

117 pages 38,521 words

First Fifteen

North Harrow, 1935-1950.

Setting the Scene

Nineteen-thirty-five, held within its grasp, two important events... my birthday and The Silver Jubilee. The former, I am happily celebrating, the King's unfortunately, lasted only a year... It was also the year Stanley Baldwin was elected Prime Minister... when massive unemployment the main social malaise... a fear I felt acutely, all my working life...

Perhaps my brother was named Stanley after Baldwin, or my middle name, given - after Arthur Balfour. How many of us know why we are so named...? However, my surname Kearey, I do know – comes from the anglicized Gaelic-Irish name O'Ciardha - a clan name, originating from central and south-west Ireland. My mother's name of Collins is linked to the land, and hails from Tatworth, a sub-manor of Chard, in Somerset...

The Jarrow march celebrated the first year of my birth. Later that year, anti-fascist activists persuaded Mosley to call-off his march... both these events took place the year King George V died. Two years later, Neville Chamberlain was elected to take control of that same party. It was the war years - of the Coalition party, headed by Winston Churchill, which covered the first ten years of my life...

The years of the Labour Government of Clement Attlee - his Second Ministry coincided with the Korean War, the Berlin blockade, and formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]... these events saw me through my 'First Fifteen' – school years.

As will be explained: the town of my birth North Harrow was a new town built in the thirties occupying land along the Metropolitan railway line... linking Harrow to Pinner and Wealdstone to Rayners Lane. It represented all the hallmarks of Home Counties life-style - to become the suburban housing estate espoused by estate agents and land developers. It was not quite upto the quality and style of the Garden City movement launched by Ebenezer Howard at Letchworth and Welwyn - pre First World War, or in the class of John Loudon's, Country Houses - for the new rich, a vision of the ideal English village community where all would be impressed by the 'picturesque'. The government, to give work to the unemployed after the General Strike - and the depressed period after - designed to give a haven of domestic peace to cover up the harsh urban environment, promoted these new builds. This was not the first time that the homeless were given a step up the social ladder involving a move out into the country. It had happened in the mid-nineteenth century, to the outer reaches of London, and continues today...

For us boys the knowledge that just behind the houses, resided the North Harrow Tennis Club, elevated Cumberland Road to the dizzy heights of middle class Pinner Village. The trees and flowered borders, the grass verge and spacious pavements, all part of *garden-city* living - designed to achieve airiness; the green swathed parks gave recreational space, and the Hall's Farm complex added bucolic rural charm...

During this period, home meant North Harrow. A time, when the knife grinder and onion seller cycled round the roads... the milk was collected in churns, to be delivered by horse and cart, by the half-pint and quart... the coal by the coalman wearing his tarred sacking hood and apron... and the bread - by van. Gypsies sold pegs and posies of heather at the door - leaving special chalk marks on the pavement. The Rag-a-bone man sang, and the scrap man called..., 'any-old-iron'. Biscuits and sugar sold loose... salt and soap by the block and flour and split peas by the bag... all obtained at Lipton's or the Home & Colonial. The butcher sold you fat - to melt down for lard, and 'skewered' meat... pinned tag, declared part and price. Greengrocers sold seasonal homegrown vegetables whilst the beetroot boiled in a

bucket at the back of the shop. Large blocks of chocolate and toffee - broken with a small brass hammer, sold in Woolworths, whose goods were displayed on open counters. Few aeroplanes seen or heard... no cars, ran down our road and not everyone had a telephone. There were no televisions, central heating systems, super-markets or electric toasters... Holes were dug in the road by workers using a sledgehammer first to break-up the concrete - taking it in turns to hammer an enormous chisel, held in long-handed grips... concrete was mixed in the road by hand and plasterers stirred their daub adding horsehair. The building trade still used methods devised many years before - after the First World War.

The family diet consisted mainly of bread and jam, roasts beef... hot, with roast potatoes and cabbage, cold-slice or minced with mashed potatoes... beef or mutton, perhaps stewed with dumplings... sausages, and very occasionally - fish on Fridays. Puddings, of rice or stewed fruit - perhaps in a pie... but always served with thin custard... Tea was the drink of the nation, no less to us! Long-grain rice, pasta, pizza, burgers, multi-grained bread, packets of sauce mix and ground coffee - never! Chicken a rarity - reserved as a special treat for Christmas. The mince was screwed to the kitchen table and was used every week. The weekend's leftover meat was passed through it with an onion, carrots, and crusts of bread to make mince for cottage and shepherd's pie, forced meatballs and meat pies. Rendered fat was used as fat for pastry, puddings, dumplings, pies, and dripping.

School life was coming to an end... my aunt, alerted by an overheard conversation - whilst serving at her employers table, heard about the difficulties experienced 'finding an applicant to be an apprentice' - in a lithographic printers - their artists department. She spoke to her employer, the owner of the printing factory, about my interest in drawing... He invited me to attend an interview...

On that momentous day, in early July 1950, my hair slicked back by copious applications of water, my shoes - brilliantly polished, including the insteps, by much hard work - shone like mirrors. The creases, put into my trousers the night before - ironed, whilst listening to Tommy

Handley, were razor sharp. My tie, knotted in regulation style, drawn up tight. In my pocket was the full six shillings and sixpence – hard earned from my paper round.

My father had generously paid for a weekly train ticket – an action meant to demonstrate to me the confidence he had in my ability to hold down my first job, was very much of ‘the old school’. Whilst I was looking forward to a bohemian life-style, he, understanding the ways of the world, lectured me... emphasising dedication and perseverance, that if maintained would ‘*set me up*’ for a lifetime of work! Ever since leaving home that morning, my thoughts had been consumed by doubts and fears... every part of me charged with foreboding. My walk to work - dodging in and out of the streams of workers down Station Road, Neasden, took me away from the railway station... past the bombed out sidings and goods-yard - that stretched as far as Wembley. The soot blackened, bomb-blasted, pockmarked factory walls hid behind spearheaded railings... The endless rows of terraced Victorian villas - bravely advanced upon the pavement and down the hill; their geranium filled window boxes lending colour, attempting to distract from the all too obvious bomb damage. A poster-hung hoarding exclaimed, by stark design, the virtues of Persil’s whitening power and Tetley’s superior leaf - promoted by a colourful plantation scene... gave colour and interest to the industrial setting.

I reached the factory gate... Peering out from behind the grill of a small enquiry hatch a portly gatekeeper acknowledged my knock. He was attired in a brown, patched, warehouse coat, gripping a rolled-up cigarette between a few stained teeth, croaked a gruff, ‘Whot-ja-want?’ My fear returned; I thrust out my letter – Mr Frank Oppenheimer’s elaborate hand graced the paper... I made my first utterance, since leaving home, ‘Here sir!’ The iron-studded door screeched opened... I reluctantly squeezed in. My working life began...

CHAPTER I.

North Harrow – General Strike – Unemployment - Recreation facilities – Street life - Ramsey MacDonald – German expansion - Lead up to WWII – Rearmament - New town status – 1930s architecture – Shopping – Schools – Churches - The role of women – Metropolitan Railway – The society – Public entertainment – The radio.

There was nothing particularly unusual about the house, road, or town... it was typical of pre-war town development – able to be seen in any number of places throughout Britain. Looking back, I was fortunate to be raised there, by parents who provided a stable upbringing in wartime austerity. The society was, in the main, lower middle-class. There was no unemployment and very little serious crime – it was a society wedded to order and conformity. I hope my story tells why I'm pleased I lived in that place, with those conditions and in those times..., and how much that society differs from today's...

From 1950 onwards, society's behaviour changed. All over the country, the past was being replaced. We were not to know it or feel it... but imperceptibly, one routine, habit, custom, and manner, was given over to the less formal - simpler, more informal, casual style... which was being imported. My father

would have called it sloppy and scruffy. In reality, it was Britain aping the fashions of America, shown to us by the cinema projector. The majority of town folk went to the cinema at least once a week... we children supplemented that visit with Saturday morning pictures, relishing Roy Rogers and Trigger, Gene Autrey and Bronco Billy.

Within fifteen years, separate starched collars gave way to attached soft collars. The introduction of blue jeans made everybody a cowboy, hot pants became outerwear, the acceptance of county accents cast aside the Queens English; television replaced cards, draughts, cribbage, snakes and ladders, and tiddly-winks and dancing apart made the jive a craze.

The break-up of The British Empire went with drinking coffee instead of tea; grammar schools thought outdated, comprehensive education promoted by Shirley Williams, as the 'in thing.' The Scouts, Boys Brigade, and Church Lads considered 'old hat'. The Union Jack replaced by the cross of St George at football matches, steam trains gave way to diesel, camping was suspect, steamed puddings bad for your health and contraceptives something sexually useful instead of keeping the rifle barrel clean... Oh, and by the way...., if you were walking down the street, with a lady, you walked on the kerb side – so that any splashes or road dirt went on you - not on the lady... When I took out my first girl friend home that is how I behaved.

Number thirty-one, Cumberland Road, was designed in the late twenties and built in the thirties. The General Strike of 1926 prompted the government to find solutions to reduce unemployment... the result of this decision was to stimulate house building and develop new towns - North Harrow was one such town...

As you drive about Britain, you come across public buildings and houses that all have similar architecture. The nineteen-thirties building style was recognisable by the use of brick and tile, gabled roofs, roughcast walls, tile hung bays and suspended floors, symmetrical windows with stained glass inserts and panelled doors. The front gardens were small, bordered by a privet hedge and divided by a narrow side entrance - leading to a back garden. I have seen similar houses all around England built to a particular standard of design and quality. There was nothing wrong with it... once the trees and gardens had been planted the formality was rather charming... That is before the weekend 'do-it-yourselfers' ruined the style and grace by tearing out the dado and picture rails and boxing in the stairs... Later, the double glazing salesmen finished the job.

The majority of houses built in North Harrow were Cutler homes. Albert Benjamin Cutler came from Tottenham. He began building in 1909 but most of his work was in North Harrow and Pinner. His son Horace took over the business eventually becoming Mayor of Harrow, then Leader of the Greater London Council; to be finally rewarded for services rendered in 1979. Albert Cutler lived in Beresford Road, Marsh Road, and finally in Eastcote Road. He was closely associated with the Imperial Properties Investment Company then Amalgamated London Properties. During the period, 1925-1939, T. F. Nash Ltd., had three large estates for developing. One was at Eastcote, where Nash lived, another at Kenton, and a third at Rayners Lane... the most economical... Others, more elaborately built, situated on the way to Pinner, ranged from £595 to £750 – four up and two down, plus a garage.

I was born in Cumberland Road, situated at the not so fashionable end of town – towards Wealdstone, just off Station

Road. Gloucester Road and Westmorland Road...ran - at their top ends, to Pinner Road...

The further end of Cumberland Road runs into Canterbury Road – entering the start of the council estate. Here, no softening effect of grass verge, well stocked flowerbed or shading tree, but making do with narrow pavements and fluted lampposts... Telegraph poles were just about to be raised; lines strung, and ordered telephones installed. This was no depressed environment but a well designed, new, and ordered, living space...

This dormitory town, for that is what it was - having no factories or large offices, relied on the railways and buses to ferry the working population to the nearest main town and beyond... London being only twenty minutes away. The town's wide pavements – fronting the shops, provided a feeling of light and space, whilst the classically styled, imitation marble-walled Embassy cinema, one of the Associated British Cinema [ABC] chain... reserved for itself the role of premier landmark.

In Britain, the years between 1935 and 1939 were considered 'the calm before the storm'. Travellers, holidaymakers and businessmen, who went to Europe, came back with tales - describing Germany as being prepared for expansion both militarily and industrially, with a population indoctrinated to consider others, not Germanic, as inferior. The British government did not discuss or predict their feelings, of 'troubles to come'... nor was it forcefully spoken of, or written about - by the media... at least, not sufficient to raise alarm or disturb the peace.

North Harrow's political and social atmosphere was one of dignified calm – of people trying to get on with life. I do not remember any new building work going on - for the land was totally developed, except the farmland at Headstone - still there today, that provided local dairy produce. Neither the leading

citizens nor local government agencies gave any indication what was imminent... peace reigned in a vacuum... The summer of nineteen thirty-nine was glorious, predicting a good harvest...

Cricket was being played at Lords, where Middlesex harboured great expectations. No aircraft could be heard overhead and London's airport never mentioned. Northolt still had biplanes taking off and landing and Brooklands still held motor racing. Fathers' walked with furled umbrella, or walking stick, wearing a jacket and tie. Mothers' pushed coach built prams with sunshades, children wore school uniform, including caps, policeman patrolled on foot, and errand boys delivered goods - on bikes. Children skipped and collected cigarette cards..., and football became the national sport - relegating cricket to second place. Lord Reith, the Managing Director of British Radio, demanded absolute decorum; parks, recreation grounds, bowling greens, and council gardens competed with each other to see who could cultivate the neatest lawns and plant the most colourful flowerbeds.

In all of this, Harrow was no different from many other Boroughs throughout Britain. Office workers, tradesmen, skilled workers and hospital staff were expected to work to a high standard and most were proud of the quality of their work. Every trade skill was taught through an apprenticeship system, which had not long been reduced from seven years to five. Journeymen were justifiably proud when finishing their training and stoutly defended any erosion of their place in their trade or wider society. Girls were not apprenticed, taught industrial skills, worked on building sites, or drove cars. Mothers did not work full or part-time, but stayed at home; at least until the youngest child went to junior school, then they worked in shops, went back into nursing and teaching, or took a cleaning job.

The town's citizens, although living in up-to-date houses, observed turn of the century attitudes. Boy Scouts and Cubs,

Girl Guides and Brownies were the centrepiece of many children's lives. Some older boys joined one of the cadet corps. Shops were shut on Sundays and Wednesday afternoons, attendance at church was normal for about fifty per-cent of the population, attending at least one service during Sunday. Most young children went to Sunday school. Shops opened at eight and closed at five - during the weekdays... on Thursdays and Saturdays stayed open an hour later. There was no poverty; all the children were well dressed, keeping aside special clothes for Sundays. I do not remember any rowdiness or drunken brawls. Teashops were popular and cakes and sandwiches formed the basis of afternoon teas. There was no Hire Purchase and personal saving the only way to pay the bills. Jumble Sales a regular feature and Tea Dances a popular afternoon event.

Much was made of The British Empire. The newsreel camera showed the Royal Family maintaining a ridged schedule of familiar appointments. The National Anthem was played at every performance at the cinema, theatre and concert, and at most public meetings – everyone stood, and those in uniform saluted. The National Flag was hoisted at every big occasion. Each of the Armed Services was seen as saviours and protectors of every country of the Empire. Explorers, Generals, Colonists and Missionaries were written about and applauded. Newspapers, books, and magazines promoted The Empire's people, produce, and position. Churches collected for The Empire's poor, and prayed for the continuance of the Monarchy, The Colonial system, and the government. The country's laws, institutions, businesses, and educational system were organized to continue its growth and wealth... The Empire was a very important part of the country's way of life... you were always made aware of it by all forms of indoctrination. This was not by official propaganda but part of a proud culture.

The Metropolitan railway line, laid down the previous century, reached Pinner from Baker Street, in 1885. New house building started where the old Edwardian style left off - at Edgware Road and Willesden. All along the line, in the late 1920s - on either side of the railway-line, new housing sprung up - Wembley Park, Preston Road, and Northwick Park... onto North Harrow, Pinner... and beyond..., all this took place in the twenties and thirties. Previously it had been farmland... now transformed into The Greater London sprawl. It linked up all the little villages and hamlets along the line... it just needed more schools and other institutions, to convert each area into *new town* status. By the time the plan completed, between 1928 and 1933, the European situation directed the government to reallocate the country's resources... Serious house building had to wait twenty-five years until it started again in Chesham. By 1960, there was another enormous shortage of first time buyer's homes.

Germanic military expansion was threatening, sufficient to galvanise the government into building-up the depleted armed forces, and place orders for military equipment. Even after this awakening, Britain was still poorly defended - it's Military woefully inadequate and badly trained... tactics and procedure based on lessons learned during the first part of the First World War. The Indian Army and Overseas Detachments were in being to show force - military strength - to help the civilian authorities hold the peace. The military establishment was rigidly structured based on the class system not on merit.

Unemployment in, 1935-50, and for the following twenty years, was not an issue. I recall the concern my parents exhibited towards the advancement of war, brought on by 'The German Attitude'... A build-up of incidences led to Chamberlain's 11.15 a.m. radio announcement - on Sunday the 3rd September 1939 -, which took the country into war.

We heard the announcement whilst in the kitchen. Why we were all there I cannot recall but we took in the solemn statement with I believe bated breath. I can still hear Chamberlain voice, a rather high, brittle voice, with clipped intonation..., a rather theatrical performance – as though, expecting a cheer!

France announced they were to be at war with Germany that afternoon, as did Australia and New Zealand. South Africa announced their intentions three days later and Canada followed within the week. As all this was going on, the inhabitants, of North Harrow continued their lives as if nothing was happening.

On the continent, British troops advanced through France to Lille - near the Belgium frontier. They dug defences, then advanced - leaving their prepared positions... then fell back..., never to fully recover. The army was unfit for war, inadequately equipped, carrying outdated weapons, and adopting inept tactics in a doomed campaign. By the end of the following May the British Army was in full retreat... to the coast, and Dunkirk - to re-embark and be shipped back home... It was thought by the populace, an act of providence – like the river Jordan parting. In fact, it demonstrated an almost total ineptitude brought on by thoughtlessness and ignorance, exhibited by most of the political and military elite. It took almost four years to recover... then the outcome was inevitable... however, by that time, Britain was in debt to America, never to regain its premier position.

North Harrow, that autumn, was a town with pride..., a place that grew out of the thirties and prospered... linking the old towns of Harrow, Pinner, and Wealdstone. Its design showed off town planning at its very best with accommodation for all pockets and services to match. Many of the roads had pavements fringed by a grass verge... A crab apple or almond tree was planted outside each house, gave a pink haze - to the tree's canopy, in spring. The whole described poetically by John

Betjeman as Metroland, a term applauding suburban planning. Householders competed with each other to see who could produce the best verge and neatest front garden.

By the time, I was four – able to take note of things around me... the gardens in the road were fully stocked with shrubs and trees - softening the outlook, which left me with a lasting memory of flowing greenery. The scene - presented to the interested onlooker, was one of orderliness, neatness, and tranquillity... essential requirements for lower middle-class life. Because newly built, the pavements, roads and buildings were clean and undamaged - in pristine order – no cracked paving slabs, discarded litter, or graffiti. The town was exactly as designed with no extensions, garages, conservatories, replaced windows, or doors. Its citizens assumed the conventions of studied politeness – hats were raised to friends and neighbours and audiences stood for the National Anthem.

It is difficult now, over seventy years later, to describe the atmosphere and general ambience of the place, because it was so different. There was no frenzied traffic passing, no pollution, or noise. Many bikes were ridden, the horse and cart a means of delivery... prams abounded, and children held hands. Compared to today's picture those times were quite charming... the likes, never to be seen again.

I am closing my eyes... thinking back to when I was a boy... standing at the crossroads, clutching an Evening News and two ounces of Rosemary tobacco - bought for my father that Saturday evening. There is very little traffic about, occasionally a single decker bus - the 230 route, passes on its way - to Rayners Lane or Wealdstone. It was quiet, with few people about – those that are are hurrying home. It was the lack of road traffic, the emptiness of the pavements and the quietness that dictates the difference from today's... it was almost a rural atmosphere

North Harrow's railway bridge, of riveted steel, spans Station Road, casting a shadow on Headstone Hotel - the local hostelry. The railway station had two entrances each with a bank of telephone kiosks. The ticket office displayed the tickets in racked, serried ranks, drawn upon the counter ready to be punched. Access to the platforms was made through the barrier, up the stairs, out onto the raised platform - next to the waiting rooms. Bright advertising posters, hand drawn and printed by the lithographic process, heralded Brighton and Seaton as being everyone's dream location for a holiday. The London underground map flanked by the 'up and down line' timetables framed on the platform and waiting room walls.

The town's banks - railings and porticoes, faced in Portland stone, stationed impressively on the crossroads. Their solid respectability made a good impression on visitors and townspeople alike. Many of the shops had countrywide names: Express Dairy, United Dairies, Dewhurst's, Home & Colonial, Maynard's, Cullen's, Mac Fisheries, Boots, W. H. Smith, Woolworths, Cooper's, and the Watford Co-op. The local dance studio operated from the large room over the Co-operative Department Store. The dance teacher taught ballroom, Latin American, and old time dancing. Previously this large room had been a snooker hall and in common with many became obsolete - giving way to more profitable pastimes. Both have long since disappeared along with the cinema, car showroom and bicycle repair shop... Another building, which made North Harrow unusual, was the car showroom, laid out under the distinctive clock tower. The large plate glass, sliding doors, separated off the public from the lucky few who could buy the latest models. Cars, what few there were, serviced at the rear - next to the petrol pumps, their fuel pipes attached to swinging arms that carried the contents to the roadside. In 1939, there were nearly two million cars on the road, one for every twenty-five members of the

population. The cheapest car could be bought for just over a hundred pounds.

Opposite – on the other side of Pinner Road, lived Stan and Rose Kealey and daughter Joyce. Stan knew my father in WWI – they became linked by the closeness of their names. Ever more, they kept in touch. As a family, we often visited them for tea. He was a groundsman for the council and was very proud of his bowling greens. As a family, they joined to make jigsaw puzzles and they always had one ‘on the go’ inviting us to join in.

