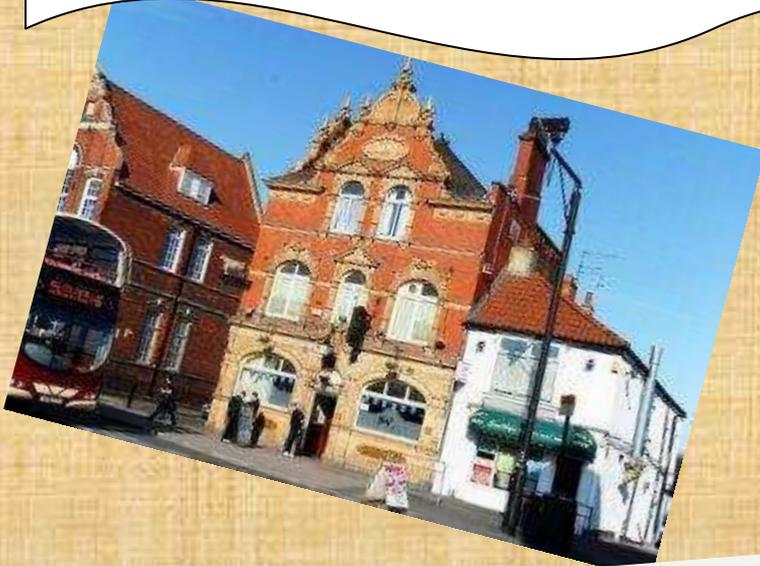




# Noel Proud Remembers:

Beverley Road in the 1950s & Life at Stepney



## **Part 1: Noel Proud's Memories of Beverley Road in the 1950s**

(sent to the pupils of Stepney Primary School in November 2010)

Hello Everyone,

I saw your school website yesterday, I was really surprised! Fifty five years ago I sat in the same classrooms that you are sitting in, listened to my teachers and learned the lessons which eventually helped me to become the person I am today.

Beverley Road School (as we called it then) was a very different place to the school which is pictured on your website, but then the world I was brought up in was very different to the one in which you live.

The school had already almost seventy years of history behind it when I went to the infant school in 1953, and of course there is no one now who can remember what things were like when it first opened. It is such a long time ago! Or was there?

Well, my Grandfather was born in 1883, before the school was built and at that time there were no cars and lorries, everything was moved on hand carts or wagons pulled by horses. When I was a child, many of those vehicles were stored in the transport museum on the High Street. That's opposite to where my Grandfather had his smithy, he was a farrier. The smithy is still there I think, and if you look down the side streets nearby you can see ruts worn into the cobblestones by the iron tyres of the carts.

Queen Victoria was our Queen then and Granddad joined her army on his sixteenth birthday, he met a recruiting sergeant on Monument Bridge.

I've thought very hard about what I should tell you this morning, rather than launch straight into my memories of school I think it might be better to tell you a little bit about what our life was like in the 1950's.

Our family lived at number seven, Grove Street. The street was quiet, only two people who lived there owned cars at that time and we could play football in the street quite safely. Two of my aunts lived there as well, Auntie Lily lived at number three and Auntie May lived at number 19. Mr and Mrs Hale lived at the far end of the street, their son Jack was an Olympic swimmer, and he was a coach at Albert Avenue baths. We were very lucky because our house had a bathroom and an indoor toilet, many people still had to go outside to the toilet and had a metal bath that they would put in front of the kitchen fire and fill with water boiled on the range. Most of the houses on the street were owned by an engineering company called Thomas Hill, their factory was at the back of the houses on what we called "mucky peggy lane" the site of the factory has been built on now by a housing association. I used to get very frightened when the boilers in the factory vented steam, it made a scary noise.

A stick of bombs had fallen across the street and nearby Cave Street during the Second World War and a number of buildings had been destroyed. We used to play on the "bomb buildings". Some of the houses still had concrete air raid shelters in the back gardens. The doors and windows in our houses were all tilted a bit because they had been damaged when the bombs went off.

There was a 'ten foot' running behind the garage, which stood where the shop is next to the pedestrian crossing now, and at the end of the ten foot there was the old coach house and stables that had been used by the owners of the big house which stands between Grove Street and Pearson Avenue. It was quite a spooky place!

