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Lynette Arden's memories of Liverpool

Early days in Australia

"My name is Lynette Arden. I was born on 22 June 1943 in Sydney, Australia.

My parents lived in a block of flats near Sydney Harbour. We left to live in New South Wales about a year after I was born. My father and mother were both teachers. I had an elder brother and two younger sisters.

Australia in those days was a peaceful country with a high standard of living. When I was a child the facilities in a small country town, such as Yamba, were much more basic than would be expected in a city today. We had a large garden area and even kept our own hens (and roosters). The climate was warm and agreeable most of the time, rarely too hot or cold."



Lynette Arden, during her student days

Moving to England to study

"In December 1971 I left Australia and travelled across Europe to England. My application to St Martins had not been successful. I decided to try to get into a different art college.

In September 1972 I began the Foundation Course in art at Carlisle. The course was general and covered nearly every sort of art one could imagine. Printmaking, my chief interest was the only course where I failed to get a place.

My tutor advised me to try for Liverpool College of Art and Design, as he knew one of the lecturers and thought the course would suit me. During my time in Liverpool I sent my mother's birth details to the Home Office and they granted me right of residence."

Arriving in Liverpool

"I arrived in Liverpool in September 1973. I had found accommodation in a group of new buildings designed to accommodate students. I think it was somewhere near Penny Lane, as I remember the name from the Beatles famous song.

The first year of the Graphic Design course was located in the Myrtle St building of the Art College, which was part of the Liverpool Polytechnic. The lecturer advised students get a manual 35mm camera. I bought a Praktica, which I still have, although nowadays I use a digital camera. At the end of the first term I got a holiday job working for the Post Office helping to sort the Christmas post. They had employed a lot of casual workers to sort the huge quantity of mail. On Christmas Day one of the residents on my floor asked me to go to her family for midday Christmas dinner. Her family lived in a small two storey attached house, which reminded me of my Grandmother's place in Paddington (Sydney)."

My first bed-sit

"In the second term I had trouble with my accommodation. A couple of students from the Art College took me to their landlord's office and the staff there let me a room.

My room was in one of the multistorey Victorian houses in Kelvin Grove, a cobblestone street not far from Princes Park. My first bed-sit! I was used to sharing accommodation with others and it felt a bit strange by myself at first.

My student friends told me that the landlord owned the Everyman Theatre. For a while I ran into the dead spit of Paul McCartney running up and down the stairs from the top flat. This was when a play on the lives of the Beatles was running at the Everyman Theatre.

In 1974, when Liverpool won the FA cup, the city went wild and the street residents made a bonfire in Kelvin Grove to celebrate the victory.

One of the lecturers at Liverpool Art College, who took us for a Complementary Studies segment, took a group of us out to Kirkby, which was a newer settlement on the outskirts of Liverpool. She wanted us to write about the problems of the newer housing, as opposed to housing in older areas. The newer blocks of flats in Kirkby looked fairly stark to me. Open spaces full of rough grasses and weeds with a fair amount of litter surrounded the buildings. I couldn't understand why the residents had taken no trouble to plant a garden or brighten the place up in some manner. The lecturer talked a lot about the demoralization of the people and the lack of

facilities.

Just before Christmas that year, one evening while I was walking home to Kelvin Grove after College someone snatched my bag. This was quite a disaster for me, as I had just purchased a railway ticket to Hull, where I planned to spend Christmas with some Australian friends. I also had money for the trip in my purse, the great sum to me at the time of Â£20. After that I stuffed any notes into one of my socks when walking home."

Summer employment

"At the end of the first year I looked for a job to maintain myself during the summer. At first I had no luck and had to apply for Social Security. This wasn't something I wanted to do. I had never applied for it before, anywhere. I found the whole process unpleasant. The offices were crowded and dingy and you had to queue up to collect your money. However I soon found some work.

The first job I got was in a tin can factory. The training consisted of a man demonstrating how to pick up a bunch of metal pieces, which were the sides of cans, and shoot them through a piece of machinery which flexed the metal.

The noise in the factory was so loud that we had to shout right next to someone's ear to make them hear. The machines ran all the time. The other workers told me the machines were quite old and pre War. We all went into the ladies toilets for five minutes every hour for a rest break. There was no-where else to go. At lunch time I swallowed a sandwich and went for a walk along the street to get away from the constant din.

Men shifted the supplies around with machinery and women worked the assembly lines. During one of the breaks some of the women mentioned that a man worked on the assembly lines for a while. But, they concluded "it was degrading for a man".

I lasted for almost a week on the machine. By the end of the week I developed a violent migraine and decided I had better leave. On my way out the lady who cleaned the washroom rushed out and grabbing me by the hands shook them enthusiastically. She told me I had lasted a long time on that machine. She said the machine could give you the shakes. As I was feeling extremely ill I didn't take in all she was saying. I went home to bed and thought I wouldn't try for any more factory jobs.

Luckily, very soon after that I noticed an advertisement on the side of a bus for an employment agency and through them got a job with the Gas Company. The job was in the canteen.

The canteen was in two different buildings and they placed me in the smaller one. The chef in charge there ordered food separately from the main kitchen. At that kitchen there was plenty of food and even cartons of milk left at the end of the day. I was able to take enough food home for my dinner and milk for breakfast."

Second year studies

"At the beginning of the second year of the graphic design course we split into smaller and more specialised groups. I elected to concentrate on print making and illustration and our group shifted to the main College building in Hope Street.

In our Hope Street studio we got to know an elderly cleaner we only knew as Mollie, who proudly claimed to have known both John Lennon and his wife Cynthia, who had studied pottery in rooms near our studio. I made a portrait of Mollie using an electric engraving needle."



Lynette back at home in Australia in March 2006

Reflections on my time in Liverpool

"We had our final exhibitions and I decided to book a passage home. I hadn't tried to get into further studies. The lecturer in charge of printmaking at the Royal College in London had visited Liverpool College earlier in the year and had urged me to apply. He said I had the most original work of the students he had seen at Liverpool. This was a great compliment, but I felt I couldn't borrow more money. My mother had sent me a basic allowance for my last two years of College, as my savings had begun to run out. Even if I managed to get into the Royal College, which would be very difficult, I couldn't afford to go. I didn't want to continue working in the type of casual job I had done in Liverpool, so I felt it was time to go back to Australia.

I am very glad to have had the experience of living and studying in Liverpool. I think the policy of taking a large proportion of students from elsewhere than the local area paid off for me. I found that the students who had come to Liverpool were willing to make new friends with me, as they didn't have a local network of their own. Both staff and students accepted me very well and I retain many happy memories. As far as I was concerned I found it easier to live in a city like Liverpool, with its larger number of people who had come from elsewhere.

I often felt that living in Liverpool was like being in two or more countries at the same time. Different groups of people seemed to have little idea of how others lived. There seemed to be much greater distances between the rich and poor than I noticed in the Australia I had left, although this might not be equally applicable now.

It was fascinating to experience a different sort of lifestyle, although I had considerable hardship

at various times. I still have fond memories of Liverpool, although I haven't retained contact with any of the friends I made there. I don't think I would go back to Liverpool to live. It would be nice to revisit some time to see the changes."

Lynette Arden

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