

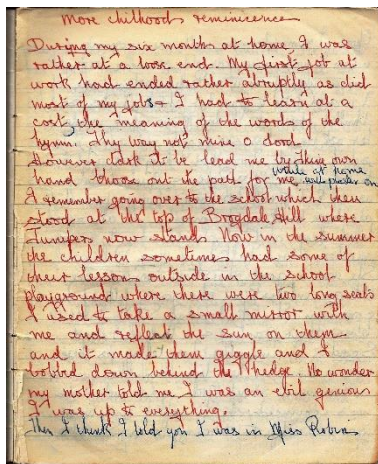


## News and events

- Tickets for the **Herts Association for Local History symposium** on Saturday 19 November can be ordered up to the morning of Thursday 17 November. The theme is '**Wining and dining in Hertfordshire**'. Go to [www.halh.org.uk/symposium.html](http://www.halh.org.uk/symposium.html)
- **Our next meeting** is on **Wednesday 21 December**. We will celebrate the Christmas season with mulled wine, coffee, tea and mince pies, a "Show and tell" session, and a quiz based on what you can find on the Timeline on our website at [www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk/history-society-timeline.asp](http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk/history-society-timeline.asp)

## Freda Bates

It is often the stories of 'ordinary' people that give us most insight into life in the past. A recent donation from Rodney Locks to the Society's archive includes three school exercise books containing the hand-written childhood memories of Freda Bates (née Jones) who was born in a cottage in Gustard Wood on 29 March 1903. Her father, Eustace, was a foreman at Wright's Nursery.



Freda's memories of her childhood are simply idyllic. Gustard Wood was '*a child's paradise ... we had ponds to paddle in, sand bunkers to play in, and trees to climb*'. Living there was like having '*an island to ourselves ... almost self-contained*' with two shops, two shoe-repairers, several pubs, the school and, from 1910, St Peter's Church. There were regular visits from the coal man, the ice-cream man, the fish man, the hat man, the barrel organ man and, in winter, the muffin man. Water came from the well.

This was a time of deference within a rigid class structure but Freda writes fondly of Olivia Robins of Delaport ('*a good Christian woman*'), the first

Lady Cavan, Mrs Apsley Cherry Garrard, and the Baxendales of Blackmore End.

At the age of 14, Freda was found to '*have one shoulder higher than the other*' and was sent to the orthopaedic hospital in Baschurch, Shropshire (the world's first orthopaedic hospital, established in 1900). Here she was fitted with a plaster of Paris jacket from hips to neck. She describes the experience:

*'... have a bath before going on the frame as we called it. Now you all know what the garden fete stalls look like before they get their coverings on. Now that was the shape of the frame only where the top of the trestle is wood this must have been a strip of canvas where we were laid. I felt like a sacrifice on the altar. Well, we had strips of canvas wound round us with long ends which were attached to the frame and then they were screwed tighter and tighter until you could hardly breathe. I should add that before putting us on the frame we had one vest on then a layer of thick felt like they put under carpet, then another vest. Well, when they had you in a vice very tightly squeezed they dipped the bandages in hot water and round and round they went. At last they cut the canvas and lifted you off to dry.'*

Freda wore this jacket at home for six months, during which she once managed to get stuck in fence railings, before it was changed for a smaller jacket which, having received permission from the local doctor, Dr Smallwood, her father eventually removed.

Freda's Christian faith and St Peter's Church were the bedrock of her life, supporting her through the death of her mother in 1925 and her brother Bertram in 1927 '*in tragic circumstances*' which it '*took me a long time to get over*'. She married Charles Bates, a merchant seaman, in 1941 but there is no mention of children.

Freda died in 1981 aged 78.