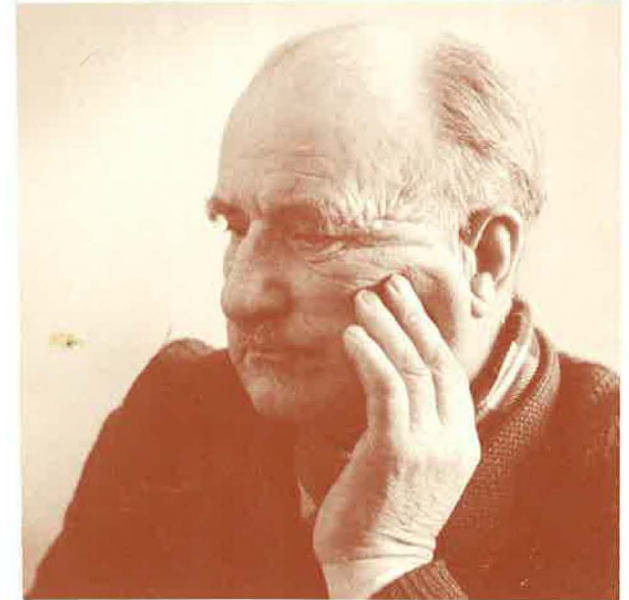


# WHO WAS HARRY COWLEY ?



QueenSpark Book 13 £1.50

# WHO WAS HARRY COWLEY ?

Harry Cowley was a Brighton chimney sweep who became a local legend. He battled for the homeless and unemployed, for market traders and old age pensioners. He fought against Mosley's Fascists in the 'thirties and against tight-fisted councils and governments. *Who was Harry Cowley ?* recalls this changing century of Brighton working class life and politics, and how one man, with his rallying cry of "It don't come right to me", struggled through an eventful life.

QueenSpark Book 13

# QueenSpark Books

QueenSpark Books are produced by people living in the Queens Park area of Brighton. We are not a commercial company. We make these books ourselves, learning as we go, and keeping the price as low as possible so that people in the area can afford to buy them. The aim of the books is to publish the autobiographies and other writings by working people and all those whose lives and writings do not normally get heard. Everyone can be a writer. QueenSpark runs two writers' workshops and we belong, with many other groups, to a national Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers. We also produce a local newspaper, 'QueenSpark'.

We have produced 13 books:

1. Albert Paul, *Poverty - Hardship but Happiness: Those were the Days 1903-1917*, 50p
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If you are interested in writing or working with QueenSpark Books in any way, you can get in touch with us at 97 Hanover Street, Brighton, 13 West Drive, Brighton or 48 Albion Hill, Brighton.



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# Contents

	<i>page</i>
Who was Harry Cowley?	1
"I was born in a place called Brighton...."	3
"The leader of a bunch of unemployables."	6
"I never met a blacker man...."	8
Who was Harriet Cowley?	10
"Anything you wanted, go to Mr. Cowley...."	14
"Has justice blundered?"	18
Harry's battles with the Black Shirts	22
The Vigilantes	24
King of the Barrow Boys	30
"Old folk make so much row...."	34
The Trouble with Harry....	38
They remembered Harry Cowley	43



# Who was Harry Cowley ?

Five hundred people packed St Peter's Church. Many hundreds more waited outside in the cold. A local television audience watched the service at home. March 11, 1971, and Brighton was paying its last respects to Harry Cowley, "The Guv'nor".

His body had lain in state at St Peter's overnight, and now a huge wreath of yellow chrysanthemums woven into the shape of a bowler hat lay on the coffin, alongside a set of chimney sweep's brushes. The congregation sang Harry's favourite hymn, Bread of Heaven. Then the funeral procession moved slowly to Brighton and Preston Cemetery, detouring up Trafalgar Street and across into Upper Gardner Street, through Harry's old market-trading haunts.

Who was this Brighton chimney sweep who wore a bowler hat ? What had he done to become a local folk hero ? More than a decade later, we asked people in the streets of Brighton, "Who was Harry Cowley ?"

One of those names you've heard.

The chap they used to call The Guv'nor.

He used to knock a bit of money off his sweeping to help old age pensioners.

He was always for the down and outs, and if there was a place empty he would try to get them in.

He was a rough diamond.

He should have been Mayor of Brighton.

He didn't have any political side to him. He was an independent man.

He was a socialist rebel without knowing what the socialist cause is.

He took the blows and stood out all through his life.

Harry Cowley's name also cropped up in almost every life-story sent into the community writing and publishing group, QueenSpark. That's how we decided to make a book of Harry's extraordinary life. We gathered newspaper clippings covering a fifty year span, and discovered old family scrapbooks and photo albums. None of our workteam had actually known Harry Cowley, so we interviewed family and friends, neighbours, workmates, and people who had battled with Harry, and sometimes against him.

We wanted to listen to as many memories and opinions of Harry as we could, and to share our discoveries, so we held a Tea and Reminiscence party at the Hanover Community Centre. At the end we've listed the many people who knew Harry and who helped to make this book.

There is no simple answer to the question, "Who was Harry Cowley ?" Memories and news clippings add up to an intriguing web of contradictions. They recall this changing century of Brighton working class life and politics, and how one man, with his rallying cry of "It don't come right to me", struggled through an eventful life.



# Hundreds mourn The Guv'nor



*Hundreds of Brighton people waited outside St Peter's Church at Harry Cowley's funeral. The bowler hat was Harry's trademark and one of his mates sent one in flowers.*



# "I was born in a place called Brighton..."

Late in his life, Harry Cowley remembered a grim turn-of-the-century childhood:

I was born at a place called Brighton, number 33 Lincoln Street. My father died when I was very young, and he left my mother to bring up eight of us. Mother used to go to work at the washtub for half a crown a day. I used to get up early in the morning, at 6 o'clock, go to the hotels of Brighton with a pillow slip to get our breakfast. That was bread which was left behind the day previous at the hotels.

This carried on for years, and when I left school I managed to get a job on the Brighton Corporation Tramways. The money wasn't alot - it was six shillings a week, twelve hours a day.

That was in 1903 when Harry was thirteen years old. Yet he dreamed of a more adventurous life, and a few months later joined the army as a drummer boy. After three years he transferred to the navy, but was invalided out when a spar hit him on the head. Work was hard to find, but eventually Harry got a job in Putney as an apprentice chimney sweep on four shillings a week. During the warmer months there was little need for a sweep's work, so Harry started a second, summer job in a laundry.

Back in his tramway days in Brighton, Harry had met a girl called Harriet Bradbury. He must have kept up with her, because in 1911 he proposed marriage. Harry remembered that her father objected:

*A portrait of Harry's mother (sitting), and his aunt.*



He didn't seem to fancy me I s'pose. Anyway he put the bar up so we eloped. We got no money hardly. We went to a place called Ashe, near Sevenoaks, and we went on a farm pea-picking, to earn our fare home to Brighton .... We took a little room in St Paul's Street for 1s 6d a week. I borrowed half a quid and we went to the Register Office and got married.



The young, penniless couple returned to London, Harry to his brooms and Harriet to ironing work in a laundry. When the Zeppelins started bombing London during the war, Harriet went home to Brighton and Harry joined the army and went off to the battlefields of France.

Harry in his soldier's uniform

TELEPHONE No. P.O. 988.

MEMORANDUM.

FROM The Sunlight Laundry,

119, 121, 123 and 125, HAVELOCK ROAD,  
PRESTON PARK, BRIGHTON.

THIS is to state that Harry  
Cowley has worked for me  
<sup>as a washman & engineer</sup>  
~~for some months~~ which time  
I have found him honest, sober  
and a good worker, he has only  
left me because we are shortening  
our staff.

J. L. Davis

A reference for Harry from the Brighton laundry



Life in the trenches of France was miserable and often horrific. Disillusioned and bitter, some soldiers like Harry began to realize that ordinary working people needed to fight a different battle :

I remember sitting in the trenches one night at Christmas time when I was a drum major in the Royal Fusiliers. I was sitting in the dug-out and it was raining hard. When it came to stand-to, at dawn, our feet were stuck in the mud. And there was a chap - an old London totter I s'pose he was - and he says, " I dunno 'Arry, whatever we done to deserve this ? There's the aristocrats at home, their feet under nice tables. And there's all this shot and shell, and here we all are smothered in mud."



I thought from then onwards that if there was a party that would assist the working classes, I should join it.

After he was demobbed, Harry soon grew sick of wandering the streets of Brighton looking for work. One day he saw a poster outside a recruiting office calling for volunteers to fight the Bolsheviks in Russia. Harry's service career, and his politics, took a curious new twist :

I went in and joined up to fight those Bolshies.... But instead of me going to Russia they asked for volunteers for exhumation, digging up the dead, you know. I went out to Belgium and I started digging up the dead and I stuck that for twelve months.... We dug 'em up and made cemeteries for 'em.

When Harry came home for good, he found the unemployment queue longer than ever.

