

Gareth Rowbotham remembers the community of Simson Shand Printing Company families.

Well in those days, in the print, it was Hertfordshire, in those days, ie Watford was very big indeed for printing firms, so wherever you lived, if you got a job in Watford you were on higher money than probably what you were on where you were at. My father worked in Cowbridge in a small printing firm in the village, so it was very restricted. He had been used to something more advanced than that in Newcastle. But my mother being Welsh, I think it might have been a bit of persuasion, let's put it that way, to move back down to South Wales and then he got a job with a flat that went with the job in Cowbridge. And we were there for three and a half years after coming down from Newcastle.

But he was unsettled, my father, in Cowbridge, with his work and I think he was quite restricted and he was looking out for a job and actually he saw the adverts by Simpson Shand in a national paper I believe and it said a brand new house was going with the job. So, he came up for an interview, got the job and then went back to South Wales where I think my mother persuaded him to stay. So, he left it a year before he got itchy feet again really and he came back to Shands and got in touch and said, "Well our circumstances have altered and I'm interested in the job." And they said, "Fine, it's still open."

I counted the houses in Calton Avenue that Simpson Shand owned in those days, they had 21 houses in Calton Avenue. Yeah, they had. Just past Carde Close on the right-hand side were semi-detached houses, two-bedroom and beyond the gates of St. Andrew School, both sides of the road were three-bedroom terraced houses. So, there was quite a lot of properties there. They were attracting people from all over the country, because we came up from South Wales when in actual fact working in there was people from Yorkshire, Liverpool, Scotland, Bedfordshire, Wales, Edmonton North London and various other places. They were the people that worked at Shands and lived down Calton Avenue in the two-bedroom or the three-bedroom houses.

Was it a big leap coming from there to here?

Well, my mother being Welsh, it probably was more for my mother. She never showed it, you know, she wasn't unhappy in Hertford, anything like that, but it must have been an adjustment. But it was the first house, a brand new house as well, that they had since they'd been married. They always had flats and things, so she was chuffed with that, they were nice houses with big gardens at the back, it was a good little spot really, there. So we stayed in Hertford and they settled in Hertford, they made friends in Hertford and in Calton Avenue particularly, there was all these people from different parts of Britain and didn't have their families on hand because, you know, they left them in Manchester and Scotland and Liverpool, so it was a family sort of, down there, there was a lot of closeness between the families in Calton Avenue.