



19. Irene Robbins: King Street life, Horns Lane school, Keel & Wherry pub, Bombing, Argyle Street, Pub outings

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I was born in 1920 in King Street, where my parents kept the Keel & Wherry Inn, and later moved to Argyle Street to bring up my family. My first memory is going to Horns Lane Infant School and my fear of passing the huge brewery horses from Youngs, all loaded up and ready to start work. They were Clydesdales and they would have their nosebags on while they had their breakfast. If they shook their heads or sneezed, I thought it was the end of the world! Mother used to watch me along the road to see I got past them safely.

You could get everything you needed in the King Street shops. There was a butchers, fish shop, Haydens the bakers, and everybody delivered. The milkman brought the milk round in a churn, measured out in a little measure. You would be cleaning in the pub in the morning so he would come in and start to read your paper, then the horse would put its head in the door, as much as to say, "That's time we moved!". Bakers also had horse-drawn carts. It wasn't a lonely street. People would sit on their doorsteps on warm evenings, knitting or whatever, or bring a chair out from the yards. Children played out in the street after tea - hoopla, marbles, swing on lamp posts, skipping. There was not much traffic then and no buses or

trams on King Street.

I went to the Horns Lane schools until I was 11, then to Crooks Place. My school report said, "Good in all subjects, especially needlework." Teaching was excellent and it was a good all-round education; by the time we left we were expected to be able to make a dress and to cook so we could be self-supporting. Some of my family ask me for help now with cutting out and so on, because they don't get this kind of education at school. The Head was very strict. She was a tall lady, typical schoolmistress, hair drawn back, but although you went in awe of teachers as children, you realised later they were quite kind in lots of things.

We went to a branch of the Princes Street church, then once or twice a year to the mother church. You had Sunday school - possibly twice - Christian Endeavour at night, and the chapels did a lot, there was a chapel mission in Sherborne Place, people gave up their time to take classes. It is demolished now but it was there for a long while. The leader was Mr. Le Grice.

My first job was packing tea and coffee in Lamberts shop on Hay Hill. You left school at 14. The school told you of places where there were vacancies and also followed up after you had left. I only earned about 8s 6d a week but the hours were good and Lamberts had several shops in the city so if you stayed with them they would gradually give you the responsibility of going into one of their shops. I later worked for Colmans, on the starch packing floor,

then I married and started my family. When the boys had grown I went back as a guide for their visitors, that was a very pleasant job.

I used to like buying records, everybody went to dance classes and to cinemas - the Regent, the Carlton, the Haymarket, the Electric - and the theatre and Hippodrome were there. I used to enjoy going for a good walk on a Sunday, you could walk out into the country easily from King Street. Men would go fishing or to the football.

At first our living quarters at the Keel & Wherry were just the back of the pub, but they later made this into the cellar and built us a nice private flat upstairs. One large room was licensed for wedding receptions and so on. We had an indoor toilet and bathroom. There was good big garden with outbuildings and a stable with a loft where a lady lived with her son, but they were moved out. We kept chickens, ducks and a goose who lived to about 12 and became the family pet. She was as good as a dog if there were strangers around.

There were big boats coming up the river then. We were opposite the coal yard, where the men took coal from the barges in hundredweight sacks and piled it up in the yard. There were also yachts and rowing boats on the river.

Christmas was much nicer than now, because it was all crowded into the last fortnight. People saved up. Shops would be open until 9. Poultry would hang outside, and they hoped for it to

be cold weather. Postman would bring the letters into the pub perhaps at 9 on Christmas Eve night and say, "See you in the morning again." I still treasure a dressed doll that I've had since 7 or 8.

The pub was bombed out at six o'clock one morning. A string of bombs went across King Street and one fell on a wall at the back of the houses. We were all in bed, mum and dad's bedroom ceiling came down and the kitchen had disappeared. The family that lived next door, their kitchen and small bedroom went down, and when they dug the boy out he was still in his bed and fast asleep. That hit Argyle Street and Pecks Opening and killed a whole family in one of those small houses. The bus station was also hit. I remember one night after a raid my husband going up the hill to see if our friend was alright, she had a young baby, and Youngs was on fire, the hospital, Colmans, all sorts of places. There was a daytime raid at 5 when some girls from Colmans were killed on Carrow Hill. Really nasty, that was. We never got any warning. I knew some of those girls. Boulton & Pauls was hit one lunch hour. I saw that plane. That was so black, a big black cross on it. I was having a wash in the bathroom before I went back to work and I called out to my mother, "Lay down, lay down, there's a big black plane out there" and then that hit Boulton & Pauls. You don't forget these things. I wonder how we did live through all this, because you try to make some sort of life for yourself. You wonder now how ever things got right, because there was bomb damage everywhere in the city.

They patched up the pub so we could serve there but gave us a house at 147 Argyle Street. I later took it over when mum and dad went back to the pub. It was a nice hall-entrance house with a landing. My husband was from Crewe, came to Norwich to work at Boulton & Paul, lodged with a widow in Argyle Street and I met him when he brought her into the pub one night. We were married at St. Etheldreda's. Argyle Street was a nice street with iron railings in front of the houses, which were all taken away for the war effort. I still see some of my old neighbours and pub customers, who live around here. The houses were owned by Colmans, who sold them to the city council, who started to close them down to rebuild, that was the squatters moved in and it got a bad name.

My mother ran outings from the pub. The men had Sunday morning drives and they had an outing once a year, while the ladies had two outings a year, they'd hire a coach to Skegness or Southend, starting around 6 or 7 in the morning and getting back at 11.30 at night. If they were going north they always booked their breakfast in a restaurant at Kings Lynn. They'd have a good day out, which they didn't get many of. You had Thursday afternoons off school from Whitsun to August and your Sunday School outing would be on one of those Thursdays, not very far, Mundesley or somewhere. You'd go on the beach and have your tea at a mission hall. Sometimes the brewery horses would take you in a wagon out to the country, perhaps Arminghall. Beautiful horses, they used to be used

for the Lord Mayor's procession.

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