

CHAPTER IV

Bayswater – Salem Gardens – Queen Victoria – Poor families – The parlour – Education Act – Church School – The church – Perambulations around Kensington Gardens – Abduction – Board School – Piano lessons – The Music Hall – The Boy's Brigade – Steam engines.

My father, christened Albert Edward - Albert after the Prince Regent; he was the fifth child, born on the 21st March 1889, at 6 Salem Gardens, Bayswater. After my father's birth, three sisters and three more brothers were added to the previous four children... making eleven in all. He recognized later, all his brothers and sisters were most fortunate having parents who were so considerate and caring.

In the late Victorian age many children from poorer families were thought of as 'an investment' and put out to work as errand boys, carriers of beer, street cleaners and railway station porters. Others held horses, carried trucks, and delivered parcels, they stood at doorways ready to call a cab and helped cabbies who were drunk, – and the number occupied thus was estimated as between ten to twenty thousand. Many became match boys and street sellers, carried food and fruit. They did even the smallest thing to make what they could to help at home. As soon a dawn broke, they were to be seen outside every market place ready to take up a barrow. Others traded by the queues of shops and theatres to entertain and amuse by 'their antics'.

Workmen of the period sported heavy moustaches; wore heavy boots with hob-nails, thick twill trousers, coarse worsted jackets, a waistcoat supporting a watch or key chain, and a cap or billycock hat – a short top-hat, but all very well worn - probably cast-offs! Some may wear smocks, overalls or wear a uniform that would distinguish him from other workers.

A middle-class man whose face was richly adorned by hair in the shaped of muttonchops, full beard with moustache, wore a universally prescribed silk-plush, top hat on a stiff blocked base made of canvas. A black or dark blue frock coat, with a fashioned waist and skirt, with straight edges to about knee height open at the front by curving or wrapping the skirt-front round to the back. A pocketed, silk lined, velvet waistcoat with a man's watch usually on a silver chain. Trousers were fashioned tight in white, grey, fawn or striped, held up by braces. A pinned satin cravat beneath a studded collar-band topped a mid-thigh length shirt with separate, point up, starched collar and linked secured, folded cuffs. For special occasions, a starched, frilly shirt front and tied silk bow. Beneath all would be one-piece long johns and silk socks held in place by garters thrust into ankle-boots.

By 1865, the very wide skirts for women, supported by crinolines, which took over from tight-laced corsets, were being superseded by tunic dresses; waisted blouses with a bustle at the back soon to be replaced. A waterproof cloak with hood, heightened boots, the essential hat, and parasol, completed the picture.

My father lived with his parents, Martha and Alfred Kearey, at six, Salem Gardens, Moscow Road, Bayswater... Salem Gardens, which was later demolished, is now called Salem Road, which is to be found just off Queensway, and Bayswater tube station - which forms a square. On the other side, backing onto the gardens is Moscow Place and Moscow Road both forming another square with Queen's Mansions, just a few doors up from his paternal grandparents. It was a small rented house with just four rooms, two up and two down, a kitchen and an outhouse. It had a back garden, which stopped at the Queens Mews stable wall belonging to a house in the next road.

Within the homes of father's friends, elaborate rules of etiquette were observed. In middle class homes, one had to dress for dinner in full evening dress. Lace curtains were *de rigueur* and Sunday best clothes worn. No games were played; no shops were open, no theatres played, and only

the bible read. No running in the road and parks – decorum was observed at all times, and no shouting ever! The parlour was used as a ‘special room’ for Sundays, entertaining guests and visitors, high days and Christmas.

Albert attended Sunday school aged four in 1893, at the school in Queens Road [now Queensway]. The girls and boys were formed up in ranks of two... Then, holding hands, marched off to Saint Matthews Church, Saint Petersburg Place, Bayswater... led by a Master and Mistress. It was here that Albert spent two years at the Infant School.

It was thought important, by the government, that, as more people were taking up the option to vote they should be educationally equipped to make proper decisions. At the same time, it became apparent that Britain industrial base was lagging behind some European countries. Both these factors suggested that elementary education should be expanded. The 1870 Elementary Education Act ensured this would happen and school boards were set up. In 1895, the voluntary schools still provided half a million more places than the board schools. Poor families complained that sending their children to school instead of to work prevented the rest of the family from eating.

