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If Walls Could Talk

Memories of the Park Estate in Weymouth



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THE PARK CHURCH CENTRE



*Some of the history group outside St John's Mission Hall, 30 Chelmsford Street
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Dedicated to Joe Stevens – a creative spirit

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Tilleys 1950s – Weymouth Museum

1. The birth of the Park Estate

Until the 1830s, the land the estate is built on did not exist. But in 1834, Weymouth Corporation took the big decision to reclaim 50 acres of marshy land from the Backwater.

The plan was to create a beautiful new park, with extensive drives and paths, and two grand entrance lodges. Great celebrations were held, with almost nine thousand people turning out to watch the laying of the embankment wall foundation stone. Bands played, speeches were read, and in the evening, there was a grand dinner and ball held for the dignitaries, and even a special menu provided in the local poor houses.

The land was reclaimed as planned, but for various reasons, including skulduggery on the part of certain civic leaders, and the arrival of the railway (which meant building the station on part of the reclaimed land), the creation of the park never happened.

Instead, the Corporation sold the land to housing developers, and building work began in the early 1860s. By 1900 the estate looked very much as it does today. The development had been managed by a conservative land agency, and they named the terraces after Tory statesmen – for example Walpole Street, Stanley Street and Brownlow Street.



Charles Street residents 1967 – Gillian Hillidge

2. Everyday life

Members of the history group described the Park area from the 1920s to the 1960s as being ‘not posh, but very respectable’. It was quite a sought after area to live in, and many of the residents were railway men and their families. It was like a village community, with everyone knowing everyone else, and people rarely moved away, so you’d have three or four generations living in the same few streets, or even in the same house. For instance, Diana remembers that at the time of her birth there were three generations living in her grandmother’s home, nine occupants in a two bed-roomed house. Gerry had three aunts living in Penny Street, so plenty of cousins to play with and always somewhere to go if his mother was out!

“It was like living in a little village, everything was here, you didn’t need to leave”

The Park Estate was remembered as being crime free. The policeman (PC Crabb in the 1940s) lived in William Street. He was held in high regard by the community and would regularly be seen cycling or walking around the area. During hot summer nights in the 1930s and 1940s it was not unusual for families to leave their front doors open at night to let the air circulate. People didn’t lock their doors and in fact many people didn’t even own keys to their front doors. The group felt that part of the reason for the lack of crime was that everyone knew everyone, so you’d be very unlikely to get away with anything, but also that there was very little worth stealing in those days!

People lived without the commodities we now expect. Houses had just one cold tap, there was no bathroom, and toilets were outside. The tin bath was stored on the yard wall and the weekly bath involved the whole family taking turns in the same water, which had been heated using pans and kettles on the stove or fire. Once bath time was over, the water would be tipped out and used to scrub down the yard. Some of the group remembered having no lights upstairs, you would just use candles. Refrigerators were not used; instead a meat safe was hung in a pantry or on the wall outside in the yard to keep food as cool and fresh as possible.

Mary grew up in Stanley Street in the 1920s and 30s. She remembers that her house was the first in the area to have a bathroom, put in by her father by dividing a bedroom. He was the only one who could work the gas geyser, so you had to make sure he was around if you wanted hot water for your bath. The neighbours were very jealous, even more so when Mary's father and a friend installed electricity (everyone else was still using gas).

Although most properties were rented rather than owned, people took a great pride in their home and street, scrubbing their front steps and the pavement outside their houses, every day. You had to work hard to keep things clean because of all the dirt from the steam trains. Any laundry you put out to dry would often come back in covered in smuts.

Proper metal dustbins were used and the bin men would collect them from the back alleys, so the rubbish was kept out of sight. The alleys themselves were kept in nice order, clean and tidy with pots of flowers and children playing. The galvanised metal dustbins would probably have deterred the seagulls who cause us trouble on the estate today, but in fact very little of interest to gulls would have been thrown away in the past. The 'Pig Man' would come round regularly to collect any food waste so that it could be used as pig swill, and the Rag and Bones man would come with his horse and cart to collect anything re-usable.

At twilight the lamplighter would come round. A small pilot light was always left burning in the gas streetlights, and using a long pole with a hook on the end, he would push the lever controlling the supply of gas to the jet, and with a pop the lamp would blaze. Each lamp post had a pool of warm yellow light around it and you would walk through alternate dark areas and lit areas as you went down the street. Each morning he would come back and turn the lamps off again. Gerry and Diana also recalled the 'knocker up' who (in the days before alarm clocks) would come round in the mornings to wake everyone up, so they'd get to work or school on time.



Charles Street 1967 – Gillian Hillidge

From the 1950s, as more people started owning cars, there was a system of 'odds and evens parking'. Car owners would be expected to park on the 'odds' side of the road one day and the 'evens' the next, so that no one had to put up with cars right outside their house every day. A sign with a little arrow indicator which could be flipped to odds or evens hung on the lamp post to tell you which side to park on that day.



Penny Street Coronation Party fancy dress 1953 – Christine Worsley

3. Growing up on the Park Estate

Most of our history group members had grown up on the Park Estate, and they had fond memories of their childhood playing in the alleys (known locally as 'lanes') and exploring the neighbouring lake and seashore.

John W grew up in Brownlow Street. As a child in the 1950s he would play tennis for hours with his mates against the wall of the railway signal box at the end of Ranelagh Road, as well as holding Mobo scooter races with his friends through the lanes. On Saturday nights they would go to the Youth Club in the Mission Hall or the YMCA above the boxing club in Hardwick Street.



left: Alleyway off Walpole St 1967 – Gillian Hillidge
right: Alleyway off the main alley from Walpole St 1967 – Gillian Hillidge

The lanes were a great place to play 'hide and seek', and large groups of girls and boys chasing each other through the alleys was a common sight. People remembered playing 'kick the tin', 'knock down ginger', skipping games, marbles, jacks, roller skating and football. Hopscotch was popular,

and whenever a road was dug up, the children would go and collect chalk from the hole to use for their games, as a lot of the rock used in the foundations of the estate was chalky.

