

An account of life in Withington

by Coralie Adamson

I first moved to Manchester in the early 1950s with my husband Bill and our two children. Bill and I had met when we were serving in the air force at Scampton during the Second World War. As we had been in the air force, we were allocated a house in the new estate built near the aerodrome in Manchester. Bill was a Mancunian. His parents lived in Manchester but it wasn't feasible to move in with them as we wanted to set out as a family ourselves. Our third child – a son, John – was born in 1951, after we moved to Manchester. It was lovely to have our own home – to actually have a bathroom and toilet upstairs after five years of living in rented accommodation in High Wycombe, without a bathroom or a toilet. Our house was out near the airport field and you could go and sit there and have picnics with the children. You can't do that now of course – you can't get near the 'planes. Everything was so different then.

The house we were allocated was absolutely brand new. In fact there was water running down the walls - hadn't dried out! But they moved us straight in and we had a wonderful doctor which was marvellous - Dr Hewitts. He would walk round, usually every morning, round the estate, checking on his patients. If you stood at the door and called him because something was wrong, he'd come in and I don't know what we'd have done without him in those 25 years.

When I was about 36, Bill died leaving me with the three children to care for. Since we had been married I had not worked, women didn't in those days, in the forties. If Bill had not died I would never even have thought about working – he was the one who went out to work, I was the one who sorted the children and the house. And so I tried to go over some old books of shorthand typing and accounting, which had been my job in the air force. Eventually, when I was about 38 I got a job in Withington, in a big house near Wilmslow Road and Mauldeth Road. The firm I was working for was called Barnaby and Tarr. They were in advertising, and I was employed to do shorthand typing and accounts. Advertising was quite a new thing in those days – you didn't get it on tele or anything like that. Barnaby and Tarr were in advertising for technical magazines – equipment and machinery and that kind of thing. There were only about seven of us working there to begin with. Gradually the company grew and grew and over the years we had more and more staff. We had to start a print company and then a big studio and the accommodation in Withington was just too small so we re-located to Didsbury – to a big house near to the cricket ground. The company eventually got around fifty staff. I worked with them for about 25 years, until I was sixty.

I came here in 1970 - to this house, because I got the job in Withington while I was still in that house - on the estate. I got the job here, and to start off I used to come on two buses. And I said "it is no good. I am going to have to get a house in Withington." And then, by luck, the couple who lived here, elderly couple, wanted to go and live up in the airport. This was also a council owned house - I think they owned about 8 here, because, you see how long the gardens are? Originally, a road

was going to come through, so the council had buy various houses that were going to bring the road through. So we swapped houses. The council allowed us to do that in those days. So 1970 I came here.

I loved Withington. It had everything here. Just so different you would not believe. Every shop you can think of. We had our own newspaper, which was in Didsbury I know, but they wanted all the information from Withington. You name a shop, we had it. We had a Gas showroom, Electric showroom, everything. You could go and get your photograph taken for various things. None of the pound shops. None of the cheap shops, you know the charity shops. They just didn't exist. Near the Library there was a fantastic haberdashery on the corner there where all those house agents are now. You could buy everything for the house, which was wonderful.

This was a good place for the family. There were schools. It had a wonderful atmosphere. It was so different. All the old houses. There were the old Victorian houses ... which were all taken down – huge areas which were all taken down to become car parks.

In the 1970s we started off the Civic Society in Withington. I did it because I kind of felt it would mean I actually belonged here somehow. We had a local meeting in the Methodist Hall, because you could do that in those days. I suppose you can now. People were asked if they wanted to join, kind of thing. And we had people from the Civic Trust come to talk to us and what it would be all about, and what we would be expected to do. I think the Civic Trust try to do this. If there's an area which doesn't have a Civic Society. They kind of feel it would be helpful for the people to have one.

After the meeting many of us stayed behind, because we felt we could form a committee. We more or less started it there and then and said "right, we'll get together at such and such a time". And they helped. They sent us an awful lot of information. Jack Edwards was our first Chairman – he's dead now of course. We had several changes of Chairman as several of the Councillors wanted to be Chair. I became Secretary straight away.

