

THE BEGINNING OF PEACE

Unheard music drifting by them on the water
they paraded the piano like their high ideals,
bore it as a banner to the gardens
on that bright and moonlit night
and let the jazz man play sweet airs
above the grass, the current riffing
on their circle chants, spinning in its dance
the little web of universes
they were evolving
all perspectives of possibilities
stirring in honky tonk reveries
that defeated distant wars, kept at bay
by bands unthought of, Saturday
stalls dispensing wholesomeness,
fellowship handmade and tie-died,
the music makers, dreamers of dreams
consecrated this ground for peace.

Christine

I come to the Peace Festival every year – its something different. I have been coming since it started – to begin with there were more stalls to buy things – they don't do any of that sort of thing now, like pictures and ornaments. I still like the atmosphere, and I enjoy trying all the foreign foods. They have some good music too.

Daniel

I come every year to the Peace Festival – I enjoy the atmosphere and the music, and the mix of stalls. All my brothers and sisters come too.

We came down here for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations. There was a big party here – I was about 16 – there was music and entertainment for the children, and everyone seemed happy.

Sydney

Sunny early Peace Festivals – when there were genuine craft stalls.

I have many memories of running the Amnesty Stall at the Peace Festival. The wind was always a problem – leaflets flapping or flying until we resorted to stones, mini sandbags or sheets of glass under which they lay.

I remember the sun, which brought the crowds of all ages,... and the rain sometimes torrential when I was glad we were near the large horse chestnut trees, many of which have now gone.

Also Millenium in the Park in 2000 – a Pentecost service with hundreds of people from all churches in Leamington. The sun shone that day and we all had a great time.

FLOODS

The waters brought the gardens to the street,
and from the sweet shop shoals
of bon-bons, sherbet fizzing into pop,
tide marbled, slicked, awash
with tears, a caucus race of stationers,
solicitors, cars half-submerged in Euston Place.
In Dormer Place, tarmac lifted, driftwood,
treasured flotsam. The bandstand proud like Ararat,
a coracle aground while all around
the gushes and the rushes of the Leam
grumbled through the trembling arches,
trumpeting like elephants
stomping on the beds. What withstood?
Old trees held firm like main masts
in a storm, though buildings gulped
and shuddered. In the borders,
wrack and coral beneath the waves,
smallest flowers kept their heads down,
overlooked, until the flood abated,
beaching them, a carpet,
dry on the river shore.

Mike

In 1998 the gardens were flooded when the river burst its banks after continuous rains the days before and was flooded up to about four feet. And I remember a lady floating in a large bin in the middle of the gardens, with firemen trying to rescue her with difficulty. I still wonder how she got into that state. Across the road in St Peter's it was two foot high, the water and it was Good Friday the afternoon. The service had to be cancelled, but late that evening the waters went down and they went back to the high water level on the riverbank. We had a meeting that night and decided to hold the main Easter Saturday service at eight pm. So I got onto the Coventry and Stratford radio to broadcast, asking for volunteers to come and help us to get the church back into shape on the Saturday morning. About a 150 turned up from all over the area, and work started very early. All the heavy benches and items were taken out of the church and pressure washed in the car park. All the volunteers did not want to rest so pizzas were ordered by the dozen and sent in boxes, cooked and still hot. We just managed to win and start on time for the service. A well done effort by all helpers. There was a second flood a few years ago, but not much damage was done and the water did not quite come so high as it only reached the road and Dormer Place.

Vivienne

I have to say, it was magical. It was amazing. I mean, you know, water practically lapping up to Queen Victoria's statue. And you know the estate agencies along Euston Place probably

