

W 1920.
MRS ANNIE FORD

After reading Mary Turner's book, I doubt very much if I could improve on what so many of her pupils have already written about Collyhurst.

The description of places, works and shops, which had been pushed far back into the dark regions of my mind, were very vividly brought back to life.

Most of what was written was bounded Rochdale Road and Livsey Street. My Collyhurst was the upper part of Collyhurst Road.

I was born at 10 The Brows off Collyhurst Road, a row of houses which very often went unnoticed and which were built right up to the edge of a sixty foot slope down to the River Irk. To get to them you went down an unpaved ginnel, and had to pass the backs of the houses before you came to the front door, by the way of a veranda.

Strangers were none too happy negotiating our front door, as they were not used to the height, particularly as you could see the river down below, then the twenty or so railway arches, beyond again over to Queen's Road and Barney brick croft. A panorama view would have been written in a holiday brochure.

The houses were a reasonable size a small parlour, a good size kitchen plus scullery. Two good bedrooms (both rooms being bigger than my own bedrooms today in a 1935 semi-detached house) plus attic and cellar, where my Mother did the family and other families washing. The great thing was, the cellar was above ground level, by opening the door you could go along a narrow path which lead you onto 'The Green' a piece of land which was covered in rough grass, which we kids used to play on, a 'Paradise' we also would play underneath the veranda on wet days.

The first ten years of my life I remember my part of Collyhurst being quite a good district. The Green, which was about a hundred yards long and forty yards wide was surrounded my Elderberry trees (with lots of furry caterpillars on), and the houses on Collyhurst Road were very well kept.



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A number of these houses also had a middle room but this was rather dark due to the fact that the window was overshadowed by the brick walls of the yard and the house.

They were always painted and grained every few years by the landlord, but the tenants would wash and revarnish each Whitsuntide. It was something of a ritual in those days, that neighbours whitewashed the back yard and painted.

There were a number of school teachers lived just around. I can remember Mr Horrocks who was a retired headmaster of St. Oswalds School. He once gave me sixpence and told me to go to the corner shop to buy some chocolate while he chatted to my father. As I had never had sixpence to spend before, all at once, I just didn't know what to buy, I returned with three pennies in change, which he told me to keep. I thought he was the richest man on earth.

But somehow things began to change, the neighbours we had known moved out of the area, some to Blackley, Alkrington etc., and a rougher and harsher element took over.

The houses which had been proudly looked after began to have that unkept appearance. At first an odd one, then another and so on until in the wastime fo 1938 austerity did the rest. Somehow Collyhurst Road never regained its pride.

The trees which we had played hide and seek in, were gradually broken down and finally disappeared altogether.

Was vandalism begining to show. I suspect it was. I must make a point here. There were two elderly ladies who lived on our row, who kept an eagle eye on our green and trees and woe betide any strangers who trespassed. If you didn't live close by you were sent packing and quick, there was no cheek or hack answers in those days. I spent the first 27 years of my life in Collyhurst when I think back the deterioration over the last twelve years was unbelievable. I suppose the war years took its toll, not that it suffered war damage by bombs.

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I was the youngest of five children and my parents were in their forties when I was born. I have only the vaguest recollection of my two sisters and a brother being at home. My other brother was twelve years my senior and he and myself were at home. From all accounts I was a bit of a nuisance, he had the job of looking after me, and we all know what that can do for a boy's morale. He tells me he had the errands to do, pushing me around in a trolley type of contraption. I don't remember being taken around in it, but it was kept in the cellar for years after, a kind of cane chair on wheels. Father cut off the wheels and arms and made a chair of it, and would use it in the summer time to sit out on the veranda.

From the age of two, my father came off work through illness with neuresthenia, today - nerves, and so what must have been the hardest part of my mothers life after my sisters had married. Dad had been a foreman cabinet maker, and had earned good wages. He never went back to work and lived to be 86 years old.

My brother at fourteen got a job at Waltons' Collyhurst Road, a dyers and printing place. Unfortunately the textile business was, in the 1920s and early 30s a shaky trade to be in, and I can remember times when he was only working three days a week.

Mother never complained, I never realised we were just about scraping through. One thing I do remember my Mother saying to a neighbour. ("So long as I can keep out of debt I don't mind.") Little pigs have big ears. It's funny how some little things can register, though at the time you don't really know the significance of it. We didn't go hungry though food was plain. Some things I remember and always enjoyed. Monday dinner was always banana butties and Friday was meat pies from Deardens' at the corner of Churnett Street and Rochdale Road, they were lovely. Other things were potatoe pie, tripe and onion another favourite of ours, and rabbit stew.

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Monday night tea was always the cold joint from Sunday dinner, which I would have preferred not to have, if I could get out of it.

Monday washing took nearly all day as Mum washed for the people who lived in the big house. This was how Mother supplemented our income, I realized years later. The big house was at the top of the ginnel on Collyhurst Road, a big double fronted place. The rooms were big with a huge kitchen, and as I believe, built by the man who built most of the houses round about. In my very early days, attached to the house were stables where two horses were kept, which belonged to Hansons' a grocery warehouse which was a little higher up Collyhurst Road. Hansons my brother tells me had three or four shops in the area; but had their stock delivered from the warehouse. It looked as if it may have been a little church at one time, but I cannot find out about that. Later it was taken by a sweet manufacturer. The big house was converted into two separate houses about 1936-7.

