

**1. Families from all over Bristol were rehoused in Southmead from across the city and beyond**

**PAMELA FOWLER, BRIAN ALDEN, HENRY HORSEMAN and JOYCE WILLIAMS share their memories.**

- My father was in the army for 22 years and was demoted in October 1945. We lived in St Pauls in 2 rooms with 5 children and my dad literally haunted the Council House until a few days before Christmas Day, we were given a council house in Southmead. My mother was overjoyed absolutely. We'd never had a house before. We'd always gone all over the country with the army and been in flats mostly.
- Well it was a new estate so we didn't know how it was going to turn out so it was all sort of young parents with young kids.
- I moved into Southmead when I was about 3 because I was down there with slum clearance. They was all pulled down and the people down town, they moved out here and really crazy when I moved into Ringwood there were no lights, no lamps, no rooms, no payments when we moved in there.
- I was born in St Pauls. We had to move out because they called it the slum clearance, but it was poverty. It was really in the dark parts of Bristol. You know I had the 2 brothers and sisters, we all like sleeping in 1 great big room and people that were there came down with their buckets, 1 toilet, you can imagine it was terrible. Dad couldn't get work on the docks, but he'd walked from Milk Street which was where I lived in Avonmouth and then come back "What's the matter Tom?" "No work, no work." So I was about 10 when I came out to Southmead in 1936 and I was scared we were the underdogs put in that way you know.
- We had nothing. We had absolutely nothing. We came here. Believe it or not, we were drinking out of jam jars. My dad made lockers for our bedrooms with orange boxes and my mum sewed curtains and put around them and we were always hungry. Always. I can't ever remember not being hungry.

2. Bristol Corporation (later Bristol City Council) wanted new residents to feel welcome, but instructed them to disinfect their possessions and themselves first.

Read by PETE INSOLE and RUTH MYERS

Corporation of Bristol Housing Estates.

1 ST. STEPHEN'S STREET,  
BRISTOL.

10<sup>th</sup> June 1936

Dear Sir,

The dwelling which you occupy at present is not considered suitable for a family to live in, and an order has been made for the house to be pulled down.

You are now offered a house which will be easy to keep clean and one which will be very light and cheerful. There will be a gas heated copper for your washing and a bath which can be supplied with hot water. A large garden will help you to provide vegetables all the year round for your family.

Within reason everything has been done to make your new home as comfortable and convenient as possible, and the Housing Committee trust that you will be very happy in the new surroundings.

To avoid any vermin being taken from the present house to your new home, the Housing Committee are prepared to arrange for the removal and fumigation of all your household effects. As you will not be able to use your own furniture for a short time, the Committee are prepared to offer you temporary accommodation for three days. Everything necessary for household use, except food, will be provided without charge. Coal and light, washing and cleaning materials will be given free. You will be allowed temporary occupation of a house which will be so near to the one which will be let to you that you can get all your furniture, etc. properly cleaned before you move into your new home.

The Housing Committee rely upon you to do no damage to any articles of furniture or bedding, etc. lent you by the Corporation, and you will of course be expected to keep clean and tidy the house which you will temporarily occupy. Do not let the next family coming into the temporary home have any cause to complain of your neglect.

Arrangements can be made for you and any members of your family to have disinfectant baths at the Disinfecting Station, Feeder Road, St. Phillip's. Personal clothing can be treated there whilst baths are being taken.

The Housing Committee realize that you have been living under very undesirable conditions, and that in worn out houses it is very difficult to get rid of vermin. But there will be no excuse in the new house. Do not buy secondhand furniture, bedding or pictures unless you are quite sure that the articles are free from vermin. Insects do not like soap and hot water, and they also dislike dusters and polish. So if in the new house you keep your windows open, and keep your bodies and clothing, floors and stairs, furniture and bedding clean; use the duster frequently on all skirtings and ledges, you are not likely to be troubled again with vermin. This sounds a lot, but life isn't going to be all work for the housewife. The new house will be so easy to keep clean and it will be well worth looking after.

Full details of all arrangements made with regard to removal, etc. are printed on the back of this letter. If you desire further information on any point raised in this letter, please let me know.

Yours faithfully,

*Ed Smith*

Secretary.

