

## Sue Smith Remembers.....

# Footpaths and Play Areas



***Sledging On A Footpath in Beoley***

Image: Sue Smith

When we moved to Church Hill from Hollywood in Birmingham, our daughter was a baby and I was a stay-at-home Mum. I found many friends amongst the other recent arrivals as new homes were being built all around us. From the pool of young families in the area it was easy to form baby-sitting groups (using curtain rings as exchange tokens) and to arrange what are now called play dates for our children. There was also a branch of the National Housewives Register in Church Hill where women missing their professional lives could meet up for stimulating conversation.

What I loved more than anything, however, was the network of footpaths which made pushing a pram - and later a pushchair - a pleasure. Away from busy roads and car fumes, we could stretch our legs and enjoy the thousands of trees planted by the Development Corporation. From our house, it was a lovely walk along well-made paths but through trees and fields to Beoley. I could not drive when we first came to Redditch but I could walk wherever I wanted.

As our daughter became a toddler - and was later joined by her sister - I came to appreciate the many small play areas dotted around the new estates. Any reluctance to walk expressed by a small child would be overcome by the promise of the play equipment just round the corner. Those play areas have now disappeared, victim, perhaps, to new safety laws or upkeep costs or perhaps they were no longer needed by a changing population. They were a highlight of our daily routine at the time and I think of them with fondness as part of a golden time in my life.

From our house, we could walk easily to the bus road which led into town. One day in July 1983, when our second daughter was a few months old, elder daughter and I walked the short distance to the bus road, with the baby in the pram. We set up on the grass verge to watch the Queen drive past. Perhaps we should have waved flags or draped the pram in bunting, but it was a fairly low key affair. I think I must have had a rather romantic view of seeing a queen, perhaps derived from all the fairy stories and nursery rhymes I was reading at that time. For all her fine

qualities, the Queen is a human being like the rest of us and the moment of seeing her was a bit of an anti-climax.

The network of footpaths surrounding our house was a boon throughout the year, in every season. You could enjoy wild primroses on spring walks and I used to make wine in those days and picked elderflowers in early summer from the walk to Forge Mill. I loved to pick blackberries each autumn and made blackberry wine or bramble jelly with the berries. Despite all the new building, Nature managed to find corners to flourish! Even in winter the footpaths came in handy. The picture shows our elder daughter being pulled along the footpath towards Beoley on her father's childhood sledge!

In my late sixties now, I find Redditch still offers a welcoming community. Those eighties newcomers are pensioners now too and the U3A replaces the NHR and playgroups. I still pick blackberries and the play areas at Arrow Valley and Forge Mill are a great draw when the grandchildren visit. I have reason to thank the Redditch Development Corporation for over thirty-five years of enjoying the environment they created for us to enjoy.

**Sue Smith**