

CLASS AND CONTEXT

Narration (Tot Foster): Setting the scene before the baths were built involves understanding an impoverished, early Victorian urban working class community. John Parke, local historian.

John Parke: There were houses in the local area, which were being rented, were then sublet to somebody who would take a room and even those rooms were sublet to other people. And I have an example of a cottage in St George's Road where there was a man, his wife, their mother and a lodger living in one room. If you think about having to heat that room and get the coal to the room and so forth, going out into a pub was probably a very comfortable way to have a warm place to go because they would have all had fires. At one time, in the 1860s, there was something like 40 public houses in Hotwells Road. I think there was a lot of drunkenness because people lived a very miserable life in those days.

Narration: Liz Darcy and Pat Baker experienced difficult living conditions within their living memory.

Liz Darcy: I can remember waking to frost on the inside of the window; we only heated one room at a time. I don't like labels but I guess they were all working class, so we were all pretty much in the same boat; nobody had much money to spare.

Pat Baker: My mother and father slept in the lounge; had a bed in the lounge. It ended up that we were sleeping me at one end and the boys down the other end. We would be complaining because you kept getting their feet in your mouth and things like this. And down below Mr Cottel, he had a load of grown up children, he had boys and girls, and they had to sleep top to tail. Our food table was a big scrubbed, white scrubbed table that's where they used to have their babies, they used to put them on there because it was a hard thing and that's where apparently the babies were born.

Narration: Even by World War 2 the area was still desperately poor. Derek Gay.

Derek Gay: In about 1942 the American soldiers came over here. We used to love them coming in because they brought us cookies and Hershey bars and lots of old shoes because a lot of the kids that went to school, they didn't have shoes at all. These American soldiers would come along and give all these kids a pair of shoes to wear.

Narration: Pan Radford as a child lived up the hill in Park Place. Lower down the hill, the area still had a bad reputation.

Pan Radford: I went to school on Jacob's Wells Road to the infant school and I was very happy there. On a nice day my mother would take me to Brandon Hill to play, but my mother never came down past my school to the Hotwells Road, I think my mother was nervous about it because she still said, even in my 40s and 50s, that that was where all the muggers and the rapists lived and she was very frightened of them.

Narration: Many parents worked hard at menial jobs. Derek Gay and Pat Baker.

Derek Gay: They had part time cash in hand jobs. My mum was always popping up into Clifton to clean in the houses of Royal Crescent. My father, after he finished work for the building firm he would go off somewhere else and paint somebody's kitchen out. Sometimes you wouldn't see him from one weekend to another.

Pat Baker: She earned a few bob extra because if anybody died, she would go and help to lay them out.

Narration: Gloria Winter recognised the us and them too, her memories are read by Lori Streich.

Gloria Winter (Read by Lori Streich): Lots of my family lived in Jacob's Wells Road. My auntie was a cook at QEH, the posh School at the top of the road in the 1940s and 50s, she often came back angry because the rich kids, the little lords, used to throw food at each other as a game. I used to wait for my aunt to come out of the school and see Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars picking up the children.

Narration: John O'Neill remembers the closeness of the community.

John O'Neill: You could guarantee going to any of the houses or any of the flats there and putting a hand through the letter box and pulling a key out on a piece of string. It was nothing to come home and there would be a note pushed through the door, "I've borrowed two spoonfuls of sugar or I've borrowed two eggs". That was the honesty and the community spirit in the area. Very very good.

Sue Wilkins: Well my father said to me, "You can't go and live in Bellevue Crescent, there's a brothel there" which we duly discovered there was though it was heavily disguised, but it still kept its sense of community and friendship; it's a lovely street to live in.

Narration: In recent years, gentrification has been coming down the hill from Clifton, through Clifton Wood and is poised to arrive at Jacob's Wells Road. Mary and Kevin Lehane.

Kevin Lehane: We live up in a house on the hillside, which is quite old, the oldest one in the area. When we bought it, we saw the survey from the previous owners from about 1964, which contains the phrase "this house is close to the undesirable docks area", which again shows how the area has changed over time.

Mary Lehane: I think a lot of older people have gone and a lot of more local people have gone, sadly. But it's a lot of families live around our area so it's a very nice community, we have a street party every year and in fact Clifton Wood is well known to have the most street parties in Bristol.