

Walking around Pittville Estate in the early twentieth century, with a few asides.

Let us start at the top of Whaddon Road opposite what was 9 Pittville Villas, now 52 Prestbury Road. Why? 'cos there is a lot of history on this spot.

In the late 19th. century one could turn round and look towards Prestbury without seeing another dwelling; it was all farm land, a lot of it belonging to the Misses Skillicorne descendants of Captain Skillicorne who brought Cheltenham to the fore in the 18th. century and some of the land was covenanted not to be built on and that lasted until the second world war when the last field had a fire station built on it. It had been rented by the Gloucestershire Dairy who turned out up to forty milk ponies overnight in the summer months.

Whaddon Road had been Whaddon Lane, an unmade road topped with ash and clinker from the Gas Works, and down on the left of the Lane was the Cotswold Hounds Kennels afore they moved to Andoversford, with the whipper in, one Charlie Beauchamp, living in a house in the Lane called Beauchamp Lodge and that is still there and occupied.

However, we be up at the top of the Road and facing Pittville Villas, on our left is an alleyway through to Pittville Circus with an iron bollard at either end originally to stop horses going through. That alleyway had Hawthorn hedges either side and was known as Nanny Goats Alley, because an old codger kept goats on the other side of the hedge. Part of the field was market garden and there was quite a few of market gardens for there was a ready market for seasonable vegetables in Pittville.

From this spot, as a boy, I had seen the white cart horses lifting the redundant tram lines, the trams ceased in 1931, but my best bit of excitement was when a gas main burst and caught fire right alongside a large tree which was also alight. No fire service attended because that would have cost money and in any case Cheltenham only had a retained fire brigade, most of them lived in New Street and were Corporation painters, and when an alarm was raised someone had to go and locate them, then they had to get to the fire station in St. James Square, don their uniform and collect their Captain, a Mr. Such who owned an engineering works in Swindon Road, before proceeding to the incident. If it was an incident like a man trapped in a tree with a branch crushing his leg; I saw such a thing when they felled the elm trees around Cheltenham Football ground, then three men would come out with a large extending ladder on a push truck with six foot wheels. They would run through the streets and it might be an hour or so before they reached the scene. However the gas people dealt with the fire and I remember seeing the residents of a rest home for retired clergy, which overlooked the incident, looking through the windows. They had evidently put down their books of religion, (cramming for their finals as Ken Dodd would have said) and had taken interest in the commotion. This must have been a welcome diversion from their normal daily life and no doubt the Burgundy was out for the owner was known to bring out the wine at the slightest excuse.

There was another Rest Home at the time in Pittville Circus Road at Haddo; it was designated as a Rest Home for Distressed Gentlefolk and run by a Miss Scott.

Talking of gentlefolk, it would be advisable to point out the class status in vogue at this early part of the 20th. Century and such a classification existed in Cheltenham. The lowest class consisted of gypsies and rough sleepers, the next were labourers and domestic servants, then came the craftsmen, engineers and perhaps female typists and book keepers, then the shopkeepers, builders and self employed tradesmen who earned a reasonable living, the next level were the teachers, lawyers and solicitors and people of that ilk, rising to the moneyed people in trade, many who, as regards wealth, were on par with the gentry but nevertheless had to work to sustain their wealth. The top of the class were the gentry, people who did not work but existed quite well on the labours of others, plus earnings from shares etc. Pittville Estate was more or less occupied by gentry, there were some wealthy trade's people but mainly it was just gentry, Lords and knights of the realm and many senior military figures. We shall bump into them when I move from the top of Whaddon Road where I am beginning to feel the cold.

Let us move left towards the town. On our left is Selkirk Parade and on our right is Pittville Villas all now part of Prestbury Road. These houses were not as commodious as many others we shall see as we

walk around Pittville, but they were still occupied by people living on their income, not on salaries. There was one exception I knew, a horse dealer who frequented Wales for his mounts and brought them up to Cheltenham by train and put them through the regular sales at the Horse Repository in Winchcombe Street. He therefore was in trade, but still he probably had domestics either living in or out.

The inhabitants of even these smaller villas were Victorians, because one would have to be under thirty to qualify as Edwardian. Victorians had a totally different outlook on life to those who followed after. Victorian etiquette was evident everywhere; the mistress seldom went to town on foot and certainly not on a bicycle, why should she? Everything was done for her, a simple pull on the bell ribbon beside every fireplace brought a maid, if the fire wanted making up, the bell was operated, if the sun shone and the curtains wanted drawing the bell was pulled.

