

Cherry Tree Hill & Spondon in tandem

The small area known as Cherry Tree Hill rests on the eastern edge of Chaddesden on the entrance to Spondon just over the small wedge of fields and greenery. When I first encountered the locality in the mid-sixties it was still surrounded totally by fields and lay in the county of Derbyshire and not within what were then the town borough limits. Just as everywhere in Britain now represents a different face to that of over fifty years ago – Cherry Tree Hill and Spondon are no exceptions. Derby, as older residents will remember, was in those days just a big old engineering and railway town with the curious legacy of its original Market Town origins still peeking through in most quarters. Areas such as Chaddesden, Spondon, Littleover, Mickleover and others were still regarded as villages by and large, by those who resided in them. I moved into the area as a thirteen-year old lad from south east Northumberland and loved where I had come to live but it in no way felt like living on the cusp of a large town. Our house in St John's Drive had been built in the early 1920's and was one of twelve small cottage style semi's- at the end of our small cul-de-sac; where other houses now stand was a small paddock, home to a couple of donkey's. We were the first family in the close to buy one of the houses, most were occupied by elderly couples whos' fledglings had flown the nest; having lived there for decades (Donkey's years in fact!!) Although barely three miles to the east of Derby, residents had to catch the bus to Long Eaton to pay their rent on occasions and curiously referred to their trips as 'going in to town' as opposed to 'popping into Derby' which was in fact very much nearer.

Nearly all the houses in the vicinity had extremely large gardens which housed a variety of poultry and pigeons; a polish gentleman in nearby Lyndhurst Grove even had a small flock of sheep. Adjacent Cleveland Avenue had two houses at its northern most end, which still boasted pig sties, even though they had been dormant for years and were certainly without the occupancy of Middle Whites and Gloucester Old Spots in my time in the locality. Adjoining the Drive was Cleveland Avenue which was where I eventually bought a property myself, after a short exile in Smalley Village, in reality it was built a few years after St John's and consisted mainly of rather nice detached properties in its upper reaches. I certainly liked mine and its enormously large garden. At no 8, our next door neighbour Mrs Butler who had lived in the house next door to us for most of her adult life and had brought up five or six children there, still turned out the most unbelievably copious and wonderful array of baking in the tiniest of kitchens: something that makes me smile today when I think of young women with large well-appointed kitchens who can barely boil an egg. My father doubled the size of ours by converting the adjacent brick coal house and you would have still been hard pressed to swing a cat. When Mrs B. had swapped the Staffordshire moorlands for St John's; cattle still grazed at the top of the garden and it was open countryside virtually all the way to Heanor and Ilkeston beyond. Sometimes she would glance towards Cleveland and its 'new' residents and properties and murmur, 'some of them round there really think they're it; when I lived around the corner, I didn't – I swear! 'Her husband had been a 'Master butcher', a term never heard these days. In fact, older Derbyshire ladies in those days often referred to their husbands as 'the master'- I just cannot imagine today's 21st century 'Cosmopolitan' and 'Heat' magazine influenced females referring to their 'partners' as Master. St John's Avenue which led on from the Drive boasted its own tennis courts for residents, inevitably these days the land has been swallowed up for bungalows; no doubt nice residences but a shame that such a lovely facility has succumbed to modern living. In those days, few ordinary families possessed a car, so the presence of Oliphant and Rayne's shop and

Post Office on Nottingham Road and the adjacent Co-op store were where most did their daily and weekly shopping, were a Godsend. Far away Derby was still a good bus ride away, and shopping bags had to be carried uphill too! - Cherry Tree Hill, in fact.

Where Sunny Grove now runs continuously through was truncated by a Spinney and over the road Chaddesden Park; which in essence made it a direct run from open countryside near Morley right up to our back door-no wonder we were oft visited by wildlife. Our Scout hut on Meadow Lane even boasted a stuffed Otter caught in the twenties in Chaddesden Brook. I am led to believe that St Marys in Chaddesden was originally built because when the brook flooded in centuries past the deceased could not easily be taken for burial in Spondon within the parish due to the swollen waters. Spondon residents may sometimes complain about the steep walk up Willowcroft hill but an amount of elevation has its merits.

At the corner of Lyndhurst and Nott's Road lay another retail emporium - Willy Bates corner shop and off licence. In over a decade I only made one excursion during daylight hours into the old fashioned and rather dingy shop and am sure it did not stock what I needed anyway. In fact, I never knew anyone who had ever actually purchased anything there. The other part of the enterprise however was a different story - at night, the tiny 'beer off' came to life and was often packed. It was an establishment where chocolate and crisps and pop were readily found, in addition to a variety of alcoholic beverages including 'sherry from the wood'. Our visiting relatives from the north east valued its existence and it was possible to extract from its shelves, bottles of the now extinct and delightful Newcastle Amber Ale, which my father knowledgably informed me was known by shipyard workers as 'apprentices beer'. Most of a certain age will also recall Cholertons village shop right in the heart of Spondon, it was a daily call for my school pals over half a century ago. Latterly, the senior figure of Mr C owned a house 3 doors away from mine, I loved his tales of old Derbyshire and the way that life had once been in Spondon and surrounds.

