

Chapter 18: Our Street As It Was

*We were not born with silver spoon
When I was just a lad.
But my heart was warm as a day in June
And so wealth untold I had.*

*I had the wonders of our street
What wonders the pavements hold
Top and whip and hop scotch at our feet
And gutters where our marbles rolled.*

Edgeworth Street

The Edgeworth Street of today differs from the street that I knew as a lad. The street then, as I knew it, contained six rows of terraced houses, in which were eight shops, one chapel and one public house.

First of all, the shops. Four of these were more or less front rooms of the houses converted into small shops, without any alterations to the front windows. They still retained the original house windows. They were mainly small grocery and sweet shops and also took orders for bread. There was one exception to this. It was the shop run by a Miss Price, who opened a small pork butcher's shop and sold cowheels, trotters and savoury duck. The people running the other small businesses were Mrs. Beasley at No.88, Mrs. McVitie at No.74, Miss Jones at No.58 and Miss Millie Price at No.51.

Mr. John Davies had a large dairy at No.73. This house was the only detached house in the street. It had a fair amount of ground, enclosed by a surrounding wall. It also enclosed stables for four ponies and an enclosure for several milk floats, with the cleansing dairy to the rear of the house. Both Mr. Davies and his wife worked the milk rounds each day, and Mrs. Davies started her round at the front of our house. She summoned the customers by sharp blasts on her whistle and people would come out of their houses with jugs in their hands, and ask for a gill or a pint. Mrs. Davies would then take the lid off the large churn of milk and measure out, by means of a gill or pint scoop, which had a handle attached to it, bent over at the top to rest on the lip of the churn. On receiving the milk, customers would pay there and then, and Mrs. Davies would give them change, if necessary, out of a leather bag which she had slung at her waist and leather straps over her shoulder.

As far as I can remember, the price of milk was 2^{1/2} pennies for a pint and one penny and a farthing for a gill of milk. Their son, named Dick, who was a year older than me would go, after coming out of school, to collect the milk from several farms in Bold. I often went with him.

Our first call would be to the Moat House Farm. You reached this by passing W.M. Neill's Foundry and turning left into Gorsey Lane for about four hundred yards, and then turning right down a cart track to reach the Moat. When we got there, the farmer would manhandle a large churn of milk into the float, which we secured by means of a chain to the side of the float.

Coming out of the farm, we would make our way back as far as the North Field Farm, which was then known as Ratcliffes. There again, we would collect another large churn of milk, and attach that to the opposite side of the float to make an even balance. But we would carry on, and call at Travers Farm, known then as Pembertons, for a third churn. Travers Farm was at Travers Entrance, now referred to as Bold Road, opposite the Bold Power Station, which was not even thought of at that time. The fields belonging to Pembertons stretched from the farm to the main Manchester to Liverpool railway line.

With the three churns of milk safely attached to the float, we would make our journey back to Edgeworth Street, where Mr. Davies would lift the churn out of the float and rotate them to the dairy. We would then unharness the pony and lead him into his stall and, if he was steaming, rub him down, and put some food in the manger to keep him quiet.

Some of these journeys into Bold were quite arduous, especially in the winter when snow was on the ground. At that time, the roads into Bold were not kept in the condition they are today. Large potholes appeared in the roads, which were filled in by granite stones taken from the two old stone yards, which were on the left hand side of Bold Road. I really loved those rides into Bold, visiting the farms and looking round the shippens, stables and pig sties. I never grew tired of this. It ended when I started work at the age of fourteen.

Passing Millie Price's pork shop at No.51, you came, at the end of the row, to Fred Hill's grocery shop. It was the kind of shop in which you could buy anything in the food line and it also had a fine assortment of toffees, or sweets as they are called these days. Fred Hill took good care we youngsters were kept well supplied. There were Kayli Suckers, Atties Mint Balls, sold at twelve a penny, liquorice sticks and lucky bags at one penny, each containing charms etc. I suppose during Fred Hill's life behind the counter, followed by his son Harold, thousands of Friday night's pennies were handed over the counter. A penny was a luxury to hundreds of us kids. The shop at No.31 Edgeworth Street has now been pulled down.

