

THE HARRIS FAMILY OF 166 HIGH STREET

In my article on the 'Russell Family' (the fifth in this series looking at the history of our house), I briefly mentioned that 'my 1968 Street Directory lists a 'MJ Harris' at 166'. That, I am glad to say, was enough for his daughter (now Sue White) to find my website and get in touch with some wonderful memories, and pictures to match.

Michael (Mike) John Harris apparently bought 166 High Street from Mr & Mrs Hale on the 31st March 1965, paying about £2,400. He was just 22 years old, and a few months later, following their marriage on the 12th June that year, he was joined here by his wife Elizabeth (known as Betty), aged 20. They both came from Guildford, but bought the property in Old Woking as Mike had landed a job as a printer at Unwin Brothers printing works (where Gresham Mill is today).

Sue was born in December 1965, with her sister Julie being born in March 1968. Sue recalls 'as children, Julie and I had the front bedroom (overlooking the main road) and our parents had the back bedroom. To get to the bathroom we had to pass through our parent's room. A staircase separated the two bedrooms and I recall an exciting storage cupboard which you could access from our bedroom which also went over the staircase'.

The 'exciting storage cupboard' with its access over the stairs, was fortunately covered up before we bought the house in 1987 – otherwise I hate to think what havoc our three girls would have wrought – but unfortunately access to the bathroom is still through the back bedroom.

Sue continued her recollections – 'downstairs the front door led directly into our lounge and the backroom was our dining room, with a step down to the kitchen. From the dining room there was a window that looked out onto a concrete area and then down to a longish garden, at the end of which was a compost heap. A wire fence at the end marked the boundary to the primary school grounds where we went to school. I remember once being lifted over the fence into the waiting arms of either a teacher or dinner lady when the pavement outside our house was being re-tarmaced and we couldn't get back to school after coming home for dinner.'

Unfortunately the school grounds were replaced by the development of The Cloisters, so sadly we never got to pass any of our three daughters over the fence to school, but otherwise her description matches what we found when we moved in (although we have made a few changes since).

Like us, the Harris' had three children, but with their third child being a boy (Steven, born in May 1972), the family soon outgrew 166 High Street and with Mike gaining a new position at The Pitman Press in Bath, the family moved out of the area on the 7th November 1973. Apparently 'a bridging loan' was required as they 'couldn't immediately find a buyer – a Mr and Mrs M.F. Barnard eventually purchasing the property on the 23rd October 1974.



The photographs Sue sent are reproduced here – the first of the garden in the summer of 1967, with the second 'circa 1970' which as Sue notes 'shows the dining room window and the rear of our neighbour's houses (which seems to show major renovations being carried out on number 168).'

I should point out that the 'cropping' of the second photograph (excluding part of Julie) is not down to me. Sue helpfully noted, 'I think the picture was taken by my uncle who was famous for not being able to frame a shot and hence was regularly 'cutting off' bits of people'.

Sue also told me of her memories of the neighbours, especially Aggie Pratt at 168 – who 'seemed elderly then and we would occasionally go into her house' – there just being a low gate that separated the two gardens'.

I would like to thank Sue and her mum Betty (who sent me the pictures below of the garden) for sending their memories and photographs to me – and for allowing me to reproduce them here. My hope is that others will likewise come forward with recollections and illustrations of not just our house, but any of the properties featured in these pages, so that we can build up as complete a picture as possible of Old Woking.

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