

Looking back

In an article first published ten years ago, Tony Bradley, a former local resident shared his memories of growing up in Heswall during the 1930s.



On my bike aged 2½

Don't knock nostalgia! It is also social history. A fleeting reference to my father Bill Bradley in a previous issue has sparked off many memories. He actually did not own the bike shop on the corner of Downham Road. That was his brother Jack with whom my father worked for a while. Jack overreached himself financially building the shop which became the Library eventually and went bankrupt. Bill had to find another way forward.

Family

My father and mother, Doris, did what many did in those days, emerging from poor family backgrounds through domestic service into shopkeeping. Bill's parents were a gardener and domestic servant in a large house in Childer Thornton. Like so many, Bill went into the army in the war before he was 18. He drove some of the first army supply lorries in France, was gassed and then sent to East Africa. He never talked much about his experiences, pretty traumatic for a country lad. His brother Tom was killed in France in 1918. Doris was one of three Kendrick girls from Buckley in Flintshire who came to Heswall into domestic service. Kate married Fred Greenwood, a shipyard worker who later became the caretaker of the Parish Hall. Gladys married Bob Lamb, one of the farming family who had a farm at the bottom of School Hill and fields dotted around Lower Heswall, most of which now lie under new(ish) housing developments. Doris worked in Styvelooms in the Lower Village and then in Oldfield Road before she met and married my father.

First house

Their first house was 6 West Grove, where I was born in 1928. My first memories are of sitting in a pram at the top of the yard and being knee-high to a policeman who was a lodger. Times were hard. It was an idyllic time to be a toddler and then a little boy however. West Grove and School Hill were traffic free and next to the Park. My bosom companion was Thelma Mousley, daughter of 'Aunt' Kitty a very good friend of my mother – also out of domestic service – who was married to Jim a chauffeur/gardener in a huge house with a very long 'roomed' garden in Farr Hall Road. We played in the road and in the park pretty well as soon as we could walk. It was totally safe. I still look down on modern delphiniums because the ones in the park were well over my head, so these days any delphinium less than ten feet tall is puny by comparison with my toddler memories! We lived opposite the Church School where I was to end up eventually.

The Mount

Somewhere about 1931 we moved up to live in the Mount by the bottom of Mount Avenue opposite the doctor's surgery with the Castle grounds across the road. The houses there were a labyrinth and we lived in at least three parts of the buildings before we settled in the shop which my father and mother opened as the Cycle Shop in what is now a children's clothes shop. Starting up was difficult in the Depression with a history of a bankrupt brother. They had £27 hard-earned to stock the shop. All the stock was in the window, replaced when sold from a very supportive wholesaler, Mr Bibby, who lived opposite Ness Gardens in a house which I still look at with affection whenever we visit the Gardens. Dad worked in a small repair shop at the back and Mum kept the shop. She had started work as a 14-year-old in Buckley Co-op when the men were away at the War and the training stood them in good stead. The Co-op was always a force in our family economy. There was one at the top of School Hill and later we went to the one at the top of Pensby Road. I still remember the 'divi' number 48631 from my many trips to get things and going into Birkenhead to collect the divi(dend) as it built up. Behind the shop was a yard surrounded by corrugated iron sheds housing sundry stores. Next to our shop was Alfred Male the builder and a lot of stuff was based at the back. I well remember George Law who worked for Males through my early years as a genial giant who was great at knocking things down and, though I don't remember this so much, putting things up again.

Addition to the family

The shop prospered. By the time I was rising five and likely to go to school they could afford another child and brother Alan was duly born in 1933! After a while the tradition of domestic service came full circle and we had help in the form of Mollie Lightfoot, a school-leaver who was a great friend and support in the next few years and sadly missed when she left. I believe she became eventually landlady of the Glegg Arms. I learned to ride a bike in the yard and my play area now extended to the Dales, easily reached down Feather Lane. The kids on the block were Phil and Audrey Stanley at that time.