DAN NASH

AFTERTHOUGHTS

FOREWORD

The Chronicle that follows was written spontaneously and little or no revision has been undertaken, which may account for a certain lack of sequence in the report. There have, however, been inserts of "afterthoughts" arising after reading through the material.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to those whose contribution has been essential to the production. First, to my daughter-in-law, Caroline, without whose encouragement and suggestions the job may not have been completed; to Grandson, Toby, for the design of the front cover, to Mr Michael Bayley, local historian of Maidenhead and to the "Met" Office at Bracknell, and to Mr David Dover for the finished article.

D C N

In 1906 my Father, with a friend, ran away from his home in Guildford to enlist as a soldier. He had not too far to run, since Aldershot "Home of the British Army" was but a few miles along the road. He found it necessary to be economical with the true details of his age, since he was under 16 at that time. The Worcestershire Regiment laid claim to him by random chance and the connivance of a recruiting sergeant. However, he served loyally with that regiment (at one time 29th Division) throughout his service career, which included participation in World War 1 and shrapnel wounds to his hand and leg which resulted in his being 'invalided out' of the Army in 1917.

Meanwhile, my Mother, whose place of birth was for sometime somewhat in doubt, appears to have spent her early years in East Malling, and had been "in service" at one time with her Irish Aunt Annie Steel at a public house called the Lord Bexley's Arms near Dartford and some time later with a family called Limbery-Buse, sometime resident in Tunbridge Wells and at other times in Dover. She referred to these people as the gentry.

It was at Dover Castle that her brother, Charley was garrisoned with the Royal West Kent Regiment, at the same time that the Worcestershire Regiment was stationed there. It thus came about that Charley introduced his sister Nellie to my father and romance and marriage ensued. Again, so the story goes, Dad played fast and loose with details of his birth as far as my mother was concerned, since she insisted that she would never marry a man younger than herself (men were deceivers ever). Whether she had firm intentions with regard to the maximum age at which she would marry, we are not told. Perhaps that the marriage took place on October 2nd, two days before her birthday tells us something.

It appears that even in wartime, the army was quite generous with its Christmas leave arrangements, and so I came into the world on 20th September 1916. Dad was preoccupied at the time with a serious dispute between nations currently in progress on the River Somme in France. That, together with the excitement of the introduction of the military tank coming into use for the first time five days previously, meant that he was not aware of my arrival for many days.

I might have been born in Maurice Town in Devonport where my Mother was in lodgings with a lady she called Ma Darch. (I met this lady when I was about 14 - she called me my "My flower"). Devonport being a naval base at the risk of attack from sea or air, Mother decided to return home for my nativity to the safety of East Malling - a quiet Kentish village a handful of miles west of Maidstone and about three handsful of miles from Chatham another naval base. Maurice Town was suitably rewarded with the consolation of having the name Maurice included as the third of my Christian names; the two first being Daniel and Charles awarded in honour of her two brothers, in order of seniority.

Now comes a lull in proceedings. Like most folk I don't recall being born. My first recollections begin at the age of two or three years. Dad, it seems, was working in a sweet factory (Mansfield Chocolate Factory) in Mitcham where we lived and Ted, my brother, and I used to wake in the early mornings to discover if it was toffee or chocolate left on the bed-side table between us. Quite soon after this the family moved into the shop in Fulham at 195 Dawes Road. Mother at this time was busy fighting the

authorities for a decent pension for Dad who had been honourably discharged - wounded from the Army. She did well in refusing to accept a lump sum in lieu of pension for life; a shrewd move as it happened since he drew his disability pension up to the age of 85

Meanwhile at some 60 miles to the North-west, another story was beginning to unfold.

In 1937, Poet John Betjeman had written:
"Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow"
Three years later they did fall but they were not friendly. Barrage balloons were floated and a smelly smokescreen rising from oil drums, lit by Italian P.O.W.s was set up, and a mock Estate was erected a few miles away as a decoy.

Just outside Slough is or was a suburb called Chalvey, where in December 1919 a happy event was expected in the Holbrow family: come Christmas time a baby was to be born. The weather on Christmas Day was windy and wet, with frost to follow the next day. I am informed by the Met. Office, that three days prior to Christmas the weather had been wet and gusty and the thermometer registered but a few degrees above freezing. So out of doors life would have been uncomfortable in those austere days about a year following the end of the First World War. Sadly, indoors matters did not go well either - the happy event became a tragedy. The baby was born, but, as was not uncommon then, when childbirth was invariably at home and money and facilities were not what they might have been, the mother, Anna Holbrow, died. A doctor's presence would possibly have helped - in the event, however, cost was a factor it seems.

The father, no doubt distraught by the event, was keen to depart the scene, and within weeks, was away across the sea to carry on his occupation as a Master Baker in Hamilton, Bermuda, where he remained until his death in 1954 at the age of 63. Thus it came about that the baby girl now christened Nancy Joyce, never came face to face with either of her parents.

So, here was a baby girl in the house of a friend where the mother had been confined. What to do? It seems that family members had things to suggest about the disposal of baby Joyce, the orphan child, but were in no hurry to undertake her upbringing. Eventually the paternal grandmother accepted this demanding undertaking at the age of 55 after raising six children of her own. This, despite being afflicted with serious leg ulcers.

The distant father was economical with his communications with his daughter; usually then to advise her of how to order her life. Another economy he exercised was in the matter of material support, which gradually decreased and eventually ceased.

Interestingly, the Northern end of the village of Chalvey where the early scenes of this story were played out has subsequently been demolished to make way for a section of the M4 Motorway and twenty-four hour road traffic between Junctions 5 and 6 runs over the site.

In 1938 at the age of 19 when I met Joyce, she was, like myself, working in the City of London, with a firm of accountants named Keene, Shay, Keene in Broad Street close to

Liverpool Street Station. We found we both attended the same Evening Institute for Further Study, belonged to the same cycling club, as well as having other things in common. She had attended the Eliot School in Southfields and had learned shorthand and typing working after school.

We were able to travel together by London Underground to Mansion House Station. We met often for lunch and often after work went to the Stoll Theatre in Kingsway. We also attended Promenade Concerts at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place, where we saw Henry Wood conducting and heard performances by luminaries such as Arthur Rubenstein and Dame Myra Hess. Promenaders paid 2/- to stand or, at the cheapest, 3/- to sit.

Joyce lived with her Grandparents until she married at the age of 20. The house was in Southfields close by Wimbledon Tennis Courts.

Circumstances were straightened; family income dependant upon the wages of an Aunt Gladys, who worked as a "Nippy" in a Lyons teashop, Grandma took in laundry on quite a large scale, some of which Joyce would collect and deliver, and Grandpa, a Boer War veteran worked, when work was available, as a scaffolder.

Memory is somewhat blurred for the next year or two. Brother Ted was sent off to live with Gran at East Malling, I was sent to the local St. Thomas's Catholic School because it was the nearest; maybe Aunt Annie had some influence here. I was expected to attend Mass every Sunday or to have a good excuse for not doing so. The nuns were strict disciplinarians I recall, one teacher - a lay person - chastised me for breaking my pencil point. It couldn't be said that I was agog with pleasure at the experience. Next I knew, my sister was born, over the shop. She was christened at the same local Catholic Church - Aunt Annie's pressure here, almost for certain. The latter was present at the ritual, and caused a certain stir when the "names for this child" were requested. They were to have been simply, Eunice May, but said Aunt added "Peggy". It could have been that an Irish song at the time was popular - it was called "Peggy O'Neil". I was sitting in the shadows, my presence barely noticed as I witnessed these proceedings.

Shortly after this Ted was recalled from Gran's to be replaced by myself and I spent from, it must have been later 1920 until about 1928 in East Malling. Happy times.

Gran lived, had always lived, at the house where I was born on the Rocks, East Malling at the top of the hill, next door to the hop and fruit farm. The house was simplicity itself - most things were in those times - the smallest and at the end of a terrace of six country cottages. Two up, two down, low pitched and lit by oil lamps and candles. Grey stone walls up to the first floor, then ship lap timber to the slate roof. Downstairs, floors of red brick covered by coconut matting and a rag rug before the kitchen range, black-leaded weekly, and sole source of heating for the whole house, the singing kettle a permanent feature and filled with water from the outside well, tap water to arrive many years later. The coal fire gave rise to winter chilblains and a curled up cat. Through to the whitewashed scullery at the rear with its shallow, yellow stone sink and a washing copper in the corner. A door from the scullery hid the stairs leading to the two bedrooms above. Between the living room and scullery and beneath the stairs was the "coalhole". The furnishing was simple: a drop-leaf table under the window, covered with American cloth and upon which stood an oil lamp for lighting and from which my Uncles lit their cigarettes - the wick needed "trimming" frequently. On the window sill

two plants stood; one always a geranium and the other always a shamrock plant. The five chairs around the table were used for dining as well as for general purposes. Otherwise, a tallish chest of drawers containing all that was considered valuable. The mantelshelf bore a tea caddy, the chapel key and a chiming clock, which had been silenced and was adjusted to the dictates of the clock on the church tower. As a gesture towards art, on the walls were some small prints of rural scenes and a poster sized portrait of King Edward VII.

No inside loo, just an outside privy 20 yards up the back garden path; a place I avoided after dark: I didn't like the spiders. The toilets were simply buckets with rough wooden seats set above them, and emptied weekly by the 'night men! Goodness knows how the really large families coped with just one bucket per family. We thought nothing of it. It was the way things were.

The two upstairs rooms were again low pitched; that at the back smelling of apples stored under the bed. The front bedroom window looked out over the front garden with its rows of potatoes and a rhubarb patch: thence across a quarter of a mile of open fields to the Southern Railway whose steam trains could be relied upon to be on time to the minute. They stopped for about three weeks in 1926 because of the general strike. If you craned your neck to the right you looked over the garden wall into the hop-pickers' huts and beyond them to the oast house and hop kilns, their soporific aroma drifting in September. Served daily by the village baker and milkman in their pony traps. Rent 3s 6d per week - i.e. 20p approx.

I remember, too, my two uncles, both farm labourers at ten shillings - 50p a week- until one became upwardly mobile and became a plate layer on the Southern Railway at 12s 6d per week. My Aunt May worked in the Upper Mill as a rag cutter (provide your own blade) receiving, I've no doubt, a much lower wage.

Mind you, my Uncles could obtain 10 cigarettes for 2d (ie1/120 of £1) less than 1p today. Gran and Aunt May were snuff takers - a common practice in the village but not openly acknowledged (unlike in Regency Times). I was frequently sent down to Polly Iggulden's for 1/4 oz of Wilson's SP (Snuff powder).

The house, of course, was Gran's. She received her Old Age Pension of ten shillings per week from the Post Office. She was, to my young eyes a very old lady, all pensioners then were very old. She dressed in a long black skirt reaching to the ground and protected by one of her two aprons - a "working" one of hessian and for Sundays an apron of flowered fabric. She was Victorian in her ways, her views and her dress, adding an extra hair piece to her coiffeur when she went out, which was, with one exception, only ever on Sundays to Chapel - Wesleyan Chapel that is; in Chapel Street. She was strictly religious and was caretaker of the Chapel key, an object of about 8" long weighing about half a pound.

Gran kept the cottage scrupulously clean, a weekly scrubbing of the kitchen lino and whitening of the back step. Monday was wash day when the copper was lit, the scullery filled with steam and the copper stick used to stir the laundry in its hot water re-inforced with washing soda and Rinso. A product called Recket's Blue was added to the laundry to whiten the whites. No spin dryer so washing had to be hung (in the sun hopefully) on the washing line, or on a 'clothes horse', adding to the already steamy scullery. Monday was also cold meat day, when the remains of the Sunday joint from Mr. Hulse,

the butcher in Mill Street, provided the meal.

On Tuesdays the flat iron was heated on the kitchen hob and spat upon to test its readiness for service. The same method of heating was the practice for the heating of the curling tongs used to wave Aunt May's hair.

Gran was a very good cook, learned 'in service' most likely. When I came home from morning chapel on Sundays, there was an aroma of apple turnovers. (The American Mom's apple pies were no match for these). She also made rock cakes, and, especially for me, with desiccated coconut. She often sang to herself as she worked, I, alas, never took the trouble to learn the words, but they were mostly humorous from the Music Halls! With no radio or visits, I've no idea how she learned them. In her leisure time (if any) she read the Woman's Weekly or Old Moore's Almanac. She found time, too, to teach me to read using the 'old fashioned method' but it worked. I cannot recall her ever going to an optician or dentist, although she wore glasses and false teeth. She was never, ever, profane; the strongest expression she used was 'Oh! Bother'. She probably avoided saying 'drat' it being a four letter word.

I was sent off to Chapel twice on the Sabbath and to ensure my attendance carried my "star card" to be stamped by the Superintendent. Little did Gran guess of the dodge some of us boys used by means of wild poppy heads to falsify our star cards which would not have held up against close scrutiny had anyone taken the trouble.

The one exception to Gran's confinement to the cottage other than on Sundays, had to do with the matter of income. She was able to augment this by going hop-picking in the Autumn and earlier in the year by fruit picking and pea picking, both of which meant being out of doors and close to home; it was, too, a means of social contact.

School holidays were arranged to coincide with the various harvests. (In Lincolnshire, I believe holidays fitted in with potato picking.) This had a double effect - children were able to help in the orchards and hop fields, also housewives were able to know where their offspring were whilst they were engaged in this seasonal work. Thus I turned out on some very early frosty September mornings into the hop "garden" next door. Gran always had a half bin with the same old lady; name escapes me, but she was partly disabled and never cheerful.

Hop growing was ritualistic. In the early Spring, the hop "planters" selected the new growths of this perennial plant, two to each "line". Shortly afterwards came the "stringers" always men, walking on stilts about 8 ft high using coarse coconut string to form rows of trellis work 6' to 9' wide for the vines to grow up. There were two main patterns: the umbrella and the alley, the rows being about 7 or 8 feet wide. Finally came the hop tie-ers who trained the vines up the string - easily, since the string was coarse and the vines themselves were harshly rough as one learnt if one scraped along a bare arm. The vines grew fast 4" to 6" a day to a height of about 15 feet with roots going down 12 to 15 feet.

The crop was ready about the end of August and the village was alert as to progress. Then picking began, pickers being local plus a contingent from London's East End.

We paused for cold tea at about 11 o'clock, time having passed so slowly. Again at about 1.00 p.m. we stopped for a dinner of bread and cheese and a pickled onion if we

were lucky. Then on again; a monotonous slog until a horn was blown at about 6.00 p.m. to indicate the cease of work. Gran would note my restlessness and usually at about 4.00 p.m. would send me home to wash my hands which were black - literally. My arms were scratched by falling vines and I had had my fill of the most exotic and curious insect creatures. The house was empty and wide open upon my return - not that there was anything worth stealing. I used an abrasive called Vim powder to clean my hands, and the water turned a bright green as my hands turned white. Home was the more welcome since on the hop field there were no toilet facilities.

There was little to break the boredom during the day; just once or twice a day, depending upon the demands of the oast house, the measurer came to empty the bins. He used a specially designed bushel basket, emptying the hops into a “poke” (these were large square hessian sacks) and calling out the number of each bushel; complaining at each visit that there were far too many leaves amongst the hops. A tally man entered the score in his book against your bin number. We were paid about 2 1/2d per bushel (1p approx). The pokes were lifted on to a flat farm wagon and pulled by a huge carthorse, through the hop field, past the tar tank (where the bottoms of the hop poles were dipped for protection) to the oast house, often with one or two of us youngsters sitting atop. The hops were emptied and spread across the oast house floor to dry. The dried hops were then heavily compressed into huge cylindrical ‘pockets’ about 8 feet in length with a 30 inch diameter ready for transport to the various breweries. Style and Winch was a well known local brewery at that time.

The only other diversions were perhaps rain, or the occasional argument breaking out amongst the Londoners.

A bright spot, however, was the attendance of the lolly man, who heralded his arrival by ringing a bell in muffin man fashion. He was ancient and dirty with a perpetual dewdrop at the tip of his nose. This fascinated us but hygienically bothered us not one whit, nor the fact that his sweets were not ready-wrapped, but dispensed by grimy hand into a small white paper bag. We didn’t complain, for, after all, he charged only a farthing for his products which were limited to pear drops, bulls eyes and milk drops.

The East End hop pickers were, to us, both exciting and curious. In late August/early September these Londoners came by train to East Malling for “hopping”. They walked from the Railway “halt” up the Rocks to the hop fields which stretched from the oast house to the Heath. They lived in hopper huts at the farm and the house where I was born looked over the garden wall into the hutted area. For a few weeks they brought about a change in village life. They filled the park and the pubs ‘though not the church or chapel with their noise and unusual cockney accents. During the weekdays they cooked on open fires in the area between the rows of huts - alfresco but not exactly barbeque. On Sundays they took their meat joints down the hill to Mr. Colegate, the baker, who kindly roasted these in his bread oven. Weekdays were not too noisy, since early rising was the order of the day; but weekends, after picking stopped at midday on Saturdays, were somewhat rowdy. The pubs “turned out” at 10.00 p.m. in those days but they brought full bottles with them to the huts and enlivened the night with their noise and singing. There was usually someone amongst them to play the “Jews Harp” mouth organ or banjo for accompaniment. Although there was not a great deal of fraternisation between them and the villagers, we missed them when they returned home.

Fruit picking I preferred for its compensations, i.e. a later start to the work due to morning dew and the fact we were permitted to eat the product (not all of it, of course) as we harvested. Red currants were easy picking, since they grew in bunches; black currants had to be picked almost singly. Raspberries were favourite, they required less bending, were larger and more palatable. We picked these into "punnets" which, when full, were taken to the end of the row for collection. As the season neared its close, the fruit were soft and squashy and, when full, punnets were emptied into barrels containing a few inches of water. When full these were transported to Hartley's jam factory. Gooseberries were unpopular, as it was necessary to bend low to pick them from bushes which attacked the hand with their thorns. Pea picking was different; they grew on the ground necessitating a kneeling posture to reach them. They were nice to eat, especially the sweet young ones. No one had yet given "pick your own" a thought so strawberry picking was also an activity.

Apples, plums, pears and cherries were left to experienced ladder men, we mere mortals were considered insufficiently proficient. The cherries needed protection from the birds; so old tin pans were hung from a branch and these could be pulled by a long string and allowed to crash noisily against the tree trunk. There was competition for the job of 'bird scarer' amongst my contemporaries - it was worth a shilling per afternoon's session. Later, an automatic shot-gun (blanks of course) was brought into use.

So much for our vitamins; for our protein we would have been looking out for the odd wild rabbit or wood pigeon, these to augment our garden production of potatoes, cabbage, beans, rhubarb etc. and damson fruit for jam and wine. We kept a dozen or so one year old laying pullets for their eggs and later to grace the dining table. We accumulated a surplus of eggs. This being before the home freezer and when the "Frigidaire" was for the rich, the surplus was accommodated in a galvanised (not plastic) bucket containing a preservative called isinglass.

Encyclopaedia Britannica admits hops into the category of fruit. I may have mistakenly considered these to have been palatable during my experimental stages of infancy and to have found to my concern and discomfort that indeed they were not so. However, in my mature years, I have reconsidered the matter and have come to enjoy their benefits in another form.

A common sound in the village was that of the church bells. The ringers practiced during the evenings, led by Old Charlie Newman, from the Rocks, who made his way by wheelchair. Sometimes a single bell would toll to mark the age of the passing of some member of the village community. Gran would listen to count the number of times the bell tolled and would say: "Oh that must be poor old Mrs. so-and-so. I heard she was ill." She rarely had to count above 50 or 60.

When I first lived on the Rocks, the road surface was of crushed stone and when later it was treated to a surface of tarmac, we children, who had always had the advantage of playing outside on the traffic free road, were now able to chalk our hop scotch squares on the new medium. No, it was not graffiti, because the rain washed the chalk marks away. We also played at skipping with a rope stretched across the road to admit up to four to six "skippers" at a time, and lowered occasionally to allow the passage of a bicycle or a pram. Hoops, too, were another pastime. They were of metal and we would often let them run away, down the hill from the old "Rock Tavern" so that they would smash against the barn wall opposite the "Prince of Wales" pub and break. This

gave the excuse to take the broken hoop for repair to Cornfords Forge, where, with luck, we might also witness a horse being shoed. A great deal of shoeing went on, since most traffic was horse drawn - traps, wagons, hearses, ploughs. Tractors were known but not common. Thus farming was labour intensive, the main activity in ours and other local villages.

Our other games included tops, five stones or knuckle bones, and fag cards, flicked against a wall, conkers, of course, in season and marbles. We boys made catapults, wooden swords, bows and arrows and slings and whistles from elderberry twigs. At times we indulged in rather rough games of tag, hide and seek, "Releaso" and "Kingey". We wore boots rather than shoes too and grey flannel shirts with short trousers. Perhaps our elders preferred knees with gravel-rash to long trousers with holes in the knees in those frugal days. Winter always brought snow, usually fairly deep snow, giving rise to downhill slides, unpopular with adult pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists. Hectic snow balling came into its own, occasionally reaching vicious stages, as when boys from "down the village" challenged. It was not unknown for the odd pebble to be "enclosed" within a hard white missile.

I feel sure we were never intentionally malicious but standards have altered since the 1920s which followed but a few years after some horrendous goings on on the continent of Europe which had hardened society generally. In any case some things we did then were never questioned by authorities that we invariably respected. For example, boys' bird-nesting was not considered heinous. Teachers would suggest that the removal of one bird's egg from a clutch of seven or eight was excusable though perhaps not encouraged and later a woodwork teacher in Fulham did not question my making a specimen box for eggs such as I had seen in the Natural History Museum. Wild birds I suppose were more prolific and not always made welcome by growers of soft fruits especially cherries. "Scrumping" too, was seen as more of a challenge than a crime. We knew that, if caught, we would get a "thick ear" from the farmer (where were our human rights?) and a thump from Dad or Uncle later when he got to hear of it. It just went with the territory. Preferable to being picked up by the Police and hauled before the beak, culminating in a criminal record. Nor did we hesitate to pick honeybees by the wings from off the Michaelmas Daisies to chase the girls, screaming, down the road with them. The girls would run a mile if you just pretended to be armed with the offending weapon. I came to see these things in a different light as I grew older.

The girls, bless them, were far gentler creatures, and were content with their skipping, hop scotch and producing miles of chains of woollen fabric with their "cork stitch" and impromptu play acting.

About twice a year there would be a pig killing, when our neighbour, Brad Sampson, who lived at the opposite end of our row of cottages, would despatch one of his pigs - kept in a sty, usually six strong at the end of his garden. The excesses of the sty were always sluiced off into a trench and used to manure his runner beans. This invariably enabled him to carry off first prize for runner beans at the Annual Village Flower Show and Fete, held on the Twisden Estate, along New Road opposite to Clare Park. Once a day, a great clamour of squealing came from the sty in anticipation of feeding time. The food consisted of a hot mash of kitchen scraps, bran and small potatoes which were called chats. We children, with luck, might managed to lift some of these latter at the cost of scalded fingers from the passing buckets, but they were lovely. After the pig killing and dissection, various portions of pork would be offered around the local

neighbourhood at no charge. Gran's share always came in the shape of pig's fry (liver).

Brad Sampson also made himself responsible for the annual Guy Fawkes Night enterprises, always looked forward to by all.