The nearest local National School was built in 1841 at the bottom of Pinner High Street – on the corner behind the signpost opposite the photographers. This was a development of The Church of England’s interest in promoting education for religious purposes. This took the form of The National Society for Promoting the Education of the poor in the Principles of the Established Church in 1811 to grant sufficient money to open up the Pinner Sunday School five years later. In 1833 the government enquiry into education for the poor lead to a series of grants to regularize religious involvement. This was the first nationally organized involvement, which lead to The National School being granted land by the lord of the manor, maintained by the school fee of a penny and voluntary contribution. Ten years later, at the time of The Great Exhibition, the school catered for 190 pupils. A much larger school was built in 1867 with five rooms in School Lane, Marsh Road, becoming Pinner’s National School. [In 1950, this school building became the overspill for Headstone Secondary School – where I spent my final year.] The Education Act of 1880 made school attendance compulsory. In October 1891 lessons at the infant school was free, though the upper schoolchildren were charged 1*d* per pupil.

The National School continued servicing the local children’s education for a further forty years when the influx of children from the new estates demanded more accommodation.

The Middlesex County Council soon provided new schools. Headstone Lane Secondary School was the first in 1929, Pinner Park in 1931, Cannon Lane in 34 and Longfield a year later. It was to this school that my brother and I attended in 1939 and 1940 respectively.

Longfield Primary and Junior School was situated midway between North Harrow and Rayners Lane, built at the same time as the surrounding houses in typical thirties style, of brick, with a flat roof, concrete cills, and metal framed windows. It educated about a hundred and fifty primary children and about the same for juniors; staffed by ten teachers, a headmistress, secretary, and caretaker. The playground asphalted and marked out for netball, relieved by a shrubbery on two sides. The headmistress banned the sports field for breaks - except for the annual sports day, because children became far too dirty - even in summer..., a chain-link fence circled the school's boundary separating the school from its surroundings.

Children seldom played truant, although there was always the odd boy who did - and got away with it. The School Board's Inspector peddled round the roads on his bike to catch out those unwary children - trying to evade being caught.

Headstone Secondary Modern School was built at the other side of town, for the bulk of teenagers who failed their 'eleven-plus' exam. Pinner Grammar, built just down the road, catered for the selected few. To cater for aspiring parent St. Andrew's private preparatory school for mixed infants and juniors, and girls up to eighteen lay behind the fence next to the bus stop on Station Road. Atholl House School built at the other end of town, nearer Rayners Lane. How strange it was to have private school, with red-coated pupils quite separate from the rest of the community. Who were the parents who sent their children to these private schools... the children were hardly ever seen or heard... and where did they go to when they did leave?

It was a mystery. The nearest private school for juniors and seniors was John Lyons School where our neighbour's two boys went. The parents of such children planned for their offspring to be educated and shaped for managerial white-collar occupations. This private education distanced their children from the rest of society – the parents in effect chose social exclusion... The school fees: bought better academic and sports facilities, discipline, compulsory homework engendered higher social expectations. The parents believed that it was worth the financial sacrifice to buy privilege, reinforcing the schools curriculum by ensuring that their child mixed with children of similar minded folk.

During the day, the shops and pavements were the preserve of women – mothers - pushing prams, shopping and meeting neighbours. It came to life when children came out of school, and again, later, when the trains delivered men from work. There were no nearby factories, and the frequent question, 'where are all the men' received the time honoured reply, "Gone up to town - it was mainly a white collar community commuting to London.

My brother and I had our clothes bought from Sopers or from a London second-hand shop. I do not remember any from local stores. This applied to all household linen too – Harrow was the main shopping area. In the linen department all, the items were arranged in countless drawers behind glass-topped counters with recessed brass measures screwed to the working surface. The cashier sat in an enclosed glazed box taking the money then sending the bill and money to the back of the shop using a brass tally chain or pneumatic tube. Change and a receipt came back the same way. Shoes were the only item bought locally - being needed at frequent intervals. When new, the soles were covered in steel studs or blakies, which made a crunching

noise – like a soldier marching – that sent, sparks flying, when sliding on the pavement...

My father was a cartage manager at Marylebone main-line railway station. He rented the family house spending very little time and no money maintaining it... being very prudent never overspent or borrowed money... His was a secure job that included a free season ticket - for personal use, and an annual pass for a family holiday. His membership of the Freemasons and Old Contemptible took all of his free time, and we suspect his spare cash too.

Shops in Harrow stayed open late on Saturdays and Thursdays, with half days opening on Wednesday. I do not remember any of my friends owning a wrist or pocket watch. The only person to give the correct time was the policeman. Life in Britain had changed little since before The First World War.

The most noticeable social change was the employment of women in offices and shops. Previously, most office and shop work had been the preserves of men. Later, women took over during the First World War leaving older men to continue as overseers, managers, and senior clerks. The use of women in factories, offices, and shops escalated as the years went by. By the time, the Second World War was underway women were finally accepted as 'essential for the country's economic survival'. Thereafter, the employment of women continued apace. It took another fifty years for girls to be considered suitable for technical work and given suitable training - at Further Education Colleges. In the printing industry, there were no women employed in any of the craft sections until the 1980s. In graphic reproduction studios, the training of girls began for film planners, but even so, there were no indentured apprentices. Industry stepped back from long periods of training for girls - believing that in many cases it would be a wasted effort.

Girls leaving school in the 1950s were expected to work upto the time they were to have children. This was the first time girls in mass had these expectations – it was an understanding of female ‘self-worth’. This led to sexual liberation and the concept of ‘the modern marriage’. Within fifty years, the ridged social structure was transformed. ‘Flower power’, nuclear disarmament, hippies, rockers, trial marriages, television watching, Further and Higher Education, popular culture, lost innocence, drug taking, contraception, part-time working, job sharing, single parenthood, throwing keys into the ring, drug taking, increased alcohol addiction and divorce played their part in the social changes that took place. The once quiet, vehicle free, ordered and regulated society was to go through a quiet transformation... along with the architect designed - sameness of the houses. It was now the age of ‘Do It Yourself’... replacement hardboard doors, ripped out architraves, dados, picture rails, fireplaces... concrete over gardens to make a parking space and the installation of white plastic covered aluminium picture windows.

Harrow Public School gave the town and surrounding villages an air of distinction and grace... by association. Its pupils, wearing straw boaters, stiff white collars and frock coats - matched the schools history and esteem. Harrow Grammar School - considered one of the country’s best - the equal of Manchester, was the goal for the children of aspiring parents. Pinner Grammar and John Lyons, fee-paying school, considered joint third in the educational hierarchy. The Eleven plus Exam was marked to give a cut-off point – to allow just enough passes to fill the local grammar schools. A selection system guaranteed to waste a high percentage of the country’s potential labour force however careful the sifting even though the failed could a year later sit for a technical school.

Houses built on the outskirts of Pinner, along the Pinner Road - towards North Harrow - just before the fire station and

Headstone School, were built in the early twenties. The Kodak factory, the first Eastman built outside America started manufacturing film and papers in 1891. Today it covers an area of 55 acres including a boundary of roads containing terraced workers cottages built in late Victorian style.

In 1925, Hendon Rural District Council bought Headstone Manor House with its twenty-five acres of land. The object was to build a recreation ground. The council widened Headstone Lane and made a new road called Parkside Way. Headstone Manor Estates bought the land from the council to develop the land, the builder being A J King whose design and quality was an improvement upon Cutler. The Headstone Races took place just north of Southfield Park. These farmer's horse races were keenly followed but exuberance saw its demise following riots in 1899.

Pinner was looked on as a middle class area... circling its much photographed fifteenth century church, coaching inn and High Street. Its borders nearly reached the Methodist chapel, North Harrow, which is set back from the cross roads that links George V Avenue to Hatch End, and the nearest farm. Originally, called Pinner Park Farm now Hall's Farm...Its fields, ranged either side of the road, gave good grass for the cows..., which in turn provided milk for the dairy - bottled for the town and surrounding area. [*During the war, these fields held a local searchlight battery*]. The milking parlour, built next to the bottling factory stood opposite the stables and sheds - housing the milk carts painted in red and white livery...

The horses, harnessed to all delivery carts, remembered their round as well as the milkman... never needed to be told to 'walk on'. These horses provided my mother with the necessary manure for her tomatoes and roses. The farm's original estate had been a deer park of over two hundred acres - the first recorded building on that site was in 1560. The present

farmhouse, which boasts Halls Farm painted in large letters on the side, was built in the 1750s.

Across the field, following the public footpath... towards Pinner stands East End Farm Cottage, which we called Snow White's Cottage. This is an early fifteenth century building in Moss Lane and can claim to be one of the oldest surviving houses in Pinner. It was built by Roger of Eastend and reputed to be an open hall house. In the 1850s, the farm was called Hedges Farm and generations of the Hedges family owned it until 1935, when it was sold and the land split up.

Gypsy caravans travelled along the main road sometimes in convoy. Many of them were richly painted - with floral designs, with beautifully carved furniture and antique porcelain. They told fortunes at fairs and sold pegs and rattraps door to door. The women brought round baskets of 'lucky heather'.

Four main churches served the town's citizens. The Roman Catholic Church, St John Fisher, which was, positioned half way down Imperial Drive, The Church of England created the parish of St Alban in 1930 - graced the cross roads near Village Way. The Baptists eventually found their home in Rowland's Avenue... The Methodist's Chapel behind railings and privet hedge stationed at the corner of Pinner Road and George V Avenue, and The Christian Science Hall along Imperial Drive not far away from Elmfield Chapel. These places of worship were stationed at the boundaries of the town and gave shelter to their own school and choir, plus sundry other associations and groups... the largest congregation attending the Roman Catholic Church.

Every national club and association celebrated Saint George's Day, The Sovereign's Birthday, Empire Day and other special events associated with the club. The National Flag of St. George was raised on those special national days. The majority of boys in every town were members of national youth associations

like the Boy Scouts, Church Lads, or Boys Brigade. Older youths joined Army, Navy, and Air Force Cadet Corps. Girls too had their organisations, which they usually finished when they reached school-leaving age - at fifteen or sixteen. Monthly church parades saw the various organizations march behind each other following the Boys Brigade band. Flags held at the slope before the church door as the signatories filed in... lead by The Mayor.

Other than perhaps the architecture and town, planning this was a society that had changed little from that lived for the last twenty-five years. My parent's pattern of life and expectancy were set before that period. My father's upbringing went back, to 1890 - Victorian London. My mother's upbringing, that of a West Country village girl, from a large family; after leaving school she worked as a lace-hand at the Mill in Perry Street, Tatworth. They ran their lives as they had been - maintaining codes of behaviour adhered to since childhood. Shame, honour, duty, integrity and honesty were expected and not only talked about by our parents but also emphasised at school, church and youth club. Sundays were a day of rest. No games allowed, no card playing, and 'no going to the pictures'. Church attendance, reading, going for walks, picking blackberries in the summer filling a stamp album in the winter, listening to the radio... all these were allowed.

General heating in all homes was by coal fire and the cooking by gas. Lead pipes continued to be laid and no loft or window insulation installed. Cavity walls were not thought of, concrete or breezeblocks unknown and pipe work inside the house exposed. Damp courses laid in slate and all wood joints nailed, not bolted or screwed. In the winter ice formed on the insides of the windows and there was always the danger of pipes freezing up. Plugs were kept in the sink to stop the dripping tap freezing the outflow pipe - becoming blocked.

Terms of endearment never used, love, not mentioned, affection never exhibited. Hand holding, kissing and arms round shoulders not countenanced. Boys followed a Kiplinesque character raised to serve the nation and girls nursed those that were injured. Sexual thoughts words and deeds never spoken of. This was not only a source of guilty daydreaming but total embarrassment. Procreation, it seems, was a mystery to the nation. All this may suggest we were all frustrated, lonely, and unloved, but that would be wrong. If society proceeded along these lines and no questions asked, who was going to change it? Society must have been either downtrodden or reasonably happy. I believe it was the latter. There were many jobs with varied occupations possible... what father did still control many children's choice of a job. What was shown at the pictures, mostly made in America, and what was printed in magazines became the latest craze, which had a knock-on effect in time - to be produced here.

In 1837, the railway line was laid that linked Euston in London with Birmingham, passing through Wembley and Harrow. In 1873, Parliament accepted a plan for the London, Harrow, and Pinner Railway, which would terminate between The Grove and Cannon Lane Farmhouse [now the Whittington Hotel]. Five years later the terminus was moved to Pinner Green. In 1880, Harrow Metropolitan Station was opened and just four years later Marsh Farm was demolished making room for the new station. On the 25th May 1885, two days before Pinner Fair, the line was up and running. Steam trains ran every half hour to Baker Street.

The chairman of the Great Central Railway, which had joint running rights over the Metropolitan line, decided on North Harrow as the correct place to build a new station. The fields between London and Pinner had been extensively developed with three-hundred roads created. The existing

railways stations could no longer cope with the influx of passengers. The station opened on the 22nd March 1915 just where a farm access road passed under the existing line. The Metropolitan Railway Line affected the character of north-west Middlesex and with it North Harrow. The peak year for new-builds was 1934. The houses were built for white-collar workers and highly paid manual workers. Average weekly wage was then £2.15s.0d.

North Harrow Station, opened in 1915, nestled in a hollow under the railway bridge... spanning Station Road, was recognisable by the telephone boxes - at the entrance to the booking hall... The architectural style looked to the age of art deco rather than art nouveau - observed in the letterform, tile, and paintwork's colour scheme. It declared the age of the Metropolitan Railway Line... a line that ran between Bakers Street and Amersham, Aldersgate and Aylesbury. The train company's brown livery decorated the carriages. All the Aylesbury line locomotives were steam driven, as were a number on the Metropolitan - the majority however were powered by electric motors. It was not until some years after the war that the line was completely electrified.

The carriages held ten people sitting - five on either side. In the rush hour, a further six stood... swaying, while adjusting their stance - attempting to keep their feet. Claspings hold of the luggage rack, each tried to read. Smokers, who were the majority, relied on the nearest person to open the window, to suffer the draughts, occasional drops of rain, and smoke... The interior sprung seats bounced the occupants to the tune of the joints in the rail, as the train swayed and lurched along the track... The seated, appreciating their luck, began to nod off...

It was only the first and last compartments that banned smoking, all the others smelt strongly of tobacco. On cold and wet days, the carriage windows soon streamed with condensation

- areas cleared of mist, made by the person sitting next to the window, gave a clue to the whereabouts of the train on the line. The dripping raincoats, flapping umbrellas, and sneezing passengers heaved a concerted sigh as the train moves off... conversation again stilled as newspapers reopened...

At eye level, underneath the netted luggage racks, brass-framed prints advertised seaside resorts... A London underground map took up the centre frame, frequently hidden when the carriage was crowded, causing panic for passengers unfamiliar with the line - not knowing where they were.

Platforms and waiting rooms were made mainly of wood emblazoned with hearts and arrows carved by the younger passengers, who, on the walls, proclaiming their hearts desire... more pungent cartoonists, criticised the punctuality of trains – which they often, ‘died waiting for...!’

At night, looking out from our front bedroom windows, we could see the orange glow of opened fireboxes, as the firemen shovelled in another load of coal. The shunting tank engines, coupling-up their wagons in the sidings, gave cheery toots, as their flashy cousins - the express trains, thundered on their way warnings more urgent – a shriek, that gradually fell away, as they disappeared up the line. The nightly routine of coal delivery into the pens continued supervised by the controller as the nightlong process resumed.

As with all large towns several bus routes serviced the citizens, some ran to Harrow and Northwood others to Rayners Lane and Wealdstone. They were mostly single deckers and all had their conductors - who issued punched tickets. They ran at ten-minute intervals servicing a growing queue as the time-approached rush hour.

A bus ride was a community affair: getting on and off, lurching from hand bar to strap... up the bus; the favoured seat, ringing the bell, standing in packed togetherness, listening to

each other's conversations; wiping the condensation off the windows... It was not often that someone was turned away even if the bus was overloaded...

The conductor stood at the door taking the fares of all the unpaid passengers - those he was unable to reach when he forced his way up the aisle... piling up the spent ticket underfoot. He was an expert at dishing out loose change, having a pile of pennies in his hand ready, as he punched the green cards.

Horses and liveried carts made local deliveries. My mother took in a delivery of milk - in quart, pint, and half-pint bottles; quite often the milkman he would leave a crate for collection - the next time he called. The rag-and-bone man came round in his cart calling out 'any-old-iron' or 'rag-a-bones' in a sing-song voice and the knife-sharpener echoed with 'scissors-to-grind'. The newspaper seller, on the corner of Pinner Road and Station Road, stood by his upturned orange box outside United Dairies, his newspapers folded under his arm, calling out, through rolled cigarette, 'star, news or standard'.

Coal and coke was delivered in hundred weight sacks by the coalman wearing his leather hood and shoulder apron. At least four times a year a gypsy woman called to sell pegs and a posy of heather. Children played in the streets and called at each other's houses. Roller-skaters held onto the backs of passing carts... The chalked stumps, still visible on the garage doors from the match the day before... stayed - all through the war.

Mother's left their babies in coach built prams outside their front doors - to take in the morning sun, as Cumberland Road continued its daily life, uninterrupted and contemptuous of all distant international events. English society wasn't altering its habits one jot to suit jumped up foreigners - declared the papers.

The jolliest annual attraction - attended by the majority of children, was Pinner Fair... the license granted by King Edward III in 1336. Their parents, needing little encouragement, attended

in the evening. The fair took up the whole of High Street and Pinner Road being within arms length of the houses on either side of the road. Stalls and merry-go-rounds, helter-skelter, ghost house and candyfloss, roll-a-penny and toss a ring, all vied for attention... the stall owners shouting out in encouragement. The streamers, strung lights and colourful bunting all contributed to the colourful occasion whilst the steam organs piped-out the old pre-war tunes... The fair, held on one day only - the first Wednesday-after-Whit... [*Its Charter awarded by Edward I*], was always well attended, even during the war years. There were never any disturbances needing the authority of a policeman although they were very evident. The nearest workhouse onetime stood behind the George public house in Pinner. Union Workhouses and Guardians of the Poor were abolished in 1929, their places taken by the Public Assistance Committee under the MCC – the workhouse became an institution and the infirmary a hospital. Pinner became a parish, which separated it from Harrow, in 1766.

Greater Harrow was formed in 1934 uniting Wealdstone, Hendon, and Harrow under the title of Harrow Urban District Council. Harrow Borough received its Charter of Incorporation in 1954. In population and rateable value, Harrow became the largest urban district in England and Wales, secured its civic status, and granted a Charter. North Harrow, Pinner, Wealdstone, and Rayners Lane were all part of this mighty Borough along with other onetime hamlets. They all were within comfortable walking distance and each had a cinema.

1934 was the middle of a prosperous period one of expansion and full employment. This happy state could be seen in the demeanour of its citizens and in the ordered environment. All this was about to change...

The British Restaurant chain was a government institution organized in 1942 to cater for people who could not for one

reason or another cook their own meals. There was one at Bennett's Park, Station Road, North Harrow, and behind the cinema Rayners Lane. For a shilling, you could buy a three-course meal when they first opened. They were cheaply built, as prefabrications on a concrete slab and seen in most large towns. Others situated in suitable halls or galleries. In effect they were soup kitchens but on a far larger scale and served a variety of meals. After the war they still existed but soon operated on a different footing having to make a profit - hired out for jumble sales and evening classes - in effect became community centres. By 1943, they served 700,000 meals per day charging an increased fee of 1 shilling and tuppence [about 6p] for a two-course meal.

Sharing the same site, at the back of The British Restaurant, was the Home Guard Hut, the Manager, David Villers father, Basil. It served also as Number 21 ARP Wardens' post. Just up Station Road almost on the corner of the crossroads was the cinema. The Associated British Cinema group owned North Harrow's classically styled Embassy Cinema, which opened in October 1929. The frontage, decorated with linked railings, bordered oblong gardens decorating the 'notice boards' giving the current and future film previews. The large, wooden, double doors at the side of the cinema, lead to the deserted car park - marked out at the back. Beyond... the towns wood yard - opposite the British Restaurant.

The 'pictures' or 'flicks' - was the main form of public entertainment. The sound, delivered from a single, central source behind the square screen - had to wait until after the war to be improved - not a patch on Technicolor and stereophonic sound, of later times. The majority of cinema audiences participated at least once a week... watching films from Hollywood - a life very different - made the entertainment romantic and exciting. Every night queues formed outside the cinema behind price boards - the queues stretched right round the cinema. Patrons slowly

shuffled in during, but mainly after, each three-hour performance; if there were no seats left then there was standing room only which you might have to do for the whole length of the film.

A thick, grey, smoky haze greeted the ticket holder as the usherette's torch sent a beam of projected light into the black interior... penetrating the fog... lighting-up the rows of seats. The rustle of sweet papers and the rasp of matches punctuated the film's performance. Courting couples filled the back row, with those standing, unable to have seats, leaning over the rail. The main event – 'A' film, was the public draw - enticed the audience in. A newsreel followed the advertisements and trailers... before the second featured, 'B' film. Larger cinemas, particularly on a Saturday evening, would put on a talent contest, band, or organ recital... with the audience singing along - following the words shown on the screen. The nearest large cinema was the Granada, Harrow Town, which also accommodated the Herga cinema and the rather grand Coliseum theatre. It was an enormous treat to sit in its plush, red seats - particularly in the circle, and see the occasional West End Shows. The Langham in Bridge Street, Pinner was part of a small chain called the Modern Cinema Company opening in 1936. The Grosvenor at Rayners Lane became part of the Odeon chain opened the same year. Eventually, forty years later, Benjamin helped in this cinema, in the projection room, and became an authority on art films collecting his own of which he was very proud.

