11. The Slade.



My dad worked nights and when I wasn't at Ody's (see Button 9), my mum used to push my pram around Oxford and give me sugar crystals to suck on, which I must have enjoyed for I was a roly-poly baby. My mother was relentless in petitioning the Oxford Council for a better home for her baby than the single room we rented in Hendred Street and so we were assigned a council house in Slade Camp. It was as grim as it sounds. An old army camp, home to the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, that had been repurposed for public housing. It was located to the East of the Northern by-pass. I spent the next 4 yers of my life there. Playing amongst the abandoned tank ramps and other detritus left over from the army presence. The Slade was also in East Oxford, a working class district with car factories. During the war, wrecks of German planes shot down were taken to the parking lots of the nearby car factories and dumped while they awaited scrapping. Paul Nash visited these bone yards and they became the inspiration for one of his most famous paintings "Totes Mers" - "Dead Sea". The waves of the sea are suggested by the pile of triangular shape of wings, jutting out from a background of twisted metal, painted the marine green-grey of WW II

German camouflage. In the bottom right corner of the paining is a rusted, diagonal sheet of metal suggestive of a beach. Over the wreckage a white owl flies. I mention this because Paul Nash was great friend of the Nielsens. They had a country house in Gloucestershire and my grandmother was their cook. I spent many summers clambering through their house and garden while they were up in London. 6 degrees of separation. Some degrees are larger than others.