The village school was the centre for various activities, particularly as a C of E school it was closely associated with the church community and the Rev. Hamilton (I believe was his name) came to the school often. The Church figured largely in village life. Our Church, St. James the Great, had a powerful influence over village life; not only for christenings, marriages and funerals because the majority of the population at the time, were, unlike today, quite religious. The Wesleyan Chapel was also well attended with few empty seats at the Sunday evening service. In fact, village affairs were left largely in the hands of the local rector, local headmaster, Dr. Dudley and Squire "Billy" Wigan, whose daughter, Caroline, taught at the school. I attended, first, the Infant School, with Miss Swaffield in charge, supported by Miss Rutherford who taught piano privately and was noted as a singer. (We children were intrigued to watch her performances as her lower lip used to tremble violently as she sang).

At about the age of 6 or 7, I moved into the Primary School. Here the headmaster was a Mr. Biggs, who lived with his sister, Miss Biggs, in the school house; she was also his assistant, together with the aforementioned Miss Wigan. Soon Mr. Biggs was to retire and with his sister leave the area, and the school was in the hands of Major Acton. Many ex-service officers retained their titles at the end of World War One. Major Acton grew his own tobacco in the school garden and introduced one of the early cars into the village; a two seater A.C. Being the son of an old soldier, I got on well with him. Years later, after his retirement and post World War Two, I visited him in his retirement bungalow in Dymchurch; he still grew tobacco and cured it.

School was a happy experience with a sizeable religious content and moral teaching. We were not put under undue pressure and the normal flow of events was punctuated by special days. Empire Day gave rise to displays of Union Jacks and processions including imitations of members of our colonies together with their flags and costume and, without fail, the figure of Britannia in a wheelchair. All this accompanied by patriotic songs and hymns. May Day followed with its May Queen, Maypole dancing, with girls in white frocks and boys being polite to them for a change. Armistice Day was a sombre affair, accompanied by more flags, bugle calls and lots of marching in step.
"Twenty-eighth of May
Oak Apple Day,
If you don't give us a holiday
We'll all run away" was the ditty of this unofficial celebration of King Charles II hiding in an oak tree to avoid his enemies, so the story ran.

On this day you were wise to carry an oak apple button hole or be exposed to the treatment of boys carrying stinging nettles and recall, boys wore shorts in those days.

As for the other members of the household; there were two Uncles and an Aunt. Uncle Dan was moody, muttering darkly of the Black and Tans - to do with the Irish situation in 1917. He remained in farming throughout his career except for service in the First World War, when he served some time in India and Mesopotamia. I believe he may have contracted malaria at some stage. He sometimes would take me with him as he

drove a horse and cart, carrying farm implements and produce between the farm in East Malling and West Malling Southern Railway Station. This may have been because the goods were too heavy or cumbersome to take up the steep steps at East Malling Halt, whereas West Malling station platform was on a level with the street, and trains more frequent.

Uncle Charlie was as extroverted as Dan was introverted. He was well known in the village, cycled around quite a lot and played football for the village team in Craven Park, which after World War Two was turned into a housing estate. He smoked, as did Dan, and drank regularly in “The Ship” by the Station until closing time, after which he walked back home calling en route at the “Prince of Wales” for a session of after hours consumption. I was the subject of his teasing at times, but this was inoffensive; usually resulting in my laughing with him.

Both brothers married girls from West Malling; Charlie’s wife was May Relf and between them they produced six offspring. Dan married Lil’ Taylor; only one daughter - Florence being the result of their union. My Mother didn’t like Lil’, for whatever reason, I know not. On one or two week-ends when Mum and Dad drove down to Gran’s to see me, if their visit should coincide with a visit from Dan and Lil’, Mother would go out of the back door to sit on the wood-chopping block to avoid Lil’.

Aunt May was the youngest of the family and stayed at home. She went daily to work at the Upper Mill as a rag cutter- always on foot, taking sandwiches and the inevitable bottle of cold tea. The village boasted three mills: the upper, middle and lower, all powered by the same water course flowing through the village. The upper and lower were paper mills, the middle mill was a flour mill. Each evening she came home and sat straight down in the armchair in the corner by the fire, and the tabby cat “Wimmie” sat upon her lap whilst she read the then equivalent of Mills and Boon from Boots 3d library. Never once did she offer any help in the house, never dust nor wash up and certainly did not offer to scrub the floor. Every Saturday she would venture by train in the afternoon to Maidstone for the weekly shopping, including invariably one pint of whelks, which would be put into vinegar for Sunday tea. Judging from her demeanour I suspect she may have taken a “tot” or so during the trip. She was not one for excitement. Her most daring exploit was to come home from Maidstone one Saturday with her hair “bobbed” much to Gran’s surprise and disapproval. At work she partnered a Mrs. Crampton who fell terminally ill. Being aware of her possible demise she persuaded May to undertake to “look after” her husband, Charlie, after her death. Thus, it came about that May became Mrs. Crampton and the family found itself with two couples called May and Charlie.

The marriages of these three siblings could hardly be said to have been celebrated on a large scale. I saw Charlie go off to his nuptials one Saturday morning on his bicycle. My brother Ted claims to have been present at the wedding of Dan and Lil’. Aunt May married some time after I had left East Malling to return to Fulham. Joyce and I were married some 15 years later. Our wedding expenses, to include: choir and organ, church fees, catering for 30 guests and hire of church hall, were covered at the cost of just over £10. (I have the receipts to prove it).

Anyway, there we were, a family of five living in a two bedroom cottage. Dan and Charlie shared a double bed in the back bedroom; Gran and May shared a double bed in the front bedroom, whilst I enjoyed the comfort of a small bed tucked into a corner of

the same room. Upon the assumption that I was asleep, May would recite the village gossip, including references to some girls by name who were no better than they should be who had allowed themselves to be "interfered with" and found that now they were "in trouble". Gran's reaction was usually, "Fancy that; who told you?"

During my time at Gran's, Mum and Dad would come down from London on the motorbike and side car (Matchless LX3756) bringing brother Ted with them and we would go off into the countryside, perhaps to catch sticklebacks in a jam jar, (Yes, you really could do that with a worm on a bent pin on the end of a piece of cotton tied to a stick.) or we would play in the woods and often to the old stone quarry near the Isolation Hospital where we would play with the tip-up trucks on rails, the latter being most dangerous and quite forbidden, of course.

I think, perhaps, the most exciting event during my stay in East Malling was when the first aeroplane I had ever seen flew over the village and promptly fell out of the sky, up at the Heath. A Frenchman was a survivor, and the village Headmaster, being the only individual to understand any of his language, took a great deal of credit therefrom. Many locals visited the wreck, taking home pieces of timber as souvenirs.

After I left Gran's, my sister Peggy took my place there and passed through the various schooling stages as myself, a difference being that she stayed for a much longer period, eventually attending Maidstone Girls Grammar School from whence she moved into successful training as S.R.N. at St. Heliers Hospital in Surrey: Subsequently she spent the earlier part of her career caring for military wounded from U.K. and U.S. forces at a hospital in Basingstoke, Hants. She later, as did a number of her contemporaries, saw service as a "Nanny" to a private family. The parent of one such family was in shipping and arranged a berth for her on a trans Atlantic liner when she sailed to the United States to become a G.I. Bride in Catonsville near Baltimore on the Eastern seaboard of the U.S.

I think the main reason for my Mother sending us to stay with Gran was not so much to relieve the pressure on the accommodation at Fulham, as for an excuse to augment her Mother's income by paying her generously for our "keep". Gran's "pride" would not allow her to take charity.

The hurly burly of town life in Fulham was a great contrast to life in the quiet countryside of East Malling. There was limited greenery only at the rec' or Bishop's Park or Parsons Green - poor substitutes. The clean air and morning mists of Kent were replaced by a polluted atmosphere and "pea soup" fogs. After the friendly, healthy atmosphere of a mixed country school one found oneself in the aggressive, crowded classes of Sherbrooke Road Elementary single sex school. I was to find myself in single sex schools as a pupil and eventually as a teacher for the next thirty-four years.

The School was but 200 yards from the shop in Dawes Road in Fulham and the School bell could be clearly heard from there. It was on three storeys - infants at the ground level, boys on the first floor and girls at the top, using separate stairways to reach them. The Headmaster here was Mr. C. W. Radley. On his staff were Messrs. Paine, Verncombe, a Mr. Woods who taught singing, Mr. Hancock for woodwork and Mr. Downham. The latter was keen on sport, especially swimming. He it was who met us at Walham Green Baths in the early morning, once a week and took us back in a crocodile to School, about half a mile's walk. The "back marker" was deputed to drop

off at Hemming, the Bakers, to pick up "stale" cakes (for free) as we passed.

As juveniles, we were able to obtain a season ticket at the baths, this was a piece of 1/4inch laminate, about the size of a modern credit card, showing our name and school on its face. With this we could then gain admission to the 3rd class bath for 2d a session, i.e.. from about 2.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m during weekends and school holidays.

Mr. Downham had invented a machine, a sort of wooden frame with cords and pulley and a weighted box for we boys to learn to do the crawl stroke properly. This was at about the time that the U.S.A. Olympic swimming champion, Johnny Weismuller was breaking records, which made us all very keen.

I would have been about twelve years old when I left Kent and was quickly in the top class at this Elementary School. Having caught up with my brother, he and I sat together in a double desk in class.

My Father, Bert, as he was known, wasn't keen on his children's education, but Mother was and ours being a matriarchal household, Mother had her way in the matter. First, Ted was moved to a secondary (as against elementary) and later to be called grammar school in Chelsea known as Sloane School. His, hard to come by, four guinea a term school fee had to be found nevertheless. Within a year I joined him there with fees now being three and a half guineas each. In my case I was young enough to be able to sit and to pass the so called Supplementary Junior County Scholarship examination, which reduced my tuition fee to nil. Part of the package was that at the same time a payment of 1s 8d per week was paid into a Post Office Savings Bank account in my name. Ted was too old to be entitled to sit the exam.

Sloane School was a culture shock, academically challenging to begin with and being a late entrant there was catching up to be achieved. Here we did not just do adding up, subtracting, dividing and multiplying, there was more to this than arithmetic, there was algebra, geometry and later logarithms! The staff wore academic gowns and included Drs. of Philosophy, Divinity et al. On school functions, such as speech day, they turned out in full rig, providing a very colourful platform.

The building was very similar to the old school - the London County Council had seen fit to provide a mushroom growth of these three storey buildings across its whole territory after the Great War. The difference was that the ground floor infants had been given over to a large gymnasium, a dining hall and kitchens and huge cloakrooms (sorry locker rooms). The upper floor Girls was here science labs, specialist and music rooms. It was possible to look out from the top floor directly into Chelsea Football Stadium and to watch the red buses of the L.G.O.C. (London General Omnibus Company) struggle over Stamford Bridge (Rly), on their solid rubber tyres on frosty days. We also enjoyed the use of sports fields some five miles away at Roehampton, to which we were transported on games afternoons by Black Marias.

It was here that we first experienced the school play - always Shakespeare (What else?). Our Headmaster, newly appointed as I joined, was Guy Boas, had a wife who was an author, whose Grandfather was Mr. Whitehead who had invented the Whitehead torpedo. Guy Boas himself was well known in literary circles and was an editor for the Macmillan book publishers. One of his first projects was to appropriate three classrooms and turn them into a new school library, with a grand opening by a

contemporary author - one Margaret Kennedy.

Guy Boas succeeded a Dr. Pritchard who had recently died ‘in harness’ and who had interviewed my Mother and myself upon my application for a school place. The new head quickly busied himself organising the school to his own taste - as new heads are wont to do. Apart from the library he had ‘fives’ courts built in the play grounds - not much used, I might add. He took over production of the school play from poor old Gubby Alan who had been doing it for years; introduced two staff-rooms; a smoker and a non smoker and arranged musical evenings amongst other things. In the dining hall he sat in state at the head of the staff table from where he carved the meat or served the fish or other dishes for the rest of the staff. Ted and I were very much privy to this, as we were invited to undertake waiting duties to the staff and prefects, no doubt recommended from the school’s awareness of our parents’ occupation. Our privilege in recompense was a free lunch each and special treatment by the school chef; Zebedee by name and a maker of wondrous apple tarts. There was a hint of snobbery to do with dining arrangements - the school dinner boys eating in hall whilst the sandwich boys were confined to a draughty corridor without.

The staff were entirely male as were the secretary and the caretaker, a Mr. Chappell. They, like all teachers, had their idiosyncrasies and their nicknames. ‘Flippy’ Beaton whose ears stood out taught languages, Mr. Nightingale was called ‘Shirty’ and was in charge of ‘Remove’, ‘Bill’ Berkeley taught history. ‘Sandy’ MacDonald from whom I learned French mainly through Gallic folk songs was an ex tall-ships mariner who played the flute and could always be distracted by disarming requests beginning, “Please sir, can you tell us about---------” very good stories they were too. Also there was Dr. Plyman called ‘Flyblow’ for reasons I never discovered and B________Balchin, deputy headmaster, with a gift for sarcasm and who, upon being called upon to take assembly when the head was otherwise occupied would rattle off the only prayer he knew with the rhythm of a trip hammer, the speed of an express and the sincerity of Judas Iscariot.

I could go on, suffice it to say that I cruised through my school career, sat and passed School Certificate (one had to pass on each of five subjects; English, Maths, a modern language and two other subjects, usually two sciences or two arts). Then after Christmas 1932 at age 16 it was time to seek gainful occupation. Most people finished their education at 14 years of age.

All the while I had been at school, I had been called upon to work on matters connected with the shop. This meant spending hours scraping or peeling potatoes, piles of washing up, putting meat or parsley through a mincer and then usually once a week travelling to Billingsgate Fish Market to buy eels - all of which more later. This had made inroads into any time which might have been devoted to school homework, apart from my natural inclination to enjoy such boyhood pursuits that were available. In any case, conditions at the shop were not conducive to preparation of homework, it having to be performed in the ‘supper room’ adjacent to the shop itself, with its various distractions. I was rewarded for the domestic duties at the rate of 1 shilling (equivalent 5p) per week pocket money.

By the time I left school, Ted was already out to work. He had wanted to become a chef and had taken up a sort of unofficial apprenticeship at the Park Lane Hotel in the West End. However, the long hours, the nature of the work and its acolytes, together with

having to walk home from the West End at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, since there was no public transport at those hours, he withdrew from the kitchens in favour of a job in men's tailoring at Meakers. Imagine: he might have had his own T.V. programme eventually.

I was more fortunate. Accoutred with a School Certificate and aided by the fact that other boys from Sloane School had made a satisfactory impression upon the firm, I was appointed office boy to the well known Hudson's Bay Fur Company. I was engaged in the fur warehouse building, which sat over the Mansion House Underground Station, and trains rumbled the day long beneath us, vibrating and noisy. There was an auction room next door to the warehouse and below the first floor was a cold store accommodating dressed furs and fish - mostly lobster tails brought over from the firm's fisheries off New Foundland. There was head office across the city about a mile away in Bishopsgate. Market forces decreed that my starting salary should be £11.10.0 per month and such a low figure was to be explained in that the early 1930's were a period of serious economic depression. Unemployment figures stood at 2 1/4 million and this did not include women. Many women did work in offices, shops and factories but most stayed at home raising families in a labour intensive situation. Women teachers and bank clerks were expected, upon marriage, to leave their occupation to make way for some unemployed male breadwinner. Many women kept their marriages a secret.

My first duties were to print the interior stationery - internal requisitions, bin cards etc., and to deliver hand letters to firms within about 3/4 mile radius, so that HBC saved 1 1/2d per letter at the cost to me of shoe leather. Also twice a day visits had to be paid to the bank and once a day to head office in Bishopsgate. I was pleasantly surprised when after three months I was awarded an unsolicited pay rise of half a crown a week, bringing my monthly salary to £12.

The Governor and Company of Adventurers trading into Hudsons Bay, by Royal Charter granted on 2nd May 1670 had been in operation for over 260 years when I joined them. It had engaged in developing vast areas of Northern Canada and supplying fur trappers, mainly Indians, with blankets, tents, tools, guns and whisky amongst other comestibles in exchange for the furs that they brought into the FPA's (Fur Purchasing Agencies). Beaver skins for beaver hats, black bear skins for military busbies and other skins to meet the demands of people seeking exotic adornment; these were the business of what was a thriving fur trade. Animals killed for their skins were looked upon much as animals slaughtered for their meat. No ifs or buts, no demonstrating groups against and the Animal Rights organisation was a thing of the future some 30/40 years ahead.

We were the centre for the fur trade, much as Hatton Garden was the centre for gold and jewellery, or Harley Street the centre for medical consultancy or Covent Garden for fruit and veg. Around us were gathered a number of lesser establishments in the same trade covering an area of some 1/2 square mile between the River Thames at Southwark Bridge and St. Paul's Cathedral.

Eventually I was transferred to the warehouse office - situated not surprisingly in the warehouse itself. I was to discover that the warehouse was on two floors and was piled from floor to ceiling with raw fur skins particularly so in winter time when wild animals achieved a specially fine fur covering as a defence against the seasonal cold.

I was shown the skins of animals mostly from Canada, Russia and Scandinavia all cold

countries and some few farmed animals such as silver fox and mink - often from Scotland. The only skins, they told me, from a warm climate were South West African lambs or Karakuls, which were glossy black with tiny wave-like patterns and were used to make Astrakhan collars for the top coats of wealthy men.

There was a great assortment of skins or pelts, from huge Polar bear down through wolf, beaver, fox, musquash, marten and mink to the diminutive squirrel. The colours, too, were varied. In the fox alone, five colours prevailed. There was silver fox, which in fact was a shiny black with a smattering of white hairs which gave it its name. There was red fox, much like our native creature but usually much larger. There was the blue fox - a blend of dull blue and grey. Then the cross fox - a mixture of red and blue fox with what might be called a brindled coat - grey blue streaked or patched with brown. And finally the Arctic or white fox, camouflaged against the snow; never a pure white always with a creaminess about it. The only true white fur was that of the ermine, used to make fur capes for royalty and peers of the realm, worn on state occasions. Another fur was its counterpart in black - that of the black bear, its fur was used to make the busby for the Grenadier Guards at the ‘Changing of the Guard’ at Buckingham Palace. Squirrel skins were a dainty shimmering grey as against the rough grey of the timber or prairie wolf - a dirty grey powdered with a touch of umber pigment. Pine and Stone Martens went through stages between off white and delicate light brown. Mink, apart from Russian Sable, was the most expensive skin, not because of its rarity but due to the difficulty in matching together sufficient skins to make a cape or coat. Its fur had a special quality obvious to the touch.

The basic colours of all these skins have been mentioned. These colours and textures were enhanced and often transformed through the processes of dying and dressing. The dyers and dressers could take a tatty old goat skin and turn it into a sumptuous fabric with a mother-of-pearl effect, as was shown to me by a warehouseman. This is where the tactile comes into play. The raw skins were harsh in character and stiff as boards. After passing through the hands of the dyers and dressers they were transformed into an artefact which was luxuriously soft to the touch and of a character that women of fashion, and other women too, would sacrifice much to possess.

Another quality I discovered quite soon was that raw fur possessed a quality of odour that was disagreeable and pervasive. I was to learn later that having spent time on the fox floor of the warehouse one could be sure when going out on the street even hours later that one’s neighbours’ dog would take an unwelcome and unwholesome interest in ones trousers. On the other hand if you wished your local Rotweiler to give you a wide berth you would linger a little longer amongst the wolf and bear pelts.

In the warehouse office there was less formality than in other departments, but there was a price to pay, in that just prior to the main fur auctions, just before Easter and Christmas, we were called upon to complete the sales catalogues “on time - no matter what”. Thus we worked “late” even on Christmas Eve or Good Friday if necessary. Work was hectic; most of the auction “lots” were straightforward - say 50 beaver or 60 blue fox; but trouble came with the miscellaneous lots of mixed skins. A typical lot might consist of 12 ermine, 15 squirrel, 28 ocelot, 15 nutria which skins might have arrived on the fur floor in dribs and drabs sent in by consigners from S. America, Scandinavia, Russia, Japan and Canada - all of which had to be accounted for and recorded down to the last squirrel tail. Our recompense came in the shape of a luncheon voucher, because we were staff and salaried as against receiving wages. What cries of

"Exploitation!" would be heard today in these circumstances. We needed to hold on to our jobs.

The office itself was operated by the warehouse office manager, a Mr. R. C. Marshall; never without a cigarette, the smoke rising into his eyes permanently and who worked in a small office, attached. For the rest, we were a mixed crew, all in our early twenties except for Sid Kaufman, a Canadian, who for some reason was given this job with us. He was 70+ and had worked upon the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway across the continent and told stories of the competition between his railway company and that of the Canadian National Railway, whose work force frequently came to blows with his own crowd. On occasion such clashes resulted in manslaughter.

The office staff totalled eight in all. Senior amongst us was Jack Bartlett - liked to be thought of as being Scottish which he wasn't and preferred being called Jock. He was a keen cyclist, with me often and served in the Royal Navy. I was still in touch with him until the mid seventies. Alan (Al) Harrison, Jimmy Ford and Jim Lawry - all ex public school and thereby O.T.C. members who departed very soon at the outbreak of war into the services. Jim Lawry to the RM and was lost at sea within three months, Jimmy Ford went into bomb disposal, an unenviable job. There was George Evans; the singing Welshman - ex Sloane School who joined RAF aircrew and was reported "missing" quite early in the War. There was also a middle aged, very shy Scotsman from Edinburgh who joined the party somewhat later. I had worked in the warehouse office for two to three years, but before the end of 1940 the whole office staff, with the exception of Sid Kaufman and the Scotsman were all in military service - myself included. The fur trade stopped, only to recover for a few years after the War prior to its final demise.

There had been fur trade centres in Leipzig, Paris and Petrograd, but trading with Europe came to a halt. Between the outbreak of War, 3rd September 1939 and my call-up, I had spent a great number of nights at the warehouse, "fire watching" as it was called on a rota system with a diminishing number of participants. This, however, was the period of the "phoney war" before there was any serious bombing of London, so these duties were just boring. Then on 24th February 1940 Joyce and I were married.

In my youth, and living in London, my parents had a rooted objection to my having a bicycle, due they claimed to the weight of local traffic. True, the No. 11 Bus passed the front door at 1 1/2 minute intervals until 1.30 in the morning, but it was also when about 20% of vehicular movement was horse drawn. So, as soon as I started work I was able to save and buy myself a machine, despite objections. Cycling became an obsession - the open road and freedom of movement. Instead of going in the family car for a Sunday picnic, I would arrange to meet the family at the chosen spot in the Surrey woods, usually some thirty or forty miles distant. My brother and I often cycled together.

Before the onset of, first by-passes and later motorways, I was able to explore and enjoy through country lanes the greater part of the United Kingdom. Holidays were always cycling holidays; into the West Country, or the Yorkshire Moors, Lakeland, Wales or Scotland. A hundred miles was taken in one's stride.

Club riding was popular, and groups of cyclists, numbering often up to 40/50 were common on the roads, particularly on the country lanes on Sundays. There was the

time trials section, belonging to which involved starting out before daylight to either ride or to "marshal" those who did. Incidentally, before Roger Bannister ran a mile in under 4 minutes, a cyclist named Ray Booty had ridden 100 miles in under 4 hours. There were, too, Sunday club runs, YHA weekends and mid-week evening rides in the summer periods. One epic Bank Holiday weekend eight of us set out on a Saturday morning to ride from Fulham to Minehead - 165 miles to the Youth Hostel there. On the Sunday we carried on to Lynmouth and Lynton, thence across Exmoor via Simonsbath to Taunton, returning to Fulham on the August Bank Holiday Monday evening. We did not find this a problem despite the mileage involved, but the weather and traffic conditions were in our favour. We were young and fit and kept our machines in tip top condition. We also engaged in events such as 100 in 8, 100 in 7 even 100 in 6 rides. The time trials events were over distance usually of 25, 50 and 100 miles. There were also 12hr and 24hr events. Professionally there were 6 day track events for pairs of riders and the Tour de France was the classic.

