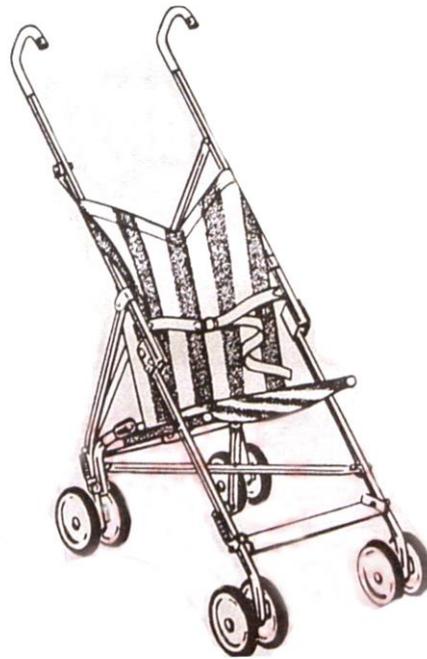


BABIES and BUGGIES



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by Ann Luntley

We bought our first house and moved to Barby in March 1965, six months before the birth of our first child. Castle Mound had just been finished and we were among the last to move in. The prevailing style of architecture at this time was a square box, and we immediately fell for the different styling of these chalet bungalows.

Almost all the houses were occupied by young married couples, so in due course along came a steady stream of children. We young mothers were fortunate then as most of us had our babies at home; only if there were complications or if you preferred did you go to hospital for the birth. Then, as now, this entailed a fair journey, either to the Barratt at Northampton or to St Mary's at Harborough Magna. Only later did St Cross at Rugby have its own maternity unit, which has since closed, offering now the only alternative of University Hospital, Coventry.

Our two local midwives were based at Crick and they made the regular rounds of the villages to see their pregnant patients. (There was another midwife at West Haddon if ours were off duty and we needed one quickly.) They visited us regularly before the birth, attended us during it (mine usually seemed to be at night!) and for a couple of weeks afterwards. It was so reassuring to have the continuity of care from someone you were used to. Sometimes student midwives came too, and my second child, who arrived in rather a hurry, was delivered by one who no doubt was glad to add him to her tally on her way to qualification.

It was around this time that the new village school in Daventry Road was built to cater for the increasing number of children in the village. I vividly remember one summer Sunday after lunch looking out of our dining room window and counting 28 children playing out in the road on bikes, with prams etc, none of them over 5, many of whom had a baby sibling at home.

Six of the 28 houses in the Mound are still occupied by the original purchasers nearly 40 years later, and several more by the second purchaser. Most of the houses have been altered and extended in that time. The style lent itself to the insertion of a dormer roof extension, there was ample space for further rooms or conservatories on the back, and even in a few cases for the enclosure of the front porch to extend the property. My husband Robert built our roof extension himself when the birth of our fourth child made space rather tight indoors! This saved us quite a lot of money and, being an electrician by trade, he was well used to the practical side of building.

Most of the young mothers stayed at home and looked after their children while they were small. There was plenty of social life during the day: coffee mornings, playschool, walking with friends round the local roads or up to the school, working in the allotments or your garden. Very few of us had a car of our own as our husbands used the one family car for work.



Once their children went to school many mothers returned to work and life changed. There were a few of us who were able to work from home, and three of us in Castle Mound sewed pushchair fabrics for the infant firm of Maclarens. This had been started by Mr Owen Maclaren, who had been an engineer, and lived in Arnold House in Daventry Road. He invented his lightweight collapsible pushchair, the Baby Buggy, in his own outbuildings, influenced by the difficulties experienced by his daughter when she travelled from America by aircraft with the large cumbersome pushchair of the 1950s. His invention revolutionised the pushchair industry at that time.

Mr Maclaren had a few local women assembling them in his outbuildings (I remember Joyce Bubb, Joyce Hambridge and Brenda Stanley), while outworkers like me sewed the fabrics at home. Later, he took over the factory on The Green, and, when business really expanded, moved to factories in Daventry and Long Buckby. After his death, the business was eventually taken over by Hestair and I read recently that it is suffering with the advent of more trendy designs from other manufacturers popularised by modern 'fashion icons' like Victoria Beckham. They will however have to go a long way to match the simplicity and user-friendliness of the original Baby Buggy.¹



A group of Barby mothers, several of whom worked for the Maclaren company, posing for an advertising photograph with Owen Maclaren (seated) and their Maclaren Baby Buggies at Arnold House, Daventry Road, in about 1976

¹ For another account of the beginnings of the Maclaren buggy business, see the DVD *Barby: A Village History* (Barby: Barby Local History Group, 2002)