Many of the activities were seasonal, so in early summer they would make pea shooters from hollow swan feathers found by the lake, and collect vetch seeds to use for ammunition. In autumn they would play conkers and go scrumping from an apple tree on the corner of Cassiobury Road.



The Triangle 2014 – Mandy Rathbone

'The Triangle' is the triangular area of land bounded by Hardwick, Lennox and Walpole Street, now filled with warehouses, garages and work buildings. It was one of last areas to be built on and had been intended to be left as a sort of village green. In the 1920s it was used that way, with children playing leapfrog and rolling their iron hoops (many of those hoops made by William Tett the blacksmith at 2 Stanley St).

Children would earn money by doing chores for their neighbours, or collecting holidaymakers and their luggage from the station on home-made trolleys. Gerry remembers making a fair bit of money in the 1940s as a choir boy. He reckoned he could earn up to 16 shillings a year depending on the number of weddings and funerals he sang at.



left: Advert – Holton and sons
 right: Receipt from Lush butchers, Hardwick St – Weymouth Museum

4. Shops

The Park Estate was pretty much self-sufficient, with a very wide range of shops. You didn't need to go as far as Weymouth town centre for anything. Diana thought it was possible that her grandmother had never been into the town.

Food had to be bought daily as there were no freezers or fridges. You would take your wicker basket to go shopping and the items you bought were placed in paper bags. Very little was pre-packaged, and there were no plastic bags. A bell over the door would ring as you went in and there'd be a counter in front of you with the stock kept on the shelves behind. The shopkeeper would fetch the goods you asked for and there'd be a lot of weighing and measuring, which took time, but no-one was in a hurry. The prices were totted up on the back of a paper bag, and a drawer was used for the cash.

The group felt that when the big supermarkets came, and people stopped shopping on the estate, it killed a lot of the social life locally as when you were buying food every day you'd meet lots of people and have a chat with everyone you met.



Site of the Co-op butcher in Brownlow Street 2014 – Mandy Rathbone



Holton's 2014 – Amy Hopwood

Butchers

Over the years, there were a number of butchers on the estate. For example, there was Gill's in Queen Street; the Co-op butcher in Brownlow Street; and Bridle's at 28 Hardwick Street, which had a pit at the back of the shop for cold storage.

One of the best remembered butchers was Holton's, at 10 Ranelagh Road. Although it is now a house, you can still see the elaborate tiles in the doorway, and the shadow of the word 'Holton' on the hoarding above the large front window. Mr Holton was described as a fine figure of a man, tall, upright and immaculately dressed. He ran the shop with his two sons, and was also an elected councillor for Melcombe Regis North ward.

All the butchers in the area would have sawdust on the floor, with birds and rabbits hung up around the walls. In some cases there was a bit of suspicion about where these had come from as you had to watch out for the lead shot when you ate them. They would sell dog meat, painted blue to show it wasn't for human consumption. Some of the butchers would sell hot faggots and peas, ladled straight into the bowl you'd brought from home.

Derek remembers the manager of the Co-op, Mr Symes, as a very hard-working man. You'd often see him working late into the evening cutting bacon to be delivered to the local hotels and guesthouses.



Wedding cake (Christening tier) from Nash's Bakery – Diana Cleal

Bakers

There were several bakeries to choose from on the estate, all doing a good trade, partly due to the needs of the guest houses and larger hotels on the Esplanade. Bread was the main product sold at bakeries in those days, if you wanted cakes, you tended to make them at home. The best remembered bakers were Bond's, Nash's and Tett's.

George Bond had his bakery on the corner of Walpole and Lennox Street. The building is now converted into an ordinary house, but from the lane at the back you can still see the old bakehouse where Harold Bond (George's father) made the bread. George was described as a jolly character, looking a bit like Father Christmas, but he could be volatile – the barber working opposite remembers him throwing bread rolls at a sales rep who had irritated him! When George came in to get his hair cut he would always sit in a certain chair near the window so he could keep an eye on his wife, Edna, and her sister, running the shop.

John W worked as a Saturday boy at Bond's, helping to deliver bread from the van in big wicker baskets around the Park Estate and surrounds. They even delivered as far as Littlemoor and George Bond would often remark that in the past the trip up there had taken much longer as they used to go by horse and cart, and would have to open and close so many farm gates along the way. Although John W remembers George's temper, he also remembers that he could be very generous, he gave John a calfskin wallet with his initials inscribed on it as a leaving present.

George Bond was also the President of the Dorset Baker's Association, and John remembers George's reaction when the first ready-sliced bread went on sale at a baker's in Lynch Lane, 'This'll never work!' he said. But it caught on, sold in yellow and red packets to indicate the different thicknesses, and John was even asked by George to help publicise the new bread in Weymouth Carnival one year.



Nash's 2014 – Amy Hopwood

Les Nash, his wife Bet, and his five daughters, ran the bakery at 8 Ranelagh Road, as well as two other bakeries in Weymouth. Nash made more fancy goods than Bonds, but still only displayed bread in the windows. You bought only what you needed in those days, you weren't tempted just because something looked good in the window. They did make celebration cakes however, including Diana's wedding cake in 1956. It was a traditional fruitcake with two tiers, and the photo on the previous page shows the tier saved for the first christening. The building is now residential, but you can still see the elaborate shop windows on the corner of the old bakery and the beautiful green tiling around the doorway.