The Club of which I was a member was known as The Childerley Wheelers which took its name from the Childerley Street Evening Institute where I went to study book keeping and French. The Club membership of about 60 comprised about 60% male and 40% female riders. Joyce was among the 40%. World War II put an end to all this activity; most members being called into the armed forces. Luckily, I was fit enough at the age of 40 to qualify for membership of the VTTA (Veterans' Time Trials Association) and so maintained the interest in cycling.

Fulham at this time was a drab, urban district, surrounded by Chelsea, Hammersmith, Kensington and, across the Thames, by Putney. It was served by buses, open topped until the mid-thirties, and by an underground station - called Walham Green, since changed to Fulham Broadway. It had street lighting - gas operated and turned on and off daily by a lamp-lighter with a pole who rode his circuit on a bicycle. There was much horse-drawn traffic in the shape of coal carts and for general purpose deliveries, such as vegetable and groceries as well as an ice-cart. Most shops were small affairs and with just one departmental store. It boasted a very good swimming baths with three pools of 40, 33 and 25 yards, the latter referred to as "the sink". It also included the "slipper" baths. Very few houses were built with bathrooms at the time. There was a Town Hall and a street market of barrows along the whole length - about a quarter of a mile of North End Road with number 28 buses endeavouring to drive through the crowds on its way to Olympia. There were three cinemas and a music hall called the Granville Theatre. We displayed in our shop window posters for two of the cinemas and the theatre for which we received for each, two complimentary tickets each week and made good use of them. I recall seeing performances at the music hall by Max Miller, Gracie Fields, Harry Lauder and George Robey all for free. We lived within walking distance of the South Kensington Museums and the Albert Hall where my Father often took me with him to see the boxing. A number 11 bus passed the door regularly on its way to the City of London. The Olympia was close by where we visited The Ideal Home, equestrian events, the Motor Show and Bertram Mills Circus and fun fair.

There were many mean streets - slums in fact quite close to the shop, housing poor families, many of whose would-be-breadwinners were unemployed, resulting in rickety children poorly dressed and sometimes without shoes wandering their streets carrying their meal of bread and jam as they went. Tuberculosis or "consumption" was fairly prevalent and was talked of in hushed tones, much in the manner that cancer was until

more recent times. There were many pubs - three within a distance of 150 yards of the shop: the Salisbury, the Wilton and the Bedford, which sent their customers to us when they turned out at 10.00 p.m. The men would have been drinking beer in half pints and the women porter or gin, both copiously. There were happy drunks, maudlin drunks, there were also fighting drunks. Surprisingly applied as much to the women as to the men. In the case of the men it would often involve more than two. In the case of women invariably a pair and more ferocious. Whereas the men punched; sometimes kicked, the women scratched or tore by grabbing any convenient part of her adversary's person or dress i.e. hair or clothing. Nothing more undignified than women fighting. Fights were mostly short lived. Police in pairs - several pairs were on hand at "turning out" time. They knew what to expect and would act promptly and with effect, since fights would attract a crowd. They sometimes used a sort of stretcher on two wheels, with a means of restraining a drunk with straps. Saturday nights were often rather "fraught" at turning out time. Fights would occur, police would appear, sometimes with a two-wheeled trolley upon which over "stimulated" customers could be restrained on their journey to the police station. The constables were not always male.

These days, if you aspire to the position of Prime Minister you may boast almost of parents who made gnomes for a living or who kept a grocer's shop in Grantham. Somehow, my brother, sister and myself were not proud of our situation; we felt it to be infra dig socially - snobs I suppose all three of us. It may have been to do with our peers. If a stranger or new acquaintance asked what our parents did - a common question in those days - we would simply say that they were in business. If pressed to say what business we would say they kept a restaurant, praying that the inquisitor would not turn up expecting a cordon bleu meal and we finding our cover was blown. Our restaurant consisted not of tables and chairs with waiter/waitress service, but two parallel, long marble topped tables with long wooden benches for seating and a simple cafeteria service.

It wasn't so bad at School where the pupils were an anonymous mixture. You see, if you came from a fish and chip shop family, the children could smell it on you, whereas we were odourless in that respect.

Hygienically the shop would not pass muster today; although my parents were meticulous in their cleanliness by the standards of the time. Nevertheless, sacks of coal and sacks of potatoes were carried through the shop on their way to the yard at the back of the premises. Also much heat was generated in the downstairs bake house, making the whole house warm and giving rise to the presence of unwelcome bed bugs.

Mother was head of the household, she had somehow raised the capital needed to purchase the shop and its goodwill from a family called May. She also got a temporary job in a shop across the road, from where she could study the state of trading in the shop before buying it.

The premises were small, gas lit and low pitched, electricity and telephone (Fulham 7091) were to follow later. Just three upstairs bedrooms on two levels and downstairs; the shop, the supper room, so called; the bakehouse and a glass roofed outhouse where live eels were kept in a zinc lined wooden tank, with running water from a tap.

The eels were supplied by the Dutch eel boats, moored on the Thames just outside Billingsgate fish market, right next to London Bridge and close to where the Great Fire

of London had started in 1666. The Dutch had been granted a Royal Charter to trade there by Charles II in recognition of some service or other provided before the Restoration.

The eels were mud eels caught off the Dutch coast near to the Freisian Islands. They were sold by the “draught” - approximately 20lbs avoirdupois. Their collection entailed a journey by underground railway from Fulham to the City of London. One had to go down Fish Hill past the Monument to the Fire of London - it was a hill of cobblestones, with drays pulled by pairs of huge handsome horses, stamping their hooves, striking sparks as they did so, then feeding from their nosebags. One then walked through the fish market where usually the main business of the day had been completed. Sometimes passengers on the Underground became uneasy about the movements in the raffia bag in which the eels were carried. Father was responsible for preparing the eels for consumption, which he achieved with sharp knives and cold hands in all weathers; come rain, come shine - this was in the glass roofed outhouse. Dieticians had great praise for the nutritional value of eels as a dish. They were boiled in salted water for about twenty minutes. Had they been left to become cold they would have turned into a jelly. We however sold them in hot parsley sauce prepared with a runny batter of flour and water, together with the hot water in which the eels had been cooked, throwing in at the same time a tea-cupful of minced parsley. The eels swam (excuse the pun) in the parsley sauce which covered them. The parsley was brought to the shop in large bundles by the “parsley man”; never knew his real name. He would arrive with a costermonger’s barrow pulled by a donkey, having travelled from Camberwell via Covent Garden, across South London. He maintained a reliable service except when supplies became difficult during frosty weather or in the winter snow. We discovered years too late that it was possible to dry this herb, for use when supplies ran low.

Now for the meat pies. I recall it was a fairly pleasant chore, especially in winter time to help in the bakehouse making these. Always there were 18 to a tray. Mother made the pastry. Surplus and additional mashed potatoes were mixed with flour and allowed to stand overnight. Next day, this mixture with a certain small amount of beef dripping was kneaded into a soft dough. The oval pie tins were greased with melted dripping and the pastry base was pressed in. The meat used was minced ox heart, which surprisingly was purchased on a retail basis from Beales, the butchers just along the road. After the meat filling a pastry top was put on each pie and a knife was run around the edge of the tin. The top was brushed over with ordinary water, which gave quite a reasonable glaze to the finished product. The tray was slid into the oven which was brick built and coal fired; the bakehouse became uncomfortably hot in summer.

I remember particularly that my Mother was an inveterate smoker, a fact for which she blamed her two brothers, who had come back from the front and interested her in cigarettes. It was a habit she never managed or wanted to break. The craving stayed with her to the age of 91 when she was still smoking 30 cigarettes a day, defying the warnings which even then were rife from the medical profession. However, the point is that she always smoked whilst making the pies. The length of ash at the end of her cigarette would grow ever longer as she worked, but always she managed to dispose of it a fraction before it fell of its own accord. I am able to tell of this now, since she is well beyond reach of any Health Authority. The pies, when cooked, were carried in their trays and placed upon the shop counter.

My contribution to proceedings, apart from helping in the bakehouse was two fold: first

came the preparation of potatoes. There was a manually operated potato peeler which spun the tubers by centrifugal force against a roughened metal surface whilst water was sprayed upon them. Alas, that was not all; the eyes and other blemishes had to be removed with a potato knife prior to cooking. June was a month to look forward to, when the new potatoes became available. As the year wore on the supplies became older and more difficult to cope with. I must have dealt with tens of tons of potatoes in my youth. This was more frustrating by virtue of the fact that my brother was learning the piano and was excused from this duty. The potatoes when cooked were mashed - not creamed you'll observe, - then placed in a huge crock pot, which was placed in a hot water container set into the counter; this was kept heated by a gas burner.

My other undertaking was to work in the shop itself. I collected the used plates and cutlery from the tables and took them to a bowl of hot water containing washing soda and placed on a marble topped table in a corner and there wash and dry them ready to be used again in a few minute's time. Dishwashers were a thing of the future. With potato peeling and washing up, I developed wrinkled fingers to compete with those of Toad of Toad Hall after his washer-woman encounter.

The only other food dispensed in the establishment was haricot beans. Mother insisted that they must originate in Patna and were soaked overnight ready for cooking next day.

Our shop opened from 12.00 to 2.00 p.m. and 6.30 to 11.30 or beyond. It provided a sit down meal of a meat pie and mashed potatoes awash with parsley sauce to a child for 3 old pence, equivalent to 1 1/4 today's new pence - a child who otherwise in that poor area might have had to survive on bread and jam whilst playing in the street. Inflation has much to answer for.

The few affluent of the community, often the local shady characters, could have spent 8 old pence, about 3 1/2 now, for a full meal of eels, pie, potatoes and beans.

Most customers took their meals in the shop, although many brought dishes or jugs for take away meals.

Although as I reported, my brother, my sister and myself were not elated by our parents' calling, we were providing a social service, particularly to the poorer children of the area. At the same time we were also one of the few families able to afford to run a car in the days when Dad merited a smart salute from AA patrolmen. We were also one of the few families able to take a regular holiday in the summer.

My Mother was the family boss, she was of medium build, fair haired and liked to feel well dressed, especially when ballroom dancing upon which she was keen, insisting indeed upon my learning ballroom dancing and etiquette at the age of 12. She was friendly with a Mr. Charles Gardner and his partner "Fairy" who ran a dance hall in Lily Road, Fulham. He also had a wife who looked after the till. Thus, I was persuaded to go to evening dancing sessions and to learn such dances as Valetta, St. Bernard's Waltz, Tango as well as the better known Foxtrot and Quick Step at the age of 13. Mother was an enthusiastic reader of authors of her time, such as Doris Lessing, Hugh Walpole and Naomi Mitcheson. She read each and every one of Charles Dickens books. Her idle moments, if she would admit to any such, were occupied in cooking, dressmaking and knitting. She would handle any awkward customers, who appeared after "turning out time", with aplomb. She was an acute business woman who relied upon me for

correspondence thereto. She was quite superstitious and often attended séances with a medium (Mrs. Hatt) who lived across the road from us at Fulham. She had a great respect for the aristocracy and in service learned much of their habits, rituals and behaviour. She held a fund of knowledge with regard to royalty and without hesitation could relate their connections - who was second cousin, once removed from the daughter of the Duke of X.

Although seemingly sophisticated, she was a country girl at heart, and when we - the family - were too young to remonstrate we were coerced into harvesting the countryside. It was bilberries in July, blackberries in September, sweet chestnuts in October and mushrooms with an "r" in the month. Wine making, too, was a favourite pastime of both my parents, particularly after retirement and especially if the base of the brew could be collected, free, from the countryside, dandelions and cowslips for example.

As a family we spent a fortnight each year camping at Goodrington Sands, always in the same spot - it's still there - and we would dine upon the spoils of the sea; crabs, seashore winkles and mackerel fished from the little boats.

There were occasions when my Mother would "take against" certain individuals. In fact she refused to have anything to do with my brother and his wife, Eileen, on the basis that she didn't approve of the match. It took a World War and a couple of years to bring them back together. In my own case, since, she did not approve of my choice of a wife, a gap was created in our relationship which was not closed until (under pressure from Joyce) I visited her in hospital. I was the only one of their three children whose wedding my parents attended).

As well as being in control of our family, she hoped to have influence over other branches of the family without much success.

Surprisingly, she was concerned for her Irish father, Thomas Steel, who, on the only two occasions that I met him, was "on the road" an itinerant, scratching a living, fruit picking and doing odd jobs. He was the parent who deserted the family and returned to it, from time to time to impregnate his wife, then drift off again. I presumably will have inherited some of his genes - I've never worked out which.

Back to Mother; she had, what is known as a strong constitution and despite her heavy smoking habit, lived to be 91. From what she has told us she was born in the Old Kent Road in East London, but details upon the Birth Certificate that she held were very hazy. Her true birth certificate has more recently been traced by my daughter-in-law Caroline . Mother made a habit of dominating any conversations, whatever the topic. I think that, in her waking moments she was unable to contemplate a moment's absence of conversation for more than a few seconds. She was writing in a strong round hand until well into her eighties. Under her influence my brother and I, when earning, were coerced into handing over our pay and she would "dole out" what we could have for spending money - not always generous. The aforementioned Aunt Annie bequeathed legacies of £50 each to my brother and I and £20 to Peggy. Mother insisted that Ted and I each gave £10 to Peggy to bring an equal sum of £40 to each of us.

Dad was younger than Mum, tall, dark and very upright. He had two passions; one was the army by whose standards he thought and operated e.g. his shoes were immaculately

polished - even to the instep on the underside and we boys were expected to follow his example. His second great interest was in cars, such as they were in his younger days. The shop being profitable provided the wherewithal to indulge this interest. First was a Matchless motor cycle and side car (LX3756) soon to be followed by a Morris Oxford (YK9523) then an Austin 12 Tudor Saloon (PK2146), each of which he kept and maintained for years. Until he left Fulham for Teddington and a house with a garage, his vehicles were kept along the road behind Smallwoods Emporium, in a back yard, matched only by the premises of Steptoe and Son. I was granted the privilege of going along with Dad on Saturday afternoons to clean the car ready for the Sunday outing or visit. He was also keen on boxing and often took me with him to watch the professional and "services" events at Albert Hall. Whereas Mother was not noted for her sense of humour - jokes had to be explained to her, Dad was always ready for a "leg pull". He was not a well man, partly due to shrapnel collected in WW1 and partly trauma from the same source.

It was not until WWII that he became more active in matters military. He joined the Home Guard and helped to build "Horsa" Gliders to be used at Arnhem. At this point, too, he joined the Royal British Legion and contacted his old Regimental Association. My Father's educations had been sadly neglected in the early days and I doubt if the Army of his time did much to augment his lack of learning. I suppose one could say that he was untutored. I can recall his reading a newspaper but otherwise only car manuals or AA Guides. So the more surprising then when I attended the Worcester Regiment's Annual Dinner with him and on the occasion of his Golden Wedding (which coincided), he addressed the members, including high ranking officers. He spoke fluently for about 15 minutes without script in a most humorous and interesting manner. The Army had left its mark upon him in his upright bearing, smart appearance, cleanliness, punctuality, loyalty and patriotism which attributes he was keen to pass on to the family.

My parents were in the habit of collecting "characters". Beginning in a small way one was the taxi man. The latter, in his vocation, met many unusual characters with strange stories to tell and such stories appealed to my parents. So the taxi man was invited through the shop into the supper room to enjoy an free meal of eels and pie and to tell of his experiences. I'm sure that the truth was stretched somewhat at times.

Then there was the policeman, who although on duty, would come through to the supper room to receive similar treatment as the taxi man and return to duty only after my Father had looked out to ensure that no superintendent was outside on the street looking for delinquent constables. They always seemed to be such huge men to me and you could have fitted three heads of my size into one helmet.

These characters had a minimal effect upon our lives, but there were those whose influence was greater. One such was Billy Albon, a musician whose natural great talent had been enhanced at the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall, Twickenham. He was huge and fat and smelt of tobacco and beer. He was an ex-Hussar (WWI) and a wonderful performer having specialised in piano and cello during his training. He became the basis of many musical evenings held in the room over the shop at weekends and holidays. The style was classical. He also undertook to teach my brother to play the piano and the evenings were a great joy to family and friends. Sometimes we were blessed with a trio of Ted piano, Billy cello, and a friend of Billy, providing a wind instrument, sometimes Bill Wise on trumpet. Billy had contradictory character traits,

one moment playing like an angel, the next boozing and telling smutty stories - sometimes at the expense of his quite charming wife, Nancy.

When prospects of war were in the offing in 1939 business declined and steps were taken to abandon the shop and move out of a threatened London. To augment the family income Dad advertised his car “For Hire”. A certain amount of work came his way, but in particular one lady and her friend used his services quite frequently. She was a Mrs. Diana Hopkinson, widow, a gentlewoman from Kensington who had fallen upon hard times. Her son, An R.A.F. officer pilot, had been killed in an air crash (in peacetime). I still have his half hunter gold watch which she gave to me. The upshot was that Aunt Di, as she became, joined as part of the family when we moved from the shop to live in Teddington. I saw her frequently when I was on leave during the War and eventually learned that she had been taken ill and removed to hospital. She had helped my Mother with domestic matters early in the War and was a great help in the contacts between Mother and the numerous U.S. Air Force officers who were billeted in the house.

September 1939 came and with it World War Two and with that the evacuation of most of the local children and much of the populace. Shortly the Dutch eel boats were recalled, meat was rationed and other supplies were difficult to come by. The closure of a gastronomic era had been brought about.

We now approach some turbulent years - a few opinions may be thrown in, with which the reader may not agree (tough).

It is strange how something half expected manifests itself as a shock when it occurs. September 3rd 1939 was a case in point. We were suddenly at war with Germany, a rising power directed by a megalomaniac who would shortly form an “axis” with a power crazy puppet from Italy. This event was to change (and in many cases terminate) the lives of everyone in what became known as the Western World. History reveals how eventually a third power became involved in the mayhem thus involving the whole world.

Although the whole population was affected each individual was about to embark upon his or her particular war - the end of which was nowhere in sight.

We had not been particularly happy bunnies beforehand. There had been world-wide economic depression, high unemployment and exploitation of “the workers” by unscrupulous employers - “the unacceptable face of capitalism” as Edward Heath would have put it. Much of this situation arose as a result of the First World War, twenty or so years earlier which had had a destabilizing effect generally. So, we waited to see what was to happen to our goodselves.

I will endeavour to record events chronologically so far as our wartime memory serves.

In early 1939 the family had left the Fulham shop and moved into a large three storey property in Teddington.

The almost immediate upshot of this was that the “billeting officer” imposed a number of U.S. 8th Army Airforce officers upon my Mother who was expected to house and feed them, since the house had seven or eight bedrooms and the said U.S. forces were

encamped in Bushey Park nearby. The situation had its advantages in so far as the officers concerned were more than generous with the "extras" they were willing to provide to more than eke out the official rations. In addition to the U.S. contingent, three staff from the N.P.L. (National Physics Laboratory) also sited in Bushey Park completed the occupancy of 18 Gloucester Road.

Brother Ted had married in April of this same year to a partner of whom Mother did not approve. This gave rise to dispute and a breaking off of relationship between Ted and Mum for quite a few years.

Joyce had been in Westminster Hospital undergoing surgery for appendicitis - a matter of many days in bed at these times.

One immediate effect of September 3rd was that I was required, on a rota basis, to stay in the city overnight to perform "fire watch" duties - just boring, as it happened since it was in the period of the phoney war, during which no enemy aircraft appeared in our skies day or night.

I continued to live in Teddington, work in the city and go courting Joyce in Southfields (near Wimbledon Tennis Centre) by bicycle in the evenings when I was not on fire watch duty.

At the age of 23 I knew that conscription would shortly compel me to join the armed forces. In this matter, if you were to volunteer for service you could at least join the particular arm of the forces of your choice. Having been accepted in that particular arm you were then invited to opt for which "trade" you preferred. Unless you were a qualified doctor, dentist, lawyer, scientist or priest, you stood little chance of achieving your choice. If you were a butcher you would be drafted into the parachute packing department, or should you be a motor mechanic you would likely become an RAF policeman. Being patriotic, youthful, romantic and perhaps a little stupid, I put myself forward for service as aircrew - it was the glamour - then waited. In the meantime our courtship had become serious and like so many couples at this juncture - you know, undying love and let's take the opportunity to be together while we knew not what the future held. I think perhaps in the present climate of sexual mores the pressures of the marital state would not be the same; but sixty years ago the key to decency was marriage. We decided to go with the flow. In February 1940 (24th to be precise) therefore we were married at St. Barnabas Church, Southfields, by the Rev. Speechley. Some interesting details are to be noted here. First, Joyce was 20 and being under the age of consent (21) official approval was necessary, not from her grandparents who had brought her up for two decades; it had to be from her father or no go. On this account we had to send a return paid cable to her father in Bermuda for his permission for us to marry. This was grudgingly granted, with a following letter upon the difficulties of holy wedlock. I would rather have gone to Gretna Green.

At this point, too, rationing had become a problem, so that ingredients for wedding cakes and other consumables as well as for fabrics for wedding dresses was a difficulty - as was the cost. It was the practice to have a two tier wedding cake; retaining the smaller upper tier as a christening cake for the first born - which was duly the case. Also Joyce's wedding dress eventually became a night-dress. Again, my Mother did not approve of Joyce as a daughter in law. I think, having two sons marry inside ten months was perhaps too much for her. Or again she felt her sons were too good for

anyone.

Setting up home was not easy; more so since many items were becoming short in supply. Time was to come when you married only when you could afford the lot; the house, the mortgage, the T.V., car and the conservatory. At a joint income of about £25 per month we managed a dining room and bedroom suite and took up residence in Elm Bank Gardens, Barnes, S.W. London in two spare rooms of a flat in which brother Ted, wife Eileen and daughter Toni were in residence. The landlady was very understanding and didn't demur. Many of the other items to do with domesticity were provided through wedding presents. I cycled to work to save fares. Joyce made her own clothes and fairly soon we moved into our own flat in East Sheen, part of a house owned by a father and daughter named Joliffe.

In August 1940, with the war about a year old, I was called to RAF Uxbridge, an induction centre, for medical assessment for fitness. Soon came a call from Air Ministry in London for aircrew selection. Rather like a job interview with three senior officers wearing gold braided caps (scrambled egg it was known as, just to impress I suspect). What did I want to be? Pilot, of course. "Oh no we have too many in training already, here at home and in Empire Training Schools". Their minds were already made up. They were looking for two types: extroverts for Fighter Command and introverts for Bomber Command. So you can guess at their assessment of me.

Subsequently the mills of God which had so far been grinding at snail's pace moved up a notch. By September I was installed in a billet (typical Blackpool landlady's boarding house) in that West Coast Lancashire resort, soon to suffer the indignity of multiple injection needles and what followed in the shape of footdrill and rifle drill on the Blackpool promenade for the entertainment of the holiday makers. We were, that is, our column of 40 recruits, instructed by a Sergeant Batson. These recruits were from all sections of the Community (nearly wrote "of all classes" - not P.C.). They were from varying economic levels and of mixed ages between twenty-two and forty-five few of whom had any idea as to which "trade" they would be allocated. I was, however, especially being fairly recently married, somewhat shocked at their farmyard morality. Leaving behind their wives and families they relished the freedom to mix with the holiday-makers especially the Lancashire cotton-mill girls with one end in mind.

