

# BACK IN TIME

Going back to my early years is not easy, this story is from memory and not researched and my memory of those years is poor, it is like a sort of half life, and the more I look back the more difficult it is. I remember bits and pieces, streets and places, and one or two incidents stick out some of the names in this story of schools for instance may not be quite right. one story I remember happened when I was about nine, I went to the fish shop after dark, and on my way home with a parcel of fish and chips and a large bottle of pop, a bloke tried to get hold of me, he may on reflection have just wanted to pinch the fish and chips, I made a run for it and fell, badly cutting my head but reached home safe and sound. The matter was not reported, my face was wiped clean and a bandage put round my head, then we had our supper, my mother was proud of me and told people how I had arrived home with the fish and chips together with the bottle of pop intact.

My dad came from a family that was quite well off but he was the black sheep of the family, he was well educated but never seemed to stick at a job, he liked to have a bob or two on the gee gees and when the first world war started went into the army as a private and was sent to France, I bet that shook him, he was involved in some of the big battles and when he come home at the end of the war he suffered from mustard gas burns.

I don't know how he met my mother, a tall smart good looking woman going from the photos I have seen of her, but they were married and had four children. I had an elder brother called Robert Dean, Bob to his friends, and two sisters. Bob for some reason was adopted by my fathers family and went off to live with the posh folk on Carlton Grange. We lived on Chapel Fold, one day my mother walked out and left us, my dad had to get a woman in to look after us, a sort of house keeper. They later had a baby girl and called her Pat which was the same as my sisters, that made my mother mad I can tell you.

Out of the blue my mother came back saying that we were living in filth and took me and my sisters away with her to live at a house in Dewsbury. It's funny how some things stick out but I remember one night when I was about nine my mother was out leaving me to look after the children when the light went out in what was a big old house, it was pitch dark, we were able to find a bit of a candle and light it hoping mother would soon be home, I had a look round but was not able to find any money for the meter. when the candle was almost done we collected the candle fat and tried to make candles with the threads pulled out of the coconut matting on the kitchen floor. I don't know how it ended, its a bit like a dream in my mind, with no ending.

My Mother used to send me from Dewsbury to Liversedge Labour exchange where my dad worked to collect her maintenance, and my dad used to give me sixpence for myself which I kept secret as my mother may have taken from me, when he sent less than the full amount she used to make a real fuss. I remember once that I lost the envelope with the money on the Empire Theatre steps while I was looking at the display pictures, when I arrived home without the money there was hell to play, lucky for me I found the money under a poster of Issy Bonn. On an other occasion I went to collect the money my dad was off sick and my mother only gave me the fare one way, so there I was stranded about six mile from home with no money for the bus fare, I had to put on a show, I sat on a wall crying and a kind lady gave me the fare home when I told that I had lost my money. When you lived the life that I did you had to live by your wits, apart from one auntie called Betty I cannot remember any member of my mothers large family ever giving me a birthday or Christmas gift. My grandmother never seemed to smile or speak kindly to me and I look on today's grandparents in amazement and think that kids now don't know how lucky they are.

## A Visit to St. Neots

It was 1938 I lived with my dad, lodging with a large working class family in a small house in Queen St. Batley. Queen St. now demolished was a small mean street linked to Taylor St. with a series of alleys and ginnels. The name of the family was Hepworth, the oldest son was a story teller, and I remember on winter evenings we used to sit round him often when the gas mantel was broken and with only the light from the coal fire and maybe a candle on the sideboard, and he would tell a story. his rendering of Sweeny Todd was a master piece.

My Mother and Father had divorced about three years earlier, and my Mother, after keeping me and my two sisters for a couple of years remarried, dumped me with my Dad and went to live at St. Neots with her new husband, a railway signalman she had met in Dewsbury who had been promoted to a large signal box on the main line.

It was decided in the summer of 1938 that I would go for a holiday with my mother, I was at this time 11 years old. street wise and a scruffy little brat. The journey started at Batley station, my dad took me to the station with a luggage label with the address of my destination fastened with a piece of string to my lapel, he put me on the train and off I went on the great adventure. I got off the train at Leeds and went off in search of the train to Peterborough, the station was massive with people just rushing about, steam engines blowing off, lots of noise and excitement all around, I approached the guard of the London train and asked him if the train would take me to Peterborough, he gave me a look of amazement, read my label and said tha'd better cum wi me and dumped me in the guards van. Well this was just great, the train set off with a great shudder, screeching and whistling and I looked around the van, there was a goat , pigeons in boxes, piles of mail bags, parcels, rolls of newspapers, two dogs, bicycles and lord knows what else. The train was for ever stopping and when it reached the big stations like Doncaster it was pandemonium in the guards van Postmen throwing in more mail bags and the guard throwing some out, people collecting their bikes, a fellow dragging off his dog which was barking and growling, a new dog was dragged in resisting all the way, I had never had as much fun in my life and decided then and there that one day I would be a railway guard. The guard gave me some of his sandwiches and some hot tea out of a thermos and told me tales of the Great Northern Railway of which he was very proud to be part of, and all too soon after lots of stops at places like Newark, Grantham and little places I had never even heard of we arrived at Peterborough. I had to say goodbye to my benefactor, he gave me threepence as a parting gift to spend on my holiday.

After the hustle and bustle of loading and unloading, on which I was now by the way something of an expert, which no doubt I thought would put me in good stead when I grow up and went looking for a job, my guard blew his whistle and my favourite train ever, roared out of the station and disappeared in a cloud of smoke. When the little local train which was to take me on to St. Neots came puffing in it was a bit of an anti climax and I got on board knowing full well that I was not a local person but was a traveller from far away. My Mother and Pat my sister, one of my sisters Joy had since died in a school epidemic of diphtheria, met me at St. Neots station which was not very impressive to a traveller like me and was not much bigger than Batley. They took me off to what was to be my new home for the next few weeks, a row of very tidy council houses not far from the station. At night I discovered you could hear the whistle of the trains as they approached the station and the through trains thundering by and if you looked out of the window you could see the glow from the fire box and the red sparks from the fire lighting up the night, if only my mates from Warwick Rd. School could be with me now, there was nothing like this at Batley Carr.

On the first morning of my holidays I explored the shed in the back garden and discovered that it contained what seemed to be dozens of canaries. The birds were in home made cages, made of wooden boxes with wire fronts and were stacked one on top of another. It turned out that Peter, that was the name of my mothers new husband bred canaries and I remember thinking that they all looked alike and felt that it would have been a lot better had they been budgies. It was from this find that I went on to discover the wonder of council house back gardens, there was homing pigeons, rabbits, green houses full of tomatoes, gardens full of chrysanthemums, dahlias, and even onions and leeks not to mention fish ponds and fruit trees. The women too were very special and they all seemed to have their speciality, sticky toffee, flat cakes and home made jam, chocolate cake the list was endless. It must be remembered that in those days before slum clearance that council house tenants were selected, they had to convince the council that they were clean and tidy people and of good character.

At my very first day at the local school I found both the teachers and pupils were sort of nice and a bit soft, when the teachers hit you it was only with a ruler and they were really gentle with it, the other kids didn't seem to want to fight and I was very soon able to establish my position as a person of some importance, I soon found if you gave someone a bit of a bashing they would go crying to the teacher or even tell their mother, a thing unheard of back in Batley where the whole school would brand you a sissy.

Peter was a lot stronger than my dad, a sort of hard but fair type, my mother seemed at first to be a bit soft but I came a cropper the first time I put her to the test. We were at an auction sale, for which my mother had a life long addiction and there was a selection of boys books, being addicted to reading I begged my mother to get them for me. Well she fell out of the bidding when the price went too high and I tried one of my sulks for which I was famous, I even put on a bit of drama and laid on the floor and went into a paddy, my mother reverted to her Yorkshire roots and gave me a good kicking, dragged me up by the hair and out of the saleroom which established our relationship for the rest of the holiday and let me know the score. I think when I left St. Neots most of the population including my sister, who was my mothers favourite anyway, were pleased to see the northern barbarian go. I left with some goodies, my mother who was the worlds best dress maker and tailor had made me some clothes and Peter gave me a canary in a cage. The journey home must have been uneventful as I have no clear memory of it, but I do remember that no one met me at Batley Station and that I had to walk home with my case in one hand and the cage in the other.

The contrast between Batley and St.Neots was stark, the green fields, miles of river walks and the feeling of space at St Neots contrasted with the massive woollen mills like Theodore Taylors and Stubleys together with the hundreds of small warehouses were like different worlds. There were little warehouses tucked away in yards many employing only a few people to sort rags to pass on to the shoddy trade.

Picture if you can a mountain of rags, with women sat on the floor or on a seat made from rags sorting the wool from the cotton and throwing them into their separate piles, ripping the linings using a pair of cutters from suits and jackets and in winter with very little heat if any wearing top coats, wool hats and scarves, often borrowed from the pile of rags. Picture the smell of old clothes and the fleas and the odd rat in the dark corners of the warehouse and in spite of all this the women laughing and joking together. The problem of all being poor together is that you don't know that your poor, but when you have been to Otley on your bike and St.Neots on the train it makes you think.

## **STREET LIFE IN BATLEY 1938/9**

One day on my return from school I found that the Hepworth's, with whom my dad and I lodged had been turned out of their home by the landlord. Their bits of furniture were all out in the street, so I sat down on one of the chairs to wait for my dad to arrive home from work. My dad by the way was a bit of a dandy, he wore a smart suit with a shirt and tie, a clean mac. and was the only man in the street to wear a trilby. When he arrived home we collected our odds and ends and set off to find new digs, we ended up in Taylor St. a long wide street with houses and one or two shops up each side, the houses tended to get better at the top end of the street. We found new lodgings with a old widow lady who lived by her self, it was a big improvement on Queen St. my dad and me had a bedroom to our self, there was a velvet cloth over the table, a home made clip rug before the fire, a wireless with accumulators, and a collection of ornaments on the shelf over the fire. The wireless accumulators were like small car batteries but made of glass, you could see the acid inside, you had to take them back to the local shop and change them when they ran down. Our new local shop sold meat and potato pies and you took them home steaming hot together with a jug of steaming gravy.

### **CASH FLOW**

Because of the shortage of cash we had to find ways of making a copper here and there, on nice hot days you could stand at the bottom of the street and wait for the ice cream man to arrive with his heavy hand cart, a couple of you could give him a push up the hill, this was a long and hard job as he was for ever stopping to sell ice cream. On arriving at the top they were often reluctant to give you cash and you had to take payment with an ice cream cornet. A better way was to go up to the rugby field on game days and ask the blokes going in if they had any cig. cards. If they were friendly you asked them to give you a penny and on a good day you collected a nice collection of cards and a copper or two, but on a bad day the cops would give you a clip and run you off. Market day was the big day, you arrived just before closing time and helped the stall holders to load up their trucks, then went and collected the empty wood boxes from the fruit stalls. The next day you chopped up the boxes and sold it door to door for firewood.

### **GAMES**

At the start of the summer all the seasonal games came in, the big one was whip and top, the shops were full of fancy tops, most kids just bought a basic one or got out last years favourite and made the top fancy with coloured chalk, both boys and girls played at whip and top but there was skipping and hopscotch, for girls, for some reason boys did not play these games. All year round boys played relieveo or squatcan, a game in which you placed a tin can in a ring, al 1 your mates went and hid while you covered your eyes, you then had to find them before they could sneak up unseen and kick the can out of the ring. With all the allies, walls, and bins about it could be a bit hectic. Then there was cig. cards, you held one up for you mate to see the picture, told him it was between twenty and thirty or what ever and he had to guess the number on the back of the card and last but not least the all time great game, marbles some times known as allies or tors, the best game was the walking game which you played as you walked to school, you rolled the marble in the gutter and your mate had to roll his and try and hit yours and at the same time not to stop too near yours if he missed. This was a game of great skill in which you had to contend with all the bumps and drains and when it rained the puddles. Games with cig, cards and marbles were taken very seriously as a blokes worth was often measured by his collection of cards and marbles.

