

Horses Sweat, Gentlemen Perspire, Ladies Glow

Margaret Hutchinson was born in 1915 and interviewed in 1993

I was born in Endmoor. My dad was an Irishman who, along with three or four other young men, came to work in the Gatebeck Gunpowder Factory. He was a journeyman cooper by trade. He made the whole barrel which was very hard physical work. At some of the shows people used to try to make a barrel keeping them all together and of course all the staves would collapse. We lived in a three bedroomed house. There wasn't a bathroom. We didn't have a water closet but an earth closet with buckets which were emptied every week.

When I was eleven I left Endmoor School and went to the High School. I used to go on what were called K Buses in those days you had to pass a scholarship to be able to go there for four years. All the schooling was paid for but you had to buy books and uniform. I always remember what a trouble going into long black stockings. I'd only ever worn short socks and I was a real tomboy, used to climbing and scrambling, and I think it nearly broke my mother's heart when I came home with huge holes in these black stockings. We used to have country dancing lessons and I used to love Sir Roger de Couverly and Gathering Peas Pods.

Our form mistress really begged me to stay on after the four years, but my parents couldn't afford it. Top of the form for the first time; left school on Thursday and started work in the office at Netherfield on the Monday. Ten shillings and sixpence a week. I had about one shilling for myself and the rest was for mother and bus fares.

My father was secretary of the local National General and Municipal Workers Union and as I got a bit older he always used to get me to write his official letters. When the works closed down any of the workforce who had any injuries, all remembered they had lost a finger or had an accident and the letters we wrote helped get them a little compensation and they all got a few shillings a week - a little pension.

Our teachers at the High School were really nice. There were two sisters called Horner. Mrs Maud Horner was the headmistress and her sister Miss Winnie, "Skinny Winnie," she taught domestic science. Then there was another teacher called Miss Faithfull (she was called 'Fido'.) She was tall and had lovely straight hair, sort of beige-browny, parted in the middle and drawn back. She was very quiet and very nice. I think she lodged with Miss Steele who taught maths. She had white hair and was very brisk. There wasn't any teacher that I did not like. Miss Eyedale taught English and for my last year she was my form mistress and she was great. She used to like reading aloud from Shakespeare and writing essays and things like that.

There was the Keighley scholarship every year for the boy and girl who wrote the best essay on The British Empire. The winners were given a pound. I won it one year and my brother Pat won it another year.

Mrs Guinea was the gym mistress. She had ginger curly hair and was quite well built. We used to wear gym slips for sport and we used to have to kneel down and see if it was the right length. It had not to be too short or too long.

There were some nice grounds on Thorny Hills. I know there was a lovely big copper beach tree in the school grounds and sometimes we had lessons under there in the summer. There was another tree whose branches were just the right height for climbing. There was a couple of hard tennis courts. Because we hadn't a hockey pitch we had to walk, in crocodile formation along Appleby Road to some playing field there. Coming back one day I can remember saying to Mrs Guinea "Oh it's hot and I am sweating." Mrs Guinea said to me "Horses sweat, gentlemen perspire and ladies glow."

Outside of school we had to look respectable and tidy. A green blazer with KHS on the pocket.

And we had to wear material hats with the brim turned up at the front. In the summer we had to wear a panama hat.

We never went to Kendal shopping or anything like that. There was a house next door. He had toffee, sold sweets and tobacco in his front room and he made his own ice cream. At the end of our row, there was a garage. Upstairs used to be where my grandad did his cobbling. Down stairs was where George Fawcett made the ice cream. He put the ice in a sort of Thermos flask, then he put the milk in and all the other ingredients you need for ice cream. It had a handle on the top and he wound it round and round for a long time. It was like making butter with an old fashioned churn.

Then there was the Co-op just up where the antique shop was. There was the Post Office, next door to the working men's club and at one time, just past the Co-op, on Gatebeck Road, Miss Macpherson had a draper's shop. At Christmas time she used to stock her window with toys. That would be 70 years since but now there's nothing.

Then of course in those days there was the village cricket and a football teams. There used to be a silver band. My uncle Walter played the cornet in that and on Christmas morning the band used to walk through the village. There was an old man called Archie McLean, a small man with white hair and red face, and he was on the big drum and he used to come down the road – boom, boom – “Christians Awake.” They always stopped at every house for a nip of whisky and a piece of cake. I don't know what they were like when they eventually got home. The postman used to come round on Christmas morning as well.

Up the road was a building which was the Drill Hall meeting place for the local Territorials which is empty now. On Armistice Day they used to line up and march down to Preston Patrick Church. I can always remember a man from Kendal, Jack Elvey, a drum major with a leopard skin round him going marching down and one of the local lads playing the last post. We used to have dances down at Preston Patrick Memorial Hall and my sister and I and the girl next door used to go. The boys always used to congregate at the back of the hall and were very slow in coming forward. Often girls used to dance with each other.

One night we were standing outside waiting for Mary sister, to come out and this young man walked past. At the time he was quite tall and I said to my sister “Oh I wouldn't mind going out with him!” Anyway he came into the dance almost as it was ending and said “Will you dance?” So we shuffled round the room, shuffled because George hasn't got an ounce of rhythm in him. After that we started courting. That was in October 1940 and we got married in May 1942.

In 1943, we had been married for just a year and one night George came home with a very, very sore throat and he stayed in bed the morning after and he got worse and worse. The doctors came and they thought it was Quincy. Then they thought it was something else. All round his shoulder and top of his chest was swollen and blue, red and purple and he had a very high temperature. The doctor down at Milnthorpe said if it is no better in the morning I'm going to open that up. Anyway he had an attack of gout and a younger doctor came. He took one look at George and said “ambulance straight away!” He was sent to Lancaster and it turned out that all this was gangrene. He was very, very poorly for six weeks and they fed him through a vein in his leg. It was a new drug that they had been using to treat gangrene on the battlefields. I was pregnant with my daughter Kathleen and it was an awful job getting down to visiting him because of restrictions on petrol in war time. When he was fit again the next job he did was driving the Italian prisoners of war from Bela Camp at Milnthorpe. They used to be hired out to different farmers.

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