After three weeks spent at this ITW (Initial Training Wing) we were deemed fit to move on to the next stage, which in my case meant being posted to a unit awaiting training. The unit concerned was called RAF Locking, about two miles inland from Weston-Super-Mare. No information was available as to how long a period was to elapse before training would commence. Joyce was impatient for us to be together. Despite the view of the pessimists that accommodation in such an area would be impossible, by diligence I managed to find a room in the nearby village of Banwell with a Mrs Stock, who with her son, undertook a round by van to the local villages supplying paraffin and other comestibles. Her husband, Algy, worked at the camp as a sanitary orderly and kept a barrel of cider in his garden shed unknown to his wife.

In the village was a chapel - Baptist or Methodist I don't recall; the latter I think and from there the Minister Mr. Rees, and his wife adopted us for evangelical reasons I imagine. We visited their home for tea and socialising quite frequently. Meanwhile what was to happen on the courses front? We waited. I was spending my time at the camp guarding the water-tower, two hours on and four hours off with a day off thrown

in twice a week. This was tedious, and somewhat pointless - “Dad’s Army” would have jumped at the opportunity. Joyce had registered as unemployed at the local “labour exchange” as it was then referred to, in the local township of Axbridge. However, a new “shadow factory” for the Bristol Aircraft Company was recently established and she was detailed to work there as a secretary.

A surprise had awaited me when I arrived at Locking Camp - bugle calls were made to indicate periods of the day: “Reveille”, “On Parade,” “Cook House” and “Last Post”. I was taken by surprise at such an antiquated operation and recalled hearing the details of these calls from my Father; both the actual times and the words he used to go with them.

After about two to three months came the call for me to move back to Blackpool to begin training in wireless telegraphy. This involved learning to send and receive Morse Code up to a speed of twelve words a minute with a smattering of radio theory in addition. Theory meant accommodation in a nice warm building with comfortable furniture. On the other hand the Morse practice took place in the municipal tram sheds through which the winter winds howled. It was a hard winter in 1940, deep snow and a wind so strong that ropes were tied between the lamp posts along the sea front for pedestrians to hold on to if they were foolish enough to go out in such harsh weather. It was back to billets for me. However, it was not long before I was able to find “digs” for Joyce with a couple - The Sharples (no, not Ena) - our Mrs. S. was far less abrasive); her husband ran a local barbers shop. The address was 19 Cumberland Avenue, Blackpool Central. Thus, soon instead of billets I claimed “living out” allowance and we stayed as a happy married couple so long as this did not interfere with my service duties. We were able to enjoy Blackpool out of season; the holiday makers were gone from the town although the amenities and entertainments remained for the benefit of the forces, mainly RAF although there were, too, Army and Navy contingents as well as a large number of Polish Air Force personnel flying Blackburn Bothas from nearby Squires Gate Air Field. We danced in the Tower Ballroom and the Winter Gardens and were allowed, in uniform, reduced prices for the theatres.

Joyce spent her 21st Birthday whilst at Blackpool and we celebrated by spending the one pound sent to her by Uncle Walter and Auntie Lily (Joyce’s Mother’s sister) on a splendid three course meal for two.

My wireless course ended successfully after ten or twelve weeks, so that I left Joyce behind at the Sharples whilst I was posted to complete the second half of the course to an RAF camp at Yatesbury some ten miles West of Marlborough on Salisbury Plain. The camp was huge - four wings- and remote; the nearest contact with civilisation lay four miles further West in the town of Calne. The course here entailed building up our Morse speed from 12 w.p.m. (words per minute) to 18 w.p.m. - a word being a group of four letters and one numerical digit, and some further radio theory. If you succeeded in achieving the requisite standard you were then allowed to fly. The prospect was exciting; flying was in its relative infancy. Our aircraft were to be DeHaviland Dragon Rapides: twin engines each of 97 horse power to lift the machine with radio equipment, a pilot, a civilian instructor and six pupils off the ground. The fuselage and wings were of timber construction, covered in “doped” canvas. Marvellous to contemplate from outside - but climb on to the wing and enter the cabin - a different world. The radio equipment left only a cramped space for pupils and instructor. Then the smell!!! and I am always sparing in the use of the exclamation mark. This smell was of hot engine oil

and the “dope” of the canvas mixed with the smell of vomit generously donated by the previous class. Air sickness was common: little wonder, there was so much help. The aircraft was equipped with a trailing aerial, about 200 feet long and weighted at the end with three or four lead balls about 1” in diameter. This was wound out from a reel. If you forgot to rewind before landing you can guess what would happen to the trailing aerial and the cost was debited to your account. This occurred frequently, since the “last” pupil, having had nothing else but the smell to think about for perhaps forty or fifty minutes was in no condition to wind in anything; his mind being on other unpleasant matters.

Blackpool where I had left Joyce was over two hundred miles. There were no motorways and only heavy goods vehicles using the roads. Nevertheless, at weekends from Friday night until Sunday night until 23.59 we were free and most weekends I made an attempt to “hitch” my way to Blackpoool and back in that time. I usually made it. Some journeys were easy, usually dependent upon the weather, others were not so. I recall one occasion returning to camp about half an hour after midnight. The duty sergeant should have “put me on a charge” but agree to overlook the matter if I would volunteer to spend two hours helping in the cook-house to which I readily agreed. The last lift which had brought me back to camp necessitated my sitting on top of a load of animal hides in the back of a lorry - a somewhat stomach churning experience. The first thing I saw upon entering the cook house was a tin bathful of raw shelled eggs, ready for scrambling for breakfast. The conflicting senses of smell - the hides and sight of the eggs made an unsavoury combination.

By this time Joyce was being employed as a civilian secretary at Squires Gate Airfield and when I was unable to have a week-end pass (F395) she managed to obtain blank pass-forms from her office for me to complete and to rubber stamp them with the stopper from a bottle of Watneys Pale Ale. The authorising signature wasn’t a problem, the camp was so vast that authorising signatures were many and various.

My wireless operator’s course was successfully completed in early June of 1941, when I left Yatesbury to go to RAF Linton-on-Ouse in Yorkshire, again to await my next training course. I spent my time there in a little department of my own with the responsibility for keeping wet batteries fully charged, these being for use internally for certain circuits in aircraft, but mainly there were huge accumulators used to start the engine of the four engined Halifax bombers flying operationally from Linton. I was kept too busy there to even consider trying to go cross country to visit Joyce in Blackpool. I was there for a very short period before my posting RAF Pembrey in Wales for a course in air-gunnery

RAF Pembrey was a remote unit set along a lonely stretch of the South Coast of Wales. It overlooked Carmarthen Bay and was about 10 to 12 miles West of Llanelli, with the nearest community at Kidwelly some 3 miles to the North. The old site is now a motor racing circuit. The whole area and for some miles out to sea had been commandeered by Air Ministry for bombing and air gunnery practice.

We flew Blenheim aircraft from here. These had originally been the RAF first line attack and defence aircraft at the outset of the war, some 18 months previously, but were being replaced by twin engined Wellingtons and later four engined Stirling, Halifax and Lancasters. All these were propeller driven - jet aircraft were not in the air on military or civilian operations until after WWII.

We flew out over the sea parallel to the shore and fired at drogues - rather long white wind-socks trailed about 200 yards behind towing aircraft. The bullets used were covered in some sort of emulsion paint of varying colours in order to make marks in your own personal colour on the drogue to record your number of "hits".

The machine-guns used were known as Vickers gas operated (VGO's) firing at the rate of a single bullet per second. Rather ridiculous when we were eventually going to fire from turrets with four high speed Browning guns, each capable of releasing several bullets per half second. The gunner stood up with his upper half protruding outside the fuselage (in the slip-stream) and swivelled the gun on a "scarf-ring", taking care not to hit the wings, the tail or particularly the pilot.

Typical of the Service, too, we had to learn the mechanics of the gas operated Vickers gun, which bore no resemblance to the guns to be used on operations.

The course lasted three weeks, at the end of which there was automatic promotion to the rank of Sergeant, with pay rising to 7s 3d per day - about £10 per month, which was still below my Hudson's Bay Co. pay. The firm's policy was to make up the difference which was paid into my Bank Account, which was now made into a joint account in order that Joyce could draw upon it. Mind you, I was being fed and clothed by the RAF, so not too bad a deal. Also, being married, Joyce received a wife's allowance from RAF, some of which was deducted from my pay (sounds complicated).

So at the end of July '41, within a year of enlisting, I had become a Sgt WOP/AG and was entitled to three chevrons on each arm and a half-wing brevet on the left breast of my tunic. There were plenty of WAAFS willing to sew these insignia on to our uniforms before releasing us on to the residents of Kidwelly, who made us more than welcome. First time I had ever been offered a drink in a pub from a complete stranger.

From Pembrey we waited to be posted to various OTU's (Operational Training Units) for the next stage in our careers. My posting was to RAF Lichfield - No 27 OTU. It was here that I/we learned of the extra responsibilities that fell to the lot of wireless operators air. Gunners and navigators remained on firm ground, but wireless ops. air were called upon by RAF Regulations to fly with pilots under instruction, in order to maintain air to ground communication. Thus it came about that on many nights I found myself flying with pilots doing their first "solo" night flights in aircraft to which they had just been introduced. In many cases they had flown only single engined aircraft such as Tiger Moths and only in daylight, so now were taking their first step into the unknown with Wellington aircraft. Over the intercom. one heard the instructor say to the novice pilot, after about 3 shaky circuits and landings (circuits and bumps as they were referred to), "O.K. that wasn't too bad, now try it on your own. Good luck". On your own indeed; what about the trembling wop at the back. This duty came so frequently that I didn't log all of these flights.

Often, upon the arrival of daylight one looked across the airfield to see three or four broken aircraft, some "pancaked" with smashed undercarriages, some on their noses with tails in the air, some, sadly, burnt out. I read recently that since the formation of the RAF shortly after World War I over 8,000 aircrew were killed in training; glad I wasn't among them.

At OTU we were formed into crews in very arbitrary fashion, very much at random - no question of preference. Thus I found myself in a crew of five: Pilot - Sgt. Eric Arnott wearing a "Kenya" flash on his shoulder. Navigator - Geoff Jeffereys from London's East End. Front Gunner - Dougie Barham from Maidstone, Kent and Rear Gunner - Duncan Crookston, from Sydney, Australia, myself being the fifth member. We also had attached a second pilot - Freddie Lewin from Leicester. We got on well together and became closer as we went through our "tour" of ops. We now awaited posting to our operational squadron. At this juncture Joyce decided to leave Blackpool where she had been staying on with the Sharples and working as assistant to the Adjutant at RAF Squires Gate Airfield just south of Blackpool. We met at Stafford Railway Station and went for a meal in the town together before she left to go to stay at Southfields with her Grandparents to be ready to join me if possible wherever I should be.

Our posting came through within a fortnight to 149 Squadron, flying Wellingtons and stationed at RAF Mildenhall. The latter was a well established and renowned Air Force Base, to which many famous early transatlantic fliers made their way after their crossing. We were impressed. We spent a couple of weeks drawing our flying kit and going through various departments, parachute packing, stores, medical and dental, before embarking upon more serious matters. Now, being attached to an operational station our pay was increased by 6d a day - danger money, making our pay 7s 9d per day, still below my "civvy street" pay.

Despite reports that accommodation for wives near the airfield was out of the question and the fear that "security" might prevent my "living out", I searched for and found a room in the nearby village of West Row with a Mrs. Hinds who kept the village store. The RAF seemed to turn a blind eye to the situation. As operational aircrew we were allowed a fair amount of licence, although the Station knew where to find me - as they did on one occasion.

It was a severe winter in 1941/42; inches of snow and aircraft often grounded. The local sugar-beet fields were frozen delaying the harvest. We spent a fair number of evenings with the crew in the only local pub "The Bird in Hand" a few hundred yards from the station entrance.

There was a break in the poor weather towards the end of November during which we managed to complete our first three operations all in one week. The first was a short initiation effort, when much of our missiles took the form of propaganda leaflets apart from some light bombs. The wireless operator, over the target, was detailed to "manage" the flare chute through which photo flashes and leaflets were dropped, so on this occasion I was busy dispensing leaflets in bundles which formed a white cloud as the slip-stream hit them. I was therefore pretty much unaware of what was going on outside the fuselage.

The trip from the wireless cabin to the flare chute undertaken at 25,000 ft was fairly arduous. It meant clambering over the wing roots and half way along the fuselage on a metal walk-way. (The aircraft structure consisted of a network of aluminium covered with fabric.) One could plug into the intercom at various positions and there was an oxygen point right next to the flare chute. The oxygen was of benefit when it came to lugging about bundles of leaflets or photographic flares.

At the beginning of 1942, 149 Squadron was told it was to convert from twin-engined

Wellingtons to four engined Stirlings. So for the next 3 1/2 months we were off 'ops' and training in these new, huge monsters. We trained partly at RAF Mildenhall and partly at RAF Marham. At this time our pilot, Eric Arnott, joined the commissioned ranks to become a P.O. (Pilot Officer).

In the late 1990's I returned to Mildenhall to see how it might have changed. The change was staggering. No sign of "The Bird in Hand" but a number of newish pubs. The main gate could not be recognised. What had been a quiet Suffolk hamlet, was now the size of not a small but a large town. Cars were left hand driven and huge into the bargain. It had all become a U.S. satellite with black, crouching threatening shapes of aircraft waiting to pounce.

Also at this time, Joyce decided that she wanted to start a family. Impatient? Maybe. Optimistic? - in the circumstances - yes. Risky? - of course. Courageous? - most certainly.

Our training involved two crash-landings; both down to our second pilot, Freddie Lewin. The Stirling had a peculiar, double-jointed undercarriage which was huge and clumsy. If one wing dipped on landing it was possible to hear the undercarriage on the dipped side crack and to know that the other side would not support the weight of the plane. Hence you found yourself looking through the fuselage windows to see four 'props' curling back over the leading edges of the wings. The engine noise stopped abruptly, to be replaced by the horrible squeal of suffering metal in contact with unforgiving concrete. Automatically one looked quickly for the nearest exit. Luckily the bomb-bay was solidly constructed and in each case saved the day. Freddie was taken off flying; he had been an expensive investment for Air Ministry.

The Stirling had another drawback - it had a maximum ceiling of 14,000 feet; even less, with full tanks and bomb load. The reason? It had been built to the specification of a very famous flying-boat called the Sunderland, and was built by the same firm - Short Bros. of Belfast and Calshot. A snag arose when an attempt was made to wheel it into an aircraft hangar; the wings were found to be too wide for the hangar doors. Answer: the wings must be shortened thus reducing the 'lift' of the aircraft. This was partly responsible for the fact that out of the 27 remaining operations we were due to undertake, 9 were referred to as planting vegetables - in other words - mine laying.

The mines had to be dropped very accurately from a height no greater than 2,000 ft and were lowered by parachute, which later became detached upon impact. Mines were huge cylindrical objects and lay in wait at the bottom of shallow waters. Some were primed to detonate after a certain number of ships had passed over them (false sense of security), others were activated only by ships of a high tonnage.

We mined waters around the Friesian Islands frequently. These were a string of islands running parallel to the Dutch coast, over which the majority of raids into Germany and the occupied countries had to pass. These were the enemy's first line of 'flak' defences and very heavy. Other places were the Kiel Canal, the R. Gironde estuary on the West coast of France and also around the Island of Heligoland, in the North Sea off the Scandinavian coast. Actually the British had seized this island from Denmark in 1807, but later arranged with Germany to swap it for Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean.

Having completed our training, we were a little surprised to find ourselves posted to a

new squadron. This time 15 Squadron based at a different area. It was RAF Wyton, a few miles from the town of Huntingdon. At least, we would stay together as a crew. Additional crew members were required: a flight engineer called Phil who was in the regular Air Force before the war and who had trained as an apprentice. His task was to 'balance the wing tanks' during flight and to assist the pilot during take-off and landing. We also needed a mid-upper gunner, bringing the crew total to seven.

RAF Wyton was a pre-war peace-time station, not unlike Mildenhall, only newer. I was soon able to find accommodation for Joyce as there were a number of local villages. Thus she/we stayed with a young woman called Lorna and her baby daughter in a village called Brampton on the Great Ouse. Lorna's husband was away in the army. Our rent was useful for Lorna and she and Joyce were company for each other. I believe Joyce thought she had learnt a lot about how not to raise children whilst we were there.

I was able to cycle between the airfield and our 'digs'. We would often walk along the riverbank of the Great Ouse into Hemingford Greys and St. Ives - a pretty part of the Cambridge countryside. On occasions the crew would come to visit and we would go fishing, with borrowed gear and a 'borrowed' punt on the river.

In the mornings I would cycle up to Wyton for food and duty. Duty consisted of maintenance of the radio equipment and exchanging signals with local stations. Next we would check in at the Flight Office for routine activities and await instructions for 'ops'. If operations were due we would embark on a short NFT (Night flying test) to check the aircraft fitness.

Operations depended upon meteorological conditions and instructions from Bomber Command Headquarters at High Wycombe. If operations were 'on', briefing would take place during the afternoon, when targets would be notified, usually the name of a city or town and an aiming point - say a river bridge, a railway marshalling yard, a factory known to be producing war materials e.g. ball-bearings, shells, tanks, in so far as 'intelligence' could identify them. Recent reconnaissance photographs 'blown up' - excuse the pun - would be screened and any details of defences that were available would be issued.

Oddly enough 'security' notwithstanding, I was able to cycle back to the village to let Joyce know I wouldn't be back 'til morning (optimistically).

On such occasions I would return to the station to join the rest of the crew, to collect parachutes and standby rations (caffeine tablets, Horlicks tablets, chocolate and fruit pastilles) then find out any last minute information - met. reports etc. before going out by truck to dispersal points to board the aircraft.

Whether mine laying or attacking other targets the routine was pretty much the same. The aircraft was already 'armed' and fuelled. Cockpit drill would be carried out, each engine would be 'run up' and checked and readiness confirmed to control tower. Next, aircraft would leave dispersal to follow a series of blue lights set into the ground to indicate the line of the perimeter track, then line up at the end of the runway for take-off. Aircraft were called by letter from control and given permission to take-off - one each 30 seconds. A squadron had two 'wings' each of 12 planes.

Now began one of the worst moments of the operation. Runways were 2000 to 3000 yards in length, never long enough for us. With full revs the plane would rumble along, endeavouring to gain sufficient speed for lift off. Not a nice feeling with wing tanks full of aviation fuel and tons of high explosives underneath you. The cockpit was tense and those who had Gods to pray to prayed to them and those who hadn't prayed anyway. Our flying helmets were fitted with earphones and microphones and these in turn were clipped into the intercom system. So once clear of the ground and safely airborne a chorus of congratulations came through to the skipper, including a 'Good on yer' from our Aussie rear gunner.

It has to be remembered that the first heavier than air flight had been made by the Wright Brothers only 36 years prior to this, at the end of 1903. So that flight was just about out of its infancy, but was barely into its state of adolescence. War had been responsible for swift advances, but there was small comparison to today's sophisticated machines, be they civil or military. No pressurised cabins, speeds little above 250 m.p.h., the 'ceiling' of the Lancaster was not much above 35,000 ft. and heating was nil, apart from electrically heated clothing for the turret gunners. Navigation too was primitive. Mariners had plenty of time to use their compasses and sextants, airmen were moving at greater speeds and had to use a system of 'dead reckoning' with the aid of ground observation (if possible), the compass and our aircraft were fitted with an 'astrodome' - a perspex bubble on top of the fuselage, by means of which the navigator could use his sextant, with the help of the wireless 'op' who had to count the seconds for him. Other than this the wireless 'op' was required to call up home D/F (Direction Finding) stations for a bearing or, more often, a 'fix' - no, nothing to do with drugs.

Only a small force of aircraft was deployed for mine-laying operations, each with its individual aiming point; so each very much a solo mission. We approached our target area at very low level. German radar at this phase was sub-standard, which was a help; but obviously a four-engined propeller driven plane was audible way off, especially so over water, so that the enemy had prior notice of our arrival, though perhaps not of our intentions. We were made to feel most unwelcome. However, RAF pilots and bomb-aimers were a dedicated lot and invariably pressed home the attack, leaving just the air gunners the task of returning answering fire. Our approach was at such short notice that the Germans had insufficient time in which to call up the night fighters. Accuracy in targeting in this sort of enterprise added to the risk, since altitudes were low and speed had to be reduced.

During this period of the war now being recounted - 1941/42, things had been going badly for the Allies. The Royal Navy was engaged in defensive operations against U Boats and pocket battleships; the Army was on the defensive in Southern Europe and North Africa and Japan had entered the war, uninvited. At the same time there was night bombing of the London Docks, ports such as Plymouth and Bristol and industrial areas like Coventry. Talk of invasion was in the air. The only branch of the armed forces to be on the offensive was the R.A.F. We had literally 'put to flight' the German daylight offensive through the Battle of Britain and although there was German night-bombing, Bomber Command was carrying the war to the enemy. As far as the Command was concerned night operations were building up. When our crew became operational in November 1941, often fewer than 100 aircraft per sortie were possible. This number increased gradually, so much so that a few months later as many as 500 aircraft would set out towards perhaps two main targets with other diversionary efforts on the fringe to confuse the enemy. Eventually on the 30th May 1942 we took part in

the first 1000 bomber raid over Cologne (my part in history).

Much was made of the first 1000 aircraft bombing raid. Not so much made of the second, only two days later, over Essen. The novelty was over.

As a fighter aircraft the Spitfire was given over-much credit for the success of the Battle of Britain. The Hurricane contributed quite as much to that success, if not more. In the same way, it was the Lancaster bomber which was glamorized as a heavy bomber. In fact the Stirling was only 18 m.p.h. slower in flight and carried a heavier bomb load, except when the Lancaster carried its 20,000lb “Block Buster”. The Lancaster indeed had a much higher “ceiling” and being of a later design was more up to date. Other bomber aircraft such as the Halifaxes, Stirlings, Wellingtons, went out of service in one way or another, so that the majority of aircraft of that type were replaced by Lancasters, and rightly so.

We embarked eventually upon our serious operations in mid-April 1942, two months after Arthur Harris was appointed Commander in Chief of Bomber Command.

There are golfers I know, ready to bore their fraternity with hole by hole and stroke by stroke accounts of their exploits in previous games. Rather than risk a similar misdemeanour I will generalize.

There were highlights, of course. We visited the industrialised Ruhr Valley, and got to know Essen, Bremen, Emden and Duisberg well. It was at the latter target on 6th August 1942 that we came nearest to meeting our Nemesis. A searchlight “cone” caught us with its unexpected mauve beam (used in conjunction with other beams to calculate aircraft height) just as we had completed our bombing run. I was glad that I had returned from the flare-shute to my wireless cabin and was able to observe matters from the astrodome. As was to be expected, in no time at all, we were beset by bursting ironmongery all around us. Fortunately, with bombs gone, manoeuvring was easier. With banking and dipping this usually meant losing height. Our pilot, however, confused the ground forces by climbing instead. Even so the “cone” held us for five minutes or so which stretched to twice that number of hours it seemed. We turned for home and beyond the range of flak but not without considerable damage. Some hydraulic and electrical lines had been cut and the starboard inner engine was shut off. This meant that the gun turrets were inoperable and we prayed that the undercarriage would still work for landing. The ground crew afterwards counted over fifty shrapnel holes in the wings and fuselage.

I guess that other aircrews in the vicinity witnessing our predicament would be grateful for our drawing enemy fire away from themselves.

I cannot recall the expression “adrenaline flow” coming into the conversation of the 1940s but it was obviously a fact of life at the time, since the response of the senses in those dangerous situations became considerably heightened. One became more fully aware of the sound of exploding ordnance a few yards away, even above the sound of the engines. Also, the rattle of shrapnel around the inside of the fuselage was distinguishable, as was the smell of cordite from the machine guns above the normal oily smell of those old aircraft. The outside scene, too, impacted sharply upon the vision as well as on the memory. Looking down upon the target scene below, as the aircraft banked, meant looking into a black pit over three or four miles below and partly

illuminated by the reflection of searchlight beams off the smoke and clouds. Fires below began with a magnesium flash, followed by a sepia afterglow. The only live colours came from the streams of green and red tracer shells reaching up towards you from downstairs.