## **SCHOOL**

I went to Warwick Road Elementary School at Batley Carr which was about a mile from Taylor St. the kids were a rough lot and the teachers were on the stern side and very handy with the cane. The canes used were not the hollow garden stick sort but the solid type used in basket making and were about half an inch thick. If they hit you on the palm they were not too bad, but on the fingers especially on the tips the pain was intense and brought tears to many a boys eyes. All caning took place in front of the class and it was important not to show fear or to cry or make a fuss if you wished to retain your standing within the class. All new kids to the school had to establish his position in the class, this was based on a physical relationship and not scholarly achievement Most of it was easy, you avoided the real hard cases, and let the weaker one's know by the way you spoke to them noting their response. The problem was with your equals and this at time resulted in a fight if one of you did not back down. After the first week or so things settled down and you were accepted into a group or gang. Even then fights could flair up from out of the blue, on one occasion one of my mates had been given a nit card by the school nurse and on the way home we got into an argument and I made some remark about the nits which resulted in a major fight. We were evenly matched, and the fight just went on and on. No real damage was done but there was, I remember lots of blood and minor cuts to the face, we ran out of steam and in the end the dread of being late home for tea was a factor ' so we called it a draw and went home.

The only sex lesson I ever received was at Warwick Rd. we had a boy who was over developed in the private regions and a gang of hard boys found out and put him on show in the toilets at playtime. Somehow the teachers found out and they were brought before the head master. Well next morning at assembly the girls were told to leave and the gang were lined up before the head master, who gave a very short speech in which he said that the only thing worse than playing with your self was playing with some one else. He then went on to give them each six of the best from which no doubt he gained much pleasure and I was pleased to discover that my secret vice was at least the lesser of the two evils.

## **KEEPING CLEAN**

Keeping clean was a problem for both yourself and your clothes, the sink was a stone trough with a cold tap stuck on the end of a lead pipe. Hot water had to be boiled in a kettle on the fire, or gas ring if you were lucky. Washing day was a hard day for the woman of the house, and took all day and for big families well into the night, the smell of the soap and the wet clothes the built up fire and steam from the kettle was not very pleasant. Clothes had to be washed in a tub and rubbed on a rubbing board then on fine days hung out on lines which ran across the street from the bedroom windows. On cold or rainy days they had to be dried inside which was very unpleasant, we had a sort of clothes rack hanging from the ceiling near the fire which could be lowered for loading up with clothes. Ironing seemed to take forever, the iron had to be heated on the fire and then put in to a sleeve, a skilled operator tested the heat by licking the finger and lightly tapping the face of the iron.

Keeping your self clean was a matter of a stand up wash over the sink and now and then a visit to the local slipper baths, the baths were huge with a great big tap, a bloke came with a big spanner and turned on the water which came out with a great rush filling the bath in no time. It's no wonder we were called the great unwashed.

## **BAKING DAY**

I have told you how unpleasant wash day was well to make up for it there was baking day. Once a week most women baked their own bread and flat cakes, the flat cakes were about ten ins, across and to eat them while they were still warm with dripping or jam and butter on was one of life's great joys. All the cooking was done in a Yorkist type oven which was a fitted cast iron combined fire place and oven. The oven was heated by pushing the fire under the oven from the fire. Life revolved round the fireplace, the posher ones had gleaming brass fittings and each week the housewife would black lead the oven until it sparkled. The fire had bars across the front and the top half would drop down as a stand for the kettle, the kettle was also a proud possession the better ones had a fine brass handle and long swan like spouts. Some of the really posh ovens had a water tank fitted on the opposite side to the oven with a brass tap fitted from which you could run water heated by the fire. Over the top of the fire place there was a shelf often covered with a velvet cover with tassels running along its length. In the centre of the shelf stood the clock and on each side of it in matching pairs were the families ornaments. To finish it off in front of the fire there was the fender the bigger and brighter the better. The whole family on winter nights used to sit round the fire each one to there allotted spot with fathers chair taking the pride of place. Every thing that would burn was thrown on the fire, old shoes tin cans that would glow red and throw out heat and father to show his authority leaned forward and poked the fire with the long brass handled poker, often spitting with great accuracy between the bars of the fire. To get back to baking day it was the smell of baking wafting down the street that you younger readers will never experience that greeted you as you arrived home from school with the knowledge that tonight's tea was going to be a treat.

## **THE TABLE**

The table dominated the centre of the living room, it was a square table strong and firm with a plain white wood top that was scrubbed clean, on a Sunday or when visitors were expected a velvet cloth was put over it Everything was done on the table the family sat round for their meals, and sat up straight I might tell you, and the kids when they wished to leave said "thank you for a very nice meal please may I leave the table. On Sunday meals even in poor households were very formal affairs and Sunday tea was the high light of the week, a tin of salmon might well be opened and there was prunes and custard to look forward to. On the table shoes were repaired, home work was done, jigsaws were completed, one of the few pleasures allowed on a Sunday by the way, battles were fought with toy soldiers, ironing was done, baking and cooking preparation and letters were written and dad filled in the pools in the hope that one day his boat might come in. I have mentioned Sunday, well for kids Sundays were dreadful, there was no laughing or running or skipping, no games, people used to put on their Sunday cloths, the wirel6ss played hymns and church services all the shops were shut it was just like a total dead day and sometimes just to get rid of you, you were made to go to Sunday school in the morning which was pretty dreadful, unless you were a mamby pamby you just wished it was Monday even if it was a school day.

## SATURDAY

Saturday on a cold pre war winters morning, get up nice and early about half past eight, it's blooming cold, get some clothes on, have a skimpy half wash in the bowl in the sink. The fire's just been lit and there's no heat coming from it, Mrs Walker the old landlady mashed a mug of tea and you washed down a slice of dripping and bread sitting with your coat and scarf on. My dad was having a lay in ' it being one of his days off, he would get up later have a bite of lunch and then go to watch Batley play rugby, later he would spend the evening with his lady friend who worked as a barmaid at The Little Saddle a pub in the centre of Dewsbury.

Well having got the grub down you go out to meet your mates and try and make a bit of money going round with the firewood you had for sale, you could also run a few errands and earn a copper. For the young reader let me explain the strange currency we used to have, first there was the orpney or half penny , the penny and the thripny bit and a tanner or sixpence not forgetting the farthing which was a quarter of a penny. The bob or shilling which was twelve pence, the two bob piece and half a crown which was two bob and six pence, the ten bob note and the pound. Twenty shillings made a pound and two hundred and forty pennies made a pound so when I say it cost tuppence to get in the pictures you can work it out.

Well after a hard mornings work it was home for a bit of lunch, if you were lucky it was fish and chips from the local fish and chip shop together with a real treat. a shop bought cream bun.

Then gather together with your mates to go to the Saturday afternoon special kids show at the flicks, the best show was usually at the Plaza which was up in the centre of Batley so the gang set off causing as much noise and general disruption as possible on the way, call in at Woolworth's and get some of their supper slab toffee covered with chocolate and join the noisy queue waiting for the doors to open, the more adventurous would try and get round the back to see if the fire door was open or maybe the toilet window.

Well when they let you in there was the pushing and kicking to get the best seats, the six foot doorman dragging you off each other and an appeal from the manager to calm down. Well the show started, first with the beam of light onto the screen and then lots of jumbled up numbers flashing on and off which brought lots of booing and get on with it if they went on too long. Once the film started there was lots of participation from the kids with screams of look out their coming, kill him and get on with it if it was dragging. Sometimes they would stop the film half way trough in order to flog their ice cream and sweets, and you had a chance to assess the film so far, with "what do you think of it so far", " I told you it was good" . At the end of the film we all emptied out into the street to make our noisy way home arguing with each other on the merits of what we had seen, whether it was better than last weeks, according to the traitor next week was going to be even better.

Home for tea and then a couple of hours roaming round the streets, standing outside the off licence shop and making a general nuisance of ourselves and home to bed. One Saturday night I woke up and there was a women in bed with me, it was Edna my dads lady friend it was foggy and she lived with her mother the other side of Heckmondwike so she spent the night with us, my poor old dad had to sleep on the bedroom floor that night. When I said that Edna was a barmaid you may have assumed that she was a lady who knew her way around, but far from it she was a highly respectable sort of woman, she had red hair and a fair clean complexion and was to take on the most difficult and often unrewarding job of step mother, I am very grateful for the way she looked after me, at times I must have been a horrid little brat, she died suddenly from a dreadful throat cancer while only in her early sixties and I never really thanked her.

## LIFE'S PLEASURES

Well there was the corner shop which was full of special treats for kids, lots of sweets or spogs like lucky bags, lolly pops, aniseed balls, bubble gum, liquorice and kali, together with pop and powders to make your own drinks and if it was a paper shop there was all the comics like the Dandy, Beano, Rover and Wizard. Outside the shop was the fag machines, two Woodbines and two matches for a penny, there was a big selection of cheap cigs, but the favourites were the Woodbines followed by Robins and Players Weights, my dad by the way, with him being a bit posh smoked Capstans. Then there was Woollies with nothing over sixpence.

Late October and the start of November there was the fire works the preparation of fires in every street and bit of spare land, going out in gangs chumping, raiding other fire stacks and protecting your own resulted in lots of late night fights often with the old man involved, and then on the eve of bonfire day there was Mischief Night running round knocking on doors, hiding in corners and blowing up sink drain pipes, tapping on windows, putting drawing pins on outside lav. door snecks and taking off the lav seats. Then the big day the fires were lit and you could go from one to the other, most of the fire works were bangers, the louder the better, jumping crackers to throw down unseen and make people jump, rockets and spinning wheels and best of all whizz bangs which you lit holding them in your hand and when they started to spark you throw them towards people and they went like a rocket leaving a tail of sparks, people used to laugh and scream running for cover, somehow I don't think they would go down well today. There was potatoes placed in the fire, home made toffee and parkin and the grown ups drank beer from jugs filled up at the off licence, often with it being special they let you have a drink.

On Saturday afternoon we went to the pictures. In Batley there was the Regent at Hick Lane and up in town there was the Plaza, the Empire and the bug hole with wooden seats at the front The Victoria which is now I think the Conservative Club. On Saturdays it was the cowboy films, Tom Mix was a bit before my time because we now had the talkies, there was Ken Maynard, Buck Jones, Hopalong Cassidy and Roy Rogers, Rogers was a bit sissy what with his singing and trying to please the ladies. There was comedy, I did not think much of Chaplin who was over rated, when you had seen one of his films you had seen them all, the best were The Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, Our Gang, The Dead End Kids and Edgar Kennedy. The show used to end with the serial to get you back next week, and Buck Rogers was about the best.

We had home made go-carts made from planks and pram wheels, with the front wheel connected with a nut and bolt so that you could steer it with you feet and a piece of string, we used to go racing down Taylor St. in our very own Formula One if there was such a thing in those days.

At Whitsuntide we had the church and chapel sports day and walks, they were great fun and even if you did not go to church you could tag along, there was food to eat and pop to drink and races to win and you never know you might win a prize.

Then there was the boy's best friend his penknife with which he could carve a gun or sword to play endless games of cowboys or soldiers, dig holes, cut his name on trees, doors and desks and show it off to his friends.

For those who had a bike and I had an old rusty banger we would go out on the road into the country, round trips of twenty or thirty miles were not uncommon and we visited places like Wetherby and Otley in great journeys of discovery.

