

There's always tomorrow..



John Edwards



The early childhood of a 'Firbob'

This is the life story of John Edwards as written for his grandchildren by him over several years and transcribed by his son [also called John Edwards]. Sadly the story never progressed very far into what turned into a happy 90 year life, but it does give a wonderful insight into Cheshire rural life before the modern age. The readership of this little book is probably no wider than the remaining family but by creating these books the story may last longer and future generations may sometimes think of him.

CHAPTER -1 SOME PEOPLE AND EVENTS BEFORE MY TIME.

I was born in the first quarter of the Twentieth Century - only just, but for the vast majority of ordinary people at that time, especially those who lived outside the towns in the country districts, life had changed very little since the late Nineteenth Century. As I was born into a country area fairly remote from any town influences, I was living in a Victorian / Edwardian time warp for the first few years of my life.

My father, Samuel Edwards, was the youngest of five children and he lived in one of the railway houses at Delamere station. He was born in that house on the 27th March 1890. The house is not there now, it was demolished during the 1960's. My father's parents were Thomas and Ann. Thomas was born and lived in a place called Alvanley, near Helsby. Ann Parker lived on Manley Common which is actually in Delamere parish but is nearer to Alvanley. I assume they were married in Delamere Church but I have yet to confirm that. I suppose that would be in the late 1870's Thomas worked on the railway and was the signalman at Delamere station. The station was a very busy place in those days since the only other means of transport available was the horse and cart. The railways provided a much faster means of transport than the horse and also ran a regular and frequent service both for passengers and freight. So, life for many in the community was controlled by the train timetable.

The freight yard was busy too. Everything heavy or bulky came or went by rail, all the farm produce -milk, potatoes, vegetables etc, all the animals to and from market, timber from the forest but above all - coal. Everybody used coal, there was no gas or electricity. All the shopping had to be done in the towns,

Northwich or Chester. If you bought anything bulky such as furniture, that had to be delivered by rail.

Since the railway was such a busy place, my father and his two brothers, Walter and John, all ended up working on the railway. Walter was a driver on the L.N.E.R. based at Sheffield, John and my father were train guards at Northwich for quite a while. My father then changed over to working in the telegraphy office. He remained in that job until he died on the 22nd January 1951. He is buried in Delamere Churchyard. I never knew my grandfather Edwards as he died long before I was born. He was born in Alvanley in 1854, I can't be more precise than that. He had a sister called Mary who married a man called John and they lived in Frodsham, and at least one brother. I think he was called Ralph but I never heard my father mention his name. In fact my father told me very little about his side of the family. He told me that he had some cousins in that region but we never had any contact with them. I have looked at the gravestones in Alvanley Churchyard and I have been able to construct a family tree back to 1804 with one name missing, but this is not definite, the documents still need to be traced. One problem is that my Grandad (Thomas) and his immediate ancestors were born before Alvanley Church was opened in 1861 so I don't know yet which Church will hold the records. Grandad died suddenly of appendicitis on the 14th December 1909. He is buried in Delamere Churchyard.

If my suppositions are correct, then my great - great - grandfather was also called John Edwards and his wife was called Elizabeth. John was born in 1804/5 and died on the 14th March 1888 aged 83. Elizabeth was born in 1804 also and died on the 29th December 1880 aged 76. I have knowledge of only

one of their children, John, who was born in 1844 and died on the 28th December 1867 aged 23. He appears to have been unmarried. He could not have been my great - grandfather since my grandfather (Thomas) was born in 1854 when John was still only 10 or 11 years old. There must therefore have been at least one older son - Thomas's father and my great - grandfather.

Once again, if my suppositions are correct, I can piece together little bits that my father told me and I can identify John and Elizabeth as the young couple who moved to Delamere from Wales to take over Forest Farm which had recently been cleared from the Delamere forest. That would be in about 1830. However, I think it more likely that it was John's parents who left their farm in Wales to take over Forest Farm and their son, John, came with them. That would fit in with what my father told me. He said that father and son moved to Delamere to start-up and run the farm. That sounds very plausible as it would be a huge job for one man alone, and, as John would be aged about 25 at the time, he could not have had a son old enough to share the work but, at that age, he would be an ideal partner for his father.

Unfortunately, they appear to have fallen prey to an unscrupulous and dishonest agent who took advantage of the fact that no-one in the family could speak a word of English. A few years after taking possession of the farm, they were evicted. The agent had taken their money but had worded the contract so that the farm reverted to him after a few years. The family fought a court case and the agent was convicted and transported, to Australia I believe, but the contract could not be rescinded, so they lost their home, their livelihood and their money. I have no idea what they did after this, but they stayed in Alvanley for two generations at least. It is strange, just writing

little bits that I know about these people doesn't really turn them into real relatives of mine, they seem so remote and I know so little about them or their way of life until I remember that the Grandfather Clock that ticks our life seconds away in the dining room today is the self-same clock that ordered their lives. John's father would, almost certainly, be the original owner. The idea of that same clock belonging to each generation of our ancestors in turn seems to be a thread woven into the family tree and binding it all together. It gives a sense of family relationship to these people we never knew. When I was young, our house was full of things which had been handed down through the family, perhaps for several hundred years. I remember, in particular, my Grandmother's Rocking Chair which used to be on the hearth in front of the big open fire in the living-room. It was a lovely Georgian chair, although no-one appreciated it at the time. It was just another old chair and so, when the mad scramble to modernise by replacing everything with mass-produced rubbish began in the late 1930's and continued after the war, sadly, my parents disposed of it. It must have gone while I was in the Navy as I have no memory of it going, it just wasn't there after the war, but neither was 75% of the home I had grown up in. But I digress so, back to the story. I'll have to return to the Rocking Chair later.

I have very little knowledge of Grandmother Edwards's family. As I have already said, her maiden name was Ann Parker and she lived in a row of cottages by a quarry on Manley Common. Her father may have worked in the quarry but I don't know that. She had only one brother, Bill, but his name was Berry so Grandma's father must have died soon after she was born and her mother must have then re-married. Bill was eleven years younger than Ann. Bill had three children, Sidney, Mary and Ann. They all married and lived in the Frodsham area. We had a fair amount of

contact with them when I was young. Bill was a cripple due to an accident and lived with his daughter, Ann, and her husband Bill Walker. We used to visit Frodsham to see Uncle Bill (I should say Great - Uncle I suppose) and I have never known so much talking in such a short time in my life. Perhaps because he was an invalid he was a great reader and he could carry on a non-stop conversation on almost any subject under the sun, sometimes on several subjects simultaneously. He was a very interesting person and in spite of his propensity for talking, he was always keen to listen to what others had to say. I know of only one other branch of the Parker family. When I was still very young (1930/1) I went with my auntie Mary to visit an old lady called Lizzie Blythe. She was in her nineties and lived alone in a cottage between Mouldsworth and Manley. Both she and the cottage looked as though they had been lifted straight out of the 1830's. she was tall and slim, dressed all in black from her neck to her feet except for an immaculate white apron. The cottage had flagged floors and no mains services, no gas, water, sewers or electricity, but a big garden and orchard. I don't know her relationship to Grandma but I think she was a sister of one of Grandma's parents. Her long dead husband, John, was notorious as a fighter in his younger days. No matter where he was or what he was doing, if someone told him about another fighter somewhere, he would set off immediately to go and fight him. He would walk miles, taking several days sometimes, until he met up with his opponent. They would have their fight and he would walk home. Sometimes it was the other way round, someone would meet up with him and challenge him. Ah well, it takes all sorts to make a world.

When I first knew Grandma Edwards, she was living next door to us with her son John and family. She was short in stature, large in girth and crippled with rheumatism. She spent most of her

time sitting down She was not idle though, she always seemed to be busy but had developed the technique of sitting down to do her work. During the Summer she used to take a stool and sit for hours picking black currants. In 1930 my auntie Mary had a bungalow built in the fields a little further along Station Road so Grandma went to live with her soon afterwards. She remained there until she died on the 29th July 1939 aged 82. She is buried with Grandad in Delamere Churchyard. I think the main cause of her death was heart trouble probably due to her sedentary life style over the latter years of her life.

I said my father was one of five children. There were two daughters as well as the three boys I have mentioned. Mary, the eldest of the five was born in 1880. Then came Walter, Alice, John and my father. Mary never married. Alice married Fred Crank and they had a farm in Oakmere. Alice had a daughter on the 30th April 1916 but unfortunately Alice died in childbirth. The baby was called Alice. Mary went to keep house for Fred and to look after the baby. She devoted the rest of her life to her. Fred died of pneumonia in 1925 when Alice was only 9 years old. The family helped out until Mary had her bungalow, "Sunnyside," built. Mary died in 1949.

My mother, Ethel Edwards, was the youngest of the three daughters of John and Rebecca Spruce, she was born on the 16th July 1893 in the village of Kingsley near Frodsham. I am not sure where she was born as her parents seemed to move house fairly regularly, but I think it was at Nursery Cottage on the Frodsham Tarporley road. Her Birth Certificate is a very brief document which gives very few details but her parents retired to that house and I think I remember her saying she was born there. I know she lived there at some time. I shall have to check the Kingsley Church records sometime. As I said, the family

moved house several times during my mother's childhood. I have no knowledge of many of the moves but I know they lived at a place called Staniford in Kingsley village centre and on a farm in Whitley, a village near Warrington. My mother hated living on that farm because the man who had farmed it before them had hung himself and as a result my mother and her sisters were scared to death of being alone in the place. They all heaved a sigh of relief when they moved back to Kingsley. They stayed in Kingsley then, so my mother completed her education at the village school at the age of twelve. That would be in 1905. School was compulsory in those days but once a child had learned a few basics it was thought reasonable to leave school and start work. So, aged 12 years, she went to work at the Old Pale farm at Delamere. She lived in the farmhouse with all the other servants and her job was as the nursemaid to the three children of the family-a boy aged three and twins aged six months. Her day started at 6 a.m. and ended when the children were in bed and all the preparations for the next day completed. She had half a day off each week when she walked home to Kingsley, then back to the Old Pale by 9 P.M. a distance of nearly four miles each way.

In 1910 her parents moved to Stoneybutts Farm at Delamere and she went back to live there with them and to help on the farm. I think she had returned home for a period before this to help her mother. I think one of the three girls was at home to help all the time but they changed around periodically, and this continued for several more years.

The significant thing about John and Rebecca Spruce moving to Stoneybutts farm was that the farm was the nearest place to the station where, of course, my father was living with his family. It

was normal for people to live at home until they married in those days.

John Spruce was born in Kingsley in 1860, I think his birthday was in April. His parents were in farming but I don't know where they lived in Kingsley. John married when he was about 20 but his wife died during the birth of their first child a year or two later. I have no other knowledge of this marriage but mother and child are buried with John and Rebecca in the churchyard at Kingsley. The church records could reveal more.

John then remained a widower for seven years until he married Rebecca Lightfoot in the late 1880's. I suppose the wedding was at Kingsley Church but, once again the church records need to be consulted. I think that John and Rebecca set up home in Nursery Cottage but this needs verification. It is also possible that John lived there with his first wife and therefore already owned the house. John and Rebecca had three daughters. Amy was the eldest, she was born in 1891, February I think. She married Thomas Johnson from Norley and had two sons, Harry and Frank. The second daughter was Martha, known as Pattie. She married William Whitby and had two sons Kenneth and Alan. My mother, Ethel, was the youngest daughter..

