

Memories of Kingsland by Bruce Hepburn 1940- circa 1948.

Reading through 'Memories from the Past' I also experienced some of the observations made therein.

I was born in Bristol in 1 June 1936. In 1940 my mother evacuated me to my Grandmother in Kingsland. (Miriam Freeman and her daughter Audrey).

Arriving at my Grandmother's at No. 4 Council Houses was a bit of a shock coming from a house with running hot water, bathroom and inside toilet. To no running water, nor bathroom, and the toilet a chamber under the bed at night or bucket in an outhouse during the day. Bath time, once week was done in a long metal bathtub in the front room. Water was obtained from a well with a hand pump situated between houses No. 3 and 4 and shared by all six houses. Its position made it handy for watering the garden. We had a drain but could put water down it (I guess it was a soak away system). In winter the range would be lit to heat water for the bath. I guess I must have got used to it as I have no bad memories of it, and in fact it was probably a bit of an adventure.

In summer time we were allowed to swim in the River Lugg from the bank of the meadow downstream from the bridge at Lugg Green. This we used a lot and not just for swimming or playing but we also took soap with us so we could have a good wash, saving having to use the bath tub at home. I also remember the otter hunts. At that time it seemed the right thing as a naive young boy. But today now know not only was it very cruel but entirely the wrong approach to increase the stock and quality of trout.

In the kitchen corner opposite the back door was built-in brickwork supporting a round cauldron heated underneath by a coal/wood fire. This was used every Monday morning to do the laundry. Not only was the washing boiled in the cauldron but also placed in a large tub where it would be rubbed on a washboard. Washing was then rinsed in fresh water, all water having had to be brought in from the pump outside. Having rinsed the washing it was squeezed in a mangle. It was my job later to turn the handle while Gran fed the sheets etc into the rollers. How different is it today doing the laundry.

Gran had a very long garden, as did most houses then, in which was grown all the vegetables needed. Surrounding the front lawn was a trellis on which grew raspberries and loganberries. Any other fruit was either bought at village shop or from the local farm, usually Day House Farm. I say bought, a lot of scrumping also went on. Any other requirements were bought at the village store or by a trip to Leominster either by train or bus. Milk was delivered daily by a, I believe, donkey or pony drawn trap. Milk was measured out from a churn into a jug. We also had a fishmonger come round once a week, if remember correctly. We ate the fish and the cat got the fish heads.

I remember the rationing well. We managed to supplement it by various means, legal or otherwise. My friend Tommy Craig (Tom) and I often played by the River Lugg upstream from Day House Farm. There part of the hill had fallen away creating a tiny canyon. There we made ourselves a little den. From somewhere long forgotten we managed to get a small frying pan and also a couple of empty tins to use for cooking. There was always plenty of fallen dead wood in the nearby woods for fuel. On our way through the farm we would look for hens nest (there was no hens house, the hens nested wherever they could) and take the eggs to the farmer's wife. She would allow us a couple of eggs each for our effort. Sometimes we took the eggs home, other times we took to our secret den and cooked them over a wood fire. On our roaming around the countryside we would often scrimp whatever was in season: potatoes, turnips, peas etc. We tried our hand at trapping rabbits, rarely successful. We also noted when the Water Bailiff was on the River Lugg as he would sometimes be fly fishing. Any trout caught were carefully put back, any other fish left on the bank to die. Tom and I would be allowed to take some which we cooked at our den.



Tom Craig in bracken near Tars Wood.

At Day House farm I vaguely remember there was a small metal trunk shaped bridge that carried water and went from the farm across the River Lugg to the other side. I assume this carried water from or to the mill race. I can no longer remember. What I do remember is Tom and I would crawl across this to get to the other side so we could walk up to a farm, I believe Sodgley Farm, without going down to the road. At Sodgley we used to play in the barn building a castle with straw bales. Like Day House, the farmers did not seem to mind us playing there so long we behaved and did no damage. From Sodgley Farm, Tom and I would make our way to Tars Wood where we could explore and climb trees. Afterwards we would make our way down to the River Lugg and if it was hot have a swim to cool off before wending our way home via Day House.

