

'An Early November Day' by Norris Kenwright

The day was a typical early November day in the mid 40's, cold, damp, misty and not the day you wanted to head off to school. The hoar frost on the hawthorns along Sutton Park indicated an overnight drop in temperature. This final year at Robins Lane Primary was different to the many years at the main school. Suddenly due to overcrowding in this final year we were sent down to the Chapel in Sutton Road where we would study for the 11 plus exam which would determine our secondary school education.

Norris and sister Iris at the bottom of Sutton Park with cottage at 81 Robins Lane owned by Thomas & Maggie Abram and Charlotte Heyes



Norris and sister Iris at the bottom of Sutton Park with cottage at 81 Robins Lane

I stood at the corner of Robins Lane and Marina Avenue as the number 6 trolleybus swept by intending to stop outside the Bowling Green Pub on the corner of Baxters Lane. Often it came too fast and the trollies came off the wires with sparks flying everywhere. Young lady bus conductors struggled as they pulled out a huge bamboo pole from the bus and performed a strange sky ballet as they swept the sky with the hooked pole trying to capture the wayward trolley and bring it back onto the wire. Those girls had strong arms.

Heading across the road I remembered how my friend, Mike Melia, and I came home from town on one of those buses. Mike had this idea: clever at the time: that if you jumped off the moving bus outside Mrs Heyes's cottage you could save the walk back to Marina Avenue. He had this flash of inspiration that if you jumped and ran fast enough it

would be OK. On the bus platform I watched first in anticipation and then in horror as he jumped, legs pedalling, and then did this amazing tumbling act rolling after the bus.

Norris Kenwright pictured left and his friend Mike Melia, along with Norris's dog Flash



Norris Kenwright (left) and Mike Melia, along with Norris's dog Flash

Those were days when you learned safety the hard way. Common sense was either added to your growing brain cells or others remembered you with affection and learned from your mistakes. Happily after a short recovery, Mike and I remained good friends and he became a legend.

Heading on to Baxters Lane the old chippy on the corner looked old and deserted and a couple of people headed to Ashton's general shop a few doors down. Ashton's was small, crowded but a wonderful emporium of jars of confectionary, bread and everything a small local shop could be. Mr & Mrs Ashton never changed and were permanently old. Not having sweet coupons I often bought liquorice sticks to chew to satisfy my hunger for something sweet or savoury. My endearing recollection of them was their fireworks club. Six months before the glorious fifth you had a card and added the odd penny here and there; often from returned bottles; and on the 4th you had enough for the two shillings and six pence box of fireworks. (Another story to tell).

Back heading along Baxters Lane the small narrow humpback bridge appeared; an amazing construction to test one's skills of self-preservation against oncoming traffic. - way before traffic lights were installed. To the left were the engine sheds, with smoke and steam rising from those grimy engines. I loved those smells and was soon a devoted Ian Allen train spotter spending hours at the Junction and Pudding Bag, as the local trains dashed past imprinting their wheels on the pennies I put on the track. (Days at Winwick, Crewe and Lime Street stations were to come).

Turning right into Webb Street which was a rough unpaved road I was sometimes hassled by a gaggle of white geese. I don't know where they lived or came from but they were guardians of the street. At the bottom of the street was the chapel and a large rough area in front, which was our playground. To the right was a large fence behind which was Crone and Taylor's works.

