

## **MOSELEY MEMORIES by Susan Smith, nee Bromilow – April 2022**

My mother's parents were married on 6 July 1909 from the family home, 'Welton', Yardley Wood Road. Her mother's much younger sister Dorothy went to Moseley College, on the near left corner of Yardley Wood Road and Wake Green Road going towards town (the 13A and 24 'bus route, the latter going past the Women's Hospital.) By the time we lived in Moseley the school didn't have a good reputation (it was for girls only) but not as bad as Greenmore College, on the 1A bus route between Pershore and Bristol Road on the left. The main school was in a big house on the corner of Priory and Bristol Road but the teenage pupils – it was a mixed school – would be lounging around the cobbled yard at the back, which in the old days must have been the stable yard. The uniform was bright green and purple; there was a distinct touch of St Trinians about it all. The girls had blouses half undone, ties pulled down and skirts folded over at the top to make them shorter. I wondered if they ever stopped flirting with each other enough to learn anything. Slightly nearer to Moseley, opposite the Tally Ho club, there was a smaller wooden nursery-type school with a long narrow garden; you could see younger children running down the central path. This may have been the junior department of Greenmore College.

My mother and grandmother were living in a flat at Ingoldsby Court just before she got married, fatefully on 8 July 1939. It was round the corner from Moseley College, in Wake Green Road. My maternal grandfather (a Brigadier General in the RFC in WW1) had built a house at 42 Billesley Lane. My mother remembered laying a foundation stone with her name on it, which must still be there. She was about 7, so this would have been in 1924. (Unfortunately B-G Huggins deserted the family for another woman when my mother was very young, but that's another story). We moved to 241 Yardley Wood Road in 1947, a house I believe my grandmother and mother had lived in before the War. I'm not sure if it had been bombed and rebuilt – anyway the garden, like most of them at that time, was a paradise for children, with brambles, overgrown bushes, rose bay willow herb etc – wonderful for making dens! We were near the bend in the road, with a hedge and a big old oak tree opposite. The Tallitts were on the 'Knoll' side – he worked in the Crown Court as an usher or similar. The Hills were the other side. Mr Hills' brother was in the news at the time; he was kidnapped in Africa by one of the dictators. Next to the Hills' a long garden from one of the big houses in St Agnes' Road, the Wake Green Road end, ran right down to Yardley Wood Road. An eccentric widower/bachelor owner kept hens there; I could hear them from my bedroom. If I remember correctly, a nonconformist church was built there and before that a squash court? The test centre where I took my driving test in c., 1959, was in one of the houses opposite.

My mother's Aunt Dorothy – who went to Moseley College – had married Charles Oscar Sumner from the Typhoo Tea family at St Agnes' Church on 1 June 1920. They lived at 54 St Agnes' Road and sold it to us in 1950. At that time the road was full of elderly people, except the Cariss family at no 56. Brigadier Cariss, a rather remote figure, was I was told, one of the only two Territorial brigadiers in the country. They had no car, so their front garden still had a path down the centre, lined with tulips which stood stiff and upright just like the Brigadier himself! His family firm was Cecil Cariss & Son, Estate

Agents. Their eldest son David was 21 in 1956 and working in the family firm. Peter, a bit older than me, and Richard a bit younger, were at Hallfield School. Penny, younger than my brother Miles, went to the High School (after 1950). She was adopted and was the “apple of her father’s eye”! We had a gang called the Carilow Club; in those days you could be out all day on your bikes, and nobody worried where you were. At no. 52, “Chalford”, were Mr & Mrs Fisher and her sister Dolly. She said her daughter was a ballerina. My father said “Dolly is a dangerous woman” – she looked like a little old lady to me, but he actually meant she was a terrible gossip! Mr Fisher was an accountant, whose office was in the parade of shops opposite Church Road, just past Toc H on the left and the Sorrento Maternity Hospital on the right. Opposite no, 54, “Eversley”, was “Penshurst”, no 45, where the Reynolds family lived. My mother had been at Edgbaston C of E College with Tony’s sister Helen Reynolds. Tony owned Reynolds Tube, later part of Tube Investments. He patented Reynolds 531, lightweight cycle frame tubing. Jane, a bit younger than me, went to the High School; John was sent to Oundle, where he was accidentally shot in the stomach by a live round in the CCF. It was in all the papers. Irene Reynolds was daughter of a Birmingham architect called Hobbiss. They were still at 45 when I got married in 1966 but then sold the house, to be demolished in favour of the unsightly flats. Next to this, opposite no 52, was “Old Mrs Ratcliffe”, who had only one leg. I don’t know how she coped with all the stairs! At 52, after the Fishers, came the Jacobs – Coleman, Gerda, and Judith-Ann their daughter. After them came the Hawkins, who did some horrible things to the house, including a porch which was totally out of character. The Parsons moved to no 56; Freddy and Joyce. He was a somewhat eccentric Welsh barrister. They had two sons, Marshall (named after Marshall Hall) and David.

