

Chapter 4.

THE FACILITIES

THE TOWN'S SCHOOLS:- Public – Grammar – Secondary Modern - Car Production – Public Entertainment – The Cinema – Theatre – Radio Broadcasting – The Shops – Shopping – The Nation's Food – Meals – Laundry – Wives and Mothers – Society Changes.

The vast majority of children attended State Secondary Schools working towards an in-school – set, marked, and invigilated, exam. I do not think that those children at the bottom of their year looked up to those above, nor do I believe that those in the highest streams looked down on those below. As far as I can remember it was a conveyor belt of things you had to do... you stepped on at twelve and alighted three years later. Not one of us displayed any fear for the future or suffered from sleep disturb nightmares. The future – leaving school for work, was another step on the path to adulthood. There was an abundance of jobs. What one ended up doing was as much to do with your father's job, as to the result of year's report.

A number of boys quickly and quietly went from Secondary School to Polytechnic, Trade School or Technical College. They had worked out what they wanted to do. Others went to a prearranged apprenticeship. It wasn't a question of this job, or that line, or this was paid better. It was up to fate, and a little luck. And, any rate, there were girls to think about – that was enough to worry about!

The Labour Party adopted the principle of secondary education for all, irrespective of the income, class, or occupation of their parents; that children maybe transferred at the age of eleven plus, from primary to one or other of the secondary schools, and remain there until sixteen. This principle was a cornerstone in the Hadow Report in 1923, and came into being in 1926. The two types of secondary school were, Secondary Modern Schools and Grammar. The children attending secondary modern schools were to leave at the age of fifteen. The Hadow Report was accepted but the implementation delayed by the poor state of the country's economy. The majority of children by 1938 were operating within the reorganized secondary modern system. Some fee-paying school from the private sector qualified for 'direct grants' for taking on a number of scholarship boys.

My primary school was Longfield. The class sizes in 1938/9 were between twenty-five to thirty children. The first class was The Introduction Class, a further three classes held a years difference between each. Similarly upstairs, the Junior School operated the same class structure – years 8/9, 9/10, 10/11. The school had been built at the same time as the rest of the town displaying the then modern style – brick walls, metal framed windows and a flat roof. All the furniture and equipment was new.

The New Secondary Education system followed the then pattern voiced in the thirties – that there should be different schools for different abilities, and the children tested to decide which school system at the age of eleven.

It is impossible to write about England's class structure without some reference to education. It is what is taught, how it is taught and why, that defines for the recipient where they fit in the social structure. Children are carriers of the parents assumed place in society. When educated they carry also the school's aims and objectives which includes aspired place for their charges. This overlays their parents opinions, lies in sympathy with it, or, gives them their own place. It is highly likely that these opinions, shaped by heredity, environment, and education, are confused, easily changed, depending on circumstance. Class is a subject which will always have to be defined, and the answer will always include: the school, place in year, class, what university, which course, who taught

it and with what result. As today's thinking suggests education is a continuous – ongoing, event... social class, for the individual, in the centre layer, is beyond defining... and quite rightly too!

CAR PRODUCTION

In 1929 William Morris of Oxford was dominating the car production industry. He alone, out of fifty-eight companies, was way out in front, producing a series of models to take British car production ahead of France, to become Europe's largest car producer. In 1937 Britain provided fifteen per cent of the world's vehicle exports – a record level of production. By 1938 Morris Motors included MG, Wolseley, and Riley. In 1939 Morris Motors produced twenty-seven per cent of the car market – the largest share. By 1924 Britain was producing 146,000 units; thirteen years later the figure was over three times that number. The years at Britain's lowest production level – in the middle of the depression Britain produced more cars than in any previous year. By the end of our period there were nearly 400,000 employed in motor manufacture. In 1935/6 a popular model could be bought for half the cost of one produced ten years before.

The motor vehicle industry was closely linked to aircraft production, motor cycling, push bikes, electrical engineering and kitchen equipment. The whole industry was sixty per cent higher in 1937, than the figures for 1924. From the early thirties rearmament boosted up production in electrical and mechanical engineering – particularly those industries closely linked to military vehicles and aircraft.

