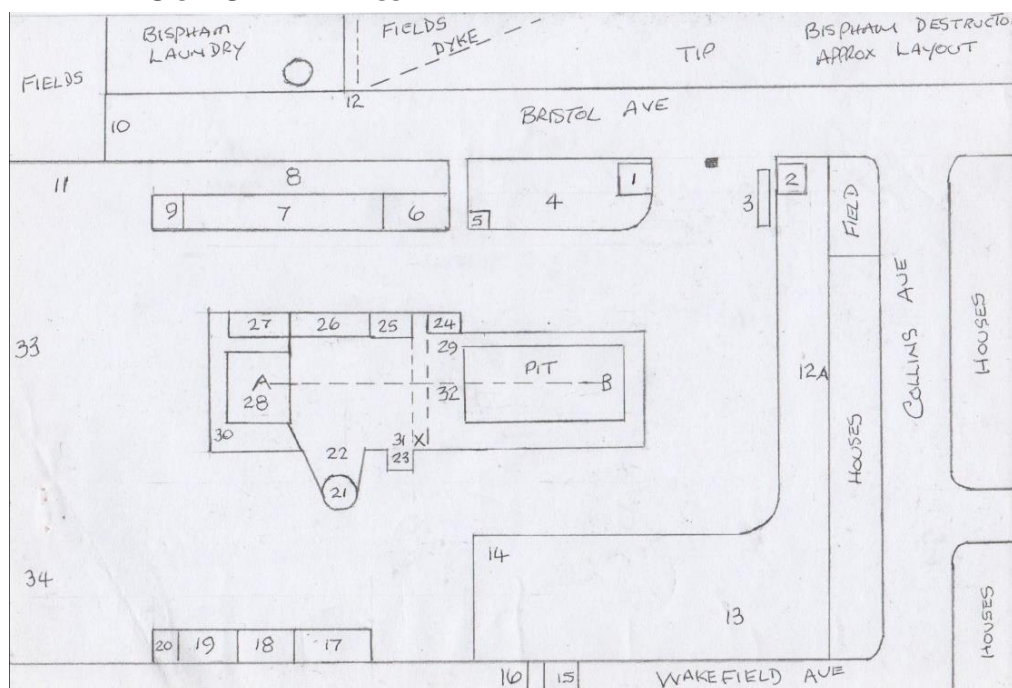


CHAPTER 5 – THE DISSY

THE BISPHAM DESTRUCTOR

The Bispham Destructor, to us it was The Dissy, was built in 1930 and demolished in December 1980. For a lot of kids growing up on my council estate it would be our leisure centre, going in after working hours or at weekends. My main two accomplices to sneak in the destructor were EH and JC. I have produced an approximate layout of the site for reference when telling the stories and my memories of events.

THE LAY OUT OF THE DISSY



1. The manager's house.
2. The booking office.
3. The weigh off grid.
4. The manager's garden.
5. Possibly an electric box room, the only time I got caught in the Dissy I was put in here and locked up for a period of time, I made sure later I would not get caught again.
6. Works canteen.
7. This was an open front building, a garage for all the dustbin wagons to go in and park at night to get recharged as they all ran on batteries, a bit like a milk float today. They were that slow at

moving you could jump on the back and rummage through the paper sacks to see if there were any comics. All paper and cardboard went into the paper room at no 23.

8. Rough shrubbery.
9. Vehicle maintenance depots.
10. The dead end of Bristol Avenue, fenced with barbed wire to keep farm animals in - it did have a farm gate for access and much later a stile so the public could walk to Carleton Crematorium.
11. Very mature trees in this area where we put up many rope swings - these were very handy as you could use them to swing over the fence when being chased.
12. Stile access to the open fields and you could walk around the laundry to the cinder pit, a pond or again on to the crematorium all through the fields.
- 12A. Rough shrubbery up to the back gardens of houses.
13. More mature trees and quite dense, handy for us to hide in plus to see who was about in the destructor yard.
14. The metal scrap dump which had old ovens, bikes, camp bed frames, cans, large drums - just about anything metal. I remember just after the war seeing many soldiers helmets: British, German, rare French ones with the rib on top and the odd American one. I did once find inside the works an American war helmet still with all its leather head gear inside. One pile of scrap on the metal dump was many old sword cases, like a large Scots curved sword with a rim fixed to the top of the sheath or scabbard. I never did see any swords in the destructor to match these cases. We once took an old motorbike out of the Dissy across the road to the tip which in one area had quite a steep slope - we took turns to push the bike to the top then free wheeled down the slope.
15. K W Bodies Coach Building Co, I did work there for a short time later on, the owner Mr Burt Kitchener had some pigsties at the rear, sometimes kids would open the gates and the pigs finished up in the fields nearby.
16. The pigsties.
17. An open front building with two very big machines inside - they looked like they had never been used, some kind of crushing machines, a large circular shape with a centre arm that may have rotated (possibly a cement or concrete mixing machine).
18. Very large open front building full of sand.