The Kearey family was relatively well off - having a father skilled in his own painting and staining business with a full order book. The school fees were *1d.* or *2d* per week; there was, however, a considerable variation of fees depending on the numbers of children from one family going to the same school or whether there was sickness or lack of footwear – a fairly common occurrence. By 1891, sufficient money was made available by the government to provide free places. When Albert went to school in 1893, he did not have to attend school with his fee in his pocket. The minimum age children could then leave school was eleven... It would take another six years to push this up to twelve.

At that, time education in London led the way in curriculum innovation promoting music, drill and object lessons – some instruction about the world around them... about science, history and geography. Lessons other than the three Rs were considered ‘class lessons’. For the older children two other specific subjects were included. The question about the provision of a piano was much debated finally it was left to the head teacher knowing what funding from grants was available.

At around the age of twelve children who went to church were confirmed... afterwards allowed to attend communion services. For several weeks before confirmation, there would be classes of instruction to learn The Creed, Ten Commandments, The Catechism, The Lord’s Prayer and other religious works. On the day of communion the girls would wear white long sleeved dresses, white shoes and veils and the boys their best suits and well shone shoes, starched collars to their white shirts a buttoned up waist coats. In the late Victorian era, Sunday’s were a special day, no work was to take place, and no games played. People who did not attend church were considered wicked or lacking in respect.

Most children went to Sunday school and attended one proper service – morning or evening. At Christmas, they went twice a day. The Sunday school lessons consisted of bible reading, instruction and righteous stories with a moral theme and learning the collect [single prayer of the day]. Picture stamps of bible scenes were collated and mounted into an album. Hymns for young children were sung to the accompaniment of a piano. All the people were dressed in their Sunday best. Children in particular were clothed in shirts stiff with starch. The congregation knew were to sit and usually always in the same pew. The congregation knelt down and said a prayer or to ask for forgiveness for wrong doings, before the service began.

The High Altar, a covered table, was reached by several steps around which were displayed several oil paintings depicting biblical scenes. The chancel was imposingly large being separated from the body of the church by a wrought iron grill. There were always on hand many servitors - functionaries, in high-church dress. The service was intoned and sung, except the lessons.

There was a special service for woman who had not long given birth. This was called 'Churching for Women' and was a service to cleanse her and release her from sin. There was no such thing as feminism or a feminist movement. Why this should only be for women was never explained nor how they had been sinful.

At St. Matthew's Church, pews could be rented. When the Upper Classes – particularly the Nobility and Aristocracy, attended the service, a footman followed them. He was dressed in frock coat, white skin-tight trousers and buckled shoes - whose job it was to carry a bible and prayer book – to be handed over to their masters at the door. Pew-openers directed the ordinary parishioners into their strictly graded, rented and paid for seats. My father went on to say that in his mother's day these titled folk were ushered into their pews, which had doors and sometimes separate internal roofs, by attendants who saw them in and spread blankets over their legs. These attendants were women who had black poke bonnets and white aprons. Services were known by heart particularly the hymns. The sermons were often long and difficult to hear because of the echo.

The rector constantly instructed his parishioners that they should worship all day Sunday. However, the evening services were those best attended. The aristocracy attended church in the mornings; in the evenings by their servants, who were too busy at their household tasks and looking after the horses and farm animals, to find time during the day.

In the winter months, the church interiors were lit by the soft glow of oil lamps, which cast mysterious shadows over the walls and pillars - making the gloomy, cold, and damp environment eerie – to small children, frightening. The congregation sat in the same seat every week and woe betides if you sat on somebody else's pew. You always had to be on your best behaviour. My father knelt down with everyone else and said a prayer, asked forgiveness, before waiting for the service to begin. He was supposed to read the collect for the day or a psalm. Everyone knew the service order by rote and most of the hymns. At the collection, a halfpenny would be dropped in the plate. It was not unusual for the gentry to have their own family pews and the added luxury of a couple of heated rooms where they could meet, entertain, and retire to. The beadle kept order and the poor out.

At the end of the service, the parishioners walked out into the blackness of the night and those who had a long way to get back home would light candles in their lamps that flickered on the footpaths and disappear into the night. However distant the journey there was little fear of being accosted by vagabonds or scoundrels for the congregation all left together. You could hear the happy 'goodnights' all around you as the cheery calls echoed through the night air... The clear night sky would enable you to recognise the constellations and sometimes see a falling star and get a wish.

It was a ritual on a Sunday for the ladies and gentlemen from surrounding churches to perambulate around the squares and gardens, after Matins. This walk ended up strolling down Lancaster Walk past Speke's monument and further still onto the Albert Memorial. This walk was termed 'The Parade'. It was here that the bonneted women and attending dandies would be bobbing and nodding to their acquaintances all showing off their latest fashions.

