

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 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, 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 to 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 to 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 sign directed the patient to enter.

As soon as the door was opened, a number of glaring eyes greeted you. There was no means of knowing who the last to enter was. To know your place in the queue you had to either remember or recognise all who were there, or ask... It was very rare for this to happen. This uncertainty

created its own degree of nervous anxiety - overlaid your already weakened state of physical or mental health.

The ill-hung lace curtains behind full-length blackout curtains covered the windows. Peeling posters and scuffed linoleum floor 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 for signs of infectious disease or distressing habit. In the centre of the room, a green-blaze covered table, held a pile of ancient magazines... These gave only limited distraction to the desperate company... men wanting a chit to enable them to take time off work and children time off school.

Posters declared the horrors of measles, mumps and TB... and one - the latest government warning, declared that 'talk costs lives'. The low wattage bulb, its illuminate quality severely restricted by a fringe decorated coolie-hat shade - attempted to offer some much-needed light to the wartime patients waiting to act on the summons of a piercing bell.

The rattling striker of the distressed bell emitted a throttled b...ring. The assembled company jerked into 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 leaves 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 slippered feet 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 ailer 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 scrumpled, 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 scrabble 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 furred 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 upto 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 distemping 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 dual-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 one's 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 foot 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.