

# *Trentham Memories*

## **A Bit of Family History by Mike Smith**



Mike Smith – School photo 1953



**Trentham Heritage Project**

My paternal grandfather, Thomas Smith was born on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1870. He was a coalminer who lived in Hanford, originally on Janson Street. He was the second born of eight children to William Smith (born 1841) and Emma Hemmings. William's father was another Thomas Smith (born 1809) who was a tailor and lived at 61 Cliff Bank, Trent Vale. My grandfather married Annie Elizabeth Anderson born 1873 on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1892 and they had eleven children. My father - also named Thomas - was the eighth, born 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1909. When I was a child, they were living in a council house at 2, Florence Road.

Dad worked as a gardener in Trentham Gardens. He had a job lined up at the Michelin, but this was in the depression and his sister Annie's husband, Jim Bates was out of work with children, so Dad let him have the job. Dad never spoke much about his youth, but he was very keen on sport, he played cricket for Hanford and had a trial for Stoke City. I recall as a child, Dad could pitch a ball behind your legs and still hit the stumps, such was the leg spin he could put on the ball. He was unsuccessful with his trial for Stoke being described as "too selfish with the ball."

In 1938 Dad left Trentham Gardens to work for Geoff Corn at Meriden, on Barlaston Old Road in Trentham. He had been on thirty-three shillings a week at the Gardens and this went up to forty shillings at the Corns. Mum and Dad married on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1939 and life was then brutally interrupted by the war.



Mum and Dad's Wedding 1939

Dad being relatively old at thirty was not called up until 11<sup>th</sup> December 1940 and spent the first two years of service at Whittington Barracks near Lichfield. In the year before he was called up, he did extra jobs at Trentham Gardens including operating the spotlight from the balcony in the Ballroom where he witnessed many illicit affairs with many local men absent! He also drove one of the motor launches on the lake on busy Sundays, something he continued after the war when we children would get free rides.

Dad was quite tall, and he was offered the position of a Red Cap but turned it down, I think he liked being one of the boys too much. He was first posted to North Africa in the 1<sup>st</sup> Army where he was an anti-aircraft gunner at a town called Bone. Apparently, he never had the shirt off his back for six weeks in the defence of Bone. He then went to Crete and Greece where there was a civil war and he said you were never sure who was on which side. Later he went to Anzio in Italy, not a pleasant experience for the British. Mother said he once marched 2000 Italian prisoners on his own!



Dad in Greece

My maternal grandfather was Harold Heeley from Stone, he married Ann Bate who was the second child of eleven to Edward Bate (born 27/2/1848) and Emma Jane James (born 20/2/1859). Edward was one of three brothers born to



Ann Bate 1901

another Edward who is believed to have been a doctor while his wife was a midwife for Eccleshall. They must have been quite well off buying each of their three sons a farm. Edward Jnr was given a farm at Little Heath, Dunston and this was a place often visited by my mother when she was a child. My mother - born 20<sup>th</sup> February 1912 - was the youngest of three children of Harold and Ann although a cousin from Little Heath was brought up alongside her as another brother.

Grandad Heeley had a better job than the Smith side of the family, he was an agent for the Refuge Insurance Company and used to ride many miles on a bicycle all around the rural areas collecting premiums and selling policies. This job also gave him a company pension. My mother's eldest sister, Jean used to catch the train from Stone to Hanley (on the old Potteries Loop line) to her job at Bratt and Dyke. She was an accomplished pianist and made a bad career move when she started to play piano at a Hanley cinema in the days of silent movies only for talkies to come out very soon after!

Mum was born at 15 Victor Street, Stone at her mum's house which was rented from a Mr. Baggot who was the organist at the Congregational Church. His family owned quite a lot of property. Gran then moved to 69 Victor Street which was rented from a Miss Vernon who herself lived in a detached house in

Edward St. Six months later - circa 1930 - Gran bought No 7 Field Terrace where I was born. Mum and Dad married in 1939 and lived at 63 Victor St also rented from Miss Vernon and when Miss Vernon died all the houses she owned in Victor St were sold for £200 each.

