

# **From go to whoa**



**A personal history**

**by Arthur Parker**



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## **Foreword**

I must begin by expressing my deep gratitude to my late wife, Hilda, for her love and support all through our life together. And for helping to establish a new life for me and our children in Australia.

I am writing this account of my life to give my children some idea of what it was like to grow up in the 1920s and 30s.

Already there has been considerable change in the lifestyle of children due to the advances in technology since WWII. Not many people had phones then, radios were quite common, usually battery operated. Interests and games varied according to where you lived.

My children will understand this because changes were less rapid during their childhood. My grandchildren probably will. To my great grandchildren and beyond it will be ancient history. I wish them all a happy and enjoyable childhood, and the ability to do their best and succeed in whatever they choose.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Also thank you to Rhonda Byrne for her guidance and looking after the commas.

# Chapter 1

## Starting Out

I was born under the star sign of Gemini, on the evening of Wednesday the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1920. It seemed that I wasn't terribly impressed with the world as I saw it then, as the doctor had a job to start me breathing. Anyway, curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to give it a go and find out what this life thing was all about.



*Me and Edna*

I was christened Arthur, after my father, and William, after my uncle. As far as I know, I was born at home, a situation which I believe was common at that time. This was in the back bedroom of a four-roomed upstairs flat, in a row of two story terrace houses, in Hazelwood Road Walthamstow, a suburb in NE London. I slept in a cot in the corner of the room for the next two and a half years until my sister arrived on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1922. She was christened Edna Elizabeth. I was then promoted to a bed in the front bedroom, generally known as the Front Room or Parlour. It was furnished for relaxing in on the weekend or entertaining family and guests.

My parents were Elizabeth Sarah and Arthur Parker. They were married on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1919, after my father was demobilized from the army. They were married in St Michael's Church in Palmerston Road Walthamstow.

Mother's maiden name was Blackaby, born to Joseph and Sarah Ann on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1881. She had an elder sister and a brother.

My father came from a large family. His parents were William, a cabinet maker, and Maria, nee Street or Streat as shown on their marriage certificate. There were eight children in all, four boys and four girls. I knew all but two of them, Alfred and Harry, who were killed in WW I. The others in age order from the eldest down were William, Emma, Louisa, Arthur, Maud and Ada.



*The people in the photo are, dad and mum, Aunt Emma, dad's third eldest sister and George Hopwood, Aunt Lou's husband. The children are Lilly Parker, daughter of William Parker, dad's eldest brother and Winnie Hopwood, daughter of George and Louisa Hopwood.*

Although I remember being taken around as a small child to visit various relatives, I don't have much recollection of some of them, or their relationship to me. I do remember the pennies that I collected on such visits! My favourites were Aunt Jennie, Mums elder sister, and her husband, Uncle Jim. Their name was Blackeby, spelt with an 'e', whereas my mother's surname had an 'a'. Aunt Jennie had two children, Jennie and Ellen. Sadly, Jennie died in the flu epidemic during WWI.

## My Father



My father was born on Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1884, in the district of Bow, in East London. His parents were William and Maria Parker, and he was christened Arthur. He was a capable handyman, and an excellent carpenter, making several pieces of furniture around the house. He also excelled at painting and wallpapering. I learnt much of my handyman skills from him.

In those days there wasn't the range of paint colours that one sees now, perhaps a dozen or so. Paints then were all oil based. Doors and window frames in our flat were either light stone or dark stone, or a combination of both. After I was married and had my own house to maintain, I favoured shades of green. At that time plastic based paint was appearing on the DIY scene, and the hardware shop assistants were scoffing at it. 'It won't last', they declared.

I never learnt much about Dad's childhood. His father was a cabinetmaker, and kept birds as a hobby. The unusual thing was that they were not kept in cages but had a room to themselves. The room was fitted with tree branches for them to perch on and they were able to fly around as they pleased.

Fortunately, I have more information about his working life, as he spent most of it with one firm, which he joined in 1901 aged 17. He may have had a job before then in a chair making works. He did mention it at one time. His permanent job was with John Wright & Sons, veneer manufacturers.

