

An account of life in Withington in World War II

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I came to Withington in 1934, when I was nearly seventeen. We came from Chorlton on Medlock. I think my mother must have thought that we needed more room, and our house, although it had two bedrooms, it wasn't big enough. It wasn't condemned or being pulled down or anything like that. And so mother decided we would come and live in Withington.

We lived off Burton Road, in Norden Avenue, and we all lived there together for many, many years until we left home. My brother, Vinny, he was the last one to have the house. There were seven children – I was the eldest of them – but two had died and so when we came to Withington there were five of us, plus my parents – so seven in that house.

At that time I worked at a sewing job, as a machinist making bags - not handbags, but to put birdseed in and things like that. So I worked at the sewing mills on Cambridge Street in town.

I remember the war the very well. I remember all the bombs dropping, and I remember there was a big land mine dropped on St Paul's, but fortunately it didn't go off. It got caught in a tree. So it saved us all you know. Round the corner from where we lived, an air raid shelter was bombed, and four men were killed. I remember going to a wedding, I think it must have been over in Urmston or somewhere, but anyhow coming back there were no buses and my sister and I had to walk. And we were coming down I think it was Mauldeth Road, and all these bombs were going off. It was terrifying. I was absolutely terrified. Somebody told us we'd have to go into a shelter, which we did for a while and then I wanted to go home. Fortunately we got home safely. It was very frightening that. My younger brother used to get up every morning and search round the garden for shrapnel that had dropped from the bombs and he used to take it to school and see who'd got the biggest piece.

We had an air raid shelter, an Anderson shelter in our garden.

I carried on working for a little while when the war started, and then I joined the Land Army. I was in a place called Radnorshire in Wales it's not known as Radnorshire now but it was then. Radnorshire in Wales. I was there for about 18 months I think. That's where I lost my arm. We were working on an old fashioned threshing machine with a big box, and we fed the corn in. Men threw the corn in the box and we fed it into the machine. And it went round, ooh a terrific speed. I don't know what happened. I was feeding the corn in and it mustn't have gone right in, so I must have put my hand near it, and of course it took it straight off you know. We were right out in the wilds. It had taken us a day before to get up there so they couldn't get any ambulance or anything to me. Fortunately they took me to Shrewsbury hospital and there was nothing to do, only just sew it up. It had already gone. I had very good healing skin so it healed well and I was all right. And actually even though I'd

lost the arm, I didn't suffer anything ill health or anything through it. I was always fine apart from losing my arm. Anyway, I've had all these years to get used to it!

I came back to Manchester then. They wanted me to stop in the Land Army, as a Land Girl - but helping in the hostel we were in, but I wouldn't do that. So I left and came home. And of course at the Court they didn't call the Land Army an armed force, so because of that I got no pension. I had no money off them as there weren't all these benefits there are now. I had to fight for a pension. I worked for the Executive Board, and two men off the Executive Board, I had to sue them. And they were friends you know, I knew [them] very well! It was nearly two years before I got anything.

When I came back to Manchester, my parents looked after me, so it was all right. And I never suffered, apart from not having my arm, I didn't suffer in any way. I had good health and was able to do things, so I came out on the whole pretty well.

Withington was very, very different then. When you think of the lovely village we had for one thing. The shops on Copson Street, of course it was Cooper Street then, not as many shops as there are now, nothing like it is now. And beautiful shops in the village. It was a lovely village.