As I have already said, John came from a farming family and was engaged in farming himself but he did other things as well. He built up a fruit and vegetable wholesale business. He travelled all over the area from Frodsham to Tarporley with a horse and lorry buying from the farms and taking it to Warrington for resale. I said he did the travelling with a horse and lorry but I have heard many stories of journeys to outlying farms and going up steep hills with heavy loads which required three or more horses and even then half the load had to be taken off at the bottom of the

hill, then unload the rest at the top before returning to the bottom to pick up the other half and haul it up top. This process might have to be repeated several times on one journey, a hard day's work indeed. He did other work as well though. Possibly my earliest memory of going out with my grandfather was when he took me to a tree felling job he was doing. He was clearing a swathe about 35yards wide through the forest to allow a large aqueduct to be piped through. He felled the large oak trees and cut off all the branches. He had some casual helpers clearing the smaller trees and undergrowth and piling it up into large heaps for burning. That is the image that is indelibly impressed into my memory, huge oak tree-trunks lying on the ground waiting to be taken away, men chopping away at the branches of a large oak lying on the ground - like cutting up a beached whale, but above all else, I remember the fires. One I remember most vividly had finished burning and a huge mound of hot ashes was glowing on the forest floor, it must have been 25 - 30 feet in diameter and six feet high in the centre. It was so hot I couldn't go anywhere near it, which frustrated me, because I loved a bonfire. The most irritating thing about it though from my point of view was that a distant cousin called Lionel Stott was looking after the fires. He was about 15 at the time and I was only three, but oh! how I coveted his job. Lionel was the son of my grandfather's youngest sister, Minnie, so he was my mother's cousin really. I never knew him very well but he kept popping up from time to time. The trouble was that he was half a generation away from my parents and from me.

John, my grandfather, was a good farmer, a very astute business man and a very hard worker, but he expected the same from everyone else and made that very clear. He was well known for miles around and very few people chose to tangle with him, not twice anyway. He was a hard man by any standard but totally

straightforward in his business deals, nothing was put in writing but his word was his bond. He feared nobody and rode roughshod over anyone who tried to interfere with what he saw as his right, he ate petty officials for breakfast. During the First World War, one of the men who worked for him on the farm received his call-up papers for the army. Grandad wanted to keep him on the farm so he asked for him to be released. The outcome was that my grandfather had to go to an Appeal Court hearing to plead his case for this man to be released. At the end of the hearing, however, the Judge ruled against him but said that he would give him another man instead. On hearing this, my grandfather leapt to his feet and told the Judge where to stuff his workman adding that he could carve a better man out of a lump of wood than the Judge would give him and stormed out of the court.

I said earlier that my grandfather never put anything in writing. There was a good reason for that, he could neither read nor write. This was due, almost entirely, to the fact that he never went to school except on a Monday morning when he had to pay two pence, old pence that is, for his week's education. He left at lunch time and then did his own thing for the rest of the week. Provided the weekly fee was paid nobody bothered whether he was there or not. So, he grew up as a free spirit unfettered by convention, he never read a newspaper in his life and there was no radio or television so he had to rely on what people told him. If he received a letter he asked the postman to read it for him if it was hand written otherwise he burned it. In spite of his lack of education, he was, as I have said, very astute in all the finances of the farm and his other interests. He could do mental arithmetic in Pounds, Shillings and Pence extremely quickly and accurately.

I have very little knowledge of his parents other than that they lived in Kingsley and were farmers but I don't know where or on what scale. I don't know their names but I seem to recall being told that his father was either a John or a Thomas. We do have a photograph taken with their dog where his father is seated while his mother is standing. This is reputedly because his father was too drunk to stand up. There were, to the best of my knowledge, five children - John, Thomas, Louise, George and Minnie. I think the order is correct. I know nothing of Thomas or Louise. George educated himself and reached a high ranking position in the engineering division of the railway before retiring back to farming. He had a wife called Dora and two children called George and Dora. George carried on the farm at Bridge Trafford Hall when his father died. He had a wife and two children but I have forgotten their names. Minnie married William Stott from Oldham and had two children Lionel and Mabel. Minnie didn't like Oldham, so, as her husband was working away from home nearly all the time, she moved back to Kingsley and lived in the farm next door to Nursery Cottage. This farm seems to have had a previous connection with the Spruce family and to have been already in their possession. My mother knew a lot about it and had obviously slept there as had other members of the family but all of them were extremely reluctant to talk about it. However, I did manage to get my mother and her sister to tell me a little once. The house was reputed to be haunted and although neither my mother nor her sister had experienced anything untoward they had not been in the room which was supposedly haunted but the whole family knew it was haunted and the room was left empty. Even so several people who had been in the room on various occasions had experienced strange phenomena and that was enough for me and all the other children of the family to be banned from the house. I don't remember any of the adults going there either except grandad

on a very few occasions but he would not allow me to go with him. I know nothing of the history of the house but, like Nursery Cottage, it is old.

My grandmother, Rebecca, also came from a farming background but her family seem to have been more "well to do." She had been educated privately. I don't know where this was but I imagine it would be a small school run by an unmarried lady from one of the wealthy families in the area or perhaps an educated lady who had moved into the area as, say, a governess and stayed on when the children grew up supplementing her income by running a small school in her own home. That is merely supposition and the reality might have been quite different but the indisputable result was that my grandmother Spruce was almost a complete opposite of my grandfather. Where he was illiterate, brisk mannered, fearless, belligerent and lacking in the "Social Graces" she was well versed in the three R's, calm, placid, tolerant but above all she was a peacemaker, a quality much in demand at times. In spite of, or maybe because of, their very different personalities, they appear to have been very happy and contented together. I think the basis of their marriage was their absolute trust in each other and their mutual respect for, and dependence upon, each other. Although my grandfather was as I have described him and probably much more besides, my grandmother cast her influence over the household and in many ways was the stronger personality, certainly within the home and family. They complemented each other very well and worked together as a team. Grandad was a good husband and father and worked relentlessly for his family. He could do the work of three men and did so regularly, but he relied on grandma to keep all the business records and to look after the family finances in addition to being a housewife and mother. She maintained harmony in

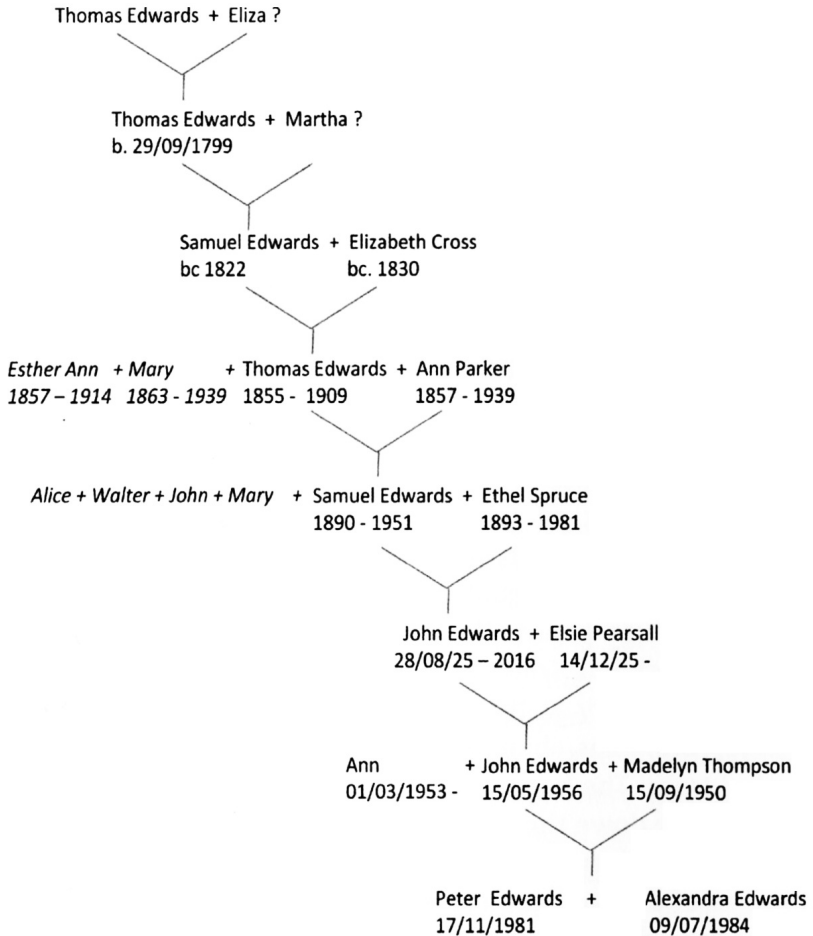
the home - not an easy task, and then when the day's work was done and the children and animals all secure they would sit round the fire and, in the light of an oil lamp, she would read to him. He had great respect for her education and after she died he tried very hard to learn to read but he never succeeded. He did, however, learn to sign his own name.

I think Grandma had discovered the only way to deal with Grandad. When he was in one of his disagreeable moods it was useless to do nothing in the hope the storm would blow over, he would trample all over you. It was equally useless to enter into a shouting match with him, he would quickly over- power the opposition and dominate proceedings from then on. Grandma used to listen for a while, then, adopting her most calm and serene manner she would say "Calm down John, you are wrong and you are getting upset and you will end up making a fool of yourself." He was like putty in her hand after that, he had such a high regard for her intellect. He was like a savage guard dog growling and barking and showing it's teeth, but, one word from it's master and it rolls over to have it's "tummy" rubbed.

I know nothing about my grandmother's parents except that they were farmers somewhere in Kingsley and their name was Lightfoot. They were of Welsh origin and a relative called Samuel Lightfoot {maybe Grandma's brother} was a farmer in the Mold area. He used to visit from time to time and Grandad used to visit him. (That was probably the farthest he ever went in his life)

Rebecca died at Nursery Cottage in 1927. John stayed there and died in 1942. They are buried in Kingsley Churchyard as are their parents Once again the church records may reveal more details about previous generations of the Spruce and Lightfoot families.

Provisional Family Tree of the Edwards Family



The earlier names and dates are subject to documentary proof.
The families of Dorothy, Stanley, Alice and Clifford will be found in the text.

CHAPTER - 2 MY ARRIVAL AND EARLY YEARS

My father and mother were married in St. Peter's Church, Delamere on Michaelmas Day (29th September) 1920 and the reception afterwards was held at Stoneybutts Farm. That is where the wedding photographs were taken. Their honeymoon was spent in Old Colwyn on the North Wales coast. When you consider that they must have known each other for at least ten years by this time, it can hardly be looked upon as a whirlwind romance. I have no idea what was happening during those years or how long they were engaged but, of course, the First World War had intervened.

