

Interviews with Ada Rolls at Birch Road Wardle



June – November 2016

Ada was born in Wardle and has lived there all her life except for the time between 1952 and 1957 when she lived in Devon and London. She was one of seven children and the family lived in Newhouse Street just across the road from where she lives now. She had a younger brother and sister and two older brothers and sisters. The house was very basic and to get to the lavatory they had to walk round the side of a stone house and the lavatories for the houses were in a row attached to this big house. Some of her siblings moved away from Wardle. Nora lived in Norden and Heywood. Winnie in Southport, Maghull and Liverpool, Eric in Worcester and Preston, Hilda in Northumberland and Durham. Her other two brothers lived in Smallbridge after war service.

Her father John Greenwood was born in Mottram-in-Longendale in 1882 and came to Wardle for work. Her mother was born in Whitworth in 1889 and came to live in Wardle as a child. When Ada was a child her father worked at Wasp Mill as a fire beater and later moved to Spring Mill Dyers and Finishers in Smallbridge. Her mother worked briefly at Watergrove Mill and then she worked at Mapletons in Wardle before the children were born. When she had her first baby she suffered from eclampsia. Ada's father was working nights and Nurse Hancock was in attendance for the birth. At this time they were living at Little Town and the baby was born late at night so after the delivery Nurse Hancock got in bed with Ada's mum and stayed the night. Another local midwife was Mrs Edwards, grandmother of the Uttley family. She was not qualified but the local doctor wanted her to get qualifications as she was good and very popular.

Ada started school at the the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel School. At break time they used to be given a drink of hot Horlicks. It was a small school with three rooms and children started school at four and left at the age of fourteen years. When Wardle Central School opened the Methodist school closed and the pupils went to St James' Church school. When Ada was eleven she won a scholarship to Heywood Grammar. She had to get a bus from Wardle and then a train so it was a long day.

Ada attended St James' Church and Sunday School when she was a child. There she joined a missionary society for young people called the King's Messengers. The group once walked from the church to Walsden which seemed a huge distance to her at the time. The chapel had a Junior Guild which was similar. The chapel also had a thriving Amateur Dramatic Society that put on two plays a year. There was another at St James' Church but that was not as successful. In the late 1920s The Methodist Chapel put on a concert of The Messiah in the late 1920s but Ada was too young to attend. She said that all the villagers who were able to sing were involved and Isobel Baillie, who was just starting out, was the star. Ada has always liked reading and as a child some of her favourite books were *Her Benny*, *The Water Babies*, Andersen and Grimm Fairy Stories, *Aesops Fables*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Little Women*, *Good Wives*, *What Katy Did*, and *Canterbury Tales for Children*. She also read *Tiger Tim's Weekly* and *Chatterbox* which were weekly comics. She enjoyed going in the cloggers because he always had piles of comics and magazines. At the time Ada thought he was very sad and later found out his son had been killed in the war.

As a child she doesn't remember going up to Watergrove village but remembers the building of the reservoir. Before it was built the farmers were allowed to stay on their farms rent-free. Ada thinks this was probably so that the owners could claim more compensation when they were demolished if the farms were tenanted. Watergrove was also known as Chinatown because some of the people who lived there looked rather odd and dressed very shabbily because they were poor. She also remembers the first Wardle bus in 1926. There was great excitement and everybody came out of their houses to see it. When she was older she used to walk over to Whitworth and explored some of the old ruined farms. All the children played outside and the girls would stretch a skipping rope across the road as there were very few vehicles about at that time. Children also used to bowl hoops down Birch Road or play with whips and tops. Other games were "Jumping t'brook" and Jacks or Five Stones. The Whit Walks were very popular at that time and Ada always walked in them. There was also a Carnival and she remembers that the local milk floats and wagons were decorated and people dressed in costumes drove round the village. The Rose Queen and her attendants also took part and Ada always wanted to be one of them but was never chosen. She thinks that there was some favouritism involved as the same children seemed to get picked more than once. The attendants wore long dresses and a small boy in a white suit carried the crown on a cushion. The village was very lively in those days unlike now. There were always people walking up and down the road because nobody had transport. Housewives would go to the shops every day, children would walk to school and most came home for dinner except for the ones who lived on the farms which were too far to go home in the time. They brought dinners into school and they were warmed up.

Ada remembers men in blue denim suits walking through Wardle and thinks that they were from the Workhouse at Birch Hill. Some of the children from the Cottage Homes went to the Wesleyan school. The boys didn't wear a uniform but the girls all wore thick dresses and thick dark stockings winter and summer. There were several mills in Wardle and work started early and finished late. There used to be a break for breakfast and at about 12.30 pm Ada remembers that the road was full of men going home for dinner. In the 1920s there was a man known as Talt Rigg who went round collecting urine (locally known as lant) with a horse and cart. The liquid was collected in a metal container and taken to Little Ned's Mill for the treatment of raw wool. There was a pub called St James' Tavern in Wardle Fold and the landlady was called Sarah Dearden. Sometimes her family would shop at the Co-op store at the top of the village but it did not have connections with the Labour Party.

William Bamford known as Billy Bam was an undertaker who used to walk in front of the hearse at funerals wearing a tall hat, tailcoat and carrying a stick. Another local undertaker was very meek and mild and his wife was the boss. If she thought that somebody might not pay the bill for a funeral she would not give them the coffin lid until they paid.

Before the National Health Service started people paid money every week to a man who called at the houses so that they would be able to afford to go to see a doctor. There were three doctors named Scarr in the area at that time. Ronald covered the Littleborough area, Sidney was located on Yorkshire Street and Jack had a surgery at Milnrow. Dr Vining from Littleborough rented a room from Blanche Whipp to do a local surgery in Wardle. It was on Ramsden Road opposite the butcher's shop of Ted Leach.

Her father was the first secretary of the Labour Party in Wardle. The members met in Ada's home and the men used to bring books on politics to make a small circulating library. However, the village was strongly Conservative and the party didn't grow much. At one time it was suggested that members of the Conservative Club had to say how they voted before being allowed to join but that never happened.

After the war Ada trained to be a teacher and taught at Heybrook School and spent twenty years teaching at Littleborough Central School before retirement. Now at the age of 95 she still lives independently on Birch Road, Wardle across from the street where she was born. I brought Ada to our Open Day in November and going through some papers she found a copy of a letter sent to Jim Tweedale from her Aunt Ada Howarth. It described all the shops in Wardle that she could remember. Coincidentally Ada also wrote out a list of shops that were in the village in her childhood.