Sutton------- Norris, My Early years in the 1940's

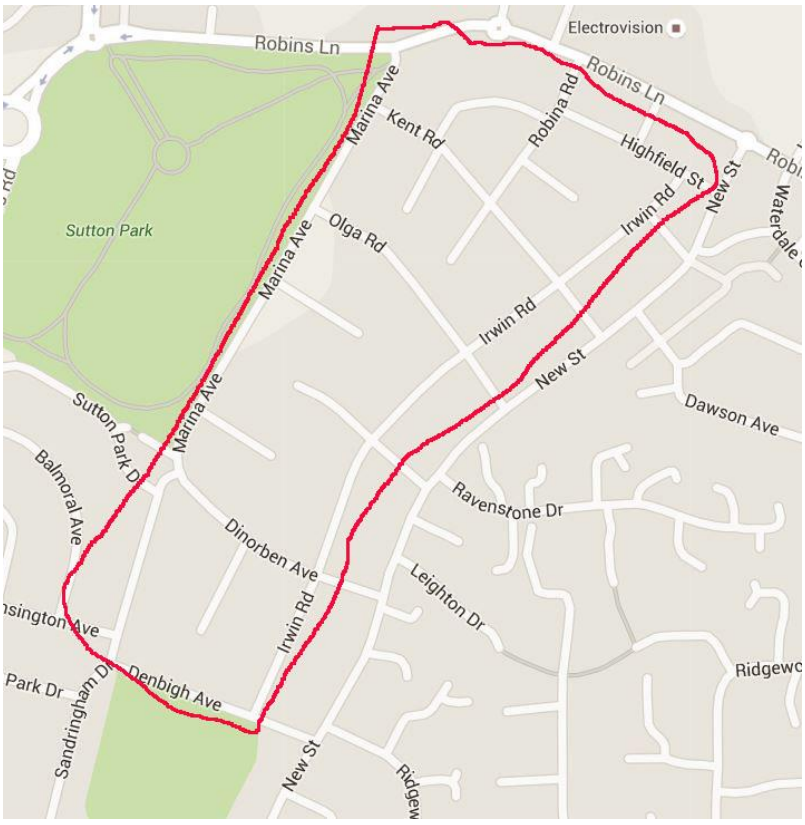
From 12,000 miles away in New Zealand I am still drawn to a place of my birth.
Maori has a special name for this, which is very special concept to them. It is **tūrangawaewae** which literally means "a place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and *whakapapa* (ancestry)". **Tūrangawaewae** are places where we feel especially empowered and connected. They are our foundation, our place in the world, our home. It is somewhere that you should always be attached to, think about, and where to rest. It is a treasured place. A Maori proverb:-

"Māku e ringiringi ki aku roimata nga ara e ahu ana ki te kāinga …"
I will water with my tears the trails that lead to home.

Sutton Park is my Tūrangawaewae

I was born at 1 Marina Avenue opposite Sutton Park in a house my father built in 1935. Grandparents lived next door. I went to Robins Lane School with my sister Iris and had dozens of friends who played in the Park and in the surrounding streets which were not paved or sealed. I met my future wife (Rita Woodward) one day in 1949 in Sutton Park. My father died in 1948 and my grandfather helped Mum my sister and me. When I left school in 1953 I started as an apprentice carpenter with my grandfather. In 1962 I was a builder and designed and built my own house at 69 Marina Avenue and married Rita at St Nicholas Church. We had two children Diane and David who went to Robins Lane School. Rita also taught at Robins lane Primary and infant school. We had many family members who lived on the Kenwright Estate.

Beginnings



My Grandfather started as a plumber in Green End Lane and then started building houses when he moved to Robins Lane. The building company of AJ Kenwright started in the 1920's and my father Donald became a partner in the 1930'sThey built what was known as the "Kenwright Estate" of mainly semi-detached houses. Due to the War all house building stopped and our wagon was commandeered by the air force to build airfields in Norfolk and Suffolk. By 1939 Marina Avenue went as far as number 15. Kent road was built on one side and Kenwright Crescent, Robina Road and Highfield Street were complete. The rest of the land was farmed up as far as the Cricket Club and Eaves Lane and a path called the style led across the fields. October

holidays was a potato picking week with families and children collecting the potatoes behind the tractor. Payment was in spuds. We didn't start house building again until licences were issued in 1946.