Back in those early days of my Derbyshire introduction a mobile butcher's van from West Hallam did the rounds every Wednesday and kept us supplied with sausages and the weekend joint. Young 'Jimmy' the driver with his striped apron, had a regular circuit supplying the surrounding area and villages and Mrs Butler who knew a thing or two about meat as well as baking, heartily endorsed the quality of his produce although she was heard to state on occasions that sometimes it was a bit 'pricey'. With a small hardware shop placed just over the Nottingham Road that sold paraffin and supplied my father's insatiable appetite for nails and screws and Jackson's newsagent's on the corner of Lime Grove, everyone's needs were met without continuously backing out cars from garages and off drives which is the norm these days. No Asda or super store in those days, just a paddock with fields adjacent, that thankfully survive flanking the Nottingham road.

Ernie Jackson who supplied everyone with their 'Evening Telegraph' and monochrome 'Radio Times' was a superb engineer and like myself, had, I believe; come to the area at the start of his teens. In his case though, it was to undertake an apprenticeship with the exalted Midland Railway Company. The Midland was unique in that it was a major railway without a London HQ, its base, administration and far reaching empire's control being firmly set in Derby. In Victorian and Edwardian times, it set the standards that others could only try to emulate. E. Jackson esquire having been trained by them was of a similar persuasion and had high standards. His large

detached house placed at the top of Lime Grove has, now disappeared, where half a dozen other dwellings currently now sit, it had once sported a miniature rail track to test his hand built model locos: exact scaled down steaming replicas of Derby's finest designs. Like all enthusiasts and many former railway-men he had time for most engines, but left you in no doubt that anything constructed at Crewe or anywhere else was much inferior to Derby designed and built examples of motive power. Above the shop were, a number of rooms, one was a store that also was home to his model engineering exhibits, whilst the largest room featured an immense '00' gauge model rail layout. Just after the war along with some other model enthusiasts he built a miniature race-track on waste ground at the top of Raynesway where a nursing home now stands and put on the regular equivalent of a grand-prix. It was a popular venue on Sunday mornings when a free display was provided for all, until it was stopped by the small-minded attitude of the Town & Country Planning Department. On winter evenings my older rail fan pal Mick, who lived a couple of doors away at the then last house before the old Creamery and gap: and myself, went around assisting the maestro with his layout -we often fell short in terms of excellence. Ernie built his own loco's and track, all to perfection, it was difficult to gauge which smoked more continuously, himself or his soldering iron: often in an eve his pal Les would come through the upstairs door to the adjoining property and we would all enjoy a cup of tea. Les's passion was growing chrysanthemums: my grandfather on his numerous sorties from Tyneside was no mean gardener himself but was in pure rapture over the marvellous blooms portrayed at side of the entrance used by the paper boys. He consoled himself with short Barton bus rides up the A52 to secure the 'best rose bushes in England' from the nurseries in Stapleford and Sandiacre.

The land all around Cherry Tree hill stretching down towards the canal, including the old farm and the extensive railway sidings had all been at one time owned by the Midland Railway; from by bedroom window, particularly on summer evenings I could hear the distant clanking of wagons being shunted and the rasping bark of steam loco's easing freight trains away from Chaddesden and Spondon to points all over the U.K. Today the A52 covers the former goods lines and even the most industrious student of Industrial archaeology would be hard pressed to trace the route of the old Derby- Borrowash canal which was overgrown and alongside. My Uncle, a Scot who lived near the Park, like me had acquired a great love of Derbyshire and its people. He had come to Derby in wartime prior to overseas posting and had met and married my aunt- a Derby girl. In addition to his full-time occupation he assisted Derby's world renown cycle company the legendary 'Mercian', and for my fourteenth birthday was instrumental in the provision of a second hand racer so that I could tour more of the county. In the sixties when I used to cycle up to Mansfield to visit my mate from the Notts and Derbys Railway Circle, I would wend my way through Chadd past the turn to Locko and up Morley Rd and rarely see a soul until I hit the outskirts of Heanor. There was no route from the Raynesway, Britain's first dual carriageway, towards Oakwood in those days. Then, there was no Oakwood at all, just Chaddesden Common as it was termed. A place I remember only too well as an irate farmer once chased me off his land for cuddling under an oak tree with an early girlfriend. One day, shortly before England secured the World Cup in '66, I walked to school as normal, past the Enoch Stone where the unfortunate chap was murdered, on by the Old Creamery and through the fields where I was accompanied by a gathering of rather frisky cattle. I stopped to gaze from the high ground over the dip below where the railway flanked the Derwent and the old canal bed. One of Britain's last steam engines was creating a plume of smoke all the way from Raynesway Bridge to Celanese. On my mini transistor radio, 'The Who' were blasting out 'My Generation'

and the square modernist and now lost form of the newly built Spondon House school loomed large, barely a furlong away. I clearly recall thinking, these are modern times; can it get more modern, what else can change? Five decades plus, I have my answer. Yes, like all of Britain, Cherry Tree Hill, Spondon and surrounds have changed immensely and will surely change again. I still have my memories though – and they are certainly good ones!

Neil Johnson

2020