With the advent of electricity in Cheltenham from about 1899, generated from the Arle Road Works, assisted at times from the steam produced from the Ash Destructor on the same site, it generated DC for the Trams that started in 1911 and also mains AC at 230 volts 100 cycle frequency for general use, but it would be years before the majority of households received electricity, gas having been available since 1829. In 1931 the National Grid was formed and the whole country was now on 230/250 volts and 50 cycle frequency, which meant changing over all electric meters and motors to this lower frequency, Cheltenham and Brighton were the two towns most affected by this.

As a boy most of the houses I visited still had gaslight but some of these had an electric doorbell run off a battery. The battery was a sal-ammoniac cell on a shelf near the front door, an earthenware jar that was topped up occasionally with distilled water, once the door bell was rung one had to wait before it could be rung again because the battery plates sulphated up. The house bells in each room were wire and rod operated culminating in a row of bells in the scullery, all of different pitch, (I am looking at one now whilst I am writing this) and the maid would know from the tone which room she was required. A house that was wired for electricity would have a row of little flags in a glass case, when the bell push was activated the requisite flag would vibrate and a buzzer would sound and the maid would trot off to the room indicated.

Visiting cards were still being put through the door and it wasn't " hey missus I think someone has put something in the letterbox", the maid on duty collected the missive and duly presented it to the master or mistress on a small silver salver.

They had no need to shop, tradesmen called on a regular basis, not to the front door but to the rear by way of the tradesman's entrance, I wonder how many side gates still declaim TRADESMAN as they did when I was a boy. The only people that went up the front steps were the doctor, the priest, the lawyer and funeral director and perhaps the district nurse, but more often than not she went to the rear of the house.

The cook held sway downstairs and received most of the trades people. Grocery orders were given after discussion with the mistress of the house and the accounts in this respect were settled quarterly. The butcher did likewise and the Pittville butchers delivered in high kicking Welsh cob carts, the small highly polished carts were a sight to behold. They were housed and the ponies stabled next to where we lived, and at one time I had the job of sweeping the cobbled yard, cutting the chaff and then taking the butcher boys bicycles down to the shop on the way to school, on reflection, what for, as the ponies would be returned in the afternoon. On occasion the mistress might walk as far as the grocers shop in Pittville, it was Gillers and had been since Pittville was built, but any purchase would be on account because like Royalty gentry did not carry any money.

The grocers, bakers, butchers, post office, dairy, chemist, gownshop and two funeral directors (local builders) were with a few paces of one another in the Prestbury Road, so designed by Pitt because as the name suggests it was built as a separate town from Cheltenham and was a gated estate. Now coal purchasing did demand a visit to town or a letter to the coal merchant if the master or mistress knew what type of coal had to be ordered, in my boyhood the run of the mill coal was two pounds and four shillings a ton or sixpence halfpenny a quarter, ie, twenty eight pounds, but fifty years before it was about ten shillings a ton. It was purchased from the coal agent,

who usually operated from a small shop or kiosk and displayed his wares from different collieries in a glass case on the counter. Such a shop could be found just inside the Colonnade and behind the Imperial Spa in the Promenade. One bought coal from a designated colliery and it varied in price according to the quality, anthracite was not used on domestic fires because it needed a forced draught to burn, but it was a smokeless fuel mainly used on steam trains and ships. A dangerous fuel to mine from the Welsh collieries, it claimed hundreds of deaths from the dust created which would fire instantaneously along with methane and sulphur damp. Having selected the coal the time of delivery was important, because it had to coincide with spring cleaning and the decamping of the family to other places whilst this was going on.

Spring cleaning not much loved by the staff: the coal house as starters had to be cleaned out, usually by outside help, the slack riddled and the dust taken away, usually by the man or men doing the cleaning. It could be used for fuelling if mixed with tea leaves. All the chimneys had to be swept and the bags of soot were charged extra to be taken away. Most of the sweeps sold this in turn to gardeners and allotment holders; they used to dump it in a big heap on an allotment I knew.

Then starting at the top of the house all the curtains were taken down along with the drapes, blankets and other multifarious items and collected by one of the many laundries for cleaning. Everything was now washed and polished, all carpets were removed, (no fitted carpets then) and taken for beating and some of these were quite expensive carpets often brought home by the military officers. All the paint work was washed and if a room was due to be redecorated now was the time to do it, which was more work for the staff moving furniture. No Hoovers, all hand dusting and when one room was completed the door was shut to prevent the dust getting in again, and there was some dust. This type of cleaning was only carried out once a year and just imagine what collected with all those open fires.

The basement was the last to do. Invariably the long passage from the scullery to the pantry at the front of the house was covered by jute matting which had to be rolled up and washed by hand in the rear basement yard. The gardener with his shovel, yes his shovel, would clear the passage of dirt off the flagged floor which was then scrubbed by the scullery maid and the matting, when dry, returned. The front and rear basement areas were usually lime washed at this time. I have only recorded briefly the work of spring cleaning, but, if possible as a boy, I kept away because staff tempers became terribly frayed.