The area Police Station was at Pinner - two miles down the Pinner Road. You would always see a police officer on duty walking along the main street of all towns - at least twice a day, and again during the night... checking all the shop's doors and windows, the alleyways and side roads. The patrolling sergeant, who would phone into the police station - using the blue call

boxes found at most main-road junctions. If, as a child, or even adult, told to 'abide by the law' you did as instructed. Police officers were very much-respected citizens, perhaps, even feared... They saw to it that there was no cycling on the pavements and bikes had efficient brakes and a bell.

All parks, recreation grounds and sports areas monitored by their Keepers – who acted very much like police officers in their duties. The Yeading Walk Gardens or Streamside Walk, and Pinner Park, as all the other parks in the Borough, had carefully designed flowerbeds arranged in floral decoration – to give a fantastic riot of colour all summer season. Their beauty replicated those gardens at the seaside and London parks. The grass beautifully manicured and the edges trimmed. No cycling or roller-skating - no walking on the grass or running about. The garden's facilities were built for recreational walking and it good maintenance, considered important to the town's standing. Bands played every weekend at the larger parks... fountains worked, paving regularly levelled and autumn leaves gathered... Cricket pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts all carefully manicured and maintained. Competitions organised by the local authorities, between each other – award certificates to the best Head Gardner... who - vied to outdo each other... The workers used their winning certificates to obtain better jobs. Councils produced their own seedlings, trees, and plants at the town's nursery. Our local park was Streamside Walk - its paths wandered over stones bridges... alongside the river. Within easy walking distance of home, were Pinner Park, West Harrow Park, and Headstone Recreational Ground all giving us lads ample play areas?

Streets had their own sweepers, who swept into the gutters the dust and waste - made up into piles, to be loaded onto their carts and taken back to the Council depot. Dustmen called once a week in the corporation dustcart, which had curved sliding-lids

to half a dozen compartments. Each house had their own dustbin... there being no limit to the amount collected or type... just size - which could be picked up later if it could not be thrown up onto the roof of the wagon. A great deal of waste was thrown onto the kitchen fire or onto the bonfire - along with the garden clippings. There was little or no packaging... most meat or dairy produce wrapped in greaseproof paper. Gas lampposts had small boxes attached to take cigarette boxes or sweet paper, there being no large receptacles. Sand boxes at main street corners, tops, and bottoms of hills and level crossing to give grip for horses and cars - in icy conditions.

CHAPTER II

Suburb of London - Environment - Cumberland Road - Family car - Doctors - Dentist - Freemasonry - Old Contemptible - Standard 1930s home design - Heating - Washing - Interior decoration - Furnishing - Gardening - Home entertainment - House maintenance - Radio programmes - Propaganda - The Blitz - Bomb sites - Shelters - Diet - Neighbours.

My father looked forward, to providing a new house in a better environment for his wife and new son... They were living in rental accommodation in Sudbury Town. He read about a house being for rent in North Harrow, which might provide the answer to his quest... the Metropolitan Line connecting him to his work at Marylebone station's goods yard, was an added bonus.

All the roads in North Harrow were named after counties and county towns, and had not long been finished by the

builders. Number thirty-one was vacant – unoccupied since first built, and provided just the sort of living area and garden my parents were looking for. It was perfect. My father, paying the deposit, arranged to move in that autumn.

Later in life, I asked my father why he rented. His reply was, “I believe it allows flexibility of movement, and that over a period of time maintenance and depreciation makes ownership uneconomic.” I wonder now whether this was not just an excuse, to compensate for my parent’s age difference and that he could not face up to the realities of social progress and changing circumstances. He never gave voice to what was to happen when he retired – that ownership might provide security in old age. Perhaps my father did not want the responsibility after experiencing the useless slaughter in the First World War – his perspective shaped by the transience of war, or was it to give larger donations to the Masonic Lodge... We will never know, but in the event, it was a bad decision - revealed later in my tale.

Number thirty-one was built in 1933 with two reception rooms, three bedrooms – two of reasonable size the third a box-room, a kitchen, and an upstairs bathroom. The exterior walls pebble dashed and the bay roof and gable end hipped. The side entrance - behind a close-boarded wooden gate... led to the back garden. At the front of the house, facing the road, and acting as a boundary with the neighbours, the obligatory privet hedge - standing four feet high... The hedge almost smothered a low cinder-brick wall, built around wooden posts supporting a barbed, broad-linked chain..., which also served as a boundary marker to the house next door. The house built on a slight right-hand bend halfway down the road - the even numbers ranged opposite. Following the building line, and almost directly facing our house, four lock-up garages with glazed wooden doors one of which housed my father’s car - loaned to him for official duty

for the duration of the war... the other three remained empty throughout.

My father's car was an Austin 14 – a large square shaped saloon with leather seats, bulbous mudguards, and the battery and spare wheel bolted onto the running board. On most days, it had to have the engine turned over with the starting handle... with the choke fully out... This control of the butterfly valve always started to work its way back to the open position. To ensure the engine fired the driver had to pull out the choke, leap from seat to grill, turn the engine until it fired, bound back into the car, to catch the engine firing - before the choke retracted back to the open position. This daily exercise guaranteed the driver was fully awake before chancing his life on the road.

Our family Doctor had his surgery just past the small line of shops up on the left – past the crossroads. Doctor Mayer was a large framed, loose-limbed Irishman, who hardly ever moved from his swivel chair. His waiting room, to the left of the front door, was entered off the small hall... A small sign directed the patient to enter.

As soon as the door opened, a number of piercing eyes greeted you... some appeared over newspapers, others myopically through glasses... the women present, looked up from their knitting. They were not all hostile, but most certainly wary... you maybe bringing in some dreadful disease... there was no means of knowing who was the last to enter before you? To know your place in the queue you had to recognise all either who were there when you entered, and then use elimination, or, if you were bold, you just asked... It was very rare for this to happen. It certainly created uncertainty, which contributed to its own degree of nervous anxiety, which overlaid your already weakened state of health...; it also partly explains the anxious piercing glances when you first arrived. There was always a rather fat boy with glasses who sniffed repeatedly, judging each sniff to a nicety

– to prevent total embarrassment! It was the only source of real entertainment, and either caused the onlooker to feel even more sick, or drove them out of the room... The ill-hung lace curtains, behind full-length blackout curtains, covered the bay windows – the glass, criss-crossed with brown paper tape to prevent splinters - if a bomb fell. Peeling posters and scuffed linoleum did nothing to entice the visitor to linger. The kitchen chairs, ranged round the sides of the bleak room, allowed the group of coughing and sneezing patients, to examine each other carefully over their magazines... each scrutinized carefully for signs of infectious disease or distressing habit. In the centre of the room, a green-blaze tablecloth covered the circular table, which held a pile of ancient magazines. These gave only limited distraction to the desperate company of men, wanting a chit to enable them to take time off work, women, who needed someone to take an interest in their nervous condition, and children, to obtain a school pass...

Posters declared the horrors of measles, mumps, and TB, and the government's latest warning, showing an owl silhouetted against a yellow moon - declaring that, 'talk costs lives'. The low wattage bulb, its illuminate quality, severely restricted by a fringed coolie-hat shade, attempted to offer some much-needed light - to the wartime patients, as they waited... to act on the summons of the piercing bell. This jerked everyone into a response: some to almost fall off their seats, others to stand, only to sit down again as someone else beat them to the door, a third who seemed to shake in desperation at the clammer.

The rattling striker of the distressed bell emitted a throttled b...ring. The assembled company came to life... their hearts pounding... The next patient, checking his position in the order of entry, lurched to his feet. Placing his magazine carefully on the table, attempted to leave the room unseen and unheard... his trailing scarf dragged on the floor. There was very little science

on offer, precious little comfort, and no privacy. Every flat surface of his consulting room filled to overflowing with strewn papers, sample dishes, stethoscope, microscope, torch, ruler, and bottles of pills and pink coloured jollop. Doctor Meyer started to write out a prescription before you even taken your seat... "What can I do for you my son?"

On the other side of the road were the dentists. Mr Hudson was the very antithesis of Dr Mayer He was short, erect and slim, quick of action and slow to rile. He operated a belt driven drill with the dexterity of a diamond cutter. It's rotating belt spun round as the coarse drill ground in. I had good reason to admire his expertise and technical qualities.

Our neighbours on the right were the Williams', sons Frank and Victor, attended John Lyons School. On the left, Mr and Mrs 'Tripps' kept a very low profile, being hardly ever seen. He a professional backer of greyhounds and she a dedicated homemaker. Both stood high on our list as good neighbours... the formers garden contained two delicious apple trees and the latter, a cherry, both raided during the summer holidays. They ignored our many boyish escapades. I do not remember my father ever talking to either neighbour or passing the time of day with anyone in the street... He only recognised them, by raising his hat. We never had a friend of my father's visit the house, except two maiden aunts and our grandmother, at Christmas time. His social life was at the Masonic Hall and with The Old Contemptible Association. My mother had three friends who called during the day. I never knew my parents have a party or socialise.

A bow-topped, slatted, wooden gate - painted drab green, greeted visitors to the house... It was the only means of entry to the house and garden... This reluctant guardian to the estate snapped either shut with the force of a rattrap - achieved by an

over tightened coiled spring, or, more often than not, was propped open by a brick.

The opened gate allowed you to enter up the quarry-tiled front path flanked by black serrated edgings tiles. Flowerbeds on either side of the path were planted-up with rather poor roses on the right and Michaelmas daisies on the left, both needing some of mums acquired horse manure. The clay soil was light dun coloured forever-needing lots of humus to grow anything really well. London pride and grape hyacinths gave a cheerful display as an edging and under the sitting-room bay windows, a clump of white lilies lent over to get the sun... as the panelled front door, with noticeable bubbled paint, stood before you, under a canopy of sheet lead...

The glazed panel of the front door, the hall window, landing and small fanlights, to the sitting room, were of stained glass; set in lead... these dictated the architectural style of the period... Only the hall, stairs and landing had a dado rail plus a picture rail. All the woodwork including the doors, architraves, doorframes, skirting and stair surrounds were stained brown to resemble dark oak - as was the embossed lyncrusta wallpaper below the dado line. The decoration copied more expensive properties - using cheaper mediums to achieve the effect.

Standard house design after the war, did not include stained glass, leaded lights or roughcast walls. Lath and plaster gave way to plaster board; hung wooden floors became a concrete raft and chimneys defunct by sidewall vents for gas boilers. Plate racks, picture and dado rails, coved ceilings, stair spindles all outdated, plain mouldings replaced ogee for windows and door architraves. Where possible, concrete used instead of brick, tile or wood... it was the period of 'utility', and adoption of the kite mark! It took many years before substantial housing was built with anything like the same attention to detail and solidness of construction.

By convention, houses of the period were painted either green and cream or brown and cream. Ours was the only exception relying on what my father could acquire from work..., which was usually battleship grey.

At the end of the hall, facing the front door hung a picture of the royal coat of arms flanked by two of my fathers dress swords. Decorating the wall next to the front door, on the right, were crossed imitation Roman swords, hung either side of a silvered mirror. On the wall opposite stood the hallstand completely covered in numerous coats, hats, scarves, umbrellas and walking sticks. Built into the centre of the hallstand a glove box, under a mirror. Coat hooks screwed into the dado rail next to the hallstand lined the wall upto the stairs... the hooks strained with the weight of umpteen coats, scarves and hats, shoes peeped out from beneath the coats. Under the stairs a larder and an overfilled hall-cupboard.

The larder had a marble slab and numerous shelves. A bread bin, cage for cold meats, cheese and butter dishes plus jug of milk all resided on the slab and on the floor a vegetable basket with separate containers. Either side on wall brackets were shelves filled with condiments and bottled sauces. The larder ventilated by small holed wire grill covering a small window - this too was patched over with cardboard in the winter. The under-stair cupboard contained the Eubank carpet sweeper, dustpan and brush, Goblin cylinder vacuum cleaner [that never worked] and a singer sewing machine [my mother's pride and joy], many shopping baskets and sundry bags... I cannot remember ever seeing the back of the cupboard!

Health officials go on today about the necessity for cleanliness in the home and work place and caution against leaving food out of the refrigerator. We had no such warning strictures. The meat was eaten even though there was not a refrigerator or meat safe and if the milk went off then you drank

it or went without. In hot weather, the milk was boiled and the larder's marble slab was cold in all weathers. I never remember the larder being taken apart and cleaned thoroughly and I certainly do not remember anyone having an upset stomach. The cats kept the rats and mice away and no one complained about the lack of hygiene.

Father, not owning the house, felt it not incumbent upon him to maintain it. Therefore, a very infrequent redecoration was all that the rooms ever received - by that I mean the ceilings were white washed using a lime powder with the addition of a blue bag to give a whiter effect, and the walls distempered using the same powder with the addition of a coloured dye. The walls downstairs were papered but in those days the paper was not trimmed - one side would have to be cut with scissors - to overlap the previous sheet. We boys, halfway through the job, would start humming the tune, 'When father pasted the parlour'..., this did not go down very well!

The result of almost zero maintenance over ten years - the property underwent a slow deterioration... The final nail in the coffin was the doodlebug, V1 bomb, which finished off the job... After that number, thirty-one had an extensive refit.

The furniture and furnishing remained the same; items of furniture positioned to cover up bad decoration, damp patches, and worn carpets. My mother made all the curtains, cushions and chair covers using her Singer sewing machine - kept in the cupboard under the stairs - opposite the now 'best room'.

The 'best room' - lounge, or front room, was used as the formal dining room, for the few visitors that dropped in and for very special occasions. It was undoubtedly, the coldest, dampest, most uninviting room in the house. It held a large table, that by operating a winder - to turn the ratchet, the two outer leafs were pulled apart, a third leaf dropped in-between. Four dining chairs, two kitchen chairs, and two carvers could be accommodated

around its sides. This complicated operation only occurred at Christmas time - needing every resource available to keep my father calm... as every other gadget in the house, it was temperamental.

A sideboard took up the entire wall immediately in front of the open door, two bookcases, with glazed side cupboards, stood either side of the chimneybreast – one cupboard holding half-filled decanters and the other my father's service revolver... Placed on top, a framed box - containing my father's medals, taken out and worn once every year at the cenotaph - Remembrance Day. Opposite the fire, the table... and taking up the only other wall the bay window, looking out into the street.

A green tiled fire surround and hearth, with mirrored over mantle held the central position. On its wooden mantelshelf chimed a French clock my father brought back from France. No fireplace was complete without a fender and coal boxes. A fireplace companion set of poker, brush and shovel in a polished brass holder decorated the hearth. Perched on a high round table was a rather unhealthy looking aspidistra in a round, green glazed pot. This offending plant scattered innumerable small black seeds everywhere and led a charmed life, to my knowledge never was watered. Two upholstered armchairs, with tassels on the arms, either side of the fireplace tried to lift the room - give it a feeling of comfort and warmth. They failed miserably. Two heavy curtains on runners framed the bay windows, permanently covered by lace suspended on stretched wire. This lace shut out much of the light and gave the room formality it also prevented scrutiny of what was going on in the room. Nobody ventured to disturb the net curtains - father considered any movement linked to nosiness - impolite. It was the general rule for all houses of that period to have lace covering the windows. A framed silver plated oval mirror on chains separated two Scottish river scenes, hung from the picture rail centred over the sideboard. Here, on

top, was displayed the wooden nut bowl, biscuit barrel and cut glass fruit bowl. The tasselled patterned carpet square fitted into the surrounding border of linoleum, nailed down. A painted wood standard lamp stood next to the round table holding the fern which when lit cast a shadow of its tracery over the floor. The windows were hardly ever disturbed throughout the house for if they were could never be closed.

When we had our aunts to tea, a special effort was made to do everything perfectly. The cucumber, beetroot, mustard, and cress sandwiches were made of white bread with the crusts cut off. There would always be at least two cakes available displayed on stands with paper doilies peeping out from beneath. The tea: cups, pot, basin arranged with precision on the best tray... all graced the table on top of a pristine tablecloth with razor sharp creases.

The back room – originally built as the dining room, had French doors leading out onto the back yard and garden. It was always used as the sitting room, it offered privacy - which was lacking from the front, and what was convenient, on the warmest side of the house. A brass fender boxed in its maroon tiled, fire surround and hearth. This room only sat in at weekends when my father lit the fire. The over mantle held a large mirror and various knickknacks perched on the suspended shelves gave ornamentation. Pipe racks, spill containers, Swan Vesta matches and two porcelain figures of nubile dancers graced either end of the mantle shelf.

As previously described, all the floors close boarded and frequently patched. Because of the poor ventilation incessant damp abounded, some floorboards were rotting and plywood lay over these areas to stop people falling through to the void beneath. Newspapers placed under the carpet to give an added underlay, unfortunately these tended to smell which all added to the slight musty odour. Although coal and coke was available,

much of the time wood was burnt, which cause much crackling and spitting and the occasional shower of sparks, which fell onto the fireside rug. As the fire burned down coal heaped on and to get a good blaze a metal plate, which covered the whole fire, placed in front of the fire. We called it the 'roarer' and its purpose was to draw in the draft from below the fire basket. This metal plate sometimes became red hot and a rush made to take it outside into the garden to cool it off. The soot at the back of the fireplace, on the fire-back, glowed and became the soldiers, which climb up the chimney, snuffed out when the draught cooled them down. The chimney to the sitting room had to be swept every year. It was mums job to distribute the soot around the garden.

Heavy curtains on poles drawn tightly together to keep out any draughts covered the French-doors. Two upholstered armchairs and a settee, a pair of small cupboards either side of the fireplace and the upright piano, with a stack of music on top, and its accompanying stool, which twiddled around, completed the furnishing. Light provided by a low wattage, centre electric light bulb with a coolie-hat fringed shade. A reproduction oil painting in a gilt frame of the battle of waterloo provided the wall decoration.

On cold stormy nights, with the wind whistling round the house and blowing through the upturned branches of the poplar trees... in next-door's garden... it was particularly comforting to be inside, in the warm. The rain beating on the windows invited the chairs to be 'drawn-up close' to form a semicircle round the fire. Once the rolled up piece of carpet was thrust tight up against the bottom of the door to stop the draughts, the radio set tuned for the light programme: Henry Hall's Guest Night, Band Wagon with Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch, the BBC Doctor Charles Hill, Friday Night Is Music Night, Down Your Way with Franklin Engelmann, In Town Tonight, Old Time

Dancing with Sydney Thompson; Valentine Dyll, as 'The Man In Black' and Edgar Lustgarten in murder intended. Lift -up-your-hearts, Life with the Lyons with Ben and Bebe Daniels. Forces Favourites from The British Force's Broadcasting Network in Germany with announcers Cliff Michelmore and Jean Metcalf linking those at home to the forces aboard - then the entertainment would begin. My Mother would take up her knitting, usually from wool unplucked from an old jumper, and the cat would jockey for position before the fire. It took a brave person to disturb the well-lit pipe, the warm slippers and the sense of peaceful tranquillity. My father's pipe would emit a stream of sweet smelling Rosemary... he was deep in his book.

On most weekend evenings, my father played the piano - I, turned the music and sometimes sang - from The Daily Express Community Song Book, which he loved me to do. As I sorted out the music, I chose music, which looked hardest for my father to play - like the Hungarian Dances - where the pages of music were black with notes. My father never turned down any piece however difficult and the old piano would almost bounce across the floor. The sound of the piano intensified by removing the front panel, so that the 'action' was exposed; this part of the piano held the hammers, which together with all the other wood and felt parts became damp in the winter. It must be explained that our piano was not 'over strung' but made of all wood with the strings strung on a metal frame. The candleholders on either side of the music stand - long since removed, what was unusual, the piano was made of a pale yellowy coloured wood.

The action was lifted out... straddling the brass fender - dried in front of the fire. Eventually the squeaks from the stiffened action were reduced - the action eased; the weekly recital started when the washing of the tea things had been dried and put away, the coal and logs had been fetched in and my father had smoked his first pipe-full of tobacco.

The kitchen was at the end of the hall - next to the larder and dining room – now our sitting room. It was about ten foot square and became the hub of family life... most meals eaten there – the ancient radio, with its fretted front, continually tuned to the light programme... When first turned on the radio emitted a series of high-pitched screeches and whines, which lasted for about two minutes until the set warmed up. Woe betides anyone who changed the station waveband because it was almost impossible to re-tune. The radio rested on a wide shelf held up by substantial metal brackets one of which held all my fathers rods and canes for checking us children. The rest of the shelf occupied by a row of graded saucepans and a large over-filled cupboard.

There was a constant need to ward off the problems of damp. The woodwork and kitchen walls painted in gloss - a drab mustard colour that did nothing to raise the spirits... their surface ran with condensation during the winter. Heating the house by coal fires and using gas to cook by contributed to the damp conditions. Doing the family's washing by boiling in a bucket, hanging wet washing on the airer and boiling, most vegetables contributed to the damp atmosphere. The main reason why the family washed in the kitchen was simply that it was the only warm room available in the whole house.

Although there was a slate, damp-proof course in the brickwork there was no cavity wall. Under the downstairs floors, there was a void of about four feet, which collected rising damp to the extent that it was permanently wet - in some places covered by a few inches of water. In the hottest summers, this never completely dried out. The ventilation airbricks below floor level and in the upper walls were religiously blocked-up by my father - to prevent draughts. Though blocked, the wind blew through the gaps separating the skirting from the floor... all doors and windows provided with draught excluders - torn strips

of paper. Even so, it was a constant battle to save heat and prevent draughts. In winter, the upstairs windows had ice on them all day... this could last for days.