Mum went to school at Stonefield School, Arthur St in Stone from ages five to seven and then Christchurch School in Northesk St. Stone which is still a school today. She worked at Lotus Shoes first on a folding machine and then marking out. With the advent of war and to avoid having to go to the armaments factory at Swynnerton she knew she would have to leave Lotus so she went to Alvis which was then where Morrisons is today. She started in the canteen making tea and after four months went into the factory working on a lathe cleaning aircraft pistons, including those from Merlins which powered the Hurricanes, Spitfires and Lancasters. From there she moved to the brewery premises on the Newcastle Road which were given over to the war effort and she continued working on pistons on an American lathe. Those buildings are still there today as Sanders' precision engineers. I remember we had a couple of ash trays at Melton which were in fact Merlin piston heads complete with the grooves for the piston rings.

Dad returned on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1945 but he was very ill with stomach ulcers caused by stress, worry and lack of food. Mrs. Corn was very accommodating suggesting he could return to work but at his own pace, Mum and Dad moved into Melton in March 1946. Mum said Dad suffered from nightmares almost every night for the first few months and I do recall being woken occasionally as a young child when Mum would say "Dad's having a bad dream about the war."

## **Family Life**

You will have gathered from my Dad's wages we were not well off but as children you don't see that and it is only when you look back that you understand, for example in all the time we lived at Melton we didn't have a TV, fridge or washing machine and never went on holiday other than to stay with my Gran in Stone for a week. In fact, my first holiday was when I was eighteen and spent a week in a caravan in Tenby with my girlfriend and her family. Today the Joseph Rowntree Foundation would include us as people "living in poverty" but we never thought that. All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed my childhood.

Although we had little money this was offset by the quality of our house "Melton" which was owned and presumably built by Mr. Corn. He, of course, was the managing director of Richards Tiles and the whole house had far more tiles than most. The kitchen had a tiled floor and fully tiled walls as did the larder. In the larder, instead of a fridge, was a thick stone slab also tiled. The living room was half tiled and there was a cooking range with a tiled door to the side oven. The hall floor was tiled as was the floor of the 'glory hole' the room under the stairs! The bathroom was of very high quality, all the walls fully tiled as well as the side of the bath and the shelves at the end, even the soap dish was a large special tile set into the wall.

Mother would use a dolly tub and mangle to do the washing, which was always done on a Monday, she was very proud if the weather was kind and she could wash, dry and iron in the same day. As well as the fireplace as part of the range there was a tiled fireplace in the front room and a fireplace in the main bedroom - a room where I would set up a card table and do my homework by the fire in the winter when I was a teenager at Longton High. In the winter even as a small boy of about seven I would light the main fire in the range on a Sunday morning when Mum and Dad didn't have to get up for work.

As mentioned before, we never had a TV but used to listen to the wireless. If you were in John's house next door at 6.45 pm you did not dare make a sound as his Dad listened to the Archers. I recall programmes like 'Have a Go' hosted by Wilfred Pickles – "Give him the money Mabel", then there was 'Life with the Lions' hosted by Ben Lion, The Goons, Hancock's Half Hour, Take it From Here, "Oooh Ron" spoken by June Whitfield and the Navy Lark, with its catchphrase "Left hand down a bit". My favourite was the detective Paul Temple and his



wife – Louise known as "Steve". There was a school quiz show which was called 'Top of the Form', Sunday lunch time was, of course, time for Family Favourites and the Billy Cotton Bandshow.

At the time our house and "Mowbray" next door - occupied by the Brassingtons, another gardener for Mr. Corn, were the only houses on what was then a cul de sac and is now Burrington Drive. The road was unmade and had no name and our address was Melton, off Barlaston Old Road.

Margaret sitting on the fence at the top of "Ash Lane" beside the gate into the field circa 1956.