As a young boy the Victorian folk I lived with, my parents, grandparents and other old people born in the 1860s, spoke of the fact that Joseph Pitt would have liked to have built a thoroughfare from the almost straight Evesham Road right through to where the Queens Hotel is now situated. That stems from the kerfuffle he had with the Commissioners over the realignment of Pittville Street. It would have been a rival to the Unter der Linden in Berlin, but the town Commissioners would not give way on Pittville Street, of course it could have been just a rumour.

You will have noticed that I have not mentioned any medical facilities built on the Estate. I assume that at the time of building 1820 to 1860 it was considered that medical doctor services were adequately covered by the group of medical men in the little cul-de-sac just inside the High Street end of St. Georges Place. This was known as the Harley Street of Cheltenham and this cul-de-sac went right back to the rear of the graveyard by what I think was the old Anabaptist Chapel. There was, however, before the General Hospital was built, a hospital at Idminton house opposite the Ambrose Street of the High Street. Also at Stonham House in North Place there was an Ear, Nose, and Throat Hospital and this remained so until the extension was built to house this hospital in the General Hospital in Sandford Road.

That brings us to the general health of the occupants of these new houses, houses built surrounded by an abundance of fresh air. But until 1870 the sanitary conditions left a lot to be desired. Joseph Pitt who died in 1833 and his son William who took over the Estate management refused the establishment of a piped water supply, a gas supply and a sewerage system on the grounds that as it was declared by Pitt that Pittville was a town in its own right, therefore the estate managers should have control of the utilities and charge the new owners of the dwellings for such facilities and thus not allow the Commissioners any say in the matter.

I often wonder why anyone bothered to live in these dwellings at this time, because water had to be extracted from personal wells or purchased from the water carts. In 1824, four years after the commencement of building the Estate, a private company built a reservoir near the Hewletts. It is still there but now covered over and it is fed by springs coming off Aggs Hill.

Now then, a bit of conjecture and gossip. Who built it? An old resident who lived on Harp Hill told me that it was built to serve the left hand side of Harp Hill if one was standing at the bottom of the hill and from thence the pipe was going straight to the Brewery owned by John Gardner in the High Street at the corner of Fleece Lane, now Henrietta Street.

A certain Joseph Pitt had by 1812 large interests in John Gardners Brewery along with property on both sides of the High Street and at Cambray. Pitt also owned the County of Gloucester Bank and John Gardner was a sleeping partner in this bank, and his wife was the sister of one Major Agg who owned the Hewletts, a large house on Aggs Hill the top of Harp Hill. Agg was a very wealthy man; he had made a fortune in India in the Bengal Corps of Engineers. If the water pipe was going right to the brewery, what was the best way to get it there? but for two short spells it could go almost direct on ground belonging to Joseph Pitt, thus giving him access to a piped water supply with a good head that he in turn could sell to his residents, a service that he eventually offered to his residents but only those who could guarantee to pay the supply costs which I understand were quite high. Water supply was available in the rest of Cheltenham from several bore holes but the pressure was invariably low.

Sewage must have been collected by the night soil carts and I am led to believe that they probably emptied them in Wymans Brook. The Gas Company who started to lay pipes on the estate were stopped by Pitt because it was a privately owned estate as was Lansdown and Bayshill. Old people have told me in the past that there were no outbreaks of cholera or typhus, but diseases that Victorians suffered and often fatal, are not present with us today or controlled by modern medicine.

Death then to Victorians was accepted perhaps more readily and dealt with a long respectful period of mourning, my mother told me of the practice of strewing the road when a person was dying to lower the traffic noise, the litter warden would think Christmas had come if he chanced upon such a situation today. There were no Chapels of Rest and the deceased remained in the house until the funeral. Once the undertaker had made the coffin and the Sarah Gamp of the day had completed the laying out, the deceased was put on display in the best parlour for friends and neighbours to pay their last respects and this was so before the last war when I worked in the holidays as a part time delivery boy for Barletts the florist in the Promenade, now long since gone; I invariably had to place the wreaths alongside the open coffin.

