

*New Bilton  
Community Association*

*'CHANGES IN  
OUR LIFETIME'*

*The New Bilton Golden Jubilee  
Commemoration Project  
1939 - 1989*

*Published July 2003*

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The New Bilton Community Association (NBCA) have commissioned the production of this booklet, 'Changes In Our Lifetime' to commemorate and record the memories and recollections of past and present residents of New Bilton. The focus of 'Changes In Our Lifetime' is on the years 1939 to 1989 and looks at the reminiscences of past and present residents, including, schooling, local businesses, local 'characters' and anything the meant something to the residents of the area they fondly describe as 'Happy Valley'.

The NBCA hopes that you enjoy the trip down the memory lane of New Bilton and that these recollections mean something to you too or that they trigger some of your own memories of your local area.

***The NBCA would like to acknowledge and thank Awards For All, Community Education and the Rugby Area Planning Team, who have funded this project. They would like to extend their thanks and appreciation to everybody who has contributed to this project and was generous enough to share their memories.***

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The NBCA would like to thank all residents for their contribution to this project, with particular thanks to those who have shared their memories through the New Bilton News, our community newspaper over the last 5 years. The NBCA's thanks also go to Louise Webb, Oral History Consultant who researched and collated this booklet.

***Sheela Hammond, Chairman NBCA, Editor New Bilton News***

## *New Bilton Geography, as Was*

***When asked about the development of New Bilton and how the geography has changed over the years it seems most people recall the decline in local business and shops and the later addition of the newer roads in New Bilton.***

“The following list of shops and off-licences existed during the period 1922 to 1960, (I knew most of the shopkeepers personally), from West Leys to Jubilee Street and Pinfolds Pit (now grassed over fields)”.

- ❖ Champions Pet Food & Dog Food
- ❖ Cherry Tree Terrace
- ❖ Engine Public House
- ❖ Austin Shoe repairs
- ❖ Bryants Fruit & Veg
- ❖ Groococks Sweets
- ❖ Bennett’s Antiques
- ❖ Lissamer Off-Licence
- ❖ Co-op Stores & Grocery
- ❖ Golby Sisters Women’s Clothes
- ❖ Haggars Off-Licence & General Stores
- ❖ Botteril Fish Shop
- ❖ Yorkyies Fish Shop
- ❖ Line DK Bakers, Bread & Cake Makers
- ❖ Turner Newsagents & Sweets
- ❖ Foxon Barbers
- ❖ Wilkie Dairy Shop
- ❖ Smith Fruit Shop
- ❖ WH Smith Chemist
- ❖ Brooks Shoe Repairs
- ❖ Green Post Office & Grocery
- ❖ Whites fruit Shop
- ❖ Watts Fruit & Fish
- ❖ Bissels Sweets
- ❖ Morton Off-Licence
- ❖ Cowlshaws – Children’s & Women’s Clothes
- ❖ Becks Newsagent & Sweets
- ❖ Wells Milkman
- ❖ Holton Sweets etc
- ❖ Weston Paint / Sign Writer
- ❖ Arnold Oil, General Stores, soaps etc
- ❖ Peets Fish & Chip Saloon
- ❖ Wells General Store & Off-Licence
- ❖ Parker Skin & Sack Merchant
- ❖ Club – Conservative Working Men’s
- ❖ Dobbin Gilbert – Wallpaper, comics, newspapers paint etc
- ❖ Sam Robbins Motor Engineer / Car Garage (Repairs)
- ❖ Half Moon Public House
- ❖ Horse & Jockey Public House
- ❖ Simms Pork Butchers
- ❖ Rainbows Furniture Retailer
- ❖ Elliot Butchers
- ❖ Taylor Grocers
- ❖ Randall’s Women & Children’s Clothing
- ❖ Co-op Grocers
- ❖ Holly Bush – Public House
- ❖ Worthings Oak Grocers
- ❖ Marriott’s Sweets
- ❖ Yardley’s Garage Repairs

***Submitted by R H Dumbleton***

“Remembering how New Bilton used to be, every corner had a shop, we were living on Victoria Street, we used to go through to York Street, where there was an off-licence. There was another shop run by Pop Mitchell, a cobbler, who was very big in the Scouting Association. The other corner used to be Peet’s off-license and across the road was Watts Fruit & Veg. Down Bridget Street, there was Bill Smith’s Fruit & Veg Shop and there was Wilkins the Dairy Shop, which was opposite the chemist, which is now a house.”