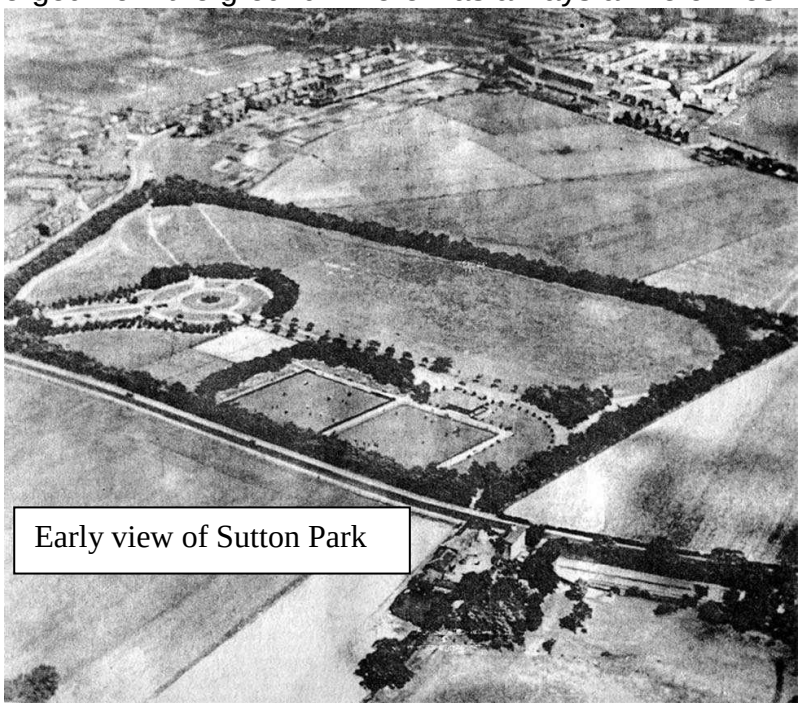
Donald with the wagon **The Kenwright workers in 1935 outside the building of 1 Marina Avenue in 1935. Dad is in the white suit and Grandad (AJ Kenwright) in the dark suit two to his right**

A J Kenwright & son Works outing to Blackpool 1945. Front Row: Fred Howard; Bill Lympany; AJ Kenwright; Donald Kenwright; Charlie Kenwright (AJ's Brother) George Gardner. Back Row from the Right; Harry Woods Ernie Green; ??; Raymond Wilde; Between Bill and AJ - Jackie Wakefield . Rest ??

Early War years in the Park

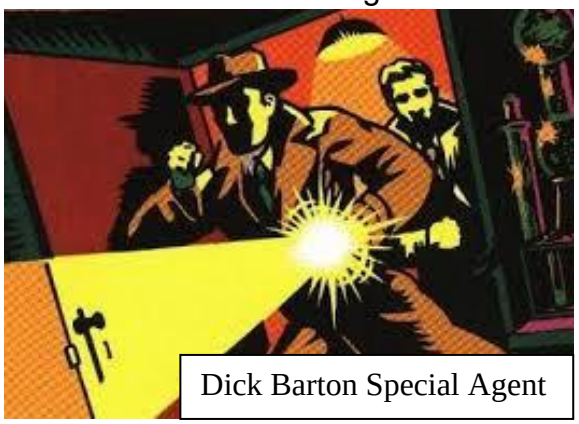
Sutton Park must have been a special place for the people of Sutton. In the war years it was a favourite place and I remember Anderson Shelters in the field by Marina Avenue and we played up and over the domed grass banks. There was an old bandstand near the bowling greens, a merry – go- round which had an amazing speed and children were hurled off and swings and a large rocking

horse. War time Allotments were planted on the big field and easily watered by a natural spring that emerged from the ground. There was always a line of fresh green grass which ran down the field to Marina Avenue. Mr Helsby of 5 Marina Ave had an allotment and grew lots of vegetables. He carved my name and my sister's on small marrows and we were fascinated to see the names grow larger as the marrows grew. The park became neglected over the years and the shrubs along the shaded path from Marina Avenue to the central rose garden became overgrown. The roses in the central rose garden by the flagpole looked a pale shadow of their former selves. A group of aged groundsmen had the unenviable task of tending the gardens and once a year dug over the soil between the trees – mainly elm- which surrounded the park- which was soon trampled down by tiny feet.



