

MEMORIES OF SCHOLES

A TOWN WITHIN A TOWN

I have very fond memories of Scholes. Born in McCormick Street, named after the second parish priest of St Patrick's, this in itself made it part of the history of the township. I describe the area as a township because that was what it was, a separate community in every sense. People had a feeling of belonging to Scholes first and Wigan second.

The majority of men were miners, many women worked in the cotton factories both in Wigan and further afield traveling to local towns by coach, putting hours on to the working day because the pay was slightly better. I remember hearing the Knocker Upper rousing households and not leaving until a response was forthcoming, the lady who filled that role in the streets surrounding my home was Agnes Wynn who charged a shilling a week. Agnes, lived locally, and because of her job, went to bed early, children were instructed not play near her house, she needed her sleep, if she overslept half the parish would miss a days work!

Scholes itself had shops of every sort, so much so that many older people would rarely visit the town centre as almost everything could be sourced locally, from ladies fashions, Vi. Almonds, to motor bikes, Millers, we had two cinemas, countless public houses and grocers, a Chinese laundry and a myriad of other businesses. Locals say that if they had put a roof over the street in its heyday, it would have been the first Trafford Centre! Many shops had nicknames, "Pie Joe's "being one, it's a wonder he didn't go bankrupt. I remember going there, sent by neighbours for a meat pie, they would send a large jug with the instruction to fill it with gravy, free in those days. I think the surplus was for use on the Sunday dinner! Another amusing name was 'Polly do out', a clogger, it was said she could put a clog iron on a bladder without bursting it! One of the less hygienic shops often had a cat sat on a flich of bacon. Needless to say most housewives avoided that shop's delights. A temperance bar, though fair to say it wasn't the most frequented of venues. Public houses seemed a more tempting prospect to most. Similarly many of these had colloquial names the two most famous the Dust Hole, (Rose and Crown) this establishment was reputed to sell the best pint in the district, and was one of the last ale houses (licensed to sell beer and porter only) and the Kill and Cure (The Regent) the latter because it was near to Dr Hoey's surgery .

Whilst times were difficult for many, the feeling of community was tangible, even though many struggled and had little, they would share what they had. Anyone without family who fell ill would be cared for in the neighbourhood. People could leave the door unlocked, in my Mother's case she would leave the rent on the sideboard for collection. I never heard of a house being burgled. When recounting this fact the reply often comes back "there was nothing to steal" on the contrary, every house had a gas meter full of money, talking of which after the gasman had emptied the meter and left the rebate there was unusually spare money in the parish, children armed with shillings bombarding local sweetshops. No deed for ASBOS, "I'll tell your mother", or a more a portent "I'll bring Father Lappin, the respected parish priest of St Patrick's, was enough to bring the most unruly youths to book.

The overwhelming majority of houses were very well kept women would mop the step daily, and woe betide anyone who walked on their labours. Mondays was washing day, few had washing machines, dolly tubs and rubbing boards was the order of the day. It was said that there was a rainbow over Scholes on Mondays! There was great excitement when the first launderette opened, half a crown for a 9lbs wash, the price alas put it out of the reach of many families, An example that would have bought fish and chips twice, in the early 1950s! Every day a different task, bedrooms , baking another day and so forth. Thursday in our house was the day Mother

would black lead the Yorkshire Range, I remember the cleaning agents Zebo and Brasso each with its own distinct smell, as had Mansion polish used on well cared for furniture.

I am proud of my background, and wouldn't wish to be reared anywhere other than my beloved, and much maligned Scholes of yesteryear. Maybe you had to be born within the sound of St Catherine's or St Patrick's bells to fully appreciate the wonderful atmosphere and sheer goodness of its people. I am often accused of looking back with rose tinted spectacles. I suppose there is an element of truth in that, but better that, than looking back in anger.

Whit Monday.

Whit Monday morning has finally arrived, I live at the back of St.Patrick's RC Church. Mam has been up and about for hours, ironing, last minute alterations, cleaning and polishing, not to mention baking, in preparation for the many visitors we would most certainly receive on this very special day.

The first thing I hear is the sound of the bands and the bagpipes tuning up, Mam has left the job of getting me up and ready, till as long as she dare, in case I get over excited. I always need great persuasion to get from under the eiderdown, except on Whit Monday, Christmas Day, and come to think about it, Easter Sunday too. The teachers have been drilling us for weeks, on walking day etiquette, don't walk too close to the pavement, don't wave to people you know, and definitely "DO NOT TAKE MONEY", the latter instruction was almost universally ignored.

