

'That's the last time I'm fixing your bike!'

Last summer James Smith and Lucy Maple revealed what they got up to as teenagers in and around New House Lane during the long school holidays, taking care not to give too much away — they may now be grown-ups in their late twenties, but they're not too old for a telling-off from their mums and dads. They

needn't have worried too much, though, as the previous generation clearly had more to hide from their own parents.

Here, James' dad Colin reveals what he and *his* gang got up to around Hilltop in the fifties when they were kids ... (*Someone should've kept a closer eye on them!*)

THE YEAR always started with snow, which brought all the Gang out on to the piste, namely the larger of the two hills in Merton Lane. A fleet of sledges all lined up to see who could go the furthest that developed into the Formula 1 of sledging, with two sledges lashed together making a formidable articulated machine loaded with as many passengers as possible. Didn't it go! Usually depositing the occupants unceremoniously at the bottom of the hill. There were the occasional infiltrators from Cossington Road, sparking off major conflicts settled with WMS (wet moulded snow, otherwise known as snowballs). Who won? Must have been the Gang of '56.

Could the kids do it now? Unfortunately not—too many cars, too dangerous and remembering the intensity of the snowball fights, everyone would end up with ASBOs.

THE EASTER period heralded Mother's Day where a trip to Mr Hoare's smallholding was essential to buy field-grown daffodils for mum. Buying as many as you could carry for very little money made you mum's favourite for days. What a result?

We did not have to cycle to the Bon-Bon for sweets as we had our very own village store, a bit like Ike's store in *The Walton's*. The downside here was rationing—we were, after all, the War Time Babies. But what excitement when rationing was abandoned and Wagon Wheels appeared. Kids, they were enormous!

British Bulldog and Man Hunt are just buzzwords. The real game was for two teams - one to defend the area around the telephone box the other to attack it by getting to it undetected or caught. It took in the field above, on the corner of Iffin and NHL, Lovers Walk (how many of you can identify this walk?), banks, trees etc. Health and Safety—what Health and Safety? On reflection it *was* dangerous, however we never lost anyone, perhaps more by luck than judgement.

The woods at the top of the Lane had to be explored, bomb craters to be found, trees to climb, trial courses to be ridden on bikes, often resulting in a damaged machine. My Dad, saying

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With a little help from his old friend Lucy Maple, James Smith (left), now a 25-year-old public relations executive living in London, reveals what he and the other local kids got up to in the long summer holidays and offers some top tips for today's teenagers...



Keeping an eye out for parents on the doorstep... Members of the nineties gang: James Smith (bottom right) with Kelly Allen and Matt Sackett and, on the roof, Lucy Maple with David Amsley and visiting friend Kevin.

10 ways to have fun this summer (if you're 16 or under)

THE LONG HOT days of summer on New House Lane - a child's paradise? Or a desperately tedious routine of sitting around waiting for something to happen.
We were lucky, we hailed from the vintage years of '45-'46 and with a little imagination and good friends, summer could always be a lot of fun. The first day of the holidays was a time to celebrate: school work could be forgotten until September, new adventures were just around the corner, routines of summers gone-by resurrected and friendships rekindled. Indeed, the romantic relations of New House Close were more like something out of EastEnders.
So, if you're young and you find yourself stuck for something to do this summer, here's our top ten list:

Explore the countryside: Rumour has it that there's more to Kent than Thanington Without. Highlights include the fords of Bridge, hills of Petham, bike trails of Chartham Hatch and the slopes of Tankerton.

British Bull Dog: What better use of the front

Combine harvesters: Great fun! Never get too close, but the hay bales provide countless opportunities for inventions of new games (just don't let the farmer catch you!).

Rounders: The com has been harvested - you have a whole new playing surface!

Romantic liaisons: With six weeks to spend in each other's pockets it's bound to happen to one or two of your friends. The trouble starts when one of those friends ends up preferring another friend and decides to swap halfway through the summer.

Video, sleepover nights: It's every parent's duty to host (and fund) a summer video night. Whether they have a decision in choosing what you watch is down to your own negotiating skills.

Misadventures: This one comes with a heavy health warning and usually doesn't involve any real

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every time 'this is the last time I'm fixing your bike!'. But he always did.

SPRING INTO SUMMER - the meadow opposite the Hall became our recreation ground with the sheep taking off to the other side. Memorable cricket matches were played out often with dads joining in. I can't recall any ball tampering, perhaps we had standards. The first stile on the path to Cockering became our meeting point where we would plan the next adventure. The Gang of '56 Think Tank had no boundaries.

Summer holidays called for serious planning, particularly