

Visiting Withernwick



*the memories of Moira Ryan
as told to Jonathan Simons*

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Moira Ryan is the daughter of Billy Harvison, and granddaughter of Fred and Ginny Harvison, formerly of Church Lane Withernwick. Before the War she and her sister Valerie lived in Hull but spent most of their holidays staying with their grandparents.

Valerie's recent passing prompted a return visit to Withernwick in March 2013 with Valerie's daughter Jenny and her husband Jonathan Simons. The first stop was at the station where Moira began her tale.

This description includes photographs taken on that day, photographs from Valerie's collection, probably taken by her father Billy Harvison, and images from the excellent village web-site, where many other tales can be found - www.withernwick.co.uk

The Station

Billy's cousin, Hubert Harsley, was the signalman at Whitedale station, although Moira remembers him as the station-master. He had three boys, Cedric, Rowland and Stanley. They were a little older than Valerie and Moira and the girls were rather in awe of them. Much later on after the War, by chance, Cedric turned up at Moira's house in Hull, delivering some accessories for her bicycle. After the usual pleasantries they were both surprised to realise that they knew each other already and were of course related. Hubert bought a bungalow just up the road to prepare for his retirement. Moira recalls that he was a noted 'topiarist' and his garden was quite a sight, with animals and birds and even chairs sculptured from hedging.¹

¹ See web-site article from the Hull Daily Mail



When the girls were taken to Withernwick it was often by car, maybe giving Granddad Harvison a lift home from Hull where he worked on the railway. Occasionally though they had to go by train and walk all the way down the road to the village with their bags. This seemed a terrible long way to them and they dreaded the prospect. It looks no shorter a march even today.



Church Lane



Church Lane cottages in 1911 - from www.withernwick.co.uk

The girls visited at weekends and holidays, particularly in the summer season when their parents were busy playing the dance halls with the Billy Harvison Band. In Hull they lived quite a comfortable life with heated piped water, indoor lavatories and electricity. Grandmother's was a great contrast.

There was a well at the back of the house and a rain butts in the yard. The bath was hanging on the back door and on bath-night it would be put in front of the range and filled from the hot-water that had been heated to the right of the fire itself, the oven being on the left. After washing, their hair was rinsed with fresh water from the tubs complete with wriggly creatures, which they hated!



Fred and Ginny Harvison- from Valerie's collection

The girls slept upstairs in a little room where it was often bitterly cold. Grandma used to heat the beds with the oven shelf wrapped in a flannel blanket. She sometimes put a brick in the oven and used it in the same way and that used to stay hotter for a lot longer.

The range had to be black-leaded once a week. Lighting was provided with paraffin lamps which had to be pumped to get going. Despite what appeared to be primitive conditions Grandma was a prolific baker, turning out all manner of cakes and pastries.

Valerie was often invited by Grandma to join in with the baking but Moira was usually told to go out and play. Once, when complaining that she wanted her mother, Grandma told Moira to look in the mirror! Grandma was very strict and strait-laced. Moira was often homesick, but the village people were very kind.

The cottage had a large garden in which Grandad grew all sorts of flowers and vegetables. There were sheds, a greenhouse, a summerhouse and of course the outside toilet. The girls had to tear up newspapers for use in the toilet, which they hated!



The cottages in 1970 shortly before demolition – from the website



*Grandad and Grandma by the greenhouse
- from Valerie's collection*

In the late summer Grandmother got the girls to walk down the long Whitedale Road with a big tin can with a handle on it and a hooked walking stick. They pulled the brambles down and picked the ripe fruit. They had to do this most days until the brambles were over. Grandmother turned them into jelly, jams and pies. They also had to help pick all the other fruits in the garden: apples, plums, raspberries, blackcurrants, gooseberries.

There was very little to do in such a small village, so every night it seemed the girls sat and cut rags into strips to make the rag rugs that used to cover the stone floors. The rugs had to be taken out every Friday afternoon and beaten to get the dust out. Needless to say, Moira hated Fridays! She does not know where the rags came from but every cottage seemed to have plenty of them. Nothing was thrown away in those days.

Grandma seemed to own all three cottages at one time. They are now knocked down and there is no sign of that wonderful garden any more.



Church Lane 2013

The Farm

Across the road was the farm where the girls could wander around freely. They took the farm labourers cold tea at harvest time.



Valerie in the farmyard with Moira's doll's pram. Moira was very fond of the pram and the doll which had walkable floppy legs. She was rather upset when her mother decided that Moira was too old for such things and gave the pram to the rag-and-bone ma. The photograph is from Valerie's collection.



