



Anton Rippon

Derby

Memories

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Introduction

THE OLDER you become, the more you value the past. As the years roll on and you enter what some describe as the “autumn years” of your life – a description I always find disquieting – the more you want to look back. It starts the day you suddenly hear yourself saying: “I remember when it was all fields around here.” That is when you realise that you are turning into your parents.

For those of us who grew up in Derby in the years after the Second World War – and, if truth were told, right into the 1970s – the city we see today has changed so much from the town we first remember. Some things are better. Some things are worse. When things are worse they generally revolve around people’s behaviour. We can recall a time when it would have been unthinkable to hear men swearing openly in front of women on a bus. Nowadays you hear even teenagers of both sexes doing just that. We remember when children were in awe of their local bobby. When you could walk back from the Midland railway station in the early hours of the morning and feel quite safe. Nobody was going to mug you. We remember a time when you really could leave your front door off the latch while you nipped to the corner shop. And recalling all this isn’t the result of looking back through the rose-tinted lenses of distant memory. It really was like that. No wonder we like to look back.

Few of us are comfortable with unfamiliarity. A friend of mine summed it up beautifully when he said: “It’s just that I like things the way they used to be.” If we were fortunate to enjoy a reasonable childhood, at least one free from poverty and hunger, then I suppose most of us would agree. We like to look back to a gentler

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time, when it was safe to roam abroad during those long summer school holidays, when going out on a Saturday night meant no more than joining a long queue for the pictures, or a quiet pint in a city centre pub, and making sure that you were on the last bus before the inspector blew his whistle. It was a safer, much less vulgar world.

And that is pretty much what this book is about – looking back.

I've brought together what I hope will be a gentle ramble down memory lane, mixing my own meanderings with some of those who I have had the pleasure of interviewing these past 40 years, and with more recent contributions from Derbeians, and former Derbeians, who retain a fondness for this place we call home. I hope that you enjoy it and that it may evoke a few pleasant memories of your own.

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Gerard Street Memories

SO, THE last protests were brushed aside, the bulldozers moved in – and the final stage of Derby’s inner ring road finally and forever changed the area in which I grew up. Gerard Street was cut in two, the lower half of Wilson Street all but disappeared and with it went a large swathe of the place where I was born and spent my childhood.

Yet, even after all this, it was still possible to stroll down that particular stretch of memory lane and recall the people who once made it such a wonderful place to live.

In the 21st century, it is not uncommon to live in a house for years and still know very little about even your closest neighbours. Yet when I was growing up, I knew practically everyone in Gerard Street, even though it was half a mile long. Most of all, I knew the other kids.

My two best friends were John Burns and Colin Shaw. John lived at 16 Webster Street, the little road on whose corner sat our house. I spent a lot of time at number 16. At four years my senior, I regarded John as an older brother, and his mum and my mum were also friends.

Colin Shaw lived at 142 Gerard Street with his parents, Arthur and Dolly. I also spent a lot of time there, playing Subbuteo tabletop football; we had a proper league and even “floodlit” matches, contrived by switching off the room lights and illuminating the pitch with four bike lamps balanced on piles of books. The most wonderful part of the Shaws’ house, however, was Arthur’s garden shed, which had started life as an Anderson air raid shelter. For

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two young lads with a vivid imagination, this became the cockpit of a Lancaster bomber on a dangerous mission over Berlin, the hull of a submarine searching for German shipping in the North Atlantic, a machine-gun emplacement in the Western Desert. We spent hundreds of hours in that shed, fighting the Second World War all over again. And the Korean War as well because, for some of the time, Colin's older brother, John, was serving as a National Serviceman in that conflict.

Our happy gang was complemented by several girls: Kathleen Radford, whose father, Cyril, was one of the local window cleaners (George Manning was the other), was a regular, as were Janet Foster, who lived in Webster Street, and Margaret Helliwell, who lived opposite us on the other side of the entry to Mick and Ivy Betts. Margaret's father, Fred, was a bit of a card. Every evening at 7.30pm prompt, Fred would emerge from his house and, looking most reluctant, stroll off to the Durham Ox, a large white-tiled 19th-century pub that stood in the corner of Gerard Street and Burton Road. Fred always had this "oh well, I suppose I must" manner when he set off the "DO", as everyone called it.



Colin Shaw's mum, Dolly, and his aunt, pictured in front of Arthur Shaw's shed that became anything two boys with vivid imaginations wanted it to be.

As he crossed the road by our house, he'd wink and ask: "Are you coming for one, then?" The funny thing was, he never asked me once I'd turned 18.

Sandra Attenborough, who lived just up the road, and Susan and Pat Mellor, a few doors further along still, also joined in our games, while Doris Wass, who lived with her family at the first house in

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Webster Street, and me were the only kids in the neighbourhood to pass our 11-plus exam. I went to Bemrose School, Doris to Homelands. In the mid-1950s, the Poples came to live in Webster Street, opposite Doris. Tom Pople and his two sons, Brian and Eric, worked on the roads. Every night they'd come trudging up Gerard Street after a day's graft; Tom was a hard taskmaster who didn't let anyone off lightly, even his sons. He was also quite a comic with a dry sense of humour and the Poples soon fitted into the neighbourhood. They had two daughters: Eileen – who would one day marry my pal John Burns – and Janet.