***Graham Gare, New Bilton Resident***

“On the corner of Victoria Avenue and Avenue Road was Mitchell’s Shoe Shop and on the opposite corner of Victoria Avenue and Bridget Street there was Spencerly’s Sweet Shop and grocers. Opposite this was Watts the Greengrocers on the corner of Victoria Street and Bridget Street, opposite this was Peets Off-Licence.

Outside the shoe shop was a Gas Lamp, which in the 1930’s was a meeting place for people, ‘Meet you under Mitchell’s Lamp’. This lamp did get knocked down once and we (The Mitchell’s) had to plug the pipe with newspapers to stop the gas escaping, the clock was brought in to the shop, which made it smell of gas for ages. The lamp was also the meeting place

during the war for the Fire Watchers when a raid was imminent.

On the corner of Avenue Road and Gladstone Street was a Ladies and Children’s Outfitters and Haberdashery, Cowlshaws which later became Stewarts. The opposite corner was Becks the paper shop, further down was a Greengrocers called Kennings, next was Penny’s the electrical shop and a bit further down was Arnolds the Hardware shop, next to which was the fish and chip shop, I believe it was called Peets which later became Wombles. There were other shops on the other side but I cannot recall names.”

**Ena Miller, resident of New Bilton until 1951**

## *The Way We lived...*

***A time to reminisce about times when we didn’t have it so easy, funny how nobody seemed to mind.....***

“Remembering back to the late 1970’s there was a strike and so there was a bread shortage, Mrs Alderman used to run a bakery by the crossroads and we all used to queue up for bread when the strike was on.”

**Mrs Harris, previous New Bilton Resident**

“I have lived in New Bilton for fifty years. Before that as a lad and living in Stretton, we used to visit my aunt and uncle, Fanny and Harry Jarvis in New Street. I remember seeing a little old lady in a black cloth cap and a black apron carrying a jug going to the Holly Bush to get her husband’s supper ale. When they built the area the Victorians restricted the number of public houses to the Holly Bush and the Royal Oak for the whole of New Bilton. But there were off-licences on nearly every corner. People could have as much beer as they liked provided it was drunk under the watchful eye of the good lady of the house. It was called Happy Valley not because it was happy, quite the contrary, it was common for men to settle their differences with fisticuffs particularly after closing hours.

One famous story is that of the police sergeant who was posted to New Bilton. He announced, “Before I’ve been here a month, you will be able to hang your gold watch on the doorknocker.” That night, his rabbits were pinched from his back garden. He wasn’t very pleased!”

**Percy Smith, Edward Street**

“My first real memories of living in New Bilton are obviously of those at home. My family lived in a three bedroomed terraced house with an outside toilet and no bathroom. My mother’s kitchen had a red quarry tiled floor. Next to the ‘New World’ gas cooker was a stone Belfast sink with a wooden draining board and a cold water tap above the sink. In the corner there was a brick fireplace housing what was known as a copper. The copper was filled and then the fire was lighted to heat the water to wash the clothes. A wooden stick and tongs were then used to lift the steaming linen in to the adjoining Belfast to be rinsed and wrung, then they were put through a large mangle before being pegged out to dry. The shirts had to be folded correctly to avoid breaking the buttons.

The copper was the only available method to heat sufficient water to fill the large tin bath which used to hang on a nail next to the coal house. The bath would be brought into the kitchen and the hot water ladled out with a large saucepan. To empty the bath the water had to be ladled out into the sink until the bath was light enough to be manoeuvred outside and the remaining water poured down the drain. Rain water was collect in a large water butt, this water was used to water plants and also heated on the stove to wash our hair in soft water.’

The houses were built circa 1911 to provide cheap housing initially for Co-op employees in the area.

They remained as Co-op properties until they were offered for sale to the tenants who wished to buy, the remainder being sold to a Housing Association. My grandparents moved from London in the early 1900’s and rented the property from new, my father lived there until 1998. Apparently during WW II several people in Victoria Street kept pigs and chickens in their back gardens in order to supplement their diet. My family had a chicken coop and my brother used to cycle to Church Lawford to select the hens for their laying potential and presumably plumpness for the table. We continued to keep chickens until the late 40’s. My father also had an allotment for growing vegetables as did quite a few other families.

The Co-op were responsible for the maintenance and external painting of the properties and it was a matter of pride to constantly polish the brass letter boxes, (I still have the original which was taken off when the old front doors were replaced). The granite front steps and window sills were scrubbed as they were constantly covered with cement dust from the local chimney. Until the chimney was heightened in the 60’s the slate roofs at the lower end of Lawford road always appeared to have a light dusting of snow on them.”