The excitement is palpable, it has been for weeks, possibly months, it is difficult to explain how important a day this celebration of Whitsun is in the homes of the Catholic community. Lining up outside school the teachers and the helpers, usually parish stalwarts, would remind all the children again on the etiquette of the day with the added proviso, not to walk too fast. Starting off at St Patrick's Church we would process down Rupert Street, on to Darlington Street, very poor territory for me, being from the heart of the parish, I knew only a handful of people from that street, although my Dad had an auntie, who if she remembered me, might have been minded to give me sixpence, or being a relative, maybe a shilling. I looked unsuccessfully ever year for Auntie Maggie, or was it Mary? which ever, had she spotted me she would undoubtedly have given credence to the old maxim, blood's thicker than water.

After the poor pickings of Darlington Street, into Chapel Lane, then onto Caroline Street where the welcome (though not in financial terms) was absolutely unbelievable, the parishes of St. Joseph's and St. Patricks, both with large Irish diaspora communities, had an affinity that was tangible, even to a child, I remember with great fondness the shouts of "Come on The Pats" from the old ladies of our sister parish.

On reaching the Market Square, to meet up with the other parishes, the two already mentioned, along with St. Mary's, St. John's and Sacred Heart. The heightened excitement, was taken to an even higher level, as hundreds and hundreds of people, and the massed bands seemed to have no end. The cacophony of sounds all added, strangely to the solemnity of the day and contrasted to the almost silence as the conductor mounted the rostrum, to lead the bands and the laity in hymns and The National Anthem. I think you would have needed to have been present to understand the feeling of nostalgia and pride, when Faith of our Fathers was sung, hairs on the back of your neck would stand to attention. The National Anthem was sung with equal gusto and then what seemed the long walk back to our parishes loomed.

The road ahead was going to be difficult, but realising that my best patch lay not too far away gave renewed vigour to my little legs, Scholes, Wellington Street, (The Wearing of the Green was always played when entering this street) and Hardybutts, full of Aunts, Uncles and older cousins, now working, as the modern saying goes "with disposable income". I would probably be able to buy a bike, or at the very least a scooter. The end result was a few Dinky Toys and a YoYoyo. I didn't want a bike anyway and scooters are only for babies.

On finally reaching home we were treated like returning heroes, having walked seven miles, forgive the poetic licence, be it seven, or three (nearer to the truth), it was a long way for the afore mentioned little legs. Now the business of the day to count the coins collected. We hadn't ignored the instruction "Not to Take Money", but it would have been churlish to refuse, that's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Your home would be full of visitors, the table groaning with home baked pies, meat, meat and potato, apple, jam lattice and of course two flavours of jelly, along with Carnation milk, few in St. Patrick's parish had a refrigerator in those far off days, although most could boast a meat safe, a cupboard with a mesh front, usually painted cream or white. I suppose

to make believe we had the next best thing to a fridge. I've never worked out why this devise would keep meat, milk, or anything else for that matter any cooler than an ordinary cupboard.

All the aunties and female cousins would pitch in making pot after pot of tea, cutting the pies and cakes into equal sizes, they had to be equal to save any arguments among the children. As a child I always wondered where all the uncles and older male cousins were, and was told they were having a chat, only years later did I realise that the "chat" was taking place in one of the many public houses that adorned Scholes in those days. After the feast, the post-mortem, Mam had given orders that there should be no gossiping, everybody had done their best and that's what mattered. This diktat, along with the instruction from the teachers regarding money, alas was largely ignored. It was agreed that all the children looked lovely, but our parish just edged it, this sentiment would be common parlance in the homes of the other participating parishes of the walk.

Then down to brass tacks. The women of the parish, and their outfits, Agnes such-a-body, had that suit that had been on display in Vi. Almond's window, it looked very nice in the window, pause, enough said, and then just to ram home the point "It wasn't right for the fuller figure", and the fur trim wasn't appropriate for Spring. Mary so-and-so, had that same hat, that had made three appearances before, or was it four, my memory's awful nowadays! The conversation goes on. Not gossiping you understand just expressing an opinion, you can do that even in Russia, Auntie Janey (Mam), says one cousin sullenly, having been admonished for unflattering remarks about a parishioners' choice of frock. I think the K.G.B. might have something to say about that, mutters one of the more politically aware cousins, almost under her breath. When Mam's back's turned, the conversation is returned to. However, I digress from the story.

After a long day, all the guests had gone home, Mam has tidied the house, and so to bed. Sleep doesn't come easily, after all the excitement of the day and thoughts of next year running through my head. I will be a year older and will consequently know more people, who I will not want to offend by refusing the well intended donation, and maybe, just

maybe, my Dad's Auntie Thingy, might spot me, she's very well off, she used have a chip shop, and if she does, I bet she'll give me ten shillings, to make up for past years. What with that and my new found friends I might get enough for a racing bike, with a dynamo, and in any case it will be a year nearer to be able to have a chat with my uncles. Sweet Dreams!