We used to go swimming at the Institute Road Baths, which I don’t suppose are there now, in King’s Heath. In Moseley Village the shops I remember are Lilian Freeman’s wool shop in St Mary’s Row, where you could “put aside” a batch of wool to make sure all the skeins were exactly the same colour; the first Drucker’s Patisserie also in St Mary’s Row, and a chiropodist on the corner of Oxford Road, opposite Meteor Garage, in a sort of wooden add-on to the shop next to it. Walwyn’s shoe shop was on the corner opposite the public lavatories which were below ground on the ‘island’ behind the 1 and 1A ‘bus stop. At one point they had an X-ray machine in which you could view the bones of your feet and see if the shoes fitted. Luckily for me, I can only remember being allowed to use it once! My first bank was the Birmingham Municipal, opposite the post office. It had a wonderful mahogany counter, so wide that no thief could reach across! My mother’s life was plagued by “germs”, invisible assailants which besieged us from every direction. Because of this, we were not allowed in the post office, or to join a library (think of the germs from all those other people handling the books!) There was no library in Moseley, but Boots on the diagonal corner from the shoe shop (logo “Clark’s – Walwyn’s – Clark’s) had a small library upstairs; the books had a green shield badge stuck on, with a white border. How I would have loved to join! Pattison’s bread/cake shop was just down the Parade, with a tea shop upstairs. The mostly elderly waitresses all had black outfits with white aprons and caps – very old-fashioned, even then. W. H. Smith, nearly opposite Woodbridge Road, had a fancy wrought iron “car port” for want of better words. Shufflebotham’s on the left-hand corner of Woodbridge Road used to deliver our groceries once a week, so then at least there was plenty to eat.

Back to St Agnes' Road: when I lived at 54, the vicar at St Agnes' Church was also the clergyman for the Birmingham theatres – he was interested in the stage. I believe some famous actors/actresses stayed with him over the years. I will go round the area – opposite 241 Yardley Wood Road, along the right-hand side of Hayfield Road, behind the houses on the main road, was a large, unkempt field where the boys used to play. It was bisected by a hedge with a gap in it; the bare soil was worn down and smooth where all the bikes went through. One Christmas the boys decorated a large oak tree in the far right hand corner with tinsel – it looked magnificent! (Parents didn't always know where you were then).

Down St Agnes' Road to Yardley Wood Road and turning left was what we called the "wide pavement". Halfway down this was a small group of wooden garages where my father at one point kept his car. He must have rented one. Almost opposite the end of the road, in what is now the left-hand corner of the road house car park, was the off-licence. This was a marvellous Queen Anne building which should never have been pulled down. There was a beautiful coaching lamp over the stone steps up to the front door; you turned left into the shop, which had a counter similar to the one in the Birmingham Municipal Bank. Going towards Windermere Road you came to Mr Turner's shop. There may have been two sons; there was certainly a very old father, who had his allotment next to the shop in what is now the right-hand side of the pub car park. I think they also sold what he produced as well as groceries – these may have been a better, fresher bet than the butter, cut off a big block and sometimes delivered complete with bluebottle eggs or even maggots – no inspections then! No extra charge! I think Mr Upton succeeded the Turners; he had a white coat, a "strawberry nose" and prolific spittle when talking to you! On the corner of Windermere Road was Mrs Whitehouse's sweet-shop-cum-post office, to which we were allowed to go despite its being far filthier than either the main post office or any library. The shop was quite small because Mrs W had her sitting-room at the back and would shuffle out when she heard the doorbell clang. There was an 'L shaped' counter, with both the arms of the 'L' the same length, with metal adverts for Cadbury's, Tizer attached, facing you as you came in. The small post office section was on the left and sweets ahead. The Carilow Club got its kali there – coloured sugar crystals. Mrs Whitehouse (Blackhouse would have been a more apt name!) was short and fat, with light brown/grey wispy hair and hair pins falling out. She wore the same dingy clothes plus dirty grey knitted fingerless gloves which showed off the black crescents of her nails. She was an enthusiastic finger licker, which she would do before plunging her hand into the sweet jar and plonking the sweets on the scales, or before sticking the stamps on your letters. How we didn't get food poisoning amazes me; I suppose our systems were inured to it. She franked the letters heartily, with a stamp and an ink pad.