Corner shops were the life-blood of the community. Apart from Violet Craven's little operation, which stood on the opposite side of Webster Street to our house, and which I think was more of a hobby than an income (her husband, Ernie, worked at Rolls-Royce), we mostly used a grocer's that stood on the corner of Gerard Street and Grey Street.

Over the years it had a number of owners. Eric Addelsee and his wife ran it in the early 1950s. They had a daughter, Marie, who was five years older than me and became lumbered with taking me to the Saturday children's picture show at the Alexandra cinema on Normanton Road.



The top end of Gerard Street pictured around the beginning of the 20th century. It looked much the same when I was growing up there in the late 1940s and early 1950s, apart from the fashions of course.

The Addelsees left to run a shop at Sunnyhill and their place was taken by a Mrs Harrison and her daughter and son-in-law. Mrs Harrison was an attractive unattached woman who soon gained an admirer, a former Italian prisoner-of-war called Alberto, who lived in Harcourt Street. Alberto, who sported a thin moustache which he kept jet black with some kind of dye, and who absolutely reeked of garlic, unsuccessfully wooed Mrs Harrison from the day she arrived in Gerard Street until the day she left. He also could never quite get my name right and would scurry past me, booming out: “Ello, Tony!” as he went.

Ken Tipping and his wife, and then Owen Hobday and his wife, followed Mrs Harrison. They were all good people, always ready to give someone a lift in an emergency, or offer the use their telephone, for few households boasted one. Harry Wallis ran on off-licence on the opposite corner of Grey Street. Every Monday evening, Harry, a large red-faced man, could be seen striding up Harcourt Street, trilby hat set at a jaunty angle, on his way to the second house at the Hippodrome theatre. The Marquis of Granby pub sat next to Becket School, which I attended from 1950 to 1956. On summer evenings, Ernie Craven would stroll down to the Marquis and fill up a big white enamel jug with draught bitter before carefully returning up the street for a night by the wireless with Violet.

The Walleys of Rosengrave Street

Everyone knew the Walleys, not least because there were so many of them. Jenny Walley (now Jenny Jukes) recalled those days: “I’m the youngest of 14 children – sadly, there are only 10 us now – and I think we were possibly one of the largest families in Derby then. I grew up in a terraced house in Rosengrave Street, off Gerard Street. It was a bit like Coronation Street. Everyone knew everyone. And everybody helped each other out when needed, even to laying out the dead. They did everything for each other.

There used to be a very high wall at the top of Rosengrave Street, which made it a cul-de-sac, but that came down when they built a new estate that replaced the narrow streets known as ‘the Little City’ that had been there since the early 1800s. On a Saturday night

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my mum, who was Mrs Walley, my Aunty Gladys from Gerard Street, and a friend called Mrs Hanley (she lived in Boyer Street) all used to sit in the ‘snug’ at the Marquis of Granby on Gerard Street, You could just about fit the three of them in that snug; it was like Minnie, Martha and Ena from *Coronation Street*; I could have written the script. The men were all in the bar and I used to wait outside because children weren’t allowed in the pub in those days – pity that law hasn’t remained – and I used to get a bag of crisps and a bottle of dandelion and burdock – pure heaven. I’d sit outside the snug, on the step, especially if it was a warm night.

“Mrs Hanley’s birthday was the same date as mine, and on that day every year Mum used to send me down with two cigarettes (in one of those cone-shaped sweet paper bags) for Mrs Hanley and she used to give me a half-crown. God, was I rich! I used to take newspapers, or sometimes rags, to a place in Boyer Street because they used to pay you for them; and I took empty bottles back to the off-licence, which raised a few more coppers.

“My Aunty Ivy – she was my cousin really, but you always called people aunty or uncle if you were a youngster; it was respectful and you never called adults by their first name – lived at the top of Gerard Street. They had a bathroom and I used to go there on a Friday night for my weekly bath, and when I came downstairs and sat in front of their fire, Aunty Ivy always used to give me a hot drink and Morning Coffee biscuits. Again, it was a real treat.

“Me, Mum, and Mrs Drain and her daughter, Alex, who lived in Gerard Street, used to go to the pictures on a Thursday night, to the Regal in East Street. Also, whenever I went round to play with Alex, they always had Weetabix on the breakfast table. We only had porridge at home because it went a long way, and ‘stuck to your insides’ as Mum used to say. I vowed that, when I grew up, I would buy Weetabix for myself, and I did. I went to Christ Church School on Normanton Road, as I think most of us did right from nursery, but it closed when I was 10, and I did my last year at Gerard Street School, where Mum cleaned. I passed my 11-plus exam and Mum gave me sixpence for passing it. Happy days ... ”