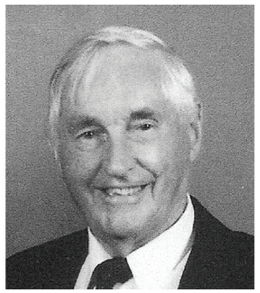

George Harris was born in Clifton in 1931. He lived in Deddington Parish until 1958 and then moved to Kings Sutton and later Kidlington until he and his family emigrated to Australia in 1969 as 'Ten Pound Poms'. He wrote this autobiography so that his children would know more about where he grew up. In doing so he vividly brings to life the hard living of agricultural families between the wars, the very high standards required to work on the Railways, the good and the bad aspects of National Service – he served overseas in the Far East at the same time as his friend Robin Hall who was killed in Malaya - and what it was like to work on the production line in Cowley. It is a unique account of living in Rural Oxfordshire in the early 1900's and so takes up where *Lark Rise to Candleford* leaves off.

George and I first became acquainted when he emailed me a contribution to *A Parish at War* (*Supplement* p.65 and back cover) summarising his National Service time. I knew he told a good story because he kept sending them to me long after *A Parish at War* went to print. I suggested he should write a book – he said he had! I persuaded him to send me a copy for our parish library. I was amazed to find that he had typed, copied and cut the pages by hand which he had then glued and bound into his own hand-made laminated covers on his kitchen table in Australia. I am not that talented and so this edition has been machine printed and bound; but otherwise it is the same as in his book - including any of the grammatical or spelling errors he apologises for at the end – with the sole exception that it was too costly to print his numerous images in colour..

I am delighted that George gave me his permission to publish this highly personal, but very evocative, story of his life in our parish. It is an important piece of history.

Robert Forsyth

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As I Remember

George Harris

AS I REMEMBER

GEORGE HARRIS

As I Remember

Growing up in the Parishes of Deddington, Kings Sutton and Kidlington from 1931 to 1969

George Harris

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Forward

The natural things in life are probably the easiest things to ***remember****, so too disasters. But kindness and sharing not always so easily remembered, as we witness every day of our lives.*

I remember *the smell of the morning freshness, the wild flowers, the new mown hay, the distinct smells of the farmyard, the cows, the pigs, the implement sheds, the rat-a-tat-tat-rat-a-tat-tat of the trains on the railway track, the phut-phut of the barges as they plied the canal, the ice and snow, the pea souper fogs.*

I remember *the Sunday roast and mother allowing me to dip a piece of bread in the dripping, then, as I added sugar, she would say "you will be as sick as a dog", the taste of that lovely gooseberry or blackcurrant jam, the seed cake and the apple pies.*

I remember *my first day at school, that lovely fresh daily milk, the smell of the pot belly stove, the nature walks, the first school holiday.*

I remember *starting work, Curry's, the farm, the baking, the railway, the Army and the car factory.*

I remember *getting married, the children and the holidays, so many friends.*

So many memories.

George.

As I Remember

1931 -1969

Some things that I may have done during my early life and indeed, my later life, may have escaped my memory. Many names have also faded from my memory and no doubt, after I have completed this account, things will come to me that I would have liked to include. I am not a rich man, but the things that have been bestowed upon me over the last eighty years are worth more than money could buy, so I think of myself as a "Cashless Millionaire.

George.

Contents

Chapter One - A son is born.

1931 - A disastrous earthquake hits North Island New Zealand. The Empire State building opens in New York. Dame Nellie Melba dies. Britain devalues the pound. Japan continues to occupy China. The Sydney Harbour Bridge is nearing completion. Dark days are looming in Nazi Germany. The great depression is coming to an end. These are just a few of the things that happened in 1931. I was born George Harris on the 4th June 1931, but this event did not make the headlines, probably mentioned in the parish magazine, probably not! I was born at home to my parents, Mary Anne Harris (nee Sykes) 1895 -1945 and Henry John Harris 1884 - 1960, in the village of Clifton, Oxfordshire. I was child number six to my mother, preceded by two brothers and three sisters. My eldest sister, Dorothy (Doll) 1918, was born out of wedlock and therefore took the surname of Sykes. Winifred Mary (Winnie) 1923, was my next sister, followed by brother John (1924) but John died when just a few weeks old, long before I was born. Brother James (Jim) 1926 was next and, sadly, when I was just four years old he was killed when he ran into the path of the local butchers van. Next was Sister Eva 1928. Then it was my turn to enter the world followed by Sister Eileen, born in 1934. We were all born at home, attended by the local midwife and the district nurse. Even being so young, when my youngest sister was born, I clearly remember the nurse arriving on her bicycle and leaning it against the hedge which separated our garden from next doors. I told dad and my sisters that the nurse was here and they told me off for telling tales, only to change their minds when there was a loud rap on the front door and the nurse entered, carrying her black bag and, without hesitation, approached the stairs to the bedroom, demanding boiling water to be made available immediately. I can't honestly remember anything of the birth taking place, no doubt I was given something else to keep me occupied. I am not sure of the exact date, but it was very soon after Eileen was born that Jim's tragic death took place, I cannot imagine how my poor mother must have felt, having lost little John and so soon after Eileen's birth. Although I was not aware as to why everyone was gathered at my grand-parent's home, I do remember being told not to go near the little fireplace in their front room, but of course I did, as children do, and pitched forward to get a

nasty little burn on my forehead from the cast iron surround over the fire. Cuddles and fuss and soon all well, but I was unaware of the funeral and the sadness, or the fact that I would never see my brother Jim again. Now I was the only boy in the family.

Chapter Two - Home Sweet Home

Home. Our humble cottage stood at the southern edge of the village, next to the green and formed the northern end of the adjacent farmyard, where my father worked. Auntie Alice and family lived next door. The cottages were some 200 years old, built of local stone, with thatched roofs. No running water or sewerage. We were not connected to the electricity grid, our lighting was by oil lamps and candles. The ceilings were very low with exposed beams, with lath and plaster between, in both the upstairs and downstairs rooms. The walls were very thick and uneven, with many nails sticking out, where pictures and other things had been hung over the years, with larger hooks in the main downstairs room which were used to hang the hams and sides of bacon after they had been salted and cured. There was one large room and a scullery with pantry on the ground floor, a passage, leading from the front door, to the back of the house, with a door leading off into the living room. The floor was made of huge flagstones, cold and uneven from years of scrubbing and general wear and tear. A large window overlooked the village green and wooden shutters completely covered it at night time. These shutters were a great asset during the 'blackout' of World war two. A smaller window overlooked the back garden and the farmyard. Upstairs there were just two windows, one for each bedroom, one to the front and one to the back of the house. There was also a small window at the top of the stairs (the landing, as we called it) set into the thick outside wall, with a wide ledge, a useful storage for apples. This window had an eastern aspect and caught the morning sun as it came up over the hill and across the meadows. A large fireplace took up most of the eastern wall, with stone seats on either side, when seated one could look up the chimney and see the sky above and feel the rain during heavy storms, the draught drawing most of the heat up the chimney, not very economical. An old baker's oven was set into the wall on the right hand side, I am not sure how this would have been fired, as it had been sealed off many years earlier. An iron grate with oven and hobs had been installed at some later time, although an improvement, not ideal by modern standards. To heat the oven, which was placed on the left side of the fire, it was necessary to push hot embers from the fire under the oven with a specially shaped tool, a flue from under the oven passed up to the chimney to create a draught and keep the embers bright and hot. I remember only too well, on foggy days during the cold winter months, the smoke from the fire filling the room and the oven not getting hot through lack of draught, my poor mother would despair, how would she get the cooking done?, she had no alternative. The

kettle and Saucepans were all boiled over the fire on a double bar that spanned the hobs, on the odd occasion a lump of soot would come down the chimney at an inappropriate time, whilst mother had a lid off a saucepan and spoil the contents, a good indication that the chimney needed sweeping. A chain with a large hook on the end, suspended from a bar set in the chimney, was used to hang large cast iron boilers on which dad would fill and boil for mother to do the washing and also for Friday, (bath night). A long galvanised tin bath, which used to hang on the outside back wall, was brought in on Friday evening each week and filled with the hot water. I think the bath was only filled once, so someone ended up last and no doubt, not a lot cleaner. It was necessary to light the fire every day, even during the summer months. A good supply of kindling was kept in a cupboard under the stairs along with coal and logs. All the kindling was collected along the hedgerows and the logs from fallen trees on the farms. Collecting the kindling was called 'wooding' and several women would go 'wooding' together, a social '*gathering'* so to speak. The men would cut the logs with a cross cut saw and split them with an axe, usually on a Saturday afternoon. The coal was delivered from the local wharf, by horse and dray, at 10 pence a hundredweight (55kgs approx.) The sacks were strong and treated with an oily substance, a smell that lingered after the coalman had left. After a time a large amount of coal dust and small chips would accumulate in the cupboard and this would be used to 'bank up' the fire.(placed on the top of the fire when it had attained a good heat). The ashes from the fire had to cleaned out every day and were sometimes used to dry up the back garden path during the winter months or placed in a bin to be collected by the local "ash man"* who called once a week with his horse and wagon. The grate and oven were polished with black lead, whilst the hearth was whitened with a chalk like substance and came in the form of a ball, about the size of a tennis ball, called a whitening ball. The tools (poker, tongues, brush and shovel) had brass handles and these were cleaned with brasso, whilst the fender too was cleaned with black lead. Mother used to scrub the old flagstone floors twice a week and always took pride in keeping the front door step clean. A large table stood in the middle of the room with six or seven assorted chairs, mother used to scrub the table top and often ended up with a splinter, the twin wick oil lamp stood in the centre of the table

**The ash man was a Mr Washington and he had lost one hand whilst ploughing for a local farmer. He had his shot gun on the plough, pointing backwards, towards himself and for some untold reason, the gun went off badly damaging his hand and one eye .He wore an eye patch and a specially made leather glove .He somehow managed to empty the bins onto his wagon. I believe the council took on the ashes when he retired.*

Dad mowing the little field with his favourite horses.

<u>Front left</u> The Duke of Cumberland's Head. My Grandfather's shop and house adjoined, the entrance door under the lean-to opposite the passing car (note there are no pavements).

<u>Front right</u> Old Bill Tustain's house, Drinkwater's shop and house adjoining, then the Malt Row (Auntie Gladys and Carr Hawkins) Warren's chimney just visible at the end of buildings.

Heavy snow at Clifton Corner in the 1930s. Wright's farmhouse and Church to the right and Homans house jutting out to the left.

Looking directly to my house, the left cottage of the pair at the end of the road, the other one is Auntie Alices'.(note the large elm trees to the rear, sadly now gone, sucummed to Dutch Elm disease) Boys unknown, could easily be brother Jim

and did give off a good light, but candles were used when the lamp wasn't really necessary, as this was cheaper than burning off the paraffin. Mother had an old wicker chair with a high back, by the fireside and always had several rugs or coats on it to keep the draught from her back. On the opposite side, dad had an old carver chair and would sit with his feet on the fireside hob. I shared the sofa with my sisters or sat at the table with assorted old toys or books.

Everything we had was second-hand, some of it probably third or fourth-hand, but it was our home and that is what we accepted. Of course in the summer months, we spent most of our time outdoors. A door in the front corner of the room opened to the staircase which led up to two bedrooms of equal size, the floors, made from hand sawn elm planks were warped and uneven from years of scrubbing and were full of tiny holes made by woodworms. The only relief being peg rugs* placed near the bedside, nice to step on when getting out of bed, especially on cold winter mornings. The top of the stairs was always referred to as the 'landing' and led directly into the first bedroom and this where dad and mother slept. A bed, made of cast iron, with big brass knobs at each corner. A chamber pot, placed under each side of the bed. Dad would hang his clothes on the bottom bed end as did mother on her side. Opposite the bed was a large ledge which was part of the chimney breast, a useful storage area. In the far corner was a small cupboard, not really large enough to be of any real use, dad kept his ice skates and fishing rod there and I think a few meagre presents were hidden there for various occasions. A wash stand, with attached mirror, a water jug and wash basin, a soap dish and towel rail, stood near the window, this was the only place where mother could wash and have a little privacy, when everyone had left. The ceiling went up to a point, the shape of the roof, the window was small and would only open half way, the thatch on the roof had got so thick, from years of added straw. A pair of swifts (*similar, but bigger than a swallow*) nested in the thatch above the window each year, and I was fascinated by the way they could fly into the nest at full speed. (*Swifts cannot land on the ground because of the length of their wings, making it very difficult to take off*). A door led into the second bedroom, the window overlooking the back garden and the fields beyond.

* *Peg rugs were made with strips of old clothing being poked through an old wheat sack with a pointed wooden peg, the strip poked back again from the reverse side to form a loop. When finished the ends of the strips would be trimmed evenly. The rugs were usually made during the cold winter months. Some of these were very colourful, depending on what material was available and the more artistic makers would produce some very nice patterns. (No television and very few radios)*

I shared this room with my sisters Winnie and Eva.

Two double beds, similar to Mother and Dad's, with a small table between just fitted in. Each bed had a palliasse (a hessian bag packed with straw, like a large biscuit) on top of which was a heavy material bag, known as a tick, filled with soft feathers, to form a warm comfortable mattress. A long bolster pillow was placed under the pillows, which too, was filled with soft feathers. Sheets and covers completed the bed, with a heavy coat as additional warmth during the coldest of the winter months. The only additional warmth came from a hot water bottle, or a house brick, that had been warmed in the oven and wrapped in a cloth. I remember only too well seeing my mother battling with the feathers when transferring them to clean ticks and pillow cases so as to wash the soiled ones, her hair was usually covered in the fine down, so would float around as she attempted to gather them up with brush and dust pan, a vacuum cleaner would have helped, but of no use without electricity. Sister Winnie left to go into service* when I was about seven years of age and sister Eva left similarly left when I was about eleven, so this just left sister Eileen and myself, a much more comfortable situation. I omitted to say that sister Eileen slept in a too her apron, and stockings. The clean-up was even harder, as the feathers cot in our parents room until she was about four years of age, as I would have done so when I was a baby. The lavatory was situated in the garden some twenty yards or so from the back door, a smelly old structure, as I remember it, leaning against the garden wall, the wall having fallen away at one corner, making it a draughty place on cold winter nights, the snow and the rain would get in when the wind was in the right direction, making it all wet and uncomfortable. There was a wooden seat with a large bucket beneath. The bucket was emptied once a week by the 'night man', who came along with a horse and tanker to take the contents away.

Once a week was totally inadequate for a large family and dad would dig a deep hole at the bottom of the garden, as many others did, and empty the bucket himself. Some homes had what were known as 'earth toilets', earth toilets were built over a deep pit and the contents were usually cleaned out annually and buried adjacent to the toilet.

**When girls of poorer families reached a certain age they would often go in to a 'live-in' mode of employment, usually at the homes of the gentry, called Service. This was full time and probably a half day off for a home visit. These jobs were not always so attractive, abuse and lack of basic needs were common, almost slavery in some cases. Others were decent, with a chance for betterment..*

Some of these toilets had a long wooden seat with two holes for adults and a lower smaller hole for the children, a family trek to the loo before going to bed, with a lantern on dark nights. My grand-parents had a large orange blossom bush growing over and around their toilet, pleasant sweet smelling. We had no such luxury, the nearest aromas came from dad's roses and other blooms when in season. Our garden was large, we had chickens, rabbits, pigeons and pigs. A mixture of hawthorn and elderberry bushes made up the boundary fence. One large apple tree and a plum tree set the garden apart from the vegetable patch to a smaller area where dad grew his favourite roses and a variety of other flowers (dahlias, chrysanthemums, flocks, hollyhocks along with the annual row of sweet peas) and a little patch where he raised his vegetable seedlings for transplantation in his allotment and orchard patch. The pigs sty was at the bottom of the garden, whilst the chickens and rabbits resided nearer the fruit trees, in a variety of cages and runs. When cleaned out the contents were put on a heap near the vegetable garden this heap was known as 'the muckle' and was left to be dug into the garden as required. Red worms loved the muckle and did a good job in breaking it down, some of them ending up on the end of the fishing line, the fish seemed to prefer them, over and above other baits. Of course our animals and birds were not pets as such, but provided us with eggs, meat and a nice rooster for the Christmas table. The vegetable garden keeping us supplied with fresh vegies of many varieties, depending on the season. Mother's washing line was stretched from a hook on the house wall down as far as the apple tree. I remember only too well, during the winter months, when the temperature stayed below freezing, the sheets and clothing hung on the line, solid frozen, no washing machine or drier in those days. Water for general use was available from a tap, some fifty yards from the front of the house, several of these taps were located at various points in the village, the water was quite safe to drink, but most villagers preferred to get their drinking water from a natural spring, known as 'the fountain', which was located at the bottom of the hill on the eastern boundary, in the grounds of the mill, the water ran continuously throughout the year and was always icy cold. At some time in the distant past, a pipe had been inserted into the outlet and a neat stonework surround had been built to accommodate a bucket, a large flat stone was at the bottom of this structure and over the years of constant flow, the water had worn an indentation into the stone. The fountain a meeting place for many, especially on a Sunday morning, when the men and boys, sometimes women, would make the journey down the hill to get their supply of drinking water. A wooden yoke was placed across the shoulders, a chain on each end with hooks from which to

suspend the buckets. Some men had made flat wooden crosses, which were placed on the buckets when full, this helped in preventing spillage as one negotiated the journey home. As I grew older and was able to carry half-filled buckets, on the yoke, made for an adult, I often got home with less water than I had when I left the fountain, but I soon learned to be more careful, having been sent back for more. As a boy it seemed like miles to walk there and back, but in reality, not that far at all. The water was stored in a red earthenware pan, placed on a sturdy bench in the scullery, a jug at hand to fill the kettle or drinking glass, etc. The pan had a capacity of probably two buckets and the buckets were left filled too, this water was used to top up the pan and this would usually be enough drinking water to last until the next week-end trip to the fountain, although it was necessary to make more frequent trips during the summer months. On the odd occasion when the pan was empty, my mother would fill the kettle with water from the tap in the street, dad never failed to notice and I remember his reaction so well, as soon as he took the first sip of his tea, he would say "you have been using that damned tap water again" a few choice words would follow and mother would retort "well you had better get off down to the fountain then", more choice words!! Also on the bench was a large bath with a handle at each end, which mother used to do the weekly washing. A smaller one to wash hands and faces, dirty knees, etc. A shelf above the bench held washing soda, carbolic, sunlight and lifebuoy soap. Washing powders were still in their infancy and most older women stayed with the old traditional soaps. Under the bench mother kept her rinsing buckets, washboard and copper stick. We didn't have a copper, but the stick was still called a copper stick. Any clothes or linen that needed boiling was put in a big bucket and placed over the fire to boil, the copper stick being used to poke down the washing and also to remove the hot washing from the bucket to the rinsing water. We did have a rain water butt near the back door and mother always used this water for rinsing, the butt seldom became empty as rain was frequent. The butt was usually a tar barrel that would have been left behind when the road menders worked in the area, the top was cut out and a small fire was lit inside to burn away the excess tar, then painted and a wooden lid to replace the top. Some people had several butts, some of which would be old beer barrels. Many people would use rainwater for drinking and cooking, the majority of homes had thatched roofs and the water would be filtered through the straw, making it crystal clear. Many streams and springs were found in the surrounding countryside and these served very well, the farm labourers, road workers, railwaymen, wayfarers and children at play. Sadly, this water is not now safe to drink, with the introduction of

farm chemicals, roadside weed killers etc. Getting back; Next to the scullery was a large walk-in pantry, which, being on the north side of the house, kept very cool. With large shelves, it was more than adequate to hold our groceries and vegetables, leaving room for dad to house his bicycle (pushbike as it was referred to). We did have the occasional rat and this could be very annoying, because they were not easy to catch and caused dad a few 'head aches'. Our coats, hats, raincoats and scarfs would usually hang on pegs, behind the back and front doors, whilst Our shoes, boots and wellington boots were kept opposite the bench in the scullery. Dad's work boots were more often than not, very wet from his work on the farm and usually placed near the fire to be dry for the next day. I cannot remember my dad ever wearing wellington boots, always hobnailed boots. He kept his 'Sunday best' boots under his bed and he would pay one penny *(1d.) for one of us to clean them,, needless to say there were a few tears when the penny was on offer, as someone had to miss out. Dad would bring the fresh milk home each day from the farm in a can complete with lid and handle, holding two quarts (a quart being two pints). When the Mr Wright (Tommy) died and dad moved to a non-dairy farm at Deddington (Butlins), Mr Hirons (Tardy) delivered it, he used a pint measure to tip the milk, direct from the churn to jug or can presented, later he introduced glass bottles, which had to be left on the front step each day, no bottles, no milk. Fresh eggs from our hens and vegetables from dad's garden and allotment, when in season, kept us adequately supplied.

Killing the pig:- A barbaric procedure, by today's standards. Butcher Course (Old Doughy, WJC's dad) usually arranged the killing for a Saturday, when men were available to assist, plus local kids. A strong, four legged bench, about twelve inches high, was placed in the yard, near the pig sty, a heap of clean dry wheat straw nearby. The poor pig was now brought to the bench, its snout tightly tied to prevent biting, hoisted onto the bench, with a man on each leg, onto it's back, being tightly secured with a strong rope around it's middle to the bench, kicking and squealing. With the sharpest of knives, OD cut the poor pig's throat, with the blood spurting out into a small tray. Now lifeless the pig was rolled off the bench, onto the clean straw, which was set on fire to burn off the bristles. With some effort it was now hoisted on to a beam in the barn, hanging head down, whereby OD would remove the whole of the inside, then leaving the pig to hang till the next day, when he would return to cut the animal into portions. The only waste from the pig, was the contents of the intestines and the eyes, everything else was made use of. Hams, sides of bacon, brawn, goul pie, chiterlins, liver, tom hodge, stuffed

heart and kidney's you name it, there was no waste. The thinner intestines would be thoroughly washed in salt water and turned inside out several times over a period of three days and then plaited to become chiterlins and fried (delicious). Of course commercially these intestines would have been be used for making sausages. The larger ones used to make black or white pudding. Curing of the hams and bacon as mentioned earlier in the story.

**A penny was worth two half pennies (1/2d.) (apenies in local slang), or four farthings, quarter pennies (1/4d) (farthens). A farthen would buy a couple of ounces of chocolate drops from Miss Shirley's sweet shop, served in a small white paper bag, which was funnel shaped, this was prior to the outbreak of world war two, never to return at such a price or quality. Three apenies would buy a stamp to post a letter and a penny would buy a stamp for a postcard. Four pennies and a apeny would buy a large white loaf of bread and two pennies and a farthen would buy a small white loaf. Brown bread (Hovis or Turog) was a penny a loaf extra for large and a apeny extra for a small. Before the war, the baker would call every day, except Friday and Sunday, but this was reduced to three times weekly during the war, for economy reasons. The British currency had stayed basically the same for many years and at school it was always referred to as LSD, pounds, shillings and pence' L for one pound (twenty shillings) S for a shilling (twelve pennies) and D for a penny (two halfpennies or four farthings). Until paper currency was introduced, the pound was a gold coin called a sovereign. (very valuable these days if one has the good fortune to find one) There was also a half-sovereign, which was worth ten shillings. Then the silver coins; a crown was five shillings, a half-crown was two shillings and sixpence, a florin was two shillings (two bob), a shilling (a bob), a sixpenny piece (a tanner) and a very small silver threepenny piece (known as a thripny joey) which was later made in an octagonal shape out of a cheaper metal and became known as a thripny bit. The penny, half-penny and farthing were all made of copper, we were always told not to put these coins in one's mouth or if you did, you would get **canker. In addition to these coins there was one called a guinea (twenty one shillings) and one called a spade guinea (ten shillings and sixpence). You will note that a couple of horse races in UK are the Two thousand guineas and the One thousand guineas, but for general use these coins went out of fashion. The crown was not used in my time, but was used for commemoration purposes, such as the Churchill Crown (one of which is in the family). The farthing and the threepenny piece became obsolete when the decimal currency was introduced many years later, so too was the half-crown, the florin and the sixpenny piece.*

*** Canker:- A gangrenous or ulcerous sore.*

Chapter Three - Clifton and District

Clifton, along with Hempton, made up the parish of Deddington, and was at the Eastern end of the parish, one and a half miles from Deddington, whilst Hempton was at the Western end, a similar distance from Deddington. A little ditty well known by the locals:-

"Hempton on the hill,
Clifton in the clay,
Poor old drunken Deddington
in everybody's way"

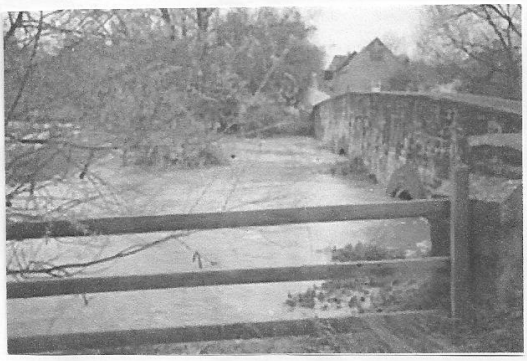
Clifton standing on the B4031 road, between Deddington (Oxfordshire) and Aynho (Northamptonshire) a village of some fifty homes, five farms, one small shop, post office and a public house (The Duke of Cumberland's Head). Also there was the Methodist chapel, the Church of England church, the infant's school and the water mill. The village was built on a small hillside, with a steep descent to the river Cherwell and the water mill to the east and a long winding hill to Deddington to the west. A small road led off to the left or right, depending on which direction one approached the village, bringing you to the green and our house. To the left of our house was the 'bottom lane', leading to the fields beyond. A similar one, referred to as 'the top lane' led off the road at the upper part of the village and served the fields and farm cottages as well as Hazel Hedge Farm (not counted as a Clifton farm). The road through the village was sealed with no kerbing or footpaths, grass verges and rough gravel in the lanes and alleys. No street lighting till 1939 and pavements at about the same time. No sewerage or mains water, electricity was connected to most privately owned homes and a few farm cottages. Water availability as mentioned earlier. Most of the farms and cottages were owned by Christchurch College, Oxford. The farms were of small acreage and worked by tenant farmers, the farmhands living in the cottages at a small weekly rent. The other main source of work was with the Great Western Railway, (God's Wonderful Railway) half a mile down the road. There were two stations, Aynho for Deddington and Aynho Park, with frequent local trains for Banbury on the down line and all stations to Oxford on the up line. To connect an express train for London or Birmingham, one would go to Banbury or Oxford. The Aynho stations were the nearest points for workers to access the permanent way, the station yard and the signal box. Of course men from other villages worked on the railway too.

Working for the Great Western was considered to be cut above farm work and paid a much better wage and reduced rail fares, plus free passes at holiday time for an employee and family. Uniforms for station staff and signalmen, overalls and wet weather clothing for the permanent way workers, made the job even more attractive, no such luxuries for the farm labourers. It was not easy to get a job on the railway, unless you had a relative, with good character already on the staff, then only if and when a position became available. This all changed after the war, when men were leaving to go to the building and car industries for higher pay and cleaner conditions, this creating many vacancies on the railway. Aynho village was a further one mile east from the stations and although Clifton was nearer to the railway, the stations were both in Northamptonshire, the river Cherwell being the county boundary and because of its winding passage through the meadows, the stations were on the Northamptonshire side. Moving in a clockwise circle around the parish, Souldern, Somerton, North Aston, Over Worton, Barford St. John, Barford St. Michael, Adderbury, and Aynho were the immediate nearest other villages, with many more, not really that far away. As previously mentioned, the river Cherwell kept Clifton just in Oxfordshire and wended its way through the meadows in a crazy pattern until its eventual end at Oxford, where it ran into the River Thames. The Coventry – Oxford canal ran almost parallel to the railway and also met up with the river in several places. The railway split into two separate routes at Aynho junction, the Banbury to London route, via Oxford, Didcot and Reading, whilst the second route Banbury to London, via Bicester, Ashendon junction and Princess Risborough. Clifton was served twice weekly by Hall's bus service to Banbury, Thursday and Saturday (Thursday being Market Day). Other days, one could catch the train, or walk to Deddington, where one could get the Oxford City bus to Banbury or Oxford, stopping at all main road villages. The Midland Red bus service also ran to Banbury every day and ran a more frequent timetable than the once a day Oxford City bus. Around about August 1939, the village was connected to street lighting and the ' head man', Willie Welford, had the honour to turn the key to switch them on for the very first time, only to turn them off a month later, at the outbreak of world war two and the introduction of the 'blackout'.

As I remember.

The Duke of Cumberland's Head

Public House. Clifton.

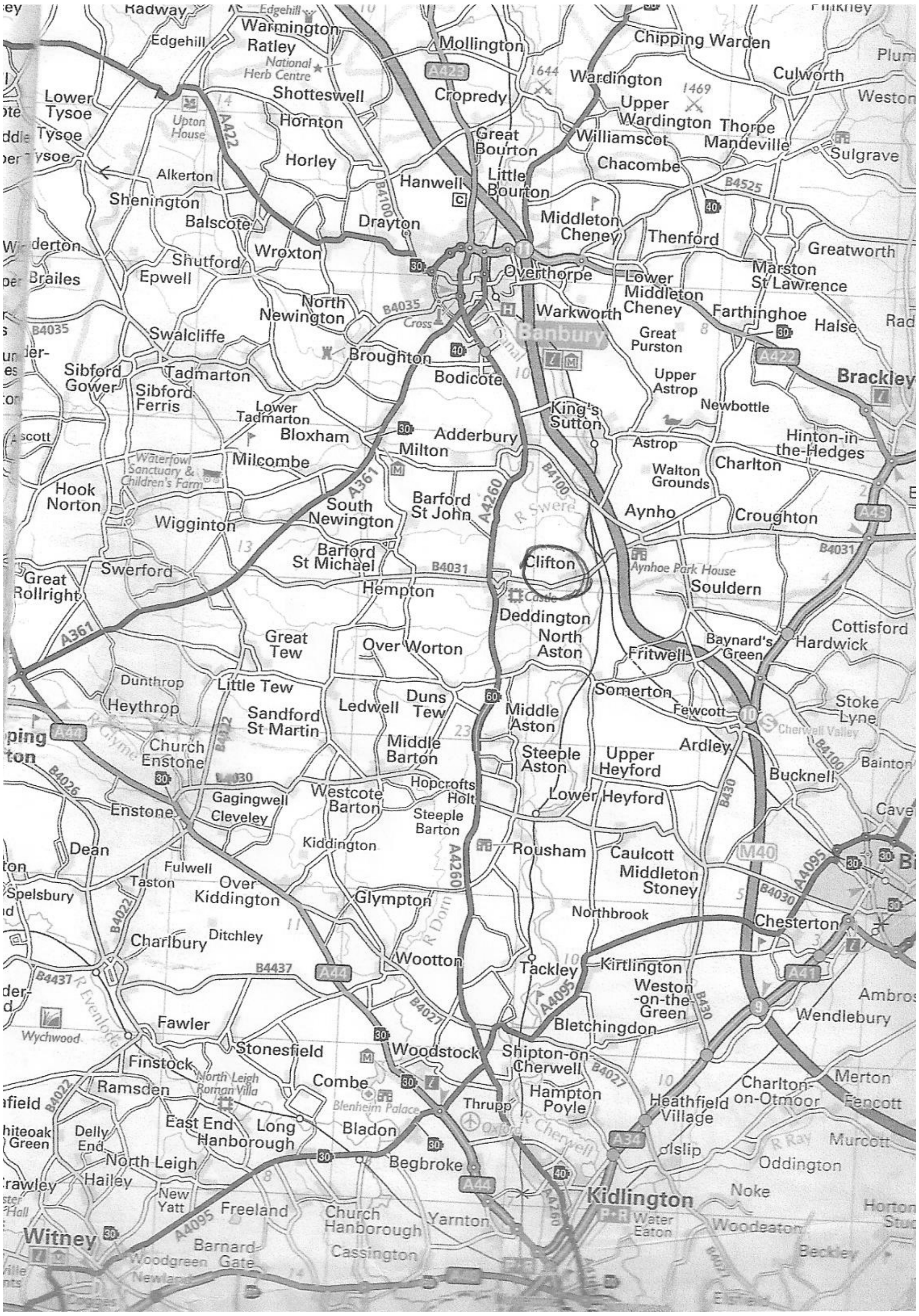


River Cherwell in flood at Clifton Mill. The walls we rode our bicycles on.

Clifton main road

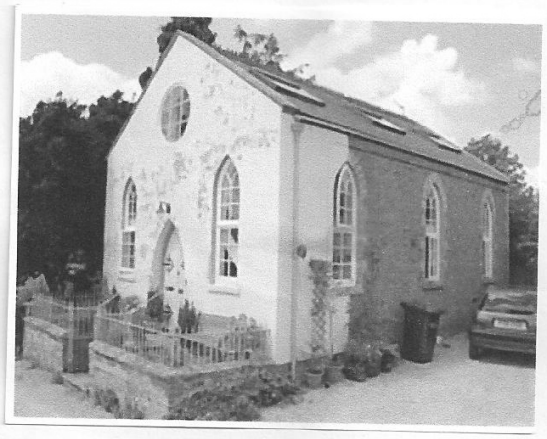
Boomerang points

towards Post Office.



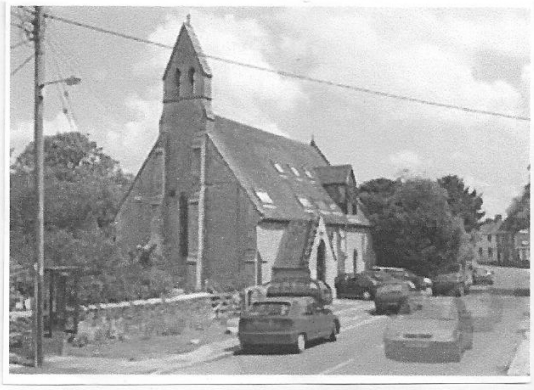
Radway
Edgehill
Warmington
Ratley
National Herb Centre
Mollington
Chipping Warden
Culworth
Lower Tysoe
Tysoe
Upton House
A422
Shotteswell
A423
Cropredy
1644
Wardington
1469
Upper Wardington
Thorpe Mandeville
Weston
Hornton
Great Bourton
Williamscot
Sulgrave
Alkerton
Horley
Hanwell
Little Bourton
Chacombe
B4525
Shenington
Balscote
B4100
Drayton
Middleton Cheney
Thenford
Greatworth
Shutford
Wroxton
Overthorpe
Lower Middleton Cheney
Marston St Lawrence
Brailes
Epwell
North Newington
B4035
Cross
Warkworth
Farthinghoe
Halse
B4035
Swalcliffe
Broughton
Banbury
Great Purston
A422
Brackley
Sibford Gower
Tadmarton
Bodicote
Upper Astrop
Sibford Ferris
Lower Tadmarton
Newbottle
Bloxham
Adderbury
King's Sutton
Milton
Astrop
Hinton-in-the-Hedges
Waterfowl Sanctuary & Children's Farm
Milcombe
A361
B4100
Walton Grounds
Charlton
Hook Norton
South Newington
Barford St John
A4260
R Swere
Aynho
Croughton
A43
Wigginton
Barford St Michael
B4031
Clifton
Aynhoe Park House
B4031
Swerford
Great Rollright
Hempton
Castle
Souldern
Deddington
A361
Great Tew
North Aston
Cottisford
Over Worton
Fritwell
Baynard's Green
Hardwick
Dunthrop
Little Tew
Somerton
Heythrop
Duns Tew
Ledwell
Middle Aston
Fewcott
Stoke Lyne
Chipping Norton
A44
Sandford St Martin
Church Enstone
Middle Barton
Ardley
Cherwell Valley
B4100
Steeple Aston
Upper Heyford
B4030
B4026
Gagingwell
Westcote Barton
Hopcrofts Holt
Lower Heyford
B430
Bucknell
Enstone
Cleveley
Steeple Barton
Dean
Kiddington
Rousham
Caulcott
M40
Fulwell
Taston
Over Kiddington
A4260
Middleton Stoney
Spelsbury
B4022
Glympton
B4030
A4095
Charlbury
Ditchley
Northbrook
Chesterton
B4437
B4437
A44
Wootton
Tackley
Kirtlington
A41
R Evenlode
R Dorn
A4095
Weston-on-the-Green
B430
Ambrosden
Wendlebury
Wychwood
Fawler
B4027
Bletchingdon
Finstock
Stonesfield
Woodstock
Shipton-on-Cherwell
North Leigh Roman Villa
Combe
B4027
Merton
Ramsden
Blenheim Palace
Thrupp
Hampton Poyle
Heathfield Village
Charlton-on-Otmoor
Fencott
B4022
Delly End
East End
Long Hanborough
Bladon
Oxford
R Cherwell
A34
R Ray
Murcott
North Leigh
Islip
Oddington
Hailey
Begbroke
A44
Noke
Crawley
New Yatt
Freeland
Church Hanborough
Kidlington
A4095
Yarnton
P+R
Water Eaton
Woodeaton
A4260
Witney
Barnard Gate
Woodgreen
Cassington
Beckley
Newland
Elsfield

As I remember.



The Chapel

(2008)



The Church

(2008)

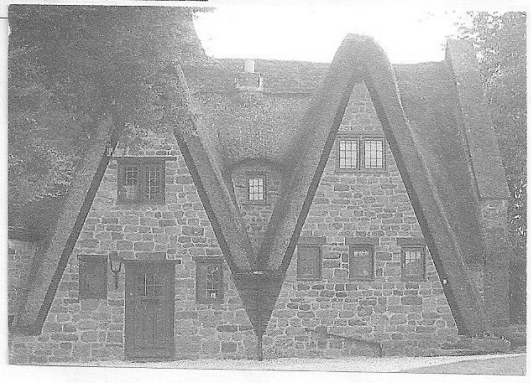
The School

(2008)

As I remember.

Wright's Farm-house, similar to ours, but minus the garden and porch.

The stone from our house, Auntie Alice's house and the farm barn was used to build this modern home on the site of the these buildings.



The portion of Lord Denbigh's home, left after the disastrous fire, during the 2nd world war.

Chapter Four - The Farms and the Mill

Farm: 1. Welford's (privately owned), a mixed farm of poultry and dairy cattle, with a small acreage for corn and cereals. Mr Welford (hop-a-long or Willie as he was locally known), lived in a modern red brick house, close to the farm, with his wife (Totsie), son Donald and daughter Marion. He was considered the 'headman' of the village and also had connections in London with Agriculture and travelled there on a regular basis, probably on a Board of Directors. Willie drove a gleaming Alvis car and I think he had a Daimler too at some time, his garage was next to the green and Willie would spend many hours washing and polishing the car, on the road between the green and his garage, making sure that he was seen doing so ("*I own a car"!, so to speak*) It was only one of two in the village at that time, Mr Spencer owned the other one, but I can't recall having seen him driving it. Willie had owned a motor cycle much earlier and at some time had had a bad accident, which left him with one leg shorter than the other, hence the name 'Hop-along' He employed three dairy cowmen, several poultry hands and other general workers. His main dairy herd of cows were pedigree Red Poles, along with a pedigree bull. He did have horses, but I vaguely remember how many. Being a rich farmer, he had tractors and more modern machinery that the tenant farmers, he also sold paraffin for the house-holder's lamps and stoves. The buildings in the yard next to his residence were modern and built with red bricks and slated roofs, these were used for the egg packing, bird processing and hatchery. The cowsheds, barn and other buildings were straw thatched. His poultry section was very large, and supplied many thousands of eggs and meat birds. Rhode Island Reds, Light Sussex, White and Black Leghorns made up the main varieties of birds and were all free range, covering many acres of land. Mr Welford also owned the Mill, (previously Robinsons Mill) from which he was able to supply most of his feed for the poultry. Some of his fields ran alongside the river Cherwell, the river also supplied the water to work the mill. Bob Vincent (shitty) was the head cowman along with Harold Whitlock (Wiggy) and Fred Pinfold (Fatty). Fred Drinkwater looked after the horses and general farm work along with Bernard Bowerman, who drove the tractor. Additionally some of these men would be used to operate the mill as

required. The head poultry man was not a local and known as Foretop, he had several assistants and during the war years, several Land Army girls were employed too, three of them marrying local lads and staying on in the village after the war. The eggs were cleaned and packed and mostly went to the Egg Producers factory at Banbury. I am not sure where the meat birds were sent. My mother plucked and dressed the ones that were sold direct from the farm to the local people, at four pence a bird, very poor pay but every penny counted then. The hatchery kept up a fresh supply of new chicks for restocking. Certainly the best kept and equipped farm in the village.

Farm 2. Wright's (Privately owned). A small farm. Mr Wright (Tommy), lived at the farmhouse with his sister, a Miss Gibbons and a George Brain, (Georgie). I am not aware of the relationship of the last two, if any. Georgie drove a very nice open-top sports car, probably a Sunbeam Talbot, and was only at the farm at week-ends, he had a very good job somewhere. I think Miss Gibbons may have been a nurse, but not sure of this. The farm buildings were very old and quite run down, a stable, a small cowshed and an assortment of smaller buildings along with the farmhouse, all of which were straw thatched. In addition to this Tommy had tenancy of the farm buildings next to our house, a large barn, which was tiled with stone slates and a long open fronted building with a enclosed part at each end, this building was straw thatched. A rick yard* was situated behind the barn. Three horses, a couple of cows, a few sheep and chickens were the main complement of the farm, the acreage was small, with mostly pasture and a few acres for corn. My father and Harry Newell (Donkey) were the only employees along with Tommy, the hard working farmer. Dad, along with Harry's helps, looked after the horses and sheep, did the ploughing, the planting and the reaping whilst Tommy looked after the feeding, the milking and cleaning.

The harvesting and the haymaking were shared and sometimes a local or two would be called in to give a hand.

** A rick being a corn or hay stack. The corn ricks usually kept in a yard, to enable the threshing machine access to thresh the corn. Haystacks made nearer to where required for fodder.*

A fairly large garden with a small fruit orchard made up the rest of the property. When Tommy died sometime prior to the second world war, Miss wright carried on for a while, but had to sell off the farm when it became too much and lived in the farmhouse till her death soon after. The house stood empty for many years, I don't know what happed to Georgie and Miss Gibbons. The farm buildings and adjacent fields next to our cottage became part of Gardner's farm.

Farm 3. (Manor farm) Spencer's (later Gardner's). I know little of Mr Spencer or of his family as I was very young when he passed on and the farm was taken over by Mr Gardner (Charlie). When Mr Spencer died, he left most of his effects to a Mrs Dewhurst, who had been his 'live in' maid for many years. His black Austin car was included, but Mrs Dewhurst or her husband did not drive and the car remained in storage at her sister's house until after the war, when it was disposed of. The farm was now taken over by, Mr Gardner and he moved into the manor house with his wife and daughters, Laurie and Doreen. This farm was quite substantial, probably the bigger of the Clifton farms. The manor house stood well back off the main road, with a reasonable sized orchard in front and a large vegetable garden to the left, with a drive on the right hand side to access the farm buildings and the fields beyond. A large barn, cowsheds, pigsties, calf and bull pens, with free range poultry roaming at will, made up the complex and added to this were the farm buildings next to our house. My uncle Dick (Sykes) looked after the horses and also did a lot of hedge cutting during the winter months. Dick was nearly blind in one eye, after being kicked in the head by one of the horses, his eye was hanging down his face and by some miracle, the doctors were able to replace it in the socket, but this is only what I have been told. Dick's son, George (Baldy), drove the old Fordson tractor and did the ploughing among many other tasks requiring the use of the tractor. Bill French (Cudgel) was the dairy man as well as general farm work. The dairy herd was a mixture of cross breeds and numbered about two dozen. These would be milked twice a day. The bull, a huge animal, was kept in his own pen and was used to service the herd and also cows from other, smaller farms, in the district. I remember a young girl, Joan Watts bringing her father's cow from Bonners Wharf, walking the mile or so, with the cow on a halter to be serviced by the bull, Bill or Charlie would actually take the cow from her to take to the bull. Charlie's brother, Will also helped a lot with the farm, his main task was to look after the sheep, a flock of about sixty (at guess) and very handy with the horses and machinery. Will also helped on his father's (Old Charlie) small farm nearer to

Deddington, and this is where Will died an untimely death. Will was leaving Old Charlie's farm with a horse and wagon and stopped to open the farm gate, something startled the horse and it bolted forward, killing Will instantly as he was crushed beneath the wheels of the heavy wagon. Will left a wife and three children. His two boys, Jim and Roger, took over the farms much later. This is the farm where I spent most of my time after school and school holidays, I suppose it is true to say, I was an innocent little slave, working and enjoying the hard work, only to be thrown a sixpence on a Saturday and five shillings for a whole fortnight's work during school holidays.. This will come later in my story.

Farm 4. Garrett's. Now we are going up the hill at the western end of the village. Mr Garrett (Frank) lived in the large thatched farmhouse with his wife and five children, Francis, Mary, Tom, John and Ken. Mrs Garret was a nurse at the John Radcliffe hospital. Francis was in the air-force and sadly, was killed as an air gunner in a Lancaster bomber on a mission to Peenemunde Germany, on the eighteenth of August 1943. Tom was in the army and survived service in Burma against the Japs. I believe Mary was a nurse too. John remained on the farm throughout, but sometime after the war, ran off the road in his car after a heart attack and died. Ken was a signalman on the GWR and when he retired, he took on the post office at Deddington, he too died of a heart attack whilst his wife, Edith, was away on day trip. Mr Garrett met his death on the farm, he was on the tractor with John, counting the cattle, when they accidentally went over the edge of a stone pit and Frank was crushed under the weight of the tractor. Another large farm, covering many acres. Quite a large dairy herd complete with a very big bull. I think as many as twenty horses at times. I can't remember there being any sheep, but there may have been. I worked for Mr Garrett for a few months after I left school and this is where I Learned to drive the tractor. This was probably the muddiest of the farms, but some attempt was made to concrete the main yard to make it easier to clean, a half-hearted attempt I might say. My cousins, John (Pumpkin), Lewis (Lulu) and Charlie (Dymock) all worked here, so too did Mr French (Freddie) and his son Gerald (Mike). John Garrett was the main stay of the set-up, big strong, muscular man and hard worker, whilst dad Frank put in time as he felt fit. John, Charlie and Gerald were mainly involved with the tractor and machinery, Freddie was the thatcher and the others looked after the dairy and the horses and general farm work.

Farm 5. Mr Fred Hirons (Tardy). This farm, without a doubt was the most unkempt of the five, small with a long thatched cowshed which adjoined the farm house and turned at right angles at the opposite end to cover the dairy (as such) and implement sheds. Fred employed one man, Brian Clark (Briony) who slept rough on the farm and seldom changed his clothes, a pleasant, easy going man, who ran the small farm, more or less single handed. Fred moved out of the farmhouse when his father-in-law, Mr Peachy died. Mr Peachy was the landlord of the Duke of Cumberland's Head public house and Fred moved there with his wife and daughter Marjory to become landlord, but still kept the small farm going in the capable hands of Briony. A Mr Taylor and his wife along with daughter Rosemary moved into the farmhouse for a short time until a disastrous fire wiped out the entire farm buildings and rick yard. Men from Garrett's farm were working with a tractor near a rick of straw, about two hundred yards or so, on the north western side of Tardy's farm, a strong wind was blowing directly in Tardy's direction. Apparently loose straw was ignited against the exhaust of the tractor and before anyone had noticed, the whole rick was ablaze and a huge wisp of burning straw was blown onto the roof of Tardy's farm buildings, here again no-one had seen this happen and quickly the wind assisted flames got an unstoppable hold, engulfing the farmhouse and all buildings as well as several ricks of corn in the rick-yard. A BIG fire!! The Deddington fire brigade was small and could only use a standpipe for water. By the time the Banbury fire brigade arrived, with their modern engine and equipment and the ability to pump water from the river, it was too late to save the farm, they were only able to hose down the ruins and prevent the fire spreading to neighbouring Garrett's farm, a lucky space of about fifty yards separating the two farms. No animals were lost or injured as they were out in the adjacent fields. Mrs Taylor had no idea that the fire was racing toward the house and had to make a hasty retreat when some-one banged on the door to warn her, Rosemary was at school, just down the hill and Mr Taylor (Bert) was at work, his dinner was still in the oven. They lost everything, and moved in with Mrs Taylor's parents in the village and that became their permanent home, when their elders passed on. The farm stood derelict for many years, except for a small iron roofed building which was used for the milking. Tardy still delivered the milk, I imagine he probably had an arrangement with Garrett's until he was able to move his cows back into the above shed. It was certainly a devastating fire, the worst by far of the two fires that happened in Clifton in my memory, the other fire I will come into my story later. All the farm fields were named, such as; Spencer's Downs, Clark's Ten Acres, Forty Acres. Little Meadow, Long Grounds, Springfield, Banslot, Harrison's Close,

The Clump, to mention just a few. The locals all knew the fields, the river and streams so well, knowing exactly the time and place to gather mushrooms, blackberries, water cress, hazel nuts, fish, rabbits, duck and moorhen's eggs, a wealth of good healthy food. Most of the farmers and workers had shot guns and often carried them when working in the fields, a rabbit or a hare, perhaps a partridge, may pop up to become dinner in the next day or so. Would be considered cruel these days.

The Mill. Many of these mills were scattered across the countryside, where adequate water was available. A building of three story's, built of local stone, with a slated roof. Built over the water with a big water wheel to turn the grinding stones and operate the sack lifts. A weir, of which we always referred to as the 'Lasher' was built into the river Cherwell, some four hundred yards (a guess) from the mill. An arm was dug from the weir, to the mill, deep and wide. When this was full, the water would then flow over the weir, keeping the river flowing normally. A large wooden barrier, with winding gear, was built behind the water wheel. This barrier was wound up to allow the water to turn the wheel, when the mill was in operation. Near to the mill a floodgate was installed in the arm, this was raised when the arm was in danger of overflowing, especially after heavy rain and winter ice and snow, this water now returned to the river through a short channel, which we called 'the stream', about eight feet wide and built of stone, with a bridge in the middle to allow access to the adjoining field. The water from this channel would gush fast and strong and in doing so, had made a big hole in the river over the years, which we referred to as the 'deep hole'. As indeed it was. During the war, a young soldier drowned in the 'deep hole', apparently he got cramp and no one really noticed that he was in trouble. My cousin, Dymock and others dived into the deep water, unable to locate him. A large old time hay rake, (a two man one, made from wood), was brought down from one of the farms, where luckily it had been preserved for many years. A rope was secured on both sides of the rake and the rake weighted to keep it submerged. Men on one side dragged the rake across the bottom of the water and men on the other side pulled it back for another attempt. Success and the body was retrieved. An Air Force truck arrived to take the man away, over the cab in large letters "Meat Only", not very nice. These days it would have been a different scene, with police, firemen, ambulance, how things have changed? The water wheel when turning was very powerful and all the mill equipment was carefully designed and geared with belts and chains which could be disengaged as necessary to prevent damage and injury. The heavy sacks of corn

were delivered by horse and wagon, the sacks being over two hundredweight's each (a hundredweight (cwt) being one hundred and twelve pounds (lbs). The sacks were wheeled into the mill on two wheeled sack carts. A chain looped around the sack and it would be hauled up to the top. floor, through two sets of trap doors to the grinding room. I never actually got farther than the front entrance, children, strictly forbidden. Rats were a big problem and got into the hoppers of corn and flour, I don't know how this was cleaned. The biggest mill (Commercial) was Clarks at Banbury and they took the bulk of the corn from the local farms to process for flour, bran and other products. Of course a percentage of the corn (Wheat, Barley and oats) was retained by the farmers for next season's planting.

Keeping it tidy: Most local councils employed men to keep the towns and villages neat and tidy, referred to as "roadmen". Our roadman was a Mr Lewis, who lived at Deddington. He covered the one and a half miles between Deddington and Clifton. Leaving the council yard each morning, with his wheelbarrow containing the appropriate tools for his planned day's work. Mr Lewis used a scythe and sickle to cut the grass on each side of the road twice a year. He cleaned out the roadside drains and swept the gutters. He also set aside a day to check and maintain the local sewer beds, supplying many people with tomato plants each year from this source. Sad to say, there are no Mr Lewis's anymore, all mechanical now and nowhere near as neat and tidy.

Chapter Five - The Villagers

The Villagers. I will start at the mill, the lowest level of the village. Bob Vincent with his wife and two children, Robin and June, lived in the mill cottage right on the edge of the mill stream, Bob worked at Welford's farm, as previously mentioned. Now up the hill (Mill Hill), perched on the very top of the hill was the home of Arthur Hawkins and his wife and three daughters, Sissy, Fairy and Darkie. Arthur worked on the GWR as a platelayer. A small paddock separated the next house where the Warrens live, Warrant Officer (RAF) Warren, his wife and daughter Evelyn. WO Warren was stationed at Upper Heyford, the then Headquarters of the Royal Air Force. Now we come to Malt Row, three small cottages joined. My Auntie Gladys took the first two with her seven children, Ida, Tom, Elizabeth, John, Nellie, Charlie and Edith. (Husband had passed). In the third one lived Caroline Hawkins (Old Carr, as she was referred to by the villagers), with her son Henry, brother of Arthur on the hill. Henry rode a motor cycle and worked in Banbury. The Coach House was next, which belonged to the Drinkwater's, Frank and Sissy with sons Leslie and Sidney. Frank also owned the adjoining shop, very small, selling a variety of goods, tobacco, cigarettes and confectionery, a cigarette dispensing machine stood near the shop front, where a penny halfpenny would by five Woodbines (known as coffin nails) or two pence for five Players. Frank also had a small vehicle with which he delivered fresh fish, vegetables and various other goods to the surrounding villages. He also partnered a fish and chip mobile van with his brother-in-law, Bert Taylor. Bert previously mentioned in the farm fire account. They ran the fish a chip van each Saturday night and did very well, right into the early part of the war, when both Frank and Bert were involved in war work and the van was stripped and became part of the war effort. I think Frank was a Fire Warden and Bert went to the Northern Aluminium factory, where aircraft parts were produced. Postman Tustain (Will) with his wife lived next to the shop, a fine brick house which stood on the corner of the little road that led to the green. Old Tustain, as he was known, owned his house and the adjoining house. He was a very stern man and hated kids kicking a ball near his house or sitting on his front garden wall. He would rap on the window or come to the front door "Pick that ball up and clear off". If a ball landed in his garden, that was the end of it, he would pick it and promptly cut in half with his pocket knife. One of the village water taps was right opposite his house too and the same rules applied, as we would often take a drink under the tap "Clear off, leave the tap alone". For many years Will was the postman, a stickler for the rules, he would not let go of the

letters at the door unless mother was there to take them, grumpy but very smart in his uniform and well groomed moustache, he may have been an NCO in the military. Next door, rented from old Bill, lived Mrs Brain, who tended to put on the 'airs and graces', befitting of the smart house that she was renting. I can't recall her husband or any children. I believe a Mr (Lou) Foreman, a signalman with the GWR, was the next tenant, followed by Bernard Bowerman and his wife, who lived there for many years. Now we turn into the 'First Alley', a small divide between the houses. My best friend's (Aubrey) parents, Freddie and Freda lived in the first house with son Peter and daughter Jean, Aubrey lived with his grandparents from birth. Freddie worked at Cowley (Oxford) at the Morris car works and caught the early train from Aynho station each morning. The train, known as 'The Cowley' left Banbury at 5.55am each morning (Monday – Friday), stopping at all stations to pick up the workers; King's Sutton, Aynho, Somerton, Tackly Halt, Heyford, Bletchington, Kidlington, Oxford and terminating at Cowley, just a short walk to the factory. Return journey at 5pm ex Cowley. After Freddie's house was a tiny cottage, but I cannot remember if it was occupied, but it was sister Winnie's first address when she married. Then a Bert Callow, a retired man, a keen gardener, not aware of his job before retirement, possibly a road worker. Sammy Fox lived next door to Bert, an odd little man, he slept downstairs, his bed opposite the front door, Sammy had a string from his bed to the latch on the door and if one called when he was abed, he would call out to ask who was calling and pull the string for one to enter. He was a short, small built man and wore cut down wellington boots, I don't think he ever had a job. Reg Hartwell lived next to Sammy with his wife (Bert Callow's daughter) and their children. Christopher, Eldrith, Dianne and Deserie, Mrs Hartwell's brother, Billie, also lived with them, he was an invalid (Downs) . Reg worked for the Deddington Council, mainly on road works. A very tall man and he was the first working man in the village to own an old car, but not till after the war. Reg was always tinkering with it at week-ends. Going back to the alley entrance and continuing down towards the green: A Nice pair of brick homes, in the same style as the Tustain's, the first one was rented from the Welford's by Bill Clark and his wife, they had one daughter Jean, who some years later was married to my cousin Lewis (Lulu). Bill was a booking clerk at the Banbury Railway station, a quiet, unassuming person, not often seen in the village. In the second lived Miss Welford (Trissie) and Miss Baker (Sparrowlegs), Miss Baker was very tall and her legs were so thin, hence the nickname. Spinsters and well off, not sure how the wealth was accumulated. They had a nice back garden with big shed and a plot of ground in the allotments opposite, Trissie being a relative of Willie

Welford was always able to get farm manure for the gardens, my dad used to do the heavier work for them, digging etc. They always went off on holiday together, not during the war, I suppose. Now a gap called the 'Second Alley', which led to Willies farm buildings and dairy, bordering Trissie's garden on one side and Willies yard on the other, with a connecting turn into the First Alley. Hidden behind Willies high walled garden, was Boulder Dyke cottage, which used to be the farmhouse of the Harrison farm, but this had been divided up before my time, several families did occupy it up to the war, The Goldsmiths, the Bowlers, then it became the home of Donald Welford and his wife Jean until it was demolished many years later, the stone being used to build a modern house. Now we are on the green, our house, which has already been covered. Auntie Alice lived next door, her cottage being much bigger than ours, with a large family room, a small lounge and an extension for her kitchen had been added to the back of the building, making the garden, somewhat smaller. Alice lost her husband just before I was born and she was left with seven children: Charlie (Dymock), John (Pumpkin), Ethel, Irene, Lewis (Lulu), Vera, and Tom (Snowy). Of course Charlie and John were soon at work and assisted greatly with running of the household, Auntie Alice working as a servant at Welford's during the day. This was a lovely spot as we had no adjacent homes, just the farmyard and the lovely green fields. Across the green to the left, down a short road of about fifty yards, is the Methodist chapel, where we were all christened. Behind the chapel, sitting on a large garden block, was the home of the French families. A double, long thatched cottage, like ours, bordering fields on one side an orchard on the other, with the chapel at the gateway. Old Tom French lived in one cottage with his wife, whilst his son Jack lived next door with his wife and three children, Bill (Cudgel), Stan and a daughter, whose name escapes me. Old Tom worked on the GWR (retired). Jack and the boys were farm workers. Not too sure about the girl, if indeed there was one. Turning now, going back towards the main road, Welford's garage stood parallel to the road, two sets of double doors, painted red and blue striped.

