

## Montpelier before the War

(Based on an interview with Gladys Newton)

I was born in 1919 at 49 Upper Cheltenham Place. My family came from Bristol and I was Montpelier born and bred! Upper Cheltenham Place was a very quiet little road, as far as I remember it. Of course, we were in the middle of one of the worst financial situations for a good many years. There was no work, you see. Most of the men there had no jobs. Women did what they could. My father was a cabinet-maker and we were fairly well off, so we were lucky. He had his own business but we sold that up after a while and he got a job at Wills. He had a good job and we were, as I say, quite well off compared to most people then.

It was an interesting period. When my mother went shopping, she would buy. . . in those days you could buy a bag of bones and it *was* a bag of bones with meat and all on them, you know, really good value and she'd hand it round to the neighbours with children who had nobody in work so at least they had one hot meal that they could have and a couple of the other women did the same thing so it sort of kept them going.

I moved to Paradise Cottage when I was somewhere around five years old, I was with my dad when he went to view it. The first thing we saw was that oil lamps were everywhere. It was a couple of elderly ladies that had lived there for several years – they'd moved in with a brother or something and he eventually died and left it to these two old ladies who didn't want a great old-fashioned place, especially with oil, so they got rid of it. We wanted something more modern and we were coming from a place which only had old-fashioned gas, gas chandeliers and things like that, and we were looking at one that was even more old-fashioned. There was no mains water, no mains gas, no electricity. Not a lot! So he looked round and said, well that's the first thing that's got to be done! We had them put in before we moved in. Paradise Cottage was a larger house, different and bigger. There was a summer-house and a greenhouse with an old vine in it which led into the garden. There was a well which went under the scullery at the rear of the house and two pump handles either side of the sink. My father used the water in the garden – my mother wouldn't allow it to be used in the house. My parents chose the house because of the garden. I had an older brother. Dad wanted a garden to do gardening in and it was somewhere for us youngsters to keep off the streets.

Richmond Road was very different from Upper Cheltenham Place where everybody talked to everybody else and if you did an errand for somebody you knocked on the door and the next thing you just walked in the house! It was free-and-easy there, especially for children. Richmond Road was one of the more prosperous parts of Montpelier then and people in Richmond Road didn't mix very much, really. It took a long time to get to know anybody. We soon learnt that Mrs So-and-so was at home on such and such a day and that was it. If you wanted to visit her and get a reception, you visited her on that day! It was quite a change. Although, like everything else it started to deteriorate afterwards.

I went to school at St Barnabas. I started almost as soon as we moved up to Richmond Road. Mostly, I think, because the people next to the pub – there were five youngsters in there, two at school, and they went to St Barnabas. My parents went to St Barnabas so really it was a follow-on! And it was convenient. Basically it was nearer home than going up to Sefton Park, which was the next nearest. I used to go home to lunch sometimes. St Barnabas was all right, it was a school! There wasn't anything that was spectacular but we had a decent state of education.

The little shops in Richmond Road were very useful. On our side about halfway down, right facing the arch, they did fresh vegetables and fish. On the other side of the road, on the upper side of the arch there was a general store and on the other side of the arch, the very first store was a corn merchant – of course there was a lot of corn used around there in those days – and next door to them was a baker's shop with sweets and chocolates, all sorts of things like that. When you got to the bottom of the road there was a restaurant on the corner down there. Lovells, the draper, had three shops right down facing Richmond Road. As far as I remember, the draper's shop had three big double windows, so it was quite a big shop. Pitts, the electrical shop, took over part of it, then the other part got divided up. We lost Lovells, they went to the country, somewhere down in Somerset. In Picton Street, we had two butchers! One in the middle, with a slaughterhouse behind, and one up where the café is by the corner where it goes into a lane, that was a butcher. They sold fresh meat on the doorstep for people.

For quite a long while, horses were still used in the streets of Montpelier. To deliver the bread they used a horse and cart. The greengrocers used to come with a pony and cart – and the butchers with fresh meat, fish the same, and the milk, the milk came on a cart. Coal came that way, mostly from the coal merchant in the area by the goods yard at the station. We had a cat which liked riding horses and would jump up and get on their backs, so there was always little excitements around.

There were a number of cars in Montpelier pre-war, but you had to garage them and there were very few places that had garages. We had a car – you could take it down to your house and pick up if you were moving something or were going somewhere and had luggage but you couldn't leave it there. You had to move it. The nearest place we could get a garage was up across the railway bridge, there's a road up there with a row of garages and my father had one of those. He had to walk up there to fetch the car to go to work in the morning. It was quite a walk, really, but he did it.

I remember that a family of Salvation Army people lived opposite us, they had a daughter and the parents were officers in the Salvation Army; they were away quite a lot and they didn't know what to do about the young girl so quite often I would spend the weekends living over there when the parents were away, to keep the daughter company.

When I left school at fourteen I went to work at Andersons rubber factory. Somebody at school came to tell us about them, that there was jobs available, and as I was coming up to the leaving-school stage, I thought, well here goes! It was on machines. I went up there and made an appointment with him there and then, he was taking on people from school

to learn and I got the job. Of course I could work a machine – a very old machine, a Singer sewing machine with a treadle, not like the electric machines I was working on. They produced all sorts of things – rainwear. Leggings – men’s leggings which you used for motorcycle riding and jackets. If you were a rider you bought the leggings and the jacket. They did lots of smaller things – anything that was rubber, rubber clothing, almost anything. They had a variety of machines and the material was all pre-cut. There was a right way of doing it – you had to do it on the right machine, which was set to a pattern. It was good fun. Andersons were well-known, actually, for rubber rainwear. Yes, I was interested in it, I liked sewing and I got on very well there and I didn’t want to leave but my dad went up and gave in my notice, chiefly because my mother couldn’t stand the smell of rubber, so I had to finish. I was there about a twelvemonth I should think.

After I left Andersons my father was waiting in the wings – he had it all mapped out! So, commercial college! No choices! The college was in Victoria Street. It was a London school, actually, run by Underwoods, one of the original typewriter manufacturers. So I learned shorthand typing and became a penpusher. My first job was in the office of a paint factory.

When the war broke out I was in the wrong age-group, but eventually I had the call-up – which I wanted, they wanted me to go up North to do forestry, but my mother put in an application saying she had just lost her husband – which she had. My father was killed during an air-raid in 1941. They were trying to bomb the railway line to Avonmouth docks and they hit the houses opposite Paradise Cottage. My father and Mr Cox, our next-door neighbour, who was out fire-watching, were both killed. In one of the houses opposite an old lady and her companion were killed and in the other, which was a St John Ambulance post, everyone was killed. The gas and water mains in the road were fractured and there was damage to the roof and windows of our house. The top of one of the gateposts opposite was blown through the window of my room and landed on the bed. I was out of the room at the time. My brother had joined the RAF straightaway and my mother said she would be entirely on her own. She fought hard, and won in the end. So I stayed at home, unfortunately. I wish I’d moved on.

The war was the crossover between two different eras in Montpelier. Before the war, everything fell into place in its right order. It was organised without being organised, if you know what I mean! Montpelier Station had a ladies room there and there was a ticket office and two platforms. It was a proper station. The church in St Andrew’s Road was a centre for a whole range of activities and it was popular until the bombing era. A bomb damaged the tower and later they closed the church. That was quite a change. Things were different.