I remember a lot of the shops. I remember Handforth's on the corner, but I remember when it used to be called Whalley Brookes - that was before Handforth's bought it. And there was Redman's and the Meadow Dairy or the Maypole Dairy. And John Williams used to be there on the other side. And Seymour Meads. And of course there was Farnworths - that was a haberdashery. And there was a beautiful dress shop, called Countalls. And there was Wilkinsons, which sold beautiful pots. I think there was a cleaners there too on that part, and there was a bank. Several banks. And there was a sweet shop - it was a nice shop called Merryls, and that was next to the Methodist Church. Quite a high class sweet shop. And opposite there, there was another sweet shop. I can't remember what that was called. It was different - if you bought a quarter, you got a quarter free! That sort of a shop. And there was a newsagent, and a toy shop, and a cobblers. And there was a big greengrocer - Allendales, on the corner there next to the Albert pub. And a chemist along there. And then there was another nice high class grocers called Kingdoms, and that was a lovely shop. There was the Dutch Oven, and the pork butchers on Copson Street. A lovely pork butchers - and there used to be Jewish butchers there also, on Copson Street.

You had everything you needed.

Eventually I went back to work. I went to the labour exchange, which was on the top of Burton Road. And the lady there was ever so nice and she said "would you like a job in Trafford Park at Metrovicks?" So I said "Ooh I don't know really, but I'll go and see". Anyway, I went, and it was like a receptionist's job, and when people came you had to show them to wherever they wanted to go. It was a huge place, I was terrified of it, and I never knew anywhere. They used to take me instead of me taking them!

I started work at half past eight in the morning. The other people, I think, started at eight o'clock or earlier. But I couldn't get there earlier - I couldn't get a bus direct. Oh it was terrible trying to get there. And coming home everybody had return tickets and I hadn't got one, and they wouldn't let you on the bus without one. I was really annoyed about it, so I decided I would leave. But I just left, I didn't tell them! Anyway a supervisor or somebody sent for me and said that I wasn't allowed to do that - I had to carry on. So I told her I didn't want to carry on, I didn't like it, and it was difficult to get there. She was quite nasty, but in the end she let me go so that was the end of me at Metrovicks. I wasn't there long.

And then I got a job in Sharston. The place was called Slidelocks - that was a sort of trade name. I think they were called Wilcox and they made fuses. I got a job there as a telephonist. I was quite happy there and I stayed there for a few years. And then I left there, and got a job at the police. I worked for them for quite a few years. And then I went to the pricing bureau, where I finished my days. I worked there for years. That was the longest job.

I got married in 1962. I was late getting married. I didn't have any children. My husband was born in Withington, and his mother before him. So they were very old Withington people.

We lived in Moorfield Street in the village. It's not there now - they decided they would pull those houses down. Anyway it was our own house, so we got compensation. But then they gave us a house. We looked at one or two houses. My husband thought the houses around Victoria Road were only about three thousand pounds, but he didn't think they were worth that. Anyway we ended up off Yew Tree Road - the pig farm they called it. I never knew it as the pig farm. We went to live there - it was a council house. And we lived there until my husband died in 1993. Then I came to live here, and I'm still here.

My husband was a painter and decorator. There was a shop on Egerton Crescent - well it was a house, but the man that lived there was a painter and decorator and he took my husband on as an apprentice. He had to work for seven years as an apprentice. Even for this job. Anyway, he finished up working in the airport at a hotel there. He worked there for donkey's years.

For entertainment, often we used to go to dances during the war. We used to go to dances at the airport. And dances at the Sharston Hotel. I don't know we went in Withington a lot really because there wasn't a lot of that sort of thing going on. We used to go to Didsbury to the Didsbury Liberal club as well, and Cheadle Conservative Club. Never stuck to one! We always seemed to go miles away, and of course we didn't go often because we didn't have much money to go anywhere. We used to go always on a Sunday evening up to Northenden and walk along the river banks. We used to nearly always walk there and back. Not like today, they won't walk a step will they? I remember one time going on the bus from West Didsbury up to Withington Golf Club. It was one pence. And after Withington Golf Club, it was one and a half pence. We used to only pay one pence and always stay on for the next stop. Anyway one evening, we got on and we came to Withington Golf Club, and the guard shouted "Withington Golf Club - the end of the penny

stage" and we all had to trail off! We didn't have any money, but we seemed to enjoy ourselves in our own way. I don't know what we did in Northenden - only walk around. And we used to sometimes walk West Didsbury way. We used to always call it the Terminus, and we used to walk around there as well you know. There was the Palatine Picture House - we used to go there every Monday and Saturday.