## 1940 GOMERSAL AND WORK

Early in 1940 my dad married a new wife, her name was Edna Fox and she had a young daughter called Eileen who was about eleven years old. We moved to a new home at Gomersal which after Batley was sort of country like. Our new home was a modern semi. with a garden back and front, and an inside lav. and bath. The furniture and carpets were all brand new, talk about posh, my new step sister by the way was not rough like me but a real little lady.

I was sent to the Church of England school at Hill Top and in no time at all the vicar had me enrolled in the local church choir, if my mates from Batley found out I would never live it down, but I felt I must put the past behind me I now lived in a posh house with a real family. Edna soon had a baby, it was a boy and they called it Kenneth, my dad was very fertile. Some people came and delivered a gas mask for the baby, it was like a space suit and took a lot of skill to get the baby into it. The news that we had this baby mask caused a lot of interest and lots of people came to see it including the local vicar, and poor little Ken had to be pushed into it so that people could see his little face through the glass.

I must tell you this, one day I went with some of my mates to the Pictures at Cleckheaton which was about two mile down the road, on our return we all went running into our house and all the furniture had gone the house was empty, and my step mother was sat on the window ledge crying, I had to sort of get rid of my mates in a hurry. It turned out that my dad was behind with the HP payments and the shop had taken it all back, that was a real blow to my new image I can tell you.

I left school at 14 and got my first job, an apprentice upholsterer at small furniture shop with a upholsterers workshop, I did not do a lot of learning my trade but was a sort of general dogs body, each Friday I had to go out on a bike collecting the weekly payments. One day while having my lunch sat on a bale of padding with one of the upholsterers he got out his john willie, which was massive and said have a look at this, I just jumped up and ran over to the shop. I don't know why but I never told any one but I made sure not to be alone with that fellow again.

I only received fourteen and six a week wage, and most of my mates worked at Thomas Burnley's Textile Mill which was only 300 yards from our house in Spen Lane, Gomersal, and they were paid thirty-nine shillings. I had a chat with my dad, who by the way worked as a c.o. at the local labour exchange and he agreed that I could leave my job and go and work at the mill.

I got a job as a creeler in the mule spinning, it was a hell hole, my job was to run up and down the back of the mules changing the empty bobbins, the spinner and piecner used to scream out at you pointing at any bobbing that was running low. In my first week I was sent an errand into the cap spinning where all the women worked and I had only got half way through when a gang of young girls jumped on me and pulled down my overalls and then rubbed heavy oil all over my willie, I had to run all the way back to the mule spinning with no pants on to be greeted with a great shout from a gang of lads waiting for me at the door. A couple of days later a lad asked me if I thought I could hit a kid whose name I can't remember, I must have said yes because he came back later and said that a fight had been fixed for me and this kid at lunch time. Well I went out full of confidence because he was not as big as me but it turned out that he was a bit of a fighter and that I had been set up, with two smashing blows he bust my nose and cut my lip and I decided to give in before any more damage was done. Life at Thomas Burnley's was making life in Taylor St. seem peaceful, But things improved because I got a new best friend called Herbert Firth and he was the toughest bloke in the mill.

## HOLIDAYS

You had a full weeks holiday each year at Burnley's, we paid sixpence a week into a holiday fund to help with the loss of pay. When they started paying you for your holidays we were amazed, and thought the bosses must have gone mad to pay people for a full week when they were not working.

My dads parents had gone to live at Hunmanby, a village on the North Yorkshire coast and it was arranged for me to go for a weeks holiday. My granddad picked me up at Scarborough Station in his big car, he was not my real granddad, he had died before I was born and my Gran. had married this bloke, his name was Joss Mortimer a builder. It was a big detached house they lived in and-at the bottom of the garden there was an old railway carriage in which my brother Bob had his den. One day there was a hell of a bang in the carriage and my brother staggered out with his face all black and his eye brows burnt off. Apparently he used to make his own fireworks, and he was mixing up some sulphur and salt petre or whatever and the ash from a fag he was smoking fell into the dish and off it went, he spent the rest of the day hiding in his bedroom in case the police came round.

Across the road lived my cousin, Henry Crowther, his mother was my dads sister and she had married Harry Crowther a rag merchant from Batley, he had an even bigger house and car and had a motor cruiser at Scarborough. On the rare occasions when I met him he used to give me ten bob and on one occasion a £1. I haven't told you this before but I had been wearing Henry's cast off clothes since I came back to my dad, they were very nice but were two sizes too big for me and sometimes I got my leg pulled about them.

All these people seemed to speak a different language from me and were posher than even my school teachers. My gran. was a smashing cook and made the best meals I had ever had.

The week was soon over, what with trips out with my granddad to Bridlington and Scarborough and me and Bob walking the three or so miles to Filey and Hunmanby gap.

On my return home I discovered that the landlord wanted to sell the house and that we had to leave. Well that was the end of our posh house with a bathroom as our next home was a terrace house in Wellington St. Birkenshaw with a lav. in the back yard, one thing though we had a lav all to ourselves, at Taylor St. each lav. was shared by two houses and that caused a few fall outs I can tell you. My friend Herbert lived at Birkenshaw so we were able to go out together, I was at an age when girls seemed to become more interesting, so we went to the dances in the Thomas Burnley Canteen and at the famous Bert Shutts dance hall at Bankfoot Bradford.. We had a four mile walk home at the end of the dance and if you walked a girl home it could be six or seven miles, life was much more innocent in those days and if you walked a girl home the most you could expect was a little kiss and a cuddle, if you were able to go a little further and I mean a little further it was the highlight of the week. On most week day nights a gang of boys and girls used to meet and play games like truth or dare in Birkenshaw Park. Sometimes local people would complain about the noise we made and the police would raid us, that was real fun we used to scream out and run in all directions, if you were caught they would give you a bit of a clip on the side of the head and tell you to get off home with the words "If I ever catch you again" ringing in your ears.

When I was sixteen I received a letter from the government, saying that now That I was sixteen I must report to the town hall at Cleckheaton so that it could be arranged for me to help the war effort and perform some useful public service, so I went along in my best suit and after a little pep talk ended up joining the army cadets. I did not like the British army uniform, it was of poor quality and design with a silly tin hat, the Germans looked a lot better.

## THE NAVY

Life went on much the same at Thomas Burnley's, we worked a five and a half day week, work started at 7.30 am to 5 pm week days and 12.30 pm on Saturdays. If you were late arriving you were stopped at the main gate and had to take a quarter which meant you went back for 9.30 am. and lost two hours pay. One of the worst things about the war was that cigarettes were in short supply, often when shops had them in, queues quickly formed and you were lucky if you got ten sometimes it was only five, and even worse they were often a Turkish brand called Pasha which were better than nothing but only just. Most shop keepers kept the best brands under the counter for their regulars.

In 1943 my friend Bert went off into the Navy and although I had been promoted to piecer I was not happy at work, the work was hard and repetitive and to think of it as a career was frightening it was also dirty oily and noisy so on 14th. January 1944 on my seventeenth birthday I went to the recruitment office in Lady Lane Leeds and joined the Navy. There were other reasons, the tide was turning and the war might soon be over and I did not want to miss it, and even worse if I waited to be called up I might have being sent down the pit as a Bevin boy and that would have been worse than life at Burnley's.

I was called up and reported for duty to Skegness at a converted Holiday camp. I spent the first few days been injected, inspected, tested and kitted up, I was then interviewed and soon realised that they were not going to give me any gold braid and it was very unlikely that I would take command of a ship even a little one. It appears that my general educational standard and in particular my erratic spelling was a factor and coloured their opinion of me. They said I could choose, it was a be a stoker, seaman, steward or cook. Well we reached a compromise and they agreed that I could be an officers cook, which sounded a bit better.

After a few weeks I was sent to a camp at Great Malvern for training and then on to the Royal Naval barracks at Devonport. While at Malvern we were informed that there was a shortage of recruits for the army and a raffle took place, those whose name were drawn out had to leave the Navy and join the army, there were hundreds standing in the barrack square and you could have heard a pin drop it was so quite, I was excluded from the draw being a boy and a volunteer.

After only a few days at Devonport I was instructed to go by train and report to the Navel Barracks at Londonderry in Northern Ireland. This entailed a thirty-six hour journey by train and boat from Plymouth via London and Stranraer most of the time sitting on my kit bag in the corridors of crowded trains. I was told that I was to be on relief to cover for cooks who were on leave or sick, my first stint was two weeks at a signal station at Magilligan Point, this was a small station and their task was to challenge ships entering Lough Foyle which was the entrance to Londonderry docks. It was odd that the Ulster side of the lough was in total darkness and there was lights on the Irish side.

On my return to Barracks I was instructed to report to HMS Inman a Captain Class Frigate, I was taken to the docks by truck and was excited to see a collection of corvettes and frigates tied up side by side. Frigates were not the large powerful ships they are today but were not much bigger than corvettes, they had a small gun and depth charges and were used on anti submarine duties. I had to step over from ship to ship to reach HMS Inman, reported for duties and was shown my quarters.

The next day we went out on trials and my action station was with the ships steward in the gun magazine, suddenly the hatch above us was opened and the gunner asked for an HE., all the shells had markings on them but neither of us knew their meaning. So we took a shell at random and hoped for the best, sadly it was a star shell and did nothing for the Captains appraisalment.

The trials over, the steward and I had a sort of meeting with the First Lieutenant, he more or less let us know that the Captain was not very happy but he did give us a card that listed the markings on the shells which he felt might help us in the event of any real action. After a short stay in port the Inman and a group of corvettes left to escort a convoy to America, for the whole trip the weather was atrocious the waves were like great moving mountains and at times the ship was under water and seemed to pop up like a cork. The short walk from the mess to the galley was like dicing with death holding on to a overhead safety rope, once safe in the galley dripping with ice cold water you had to dry out in front of the ovens. In one way we were better off than our mates on the corvettes, the Inman had been built in the US and was fitted with bunks, hammocks look romantic but on a small ship in rough weather you would be better on the floor. Most of the ships in the convoy were liberty ships built for us by America and when their bows went down into the waves you could see the screws spinning round in thin air but they seemed to stand up to it, at times like this you felt grateful for the help the Americans had given us.

At the end of the trip we docked at St. Johns in Newfoundland, there were lots of other ships most of them were Canadian. It was the new year and one of the Canadian ships had had a change of roles in which the officers dressed up in ratings gear and a selection of ratings dressed up as officers. They must have decided to have a bit of fun with the toffee nosed British and a group of these lads led by a rating in a full Commanders uniform paid one of our ships a formal visit to wish the officers a happy new year. The red carpet was laid down for them and the best quality drinks were brought out, there was much laughter and drinking in the wardroom, which ended with the visitors leaving with a lot of singing and shouting unbecoming of officers, we were all having a good belly roll having being let into the secret by the Canadians, our officers by the way were not amused when they found out. I was impressed by the less formal and more relaxed relationship between officer and men on both the Canadian and American ships, particularly ashore on social occasions when they seemed to mix together in a way unheard of among the British. I was beginning to have doubts about the rigid class structure in our armed forces which I had accepted up to now without question.

We joined a new convoy for the journey home and the weather was much better, you were able to stand out on deck and see the heavy loaded ship plodding on with the corvettes buzzing round like shepherds keeping them in line. We had one call to action stations but were not able to find a submarine, after lots rushing up and down at full speed with the ship shaking like a Leeds tram we settled down and things returned to normal.

The war in the north Atlantic was now about over although I believe at the end of the war a few U-boats sailed into Londonderry and gave them selves up. Any way I was sent back to Devonport and having helped to clear up the Germans was promptly sent out to the Far East no doubt to see if I could help dispose of the Japanese. I sailed on the Durban Castle and all on board had a smashing time, playing cards with tins containing 50 cigs as stakes which would have make my mates back home jealous, and these were not woodbines by the way but John Player export, Senior Service and even Three Castles. The journey through the Suez Canal on this large ship was spectacular for an eighteen year old from Batley and I shall never forget it.