*Harry leading his platoon.*



# "The leader of a bunch of unemployables."

*I came back from France thinking I was going to be alright for a job, but it was worse than ever. You knew if you was used to work you couldn't keep going to the Labour Exchange.*

Harry Cowley and thousands of other ex-servicemen were rewarded for their war service with useless decorations and unemployment. This desperate state of affairs became Harry's first cause. He revealed himself a born leader and a natural orator:

Outside the old Exchange there was a sandbin. So I got on it and addressed the boys. It was the first time in my life I ever got on a platform. I was so fed up with coming back and no work.

He addressed the unemployed men with fierce determination:

Well now boys, it's no good of us messing about with the Labour Exchange. Let's go where we can get a job. There's only one place we can go in this town and that's down the Town Hall. I'll go down and I want you to come with me.

Confronted by the police for disturbing the peace, Harry cheekily replied, "They're nothing to do with me. They're following me about."

Harry won this first battle with the authorities. He secured work for 600 men on the widening of Ditchling Road. But he was not happy when he discovered that "his boys" were receiving below the union rate:

I said, "Well down tools boys, and straight down to the Town Hall." I went before the Council and put the case and got the trade union rate.

A men's Unemployed Centre in Tichborne Street was one successful result of these protests. The club gave unemployed men a respectability that they were fast losing as the vacant days crept by. They organized lively campaigning marches, where banners were waved and bugles blown.

Despite the high unemployment rate, these men were accused of being unskilled and lazy. When a Brighton councillor announced, "Harry Cowley is the leader of a bunch of unemployables", Harry and "his boys" set out to prove him wrong by marching along the Sussex coast looking for work. Day after day the column of unemployed tramped from one Sussex town to the next. By day they badgered employers, at nights they slept in barns and sheds. After a couple of weeks they were back in Brighton. One man only had been left behind, humping coals in Bexhill. "Now", said Harry, "you dare call us unemployables again."

The men also spent alot of time collecting money and food for unemployed families:

Harry was distributing more than 2,000 loaves a week and churn after churn of milk. He ran boxing in the Dome and concerts at the Grand Theatre, to pay for meat and groceries and first-off boots for the children.



The Town Council was frightened by Harry Cowley's constant protests. To quieten him down they bought him a set of chimney sweep tools. But Harry had the last laugh. When the unemployed or any other cause needed leadership he dropped his brushes and reached for his drums.

*Official figures for unemployed men in Brighton:*

1921: 12.9%

1931: 10.9%

1981: 11.3%

*This does not include figures for women.*



*In the 1930s Jarrow Crusaders marched for employment. Today people are still fighting for jobs.*

# «I never met a blacker man...»



*Probably the blackest man that I ever met, but I've yet to meet a whiter man.*

John Marshall describes the life of a chimney sweep earlier this century:

"There was more chimney sweeps around then than there were chimneys so it was the best one that got the job; it was a struggle to get a living. If someone offered a shilling (1s) then I'd offer nine pence (9d) to get the job. We'd start early in the

morning and finish before midday so that the kitchens would be ready for cooking dinner. Then we'd have a bath and the rest of the day was yours. It cost 9d for years and years and then after the war it stepped up quicker. You needed 1s/10d to get by, that's 25 houses a week."

Harry was a chimney sweep competitor but also a friend, and John Marshall remembers him well:

"He was always identified by his bowler hat and you would see him pushing his bicycle with all his chimney sweep brushes, as he was going on his various rounds.

"I remember when he came to live at No 3 Grove Street, which was just above us in Albion Hill and he told us that he was a journeyman sweep from London, which means that he used to work for somebody else who'd give him the work and take a few coppers off him and the rest was his. If Harry got overrun with work he used to come down to my family's house because there were three of us, my father, his brother and me (we all had motorbikes) and he'd give us the extras, and he did this for many years. We used to exchange jobs and do some big jobs together. He'd sit on an armchair with his dirty, sooty clothes and my mother would tell him to get off and sit on a wooden chair. Then he'd say, 'Got a cuppa tea, and slice of bread, 'cos my old woman's not up yet.' "

"He used to work with my grandfather on the General Hospital boilers once a year, which was an all night



job with my father and uncle. They would work all night from 7 in the evening till 5.30 the following morning, and then continue with a day's work after all that, and the whole job didn't come to more than £2.50 in today's money. We used to do the Tamplin's boilers which took from 2 till 7p.m., and that was 30s, top-notch money for those times."

"Harry got in touch with another chimney sweep who lived at 176 Ditchling Road called Fred, who'd had an accident and damaged a leg. When Fred died Harry moved into his house, there, so we didn't see him so much. But we still used to meet regularly as there was no telephone in either of our houses. We made a point of exchanging jobs. Often he'd cycle over or we went to him first thing in the morning, and if he didn't want to do it or if he was a little worse for wear from the night before he'd say, 'Oh, I don't want to work today, you do these.' "

"He asked me to go to the Black Lion Pub, which I'd been doing for years, which didn't matter to me. His daughter, Rube, was working as a waitress out there and had got him the job. So I went out there to do the boiler, and I did most of the job, and while we were there an awful storm brewed up and when we were coming home, because he was on the back of my motor bike, we got to the corner of Ditchling Road and he said, 'Just drop me here and I'll see you tomorrow.' Well, I never saw the rest of the money. But you couldn't help liking the man. He never put himself out more than he needed to, and he never wanted to do alot of work. He just wanted to be in it. "

Throughout his life Harry carried on sweeping, and when he died he had a bowler hat and sweep's brushes placed on his coffin.



*Chimney sweep, John Marshall, walking along Queens Park Rd.*



# Who was Harriet Cowley ?

*If it hadn't been for my mother, my father wouldn't have got anywhere, (Ruby Lucas)*

You would not have seen Harriet Cowley rallying the crowds at The Level, or leading the unemployed. Maybe if you had been observant you could have spotted her organising an O.A.P. party, or clearing the debris at a vacant house.

The wives of working class heroes rarely receive the applause they deserve. Out of the limelight, it is the women who are steadily soldiering on, with an endurance that men might find impossible. As their daughter, Ruby Lucas, points out, Harry would have been no-one without the help and support of Harriet.

One reason that Harriet could not play the same public role as Harry was her lack of free time. Harriet was very hard working and rarely had a minute free. She worked a twelve hour day, balancing her paid laundry work with her unpaid housework, plus a multitude of other tasks. The house of a chimney sweep was never easy to keep clean. A neighbour Mrs Humphries remembers, "When you went down to his house all you could smell was the soot and the black, it was the chimney dust."

It was also a daily struggle for Harriet to make ends meet. The Cowley family was never well-to-do. In



the early days when the children were young, they lived on a frugal diet of bread and jam and stews. Yet as the youngest son, Abe Cowley, is quick to point out, "We never wanted for anything" and Harriet kept smiling through thick and thin. Mrs Humphries recalls, "She used to go up to the laundry and sing...oh she did used to sing."

Working class politics was regarded as a "man's world"; the "Guv'nor" was surrounded by his "boys". In spite of this prejudice and the long hours she worked Harriet still managed to involve herself in community politics. She had her own firm beliefs. In the words of Abe Cowley, "She was the sort of person who if she saw a kid walking up the street with a hole in their shoes, she would give them the money to go and buy another pair." She participated in Vigilante meetings, and was one of the main workers at old age pensioner events. "She had to get involved in political activities, she was right behind him even if he didn't want her there."

She also played a fundamental supportive role.

It's been a bit worrying you know. Still I stuck it and I thought he was doing something good for other people. P'haps what I couldn't do, and why hinder him in what he wanted to do in the way of goodness.

It is not surprising that their relationship "had its ups and downs." At times Harry's outside involvement put pressure on the marriage. "Well I sometimes feel I want to give up, so he says, 'don't be like that, we carry on you and me,' so we do." In spite of the rows they had, which were mainly over other people, they retained a romantic view of each other. "I don't know about being married to a rebel but I've enjoyed every minute of it," and Harry's belief was, "We married for love, and that's why it worked."