One brother went to live in Newall Green when he got married. My sister stayed here, and my younger brother stayed here. My other sister stayed. So we all pretty well stayed in Withington. We call Withington our home really. Of course, my younger brothers and a sister went to school here at St Cuthbert's.

We always went to St Cuthbert's church. Canon Rowntree. I remember him very well. He was quite nice. We used to have dances in the Hall sometimes on a Sunday evening. I used to go to St Catherine's dancing also - in Didsbury on a Sunday night. That was when we used to dance in the church at St Catherine's. We danced to the music of the day - on records. It wasn't a band I don't think. When we went to the Sharston, they had a band. That was when we had some money to go! And the bus fare, yes of course. We didn't go to the Scala very often. I think because you had to sit on forms when you went in the cheap seats, and so we didn't go there very often. We did go sometimes, but not very often. My husband went there a lot before we were married. I'd rather go to the Palatine Picture House.

I remember once, I don't know whether it was New Year's Eve or not, it was very, very foggy. Terrible. And we were going to go to some dance, I don't know where. And we said "Ooh we'll never find our way" so this girl that was with us said "I know what we'll do, put candles in a jam jar and put string and carry them". Anyway we did this and we still couldn't find our way! Just got to the bottom of the Avenue and had to come back. So our patent idea was no good.

My Doctor was Dr Grant-Davey, who was on the corner of Parsonage Road. But my mother and the other members of the family had Dr Mitchell. He was on the junction between Wilmslow Road and Palatine Road. He had a house there. And then he moved onto Laurel Court. My father also had Dr Grant-Davey, and my mother was ill one time and Dr Mitchell gave her a big bottle of cough medicine, and my Father said "Oh I think I'll change over to him". And then when the National Health came out, Dr Grant-Davey wouldn't go on it, so we had to find another Doctor. And I joined Dr Bordchart on Burton Road, and my father joined him - but then he left him after the big bottle!

My Father used to work in Crumpsall, and he used to have to go all that way to town and then get another bus from town to Crumpsall. A long way for him to travel. He'd leave home early in the morning. They called it a mill where he worked, but it wasn't a mill that made cotton. They had a lot of cotton going there and it had to be sorted out into different grades, and my Father worked doing that. He was a Foreman there. The firm was called *William Bottomley*, and my Father knew his job so well that they let him do just what he wanted. My mother always used to say Bottomley ruined him! Every lunch time he used to go in a pub called The Crumpsall. He used to take his sandwiches, and the paper, and probably have a pint and sort his horses

out. And one day somebody came to the mill and they wanted my Dad, and my Dad sent back "Tell them I'll come when I'm ready". He was absolutely ruined by Bottomley, but Bottomley was very good with him. They used to go shooting in Wales - Bottomley had a house there. He used to take my Dad with him. And he'd give him a couple of pheasants or something like that.

I think Bottomley was the first man that ever bought a house and converted it into flats. It was on Circular Road. A house he bought that somebody had just left – they just left the table after the meal and went. Everything was there, nothing had been cleared away. Nobody knew what happened to them. They went to America it seems. I think they might have been Jewish people, and perhaps heard about Hitler. I don't know if Bottomley ever knew, but he bought the house. It's probably still there that house. Bottomley turned it into some flats. I'd never heard of that sort of thing. They had an orchard there, with a lot of pear trees in it. Also the house had big cellars and it was full of bottles of wine, but none of them were labelled what kind. My mother used to say "That place will kill your Father with that wine". My Father worked with a man called Jake. Anyway Jake did die and my mother always said it was through wine. Father used to bring it home and my mother used to say "Nobody's touching that wine!" We used to have the pears, but not the wine. This was about 1936 or something like that. Before the war.