We arrived at our destination which was Colombo in what was then Ceylon. I looked out over the city in disbelief that I could be here in this land of mystery. We were taken in trucks to a transit camp just out side the city and I spent my first few days and sometimes nights making Cornish pasties and peeling potatoes for the hoards of people we had to feed.

## CEYLON 1945

In July of forty five I was sent to a Naval Station up country, it was a massive camp with lots of officers, the officers quarters were about half a mile from the ratings camp which was made up of bamboo huts. There was a very big officers restaurant and kitchen complex and the catering staff had a hut next to the kitchen. I was amazed to find that my function was that of a supervisor and on the night shift was in charge of about thirty Ceylonese staff and they had to call me Hall Master, lucky for me they were all very able and the work ran like clockwork, my job turned out to be issuing stores, locking and unlocking of stockroom doors and signing day passes so that the night staff would be able to leave the camp in the morning, spelling their names was a nightmare, it took me all my time to spell English names. One day the Petty Officer in charge, who had taken a fancy to me by the way took me in a truck to the local market. Shopping was great, about fifty young kids followed us round with baskets on their head, as we bought after a bit of haggling on the price say a hundred of this and a few hundred of that, the kids would scoop them up into their baskets and take them to the truck. When the job was completed the kids were milling around holding up their hands for payment and shouting Master, Master, the only way to pay them was to throw hands full of money into the air and stand back out of way as quick as possible.

The attention from the Petty Officer was a bit of a pest, he was for ever trying to grope me and get his hand up my shorts, telling me how well built he was and what a lovely little bum I had, he was a big bloke about ten years older than me and I tried to keep out of his way as much as possible, I was lucky in the end to leave Ceylon without being deflowered, I have tried to analyse since why I never reported him and with the passing of time I just don't know.

Regretfully can't say it ruined my future life or gave me nightmares so I don't suppose I can ask the Navy for compensation and I don't want the police going round arresting the guy.

There was an officers barbers shop and as we were a long way from the main camp the catering staff were allowed to use it if there was no officers waiting. Well one day I went to the barbers and he had just nicely got started when a group of young officers arrived and they had to sit waiting about ten minutes for him to finish with me. When he took off the sheet and they saw that I was not an officer they were not very happy, one of them gave me a dressing down, told me to stand to attention before an officer and said in a very obnoxious voice that the next time I was in the chair and an officer came in I must jump up and make way for him, leave the room until it was clear before going back in. I had to stand there and take it, it made me for the first time in my life feel inferior and ashamed of myself for not standing up to him whatever the cost. I think on that day a socialist was born.

We celebrated VJ day in the normal way, all the catering staff got drunk on arrack the local spirit, the whole camp seemed to get blind drunk. The next day we were lined up before the Commanding Officer and given a bit of light hearted dressing down with the hope that we would all soon be returning to the UK.

On leaving the station I was sent to join the crew of HMS Colossus a fleet carrier in Colombo harbour. We sailed to Trincomalee one of the worlds great natural harbours and we anchored well out from the shore. One day the pipes sounded and a voice said 'will Officers Cook Peter Hall report to the starboard gangway, what on earth could it be, well it was my best friend from Birkenshaw able seaman Herbert Firth, he had heard that I was on the Colossus and had come out to see me on a small tug boat. What with the pipes, the saluting, and the planes lined up on the flight deck it was unreal.

## CAPE TOWN 1946

Just think about it, Able Seaman Firth from Birkenshaw took out a tug boat went alongside one of His Majesties Aircraft Carriers, was piped aboard and asked to see one of the cooks from the galley.

We later received some good news, we were to go to Cape Town for a six week refit and then return home to the UK. So the Colossus set sail for Africa, I was still getting more than my fair share of what they now call harassment. One night I went to the bog to have a wee, the temperature was over 100f. I was stood wearing only a little vest when some great big matelot came up behind me and inserted a finger up you know where I gave a scream and ran for it, my mates back in the mess rolled about laughing when I told them and said I was lucky it was only his finger.

When we arrived at Cape Town there was great excitement, Cape Town had a reputation for being one of the great cities to visit with lots of bars and friendly girls. To sail in and see the background of Table Mountain with the city spread out before you was something else. The ship was soon settled in the dry dock at Simonstown, and then it was shore leave every other night, plus two weeks holiday at a local hotel. The point of the holiday was to clear the crew off the ship to let the dock workers free to get on with the refitting.

I was a bit surprised to discover the extent of segregation of the black people, there was segregation on the trains, in the bars, and worst of all on the beaches, one day me and two of my mates were standing on a promenade over looking a beach in which the black people were crowded in a small section and the whites seemed to have miles of sands to themselves. We were making a few choice remarks about what we thought about it and were overheard by a gang of white Africans who promptly set about us and gave us a good beating up, they held one of my mates over the prom. and threatened to drop him if we did not buzz off. Well we were not able to run very fast but did try to limp away with as much dignity as we could muster. our remarks on the subject of race relations were subdued, at least in public for the rest of our stay. You must be thinking that I spent most of my young life having my bum pinched or being beaten up, you must bear in mind that I am only giving you the highlights and that there was lots of long boring periods in which I was completely ignored.

The reputation of the city, in that it had some very friendly young ladies was true, we had some very wild nights out and one morning me and one of my mates decided to attend the VD testing station held each morning at the sick bay. We had to take off our pants and get in a queue, slowly moving forward towards a curtain across the room, when I got past the curtain I watched the man in front of me. A sick bay attendant held in his hand a long needle with a flat end, he held the end over a Bunsen burner and then pushed it up this sailor's willie oh my god what am I doing here I thought, as he slowly pulled it out, passing it over a glass slide and placing it under a microscope, NEXT' he said and held the needle over the burner.

On completion of the refit a grand open day was held on the Colossus with brass bands playing, fighter planes lining the flight deck, top brass and VIP's every where. There were thousands of sailors and their guests, there was no segregation on this day, every colour and creed were there. The next day with invited guests Colossus put to sea and gave a demonstration and fly past for the city to show our thanks for the kindness of the people of Cape Town. The local radio was broadcasting a live report and we were able to hear it on the mess decks. To give a bit of spice to the broadcast and no doubt distress to the Captain a few planes on landing over ran the catch wires and did a spectacular crash into the barrier. The pilots had then to be rescued and as the war was over the damaged planes were pushed over the bows into the sea, it made good dramatic radio.

When the day arrived for us to leave Cape Town, the town turned out to see us off, bands were playing, and ships and boats sounded their horns in farewell as we pulled away. We left Cape Town with a great deal of sadness it had been a very enjoyable visit in which most of us had worked very hard at establishing close relations with the locals. on the trip home we had a Sods Opera on the flight deck. A sods opera on a ship as large as a aircraft carrier is a pretty obscene affair, it is made up of songs and jokes as filthy as possible, songs like Roll Out The Barrel, Bless Them All were sung with lots of new words of the F and C kind together with a few shits and shites thrown in. The jokes were a bit sexist by today's standards but the jokes that went down best were the ones that took the micky out of the officers, the cruder the better and to roars of laughter the golden rivet jokes. The golden rivet is part of the Royal Navies folk lore. a young sailor is told how the golden rivet was the very first rivet used when building the ship, when he shows an interest a more senior friend offers to show him this treasured rivet and takes him down into the very bowels of the ship, into it's darkest corner, and points down saying there it is, and sadly the young sailor bends down to see the rivet, his trousers fall and he finds the rivet. Whether this ever happens I don't know but the story has being repeated for generations. I wonder what the story was like in Nelsons days of wooden ships.

We made a call at Gibraltar on the way home and spent our one night there trying to visit every bar in the main street. We then made an uneventful trip back to our home port, slipping in almost unseen and unnoticed which was a bit of an anti climax. The Colossus had come to the end of it's service for the Royal Navy, she was to be laid up and then sold to the French and I never heard of her again.

On the 6th.January 1946 after a few weeks working in the kitchens at Devonport I was demobilised with a gratuity of £34, a new demob suit and a train ticket to Birkenhead. It was a strange journey home no more service men and women filling the trains, and as darkness fell the lights went on, the stations were lit up, but many of the passengers were in new suits and were carrying little brown cases, and not a flat cap in sight, it was as if they had all been transformed into bank clerks, could they ever go back to the grey lives the working class suffered before it all started. Would all the talk of socialism and a new world come true. It's really strange, when Britain had the greatest empire the world had ever seen and was one of the worlds richest countries the workers lived in poverty.

## Back to Batley

When I arrived back at Wellington St. it was as if time had stood still, nothing had changed, there was a live-in kitchen with lino on the floor and a brodded rug before the Yorkist fire place, a white pot sink with a single cold tap, a kitchen cabinet which had a sort of drop down table for preparing food , together with drawers and cupboards, it was the latest thing in kitchen fittings. In the best room which was only used on Sundays, specially in winter because people could not afford to have two fires going, there was a carpet square, with a lino surround, a rexine three piece suite and a display cabinet with glass doors containing all the best china and glass ware. We still had-gas lighting down stairs up stairs we had to use candles. The bedrooms had lino on the floor with a little mat at the side of the bed, in the best bedroom they had a utility bedroom suite which was a sort of basic wardrobe and dressing table.

Life was grim there was still lots of things in short supply and although there was plenty of work wages were low and most people, even those with good jobs like office workers were only a week from the workhouse. People had to save up for a weeks holiday. Most towns had a holiday week in which the whole town shut down and every one went off to the seaside, Scarborough and Bridlington were the most popular. You stayed in one of the rows upon rows of boarding houses, some of the landladies were dragons, no keys to the front door which were often locked at 10.30, the food was basic and it made you wonder where all the lettuce served with half a tomato came from. Once you found a good one you went back year after year.

Well to get back to Wellington St. My Grandparents had died so my brother Bob who had also been in the Navy came home to live with us, I was expecting to pick up some money from my Dad because when I joined the Navy out of my fifteen bob a week pay I allowed my father five shilling a week, the government then made it up to ten shillings. We had agreed that he would save this money for me, but he said he was very sorry but times had been hard and they had spent all my money.

I did not want to go back to the mill, so I got a job as a conductor and later a bus driver with the Yorkshire Woollen Bus Co. Bob got a job with an estate agent and auctioneer in Dewsbury. In order to be near our work and to ease the over crowding at Birkenshaw, Bob and I rented a house together at Batley.

The house was at the top of King Edward St. only two streets away from Taylor St. so it was like going back home, it was an old house but it had been fitted with electric light and had a bathroom, Bob was able to get some furniture from the auction room together with a wind up gramophone. With only two people to feed and two full wages I suppose we were better off than average, we were able to buy things like gramophone records, we ended up with a large collection with people like Bing Crosby, Benny Goodman, Glen Miller, Fats Waller and Louis Armstrong.

At first you had to change the needle for each record and then a needle was made that played about ten records. and as for the sound box or pick up when we were able to buy an electric pick up, fit it to the wind up gram. and then plug it into the electric radio this was the very start of neighbours knocking on the wall.

Each town had a strong man and Batley had a bloke called Bumper Ellis, well one night Bob and I together with a mate of his from work were walking on the main street on our way home when we bumped into Bumper and he asked what time it was, this mate of Bobs was a bit cocky and replied that it was time he bought a watch, well Bumper had him up against a wall before you could blink an eye as they say, Bob and I grabbed Bumper and pulled him off, he let go of Bobs mate and grabbed our Bob. when I tried to get Bob free he let go of Bob and got me. Lucky for us Bumper was drunk and we got away in the end with only a few bruises.