When the winter nights closed in on us, several of us youngsters would gather at the front of Hill's shop window. One of us would be chosen to start off the game of guessing. Our noses would be pressed up to the window, examining every article which was on show. The one chosen to start off the game would give the first and last letters of something that was in the window, e.g. the letters K and I, which would be Kayli. The one who guessed it would be ready to call out the name Kayli and run across the road, touch the opposite side of the street and back again to the shop window. The winner of the two runners had the next chance to call out the first and last letter of the article he chose.

Leaving Hill's shop and crossing Fisher Street, you would then come to the oldest terraced houses in the street. There were fifteen in all, from No.1 to No.29. No.1 started at Ellamsbridge Road and No.29 ended at Fisher Street. At the rear of these houses was quite a wide space of entry, much wider than the other entries in the street. I remember seeing the remains of pig sties there, and across the entry, at the lower end was the Fletcher's slaughter house. This must have been very convenient at one time for the occupants of these houses who, I suppose, relied a lot on whatever the pigs brought for



Sutton Conservative Club in Edgeworth Street and the Caretaker's house. The caretaker at the time this photograph was taken was taken (approx. 1900) was Sandy McKinnon. The club itself was demolished in 1987.

them - either food or money. I suppose with the number of pigs around that area, and one or two roaming around rooting for food, that is why the Victoria Vaults was nicknamed the "Little Pig"

Across the street from No.1 was the public house, the "Little Pig". I have included this as the public house in our street because the rear outbuildings and the side of the public house, plus the yard and double doors were actually in our street. I also include Price's small dairy for the same reason. Price's shop window and yard were in Edgeworth Street. Price's traded mainly in milk and toffee and sweets.

Taking a prominent place between the public house and Price's Dairy was the Conservative Club, with a house provided for the caretaker. At that time, a Mr. McKinnon was the caretaker. His wife and family helped him to look after the club and the splendid bowling green at the rear of the club was Sandy's joy. It was kept in splendid condition. The members of the club affectionately referred to Mr. McKinnon as "Sandy".

The club itself had a ground floor which was licensed for dancing and music. Many wedding and birthday parties were held there and a Junior Conservative meeting was held every Friday night called the Sutton Junior Imps. This was very popular. After a short discourse was held, the night ended with music and dancing. Many friendships between girls and boys started at these meetings. The upper floor had a lounge, bar and a fair sized room with two full sized billiard tables in it, and tables and chairs for dominoes and card games.

It also gave access to a steel constructed balcony which, in the summer months, gave good viewing whenever the bowling matches took place. It also had a steel staircase, leading down to the bowling green and bowls house.

Further on, in the middle block where I lived, was an elderly man named Mr. Woods. He was a retired coffin maker and was also the local secretary for the "Odd Fellows". I used to take my father's subscriptions to his house. After knocking on the door, he would ask me into his parlour, which was very well filled with all kinds of Victorian furniture. I used to gaze around, taking everything in, while he marked my father's card and made an entry into the large book he kept there. The furniture and knick knacks would be very valuable now. The number of this house was 76.

Across the Robins Lane entry, with the length of it running along Edgeworth Street, was a "Primitive Methodist Chapel", which everyone called the "Tin Chapel", on account of it being clad on both sides, and having a roof made of corrugated iron sheets. Later on, the chapel was put up for sale and the St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church bought it and used it as a meeting place. You could also hire it for weddings and parties etc. It has now been demolished some years before the Conservative Club was taken down.

Now, parts of the street have died. Gone are the small front room shops where people, in neighbourly fashion, could go in and buy one or two items. Even more valuable, they could unburden their troubles to a kindly person behind the counter or a few friendly neighbours gathered in the shop. A worry shared is a worry halved. Gone are the dairies and the whistle of Mrs. Davies summoning all to the milk float and wishing a cheery

good morning to each and everyone. My mother used to say Mrs. Davies should not say what she does say. You see, Mrs. Davies used to ladle out the measure into one's jug and then she would add a drop more, over the measure into one's jug and say "That's not one of John Davies' pints." You see, Mr. Davies carefully measured out the correct amount asked for, but Mrs. Davies always gave you that little drop more and kept her customers happy.