The chemical industry developed many new materials from oil: Plastic, rayon, synthetic dyes, fertilizers, animal food and gas. The industry employed 100,000 by 1939, catching up fast on engineering. Once again, rearmament served the chemical industry well creating many new materials and uses.

PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT: THE CINEMA

The largest influence to change society forever was the cinema. The life-styles, values, language and music of American film producers exerted pressure, which, through a weekly injection, altered mainly working class morals, behaviour, speech and expectations. Many of Britain's best actors and comedians followed the trail to America when jobs were hard to find here. To stimulate British film production the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 was introduced. A wave of lavish productions by Alexander Korda, through London Films, tried to wrestle work away from America. It failed, not having the production cost effective. A spate of cheap 'quickies' also failed to satisfy quota requirements. Eventually the Act was modified in 1938, and again later, evened out production schedules and quotas.

Another film company in 1928, built upon the Neptune Film Company, became established as the Ideal Film Company, owned by Ludwig Blattner. The Blattner Studio was leased to Joe Rock Productions who bought the company, the whole eventually becoming British National Films Limited. Gainsborough Film Company was also operating at the same time producing comedy films with Will Hay.

Associated British Cinemas, established in 1927, merged a number of Scottish cinema circuits... becoming British International Pictures, later absorbed into Elstree Studio complex – Graham/Wilcox company. This merged with British National Studios. During the 1930s grew to become ABPC. The owner John Maxwell died in 1940 his widow sold out to Warner Brothers.

In America Warner Brothers developed the Vitaphone, sound on disc system, producing *The Jazz Singer*. This was the start to Hollywood musicals. MGM won the first Oscar for the musical *Broadway Melody* in 1929, following the Wall Street crash. Busby Berkeley reshaped the musical

stage with his clever editing and unusual camera angles. The first animated musical was Walt Disney's Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs. Quickly followed by MGMs The Wizard of Oz in 1939. The thirties was a period stage stars turned to the film studio for work including Fred and Adele Astaire, Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald.

It was in the 1930s that a series of British film comedies lifted the British cinema audiences. The works of Will Hay, Old Mother Riley, George Formby and Max Miller drew in the crowds.

Rank's venture into film making began when he was a Sunday school teacher. He punctuated his teaching with showing religious films to his own class and to other schools. Eventually he made his own and distributed them. The Methodist Society complained that about the negative influence American films were having on young people. Rank took up the challenge to make his own 'family friendly' films.

Within British National Films Company J Arthur Rank created Pinewood Film Studios. He found that after making Turn of the Tide he could not get it screened – the American movie industry denied access. Rank solved the problem by buying a large part of both the distribution and exhibition systems – formed a partnership with C M Woolf to create General Cinema Finance Corporation. He then used that company to buy out General Film Distributors, the UK arm of Universal Pictures.

By 1937 Rank consolidated his film making business in both Pinewood and Denham Film Studios, within a new company called the Rank Organisation. The following year he bought the Odeon cinema chain, and Amalgamated Studios in Elstree. The Rank Organisation then bought Gaumont–British Picture Corporation and Lime Grove Studios. The following year negotiated to buy Paramount cinema chain, in 1942.

By 1939 four million cinema seats gave daily access to the false, romantic, sham and colourful escapism of Hollywood... The first Technicolor film musical was The Wizard of Oz and from 1939 there was a string of fantastic musicals still produced on the stage today.

The country's citizens were entertained by other popular mediums: the radio, football and boxing. These sops to the daily grind of life, supplied relief replacing religion which never recovered from the tragedy and farce of The First World War. Churchgoers fell from twenty per cent to twelve, between 1910 and 1960. From the start of the thirties consumerism manifested considerable influence: there was more to buy, a more colourful society to copy, more money in the housewife's pockets and jobs were becoming available. Things were looking up...!

Harrow, as we know it today, was a merger of Harrow-on-the-Hill Urban District, and Wealdstone and Hendon Rural Districts in 1934. The town's chief claims to fame are its public school, church and hill, upon which both sit. Prior to the 1920s its population gathered around the hill unevenly spreading further out towards London.