Gran also got me a job with the Ferreters and if they managed a good catch of rabbits I was given one to take home. Gran made this not only into Sunday lunch but Monday, Tuesdays and Wednesday meals of some sort too. I also vaguely remember Gran swopping our sweet rations for sugar so she could make lots of jam and preserves for use in winter. Likewise apples would be stored in the loft which would keep right through to spring. There was no loft insulation in those days, neither wall insulation nor double glazing, so houses tended to be draughty. We had a thick curtain over the doors in winter to keep out the wind and cold.

Talking of rabbits, as mentioned by Gordon Roberts, we always seemed to find out when and which cornfield would be harvested and as he says we stood around waiting for the rabbits to run out. Most boys had a stick but one or two had a catapult. Some men also had shot guns I believe but don't think anybody got shot.

Children living at this end of the village used the Corners Inn as our focal point where we would meet and play, or just chat. If you were a friend of Bob Bodenham, whose parents owned the pub; we would be allowed to play round the back of the pub in the yard and barn and were also invited to play and eat fruit, in season, in the adjacent orchard. I also remember being invited to Bob's house where his mother made lemonade for us.

The Corners Inn produced its own cider on the premises. Gordon Roberts writes about the apple press in the Corners Inn. I don't, now, remember that sort of press, but remember the apples being brought in by horse & cart and the apples loaded into the press. This was a square boxlike device in which a thick mat was placed, and then a layer of apples, another mat then another layer and so on until it was full and then a board placed on top. This would then be pressed down by turning a handle on a corkscrew thread pressing the juice out where it would be placed in barrels. Perhaps the pub had both. We children watching would be given some fresh juice to drink, though I have a vague recollection of us being given cider that made us tidily much to the amusement of the men working there.

To the rear of the Corners Inn buildings next to Bodenham's orchard a butcher set up shop which would have been a completion for the village store but was very welcome I believe. On the main road next to the Corners Inn Tom's dad, Mr. Preece, set up a bicycle repair shop. Poor Tom had to spend a lot of time there and when I, or other children, tried to talk to him his dad's shooed us away. I wonder what has become of these two shops?

One day when we went down to the Corners Inn there were some workmen with, as I learned later, acetylene torches cutting away the iron railings that were in front of the pub. When we asked why we were told the metal was needed for the war effort to make tanks. Later when I related this to Gran she told me other men had been round all the houses collecting (confiscating she said) any aluminium items like saucepans etc as the metal was needed to build Spitfire aircraft. Apart from this and rationing,

the war had very little impact or attracted much attention for us children. When we did play roles it was Cowboy and Indians.

The rear of the (Council) houses faced onto a common drive, hence the backdoor was the main entrance, and on the other side of the drive were the outside toilets. Next to this was a large field kept for grazing and hay making where we often played. There was a young man, whose name I have forgotten, who would organise football or cricket games for us children. One day when we were playing the man shout run to the gate quickly there is a bull coming. Looking across the field we saw this big Hereford bull charging towards us, so we ran. Those of us who lived in the Council Houses climbed over the fence onto our drive way. The other children ran to the gate where the man was picking them up and dropping them over the gate. He just made it over before the bull arrived. Later Gran told me a complaint had been made to Day House farm who said the bull had escaped because a gate had been left open.