Winston Churchill reputedly said there was nothing more exhilarating that being shot at and not being hit. That may have been true hiding behind a two feet thick wall during the Sydney Street Siege. It is a different matter crouching in a thin tin box 15,000ft aloft with heavy flak bursting nearby. Exhilarating - Huh! Fear of God more like. Especially when there is nowhere to hide.

A similar clash with searchlight cones had awaited us over Hamburg in the previous November in a Wellington. Not so traumatic, however, as the older aircraft had been much more manoeverable and had the advantage of greater height. It was over Hamburg later that, reverting to a golfing expression, we score a “hole in one”. Our target photograph showed a direct hit upon a bridge over the R. Elbe which had been our objective on 26th July 1942.

On each trip, except for mine-laying, we were instructed to photograph our target at the moment of bombing. My job was to drop a photo flash/flare down the flare chute, halfway down the fuselage. When “Bombs gone” was announced, a number of seconds was counted before the flare was launched.

I was told that it took 26 seconds for a bomb to fall through 10,000ft (just under 2 miles) in which time the aircraft could have travelled something over a mile. So much for ballistics.

It was also the W/Op’s responsibility to dispatch bundles of metal foil strips down the same flare chute - these were intended to confuse such radar equipment that the Germans had. Propaganda leaflets also went by the same route. Now and again we could be persuaded by ground crew members, with whom we were upon the best of terms, to drop an empty bottle over our target. They had learned, correctly or not, that such a bottle created a terrifying whistling noise, so it gave them great satisfaction. It was OK so long as the skipper approved. Such activities were subject to restraint because one could guess at some of the missiles they might have had in mind.

Having survived a number of operations, activities became routine. Starting with the usual trauma of take-off, we next fixed our position from landmarks - water was easiest- or from ground beacons or RDF (radio direction finding). Next we faced the customary tangle with the flak from the Freisian Islands or flak-ships thereabouts. Next the threatening Dutch coast; after which a slight respite, but caution nevertheless, until the target area was reached. In that vicinity some variation of what has already been described would take place. The tension would arise during the process of having identified the target, then to line up the bombing run and hold the course for excruciating seconds, as sitting ducks, until bombs were released. Then the bombing run had to continue for up to 45 seconds to allow for accurate bombing photographs. Since height and direction were stipulated at “briefing”, bomb aiming had to be correct first time, to keep in line with the bomber stream.

It was, obviously, with a sense of relief that we crossed the North Sea on the return to base. Another duty for the W/Op was to operate the IFF box - Identification Friend or

Foe device, coded daily, before crossing our own coastline, to let our AckAck gunners know that we were RAF and not Luftwaffe. It was a duty the rest of the crew made sure I never failed to carry out. Even with the use of this device one could never be quite sure that our own defences would not let fly at us, especially coming in over Harwich. Possibly some of our crews nearby had failed to signal, or perhaps an enemy fighter had come in with the stream with a view to attacking us or the landing field.

It was as well that these various assignments fell to the lot of the W/Op since half way through our tour of ops an order from "on high" decreed that henceforth radio silence would be maintained, except in dire emergency. In other words, from then on we were not permitted to transmit from the aircraft. This was one of the examples of the waste of war. Here we were, having spent months training in Morse Code to reach quite high speeds and to learn the manipulation and maintenance of our transmitters, primitive as they were, and now were forbidden to use our know-how. At best, base or Command would belt out signals to returning aircraft to divert to certain other airfields, due perhaps to enemy action or meteorological conditions. This did happen to us on at least three occasions; so we were not quite redundant. It was the more disappointing in that, just about the same time, new and more sophisticated radar and radio equipment was being installed into all aircraft, and was begging us to use it.

There remain a few matters of interest worth noting. There were hazardous landings in fog and sometimes snow. From time to time we returned minus the contribution of one and, once, two engines. Half way through our tour of ops (a tour comprised 30 operations), we had an exchange of pilots. Sergeant Dick Bebbington took over from P.O. Arnott. Aircrews being a superstitious lot, we were somewhat miffed. Radar was coming into greater use as an aid to navigation and identification of targets; and we took "boffins" from Cambridge on test flights, helping to develop it.

Perhaps the most unusual and alarming incident came our way in early July, when having survived the customary trauma of take off; once in the air, the ASI (Air speed indicator) registered zero. With no idea of air speed, navigation was questionable to say the least, speed over the target would present a problem, and as for landing a knowledge of speed was essential, to avoid stalling or of over shooting the runway. Nothing for it but to return to base. Now W/T - wireless telegraphy, had to give way to RT - radio telephony, i.e. no radio transmissions but local talk between aircraft and control tower. A tricky situation arose in which the flight engineer's knowledge was tested to the utmost. QFE was requested, i.e. barometric pressure at ground level and was given and the altimeter was set accordingly. Then the engineer had to guess from engine revolutions what air speed was being maintained in order to decide upon:

1. fine pitch of props for landing.
2. guess at air speed to prevent stalling and
3. the right moment for touch-down.

Phil, the engineer, did us proud and we landed with full bomb load and fuel tanks, problem enough with all gauges working. The ground crew and the "instrument bashers" as they were known, spent hours checking the equipment. Eventually it was discovered that a caterpillar had crawled into the pitot tube, that was attached near the front of the aircraft, thus blocking air pressure from being registered. Given, the aircrews' superstitious tendency, much was read into the episode.

Although we were based at Wyton and were briefed for ops from there, our aircraft were fuelled and armed at RAF Alconbury. At that time the crew rooms consisted of

two wooden huts, sparsely furnished. When it was later taken over by US Airforce tremendous improvements were made.

We undertook our last operation over Dusseldorf in August. Having “lost” two engines we were diverted to Mildenhall for landing, oddly enough where our tour had begun. Joyce was at Wyton and six month’s pregnant and very anxious. Last ops were always considered to be touch and go. With some difficulty, I managed to get a telephone call back from Mildenhall to the house next door to where we lived. At the time the occupant was out, so Joyce took it upon herself to break in to take the call. Wow.!

At this juncture, Joyce moved back home to Southfields to stay with Grandma and Grandad (Holbrow) until James was to be born. My future movements were uncertain. Upon completion of Ops. ex-aircrew were granted fourteen days leave before their next posting, supposedly near to home, then after three months rest to return to operations. However, I was posted to RAF Kinloss, up on the East Coast of Scotland - a far cry from home. Whilst there I spent my time night-flying in Avro Anson aircraft out over the cold North Sea, training future aircrew.

I was surprised next to learn that my Flight Commander from 15 Squadron had put my name forward for training as a Signals Officer. So I attended a selection board at Air Ministry with that in view. I was told there that I was to be turned into a young scientist. Next I knew, I was at RAF Cranwell sharing the Sergeants’ Mess with twenty other ex -aircrew and engaged upon a three month intensive technical and administration course. Radio, or in those days wireless, technology was not all that far advanced, glass valves were still in use together with wet batteries. Transistors were to follow post-war. Aerial arrays came in for study - today’s advances make them seem ridiculous. We were flown around in small Proctor aircraft for experience of which we had already had plenty. So our Polish pilots took great pleasure in hurrying our exercises then flying low over the local countryside on a search for young RAF/WAAF couples off duty and disporting themselves amorously in the fields. Many a fist was shaken at us.

James was born just before the course came to an end. I had been keeping in touch with Southfields by phone on a daily basis. On the day of the news breaking, I was sufficiently overcome as to leave my wallet in the phone kiosk. Luckily, it was found by an honest airman of which there were not a great number, and was returned to me.

Next was six weeks “Officers” Training at RAF Cosford with a mixture of men of various trades all about to receive the King’s Commission. What seemed to be an enormous sum of money was issued with a list of the uniform items for ordinary and ceremonial purposes as well as for tropical kit. What was as much a matter of envy as the money was the number of clothing coupons that came with it. Many a wife, mother or girlfriend will have profited therefrom. I know one who did. So June 1943 saw me arriving on duty as a Pilot Officer. After the hectic days of operational flying there followed a period of comparative tranquillity.

I had been informed upon leaving Cosford that I was destined to be posted to R.A.F. Bomber Command, High Wycombe for liaison work with U.S. Air forces. Somehow someone with influence had managed to edge a friend or relative into that post. Goes to show - power corrupts.

At first I was posted to RAF Bottesford, approximately twenty miles from where I now sit writing (Sutton Bonington). I was supernumerary to a Flight Lieutenant Tom Patten, Signals Officer, of that station with its two Australian Squadrons. He was a great pipe-smoking character whose left leg was of little use to him. I learnt to double de-clutch for him as he drove the signals van around the airfield perimeter to dispersal points. He received an MBE decoration for his services quite late in life. My promotion from Pilot Office to Flying Officer followed quite quickly. Then in no time at all it seemed, I was installed as Signals Officer to the newly established RAF Metheringham Station about ten miles south of Lincoln with the rank of Flight Lieutenant. They were busy times setting up a new department in a new RAF Station, apart from operational duties.

As I moved to Metheringham, so did one of the Australian Squadrons as well as the Station Commander, a Group Captain McKechnie, an excellent station commander even though a little eccentric. He made some unorthodox demands upon my department. His habit was to fly a Tiger Moth over the airfield in the early mornings and perform aerobatics. I was required to fit air-to-ground radio equipment in his aircraft "unofficially" and was taken to task by GHQ for so doing; but it was not a Court Martial matter. Another whim of his was to hold a church parade on Sundays; almost unheard of on operational stations. For this he wanted marching music put out over loud speakers. This we managed to arrange for him, but the apparatus necessary was in short supply. So, after the Tiger Moth trouble, he had to use his personal influence with GHQ. Never understood why he wouldn't use the Tannoy system.

Sadly, he volunteered, unnecessarily, to go on a raid over Konigsberg, and was lost.

Whilst at Metheringham, Joyce came to the village with James, where I had found accommodation at a farm with a Mrs. Smith, and within cycling distance of the Station. The Smiths were an elderly and old fashioned couple who had no gas or electricity, had hams hanging in the larder and kept cattle in the farmyard. James used to walk fearlessly amongst the bulls in the yard.

Air raids had been going on over London and we received a message that the house in Southfields where Joyce's Grandparents lived had been hit and an unexploded bomb was sitting amongst the rubble. We went down there, found them in a Church Hall and brought them back to Metheringham. We found a one up one down cottage for them in the village and furnished it with items from local auctions and they settled there until after the War.

Things were settling down nicely, when out of the blue came a posting for me to Chigwell. It seemed that since it would be only a matter of time before Germany would be defeated, so an organisation was being set up involving mobile units to go in behind the Army to take over and occupy the country. To this end I was allocated a collection of 20 vehicles, three officers and 36 men to go out meantime into the countryside and undertake exercises to prepare us for what was to come. However, one matter had been overlooked. The men were lined up and asked who could drive. I think two hands went up, one of those hesitantly - this was 1944 remember. So the following two weeks were spent on driving instruction, myself included. Thus I passed my driving test in a thirty hundredweight lorry and was granted a "G" Licence. Of course, within a month or so we were driving jeeps, three tonners, water bowsers, technical vehicles et al.

At the end of the driving course, we set off across London in a huge convoy to

Maidenhead Thicket to establish a mobile signals unit, with power to requisition land or other facilities we might need. Since Maidenhead Thicket was common land, problems did not arise. We were under canvas and collected supplies, i.e. motor fuel and rations from RAF White Waltham not far away. Joyce moved to Chalvey, near Slough, with James to live with her "adopted" Aunt Elsie. This was as close as she could be to my unit. My fellow officers were all flying officers. Adjutant "Willie" Crossley from Solihull and very usefully experienced in all the service wheezes. Then there was Bill Wise, cipher officer, a keen golfer, delighted to be close to the well known Temple Golf Course where he gained temporary membership. The third was another cipher officer called Vaughan.
We had settled in at Maidenhead but for a few weeks, when instructions were received for us to move the unit to a site in the Cotswolds. We moved to a village called Windrush some five miles west of Burford and with Bourton-on-the-Water a similar distance to the North. There was a flying training school close by and I was fortunate to gain the use of some empty sleeping accommodation for the men. This was useful since it was a hard winter with several inches of snow making life under canvas disagreeable. Cooking still had to be carried on out of doors, and the camp cook, Scotty, had to rise at 5.30a.m. and break the ice before starting up the oil and water cooking system. His was the worst job on the unit but he was able to rely upon support from his buddies - still we all needed to eat.

I had found a room for Joyce and James with a Mrs. Tye in the nearby village of Sherborne, this giving rise to two particular incidents. One such was that James contracted measles and spent about a week in Bourton-on-the-Water Cottage Hospital. The other was that officers traditionally served the other ranks with their Christmas dinner. In the circumstances, Scotty had only to get the fire going, then Joyce cooked the meal of goose and whatever trimmings were available. James was spoiled by the men who would tie him into a seat in the Jeep and drive him around the immediate area. Meanwhile the unit was carrying out normal signal practice; exchanging messages with HQ and other mobile units deployed in the set up.

We had been aware of the possibility and were prepared for an overseas posting but when the order came it was not for Europe as we had expected but to the Far East theatre of war. The battle for Europe would be coming to a close but Japan was still "giving us grief". So it was back to Chigwell to collect tropical kit and to await orders for embarkation. We were moved to Morecambe to be on a direct rail route to Liverpool and in about ten days we were on the MV Dil Wara heading South over the Irish Sea.

It was a time when travellers moved between continents across water by ship, not by air, and few people did so in any case except sailors. So when such an opportunity arose excitement was engendered and curiosity aroused. When a ship arrived in a home port it was welcomed by a military band in full regalia and awaiting families. Departure was a different matter; secretive, unannounced, with details of times, dates and destination withheld in the name of security. One bade farewell to family days before, at the end of embarkation leave and they were not permitted to witness the sailing. The Dil Wara's rails had been crowded with men of all the armed forces looking forward to their voyage of a lifetime. It was exciting in a risky sense. One prayed that the U-boats had matters to attend to other than ourselves. The next day saw us out through St. George's Channel and into the North Atlantic. The "knowalls" said they could tell this by the sun's position despite the zigzag course that was adopted. We were soon into the

choppy waters of the Bay of Biscay giving rise to our first sightings of dolphins playfully travelling alongside, and to the disappearance below decks of some of the grey-faced among us. Once we saw a drifting mine some 300 yards to starboard which was quickly dispatched by rifle fire from the deck, but nothing as exciting as sailors adrift in an open boat.

Gibraltar seemed an age coming into view and our entry into the Mediterranean gave us a feeling of greater safety from enemy attack by U-boats, but apprehension of possible aerial encounter. Our passage was designed to avoid the numerous islands in the inland sea, keeping close to, but out of sight of, the North African Coast. Eventually at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, we reached Port Said and the entry into the Suez Canal. After being so long out of sight of land there was much of interest to be seen. We were delayed up to about 48 hours in a queue of ships awaiting our turn and then to be at a standstill whilst wrecked ships and other marine debris was removed from our passage.

Now began a journey due South, as the temperature rose in proportion to the distance covered. Across the arid desert the heat in the Gulf of Suez became unbearable. It couldn't get worse we thought; but it did as we passed through the Red Sea when we lay torpid in our cabins, feeling little like eating or reading - just sleeping. Our lethargy was released just once, as we passed another troopship homeward bound. Messages, many of a ribald nature, were exchanged by those expert in semaphore or Aldis lamp signalling.

Things improved after leaving Aden and sailing into the Indian Ocean and on, across the Arabian Sea with its flying fishes; to land, finally, in Bombay. We were to remain between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator for as long as our overseas tour was to last. A fortnight in Bombay, a city teeming with humanity, new experiences and certain inconveniences in the shape of upset bowels, sunstroke and other unexpected tropical ills.

Our next stage was a two day rail trip Eastwards across the sub-continent to Calcutta. The steam powered engine was fuelled by a mixture of wood and coal and I dare not think of what else, but the resultant smell was offensive. Our tempers were not improved by the fact that our seats were wooden slats, smuts and smoke blew into our windowless carriages and our so called iron rations ran out, and we were glad to be able to bargain for food and refreshments at frequent halts, when a host of locals appeared from nowhere willing to exchange their wares for very little recompence.

Calcutta was a city with an overflowing populace, much of it in a sorry state. It was hot, humid and fetid, where a cow could lie across the tram tracks for hours holding up the city traffic. The white man ruled here. So life was good for we sahibs, moving about freely and solicited by rickshaw johnnies and purveyors of fruit and other exotic and erotic promises. Mother Theresa would later have plenty on her plate here.

When life is good it tends not to last, as was the case with us. We were away from Calcutta in double quick time and across the Bay of Bengal to Rangoon. Here was a city that had been of great beauty as one could easily see from the remnants of landscaped parks, lakes, and what had been handsome colonial houses. Our entry was into a harbour which was a shambles, with the tops of ships' superstructures protruding through the surface of the once clear water. In the town itself the originally elegant

buildings were shell blasted, and overhead tram wires hung like tattered spider webs. The streets were littered with rubble.

Moving up-country by lorry to Mingladon, the nearest RAF base, we passed the beautiful Lake Victoria and the impressive 368 feet high Shwe Dagon Pagoda, its top covered in gold leaf and boasting the world's second largest bell at that time. People in India had struck us as of small stature, due, we felt, to malnutrition. The Burmese, too, were small, but not for the same reason. Rarely did a man reach more than about 5'4" in height, the women being shorter and although the rear view of the latter could be said to be attractive, upon her turning around the spell was broken at the sight of a red gash across the lower part of the face - the result of chewing betel nut and as often as not she would be smoking a thick cheroot.

My ultimate destination, over 150 miles North of Rangoon, was a town called Toungoo, on the Sittang River in the humid, torrid sweaty plains. Here I was to work out the rest of my war. The town was set in the midst of paddy fields and consisted mainly of bamboo huts on stilts (Bashas the army and airmen called them). There was a sprinkling of well designed stone or brick buildings, which, considering the military activity going on stayed remarkably intact. Upon my arrival the atmosphere, oppressive enough at any time, was rent with a foul stench; it was of rotting, partly burnt, rice. The retreating Japanese had fired a rice store upon their departure.

I was taking over from a CO who had been a well known Olympic hurdler, glad to be homeward bound. He was brief in his information to me about local issues and advice as to how to proceed henceforth. My accommodation was to be a tent hard by a small Buddhist temple and virtually in a paddy field, where not only rice grew, but into which small men threw nets to catch fish, which appeared to have fallen out of the sky. The tent had a low dirt wall built around it to keep out the monsoon flood. The floor and wall were covered with a tough material called bit-hess (derived from bitumen and hessian), a substance used to surface jungle airstrips and as a road paving at times. I would enjoy the advantage of a personal toilet - a wooden box with a hole cut in it, and a personal shower, consisting of a large square tin can with holes punched in it and with water poured in the top by my batman, Peter. He was a diminutive Indian with a family of 8 back at home. He once saw my photo of James in the office and I lost face in his eyes as having fathered only one child. Peter did my laundry, supplied me with numerous cups of "char" and provided my meals; largely of goat's meat, unless he could somehow contrive a chicken. The Burmese chickens were all of bantam size but a welcome alternative.

Our vehicles, mainly technical radio vans, were sunk into mud up to their axles and beyond, except the few which were necessary for ration runs and other communications. The mud was indicative of the general wetness of everything around us. It wasn't just the sweat from our bodies that made our shirts and shorts damp it was the sheer humidity. Battledress and forage caps grew a sort of mould upon themselves. It was necessary to keep cigarettes in an airtight tin or they became short, soggy, tubes of brown stuff wrapped in rotting paper husks.

Although a jungle area, it could not be said to excel in colourful flora; what there was bizarre and mainly green. Fauna, however, was a different matter. Bull frogs abounded, making the night loud with their constant croaking, which would cease abruptly upon the arrival of a snake. Then suddenly, a scream. Ever heard a frog

scream? They do when they are being swallowed by a snake. Minutes later the chorus would start up again. The main form of repellent life, apart from marauding pie-dogs was of the insect variety. I say variety advisedly. There were twelve inch centipedes, black and golden scorpions, fortunately infrequent, and swarms of anophele mosquitoes. Of the rest, some chirruped, some sang, some buzzed and some stridulated. Mobility-wise they ran, sprang, hopped, crawled or flew. Then some bit, some stung, and others sucked blood, preferably human. Most could perform a combination of several of these activities. All the while an assortment of ants proliferated. Anything, in the least edible, dropped on the floor would disappear within minutes. Many were downright ugly, others breathtakingly beautiful. I recall a spider with a brilliant blue, golf-ball sized body swinging in a web that I almost walked into; but arachnaphobic though I am, I could only admire it close to.

The Burmese themselves were a mild and gentle people, they appear to be of mixed races well blended, 90% were Buddhists. Older and wizened men were content to sit around talking and smoking leaving the women to look after affairs, such as looking after the children, caring for the chickens, house keeping, cooking and filling the holes in the roads with stone that they carried on their heads in flat baskets. The younger men fished in the paddy fields, grew the rice - a staple crop - built basha buts, or worked on decrepit vehicles. These were the open-sided vans one found moving up and down the Burma Road, piled with people, baskets of chickens, furniture and much else. One had no idea what was used for their fuel, but it gave rise to frequent breakdowns and a fearful smell. An alternative form of transport was a cart drawn by humped oxen or huge water buffalo. They were also adept a collecting any old tins we disposed of and added handles to them, then put on sale in the marketplaces. The men, women and children all wear the longyi; a wrap-over tubular skirt. The Burmese were well disposed towards us, they had been a British Colony of course. They had been brow-beaten by the Japanese who "lived off the land" at their expense. Their features were often not unlike those of the Japanese and one often wondered, looking at the occupants of a bullock cart, if some of them were fleeing Japs.

There was always, in the villages, the ever present file of Buddhist monks in yellow apparel each carrying a staff and begging bowl; often with some noviciates in tow.

Our duties were not onerous on my arrival and diminished as time progressed. We were a branch of what was known as the "Y" Service. Our operators listened in to Japanese military radio, which was in code in Morse Code. My lads were very clever lads, they were able to break down the Jap code, translate it into English and send it in our own code back to HQ. I was never privy to the content of these, nor wanted to be.

The most senior rank I had to rely upon in the running of the unit was a Sergeant Roberts; different from the practice back home, but he knew the men and kept things very well in hand.

Joyce wrote almost daily and also had mailed to me Air Mail Daily Telegraphs which were often as new as only two days old. It was by this means that we learned quite early that a huge American bomb had obliterated a Japanese city called Hiroshima. The men in the unit did not spend time philosophising about the justification of the action, they were just delighted that this was likely to bring a quick end to the War. Most of them had been in the Far East for 3 years or more, having nowhere to go on leave even had it been granted. They had fought their way Southwards from India pursuing the

enemy in terrible conditions. Little wonder they shed no tears for a foe whose conduct of war would have been applauded by Ghengis Khan.

We soon had confirmation that VJ Day would shortly be upon us. So, what to do next? I took a trip South to Rangoon for information and instructions and at the same time to witness the arrival at Mingladon airstrip of the Japanese surrender party. Instructions were to keep the men occupied and to inform them that they must wait to hear what their "demob" numbers were to be. We hauled out of the mud as many vehicles as possible in order to pull out from Toungoo when the orders came.

