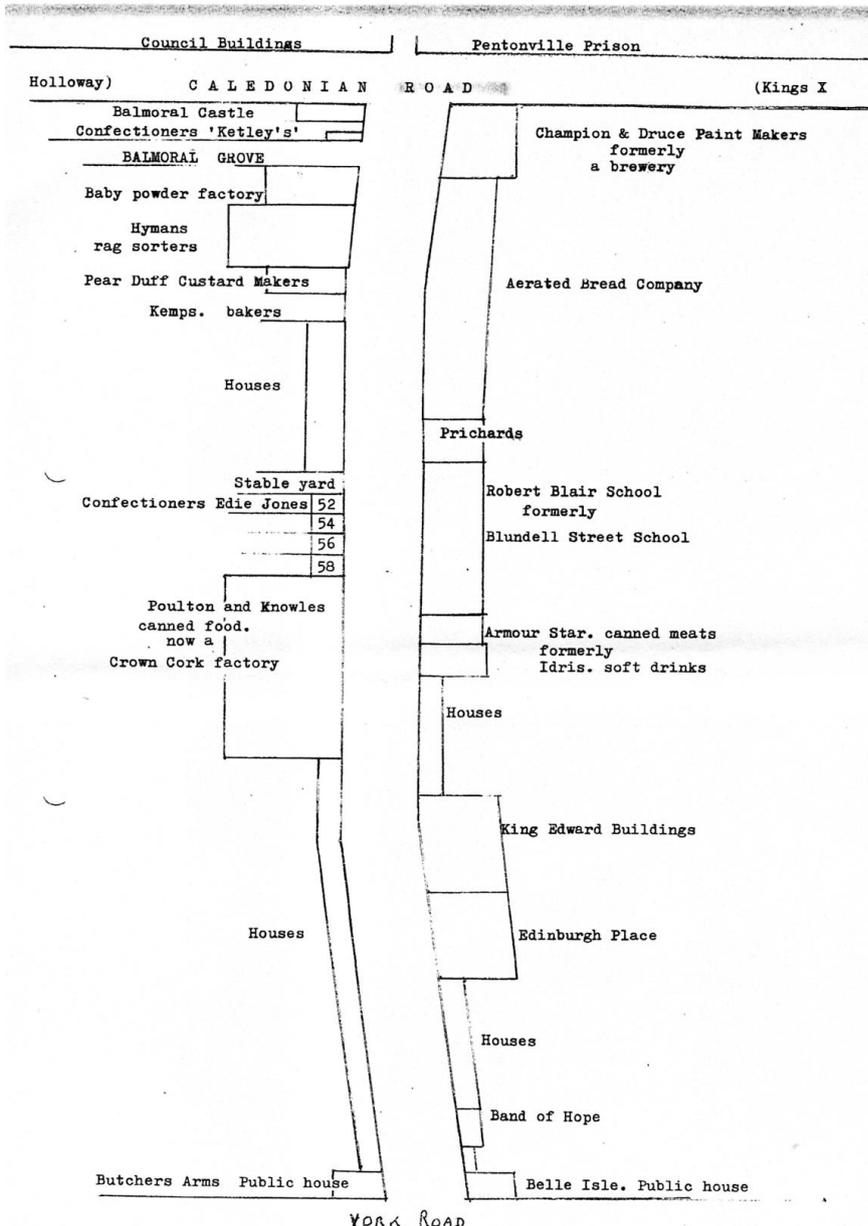


BREWERY ROAD 1926 ~ 1937

This article was written by a descendant of Esther Ward, and describes life in and around Brewery Road in the early 1900s

Brewery Road came into existence somewhere around the 1840s. A brewery was built on the corner of Brewery Road and Caledonian Road. It is logical to think that the road was named after this brewery. Perhaps the brewery was already there and the road was built around it. By 1926, the brewers had vanished and a paint manufacturer had taken over the premises. This paint firm was called The Champion and Druce Company.

On the opposite corner of Brewery Road stood a large public house, 'The Balmoral Castle'. Every pane of glass was etched with hop vines and the names of the beer and spirits on sale. The front face of the pub was covered in the usual brown ceramic tiles that nearly all the pubs were decorated with. A long covered passage at the side of the pub led to the Public, Lounge and Saloon bars. The



passage was paved with alternate white and blue tiled with a border. The walls were blue tiles up to half way and from there to the ceiling they were white.

Often I would see a man come out of the public bar carrying on his shoulder a long wooden pole with half a dozen or so 'billy cans' hanging suspended from the polecat either end. These cans hanging by their wire handles would be full of beer. These cans were open topped without lids and I would think the carrier had to be quite an expert at walking along and not spilling the precious beer.

Next to the pub was the Off-Licence. This had the usual engraved panel in the door and on it was etched, The Bottle and Jug Dept. When I was about seven years old, sometimes if my parents were not going out for the evening I would be sent to the Off-Licence to buy a quart bottle of Stout or Cider or I would be given a metal enamelled jug and told to get it filled with ale. Not being a writer and trying to remember things as I go, I have just realised that I should have described the

road first. You will have to bear with me. This story will be very fragmented. As I write I think of something else that I had forgotten. You will have to try to put it into some sort of order yourself.

Brewery Road: The road is made up of hard stone-cobbles. These are very worn and you ride a bicycle on them in the rain at your peril. From one end of the street to the other it is just one long row of houses and factories without a gap separating one from the other. The only gaps along the street are stable yard entrances and even these have houses over the top of the entrances. Only the factory's had electricity laid on. I think the houses were too old for conversion. They were all gas-lit.