**Carol O’Brien, previous New Bilton Resident**

“On a recent snowy day, sitting by the gas fire, my mind went back to the days of those nice coal fires. Welcoming and homely they may have been but they had many drawbacks, the worst being the chimney sweeps. The last of the old sweeps working in New Bilton was Alf Flavell. He travelled the district on a pony and cart. On the eve of his arrival, we removed all pictures and mirrors from walls. Furniture was covered with old sheets; carpets rolled back and newspapers put down. Alf would arrive, park his pony and cart. He would secure the pony by placing a half hundred weight on the road and tie rope to the weight that he then tied to the pony’s harness. He would grumble, “This is a bad chimney. When was it last done?”

The soot was then put in an old hessian sack and carried out leaking. “That will be two shillings, missis, and that’s the same old price, and have you got a crust of bread for the pony?” Alf would always light a piece of paper in the chimney to test the draw. “That’s better now”. Quite a performance all round. Better than being fined 7/6d for allowing your chimney to go on fire.

Old Alf’s retirement was hastened with the arrival of Mr Douglas, a man with a van and a vacuum. Not as much entertainment, but so much cleaner.”

***Phil Kilding, Seabroke Avenue***

## *The Integration & Diversity of New Bilton*

“The immigration of the Asian population Of New Bilton came about in the early 60’s and was because of the need for labour and the subsequent availability of jobs in GEC, the English Electric and AEI, located in Mill Road. Parents of this generation emigrated from East Africa; Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, at first there was hardly anybody here and no Asian communities, possibly 12 people, the menfolk and husbands came to New Bilton. They then wrote back to their families and told them to come to Rugby as they would always be able to find work.

My father came over in 65 and rented No. 1 Avenue Road, 12 months later the rest of the family

followed, from this point the Asian population started exploding. Around this time the Newbold Road became the ‘Berlin Wall’, it was them and us, the Asian population of the Benn Ward wanted their own Community Centre. We ended up meeting at the Chapel Street Caribbean Centre. In 1966 it was my sisters wedding, it was the first New Bilton Asian wedding and it was celebrated in St Oswald’s Church Hall. From then on the older boys and girls wanted to get married and the Asian Community kept looking for their own place to hold weddings etc but kept using the Caribbean Centre in the meantime.

Within a year or two, families were looking to buy houses very close to the factory, in the 60's and early 70's they cost about £500 - £1,000, the only problem being that everybody was earning on average £8 - £12 and that wasn't enough to get a mortgage and they didn't have the 20% deposit needed to pay. The manager at the Halifax, Mr Hurst recognised that the Asian and Caribbean people were very hardworking and always paid their taxes and realised that the money would be a sound investment as they would rather starve than not pay the mortgage. In the late 60's word spread on the grapevine that if you needed a mortgage then you should go to the Halifax. Trevor hall, CRE Officer in the 1970's publicly thanked Mr Hurst after his retirement during a meeting.

After renting the house in Avenue Road, we moved to York Street, people by then were buying houses either near GEC or AEI, dependant on where they worked.

In 1970, in Pennington Street, the first Multi-Racial Youth Centre and Racial Council opened, the young people needed somewhere but there had been no centre to go to and then the only problem was that there was a wide mix of communities needing the facilities, West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis, so it came about that the centre was used by different people on different days, Fridays was the Asian Youth Club, Mondays was the West Indian night and so on. It was Trevor that said that everybody should mix together irrespectively and it took 2 to 3 years

but eventually everybody all started meeting together Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays.

During the years 70 to 73, the New Bilton and Benn Ward were still arguing, but the battle of the 'Berlin Wall' was eventually won and in 79 we acquired the old TA Centre for £20,000. All the families donated a minimum of £50, pooling their salaries, during which time, we kept functioning as a committee and meeting everywhere or anywhere we could. Trevor Hall helped to obtain money and through funding from the Department of Education the centre was refurbished and opened in 81. Gradually the barriers broke down, the new centre had sparked the row about the purpose of the centre and if it should be religious or cultural or more for social purposes and should have a drinks licence, the younger generation won out and the centre was used for community events and religious events etc. It was around then that the younger generation started moving on and buying houses elsewhere.