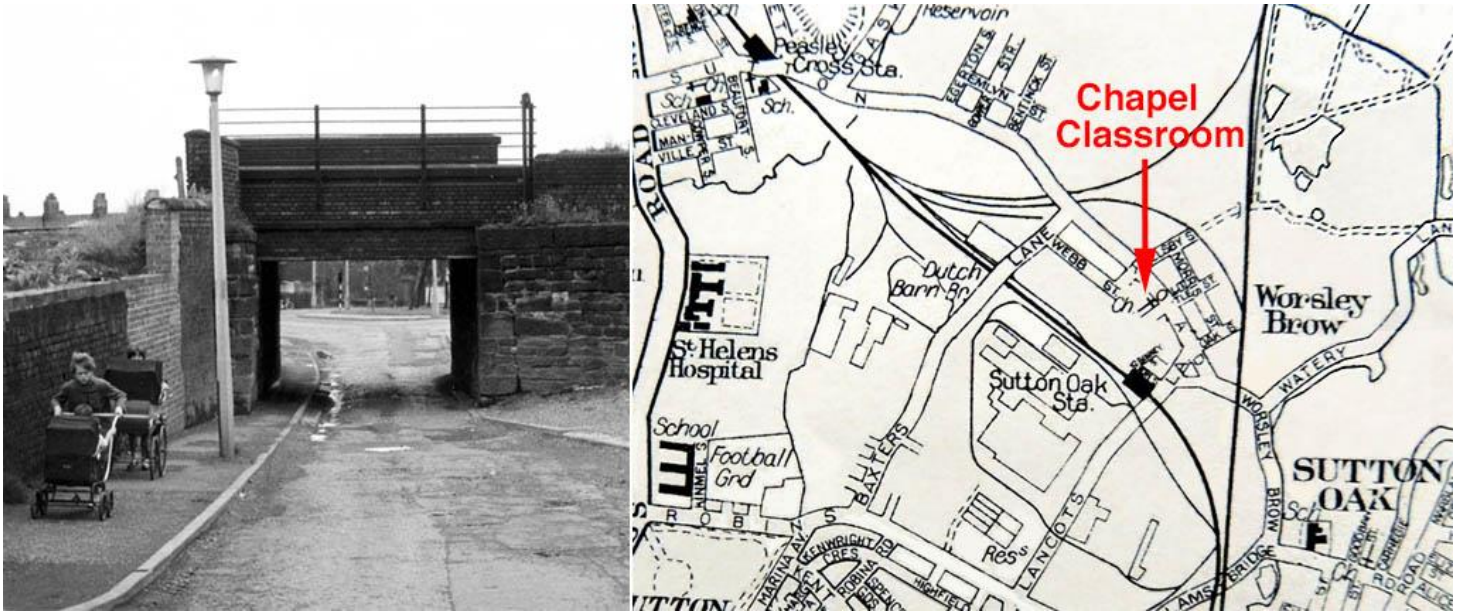
Monday was when we entered the hall to see all the cast iron desks pushed back against the walls after the weekend Chapel and with heavy scraping and pulling we soon had the desks with our books in all in place. I had a crush on one girl, Rona Brocklebank, a quiet shy girl and super clever. I always angled to have my desk next to hers. Our Class teacher in the big room was Mrs Courtman with 4A. In the smaller back room was Mr Shaw with 4B, a rather portly stiff man in usually a blue grey suit.

Mrs Courtman was strict and terrifying and had a bamboo cane. Her style of piano playing could more nicely be put as "heavy handed" and the room often resounded to the hammering of the keys. She taught us every lesson from Maths, English, Nature Studies, Art and P.E. and with our class of 48 it must have been far more stressful than today's small classes. The lines of kids stretching from her marking desk waited in silence. It is a credit that 25 of that class passed the 11+ to go to Grammar school, a remarkable achievement. We practised a small Operetta, "The Merry Peasant" to put a show on for parents – my first and last venture into this genre. I had a passible voice and found a subsidiary role as a messenger of ill news. Those lines are still in my memory as I rolled onto the stage on my hobby horse:

I've travelled and travelled o're hill and o're valley to tell you the terrible things I have seen. The soldiers are coming in hundreds and thousands, there's dozens and dozens I've counted 15. They'll kill all the people and eat all the horses Etc.

The lead in this Operetta was my friend Louis Rigby and he had the voice of an angel. He became top chorister at St.Helens Parish Church and took the lead in Cowley Boys Gilbert and Sullivan productions. Louis and I lived back to back; me in Marina Avenue and Louis in Kenwright Crescent. We swapped comics weekly. I got Wizard and Hotspur and he got Adventure and Rover; really great stories to read.

Football with Mr Shaw was taken on the waste land below Sutton Nation School alongside "Stinky Brook". Pollution seemed to be very acceptable in those days for our football often rolled into Stinky Brook which bore the colour and smells of whatever Sidac was colouring its cellophane rolls. It was noxious and horrid to collect the ball.



The Lancots Lane bridge and map of the schoolroom of the Sutton Road Methodist Church

Lancots Lane bridge & schoolroom map

More often at playtime we played impromptu games of soccer outside the Chapel with bricks for goal posts while the girls played skipping games. Ted Webb was a great little goalkeeper. After school was a walk with friends down to Lancots Lane and then under the narrow railway bridge towards Robins Lane. Being early November we discussed the coming bonfire night and remarked that the Browns of Highfield Street had a great stash of wood piled up in their back yard. Also Bill Lypany had access to rolls of old cellophane from Sidac which would make an enormous bonfire.



Saying goodbye to Beryl Miller, Olive Fairclough, Anita Ramsdale (pictured here a few years later) as they headed down Robins Lane to the junction and to Albert Bain in Waterdale Crescent, Louis and I cut across Irwin Road, down Highfield Street across Robina Road and into the Crescent. Anticipation of a dark smokey evening of fireworks, baked potatoes and fun was uppermost in our minds.

Olive Fairclough, Anita Ramsdale & Beryl Miller

But it was tea time and Mum could do marvellous things with spam and I was hungry. We would still be out again after tea with the rest of the gang playing "Tin Can Bung Off" in the dark and diving over garden walls and hiding behind the bushes in the park.

Except of course from 6-45 to 7-00pm when we vanished to listen to Dick Barton; Special Agent with Jock and Snowy. Then back out again, light the winter warmers before we reluctantly headed home. Another day over; school again tomorrow and a happy sleep with few cares in the world.

NORRIS KENWRIGHT