Tett's Bakery was at the end of Stanley Street. This was the one Mary A's family used for bread, although they also went to Nash's as they preferred Nash's buns. Although Tett's bakery had been founded by the Tett family, by 1907 it had been bought by John Blackburn. He had wanted his son, John (known as Jack), to go to Weymouth College, but the boy was rejected as his father was in trade. So Mr Blackburn hired a manager to run the bakery and the boy was accepted at the grammar school. Jack went on to become Mayor of Weymouth. The Blackburns also owned Tett's Restaurant in Queen Street, where Mary held her wedding reception.

Grocers

In 1960 there were a total of twelve grocers, greengrocers and 'fruiterers' listed in the Kelly's Directory for the Park Estate. Brantinghams on Lennox Street, Duffy's on Brownlow Street, and the Co-op on Hardwick Street were the better known grocers by our history group. The Co-op had been built back in 1887, and by the 1960s, had become the nearest thing on the estate to a self-service store, in that you could browse the goods and select what you wanted without the assistance of the shopkeeper. Many people remembered going to the Co-op to buy milk tokens to leave out for the milkman.

Until the 1940s, Victoria Arcade, which linked Crescent Street and Queen Street was a covered market for a number of small shops. Mary A remembers her uncle getting his fortune told in one of them. After the war it became a factory for Weymouth Radio Manufacturing Company, until, in 1952, Mr AJ Digby took it over.

Digby's was a fruit and vegetable wholesaler, and you would see their distinctive vans out and about supplying hotels and shops all around Weymouth. The older-established Drake's, situated in Gloucester Mews, was its chief competitor. Peter and Glenys worked there and they remember Drake's would try to pinch Digby's trade by getting their vans out earlier in the morning!



Dench's Sweet Shop 1953 – Beryl Parker (daughter)

Sweet Shops

The children of the area had a number of sweet shops to choose from. Our history group remembered a shop on the corner of Walpole Street and Avenue Road, run by a mother and daughter. The shop was nice and new, with a lovely smell. The door was on the right and the corner window displayed sweets in jars such as gobstoppers, black jacks and sherbert fountains. You would buy two ounces of what you wanted, weighed out and then poured into a white paper bag or you could pick your own penny sweets (four for a penny).

“At the top of William Street was another shop where we could buy sweets but which we mostly used for buying pop; you could get a small, medium or large glass of Corona for a penny, tuppence or threepence - though the lady in the shop always discouraged small children from buying the threepenny glass as she thought it would be too much for them” Jerry J.

A very popular sweet shop was Dench's, on the corner of William Street and Victoria Street, diagonally opposite St John's School, and so perfectly situated for the passing school children. Beryl Parker, daughter of George Dench, told us that her father took the shop over following his brother's death in 1942. George was a policeman and so Beryl's mother ran the shop. During the war it stayed open all hours offering support to the community. Beryl remembers her mother was pleased to have the company as George was usually out fulfilling his war duties.

Beryl remembers her father buying an ice-cream maker from the Nutshell auction rooms on the old High Street in Weymouth. He would go to buy ice from the ice stores (where the bowling alley is now) and pack it into the outer part of the barrel. They would then have to hand crank the churn for hours and hours to make the ice-cream. She thinks the recipe may have been a mixture based on custard powder (as rationing was still in place). Word would get out that Dench's were making ice-cream and the locals would queue up the road to buy a tiny scoop.

Dench's is no longer a shop, but if you look closely at its frontage, you can see the shape of the old wide shop window in the way the brickwork changes around the now smaller, residential window.

Hairdressers

If you wanted your hair cut, you had plenty of choices within the estate. 'Ken Webb's Gentlemen's Hairdressers' opened at 28a Lennox Street on 1st April 1961. Before that it had been Kimber & Hawker, a haberdasher, dyer and draper. John Hallett became Ken's apprentice in 1967 and went into partnership with him the next year as 'Hairdressing for Men'. Ken retired around 2000. John still uses the original wooden till with brass cup handles, and the shop still has the feel of earlier days, with old-fashioned shaving memorabilia on the walls and a striped 'Haircut Sir' sign in the door.

George Oram was a hairdresser in Queen Street. He brought the first permanent waving system to Weymouth! (There were two systems in those days, the MacDonald's and the Eugenie, and Mr Oram favoured the latter.) Mary A remembers that most of the young girls of the area would go there before the war. Mary, however, preferred to go to Nancy's at 7 Ranelagh Road, who had been trained in the West End.

Fish and Chips

Another happy memory was of 'Shooters' fish and chip shop on the corner of Chelmsford Street and Hardwick Street. The shop is now a private residence, but can be identified by the small circular window on the Chelmsford Street side. Mr Shooter had a number of fish and chip shops in Weymouth, and this one was run by Mr and Mrs Sellick.

People remembered being given the scraps of fried batter (known as 'scallops') for free. Mary A remembers teenage summer days in the 1930s, spent with a group of girls and boys on the beach at Greenhill. Mary had a tent they used, and at the end of the day someone would be despatched to Shooters, to buy fish and chips for 9d.

Off-licences

Mr and Mrs Cann ran an off-licence at 27 Walpole Street. The twin shop doors were on the slant of the corner and led into a room dominated by a big counter with bottles on shelves all around. In the middle of the wall was an opening through to the family lounge, where they would sit in between serving customers.

Children would often be sent to buy drink or cigarettes for their parents in those days, and some of our group remembered the strong alcohol smell in the shop, and taking empties back to the shop to get the bottle deposit back. However you didn't have to go to an off-licence to buy alcohol. Most pubs would have a 'jug and bottle' door, where they would fill your jug or bottle with a drink to take away.