Nearly opposite the end of Windermere Road in Yardley Wood Road was another beautiful old 18<sup>th</sup> century building – Morris' pig farm. It had a low brick wall in front with a short path from the road to the front door. The words in capital letters "Dig For Victory" on one side and "Grow More Food" on the other were clearly visible as a reminder of the War, if one were needed. My brother was at school with Mary Morris; at that time Edgbaston Church of England College took boys from 5 to 7 years old only.

Going towards Swanshurst Park were the pre-fabs on the right. Rather looked down on then but prized relics now. Going back up towards St Agnes' Road was the Council's Oil Road Rollers depot. This was a big yard surrounded by wooden lock-up garages, where my father originally kept our car. The road rollers themselves were magnificent monsters and I remember metal dispensers, tall and rather elegantly shaped, which I assumed were for dispensing the oil.

The primary school was of course in the Victorian building in School Road (which my father years later was instrumental in securing for the Church in perpetuity when the City Council wanted to take it over for a housing estate). Where I think the entrance to the new school now is was St Mary's Church Hall – well, Hall is rather a grand name for a dilapidated wooden shack with dusty bare boards and wooden steps up to it. In those days of public smoking it was probably a horrendous fire risk!

Moseley has waxed and waned over the years. The hotel on the corner of Anderton Park Road and Wake Green Road was renamed grandly the Palm Court Hotel but was in fact a dosshouse for down-and-outs, who could often be seen sitting in the lych gate entrance to St Mary's Church drinking meths. They were not allowed to have their benefit fortnightly or monthly because they'd just get legless; instead they went to the Moseley post office for it every other day, which made King's Heath a more desirable shopping venue than Moseley at that time! Thankfully since then I believe Moseley has "waxed" rather than "waned".

We have had foxes and green woodpeckers in our garden and at one time there were tawny owls in the trees round St Agnes' Church – lovely to hear them. From my back bedroom in the night I could hear good trains clanking – steam trains of course. Was that on the line that ran next to Moseley Village, which was no longer used for passengers? I could also hear, at 7.30 am or so, a factory hooter which my mother said was to wake up the workers, but which was obviously for the start of the shift! There was a "separate" garden at the back of no 50 St Agnes' Road, accessed by a path which ran along the back of nos 50, 52, 54, 56 etc gardens. I don't know to whom it belonged, but it contained a beautiful big oak tree which I think has since been taken down.

#### ADDENDUM

Opposite Drucker's Patisserie (which had only a counter and no eat-in facilities) was a very old building next to the steps up to St Mary's Church. It was a pet goods shop and had stone steps up. These were worn down by years of footfall! Opposite W H Smith's was a record shop. I remember going in when I had just started buying 45s, for Tommy Steele's version of Singin' the Blues. They had sold out of that and I had to make do with the Guy Mitchell version instead! I would be about 14 (1955).

In the 1960s and onwards developers were allowed to demolish big old houses with large gardens and build characterless estates of flats and small houses. "Penshurst" is one example and the Council flats at the end of the road, round into Yardley Wood Road, are

another. At the Wake Green Road end, I notice a complete new road on the right with similar flats/houses, completely out of character with the area.