Gone is the personal touch now, to be replaced by the early supply of milk bottles placed on the front doorstep, which, if not taken, might advertise the fact that there was an even chance no-one was in. I was on my way to the library today - it was 3.30pm, and on the step of the house where I was born were two full bottles of milk. They were still there when I returned home at 4.15pm. I thought "I hope the wrong type of person does not take notice of the length of time they have been resting on the doorstep." The old type of neighbours would have knocked on the door to enquire if there was anything wrong, and if there was no answer, they would have taken the bottles into their own homes so that no-one would be any the wiser that no-one was in. That is the difference. How people can become so isolated and strangers to one another. People tend to think "It's none of my business." This makes it easier for the thief, and so crime multiplies.

I feel it is part of my recollections to name some of the occupants of these houses. It might possibly interest some people who had their family roots around there in the early part of the century. The houses were numbered, as I have said 1 to 29. The first house was where the Burns family lived, then the Appletons and Ralph Charnock, who was the Secretary of the Sutton Commercial Amateur Rugby club. Then, Dick Charnock, who was one of the promoters of the Rolling Mill Sweep, which the greater part of the Sutton people contributed to. More information on the Sutton Sweep is provided below.

How times change. Gone is Fred Hill's shop - the corner shop, the spying out of words in the shop window. Gone is the Tin Chapel and gone is the old Conservative Club, where quite a lot of local businessmen used to spend their spare time and leisure hours. Now, the only business is a ladies and gents hairdressers in the street, replacing the Davies' milk dairy premises.

The Rolling Mill Sweep

The Rolling Mill Sweep was promoted in the early part of the century by three men: Nobby Thompson, who lived in Ellamsbridge Road, opposite the National School and worked at the Rolling Mill in Watery Lane, the mill that gave the sweep its name; Dick Charnock of Edgeworth Street, who worked as a miner down below at Bold Colliery and was the President of the Sutton Branch of the Mine Workers Union and a member of Sutton Conservatives Club, which was opposite the house he lived in. The third man was Benny Morris from Leigh Street, who worked as a moulder at Alan Bartons, I believe. Benny Morris was also well known as the scorer at the New Street Cricket Ground. A fourth man was involved, known as Billy Lathom, the Barber. He had his barber's shop just around the corner of Edgeworth Street, next to Lathom's chip shop. Billy, I believe, lost a leg in the First World War (1914-1918). It was at his shop that you paid your subscription of one shilling a week to take part in the sweep. Having paid your shilling, you received a slip of paper with your name or nom de plume, and a number, starting from nil and running up to about a thousand.

The sweep was run during the rugby league season, and in those days, the “Saints” and the “Recs” played at home on alternative Saturday afternoons. The winning number was all of the points scored, added together. For instance, a draw of ten points each would give a winning number of 20, for which you would receive the sum of £20. Also, if you had 19 or 21, they counted as side prizes, for which you would receive £5 in each case. Furthermore, prizes called Jumpers were paid out for each repetition of the number 20 plus the hundred that followed, for example 120, 220, 320 and so on.

£20, £5 and £1 can be welcome even in these days of inflation, but in those times, when wages for six days work amounted to the meagre sum of £2 or £3, winning the Sweep was like winning a small fortune. When you realise that the three main prizes amounting to £30 took 600 paying members to cover, you would need another 200 members to pay out the jumpers of £1, making the total prize money almost £40.

Needless to say, in those days in Sutton, when almost everyone was known to one another, the news of winning the main prize soon flashed across Sutton by word of mouth, on the Saturday night following the match in the afternoon. People knew, especially those going to the matches, who had the favourite numbers. Everyone from 0 to 50 fancied their chances, and it created a lot of enthusiasm for many families in Sutton at that time.

The police must have been well aware of the existence of the sweep, but I never recollect them trying to stop it being run. I mentioned earlier that the average weekly wage was £2 or £3. I know that in the early 30s, a Yard Man at Bold Colliery took home two pounds and six pence (£2.02^{1/2} pence today), whilst the plate layers gang on the railway running from Collins Green to St. Helens Junction took home £1-19-6 (£1.97^{1/2} today).