This was no strange occurrence to me for I had been taken to view my great-grandmother laid out in the best parlour of my grandmother's home. Best parlours were only used for Weddings and Funerals I reckon, for as children we were never allowed in them. When as a child, my youngest sister of six months died, she had been born with another headshaped growth on the back of her head (hydrocephalic) I slept, with her little white open coffin on the dressing table at the bottom of my bed on the day before the funeral. On the day of a funeral neighbours would draw all front curtains in respect and the family, including school children, would wear black armbands for six weeks and people seeing an approaching funeral procession would stand facing the road, men with their hats off and soldiers would salute the cortege. Luckily the frequency of such things has dropped now and a death in the family is treated as a private affair and a long period of severe black mourning is seldom observed. In my youth, let us put it this way, it was not uncommon I suppose for ladies to observe the pattern Queen Victoria had set on the death of Prince Albert to wear predominantly black garments. We have then a little insight of living in Victorian times, let us forget the morbidity and place ourselves outside Pittville Gates.

Here we are then outside the gates, beautiful wrought ironwork with the Cheltenham crest above it. I doubt if Pitt put the crest there because in his mind he was creating his own town independent of Cheltenham, and that begs the question when were the gates erected, if after 1870 when Cheltenham became involved with the estate, then the gates are probably the work of Letheren who was a local ironmaster. Behind us is a water trough for horses and beneath it a drinking place for dogs.

Looking through the gates is Segrave Place . The word Segrave sparks off a little bit of gossip history; it brings to mind a certain Colonel W.F. Berkeley who, with his brothers were to dominate the politics of Cheltenham until the 1890's. Colonel Berkeley was an acquaintance of the Duke of Clarence and the pair of them kept a house known as German Cottage in Margaret Road. The address was locally known as a house of ill repute. Never the less these two rakes, as they were described, were to be seen at many functions in the town in the early 1800,s and gossip goes that the Duke told Colonel Berkeley that when he was king which he was destined to be on the death of George the Fourth he would make the Colonel a Lord. He became king in 1830 and by 1831, Colonel Berkeley became Lord Segrave. What is more interesting, Colonel Berkeley, who had been criticised by the press for his rakish behavior, physically apprised one editor who lived in Northfield Terrace and horsewhipped him.

How this Place came to be named after Lord Segrave I do not know: Lord Segrave chaired the Town Commissioners and Joseph Pitt was somewhat of a thorn in their governing of the town. Pitt was interested in making money whilst Segrave enjoyed spending it.

Looking again through the gates we see that all the houses have got basements, not garden flats as they say today, but basements. Why? We do not normally build houses with basements today. It was 1820 to 1860 when most of these houses were built and they all had basements and the probable reason is the logistics of building the properties. Cheltenham is built on a builder's wonderland. More money on reflection could have been made if Cheltenham had become just one huge quarry. It does not matter where one builds in the area, the top soil covers building materials. Cheltenham is built on blue clay, (brick making material) or Gravel, (for drives, roads, concrete making) Limestone, (for building also for firing for lime mortar) loamy sand for bricklaying and sharp sand for rendering. So whatever was dug out for the basement it was going to be of use for the building in hand. People have told me that there were often complaints of smoke annoyance from the firing of bricks on building ground. Land was sold with the endorsement in certain areas of including the possible extraction of clay for brick making, stone, gravel or sand, which enhanced the value of the site. I cannot say what was found under Segrave Place, but I bet it was sand because a hundred yards away in the Sherborne area it was definitely sand whereas towards Whaddon Road it was blue clay and as a boy I made decorative pots out of it. So whatever was dug out for the basement, it was going to be of use to effect the building and save time and money and what is more the basement would be the work place for the domestic servants.

I assume the buildings on the estate were all speculative but I would suggest the demand for accommodation was intense in the early 1800's, it is recorded that there were something like 140 lodgings and 40 laundries across the town. Pittville Estate had a covenant upon it that laundry was not allowed on outside lines at all, so on the estate, as in other areas of Cheltenham, it would be rather difficult to dry laundry for an entire household on a wooden clothes horse beside the kitchen fire, I suspect that the covenant has never been repealed but today it is cheerfully ignored.

The actual buildings themselves are worth a mention. The construction methods appear identical to what had gone for centuries; labour intensive, wooden scaffold poles in barrels of sand with cross pieces tied with rope and the only mechanical aid a block and pulley. Building regulations as we know them were not evident apart from fire regulations, stone buildings not wooden frames stemming from previous disastrous fires in London 1666 and Marlborough and Shaftesbury in the 1700's. I do not know if there were any regulations regarding footings, but I doubt if there were damp courses or air spaced walls. This was another reason why basements were an advantage it kept the upper floors free of rising damp, any sign would arise in the basement and the floors were flagged so no wood was involved. Most of the internal walls were brick until roof eaves were reached and then the generous roof space would be separated with wattle and daub partitions for servants quarters.