At first we had about 12 – 15 people active in running the group. More then joined when they realised - when it became news. The local newspaper would print something every weekend about the Withington ... it was free of course – so it got shoved through everybody's door. And so everybody knew what was going on. We made darn sure of that. At that time, the Chairman only served for a year at a time, and so at a meeting in the Library Roger Smith stood up and said "perhaps I could help – as Chairman". And so we all said "oh great, yes". So he became Chairman. We'd been going a while then.

The Civic Society was in the local newspaper every week. The photographer would ring up and say "What are you doing now?" And he would come, and I would take him to whatever we planned to do. There's one in the clippings book called "Yobs playground". When I first came to Withington, Old Moat Park was lovely. There were the huts where the men met. There was the bowling green. There was a tennis court, where we used to come out at lunchtime and play tennis from the corner. And then gradually the bowls folded for some reason. Then the huts came down and the

Yobs took over. Kicking a ball on the Green and ruining it and the whole area was really bad. And there's a picture of me in the Park there. I was in the Park and it was in a terrible state. I used to find projects you see, to do. I said "Right, the Council have to do something about this". I wanted them to go back so that the children could use it. With Yobs in it all the time it was just ruination, it began to be nothing. The grass wasn't cut, nothing was done. I was at the town hall, more times than you'd ... So they all knew me there. "She's here again, what is it this week?" And gradually, it took a while, gradually it changed. They fenced it all off. They didn't put the huts back but they began to put an area for the children to play. It took years. It takes a while for a Council to do anything. But if you keep on at them they will do it. It's great now. They then put a Warden. A Park Warden. I used to go down and have a natter and ask her how she was doing. Then they put an area for the dogs to do their business. So it was great. It's great now. It's gone back to being used like it was originally.

When I looked round there were quite a number of things that I watched for. There was no bus stop in Copson Street. So - a bus stop in Copson Street - one of my projects. That's how it used to be you see. In all those years, I'd find different projects to do.

And then there was the Withington horse trough. It just came up at one of the meetings. It had been in the village you see. And it had moved way out somewhere, in a farmer's field. Either they put it in the paper or whatever, about this trough. We knew it was from Withington, because it says on it. It used to be by the Library – and when things began to change, the Council said, "Right, it has to be moved" because it was in the way. And so it went. Some farmer I suppose has said "I'll put water in it for the cattle" or whatever. So we said "Let's make it a project. Bring it back here" which we did, and then they broke it bringing it back! They dropped it when they got here. Just one of those things. The trough was put on the corner of Copson Street and Yew Tree Road. We were going to take over the whole area, but they wouldn't let us. They said no. They wanted part of it as a car park. Because there's nowhere else to park cars. Especially for the staff you see. So we made do with the corner. And every Saturday we used to go across there and clear around and put things in, and so it was a garden with seeds and trees at the back.

So many projects that we did I just don't remember now. But whatever we did, I made darn sure it went in the South Manchester Reporter. So everybody knew.

I started the Withington Civic Society magazine, News and Views. I wanted it to be called News and Views. I wrote everything in it – much of the time I would be taking notes at the meetings so I would have the information already. All I had to do was type it out, on a typewriter – an old thing ... gone on the scrapheap years ago! It was my typing that went into the News and Views. I typed it in two columns, as if it was a newspaper. I typed every inch of it. I did the front cover, with sketches, drawings in. All sorts of things. I'd find drawings and sketches pictures of different things in the village which were being seen to. I'd find them in all sorts of different places - sketches or the actual thing. So that if you mentioned something in an article, you had a sketch so that people knew what you were talking about.

There was a printer in Manchester where I used to take all my copies to, and he'd let me use one of the machines to print off each sheet. I had to book a taxi of course to take it there, because I'd have to come back with enough copies to make a couple of hundred News and Views. Because we had several hundred members then of course, which had built up over the years. So I'd cart it all upstairs, to my office, and start laying them all out making page one and then the next page. Fastening them together, getting them all together. Then do the front cover.