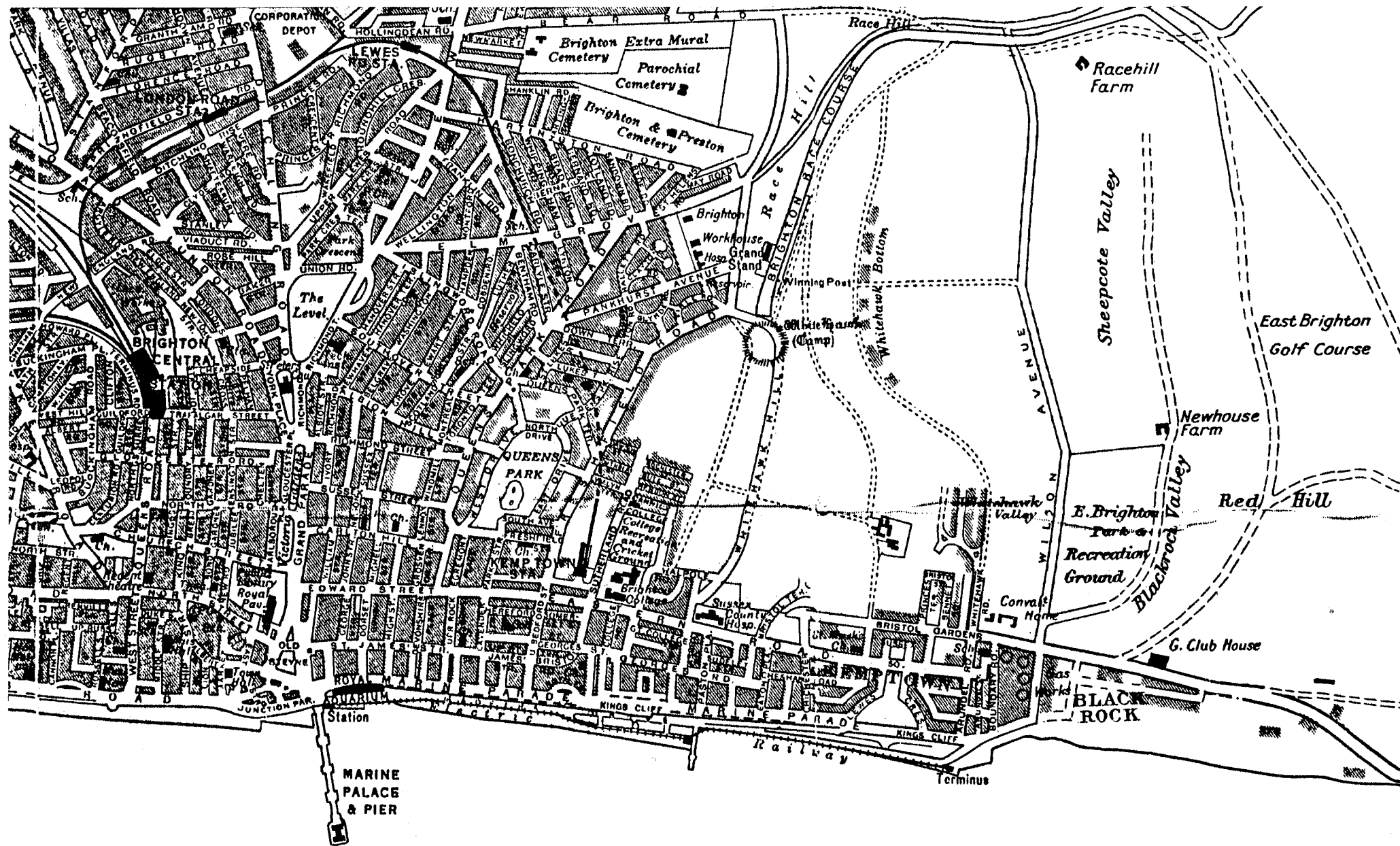


*Above - As usual Harriet in the background, helping to fix up a house for squatters.  
Opposite - Harriet with her husband, later on in their lives.*









EAST BRIGHTON IN 1928

# "Anything you wanted, go to Mr. Cowley..."

In the years between the wars the Cowley family lived at 3 Grove St, halfway up Albion Hill, in a well-established working class community. Harry Cowley's political views were shaped by the needs of that community. Rents were high and large families crowded into the small terrace houses which ran up the hills north and east of The Level. Few breadwinners could rely on steady employment and families had to scrape and save to survive. They used their wits to find work or to get assistance from charities or the miserly Board of Guardians. Les McLenahan grew up in the 1920's with a family of nine in two rooms on Albion Hill. His father was an invalid and his mother controlled the "Parish Purse-strings" of 27s 6d a week:

To illustrate the poverty experienced: it would mean regular patronage of the soup kitchen at Southover St; mother sending us to Mr Paris, the baker in Lincoln St, for stale bread, which was soaked in the galvanized iron bath and rebaked the next day. I well remember my two brothers assisting my father to negotiate Albion Hill with the aid of two sticks to answer "Parish Hierarchy" questions related to earnings he may have received through repairing boots and shoes.

In hard times people could rely on help from their neighbours, as Molly Morley of Lincoln St shows in her stories of Carlton Hill before the slum clearances:

People were borrowing from one another - tea sugar, anything - all the time. Mrs Calder, at the



*Harry and Ruby, the two eldest Cowley children, are among this group in Grove Street between the wars. Harry, Ruby and Abe, the youngest child, were not involved in their father's political life. Abe Cowley remembers:*

*Many people didn't know that he had three children, as we were never involved in anything....What he did he didn't want me to do, he didn't want me to get into trouble.*

*Harry was also concerned that he was never seen using his contacts to feather his own nest. Shoes to be given to local children were kept in their locked front room. Ruby recalls:*

*My mum asked my dad if we could have a pair of those shoes and he said, "No, they're not for us."*



Williams St corner shop, used to help people by selling them a farthing worth of tea and ha'porth of sugar and milk. Street doors ever open, a hungry child might wander and be asked, "Haven't you had any dinner?" and answer, "No, I ain't 'ad nothin." The expected, "Here you are then, have some of this," was a moment of joy.

Ruby Weston, who with her husband Clem ran the Free Butt Inn in Albion St during the 1940s, recalls:

...poor people looked after poor people in those days, everyone helped one another. It doesn't occur today. And Brighton, being such a closed area there, all up Albion Hill and Albion St, they were all of the same type, they were all poor people and needed help.

Harry Cowley was one person they could always look to for a helping hand. He saw himself as something of a Good Samaritan. Indeed, religion may have increased the ardour of Harry's crusade for the dispossessed. For five years after the birth of his daughter Ruby in 1919, he "got" religion and attended church frequently. He preached Sunday services at the unemployed centre in Tichborne St, and even had a large cross tattooed across the length and breadth of his upper body. He "lost" religion in a fight after church one day, but his campaigning speeches still often asked what Jesus would have done if he had seen the needy and unemployed of Brighton in the inter war years.

Everyone who knew Harry tells a story of "the Guv'nor's" tireless work in the neighbourhood. They remember Harry organizing outings for the poor kids of Southover St, finding furniture for old people moved in a slum clearance, or standing up to the Board of Guardians to get more money for an out-of-luck family. Mrs Williams was a neighbour of the



Cowleys:

Anything you wanted, go to Mr Cowley, he'd help you, if you was in trouble, no matter what trouble. Probably hadn't got the money himself, but he'd find something to help them with. He used to have big concerts and do all this that and the other so little kiddies could have a good Christmas. He'd give the old people 10s notes, pound notes; what he thought they most needed. And then, when the children was in want of any boots or shoes, if the authorities wouldn't give it to them, Harry Cowley got round. I remember my dad when he had nothing, he come to us and give us all shoes, and there was eight of us.

These bread and butter needs were the core of Harry Cowley's politics. His organized campaigns for the unemployed and for better housing were simply an extension of this determination to improve the lives of his working class neighbours.

It wasn't always hard times. Harry enjoyed a pint of beer in his local pub. Ruby Weston describes the day in 1940 when she and her husband started at the Free Butt Inn:

Well, it was Monday morning and we took over at about 10 o'clock and the first customer to come in was Harry. He threw his bowler in and he said to my husband, "Hello Clem, I wish you all the very best." From then onwards he was a regular customer. He would come in every day and have his two or three pints. Weekends he used to bring his wife into the saloon bar... We had a piano and people used to sing all the old songs.

At the Free Butt Inn, Harry and the Westons also raised money with raffles to buy bedding and furniture for squatters housed by Harry's Vigilantes.







*Richmond Street.*

*The pictures on the two preceding pages show Claremont Road and Sun Street earlier this century.*



*The pub was a meeting place for the social and political life of the neighbourhood. It was a man's world, and many of Harry's "stunts" were organized by getting "the boys" together over a drink.*

# "Has justice blundered?"

*I have shammed drunk to go to the sort of places where people who might have information can be found. So much information has reached me that, pretending to be drunk, I actually accused one man of being the murderer.*

While walking along Madeira Road on the evening of April 14th 1928, retired Brighton chemist Mr Ernest Friend Smith was brutally attacked and robbed, and carried off in a car to the Downs. His injuries caused his death a month later. On May 21st, Brighton hawkers James Weaver aged 21 and Percival "Ginger" Leonard Taylor aged 24 were arrested and charged with his murder. A third man, motor mechanic George Thomas Donovan aged 32 was later arrested in Maidstone, brought to Brighton and also charged.

The three men protested their innocence and were sent to Lewes Assizes for their trial. After three days the jury returned with a guilty verdict. All three defendants were sentenced to the death penalty.

Appeals against their conviction were lodged but were later dismissed, and the date for the men's execution was fixed for August 15th. But on August 14th, the day before the men were to be executed, an unexpected reprieve was granted by the Home Secretary, and the sentences were altered to life imprisonment.

