

'Oak Leaves' Prompts Memories of Roundhay from Australia

© By Barbara Rowlands

I have lived in Australia since 1946, but my roots are in Roundhay. I came upon 'Oak Leaves' in a roundabout way. When we had not heard from an old friend at Christmas and his telephone was dead, enquiries brought a letter from solicitor John Richards of Oakwood Parade to say our friend had died. But it brought much more.

In thanking Mr. Richards for his courtesy I added a footnote to my letter of how I found his address nostalgic, how I got off the tram at Oakwood to go to Roundhay High School, went to Saturday night 'hops' at Oakwood Parochial Hall in Fitzroy Drive, met my Australian husband at the Mansion and married at St. John's. Mr. Richards replied by sending me the first two editions of 'Oak Leaves' - what a delight as I read of the places, the history and the inevitable changes. He also suggested I write a chapter so I gathered my thoughts and here it is. I am now 81 and was a journalist for some 30 years (and still keep my hand in).

My paternal grandfather was a Charles Henry Pinder, a London businessman who came from Leeds before World War 1. He was a clothier and had Steander Mills in East Street, Leeds. He lived at 'Falcon's Nest' on the corner of Old Park Road and Avenue Victoria. He and his wife Grace had five sons and two daughters and first lived in a large family home 'Aldersyde' next to the 'Dog and Gun' hotel at the top of York Road.

He was an astute businessman. His factory was one of the first to use the band knife (for cutting layers of fabric) and Cornelli embroidery machines but he slipped up when refusing shares in Cortaulds, then making the new rayon material, seeing no future in man-made fabrics.

During World War 1 he diversified into making flags and was known as the 'Flag and Banner King'. He was also chairman of the Leeds Conservative Association. When he moved to Roundhay he

was a great pal of Mr. Gilpin of the hotelier family who then had the Gilpin Hotel.

My parents divorced when I was 12 and my mother, brother Denis and I lived in Harehills. From age 11 (1931) I went to Roundhay School taking the tram from Harehills Parade to Oakwood (fare 1/2d) or the bus in bad weather (1d) which took us to the school gates in Thorn Lane. The school caretaker, Mr Leuty, lived in the Lodge and the headmistress, Miss Vyvyan, and her deputy Miss Rose, lived in the principal's house on the right. Miss Vyvyan, was tall, grey haired and elegant and walked with her gown billowing behind her... always a stickler for good manners and correct dress. We walked home down Gledhow Wood Road, chattering all the way. They were happy schooldays in a beautiful school and I discovered in later years we had a good education (thanks Miss Muriel Golding, English mistress, for my English grounding).

Roundhay Park was always a hub of youthful activities in the 20s and 30s. As children we tobogganed in the snow down Hill 60 in the Soldiers Field. We ate ice creams and boated on the top lake and there was the fun of the fair when the lawns became a fairground. We thrilled to the military tattoos and strolled on Sundays and listened to the band in the Rotunda.

These were carefree years, with no TV or electronic entertainment, so we socialised with our friends. There were the Saturday night 'hops' at the Oakwood Parochial Hall in Fitzroy Drive, where we learned to dance. There was a fluid group of us who gathered in the evenings at the tennis courts near the Canal Gardens, mostly school friends, boys and girls. This evolved into the Saint Club (after the character in Leslie Charteris's Saint books) which met regularly in the Park Cafe.

Then came September 1939 which changed all our lives forever. Many Roundhay boys and girls went off to war, and an old scrapbook shows news of 'missing in action', 'prisoner of war' and 'killed in action'. But there was the welcome news of 'safe and well' after Dunkirk. There was also the bravery awards, one a posthumous VC to Roundhay boy Arthur Aaron of Thorn Lane (after his DFM) for piloting his disabled bomber over Turin.

We did our war jobs. It was interesting to read that a consortium headed by John Barran bought Roundhay Park for the people of Leeds. I did voluntary work at the Henry Barran Youth Centre on the Gipton Estate, as commandant of the Girls Training Corps (supposedly to train girls for the forces .. I don't know how good we were).

The Roundhay Hotel will always be The Gipton' to me, where on some Sunday evenings we listened to Churchill's speeches at 9 pm ('.. we will fight them on the beaches ..').

On Saturday nights we were drawn to Roundhay Park Mansion .. the dances, the reunions with friends on leave, and meeting newcomers. The dances were upstairs (1/6d) and the first class bar (dining room) was the meeting place. It was here I met my Australian husband. He had been seeing the world when war broke out, so he stayed in the British Merchant Navy. He had been visiting a shipmate's family in Leeds who took him on Saturday night to the Mansion. His host gathered a few of us around and said ... 'now I have an Australian here and I want you to look after him'.

Eric and I celebrated our diamond wedding in 2003! We were married in St. John's church in 1943, and fortunately he ran the gauntlet of U-boats and other hazards on his regular runs - Australia/England/South America/the Middle East until the end of the war. Through the Merchant Navy, Britain was able to keep her exports going (including Scotch whiskey and Pringle knitteds), returning with food and war supplies. They ran the gauntlet through the Mediterranean, guarded by half the British fleet and air cover, to supply the North Africa campaign. We were indeed fortunate.

In 1946 we were farewelled at Tilbury by my mother and friend (and bridesmaid) Joan Richmond (the death of whose widower started all this). Our home is on Sydney's North Shore, not far from the bridge and harbour, and like Oakwood it is tree lined and pleasant.

We have two married sons and six grandchildren, most of whom have visited England a number of times. One of my visits (solo this time) was in 1972 on assignment from my newspaper looking at

the wool industry (in those days Australia 'rode on the sheep's back'). So where else but Yorkshire, the top-making mill on the Pennines; the research establishment at Ilkley; the spinners at Bradford, and the International Wool Board in London.

Now a new generation is returning to England. Granddaughter Kate has been in London since 1994 and is now the Associate Director UK for her PR Company. Alison, another granddaughter, has a sports degree and has been in contract teaching since 2004 in Canterbury, and now co-ordinates all sport teaching in High Schools across Kent. Granddaughter Lucinda worked in Event's Management for Marks and Spencer on a short term visit.

Having a Yorkshire grandmother is useful for them to gain visas to work.

I have no doubt they will find their way to visit Roundhay.



Barbara with her husband and son



'Falcon's Nest' (67 Old Park Road)