We didn't have central heating at home, not many people did at that time, everyone had coal fires which made a lot of smoke. During the winter, we used to get awful smogs, thick yellow green fog. We had to carry a torch to go to school. Mum used to light a paraffin heater in the hall on really cold days and put a hot water bottle into our beds to warm them, it was real luxury when she was able to buy us electric blankets! The world was a dirtier place then than it is now, often in the morning we would wake up and find everything outside covered in a layer of dust from Earl's cement works, and when the wind blew from the river we would get the most revolting smell of rotten fish from the fish dock. Hull was the biggest fishing port in England then! On New Years Eve, we would listen as the ships in harbour sounded their sirens to welcome the new year.

We couldn't go to the supermarket to do our shopping then because there were no supermarkets. Beverley Road was our supermarket really. Between Grove Street and Cave Street you could buy everything you needed to feed and clothe your family. Starting after the public house there was an electrical shop, then there was Issie Lipman's, Mr. Lipman was a tailor, he made men's suits to measure by hand. He had a very famous niece who became an actress (Maureen Lipman), do you know who she is? Tony and Mary Kidson kept the sweet shop, and then there was Sewell's "The Working Man's Fruiterer". Further along there was another tailor, two butchers shops, Margaret's sweet shop and Townsend's off license. It was a really different street scene then, of course we could not always buy what we needed, sometimes because fruit and vegetables were not in season, and for many years. This was because many things, sweets, food, coal and clothes were rationed. I remember I left my sweet coupons in my shirt pocket once and my Mam washed them, I couldn't have any sweets for a month!! We could only have enough coupons in a month to buy a small quantity of sweets, about one Mars Bar, I think. I used to go with Mam to the offices in big nissen huts in Queens Gardens for her to get the coupons for our coal. We used to have to walk past the pet food shop on Blundell's Corner, I used to hate it, pet food didn't come in tins then and the shop had massive joints of horse meat hung up outside for people to buy to cook for their pets.

During the 1950's, there were really exciting times when Mam and Dad got something new. When I was a very small boy, Mam used to do our washing in the wash house at the back of the house, she had a coal fired copper to boil the water and a posh tub and post stick to wash the clothes. The clothes went into the tub with the soap powder and water and she would beat them up and down with the stick. When I was a bit older, she used to send me to the chip shop in Cave Street for dinner on washday, fish and chips twice and pattie and chips twice cost us 3/6d. If it was a wet day she would dry the clothes in the kitchen on a rack which hung from the ceiling. Then she got a washing machine! It had a handle on the top that she had to crank round to wash the clothes but it was easier for her. Things really changed when she got an electric washer with a wringer! We were lucky to have a gas stove, but our house still had the kitchen range. When the houses were built, people used to do all their cooking and baking on them. We didn't have television until 1956, but we did have a wireless. It had to be switched

on for about five minutes before it worked because the valves needed to warm up. You certainly wouldn't have been able to carry it around with you. Not many people had a fridge at that time, it was possible to buy them, but they were too expensive for most people. We had a big stone slab in the larder to keep things cool and a meat safe to keep flies away from food.

There were no aeroplanes flying us all over the world at that time. We used to get the train at Stepney Station, it is still there, do you know where it is? And we would go to Hornsea or Bridlington for the day, it was a great adventure for us then! The trains were pulled by steam engines and engine drivers were very skilled and respected people. Fish from the docks used to be sent from Paragon Station every day, they had a separate platform for the fish train because it smelled so bad! If we wanted to go anywhere locally we would use the trolley bus which ran up and down Beverley Road. If we needed to go anywhere else then there were other buses, the East Yorkshires had pointed tops, do you know why? It is to do with them having to go to Beverley, try to find out!

People used to turn up on the street to do things. The rag and bone man was just that: he collected rags and scrap. The knife sharpening man turned up every so often, set his bicycle up on a stand and sharpened everyone's kitchen knives. A different man came once and Mam was really annoyed to find him sharpening her knives on her front step, she'd just donkey stoned it!, Ice cream was brought round in a horse drawn van. Paget's used a bicycle with a cool box on the front and their ice cream was the nicest. The pop man used to come around once a week and mum always bought a few bottles of lemonade from him. The coal men came once a fortnight, they were always covered in black coal dust. They carried the bags of coal on their backs to the coalhouses.