The street lamps were gas as well. As a child I would often watch the lamp-lighter on his bicycle with the long pole on his shoulder stopping at every lamp in the street to either light the lamp or to turn it out whatever time of day it was. Sometimes the lamplighter would have to replace a gas mantle that had broken. In the thick 'pea souper' fogs we used to get, you could stand under one of these lamp-posts and look up to the light which was only eight or nine feet from the ground, and you could not tell whether it was alight or not.

I'll start back at the brewers again and go to the other end of the street along the one side, then I will come back to the 'Balmoral Castle' and start from there again.

Next to the brewery or paint firm was another small firm. It was unoccupied and may have been part of the brewery at one time. Next to this was the A.B.C. (Aerated Bread Company). This was a very long low two storey building. All the windows along the front of it were covered with strong wire mesh. They baked bread day and night. The workers there used to push large metal framed racks on wheels out onto the pavement each morning. On the racks were a dozen or more wooden trays with the fresh red hot bread on them. They were pushed outside to cool down, regardless of the dirt and dust blowing about.

This practice of leaving the bread in the street was to us permanently hungry kids, manna from heaven. Saturday mornings not being at school, we would wait for the bread to come out and then pounce. By the time the bread was taken back into the firm, we would be sitting around the table tucking into fresh hot bread and jam.

Next to the A.B.C. was another bread company, Prichards. I never saw the place used at all but they had a large yard door that had an iron shutter that was always closed. This, once it was chalked on, was our football goal posts and our wicket. If you just happened to be on your own for a few minutes, the shutter made a satisfying bang each time you kicked or threw a tennis ball at it. The girls used this shutter quite often when playing their ball games.

Next to Prichards was the school. It used to be known as the 'Blundell Street School' but the name was changed in the early 1930 s to 'The Robert Blair School. *(photo right of the school in 2007)* The building was set back away from the road, the playground separating them. The wall around the sides of the school was about six to seven feet tall.



All of us children went to this school, but such were our ages, no two of us were ever in the same class-room. In the summer when we had run out of things to do, we would climb over the wall after school was out and raid the dustbins for old exercise books and pen-nibs. The paper from the books made excellent airplanes when folded and the nibs fixed to the nose of the aircraft balanced it and they flew further.

Next to the school was the 'Armour Star' a canned meat business. The premises used to be 'Idris' the soft drinks company. This was another gift from heaven for us. Idris stacked their crates of soft drinks up against the side wall of the school, then locked their doors for the week-end. This did not deter us when we knew that there was free drinks going for the enterprising. Sunday, and we would be up and over the school wall at the front, then a mad dash across the playground, up on to the side wall and whoever was up first, passed the drinks from the crates down to the others.

Next to the 'Armour Star' was another small firm. I believe it was unoccupied. After this came two tenement buildings that were I think, five storey's high. The first was King Edward buildings and the next was Edinburgh Place where my father was born in 1903. Dad told me of a couple of incidents that happened there that you may find amusing. The first was that during World War One, one of the tenants who was a bit 'queer in the head' was found on the roof of the flats with a rope, trying to lasso a German airship as it flew overhead.

The second incident was that a wild steer, one of a herd being driven to the cattle market escaped from the herd and ran down Brewery Road into King Edward buildings and managed to go up three flights of stairs before getting stuck. All day they tried to get it down but they finally had to shoot it in the end.

I can well believe it because a bunch of us kids were playing as usual in the street when we heard a commotion going on up the road. We all looked around to see what was going on and there was this steer, thundering along the cobble-stones in our direction. You never saw a street empty so quickly in all your life. No-one, not even passers-by stopped to ask permission to enter your house. They were in as fast as we kids were. Luckily the front doors were never locked.

Next to the buildings was the usual long row of houses and near to the far end was the 'Band of Hope' hall. As children we never knew what it stood for, but that didn't matter. Now and then the bush telegraph would flash around the street and at this signal we all got washed and dressed after tea and spent a pleasant couple of hours at the Band of Hope watching lantern slides for free. The cinemas still showed silent pictures then. Sometimes they would show a film but I have no idea what it was. The evil's of drink I suspect. On a Sunday now and then the drums would beat out their message. We would all be ready in our Sunday clothes to go to the hall to sing hymns. Not as you may think, that we were being good little children, oh no! The bush telegraph had told us that this Sunday they were giving out the scented cards again. These cards, had a biblical picture and verse printed on then in colour, but it was the scent that was most important. We would collect a card each and dash home to mother who promptly put the card into a clothes drawer. Such was our good deed for the day. The Band of Hope never saw us at all at any other time.

After a few more houses and on the corner of the street was a public house called 'The Belle Isle'. I know nothing of this pub and I do not think it was used by any of our parents.

Across the road opposite in York Road (Way), was a fish and chip shop. I would be sent here sometimes, usually on a Friday night with one shilling and threepence (about 7p) to buy five tu'penny and a penn'orth of fish and chips. These were wrapped in newspaper in separate bundles. I used to have to dash home as fast as I could. Not in case the fish got cold but carrying that lot used to scorch my arms through my jacket. You could have pease pudding and savaloy, gerkins and pickled onions. The fish that you got for tuppence was large enough for two if you wasn't too hungry, not like the silly little piece they sell you now for £1.00 nowadays.