At the beginning it didn't always seem so appealing considering the climate we had come from, I was 13 when we arrived and it was the 1st of November and I had to walk a good distance to school, the weather was damp, moist and foggy. It was quite a depressing thought and many of us could remember thinking, what the hell are we doing here? I'd been here 3 months and had just got used to the weather when I had to take my first walk to school in the snow.

It was really cold but we couldn't afford a coat, I went to the Lawford Road where they were selling ex RAF gear, my coat was 10 sizes too big, I used to wear a pair of second hand Dr Martens from the market with woolly socks and a monkey cap brought from Kenya. We used to walk to school dressed like that 4 or 5 of us holding on to each other trudging through the snow!

Looking back, that is the history of why so many Asian communities are here today, they have played a large part in the development of this area, in which there are few racial problems, everybody interacts and integrates. Today, I am pleased to say that the Indian Centre is the focus for many of the activities in Rugby."

***Ish Mistry, New Bilton Resident***

"I can remember when New Bilton used to be called Happy Valley. When I moved here, being West Indian, it was quite daunting as we weren't accepted initially as we thought we would be, it wasn't integrated at that time."

***Mrs Harris, previous New Bilton Resident***

## *Local Businesses, 'Characters' & Buildings*

***It seems that one of the fondest recollections of New Bilton was the many businesses which meant locals never needed to go far to get exactly what they needed. It seems the 3 fish 'n' chip shops are some of those most sorely missed!***

"A lot of buildings aren't there now, there used to be schools which have closed. There was also a Shopping Centre in Bridget Street where you could buy anything, including fish, meat, clothes etc, there were 3 off licences and there was never any need to go into town for anything like you have to now."

***Mrs Harris, previous New Bilton Resident***

"From a very young age I used to love spending time in the family business, we used to run a shoe shop called Mitchell's, my father was a shoe repairer and we had a workshop out the back.

You know how children can be when it's time for new shoes, they used to get a bit stropy so my dad used to call me in to play with the children and entertain them whilst their parents used to try their shoes on. During the 30's and 40's a Children's Welfare Clinic was held in the New Bilton Methodist Chapel on Lawford Road. My grandmother, Mrs Laura Reeve was a helper and was sometimes helped by me."

***Ena Miller, resident until 1951***

***'Pop' Mitchell outside his shoe shop, a favourite character remembered by many.***



***You may remember Harold 'Pop' Mitchell for one of his many involvements in New Bilton, including Mitchells Shoe Shop and Repairs, his association with the Rugby Scout Movement or his role as a Special Constable and later Sargeant.***



***Pictured Above: Phylis Arnold as a young child photographed outside her fathers hardware business, which Phylis recalls herself and her sister helping with.***

“Most of us will have heard of the French detective Inspector Maigret and can remember the series on television, but not so many will remember that he used to park his car at the town end of New Street just above the junction with Newland Street. It was my task to take the accumulator to Harpers for recharging and on most occasions, parked nearby was the very distinctive Citroen saloon. What did you need an accumulator for you may well ask. They were an essential source of power for the battery radios and caused the valves to glow brightly. Penny’s in Avenue Road also provided the service that was no longer required with the coming of “all mains” sets in the late 1930’s.

In those days many other services were provided at your door. The bakers I remember were Lines, Cowley’s and Roberts. The Lines deliveries were made in a compact, two-wheeled van drawn by a pony. In contrast Cowley’s came round on a very large four-wheeler drawn by a Shire horse, and since they came from far distant Oxford Street was probably very necessary. Mr Roberts, whose shop was at the corner of Lawford Road and Jubilee Street was into the modern age with a three wheeled Reliant van. The driver’s position was completely open on both sides, and he sat astride a motor bike with handle bar steering, the engine driving the two rear wheels. One of Mr Roberts, ‘kids’ specials’ was his ‘traffic light’, a rectangular piece of flaky pastry with three circular recesses containing red, yellow and green jam.

Other horse drawn deliveries included Patchet’s, the fishmonger and various coal merchants. Hardware is a rarely used description these days but long ago it meant the weekly arrival of a red, open backed covered lorry with a large tank at the rear vending dusters, dish clothes, all cleaning materials and polishes, scrubbing brushes and paraffin. This was a service provided by “Arnolds” of Avenue Road, found close by was “Penny’s”.

Our daily pint came from the Co-op who had a storage building at Upton’s Farm, opposite the end of pope Street on Addison Road. The round was made with a two-wheeled handcart pushed by Bill Manning, who later was to become Rugby’s mayor. An electric milk float later displaced the handcart. Ice cream came round on tricycles with a big cool box mounted on the front and propelled by pedal power from the vendor. Wall’s (Stop Me and Buy One) and Raynes, the local rugby man, competed for our halfpennies and pennies.

