

CHAPTER V

Paddington Station - Fashions – Moscow Road – Sunday best – The parlour – Queensway – Voluntary Schools – Good works – St Matthew's Church – Churching for Women – Lancaster Walk – Regents Park – Bayswater - Marylebone Station.

On January 10th 1863, Paddington railway station was open to the public; it was The Great Western Railway Line, and the Metropolitan Railway. The railways construction had resulted in many families evicted from their houses, so that they could be demolished. The broad staircase lead down thirty feet to platform level but long before reaching the bottom the smell of smoke and steam pervades the air. You could feel the draught the closer one got to the bottom. The gas burners light the way as we jostle along – for there are a steady stream of would be passengers also making their way along the smoke filled tunnel. At last, the train is reached; it was just over a mile away from home in Salem Gardens.

That same year, riding in 'The Row', in London's Hyde Park, the latest carriage style included the Victoria Phaeton, the Mail Phaeton, the Four Wheel Dog Cart, the Light Waggonette, the Brougham, the Parisian Phaeton and the Stanhope Phaeton. The bicycle too changed with improved tyres, gears and brakes. By 1900, the cost of an average car was £385, which was about ten times that of a farm workers yearly income. Paddington was now a borough with tree-shaded roads and squares. There was an enormous disparity between the various districts. This was apparent when getting near to Hyde Park and those houses along the canal. The areas around the railway terminus, the shops and entertainment centres in Westbourne Grove, Queens Road and Edware Road gave variety and colour.

In 1900, horse-transport was the usual mode of travel for both individuals and groups of people. Most of the carriages were privately owned although there was a public horse drawn system called the omnibus. Some people had a pony and trap or small governess cart, drawn by very small ponies. Occasionally goats pulled the country carts.

Every shop had its errand boy who delivered goods by hand; the older boys, doing a bigger round, used a pony drawn cart. Very few people carried their own shopping relying upon the shop's delivery service. Men drove Brewer's drays drawn by four huge horses, with their jingling horse brasses and bells, with bowler hats sitting high up at the front covered with a tarpaulin wrap fastened over their knees. Carrier Vans collected and delivered heavier goods on either two or four wheeled carts. Two paraffin oil or acetylene lamps lit his way. These vans travelled around a particular route known by the inhabitants. If their services were required, a note had to be pinned to your door or gate. Deliveries were also made from the railway stations guaranteeing a door-to-door service.

It was alongside Kensington Gardens that the stagecoach route ran from Central London. During school holidays, my father would sit in the public gardens and watch the coaches bowling along the road to Windsor or Hurlingham with the guard whipping up the horses and blowing his coaching horn. All traffic travelled at the pace of a horse. Carriages of many different styles abounded.

On every first of May, a rustic pageant called 'Jack-in-the-Green' was enacted. The sweep's boys decorated with garlands of green leaves cavorted around the streets. Maid Marion, was the traditional May Queen who was pulled by hand-cart to her throne.

When father's family were asked to leave Salem Gardens, they rented a house in Bayswater. It was here that my father started kindergarten in 1892 at the age of three. His starter class, attached to the infant school, was well attended; taught by senior girls, at the age of fourteen - considered fit by their studies to consider teaching as a profession. Parents had to pay perhaps 4d per-week for the first child then, on a sliding scale, less for additional children; the rate was flexible according to the parent's income. These fees were only just beginning to be scrapped after an extra government grant

for elementary education brought into being. The minimum leaving age was twelve by the time Albert started school... at the same time attendance for all children compulsory.

Saint Matthew's Infant School, Poplar Place, Moscow Road, was a small Church school for very young children and was to last for two years. There were no desks or individual seats but galleries amounting to eight rows of broad steps. He had to sing his multiplication tables and alphabet every morning. These were not the only form of learning by rote there were others: spectrum colours, kings and queens, months of the year and many other useful facts. Common words learnt by 'heart' and religiously checked every day by his teacher. Proper pronunciation of words, the correct use of grammar, national tunes, mental arithmetic, countries of The Empire all given a place in the curriculum. By the end of the two-year period a great deal was learnt and committed to memory.

Girl teachers, who were very patient and kind knowing as they did how important it was that their charges could cope with the curriculum at the Junior School, gave the lessons. His girl teachers were fourteen, the age when pupils left school - were the brighter girls from the top class - who were in teacher training. There were no grants training had to be paid for by the parents. There were few jobs for girls. To be a nurse the training was the same. The parents paid the fees. Some worked in local hospitals but were not able to qualify without going to College to receive their certificate. My father was very happy at St Matthew's school and did well coming out top of the class. At this age, he began piano lessons, which he persevered with - years later achieved a professional standard.