flooded. The basements certainly flooded. The first I realised of it was Good Friday, and I knew that my local health food shop, Gaia[sp], was probably open on Friday and I walked down to see if I could buy a loaf of bread. And I saw this water and I thought a main must have burst. A local postman who lives on Russell Terrace, my street, said, "Oh", you know, "it's like this all the way." I said "Ah!", you know, by the time you got to Gaia[sp] you couldn't, I mean it was up to your thighs. And I walked around, I think, I tried to walk around. I think George Street was flooded, but I got to the little, you know, bridge over to the Jephson Gardens, and that was pretty much, the water was pretty much up. There was just a bit of it that was showing above, above the watermark. And people were just, you know, walking. They left their cars away outside and they were walking around, talking to each other, it was like a holiday. And I was very sorry for the people who lived in basements on George Street. And my friend who lived at the far end of Leam Terrace, facing onto Willes Meadow, her ground floor was flooded and she lost all kinds of things. And Bath Street, the shops they had very bad insurers, and the insurers on Bath Street. My friend on Leam Terrace, everything was replaced, on Bath Street they didn't replace the carpets. And the carpets –I don't know if I'm speaking loudly enough- the carpets went on stinking for years. I'm mean, just awful. But I remember that it was walking to the place that overlooks the Pump Room Gardens, where the old library is.

James

A: Was it 1932 when we had the floods?

SH: *Oh, I'm not sure.*

VS: *There was a flood in the 1930s.*

A: I remember being in the Pump Room Gardens, watching the water come closer and closer and closer.

SH: *Really. Right. Well, I remember the floods a bit later on.*

A: Oh, that would be later

SH: *That was about 13 years ago.*

A: It was quite exciting in 1932 because there wasn't much excitement in those days.

SH: *Right. Yes.*

A: Oh, the cinema had just been built then and there was some shops by the cinema and there was a sweet shop and as the water gradually came up and up and up, all the sweets were floating in the street.

SH: *Goodness!*

B: Did you pick them up?

SH: *So, the whole of that area was flooded in 1932?*

A: Yeah. I think it went as up as far as the town hall.

SH: *That's quite a way isn't it.*

A: I think that was 1932.

B: I can remember that. And that shoe shop was absolutely flooded out wasn't it.

THE BANDS PLAYED ON

Daisy and me, how we waltzed through the years
till the tune was done
I'd glide 'cross the grass with my arm round my lass
in the Sunday sun
There was cakewalk and foxtrot, the jive and the twist.
Three beats to the bar always suited us best.
And the bands...and the bands
...and the bands...and the bands?
Well, the bands played on.

Christine

What's your favourite memory of the gardens?

I was born in Leamington in 1948. As a little girl, as a Sunday afternoon treat, my sister, two brothers, Mum and Dad would come to the gardens to listen to the military band playing in the bandstand. They had deckchairs around for the adults and the children sat on the grass – I really enjoyed it.

Mike

My favourite memories in the gardens were watching people enjoy themselves and music in the bandstand. There was not much television around at that time and sitting in a deckchair in the sun, admiring the Linden Arches, which are being remanufactured at this moment and should be back in place very soon I hope.

James

SH: *Right [laughs] What do you remember about listening to the band in the gardens?*

B: What do you remember about listening to the bands in the gardens?

A: Taking a book, read, sit and listen to the music. I spent my half day there. I had a friend who didn't have the same day off as I did, so on my half day I was on my own, so I used to go and listen to the band.

SH: *Do you remember what kind of music they used to play?*

A: Oh, I can't remember that far back, what they were playing. That's going back, what, 80 years.

B: Was it military music?

A: Oh yes, military, yes.

SH: *And how often did they play?*

A: Once a fortnight. They played all the week, for the fortnight, and they played in the Pump Rooms in the afternoon and they played in the Jephsons in the evening. But they always played in the Jephsons all day on Sunday.

SH: *Was that just in summer or was it all year?*

A: Oh, no, no, only in the summer.

SH: *Were there a lot of people there?*

A: Yeah, There wasn't much else to do then, was there. I mean I'm going back 70 years.

SH: *I've got another picture here, I've got another picture here of people dancing.*

A: Oh yes, I can remember the country dancing

B: Did a lot of people go?

[talking amongst themselves]

C: Well my mother and father used to go every Sunday afternoon.

SH: *Was that to the gardens?*

C: To the gardens, they listened to the bands.

[talking amongst themselves]

SH: *Did you go with them to the gardens?*

C: Well I used to go to them eventually, yes. They always used to have a deckchair there and I used to join them.

SH: *Did you have to pay for the deck chairs.*

C: Do you know, I can't remember, but I think we might have done.