On returning from their honeymoon they set up home in a rented bungalow just off Eddisbury Hill (then known as Black Hill). That bungalow is not there now but a modern one has been built on the exact spot, perhaps retaining part of the original, you never know. The bungalow was situated on a driveway off Black Hill. There was a large garden which ran into an old disused quarry at the back. The quarry was overgrown with gorse, brambles, bracken and numerous types of self propagated trees. The bungalow was fairly high up the hill, with the front looking down the hill over the top of another bungalow lower down the hill, and the back sloping up to the quarry, which was the size of an average field and had a flat floor and a high cliff at the far side up to the normal contour of the hill. There was one other bungalow further along the driveway with the land between the bungalows covered with gorse. There was a strip of grass in front of the bungalows, on the other side of the drive, and about 50 Feet (16M) wide. Beyond the grass strip was a high, thick hedge which hid the other bungalow I mentioned and still lower down the hill was another bungalow which was

on the corner where Black Hill met Station Road. There were a few other bungalows and a little wooden shop on Station Road between Black Hill and where the Post Office stands today. The rest of Station Road was uninhabited from the Abbey Arms Hotel to the Station apart from four farm houses and six houses hidden behind a piece of waste land on an un-made service road running off Station Road. The land opposite these six houses was farmed by my grandfather as part of Stoneybutts Farm.

Station Road had a MacAdam surface. That consists of a good foundation of big stones firmly embedded in soil and surfaced with MacAdam, i.e.50-70 mm granite or limestone ballast set in mud, rolled level and allowed to dry out. This produced a hard, durable surface but heavy rain washed the soil from between the stones and hot, dry weather caused the soil to shrink, thus loosening the stones. Both these conditions led to large potholes which rapidly increased in area and depth when traffic passed over them. When it rained the holes filled with water. This was very uncomfortable for pedestrians. When a car passed, they were drenched in muddy water and as the volume of traffic increased in the 1930's, this could happen every few steps. Cyclists were no better off either. All this made you realise why Dr. Foster never went to Gloucester again. There was one good point though, as a young boy at the time, I found the stones ideal for throwing and there was a plentiful supply. Wet weather was not the only hazard for the poor, unfortunate pedestrian or cyclist either. In dry weather, every vehicle or gust of wind caused a dust storm. On either side of the road was a grass verge and a hawthorn hedge 3- 4 Mtrs. high. On one side the verge was wider and a footpath covered in red shale ran through it. Several big, old oak trees grew up through the hedges their branches covering almost the full width of the road. These provided excellent vantage points for owls looking for a meal in

the verges and hedgerows below. They must have been pretty successful judging by the number of pellets always to be found under the trees. Since there was no gas or electricity, there were no street lights and the lights from the dozen or so houses were only the dim glow of an oil lamp or candle. All this made the whole area a very eerie place at night, just the hooting of the owls, foxes barking, the odd dog bark, the wind sighing through the trees but, above all this, the silence, the silence of nature that can now be experienced only in a few very remote parts of Britain.-no background traffic noise, no matter how distant, no passing aircraft overhead, no hum of machinery and no radio or television blaring out. Add to this the many variations of light and shadow caused by the moon and the movement of the clouds and trees and you can see where the world of fantasy originated. The eeriness on the ground was, however, more than compensated for, on a clear moonless night, by a spectacular display of the heavens and which, in the total absence of any light pollution, stretched from horizon to horizon and the stars shone like diamonds in the clear unpolluted air. Many times, on such a night, whilst walking home, I have stopped and marvelled at the truly magnificent panorama of the heavens above me. I have stood and watched shooting stars streak across the sky. At certain times of the year they appear in profusion and are very impressive. One night I watched a shower of such large numbers of shooting stars that it resembled a distant firework display where only the rockets could be seen. When I was a student in the Physics Department at Manchester University after the war, the Department was building the Jodrell Bank facility from Government Surplus electronic gear which was sold off cheaply in vast quantities after the war. The original purpose of the facility was to study shooting stars, or meteors, by bouncing radio pulses from the trail of ionised gases produced as they entered the atmosphere and thereby calculating their speed,

height, weight etc.. One of my tutors was very much into this and used we students to help with some of the calculations. Meteors vary in size from a dust particle to a piece of matter the size of a pea. They start to glow due to friction with the atmosphere at a height of about 60 miles and are usually burnt out at a height of about 30 miles. The length of trajectory depends on their size. Large objects also strike the Earth of course, but they are called meteorites, some of which are very large and reach the surface of the Earth.

But I digress again, I haven't reached my birth yet and there I am telling you about my student days. The truth is that starting to think about my childhood has stimulated my memory to such an extent that I often sit here for hours and re-live all the memories that come flooding into my mind, memories that have not come to mind for nearly 70 years in some cases. My problem is to decide on a logical order in which to write them down and, as there are far too many to include them all, I have to decide which to forget. All very simple you might think but the more I think the more memories flood in. Telling you about the eeriness of the night in the Delamere of 70 or so years ago brought back to my mind the word "Stilly" to describe the night. I also remembered going to bed when I was perhaps 2 or 3 years old. The only light in the house was an oil lamp in the living room. I was put to bed by the light of a candle and after a few minutes my mother took the candle to light her way down the stairs and I was left in total blackness. I can still remember that period after the candle had gone, the darkness, the silence, the stillness in the room and a young child's imagination produced an atmosphere you could almost cut with a knife. I wasn't afraid but in that magic atmosphere, before I dropped off to sleep, my mind conjured up all sorts of fantasies. This memory and the word "stilly" brought back the memory of a poem I learnt as a

boy. It was written by a man named Thomas Moore who was born in 1779 and it is about the memories he relives during that period before sleep. It meant little to me when I learnt it as a boy because I had no such memories then, but now it seems to me to illustrate my problems with my own memories. So, although I am still digressing, I will let you share the poem with me. It is titled "The Light of Other Days".

Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me:
The smiles, the tears
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

There is a second verse but I won't quote it here, I will return to my story instead. You remember I was telling you about the bungalow which my parents lived in. Well, they spent over five very happy years there together with Jim the dog (all sorts) and Smut the cat (black) and about 18 hens. They had lots of visitors, relatives and friends, and made lifelong friends of the neighbours in the other bungalows. However, during their fifth

year there they learnt something that would change their lives for ever I was on the way and my arrival was foretold as being mid September 1925. As soon as my mother had absorbed this news she decided that she wanted to move house. The problem for her was that my father was doing shift work and most of the time he was either working all night or coming home at 3 am. or going to work at 2 am. She had been happy to be alone in the bungalow at night till then but she didn't fancy being alone in that isolated place with a new baby. Remember, there were no telephones to summon help if necessary.

So it was that my father and his brother, John, bought the plot of land at the junction of Station Road and what is now called Frith Avenue from the Council and had plans drawn up for a pair of semi-detached houses to be built. Nixon's of Kelsall were chosen to build the houses, the financial aspects were sorted out and towards the end of August everything was set to start. A great difference between 1925 and the present day is glossed over in that last sentence. The houses were to be built by the local builder from the next village which was quite common then but the local village craftsmen have long ago given way to the large national builders such as Wimpy and so with all the other local trades. If you wanted a custom built house today you would have to seek out a small firm which specialises in building small developments and try to persuade them to build a one-off. The other point concerned the financing, Building Societies were much smaller then and they catered for the middle class professional rather than the ordinary working man. The outcome of this was that my father and his brother financed the houses themselves. They had always intended to own their own property so they had obviously been saving for some time. Saving for a home was just as difficult in those days as it is today, the average house would cost around £500 and the average

wage was a little over £100 per year. With other costs such as solicitor's fees etc., a house cost about five years income. The ratio is the same today, the average income is about £10,000 per year and the average house costs about £50,000, about five years income.

All the necessary arrangements were made and agreements made with the builders for the site to be cleared and building to start in the last week of August with completion scheduled for Easter 1926. So, the scheme was put in motion, the site was cleared and the builders started to dig-out the foundations. On the Friday of that same week, however, my mother woke very early in great discomfort. Eventually they decided that I was responsible, so, my father was despatched to call the nurse and to go to Stoneybutts Farm and ask mother's sister, Pattie, to come up to give moral support to my mother and , no doubt, to my father as well. Auntie Pattie often recalled how she walked up that lonely road on that beautiful Summer morning with all the birds singing and, as she reached Black Hill, she heard the 6am siren sounding at the I.C.I, works in Northwich.

Well, to cut a long story short, I arrived at a quarter to ten on that self-same Friday morning, the 28th of August 1925, and, no doubt, added my own vocal notes to those of the thrushes and blackbirds. I weighed-in at 61b 8oz and had arrived about three weeks earlier than expected.

Well, my parents and I spent that Autumn, Winter and the following Spring in the bungalow but, to be honest, I knew very little about it. I have heard of only one significant happening during that period, our dog, Jim, died of poisoning. My mother must have coped with the long Winter nights alone and without incident. We never discovered where Jim picked up the poison

but my father was sure it was done deliberately and had a suspect in mind but no proof.

By the following May the new house was finished and ready for occupation. My grandfather brought his horse and lorry and he and my father removed all the contents of the bungalow into the new house. The cat rode on the lorry on every journey to and from the new house. She had never been on a lorry before but she seemed to sense that something was happening to her home and she was not going to be left behind. When the last load had been unloaded and everyone had settled down, the cat disappeared. My father went back to the bungalow several times during the following week but found no signs of Smut. However, about two weeks later Smut was sat on the doorstep waiting for them when they got up one morning. She never wandered away again.

Apart from all the usual problems associated with moving into a new house, the whole house to decorate, the garden like a builder's yard, no fences or hedges etc. my parents had another major problem. It was May 1926, and the General Strike. There had been a Miner's strike and in May the Trade Union movement decided to call the entire workforce out on strike. This was a severe blow to my parents, they had a new house that needed drying out, a new baby, no coal and no other means of heating or cooking. Remember there was no gas or electricity and even if there were they would have been cut off by the strikes. They had very little coal at the bungalow but it was considered unlucky to take coal with you when moving house. Everything was unobtainable, food and fuel were the first to cause hardship. Everyone was out of work so no wages either. My father had a cross-cut saw so he and my mother spent every day collecting logs from the forest and sawing them up for

firewood. They collected the wood from the nearest part of the forest, across the field on the other side of Station Road. At that time, that bit of forest, known as Relic's Moss, was covered with large oak trees, many of which had been felled, but, because of the boggy nature of the ground, could not be moved. It was these large pieces of oak that they were sawing up and taking home in a wheelbarrow. It was a real back breaking job hauling it up the steep bank to the road. I don't know where they left me while they were collecting the logs but when they were sawing and chopping it up after hauling it home, they had me with them and, to keep me out of harm's way, they put me in a large laundry tub. I could sit down or stand and watch them but I couldn't climb out. They must have collected a large number of logs because we always had a large stack of logs at the end of the garden and many of them were what they had carried. The stack was added-to quite regularly, no doubt to ensure that they would be able to ride out any similar emergency in the future. I got a reminder of the hard work involved in hauling logs up that steep bank during the severe winter of 1947. During January and February of 1947 the country suffered very heavy snowfalls accompanied by a long spell of bitterly cold weather. The result was similar to that of the General Strike. Coal could not be moved from the pits to the power stations or the gas works (it was all coal gas then), roads and railways were blocked, so there were no fuel supplies either for industry or the home. Millions were out of work as industry was forced to shut down. Food and milk were brought by sledge. To help out with the fuel situation my cousin, Clifford, and I went down to Relic's Moss and hauled up some of the big oak logs that were still lying there. We didn't use a wheelbarrow though, we tied ropes to them and dragged them over the snow.

