

At number 43 Plantation Street in 1914 lived a family by the name of Edmondson. Below is a extract from Life In Bacup written By Stephen Edmondson it is his memories of living on Plant Back as a child.

by Stephen Edmondson<sup>1</sup>

I am going to try and tell you about my life in Bacup from birth up to the present day; the changes in Bacup both in appearance and employment prospects.

I'd better begin before I was born and tell about my parents. My mother's maiden name was Riley and her parents came from Foxford in Ireland around 1880 to settle in Bacup for work owing to the depression in Ireland. The men were mainly labourers in the quarries or went on the land, and women went into the cotton mills. My father's family came from Wycolor, a village between Burnley and Nelson and they came to Bacup around 1900, and settled at Lee Mill.

My mother was a Roman Catholic and was educated at St Mary's school in Bacup and my father went to St Saviour's on New Line. There was a lot of bigotry and antagonism in religious beliefs about that time, so I have been told, and my mother's parents were very surprised, and I fancy my father's family was too when they started courting. As far as the Catholic religion went a non-Catholic had to have a period of instruction in the Catholic faith to be married in a Catholic church. Anyway they were married by a Father Lane in 1907, in 1909 my sister Mary was born, and 1911 my sister Margaret was born. I was

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born on 6th April 1914. We were all living at 43 Plantation St. This was a street of about 80 houses and they consisted of living room, a very small kitchen with a stone slab for a sink; with just one cold water tap. One large bedroom and a small one. The fireplace was a large iron one with oven at one side and on the other side a boiler, which one had to fill up with water as soon as you had used any. It was heated from the heat from the coal fire. Some of these boilers were white washed inside to try and stop them going rusty.

Toilets were in a row of five outside on the street and 4 to 5 houses joined at them. Each household in turn had to keep them clean every week by scrubbing the seats and mopping the floor. The toilet was a tub and you sat on a board with a round hole in it; as for toilet paper, you had newspaper cut into sheets and threaded on a string, and this hung on a nail behind the door. If your toilet had a lock the key would be hung near the door in the house. It usually had a bobbin on a string for easy finding. The tubs used to be emptied once a week by a man employed by the council, and he used to come round at night between twelve and six.

Plantation St. started at the end of the shops extending from where the Rates Office used to be and then up a brew at the back of Market St.

There were shops on Market St. and houses all the way down as far as the Railway Station. We were lucky to have trains then running from Bacup to Rochdale and Manchester. When you walked up the brew Plantation St. took a turn right and you carried on to what we called the 'Bonks', more about that area later.

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When I was 4 months old the great war started. That was in August and my father enlisted and was posted to Tidworth, Hampshire in the East Lancs regiment. I understand he had two or three leaves before being posted to India, and my mother found she was pregnant. My brother was born in 1915 but only lived for 18 months. I was too young to remember all this; I go off what my mother told me.

When I was nearly 4 years old I was taken to St. Mary's school where my two sisters went. Whether we would have gone there if my father had not been at the war is debatable because in the bottom I think he was as bigoted as lots of other C of E people at that time.

I can just remember going into the infant's class and meeting this big lady who I found out was Miss Turner. She took me by the hand and taking me into the classroom to meet the other children.

My next recollection seems to be my meeting this big man who came in class. He was dressed all in black with a big cape fast one end with a buckle at the neck. He was introduced as Father Keily, and he told us we were to concentrate on learning our Catholicism, which started "Who made you?", and we replied "God made me." "Why did God make you?", and we again replied "God made me to know him, love him and be happy in this world and the next." This we were told was to prepare us for our first communion at 7 years of age. This was taken on the feast of Corpus Christi.



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About this time when you were out at play with children from the other schools, if you told them you lived on Plantation Street they would say "Oh that's the Irish back." It got this name from the number of Catholics who were of Irish descent. There were the Flynns, Rileys, Walshes, Kellys, Monaghans, Flanagans, McGoughs, MacNamaras, Gavans, Durkins, Reagans, Burkes and many more. But most of them by my time had never even seen Ireland. In Bacup in those days as regards shops to buy clothes there was Burton's, Bradley's, Crooks, Coop and Halfpennies, all shops where one could be measured for a suit. There were men who would come round door to door and sell goods, which you could pay for at so much a week. For grocery there was the Maypole, Melias, Duckworths and the Coop. The Coop had grocery, vegetables, butcher departments and a cafe; also a shoe repair shop. You could also get your clogs made and buy shoes.

