

THE GRANGE ROAD N.F.S. HUTS.

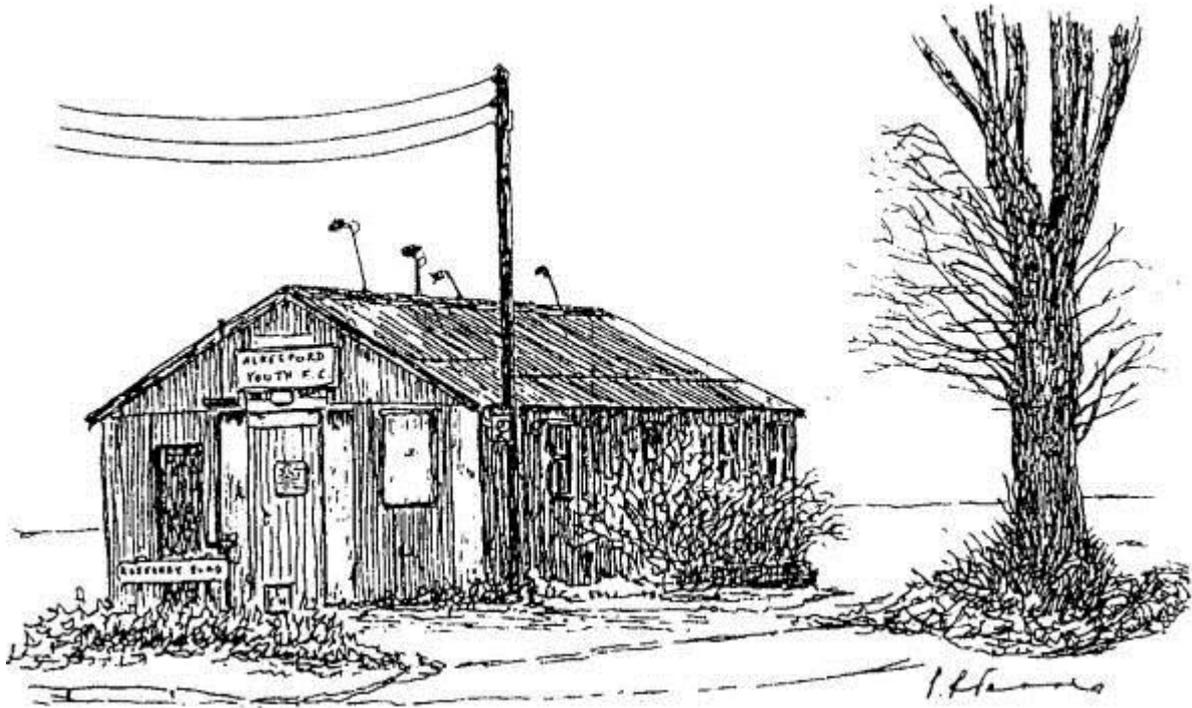
By

Sydney Pullinger.

Standing in the corner of the Stratton-Bates recreation ground, is a very worn and battered grey hut of corrugated metal and asbestos, much refurbished over the years. It is used as a changing room for the various football teams that use the ground and is the last vestige of a little snippet of history.

During the second Great War (1939-1945) the National Fire Service erected eleven of these huts in this corner of the ground. Information as to their wartime use is scant but it seems that they were used as a rest and recreation centre for blitz-weary fire-crews from Southampton and Portsmouth and possibly other towns. After the war they naturally became redundant, and were taken over by the housing department of the local council and converted into rather primitive housing for returning ex-service men and their families. By pure chance I chose Alresford for my post-war home and after living in lodgings in Rosebery Road for some months I was allocated the last one vacant. No. 11 into which I moved with my wife and a very young daughter. Those were the days of severe rationing of food, clothes and furniture. The furniture coupons were sufficient for a bed, a table and four chairs, a wardrobe and an upholstered suite. Beyond that one depended on the generosity of friends and what one could gather from sales and army surplus, of which there was plenty.

Today, in my centrally heated and double-glazed house only one hundred yards from the site of No.11. I often wonder how today's young marrieds would react, to the conditions we found. They were primitive in the extreme but after five years abroad in equally primitive conditions any home of one's own was most desirable. The huts were capacious and crudely divided into three bedrooms, a large central living room (no ceilings) with an open fireplace a kitchen with a very sooty coal range, a stone sink with a cold water tap and no drainage,, just a bucket under the sink. It was left to each man of the family to hunt up some spare pipe and lead the waste water outside. Next to the kitchen was a small wash-house cum bathroom with a coal-fired copper. The bath was portable and hung on a nail when not in use. The family in No.1 was the envy of all of us in the other ten huts as it was the only one on the main sewer. All the rest had chemical toilets emptied every Saturday morning by the Council workmen. That toilet was the worst aspect of living there and Saturdays were not very pleasant.



The floor of the hut was of crude concrete and extremely dusty. Carpeting was out of the question because during southerly gales the rain drove under the wall, across the floor and out the other side. We settled for small mats which could be quickly rolled up. There were cracks everywhere and one did not need the windows for ventilation. A big fire was essential throughout the winter because of the draughts and lack of insulation. Luckily the local timber yards had plenty of scrap wood. Few people today know that we had our own gasworks in the Dean. We could go there with a sack of any size which would be filled with coke for half-a-crown. Both range and copper were grossly inefficient and it was a common sight to see three or four of us standing on the roofs on a Saturday morning de-sooting the chimneys with a long pole.

It is difficult today to picture Grange Road as it was then. No one accepted responsibility for its maintenance and it was just a rough gravel track with a distinct, gulley down the centre formed by storm water and with tree roots protruding at the sides. There were few houses along it. then and plots of half an acre could be purchased for some sixty pounds or so.

It was not adopted by the Council until the mid-fifties, when it was made up to its present state. Perambulators in those days had large wheels. This was just as well as the modern small-wheeled buggy could never have survived Grange Road as it was then,

Two of my children were born in that hut and we seemed to cope without difficulty. There were no hospital confinements in those days, The midwife pedalled from mother to mother with her gas-and-air machine strapped to the carrier. Meanwhile fields nearby were being turned into estates of council houses and as each house was ready so a hut was vacated. Our turn came after some two and a half years and we moved to the new homes in Jesty Road. The huts were swept away and the area restored to grass.

It is all history now. Many of those early "settlers" have passed on,. After fifty years, as soon as funds allow, the last hut will go and be replaced with a new one and the only trace of a little bit of Alresford history will be this article.