Veneer is a sheet of very thin wood. It was made in two ways. One by rotating the log and slicing a thin layer off as it turned, rather like paper towel, or by slicing a thin sheet from the log lengthways. The method chosen was determined partly by the species of tree, and the pattern of grain required. The variation was almost infinite, with variations in colour, density and pattern. Even in the one tree this could vary depending on which part of the log it came from. In those days this process was important as nearly all furniture was veneered.

Dad started on the factory floor and rose to be a charge hand. In 1939 he was promoted to be in charge of the sales warehouse. I had never been in the factory, but visited the warehouse several times, and found it an interesting place. It was a large shed with piles of veneers in rows. Each pile was one complete log. Dad would show buyers around and recommend the right veneer for their purpose. He could identify any veneer by its colour, grain pattern, and smell, and even tell you its country of origin. He would glance at a length of wood and tell you how long it was, and be pretty accurate. At one time he handled the veneers that went into the Queen Mary. There were always a number of samples at home, each about six inches square. I used to know a lot of them, but can now only remember the obvious ones. Being in the East End of London the warehouse was in constant danger from bombing raids during the war, but Dad went in every day. Fortunately he and it survived.

After 21 years of service, dad was presented with a clock bearing a brass plaque. Then at 42 years he was awarded an inscribed silver tankard, and my mother received a silver jar. The big send-off came when he finally retired after 50 years. This was a social occasion, with all the directors in attendance. He was presented with a television set, which was a big event in those days. It was in a timber console with doors to hide the tube, and was of course, made to order using the firm's veneers. In 1953 the whole family was able to gather together and watch the Coronation procession on it.

Dad's time with John Wright was interrupted in 1915, when he enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Essex Regiment, and served in France until he was demobbed in 1919. He used to tell us of some of his lighter experiences in the trenches. One was about how to make tea by melting snow in a billy can, heated by a candle wrapped in a strip of sandbag, and what an awful lot of snow it took to get enough water. Another account was of the time that they captured a village and found a stack of Champagne that the enemy had left behind. Needless to say, it was put to good use. There were also more serious accounts of digging trenches, crawling out during the night to cut their way through barbed wire entanglements, the continuous noise of guns firing and shells flying overhead. They could tell what type of shell it was by the sound of its passage through the air. He did get blown up by a shell burst which resulted in a back injury. Fortunately it was not serious enough to stop him working, but left him with recurring back pain that lasted all his life. He spoke briefly of raiding the enemy trenches to advance the allied line, of taking prisoners, and the resulting casualties.



Mr. Arthur Parker (left) receives the congratulations and best wishes of Mr. Leslie C. W. Jenkins, chairman of the managing directors, upon his completion of 50 years with the firm. Behind the T.V. set are directors Mr. Leslie A. W. Jenkins and Mr. W. J. Jenkins.  
Halifax Photos.

## 50 YEARS WITH MILE END FIRM

### T.V. Set is Farewell Gift

Fifty years ago, young Arthur Parker joined the handful of people working for the firm of John Wright and Sons (Veneers), of Longfellow Road, Mile End, at their old address in Islington. Last week, to mark his half century with the firm, which now employs 600 people, the directors presented him with a H.M.V. television set.

Mr. Parker, now 67, was first employed as a general hand at the Islington works until he joined Kitchener's Army in 1915 by enlisting in the 9th Essex Regiment. In 1919 he returned to the firm at their present address and worked his way up from charge hand to the warehouse foreman in the Bow Road branch to which he transferred in 1939.

For years now he has been supervising stock and the loading and despatching of veneer wood from the firm. In his time he has handled millions of square feet of wood sent to the firm to be cut into strips and then despatched elsewhere. It has been ascertained that the actual wood composing the T.V. set presented to him passed through his hands at some period.

He has despatched types of veneer ranging from that used in the manufacture of cigar boxes to the huge strips required for making the bunks of the Queen Mary. More re-

cently he was supervising wood leaving the firm which eventually ended up in the Festival Hall.