Fortunately the strike did not last very long but the effects of it carried on long after it ended and indeed never recovered until the outbreak of war in 1939. The solution to the financial, industrial and political problems of Britain and the rest of the world seemed to be beyond the capabilities of the politicians and so the world sank into the Great Depression. This caused great hardship over the world. Here in Britain, industry was almost at a standstill so unemployment was very high, dole payments were very low so millions were living on or below the breadline. Very few married women worked in those days and there was no Social Security so it was very serious for a family if the only earner lost his job. There was a great feeling of discontent and disillusionment with the whole scheme of things. Bear in mind that these people who were suffering most were the selfsame people who, only a few years earlier, had answered the call to fight for their country and were promised that after they had won the war "they would come back to a land fit for heroes to live in". They endured the mud and the blood and all the other horrors of war, and they won, but when they came home, many of them broken in mind and body, all they got was the dole, slum housing, near starvation and a means test which made them sell all their treasured possessions, except a bare minimum, before they could get any help. There was a great hatred of the Germans as it was felt they had caused the war and should be made to pay compensation for all the hardship and damage they had caused. Meanwhile, the Germans also felt very aggrieved. They felt the peace settlement had been too hard on them and they resented it but they also had an inflation problem. They had to pay workers twice a day and they had to spend the money immediately otherwise it would be almost worthless. Life there was even worse than in Britain. Likewise in the U.S.A., millions were dependent on soup kitchens.

All this hardship and poverty in the midst of plenty led to political unrest and so Communism strengthened its hold in Russia, Fascism took over in Italy and after years of trouble-making, the Nazi party took over Germany. All these parties had a following in Britain and disturbances were common. Genuine demands for better conditions were often wrongly attributed to agitation by these parties and forcibly dispersed. Thus the seeds were sown for World War 2 and our subsequent fate was inevitable.

So, this was the world I had been born into.

Fortunately, however, I knew nothing of all this and life for me seemed idyllic. We were settled in our new home. Uncle John and auntie Lily lived next door with their son Clifford and grandma Edwards. Grandad and grandma Spruce had retired from Stoneybutts Farm and now lived in Nursery Cottage. Stoneybutts was still in the family though as my auntie Pattie (mother's sister) and uncle Willy had taken it over and lived there with their sons Kenneth and Alan. As auntie Mary (dad's sister) and her niece and ward, Alice, had been forced to leave their farm in Oakmere following the death of Alice's father, Fred Crank, they also were living in part of the farmhouse until they could buy some land and build a bungalow (Sunnyside). As he had retired, grandad had helped to sort out our garden. He ploughed the land and levelled it, planted a hawthorn hedge along the roadside and helped to plant three apple trees and numerous soft fruit bushes, raspberries, red and black currants, gooseberries etc.. So, my earliest memories are of an established home and garden which appeared to me to have always been there and so I gave no credit to my parents and grandad for all their hard work in turning a new house into a home and a piece of rough land into a garden in a little over a year.

I have spent a long time just sitting here trying to recall my earliest memory and it has been much more difficult than I expected. For one thing, I find it is not possible to recall memories to order. They usually come to mind by a process of thought association such that one thought or memory tends to trigger another. So, I find that as I sit here, my mind ranges over many subjects most of which are totally disconnected and often triggered by my previous thoughts. Sometimes, however, the trigger mechanism is an outside influence such as something I see or hear or something that just happens. So you see I suffer many distractions before I produce a thought I consider worth including here. It is amazing though, just how many thoughts come flooding in. I suppose that is the basis of daydreaming, just letting the thoughts roll in whilst wide awake but totally oblivious of what is going on all around.

During that little diversion I have decided that I can now identify my earliest memory. I have a clear memory of walking along the road from Nursery Cottage to a nearby farm with grandma Spruce. We were going to get some milk in a large jug. I remember going to the door of the farmhouse where we met two elderly ladies wearing long, black skirts and white aprons. One was the farmer's wife and the other, like us, had come for milk. Needless to say, I immediately became the topic of conversation to my great embarrassment. I have no recollection of the walk back to Nursery Cottage. The weather was warm and sunny so it must have been Summertime. That must have been the Summer of 1927 because grandma suffered a stroke and died in late Autumn that same year.

Several other isolated incidents dating from around the same time have become fixtures in my memory. I remember being left

at home with grandma Edwards and my cousin Clifford from next door whilst my mother and father went to Kingsley. I was never told why they had gone to Kingsley but I suppose it was either to help look after grandma Spruce or to attend her funeral. I had not been told of grandma's illness or her death but I must have sensed that something was seriously wrong because I wouldn't settle down. After we had tired of the toys and grandma had run out of stories, I remember her pretending to write letters to me and sending Clifford to post them through the letterbox in the front door and I collected them inside.

It must have been around the same period that a very strange thing happened although I didn't think anything about it at the time, I was far too young. I was still sleeping in a bed alongside my parents bed in the front bedroom which means that it was before the summer of 1928, because I moved into my own room then. I was asleep in my bed one evening when I woke up to find grandma Spruce sitting next to me My mother came upstairs to see why I had disturbed but when I told her that grandma had been to see me she said I was mistaken. I didn't know that grandma was dead but I remain certain that she had come to see me that night. I never saw grandma again.

Sometime later on that same winter (1927-28) I remember being aroused early one dark morning and taken to the back door. When I looked out the yard outside was white over. "What's that?" I asked. "Who put it there?" I wasn't too enamoured of my first encounter with snow, it was too cold. That Winter must have been very severe because our water pipes froze in the attic. The worst of it was that as it was the water supply to the hot water system that was frozen, we could not have a fire in the living room downstairs, so we had to live in the front bedroom and the front room downstairs. I remember my father and uncle

John carrying buckets full of thick ice down from the tank in the attic. I don't think we had a burst though. The pipes in the attic were lagged with everything they could find after that but they still froze every time we had a severe winter. In the end my father got fed up with this and had all the water system removed from the attic into the bathroom but by then I myself had experienced a few sessions of discomfort up in the attic thawing frozen pipes.

Frost wasn't the only hazard we faced that winter though, we woke up one day to find our garden full of slates and ridge-tiles. The winds were gale force from the West and blew all the slates off next door and deposited them unbroken in our garden, stuck in the ground like javelins. Next door looked something like a plucked chicken.

Enough about the joys of living in a new house in a remote area. The next two or three years saw me come to terms with my little world. Life for me was very pleasant. Spared all the responsibilities and worries of adult life and oblivious of the political and economic problems besetting the world, I was living in a veritable "Garden of Eden" and it never occurred to me that life was not the same for everyone else. If only that had been true, what a happy place the world could have been. I visited Northwich and Chester fairly frequently on shopping trips and Manchester two or three times a year and we visited uncle Walter and auntie Lena in Sheffield for a week or so each year. All these places had some pretty grotty slum areas but in my inexperienced mind I never saw them as places where people actually had to live so I never paused to realise that life there was very different from mine.

I lived in a fairly large modern house with a modern bathroom and hot and cold running water. All of these were very rare features in those days, in fact our pair of houses had the only bathrooms in the neighbourhood excepting the few very large houses dotted about. Many people thought it was most peculiar and insanitary to have an indoor lavatory and said so. Many still had bucket types at the end of the garden. I played in a big garden with Clifford and other children from nearby. There were fields, trees and hills all around. We had a hen pen, a big oak tree and a large hawthorn tree at the end of our garden and beyond those was a big pit which was reputed to be very deep. I started to climb the oak tree at a very early age before branching out to climb many of the other trees in the area. Clifford couldn't climb so he used to run home and tell my mother when I was up a tree. I have many memories of looking down and seeing Clifford and my mother at the bottom. My mother was always very calm and motherly until I reached the bottom of the tree and then her mood changed abruptly and I knew I was in trouble. I would either be confined to the house or to my bedroom or sometimes even worse, I was sent into the pantry. Slowly the reality dawned on Clifford that when he told tales about my climbing, he ended up with no-one to play with. Sometimes my mother would take me down to the farm. If it was a nice day, particularly during the summer, the housemaid would take my cousins (Ken and Alan) and I across the fields or into the woods and we would have a picnic. We had some fine times. There were various girls, I remember Violet, Mabel, Ronnie (Veronica) and a very pretty girl whose name I can't remember and at least one other also lost in the mist of time.

Although grandad Spruce had retired from the farm, he had not really retired from farming. He farmed his garden at Nursery Cottage. He had a horse and lorry, one or two cows, some

calves, hens, a large orchard, a dog called Prince and a shotgun which rested on two brackets over the living room door. After grandma died he used to walk to our house every Monday morning to bring his laundry for my mother to wash - Monday was always washday. He stayed and had lunch with us, listened to Jack Payne and his dance band on the "wireless" and then walked home. Later in the week my mother and I went to Nursery Cottage for the day. In the early days she pushed me in the pram but later on I had to walk the 3 1/2 miles each way. I spent the day "helping" grandad whilst my mother cleaned the house. So, I grew to know grandad very well, I used to love going places with him on the horse and lorry, I can clearly remember going to Beeston cattle market with him. I would be aged 3 or 4 at the time I suppose.

I mentioned our wireless and how grandad listened to Jack Payne on it. The word "wireless" has been replaced by "radio" now of course but in those days it was a rare novelty and there were not many homes with one. My father was always drawn to new fangled things, so when commercial broadcasting was starting in the early 1920's he bought a set. It cost more than a month's pay and my mother was none too happy about it. It was called a "Gecophone" and I still have the wooden case. However, the "in thing" soon became to make your own. This was beyond my dad's capabilities so he teamed up with a man from Stretford called Mr. Gibbs who produced some plans and circuits. They bought all the parts, made a wooden box about two feet wide, one foot deep and one foot high with a hinged lid, drove a copper earth about five feet into the ground, Mr. Gibbs did the electronics inside the box and wired up a galaxy of knobs, switches and large dials on the front. My dad bought a pine tree trunk about 25 feet long, attached a pulley to the top, threaded a wire through it and then erected it at the far end of the

garden. He attached another pulley to the chimney stack and then hauled up the aerial. It ran from the set to the chimney and then full length of the garden at a height of over 20 feet. The job was completed by the addition of a lead-acid accumulator, a 120 volt dry battery, a grid bias battery and a loudspeaker. This was a beautiful, free-standing exponential horn very similar to the one on the H.M.V. logo. The completed assembly looked more like the engine-room of a ship than a wireless set but dad and Mr. Gibbs were delighted and moreover, it worked. We had the same set for many years, well, nearly the same set, every so often Mr. Gibbs would arrive and say he wanted to build some improvements into it, whereupon he put it on the table and took bits out, added bits, drilled holes in the box and generally tinkered around for a few hours. Then he declared it to be better than it was and went home. Provided we watered the earth rod generously in dry weather we had no trouble with it. I'm really glad there was no such thing as television in those days because my dad could not have resisted it and I dread to think what he and Mr. Gibbs would have made of that challenge.

Another pastime my dad took up was photography. He then decided to do his own processing. I can't remember how he got over the lack of a darkroom, I was too young at the time, but later on I remember my mother used to turn a funny colour whenever it was mentioned. The memory of all the mess and upset was still fresh in her mind. I do remember him contact printing from the negatives, he had a lot of wooden frames with glass fronts and removable backs, hinged shutters and various masking pieces. He used to assemble the negatives and sensitive papers in the frames and then put them out in the garden. He then went round opening the shutters to see how the developing was going on. My mother was pleased when the

novelty wore off and he took his films to the chemist to be developed. I still have his camera.