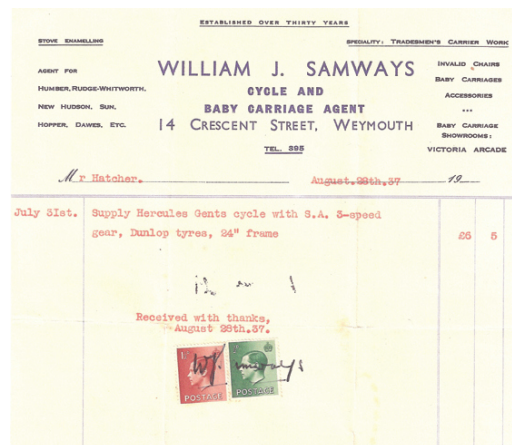
Transport

The Godden family ran the livery stables and lived in Stanley Street. They had several horses, and also had a hearse and a number of open carriages. As a little girl, Mary A was friendly with their little boy and remembers his grandmother taking them both out in a landau. She felt just like the Queen, very posh! They also owned the Royal, a horse brake that was used to take a dozen or more trippers at a time to the Wishing Well in Upwey. They owned another carriage called the Royal Pearl, and that was pulled by Sugarem Shorey and his horse.

In the first half of the 1900s there were also a number of ordinary stables in the Park Estate, as horses and carts were the main mode of transport before the motor car became more widespread. Most of these stables were situated off the lanes, and there was one behind the Brownlow pub.

Tilleys Garage was situated on the large area of land where Nightingale Court now stands. It was purpose-built as a garage and was very grand, with space on its premises for over 500 cars! It was also a big local employer, with men working in the show rooms, on the petrol pumps, and repairing and painting cars by hand. Gerry remembers buying his first car from them in 1961 - a second-hand Austin Countryman.

Opposite John W's house on Brownlow Street was a garage used by Tilleys for 'Channel Island Parking'. He remembers that the cars would be expertly driven in and parked by Miss Hayes. She lived in Radipole Manor and was rather well-to-do, going fox hunting and keeping a groom, but still found time to work as Tilleys driver. Michael Tilley remembered her *'parking the cars like sardines, and climbing out through their windows'*.



If you preferred a more sedate form of transport, you could buy or rent a bicycle from Samways on Crescent Street. Many of our group remembered their parents buying them their first bike from there, or renting them for long summer days exploring and picnicking. They would also repair and service your old bicycle. A few doors along, Mr Samways had another shop selling prams. They specialised in the high class Silver Cross perambulators, and their clientele would have come from further afield than just the local estate.

Funeral Services

Even in death, your needs could be met within the estate. Mrs Katherine Abrams lived at 23 Walpole St (in the 1940s and 50s) and was called on by local residents when someone died. She would come and lay out the body and support the family before the funeral directors became involved.

There were two undertakers in the area, Clarke and Cross on Crescent Street, and Stocking and Son (still there) on Queen Street. Fred Simmonds, the undertaker for Stocking, lived in Melcombe Place. He was remembered as a very gentle, softly spoken man. As a sideline, he would grain and varnish front doors for people, enhancing the natural wood.

In the lane connecting Stanley Street and Derby Street you can still see a workshop, identifiable by the gantry sticking out above the first floor level, that for a while was used as a coffin store.

5. On your doorstep

“The grocer would knock and ask mother what she wanted that day”

Living in the Park Estate, you didn't even have to leave your house to get many of the products or services you needed - a lot more was provided door to door than in modern times. The local bakers and grocers would deliver your regular order to your home (particularly useful for the local hotels and guest houses); then there was Miller the mackerel man; Mackie Bowles selling vegetables; and of course the milkman.

Milk, fresh from the farm, would be delivered in enormous churns attached to the back of a horse drawn cart. You would bring your milk jug to the door and the amount of milk you wanted would be measured out and then poured directly into your milk jug. In 1947, the first electric three wheeler milk floats arrived in Weymouth. The photo shows Peter Critchell sitting proudly next to his father in one these floats.



Peter Critchell and his father

Some things were seasonal, like the man who came round selling watercress or the French men who came in their black and white striped shirts from France to sell long strings of big and delicious onions in the autumn. In the summer you could buy Walls ice-cream from a man who cycled the streets on a specially adapted tricycle.



Sugarem Shorey's horse 1930s – Christine Worsley

A man known as 'Sugarem' Shorey delivered logs in the colder months, but when it was warmer used his horse to pull the carriage on tourist trips out to the Wishing Well at Upwey. He was a very fondly remembered character in our history sessions, as many of the children of the area would talk to him or feed treats to his horse as he went about his business. The photos show Sugarem Shorey's horse in the 1930s and the man himself, later in life, as he protested about the council pulling down the old toll booth house he lived in on the Preston Beach Road.



Sugarem Shorey – detail of a photo from Weymouth Museum

Mr Cox delivered oil and paraffin by horse drawn cart, setting out from his yard off a lane at the far right end of Penny Street. You can still just about see the grooves the cartwheels wore in the stone step into his yard. Stockley would come round to sweep the chimneys, and Charlie Dench cleaned the windows.

You could even buy your clothes and household linens on your doorstep. Mr Reg Dean had his base at 10 Ranelagh Road (previously Holton's butchers) from 1958 to 1973. He was a 'tallyman', so would sell you clothes on credit and then collect weekly repayments from your home. He was described as a big, jolly man, very jovial.

"He must have been a charming gentleman, and certainly knew how to sell stuff! He would take things around to the B&B ladies... 'Your curtains look a bit shabby' he'd say, or 'You could do with a new dress' to a lady in the street, and then round he'd go with the curtains or dress tucked under his arm for them to try.



Guest Houses in Lennox Street 2014 – Mandy Rathbone

6. The 'Season'

Of course, Weymouth is known as the perfect place for a seaside holiday, and the Park Estate has the perfect location for easy access to the beach, the station, the town and harbour. Lennox Street in particular had a high number of guest houses and hotels, as it still does today, but in the past, the other residents of the Park Estate would make money from the holiday season too.