Back to the lower end of the street next to the Off-Licence were two or three houses. The last one was on the corner of a small side street called 'Balmoral Grove'. This house on the corner was a Confectioners and a Tobacconists. This only difference between the shop and the other houses was that just above the ground floor window was the name of the shop, 'Ketley's. and next to this was a large blue and white Stephen's ink sign. This sign had a temperature gauge running down the centre of it, supposedly filled with blue ink. Perhaps it was because at sometime or other, the ink in the glass tube had developed an air gap of an inch or so. Lower down next to the door was a 'Wrigley's spearmint machine. This gave you a packet of gum for a halfpenny and two packets every fourth halfpenny. Never rarely having a halfpenny to buy sweets with, on a Sunday afternoon when the shop was closed and for the want of something better to do, the gang of us would arm ourselves with sticks and anything heavy enough to hit the machine with. We would belt the life out of this gum machine and poke sticks up through the opening for the gum, Sometimes but not very often the machine finally got the message and for the sake of a little peace and quiet would cough up a packet of gum.

Across on the other corner of Balmoral Grove was the firm called Hyman's, a rag sorters. I never knew quite what to make of this building. I am certain it was too grand and expensively built for a rag sorters. It was built as though to keep out an invading army. Only three storey's high, there were buttresses at intervals along the wall. The walls were faced with a sort of mosaic stonework. Large black slabs about four or five feet square with a scattering of small white stones embedded into them and then highly polished. I have a dim recollection that someone once told me that this was a brewery. The building surrounded a large open courtyard where you could see the rag sorters working as you passed by. A horse and cart would drive in loaded up with sacks of rags which were then sorted to separate the woollens etc, then they were made up into great bales of cloth and then carted off to the great unknown. Recycled into paper I would think.

I am sorry, but I have made a mistake. A baby powder firm was on the corner of Balmoral Grove, Hyman's followed after this. The powders that this firm made was all highly scented. We knew that it made "baby powder. It may have made body talc as well or bath salts but mention these to our parents and you would have been met with a blank stare.

One day this factory caught alight. Not far from the top of our road was a fire-station, so any fire engine that had to go through to Caledonian Road always had to pass through Brewery Road. They use to come belting down our street ringing the great brass bell like mad trying to make us get out of the road before they hit us. We use to chase after them but give it up after a few yards, but not this day. We tore after the fire-engine as per usual and started to turn back but then we saw it stop at the bottom of the street. We then saw the smoke from the fire rising up to the sky. Unbelievably we stared at each other and then made for the fire at Olympic speed. Jesse Owen would have been proud of us. We stood as close as we could get. This was marvellous. A fire in our own street. This was what we had been waiting all our young lives for. We watched the turn-tables go round and the ladders go up and the firemen squirting water everywhere. It made our day. There were firemen inside the building, chucking sacks and boxes out onto the street full of this scented powder. A lot of them burst and the air was thick like a fog. We coughed, we sneezed and sneezed but no way were we moving until the show was over. When at last the fire was put out and we went home, our parents must have thought that for a while we were the sweetest smelling kids in the world.

Next to Hyman's was the Pear Duff Custard factory. Nothing happened here. Next came 'Kemp's the bakers. This was only a small bakery. It made bread but I think that biscuits and small tea-cakes were its main output. They had a small window just inside their yard or entrance to it. My mother quite often sent me to buy a loaf of bread at this window.

Kemp's had a fleet of delivery vans. These vans were like large square boxes on wheels. Inside on both walls were sets of rails. On these rails were put large wooden trays full of small cakes for delivery. The van had a shutter to pull down at the back but they very rarely used it. Some of these vans had to pass us in the street as they returned empty. We would run behind the cart and try to snatch any broken cakes that we could lay our grubby little hands on before the horse took the van into the yard.

From the bakery to the next stable yard were about a dozen houses. Some of them were occupied by one relative to our family or another. Nearly all had two or three children. My father had twelve brother's and sister's all living and all married. Then we had a distant cousin living close by, and they had nine children, six of these still at school. As you can see, we were a formidable force when altogether.

The stable yard as far as I can remember was never used, and for some unknown reason, I don't believe any of us children ever tried to find out what was down there. One of dad's sisters married the son of a Romany and dad told me that they had a caravan stored in this yard before I was born. He told me that one day all the crockery was deliberately smashed and the caravan burned. I do not know whether to believe dad about this caravan being burned. Unless it had been chopped into sticks first, setting the caravan alight as it was would have burned the whole street down.

Edie's shop Next was another small shop. There wasn't even a name above this one. We just knew it as 'Edie's'. The owner's name was Edith Jones. The shop sold the usual cigarettes and sweets, but also odd items such as tea, sugar, salt, pepper, oxo's and gas-mantles etc. Any small item that you may have forgotten when you did your main shopping in Caledonian Road. If any of the gang happened to have earned a whole halfpenny for running errands, we all crowded into the shop to assist him or her to pick out whatever sweets that you got a lot of for your money. A sherbet dab with the licorice tube in was best. We could all have a suck then. If you asked for a ha'porth of toffees, Edie would weigh them out carefully, even resorting to cut a toffee in half to balance her scales. Very popular she was with us then.

She would also sell you oxo's, five for a penny and one for a farthing, or if you were short of cash that week, she would sell you a 'twist' of tea or sugar, for a penny she would weigh out a certain amount of tea or sugar from the ordinary packets into her scales, then twist a piece of newspaper into a cone shape and pour your tea or sugar into it and then seal the top by twisting it. She lived alone. I do not know if she was ever married.

My Gran's house Next door on the ground floor lived the lady of the manor, my father's mother or gran, as she was known to every child in the street. Her husband had died in 1921 and she lived with her youngest son until he died from an accident at the age of eighteen.

Gran, now on her own had a little black whippet for company. Its name was Bidy. Although gran lived alone she was never alone, not with her family all around her and us kids running in and out all day for a drink of water or to use the loo.