There were 2 cinemas: The Empire Theatre and the Kosy for silent films. There was the Coop Hall for Drama and Musical. There were one or two rooms in local factories for boxing. So there was plenty going on.

It was also said there was once about 50 to 60 public houses in Bacup and Stacksteads, along with many working men's clubs.

There was a fire station but no regular firemen like today. If a fire started somewhere in those days a klaxon horn would sound, and the ordinary policemen would be seen running to the fire station, still dressing as they got on the engine. I remember one fire where Father Keily had to be rescued from the presbytery at St. Mary's church. I

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think it was P.C. Walsh who saved him. I did hear he got a commendation for that.

Trams used to run then to Rawtenstall and Rochdale. The Rawtenstall tram set off from outside the Marker Hotel and to Rochdale from the front of St. James street.

It was practice then to try and go to the cinema to the Saturday afternoon matinee. To get in you had to pay 1 1/2p in old money, long before decimalisation. For two empty jam jars washed out the shopkeeper would give you 1 penny so you would do your best to get another to get a ticket to get in.

Films were mostly Cowboys and travel, when the words would come on the screen under the picture so you could follow what was going on.

During the week on summer nights I and my mates would go up to the Bonks which I told you about earlier. There was a big level stretch which had been levelled by quarry men, and we spent many happy hours playing cricket and football.

Things were very hard in those days for mothers. My mother would work all day at India Mill where my father now worked after coming home from the war. Every day was marked out. Monday after coming home from work my Mother did the washing. Dolly tub and scrubbing board. No washers in those day. Tuesday night if the clothes were dry it was ironing. Wednesday if she had enough money a visit to the market, which was a good one stretching up Bank Street, covering where the car park is now, and also the other side. There was also an inside



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market. The markets were open until 8 in summer and had early closing in winter. The best time to go was about half an hour before closing time. To avoid taking the goods home the stall holder would let you have them cheap. A piece of meat normally sold for 2/- you would get at the last minute for about 9 pence. Bananas about 13 for 1/- you would probably get 24 for the same price. The greengrocer in those days used to cut a piece of apple for you to try for taste. Confectionery got very cheap too; half a pound of mixed sweets for 4 pence.

Thursday night for Catholics was the night for Benediction at Church, this was about 7:30 pm, and it was over by about 8:15pm, so nothing much was done that night. Friday night was cleaning up night. Mopping the floor or oilcloth if you had it. Black leading the fire grate, oven and boiler, swilling your flags outside and donkey stoning the doorstep and window sill. Saturday as a working day until 12:00, and the afternoon was spent watching cricket in summer, football in winter. I saw my first cricket match in 1922 when I was eight years old. It was Bacup v. Ramsbottom and Bacup were all out for 12 runs. The pro for Ramsbottom was called Hickmott, and he took 8 wickets for 4 runs. It was said that he was too tall and that when his arm delivered the ball he was so high that it was over the sight screen. Whether this was true or not I don't know, but I do know that an extension was put on the sight screen to make it higher. The Bacup pro was Archie Slater who came to Bacup from a team in the Bradford league and he later played for Derbyshire County. I was such a good follower of cricket then with my father that I had been on every ground in the Lancashire league

before I was 14. Sunday was church day when we all went to Mass. It was the day that we wore shoes and a suit if we had one. When church was over we had to change into playing out clothes, suit and shoes were put away till the next Sunday.

It was about this time when, during a spell of bad weather, that on two occasions the sides of the hill gave way causing a land slide along a lot of Plantation St. No traffic could get along, no coal lorries or milk carts so everything had to be carried. It was then that a certain Alderman on the council by the name of Tommy Coates offered to Tarmac the whole length of Plantation St. as a gesture to the borough, and in a matter of a few weeks it looked splendid. The same man also built the paddling pool in the Park. The recreation ground where we played football and cricket was given by Sir John Henry Maden. It was a long way up the hill but very bracing when you got there. Swings and roundabouts and plenty of space to roam. Sir John also gave Bacup their swimming baths.

Bacup can have the proud record of having a world swimmer who learned to swim at Bacup baths. That was David Billington who by the way was taught in the same class as my father at St. Saviours. We also had other records in Bacup, as Irwell Springs Band had won the Crystal Palace Championship in London.