Early view of Sutton Park

However as young children we lived and played Soccer in winter and Cricket in summer on the lower field. We had enough boys for a Soccer team. We called ourselves "Sutton Park Rangers". With myself I remember Mike & Frank Melia, Louis Rigby, Brian French, Brian Fackey, Alban Fisher, Carl Armstrong, Jack Simms, John Woods, Brian French, Stewart Rimmer and Geoff Colquitt. The dark nights were special as we played hide and seek and Tin Can Bung off in the trees and local gardens



Dick Barton Special Agent

However at 6-45 pm we all disappeared into our houses to hear the latest episode of "Dick Barton- Special Agent" with Jock and Snowy; re-emerging at 7 pm. It always had an amazing cliff-hanger at the end of each episode.

Other programs we loved were "Paul Temple" with his wife "Steve" who solved a mystery over eight episodes. This had a lovely signature tune called "Coronation Scott". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtchzNfcKvE . Another later programme that held me spellbound was " Journey into Space", quite a novelty for the time.

The bottom of Kent road used to flood when it rained hard because of hills of dirt and no drainage and the floods covered the back gardens of Marina Avenue. A nuisance for adults but a boon for use kids to sail handmade boats and small walnut shell boats. This hilly area was especially good in winter for we made icy slides on them.

The war years meant rationing and my father and five friends took advantage of a government scheme in 1940. The government supplied piglets which you fattened and when they were ready you gave half back to the government and you kept half. http://www.cooksinfo.com/british-wartime-food

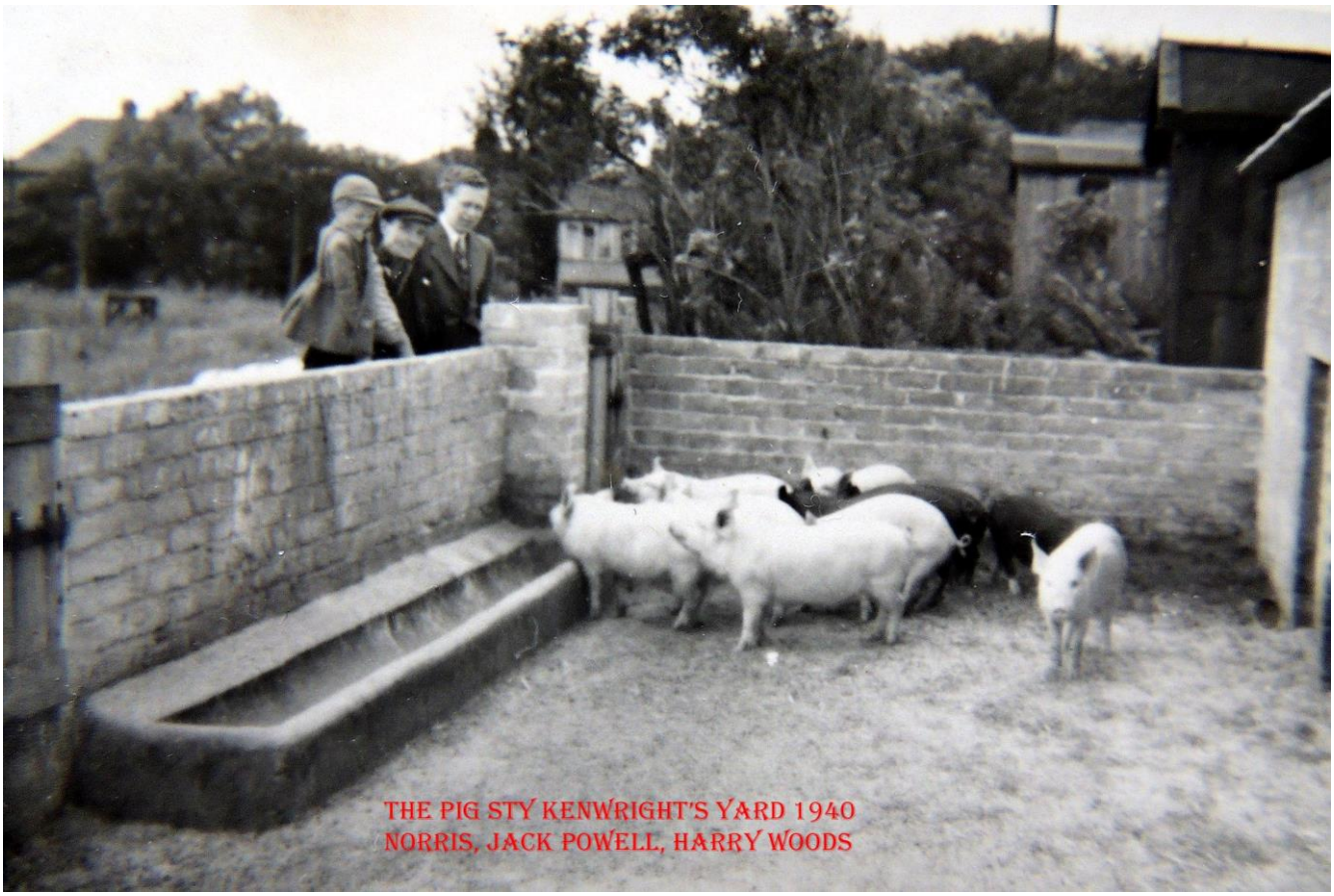
A pigsty was built in the grandfather's building yard and were fed by scraps left over. With my father the names I can remember in the group were Bill Lympany, Harry Woods. Jack Powell and George Gardner, who had a shop in Robina Road.