PLEASE READ INSTRUCTIONS ON BACK.

**3. Many residents still remember what the new houses were like in the 30's and 40's.**

**TERRY JOHNSON, JOYCE WILLIAMS, DENNIS CLIFFORD, MIKE MURCH and PAMELA FOWLER share their memories.**

- So you go through the door, there was a light switch on the wall. It was a brass light switch mounted on a wooden bapatrice. To your right, was a door to go into the front room. In this particular house was a welsh dresser fitted by the council. You had a fire place cast iron and tile. There was no power points at all if you had to do ironing, you had to plug it into the light pendant and all the light holders were provided by the council with white council light shade.
- Well it was a 3 bedroomed council house. It was the first time we had a toilet, a proper toilet, not just a piece of wood with a hole in the middle and we had the bathroom to have a bath. We thought we were in heaven, you know brand new council house. Very austere you know, nothing posh.
- A nice kitchen, big old sink, wooden draining board and a boiler in the corner. You boiled the water and had a pump on. As you pumped it, you had your hot water through into our bath and the water would come out the tap in the bath.
- It's pretty basic. Anything that wanted to come through the house had to come through the front door so the coalman came in through the front door with his sacks and the coal bunker was under the stairs at the back of the house. So the stairs, you came in the front door and the stairs immediately went up.
- So when your coal was delivered, empty up the sacks of coal and the dust was all over the kitchen. Your toilet was outside the backdoor right and the bathroom was off the kitchen. Now who, it must have been a man that designed it because why didn't he design a toilet near the bathroom and the coal shed outside.

**4. There were no cheques and cards in the 40's so residents paid their rent in cash.**

**Introduction by TOT FOSTER. MIKE MURCH shares his memories.**

- General conditions: the rents were due in advance on Monday in each week and no areas will be allowed. The collector of the corporation will collect the rents weekly and give receipts therefore in a rent book.
- Well rent books my mum saved right from the first year that they were there. They moved into the brand new council house in 1938. I was 2 when we moved into 20, Wilton Close. I guess that they were probably excited because it would have been a brand new neighbourhood, you know new friends to be made.
- The permitted number to the dwelling to which this rent book relates is 8 persons. In counting: the number of persons each child under 10 years of age counts as half a person and a child of less than 1 year is not counted at all.
- The rent man came on the dot every week. Usually what happened was the rent book was put on the side, the money was put in the rent book, the man came and he signed and in some of them you will see later on the rent man had to actually sign it over a tuppenny stamp, yeah I think he was probably one of the council officials that was paid to do that. Quite an onerous task when you think about it because he's carrying around quite a lot of money at the end of the day. If my memory is correct, the rent on the first rent book was 11 shillings and 10 pence in old money, I worked it out that is about equivalent to about 55 pence in new money. Inside the front page and inside the back cover is a whole host of regulations.

No tenant will.....private dwelling house. (copy from the rent book regulations)

You basically didn't step out of line at all which is a little bit different to what it is now.

**5. As a teenager Joyce tricked the wartime air raid wardens, and took on a man's job in Filton.**

**JOYCE WILLIAMS shares her story**

This is a true story. We had wardens during the war and when the bombs were fallen they'd come and put bombs out and my brothers - Tommy was in the air force. Arthur was in the Somerset light infantry. He never came back. He died in that one and I looked at the garden and I said to our mum (only a young girl I was) I said "Mum, how we gonna get this garden dug?" She said "I don't know. The boys aren't here to dig it." And dad was dead. He dropped dead in the garden in the 40s. So I thought to myself, this Air Raid Precaution Wardens so I shouted out "There's a bomb in my garden please get it out!" Wasn't no bomb. So they came and dug it you know, really dug it nicely and they couldn't find anything. I saw one go in and I thanked them very much and they never did know.

I had to leave school at 14 and my mum said "well you've got to get a job. Your boys are in the forces and your sister's up in London." I said "What can I do? I wanna go in the army or the airforce." She said "You can't go in until you're 18." That was the rules and I didn't look old. I used to wear ankle socks. They said she's never old enough to work, but I did. There was plenty of jobs you know because the boys have gone abroad. I went up the BAC, Bristol Air Craft. I became a welder, like a spot welder, welding all the parts of the planes the little wheels and things and all the instruments inside and I had to weld things together, but we had to go to work because the war was on. Wartime girls we were the Southmead girls.