To get back to Sir J. Henry Maden, he lived in Rockcliffe House, a very large house which had a long drive up to it from the main road, and they had one son called Hal, who later became MP for Morecambe. Bacup council in those days held their meetings at Stubbylee Hall



which they had purchased from a Mr. Hoet who owned cotton mills in Stacksteads. There were 4 wards in the Borough, 3 councillors for each ward and 6 Aldermen. The councillors served 3 years and Aldermen for 6. It was about this time when my sister Mary had left school and was learning to weave with my father at India Mill. A couple of years later our Maggie also started working in the cotton mill. I was then almost 12 year old and had a minor upset. My headmaster at school told my parents I had a good chance of passing for the grammar school, so we got all the necessary papers but a few days before the exams I developed abscesses on my neck which were very painful and try as we could they would not heal with the outcome I could not sit the exam. So I lost my chance to go to the grammar school.

I used to go up to my Grandma and read to her the Bacup Times and the Weekly News. If you read her any murders she used to say in her Irish style "Oh they want gibbeting", which meant hanging of course.

My Auntie Katie who lived at home with Grandma wasn't a very good looker, she had hairs growing on her chin, and this drew our young attention to her. She used to ask me to kiss her and she would give me 2p. That was a lot for me at the time, so I did. I could have kissed anybody for 2p. Our Mary left the cotton mill at this time to go in the slipper works at Olive Mill, but couldn't stand it and left after about a month.

I had started to take papers out for Mr. Chadwick the newsagent on Market Street. This meant I had to be up at 6:15 every morning and go down to the Railway Station to



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meet the train that carried all the papers. Along with other boys from the other shops we had to go along the platform with a long railway trolley and get all the parcels off the railway waggon and sort them all out, which parcel for which newsagent. Then carry them up to the shop and untie and help to sort the rounds out. In those days there was Daily Dispatch, News Chronicle, Daily Herald, Daily Mail, Guardian, Express and the local papers. My delivery round was down the road to Lee Mill and across Lee Wood. This meant it would be 8:30 when I got home for my breakfast and hurry up to school for 9:00.

At night my rounds started at 4:30 when I delivered Telegraphs and Evening Chronicle which took me about 1 hour. On Saturday mornings the bag was heavier as we had the Bacup Times and other weekend papers and magazines. Also I had to collect the money from the house when I delivered the papers. My pay was 5 shillings and 3 pence a week, which was 5 shillings for my Mother and I got the three pennies. I did this paper round till I left school at 14 years of age.

By the way I think I should explain what donkey stoning was when I mentioned about it earlier on. It was a stone, fawn, white or brown in colour. I think the name came about because a man used to come round with a rag cart, pulled by a donkey. If you had any rags he would give you a stone for them. So it seems that was where the name donkey stone came from.

When you got better off you put lino round your room and so didn't need to use donkey stone indoors.

Although some used it to clean their stone sinks. There was no such thing as fitted carpets in those days.

A fine sight in those days was a funeral. A sad event, but in those days there were no limousines or cars but cabs drawn by the beautiful black horses. They had long swishy black tails and were covered with a black cloth. The hearse sometimes had four horses and the cabs carrying the people had two horses.

The Catholics were in the main the poorest and used to just have a hearse and the mourners walked behind in slow procession. Two men usually walked on the outside of the hearse. These would be mostly relatives or close friends. The cost of a funeral then would be about 32 pounds, which included a boiled ham tea, mostly at the Co-op. Put that again the price of today, which could be over 600 or 700 pounds. Fantastic isn't it?

Well I started my working life at Olive Mill as a slipper worker. By this time my father had started as grounds man at Bacup Golf club, as the professional at that time was just a golf pro and not accustomed to mowing and looking after greens. Our Mary by then had got very interested in local politics as she was very friendly with a couple Walter Wright and his wife Winnie who were very keen workers. Also a man called Frank Howarth. He was an operative at Kilnholme mill slipper works. He lived with his family up Fern Street by St. Johns church. He used to go to Union St. and hold meetings even if only 2 or 3 listened to him. Frank, as I got to know him by his first name, was the union representative at Kilnholme Mill and the men were 100% behind him when he had to go to the



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management to fix a price for work which was new in the slipper trade. Three or four times the whole place came out on strike because Frank Howarth had been told to go and get his cards. Bacup council at that time was all Liberal and Conservative but really about three or four Aldermen ran the town. Frank used to go to all the council meetings and although reports of the meetings were in the Bacup Times, Frank at his meetings on Union Street used to tell what wasn't in the papers. He wasn't well liked for this by the ruling body. However after about two years of this Frank stood for the council as the workers representative and was elected which was to the dislike of the Liberals and