19. Very large open front building full of rock salts, used at this time to put on roads in winter to help when it was freezing. In these two open buildings there were many house sparrows and starlings nests inside the roofs, not easy to reach but we did.
20. A small workshop.
21. The very high chimney that vented the very large furnaces - one time in the Dissy the manhole to the inside of the chimney was open, I climbed in and climbed up the metal ladder - not to the top but far enough to be frightened - good job no one locked the man hole cover, I would certainly have gone up in smoke.
22. This was a very large area of brickwork that formed the chimney flues for the furnaces, it was built off ground level so we could very easily climb under and very quickly get dried off when wet, plus we would be out of sight.
23. The paper room - we always looked in to see if we could find interesting books or comics. There were always comics available and I once found a book on toy making which I kept and will tell a story about later. If today I could produce the findings from the paper room, I would be very rich as it contained photo albums containing some very old photographs, some with silk covered greeting cards - both would have antique value. There were very old books big and thick sometimes almost too heavy to hold and open, it is interesting to note that all the doors were sliding doors and were never ever locked.
24. Tin can press room/the armour room - this is the room with various machines inside including some which pressed and bailed tin cans. We found many metal articles in this room - old swords, army bayonets, daggers, sheath knives, small tools etc. Once I found a piece of armour, it was for sure a shoulder piece complete with its leather straps. It was in the armour room that I once got caught and as my punishment the worker locked me in the electric box room no 5. I had made the mistake of not leaving one of the three sliding doors open for a quick escape route. I don't know who gave the name the armour room to this section, but it was the name all the kids used.
25. A small furnace - possibly for smaller items that the public may have dropped off, it was only fed from ground level.
26. This was a very large room filled with a number of electrical motors possibly generating all the electricity to run the whole site,

- it was very noisy and it seemed to be running night and day - remember all the dustbin wagons had to be charged up.
27. One side of the very large main furnace which could be fed from ground level.
 28. The other side of the main furnace connecting to the chimney - this could only be fed from its roof and was made of non-slip metal durbar type steel. It had a flat sheet roof, within the roof were two sliding hatches and when open these were fed by the end of the conveyer belt which brought all the rubbish to be burnt. When the furnace was at its highest temperature the man going onto the roof would no doubt have his steel lined clogs on, in this furnace area there were very long raking tools and large wheelbarrows lying about. It was almost impossible to be in the room at times - when the fires were raked out the burning cinder and ash would be taken in the big barrows and dumped around the yard. The cinder and ash would burn for quite a long time when crushed - this was in the early days of the Dissy and it was dumped across Bristol Avenue to form the tip, I was told that all early car parts were only cinder based. I do remember three areas on Red Bank Road that had cinder covering, some land opposite the fire station and both garages opposite Abbots Coach Park also had cinder, there was never much to find in the furnace room.
 29. A set of steel stairs leading to nowhere - it was much later that I realised these were for the crane driver to access his overhead crane. At the end of working hours, he never left the crane by the stairs - so he must have been able to get out on the opposite side. We always went up these stairs because there were always bits and pieces like toy items on the small landing.
 30. Another set of steel stairs to get to the furnace roof and also to work on the conveyer sorting the rubbish.
 31. Another access to the conveyer which was just a straight up steel ladder, it was the one we always used because it was the start of the conveyer belt - this is where the workmen sorted the rubbish out. They would take out anything of value and place it on a shelf under the conveyor or against the wall - this was the place for finds: lots of broken toys (dinky cars with tyres missing or wheels off), daggers, odd swords, bayonets from the war - you could just about find anything. One day on the conveyer starting end we were seen by a workman on the ground floor (it was possibly the only area you could be seen from below) - he shouted at us, at this time the

conveyer belt was loaded with out of date oranges, so J.C. and I started to chuck them at him. For a while he just dodged out of the way continuing to shout abuse at us, but it was when he disappeared that it was time for us to scarper. We always had a couple of good escape routes – neither were accessible by the workers as they were very narrow. A to B was the line of the conveyer, A through to B the furnace, the overhead crane man would pick up rubbish from the pit and put it into a shredder machine at the start of the conveyer.