I always remember one couple, a man and a woman. They used to walk up and down Beverley Road every day, pushing an old pram, they would sit on the seat at the top of Grove Street and count these little parcels of dry bread wrapped in newspaper. When I was much older I asked my Mam about them and she told me they were survivors of a concentration camp and had been badly affected by their ordeal.

If you think about our lives then and your life now you may find some similarities and many differences, would you have liked to grow up when I did? What would be the hardest thing for you to get used to?

## **Part 2: Noel Proud's Recollection of Life at Stepney Primary School**

Well, seeing your website has really been an experience for me, I've found a whole world of memories flooding back to me, some of them very small things that it seems odd to have remembered.

The first day I went to school, I can remember Mam taking me through the side door on Stepney Lane: it was very confusing for me, we took my coat into the cloakroom, the pegs all had a picture on them so we could remember which one we had used. The peg was so high I could hardly reach it! I must have been quite small then I think. Then, suddenly Mam disappeared and I found myself so busy in the classroom I hardly had time to think. That first morning soon finished and Mam came and took me home for dinner (we still called it dinner then although now I think most people will call it lunch!). Not many people had dinner at school then, we all lived quite nearby, those of us that did went to a building just down Stepney Lane, on the first street after the bridge. I was very surprised when Mam took me back to school in the afternoon, I thought I it was all over and done with when I came home!

The school was a lot different to the one pictured on your website now: we had desks with a cast iron frame and wooden seats. In the top infants class, the desks were in tiers, so we sat looking down at the teachers desk which stood where the focus of the ellipse would be. Miss North was the Headmistress of the infants' school, She was a tall, slim woman who always wore her hair scraped tightly back into a bun, she lived in a flat on Pearson Avenue and we all thought it was very grand. I wonder if you have heard of Phillip Larkin. He was a famous poet and lived in a house on Pearson Park. He wrote one poem called Terry Street, it would be interesting for you to read it, if you can find it.

When we first started at school, we began to learn to write with a slate and a stick of chalk, it was a great step forward when we began to use a pencil! It was very different to your experience of school: lessons were very formal, mostly we were sitting listening to our teachers and then repeating things that they said or copying from the blackboard. Oh yes, we didn't have whiteboards with coloured pens, there was a sheet of hardboard painted black fastened to the walls and our teachers wrote on that with coloured chalk, it was awful when they dusted it off because we got covered in chalk dust if we were sitting near. Sometimes the teacher would catch their fingernails down the board and it made the most awful noise!

In my first year at junior school I was in Mrs Kirkwood's class, our classroom was half of the main hall. Mrs Kirkwood sat at a big wooden desk with a seat built in and because it seemed so high we had to tip our heads right back to see her when we were standing next to it. I remember that year we all went into the playground so that we could be tried out for races for sports day, I wasn't chosen to be in anything, well I wasn't any good at sporty things then, and I told my Mam that I didn't have to go to sports day because I wasn't in anything. I got a terrible telling off from Mrs. K. the next day! It was then I began to learn "proper writing" and how to use a pen. We all had an inkwell on our desk, and our pen was a round wooden stick, about six inches long with a metal ferrule that held a nib. The idea was that we dipped the pen in the ink and then used it to write. It sounds primitive but it is the same thing that is used today by calligraphers to produce beautiful ornamental writing. It was a disaster for me! I am left handed and

because we write from left to right, whenever I used a pen it dug into the paper, broke the nib, made blots and of course my hand then smeared across the wet ink and no one could read what I had written. Life became much easier for me at school when felt tip pens were invented in the 1960's.

Mrs Kirkwood left the school after I had moved up and I think I remember my Mam telling me she had been lost in one of the Comet crashes in the 1950's. The Comet was the first commercial jet airliner and in the 1950's it opened up a whole new world of air travel for ordinary people, but there were several bad accidents when it first came into use.

The next year was a great adventure, I went into Mrs. Blackstone's class, but not where you are now. There were two old buildings right at the other end of Stepney Lane, I was told they had been a prisoner of war camp but I don't know if that is true. There was a paper mill on Stepney Lane then, they used to buy newspapers, rags and scrap metal for a few pennies. It smelled of awful, damp cardboard. We'd walk over the drain on the bridge. For a few days every year the eels used to come up the drain, it was a deep land drain and it would be filled from bank to bank with eels. We had to walk there past the air raid shelters, they were smelly and scruffy concrete buildings where people used to take refuge during the raids of the second world war. They were pretty scary, especially when Ian Wardrobe, who was a mischief, used to jump out to startle his friends! You may have seen on Beverley Road, towards town, there is the front of the old National Cinema. My Auntie Emily was on firewatch there one night when it was bombed, the staff got all of the customers out of the cinema before the bomb hit and no one was hurt, but my Auntie was buried in the firewatcher's post for two days before she was rescued. She was hungry when they got her out!

