

Marple and District, memories.

My parents moved to Marple shortly after getting married in 1932. The house they bought, Ingleside, is on Ley Hey Road. I was born in 1936 in a maternity home on Station Road, opposite to Hollins Street. My father was the senior partner in James Boyd and Son, yarn agents, based in St Anne's Square, Manchester. Most working days he would catch the 8.21am train from Marple Station, a well-built station with extensive buildings and facilities. The station and the arriving train was packed with regular business commuters, so regular that small groups had unofficially established which compartments were theirs. You could usually rely on getting a seat in that specific compartment. Everybody on these early trains read newspapers, usually the Manchester Guardian, and they all read the Manchester Evening News on the journey back.

My father often took me walking around the countryside, his love of the countryside being the reason he had decided to live in Marple rather than Salford where his family originated from. The canals were favourite walks. Commercial barge traffic was very limited by this time and only occasionally met, but mostly still horse-drawn. My father would point out the rare turnover bridges the canal at Marple has, and chat to the bargees. In cold winters the traffic came to a standstill when the water froze. The aqueduct and viaduct approaching Romiley were always commented on, long before the interest later shown in them. Another walk we did was along a footpath that led from Oakdene Road to Marple Old Hall. My schoolfriend Bobby Heap lived in what was then a grand house, Green Meadows, the last house in Manor Road – his father advertised widely, selling, I think, self-help courses. Our immediate neighbours were the Fawcetts plus Alsatian dog, and Mrs Hulse – communication with either neighbours or with other families on Ley Hey Road was rare. Most of the local houses had cellars, where perishable food was stored (before refrigerators), and laundering took place. During the war ours had been partly converted so that we could shelter there in case of bombing raids, and we went there whenever the air raid sirens sounded. Our bedroom windows had sticky paper stuck over them in grid fashion so as to protect us from shattering glass.

I attended Marple Preparatory(?) School on Arkwright Road. When I was six I contracted pneumonia, my life being saved I was told later by the timely action of a certain Doctor McNair, who despite wartime problems quickly obtained gas cylinders and breathing equipment from Stockport, and moving me downstairs into a room where a coal fire had to be kept burning 24 hours a day, a special coal ration being delivered in order to do so. Later in my childhood I had to fetch prescriptions from our doctor's surgery, which was one of the rooms in her own house, any prescribed medicines left outside on a table for later collection!

My father had the use of a car throughout the war as he had to visit mills making essential supplies for the military. The car was an Austin 10, registration BDB653. Used at the most once a week and only for business the battery would often be flat or the plugs damp. Sometimes home cures worked but more often than not a mechanic from Yeats' s Garage would be called out. Petrol was purchased from the same garage which, when you walked inside, was more like a minor engineering works rather than today's service centres.

My elder brother was keen on farming from a very young age and became friendly with our milkman, Mr Lowe, whose farm was at the bottom of Brabyns Brow. Householders would leave jugs out at their front or back doors, the jugs then being carried to the horse-drawn milk float and filled with the appropriate amount from churns in the float. The milk was untreated and from cows milked the same day. Mr Lowe would often allow us to accompany him and we would help fetching and carrying jugs, and driving the float.

The local cinema was called the Regal and was one of many, many cinemas throughout the Stockport area. The Regal had a bad reputation in my parent's eyes, possibly encouraged by the fact it was locally referred to as 'the fleapit'. They would never attend it but my brother and I occasionally did. The manager had a fearsome reputation and would throw unruly (mostly young) patrons out. The cinemas we attended most frequently were the Davenport on Buxton Road, Stockport, and the Warwick at Hazel Grove. Families would think nothing of 'going to the films' two or three times a week. There was almost always a cartoon, Pathe News and the feature film, and, blessedly, no advertising. In the big Manchester cinemas you could cut the cigarette-smoke laden air with a knife.