Harry first heard about this mysterious case in the club for unemployed men:

I really don't know why, but I decided to go down to the Police Court when Weaver and Taylor first

appeared. I heard them remanded in custody. Then, as they were about to go downstairs from the dock to the cells, I saw Weaver turn to Taylor and I heard him say, "Why can't we be tried today? I want to go home. We know nothing about this." It wasn't until after the appeal had been dismissed that the significance of these words struck home. I believed the men might well be innocent.

Harry embarked on an eleven year search for proof.

I have shammed drunk to go to the sort of places where people who might have information can be found. So much information has reached me that, pretending to be drunk, I actually accused one man of being the murderer. He is the member of a gang which beats up and robs people. No, he didn't deny the accusation I'd made. He didn't even reply. He just edged out of the place.

Rumours were already circulating in Brighton that other people knew quite a lot about the crime, if only they would talk. Harry took dozens of statements and spent hundreds of hours on the case. Armed with new evidence he petitioned his local M.P., Sir Cooper Rawson, who sent a full written report to the Home Office. At first, no grounds could be found for the conviction to be altered. At a second attempt, the Home Secretary spent a whole weekend reconsidering the facts of the case, and it is claimed that the King also queried the men's guilt. The last minute reprieve was granted to the men although their innocence had still not been established.



This is an extract of a letter from a prison visitor:

May 22<sup>nd</sup>

Dear Mr Bowley,

I had a long talk with Weaver last evening. He gave me the enclosed papers for you.

There is no need for you to visit him now, as the news he intended to disclose to you are enclosed.

He also told me that, Markantonio, who at that time kept a Public House, was threatened by Detectives Wells & Beere. That if he did not keep his mouth

shut he would lose his licence.

That is why Markantonio denied that he was with Weaver and Taylor on the night in question.

Weaver can prove this.

Also that on his second arrest he was subjected to 3<sup>rd</sup> degree methods.

The detectives kept putting a pen in his hand to try to make him sign a paper which he did not know what was written on them.

# BRIGHTON MURDER SENSATION

## 'Flowers from the killer,' says Jim

JIMMY WEAVER stayed late at a Brighton market bric-a-brac stall yesterday to earn extra money to buy daffodils.

He wanted them as a tribute of remembrance and regret for the woman he made a widow—a lonely woman who died last week.

It was 27 years since Jimmy Weaver, and two companions, attacked a chemist on the Downs and left him battered and unconscious. Their victim reached home, but died.

So Jimmy Weaver was sentenced to death with his companions. Then all three were reprieved.

### Her agony

But Mrs. Kate Friend Smith, the murdered man's wife, found no reprieve for her torture—she became a recluse until death ended her nightmare of grief.

"I'll never forget that night," said cloth-capped Jimmy Weaver yesterday. "I know the agony of mind Mrs. Smith must have suffered. I, her husband's murderer, have suffered too. I make no excuses, except that I was a young hot-head."

Then he talked softly of his ordeal in the condemned cell, of the pointing fingers, the lost jobs and the way his wife and children had suffered because of him. And he went on with his job—to buy the flowers.

Dear Mr. Cowley, many thanks for your very charming letter. I can assure you it's splendid news to know that you are doing your utter most to help me prove my innocence. My good help you and guide you in your splendid effort to bring about my self and Mrs. Taylor's release.

### TELL-TALE FLUFF

Fluff found on the clothes of Mr Friend Smith definitely associated the deceased man with a motor car in which Taylor and Weaver were said to be riding on the night of the crime.

The main strength of the case against Donovan rested on the evidence of Mrs Spragg, a hawker of Hastings and formerly of Brighton, who told the court of a confession she alleged was made by Donovan.

### VICTIM REMAINS SILENT

From first to last, Mr Friend Smith declined to give the police a detailed description of what had occurred, and this seriously hampered the investigations in the earlier days.

HAS JUSTICE BLUNDERED?

## Man of the past lays posy on grave

### 'My last respects'

The card on the flowers Weaver left bore the name Mrs. Friend Smith. It read: "God Rest Your Soul. He Knows I Am Innocent."

Mrs. Friend Smith died last week in a Brighton nursing home, aged 86.

Last night, Weaver, who has always protested his innocence, told me: "I read about Mrs. Friend Smith's death in a local paper. I saw her only once—at the trial 27 years ago."

"I felt I had to pay my last respects to her. I bought a bunch of flowers for 10s. Is that the action of a guilty man?"

He added: "I did 13 years on the Moor and in Parkhurst for something I never did. They say guilty people are haunted at night by their vic-

tims. I go to bed and sleep peacefully. I've got nothing on my conscience, but people still point me out in the street.

### 'A woman knows'

"There's one person who can clear my name—a woman. One day, the dreadful wrong she has done me will weigh on her conscience so heavily she'll come forward."

"I hope to God she will do it soon. Not for my sake, but for my wife and three kids."

Mr. William Teeling, MP for Pavilion, Brighton, said last night: "Mr. Weaver has been to see me to-day and I have promised to investigate the facts of his case with a view to raising the matter in the House of Commons."

*James Weaver in the 1970s. Mrs Weaver recalls;  
"As regards the general public, my husband was a  
very bitter man, he never came to terms with it".*



Why did the Home Secretary grant reprieves after first refusing them? To this day the change in his decision remains a mystery... It was believed locally that Harry was largely responsible for saving their lives. Not content to let matters rest he then petitioned for their release and wrote to both the national press and the King on their behalf. He also held meetings in Brighton to continue the campaign. Donovan and Taylor eventually served 11 and 12 years respectively after having had their sentences reduced for good conduct. Weaver was released after 13 years.

#### DOUBT LINGERS ON....

Why did Harry choose to be involved in this particular case?

What did he discover in the pubs of Brighton that made him continue his search for "justice"?

Why was there a press black-out at the coroner's hearing about the death of Friend Smith?

Why were the defendants stopped from calling witnesses at the Magistrates Court, and why did other witnesses admit to giving false evidence at the later hearing at Lewes Court of Assizes?

Why were the police commended for their conduct of the case at an early stage, and did this inhibit later investigations?

Why did the judges at the Court of Appeal decide not to hear what was described as "fresh evidence"?

Why did the Home Secretary change his mind about the death sentence and why was no reason ever given for this reprieve?

Why was Friend Smith's watch later found in the possession of a complete stranger?

Who was the mysterious man in Lewes prison who admitted to James Weaver that he committed the murder?

Were the men innocent?

WHY DO PEOPLE IN BRIGHTON TODAY NOT WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT ?



# Harry's battles with the Black Shirts

*The meeting took place, my finger went up, and the pitched battle went on.*

Brighton was a centre of the British Fascist movement in the 1920's and 1930's. Harry Cowley organized a local anti-Fascist league to fight Oswald Mosley's "blackshirts". He realized that Fascism was completely antagonistic to working class interests, and he despised the brutality of the European Fascists.

Labour activist Lewis Cohen joined forces with Harry and later described one memorable incident:

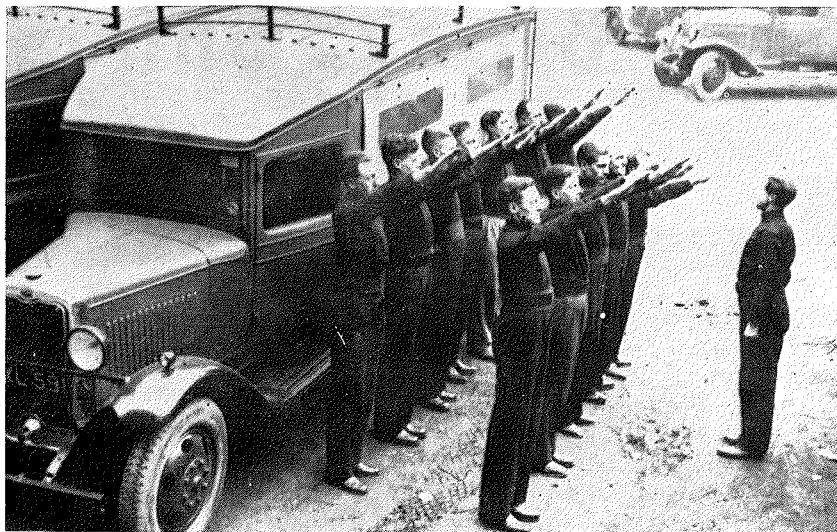
Naturally Harry was the leader of those who were opposed to the Fascists. The Fascists decided one day to hold a large public meeting in the Dome, Brighton, our largest hall. We discussed between us how best we could disrupt the meeting, and between us we had rather a bright idea.

Two days before the meeting, trusted tradesmen fixed a loud speaker in the roof of the Dome and then wired it to the basement of Princess House in North Street.

As Mosley started his speech we played, first of all, "Land of Hope and Glory", and then we followed it up with "The Red Flag". Well you can imagine the consternation there was in the Dome, with poor Mosley trying to speak against our gramophone records. It was a great success for about seven or eight minutes, but then I regret to say the machine broke down.