These doors became our goalposts, as kids, when we played football. (This old wooden building still stands, somewhat in need of repair). Now we have a little alley to access three single cottages. Mrs Pinfold senior lived in the top one with Eddie Dumbleton, (sadly killed in WW2.) Fred Pinfold (Fatty), with wife Phyllis and son Douglas in the middle one, with Bernard Bowerman and his wife in the last one. Next a smart, well built, cottage belonging to Mrs Dewhurst and husband Jimmy (ex Spencer's farm), a Mrs Dixon and children (evacuees) occupied this

house during the war. 'The Orchard', as it was known was next, this was in fact, about twelve blocks of land for gardeners to grow vegetables. It was not easy to get one of these, as they were very fertile and right in the middle of the village at about seven shillings and sixpence a year rental. (Sadly gone now, several modern cottages built upon them). We are now moving up the village and I will keep on the left hand-side. Two more thatched cottages with sizeable back gardens. Mr Homans (Arthur) with his wife and three children, Bill, Cliff and a daughter, Beatrice, lived in the first one. Arthur was a ganger on the permanent way (GWR). Tom Tustain, with wife and grandson Aubrey lived next door, Tom another railway man, this cottage was more set back than the one in which the Homans family lived, making room for a raised vegetable garden at the front. Tom had trained red currants and black currants against the wall of the house, and his wife used them to make the most delicious jam. A large weeping ash stood at the top end of this garden and although the houses have long since gone, the tree still stands. Drinkwater's barn was adjoined to Tom's barn and Frank used this to store his goods for the shop and garage his van. Continuing this long thatched line of cottages, next was Mr Fred Drinkwater and his wife (Frank's parents), I am not aware of Fred's occupation prior to his retirement, but I know that he did do casual work on Welford's farm. Now we have a large area taken up by Gardner's farm, previously mentioned and onto the village school Behind the school was the lovely, reed thatched* cottage, belonging to Lady Denbigh, with servants bungalow along-side. Being the biggest and most expensive property in Clifton, standing in several acres of land, with a very large, double garage and workshop set well back from the main road, with tall fir trees to set it apart from the beautiful, landscaped gardens.

A chauffer driven Rolls Royce car, was serviced on the property and was kept in gleaming finish. Being so young, I can't recall ever seeing a Lord Denbigh. This house had many rooms, a water well and pool. Unfortunately, it was let to evacuees early in the war and a serious fire, which started in the kitchen, destroyed over half of the building. Had it been straw thatched, the whole lot

**Reeds are water borne plants and grow in huge quantities in Norfolk and other places where there are very wet, large, swampy areas. The reeds are strong, almost stick like and are more durable than wheat straw, as well as being less combustible. Reed thatching is more expensive and more labour intensive, but the end result speaks for itself.*

would have been destroyed. It is sad to say, that the house remained empty till after the war and as a result of this, it was badly vandalised, doors, electrical fittings and cables, readily removed. The garden was quickly overgrown and the well (a very deep one) soon became un-useable, with the amount of large rocks that were tossed in to measure the time they took to hit the water. The strange part being, that no-one ever came near or by to keep people out. Lady Denbigh never returned, as far as I know. The servant's bungalow was also occupied by evacuees and stayed so until after the war, so was not subject to the same fate as the main building. Continuing our journey up the road, my Uncle Dick and Auntie Beatrice, came next and lived in the first thatched cottage of two, with their children, Freda, George, Leonard and Edith. Uncle Dick as previously mentioned worked on the farm as did George (Baldy) and Len (Natty), there was probably another child, but my memory refuses to tell me. Next door was a Mr Stevens (Aboy), Son Tom and his wife (Queenie) and their son Monty (Mick). Monty was a touch younger than me, but we did attend school together. Later in life, he was a signalman on the GWR, as I was too. Sadly Monty died at quite an early age. Monty's grandad, Aboy, was so nicknamed because he had double hernias and could only shuffle as far as the front garden gate, with the aid of two walking sticks and always called out "A Boy" to attract ones attention. Cheekily the kids would ask him "Aboy, why have you got two sticks?" he would reply "I'd give you both sticks, if I could catch you, young varmints". Tom too was a railway man. Mr Newell (William) , locally known as "Old Bill Newell" and his wife lived in a small detached house opposite the west end of the school, with sons, Arthur and Harry (Donkey). I don't know what old Bill did for a living, I only remember him as the verger/caretaker of the church. He used to ring the bells before the services on Sundays. He rang the first bell for some time prior to the service and changed over to the second, some minutes before the start of the service, an indication to the congregation to be seated. Mr Newell was also a keen gardener and kept his front garden and his allotment in fine condition. Now we have another detached thatched cottage, the home of Mr French (Fred) and his wife (Emile) and their children, Gerald (Mike), Kathleen, Rosemary, Marjorie and Horace (Podge). Fred, as previously mentioned, worked at Garrett's farm, as did Gerald later. Horace, being only three weeks my junior, was my best friend during our schooldays at Clifton, along with Peter (Aubrey's brother) and Christopher Hartwell, all four of us were born in 1931. Emile was a gypsy girl and met Fred when calling in the village to sell pegs and other goods that gipsies made themselves, from materials scavenged from the countryside. Emilie was a lovely, lady, who settled to the new

life so well. Gypsies were always treated with suspicion and had a reputation for helping themselves to local poultry etc. It was considered 'bad luck' to turn down a gypsy's offer of something for sale, so a small clip of clothes pegs seemed to be the most popular, useful and cheapest item to buy, to avoid the 'bad luck' curse. The two farms, 4 and 5, have already been covered, so we will now cross the road and turn back into the village. We come to the 'top lane', which leads to the village allotments and a little further on a pair of farm cottages. I know that Mr Cox and his family lived in one, but not sure about the other, the cottages belonged to Painters farm at Deddington. I know of two Cox children, Ron (Bingey) and Percy. Ron was a guard on the GWR, and Percy worked away from Clifton. He used to play the piano-accordion and was often seen leading the carol singers at Christmas and the May Day procession. We also had a parade for 'Mummery* day', usually on Boxing day morning, Percy would wear a colourful attire, a spotted scarf around his head, large brass ear rings (curtain rings), a little black on his face, to lead the Mummers*, who would sing and dance through the village, collecting a few pence, from onlookers, to be shared at the end, with most of the village children and some of the younger adults joining in, appropriately dressed.

Sadly these old traditions have died away, although some country villagers still keep up the May Day festivity. More on these things later. Back to the village and we now have the home of the Whitlocks, Mr (Fred), his wife, son's Harold Wiggy) and Freddie, also daughter Mary. Mr Fred and Harold worked, as previously mentioned, at Welford's farm. Freddie worked at the car factory at Cowley and Mary would probably have been in service. Next door was Mrs Whitlock Senior, she lived alone, I can't remember a Mr senior. On festive occasions, Mrs Whitlock would decorate her 'climbing rose tree', which grew on the blank end of her cottage, with beautiful hand-made roses, quite a picture, hours of pains-taking work. Now we have a small alley, leading to the rear of the next continuous row of homes. The first three of these buildings were small, stone walled, with blue slated roofs, with several steps leading up to the front door and small fenced flower gardens. When I say small, they were really small, about the size of a dining room table in width and slightly longer. Mr Knibbs (Walter) and his wife lived in the first of three small cottages, with their two children Alfred (Alf) and daughter Flossie.

** Mummer: One who wears a mask or fantastic disguise at Christmas or other festive season, to entertain. Mummery: A performance by Mummers.*

Walter worked for Painters farm at Deddington. I really can't recall who occupied the next two cottages, but I do know who lived in them later on. A small barn, then Miss Shirley's sweet shop, (mentioned earlier) Miss Rose, who may have been related to Miss Shirley, lived in the next small thatched cottage, with the Plumbe family next door, Mr Plumbe (Frank), his wife and two children, Len and daughter Joan. Mr Plumbe another railway man. Next the small post office, Mrs Jennings being the postmistress and telephone exchange operator. Mr Jennings (Midlin), son Bernard and daughter Vera made up the rest of the family. Midlin, so called, because when asked as to how he was faring, would reply "fair to midlin" he was also a railway man. The post office was tiny, just room for two people to stand at the small counter. The letter box was set in the wall of the building and a public telephone box on the grass verge outside. Of course all messages went through the small exchange, so there were no secrets in the village, news spread very quickly. An old empty house stood next, vacated by the Harper family some time earlier, they moved to Deddington, The Church of England building stood on its own ground and was built of a greyish stone with a slated roof and a twin bell tower at the western end. I will cover the church, the school and the chapel in more detail later in the book. Wright's farm, already featured, so we move on to The Duke Of Cumberland's Head public house. The pub was housed beneath a thick thatched roof, with adjoining barn and private residence. The Tap room was close to the bar, not a bar really, the beer was served over the bottom half of a split, stable type door as was all other drinks, crisps and biscuits. A slightly bigger room along the small passage was used for the darts players, shove half-penny and dominoes.' A wide passageway led from the front entrance to the rear garden, where a small lawn with a couple of tables, with wooden bench seats stood. These tables were used during the better weather, by the women and children, to enjoy a lemonade and a bag of crisps, whilst the men would be knocking back their pints of beer (Mild, Bitter, Black and Tan, etc.) Children were strictly forbidden to be inside the pub. Opening and closing times were kept strictly to the law. (10am – 2pm and 6pm – 10pm weekdays. 12 noon – 2pm and 7pm – 10pm Sundays). The landlord would call time about five minutes early, to enable men to scramble for a last fill up before closing. Next to the pub, (very conveniently for my grandfather and uncles, who were all heavy drinkers), was my grandparents shop and residence. My grandfather (Alfred Ramsey Sykes) was a hedge cutter and ditcher, a strong, heavily built man, feared by many. The story goes that, one day, after a day's work and a session in a pub at Deddington, he was waylaid by two policemen on his way home to Clifton, it is said that when the policemen attempted to

approach him, he floored both of them with his tool bag, and left them on the roadside and continued his journey home. He would leave home in darkness and walk many miles to carry out his trade and was one of the best in the district, winning many, many certificates at local agricultural shows, as did Uncles Jess, Jack and John. Uncle Dick was able to do hedge cutting, but not as a full time trade, as previously mentioned he was a full time farm worker. By the time I was able to remember, the shop was no longer open for business, the money had been frittered away at the pub. All I can remember of it, was a barrel of vinegar, empty shelves, weighing scales, dust and cobwebs. My grandparents had thirteen children, I only knew eleven, Uncles, Jess (Shant), Richard (Dick), Jack (Sherrif), Ron (Regular Army man) and John. Aunties: Alice, Mary (my mother), Gladys, Winnie, Hilda and Ivy. So loads of cousins. Jess was a farm worker with a large family, apparently he went to the Workhouse (Institution) at Woodstock, picked out a woman of his choice and married her, he was always on the move, from farm to farm. I will not attempt to name the children, although Allen and Myrtle seem to stand out in my memory as the elder two, many more would have been born after Jess left the village and moved far away.. Uncle Dick I have already covered in the villagers. Uncle Jack was a single man and lived well into his nineties, he too was a hedge cutter and ditcher, so too was Uncle John, he married and fathered twin girls, he too moved away from Clifton. I don't know what happened to Ron, after his army days. My mother and Aunties Alice and Gladys, already mentioned. Ivy and Winnie married twin brothers, London men, and both moved and stayed in London, in the St. John's Wood district. Ivy had one daughter, Phyllis (Swank) and Winnie two girls, Rita and Stella. Hilda too lived in London, not sure of the district, and had one son, Ronald (Moonshine). Ivy and Winnie, when visiting Clifton, were very noticeable, by way of their city clothes and acquired London accent. Moonshine often came to stay during the school holidays. My grandparent's house was a long, thatched building, with a stable at the east end. A large yard, with several sheds and pig sties. Chickens would roam freely in the yard, my grandmother, when requiring one for the table, would place the poor bird on the chopping block, cut off its head with a small axe, then let it run headless around the yard until it dropped dead (so cruel). A gate at the top of the yard led to a very large vegetable garden and beyond a small paddock. The afore mentioned toilet stood just inside the garden gate. A small field and farm buildings separated my grandparent's property from the mill, so our tour of the village is complete, or as complete as my memory serves me.

I might add that many of the men in the village were returned soldiers from the Great War. Under the Direction of Labour Act, ex-servicemen were sent to areas of need, to get the country on its feet again. My father was one such soldier and along with others, did not return to their place of birth, but married local girls and stayed on. One must remember that the country had suffered badly during the long years of war and manpower was at its lowest, with millions of men at the war front, leaving the women to run the farms as best they could, along with what few men who were not able to go to war. Sadly over a million that did go, did not return.

Chapter Six - The Chapel, Church and School

The Chapel. A small building, built of local stone, with a grey slated roof, Norman style windows and double front door, totally surrounded by neighbouring gardens, the Methodist chapel was slightly elevated, with several steps leading up to the entrance. A strong cast iron gate and fence at the bottom of the steps with a tiny garden, a small sidewalk on the eastern side for access to a small shed at the rear, where coke for the pot-belly stove was stored. Just inside was the font, for christenings. My siblings and I, were all christened here. Either side of the aisle were rows of seats (pews), long bench style with continuous wooden backs. Midway along the aisle was the pot-belly stove. At the northern end, stood the alter and a seat for the preacher. The organ, a small, free standing one, was to the left of the alter and was played by Miss Welford (Trissie). George Hawkins, the wharf master at Aynho station, would walk the half mile from his home each Sunday to open up the chapel. On colder days he fired up the pot-belly. When the stove was really hot, the varnish on the nearest pews would become extremely hot, leaving a rough surface and would surely have been close to combustion. George was a big man, walked rather awkwardly, from some injury incurred whilst working at the wharf. His Sunday boots were highly polished and would squeak as he walked up and down the aisle to make the collection, towards the end of the service. He sat at the back of the chapel, close to the door, he had a deep voice and would sing very loud and flat, much to the annoyance of some of the "toffee noses", but George was not perturbed and sang with gusto. Just inside, to the left of the doorway, was a book shelf, with pictorial books of Jesus and his disciples, also covering many other biblical stories. I loved these books, I had not seen such colourful books before and made a bee line for them, when I went along with mother, who sometimes cleaned the chapel. When old enough, I attended Sunday School, this was usually during the afternoon and ladies from the village ran this. I believe my eldest sister, Winnie was involved for a while. Special services were held at Christmas and Easter. The Harvest Festival was another annual festivity, when the chapel would be adorned with sheafs of corn, flowers, vegetables, bread and cakes. The thanks-giving hymns resounding from the open windows; *"All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin", "God our maker doth provide " ……..&c.* The produce would be shared among the poorer villagers the following day. The services were well attended prior to the war, The Welford's and a few 'toffies' taking the front seats, but I suppose they were the ones that made the best donations to the collection bowl. At the end of the service, the

congregation would leave pew, by pew, starting at the front, so the 'toffies' would leave ahead of the lesser souls. Everyone walked of course, even the farthest point of the village was only a matter of minutes. Sadly the congregation dwindled after the war , leading to the eventual closure of the little place of worship, the chapel was sold and converted into a residence.

The church. The Church of England building stood next to the main road at the centre of the village. An inspiring building, built of grey stone with a blue slated roof. At the west end of the roof was the twin bell tower with its own slated roof. The building was much bigger than the chapel and one would wonder why, as the population was not really big enough to justify it. The only time that I can remember a reasonable sized congregation would be at Easter, Christmas and Harvest Festival, even then, many empty pews. A tall wrought iron fence surrounded the church on the west side and the southern frontage, whilst a low stone wall ran along the rear, bordering the Wright farmhouse orchard. At the east end, a high wall separated the church grounds from the Wright farmhouse gardens. An impressive stone porch was at the main entrance to the church, leading off the main road. A large, heavy door, opened into the building, the font directly ahead. A right turn at the font brought one looking to the east. A wide aisle, pattern paved with red and black tiles, lead one up to the choir stalls and the organ. The pulpit stood high to the right of the choir stalls, ornately carved from oak, as too were other features of the church, including the lectern, from whence the lessons were read.. The altar stood on a raised area at the East end under a beautiful stained glass window, a low carved fence either side. Only the priest could pass beyond this little fence to the altar, where his blessings and closing prayers were said at the end of the service. Long wooden pews were on both sides of the main aisle, kneeling hassocks were placed appropriately. The font had a cover which was suspended from the ceiling and could be raised when required for a christening. The heating was by way of small oil fired heaters, placed at intervals along the main aisle. To the left of the organ, a door led into the vestry, where the parson and choir boys would don their cassocks and surplices, prior to taking their places in readiness for the service. The parson would also have a sash as part of his attire. As with the chapel, the congregation got down to a couple of faithful parishioners and eventually the church was sold and became a commercial business.

The school: Built of stone, a similar type to that of the church, with a slated roof, the school was situated adjacent to the main road at the foot of the hill at the western end of the village. The entrance door was on the northern side, very close to the eastern end and was set back inside a small porch. There was one large classroom, but this could be divided with a folding screen to enable separate activities to take place. The maximum capacity for students, boys and girls, would probably have been twenty or so, but I seem to recall that there were fourteen in the class when I was there. There was a large window looking to the east and one to the west, with two smaller windows on the northern side. Teacher would sit at her desk at the eastern end and on the southern wall was a large pot-belly stove. A cupboard for books and a blackboard and easel, as well as a small desk and chair for each student, would be about all that was in the room. Children would stay until eleven or twelve years old and then go to the high school at Deddington. A door at the rear of the building led to the cloakroom and toilets, with a small area for the coke for the stove. The playground was at the western end of the school and was very small. The whole area was surrounded by a low, flat barred fence, with a bank of laurel bushes on the southern side, screening the school from the bungalow above. At some time after the war, the little school was sold and became a private residence, all the village children now, one would assume, having to attend school at Deddington.

Chapter Seven - My Father

Father was born at North Leigh in Oxfordshire in 1884 and had three sisters, Ada, Bell and Mary. Sadly, I did not know my grandparents on dad's side and I never met Auntie Bell. Dad (Harry) was a quiet unassuming man, well liked in the village, a hard worker and provider. I know very little of dad's early life, only smatterings of things that he mentioned from time to time. I believe he worked on the land from a very early age, leaving school at twelve years old. I do recall dad saying that he would walk behind a horse and plough for the wage of two shillings and sixpence a week and I think that is where his love of horses began. Later in life he left the land to work for Elliston & Cavell's, a general store, in the City of Oxford, selling household goods and furniture. The store is still trading to this day. With two horses and a covered wagon, dad (now a wagoner) would deliver furniture to towns and villages as far away as Banbury and Coventry and would be away from the store for up to two or three weeks at a time, taking into consideration that the roads were not sealed in those early days and horses had to rest to be fed and watered and travelled at walking pace, so progress was rather slower than today. Another factor was the weather and it was not uncommon for delays due to heavy snowfalls and severe frosts. In one instant that was talked of for many years, a wagoner was caught in a blizzard near Deddington and turned off the road to take shelter in an old building, known as the 'pest house', alongside a little used bridal road. Apparently the poor fellow was snowed in with no means of warmth and died of the severe temperature. When he was eventually found, the crows had pecked out his eyes. He would not have been immediately missed in such weather, one assuming that he had taken shelter. The horses survived. Dad continued with this job until he was enlisted into the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry and quickly sent off to France to face the enemy. He was on the Somme and was attached to an Australian mining unit. Their job entailed tunnelling deep under enemy lines to set off massive charges of explosives. The effect was devastating, killing and wounding many hundreds of enemy troops. I think dad, along with other men in the village, who had fought in this terrible war, took many years to recover from the experience, they always had that cold expression, did not say much about it and looked much older than their years. When the armistice was signed, on the eleventh of November 1918, repatriation of troops began soon after. I have no idea when dad got back to England, but as I mentioned earlier in my story, under the Direction of Labour Act, dad came to Clifton to work on the farm, I assume that this would have been Wright's. I am not aware of where he

stayed in the village, probably on the farm, in the barn? Later he met and married mother, probably around nineteen twenty, when he would have been some thirty six years of age, so when I was born he was forty seven and I only remember him as an older man. Dad's best friend was Uncle Jack, who came to live with us when his father (my Grandfather) died in the late forties. Dad and Jack would go rabbiting, shooting and fishing and also meet up when working on their allotments and at the Duke of Cumberland's Head, for a few pints of beer. I think dad learned a lot about the countryside because of his mateship with Jack. When I was old enough, dad would take me along and I quickly got to know about the countryside too. Most country men were keen gardeners, dad being one of them. There was plenty of competition, who could grow the longest bean, the largest pumpkin or the longest carrot or parsnip, to mention a few. When I was very young, dad would sit me in the wheelbarrow, alongside his gardening tools and take me to his allotment, usually on Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning. The entrance to the field of allotments was through a wide farm gate and dad's plot was the very first one on the left hand side of the gate, with a low hawthorn hedge running on one side and a narrow path on the other side, dividing it from the next plot. Each plot was one chain long by half a chain wide (22yards by 11 yards), to little me, it looked huge and I wondered how dad could manage it. In the winter months dad would start a fire going to burn up all the old potato haulms, brussel, cauliflower and cabbage stems, which had been left to dry after the respective crops had been picked and clippings from the small hedge. When the fire had got a good heat, he would add weeds and grass, then put a thick layer of earth completely over the lot, leaving a small vent at the top. This was called 'stifle burning' and the heap would burn slowly for many days until all had been consumed. When cool enough the heap would spread over an area of the garden and dug in, an excellent additive to the soil. Dad also looked after Miss Wright's garden after Tommy died and also Miss Welford's (Trissie). Like many farm workers, dad had few possessions. He did have an old bicycle, a fishing road, ice skates and basic gardening tools. He also had a very sharp axe, a billhook and leather gloves, these were essential tools to cut hedgerows a grindstone where dad sharpened these tools and I was the one that had to turn the handle, my little arms ached and I thought that the turning would never end. As the grindstone turned, it would get wet from a tray filled with water placed beneath. Dad would touch the sharpened edges with his thumb and would know exactly when to stop, I hated it when he would say "just a few more turns" I knew that was going to be quite a few more. I am not sure who turned the grindstone, before I was able. These old stones can still be seen around the

country villages and no doubt a few may still be in use. Dad smoked a brand of tobacco called 'Juggler' which came in a tin of two ounces, or in packets of one ounce. He rolled his own cigarettes and used 'Rizzla' cigarette papers. I can see him now, with the paper just stuck to his lip, whilst pulling the strands of tobacco from the tin, placing it in the paper, rolling it and moistening the gummed edge, poking the ends in neatly with a matchstick, before lighting up. In the summer months he would place a fresh dock leaf in the tin each day, to keep the tobacco moist. He enjoyed a small cigar at Christmas and weddings, mostly ones that were given to him on such occasions. Dad was good on his ice skates and enjoyed some of his little spare time on the ice, when the sharp frosts of winter froze over the canal or flooded meadows. Dad enjoyed a spot of fishing and a swim in the river when the temperature allowed. He did not own a gun, but did use one of Jack's when they went out rabbiting or duck shooting together. He played darts, dominoes and shove halfpenny at the local pub. Sadly, being an older man, by the time I was interested in sports, he didn't find the time to be involved with me either at school or at home. However, he did take me along, from quite an early age, to go rabbiting with Uncle Jack, or gathering mushrooms, hazelnuts, watercress and a wealth of other things that could be found in the countryside and because of these ventures, I was able to identify birds and animals, nesting and breeding times, edible plants and berries, a wealth of knowledge for which I am forever grateful. Some of the sayings I remember, when dad and Jack were together; "A cold wind today Harry" said Jack, "it's a buggerhooter" dad would reply, (I haven't the faintest idea where that term came from.) "Blue flame in the fire last night, I reckon we are in for a cold one Jack", "I think you could be right, Harry, you'll have to wrap ya shirt round it"" said Jack, "the ice on the water butt was quite thick this morning, had a job to break it, plays merry hell with my chapped hands, damned Snowfire ointment don't do much good." "Keep rubbing plenty of lard in" said dad, "good as the Snowfire anytime". As a lad dad had broken his right arm, if there was a change in the weather, dad would say "going to get some rain Jack, my old arm's giving me jip". He was usually right. Dialects varied so much from village to village, dads was very noticeable and when he said eighty eight, it would be 'airty-airt' or his village of Northleigh would be 'Noorlie'. When he considered the weather warm enough, he would say "I think I'll get down to the Dog Spring and have a bit of a 'dousler' " (swim). The Dog Spring was a secluded spot in the river Cherwell, just a short walk from home. Back then, most older men wore 'longjohns', vest and long underpants in one piece and seldom took them off, only for washing. Dad had strong brown arms, face and neck, but it

was funny when he stripped off to swim, (in the altogether) his arms from elbows up and his body from neck down, were pure white, a little bit on the nose I guess, after a hot day harvesting or haymaking, wearing a heavy cotton shirt, waistcoat and boots. If one met a local and they were unsure as to who you were, they would say “who’s old boy be you then?” or maybe “what be you ferreting about at boy?” or sometimes a silly quip “was your mother an Irishman boy?”. Man to man, “how be ya getting on then you?” “going up the pub later you?”. I remember Uncle Jack, during the war, when he was cutting a piece of cheese which had holes in, “bad enough being rationed, but the damned holes in this piece weigh half a pound”. Dad loved apricots with custard, a Sunday tea-time treat, when in season. Those old characters have all passed on now, but the dialects remain. Dad also had a melodeon, (a smaller type of accordion) which he played very well, if and when one could coax him to do so, usually during the colder winter evenings. He kept it in a tin trunk, along with his army medals and various papers, birth certificates etc. In later years dad allowed me to try my hand at playing the melodeon, but, try as I may, could not get a tune out of it. I don’t know where this little ’squeeze box’ ended up. Dad worked on till he was seventy, five years beyond the normal retirement age, the reason for this being that the government paid one shilling per week extra on the aged pension for each extra year worked. Sadly dad did not enjoy his retirement, having developed gangrene in his right toe, it was necessary to have it amputated, but unfortunately this did not fix the problem and the gangrene continued to spread up his leg and another amputation took off his leg to above the knee. When all seemed well and healed, dad deteriorated very quickly and died soon afterwards on the twenty fourth of August nineteen sixty. How different! his fortunes may have been, but for that terrible war, I would not be writing this account of my memories of him or anyone else, but remember ‘ifs .buts .maybe’s’.

Chapter Eight - My Mother

I have feeling of sadness, when I think of my mother. Born into a large family and living in the same village for all of her fifty years, marrying quite late, as she would then have been around twenty seven or eight, bearing seven children and losing two of her three boys, Jim in tragic circumstances, I can only think of her life as one of hardship and misery. I have been unsuccessful in finding a photograph of her, she was not even on Winnie's wedding group. I believe she had a bad time, when sister Eva was born, bearing the marks of some form of a hyper-dermic needle in her thighs, which would not have been pleasant in the nineteen twenties! The only time she left the village was on an occasional trip to Banbury, on market day, even then not that often. I don't think she ever went anywhere with dad, other than walks on a Sunday afternoon. I was a little over fourteen years of age when she died, so I never had the opportunity to share any of my grown up years with her, my marriage, my children or travels. I am deeply moved when I think of what could have been. Mother had nothing to make her life exciting, her clothes were old and mostly second-hand, from local jumble sales. I don't think she ever wore make-up and her only jewellery would have been from the jumble sales too. She did wear a nice wedding ring. I am not sure if she ever went to a picture theatre or stage show, bearing in mind that there would have been many years of her early life, that I never had the opportunity to recall with her, being so young when she died. We did have radio from nineteen thirty nine, but dad was very strict about its use, because of the cost of batteries. Mother worked hard and kept our home as neat and tidy as was possible and managed to cook and clean the with barest of essentials. As stated earlier, all cooking was done over the open fire or in the oven. She did the weekly wash by hand and only had the luxury of a bucket to place over the fire to boil clothing or linen. She developed a skin rash on her left arm, it got worse as time went by and drove her *mad* with its constant itching, she used to rub lard in and bind it with a strip of white linen, not the right treatment! Each day in the winter, the table lamp had to be filled with paraffin, the glass cleaned and the wicks trimmed, ready for the evening and very early morning. The fireplace was cleaned, the ashes taken out, each day too. The bed chambers had to be emptied and cleaned. (*emptying the slops as it was called).* Mother would make sure that the fire was kept going, with regular trips along the hedgerows gathering wood (*wooding).* She would also gather blackberries for jam making and pies, dandelions for wine making, mushrooms and many other useful things, when in season. She loved to cook and her meat stews

with dumplings were a winter favourite. Caraway seed cake was another item that she made very regularly, well-liked by Gerald French ("Got any seed cake Mrs Harris"?), it was easy and cheap. My favourite of all were her individual apple pies, baked on a tray, hot or cold, they were yummy! Mother plucked and dressed the chickens, pigeons, blackbirds and sometimes a moorhen, for the table. She skinned and prepared the rabbits, (poor man's venison) which she made into a delicious rabbit pie or stew. We didn't have any luxuries, but we certainly didn't go short of good wholesome food. Mother liked to freshen up the small living room and sometimes managed to pick up a few rolls of cheap wallpaper from the market. She would make a paste of plain flour and boiling water and take great pains to hang the paper neatly. Any painting was usually a cheap brown varnish, which took forever to dry, so a few finger prints were not uncommon. Mother attended the Methodist chapel on Sundays and joined with other local women in preparing the chapel for harvest and Christmas festivals. She would also help at the school, when there was an open day or concert, the Jubilee and Coronation parties. I am not sure as to whether she made any contribution to the Victory celebrations at the end of the Second World War, her mind was quite confused by this time and I feel that she knew that her life was very near to the end. I can only say, how sorry I feel for a woman that was my mother, who I never really got to know. As a child I picked wild flowers for her, I ran little errands for her, no doubt I gave her lots of worry, demanding things that she could not give, but time ran out and I was never able to *'balance the books'*, so to speak. She eked out the wartime rations, often going without herself. But it all ended for this devoted, hard-working mother on the first day of October, nineteen forty five. She was hanging out the washing and apparently suffered a stroke and died all alone. Sister Winnie discovered her during the afternoon, when calling in to have cuppa, but there was nothing she could do, other than call in the doctor to confirm mothers passing. Mother did not live to enjoy the peace of the fifties and sixties, she did not live to enjoy her grandchildren. She deserved better. May she rest in peace.

Chapter Nine - Sisters

Dorothy. As mentioned earlier, Doll was my half- sister, being born out of wedlock, as many girls of her age were, so many men being away fighting the war. Doll was in service before I was born and I can only remember her as a grown woman. She worked for a Mrs Harrington who lived in a large country home at a village called Fringford, several miles from Clifton. Mrs Harrington was a slave driver, and kept Doll in less than good conditions, working long hours for very little. On her occasional half-day off, she would walk the distance home and have to walk back again to be at work early the next morning. I remember her hands being almost black, from cleaning the old fireplaces with black lead, her face was drawn and her hair straight and untidy. There were no boy-friends and no time to go out and enjoy herself, it was all work. When mother died, Doll left this awful place and came home to look after dad, myself and Uncle Jack. This was the first time that she was able to relax and get out more often. Whilst I was overseas, serving with the army, dad moved out of the old cottage and went to live with sister Winnie. Doll moved to Deddington to care for a Mr Brewer (Bert), who she eventually married. Bert being an older man and not in good health, died a few years later. Not too long afterwards, she married again, to a Mr Pritchard, who had been an evacuee from Coventry to Clifton during the war, staying with Winnie and Albert. Whilst making a visit to his wartime friends in the fifties, Doll afforded him accommodation and they became good friends, eventually getting married. I am not sure of the passing of Mr Pritchard, I believe it would have happened in the seventies, when we were living in Australia. We did visit Doll during one of our visits to UK in nineteen eighty six. She was then living in the local Alms Houses. These little homes were provided by the church, a set of four, two for ladies and two for men. Uncle Jack had already moved into one of them, he lived there until his death at the age of ninety seven. I cannot recall the exact date of Doll's death, but it would have been sometime in the nineties.

Winnie . I was born when Winnie was nine years old, so by the time I started school she would have been near to leaving or may have already done so. She got a 'live in' position (service) at the Chemist at Deddington and was treated very well and able to visit us often, being so near. At the young age of just seventeen, she met and married Albert Gibbs of Souldern. Albert worked for the Deddington council and would have met Winnie, no doubt, as she walked from Deddington to Clifton. Albert was a hard worker, looked after his money, he was a heavy smoker

and liked an occasional beer. Winnie and Albert married in September 1939 and moved into the little cottage next to Mr and Mrs Plasted in Clifton. Albert spared no expense to make this small home a pleasant place to live, installing an oil fired cooker with oven, carpets and radio. There was a reasonable sized shed where Winnie was able to do her laundry and a small tool shed and outside toilet. Albert made the garden nice and grew lots of vegetables. He made a nice chicken run at the very top of the garden plot, a steady supply of eggs. He also kept pigs, but these were in the yard near the public house and only brought home when they had been killed and cut up by the butcher. The hams and sides of bacon were placed in a long shallow tray, zinc lined, covered in block salt, which turned into brine. The meat was turned daily in the brine, more salt being added if necessary. I am not really sure of how long this process took, but when ready each piece was removed from the brine left to dry and then placed in a muslin bag and hung on large hooks on the living room wall, Albert called them his pictures and knew exactly the time they were ready to use. Their little dog was called Tiny, and I remember how it would stand on their bed and bark at its own image in the dressing table mirror and then jump down and run into the room behind, looking for the dog. I don't know what happened to little Tiny. War had now been declared and all changed so very quickly. Albert did not join the armed services and both he and Winnie worked in the Northern Aluminium factory at Banbury, making aircraft parts. A special bus would pick up the workers for the factory. On one occasion, their bus had to be diverted across fields, as two land mines had been dropped by the Luftwaffe during the night. The aim was Kings Sutton railway junction (the location of my first signal box many years later). These mines were dropped by parachute. One dropped very close to the Kingham branch of the line and stood upright near the fence and was diffused by the army the next day, children from Kings Sutton, would you believe!!? having climbed on the fence to look at it, lucky they survived to be thoroughly reprimanded. Now the other mine was entangled in a large oak tree, alongside the main road into Kings Sutton, hence the necessity to divert the bus. Most people would have been still in bed, when there was an almighty explosion, as the mine detonated. The tree was no more, a huge crater and everyone for miles around were now definitely awake. As the crow flies, Clifton would be about four miles from the blast and being on a higher elevation, we certainly felt the blast, more so than Kings Sutton, which was largely protected by the rising ground above it. Winnie and Albert worked, as did others, long hours at the factory and had little time at home. They had taken in the Pritchard family as evacuees from Coventry and sad to say the Pritchard's did not show much

appreciation to their hosts and Winnie and Albert were relieved to see them gone. Winnie had resigned to the fact that she could not have children, so she adopted a little girl called Sylvia. Nothing was spared to give this lovely little child a good home and Winnie left the factory, now that the war was nearing the end. The shock of mother's death seemed to put right her inability to have children and in May the following year, she gave birth to twin boys, Robert and Henry, an eight month pregnancy. Born at home, I remember these tiny souls, being wrapped in cotton wool and transferred immediately to the Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford. Henry weighed three and a quarter pounds and Robert only two and three quarter pounds. Winnie had to express her breast milk each day and send it to the Radcliffe. As I was working at the bakery in Deddington at the time, I was able to take the container of milk, specially sealed and wrapped and put it on the Oxford City bus, whereby the conductor would drop it off at the hospital free of charge. Now the tables turned on little Sylvia, she was no longer in favour and was sadly neglected, which led to many problems for her in later years. As the twins grew, they were very lively and mischievous; the garden soon became a mess, especially during rainy weather. The chickens now had the run of the garden, as the boys had adopted their coop, bringing the garden soil right up to the house, just a muddy mess when wet. Albert had now left the factory and worked at the GWR locomotive sheds at Banbury, I have a feeling that he had given in to the mess and said little about it. Dad still lived in the cottage on the green and I had started my Army service. On leave, before leaving for overseas, I was horrified to see how awful Winnie's little cottage had become, not a fit place for a family of five, so much so, that I wrote a letter to the Housing Department, begging them to have a look at the situation. During my overseas duty, it was pleasing to receive a letter from Winnie, to say, that they had been allocated a new Council house at The Paddocks, Deddington and had taken dad with them when moving in. Of course this now meant that I did not have a home to return to at the end of my National Service in September nineteen fifty one so I too moved in with them, sharing a double bed room with dad, until getting married in nineteen fifty four. These new homes were built in pairs, on a nice sized block, each containing three bedrooms, a large lounge, family room, kitchen, bathroom with toilet (a far cry from the old tin bath) an attached laundry and a good sized store-room and toilet. Set well back from the road, each house had a nice sized front garden and a large vegetable garden at the rear. No more chickens or pigs, but Albert still kept busy with this new garden and his allotment. He also looked after the garden at the Congregational Church and did a bit of chimney sweeping. Sylvia had started

school before the move and the boys were about to start soon after moving to The Paddocks, their behaviour had made a complete turn around and they were good average little lads. But the favouritism still went on, leaving Sylvia a very unhappy child. Although grateful to Winnie and Albert for affording me accommodation, I cannot find it in my heart to forgive them for treating Sylvia so badly. I am pleased to relate that Sylvia eventually found happiness when she met and married John Sheppard and together they raised two sons. Unfortunately, Sylvia did not enjoy good health, having several operations and hip replacements, eventually passing away. I am not sure of the date. Both Henry and Robert married but Robert's marriage did not last very long and left with one son, he moved to Brighton, I have no idea as to what he did there, sadly he was found dead in his bed at a little suburb called Peacehaven. I believe the boy married and moved back to Deddington. Henry married and he and his wife Sandra raised three boys. Henry worked for the Deddington Council for many years and I believe he moved to General Foods at Banbury. Albert did not drive and I was pleased to drive them down to Southsea for a holiday, picking them up at the end. Winnie did get her licence later and started off with an old Vauxhall Velox, changing to a Mini-minor at some time later. I last saw Winnie in nineteen seventy one, whilst visiting UK from Australia and sadly, she died of a heart attack, (her heavy smoking habit may have been a contributing factor) soon after on fourth day of March, nineteen seventy two, aged forty nine. Albert died very soon after at the age of sixty, on the eighth of October in the same year from cancer, he too being an even heavier smoker. Both buried in the Deddington cemetery.

Eva. Eva left the Deddington school at the age of fourteen, just prior to my move there. I think she worked at or near the Horton Hospital in Banbury. She met her husband to be, Gerald, sometime during her time there. Gerald was a locomotive fireman with the GWR and lived in Cherwell Street Banbury. They married in nineteen forty five and for a while stayed in Clifton at our house on the green, moving to live in Rustcote, Banbury, in a new house in Withycombe Drive. The house was of prefabricated design, one of many thousands that were built by the local councils after the war and are still in good shape and lived in to this day. With a nice sized garden at the rear and a small one at the front, these homes were elevated on rising ground, north of Banbury, overlooking the town. There were five children; Carol, Jennifer, Christopher, Colin and Phillip and seven grandchildren. Colin and Phillip remain bachelors. Gerald left the railway in the seventies, taking on a position with a packaging company at Chipping Warden

airfield. He became very ill, passing away on thirteenth of April, nineteen eighty four. Eva lived on in Withycombe Drive for several more years and then the house was due for renovation and she was moved to a similar one in Mold Crescent, just down the road. Eva came to stay with us in Australia for one month and during that time, we were able to give her a grand tour of the wineries, the city and all the usual places of interest. Because of my work connection, I was able to take her to the Adelaide Formula one Grand Prix venue, where she was able to tour the pits and offices, meeting many of the drivers, Glen Dix, the flag waver, and taking in the actual race the next day with a complimentary box seat, food and wine. It was pleasing that she was able to make the flight, never having flown or travelled before. But time moved on and her health too deteriorated very quickly, asthma taking its toll. The health authorities fitted an electric lift on her stairs to enable her to use the bathroom and toilet, a great help, but not a cure for her asthma. I am not aware of any other health problems that Eva may have had. For some reason, my records of events lapsed badly in our early years in Australia; I can only think that this was because of the many new things that were happening in our lives. However, we did keep in touch by mail and visited her in nineteen ninety five. She passed away on the eighteenth of August, two thousand and seven. At this point in time, all of her children and offspring are living, but not having very much contact, I do not intend to write further of them. But I can say, that they were all good family members and looked after Eva well.

Eileen. I last saw sister Eileen in two thousand and eight, whilst on a visit to UK. She was then living at Bacton In Norfolk and has since moved to a retirement home in Hoveton, near Norwich. Being only eleven years of age, when mother passed away, it would have been an even greater shock to her than it was for me. It was fortunate that Winnie was now at home and was able to take Eileen 'under her wing', so to speak and comfort her as best she could. I was now at work and no longer walking to school with her, I was probably not as good a brother as I could have been. Dad did his best to provide her with what he was able to do so. I think she stayed with Winnie and Albert, sharing a room with Sylvia until the twins arrived the following year, later moving to live with sister Eva at Banbury. I am not sure as to what she did when she first left school, later working at Chipping Warden with brother-in-law Gerald. Eileen married a David Castle, who was a farm worker and as he often moved on to other farms, we did lose contact from time to time. There were three children, Mary, Christine and Penelope. An old memory of Eileen was when she was just a small child, sitting in the apple tree with sister Eva

and holding the little flat poker that dad used to rake out the ashes from under the oven, she decided to hit me on the head with it, being told to do so by Eva. I must have been annoying them, to receive such harsh punishment, incurring a nasty gash to my forehead, carrying the scar to this day. Eileen has a large collection of dolls, making and clothing most of them herself, assisted by Dave, who was very good with the knitting needles. Sadly Dave passed away some years ago, having suffered with a skin disease, probably from contact with something on the farm. Of course whilst I was serving my National Service of two years, I would have had very little contact with Eileen and not always sure as to where she may be living. She eventually settled with her family in Norfolk and at the time of my writing this account, she is now residing in a retirement complex near Norwich.

Chapter Ten - Yours Truly

A lot of what I have written in previous chapters, may well be referred to again as I write of my life in more detail. My home and family, the village of Clifton and the people that lived there, still live on in my memory. It would be true to say, that when I left Clifton to join the armed forces, it was the close of the first chapter of my early life. Despite my poor beginnings, I would not have changed a thing. One is born, to what one is born, poor, rich, famous, ordinary, extra-ordinary. We have to accept what we are and make the most of it. Perhaps with a little more early prompting, my life may have been different, but our destiny is set from day one and all the 'ifs', 'buts' and 'may have-beens' are useless assumptions. Probably my earliest recollection of life would have been when I was between two and three years of age, I was fighting for life with pneumonia. I was lying on the sofa in front of a roaring fire, my mother constantly checking me over and although I can't recall, I am sure that the doctor would have attended me too. I can still see those flames of the fire, I remember my brother Jim, sitting on the stone seat, next to the oven, holding his beloved cat (a tabby). It must have been quite soon after this when sister Eileen was born. Jim had that same love for the farm and country as I adopted later. On the morning prior to Jim's fatal accident, I remember him asking mother to get an apple from the ledge on the stairs window as he could hear Harry Newell (Donkey) coming up the lane with his horse and cart and didn't want to miss going with Donkey to fodder the cattle. That is the very last I saw of him. Apparently, whilst Donkey was feeding the cattle, or sheep, Jim must have heard Sandy Hopcraft's vehicle coming down the road from Deddington, probably the only motor vehicle to pass that day, he climbed over the field gate and ran straight into the path of Sandy's van. It is said that Donkey shouted to warn him and this may have distracted Jim. We shall never know.

Like most little boys, I had that little bit of devil in me and my mother had a few worrying times. On one occasion, whilst she was at the standpipe, getting water, she saw smoke rising from behind the house, she raced home to find the straw in between the ricks in the rick yard ablaze, she had white plimsoles on her feet and in sheer panic, stamped out the flames, her plimsoles now black. I had seized the moment of her absence to take the matches from the mantle shelf, climb over the garden fence into the rick yard and set the straw alight. I believe mother kept it to her, I do not recall any ensuing consequences and the seriousness of what could have been did not occur to me until I was old enough to understand. In the farm

yard, next to our garden, huge puddles would form after heavy rain, because of the stain from the manure heap, the water became quite brown. Mr Wright kept his pitchfork just inside the open fronted cattle shed, a naughty boy decided to lay the fork in one of the long brown puddles. A loud knock on the back door, there stood an angry Mr Wright, wanting to know if someone (me) had moved his fork? Fearing punishment, I took him to the puddle and retrieved the said fork. I loved to get into the big barn and play on the farm implements, although the doors were closed, I could just squeeze underneath. I remember a big white barn owl sitting on the beam above, only to have quietly left when I looked up again. At the back of the barn, a grape vine had grown, unusual as it was, it did bear grapes, not waiting for them to ripen, I managed a few nasty tummy aches from eating them green. I can only assume that it had grown from seed that one of the workers would have thrown out when stopping for lunch. Alongside the lane, running adjacent to the farm yard was a ditch of running water, the water coming mainly from Welford's dairy. I spent many hours playing in this ditch, damming it up to make little water falls, getting very wet and dirty. My dad's garden was another favourite play area, much to his disgruntlement. I used to put stones in an old barrel and pretend it was a steam roller, flattening some of dad's plants. I had a large Light Sussex chicken and a pigeon, they shared the same pen at night and roamed the garden freely during the day, with the pigeon riding the back of the chicken, much to my amusement. It is possible that they both ended up in the cooking pot, unknown to me of course. My cousins next door were all older than me, Tom (Snowy) being the youngest and already working. John (Pumpkin) was second eldest and took the role of 'head of the house' and cared for the garden Charlie (Dymock) had already married and lived in the village. I learned a lot from John, he had a little garden shed and was often working in it at week-ends. He had lots of tools and was always making or painting things. He looked after the pigs at the bottom of the garden and often lifted me up to watch them feeding or suckling their young. John also kept pigeons and egg laying chickens. He would show me the little chicks as they hatched in a little breeder unit, which he had made, complete with oil lamp to keep them warm. John lived and worked in the village all of his life and I believe he did not leave the village at any time until in his eighties, when a niece took him for a trip to Reading. He did not marry. I will not dwell too much on the other boys, Lou married a local girl, Jean Clarke and left the village to live in Aynho, when he took a job at the local coal yard. Tom married a Scottish lass and moved away, sadly he died whilst a young man. The girls, Ethel, Irene and Vera; Ethel courted a man called Aubrey Wise and when taking a cycle ride with him one week-end,

Aubrey viciously attacked Ethel, bashing her to unconsciousness and leaving for dead. When they had not returned home, brother Lou went out to look for them, but when he found Ethel, almost dead in a ditch, near the Pest house (previously mentioned) he was so frighted, being only a young lad, that he raced off home and alerted the elder brother, Dymock, who immediately phoned the police and quickly made his way to the scene of the crime, Ethel was in a bad way and took many months to recover. Aubrey was sent for trial and was found to be suffering from insanity and was committed to an asylum. Her life took another turn, she and Vera met brothers George and Jack Woods, marrying them before they went off to war. George was captured by the Japs and suffered badly on the Burma railroad, but of course Ethel knew nothing of this till George returned after the war. She did not have any news of George for several years and assumed that he had been killed. Out of the blue came a heavily censored post card, saying that he was a prisoner of war. He never really recovered from his ordeal, with a scar in his cheek, from a heavy blow from his captors, suffering bad bouts of Malaria, he died far too early. Jack fared better and he and Vera settled in Wales. Irene married Frank Coleman and they lived in the village for many years, moving to Bodicote at some time later. They have all passed on now and I am not aware of how many children survive or where they may be. I remember Vera having a little box camera and she took a photo of Eva and myself in the little front garden, I wish I still had that photo.

Perhaps I should get back to myself again. I spent many hours by myself, in the farm buildings, in the adjacent fields, absorbing all that I encountered. But this all changed when I started school and made little friends, who later became my good mates.

Chapter Eleven - Clifton School

(1936) My first day at school lives in my memory as if it happened yesterday, I could not wait to get there. My mother made me as smart as she could and holding her hand, we walked the short distance from our house on the green to the school, others had already arrived, holding on tightly to their respective parents, few of them as eager as I to get inside. I was tugging at my mother's hand, impatiently. At the age of five, everything seems to take forever. We were in, mother talking to the teacher, Miss Deakin, but I was already playing with the wooden bricks, placing them neatly in front of a smart little wooden Dolls house. Then the parents had left, there were still lots of tears and cries of "I want my mummy, I want to go home" etc. Not 'little George', he was so happy to be there. Soon teacher had control and placed us in our little chairs, each with a tiny desk and served us up with a glass of fresh milk and a nice wafer biscuit. Playtime came and I soon made friends with Peter, Chris and Horace, as mentioned Aubrey being a little older came more into my life later. Of course there were girls at the school too, Pam, Eldrith, Kathleen, to name a few, more boys and girls coming along each year as some were leaving to go on to high school at Deddington. We were only allowed to use pencils, crayons and pastels at first, pens were considered too messy in the hands of little children, coming into use quite a few terms later. We did, however, use knitting needles and sewing needles for craft and knitting. At Easter and Christmas, we made things to suit those occasions, such as paper chains, egg decorating etc. Teacher used to set up a nativity scene prior to Christmas break up, with Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus in his manger, with sheep and donkeys, the shepherds with their crooks kneeling and the wise men on their camels, all so real and fascinating to our young minds. In the spring and summer months, we would go on nature walks in the local lanes and fields, bringing back to class, a variety of plants and flowers for identification and in some cases pressing them into books. I loved these walks and the ensuing lessons related to them. Teacher would put a dead nettle into a small jar of water and add red ink, the ink would gradually be absorbed by the nettle and turn red. She also placed a broad bean in blotting paper and put it in the top of a jar filled with water so that we were able to watch it develop, I don't think it actually got to the stage of producing beans. Another of teacher's favourite flowers, was the hyacinth and each year she would place two or three bulbs in a nicely coloured bowl, filled with soil and place them in a dark cupboard until they had grown a couple of inches and then place them on the window sill, where they would bloom and send off a

pleasant smell, which would greet you as you entered the classroom. In winter it was cosy and warm as the pot belly stove was kept stoked up with coke, very often the top would go quite red with heat. When Harold (Wiggy) brought the can of fresh milk, teacher would stand it on the stove and serve it warm, whilst in the warmer months we were happy to drink it as delivered. At lunch time, which lasted an hour, Mrs Whitlock, Wiggy's mum, who lived on the opposite side of the road to the school, would bring teachers lunch each day at twelve o'clock. She carried it on a silver tray with a silver hood, the aroma lingering in the room. Teacher boiled a little tin kettle on the stove to make herself a cuppa. She would then pour the water into a small bowl, adding Sylvan soap flakes to wash the dishes for Mrs Whitlock to collect. We children had packed lunches, in my case it would probably be bread and jam. In the cold winter months we would take a potato to cook on the stove top, teacher would look after this, as the stove had a sturdy mesh fence guard around it, to keep us at a safe distance. She would serve them up when ready, adding a little butter and salt for us. Teacher also had a little paraffin stove, which she used in the summer months, when the pot belly was not fired up. At playtime, we would play hopscotch, skipping and tag. The playground was only very small and not big enough for kicking a ball around that came later at Deddington. I remember so well the little coloured stamps, that teacher would award for effort, there were three of these; 'Excellent', 'Good' and 'Poor'. The 'Excellent' stamp depicted a song thrush, sitting on a branch, where he would whistle his beautiful tune. The 'Good' stamp, a horse pulling a harvester in the cornfield and the 'Poor', a rainy, gloomy scene. The awarded stamp would be placed in one's exercise book at the end of the appropriate subject. I wonder if any still exist? In 1938 I was awarded the prize for nature study, a book, which I still have and treasure, called 'Trees', by Janet Harvey Kelman, with thirty two coloured pictures, which have weathered remarkably well, considering that the book has not been looked after as well as it might have been. Whilst still at Clifton school I was recognised by the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), someone had told them of how I cared for a bird with a broken wing. They used to send me their monthly magazine, called the 'Winged Messenger' and other publications. The district nurse would visit the school often to check ones head for lice and nits, as well as general cleanliness. Once a year the dentist would come along with her caravan and all pupils would have a dental check and treatment as necessary. I hated the hand turned drill for fillings, cocaine was used for extractions. At the end of treatment, each child would get a tin of Gibbs toothpaste and a toothbrush. After an extraction, a warm glass of milk and a soft

sponge cake. I had a filling in one of my back teeth and it lasted till sometime in the eighties or nineties. I can't remember whether these treatments continued at high school or not, I think probably not. I regret not taking more care of my teeth. I recall a little concert that we put on and I had to recite "The North wind doth blow" " And we shall have snow" "Where will the poor robin go" "He will go in the barn and put his head under his wing" "Poor thing". Christopher had a little difficulty with his , causing a few smiles, "The camel's hump" "Is a **H**uggley hump" "Which you may well see at the zoo" "But **H**ugglier yet is the hump we get" "By having to little to do". Horace started off"I have found the bowl that was in the snow" then shyness took over. Many more stories to recall of those early days.

On sixth May 1935, King George the fifth and Queen Mary celebrated their Silver Jubilee and a public holiday was declared. Cities, towns and villages decorated for the occasion and street parties and games took place, although barley four years of age I remember taking part in the sports that took place in Garrett's field, opposite the school and I won a few pence for winning the three legged race, with Horace as my other leg. Welford's wagon shed was decked out and tables of food, made ready by the village ladies, was available to all. I had never seen so many goodies before. Sadly King George died on 20th January the following year and Edward, the Duke of Windsor became King, but was never crowned because of his romance with Mrs Simpson. Therefore, George, the Duke of York became king and was crowned on 12th May 1937. Once again the streets of the cities, towns and villages were, once again, decorated to celebrate this great occasion, but this is all well documented, so I will not add any further reference to it. Miss Deakin retired and a Miss Blackler took over Clifton School. She was a different type of person to Miss Deakin and for some reason I did not take to her very well and got into trouble a few times, even having my name put in the black book, had the arrival of the war and the evacuees had an influence on me. I will continue my school days and the war years later.

Chapter 12 - Out of school hours

Now I was a schoolboy and no longer a little boy amusing himself, I now had lots of friends and spent most of my time outdoors after school and at week-ends. Of course on Sundays, we had Sunday school as mentioned earlier in my story. To the right of our house, stood two enormous elm trees and as they were on the edge of the bank, which separated the field from the lane, the roots of the elms, over the years, had formed a labyrinth of ledges and crevices, the seeds from the trees had grown in to a little forest of bushes, these were known as wyche elm, an ideal place for us to play. The roots became the kitchen, in our imaginary house as we played mothers and fathers, or doctors and nurses. We made little rooms in the wyche elm and brought in all sorts of tins, bottles and boxes for this little haven. Picking lots of wild flowers to make it complete. It was not always so peaceful, children fall out and someone always wants to be in charge or make changes. Sadly, those lovely old elm trees succumbed to Dutch Elm disease in the seventies and were felled. I believe a few have survived around the country.

As we grew older, we moved on to other activities, getting more adventurous and finding lots to occupy us in the surrounding fields, along the river and canal, not always doing the right thing. Sometimes we would stand on the railway bridge at Aynho station and when a goods train came out of the loop line*, we would drop little stones down the chimney of the engine, much to the annoyance of the engine driver, not that he was in any way in danger. Another dangerous activity was putting a penny on the track and letting the train pass over it. When the train had passed we would find the penny, several times larger and an imprint on the rail. Similarly we would stand on the canal bridge, just a few yards from the railway bridge, and annoy the bargees, often being chased, as it was easy for the bargees to step off their slow moving boats, not that we were ever caught as they could not leave their boats for long. In the winter, when everything was solid frozen, we would spend many hours on the ice, playing ice hockey, sliding and any other thing that we could do on the ice. Walnut hill was the ideal place to toboggan when snow covered, the only problem was that it ended at the edge of the river, so it

**A Loop Line, is used to take a train off the main track for the passage of a more important train. Such as a passenger train or express freight train, or sometimes for a holding track until the train can be dealt with at its destination. So a loop line train would be barley moving when exiting the loop with a heavy train, allowing naughty boys time to take aim.*

was necessary to roll off in time to avoid going into the water. When the thaw set in, the ice would gradually break up on the mill stream and we would takes turns to stand on the huge blocks and be pushed from one side of the stream to the other, ten feet of freezing cold water beneath, madness indeed. My poor mother had plenty of worries, especially if she thought we were near the river, which we often were and would send sister Winnie or Eva, to look for us.

One day we decided that we would catch the train at Aynho Park station and go to Banbury, just little kids, with no money, but we were caught by the station staff, just before the train arrived and somehow, Winnie was racing up the station approach to take us back to Clifton, obviously some-one had dobbed us in, just as well, otherwise we would have been in much more serious trouble and in for a good hiding. We were not always up to mischief, playing football and cricket according to the season. My nose still bears the result of getting a full face hit with the ball, during a cricket match in Harrison's close. I remember being carried home, my face and shirt covered in blood, my mother almost collapsing at the horrible sight, but after a clean- up, it proved not so bad after all and a couple of black eyes, a very sore nose, I was soon no worse for wear. These days it would have been an ambulance, days in hospital, who knows? I joined the choir at the church, along with, Aubrey, Horace, Peter and Chris, not really for religious education, more for the few coppers that went along with attendance each Sunday and choir practice sometime in the week. The vestry had a door at the back of the church and opened directly onto the wall dividing the church from Miss Wright's apple orchard. It was easy to climb over the low wall and when the apples and pears were ready, sometimes not ready, we climbed over and had our supply of apples under our surplices and consumed them during prayers, with our heads low under the choir benches. Vicar Frost stepped down from the pulpit on one occasion to reprimand us for the practice and the vestry door was kept locked from there on. One boy at each service had to sit alongside the organ, behind a curtain, to pump up the bellows which worked the organ, a heavy weight on a cord would rise up and down, to indicate how much air was in the bag, it was not uncommon for the boy to nod off or forget to keep the air up during the long sermon, with laughter all round when the organist tried to play the last hymn, with no air and vicar Frost bellowing "Wake up blower." We had little giggles when Vicar Frost read from the bible, such quotes as "Up came Job with his little lot" or "Some fell on stony ground and the fowls of the air devoured them up", Aubrey, being the biggest culprit. I told vicar Frost one day, that I would not be coming to

church anymore and he said “Why not”, I replied that I was now too old for church, he was furious and said “My boy do you know all about God” and clouted me on the head with his prayer book. Occasionally a Rev Smith would take the service in Rev Frost’s absence, his main concern was getting the service completed on time, so as to get down to the Duke of Cumberland’s Head, for a pint or two with the locals, a jolly old sort.