Opposite the entrance to the park in the centre of Marple was the butcher my mother used, Bagshaws, and next to it our grocers, John Williams. Round the corner up Market Street was Goslings, the newsagents, and further up William Rainford the jewellers at number 46, where as a seventeen year old I bought my girlfriend (later my wife) my first present to her, a marcasite brooch which we still have, in its original box. Further up was the off licence store from where my father would buy crates of his daily Bass – they handed out free metal bottle openers, three of which I still have. I seem to remember the Navigation Inn being used for local Home Guard meetings. The barber I attended when not in Manchester was a Mr Chew, appropriately named according to my mother. When Mr Chew was busy there was another barbers shop, the proper name of the proprietor I forget but his nickname was 'the dancer' because of his constant skipping around the chair whilst cutting your hair.

Until well after the war vehicular traffic in the village was light. Dogs roamed freely in the streets and some were quite nasty. Horse and cart traffic was not uncommon, and the 'rag and bone' man plied and shouted his business by this method regularly throughout the village and its surroundings. Children could play quite safely in any residential street and learn to cycle without danger.

My father purchased High Gables on Arkwright Road in about 1950. This house had belonged to the Roe aeronautical family at some stage and had a roundel on the front with the initials AVR embossed in it. There was a large area of waste land on the northern side of the house on which for some reason or other building could not take place. Prior to this we had often walked past Beechwood Manor, going under the neglected bridge that ran over the road, and on to the Roman Lake, where my father and others would gather wood, probably illegally. I recall there being old penny-in-the-slot machines which never dispensed any winnings. Sometimes we would take a rowing boat out onto the lake. On our way down the hill to the lake we would pass the still standing shattered remains of Samuel Oldknow's house, a spiral staircase, rooms and crumbling walls exposed to the elements. My father, being in the cotton trade, knew all about Arkwright and Oldknow, and we would go down into the then accessible cellars and tunnels under the road. There was a footbridge across the railway some way down the hill which led up to Strines Road. My brother and I would stand on this footbridge when steam trains were pulling out of the station and delight in being enveloped in the contents of their funnels. As a newly courting seventeen year old I introduced my girlfriend to this delight but she was less than impressed, so that particular excursion came to an end, but I have always been reminded of the pleasure it brought me personally when subsequently taking our own children later in life on rides on preserved steam lines. I became well acquainted with Strines Road and the canal to New Mills and Disley as my girlfriend was the daughter of the chief electrical engineer at J and J Hadfield's Garrison works at Thornsett.

My father was intent on me taking over the yarn agency and on my leaving boarding school I was enrolled in a three year sandwich course at Salford Technical College. For the first six months I travelled daily to Manchester with my father on the 8.21, returning home at my leisure. Exiting the train at Marple to reach Brabys Brow you entered a long sloping tunnel constructed mainly of wood – the all enveloping sound of numerous hurrying feet rebounding off the tunnel's walls comes back easily to this day. No cars, taxis or buses awaited the disgorged passengers, walking being the accepted method of transport irrespective of where you lived in Marple. My train journeys were continued when I entered the second six months of my course, an apprenticeship at Ashton Brothers' mill at Hyde, again travelling to and from Marple. I soon tired of learning about cotton and to my father's disgust took a job in the mill's weaving

shed – with eleven hundred looms reputedly one of the largest in the world. Lip reading was the only way of communicating because of the noise, and in order to produce the best atmosphere for weaving the air was constantly misted, making it impossible to keep cigarettes or paper in your pockets. My short experience of the cotton trade was brought to an end, thankfully, by National Service.

More walks our father took us on featured Lyme Hall and the surrounding land. Even at the weekends other walkers were rare, and the surroundings of the Hall were quiet and neglected. When the deer were rutting our father made sure we had trees in the vicinity of our walk, so as to give us some protection if they attacked us – today I'm not sure if they would do this, or how useful the trees would have been had the stags taken against us! My girlfriend and I were married at Disley Church in 1958 and had the wedding reception at Lyme Hall.

I left Marple for good in 1957 and have only occasionally returned. Architecturally, in my opinion, over time the centre of the village has lost any charm it once had. Its character has been replaced by bland and unattractive modernism. Perhaps its proximity to Manchester made this inevitable. I'm happy with my memories of it.

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