In the 1950s we were sometimes visited by gypsy women selling wooden clothes pegs and lace. Surprisingly to me, my mother was quite superstitious and always bought something – she didn't want a curse put on her! The Empsons who lived at no 64 had longed to have a baby for years. A gypsy woman said “within a year there will be a pram in this porch” (Mrs E must also have bought something). She thought it must refer to a nephew or niece, but it was true! Perhaps my mother was right to be wary. A French onion seller came round – strings of them were festooned round his shoulders and his bicycle. He wore a dark blue beret and a striped blue and white cotton top with long sleeves. The archetype of a romantic Frenchman would be a good selling tactic! My father eventually gave up his rented garage and parked his car in our drive overnight. If he forgot to lock it, an old tramp used to sleep in there! We were going to attach a notice “Bed but no Breakfast”! These characters aren't around any more.

When I was about 16, the son of my great-aunt Dorothy (we had bought 54 from them), Andrew Sumner, moved into no. 58 with his wife and two young daughters. I used to babysit for them. They put a partition across the stairs at the top and made a separate flat. The tenants probably had to share the kitchen and bathroom – it probably wouldn't be allowed now. St Agnes' Road had some interesting residents. On the right going towards Wake Green Road before the church was a big family, the Staplefords. I think he had something to do with designing/printing the Eagle comic. There was a male violinist from the CBSO and an actor from Emmerdale Farm on TV, now Emmerdale. It was filmed in Manchester and sadly I think he had a heart attack on the train up and died. On the bend opposite the post box was Mrs Leigh, a war widow, who you could often see sitting in the front window typing addresses on envelopes to help make ends meet. She had two children, Richard and Ann (known at school as Beatrice) who both won scholarships, Richard to Stoneyhurst, probably for music, and Ann to The Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, Edgbaston. Further up on the right at Maple Dene (altho' there were no maple trees and it wasn't a wooded valley) lived Pamela Baker, whose father was a solicitor. Unusually for the time, she was rather a big girl. Her father's car had two dickey seats high up at the back, possibly called rumble seats in America, where she and I sat. It was rather a squeeze for her as they were rather small! Somewhere at the Wake Green Road end was the family of Professor McLaren. He was a professor of obstetrics and gynaecology, a Scot. He had five daughters and a son, so practised what he preached! Hazel was my age. The Taylors lived almost behind the post box – Cynthia and two sons. Michael played with my brother. I don't know Mr Taylor's name but I think my mother knew them from years ago, which wasn't unusual. I think there was another solicitor, Cedric maybe Smith, one of my mother's early boyfriends. On the opposite side of the Crescent from the Vicarage was a very big house, a retirement home for elderly Jewish people. Pat Darby almost opposite the triangle island with a bench, the same side as the Reynolds, was a (female) descendant of Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale. Opposite her, in the lovely “Dutch house”, were Sue & Steve Johnson. Sue was very artistic and they were keen cyclists. They moved to Kendal in the Lake District. Sue's flair meant the interior of their house was really elegant. The Caddell family lived on the bend towards

where St Agnes' Road becomes Dyott Road. I think the parents were again people my mother had known from her youth. Often Moseley people don't move far! Their eldest son had cerebral palsy and I was friends with him in my late teens and early twenties. I believe it was commonplace for people to keep hens, even in houses as large as those in St Agnes' Road, for example the garden running right down to Yardley Wood Road. Charles and Dorothy Sumner left a hen house behind when they moved but my parents didn't want to keep hens!

I haven't mentioned Moseley Private Park at the back of Salisbury Road. I only ever went there once as we didn't have a key to get in. It was an oasis! Another wonderful place was Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club, known affectionately as The Graveyard for some reason. In her latter years my mother and I used to go there sometimes on a summer Sunday afternoon. The beautiful little pavilion was full of "Old Moseleyites" – elderly men who had once played cricket themselves and now spent their time at the bar there in summer. In winter they transferred seamlessly to the bar at Moseley Rugby Club in Reddings Road! (We liked the cricket too of course). You could access it through a gate at the back of the Penshurst development – some of the houses overlooked the cricket pitch. My mother naturally knew some of these wonderful characters, and their wives, from years ago. The cricket club shared a fence with the golf club, which had a lake and ancient broad-leaved trees which I understand were remnants of the Forest of Arden. You could look across at all this and believe you were in the heart of the country. Where else but in Birmingham is this so often the case? "Rus in urbe".