

CHAPTER 1.

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 am pleased I lived in that place and in those times..., and how that society differs from today's...

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.

The majority 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 becoming Mayor of Harrow, then Leader of the Greater London Council finally knighted in 1979. Albert Cutler lived in Beresford Road, Marsh Road and lastly in Eastcote Road. He was closely associated with the Imperial Properties Investment Company then Amalgamated London Properties. Ellements were a family builder who concentrated on individual houses. During the period, 1925-1939 T F Nash Ltd., had three large estates for developing. One was at Eastcote where he lived, another at Kenton and a third at Rayners Lane... they the most economical... then on the way to Pinner that ranged from £595 to £750 – four up and two down, with a garage.

I was born in Cumberland Road, which was situated at the not so fashionable end of town – towards Wealdstone, just off Station Road. Gloucester Road and Westmorland Road ran up to the Pinner Road and at the other end of Cumberland Road was Canterbury Road – the start of the council houses. No softening effect of grass verge, well stocked flowerbed or shading tree in any of these roads, but having to make do with narrow pavements and fluted lampposts... As a tribute to modern living, telegraph poles were just about to be raised; lines strung and ordered telephones installed.

This dormitory town, for that is what it was - having no factories or large offices, relied on the railway 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 feeling of 'troubles to come'... nor was it forcefully spoken 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 - 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 most colourful flowerbeds.

In all of this, Harrow was no different from any other borough 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.

The town's citizens, although living in up-to-date houses observed turn of the century attitudes. Scouts and Cubs, Guides and Brownies were the centrepiece of many children's lives. Shops were shut on Sundays and attendance at church was normal for about fifty per-cent of the population at some service during Sunday. Most young children went to Sunday School, shops opened at eight and closed at five - during the weekdays, and on Saturdays stayed open an hour later. Wednesday's half days when the shops closed at one. There was no poverty, all the children were well dressed, and held special clothes to wear on Sundays. I do not remember any rowdiness or drunken brawls. Teashop was 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.

The Metropolitan railway line, laid down the previous century, reached Pinner from Baker Street, in 1885. New building started where the old Edwardian style left off - at Edgware Road. All along the line, on either side, 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 along the way... it just needed more schools and other institutions, to promote 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... 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 – its Services woefully inadequate and badly trained.

Unemployment then, and for the next 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. The family were all 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 hear

Chamberlain now, a rather high brittle voice, clipped intonation..., a rather theatrical performance - almost 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... left their prepared positions, fell back..., never to fully recover. The army was unfit for war, with inadequate equipment and weapons. 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...

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 exhibited town planning at its very best with accommodation for all pockets, and services to match. Many of the roads had pavements fringed with a grass verge... a crab apple or almond tree, 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 respectability. 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 or replaced windows and 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, nearly fifty years later, to describe the atmosphere and general ambiance of the place, because it was so different – you would not believe me. I am closing my eyes thinking back as a boy standing at the crossroads clutching an Evening News bought for my father to read that Saturday evening, after tea. There is very little traffic, occasionally a single decker bus, the 230 route, passes from Harrow or Wealdstone. It is quiet, with few people about – those that are hurrying home. It was the lack of road traffic and the bareness of the pavements that paints the scene... it was so comfortable and secure.

The railway bridge, of riveted steel, spanned Station Road, casting a shadow on Headstone Hotel - the local hostelry. The railway station had two entrances each with a bank of three 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 track - 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. This 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 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 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 led to a series of grants to regularize religious involvement. This was the first nationally organized involvement, which led to The National School being granted land by the lord of the manor maintained by school pence 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. 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 1d 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 balkiest, which made a crunching noise – like a soldier marching, sent sparks flying - when sliding on pavements...

My father was a cartage manager at the railway main line station of Marylebone. He rented the family house spending very little time or money maintaining it – being very prudent never overspent or borrowed money. His was a secure job that issued a free season ticket, for personal use, and an annual family holiday pass. His membership of the Freemasons and Old Contemptible took prime position - of his free time, and we suspect his spare cash. 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 apprentices indentured. Industry stepped back from engaging in long periods of training for girls - believing that in many case it would be wasted.

Girls leaving school after 1950 were not only expected to go to work but also wanted to. This was the first time girls in mass had these expectations – 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, 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 have all played their part in the social change that took place. The once quiet, vehicle free, ordered and regulated town, gone through a quiet transformation... along with the architect designed - sameness of the houses... it was now, 'Do it yourself', replacement hardboard, rip out extraneous architraves, fireplaces and rails and to concrete over gardens and flowerbeds. Still, we boys were polite, well spoken, and mannered. We would not dream of hurting anybody by word or deed and we thought highly of our traditions and culture.

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 out 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 to be 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 in Edwardian 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, set back from the cross roads that link 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 rattrops 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 or paraffin. Lead pipes continued to be laid and no loft or window insulation installed. Cavity walls not built, blocks not used, exposed pipe work and damp courses laid in slate. 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 discharge 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 the industrial sector - to produce it 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 railway 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 affected the character of north-west Middlesex and North Harrow with it. 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 work and paint 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 of the Metropolitan - the majority powered by electric motor... It was not until after the war that the line was completely electrified.

The carriages held ten people sitting - five on either side. In rush hour a further six standing, swaying - attempting to keep their feet - clasping hold of the luggage rack - trying to read. Smokers, who were the majority, relied on the nearest person to open the window - suffer the draughts, occasional rain and smoke... The seated - to the call of the breaks in the rail, bounced on the interior sprung cushion... appreciating their luck of having a seat...

On cold, wet, misty days the dripping raincoats, flapping umbrellas and sneezing patrons heaved a concerted sigh... conversation stilled... newspapers opened. At eye line underneath the netted luggage racks, brass-framed prints advertised seaside resorts... a London Underground map took up the centre frame - not visible when the carriage crowded - then a panicked passenger demanded to know 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, 'died waiting for!'

At night, looking out from our front bedroom windows we could see the glow of opened fireboxes from the passing express trains. The shunting tank engines, coupling-up their wagons in the sidings - gave cheery toots... the express trains, as they thundered up the line - urgent whistles... fading away... as they tore past...

As with all large towns several bus routes serviced the citizens, some ran to Harrow or Northwood others to Rayners Lane or Wealdstone. They were mostly single deckers and all had their conductors... who issued punched tickets... the route operating a ten-minute service. A bus ride was a community affair: getting on and off - swinging from hand bar to hand bar, the favoured seat, ringing the bell, and 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 passengers - those he was unable to reach... piling up the spent ticket underfoot.

Horses and liveried carts made all 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 called out '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-up under his arm, calling out, through rolled cigarette, 'Star, News or Standard'. Coal and coke delivered in hundred weight sacks by the coalman with 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. Skaters held on to the backs of passing delivery carts. Babies left in their prams outside the front door to take the morning sun.

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 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.