Some houses that enjoyed the services of a personal well would have in the roof space a lead lined wooden tank and the garden staff would pump the water up to feed the one cold tap in the scullery. The roof timbers were massive by today's standard, a similar house I once owned had joists that measured six inches by eight and if one considers a 4ft by 4ft. by 4ft tank in the roof lead lined and I had one then, and I hope my maths are right, that is 64 cubic foot and water at 10lb. a gallon and a cubic foot will hold six and a quarter gallons then the total weight of a tank this size is about one and three quarters of a ton. The local water company in the early 1800's reckoned that

the average daily use of water by these estate houses was about 100 gallons, so there was a lot of pumping to do. Water was heated on the kitchen range and carried upstairs for all ablutions such as a wash basin and jug on a marble topped washstand and for Victorian hip baths in the bedroom. Water was then carried down in the slop pail along with the contents of the commode and chamber pot to be disposed in the solitary outside water closet after 1870 and before that into the tank that the night soil men would empty.

The layout of these estate houses differed but a lot had an up the steps canopied front door and when opened revealed a long fairly wide hall with a staircase in front of you with invariably a mahogany staircase rail. To the side of the stairs, under the well, would be another staircase leading to the basement. Some houses had another set of stairs, the back stairs to the servants quarters. The dining room was opposite the bottom of the main stairs and the withdrawing room on the same side but nearer to the front door. Passing the stairway to the basement it led to another door opening onto the morning room. In the dining room was a dumb waiter that dropped into the kitchen. The first floor rooms were high and spacious and often the wall separating the dining room and the withdrawing room could be opened, allowing the two rooms to become one for social gatherings. The furnishing of these houses would have been a modern antique dealer's dream. These kind of occupants did not buy their furniture from M.F.I. Most of the houses I went into had quality furniture, Waring and Gillows kind of things, some antique French, especially the hall tables and bookcases, lots of Indian and Persian furniture and carpets; I have been told off more than once for standing on a carpet when really and truly it ought have been a wall hanging. There were cabriole legged chairs so fragile looking that one was reluctant to sit on them, overmantles with figurines by Meissen, Doulton, Wedgwood, and objets d'art of every description were evident in some of these Pittville houses as perhaps they were in other exclusive dwellings in Cheltenham.

Seeing that female servants were not allowed to continue in service once they were married, very often the mistress gave them a present on leaving, a present from the house, quite possibly a piece of furniture such as a chest of drawers, I say that because I have known such recipients from overhearing gossip from my mother's colleagues who themselves had been servants. One had a lovely piece of Chippendale furniture, another a 19th. Century Dutch painting that was to fetch some £600 at auction some thirty years later. Many expensive items of jewellery, china, and early Sheffield E.P.N.S. coffee sets turned up at the numerous church bazaars and during the time I was involved in public address systems I was often in attendance at these functions and could recognise the local antique people and jewellers looking for bargains.

So far in our drift around Pittville we have got as far as Segrave Place. Let us cross Wellington Road now and enter Pittville Lawn. I am not going to bother you with all the various residents but I think it is right to name at least one famous family who lived in Pittville Lawn. In 1846 two of the three surviving sons of the Scottish National Poet Robbie Burns came to Cheltenham and lived at 4 Berkeley Street and afterwards at number 3 as well. The elder son William Nichol Burns had married in India and had no children and resided in Cheltenham until he died in 1872. He was Lt. Col. W. N. Burns of the East Indian Army. The younger son, James Glencaim Burns, was a Major, later a Colonel, again of the East Indian Army, and had been married twice, a daughter from each marriage and these also lived at 4 Berkeley Street. The two step sisters were Sarah and Annie. Sarah had married in 1847 in the parish Church in Cheltenham and had seven children but only four survived. Sometime after the Burn's sons had died, James in 1865 and William in 1872, both in Cheltenham, we find the two stepsisters, along with Sarah's unmarried daughter Margaret, moving to 7 Pittville Lawn, now 47. About 1900, the first granddaughter to die was Sarah on the 12th. July 1909. The great granddaughter Margaret died, aged 57 years, on December 15th. 1917 and Annie lived on until she was 97 and died on the 10th. May 1925. All three ladies being buried in Charlton Kings Cemetery, Canon P.M.C. Johnstone taking the service for Annie. He was the priest who baptised me, mother having lived a few doors down from no.7. A Gloucestershire Local History Bulletin of spring 1981 gives a detailed account of the Burns family in Cheltenham written by Tina Pulford.

Pittville Lawn extends up to Pittville Gardens, and almost at the end by Central Cross Drive, an Indian Princess used to live there complete with a Mosque at the end of the garden and just a little bit further opposite the end of the Lawn there used to be and probably still is, a grand pair of gates in the garden railings, I have never seen them open and I do not know why they were put there they were always used as a backdrop for advertising products like cars. My imagination leads me to believe that the Pitt

estate put them there as the beginning of a grand entrance to the Gardens, a drive down to the bridge and then up the sweeping central drive to the Pump Rooms. That central drive has long disappeared hence the redundancy of the gates, I wonder?