*Lewis Cohen: Harry's rich Jewish friend and ally against the Fascists.*



*Two faces of Fascism, in the thirties and the eighties.*



As a leading anti-Fascist, and because he was a popular working-class activist, Harry Cowley soon became a target for Fascist brutality:

I was met by some of them in Middle Street one midnight. They were mob-handed and I was alone; they had bottles. They broke my leg and I was eight months in hospital.

And then one night they sent a mob down from London in one of them "armoured" cars what they had. They done me house in Grove Street in the middle of the night. They brought bricks with slogans wrapped round them - "Mind the draught from this one" and "We're coming to do you in", and things like that. They smashed up the windows with them.

A Grove Street neighbour, Mrs Humphries, remembers that the Fascists often came hunting for Harry, and that, "He used to jump over the back wall and come in me mum's house to get away from them!"

Harry fought back.

I thought to myself, well, I dunno., you don't get away with that. There happened to be a Fascist meeting on the place called the Level on a Sunday night. So I got some of my boys and mingled 'em in with the crowd and I told them beforehand, "When I put my finger up, away you go."

The meeting took place, my finger went up, and the pitched battle went on. And needless to say the ambulances was running to and fro with broken noses and black eyes and blood spurting everywhere. I don't want you to think my boys were *rough* boys. They were just *conscientious*.

# The Vigilantes

*We shall stick to it until we have commandeered every house that is up for sale in Brighton. We know it is wrong, but we also know it is wrong for women and children to have to live in such conditions while their husbands are away. (Harry Cowley)*

Immediately after the First World War there was an acute housing shortage in Brighton. In 1921 Harry found out about an ex-serviceman called Hodson who was sleeping with his family on the racecourse:

Harry come up and saw the predicament I was in. He said, "Hodson this won't do, we'll have to see into this." I said, "I don't know what to do Harry." So one night he come up, he says, "Hodson, I've got a house for you. Will you have it?" I says, "Yes, I'll have it." We went down to Cheltenham Place and he showed me the place - number 14 it is. I said, "Well we've got to get in Harry, haven't we." He says, "Yes." So we both threw our weights on the door and busted the door open. Got our stuff in, what we had, left the bell tent in the garden. And about two weeks after the owner come up and he said, "We're not going to put up with this, you know, you'll have to get out of this." I says, "Oh, who's gonna shift me? Don't forget, I'm not alone, I've got a few more behind me. Now I'll tell you straight," I says, "I'm willing to pay the rent, whatever you like to charge, but you're not going to put me out because I'll fight you, I'll fight you right to the bitter end."

Alf Richardson, Harry's lieutenant, continues the







*Vigilantes march past The Level to the Town Hall. From left to right, Alf Richardson, Harry Cowley, Harold Steer and Titch Pollard lead the way.*

story:

It was that first started us at getting the ex-servicemen into these empty houses. 'Cos at that time there were several empty houses, and we commandeered about sixty in Brighton.

That was the beginning of Harry's "Vigilantes". After the Second World War the housing shortage was just as bad. Harry believed that, "If it was necessary to requisition property in war time to house servicemen it was also desirable to do the same thing in peace time." He restarted the Vigilantes.

Helen Steer and her husband Harold were founding members of the new group:

We met Harry Cowley in the old Labour Club along London Road, and he come up to my husband and asked if he would consider helping people who were homeless. He had many requests, especially with the soldiers coming back from the war. Homes were very scarce. We went outside and walked along the road discussing the possibilities of what might be done, such as taking over empty properties.

Once again, Vigilante methods were simple but effective. A house was chosen and - often under cover of darkness - the family was moved in. The Vigilantes would provide the family with food and heating, and contact the owner of the building so that rent could be agreed.

But it was not as easy as that. There was opposition from the courts and the police. Once a family was installed the police could not move them, so they tried to catch the Vigilantes in the act. At one time Harry's plans were leaked, so that when the Vigilantes arrived to move a family into Essex Street they found a policeman waiting at the door. Harry

tells the story:

I said to the boys, "Don't get the wind up." And then up come some inspectors. If I could've run out of the street I would, but I didn't dare, and I says to one of them, "How long are you stopping here?" And he says, "As long as you are." I says, "There ain't room for the lot of us; I'm off." We was in time to stop the furniture coming in the street and we took another house nearby within the hour.



"I tell you, officer, we are going to hang about till he moves out!"

The courts also tried to stop the Vigilantes. After ejecting workmen and a landlord from a house he wanted, Harry was fined £31 for trespass by the Brighton County Court. But the police often turned a blind eye to Vigilante activities, and Harry even recalled an instance when he was putting furniture in a house and couldn't manage a table, "So a policeman helped me in with it." The press also lent a hand, helping Harry to decoy police "tails", and writing glowing reports on the Vigilantes.





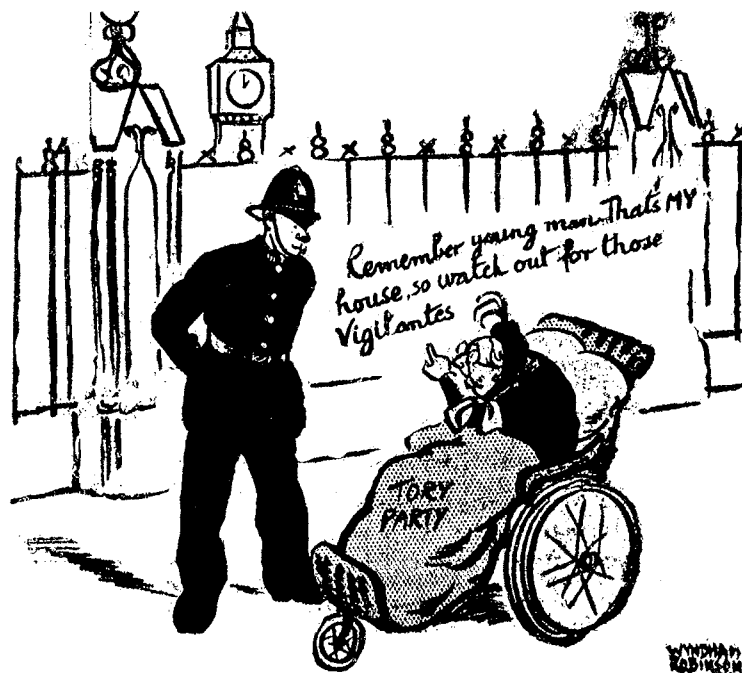
*HYDE PARK, JULY 28, 1945. HARRY ENLISTS MEN AND WOMEN FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TO JOIN THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT*





Public sympathy enabled Harry to wage a successful local and national campaign for housing reform. The Vigilantes wanted the Government to requisition empty houses. They canvassed the Brighton Council and even sent letters to Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Helen Steer explains why the campaign to change the requisitioning laws was so successful:

People were with us. Because of the need, of the great need of people of this town to have houses, and the boys and girls coming home from the war, they needed houses. What we set out to do was to bring it to the attention of the local authorities. This is what we achieved and then things were done, especially the law, and when the Bill was passed that houses could be confiscated after a long period of time. So we did a really good job. And I'm proud to have been a Vigilante.



There were other groups throughout the country campaigning for this reform, including the Communist Party. In 1945 Parliament passed a Bill enabling local Councils to requisition houses which had been empty for eighteen months.

After the law was passed the Steers left the Vigilantes. They and many others felt that the job was done, and the Vigilantes went into decline. As the one-time secretary Reggie Betts explains, there were other reasons:

I think the pressures got greater. They brought out laws, and they put an injunction on Harry Cowley refraining him from putting anyone into a squat, otherwise he'd be arrested. Well then he put it around for individuals to do, but they got an injunction on the whole movement.

A couple of times in the 50's and 60's Harry tried to revive the movement, but it didn't have the same impetus as in the 40's. The Vigilantes were dead. Ex-servicemen were more settled and the housing problem was not as obvious. Many people thought that the change in the law had provided a solution.

In fact, today thousands of people are on waiting lists for housing. Reggie Betts admits that, "You couldn't do today what you did thirty or forty years ago." How would Harry be tackling the housing shortage in 1984 ?

# King of the Barrow Boys

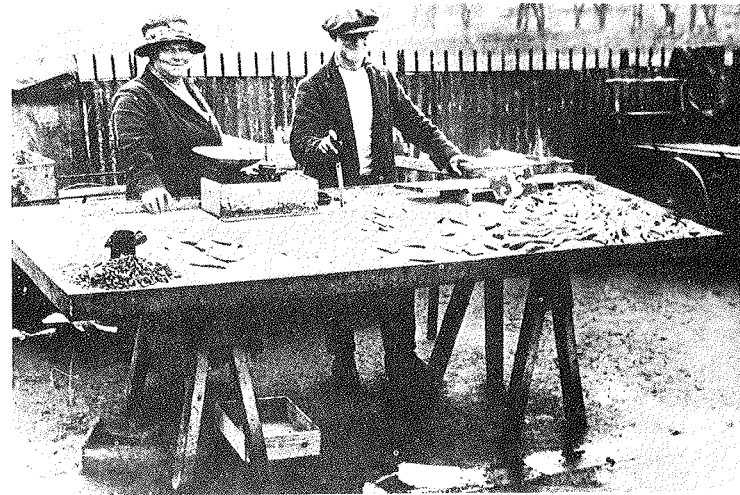
*There would never have been no market but for us,  
because the boys was set to get out without a word.*

Harry and Harriet had a second hand furniture stall in the Saturday market in Upper Gardner Street for fifty years. Stallholders had to fight for a pitch and it was first come, first served. Harry put a stop to all that. In the 'twenties he forced the Council to give stallholders fixed pitches. These pitches were in the hands of a Watch Committee which Harry chaired for the next fifty years. Ex-Labour Council man Stan Fitch recalls that, "The Guv'nor controlled the letting of sites. If you didn't please Harry you might find it difficult to get your licence renewed."

