

## **Andrew Craig's personal recollections of life in 1950s Moseley**

I am Andrew Craig. In the early 1950s I lived in the centre of Moseley village, on the corner of Chantry Rd. and the Alcester road. We called it "91", and it was also the surgery of "Drs. Craig and Ingham." My dad was Dr. Allan Craig. The house was large, seven bedrooms, although our little family of four only occupied three of them!

My mother, Patricia, was a dispenser, so that was handy to say the least.

Would you care to join me on a walk around my childhood haunts? The year is 1951. I am 5 years old. Firstly, the surgery. Come with me into the dispensary, a quite dark room, long and narrow, with a stained glass window at the far end. On the right are drawers, and these are fascinating to me. Pulling the first one out, (it is stiffly resisting my yanks,) and, yes, inside are corks! This one has at least a hundred large corks in it. The next one I open has corks again, but a bit smaller. The third, smaller still. Then I'm pulling out a drawer and I find little card pots, red and circular each with their tiny lids, large medium and small. These are the ones into which my mother doled out the tablets.

But the fun doesn't stop there. Look, I can see my mother walking into the room and picking up a medicine bottle she's just filled and she proceeds to wrap the bottle in white paper. I hear myself asking Mum if I can seal it with the wax. She's nodding and lights the wick and passes it to me. I have the widest grin on my face as the wax drips onto the paper forming an exciting wet red blob. Then Mum hands me a seal and I'm pushing it onto the wax; it's drying instantaneously. Then Mum adds the patient's name and walks out into the vestibule, placing the bottle on the table. (The patients can turn up any time of the day or night and pick up their remedy. No need for them to come in or to log in; or to wait for a receptionist (there was none); just Click and Collect but without the Click.! Very efficient)

Back in the dispensary, the patients' records are all hand written on standard issue cards, alphabetical order on a shelf. They seem to be just stacked into cardboard boxes.

Shall we venture out into the village for a walk? Moseley was all abustle, with cars going hither and thither blowing their horns, hooting their hooters, as they trundled along. I'd be hoping for a visit to the old cobbler in Woodbridge Road, because it smells so lovely. Ah, yes, here we go....A bell on the top of the door announced our arrival, and then I'd breathe in the aroma of leather and Dubbin. The workshop was so dark! The Cobbler sported a leather apron decorated with the smears from a thousand shoes it had had the pleasure of acquainting. In the Cobbler's hand a dozen copper tacks, and in the other a little hammer.

Now it's off to visit the lending library (above Boots at the top of Salisbury Rd.) Each book looked the same in its dark blue binding. And then after that just twenty paces towards Kings Heath and there we were in the butchers. Mum took out of her handbag a small booklet and removed a perforated ticket from the ration book, which somehow had my name on the front! Handing it to the butcher, I'm allocated a tiny piece of meat and also a cube of cheese, just a half inch cube. (Like all Mums, mine could make a delicious meal out of nothing at all. A wartime skill.)

Then, to top it all, Shufflebotham's caught fire!! (This was a grocery shop on the corner of the Alcester Road and Woodbridge Road, right opposite my bedroom at 91.) It was night time and my sister and I watched with awe as the fire engines arrived with bells clanging. What a noise- enough to wake up the whole village. The bells, the shouting. My sister and I crouched behind the curtains! Flames licked up into the sky and their roof was all ablaze. Crackle and crash. What a kerfuffle!

The next day Mum takes us, together with our dog, to wander around Moseley Park. Such a beautiful place. It was formed when Salisbury Rd. was cut through to Cannon Hill Park in the late 1800s, forming an oasis of nature, calmness and solitude. It is a park to this day, a private park. To own a key was a privilege, not a right. So, as kids, we realised it was special and very precious. I remember the park as a place full of memories and Rhododendrons. Memories like sledging down the hill and out far far across the frozen lake. (It froze every year for us without fail.) Memories like catching frogspawn, and taking it home in a jam jar; memories like fishing with a line on the end of a bamboo stick, never to catch anything. I dreaded the thought of catching a fish as I had no idea what I would do with it or how to release it. Anyway, it occupied so many happy hours. And remember the swings? Our favourite was a six foot plank suspended at each end from a sturdy metal frame. At its maximum it made a heck of a noise and it was called 'Going up to the rattlers!' Very dangerous of course, for us intrepid adventurers. Or so it seemed!

The lucky houses in Salisbury Road have direct access to the park at the bottom of their gardens. And they invariably had wrought iron railings, with spikes atop. Our dog met his end on these spikes. Our dog, a terrier, was a jumper. He was a free spirit. Alas one day he tried to jump over spiked railings, and to this day you will see many railings battened out with timber to prevent a recurrence. After that Mum bought Dachshunds!

Let's check out my school now. I went to a Kindergarten called Miss Vaughton's in Oxford Rd., just opposite Ascot Rd. A friendly three storey Victorian house. On the first morning I was literally dragged there. The logic of fighting back still remains in my head. It was such a reasonable thing to try to avoid. My protestations were futile, of course, and eventually I enjoyed a couple of years there before going on to Hallfield the "Prep" school in Edgbaston.

I do remember deliveries in the 1950s that were something our government would strive to achieve today. Bread delivered by Hawley's in an electric van. Milk likewise. And Dad's crate of beer, all bottles collected the next week and reused. Somehow we've lost the perfect simple solutions to our green issues.

Now I will try to remember the village shops and establishments as best as I can. There was, and I guess still is, a Presbyterian church opposite us on the corner of Chantry Rd. We went to the 11o'clock service and then to Sunday School. Nowadays I expect it would be called Sunday Club. Further down the parade was a Shell garage, and WHSmith, the bookshop. Opposite 91 was Shrimptons, the chemist. It also sold cigarettes, and advertised this fact on a sign saying "Tobbaconist". Dad pointed out the spelling error and for years we called it the tob-b-b-conist. (Never an opportunity missed for education) It had those enormous glass bottles in the window that Chemists had, in orange and turquoise.

My school friend Neil lived on the junction of the Wake Green Rd. and Church Rd. and at the end of the garden there was the railway line, deep down in a cutting. And like all boys would, we clambered down the embankment onto the line to carefully place a penny. The lovely old train would eventually appear from the tunnel going very slowly but hooting and steaming and puffing, and looking very proud of itself, and would dutifully crush the penny and right there we had another tale to tell of derring-do!

This is a world gone by but it still lives clearly in the back of my head. I see it just as if it were yesterday...memories of the way we were.

Andrew Craig