Few will remember the travelling furniture show rooms that toured our pre-war streets. These huge vans were fitted out to show all the latest designs that were made to half-full size or less, to conserve space in the van. Kingston’s of Leicester were often seen in New Bilton. Delivery to your door, plus easy payments, if required, and a free gift was, even in those days, all part of the incentive to buy.

One final thought on the street scenes of yesteryear. When the cement company re-equipped their lorry fleet with vehicles fitted with the very latest in power brakes, every lorry and trailer without exception carried on their tailboard in bold lettering the question “Can you stop if I do?” Well, I can and I have.”

***Colin Jarvis, Co Durham, previous New Bilton Resident***

## Schooling, The Best Years of Your life?

**Is there anybody without a memory from school?! Whether it's a favourite teacher or a lesson you'll never forget do you remember them as the best years of your life...?**

**WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL.**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE.**

**EXCELLENT**

St. Oswald's C.E. SCHOOL

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDING July 31<sup>st</sup> 1941.

SCHOLAR'S NAME James Fallen FORM Sta. 3.

Subject	Remarks
ENGLISH:	
READING	Ex
COMPOSITION	Ex
SPELLING	Ex
ARITHMETIC	Problems Ex Mechanical Ex
HISTORY	Ex
GEOGRAPHY	V. Good
NATURE STUDY	Ex
HANDWRITING	V. Good
GENERAL REPORT	An excellent result. James deserves his position of first in the class as he shows much intelligence

NUMBER IN FORM 21 POSITION IN FORM 1<sup>st</sup>

well done!

A. Scott Form Master  
Phoned letter Head Master

**Evidently so for James Fallen, brother of Carol O'Brien who kindly contributed a copy of her brother's top-of-the-class school report!**

"I used to go to St Oswald's Infant & Junior School and I remember having to go to sleep in the afternoon whilst in the nursery class. I remember the air raid drills during the war and having orange juice and I believe cod liver oil every week. We were also given Horlicks tablets and drinking chocolate, which I think were given us by US airmen stationed at Lawford Heath."

**Rita Rogerson (nee Ainge) Resident for 71 years since 1932.**

"I was born in Rugby, attended St Matthew's Infants School In Pennington Street, then the mixed Chapel Street School and finally ST Matthew's School until 1946. My parents and I lived just over the road at 16 Round Street and nearly all of the boys in the street attended the school.

Living now as I do in Ludlow, my only memento of the school is a first edition print of the school "1852" – The Year Books. We still have many bound copies of the Rugby Advertisers from the 1850's to about 1910 – many are missing.

I remember most of the teachers. My house was Myers. Mr Brooks, also Mr Timms, Mr Sensicle, Miss Monk and, of course, Mr Robinson, the headmaster. Our playing field was Mertens Field – just off the Bilton Road and we used to play football with Murray School. I cannot remember many of the boys in my class though some names come to mind, Sidney and Stanley Hall, Horse and Jockey pub, Shearsby, Union Street, Ormerod off Bridget Street. I liked Master Ormerod, we used to collect waste paper for the war effort together and take it to the stores opposite Gilberts, the Rugby Football Shop.

My early interest in antiques started whilst attending the school. Most of the boys visited either Bryan's hop at the top of Round Street or Grocock at the corner of Bridget Street, while I had my nose pressed to the window of Mr Bentley's Antique Shop, opposite Grocock's Shop and on the corner of Oliver Street and Bridget Street, I used to help him lift things.

Some of the slightly older boys in Round Street attended St Matthew's: George and David Duckett, Arthur Weston, Ted & Bill Hands, Tony Edwards, Percy Higgs, Derek Taylor, Brian West, Dennis & Cyril Wenlock. When the old school was demolished, I purchased the date plaque (1852) and incorporated the tablet into the end of my house in Flecknoe – the Old Oak House – which was burnt down in November 1970 and rebuilt. Mr Robinson's iron gate to his house was used for my entrance. The antique store in Flecknoe, the former Wesleyan Chapel (1837) is now a house. I have a family antiques business in Ludlow now."