Its a real shame that families split up nowadays and even lose touch with each other. When I was a child the whole street full of people were just one big happy family. Front doors was never locked. If you wanted the loo or a drop of water you just walked in and asked. You were never refused. If you fell over and grazed a knee, you did not go home if it didn't hurt much. You went into the nearest house where the mother would wash it for you, perhaps stuck a plaster on it and you were off again. I do know for a fact that when one of the mother's called their children in for dinner, quite often there would be a strange face at the table, waiting patiently for its dinner as though it had lived there all its life.

Gran's kitchen fire-place backed onto Edie's next door. There was only a wall separating them. Gran and Edie' used to like their drop of mother's ruin and a chat. To attract one or the other's attention, they would bang on the back wall of the fire-place with a poker and then whoever was called would toddle into the other's house. They eventually wore a hole through the wall with their pokers and then they were able to call each other through the hole instead.



Above Gran lived Jack Ward (see left) and his large family. His was the flat where we held all the Christmas parties etc. Dad told me once that there was a party going full swing one night and the beer was flowing freely. He said at one stage they had formed into two lines and were dancing 'Knee's up Mother Brown to the gramophone. He had to go to the toilet which was in the back yard and as he passed his mother's front room he glanced in. There was his mother in the middle of the room with the broom in her hands, vainly trying to stop the ceiling from bouncing up and down. Dad did say that at one such do, someone actually did go through the ceiling.

Jack Ward was a right joker. Anything for a laugh. He would walk back from his work wearing a blue suit and a bowler. He walked with the tread of a policeman and from a distance he looked like one. I was told that the lads who gambled by playing 'Penny up the wall' would see him coming and run for their lives leaving Uncle Jack to pick up any coins that the gamblers had left in their haste to disappear over the horizon. I did hear that uncle Jack found it quite profitable.

I believe it was he that once drove a horse and cart home and left it outside the house while he went in for his dinner. On the cart he had left was a ripe dead whale. Dad said the stink went right along the street and it wasn't long before all the mother's who were cooking dinners came out to see what was blocking the drains. When they found out what it was, and that didn't take very long, they all went in to have a few words with him. Uncle Jack was a slaughterer by trade so smells didn't bother him. Above his flat lived uncle John and his wife Elsie, (they had one son).

Our house, number 56 Brewery Road, was next to Gran's who was number 54 was the same as the rest of the street. When I describe our flat, it will do for all of them upstairs and down. Mrs. Murrell and Mrs. Brewer had the flat downstairs. I do not know if either of them had been married. They kept cats. The smell of cats and cat food stank the whole house. It really was a strong smell. The 'Cats meat man' as he was called used to drive around the streets with his horse and cart. The cart would be full of sides of horse flesh hanging from hooks in the roof of the van. I do not know if the meat was cooked or dried, but you could smell the van coming around about three days in advance. Whatever amount of catfood you paid for, he would put so many pieces of flesh onto a wooden skewer and give it to you. I often nowadays break into a grin whenever I see or hear keebabs mentioned. It was to these two ladies that our rent of five shillings a week was paid. I do know that they owned the house.

In the flat at the top of the house lived my uncle George and his family. Uncle was a very keen gardener and as he could get cart loads of horse manure from the stables where my father worked, his allotment was the best in town. He loved gardening. He was also a keen hobbyist. He built the first valve radio from a hobby kit and ran a second speaker over the backyard wall so that his mother could listen in to 2LO as well.

On the landing outside his flat was a stone sink with a cold water tap just above it. This was the only water supply for all the three flats. The only other tap was outside in the scullery where all the

washing of clothes was done. It must have been quite a chore on bath night, up and down the stairs filling buckets or jugs with water. Although I cannot remember, common sense leads me to believe that they would have heated the water in the 'copper' in the out-house (scullery). Our flat was two bedrooms, a front room, and a kitchen.

Our bedroom was at the front of the house. I suppose mother put us in that room because there was a lamp-post a few yards away that would give a little light throughout the night. We were only little children and I believe we were not too happy at being left in total darkness. Once upon a time we were woken up from our sleep by a commotion going on outside. We cried out for our mother and she looked out of the window to see what it was all about. Turning to us, she said "Go back to sleep, Its only your uncle George having an argument with the lamp-post."

My two younger brothers and I slept in a brass rail bed, one of those with the brass knobs on the four corners that nowadays, you have to be wealthy to be able to buy one. We slept most times like sardines, two up the top of the bed and one down. How the parents who had girls and boys managed, I do not know. There may have been room for two beds in the one room. In those days though, at least in our street, sex was never heard of by us. The nearest we got to it was that if you kissed a girls belly button, she had a baby.

All the windows in the houses were fitted with roller blinds so that not a chink of light escaped into the street. There were no carpets in our house. Every room had linoleum on the floor. The main bedroom was the same as the first.

The Parlour The front room or lounge as it is called nowadays, was sacrosanct to us children. We never, but never, went into this room unless told to fetch something and we used to damn near tip-toe in. It was never used at all. Even I, who was only around the age of eight or nine perhaps at the time, used to wonder why the hell we had a room that we could have played in out of the way of the parents. All furniture in the front room was polished to a high degree. The chairs had never been sat on since they were bought. The dining table had never had a plate put on it. I remember that when we had moved into a larger house mum used to have a portable mangle that screwed onto the kitchen table and she did the washing in the sink. We finally bought a twin tub washing machine, but it was no help to her. She still insisted on using the mangle after the clothes had been put through the spinner. Even when we bought a deep freeze and stocked it full of meat, she would still go out and by a joint for the dinner. Very old fashioned was mum. She couldn't change her ways.

Anyway, back to the drawing board. All around the front room walls hanging from the picture rail were photographs of my parents' parents. An Aspidistra stood on a 'what not' in the corner. This used to get a glass of beer if there was any left over from a party. We had this plant for years. I used to dash out in the street sometimes, whenever a horse and cart passed by. Shovel and bucket in hand. That plant never wanted for anything.