32. The shredding machine - I did once climb inside and it was huge. Inside this rotating machine, welded onto the sides of the barrel, were many long spikes - this would not only shred rubbish I think it would dry the rubbish as well - it was a good job nobody set it off when I was inside, I would have finished up perforated before I could get out. By the machine was a small platform which later I realised the crane man accessed to get to his crane cab.

X - A walkway through to both sides of the works without doors.

PIT - This is where commercial wagons were backed up to the edge of the pit to tip rubbish after weighing in at the entrance to the site office. The pit had large sliding doors that could be closed when the weather was bad, keeping rain out of the pit.

33. The rear of the Dissy where the vehicles going around the roads would suck out the rubbish from the road grids, helping to keep the drains clean. That rubbish would be tipped at the back of the Dissy - over the years the tip had created two levels of grounds which were possibly as high as six feet. The rubbish would stink very badly when it was wet - as kids we would never go near it. It was very wet and slushy but after a few days it would dry out and look more like black sand - this is when we would spend many hours digging in it looking for finds e.g., marbles, coins, money and the odd ring. I once found a wrist watch but it was past ever working again. The money was just coppers - half pennies and pennies - on an odd occasion we found a sixpence or brass three pence piece “a thrupenny bit”. We would take home the copper coins and clean them with HP sauce then spend them. This activity was not every kid’s cup of tea, but I did spend a lot of time doing it - even the Dissy workers would come and have a dig.

34. Rough shrubbery.

THE BEST FINDS IN THE DISSY

An unforgettable find was a very large brass coal box which was in good order. My mother had it for many years, she cleaned it until it was sparkling - when I first gave her the box it was covered in green mould. Another prize my mother polished up was a brass ornament which was a bull on a brass plaque. I also found a brass plate the size of a dinner plate with all the signs of the zodiac protruding around the edge of the plate, but I think this is one of the items my father sold at the pawn shop. There was a brass letter rack which hung in my mother's house for years - on the front were three embossed figures of Victorian pipers.

I found a bone handled sheath knife, the type a boy scout would be proud of, it was in top condition and looked like new. I glued fur onto the sheath to give it the look of a Davy Crockett knife, I am pretty sure this again was something sold to the pawn shop. In the Dissy it was possible to find almost anything - items were not always broken, I am sure sometimes things got in there by mistake.

I found a full sized anvil on the scrap iron dump, I somehow managed to get it home to Bangor Avenue - how I am not sure, but once I had manhandled it out of the Dissy I may have put it on my trolley and wheeled it home. It was in our back garden for years, what I was going to do with it I don't know. Years later I think my father gave it to the rag and bone man. If he did, then the rag and bone man would have had a full load to push as it was very heavy.

The very best thing I ever found was when E.H. and I were on the conveyor and E.H. picked up a black leather case about 12" long, 6" wide and about 2" thick. It looked like a jewellery box and it was locked. We took it home to his house and into the back garden shed - we were just about to try and open it when his dad came into the shed asking what we were doing. He saw the case and instantly knew we had been in the Dissy - he took the case and after a short while he opened it. I had about 10 seconds to glimpse what was inside it as Mr H. shut it again very quickly. What I saw was a white lining of silk, laid on it was a silver looking dagger with small balls on the top of the handle with a German swastika sign laid on the balls, also two very ornate jewel like badges again with the swastika mounted on them, all of it was gleaming and brand new. Today I would say these items were to be worn on a dress uniform of a distinguished high ranking officer at special ceremonies, no doubt it will have finished up in

the pawn shop – I am sure that the value of that case today would be quite exceptional.

Today I find it quite comical that the recycling centre on Bristol Avenue, which is the same site as the old Dissy, has a shop selling items that the workers sort out of the recycling skips. They are doing what we did as kids 70 years ago. Also, I believe that lots of councils are going back to incinerating rubbish - there is a saying “do it right the first time”.