I myself started to get interested in local politics and joined the Labour party. I think the next person to get on the council was a Mrs. Hall. I can tell you that Frank Howarth had a really rough time both from a political and family point of view. I was told there wasn't a shop in Bacup that Mrs. Howarth went into where she could get served if she had no money. This was unfair as there were lots of people used to shop at the Maypole, Duckworths and Melias each day and not pay till weekend when they got their wages. But not so for Mrs. Howarth. I will leave you to judge when the town was run by three or four Aldermen who was responsible. They were James Ireland who was owner of Olive Mill and Kilnholme Mill slipper works and found employment for about 3000 people. Alderman George Baron was a solicitor at Alex Wright and Co. and Alderman J. H. Lord accountants. They practically ran the town. It was said that Nuffield and Bee

Bee biscuits would have liked to start businesses in Bacup but it was knocked on the head from the start.

Alderman Ireland lived in the big house which was called Broadclough Hall, and once when the slipper workers were out on strike they marched up to the Hall and put a number of windows through. These strikes used to last a number of days. The slipper and shoe trade was very seasonal and I myself had to go up to the labour exchange pretty regular. You had to go up three days to sign on if you were not working all week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and if you were going to go in to work the following week you had to go and sign off on Saturday morning. Rules were very strict because you had to be off work three days to draw any benefit. One or two days on the dole were no good so you got nothing for them. A full week on the dole was 17/-. Two and tenpence a day and a married man could claim 4 pence a day, 2/- a week for a child and one and sixpence for his wife. So things were very uncomfortable for people on the dole.

It was round about this time that Bacup got their first Labour MP. He was called Arthur Law and he was a railway man. I think he came from Bolton. In those days an election was a very busy time. I used to go to a lot of meetings both Labour and Conservative. There wasn't always a Liberal candidate. I think Rossendale had had a Conservative in the name of Robert Waddington for about 20 years. After elections things were quiet and the thing was to try and save enough money to go on a holiday for the local wakes week when everything shut down. Trains would come into Bacup station a Friday night for long distance holidays such as Bournemouth and Devon. There



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was always a night train to Fleetwood to catch the boat to go to the Isle of Man. There would be a steady stream of people making their way to the station carrying their suit cases ready for off.

In those days you could go to Blackpool for a week for three and sixpence or four shillings per night for sleeping. You bought your own food and the landlady would cook it for you, for dinner or when you wanted it. Price into the Tower was one shilling and you could stay in all day for that if you so wished. There was an aquarium, zoo and dancing to the most famous organist in England,

*Reginald Dixon. It was here that I learnt to dance and continued when I was back home. We had the Ambulance Hall up Lanehead Lane, which had dancing Wednesday night and Saturday. Also there was the Liberal Club which is now the A. B. and D. centre. Dancing was also sometimes at the Coop Hall which was known as the Embassy Ballroom. They used to hold some boxing matches here too. Another popular event which started about 1932 was the opening of the skating rink at Stacksteads. I decided to have a go at roller skating, and found it really exciting when you got used to it and could skate proficiently.*

I must mention before I go any farther about the May processions held in Bacup. All of the Catholics got together for this. It was a massive turn out all round the town, up Rochdale Road down to the station and back up Dewhurst Road. Banners were carried and statues; also two or three bands. Hymns were sung en-route and it drew crowds of people into the town. It was a day my mother, two sisters and myself used to be dressed in our best clothes. All the

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gentlemen in the parish walked along with the women. Young girls were mostly in blue and white (children of Mary) or red and white (Agnesites). Other churches had parades on other days, not quite as big but still full of meaning.

By this time we had left Plantation Street and moved to a new home at Rockcliffe; 15 Pembroke St. It was supposed to be a better area. Still with the difference in rent it should have been. Four and tenpence up Plantation St and we now had to pay 11 shillings and three pence - quite a jump.

*Another innovation* which began then was started by a man named Albert Shaw. He started what he called Bacup Radio Relay, and he came to fix an aerial in your window sill, another leading to the chimney pot, and along with a receiver box stored on your window inside it was a music and news, plays, etc. all day. For this he charged one shilling per week, and he employed a man to come round collecting. Later on he sold out to a firm called Relay Vision, then we got TV. These were rented and charged as to the size of the set.

My father was now on the committee at Victoria working men's club, and was also concert secretary. I joined, but only for somewhere to go when I was not working. You could get a game of snooker for one penny for 20 minutes. Also at this time I was playing cricket and football for St. Mary's. There were then three leagues for cricket and two for football. In those days Bacup Borough football club used to hold medal competitions when all the local mills had a team entered to play. I was lucky enough

More to follow