Let us retrace our steps for a moment and have a quick run round Pittville Circus and Pittville Circus Road, We enter this area with Tower Lodge on our right and in front of us is a circular area, railed and hedged, about an acre supporting a couple of ponies. It was a plot of ground designated for the houses in the Circus for the inhabitants to perambulate around; like all other spaces of greenery it was gated and only the residents had a key for entry.

We then enter into Pittville Circus Road and these houses are large, some with coach houses and mews cottages at the bottom of their half acre plots, the first on the right being St. Anne's occupied by the Church of England Sisters of Mercy. Their stables are entered in All Saints Road by the Church and their ground went back that far. In the early 1900's Canon Gardner, the then Vicar of All Saints, exorcised a ghostly figure at St. Anne's, a lady in grey that used to be seen in the grounds by what was known as Bell, Book and Candle. I do not know if this is still practised in the Church of England, but the Roman Catholic Church dropped the rite of exorcism of bodily evil spirits in 1972.

Walking along the right hand path of this Road we come to Haddo, the Rest Home For Distressed Gentlefolk that I have mentioned before, then Worcester House and Sunnyside, a house that was used as a maternity home in the second world war. It was locally known as the telephone exchange as the Matron used to ring a handbell each time a birth took place. Then we have Berkhamstead, now an independent school and we cross the road to make our way back. In my boyhood, on our right would have been a large orchard going back to Whaddon Road with a large house in the middle of it. Having turned the corner at Hewlett Road we are now heading back towards Pittville Circus. The houses are still large but with a walled back lane entered halfway along this side going to the rear of these houses that have stables at the back and this lane also leads to the big house in the orchard.

Back in Pittville Circus Road we are still passing large houses and the rear of these are entered by a back lane opposite All Saints Road, Nanny Goats Alley, and these house also had stables at the rear. The whole of this road was occupied by gentry both civil and military. There was certainly money here, and my folk told me that when All Saints Church was consecrated in the 1860's the first Christmas collection plate topped £1000, and the following Easter £400, the Easter collection was always for the priest and at that time an agricultural labourer earned between ten shillings and twelve and sixpence a week; £8 a week was not to be sneezed at. Of course, this is all hearsay, I am not a researcher and cannot verify this.

Passing the end of Nanny Goats Alley going into the Circus and heading for Prestbury Road there was a house on our right that was demolished and a pair of Art Nouveau houses built that in their turn were demolished and a block of flats erected. Quickly heading to Prestbury Road and crossing over it we enter the Pittville Estate again this time up Albert Road.

On our left is a house that was used as a rehabilitation centre for Belgian soldiers during the Great War and they in turn did their drills in Whaddon Recreation Ground. On our right we have the beginnings of Pittville Crescent and this Crescent again has an almost oval piece of ground railed and hedged for the key holders to stroll in. In the Crescent two old ladies resided together, I think they were sisters, and they were known for their riding of high kicker bicycles, high handle bars, chain and dress guards and bars on the rear wheel cones to accommodate a passenger, they were also known for playing cards each evening and it was common knowledge that when they were out riding the one in front had been the winner the previous evening.

All the grass squares in Pittville were kept in immaculate condition by the estate staff before 1890 and by the Corporation staff attached to the estate afterwards. During the summer months the lawns were mown by motor mower when I was a boy, but I am told that, years before, donkey drawn gang mowers were used and I suppose that in the very early years it must have been done with scythes. However, in my young days the verges were cut using a Pennsylvania six bladed push mower that could cut grass four inches high and one could work all day with such an instrument

without tiring. Halfway along on the left hand side of Albert Road was another nursery garden run by a Mr. Hamlin, now built on of course, with modern houses.

We are now at the foot of the hill standing on the bridge over Wyman's brook, still Albert Road but known as Constitutional Hill by the old folk. On our left there was a large house called Ellerslie in its own grounds that went from the bottom of the hill right up to East Approach drive and back to the Pump Room but of course, a lot of the ground has been sold off and built on, the rear wall still exists and can be seen on walking up to the Pump Room. On the right from the bottom of the hill was just farmland belonging to Starveall and Carter's farms.