On the dining room table was a stuffed mongoose with a cobra wrapped around it. It frightened the life out of me when I had to go into that room to fetch something, and I saw it on the table.

The kitchen was not all that large. It had a scrubbed wooden kitchen table and chairs, a food cupboard was stood in one corner opposite in the other corner were a few shelves that passed as a china cabinet. The door was in another corner and a gas-stove stood in the centre of a wall. There was hardly any room to walk around in. Heaven knows how a large family managed.

From the shelf above the fire-place to the ceiling was fixed to the wall, a 'Mantlepiece'. It may have got this name because some of them had the gas-lights fixed to them. It was an ornately carved mirror frame that stretched almost right across the chimney breast. It had a large mirror in the centre, with two narrow mirrors either side. The narrow ones were cut into three by the little wooden shelves that were fixed across them. The shelves were supported by a carved column of wood, one each side and they were carved and scrolled as well. The mantlepiece was stained and varnished and was almost black with age. Around the fire-place shelf was the 'mantlecloth'. This was a black velvet cloth about eight inches wide. It had shallow scollops all around edged with gold lace and with little tassels all the way around the bottom. It was also decorated with black tiny beads as well. Our two gas-lights were one either side of the mantlepiece, the gas-pipe coming out of the wall about six feet from the floor.

The glass covers for these lamps came in all shapes, colours and sizes. Whatever you could afford to buy. These protected the mantle as well as spreading what little light there was coming from them. The mantles were the most fragile thing I have ever seen. If ever one got broken I would be sent to Edie's a couple of doors away to buy a new one. Twopence I think they were. Sold in a small card-

board box, I have known them to break before I got home with one. The mantle was made from a very, very thin ring of fireclay and what looked like a very thin cotton cloth, about an inch and a half long and about the same across the diameter. It looked like the bottom half of a small electric bulb. When they were new, the first time it was lit it gave off a terrible smell but afterwards it was clean. The cotton cloth used to burn and then leave its shape still there but in the form of ashes, I would say. To light it you had to hold your breath as you held a match to it otherwise you would blow the mantle away by just breathing on it.

We also had a meat safe to keep the food away from the mice. It was about eighteen inches square and made from perforated metal. This was your fridge of those days. You put your meat, butter, etc into it. In the summer it was balanced on an open window ledge to catch what breeze there was. The rest of the year it stood wherever you could find room for it. I might as well carry on with the food stuffs. You could go to the greengrocers and for a penny or twopenny, you could buy one very large carrot, a large Spanish onion and a large turnip or parsnip. Potatoes were about a penny a pound and you could go to the butchers for six penny worth of bones. As much as you could carry and these had quite a bit of meat left on them. This would make a meal for a family of five for less than one shilling (5p). Whenever mum cooked a joint, I would have the bones afterwards and with a meat skewer, dig out the marrow. It was lovely.

Shopping I loved going shopping with my mum. The meat in the butchers was all hung up in the shop. They hadn't any fridges. To buy the butter was an experience. You could smell the butter in the dairy long before you got there. On the counter would be great slabs of butter or margarine, both of them a rich golden yellow, not like the anaemic looking butter you buy now. The person behind the counter would, using two wooden paddles, carve a piece off and pat it into an oblong or square shape, weighing it and adding or taking away pieces of butter until you were satisfied, then wrapping it up. If you haven't tasted that butter, you have never lived. The food of those days tasted wonderful. Outside the dairy on the wall was a large brass plate. Embossed on this plate was a picture of a cow, and in the right place was a small brass tube sticking out with a slot at the side of it. You held your milk jug underneath it, put your money in and got yourself a pint of milk. Milk was a penny a pint then. The cream in the bottle was always at least half way down from the top. The machine was very useful when the shops had closed and you were short on milk. Because in those days, there was no way of keeping fresh food, mothers used to have to go out every day to buy something.

Entertainment In the kitchen on a Saturday evening, mum would take down any washing that was hanging up, and dad would get out the radio. Well, Crystal set. He would place the set onto the table and then with drawing pins and a chair to stand on, he would pin across the ceiling and around the walls about one hundred feet of copper wire, taking one end and connecting it to the set on the table. Then he would twist a short piece of wire onto the gaspipe of the gas-stove and then to the set. Now we had to be still and quiet as mice. He would connect up the earphones and put them on, then with great care he would fiddle with the cat's whisker trying to find a spot on the crystal that would pick up the radio station, 2LO. Satisfied he would sit there until the football results came on. He went mad once throwing everything up into the air. He had got the eight draws up. "We're rich!" he yelled, dancing around the room. Half way through the week a postal order came. Sixpence, it seemed that there were so many draws, everybody had won. Dad only ever ticked off his teams on the coupon and never noticed all the other draws.

Normally when he had checked his pools, he would fetch a bowl with some water in the bottom and hang the earphones over the side; if we kept quiet, all the family could listen to it.

Vermin Mice and bugs were the biggest worry. If you look at the map you will see that we were surrounded by food factories. There was no way that anyone could keep them out of the house. To put the icing on the cake, all the interior walls of every house were made of wooden lathes covered with a mixture of plaster and horse-hair.