At the end of the cul de sac was a gate to the field and a hedge in line with the perimeter hedge of Mowbray, to the right of the field gate was the back entrance to the Corn's kitchen garden and a very extensive apple orchard.

We nicknamed the lane as Ash Lane because my Dad would spread the ashes from the Corn's boilers in the lane. The Corns had three large coke fired boilers, two were in a cellar by the house to provide central heating and hot water and the other was to provide heating to the greenhouses and was situated between the two large greenhouses. One greenhouse was tended by Mr. Brassington and contained mainly house plants, I recall large Begonias and colourful Coleus as well as ferns. The second greenhouse was my Dad's domain where the young plants were reared, half of it was given over to tomatoes which was my job to water on a Saturday morning as a young child while Dad was busy cleaning the shoes of the Corn household.

### **The garden at "Meriden"**

The garden at the Corn's was very large and basically split into two divided by a tall brick wall on which the western facing side was covered in fruit trees including cherries, plums and pears.

In front of the house was the main lawn split in half by a crazy paved path which extended to the hedge which was and still is above the roadside wall, the grass between the wall and road was included in Dad's Friday mowing regime. The drive from the main gate up to the house had a small grass border and then about a yard wide on both sides was a magnificent floral display along the whole length of the drive. This would be wall flowers often followed by antirrhinums.



Bryan and Margaret on the grass between the main drive and flower borders at Meriden

At the top of the drive behind the house was a rose garden and behind that the tennis court followed by a flower bed up to the wall. At the south end of the tennis court was a large rockery which had a sunken area with a stone bridge across.

At the other end of the tennis court was a rose arch mounted on stone pillars and to the left of that a large area given over to rhubarb with a straw bed. I recall the rhubarb was forced using large clay sewer pipes stood on end.



Between the rhubarb and the greenhouses was an area given over to general flowers grown for cutting.

On the east side of the wall was a huge vegetable garden split into sections by three concrete paths, domed, so the water would run off. The first section by the wall only got the morning sun and was used to start off the wall flowers, the next section was the main garden, always starting at the "Ash Lane end" with runner beans then onions. Then followed the areas where crop rotation was required for carrots, parsnips, leeks, beetroot, peas, broad beans, potatoes, cabbage, sprouts, cauliflower, all interspersed with lettuce. There would be parsley at the side of the path. There was also a large area covered in netting for strawberries. This was split in half and the plants discarded after two years. This area was well tended with copious amounts of straw as the strawberries were a fundamental ingredient in the garden parties held by Mrs. Corn for charities.

I recall on one occasion my Mum was extremely worried that my sister, Margaret had gone missing, I was about eight at the time and Margaret would have been four and I realized from Mum's behaviour that this was serious. No matter how we shouted for her there was no reply until eventually I found her sitting amongst the strawberries munching away!

At the far end of the garden next to the field were two or three permanent rows of raspberries. There was an oak tree by the raspberries on the boundary of the garden and the field which may still be there. We made our tree house in this tree.

Next to "Ash Lane" between the greenhouses and the back gate were three flat roofed sheds. These will now be in the gardens of the new houses built when half the garden (the kitchen garden and orchard) was sold off. The first one by a gate into the front garden was the main potting shed. All the clay pots, tools and insecticides were stored there. It had a large bench covered in a galvanized sheet of metal on which the seed soil would be sterilized by putting hot bricks heated by the greenhouse boiler on the bench and under piles of soil. The seed soil was obtained from turf which had been piled up in the field at the end of Ash Lane and left for a couple of years.

The middle shed was a workshop with a vice. It contained timber and rolls of netting, lime, etc. As young boys we would make good use of this bench as we

made all manner of things including soapbox carts.

The third shed contained some very old bicycles which had been abandoned by the Corn children as they had grown up. They were ladies Raleigh bikes and one became mine and one John Brassington's so we learned when quite young how to ride two wheelers.