***Raymond G Cave, Ludlow,  
Shropshire***

"These are some of my memories of St Matthew's School in wartime. I arrived in the secondary school in Oliver Street in September 1940. The master in charge of 1A was a Mr Dowsell who was spoken of by the boys, when he was out of earshot, as 'Dicky Dossler'. His special interests were the written and spoken work and art. Woe betide the boys who used slovenly pronunciation, e.g. 'its sore eye' when the words should have been 'it's all right'. However, we did not see the year through with him as one day two men entered the classroom and without a word, escorted him from the school. Later there was speculation that the two men were from the Special Branch.

Mr Timms was in charge of the workshops, a fatherly figure for which safety was of first importance. The metal workers had a forge with hand-pumped bellows and

the woodworkers a lathe powered by a foot treadle. Mr Timms insisted on the correct handling and use of tools. He had written a book of rules to ensure our well being. A copy was placed on each desk. Rule No 1 was when the bell on his desk rang, we were to put down our tools and pay attention. We were expected to have a good knowledge of all the rules by the end of the first term. There was one other rule: "If you damage the tools, then I damage you!"

The air raid shelters were in the Headmaster's garden and when the alarm sounded, the whole school retired to them as quickly as possible but this did not include two boys who thought that the Headmaster's apples were ripe and ready for picking. After the exercise was over, the school assembled in the Hall with the two offenders out in front. Mr Robinson explained that the two boys had the 'AUDACITY' to steal the apples whilst ignoring the possible dangers from the German Air Force. At another assembly, Mr Robinson was reviewing the year's work and mentioned the school motto, "Think of rest but work on". He said that having looked at the examination results, some of us had been "Thinking of work but resting on". At the start of the holidays, he advised us always to "enjoy ourselves but keep out of the hands of the police!"

The move up to 2A found us with Mr Brookes, an enthusiast for Maths, Music and History. Algebra was absorbed easily and music, a mixture of folk songs and classics. He was determined that we should know the roots of our democracy and Simon De Montfort and the Court of the Star Chamber were on the men. An explanation of how three readings of a Bill in the house of Commons became an act subsequently under the Monarch's signature. Visits to the local burial barrows, and to the ceremony of the Wroth Silver at the top of Knightlow Hill were additions to the usual school week. Mr Brookes had an assistant that was kept in the corner of the classroom – a piece of bamboo cane. It had a chemist's label that said "The Mixture – To Be taken As Required".

The understanding of how ultraviolet light revealed invisible writing was shown in a trip to Air Cadet HQ of which he was commandant. Regrettably, he, like Mr Higgs, left to serve in the forces and Mrs Pittham and Mrs Mark joined the staff. At this point the Warwickshire Education Committee decided that a junior technical school should begin in Rugby and several others and myself left to attend the RCTA in Lower Hillmorton Road."

***Colin Jarvis, Co Durham, previous New Bilton Resident***

"I spent my early years at St Matthews Boys School, the headmaster, Mr Robinson, often made mention at the morning general assembly that the boys who lived furthest away from the school were always the first ones there, the boys who lived closest were always late. I am sure he had me in mind, living only ten minutes away from the school and often late. However, we had more important things to do than going to school. For instance, playing marbles in the gutter along the way, dropping in at Lines Bakery (where my father was the baker) and having broken cookies laced with whipping cream, trying to persuade passers-by to stare at imaginary things in the sky and once having engaged their attention running away.

At times when the air raid siren would sound on making our way to the shelters we had cause to pass under the head masters apple trees and lighten the trees heavy load. Mr Robinson made mention of this in one of his early morning sermons and announced he was surprised some boys had the audacity to help themselves. I confess now I was guilty of such a charge but managed to escape his wrath.”

***H Macpherson (Mack) Victoria, British Columbia, Canada***



***Pictured Above: The Teachers at St Matthews Secondary Modern School, Oliver Street, Rugby, 1952 – 1956.***

***Top Row: (Left to Right) Burton, Green, Spain, Conway, Allen, Johnson  
Bottom Row: Higgs, Timms, Robinson (Head), Brooks (Deputy Head, McCroud***

“I was very excited about my first day at school, my mother and me with Mrs Hill and her son Brian walked to the infants entrance in New Street, Brian decided to walk on the wall at the side of the Holly Bush Inn, I think I was too scaredy-boots to follow. At the school there was a big blue door into the classroom and then to my horror my mother said goodbye – I was going to be left there! Tears ensued and it ended up with Miss Lancaster pulling me gently but firmly away from the door to make my escape.

In the afternoon small camp beds were placed so we could have a rest and some I remember did go to sleep.