On a couple of occasions, dad took me to Oxford to visit Auntie Ada, Uncle Bert and Cousin Eileen, Auntie Mary, Uncle Harry and Cousin Mary. We would walk the half mile to Aynho station. Dad paid for the tickets at the booking office, situated on the down platform and then we crossed to the waiting room on the up platform to await the arrival of the train (which, as a young boy, I thought would never come). As the train pulled into the station, the porter called out “Aynho for Deddington” several times. Luggage or parcels would be off loaded from the Guard’s van and likewise any to be loaded. When all were aboard, the porter raised his arm to indicate to the guard that all doors were secure, the guard blew his whistle and waved his green flag to indicate to the engine driver all clear to proceed. With a toot on the engine’s whistle, the train moved off smoothly, I tried to read the advertisements, which were affixed to the station fence, Mazawattee Tea, Lyons Cakes, Nestles Chocolate, and so on (names which I was able to read when older). The smoke and steam from the engine enveloped the train as we passed under the Aynho to Clifton road bridge. My eyes were glued to the window as we picked up speed, listening to the clickety, click as the wheels passed over each joint in between the rails, watching and absorbing the changing scenery, dad pointing out certain places or points of interest. The canal ran alongside for many miles, with long boats (barges) carrying their respective cargoes and as with the railway, they too had their ‘stations’ (wharves) along the length of the canal. The train was a local one and stopped at each station en route to Oxford, where it would terminate for the return journey to Banbury. There was a lot of competition between the stations in those days, all plying for the ‘The best kept station’ prize. Neat flower borders, edges of the platforms painted white, fire buckets full and painted red, station barrows tidily parked &c. The station yards handled nearly all the farm produce, cattle, sheep, corn, potatoes and sugar beet, as well as hay and straw. The newspapers and fish also arrived by train, usually in the very early hours. Road transport had not arrived as yet and most of the produce was delivered to the stations by horse and wagon, later tractors came into use. So much to see! On arrival at Oxford station, we crossed to the opposite platform, via

the subway. It was my first visit and difficult to absorb all that was taking place, the hustle and bustle of a busy main line station. A gleaming green engine was standing at the head of an express train, ready to take off for Paddington (London). Smaller engines stood in bays on either side of the station, ready to take trains to country towns, via branch lines, which were many in those days. Station barrows, loaded with mail bags, parcels and luggage, more people than I had ever seen before. Big fancy waiting rooms, a refreshment room, a huge clock with train times and destinations on either side, this was Oxford station. A small country boy, in wonderland!

After passing the ticket collector and leaving the station, Dad and I walked a short way along Botley Road until we reached Duke Street, this is where Auntie Ada and Uncle Bert lived at number 25, almost at the end of the street. The front door opened directly onto the pavement, the house being one of a continuous row along the length of the street. A nice cosy home, with a fancy fireplace, nicely polished furniture and a piano, the dining table had a pretty cloth on and a bowl of fruit in the centre, absolute luxury to me!! Dad always took a rabbit or a pair of pigeons or something from his garden, these things much appreciated by Auntie and Uncle. I think Auntie Ada was older than dad, I remember her saying that she was unable to write very well because her hands were full of arthritis. To me auntie looked really old, as she would to a little five or six year old. Uncle Bert was a wheel tapper at Oxford station, a very responsible job. He had a small garden at the back of the house, all neat and tidy. I did not see Cousin Eileen, being some years older than me, she was probably with friends, but of course I would not even have known of her, not having been there before. Auntie served up a nice meal for us. I am not sure whether or not I showed proper table manners, I do know that I was very shy and afraid to ask for anything. On leaving, with a shiny sixpence in my hand, which Uncle Bert had given to me, Dad and I walked to the Oxford bus terminal, next to the station and caught a bus to Hayfield road, where Auntie Mary lived with Uncle Harry and cousin Mary. Their house too opened out on to the pavement and was a part of a continuous row of homes. Hayfield road being a through one, hence more traffic than a street. Uncle Harry worked for the Royal Mail for a time, delivering bulk mail to country post office's, including Clifton , but later got a job at the Radiator factory nearer to home. There was a nice garden at the back of the house, with the canal running by and cousin Mary and I played there for a while. We did not stay too long as we had to get back to the station for the train home, I seem to remember walking back to the station. I must have slept

on the train and dad carried me some of the half mile from Aynho station to Clifton. I was so excited, relating to teacher and the other children, about my experience, when attending school the following Monday.

Chapter 13 - The War

September 1939, world war two commenced, things changed dramatically. We were all fitted with gas masks, which we had to carry at all times, in a square cardboard carry box, fitted with a strong string to hook over ones shoulder. Soon after these were issued they had to be modified, a second filter being taped securely on to the existing one, apparently a new type of gas had been developed by the Germans, making the modification necessary. Teacher made us practice putting on the masks and checking a good fit. Fortunately they were never put to use. Big posters were pasted on barn doors around the village, showing what to expect from enemy aircraft, when they dropped their bombs, as an eight year old, I could not take in the fact that one's house could be blown to bits or people would die, but as the war progressed I became more aware of these things. People were encouraged to dig air raid shelters and many did, whilst others were quite happy to carry on without, assuming the countryside would be less likely to receive any major bombing. Rolls and rolls of adhesive tape were issued, so that all the glass in windows could be criss-crossed with it, to keep the shattered glass together as much as possible. The 'blackout' was brought into force and was strictly monitored by the ARP Wardens (Air Raid Precautions), with cries of "Put that bloody light out" or a rap on the front door to say that the curtains or shutters were showing a crack of light, Car and bicycle headlamps and those on military vehicles were blacked over, with just a shaded slit of light showing. On moonless nights, foggy or heavy clouded ones, it was total darkness and took a time to get used to. Yet we had great fun as kids, playing such games as 'I Irkey' or 'fox and hounds'. We would split up into two groups, one group setting off to hide and after a given count the second group would go seeking the others. Our street lights were turned off, having only been switched on a few months earlier. But of course there were nights when the sky was clear with a full bright moon and it was possible to see the enemy aircraft as they flew over to bomb Coventry and Birmingham. These clear moonlit nights were also advantageous to the German navigators, as they could clearly see the shiny rails of the main line railway, a direct guide for them. The drone of the German bombers was quite different to the sound of our own aircraft and we quickly got used to knowing the difference. As these heavily laden planes were only travelling at around 200 m.p.h., they seemed to be overhead for a long time Some of the planes would off-load their bombs before their target and turn for home, needless to say that plenty of stray bombs fell near to us as well as shot down enemy aircraft. In the

first field at the western end of the village was a small tree covered hill, locally known as 'The Clump'. Coventry was about twenty four miles, as the crow flies, from this vantage point and on the 14th of November 1940, we sat on the clump and watched as the German bombers dropped some six hundred tons of bombs on Coventry, totally devastating the city. Some 1000 people died that night. The sky was like a fireworks display, with ack-ack (anti-aircraft) fire, tracer shells, exploding bombs, aircraft crashing, some getting caught in barrage balloons, others caught by the gunfire, this was one of the worst raids of the war. From this same point, looking south, we could see, night after night, the orange glow of the massive fires burning in London as a result of the blitz. One very dark Saturday evening, early in the war, a small queue was waiting to be served at Drinkwater's fish and chip van, when there was a bright flash in the night sky, followed by an enormous explosion. A lone raider had dropped a stick of high explosive bombs, about three miles away near Ardley, there were screams from the young evacuees, as they ran for cover. We locals stood firm and got our orders. It would appear that the bombs had fallen in rock adjacent to the main London railway line, probably the intended target, no apparent damage. Several aircraft crashes happened around Clifton and we were often the first at the scene, seeing the burning remains of the crew, a flying boot or glove, with a leg or hand We were quickly told to move on when the military arrived. A barrage balloon landed in grandad's paddock, dragging it's ropes across the rooftops. Aubrey managed to roll up one of the ropes and had it for many years. Another balloon was caught up in trees west of the village and had a small bomb attached, the military were soon on the job to disengage the bomb and take the balloon away.

Very soon, the country towns and villages were swamped with children, evacuated from London, Birmingham and Coventry. Clifton took more than a fair share and the little school just could not cope, so most had to go to Deddington, leaving just the youngest at Clifton. Most homes were given one, two or three children, depending on what room was available. Our house was already fully accommodated, so we were unable to take any. Lord Denbigh's house was taken over and two whole families moved in, until the disastrous fire, previously mentioned. The servant's quarters also had two families, The Bunkers and the Haggs. The two Ross brothers stayed with Aubrey and his grand-parents. The Drinkwaters gave over half of their house to a Jewish family and there were lots of others, The Salmon brothers, the Mahoney brothers, to mention a few. It was more difficult to accommodate girls, for obvious reasons, but there were a few at

Clifton. The odd one or two have since visited the village to bring back wartime memories. The city children seemed a lot smarter than us, but knew little of country life as we in turn didn't know much of what happened in their towns and cities. Fights between the boys were common and I, being smaller than most, copped a few hidings and bleeding noses. The fights were usually staged and there was no escape, with a tight ring of boys keeping the fight going.

I was nearly ten years of age now and becoming more useful on the farm, feeding the calves, the pigs and the poultry. Later I was given a stool and a bucket and placed at the milking position by this cow, not aware that she was old and riddled with cow lice. I was told by Cudgel to press my head into the side of the cow and take hold of two udders and have a go. I did not have a hat on and it was only a matter of minutes before my head was alive with these wretched cow lice, dropping the stool and bucket and making for the horse's water trough and plunging my head in, Cudgel and the others laughing their heads off. The water eased the itching, but I had to head off home and mother washed my head in very hot soapy water. This was not the first of many tricks that I was subjected to, during my *'happy'* days on the farm. When I was much younger, the threshing machine was operating in the rick-yard next our house. Ron Hall, the man in charge, a big tall, strong man, would pick me up and put me inside a wheat sack and tie up the top, then squirt oil from his long spouted oil can onto my head, followed by a handful of chaff, mother was not very happy, but she still made them a jug of tea each day, and in turn we would get some corn for the chickens.

The war is now looking very gloomy, Britain's forces up against it on all fronts. One Saturday morning in June 1940, I was making for home from the farm, when I saw Aubrey running towards me, "The Germans are coming" he yelled "They have driven us out of Dunkirk". Of course Aubrey being almost two years my senior, probably understood the circumstances better than me. Panic!!

The Home Guard was formed, first being known as the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers). Shotguns, pitchforks, old swords, anything that seemed useful as a weapon was all that they had to start with, so much had been left behind at Dunkirk, there was barely enough for the regular forces. Concrete pill boxes were built at strategic points around the countryside, large concrete blocks were made ready to block off roads, as well as heavy timber barriers, which could be rolled into position on bridge approaches or narrow thoroughfares, on reflection, I fear they would not have been much of a barrier, when it was realised exactly how big

and modern the German tanks and other armoured vehicles were, as they would easily have moved them aside, such flimsy blockades had the invasion taken place. Iron railings were removed from homes and public buildings and sent off for the war effort, many of which were still in stockpiles after the war.

At school we knitted socks and scarves for the soldiers and sailors. We collected rose hips and horse chestnuts from the hedgerows and trees, these were processed for syrup and stock feed. Waste paper, bottles and cans were all collected for the war effort too. Parks and playing fields were ploughed and seeded for crop production. Airstrips were being put down every-where, we were totally surrounded by airfields and military installations. I don't think I mentioned earlier, we had all been issued with a ration book and an identity card, my identity number was DZBI 1734 and I may still have it hidden away.

Very quickly our minds had been converted to military thinking, the war now being the daily talking point. When the Home Guard marched along the street, we would march alongside them, with our pointed sticks as pretend rifles and bayonets. They had made a mock tank, complete with turret and gun and when it was towed along behind the farm tractor, the hidden guards would hurl large stones as make-believe grenades and we children would join in with smaller stones. We thought it was great fun, not really taking in, the seriousness of it all.

We formed our own little army, Aubrey being the sergeant. With three stripes (chevrons) neatly chalked on his jacket sleeve, whilst the rest of us took turns at being corporal. Our headquarters was the wagon hovel, near the river, by the mill. The hovel was open fronted onto the road, with a side door leading into a small triangular piece of land, bounded by the mill stream and the main river. This small area was ideal for us to parade and carry out our activities. We marched, did guard duty and acted out little battles. Later in the war we joined the official Army Cadet force and were issued with uniforms, like the real soldiers. In charge was Mr Wing, our new headmaster, he had the rank of 2nd lieutenant. Our sergeant was a retired regular soldier, Mr Paginton. We did field drill, map reading, marching and all things military. This experience was very helpful when being called to join the regular army as National Servicemen later.

We now move to Deddington school and now mix with children from Deddington, Hempton, Barford and more evacuees. The Barford children were given bicycles by the education authorities, because they lived more than two miles from school.

We had no such luxury, as we only lived a mere one and a half miles away. We walked each day, winter and summer, rain or shine. In the winter when the north wind cut across the road, we walked in the frozen ditch, but sometimes this was not possible, when the heavy snowfalls completely covered it. I recall the time when my ears were so cold that they became raw as the frostbite took hold. During heavy rain, the headmaster would let us off a little early to catch the school bus that left Deddington each day to cater for children further afield, not that often, I might add. Aubrey got a new bike from his grand-parents and after a while he started giving me a lift on the crossbar, I don't know why me, he could easily have picked his brother Peter or Horace or Chris. I think that this is where Aubrey and I started our long lasting friendship. On the way home one day from school, the local policeman approached from behind and told me to get off the crossbar, "You are not allowed to do that" he said, "one of you must walk". I was soon back on again, as he disappeared over the hill, oddly enough, not getting caught again. Of course there were times when Aubrey could not use his bike, the snow being too deep or the road to icy. Getting to school on those bitter cold days, it was usual to get into the classroom early so as to warm one's hands around the stove, and by golly, how they used to sting at first, we called that 'the tingles', many getting chilblains as a result.

Mr Harmsworth was the headmaster and Miss Sucrow was my class teacher. Miss Miles our music teacher, she also ran a classroom too. Other than the Clifton children, I remember lots of my new classmates. Donald Bignall, Dennis Basin, Dennis Norton, Michael Vincent, Sylvia Porlock, Ron Berry, Alistair McCutcheon, to mention a few. We had school dinners at four pence a day. A Miss Yerbury was the cook and she certainly dished up some good meals. She got to know that I liked her creamy rice pudding and let me spoon out the cooking dish at the end of the meal. Sadly she did me an injustice some years later, this I will bring into the story later. All exercise books, reference books and writing materials were provided and kept in cupboards in the individual classrooms. Each day some-one would be rostered to hand out the books as required and yet another person would be responsible for cleaning and refilling the ink wells (the ink monitor). The pens had long wooden stems with a metal slot at the end for the nib to fit, this is where my first act of misbehaviour came at Deddington school. Some-one from behind me threw there pen, dart like, and it stuck in my desk, silly me turned and threw it back, but Miss Sucrow spotted the act and I, along with Dennis Basin were sent to the headmaster for a sharp three strokes of the cane. I was sent on another

occasion, but this time, I stood by the headmaster's door for a while and then returned to class, looking down, not letting on that I had not met with the headmaster, or the cane. Horace and I decided on our way to school one morning, to play truant. We took off across the fields and were having a great time. This suddenly came to an end. As we climbed over a gate to cross over the road, a little black car approached and pulled up alongside us. Winding down the window, we saw a the very stern face of Mr Carpenter, the school attendance officer, who quickly reprimanded us and whisked us back to school, where we received three strokes of the cane and with a few tears, returned to class.

On Wednesday of each week, the boys would attend woodwork classes at Bloxham, Halls Bus service provided a small twenty six seater bus to transport us there and pick us up at the end of the class for the return journey. Mr Merryfield was our woodwork master and held the classes in an upstairs room at the Joiners Arms public house. In addition to woodwork, we also did some minor metal work. Here again all tools and materials were provided, including a lathe, a machine that I never seemed to master. At lunch time Mr Merryfield would take his lunch in the bar downstairs and we were left more or less to do as we pleased. After eating our lunch we would venture outside and walk up to the bakery in the main street and buy a warm new loaf, between us. Eating the nice new crust only, saving the doughy middle for later. Back in the classroom we would play games, including darts. During one game of darts, a dart bounced off the board and flew through the open window to the street below. Dennis Norton ran down to retrieve the dart, but instead of carrying it back to the room, he threw it up, through the open window where I was standing. The dart stuck in my left ear lobe and dangled there, like an ear ornament, much laughter, but it could have been worse, an eye perhaps? After lunch break, Mr Merryfield tended to doze off in his chair, after his pint of beer or two, so not a lot of wood or metal work in the afternoon. The bus would be waiting close to the pub, ready for the return trip, we all clambered aboard. Mr Merryfiled had locked up and was pedalling away on his bicycle, his large pipe pushed to one side of his mouth. On the bus the middle of the afore-said loaf came out and rolling it into little balls, we proceeded to start a bread fight. The driver, observing the commotion through his rear view mirror, promptly stopped the bus and demanded that all the bread be picked up and the very next boy to throw a piece would get off the bus and walk, Needless to say, no boy or boys did any walking.

Soon things were to change at Deddington school. Mr Harmsworth retired (not before time) and a Mr G R Wing arrived as our new headmaster. Mr Wing, a married man with one daughter, Pamela, hailing from London and his presence was soon apparent. A young man with a different approach to schooling and from the start, it was obvious that better times were ahead for our school. He made it quite clear that he would not stand for bad behaviour and students would be punished accordingly. He organised the school into a house system, creating three houses; Windsor, Tudor and York, each student having a ribbon to denote to which house one belonged. I was in York. ”The school must have a motto” said Mr Wing and it was decided to adopt ‘IT CAN BE DONE’. For the first time, organised games were played with inter-house competitions. A game called shinty was played for the first time, using long curved sticks, similar to hockey. I was captain of the football team for a while, but not exactly a Beckham. School trips came in, not too far away, because of the war. On one trip to Stratford-upon-Avon, we visited Shakespeare’s Memorial Theatre to watch one of his many plays. Aubrey and I could not wait till the end, we were anxious to get on the river. Walking across the bridge to the boathouse, we paid a deposit and hire fee and were soon canoeing up the river. Unfortunately for us, we got stuck on some tree roots near this little island, taking rather too long to get free. Of course we were now late and assumed that the others had gone and caught the train home. We made our way to the station and about to pay for tickets, when a furious Mr Wing appeared, saying “get over the other side you two, you have made us all late’ Aubrey explained and told him that we could have got back ok. Monday morning assembly, Aubrey and I were told to stand next to Mr Wing’s desk, facing the assembled classes. A very stern headmaster proceeded to tell the assembly what had happened on the trip to Stratford and how yours truly and Aubrey had been responsible for the rest of the party to miss the train home, saying “And that fool of a Plasted said, that we could have got back”, which indeed we could have, after all it was only about twenty miles to Banbury. We were thoroughly reprimanded and given five hundred lines of “We let the party to Stratford upon Avon down”. Here again we managed to cheat a little by taping several pencils together, but hanging on to the completed lines before handing them in, to avoid being asked how we had managed to write them so quickly, country boys had their little ways.

Aubrey had now reached fourteen years of age and left school towards the end of nineteen forty three and got a job with Welford’s farm, so he was not under Mr Wing’s wing very long. Talking of wings, a joke that came up from Mr Wing, “what

has two wings and can't fly," when everyone's brain was exhausted for ideas, he would say, with a broad grin, "I do, Mrs Wing and Pamela Wing"

Gardening was another of Mr Wing's introductions to the school and bee keeping. I loved this part of my days at Deddington School. There was quite a large garden at the rear of the school, with lots of trees and bushes, having been badly neglected for some years. It was quite a challenge to get the garden back to some form of order. Little vegetable patches were marked out and the trees and bushes trimmed and pruned accordingly. We were able to take certain seeds from home, broad and runner beans, cabbage, cauliflower and other plants and seed potatoes from the local farm. Some seeds came over from America and were in yellow packets. We also had a small plot of garden on the local allotments along the Hempton road, this too was divided up into small sections and mainly used for the potatoes. There were two bee hives and Mr Wing would don his hat, with net, gloves and light up a smoke puffer to make the bees drowsy when taking off the top of the hive. Of course some bees would be returning to the hive from their trip to the fields to bring back the pollen. One such bee decided that I should be stung on the face and did just that. Mr Wing removed the sting and applied Dettol to the spot, I have used Dettol ever since for all kinds of applications. The honey, when extracted from the comb, was bottled and labelled and sold on school open day, the money going into school funds. The fruit and vegetables mainly went to the school canteen and were used to supplement the meal requirements. A local nursery man would come to the school from time to time, teaching us how to prune trees and roses as well as the application of fertilisers and pest control, all of this information proving very useful as we became gardeners ourselves.

Sometime during the war, King George VI passed through Deddington to attend a "*Sending off*" inspection at Adderbury for soldiers on their way to the conflict. The King was driven via the quiet back lane, which ran along the side of our school. We lined the perimeter fence and waved to his majesty as his car slowed in front of us to turn on to the main road. He was in a military vehicle, with an escort of army motor cycle riders. I vividly remember the red band on his cap and the smart uniform, probably that of a Colonel in chief. Later I became one of his soldiers, as did Aubrey and Horace as we did our National Service.

I could write so much more about the war, but there is so much literature, so many films and documents available in such detail, that I feel that my account of it, except perhaps the happenings in and around Clifton, may not be necessary. The

whole area around us was military. The massive grounds of Aynho Park became the storage area for fuel and ammunition, carefully camouflaged and placed under the large expanse of trees. The owners, the Cartwrights, were not too impressed, as the high walls that encompassed the whole estate, were breached, allowing whole herds of their red deer to escape into the surrounding countryside. Unfortunately, Mr Cartwright and his son were killed, when they ran into the rear of a lorry that was parked just outside their estate, ending a long reign of that family name at Aynho. There is a book, of which I have a copy, called "*Apricot Village"* written by Ted Humphris and Doris Palmer. Ted was the head gardener at the estate and the book is a very detailed account of his life there and of the village of Aynho, which was wholly owned by the Cartwrights. (worth a read). The rail yards at Aynho station were expanded by several extra tracks to accommodate the nightly arrival of the petrol and ammunition and a convoy of small articulated trucks worked around the clock, transporting it to the park.

In the event of an air raid warning, operations would stop and all lights extinguished until the all clear. Luckily the few German bombs that were dropped were off target, one dreads to think what the result would have been, had there been a direct hit. A few enterprising people made a small fortune, by collecting the kitchen waste from the camp to feed pigs etc. After the war a lot of the army huts were taken over by squatters, who occupied them for many years, until the government later gave them the opportunity to purchase them.

As the war progressed, thousands of American soldiers and airmen arrived in the area, with their smart uniforms and plenty of cash. Quickly the local girls were being dated by them, causing a few altercations with the local men. Sadly quite a few married women also got involved, more upsets. As youngsters, we would stand by the roadside and wave to the US convoys as they passed through the village, getting lots of chewing gum, sugar and coffee sachets and biscuits thrown from the trucks. Their tanks had rubber pads in their tracks, making them so much quieter than ours. Nearer to the D day operation, the convoys of trucks and tanks would pass through night and day, our tanks leaving the road white with their iron tracks. Full scale manoeuvres also took place and many walls and fences were damaged, much to the annoyance of the farmers, who had the job of repairs and rounding up escaped stock. The thousand bomber raids on Germany began and the air would be filled with heavily laden Lancaster and other bombers, barley clearing the rooftops as they took off from the surrounding airfields, too many did

not return. Soon after this, the air was once again filled with glider towing Stirling bombers, Dakota and other types of aircraft, on their way to back up the Normandy landings, each plane and glider having three broad white stripes, painted on the fuselage and wings, I assume these were an identification sign, as so many aircraft would have been in the air at one time.

Whilst all this was going on, the farmers were still getting on with the job of planting and harvesting. I clearly remember being on the wagon in the cornfield, stacking the sheaves of corn as neatly as I could, but often getting buried, as the loaders would send two or three sheaves up at a time from both sides with their pitchforks, knowing full well that I could not cope, but I somehow survived, despite their laughter. I recall the day that a little yellow aircraft flew over, travelling very fast and I cried out "Where is its propeller?" Charlie Gardener said "it doesn't have one", this was Whittle's experimental jet and was stationed at Barford airstrip. The word soon got around and Aubrey and I cycled as near as we could get to the airstrip, to watch the little jet take off or land from or to the hangar. The Meteor jet fighter was the first operational plane developed from Whittle's plane, but not in time to be part of the war. The jet age was born. One evening during the long summer days (double summertime), we were playing a game of cricket in the meadows, alongside the river. We heard a high pitched noise approaching from the north. A steel blue, twin engine plane, flying very low to the ground, flew past, really fast. It was the prototype of the later to be famous, De Havilland Mosquito, of which many thousands were built, mainly of wood. These planes, because of their speed, in excess of 400mph, were unarmed.

Still on the farm, I had a brush with death. The old horse drawn reaping machine, which we referred to as a Binder, had been adapted to be towed by a tractor and because of the extra length could not turn at each corner of the crop as it got smaller, necessitating a loop at each end and setting in to the crop again. The binder would eject one sheaf of corn in the loop. Riding on the step of the tractor, behind the driver, my job was to hop off and remove the sheaf so that it would not be run over and hop back on again. On this occasion, I missed the step and fell under the drawbar and into the path of the cutting bar of the binder and the driving wheel. Bill Gardner, sitting on the binder carried a long pole (like a fishing rod) with a red flag on the end, with which he could reach and alert the tractor driver to stop. Luck was with me, as we were on rising ground and the earth was reasonably soft. The large driving wheel was on my leg, the cutting blade had just

cut into my rib cage as the tractor stopped and rolled back slightly. Not badly injured, I was taken home by Bill and cleaned up and no more was said. On the funny side of it all, Stan Pratley, later a schoolmate, when I started Deddington school, had been watching close by and when he saw me disappear under the machine, raced off to tell his father, who was the driver of a steam roller, working on the road alongside the field, that a boy had been run over and cut in half. But of course by the time his dad had stopped the roller and stepped down, he saw me being carried to Bill's car, all in one piece. I still bear the scar to this day. On reaching twelve years of age, we were called upon to assist the farmers to harvest potatoes (*potato picking).* We would follow the potato digging machine along and fill our buckets and then empty them into the sack. The farm labourers would handle the sacks when full. At break time we would enjoy a baked potato, cooked on a fire of the dry potato haulms and sticks from the hedgerows.

In addition to the time I spent on the farm, after school and at week-ends, most of my school holidays were spent there too. It didn't take long for me to get to know all that was required, starting so young. Charlie Gardener was not a good boss, he was quite happy to see me doing the work and getting wet and dirty, only to throw a sixpenny bit at my feet on Saturday lunchtime. As I grew older, I was able to do most things by myself. During the long summer holiday, when the men were busy with the harvest, at about four in the afternoon I would get the cows into the cowshed, about twenty four of them, if my memory serves me correctly, milk them and take the milk to the dairy. In the mornings the men were available to do the milking. Because of double summertime (clocks put forward two hours) the cows had to be rounded up from the fields initially, as they were out of their time slot and took a time to get used to the change, likewise when the clocks were put back to normal, they would be waiting at the gate. In the dairy was a cooler with a corrugated face and back, above which was a large container above, in which to tip the fresh milk. Under the cooler was a filtration unit atop a ten gallon churn. The milk would run over the water cooled cooler and filter into the churn beneath. Each churn had to be filled exactly to the ten gallon marker, the heavy lid placed on and a seal wired on with a printed label, with the details of the farm of origin. Each morning the churns were wheeled down to the roadside and placed on a platform, to be picked up by a truck from the United Dairies of Banbury. The cows are now turned out to the fields. The calves which had been weaned from mum, had to be given milk twice a day, until they were able to eat hay. The pigs had to be fed and the sties cleaned. The chickens and the geese fed with corn and the

eggs to collect. There were a host of other jobs, for a measly sum of five shillings a fortnight, if I was lucky. During the winter months, the ploughing and the sowing of crops, along with threshing, hedging and ditching, was done. In the spring the sheep had their lambs and soon after were sheared. Always something to do down on the farm!

When I was very young, I recall my mother packing a basket with gooseberry jam sandwiches and home-made cake, making a can of tea and taking these to the field where dad would be haymaking. Dad would pile up some hay and we would all sit on it to enjoy what mother had made. I remember the taste of that lovely jam so well. Sitting under the hedgerow, was a stone jar of Miss Wright's home -made wine, probably dandelion or parsnip, of which dad would take a swig or two during the day. Miss wright, as others did too, made a large variety of wines.

Chapter 14 - School Holiday

The war in Europe had at last come to an end and Mr Wing said it was time for a holiday. He decided that we would spend a week with a Mrs Goddard, who lived at Kinder Spur, Hayfield, near Stockport, Cheshire. The holiday being mostly paid for by funds raised with the sale of the rose hips, horse chestnuts, honey etc. On June 2nd 1945, we made our way by bus to Banbury, from where we caught the train to Birmingham via the Great Western Railway, then on to Stockport via the London Midland and Scottish railway, the final leg by bus to Hayfield. I had never travelled so far before and it was all so exciting. Having collected our cases, we walked the short distance to Mrs Goddard's house, which was standing in a very pleasant setting just outside the village of Hayfield. If I remember correctly, it was raining lightly. Mrs Goddard, a short, plump lady, with a built in smile, made us welcome and settled us in to our rooms. When we had changed into more casual clothing, we made our way to a very nice evening meal. Mrs Goddard had a nice fire burning in the lounge and this is where we spent the rest of the evening, whilst Mr Wing outlined the itinerary for the coming week. I am not sure how many of us were in the group, sadly I have no record, probably about fourteen.

We each had an exercise book, with which to write a daily account of our activities (I still have this book, although not quite as new as it was!) On the first page of the book was written 'WHY WE ARE GOING? SO THAT WE MAY' followed by eight items 1. Learn to use our eyes to the best advantage. 2. Increase our knowledge of our own country. 3. Study history, geography and nature study first hand. 4.Be introduced to new scenes and material, unknown to us in our own area. 5. Widen our experience, by meeting various types of our people. 6.Learn the value of a holiday with a purpose. 7. Better understand one another. 8. Learn the spirit of comradeship. Also in the book, was a detailed map of the area where our activities were to take place, one of the rail journey and our program for the week, as well as a list of the things that we needed to take for the trip.

The following day, which was a Sunday, we attended divine service at the local church, after which we took a few walks in the immediate area. Later we wrote letters and had a laugh asking Mrs Goddard if she had any ink and she replied "Ink? Oh yes I have yards of ink", sounding even funnier with her northern accent. Hayfield actually is a Derbyshire village and only comes under Stockport for postal address. I will write a little of what I wrote in my book;

'The county of Derbyshire is more than one thousand square miles in area, with a population of 750,000 people. In the county are the prehistoric remains of the past. Pottery and bronze have been found along with remains of those who used them. There are traces of Roman camps and roads, for the Romans mined the lead there. Monastic ruins and Norman castles are also to be found there as well as many fine Manor houses, such as Chatsworth. At Hathersage is said to sleep Little John, who buried Robin Hood.'

We visited many towns and factories. New Mills, Hope, Castleton, Buxton, Chapel-en-le-Frith, &c. There are many famous caves and caverns too, where I first saw stalactites and stalagmites, in all their shapes and sizes, finding it difficult to comprehend that they had taken thousands of years to form from lime deposits from the constant dripping of water, which had seeped through from the land above. Rope making is carried out at Castleton and has been done by the same family for generations, one member of the family is said to have made some ten thousand miles of one inch thick rope during his life time. Buxton is the highest town in England at some one thousand feet above sea level. George Stephenson, the builder of the Rocket steam engine, was born and buried in Derbyshire. We hiked over Kinder Scout, we visited Bakewell, where King Alfred is said to have burned the cakes, hence the name 'Bakewell Tarts". We went to a paper mill and saw the processes of paper making, a weaving mill, where we saw how cloth was woven and printed, picking up samples as we went along.

Probably the highlight of the trip for me, was the day we spent in Manchester. We visited the Town hall, the Cathedral, the Art gallery and Salford docks. I had never ridden on a tram before and was amazed at the clatter of their wheels as they moved around the cobbled streets. We climbed up the Clock tower at the town hall and arrived just in time for Great Abel (the clock bell) to strike eleven o'clock. The noise was deafening and didn't leave our ears for quite a time. I believe the bell weighs over eight tons. The Art gallery didn't really turn me on, but Salford docks really did. I am not aware of how Mr Wing was able to get us aboard a working tug boat at the docks, but he certainly did, I wish I could remember the name of it. We pulled away into the busy docks, listening to the Captain as he pointed out points of interest. He told us that only a few days earlier, German bombs had been dredged up from the docks. A ship was being loaded with shells and supplies for the Far East, as the war with Japan was still raging and did not stop, as history will tell us, until the dropping of the first atomic bombs, on

G. HARRIS.

DEDDINGTON SCHOOL. OXON.

FIRST SCHOOL JOURNEY TO HAYFIELD, DERBYSHIRE.

JUNE 2ND – 9TH 1945

PROGRAMME.

SAT. JUNE 2nd

JOURNEY TO HAYFIELD

SUN. JUNE 3rd.

DIVINE SERVICE. WALKS. LETTERS.

MON. JUNE 4th

NEW MILLS. HOPE. CASTLETON.

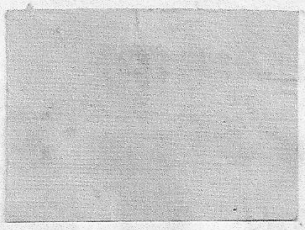
BLUE JOHN MINES. PEAK CAVERN.

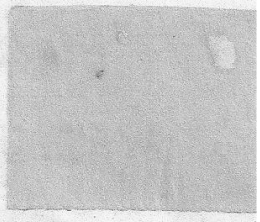
TUES. JUNE 5th (TREAK'S CAVERN

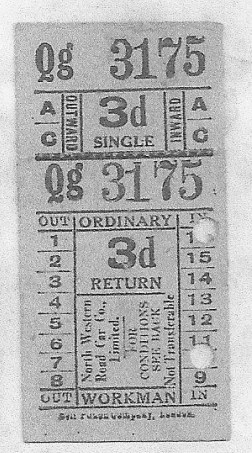
AM. HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY OF

DISTRICT.

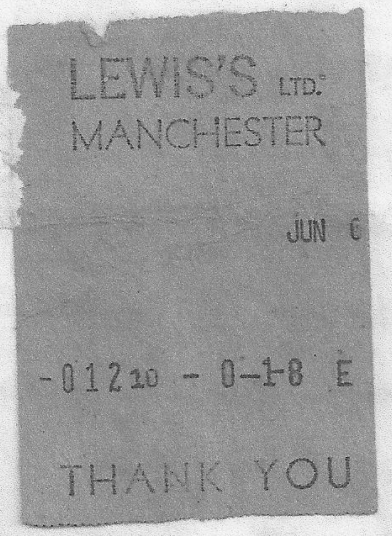
P.M. HIKE. IN KINDER SCOUT AREA.



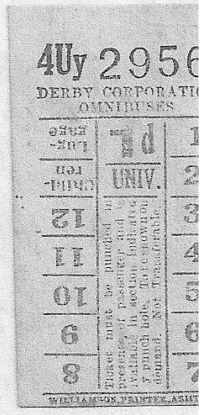




Bus



DEPT. STORE



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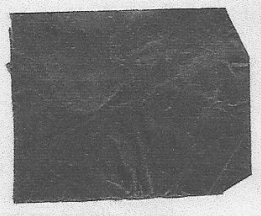
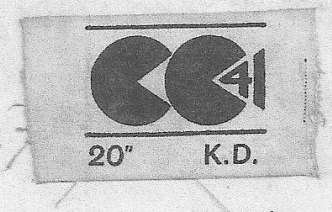


GROVE PAPER MILL



CANCO PRINT WORK (UTILITY LABEL)

PROGRAMME

WED. JUNE 6th

BUXTON. St ANNS WELL.

CORBAR CRAGS. RIVER WYE.

THURS. JUNE 7th

MANCHESTER TOWN HALL.

CATHEDRAL. CITY ART GALLERY.

HANGING BRIDGE. SALFORD DOCKS.

BARTON AQUEDUCT.

FRI. JUNE 8th

HIKING IN AND STUDY OF

HAYFIELD DISTRICT.

SAT. JUNE 9th.

RETURN JOURNEY.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We approached Barton aqueduct, but because some coal had been jamming up the mechanism, we had to wait until it was cleared to allow it to open, so as we could proceed along the Manchester ship canal. The aqueduct, the only one of its type in the world, which carries the Bridgewater canal over the Manchester ship canal, was opened in 1893.(It replaced a stone structure aqueduct.) An iron trough, weighing 1450 tonnes and is 330feet in length, holding 800 tons of water. Iron gates are closed at each end to hold the water in whilst in the open position. The reason for its construction, the newer, larger ships, could not pass under the old static structure.

Mostly, whilst on our travels, we ate packed lunches, kindly provided by Mrs Goddard, always with fine meal awaiting us at the end of each day. Of course wartime rationing was still in force, but most country people had their own chickens and pigs, with local farms providing fresh milk. On the 4th of June was my 14th Birthday, I remember that morning so well. I was in a dream, a snake was swimming across the canal towards me, suddenly I felt grip on my nose, I awoke with a start, Mr Wing had tweeked my nose, saying," Wake up Harris, Happy Birthday", handing me a nice cup of tea and biscuit. I can't remember any further celebrations, there may have been.

Our trip came to an end on Saturday 9th June and we made our way home in reverse order of our outward journey. My book is missing a few pages, little hands got to it somewhere along the way, but it still holds, good memories. It would have been nice to have some photographs, but I can't remember any being taken, film would have been difficult to obtain, I imagine, because of the war.

The following month, July, I left school and reported to the local Labour Exchange. Mr Lewis was the employment officer. There was no shortage of jobs back then. I decided, despite the love of the countryside and the farming, I wanted to try something different, which I did, only to return to the farm for a short period.

Chapter 15 Work begins

Mr Lewis's office was in a front room of his house, overlooking the High street in Deddington, a desk, with pens, pencils, paper and books, with a couple of extra chairs. All records were hand written, no computer then of course, I can't recall seeing a typewriter, there may have been. Mr Lewis was an older man with greying hair and wearing spectacles, with a pleasant approach. Naturally, he asked my name and address and started to fill in my details on the appropriate form. He asked me what I had in mind regarding employment and I told him that I would like to work in a shop, where there were tools and a variety of other goods. "I think I have just the job for you" he said, "but it will mean you will have to travel to Banbury". The job was at Curry's radio and bicycle shop in the main shopping street in Banbury and it excited me to think of it. When all formalities had been completed, Mr Lewis handed me a buff envelope, containing my National Insurance card and my Employment card, shaking hands and wishing me well, he opened the door and I proudly walked back to Clifton, to tell mother what I had been offered, I think she was a little worried about the journey each day. When dad got home from work, I told him too and he was pleased to hear.

The following Monday, I walked to Aynho station and caught the early train into Banbury. I walked from the station to Curry's store, about a quarter of one mile. The shop manager was already in the shop and let me in when I knocked, as the store did not open to the public until nine am. I handed Mr Humphries the buff envelope, along with my school reference and he gave me a run-down of what I would be doing, guided by the older employee, who's name escapes me. My wage was to be fifteen shillings per week, with four pence deducted for junior Unemployment and National Insurance stamps. Nine am till five thirty pm, half day closing on Wednesdays, half an hour for lunch. The shop was situated on the corner of High street and George street, with display windows facing both. The entrance door was on the High street side. The shop had that smell of newness, bicycles and radios and all the supporting parts. There were shelves and a set of small drawers behind the counter, containing all manner of parts, from bicycle clips to tyres, batteries and torches. A small wooden till stood on the end of the counter, with a printed receipt book for goods sold, the amount being written in by hand. When new bicycles arrived from the factory, the handle bars were turned to be sideways, the pedals inwards and often the tyres were flat, so I soon became familiar with their assembly. I was rather shy at first when serving a

customer, but I soon overcame that. I quickly got to know the main areas adjacent to the shop and enjoyed walking out at lunch time, mixing in with the shoppers and looking in the other shop windows. Most small towns had a similar high street. The Fifty Shilling Tailors, Burtons, Marks & Spencer, Woolworths, Freeman - Hardy & Willis (shoes), Dorothy Perkins (ladies), The International Grocers, these were some of the many stores, with many other lesser known ones in the side streets. The Palace cinema stood in the market place, the Grand in Broad Street, whilst the Regal was farther out in the Horse Fair, near to the famous Banbury Cross, almost opposite St Mary's church and the Woolpack Inn, where my Auntie Alice worked for many years. The landlord being a Mr Yandall, who, when retiring came to live with Auntie Alice, next door to us at Clifton.

I really did like the job at Currys, but dad had different views. My train fare was taking quite a bite out of my meagre wage and with a few purchases for myself, there was little (if any) left to hand to dad for keep, so reluctantly I handed in my notice and left with my stamp cards and spent a few months at Garrets farm at twenty eight shillings per week. The farm, being just a five minute walk from home, so with no train fare to pay, free milk and other farm goods, a few extra shillings to give to dad and mum.

Of course there was no training required, as I had done it all before, just a matter of doing the work that was given each morning. I was able to drive the tractor whilst in the fields, this I enjoyed, though legally, not old enough to do so. It was whilst working at Garret's that mother died. I happened to see dad cycle past towards home, thinking it strange, as it was only mid-afternoon and he would normally get back from his work at Deddington at about five twenty. Before we did the afternoon milking, we would pop home for a cuppa. On doing this, I got home to find the doctors car outside and Winnie was there too. Dad said that mother was not very well. But as previously written, she had had a stroke and died, this I was to learn when finishing work and returning home, an awful shock, for a young lad. I stayed with Aubrey until after the funeral and Eileen with Winnie.

My stay on the farm was brief, as I was approached by Mr Course (Doughy), our baker, who asked me if I would like a much cleaner job in his bakery at Deddington. He asked me what I was earning at Garrets and I told him the amount, to which he said " I can do a little better than that" and made an increase of seven shillings a week. I didn't really need any coaxing and took the job. Mr Garret was very nice about it and wished me well.

I learned a lot from Mr Course, WJ, (William John) an ex- Royal Navy baker. On leaving the service, sometime between the wars, he opened the bakery on New Street, Deddington. He quickly established himself, along with his wife, a reputable business, making fine bread and cakes, receiving a gold medal for his Hovis Fruit Lunch cake. I borrowed an old bicycle from Mr Hartwell, who said I could use it as long as I looked after it, until I got one of my own. I had to start at seven each morning, except Saturday and that was at 5am. Saturday being the busiest day of the week, as the whole of Mr Course's delivery round had to be served as well as the shop customers. Let me explain; Wartime restrictions were still in force and only three deliveries were allowed per area a week. Monday, Wednesday and Saturday for the outer areas, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for local area, so everyone got a Saturday delivery, this involved three separate bakes. Friday was reserved for the making of cakes and pastries, making and bagging self-raising-flour and plain flour. In addition to normal baking, Mr Course had a contract with the USAAF at Barford air strip, to supply a large order of bread twice a week, until they left sometime in the late forties. On Sundays, he would fire up the oven to allow local people to bring their Sunday roasts and at Christmas time their Turkeys, geese etc. He could never have a long holiday, the only time he would take a break would be at Easter or Whitsun, to spend a day at the races. A very busy man.

On my first day I arrived in good time, Mr Course had already got the first batch in the oven, with the next lot of dough, proving in the dough kivver. (a long zinc lined bin, with a heavy lid.) I was introduced to Mrs Course and WJ's father (Old Doughy), who helped in the bakehouse and was also the local pig killer. There was one daughter, Sylvia, about 12 years of age. The business was a smart two storey building, with a shop at the front, next a small living room, with the bakehouse at the rear. The private rooms were upstairs. The flour room was above the bakehouse, with a door opening on to the side alley (The Stile) for unloading the flour and other goods. The delivery van was always kept at the front of the shop as there was no undercover area for it. A hand-cart was kept at the back of the bakehouse, which I used on Saturdays, to deliver Deddington, whilst WJ got on with the last batch of bread. A small storage area and a garden were at the back of the building, enclosed on all sides by a high wall.

Hygiene was the first and most important thing to be observed at all times and WJ made sure that I was fully aware of this. Whilst in the bakehouse I wore a white apron and cap. My first job was to clean and grease the bread tins, ready for the

Deddington Public Elementary School, I left July 1945 then to work.

Front left, WJ Course Shop and bakery, sign between windows say'HOVIS' in large gold letters. The sign on the side of the building says 'The Stile. This leads through to Goose Green and the back of the bakery.

Mr Lewis outside his office, he found my first job at Curry's

The cart which I used to deliver the bread and other goods on Saturdays (Not me in the picture, could be WJC himself?)

next bake, this was done immediately after the loaves were taken from them, whilst they were still warm, which made the greasing so much easier. My next job was to cut and weigh the dough from the mix, it didn't take me long to cut almost accurately, adding or deducting to the weight, a very important point, because of the very strict Weights and Measures regulations. Quickly I was able to hand mould the loaves before putting them into the tins or ones that were baked directly onto the oven bricks. The dough was mixed in a mechanical mixer, 140lbs (63Kgs approx.) at a time, a quantity of salt, yeast and water was added. When thoroughly mixed, the dough was put into the kivver and left to rise, sometimes necessary to push it down as the lid started to rise. The same mixer was used for quantity mixes of cakes or buns, also for the self-raising-flour. We made many sorts of cakes and pastries, being very busy at Easter, getting the warm hot-X buns to the customs, plus the odd one or two that I was able to scoff in the flour room. Because of the war, it took some time for the major cake manufacturers to get going again, but gradually they started to filter through, Lyons, Scribans, Cadbury's, Oliver & Gurdens, some of the names I remember. The flour still contained a large amount of bran, but occasionally we did get a sack or two of pure white Canadian flour, which was supposed to be mixed with the local product, but WJ quietly made some white loaves for a chosen few (hush hush). The flour came in sacks of 140lbs and WJ would carry them on his shoulders into the bakehouse, I did this after a couple of years there, my knees almost buckling under the weight. The yeast was delivered in small sacks of about 10lbs. Mrs Course would take a small pinch of yeast with a glass of water each day, I can't say that I really liked the taste or the smell of it. The currants and sultanas came in cardboard boxes, so too the glazed cherries (a few more flour room snacks). Sugar, icing sugar, salt, flavourings, spices &c were all part of the baking process, all becoming more available, as peacetime progressed.

The Oven was fired with quality coal, small Derby Brights. There was a temperature gauge on the oven door and sometimes if the oven got too hot, an iron boiler of water would be placed in front of the fire outlet to bring down the temperature. The loaves were placed and removed with a wooden peel (not unlike an oar) and the oven was cleaned after being fired up with a damp sack on a long pole. Strange to say that the water that this device was left to soak in, was and attraction for the customer's dogs, on Sunday mornings when they came in to collect there roasts. Sometimes a mouse would make a hole in a sack of flour, making it necessary to fine sift the whole sack, what a job that was! When it was

necessary to reline the oven with new fire bricks, a specialist firm would come down from London to do the job. They would actually work inside the oven, almost on their stomachs, working through Saturday night to make sure it was ready for firing up late on Sunday morning.

We did have competition, as there was another bakery in Deddington, Bernard Wallin of the Market place. However there was plenty of room for both bakeries. We delivered in Deddington, Hempton, Barford, Clifton and Aynho station. As mentioned, I delivered Deddington on Saturdays with the hand cart. I was an enclosed vehicle, with two large wheels and two legs for standing, holding quite a number of loaves and flour. Of course it was necessary to return to the bakery a couple of times to reload. On one occasion, as I was pushing the cart along, one wheel encountered a stone and before I could control it, it upended and a number of loaves spilled out. I quickly recovered the bread and carried on, hoping that no-one would have seen my little accident. But as is usually the case, some busybody informed WJ and I had to explain, nothing more was said about it. I got on well with the customers and often got delayed, when offered a cuppa. One lady, Mrs Rainbow, would buy a cake from me and then cut it and give me a piece with the cuppa, so kind. Putting the cart away, I would then load the delivery van,(a Ford) whilst WJ was getting cleaned up and ready to take off on the big round. At the end of the day, we would sit in the dining room and have a light snack and whilst doing so, would enter up the sales in the book. I had a very good memory and told WJ what each customer had bought as he called out the names from the ledger. He would then count up the takings. It would be 7pm, by the time I got home, so unfortunately I was not able to take part in any Saturday football or cricket and too late to go to the pictures. I did get the afternoon off on Wednesdays, WJ was able to finish the delivery off himself, sometimes Course would go along. On odd occasions, a Sid Berry, who used to work with WJ prior to the war, would come and give WJ a hand, when on leave from the Royal Navy. Sid had a very distinguished naval career, being torpedoed on a couple of occasions and ending up in submarines. Sadly Sid passed away in 2010. When I had been with WJ for a couple of years, I would turn the van around and drive around the weigh bridge at Aynho station, but never had the opportunity to drive legally, which I probably would have done, had I stayed with the baking job.

Sometimes I would eat moor-hens eggs, that Aubrey and I used to collect along the river, delicious, but tending to be a little smelly. Passing a little wind, hoping that

WJ would not notice, but he did and would say “you been eating them damned eggs again?” Then he would screw up a piece of newspaper and light it in the fire and wave it around the bakehouse, much to the amusement of old Doughy, but it had the desired effect. WJ could be quite grumpy at times, if things hadn’t quite gone to plan, especially if the bread was cooking too fast and he had to get it from the oven as fast as he could, the tins falling on the floor in a big heap. One morning young Sylvia came into the bakehouse and as she climbed the two steps, dropped her plate and broke it, WJ was in a bad mood and he grabbed a tin plate and said “you won’t break this one and I am going to nail it to the table” I believe he would have, had Mrs Course not stepped in to plead with him not to. He always shaved in the bakehouse, as there was a good basin and mirror. He used a Rolls easy sharp razor, contained in a neat stainless cover, one day he had stropped the blade and was about to use it when the phone rang, the phone being in the shop, he went down to answer it. I had a coin in my pocket and decided to run it along the sharpened blade and then carrying on with whatever I was doing. When WJ returned he lathered up again, picked up the razor to shave and couldn’t get it to cut, he cursed and spent some time furiously stropping it. I didn’t offer any suggestions, I just kept working. I am sure he would have belted me had he known the cause. I always had that little bit of devilment in me. One Friday when I was mixing the self-raising flour, I added an extra large amount of baking soda. Some days later, one of our good customers, a Mrs Bliss, who had bought flour on the previous Saturday, said, “Mr Course, what happened to your self-raising flour?, it was awful, we couldn’t eat the cake that I made, so bitter.” WJ didn’t suspect that I had added too much baking soda, he thought that I had not thoroughly mixed it and told me to be more careful in the future, or else! But despite the few little evils, I got on well with WJ and Mrs Course. I enjoyed the work and meeting so many people on the delivery rounds. WJ would never let anyone down. In the winter of 46/47, the snow was particularly heavy. The road to Hempton was bordered by extremely high hedgerows, over ten feet. The strong north wind had blown the snow from the fields and filled the road almost full to the top of the hedgerow, making it impossible for anything to pass. The road remained blocked for many days, as the local council workers battled with continuing snowfall, making progress very slow. We loaded the van with bread and cakes, flour etc. and drove as near as possible to the blockage. Loading our baskets and two sacks with as much as we could carry, proceeded to Hempton on foot via the fields that were relatively clear of snow. We left a few loaves at the Red Lion, for the couple of Barford customers to collect. It was a long cold spell.

I continued to ride the cycle that Mr Hartwell let me use and one day as I was returning to work after lunch, the milk lorry was picking up the churns at Garrett's farm. Being low and having a rim on the back, it was easy to hold on to. I hung on and as we reached the crest of the hill going towards Deddington, now picking up speed, I let go. Silly me raising an arm to wave to the driver and in doing so, my knee caught the basket, which was attached to the handlebars. Before I knew, I was skidding along the road. The middle of both hands were skinned, so too both knees. The bottles that I was taking back for a refund, lay smashed on the road. When arriving at the bakery, I told Mrs Course that I had fallen from my bike, not mentioning the truck. She patched me up, best she could but my hands were so sore, I had difficulty in doing my work for a few days.

Aubrey, having been on holiday with his grandparents just prior to the war, suggested that we should have a week at the seaside. Booking a week at Boscombe, but I did not tell WJ, but somehow he had found out and on the eve before we were due to leave, he said "the next time you decide to have a week off, just say so" and gave me my wage. I had no trouble telling him the following year. I will cover the holidays separately.

A date that always stands out in my mind, is March 1947. This is when Aubrey and I took the train to Banbury and went along to Curry's shop and each purchased a new bicycle. The quality of merchandise was now getting back to normal, after the restrictions of the war. We chose Raleigh, I a twenty six inch frame and Aubrey, being much taller, a twenty eight inch frame. Both bikes had Sturmey Archer, three speed gears. Aubrey had a front wheel hub dynamo in his, whilst I had one which worked by contacting the rear tyre by means of knurled wheel. My bike cost fourteen pounds and eleven shillings and eight pence, Aubrey's a little dearer. We rode to Banbury station and caught the train to Aynho station. As we left the platform with our sparkling new machines, it started to rain and we took shelter under the bridge, not wanting to get them wet. When I got home and Pumpkin, next door saw the new machine, he commented "the baking trade must be paying well". I don't think he ever rode a bike. I gave back the old bicycle to Mr Hartwell and thanked him for the use of it. Each day, except the week-end, a chap called Wally Castle, who worked in Deddington and lived at Clifton, left work at the same time as me. Wally had a low handle barred bike and he could get up a fair pace. We never spoke to each other, but raced down the long hill into Clifton at a cracking speed, he continued on to his house on Mill Hill, (where the Hawkins used

to live) and I turned to our house on the green, panting and sweating. Wally had married Vera Jennings from the Post Office, he wasn't a local man and I am not sure of what he actually did in Deddington.

A lad who lived in Deddington, on the corner of Market Place and Hudson street, (Michael O'Neil) had a couple of motor cycles. Michael, a little older than me, came to Deddington as an evacuee from London with his family and they did not go back. When I delivered bread to them, Michael would often be revving up his machines in his workshop, a natural attraction to a young bloke and it was not too long before he let me buy the small 250cc Triumph, for thirty five pounds. A couple of quick lessons and I was mobile. No more racing with Wally. Mother would have been horrified had she been alive. Dad didn't seem to mind and later had a couple of pillion seat rides. Another chapter in my life begins.

I am now nearly eighteen years of age and Sylvia was approaching, I would say fifteen and often, after school she would spend time in the bakehouse. She was a friend of Dorothy Davies, who was the girlfriend of Aubrey's brother Peter. One evening we all walked out together and made our way to the Castle grounds. We sat on the grass and there may have been others there too, it was a lovely summer's evening, broad daylight, out in the open, happily chatting together, doing no wrong. The Miss Yerbury, who was always kind to me at school dinners, was busy collecting firewood, also being the 'nosey parker'. She spent no time in getting to the bakery, telling Mrs Course about George and Sylvia being together in the Castle grounds, silly old biddy! On Monday morning, when I entered the bakehouse as usual, Mrs Course was standing there, with a very stern look upon her face. Before I could even say "good morning", she was giving me a right telling off, for being seen with Sylvia, "how dare I" so to speak. With no more ado and without trying to explain, I picked up my bag, walked to my bicycle and cycled home to Clifton, never to return. WJ was furious, goodness knows what happened at the bakehouse, when he realised what had taken place. I am sure that both Mrs Course and Sylvia would have been glad to hide somewhere until things died down. WJ pleaded with my dad to get me to return, but I was adamant and stayed out of sight on delivery days. My days at the bakery had ended, but I had learned so much from the experience. I continued to make Christmas cakes, mince pies, lardy cakes &c for many years after. Had I not taken up WJ's offer of employment in the first place, I would probably have stayed on the farm, missing out on my Military Service, my world-wide travel and so much more. But as written earlier,

’ifs, buts and maybe’s’ are of no consequence. I never saw WJ or Mrs Course again. I probably saw Sylvia a couple of times when in Banbury and I think that was when I was home on leave from the army. Later I lived in Deddington with my wife Pauline, but I don’t recall having seen WJ delivering, perhaps he had retired by then. Aubrey said that he sees Sylvia at the Banbury market from time to time, she married and lives in the Banbury area. I was soon back at work again, which I will continue with in another chapter.

Chapter 16 - Holidays

I have now recovered from my confrontation with WJ regarding a week off to go on holiday. Aubrey and I had concocted a letter to a Mrs M Sargeant at 21 Curzon Street, Boscombe, Bournemouth , Hants. Booking for one week and sending the requested deposit. We always have a little laugh when recalling the letter, as at the end we wrote '*if there is anything that you think we ought to know, would you please let us know',* we were not quite sure if that sounded correct. We walked to the station at Aynho, carrying our travel bags, but I am not sure as to whether we caught the Bournemouth train at Banbury or Oxford, perhaps Aubrey would remember. I recall some of the lovely names of the stations as we got down into Hampshire, Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Tiptoe, Christchurch, Milton and Pokesdown. We pulled into Boscombe station, collected our bags and walked over the footbridge to Curzon Street. Just a short walk and we were at number twenty one. Mrs Sargeant showed us to our room and gave us a key for the front door and instructions of the dos and don't's. There were quite large explosions sounding in the distance, apparently the military were clearing the beaches of the wartime mines around Poole Harbour. The Bournemouth beach had been declared safe and all mines and barbed wire clear. On Sunday morning we entered the dining room and two people were already seated at the table, a retired army major and his lady wife. We shyly introduced ourselves and all went well, until the major's wife asked "where is the marmalade, we always have marmalade with our toast, not cheap jam", of course Aubrey and I burst out laughing, as Mrs Sargeant tried to explain that rationing was still in force and it was not always possible to get certain items. Then she turned to us and said in her very posh voice "what are you laughing at, I don't see anything funny". Of course this made us laugh even more and we had to leave the table because we could not stop. We waited a while and as we went back into the room, she and the major were just leaving, we seemed to get on ok after that. Just a short walk from Curzon Street was the main road into Bournemouth, Holdenhurst road, with trolleybuses every few minutes, but we walked most of the time. We spent a lot of time on the beach and in the water. Some evenings we would go to the cinema. One evening we met up with a couple of girls and we walked along with them all the way to Christchurch, where they said that's where they lived and were gone, we didn't even ask their names and walked back to Bournemouth to get some fish and chips. The parks and gardens were immaculate, the beds of tulips and wallflowers, the roses and numerous other trees and shrubs were in full bloom. This all appealed to Aubrey and I, as we

were always keen gardeners. We really did enjoy the break, which ended all too soon. The following summer (1947 we booked to go again, but Aubrey got his enlistment papers for National Service and we had to cancel. Rather than miss out altogether, I got in touch with cousin Phyllis in London and she said she would love to accommodate us for a few days. This time I had no trouble telling WJ and I took one week annual leave. Aubrey was now working as a porter at Aynho station and noted the train times to London. We caught the train to Paddington, where Phyllis and her husband Colin met us and took us back to their flat in St Johns Wood. We were amazed to see what the German blitz had bestowed upon London. The main thoroughfares were running fairly normal, but mountains of rubble and damaged buildings were very much in evidence. The next morning Phyllis walked with us to the bus stop, on her way to work and told us which bus to catch to Regents Park Zoo. Colin was in the Air force, stationed near London and had left earlier. We had no trouble finding the zoo and spent most of the day there. A lot of animals had been evacuated for the duration of the war and were gradually being returned. Unfortunately when we decided to make it back to the flat, we had totally forgotten where it was. The only thing that we could remember, that it was near the LMS stables, a policeman directed us to those and we then wandered aimlessly around the streets in the neighbourhood and out of the blue, there it was, 33 Princess Street. We kept that little episode to ourselves. Most areas were covered by horse drawn parcel delivery vans and wagons until the economy got back to normal and motorised vans replaced the horses. I think we spent another day in the city and then it was time to make it back to Clifton. Aubrey left in September to report to Cowley Barracks, Oxford, to start two year's National Service in the Royal Engineers.