Hot water from the tap was a luxury, certainly not appreciated by us children, made possible by over-stoking the kitchen fire until the boilerplate glowing red-hot with sparks flying up the chimney. Everyone would draw back from the kitchen range not because it was too hot but because the boiler might explode or the chimney catch fire - often the wood drying in the oven did. It was more normal to sit as close as possible, to the extent that red blotches appeared on those parts of the body closest to the fire. In winter, chestnuts would be cooked on the fire using an iron shovel. My father would split the chestnuts, and when cooked, passed them to whomsoever to cool - tossing from one hand to the other, and peel. Whilst all this was going on my mother darned, sewed or knitted. My brother and I sat round a table that held a jigsaw puzzle - the fire heaped up... later bread or crumpets toasted. An alternative was baked potatoes in the ashes with a dab of butter... the plates would be passed round and the potatoes dug out with a fork... trying to save some of the butter from soaking in. The kettle put on for a cup of horlicks, ovaltine, or cocoa. It is difficult now to describe the enormously satisfying comfort and security obtained by sitting round a smoking, crackling, ember spitting fire on a cold winters night; with the wind rattling the doors, the shadow's of the flickering fire dancing on the walls and the badly tuned radio drawing one ever closer to the tale being told. Quite often, we would be engaged in constructing a jigsaw, previously mentioned, dealing the cards for a game of whist, or standing up the dominoes whilst the potatoes in the ashcan cooked passed around, with a daub of margarine - which was gradually melting, on the plate.

The boiled water from the kettle provided the hot water in the washing up bowl for every need. The overhead rack, hoisted to the ceiling, was never empty of drying clothes and towels. This gave the kitchen a similar appearance experienced by prehistoric cave dwellers. If the walls had contained a recess for a bed, we would have slept in there too. The kitchen faced north and the back door had been re-hung to open outwards - to give more space inside. Any attempt to open the door was resisted by all... even the cat had to cross its legs!

Our meals at home were repetitive and the maximum use of every scrap: saving beef dripping, stewing the meat bones for stock and soups, mixing butter and margarine together. The butter bought from Home & Colonial Stores – displayed on the marble shelf behind the counter. The desired lump, cut off, salted, blended with a wooden cutter, and patted into shape with butter pats leaving a fancy set of marks, before placed into a greaseproof wrap. Coffee never drunk, being a middle-class beverage. We had ‘camp’ coffee essence from a jar, which tasted nothing like coffee. All main shops had an errand boy who delivered the order by bicycle with a basket on the front.

No one had a refrigerator – dairy produce and meats would only last a few days, depending on the weather, all larders had a cold slab made of marble. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding the treat on Sunday, cold cut Monday, Tuesday mince, Wednesday cottage pie, rabbit or stewing steak Thursday, fish on Friday and perhaps Ham Saturday. Puddings, desert, or ‘afters’ - some sort of apple dish with custard - used as a pudding at every meal even with the rice pudding or tapioca. However, my mother persevered in all things, which would save money, so puddings were inevitably apple pie and custard. Next door’s garden held a cooking cherry tree, the other neighbour - apple, both vigorously scumped, as were overhanging branches from trees along the road.

Our weekday clothes were bought second hand, patched repeatedly and darned - to the extent that the foot of a sock was more darn than not. However, Sunday clothes had to be special – to give a good impression.

To all the country, the wireless was the chief form of entertainment in the home. To us children it was a liberating view of the wider world - something our parents never had, as well as an exciting form of whiling away moments between play. Derek McCulloch, better known as ‘Uncle Mac’, produced the BBC Children’s Hour; this programme ended in 1964. There were many much loved programmes especially *Out With Romany*, written by Bramwell Evans in about 1938, who pretended to go out for countryside rambles with his dog Raq and two children. These nature-loving walks talked about finding birds nests, walking beside a stream, climbing over stiles and discussed how the weather affected the flora. All the interviewers and introduces were referred to as Uncles and Aunts. There was *Toytown*, read by Uncle Mac [Derek McCulloch] and C. E. Hughes, *The Boy Detectives*, *Norman and Henry Bones*, *Castles and Their History* and *Young Artists*, *Wind in the Willows* read by David Davis and Norman Shelley and many other wonderful stories. Later on, during the weekdays the family spent most of the time in the kitchen, as a special treat, most weekends, we gathered around the fire in the sitting room. As routine, certain programmes looked forward to and formed special moments of togetherness and companionship. Programmes such as *Monday Night At Eight* with Gillie Potter, *Grand Hotel*, *Henry Hall’s Guest Night*, *Dick Barton Special Agent* with Duncan Carse, *Itma* and *Tommy Handley*, *Happydrome*, *Worker’s Playtime*, and *Boxing Matches* commentated by Eamon Andrews; news reader such as Bruce Belfrage, Alan Howard, Stuart Hibbard. Alvar Lidell, I remember, told us about a new tank battle in the Western Desert, which involved New Zealand troops. An enemy

raid on Sidi Omar. “In Russia, the Germans still made progress towards Moscow and a small force of bombers attacked Brest and Cherbourg,” or the Brains Trust with Professor Joab who always began an answer with “it all depends on what you mean by”?

During the war, to achieve maximum working hours, the clocks put forward two hours - called ‘double summer time’. Later, in the autumn, the clocks were only put back one hour to give ‘summertime’ hours – sunrise being about 9am in December. This arrangement continued for many years, even after the war, to allow maximum daylight working hours.

After the war, Saturday teatime about five o'clock, the full-time football results would be broadcast straight after the news. The sing-song voice of the announcer, announcing the score in such a way that the listener could guess the final result, would relay the information for the populace as a whole to take down the results - that they could find out if they had won the football pools prize and mark up their coupon. My mother would generally do the marking up by giving one point for a home win two for an away result and three for a draw - counting the completed coupon for each line’s result. How excited we all were as the scores mounted.

Quite often, my father would go to MacFisheries fish shop to buy a pint of winkles – a small edible sea snail for our tea. My mother would butter some bread and he would bend some pins – to wrinkle out the snail. They were lovely and we considered them a treat.

At weekends, my father’s main job was to put-by sufficient chopped wood for the fire. Large planks and balks of wood sawn into logs, using the family saw. This my father sharpened by knocking out every alternate tooth of the saw and turning the saw over repeated the process the other side. If extra care taken, he would file the teeth as well. Oil rubbed onto the saw to ease

its passage through the wood and for the last inch; the log smashed to the ground to break it off. He would then chop the wood into pieces for both lighting the fire and into logs. If the axe or chopper proved difficult to cleave the log then a hammer helped it.

The backdoor, with fan light above, lead out to the back yard and garden. It was built into the centre of the rear kitchen-wall, next to a small window - dutifully clothed in its regulation net curtain, under which resided an ancient gas stove with polished brass taps. On the other side, the butlers sink - with traditional wooden drainer, above, which, a range of shelves containing toothbrushes and powder [just imagine the whole family using the same tin of tooth powder]. A whole range of, never to be disturbed, cleaning fluids and mugs... their own layer of clinging dust and debris added to over the years. Underneath, hung on cup hooks, the flannel and dishcloth, scourer and bottlebrush... ever in the way, swaying and dripping, occasionally dropping into your bowl...

Opposite the back, door – in the corner - the door to the hall, the rest - a Welsh dresser and narrow fitted broom-cupboard. The top section of the dresser - enclosed behind glazed doors - covered by a patterned film, the tea and dinner service. Under the shelves - screwed cup hooks, holding an assortment of cups, jugs and pots. Two shelves contained all the family's pills and potions - Beecham's pills, Carter's Little Liver pills, aspirin, Friars Balsam, calamine lotion, corn plasters, Band Aids, smelling salts, camphorated oil, cough mixtures, Vaseline, boracic powder, iodine, bandages, and slings: syrup of figs for tummy upsets castor oil, senna pods and camphorated oil, Epsom salts, various syringes and assorted safety pins. The bottom of the dresser housed all our toys. On the side of the dresser, next to the door, a pipe rack – holding at least six

pipes... a letter rack, filled to the gills, took up the rest of the space beneath...

On the farther side, opposite the door, the broom cupboard - giving space to the mop, broom, dustpan and brush, dusters, candles, oil lamps, kindling for the fire, shoe-cleaning gear, cod liver oil & malt - and all the family's - every-days, shoes. During the war, my father's rifle [key men were issued with a rifle to shoot paratroopers and guard prisoners] stood in the corner - next to his chair, whilst he polished his uniform. The gas pipes, competing with the rifle - ran up the wall to the meter - perched on top - next to the torch and radio's earthing wire.

The radio relayed the fateful message that September. I can remember distinctly the concentrated silence - the whole house was stilled, as we all listened to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, tell the Nation - that Sunday, September 3rd. 1939, they were at war with Germany.

I was four so it must have been an event etched into my very being. The following May Churchill assumed office; the end of the month... saw the retreat from Dunkirk. My life remained unaltered... I saw and felt no change whatever; it was not until that September that the air raids, the searchlights, the anti-aircraft guns, began to focus attention on what was happening. It was really the London blitz - after Hitler switched his forces from levelling Britain's airfields and Radar chain that the war made its first impact on our life... then we could see and feel the difference. It took the victory at El Alamein and Stalingrad to mark a turning point... lead to ultimate victory. Still, that event was in the future, during which time I attended Infant School and marked the map printed in the newspapers as our troops advanced... dropped back... before advancing again...

Every householder had to fill in a census form on 29th September 1939, detailing who lived in his or her house. This information enabled the government to issue identity cards, a

National Registration Number, and a ration book to each person. The whole nation was informed through the radio, newspapers and notices displayed in local shops, how the system operated – how to register at local shops [the shopkeeper cut out and kept the counterfoils], how to fill in the Ration Book – name, address on each page and counterfoil [the counterfoil needed the date, the shop’s name and address... elected as ‘shop of choice’ for a period of six months]. My mother had to queue as soon as the shop opened... there was often a scramble to make for the counter bearing what was currently in short supply.

At home, what would have reminded the visitor that there was a war on, the rifle, propped up in the corner? My father was now in uniform, and his frequent trips away were a trial to my mother. The installation of the telephone all marked a change in routine. However, I was not unduly affected... home life continued governed by my mother’s preferences and capabilities - based upon her past rural habits and upbringing.

School dominated my life... indelibly linked to my great friend David Villers. Life continued... the kitchen, remained the focus... dominated by the dresser – the toy cupboard, and always... the fire...!

Between the broom cupboard and the sink’s drainer was the black kitchen range - built into the wall... All the cast iron and lead pipe-work ran along the kitchen wall from the kitchen range to the sink, to the bathroom, hot water tank in the airing cupboard and to the cold-water tank, housed in the loft... This, patented, multi purpose, iron monstrosity - contained the back boiler and bread oven. The bread oven, never used for that purpose but to dry kindling - to light the fire in the morning. We lived in perpetual fear that the whole lot would catch fire, which it frequently did. Above the kitchen range was a mantle shelf - always crammed with: a biscuit tin, fire lighting spills, clock, candleholder, small box with drawers, letters, bills, post cards,

and always the day's pipe, pouch - and my mother's cigarettes. Strung under this mantle-shelf a washing line - hung the current tea towel. Above the shelf, a mirror - hanging from a string - with post cards decorating the sides.

In front of the range - surrounding the hearth - enclosing the wooden, copper sheathed, fender and upholstered coal boxes - the brass railed fire-guard... also served as a clothes horse. When young we boys bathed in front of the fire in a tin bath - that hung outside the back door. The towels stretched out warming on the guard ready to dry us when we stepped out onto the hearthrug.

Mondays were always washing day; the clothes placed in a large, galvanised iron, washing tub over the gas burner; a convex bottom plate kept the washing off the bottom - from burning. The washing boiled with frequent turning and pummelling with a large wooden spoon. Soapsuds came from, soda crystals and shavings taken from a Fairy soap block. The washed clothes then taken out of the boiler and ferried dripping to the sink to be rinsed. A Rickitt's Blue Bag used in the rinsing water for all the whites, whilst collars and cuffs, treated with Robin's starch. Once rinsed, the clothes were taken out to the back yard to be mangled - hung to dry. The mangle, like all the mechanical apparatus in the house, was never new to the family and had seen better days. To extract the maximum water from the clothes the tensioned roller springs were over-tightened by screwing down the tap-like screws at the top of the mangle - to then turn the rollers, using the crank-handle, needed the strength of ten men. The machine would creak and groan, to spew out its charge flat as a board, sometimes with all the buttons split. The wrung out clothes shaken out and hung on crossed washing lines that divided the backyard. If it rained, they were hung on the airer in the kitchen or placed on the clotheshorse in front of the fire.

Ironing day a Tuesday, using flat irons heated on the gas stove. I can remember my mother spitting on the iron to see if it was hot enough. The ironing done on a blanket laid on the kitchen table. My father's shirts with their detachable collars and cuffs pressed and polished using an iron. His trousers were pressed using an old tea towel to stop polishing the nap of the cloth - using soap from a thin bar run down the inside creases - then the whole ironed on the outside to give them extra sharpness. He always wore pinstriped trousers, black jacket and waistcoat, watch chain, black greatcoat and highly polished shoes topped off with a bowler hat; always carried a pair of leather gloves, brief case, and furled umbrella during the day, at night a silver-topped walking stick.

Mother cleaned and tidied the house but not to the extent that she could be accused of being house-proud. Life proceeded in an orderly manner with the rules laid down by my father. Meals expected at a set times... the weekly routine never altered... made for continuity - a reliable settled existence maintained. There was little formality except when an aunt came to tea and the front room used. The few visitors who did visit came to see my mother, which was during the day and only then for a cup of tea in the kitchen.

I do not remember my parents doing much dusting or carpet cleaning. The vacuum cleaner did not work and there were no feather dusters. Damp tealeaves scattered over the carpet - to be swept up using a dustpan and brush. The damp leaves attracted the dirt and the collection achieved without causing more dust. This old Victorian habit took the place of sawdust. If there was any hard and dirty work like cleaning the gas stove, heavy gardening, hedge clipping, beating the rugs, blacking the stove, fetching the coal, cutting the wood, cleaning the shoes, decorating and cleaning all the brass work, my father did it. My mother's main tasks were making the beds, seeing to the

washing, ironing, and most importantly, planning the meals, doing the shopping, cooking and serving. Windows attended to by the window cleaner the only outside labour my parents engaged.

There were never in arguments or discussions about what work had to be done. My mother was not into DIY nor anything mechanical or electrical. When the carpets had to be cleaned wet tealeaves were scattered and the carpet was hand swept or the Eubank cleaner used. This also applied to sweeping the stairs - done with a dustpan and brush. A spring clean was an annual event and taken as an opportunity was taken to apply white wash and distemper to the walls and ceilings. The Goblin vacuum cleaner was never used to my knowledge so it must have been broken.

Nothing was ever wasted; worn clothes altered, patched or darned. Faded clothes were dyed, frayed collars turned, worn sheet top and tailed, towels became flannels, and flannels became dishcloths and dishcloths consigned to the shed. Orange boxes became bedside cupboards, bricks used to take up room in the fire to save coal. Buttons saved lace hoarded, wood stored.

Our basic kitchen furniture consisted of an old, dark, polished wood, dressing table which had a hinged flap screwed onto one side - always covered in an off white oil cloth, which had two drawers to the front holding all the cutlery and kitchen utensils. Under the table was a box on roller bearings - pulled out for extra seating at meal times, a wooden carver, and a folding, wooden-slatted chair made up the seating arrangements, augmented by a deck chair - naturally claimed by my father. The whole floor was covered in painted linoleum with a carpet square on top further reinforced by another rug just before the fender linking the upholstered box ends holding the dried sticks - for lighting the morning's fire.

For some strange reason our taps would drip incessantly. Part of father's regular duties was to change the washers. The tap's washer, held in the spigot, tightened into its base by the tap. The tap assembly held into the body by a nut, the size of which our toolbox could not provide a spanner. An adjustable spanner was the universal tool used in almost all cases where a spanner was required. Unfortunately, the adjustable screwing mechanism was deficient of its stub screw. This unfortunately was missing so you had to hold the adjusting screw in with your first finger and thumb whilst turning the wrench. I well remember the 'U' bend in the kitchen sink blocking and my father doing his usual 'fixing' which involved minimum preparation by him and maximum nervous energy by the rest of the family to keep out of his way pretending that all was normal. I was fascinated by the more than excessive grunting and banging so enquired how he was getting on. He explained the intricacies he was experiencing - trying to make a repair using the much used tool kit on a more than stubborn nut. I do not know what came over me but I remarked how I thought he was being a bit of a twat. He exploded, leaping to his feet whilst bashing his head on the bottom of the sink. I retreated at speed he meanwhile shouting out that I ought to know what I was saying – that I should look up the word in a dictionary. Later I did just that finding out that I had called him a female genital. I felt such a fool and have never used that term again. All this was typical and part of 'life at home' for anyone using our tools had to be adaptable, versatile and quick thinking whilst maintaining a cool exterior and a positive outlook. Just look at any of the nuts in our house and you will see they all have rounded sides - made by slipping spanners and wrenches. I have known my father resort to tapping a screw round with a screwdriver and a hammer, which made the already rounded nut lethal for unsuspecting users.

The tiles, which surrounded the kitchen sink, did not help because they were only a millimetre away from the tap - there was not a great deal of space to do any repairs. Having the flannel and dishcloth hanging up under the overhead cupboard was also very handy for they provided extra grip. Such things were not considered important enough to move - were after all handy to stem any blood flow caused by the slipping pipe wrench. Job preparation by my father was always a little sketchy because he always approached any task with a positive approach. To repair a leaking tap he sought out just one spanner. This meant that he was always going backwards and forwards to the shed gradually to work-through our set of prehistoric tools. Gradually the kitchen drainer would represent an artisan's workbench. Holes would appear in the surface and bits sawn off the sides - made it look as if termites had been at work. These incidences made up much of my home life, later on used to bring laughter to family gatherings, and remembered with relish.

The stairs, led up to a landing - with four doors... above - by trapdoor, the entry to the loft. The insulation - lagging to the loft pipe work and cold storage tank, was sketchy at the best of times. Every year saw the annual freeze-up - when the pipes and inlet valve to the storage tank had to be thawed out. Ice used to block the ball-cock valve, which prevented to water flowing into the cold-water tank pipe and blocked the rainwater down pipes. Quite often, a small paraffin heater put into the loft at night to stop the pipes from freezing-up. My brother and I thought this exciting; to my father it was a calamity. He had to fetch the ladder in from outside to reach the trap door on the landing then to fumble his way around the loft so that he could see where this day's blockage had occurred. It was usually the inlet valve and short section of pipe, which lead from it. Hot water bottles passed up through the hatch, candles and paraffin lamps lit to

thaw out the pipes. With any luck, there would be a hissing noise and the water would start to flow back into the cold-water tank.

The bathroom, at the head of the stairs contained the airing cupboard – the bottom half filled with an oblong, galvanised, hot water tank – the top-half - bed linen - and yesterdays ironing. Bathing was so rare that I cannot remember it. Obviously, it occurred when we were small children - only because so little water necessary. The water heated by a very small back-boiler sited at the back of the kitchen range - most of its heat needed in the kitchen not up the chimney... past the boiler. The hot water system at onetime did operated fairly efficiently, but later on - particularly during the war - a limit of 'four inches of water' - for bathing, and restriction placed on the amount of coal available certainly stopped 'a good soak in the bath'... A strip washes being the order of the day... most days! My father shaved and washed in the kitchen very early in the morning before we children, surfaced. My mother did her ablutions later - during the day – in peace and quiet. Normally, hot water provided by a kettle carried upstairs - for those who were shy - that required privacy.

Each of the bedrooms, except for the box room, had small cast iron fire grates and surrounds. These were lit on very special occasions - an illness or the birth of my youngest brother. Before the hearth, a fender... gave boundary - to a small hearthrug. Both rooms had carpet squares with an outer border of linoleum.

All the rooms in the house had the walls papered. This claim to middle class convention continued for many years. The wallpaper, purchased from the hardware shop, needed the lap removed to match-up the pattern... achieved with a pair of scissors. Eventually the manufacturer cut this off. Over the years, my father tired of papering and decorated the walls by distemperring over the paper... the simple solution. The windows

curtained... with the addition of nets, by convention, always drawn.

My brother and I, were shepherded off to bed promptly at nine, armed with a sock-wrapped hot water bottle, and tucked up in bed with two goodnight prayers:

*'There are four corners to my bed,
There are four angels at its head,
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lay on'.*

Alternatively,

*'God bless mummy,
God bless daddy,
Make me a good boy, Amen'.*

Whichever, the calming influence of the familiar words soon had us off-to-sleep. Outside: the owls hooted and cats screamed, as the ghostly trains hurried by... trailing smoke and steam..., their whistles fading away in the night sky...

Beyond the back door lay the concreted backyard - which ran: to the width of the house, side passage, and to about fourteen feet - out into the garden. Today backyard might be elevated to the more modern term of 'patio...!' To the right hand side, facing the rear of the house, were two coal sheds, one for coke and the other coal, which also held the logs for the fire and kindling. My father, at regular intervals, had delivered from his rail yard a lot of used wood. Over time, this was cut-up and chopped for firewood.

