

Meadow Bank Avenue History Project .

Interview with Philip Marshall, 18th June 1996.

Philip and Sheila Marshall came to live on Meadow Bank Avenue in 1959. Sheila had been brought up in the area, which was considered high class and desirable in those days. They came to Meadow Bank Avenue from Totley and moved from a small semi into number 29. Philip remembers that the price difference between the two houses was very small, partly because the house was in very poor condition but also because there was relatively little demand for big houses at the time. The price of number 29 was £2,100. Philip and Sheila had trouble filling the bigger house, none of the carpets fitted! They had misjudged the size of their new home.

Sheila's connections with the Avenue went back a long way. Her Aunt, Vera Toothill, was the daughter of a builder, Mr Abbott. Vera was born in 1898 and her parents lived in a substantial house on Machon Bank. Mr Abbott was a successful builder - Sheffield Fire Station was one of his projects and he combined building with the responsibility for maintaining the Sheffield to London railway line. Every night, Abbott's workmen brought the horses used by the company up through Nether Edge and Edge Bank. At the top they were let loose to graze the fields of Cherry Tree Farm. Vera would ride the horses as they were led by the workmen and then they would take her back to her parents on Machon Bank. In the morning the horses were collected for another day's work.

This explains how Mr Abbott developed his connections with Cherry Tree Farm. He was later to build houses at the top of the Avenue (numbers 8, 10 and 12) when the farm buildings were demolished. Philip recalled that the building and sale of two of these was the cause of a degree of tension between Vera's parents. Mrs Abbott was very keen to have a house on Meadow Bank Avenue and her husband set about building number 12 with this in mind. As it was nearing completion, a solicitor offered him £500 cash for the house and he accepted. His wife was not pleased but he placated her by building number 10. Unfortunately, he then sold that in similar fashion! Relations between man and wife were never the same. He tried to compensate by building a family home at 13 Brincliffe Gardens but Mrs Abbott never liked it and she never managed to live on the Avenue.

The cash sales reflect the way in which speculative builders operated in that period. Abbott went on to build some of the bigger houses on Brincliffe Crescent (left hand side as you go up the hill). He also built rows of workers houses, for weekly rental of ten shillings (50p)

Aunt Vera died in January 1996, just short of her 99th birthday.

The firm's name lives on with the local company Ackroyd and Abbott.

Philip's recollections of the Avenue in the period since he moved here in 1959 indicate that there has been a noticeable change in the nature of the community. He was working as a schoolmaster at the Nether Edge Boys Grammar School, which occupied the buildings opposite the hospital on Union Road (now a computer centre for schools) Ironically, the school moved

to new premises in Millhouses as Philip came to Nether Edge. It became Abbeydale Boys Grammar School and then Abbeydale Grange Comprehensive. Some of the Avenue children went to private schools, others opted for King Edward's (the first choice for many) and to High Storrs which was newly built. Nether Edge Boys was less fashionable and a small school with about 400 pupils and 20 staff. Primary age children went to Clifford, Hunter's Bar or Abbeydale.

The attraction of Nether Edge was its pleasant surroundings, its trees and the fact that it was considered "select". The whole suburb was quite attractive and there is now a more obvious division between the more affluent and the poorer sections of Nether Edge than there was in the fifties.

The social composition of the Avenue was solidly middle class, teachers being at the lower end of the scale! There were solicitors, doctors, a number of middle ranking businessmen and several single women/widows on private incomes. There was a great tradition of stability on the Avenue, with relatively little movement and few houses coming up for sale. Only when it became the norm for people to move for new employment did this begin to change.

The exclusive nature of the Avenue was jealously protected by some residents. Tradesmen were not allowed to sell their goods, with the exception of one mobile grocer (name?) who had negotiated the privilege with the trustees. However goods were delivered from the local shops, including Tym the butcher and Orme's the grocers (located at Nether Edge Terminus where the DIY shop is now). This was a very good quality grocers. Several residents would stop traders if they came onto the Avenue and this perhaps contributed to the reputation that this was a "snobbish" road. The closure of the gates furthered this impression and pedestrians were discouraged from walking through to Edge Bank.

Children also found some residents rather fearsome, particularly the older ladies. The Trustees often implemented rules to control children - no hard balls to be used on the Green for example. However, Philip recalled that some children devised their own contest in defiance of such constraints - they hit balls high in the air to try to get them over the roofs of the north side houses! It seems that there were fewer children here until the 1970s, when some residents moved out to "more select" suburbs - Dore, Fulwood etc. In their place came young families and the population grew.

Social contact between residents was much more limited in the past than it is now. There was very little socialising and certainly no pattern of communal events - these began in the 70s and were not always welcomed by residents. The bonfire in particular brought several protests and objections.

The Trustees were frequently called upon to maintain standards. In the early 1960s, one resident who had installed lodgers in his house duly received a visit from the Trustees. He was told to get rid of the lodgers or move out - he left and set up in a bigger house elsewhere. On another occasion, a group of "hippies" set up camp on the Green. Philip, as Trustee, asked them to leave

but this had no effect. The son of a resident intervened and removed the front teeth of one of the campers. In the meantime, the police had been called. No charges were pressed. The would-be campers received a stiff warning about trespassing while the resident's son, who perhaps deserved to be charged with assault, was sent home.

There were still few cars on the Avenue in the late fifties - perhaps only a dozen or so. The residents used public transport as a matter of course, first the trams and then the buses. As cars increased, double parking became a major issue and the Trustees were asked to consider a one way system around the Green. Few people used taxis. The private cars were quite modest. It is ironic that many of the older houses were equipped for servants but not for cars. There was no space left for garages or for stabling/coaches. This confirms the reliance on public transport.

There has been a positive change to a more friendly community, with more mixing, perhaps encouraged by the presence of more children.

Whilst Sheila and Philip were at number 29, the Steiner Foundation took over Tintagel House and subsequently built the Merlin Theatre. This blocked the view across the landscaped gardens of the House but Philip could not recall any formal objection being made by the residents.(dates?)