In the summer of 1948, Aubrey had now gone overseas to Egypt, so I asked Chris if he would like to go for a holiday with me. he agreed and I wrote to Mrs Sargeant and booked a week for July. Having been before, it was all so easy and we soon settled in at number twenty one. It was nice to see the shops getting back to normal, stocking more goods. Although some food remained rationed.

Chris just loved peaches and would buy a couple to take and enjoy as we sat on the beach. One day as we were sitting on the sand, a young boy was playing with a beach ball and it landed at my feet, picking the ball up, I tossed it back to him and I got it back again, so I stood up and tossed it back once again, but unfortunately it landed on a tea tray, being carried by another beach person. Apologies and the

boy was now sitting down with an elderly lady and two young girls, the elder one gave me a nice smile and I said “hello”. The elder lady turned out to be their Auntie Nellie, who thanked me for rescuing the beach ball and I stayed with them for a while, keeping an eye on the older girl, who in turn was doing likewise to me. I asked her name and she told me it was Pauline and her younger sister was Pearl and the young boy was their brother Ivor and they were on holiday from Southend on sea in Essex, with their Auntie. We all met up again the following day and Auntie said that they were going to join a mystery tour the next day and would I like to go along. I said I would love to, with Pauline in mind. I told Chris about the invite and would he mind? “No, not at all, I will be quite happy here on the beach” he said, keeping in mind that he had a girl-friend back at Clifton, a Land Army Girl, (who he later married) some twelve years his senior and worked with Chris on Welford’s poultry farm. It was now Friday and we were going home the next day anyway, so I didn’t feel too bad at leaving Chris by himself for one afternoon and evening. I met up with Pauline and the others at their hotel, which was just a short walk from number twenty one. The coach picked us up outside and we climbed aboard. There were some passengers already on board and we picked up a few more en route. I sat by Pauline, Pearl with Auntie and young Ivor at the front alongside the driver. I can’t remember all the places that we drove through, I was too busy talking to Pauline. We stopped at the ruins of Corfe Castle and spent some time there amongst the ruins. Auntie bought lemonade and crisps at the little pub and we all enjoyed the treat in the lovely summer evening sunshine. By now Pauline and I had really caught on and she asked me if I could visit her at Southend, to which I said I would and we exchanged addresses and promised to write to each other. The coach dropped us off at the hotel and Auntie invited me in for a while. I thanked Auntie for a lovely evening and the tour. Pauline saw me to the door and with a shy cuddle and kiss, I walked back to number twenty one. Chris was already packing his bag, ready for the off tomorrow. I told him about the tour and Pauline. He said he had had a pleasant time on the beach. Rising early the next morning, we had an early breakfast, said farewell to Mrs Sargeant and caught the train home.

Chapter 17 - Tarzan & The Jungle

Before I race on, I must go back to an earlier time. I am not quite sure when Aubrey and I started off with our own '*Little Jungle",* but it all resulted from going to the cinema and watching Tarzan films, especially the early ones with Johnny Weissmueller and Maureen O'Sullivan. In and around the viaducts, which carried the GWR over some old gravel pits, was about five acres of thick bushes and trees of various kinds, surrounding the old water filled gravel workings. Because the area had been fenced off, very few people ever went there and over the years it had become extremely dense. The small lakes were an ideal breeding place for ducks, moorhens, cootes as well as a lot of snakes, mainly harmless grass snakes, but a lesser number of adders. There was a well-trodden path immediately adjacent to the arches of the viaducts, with a long timber bridge, crossing the water that cut across the path, which was used by the railway employees to inspect the brickwork from time to time. Even viewing the area from the railway above, it was still difficult to see what was going on under the thick cover. We had often walked the beaten track before, but now we decided to go into the thicket and when we did, we saw the area of fun that awaited us. We pushed through the bushes, climbed over dead and rotten trees, occasionally stepping into a wet area and getting wet feet. We found a little clearing, with a sizeable tree standing next to a small area of water, Tarzan coming to mind, we decided that we would visit again and bring the rope that Aubrey had rescued from the barrage balloon that had landed in Grandad's paddock. Early on the following Sunday, with the rope and daggers in our belts, we set off on the half mile walk to our new found *'jungle'.* It didn't take long to secure the rope on an overhanging branch and Aubrey decided to hold on to the rope and swing across the water, not very successfully, but he did just make it. We realised that Tarzan always took off from a height, so we built up a platform of branches and got the hang of it. It wasn't long before we decided to build a hut from the plentiful supply of raw material.

We cut a large number of long willow sticks to make the frame and roof support and then cut bales of waterside plants, which were about four feet in length and dry. With this we cladded the walls, securing it with thin interwoven osiers (a type of ground willow) .We thatched the roof with long grass type reeds, which were growing near the water's edge. A quickly made frame for the door, a log seat and the job was done. When leaving at the end of each visit, we used two stout sticks, one at the top of the door and one nearer the bottom, hidden in the cladding and

pushed along into the side wall. Even on very wet days, our little hut was warm and dry. Later we added a circle of willow sticks at the front of the hut to form a small yard and being a damp area, the sticks soon began to sprout, as willow readily does and during the spring and summer they became a nice green hedge. Our skill with the rope across the pool had now improved and not so much wet clothing. We also became good at knife throwing, not quite as good as Tarzan, sometimes having to retrieve our knives from the water. It was not too long before we had explored the whole area, discovering some unusual plants and shrubs, as well as bird's nests and eggs. On warm sunny days, the snakes would crawl out of the undergrowth and bask in the sunshine near our little lake, but quickly slithered off if we made got too close (not my favourite things!!) From the railway embankment, we used to pick bunches of lovely violets to take home, as well as Cowslips, Buttercups and Milkmaids from the meadow. An express train used to pass over the viaduct at about eleven thirty, this was our signal to make for home. One morning we were there as usual and Aubrey said "I wonder what the time is, the express should have gone past by now", Of course there was no train that day, because the line was under repair and it had been diverted via the Oxford line. Hurriedly racing home, we discovered that it was very late and Aubrey's Gran, called out "where have you been, your dinner is spoilt, its after one o'clock". I ran down to my house to be similarly questioned. In the winter months, we would cross the meadow and the frozen canal to our hut, this cut off about a quarter of one mile. Arriving one morning, a note was sticking out of the door cladding, we had been discovered. The note read "Who are you? Where do you come from? We would love to join you". We now kept very alert, it would be easy to hear anyone approaching because of the dead sticks underfoot. However, no-one ever came, so the mystery remains. Later one of the railway workers, somehow got to know where our hut was, he must have seen us while he was rabbiting and followed us. Tommy Ashton was his name and he said "what's this little 'shanty' place you've got here then?" I am not sure when we stopped going to our little hut. But some years later we did visit the spot. The willows were now young trees, the hut had collapsed into a heap of rotted material. Tarzan had left the jungle!!

Chapter 18 - Cycling and Other Pastimes

We now had our brand new bicycles, which we kept polished, lubricated and well used. They were our means of transport to work and pleasure. I am not sure why it was Aubrey and I that kept together, Peter didn't have a cycle and I don't think Horace or Chris took up the pastime either. On Sunday afternoons, especially in the summer months, we covered many miles, visiting the locality and beyond. It was not unusual for us to cover one hundred mile return trips, stopping for refreshment and taking in the scenery. Blenheim Palace, Stratford upon Avon, Warwick, Leamington, Buckingham, Evesham Valley, Windsor, Kenilworth, Oxford and the Cotswolds, are just a few of the many places. In those days, one could leave ones cycle safely outside, whilst visiting a castle or other building. At Stratford we would leave our cycles at the boathouse whilst canoeing on the river Avon. Later, when Pauline and Aubrey's girl-friend Agnes, came on the scene, we still cycled a lot, but more locally. On the way to Stratford there is a very steep hill, called Sunrise, which trails on for about a mile, keeping one's head down one could free wheel at a great speed on the way down, but low gear and a very leg straining ride back up. Many people had to walk up the very steepest part near the summit.

We spent many hours, roaming the fields and lanes. We had a fine collection of birds' eggs, finding some of them, where no-one else would have looked. One very rare one would have been the lovely blue egg of the Heron. The Heron is a very shy bird and it is not easy to locate their nests, because they build them in quiet, isolated places. We visited a very isolated wood, called Hazel Hedge cover, very seldom would this place have been set foot in. As we walked through, the sticks crackling under our shoes, we heard a flapping of wings and were just in time to catch sight of a Heron leaving its nest in the tall tree above. Quietly we sat, as concealed as possible and sure enough the bird returned and settled back on the nest, with its long legs protruding through. With some difficulty, we scaled the tree, the bird once again making off. Two lovely pale blue eggs were sitting on the nest of sticks and we took one for our collection. Close to the railway line at Aynho junction, Aubrey's grand-father had a large plot of garden, where we used to help him with the digging and planting potatoes. In the field, just outside the boundary fence, were two very large elm trees. In the top of these trees, was a rookery, of probably twenty or so rooks nests. Once we were able to get onto the lowest branch of one tree, it was easy going to the top. Rooks were considered a pest to

farmers, later to be disputed, and would they pay a few pence a bird if presented. Once at the nest site, we threw out all the young birds and the eggs, amid the noise of the squawking adults. Aubrey's Gran-dad looked up, to see us up the trees, shouting "get down, you'll fall and break your necks". Collecting up the young birds, we took them to Mr Welford, not telling him that they were not from his farm. He gave us a few pence. I believe rook pie was popular in earlier times. We collected moorhen and duck eggs, tasty, but tended to make one a little smelly as you will recall in my days in the bakehouse. We would often, pull up a swede or turnip and have a feed. An ear of corn, rubbed in the hands to get the grain, was nice to chew and lasted for quite some time. There was always a feed to be had, summer or winter, hazel nuts, blackberries, water cress and often a carrot, or a few pods of nice green peas, nicked from some ones allotment.

During the coldest of winter evenings, Aubrey would ask his Gran if we could use the dining table to play a game of cards, dominoes or bagatelle. Unfortunately, I could not return the compliment, I didn't have any games and our one room was more than taken up by the rest of the family. During the war, we had double summer time, which I may have mentioned earlier and it was daylight till well into the evening. We spent many hours down at the river, swimming and making rafts from the rushes. We also made boats with bulrushes and set them off to float downstream, armed with pebbles to see how long each other's boats could survive the bombardment, great fun. Often we would start the swimming season in March, going quite blue with the cold, but later getting sunburn by lying in the hot sun too long. In the middle of the harvest, on hot sticky days, it was funny to watch the men come down to the 'deep hole' at the mill and plunge in, fully clothed after their hard day's work in the cornfields, throwing out their wet shoes and socks, as they kicked them off in the water, very often the rest of their clothes, much to the amusement of the local girls. It wasn't too long of course, when I was busy on the farm, but I usually had the cows back in their field and the milk in the dairy, before the harvesters came back to the farm and quickly off to the river and then the Duke of Cumberland's Head for a pint or two, sometimes in reverse order. The older men to the Duke only. The good old days!!

Because of the winter flooding of the meadows, several arches had been built under the road from Clifton to the canal bridge at Aynho station, this was done to allow the huge volume of water to pass under the road, not always adequate from time to time, when we had more than average rain or snow falls. The river arch

and the next three relief arches were walled from the road, the walls having flat slabbed tops of about fifteen inches (20 cm) wide. Bernard Jennings, the village show-off, would put his cycle on the wall and ride it the full length, in both directions and either side of the road. It was not too long before Aubrey, followed by me, was doing the same. Another thing that Bernard started was jumping the mill relief stream. It seemed like ten feet to me, but probably a little less. Now this really was a challenge and despite several run ups, I could not bring myself to jump. Aubrey, with his longer legs did jump after a couple of run ups and seemed to have no trouble after that. With sheer determination and gritted teeth, I took a long run and I did it, but I think it was very near to a watery and probably injurious attempt. Bernard was also an excellent swimmer and could do somersault dives into the 'deep hole', he certainly was a smart cookie! The older boys could be cruel in their playful ways. Between the arches there was a small bank of earth and when the floods were up this was very small and from the top of the wall on the field side it would have been a good six feet. Being very small, Ken Garrett, would hold me by the ears and drop me onto this small island, knowing full well that I could not climb back up the wall and I could not walk in the deep swirling water either, so I had to wait to be rescued later by one of the bigger boys. On one occasion, my ears were slightly frost bitten and as Ken lowered me down the skin peeled off the top edge of my ears and they were sore for days. Sometimes the older lads, would hole up in the cattle shed, next to our house and play cards for money, which was strictly forbidden in those days, so they would post one of us younger boys to keep watch, in case the local policeman (bobby) appeared in the vicinity. We did this without protest, as we knew that some form of punishment would follow if we did, perhaps a wrist burn or fingers pulled back. So bullying has always been around. Later we were allowed to join the card players and some other poor wretch became the look-out. I could go on with many more tales, but I must move on to other things now.

Chapter 19 - Gardening

Being country boys and being brought up with keen gardens, it was inevitable that we would follow the trend. My dad managed to get me a half chain plot on the allotments, almost opposite his own plot in the allotments. The other half chain was Bert Callows, who also had a full chain block alongside. Bert had a smart little garden shed at the end of his plots, which contained his wheelbarrow and garden tools, all neatly arrayed. I quickly learned a lot from observing my dad, Bert and other gardeners. There were proper ways and times to dig and plant crops and harvesting. Farm manure was readily available for a very reasonable cost and this was usually dug in in the autumn or spread over the plot to winter in, ready for the spring plantings. Lime was another additive, which could be sprinkled on the soil as it was dug, a dual purpose chemical which kept the pests under control as well as improving the soil. I think I mentioned 'stifle burning', the ashes from this method, also good for the soil. There were accepted measurements between the rows of plants and vegetables and most gardeners had string line and a stick notched with the required distances. Rough digging in the autumn, allowed the frost to get in and break down the soil, this made it easier to rake over in the spring for seed beds, carrots, onions, beetroot and parsnips. Potatoes did not need fine soil as they were planted in trenches and covered lightly with soil and when they were about four inches high, would be what we called 'moulding up', the soil being banked up from either side to form a strong support for the new potatoes to grow in. Cabbages, cauliflower, broccoli, savoy and sprouts were all planted in a separate seed bed, usually at home and set out in their respective plots when they had grown into strong plants. I enjoyed my plot at first, but as we got out and about more, especially cycling, dad was doing most of the work and eventually took over my plot. We also had a plot in the orchard garden in the middle of the village, rich black soil and so easy to dig. Aubrey's grandad had a couple of plots here too and a half plot for Aubrey, who took up strawberry and raspberry growing. I looked after Aubrey's plot whilst he was in the army, harvesting the fruit, weighing and selling in the village, the money put aside until Aubrey returned. When first married, I had a plot in the allotments at Deddington and was able to grow more than the needs of two people, often sending a sack of potatoes by train, to Pauline's parents at Southend. Later when we moved to our new home at King's Sutton and Aubrey had also moved to Aynho Station we both had large plots and would work together each year to do the winter digging. Now that we were in our own homes and no longer renting, we could now plan our flower

gardens. We went into rose growing and got some of the best varieties from some of the better known nurseries. Pauline bought me a rose when she visited the Ideal Home Exhibition in London, called Donald Prior, a lovely red floribunda, which I planted just inside the gate at King's Sutton, I doubt if it is still there after well over forty years, but I do have a picture of it. Since being in Australia I have continued growing roses, they do well here. The love of gardening has remained and still stays with us today.

Aubrey's grandad, used to grow large crops of broad and runner beans, letting some of the crop ripen and save the seed, which he would sell at about sixpence a pint to other gardeners. Growers would also swap seed potatoes. The best potatoes would come from Scotland and grew well in the south. The earliest new potatoes came up from the Channel Islands and were much sought after because they were well ahead of our own. Frost is the biggest threat to early potato growing. One year, we had a very late frost on the first of May, most potato crops were already moulded up and some almost in bloom, but the frost put paid to them and it was too late to plant again. Needless to say there were few potatoes harvested that year and supplies had to be bought from frost free areas. The frost doesn't kill off the plant completely, only that part that is above the ground, but this stops the new potatoes from forming and you end up with a bunch of fibrous roots, only fit for drying and burning. As history will tell you, there was a potato famine in Ireland many years ago because of blight, which wiped out their entire crop. Large numbers of the people left for America.

The best seed outlet was Boxholds at Banbury. I think the owners name was Harry, a little bent over figure with a deformed nose, but by golly he knew his seeds. Behind the counter in his shop was a set of small drawers, each labelled with the contents, onions, carrots, parsnips, peas, beans &c, Harry would select the correct draw without hesitation and weigh up the requested seeds on his shiny brass scales and have them in the packet in no time at all. Harry has long since passed. I could fill many more pages about gardening, but I must move on.

Chapter 20 - The Great Western Railway

I was now unemployed and enjoying a couple of weeks at home. By chance, when having a beer at the Duke, dad happened to mention to George Doggett, a ganger on the GWR at Aynho, that I was looking for a job. George said that it was difficult to find men for the railway, so many were leaving to go to the car making industry and the building trade, but because I was only eighteen years of age, I may not be allowed to work on the track as twenty one was usually the minimum age. He promised to ring Mr Quinn, the district Engineer and ask the possibility of taking me on in his gang. In reply, I was asked to go down to Mr Quinn's office at Banbury Station for an interview. I reported as requested and found the office. Mr Quinn, a Londoner, a big roundish man, known by the workers as 'Bouncer', with a scar on one side of his face, made me welcome. He explained to me the dangers of working on the railway track (the Permanent Way), from speeding trains and the importance of observing the safety rules (a copy of which he gave me). "If you feel that you can do the job" he said, "I will take you on, there isn't a junior wage, so you will be paid as an adult, report to Mr Doggett on Monday morning." "Before you leave, go next door and see the storeman, Mr Pitman (another George) and he will fit you up with some overalls and wet weather clothing". I thanked him and went next door to see George, the storeman. George had a bad limp, from an injury incurred when he too was a ganger on the perway. I took a like to George, a very pleasant easy going man, who I was to see on many visits to his store to pick up orders and tools that had been put in for repairs. I left and walked back to the platform and caught the local train back to Aynho Park, where I walked along to the cabin and told Mr D the good news and said I would meet him on Monday morning. I then made my way home to await dad to get home from work and tell him that I had got the job and he was really pleased too. I am now on the railway, quite unexpectedly, this is where I always wanted to be. Aubrey was already a porter at Aynho station under the then station master, Mr Miller, a very strict and obedient railway servant, a railway man to the letter.

On Monday morning I walked with Mr D to Aynho Park station, we only lived a short distance apart. A long steep path led from the road up to the station platforms, the station standing on a high embankment. The plate-layers cabin stood just off the end of the up platform. I had been in the cabin on the odd occasion, so it was not an entirely new experience. I already knew most of the gang; Bert West (Crusoe), Dick Woolgrove, Fred Gibbs (Gibby), Jack Pinfold, who

was the sub-ganger and Jack James, all a good bunch of friendly blokes. I quickly got into the routine, an entirely different type of work to the bakery.

The whole of the railway system was divided into sections, each section having an identity number, Mr Doggett's section being number 163, coming under the umbrella of the Wolverhampton district, it was also the first section of the 'new line', which branched off of the older, Oxford line at Aynho junction, opening about nineteen hundred and one, a more direct line to London, via Bicester, Ashendon junction, Princess Risborough and High Wycombe, Paddington being the London terminus. Crusoe West was one of the workers for Scott & Middleton, who built the extension, but married locally and stayed on at Aynho for the rest of his life. Each section had a gang, the number of men for each gang depending upon the contents of the section; plain track, cross-overs, stations, bridges, &c. Our section was basically plain track, with up and down main lines and being two and a half miles in length, with two sets of viaducts, one large fly-over bridge, two road bridges, a cattle creep, a throw-off point and an automatic greaser. The tracks ran through the Aynho Park station, which also came under the charge of station master Miller, the station just a short walk from Aynho station. I believe Aynho Park had its own staff some years earlier, when there were more passengers, the booking office and waiting room now standing, unused, at the bottom of the up side entrance path.

The section was always referred to as 'the length.' The ganger or sub ganger would walk it from end to end, every day, including week-ends and holidays, meeting the traffic on the down track and meeting the traffic on the up track, (never walking with ones back to it), for the purpose of inspection and replacement of the wooden keys that held the rails tightly in place. These keys often came loose in very dry weather, so the walk was a very important part of the day's work. In later years the keys were no longer used, when a different system was brought into use. The walker would keep a keen eye on the track itself as well as the boundary fences, not just a walk in the park! The track was laid on a deep bed of ballast and was divided into sixty foot lengths, each length containing twenty four sleepers and a fish plate at each joint. The distance between the rails at the inside was four feet eight and a half inch. (standard gauge). On curves in the track the outer rail was raised according to the radius of the curve, with a maximum of six inches, when an inner check rail would be added. The wheels on the rolling stock had a tapered running face, so that when negotiating a curve in the track, the higher part

of the taper would make up for the extra distance travelled on the radius. Each year the fish plates had to removed, cleaned, oiled and replaced, usually done in the cooler days of spring (called 'fatting' by the gang). With one way traffic, the rails would travel and the joints would close up too tightly. To compensate for this, we would take out a rail, each side of the track, remove all the keys for a quarter of a mile and loosen all the fish plates. A chain was bolted to the open end of the track, using the holes of the fish plate bolts. The chain was then attached the drawbar of a locomotive. Moving slowly under the watchful eye of the engineer, the entire length of track was pulled back to its correct position. When all the fish plates and keys had been replaced, the two rails that had been removed would be replaced with ones of the correct length, bolted up and the job was done. It was essential to keep the track firm and level, the ganger would get on his knees and cast an eye along the rails to detect any dips, these would be marked at each end, the track jacked up and more ballast packed under the sleepers,(this was called 'shovel packing') just a little higher than level. The first train over the repair would pack down the track to the correct level. Each year the Chief Engineer would ride over the system in a special train, the rear coach had windows at the back, giving a good view of the track. This train was called 'the whitewash', so called, that when passing over any track that was uneven or badly aligned, whitewash would be sprayed over the affected area. All defects would be recorded in the train on a system similar to an earthquake detector. After the train had passed, the ganger would quickly walk the length to see if any whitewash had been sprayed. I remember one time, when it had been sprayed almost at the last sleeper of our length, George got busy trying to camouflage it, so as the ganger from the adjoining length wouldn't see it. The competition between gangs was fierce! A "Best Length" award was presented each year, the winning section would have a large board erected at a vantage point to say so. I don't know if 163 ever got the award, not during the short time I was there, anyway.

The job of the gang was not just to keep the track in good repair, fences had to be kept in good animal proof condition, grass and bushes trimmed, the station approaches and surrounds kept neat and tidy, all part of the competition. Bridges and station buildings of course came under a different category and were inspected on a regular basis by the appropriate authority. Inspector Quinn would walk through from time to time, often quite unexpectedly, carrying his track gauge which he would use at specified points to check the measurements. He would also decide when the track would need to be replaced, usually one mile at a time,

(plain track) this work being done at week-ends, the line would be closed from midnight on Saturday until reopened for traffic by early Monday morning. A special relaying gang would do the bulk of the work, along with the assistance of the gang of that particular section. I remember the relaying gang foreman, Joe Hartland, a giant of a man, no messing with Joe, he kept his men at it, no let up until the job was done, a different man then and a pint or two at the local and a sleep in the workman's coach. The materials for the relaying job were all laid out alongside the track some time prior to the day. The sleepers already chaired, the new rails lying opposite. Joe had his men organised into separate job gangs; Fish plate and key removers, old rail lifters, followed up by sleeper removers. Each gang following through, levelling the ballast and the reverse, new sleepers lined up, new rails inserted into chairs and expansion joints correctly measured, fish plates and keys replaced, all new of course. Then the expert eye of Joe and ganger would align the track, having eight men with crow bars, four on each rail, which they placed under the rail and on the order from the leader, would slew the track, "heave! heave!" until Joe was happy with it and move them on through the entire length of the new track. The next job, most hated by the shovelers, was the delivery of the new ballast, which came in special hoppers, which opened from the bottom and as the train moved slowly forward, the ballast spilled out between the rails. The gangs then got busy with their shovels, levelling it between the sleeps and making a good shoulder on the off side, the nearside would be levelled to match the opposite track. In the case of a single line track, both sides would have to be shouldered. A speed restriction was imposed, usually twenty miles per hour, until the track had settled in and the correct packing of the sleepers carried out, this could be done between trains, with the assistance of a flagman, who would place a detonator on the line and hold a red flag, some distance from the workers, he also had a whistle to warn them of the approaching train, giving them plenty of time to remove the lifting jacks from the track. He would then remove the detonator and use a yellow flag for the train to proceed with caution; the driver would have information in his working journal of the restriction and would have been cautioned too at the preceding signal box. Hard work!! These days the sleepers are made of concrete, the rail sits on vulcanised pad and secured with strong steel clips, the rails are of continuous section, some two hundred and fifty metres long or more, with expansion tongues. Now-a-days automatic ballast cleaners, sleeper and rail placement is the way it is done. No more section gangs, all done by mobile teams, travelling by road in coaches. The pride has gone, but

the speed of the trains now would be far too dangerous for men wandering about on such short sections.

Getting back to 163. We each had a set of tools, a pick and shovel, a crow bar and a scythe. We had sighting boards for measured shovel packing of the sleepers and sledge hammers for knocking in the keys. We had three cabins spaced along the length. Each cabin was made of old sleepers and the roof was covered with asphalt, each had a fireplace and benches. At the main cabin there was a grindstone for sharpening the scythe blades and sickles. There were several good springs, where we got our water for tea making and washing up at the end of the day. We were able to buy ten old sleepers per year, for firewood, some got used for pigsties, benches &c. Aubrey and I hold the record for cutting a sleeper into blocks with a cross-cut saw. We got a sugar allowance as rationing for some commodities was still in force and of course we got reduced travel costs and three free travel passes per year, one of these was called a 'foreign pass', which could be used on a most European rail networks. We were paid once per week and had to line up at the ticket office window at Aynho station to collect it. Aubrey and Mr Miller would hand out the money in tobacco tins, with a small payslip. Dick used to get very excited on pay days, pinching the back of one's leg and rushing off to the Railway Arms, just outside the station yard, for a quick pint or two. Crusoe used to bring a nice fruit pie with his lunch and some-times would give it to one of us, this all came to an end, when Gibby, put a note in Crusoe's lunch bag, "Thank you for the pie, Mrs West"! No more pie! Jack James loved doing puzzles in the odd magazine that got thrown from the trains, blow me down! He won a lovely little caravan. He was also the first in the gang to use the new sliced bread, wrapped in wax paper then. Gibby was a strong bloke, a little ham fisted, one day we had a ballast train unloading, he was walking alongside as the train moved slowly forward, disgorging the ballast. Fred had his right hand on the buffer of one of the wagons, I assume to steady himself, being on a slope, the wagons closed up when the engine slowed, trapping his hand between the buffer and the buffer of the next wagon, I quickly put the hand-brake on the wagon immediately behind Fred and the buffers opened up and he dropped to the floor, his hand badly damaged. We loaded him onto the footplate of the engine and I was asked to go with him. As we approached the outer home signal, which was in the danger position, the driver gave several blasts on the whistle, to alert the signalman that we needed to proceed. The signal was lowered and we pulled up at the Aynho junction signal box, the driver explained and asked the signalman, to phone ahead to Banbury and

have an ambulance waiting as indeed it was when we got there. Fred was helped aboard and off we went to the Horton General Hospital, where he was attended to and kept in. Now I had to make my way back to the station, catch the local train to Aynho, collect Fred's bag and cycle off to Souldern and inform Mrs Gibbs. I was a little unsure as to what to say, so I said "I have brought Fred's bag, he has injured his hand and has to stay in the Horton overnight, he is not injured anywhere else". Naturally Mrs Gibbs was concerned and worried. I was relieved to be cycling home to Clifton. Fred was off work for quite time.

Near the top end of our section, was an area of track which we referred to as the 'slip', as indeed it did. Bearing in mind, the whole of our length was on an embankment. The track was extremely unstable because of the nature of the clay soil. Ashes from the locomotive sheds were continuously unloaded in an attempt to stabilise the track, which worked reasonably well. One very hot day, as we were walking back to the main cabin, in readiness to make for home, the two ten Paddington express was approaching at a much reduced speed and blasting from the whistle, without coming to a complete stop, the driver yelled "you had better get back up to the slip, we nearly came off the track, I will warn the signalman at the junction, not to let any more trains through".

On arriving at the scene, we discovered the fault, the track had buckled badly, only the sheer weight of the train had averted a disaster. An immediate speed restriction was imposed, a flagman posted, a good distance back from the scene, with flags and detonators. As the rails cooled as the sun went down, we were able to slew the buckle a little. George telephoned "Bouncer" and told him what we had done. The next day we cut four inches out of each rail and aligned the track, which closed the gap to approximately the correct gap. Both cut ends were drilled and fish plates affixed. This 'first aid' stayed until the rails were replaced. The 'slip' needed constant attention and the ashes kept on being delivered, until the problem was fixed permanently some years later.

There were many nice trees growing along the length, one being a very nice apple, grown, no doubt, from a core that had been thrown from a train and because of its isolation the fruit was not taken. Chestnut and hazel nuts too were to be found, also a good supply of watercress from the trout stream that ran beneath the viaducts. The up line swept off the Oxford line at Aynho junction on a very steep gradient, on the very odd occasion, when a preceding train had not cleared the section ahead, an express train would be brought to a standstill at the starting

signal. It was amazing to watch the power of a mighty “King” Class* steam engine, with fourteen passenger coaches, pull away up this steep slope and quickly gain speed. The King was not used on the Oxford line, due to bridge and platform restrictions.

The down track split from the up track just below the station and passed over the Oxford line via the ‘flyover’ bridge and swept round a steep radius of six inches, to level out and join the Oxford line at Aynho junction.

I mentioned an automatic greaser, this was placed on the high rail of the radius at the ‘flyover’ bridge and a small plunger stood proud of the rail and would be depressed as the train wheels passed over, releasing a small amount of grease, which lubricated the high rail on the radius, thus reducing wear. The ‘cattle creep’ was a small tunnel under the embankment, to allow access to the land that had been cut off when the line was built. There was plenty of spare land along the railway and some of it very productive, as railmen from all departments had plots to grow vegetables, mainly potatoes, which the rabbits didn’t eat.

There was work most Sundays, usually a quieter time, traffic wise. A special workman’s coach would pick up the men from the various gangs and take them to the job. Sometimes we would work well away from Aynho, either on our line or the Oxford line. The jobs varied greatly, from changing sleepers, loading debris in the marshalling yards at Banbury, renewing fittings or maybe oiling fishplates in the Ardley tunnel. On one particular Sunday when we supposed to work in the tunnel, our special train had dropped us off and carried on to Bicester station to stable ready to pick us up at the end of the day. It was a cold damp morning and before we could get started, a slow goods train passed through the tunnel and left it filled with dense smoke, which didn’t want to budge, so no fish plates were removed that morning adding another Sunday to that job. I used to get down to the station early on Sundays which gave me time to check my rabbit traps, gut them and hang them in the cabin, to pick up at the end of the day.

The first of the “King” Class locomotives was King George V No. 6000 was completed in June 1927 and in August of the same year was shipped to the United States to take part in the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad’s Centenary celebrations and during this visit was presented with a bell and a plaque and these are carried on the front buffer bar to this day. It was withdrawn from British Railways main line services in December 1952, having covered some 3.074.529 Kms. Now on display in The National Railway Museum, restored to it’s original condition.

I had done this one day and saw the smoke of a train coming past Aynho junction, thinking that it was the special. It seemed to be taking a long time to get to me, when I realised that it was a slow goods train. I knew that it would take half an hour to get to Bicester, before another train could be allowed into the section, so I got the rabbits from the cabin, cycled off to Clifton, dropped off the rabbits, had a quick cuppa and returned to the station, in plenty of time to get the special. Sometimes the coach would be hemmed in a siding at Banbury and the engineer would commandeer a couple of brake vans as a substitute. Oh! The fun of it all!

I had only been with 163 for a short period, when I received my enlistment papers for National Service, but I will cover that in another chapter and continue my perway days. I started perway education classes at Wolverhampton Engineers Office and travelled up by train each Thursday to be there for the evening class and getting back to Banbury, in time to catch the 8.30pm Oxford City bus home. I was the only perway man from our area that had ever taken up these classes. I did the A and B classes over two years and I am proud to say that I passed both the final exams, gaining two very nice certificates and a book on Railway track Maintenance (I still have the certificates, but the book has gone astray).

Now I was anxious to move to a section with more than just plain track and transferred to number ten section on the Oxford line, which ran from Aynho station to just a short walk from King's Sutton signal box.. The length included the Aynho station and the goods yard, Aynho junction and water troughs. The work was exactly the same, except I was now involved with cross-overs, facing points and the water troughs. The ganger was Lou Perry and the sub ganger was George Dancer, along with the rest of the gang, who were, the two Aston brothers, Tommy and Bert, Albert Adams (Nobby), Bert Dunn and his son-in-law, Dick Worthington. Lou was a good ganger, but tended to ask too much of his gang and this sometimes caused a few altercations. George Dancer, in my opinion, should not have been 2i/c, a nice bloke, but did some rather un-railway things at times, which I won't go into. Tommy was a quiet, unassuming man and got on with the job, although he could be quite amusing at times. Brother Bert, was a very smart younger man and played professional soccer for Banbury Spencer at week-ends. Nobby, a small, rather scruffy little man owned a very old Austin seven motor car, which we called 'a matchbox on wheels' and gave us a few laughs , when he had trouble getting it started, but he took it all good spirit. Bert Dunn was an ex-army man from the First World War and retired soon after I started with the gang, he

had been with number ten under the old ganger and didn't always see eye to eye with Lou. Dick also moved on, joining the relaying gang. Others came and went.

On a perfectly level piece of track on both the up and down lines, a water trough was placed in the centre, like a continuous pig trough, about a quarter of a mile long. The idea being that, locomotives could pick up water at speed, thus avoiding having to stop at a water point. The track under the troughs had an additional sleeper per sixty foot length and the wooden keys were replaced with spring steel ones. The fire man of the loco would wind down a scoop on approaching the trough and rewind it at the end. On GWR locos a dome over the outlet would prevent the water from spurting into the air. The Great Central engines, which hauled the fish trains from the East coast to London, did not have the dome and when they picked water, a great spout would come from the tender when overfull. There was a road bridge about half way along the trough and it was not unusual for a section of the bridge parapet to get knocked out, sometimes involving vehicles passing over the bridge. The troughs were close to the river Cherwell and the river water was pumped into a huge tank alongside the track, so that the troughs had an adequate supply of water at all times. A team of men from Swindon works would arrive once a fortnight to clean and maintain the troughs. During the cold winter months, the whole track could become a sheet of ice after severe frost.

Two more tasks for the members of the gang;- fog duty and snow and ice duty. If fog came down and visibility got too bad, day or night, it was usual to report to the signalman and if he deemed it necessary to post fog-men, he would sign you on. One man would be posted at the distant signal, where a little cabin with a small stove was provided. The signal is usually about one and a half miles from the approach to the signal box and can be passed at all times, as it is only a caution signal. When in the caution position the driver of the train knows that he may have to stop at the outer home signal nearer to the signal box. So in fog, when the signal may not be seen by the loco crew, a detonator is placed on the rail and the fog man's hand lamp is kept at amber. If the signal is lowered to the green position, the detonator is removed and the lamp left in the cabin. At the outer home, which is a stop-signal and cannot be passed on red, the fog man here too has a similar cabin and his hand lamp shows red or green. Whilst the signal is in the red position, the fog man places three detonators on the line, three metres apart, a little distance from the signal, keeping his lamp at red. If the signal

remains in the danger position and the train arrives, three very loud bangs give the loco crew fair warning. Sometimes of course, the signal would go to green before one could remove detonators, in this case it was usual to wave the green lamp, as the detonators had already exploded and loco crew would wonder why? During daylight, the lamp would be replaced with Yellow, green and red flags. When the signal man was satisfied that you were no longer required, he would waggle the signal a few times, when no train was in the section and the flagman would go to the signal box, sign the train register and head for home. Some-times, the fog would persist for several days and or nights, so not much time left for normal work. Now to the snow and ice; All movable points (to change from one track to another) were cleaned and greased every week, but during heavy snowfalls and severe frost, a man would be posted at the signal box, where such points were in use and to make sure that there was no build-up of snow or ice to prevent their proper function. Sometimes the signal arms would freeze and had to be freed. One very severe winter when the country was almost at a standstill, Mr Beeching, the then, transport minister, said "Well done railway men, you have kept going, when practically every-thing else has stopped" or words to that effect.

A local farmer had free range chickens in one of his fields alongside the track and they would wander on to the embankment to forage and often made a nest in the grass and laid their eggs. I quickly caught on to this and made regular checks, collecting a few dozen eggs per week. We kept a few chickens at home and with the additional eggs acquired, we were able to sell them for a little extra cash. I think the farmer caught on that the hens were straying, as I found large stones in some of the nests, but the hens still laid alongside the stones, they must have been puzzled, as to what kind of bird had laid these stones! I kept the secret until the chickens were moved elsewhere. Rabbits were always present along the entire railway system, until the myxamatosis virus was introduced wiping out millions. It was a cruel, but deemed a necessary solution, it was sad to see the poor animals, wandering around, blind and dying. The 'poor man's' venison was no longer caught, no more rabbit pie or stew. It was not too long before their numbers built up again and other methods have been used to try and control them.

I mentioned safety earlier, especially when walking on the track. Shortly before I joined the GWR, a ganger Adkins was walking his length, when he was struck by an express train and killed instantly, I am not sure of the circumstances, he may have crossed the track to inspect something, but there were no witnesses to the

tragedy. His hammer was carried by the express, some seven miles to Banbury, where it was found on the track, apparently being dislodged as the train braked to stop at the station. I could have lost a finger or worse, when we were loading sleepers by crane in Aynho station goods yard. My job was to put the chain around the sleepers and steady them until the chain tightened for the lift on to the wagon. A large splinter was protruding from one particular sleeper and caught in my signet ring and as I was about to be hauled up by my ring finger, the splinter gave way and left my signet ring imbedded in the flesh and had to be cut off, but luckily I still had a finger. The ring was repairable. A lesson:-"When loading sleepers, remove your signet ring."! One day I had to go to the stores at Banbury to pick up a bag of new wooden keys. My friend George, the storeman said "I haven't got any in the store, but in the wagon just outside you will find a new stock, perhaps you would be good enough to climb up and throw a few bags down for me". Being agile, I soon climbed up and got under the tarpaulin and found the required items, among other stores, yet to be unloaded. Having thrown down a few bags, I decided to jump down from the high wagon, rather than climb down the proper way. As I jumped, my foot caught in the rope of the tarpaulin, it held and as I fell the front of my ankle slammed against the rail. The pain was excruciating, I could hardly put my foot to the ground, quickly waving to George and picking up may bag of keys, I made off to the station to return to Aynho!!! Although I had a limp, I told no-one of my stupidity, the pain eventually left.

Chapter 21 - To Southend

Going back to 1948, I have kept my promise to visit Pauline and her family at Southend-on-sea, in Essex. I was still at the bakery and told WJ that I would like to get away early on the Friday, as I had to get to Banbury to catch the seven pm express to London, no problem. I think Saturday was Xmas Eve. I told dad, Doll and Uncle Jack that I would be away for holiday and wished them a Happy Christmas and said I would be back late on Sunday, (it may have been Monday). I walked to Aynho station and caught the local to Banbury, where I bought a return ticket to Southend. The express was on time and we set off for Paddington (London). I had worked out where the London Underground station was and found it easily. I caught a Circle Line train (my very first ride on the underground) and watched the route map very carefully, knowing that I had to get off at Tower Hill station, which I did. Now I had to follow the street around to Fenchurch Street station, (LMS) to catch a train to Southend. The station was dull and grimy as most stations were in the days of steam. First I had to look at the huge train departure board and find the correct train and platform number, bearing in mind that I had never heard of Fenchurch Street station before. Things worked out well and I caught a train just after nine pm. The carriages were of non-corridor stock. I watched carefully as the train pulled into each station, keeping an eye on the map above. I had previously told Pauline at what time I expected to be at Southend and she and her Uncle John met me off the train. With a little bit of luck on my side, I had picked the correct station, as I discovered afterwards, that there were two stations at Southend, (Southend Central and Southend Victoria (LNER). On later visits I used the latter, as the trains from London left from Liverpool Street, a few stations nearer on the Circle Line and about half a mile nearer to Pauline's house. John had his car parked close to the station exit and we drove to 23 Chase Gardens, where Pauline and her family lived. I met Pauline's parents, sister Pearl and brother Ivor, brother John, only being four years old, had long been asleep and I met him the next day. I was made very welcome and enjoyed a late cuppa. I think there were a few smiles at my broad country accent. Being very shy, I didn't say very much, but overcame that over the rest of my stay. Auntie Nellie, who I had already met at Bournemouth, had arranged for me to stay overnight at her friend's house. Her friend was a major in the Salvation Army and always referred to as "The Major". Being so late I did not meet her till the following morning. Pauline and her Uncle dropped me off at the Major's house on North Road and made for home, as it was now very late. I am not sure where John, a Baptist minister, was staying in

Southend, as he was up from Southampton, where his church was at that time. Auntie Nellie, who lived with the Major, had kindly stayed up and showed me to my room and she too turned in for the night. The next morning, after a nice breakfast and a pleasant chat with the Major and Auntie Nellie, I walked the short distance to Chase Gardens, where I was now able to have a more relaxed meeting with Pauline's family, her Dad, being Sidney (Sid) and her Mum Sophie (Soph). Pauline, sister Pearl, Ivor and little John were up and about too. Sid showed me around his very neat and tidy back garden, also his allotment plot, which ran along his back fence, in the grounds of the Southend General Hospital. Pauline had the job of picking the brussel sprouts for dinner. The front garden had a nice lawn, with a smartly clipped hedge, dividing the garden from the Cason's garden next door. Sid was a Springsmith and worked at Capon & Capon in Southend, was a keen supporter of Southend United soccer club, a loyal member of the Baptist church and their Male Voice choir. He asked if I would like to go to watch United play a match on Boxing Day, which I did, this being my very first visit to a professional match. I was to watch many more matches with him over the years. Sid kept a record of every match, the opponents, the score and the players, home and away. I believe Ivor still has this book. Soph was a nurse and as far as I know spent all of her career at Connaught House at the Rochford General Hospital, except for a period during the war, when she opted to be evacuated to Devon and Cornwall with the family. Sid stayed in Southend because of his important work. I believe he and Nellie were fire-watchers as many bombs fell on Southend during the war.

After lunch, despite being wintry, Pauline and I walked to Fairfax Avenue, a few minutes along the road, where we caught a trolley-bus to Southend High Street. We walked to the seafront and onto the pier, the longest pier in the world at one and a half miles long. We boarded the electric train that ran almost the entire length of the pier, getting off to enjoy a few rides on some of the amusements there and having Rossi's ice cream, Pauline's favourite, then walking slowly back to the shore. We spent some time looking at the shops and amusement arcades along the seafront, mostly closed for the winter months. We then made our way up the high street, catching the trolley-bus back to our stop in Fairfax Ave.

On Christmas day, we enjoyed rabbit pie for breakfast, traditional at the Potter household apparently. Sid and Nellie attended the morning service at the Baptist church on Hobblythick Lane and on returning, assisted Soph with the preparation

of the Christmas dinner. The Christmas pudding was bubbling away on the stove and the rooster was cooking nicely in the gas oven (new to me, no gas in Clifton), I recall my mother struggling with the old coal fired oven and the black, sooty saucepans, but it all amounted to the same at the end of the day. Oh! How my mother would have loved to have lived in such a lovely house as at No 23, with a nice lounge, dining room, kitchen and entrance hall, three bedrooms, bathroom and toilet, electricity, gas and hot and cold water. No trips to the fountain or the standpipe in the street, no lamps to fill and trim, just the turn of a tap or the flick of a switch, but of course I was not able to relate to her the new life that I was about to begin, poor dear had passed on three years earlier. Dad was supposed to travel with Winnie to our wedding, but Winnie was badly scolded, just a few days before, when one of her twins knocked a kettle of boiling water over her legs, a nasty experience for her. However, they were able to visit at a later date. Dinner is served, the table all set up with things that I had not had before, Christmas crackers, serviettes, matching cutlery, you name it! I think Sid carved the rooster, the dinner was delicious, I hardly had room for the pudding. After dinner, we all sat in the lounge, a nice warm fire burning. Auntie had made a snow-house, filled with presents and we all had to take a dip in the little house, all very new to me. We enjoyed mince pies and sweets, soon it was tea-time, more food and relaxing. We may have walked with Auntie, back to North Road, I am not sure, after all that was sixty four years ago. On Boxing Day, Sid and I, along with Pauline, watched United play, I seem to remember that it was against Norwich, not too sure of that or the score. Back then there was no Premier League, just First, Second and Third Divisions, Southend was in the Third Division South, and played their home matches at the greyhound stadium for a number of years until they moved to their own ground at Rootes Hall, just off Fairfax Drive, about a ten minute walk from No 23. After the match Sid had his regular cuppa at a little café, just outside the ground, giving the crowd of football fans a chance to clear, before heading for home.

Auntie Nellie who was the manager of a clothing factory in Southend, had her own home called Hansford at 30 Henley Crescent, just a short walk from No 23, but she had tenants in the downstairs rooms and upstairs Pauline's grandmother,Ellen Lander (her mum's mum) and Auntie Florence (Dears) lived separately in the two large bedrooms, both fitted with a gas stove for cooking, both sharing the bathroom and toilet, hence the reason for Nellie sharing with the Major. Dears also used the small box room for her bedroom. There was a very large garden,

divided by a nicely trimmed box hedge, the plot nearer to the house being lawn, with shrubs and flower borders, the other half being for vegetables, which I believe Sid looked after. Dears too was a nurse, but in her later working days, she was an inspector at E K Cole (Echo) the radio and television factory at Prittlewell (Southend), retiring to a little cottage that she owned in Pensilva, near Liskeard in Cornwall. Soph, Dears, Nellie, John and one more brother, Uncle Will, who was a manager at the Bata shoe factory at Tilbury in Essex, were the siblings of Ellen and Joseph Lander. Joseph had passed some years earlier.

Pauline's other grandma, Margaret Potter, lived in Sweyne Ave, in Southend East, some three miles from No 23, she was always referred to as Nanna, being born in Barry Island, South Wales as indeed was Julia Gillard, our prime minister. Nanna had a very sad end, being alone in her house, she had somehow fallen into the fire, laying smouldering until late in the day when her neighbour found her, all too late. Her husband died during the first world -war. You will appreciate that the fore-going details of Pauline's family came to me after many more visits.

The short Christmas break came to an end all too quickly and I didn't visit Southend again until early the following year. I had planned to motor-cycle there, with Peter, but the motor cycle had broken down. On reflection, I am glad that it had, as I am sure that we would not have made the journey. I had not taken into consideration, the distance, just over one hundred miles, or getting across London. I was to discover all this when I got my first motor car.

I now return to the bakery, the GWR and National Service.

Chapter 22 - National Service

On 2nd July 1949 I was requested to report to the Services Medical Centre at New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, for an examination of physical fitness, under the National Services Act. The hall was divided into sections and worked like a production line at the car factory! The medical orderly told us to line up in alphabetical order and "Strip off!!" How embarrassing, all these young eighteen year olds, standing in line, starkers!, large, small, short, tall, fat, thin, just to begin. Doctor No 1 walked the line with his little cane, "legs astride, arms up", a lift of ones credentials with the little cane. "OK move on". Then it was from one section to another, "Pee in this", "cough", "Spit in this" "touch your toes" until "get dressed and sit over there until your name is called". My name was called and I was given a card, Registration number DDR986, placing me in Grade One and signed by Chairman of the Board, Ralph Cox. I walked along Queen St onto Station Rd and caught the train back to Aynho, collecting my bicycle from the shed on the platform and cycling back to Clifton. I now had to await my Enlistment notice, so it was back to work till it arrived. Dad was pleased that I had passed and said " it will make a man of you, no messing about in the army". Although he had never said a lot about his army days, I knew in my mind that I would never have to go through the horrors of the First World War which he had done. The next day I told the gang about the medical and of course there were a few laughs and comments Now the wait for the postman to deliver the said document, which came in due course:- "*Dear sir, in accordance with the National Service Act of 1948, you are called up for service with the regular army and are required to present yourself on Thursday 15th September 1949, between 9 am and 4 pm to No. 17 Selection and Basic Training Unit, Royal Engineers, Gibraltar Barracks, ALDERSHOT, Hants. A travel warrant and a postal order for four shillings, representing an advance of service pay, are enclosed" (*4s would be about 50cents, hey! Big spender!!) This was to be the same day that Aubrey was leaving the army after his two years and Horace was joining the King's Own Yorkshire Regiment (KOYLI) elsewhere.

On the morning of 15th September 1949, I caught the train to Aldershot, having to change to the Southern Railway, somewhere along the way. An army truck was running a shuttle service from the station, to Gibraltar Barracks. Aldershot is a military town, camps everywhere, so plenty of military personnel in evidence. It was not a long journey to our destination. Arriving at the Guardroom, our driver presented the appropriate papers and the sentry raised the barrier for us to pass.

NATIONAL SERVICE ACT, 1948

ENLISTMENT NOTICE

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE REGIONAL OFFICE,

MINISTRY OF LABOUR & NATIONAL SERVICE
SOUTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE,
40 CH. [illegible] HIGH ROAD,
READING, 31 AUG 1949 (Date)

MR. G. Harris,
Clifton,
Deddington,
Oxon.

Registration No. DDR 980

DEAR SIR,

In accordance with the National Service Act, 1948, you are called up for service in the Regular Army and are required to present yourself on THURSDAY day 15 SEP 1949 (date), between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to :—

No.17 Selection & Basic Training Unit
(Royal Engineers)
Gibraltar Barracks,
ALDERSHOT, Hants.

ALDERSHOT (nearest railway station).

* A Travelling Warrant for your journey is enclosed. Before starting your journey you must exchange the warrant for a ticket at the booking office named on the warrant. If possible, this should be done a day or two before you are due to travel. If your warrant is made out to travel from London you may obtain a railway ticket at, and travel from, the most convenient station to your address.

A Postal Order for 4s. 1. representing an advance of service pay, is also enclosed.

Immediately on receipt of this notice, you should inform your employer of the date upon which you are required to report for service.

Yours faithfully,

E. A. ROGERS

for Regional Controller.

YOU SHOULD READ CAREFULLY THE NOTES OVERLEAF.

* *Delete if not applicable.*

N.S.12A M12002 100M 12/48 CN&CoLtd 749 (4815) 8

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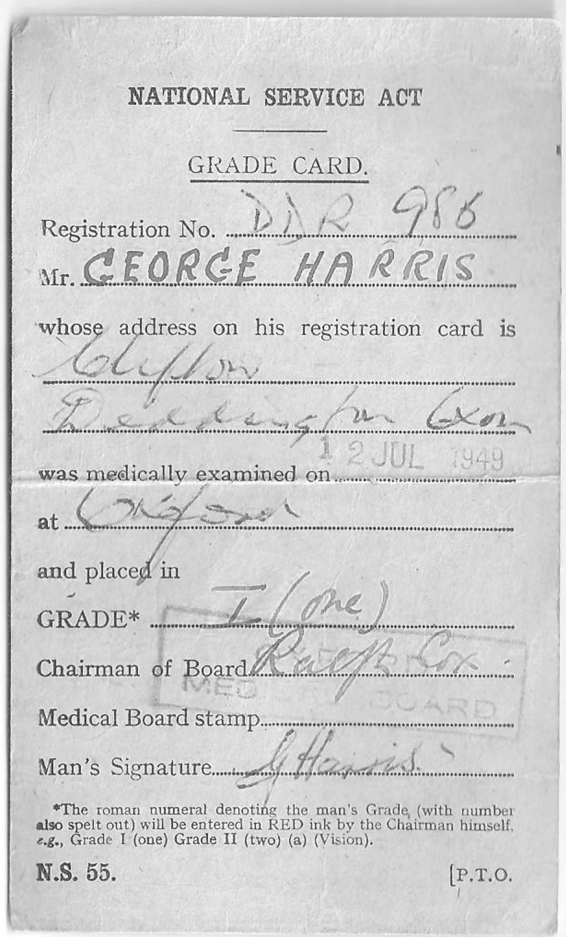


NATIONAL SERVICE ACT

GRADE CARD.

Registration No. DAR 986

Mr. GEORGE HARRIS

whose address on his registration card is

Clifton

Deddington Oxon

was medically examined on 12 JUL 1949

at Oxford

and placed in

GRADE* I (one)

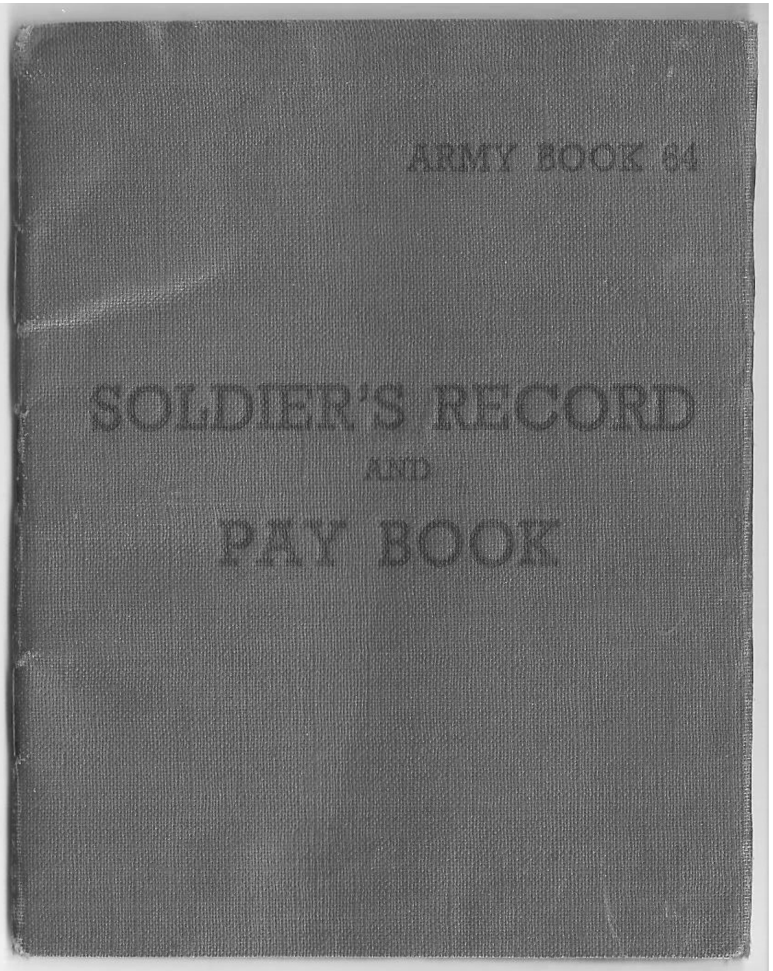
Chairman of Board Ralph Cox

Medical Board stamp MEDICAL BOARD

Man's Signature G Harris

*The roman numeral denoting the man's Grade (with number **also** spelt out) will be entered in RED ink by the Chairman himself, *e.g.*, Grade I (one) Grade II (two) (a) (Vision).

N.S. 55. [P.T.O.



ARMY BOOK 64

SOLDIER'S RECORD

AND

PAY BOOK

We quickly disembarked the truck. Gibraltar Barracks, a permanent military establishment of red brick and slated buildings, very much alive with army activity, several squads of soldiers being drilled on the huge square, trucks and other vehicles neatly in line, white lines, red fire buckets, sentry boxes. We were marched into a huge assembly hall, where there were many desks. Each desk had a large letter of the alphabet and an army clerk. The sergeant in charge, strutting about like a proud turkey, shouted out. "PAY ATTENTION!! Form a line at the desk, with the letter appropriate to your surname and when called, say SIR!! walk forward and present the clerk with the documents listed on the back of your enlistment notice." "HARRIS G", I responded as instructed, "Sir" and handed over my documents. All correct and I was handed a 'Soldiers Record and Pay Book', a chitty to hand to the QMSS (quarter master sergeant stores). I was now 22183181 Sapper Harris G. Royal Engineers. I walked with others to the stores, where we were kitted out with a ' truck' load of gear:- Uniforms 2. Denim over-all 1. Shirts 2. PT shorts, vest and gym shoes. Tie 1. Beret 1. Cap badge 1. Shoulder badges 2 sets (to be sewn on). Lanyard 1. Gaiters 1 pair. Brushes (boot) 2. Brass button cleaning slide 1. Sewing kit (house-wife). Belt webbing 1. Greatcoat 1. Boots 2 pairs (best and second best). Socks (army grey) 3 pairs. Draws cellular 3 pairs. Mess tin, knife, fork and spoon. Kit bag 1 and anything else that I may have forgotten. I always seemed to be the one that missed out. The storeman had run out of size eight black boots, so I got a pair of officers brown ones and a bottle of black dye and brush, but in the end I gained, because these boots were smooth and the toes did not need so much spit and polish. I, along with Sapper Gilpin, also got the old style tunics which had skin faced inner collars, having to be kept white, so in any photographs, Gilpin and I were easy to locate. The new style tunics had material faced collars and looked so much better.