The garden shed, with laid brick floor, nestled next to the coal sheds - in the corner of the yard. Inside a workbench and a

number of shelves lined the walls. To us boys the shed was a source of continual mystery and experiment - gave us lots of enjoyment and excitement. It was packed with a variety of useless tools and half-used materials, piled on top of each other - each vying with each other for space. The roof beams held a myriad collection of nails, hooks, and screws, each supporting another collection of articles of fascination and awe. We children looked upon the garden shed as an Aladdin's Cave. It's very deepest corners held untold secrets. Access denied to us initially by a padlock - in time, picked so often that eventually left unlocked. An old German helmet, a first world war trench periscope, numerous boxes of assorted nuts and bolts - all rusting into a solid lump, tools which might have graced a workman's bag of the mid eighteen hundreds, many sizes of sawn wood, sheets of tin, deck chairs with broken bottom struts and torn covers which challenged the boldest user. Folding slatted chairs and a table of indefinite vintage. It was all inviting and we children used all its resources to construct gang huts, tree houses, soapbox carts, stilts, and cricket bats. The assorted tools had the look of Iron Age implements. Saws lacked teeth, hammers had rounded heads, which turned over every nail hit, spanners that were adjustable but were never designed with that in the manufacturer's original specification, wrenches, jemmies, gauges, and rulers - long since losing their working life. The vice would have done justice to a blacksmith's forge. It could have held the most stubborn of rusted nuts except that the turning screw on the shank had such enormous play it was impossible to make any sort of final adjustment.

From the pole, nailed to the near corner of the shed, ran the radio aerial... strung between two porcelain separators. The wire passed through the kitchen window frame... along the shelf... into the ancient wireless set, there, held in its aerial socket by a matchstick. We were all very concerned when there

was an electrical storm - that this arrangement would attract a lightning bolt, when we expected the house to go up in flames or at least the radio to give its final shriek...!

I do remember my father resurfacing the back yard. Like anything else father did, the task was to be completed with minimum effort at maximum speed. To achieve that, the procedure had to follow a set plan. Unfortunately, the plan did not include the right dress, proper preparation, correct tools, or the best materials in the correct proportions. My father would approach the job in his normal rig-of-the-day, giving the job its proper recognition of difficulty and respect by rolling up his sleeves.

As with all the family's tools this screwdriver had the extra task of doubling up – to become multi-purpose. Large screwdrivers, filed down to take small screws, the coal shovel act as a trowel, wood rasps to smooth metal, metal files to smooth wood. Speed was essential for all tasks, minimum effort - an equally important work goal; technical difficulties overcome by muscle power and any onlookers bamboozled by an enormous flurry of arms and legs. Fine-tuning and attention to detail given due respect by a fine selection of hammers: that had rounded heads, heads that flew off - handles that was not at right angles or split. All these would have proved to be a mountain to be climb but the job was still possible, if....

A load of sand delivered and a quantity of cement obtained. The cement, long past its sale-by-date with bag split, was comprised of large lumps. These rocks had to be broken up, crushed, and sieved - to produce some semblance of the original powder. In crushing, the pile assumed a smaller density – looked as if it might be in short supply? The sand too, had its own variety of foreign particles – came from a number of sources - multi grained. A tin bath, employed to hold the cement mixture, had a quantity of sand and cement added. The duel-purpose

coal-shovel agitated and mixed a slightly aqueous gritty substance ready for spreading.

The yard contained the mangle, a large box – very much like a cold frame, which held firewood, the rabbit hutch, and sundry other, bits, and pieces. This extraneous matter treated as part of the permanent structure – by its longevity.

It is said in the army that, ‘if something moves you salute it and that if it does not you paint it’, this general rule applied at home. There are other secondary rules: ‘what is moved might have to be put back’, ‘out of sight is out of mind’, and if you have a surplus you might have to get rid of it. It has always stood countless soldiers in good stead to apply these basic rules. There are however, another two, which did not apply in this instance, although we children used them on countless occasions. Do not be caught, not carrying something, and, if moving abroad in daylight hours, do so urgently. My father was an old soldier...!

The mixture was now ready for spreading. It soon became apparent that using the right proportions of 6:1 the cement would soon run out... Therefore, savings would have to be put in place. Father decided that 8: 1 would have to do – after all, there would not be a lot of wear on the surface... Even this lean mixture found to eat away at the now ‘valuable’ cement pile... Subsequent mixings saw a very sandy mixture... getting worse... The planned concreting was now adapted – modified...

It was soon discovered the shovel was not up to the job in hand. The wooden handle dropped off - meant holding the metal sleeve. Some of the cement stuck to the surface of the shovel, which steadily grew - increasing its weight, [This never came off and dried solid]. That did not slow down the job only made my father speed up. Soon, a simpler spreading technique had to be adopted, for time was ‘getting on...’

Now my father’s patience was wearing thin - impatient to see the job over! The yard broom, like all brooms in our house,

required tapping down - to ensure the head was securely attached to the handle - which it never was. Just as all tools that have a handle there is a 'right' size for the hole... For some unknown reason our handles were always smaller.

It was not odd to see a screw hammered in to secure the handle instead of a nail. This was viewed, like many others, as a temporary fixing, awaiting a more permanent job, later... This was never successful. It could have many nails, of mixed parentage, sticking into the head like a porcupine... some oval others round, with or without heads... Numbers did not always guarantee a firm result.

By watering down the mixture a coat of light grey, sandy cement, could be brushed on. At last...! Here was a technique that would solve all the problems - time left to do the job, degree of muscle power available, after much effort, tamping to achieve level and smoothness, and sort out the now obvious lack of materials.

Soon the job completed... tools put away - with their own coating of cement, especially the shovel. The broom, now the multi purpose leveller and spreader, was the last tool to be used - walking backwards brushing as one went... could not be dunked in the water barrel to clean it off so retained, ever afterwards, a healthy amount of grit.

It did not take long for the oncoming rain to cause its own effects upon the drying mixture. Small rivulets of grey cement channelled its way down the garden steps on to the lawn making the end result something like the Ganges delta. Ever afterwards, the yard grated under ones feet and a thick dust-cloud blew round the side entrance. It was never the same again - I do not ever remember the yard ever being free of grit swirling around - in any sort of wind!

The garden which led off the back yard was to be found below a series of brick steps cut into the bank leading to the

lawn. Privet hedges separated the steps from the flowerbeds, on either side, which were planted with Marigolds, Michaelmas daisies, Roses and Sweet William and at the bottom just before the lawn, mum's favourite, London pride. A random curved stone path ran to the ditch at the bottom of the sixty-foot garden. This ditch was a drain - a tributary of the river Pinn, enclosed in a four feet diameter concrete pipe. Flowerbeds ran down each side of the garden from top to bottom. At the bottom of the garden was an oval bed and the side farthest away from the house was four small trees. This oval flowerbed was, during the first part of the Second World War, our air raid shelter. Unfortunately, it was always filled with rainwater and never used...the'oppin' trench was a risky playground... not a saviour of skins!

Many games involved landscaping earth, mud, and stones to form: The American West - provide our lead cowboys and Indians with an 'out west' backdrop, or, Indian Plains - an enactment of the part played by soldiers in khaki - of the Empire... There! That is it then... the answer to the question my first memory games with lead soldiers taken out of their boxes, kept in the kitchen dresser, and 'set up' - for a battle - whether inside the house or outside in the garden. Mostly, however, our never-never land was at the bottom of the garden, well away from the house. When something required tools... it was to the shed and dad's workbox, we went... First though, to get past the lock...! We became very adept lock pickers. Fortunately, they were very simple locks.

The garden steps, flanked by two rather moth-eaten, variegated leafed, privet-hedges lead down to the lower garden and lawn. These six steps were our *second choice* play area - 'gladiatorial' arena. Their brick construction - their goings one brick high and treads two stretcher bricks deep, were about a

yard wide... These provided a number of wheeled contraptions with a suitable descent ...

The steps represented for us what the 'Cresta' run does for downhill skiers, although the sides were considerable rougher than tape or netting, being a rather spiky privet hedge. To ease the decent, boards propped up to take away the bumps to make a smoother ride...

Initially, when it had all its wheels, our first carriage was a horse on wheels. This was later substituted by a rather wobblerly tricycle – unfortunately it's large single front wheel difficult to keep in a straight line, caused many mishaps... a pedal car came third, but suffered from having a rather low chassis which tended 'to ground'. Finally, a home built soapbox-on-pram-wheeled, go-cart; boasting many modifications - add-ons and adaptations, all designed to surpass all others... it was to be the fastest thing on wheels.

Extra propulsion - provided by a gentle guiding hand, gave an initial start... this soon became a more vigorous push which considerably increased momentum. After, *a go* each – excitement being then at its peak, the push turned into an enormous heave taken at a spirited run. This, *upping* of the danger levels - from running shove to gigantic heave always ended in catastrophe... me crying. My brother with hands on hips adopting a superior stance demanding what I was crying for... my mother rushed out of the kitchen door demanding, 'what was wrong?' These are some of my first impressions of play – when I was four.

Friday the first of September 1939, was a momentous day. Germany invaded Poland, completely subjugating the nation in four weeks; in a similar number of days, the defeat of Holland followed. Chamberlain's declaration was the following Sunday. Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg invaded and overrun... shortly afterwards, and the great retreat began... ending with evacuation

from Dunkirk on June 4th. My brother started school the next day, which was a far more monumental event... for me.

Prior to the war being declared the Government considered whether air-raid shelters should be built - not for individuals but for high-ranking government employees or particular scientists, living in range of enemy bombers. It was decreed that particular individuals could apply for special dispensation. Local Councils would deliver free shelters to individuals in need, mostly families, but only in specific danger zones.

There were two types of air-raid shelter for families: the Anderson shelter, named after the then Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson, which was a corrugated iron structure with a domed roof for outside - could be either partially sunk in the garden or completely buried - catered for a maximum of six. They were extremely damp - suffered from condensation and needed to be properly installed - with sump and pump, or proper drainage channel, routed to a soak away. A special bomb blast wall was needed to protect the entrance. The other one was a three-foot high steel-topped table with steel-mesh sides - for use inside the house; this was a Morrison shelter, devised by Herbert Morrison. It was not long before both types were unused - being too inconvenient. People preferring to hide under the stairs, in basements or under the kitchen table, particularly the latter - it was warmer there.

Street shelters - to provide for the population of a small road, a windowless oblong brick built structure, with a flat, nine-inch reinforced concrete roof was built at convenient places throughout North Harrow. Our nearest was stationed near the crossroads - at the end of the road. Its main fault, when there was a near miss, the bomb-blast would collapse the walls and the very heavy roof crushed those inside. They were extremely cold, airless, damp, and smelly; had neither light nor heat and did not

boast a door or window. I do not remember anyone using one with a positive outcome... in retrospect; they were a waste of money and effort. Those shelters, which did save thousands of lives, were those that had been purpose built - deep - mainly underground railways. During the Battle of Britain - the most critical period, people bought platform tickets and waited underground until the all clear sounded. Later, the government realised the benefit and allowed people to enter the platforms after dusk, free of charge - planned a proper organised arrangement for Londoners using the underground railway system.

At the outbreak of the war father dug a trench at the bottom of the garden. A shallow trench with sandbagged walls. He scoffed at the more conventional design as being 'death traps' declaring that a slit trench was far more serviceable. From a military standpoint, this was undoubtedly true - allowing easy access and escape. However, for a purely practical family shelter suitable for all weathers a more conventional structure with a roof would have been better. Still, as our shelter was never put to the test, and I do not remember any of my friends needing to use theirs either, perhaps my dad was right. Even during the most frightful of raids our family never so much as retired to the cupboard under the stairs.

What garden furniture did grace the lawn was skimpy - consisted of a seat on a canopied swing and a hand made garden bench painted green. At the right hand corner of the garden, a tall copper beech tree - our tree house - accessed by a rope ladder. A swing - single or double rope, tied on a lower branch. The tree was also '*in extremis*' an escape route - to a part of the tree as far away as possible from my father's reach... who waited with diminishing patience - at the bottom, with a cane.

Next door, the Tripps had an enormous Lombardy poplar tree, which dominated the area - taking all the goodness out of

the surrounding gardens. During, and just after the war, we kept chickens, as a number of other families did, and occasionally, a rabbit too! Our family was never without a tabby cat. It often monopolized mums lap... playing with the knitting wool... whose kittens – arrived in frequent litters...

Separating all the neighbouring gardens was an open wood fence tightly enclosed behind obligatory privet hedges. At the bottom of the garden, a close-boarded fence indicated the boundary - divided us from the houses in Canterbury Road. At its foot, ran a ditch and stream – a tributary of the river Pinn. This stream had been contained in a four-foot diameter concrete pipe and serve as a storm drain. Fortunately, the boundary hedge totally screened us from our neighbours at the bottom by tall hedges and trees... probably the original hedges dividing the farmer's field.

Dig for Victory, Wartime Allotments, The Kitchen Front, The Kitchen Waste collection and Pig Club were all government initiatives - instigated to provide incentives to spur people on - to help themselves and others. The object was to become independent and self-sustaining. It was declared unpatriotic by a government official, to feed birds or throw anything away which could be recycled.

The lawn, laid on either side of the garden path – from the bottom of the steps to the oval flowerbed at the other end of the garden, was undulating because at the start of the war garden owners were encouraged to dig up their lawns and turn them into allotments - which my parents did. As far as that went all was well. When it came to planting the seeds, pricking out, spacing, nurturing, and 'bringing-on'... the whole plan faltered... finally collapse. Like most other plans, it came to naught... grass replanted itself in the levelled off patch. The indentations were never totally made good - the lawn assumed the feature of an ancient burial site.

The already much used lawn mower - an apology for a gardening aid, never had its blades sharpened or set and would have graced any respectable antique shop. The adjusting nuts, their corners rounded by frequent attention, did the job without their necessary locking nuts. The uninitiated who attempted fine-tuning ended up having bruised and bloodied knuckles. The selection of spanners, of doubtful manufacture acquired over the previous industrial age, was impressive - in size and assortment... but rarely delivered up the correct size. The keen do-it-yourselfer had to resort to many devices to get round the problem... Many times my father would dance round cursing and shaking his fist hurling many and varied abuses at the mower.

The mower's driving roller operated the cutters by an adjustable chain, which had so much play in it that it often fell off. This fault, however, was secondary to the lack of sharp blades properly set. The handlebars covered by rubber grips - over time worn and torn. Rubbed raw blisters on your hands. Quite often I would stand on the roller's scraper-plate, to give the roller extra gripping power - stop it slipping - increase the mowers weight, so that the many bumps in the lawn were further flattened. This slipping, of the smooth back rollers, also added to the grass becoming squashed, scuffed, and made many flattened mud patches. None of this was helped by the handles of the mower being adjusted too low - the pusher always started with a slight stoop which would progress to become like a potato picker - doubled up. The reader has to picture all this going on with my father who never removed his jacket, always insisted on wearing a waistcoat and continued to wear long johns even during the hottest of summers. He wanted to show the neighbours that everything was going according to plan - that the mowing was effortless - accomplished with panache and skill, even when the chain had jammed and the stationary rollers skidded on the muddy surface. My father used oil and grease on the mower as

tools rather than lubricants... a trail of black slime followed the mower wherever it went. Today, the mower would be an heirloom and much sought after - fetch a tidy sum at the Antique Road Show. The slack driving chain contributed to the already worn down driving sprocket. The front wooden rollers had always been there, partially rotted away by being left with mud and grass cuttings over the winter months.

Overall, it was an excuse of a lawn. The weeds grew abundantly, provided extra pocket money for us boys to prise them out with a weed trowel, and the depressions created pools of water unable to escape from the present glutinous clay soil. One flowerbed held two apple trees, a cooker, and a very sweet red desert apple. Both trees produced apples so small and worm eaten they were hardly worth peeling. That never put my mother off extracting the maximum from what the gardens offered. Paring the apples - with film like peelings, or accepting next doors bitter cherries - 'to help them out'. Apple pie was mums forte, first and last. If the Kearey family has fortitude, stamina, and endurance then it is the result of mum's apple pies.

There is no doubt that by the end of 1940 the nation had developed a core of fortitude. It was not obvious to the casual onlooker but underneath - showed itself increasingly by grim determination - a flame that was not going to be extinguished. When Russia was invaded the following year, the working population began to warm to their struggles. Eventually many became communist with a small 'C' admiring the mighty efforts of a beleaguered nation. There was enormous sympathy and admiration, which the people of Britain felt and recognized.

CHAPTER III

Longfield School – Air Raid Shelters – Community singing – Radio programmes – Curriculum – School lessons – Teachers – Sports – The German bombers – Air Raids – Searchlights - London Blitz – Total War – Rationing – The Nations Health – Make-do and mend – Meals – Diet - British Restaurant - Home Guard – Doodle bugs – A flying bomb fell - The tide turns - VE Day.

My mother took me to Longfield School in September 1940 - one year after the declaration of war. I was five years and two months old. I can still remember walking past North Harrow station holding her hand. I felt nervous, but very grown up!

The Introductory Class - the first classroom on the right from the main entrance and stairs, caused me the normal shy, worried fears all the other children had to cope with. This was the only time I ever remember my mother attending one of my schools - I am sure she must have at sometime but I do not recall it. After my first day at school, I continued my attendance walking with my brother until I was conversant with the route. This initial period did not take long and I was soon making my own way. Over forty children were in the first class, all sitting on tiny chairs in front of tiny desks. The whole room in keeping with the furniture – all on a Lilliputian scale.

As well as recognising letters and numbers every day of the week, we were taught how to sew - with very blunt needles and to paint and sing. On the windowsills, boxes of wet flannel grew mustard and cress, jam jars, lined with blotting paper, demonstrated the growth of peas and beans. I took to it all immediately... all my fears evaporated... so did my cap! Throughout my schooldays, the uniform was the same – jacket and trousers. I never had a greatcoat, raincoat... come rain, or

shine the jacket had to suffice... It was the same for all my friends.

Joined up writing was the next stage in the art of writing. Individualism was not acceptable – up and down strokes were to be on top of each other, loops banned; each generation seemed to have their own preferences in letter writing form – with or without loops – continuing without space from capital to lower-case... more paper covered, more notebooks used, than any other task. Row upon row of individual letters, repeating page after page all designed to perfect the writing. Another daily task was repeating multiplication tables by rote in a singsong fashion every morning... on and on... it passed a great deal of time only to be interrupted by the air-raid warning... which we might make before the ‘all clear’ sounded... Then back to mental arithmetic - so many apples bought - so much change returned?

We learned music from visual aids - Tonic Sol-Fa draped over the blackboard. Music pieces played on a record player and the tune picked out on the piano – a demonstration of variations within the piece... the time rapped on the desk. Music increasingly became an important part of the curriculum. This was due to the government’s recognition that it was important; the public’s habit of listening to the radio and an increase in concert going in town halls and parks. Posters decorated the walls with multiplication tables, nursery rhymes and a nature scroll. There were painting lessons, highly coloured daubs with an almost hairless brush... reading Janet and John type books – fingers running across the page - each child having to read in turn.

The school’s air-raid shelters were installed in 1940. Large concrete pipes, originally made for enclosing streams or sewers, about six foot in diameter sunk into trenches in the ground. A bombproof entrance and exit steps built at either end then the whole lot covered in eighteen inches of soil turfed over.

Duckboards covered the floors and slatted forms provided seating at the sides. They were dimly lit, smelly, cold, and damp. When the sirens sounded, we left our classes and streamed to the shelters, each class having their own place. I do not remember any lessons being taught or even attempted to be taught whilst we were down there. We sang many songs in the round, took part in general knowledge quizzes. Using a cotton reel with four small nails over which wool was looped French knitting was produced., Eventually a long knitted tail was made which was sewn together to make a round mat in turn could be further stitched together to make a rug. Wrapping wool round a cardboard ring with a hole cut into the centre was another craze. You continued threading wool round – from the outside into the centre until the centre totally filled with wool. The outside edge was cut, the cardboard removed, producing a ball of wool. My Infant school-days consisted of many such Air Raids which meant ‘going down to the shelters’ where teachers tried to occupy the children by keeping us entertained.

We all had our own gas masks in a square cardboard box equipped with string shoulder straps. Very soon, after the masks issued and the Battle of Britain fought the fear of enemy troops landing diminished. We were told gas masks need not be carried but must be kept near to hand, so they were consigned to the cupboard under the stairs never to be got out again. There was government propaganda put out over not only the air but also printed in newspapers extolling the need to be aware of the seriousness of the national position and that everyone should be prepared to do their best for the country and those fighting aboard.

Although adult conversation was about the war, children did not participate – their talk was about the latest film from Hollywood, the latest action in the Beano or Dandy... perhaps, about some sporting event or train spotting. For life went on, it

appeared, as if, nothing was happening... much as always ... As children, we never noticed or commented on the lack of men - that the shops and town streets were only populated only by women ...!

Radio news programmes were highly censored giving a report on the wars progress in line with government's plans. Newspapers took their line from a similar agency keeping in mind the necessity of keeping up moral. Everything was said and done to help the country's war effort. Programmes such as Wilfred Pickles 'Have a Go, Joe', Tommy Handley's 'Itma', Workers Playtime or 'Bombed Out' written to raise the spirits.

The period of the blitz was over relatively quickly. The Germans, before putting Operation Sealion into action - the invasion of Britain, planned to put Britain's airfields and radar stations out of action... a sensible decision. Our airforce - guided by radio waves, could and would have caused considerable confusion and damage to an invasion force. Shortly after the German initiation of this policy - when many airfields and radar stations damaged or put out of action, Churchill demanded a retaliatory bombing mission on Berlin. This had the effect of prompting Hitler to return the attack to London, diverting his forces. Churchill never appreciated the result from this fortuitous order...