Bruce Hepburn front row second left, Audrey Freeman far right,

I also had a personal run in with this bull. One day Tom and I were on our way to our den when it rained heavily so we took shelter in a barn at Day House farm. This barn not only housed the bull in a byre but was also used to store hay. Er climbed up into the hay lift and had fun playing. The floor over the byre had holes and a gap in it. Unfortunately one of the wellington boots I was wear got caught in a hole and when I tried to retrieve it, it fell through and landed next to the bull. The fear of getting into trouble over the loss was greater than fear of the bull so I climbed down though the gap onto the bull's back, slid own o the floor, retrieved my boot the using the byre wall and the bulls' back climbed back up to the hay loft. Somehow this got spoken about in the Corners Inn where, I was later told, it was suggested I was very lucky as this particular bull was very fierce.

In Gran's house we had an upright piano which Gran played and we would have a singing session, my favourite song being "Red Sails in the Sunset". When Gran realised I had a good singing voice she got me into the choir at St. Michael and All Angels. This I enjoyed very much as it gave me some self-esteem, and I no longer needed to look up at other boys. Singing was fun even though choir practice and church services took away play time. The hard part was the church organ. The air pressure for this was produced by a hand pump which consisted of a long handle coming out of the, I guess, back of the organ. We were supposed to take it in turn to

pump, but if you failed for some reason, e.g. late or missed practice, then punishment was pumping the organ. One time I had to do this I was not too well and I soon ran out of effort at which point the organ sounded wrong and one of the choir men had to quickly take over.

One thing we children looked forward to was the vicars garden party held, I think in summer, as not only sandwiches, cakes and lemonade were served but we were treated to extra things like an orange each or some sweets. One extra enjoyment for me was the vicarage had a flushing toilet and proper toilet paper. At home we cut up newspapers into small squares and threaded them onto a length of string to hang on the wall. Just flushing to toilet was a joy to behold. I wonder where the vicar got his toilet paper from.

Gran also arranged for me to take piano lessons which were given by a lady who lived in a house near to Lugg Green. Lesson went well for a while but I often heard noisy, joyful children passing the house on the way to the river. Eventually Gran realised piano lessons for me were a waste of money so I was glad not to carry on with them. Years later of course, I regretted not sticking it out.

On a summer Sunday after evening service, Gran, Uncle George (her second husband) Audrey (my half Aunt) and I would walk up to Monument. There was a very small pub with one room. We would sit outside on a bench under an arbour covered in flowers where Audrey and I were allowed a small glass of cider. On the way back we would stop near Croase House where there was a large walnut tree. In season we would throw sticks or stones up the tree and collect any fallen nuts, ending up with stained fingers. A wonderful way to end to the day.

As related by Gordon Roberts, hop picking was a big thing in the summer. Gran, Audrey and I would go to the hop fields every day where initially Audrey and I would help Gran strip hops from the bines. But after a while with other children playing Gran realised I was not helping much and let me off to go and play. For Gran hop picking was a necessary source of income so she was better off with me out of the way. I too remember playing and paddling in Pinsley Brook. There were a lot of families there some which Gran knew but also I believe Gipsy families who went round the country from hop field to hop field.

One day the word went round that the Yanks are coming. On the day we all lined up in the main road near the Corners Inn. After a while we could hear a new noise, a rumbling, roaring noise and then they turned up in great big Lorries, Jeeps and personal carriers. As they drove by they threw candy, sweets and fruit to us children where we scrabbled and fought each other for what we could grab. Apart from the vicars parties I did not have sweets so did not miss them. However, I did enjoy scoffing the American sweets.

Another enjoyable family outing was to walk up to Oaker Woods where we would pick flowers. Primroses were dug up to plant in the garden and when they were in

bloom we took armfuls of Bluebells home. The smell in the house was nice. It goes without saying that we all went blackberry picking with which Gran made jam and pies. We also went rosehip picking which were collected and sent away to make rosehip syrup, a valuable source of vitamin C.