(Singing) We were the Southmead girls. We know our manners. We pay our tanners. We are respectful wherever we may go. As we walk along the Southmead road doors and windows open wide. We are the girls of Southmead. We just do as we do please. We are the Southmead girls.

Wonderful, wonderful days we had. One bloke came in and have you ever heard of the conscientious objector? They don't want to go in the force cause they're scared they're going to get killed. And we all banged our tools on the benches and he just ran out. Oh war's no good. You know he was saying war's no good and I said "You tell me that I just lost a lovely brother" I said "And you refuse to fight for your country." He was a bit embarrassed.

We left there in 1945 because the boys came back from the war, the lucky ones and they wanted their jobs back so we had to leave and then I got a job as a barmaid and that's why I got accustomed to the booze you know I loved the drink, you got a drink there?

## 6. Memories of terrifying, yet fascinating, bombing raids

### **HENRY and KATHLEEN HORSEMAN, TERRY JOHNSON and MIKE MURCH share their memories**

- During the war, planes come through Filton down (Raymond Crescent?) cross the road and the pom pom guns just going \*boom boom boom\* all behind him chasing him down.
- You sat on top of the shelter watching it and his mother came in and gave him a (00:20) and said get in that shelter 'cause he was frightened for him but he didn't care he was just sat on top of the shelter. But you know there was the big raid on Bristol, Henry's sister was born in that raid and Henry had to go as a little boy running through the streets of Southmead with all this going on up in the sky to fetch his Auntie Liz who lived in Eastleigh Road because mum was in the house just getting on with her baby.
- (...) and that's when Filton got bombed.
- I was beside the school near the caretakers I had an upset stomach and of course them days all the school toilets had entrances from out in the playground and I came out of the toilet and everybody had gone to the shelters and I watched this 50 bomber raid coming over Bristol in the daylight, they had put a Polish squadron probably spitfires. Those 6 went up among those 50 bombers which was over Bristol at the time and (...) they never made the works. And I also remember standing there watching it. Of course, the shrapnel that came down mostly wasn't, it's not the damage to the aircraft or bombs but mostly ours (...) coming down. Sometimes it was hot when you picked it up.
- Of course we moved in '38 the war started in '39 and they constructed an Anderson shelter in the back and they dug a big pit, built the Anderson shelter and put all the soil over the top you used that to grow marrows an things like that.
- I got the blame when our shelter.. what happened is there was a clang in the night and the next morning I got a rocket because I was supposed to have chopped a cabbage off that was growing on top of the shelter but it was a piece of shrapnel because I dug it out in the end and the shrapnel had taken the cabbage off.
- Every night we'd have to go down in the shelters and a funny story, my mother was very deaf, the sirens went you know terrible noise and we all drifted down to the shelter. Forgot about our mother. We were coming back to our house in the pitch-black dark across the road. I said, "Mum where are you going?" She said, "I just heard the siren." I said, "That was the All Clear" and she was going back down to sit in the shelter on her own.

- The council obviously put them in for you they were underground you went down 3 or 4 steps and had a candle and it was very scary 'cause you could hear planes going over and you could hear bombs you could hear bombs being dropped. We came out from the air raid shelter to find that all our doors of our council house and the windows were all blown in and there had been a bomb dropped in Coleford? Road, massive crater was there. It was a shock to come back to find it, my mum was crying you know that our house had been hit like that. Sometimes if we could hear the air raid sirens we didn't always have time to get to the shelter and mum and I would get under our dining table and just hide under the table. People had been injured if not killed.

7. As Southmead building continued and the Welfare State was born, a group of school boys created a vision of a perfect place to live.