Our cured half pig hung in the garage for several weeks and we had a good supply of bacon.

We also kept hens at the bottom of the garden and I remember breaking shells up to feed them grit. Spare eggs were preserved in a galvanised basin full of water glass (sodium silicate). They would

last in there for months. We did have budgies as well but I was told that as a two year old I went to see them and left the door open and they all flew away.

Here I am aged 3 with Jack Powell and Harry Woods.



The builders' yard was quite extensive and with a friend, John Woods, who lived in Robins Lane opposite to me -91 or 93 I think used to frequently play there.

John who was older than me taught me great fire lighting skills and we would often have small camp fires at the back of the builders' yard near Robins Lane Primary school. We used to burn scrap wood from the yard.. John's superior knowledge unfortunately let us down which curtailed these activities. We found an old 40 gallon drum one day and had a roaring fire going in it; so good that it began to glow. John suggested we put it out and thought the liquids we found in some tins would do the job fine, so we threw them in. An idea that would have borne fruit except that they were oil based paint and the fire took on a life of its own which was quite terrifying. John's next idea; actually with good intentions; didn't help; and that was to knock the tin over with a long piece of wood to smother it. As the fire then spread quickly to the grass behind the yard and headed off behind Robins Lane School towards Clay Holes and the wooden fences at the back of the houses in Baxters Lane we realised that it was beyond our control. We ran to the workshops and the Plumbers and Carpenter came out to take control as we surreptitiously slunk off to the sound of a fire engine. Our days of fire were curtailed and we were banned from the yard and our little arsonist days were over(for a while anyway). However I have never forgotten the fun we had and still light bonfires at the slightest opportunity. Thanks John for the skills.

With lots of children on the estate there were many birthdays to celebrate. Even in the hard times Mums could usually rustle up cakes, jelly and sandwiches. With our birthday presents in hand we headed towards the party and once disastrous for me. Running as usual I turned to wave goodbye and then turned to run full tilt into a cast iron gas lamp standard. My broken nose is still bent and my birthday party was spoiled as I was collected by Mum on the floor and nursed as only Mums can do. Here is a picture of my sister Iris's second birthday in 1941.

Back Row
John Woods; Norris K: Arthur Helsby; Sheila Howarth; Joyce Valentine;
Front Row.
Mike Melia; Brian Fackey; my sister Iris; Marie Howarth; Eileen Melia.