However, before the second world war, on this farm land the Pate's Grammar School for Girls was built. They transferred from their old school on the corner of Margaret Road and North Place, but kept the junior playing field by West Drive and on this playing field I was to see in May 1940 about fifty men with broomsticks who had answered Anthony Eden's call to arms for the local defence volunteers, (Look, Duck and Vanish.); the broomsticks were substitutes for rifles in the drill training. Carters Farm became Cleevemont estate, but right at the top of Albert Road on the left was the grounds of Rosehill House, the house itself being in Evesham Road, it was a former home of Lord Ellenborough, the only Viceroy of India ever to be brought back when he started a war in India. He also lived at Southam De La Bere and died in 1871 and is in a mortuary chapel at Oxenton Church.

If we come back to the foot of Constitutional Hill we can enter Pittville Gardens through a little gate, that is if we have a key, for it was for residents only. These Gardens are bounded by from Central Cross Drive, Pittville Lawn, the back wall of Ellerslie up to East Approach Drive, the Pump Rooms, West Approach Drive and the down Evesham Road to Central Cross Drive. Railed all the way round with a kiosk in Central Cross Drive where one could gain entrance if not a key holder for two pence on weekdays and free on Sundays. It was only open between sunrise and sunset and a bell would be rung just before sunset. The Pump room was opened in 1830, Pitt died in 1833 and the estate remained in the family until purchased by the Corporation in 1890.

My grandfather William John Hamblin was the custodian of the Pump Rooms before 1890 and lived there; my aunt Edith was born there, in 1890. He must have been taken into service by the Corporation because he retired from them in 1934.

Here was a man who had left schooling at Prestbury in the 1870's at the age of twelve wearing his mother's lace up boots to commence work as a live in gardener's boy in Queens Road Cheltenham, to be eventually employed by the Pitt Estate and then in 1902 build Whaddon Park and Recreation Ground, with one of the finest displays of Victorian floral art, all the trees planted by himself and one of the lawns a veritable oasis of shade with Lombardy poplars pollarded and then allowed to grow at right angles until they met one another, top growth being pruned each year. He could scythe around the railings in the park without hearing metal against metal. He never took a day off or a holiday, much to my grandmother's disgust, and he would never allow a relief gardener to touch his park. He always purchased his own seed and propagated all his own plants, which must have pleased the Corporation because it saved them money and they certainly allowed him a free hand in most things, like arranging a summer band concert in the park with Horace Teague, Musical Director of Cheltenham and his Cheltenham Military Orchestra.

As a trained St John Ambulance man he held a surgery every morning at the Lodge to advise people whether to call for a Doctor, Nurse or Chemist, the reason for this is that medical treatment had to be paid for and any advice on such matters could save a few pounds. Any misdemeanour in the park, like standing on the swings, he would ban the culprit for a week and in later years elderly people who knew him would come up to me and say that the children respected him for the rules of behaviour that he laid down. Saturday at dusk all the swing and roundabouts were locked with chains and the park was closed until Monday at 9am. It was Victorian England and in Cheltenham we were always thirty years behind the rest of the world; there was no singing, or whistling or running on the Sabbath.

His only means of transport was a penny farthing hung up in his backyard. I never saw him ride it or any other bicycle. I only wish our family had kept it, because we lived across the road then and could easily have housed it when he retired.

Along with my own father he taught me all I know about the Horticultural world. I knew the rudiments of Pythagoras's Theorem long before I had ever heard of him, demonstrated by three pieces of string or multiples of three, four and five with five being the hypotenuse to obtain a right angle for flower beds, football and cricket pitches. He was a man conversant with horticultural Latin though he had never been taught a Latin phrase. There is much I could say about my grandfather but we are supposed to be walking around Pittville. I will just say in interest, the day he retired in March 1934, the long drive from the Lodge to the bronze Letheren fountain was illuminated by a multitude of candles in coloured beehive shaped glass jars borrowed from the Corporation and these glass jars had been used over a century before to illuminate the Long walk from Montpellier to the Parish Church.

Back again in Pittville Gardens, and I apologise for the diversions, but when one is walking around these things come up from time to time, you know, in 1890 there was a long drive from the lake up to the Pump Rooms but that has all gone now and turfed over. Also, the Boa Constrictor has gone that was on show in the Pump Room dome and required sixpence to see it. Granddad used to say that once a year half a ton of Epsom Salts was added to the well to keep up its laxative quality, I cannot verify that.

Behind the Pump Room were heated greenhouses necessary for the Victorian planting of various summer plants and as a boy I used to delight in visiting the long herbaceous border that ran all along the back wall of Ellerslie House. It was always planted for the seasons so on any visits winter or summer there were sights to enjoy. The border was deep, allowing for a gradation of plants and must have kept at least one gardener occupied throughout the year.

As far as I know the lake on the Garden side was never used for boating, it was for ice skating, and I can remember going to see such an event on a cold winter's night to see the skaters, it was lit and the Corporation men on skates were brushing the lake with besoms.