**BOYS FROM ORCHARD SCHOOL READING 1948 BOOKLET**

[View original booklet \(pdf\)](#)

**8. Edna dishes the dirt on local gossip as she heard it all working at a laundry on Southmead Road for 30 years.**

**EDNA SHOPLAND shares her memories**

- A lot of the people that lived in Southmead worked at the Clifton Laundry on Southmead Road where I worked for years and of course the people who lived in Clifton were the only ones that could afford to send laundry and they used to pack it in boxes with tissue paper and it was high class laundry. Well then as the time went on, they did what they call a semi finish laundry, a bag wash. You just send it, they wash it and dry it and put it back in the bag and charge you so much a pound you know. I went in as an office junior and then progressed to be a Customer Relations Officer and course in those days people would buy a set of bed linen: 2 sheets, 2 pillow cases and if you lost 1 pillow case they wanted to claim for the whole set so we used to have quite a lot of battles about that.
- *(Interviewer)* Were those claims always genuine?
- No.
- Americans you know there was a big camp of Americans and of course the girls would go mad when these Americans would come in with their laundry because they would bring them candy and stockings and I think there was about 4 or 5 of them married GIs and went to America. 1 girl was quite attractive, one of the engineers that works on all the washing machines and things they fancied each other and had a sort of relationship and the husband of the girl found out about it and he came up 1 morning and stabbed the engineer. Oh I tell you, it was high drama, all these things happen.

## **9 "In the 1950's the Southmead Teddy Boys were notorious"**

### **BRIAN ALDEN shares his memories**

What I want to talk about is the Teddy Boy era which began in 1954 when Southmead instigated the teddy boys and then before you knew where it was Barton Hill had a teddy boy sect, Lawrence Hill and gradually it spread all around Bristol and then all around England, they just started wearing Edwardian clothes; long jackets, boot lace ties, drainpipe trousers (very tight you'd have to lie on the bed to get them on it'd take you about literally about a quarter of an hour to get them on they were so skin tight), blue suede shoes but the soles were about an inch and a half thick, they had long side boards in their hair or side burns as they were called then and a quiff and their weapons were flip knives, knuckle dusters what they call safety razors. There would be a razor blade which you screw into the handle to shave but the actual blade they'd sew it inside their lapels so if another teddy boy grabbed them by the lapels like that it would cut their fingers to threads.

And the leader of the Southmead teddy boys was called Brian Sugar and he was famous all over the country. The News of the World, they did a full story about the Southmead Teds and the headline was what makes Sugar tick. Now I was only 16 so I was sort of way down the pecking order but they travelled all around the country and they'd go into a local caf somewhere, all the local Teds would be in there and as soon as they saw strange teddy boys walk in they'd jump up immediately and start ready to fight and all Sugar would say was "I'm Sugar, Southmead" and straight away they'd say "Alright mate how you getting on? Would you like a coffee/cup of tea, get you a coke?" Terrified. Now say he went to say Barton Hill or Lawrence Weston or wherever, Hartcliffe to seek out a crowd of teddy boys, have a gang battle, I'd keep out of that I wouldn't go. But I'd just hang around and we used to sit outside The Standard of England and we'd all sit around chatting and eventually they'd go off to fight somewhere and I'd just go home 'cause I was too young.

I mean they'd go to Weston on a train about 30 of them, the Weston people would hear they were coming and they'd all go home. They didn't need to because teds wouldn't hurt ordinary people but they'd be terrified they'd all go in and Weston would become a ghost town. In the autumn of 1958 Brian Sugar went to Barton Hill, went to a caf, usual thing all the teds in there jumped up ready to fight and he said "Sugar Southmead" and this chap jumped up and said "I'm John Little, Barton Hill" and they fought and Sugar lost. The story goes that Sugar was drunk and wasn't able to perform properly. His reputation had gone, the Southmead teds broke up and as they broke up all the other ones broke up and by the end of '58 no more teds for about another 10 years right up into the 60s' Southmead as a whole had this reputation as being the roughest toughest area in Bristol.