Above - a detail from the front cover – Valerie's collection
Below, the farm from the field behind in 2013



The Blacksmith



Nearer the church was the blacksmith. Moira remembered the blacksmith as being named 'Skelton' and that 'Tom and Mabel'² lived in the last cottage. Round the back was the blacksmith's workshop, a busy and fascinating place for a child to spend time hanging around. The buildings have been restored and Moira was amazed at how it seemed to be almost exactly how she remembered it.

² Mabel Ireland was the granddaughter of Billy Barker and so was Moira's cousin

Aunty Thirza

Aunty Thirza³ lived in Tanton Terrace. She seemed to have a form of palsy and her husband, Uncle Harry, seemed also to be disabled in some way. Nevertheless they coped very well with conditions and had another wonderful garden at the back of the cottage which was full of fruit trees.



³ There is a lot more about Thirza Harvson and Harry Southwick on www.withernwick.co.uk

After the War Valerie and her children continued to visit 'Aunty Thirza'. Valerie's daughter Jenny can recall the rag-rugs on the floor, the pot of marmalade on the table and the thrill of being allowed to play with Aunty Thirza's jewellery in the front room, which was always golden with sunlight. Her brother John recalls that everyone in the village had been given a Bush Radio but Thirza, not holding much truck with modern contraptions, had covered it with a cloth.

Later, after Harry's death, Thirza moved to a flat in Hull. Jenny remembers it as being on the corner of Spring Bank and Princess Avenue, although this is not as reported on the web-site, where Thirza could watch all the traffic go by. One day after visiting her, Valerie reported that Thirza had declared herself 'ready for her box'.



*Harry and Thirza on the left, possibly on their wedding day about 1940
– from the web-site*

Uncle Barker

On Main Street in Lynton Cottages were Uncle Barker⁴ and his family. On the other side of the road was the shop and to the left of that was a cottage in which lived a kind lady with a huge goitre.



*Uncle Barker with the girls, presumably on Armistice Day
- Valerie's collection*

⁴ Billy Barker married Bertha Harsley, sister to Ginny Harsley



Here is a second shot on the same day with Grandma in the background. Also can be seen the tubs holding the rain-water with mosquito larvae that was used to rinse the girls' hair

On the High Street were many more relations with various children. Moira was never sure whose children belonged to which parents and does not think they rightly knew either. During the visit Moira saw a photograph of that street in the Falcon that seemed to give a good flavour of those times with all the children lined up across the road.



The Chapel



*Dressed for Chapel with the girls' mother, Olive, in the middle
- from Valerie's collection*



Grandad and Grandma were great 'Chapel' people. There was an annual 'Anniversary' celebration, although Moira cannot say what it was the anniversary of.



Dressed for the Anniversary. Valerie is in pink and Moira is in blue

On one occasion the chapel was holding a fund-raising event to get electric lighting installed. Moira had a decorated bicycle with a light on the handlebars and a sign that read 'spare a copper to light me up'. She rode it up to the grocer's with Valerie to get a cardboard box to put under the crinoline that Valerie was to wear. On the way home the box proved awkward to carry. Church Lane seemed so much longer and steeper than it does today. Moira lost control of the bike and fell off, badly grazing her face, arms and legs. She bears the scars to this day.



The Chapel in 2013 and the foundation stone that we think was laid by Moira's Great Aunt, wife to her grandmother's brother James Webster Harsley.

The War

At the start of the War their parents evacuated the girls from Hull to Withernwick. They stayed for about a year and actually attended the local school for a couple of terms. Moira confesses she did not really enjoy it. However, Valerie was fifteen and soon got a job, at Waddington's glove factory in Hull, and the girls returned home. Shortly afterwards Moira, too, got a job, as an assistant in a chemists in Cottingham, near their home.

The girls both met young men whom they later married. Valerie's Tom was a navigator in the Merchant Navy and was sunk in the infamous Arctic Convoy PQ17, spending time in Russia before making it home. Moira's Jim was training to be an accountant but joined the Royal Navy and survived the Battle of the Atlantic.



*Valerie with her grandparents
outside their greenhouse*



Tom outside the summerhouse

Post-War

Grandad died at the end of the war and soon after Grandma went into a home. Moira and Valerie started their own families. There were occasional visits to Auntie Thirza but the girls no longer needed to be packed off to Withernwick for the holidays.



Right - Ginny and great-grandson John about 1950.

Left – Ginny’s own son Billy visiting his mother at the home with Valerie, his daughter, and family: Tom, John and Jenny.

For Moira, those times in Withernwick were not always as idyllic as they might seem but it was an experience that she is pleased to have had and is keen to reflect on. Revisiting the village eighty years later, with Valerie’s daughter Jenny shortly after Valerie’s passing, has given her memories added poignancy.



Ginny and Fred's grave in St Alban's churchyard

Jonathan Simons 12 April 2013