

Redditch in the 1980s



Church Hill Local Centre in the late 1970s

Image from the RLHS archives

I moved to Redditch in 1981 with my wife and one year old daughter. We bought a brand new house in Church Hill, on a developing estate. In fact, we were the first to move onto the estate and our house was next to the four show homes. We spent the next two years living on a building site.

Like much of Redditch in the 1980s everything was new. The Church Hill Shopping Centre had a pond with a fresh green lawn all around it. There was a supermarket, post office, pharmacy, chippy, barbers, a dentist, and a pub - the Book and Candle, I think. There was also the YMCA which provided a venue for social activities such as jumble sales and clubs for kids after school and in the school holidays.

Across the bus road was the medical centre which housed two practices. The waiting room was invariably full and you could wait a long time to see your doctor. There were a couple of portacabins next to the centre, a hangover from some previous project. These were used by various groups for meetings but eventually fell into disrepair and became overgrown. At some time they were eventually removed.

The Kingfisher Shopping Centre was, of course, newly developed and was even advertised on Midland television. People came from some distance to experience the delights of Redditch shopping, particularly the palm trees. All the big names

were there: Marks and Spencer, Woolworths, British Homes Stores, Mothercare and Alders. We bought our first computer from Alders. Both Tesco and Sainsbury had stores. Tesco was a very large shop with an entrance from Royal Square and a traveller to take you to the upstairs part of the supermarket. Sainsburys was where Poundland is today, but was larger than today's replacement. There was an extensive second floor in the Centre which allowed access to a whole new set of shops. As well as Tesco you could get to the Gas Showrooms, the Sony Centre and into Alders, which later became Owen Owen. You could use an escalator to access this area with one situated where the toilets are today.

The market was housed in Royal Square which was much busier than today's with many more stalls. All around the Square were shops. In one corner was a building society - the Halifax, I think. There were further businesses above the shops with a walkway to get to them. The infamous indoor food market was also accessed from the Square; this was eventually closed down due to hygiene reasons causing a great outcry from shoppers. A new one was promised but it never happened.

As newcomers to the town we wanted to get involved in the community. We took on an allotment and spent many happy hours tending our crops. We had a plentiful supply of vegetables that kept family and friends fed for a good part of the year. Each year a Flower and Vegetable Show was held at Marlfield Farm and we entered a number of categories achieving some success with melons, aubergines and other crops. At the end of the show all the entries were auctioned off and on occasion we found ourselves buying back our own vegetables.

The 1980s was a great time for my wife and I and by 1983 we had a second daughter. Life was busy as I commuted into Birmingham for work five days a week. Now, in retirement we have both found there is more that Redditch has to offer now we have the time to rediscover it.

Graham Smith