Harry continues the story:

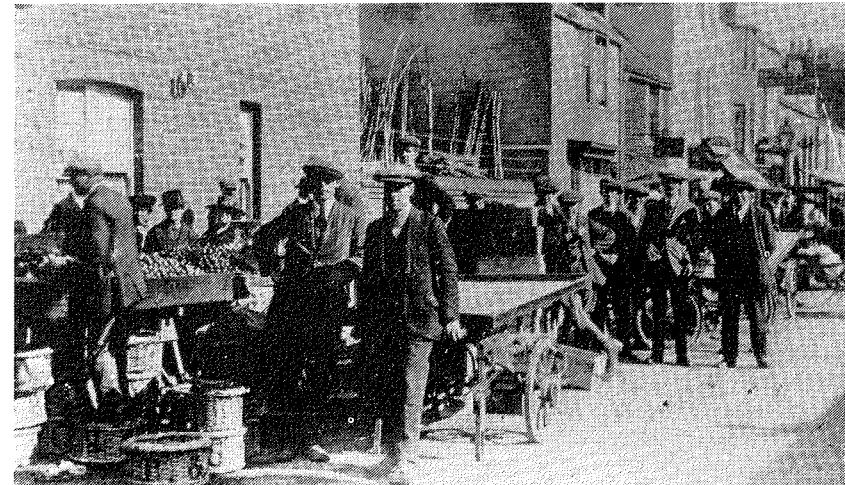
No sooner was that done and there was the battle of the Oxford Street market - oh, a terrible battle that was. It was a wartime market and the boys had the order of the boot.

I said to my friend Alf Richardson, I said, "Well Alf, I dunno what you think about it, but I think we oughter have a go for these people. They don't want to leave Oxford Street." So I said, "Alf, go get that rostrum", and he gets it and we stick it in the middle of the tramlines in London Road. We got the road packed. As I was speaking, I could see over their heads there was a couple of tramloads of coppers coming along. I said, "Stick it Alf." The coppers raided and struck out with their truncheons, but I still stuck on the rostrum. Alf got up and I propped the rostrum up while they



*Market on the Level, 1924.*

*Oxford St Market.*





was raiding.

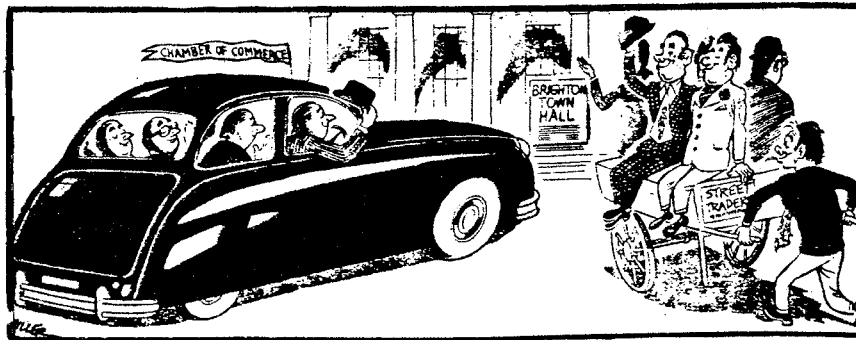
Anyway, that got the Council to let the boys trade on The Level until the Open Market was built. There would never have been no market but for us, because the boys was set to get out without a word.

Who were the barrow boys? According to one barrow boy they were "flamboyant, outrageous"...and their own bosses. Some were shopkeepers who had fallen on hard times. Union activist Ernie Scrase remembers that:

The barrow boys were regarded as rogues. Some of them I knew well, some of them I went to school with. They may have been rogues, I don't know, but they never done me a bad turn. So if nobody does me a bad turn he's not a rogue. Many of them were ex-servicemen.



*Harry believed there was a need for barrow boys; "They were a source of cheap food for the people who had very little."*



*How a cartoonist saw Harry's battle for street Traders, in the early sixties.*





Rogues or not, Harry was their champion. Vigilante Reggie Betts recalls:

He was a very strict man at Upper Gardner Street. He was in charge of it. He used to go round there every Saturday and collect their dues, and if somebody hadn't got it and all that he'd give them two weeks and he'd tell them to get out. Nothing violent...he'd make sure no stall went into that area. He'd have the backing of the rest, obviously.

He also strictly controlled their conduct, as this *Evening Argus* article of October 1960 reveals:

## A TICKING-OFF BY THE GUV'NOR

**B**OWLER-HATTED and bow-tied chairman of Brighton's Upper Gardner-street Traders' Association Harry Cowley ("The Guv'nor") warned members of the association at a meeting in the City of London public house in London-street, Brighton, that they would be in danger of losing their trading licences if they did not "play the game" and support him in enforcing the trading rules.

He warned them against:

- Using bad language.
- Leaving rubbish in the street.
- Not wearing their armbands.
- Not displaying name and address plates on the stalls.
- Auctioning goods from the stalls.
- Allowing unlicensed traders to trade in the street.

He said that police had already been round and warned every stallholder individually and that in future he would report any offenders himself.

"Bad language has been reported on several occasions," he said. "As for the rubbish, how would you like all that rot and filth dumped outside your house? The

loads of filthy, rotten apples and rotten tomatoes are an absolute disgrace.

"If you won't abide by the rules," he warned, "I shall leave you. Help me, play the game and remember the wonderful concession you have. If I do leave you, you will be very lucky if you find someone else who will fight your cause so sincerely—and I have been fighting it for the past 40 years."

On the subject of condoning the actions of unlicensed street traders, he waved a licence in the air and said: "It has taken me 30 years to get this for you. You are now protected by the police and by this association. There are only two or three people offending in this respect."

He thought that the blame for their presence in the street must go to the licensed stallholders who worked next to them.

The meeting approved a recommendation that in future any stallholders found leaving litter lying around after their day's work would be reported by other stallholders to Mr. Cowley.

*Upper Gardner St in the fifties.*



Harry's strong-arm tactics caused resentment. In 1959 his store was burnt down, supposedly by some of those excluded from the market. Despite these tensions, Harry was well-respected by many street traders:

Some of the barrow boys thought he was doing it for himself – but he was a man of principle and did it because he loved it. It was all he knew.  
(Western Road barrow boy, in 1984)

He had a tremendous business sense. If he had wanted to make money he could have been a rich man. But he preferred to help others. He was a man of iron.

(market trader Parny Martin, at Harry's death)



# « Old folk make so much row... »

*We've got to take the cudgels up on our own behalf... I shall not hesitate to rally the whole of England and gather outside the House of Commons.*

As Harry Cowley got older, he became less involved in fighting for the unemployed or the homeless, and concentrated more on the needs of old people. For many years he had organised outings and Christmas dinners for pensioners. In the 1950s, a pensioner himself, he campaigned for pension increases as well as for half price bus and train fares for old people.

In 1957 Harry organised a march to support demands for a rise in pensions from £2 to £3 per week. 300 old people marched through foul weather to a rally at the Dome. There Harry declared nothing was achieved by a 'Yes sir, please sir, no sir' attitude.

*We've got to take the cudgels up on our own behalf... I shall not hesitate to rally the whole of England and gather outside the House of Commons. Surely to God we are not asking too much. We have gone the right way about it. Now we have to go the wrong way.*

At a meeting later that year he appealed to youngsters and the trade union movement to throw in their lot with the old people.

It was the noisiest, angriest meeting in Brighton for years when OAPs gathered in a school to protest about their recent pension increase. The uproar at times completely drowned the speakers and the chairman threatened to call

To: Her Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth,  
Buckingham Palace,  
London, S.W.1. 18th February, 1957

Madam,

You will no doubt have heard about the controversy occasioned by the introduction of the recent Rent Act.

Much hardship is likely to accrue from this unpopular Act of Legislation and, unless adequate representations, based on public reaction, are made to the Government, consequential repercussions would undoubtedly produce many homeless British Citizens, among whom regrettably, would be included many old and feeble people.

Your Majesty has gained the love and affection of your loyal subjects, because, among other attributes, of your concern for the welfare of your less fortunate subjects.

As leader of the Brighton Vigilantes, I take the liberty of humbly inviting your Majesty to exercise the Royal prerogative, and to intervene in a matter which is to be ventilated at Trafalgar Square, London, on March 16th at 3p.m.