With the sheds having flat roofs it was common for our cricket balls and footballs to land up there and from very young ages we were able to climb up and retrieve them.

One of my earliest memories is driving a pedal car around the concrete paths in the vegetable garden. I would have been about two at the time and had

Me on my trike on Ash Lane with the hedge along the end 1950



been given the car by the Heeley side of the family. It was an American jeep with a star on the bonnet and a jerry can behind the seat. However, when I was three I was given a three-wheel trike, which cost nine guineas and was bought in equal shares by my Mum, my Aunt Ethel and my Gran. It was bought from Coopers in Stone which was on the right side of the High St, towards the bottom as you go down the street. As trikes go it was quite large, I remember John had one and even though he was two years older my trike was larger.

The next section of the vegetable garden was not cultivated but it would have been prior to and during the war when the Corn children were young and when they employed more staff such as kitchen maids. At the top end of this section were the gooseberry bushes.

Finally, there was a very large apple orchard with the third concrete path running through it. At a guess I would say there were at least 40 trees.

### **Other land nearby and boys' games**

As mentioned at the end of Ash Lane was a field, this field along with others belonged to Mr. Corn. It was rented out to Jim Fairbanks who farmed Ash Green farm which was opposite the end of Barlaston Old Road. The first twenty yards or so behind the hedge was not cultivated. It was the old drying



ground as used by the kitchen maids to hang out the washing. John and I had swings in this area, and I have a photo of us on the swing. The area was also used to provide and store the turf to make the seed compost as previously described. It also had the septic tank for Melton and Mowbray. Most importantly it was where we constructed our monster bonfires for Nov 5<sup>th</sup>. This reminds me that the boys (The Rileys and Lists) from Leyfield Road also had a bonfire in the next field and this created rivalry with attempts by them to light ours before Nov 5th only to be stopped by my Dad who was working late. We would scour the area for firewood, from the golf course across the road, in the hedges, as well as cuttings from hedges around the Corn's garden.

One year we decided we would cut down a large dead tree at the bottom of the field by the canal, it had been struck by lightning and was about two-foot diameter. We knew that when we had sawn through it would fall towards the canal so we therefore obtained numerous strands of wire and tied it back to other trees. But when we had sawn almost through it started to fall and snapped all the wires, so we were extremely lucky nobody was in line of the recoiling wires. We had severely underestimated the height of the tree and the trunk fell across the hedge and the smaller branches completely blocked the canal. In those days the canal still had working boats usually towing a butty. We had descended on it like beavers and started to saw off the branches when we heard the distant "thump thump thump" of a narrow boat's engine, but luckily we had cleared enough to allow it to pass. We then collected all the small branches and cleared the towpath but the trunk lay through the hedge for many years afterwards.

Mr. Corn in fact owned all the fields behind Barlaston Old Road and the canal except for the first field adjacent to Leyfield road. I think there were four fields and the line of Oldacres Road is basically the track across the first fields to the last one which was the largest and ended by a track which went over the little canal bridge and came out on Barlaston Old Road from where it continued across the road to Strongford on the A34. We knew the area it came out on Barlaston Old Road as Yockerton. It was, maybe still is possible to see the boundaries of the fields as some of the mature trees were left when the estate was built. The track from Barlaston Old Road across the canal then to New Park was all included in land belonging to New Park Farm, owned by Joe Tellwright and farmed by John Fairbanks the nephew of Jim at Ash Green Farm.

To this day "Ash Lane" has a step in the boundary wall of Meriden which was at the point of the tall wall dividing the garden. To the west of the step were

the greenhouses, the back walls of which were solid and whitewashed and to the east were the sheds. This step in the wall, more or less opposite Melton, was where we constructed our dens. Over the years we built one with turf walls and a corrugated sheet roof, this was followed by a brick one. We built the bricks without mortar but all properly interlocked. We were proud of this, and it was solid, but John's dad made us knock it down for fear it may fall on us. Who would know that later I would build numerous house extensions and become a reasonable bricklayer without any special training? Lastly, we built a hut from timber with metal sheets which was still there when I left aged sixteen, although we hadn't used it for some years. This had a fireplace and chimney inside on which we burned coke. We used it as a signal box to control signals we had erected along Ash Lane and rode our bikes as the trains. We even rigged up battery operated detector pads in the ground to illuminate lights in the box to show where the trains (bikes) were.