First lessons consisted of learning the alphabet and we were provided with small blackboards and a chalk to copy from the board. The boards were also used to

draw with coloured chalks. A lot of lessons used large printed oilcloths which were slung over the top of the class blackboard and a wooden pointer was used to show us the letter or word to recite. We all used printed word cards that had to be made up into sentences, I remember being told off for helping another child who couldn't see where to put the extra word he had over.

My first introduction to music was at St Oswald's infants, a gramophone came out and we all had to sit and listen to Peter and the Wolf – I wasn't over impressed!"

**Carol O'Brien, previous New Bilton Resident**

### *Leisure & Pastimes in New Bilton*

***Sad recollections from local residents reflected in the freedom to play that they had as children but over the years is now denied to the future generations.***

### **Scouts 21st Group, 21st Birthday Party, 1950's**



**Committee Members** {Left to Right}:

***Top Row: Mrs Fisher (?), Mrs Hartwell, Jan Brown (now Leeson)***

***Bottom Row: Mrs Gare, Mrs Loud, Mrs Johnson(?), Mrs Cleaver, Mrs Mitchell, Mrs Ena Miller***

“I remember how we were always playing out and we never got any ‘aggro’, apart from when we were chased by the farmer from Malpus Farm. I remember playing out in the streets as a young boy, we used to go down the black path, past tank cottages, under the railway bridges, past tickle berry tunnels and over the fields to play near the Avon. When we were about 6 or 7 years old, this would have been around 1947 we used to go and collect train numbers. It was safe to play out in the street then because there was no traffic, if you saw 1 car a day, we all used to gather round to watch it.”

**Graham Gare, New Bilton Resident**

“I can remember in school holidays or at week ends lots of people used to take their children in to the field near the cement works. We went down a footpath by the Coventry Rail Line, the path went through to Townsend Lane, Long Lawford built there was water there that the children paddled in. Farther round was ‘Tom Browns Island’, which was deeper and some children swam in that. It was a lovely way to spend the afternoon. There were also ‘Clay Hills’ that was what they had dug out from the Quarries and the older children used to have a lovely time playing there.”

**Eva Goodwin, resident for 83 years**

***The well-known Tom Brown, alleged to have climbed the tree on Tom Browns Island, can anybody corroborate this?***



“My first lesson in fisticuffs was at the hands of Bruce Tranter who had learned the noble art at Scouts. He made my face look as if I had run into a brick wall. My only experience on a penny farthing bike was one owned by Mr Tranter.

The only way to stop was to grasp hold of a lamp post as you passed by. Fighting seemed to be virtually compulsory at Addison Road Infants School every playtime. The freedom of the Clay Hills, Tom Brown's Island, damming the Sowbrook, making fires and burning twist (a mixture of flour and water) over the flames, or a tin of stewed beef heated over the fire and shared with my most loyal friend John Smith of Jubilee Street.

The characters and exploits are innumerable and live on in many old New Biltonians' memories."

**Gordon MacPerson**

"On a recent visit to the model Railway Exhibition at the Indian Centre, I took a nostalgic stroll back to Gladstone Street, past your office that I knew as Becks Newsagents to the end house, number 13.

I thought back as an 8 year old when I lived there. While listening to the radio I heard a commentary on the first running of the Coronation Scot. (19/6/37). The commentator on the footplate said, "We're passing through Rugby now". On looking at the back window across Tank Cottages, there it was, a marvellous sight never to be forgotten."

**D Johnson, Hilmorton**

"I'm a happy New Bilton lad born in the 30's and very proud of the fact that all my childhood days were spent over the clay hills and seaside trips, if any, were only day trips. I have camped out by the first clay hills at the side of the Sow Brook and learnt to swim on Tom brown's Island at the back of the waterfall. There were times when we'd just jump all day until we'd stick in the mud and fall back in to the water. There was also a place called Gypsies hollow – it seemed very deep when we were children and very scary. On Tom Brown's Island there was a big tree that was said to be climbed by Tom Brown himself. My two elder sisters still swear blind today that we could hear our mother call us when it was time to come home from the clay hill (Peggy Root nee Lines).

There were a variety of rope swings even for those who could swing and drop into the Avon. I wonder how many roller bearings that we used to acquire from the Cement Works and shoot with astonishing accuracy, are still at the bottom of the Avon? The best shots were Speedy Brain and Lol Bency.