Every town in the vicinity had its own cinema. Naturally the largest town required the largest cinema which more often than not the smartest. Harrow had its Granada cinema which boasted an organ – the only cinema that had one close at hand. In 1929 there were about four thousand cinemas in Britain. The Granada was, when built, considered to be one of the new super cinemas that could seat up to four thousand patrons.

THE THEATRE

The Harrow Coliseum, as with all large theatres of the day, was resplendent in gold paint and red velvet cloth. The carpets, thick and lush, and the seats, soft and springy. All covered in red velvet with gold headed nails. It represented 'High Victorian' design - mouldings and motifs, statues, niches and plaster cornicing.

RADIO BROADCASTING

In 1922 the British Broadcasting Company advertised for a General Manager. The company had been running for some time using six transmitters, the capital provided by six main producers of components; the BBC was the only source of broadcasting having gone on the air as 2LO on the 14th November 1922. Reith was asked to manage all the company's copyright and performing rights, the technical patents for wireless transmissions, create associations with artists, authors, playwrights, composers, music publishers, theatre managers and wireless manufacturers. It was a daunting prospect but one he felt he could manage.

In 1926 Reith believed that during the General Strike the company should invite all sides to give their side of the dispute. He attempted to arrange a broadcast by the leader of the opposition but was vetoed by the government. He again tried to mediate by inviting The Archbishop of Canterbury. It was not allowed to happen.

Prior to 1929, the British Broadcasting Company was owned by a number of wireless part manufacturers including British Thomson-Houston, General Electric, Marconi and Metropolitan-Vickers. The BBC became a corporation in 1927.

Reith's policy was to consider all views and if possible to broadcast those views so that the citizens of Britain could debate the issues. He insisted on high broadcasting standards, honesty and debate of all common interests. Reith resigned his post in 1938.

THE SHOPS

The shops in Harrow, North Harrow and Pinner represented most of the popular trading outlets of the time. Harrow had the largest department store in Sopers which was very similar to today's super stores, and Burtons, the fifty shilling Tailors. North Harrow had Home and Colonial and Liptons, both grocers, which sold most provisions other than fruit and vegetables. There was United Dairies selling milk products and cakes, as did Express Diaries. Lists and Garners, the bakeries. Coopers, the hardware store. Maynard's, making and selling sweets from tall jars. Woolworths, the 3d and 6d stores The Cooperative Stores, with their pneumatic checking system, part of a large chain that operated a half yearly dividend [divi] payout system, and W H Smiths, the stationers, awash with diaries and calendars. Pinner had Sainsbury's which always suggested quality.

Many of the items at the grocers were sold loose... that had to be weighed and bagged. Other popular brands were displayed prominently using brand colours and designs. These were most fashionable and the stores major sales items. At the cheese counter the blocks of cheese were cut up and weighed as was bacon and ham. The backs of the counters – against the rear wall, lined with shelves and cupboards - displaying their wares. The counter display with: marble slab, knife block, weighing machine, coffee grinder, wrapping paper and string.

All these shops were most particular to have the very best hop fitters to furnish their counters and façades. Their house styles always the same, in whichever town they resided. Nothing was ever poorly made or shoddily equipped. They relied upon good service and politeness to ensure customers returned.

Mothers had no fear about leaving their prams outside. In fact the pavements would be littered with prams dotted about as their owners went from shop to shop.

SHOPPING

Generally two mornings during the week were set aside for shopping – Tuesdays and Fridays, Wednesdays the shops were closed for half day opening. The Friday shop had to carry the housewife over the weekend. Very few husbands shopped for groceries, children's underwear and toiletries. They condescended to look after providing for the children's top clothes – in the main, school uniforms, purchased in Harrow.

The women provided themselves with either a basket or shopping bag – perhaps two for there was a lot to get in if the family was large. Many are the times my mother came in from the shopping trip with her hands showing the signs of a heavy bag and freezing cold – to be warmed in front of the fire.

Those mothers with a family with small children had the convenience of a pram which would double up to be used as a shopping trolley – in some instances it would be used to fetch bagged coal or wood from the ironmongers.