## **10. A Christmas tragedy was narrowly avoided**

### **NORMAN LAITY, KELVIN LAITY, ALISON LAITY share their memories**

- It was Boxing Day 1963 or 1964, we had a fire at the house that we lived in 1, Danberry Walk. What caused the fire was a faulty socket in the front room which the Christmas tree was plugged into.
- It was the Christmas tree lights of course I remember.
- How did you know the house was on fire?
- Dad woke up because he had a dog that was trapped in the front room, he alerted dad so dad went down and opened the door, the flame just hit him back so he shut the door again. I'd jumped out of bed and you'd burn your feet on the floor 'cause the floor was so hot that you didn't want to stand in one place too long. The outside of the front door all the paint was bubbling.
- Did your dad not queue all the kids up at the top of the stairs and push them down out- the front door was open and just push them all out?
- Well I have 14 brothers and sisters we were trying to get them down the stairs but when you get down the stairs you had to go past more or less where the fire was where the worst of the heat was and as soon as they got down there they tried coming back up the stairs so it was a bit difficult getting them out because they were all toddlers really. And it was snowing and John jumped on his bike he had no shoes or anything on and rode up to the phone box to phone the fire brigade. Kelvin was still upstairs asleep in the cot so I ran back into the house and went upstairs and dragged him out of the cot by his feet I didn't know which way he was laid 'cause you couldn't see nothing through smoke. but we managed to get them all out with no injuries apart from singed eyebrows and hair and stuff like that. Dad went round to the back and broke in through the kitchen window to go in and rescue his dog on his hands and knees. The fire brigade actually brought the dog back to life more or less. They gave the dog oxygen out in the front garden. The Evening Post came and took photographs of the family in the front garden and I remember the reporter saying that he'd love a cup of tea and I said "Well we've got nothing in there to make it" so he went up to the shops, the reporter, and bought some teabags and some sugar for us to make a cup of tea. The neighbours in the Walk were very good there was a few neighbours in the Walk that took different ones in until we could get the house sorted out and they could move back in. Of course the council wouldn't move you out because they never had facilities anywhere else to put you so we all got stuck in and cleaned the house back up ready for to move back in again.

## **11. As a child Mike suffered abuse and deprivation. Now he runs the Southmead Project**

### **DR MIKE PEIRCE**

When I was 1 I brought to Southmead when the family had moved up there my father beaten had my mother in a domestic fighting abuse and all the rest of it. I could never sleep as a kid. I can remember the fights and then the awful silence after that and silence almost was worse because it was like you know, what's going to happen next, that sort of thing and we didn't have any money, bedclothes, you know were the old army great coats and these kind of things.

It was Dickens really. For a little kid with no boundaries, very poor and all the rest of it no wonder I learned how to tough it out really and to become probably as violent as I could be really, even as a little kid because that seemed like the answer to everything really and you know I love Southmead, love the area, but I am very honest about what situations are here sometimes and I know there's 336 problem families now and I bet you little kids now are experiencing what I did as well. So that's why I do my work really. My first office was a satchel, you know where I used to get the paraphernalia; little cards, homemade cards and all this and then we graduated to a telephone on a wall at the white church, got some money gradually scrounging and giving talks in different places where I've never done before. I remember being terrified really and just writing it down on bits of paper. That's when an MP for the area asked me have you got a business plan, like we don't even have toilet paper, you know that kind of thing and people come in, senior social services people, saying "Mike, but what is counselling? What are you going to do?" And it's like I'm trying to explain that I'm going to help people overcome what they're facing and to help them to live a life. I mean the clients used to come to me and drug addicts being abused all you name it, it's happened. I get them soup tin of soup and a bit of warmth and those kind of things and they found it really strange because I used to listen to them rather than telling them what to do so gradually building what kind of respect.

I think it's about recognising that the impact of poverty and depravation, what it has on the soul of people, it's about how our identities are shaped in childhood, but how too we can change that identity in adulthood, provided we've got someone who understands what abuse is. I'll never ever forget my abuse, but I've come to terms with it. It's not my driver now.

