

Norma and Ron Braybrook

Norma was born in Marlborough Road in 1931 and apart from five years in Putnoe has lived in Queen's Park all her life. She worked briefly at Tilley's and claims to be the youngest female employee at Allens (aged 15). Ron lived in Black Tom before moving to Queen's Park in the early sixties. He worked in the loco shop at the south-west corner of Ford End Road railway bridge.



During the war, people used to live on fish and chips. The queue from Eric's (Bridgman's) would go out of the door, right down Coventry Road and past the passageways halfway down there. It wasn't 'in and out' at Bridgman's... You'd have to wait for half an hour to an hour to get served.

Once, I was in the queue with my friend Teeny Wildman and in front of us was a young woman who was married to Gerry Hutton (who did a bit of boxing). She was expecting and we were in the queue so long that she fainted and got taken inside the shop. When she had recovered, Eric gave her fish and chips and she went home. My friend said, 'I know, let's pretend we're pregnant and then faint - then we'd get served quicker!' We were only about twelve at the time. What made us have to wait longer was that every so often, someone would phone up with their order and Eric would say, 'Alright, we'll have it there in five minutes' and they'd get served next and have it delivered. We used to curse the posh people who had phones and held the queue up! Any left over cooked fish went in the window the next day and they would sell it half price. My mum loved to eat it cold with a bit of bread and butter.

Bridgman's also sold wet fish. It used to fascinate me how Eric got a piece of paper and quickly folded and turned it into a little cone shape. He'd then twist it a few times at the bottom and fill it with winkles. You'd pick them out of their shells with a pin... it was a lot of work for not very much.



Kimbers' shop as it is now.

When the war was on, Mrs Kimber's shop in Iddesleigh Road used to sell little ice blocks - they had a fridge and in those days, only posh people had them. The kids would queue outside until it was frozen and shout, 'Are they ready?' 'They're not frozen yet - it'll be about an hour', Mrs Kimber replied. I'm not sure they charged for them, probably gave them away, but all the kids would go away sucking on an ice cube.

Recently, I was in a cake shop and saw this stuff they called bread pudding - haven't seen that for ages. My mum called it 'Killmequick' and made it with breadcrumbs and currants - it always turned out dark brown. I really liked it and often asked mum if she was going to make more 'Killmequick'. You'd cut it up as you wanted, as you couldn't get sweets in those days.

'Killmequick'

1 lb stale bread (large loaf), 8 oz mixed fruit, 4 oz soft brown sugar, 4 oz suet, 2 eggs, 2 x 5ml spoon mixed spice, 1 x 5ml spoon cinnamon

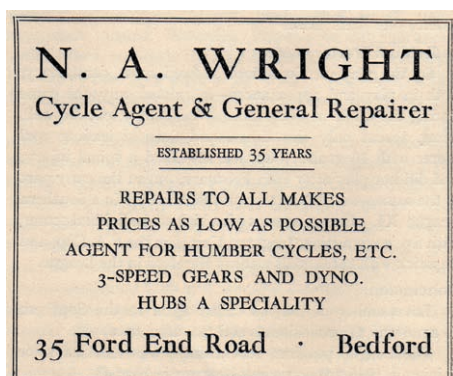
Soak bread in a mix of milk and water for at least half an hour. Squeeze as much fluid as possible from bread (use a sieve). Mix in all the ingredients and put in a roasting tin. Sprinkle nutmeg on top and cook at gas mark 4 for 1½ hours until dark brown. When cool, cut up and sprinkle with caster sugar.

Also during the war, Mum would boil up a load of parsnips, mash them up and add banana flavouring. She'd roll them into little balls and they were like sweets. I (Norma) worked full time at Tilley's sweet factory in Gratton Road. The factory was divided in two halves; they made crumpets in one part, boiled sweets in the other half. In the crumpet section, there was this old man in his seventies who would fill this huge pot with milk and flour. The pot came up to your waist and he would push his sleeve up, put his whole arm in the mixture and stir it up. It was disgusting, but it didn't stop me pinching them and eating them. They had a machine that dropped the batter mixture into eight or twelve metal rings on the hotplate - they would all be turned over at the same time by this great big spatula. In the sweet factory, there was this pipe coming out of the wall in one room. You pulled down the handle to open it and caught the syrup in a bucket to mix with the sweets. When the bucket was full, you had to push the handle up to close it... one day, it was left open and the whole floor was covered in a few inches of this thick, sticky syrup. I wouldn't be surprised if she did it on purpose as this girl didn't like working there. I liked to watch them making the rock, which was twisted round and hung up on a hook on the wall. The mixture was flopped into a drum as a big thick roll, and then thinned out to make the sticks of rock.

The school milk was carried into the classrooms in a big crate and the bottles were smaller than a half a pint. They had rotten little round cardboard tops and you'd press down in the middle and pull them out with your finger. The teacher would say, 'Who wants it warm?' and these bottles would be stacked along the top of old metal radiators ready for break time.



Milk churn hung on the front of Humphrey's milk cart



They had a milk machine outside Neville Wright's bike shop on Ford End Road, set back from the road. It was like a Coke machine, but much higher and bigger like a huge fridge. It sold cartons of milk and pink milk - the pink milk was only strawberry coloured... it didn't taste of anything!