THE NATIONS FOOD

Towards the end of the 1920s the Government started to introduce new measures to support the country's agriculture and farmer's income. Guarantee prices bolstered up the production of sugar beet and wheat. Meat production was treated in the same manner. The Agricultural Marketing Act of 1928 promoted the standardisation of different grades of produce and its packaging. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food introduced the 'National Mark' a trade-mark to label British produced food - indicating a defined quality in egg production, beef, apples and pears. The Agricultural Marketing Acts of 191 and 1933 advised farmers to form co-operatives out of which came Marketing Boards for hops, potatoes, milk, bacon and pigs. The Import Duties Act 1932 placed an import charge on most foreign produced food stuffs. In 1936, the rent tithe charge for farmers was abolished. The following year saw a scheme introduced to subsidise the spreading of lime on agricultural land to replace some of the minerals lost through planting. Later the Ministry was given powers to regulate and open up dormant land – to regulate the cultivation and management of land, end tenancies, take possession of badly cultivated land and order the use of previously difficult land to plough and water meadows.

MEALS

There was always a set plan for the whole week's meals. The Sunday roast would be eaten as a cold cut on Monday, minced with bread and onion on Tuesdays. Braised steak on Wednesdays, Liver and Bacon Thursdays and Fish on a Friday, Saturdays would be rabbit, lamb chops or mutton stew. Chicken was very rarely eaten even for those who kept them as we did. They were too valuable for laying.

Puddings had the same routine treatment: Sunday's apple pie, Monday apple turnover, Tuesday Apple sharlot, Wednesday Rhubarb tart, Thursday Rice pudding, perhaps with rhubarb, Friday bread and butter pudding, Saturday maybe blancmange and fruit.

There is little doubt that the level of nutritional content to the average British diet was not high. The home produced vegetables were good produced with little or no chemical fertilizers. The locally grown fruit was also grown without an abundance of pesticides. The problem was in the cooking, the amount of highly processed sugar, and the amount of salt, mainly as a preservative.

The amount of cigarette smoking was high and about to go even higher. Drinking sweet tea, sweetened bottled coffee and sweetened fruit juices complimented the smoking. The level of sweets eaten was also high, particularly for children. It was normal fare to consume very sweet puddings rather than eat fruit or yogurts.

WASHING

Was always done on a Monday if dry. Tuesday the washing was dried off, Wednesday it was ironed, Thursday aired and Saturday out away for Sunday – a day of leisure!

Our washing was done on a round tin tub on the gas stove – to be boiled. From there it was transplanted to the sink to be rinsed and from there to the garden to be mangled and hung on the line. Some of my father shirts, cuffs and collars, would be starched. On occasions a blue bag used to whiten the whites.

This routine was carried out including dusting and sweeping, vacuuming and polishing. The majority of homes had this or a somewhat similar list to be carried out. It not only got things done but allowed friends and neighbours to call at an appropriate hour – to drop in for a cup of tea and a chat, at a reasonable hour when it was normal to have an hour to spare in the afternoon, before the children came in from school – about four.

WIVES & MOTHERS

Women were seen to be future wives and mothers... This is not a cliché but a matter of fact. It is what they talked about, dreamt of doing, and fantasised about. That is not to say that they didn't have a job after leaving school or that a number did not go to higher education and delay the inevitable. If society viewed women in a certain way, and that in general, that is how women wished to be viewed, appreciated, longed for and desired... then it is how they were to be.

Women, socially and practically, did the things their mothers did. As society changed, as it did, as much to do with world wars as evolution, so did women's relationship to their children change. Those women, who wanted a different lifestyle, at least in their former years, gradually had the opportunity of doing so. What changed was their view of themselves as gradually they reached out to take on a range of jobs that would allow them to have independence, a chance to select for themselves their own life style, when they were to have children, appropriate to have sexual relationships, either casual or long lasting.

There were improvements in a woman's legal status, employment, and social freedoms but it was little. My mother accepted her position; she had grown into it - doing what her mother had done. She did not question it or rise up against it being subservient in practically all things. In this I believe she was happy. Later on she realized my father's philosophy in life let her down – allowed her very little say.