## 12. Memories of a Southmead celebrity - Dave Prowse, aka the man inside Darth Vader.

### JOAN CLIFFORD, DEANA PERRY, BRIAN ALDEN share their memories

- I went to Fonthill Road School. In my class was David Prowse. He was quite intelligent, but very quiet, very quiet lad. The photographs which I have got show him the tallest in the class. He always was in the back row, probably almost 6 foot when he was 13, I would say. He's 6 foot 8 now. He left when he was about 13 to go to technical school. While he was there he developed a leg problem, think it may have been polio and he was at hospital for about 2 years with leg irons on, but it turns out in the end he didn't need them. I didn't see him again until he was a bouncer then. And he was probably 17 or 18 at The Glen. I remember going there and he said "Joan Hanford" and I said "David Prowse". I haven't seen him since then, but I followed him on the television and Radio Bristol.
- Many years before I was born, I think it was during the Second World War, my mum very kindly took in Dave Prowse and his mum and his sister. My mum always said they were evacuees from Wales. Now it should have been maybe the other way round, but I don't know that's what my mum told me and they stayed with us for a few months and because his legs needed strengthening Dave Prowse used to do weight training in my dad's garden shed.
- Dave Prowse lived in a little cul de sac off of Southmead Road and he was a bouncer up the Glenn. This was the teddy boy nightclub. We all used to go there from 54-56, but he was massive. He was about 6 foot 6 and about 22 stone and cause he lived in Southmead of course in the daytime he'd be walking to the shops or something and he bumped into teddy boys, they'd recognise him and say "Ayyy" but they used to make fun of him and eventually Dave Prowse became Darth Vader in *Star Wars*. Not the voice. They wouldn't use his voice because he was Bristolian and he was a Green Cross Code man as well.

### **13. Greenway boys school pioneered 'Rural Studies' but some boys got more out of it than they bargained for.**

#### **Ron Rogers shares his memories**

- I worked in Southmead for 38 years. 27 I taught at Greenway Boys school. I think the school was opened in 55. Previous to that, the children of Southmead used to be bused to Penpole. Well when I started I taught everything, then I specialised in Rural Studies and we built up a really great department where we had 4 or 5 teachers and the school became known throughout Bristol. We had a large garden which had to be maintained. We kept bees, we bottled our own honey and everything, we covered farming, grew everything; gourds, potatoes, carrots, turnips, everything people normally grow in a garden and all the crops were sold. We included wine making, but no one was allowed to take wine home. The parents had to come up and collect.
- Have you got any other stories about specific things that happened at the school?
- We had grown all this fruit and everything was ready for picking. This was Friday. When I come in on the Monday it had all gone. Somebody had been up and stolen it over the weekend. They not going to get away with this. I'd seen the nurse and I got her to prepare some horrible tasting, but harmless substance so I got up on the stage and I said, "The fruit had been sprayed with poison so if you've eaten any of it, you'll likely to have very serious problems, but if you come to me, I've got something prepared that you can drink. You will not be punished" so when I saw the 5 little ones where they said they'd eaten it so I made them drink this stuff and they all spluttered and hated it and that was that and I thought well at least they will think twice again. Anyway after dinner 1 of the lads come back and he said could he have some more and I couldn't believe it and I say "Why?" He said "My mother was stealing with us and I don't want her to die."

**14. In the 1980's Southmead Writing Group was formed and became part of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers.**

**Kathleen Horseman shares her poem.**

I really don't wish that it should be known  
But I lived life in a council house home.  
And I mustn't act posh or all that bright  
Because for someone like me well that just isn't right.  
My children were scrubbed, sent off to school  
Well with learning they soon get a hang of the rules.  
They know if they try and work really hard  
At the end they can get a signing on card.  
Then they can claim soc or maybe the dole  
And they can play at their own given role.  
But I know my own kind and I know what they're worth  
Of their hopes and their dreams which are with them from birth  
To live and to work, earn respect for their own  
And be free and at peace in their council house home.

I tried to remember it and I did.

It was discussed decided to start up a Southmead Creative Writers Group I think we're talking about 1982 in that area. It was really a very very original and in a way experimental. I've never passed an exam in my life and this particular evening I went along to the first writers group and there was, I think the representative of adult education, our local ward councillors, a policeman and in a way we were revolutionary in changing people's attitudes towards literature in Bristol generally. You could write in a way what was of ordinary people's language and the way people form sentences you know you could start a sentence with 'and', but you could.

I met people from different walks of life entirely different from my experience you see Southmead as a whole. I love it and I hate it and that's the truth because I love it for safe security of home for the people you can go up the road and onto the shops and say "Hello Mrs So and so" or "Hello Sir" you always see somebody and there's somebody there. We're all just trying to get along in life, but I hate it for its restrictions that it imposes on people through certain social conditions and opportunities.