When I say we, there was myself and John and other friends who came regularly to Ash Lane such as the Proctor brothers who lived in Edward Ave and Ken Barker who was from Earls Street.

One year we made a very large soapbox cart, so big four of us could sit on it. The back wheels were 24 inch bike wheels. We rode it down Barlaston Old Road to Wedgwood where we rode it at speed down from the canal bridge, my brother Bryan suffered an accident when his heel got too close to the back wheel and the spokes took all his skin off!

### **More about family life and income**

In order to earn extra money Dad would also look after a number of smaller gardens for elderly people. He would take me along as a small child of about five or six and I would be set to weeding while Dad did the heavier jobs. One house was on Leyfield Road and the lady would bring me out a glass of orange juice and a digestive biscuit, unheard of at home, and would probably give me a shilling. In some other gardens when I was a bit older, I might get as much as half a crown!

Mum also took in washing for extra money. I can recall it was my job to deliver neatly stacked and ironed shirts to a house on Longton Road. I recall it was the house just above the care home opposite Oaktree Road.

Another evening job for extra money was taken on by my Dad and Mr. Brassington, and that was the planting of cabbages for Jim Fairbanks. These would become very large cabbages used for cattle food. They were planted a yard apart and were grown in the field at the top of Ash Lane. Mr. Fairbanks would mark out shallow furrows a yard apart with his machinery and then we would use a line at thirty degrees to these furrows and move it down the field a yard at a time. With the line in place Dad's spade would hit the furrow by the line and from the opposite side of the line I would put a cabbage under the line and into the hole, holding it there as he withdrew the spade and then moving my hand away quickly as his boot came down to heel it in and on to the next. John would be doing the same for his dad. The thirty-degree line had the effect of making the field look very orderly and straight lines could be seen from several directions. This would be typical of the way gardeners laid out formal flower beds. Again, I would be about seven or eight when I first did this job. Dad also tended the garden at Trentham Hotel including mowing the bowling green and I also helped with the weeding there but nobody came out with goodies so my dad would give me a shilling. I remember it was while weeding there that for the first time in my life I almost fainted as I stood up too quickly. Over the hedge from the bowling green was a grassed area with large round tables, this was a very popular area for families on hot summer evenings and we used to go there often as small children. The area is now part of the car park, while the bowling green is under the Travelodge.

Our own garden at Melton was used to grow our own vegetables, much the same list as Corn's garden but in addition both Dad and Mr. Brassington would grow Chrysanthemums some of which Dad would sell in Trentham Hotel for his beer money but the majority were collected on a Friday evening and stood in buckets of water in our "lounge" until a lorry from John Titley and Sons arrived with long cardboard boxes in which the Chrysanths would be laid on supporting sections to keep the heads from being damaged. Even in those days around 1956/7 he would get a shilling each for the best blooms.

Another job Dad did for extra money would be as a caddy on the golf course on Barlaston Old Road. A number of men would turn up and it was pot luck if sufficient players needed a caddy.

In the early years after the war food rationing continued and to supplement the meat we would often have rabbit caught locally. I can see Mum skinning a rabbit now, not a pretty sight. I never thought much about it and quite liked it until one day I found lead shot on my plate. Although I have never been a

vegetarian, I have never eaten rabbit from that day. Having a reasonably large garden and growing much of our own food meant although we had little money, we never went hungry.

One treat we had was on summer Sundays when we would look forward to the Walls ice cream van coming up Ash Lane. We would either have an ice cream then or Mum would buy a small block for later use at teatime. The Ice Cream man would give her a small block of dry ice (carbon dioxide) and this would be wrapped with the ice cream in newspaper and placed on the setlace. At tea time to avoid squabbles the block would be shared using a ruler!

