

## HARRY LEVER LOCAL HISTORIAN

Harry Lever was born on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1923 at 12, Thomas Street (now Gair Street), Flowery Field, Hyde. He was the eldest of three sons, having two brothers Fred and Brian. He attended Flowery Field Church and Flowery Field School.

His grandparents were a huge influence in his life. His grandfather taught him gardening, an interest he kept all his life winning Tameside in Bloom awards in his later years. He also learnt a deep and abiding love of all nature from his grandfather, especially the local flora and fauna. Flowery Field during his childhood was semi-rural, as a child he would lie in the fields and watch sky larks rise singing in the sky. He regretted the loss of so much of the natural world around the area. Rev. Burgess of Flowery Field Church taught him a life-long love and appreciation of music. He mentioned some teachers who were instrumental in forming his interests; Miss Whitehead, Miss Thompson and Mr Renwick. It was whilst attending school that Harry developed a love and interest in history.

Harry Lever was a member of the Home Guard during the Second World War. Harry had volunteered for the regular forces but he failed the medical due to his asthma. It was during the War that he met his wife Phyllis. Their daughter, Beryl, was born in 1950. They had a long and happy marriage and Harry never really got over the loss of Phyllis in 2002.

Harry's interests were many and varied. He had worked at Belle Vue Zoo and developed an extensive knowledge of rare species of animals and birds. During that time he was frequently called upon to identify species by Manchester University and Museum. As the National Championships for Brass were held at Belle Vue, Harry became an enthusiast of Brass Bands attending not only their concerts but also their rehearsals. He found and gave them sheet music which he thought they would enjoy performing. He was a well known and popular figure in their circle.

When he left Belle Vue he worked for British Rail becoming a Union Shop Steward, which involved him reporting across the country at tribunals and trials using his technical knowledge.

When he retired in 1988 he had time to follow his many interests. He studied and researched local history especially about Hyde. He gave guided tours around Hyde Town Hall, was involved in the booklet 'Chartism in Tameside' and had his book entitled 'Flowery Field a village and a way of life gone' published in 2002. His love and knowledge of the characters and history of his birthplace shines throughout this book. He was Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of Hyde Historical Society and when it closed he became a founder member of Tameside Local History Forum. He was always the first to volunteer for the events held by the society and a great help and support to the Forum's Secretary. He took

part in the archaeological excavations held at Newton Hall in 2012. He wrote articles for the magazine 'History Alive Tameside'. He gave talks to local schoolchildren borrowing artefacts from Portland Basin Museum to illustrate his talks.

He was President of Tameside Speakers' Club and recorded many of his recollections and dialect monologues in the studios of Tameside Talking News for the blind.

He was a member of the Tameside Concert Society and attended every concert. He was also a founder member of the Fairground Organ Preservation Society.

Whatever the event, Harry always dressed smartly and would welcome everyone with a smile and every lady he knew with the greeting 'Hello flower'. He served as an adjudicator on the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. He attended all the District Assembly meetings and was well known by the local councillors and Members of Parliament, and he never shied away from expressing his opinion. In 2017 he was given a well-earned 'Pride of Hyde' award.

He died peacefully, surrounded by his family, at Tameside General Hospital on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2018. He was a well known and loved character and will be missed by many, many people.

Valerie Bowker

Tameside Local History Forum