Even the wallpapers were stuck on with flour paste. The mice and bugs could not have had a better breeding ground. We used to have mouse traps everywhere in the house and in the mornings the traps almost always had a mouse in them. When dad was on night shift, after we had been put to bed, mother used to sit by the dying fire and clobber the mice as they came out from behind the fire-place. Dad once told me that one morning as he was going out of the street door to go to work, he felt something move under his overcoat collar. He had to walk about two miles to work, so all the way, he held his lapels tightly down until he got to work. In the stables he said to his mate, "I think I've got a mouse under my collar. Kill it for me." "Sure" said his mate, "Turn around." Dad did so and his mate fetched him an almighty blow on the back of the neck with a shovel. He nearly killed dad as well. As for the bugs. If you sat and stared at the wallpaper of an evening you could actually see the paper moving as they crawled about underneath it. At night they used to crawl across the ceiling and drop

onto the bed. It was a ritual by all the parents to strip the beds fairly often, put a bucket or bowl underneath the springs and joints and pour scalding water over them to kill or make them fall into the hot water. It really was a hopeless task. I know that one day my uncle George said to dad, "I'll show you how to get rid of them and promptly set fire to a wall. It must have been a controlled fire because the house was still standing afterwards. I believe Uncle George did take some or all of his walls down in a vain attempt to clear the house from bugs, but in those days you had no other materials other than horsehair and plaster to rebuild the walls with so the insects would soon be back again. My father's wages at that time were just about £2.00 a week. Not enough to get a mortgage. It was hardly enough to keep us fed and clothed. There was no way that he could get a better job. There just wasn't any jobs during the slump years. You had to hang on to what you had by the skin of your teeth. There was always a few hundred men for each job that may be going.

Washing Day Now to the wash-house or scullery. Take your pick on the name. This was where all the washing was done on a Monday morning or rather, all day Monday, sometimes into Tuesday as well. I can understand now why wash day had to be on a Monday, as you will find out. The wash-house was added on to the end of the house in the back yard. The walls were of brick and whitewashed. Inside there was a stone sink under the only window. The water tap above the sink. In the middle of the scullery was an old kitchen table with a tin bath on it in which mother stood her scrubbing board. Near to the table was a great mangle. It must have been at least five foot tall. A handle on a wheel for turning the rollers was so large that for me to turn it, I had to take a step forwards and backwards because of the diameter of it. In a corner was the 'Copper', this was built of bricks with a firehole just above the floor. Inside the bricks was, I suppose a copper cauldron. Some were galvanized metal. I do know that they were all called coppers. Now you will see why the washing of clothes and linen had to take place on a Monday. Mother would bring her washing down early in the morning. The housewives must have taken turns to be first. Mother would then put paper and sticks in the fire hole to light it and once it was going well she would then put the coal in. She would have already put the water in the copper beforehand, by using a jug or bucket fetching the water from the tap. While the water was heating she would pare a bar of Sunlight soap with a knife, dropping the shavings into the boiler. She would stir it with a copper stick as the water heated until it was all suds. When it was hot enough in would go the washing, stirring it every now and then with the stick. For whites, she used to put a 'Reckitt's Blue' bag into the water. Each item when she thought it had boiled enough she would lift out with the stick and drop it into the tin bath, then she would place it on the scrubbing board and scrub it and then it would go back for a second boil. As each item was finished she would place it between the rollers of the mangle and squeeze the water out. I used to find that it was too hard for me to turn. There was only room for a short washing line in the back yard. Drying the washing could take a day or two. It usually made sense for the next person who wanted to do their washing to follow straight away so that the fire could be kept burning and save the time of lighting it. The actual washing could take a day or to depending how large the family was. Then there was the ironing. No electric irons then. Mother had two cast iron irons, both weighing seven pounds each. In the summer she would have one iron heating on the gas-stove while she used the other one until it got cold then she would exchange it for a hot one. In the winter the irons would be stood on a metal plate hooked onto the fire-bars of the fire. As you can see, to do the wash for a family usually took three or four days to complete, what with shopping each day, carrying coal upstairs from the backyard or fetching water every time you needed a drop. Her day never finished until late at night.

The toilet On the back end of the scullery was the toilet. This was bare brick again and whitewashed. About five or six feet long and four feet wide with a planked wooden door that had no lock and could only be latched. Plus a large gap above and below the door. You didn't know where the draughts were coming from but you certainly knew where they were going. The toilet seat looked like a big wooden crate pushed tight up against the back wall and the side walls. The porcelain pan was underneath inside the box. The seat had been scrubbed so often that around the hole the edges of the wood had frayed, and for a child who's feet didn't touch the ground when seated, it was a delicate operation to find a comfortable position. Night time was a terrible time for a child who was just old enough to be able to use the toilet without help.

First because you knew it was dark outside you hung on and hung on until to avoid an accident you had to go. You beg and pray to your mother for a piece of candle. After you have been told off for being scared of the dark, she relents sometimes and gives you a lighted candle. Outside on the landing you now have to go down the stairs. There is no lighting, only your candle, which as you creep down the stairs timidly, throws flickering shadows on the wall, further scaring you. You cannot see past the light of the candle because you are holding it close to your chest scared stiff that it would go out. You are also expecting the bogey-man to jump out on you any second. It would have only taken someone to slam a door or creep up behind you and say Boo! and your journey would have been completely wasted. You get down the stairs safely with your heart in your mouth and finally make it to the back door. You now need three hands because of the wind that will try and blow out the

candle. One hand holding the candle, another protecting the flame and burning your hand and another to open and close the back door. Somehow you manage it. With three house walls, one behind and one each side plus the high stable wall that runs along the end of the back yard, it is pitch black outside. With a trembling hand shielding the candle and every flicker of the flame makes you certain that it is going to go out any second, you make it to the toilet. Once inside you quickly put the latch on the door. You tip a drop of hot wax on the seat at the side and stick the candle firmly in it. Once you are comfortable, you sit there whistling and with your feet stuck out like ramrods in case someone outside tries to come in. When all is over, you still have that dreaded journey to do in reverse. You may laugh but to a very small child the darkness is full of terrors.