I can also recall Mr. Fairbanks haymaking in the fields at the top of Ash Lane. At first although he had one of the early Fordson Tractors in dark blue he was still using cart horses as well. The tractor would tow the wagon over the row of dried hay and behind the wagon would be an elevator. This was powered by its own iron wheels and picked the hay up and over the end of the wagon where it was placed by one or two of his workers. This was a few years before the hay was baled. Once a wagon was full it would be taken to Ash Green farm by a cart horse.

One-year Jim Fairbanks asked us children to thin out the mangels he had sown in the field. Normally they would be thinned by his men using hoes to knock out all seeds leaving one every nine inches. Jim gave us nine-inch sticks which we used as we crawled down the field, knees either side of a row. I must have been about nine and there was the usual group of us who set about it. He promised us sixpence a row. A row was the full length of the field down to the canal. 150 yards at a guess. We put some time in on this and when we went to collect our wages Jim was most surprised how much we had done, and I know I went home with £1, a fortune in those days.

In later years John and I had a reputation for getting on with a job and we were often in demand by both Jim and in my case more so with John Fairbanks at New Park where I worked every weekend and school holiday from Easter 1960 when I was thirteen until John left in the seventies. In very busy times on the farm, when I was in the Lower 6<sup>th</sup> at Longton and we had double physics on a Wednesday morning with games in the afternoon I would ask my classmate to put carbon paper in his book and give me the notes. I came to no harm with an A in physics and we would also help out at John's father's farm in Chebsey. The main reason for these completely unofficial jobs, all cash in hand, was that as a teenager my parents could not afford pocket money and the money went

on my bike, my clothes and trips to the cinema in Hanley and Stoke and later on nights out at The Crystal in Newcastle or Top Rank in Hanley.

### **Extended family**

As very young children we would visit my Gran and Grandad in Stone every Saturday. We would walk from Melton to Trentham Station and catch a train at about 11.00am. I think my Gran subsidised the fares, Gran's house was very lively on a Saturday, many other of my cousins would drop in, I recall particularly Bert Selwood who worked as a Chemist in Boots but often called wearing his cricket gear as he played for Little Stoke. Also my Uncle Joe (really my Mum's cousin), who had a good job at Lotus and was married to Aunt Rena (the Scottish term for Catherine) who had her own hairdressers on Lichfield Street in Stone. They had no children and lived in a bungalow designed by them on Lichfield Road not far from the Three Crowns at Little Stoke. Uncle Joe drove a red TR2. After a bite to eat we would always have a trip down the High Street. We would catch a train home at about 4pm. This went on for some years until you had to start paying fares for my younger brother and sister when we would then walk to Ash Green and go by bus as the fares were cheaper. Stone High Street was then very busy as there was no bypass. Buses on a Saturday between Hanley and Stafford (in those days it was the No.10 service by the PMT) were every twelve minutes such was the demand, and they were double deckers.

I can recall the day when we were walking home from the station, and I felt quite ill. Mum asked me to hold onto Margaret's pushchair while we crossed Longton road to walk along Oaktree Road, and I assumed she would ask Mrs Corn to phone the doctor (Dr. Browne from Barlaston) I had scarlet fever and it was suggested we all caught it and afterwards the bedrooms were sealed and fumigated.

Occasionally but not as often we would visit my Dad's family in Hanford. We would walk up New Inn Lane and look forward to spotting the terraced row towards the top as you then knew you were getting there. We would go to our grandparents at No 2 Florence Road but Gran died when I was very young. Often Dad's sister Hilda would be there, she lived in Janson St. and Uncle Ken still lived at No 2 ( actually he wasn't Uncle Ken but a nephew of Dad) We would also visit Dad's brother Bill and his family in Leveson road and another sister Helen who lived opposite Bill.

