph 2 Boyles Edward Geo</p> <p>Court 12</p> <p>1 Ivey Richard 2 Woodward Horace 3 Ivey James</p> <p>Court 1</p> <p>Right hand side from High Street</p> <p>1 Harris Mrs Caroline 2 O'Hare George Ed 3 Thomas Albert</p>	<p>6 Carter Ernest Geo 7 Link George 8 Gibbons George 9 Belcher Heber 10 Carter William E 11 Woodley William 12 Elloway Charles 13 Butler Frederick 14 Hook George 15 Eggleton George 16 Trinder Joseph 17 Bennett Dennis</p>
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Saxton Road 1955

Houses (evens) 127

Houses (Odds) 111.5

John Morris Rd

 Evens 39

 Odds 43.5

Total 221

Blacknall Rd 8

 TOTAL 229

Golafre Rd 14

TOTAL 243

Local Abingdon Hollywood !!!

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Slum Houses 1931

Abbey	16
Bury St	4
Fore St	8
Gaol Yard	17
New St	17
Ock St Court 4	2
Court 6	4
Court 8	7
Court 10	13
Court 12	8
Court 14	8
Court 16	4
Court 18	9
Court 20	7
Court 22	2
TOTAL	116

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Slums 1931

Ock St Ct 24	7
Pig Row	31
Ct 1	4
Ct 3	2
Ct 5	8
53-57	3
Ct 7	3
Ct 9	3
11 -13 missing	
15	15
Queen St	6
Back Lane	16
Stert St	2
Thames St Ct 1	11
No no. 10	10
Turnagain Lane	8
Vineyard Ct 7	2
Malthouse	8
Ct 5	5
TOTAL	140 + 116 = 256
St Edmunds Lane Cottages	5
1 – 14	14
TOTAL	275

1931 RATEABLE VALUE £44,000

Area 727 acres Population 7167 Houses 1959 Electors 3548

Slum houses 275 Hollywood 243

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Correction Pages 46 and 133

NOT CLARKES

They are:

In the book : 'Around Abingdon In Old Photographs' Pamela Horn 1987

Landlord and wife and customers of the Lord Nelson PH

Please note: They are all wearing the same dress in the photos.,

I know my father and mother are on both and I know all the others.

Holybush coaches (Mr Hudson)

Local Knowledge

Ref: Page 25 Court 7

This is the 1st photo I have seen of the Court. Good News !

The 1st house on the left is where I lived (mother, father and 9 children).

Centre: Mrs E Boulter (1 daughter)

Right: Mrs and Mr O James (2 daughters)

There were 12 houses in this court (3 rooms only, living room 2 bedrooms)

I knew them all !!

ZION PLACE

(1) Weststeynhelene Street to us locals Back Street

2 Estsenteleynestreet Fore Street