Later Mother worked for a confectionery shop on the Balmoral row. The Balmoral being a public house at the top of Collyhurst Road and facing Rochdale Road. Then we did get a treat, Friday nights' tea was always cream cakes, how we did love them. Up to then we had never had bought cakes, only Mothers own baked. Very occasionally did a bag of broken biscuits from Crumpsall Biscuit Works appear.

I was at times bought clothes off the market on Rochdale Road near where the Cenotaph and the Essoldo stands today. I resented this very much particularly as I felt sorry for the girl next door whose parents both went out to work full time. I thought they were the poor ones, and she didn't have to wear clothes from off the market. (The mind of the young). Another shop where I was bought clothes from was May's pawn shop. They weren't all second hand, but lacked colour and variety. I vividly remember having a brown coat bought, and how I longed for the blue one which I had tried on, but brown being so much more serviceable that was the one I had to have.

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And I remember once being bought a pair of button up shoes when I wanted a pair of ankle straps. Still I was kept clean and tidy and well looked after and now I can see the other side of the story I'am grateful for all that was done for me. The highlight was Whitsuntide, I loved it. To walk with the scholars was a real thrill. Every stitch was always brand new, right down to vest and pants. One year I had a dress made in a silky blue material and the best thing of all - I was walking with a crook. What a performance, we set off alright, but after a while when the novelty had worn off!! I kept getting it stuck first the tram lines, then the melted pitch, and every now and again getting the thing between my feet and tripping up over it. I wonder if there was ever a photograph taken, I don't think there was - though I have one holding a primary banner ribbon and a circle of artificial flowers almost covering my eyes. Ah! Well, happy days.

My first school was Willet Street Nursery where in the afternoon all the children had a sleep on little camp beds. There were two teachers, two lovely ladies they were exceedingly kind and gentle, one was called Miss Lister, the other lady I'am sorry to say I cannot remember her name. If you didn't go to sleep after a little while, they would sit on a little stool by your side and pat you to sleep. It was lovely.

After the nursery I went to Collyhurst Tin School but that was never a success. I was never very happy there. For one reason which has always remained with me is. My first Christmas there I was invited to the Christmas Party at Willert Street, which was also the same day as the class party at the Tin School, I elected to go to Willert Street. The day we broke up for our holidays the teacher came round the class with little samples which were given to the children. The samp;es were Beechams' book of tables and little rulers. However when she came to me I was passed over because I hadn't been at the party. There was also a few sweets given out I didn't get those either.

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I stayed about two years at the Tin School, during which I seem to have had a lot of time off due to childish illnesses, and eventually I persuaded my parents to let me go to Smedley Road School. My father was quite pleased about this as it was his school, though in his day it was called Smedley Board School where there was a charge of either 1 or 2 pennies per week. There I stayed until I was fourteen. It was a good school with good discipline. The teachers were respected, you did as you were bidden. Law and order prevailed. The strap and cane were used, but never misused to my knowledge. The three 'Rs' were taught and every girl and boy could do them in various degrees. I'am sorry I cannot say I was one of the clever ones far from it, I dreaded gaving to read out aloud, but all the class had each to read in turn. Composition was another poor subject. History was my favourite. It makes me wonder why there are so many people who cannot read today. Where has the system gone wrong? That is something which could be a debate in itself, and which there isn't time for, at the moment.

In conclusion what can we say about our childhood days. For most parts we were happy and contented, we would play games like skipping ropes, hop scotch and hoop made from the wooden strip from off barrels. The skipping rope was off barrels from the greengrocers. We would dig up clay and play shop. Play football and marbles with the boys, not leaving out cricket. Each thing seemed to have its turn. Whip and top was a great favourite. We also had penny clay pipes and soapy water, and blew bubbles. The Green came into its own during the summer time, a great place for ticky and rounders, the games were endless. Another thing which kept the girls happy was dressing little celluloid dolls which cost $\frac{1}{2}$ penny each in little bits of material which kind neighbours would give to us. The same games time and again came round. No child was ever heard to say I'am bored. There were very few ready-made toys like today. I remember a Ludo and Snakes and Ladders which my Dad would play with me on winter evenings. Another thing I did with Dad was to go in the cellar and make things, if he went down to make something then I was there also. A little saw and

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hammer, a piece of wood and I was happy. My great pride and joy was a dolls table, I made, he even let me use his glue, under his supervision.

I only remember going on holiday once with my Father. It was at Marton, where we stayed for the week. Mother had to buy in the food and the lady of the house did the cooking. My Father never went away again after that holiday, and Mum and I went either to an aunts at Southport, or an uncle who lived at St. Anns. Most of my friends seem to have holidays nothing as spectacular as todays children get, but one weeks holiday was quite something in those days. One week was all that the worker got, and without pay.

Over the past weeks I have been talking to friends around my own age and older, and although we are better off by far than our Mothers and Fathers, we seem to have lost something. Shall we say "Lost the grace out of life."