

LIFE AFTER TANFIELD

I remember many years ago, asking Dr Sharp if I could take Woodwork instead of Cookery as my mother taught me to cook at home. You can, I'm sure, imagine the response!

Years later, my teaching friend and I joined an evening class to learn Spanish and over many years it became a habit to go to evening classes and learn stuff! She and I took a French (revision for us) course and I embarked on a series of practical courses at various technical establishments. I did Pottery and Guitar at Durham Tech then Woodwork at Roseberry Comp.. That included lathe work and at Gateshead Tech. I did Woodwork when we needed some kitchen units and had no money. The ones I made served well until we could afford decent ones. Later I started a Metalwork course which lasted only until one of the guys took skin off his fingers instead of smoothing the metal. As blood was spilled, the class closed. Stained glass and glass etching was another course I really enjoyed.

From all of the completed courses there were, of course, certificates to be gathered.

Accountability and all that stuff you will recognise. However, there is one such certificate which is framed and is hung proudly on the wall in my work room. That is my certificate for Bricklaying. It was the most fun and gave me the most satisfaction of any of the courses I undertook. I loved it! When I saw it advertised, I enquired as to its intention. Was it a taster course for people intending to go into the trade? Not at all, I was told. Anyone can come. We often have several women on these courses. Great, then I'd like to enrol please. Time and date supplied, money paid, I presented myself at the appointed place. And of course, at 50, I was the only female in a group consisting of young guys often in process of modernising their own homes and older men who were there for reasons best known to their wives. After a couple of weeks worth of suspicious looks, I was finally accepted as human when I made clear that I would supply all the boards with a shovelful of "muck" when it was my turn so we could crack on with building walls, gateposts and other interesting edifices. The best compliment I got was from an old chap who thought my wall looked lovely and neat. "I bet you do cake icing," were the actual words he used to my initial puzzlement. Then I looked at his wall and got what he meant as his "icing" was there, not there, glooping out, bricks uneven and so on!

When the young chap who lived next door to us, suggested that the wall dividing our terrace yards needed to be replaced, we agreed and said it was our responsibility and I would be doing it. He went quite pale. However, having checked with my tutor as to my capability for the job, I went ahead. People walking their dogs took new routes to see if the rumour was true that there was a woman building a wall! It was accomplished and was the only reason I was sad to eventually move house as I could not take my wall with me.

There is always time to learn new stuff so now I quilt and do leatherwork.

Claire Humpherson (Flowers 1953-60)