## Schooldays

I started school at the old Trentham Junior and Infants school opposite the Café Monica in 1951 when I was just five. Mum walked me to school that day and I can recall being lined up with about five or six others who started at the same term to be allocated our tables in Mrs. Eagles' class. Mrs. Eagles' daughter, Susan was in the same class and shared a double desk with me in our last year at the school 1957 - 58. The second day I walked to school with John from next door who was two years older.



Mrs Ellerton's class of 9 year olds in 1956.  
Michael is next but one to Mrs Ellerton on the back row

Can you imagine that these days, a mile walk to school as seven and five-year olds - and unaccompanied?

I never had school dinners at Trentham and would walk home at lunch time and catch the bus back or vice versa depending on the timetable. The bus was a single decker on the Hanley to Barlaston route via Stoke and Campbell Road.

My brother Bryan is two and a half years younger so, other than on his first day he walked with me. I would then have done a year with Mrs Eagles followed by a year with Mrs Massey and was in Mrs Hanwell's class (the wife of Hanwell's opticians who were on Glebe St. in Stoke). Because the infants finished about half an hour before the Juniors, Bryan would come and sit with me when I was in Mrs Hanwell's class. There were other siblings who did the same. I expect Margaret who was four years younger than me would have sat with Bryan.

After Mrs. Hanwell was Mrs Ellerton who cycled to work from Barlaston and we always tried to beat her as far as 'Ash Lane' on the way home. Another pointer to my later modest success as a runner for Longton High and Newcastle AC.



The final two years were with Mr Wilson, who along with the head, Mrs Pollard, made sure we all passed the 11 plus. In the months leading up to it we did mock papers every Wednesday instead of having sport. In the first year in Mr Wilson's class I had yellow jaundice and was off school for several weeks.

When Margaret started school Mum got a part time job as a cleaner in the house belonging to the Bedsons who ran the store on Brough Lane. She was well liked there and stayed until she retired well in her 70s. She remained very friendly with Mrs Bedson, who, when she retired, moved onto the estate on the right as you go up Dog Kennel Lane.



The teachers at Trentham School 1958

## Sunday School

As young children we would also go to Sunday School at the Methodist Hall on Barlaston Old Road. I recall being given colouring-in sheets depicting bible stories and each year there was an anniversary concert which I detested and did my best to get out of. The good thing was the annual Sunday school outing and I recall one when we went by coach to Drayton Manor park. Late in the afternoon I was watching a train ride, basically a tractor done up to look like a train towing a number of small trailers and going around a pathway between very close laurel hedges and I became detached from our party. Mum found me just as it started to rain heavily. As we made our way back home along the A51 I remember it went as dark as night and there was a huge thunderstorm which seemed to follow us home where we found Dad hiding under the stairs, he was frightened stiff of thunderstorms I think because the noise took him back to that he had experienced operating anti-aircraft guns and the noise of war generally.

Mrs Hooker who lived in Brough Lane was our teacher, but we knew this wasn't school and I confess me and Ken Barker misbehaved somewhat and didn't go after we were about nine.

## **Railways and Train Spotting**

In those days trainspotting must have been one of, if not the most popular hobby for young boys. I recall getting a new bike, again via my Grandparents in Stone, it was a Hercules with dropped handlebars and a three speed gears. I would be about ten at the time and having exhausted the likely locomotives we would see at Trentham (there were only 9 expresses a day and the named locomotives tended to be regulars) we rode our bikes up Dog Kennel Lane across Hanchurch Cross roads onto the A53 and down to Whitmore, more specifically Baldwins Gate where we would see some of the most famous locomotives and trains of the day such as the Royal Scot, The Caledonian and The Irish Mail.

When we arrived, we would lean our bikes against the three-rail wooden fence, climb over and sit on the embankment. Sometimes our bikes would be 6 or 7 deep as we joined hundreds of other boys from all over the Potteries. Nowadays there is a huge palisade fence to stop such trespass, but the authorities never bothered us even though occasionally someone would go down to the first track (a slow freight line) and put pennies on the line.