He actually completed his fifty years in April, only a few months behind Mr. Leslie C. W. Jenkins, chairman of the managing directors, who was the first man in the firm to reach this distinguished period. Before some 400 of his workmates in the Flat Shop, Mr. Parker was then presented with a replica of the T.V. set as the model destined to eventually rest in his home was as yet unfinished.

Although he would not describe himself as a technical man, there is little about wood which he does not know. He has handled grades from countries all over the world, yet today, with his vast experience, he still prefers the English oak and sycamore for all round purposes.

Mr. Parker, who lives at 55 Hazelwood Road, Walthamstow, has not yet decided on anything definite about retirement.

It was probably during the pre-war days that he met my mother to be, as he worked in Islington, her home suburb. There were some letters and postcards from France at home, which I recall seeing in my younger days. He married Elizabeth in April 1919, and they rented an upstairs four-roomed flat in Hazelwood Road, Walthamstow, in NE London. Edna and I were born and grew up here. We were a happy family, often going out on day trips at weekends, and a holiday by the sea each year.

My father died from prostate cancer on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1975. He was nearly 92. Communication in those days was by air letter. I knew that he had been in hospital several times. Then I received the sad news of his death, worsened by the fact that it had been on my birthday. He had been living with my sister and her husband, and was very well loved and cared for.

## My Mother



Mum's parents had both died before I was born. Whether it was the flu epidemic or not, I don't know, but hope to find out now that such information is more readily available. Mum then went to live with her elder sister, Jennie, in Islington, London.

Describe my mother; well what can I say? Mothers are lovely people to their children, and our mother certainly loved and cared for us, and comforted us when we were sick or sad. Many are the times that she bandaged a grazed knee for me. Sometimes she would tell us of her own childhood, and sing the little skipping songs which they used to sing. At other times she would join us in a game of 'Ludo' or 'Snakes and Ladders'. She was a good cook, and excelled at cake making, an accomplishment that was greatly appreciated by us children. We especially liked her rock cakes which were full of juicy sultanas. We would always arrive home from school to find a drink and something nice to eat. Her favourite occupations were knitting and crochet. She was always ready to help an expectant family member or friend by knitting a new baby's outfit.

Mum was quite a small woman, not as tall as her sister. This was probably compounded by the fact that she had had to go to hospital for a duodenal ulcer operation when my sister and I were quite young. It must have been a more serious procedure then than now, as she was in a convalescent home for some time after. I remember one Sunday we were taken to see her, after what seemed to be an interminable tram journey. In those days children weren't allowed into hospitals, so we were left outside in a sort of gazebo, watched over by one of our elder cousins armed with a bar of chocolate. When the grown-ups came back, they pointed out our mother on one of the balconies, so that we could wave to her. During this time Edna and I went to live with our Aunt Lou, Dad's elder sister, because he would be at work all day. This was convenient as we were only two streets away from home.

As mentioned earlier, after her parent's death, my mother had gone to live with her sister Jennie in Islington. I presume that originally it had been a middle class neighbourhood of three or four story houses with basements, but in common with other inner city suburbs, had gone down the social scale and had been converted to flats. In line with modern trends, it is now upmarket again.

Schools then, seemed to concentrate mainly on housekeeping, and children wrote on slates. The favourite games for girls in those days were skipping, hopscotch, and a ball game called rounders. Mum used to sing us a little skipping song that went, 'One, two, three alairy, my ball's down the airy'. The 'airy' was the open space providing light and

ventilation to the basement. She had several of these ditties that she used to sing to us when we were little.

Mum's occupation had been making cardboard boxes by hand. Her experience came in helpful to us when we were making cut out cardboard models. She showed us how to fold the sections and to fasten tabs to make a neat job of it. The models were printed on sheets of thin cardboard. We would carefully cut out the sections of the models and glue them together. There was quite a wide range of these models sold in the corner shop, from boats and railway engines for boys, to roundabouts and cut out dolls for girls.

