

Notting Dale Urban Studies

MARY OSBOURNE (Osborn in transcript) and Betty Brown ND-INT/11/01 KCCHG oral history interview summary part transcript ref no 002 interview by Shaaron Whetlor for *The Story of Notting Dale* Mary Osborn born 1928 at 21 Bangor Street, mother Harriet Worley nee Rackham, father Albert 'Buller' Worley totter, maternal grandmother Nan Finn came from Ireland. Betty Brown mother ? Brown nee Rixon.

Mary lived in 21 Bangor Street with eight children (siblings). "We had an area what got flooded and ratty through the summer. We had so many bugs you'd be glad to come out in the summer and sit on the step to get away from them. They'd be crawling up the walls everywhere and them times you had that thick brown paper and inside you could see the larvae. You'd have bets on what one was going to reach the top first. The bugs were in abundance and you would paraffin the bed. They were always buying stuff to get rid of the bugs but you never did."

When moving from Windsor House, Sirdar Road, to Threshers Place in about 1951, "When we were moving they wanted to come and fumigate your stuff before you moved to the next house and I always remember this, my dad, a Tommy from the Town Hall come, 'you pack all your stuff up, it's going to be fumigated', and my dad said 'what for?' He took her in and she must have been sorry she came. Off came the bed clothes, up went the beds, 'you don't take my home out of here, there's nothing wrong with it.' He done his nut, my dad, even thee knives and forks and plates and everything you had they wanted to take.

"We had a front room, a back room and a kitchen and eight of us lived in there. As I say in Bangor Street people helped one another. If you were ill they would order the food. They'd order the food, take it to the family and then go out and collect it, and their first stop use to be Notting Dale Police Station. They had a basin and everybody would drop in.

"We'd get the gamblers at night and then the police would come. We'd have the gamblers standing around the lamppost and there would be a boy there and he'd clap the clapper. My brother done it one night and as he clapped the clapper the policeman got hold of my brother and slapped his face. So me mum come out of the house and she, down she went, took my brother away, my Jim it was, and she's hit the copper back and she had to run and the police chased her. She couldn't come out for about a week because every time he was there and they asked the kids 'do you know that lady?' and they'd say no. If they asked anybody they'd say she only just moved there, we don't know her. They used to call the policeman Lightning because he was quick, so she said to him 'you're not like lightning today are you? You're more like bleedin' thunder' and she smacked his face and ran. The whole street came out.

"It was a good street and everybody helped everybody else. We never had nothing but we were never hungry. We had a little shop along there, Abe (Abbe) Greenfield, and if anyone was ill they'd go to Abe and he'd let them have all the food and wait for the money to be collected to pay for it. It was a good street, we had nothing, we had nothing to lose, but they all helped one another, it was really good."

Most of the men were totters. "As a kid you wasn't frightened to come out, my mum would be out there with a skipping rope. My mum and Annie Podmore, and they would be turning the rope and all the kids would be playing 'drip drop', or they'd have a rope round the lamppost like a maypole and they'd all be having a go, mums and all. At 12 O'clock at night on Saturday night, that was our late night out and in the summer we'd all be sitting on the street and along would come Fred Jeffreys, the midnight fruiter we called him, and you'd get a penny orange or what was going and then along would come the late night final, the dog results, Billy Robbins, he was our last one round. They'd all go to the dogs and he would come round with the dog results."

They had quite a few rats in the area. When Mary's parents were young they remembered pigs being kept in Threshers Place. "The Rag Fair, that was good. My sister used to stand out there, she was only little and her name was Harriet but we called her Minnie, and she used to have a basket of mint and she'd be outside selling her mint, a penny a bunch, and my dad being a totter he'd have gear out there in Rag Fair and at one end there was a man who sold canaries. You had your railings and your gear was hung over the railings or you had your pony and cart, his cart would be there with his bit of gear sorted out, but all along the railings you'd see it all." Totters rented a barrow from Bobby Wheelwright's. Mary's dad had his own horse and cart and it was stabled in Dulford Street.

"When we come out of school we'd go in the diner Soupy Everetts. On hot cross bun day you go round there in the morning and get a hot cross bun, and sometimes they had a Christmas party and you'd all be invited round there. They had the kidnapper (from the NSPCC) and he would be round the streets every

day. If you had no shoes he would be in after your parents. He'd be walking the streets and if you had no shoes he'd be in after you. You'd see him chasing the kids he knew to make the parents get some shoes of some sort." There was the Salt and Vinegar man, Hokey Pokey, Jo Mancini sold ice-cream on the corner of Bangor Street. The Dolphin was the pub for the totters and the Garibaldi. Mary's mum worked as an ironer in the Holland Park laundry when she was young. Mary went to St Francis School. In 'Beattie's story' there's a mention of a priest at St Francis called Father Worley and Nora Firm (Finn?).

WORLEY FAMILY HISTORY www.worley.org.uk/NOTTING20%DALE.htm

As many of my ancestors came from the area of Notting Dale in Kensington, I have heard several stories, mainly about a close knit community, pulling together whenever needed. There was a lot of petty crime going on in the area, and gambling was something most people did. The police had trouble controlling these illegal activities because conveniently no one ever knew or had heard of the people they were looking for.

Large numbers of Irish families moved in to help with the building of railways in the surrounding areas in the early 1800s. They became so large in number that a church was built for them, St Francis Catholic Church in Pottery Lane. Along with the church came a school, also St Francis, I have ancestors who attended this school.

My father used to live in Avondale Park Road, which was Tobin Street when he was born, and prior to that it was Thomas Street. My grandfather worked in Pottery Lane as a general dealer, dealing in scrap metal and used tyres and batteries. I have found several ancestors on census including the family of my great-great-grandfather John George Worley who had a marine store in Walmer Road. Stories of fighting in the streets, such as the one between two women, one of which I believe to have a connection to my family, an Annie Strutton, reached a local newspaper in 1913.

My grandparents on my mother's side used to manage several flats in a large house in Holland Park, which was quite a select area. As my mother was working, I spent a lot of my time with my grandparents in this large house in Holland Park, playing in the garden and often spending the night. Talking to family members and distant relatives, many from Notting Dale, they all have stories to tell, many of hardship and poverty but many also of good times, outings and street parties. They seemed to make the most of what they had. My Worley ancestors were divided amongst the lowest and very poor, and must have had a hard existence, whilst the house in Holland Park where my mother's parents worked was amongst the wealthy.

My ancestors, the Worleys, were very well known totters in the area of Notting Dale, they lived in Walmer Road where the kiln still stands. They had horse-drawn barrows for collecting their wares. One Worley in particular was well known, Harriet, she would apparently take no nonsense from anybody, not even the police, a relative of mine remembers her very well. She would be outside in the street overseeing what was going on.