

# Local History



Children gather for a photograph near Hollow Ponds in 1948 and right, Malcolm Knight on a tricycle outside his Nissen Hut on his third birthday



June Bradley (above, and right as a little girl) stayed in a Nissen hut between the ages of five and 11



Eileen Ray, (above as a toddler and right) June Bradley's sister, was born while her family lived in their Nissen hut



Above: Celebrations on VJ Day. A young Malcolm Knight wearing a white hat, sits on a girl's knee in the centre of photograph. In the background stand the distinctive corrugated Nissen huts

## Huts that were a home from home

Wartime Nissen huts, temporary homes for people whose houses had been destroyed in the Blitz, once dominated Whipps Cross Road. **CLAIRE HACK** spoke to some of the former residents about what it was like to grow up in the distinctive corrugated dwellings

THOUSANDS of east Londoners were left homeless during the Second World War when their houses fell victim to the Blitz.

The result was hundreds of temporary "Nissen huts", many of which were built along Whipps Cross Road in Leytonstone.

The semi-cylindrical huts, made of corrugated steel and concrete, formed rows from Forest Glade to what is now the Green Man roundabout.

The design was first developed during the First World War by Canadian mining engineer Major Peter Norman Nissen.

June Bradley, 67, moved into one of the huts in 1947 as overcrowding increased and stayed there from the age of five until she was 11.

She said: "It was great fun for us children, even though it was freezing cold in the winter and boiling hot in the summer."

Her hut, she explained, was divided into four and included a living room, a small kitchen and two bedrooms.

"We used to have all the cows coming round - they were allowed to roam then," she said.

Ms Bradley, now living in Wood Street, Walthamstow, lived in the hut with her mother, stepfather and half-sister and recalls swimming in Hollow Pond.

She said: "It was clean enough then and there was the boating lake there. We had the Whipps Cross lido as well, which was an open air swimming pool, but that closed down in the 1970s."

Her sister, Eileen Ray, 61, of Norlington Road, Leyton, was born while the family were living in their Nissen hut.

She added: "I can remember the cows - there was a beautiful day when this cow poked his nose right through the window."

Malcolm Knight, 65, now living in Bexley, lived in a Nissen hut in Whipps Cross Road between 1945 and 1947, after his first home, in York Road, Leyton, was destroyed.

"We were V-1 bombing victims," he said.

"My sister was born in 1947 during that really freezing winter when nobody could get out of those huts."

His clearest recollection, he said, is of water tankers delivering emergency supplies to the huts after pipes froze and burst.

Father-of-two Mr Knight said: "I remember people walking down to those tankers with zinc baths to fill up with water."

He also celebrated VJ Day there as a toddler, along with his family and neighbours, with an outdoor party.

Mr Knight, Ms Bradley and Mrs Ray all recall a sense of belonging as everyone looked after each other.

Ms Bradley said: "It was a real community there - everyone knew everyone else."

Mr Knight's aunt, Doris Hotten, now 84, of Eatons Mead, Chingford, arrived in

1948, with her husband, who had spent three years in the navy.

"We used to have a baker come up with a big barrow and a green grocer used to come up with a horse and cart," Mrs Hotten said.

"My son was born when we lived in the

Nissen hut but not my daughter."

She left the buildings in 1953, but many of the Nissen huts in London, which housed hundreds of people during the Second World War and in the years that followed, remained standing and in use as late as the 1960s.

**ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS**  
Waltham Abbey

*Ignite your imagination and...  
...BLOW your mind!*

**What's on this weekend...**

**Rocket & Space Event** 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> July






**Also upcoming...**

**America in the 18th Century**  
11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> July



[www.royalgunpowdermills.com](http://www.royalgunpowdermills.com)  
Beaufeu Drive, Waltham Abbey, Essex, EN9 1JY, Tel: 01992 707 370