Once there we would eat our picnic sandwiches perhaps buy a bottle of pop from the shop opposite the Sheet Anchor and regularly see over one hundred trains a day. I can recall riding the same bike all the way to Stafford along the A34 and returning via Norton Bridge.

The last day of the school summer holidays was always a trainspotting day and in the company of John Brassington and Alan Proctor who were both two years older we would take the train to Wolverhampton where we would walk from the high level station to the low level where we would enter the polished brass world of the Great Western Railway with its Kings, Castles, Manors, Halls, Granges and Counties. There was always a chance you might see County of Stafford No 1027 or even Trentham Hall No.5915.

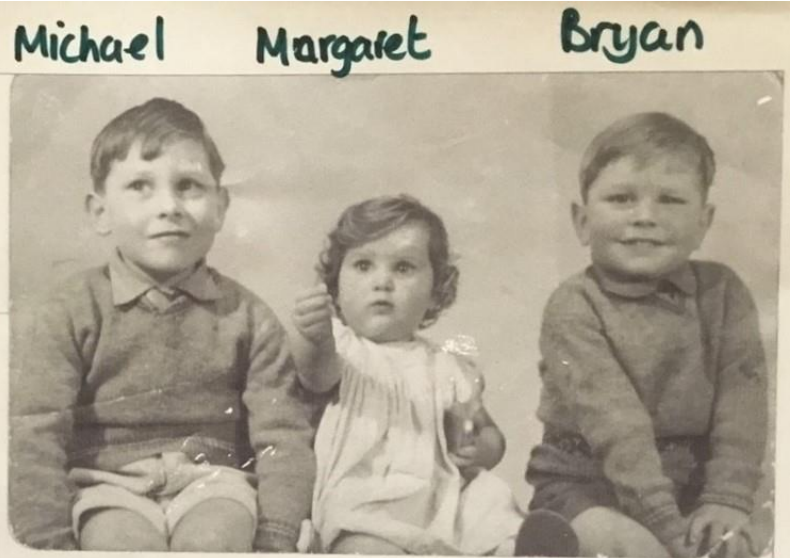
Trainspotting is now looked down on but in those days much could be learned from the names of the locomotives, the most prestigious of the LMS being named after the Royal Family or Cities of the UK and the Jubilee class was a lesson in British Colonies.

My last trainspotting expedition would have been September 1959 when I was twelve years old.

## Some photos from the family album



Margaret and me taken on "Ash Lane" outside Melton in approx 1956. Mum would have made Margaret's dress and I am on the ladies' bike which belonged to the Corns



A studio portrait taken in Stone on the High Street around Christmas 1951



My Mum with me on the wall of Melton 1947



My Dad holding me in the back garden of Melton 1947



John Brassington and me on our swing in the field at the top of Ash Lane. The field gate is propped open



Bryan and me on the wall of Melton in May 1950



Me and Mum in the back garden of 7 Field Terrace Stone April 1948



The three of us taken in the car park one evening at Trentham hotel c1956





My maternal grandmother and grandfather c1926



Post war street party in Field Terrace Stone  
My Mum is third from the left and my Aunt Ethel is next to her



Gran and Grandad later in life circa 1952



Mum and Gran in back garden of 7 Field Terrace Stone in 1936



Mum sitting on the mound to the bottom left of the field at the end of Ash Lane. Behind the hedge to the right of the picture is the canal and to the left would be the end of Beechfield road, so she will be on land belonging to a property towards the end of Danebower road.





This is me on the bike I bought from my first year's savings working as a schoolboy at New Park Farm.

I bought it from Roy Swinnerton's in Fenton at Christmas 1960 and it cost £33.

I was 14.

John Fairbanks is holding the bike upright and behind is the Cowshed/Milking shed of New Park Farm.



Trentham Gardens Railway circa 1960