The meeting has been convened by the Brighton Vigilantes, who have pledged themselves to agitate constitutionally, in the hope that their efforts will serve some useful and humane purpose,

I remain, Madam, your loyal subject,

*H Cowley*



# **THE DOME BRIGHTON**

## **VARIETY**

### **AND THOSE WERE THE DAYS**

A NIGHT AT AN OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL

IN AID OF CLUBS OF THE BRIGHTON AREA COUNCIL NATIONAL FEDERATION OLD AGE PENSIONS ASSOCIATIONS

FEATURING

**THE MOTLEY SCHOOL OF DANCING VARIETY GROUP**

WITH GUEST ARTISTES

**DOREEN HINES**

**JOHN SOUTH**

**GEORGE ARTHUR**

PRODUCED BY Mrs. KATHLEEN TAYLER, L.I.S.T.D., A.I.D.M.A.

**MARIE HAYDON**

**VILMA NEVE**

**STAN TURNER**

**ARTHUR STOTT**

**FRANK CHILDS**

**JANET SULLIVAN**

**JOE DOUBLER**

ACCOMPANIED BY

**HERMANN WASSER**

**THE GAY ACCORDIONAIRES**

Compere: Harry Cowley

At the Piano: Winifred Sinden





the police....Old folk were jeering, cat-calling and almost fighting amongst themselves.

These and other angry meetings caused the members of the Kent and Sussex Regional Council of the Federation of OAPs to accuse Harry of "communist activities" and of advocating militancy against the government. He was denounced by some as "a renegade always ready to jump on the bandwagon". This friction caused Harry to form his own association for old people, and six out of eight clubs in the Brighton area rapidly joined him.

Harry is fondly remembered for organizing annual Christmas parties and tea parties in the Corn Exchange and the Dome. Up to a thousand pensioners attended these parties and enjoyed an ample spread and a variety of entertainments. At one of these parties in 1965 a speaker remarked, "Harry's voice is not heard so often now; he's been much quieter of late." To which Harry replied, "That's because there's nothing much to be noisy about these days. But when there is - I'll be there."



*The pictures on the two preceding pages show Harry about to take pensioners on an excursion, and as compere of the Dome Variety Show for OAPs.*

*Opposite, above, Harry leads Brighton pensioners on a march through London in 1957, protesting against the pension rate. He was chairman of the Manor Paddock social club.*

*Opposite, below, pensioners enjoy a tea party in Dome.*



# The Trouble with Harry...

## *IT DON'T COME RIGHT TO ME*

This was Harry Cowley's rallying cry. If he believed something wasn't right he would fight to change it. But what shaped his strong opinions on such a variety of issues? What persuaded him to take up a fight?

According to Ruby Weston, "He wasn't for the people who'd got business or got money." And he wasn't for rules or rulers. As Labour man Stan Fitch recalls, "He could not be controlled by rules - he challenged authority and defied it openly." Harry was for the "underdog", for working class people in hard times:

He was a real labour man - he must have been because he was for the working class. (Ruby Weston)

Sometimes those he tried to help could not immediately see how he was trying to help them. Ernie Scrase told us this story:

The one thing that Harry Cowley was very much opposed to was that if a person wanted a ticket for the Board of Guardians they went up to the Workhouse and did two days work chopping wood and then they got a ticket for five shillings. This was one thing that he did fight and of course the poor people thought he was trying to take away their ticket for their five bob, and five bob was a lot of money.

Also in those days...there was the everlasting pawn shop, and Harry Cowley used to run the pawn-brokers down as well; he hated userers. And he

did fight for those people, but he came in to so much controversy.

Childhood poverty and then the bitterness of trench warfare, post-war unemployment and the desperate plight of his working class neighbours, out of work, homeless, or old...it all made Harry a rough socialist and a practical Christian. Harry knew that "It don't come right."

There was also a fatherly, paternal element in his politics: "He wanted to help those who can't help themselves." If Harry decided that the authorities were not assisting someone in need he never doubted that he could find a way to help. He had great faith in himself, The Guv'nor, and thrived on success and popularity:

Harry liked people to respect him, know what he was and what he did. (Ernie Scrase)

## *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE, BUT NOT OF THE PARTY*

Harry disliked the rules and doctrines of party politics. Though always "a labour man" he often fell out with the Labour Party. Ernie Scrase recalls that "Harry did not agree with many, many things about the Labour Party." Stan Fitch told us that:

He wouldn't be bound by rules. If he wanted to go one way no one would stop him. There was no question of loyalty to the group. He did good and he made himself known, but he didn't do it in the

way that we in the Labour Party would have liked. I would call him a socialist rebel without knowing what the socialist cause is. It was really Harry Cowley's philosophy, if you know what I mean.

Harry hated the Conservatives, but just as hotly denied "Communist sympathies". He once told the press, "I am not a Communist and never have been." The couple of times when he stood unsuccessfully in Council elections as an independent, and even as a Liberal, he was supporting a particular issue rather than a party platform. As Ernie Scrase reflects, Harry was for people rather than political parties:

Harry was not representing people he was trying to help them. He had no practical political ambitions, I don't think he had any ambitions for self-glorification at all. It was just an honest desire to help people who were, in his opinion, more down-trodden than he was.

#### WHILE I'M LOOKING I'M LOSING

Harry Cowley's methods certainly didn't suit the placid, bureaucratic ways of party politics or council committees. Ernie Scrase recalls that "Harry's methods were quick and direct, decided one minute and done the next. He moved so fast that the opposition had not time to react." Harry easily justified this direct action: "Some people have asked me why I haven't looked before I leap. But while I'm looking I'm losing."

These methods relied on the support of the men, and sometimes women, who rallied to Harry's causes. Harry's role was not so very different from the big gang chiefs of America. By firmly controlling and directing "His Boys", the Guv'nor was able to act faster and more effectively than any committee or

## Robin Hood or gangster?

"GANGSTER or Robin Hood, which is Harry Cowley?" This was the question posed during the programme "People today" over the Home Service of the BBC on Monday.

The story of "The Governor" was put over in fine style in the course of a 30-minute programme. In addition to Harry and his wife Harriet, many other well-known Brightonians took part.

These included Cr Lewis Cohen, deputy Mayor of Brighton who told an exciting tale of how a loud-speaker was wired into the roof of the Dome to the consternation of Sir Oswald Mosley and his fascists, and Cr Leonard Knowles, a journalist who spoke of his role in the affair of the three men, sentenced to death for the murder of a chemist, and who stoutly maintained they were innocent.

#### INTERESTING

Harry Cowley's efforts on behalf of the old folk, the ex-servicemen, the unemployed and the doings of the Vigilantes made interesting listening.

Mr X. provided the mystery, while the stirring deeds of Harry in helping the barrow boys, the establishment of the Open Market and his work for welfare all helped to make this an enjoyable programme.



"You're wanted for a Robin Hood job, 'Arry."

Newspaper articles like this one from the *Argus* in 1959 helped to make Harry an ambiguous local hero.

Opposite - "While I'm looking I'm losing", Harry and his boys on the move.





council.

Sometimes the direct action of brawling anti-Fascists or house-breaking Vigilantes was on the edges of illegality. Harry was no stranger to the courts, on either side of the dock. But as Mrs Humphries told us, "The police tolerated him because he wasn't... well he didn't abuse them." Abe Cowley says that for Harry the ends justified the means:

He believed in law and order although he broke the law. He only did it to help other people.

Some critics were more concerned that Harry personally profited when he helped others. Perhaps he did help himself, but most people thought that it didn't matter. Stan Fitch considers that taking money on the side was "a small issue. He accepted money but it didn't affect his enthusiasm for helping the under-dog." Maybe Abe Cowley is right:

Some people couldn't accept that he was the sort of person that did things and didn't want anything out of it.

Certainly, Ernie Scrase is convinced that any shady image of Harry, as the rough and ready gang chief who helped himself as much as others, was created by the media:

Because he had such a strong opposition to the establishment, that was the only way they could discredit him. They had to discredit him, because if they hadn't he would have been one of the leaders of Brighton.

#### *IF HARRY COWLEY WAS ALIVE TODAY...*

The issues which Harry Cowley fought against, homelessness, unemployment, extreme right wing politics, and the position of OAPs, are still problems in the 'eighties. We asked people who remember Harry Cowley what they thought he would be doing today.

One person said that there was no longer the need for Harry's activism:

He was for the poor person. I don't think you'll find anybody poor today. If they are poor it's their own fault. But years ago you didn't have any help, you didn't have any going to Social Security. They were hard days for poor people and if anybody helped they were doing a good thing, in those days. Poor forty years ago and now is two different things.

Labour Councillor Dennis Hobden argues that Harry "belonged to that era of unemployment and poverty of the 'twenties and 'thirties, and because that era has passed I don't think Harry could find the issues that he did then":

If Harry was alive today, he would be running old people's Christmas parties. and he'd still be concerned about homelessness, but not in the same way.

