

## More Memories of Kings Heath by DRJ



**Grange Road early 20th century**

I was born in 1929 at the family home in Grange Road Kings Heath, the youngest of 4 children - three girls and one boy. My father suffered from ill health and was only able to work occasionally and so it fell to my mother to be the main bread winner. My father worked for Harvey and Sons, decorators on South Road, Kings Heath whilst mother undertook a variety of cleaning jobs for private households and later for a small local business in Kings Heath called Panel Craft located on Grange Road. This company turned over its production to the making of aircraft parts during the second World War as did many factories within the city. Mother's role included cleaning the offices and preparing meals and hot drinks for the small factory workforce.

I was 10 years of age when the second World war broke out and I remember regular bombing sorties on the city and the local area. We would take refuge in the Anderson Shelter in the back garden where we also grew vegetables as an extra source of food. If there was not time to reach the shelter we took refuge under the stairs of the house. I can remember direct hits on the Kings Norton Factory Estate and St Dunstan's R.C. Church, which was then on Westfield Road, Kings Heath. Several nearby houses in Grange Road took a hit and the fallout ricocheted along the road blowing open our front door and trapping us in our refuge under the stairs. Passing neighbours, who witnessed the event, alerted my older sister, an Air Raid Warden on our street and who came to to our rescue.

As for schooling I attended Colmore Road School from the age of 5 – 14 years. Back then it wasn't uncommon to remain at the same school during infants, juniors and seniors. Girls and boys were educated in mixed classes until reaching senior school age when the boys went to Wheelers Lane school in Kings Heath and the girls remained at Colmore Road. I had passed for the grammar school but like many working class children at the time, I was unable to take up a place as my family could not afford to pay for me to attend. When I was not at school I played with friends in the local park at Kings Heath and I can remember that a couple lived in the house. He was an horticulturist. Another favourite passtime of mine and my friends was skipping in Grange Road which was then usually quiet with very little passing traffic.

Rationing persisted and I learnt to how to cook at school using rationed goods and portion sizes. As a result I became the main cook at home for the family whilst my mother went out to work. Mother had previously trained as a cook in a private household and later worked for a local Birmingham councillor as a cleaner and occasional cook preparing food for functions held in the councillor's home. Meanwhile, I was given responsibility for doing the family grocery shopping and for trying to find off ration food to buy. This would typically include offal, Whale Meat, which doubled up as a fish or meat substitute, and Snook a type of fish.

At fourteen I left Colmore Road Senior School and started work at the Ideal Benefit Society on Moor Green Lane, Moseley as an office junior. It was my job to address envelopes for correspondence to be sent to insurance policy holders, a soul destroying job carried out using pen nib and ink pot. I can remember large offices filled with 30 staff including men and women working silently, overseen by an office supervisor. Staff had to clock into work and change their outdoor shoes for soft soled alternatives which would not damage the parquet office floor. Lateness was not permitted and stopping for a chat was actively discouraged as time wasting. After a period of 18 months I was promoted to working in the basement filing notices of deceased war veterans in their family files. These documents arrived daily and in such large numbers during the war that it had a great impact on me because it highlighted the sheer scale of the number of deaths and injuries caused to military personnel from both World wars.

In my spare time I joined the Girls Training Corps, known as the G.T.C at Brandwood Barracks on Brandwood Road, Kings Heath. Young people were encouraged, if not required, to join organisations which would prepare them to join up when we were old enough. The G.T.C had links with the Royal Navy and here I learnt First Aid, Morse Code, Flag Waving and helped to fold bandages for the Red Cross. My uniform mirrored the colours of the Navy uniform, namely navy blue, white and black. Other interests included going to local dances held at Colmore Road School, Brandwood Barracks and Institute Road Baths.

Eventually I moved on from the Ideal Benefit Society and went to work for the Birmingham Evening Mail, albeit for a very brief spell, proof reading classified ads. From there I moved to A.T. Ryberg, Ashfield Road, Kings Heath purveyors of wholesale beauty products, where I learnt double entry book keeping. Following this I moved to Premiere Cycles, Sparkhill selling bicycles. It was here that I met my future husband. He worked for a nearby Hire Purchase company involved in processing applications for Hire Purchase agreements used to purchase goods, beyond the pocket of most ordinary people, including bicycles. He was also a keen motorcyclist as was the manager of the shop where I worked and the two of them would often discuss the sport and future race fixtures.

From there I moved to Suffield's on Kings Heath High Street. They were retailers of electrical goods such as radios and TVs. I was later promoted by my employer to staff their annexe in Poplar Road, Kings Heath, which also sold second hand records. This shop was not far from Hobbs, which also sold new records.

My older brother (by 10 years) worked at John Gibbs on Grange Road, manufacturers of metal window frames and whose customers included the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. He also joined the local Territorial Army until he was old enough to join the Army at age 18, which he duly did. When the second world war ended we bought our previously rented house, on Grange Road, from our landlady for the princely sum of £450.00. She owned several houses in the road and had decided to leave the rental housing market.

I began dating my husband seriously from 1949 and our first date was at Red Marley in Gloucestershire, an off-road motorcycle racing fixture at the time. By Christmas 1950 we were engaged and by Easter 1951 we were married. The wedding took place at Cambridge Road Methodist Church, where my mother and I were regular worshippers and where I had attended Sunday School. (I later left Cambridge Road Methodists to join the congregation at All Saints Church.) Our wedding reception was held at the family home in Grange Road. Once married we moved straight into the family home with my mother and one of my sisters. My father had already

died by then. We continued to live at the family home, which we continued to share with one of my sisters even after the death of my mother.

There used to be a lot of local shops on Grange Road mainly situated between Highbury Road and Avenue Road. There were 3 general stores including Wilsons and Sweetings, Shorts and also Vale's; 2 greengrocer's; an outdoor or Off-Licence and a sweet shop. There was also a barber's shop called Charlie Hartle's, a butcher's, a shoe repairer's and a newsagent's. It wasn't always necessary therefore to shop on King's Heath High Street, except to buy off ration goods such as meat and fish products from e.g. Barr's, Rowbotham's or Cooper's or to visit stores such as Woolworth's or Bebbington's a smaller version of Woolworth's. The local coalman also lived in Grange Road and stabled his horse and delivery cart nearby. He collected his coal deliveries from Kings Heath Station, where the coal yards were located close to the railway line. Midland Counties, with a depot in York Road, delivered the daily milk to households using horse and cart down the traffic free side streets of Kings Heath.

After my sister died my husband and I continued to live in the family home on Grange Road. My career developed into road haulage and car sales firstly at Timms Garage in Moseley and then working for Patrick Motors on the Bristol Road where I worked for many years until I retired in 1984.



Grange Road 1960s