They would offer rooms in their house to visitors on a 'rooms and attendance' basis. This would mean that the visiting family would take a room, and the resident family would clean and tidy and bring them hot water to wash with in the mornings. Meals would be provided, but not in the way you would expect now. In those days, the visiting family would bring with them all the food they wanted to eat, and the lady of the house would cook it for them. They would expect to eat breakfast and their evening meal at the house. It took a lot of work to cater for guests like this, and girls were sometimes kept home from school in order to help their mothers.

Park Estate residents often sacrificed their own comfort in order to accommodate visitors and make money. John W remembers that during the summer, he and his sister had to give up their bedrooms – she would sleep under the stairs, while he would sleep in the garden shed!



Swindon Weeks

There were two week slots throughout the summer when factories in different cities would close down and their workers could go on holiday. Weymouth was a favourite destination for the Great Western Railway workers of Swindon, and many of the stories people remembered were about those visitors.

Swindon Works Holiday of 1952: The Great Western Railway Works closed that year from 5.20pm on Friday 4th July to 7.40am on Monday 21st July. Five special trains (third class only) were put on for conveying workers and their families to Weymouth, a total of 2,990 passengers.

Arrival day was known as 'Swindon day', and the following week as 'Swindon Week'. People had strong memories of the local boys taking their handmade carts to the station to earn money by collecting luggage and leading the visitors to their accommodation in the Park Estate. The visitors would bring two suitcases, one filled with clothes and the other with food to give to the landlady.

Lots of events were put on to entertain the 'trippers' - sandcastle competitions, cricket matches against the local team, singing contests, beauty contests, shows and carnivals - sometimes organised by the locals, sometimes by the visitors themselves.

"It was like 'Swindon by the sea'. Walking along the Esplanade everyone seemed to know everyone from back home."

It was traditional for families to return year after year, not only to the same resort but to the same lodgings. This meant that friendships were often formed between the children of the visitors and the locals. But it was a busy time and the visitors could be a bit too intent on enjoying themselves for the tastes of the more respectable locals, so there was usually a feeling of relief at the end of August, when the season was over.



The Ranelagh landlords 1950s – Colin Smith

7. Public Houses

There were many more pubs within the Park Estate in the past. Some of them have been converted to shops and others to housing. For example, The Ranelagh pub on the corner of Ranelagh Road and Queen Street is now an 'adult' shop, but you can still see the old tiling around the front door and hidden behind road signs on each side of the door, large olive coloured tiles depicting goddesses. Mr and Mrs Haddon were landlord and landlady, and the photo shown is from a Christmas card they sent to Colin Smith in the mid-1950s. The handwritten note accompanying the photo reads, "This is what is left of us after 32 years in the Ranelagh"!

The history group only had memories of a few of the pubs in the area, so it is those that are focused on here. Part of the reason for this is that pubs were quite different in the first half of the 1900s to how they are now. They were male dominated, smoky places and they only sold drinks, no food, although you might manage to buy some plain crisps, with salt in a blue twist of paper. Pubs didn't really appeal to women in those days, although some would take a jug to the side door to get a drink to take home.



The Stag pub: believed to be 1940s

'The Stag' public house was a fine old building on the corner of Walpole Street and Lennox Street. The land it stood on has since become a newsagent and convenience store. John H remembers one of the publicans as being perhaps a bit unsuited to his trade...

"He was a strange guy, not at all hospitable. He stood on the doorstep and dared you to go in".



Site of The Stag pub 2014 – Mandy Rathbone

'The Brownlow' was a large square building on the corner of Brownlow Street and Ranelagh Road. It has recently been converted to flats. Andy Fisher, the son of Bill and Connie Fisher, the landlords in the 1960s, shared his memories with us...



Brownlow darts team – Andy Fisher

“The pub was a real ‘local’ pub – a bit off the beaten track for holiday makers staying in town and not one of the ‘night out’ pubs in the Park Street Shuffle or on a town/seafront pub crawl route. As a result it was always full of Park District locals from the streets immediately around it, with everyone knowing everyone else and seeing each other in the streets on a day to day basis and then in the pub most evenings – I grew up thinking I had 50 Aunts and Uncles! There was never any trouble – not that my Dad, who was ex-Royal Navy would have allowed it [...] There was a piano in the bar and I often went to sleep upstairs serenaded by the singing below – the lyrics to ‘Roll Out The Barrel’ I will never ever forget!”



Star and Garter: believed to be 1930s – Stuart Berry

‘The Star and Garter’ was on Crescent Street, in the building now used by the Angel Pharmacy. The beautiful, decorated bow windows of the first floor function room can still be seen. This was where many Park Estate wedding receptions were held. Susan has happy memories of attending the annual ‘Bufs’ (Royal Antideluvian Order of the Buffalo) children’s Christmas parties there in the 1950s. The RAOB’s meeting house was just a few doors further along Crescent Street. The pub also had a skittle alley, or you could play shove ha’penny, draughts and cribbage in the bar downstairs.

The Prince Regent Hotel used to be the Burdon Hotel, and ‘The Burdon Tap’, behind it in Crescent Street, was the hotel’s bar. It was literally a ‘tap room’ selling beer to working men and is no longer there. We received the following memory by post from Jerry J:

“Opposite was one of the smallest pubs I’d ever seen - the Burdon Tap. I could never believe that such a tiny premises could actually be a bar and I could scarcely wait until I was old enough to step through the door and see what it looked like inside. Only went in once though - once was enough: facing the bar was a single bench attached to the wall; no table. The sullen barmaid didn’t get up from her stool to serve you, and on the counter was a glass case containing one sandwich and one meat pie, which I wasn’t tempted to order. That’s gone, and not much missed.”



*left: St John's School 1912 – Christine Worsley
right: St John's school 1964 – Diana Cleal*

8. Schools

St John's Church of England School was an old stone building of Victorian gothic style, at the Greenhill end of William Street. Although the building was relatively small, in the 40s, 50s and 60s, the average attendance was 340 children. This meant cramped conditions, with classes sharing the same classroom, just split with a thin partition. The toilets were outside and the heating was poor. So, in the 1970s, the building was demolished and the children transferred to a new, modern school built outside the Park Estate. Where it once stood is now a red brick block of flats with a dental mechanic and a hairdresser on the ground floor.



