**Memories of the 1920s and 1930s in Bere Alston**

by Mr. Rex Toll *(editorial notes in italics)*

Not long ago we had some severe storms, but in 1929 we also had some storms. One was during the winter when my father was building a bungalow for Mr. White*(?)* at the bottom of Cotts Lane on the crossroads. We were walking home during the storm but were picked up by Mr. A. Brown in his taxi. We did not hear the wind but noticed slates everywhere on the roads. During the night it became worse and the high winds blew off all the slates of numbers 29 – 35 Station Road that were known as Mosley Cottages after my great-grandmother (Ann Mosley Toll). Some of the slates were blown down as far away as Tuckermarsh. My father, who was looking after the properties had to move the occupants out. He had an empty cottage at Edgcumbe Terrace and my uncle Alf Spry, who lived at no. 33 was moved into it. I can’t remember where the others went. Some of the sections of the roofs to numbers 21 to 25 were also damaged. My father and staff repaired these on the Sunday after the storm.

During the storm a large tree in Sarah Park was blown down. It was in the middle of the field and remained like this for years. This tree was used to fix a pully rope to during the Flower Show and people could pay a penny to hold the pulley and swing down to a straw mattress on a tripod.

Sarah Park was opened up for sports for the day. It was an annual event. A section of the hedge was taken down to gain access from the Parish Hall to the field. There were side shows, pony sports around the tree – sports such as sack race, high jump and running. Mr. Blackmore used to supply animals for the public to judge the weights etc. At one time Anderton and Rowland’s *(Fun Fairs)* used to set up their amusements in the area adjoining the Parish Hall and stay for the week.

I remember the War Memorial being built: the ground excavated was solid clay. In later years railings were erected to prevent children playing on the memorial. These were made by Mr. A Lillicappe *(Lillicrap?)*, the blacksmith up the road. My father fitted the railings and helped bore holes in the granite, and the wall surrounding the memorial was moved back towards the Parish Hall. This was ideal for us boys because we could sit on the wall and watch what was going on in the hall.

On one occasion we were watching through the window and out of the corner of my eye I saw the local bobby *(policeman*) coming…. One of my pals was not quick enough and had the copper’s *(policeman’s)* stick across his bottom. The copper’s name was Diamond, who, if he saw a lad around the village near the shops at about seven or eight o’clock in the evening, he would ask if you had a home to go to. He kept a small cane up his sleeve and used it at times. He made a mistake one night when Mum asked me to run over to Winnie Sleep’s to collect a loaf, as Dad would need sandwiches the next day. As I passed Pugsley’s[[1]](#footnote-1)\* sweet shop, Diamond was in the doorway and he thought I was one of some boys running away from him. So he told my father (who was a ‘rough handful’), and my father told the copper he was a lucky man - if it wasn’t for him being sensible he could have been taught a lesson. The copper said he was sorry. (On telling my father that P.C. Diamond had chased me, my father replied, ‘You must have been up to something!’)

Dad and Fred Brown, of Brown and Toll Builders, built the row of houses at Highlands, (Broad Park Road, Bere Alston). Fred married Martha Toll, Dad’s sister and lived in one of the houses when they were finished. My mother would not have one due to something her sister-in-law did regarding my father when he went to South Africa to get some money together to start up his own business.

The large house in Broad Park Road was built in 13 weeks. A team of Italians carried out the mouldings etc., on the ceilings and other decorative work.

The Wilcocks family carried out the carpentry for my father and I have noticed that the front door made around 1908 is still in good order. I have a photo of my father and others taken in the front of the house.

1. ‘Pugsey’s’ had a long ‘form’ seat on which the village boys would sit in the evenings and Saturday afternoons, drinking 1/2d *(half-penny)* bottles of raspberry drink. They could also buy 1/2d of sweets. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)