Mums organised great parties with “pass the parcel, musical chairs; statues; meet the King and Queen and spin the bottle and postman’s knock”
We didn’t have Halloween but Mrs Simms of 2 Kent Road always organised a duck apple night on the 31st of October. The Simms were a lovely couple and had Eileen, Joan, Rita and Jack and Betty (in that order I think). This consisted of apple or pieces for small mouths floating in a bath of water and with hands behind your back you had to bite one and eat it.

There was lots of fun, wet hair and towards the end of the evening the water was; by today’s standards; quite grotty, but we survived-mostly.
Of course children’s illnesses swept the area and at one time or another we all had chicken pox; whooping cough; measles and mumps. I had the lot! Perhaps a good lot of earth in the diet from playing outside may have helped bump up the immune system. There were killers and Diphtheria and scarlet fever were feared. Mr & Mrs Cork in Kent Road lost a most beautiful daughter at a young age.
Another activity in the war years was the annual May Queen where children all dressed up in costumes and followed the queen around the streets, followed by eats and drinks afterwards.

May Seen Group; 1944

Back row, Eileen Simms, Liz Wallace; Marie Howarth; Joan Simms; Norris Kenwright; Louis Rigby;
Middle Row; Arthur Helsby; John Woods; Rita Simms; Iris Kenwright
Front Row; Mike Melia; Jack Simms; ??; Betty Simms; Brian Fackey;
A picture also of Joan Simms walking down Marina Avenue with Brian Fackey carrying the crown .

Looking back the 40's seemed to have beautiful summers and cold snowy winters.
We lived outside making up our own games. Home was were you ate before going out again.
You got presents for your birthdays and Christmas and nothing else. Food was simple ; jam butties were a treat when jam was available. With no electronics our telephones were two cans with string in-between. Skipping games –every girl had a skipping rope and there were lots of Rhymes. *(Crawfords Cream crackers penny per packet; when you eat them they go crackit);*

Hide and seek and "Film Stars" were fun and daring "Doctors" played in the air raid shelters.
Marbles or stonies were great as we played "Rink" and chase up and down the hardened dirt roads. Coloured marbles were prized.
We made "Winter warmers out of old syrup tins" (*a syrup tin with holes and a wire handle-started with paper and wood and then coal added*) and whirled them around and around our heads as the flames shot out. Bonfire night was special and we let out fireworks off around the local bonfire (most streets had them) and then baked potatoes in the embers- a real community effort. Christmas was carol singing as we tried out luck to earn pennies knocking doors and singing carols- always in the dark and usually frosty and cold. If it was too cold or raining home activities were making peg rugs out of cloth scraps, roasting chestnuts by an open fire and making toast on a trident fork; shielding out hands from the heat.
Summers were in the fields casing hapless butterflies and hurling our coats and jerseys on them to put them in our jars – we were kids. Days were spent wandering across Marshalls Cross Road to the score were in spring we raided the bluebell woods taking them home to Mum. I loved playing cricket with friends and had fun in our back garden with sister Iris and family.

Playing cricket with Iris in the back garden 1943

Autumn was conker time and we hurled our missiles high into the branches to knock down a treasured conker ; there were of course injuries from falling sticks and stones for the law of gravity meant what goes up must come down- Brian Lympany discovered this (after Newton) as he went home with a gashed head one day. Then to thread it, harden it and play conkers with one another to see who had the best. (*Here in NZ conkers are never played and loads of conkers lie under the horse chestnut trees unpicked. I tried to get kids to play without success*). The Delph in Sherdley was a wonderful place to fish and whereas adults had rods I had a bamboo stick, strong cotton and a bent pin were my trusty tools. With a jar of dug up worms and another for the catch I set off on many occasions with friends. My catches were the sticklebacks which swam in the shallow sand a jar of them was often taken home. Nature conservation was not a lesson I knew then and after a couple of days they died of course.

Looking back once more I remember the freedom that we had to roam; it was safe, little traffic, lots of friends and although there was a war on it never seemed to affect us. The community was fabulous and families and relations always lived close by**.**
Dear Sutton; Thank you for the memories.

To My Friends
As I tread the paths of Yesteryear; my memories and thoughts come true. Days of peace and Joy and happiness will lead me back to you. Norris Kenwright