Before I got sidetracked into telling you about the wireless set, I was telling you of grandad's addiction to Jack Payne. To people of his generation, Jack Payne would be the equivalent of what Johnny Rotten is to my own generation. I can't imagine myself walking 7 miles to listen to Johnny Rotten so I find it truly remarkable that he did, especially as, to the best of my knowledge, he displayed no liking or talent for any other type of music whatsoever. I never heard him sing, whistle, hum or make any sort of musical sound.

Although, as I have said, I spent some of my time at Nursery Cottage or on the farm, I suppose most of my time was spent at home playing in the garden. Dad and uncle John next door did not fence between their gardens so the result was a double sized play area for Clifford and I. At various times our gardens were a football pitch, a cricket ground, a first world war battle ground complete with shell holes and trenches, a road works site complete with hazard lights (bicycle lamps), a pipe laying scheme, a site for endless bonfires and numerous other activities that took our fancy. The gardens were always like a building site but in the midst of all this my father and uncle did what they could to maintain a vegetable garden. They suffered badly from our activities and the successes they did achieve were often eaten long before they were due to be harvested. We had our own illuminations one autumn, we gathered together all the cycle lamps, flash lamps, candles in jam-jars etc. and attached them to the trees, the clothes posts and anything else we could find and when it went dark we lit them all. Our parents must have been very tolerant.

At times, my cousin Alice brought her friends to play so we were over-run by girls and hopelessly outnumbered so we had to play house with them. There was a shed at the end of the garden which converted into an excellent house. My problem with this was that Alice and her friends were a few years older than me and they all wanted to be mother with me as the baby since I was the youngest. They all bossed me about, nursed me, wheeled me in the pram and generally behaved like mothers do till, eventually, I rebelled.

I played in other gardens too, particularly Lightfoot's garden which was extra-big. There was a small pit at the far end and an old oak tree overhanging it. The lowest branch was about 4 metres high and was hollowed out like a canoe for about 3 metres. With the aid of a rope and miscellaneous other means we could climb into our "boat" or whatever it happened to be that day and no-one knew where we were, apart, that is, from all the noise we were making.

Life was not all play though. Sundays were real rest-days in those days and you did your resting dressed in your Sunday best clothes. To be honest, Sundays could have their boring moments. Nobody worked on Sunday, no gardening, no D. I. Y. or anything like that, and no play either unless we could slip away while no-one was looking. Sunday lunch was traditional roast meat, potatoes, vegetables and gravy followed usually by apple pie and rice pudding, very nice, I liked that part. My dad always did the washing up afterwards and then our famous wireless came to my assistance. There always seemed to be The Black Dyke Mills brass band, Peter Dawson singing "On The Road to Mandalay", Dame Clara Butt singing "Abide With Me" or Christopher Stone playing gramophone records of a similar type of music. It used to lull mum and dad to sleep quite quickly so I

made my escape provided the weather was fair. I was, however, still dressed in my Sunday clothes so my activities were severely restricted. To improve things, Clifford had to escape as well and they had no wireless. Sometimes, when the days were short in winter, we would go for a walk in the forest during the afternoon but in the summer we always went for our walk in the evening. I think mum and dad really preferred their rest in the afternoon. Sunday tea was always the same sort of meal, tinned salmon or tongue sandwiches followed by home bottled fruit and custard, tea and home made cake. This was a time before going out for the day on a Sunday became popular. I think that started in the late 1930's. Our Sunday evening walks were therefore a very local affair. We often went as a family, uncle John and aunty Lily, auntie Mary and Alice and of course Clifford and I. The walk usually ended with a visit to grandma Edwards and the rest of the evening was spent with the grown-ups talking while we young ones amused ourselves by doing our own thing and eating or drinking everything that was offered.

I think though that the high spots of every year in this respect were the visits of uncle Walter and family from Sheffield. They usually came for a week or so in the summer and then again for Christmas. Uncle Walter was the life and soul of every party and we children never left him alone. The whole time he was there was spent walking all over the place, I suppose he was re-living his childhood memories with us. He knew so much about the place, he was so light-hearted and tireless in his efforts to keep us amused that the time he was with us was one long happy event. We never seemed to stop laughing at his stories and antics. I think he must have been glad to go back to Sheffield for a rest His Christmas visit was much the same except that the walks and rambles were restricted by the weather. The highlight was always the Christmas party. It had apparently long been a

tradition in the Edwards family that the family gathered with grandma on Christmas Day and this is apparently how I spent my first Christmas. Grandma still lived at the station then so I was taken there in my pram and spent the day and most of the night there before returning to our remote bungalow in the early hours of Boxing Day. It was late into the night one Christmas, the men were playing cards and the women had called it a day and gone up to bed. Suddenly there was a crash and the card table and everybody sat round it were showered in dust and plaster. When they gathered themselves together they saw, sticking through the ceiling, were four bed legs. I don't know how many ladies were in the bed already but apparently it happened when auntie Mary joined them. That proved to be just too much for the old floorboards. Talk about a white Christmas

The first Christmas parties that I can remember were held next door, grandma having moved from the station with uncle John and auntie Lily. I can't recall many details, just the usual fare, sandwiches, jellies, trifle, custard, mince pies and cake, lemonade, crackers and funny hats followed by party games. Then, presumably when they were tired of amusing the children, the grown-ups left us to play our own games whilst they played cards. The party ended when we either fell asleep or became so anti-social that the only cure was to give us our supper and take us home and to bed.

And so the 1920's drew to a close but as they did so I was left increasingly on my own as, one by one, all my playmates started school. This period is fixed in my memory in very little detail but, generally, as a time when the sun shone all day and every day during summer and life was one long happy playtime. Winter's days were always crisp and bright and the nights were always clear and starlit. Such are the tricks the mind plays on us. The

memories are genuine but the unpleasant and uninteresting parts have been forgotten.

It has just dawned on me that, very soon, I shall have accumulated 70 years of conscious memories. That adds up to a lot of time spent awake at an average of 15 to 16 hours per day. My mind appears to have condensed all this time either by consigning a large part of it to the dustbin or putting it into an archive store. I think the latter is the more likely explanation because, as I remarked earlier, I am able, by the process of thought association, to bring back memories of incidents that I have never thought of since the incident occurred up to 70 years ago. Yet, I am sure I would find it impossible to recall all the dreary, boring, routine periods of my life when nothing of interest was happening. This is probably because there are no incidents to associate with any other thoughts or memories and therefore cannot be recalled. I am sure the memory remains stored though because a general impression of boredom can often be remembered about such periods. If I were to devote the rest of my days to recalling memories from the past and if I then laid them end to end in real time such that each memory lasted the same time as the original event, I wonder how much of my life would be missing. I suspect that most of it would be unaccounted for and that seems a great waste of a life and a very good argument in favour of leading a full and eventful life on the basis that the more incidents there are the easier it will be to recall them and a smaller portion will be beyond recall. I don't know why some incidents are impressed into the memory and recall themselves regularly and uninvited even though some may not be very pleasant memories. Maybe we are meant to learn something from these recurring memories. I wish I could remember what it is.

Well, I've done it again, pouring out a whole paragraph of irrelevant homespun philosophy when I really intended to say was that with the passing of the 1920's, the first part of my life drew to a close and so completed this chapter. A natural break point in my life had been reached. I had to go to school. Before I finally close the record on my pre-school era, however, I must tell you of one piece of good fortune which built up a store of goodwill for me and stood me in good stead for the start of the next phase of my life. I think it would be late in 1927 that my mother allowed a lady called Mrs Lightfoot, her son Bert. And Bert's motorbike to rent our front room and the back bedrooms until their new house, in what is now Frith Avenue, was completed in about six month's time. (The motorbike lived in the wash-house, not the front room or back bedroom) Nothing resembling good fortune or goodwill in that you might think till I tell you that Mrs Lightfoot was the reception and infant teacher at Delamere school. She was a middle-aged lady whose husband had been killed in the war.

Apart from what I have already mentioned, I must mention a few other things which are still clear in my memories of the period. I remember the sampler by grandma Spruce aged 12 and I wonder whatever happened to it. I remember the beautiful, 18thC. oak corner cupboard that grandma Edwards left next door and which Clifford later chopped up for firewood. It has left me with a great love of old oak corner cupboards. I remember the old sofa in our living room-Victorian horse hair-and how it used to prick my bare legs. I remember our dining table wearing mother's old silk stockings on it's legs and a large, green, chenille tablecloth down to it's ankles thus displaying a true Victorian horror of revealing any leg above the ankle. It used to give me a feeling of indecency when I lifted it's skirt to play or hide under the table, I felt I ought to keep my eyes closed. I fear that table

must have suffered the same fate as grandma's corner cupboard as, in about 1929, it was replaced by a brand new, ugly Victorian style table which I still have. Fortunately this table continued to dress in the same manner as it's predecessor. I say "fortunately" because, in my opinion, it had much to hide, great fat ugly legs, not at all like the one it had replaced which had really elegant Georgian style legs and a sleek figure, but, it had seen better days as it must have been at least 100 years old. It has left me with a lifelong interest in legs and I still prefer sleek and athletic to fat and ugly whether bare or clad in silken hose.

Lastly, I remember the fire grate in the living room. It was a big black and bright steel monster complete with an oven, two warming compartments, a hob on which to stand our black cast iron kettle, a hinged gate to carry saucepans over the open firebox, a front hinged gate on which to boil the kettle or an extra saucepan, a front griddle that could be hinged down to toast bread with a long toasting fork, to fry bacon, sausages etc. or to heat flat-irons, an ash pan and numerous dampers to control the heat flow along the various flues and internal passageways. It was a veritable potholer's paradise in that respect and using it was like driving the Flying Scotsman from London to Edinburgh in the days of steam trains. It had a full width fireguard attached to the wall at either end and about three feet high with a brass rail along the top. This was always in place until I learnt how to climb onto the top rail and tight-rope walk along it using the mantelpiece to assist my balance. My mother was an expert at driving this fiery dragon and produced an endless supply of dinners, puddings, pies and cakes which I never failed to enjoy. The old monster also provided comfort on long winter evenings when we closed down all the dampers and built up a big fire with coal, logs, slack and cinders and then sat round it in the light from the flames and the glimmer of the oil

lamp and listened to our wireless. Slack, by the way, is very small coal and coal dust and cinders are the small pieces of partially burnt coal that have been riddled out of the ashes. Each evening the warming compartments would be filled with wood to be dried for lighting the fire next morning, the oven would contain a selection of bricks or egg shaped stones about the size of a brick to be wrapped in cloth and taken to bed as a bed warmer. When it was particularly cold or when using a bed that had not been used for a few days, the heavy cast iron oven shelves would be wrapped up and laid out in the bed a few hours before bedtime. They were, of course, removed before climbing into bed. So you see, the fireplace was the power centre of the house. All that remains now is the iron kettle and some flat irons.

I never thought I could ramble on so about legs or fireplaces, but now I must press on with the next chapter of my story.