I once found a gorilla head and shoulder piece which would have been part of a theatrical costume outfit. It was so real looking with glass eyes and a growling expression showing what looked like real teeth and was much too big to sit on my shoulders. I took it home upstairs to my bedroom and stood it on a chair, I put a lit candle inside and it brought the eyes to life - it was quite frightening. I later set it up with the lit candle and covered it with a sheet and invited my brother Norman to the bedroom, it was night time so it was very dark. I was not present, but I heard the scream, he came flying down the stairs and into the back garden - when I asked what the problem was, he could hardly speak, he was petrified. I would have then told him that it was just a set up I had done on him - it was a long time before I was forgiven. Thinking about it today it was a bit over the top for a casual prank.

In the destructor we found many old fashioned storm lamps, some would be okay but usually the glass globe was missing. On one occasion I found one in full working order – it just needed filling with paraffin in the bottom tank and a new rope wick. I had one in my garden shed for years - I could always buy a wick from Mr Singleton's the ironmongers on Red Bank Road, he sold most do it yourself items like nails, screws and wicks.

One year at the Dissy there was a delivery of full size wooden profile army rifles - there were possibly two to three hundred of them. Later I found out that they had been made for the home guard to use to practise drills marching. When the enemy approached it was halt who goes there - stop or I will club you with my gun – joke, the home guard did do a wonderful job during the war.

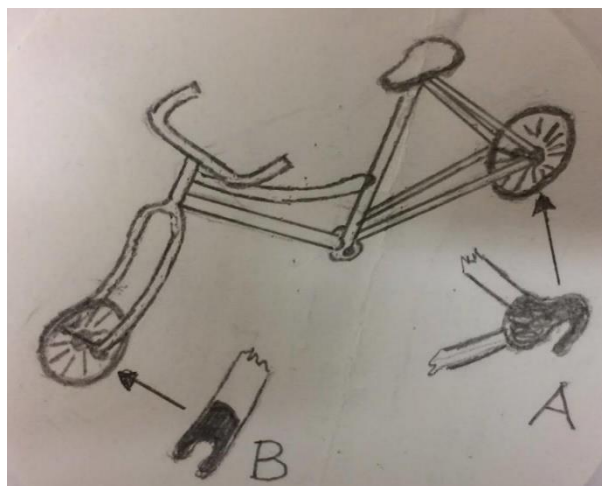
When I grew a little older, I would go into the Dissy and collect orange boxes, strip them down and use them with other bits of wood to make dens in our back garden and later a wooden shed. Many orange boxes came

to the Dissy although orange box wood was very brittle which made it difficult to nail through.

More finds at the Dissy were the 'Jolly Black Man' cast iron money boxes. When you pressed a lever on the back, the eyes and tongue went down and the arm raised to put a coin in the mouth. Today these are very rare as an original antique – in the Dissy they did show up quite a lot but were usually broken or had missing bits, although I did once find one that still had its arm in place.

SCOOTERS

On the iron dump there were always old bike frames, prams and a choice of small wheels - we took wheels off prams to make our trolleys and the small wheels to make our bike scooters. To make these you took a bike frame, preferably a lady's, as there was no cross bar, plus two pram wheels. Next, I needed a couple of 6 inch nails or similar iron rods or long thin bolts. I now had the parts to make my first bike. I stripped off all the bits like the brakes and knocked out the cotter pins this released the chain wheel and pedal arrangements. On the back of the bike frame the lugs where the wheel went were the shape at A and the front fork of the bike were shape B.



You found a piece of steel rod to act as an axle, put it through the wheels and lugs and then hammered the lug to grip the rod. This then held the wheel in place giving you a scooter - you just pushed it along putting a foot where the chain clog had been. You removed the chain cog and pedal if there was still one on the bike frame, leaving just the small axle.

There were many glass slides - two pieces of glass with celluloid glued between them showing photos of various images. I was told later that they were used in the magic lantern (later called a slide projector) to reflect onto a screen. In the Dissy paper room we found many comics, there were the 'Dandy', the 'Beano' and 'Film Fun' - to name a few. There was also the 'Rover', a comic for older kids which had more reading in it. I often found the Christmas comic annuals which were usually battered - I never had a new one as they were too expensive for my mum.

You very rarely saw glass bottles in the Dissy as these had a return value - if you took a pop bottle back to the shop you bought it from you would get one or two pence return on it.