## BUS AND TRAIN

About a month later I was having a drink in a local pub one Saturday afternoon and who should I meet but Bumper, I reminded him of our previous meeting and asked him if he was prepared to play a joke on my brother. He was really keen to have a bit of fun, so we drank up and I took him home with me. Bumper stayed outside looking very grim which was not hard for him, and I went in and told our Bob that I had met Bumper. We had had a bit of a set too and he was outside and wanted a word with him, well Bob went drip white and had a look out of the window, Bumper growled at him, Bob swelled up to his full height and went out to take his punishment. Well Bumper turned out to be a real sport, he gave Bob a slap on the back nearly knocking him to the floor and burst out into a roar of laughter, we then all went in and had a drink to Bobs great relief.

The winter of 1947 was one of freezing snow, snow ploughs cut a road between Batley and Morley it was single track with some passing points, I remember driving a bus on this route, the bus was just able to get between the walls of snow standing more than six feet high.

The people in the Heckmondwike district well known for their friendliness helped to make the job bearable in this period of extreme weather, bringing out warm drinks and often helping to push and dig out stranded buses.

Getting a meal when working on the buses meant grabbing a bite at the turn round point, this could be as little as ten minutes. Leeds Queen St. was well served with a little cafe at the bottom of the street. These workers cafe's which were to be found in every town in those days gave first class service to bus crews. There was a secret one in Batley at the top of Branch Road, it was in a bakers shop, from six in the morning bus crews were allowed to go down into the bakehouse in the cellar and to sit round a big table surrounded by new bread and cakes straight from the ovens. The baker and his wife served up mugs of steaming tea and new bread cakes with lashings of best butter. On a winters morning it was better than the Ritz.

There used to be young ladies who liked to travel round with the conductors and sometimes would send little letters to the driver. There was also travelling dogs, they used to stand at a bus stop and get on the first bus to arrive, it was really odd, they seemed to know when to get off. There was a mongrel terrier that used to turn up at our terminal at Huddersfield each morning and welcome each bus as it arrived, the crew used to bring tit bits for it, now and again it used to take a round trip on one of the buses, it seemed to know the last bus and after seeing it off make its way home where ever that might be, rumour had it that the dog used the local buses to get too and from the terminus.

After I left the buses I got a job as a signalmen on the railway. My first job was at Ossett station. Railway stations in those days were like the hub of the town, the Station Master was one of the towns leading citizens. Goods trains even in a small town like Ossett were in and out of the yard all day long. There was coal and wheat, sheep and pigs, news papers and parcels, horses and cattle, and one day they had to load a frisky bull who did not wish to leave home by the look of him and the time it took to load him in the van. We had a spur line which used to run to a pit at Shaw Cross which had been closed down, and we had a train and heavy gang taking up the lines and loading them up to haul away. Well the driver rang me from a I phone we had at the junction and said he was loaded up and wanted to run to Wakefield, I had the London express due in thirty mins but judged that I had time to run him, I cleared the forward line for him and pulled off the signal. It was an up hill pull from the junction, the train just cleared the junction and came to a stand, the engine unable to pull the load.

I rang control and requested an engine be sent to assist, and by the time one left Wakefield I had the express standing down the line waiting for me to clear. When the engine arrived I issued a wrong line order and sent it down the line to assist in pulling the stranded train. When engine no two arrived on the scene engine no one had run out of water so they had to uncouple it from the train and tow it up to Ossett. The engine was topped up with water then they had a cup of tea while they got up steam. Meanwhile I had the Station Master in my cabin and control on the 'phone every five minutes, people were getting upset and I felt they were looking for someone to blame. I sent the two engines back down to couple up and hopefully bring the train out.

It had started to rain and when the two engines tried to pull what turned out to be a grossly over loaded train their wheels started slipping and they were not able to make any progress. They reported to me on the telephone and I instructed engine no two to uncouple and return to Ossett, on his arrival I sent him to the cabin down the line and he crossed him over so that he could get behind the stranded train and push. It worked, I heard the whistle of the engines in the distance. the control were still ringing, the express was still waiting, and the Station Master was looking a bit sick. I intended to put the train in our goods yard and let the express go by. But alas when I saw the train approaching I realised it was too long for the yard and we had to give it a run to the main yard near Wakefield.

Because of its load it was only doing five miles an hour so the poor express had to follow it in to Wakefield at a snails pace. So if by any chance you were on a London express sometime in 1950 and were delayed for four hours now you know why.

I was later promoted to a larger cabin at Batley but I then left the Railway and got myself a job at the Post Office. My main reason was that I discovered the Post Office offered much better conditions of service and pensions, I did not know at that time but I was starting on what was to be my last job that would last for thirty years. I started as a Postman at Dewsbury and then a Postman driver at Batley. I then moved on to Leeds and started work in the Catering Department and ended up as the Group Catering Manager at Bradford HPO with restaurants at Bradford, Huddersfield, and Keighley. I later became a national executive member of the Post Officers Management Union, for which I had full time release from the Post Office and spent most of my time travelling round the country including Northern Ireland on union business.

It was an interesting and sometimes stressful life. Some weeks I went up and down to London three times with a trip to say Cardiff thrown in. At the age of fifty seven I had a heart attack and this together with thrombosis of the legs and chronic bronchitis as a result of a life time of smoking resulted in me being given a medical discharge from the Post Office.

I am now sixty eight. On retirement I took up water colour painting with some minor success, joined a drama workshop and although I was not up to much with scripted work was happy doing improvisation and did some role play work for Leeds university Medical school, I ran a painting class for the Yorkshire Playhouse and now after all these years I have written this account of my early life and hope you have enjoyed it.

By the way before my dad and step mother died they had two more children, two girls, so when I got married to Barbara Hill a Station Masters daughter by the way, I had a father, a mother, a step farther, a step mother, a brother, a sister, a half brother, three half sisters, and a step sister. But then did say my dad was fertile.

## DIPPING IN

A few people on reading my story have said that I should continue to map out my life on paper, but on reflection I have decided that it would cause me too many problems. Even in my early years I have left a few locations a bit vague so as not to identify people. My later life is interwoven with other people and if I was to stick to all the nice things it would be very boring and if I told the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth I might lose a few friends and no doubt the wife would hit me on the head with the frying pan. So I have decided to dip in here and there.

## MOTOR CARS

Going back to the days in Batley with my brother Bob, we had made contact with our mother who now lived near Retford in a small village called Ranby. Well in order to cut transport costs we bought a tandem and used to cycle the fifty miles or so, we used to set off from Batley just after midnight and arrive shattered about six in the morning. On one occasion we borrowed an old van from Charlie Stringer a famous junk man in Dewsbury, half way to Retford the blinking thing broke down, we spent hours trying to get it going and eventually found a lump of old lino in the petrol feed, we stuck to the tandem after that.

Jumping forward to the nineteen sixties I bought my first car, it was a 1936 Rover saloon which made it about twenty six years old, Barbara and me set off for London and the south coast with about £15 in our pocket and about £5 in the Post Office Saving's bank. The trip down the Great North Rd. was like a comedy film, the radiator boiled over about every forty miles and we had to let it cool down and then fill up with water, we had the boot full of quart pop bottles full of water. The A1 was not the three hour dash to London it is today but meandered through town and village, through the main streets of Doncaster and Retford and too many places to mention. One good thing about the open road of those days, there was no yellow lines and you could stop in the middle of towns and do a bit of shopping. On the way back after our grand tour about ten miles short of Retford the big end went with a blooming big bang and we had to drive the last seventy miles home at about ten miles an hour in the dark. We had to stop at a garage and get some cans of oil and spent that last seventy miles filling her up with oil as well as water. I sold the Rover for eight pounds for scrap and as it only cost me fourteen pounds when I bought it we were not too unhappy.

Our next car was a total disaster, we paid £100 for an Austin Somerset advertised in the local paper, we were like babes in the wood and bought a real duff car from a conman who brought the car to our house and without any real checks we gave him our savings and he left us the car. Every thing that could go wrong with a car did, after a new engine and other new parts week after week we gave in and I took the car to a sale on commission dealer in Leeds. Well he sold the car for thirty pounds and then would not give me my money, each time I went he gave me a different excuse, well after a while I went round with a gang of my bigger mates and we all went into his little office and he sort of changed his mind and gave me the money.

My next car was a dream, a Morris Oxford, it was only two years old and we ran it for about six years and then sold it to one of my mates who kept it through my next three cars and every time we saw him out in it Barbara would tell me off for selling it.

I could go on boring you about each of my cars, thirteen to date, but I will just say that we have never been without a car since that first Austin, we bought our first new car, a Datsun Sunny in the mid eighties and felt we had really arrived. The motor car has given us a great deal of pleasure and I feel that in years to come people will think of the days of the car as we now think of the days of the cowboy.

## POLITICS

I suppose by the time I came out of the Navy You would say I was a bit of a communist, I never joined the party or got involved in any active work with them but I did read the Daily Worker from time to time and did steep myself in the works of Marks and Engles together with books like The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists also went to the meetings Of The Free Thinkers at the Mechanics Institute at Bradford. I once got involved in a debate with a catholic priest on the existence of God in which we had a real ding dong battle, the priest had a fine sense of humour and when a member of the audience asked him what he would do if the late Henry the Eighth entered the room, he replied 'I would ask the ladies to leave'.

I got a lot of my political inspiration from the work of Thomas Pain and I feel I was too much into freedom of the individual to be happy with the communist state together with powerful central government which did not seem to fit in with Marx's withering of the state and freedom of the people. So what did I do, I went and joined The Socialist Party of Great Britain a purist Marxist party that considered the Communists to be state capitalists, the Labour Party a reformist party propping up the capitalist state, and the Tories and Liberals to be outright enemies of the working class. We had six members in the Bradford Branch spread round the West Ridding, there was Albert Yarrow from Wakefield, Vera Barrett from Bradford me from Batley and three others who's name I can't remember. We used to go round door to door like the Jehovahs selling the Socialist Standard and each year we attended the annual conference held at Red Lion Sq. in London. From then on most of my friends and my father considered me to be a bit of a nutter. Sadly I was not able to bring down the government and bring in utopia but I did get involved in lots of smashing political arguments.

On one occasion MI5 checked up on me at my place of work and asked my boss for information about me, they said that it was known that I read the Daily Worker, and that was under a Labour government.

All my working life I have being involved in trade unions and was an active member of the NUR when working on the railway and became active at branch officer level when I moved to Leeds at the Post Office. It was when running the annual Post Office Union dance at Leeds Town Hall that I met my future wife Barbara, she was a smashing dancer and I asked her to dance giving little regard to the fact that I could not dance for toffee. I was so bad that I thought it would be better if we sat down and had a coffee.

On joining the catering department I took on the job of secretary of the catering managers north eastern branch and got involved nationally with the national catering committee and from there to being a member of the national executive of the Post Office Managers Union.

To change the subject the catering managers used to attend Hotel Olympia the national catering exhibition held at Earls Court and one year I was a member of a joint Post Office and Royal Navy team entering an exhibit. There was three from the Post Office and Two from the Navy working together and wait for it, the two Navy men were both Lieutenant Commanders and I were working with them on first name terms, I did not let on that I had been a navy cook.

I drifted out of active political life and became a sort of labour voter. Each year I take my wife to the polls in the car, I vote labour and I think she votes something else and I wonder why bother going.

In 1982 I attended the TUC at Blackpool as a delegate from my union and sat and watched the union leaders. By the end of the week which the ordinary workers pay for with their subs I felt there was not much in it for them. I am still a bit of a political misfit.

## 10 SPRING GROVE TERRACE LEEDS 6

I don't believe in ghosts, there is no such thing, but 10 Spring Grove Terrace was haunted, I say' was', because it has now been pulled down and there is a kids playground built on the site. The house was a back to back terrace house and comprised of cellars with toilet, live in kitchen and large front room with a fine bay window, two bedrooms and two attics containing a bathroom. So if you wanted a wee when You were in the bath it was a long way to the cellar.