At about a quarter past seven on the first day of term after the Easter holiday in 1930, I was roused, washed and dressed in clean black boots, knee length grey stockings with turned down tops and two coloured bands on the turned down bit, a pair of garters made to measure from knicker elastic and neatly tucked under the turndown, a pair of short blue serge trousers held up by a pair of braces, a fawn, long-sleeved jersey buttoned at the neck, a jersey knit tie with wide horizontal bands of red and yellow alternately, a blue gabardine raincoat and the whole lot topped off with a navy blue school cap with a button on top. In my hand I had a small, brown metal case containing a flask of tea, a small bottle of milk, some sandwiches and a piece of cake wrapped in greaseproof paper and the whole lot neatly wrapped in a large, white, linen serviette. Thus attired, and having breakfasted on my usual boiled egg, I set off, in Alice's care, and accompanied by Clifford and several others for the great adventure of my first day at school. I had absolutely no idea what to expect when I got there and I had no idea where the school was but I had complete faith in Alice's ability to find the way. And so we went over the fields to the top of what was called the "Big Hanging", a steep climb, then on to Black Hill and finally onto Stoney Lane, a walk of over 2 miles. So far it was like those picnics on the farm, so that's what school is all about, a big picnic. Fortunately, I remember that day as warm and dry, so I arrived at school in much the same state as I had set out. When the nine o' clock whistle blew, Alice took me to Mrs. Lightfoot in the infants' classroom and my school career had started.

The entrance to the room was through the back wall in the right hand corner as I looked towards the front. The desks were arranged in columns facing towards the front, three in each column and six columns. The seventh column on the far left was made up of three long desks each one seating three people well spaced out. As you will have gathered from this, the classroom was very wide but not very deep. There was space along the front for the teacher to move across the full width. The room was very high with a big bay window at each end and an open fire on the front wall at the right hand end. Mrs. Lightfoot's desk was by the fire. There were three freestanding blackboards across the width of the room. I was given the desk at the back of the first column by the door. I was the only new starter that term so I was given the starter's desk. I discovered later that new starters always started in the right hand column and then progressively moved to the left each term or year thus ending up on the extreme left hand long benches before moving out of infants into the juniors

The other children came into the classroom and sat in their desks as allocated to them by Mrs. Lightfoot but my eagle eye had noticed that my seat was just cold, bare wood so I remained standing. Eventually teacher came and asked me why I was still standing so I pointed out that there was no cushion on my seat. I don't think she had ever come across that complaint before but she dealt with it in a truly professional manner and I got the message loud and clear. From that moment on, it seemed, mine was to be a hard seat that I would have to warm myself. We young ones in the right hand columns were set some simple tasks to get on with whilst Mrs. Lightfoot busied herself with the left hand columns. Clifford was in one of these and I noticed that every time he was asked a question, he didn't know the answer so I stood up and shouted it out,

only to be told to keep quiet by Mrs. Lightfoot. Eventually though, I noticed that when someone gave the wrong answer to a question or did something he should not have done, Mrs Lightfoot invited him out to the front and whacked him across the hands with a stick. Ayup, I thought, this is no picnic, here we are, barely half way through the morning on the first day of term and some of those poor devils have had the cane twice already, this is a time to "Hear all, see all and say nowt" and keep your hands in your pockets, or better still, sit on them and take some of the hardness out of that wooden seat into the bargain. Eventually morning playtime arrived, so out we all went and ran off all our frustrations in the playgrounds. When it was nearly time to go back into school I hadn't been to the toilet and I didn't know where it was so I did it down a grid in the girls' playground. That caused a bit of a stir so I was shown the toilets in the boys' playground. The entrance was through an opening in the high wall that divided the boys' and girls' playgrounds. A narrow pathway went straight ahead for about 3 metres straight into a whitewashed wall about 2 metres high. On the right of this path was a stone trough tarred black and a 2 metres high wall behind it. There was no roof, just the sky above. On the left were three separate cubicles, each one containing a box like structure at the rear. In the top of the box there was a hole about 30 cms. diameter and underneath this was a bucket. Access to the bucket was via a trapdoor at the back of the cubicle. The girls had a similar arrangement on the other side of the whitewashed wall but without the tarred trough. The remainder of the morning was a repeat of the first half and then came the lunch break. We collected our cases from the cloakroom, went into the senior classroom, rapidly devoured the contents and then joined in whatever activity took our fancy on any particular day. During that first term we young ones spent most lunch-times as a group, either on

Stoney Lane or in the field across the main road from the school. The playgrounds were hardly ever used except for ten minutes each playtime and, as a result, they were covered with tall grass during the summer. There were six or seven enormous oak trees in each play-ground and at the front of the school. These served many useful purposes, such as hiding places, something on which to hang a rope for climbing, swinging, jumping or even to support one end of a long skipping rope. We couldn't climb the trees as they were too big and the lowest branches were too high to reach or to throw a rope over. Anyhow, we were always too busy doing other things outside the playgrounds if the weather was suitable. In bad weather, all the boys congregated in the senior classroom, as usual, for lunch and as we sat round the big stove and ate our sandwiches, we discussed how we would spend the rest of the break. Sometimes we had an impromptu concert, somewhat like the old Music Hall with songs, simple sketches, clowning etc.. Sometimes we played Ghost Trains. To play this we blacked out the only window in the cloak-room and corridor and closed all the doors. A number of boys then took up positions in corners, on high shelves or in cupboards, and, armed with trailing strings, sinister paper cut outs and the inevitable bucket of water, they preyed on the rest of us as we passed through in single file to the accompaniment of ghostly noises, shrieks and laughter. Sometimes we had motor races with the desks. The desks seated two with a steel frame supporting the writing desk in front and a bench seat behind. When both occupants sat on the seat with their feet performing a running movement under the seat and with the body leaning forward onto the writing desk, the whole desk could be propelled forwards at quite a high speed. I suppose there would be about twenty desks in the room, so sometimes we drove them all around like dodgem cars and sometimes we

raced a few "cars" at a time. The room was very large and high so it lent itself to all sorts of activities like this. The main school was a large, stone building with a high roof like a church. The inside was divided into three sections by sliding partitions, the senior room was at one end, the juniors at the other end and the middle was used only for assemblies and for storage. When required, the partitions could be folded back to produce one very large room. The infants room was an attachment to the rear of the main building.

Sometimes we just sat round the fire and talked all through the lunch-break and we often amused ourselves by heating the poker in the fire and then pushing it through the floor which became so full of holes that a large section fell through one day. While the boys were spending their lunch-break in the senior room, the girls were similarly occupied in the junior room. I don't know what they got up to. I don't know why the sexes separated during lunch-breaks in bad weather because the classes were mixed and, although there were separate playgrounds, no attempt was made to confine boys or girls to their own areas although they usually played in groups of the same sex.

During the summer, the lunch-break was from 12 noon till 1-30 P.M. and school ended at 4 P.M. but, in winter, lunch was from 12 noon till 1 P.M. and school ended at 3-30 P.M. as most children had to walk two or three miles home. The homeward journey was a very slow version of the morning walk due to the many diversions we encountered on the way. A popular pastime was to go to the top of Eddisbury Hill and roll big rocks down the hill. The farmer (Norman Frith) would meet us some nights and yell at us. He had had his workmen carrying the rocks back to the top of the hill all day and he didn't like having

to pay them for our amusement. Other diversions included sliding on frozen ponds, playing in the old fort on Eddisbury Hill or the old tunnel on Merrick's Bank, picking and eating damsons, apples, blackberries, catching tadpoles, collecting conkers or chestnuts or playing a host of different games, many of them not appreciated by someone or other. Many times we didn't get home till nearly 6 o'clock in the summer. Eventually my first term came to a close and the long summer holiday started.

I have no special memories of this particular holiday but as I was now a full member of the local group of school goers I, no doubt, spent the month in much the same way as I did in later years, that is to say, I frittered the time away playing with the boys and sometimes with the girls as well. We played cricket or football in the Big Hanging, we dug a hole about 10 feet square and 6 feet deep in Lightfoot's garden and roofed it over with timber, old iron bedsteads, an old tarpaulin and turf. We carved seats and a fireplace into the walls and a flight of steps topped by a trapdoor served as entrance and exit. A small glass skylight and an old iron bucket with no bottom as a chimney pot completed the den. The skylight reduced the total darkness down there to a sort of midnight gloom but when we lit the fire we reverted to total darkness plus choking due to the fact that only about 1% of the smoke went up the chimney. We roamed freely over the entire area of the forest and countryside for several miles in each direction. We told the time by the trains but if we missed one we could be an hour or two out in our estimate so we then had to be guided by our stomachs, not that we went hungry, we knew where food could be found, nuts, gooseberries, apples, damsons, watercress, young hawthorn shoots known as bread and cheese, new potatoes scraped out of the ground in the fields,

white turnips pulled up and washed in a stream, wheat ears or the tender stems of certain varieties of tall grass which could be exposed by pulling upwards and the edible stem appeared like a sword from a sheath.

This was the pattern of life during the next several years, we didn't have a care in the world, we were allowed to roam anywhere we chose but were told not to talk to strangers, not to get into any "mizzecky holes" and to watch out for "Jenny Greenteeth". A mizzecky hole was a boggy area in the forest which was really a floating mass of vegetation but looked like solid ground. If you walked over it you were liable to fall through the top surface into the swamp beneath and disappear without trace. I have heard stories of travellers through the forest hearing cries for help and finding someone clinging to the vegetation but not able to pull themselves out. True or not, I don't know, but my parents believed it to be true. I also think that they invented the word "mizzecky". Likewise with Jenny Greenteeth, this is the green slimy weed that covers many forest pools and it had the reputation of pulling you under the water and drowning anyone unlucky enough to fall into it. Like the mizzecky hole, it was not always easy to spot before stepping into it and I recall an incident which happened several years later at the start of the war in 1939. A boy from Liverpool, called Bob Smythe, had come to live in Delamere to avoid the bombing. He was a few years younger than Clifford and myself but we spent a fair bit of time together. He was an active type of lad who loved the outdoors and was eager to learn to be like the country boys, but of course, the forest and the countryside which we had been brought up in were totally alien to him, but he was determined to be our equal in finding his way about and gaining local skills and knowledge. One day we were taking him somewhere which involved crossing a very

boggy area which was criss-crossed by many ditches full to the brim with black stagnant water which was covered with "Jenny Greenteeth". He was, as I said, eager and independent so he was running quite a few yards ahead of us through fairly tall, open, grass and bracken type growth, good lion country, when we heard a shout and then he disappeared. When we reached him, all we could see was his head looking like a ball of black/green mud bobbing about on the slimy green surface of a ditch. We pulled some long bracken and held it out to him, he grabbed hold and we pulled him out. Then we had to take him home and explain how he had got into that state. I think he had to be hosed down in the back yard before he could even be undressed. The tables were turned on me a few years later, however, while I was in the Navy. A group of us had been sent on a training course to an R.A.F. station at a small place in Wiltshire called Melksham. I had known most of the group for only a few weeks but myself and a chap called Derek Almond from Blackburn had joined up together over two years previously and had stayed together and been the best of friends ever since. Well, one day someone who was moving away from the camp decided to raffle his bike. I bought a ticket and won the bike, it was not up to much by present standards but it was in good working order and was invaluable in those days when transport was almost non-existent. Derek and I decided to go out to celebrate my win. He managed to borrow a bike, so off we went, resolved to ride round the country lanes and to stop and have a pint at every pub we came to. (In those days, in the West Country, pubs sold only draught rough cider). When we left the last pub at closing time and after umpteen pints of rough cider, we were a bit unsteady. About a mile up the road we realised that we were riding the wrong bikes so we went back to the pub and found our own.

