

## Extracts from the Elizabeth Roberts Archive

### Neighbours

1. Mrs M.3.P (born 1898)  
ER Where did you live then?  
R In River Street, it's gone now, off Bow Lane.  
ER I know where Bow Lane is!  
R It ran between Bow Lane and Fitzgerald Street where the little school is. They were little tiny houses. That was our first house.  
ER What was it like?  
R One downstairs and a little back-kitchen and two bedrooms. They were only talking about it the other day when they were all here. You should have seen the house me mum first lived in! The two eldest children, they remember it but we moved before Annie was born. No, Annie was born there and we moved just after Annie was born. We had wonderful neighbours there. They were a wonderful lot of people.  
ER How else would they help? You said this one would send in a shilling.  
R One took the washing in when I was in bed confined, one took baby's washing, another one took all the children's washing. One would bring me my dinner, another would bring me a tea, and all this sort of thing. I had a lady across the road who had her leg off and was confined to bed and I would run across and give her a cup of tea when the girls were at work and she had nobody to attend to her. We all went in to look after her. There were no need to have anyone else.  
ER Was there much loaning money?  
R No, I can't say anything about that. They used to do didn't they? We used to have one that came across and one day she asked me if she could borrow my shoes to go to the pictures in. I wanted my shoes to go to work, but she wouldn't work! Another time she came across and said had I no bedding to spare? I said that I hadn't. She said that I had had a drawer full the other day. She had happened to be in when I had had my drawer out. I said that that drawer had been for me to go to bed with Annie. I always kept certain things for going to bed. I said that I couldn't part with that. She said 'Oh I just thought you might have some to spare.' That person would go round to one for an onion and one for a carrot and one for something else until she got her dinner and a penny for the gas.  
ER So she lived on the neighbours really? Was there a lot of genuine running out of things?  
R Yes. And they would always help one another. I have never known anyone refuse! Mind you, they got to know this person! Well apart from this, she could go to the pictures and we couldn't. It was only 2d or 3d but she could find that when we couldn't. One of her children got to going and asking for money. He would ask for a penny for his mother and it wouldn't be for his mother at all, it would be for somebody else when she was asked about it. It just shows that what you do, passes on, either good or bad!  
ER Do you remember them ever quarrelling in that little street? What would they quarrel about?  
R Children, noise. I shouldn't think it would be anything else. They used to use all the words. Because my children would come in and ask what the words meant. I was only saying yesterday, our Kenneth, the elder boy used to sit under the table and say them all and then look to see if we were looking. And father used to say 'Take no notice, he'll give over, the more you say he hasn't to say them the more he'll say them. So just take no notice.' So we never did and he gave over.  
ER You don't remember them actually fighting, just quarrelling?  
R Oh no. I have never seen anybody fight. I've heard them quarrel but never fight. It would just blow over. It would mostly be about children running up and down and there was a lobby through and there would be no peace. This was mostly what they'll fight about.

ER Did they used to sit on the doorstep?  
R Of course we did! When it was hot in summer of course we sat on the doorstep and talked all sat out. It was the only fresh air we got!  
ER What did you talk about?  
R I suppose anything, children. I don't suppose it would be war as we had had enough about war. Mostly children I think. This woman used to bring all her children out and comb their hair looking for .....? Yet, she was a grand person. She would have done anything for anybody. My husband had to go for an interview one day, you know they were always sending for him, and I was at work and she said 'leave t'child, I'll have it.' When she came home she was covered from head to foot with treacle toffee. She'd had her and kept her quiet by giving her treacle toffee, she would do anything like that. She used to love a ha'path of dolly mixtures that person.  
ER Did you ever go into each other's houses for a cup of tea?  
R Yes. Not in everybody's house but one neighbour and I were very, very friendly. In fact, they thought of putting an archway up so we could go when it didn't rain. She would come in a lot and I would go into her. She would clean up for me while I sewed for her. She couldn't sew and I would make her child a dress or knit, well I taught her to knit. She would come and scrub my floor or something like that or take my washing while I did a job for her.  
ER That's lovely!