One day we saw some men walking around the first field on the right side of Lugg Green Road. We soon learned they were going to build houses there. Eventually machinery, materials and men appeared on the site and work commenced. One evening after the workers had gone some of us children took a walk round the site. We discovered a partially built wall with some bricks and still wet cement so we had a go ourselves at bricklaying. I wonder what the builders thought next day when they saw our handwork. On the building site they had erected a tent in which to store materials like sand, cement and timber. We soon found this an ideal place to meet and chat with other children in inclement weather when it was too wet to play by the Corners Inn. We youngsters learnt a bit about life and things from the older ones.

My Great-grandmother Mary Ann Taylor (née Glew) died in 1943 and the funeral and burial was held in the church. Afterwards a wake was held in the Angel Inn. There I became very upset and ran out of the pub. When asked why I said I had just seen my favourite Great Gran solemnly buried and everybody is now laughing and joking and drinking. The real world was explained to me and so I was happy then.

My Grandmother, Mrs Miriam M Freeman (née Taylor) died in 1961 and is also buried at St. Michaels. Reading her obituary I see she was staunch member of the Methodist cause in Kingsland and was a trustee of Kingsland Chapel and member of other clubs. I probably learned more about life and goodness from my Gram than any other person.

I have written the above without a timeline as I don't remember dates now, to the best of my, now age 84, memory so some items may have minor errors, with some things triggered from reading Memories of Kingsland.

I left Kingsland about 1948 to rejoin my mother and new step father in Birmingham.

I did make some holidays to Kingsland, by the then wonderful Midland Red bus service, and remember spending a week with a girl Pat ? I think from Eardisland who Audrey introduced to me. The relationship only lasted a week however. I also came down during a summer holiday joined later by two friends and their girlfriends who cycled all the way from Birmingham. We pitched a camp in two tents next to Tars Wood where I taught these city dwellers country survival crafts. At aged 16 I got a gun licence from the Post Office and bought from a rifle from a gun shop in Birmingham. This was a WWI or WWII lee Enfield .303 Army rifle converted to a 410 shot gun with a quarter bore. It was a very fine gun with good range and accuracy. I also bought a box of shells, I think 24. I contacted Day House farm and got permission to go shooting on their land, I probably wondered onto others, to go hunting, the farmed said he would be glad if I got rid of a few pigeons and crows. I

had hoped to bag a rabbit or two for the pot. However, Mixomatosis was rampant at the time and as I walked around the countryside I kept coming across distressed rabbits which I put out of their misery. I was so disgusted with this that I did not use the gun much and on return to Birmingham sold the gun back to the shop.

I left Secondary School aged 15 and got a job in a factory that made specialised purposed electrical switching equipment. It was a good job which I enjoyed.

At this time Military Conscription was in vogue so I decided at 17 1/2 years to join the Royal Air Force, where I served for the next 37 + years. Tom Craig, who was also in the RAF, and exchanged letters for a while but lost contact,. I wonder where he is now. In 1956 I was posted to Germany where in 1957 I met a girl at a Jazz Club in Schleswig. We planned to get married there in September 1958. However, in the wisdom of MOD and in spite of being over 21, I had to go home to UK to get my parents' permission. While over here I took my fiancée down to Kingsland to meet Gran, who approved of my choice. (We married in July 1958 and have now been married for 62 happy years. We have a daughter, a son, two Granddaughters and two Great grand children). That was the last I was there. Though we had plans to visit Kingsland we often overseas, and only managed time to visit Aunt Audrey and to attend her daughter Ruth, wedding at Vowchurch.

Looking at Kingsland today on Google Earth I see it has changed so much that parts I knew are now gone. For example all the orchards belonging to Day House farm seem to be replaced with buildings. The two oak trees I could see from Gran's back door in which we climbed have gone. I guess that progress. Perhaps when this pandemic is over I'll try to visit. My memory of names is now very poor but if anybody remembers me and wishes to contact me my email is [g8bgi\(at\)tiscali.co.uk](mailto:g8bgi(at)tiscali.co.uk)



Audrey Freeman, Marjorie Hepburn (now Evans,) Frank Evans, Miriam Freeman