

## **50 Years Of Memories**

I was standing at Bull's head bridge, just looking around when Bert appeared. "My word, Bacup's changed." Said I. "How long hasta been away" he asked. "Fowerty year?". That started it all and when Bert left with "Ah'm glad to sithee looking so weel", many things came to mind some long forgotten. I remembered Bacup as it was, and my ability to negotiate complicated short cuts and know the names of the street. Not far away was "Th'end shop" where nobbler asked the old lady if she sold wild woodbines and told her to tame them.

Boys used weft, a superior sort of "burning band", for smoking and lighting fireworks. Headless of the people or traffic, I stood reflectively...surely, Mickey Luke would be passing soon. Mickey real name Unknown was a very small old man, quiet and inoffensive, who always wore an overcoat, summer and winter, that was many sizes too big for him.

### **Mumbled**

He mumbled more to himself than anyone else and had a habit of twitching his shoulders ceaselessly that earned for him the name of "Itchy Mick". Perhaps Johnny Ratter would put in appearance. John Pilling, for that was his real name, was a rat catcher along with his mongrel dog "Lady". On a ratting expedition, he'd say to his dog "Lady, doan't kill" and take the live rat from the dog and push it between his belts and his breeches. When he had enough rats, he would go into the beerhouses and bite off a rat's head for a pint of beer.

The railway station and auction rooms were favourite haunts of Robert the Devil who was always ready to carry anything. He was a "bit weak int'yet" but a cheery sort of cove ever ready with: "Got a fag guv'nor?". Once, after an auction at the King Street Saleroom, he was asked to carry a bed to Weir Terrace. This commission was carried out and Robert was given a sixpence, "Is that all?" he asked. "That's all", came the reply. Whereupon Robert once more humped the bed on his back and returned it to the saleroom. Every cricket match at Lanehead saw old Mather going round the ground to sell his cough drops. He was a small wizened old man who wore an old weather-beaten hat and coat and vended his wares from a black, round tin box.

### **Happy Jack**

His looks and general appearance in those early and formative days of my youth, brought to mind Nell's grandfather in "The old curiosity shop". Old Mather was the same size and shape as John Whitehead—alias Happy Jack—the marine store dealer, except that Happy Jack always has a drop on the end of his nose and had a donkey and cart. In return for rags and bottles, Happy Jack offered a variety of rewards ranging from "spice" and balloons to donkey stones. Doctor Rigby and his Bulldog emerging from the King George V hotel woke me from my reverie. Story has it that the hotel was the only hostelry in the land to bear the name of the then reigning monarch. It'd go and look at Hargreaves mortar mill at the bottom of Ash Street if it was still there. It was driven by a steam engine and held a strange fascination for me. First went in the Lime, then water, then a load of clinker—still smoking—from Shepherd's mill. The whole was mixed by putting a shovel in the cylinder. A little further up Burnley road is Allen's Garage, built by Bert Brierley. The first charabanc in Bacup a De Dion Bouton was introduced by John Holden of Yorkshire Street.

## Market

Allen's were a little later with two Thorneycroft's, one called Mary and the other John after the offspring of one of the Allen Brothers. For entertainment, you needn't go further than the market. The covered market was demure compared with the open one with its canvas-topped stalls and spluttering paraffin flares. Here was a negro who called himself "The Black Wonder" and promised to cure anything. Toffee was made in the open air and one stall sold only incandescent gas mantles. One of the outstanding characters was "Owdham Joe", who had a fruit stall. He had barrels of apples in front of his stall and it was his wont to pick up an apple, cut it in pieces and offer them to passing housewives. Woe betide the lady who refused. . . . she's be the sure victim of Joe's scorn and derision. Oatcakes weren't bought in a shop but in a house up South Street where they were poured and baked on a hotplate or griddle "before your very eyes".

Evening was falling and I was reminded of the lamplighter who seemed to go about his job by stealth. Thoughts came thick. . . . and fast. . . . of Maden Public baths where coal black colliers—except for lions, insteps and the whites of their eyes—turn on the hot shower and sit steaming.

**Gun**. . . . of Bacup fair, sprawling all over the cobbled streets of the town with lion tamers, roundabouts, coconut shies, fat and tattooed ladies. . . . of the German Howitzer, captured during the Great War, standing on the site of the present war memorial. . . . of the eagerness and impatience with which people waited for news of the Irwell Springs Band from Crystal Palace. . . . of the Bacup Borough versus New Brighton match when they had to smuggle the referee to the station in a skip. . . . I've just heard someone say "middling" and "toothri" and "nobbut". I'm glad that my memory keeps long and I'm not so sure I really want to "Wekken up."

Mr J.A.Pilling