The ghost was a bloke who lived on the landing between the bedrooms, he was not a lot of trouble, but you do feel uneasy with some one just outside the door.

The light switches were solid brass and when you put the light on you could hear the click, well Harry, that's what we called him, used to turn the lights off, it was a bit odd but he never turned them on. At the dead of night he used to come into the bedroom, Barbara spoke to him one night thinking it was me out of bed, and then noticed I was there in bed beside her.

She used to tell me about him and I humoured her, until one night we were both awake in bed and he put out our light out with a click and we both saw him standing in the doorway, he was not all that clear but you could tell it was a young man, I jumped up and shouted, told him to bugger off and he seemed to go.

The very next day we moved the bed so that we could not see the door when we lay in bed. our cat, Scruffy we called her, would not go upstairs and never did, she just stood at the bottom of the stairs and her hair would stand on end.

Susan my little sister, she was about nine at the time, came to stay over night. In the middle of the night she screamed out and we ran in to her, she said a man had been in the bedroom we had to take her into our bed for the rest of the night.

Then my Mother came to stay, she liked to read in bed and she went up to bed about ten and took a book with her, about half a hour later she was banging on the floor and shouting, we both ran up and she said that I had gone into her room and put the light out.

The presence of Harry was also noted by a friend of mine who used to stay overnight from time to time and he said the room was spooky. One night Barbara, was having a bath in the attic, the second attic I used as a photographic darkroom so the attic was blacked out when I heard her screaming, I ran up to her and she was in a panic in total darkness, he had put the light out, the switch was not in the attic but down on the bedroom landing wall, that was her last after dark bath. Another funny thing, we had a tobacco jar standing on a corner cupboard in the front room, we were saving up for a new engine for the car and were putting money in this jar. One day we returned home together and the jar had exploded into a thousand pieces which were all around the room together with the money.

We had a medium lady come to the house, she said she felt him, well she would wouldn't she, but it was best not to upset him, he seemed apart from a joke or two with the lights to be harmless and have no evil intent, she warned that if we tried to hound him out he might turn nasty. So we just went on living with him, he did not come into the bedroom again but we heard his footsteps from time to time and the lights would go out now and again, but it could not really be happening because I don't believe in ghosts anyway. As I said at the start of this story the house has gone and there are kids swings there now, wait a minute' is one of those swings moving ?. But like me you don't believe in ghosts do you ?.

## **SPEELING OR IS IT SPELLING**

I started reading comics at a very young age, probably because of My life style in which I had to make my own entertainment. I played at make believe or pretending, I could be a king or better still a young prince going round doing good deeds. I taught my self to read with comics like the Dandy and soon passed on to the story telling comics. I think that in some way I started to read before I could spell, I knew all about Treasure Island and Mark Twain and later in life I used to sit and read Marx, Julian Huxley, Upton Sinclair, Bernard Shaw, Sinclair Lewis and lots more. The funny thing is that I could read and understand but there was lots of words I could not pronounce never mind spell.

I found my poor spelling to be a real problem, people say you can always use a dictionary but to use a dictionary you need to know the first letter or two. In the early sixties I was running a Refreshment Club, had an Off Licence Shop, and did Trade Union branch work, all jobs that involved me in writing and I decided to meet the problem head on, I took on the job of editor of the Branch monthly magazine and forced my self to get involved in more and more writing work. I did correspondence courses with the National Council of Labour Collages and Ruskins and in the end was able to get by with the occasional dip into a dictionary.

One benefit that can flow from a spelling problem is that you need to develop other skills, you need to learn how to speak in public with limited notes and master the art of ad libbing particularly if you are involved in National Trade Union work which can involve you in some stressful speech making from small meetings up to Annual Conference. I did discover one thing about well educated people they were often over confident and put too much weight on logic and did not make allowance for peoples self interest, emotions and as Edgar Allen Poe said mans perversity.

Now ten years after retirement I am banging this story out on my Atari ST and find that I am slipping back into my bad spelling habits, but at least I've got the spell checker that can sort out words like hte but what about Pease and piece, there and their, been and being, bare and bear and or and ore and whore..... HELP.

WE have lots of young people especially lads today who have no jobs and seem to have no prospects, many of ' them neglected their education for one reason or an other, they have poor communication skills and often have problems in reading and writing making employment in this age of the computer very difficult to find. Instead of teaching them basic wood work or sending them to boot camps why not give training in the full range of communication, speaking, reading and writing which will improve their confidence in them selves and give them a better chance in the world of work.

Last but not least if you are a young person with spelling problems do something about it and seek help.

## MY MOTHER

She was born Florence Bamforth in Dewsbury at the turn of the century I know very little of her early life except that she worked as an apprentice in a dress making shop and on leaving she worked for her mother taking in sewing work. My grandmother seemed to run her home like a work shop, I remember later in life that we had a cousin called Millicent who lived with my gran and was made to work like a skivvy doing most of the household chores. To jump forward to St.Neots my mother became distressed when the nightly bombing of London started. The sirens sounded every night and the planes often dumped their load in the St.Neots area, one bomb dropping quite near to their house. She had Peter apply for a vacant post in Retford which was Peters home town and they moved up to live in Ranby late in 1941.

I paid them a surprise visit when I had a weeks leave before I went out east. It was a bit of a shock for my mother to find her son stood on her doorstep in a sailors uniform. There was a large army camp at Ranby and each week they held a dance and my mother used to chaperone my sister Pat and her friends at these dances. My mother made friends with some of the older soldiers. mainly sergeants and turned her home into a open house, I don't know what the neighbours in this small village felt but soldiers used to come and go bringing with them fags, bottles of beer and food from the N.A.A.F.I In the evening they would sit around the table into the morning hours, on a quiet night playing solo and on the busy nights brag, shoot and pontoon, it's a wonder the police didn't raid this village gambling den.

I have told you that my mother was the worlds best dressmaker, well you should have seen her at work. she used to sit at her machine with a cig in her mouth and the ash used to get longer and longer and you just sat in fascination waiting for it to fall, but it never did, at the last minute she would pop one hand under the fag in a sort of cup and tap the cig with the first finger of her other hand.

Her customers use to bring copies of Harpers and Vogue type magazines and point out the dress or outfit they wanted and she would make it for them and this could be the simplest dress up to the most elaborate wedding dress. She would cut out patterns in news paper or old brown paper and pin these onto the customer, then cutting them to size and hey presto the dress was made, she certainly burnt the midnight oil. When she cut out the material I told her she was wasteful cutting the shapes out at odd angles and I learnt that for instance you had to cut the material against or with the weave or even on the cross for the different types of skirt such as straight, flared or pleated and that the cut of the material decided the way the finished garment would hang. After Peter died my mother came to live in Leeds and ended up in a flat in Armley, she no longer took in any work but was for ever making things for the family. Bob and I used to make work for her to keep her going we would break a zip and then have her mend it for us, she had tins full of zips, buttons and fasteners all round the flat. I used to visit her each Friday on my way home from work, I used to visit a stall in Bradford market and buy a remnant from which my mother would make me a tie. Ties had to be cut on the cross and I became an expert on selecting the best off cuts. I did by the way end up with the biggest collection of ties in the country. About 1978 she moved back to live near Pat my sister and her children and got an old folks bungalow in Worksop. On my trips up and down the A1 I used to call and see her mostly on my way home. For some reason she thought I was rich, so to tease her having received a months expenses most of it owed to my credit card I pulled out of my pockets about £500 in pound notes and sorted it out on the coffee table. When you think that her total assets were about £250 in the Post Office bank it just confirmed her view and she never let me forget it.

## VANMEN AND COLLECTORS

There was always the weekly visitor, it's really true that You never locked the front door except when you went to bed or were out for the day and even then there was a key on a length of string hanging behind the letter box and visitors just gave a tap on the door and walked in. There was the man from the Pru. every one had a death Policy and payments were as little as a penny or twopence a week and there was the man from the Provident Cheque Co. the cheques were for one Pound each and they cost one shilling plus a shilling a week for twenty weeks, the cheques could be spent in town at shops displaying the Provident sign.

My mother had the man from the Co-op visit each week he used to bring the weekly grocery order and sit down with a cup of tea and write down the order for the next week. the paper man used to call on a Sunday and he would sell cigarettes, sweets and chocolate. Although my mothers house at Ranby was a new semi there were no drains in the village so they had an outside chemical closet and before my time they told me that a horse and cart with big drums on used go come round to empty them. In my days Peter my step father had to dig a hole at the bottom of the garden and empty the closet in the hole, it was a pretty good spot for growing some very fine blooms and you had to be very careful were you walked, it might be a good idea for today to stop burglars coming in over the back garden.

Back to Batley before the war, there was the fruit and veg horse and cart, the cart was like a market stall on wheels with a fancy top often painted in fancy colours like a Gypsy caravan, he used to ring a big hand bell to announce his presence. The milkman had a sort of pony and trap and the milk was in large milk urns, you had to go out with your milk jug and he would fill it with a pint or half pint measure which used to hang on the lip of the urn. Ice cream men had a sort of three wheel bike with two wheels on the front and a sort of freezer box in front of the handlebars or a very heavy sort of hand cart which they had to push or pull round the streets, all they sold were cornets or sandwiches a penny a time.

The coalman with bags of coal piled on a horse and cart. every house had it's cellar and a grate in front of the house, you had to count the bags as he emptied them down to make sure he did not fiddle you. The breadman was a bit posh, he often had a van and a clean white smock and the man with the tingalary, they used to rent them by the day together with a monkey chained to the top of the player, they would come round the streets playing tunes like It's a Long Way to Tipperary and hoped people would go out and give them a copper or two. Barbara was brought up on various Railway Stations, mostly in the North Riding as her father who was a Station Master moved up the promotion line. She told me that at Goldsborough a small North Riding station isolated from the village they had paraffin lamps and did not even have a water supply and their water had to be delivered to them in large milk cans each day on the early morning train.

Her mothers family were farmers at West Ness near Nunington and she remembers that about three times a year a Tinker used to visit the farm. He had a fine horse and cart, the cart had every kind of kitchen utensil hanging from hooks and as he entered the farm yard you could hear the pans ringing and clanging together, the farm dogs barking and the chickens screeching as they rushed out of the way of the horses feet. The local doctor used to visit in a pony and trap and on one occasion Barbara had a very nasty cut on her forehead and the doctor was sent for. When the doctor arrived he first had a look at the nasty cut and then spoke to her father in a low voice, her father took a shilling from his pocket and placed it on the table next to her and said" not one sound out of you and you and it's yours", he then held her firm by the hair and the doctor stitched up the cut and not a sound was heard as she earned her first ever shilling.

## THE YANKS

The USA has probably affected the culture of Britain more than we are prepared to admit, I know it was an influence on my young life, the films, books, songs, jazz and big bands, the Ford motor company and of course during the war the massive help they gave in food and war materials.

Well when they arrived in the flesh as you might say, to the delight of the ladies and the dread of the men it made for a bit of friction. You see there were lots of reasons to dislike them, they all seemed so sure of themselves, their uniform were of good quality and very smart and sexy, they seemed to have lots of money and better than money or gold were the things they could get, like ladies stockings, chocolate, cigarettes and tobacco, a funny kind of whisky, and food of all kinds. When a lady got herself a yank for a boy friend the whole family benefited. Remember clothes were on ration, you only got about twenty coupons a year and a pair of ladies stockings were about three. Talking about stockings well the girls used to paint their legs with a sort of stain that dried and looked like stockings from a distance and some one had to draw a seam line down the back of the leg with a soft brown pencil.