St John's dinner ladies 1955-58 – Christine Worsley

Before the 1940s, the numbers enrolled at the school were even higher – as high as 600 in the early 1900s. However, not all of these pupils would have attended at the same time – in summer, girls were often kept home to help their mothers with holiday makers, and in winter it was often so cold that younger children were kept home in the warm. General poor health would also have prevented many attending – measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough were common.

People remember girls and boys being educated separately, with the girls in the upstairs rooms. Each child would be given a third-pint of milk in the morning, which had been stored near the fire in an effort to stop it freezing. The children had a sleep period in the afternoon, and in the summer they would be walked across the road once a week to have swimming lessons in the sea.

During WW2, St John's School had bomb shelters in the playground, and Gerry has vivid memories of being sat in one during an air raid and the children being given a stick of barley sugar each as a comforter. There was a locked room on the second floor of the school where the Home Guard kept their ammunition, and Gerry tells that an incendiary bomb came through the roof and into that room, but thankfully did not explode. Ray Cash and his colleagues in the Home Guard put the bomb in a bucket and managed to get it safely across the road to the sea.

At one point in the war, bombing became so heavy that it was decided that it was too risky to have all the local children in one location, so the school was split and some classes were held in the front rooms of two houses on Lennox Street. During wartime summer holidays, the school would remain open so that children could still get their third-pint of milk and supplement their sparse war-time rations.



St. Augustine's 2014 – Mandy Rathbone

Although none of our group attended it, there was another school in the area, the St Augustine's Catholic Primary School. The school building is still a prominent presence on Walpole Street, with the old toilet block and girls' entrance visible from the pavement; however it is now occupied by a laundry business. Like St John's, St Augustine's had become too small to serve the local need, so in 1964 the school relocated to new premises in Hardy Avenue.

9. The Mission Hall

The Mission Hall, linked to St John's Church, and now more usually known as the Park Community Centre, is situated on Chelmsford Street. Throughout the decades it has played an important part in the Park Estate community. Whilst these days you might go there for social events, craft groups and exercise classes, in the past you might have gone there to play billiards, go to Sunday School, or to take a bath! During WW1 it was used as a hospital, and in the 1950s and 60s, it was used as a summer holiday base for children with learning difficulties, particularly those with Downs Syndrome.

The Men's Club

The upstairs part of the hall used to be the preserve of the St John's Men's Club. The club was for males of all ages, from boys through to men in their 80s. In the smaller room they did boxing, but billiards was the main pastime, with three billiard tables in the larger room. The men played for the Cornick Cup, and matches could last for hours. Gerry remembers winning the Cup in 1949/50, successfully beating Jimmy Quinn. In later years, table tennis and snooker were introduced to the club, and eventually snooker took over from billiards. The upstairs kitchen and toilet currently in the hall used to be bathrooms, which members of the men's club could use.



Cornick Cup 1949-50 awarded to Gerry Maynard

Campaigners

Many of the group had fond memories of attending Campaigners or Junos meetings at the hall. Campaigners was a national church-based youth group, up to age 16, and Junos was for the younger children, from about 5 up. They would meet weekly, in the downstairs of the hall, the girls on Fridays and the boys on another evening. Girls wore a navy blue tunic with a scarf and blue beret, while the boys wore blue caps, grey trousers, dark and light blue socks and tops.

"We had to recite a Creed every time. Still remember it word for word... 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life'"

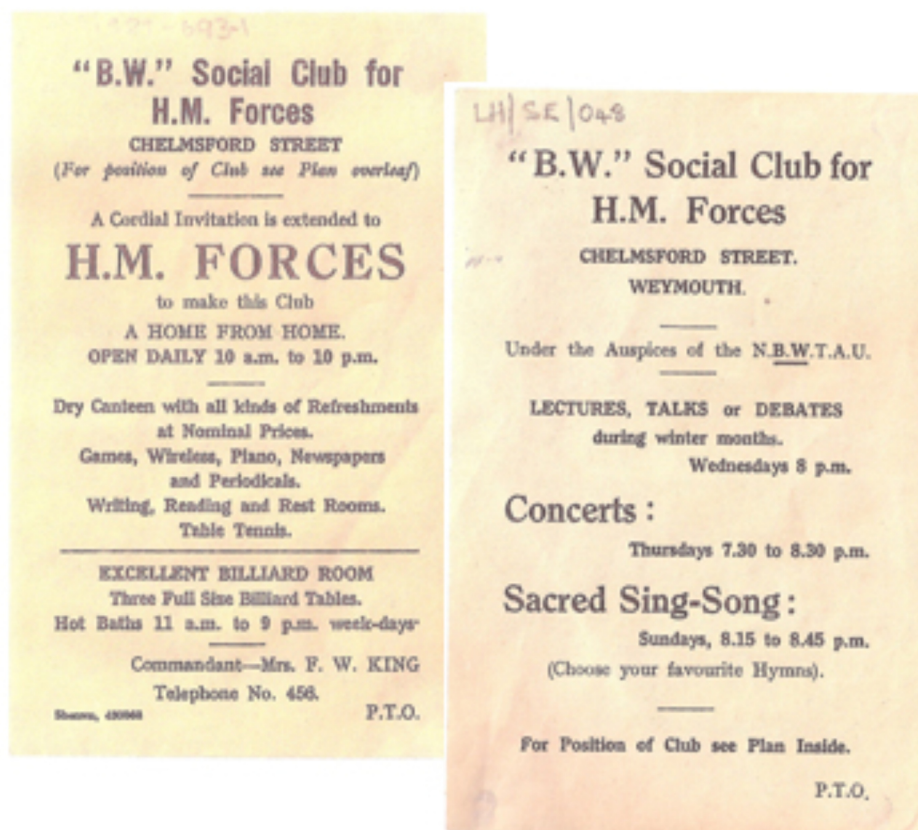
The Campaigners would play games, have treasure hunts, and work towards badges (just like Guides or Scouts). There was a stage at one end of the hall and they used to put on shows and productions. They also had a band, and every couple of months, after the service at St John's Church, they would parade through the streets of the Park Estate and back to the Mission Hall.