From the gun turret on the second clay hill you could see a farm. It was, owned by a man called Malpas, and woe betide you if he caught you on his land – he would bellow out to you to clear off and if you didn't he would send his son to chase you. He was not too bad a person because I can remember being on his farm and one of the jobs was to pump water from the quarry below up to the tank in his house and he was pleasant enough then."

**Michael Root, Lutterworth, Leicestershire**

“I was born at 66 Pinfold Street and lived there the first seven years of my life. Playing in the street was the done thing in those days and walks in the countryside taken at every opportunity. I remember one occasion when Lines, McPherson’s, Chaters and we decided to walk to Long Lawford regaled on the way by ‘Pom’ Lines on the haunted house there. Not being very old, it was all scary stuff but exciting too. To this day, the tower of the haunted house can still be seen from the main road of Wolston. Walks with family or friends over the humped-backed bridge down the Black Path, under the railway bridge and into the Lido fields. From there we would scramble through the small copse to reach Tom Brown’s island, where we paddled our feet near a small waterfall. Down Lawford Road in to the Sow brook Fields and scrambling up the clay hills was another favourite.

In 1936, we moved to 69 Victoria Street. Can anyone remember the small shop run by the Radmalls? We used to get dad his packet of Woodbines (legal in those days!) and spend our ha’penny pocket money or penny on a cone-shaped bag of dolly mixtures, still my favourite sweet.

The Salvation Army band came on Sundays and held a service in the street. I still love their rousing music. As I got older, long bike rides with friends was the ‘in thing’. We thought nothing of biking to Leamington Spa, Lutterworth or Stratford upon Avon and I only had an old, sit-up-and-bed bike.

Isn’t it sad that children can’t have the freedom and won’t have the memories such as ours for the simple things in life?”

***Pat Honeysett (formerly Chater), Maidstone, Kent***

“As I remember these pits were quite deep and our parents warned us to keep away from the water and banks as several people had drowned.

The Paragon Pits of which there were 3, 2 in the ground near Leamington Railway Line and one close to Gladstone Street, they were quite deep, and were used by some local workmen from Willans Works in the summer for swimming purposes. My cousin J Falcher and Albert Godding both apprentice moulders in the foundry which was only 150 yards away. Most times they went during their dinner break as their work was in the molten metal area and you can guess it was very hot in the summer time when casting.

Previous to using these deep pits for getting rid of sand it was tipped on to the Sports field, which is east end of Works and the result as I remember was the football ground was in the middle of two or three steep banks of sand and we used to sit on top of the banks, 10 – 15 feet above pitch level and have a very good view of the sport (i.e. Rugby or soccer). Most of the ground these deep pits occupied I understand were clay pits, once used for making house bricks, eventually when discontinued, before 1900 filled with water from springs.”

***R H Dumbleton***



## *Do You Remember When...?*

***Everybody has their own memories personal to them, maybe happy times from their past which they know they will never forget or obscure memories that for some reason will always stick in their head!***

“I remember the street party in Campbell Street at the end of the war. Speaking of the war I remember standing with my mother in the bedroom on the night of the Coventry Blitz and the sky was bright red. The following days I remember seeing people walking up Lawford Road with prams and carts, people who had lost their homes in Coventry. Another memory is of the Coronation of the Queen, one of my father’s friends had a television and there must have been about 25 people crammed into his front room.

***Rita Rogerson, (nee Ainge)***

The end of the Second World War was celebrated in the Market Place, hundreds of people gathered and were dancing to music played by different bands, no fighting or vandalism then. We in Adams Street and around had a very nice street party too. In the 1950’s the church had a Rose Queen Party held in the Recreation Ground in Addison Road. The children walked in procession from the church, a girl chosen as Queen, 4 flower girls and 2 Page Boys, then there was different entertainment afterwards.”

***Eva Goodwin, New Bilton Resident for 83 years***

“If I ever went missing from the garden, my mother always knew where to find me – I had wandered up to the school. No worries about crossing the road then! I had quite a few friends around my own age, and had lots of fun and games. We had a good laugh one day when Mr Tranter had had too much to drink, and took his pony into his front room and bedded it down with hay!

I wonder how many of my schoolmates remember the mirror in the toilets with “Am I Clean?” over the top. We used to love to run down the bottom of Lawford Road when it was flooded, just to see the cars dash and splash through! We had great fun up the clay hills, and I saw my first snake there. I remember my father carrying me up Croup Hill when the zeppelins came over. Lots of water has flowed under the bridge since then.”

***Carole May MacFarlane, nee Higham, Linnell Road, Rugby***



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