The German bombers were to be attacked - to ensure sufficient damage and loss that fighter escorts needed, if the policy were to be continued. For Britain, the raids continued further draining Germany's resources... but most of all relieving the pressure on Britain's fighter airfields and radar installations. Eventually Hitler put off the thought of invasion instead marched into Russia. This heralded the end of the blitz particularly raids towards inland sites - meant fewer air raids. The school's shelters gradually became redundant.

As boys, watching from my parent's bedroom window, Stan and I observed the air raids at night over London. The air raid sirens would start their interrupted pulsating wail that told you to take cover – approaching bombers were within range. The searchlight batteries would illuminate the night sky flicking their beams of light about in an attempt to locate the planes. The interrupted drone of the unsynchronised engines of the German bombers punctuated the night. Occasionally the searchlight beams caught a bomber making it look like a silver, midget fly. The bombs would be exploding making a dull crump then flames would shoot up eventually making the completely eastern sky glow orange and red like a semi-circular, northern-lights spectacular. We could see at first the searchlights seeking out and occasionally lighting up an enemy plane – the beams of light flickering across the sky forever probing for the aircraft. Then the ack-ack guns firing - trying to shoot the bombers down. At night, you could hear the pieces of metal shrapnel falling onto the roof. Finally, the sirens would give the all clear by a continuous tone and the searchlight would begin to flicker out. In the morning, it would be a rush to see who could find a piece of shrapnel. These pieces swapped a larger piece for two smaller.

It is interesting to remember that Winston Churchill declared 'total' war early on. Germany's total war effort was not declared until 1944. Total war is about every person, involving every field of human endeavour. Pre-war Britain had more merchant ships than America and Japan combined. By the end of the war, 5,150 of those ships were lost [a total tonnage of more than its pre-war fleet]. The country lost its prestige, its world position and became deeply indebted to America, which would take many years to pay back.

As much as fifty percent of the county's food was imported before the Second World War. Food rationing started on the 8th January 1940, organized by the Ministry of Food, after

the populace warned the previous November - it was scheduled to happen for the purchase of butter and bacon [sugar and all meat followed the next January; cheese cooking fat and tea soon afterwards] and to register - to a shop of their choice. The government believed that it was possible Britain could be forced to surrender by the sinking of food supply convoys and wished to share out the food available; they were also aware that hoarding - by the 'well off', was likely to occur.

By 1941, people began to get more accustomed to the limited supply - to experiment with unusual ingredients - imported tinned sausages and spam, powdered milk, eggs and potatoes. We hardly ever had to resort to any of these new foods in the home although school meals included them.

One of the changes to our diet, my brother and I made, was to take part in the governments Vitamin Welfare Scheme. We had a daily spoonful of cod-liver oil and malt [which was free for children under two]. Years later, the cod liver oil scheme was changed - to one of concentrated orange juice - to supplement the Vitamin C intake. At school, we had a third of a pint of milk thought beneficial for health - particularly Vitamin D, to prevent rickets.

How to save scraps of food to make further dishes and how to conserve fuel and water was practiced. The radio doctor Charles Hill, later to be Minister of Health, told the listeners how to make simple diagnostic tests and how to treat basic health problems - what to eat to keep healthy. He became an established radio celebrity whose advice was avidly listened to and followed. He became a radio celebrity and an institution so fondly was he considered.

The population was coping becoming progressively more frugal. There were hints on how to make clothes last longer. Clothes rationing [a separate clothing book] introduced after food in June 1941. Early the following year each person allocated

sixty coupons, which had to last for fifteen months. People were encouraged to Make-do and Mend. The government introduced the 'utility' scheme designed to save material. Much later, this scheme involved all household goods and brought about the utility kite mark.

Being Ink-monitor was a chore for the reservoir pot was large and heavy. Trying to fill the small inkwells was difficult and messy enough without having to retrieve them from each desk and return them full up. All pupils allocated a School House, which identified the member, by a coloured diagonal band, especially recognisable for sports and team games.

School Assembly held first thing in the main hall of the school. Mrs Gotobed, a person who would easily find an equal place alongside Chalky of Giles cartoon fame, would officiate. When the final announcement made we marched from the hall, to the tune of a popular march, back to our respective classrooms. At sometime in the school year we had to parade in front of the Nurse to have, our ears looked into, and our hair searched for lice.

My co-educational primary education completed, without any streaming, selection or the altering of class position. I do not remember any child having behavioural problems – towards each other or against those in authority, or, not able to keep up with the rest in lessons. There were no tests, which would have blighted my day.

On Empire day, we were allowed to go to school in cub uniform. The Union Jack flown on the flagpole and The National Anthem sung. Even at home, if the anthem played on the radio one was almost made to feel disloyal if you did not stand to attention. The playing of the National Anthem outside the home in theatre, cinema, concert hall, or park demanded total respect. No one would dream of being anti-royal or casting

aspersion towards the hierarchy. King and Country maintained and claimed as the highest ideal.

School dinners served in the hall, sometimes divided to accommodate overspill classes. Some children went home for their meals – those who lived nearby. Milk drunk from third pint bottles with a straw at the morning break-time continued for several years. In the winter, the milk was cold - sometimes frozen solid and in the summer warm, often tasted sour.

Friday afternoons at school was the time when our teacher read us a story. *Coral Island* or *Wind in the Willows* – a great favourite. During the reading of these stories by the teacher, I can still remember how much they excited me. I could quite ‘get into them’ and could imagine all the descriptions - of places and people.

The other abiding memory at this time was playing submarines with my ‘best friend’ David Henry Villers, later to be nicknamed China [china plate] after the cockney slang for *mate*. Every school lunch time we would be playing, by the box hedge near the school gate, submarines. What prompted us to play that game I know not except that it was about this time that the action of German submarines was playing a significant role in the war and was therefore much in the news. As the land war was being won by a continuous string of enemy successes so too was the war at sea. It was a very frustrating period, which never seemed to end.

I continued with the same class of children throughout my period in the primary school. There were tests and reports in the juniors; whatever the result, in my case not too good, my parents took no action to motivate me to do better. They did not demand any homework or to my knowledge require any explanation as to what they should do to improve my education. Eventually I went upstairs to the Junior School and the educational process continued.

In 1941, my brother enrolled in the local piano teacher's class. He practised religiously and throughout his many years of lessons took the Royal College of Music's exams. Two years later my father asked me if I would like to learn too. To this, I replied "No" keeping to myself that I did not want to spend all my time practising whilst my friends were outside having fun. I do not think my father was very pushing. He knew that if I did not want to learn he would not have to spend the fees.

One of my elder brother's great schemes – it may have come from stories during the war or through the scouts, whatever, his idea was that we should build an aerial ropeway from bedroom window to ground.

The clothes line running from garden shed to a pole, close to the fence, was borrowed and sneaked up to the bedroom – making sure that my mother didn't realise what was going on by being stuffed up my jumper. The bedroom window flung wide open, one end of the washing line tied to one of the iron bedstead legs, paid out over the window cill, and the spare... dropped to the ground. We casually went down stairs out into the back yard. Using the mangle as an anchor tied the spare end to it and drew the rope tight. Back we went upstairs to begin our descent. My brother being the organiser and senior elected to descend first.

There were, other than the poor quality of the rope, two main essentials to the success of this escapade. One, the need for a firm anchor at the top, two, that the bottom firmly held - to prevent 'swing'.

The architect who designed the house believed that a semblance of balance was necessary in his design - the doors and windows were in alignment vertically and horizontally... beneath our bedroom window was the French doors.

After clambering out onto the cill my brother gradually descended. It was here that the first safety feature was missing.

The bed took up the strain... our bedroom never had a carpet but relied upon linoleum to offer it a taste of luxury. The floor surface did not allow sufficient grip... the bed gradually slid towards the window. Perhaps, if the second principle of safety reliably put into place success achieved. There again, if I had been strong enough - by holding onto the other end drawn tight the slack... that may have sufficed, unfortunately, I was not!

Thinking about it afterwards the outcome might appear obvious but to us then it did not. The mangle, though of ancient lineage, still had the castors attached; these found to be necessary for us two to move the mangle to the other end of the yard.

This is where, had there been complete reliance upon total 'grip' [to use an expression much used by General Montgomery] help might have been to hand. It was not, the mangle started to move towards the French windows and the rope slackened. My brother wishing to stop the rope spinning and to give some semblance of order to his descent pushed out his foot, which found purchase on the main French window, which gave way under pressure.

Without going into too many details, he landed in a heap on the ground via the mangle. My mother now took a greater interest in the proceedings and flew out of the kitchen. She did not have to say that she would tell our father what we had been up to for the results of our labour were obvious.

It was normal to meet my father at the railway station every evening. It was on our walks back home that I was able to get my side of every issue straight before any nasty rumours broadcast later on. In this case, it was to no avail even though my brother and I often took to the top of the beech tree, into our tree house, as we did in this case, my father meant to have his say with the cane. I never enjoyed being up the tree looking down on my father who was stalking about at the bottom with a strap or cane. Time was not always a good healer...

From the time my father joined the Home Guard to the time he was demobilised we saw little of him. There were brief spells of home life but he was not around sufficiently long enough to change the way my mother ran things; she continued her placid way of life – nothing hurried, no upsets, nothing altered to show that there was a war going on or that rationing dictated the type of meals we were eating. There was nothing obvious, to the casual observer, to suggest we were nearing the middle of the twentieth century for we were locked into how she was raised back in rural Tatworth.

Mother was pregnant. At 54, my father had another son, Derek, who was born in October 1943. My mother had a home confinement. This did not alter the daily routine. I can only believe that Nan, an adopted Aunt, was there to hold the fort.

I enjoyed school and my classmates, but most of all, I appreciated my particular friend David. My life revolved around his family and home. Our conversations mainly taken up by the history of the Plantagenet kings, their castles - and the breaching of their walls. The lessons were not onerous although I was not keen on mental arithmetic: problems, especially those awful ‘if you bought six apples at 2d each and four pears at 1d how much would you have out of a 10 shillings note,’ were horrific - I always forgot the beginning of the question. There was no fuss about exams although we took classroom tests. However, we were becoming more aware of a horrid event looming before us. A scholarship examination, as the eleven-plus was, put into place.

All children were taught to read and write in a manner laid down by the education authorities. Conversational English based on the language of radio announcers – the Kings English. Sums were a compulsory part of the curriculum as was scripture, music, nature lessons and model making. Every year had its sports and Empire day, dancing round the May pole, cricket and football - when the field was dry, which seemed to be rare. It was

a good school although unfortunately my period there coincided with the war, which interrupted most lessons. Sex reared its head in a very innocent way with, 'I'll show you mine if you'll show me yours,' which never to my memory produced anything other than mild amazement.

Saturday morning cinema club either at: the Granada Cinema, Harrow, the Odeon, Rayners Lane or The Embassy, North Harrow. They all had their theme songs, which we children all sang loudly in time with the spot, which indicated on the screen the next word. Their special clubs, which passed out badges of membership, were much prized. I can still remember the songs and feel the tense excitement. Westerns, with Roy Rogers taking the lead, detective mysteries, with Mr Ching, the Bowery Boys who were led by Slip Mahoney. Laurel and Hardy comedies, Charlie Chaplin's slapstick humour, and the Keystone Cop's mad antics were the most frequent comedies. There was the usual competition for small boys to try to get to the front by crawling under the seats to get nearer the screen. On special occasions, live actors and singers gave a concert during the middle of the show. The organ at the Granada would rise out of the floor and the white coated figure would strike up the tune to a roar from the whole audience. A two penny, round, Lyons ice cream cornet was a particular delight.

Although I never took part there were always 'crazes' going around the school. Either it was: special cigarette card collections, a particular coloured or sized marble to swop, flicking cigarette cards against the wall to see who got the nearest the wall or covered the other cards. There were gangs of boys who leaped upon each other's backs to see if they could get higher than another team, girls screaming at catch or skipping, or hopscotch. Boys playing football with a tennis ball or just riding on each other's backs to see who could knock another pair over.

However, the greatest collectors were those who could produce the largest piece of shrapnel.

My brother had joined the cub scouts the year before me and when it came to my time, I was eager to attend. My father took me to the Scouts shop in Hindes Road, Harrow, where I was fitted with neckerchief, woggle, cap, and jumper in the Headstone Wolf Pack colours. Tags and badges brought home - sewn-on by my mother. My life as a cub scout began. We learned our scouts promise, sat for badges for fire lighting, telling the time, and tying our laces up. Learning special recitations like “doing our best, well dib, dib, dob,” and going to summer camp.

One of my greatest regrets is that I was never able to swim. A whole group of us would go to the outside swimming baths in Harrow. There the group played team games in the water. Because I could not swim, I used to pretend by hopping about on one leg. It was awful not being able to join in properly.

Although having explained that the war for us children was exciting and a great talking point nothing frightened us. The blitz over London was visible, the searchlights lit up our bedroom, and the ack-ack guns pumped their shells into the sky. Shrapnel rained down and could be heard bouncing on the roof... still it all seemed a long way away. Bombs did fall on Pinner in the summer of 1940 and some close to St Albans church, a number in the centre of Pinner later that year. All these were over quickly and soon forgotten. It was in the final year of the war that we were actively involved this was not forgotten...!

The V for vengeance bomb, or doodlebug, was a jet engine powered, stubby winged plane, operating from a ramp, which gave flight direction, the distance controlled by the amount of fuel it carried. This was the first of Hitler’s vengeance weapons. The second was the VII rocket and the third an enormously long barrelled gun. All three were random weapons – used for scare tactics rather than pinpoint accuracy.

The VI had an engine noise which was distinct – had a sort of spluttering sound. Everything was all right whilst you could hear the engine but when it stopped you knew that the plane was in a steep dive to the ground. Three fell in the summer of 1944. One fell in Parkside Way, another in Rowland's Avenue, and a third fell seven doors away, between numbers 49-53 in Cumberland Road, also damaging the British Restaurant and Home Guard hut. The doors and windows were blown in, and part of the roof collapsed. At least five houses were blown-up and many more damaged. A number of neighbours died and others seriously injured. This occurred when Derek was just under a year old when the war was in its final year.

My brother and I were getting ready for school after finishing breakfast. My father was there also having just dressed into his uniform. We were all milling about in the kitchen mum was putting on my tie and my brother Stan still sat on the box seat. It was a normal start to the school day and we were about to head for the front door. There was a whooshing sound and then the explosion – not as you would expect an enormous bang but more a rumble, there was an enormous billowing of plaster dust – actually all quite unimpressive for the devastation it caused. There had been no air-raid siren sounded - we had been taken by surprise...

Naturally, my mother's initial cry was 'Derek', which stimulated the whole family to rush for the hall and stairs. Up, the family went and into my parents bedroom. There was the offending article, smiling, sitting in a sea of glass and dust. It was amazing that no harm had come to him for on closer look around us all the windows had blown in and most of the doors too.

A number of neighbours killed and one lost his sight. My father immediately headed down the road to see if he could offer any assistance and to organise the relief services. We meanwhile

started to clear up the mess. Auntie Nan who was working at my Uncle Will's house in Pinner was informed. She kindly cooked our evening dinner and brought it over, walking all the way with the dinner on a plate with a cloth over the top later that day.

It was not long before workers came round to repair the damage – to make the house fit to live in. It was during this time that the floors were lifted and the void beneath was filled in with rubble. This to some extent cured the problem of damp. Many of the rotten joists were replaced and so too the damaged floorboards. During the weekends, it was my job to take Derek out in the pram when we went for miles mostly up to Hall's farm. Often I would take him to 'Snow White's Cottage', which was just up a cart track off George the Fifth Avenue and could be got to from Noah Hill in Pinner.

My father's, spell in the Home Guard ended in 1944, when it was clear to the government that Hitler was not going to invade. On leaving, his rank was made substantive – he was now a Major, although not on the serving list. His move back to the railway, which had two important effects on the family. One was that his car had to be given back to its rightful owner, and two, life got back to the routine left behind - four years previously.

When I was about ten, I joined the choir at Saint Albans Church, North Harrow. My brother was already in the choir and the whole idea was my mother's, whose friend, Mrs Green's son Peter, was senior choirboy. This was not a success as eventually it interfered with playing with my friends and it was all too confining for my tastes. Another call on my spare time was a paper round which gave my six and sixpence a week. It was the smallest round in the shop but it suited me and was to last for five years. This was the means whereby I could go to the pictures; buy a packet of five woodbine or turf cigarettes and round it all off with a bag of toffees. However, I did enjoy music and accompanied my father and mother to the Saturday or

Sunday concert at the Moat Farm concert at Headstone Recreation Ground almost every Sunday after the war until I started work.

Our gang, which used to roam the streets of an evening, got up to many larks. The railway line tempted us - to put pennies on the line so that the weight of the train squashed them; or perhaps build another gang hut on the embankment. Quite often, we had to take to our heels because the railway police were after us. On one occasion I quickly jumped down from the embankment only to find at the bottom that I had cut myself badly on a piece of metal sticking out from the concrete side.

Playing 'knock-down-ginger' was another prank we got up to - tying a piece of cotton to a door knocker pulling it and watching the annoyed face of the house owner wondering who kept on knocking his door. Tying a dustbin to a car bumper and watching it disappear down the road scattering the contents. Pushing a potato down someone's exhaust pipe crated mayhem or scrumping apples from the back gardens. Throwing fireworks - bangers, when we were annoying another gang - know where their hideouts were and creeping up on them.

There were frequent gang fights between the Canterbury Road and the Cumberland Road gangs using the bombsite at the top of the road. Broken roof tiles provided the ammunition and the many brick lined holes made excellent trenches. Scaffolding poles, which stretched, from roof to ground, gave us a thrilling slide to the ground. It was all a perfect adventure playground.

My father treated Christmas as time to massively celebrate - he loved it all - the hanging of paper chains, bells and balls... made the front and back rooms look like Father Christmas's' grotto. Copper three-penny pieces wrapped in greaseproof paper added to the pudding mix - if silver ones not available. The pudding-cloth lay over the pudding the string tied round the

basin and the ends of the cloth knotted over-all... the pre-Christmas preparations would be done well in advance. The lead-up time exciting... the rest, viewed with trepidation and concern...

Christmas was a time to look forward to with its fog and possible snow, which gave it a special atmosphere of comfort and togetherness. Presents gathered and spread around the bottom of the Christmas tree. Pillowcases hung on the stairs to receive masses of simple presents. Stocking hung up on the bottom rail of the beds. The sideboard groaned under dishes of fruit, boxes of dates and chocolates. The front room table lay with an immaculately ironed cloth and set using the best china and cutlery. Grandmother was the chief guest; unfortunately, she died in the last year of the war. Aunts, Amy, Lil and Nan were usually in attendance and the house used to vibrate with their chatter and bonhomie. The Christmas tree had strewn to excess, with tinsel and glass balls, the fairy at the top waving her wand. Tiny candles in their holders clipped to the branches and lit. Eventually the candles burnt away and no more obtained during wartime.

I had to queue up at the express dairy to get what cakes and sponges were available. The highlight of it all was my father playing all the old tunes on the piano with everyone else singing along. Song sheets distributed - cut out of the newspaper especially for the occasion. The blue covered Daily Express Songbook had its annual exposure to daylight. Mum and Nan would fuss around the kitchen stove and sink since early morning; for nothing spared to give everyone the best. Crackers arranged by every placing - everyone had to wear one of their paper hats, jokes read out and miniature fireworks set off. English sherry consumed whilst the nuts passed round. The fire banked up to the extent that sparks would fly up the chimney and everyone would draw back from the heat. The Kings

message was eagerly looked forward to whilst the port and mince pies circulated.

Most Christmases, before Martha, grandma Kearey, died in 1944, Dad would fetch her and Auntie Lil from Eastcote in his car to spend the day with us. I well remember on those trips to fetch them how foggy it was, to the extent that Stan or I had to walk in front with the torch to show the way. On other occasions, the snow was so thick driving was difficult and we had to take a shovel to dig the car out of the ruts.

The money I needed to afford recreation - going out with my friends, visits to the cinema and buying sweets came from money earned from my paper round [my father had stopped paying pocket money immediately I started]. Although this method of earning money was illegal for I had lied about my age to the newsagent - was under the age of eleven years. Taking jam jars and pop bottles back to the shop to receive a halfpenny each and doing errands for my mother also brought in an additional sum.

To afford Christmas presents my friend David and I went carol singing. I painted stripes onto a jam-jar and lit a candle that was stuck in the bottom - to make it look like a lantern, and strung it on a pole. With that, we lighted our way and presented a Yuletide image. At first, we had a song sheet but eventually this became discarded when we had learned the words. Every evening we earned pounds and saved it away to give ourselves treats and pay for our present giving. When people were coping with the war and afterwards when rationing was still in place people were very generous and concerned about those less well off - particularly children.

Victory in Europe [VE Day] was in May 1945. I was almost ten years old in my penultimate year at junior school. I do not remember any particular fuss about the ending of the war - we had no street party or bunting flown, although the local

church bells rung. War was still being waged in the Far East and there were still many shortages. Ration Books were still in use right into the fifties.

After the war, many men needed to repair and reconstruct the damaged homes and factories. Most major southern cities of England were war torn and ravaged with many levelled bombsites, very bare of buildings or holding just the skeleton. The houses in our road, blown-up by the flying bomb, rebuilt to the previous design; the damaged houses repaired - this included our house - which also had the void under the floor filled in and the rotten floorboards replaced. The men doing the work were only using hand tools adopting standards that were pre-war mixing up plaster with horsehair and mixing cement by hand.