I spent three years there, with Mrs. Blackstone, Mr Dalby and Mr. Grey.

It is interesting to notice the changes which have taken place over the years, the toilets were outside. They had a roof but no windows and it was very cold in winter, the heating for our classrooms was provided by an old coke boiler in Mr. Gray's classroom, and he had to keep adding coke to it during lesson times to keep us all warm. We all had a third of a pint bottle of milk at morning break: in winter it was often frozen and the ice had forced the top off. We didn't have television at home or in school, but two or three times a weeks we would listen to the school programme on the wireless. One of the programmes was about history, another was a singing lesson and another was a nature programme. Sometimes we would do dancing, Mr Gray would take us down to the dining centre, we had a wind up gramophone and he would play the music on that. He forgot it one day and sent me back to the classroom to fetch it, it took me ages to find it and when I got back it was time for the lesson to finish! During the winter the baths were closed for swimming, but they put floors in so that they could be used for dances at night (that all finished when the Locarno opened near Blundell's Corner). During the day we could go there for PE: no-one had P.E. kit then, we just wore our ordinary vests and pants, it took us nearly as long to get the equipment out and set up as we had using it. We went to play football once: Mr Gray took us all to the bus stop and we got on the trolley that took us up to Endike Lane I think. There was a school there where we went and played football. It was a very different kind of building and my Mam told me that it had been an open Air School. Years ago a disease called tuberculosis was a serious

problem, it isn't around much now because of vaccinations. This school was there for children who had contracted TB.

As I got older I learned to swim, the city council thought it was important that we all learned to swim (I suppose that was because the main industry was fishing, although how long one would have swum for in the sea off the coast of Norway is an interesting conjecture!) and so everyone under 14 could have a free pass for the swimming baths, the pool used to be packed during the summer holidays!

My Grandmother's maiden name was Brocklesby and one of her brothers was a trawler skipper. My mother's cousin was Laurie Oliver, he was the last skipper to win the Silver Cod. My great uncle was a fish merchant, he used to transport the fish from market on horse drawn rulleys. During the 1960's we used to listen to recordings of Icelandic naval skippers attacking the trawlers. Eventually, the fishing industry in Hull was ended because of what were called the cod wars.

In my last year at Beverley Road, School Mr Grey encouraged us to enter a competition which was being run by the Hull Daily Mail. It was an "I Spy" competition and took us all over town looking for interesting things, like the smallest window in the town and the ruts in the cobble stones, a Victorian pillar box and the slab showing where the Wilberforce memorial stood before it was moved to its present site. I went back to Wilberforce House recently, and although the layout has been changed a lot it still stands as a fitting memorial to a courageous man.

My sister, Elaine, went to the school as well, and she went to the girls' school when she was 11, that was upstairs in the same building. Her teachers encouraged her and she transferred to a pre-nursing course at Thoresby School. Her teacher there was Miss Plater, who was the sister of another very famous Hull man. Elaine became a nurse in the Royal Air Force, and was given a medal by the Queen at Buckingham Palace some years ago for her work, which included the Falklands War, the first Iraq War and bringing the British hostages back from the Lebanon.

One day, Mr Gray turned up with an exam for us, he said it was a preliminary, no one knew what that meant but it sounded important. Afterwards, he saw us all individually and asked us which secondary school we wanted to go to, I was adamant that I wasn't going to Wilberforce High School: there were some boys there I really didn't like. Eventually, we took the eleven plus: we sat down with a test paper with lots of puzzles and questions and for what seemed like ages I ploughed through it, I didn't have the faintest idea what I was doing but I must have done fairly well because I was given a place at a brand new school on Bricknell Avenue called Kelvin Hall.

I have always been very grateful for the education which I received at Beverley Road School, it enabled me first to become a teacher and then a psychologist, and as a result of that I have been able to help many people during my career.

Noel Proud