A Lance-Corporal, whose name escapes me, selected his group, which included yours truly, and marched us to our barrack room of which he was the resident NCO (non-commissioned officer). We each selected a bed and wardrobe and then listened to what he had to say. "I am L/Cpl so and so and I am in charge of you in this room, we will get on well if you respond properly to my orders, my arse will get kicked if you don't, and your punishment will be severe. You are now in the army and for the next four weeks, your feet will hardly touch the ground, you will probably hate me, but you will hate your Sgt worse, be warned! After four weeks, you will be glad to be getting away from us, but you will be better for the experience, thousands have done it before you. Tomorrow you will parade outside

at 8.30am after breakfast and ablutions, wearing your uniform, with tunic buttoned to the neck, boots and gaiters. You will be introduced to our RSM (Regimental Sargeant Major), your unit sergeant and corporal. My bed is at the end of the room, next to the entrance, the toilets and washrooms are across the passage. You will observe that the bed alongside mine is covered with a kit layout, this is how your kit will look when a kit inspection is called". He went on to tell us where our personal belongings were to be stored, where and when the ironing board could be used, the distance between beds and how they were to be made, where the cleaning cupboard was and what could and could not be used and when. This all took about an hour and I was relieved when he said, that being as men would be arriving at various times, the mess room would provide refreshment all day and the regular routine would start at breakfast in the morning. Our beds had a standard mattress, two army blankets and a pillow. No sheets or pillowcase and no pyjamas, just in the raw in the rough blankets, a 'toughening up'. I was now among a bunch of lads from all walks of life, from bank clerks to labourers, some moving on with me at the end of the four weeks and some staying on to become drivers, as the transport section was based at Gibraltar Barracks, I meet up with some of them again later.

As said, parade at 8.30 next morning, where we were joined by men from other rooms and their respective corporals. We formed a line at the command of the Cpl in charge "Tallest on the left, shortest on the right , MOVE!!" then formed into three ranks by Cpl walking along the line, tapping each on the shoulder, "front, centre, rear, front, centre, rear" until all were in the three ranks. We were then called to attention and a mean looking sergeant took over, his hair very short, his uniform immaculately pressed, his boots highly polished, he had medal ribbons on his tunic, "I am Sgt Daly and will be with you for the next four weeks, today will be spent getting you horrible lot smartened up. When I ask your name at any future time, you will reply with your number, rank and name, ending with Sgt, do I make myself clear? WELL DO I!!" A loud "Yes Sgt" He continued, "you will also memorise your Commanding Officer's rank, name and decorations, Lt Col Stack, DSO etc. Officers will be saluted at all times and you must always wear your hat when outside. Half of you will be marched to the Tailor's for uniform adjustments, while the other half will line up at the barbers shop and then vice versa". Some of the lads had spent a lot of money on their hair dos and were in tears as they saw their locks fall to the ground, after a very 'short back and sides'. There were several chairs and each cut took less than five minutes and soon we were at the Tailors.

After these two important events we took a NAAFI break (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute) for refreshment. Now every move we made had to be at marching pace, shoulders back, arms swinging at just less than shoulder height. Having been re-assembled, our next move was to the stores again to be fitted out with large and small kit bags, gas mask, steel helmet, webbing straps, ammunition pouches and water bottle. Then to the armoury, where we were supplied with a 303mm bore rifle, bayonet and scabbard, a rifle cleaning kit consisting of a piece of four by two inch piece of cloth, pull through and oil, which fitted neatly into the butt of the rifle. A special clamp on the side of one's wardrobe accommodated the rifle and bayonet. The kit bags and webbing fitted neatly inside the robe. We were supplied with a bottle of khaki blanco paint to be used for painting the webbing and belt, brasso for cleaning the brass buckles and badges. I think I have said enough about equipment and now down to training and the weeks of army life to come. After lunch L.Cpl demonstrated how to do a 'kit lay-out' how to spit and polish our best boots, where to blanco our webbing, fire drill and a load of other dos and don'ts.

6 am sharp the lights were turned on by our NCO and with a bellow "WAKEY-WAKEY !! feet on the ground, last one out of bed gets a run around the block at the double". Toilet, wash room, breakfast. Breakfast was well organised by the well trained mess room staff. Pick up tray, two slices of bread with knob of butter, hold out mess tin, top and bottom, porridge or cornflakes in one, eggs, bacon and toast in the other. Milk and marmalade, tea or coffee. Good grub, no doubt about that. Outside the mess room were three large stainless steel troughs, marked Wash, Sterilise and Rinse, all with boiling hot water, so washing up was just a minute's job. Back at our room, we dressed in what was the order of the NCO. Usually we started off dressed in our shorts and vest, making for the gym at the double, for half an hours work out, some lads were really fit, and went on to be PT Instructors, others, like me, made hard work of it at first. The days were always at a fast and furious pace, Marching, rifle drill, cleaning and an endless abuse by the NCOs, but by golly at the end of the four weeks, we were fitter and wiser.

On 7th Oct we had our first TAB injections, I dreaded the thought as I had never had one before, remembering back to my school days, when we to be given diphtheria injections. It was on a Saturday morning and when I got to the school gate, I held back and didn't go in, going back home to tell mother that it didn't hurt one bit and it never came to light that I had not had it. Getting back to my army injection, well I saw the needle and I felt the room spinning, crashing into the tray

of instruments and passing out. TAB injections were of the worst kind and we spent the whole week-end unable to lift our arm and feeling dreadful, but I do remember one or two of the lads being able to play sport on the Saturday afternoon. I had had a TAV on 24th Sept., and a schick test, which proved positive and I ended up in the sick bay with vaccination fever, missing a few days training. There were many more injections to come, TAB, APT, Cholera, TT etc. but they became less painful as one got used to them.

Wearing our denims, we spent a few days on the rifle range, where we fired at targets at varying ranges, an armourer in attendance to zero our rifles to be very accurate. We were taught to allow for wind velocity, which could badly affect the accuracy of one's aim. The targets were manned by other soldiers working in pits (called the butts) and they would raise and lower the targets and signal back to the firers, the results ie; Bullseye, inner, outer or miss. Strict safety rules were always in place. It was too hard for some of the lads and there were a few bruised shoulders from incorrect positioning of the rifle butt. One rather delicate lad had tears in his eyes as the sergeant told him "Get a grip of the bloody thing lad, you are like a young maiden handling a navvies penis". The best weapon that we used was the Bren gun, which was usually fired from a tripod and didn't have the recoil of a rifle, heavier muscular men could fire it from the hip, but not usual. We ran a competition with point 22 rifles, each tipping in sixpence, firing at pop-up targets, I won this easily as I had done a lot of this type of shooting with my shot gun at home. At the end of the day, all rifles had to be cleaned and two pints of boiling water was poured down the barrel with a funnel, being very hot the guns quickly dried and a pull-through with the four by two and a little oil, the job was done. I might add that our rifle and bayonet had to be perfectly clean at all times and one of the orders when on parade would be "For inspection, port arms", whereby one would hold the rifle at the hip with bolt open and the muzzle at eye level to the officer inspecting, thumb nail in the breach which would reflect through the length of the barrel. At the end of the inspection the NCO would say "Ease springs" this entailed closing and opening the bolt a few times and apply the safety catch. We spent time on the assault course, as one would have seen on many war films, the six foot wall, the ditch, etc and bayonet practice. There were many other endurance tests, a five mile march, carry another soldier two hundred yards, the under wire crawl, just to mention a few. The most enduring was to march with FSMO (Full service marching order), one's complete kit, complete with greatcoat, steel helmet, rifle and bayonet, as one would under battle front times. We also

had a gas mask drill, which included a visit to the gas chamber, where, on the order of the NCO, masks were removed for five seconds in the gas filled room, a nasty experience, stinging eyes and much coughing on emergence to the outside air, but a very important part of one's training. In addition to our outside training, we did have a certain amount of indoor films, lectures and aptitude tests to determine the job to which we would be best suited. Just prior to the final day, lists were put on the notice board, detailing our next move and for what we had been selected to be. I had hoped to stay at Aldershot and become a driver, but this was not to be and I was posted to No. 9 Training Unit at Farnborough to train as a clerk. I had not previously mentioned, all our time was by the twenty four hour clock :- 0730hrs, 1359hrs, &c.

One lad, who was determined that he was not going to stay in the army, he disobeyed orders, (called working one's ticket) but he went through hell because of it, given a rusty bucket to clean, scrubbing and marching up and down till late, his bed tipped up and told to make it again, only to be tipped up several more times, it was cruel. I don't know what happened to him in the end.

Our four weeks were nearly completed and we were now getting the hang of it. The final day came with a 'Passing out Parade', we dressed in our best uniform, highly polished boots, shining brasses, rifle and bayonet. We formed up outside our barrack room and Sgt Daly gave us the once over, picking the smallest detail. Then the orders "Attention" then "Fix bayonets" this was done by placing the rifle between the knees and placing both hands on the scabbard and standing still until the order "Bayonets" when the bayonet was removed from the scabbard and snapped onto the muzzle of the rifle. "Order arms", the rifle then placed at your right hand side, standing rigidly to attention. "Squad slope arms" the rifle placed on the left shoulder "Right turn" "By the left, quick! March" We marched proudly onto the parade ground, which we knew so well after so many hours being drilled there, to join other groups. "Halt, right turn" "For inspection open order march." The centre rank stood firm, the rear rank stepped two paces back and the front rank two paces forward. The RSM along with an officer walked the ranks (a formality). "Squad, close order march" "Stand at ease" "Stand easy". We were now joined by the resident band of the Royal Engineers, who headed the march past. The RSM now marched to the front of the parade, saluting the officers and in a very loud voice shouted "Parade attention" "Right turn" "By the left, quick march" with this the band struck up and we marched past the rostrum where the

Commanding officer was standing to take the salute. The Cpl of each section shouting “Squad, eyes right” as we passed, followed by “Squad eyes front” We then wheeled around and marched back, to the rostrum, the band had now detached. The RSM bellowed “Parade Halt” “Left turn” “Parade! General salute, present arms!!” “Parade, slope arms.” “Parade dismiss”. So endeth the first four weeks!!!!! We made our way back to the barrack room, where we placed our rifles and bayonets in their bracket, took off our gaiters, picked up our mess tins and made for the mess room, where we were joined by Sgt Daly, the man who had given us such a hard time, along with the other NCOs, to enjoy the best meal of our stay at Aldershot. Mess tins were substituted with plates and Sgt Daly and the NCOs did the serving, with a little guilt, no doubt. No more duties that day.

The following morning, we packed our kit bags, donned FSMO and were transported to No. 9 Trg Camp at Farnborough. Disembarking from our troop transporter, we were met by a Cpl Lewis and a Sgt Target to join troops that had already arrived. Target, with a broad Dorset accent, addressed the assembly. ”You have now arrived at No. 9 and this is where you will spend your next nine weeks of your army service, discipline remains exactly the same and the job that you have been assigned to do here, will be interspersed with other training and a passing out parade at the end. The noise here from the jet engine testing at the nearby Farnborough Research Establishment will drive you mad for the first few days and then you will become accustomed to it. Cpl Lewis will now march you across the square to your new quarters, where you can stow your kit and he will explain a few details of the camp. At parade in the morning, you will be split up into your respective working groups. By midday you should be ready to pick up your first week-end leave passes from the Guard room, where you will be taken by your NCO, who will have instructed you how to correctly fill in your leave pass application form, bearing in mind that you must return by 23.59 hrs., on the final day of your leave” otherwise you will be considered AWOL (absent without leave) and put on a charge, resulting in a punishment that the Commanding Officer will decide.”

Our new quarters were entirely different to the brick barracks at Aldershot. They had been built on a Canadian style during the war, and were called ‘spiders’, made entirely of timber and totally enclosed. The mess room and ablutions were in the centre and four dormitories on either side, hence the name ‘spider’. We were now to have a more relaxed time, no nasty Sgt Daly, but discipline remained and the

occasional ‘kit inspection’ took place, as well more time on the rifle ranges and lot’s of marching in preparation for the big parade at the end. We clerks were the smallest group of the whole battalion. Having been shown the clerical section and introduced to the Staff Sargeant, chief clerk, we knew where we had to report to following our leave.

Still in uniform, I had my leave pass, travel warrant, small kit bag and made my way, with others, to the southern Railway station at Farnborough and caught the train to London (Victoria station) and then to Liverpool St station, via the underground, where I caught a train to Leigh on sea, being one station short of Southend, but much nearer to walk to 23 Chase Gardens. Pauline’s dad had arranged for me to sleep at the Casons, next door. Mr Cason having been a sergeant in the Royal Engineers at Aldershot during the war, so you can imagine what the conversation was about, whilst I stayed with him and his wife. I probably went to the soccer on Saturday afternoon. Being mid-October, it was much colder and darker earlier in the evenings. The week-end ended all too quickly and I seemed to back at camp, in no time at all. Of course there was not enough time to visit dad on this occasion, but we now got passes most week-ends, so he didn’t have to wait long.

Now that there were no resident NCOs in our rooms, a few tricks were played on unsuspecting late comers. French beds were a favourite, the top sheet being folded double and the bottom sheet hidden, you can imagine the scene, when the unfortunate victim arrived after lights out, trying to push his feet down the bed. Another one, the complete bed was hauled up and secured high up on the beam above. The other beds were spread out to fill the vacant space, the victim groping about in the dark, trying to find his bed, sometimes thinking he was in the wrong room and going off, everyone busting with laughter. We had one lad, who would go into a deep sleep with his eyes wide open, one night when he was snoring away, we opened up the double doors at the end of the room and carried his bed quietly out and placed him in the middle of the parade ground, fortunately awaking before daylight, poor bugger. One night there was a bright orange glow in the room and a lot of smoke, someone had left the iron switched on and the iron had burned through the ironing board and was dangling on its lead, this had to be paid for through a stoppage in our pay, called ‘barrack room damages’.

We got down to our training as clerks, others were doing demolitions, bridge building, watermanship, welding, all kinds of things, but all coming together for

guard duties and practicing for the parade at the end of the nine weeks. When marching, Sgt Target seemed to enjoy having a go at us clerks “come on you clerks, smarten up, you are waving about like corn in the breeze” but not with that meanness of Sgt Daly’. I will not go into all the fine details of our clerical course, I only wish that computers had been available then, typewriters and duplicators being our only mechanical aids, otherwise it was pen to paper. I cheated just a little on the typing, tapping the last couple of letters of the test after the instructor had said “stop typing” hearing those last little taps here and there, he repeated in a loud voice “ I said STOP typing”, but those extra little taps got me through and I became a Clerk GD Class III, instead of an office runner or transferal to a lesser duty. Our course was designed to give us a thorough insight to army documentation, pay, leave and legal requirements. All records were kept at the Royal Engineers Records Office in Brighton, Sussex.

With the big parade getting close, Sgt Target and the other NCOs had us on the parade ground to practice the now all too familiar marching. We spent extra time cleaning our kit, ironing razor sharp creases in our trousers, a visit to the barber etc. The parade was even bigger than the one at Aldershot as many other units had come to Farnborough to do their nine weeks. After the inspections and the parade, Sgt Target said “it breaks my heart to say this, the Clerks were the smartest group in the parade, well done” Our nine weeks is almost done, just a few loose ends. The next day we had to face the Personal Selection Officer, his job to distribute us to positions, both at home and overseas. “Ah Harris” he said, I see you are a railway man, I can place you on the Royal Engineers rail system at Longmoor”. “I was rather hoping to get an overseas posting Sir”, he wrote something on his pad and called out “Next”. Now it was a wait till after leave to find out and looking back in my Pay Book, I note that it our leave was for the Christmas period 23rd Dec to 17th Dec.

Looking up at the notice board, on returning to No. 9, everyone was anxious to see where there next move would be. ‘Harris G 22183181 Malaya’, I knew that I may be involved with the fight against the insurgents there, but I wanted to see the world and this would be a good start. At this point in time, the British military had installations world-wide. Some of the lads were posted to Germany, Ceylon, Burma, Egypt, Malta, Gibraltar, so many places. The unlucky few to Elgin in far north Scotland, some to Longmoor and other posts around the UK, these were called ‘home postings’ and mostly, that is where they stayed till demob. The

contingent going to Malaya, including yours truly, now had to complete a further four weeks of training for 'jungle warfare', this was called "Intensive Continuity Training" at No 3 Trg Unit RE, across the square from No. 9.

The last night at No. 9 there was much hilarity, a certain amount of broken glass and ' leg pulling' (more barrack room damages to be paid). The following morning a big clean up and room inspection. Later in full FSMO, we were marched across the square to No 3. Having settled once again into a new camp and meeting with a new staff of Officers and NCOs we were quickly made aware of what we were about to undergo for the next four weeks. I can't recall our numbers, but I think we were divided into four small groups, each with a L/cpl to put us through our paces. "Everything you do will be at the double" said our leader, "starting from breakfast each day, till 5pm (except for pm Saturday and all day Sunday), you will feel absolutely buggered for the first week and it won't get too much easier, after that either, trust me! After lunch today, we will visit the QMS and you will all be kitted out with 'jungle greens', puttees, cap comforters black face painting sticks and special boots. You will retain your best uniform and hand in the other one." As told, everything was now at the double, even when leaving the barrack room, last man out, ten 'press ups'. The days started with half an hour in the gym, tossing medicine balls, press ups and various other exercises, then to the showers, quick change and onto the road for a four or five mile march, with full kit. Another shower and then, perhaps, unarmed combat under the instruction of an expert officer. We did night patrols, wearing our puttees, cap comforters and black faces. We were now introduced to the Sten gun, a cheap, massed produced weapon, designed for close combat, not very accurate at long range, ideal for the jungle. It was also a dangerous gun to handle, as it was easy to wrongly place ones hand over the uncovered breach, taking away ones fingers as the spent cartridges ejected, much easier to carry of course than the rifle. I recall one very bitter night, when we had to dig in and make a 'fox hole', the frost glistened in the moonlight on the soil as we dug deeper. Settling in the ground we were surprised by a sudden burst of loud explosions as the hidden NCOs threw 'thunder flashes' from behind and set off flares to make the situation as confusing as possible. On another night we were transported in covered trucks and dropped off far in the countryside (Orienteering) and had to make our way back to camp, some lads got completely lost and didn't make it back till late in the morning. And so it went on and at the end, we were the fittest that we had ever been and more than ready, we thought, to face the jungle. How wrong can one be?

Looking in my Pay Book again, I note that we were sent on embarkation leave on the 2nd February 1950 till the 15th February. Dates from here on will be sketchy, as my Pay Book was not always kept up-to-date, with the exception of injections, which were of the utmost importance. I made my way home to Clifton and spent a few days with dad and family and as previously written, got the wheels in motion for Winnie and Albert to get away from that dreadful little cottage. I spent some time with Aubrey and went out shooting. I managed to bag a pheasant and Aubrey's gran cooked it and invited me to dinner. I ended my leave at Southend with Pauline and her family, making the most of my stay, as it would be May of 1951 before I would see them again.

On return to No.3, our kit was inspected and then packed ready for transit, our rifles, bayonets, steel helmets and gas masks were handed back to the QMS and we were now ready to go to Liverpool to board our troopship.

Chapter 23 - A slow boat to China

February 23rd 1950: Our troop train pulled into Lime Street station, Liverpool, late afternoon, snow was falling lightly and it was very cold. Forming into three ranks outside the station, the band of the King's Own Yorkshire Regiment was playing a farewell, as some of their lads were going abroad too. We marched to the dockside, where the old HMT (His Majesty's Troopship) Lancashire was berthed. It was said that the old vessel had been a banana boat, a collier, among other things, before being refitted as a troopship, as many others had been, to move the thousands of troops around the world throughout the war and since. It must have been low tide as the gang-plank onto the deck was not very steep and we were soon aboard, quickly being lectured of the dos and don'ts. We were allocated a deck and a sleeping berth. The beds were triple bunks, called 'standees', long, double rows, I was on the bottom bed and had two above me, so a certain amount of disturbance as each climbed up to settle in for the night. Rows of racks opposite gave us space to stow our kit. The toilets and salt water showers had certainly seen better days, but kept clean by the civilian crew. The dining area was fairly large, but would not accommodate all aboard at once, so there were several sittings. The anchors and davits were all worked by steam and clanged and rattled when in use. The maintenance crew were always busy along the way, scrubbing the decks, painting, splicing ropes etc.

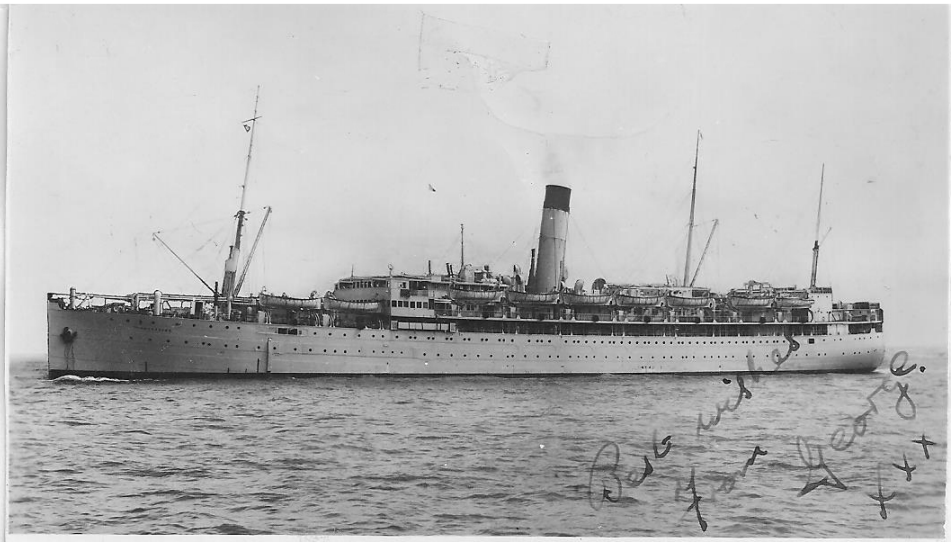
Now that all was done and we had had our first meal on board, I made for the upper deck to observe what was going on around us, we would not be sailing till high water. The smell of the sea had already affected one or two and they were sick, still in dock. Standing at the deck rail, I noticed KOYLI on the shoulder of the soldier next to me, I said to him "you wouldn't have a Horace French in your mob?," a voice from the man next to him, "well bloody hell George, fancy seeing you here!" it was Horace, off to Malaya too.

The next morning we were under way, heading out into the Irish Sea, bitterly cold on deck and there was a heavy swell, but we seemed to be riding it very well. Many sad, seasick and probably homesick lads today, but I must say that I was not sick for the whole voyage. Before leaving Southend, Auntie Nell gave me a nice little book 'My Trip', in which I recorded the voyage and the rest of my army days In some detail, but at some-time since then, that little book has disappeared, which is sad. it would have helped me immensely with dates that I am struggling to

recall. We were soon plying the waves of the Atlantic Ocean and the notoriously choppy Bay of Biscay, off the Normandy coast. I spent as much time as I could on deck, It was all so new to me and I didn't want to miss anything. But! it was not going to be all a holiday trip, we were soon allocated some duties. I was put in the ships office, along with other lads of the unit, getting records up-to-date, typing and printing daily orders etc. The hours were not long and there were still plenty of leisure hours. I discovered that some of the chaps that had remained at Aldershot, to become drivers, were on board, Gilpin, Hall, Harry from Reading and others, so it was good to catch up again. My mate John Bruce had been with me from day one and we remained together till demob. John and I would buy a tin of Libbys peaches and Walls ice cream from the on board shop and go up on deck and enjoy, the peaches were not available on shore in UK. We passed along the coasts of Spain and Portugal, turning into the Straits of Gibraltar, passing the Rock on the port side and Morocco to the starboard, we are now in the Mediterranean sea. We called into Valetta Harbour (Malta) to off-load an injured seaman, but we were quickly underway again, no shore leave at this unscheduled stop. Already the weather was much improved from the bitter cold of the Irish sea and the Atlantic. We anchored at Port Said (Egypt) at the North end of the Suez canal, the statue of De Lessop 's (The engineer responsible for the construction of the canal), standing prominently there, the statue being destroyed, as history will show, during the Suez blockade some years later.

After the usual formalities, we were now going ashore, my feet were about touch the land of the Ancient Pharaohs, Egypt. The canal was, for its entire length, under total British Military control, but I will not attempt to go into the details as this can all found on Google and in encyclopaedias. After clearing the security gates, we walked into Port Said, surrounded by a scruffy mob of locals, all trying to sell or beg, there were camels and goats wandering freely. The market and side streets were a mass of stalls and casbahs, flies and unpleasant smells, offers of donkey rides. "Hey Johnny, you like my sister? All clean inside just like Queen Victoria!' "Come with me, I show you, I show you" and so it went on, I was glad to get back on board ship. A local magician, called 'The Gally Gally Man', wearing a big red Fez, black cape, shorts and sandals, was allowed on deck and entertained .

us with his many little tricks. On the water, men in little boats (called bum boats), loaded with fruit and all kinds of other goods, were desperately trying to sell. They would throw a rope for one to tie to the deck rail, attach a basket with goods and



H.M.T. "LANCASHIRE."

The Dear Old HMT Lancashire

George. Bruce. Horace

George at Fanling







From the top L to R :- Sgt Kendrick, SSM Duffield. Coolie hut. Buffalo ploughing. Planting the rice. 'Shit Bint' with her buckets. Jeep track. Suez Canal. Bum boat at Port Said Egypt.

plead “up, up”, hoping for a sale. The British Tommy, as we were called, did not always treat other nationals with respect and some of the ropes were untied just before the basket reached the deck, spilling the contents into the water, with shouts from the boaties “you damned English devils”, one poor fellow copped a jar of hair cream on his forehead and had to be rushed off to shore for treatment. I am sure the Pharaohs didn’t mean it to be like this. While all this was going on, the ships supplies were being replenished, barges full of water melons, oranges, coconuts and bananas, trucks on the port side bringing a mass of other goods, fresh water and the oil being pumped aboard. We are only one ship, this is going on every day, the supply chain must have been enormous and a big headache for the Ordnance Corps. So we leave Port Said.

The canal is about eighty eight miles long, running through the Bitter Lakes, (where so many ships were trapped during the Suez Blockade) and ending at the City of Suez at the entrance to the Red Sea. The canal is not wide enough for two way traffic, so ships are formed into convoys for North and South travel, escorted through with a pilot aboard. When the South convoy is clear the North one proceeds and so forth. Aubrey was stationed in the Canal Zone near Suez, but of course he had left there some time in 1949. As we traversed the canal, desert dwellers would line the waterside, shouting abuse, waving fists, the women lifting their ragged clothing to expose themselves, making rude gestures as too did the men. We passed Military bases too, from where there would be shouts of “get your knees brown” “bring back a few nice Orientals” and other not so printable things. It is a long, slow journey, as the ships must not create waves, which would erode the sandy embankments. When awakening the next morning, we had entered into the Red Sea and making our way to Aden and more shore leave.

Our ship dropped anchor in the water just off Aden and we were ferried ashore by large flat top lighters, the only greenery being a few bushes in the vicinity of the larger buildings near the jetty and clusters of date palms. Port Said was bad enough, but Aden, well what can I say? “awful !”. Walking on the sandy track, avoiding the goat and camel poo as best we could, we made our way up the hill and through a natural arch to the main town of Crater, so called because that is where it was built, inside an ancient volcanic crater, a stinking, dingy little, goat and camel ridden settlement. A little lad came up to me with a couple of postcards (which I still have), “you buy Johnny?” and before I could sort out a coin for him, he grabbed a sixpence and was gone. Down at the small jetty, stark naked

children, sun baked black, were diving into the clear water for pennies being thrown by our mates, the pennies never reached the bottom, these kids were dab hands and as they retrieved the coins, placed them in their mouths (no pockets!) Aden is one of the driest places on earth and whilst we were there, a large cloud passed overhead, dropping a few spots of rain, the adults were dropping to the ground in prayer, but alas! It was gone. A large water tanker was refilling our tanks, I don't know from where it came, as we were told that there were only two places where ships would not take on local water and those two places were Adelaide and Aden. That was 1950.

We now head out into the Indian ocean, passing the large island of Sacotra on the starboard and South Yemen fading away on the portside. During daylight hours I spent as much time as I could on deck, there was always something going on, schools of dolphin and porpoise would escort the ship for miles, flying fish, large and small, would leap out of the water and glide for quite a distance before plunging back into the water and being in one of the world's busiest sea lanes, there were ships of all descriptions to see, including troopships going the other way, when there would be almighty whistles and shouts. The weather was now very warm and sleeping on deck was allowed, but, as we were to find out, not until the official order was given. So!! Yours truly and several others, found ourselves in the brig one night, because we had taken it upon ourselves to sleep-out. But the order did come a few days later and it was better on deck than in the stuffy sleeping decks below. As the ship churned up the water in the darkness of night, the water was a picture of fluorescent colours. Tombola (bingo) was played most nights in the mess room and the bar was open every night, where the drinks were very cheap and cigarettes were duty free, but being a non-smoker and a very light drinker, this didn't mean a lot to me. Each day there was a mileage guess, I am not sure, but probably about sixpence a go, to estimate the mileage covered each 24 hours, I was not a winner. We also had target practice at the aft of the ship, firing out to sea, just to keep up our readiness for the future. The KOYLI's practice was more intense as they were an infantry brigade, using heavier weapons. There was PT every morning and a prescribed number of times to walk around the deck. We played darts, deck quoits and five a side football in a netted area, there would have been no volunteers to retrieve the ball had it gone overboard. The meals were of a very high standard and we all had a turn behind the serving counter. Not so funny, but laughs never-the-less, one lad was standing very close to the counter, when someone next to him, slid the door of the under-counter warmer,

catching the poor fellows willy in the other door, funnier still he was serving with one hand and showing everyone the damage to the afore said, with the other hand. Now it was my turn to suffer, the roast potatoes were just mouth-watering, but!! As I bit into one, the crispy outer part, pushed onto an old filling and I was in agony. There was no dentist on board, so it was down to the sick bay, where I was given the needle. As I was coming round, I could hear a voice, telling me of what to see in Colombo (Ceylon), the next port of call, it was the voice of the sick room orderly. I now had a nasty hole in my gum and I asked him what had happened to my extracted tooth, thinking that it would be a good souvenir, "sorry pal, it is at the bottom of the Indian Ocean" said the orderly. Next day, Horace and I, along with Gilpin, Hall and Harry, now wearing our tropical uniform, stayed together for the shore leave at Colombo and I was able to tell them what that orderly had related to me in the sick bay. It was almost as though I had been there before, The memorial tower stood out at the top of the main thoroughfare, the church and other buildings. The children looked very poor, one with half an arm. Elephants were being used to haul large loads to the dockside, with the mahout riding with his prodder to keep them going. We bought pineapples and coconuts, only to be told to throw them overboard when returning to the ship. I had already eaten some pineapple and I was feeling quite ill after a few hours back on board. The fruit thrown over, was quickly recovered by the bum boats below, ready for sale to the next ship. You live and learn! We continue across the Bay of Bengal, heading for the Straits of Malacca, a narrow channel between the Malay Peninsular and the Island of Sumatra. We were now able to look across the jungle expanse of Malaya, the most beautiful green, yet lives were being lost under that great canopy of trees, where I soon expected to be. Singapore was the next stop and our destination. Being called to the office, where I had been working as a typist during some of my time on board, I was told that several of our group would now be going on to Honk Kong to fill vacancies there, including yours truly. After a couple of days shore-leave in Singapore, where we spent quite a bit of time relaxing in the world famous Raffles hotel mixing with officers and other ranks. It was a good opportunity to write a few letters and get them posted through the BFPO (British Forces Post Office). When writing letters at sea, these were dropped off at the nearest next port of call. Now we were experiencing the tropical heat and humidity for the first time. Singapore was still in recovery from the Japanese occupation, so there was still plenty of evidence of this, however it was certainly a great experience, but I was not to stay, I was to join 11 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers, 24 Field Regiment HK.

Sailing away, we headed for the South China sea, passing Borneo to the South and South Vietnam to the North, along the North coast of the Philippines, pushing steadily North to Honk Kong, now being back in the Northern hemisphere and very much colder. The old Lancashire had made the trip without a hitch and I believe she went on for a few more return trips. We docked at Kowloon across the harbour from Hong Kong Island. The harbour was pulsating with so many boats, Chinese junks, sampans, the Star ferries, criss-crossing to the island, cargo and passenger ships. We were met off the ship by our to-be Squadron Sgt Major, SSM Duffield, a really nice bloke, but still a soldier with strict disciplinary ways. He had a driver awaiting us with a 15cwt open back vehicle, our kit having been loaded on to a second such vehicle. As there were only five of us, Sgt major sat in the back with us and his first comment was "You might get used to the stink of this place, I have been here three months and I haven't" then went on to tell us that we were going up to a camp at Sek Kong, about twenty six miles up in the New Territories, a long winding up hill road, levelling out as we progressed nearer to our new address. We now noticed that the pong had got decidedly worse as we had now entered the large rice fields (paddy) and all the human excrement being used to fertilise the paddy fields was the cause. I vowed I would never eat rice while there, shame really as that was one of my favourite dishes at school.

Sek Kong camp was set out on a large expanse of treeless land, next to an airstrip, made of steel channel tracking and the base for a Spitfire fighter squadron. Our hut was very near to the barbed wire fence that separated us from the airstrip and the wing tips of the Spitfires seemed to almost touch the wire as they took off and landed. On the other side of the airstrip was 15 Field Park Regiment Royal Engineers, a huge equipment base, which served the whole of the Hong Kong garrison. A long trough outside our huts, with taps along, served as our wash place, with a couple of outside showers, with sacking walls, served by an iron pipeline that was above ground and running from the hills about a mile away, so in the evening, after a hot sunny day, the water was almost boiling until the taps were left on for a while. The toilets were simply a wooden bar over a small pit, which the coolies cleaned each day and carried it off to add to their stockpile for use on the paddy fields. (Charming!). Awaking the first morning after arrival, the mosquitoes had left us with spotty faces and any other uncovered parts, but we were issued with nets that day and given a mecacrim tablet, later palladrin tablets were given on morning parade, (malaria prevention) even then, some lads would spit them out when the NCO in charge was not looking. I believe quinine was used

in the early days. After showers in the *'first class'* facilities, we had breakfast and then assembled at the gym (a wire fenced area with a tin roof).

Sgt Major then introduced us to the Officers and NCOs. "Your CO (Commanding Officer) is Major Daly" (god not another Daly), as it happened he turned out to be a very understanding, but strict person. "Your 2i/c (Adjutant) is Capt. J.S Barker". J.S. a six feet four South African, the nicest and friendliest officer one would wish to serve. "Lt. Sweeny and his brother, 2nd Lt. Sweeny." Major Daly then took the floor and went on to tell us of the work that 11 Fld. Sqn. was doing in the Northern Territories. "Because there is always a threat of the Chinese Communists wanting to take Hong Kong and the Territories, before the ninety nine year lease expires, we are building gun emplacements at the crest of the hills, overlooking them, which necessitates the construction of jeep tracks up the hills to facilitate this. In the garrison, there are several Artillery Units, Units from the South Staffordshire, the Middlesex and other regiments, as well as supporting units, such as the RASC, REME, Catering Corps, to name a few. You are trained soldiers, so there will be regular battle training. Next week we shall be moving to Fan Ling Camp, next to the village of Fan Gardens, an entirely different location, with plenty of trees and greenery, you will all be under canvas, except the clerks, who will be moving into an old mansion, left badly damaged by the Japs, but there are enough rooms suitable for us to set up the Squadron Office, with a bit of help from the maintenance department. The officers will be housed in another building just across the yard , but Capt. Barker and I will have our offices in the old mansion too. New arrivals, clerks and drivers, will take up their assigned duties, when we have settled in to Fan Ling, now I will hand you back to SSM Dufffield, thank you". So for the next few days we relaxed and mixed with the regulars, watching the Spitfires and venturing out a little. Every inch of spare ground that was not taken up by camps or buildings was used for rice and vegetable growing by the locals, who lived in little shacks, usually made from rice straw and bamboo, scattered among the paddy fields, each with a hole nearby, used as a toilet, the contents of which was scooped into wooden buckets and carried on a wooden pole, one bucket hanging from each end, by the women, who were commonly called 'shit bints'. These women were always to be seen, carrying their heavy buckets and some of our drivers would get as close as possible, forcing the poor wretches into the paddy. On one occasion we were travelling to the beach in a 15 cwt, open side cab and the driver caught a bucket of one such bint, but unfortunately for him, she swung right around and the other bucket slammed into the cab, spilling the

contents all over him and his mate, we in the back hopped out and made it back to camp on foot, we couldn't stand the stench, I can't imagine how the other two felt until they could get the vehicle and themselves back for a clean-up! Most of the coolies had very large families and it was not unusual to see them on a Sunday walking on the narrow paths between the paddy, Dad leading, up to ten children in a long line, with Mum bringing up the rear, all dressed in black cotton smocks and trousers, sometimes blue. On slightly higher ground and in the hills, there were many acres of bamboo of different varieties, which the locals used for practically everything, from baskets to boats, to scaffolding for building, walking poles, a cheap, plentiful commodity. On little hillsides one would find rows of earthenware pots, large and small, not having been told as to what they were, wrongly, we took the lid off one and discovered its use, it was full of human bones. Apparently the locals bury their dead in shallow graves and leave them until the ants have eaten all the flesh, later placing the bones in the said pots. There were many funeral processions, led by men blowing horns, to scare away evil spirits, the body carried on bamboo poles and decorated with flowers and ribbons, followed by the mourners. Weddings were more colourful and very noisy. When our jeep tracks were cut and concreted, the locals were upset, as they were afraid that dragons would be able to use the tracks to come down from the hills, so our boys put a wooden pole across the entrance, telling them that dragons could not jump wooden poles, strangely they accepted that and no more was said. Not all the locals worked in the paddy fields, some ran the local market, others bred chickens, ducks and geese. There were no horses, only buffalo were used to drag crude wooden ploughs in the mud of the paddy fields, strong, slow moving animals. Bananas were plentiful, little clumps of trees widely scattered. Tea too was grown in small quantities and laid out to dry in the sun, I didn't try any, I fear that there would have not been too much hygiene among the locals.

So we move to Fan Ling, for the first couple of nights, the clerks were under canvas too, which gave us time to make our small rooms habitable and mosquito free, this is where I first saw aerosol cans, which we got from the QMS, very effective, but we still used nets for sleeping, mossies seemed to get in somehow. John and I shared one room, Cpl Reynolds, the Pay Clerk, by himself and across the passage, was the radio room, run by a Cpl from the REME. Our Chief clerk, Sgt Jones and SSM Duffield had accommodation near the Sargeants Mess. Cpl Roper, the SSMs orderly had a room in the main building along with L/Cpl Benson, the documents clerk.

So I became the Squadron typist and John the mailing clerk. S. Sgt Jones had a big desk in front of us, the pay clerk had a separate office in the passageway as did Major Daly and Captain Barker. SSM Duffield along with Cpl Roper,had their office near the entrance door. My typewriter was an old Barlock, later I got an Olympic. Standing and Daily Orders were typed on stencils and copied on the old roller and ink mesh. If one made a mistake on the stencil, pink correction fluid was used and took a time to dry until you could type over it, another mistake and it was start all over again on a new stencil, I made a few mistakes I can tell you. As good a bloke as JS Barker was, his writing was almost undecipherable and many times I had to ask Sgt Jones to go and ask him to explain. Enough about the office.

Mr Chan was our interpreter, a friendly guy with a broad smile, he had a pedal cycle, but mostly he would walk, pushing the bike. Another Chinese lad came into the camp daily, during the warmer months, selling cold drinks and ice lollies from a little ice box attached to the front of his bike, one day our pay clerk called him 'pop-sickle pete' and from then on that is what he was called. All of our laundry was done on the camp, by a Miss Wong and a couple of other girls, who did an excellent job, all ironed and the creased in the correct places. When ironing, they held a little can of water in their teeth, blowing a fine spray through a small tube onto the garment being pressed. Other Chinese were employed as cleaners. A film projector was set up outside, in front of our building, and during the warmer evenings, we would have film shows. Tombola was played too in the mess room. The first time that I attended the cinema in Kowloon, John and I left by a side exit, stepping into an out-of-bounds area, quickly being spotted and picked up by the RMP (Military Police), despite our explanation, we got seven days confined to barrack. Many streets and buildings were out-of-bounds to us in Kowloon, because of the unhealthy state. The main thoroughfare, Nathan Road runs from the waterfront in Kowloon to the foot hills on the way north, it was estimated that some three thousand prostitutes operated along this three mile route alone. Many of our regular soldiers fell victim to venereal disease and were disciplined accordingly. Hundreds of poorer people, lived and slept in the streets, the gutters and drains full of rubbish etc. (*Pauline and I visited in 1996 and I said that I would take her to some of my old haunts, ALL GONE!! The single line railway, is now a double electric, trains every fifteen minutes. The paddy fields are gone, replaced by large satellite towns with high rise tenement blocks, the poor have been placed in a ghetto. The train runs into a modern shopping complex at Fan Ling, I could not recognise a single building or place the site of our old camp. One place that had not*

changed, however, was the Taipo Market, still the same stinking place, where poultry and animals are killed and processed, best avoided)!

To continue; Each night there was a guard contingent, I was selected three times during my stay. Each night, one man was picked as 'Stick Man', who was deemed by the SSM as being the smartest, I was picked twice and was excused duty, only having to serve once. There were a few night exercises and time on the firing ranges, necessary to maintain our readiness for unseen events.

I spent several days in the Military Hospital, with an abscess in my left ear and became a guinea-pig for the use of penicillin, having injections four times a day, the young nurses of the QANS (Queen Alexandra Nursing Service) enjoyed giving me pain, but it did the trick. On another occasion the camp medical orderly put silver nitrate on a boil near my navel and left me with a a nasty blister and another few days sick leave. My pay book tells me that In August 1950 we had another batch of injections, Cholera, TAB, TT, I was fast becoming a sieve.

Outside our little rooms, which were detached from the main building, there was a nice little grassed area, where two geese decided to stay, one day we noticed that one had been sitting for a while and discovered that she had laid a number eggs and awaited the hatching, with the other goose nearby, thinking he was the gander, only to discover that (he) she too was sitting on eggs, so no chicks and no one was game to try the eggs. Soon the hot weather was upon us and the monsoonal rains would flood the parade ground as we stood on morning parade, dressed only in shorts, socks and boots, in minutes we were dry and the ground was steaming, hundreds of frogs from nowhere, were croaking near the deep pools of water and very large, colourful butterflies, flitted among the trees. There was also a typhoon, when everything not tied down, got blown away, the corner of our QMS building was lifted off, debris hanging from the surrounding trees and bushes, a big clean-up ensued. Some years earlier, a very severe typhoon, had blown a sizeable freighter ashore, near our bathing beach, leaving her stranded there as a permanent reminder. Probably gone for scrap now. The single line railway, which ran from Kowloon to Canton, ran fairly adjacent to the camp. We had a bus, built on two Dodge chassis, back to back and could be driven from either end, we used this to travel to Kowloon at week-ends. Going the other way, it was only possible to go to the border with Communist China and we had to terminate at Shat Au Kok. Officials that were permitted across the border, had to walk through two check points to the other side and vice –versa. When our old bus

was withdrawn, there was a limited train service, but on quite a few occasions we were driven into Kowloon Barracks, by one of our drivers and it was only short walk to the Star ferry which crossed the harbour to Victoria on Hong Kong Island. There was plenty to do and see on the island, the shops mostly open 24 hours, very modern and full of products that were yet to be available in UK. I used to send canned fruit, nylon stockings, etc back to UK, all one had to do was select and pay for the goods, give address in UK for delivery and the rest was taken care of by the shop staff. Sometimes we would travel on the funicular railway to the top of Honk Kong Peak, the highest point on the Island, from where one got a panoramic view of the harbour, the city and across the water to Kowloon, Macau (the once Portuguese colony) and Kai Tak airport. Sometimes the low cloud would totally obliterate the view below, giving an eerie feeling of isolation. We mainly used the 'Cheero Club" for meals, when on the island, because it served European food, not that there was any shortage of eateries. Capt Barker took the office staff to a Chinese banquet. Birds nest soup, shark fin soup, dozens of small dishes, I was violently sick on the way back to camp, vowing to never eat Chinese again. There are many little islands scattered around HK, in more recent times, one has been flattened to become the new and very modern International Airport, with tunnel links to Victoria and Kowloon. The old Kai Tak runway was on a narrow strip jutting out into the harbour, where more than one plane has ended up in the water. Nearer the terminal buildings, stood a row of aircraft, minus engines, which were left there by Chiang Kia Shek and his Nationalist army, after defeat by the Communists, I suppose they were scrapped as they got beyond their use by date. Our firing range was immediately under the Kai Tak flight path and the planes were very low as they passed over us, all piston engines then, the big jets were yet to come.

On June 25th 1950, North Korea crossed the border into South Korea and the American forces were ordered to assist S Korea, but were unable to hold and on the 26th July, British, Australian and New forces Zealand ground forces are to be sent to assist. Honk Kong, being the closest garrison of British Forces, these troops were the first to be called and 11 Field Squadron was ordered to mobilise and go to Korea as a support unit to the Middlesex Regiment. We were kitted up to a battle footing and were prepared to go, having written home to say that we were moving to another location, not allowed to mention Korea. However on receipt of a urgent despatch from Headquarters RE, we were stopped from being shipped, as it was found that the unit had served three years in the Far East (called Python)

and were due to return to UK. So 55 Field Squadron RE, took our place, to accompany the Middlesex Regt. In the meantime I had learned that a schoolmate, Robin Hall of the Shropshire Regiment, had been killed in Malaya. As we would be leaving Hong Kong as a complete unit, every last item of stores and equipment had to listed, crated and despatched, but this took many weeks. The carpenters and welders made the crates, one which was specially made to house Capt. Barker's Sunbeam motor-cycle and labelled 'Welding Equipment'. My typewriter and that of Cpl Roper in the orderly room were running hot with all the paperwork, copies going to HQ 24 Fld Regiment and to RE Records Office, Brighton, UK. John and our recently arrived documents clerk, Ray Baddick, were also working non-stop, along with our chief clerk and pay clerk. Other men were packing and labelling, using stencils to paint on the contents and destination of each crate, large and small. Trucks and earthmovers were treated with grease and sprayed with wax for the sea voyage. Quickly Christmas was upon us and our equipment had been loaded onto a freighter and sent on its way. We were now moved to the well-appointed leave camp near Kowloon, to await our ship home, but still a little work for us clerks.

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO DIED FOR OUR COUNTRY

A Soldier

I too was a soldier many years ago
Fully trained and ready to go
It was early 1951
The Korean War had begun
Stationed in Hong Kong, not far away
We were ordered to sail to join the affray
From Headquarters came a last minute communication
We were to be diverted to a different location
A soldier must go where he is sent
My schoolmate Robin was in a different Regiment
Serving in Malaya to fight the insurgents there
The jungle thick and so unfair
A burst of gunfire from a river bed
Robin and his patrol lay dead
As I live my life I often wonder why
Who decided that I should live,
Whilst Robin and so many others had to die?

George Harris, Royal Engineers 1949 - 1951

"Christmas Day."

On this day in 1950 Christmas celebrations had begun.
Our Sergeant Major was a hard man.
He was a soldier, not a family man.
But on this day, with the help of our Chinese interpreter, Mr Chan.
He had cooked up a plan.
The alarm was sounded loud and clear.
Everyone scrambled for their gear.
With lot's of noise and some disorder.
We took up our positions along the border.
Mao had picked a good day to launch an attack.
But there was no one there, had he gone back?
The "All Clear" was sounded, something amiss.
Sgt Major must know something of this.
Secretly the cooks had been told to keep out of sight
They had to prepare something special for tonight.
We returned to camp, no worse for wear.
Darkness had fallen, not a light anywhere.
When our gear was put away.
There were few hours left of this special day.
Suddenly the camp was ablaze with light.
What was happening on this Holy night?
The Mess hall was abuzz with noise.
Lot's of local Chinese girls and boys.
Then open came the doors.
There stood our Sgt Major, dressed as Santa Claus.
"Come on lads he shouted, let's have some fun.
Show the locals how it is done.
Merry Christmas one and all". He wasn't so hard after all.
Mao was no harm, It was a false alarm
"Thank you Sgt Major and Mr Chan.
Merry Christmas to you too, what A CLEVER LITTLE PLAN"

George Harris = Royal Engineers 1949 -1951.

Chapter 24 - Take me back to dear old Blighty

We were nearly four weeks at the leave camp, getting somewhat impatient for news of our departure, which came towards the middle of February 1951. We boarded the Empire Orwell, a fine looking vessel, being, along with her sister ship, Empire Fowey, reparations (spoils of war) ships from Germany. The decks below, were all air conditioned, the dining room was really large and covered the full beam of the ship, with double port holes on either side, I forget the tonnage, probably twice that of the poor old Lancashire. A band was playing as we left the dock and streamers were flying from the deck rails, we were under way. The journey to Southampton, over much the same route as for our outward trip, but for the life of me I can't recall too much about it, I suppose we spent more time doing other things and not too fussed about what was passing by. I can't recall calling in at Singapore or Colombo, but I suppose we must have done, as with Aden and Port Said. Arriving at Southampton, we boarded an awaiting troop train, which took us up to Andover, from where we were transported to the large transit camp at Barton Stacey, Hants. After the usual formalities we were allocated some well used huts for the night. The next day, being issued with travel warrants and leave passes, we left for twenty nine days, in-transit leave on 26th April to the 24th May, having been informed that we would be posted to Austria, soon after our return from leave.

I am not sure whether I made for Southend or Deddington, but I did divide my time up as equally as possible. Pauline and I made up for lost time, visiting the Festival of Britain in London, Madame Tussauds, Harrods, Buckingham Palace and many other attractions. We spent some time visiting her relatives and also joining with her friends to go to the cinema and walks along the seafront. I may have caught a couple of soccer matches with Sid, but it was near to the end of the season. I was now able to wear civilian clothes, which made a change from uniform. Making my way to Deddington, I walked from the bus, which dropped me off outside the police station and made my way up Hempton Road, to No. 2 The Paddocks. I knew these homes very well, having delivered bread, when working for Doughy Course. Winnie was overjoyed to see me again after such a long time, so too was dad, who was now living with Winnie and Albert, Sylvia and where I would return to when leaving the army. I travelled to Banbury to visit sister Eva and family, but no one was sure where Eileen was living at the time, husband Dave, tending to move from farm to farm, not always leaving a forwarding address, so I

didn't see her until much later on. It was good to get on my bicycle again and I cycled to Clifton to visit Aubrey, where I talked to quite a few of the villagers, including Horace's mother, Emily French, she wanted to know why I was home and not Horace, she seemed very upset, I expect she had heard about Robin Hall being killed. I tried to explain that I was not in the same regiment as Horace and still had to go back till September to finish my time. I visited the gang at Aynho Park, Crusoe had retired and Jack Pinfold was off sick. Having stayed for a while, I left my bike at the cabin and hopped on to the local train to Banbury, where I walked along to the Engineers office to say g'day to Bouncer and George Pitman, very little having changed. Station Master Miller had retired from Aynho station and left the area, his post and the station master's cottage being filled with a much younger Mr Davidson. Peter and Chris were still working on their respective farms, life in the village much the same as when I left in 1949. Leave was over all too quickly and I returned to Barton Stacey. The permanent staff at BS, gave us the run-a-round whenever they felt like it, I suppose they felt a bit envious of the fact that we had been abroad, whilst they were stuck with a 'home posting'. Being at BS for a couple of weeks, we all put in for week-end leave, but when we reported to the guard room to pick up our passes, the Sgt in charge, standing on the raised decking of the guard room, with a wry smirk on his face, called out a couple of names and then held up the remainder of the applications and tore them in half, tossing them into the bin, "YOU MISSED OUT, you didn't write your return time of 2359hrs, did you? Enjoy your week-end in camp!" A few of our lads slipped out anyway, taking a chance and getting away with it. There was a camp cinema, called the Globe, which was open all week-end, so that took up some of the time, plus a few letters to write. John Bruce, along with Capt JS and a few other selected staff, had already left for Austria in the form of an advance party to prepare for our arrival. We handed in our Jungle Greens, re-issued with a second uniform, new boots etc. Goodbye BS.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GOVERNMENT OF HONGKONG
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香港政府 A/3861364
THESE NOTES ARE LEGAL TENDER
FOR THE PAYMENT OF ANY AMOUNT
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HONGKONG 9TH APRIL 1949
FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF HONGKONG
A/3861364
FINANCIAL SECRETARY
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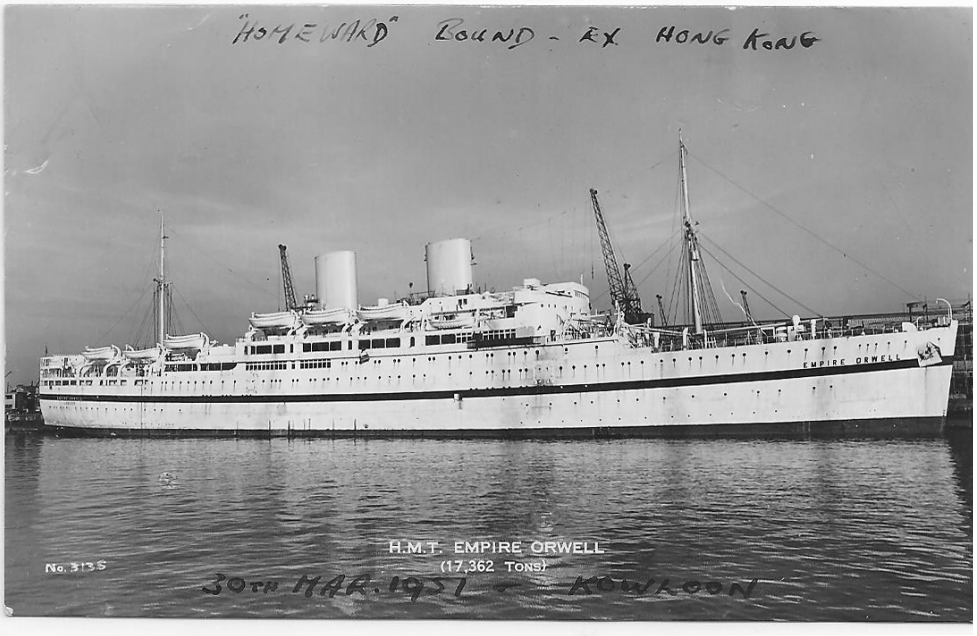
BRADBURY, WILKINSON & Co LD ENGRAVERS, NEW MALDEN, SURREY, ENGLAND


"HOMEWARD" BOUND - EX HONG KONG
EMPIRE ORWELL
H.M.T. EMPIRE ORWELL
(17,362 TONS)
No. 3135
30TH MAR. 1951 — KOWLOON


ROYAL ENGINEERS

Chapter 25 - Here we go again!

Our troop train left Andover for London (Waterloo), where we were held for some hours, before moving on, enabling us to walk across the footbridge into the Festival of Britain, where Pauline and I had been a few weeks earlier. Our uniforms allowing us free entry. Moving off again, we headed for Harwich, to join the very old and oily SS Empire Parkeston Key, which was to ferry us across the lower end of the North Sea, to the Hook of Holland. I had never been sea-sick before, but I certainly was on this trip, I had taken it upon myself to buy a nice big juicy Jaffa orange from the on board canteen and enjoyed it immensely. As we got out into the very choppy North Sea, my juicy orange wasn't going to stay down for long, sea-sickness took over and I was jolly pleased when we arrived at the Hook of Holland the next day. We now boarded the train, known by thousands of soldiers before us and since, the Medloc C, from the Hook to Villach in Austria. Being Spring, Holland was a patchwork of tulips, so many colours. Our first stop was at Krefeld, just inside the border with Germany, where we left the train for exercise and showers. Refreshed, we travelled along the banks of the river Rhine, passing Cologne (Kohln), still in ruins from the allied bombing, the twin towers of the cathedral standing there, almost as in defiance, Fairy-tale castles, hovering on the most precipitous little islands along the river, one wonders how they were built. Some parts of the journey were through snow covered mountains and many tunnels. Our locomotive was changed several times during this very long journey, from steam to electric and back to steam. We stopped for another refresher at Traunstein, before the final leg of our journey to the transit centre at Villach in Austria. The Medloc C would have been serviced there ready for the return trip to the Hook. We now joined a special train, loaded with our stores equipment, that had been so carefully packed and crated at Fan Ling, to make the shortish journey from Villach to Judenburg, where we took a branch line into our new camp at Zeltweg, formerly a Luftwaffe bomber station. Snow was very much in evidence and it was very cold as we made our way to our quarters, big concrete block-houses, typical of any structure built by the Nazi regime (slave labour, no doubt). John Bruce had made ready three comfortable beds, in a large first floor room, for himself, Ray Baddick and I (the clerks), as well as a good supply of quality towels and linen, which he *acquired* whilst helping to set up the stores, before we arrived. I think the walls would have been two feet thick, the hallways about eight feet wide and the stairs to the ground floor about the same. The windows were large and double glazed. As yet, no-one had been able to get the radiators to work, so it

was mighty cold. Our offices were on the same floor, spacious and well lit. The mess room was a delightful structure, based on the design of an Austrian chalet, the ceiling covered in upside down silver cups, that had been made from the silver foil from cigarette packets and thrown up with a lump of chewing gum stuck to the bottom and believe me they stayed stuck. We were now on Active Service, being a part of the occupation forces and getting a small increase in our pay. I now had the assistance of an interpreter, a delightful lady, Princess Lichtenstein, who was of great help when some things had to be typed in Austrian for the benefit of local readers. She was an offspring of the old royalty and still lived in a very large mansion, but had little money for the upkeep. On an occasional week-end, she would invite us down to have tea, along with her boyfriend, a Sgt in the air-force. She made fruit flans of pastry and fresh black, red and white currants from her extensive garden. This was a dream posting, so relaxed, few parades and set in the beautiful Austrian countryside. It was just a short walk into the local village, where we were able to buy a stein of beer and enjoy the music of the town band, dressed in their leather shorts, traditional hat, shirts and braces. Bicycles were available for hire for a few schillings and grochen, enabling us to make some very pleasant trips in the locality, riding now on the right hand side of the road. Our pay was in BAFVs (British Army Forces Vouchers) which we had to exchange for local currency to spend outside the camp. Pay day was held in the large passageway, mentioned above, Cpl Reynolds, the pay clerk would call out the name and amount, John, Ray and I would count out the cash, the Chief Clerk, S Sgt Jones and Cpl Roper would check each one and hand it to the individual soldiers, lined up in alphabetical order. Capt Barker would attend to the conversion to local currency. One such pay day, just prior to the men being brought in, the cash neatly piled, I did a stupid thing, there was a huge hail storm, I had never seen such large hailstones in my life, I opened the window and the notes started to fly around, I closed it as quickly as I could, Capt Barker shouted “who opened that bloody window? Put that man on a charge”. I joined in picking up the notes and luckily nothing more was said. Had the men been lined up, I would have been sitting behind the table and it would not have happened, but it did! (silly me!

