

Living in the Shadow of the Chocolate Factory

Alan Brain 1935 - 1950

I was born in Camerton Road in 1935 and therefore grew up in the shadow of the chocolate factory.

My earliest memory of the factory is being carried by my father to the shelter there during an air raid in 1941. Many of us had Anderson shelters in our gardens and there were two brick built shelters in Camerton Road but a lot of people preferred to join neighbours in the basement of the factory, partly because of the company and partly because it was thought that such a large building provided greater protection from German bombs. Entrance to the shelter was through the gate at the top of Turley Road and writing this note sixty odd years later still brings back the characteristic smell of damp concrete. In later years we often wondered whether a shelter beneath a factory beside a busy railway line (as it then was) was a good place to be but as far as I know no bombs fell in the immediate area although a barrage balloon did come down and drape itself over some houses in Camelford Road.

Later in the war American soldiers were stationed in the factory and we used to go and chat with the sentry guarding the Turley Road entrance. At this time you had to look out for American Army trucks speeding along Co-operation Road.

After the war it was business as usual but these were difficult times and rationing of sweets and chocolate continued until the early 1950s. During the summer months when the windows were open we were treated to the sound of Workers Playtime, a BBC radio programme which was broadcast to the workers in the factory over the company's tannoy system. There was often a strong smell of chocolate, as mentioned in the Observer article, and some superstitious locals believed that this meant that it was going to rain. It was quite a busy place and created sufficient business to justify a post office at the top of Turley Road in addition to the one at the top of Camerton Road.

At that time the factory was referred to as Packers after the man who founded the company in 1881 but I never saw a chocolate wrapper with Packer's name on it. It was more likely to be in the name of one of the other companies in the group such as Bonds or Carsons. The sports ground on the other side of the railway line was, and I believe still is, referred to as Packers Field although this was sold off during difficult trading times before the second-world war.

The factory gateways made very good football goals, especially the one at the Carlyle Road end and we used to spend many hours kicking a ball against the factory wall in the hope that one day we would be doing the same in front of a large crowd at Eastville or Ashton Gate. When I last visited the area I was astonished to see how many parked cars there were in every street-no room to play football now. Sixty years ago only one person in Camerton Road owned a car and the road was completely clear most of the time.



The only photograph I can find which shows something of the area is one taken at the Camerton Road victory celebrations in 1945. I am the "bridegroom" in the middle of the front row. We lived in the house on the right and you can see that number 26 still has sticky plaster in a diamond pattern on its windows to protect them from bomb blast. One of our windows was damaged by shrapnel and we had opaque glass in it for several years because of a shortage. There was no serious war damage in the road but I can vaguely remember a bomb damaging the cemetery wall in Greenbank View.

You can see a gas street lamp at the top of the road and the two corner shops are visible. There was another lamp post outside number 13 to which a bin was fixed into which we all put leftovers of food for pigs to eat (so we were told) and you can imagine what a festering mess that was.

The victory celebrations included a bonfire outside number 2, against the wall of the shelter which stood in the road alongside the side wall of the house in Greenbank Road.

It will be interesting to see what happens to the factory in the end. I must say that although I lived in its shadow for twenty years I have no great affection for it as a building but it was the place of work for many people for over a hundred years and it is only right that it should be remembered.

I no longer live in Bristol, but friends and relations often let me know what is going on in the area and one of them sent me a cutting from the Observer dated the 17th January 2007 with regard to the Heritage Lottery Project.

The IRIS project is very worth while and I wish you well.