To comply with orders an "It ain't half hot mum" party was formed. Quite a few men joined out of boredom, others out of interest. Prospective audiences would be from other local service units and the locals. The main interest, however, was football. Not far from our site was a field of sorts, and so for weeks, having enough players in the unit for three good teams we set about developing, with practice, a polished team. A knock-out competition was organised to include all Army and RAF teams in the local area. So every day, despite heat and humidity, it was football, football all the way. In brief my unit reached a final against an Army team to be played on what was laughingly called our ground. More activity to keep the men occupied. A large crowd of spectators was anticipated, so we prepared as good a pitch as possible and set up a timber and bamboo grandstand - with seats.

It was as well we had taken these measures, since no less a personage turned up to support the match than General Slim, Commander of the 14th Army. Thus I basked in reflected glory as his host for the afternoon. Of course, we had to let the Army win by one goal; score 4 : 3.

The war with Japan having ended; up to that point I always went where I was told to go. Having suffered the rigours of jungle life I decided to make a journey of my own choosing. Thus, a lorry was organised for anyone who wished to go on a trip out of the plains up into the hills to visit a tea plantation near a village called Than Daung. The lorry, or garry as the men called it, left Toungoo, loaded with Burma veterans looking upon the journey as a celebration. The departure took place in the cool of the early morning in bright daylight. We were soon up into the jungle covered hills and looking down, on occasions through war torn gaps in the trees, to the Sittang River with its few lazy rafts and canoe type vessels moving downstream on the sluggish current. Even in the early morning the sun was already drawing a light mist off the water. We passed some of the enemy's abandoned equipment - in one place about l000 steel helmets strewn over the forest floor.

Luckily, we were able to follow the original road-cum-track, and at the steepest places we climbed a series of hairpins bends, where at each corner we saw the remains of camouflaged Japanese gun posts, which had a clear view of an on-coming approach from either above or below. The damp atmosphere dropped away as we gained height, until at last we broke clear of the jungle and out on to a level plateau of cool dry open country and the tea plantation. Idyllic, what peace, what Paradise - clean cool air. No sign of tea planters or gatherers as yet, just a run-down bungalow with a battered veranda and broken windows. The plantation itself was intact - rows of bushes badly in need of pruning, but otherwise orderly and undisturbed. It seemed the Japanese although prepared to destroy rice crops and other forms of life support, had some respect for the tea, which possibly they hoped to drink in ritual fashion upon their

victorious return home.

Now began a long period of waiting. Demobilisation became a long and rather tedious affair. It operated on the basis of age, length of service and time spent overseas. The men very quickly worked out their own situations and were ready to tell me, before I had confirmation from Headquarters in Rangoon of what their “demob” number was to be. My “demob” number was 26 and I had a good idea of my departure date, largely from the airmail newspapers that Joyce was mailing out to me.

Quite good supplies of beer and cigarettes were now reaching us: these helped to relieve the tension of waiting. Empty passenger ships were coming into Rangoon with them and were returning to the U.K. full of “time expired” men from the Army and the R.A.F. So, we had to set up a weekly ferrying service and the unit was becoming gradually depleted. Men who had been together, for years in some cases, were now parting, with promises to keep in touch and in some cases to take items home, ahead, for their friends. Sadly, in some cases, men were going back, as they knew, to broken marriages. I had had hints of this from some of the men themselves and was also aware from men’s correspondence, which it was my duty (for security reasons) to censor.

My departure from Toungoo meant that the rest of the unit had to come with me. It took us three days to haul our vehicles out of the site, with the aid of the Army’s R.E.M.E. unit - they were up to and beyond their axles in mud. I didn’t see the necessity for this, since they were not going to leave Burma. One vehicle would have been sufficient to get the remnant of the unit to Rangoon.

Back in the Officers’ Mess in Mingladon, I renewed acquaintance with a number of friends I had travelled out with from U.K. They each had their experiences to relate; and I had thought that I had had all the adventures. Amazingly, I also came across one Army Officer, Dennis Holland, who had been working with me at the Hudson’s Bay Company in the City, pre war.

The cruise home from Rangoon taking 28 days was relaxing: food was good and I read every book in the ship’s library. As we approached nearer home a peculiar circumstance came about. We had been taking anti-malaria tablets called “mepacrin” and as our sun tan became less we took on what appeared to be odd, jaundiced yellow complexion which took days to diminish.

However, home to Southampton Dock and train to R.A.F. Hednesford, near Birmingham, to be kitted out for “Civvy Street” with a grey chalk stripe suit, trilby hat and black shoes. Then a railway warrant to Hampton Station. I was permitted to keep my uniform and tropical kit - for old times sake. Strange: I ought to be able to quote the exact time and date of my arrival at 9, Deanside, Hanworth Road, Hampton, Middlesex, but it escapes me. It must have been in early March 1946 with three months service leave due before launching myself with millions of other ex-servicemen upon a strange new world. This time, we were not promised it would be a land fit for heroes. Just wait and see.

From this point we are looking back over about sixty years to a crucial stage in people’s lives, just as a disastrous world conflagration had come to an end. A new way, a better way of life we hoped was to open up. At home, shortages of food and materials prevailed - rationing still had years to run. Abroad, the world was still destabilised.

The defeated countries were still destined to be occupied by British and American forces for ten years or so. They had been so devastated by war that priority was granted to them at great cost to the so-called victors. Indeed the vanquished were availed such priority that economically and industrially they even forged ahead of the victors. It was truly said that we had won the war but lost the peace. In a few years devastated cities such as Cologne and Hamburg were rebuilt and back into working order whilst our own bomb sites, so called, were to be with us for up to 30 or 40 years and some of our own manufacturing industries such as those of cars, motorcycles and electronics had largely been taken over by Germany and Japan.

So, it was against this background that ones own personal plans had to be formulated. Ex-servicemen and women were each to receive a "gratuity", in my case £35 seemed a fairish sum at that time. Also, since extra income tax had been deducted to subsidise the War, a rebate was to be paid in compensation. Again, in my case it was to be £12. Alas this did not reach me for another 3 to 4 years, by which time half its value was lost, due to inflation, which had come about through shortages of almost everything. Market forces decree that when things are in short supply they increase in cost (not value). Much cynicism was abroad therefore; not surprisingly. Those who had "pulled together" out of necessity now were pulling apart. It was every man for himself. Although there was plenty to be done to put the country back on a peace time footing the employment market was unstable. Jobs were very much of a temporary nature. The de-mobilised forces had been trained for 5 or 6 years in war time activities and now were in need of re-training for what was to follow. So very soon courses were set up in almost every trade one could contemplate especially in certain areas which demanded essential work in such as house building; bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers. Later qualifications in the shape of diplomas could be obtained.

At this stage, for many years, there had been a stable coalition government of all political parties with an able leader at its head. However, it was decided by the power seekers that a General Election was due. All at once to the surprise of many, if not most, people a left wing government took charge with an unstoppable majority and the cry became "Nationalisation". So everything that was thought to be of importance became nationalised, taking on the title of "British" so we had British Rail, British Gas, British Overseas Airways Corporation, British Coal, British Transport and so on. Cash was taken out of the Exchequer to buy these industries from those who owned them. Health, education, agriculture having already been subsidised by government was now taken fully into government control.

Like many others I went back to my old firm to test my prospects there, to find that I could begin again where I had left off upon being "called up". I wasn't keen, having received so much promotion in the R.A.F. I felt I was worth more and had so much more experience to offer. Amusingly I had been holding a higher service ranking than some of the senior staff who would be returning.

In the interim, I applied for and obtained temporary work with the Post Office Saving Bank in a huge building behind the Olympia in West Kensington. I was classified as a temporary civil servant and spent my time chasing fraudulent withdrawals from P.O.S.B. accounts. I cycled daily from Hampton to Kensington and learned much about the lives and practices of permanent civil servants.

I read in the meantime in a national newspaper of a full-time course for Emergency

Teacher Training which appealed to me and decided to apply. My school qualifications and employment and service records were sufficient to satisfy the College authorities, and admission to the course was granted, after a wait of some 3-4 months. The course was to be of 15 months duration, allegedly as near to home as possible and a grant of financial support based upon the family situation and other details. So January '47 saw me installed in an emergency teachers training College, one of many which had proliferated after the War, right across the country. This all male College was newly established up in the Chiltern Hills at a village called Little Gaddesden. The College had taken over the temporary buildings of what had been a military hospital opposite to a stately home called Ashridge House and next to a golf course. The college was blessed with a large assembly hall - capacity of 400 students and staff and 20 huts: ex-wards each with 20 bed spaces. The huts were timber and asbestos structures and were connected by covered ways. The furnishings - beds and bedside tables almost certainly ex-hospital property. I was in Hut 13. The other 19 inhabitants of Hut 13 were, with one exception, all ex-service personnel. Some were of high rank in the services with a sprinkling of graduates and of mixed ages between 25 and 50 years. Most had pre-war experience in commerce, trade or industry, but all with a strong sense of vocation. Some carried the scars of battle in the shape of amputations, one, even, was deaf. (How would he cope?) Another would wake us up in the middle of the night due to his nightmares.

The regimen was demanding we each had to prepare for teaching general subjects, i.e. English, Maths, R.E. and P.E. and to specialise in two subjects. Our 15 months course had to cover what usually had three years devoted to it. The day began at 9.00 a.m. with a lecture in assembly, by the college principal - a Mr. Panton or by a subject specialist and at times a guest speaker. Then subject studies continued through the rest of the day until 5.00 p.m. or later and Wednesday p.m. was devoted to compulsory sport. The campus was isolated at the top of the Chiltern Hills - nearest village Little Gaddesden over a mile away and nearest towns Berkhampsted or Tring each about 4 miles distant as the disabled crow flies. There was a strong students union which promoted a host of activities and demanded from the authorities a bar. Said authorities, having been accustomed to dealing with younger students were a little taken aback at the request, but acquiesced none the less. A number of the students as it happened were older than the tutors. Lectures and tutorials continued throughout the week until Saturday mid-day. It was then that I got on my bike for the 40 mile ride to Hampton for the week-end, returning early on Monday just in time for the 9.00 a.m. lecture.

Amongst the many activities embarked upon by the Student's Union there arose a drama group with which I became closely involved, becoming secretary. Despite the amount of time absorbed by the college programme, the drama group managed to stage a performance of "The Taming of the Shrew" in Elizabethan style including the music, "The Doctor's Dilemma" by Bernard Shaw and a play written by students themselves. At the same time a splinter group attached put on a "Review" once a term and a pantomime at Christmas 1947. The Shakespeare and Shaw plays toured local senior schools. They were indeed busy times.

In the midst of all this, son John was born, and it was greatly to the discredit of the Vice Principal that I was unable to be at home nearer the time of birth. This unpopular character - an ex-army adjutant, insisted upon my remaining in situ until the following week-end, with the threat of my withdrawal from the course.

The course ended with the customary displays of students' works and achievements and with visits from such bodies as the N.U.T. and recently formed N.A.S. (National Association of Schoolmasters). Visits also were made by representatives of various educational bodies, through one of which I made contact with my own Local Education Authority - Middlesex County Council and became committed to teach after Easter 1948 in what was known as Stanwell Road Boys Secondary Modern School in Ashford, Middlesex, quite close to Heathrow Airport. (The School later became a mixed school called "Abbotsford Comprehensive").

Upon arrival there, I found an all male staff, mainly ex-service and about half of them emergency trained. Not surprisingly therefore the school was a little military academy. A whistle blown in the playground all boys froze to attention to await the next order to "fall in" and thence to march into School There was great emphasis upon sport: football, cricket, athletics in season and an annual boxing tournament and swimming gala. All this as well as inter-school exchanges. Competition between the "houses" was fierce. The top 20% of boys had been creamed off to go to grammar school and our 80% ranged academically from quite bright to quite illiterate and innumerate. Stress was laid upon spelling, times tables and handwriting. Oddly, little Cyril Smith could produce the most beautiful handwriting but was unable to read it - or much else.

The backgrounds from which the boys came were varied, a number being from "single parent families" (an expression unknown then) not out of fashion but because fathers had been lost at war or marriages had failed due to war. To make matters worse this was the year when the school leaving age was raised from 14 to 15. Boys had been looking forward to leaving to get a job and felt let down. In just two more years the leaving age was to be raised from 15 to 16 years. The boys were feeling "bolshie" and the headmaster, a Mr. Robertson (Robbie as he was known) had recourse to corporal punishment to maintain control on occasions. I got on very well with Robbie for whom I had much to thank as time progressed.

It had become the practice for committees to be set up by government to assess pay scales for various occupations such as police, nurses, doctors and teachers. For teachers it was the Burnham Committee, due to meet every third year to set out the new scales of pay for the following three years. Supply and demand was a consideration and as I entered the profession quite a reasonable new scale came into force. Soon, special "graded" posts were on offer to schools based upon the numbers on roll. To my embarrassment the head awarded one of these to me and I was to keep the matter confidential. In a year or two, higher scales were awarded to those who were to become heads of department. Again, unsolicited, I was made Head of the English Department with a "Scale III" post.

I was, at the same time, embarked upon part-time paid "Youth Work" in the evenings and some week-ends to augment the family income. Things were going so well that they were too good to last. The bright light on the horizon was the birth of a third son - Peter - in April '49. He was the only child at whose birth I was to be at home for and I joined the "plenty of hot water" brigade as was the practice of the day.

The Head, Robbie, was offered, and accepted, the headship of a new large "mixed" school in Sunbury-on-Thames, Kenyngton Manor School. Said school was also to be the premises for a new Evening Institute as they were then called. As a result of Robbie's influence I was offered the post as Principal - part time. It proved to be an

absorbing and fascinating job. Plenty of funds were available for equipment and the school facilities were new and excellent and the area well populated. Within a few years we had managed to establish a student body numbering over 2,000 and another Institute in Shepperton was put in my charge.

As well as vocational classes in commercial subjects: typing and shorthand and initial courses leading to national diploma courses and three foreign languages, there were many recreational courses to include pottery, art, car maintenance, flower arrangement and dressmaking. One high spot was the occasion when television broadcast our somewhat unusual “Ladies Metalwork” Group at work.

By this time we were into our second car - an Austin 10 to follow our first which had been an Austin Seven. Petrol being still on ration, I was granted extra coupons for use in my Institute work.

So life was full and fully occupied. In term time I was at School all day and four evenings a week at the Institute still finding time to spend with the family especially at weekends and especially during the breaks between terms. Added to this in 1957 at the age of 40+ I was qualified to become a member of the Veterans Time Trials Association, i.e. for cycling which had come about largely due to cyclists like myself whose time trialing careers had been interrupted by the War, so that now on two mornings a week I was up before 6.00 a.m. for a training run before School. My diary was full, you might say.

A new Head had been appointed to replace Robbie. In this I may be prejudiced. If so, then also were the rest of the staff, many of the parents and the local education office. “A new brush sweeping clean” was his objective, but in too much of a hurry with no consultation with those who mattered - the staff. The “house” system was abandoned and much of the sport was curtailed. What had been a strict adherence to full attendance was ignored, truancy became rife and discipline reached an all time low. I found myself at loggerheads with him on matters of discipline and teaching methods. He had come from a northern establishment of senior technical education and knew it all. I think he possibly saw my two jobs as too consuming and raised difficulties for me in various ways. Matters became such that I felt it best to make a change and decided after 14 years service to give up the post as Head of Department and join the staff of a local Primary School; a retrograde step in the eyes of many. However, I spent four very happy years at Crane School in Feltham with a small staff and about 200 very keen, very bright seven to eleven year olds. The atmosphere in the school was a tremendous change from that which I had recently left behind. The children would jump at any suggestion laid before them for any work or play, and questions of discipline simply did not arise. Oddly, the Head teacher, Les Gardener, had a brother, Len, who was a member of my staff at Evening Institute.

After my four years at Crane School the education authorities, both locally and at County level demonstrated their confidence in me by appointing me as Head of English at a newly opening school in Weybridge. Due to boundary changes coming about at that time Middlesex was absorbed into other local counties - i.e. Surrey, Essex and Hertfordshire, so the way was made easy for me to move from Middlesex L.E.A. to Surrey L.E.A.

The new school was staffed mainly by teachers who had been working in an old church

school (St. James's) which would now be closed and children and staff would all be transferred. The staff made a good team, working well together and I was one of only three or four additional newcomers. The school was not referred to as secondary modern, was too small at that stage to be called comprehensive - it was just "Heathside". It quickly earned a good reputation and attracted new pupils; even some from local private schools and the post-war bulge had some effect also.

The Head was a Mr. Eric Hillman with whom I was on very good terms, largely perhaps because I was able to take over assembly for him three times a week. In those times assembly was compulsory - the 1944 Education Act insisted upon a corporate act of worship being essential to start the school day; largely ignored now-a-days. This, I suppose, was the period in my teaching career that I found most rewarding. A new school in a woodland setting and a staff ready to collaborate in every possible way. They would help with library duty and when it came to putting on "The School Play" or Christmas presentations which fell to my lot, every department was willing to help. Home Economics provided wardrobe and interval refreshments, Art with scenery and "props", Science with stage lighting and effects, even the PE department with stage hands and dancing girls, trained by their very able teacher, Shirley Trussler.

The teachers were also very much into out of school activities, especially in sport and foreign travel. Also they met socially for theatre outings and car rallies. Academically the level was high; undertaking O and A levels in all subjects.

On two occasions, whilst at Crane School I was in charge of a project undertaken annually. This involved taking a coach with a driver, two other staff and 51 children to two adjacent hotels at Goodrington in Devon with a pre-arranged schedule for a week. This included a church service, a visit to a fishing trawler at Brixham, a walk across Dartmoor from High Will Hays Tor to Widdecombe in the Moor, a light house at Berry Head, a walk through woods to the ruins of Berry Pomeroy Castle, near Totnes, a riverboat trip up the River Dart from Dartmouth, and an official visit to Plymouth City Hall to meet the Mayor. Real education: from which the youngsters created an exhibition with illustrations, specimens, models and photographs together with drawings and diaries. On the strength of this, I managed to persuade the Head at Heathside to agree to my making a similar trip to Goodrington with the new first year pupils. However, I was in for a surprise.

Whereas the junior school children had accepted that the experience was to be an occasion for working with an end in view, the first year children at secondary school looked upon it as a holiday. The juniors had each posted home a card on the first day to tell of their safe arrival and first impressions. The lst year secondary pupils, only a year older, didn't take the trouble, so that I was receiving 'phone calls from worried parents. Sophistication had set in - after all they were doing joined-up writing now, and had their new bicycles which were supposed to be on offer after passing their 11+ exam which they hadn't. Finally very little was produced as a result of the trip. It had been just an extra holiday.

I think that probably such excursions are out of the question these days. It would require a four figure sum in insurance premiums to cover the school against possible litigation.

I had expected to "serve out my time" at Heathside. However, matters of a financial

consideration arose. My head of department grading for salary was Grade Four. The school was offered one Grade Five post. The School Governors decided to award the post to the Maths Department. I was now in my late fifties and being aware that in a few year's time my pension would be based upon my final salary, considered it wise to apply for a Grade Five post elsewhere. Normally such a change could take years to achieve. Surprisingly on my very first application I was invited to interview for a Grade Five post at Farnham in Surrey. Application successful.

This brought about sudden upheaval. It became necessary to retire from the Evening Institute work. A journey of twenty-four miles each way to the new school would have to be undertaken. Luckily, we were already a two car family. Joyce had her own Mini for work. (Very soon we were to become a multi car family as the boys were driving their own vehicles). The matter was solved by moving house to Liphook in Hampshire to be nearer Farnham.

Liphook, a small township, is situated on the Portsmouth Road, between Guildford and Petersfield, its only claim to fame was a nearby golf course and the fact that the author of the book called Lark Rise to Candleford, one Flora Thompson, had been postmistress there in the past. We were at the confluence of the three counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex. This was the countryside and away from suburbia.

The house was fairly new, with parquet flooring throughout and a newly landscaped garden set within four high walls, with a lean-to greenhouse, fully equipped. The house wall overlooking the garden was adorned with wisteria and clematis Montana. Although detached, our garage and car port was joined to those of our neighbours. These were ex-publicans the husband, at the time working overseas in the Middle East. His wife was nanny to the family of Peter Aliss - a well known golf commentator on radio, who lived at Hindhead some few miles along the Portsmouth Road.

At this time there had been a great deal of complicated family movement. My father had died at the end of 1975, and my mother had moved from Crayford in Kent to live in a residential hotel at nearby Beacon Hill. Also our niece, Anne, had been living in the police house at Beacon Hill with her husband Bob. He had recently been killed on duty in a car accident during a police chase in Thursley. Thus, having to leave the police house, she had gone to live with her parents; my brother and his wife in their house, almost opposite to the hotel where my mother resided.

Our son John was about at the end of his medical studies. James had come out of the Merchant Navy and was embarked upon a degree course in Marine Studies at Plymouth and was soon to purchase a property at Weybridge. Youngest son Peter was leaving Twickenham Technical College and embarking upon a degree course at Loughborough.

As for the new school; it was called Weydon Lane School and was situated on the southern outskirts of Farnham town. It was a large comprehensive school with over 1000 on roll and my new department was quite large. Although, as usual in those times, the staff were not all English specialists, as had been the situation in my previous department, they were keen, however and ran a school magazine on a large scale with outside printers. The Head was an Eric Chambers who had been established there for a long while. He was very exacting, with little sense of humour, but well disposed toward his staff.

Come July 1980 and the end of the school year, I was two months short of my 64th Birthday. For a long period recently the classroom situation in the state comprehensive schools had been deteriorating. There had been a time when I had felt that I was enjoying a satisfying job and would not mind carrying on in it for years ahead; but changes had come about. Unruly children - boys mainly - were free to behave as they pleased, and however provoking staff had no redress. What had been a harmonious atmosphere was now become a burdensome environment. One met retired ex-staff who would say how life had changed for them and recommended retirement at the earliest opportunity. So, with pension prospects quite promising, it seemed sensible to withdraw from this onerous routine.

Joyce, at this time, was enjoying her job at the Woking Careers Office and intended carrying on. So she was at work and I was at a loose end. The garden needed little attention, it was so well designed, so golf became a new interest. We had friends in Hindhead also interested in the game so that finding playing partners was not a problem. Rather late in life to take up the sport, but it became absorbing, especially with so many small local courses available.

We had not long settled into this "work and play" routing when we learned that Elizabeth, our youngest son's wife, was expecting a baby quite soon. This prompted a move Northwards - from Liphook to our present domicile at Sutton Bonington, near Loughborough, and within easy reach of the cities of Derby, Nottingham and Leicester in July 1981.

We have resided continuously in Sutton Bonington since our arrival - the longest we have tarried in one place. We became well established in local community activities, usually in an official role. Such things as driving the village school bus, W.I., Men's Society, meals on wheels, books on wheels, annual garden walk-about and "Village News", and more latterly U.3.A. Moreover we have enjoyed what we primarily moved here for: the prerogative of grandparents in matters to do with our grandchildren, Toby and Rachel; particularly taking holidays with them, and following their progress and various successes with satisfaction.

To consider, in retrospect the progress of our close family members: the three boys all passed the 11+ exam as it was in those days each attending a different grammar school. James left Strodes School in Egham but eschewed University in favour of a ship's officer apprenticeship with B.P. tankers. He spent 14 years at sea and came ashore to complete a degree course in Plymouth prior to embarking upon shore based mercantile employment and retired early; sick. John moved from Tiffins Boys School in Kingston to study medicine at Newcastle University and eventually to become a G.P. He spent a period of his training in the U.S. learning the American practices. His birthday being the 4th July, he found himself on duty on his 21st, Independence Day. After leaving Woking Boys' Grammar School, Peter found himself in a minor conflict with the education authorities before settling into a course at Loughborough University, where he met his future wife, Elizabeth, and remaining in the vicinity of his Alma Mater, subsequently applying himself to various undertakings.

