

Imaginary Friends



Me outside the house in Whitaker Street

As a young child I lived in a Victorian house near the centre of Liverpool. The house was built on four levels. There were two large basement rooms, one of which still contained the original black range. On the ground floor there was a 'sitting room' that was used very rarely and which housed the piano and the best furniture including a three piece suite and a gramophone. There was a 'kitchen' which was the main room. We did nearly everything there. We ate our meals there and this was also where the television was kept. Then there was the 'back kitchen' where the food was cooked, dishes were washed and where there was a Frigidaire fridge and a Hotpoint washing machine.

On the first floor there were three bedrooms although I think one of these was really a dressing room. On the second floor there was an attic room where my uncle slept.



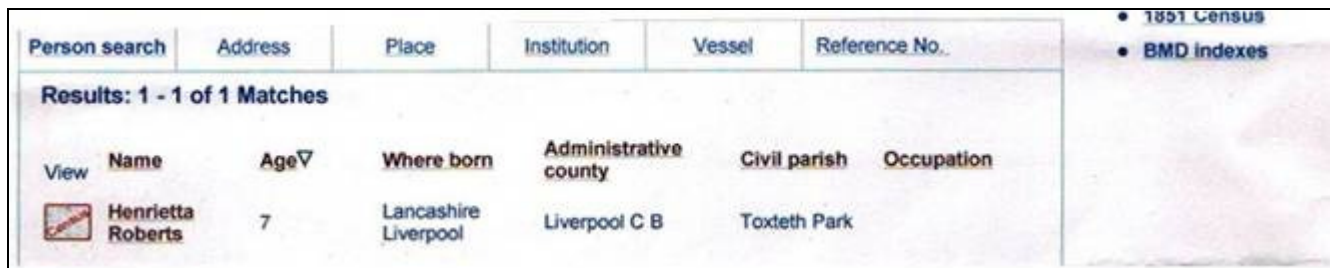
A map of the Toxteth area showing Whitaker Street

As an only child, although part of a large extended family, I spent a great deal of time in the house which was quite dark and spooky with just my grandmother for company. Soon during my waking and sleeping hours I was joined by a gang of imaginary friends. Two were based on friends of my uncle, one was a male version of myself, and one was a feisty, slightly older girl called 'Hen'. The other friends came and went but Hen was a permanent feature. From time to time my mother would ask with a bemused look on her face, 'What is your friend's name?' and when I told her 'Hen' she would sometimes ask 'What sort of a name is that?'

Time passed, our street was planned for demolition, and so we moved away. Hen did not move with us to our new house in Hoylake. By that time I had two first cousins living with me and there were two children living next door. There was no need for imaginary friends any more. There was plenty to do – on the beach, in the swimming pool and the surrounding parks and countryside.

Later on in life I used to occasionally think of Hen and agreed with my mother that it was after all a strange name but I did think that maybe Hen could be short for 'Henrietta'.

More years passed and whilst doing a search for some details of my mother's brothers and sisters I decided to have a quick look at the 1901 census. I couldn't look up any relatives as in 1901, my mother's mother was a small baby in Germany and the rest of my family were still in Nigeria. However I could look up the old house in Liverpool – see if it existed then and if it did who was living there.



The image shows a screenshot of a census search results page. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Person search', 'Address', 'Place', 'Institution', 'Vessel', and 'Reference No.'. On the right side, there are links for '1851 Census' and 'BMD indexes'. Below the navigation, it says 'Results: 1 - 1 of 1 Matches'. The main table has columns for 'View', 'Name', 'Age', 'Where born', 'Administrative county', 'Civil parish', and 'Occupation'. A single row is visible with the following data: 'Henrietta Roberts', '7', 'Lancashire Liverpool', 'Liverpool C B', and 'Toxteth Park'.

View	Name	Age	Where born	Administrative county	Civil parish	Occupation
	Henrietta Roberts	7	Lancashire Liverpool	Liverpool C B	Toxteth Park	

Imagine my surprise when the census revealed that in 1901 there were two families living in the house and that one of the inhabitants was a seven year old girl called 'Henrietta Roberts'.

I wonder if she was my imaginary friend Hen?

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