In 1957 Harry himself said:

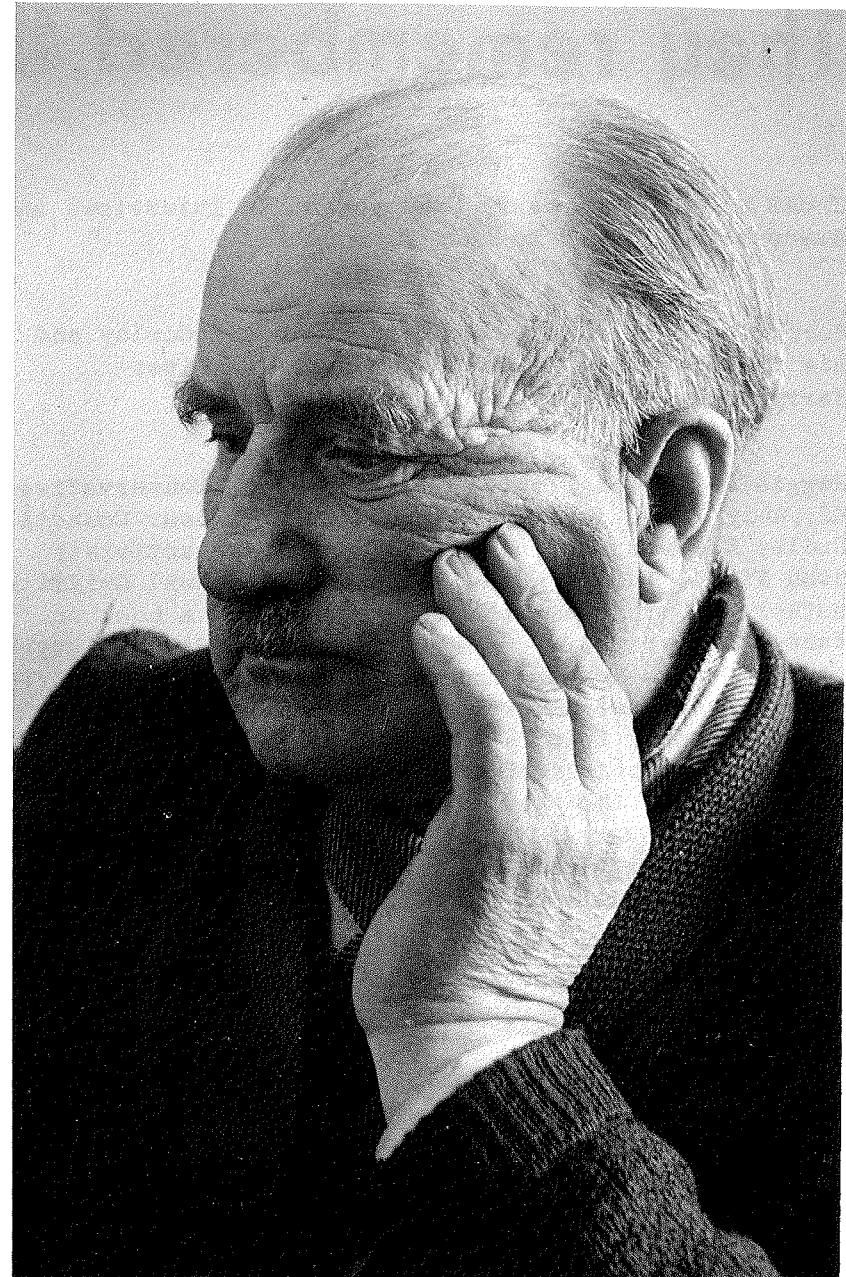
There is no excitement now....What is there to scream about? Except of course the welfare of old people, who could certainly do with a bit more.

But Ernie Scrase thinks that if Harry was alive in 1984:

He would be fighting for the people that had nowhere to live, he would be fighting for the people that had nothing. He would most definitely be fighting against the cuts in the social services, and he would most definitely not be in agreement with the three political parties today. I think as a great individualist he would have probably tried to form some organization of his own, even though it was a local organization.

What do you think?

## The End





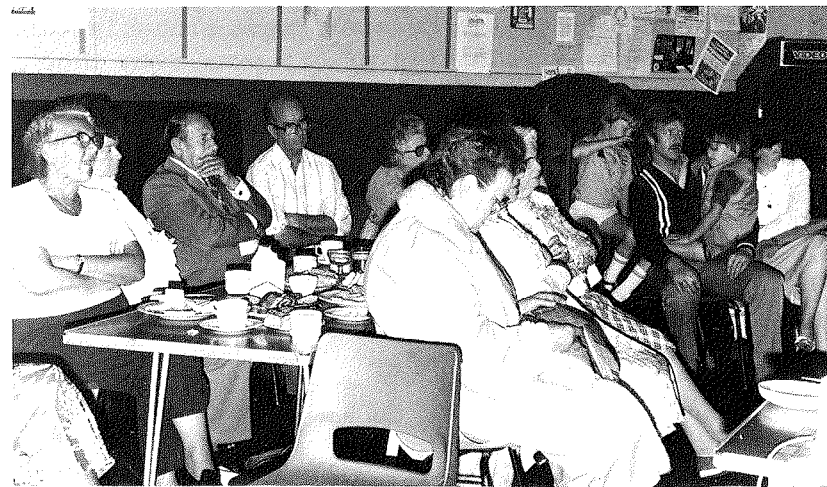
# They remembered Harry Cowley

These people knew Harry Cowley, and in interviews and discussions helped to make this book:

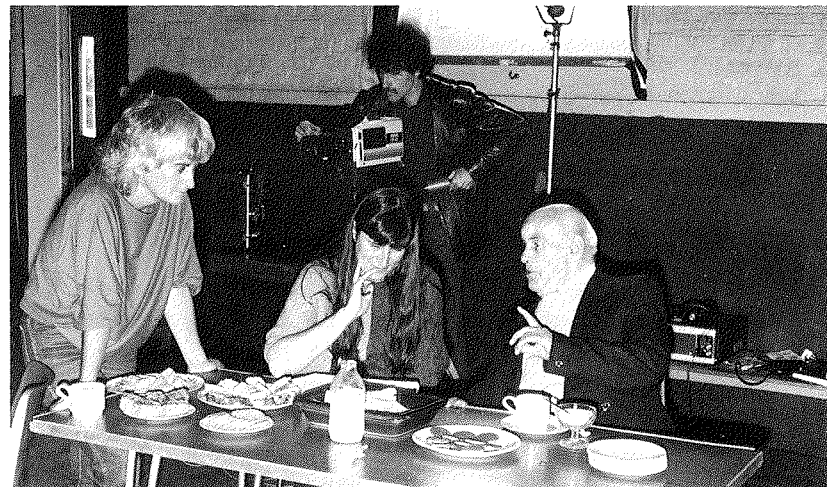
Harry Cowley's sons Harry Cowley and Abe Cowley and his daughter Ruby Cowley, and their families; Harry Cowley (nephew of Harry Cowley).

Reggie Betts, vigilante; Andrew Bowden, Conservative MP; Andy Durr, local historian and ex-Labour Councillor; Dudley Edwards, socialist and unemployed activist; Stan Fitch, Labour Councillor; the late Neil Griffiths, author of *Shops Book* who first suggested a book on Harry Cowley; Cherry Hewston, singer at OAP variety shows; Dennis Hobden, Labour Councillor; Mrs. Humphries, Grove Street neighbour between the wars; Valerie Kippax, family friend; Olive Larker, helper at OAP parties and socialist; Gus de Lacey, market trader and member of the Communist Party; B.J. Macy, market trader; John Marshall, fellow chimney sweep; Rose Marshall, neighbourhood friend; Joe Mitchell, fishmonger; Mrs Mitchell, Alf Richardson's daughter.

Molly Morley, QueenSpark writer and local historian; the late Les Moss, author of *Live and Learn: A Life and Struggle for Progress* and lifelong communist; Ernie Scrase, trade unionist; Helen Steer, Vigilante; Mrs. Teague and Mr. Teague, neighbourhood friends; Leonard Ward, Harry helped him in 1921; George Watts, fishmonger; Marie Weaver, wife of James Weaver; Ruby Weston, landlady of the Free Butt Inn in the forties; Mrs. Winter, who helped with OAP parties..... and many others.



*Pictures of the tea and reminiscence party show Leonard Ward talking to Toni and Jane and members of the Cowley family listening to the radio programme.*



# WHO WAS HARRY COWLEY ?



*...the chap they used to call The Giv'nor*

*...he should have been Mayor of Brighton*

*...he was a socialist rebel without knowing  
what the socialist cause is*

*...he wasn't for the people who'd got  
business or money*

Harry Cowley was a Brighton chimney sweep who became a local legend. He battled for the homeless and unemployed, for market traders and old age pensioners. He fought against Mosley's Fascists in the 'thirties and against tight-fisted councils and governments. *Who was Harry Cowley ?* recalls this changing century of Brighton working class life and politics, and how one man, with his rallying cry of "It don't come right to me", struggled through an eventful life.