Everything seemed very funny to us in our state and we couldn't stop laughing and the more we laughed the more we wobbled till we eventually collided, fell off and rolled into a ditch which just happened to be full of slimy water and Jenny Greenteeth. We crawled out of the water but must have lain on the grass for a while before we heard footsteps and voices approaching. We decided to ask the way back to camp but when whoever it was saw we two slimy objects slithering over the grass towards them in the bright moonlight, they took to their heels and disappeared into the distance. We were still lost, but sobered up a bit by now, so we decided we would call at the first house we came to and ask the way back. It must have been well after midnight by now but our only hope of finding our way through the maze of lanes was to ask someone. At last we came to an isolated cottage and knocked boldly on the door. After a while we heard locks being turned and a bolt being drawn. The door opened an inch or two, a face appeared but before we could say anything, the door slammed shut and the lock turned. We were just wondering what to do next when an upstairs window opened and a man's head appeared and asked us what we wanted. After some reassurance he gave us directions, I often wonder if he had his shotgun in his hand. When we got back to camp, we crawled in on our hands and knees and with the bikes flat on our backs so that we couldn't be seen from the guardroom window.

Bob Smythe left Delamere soon after the incident in the swamp and I have not seen or heard anything of him since. I wonder where is he now? Derek Almond and I stayed together for about a further year and we had many more escapades together. We met up again after the war at Manchester University. He did a Law degree while I was doing Science but

we lost touch with each other after we left university. Once again, I wonder where he is now.

Well, all that is a long way from Delamere School which I was supposed to be telling you about so I will return to where I left off. I had got as far as the summer holidays following my first term at school. Well, as happy times do, they came to an end and back to school we went. Same old routine, chanting tables and answering spot questions addressed to individuals "John Edwards, what are six nines?" I either said 54 or got the cane, a session like that concentrates the mind. After that came reading, chanting the alphabet, letter A says "ah", letter B says "ber", letter C says "ker" and so on, over and over again followed by the spot questions accompanied by the cane. I can still see that cane, it was a straight stick about two feet long, a bit less than half an inch diameter and covered with brown bark except for a few places where it had worn off allowing the bare wood to show a nice golden colour. Strangely enough we didn't resent the cane, it was just accepted as a normal part of life at school. Next, we might do some clay modelling or simple arithmetic using shells as counters. Sometimes we did knitting making pom-poms by winding wool round and round the rim of a round disc with a hole in the middle. As far as I can remember, that was the full extent of art or handicraft. Of course we did writing as well but the favourite time was when Mrs Lightfoot settled us down and read a story. Unfortunately, part way through this term, I caught diphtheria, a deadly disease in those days and often fatal. As I was an only child I was allowed to stay at home in total isolation in the front room. A sort of vestibule was erected in the doorway using sheets impregnated with strong disinfectant. The door formed one side, the sheets made up the other three sides and the top, a disinfected mat was on the floor. I spent about six weeks

in there, only my mum and dad and the doctor were allowed in the room. Other people saw me through the window. When it was time for me to be allowed out of the room, a man from the Public Health dept. arrived. He sealed the windows and the fireplace. I was then undressed completely and dad carried me upstairs and put me straight into the bath. All my clothes and everything I had had in the room with me had to be left in the room. The man then burned some fumigation substances in the room and sealed the door as he came out. It remained sealed for about a week, then he came and removed the seals. The room smelt terrible for weeks afterwards and, if the door and windows were closed and the room was warm, the smell was just noticeable when we sold the house in 1976 but not enough to be unpleasant, just a faint disinfectant smell.

Well, back to school. I must have moved into the juniors after about 18 months in the infants. We had a series of short stay teachers and then one called Miss Owen, a Welsh woman from Welshpool and a very good teacher. She left after a while and I was put in the top class with Mr. Fugler, the headmaster. He was an old style teacher who ran the school in a manner which would do credit to a Dickens novel. I remember very little about his teaching, in fact, I recall my time in his class as pure bedlam. I suppose he did the best he could but some of the material he had to work with was very poor and totally disinterested. The Whitfields, and there were a lot of them, never arrived before 10 o'clock and several others were almost as bad. Many others failed to turn up at all if there was something more interesting going on. Most of the children had a long walk to school and, no doubt, encountered many distractions on the way. I suppose the morning classes were fairly orthodox except for the late arrivals and the constant firing of rubbers and paper darts up into the roof trusses to

come down no-one knew where, (I recall one landing on Mr. Fugler's bald head). It was at lunch time that the problems started. As I have already said, we rambled all over the countryside for miles around playing fox and hounds and often didn't get back till nearly 3 o'clock. If we were fairly close at hand, such as playing in the field opposite the school, Mr. Fugler would come chasing after us and blowing his whistle. We had gardening lessons, weather permitting, on one or two afternoons each week when we all toiled in the large school garden. He had two sons and a daughter, Jack, Amos and Kathleen, in that order, and they lived in the school house. Jack was a little older than I was, Amos was around my age or a few months older and Kathleen a year or so younger. Amos was one of the ringleaders of all the disruptions in class and, like everyone else, he got the cane regularly but all to no avail.

Life continued very much unchanged for the next five years. I suppose it must be a trick of my memory but I remember every day as beautifully warm and sunny or deep crisp snow and a howling wind. I remember those summer days, the morning was usually misty, due to all the trees they said, but the sun broke through early and no sooner was breakfast over than we were out and about thinking how to spend the day. The options were many and varied, sometimes just one or two of us would visit our secret places - in the woods, in the fields or over the hills and far away. We had dens in various places where we lived imaginary lives quite different from reality. Or in a larger grouping we would rampage through the woods, climb the big sycamore trees in what was known as "the little top field," play in Lightfoot's garden or do something entirely different according to how imaginative we were at the time. Usually, when we either could not think or agree what to do, we would play cricket or some other ball game until we came

up with a better idea. Much of this activity took place in Lightfoot's garden because it was so big and Mr. Lightfoot was very tolerant, unlike his next door neighbour, Fred Greenway. The Greenway's were a childless, elderly couple and Fred had no time for children. We thought of him in the most ungenerous terms as the most miserable so and so we had ever come across. We avoided him like the plague. I well remember such a day when we were killing time playing cricket. There were Raymond and Alan Lightfoot, Albert and John Leach, George and Ken Capper, Clifford and I and maybe one or two more. George was batting, he hit the ball hard and high and we all stood and gaped as it soared over a tall hedge into Fred Greenway's garden to be followed by the sound of breaking glass. A peer through the hedge confirmed our worst fears, the ball had gone through his greenhouse roof. We had scarcely recovered from this shock when George staggered us by calmly doing the bravest and most foolhardy act I had ever seen. He walked up Fred's path and knocked on the front door and when Fred answered it he calmly asked if he could have our ball back. Fred must have been surprised too because he calmly said he would get it for us and enquired as to it's whereabouts. "Oh thank you" said George "it's in your greenhouse." Needless to say our relations with Fred rapidly reverted to normal. Poor George, like all the rest of us who were there that day, a few short years later he ran slap bang into World War 2, but unlike the rest of us, George didn't make it. He was in the R.A.F. and his plane was damaged over the North Sea. He crash landed in Iceland and has lain in a military cemetery on the island ever since.

I recall another occasion when we were all gathered together doing not much of any importance when we noticed a large object in the sky and what was more, it was coming straight for

us at a height of only a few hundred feet. We stood and watched in awe until it was nearly over our heads. At this point, mindful of all the First World War stories we had heard, we decided it must be a Zeppelin and therefore liable to drop bombs on us, so we did what every sensible British lad with a strong sense of self preservation would do, we ran like hell. At what we reckoned to be a safe distance, - about 50 metres -we stopped and watched it glide majestically past, and, as it did so, we saw "R101" boldly displayed on it's side. A few days later it crashed onto a French hillside, killing everyone on board, whilst on it's maiden flight to India.

It's not surprising that we were afraid, it was enormous, about the size of a Boeing 747 without wings and almost silent. The only aeroplanes we had seen were small biplanes flying at a few thousand feet. They appeared to be about an inch long and I'm sure several dozens could have been fitted into the R101. Someone once gave me a model aeroplane, it would be about 12 inches long with a 10 inch wingspan. It was just like the ones we saw flying around. For some unknown reason my father nailed it to the top of one of the clothes line posts. He thought it looked more realistic up there and he was right, a little while later we were eating our lunch when Clifford came dashing to the window yelling "Uncle Sam, Uncle Sam" with real panic in his voice. My dad dashed out to see what was wrong and Clifford yelled "Come and look Uncle Sam, an aeroplane has landed on your clothes post."

Looking back to that time now, I realise what a time of innocence it was for us. We knew and appreciated our immediate surroundings and very little else. There was no television and neither the wireless nor the newspapers were of much interest to young children. The cinema was silent,

"talkies" only started to appear in the early 30's and cartoons had yet to be invented, anyway, we never went to the cinema till later in the 30's. We once went to a Magic Lantern show at the school one evening but the show was cancelled because, when the man who was running the show arrived, he discovered that there was no electricity, so that was the end of that.

I've been reading a book about Delamere and it has some information about the early history of the school which I will tell you. The whole area surrounding the site where the school now stands was a large plantation of oak trees grown for the Royal Navy to use for building their warships. Unfortunately, many of the trees were found to be faulty and unsuitable for shipbuilding and in any case the era of wooden ships was coming to an end. In 1844 Queen Victoria decided to clear all the oak trees and turn the land over to agriculture. (The Royal Family had owned Delamere Forest ever since it was a Royal hunting forest in Norman times). The area cleared became the large farm known as Organsdale, about 1000 acres, but the Queen gave one acre "for the creation of a school for the instruction of the children of the poor in the tenets of the approved church." The school was built in 1846 and was described by two contemporary writers as "Large for it's date, and lavishly done. Gothic. A symmetrical front with two canted bay windows. Entrance is from the back." It must have made an extraordinary impression on the local population due to it's size and style. Built entirely in local sandstone, nothing like it existed in the vicinity. It was, of course, a Church of England school. The Rector at the time was Darwin Fox, a cousin of Charles Darwin, who lived in the rectory with his wife, 17 children, a nanny, a lady's maid and three gardeners. Charles visited the rectory and wrote a deal of correspondence. The

school was known as Fox's School at first and then the Forest School. In 1935 the old oil lamps which hung from the roof were replaced by electric lighting and the old bucket toilets were replaced by flush toilets. The first teachers were Samuel and Martha Jones. Mr Fugler became headmaster in 1911 and retired in 1935 with a break while he served in the first world war. It goes on to say "He was regarded as showing little sympathy with modern teaching methods".

Those big trees which were in the school playgrounds and the surrounding fields were obviously remnants of the trees grown for the navy. They were very majestic trees and seemed a part of our lives. We identified many of them individually and used them as landmarks to fix a position in conversation. I remember some of them with nostalgia. I remember a gang of us meeting up to play cricket one day on a flat piece of ground near one of the big oaks. Jack Fugler came along but, as it was a hot day, he didn't want to play. He sat under the shade of the tree and made derogatory remarks about our efforts and received many in return of course. That was the last time I ever saw Jack. When war came he went into the army and was sent to the Far East. He disappeared in the jungles of S.E. Asia and his family have no idea what happened to him. He is listed as "Missing, presumed dead but with no known grave". I wonder where he is?