Every Sunday Stan and I would go to Sunday school in the morning where we would contribute to the farthing collection and in the afternoon go to my grandmother's house in Eastcote where my Aunt Lil would make us honeycomb and treacle toffee. It was there that we explored our Uncle's garage and looked at the lines and lines of military vehicles parked in the field at the back of the house.

Looking back at that time it was a difficult time for my father to adjust and the family fortunes were at low ebb. This was no so much in monetary terms, although that was hard, but in my parent's social well-being. The age difference between my parents began to become more obvious; their appreciation of the latest industrial advances and current changes in social behaviour became more distant. There had been little change in social behaviour and working environments since the twenties. Now, under a thrusting new workforce looking for change and greater distribution of wealth, everything associated with the past challenged. It was much later when the same thing happened to me and I began to appreciate the feelings he must of felt. My father began to face impending retirement, the advent of 'the

nationalisation of the railways', younger men coming out of the services and modernisation as a threat. His career had reached its peak just before the war in the late thirties and felt distanced by the integration of the railways and road services. My mother was increasingly left behind by city and town life – she progressively relied upon my father – trusting that he would be able to provide for the future – a future that was totally different from those experiences previously inculcated.

The eleven-plus examination was brought into being by the 1944 Education Act. This was a system of secondary education made to fill the number of grammar school places then available. In some counties, the child who failed this 11-plus exam could re-sit the following year.

For those who failed there was the chance to sit for a Technical or Art School - both for boys or girls wishing to be trades people and could be sat at the age of twelve. Girls tended to go on to secretarial schools or catering colleges and boys into engineering and commerce.

Those children who failed both these exams and were not in 'O' level streams within the Secondary Modern Schools system became an underclass of poor achievers. They could re-enter the higher educational system by applying for Polytechnic places. This was not its intention - to make young people feel of lesser importance, but a fact. I was one of those who felt belittled by failing those tests. In this, I am not necessarily blaming the system for there must be a hierarchy of learning with a place on the scale for technical and manual ability... but it did play a part in my mental attitude to education.

At last, the day came for me to sit the exam. I was sure that if I prayed hard enough my request would be answered. The night before I had knelt down and said my prayers, hands tightly placed together, eyes firmly shut, Lord's Prayer intoned, and the special prayer my father had taught us to say... God bless

mummy, God bless daddy, make me a good boy, Amen. However, most of all I made a promise to God that I would worship him forever, come what may, if I passed. I polished my shoes and smartened myself up. Pencils sharpened, pen nibs cleaned, special fountain pen bought specially for the occasion, rubber and ruler to the ready. We all had to file into the main hall and sit at desks spread apart in long lines – all neatly arranged with the teacher sitting at the desk on the stage and other teachers walking about between the desks.... I was quite right to be nervous. I knew there was no way I could pass that or any other exam. It was all a massive shock to the system. There had been by me no preparation whatsoever and it was easy to compare myself to those special others, a very few, who I knew would undoubtedly pass. I just had not a chance. One look at the paper convinced me that what I had thought would happen was a total certainty.

There were so few places in so few schools. The numbers, which passed, obviously corresponded to the number of places available. Those that passed were the exception – perhaps there were just half a dozen in my class of thirty-five. I mention that but do not know how many for sure. What I did know was not one of my friends who did. Some children were to go to fee paid schools others like myself sent to the nearest secondary modern, which was Headstone School. All the boys that I associated with failed. As an individual, I somehow knew - even at that young age, the divisions wrought between those that did go to a grammar school and those that did not would never be joined - the stigma would attached itself. We who did not pass were failures, our parents knew we were and the community did too.

The grammar schools particularly the most well known like Harrow took the elite and they were known to be quite as good as the best private fee paying schools. There was a feeling at the time that this was a fair system for progressing bright pupils.

Those that failed could have a second chance at taking the 'twelve plus' and after a year one could sit the entrance exam to a technical school. The thought that if you were not clever using your head you might be clever with your hands and go to an engineering, building or art school. It believed that children had aptitudes - if not up to standard at one subject then better in another. It was never discussed or explained openly that some parents who understood what was going on, cared sufficiently to do something about their children's education at a time when it would count - in a positive manner, and would make all the difference. That a caring attitude towards what was happening to their children would count. It was not much good thinking about what would help little Jack just before the exam or even a year before. It had, by preference, to be thought about even before the Child's birth, certainly soon thereafter, as a mindful planned exercise when the child is adaptable, obedient and capable of being directed towards discovering through games and challenges. This should be a plan just to get the child through the Scholarship but as a way of bringing-up your child. There is no doubt that there were some parents who did think about such things because they were either deprived themselves and meant to make sure their children did not end up as they did. They could have been social climbers or even to show off to their neighbours, friends and relatives. However, by far the best way was by the parents having the intellect to know what was best and sensible. Perhaps they may even have had a good education themselves and therefore appreciated the value of a good education - were going to make sure their children had an equal chance. No matter the reason behind their motivation, the fact was they recognised that an effort made and they needed to direct their children. There were some parents like that but they were rare. The majority of children slotted into the prescribed

pattern and to some extent that suited the limited provision obtainable.

There was no feeling of relief after sitting the exam. I knew deep down that I had failed. When, some weeks later, the letter from the Education Department arrived the truth was out and what I had thought would be the result came true. All my friends failed too which was a relief and we all found ourselves bound for Headstone Secondary Modern. A new uniform bought and a new life began. Each new part added more pressure and challenges – the golden years of having no responsibilities - of permanent blue skies, gone for good.

I now realise that to make a difference, for any improvement in learning skills, the child has to make a sustained effort. To do this, if it has not come about naturally, the parents have to make an equal effort too to see that that effort made is not wasted. It is a matter of the correct state of mind, which must come from the parent first... To ensure that the child's efforts become a natural habit... then it will last a lifetime.

Passing the eleven plus did not necessarily guarantee a secure permanent job or an ability to earn more money than those who did not. That the Grammar Schools gave a better education is not in doubt for they most certainly did. Secondary Modern Schools or Comprehensive Schools later on, failed to reach the educational heights of the old established Grammar Schools. Breaking up that system by Shirley Williams and the Labour Government was understandable but at fault. They should have considered building more Grammar Schools, opened up the intake, and selected by Committee rather than exam - referring to the Childs yearly reports.

CHAPTER IV

Secondary Education - The Headmaster – Headstone Secondary School - Homework – The Boy’s Brigade – The Methodists Church - Annual Camp - Isle of Wight - London School of Printing – Boulton Court – Fleet Street - Employment – Selection – Apprenticeship – Lithographic Artist - City & Guilds - Dancing – Girl friends – Relationships – Life at home.

The Headmaster, Mr H. E. Manson, was a short, stout, red-faced man with swept back, slicked down hair, in a pin striped, pin neat suit with a projecting white handkerchief from his top pocket. He stood at the school gates in the morning rocking on his toes, alert to every living thing fluffing out his feathers.

The light, reflected off his spectacles - like the yellow orbital ring of a peregrine’s eye, scrutinising its territory. He patrolled the corridors during the day catching his prey on the wing, alive to every trick played by his charges; stopping here, then there - to look in through the windows of the closed classroom doors to see if there was any ‘larking about’. Not only did we the pupils fear him but the teachers too...

Morning assembly saw the whole school gathered, including the teachers..., a respectful mass of upturned faces ready to take part in the daily service before the start of lessons. Achieving this army of serried ranks was a thing of organisational beauty. At the command of a whistle, the playing children would stand still.

Another ear shattering blast would direct all to form up by class - in twos. A third whistle started the leading class to file into school, along the corridor to the hall.

On my first day, Mr Manson explained to the assembled gathering that it was important to refer to the school as Headstone Secondary Modern School and not Headstone, as that was a private school down the road. He went on to say that, we should be proud of our school and should not feel ashamed of not passing the eleven and... we attended a good school with an excellent record. I fear all his strictures were ignored. We were very aware we had failed and besmirched by the fact. Needless to say, thereafter, we referred to our school as Headstone.

We were allotted our classes; thankfully, all my friends were with me - in the same class - Upper 4B. I refer to the boys only, for most, if not all the girls, were from other schools in the neighbourhood. That day in September 1946, we began our four years of secondary education.

There were about thirty-five pupils to each class and four classes to each year - in order of merit. Annual exams were set and tested in school and my results were consistent throughout all my school life - being within the first half dozen in the second class. For some reason, which I cannot now imagine, I was quite satisfied with being in that group. Eventually the top class streamed - to take 'O' levels, which gives you an idea what the other three classes were like - in ability.

Education was affected just as much as industry by the war, the lack of male teachers and a lessening in standards - caused by lack of discipline. Today we see children carrying enormous quantities of books and school equipment. I do not remember anyone carrying books to school. What was necessary was provided - was read on the day of the lesson not taken home. We sat in-school set exams marked by the teachers who

took the subject. There was no external assessment and I do not believe we ever had the School's Inspector pay a visit. Simple grammar taught with no reference to Latin. Mathematics including decimals and simple algebra the peak of achievement. French taught for a couple of terms. Music consisted of singing national tunes and listening to records. History taught more as a reading test without committing much to memory. Geography as countries of the world than rock strata and population growth than birth of a town. Boys had metalwork and girls home economics. Gardening consisted of a lot of digging with no planting. Woodwork for boys making boot scrapers and Sewing for girls making shoe bags.

Although some homework was required throughout the four years, I rarely did any at home. Mostly what was needed completed before I left school - that same day - during school hours. If homework was given at the end of the day, I did it next morning - in the playground. My friends and I considered homework unnecessary - an interruption to play. My parents did not question what was going on - they never attended a parents meeting or visited the school - at sport's days or special events. As my end-of-term results were sufficiently high, they never enquired too deeply, how I was getting on. Very few pupils went on to full-time further education no one stayed on at school beyond fifteen. The shortages, previously described, plus lack of equipment and limited accommodation did not offer the chance of greater advances. Grammar schools concentrated on producing literate students not technocrats. Secondary education, apprenticeships, day-release courses and night classes not only produced tradesmen but skilled manpower which the country desperately needed to keep up with the rush of new innovations brought to the market just after the war.; for very many this was to provide a better means to make social advances...

One of the many crazes during my time at Headstone was miniature cricket. This played using stumps three or four inches high, a bat carved out of a small piece of wood and a marble. The whole assembly of players knelt down and gathered round the batsman, bowler and wicket keeper. This game, played on the field, soon turned trouser knees green.

Mr Mason declared at assembly that anyone caught playing this game would be caned. He thought the game ruined good clothing – that the parents would support him. Our team ordered onto the stage - made an example. We trooped out and lined-up, with hand extended, to receive our just deserts.

After school, we walked home past the shops towards the Embassy cinema. There were the usual skylarks of chasing each other and playing ball. One of the boys jumped on my back and I fell forward smashing my face onto the pavement. I leapt to my feet pretending that there was no harm done. Suddenly, felt a cool draught in my mouth. Putting my hand up to my face, I found that two of my front teeth knocked out. For months and years afterwards I was to be plagued by having to go to the dentist to have caps put on – temporary ones initially that had to stay there for two years. They were silver and obvious and I hated them.

It was during my first year at Headstone that my friends and I agreed to join The Boys Brigade. I was never happy at the scouts particularly digging grease pits, making chairs, tables, cooking stoves, and latrines and sitting round the campfire – it was all so cold and very uncomfortable and quite prehistoric coupled with the fact that the uniform slouch, wide brimmed, hat, and pole looked ridiculous.

Joining The Boys Brigade [first Pinner Company based at Pinner Methodist Church, Love Lane], at the age of eleven in 1946, was probably the highlight of my young life and lasted up until the age of seventeen. I went to gym classes, drill lessons,

band, and drill nights, and Church parades every Sunday, attended every camp and sat numerous badges. It was more important to me than school and anything else. It gave me security, interest, hobbies, and social skills. We took part in drill and band competitions and for our summer, camp went to the Isle of White. For some years, we camped in the same field as the sixth London Company the same company my father had belonged to so many years before.

Our Company was lead by Captain Leslie White who started the company just after the war. The company attached to the Methodist Church in Love Lane, Pinner. Four years later, the church insisted on having a Scout Group – partly prompted by an inherent class preference Our Company had to find other premises, which it did in Northwood. George Munday and Leslie Tanner were the other officers and together they formed a strong base for the company taking it to over thirty boys strong. Looking back it would be difficult now to find a more loyal of dedicated group of people who were only interested in doing their best for their charges. I owe them a great deal for their long-suffering patience and fortitude. Hardly a day goes by without some reference to those times and how they have ‘stood me in good stead’. Church every week and church parades once a month, every national holiday celebrated, the flag raised – if not in fact metaphorically, and the old Empire given prominence. They were days, never to return, days of strong community bonds and ridged rules of etiquette and behaviour. These extended to local use - when the family went out or on holiday, and to Brigade events and camps.

During one of these camps, my father had written to me one of his comical letters and addressed the envelope, ‘To Master Terence Kearey. Forever after my nickname was ‘Master’. As usual, my great friend David was with me throughout all my school days – from the age of five until eighteen - our lives were

together. We went to Lords cricket ground. Every Sunday afternoon in summer went into the park at Headstone Recreation Ground to watch the cricket and take the scores. Camped out on Chorley Wood Common in forever-leaky tents and walked back from Church from Northwood to North Harrow every week. Forever discussed the war, the history of England, castles and their upkeep, defences and sieges.

Every year we spent a week's camp at St Helens in the Isle of White. When we were there the island ran a railway service all round the island. The train, built smaller than normal size, started off from Ryde pier where the paddle steamers tied up, after their run from Portsmouth harbour. We arrived there from Waterloo Station having had to wear our uniforms throughout the whole journey, which made us very self-conscience. Still, we made a brave sight marching up from St Helens station with the bugle band in front in turn lead by Captain White to arrive at the field. This venue was the same every year I attended. The cookhouse was staffed by professional cooks whilst we boys had to peel the potatoes and do the washing up – not so very pleasant after having porridge or stew.

Every day there was kit inspection and the bell tent flap and brailing railed-up - made ready for rounds! The Union Jack rose to the bugle call, blankets folded in true 'pusser' fashion and kit neatly laid out on ground sheets. Palliasses stuffed with straw and tents carefully swept out, for woe betide any dropped points for that meant not winning the trophy for best squad. It is difficult now to describe what all this meant to us boys and how seriously we took it. An inordinate time spent cleaning the equipment, the tent, and the site. The tent lines had to be exact and so too the kit for inspection. The bugle call perfectly played and the Union flag rose with ceremony and pride. Prayers said every day and church parades an essential part of the week's

proceedings. Every squad had to perform a special task and to provide part of the week's concert party.

On one of my early camps, Mr White the captain ordered that no one should take a boat out on to St Helens bay. The St Helens bay constructed to act as a holding lake for a water mill and had a low causeway built to retain the seawater. Every time the tide came in it filled the lake so that at all times there would be sufficient water to drive the paddles of the mill. The public could hire out rowing boats, the area considered safe for boating. Just why Mike Langley, David Villers, and I voted to take a boat out I do not know. However, it was not a surprising thing for us to do for we did form a dastardly trio. It was only natural, and just our luck, that one of the officers would be passing the lake as we were playing Nelson. Therefore, up before Mr White we were marched. To be told "pack-up your bags" - for us to return home. Whether this was, just a trick to worry us I am not sure, but if it were it worked. The riot act read and bags packed; dressed in our uniforms we attended the assembled Company to hear of our misdoing. It was a most worrying moment. He finally let us off with dire warnings...!

A trip to Sandown was always high on our list of places to go. We piled out of the train to see what fun we could have. There was clock golf, crazy golf, who could make the best sand castle and who could skim the water with a stone to see who has bounced the most. None of these came up to starting the day off with a hot jam doughnut. These doughnuts were then and to my mind even now the very best that were ever cooked. Perhaps it was the dough, the amount of jam or the mass of sugar that the enticing doughnuts were rolled in, I do not know all I do know is many were eaten. Mike Langley ate twenty-seven at one sitting. Now that is what I call a record.

The round the island coach trip was another exciting event. Alum Bay, Blackgang Chine, Shanklin, and Ventnor all are

wonderful memories. Granny Smith apples have never been the same since. At this time my annual Boys Brigade camp was the only holiday I had and most of my spare paper round money spent on it. I can even remember buying a glass of brown ale in St. Helens for sixpence.

The lessons we received had the same core component as most other schools – then, as today. A great emphasis was laid on English - language and grammar, and arithmetic... metalwork and carpentry for boy's domestic science and housecraft for the girls, these thought mandatory. A teacher dressed-up like someone from The Woman's Land Army gave gardening, thought fitting for secondary school children, especially during and just after the war.

We did have French lessons as well as Latin, soon replaced – thought unnecessary for future 'blue collared workers'. I finished school just before my fifteenth birthday definitely deficient in Basic English – not being able to explain the construction of a sentence, why one method of expression was preferable to another. I can still recite G.K.Chesterton's 'The Donkey' and John Masefield's 'Cargoes'. I managed to take the school's prize for technical drawing – with the painting of the school, both being the summit of my educational achievement... skills I found interesting... thankfully, stood me in good stead for my intended career.

My last year at school was a joy because I was asked, in company with another keen artist Michael Gilbert who's father was an architect, to paint a picture of the school's annex in Pinner. It must have been big because there were two of us painting it at the same time. That summer given spice and much nervous tension by games of 'truth, dare, promise, or opinion' held on the school field – where I was hoping to be asked if I dared 'kiss a girl'. Unfortunately, I was never asked, but that did not stop me from being enormously excited by the thought.

Those long hours I would spend round at Joan's home in Hatch End just cycling or walking up and down looking for a face at the window... It made me dizzy so goodness knows what it did for anyone watching. Joan was so popular that I did not have a chance - I was also totally unsophisticated, unsure, and inexperienced. Then there was Joy who used to ice skate at Wembley. She would walk down the high street with her white sided skate boots tied over her shoulder, long flowing hair, and short skirt - even for those times. During class, I would have love notes passed to me which completely left me in a state of mild panic. I never knew what to do with them. It needed something far more direct and forceful for me to do anything about it. I was quite hopeless - totally shy and self-conscious but longing to be asked. As I think about it now if one of the girls, say Ann or Judith, had asked me out, and I had gone, it would have changed my whole life... so I would like to think... Being so lacking in self-esteem I would have grown in confidence overnight. In the final week of school life, the class told they could have an 'end of school party'. There would be music provided by the school gramophone, records we could provide, and each pupil asked to bring something for the table- to eat and drink. In the event, because I could not dance I sat out and consumed a box of dates kindly provided by someone else.

The teachers had been reasonable considering that many were onetime injured servicemen, or demobbed - just returning from the war, others filling in - whilst seeking employment. There were too many children to each class. Doubling up went on in classrooms using any extra space available - including the hall and corridors. Class sizes were always over thirty-five. Discipline was difficult to maintain due to not only the class sizes being large but also children disinterested after the excitement and expectations - of the war ending. It was always obvious which child came from the lower forms by their speech, dress

and behaviour... made it a challenge for the sternest teacher. The teachers attempted to amuse the lower classes to keep them quiet for they, in the main, were not interested in taking any exam! The top class [A], taught to sit 'O' levels - the other extreme, also recognisable and in every way as capable as grammar children. They were to go on a take 'A' levels for a university place. The rest of the final year's children faced an internal, school-based exam - not invigilated by an outside body... They were to go on to Colleges of Education, Polytechnics - to take City and Guilds exams, apprenticeships, nursing or secretarial courses.

The result of secondary education for most children in 1950 was a modest improvement compared to the 1930s. It was if anything a limited implementation of the 1944 Act. Even five years later only twice as many stayed on at school to seventeen than in 1940. What was lacking was a long look to the future by both the Labour and Conservative Parties. Overseas countries were adapting faster to new technologies. Still, in my last year all this was miles away. I drifted into the finishing school eddy... the wind driven current of work without me realising it was forcing me back into choppy waters!

My adopted aunt, who was working as a cook for Frank Oppenheimer, Managing Director, Chromoworks Limited, overheard a conversation whilst she was serving dinner. It was about the problem the firm was having finding suitable apprentices - in this case, it was for an apprentice in the Artists Studio. This was during my last year at school when I was fourteen. She approached Frank Oppenheimer the next morning - which she knew of a relative who was interested in drawing and painting, could they apply for the position. He said they could and asked her to get this young lad to submit some drawings.

There was feverish haste to comply with the request to produce sufficient work for a portfolio. My father was keen for

me to leave school, impressing on me the need to pay my way by contributing towards the housekeeping. A letter sent to the firm and a date arranged to attend an interview, with a portfolio of work. My father and I went by train to Neasden and then walked to the firm. The Board of Directors interviewed me and looked at my work. I was told what to expect... if accepted, and that, 'I would hear from them in due course'.

A fortnight later I received a letter telling me that I had been accepted and that I was to report to Doughty Street, Headquarters of The Institute of Printing, in London, to sit an exam and take a medical, both of which I passed. This was done in May of that year and I found myself accepted for apprenticeship to the Lithographic Artists Studio at Chromoworks Limited; but only if I completed satisfactorily a three-month probationary period and subsequently was accepted by the Union. I started work immediately I left school.