There will be some duplication of details in what follows concerning Joyce.

Joyce attended at the Elliot School in Southfields, near to where she lived with her Grandparents. It was a Technical/Grammar School. As a result she was able to follow

a normal course of study during the daytime, then after school was allowed to undertake "office studies". this meant she became well qualified in shorthand and typewriting by the end of her school career. In about 1936 she took up employment in the City of London offices - near to Liverpool Street Railway terminus - of a company of auditors and accountants, by the name of Keene, Shay, Keene. She was career minded, but certain matters stood in the way of her ambitions; namely World War II, a family and domestic responsibilities, in that order.

However, during that War, she made a point of moving around the country to be at or near the places at which I was stationed with the R.A.F. thus it came about in September 1940 when I was posted to R.A.F. Locking, near to Weston-super-Mare, she took up residence in the local village of Banwell. It transpired that a "shadow" aircraft factory was to be built for the Bristol Aircraft Co. quite nearby, creating a number of jobs, including an office job for her.

I had been awaiting training whilst at Locking and in a matter of a month or two was posted to Blackpool on a signals course. Moving to Blackpool with me, Joyce next took up a post as civilian secretary to the station Adjutant at R.A.F. Squires Gate, just south of the town. She remained in Blackpool until I joined 149 Squadron at Mildenhall, when she moved into accommodation at West Row, a nearby village. Next it was to R.A.F.Wyton with 15 Squadron and a nearby village again provided lodgings.

My operational duties at an end, I spent some time next at R.A.F. Lossiemouth training future wireless operators in the air for a month or so. From thence I was next for 15 months at R.A.F. Cranwell. So after Blackpool there had been no opportunity for employment for Joyce until the War was over and two more sons had been added to our family. Since I was teaching she took advantage of school holiday periods, whilst I was able to look after the boys - also on holiday. She undertook temporary office work usually in London. Eventually as the boys became off hand - so to speak- she worked at the small office of a gravel pit, close to the Thames at Chertsey. This meant a four to five mile cycle trip each way. The pit became worked out so her next employment was in the consumer service office of the Birds Eye frozen foods company, just about 11/2 miles from where we now lived at Walton on Thames. This was a varied and interesting job, involving contact with some prominent people and included flights in the firm's executive aircraft to visit packaging factories At this time there was considerable socialising for us both, since the Staff Social Club was very active. Also the Company laid on an annual staff dinner at the Grosvenor Hotel in Park Lane, by London's Hyde Park.

This was not her final job. Her final job before retiring was with the Careers Service in the Ministry of Labour at their local office in Woking, Surrey.

We humans enjoy the gift of memory, but it plays tricks with us. Sometimes, it fails us and will not give us the answer we wish for; so we make up a false one to deceive ourselves and others. Also our recall is much more efficient in the details of pleasant events, but less so in matters disagreeable or painful - a protection from morbid thoughts, perhaps. For some reason, too, particularly with age, our short term memory fails us altogether however hard we try. All of which may explain why the distress of the loss of a son and a wife within a short period of each other becomes blurred and hidden, over time behind a miscellany of events and activities mostly mundane but many exciting, allows one to get on with life. So much for memory.

APPENDIX

Joyce and I were due to celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary in February 1990. Our family wisely foresaw that the earlier we received the Golden Wedding present they had in mind, the younger and presumably fitter we would be to enjoy it. Thus, it came about that at the end of 1985 we were generously presented with a pair of "Round the World" air tickets - moving in an Easterly direction. Our carriers were to be British Airways and Pan Am Airways. Hotels had been booked ahead with open dates as far as Perth, Australia, where our first long stop would be, visiting my brother Ted his wife Eileen and their family who had moved there fairly recently.

So, at 10.25 a.m. on 10th January, 1986, we lifted off from Heathrow Airport bound for our first destination at Dubai - the world our oyster and time immaterial. Sons John and Peter came to Heathrow for a send-off but had had to resort to a motorcycle for transport.

There had been much preparation, clothes for tropical and moderate climates, foreign currency and travellers cheques, stop the papers and the post, no pets fortunately and the house let to a police inspector and his wife. Our arms had been made pin cushions to receive a multiplicity of serum injections against every known disease. Flying would be no problem, we had travelled by air frequently into both Europe and the U.S.A., often by prop aircraft.

After the cold departure from Heathrow in early January, Dubai seemed hot. The Hyatt Regency Hotel was tall and we were high up overlooking a wide sandy beach along the Persian Gulf. Why was the beach empty we wondered, we never discovered.

It was a location of opposites: empty beaches which should have been full, a tropical situation where there was an ice rink on the ground floor of the hotel. The heavy work was being undertaken by women mainly, whilst the men in their long white robes and peculiar head dress occupied themselves looking important and just doing business.

We made good use of our time in Dubai wandering through the food markets full of colour and strange scents and were almost tempted to purchase items of gold in the souks. We visited Sharjah along the coast, and in this arid desert area saw an emerald green racecourse and similar golf course kept that way by constant watering.

Delhi next. We had booked our flight from the hotel, but upon arrival the booking hall was seething with Indians homeward bound, carrying huge bundles - sort of bed sheets wrapped around goodness knows what, and more surprisingly many of them were in possession of huge ghetto blasters.

Now we met racial discrimination in a sort of reverse. Our white faces - not yet sun tanned, stood out in the crowd and a young white lady booking clerk came down to the back of the long queue where we stood, dutifully and patiently as we British do. She called a porter who took our cases and hauled us up to the front of the queue: not a murmur of objection from the crowd. Were we embarrassed!

On the flight to Delhi a mass of people wandered up and down the aisles constantly on the move, not just for the toilets - exercise we supposed? We had asked for seats on the port side of the aircraft and were rewarded as we had hoped we would be with a distant view of the snowy summits of the Himalayas. We were at almost 40,000 feet, the mountain range was up to 30,000 feet their distance over 100 miles but the air was thin and clear and the view breath-taking.

The arrival in Delhi was in contrast to the departure from Dubai. The queue was as long but no kind young booking clerk came to our rescue. When eventually we reached the front, a very slow, unnecessarily meticulous interview took place. An elderly man with a beard and wearing a turban crossed every T and dotted every I. No wonder the procession had moved so ponderously. We were fairly soon afterwards at our ease, seeing our name held high on a board, where awaited us our guide and Hindu driver with a white, quite new Toyota to whisk us off to Hotel Akbar. The white car proved to be a prince among paupers, everywhere we went other traffic gave way to us; and what traffic that was. Our Hindu driver intimated to us his belief that to drive in Delhi three things were needed, a good horn, good brakes and good luck.

The city traffic was erratic, frenzied and frightening. There were huge single decker buses so crammed that many were sitting on the roofs or hanging on to the sides. There were cars a plenty, many far from new. Intermingled were mechanical rickshaws - three wheeled vehicles powered by a motorcycle engine of inordinately few ccs capacity, just capable of conveying the driver and our two selves at about 12 mph on the level. Riding in these amongst the hectic traffic could best be described as a laxative. Dodging about amongst this melee were man-powered rickshaws, cyclists and suicidal pedestrians.

Out of town traffic was of a different nature, certainly less congested but with a touch of the exotic. Some huge carts loaded to a height of perhaps 15 feet with local crops drawn by teams of camels, shared the roads with us, bullock carts abounded, the odd elephant was to be met and the occasional monkey would cross our path. Amongst this straggling community cars and lorries would weave a path at the highest speed attainable, leaving in their wake a road dotted with dead dogs and other unrecognisable animals not swift enough to avoid the carnage.

We realised eventually that our guide and driver had adopted us - probably found our names from the hotel staff. The Hindu driver came from miles away and saw his family about once every three or four months. Our guide was knowledgeable and articulate. They would meet us at the hotel at a time stipulated and take us to wherever we decided to go or would suggest places to visit. These arrangements were very helpful and extraordinarily inexpensive.

We visited the pink city of Jaipur, and rode up to the winter palace on an elephant, used as a taxi service. Here too we came across a “demonstration” by civil servants who were on the march for - I don’t know - better working conditions or higher pay. And here there were little girls of about 8 or 10 years in neat uniforms and carrying satchels going home from school by taxi.

Our guide and driver wanted to show us what they thought we ought to see. So we found ourselves in carpet factories where boys of ten or twelve were working - eye straining labour, or in shops retailing jewellery. We were treated to many of the

numerous ancient buildings - forts, palaces and observatories. India Gate was worth a visit - similar to Marble Arch in London but larger and in red fabric and carrying all the names of Indians who had given their lives in world Wars I and II fighting for the cause of the Raj. Mahatma Ghandi's tomb also impressed us - a large black marble slab covered in flowers.

Of course, the Taj Mahal at Agra must not be missed. It was all that it was reputed to be, in warm bright sunshine under a cloudless sky. The customary pictures of the Taj do not show the River Jumna that flows behind it. The sunshine reflected off the splendid white marble building - indeed, a work of art. We removed our shoes and went inside into what would be a first floor level where two cenotaphs stand then we went below to where the true sarcophagi are to be seen; but very dimly by candlelight. The building, nearly four centuries old, took 20,000 men 22 years to complete. The Taj is a memorial built by a Mogul Emperor for his wife, who died in childbirth after 19 years of their marriage.

The Emperor himself was later usurped by his brother and incarcerated in a black marble building some distance away from the Taj, from where he could see his wife's memorial. What is not generally known is that for years the surroundings were left untended and the jungle was allowed to proliferate around it until in the 1800s when an English Peer (Duke of Connaught I believe) cleared the trees and vegetation all around it and exposed it to view. Upon leaving, we made our way through the gardens, where the lawns were being cut by a mower being pulled by a donkey.

Our guide needed a lot of persuading that we really wanted to see how life was lived outside the cities and in the rural areas. So eventually we went off the beaten track where few cars ever venture. At one small hamlet a crowd of little boys about 8-10 years old stared into the car at my wife who was told she was the first white woman that they had ever seen. Their faces were smiling, exposing beautiful white teeth. Their mothers, at a nearby well, were doing the laundry dressed in golden silk saris, wasted with no one to see them. Their habitats were mud huts roofed with a fern thatch, with, close by the entrance, neat piles of bullock dung, each pat formed into a plate-like shape, to be used for fuel we were told. Did the children not go to school we asked, there was no school for miles and they depended upon visiting tutors who attended from time to time.

Next upon our travels we came across a small group of men, who were carrying on their shoulders what we took to be Hessian sacks containing sand. They were, however, collecting salt scraped from the ground.

Upon our insistence our guide took us to a small native village, which had no tarmac or pavement, just an area of impacted soil, dry and hard. What would it be like when the monsoon arrived we wondered.

Unusual activities were going on here. In one spot a man was actually shoeing a bullock as it lay prone upon the ground. Close by a man sat in the open upon a chair being shaved. Elsewhere another man was not having his beard removed, but a tooth. Another man seemed to be operating a bicycle repair shop with a strange machine for puncture repairs. Amongst all the people we saw there was not a frown, everyone smiled happily.

Food at the Hotel Ackbar was, of course, Indian cuisine, much of which could not be matched by what is on offer in Indian restaurants in this country. However, very good English was spoken by the staff who were at pains to keep us informed upon what we ate.

In the wartime period that I spent in Burma, my Indian batman had prepared my meals which bore no resemblance to the menus of either the Hotel Ackbar or the Curry House in East Croydon.

Having experienced transport by Toyota car, by elephant and by the strange mechanical three wheeled rickshaw, we decided one day to make a journey by coach, advertised as being air conditioned. Quite an experience in so far as the air conditioning meant the windows were left open. The road surfaces outside New Delhi were best described as undulating, with frequent halts to avoid pedestrians and various animals: all of this plus the fact that the coach's suspension system was non existent, meant that travelling could hardly be described as comfortable. All taken philosophically until the last straw - a 35 minute wait at a level crossing for a train that eventually failed to arrive; we concluded that travel in India by coach was not to be recommended.

Looking out of our hotel window we could see a building nearing completion. Two matters of note here. One that only women were undertaking the onerous task of conveying the heavy materials, sand, cement and bricks to the site in flat baskets balanced upon their heads. Two: the entire scaffolding was of bamboo, lashed together with ropes, up to some 30/40 feet high.

Checking out from New Delhi Airport compared to checking in was a doddle, carried out by the authorities in indecent haste.

Now, our journey was to continue in an Easterly direction with Hong Kong as our next destination. Since our visit in 1986, the colony has been returned to the Chinese and a new airport has been built. As it was for us the approach by air was quite hair-raising. First the pilot must negotiate around or over The Peak, then drop steeply to the landing strip at Kai Tak, the strip resembling a seaside pier where upon landing the wings of the aircraft hung over the sea on either side. This was Kowloon.

We were met at the airport building by an official whose job was to direct us to the hotels which had been pre-booked by the air lines and who suggested we might consider wearing identity labels "since to the Chinese we all looked the same".

We were soon to decide that Hong Kong was not so much a place as an experience. Hong Kong is an island that stands within a stone's throw from the Kowloon Peninsula (part of which was at one time mainland China). It is a very much overcrowded population giving rise to high-rise buildings to accommodate both the people and the huge amount of business essential to the advantage of the colony. Many people commute daily from Kowloon to work in Hong Kong. There is a very efficient system, known as the Star Ferry Service to carry them to work across the harbour, plying between the island and the mainland.. It is fast and turns around either side in a matter of minutes, fares enormously cheap 2nd class on the upper deck and lst class below (under cover).

The island is mountainous with a number of summits, the highest being The Peak at

over 1600 feet. Looking down from The Peak one views - on the Kowloon side - a forest of high rise buildings in which glass prevails externally. Descent from The Peak can be by tram or cable car.

The primary concern of the Hong Kong Chinese is (or then was) business prosperity much of it directed towards tourism. You could be measured for a suit in the morning and collect an immaculate garment later in the day or have an eye test and call back 2 hours later to collect some well made spectacles. What's more, the prices for these items were ridiculously low. One restaurant advertised in its window "Bloody Good Cheap Chinese Food at Fair Dinkum Prices" - 7.00 a.m.-1.00 a.m. Convenience for the customer was a main aim.

We stayed at the Park Hotel in Kowloon and used the Star Ferry as well as taxis, trams and buses, but walked a lot. One felt very safe out walking in daylight or dark and we enjoyed evenings, wandering the streets and watching, in little huddles on the pavements, groups gambling, or giving their attention to fortune-tellers. There were areas, too, where they would buy food and take it to tables and use hired stoves to cook a meal from the proceeds, usually in family groups. We also took a ferry trip Westwards out of the harbour and visited the Island of Cheung Chau on an afternoon trip and walked through a village street where at every house were groups of elderly ladies playing Ma jong. Also near the harbour awaiting transport was a pig in a wickerwork container. The Chinese are keen on pork.

We were advised not to miss the Sung Dynasty Village on the outskirts of Kowloon. It was a reproduction of a typical Chinese town from some way back in Chinese history, reminiscent of Williamsburg in Virginia, U.S.A. in which costumes of the time were worn and activities like noodle-making were demonstrated.

There was much, much more to be seen but our schedule called.

Our departure from Hong Kong was noteworthy for one thing. At the airport we came into conversation with a world wide and worldly-wise commercial traveller, who asked at "check-in" with Qantas Airways if there might be spare spaces in business class. It seemed that only two other passengers were booked there and we three could have spare seats without extra fee. Thus from Hong Kong to Perth, Australia, we enjoyed the advantages of flying in the upper deck (that is the bulge) of an 747. Seats were luxurious, leg space vast, meals and other services provided by very experienced steward, out to impress; and we disembarked, each with a bottle of champagne.

This was to be our first visit to Australia and since we had not seen my brother, Ted for a number of years, intended to remain with him and his family for some, as yet, undecided period. At that time the family there lived in the suburbs of Perth in an area known as Bull Creek and close to the Swan River. It being January it was high summer and fire warnings were advertised everywhere. There was much socialising and numerous "barbies".

We were transported around much of Western Australia and discovered:
Swans were black.
Voters were fined A$200 for failing to vote.
Garden lawns needed mowing at least twice a week.
Housing was cheap and mainly bungalow in style. (Walls were one brick thick and

probably unable to support an upper storey). Being bungalows they took up more space than standard housing but land was plentiful. Swimming pools in gardens were plentiful.
Petrol filling stations closed at 6.00 p.m. on Saturdays until Monday mornings.
Trips by steamer through the Swan Valley to the vineyards were popular.
Except in Urban areas roads had no footpaths or kerbs.
Most cars were of Japanese manufacture and usually quite new.
We attended a ceremony wherein my brother and family became sworn in as naturalized Australians.
A whaling station on the south west coast had finished operations only ten years previously.

This was the year in which Australia won the "Americas Cup" for yachting, and we found Freemantle, nearby Perth, was active towards the event and the yachts of all nations were on display. Freemantle itself had been "done over" for the occasion, resulting in some people losing their homes.

We visited an offshore island called Rottnest around which we cycled on hired bikes. This was the home of some creatures called Quokas and Rottnest the only place where they are to be found. They resembled rats but were fatter and tails fairly short. They were said to be nocturnal, but this could be disproved upon the presentation of food, we found.

Our stay in Perth lasted some six or seven weeks before we headed East in a 1200mile air trip to Adelaide. Here was an attractive city, where the trams were given priority over all other traffic. There was an air of culture prevailing. Outdoor classical concerts, very active theatre and a procession of floats of flowers representing historical events or various organisations, such as nursing or fire services - so colourful. The Queen was somewhere in the neighbourhood and the locals were agog for a glimpse. In Adelaide we took the opportunity to post off back to the U.K. souvenirs and various gifts we had collected on our way. Again, vineyards were of interest and we visited the Barossa Valley to partake of its produce.

Next Melbourne; very much in contrast to both Perth and Adelaide. Very crowded; you could easily be pushed off the pavement here. We stayed in the Salvation Army Hostel here as recommended by the local tourist agency. It was run pretty much on hotel lines but rather severe in certain aspects. Street names, shop names and certain areas had an Irish flavour about them. Transport was cheap and easy. The same all day ticket could be used on bus, tram or train. There was, in fact, a special train excursion for senior citizens out to Sovereign Hill Goldmine Township (A place like Kalgoorlie in Western Australia). Senior citizens were allowed free travel on this trip - but not "Poms" - it was that sort of City.

So, on to Sydney. On our way there we must have flown over Canberra unknowingly; so that we missed that very important city - the national capital of Australia. Sydney impressed as being cultural and urbane. It seemed to have everything: bustling business centre, botanical and zoological gardens, Opera House, the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge with its 8 lane roadway, footpaths and railway tracks, a good shopping area and a wonderful skyline. People there were relaxed, polite and helpful. There was a very good public transport system but we explored the city mainly on foot. We also bought opal earrings for Joyce and telephoned home from Sydney.

I also had a project in mind. Our rear gunner on the crew had a fairly unusual name - Duncan Crookston and sure enough, there his name appeared in the telephone directory. When his wife (a girl he had married in Lichfield when he was in the U.K.) answered my call, she was glad that he had not answered the 'phone - he had a heart condition. We hadn't met for 44 years but he had changed little. He had had a bad war after leaving 15 Squadron. In a raid on Berlin his aircraft had been shot down; he had managed to parachute in the darkness over a forest and became caught in tree branches. When he hit the parachute release button, had fallen about 30 ft and broken a leg. The German hospitals had treated him very well, but he was P.O.W. for the rest of the war.

Duncan was aghast when he came to meet us at our hotel in Kings Cross. "Didn't you realise you are in the red light district of Sydney?" In our innocence our residence in Kings Cross meant little; the more so since Australia generally has so many place names "borrowed" from the U.K. Mind you, prostitution in Australian cities is very much "in your face". Duncan took us to Manly Beach, which he claimed was better than Bondi Beach and there we had sea-food, John Dory was the choice - excellent. He also took us to the R.S.A. purpose built establishment. R.S.A. is Returned Servicemen's Association, equivalent to our British Legion, but on a grander scale. It was on three floors. Ground floor, reception, various lounges and games rooms, first floor for theatre and entertainment, top floor - Las Vegas gambling set -up.

One particular memory we brought with us from Sydney was of a ferry cruise through the harbour. There was much to see on a very fine afternoon. The harbour is at one place near the famous bridge as much as 49 metres deep. We saw Garden Island - at present headquarters for the Australian Navy - where in May 1942 three Japanese midget submarines fired a torpedo killing 19 ratings. There was a swing bridge, some bathing beaches (one for nudists), the Opera House and, all the while the white and blue sails of yachts moving about in the slight breeze. Also, along the harbour side were the palatial homes of the well-heeled section of the city's population. It may be easier to be a millionaire in Australian terms when the exchange rate at the time was £l sterling = A$2.

In due course it was time for us to leave Sydney to travel North by Ansett Pioneer coach out of New South Wales into Queensland to the town of Cairns. The distance was almost 1500 miles and from Lat. S34 to Lat. S17. We undertook the journey in all innocence not realising quite what the journey entailed. To have flown: because Cairns is about 5degrees West of Sydney, air fair would have had to be found, a consideration compared with coach fare. The coaches were comfortable and fast, the drivers being keen to keep on schedule. There were "comfort" stops about every two hours and changes of vehicles at Brisbane and Rockhampton. Leaving the coaches one realised how efficient the air conditioning was. After crossing the Tropic of Capricorn and approaching the Equator, larger and larger insects began to batter the windscreen. Eventually the driver was obliged to stop from time to time and wash the insect soup from the screen with a high pressure hose and scraper. At one time we were hitting locusts.

At Cairns we found that most of the hotels were Japanese owned and quite expensive, many better-off people were there for the marlin fishing. However, the tourist board put us in touch with a "budget" apartment - lounge, kitchen and two bedrooms at a very low rate and about 10 minutes walk from the harbour. The climate was tropical and

humid. From the edge of the town equatorial forests spread and one could go on "board walks" through certain prescribed areas. Of course, our object was to experience the Great Barrier Reef. This we did on a large passenger carrying catamaran, leaving the harbour to reach Green Island in an hour or so, fast sailing into the aptly named Coral Sea.

Green Island had a compound with crocodiles. It was also a place to where large vessels like ours could convey tourists, like ourselves, to a haven where we could disperse on smaller vessels of lesser draught out over the shallows of the Reef. We went, first, in a "semi-sub" which had glass sides through which one could observe the undersea aquatic life. One was tempted to take photos, which, alas, when developed came out almost black and white, despite the beautiful brilliantly coloured coral and weed as we saw it. Next, we changed into swimwear and went out in a glass bottomed boat to study the coral below and I bravely snorkelled around that area of the Barrier Reef just to say that I had done so. We returned to the catamaran for a meal - and such a meal - seafood delight. Lobster, oysters, king prawns, fish of all types and exotic salads and all without limit. The mouth did not just water - it became a waterfall.

Cairns had more to recommend it than just the Barrier Reef. We took a fifty mile coach trip northwards along the Cook Highway to Port Douglas. This was a narrow road running along the coast about 200/300 feet above sea-level on the steep side of the mountains as they dropped precipitously down to the sea-shore. Port Douglas is an idyllic, photogenic spot having a curving four mile beach with a background of mountains and coconut palms. It is sparsely populated - a few hut-like residences, a tiny fishing harbour and, of all things, a World War One war memorial and a captured German tank on the shore. On our journey we looked down from our coach and saw on the shore below several battered vehicles and a coach at the sea's edge. Our driver just said: "Poor brakes or heavy mist - or both".

