

Memory Lane

If you have a story or picture of interest please contact Emma Harris, The Gazette, Avroe House, Avroe Crescent, Blackpool FY4 2DP, telephone (01253) 361737 or e-mail emma.harris@blackpoolgazette.co.uk, marking your email with 'Memory Lane' as the subject. Go to www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk for more nostalgia



Emma Harris

Celebrate the Fylde coast's rich past

with our Tuesday and Saturday nostalgia pages

Here's to you, Mrs Robinson



From left: Mrs Robinson is invested with the CBE at Buckingham Palace, accompanied by her daughter Mrs W Griffith, in 1969. As Mayor Alderman, she is pictured with her daughter Decia, a former deputy head girl at Collegiate School, her son-in-law Mr Will Griffiths, MP for Manchester Exchange and grandchildren Vaughan, aged 13 and Stella, 10. Right, as a Blackpool councillor



She was a woman who achieved a lot of 'firsts'.

A woman left to fend for herself at the age of 10, who worked in a cotton mill as a teenager – but in later life danced in the Empress Ballroom with Ted Heath and was awarded the CBE.

Jean Robinson made history and headlines in Blackpool when, in 1968, she became the first woman Mayor in the resort's 92-year municipal history.

She had moved to Blackpool in 1933, after marrying Noel William Robinson in 1926. The couple ran a catering business in Abingdon Street Market and stayed there until their retirement in 1959.

Mrs Robinson joined the Blackpool Labour Party and fought Talbot Ward four times, before winning the seat in 1954. The same year she was appointed a magistrate.

A former chairman of

Blackpool Borough Labour Party and secretary of the party's women's section, she was appointed to the council's Alderman bench in 1964 – the first woman to be so honoured.

As Mayor, she had a "more feminine" Mayoral robe, designed by a technical student. The two-in-one design was made up of a day-length coat, with princess-style seams and pockets for more formal occasions, such as town council meetings, and it was fitted with a detachable elbow-length fitted cape.

The Gazette photographed Mrs Robinson, in October 1968, dancing with the then opposition leader Edward Heath, during a civic reception for delegates at the Conservative Conference, at the Winter Gardens. She told the paper "he's a good dancer."

She was also pictured with the Prime Minister, Harold

Many of my school friends frequently did not have enough to eat

Wilson, at the opening of the Labour Party Conference, in September 1968.

Mrs Robinson was born on December 8, 1899 as Jane Yates, but from an early age preferred to be known as Jean. She attended Trafalgar Day School in Ashton-under-Lyne.

Her mother died in 1907 and her father left home in 1909 – the children had to fend for themselves.

Mrs Robinson started part-time employment at the age of 13 at Whittaker's Mills.

She lost her older brother Joe and older sister Rebecca within five weeks of each

other in 1914. In 1915, her only remaining sibling Jack was sent to a hospital/institution, and was never to come out, so at age 14, Mrs Robinson had lost her family.

She was almost entirely self-educated, though in the 1970s, she went back to college to study for O and A levels.

She was active in the Soroptomists and the Workers Education Association.

In later years, Mrs Robinson – who requested to be referred to as "madam Mayor" during her term – said: "School days to me were times of children in drab, worn clothes, bringing bread and lard for lunch.

"Many of my school friends frequently did not have enough to eat and would stand shivering in the school yard."

She also told how much she had enjoyed her work in politics.

"It was very hard-going at

LOOKING BACK WITH BARRY BAND

100 YEARS AGO

Blackpool lost one of its great benefactors in Mr J R G Grundy, who died aged 74. He and his younger brother Cuthbert endowed the resort's art gallery adjacent to the Andrew Carnegie-funded Central Library in Queen Street. He also endowed the reading room at the Highfield branch library together with the land at the rear for a recreation ground.

The resort was hoping the withdrawal of cheap day and half day railway excursion tickets would be lifted for Easter.

Belgian refugees of military age, living in Blackpool, were to be interviewed by their Consul, from Manchester, in a diplomatic bid to introduce them to the armed forces.

50 YEARS AGO

Coronation Street stars Pat Phoenix and Philip Lowrie (Elsie Tanner and son Dennis) opened the annual International Hairdressing Fair and Festival at the Winter Gardens.

The council rejected the Education Committee's recommendation the new Technical College and School of Art be built near Stanley Park. The Bispham site won the day.

After a three-hour debate, the council approved an increase of 2p (equivalent) in the rates for 1965-66.

25 YEARS AGO

A £675,00 multi-purpose sports hall was officially opened at Kirkham Grammar School by Lord Derby. The building had taken 15 months to complete.

Plans for a controversial £10m shopping city on the edge of Blackpool were to come under the spotlight. An appeal into a non-decision by Blackpool Council on the scheme, in which the local Glasdon Group proposed a retail park on land at Preston New Road and Clifton Road.

Animal welfare groups were demanding improvements at Blackpool Zoo after conducting an undercover survey.

Can you dip in and help with story?

Memory Lane reader Keith Myerscough is hoping fellow residents can help him tell the story of two swimming heroes who moved to Blackpool.

Mr Myerscough is a sports historian and is hoping to tell the story of Anne Field Whitehead and her husband Richard Matthew Whitehead.

The Salford-based pair were well-known swimming

instructors around the turn of the 20th century.

Mrs Whitehead was a famous Victorian ornamental (artistic) swimmer and coach.

Her husband was the swimming baths superintendent for Salford, from 1880 to 1906.

After 26 years of service to the Salford Baths Commit-

tee, the couple resigned and moved to Carshalton Road, North Shore, to run a boarding house.

Mr Myerscough said: "Are any readers a Whitehead? Did anyone in the area have great grandparents who were famous swimming instructors from Salford?"

"The Whiteheads made swimming an acceptable

profession at places like the Blackpool Tower Circus and at the end of the North and Central Piers.

"If anyone can help me tell the captivating story of these two pioneers of swimming, I would love them to contact me."

Call Keith on (01253) 893253 or email keithmyserscough@gmail.com



Anne Field Whitehead famous Victorian ornamental swimmer and coach