

Father was a Brewery Accountant

Barbara Miles was born 1912 and interviewed in 1991

My father was the managing director of Whitwell Mark and Company 1775. He came to Kendal from Lichfield as an accountant to sort them out. I was never sorry that he did. The Brewery was a lovely old building. It had an oak staircase which I think they retained when it changed to a youth hostel and my father had his office which looked down Highgate and we used to pop in occasionally, usually on a Sunday when nobody was working there. We were allowed into the storage rooms with the big vats. There was a huge weighing machine that they used to weigh the sacks and my father used to weigh us children to see if we were gaining weight. The big vats were always bubbling with yeast mixture for the beer. I'm sure health and safety regulations would not allow us to look in them now. They would be all covered up.

We had a lovely garden of course because we had the Brewery Steps and everything in our garden and the car park was all in the garden. We used to do a lot of walking with my mother and we used to come back with a bunch of flowers then we had to sit down and identify them. Mother wouldn't tell us the names. We had to find them in a book.

There wasn't a lot of traffic in those days. One knew all the cars that were on the road; you just had to look at the registration number and you knew who it was there were so few cars really. I don't remember my father without a car and the one I remember best was a great big open, EC2428, Crossley. We all used to pile in, it would accommodate seven of us all together. My sister used to sit on my mother's knee in the front and my brother had a stool in the back which would be frowned upon now-a-days. We three girls sat in the back seat. My father used to give us turns in saying "Turn first left or first right" so often we would end up in farmyards.

It was a wonderful old car, that Crossley and, although it had a good engine, when we got to a steep hill often we all had to get out and father used to say "Get a big stone and put it behind. Now right push." It had acetylene lamps and a great big brass horn. The acetylene lamps used to blow out on a windy day on the top of Shap and it was very difficult to relight them. It had a crank handle to start when the engine stopped so I learned how to crank start a car at a very early age

There wasn't very much traffic on the roads. The ones we used to have to look out for would be the horse-drawn big lumber lorries. When they cut down full length trees there would be a team of at least four to six horses used to come up the road. I don't think the road would be tarmacked in those days but it would be a hard and often muddy surface, and of course they often used to drive sheep up the main street.

The Brewery company used to have two dray horses they were lovely. They used to come out of the yard – it was a very narrow entrance – into the back of the Brewery. Then of course they changed to lorries and they had a great time trying to get in and out of that entrance.

I went to Balliol School for Girls in Sedbergh as a boarder. My two sisters went just at the end of the First World War and I followed on. It wasn't a very big school I rose to be their hockey captain. We got three holidays – Christmas, Easter and Summer. Our lessons, compared to the choice children have today were really quite basic – reading, writing, writing and arithmetic, history, geography (botany as it was called then). There used to be lots of outings. About three times a term we would go on one of these outings. We used to do a bit of caving. We used to follow river beds underground. We just had candles, which used to blow out, and torches and climb up the river beds. Nothing terribly deep. Hill walks were every Wednesday

and we had our own outdoor swimming pool which we were allowed to go in every lunchtime once the temperature got up to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. We also had our own gym which we went down to everyday when there was no swimming.

I was 22 years old when I started nursing training at Manchester Royal. It was a long course – three years at Manchester, then a year as a staff nurse then I went to Oxford and did my midwifery and the second part of that, I did it in two parts, at Luton and then eventually took my health visiting as well.

I did some Girls Guides work before I started nursing. I was responsible for this bit of Westmorland when there was a message sent from somewhere in Scotland down to Buckingham Palace. I cannot remember what was the message sent down by semaphore was but it passed through Westmorland from one group of guides to another. It was so wet and windy. I made the girls run until they could see the next group with flags and then flag it out. I cannot remember what the message was but it involved hundreds of girl guides and it did get to London and the Palace. But I suspect it might have been quite different from the original message that started in Scotland.

Interview No R021

© Kendal Oral History Group