Sunday School

Sunday School was held downstairs in the hall, except during the war years, and the Sunday School prize giving was a big event. The group remembered entertainment being put on in the form of an accordion player and a magician. There was a stage along the wall nearest the door, and children would go up to collect their prizes (always books), which were given for good attendance.

There were fond memories of Miss Holbrook...

"...a lovely Sunday School teacher. She always wore a brown felt hat and told us nice stories in a lovely soft voice"



*Mission Hall: H.M. Forces 'A home from home' – Weymouth museum
 Mission Hall: H.M. Forces Lectures and Concerts – Weymouth museum*

War at the Mission Hall

During WW2 the hall was taken over by the British forces and used as a canteen and recreational facility. The soldiers would put on concerts for their own entertainment, but local children used to sneak around to the back door and watch. Gerry recalls the delicious smell of the cooking from the canteen during this time, when many locals were hungry due to rationing.

10. Second World War

As we have seen, WW2 affected St John's School and the Mission Hall, but it had an even greater impact on the Park Estate as a whole. One of the biggest changes was the influx of American, French and British Troops. Many of the guest houses on Lennox Street were requisitioned as quarters for the army, as were the hotels on the seafront, and the larger houses in Weymouth.

Living in the Park Estate became 'like living in an army camp' (especially in the run up to D-Day) with military vehicles on the streets constantly. There were gun emplacements in Ranelagh Road and machine guns set up opposite Penny Street, in the Triangle area, in an attempt to protect all the military equipment stored in the estate. The beach was cordoned off apart from a small area which would be open during the day and closed again at night. There was a row of sea defence bars about 100 yards out into the bay, and local children would swim out to them in the summer.

Excitingly for the local children, the Americans set up a doughnut factory in the Triangle area of the estate. Doughnuts weren't sold to the locals, but if a lad hung about down there he would be asked if he had a sister, and if he said yes he would get one for free! However, Gerry remembers biting into a doughnut from there and finding a bit of cigar in it, so he never went back for another... After the war this building became the Walls Ice Cream Factory, and later still, Radio Rentals.

Before they embarked for Normandy, and also when the war was drawing to an end and the American Troops were being sent home, they had no further use for British money and would literally throw it to the children. Sometimes they would chuck coins in the sea and watch as the children dived off the Pier and swam to collect it. One night, coming out of choir practice, a boy found thousands of cigarettes stashed in cartons under the noticeboard in St John's churchyard!

Of course, like anywhere else, there was a real risk of being bombed, so air-raid shelters were constructed on the streets of the Park Estate. Each shelter could hold about 20 people, and families would sit out the raids together. Those sheltering from the bombing would be mainly women and children as the majority of the men would have been away at war or on local defence duties.

Some would choose to stay at home and sleep under the stairs or in their indoor shelters. Beryl, daughter of George Dench, remembers they could only fit a Morrison shelter into their small sitting room at the back of the sweet shop by balancing the sofa on top. Beryl as one of the younger, more agile family members had to scramble up to sit on the high sofa in the evenings.

Diana remembered waking up in the middle of the night and asking her grandmother if she'd eaten supper in bed the night before as there were crumbs in her bed. When a candle was lit, they found a shell lodged in the ceiling above her bed, and realised the 'crumbs' were bits of shattered plaster!

Like everywhere else, the Park Estate was subject to rationing during the war. Each family collected a ration book from the Post Office and was assigned to one particular shop to buy their rationed groceries. Members of the group remembered having to share one rasher of bacon between four people or being given just one slice of a banana. People would supplement their rations with chickens or rabbits kept in the back yards, fish caught locally, and vegetables grown in pots or in the allotments at the top of Ranelagh Road where Heron Court now stands. Not all ration-based recipes were bad though, Gerry remembers his mother making delicious fried patties out of dried eggs and dried mashed potato...

11. Flooding

The Park Estate has struggled with a couple of floods in recent years, but in the past, the area suffered much more frequently. Every three to four years, a combination of high tides, heavy rain, silted up drains or pump failure could lead to severe flooding. Gerry remembers being up to his waist in flood water at least twice in the 1930s.

Even in these extreme floods, nobody left their homes. Once the water receded, floorboards would be pulled up so you could bail out the foundations of the house, and then you would just do your best to dry it out and clean everything. But with the absence of electricity and electrical equipment, there was also a lot less to be damaged in those days.

The Dorset Daily Echo tells of a cloudburst on 23rd August 1931, localised to the Park area. After just ten minutes of torrential rain, the drains were full and the area started to flood. Holidaymakers returning for their lunch in Chelmsford Street could not get to their lodgings. Boats were launched from the Mission Hall and rowed through the streets to help people. The day had started off promisingly and so visitors had gone out in flimsy attire... "hundreds of frocks were ruined"!

We discovered that in the 1920s and 30s it was widely believed that the reason for this regular flooding could be traced back to the 1830s. During the reclamation work, stakes had been placed in the marshland to indicate to the men how high they had to fill in the land, and the rumour is that men were paid to go around under the dark of night and hammer the stakes further into the ground, so that those doing the costly and time consuming work of filling-in would be 'finished' more quickly. It was said that this left the land the estate is built on lower than it should be and so more prone to flooding!