There were several empty large aircraft hangers, one of which the lads sprayed the floor with water, which quickly froze over and became ideal for skating and ice hockey (I couldn’t skate). The runways were long and wide and when Capt Barker’s Sunbeam motor cycle was unpacked and made ready, he joined us for some speedy rides on them. We didn’t see a lot of Major Daly. Cpl Reynolds, told me I

was due for leave and I fronted up to Capt Barker, who asked me if I would like to spend a couple of weeks in Trieste. ”You can stay at the small CRE Unit there” he said, “the chaps are all NCOs and will make you welcome, you don’t need to wear uniform, as long as you carry your AB 64 (Pay Book) with you at all times with the signed authority to wear civvies, I can only spare one clerk, so you can go with Spr Ross from the MT (Military Transport) section”. So it was all fixed up, Ross and I caught the train at Judenburg to Villach, where, with others we boarded a big MAN bus, with a trailer. Ross and I got in the trailer and off we went, through the border into Northern Italy, the most scenic mountains and blue lakes. At the first stop, the conductor caught up with us, saying that our seats were in the front section of the bus, not in the trailer, so now we had an even better view. We made a number of refreshment stops before crossing the border into Trieste, situated on a small strip of land at the northern end of the Adriatic sea, which in 1945 had been declared an independent state, divided into Zone A (Administered by Allied forces) and Zone B (by Yugoslavia.) In 1954 Zone A, minus a couple of small settlements to the south was ceded to Italy. We were met at the bus terminus by a member of the CRE and taken the short distance to their small establishment and as Capt Barker had told us, we were made very welcome, good food and accommodation and plenty to sightsee in this historical old territory, with the Adriatic so blue and calm. One day we were stopped by a couple of RMPs, who asked for our identity, handing them our AB 64, one of them said “ah! 265 draft, so are we, might see you on the Medloc C on the way back to UK, enjoy your leave”. Getting back to Zeltweg, we were told that Capt Barker had gone, I reckon he knew before we left for Trieste, not wanting to upset our leave, a really top guy, he left a personal letter for us (which I still have). A Capt Mills took his place, ok, but not quite the carefree type as JS. John and I, along with Gilpin, Hall and others left to go to Villach, where we boarded the Medloc C for the long trip back to the Hook of Holland, where we boarded the SS Vienna for the sea crossing to Harwich and ultimately to Longmoor Camp for demob on 15th September 1951, being placed on AER (Army Emergency Reserve) for three years. Back to the GWR.

Chapter 26 - The Signal Box

1951, back from National Service, I returned to 163 gang, till Oct 1952. then I Joined No 10 gang till Nov 1954, when I applied to fill a vacancy for a signalman at Kings Sutton Junction signal box, having spent time in the box when at that end of the section, I put in my application for the job and was immediately accepted, as vacancies were hard to fill because of the exodus of staff to other industries. Aubrey had already become a signalman at Aynho Station box. Kings Sutton Junction signal box was a class two box and at one time was one of the busier boxes in the region, handling three sets of traffic, passenger and freight trains, on the 'up' and 'down' main lines. On the 'up':- Set one was the Birmingham to London route, via Bicester, branching off at Aynho Jct. Set two the Birmingham to London via Oxford and Reading, whilst set three was the Birmingham to Kingham route, branching off at Kings Sutton and on the 'down' in reverse order. In addition to the through traffic, a local goods train would service each station daily, except week-ends and this train had to be worked between through traffic, but when in the station yard, off the main line, the crew could do their work, the guard operating the hand levers to turn the points to suit. There were forty two levers in the box, four telephones, two separate sets of bells and instruments for the main lines, repeaters for the distant signals, which could not be seen from the box, a desk and stool, a small pot belly stove and many other items. The levers, being about one metre long, were sitting in a frame, made of cast iron and painted in different colours, to clearly indicate what they operated. Yellow were for the distant signals, which could be passed at any time in either the clear or caution mode. The red levers were for danger signals, which could only be passed if in the clear position. The black levers were for movement of points, to facilitate the movement of trains to the appropriate track, the blue for locking. Two short levers painted in zebra stripes, were for emergency placement of double detonators on the track, fortunately seldom used. At each end of the frame there were red, green and yellow flags, which would be used when major track work was being done and signals could not be operated, in this case an additional signalman would be in the box, to act as pilot to the train crews, as well as the district inspector. The GWR operated, what was called an "Absolute Block" system, whereby signals and points were interlocked and could only be operated in the correct sequence, signals could not be put in the clear position to enter the next section, until 'line clear' came from box ahead. Bells, instruments, inter box phones and track circuit plungers, were all placed on a shelf above the lever frame and known as 'the

Astrop Signal Box

Hard at work in the signal box

A MIGHTY KING CLASS ENGINE OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY

KING GEORGE V

block'. All trains were signalled between signal boxes by the use of bell codes, too many to record here. The most important would be the danger code 6. The Royal train three sets of four (4-4-4). Express 4. The codes were the most difficult part of the training as they had to memorised and ready for the day of the test, which was carried out by the chief inspector at the head office, at Birmingham's Snow Hill station. I spent six weeks training with the resident signalman, George Probert, who was a very good teacher and I passed with flying colours. I also had to spend a few days at Astrop Sidings box, as this was shared with KS, because of staff shortages. So it was a week of day shift at KS (8am till 4pm) and two weeks of one 12 hour day shift and one of 12 hour night shift at Astrop. KS box being closed at night as there were no trains using the Kingham line, so it was a long section between Astrop and Aynho Jct. It was not all easy going, especially in fog, when trains were running late and freight trains had to be held back for passenger trains. Astrop was the feeder box for Banbury loco depot and the main passenger station, with three down lines, the main, a loop line and a reception line, the signalman at Banbury South box, dictating which line was to be used. Freight trains and light engines could use all three, depending on destination and clearance time. Passenger trains could only use the main and reception lines. On the 'up' from Banbury there was the main and a very long loop line, which could accommodate several freight trains, leaving the Astrop signalman the job of interspersing them with main line traffic. Some drivers were not so speedy and occasionally failed to clear on time, delaying expresses, with a "PLEASE EXPLAIN" from head office. All trains and times had to be entered in the 'Train Register', which was signed too when starting and completing ones shift. When handing over to your relieving mate, it was usual to tell him the present state of the operation and inform him of any alterations to the running times or cancellations, mostly entered in the train register already. Arthur Gardner was the station master at Kings Sutton and he was our immediate senior and would visit the box each day and sign the register, also bringing a can of drinking water, staying for a cup of tea and observing the operation of the box, he would also bring train journals and timetables, as well as wages and any complaints from head office. Usually he would arrive at the busiest time of the morning and loved to watch as I threw over the points from the Kingham line, having cleared the local goods to Adderbury, back to the London line, accept the 9.10am Paddington express from Aynho Jct on the down line, another train from Astrop on the up line, getting the line clear ahead in both directions for the passage of these trains, bells ringing from three signal boxes, all of which had to be responded to, the clatter of the levers as I pulled of the

appropriate signals. The Paddington express, headed by a gleaming green and gold banded King Class engine, roared through, pulling fourteen, sixty foot coaches and probably nearing eighty miles per hour. The up train came through and as I cleared in both directions, the bells would sound again for more traffic. Later the 10.10am Paddington, Inter City express would come roaring through, first stop Leamington Spa, then on to Birmingham. The fastest train of the day was the Cambrian Coast express, headed by a Castle class engine, at about ninety miles plus an hour, not stopping at Banbury and because of this, when working the Astrop box, it was necessary to get the line clear ahead as soon as it was offered from Banbury, and when getting the 'train on line' signal, the 'train approaching' signal (1-2-1) sent on to Aynho Jct, giving them plenty of time to get their signals set.

The Royal Train! I can't recall the date, but I can certainly remember the procedure. I believe our very young Queen, Elizabeth II was to open something in Birmingham. The royal train was to be stabled on the down track of the Kingham line. Our district inspector, Harry Gwynn had to be present in KS box. The train was signalled 4-4-4, I started to reply after the first 4, but I realised when the bell continued and waited to reply with the return of 4-4-4, I don't think Harry noticed, at least he didn't say anything. I kept the signals in the on position and when the train neared the outer home signal, I lowered it and the train crawled forward and came to a standstill in the station platforms, allowing officials to make sure everything was carried out to the book. No trains allowed on the up line until the RT had been dealt with. Setting the points for the Kingham line, Arthur Gardner secured and locked a clamp onto the facing points and the RT then reversed to a pre-determined stop along the track. A half mile to the rear of the train the perway gang had removed a rail from the track as a precaution. A gang from Swindon works had brought stainless steel containers, which were placed under the train for kitchen and toilet waste. I omitted to say, that a highly polished Castle class engine, had pre-ceded the train to ensure the track was safe and I stabled this engine in the refuge siding, where it was kept till the following morning, when it would pre-cede the RT on the next stage of the journey. When the RT had reversed and cleared the points, Arthur removed the clamp and I reversed the points to the main line again and he locked the points in that position, bringing the key to the care of Harry, who then settled in the chair with a cuppa. A relief signalman took over from me and when I returned in the morning, the RT had gone and all was back to normal. To add to all this, every bridge and level crossing for the entire route of the RT are closed for the passage of the train, the local

police looking after public road bridges or crossings and the gang members for non-public crossing, plus each ganger has to inspect his entire section immediately prior to passage of the RT. Bit of extra cash I suppose.

Despite all the safety devices and rules, there were still accidents, usually because of human error. For some, never explained reason, the starting signal on the 'up' line at Astrop, was not interlocked and could be set in the clear position at any time, without 'line clear' from KS and this was almost the cause of a very serious accident. During a week-end, the track on the up line at KS station was removed for replacement by the relaying gang. A young signalman on the night shift at Astrop, had accepted the only passenger train from Banbury, but had not replaced the signals to danger from the previous train, probably having fallen asleep. Of course the little express came thundering past, when in fact it should have been stopped at Astrop, so as to await a 'pilot', who was bringing a train from KS, who in turn would have piloted the express forward. The correct procedure had been carried out by the workers at KS, having placed three spaced detonators on the track and a red lamp at the prescribed distance from where they were working. Passing over the detonators and seeing the red light, the driver of the train applied the brakes and according to those present, there was a huge display of sparks from the wheels and the front wheels of the engine were just about out of track. Needless to say, the signalman was relieved of his job and I imagine that the engine crew would have received some sort of reprimand, for not having read their train journal.

I received a 'Please explain'! I had to do this because I had delayed the Paddington to Birmingham express. I had a small train of empty wagons to hold at KS until Banbury could find room for them. I decided to reverse them into my refuge siding, but! they were a couple of wagons too long for the siding and the engine could not quite get clear of the points, so I was unable to set them to the main line position. My only alternative was to the get the wagons back out of the refuge siding and reverse them on to the down track of the Kingham line, which I would have done in the first place, had I known that there were too many wagons. By the time I had got the wagons moving back to the new position, the express was whistling and approaching my outer home signal, I switched the points to the main line position, got the 'line clear' from Astrop and pulled the signals off to get the express under way again, the driver shouting and waving his fist as he passed my signal box. My explanation must have been ok, as I heard no more of the incident.

Each week a man called ‘the lampy’, would call and change, clean, refill and replace the kerosene lamps in all the signals. He left and no replacement was found, so after the busy morning period, on the prescribed day, we would switch the signal box to operate between Astrop and Aynho Jct, all signals for the up and down main left in the clear position for three hours, to enable the KS signalman to perform the ‘lampy’ duties. There was a little tin shed in the station yard, with a complete set of lamps clean and ready for the next change. There were eight gantries to climb, to exchange the lamps, plus all the crossing points had ground level signals, called ”dummies” which also had lamps. The distant signals were very high and very shaky and being so far away, it was easier to cycle to them. We only trimmed the lamp in the starter signal on the down Kingham line, as there was only day-time traffic. The replaced lamps were then cleaned and refilled for the next change. I can’t remember how long we kept this up for, but it was a welcome relief when a new ’lampy’ took the job. There were also two linesmen, Glen Parry and Don Mobbs, who looked after the maintenance of the signal boxes, changing the batteries that worked the instruments and locking devices, checking the telegraph wires and phones, signal wires and lots of other little jobs that kept our boxes in good working order.

Members of the gang would call in and have a cuppa, when in the area and when I was at Astrop, the ganger of that section, Jack Rymill, called in every morning, I would see him well before he reached the box, so his tea was always ready when he arrived. Jack wore a nasty scar on his neck, where he had been bayonetted by the Turks, during the first world-war and left for dead, he had managed to feign death until darkness, when he managed to crawl back to safety. Jack was a KS man and I asked him if he knew of any land being available there as I was looking to build and would like to live a little nearer to the signal boxes. He told me that Jack Herman, the local builder had several blocks on Banbury Lane at KS and he thought it would be worth a try, saying that Mr Herman was a good builder. I will get back to this later.

The porter at KS station was a woman named Freda, who always wore trousers as part of her uniform, a strong, efficient person, who knew the job inside-out. When asked by Glen, “when are you getting married Freda”? “I’m not” she replied, “I don’t want a bloody bloke, bouncing up and down on me all night” I think Glen already knew that she was gay and was stirring her up. Freda’s friend was a girl who worked on a local farm and they spent most of their free time together, going

on holiday each year. It all ended up so sadly, when the affair ended, for reasons unknown. Freda hid under the bridge, just along the track and jumped in front of an express train. Each day, a chap named Bill, I can't recall his surname, called with his small truck, to collect and deliver parcels to the surrounding farms and businesses. One day when he returned to KS station, the police were awaiting his return. Apparently at one of the farms, as Bill drove away, he had unknowingly run over and killed a little child, which had crawled under his truck. What a shock, Bill never really recovered from it. In another incident, a man named Jack Trott, a KS man, who was a member of the relaying gang, was cycling home, alongside the up track, when, it is believed, he fell as a train was passing, falling against the train, being killed instantly.

Each signal box got an allocation of coal per year, adequate for KS box, as there was no night shift, but Astrop, being open day and night had to rely on the generosity of the engine drivers, if they were standing, awaiting the road ahead. The GWR engines used Welsh steam coal and this was not very good for domestic use, as it really needed a good draught to keep it going. However, we were fortunate in getting Great Central engines, returning light and they used really good quality, hard coal, so this was very handy, when they stopped at the box, the firemen obliging with a goodly amount, some of which ended up elsewhere.

I was now working seven days a week, a week day shift at KS and two weeks of twelve hour shifts at Astrop, I was only getting a Sunday/Monday week-end when coming off the night shift on Sunday morning and doing the KS box week next.

During my time with the perway, I had purchased an auto-cycle, an old Rudge, which served me well, until I decided to become a '*motor-cycle mechanic'* and left off a circlip from the gudgeon pin, which scored the cylinder barrel badly. Of course this happened mid-way between Aynho and Deddington, I was able to freewheel down the hill to Aynho station, but it was jolly hard work pedalling and pushing back to Deddington. So back to the pedal cycle again, but not for long, a Dr Newman, at the surgery, just across the road, from No. 1 Chapel Square, had a nice Douglas Vespa scooter for sale, which I bought and at about the same time Aubrey purchased a Lambretta scooter, which was really a better machine and looking back, I would have preferred one too.

When working at the Astrop box, which stood in isolation across a couple of fields, we left our motor-cycles at the nearby mill and walked the short distance to the

box. One very cold, dark, winters morning, as I approached the very steep, Deddington hill, I hit a patch of black ice, my Vespa tipped on to its side and sitting firm, together we skidded on the ice to the bottom of the hill. On any other motor cycle, I would probably have been badly injured. On the 4th January 1958, I was returning from Astrop, after a night shift, breaking down at Adderbury, about three miles from Deddington, I pushed the Vespa as far as Twyford seed mill, about a quarter of one mile and left it there. As I approached the mill, I stopped for a breather, looking up towards the East, I saw a bright light in the sky, followed by a long, grey, smoky streak. Being in my uniform, I started the long walk to Deddington, but I had only walked a few yards, when a police car pulled up and asked me if I would like a lift, which I gratefully accepted. I explained to the officers what had happened and they kindly dropped me off right outside No. 1. Turning on the radio, I just caught the news "the USSR Sputnik 1 disintegrates, as it re-enters the earth's atmosphere", so when I stopped for that breather near Twyford mill, I had witnessed a historic event, probably not seen by too many other people at that time of day. On another occasion, I left my Vespa at the mill and tried out a BSA 500 Gold star motor cycle, which belonged to a young signalman, Derek Bond, who had recently filled a vacancy at Astrop box. As we were on twelve hour shifts, Derek said "give my 500 a try, you will be relieving me at six o'clock this evening, so I won't be going anywhere". Reluctantly, I said I would and when I got to the mill, I could barely get the 500 off the stand. Getting astride, I gave it a kick start , dropped it in to first gear and off to Deddington, the power was amazing, against my little Vespa. When I got on to the main road at Twyford, I opened up and would easily have got caught for speeding, had the cops been around. When I got home, I wheeled it inside the front passage way and had to lean it against the wall, as I could not pull it up on its stand. Returning in the evening, I lost my hat as I passed through Adderbury, I kept going, not daring to risk a stop and relieved, when I got to the mill. "Thanks Derek, lovely bike mate, bit too big for me though". I didn't tell him about the hat, or my inability to get his bike on its stand.

Radios were not officially allowed in signal boxes, but they were an extra little comfort at quieter times of the day or night and we had one at Astrop, secreted away in the back of our provisions locker. Harry Edwards, the signalman at Banbury South box, was a Manchester man and on the 6th February 1958, I was able to relate to him the Munich air disaster, which killed seven of Manchester United's superb soccer team (the Busby Babes). Normally Harry was regarded as a fairly grumpy bloke, but this night, our secret radio had made Harry a saddened,

yet, a more friendly man, he kept ringing on the inter-box phone for the latest on the disaster. The news spread very quickly and signalmen from all the area boxes were in conversation on the general phone line.

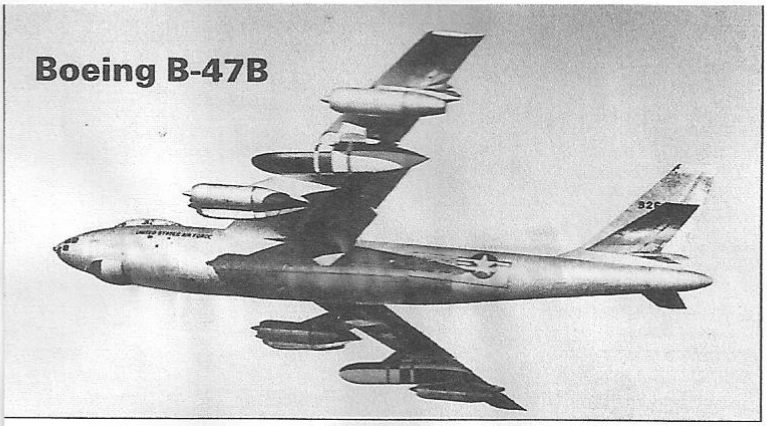
Some of the signalmen that I worked with or had contact with over the years:- George Probert, my trainer at Kings Sutton. Stan Brown, Eddie Lines, Derek Bond, Young Carpenter, A Welshman called Butty, all at Astrop. Ken Garrett, Len Churchill, Monty Stevens, Charlie Brice at Aynho Jct. Aubrey, Bill Clements, Sammy Calvert and Albert Taylor at Aynho station box, Jack Nash and Freddie Atwell at Somerton and others. Chris Timms, Lou Foreman, and a few others were relief signalmen. In addition to these names, I got to know many train drivers and firemen, who would come to the box, to sign the register, if they were brought to a stand for more than a few minutes, especially at holiday week-ends, when holiday specials were many and Banbury could not handle them immediately. Freight trains were kept to a minimum and moved to later times.

There were many characters and happenings during my days in the signal box, really a separate book would probably be the best way to tell all, but I will think about that when this one is finished.

Chapter 27 - A Jet crashes on the line

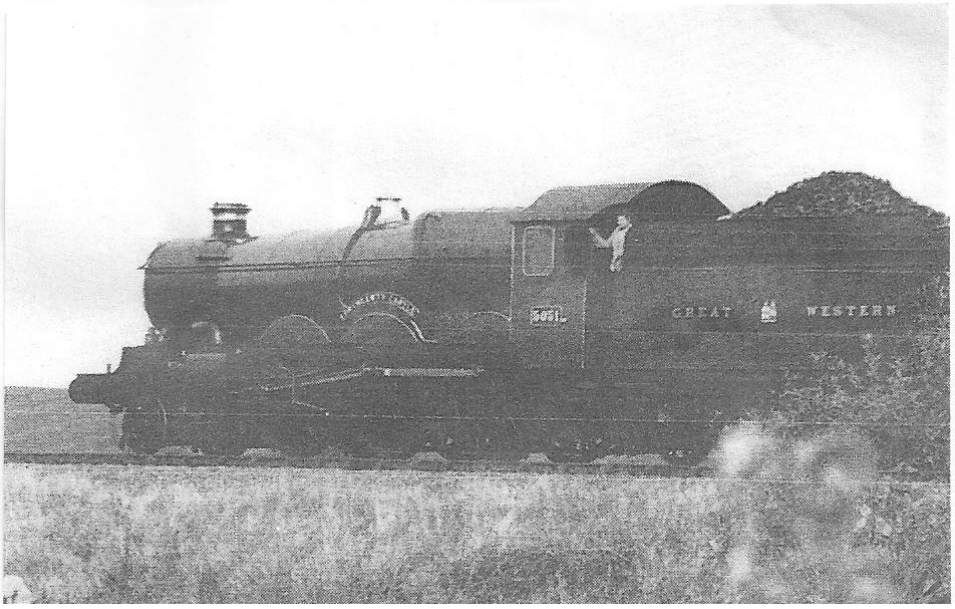
On Thursday 2nd July 1953, two US Air force B 47 Strato-jet bombers flew from Fairford base (Gloucestershire) to Upper Heyford base (Oxfordshire), about five miles from Deddington . These were the first swept wing bombers to be produced in large numbers for the US Air Force, weighing some sixty tons, with six jet engines, placed under the wings and two liquid-fuel rocket motors in the fuselage, to assist take-off performance, a combat radius of 800 miles and a speed in excess of 600mph. The first of these planes overshot the runway and got bogged in the field ahead, with little damage and no injuries to the crew of three. However, the crew of the second one, misjudged the landing and attempted to take off again, unable to gain height, so nearly crashing into Heyford village, heading for a disastrous crash into North Aston village, but now almost touching the ground, the port-side wing hit a sturdy oak tree and in doing so, twisted the plane completely around, the undercarriage gouging two deep ruts into the soft ground of the field as it careered on a downward slope toward the railway line. At this point the railway line was in a cutting, some ten feet deep and the plane plunged into it, smashing to pieces on impact and catching on fire. I am not sure how I found out about the crash, but I quickly made off on my old Rudge auto-cycle in the direction of the black smoke. Dumping my bike close to the river near Heyford, I ran across the field to the scene of the crash. A big coloured US military policeman saw me and challenged me to stop, which I did and told him that I was part of the railway gang. I got down the embankment and reported to the local ganger, (Ted Coombes) who quickly put me to work, with the other gang members, who had already arrived. The track was buckled, sleepers on fire, the ditch alongside was full of jet fuel. The Americans were quickly on the scene with heavy lifting gear and a fire tender. There were four men on board, three crew and an aircraft fitter, who had hitched a lift from Fairford, his tools were scattered on the track. The crew members had gone into the embankment and had to be dug out, I shall never forget the smell of their burned bodies as they were lifted out and put into body bags. The little express, that left Banbury for Oxford each day, was standing just short of the scene, as luck would have it, the driver had seen the crash from a safe distance and was and was able to stop in time, it could have been even worse, had he not seen the plane. I didn't actually see the train leave, but I assume that it would have been reversed to the nearest set of cross-over points, enabling the train to return to Banbury. Because it was the middle of summer and the clocks were advanced one hour, we were able to work in daylight. The Americans laid on

Boeing B 47 Stratojet
(no pictures of the actual crash permitted)



The first genuine production Stratojet, this was first flown on 26 April 1951. Oddly, it was not equipped with ejection seats. It differed from earlier Stratojets in having a braced nose cone and squared-off vertical tail tip. It introduced a shortened bomb bay and underwing auxiliary fuel tanks. Most had six 5,800-lb thrust General Electric J47-GE-23s. 399 were built.

Stopped in time (a more serious disaster avoided)



BR 12300/41

BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSION

JAH/EMH

J. R. HAMMOND
District Engineer

Telephone 22361
Ext. 262

Our Reference 108/723.S.

DISTRICT ENGINEER'S
OFFICE
WESTERN REGION
WOLVERHAMPTON

9th July 1953

Mr G Harris
Lengthman
Kings Sutton

Dear Sir,

Plane crash – Heyford Length

I wish to thank you for your efforts, in assisting Ganger Coombes and his men, to restore the permanent way to allow the passage of trains to resume.

Yours truly,

J. R. Hammond

District Engineer.

plenty of refreshments and they did their part, getting the bulkier parts of the plane clear of the track. The local police were very helpful, getting a message to my sister at Deddington, to tell her where I was and that I would be rather late home. By now help had arrived from other gangs and we got the track back together, sufficient for trains to pass over at reduced speed. The Americans had portable floodlights and kept tight security around the scene, keeping locals at a distance and confiscating any film from cameras that were seen to have been used to photograph the crash scene. There was plenty of loose debris to be picked up and the larger sections and engines of the plane, which had been lifted clear of the track, I guess the USAF men worked on through the night. We had done our job and I left in the failing light to locate my auto-cycler and made for home. The smell of the burnt crew and the jet fuel, stayed with me through the night and I had plenty to tell the gang, when reporting for work the following morning. A few days later I received a letter of commendation from the Chief Engineer, as all the other men who were at the crash scene would have too. I still have this letter.

Upper Heyford saw many changes over the years, with many different types of aircraft stationed there. Prior to the second-world war, there was usually an air show for Empire Day. I remember the old Vickers Vimy planes, the old Handley Page bombers, locally known as Hayracks. In the early part of the war, Aubrey and I would crawl in the grass, right up to the very edge of the runway and as the Avro Ansons, Airspeed Oxfords and other planes took off, we could clearly see the rivets on the wings, as they roared overhead. We watched as a German, daylight raider, dropped bombs and disappeared behind the clouds. Aircrew were trained at Upper Heyford and a few came to grief in the Handley Page Hampden, the Vickers Wellington and the slow old Whitworth Whitney. In July 1952, the giant US bombers, B36Bs, with six piston engines, mounted on the rear of the wing and four jet engines, mounted in pairs on the extreme front of the wing, these planes were so large, there was a small track inside the fuselage for the rear gunners to travel on a small trolley to and from their position. Many more planes till closure.

Chapter 28 - I become a married man

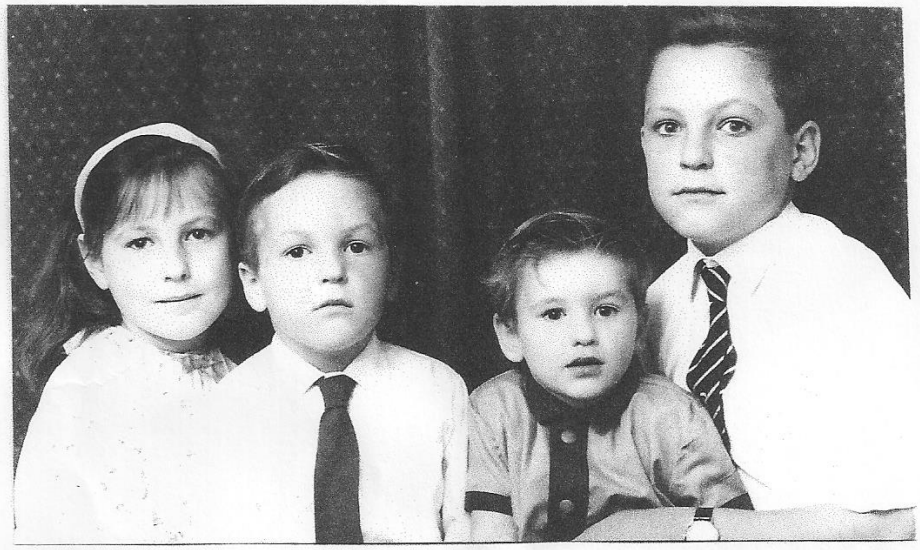
It was now 1954 and I had completed my perway classes at Wolverhampton and was still with Lou Perry. The Chief Engineer, Mr Hammond, came up to Kings Sutton in his special coach and when I say special, it certainly was, fitted out with polished desk, leather armchair and couch, wine cabinet, plush carpet and glass windows at the rear, which gave a clear view of the track. The coach was shunted into the station yard, I climbed aboard, shaking the outstretched hand of Mr Hammond. "Take a seat Harris" said the engineer, "I wish to personally congratulate you on achieving a pass in both the A and B sections of the Permanent Way classes and I have here two signed certificates for you", he didn't offer me any amber liquid, mean old sod. "Now Harris, I would really like you to move up to my offices at Wolverhampton and become a junior engineer, this would involve quite a bit of travel over the GWR, Wolverhampton division." This came as quite a surprise, but I knew in my mind that I would not accept there and then. "Thank you Sir, that is a nice offer, but as I am about to get married, I would like to discuss it with my wife to be". He said "Congratulation, by all means take time to think it over and get in touch when you have decided". Shaking hands, I stepped down from the coach and walked up to the signal box to have a cuppa with the signalman, I watched as he got the 'line clear' for the engineers coach and watched it disappear around the curve towards Aynho Jct. At this point in time, I had no idea, that it would not be too long before I would be a signalman at this very box.

Pauline and I had now known each other for six years, including my two years National Service. I was travelling to Southend on a regular basis and Pauline had come up to Deddington on a couple of occasions too. We had got engaged and discussed getting married with her family, who were all happy to hear of our decision. So on the third of April 1954, we were married at the Earls Hall Baptist Church, Hobblythick Lane, Southend, Mr Butcher, the resident minister at the church, officiated. Aubrey, having declined, Horace was my Best Man and he travelled down from Clifton with his girl-friend Maureen, Aubrey and Agnes for the day. As previously written, sister Winnie had been badly scalded and was unable to travel, so dad didn't attend either, which was so sad, not having any relatives present. The family bought us a lovely Royal Doulton dinner set, grapevine pattern, with square plates, unfortunately some of the dishes were broken when it arrived in Australia and not replaced, but we still have the rest.

Bridesmaids

with Pauline

Daphne, Pearl, June.



Rosalyn, Adrian, Kevin, Trevor.

From left to right: Grandma Lander, Daphne, June, Best Man Horace, Groom, Bride, Father, Sister Pearl, Mother (Mamie), Grandma Potter (Nanna).

The wedding cars arrived and the organist played “Here comes the Bride” Pauline looking radiant in her beautiful wedding gown, made of white satin, with trailing lace veil and train, carrying a bouquet of twenty four red roses, mixed with her favourite flower, Lily of the Valley, as she walked down the aisle on her dad’s arm, followed by her bridesmaids, sister Pearl and friends, June Grays and Daphne Brown, all dressed in long turquoise gowns and carrying bouquets of pink roses. All the dresses were expertly made by Auntie Nell. The church was filled to capacity and Rev Butcher conducted a memorable wedding service. I must admit, that my knees felt a little weak as I stood with Horace in front of all those people. We then made our way to the reception, which was held at Winton Hall hotel, overlooking the sea-front at Westcliffe. Not having addressed so many people in my life, I nervously said a few words and Horace had some difficulty too, anyway, we did our best and it was a lovely reception, with a big two tier cake and a three course meal, followed by music and dancing. Horace created a few laughs at the end, when he said “We will have to push ‘orf’ to catch our train”. Pauline and I were driven off, with the usual clatter of attachment to the rear of the car and showers of confetti. Our honeymoon was booked at Bournemouth, where we met, six years earlier and we caught the 7.30pm train from Waterloo, arriving at Boscombe station quite late, but only a short walk to our hotel.

I had already rented a little cottage at No 1 Chapel Square, Deddington, which was one of a pair, built of stone, reputed to be some 500 years old, the old stones a dull red, the cottages having been burned to the ground in the distant past. The roof was tiled with wooden shingles, replacing the old style straw thatching. There was one very small living room, with an open fireplace, a bay window, overlooking Chapel Square and stairs to one large bedroom, the floor of which resembled a shallow dish, only the dividing wall downstairs preventing it from collapsing. A brick placed under each of the bottom legs of the divan bed, gave it some form of level and a rope around the mattress, firmly tied to the bedhead, prevented it from sliding off. I must admit the bed often slipped off the bricks! The bedroom window also overlooked Chapel Square. The kitchen was placed in a wide passageway, which led from the front door to back garden. I bought an Electric cooker, which I plugged into a point on the wall, there was an almighty bang and the contents of the power point were no more. Mr Middleton (Prof), a friend of ours, a qualified electrician, repaired the damage, installing the proper power point, telling me how lucky I had been, not to have been badly burned and charged me nine pounds, eleven shillings and four pence. There was a large shed near the

back door, which substituted as a bathroom, come laundry, with washstand, tin bath and a Burco boiler to heat the water. The toilet was the most modern part of the whole property, only having recently been added, prior to this, it would have been a trip up to the top a of the small garden, which was shared with the cottage next door, where two brick toilets stood side by side and had been utilised as two small garden sheds. The West wall of No 1 was the adjoining wall of the Methodist Chapel, the East wall abutted No 2. The top boundary of the garden was the chapel hall. An old lady named Mrs Nash, lived in No 2 and was quite happy to let me have the whole of the back garden, where I grew some very nice flowers and vegetables. I made a nice chicken run against the chapel hall wall, keeping up a nice supply of fresh eggs, along with the eggs previously mentioned from the railway embankment. Inside this ancient little cottage, I wallpapered, painted and tidied it up before Pauline was able to see it for the first time, certainly not what she had been used to, but she just loved it and soon made many friends. There was no room for much furniture, just a table and four chairs, two fireside chairs and a sideboard, with a radiogram sitting in the bay window, the mantle shelf held our chiming clock and a few odds and ends. Our plan was to build a little later on, we had already decided on what we wanted, but yet to decide where and when. Our little home was ideally placed, everything was available, the doctor's surgery was opposite, the grocer and the butchers were side by side two doors down, the market square, with many shops, the post office and several public houses, was twenty yards further on. The Oxford city bus and the Midland red bus stops were both in the market place. At least we had running water and electricity, how very modern!! The front garden was just two feet wide and fenced. Our landlord was a Mr Cooper, an Oxford College dean, who lived at a little village called Eynsham, just a few miles away, he was quite impressed to see the transformation of his old acquisition, although I did upset him, quite unintentionally, when I knocked out the dividing wall of the two old toilets, to make one decent sized shed. I had also acquired a half chain of allotment, just off the Clifton road, which was more than adequate to provide our vegetables, often sending a sack of potatoes to Pauline's parents at Southend. As I was still working on the railway, Pauline too was now able to travel at reduced fare and we visited her parents and relatives at Southend on a regular basis. Pauline always loved animals and on one trip to Southend, we purchased a Chow-Chow (pedigree) from a Mrs Gawthorpe who lived at Rochford, near Southend. Pauline named the dog Duke and we brought him home on the train, much to the delight of many passenger en-route. Of course Duke soon grew into a large dog and needed a strong collar and lead, he soon got used to the noise

of my auto-cycle as I came home from work and would bark long before Pauline could hear me. On one occasion, he jumped up to the window, putting his foot through the front of the radio-gram, I never did get it repaired, but it was useable anyway. I had made a small trolley, which I was able to tow behind my bicycle, handy for carrying my tools to the allotment, but it wasn't long before Duke decided that it was handy for him to ride in too, getting a few looks as we rode to my allotment. It all changed when the children came along and he became very jealous, as you will see as I write more. We had yet to get television, that came much later, so we went to the picture theatres on a regular basis, also live theatre, especially at Christmas for Pantomine, often with Aubrey and Agnes, we also cycled a lot and later when we bought our motor scooters, previously mentioned, we were able to go further afield. In the warm summer days, we often spend time swimming in the river at Clifton. I remember one day in particular, it was extremely hot, Pauline was pregnant with our first child (Trevor), looking to the west, over Clifton, the sky was black, Aubrey said"we had better make a move, we are going to cop it", we walked as quickly as possible, helping Pauline along and just as we got to Aubrey's cottage, the lightning and thunder was very close and soon directly overhead, it was a vicious storm and lasted for hours. The rain was like a tropical storm and the whole area was several inches deep in water in minutes.

I was still with Lou Perry and the gang and worked most Sundays, except of course, when Pauline and I visited Southend. But I saw an opportunity to move on and applied for the job as signalman at Aynho station, but Aubrey having been at the station for a few years also applied and got the job, he had spent many hours in the signal box and already knew the job quite well, but the job at Kings Sutton box came up soon after and I started my six weeks training there on 15th November 1954, much to the disappointment of Mr Hammond, the Engineer, as he had hoped that I would have taken the job at Wolverhampton.

Pauline's sister Pearl and boyfriend, Derrick, came up by train from Southend to stay for the weekend in June, not many younger people had motor cars and were quite used to using public transport, but one exception, was Pauline's brides maid, June, who's boyfriend Ken, did have a small car and came up from Essex to visit us, enabling us to show them around the district. Pauline's father and brother John, cycled the one hundred miles from Southend to Deddington on a couple of occasions, a creditable feat for non-professional cyclists.

On 14th August 1954, I had to leave to start my final two weeks Army Emergency Reserve training at Liss in Hampshire, Pauline's parents, Ivor and John, had arrived the previous day to stay with her for a few days, whilst I was away, I think Mrs Nash, next door was able to provide her spare bedroom, so all very close and easy. My two weeks away, seemed to take forever and I was glad to get home again, Pauline having had a week alone as her family had gone home, but Aubrey and Agnes and my sister Winnie had been able to visit her, plus other friends that she had made in the short time that we had lived at No 1. Looking back, it must have been quite a wrench for Pauline, to leave her comfortable home in Southend, her work, her friends and the ease of the city life, with buses passing the end of her road, every few minutes and several picture theatres within walking distance. We did consider taking up residence in her grandmother's little bungalow, with six acres of land in Maylands, near Latchford in Essex, with the possibility of getting a job with the nearby railway, but my inner self told me to stay put, probably a little inconsiderate on my part, we shall never know. The first Christmas came and among all the things that I had in my presents, was a smoking pipe. We visited Doll and her husband Bert on Christmas Eve, Bert was a pipe smoker and filled up my pipe with his favourite tobacco. Never having smoked a pipe, I took down a few lungs full of this awful stuff and it was not long before I became violently sick and bilious, Pauline and I made for home and even when I laid in our bed, I could not escape this awful feeling, needless to say that the pipe met an unceremonious end and I vowed never to smoke again, although I did try a few cigarettes from time to time, but I quickly gave up the habit and I know that it was the right decision. Pauline too, smoked for a little longer than me, but eventually gave it away, but she suffers badly with a smokers cough, caused by passive smoking, breathing in other people's smoke during her 22 years working in an enclosed environment, in Australia. 1954 seems to have passed very quickly and we are now moving into 1955. Pauline has discovered that she is pregnant, expecting to give birth sometime in August, so that was a pleasant start to the New Year. During my spare time, I had been looking after our doctor's (Dr Woolaston) rather large garden, only a short walk from No 1. The doctor having all the necessary tools and a good quality lawn mower, I found the garden so easy to manage and the extra cash very acceptable. The last two weeks in February were bitterly cold, with heavy snow and severe frost, making it quite treacherous to get to and from work. I can tell you, it was not very nice, climbing the signal posts to change the lamps either, the warmth of the signal box fire could not have been more welcome. It was now my turn to call the perway men to clear the snow from my points and

crossings and for fog duty, when required. Dr Woolaston moved during this very cold snap, to a very nice country residence at Bloxham, about four miles from Deddington, I was unable to do any gardening for him whilst the cold snap continued, but the spring was not that far away and I did help with the garden for a while, I am not sure when I stopped. Mrs Woolaston had a little black poodle, which didn't take to me at all, nipping my ankles when I got too near. I note that 5cwt of coal was twenty seven shillings and eight pence and petrol about four shillings a gallon (hand pumped.) I also note that we visited Auntie Alice at Clifton, to watch her new TV!!!, ours was still yet to come. On April 16th, Aubrey and Agnes married and I was able to get a day special leave to be Aubrey's Best Man. After the reception, Aubrey and Agnes left for their honeymoon at Brighton. In May, my old Rudge getting very tired, I bought a Douglas Vespa scooter from a Dr. Newbourne for seventy pounds. The scooter was in very nice condition, but I have to admit, that I didn't look after it as well as I should have and I paid the price for repairs. For the first time, I was able to take dad for an occasional ride, which he thoroughly enjoyed, although he tended to lean the wrong way on corners, but he soon got used to it. Our American friends, John and Jane, who lived on the other side of the chapel, left for America, John being in the air-force and had served his time in UK. They had a very young child and being unable to take all the baby goods with them, they kindly gave them to Pauline, nearly all new and unused and of good quality, saved us a pretty penny. Sad to see them go, they had become very good friends. Also in May, Aubrey bought his Lambretta scooter, so now the four of us could go out and about together, the pedal cycles taking a long earned rest, but not retired! So many happenings, I only wish that I had kept my diaries filled with more information.

Chapter 29 - The Stork has been alerted

Pauline's pregnancy was progressing rapidly and we were now fitting in a few visits to the Horton General Hospital at Banbury for Xrays and other procedures, as well as regular visits to the doctor's surgery, just across the road. From midnight 28th May till Tuesday the 14th June 1955, the Locomotive drivers and firemen went on strike; the rails of the track soon turned a rusty brown, with the lack of trains. There was little to do in the signal box, except trim the signal lamps as usual and spend most of the time at home, keeping the radio on, in case of a sudden end to the strike. June 12th, Eileen celebrated her 21st Birthday. In July Pauline's family joined us for a few days and her dad cycled to the signal box with a cooked lunch for me. On 23rd July, Horace and Maureen were married at the C of E church at Deddington, followed by a reception in Priory hall and then leaving for Paignton for their honeymoon.

On Saturday the 13th August, I would normally have been at home, but as things always have a twist, I was asked to open the Kings Sutton box at 11pm as the perway gang would be working on the track through the night and single line working would be necessary. As a precaution, Pauline being very near to having our first child, I arranged for her to stay with Mrs Garrett (Edith) overnight. When I got home at 9 am on Sunday morning, a note on the front door, from Edith, to tell me that Pauline had gone into labour and was taken to the Neithrop Maternity Hospital at 6 am. I rang the hospital immediately, being told that she was still in labour and I would be able to visit her between 7 & 8 pm in the evening, (very strict rules then). I got in touch with George Probert and he agreed to change shifts with me, so that I would be able to be at home for visiting times. There was no change in Pauline during my first visit and I left for home, ringing the hospital again at 10.30 pm, still no change, poor girl was suffering and I was getting worried, ringing several more times. I visited her again the next evening (15th), still in labour, how much longer can they keep her in this state? In those days, it was not customary for the husband to stay during birth, so I had to leave at the end of visiting. I rang the hospital at 5 am, just prior to leaving for work, to be told that Pauline had given birth to a girl at 9.10pm. I told Edith and my sister Winnie, on my way to work and phoned Pauline's Mum when I got home. All my phone calls had to be made from the local phone box, which, luckily was just across the road. What a surprise was awaiting me, when I visited Pauline in the evening of the 16th. Taking her a nice bouquet of flowers and congratulating her on the birth of our

daughter, she said, “What do you mean a daughter? We have a son, 8lbs 14ozs”. “You are joking,” I replied, I rang last night and the sister told me quite clearly that you had had a six pound baby girl”. The duty nurse took me to the nursery where our baby son was sleeping in a crib, a band on his little arm, clearly said, ‘Baby Harris, Male.’ Apparently there was a little girl born at the same time and the relieving sister that I had spoken to assumed that I was the father of that child. All sorted, I now had to relate to everyone that I had told, of the mistake and that we had decided to call our little boy, Trevor George. It had been a long painful time for Pauline, some 36 hours in labour, I wonder if they considered a caesarean operation? Pauline and baby Trevor were released from the Neithrop on Sunday 28th August 1955 at 2.30 pm and we taxied back to No 1. In the evening, Aubrey & Agnes, along with our friends Pat and Dick called in to help us ’wet the baby’s head’. Sister Winnie and Albert, my dad, Edith were among the many visitors over the next few days and our small room could barely cope with the flowers and gifts. It was not until after all the aforesaid had happened that I learned that there was a bit of a comedy prior to Pauline getting to hospital. Pauline had had her case packed for the happy event for a number of days, but when she went to stay overnight with Edith, the case was still at No 1 and I had locked the door, leaving Pauline with no key (silly me!). I don’t know where from, but Edith managed to get a ladder and climbed up to our bedroom window, fortunately not locked, got into the bedroom, grabbed the case and handed it to the taxi driver (Fred Davis), who then sped off with Pauline to the Neithrop. Edith’s husband Ken was on night shift too, at Aynho Jct signal box, so she could not accompany Pauline as she too had two small boys, who thankfully slept on while the drama unfolded.

On 2nd September, I took Pauline and Trevor to London on an early train, where we met with family, who in turn took them on to Southend, for the life of me I cannot remember who met us, the only reference in my diary is that after seeing Pauline and Trevor off, I caught the Cambrian Coast express back to Banbury, as I had to be back in time to go to work at 2 pm, a very tight schedule.

It could not have been busier at work, just when I really needed to be with Pauline and Trevor, but I knew that they were in good hands and getting all the love and attention from Pauline’s family and friends. The pressure stayed on at work for the next two weeks, as the perway works continued, making it necessary for the Kings Sutton box to be open 24 hours daily until completion. However, I was able to change shifts on Friday 16th September, working till 2 pm. With haste I was able to

get home quickly, get changed, pack my bag and get to Banbury in time to catch the 4 pm express (The Zulu)* to Paddington, then on to Southend. It was great to see Pauline and little Trevor, it had been two whole weeks without them, but I had phoned Pauline every day, I shall never forget the number – Southend 45081. There were not that many private phones, but being as Pauline's mum was a nurse, she was considered under the essential services and was connected. This turned out to be an extremely busy week-end. On Saturday the 17th September 1955, Pauline's sister Pearl and brother-in-law to be, Derrick, were married and on Sunday, the next day, Trevor was dedicated at Earls Hall, Baptist church. Some of the congregation believing Pauline and Pearl as the same person, being a little surprised, that the wedding took place on the Saturday and the dedication the following day. An acceptable mistake, one would say, as the family were the same and Pearl and Derrick had gone on their honey-moon. After the dedication service, Pauline and I and baby Trevor caught the 6.10 pm train from Paddington for home. Whilst Pauline had been staying in Southend she and her Mum went out to Liddiards, a big store, selling prams and a host of other baby requirements.

Nicely packed and labelled, the railway goods department, picked up the pram and it was despatched to their distribution depot at St Pancras in London, eight days later, the pram was delivered to No 1, somewhat a little lop-sided, obviously having been under a heavy load along the line. On the 22nd Aubrey passed his driving test on his Lambretta and the next day, Pauline had her first ride on my Vespa. We still made regular visits to see Pauline's family and on one occasion we took along our friends Pat and Dick to see the Southend Illuminations, along the sea-front. Thousands of people flocked to Southend in those days, as the lights were quite spectacular, competing on a smaller scale with the world famous Blackpool Illuminations.

We travelled down to Southend for Christmas 1956, Trevor too young to remember this one. We took with us a big plump rooster for Christmas day and Sid had bought a turkey for Boxing Day, when the whole family was able to be at Peacehaven. It ended all too quickly and we caught the early train from Southend on Tuesday the 27th, as I had to be at work at midday, catching the 9.10 am express from Paddington to Banbury and then a taxi to Deddington, little Trevor was certainly getting some early travel into his life.

* *'The Zulu' I believe this express was so named because it's inaugural run was at the same time as the fight with the Zulus was raging in South Africa*

So now another year begins, 1956. As New Year's-day, not being a public holiday in England, so it was a normal day at work. Tragically two well-known ladies in Deddington, Mrs Walker and her daughter were killed in a road accident, a sad start to the New Year. I applied to fill a vacancy at Astrop signal box and took up the position on 6th February, but still taking a turn at Kings Sutton box, every third week. I managed to sell my old Auto-cycle for fifteen pounds and put the money in the Post Office savings bank, keeping in mind that we were looking for a plot of land on which to build. Mrs Nash, our next door neighbour, died on 28th February, she had been hospitalised for some time and did not return home, the house now vacant. I asked Mr Cooper if it would be possible for us to transfer from No 1, he asked me if I would like to buy it, I told him that we planned to build a new home, to which he replied, "this would be better than anything you could build" and it was some time before he agreed to let us move into No 2. I spent a lot of time and money, getting it decorated and furnished. Now we have a home with two large bedrooms, a large living room, with thick carpet and kitchen, moving in on 14th October. It was an easy move, just a matter of carrying from one building to the next. No 1 remained empty. Going back to March, we visited the Ideal Home Exhibition at London Olympia, also taking in Regents Park zoo. In April Horace and Maureen were blessed with a daughter and in July Aubrey and Agnes were blessed with a daughter too.

Chapter 30 - A holiday

Because I was working such long hours, I made up my mind that I would take Pauline on a nice holiday when my annual leave came up in July. I wrote off to an address in the Channel Islands, 4 Elizabeth Place, St Hellier, Jersey, getting an almost immediate reply. I sent a deposit and applied for a free travel pass from work, also booking a berth on the ship for 19th July. My annual leave commenced on 15th July and I made arrangements with my sister Winnie to feed the chickens and collect the eggs. The next day we travelled to Southend and with a few days to spare before our trip to Jersey, we took in a swim at Leigh swimming pool and a family day trip to Clacton on sea, where I remember the cold wind coming from across the North sea, on an other-wise , bright sunny day. Pauline's mum took some leave and was only too pleased to care for Trevor whilst we were away. I am not sure where we kennelled the dog, probably with Mrs Gawthorp.

We caught the 9 pm boat train from Waterloo (London) to Southampton and boarded the boat at 11-45pm. Although dark, we sat on deck for quite a time, eventually turning in to our berth in the early hours. We had breakfast in the cafeteria as we neared the Islands, our first port of call being St Peter Port, Guernsey, where passengers and freight were off-loaded and there would have been passengers joining, no doubt, for Jersey, a further thirty five kilometres, the southern-most of the islands, where we arrived at 9.20 am. A taxi dropped us off outside 4 Elizabeth Pl., only a short walk from the harbour really, but nice to be pampered. Our room was on the third floor of the guest house and overlooked the lovely gardens of Elizabeth Square. St Hellier stands on the East corner of the beautiful St Aubin's Bay, the beach of golden sand, is some one kilometre wide at low tide, but one must beware of the incoming tide, as being so flat, the water comes in at quite a fast pace. On the first afternoon we walked to the Windmill and to the town hall, where I acquired a Jersey driving licence (I still have it|, as the next morning I hired Vespa motor scooter, this came with a small lock-up garage and the total fee was just twenty five shillings for four days. We toured the island, taking in as much as possible, including the German hospital that had been built by slave labour, during the occupation of world war two. We met a couple on the beach at St Aubin, I forget their nationality, but the man knew all

About the hospital, I think he was somehow involved, telling us of the cruelty to the prisoners working there and how many of them ended up in the concrete as

they became too weak to work and were quickly replaced by an unlimited supply of these unfortunate souls. The hospital was never finished and never used .We went to see Dianna Dors in "Yield to the night" at the Odeon Cinema and we saw 3D for the first time at the Little Theatre, being supplied with pinz-nez (cardboard spectacles), with one red lense and one green one, with which to watch, there were screams from the audience as a rat on a string, appeared to be heading into them, low flying planes seemingly, flying into the theatre, yet it has taken so long to have been adopted. We also saw the French 'Follies Begere' and had our first taste of 'rock-n-roll' with a young man singing Blue Suede Shoes, accompanied by a drummer, who we now know as 'Ugly Dave Grey', the little theatre suddenly becoming alive, with young people dancing in the aisles and between the seats. After returning the Vespa, we shopped and spent a lot of time on the beach as the weather was very hot and the sea water was warm as the tide came across the hot sands. We had a really good time, with just one day of rain, tanned and refreshed, we boarded our boat at 8 am and made for home, passing through customs, with nothing to declare, just carrying the specified amounts of cigarettes and perfume, arriving in Southend at 9 pm. We gave the cigarettes to Pauline's dad and the perfume to her mum, with little gifts for Trevor, who was now a little over eleven months old and when Pauline's mum let go of him, he took his first steps towards us. It was still very warm and we were able to go for a swim at Westcliffe pool and a paddle on the beach before returning home to Deddington on Sunday 29th July. A horror week to follow for me, with dental treatment, 3 teeth filled on Monday, unable to go to work on Wednesday and Thursday due to an upset stomach, 3 more teeth filled on Friday, back to work 10 pm Saturday and yet another tooth removed the following Wednesday. Trevor was one year old on the 15th August, but we did not celebrate until the week-end, when Pauline's parents and brothers came to stay and although we had not yet moved into No 2, we were able to utilise the bedrooms, which made things much easier, but as written earlier, we did move into No 2 on Oct 14th.. Unfortunately, Trevor received a nasty bite on his arm, when he tried to take a bone from Duke and Dr Wollaston came over and treated the wound, which soon healed. Duke seemed to be getting jealous of Trevor and perhaps, on reflection it was time to have found the poor dog another home, which we had to eventually, as this story will tell.

Chapter 31 - It's all happening

Christmas 1956 has been and gone and we move into the New Year, still working long shifts, including week-ends and managing to get a little bit of wall-papering done for Winnie and Albert at No 2 The Paddocks. Being in mid-winter, there was not much to do in the garden, other than wood sawing with Aubrey, when we could fit it in. Dad had been ill just before Christmas, but seemed to be back to health again and he visited often as it was only a ten minute walk from The Paddocks and of course, now that we had the extra bedroom, he was able to stay over if he wished to do so. I took him out on my Vespa from time to time and I also cut his hair when needed. I note that we attended the Pantomime at the New Theatre, Oxford, starring the great comedian, Charlie Chester on 2nd February. We had attended many shows at Oxford and Coventry over the years, especially the Christmas pantomimes, plus a few at the Odeon and Palace theatres at Southend. I had more than my share of trouble with the Vespa, mainly because of my inattention and got to work by various means, depending on which box I was operating at the time, including the early morning 'paper train', the driver kindly dropping me off at the Astrop signal box and also the workman's bus that conveyed the workers for the Northern Aluminium factory, which picked up passengers at King's Sutton, just a short walk to the box, but I managed to get to work on time. George Probert, who you will recall was my trainer, when I first started in the signal box, was found unconscious on the side of the road, his motor-cycle nearby, I visited him in the Horton General hospital at Banbury, he could not remember anything of his accident and made a full recovery, as there were no witnesses, the mystery remains.

We were now ready to begin our plans to build a home of our own and remembering what Jack Rymill, the perway ganger had said about Mr Herman, the builder having a few blocks of land on the Banbury Lane at King's Sutton, we made a phone call to him and made an appointment to visit him at his yard. Taking along a copy of the plans of a house that Pauline's sister and her husband had built at Rochford, we met Mr Herman (Jack), who said he did have the said blocks and they were seventy five pounds each, providing that he would build the houses thereon. He looked at the plans and said that he would be able build it very economically, in local stone, rather than bricks, because he had a large quantity of stone available. He came up with an estimate of seventeen hundred and seventy pounds, a price too good to refuse and we accepted on the proviso

that we could get finance and we would get on to that without delay. We now returned to Deddington and called into the offices of Stockton Sons & Fortescue, where we saw Mr Phillips (who now in fact ran the business). He advised us to buy the land, as we had savings to more than cover the asking price, this would then become the deposit on any loan. The Cheltenam & Gloucester Building Society was suggested by Mr Phillips as a reputable financial institution and he filled out the application forms for us and sent them off, within a week we had got approval and the wheels were now set in motion for Mr Herman to go ahead and build our very own detached bungalow. At this time there was only one other residence on this side of the road and this was a lovely two story building, belonging to Roy and Yvonne Hines, Roy being a metallurgist with the Northern Aluminium Company at Banbury. A couple of blocks further down, was the bus depot and workshop, belonging to Canning's Coaches, with a vacant block alongside, where Mr and Mrs Canning (Terry & Winnie) proposed to build their new home. On the opposite side of the road were two cottages and a small paddock with farm buildings. A little further on, there was another small farm, belonging to a Mr Plank, who also operated a petrol bowser. It was an ideal spot, with the railway station and signal box just five minutes around the corner and Astrop signal box just a short cycle ride in the opposite direction. The post office, butchers, bakery, grocers and school were only minutes away, with the Midland Red bus service passing the front gate, not that we used this service often, with the railway station so near and the ability to take the pram free of charge and fare concession for Pauline and myself.

Life seemed to be going at a crazy pace, so much to and from, all going well with the building plans, just the final approval from Brackley Rural Council (Northamptonshire), which came on 20th June 1957, so now all can be finalised for Mr Herman to get started, I have no record of the exact date, but we made many visits during the construction period and sometimes thought the progress a little slow, but as Mr Herman said, when I voiced my concerns, " you may not always see any work being done on site, but I can assure you that plenty is going on at the yard, the windows and doors are all being made, along with the cupboards and tops for the kitchen". Not having any building experience, it would not have occurred to me about these things, the builder did the lot in those days, sadly these genuine craftsmen have given way cheaper massed produced stuff.

Meanwhile other things were happening, some good, some bad. Mickey Monaghan, my cousin's son, had fatally stabbed his mate, George Harper, whilst at

play, a dreadful shock to the community. Aubrey's sister Jean and Norman Jenner were married. Aubrey's Gran broke her hip. Sadly, in February of 1958,Aubrey's brother, Peter, sustained an injury to his fore head, when working on the farm and this resulted in his death from tetanus, too much time had passed until it was discovered and Peter passed into a coma and died, a fine, strong, family man, who might well have survived with today's medical advances.

