

Rudloe Landscape, People and Politics

Part II(2) – People

(Note that Part II(1) looked at Rudloe residents from medieval times through to the mid-20th century. Part 2 looks at the people who came to Rudloe from the time of WWII onwards)

In her 2020 publication 'The Boxfields Bungalows', Rosie McNamara describes the physical and demographic transformations which took place in and around Corsham and Box as World War II loomed and former stone quarries were converted for ammunition storage and aircraft engine and weapons production. In 1941, with a requirement for substantial quarry clearance (two-million tons of waste stone), Alfred McAlpine, the main contractor, opened a recruitment office in Dublin. Ten-thousand men signed up.

Construction then began of hostels for single men at nine sites (each with a capacity of 1,000 men) and bungalows for families at ten sites. Two Boxfields sites received the designations MQ2 and MQ2A while Rudloe was HS14. However, at some stage HS14 was rebuilt as a bungalow site (see early-50s photos here: <https://www.rudloescene.co.uk/archive-1/rudloe/rudloe-estate/>). Rosie recalls Irish family names from this time: Boore, Cafferty, Casey, Devine, Grogan, Kelly, Lynch, McCarron, McComb, McGrath, O'Brien, O'Connor, O'Neill, O'Shea, O'Toole, Reid and Riley but omits hers, Feeney, and that of her oldest friend, Murphy.

These names live on with many of the second-generation and beyond still living locally. And in times of trouble, the community continues to come together to offer support. When Martin O'Shea was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2012, Rudloe Social Club organised an event in support of Martin and the MND charity where £1,200 was raised. At Martin's funeral, with hundreds in attendance, Brendan Kelly's eulogy was both powerful and heartfelt. In June 2017, little space could be found in the streets and verges of Pickwick when the life of John O'Toole, a popular man who had established a successful civil engineering business, was celebrated at St Patrick's.

With the establishment of RAF No. 10 Group at Rudloe Manor in 1940, there was also a great influx of service personnel during the war and afterwards. Accommodation blocks for single personnel were built on-site; married personnel would live away from base mainly in rented accommodation. However, in order to encourage technical and senior staff to remain in the service, RAF policy moved to the construction of accommodation on the basis of one third station strength married, two thirds single. In the early 50s, the RAF married quarters at Leafy Lane were constructed, Park Avenue for officers and Portal, Trenchard, Tedder and Dowding Avenues for other ranks.

The present Rudloe Estate was completed in 1964 with many residents of the Boxfields and Rudloe prefab sites moving to new homes in this well-planned, spacious estate of flats, maisonettes, 2- and 3-bedroom houses and retirement bungalows. Five years earlier, in 1959, storage of Admiralty electronic equipment was centralised at Copenacre – just 1/3 of a mile distant. With a staff of 1,700, RNSD Copenacre was the largest employer in North Wiltshire so many locals, naturally, took up employment there in the offices, stores, testing/calibration labs, workshops (MT, wood) or as drivers – a fascinating account of life at Copenacre may be found in the public (no login required) Facebook group *Friends of RNSD Copenacre* here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/183328529950/>.

Later in the 1960s and into the 70s, more estates were built in 'Rudloe Park' - land previously owned by the Padfield family (see People(I)). Firstly, with a nod to Bauhaus and Le Corbusier, Springfield Close and Clift Close were intended as locations for life with 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-bedroom houses for

young, then growing families. In the early 70s, the more traditional homes of Highlands Close and Kidston Way were constructed and, on the other side of the original RAF estate, Ashwood Road and Pine Close were built. Many families in rented accommodation on Rudloe Estate and RAF families in rented accommodation at Rudloe and elsewhere then bought homes on the new estates. In Springfield Close alone, at least a dozen houses became permanent homes to RAF personnel and their families.

With regard to the stories of the people themselves, in just one quiet corner of Rudloe Estate resides a lass with an MSc who is also a Chartered Environmentalist and lass with an MA who is a specialist in arts psychotherapies. Close by, we find the former home of a lad who has gone on to become a director of an American multinational corporation. Not bad for one of any number of supposedly 'deprived' areas according to socio-economic stats (more on this in part III - Politics). But academic and business success needn't define a person – another Rudloe Estate resident of times gone by, Colin Worthing, was a lovely man, a union rep at Copenacre, who departed life's stage much too early.

As the years moved on and a more eclectic mix of people moved to Rudloe, the environs of Leafy Lane became home to an alumnus of a Hertfordshire school whose motto is 'Bold in God'. This Rudloeite obtained a 1st with honours in Business at a London college. A career with international computing companies and in headhunting/recruitment is now tempered with a karate black belt, team-building with sheep and singing for charity. This lady was mentioned in People (I).

And talking of eclectic, how about this Rudloeite of twenty-three years ... Educated at Graham Sea Training School, Scarborough and Hull Nautical College, he gained an ONC in Nautical Science and 2nd Mate's Certificate, then circumnavigated the globe during his first sea voyage, surviving a mutiny! On to Bath Academy of Art and a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. Subsequently owner, for thirty-six years, of a mechanical engineering company serving customers in the UK and exporting to Europe, Scandinavia, USA, Canada, Brazil and Australia. But hang on, I'm forgetting the family ... both mother and daughter hold BA (Hons) degrees in Fine Art from Bath and UWE respectively and the son has a PhD in Theoretical Physics from Birmingham University – some kudos here for Corsham Comp! Also, mum's degree was sandwiched between working at advertising agencies in London and a formidable career as a motorcycle racer.

And a Rudloeite of thirty-five years, this "good man" of Winneba obtained a first-class honours degree at UST Kumasi followed by a PhD in electrical engineering at Imperial College, London. Following some time with Saudi Aramco in Dhahran designing electrical transmission and protection systems, he moved to Westinghouse, Chippenham where he developed a power management system, the installation of which took him to New Zealand, Australia and several countries in South America. Installation in Turkey saw his family living with him for the second of his two years there. But death, oh death, you have laid your icy hand on another Giant of the Class of '68 (from a tribute by Dr Ofori Quaah) – the coolest of customers, the calmer of all our storms, consistent, generous and a heart so giving (from a tribute by Fosu, Afua and Adjoa, the three children of Dr Christian Kow Gharban).

Chris's wife Doris supported their elderly neighbours over many years; by the same token, we hope that they themselves enjoyed the support of their neighbours particularly during Chris's long, enforced retirement on health grounds. Our seafaring engineer and motorcycling spouse have said: "There is a great community in Rudloe with people helping one another out, but crucially not interfering or prying in others' affairs. It is in fact, the nicest place we have ever lived".