So we continue around Pittville Estate, I do not know when the boating lake came into being or when it was acquired by Joseph Pitt, if I researched it I might find out but I am going on oral memories, I know that the boating lake area was owned at one time by a Robert Capper J.P. who lived at Marle Hill house, whether Pitt acquired it when the enclosures came in in the early 1800's when he got his 189 acres, I do not know but the layout of the Park and Gardens must have been envisaged before building started. I do know that the Estate owners became bankrupt and never completed their plans, but what those plans were I never found out.

The boating lake was just that, as the name suggests, trees mounds of earth grassed over, a rustic bridge, an island and gravel paths around it, no banks of floriferous shrubs, no rhododendrons because the soil was not acid, very much a lime based clay hence the name Marle Hill. The two lakes are joined by two tunnels under Evesham Road one for the lakes, ie. Wymans Brook and the other a pedestrian walkway that was used as an air raid shelter for the girls of Pate's Grammar School during the second world war; they carried along with their gasmask a newspaper to sit on.

Now we are in Evesham Road. How far did Pitt's 189 acres go, it was probably cut off above Hillcourt Road: on the other side the land was owned by Robert Capper. Did Pitt buy it from Capper? Some of Capper's land was covenanted anyway and not released until Cleveland's Estate was built after the last war. Pitt was a clever but devious man, the richest at the time in Cheltenham, who purchased land all over the place, not only in Gloucestershire.

Three years before he died he gave the land for St. Paul's Church, the first free evangelical church in Cheltenham' to the delight of Cheltenham's Pope, the Rev. Francis Close, Rector of Cheltenham and future Dean of Carlisle. My cynical mind says I wonder what Pitt got out of that? We know that the ground below the boating lake was part of the 189 acres right down to Clarence square which was built as the name suggests as a square of houses with a large plot of hedged and railed grassland with a diagonal gravel path running through it, all for the enjoyment of the keyholding residents in the square.

At the Monson road end there was a wooden gate that straddled the road and like Pittville Gates would be closed once a year to indicate the privacy of the estate, this gate was there until the last war when it was probably taken down as a blackout hazard.

Walking around this square a couple of memories come to hand, I am pretty certain that in order to cross the road by West Drive there was a pavement's width of stone sets. These stone sets must have been let into the road when the road was only puddle surfaced like the rest of the estate, ie. limestone gravel and clay rolled into an hard surface that would be dusty in summer and muddy in winter, hence with stone sets and a crossing keeper ladies could cross the road without soiling their dresses. Victorian ladies along with the bustle were prone to wearing long dresses and coats and it is said that a sight of a well turned ankle could arouse the natural enthusiasm of a man. It was not uncommon for the bustle to be weighted at the hem with old penny size lead weights and also for the hem to be reinforced with bristle edged fabric. I have in my time had both these items in my old button tin. Thus ladies in their perambulations literally traversed the roads and swept them at the same time.

Turning left out of Clarence Square we come upon another almost identical to Clarence, but this square is called Wellington and Wellington Road emanates from it right up to Prestbury Road. Both these squares housed as was custom, gentle folk, all had back lanes with the odd stable or mews cottage. Right in the corner of Wellington Square was a building called Dunalley Lodge and I often wondered if that was the entrance to the home of Lord Dunalley that is now in St, Paul's Road called North Lodge; it is on an 1805 map with no other houses around it. Lord Dunalley, whose house is at right angles to the road, was an Irish Peer and there is a story about him that could be apocryphal; his butler was accused of stealing Lady Dunalley's jewels, duly tried at Gloucester and sentenced to death and that he was hanged publicly at the gibbet at the end of Marsh Lane. The story goes that Peggy Broad's uncle took him down and gave him a decent burial, Peggy Broad was a man and a master at the Boy's Grammar School and used to recount the incident to his charges. If it occurred it must have been before 1868 because that was the time of the last public hanging in England.

Well, while we are talking about hangings, there was another foul death on the Estate about the turn of the century in the 1900s; a woman was murdered in Murder Lane now called Wellesley Road by the playing field. She was found by a boy scout and the murderer was a postman. On the wall by the site carved into it was a little cross, it could be there now, it certainly was seventy five years ago when I was a boy.

I have not told you all there is to know about the Estate, but there are publications about, written by eminent historians, all I have told you is memories of mine and tales gleaned from my parents and grand parents. To me it was a boyhood memory of horses and carriages, of tales of Mr. Theobald and his four in hand and Mrs. King turner with hers coming down the Promenade with an ear trumpet as big as the one off our windup gramophone, and on one occasion, probably hired for the day, a fully loaded stage coach coming round Pittville Circus.

I hope these few memories will be of interest.