Other memories of this period which are imprinted into my mind are many and varied. I remember grandad Spruce living with us for two years when he was ill in the early 30's. He recovered and went back to Nursery Cottage and spent the rest of his life there. I remember those summer Sundays when some of our friends from Northwich used to spend the day with us. We used to walk all over the forest and the hills

carrying our picnic with us. I remember those days when I didn't take my lunch to school. Instead, I met my dad on Eddisbury Hill and we just sat and talked and ate the contents of the basket he had brought. It was always steak and kidney pie in a basin, cake and tea or lemonade. I recall the sound and scent of those hot summer days, The morning sun burning through the early mist and distilling off the heady smell of pine trees, new mown hay and the perfume of old fashioned roses, honeysuckle and the like with skylarks for accompaniment. And later on, as the temperature rose to a peak, the air became still and humid and the humming and buzzing of billions of insect wings rose to a positive background drone, what Matthew Arnold described as "All the live murmur of a summer's day" in a long poem entitled "The Scholar Gipsy". That was one of the poems in a poetry book which was one of the set books for the English Language syllabus when I took the Oxford School Certificate. In those days we used to have to learn large chunks of our set books and the Bible off by heart and it is amazing how much of it I can still remember after all those years. There is another line in the same poem which now seems very poignant to me. He is bemoaning the cut and thrust of modern times and longing for the old days "Before this strange disease of modern life" and that was in the middle of the 19th Century. Nothing changes does it?

I remember Alan Lightfoot's organising ability. He appointed himself leader of our local group and in that capacity he embarked us on many lunatic schemes. He once decided we should give a grand concert to all the local residents, so, he wrote the scripts for a whole series of sketches and solo performances and dealt out the parts in much the same way as dealing a pack of cards. We built a stage in the middle of a field

from old wood, curtains, sacks and any other old rubbish that looked as though it could be useful. We borrowed old clothes to match the parts and Alan made lots of posters and put them up all over the village. The whole thing was called "The Wedding of the Painted Doll" for no good reason at all that anyone could think of. We learnt our parts and on the day of the concert we gave the performance of our lives to half a dozen cows nonchalantly chewing their cud in the best seats. That was just one of many such schemes all of which failed equally miserably.

I remember Clifford and I cutting all Sam Lightfoot's roses and going round selling them. I also remember going round knocking on doors and singing. I sang "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" and Clifford sang "All things bright and beautiful" and for an encore we gave "Oft in danger, oft in woe". I think we made a shilling (5p) for the roses but only half as much for our singing, or was it the other way round?

And so our lives progressed, totally unpressurised as far as schoolwork was concerned. Neither the school nor our parents bothered in the slightest about our progress or otherwise. I had my jobs to do at home, all outside, man-type jobs such as bringing coal in, chopping firewood, helping with the garden etc.

These jobs were particularly important because my dad was very often either at work or in bed when the jobs had to be done due to his strange hours of work. Then, in 1935, disaster struck or, as I suppose they would say nowadays, it all went pear shaped. Mr. Fugler retired and a new headmaster and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Ackerley, were appointed in his place. Mrs.

Lightfoot remained with the infants, Mrs. Ackerley taught the juniors whilst Mr. Ackerley took over the seniors. Life at Delamere School was never to be the same again. We were not allowed out of the school grounds any longer, in fact, we were restricted to the boys' playground so the long grass was soon worn away and it became a mudbath in wet weather. Inside school, the lessons became much harder work, and we began to feel pressurised. In the second year of the Ackerley regime, I began to get homework set each night as I was to be entered for the scholarship examination for entrance to a Grammar School. I went to Northwich with two other boys to take the exam. I don't know where the two girls went. We took the exam in March and the results came out in early June. I had gained a place at Sir John Deane's Grammar School in Northwich and Marjorie Walton had won a place at Winsford Grammar School. Although I didn't realise it at the time, life was soon to change dramatically for me both in my school life and in my social life within the Delamere community. Looking back to this point in time, I now see it as one of the major turning points of my life. Moreover, the world seemed to change at the same time. Previously, I had been living in a small community well insulated from the worst effects of the great depression in the outside world and progress, such as it was, had been slow in reaching us. As I said earlier, life was much the same as in Victorian or Edwardian times. I wonder if the First War had been so traumatic that people just put it out of their minds, pretended it never happened and carried on their lives from where they left off in 1914. It wasn't only in the country areas either, life for many in the cities was Dickensian. I have vivid memories of Manchester streets circa 1930 thronged with trams, horse drawn carts, bicycles and motor vehicles. With no traffic lights or pedestrian crossings, traffic relied on policemen on point duty to bring order out of chaos. I

remember the children selling newspapers, bare footed and wearing men's old cast-off clothes, shirt, jacket, cut down trousers all tied up in the middle and wearing a big floppy cap. They just looked like a bundle of old rags. It was these children who prompted Sir Hamilton Harty, the conductor of the Halle orchestra, to gather as many as he could to form a choir. He gathered them into the Free Trade Hall in the evenings and weekends to get them off the streets and keep them warm while they practiced singing. Eventually they were able to sing like angels and they made recordings with the Halle. Two famous ones are "Nymphs and Shepherds" and "Hansel and Gretel". On the brighter side I remember the Belle Vue Circus and afternoon tea in Lewis's restaurant with the orchestra playing.

By 1937 a more modern outlook was evident and the air of depression from earlier years was lifting. More people were working and our community was beginning to lose it's isolation. A few characters from Delamere School deserve a mention here because I never saw them again after I went to my new school. I remember:-

Agnes (Aggie) Walker - the big, red-haired bruiser, frightened the lads to death. Left me with a dread of redheads.

Madge Cooper - exact opposite - very feminine, loved by all the boys. I wonder who eventually won her heart.

Patricia Henshaw - someone taught her the word "hypocrite" and she said it, with great feeling, in answer to almost every question the teacher asked.

Vera Prince - Tom-boy extraordinary, never even looked or behaved like a girl, I suppose she was one.

Barbara Saunders - Lived just below where I was born. Our families were very close friends. We played together quite a lot on a brother / sister basis. She should not be listed here because I continued to see her for many years. Her family moved to Leeds but we saw each other occasionally and wrote to each other all the time I was in the Navy and for a long time afterwards. We still exchange Christmas Cards.

No record of this period could be complete without a mention of Judy. She was a reddish brown fox terrier and belonged, originally, to a relative of auntie Lily. When that relative died, Judy came to live next door and from then on Clifford, Judy and I were inseparable. Everywhere we went, Judy came too. She was a wonderful little dog, she joined in all our games and became well known throughout the area. She did have one bad habit though, she couldn't pass a rabbit hole. We spent hours trying to get her out when she got stuck, I remember one old gentleman lending us his walking stick to try to hook her out but all to no avail. She got herself out in the end.

I remember our seaside holidays, in particular I remember Llandudno several times, Scarborough, The Isle of Man and Anglesey. We always went for a week or ten days which was quite a luxury as most children didn't get a holiday at all. It was always a seaside holiday in those days because hardly anyone had a car so holiday trips into the country were not possible. We went where it was easy to reach by rail. Only the very rich went abroad, there were no package tours. I never knew anyone who had been abroad for a holiday before the war.

I remember learning to play the piano. That was not very popular or successful. I learned to play in a fashion but my heart was never in it, I didn't like spending time practicing. Fortunately, no-one else in the family was musical, so I stood with my back to the piano playing anything while watching my friends outside. I passed one examination in Liverpool but gave up before the next was due.

I remember the village trip to the pantomime at the Royalty Theatre, Chester, followed by tea at Bannister's Restaurant and, afterwards, a browse around the shops (they stayed open till 9 or 10 p.m in those days) and then home on the last train.

I remember the annual Parochial Party and Concert held in the school every winter. It started at 2 p.m. with games and general socialising then the room was cleared, tables and chairs were laid out, and every one sat down for tea, a proper party tea, sandwiches, cakes, jellies and all the usual trimmings. Then, once again the floor was cleared, and the chairs arranged in rows ready for the concert which would last between two and three hours till about 9 p.m. when, yet again, the floor was cleared. A band took over on the stage and dancing started and continued till 2 or 3 a.m. The whole village and many outsiders used to attend so the school, large though it was, was packed. Farmers used to go home to do the milking and then come back again.

The summer event was the Garden Party in the Rectory gardens. This was a large scale fair with various stalls, games, displays etc., bowls contest, tennis, tug of war etc., tea in the marquee ending up with dancing on the lawn till midnight. Now! No more reminiscences, I must press on to the next phase.

Before I do, however, I realise I have mentioned the summers but I have made no mention of the winters. You must picture the Delamere of that period, all forest or open fields with a few houses dotted about and all joined together by a network of country lanes lined with tall hedges. Likewise, all the fields were surrounded by hedges or fences about a metre high. Consequently, when snow fell, it tended to cover the whole area with an even depth which was ideal for sledging on our home-made sledges or snowballing. Sometimes we made long slides by packing the snow down hard and smoothing the surface. We ran up to the slide and then slid along as far as possible. In frosty weather we used to water the slide each night to produce a really good icy surface for the next day. The best, though, was undoubtedly the long sledge runs from the top of Eddisbury Hill right down to the bottom. There was very little traffic on the roads and there was no gritting so they very quickly became impassable to motor vehicles unless chains were fitted to the wheels,

If the snow was accompanied by high winds, many lanes were covered with deep drifts, sometimes right up to the top of the tall hedges. I remember going to school one morning and the snow had drifted on Black Hill to a depth of at least ten feet (3 metres) and we had to walk over the top of the drifts. Luck was with us and the surface held our weight. If we had fallen through we could not have got out as we were only about three feet tall at the time. The whole area was really beautiful when snow covered. The snow remained perfectly clean and at night there was only the faint glow from the odd window dimly lit by an oil lamp in one of the houses. If there was some moonlight or starlight, the whole place took on an eerie glow. We seemed to get much more snow in those days, I well

remember our garden regularly covered with deep snow so that we had to dig out the paths to reach the coal house and the hens. We always had to keep a spade in the house overnight to dig our way out next morning. I have seen the back door completely covered by a drift and half of it always managed to fall into the kitchen when the door was opened. All the ponds were very popular when they froze over. It seemed wonderful to walk or slide about in a place usually out of reach. I remember walking all over Hatchmere Lake with my father and a couple of hundred others till my father noticed a crack in the ice which stretched full width of the lake. The cosiest winter memories though are of those long nights sat round the fire listening to my parents and grandparents telling tales about people and events from days gone by while the wind roared and howled outside. That's enough of winter for now, so, on with the story.

And that is as far as he wrote in May 2012, I tried to encourage him to resume the story and he admitted to "thinking about it". Unfortunately he thought for too long and on April 9th 2016 he passed away in his sleep. We will never know what the next chapters would have brought.

Seventy

Now we have reached three score and ten,
We are allowed - just now and then,
To reminisce and think aloud
Of days gone by - and how things were,
The daily round - no time to spare,
But safe in a world we understood
And thought of as our own.
But we must not dwell in yesterday,
Our way still lies ahead.
So let us saunter down the shady path
That runs beside that busy road,
Down which the young still rush
Into a hectic world we have no wish to know,
But which they will call their own.
Our path, however, winds through pastoral scenes
In a peaceful world we'll be happy to adopt as our own.

John Edwards December 1995



In loving memory of John, Dad and Grandad



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