The end of school party and wanting to 'take a girl out' convinced me that dancing was going to have to be faced so I enrolled at The Guy Haywood School of Dancing which met above Burton's store in Harrow. There the intricacies of the waltz, quickstep, fox trot, and Latin American dances – girls to line up one side of the room and boys on the other, 'take your partners please'. So began my introduction to girls and it did not take me long to realise that once again I had been missing out. No wonder those dark haired gigolos with their flashy suits had ruled the roost for they could show off their girls and, quite naturally too, they were more easily accepted socially and learned the art of small talk which improved their confidence.

To illustrate how bizarre life was at home I never had a front door key. From the age of fourteen, my brother and I were out most nights. My father locked up the house at about half past ten when both my mother and he went to bed. When my brother and I came home, which would be between eleven and

twelve, we had to get in through the landing fanlight window first by climbing the fence then balancing on the concrete cill and finally by squirming through the ten-inch window. Once inside we had to reach down placing one hand on the inside, window cill and then grab hold of the banister rail with the other. All this had to be done without waking my parents. In the morning nothing ever mentioned about how we got in, where we had been or what we had been doing. Even when I started work, I was never presented with a key.

At that time, I attended the old time dancing evening classes held in the British Restaurant on Headstone Lane, at the bottom of Cumberland Road, next to the Home Guard Hut, where David Villers father was the manager. You may well imagine what it was like for me to go there and have to dance with middle-aged partners doing the valleta, dashing white sergeant, palais glide, waltzes, and the one-step. I was in much demand and really, it was great fun.

Gradually as those men and women, who were demobilised raised their own families they had aspirations honed from countless discussions with each other throughout their years of war service. These were, in the main, socialistic ideas about social betterment for the individual in an equal society.

The history of the Trades Union movement was always towards an increase in wages, and a shortening of the working week, whatever the shade of government. The unions also preached 'fair deals for all and that everyone deserved a job with a minimum wage based upon the cost of living'.

My childhood was happy and innocent. As a callow youth I was very unaffected by the opposite sex surrounding myself with a group of like-minded fellows who felt and viewed things much as I did. Most children joined a youth group of some complexion even if they did not keep up their attendance. Stress was not a word ever mentioned throughout the war years and

thereafter. You just got on with life and never questioned what was going on around you.

In my early years, I suffered, like many others, by shyness, generated by a lack of confidence, something I found impossible to control. My lack of confidence would be overcome, when I had thoroughly learnt a skill, and by this, achieved independence. In the last days at school, Barbara Sutherland invited me to a party. It was not only my first invitation to such an event but the first by a girl. It was a joyous, frustrating, and clumsy occasion – probably for us both. I never went out with her which was a great loss of opportunity and very much regretted.

Drawing, both freehand and technical, was my favourite subject all my school life and thereafter through to old age. I enjoyed the precision of constructing a worthwhile design and a pleasing effect and had the patience to produce complicated and detailed work. I realised early on in my life that it was up to me to make a go of it - to make up for my lack of formal educational and paper qualifications.

Getting a job on leaving school expected, any thought of taking time off, either school or work, just not considered sensible or economically desirable. Fortunately, there was full employment and there was any amount of vacancies to choose. There was plenty of choice but only up to a certain educational level - a standard governed by the selection board or interviewing manager associated with whatever trade or commerce chosen. As a generality grammar school children were educated for white-collar office jobs, perhaps management, whereas the child trained in a secondary school was more fitting for the shop floor and manual labour.

The Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, decided to hold a general election for 1950, which he won with an overall majority of ten. The 'Welfare State' and the policy of 'Nationalisation' for the chief industries, including the railways, were established. Both

these pieces of social legislation were not just the result of one party but achieved by a social awareness of nationhood. The Conservative Education Act of 1944 and Labour's National Health Act 1948, marked another change in the national conscience – made an effort to provide a comprehensive scheme of insurance to provide health care for the general population and long-term care for the old. For children and teenagers there were primary, secondary, and further education – each abiding to a national curriculum? This was supposed to bring about greater equality between the classes and provide full employment - but it never achieved these goals. Class was still a great divider.

My father was a Conservative, imperialist and anti-trades unionist in a world conditioned to middle-of-the-road - left of centre politics. He was coming up to his retirement and was frankly scornful about allowing any work force to have any say in how businesses should be run... he believed that 'the management' knows best how to produce profits and govern their work force. How he believed this having the experiences he had had managing men in a cartage company closely associated with the railways I do not know. Britain has benefited from the slow growth of trade unionism. Most agree that without the trades unions acting as bargaining agents the country would have to be content with state intervention.

It was not universally considered, and certainly not at home, that a person's job might not last a lifetime. That workers might have to retrain a number of times to adjust to industrial demands was never thought of. Flexibility and an open mind to changing circumstances were not universal traits. This was not just the closed minds of my parents but national habits... people did not readily accept new methods of doing things in the home or workplace..., which made flexibility of thought and the acceptance of unexpected events impossible to come to terms with.

It seemed that my mother was quite happy that my father should have his own way all the time. She never questioned him, argued or discussed matters... it was how things were and had been.

My mother's main love was her home and garden, her children and pets. She hailed after all from the country and never lost her love of flowers, animals, the seasons, and village life. She was neither sophisticated nor a seeker after the latest fashion. Her naturalness made her very comfortable to be with - a trait appreciated by her few friends. Above all she never lost her love for country living.

It has been, and is a continuing to be, a theme in these writings, that the British population after the war had to cope with a changing world... a world that could not, would not, and will not, ever be the same again, even though hankered for.

Do not read into this that my parent's relationship with their children was that much different from other parents. In the main, I am sure it was not. The main difference was that my father was that much older and was therefore, in this instance, a true Victorian in upbringing, thought, word, manner, and deed. My relationship with my parents was in the main 'of the times'.

I do not remember my parents ever saying to me, my brothers or to each other, I love you. I never saw them kiss, hold hands, touch, and cuddle or show any sign of affection; they never gave way to sentiment or feelings of inadequacy nor admit they had been affected by sadness or sorrow. On the other hand, I do not remember any great displays of attachment - feelings of warmth, towards my friends by their parents... these were things thought to be sentimental, weak, emotional and 'not British'. It wasn't a way of teaching children to toughen up - to be unfeeling, just that individuals had to get on with life and 'see it through' - have a stiff upper lip in adversity and not give way...

CHAPTER V

Chromoworks Limited – Neasden - Oppenheimers – Printing House - Factory Work – ‘The Artists Studio’ – Lithography - Drawing Techniques – Studio set-up – Work relationships – Trial Period – SLADE & PW Union - Father-of-the-Chapel – Getting to grips with work- Management – Apprenticeship – Work place - Printing processes – Posters – Festival of Britain.

My father had generously paid for a weekly train ticket – an action meant to demonstrate to me the confidence he had in my ability to hold down my first job. He was very much of ‘the old school’. Whilst I was looking forward to a bohemian lifestyle, he, understanding the ways of the world, looked towards *my* dedication and perseverance... to ‘*set me up*’, for a lifetime of work!

Ever since leaving home, my thoughts consumed by doubt and fear. Every part of me charged with foreboding. My walk, dodging in and out of the streams of workers down Station Road, Neasden, took me away from the railway station... past the bombed out sidings and goods-yard that stretched as far as Wembley. The soot blackened factory walls - hiding behind spearheaded railings... the endless rows of terraced Victorian

villas - bravely advanced upon the pavement; their geranium filled window boxes trying to lend colourful distraction from the all too obvious bomb damage. A poster-hung hoarding exclaimed, by stark design, the virtues of Persil's whitening power and Tetley's superior leaf - promoted by a colourful plantation scene, which gave colour and softened the aspect... I reached the factory gate...

Peering out from behind the grill of a small enquiry hatch a portly gatekeeper acknowledged my knock. He was attired in a brown, patched, warehouse coat, gripping a rolled-up cigarette between a few stained teeth, croaked a gruff, 'What-ja-want?' My fear returned; I thrust out my letter - Mr Oppenheimer's elaborate hand graced the paper... I made my first utterance since leaving home, 'Here sir!' The door opened... I reluctantly squeezed in. My working life began...

The Gate Keeper showed me the clocking-in procedure, having found my card, then marched me down the long corridor which followed the whole length of the factory to the Artist's Department. There, a grey painted sliding door opened onto a room furnished with eight six feet by four feet wooden tables, several racks of metal plates, and a small anti-room which contained the Forman's toilet and a storeroom.

He introduced me to the foreman, Mr Brian Porter, whom I had met before at my interview. He, in turn, introduced me to Charlie Cockburn, the eldest in the room. Although past retirement age had elected to stay on - at onetime had been the foreman. Reg Passey held the position of unpaid deputy, Bruce Ormarod, the second eldest and the most irascible. Frank Clements the lettering artist and finally to Eric Campbell the ex-apprentice - had just serve an extra year's apprenticeship to improve his skills.

I was then shown to an empty bench - to be mine, and to the storeroom cupboard... my responsibility. It had been

explained to me at the interview that I was to serve a trial period and that if then I was accepted my indentures - a signed and sealed binding document made by the Master and Apprentice stating the terms and conditions, witnessed.

For my duties, I had Eric to show me round - as he was a most sensitive and industrious fellow, his explanation of my tasks most detailed and seemed to last for ages! The first thing in my day was to mix up the ink using an enamel plate as the mixing container I had to rub onto it a greasy wax black stick and then by rubbing the tip of my middle finger over the applied wax using water as the base. By this method, a black drawing ink produced - the consistency of thin cream.

My second task was to take the orders for dinners and snacks. Chromoworks had an efficient and popular canteen, which remained open for the next five years and that, was where my love for cheese rolls began. Their rolls freshly baked to a nicety and the butter and cheese unsparingly applied. The Works Drama Group laid on frequent dances and the annual Christmas Pantomime. As a whole, the firm was a family run affair and The Directors looked upon their factory with a parental responsibility; the workers viewed the firm as a means of employment and social companionship. Chromoworks was self contained not only having a canteen but a carpenters shop, it's own engineers and electricians, a resident nurse and social worker and the works painter and decorator. It was efficiently run, clean, freshly painted, windows regularly replaced and cleaned, and the industrial site up-to-date regarding methods of production and delivery of goods.

Eric took me on a tour of the factory- to every department and shop, introducing me to all the workers. The works employed sixty percent men. The forty percent women mostly occupied positions in the warehouse and print finishing. Any man walking through these areas, for the women would call out

and barrack them, took great care. However, it was all in good fun and never got out of hand. If any of the machine minders became too fresh they were soon slapped - the women sheet feeders who fed the paper into the grippers of the large machines worked on platforms above ground and the men passing would make to grab for a leg only to have their hand stood on. Mostly the machine minders were very protective of their women helpers so there were hardly any problems.

Chromoworks was a Lithographic Printers - a printing house that was able to reproduce in colour all forms of commercial printing work. Their work covered production of the smallest labels right through to the largest posters. The reproduction of drawings, paintings, photographic prints, and transparencies reproduced both photographically and by hand.

A Lithographic Artist in 1950 was still using the same tools, materials, and processes adopted in 1796. He was drawing on the printing surface with a wax crayon and ink... either copying a previously painted artwork or making his own drawing. The standing, and future development of the industry, were not explained to me - that the industry was about to be revolutionised by new technology; even if they had I would not have understood the significance.

I was born at the time Kodachrome transparency film was invented - a process giving excellent quality. In 1942, Kodacolor negative film was introduced which bought about the eventual tricolour separation for colour reproductions. It was during my apprenticeship that this discovery, and the inventions that followed, was introduced from America. By 1950, all small colour artworks were reproduced using photographic halftone principles, adopting primary colour filters to separate the tricolour printing images. Lithographic colour retouchers corrected those separations for their spectral deficiencies.

I do not know how much the men understood about the changes that would come about when the film companies introduced their new discoveries and inventions. Even by looking at the American industry, you could not foretell the future. It has always been surprising to me how backward the Americans are in implementing new advances. Their printing processes were lagging behind European print houses. What was sure because I was there and experiencing it was that in 1956 the hand drawn poster industry was finished? Photographic film was now produced in large format size with a stable backing... previously; photographic plate glass size was 30x20 inches. From that moment, a very quick change took place. It was a retrograde step but customers insisted upon having their work produced using the latest technology. It is obvious that multiple printing improves commercial posters, which were now printed in four colours instead of eight. Over printing increases depth of colour, allowing self-colours to match the original and customers house style. Those lovely seaside posters on railway platforms would never be seen again.

By the 1960s, electronic scanning began to be introduced for black and white newspaper block making using a Hell Klishograph. This spelt doom to photographic screened halftone images. Still, that was to come later, although workers began to appreciate what was in the air... These changes were to make the onetime power of the camera operator, colour retoucher, lithographic artist, and film planner, redundant...

After my trial period had been successfully completed - three months after starting work, I was invited to the following month's union meeting to hear whether I was going to be allowed to become an apprentice. I stood outside, whilst my worth discussed; later allowed back in to hear the verdict by Frank Clements, the Father of the Chapel - elected sometime before I arrived at the firm. He continued in this position until

the Printer Strike in 1956. He was my mentor and had taken me under his wing ever since my first day in the works. Frank was an avowed Socialist, proclaimed the worth of social care and the brotherhood of man and was not afraid to say so - he frequently stood up at Head Office Union Meetings and declared his position - he was a most caring individual but unfortunately he expected others to be equally strong both in opinion, resolve and care for others. This was all very well but his thinking did not seem to include a consideration for the management and owner's need to make a profit; the effects of overseas and homegrown competition nor union strength used undemocratically. Without the use of a sealed ballot - to evade undue pressure applied to an opposing union or works committee.

The vote taken without dissention, I was pleased to stay and start my apprenticeship. However, I had to join the Union and attend Head Office and works meetings.

I started my five years as a Lithographic Artist continuing very much the methods and techniques used all those years ago in Prague. One of my first tasks, after mixing up the ink required for all the artists, was to draw a letter 'c' by hand [without the use of a compass] large enough to fill a 60" x 40" poster plate. The Foreman, Mr Porter, got down on his hands and knees, gazed along the curves by turning the plate round and if there was the slightest bump or undulation, I had to do it again. I had to do that letter 'c' over a dozen times which took over a week and even then he only allowed me to stop and do something else when there was grumbling from the other men that I was being unfairly treated. This sort of attention to detail followed me in all that I did. No work accepted unless it was of a very high standard. Eventually such tasks were commonplace; I had to draw the whole side of a Heinz bean label - that is all the written ingredients, letters that were half an inch high. However, for this I used a ruling pen and compass. These were the first tools

bought, and I have them here before me now, a half set of compasses and a ruling pen, so frequently sharpened down that it's blades are half their original length.

My days at work quickly passed. There was so much that was new to me - so much which was a challenge. I had found by luck, something that interested me - and eventually after a lot of hard work became proficient. I was never a lettering artist although I could produce a reasonable effort. It was lucky that we had Frank Clements who did all the lettering... and he was good at it too. Sometimes to do small letters he would cut down a brush handle to make a wedge shaped tip and use that instead of a brush. It was at colour evaluation, that I found I had a natural bent. It never seemed to me to be difficult to assess how much of each colour needed. What I did not have was the strong fingers of Reg Passey who could lay on a three quarter tint of chalkwork over a large poster plate first time, without having to build it up by continuous application of the crayon. His tint-work would be so smooth - without any patches.

It was in 1950 that Chromoworks won the contract to produce the official poster for the Festival of Britain. This was excellent for the firm and a whole range of posters needed, from small Underground Station posters to the largest forty-eight sheet posters measuring 200 x 120 inches. Much of the other work printed was a succession of well-known advertisers from Tetley's Beer, Persil, Heinz, and British Rail. Annually Lyons Corner Shop commissioned pictures for their restaurants. What was interesting was that a number of these were the self-drawn works of well-known artists - known as autolithographs.

Throughout my time as an artist, the basic drawing techniques never changed. To speed up the production of vignettes and increasing the weight of chalkwork an airbrush was sometimes used... for smaller areas the use of Ben Day Mediums - a mechanical tinting devise with a raised dot structure stretched

over a wooden frame charged with black ink, was appropriate. A pen and ink artwork or architectural drawing could be reproduced photographically that saved drawing by hand. All these methods were adopted to augment the use of chalk and ink. Towards the end of the process - of hand drawn work, great efforts were made to stem the tide of the camera taking over. However, in the end customers wanted the latest techniques to help sell their produce – thinking that to be modern and up-to-date would give them an advantage - nothing would entice the client to stay with hand-produced posters. Those changes to the industry were to come about, when I came out of my time as an apprentice and had served my National service, six years later...

In October 1950, I started my indentured period of apprenticeship for one day a week, including the evening; I had to go to The London School of Printing at Bolt Court - just off Fleet Street, to study the City and Guilds Course for Lithographic Artists. Many of my fellow apprentices had been to the school for their full-time education, having passed an entrance examination. Their knowledge of the industry was far greater they had had the advantage of training in a department that had a long-term future – the majority were photographic colour retouchers.

The course was for five years and taught by lecturers who were still there in 1980. They were keen on me continuing with hand drawing and showed great interest in the work that I was doing. I produced a reproduction of a horse and cart in nine colours, using hand stipple, by pen and ink. This method last produced commercially, before the war - in the 1920's. It was, even to me, outdated, but I did as I was told... much later I regretted the waste of time and effort!

There was an air of obsolescence about the whole process. It was not just all the other industrial trades affected by modernization and union disruption. Printing, particularly for

London's national newspapers, beset by labour problems. National newspapers are unique. Their production is geared to 'the latest story' and 'the fastest deadline'. They make their profit on the advertisers who use their vast circulation for maximum coverage of their product. Any disruption in production is critical. Newspaper owners are caught by the threat of a strike. They always gave in. This gave the letterpress union's massive power and an enormous pay packet to boot.

I had to belong to a Trade Union. Chromoworks was a union house – a fact accepted by the management. The Legal status for such gatherings of workers did not come about until the mid 1860s - include all trades. The monthly union meetings were held at Doughty Street in London, and all members took it in turn to attend and report to their colleagues what took place - raise any questions the chapel required an answer to, and to vote in a manner agreed upon.

The union was organised within printing houses and platemakers in trade groups called Chapels with officials elected annually. The representative for each chapel was called the Father-of-the-Chapel, who was voted into office, with the rest of the committee, annually. It was hoped, by keen trade unionists that each member would fill these positions in turn, in reality, all the officials continued until they gave up the position. Most of the business covered was routine and to a man, the chief participants were left wing Socialists... In 1950, the majority of workers were ex-service men in favour of Marxist ideology – means of production.

The Head Office staff also retained their position until retirement - deputies into the shoes of departing leaders. The main union policy or philosophy was one-man one job – using a 'white card system'. Every journeyman was equal to another and the rulebook was the law.

The union was there to look after your interests from apprenticeship to retirement. The minimum wage was set annually for a trained member based on 'the cost of living index'. All other wages balanced to this sum, including apprentices paid an incremental proportion.

The rulebook covered every known instance of dispute. On any 'in house' dispute, between a member and the employees, it was insisted that the Chapel would sort it out - by self-regulation. Any self-regulating system is flawed by self-interest and a lack of farsightedness.

In my experience, there was little regulation. Workers and management flouted agreements when it suited their interests. Managements were tied to making a profit, meeting deadlines, and competing against other firms, markets, and new techniques. Workers kept new production techniques and true production times secret whilst protecting the number of jobs and working habits. Employers either extracted unfair profits in good times or did not have the will to take a moral stand in bad... They were at the mercy of the unions, especially the newspapers, who had a deadline to keep. Minor union officials were often dissatisfied men threatened by their own lack of skill - their need to control others gave them a feeling of power - to make up for their own shortcomings.

From 1950 onwards, momentous changes occurred in the printing industry. There was a transfer of work from one printing process to another as advancing technology dictated. Letterpress up to 1960 was the process for general printing work, Lithography the process most suitable for large posters, and Photogravure produced all the most popular magazine work. This order of work lasted from the late thirties until the seventies, when lithographic web-offset printing took over - the large print runs for magazines and newspaper production. Both letterpress and gravure declined leaving lithography in advance

until jet and laser printing made inroads into that, in the nineties. While all this was going on, the labour force shuffled from one process to another, retraining as it went, trying to keep up with each innovation as it fitted into the production line. Technical colleges could not keep pace and Training Boards floundered. Finally, the unions lost power and the adage of one-man one job went out of the window – colour scanners and word processors linked to laser printers won out. However, all this was to come. No one could predict in 1950 what was to happen in fifty years – a revolution for the printed word.

So ended my first fifteen - wartime interrupted, years. No great scholastic achievements – few personal attributes unearthed. These moments were for me, and for my circle of friends, times of childhood innocence... of freedom, security and simple pleasures... In retrospect, they were halcyon days, taken for granted, and as described, doomed not to last.

I now realise my generation was very lucky – discipline, responsible behaviour and public order dissolved as the old social order changed. In America, the lowest common denominator was ‘anything for a fast buck’, here, ‘I deserve a living’, to become later ‘because I’m worth it!’ Society now is far more selfish and demanding.

The anniversary of Prince Albert’s 1851 Exhibition was celebrated a hundred years later. In 1951, The Festival of Great Britain was incorporated to show the world Britain had survived – emerged from the conflict of war with all the skills and trades ready to resume where it had left off – to claim its previously held premier position. The site chosen for the festival was the south bank of the Thames, which had been badly bombed. Several aerial attacks had left a derelict site close to the centre of London - an ideal place to show what the future would bring and

to demonstrate what Britain could do. A joyous expression for a war weary nation. This exhibition brought about much needed work especially to those businesses around London. In the event, it had about the same effect as the millennium dome.