Penny Street Coronation Day 1953 – Christine Worsley

12. Street parties & celebrations

The Park Estate is ideally laid out for street parties, and people remembered them being held on both VE Day and for the Queen's coronation in 1953. On Coronation Day, a number of street parties were held in the area, and several members of the history group attended the party on Penny Street. Whatever tables and chairs people had were pulled out of the houses in the morning and laid out in a long line down the street. A piano was carried out too, so music and singing could take place, and there was a small stage erected near the lamp post. The mothers made the food - lots of sandwiches (jam sandwiches, spam sandwiches) and cakes, with tea or lemonade to drink, but no alcohol. The children wore fancy dress and received a commemorative Coronation gift. Christine remembers her outfit was a ballet dress with flags draped around it and a hat in the shape of a cone.

It was also tradition, every Guy Fawkes Night, or when there were other reasons to celebrate, like on Coronation Day, for the local children to build huge bonfires along the beach. They would collect rubbish for days beforehand and try to make their bonfire the biggest. In the run up to the big night, they would often keep watch on their pile to ensure none was stolen and to deter drunken sailors who might light the fire early for a lark. On the big night, the bonfires would stretch all the way from the Pier Bandstand to the Pavilion.



Penny Street VE Day 9th May 1945 – Gerry Maynard



Charles Street Coronation Party 1953



Chelmsford Street 2014 – Mandy Rathbone

13. Present day

The Park Estate today has a different feel to the one we discovered in the history sessions. There is no such thing as the 'Swindon Week' anymore, and people are more likely to take their holidays abroad. This has had an impact in that many of the old guest houses have been sold and converted into 'houses in multiple occupation' (HMOs), and of course it is no longer usual for children to sleep under the stairs, or in the shed, over the summer months, in order to free up bedrooms for holidaymakers!

Although a surprising number of businesses are still sprinkled through the streets of the estate, the number now would be nearer to 20 than to the 95 listed in 1960. These days, most people do a 'weekly shop' at an out of town supermarket, instead of the more sociable, daily shopping habits of the past. This change has had an impact on the range and number of local shops that can survive within the estate.

However, the Park Estate today retains its distinct identity and has a strong community spirit. Although people no longer scrub their front steps every day, there is similar pride shown by many residents in the flower boxes in front of their houses and the organisation of street parties for recent celebrations like the Queen's Golden Jubilee. And of course we all love living just minutes away from Weymouth's glorious beach!



A huge thank you to all of the following people, who have contributed their memories, photos, and/or time to the project, whether in person, by phone, letter or online:

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Deborah Merrill		Ken Webb	Ken Webb	Michael Tilley
Ken Whatley	Penny	Mrs Samways	Mrs Samways	Ruth Ballard
Ingleheart Diana		Christine Worsley	Christine Worsley	Stuart Berry
Cleal		John Walcott	John Walcott	Joe Stevens
Mary Lavelle		Monica Tett	Monica Tett	David Rogers
John Cleaver		Brian Squibb	Brian Squibb	Mandy Rathbone
Julie Cleaver				Weymouth Library
				Weymouth Museum
				Park Community Centre

More Information

Website: www.ifwallsouldtalk.org.uk
 Facebook: [ParkDistrictHistory](https://www.facebook.com/ParkDistrictHistory)
 Contact: Amy Hopwood on 07590 827887
 or amy_hopwood@yahoo.co.uk



The 'If Walls Could Talk' project was created to remember the old shops and businesses of the Park Estate in Weymouth, Dorset, and discover what the area was like in the past. We focused particularly on the heart-shaped area from Ranelagh Road to William Street, and from Charles Street to Crescent Street (see map above).

We held a series of history sessions, bringing together local people with memories of the area and those interested in hearing them or undertaking research. A number of personal interviews were held with people unable to attend the group sessions. We undertook research at the local library and museum archives. Our Facebook page, website and local press articles also helped to engage people near and far, and a number of the memories and photos represented in this booklet come from ex-Park Estate residents now living in other parts of the country or even as far afield as Canada!

Alongside this booklet, we produced a 'tourist-style' map of the area, as it was in 1960, mapping out the old shops and businesses, and showing photos and memories relating to them. In August 2014, we held a series of guided tours around the Park area, pointing out the interesting buildings, and a 50s style tea party to celebrate the project and share what we had discovered.

The project was funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and was delivered through the registered charity digital:works. The project was led by local resident, Amy Hopwood.

About digital:works

Digital:works is an arts and educational charity that works with communities, providing training and creative assistance to produce arts and media projects. www.digital-works.co.uk

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, it invests in every part of our diverse heritage. www.hlf.org.uk



All text is collected from participants' personal memories, Digital Works cannot accept responsibility for any inaccuracies.



*Gordon Lake
outside 6 Chelmsford Street*



*Amy Hopwood outside
8 Ranelagh Road
Nash and Son (bakers
and confectioners)
the inspiration for
the project*



*Gerry Maynard
& Christine Worsley (cousins)
standing in front of . . .*

*'the longest wall in the estate,
to play cricket against'*

The Triangle - Hardwick Street



*Patricia Giles outside
the girls entrance to
St Augustine's (RC)
Primary School
Walpole Street*



*Jason West outside the
Derby Street Methodist Church*



*Tricia Donovan
& partner outside
27 Walpole Street
Cameron-Clarke
(wine and spirit
merchants)*

About this Map

The 'If Walls Could Talk' project was created to remember the old shops and businesses of the Park Estate in Weymouth, Dorset, and discover what the area was like in the past. We focused particularly on the area from Ranelagh Road to William Street, and from Charles Street to Crescent Street.

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The map shows the shops and important buildings of the estate as they were in 1960, alongside photos and memories going back as far as the 1920s. As well as the map, we produced a booklet containing more detailed histories. In August 2014, we held a series of guided tours around the Park area, and a 50s style tea party to celebrate the project and share what we had discovered.

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If Walls Could Talk
Memories of the Park Estate in Weymouth

