

rest of us. We would start at a set distance from the wall (usually the middle of the road), and begin moving towards it as the person 'on' and still facing the wall, would call out *L-O-N-D-O-N – LONDON!* loudly, and then turn around to face us quickly, trying to catch us still moving. If we were caught moving, we were 'out'. We had to be still as *statues* when the caller turned around, only moving when he or she turned back to the wall and called *L-O-N-D-O-N – LONDON!* once again. The first to reach the wall would take over the caller roll.

About a month before bonfire night we kids in the street collected the materials for a 'street bonfire'. The 'gang', gathered fuel for the bonfire which was built and lit on a bombed building site, where we did most of our playing together when out of the house. We would build these bonfires year after year; often they would be up to 12 feet in height. No one seemed to mind in those days, in fact we were encouraged to build them. Rival street gangs often sabotaged our work by stealing our fire materials or, as I remember one year, the gang from Jakeman Road, set fire to our bonfire just prior to the big day. There was no organized firework display as such; we just let off our own personal fireworks when we were ready. The boys liked to put 'bangers' under dustbin lids to see them lift off the ground with the force of the explosion. My brother (Shay) hurt himself one year, when a 'banger' went-off in his hand.

I remember that our house had a large bay window like a shop and displayed flags for Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. At Christmas this window was filled with an enormous Christmas tree. When we wanted coal for our fire to keep us warm we had to go to the coal yard in Balfour Street. My friends and I joined the Guides and Brownies in Tindal Street, and later the youth club using a large room (in Lime Grove?) behind the Arts School on Moseley road. We also went to the Moseley Road Baths across from the Arts school, for a bath ready to dress up and go out at the weekend. The attendants would fill the bath to half way with scalding hot water; we would spend most of our allotted time adding cold water to make our bath bearable.

My first job was at H Monty a firm of seamstresses making dresses. For my job interview I wore a crinoline petty coat under my dress which had been stiffened by soaking it in a bath of sugar and water. During the interview I found out that my dress had been made at Monty's".

Our thanks to Jim and Elizabeth. Next newsletter will feature a "special" on Shay Bartley and his wonderful photographs.

NEXT MEETING: 24TH FEBRUARY

SEND IN THE CLOWNS

David Vaughan visits to talk about Clowns and Clowning. In 2008 Calthorpe Park was the scene of controversy as clowns were warned against blowing their own trumpets. Zippo's Circus was told by officials that the show could not go on unless the clowns dropped the musical section. The circus fell foul of the Licensing Act 2003 which forbids the playing of live music without a licence.



Proprietor Martin Burton called for circuses to be exempt from the legislation. He said: *"I'm a big fan of silent comedy but this is nonsense. Live music is an essential part of traditional clowning, and for us to be told that they can't play instruments, is laughable"*. The media added that Balsall Heath was the only place the clowns' trumpeting had faced objections. Conservative MP Peter Luff said: *"When the law silences the clowns, one wonders who the clowns really are"*. Quite.