Trevor was now finding his feet, making his way up to the strawberry patch, where Pauline found him, happily eating the strawberries, red and green. On another occasion, he had managed to get into the henhouse, having fun, cracking the eggs with his little wooden hammer, the rooster wasn't too happy, but stayed clear of the hammer. One morning, quite early we could hear the alarm clock ringing rather strangely from under the bed, we noticed too that Trevor had climbed out his cot and was asleep next to our bed, the clock having been, cleverly placed in the chamber pot, hence the change of tone, but at least I wasn't late for work! In fact I was in *'pissing'* good time! I made Trevor a little wheelbarrow, providing a sandpit, but it wasn't too long before my veggie patch became a little un-veggie. We took him to a Pantomime at Coventry Theatre, his concentration soon turned, he found more interest in climbing over the back of the seats, he did this on the bus too, he was a strong little lad, so difficult to hold, a couple of things that I may mention, although not happening until he was a little older; Aubrey and I took him to the Farnborough Air Show, a crowd of one hundred thousand, during the show, when our attention was so easily distracted with the flying and static displays, Aubrey said "where's Trevor?", I said "My god, where on earth will we find him in this crowd?" With no success we walked back to the car, parked among a thousand others, next to the car, with a broad smile on his face, TREVOR!!, how on earth had one so young found his way? We were mightily relieved and praised him for his common-sense. Pauline & I, with baby Rosalyn were on the London Underground, on our way to Southend. We were on the Circle line, the train being quite crowded, as the doors opened at one on the stations en-route, Trevor got off with the crowd and before I could get to the doors, they closed and we were on our way again. We got off at the next stop, made our way over the footbridge to the opposite side, hopped on the next train, which luckily our only minutes apart, and made it back to the previous station, over the footbridge, panicking like you know what, Trevor standing with the station master, not even shedding a tear, hardly aware of the serious situation that could have unfolded.

I told Mr Cooper, that we were planning to build and he said “why not buy No 2, much better than anything you could build?” I thanked him for the offer, knowing in my mind that the old building was well past its use by date. He then asked if we would like to move back into No 1 for the short time until our move to Kings Sutton, hoping that he would be able to sell No 2, so with little effort we moved and all the extra things that we had accumulated since the original move, we stacked in the shed. But No 2 stayed empty and at some time after we left, Mr Franklin the builder, bought both No 1 and 2, totally gutting them and turning them into a single, modern home, a huge improvement, I don’t think Mr Cooper would have gained too much of a profit on the sale. Pauline having visited the doctor, discovered that she is pregnant, our next little arrival should be early April next year (58), the stork having to be alerted once again. So it seems that we have made the right decision to go ahead with our planned new home. I had been buying some good tools in readiness for my future needs, also prefabricating the trellis fence and gate which will divide the back garden from the front. I acquired some good second hand railway sleepers from work and got them cut into posts for the dividing fence between us and the adjoining block. Dry stone walls made up the front and rear boundaries. I had plans for a small shed and sent off to a Mail Order company for sheets of corrugated iron for the roof, which duly arrived and I already had a second-hand window. I made a small bench and bought a vice from Mr Beardsley, I had never had the luxury of a shed before, let alone a bench and vice, wow!! So that was something to look forward to when moving to Kings Sutton next year.

In September we attended the Farnborough Air Show, with Aubrey and Agnes, a fine day with excellent flying weather. I took my annual leave in October, keeping up the visits to Mr Phillips and Mr Herman, the excitement mounting. Pauline attended the Neithrop Hospital for her first check-up. We took in a few picture shows and visited our Oxford relatives and finally Christmas at Southend. All go!!

Chapter 32 - Two busy years!

Another year has been and gone and we are about to embark on a very busy schedule in 1958. Pauline was now preparing for the birth of our second child, with more check-ups and visits to the doctor. Mr Herman was making good progress with our new home and I detoured via the site most days, on my way to or from work. Pauline and I were now looking and selecting furniture and other effects to have ready for our move to Kings Sutton. We had decided to call our new home 'St Aubin', a name that we fell in love with when on holiday in the Channel Islands. The connection of gas and electricity supply had to be arranged and I ordered wrought iron gates, one small entrance gate and two large gates for the entrance to the garage, which will come later. I am not sure how it came about, but Mr Curtis at the local shop had a very large back garden, with fruit trees and an old pig sty, which was very overgrown, the garden extended right down to the south corner of our block and I decided to take it on, as Mr Curtis had more than enough to do with his busy shop and the flower gardens. The garden had obviously been very productive for previous owners, the soil rich and dark. It would be too far for me to keep up my Deddington plot, so this came at the very right time. Aubrey and I spent a few visits to the garden, clearing the weeds and pruning as necessary and giving the whole plot a good deep digging, then getting all kinds of seeds and potatoes planted in readiness for our move to Kings Sutton in just a few weeks.

Pauline entered the Neithrop hospital at 8-40pm on the 25th March and the next day her mother, father and brother Ivor motored down for an overnight stay, leaving for home the next day, taking Trevor, who was now two years and seven months old, with them, which made things easier for me, with work and visits to Pauline in the evenings. At 4-30pm on the 5th April 1958, we were blessed with a little girl of 8lbs & 1/2oz, Rosalyn Pearl. My work mates obliged, allowing me to change shifts to suit my needs. Rosalyn was born on the last day of the tax year, so a visit to the tax office to change my tax assessment number, which was backdated for the whole year, so my pay on the 15th April was a bumper seven hundred and fifty pounds, fifteen shillings, tax forty five pounds and thirteen shillings. Under the Pay-as-you-earn system in UK at that time, if one earned over the amount allowed by your assessment number, you paid higher tax, the next week you may earn less, so you would get a refund, so at the end of the tax year, all paid up, no silly tax forms to fill in. This also applied when one married, we married on 3rd April, so another big refund for the backdated number.

Pauline and baby Rosalyn left hospital on the 16th April and we travelled down to Southend for the week-end, Trevor thrilled to see us and his new baby sister, lots of visitors and gifts from the family. I note that we went to Shoeburyness by car, I am not sure who's car it was, anyway we ended up at the beach there, so the weather must have been good. On returning home, Mr Herman informed us that we could move into our new home on Monday 28th April and would we like to meet with him there, along with Mr Phillips, to receive the key and finalise the paper work. At last, the move was on and I got in touch with Mr Deely, the local haulier at Deddington, to arrange the transport of our effects. On Saturday, Mr Deely made one trip with the garden tools, bench, wheelbarrow etc, and on the official hand-over day, he did two more trips with the furniture and pram, Pauline riding passenger with baby Rosalyn and I with the last load and Trevor who was now approaching three years of age. I sold the chickens to Aubrey for three pounds, with the intention of buying more when we were established at St Aubin, but I never got around to it and didn't keep chickens again until 1973. I had arranged to take the day off for the move, as my annual leave was still a couple of weeks away and I also had the following day off, just enough time to get things reasonably well sorted. I had bought a carpet for the lounge and this was delivered, along with the three piece suite, enabling me to get that room in order very quickly. Our bedroom, with a nice bay window looking out to a small farm paddock and Kings Sutton village beyond, did not take too long either, as there was only the double bed to assemble and the cot for Rosalyn, we had ordered and paid for a bedroom suite, but as some damage had occurred whilst it was in storage, we had to wait until the 9th of May for delivery, only a minor hiccup. Pauline's parents had bought two single beds, which had arrived some time earlier and I painted them blue, standing them side by side in the second bedroom, Trevor opting for the one nearest the window. We now had the luxury of a bathroom, with toilet, the floor being of Marley tiles, black with a white fleck. The entrance hall was wide and long, with Marley tiles of ocean blue with white fleck, later used by Pauline and Yvonne next door for a small hairdressing salon.

The kitchen/diner had a glass partition to separate the kitchen from the dining area. A small Rayburn stove in the corner, heated the water very efficiently, with the storage tank housed in the airing cupboard alongside. The dinette and lounge windows overlooked the back garden, with the Baptist church grounds and allotments beyond. The kitchen door opened to the Southern end of the house

and looked directly up to the magnificent church spire and houses standing above us on rising ground. Our front door, made in Mr Herman's workshops, was in six inch bubble-glassed squares, full length, with a small side window to match. Pauline had made the curtains for each room and I had the job to hang them, but I can't recall how, probably stretch wires? Each time we went to Banbury, we were buying all sorts of little things that we needed for the home and the children. My annual leave gave me some much needed time to get on with building the shed, erecting the trellis and gate, also the side fence. As Mr Curtis's garden was on a higher elevation than our block, I made some sturdy steps of railway sleepers, with a small gate at the bottom, now I had easy access from our garden to his. I made an opening in the front wall for the entrance gate and a larger opening on the lower side for the double gates. I planned the front garden, with a straight path from the front gate to the gate at the entrance to the rear garden and a curved path leading off to the front door, with a garden bed on either side. A small retaining wall was necessary along the south side of the straight path, because of sharp rise in the ground. The soil was easy to dig and I found quite a few wire-worms present, so a treatment of Aldrin (now a banned chemical) soon got rid of them. I planted potatoes and carrots, strange you may think for a front garden, but the potatoes cleaned the ground and the carrots attracted any last wire-worms that had not taken the Aldrin. Another good digging, after clearing the crops, allowing the winter to do its work, leaving a nice tilth for spring sowing of the grass seed and planting rose bushes in the borders. For the record, Bolton beat Manchester United in the FA Cup at Wembley two goals to nil, on May 3rd, long before Sir Alex Ferguson took over as manager. Aubrey and I were still sharing the heavy digging on the main veggie plots, so much easier with two.

My 27th birthday was on Derby day, and the race was won by Hard Ridden, ridden by C Smirk. On the 11th June, Trevor had his polio injection. On Saturday the 14th June, I observed from the signal box window at Astrop, a figure walking very fast on the down track towards the signal box. It was Mr Curtis, hurrying up the steps, out of breath, "Mr Harris, I have just taken Pauline and Trevor to the hospital at Banbury, Duke has bitten Trevor in the face, necessitating stitches and I thought it only right to come and tell you", I thanked him for his concern and gave him a glass

of water, he then said “Pauline, Trevor and baby Rosalyn are sitting in the car by the bridge, so I must get back to them”. Thanking him once again, he made off. There were no direct telephone lines to or from the public from the signal boxes, which made communication somewhat difficult, other than from the station masters office, so more often easier to go to the signal box direct. When I arrived home after my shift, Pauline related to me what had happened to Trevor, who was now sleeping, apparently she had been for a walk with Trevor and Rosalyn and when returning home, Trevor had opened the back door, stepping on Duke, receiving a nasty laceration on the face. This was one bite too many and time to get rid of the dog. I did get in touch with Mrs Gawthorpe, the lady who sold us Duke, hoping she may take him back, but to no avail and we then got in touch with the RSPCA, who came and took Duke from us. On 15th June, I took Trevor back to the hospital to have his stitches removed, I remember well, that brave little boy, sitting on a table whilst the nurse removed the stitches. The next day Pauline’s parents and brother came to stay for a few days, a great comfort to Pauline, after the nasty shock. So life went on, my dad stayed with us on several occasions, giving Winnie a break. Dad enjoyed helping in the garden and being with his grandchildren. We made many trips to Southend and Pauline’s parents and relatives came along to visit us often. Aubrey and I continued to work together, with the gardening, etc, we also took rose growing more seriously and bought the best varieties from the more well-known nurseries. We also grew strawberries and raspberries in addition to the normal vegetable range, more than adequate for our needs. I was able to concrete the paths that I had laid out in the front garden and around the house, lay the lawns and set out the borders. These were exciting years, so peaceful, the country having recovered from the war, with everyone enjoying full employment, holidays and leisure hours. Married women were able to stay home and look after the children, meet with other mothers, husbands bringing home enough money to look after the family.

Not so exciting though, when Trevor almost caused a tragedy, my fault really for putting the temptation there. To draw up the fire in the lounge, I had a large piece of stiff cardboard to place over the opening, which created an instant draught, to get the fire going, which it did very successfully. I then placed the cardboard behind the cabinet in the recess by the chimney breast. Pauline had placed Rosalyn’s cot near the front of the fire, Trevor walked into the kitchen with a worried look on his face, indicating that something was wrong, my god! it was lucky that he did. He had seen me put the cardboard in front of the fire before and

he had done exactly that and of course the draught held it there until the flames burnt through, dropping onto the hearth and carpet and catching the frill surround of Rosalyn's cot. Had I not been home on that day, Pauline may have been hanging out the washing or some other distraction, the consequences could have been disastrous, fortunately no ill effects for baby Rosalyn, who I quickly removed to the bedroom, slight repair necessary to her cot surround and the carpet was left with a couple of burn marks as a constant reminder of the tragedy that so nearly happened. One day Pauline told me that the toilet was blocked and I lifted the inspection cover in the garden, there was nothing there, so it was obviously in the toilet pan and our neighbour across the Road Vic Lutman, came over and put his hand down the toilet (yuck!!) pulling out a broken jar, which a certain little boy named Trevor, had kindly dropped in, Vic could easily have cut his hand, but thankfully he didn't and the toilet was up and running again.

I am not quite sure exactly when, but I too so nearly caused a major blaze. It was usual for me to fill the kettle and plug it in to the power point ready for the morning, when on day shift. On the older style electric kettles, the plug would pop out when the water boiled, BUT! Inadvertently, I had left the kettle tight against the wall of the airing cupboard and switched it on, when the kettle boiled the plug stayed put and the kettle boiled dry and became red hot and started to burn the wall. It was usual to leave the dog in the kitchen, and he was our saviour, I got out of bed to find out why he was whining, the kitchen was filling with smoke, the kettle was bright red, the cable burning and the wall of the airing cupboard smouldering, I switched off the kettle, soaked the tea-cloth and doused the airing cupboard wall, opened up the back door and the dining window, all this without awakening the household, I shall never know why I switched the kettle on, just one of those things. The damage was: one new kettle and a bit of paint.

Wallpaper was still very much in vogue and I soon had all the rooms papered, quite an easy job on the new and even walls, no ladders required, just a kitchen chair and the dining table to measure, cut and paste. Fred Turner at work had a spare TV in his attic, which he said I could have if I collected it, which I did. George Sunderland, signalman at the Bletchington box, had a spare aerial, which he let me have for three pounds and sent it down on the train to Kings Sutton. I can't remember putting the aerial on the roof, I rather think that I placed it in the space above the ceilings. The picture was very poor and a violet colour, no doubt it could have been fixed up, but we tolerated it for quite a while until we bought a brand

new one, (Nov 59) a GE (General Electric) with chrome legs and sliding doors to cover the screen, when not in use, a huge improvement, with the aerial now attached to the chimney on the roof. Record players were very much the order of the day, most homes having large collections of records. The radio shows, such as The Archers, Mrs Dales Diary, Lost in Space, The Billy Cotton Band Show, In Town Tonight, Much Binding in the Marsh, ITMA, Desert Island Discs. Family Favourites, Workers Playtime, The Navy Lark and many others, enabling one to get on with other things whilst listening. Not so with TV. Premium Bonds had been introduces in UK and I bought a few for ourselves and Trevor, they are perpetual and go into every draw throughout the year, but after fifty seven years, only one prize of fifty pounds, has come our way and that was for Trevor in 2010, so, although we still have the bonds and always the possibility of a windfall, one wonders how much those pounds would have made in a long term deposit account instead?

So we move toward Christmas once again and now we have two little ones to take along to Southend on the train, Trevor absorbing everything en route, keeping him on reins, for safety, so busy, especially on the London Underground, or as it is commonly known 'The Tube'. As I mentioned earlier, we did have an incident with Trevor on the underground, but he was much older then. Christmas Day was on a Thursday, so taking in the week-end and an extra day special leave, we were able to have a nice break, returning home on the 29th. New Year's day (1959) came in with a vengeance, according to my diary, we had gale force winds, rain, hail, snow and severe frost at night. On the 3rd, the Russians landed their rocket on the moon, upsetting the Americans, who wanted to be first. On the 19th Aubrey collided with our District Nurse's car at Co-op corner, Kings Sutton, incurring cuts and bruises, damage to his Lambretta and the nurse's car, I think Nurse Dawson treated Aubrey on the spot and then brought him back to St Aubin, where after a rest, we collected his Lambretta, straightened it up so that he was able to ride it home, getting it properly repaired later. We had booked a holiday at Torquay by telephone that day for 29th August, so probably Aubrey had that on his mind and lost his concentration.

May the 25th dad entered the Horton General Hospital, to have a gangrenous toe removed, he was hospitalised for one week, so being on night shift I was able to visit him each afternoon. Unfortunately for dad, the gangrene continued to travel up his leg, necessitating an amputation on 24th June and a longer stay in hospital. On returning home, Winnie and Albert set up dad's bed in their sitting room, it was

so sad to see him, so white, with tears in his eyes, those rotten trenches of the First World War had played their part in dad's demise and sadly he passed away on 24th August, aged 75 years and seven months. Being on annual leave, I was able to be with him when he died and in the evening I made my way to Oxford to tell his sisters (Ada and Mary) of the sad event. The next day I went to Banbury to register dad's death and call in on sister Eva to tell her the bad news too and in turn she got in touch with sister Eileen. Winnie made the funeral arrangements. In the evening, Pauline and I, with Trevor and Rosalyn caught the late train to Southend, as we had arranged with Pauline's mother to care for Rosalyn whilst we were on holiday at Torquay. Travelling back for dad's funeral on Thursday the 28th. Dad being buried in the East end of the Deddington cemetery alongside mother's grave, with brother Jim's grave not far away, later of course, Winnie, Albert and Doll were laid to rest there too, all graves unmarked.

On Saturday 29th, Pauline, Trevor and I, caught the 10-50am train from Banbury to Torquay, arriving there at 3-40pm, walking the short distance from the station to our hotel. I note that we went to the pictures in the evening at the Regal cinema, to watch 'Carry On Teacher' (Ted Ray) and 'White Trap'. On Sunday we went swimming at Torre Sands and took a mystery tour in the evening. On Monday we did a little shopping and later we met Aubrey, Agnes and Linda off the train at 3-15pm. On Wednesday we spent time at Paignton Zoo and Goodrington Sands. Another visit to the cinema, to see 'Pork Chop Hill' and 'Crash Dive', after which we made a short visit to the local aquarium. We spent more time on the beach at Babbacombe, where Trevor made friends with another small boy, taking over his small inflatable canoe, not wanting to leave when it was time to head back to the hotel for dinner. Friday was another all-day beach. We did lots of swimming, tea trays and ice creams, with other assorted drinks and confectionery all available at the beach shop. But on Saturday it all came to an end when we caught the 9-10am Kingswear train (running one hour late) home, suntanned, a little beach sand in our luggage and a little lad called Trevor who wanted to go to the beach, but he soon settled on the train with Linda and they both had a sleep on the way.

A mate called Les Williams, had completed six weeks training in the Kings Sutton and Astrop boxes and should have reported to Head Office in Birmingham to be taken on the rules and regulations. Les came to the box about two weeks later and said that he did not go to Birmingham, but instead went to the British Motor Corporation (Morris's) works at Cowley and got a job on the Mini Minor line,

saying what a great job it was and the money was more for a forty hour week than what we were earning for all the hours operating the signal box. “Why don’t you get a job there too” Les said. I being a little cautious, said “ I will think about it” although in the back of my mind, I thought about the extra money for less hours. So I caught the train to Cowley and made my way to see Mr Gurden, the employment officer at Morris’s and said I would like a job on the Mine line. “what is your job at the moment” he asked, “I am a signalman on the GWR I replied”.to this he said “I can’t keep taking men from the railway, I will soon be having to answer to them, sorry”. So I then mad my way across the road to the Pressed Steel Company and observed the fork lift trucks, buzzing around like a swarm of bees, loading and unloading a constant flow of trucks, I could also hear the noise of the presses, as they stamped out hundreds of panels and parts for the assembly of car bodies of all descriptions, the noise was horrendous, I could also see the sparks and flashes of the dozens of welders and the haze of smoke that emitted from the buildings, sorry not for me, no way! a far cry from the comfort of the signal box. A few days later, Les called by and asked how I fared at Cowley and I told him what Mr Gurden had said and about my observance at the gates of the Pressed Steel Company. “Go back again” said Les “and this time say to Mr Gurden, that he told you to come back in a couple of weeks, he won’t remember you, as he would see hundreds over the course of a few weeks”. So I did go back and said to Mr Gurden “ you told me to come back in a couple of weeks and you would have a job for me”. He didn’t ask any questions, other than my name, gave me a form to fill in and then to report to the medical room, which I did.

Chapter 33 - A Decade of Cars

Had I done the right or wrong thing? I would lose my free travel, have to swap my uniform for blue overalls and travel twenty eight miles (by road, shorter by train) each day to the factory? Pauline didn't seem to mind, so I reluctantly gave the mandatory one week's notice to Arthur Gardener, the station master, who was visibly upset, losing another member of his staff, times were changing rapidly.

So, on Monday the 21st September 1959, I made my way to the station at Kings Sutton, bought a return ticket and caught the 5-55am Banbury to Cowley, (workman's special), picking up more workers at each station en-route, the train being very full on arrival at Cowley, the passengers hurriedly disembarked and made a bee-line for Bob's café, within the confines of the factory, for a mug of tea and food of varying kinds, then dispersing to Morris's and Pressed Steel to their respective workplaces. I might add at this point, that Morris's were churning out six thousand cars a week,(all models), Morris, Austin, MG, Riley, Wolseley, of many marks and variations, including CKD (complete knock-down), complete cars which were packed unassembled, unpainted and exported to many parts of the world, thereby the company not incurring any import tax, the cars being assembled by the countries concerned.

Having passed my medical, Mr Gurden told me to report to a Mr Charlie Willett, the foreman of the assembly section of the Mini Minor, in the brand new, purpose built, E Block. A brief meeting with Mr Willett, who then referred me to Ron Cann, supervisor of the final section of the Mini assembly line and the hospital line. Bob Hollis was the senior supervisor, and he covered the whole of the assembly line (several sections, each section having its own supervisor). Bob was immediately responsible to Mr. Willett. The car inspection staff was a separate body and their line of command was similar, with on-line and off-line inspectors. The Stores too had its own foreman and storemen, a very busy section, supplying the whole of E Block, the fork-lift operators were very skilled at stacking the pallets, probably twenty or more high. (there was the odd mishap). The Paint shop was an enclosed area, behind large glassed walls, for obvious reasons, large exhaust fans keeping the fumes down to a minimum. It was one of the first in UK to be fitted with automatic sprayers (a German idea, I believe),

So I meet Ron, a nicer chap would be hard to find, “come with me George, the first job is to the clothing store, for overalls and then to the tool store for a tool kit, all tools are supplied and are clearly marked ‘NO’ (Nuffield Organisation), so look after them, they will be your responsibility, files, drills and certain other expendables will be replaced when worn and presented for exchange. You may need other tools to perform certain jobs if you are moved to another section, which will be supplied on request. All parts relevant to your job are placed in your work section, any damaged parts must be labelled, with defect stated and taken to the stores for a replacement. All equipment on the assembly line is air operated, for safety reasons. You will observe that there are many empty spaces on the assembly line, but when in full operation, these spaces will be filled and the production will gradually increase to a maximum of twenty five Minis per hour, day shift and later night shift too.” With all that said Ron introduced me to my opposite number on the nearside of the line, who was sitting, awaiting the next mini to present itself. “Robin”, said Ron, “perhaps you would like to show George the ropes, he will be your opposite number on the door trimmings, front and rear name badges, radiator surround and grill, etc, plenty of time, you won’t have another car along for some time by the look of it, still plenty of teething problems, both here and Longbridge (Birmingham), where the bodies are made.” I got on well with Robin from the word go, he was friendly and very helpful and he too was relatively new to the job. He explained about piece-work and ‘time and motion’ saying that when the ‘time setter’ comes along, to take your time and try for that extra farthing a job or more, later you may be able to take on a few extra jobs to boost your rate. For each operation, there was a marked space, and this was the space in which to complete your car and moving back to your next one, you could not encroach on the next space, otherwise you would be in that persons way, bearing in mind that the assembly line is moving all the time, unless stopped for a breakdown. But at this point in time the cars are only coming along the line spasmodically and the more experienced workers would move well back and get their job done and then go off to the rest room, as they could more or less judge the time of their next car by looking at the overhead line, where cars from the paint shop would drop onto the beginning of the assembly line. The line was barely moving, so Robin had plenty of time to show me what was required. On the windscreen was an order form (every car already sold), the form would have the buyers name, De-luxe or Standard, Morris, Austin, Riley, MG or Wolseley. The Riley, MG and Wolseley cars were not trimmed on the assembly line, they were complete in every other way and then sent over to a special bay in C Block, where

men with higher skills fitted them out with more luxurious trim, seats, dashes, radios, heater/cooler etc, making them very much more expensive than the Austin and Morris types, which were very basic by comparison. I had not worked with air operated tools before and I soon managed to break the first drill bit. A large single piece of trimmed Masonite formed the inside of the door, with a small insert to cover the ends (which were constantly falling out), a long painted cardboard strip, lined the door pocket, with one screw in the middle (basic), a chrome strip finished off the edge of the door pocket, with a small screw at each end. There was a template for both bonnet and boot lid, to drill holes for the affixation of the name badges, two large holes for the Morris badge and three small holes for the Austin badge on the bonnet, these were held on with speed clips and the boot badges were pressed into small nylon inserts, on the odd occasion, a car would leave the assembly line with Austin on the back and Morris on the front, much to the annoyance of the foreman, because this meant that the holes would have to be welded up and the whole bonnet or boot lid repainted, extra work for the hospital lines. Badges on the other models were fitted in the special bay in C Block. A long piece of formed aluminium was used for the kicking strip, held by four small screws. So basically that was my job and I quickly hated it when the line was full and gradually speeded up, thinking to myself, "please god, have I got to do this until I'm 65?" On one occasion, towards the end of the day, Robin and I fitted a car with De-luxe trim instead of Standard, we only knew about this the next day, when we had to front up to Mr Willett for a reprimand and a stern 'ticking off'! BUT! there were many mistakes on the assembly line, and these were rectified on a small line, called 'the hospital line' and Ron used to come around every day asking if anyone would like to work overtime on that line to help get the backlog moved. I never missed the opportunity to make extra money and invariably volunteered and because of this, Ron took me off the main line eventually and I ended up on the hospital line permanently. Just getting back to the main line, there were a few pranks and deliberate hold ups. The section where I worked was raised, to allow work beneath the car. This is where the hydro-lastic suspension was filled with fluid and pumped up to the correct level. A chap called Martin Conway operated this part, he too ending up on the hospital line. However, getting back to the pranks, it was not unusual for your tool box to disappear off the moving line, being placed further ahead to end up in a mess at the end of the line, or a squirt of fluid in the screw section of your box, only discovered when reaching down for screws. Martin had a few different colours of paint, with which to mark certain parts under the car, these colours often ending up on the heels of ones shoes, he could easily

reach, and a paint brush doesn't really make any noticeable noise. Each car had four slave brackets attached to the underside of the body, which were used to hold the car bodies in the hoist when they left the paint shop, having to be removed before leaving the assembly line and returned to the paint shop to be used over and over again, this job was performed beneath the car and it was not unusual, especially on Friday afternoon for one of these to be '*accidently'* left on the line, getting jammed in the mechanism as it passed under the line, this would cause a major hold up, the plant maintenance crew having to be called., the line workers clocking off and away for an early start to the week-end. There were about two more sections on the assembly line after ours, the seats were the last things fitted and the cars would then be started and driven off the end of the line by a specialist test crew, onto rollers, where the cars could be tested as if being driven on the road at high speed, then onto a further small test pit, where the underside was inspected, the head lights adjusted and then onto the hospital line, where the inspection cards would be read by this line crew (me being one of these later) the defects fixed and the cars then despatched to, perhaps the welding bay, the tuning and electrical bay or the little hospital paint line. Eventually when all was finished the cars would go to the water leaks section, where the cars would be driven through a flooded trough at a reasonable speed and then through a car wash, the leaks, if any, would be recorded and fixed. When the cars were satisfactorily passed by inspection, they would be driven to C Block for final view, coated in wax and then sent to the transport yard for delivery to the respective customers. Large overseas orders would be loaded on special trains for delivery to the sea ports. One such delivery, of 400 cars, to Hans Osterman in Belgium was refused on arrival as they were considered far from good quality (water leaks, ill-fitting doors, etc) and returned to Cowley. These cars all being left hand drive, were put through C Block, thoroughly cleaned, defects rectified and exported to Canada. To be perfectly honest, although the Mini was a smashing little car to drive, the trim and interior finish was far from perfect, except those that were trimmed in the special bay in C Block. I had now moved down to the hospital line and the boredom of repetition on the main line was soon forgotten as I was now involved in all aspects of the assembly of the little Mini.(Windscreens, back screens, door windows and mechanisms, seats, bumpers and many other jobs) The electrical, Mechanical (tuning), welding and paint jobs were all separate and one could easily have caused strike action by attempting to encroach on anyone else's job, *who pulls the string?* so to speak. On the hospital line, we still worked in pairs, with one man at the end of the line, (Les Hemmings) pressing the stop/start

button and also directing the drivers where to take each car (Tuning, paint, etc or direct to C Block if no further work was necessary). We had a touch-up painter from the paint shop, (Botley, Derrick or Albert Kettle), two 'tinnies' (panel beaters) John Farmer (ex-Rolls Royce) & Henri Prusis (Latvian) and an auto electrician (Mick). There were three pairs of body builders, Martin Conway & Dick Jerome, Chris Symonds & Ken Smith(Stirling), Amy O'Neil & Myself. Amy was a well-educated Irishman, but a womaniser and drinker, never-the-less a good worker. Pat Woods, another body builder, worked off the line in a small area opposite, to deal with cars with too many defects, which would hold up the flow of the line. The hospital line worked over-time four evenings per week and all day Saturdays and in the early days of production some Sunday work was necessary, especially when we got returns, as in the case of Hans Osterman (big job). Of course when the second shift was introduced, all these jobs had to be duplicated and on Saturdays the two teams would work together.

There were pranks and accidents and Amy and I were nearly sacked for overstaying our time in the rest room, we got carried away doing the Daily Telegraph crossword puzzle and our car reached the end of the hospital line with no defects attended to, so it was returned to the beginning of the line, but this time around it was out of sequence and fell to another crew, who ignored it and moved to the next car, so the car got to the end of the line once again without the defects being fixed. Supervisor Ron was livid and gave us a right ticking off, saying "if I send you down to see Mr Willett, you won't have a job when you leave his office, I will stand the car over in Pat's bay and you can work on it between your other cars until it is finished" Had it been any other supervisor, I feel our time at Morris's would have been short lived. Luckily some cars would probably have only one or two quickly fixed defects, so we soon absorbed the *demon* car. Ron's wife's name was Edna and Chris Symonds, always the joker, aptly called her "Ed-in-a can", much to the amusement of all present. We used contact glue, which came in four litre tins, a hole punched it the top to insert the brush, over a period of time the glue would build up on the top of the tin, as the brush was used, when there was a good build up, we would peel of the thick layer of glue and roll it into a sizable ball, throwing it at unsuspecting mates, on one occasion Martin let rip with one such ball, intending to hit Stirling on the backside as he bent over the bonnet, but at that moment, Mick the auto electrician, popped up from the pit below and copped it smack in the eye, knocking him back, he was fuming and had to go to the medical room for attention, returning with a patch over his injured eye, I don't

know what he told the medical staff, but there was nothing more said. Another silly prank, we used a substance called Prestick, similar to plasticine, but a little heavier. Rolling it into marble sized balls and using a short piece of rubber hose, we would hide in the pit and aim it at anyone above. One day I caught Derrick the touch-up painter on the side of the face, he went beserk, pulling out his pocket knife and saying “who-ever threw that, is going to get the knife”, I kept my head down, he hadn’t a clue from where it came and when he was further up the line, I quietly climbed out of the far end of the pit and melted back into the car I was working on. Some-time later, when we were on the night shift, Amy came into work quite inebriated and having done a job inside the car, he stumbled as he stepped out, lurching forward, holding his screwdriver and his arm smashed through the glass panel of the dividing wall, I grabbed him, his arm was deeply gashed down to the muscle, white at first, then gushing with blood. “Amy” I said, “grab your arm with your other hand and close the gash as tight as you can”, then he was quickly taken to the Medical room and ultimately to the hospital, where he received a huge amount of stitches and sent home. I had now lost my opposite number for several weeks and had to work in with the other pairs until he returned. These days Amy would have been breath tested and have lost his job, with no compensation, I shall never know how he got away with it, probably charmed the nurse, knowing Amy. He spent a lot of time at the USAF base at Upper Heyford, where he acquired large quantities of duty free alcohol, supplying a few willing buyers. A lot of parts used to be stolen from work, and many got caught and paid the penalty. An organised group were caught taking a large number of tyres, using the works delivery truck to get them out of the premises, whilst another very well organised group were diverting complete minis from CKD to various outlets, but were caught when an informant was put in. Some of these men were well paid supervisors, who must have been well aware of the risks. There was large scale theft of minor parts, but even these brought a few dismissals and the loss of well-paid employment, some of the offenders didn’t have the intelligence to realise that the parts would be eventually missed and an investigation would be implemented, with observers planted.

The Red Cross blood donor service had a room at the works and Amy and I decided to give it a go, a break from the line, a free beer or tea/coffee and an hour rest, I felt a little faint after the first go, but decided to carry on four times a year, thinking nothing of it from then on, continuing in Australia years later to tot up a

hundred pints, only giving up after being administered a medication for polymyalgia, which apparently was not compatible with blood donations.

I only used the train to travel to and from for a short while, as several lads were now driving their vehicles and glad to take passengers at one pound per week, easily paying for the running of the vehicle, especially when using a twelve seater. When I got my first car in 1962, I took up the idea too, carrying four passengers and, although twenty eight miles each way, much more convenient than the train, especially on Saturdays or the occasional Sunday, when the workman's special did not run, also I was able to park at the local deli, near E Block entrance, only two minutes from hooter to shop, enabling a quick get-away, before the masses of locals on their pedal cycles, filled the road from kerb to kerb. One morning, as we came off the night shift, just a short distance from the works, down Cowley road, we ran into a pea-souper fog, the fog was sitting on the bonnet. Alongside the passenger side of the road was a deep trench, where pipe-laying was taking place, suddenly there were shouts and swearing as several cyclists plunged headlong into it. I slowly followed the car in front, couldn't see a darned thing, the car ahead turned and stopped, I heard his door slam and could make out the outlines of buildings, the driver came to my door and I wound down the window, "you won't get far mate, you are in my driveway", with a few curses, some delay and the fog lifting, I was able to get on track again I did have one mishap, involving running off the road and into the hedge, small damage and no injuries. I was about to pass a Rowntree's Chocolate delivery van on a nice piece of straight road, no oncoming traffic, I was about half way along this van, when the driver pulled out without warning and I was forced to take avoiding action and pulled over onto the grass verge (probably sixty miles per hour), the grass was wet and I slid into the hedge. A small sports car pulled up to see if all was well and sped off, a short time later he returned to say that he had caught up with the offender and taken his details, reporting this to the police, who in turn stopped the van at Brackley, Northants. This '*Good Samaritan'* turned out to be a Dr P.E. Potter *(*my wife's maiden name) and because of his good deed, I was able to claim against his insurance. Another stroke of luck, my passengers hopped on the works bus to Kings Sutton, which stopped when the driver realised who we were. I picked up the car the next evening and back to normal again. For a short time before I bought my car, I travelled with a chap called Derek Marchington, he had a Meschersmit three wheeler, two-seat, one behind the other, it could really get a speed up, but it was strange sitting so low, when pulling up alongside a bus or truck, one' s head was

about level with the top of that vehicle's tyres. One morning we were almost home, a little cutting just a short distance from Kings Sutton, Derek nodded off, the little car ran up the embankment of the cutting, turning just short of the hedge at the top and returning to the road, Derek calmly gets a grip of the steering and continues without a word, I tell you, I was very close to having to change my under-pants, a bigger vehicle would have overturned, I am pretty sure! Les Williams, who got me to Morris's in the first place and his mate Les Holland, both worked in the paint shop and were always having a laugh about something or somebody. Les would say "when I fill in my tax form, what shall I put down as my occupation?" "Scratcher" said the other Les, I shall put Tag-ragger on mine" Of course these were paint-shop terms for their particular jobs on the paint line. There was a poor old chap in the village, his name escapes me, he had a very runny eye, exuding a yellowish secretion, Les Williams would say, "I wonder if he would let me dip my bread in his eye?", "no" said the other Les, "I've already asked him". So it went on.

Because the water test crew were somewhat isolated, they took turns in having an occasional day off, clocking for each other. One day Phil O'Leary was down at Oxford station, to catch the train, when, who should appear on the platform, was none other than Mr Willett himself, there to despatch a parcel, with a bit of the *Irish*, Phil dodged behind a loaded platform barrow and got away with it. One of Phil's mates on the water test gang, was a young man called Eric, he was a strong giant of a lad, and worked on Saturdays at the local abattoir near Bicester, telling us that he always drunk a glass of the warm blood as they slaughtered the cattle, no-one doubted what he said. I stayed on the Minis for eight years and during this time the one millionth of these small cars had been built. To commemorate this milestone, a limited edition of 500 cars were built, mauve in colour, with white interior trim, enough vehicles for each distributor to be supplied with one car, the *1-000-000* badge being displayed on the boot lid. During the eight years, there had been many modifications, the little car had proved a winner and on the race track as the Mini Cooper S. Being discontinued at Oxford and moved to Longbridge, the Mini line was ripped up and a new line laid down for the production of the Austin America (exclusively for the American market). The Mini line crew were distributed to other parts of factory and I ended in the 'labour pool', being assigned to a variety of tasks. I had now been teamed up with a Les Parsons, a single man from Chipping Norton who had spent most of his working life on a country estate as a game-keeper/general handy-man, but had joined the

car industry at Cowley, where his brother was already a supervisor in C Block, ending up in the pool. At this point in time, sales of BMC cars had slumped badly and many hundreds were driven out to Oakley airstrip (alongside Leatherslade Farm, where the great train-robbers holed up) for storage. Les and I, with several others, spent a time ferrying cars of all descriptions out to Oakley, being transported back to the factory by a twelve seater van. For a time we were stationed out at Oakley, a portable building supplied for our office and mess room, from where we patrolled the masses of parked cars, to observe flat tyres or damage. These cars were all waxed, but after months of being stationary, mice had managed to get into the head-linings, creating major re-work as well as chewing through wiring looms, creating major problems. Two years passed before this backlog of cars was shifted.A 3 litre Austin was built at Cowley, not extremely popular, but a large powerful car, never-the-less, too powerful for the tyres and rims, the rim spinning in the tyre when taking off too fast. Les and I spent a couple of weeks, removing the wheels and replacing them with tighter fitting tyres. The Morris Minor was nearing the end of its run and had been moved to a short assembly line in the CKD building, Les and I spent a while on this little line and then transferred to C Block on the Final View line, (under a top boss, Roy Wiggins) (next step Supervisor from this line), where we made the final adjustments to whatever type of car came along, clean, collar and tie job, staying here for a whole year, until we had the opportunity to work four nights per week in a specialist section, supervised by Roy Barnes (mouth and trousers). Roy was a tall man, strutted around giving out his orders, wearing wide bottomed trousers, hence the nick-name, but once you got to know his way of working, he turned out to be a top boss. Our main task here, was mainly modifications to already completed and ready-to-go cars, different plug leads, tyres etc. We modified a whole set of black diesel powered Morris Oxfords, which were built as Hong Kong taxis, filling the building with diesel smoke, when the hot-point ignition failed. The very last Wolseley 4/110, (the largest of the Wolseley fleet), that had been stored out at Oakley, came in to be completely stripped down, checked for signs of rust, mice damage, etc and Les and I ending up with this job. When finished, the car was sold to a man in Manchester as a two year old new car.

Ken Smith (Stirling) was the son of a gipsy family and, although now married, with a small family, he told us that he never had a bed as a boy, always sleeping under the gipsy caravan, on a bed of straw, with the dogs. Only of small stature, Stirling was as hard and strong as nails, fearing no-one, but a most like-able chap. Some

lunch times, rather than use the canteen, he would take three or four of us down Cowley road in his car to the Municipal restaurant, where one could buy a really good meal. In the summer on warmer days, a quick dip in the river, just a few minutes from the factory by car and sometimes to the local car wreckers, where Ken was in his element, buying bits and pieces for his old car, telling us that when at home, the kitchen table was his work bench (the gipsy up-bringing!). Pat Woods and Stirling lived near Reading and travelled to work together, Ken getting the 'Stirling' nickname from his speedy driving.

Martin Conway and Dick Jerome were also good friends, Martin living in a flat at Summertown and Dick at Abingdon. Dick was a strong man and when I collected some roofing sheets from his home, he managed to bend my roof rack, when tying the sheets down (whoops!) Martin was pulled over by the cops for speeding and when the policeman asked Martin "where's the fire mate", he replied Sorry I can't tell you, I didn't know there was one". With a caution Martin got a let-off.

Everyone was so helpful back then, I was building a shed at our next address and was looking for some windows, Stan, one of the mini-line inspectors, said "come around to my place, I have just dismantled a shed, to make room for an extension, it was not very old, so I kept the windows, you are quite welcome to have them, if they are suitable to your needs". Just what I was looking for and when I picked them up from Stan's place, I was very impressed with his new extension, especially the brickwork, which Stan had done all by himself. You live and learn and seeing Stan's handy-work, I changed my plans for my shed and incorporated brick walls instead of the iron sheets. A neighbour had hundreds of new bricks and gave then to me for free (more of that later).

There would be a story to tell for each and every-one of my mates. Robin, my opposite number on the main line, it was he who told me of the great beaches and caravan sites in Devon and Cornwall and we joined him at Polzeath, near Padstow, Cornwall, on the first one of our many trips. Robin and his brother had a boat and were fishing in the mouth of the river Camel, supplying us with some very nice mackerel, which we soused in vinegar and enjoyed immensely. Sadly I never met up with Robin again, after leaving the main assembly line.

A group of enterprising lads from the assembly line, formed a consortium to build each other new houses, working at week-ends, holidays and lay-off times. All had to agree to see the project through until the last house was complete, each having

specified skills (bricklaying, carpentry, electrical, etc). A draw would be made as each house was completed, to see which member moved in. Most of these men would have been involved in the building industry prior to working at Morris's no doubt. I am not aware of how many houses were built.

Old Fred from the paint shop, made trips up to London most week-ends, where he had contacts for cheap merchandise, bringing back, razor blades, hair-cream, condoms, Nivea cream, all at a fraction of the retail price. Fred was no fool, he raffled his wages every week, having no trouble selling the tickets and making a nice little profit.

During my years at Cowley, there were many union disputes and walk-outs, including a boycott of the four-hour Friday evening shift, the union asking for four straight ten hour night shifts, this went on for over a year, but eventually the company gave way to four ten hours. Having been fortunate enough to have been selected to work on the hospital line, there was usually plenty of work, even when the main production line was sent home through lack of bodies or parts, but union disputes usually involved everyone, so too did the weather, which created many delays and disruptions. I terminated my employment at Cowley early in 1969 to emigrate to Australia, but after two years returned to UK, only to find that the factory, now British Leyland, was on the slippery slope, with hundreds of the employees in the dole queues, with no hope of me getting my job back, as I had left of my own free will and as Roy said "George, I would be glad to take you back, but that would be after all those that have been laid-off have been given the opportunity to return, could be six weeks, could be months". I now know that most of them never did get their jobs back. E Block, C Block and CKD, all gone and the whole area now a site for small industry.

Chapter 34 - Back to Kings Sutton

In the previous chapter I covered the whole of my ten years in the car-industry, so I can now go back to other things that happened during that time. We were now getting many visits from our friends and relations as we were probably the first young couple to have gone ahead and built a new home of our own in the locality, so they were all coming to have a look, which was very pleasing for Pauline especially, as she had yet to make new friends in Kings Sutton. But once she ventured out with the children, she soon had a nice circle of new friends in the village, June Jakeman, who lived just a short distance along our road was one of the first, Kathleen Cadd, the wife of a railway fireman, who often came to my signal box, was another and gradually there were many others, including Joan Brain, a little Welsh girl, who lived higher up in the village, opposite the school. Joan and her husband Ron had two children, a boy and a girl, Ron was the area rep for one of the oil companies, a well-paid job. Ron and I became good friends and we often visited the Inn-within at Banbury for a few drinks. Joan loved the James Bond movies and when they were showing at the cinema in Banbury, she and Pauline would go together, although Pauline was not really a Bond lover, Ron and I would take turns in taking and picking them up, each taking our turn at baby-sitting. Aubrey and Agnes of course still remained our good friends and along with daughter Linda made many visits and we visited them as often as possible, more often when we bought motor cars.

As previously stated, when at Morris's there were disputes and lay-offs, but I could not be idle and I asked Terry Canning at the bus garage, two blocks down, if he had any work, telling him that I had been a clerk in the army, with typing skills "Just the person I am looking for" said Terry, "my wife manages to do the wages, but not much good at the bookwork, I can't really take on a full time office worker at this point in time he continued. So I had a part-time job (cash in hand), only two doors down. At this stage Terry and his brother Ralph, were struggling a little, to maintain three or four older buses, Terry's dad, sweeping and keeping the place tidy, a couple of locals doing part-time driving on school-runs and week-end trips to the coast. There was a small office next to the main garage, where the buses were maintained, a small desk, a filing cabinet, a couple of chairs and a phone. The typewriter was an Olympic, one of several types that I had used in the army, paper and carbon, but no duplicator. The job was mainly typing up accounts for coach hire and school buses, also a few reminders for unpaid accounts. One man in

particular, would organise a bus trip to the seaside, collect the fares and pocket the money, paying in dribs and drabs after constant reminders and threats of court action. There were numerous invoices to be processed for parts and fuels, cleaning material &c, but these only needed a 'with compliments' note and a cheque and entered in the accounts ledger. But things did get better for Terry and soon he was looking at expansion, his bungalow had been built alongside the garage and he moved in with wife Winnie and their two children Gillian (Jill) and Dawn. Adding a couple of more up-to-date coaches and taking on a full time mechanic, Horace Mann. Terry told me to get my provisional driving licence and he would take me out in his Ford Consul for a couple of lessons, so that is what I did and I quickly got the feel for driving and booked lessons with Smiths Driving School at Banbury, driving a Wolseley 444, a Miss Taylor being my instructor, I don't know why I failed my driving test the first time, but I eventually passed on 12th January 1961. Terry had now up-dated his car to a new Vauxhall Cresta and it was not long before I was driving it to take and collect workers from the USAF base at Croughton and workers from the factory at Chipping Warden, among many other little errands. Of course seat belts had not been fitted to cars as yet, one day I had Trevor sitting alongside me (now six years of age), as I was driving the Cresta to pick up a passenger at Twyford Mill and as we were about to pass over the railway bridge, a car in the opposite direction came hurtling along in the middle of the road, I braked hard and little Trevor disappeared under the dash, a nasty accident avoided, Trevor happily sitting back on the seat. I loved driving the Cresta and I sometimes detoured to visit Aubrey, on my way back from a job. Terry asked me to have a go at driving the buses, which I did, but I was not happy with the old crash gear boxes and nervous of the extra width and length, so I didn't continue, not knowing then that I would have many years driving buses and recovery vehicles in Australia. Now that the coach business was going well, Terry was able to employ a full time office worker. I continued to help with his taxi work and often got a knock at the door, whilst sleeping after night work, Mrs Canning asking if I could do a run, which I did willingly, despite losing some of my much needed sleep. We enjoyed our association with the Canning family, spending time at their Christmas and staff parties, the help that Jill and Dawn afforded us with our children, Terry taking me to the Wrestling at the Winter Gardens in Banbury and soccer matches at Birmingham, West Bromwich, Aston Villa, Leicester, Oxford and other venues. Later when I had acquired my own car, I was able to get free service at Terrys and on one occasion, as I was leaving Kings Sutton to go to work, a passing car threw up a stone and smashed my screen, returning home and telling

Terry, he said “Take the Landrover George, we will worry about the screen later”, that’s the kind of man he was. Some years later Winnie passed away, Terry sold the now lucrative business to Heyford Coach Service and moved into a very nice split level home in a new development at Kings Sutton, overlooking the spread of meadows in the Cherwell Valley, looking toward my birthplace of Clifton in the distance. Sadly, Dawn, got herself pregnant at 15 years of age, much to the horror of Terry and Winnie and when the child was born, they insisted that it be adopted out of the family and it was. Later Dawn married an American serviceman, Wally, and eventually settled in America, but when we visited Terry in 2008, he said that Dawn and Wally had divorced and she was on her way home to Kings Sutton, soon after our visit, we learned that Terry had died, so we assume Dawn would have probably settled in Terry’s house. Gillian married a local lad (Norman) and lives with him and their family at Twyford, some three miles from Kins Sutton.

Trevor had now reached four years of age and Pauline tells me that he started school soon after his birthday, sorry to say that I did not record the date in my poorly kept diaries, Trevor being a very strong, active child, making life somewhat difficult for his mum. I am not sure how soon after he started school, that I got a telephone call from Freda, the porter at Kings Sutton station, “George! Is your son supposed to at school?” “Yes” I replied, “well then you had better come down to the station, as he is playing down here on the platform and I have him with me in the ticket office”. I quickly cycled down to the station and retrieved him, telling him how naughty it was to wag school and proceeded to return him to Mr Rippon, the headmaster. When we got opposite our road, he wanted to go home first, but no! despite his protests, I took him straight back to school, on reflection, perhaps I should have given him a little break first. Trevor was not a lover of school, he wanted to be outside, making his own amusement, as his teacher said “Trevor is like a wasp in a jam-jar, desperately wanting to get out”, how very true as time was to prove, he loved the outside world and got in to a few scrapes, but brought little trouble home. One day there was a loud rap on the front door, farmer Prosser was standing there with Trevor, “if you don’t give this son of yours a hiding, I will” he said very sternly, “my hay bales are all over the place”! I said “calm down Mr Prosser, no-one is going to hit any-one, the lad is six years old, bet he and his mates were having the time of their lives, what harm have they done? If you want me to go to your field and tidy up, I will, but please don’t come here with threats, kids will be kids”, with that he left and I don’t think I ever confronted him again. Trevor had and still has a good sense of direction and a good memory,

as you will recall in my previous mention of his little episodes on the London Underground and at Farnborough Air-show. He loved going to the river and the canal, a country boy for sure. Trevor never showed any interest in gardening or sports of any kind, I tried to get him to play soccer and bought him the boots, but they soon got cast aside. He loved tools and tinkering with bicycles and at a very early age, motor-cycles, which became his passion for many years. One day he came home with a car-wash brush, saying that he found it on the side of the road, which he did, but he didn't tell me till a long time afterwards that it was on the wall of Moon's garage, where it had been left to dry. I used this brush for years, in fact it may have travelled to Australia too. I made a little sledge and in the winter snow, Trevor would have great fun with it and his little mates as they careered down the slope of the rising ground along Station Road, Rosalyn too may have joined in the fun, as she would have turned six years old by the time we left Kings Sutton. Trevor also enjoyed riding with me on my bicycle, I had attached a little saddle on the cross-bar, with stirrups and when cycling to Aubrey's, and getting to Aynho village, turning onto the Clifton road, there were two steep downward hills, heads down, we could free-wheel at some speed, all the way to Aynho station, much to Trevor's delight. In the mean-time, Rosalyn was becoming more venturesome and one day Pauline found her on top of the trellis fence, this is before she could properly walk. When a little older she was playing with the Lutman children, across the road and when walking on the top of their garden wall, tripped and landed in the stinging nettles and brambles on the farmers side of the wall, incurring a nasty gash on her leg as well as some nettle stings for good measure, the scars remain. Many more un-recorded incidents, no doubt.

My new garage had arrived from Manchester and erected all in the price, it had a steel frame, corrugated iron roof, double doors and cladded with cement fibrous sheets, in the space behind the garage, I had tied a car tyre between two poles, for the children to use as a swing. The Worrell children, whose dad worked at Morris's and travelled with me, often played with Rosalyn and soon after my nice new garage had taken it's spot in the garden, the children managed to swing the tyre hard enough to smash the panels of the garage. The Worrell children quickly left for home, obviously terrified as to what I would say, but I told Eddie, their dad, that it was an accident and it was my fault for putting the tyre so close to the garage anyway and is was soon forgotten.. Later I repaired the damage and moved the offending tyre farther away. I got home from work one day and noticed that the glass of the bottom panel of the door, which led from the kitchen to the hall,

was missing, Pauline told me that the children had accidentally kicked a ball and broken it, but I have since learned that Trevor and Rosalyn were sitting with their backs to the glass, bumping backwards and forwards, resulting in a cracked pane, which I fixed by placing a piece of hardboard in place of the glass, leaving it like that until just before we sold and then changing back to glass. Trevor came in with nasty gash in his hand, apparently another boy had snatched a rusty blade from his hand, Pauline called Mrs Canning and as it happened her sister answered the call and being a nurse, she quickly bathed the wound, plastered it with Germolene and bandaged it up, hey presto! All healed well.

I had been on night shift, being in a deep sleep, I thought I was dreaming that a war was raging, with the crackle of gunfire, but as I awoke, the crackle was still there, loud and clear, I got out of bed and opened the curtains, the barn opposite was well alight and the heat was popping the asbestos roofing, just like rifle fire, apparently workers had been welding and the sparks had set the loose straw alight, quickly spreading to the hay bales, stacked in the barn, luckily the wind was blowing away from the other farm buildings and the farmhouse.

Pauline and I were in bed, asleep, when there was a rap on the front door in the early hours of the morning, opening the door I confronted a man with a torch, “have you got a rope” he said “I have got to catch a horse, which is running loose, just along the road”, “Sorry!” I said “ I really haven’t” and he made off on his bicycle. The next thing I could hear the horse on the road outside, I popped out and clapped my hands and the poor animal bolted up the road, sparks flying off it shoes, I can’t imagine where it ended up, but a little later, the *kind* gentleman that had awoken us, passed by with a rope, going in the wrong direction!!. Unusual things happen, especially when living in the country, Pauline, whilst busy in the kitchen heard a little patter of feet in the hall and a lamb wandered in and settled under the dining table, she doesn’t remember how she removed it.

Soon Mr Herman was building another bungalow next door to us, this one for Bob and Rene Ayriss, a few years older than us, with no children, but when they moved in, we quickly became good neighbours. Bob worked in Banbury, not quite sure where, Renee worked at the Fifty Shilling tailors, where I bought a new suit for Gillian Canning’s wedding, which she kindly got made for me and brought it home. As we stood up in the church for the ceremony, Yvonne Hine, who was in the pew behind us, tapped me on the shoulder and whispered “George! You had better sit down, I can see your bottom, your trousers are split all up one leg” (giggles). “Call

in before you go to the reception, and I will quickly hem it up for you". Apparently, because of the hurried order for the suit, the tailors had left the hemming stitches in and in their haste, forgot to machine that leg. Bob made lots of wine and had all the equipment in his garage, pipes, bottles and gadgets. I can't remember if he had a car, he probably did. We now had another dog, called Sweep, a black cross-breed Labrador/ Collie, a lovely dog, but he would roam the fields and came home covered in sheep ticks, taking him to the vet, I wrongly opted to have him put down, it took Pauline and Rene a long time to forgive me. Soon a third bungalow was built and this one was for Horace and Mollie Mann. Horace worked for Mr Canning and Mollie was the local postwoman, they had one daughter, whose name escapes me. Terry and Winnie had moved into their new bungalow, so now we had an un-interrupted row of five houses on our side of the road, leaving just two vacant blocks, which stayed so for quite a few years.

A Mr Fred Dale, his wife and two sons lived at the top of our road and was the local haulier, running ex-military vehicles, thousands of which were available so soon after the war. In addition to helping Terry, Fred would often come along to see if I was able to give him a few hours, perhaps to move some-one or deliver a load of wood &c. I was burning the candle at both ends, getting home on Friday morning from night shift, working all day, taking my turn picking up Pauline and Joan, falling into bed about mid-night, usually staying up all day Monday and going to work, half asleep on night shift again. There was a saying at the works, "Don't buy a car made on Monday or Friday" Monday cars were usually made by men with little sleep and Friday cars by men with their minds on what they were going to do at the week-end. Spot on, I would say. Fred was another 'Terry', always willing to help. When I was ready to dig out the drive way to my new garage, Fred stood one of his trucks on the front garden and with the assistance of a chap from work, a Welshman named Bert Davis, we loaded it with soil, spilling lots under the truck. I was about to go and ask Fred to come and move the truck, Bert said "I'll move it", I had no idea that he had not driven a truck before and assumed it would be ok, but with the build-up of soil under the wheels, Bert was revving away to no avail and getting nowhere. What Bert had done, was to sheer the half shafts (I only learned this later when Fred came on the scene). "Shall I unload the soil Fred", I asked him, "No, leave it, I will get my son down with the heavier truck and tow you out, just clear the build-up under the wheels". So the heavier truck arrived and Fred and his son towed us down to Plank's field, where we emptied the soil. I felt awful, Bert said nothing, "I am sorry Fred, you will have to charge me when you

St Aubin Kings Sutton

160 Oxford Road Kidlington

1 Chapel Square Deddington

Austin Cambridge 188 GWL

Vauxhall Victor Super NRD 967

Good friends Aubrey & Agnes
on Lambretta Scooter

Pauline & Yours Truly
on Vespa Scooter

have costed the repairs" Fred drove out to Kingham, a fair distance, to the yard where the old military trucks were stored, where he was able to get a ready supply of half-shafts. I didn't know all this at the time of course, only what I learned later. However, Fred never mentioned any costs and I continued to help him when required, using him to move our effects when we left Kings Sutton to move to Kidlington. So putting that drama behind us, I ordered a load of nice gravel to cover the newly dug driveway and built a small retaining wall on the boundary, to prevent the gravel spreading into Roy and Yvonne's garden bed.

I was always able to get plenty of manure for the garden from Mr Plank, just a short walk with the wheelbarrow, no other fertilisers necessary, just a sprinkling of lime when digging the vegie patch and an occasional spray for aphids. Things really grew well, I have a picture of Rosalyn standing in my broad beans, a little girl in a little forest.

For a couple of years, before our next two children arrived, Pauline and Yvonne Hine, started hairdressing and Roy and I converted our hall into a small salon for them, putting suppressors into their driers, fixing mirrors &c., a successful venture, whilst it lasted, free haircuts for Roy and I, Pauline and Yvonne taking turns in doing their hair dos too. But at about Christmas time 1961, Pauline was now heavily pregnant with child number three and the lucrative little business came to an end. Trevor was now over six years old and Rosalyn three years and eight months. Trevor being so active and very much self-willed, Pauline had her work cut out, no doubt out of her wits at times, I don't think she told me all that went on, me now working so far away and taking in all the overtime that presented itself, luckily she had such good friends close at hand to call on.