Our first radio, for it to work you had to have a mains battery of 120 volts, which was about 12x9x3 inches and very heavy. It also had to have a 9 volt grid battery and a one and a half volt wet battery commonly called an accumulator. This accumulator was about 6x 4x4 inches made of very thick glass. The glass was clear so that you could see the plates inside. On the top was a black and a red terminal. This accumulator used to last about a week and it was my job to take the worn out battery and twopence to a shop and exchange it for a fully charged one.

A Mrs Kemp lived at number 58. I believe she lived alone but I am not too sure about this. We children thought she was a very rich woman. Normally with us kids, if someone wanted an errand run, they would go to the front door and give the first child that came along the task. It did not matter whether it was your mother or not. Every woman in the street was your mother. You went for miles sometimes and all without a murmur. If you were very lucky you might get a farthing for your efforts but normally it was just a thank you. Mrs. Kemp was different. Do an errand for her and you always got a penny at the very least, The penny had to be taken straight to your mother. It was too much for a child to have to spend on sweets. It could buy a Loaf or something.

Next to Mrs. Kemp was the Crown Cork Company. It was Poulton and Knowles, the canned food company, but it changed hands in the mid 1930s. One day this cork factory also went up in flames. As luck would have it (for us children) it was on a Sunday morning. No school. We were there watching the flames coming from the roof well before the firemen turned up. We were chased away when they arrived but we climbed onto the school wall opposite where we had a grandstand view. The firemen were too busy to try to chase us off the wall. We sat there enjoying every minute of it, only going in for dinner and then back on the wall again. Of course, none of us realised that the fire was only one house away from our own and could have gone up in flames as well. No one was ever told to evacuate their houses while the fire was raging.

After the cork factory it was all houses except for a stable yard here and there.

Local pubs The last building on the corner was a public house called the 'Butchers Arms'. This was my Uncle George's favourite oasis, much to the disgust of his wife,

My father's watering place was 'The Prince of Wales'. Only a small public house in St. Pancras Way, or Road as it was at the time. I must tell this story that he told me. He and mother and us kids would go to this pub occasionally on a Sunday night. We would be left standing outside until closing time. Anyway, mum who did not drink, had her usual glass of ginger wine while dad had his beer. Mum called dad over and told him that her ginger wine tasted funny and she said it was off. Dad took a sip just to confirm it. He ordered mum another one, threepence a glass was the price. Mum said it tasted the same as the first one. Dad's eyes lit up. "Do't say anything to anyone" he said, and for the rest of the night whenever he bought a drink or whenever one of his drinking partners bought a round, dad would say. "Mine's a ginger wine. All his mates were laughing at him ordering ginger wine instead of beer, till when dad started falling all over the place, they got suspicious. From then on until closing time they were all drinking ginger wine. Dad said that the publicans wife who was helping her husband that evening was putting the spirits in the rack behind the bar to help out. As luck would have it, the labels on the whisky and ginger wine at a quick glance looked the same, and she was putting whisky bottles from a crate under the bar into the ginger wine slot instead. Mum grumbled to me after dad had told his story. "It was all right for him, but I had to go without all night."

In the street

Outside the school the road for about one hundred yards was paved with wooden tar-blocks about the same size as bricks. I would think that this was to keep down the noise of the steel rimmed cart wheels as they passed by. The racket when the wheels ran over the cobbles was really noisy. Now and then these tar blocks had to be removed so that the water or gas-pipes or whatever could be repaired. These were a great source of income to us. They paid our picture money for us at the 'Tupenny Rush' All silent films, Buck Jones, Tom Mix, Flash Gordon. All the films you get on TV nowadays.

We would watch them dig the hole. Then a watchman's canvas hut would be erected and at night although no traffic ever passed during the night, the watchman would light all his paraffin lamps and stand them around the hole. Always as soon as a watchman had set his lamps he would be off to the pub for an hour or so. This was our chance. We would grab armfuls of these tar bricks and run indoors with them, collecting as many as we could. When the hole was repaired and the workmen gone, our backyard became a hive of industry. The eldest of us chopping the tar blocks into fire lighters and the rest tying them up in bundles to be taken around the streets to be sold at a farthing a bundle. We could have made a fortune if we had been old enough. The firewood was bought eagerly by a mother as soon as we knocked on a door. Being impregnated all the way through with tar and creosote our firewood could light a fire and you could put your coal on straight away instead of having to keep putting wood on until it became hot enough to burn the coal. If the watchman had a brazier in the cold weather, he would be lucky if he still had his bag of coal left when he came back from the pub.

My bicycle At about the age of ten, I found myself the proud owner of a second-hand adults bicycle. Five shillings it cost. All my cousins who were older than me already had their bicycles so I was able to join them. In the summer we would get a lemonade bottle full of water and a jam sandwich and off we would go. We would cycle from our homes in Islington to Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, play in and around the stream there and start back home in time for a late tea and to bed. At the half-way stages going there and back, we would lie on the wide grass verge of the Great North Road for a rest. You could count the cars that passed you by all day on one hand. The oldest of us would be about thirteen years of age. I wouldn't like to ride a bicycle at the present day, even at the age of thirty, that distance and expect to live.

Transport One or two things you may be interested in: The old boneshaker trams ran along Caledonian Road until the mid-thirties. The seats were wooden slats without cushions and on a long journey you were liable to be marked for life. On some of the trams, the upstairs section was roofless and open to the weather. When the trams had to go up Archway Road, they had to be assisted up the hill with a team of horses.