Most of the long stay Americans were based on the many air stations from which they made the dangerous day time bomber raids in their magnificent Flying Fortresses, sadly this was for many a very short lived occupation, so it was the ground staff that tended to mix most with the local people, they liked as all men do when far from home and their mothers or wives to find a local family that would sort of adopt them and give them a home from home and if there was a nice young lady involved well that was a bonus. They were the lucky ones for remember most of the home grown young men were away doing their bit for King and Country or if they were lucky were in some nice safe base where they had found a home from home and may be a nice young lady.

You may think I take a very frivolous view of the war, I do know that for the millions of people of all nations who had been involved in the real war it was a ghastly experience and the holocaust of which ordinary people were not aware of at the time was the most dreadful incident in the whole of recorded history. That it happened in a modern Christian country is almost beyond belief and should act as a warning to us all to be no our guard against extremists of all kinds, for they spell trouble and disruption at all levels and have you noticed that when an out and out vegi comes to your house for a meal they expect you to give them a special meal but when you go to their house they think you should conform to their eating habits, if they took over the government they would make you.

Well to get back to the Americans, when they gave a dance at one of their stations it was like a different world, not just a little three or four piece band but an almost professional standard army swing band that transformed the occasion into something special, there would be streamers and balloons, a bar with fancy drinks and lots of laughing Yanks just enjoying them selves, no wonder we didn't like them.

Very many of the Americans married British girls and at the end of the war the girls went over to the States to start a new life and even today fifty years on many British people visit their families who left our shores in those far off days. We still pretend to hate them, but go on loving their films and cars and burgers and songs and in spite of all their sins have a secret regard for them. By the way talking about the Americans my cousin Millicent who my grandmother made work like a skivvy married a Yank and now lives with her family in the Florida Everglades. Pat my sister tells me that lots of the girls in Ranby married Americans and there is a great to-do in the village when they come home on a visit, she also tells that German POW used to work on the local farms and visit the village social club to flirt with the girls if they got half a chance.

## SPGB

I have briefly mentioned the Socialist Party before and I think it is worth a little more space, like I said we had six members to cover the whole of Yorkshire. Albert Yarrow was a signal man on the main line at Wakefield, he was a very handsome man and was involved in amateur operatics, he was a very good friend and was my best man when I married Barbara, sadly he died quite young in the early nineteen seventies. Vera Barrett was a school teacher in Bradford, she had a fine presence being tall and very smart with a cultured speaking voice, what they made of her when she tried to sell them the Socialist Standard I don't know. Then we had a member called Terry, he was a family man and lived on the Buttershaw estate in Bradford, he was a fanatic on Boogie Woogie piano players and used to drag us all to some very seedy pubs to listen to them playing, of the other two members only one was a regular member, he was older than the rest of us and had a Jowett Bradford van in which we all got in the back to be driven round to our meeting places or on visits to pubs. When we went down to London to the annual conference London members used to put us up for the week end I used to stay with a family called Stovolds who lived in a big terrace house in Balham.

We had a HQ in Clapham High St. which was in a converted shop with a back room together with rooms upstairs. It was in the smoked filled back room that all the learned veterans used to have sometimes heated debates on Marxism and related topics. I felt very humble in the presence of these learned elders of the Party. There was one of these senior members who was very impressive with a powerful speaking voice linked with very strong opinions who used to sit at a table and thrash all comers at chess. Well on one occasion the seat opposite him was vacant so I sat down in order to do battle, he gave me a withering look and without a word moved his Kings pawn forward to start the attack on this young upstart from God knows where. Well I must have being on form and irritated him because he made a silly mid game move and exposed his Queen which I promptly took. He let out a sort of moan and silence fell on the room as members gathered round to see his downfall. But alas he was too quick for me, he said "it looks like I made an error, he then placed the queen back on the board and remade his move. Well that seemed to put me off my stride and he was able to overcome me. I had lost my moment of glory but at least from then on he knew who I was.

I am going to tell you a secret, Barbara was not my first wife, in the early nineteen fifties I married a girl called Edith Wharton. She was a rag sorter and lived in one of the mean streets of Batley Car, but don't let that mislead you, she was a fine looking girl, smart with a good speaking voice, she had a sister called Ann who had a fine classical singing voice and Edith was no mean singer herself. We set up home in a cottage at Shaw Cross which was on the Dewsbury Leeds Road, the cottage was part of a back to back terrace and was round the back away from the main road. Facing the house was the Shaw Cross pit, on the right there was a farm and to the left there was a butchers shop where they used to kill their own sheep and pigs and on killing days you could hear the pigs in particular screaming out, the butcher had a fine reputation for his pork sausage by the way.

Edith had a very happy disposition and given that there was not much spare money we got on very well together. I by the way was into photography and was active with the Dewsbury Photo club with which we were able to have one or two trips out. Marriage in those days was mostly visits round the family, Saturday night at the pictures, a big Sunday dinner and work. At least it was better than before the war when you were lucky to find work, I remember when I used to go out into town with my dad who worked at the Batley Labour exchange, in those far off days that he knew almost every man in the town by name.

He told me that they had all been unemployed at some time or other most of them seemed to know his first name. Funny thing about my dad I never heard him talk politics or religion and I never did know how he voted, I asked my sister Margaret who was part of his second string and she said that although he gave the impression to people that he was labour she felt that he was when it came to the vote a conservative. Any way even if that were true he had a laid back and friendly way with him which seemed to be appreciated by the blokes that signed on as many public servants could be a bit on the superior side in their dealings with the less fortunate to say the least.

Well to get back to Shaw Cross and Edith, it was at this time that I left the Railway and went to work at the Post Office. I must tell you this story, I used to do a letter and parcel delivery up Bradford Pd towards Birstal and I had a parcel to deliver at a house where they had gone on holiday. There was an outside toilet with a small window that had been left open, on the house door there was a letter which said "Postman please put any parcels through the toilet window", which I did and it went splash, they had left the toilet seat up. The toilet door was locked so I took the letter and put it safely in my back pocket and it was just as well I did for sure enough a week later came the letter of complaint, it appears the parcel contained a new pair of shoes and they were ruined by the silly Postman dropping them in the lav. if I had not held on to their letter I would have been a silly Postman

Well once again back to Edith, I put in a request to move to Leeds as my brother Bob now worked for an estate agent in Leeds and was able to get us a house with an inside toilet and bath. We had just got settled down when I received a letter from a bloke in London, he said that he was a member of the SPGB and that he got a part in the Pantomime at the Leeds Grand theatre and could we put him up for a few weeks. I must have been a bit daft as I said we could, well to cut a long story short he must have been one of those extremists I have told you about and believed that Fredrick Engles stuff about marriage just being a property based thing, together with the SPGB thing about a free life for the working class and he buggered off with Edith one day while I was out at work. Well it was a bit of a blow to arrive home to an empty house and to go upstairs and find all Edith's cloths gone from the wardrobe. Its funny really for I was eventually to meet Barbara and start a new life and no doubt Edith went on to find a life with someone who did not spend all his life at work or going to union meetings.

Now I will tell you a real coincidence about twenty years later I was visiting my step mother who was very ill in the Dewsbury hospital and I decided to pay a visit to the house we lived in before the war which was on Chapel Fold not far from the hospital. Well I went to the back of the house and was looking over a wall into the a little yard at the back of the house when the door opened and out came Edith's sister Ann. She was now married and this was her home, we had a laugh about the circumstances of our meeting and talked about old times over a cup of tea.

## PETS

I just thought I might tell you about a few of the pets in our life, first there was Joey the budgie he lived with my mother at Worksop in her little old folks bungalow, the problem was that Joey never stopped talking and he was sending her up the wall. So we agreed to give him a home. We installed him at Highwood Grove and Barbara taught him even more little homilies, two of his best were "Peters gone to London" and " Auntie Betty lives in Huddersfield" when you spoke to him it always set him off and if you asked him a question every now and again the answer fitted in. Well on one occasion when I was away and Babs. had friends in she said to Joey "where's Peter" and Joey replied "Peter's gone to London" so Babs, pushed her luck and said "where's Auntie Betty", and you've guessed it, Joey replied "Auntie Betty lives in Huddersfield" well the company where amazed and Joey's reputation as the worlds best talker was established.

To go back to Ranby Peter and my mother acquired a boxer dog which was a bit frisky if not down right bad tempered at times and one day while my mother was sat at her sewing machine the dog went berserk grabbed her by the dress, luckily Peter came in, finding my mother trapped in the corner of the room he was able to get the dog off her and get Flo out of the room. He then made a sort of club out of electric cable and went back in and thrashed the dog into submission. I don't know the right or wrong of it but I do know that the dog lost it's aggressive tendency, Peter never had to hit it again and the dog did not have to be destroyed.

On a happier note there was Scruffy the cat, she was a ginger and white long haired cat whose back legs looked like Russian boots, she adopted me at Spring Grove Terrace, her name relates to the state she was in when she first arrived. She very quickly took charge of the house, she arrived just before I married Barbara and when she moved in she had to work very hard to be accepted and to convince scruffy that she meant her no harm. We had a letter box about eighteen ins. high on the door and scruffy used to first give a light tap on the flap, to be followed by two harder taps if there was no response, and finally a barrage of taps to bring us to our feet, on opening the door she often swung in hanging on to the letter box. My brother Bob lived next door with his wife Connie and when we were out Scruffy used to honour them with a visit, she would ignore all the traffic that went by or stopped outside, but when our car arrived she recognised the sound of its engine, jumped up and went to the door to be released. Bob kept canaries down in the cellar and one day Scruffy got down there and had a birthday, all the cages where pulled down onto the floor half the fronts were broken and about six birds lay dead, others were flying round in a state of terror and Scruffy was having a ball.

Round about nineteen sixty five we rented a new empty shop which was part of a new estate at Park Avenue, Allerton Bywater a mining village near Castleford. Well at first Scruffy was a very unhappy street cat moved into this strange land of woods and fields but she soon discovered mice, rabbits and birds and became the worlds greatest hunter bringing home enough bounty to feed a family . After we had got the shop going we had to take great care because many of the mice she brought home were only stunned and she would let them go in the store room and until we were able to catch them they caused havoc with our stock. The estate was half private and half council so we had council house cats and dogs and private cats and dogs, most of the private dogs were sort of small pedigrees and the council house dogs tended to be biggish mongrels, there was one lady who always complained of the damage done by those horrid council house dogs. We called the shop P & B Stores and Barbara used to keep shop while I went off to work in Leeds. We had to sell up when I went to work at Bradford and we set up home in Moortown, a suburb of Leeds.

Scruffy settled very well back in Leeds, it was her home town after all, at the back of the house there is a wood so she was able to continue her trade of hunter and trapper with the extra treat of lots of grey squirrels to run around after. She eventually died Of old age and was buried in the back garden.

Well next door there was a black cat called Portia and she took a liking to Barbara and would sneak in when ever she got a chance and settle down on Barbara's knee. One day she went into Shirley's garage our neighbour on the other side and knocked over a can of yellow paint and managed to get her self completely covered, she ran home leaving a trail of yellow paint and paw marks. She had to spend an overnight at the vets and looked a bit forlorn for a week or two with most of her hair cut off. When her owners moved away she stayed back and simple moved into our house. Her liking for Barbara grew into a sort of obsession and she wanted to be with her all the time. Barbara could do any thing with her, Portia had complete trust in her and when she was holding her she was completely relaxed, if Barbara had let go Portia would have fallen like a stone. If we had to give Portia a pill she would sit her on her knee open her mouth, pop in the pill tickle under her chin and Portia swallowed it. She was the most loving cat I have ever known but she would furiously defend our house and garden against the intrusion of any other cat, and had battle scars all over her body to prove it. In the last week of her life when she was very weak and hardly able to walk she limped after an intruder intent on attacking it. When both Barbara and me were working Portia would call and visit a local lady but after I retired she never visited her again, the way cats use people and make them do their bidding is amazing.