We left Cairns railway station on a journey on the Kuranda Railway. This railway was a project undertaken in the 1880s to connect Cairns via a jungle, rivers and gorges and rising 1000 ft in twenty miles on its way to the Atherton Tableland. No mean feat when it is considered that only picks and shovels were available to work with and 15 tunnels to create. A coach transported us from Kuranda Station out to the Atherton Tablelands where we saw growing, ground nuts, rice, sugar cane, tobacco and cotton. Also there was a lake over which we travelled in a concrete boat. What a day it was.

I recall little of the return trip to Sydney: brooding perhaps on the adventurous times we had enjoyed in Cairns, the only place in which we had encountered aborigines, a number of whom were lounging through the town, many in a perpetual state of intoxication.

The flight across the Tasman Sea, 1500 miles between Sydney, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand, passed without incident; a journey of something over three hours. The contrast was quite apparent. We had moved from the rather brash, hurrying atmosphere of Sydney to one of a less sophisticated laid-back agrarian type in New Zealand. The economy was in contrast too: our exchange rate for Australia had been about $A2.20 to the pound: for NZ it was nearer to £NZ3.00. A further sign of the weaker economy was reflected not only in the cost of living, but also on the road traffic. Whereas the Australians drove mostly new Japanese vehicles - Toyota mainly; on the NZ roads we recognised the cars we had been driving about 20 years previously: old Riley Elfs,

Vauxhall Wyverns and Austin Cambridges.

To the Australians, with some exceptions, we had just been "poms", though we had tried hard not to whinge. The New Zealanders were interested in us personally. Where in England did we come from? How were things there now? Did we know their aunt, Mrs. Smith who lived in Liverpool? On one occasion at night, miles from anywhere, in a tavern, the landlord sent out for miles to get a steak for a meal for us. (Incidentally, lamb would have been better appreciated.)

The terrain too was different. The towns and cities of Australia were confined mainly to coastal areas and the central landmass was arid. In New Zealand communities were widespread across the country and the centre was a haven of beautiful lakes and mountains. Of course, size and latitude were mainly responsible for this.

In Auckland, we picked up a pre-booked camper van fully equipped for cooking and general living and set off southwards to see what we would find. It seemed that a general rule on the roads was that, when driving you "give way to the right". Petrol was cheap; equivalent to 30p per litre. Roads were empty and mainly well surfaced. On occasions one shared a road bridge with a railway track. Camping sites were excellent. Each caravan, campervan or tent had its own numbered site, with an electric socket and water connection and refuse bin. Ablution blocks were luxurious with hot showers/baths and fish-cleaning rooms. There had to be a snag, of course. This was that gates were locked at about 10.30 p.m. OK for caravans towed by cars or those under canvas, who could park outside the entrance on a late return. Average overnight charge for our campervan was $NZ10, i.e. about £3.50, well worth it for the facilities available, also including a shop/dairy.

We travelled sedately southwards (maximum permitted speed 80kph) in fairly short stages, wondering at the strange Maori place names and making for our first main stop at Rotorua. It was a remarkable visit; the whole area suffused with a smell of sulphur. It had its geysers and boiling mud pools, and great fountains of steaming water shooting up 15 feet into the air at predictable intervals - most impressive. There were, of course, bath houses and demonstrations of Maori dancing, arts and crafts. The Maori people had a certain dignity and seemed to be more comfortably integrated into the whole community than was the case with the aborigines in Australia, due, we felt, partly to the environment and partly to the attitude of the colonists.

We spent comparatively little time in North Island before crossing Cook Strait from Wellington to Picton in a 3 ½ hour ferry voyage. Our journey through South Island took us outwards along the South-East coast and along the North-West coast on our return. To record our journey location by location would mislead - we tended to dodge about. However, the events and highlights are worth a mention.

We passed through an "almost British" landscape, which was green and pleasant but with higher mountains, larger lakes, higher waterfalls and deeper gorges. There were immense open plains dotted with multitudes of sheep. Not many expanses of woodland but we found Norfolk Firs and tree ferns a-plenty. In remote places we drove along hillsides on roads that threatened to collapse beneath us. We walked upon glaciers and also flew over them in a helicopter up to Mount Cook. White painted wooden churches stood by the roadside much as in New England, U.S.A., At a placed called Franz Josef was a ski resort. At some of the coastal area, seals were to be seen basking.

The lakesides were picturesque. At the end of one of these was a tiny stone-built "Chapel of the Good Shepherd", through the window of which one looked over the surface of the water to Mount Cook. Outside stood a statue to a Scottish Terrier who had watched by the side of his deceased master for a number of days until they were found. Near to Lake Te Anau were some water filled caves through which we were pulled by chains in a metal barge. Above us on the roof were hundreds of thousands of glow worms, which, as their name suggests, "glowed" when the lights were switched off.

We visited "the most English City outside England" - Christchurch, where a new bell had recently been hung in the belfry; said bell having been cast at Taylors Bell Foundry in Loughborough, U.K. In a few days after our visit a concert was to be given by the choir of Wells Cathedral, Somerset.

The real highlight of our visit was a cross country journey from Te Anau to Milford Sound. This was a magnificent coastal feature almost as far away from England as is possible on this planet. It takes the form of a fiord, deep enough for the Cunarder, the "Canberra" to navigate which she does. The Sound is overlooked by Mitre Peak which name adequately describes the mountain of that name. One, having visited New Zealand, would never forget that country nor its people.

Footnote. We met a number of elderly farmers married to most attractive young Philippino wives. One farmer explained that a Philippino wife could be easily obtained through a "mail order" system. It seemed that there was a surfeit of women born in the Philippine Islands who would be a) loyal, b) amenable, c) feel the cold, d) less likely to divorce, e)unable to return to their own country. In law, a native New Zealand wife, upon divorce, automatically claims half a man's estate. Hence, a farm has to be sold up and the livelihood of the farmer lost.

Next; Hawaii. To reach this Island it was necessary to return to Sydney as the only place from which to book an Easterly flight in that direction. However, Sydney being some 1500 miles West of Auckland necessitated an outlay of air fare: some £74 each. We departed from Sydney across the Pacific Ocean, (our first view of same) for some 4,500 miles and landed at Honolulu situated almost exactly upon the Tropic of Cancer. The island itself went by the name of Oahu, which, I believe, means welcome. This was borne out by some dusky Hawaiian belles meeting us descending from the aircraft steps and throwing a lei around our shoulders. A lei is a circlet of native flowers. Honolulu is a centre for tourism with a "hard sell" aspect. It is over-built, over-populated and over-motorised. A volcanic island in mid Pacific reminiscent of Hong Kong with its high rise buildings. We were established, I remember, on about the 40th floor. We were immediately invited to a "free" coffee meeting at which the various tourist interest were present and who took the opportunity to bombard us with their offers; harbour cruises, sailing boats, coaches, helicopters all offered at reasonable and competitive prices. We paddled our own canoe. The sun drenched Waikiki Beach was enjoyed as was the wonderful tropical marine aquarium. Another experience was to cross this mountainous island by mini bus driven by a loquacious individual, anxious to inform us of his previous life in New York. Our route took us through pineapple estates where we partook of enormous quantities of that fruit in its various forms, cubes, rings, juices, fortunately it is not a laxative. The very atmosphere was permeated with the scent of pineapple. From here we dropped into a sandy cove and were given snorkel

equipment and plastic bags containing breakfast cereals. We spent hours feeding the colourful bold fish from the bags. It was necessary at times to shoo the fish away from the bags which they appeared to recognise and fully understand.

Of course, a trip by passenger steamer through Pearl Harbour was essential. Here we saw the rusting hulls of what had been the U.S. Navy's battleships, cruisers and destroyers. Ships like the Arizona, the Oklahoma and USS Pennsylvania. These were still visible above the waters of the harbour, as they had been left after the Japanese air strike of 1941 some 45 years previously. For the same attack by two close waves of aircraft the enemy had found both the naval ships in the harbour and the 100 or more aircraft in the Wheeler Airfield conveniently lined up for their bombing run - bad planning and a false sense of security on the part of the U.S.

The tour guide enquired of the passengers where they had come from. Maine, Oregon and Texas were mentioned then India and Brazil. Anywhere else? When we said England, the acclaim from the rest of the passengers caused us to blush with embarrassment.

Leaving Hawaii in the Pacific, we would be on the home run Eastwards into the Atlantic. We might well have crossed via South America or Canada even. There were, however, commitments in the U.S.A. Firstly, we were equipped each with a two month's Greyhound Coach pass, (bought at ridiculously low prices in the U.K.). This also meant we need not observe the Eastward direction of travel routing. Secondly, we had a number of social undertakings in various parts of the U.S.A. So it was to Los Angeles first, to be met by one of our son Peter's friends, Philip and his wife Betty. We were met at L.A. Airport and via a melee of city motor traffic driven to their home in the suburbs. Whilst staying with them we were taken on a visit to Universal Film Studios, to witness an artificial flash flood, and to meet "Jaws"; then to Disneyland with its square miles of parking space. We also enjoyed a baseball match between the L.A. Dodgers and the "Braves" from I cannot remember where. Philip's wife, Betty insisted upon our visiting her Mother in San Diego some 100 miles South. We were made welcome by all the family and their friends, all of whom just wanted to hear us speaking, which they all thought was "quaint". A visit to the wonderful San Diego Zoo was made all the more enjoyable since any senior citizen was entitled to free entry on that day - so I qualified. (I wondered if this hadn't been "fixed"). We were entranced by the Old Town of San Diego, very Spanish in style, also impressed by the cleanliness and architecture of the harbour and its unusual curved bridge.

Next, northwards by a striking coastal road to San Francisco. The altitudes en route were marked in 1000s of feet, at times above 3000 ft. In this city we rode on the crowded cable cars - these are not aerial but ground based and travel up and down the very steep inclines by clamping on to a moving underground cable. To halt they release the cable and use brakes then pick up the cable again, when ready. The moving cables are operated from a huge powerhouse near the city centre. The city is eccentric in other ways. What we believed were dogs barking were, in fact, seals swimming in the harbour and begging for fish. On a famous pier (29 or 39 I cannot recall which) we found a Christmas Shoppe purveying a variety of Christmas goodies and a left-hand shop offering such things as LH golf clubs, LH sewing machines and LH scissors among a lot of other LH things. A special visit was made to the prison Island of Alcatraz - really creepy. Chinatown, an area of acres and acres, we visited late at night to test the atmosphere and walking back to the Senator Hotel, with less traffic about we

were able to hear the car cables moving beneath our feet.

To join the passengers on a Greyhound coach was not unlike joining a social club. Everyone talked to everyone else. Mind you, unlike our own coaches with their frequent "comfort" stops, the Greyhounds travel for miles and hours in one hop between cities, so conversation fills the time. One woman we heard expounding the lurid details of her recent divorce to a complete stranger. We were of special interest to the passengers, being from U.K. and for the fact of our world tour. Sometimes we travelled over night - saving hotel bills - sleeping in our reclining seats, which were spacious and luxurious. The coach would stop at our driver's favourite spots, maybe at an all night DoNut stall for a variety of said comestibles of various shapes and flavours from chocolate to raspberry. Unlike our British coach drivers who discourage the use of coach toilets (possibly because they have to attend to the hygienic requirements themselves), our U.S. counterparts positively encouraged passengers to use them. (Certainly because at the termini it was a matter for the garage maintenance staff). Every so often the driver would open the passenger door; this, we discovered, was to abide by the regulation that these doors must be proved to be operable at level-crossings. We did once have to stop for a train on the Santa Fe line. Our halt was for at least 15 minutes. The train was drawn by three engines with an estimated length of one mile of trucks. In U.K. you can usually recognise the approach to a community by the appearance of a church spire, in the U.S. it was marked by a very high water tower, with the name of the location painted on the approach side. Now and again we passed through a town which claimed the distinction of being the world capital for some commodity or other. In one town it was the carrot capital, hence a huge model carrot some 20 ft high marked the fact. In another case a huge model pig was on display. The coach stations were often located in the poorest parts of the towns/cities, possibly for cheaper rentals. Once inside they were well appointed and organised. Waiting rooms had comfortable upholstered chairs with coin-operated TV attached. Usually there were free telephone calls to local accommodation - hotels or boarding houses. No bed and breakfast, everyone seemed to have breakfast in diners on their way to work. Usually Joyce waited in the coach station with the luggage whilst I telephoned and went out to vet our overnight accommodation.

It was thus we made our way to Las Vegas from San Francisco and so found our hotel which was simple and low budget. Plenty to do in Vegas even if it was just people watching that interested you. Theatres and cinemas abounded, but the emphasis was upon gambling, which was accommodated in huge ground floor premises, bereft of windows and clocks. Stakes were anything from 5 cents on one armed bandits to $100 on roulette wheels. Needless to say the places were crowded for 24 hours a day and beer and wine were almost given away. On the "Strip" you could pick up a coupon for the little White Chapel - open 24 hours a day. This also entitled you to a five minute wedding - no waiting - at the economy price of 35 dollars (say £20). No witness fee, no hidden costs and with a complimentary bottle of champagne and a wedding photo thrown in.

Our coach departed from Las Vegas towards Flagstaff in the early morning and soon we were overlooking the famous Hoover Dam on the Nevada Arizona state boundaries and sited on the Colorado River. The driver felt obliged, for the sake of his passengers, to pause, then drive slowly to afford us a good view. This was the more impressive as the morning mist was just giving way to the hot morning sun. Flagstaff was one of the nearest towns to the Grand Canyon - 78 miles distant. We were surprised, a hotel here

so very cheap, a whole flat for a few dollars a night with a nearby local "diner". Greyhound Coaches surprisingly, do not "do" the Grand Canyon so a local service, once a day, conveyed us there. We were surprised to find that the rim of the Canyon was about 7000 ft above seal level and the atmosphere, even in May, was quite chilly. There was a very good arrangement for tourists; not a great number it seemed - too remote perhaps. A centre in the shape of a huge chalet with a huge log fire, the inevitable gift shop and a restaurant was available. Also a shuttle bus service with an all-day ticket ran along the rim from one viewing area to another. We looked down into the red/brown canyon (gorge to us) which was awesome. We could see miniscule figures descending by pack mules into the abyss down to the Colorado river which flows at the bottom. Meanwhile helicopters paraded above for the benefit of those who could afford them.

Our itinerary next took us across the arid deserts of Arizona and New Mexico some 300 miles to Albuquerque. An air-conditioned coach was a necessity and a blessing. It was a monotonous route through long stretches of purple sage (literally) interspersed with strange rock formations and tall cactus and lots of prickly pears, without cowboys, Indians or ambushes, which might have broken the monotony. The town when we arrived in no way resembled what one might expect from the old western films. It was modern with tall buildings and men wearing stetsons and cowboy boots, but not "chaps". Part of the old town had been reserved as a show piece.

After Albuquerque it was Southwards along the Rio not so Grand and various mountain ranges into El Paso - another of the old western locations. El Paso had a little more atmosphere, especially our hotel with its real western bar and a tube from our 14th floor and above which would carry your letters, or in our case, picture post-cards down the mail-box below. The old town here seemed more genuine and less touristy.

By special dispensation from El Paso we crossed the U.S. border into Mexico at a township called Juarez - from riches to rags. Here the main street was just hard-packed soil and thronged with mainly poorly dressed and swarthy people, some indeed begging. There were no road direction signs and the shops were in the nature of a street market mainly, among them liquor stores, and, of all things, a number of dentists. Horse drawn ice carts along the streets were dispensing their large blocks of merchandise.

Texas is a huge state, about which Texans themselves rightly boast, and we seemed to be ages crossing it. From El Paso to San Antonio thence Houston. I cannot recall passing through the latter - it must have been night time. However, I do recall our first glimpse of the Gulf of Mexico and the coastal road along it near Port Arthur. We were admiring the miles of beautiful sandy beaches, when a traveller behind us leaned over to explain that the beaches were artificial, sand having been imported from miles inland.

We arrived at New Orleans, but had missed the Mardi Gras, though signs of it remained in the streets. Again our informant explained that the queue of disreputable-looking folks were there not to donate, but to sell their blood.

If a place can be said to have charisma then this city had it. The people, the buildings, the food, the atmosphere, different in so many respects. Most of the city is just above the sea level of the nearby Gulf, much of it is some feet below sea level, so much so, that levees have been built to keep out the sea to prevent flooding. Graves cannot be dug due to water logging: internment is in sepulchres above ground. The bridge across the Mississippi required piles over a hundred feet into the ground below to support it.

We took a river trip in the paddle steamer "Natchez", reconnoitred the French Quarter, sampled Creole and Cajun cuisine and sat on the floor in "Constitution Hall" to hear the jazz musicians. A point of interest was St Louis Cathedral, outside of which horse-drawn "fiacres" plied for passengers - the horses each wearing "nappies" (diapers in U.S.A.) in the interest of hygiene. All these we enjoyed; what we didn't enjoy was good accommodation. The best we could find was a room in the Spanish quarter on the outskirts, no food available, not very clean and walls thin enough for us to hear a couple in an adjoining room quarrelling in the early hours. The city appeared historic, yet was only established in the early 1700s. It's history has been eventful, however, with two wars, floods, yellow fever epidemics, conflagrations and hurricanes. On our last day there we turned a corner and came face to face with a full-length bronze statue of Winston Churchill with a cigar and his customary salute - a parting gesture so to speak.

The Greyhound service next conveyed us via Pensacola and Tallahassee to a settlement called Kissimmee. (Don't they love their double letters, what with these two names and Mississippi). This was the nearest place to Orlando which is the tourist centre for Florida. Here we found a popular motel on two floors with T.V., shops, a pool and a slot machine dispensing ice cubes, useful since the weather was becoming quite hot. Orlando's chief feature was an ancient railway station converted into a market place, but it was the centre from which one could take coach trips out to the Kennedy space launch site to see the Space Museum and some of the huge space vehicles on the ground, taking care not to disturb the local crocodiles. It took us a whole day to cover the major part of the Epcot centre, with its "World Showcase", its "Fantasy Theatre" and Information Satellites; all very well organised - entertainment the whole way without pause. Our intention had been to visit the nearby Disney World. However, the schools were on holiday and every coach had been reserved for the local children to visit there on that particular day. But we felt well rewarded by visiting nearby Sea World. Kissimmee was in a pleasant walking area. We ate in the Motel restaurant where we discovered that the manageress was a contemporary of my sister at Maidstone Girls Grammar School.

Now, we would be putting the "deep South" behind us, as we moved towards our journey's end. The coach was making for Birmingham, Alabama and we awoke with a start at Nashville thinking we must have overshot our destination but realised it was Nashville, Georgia (there are so many names duplicated throughout the land). We were in the habit of using the libraries in the places we passed through to look up details of our next stopping place. The Birmingham Library was on three floors with escalators to each. It was equipped with the previous day's copies of the world newspapers; we were able to read "The Times" of the day-before. Queues for the Greyhound buses were orderly until the vehicle arrived, then a sort of "free for all" took place for seats. As we stood in the Birmingham Queue we realised all other faces but ours were black; our by now sunburned faces offered very little competition.

Next - Memphis, Tennessee - those double letters again. This place, despite its reputation, disappointed us. Our evening meal was disturbed by two parties of newly established graduates celebrating their achievements. One expects some frivolity on such occasions - but less noise p-lease. Local diners, beside ourselves, were not amused. The town is spoiled by its own reputation, resulting in high prices and exploitation of visitors. We left promptly - early a.m.

Our route followed closely beside the Mississippi, which runs Northwards to just short

of the Canadian border. We must have passed through much of the terrain covered by Huckleberry Finn. He wouldn't recognise it now. It is possible to recognise St. Louis, Missouri miles before you reach it. It has assumed the title of "The Gateway to the West" and this is signified by a great stainless steel arch rising 630 feet into the air (that is just 20 feet short of a furlong and twice the height of the Statue of Liberty). Moreover it is possible to travel up through the inside of the arch in a train of capsules to a viewing platform which commands a view of a 30 mile radius panorama. Thus, it is possible to realise what a well planned city lies before you, with a huge sports stadium, convention centres, municipal buildings, market places and along a great stretch of the Mississippi. Oddly, as in New Orleans, a levee is seen to be necessary to avoid flooding.

It was Northwards again to Peoria, Illinois, for a social visit to the family of the daughter of Joyce's friend and bridesmaid, Margery Grant. The actual location was a place called Kewanee.

Added to the enjoyment of this visit was the fact that Margery herself was staying at the same time with her daughter Gillian and her son-in-law Neil. The latter worked as a heating engineer, fitting haystack-sized boilers into skyscraper buildings. His talent was widely appreciated in the States, leading to the necessity for the family moving from city to city. Gillian was self-employed in "real estate" and legal undertakings. Their three teenaged sons were at home on holiday and we found ourselves involved in various sporting activities. A special occasion was a visit to a local quiet spot to watch a pair of beavers building a "lodge" on a stretch of river.

We were intending next to visit Chicago, but it seemed that there was no direct Greyhound link for this. So we had to go into town to book rail tickets for the journey. Our decision made it necessary for a main line train to halt to pick us up. Thus, a huge monster with ringing bells broke its journey as we climbed a set of special steps to allow us on board.

Chicago, like many stop-overs was not was we had expected - no Al Capones, John Dilingers or other gun slinging gangsters on view; in fact, the taxi from the railway station to the pre-booked hotel was quite civilised. There was a huge financial centre contained in one immense building; but we had difficulty finding a bank prepared to dispense hard cash upon presentation of our UK documentation, and then only a limited amount - suspicious lot. We were compensated by a long walk along the lakeside of Lake Michigan and even more so by the wonderful museum at the end of the promenade. It was a mixture of all the best aspects of the South Kensington museums, but, of course, on a grander scale.

By this time we were becoming travel worn - on the move constantly from early January to mid-June and the Eastern States were warming up. The final 600 miles or so from Chicago, crossing Indiana, Ohio and Virginia to Maryland were covered at a gallop. I can just recall awaking in the middle of the night and looking out of the coach window to see a huge industrial complex exuding steam, smoke and noise. "Where are we?" I asked, and was told it was Sunbury. So, via lots of -villes and -burgs we found our way eventually to Baltimore.

My sister, Peggy, lived with here husband Robert (Bob) Rous and their son John and daughter Beverley in a suburb of Baltimore called Catonsville. We had visited

previously in 1965 and again later, so that the area was not new to us. Also there was a number of friends and relatives in the vicinity, so we enjoyed much socializing with picnics and barbeques. Bob Rous worked in insurance in Washington D.C. - 50 miles distant and we travelled there with him occasionally to repeat visits to the various monuments, museums and art galleries. My sister was very active in the English G.I. Brides Association to which there were a great number of members in the area. Her children were at the adolescent stage and rarely appeared for meals, but came home at opportune moments (for themselves) to help themselves to food from the "fridge". In 1965 when we had first seen Baltimore Harbour - on the Chesapeake Bay - it had been a busy industrialized area with cranes and coal carriers abounding, but in 20 years a complete change had come about. It was more like a holiday resort with smart restaurants and recreational boats and yachts at anchor.

Our stay at Catonsville lasted for some four or five weeks and was a fitting conclusion to our round the world trip. What an experience it had been - THE highlight of a life time. In the space of some six months we had savoured a variety of cuisines, met a cross-section of nationalities, encountered an assortment of weather conditions - mainly benign. What was more we had witnessed some of the "Wonders of the World" The hot geysers of Rotorua, The Grand Canyon, Taj Mahal, The Great Barrier Reef and many others like the tomb of Mahatma Ghandi and the New Zealand glow-worm caverns; all never to be forgotten by us.

Meanwhile, during our absence our sons back home had been managing whatever affairs needed to be managed on our behalf so that we were able to settle in comfortably with our memories upon our return.

Later, the family were to send us on a "Nile Cruise" enabling us to add the Great Pyramid of Cheops to our list of "Wonders of the World".