

# A POOLSTOCK CHILDHOOD

I WAS born in 1919 on the 'island' of Poolstock with a sister two years older than I. We lived in a rented, Victorian house which had three bedrooms, bathroom, front room, middle room, kitchen and scullery.

In the kitchen there was a large black range (which needed black leading) with a steel fender and large fireguard. There was a large scrub topped dresser, a similar table and a corner cupboard. Most of the cooking was done on the fire and in the oven of the range but we did have a gas ring in the scullery where there was also a large sink, a slop stone, copper boiler and a mangle for washing clothes.

From the scullery door four steps led down to the back yard where there was an out-house in which a cockerel and hens were kept. I was terrified of the cockerel who seemed to strut about menacingly and always appeared to have his beady eye on me.

In front of the house there was a long garden with a path from the gate to the front door running along one side. To the left of this path my father attempted to grow a lawn, and a family story goes that, on coming home from work one day, he found my sister leading me by the hand and walking all over his newly planted grass seed. On being admonished she replied that she had only been showing me where I had not to go!

Next door but one to us was a brewery, and every so often water would be discharged from the building and with it came dozens of rubber bands which we collected - though what for remains a mystery!

There was a corner shop which sold nearly everything. My mother would send us with old newspapers which were used to wrap vegetables, and the shopkeeper would give us a twist of paper containing sweets - usually dolly mixtures or sometimes aniseed balls which I preferred because they lasted longer.

Across the road lived the headmistress of St. James' Infants School; her

## c.1920

along the tow path dangling a jam jar on a piece of string into the water and she fell in. Fortunately there was a canal boat in the area and the owner fished her out. I think that this was probably why my mother was determined that her daughters should learn to swim. Firstly she taught herself and then she taught us.

and election address pinned to our frocks singing -

*Vote, vote, vote for Sidney Wild.  
He is the best man for the job,  
and if you don't get him in,  
we will kick your door in,  
and you won't see your mother any more  
(We didn't mean it!)  
We attended church*

and on each desk there was a small sponge. When it was time to erase our workings the teacher would come along with a large sponge and a bowl of water and squeeze a little water onto each pupil's slate.

Mother always baked the bread - 6 lbs of flour, 2 oz. of yeast - which she would knead on the rug in front of the fire. She seemed to bake every other day and we were allowed to have the scrapings from the bowl which we would mould into something recognisable - but by the time we had finished the dough was grey in colour.

When I was four years old I contracted typhoid fever and was admitted to Whelley Sanatorium. As the ambulance took me away my mother wondered whether she would see me again. I can recall some instances of my time in the hospital - seeing my parents looking at me through a window and having to stand to attention by my cot when the Medical Officer, Dr. Whitehead, did his rounds. When I was getting better I was allowed to walk to Matron's house in the grounds to take the post. At Christmas I helped the sister to string up autumn leaves which had been collected and dried. They made a colourful decoration.

In 1925 our parents told us that we were moving to a brand new house. This was near the 'New Road' as Mesnes Road was called at that time. We would go to a new school and have new friends, so we had to get used to a fresh environment. It was exciting but that is another story!

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daughter taught dancing in the front room and she would arrange concerts at the school. I remember being taught the "Sailor's Hornpipe". When I was two years old I was taught a simple dance at the end of which I was told to "bow to Margaret". On the night of the concert Margaret was in the wings at the back of the stage - so, of course, I turned my back on the audience and bowed to her!

Behind the houses opposite was the canal. One day my sister and some friends were attempting to catch 'cockies' by running

There was quite a gang of boys and girls who lived in the area, not much traffic and very little crime - one could leave the door 'on the latch'.

I haven't mentioned my father yet. He was working long hours in order that we might have a reasonable life. I remember his taking us to collect eggs from the hens and for walks along the canal. He was persuaded to stand for election to the Town Council and four of us children walked arm in arm along the road on election day with his photograph

and Sunday School. There was a great community spirit surrounding the church. I vaguely remember a fancy dress party in which I was dressed as a bride, together with Leslie Duckworth who was my 'bridegroom'. I think his hat only stayed on his head courtesy of his ears. My sister won a leather music case dressed as a crinoline lady. (See photographs above).

At day school, which I attended at five years old, we learned multiplication tables parrot fashion - I can still say them all to this day. We had slates and chalk to write with

