

Walter Moorcroft - Growing up in Hem Heath in the 1920s



“ I was born on 12 February 1917 when the outcome of First World War was in balance. My parents had married in April 1913 and bought a house called Glendair in Albert Drive, which was to be my home until I married in 1946.

During the 1920s there were no road names or street lamps in Trentham. The village shop was Littler's at Hem Heath Post Office and was run by Mr and Mrs Littler who sold everything from groceries to haberdashery - their son Dick owned a taxi with a shiny bonnet. Further down the lane was Bickerton's which sold every kind of biscuit displayed in large square tins with glass lids.

My sister and I went for long walks along the canal bank with strict instructions to stand aside when a horse drawn barge went past. Water rats swam in the canal and kingfishers provided flashes of colour as they darted to and fro. We caught sticklebacks with jam jars attached to string and had picnics by the stream that took the overflow from the canal.

Another area for jam jar fishing was the pond in the middle of the "froggie" fields which lay between Leyfield Road and the canal. It was a meadow which became a sea of buttercups and king cups and was alive with frogs in due season.

Parallel with the canal was Barlaston Road. It was unsurfaced and the rare passing of a car was followed by a cloud of dust. There was a bridge where the stream from the canal ran through a brick lined tunnel which we could run through. Next there was a farm with a large duck pond beside the road. Beyond that was a ford where another stream sparkled its way across the road.

We travelled to school in Stone by train. On the half mile walk to Trentham Station we passed Arthur Ainsworth's farm on the right then over the canal bridge to the forge where the blacksmith worked with the doors open so that you could see the glow of the furnace, hear the clang of hammer on anvil and smell the fitting of the hot shoe to the horse's hoof. Adjoining the smithy was a garage that belonged to Walter Ainsworth, Arthur's brother. Walter was very large and round and a jack of all trades, who served us well in later years when he developed his taxi business.

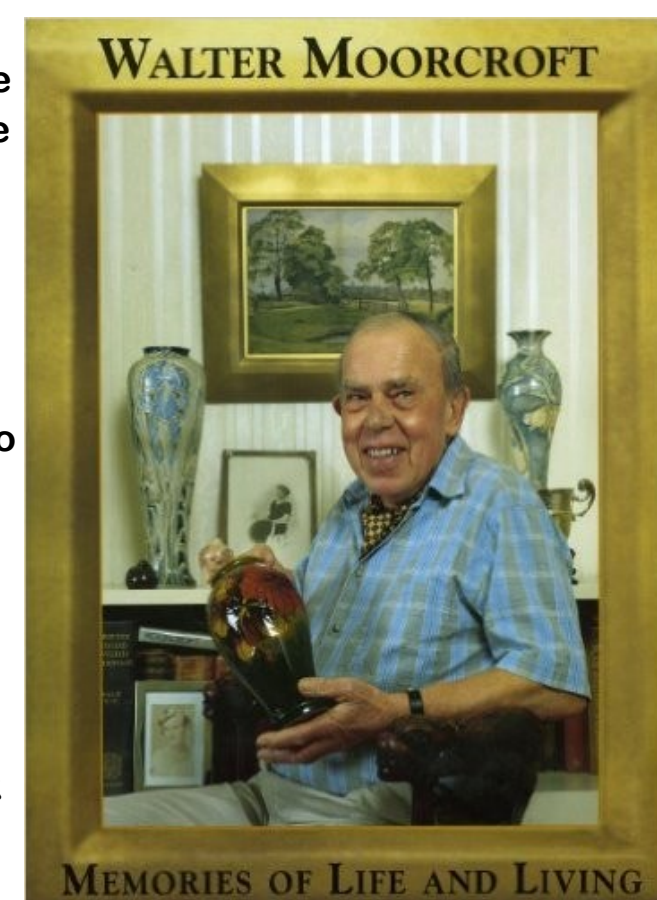
During 1922-23 Trentham was, for the first time, linked with Stoke by petrol driven transport in the form of charabancs, which ran from the road leading to Trentham Gardens. These had canvas hoods and five bench seats each with a separate door. The conductor collected the fares while standing on the outside running board.

At Trentham Gardens the lake was the great attraction. We sometimes hired a rowing boat and rowed out to the island. To save carrying picnics we often went to the tearooms in the orangery. In the 1920s it had a sandy gravelled floor and orange trees growing in square wooden containers. We were usually served by Mrs Tansley whose family had been tenants of the Duke for many years. She wore a black dress and white apron and a starched white hat.

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Thank you to Richard Dennis Publications for kind permission to quote from Walter Moorcroft's book "Memories of Life and Living" 1999.

The book is a personal reflection by the renowned potter on his life spanning eight decades.

He died in 2002 aged 85.