Trolley-buses took over from the trams but they only lasted a few years. I think it was because the bus company couldn't change their routes easily. Each route had to have electric cables strung above the road.

The Caledonian Market

The cattle market or the Caledonian Road market as it was known countrywide, was my father told me 440 yards square. I never paced it out myself but he said that he had.



All around it were massive wrought iron railings. The railings were spear pointed about ten feet long and one inch in diameter. The pillars that they were connected to were about two foot square and rose above the railings by about three feet. On each of the four sides just above the height of the railings, was a life size casting of a bulls head. Everything was painted a matt green. In the centre was the well known clock tower. One storey tall, it was circular with a sloping tiled roof, the clock tower above the centre of it. I have no idea of the diameter, fifty feet perhaps. I never knew what the tower was for as a child but I now realise that it must have been the auction or buying and selling office.

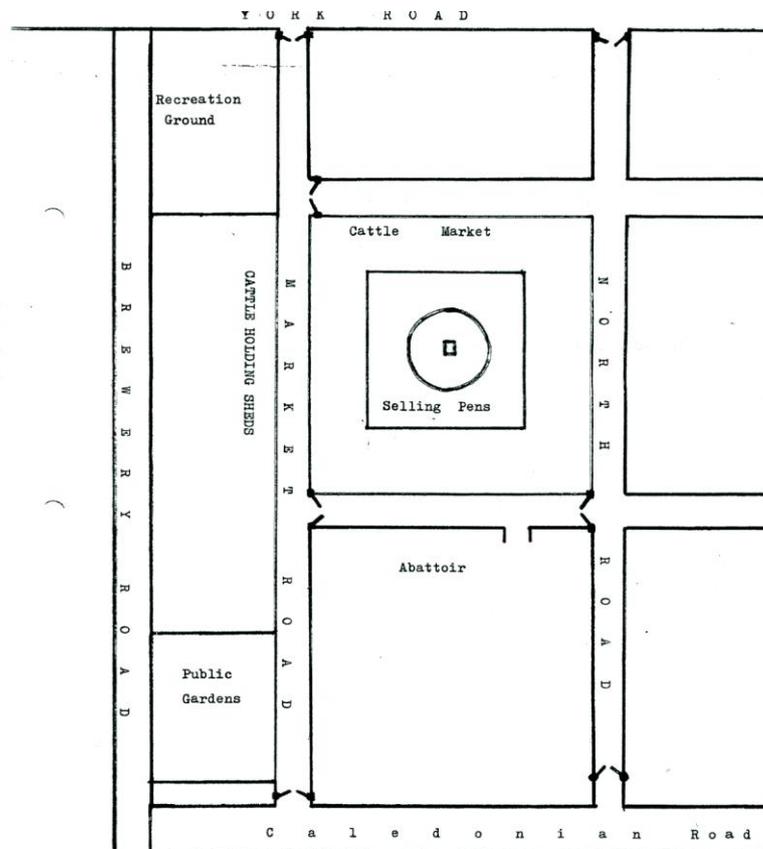
The pens where the cattle were held while being sold held about six animals each and so arranged with gates that you could move the cattle around singly if you wanted to,

The cattle that were bought and sold here were not the now short-horn variety, these were the American wild west cattle, wild, and with a horn span of six feet or more. To get them to the market, there were these great wrought iron double gates that could be closed at the end of all the surrounding roads to keep the cattle in. Once these gates were closed, no traffic or pedestrians were allowed through until they were opened again. I know all about that. I used to visit my other gran and grandad every Monday lunch-time for half an hour. They lived just past North road and I had to pass the abattoir to get there. I had walked up Market Road and was walking along the turning where the abattoir was when I heard someone yell. I looked around and saw a herd of cattle being driven

towards me. They were being driven straight to the abattoir. The cattle were panicking because they could smell the blood in the slaughter house. I took one look at those horns and was cured of constipation for ever I hared it down the street to the gates where someone let me out. I used to have to make this journey a little later on when mum started giving her white laundry for Gran to get done for her. Gran's youngest son worked at the laundry. I took the laundry every Monday and collected the wet washing a couple of days later. Quite often I would have to run for my life. The drovers didn't bother to close the gates sometimes.

The Market was opened twice a week as an open air bazaar. There would be rows and rows of coster-barrows right across the market from end to end. Some of the traders just had a carpet on the cobbles with their wares on. You could buy anything you wished, new or second hand. It did not matter what it was that you wanted, it would be on offer somewhere in the market. You could even buy a watch exactly the same as the one you have and then get home and find out that it was yours. The market was always crowded and the pick-pockets were having a field day.

There would be sword-swallowers and jugglers etc. People demonstrating all manner of things to tempt you to buy, I can remember a man with a very thin narrow steel coil on his arm waving the end about. He was demonstrating how sharp the metal was when it was made into safety-razor blades. I use to love being there as it got dark. All the traders had these great Acetylene lamps that gave off such a brilliant light. Of course my best time was when the traders left. They had to push their barrows home, maybe miles away. If business had been good they would throw some of their wares away to save them the trouble off pushing it all the way home. You could pick up all sorts of fruit, books, chairs. Anything in fact, all in good condition. We children would sometimes go their for a deliberate purpose. To find wooden boxes, planks and wheels to make our trollies, cricket bats, rounders bats and scooters.



The original Cattle Market – there is now a park there, but you can still see the original wrought iron railings and the clock tower. Although there are still a number of familiar street names, all the old housing has been demolished and replaced with factories or blocks of flats.



This article was kindly submitted by another descendant of the Ridgwell family, but we have not been able to get in touch with the original author ... If you know who wrote it, please pass on our grateful thanks!