Just to go back to Scruffy and Spring Grove Terrace, Bob who used to collect strange things had a stuffed sea gull and much to the amusement of passers by he used to stand it at the top of his door steps, it used to keep out stray cats and dogs and it terrified Scruffy and under no circumstances would she pass it so if she was in she was in and if she was out she was out.

Now in nineteen ninety five there is a cat called Tigger and she lives two doors away, if we were to feed her we would never get rid, I feel it is all starting again.

I must tell you about Bengy, well he arrived in our garden at the peak of the red hot summer of ninety five, he was a pedigree ginger Persian which must have cost the earth, well he settled down and shared his favours with us and our neighbours on either side, we were all feeding him, brushing him and petting him, he was living the life of Riley. After about a week his owner turned up and laid claim to him, we were all very sorry to see him go. It turned out that Bengy lived about half a mile away the other side of the wood and was normally kept indoors but had escaped and they had been searching for him night and day. Any way there is a happy ending he now pays us a visit about once a fortnight, spends about two hours with us and then goes home, he is by the way here now rubbing round my legs as I write this story.

I have just remembered something and I must tell you, when we were selling the shop we had a couple call to talk over the final details of the sale, we were having a cup of coffee when scruffy came walking in and dropped a half stunned mouse at our feet. We had a real job convincing them that she had brought it in from the fields via the cat flap and that the shop did not have vermin. Now I ask you was the cat bringing us a present or was she trying to stop the sale?, you never know with cats.

## HOBBIES

A lot of people get so involved in their work that they have no time for hobbies, others watch sport like football and rugby as a sort of escape, well I have always been into collecting and hobbies, like records and books I end up with hundreds and have to catalogue them, I once worked out that I would have to play my long playing records continuously until I was ninety if I wanted to hear them all. With cigarettes it was up to forty a day at times, Barbara said what ever you do you go over the top, thank heaven you are not into drink or gambling. I used to sneak records and books into the house and hide them upstairs, then bring them into my collection when Barbara was out, and that's a full grown bloke in his forties. I once left some records out side the front door step to wait an opportunity to sneak them in, well Barbara found them and hid them in the garage and it was months before she let on. I have a feeling that she was up to my little ways all the time.

At Spring Grove Terrace I started home made wine making I specialised in the extra strong like potato, barley and elderberry. I fermented it in five gallon tubs in the cellar and as the temperature was on the low side it resulted in a long slow fermentation I used to take the specific gravity and try to convert all the sugar in to alcohol before clearing it. I normally had about two hundred bottles ready for drinking lined up on shelves in the cellar. The toilet was in the cellar and when I ran out of shelving I took off the toilet door to make extra shelves. We had some posh visitors from London and they just rolled about laughing when the lady asked were the door had gone and I explained that it was a matter of priorities and it had to be done.

I once entered a bottle of barley wine in the Ledsham village fair, there was only four bottles entered and there was three prizes, the other three wines were not clear, not labelled properly and one of them was in a sauce bottle, mine was an excellent wine in a correct bottle with a first class label and it lost, it did not get a prize, I was shattered.

I later entered a bottle from the same batch in a County Show in which there were more than one hundred bottles and it won the first prize, so either the Vicar of Ledsham was not a drinking man or the show was a little bit bent in favour of the locals.

The wine was mostly about sixteen percent alcohol and one evening I had a wine drinking party and invited some union mates, they thought home made wine was a bit of a joke and were drinking it by the half pint glass like they would beer, well they did not all make it home that night and a few had to sleep it off on our front room floor. One hard drinker was still drunk two days later.

Then there was my camera, I took my camera with me wherever I went and must have gone through thousands of films, it a great pity I did not take pictures of the old railway stations- like Little Gomersal, together with the old buses and coal mines but I wasted a lot of film on country scenes and snapshots. I have recently had a clear out giving members of my family and friends all the photo's I had of them and threw lots of the rubbish away. I did do some good work and won a few awards in exhibitions. Yorkshire TV used to have a programme called Take A Picture or something similar, it was a first class show with good local judges and involved the local people, I entered one or two pictures with some success one picture was shown by one of the judges, it was a sort of multi picture made up of about six separate shots, he said it showed a lot of skill, but then I did say they had good judges. I did a lot of good work with birds and squirrels in our back garden, one of these was part of a YTV exhibition held in Harrogate.

Regrettably YTV tried to make the show too flash and made a real mess of it, they introduced celebs as judges, reduced the input from the public and made the program a bit too slick and trashy.

Then there is my water colour painting, after I retired I attended the unemployed centre in Leeds market buildings, there was a fine painter and teacher there who's name to my shame I just cannot remember, he did the cartoons for the Evening Press in York and was a first class modern painter. He started me on the road and gave me encouragement to keep going, he would spend lots of time helping backward and slow learners in a way that I feel I could never do and I admired him for the work he did at the centre.

I shall never be a great painter but I have had some success, one of my paintings to the Post Office National exhibition was selected to go to a international exhibition to represent the UK. and a couple of years ago I won the first prize at the national exhibition in Oxford against some very strong competition. Barbara and I were treated to a free trip to Oxford with four star accommodation and I was presented with a cup by the Director.

I have given painting classes at a local authority school and at The West Yorkshire Playhouse one of the north's greatest theatres. When you think that I have heart disease, chronic bronchitis, thrombosis in the legs and am supposed to be a retired old age pensioner you might say what ever next. Well I joined a drama group, when I went to my first session I ended up with a selection of what appeared to be very middle class people pretending to be chimpanzees running round talking to each other in grunts, well things could only get better. At a later session we had to write and perform a work before the group, well I did this little story.

My family were very poor and we lived in a small mining village, we had a very fine whippet and my dad used to take it each Saturday night to a different pub a few miles away. He used to sell the dog to some punter and the very next day as soon as they let it out for a wee it ran back home, my dad had sold that dog more than fifteen times and he said he was better than any homing pigeon. Well I when I was about thirteen years old my mother lost me, she lost me playing cards, a bloke from the other side of the village was having a game of brag at our house and my mother having three fives had no money left so put me up as her stake, well he had three tens and promptly took me home to his wife. "I've won this kid" he told her with great pride. Well they gave me a bed in the attic but I only seemed to have slept a short while when this bloke, Tom they called him, woke me up and took me off to the morning shift at the local pit.

Well down the shaft we went and I got the job of pushing a little tub on a set of tram lines, there I was up to the seam and down to the shaft time and time again. There was small parts of the wall were the coal had sort of crystallised and I found one place where it was like glass and you could see through it into another shaft which seemed to be full of water. I was looking through this glass when I saw a German U-boat sail by heading due west. I told Tom and he rushed me up the shaft to see the manager, well he was an air raid warden and knew all about such things. He said that the shafts went right through to the coast and were full of water, the sub must have found a way in. Good lord I shouted the sub is heading west towards Cleckheaton it could torpedo the Town Hall. Well I knew of an air shaft on the moors and led them to it. We had sticks of dynamite from the stores, we listened for the subs engine and then dropped the dynamite down the shaft and that put an end to the attack and saved the Town Hall which is still there today, which proves that we got the German U-boat. If you don't believe me, well you go to Cleckheaton and you will see for yourself the Town Hall is still there, thanks to me all those years ago.

## MEMORY RECALL

Reading over my story brings back to me incidents long forgotten like my times on the buses at the Beck Lane Depot in Heckmondwike, relations between the garage staff and the drivers were often strained, I once rang in to report that my gear lever had become disconnected, they asked in a superior voice how I, a driver, knew it was the lever that had come loose, I then took great pleasure in replying that I was in a call box and the lever was in my blinking hand. On an other occasion a member of the garage staff was helping me to reverse, he said "OK OK OK" and bang went the back of the bus together with the tinkling of broken glass, "STOP" he said so I did and that was one bump for which I did not have to complete a damage report. During the war you were not allowed to leave certain jobs without permission, so if you wanted to change your job you had to get yourself sacked. Well there was a story about a driver who wanted to change and decided to get him self the sack. He was on a half hour turn round from Heckmonwike Green to Hightown, he picked up a bus load on the Green and took them all up to the terminus, turned round and brought them all back to Heckmondwike to a reception of police and bus inspectors and was rewarded with instant dismissal.

Then back to the Post Office, I was delivering mail at Hanging Heaton which is a village built on a hillside a bit like Hebden Bridge, well I was feeling fit on a lovely summer morning and I vaulted over a three foot wall, sadly there was a fifteen foot drop the other side, I came round to find my self being placed in a Post Office van and taken back to the office. Lucky for me apart from lots of bruising there was no real damage and after a day or two I was back at work with a warning not to take short cuts from the official route. When I first went to Leeds I had a walk on Kirkstall Road which included rows of back to back houses, well a large mongrel dog used to meet me each morning and accompany me on my round, everything went well until one morning I knocked on a door to deliver a packet and inside there was a bitch on heat, well my doggy friend went in like a rocket and there was pandemonium in the house with the dog chasing the bitch, a half dressed bloke trying to hit the dog with a frying pan and the woman of the house screaming abuse at me.

Now for a game we used to play it was called Piggy. Piggy was a game played by a gang of lads and you could make all the equipment needed to play it. All you required was a length of wood, something like a long brush handle about one inch thick, first - you cut a piece about four ins. long with you sturdy penknife, you then cut each end to a point like sharpening a pencil. Then from the remaining piece you cut a piece about eighteen inch long to act as a bat. To play the game you each in turn placed the piggy on a flat stone or brick and you hit the point of the piggy with your bat, with a bit of luck the piggy spun up into the air and when it reached it's peak you hit it with the bat. If you missed three times you missed you turn. You then had to call the score you claimed according to the distance you had hit it. The score was related to the number of jumps it would take you to reach it so if you were challenged you had to jump it off and if you failed to reach the piggy in the number of jumps you had claimed for the hit you lost the score. At the end of the game the one with the highest score was the winner.

Did you hear about the bus driver who was feeling a bit fed up, he looked in his rear view mirror at the passengers, and said "your load of plonkers aren't you" he then gently pushed on the brake peddle and they all nodded their head in agreement.

After my heart attack I returned to work for a few months before it was decided to retire me off. I attended my last annual conference and was able to say farewell to my many friends. At the conference dance I was made a presentation together with my friend David Jackson which included a display from a kissagram girl. I received a massive retirement card in which more than 300 members from almost every town and city in the UK had signed together with their best wishes.

I must tell you a little story that has just come to mind, I had just returned to work and was on my first trip to London since my illness. I was staying at an hotel in Earls Court and was ringing up Barbara in the hotel bar one evening when a very beautiful young woman approached and stood looking at me, I made the mistake of smiling at her and she then came and stood next to me looking into my eyes. I told Barbara what was happening and she warned me about my health and advised extreme caution in my dealings with this young lady. Well the pips went, I put down the phone and invited the young lady to have a drink with me. We sat together in a corner of the hotel lounge and slowly sipped our drinks, she told me about herself, that she was a princess, well known on the West End stage, she took a collection of photographs from her hand bag. They were all of her on the stage in the nude and with no clothes on, I began to feel tight in my chest and was about to have a puff from my inhaler when she suggested that perhaps we were wasting time and should retire to some where a little more private. It was at this point that I had to explain my medical condition and to tell her of my wife's concern for my health, regretfully we had to part. She seemed to have taken a liking for me because she said that if business was poor she might call back later to see if I had changed my mind. Well I went to the phone and rang up Barbara, told her what a good boy I had been and went off to bed never to see my princess again.

This little story which sticks out in my memory only because contrary to what you may think, spending the night away from home in an hotel, however posh, can be a very boring experience. If you are with a gang of your mates have a good nosh up together with a few drinks, well that's a different tale altogether.

This brings my book to an end, I have enjoyed doing it and hope you have had some pleasure reading it. I have not had the grammar corrected because I want it to read as I say it if you know what I mean.