The riders had a similar parade; both men and women wore top hats, the women rode sidesaddle, the society dandies and their simpering belles disporting in their barouches whilst chattering loudly fluttering their fans. Some of the small children would be riding their ponies besides their parents giggling and chattering like sparrows.

The nannies would be pushing the enormous sided prams, the largest of which displayed wealth, kept to the railing paths. Regents Park, planned by Nash, displayed the Zoological exhibits – was a favourite place for them to go...needing one shilling for the pleasure.

This display, performed by the rich, occurred in all of London's royal parks. This droll, ostentation by the bourgeoisie had a great effect upon my father who saw it as a display of wealth –

from those who might also cast a glance of disdain on the unfortunates who did not have an equal social standing.

Although he always voted conservative, he was fully aware of the injustices in society and could not abide pomposity.

After church, my father would walk to the top of the road towards Kensington Gardens. At that time Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyle, occupied The Royal Palace of Kensington. When he got to the park, he had to walk and never run because the Park Keeper would soundly admonish him for desecrating the Sabbath Day.

Regent's Park was never just the preserves of aristocrats, about a third of occupants of Nash's terraces were in business. Kensington Gardens was not open to the public for its first ten years after it is inauguration but kept as a great private estate for Royalty and the aristocracy.

City life was one of organised chaos. There were few women particularly in public areas – there was a changing shift of people mainly men to and from work. Clerks were in abundance being the main form of employment for the non-servant classes; they would not only populate their offices but be rushing delivering letters, plans and manuscripts.

The water carts would be out laying the dust, crossing keepers dressed in their uniform, keeping their particular spots clean of mud and dung. The potboys and shop staff lifting open the hatches to the cellars, rolling back the blinds and pulling open the shutters. The street life during the day was cosmopolitan with a frantic grating, crunching, swirling of speeding horse drawn traffic, the hackney drivers vying with each other to get back to the pitch as soon as possible - were the worst, darting here and there without a by-your-leave'. During early mornings and after work the streets returned to almost village life... over and behind the shops family life progressed. There were three main commercial and business groups: the sellers, the buyers and the providers. This last group contained the service and maintenance staff, builders and repair people who lived in the so-called village.

Babies at the turn of the century were not often weaned until they were at least one year old. It was not only expected, not to give up breast-feeding, but cheaper and more convenient. Babies were kept in long gowns and nothing was done to disturb them or excite them. They were not expected to sit up until the age of at least six months. Their prams had large wheels, high sides and were fully sprung. Trying to help the child to walk before the age of two was frowned on because it was thought the childhood become bow-legged.

In summer, many of the children went to the London parks. As most children were from large families, the eldest daughter kept an eye on the younger-ones. The prams were pushed by their owners some hired other by the child's nanny...picnics held beneath the trees or by the lakes. Drinking water was to be had at the fountains, ducks fed on scraps of stale bread and peacocks gazed at in awe.

He remembered an incident when he was a toddler when his brothers came out of the park to return home. They had forgotten him - he was quite innocently trotting off in another direction. A chimney sweep saw him apparently all alone, picked him up placed him on his barrow amongst all the brushes and bags of soot, and made off with him. The brothers meantime had reached home still engrossed in conversation to find him not bringing up the rear. There was panic at home and his mother ran up to the park frantically searching for her son.

In Victorian times the slums of Notting Hill, which is the other side of the park, had an evil reputation for kidnapping and extortion and it was because of this reputation that she made her way there. Fortunately, she found her son Bert perched on the barrow parked outside a public house. The sweep was celebrating his successful abduction inside the inn.

Sweeps and slum factory owners wanted cheap labour - frequently resorted to child theft. Small children were used by sweeps to descend narrow chimneys, especially the bends used in the

chimney to obtain a better draught, being lowered from the top scraping and sweeping whilst they were lowered, the soot being collected at the bottom. Sweeps, as a form of promoting their services, used very small children, declaring that, 'they could clean smaller chimneys than any other sweep.'

There was an argument on the pavement between the police officer and the sweep - vigorously holding onto Bert. The sweep was heard shouting, 'I know my rights, he's my child and I'm defending and protecting him!'

The interested onlookers gathered around, some coming from within the public house. They heard my father calling out to his mother, whilst furiously trying to clamber into her arms. The crowd supported my grandmother calling to the police officer to do his duty.

That decided it for the police officer who, taking the infant from the cart, returned the child to its parent...telling the sweep of a possible summons, if he did not be quiet!