Chapter 35 - Two Plus Two

I am not able to find a diary for 1962, I am sure I would have had one, perhaps it will turn up when this story is finished, so now I have to wear my thinking cap continuously, with the help of Pauline, Trevor and Rosalyn. Christmas 1961 was exceptionally cold and heavy snow began to fall during the last few days of December and into the New Year, making travel very difficult, causing many delays and making one late for work and returning home. Pauline was having a bad time and had to stay in bed, I was off over the Christmas period and a few extra days until Pauline's mother came down to look after her, poor girl spent her 29th birthday in bed, but now my records stop. On Monday 15th January 1962, Pauline entered the Cottage Hospital at Brackley, Northamptonshire, about five miles from Kings Sutton and at 1-40am the following morning, Tuesday 16th January, she gave birth to a baby boy, 9lbs 4ozs, who we named Adrian Graham. I was able to use Terry's car to visit, which made things so much easier. However, Pauline only had a very brief stay in hospital as there was a bed shortage and was brought home by ambulance the following day, with the district nurse in attendance and the help of good neighbours. I had purchased my first car, a Vauxhall Victor NRD 967, Empress Blue in colour and I was able to collect it on the first Saturday after Pauline left hospital. I drove into the new driveway and tooted the horn, Pauline was able to leave her bed and look out of the window, the weather still bitterly cold, so now we had our very own transport, no more buses or trains. Another man in the village, Geoff Smith, had an identical car, so it was not unusual for people to mistakenly say "saw you in such and such a place" when in fact it would have been Geoff. One day we were in Northampton shopping, getting late, we saw Geoff with his bonnet up, "What's up Geoff?' I enquired, "no lights mate" said Geoff. "No good staying there mate, keep up tight behind me and let's get back to Kings Sutton" I replied. So he did.

Oh for that missing diary! There were many things that may have happened in 1962, but my memory is vague. But I remember our first holiday at Polzeath in Cornwall, going by car to a hired caravan there. Not having experienced holiday traffic before, we left home early on the Saturday morning, Trevor, Rosalyn and baby Adrian seated in the back, with Pauline alongside me, holding the road map, the boot filled to capacity, with the suitcases and push-chair firmly strapped to the roof-rack. Pauline had made scotch eggs and sandwiches, I made a flask of tea, soft drinks and a bottle or two for Adrian. Setting off, we made for a stop somewhere

along the way, probably about half-way, selected a nice quiet stop off the beaten track and using the base of a large tree, that had been felled many years earlier, laid out the food and drinks, enjoying a picnic in the lovely fresh country air. After a freshen-up and a nappy change for baby Adrian, we set off again, BUT!! Our relaxed start, soon became a slow stop/start, as we got deeper into Devon and Cornwall, no motorway back then, traffic was coming from all directions, choking every major junction as the holiday-makers from the industrial North merged with us Southerners. At some points, i.e. Exeter, Truro, Taunton, half hour standstills or more, making, a long miserable last half of our journey. However, we got to the caravan eventually, pleasantly surprised at the size and comfort of it, unloading as quickly as possible and making a light meal, showering and getting into the holiday mood, made for the beach, where it didn't take long for Trevor and Rosalyn to make friends. I hired a couple of deck chairs and with Adrian in the push-chair, Pauline and I were able to relax with an ice-cream and later a tray of tea and biscuits, Trevor and Rosalyn back and forth with various requests. As we left the beach, we bought real Cornish pasties, taking them back for tea. It had been a tiring day and it wasn't too long before we were all ready to try the beds. A holiday to the seaside with the children was just that, spending most of our time on the beach and relaxing. The surf at Polzeath was likened to Sydney's Bondi and this is where I first saw the surf-board riders. I hired a small flat wooden board for ten shillings, and spent a few hours riding the waves, but not standing, just lying flat on the board and catching the incoming waves, great fun. Trevor carried the board over the dunes and left it by the car, for use day after day and eventually it ended up in the boot when we left and it even travelled to Australia with us in 1969 and back to UK in 1971, eventually getting confiscated on our return to Australia in 1972. We did have a couple of wet days and a chilly evening or so, I even lit the little wood stove on one occasion, noting that other caravans had done likewise. As written earlier, Robin and his brother had some good days fishing in their boat, just off the mouth of the river Camel, catching some lovely fresh mackerel, which we enjoyed immensely. It was a lovely holiday, the first of more visits to Devon and Cornwall, but from the first experience we made 4am starts in the future, avoiding those nasty hold-ups.

Aubrey too, had now bought a car, a light blue, Ford Prefect, so now both our families were mobile, but as Aubrey's annual leave was not always the same as mine, we did spent some holidays separately, but we still shared many home visits and week-end trips together, they were very good times. Aubrey and Agnes, now

having bought a nice cottage at Aynho station, moving in with Linda and Grandmother, a nice size garden with a huge vegetable garden just through the wall alongside the Oxford/Coventry canal, where we put in many hours of digging that lovely black, fertile soil, resulting in some excellent vegetable production. Aubrey built a good sized shed in the far corner of the house garden, erected a greenhouse and a concrete garage, quite a transformation.

I now have a diary for 1963 and I note that on News Years day I had written "Worst blizzard for eighty two years, over Sunday and Monday", continuing to be very severe, with roads impassable, making me late for work because of diversions and a few more late starts to follow and of course late home too. I note too that on Saturday 12th January, it was the worst conditions for the English football (soccer) league, since it started, with only five matches being played, the football Pools cancelled. On the 16th, Adrian had his first birthday, I made and iced a cake for him, but because of the severe weather, we were unable to invite anyone to celebrate with us. The severe conditions continued and on the 22nd our coach broke down at Kidlington, on the way to night shift, taking shelter in the King's Arms, public house until a relief coach got us to work by 11.15pm. The following morning our bus was late and we didn't get home till mid-morning and on Thursday the 24th Jan, the bus failed to get through at all, so we hitched the 28 miles home, four different lifts, trudging through the snow for the last mile and a half along the Kings Sutton road, walking on the tops of cars which were buried in snowdrifts. Just for good measure, on Friday a relief driver took a wrong turn and we ended up at Bicester, adding many extra miles to our already treacherous journey, getting home at 10am. The road into Kings Sutton from the Aynho end remained closed for some days, so a long detour was necessary via the Banbury Lane road, to Twyford to get back onto the main A40 road, passing the blocked road. To add to all this, our '*kind*' boss, Mr Willett, said "I must do something about you chaps from the country, all these late starts, disrupting production". OK for him, he only lived a five minutes-walk from the factory. (Twit!).

In the country is was usual to listen out for the first cuckoo and I note that I heard one on 24th April and again on the 28th, I had a better chance of hearing one earlier, when I was in the signal box at Astrop, the box sitting alongside the river Cherwell, well away from built up areas, most of the '*cuckoos*' these days are not of the feathered kind, I might add!

The car was making our life so much easier, we were getting out and about much more, with regular trips to Southend to visit Pauline's family and friends. In March, I booked a caravan for a holiday, at Woolacoombe, Devon, starting on 14th July for two weeks. On this occasion, Pauline's dad accompanied us, making a little less room in the car, but we managed very well, with Pauline in the back seat with Adrian and Rosalyn, and her dad in the front, with Trevor sitting in the middle of the bench seat. With a distance of 200 miles to cover, we made several stops and arrived at 1-30pm, yet again, a very nice roomy caravan, not too far from the beach. Unfortunately Pauline's dad, not having exposed himself to too much sunlight, rolled up his trouser legs when we visited the beach, falling asleep and getting badly burned legs. Trevor was now eight years of age and Rosalyn five and a half, so they were now mixing with other children and having great fun together. An Irishman arrived at the park and was driving a hired car, complaining that it didn't have good brakes and asked if I might be able to have a look, as he had no idea. I tried the brakes, wondering how he had driven so far without hitting something, apparently relying on the hand brake. With no effort I jacked up the car and with an adjuster, which I had in my tool kit, adjusted the brakes and gave them a quick test. Later Trevor came into the van with a pocketful of sixpenny pieces, saying that the Irishman had had a win on a machine in the Park Centre and had given the win to Trevor, because dad had kindly fixed his car. So one good turn! During our stay I visited the Ilfracombe railway station, where I found Ray Baddick working in the booking office, Ray and I served part of our National Service together in Hong Kong and Austria, so it was good to catch up again. Later Ray married a local girl and they opened a small guest house in Ilfracombe. We visited the cinema there too and saw "The Longest Day", also taking Pauline's dad to see it too when he had rested up for a few days with his sore legs. Although the beach was the main attraction, we did visit Clovelly, the Ilfracombe zoo and other attractions. I remember there being a few tears from Rosalyn at Clovelly, because Adrian got a ride on the donkey and she didn't. I can see Pauline's dad, sitting on the rocks after negotiating the steps to the beach.

On the way home we encountered the 1 in 4 Porlock Hill, stalling halfway up, causing Pauline to be alarmed, fearing we would run backwards, however, all was well as I got started again and pulled slowly away in first gear. I can't say that I too didn't panic a little, hell of a steep hill.

So back home safely, Pauline visited Dr Hulse, who confirmed that she was pregnant and would expect to give birth in March next year, hence the **'Two plus Two'** heading for this chapter, I note a number of visits for Pauline to both the hospital and Dr Hulse, with additional visits by the district nurse. So busy now, it is difficult to recall so much. In August I taxied Winnie, Albert and the children to Southsea for a holiday, picking them up the following week. I suffered a nasty boil next to my ear and Dr Hulse gave me Penicillin injections. I commenced donating blood. There were numerous air disasters. England lost the fourth test to the West Indies by 300 runs. Trevor had his eight birthday. Three railmen were killed at Knowle and Dorridge station, when an express rammed a goods train, G wiz! On 2nd September Doll married her second husband, Griff Pritchard. On 28th I joined with a group of chaps from work for a trip to London to see Tottenham Hotspur beat West Ham three nil at soccer, followed by visits to a few pubs at Leicester Square, Trafalgar and Haymarket. Quite funny, as we were in Leicester Square, it was getting dusk and thousands of starlings were settling into the trees, to roost for the night, a local woman and her husband were observing this and in her cockney accent, the woman said "Cor look at all them pidgins" to which her husband replied "They are not bluddy pidgins, how long have bluddy pidgins bin blick?" (black). A sing-song on the way home, arriving back at 3am. Just a one off!

Sharing the gardening with Aubrey was paying off very well, ample vegetables and fruit, enabling me to make lots of jam, raspberry, strawberry and blackcurrant, we even had a go at green tomato chutney, pickled onions and beetroot. I sold many scores of (a score being twenty) of cabbage, brussel, cauliflower, broccoli and savoy plants to mates at work, as well as onion sets and seed potatoes, which in turn paid for new seed.

As much as we loved our little bungalow at Kings Sutton, Pauline and I had now decided to start looking to move nearer to Oxford, cutting down on the mileage to and from work and at the same time, finding a bigger home and garden, making many visits to properties within a few miles radius of the city, but the move was not imminent and there was plenty to do before it was, painting and making repairs where necessary, before putting our home on the market. I told Mr Curtiss that I would no longer be using his garden, thanking him for the time that I had and moved the steps and repaired the wall. President Kennedy was assassinated on the22nd. Dawn's baby was born. We spent this Christmas day at home, a fifty five shilling turkey and all the trimmings for lunch, with Ron and Joan to tea, we

going to them for Boxing day, wood sawing with Aubrey on the 30th and New Year's Eve drinks to finish up a very busy year.

So now we have visited many homes, but a temporary stop came to this when Dr Hulse ordered Pauline to bed on 28th February '64, where she stayed for several days, as it would happen I was at home because of an industrial dispute at work, which ended on 5th March. On 13th, Pauline entered the Cottage Hospital at Brackley, once again and this time I was present at the birth of Kevin James, born on Saturday 14th Mar '64 at 3-17pm, 8lbs 5ozs. On Sunday I took Rosalyn to London, where we met Pearl and Derrick, who took her to stay for a few days, until I got Pauline home again, her mum having arrived earlier, which was very helpful as Adrian was only two years old, Trevor now able to help too, running little errands to the shop after school. All the usual things followed, birth certificate, tax number, family allowance &c. On Good Friday I took Pauline's mum to London, where we met Pearl and Derrick, who took her home and at the same time they brought Rosalyn along for me to collect. On 3rd April '64 we celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary, going to the pictures at Banbury to see "The L Shaped Room" starring Leslie Caron and Tom Bell, Yvonne Hine, next door, happy to baby sit for us. On the following day it was the coldest April day for over ninety years, 39d F., followed by Rosalyn's sixth birthday party on the 5th

On the 16th we viewed 200 Oxford Road Kidlington, which surprised the man living next door, who said "I can't believe that the house is on the market so soon, the last occupant was only buried yesterday". Driving back to Kings Sutton, we checked with the agent, who said "I clearly told you 160", so off we go again to the correct address!, looks good and Sunday we met with the agent, who showed us through the house, at just $4,500 pounds, just the home we were looking for, two large double bedrooms and a small box room, ideal for Rosalyn. The front bedroom had a large bay window, looking directly out to the main Oxford/ Banbury road, as did the little box room, the second large bedroom over-looking the long back garden and the school grounds beyond. A large bathroom and toilet were at the top of the stairs, with an airing cupboard, which contained the hot water storage tank, alongside. Whilst down stairs, a large entrance hall, a small kitchen, a nice sized front lounge, with a slightly smaller dining room at the rear, a coal bunker and outside toilet were attached to the back wall of the kitchen, with a brick garage at the end of the drive, the house standing well back from the main road, with a service road, a good sized front garden, with drive to the garage, a

long back garden, bordering onto the primary school grounds and being just three miles from my work, just what we were looking for. The house was owned by a Mr Penny, he had only occupied one room downstairs, so the rest of the rooms were empty, but in good condition. Alerting Mr Phillips of our discovery, he did the paper work for the purchase of No. 160, subject to the sale of St Aubin. So our little gem goes on the market at $3,500 pounds and it was not too long before several people had come along to have a look, Mr & Mrs Mobley (Yvonne's parents) thinking that it would be nice to live next door to their daughter, son-in-law and grand-daughter, Sally, decided to buy it on 6th May 64 and the wheels were in motion, but at this time, Yvonne, Roy and Sally were in Canada, as Roy was on an exchange contract with his firm for twelve months, Mr and Mrs Mobley having booked a trip to visit them, left the sale in the hands of their agent and off to Canada they went. Now this made things rather difficult when it was time to exchange contracts, necessitating to and fro relays of paper-work to and from Canada, also adding the extra cost of a bridging loan to secure No. 160 until settlement, on reflection, I think Mr Mobley should have paid that, after all, it was he that caused the delay, but that didn't occur to me then and settlement came on 22nd August 64. Also my annual leave, which I was hoping would have coincided with our move, came and went, but not totally wasted, as I was able to get many ends tied up, Pauline and I wasting no time in purchasing things ready for the move; easy chairs for the dining room, a new sink unit, a bedroom suite and new double bed, I ordered a 25ft extension ladder and a new electric drill. I made lots more jam and things carried on much the same, the summer weather was good, so a few more swims at Clifton, with Aubrey and Agnes. Trevor hooked a fish at the deep-hole at Clifton Mill, Rosalyn and Linda looking on. I had told Mr Canning of the move and although disappointed to see us go, wished us well and promised to visit when we were settled in as did many of our friends and relations. It was a wrench to move, we had made so many friends and Trevor and Rosalyn settled in school, Adrian and Kevin of course, too young to be affected.

Chapter 36 - Kidlington

So after the traumatic experience of selling St Aubin, Mr Dale and I moved all the garden tools and the contents of the shed to 160 Oxford Road on Thursday 27th August 64. The following day, after night shift, we moved the household furniture and on completion, I paid Fred and then collected Pauline and the children for the move to our new home, a few tears I am sure as we left Kings Sutton behind, but there were many visits there later.

At one time, it may be still, Kidlington was the largest village in the UK, it did not have town status, it was really in two parts, old and new, a lovely old church in the older part, with a cinema, a super-market and lots of other shops in the newer part. Opposite 160 was the Bicester road corner with Bucklands garage having petrol bowsers on either side. Eric the butcher was to the left side and Burtons super-market on the right. Looking a little to the right, stood the police station (later it was enlarged and became the headquarters of the Thames Valley Police), then the Doctors surgery and the High School. On our side of the road, a few doors down, was a news-agent and opposite was Truby's Café. Travelling a little farther along Oxford road, was the newest area, called Garden City, with numerous shops and the Zoo Garage, so called because it was built on the site of the old Oxford Zoo. There were a few pubs, one being called The Kings Arms, sited on the Bicester road and another, The Dog, just a few doors along from us. The primary school, as mentioned was adjacent to the bottom of our garden, but accessed from our service road by a small road near the Dog. The Great Western Railway station was almost out of the village, being at the extreme northern end, with the Oxford/Coventry canal running close by, with the Kidlington airstrip (now Oxford airport) a little farther north. With the Pressed Steel factory, BMC's Morris factory and the City of Oxford just a little distance away, the Oxford/Banbury road was very busy at all times, with buses and cars interspersed with heavy vehicles carrying supplies and finished products to and from the factories, our service road, with a wide grass section, was a very useful asset, sometimes being used as a relief road in the case of a serious accident on the main road. As much as we loved St Aubin, 160 became our favourite, a challenge to work on.

Chapter 37 - Settling in at 160

Fortunately we had not brought a large amount of furniture from our little bungalow and the new things that were ordered did not arrive till the next day and days following, so we quickly set up the beds and dining room. It was not until I was about to plug in the cooker, that I noticed that there was no cooker point, only the old original 5amp plugs, Mr Penny had used gas, so now we were stuck without hot plates or oven and unable plug in the kettle, we had no gas appliances either, but were able to boil water in a small saucepan on one of the kerosene stoves. So, fish and chips it was. I found the electrical shop and explained our predicament to the proprietor, Mr Woodward, who came up to 160 within the hour and had a look, saying "I will be here first thing in the morning" and he was, putting in a cooker point, which included a point for the kettle, in no time at the same time looking at the out-dated 5amp system, advising us to up-date, with a 13amp ring main, which he could do for us at a very reasonable price, so without any hesitation we agreed and he and another electrician came along about a week later and installed a brand new system, with fused 13amp power plugs and the wiring neatly secured beneath the flooring, all for thirty one pounds and ten shillings. So now our sparkling new cooker was operational, Pauline tells me that it was a Tricity Viscount and I note that I paid fourteen pounds and ten shillings to the Electricity Board, so, although I can't recall, I imagine that was a deposit and probably we paid the rest on the quarterly bills? The telephone was installed on the 15th Oct 64 and our number was Kidlington 3547 (a shared line at first) As I said earlier, the house was in good condition, but the paint-work was brown everywhere and I quickly got on with changing it to brilliant white, the walls just needed a wash and it didn't take long to wallpaper them. I now had the benefit of being nearer to work, thus saving many hours of travelling time. There was a very old cement sink in the kitchen, which I removed and installed a nice stainless one with drainer and cupboards beneath, with a smart little end unit near the door where Pauline kept a few handy things. The next job was to make a serving hatch through the kitchen/dining wall, certainly saved a lot of trips to the dining room via the hall. The kitchen window and door were on the driveway side, immediately opposite our new neighbours, Fred and Gwen Gibbons, Fred a retired man drove a Morris Minor car and did odd jobs in the area, whilst Gwen, his second wife, was a much younger lady, with one daughter Jean, excellent neighbours. Our driveways were divided by a smart brick wall between the houses, with a neatly trimmed privet hedge to the roadway. Our neighbours on the other side were Mr & Mrs

Scroggs, with two sons, Steven and David. Mr Scroggs owned a newsagency in one of the city suburbs, but sadly had a heart attack and died soon after we moved in, the boys then taking over the business, but David turned to drugs and quickly became heavily addicted, and looked like a man of seventy as he walked past, dying a young man. I think the business was sold and Steven continued his trade in the manufacture of lead light windows, mainly of the stained glass church type. A large Prunus tree (Ornamental Plum) stood in the South corner of our front garden, a lawn and flower borders, with a small leaved Cotoneaster growing against the wall under the bay window, with a larger leaved American Cotoneaster scaling the side wall to the kitchen door. A large fish pond was the main feature of the back garden, near to the house, a large apple tree near the back of the garage with a variety of shrubs, dotted around the lengthy garden.

Trevor wasted no time in finding a friend, just three doors down lived John and Jenny Hunt, with their two children, Timothy and Tracy. Trevor met Tim outside his house on the day we arrived and told Tim's mum, Jenny, that he was hungry, because his mum didn't give in any food, we didn't know this at the time, only when Jenny came down to collect Tim and made herself known to Pauline and I, telling us the little *'white lie'* story of the *'hungry'* boy. But this was the start of a great friendship with Jenny and John, which lasted until we left in 1969. Jenny wore a long plait in her hair and was about the same height as Pauline, unfortunately a smoker, but a lovely, happy person, never-the-less. John worked at the Pressed Steel factory at Cowley and drove a Hillman Minx car. Anyway, Jenny gave Trevor and Tim a bag of walnuts to share and they sat on the grass at the front of our garden to devour them, some months later when I was trimming the hedge, I spotted a walnut with a green shoot growing from the cracked shell, carefully digging it up, I placed it in the back garden, where it developed into a fine young tree. Rosalyn, in the meantime, had met two little girls, Anita and Debbie and it was only when this young mother came to look for them, that we met Valerie Bossom, a friendship that has lasted from then to this day (2013) Valerie's husband Ken we met later. Pauline was now overwhelmed with new friends, really enjoying the new life. Jenny had introduced her to many of her friends, Jean (moon-face) and Brenda being the closest. Jen, as husband John, always called her, spent a lot of time at our house, putting on the kettle when a cuppa was needed and helping Pauline with the children, almost one of the family, sharing each-others problems and pleasures. With so many shops close at hand, Oxford City, just three miles away, and the big Cowley shopping centre a similar distance,

Pauline was much happier, not that she had abandoned her friends and memories of Kings Sutton, after all they were only a few miles away and made many visits. We exchanged regular visits with Aubrey and Agnes, still enjoying are gardening together and many drives to various places of interest and the Pantomimes at Christmastime. I think the wood-sawing had ended. With no hills to climb, Kidlington being built on a flat plain, Pauline, Jen and friends were able to take the children for long walks with their prams and pushers. Pauline had kept her bicycle and Jen had one too, so with a couple of new tyres and the addition of a baby carrier over the rear wheel, she and Jen, who's bike was already adapted, were able to cycle along to Garden City to the shops and also visit Jean, who lived nearby. Eventually her bike, as well mine, which we had had for so many years, became part of Trevor's mechanical *'learning',* in other words it wasn't too long before they were in many pieces.We purchased the appropriate school clothing for Trevor and Rosalyn and when school resumed after the summer break, we took them to the Primary school and they were allocated their respective class. The school was not very old, with modern facilities, large sports field and a swimming pool. Rosalyn hated the pool, because she said it was always freezing cold, I can't recall Trevor complaining, but he may have, school was not really his forte, he was an outside boy and was happy to be out there, but he did much better later, when he crossed over to the High School. One day there was a knock on the door, a policeman standing there, "Does Trevor Harris live here?" he asked, as though he didn't already know, "yes, what's he been up to?" I replied, "he handed in some tools a while ago, and as they have not been claimed, they now belong to Trevor". Sometime later we had another couple of visits from the law, firstly to bring Trevor a silver Churchill Commemoration Crown (five shillings) which he had handed in. (we still have it) and on the next visit to enquire if Trevor owned an old canoe, which they had found along the river, saying that they had destroyed it, considering it to be too old and unsafe, fearing a tragedy might result from its further use. Trevor said that he and his friend Tyfull had found it at the dump and had had great fun with it. One day I heard the sound of an auto-cycle passing the kitchen door, Trevor was now twelve years of age, I looked out just in time to see the rear wheel of a green machine passing into the outside toilet. "Trevor where did you get that from and how did you get it here?" I said sternly. "I swapped something for it with a boy up the road and I rode it home" he said, "for god's sake Trevor, you are only twelve years old, you will be in all sorts of trouble, if you get caught riding it, take it back at once and push it" I am not sure what happened to it, but I must say, Trevor never brought any trouble home that I can recall and he

made many friends, sadly a couple of them died very young from motor-cycle accidents. Trevor and friends made many visits to the Yarnton refuse dump, bringing home a variety of things, since having heard that some things were not from the dump. He and Rosalyn, along with other mates, were making regular visits to a house near the Catholic-School, the owners were overseas on a very long stay, so their house became a meeting place for the youngsters, who gained entry from the rear. Rosalyn seems to remember the house being called "Two Candles", but Trevor insists that it was indeed "Two Acres", not really that important. The fact is that the children seemed to have a free run of the place, without being disturbed, leaving it a bit of a mess, I understand and lots of the so called *"dump items"* probably came from here too. It is uncanny, that as a boy, I, along with Aubrey and other boys and girls, were doing exactly the same in Lord Denbigh's house, as written earlier in the story.

Rosalyn too made lots of friends, Carolyn Tuppeny, the Bossom girls, Anita and Debbie and the Eastmans, who had returned from Australia, but born in South Africa, to mention a few. Rosalyn and Caroline, ventured out at Christmas time to go carol singing and made a few pennies, not a safe venture these days, I might add. After sometime had passed, Rosalyn told us that she, along with Adrian and little Kevin would walk to the canal, which was a short walk across a field past the school and on one occasion, Kevin fell in the canal and she managed to grab him, had it been the river, it would have been a different story, being deeper and flowing. In the swampy land, opposite the primary school, there were some quite large pools of water, one such pool had a huge pile of rubble and soil in the middle, like a little island, taking a wooden drawer from my tool cabinet, using it as a boat, Rosalyn, with Adrian and Kevin, attempted to get to this 'i*sland',* whether they succeeded or not, only they can say. Going back to Kings Sutton, I have since learned, that Rosalyn was chasing little Adrian around the oil stove in the hall and managed to knock it over, incurring a nasty burn on her arm, only quick thinking by Pauline, who averted another disaster, by quickly extinguishing the flame. They were merely doing what children do, 'bless their little cotton socks', as the locals would say.

I recall one morning, as I was about to go to bed after night shift, there was a sound of a collision on the main road, dashing out, two cars had collided opposite our front garden. A truck was just pulling away, it would seem that the young woman in one car had pulled out from behind the truck and collided almost head

on with Caroline's dad, Mr Tuppeny, he was not hurt, but the girl in the other car was in a stupor and did not respond to my questions, so I stayed with her till the police and ambulance arrived, telling the policeman that I had not witnessed the collision, only that I lived opposite and heard the crash, leaving Mr Tuppeny to fill in the details and left the scene and went to bed.

One morning Fred next door came into the drive with Adrian, saying that he had seen him wandering on the main road outside, running to his rescue, but for Fred another tragedy may have occurred, Adrian, now three years of age, had climbed over the side gate, we shall never know what he had seen to attract his attention, I was at work and Pauline probably attending Kevin, thank god Fred had seen him, after which I added more height to the gate.

The downstairs interior decorating, along with visits to Southend and the usual every-day happenings, had taken us up to November and during this time Pauline's brother Ivor and his fiancé, Chloe, were married at St Lukes church, Southend on 26th September 64 and I was best man, so with Christmas fast approaching and the shorter, colder days upon us, the upstairs decorating took me well into the New Year. We carpeted the hall, stairs and landing in a rich cherry red, with a cheaper body covering for the bedrooms and dining room. The main lounge floor was left till later. All the furniture had now been delivered and the rooms were looking really nice. I had made Rosalyn a nice little dressing table with a kidney shaped top and mirror, Pauline had made a nice frilled curtain to cover the front, as well as curtains for the window and with a small wardrobe and comfy bed, Rosalyn had her own cosy little room. Trevor and Adrian shared the back bedroom, later replacing Adrian's bed with a double bunk to take in Kevin.

Turning now to the outside, I had not neglected the garden, having planted the vegetable patch, to yield some very nice veggies. The rest of the garden, both back and front I was keeping tidy until such times, when I could put my plans into practice. The very first thing though, now that the weather was improving, was to get the outside painting underway. My new ladder now came into play and I cleaned the guttering and painted it dark green as I did the downpipes too, the windows in cream and the sills in the dark green. The front door was of glass panels, I painted the frames cream. The kitchen door was half glass squares and wood at the lower half, I think I painted that green and cream, with the coal-shed and outside toilet doors green (guessing). But other things were also taking place of course, funny if they were not. A front wheel bearing gave way, as we were on

our way to Stoke-on-Trent, costing me seven pounds and ten shillings to get it fixed. We visited Trevor and Rosalyn's school on 'open day,' where they were excited to show us their work and classrooms, talk to the teachers and enjoy refreshments with them. On Pauline's thirty second birthday, Winnies daughter Sylvia married John Shepherd at the Weslyan Chapel in Deddington. Sir Winston Churchill died on the 24th January 65 and was buried at Bladon Churchyard on the 30th, I took Pauline and children to the railway bridge just along the road, to see his special funeral train pass, hauled appropriately by steam engine number 34051 "Winston Churchill". For many, many weeks, people were flocking to the small village of Bladon to pay homage at Churchill's graveside, creating huge traffic problems, people having to park a long way from the village. As we only lived a short distance away, we made several visits much later. On the 28th, we booked a caravan at Blue Anchor Bay, Minehead, for one week, 17th July to 24th. . Jen's husband John, a keen supporter of Oxford United soccer club, asked me to go along to the fixtures, which I did on many occasions. Rosalyn had her seventh birthday on the 5th April 65 and I note that at her party, there were nine girls and three boys (wow!). We made sure that the children attended the dentist, at one appointment, I note that Rosalyn had four teeth removed. Pauline's Grandmother (Mums Mum) died on 10th July 65 and I took the day off to look after the children, whilst Pauline travelled down to Southend for the funeral, on the 15th, her Uncle Will, picking her up on his way through from Dudley along with Auntie Ruby. Trevor went to stay with Chloe's brother Gordon at Tadley, Nr Basingstoke, but he wasn't happy with Gordon's mum, so he rang me up to collect him, I remember it well, I drove down to Tadley in a raging thunderstorm, Trevor awaiting me at the telephone box, near Gordon's home and we drove home in the pouring rain.

Chapter 38 - More Holidays

It was now time to set off for our holiday at Blue Anchor Bay, Minehead. Not leaving until almost 7 am we paid the price, taking six hours to cover the 130 miles, but of course some of his time was taken up with meal breaks and toilet stops. Having located the camp site, we found the caravan, being pleasantly surprised at the size of it and the closeness of it to the beach. Minehead is situated on river Severn estuary which flows into the Bristol Channel, so at low tide, the beach can be a little contaminated with river debris. The weather wasn't too kind, the children back and forth to the beach, between the showers, some days better than others. We spent a little time shopping in Minehead and visited Exmoor, returning via that steep hill at Porlock, but in this instance, driving down in low gear, not up. Whilst in Porlock, we visited Mr Canning,s brother at the weir, where the children had great fun playing in an upturned boat. Returning home on the following Saturday, it was necessary to make a detour, via Castle Carey, due to a huge traffic build up, adding extra miles to the journey, arriving safely home at 5.40pm to a welcome cuppa and unpacking, the children having gone to find their friends I will jump to 1966, Aubrey and Agnes, with Linda, were able to join us this year for a holiday at Woolacome for two weeks. We left separately as there was no point in Aubrey detouring to Kidlington. On arrival at the camp site, we noted that A & A had not yet arrived, so after settling in and having some refreshment, we made for the beach, which being about a half-mile down the road, we took the car. On returning to the caravan, A & A had now arrived and as we pulled up, Aubrey said "Where have you been? We have been here ages and are having our tea" he was very surprised when I said "We have been on the beach all afternoon, we got here late morning". The weather on this particular holiday, was hot, plenty of sun tan lotion being necessary. We spent a lot of time in the water and basking in the sun on the sand dunes, behind the beach cabins. We lost Adrian for a while, worrying and searching, then we noticed him on the life-savers dune-buggy, he was enjoying the ride, not one bit upset. Woolacombe has a long, wide beach of golden sand and attracts thousands of holiday-makers each year, so not hard for a child to mingle with the crowd. Whilst there we met Michael Hawkins, a railway signal-man, also a keen Country & Western fan, getting Aubrey and Agnes involved, as they still are to this day. A good holiday.

Chapter 39 - Double transformations

With holiday to Minehead gone, it was back to some very hard work. The fish pond in the back garden was too close to the back of the house, not only that. It was set in the middle of the lawn with a concrete surrounding path, not a good place for children to play. The pond had been carefully designed and was of solid concrete, close to a ton in weight. I did not want to destroy it, but to relocate it in the far corner of the garden and in doing so, making space for a more child friendly lawn, but at the same time keeping the pond as a feature and fish for the children to look after. The surrounding path was easy to smash with the sledge hammer and the pieces placed to one side in readiness to make a rockery behind the pond, when relocated. Now for the big lift. Digging deeply around the entire circumference of the pond, I placed a car jack, under the rim, using a piece of timber for the jack to stand on, as I wound up the jack, the timber sank into the ground, the pond had not budged, so unwind and place more timber under the jack and as the pressure solidified the soil, there was a slight movement and after several such operations, I was able to get a heavy piece of timber under one end of the pond, turning now to the other end and applying the same procedure, until that end was sufficiently high to get timber under. Repeated jacking, enabled me now to get two half railway sleepers beneath and with further jacking and adding more half sleepers, the bottom of the pond was a little higher than the level of the lawn and that is where I left it for now. Taking measurements, I dug a large hole in the corner, heaping the soil close to the hole from where I had lifted the pond, in readiness to fill that hole in, once all the timber was removed. I placed two pieces of timber across the new hole in readiness for the pond to rest on, I had not worked out yet how I was going to get them from under the pond for it to settle in the hole. Now I placed several railway sleepers across the lawn, on which to slide the pond to its new location, I now needed some help and summoned Aubrey. With the aid of two hefty poles, with great effort, we gradually levered this mass of concrete steadily along the sleepers and onto the timbers which I had placed across the new hole, I didn't have to work out how to move them, a sudden crack and both pieces were broken, the pond falling perfectly into the hole, not needing any adjustment, but I copped a hernia for my effort, which I will cover later. Stacking away the timber, filling the vacant hole, the hard part was over and done with, I could not have managed without Aubrey's help. So the rockery was made behind the pond. I made a dividing trellis work between the lawn and the veggie garden, with climbing roses to be added later. A truck load of gravel arrived, for

the concrete paths, but the truck driver tipped it in the entrance to the drive, blocking me in, but with the help of John and Jen, we barrowed it in, placing it on the front lawn from where I was able to mix the concrete for the drive and the paths at the rear. Now that the pond was moved and the paths concreted, I was able to dig up the lawn, and plant new seed, covering the whole area with plastic sheeting and in days a magic new lawn was taking shape under that cover. Next door to Mrs Scroggs, lived the Bakers, sadly Mr Baker was terminally ill with cancer and I had been going in to visit him and give him a shave until he died. Mr Baker had bought a large quantity of bricks, with which to build something, but of course that didn't happen and the bricks were piled up in the garden. Now I had the windows, as you will recall, earlier in the story, and having seen Stan's brickwork, I asked Mrs Baker if I could buy the bricks, "just take them, I can't use them" she said. So with the wheelbarrow, I made many trips to bring the bricks home, ready to build my garden shed. I had never laid bricks before, so the finished product was nowhere near as professional looking as Stan's, but Fred, next door, thought I had made a good job and I was happy. So the shed was completed and I put a connecting door from the rear of the garage into it. In October, now that gravel had gone from the front lawn, I decided to skim the turf and replant with new seed. As I was skimming, I noticed a wire rolling along behind me, taking a closer look, I realised that it was telephone cable, sure enough on checking, our phone was dead (bugger!) so I cleaned up the ends and carefully joined the wires together, colour to colour, taping each joint firmly and then the whole lot with a good measure of tape I trenched a little deeper, the phone back on line again. When the phone was installed, it is fairly obvious, that some lazy installer had made a slit in the lawn and pressed the cable in. My repair lasted for a couple of years and the phone went dead once again. I guessed what had happened and got in touch with telephone company, who sent out a repair man, putting on his test gadget, he said " you have a fault in the line" I said nothing. He quickly put in a new line, not even digging up the old one, just made a new trench and cut off the old cable at the base of the house wall and at the pole outside.(no charge). More visits to the dentist, Pauline with Joan to see "Mary Poppins. 1965 seemed to be racing away, a large bonfire for Guy Fawkes on 5th November. Mrs Buckland's so the road had an unfortunate accident with their fireworks, having placed a rocket in the neck of a bottle and igniting it, the bottle fell over and Abe attempted to upright it, in doing so the rocket fired, taking out his eye, then dropping into the nearby box of fireworks, setting them all off in a spectacular display, poor Abe writhing in agony and eventually being rushed off to hospital, but it was not

possible to save the eye, such a young man with a patch and later a glass eye replacement. We managed to get one more trip to Southend to visit the family, taking and receiving Christmas presents, getting home in time to spend Christmas at home. Trevor, now over ten years old and Rosalyn 7 years and eight months, got bicycles and Adrian and Kevin, still very young, so presents suitable to their age. I note that Ivor had called in on 19th December, with his presents and the next day, took Trevor along with him to Werrington (Stoke-on-Trent), to take presents to his mother, who was living there at that time, returning the next day.

So we burst into 1966 and the second of the two transformations takes place: John and Jenny had removed the wall between their lounge and dining room, this was a great improvement and Ken and Valerie took up the idea and did theirs too. When Ken had finished his, I decided to do likewise and Ken let me have the acrows (adjustable ceiling props) which he had *'acquired'* from work. Firstly I had to get an RSJ (rolled steel joist) to support the ceiling after the removal of the wall, which I purchased from the local scrapyard for one pound. Ken and John came along and between us we put supporting timbers and the acrows under the ceiling, then knocking a hole through the wall, Ken said "Pauline, come and look through, to see if you like it before we knock down any more!" which she did, anyway it was unlikely that we were going to repair the hole, even if she had said "no". So we continued to remove the brickwork and inserted the RSJ across the gap, using oak wedges to make sure that it was firmly against the wall above. As the lounge was about eighteen inches wider than the dining room, this left a good solid piece of wall with which to support the RSJ, the light switches for both rooms were also affixed to it, another saving, letting the other end into the opposite wall, cementing both ends and leaving to set. The rubble I placed outside the French door, in readiness to make a base for a conservatory at a later date. There was now a gap in the floor, which had to be covered, luckily there was no difference in the floor levels of the two rooms. Allowing a few days for the RSJ cementing to set firmly, I set about boxing it in. The broken ends of the wall had to rendered, not a big job. Now I was able to decorate the lounge, lay the carpet and get the new three piece suite delivered, which we had ordered and paid for in readiness. Pauline had made nice green curtains and cushion covers to finish off the job. The transformation was complete and we were now able to observe what was happening at both the front and the rear of the house from one room.

We didn't really like the bannisters to the stairs, so I boxed them in and at the same time, made a small gate at the bottom of the stairs, to prevent Kevin from climbing them. The area under the roof, above the bedrooms was all one and previous owners had laid boards across the rafters to use the space for storage, many items having been left there and forgotten. It was in my mind to make this area into a playroom at some time in the future, but the idea faded and was never carried out. Trevor had a habit of jumping the last couple of steps as he came down the stairs, but this ended when he landed and the floor collapsed beneath him, I was not too happy. When I lifted the broken flooring, I was horrified to find that the floor bearers were riddled with dry-rot, I think that this had resulted from some past flooding. I quickly cut some treated timber, replaced the boards and carpet and that was how it was when we sold. Ken and Valerie, I believe had a similar problem and had to replace the whole of the downstairs flooring, which I would have ending up doing had we stayed, no doubt.

Some-time after we moved into 160, the National Coal Board, was offering the new slimline radiator central heating, with a Redfire, smokeless fuel burner, a smart looking appliance, with glass door and back boiler to heat the water. At two hundred pounds, the offer was too good to refuse and we arranged with Jean's husband John, who was a licensed plumber to do the job. John and his mate came along and made templates for the curved radiators to fit under the bay windows, upstairs and down and counting the number of other flat ones to be installed as well as a heated towel rail for the bathroom and sent off the order. Whilst awaiting the arrival of these, John removed the old style chain pull toilet system and fitted a new low level suite, after which I boxed in the bath, making things look very modern. The complete CH system arrived and John quickly got on with the job, when finished, the smart white radiators really looked nice and the heat from the Redfire, certainly made us sit back a little and was so efficient, being an enclosed unit. Now that we had the central heating, I removed the fireplaces from the lounge and the double bedrooms, bricking them up.

Chapter 40 - Hernia Harris No. 1

I was admitted to the Churchill Hospital, 10th August 1966, having returned from Woolacombe, the previous week-end, sun-tanned and rested. At 11am the next day I was wheeled to the theatre, the anaesthetist asking if I had just returned from the French Riviera, "no, we have just got back from very sunny holiday at Woolacome" I replied, "well count to ten" he said and I woke up as sick as a dog, in the recovery ward, wondering where the hell I was. I shall never forget that horrible dry sickly taste and the yellow bile, which is a thing of the past now-a-days. Back in the ward of 26 beds, another chap, also named Harris had had a similar op and he was dubbed Hernia Harris No.2 much to the amusements of the other patients, who had all sorts of other ops and were from a very diverse cross section of the community. Matron was a very smart lady, with her starched collar and immaculately pressed uniform. There were several nurses and the ward was run entirely by these lovely people. In the next bed to my left was a Mr Wright, an older man with a dry sense of humour, he had had a gall stone op and proudly displayed the stones in a little jar on his bedside table, his little jokes kept us laughing and anyone who has had a serious op, will be aware of the inability to control laughing. A man came in for an op to enlarge the urinal pipe in his penis, he really created laughter, when relating the after effects of the op, saying that when he tried to pee "it was like pissing red hot fish hooks", Mr Wright burst out laughing and all of us who had heard his comment, joined in. A younger man opposite, went into hysterics, rolled out of bed and crawled along the floor, out of the doors, onto the lawn outside, having to be retrieved by matron and nurses, still laughing uncontrollably. I don't know what they did to overcome the problem. After a few days, I was able sit at the table for meals and converse with others there. In the evening I was able to take a turn with the drinks trolley to serve up the night-caps. It had been a painful first visit to a hospital, but the op was a great success and still holds to this day. If I remember correctly, Jean collected me from hospital. Worse to come, the weather continued to be fine and warm and I spent most days on the back lawn, only to go down with a dreadful flu, keeping me off work for a further three weeks. With tax refund, the payments from two Sick Clubs, that I had wisely joined, I was slightly better off in bed, but I certainly wouldn't have recommended a hernia op to anyone back then.

Chapter 41 - The odd job man

Having moved to Kidlington, I was no longer able to work for Mr Canning, the disputes and stoppages at the factory continued to happen, so I looked for part time jobs to supplement my earnings. Fred next door had plenty of contacts and I was soon finding more odd jobs than I could handle, painting, gardening, repairs, you name it. Mr Rowe, who lived midway between us and Garden City, was an ex tea-planter and in his retirement had taken on housing for students from the Oxford University. There was no shortage of repairs and other odd jobs in these old houses and flats. I also did a large amount of decorating in Mr Rowe's own home and when he moved to Jack Straws Lane, near Oxford, to an even bigger property, I spent many hours changing the décor for him and his American wife. I also put in a few hours for a Miss Wake, a direct descendant of Hereward-the-Wake, very amusing really, Fred had put me on to the job. I found the address and parked outside. There was a long stone wall, with yellow forsythia hanging over it, in full bloom. I entered the heavy wrought iron gate an proceeded along the wide gravelled path, It was like going to "Downton Abbey". When I arrived and rang the bell at the large front door, a maid, appropriately dressed, came to the door and asked to who I might be. Saying that I had come to do some gardening as arranged by Fred, she said "please step inside and I will inform Miss Wake that you are here", disappearing through a door at the other side of the room. Re-appearing some minutes later, "Miss Wake will see you now" she said and opened the door and said "Mr Harris, ma'am". I stepped inside, confronting a very old lady, propped up in a large four-poster bed "Now young man" she said " I want you to dig the front garden thoroughly, taking out all the Sternbergia (Aconites), which have taken over. You can leave your bicycle in the tool shed and later the maid will make some refreshments". I didn't have the heart to say that I had a car outside, which was well hidden from view by the stone wall anyway. So I dug away the entangled mess of Aconites, trying hard to get every root from the deep black soil. After refreshments, I continued into the afternoon, being surprised to see the old lady, slowly approaching on two sticks, "how is the job going?" she enquired. "I have done my best, there may-be the odd root or two left." I said. "But that is not what I want, I want it all out" she said, with a little bit of authority in her voice. "I will fork it over again" I said and with that she ambled off. Returning the next day, I was pleasantly surprised, when Miss Wake thanked me for doing a good job and before handing out any more work, she asked me to take a seat near her bedside, where-upon she enquired as to where I was born and where I presently lived,

telling her that I was born in the Parish of Deddington, “Oh! Deddington” she said “I am sure I have a book on Deddington, I shall seek it out of my library and you may like to borrow it”. “Indeed, I would ma’am, thank you” and sure enough, at my next visit she had it wrapped and ready for me. I left Fred to carry on with the garden, as the factory was running fairly smoothly now and I never did any more work for Miss Wake. Another job that Fred asked me to share with him, was to lop the top of a tree for a retired navy captain, his name escapes me. But I didn’t tell Fred which day I was available, so went off to do the job by myself. I can’t recall the species of the tree, but it had been lopped before and the new growth of long poles had attained a height of, probably fifteen feet. Getting the ladder and taking a saw, I climbed to the base of the long poles and proceeded to cut them off, letting them fall to the ground, not too far from the captain’s residence. So, the last one was standing proud and right opposite the lounge window of the house. Eying the distance, I figured that there was plenty of room for the last pole to fall, which there was, BUT! When this defiant pole fell to the ground, it stood on end and, you’ve guessed it, instead of falling backwards, as the others had, it teetered momentarily and fell forward, the strong saw cut end, plunging through one of the small fancy lead-light panels, above the large window. God! What can I say? I knocked on the door, and the only one at home was the young daughter, who had not heard the breaking glass, being in another part of the large house. I helped her clear the broken glass from the carpet and said I would ring later when her father was home, still wondering what the outcome would be. I told Fred, “well, I told you that we would do it together, don’t come to me for help” How-ever when I spoke with the captain later, he couldn’t have been nicer, saying that he was taking all the coloured glass out and replacing with plain glass. It could have been worse, had the pole smashed the large window. John and I did a lot of decorating together, with thoughts of setting up in business, but Jen was always ringing to tell John to get home for his meals or other things, so in the end we abandoned the idea. I carried on, fitting odd jobs in with my own, but the family benefitted so much from my efforts, a lovely modernised home, good clothes, always well dressed and good holidays. Above all I loved doing it for them.

Chapter 42 - From Memory

My Diary entries dried up somewhat during 1966 till early 1969, when we departed for Australia, I suppose I was trying to fit in too much, so most of what I write now will be from memory. My hernia fixed, the flu gone, I was now restricted, somewhat, as to what work I could do at home, having been lectured on this by my doctor. At the factory, I was able to avoid any task that might be too strenuous, filling in with easier jobs that Ron could find for me. The rest of the year raced away, spending Christmas at Southend. 1967, the New Year dawned and now I was feeling well and carried on with my normal activities. Trevor's school had announced that a number of children would be able to join a cruise on the School Cruises ship, the SS Nevassa, to Morocco and he was keen to go, so without any hesitation, we paid a deposit and the cruise took place at Easter, possibly for two weeks, I am not sure. However, Trevor had a great time and has a postcard of the Nevassa, signed by all his mates, who cruised with him. I wrongly thought that Rosalyn went to Italy with her school, but she tells me that we cancelled the trip, as we had decided to emigrate to Australia. Pauline reminds me that we bought Kevin a red pedal car for his 2nd birthday and Adrian had a police pedal car sometime prior, remiss of me to forget. Early one Sunday morning, after a late night having a few drinks at home with Aubrey and Agnes, we heard laughter from downstairs, on investigation, we found little Kevin, sitting behind the settee in the lounge, with an empty sherry bottle, a broken glass, giggling away, drunk. Pauline rang the doctor, explaining what had happened and he said that as long as it was only sherry and not a large amount, let him sleep it off. He slept well into the morning, lucky is wasn't something stronger and lucky too that he didn't cut himself on the glass. Lesson learned!

1st June 1967, I sold my old faithful, NRD 967, to Ken for twenty pounds and the next day bought a black Austin Cambridge, 188 GWL, with red leather seats, for two hundred and thirty pounds, from Hartford Motors. Working at BMC where the Cambridge was made, I was able get any parts required from the reject store, for a fraction of the retail price. When polished, it did resemble a police car, as they were using the Wolseley model at that time, from the same range of cars. I was driving towards Oxford one morning, I spotted Martin in his little mini-van, slowly pulling alongside him, hailing him to pull over, which he did and when I stepped out, he said "bloody hell mate, I nearly shit myself, I wondered what I had done wrong", this created a few laughs at work. The Cambridge was roomier than the

Vauxhall, with a split bench seat at the front, a large boot and a strong roof rack. In a short while I had turned it into a practically new car, not as nippy as NRD 967, but nice to drive.

With the alterations and decorations to 160 complete, I was able to spend more time doing other things, Pauline and I taking the children to many places of interest, Stratford-upon-Avon, Blenheim Palace, Windsor Castle, the sights of London, to name a few, not always by ourselves, Aubrey and Agnes, with Linda were still our regular escorts. Of course we made many trips to other parts of the country, when we were at Southend, Pearl and Derrick, with Corinne and Sally, took us along to Constable Country, Flatford Mill, a favourite, as well as many old country homes and historical places.

John and I continued to follow Oxford United when playing at home, or away if not too far, such as Swindon or Reading. On one occasion, I can't recall the date, but it must have been late '68, I took Adrian along to watch Manchester United play Oxford United in an FA Cup match. Thousands of extra temporary seats had been erected at the ground to accommodate as many supporters as possible, to watch a top division side. Ron Atkinson (Tank), who was Oxfords star player, eventually became manager of Manchester United. Anyway, on this day, Steven Scroggs, offered us a lift and we noted where he had parked for the return trip. The match ended, we made our way to Steve's parking spot, gone!! The traffic was horrendous, so I said "not that far, Adrian, let's walk" So cutting off a fair slice, by using a short cut to the City by-pass, we set off. The by-pass was chocker block, the traffic stop/start. Mr Canning's bus was amongst all this, but the driver could not pick up passengers with a charter bus. As we walked we would catch the bus up and then it would move on a little way and we would pass it again as we walked on the footpath, in those days it was only a two way road, so it didn't take a lot of traffic to cause a jam. Well eventually we had walked the length of the by-pass to Summertown round-about and turning onto the Kidlington road, a city bus came along, we gladly hopped on for that last mile home. We never did find out from Steve, why he had left us stranded (mean sod!), but we probably got more benefit from the walk than he did from the stop/start traffic!

John and I also enjoyed a game of darts and a couple of beers at The Dog at the week-ends. Jen would baby-sit for us, when Aubrey and Agnes visited to go out for an evening meal, perhaps to the Sturdeys Castle restaurant or the Evenlode on the Witney road and on return visits to A & A, we would dine at the Red Lion at

Bloxham or in Banbury or Brackley and in turn, Pauline would sit for John and Jen, so it was all very friendly and enjoyable. I recall one very cold Winters evening, when Aubrey and Agnes came for one of our get-togethers, as they were ready to leave for home, I said jokingly “might be snowing”, upon opening the front door to see them off, there was about three inches of snow covering their car and the ground. Aubrey told us later, that they had a slippery ride home, only just able to negotiate the steep hill into Deddington

1968 and I cannot recall any significant happenings, no doubt there were a few things that would be worth a mention, but these will come when my account has ended. Life continued much the same, I do remember a Fete being held at Trevor’s High School, where teams of four adults had to smash up a piano and poke all the pieces through a 12 inch square hole cut into a large plywood board, there must have been at least ten pianos lined up and on the signal the destruction began, each team being monitored, to make sure all the pieces got through the hole, the hardest part was the iron frame, which held the wires, I couldn’t grasp the fact that all these, once treasured pianos, were being smashed, I seem to recall that the winning team was from the local bank. Pauline had found a little part time job for a couple of hours, twice a week, more a friendly help to a friend, than a job. I kept up my odd jobbing, if time allowed.

Whilst I was doing some decorating for Ken and Val, they mentioned that they had decided to migrate to Australia, under the ‘Ten Pound Pom’ scheme, many thousands, country-wide, were making the break, and said that we might be interested to go along to the films and lectures that were being held in Oxford, telling Pauline of the suggestion, we decided to go along to look and listen. Like a holiday brochure, the films were colourful and showed all the best features of that land ‘down-under’, the sunshine, the golden sands, the outdoor life, but not all so rosy once you are there, everywhere has its problems and hardships, some settle, some don’t, it’s what you make it.

Chapter 43 - Goodbye 160

So the decision was made, taken in by the films and lectures we decided to migrate to sunny Australia. We could have made things so much easier, had we been less hasty and planned better, but we could say this about lots of things that happen in one's lifetime. The decision made and the wheels were now in motion. With some sadness, 160 was put up for sale at 5,200-00 pounds, despite Mr Rowe advising us not to sell, as he said, he would have no trouble renting it out, with a home for us to come back to, if we didn.t settle in Australia. On reflection, that is what we should have done, the prices for such a home rocketed over the next few years, even little St Aubin had been sold for 13,000-00 pounds and when we visited in the nineties, the new owner said he had paid 104,000-00 pounds for it.

Lots of forms had to be filled in, as well as medicals, vaccinations and X-rays, all of these things being necessary to meet the requirements of the Australian Migration Department. Then the sale of 160, which we put into the hands of our faithful Mr Phillips and it was not long before a Miss Chance and her Australian partner had signed on the dotted line, delighted to find what they were seeking. Because of the quick sale, we now had the opportunity to travel to Australia on the flagship of the P&O shipping company, the SS Canberra, 42,000 tons of luxury.

There were different categories that one could migrate to Australia under. One could go direct to a migrant hostel and stay until settled by the authorities, or with $A5000-00 or more, travel under a sponsored arrangement with a Reality group, who would anticipate that you would buy a home from them, staying in accommodation that they would provide, but only for four weeks if you failed to sign a contract with them and then out into the big wide world to make your own arrangements, which is what happened to many, including us. Your bum was barely on the chair, on arrival at your provided accommodation, when the agent was knocking at the door with a contract in his hand, desperate to get a sale and his commission.

So we were about to leave our now very comfortable, modernised home, barely having had time to benefit from the hard work in making it so. We were able to take one ton of luggage for a family of six and Brambles, the assigned packaging company, came to 160 to pack the crates, that I had managed to get, free of charge, from an office in Oxford, with the things that we had chosen to take,

making several trips to collect them. On the last trip I was unfortunate enough to get some damage to the back of the Cambridge, when a little tray top truck, laden with heavy drums, was unable to stop on the wet road, pushing and squashing a Ford Cortina between it and mw. The poor little Cortina was a 'write-off', smashed at front and rear. My damage was minimal, thanks to the robust rear bumper and chassis. I was able to get replacement over-riders for the rear bumper from the reject store at work. Leaving the accident, I drove to the police station at Kidlington to report the incident and returned to the scene with a motor cycle policeman, explaining what had happened and telling that I would be able to repair my small amount of damage and would be leaving for Australia soon. He wrote down a few details and said "off you go then, good luck in Australia, I will now sort out the bloke that caused it and check the poor bugger in the Cortina. I dread to think how long I would have been held up at the scene these days. I heard nothing more of the affair. I got the crates stencilled with the required details and left Brambles to do the rest. Personal items for the voyage, we packed ourselves and I note that I had to pay twelve pounds and eleven shillings excess baggage, when arriving at Durban, South Africa, so alphabetically I suppose Z got their bill when arriving at Melbourne! I had been advised to take my car, which I did and it travelled on another P & O vessel, the SS Himalaya, which was neck and neck with us all the way to Adelaide. The car had to be delivered to a special depot in London, where it was steam cleaned and waxed for the journey. I packed the boot with garden and other tools, also placing other things between the front and rear seats. I locked the boot, which had a separate key and removed it from the key ring, just leaving the ignition key. When I eventually got the car released from customs, a note on the steering wheel said "Unable to unlock boot", imagine that these days!! So all that I had packed in th car got through ok. I now had to decide how to dispose of our furniture and other things that we were not taking. Our lovely, almost new lounge suite sold to a young couple about to marry, along with the dining suite and other bits and pieces for less than the true value. My niece Sylvia gladly accepted the bedroom furniture and my almost new extension ladder I gave to Fred next door. How wrong we were to get rid of our home so readily and cheaply!and Roy (mouth and trousers) called in to say 'bon voyage' and collect my nearly new shovel, which I told him he could have, if he collected it. So eventually all our unwanted effects had been disposed of, just hanging on to the beds until the day before we left, sleeping on the carpet on the final night, Jen providing blankets We were now without a car, but still had the telephone, so we were able to contact our friends to tell them of our departure date, in turn many made final

visits and calls. So on the Wednesday 21st May 1969, Mr Phillips called in to finalise any business and promised to settle any accounts that may present themselves after our departure and keep us posted. Jen, John, Tim and Tracy, joined us for a final photograph under the Prunus tree on the front lawn and with lots of tears, we left by taxi for Oxford railway station. We caught the 7-07pm train to Southampton, where we made our way to 48 Atherley Road, Shirley, the home of Pauline's brother John and wife Dorothy. After some welcome refreshment, John took us the short distance to the docks, where the Canberra was moored, a truly magnificent looking vessel.The next day, having said our farewells to the family, who had travelled down to see us off, we boarded the Canberra, being carefully checked in by the on-board Migration officers and were allocated cabins 254 and 256 on D deck, our portholes about water level. Stowing our luggage and speaking with our Goan cabin steward, we returned to the upper deck, high above the wharf below, where in a large group, stood Pauline's Mum, Sister Pearl and husband Derrick, brothers Ivor and wife Chloe, John and wife Dot, Auntie's Nellie and Dears. At 5pm "anchors aweigh' and Canberra slipped away, Australia bound. We waved and blew kisses to the family, who we would not see again for two years, amid the noise of the ships hooting siren and the the shouts and yells of hundreds of other passenger and seeing-off families, with bunting and streamers trailing. This was not new to me, as I had already been half-way across the world during my Army days. Pauline had a small taste on our trip to the Channel Islands and Trevor on his school trip to Morocco, so half of us were prior seafarers, whilst for Rosalyn, Adrian and Kevin, a new experience, which they thoroughly enjoyed. But this would not be their last voyage, as we circumnavigated the world in 1971/72 on a most memorable cruise. But that is another story. I can safely leave the children to record our life in Australia.

I will conclude this account of "As I Remember", You will find the odd grammatical error and spelling mistake. Thank-you to my dear wife for her patience, during the many hours she spent alone during this bum numbing account. *George 2013.*

Neighbours Jenny & Husband John Hunt with children Timothy & Tracy, farewelling us as we are about leave 160 Oxford road.

'Bon Voyage' to Australia.
SS Canberra 22/05/1969

Sir Winston Churchill's funeral train, hauled by Battle of Britain class locomotive No 34051 Sir Winston Churchill, passes slowly through Oxford station on January 30, 1965, carrying his body to Hanborough