I wanted it for the people, and so whatever was in it, was to do with Withington. I don't want to be reading about umpteen meetings that are going to be taking place, if you know what I mean. Nor did the rest of them. I'm sure they weren't interested. But if we had tickets to sell, or somebody's birthday or ... something that was interesting to the people, we put that in. To me, it was a people's magazine.

I enjoyed doing the magazine. I think that was my proudest thing - that I did the first 65 editions.

We'd book the Church Hall and have a Spanish evening and we'd have 80 tickets to sell. Only 80. And we'd sell them all and that brought funds in of course. If you wanted to wear something Spanish than you could, but we'd get the Spanish children to come and do a Spanish dance, or something to bring in different nationalities. My idea. And we'd have do's at Christmas, maybe Easter and something where we could get to sell tickets. Get cash in because it was essential. I also did all the accounts of course. It was a full-time job, but because I'm very good at recording things, I knew where every penny was going, and put it in the News and Views. I would put the whole of the balance sheet in, every three months. So that everybody knew where every penny went. And to whom, and why. We got money originally from the sale of paper and silver paper. Anything that could be collected, we collected.

I knew everybody, and everybody knew me. I did stand for Councillor once, but I only got about 750 votes. I think the one who got in again, he had about 900 and something so he got in. I was glad I didn't. I didn't want to get in. I sort of got pushed into it. They didn't have anybody's name to put forward. I'm not political at all.

I learned quite a lot about the history of the area. I knew that there was a farm at this place - that's why I'm growing fruit trees in the back, no matter what we do it grows. The soil, it is wonderful in Old Moat, on this corner. I knew every road, every street, where everybody lived. Can't remember now, of course. And things have changed so much.

The whole area has changed now. The design has changed for a start. The Co-op wasn't here to start with. There were houses right to the end of the road. Both sides. We had a police station at one time, which was great because I was for everlasting popping in there. "Right there's so many pot holes want seeing to - which are dangerous. A child could fall down." And I would give them the exact spot, and they would see to get it done. Or something wrong with the pavement, or whatever. I

was so sorry when they moved. It was in Copson Street, where the pound shop is now. Yes, it was great.

It was more of a village then, because it is 'Withington Village'. It isn't anymore, it is just a shopping area now.

In those days, in 1970, every other building wasn't a cafe or a charity shop like it is now. Especially in Copson Street. The shops were completely different. For instance at the top end where there's a cafe, there was a Haberdashery. You could buy nice cups and saucers, and not second hand I don't mean, actually new things. For your kitchen. I don't think there's anything like that now, for your kitchen. Anywhere.

All the decent shops moved. We had a wonderful shoe shop, it's gone into Didsbury. The area was like a village should be – able to cater for people who can't travel.

We had all these huge areas, like on the other side of the road from the Nat West Bank, and all that was as far as you could see was - nothing. They took everything down. There was nothing there, and they wanted to put a homeless shelter for men there. We objected most strongly because we said "you don't put those kind of men right on top of a Bank to start with, because they'd be "have you got anything to spare?" as you were going out of the Bank. So they dropped the plan and just put houses there. That sort of thing.

Where the Co-op is now, you could see right across to Burton Road. You could see right across, nothing was there at all. And then the Co-op came, to fill in, and they made a car park, and we did the corner with the trough and the plants of course.

In those days everybody knew everybody else somehow. At least I did. And now the atmosphere is slightly different. I go out at 7 o'clock for my paper, always, every day. And I'm usually up at about 5. And you don't see a soul, except the boys going to school. There's three of them. They've started saying "Hello, Good morning" and I say "why are you out so early?" I say "it's only 7". They're going for their breakfast apparently.

They feed them in the schools now apparently because a lot of children were going in hungry. Yesterday, I beat them to it. I was walking back as they were coming. "I beat you to it this morning." They said "Good morning, hello". They're quite friendly the children are quite friendly. But so many people don't know me, like they used to do,

Life was a lot more serious in those days. Now it's - I don't know, it's just not the same. Maybe not serious, but we meant what we said. If we said we'd do something, we did it.

I loved Withington, it became home - in 1970.