2. Mrs A.3.B. (born 1892)

ER Did they help you if you were in trouble?  
R The neighbours were far better than what they are today. They were not as clannish. If the next door neighbour was poorly we would go in and help. We'd do her washing, do her ironing and we'd take them back and if they wanted any messages going we used to do it. They were always willing to help you. Now, today, they're more clannish, they seem as if they want to be on their own.  
ER Do you remember people doing bowls of broth or soup when people were ill?  
R When they were ill they used to get a sheep's head and a marrow bone and then twopennyworth of pot herbs and make a good pan of soup, and some split peas and barley and take them a good bowl of soup in at night. We perhaps used to take them their dinners. Really they were better friends than what they are now. They're good friends today but they're more for themselves. In the olden days it was sisterly love and more motherly love. I used to be knocked up time out of time when anybody died. They used to come and knock at the door at midnight and say, 'Will you come and lay the baby out? Will you come and lay so-and-so out?' I used to go and lay them out.  
ER Do you remember how old you were when you first laid somebody out?  
R Oh, I'd be about twenty. I would have loved to have been a nurse but my mother made me go as a cook. One night I had a knock at midnight and I'd three little girls and I got up and an old lady up the street had passed on and they asked me if I'd go and lay her out. I said 'Just give me time to get dressed.' I got dressed and when the children got up in the morning to go to school they said, 'Who was that man knocking the door again through the night?', 'It was only Grandma Houldsworth ha passed away and they asked if I'd go and lay her out.' Mabel turns round and said, 'Why don't you put a blinkin' card in the window - 'laying-out taken in'? Not 'washing taken in', 'laying-out taken in!' We never used to take anything off them, never bothered, but now today everything is altered and the undertaker does all that.  
ER Would people give you a present, were they grateful for what you did, or just take it for granted?  
R No, they would ask you and try to offer you summat or buy you summat. They hadn't the money and we used to say 'No'.

3. Mr C.1.P. (born 1884)

ER When you were young what did you think of as a rough family?

R One where the father was a boozier. I have one or two recollections of that. I remember coming back from Blackpool one time, I should be about eighteen and my father had a neighbour on the floor. My father had him by the throat as this neighbour had come home drunk and turned out his wife and kiddies in their night clothes. My father reprimanded him and he struck at my father and my father retaliated. That was one incident. There was another, with a chap named Brennand from across the road, he was maltreating his wife and my father reprimanded him and that led to some trouble. It was booze that was the trouble.

4. Mrs D.1.P. (born 1908)

R Bride and bridegroom used to walk to the church to get married. Now this here woman was pregnant, I think that was really cruel – she might not have been the willing party. It isn't always the girl's fault you know! A man's a man and he's blinking strong, isn't he, and they get really lust in them. They can overpower you, you know! But this here woman, she worked in the same mill as my mother and this here weaver's asked my mother if she was going to watch the wedding. She said that she couldn't as she had her washing to do, and she were working while Saturday dinner-time. Anyhow, when my mother went to work on the Monday they told her what the wedding was like. They stoned the woman because she was pregnant! That was at Emmanuel Church!

ER Who threw the stones?

R Nasty minded women you know?

ER What did the weavers think of that? Did your mother say?

R My mother said that some agreed with stoning her. They thought it was a crime to have a child before you were married.

5. Mr G.3.P. (born 1913)

ER Did she do the front doorstep?

R Oh yes, the front doorstep and four flags to the right. Usually in terraced houses the two doors were together with the lobby inbetween. And so you did your step and half the lobby and you did four flags up to the edge of your window and everybody did the same thing. Of course, if anybody deviated they would say: 'Oh, look at her – she has done five flags!'

ER What if people didn't do the donkey-stoning?

R You would just say about them what you would say if the people opposite .... you hadn't changed their curtains. The same things.

ER They were a bit dirty?

R Not necessarily dirty, but they would expect them to do it. They would comment about it, the other women in the street would talk about the one that wasn't doing it. If you ever got somebody that came up from the South of England, and they didn't know about Northern ways, well, of course, they didn't do this sort of thing, then this was it.

R1 You used to stand at the top of the street and look down and the next row of flags from the door was yellow or white all the way down.

6. Mr A.2.B. (born 1904)

ER What were thought of as rough families on the Island?

R I think the roughest family was where drink was prevalent and where the men used to go home and abuse the wives. I remember one incident next door to us, we lived in 28, and they lived in number 30, where there was a big family and he was a real drunkard. He had a girl of eighteen and the mother died and she had a private account and she willed this private account to the daughter. I'll never forget one night the father came home drunk and he thrashed this girl with a belt for her to give up the bank book.

ER Did she?  
R Yes, she did – she had to. She'd have been killed if she hadn't have done. Next day she went to the solicitor's and complained .... she went to her aunt really and they took her to a solicitor and they recovered it eventually and she left home. It was a terrible night we put in listening to her screaming.  
ER Your father didn't think of calling the police?  
R I think he did eventually.

7. Mrs M.3.L. (born 1917)

R There was nothing too good for anyone to do or to give, or to stay. Any accidents they'd be there to see what they could do with the child if it was a child or if it was the husband who'd had an accident and the husband couldn't work and the wife had to find a bit of a job, the neighbours would all help and bake, wash and do anything. We had a neighbour called Mrs B. and I tell you when my stepmother had these varicose veins, although she had a family of six of her own, she was in every morning to see to stepmother and she showed me what to do. What I couldn't do she did. It was no trouble to her to help at all. It was never any trouble to them, everyone did the same. Your trouble was their trouble and your happiness was their happiness.