In June 1940 mum tripped and fell over, resulting in a cerebral haemorrhage. She passed away on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 1940. I was away in the army at that time, and was granted compassionate leave, arriving home to find her in a coma. I was able to say a last farewell to her before she passed away the next day.

## Visiting Aunt Jennie and Uncle Jim



Aunt Jennie and Uncle Jim lived in the front basement and first floor of a four-story terrace house. Uncle Jim worked in an engineering shop making metal working machinery. We quite often visited them. This meant a twenty-minute ride on a train, which we children always enjoyed. While waiting for the train we would be allowed to get a penny bar of Nestlé's chocolate from a slot machine on the platform. The train trip was always interesting to us children; we each sat at a window seat and watched the passing scene. One thing that had intrigued me as a small child was seeing the telephone wires at the side of the track rising and falling as we went along, but I eventually fathomed that out. I was very pleased with myself to learn some years later in primary school that it was called a catenary curve. Most of the way, the track ran along an embankment. In some places, the land at the bottom of the embankment was divided up into allotments that people could rent to grow their own vegetables and flowers.

At the start, the train puffed over a bridge across St James Street, a main road, part of the shopping centre on the tram route running across Walthamstow. Once across the bridge we skirted a strip of allotments then looked down on the local park with a children's play area. Mum used to take us there after school some days, to run around and play on the swings or slide. There was also a paddling pool. In addition, we could watch the trains steaming along the embankment, knowing that our father would soon be on one of them on his way home. After the park we left Walthamstow and continued across the Lea Marshes to the river Lea. This was a popular area for walking and exercise. Sometimes we strolled along the towpath by the river and often saw a bargee and his horse towing a barge, or members of the rowing club practising. It was also a lively venue at holiday times when a travelling fair or a circus set up. There was much excitement in the early 1930s when a flying circus arrived. They had two biplanes that gave acrobatic displays, and joy flights for half-a-crown (2/6).

After clearing the river flats we reached a built up area. From here on, it was all high-density houses and factories. One could look down into the backyards of the houses. There were five stations on the line. Three of them had pleasant sounding names evoking visions of the countryside. These were 'Hackney Downs', 'London Fields', and 'Bethnal Green'. No doubt they were the names of the individual villages before London engulfed them. Now they were just a sea of rooftops and smoky chimneys. At London Fields there was a soap factory engulfed in a dense cloud of perfume. The train would latch onto a big hunk of this and drag it along for some distance. Phew! The final exiting bit, at least to me,

was passing through a long black sooty tunnel. From there we puffed into a wide vista of railway lines leading into Liverpool St Station which was the terminus of lines to the north of England and Scotland as well as many suburban lines. It was very busy with trains coming and going all the time. Being steam trains, there was plenty of smoke and steam puffed out, resulting in a generous coating of soot on the brickwork and roof. Being a boy, I always had to get a good look at the engine. Here, there were engines galore, including some big, shiny express train engines that roared all the way up to Scotland.

After leaving the station we walked past a large building, which was the stables for the railway horses, distinguished by its own distinctive smell. In those days the railway companies had their own delivery service of covered vans pulled by carthorses. That amounted to a lot of horses.

The next stage of our journey was a ten-minute tram ride to Islington. Then we were soon at Aunt Jennie's house, which was in a quiet back street. Dad attracted their attention by rattling his boot on the iron railings, which made a sort of dinging noise. Then someone would come up from the basement to open the front door.

The basement room was their living room / kitchen. It was very homely and comfortable. Once settled down, tea and biscuits or cake were served up. Then the grown-ups got down to the serious business of gossiping, while we kids were entertained by our cousin Nell. She would often take us out for a walk to a park where we could run around and let off steam. Sometimes the whole family would go out for a walk. Maybe we would go through the shopping centre in City Road, and past the 'Angel'. The pub featured in 'Pop Goes the Weasel'. Occasionally, if we stayed until the evening, Uncle Jim's mate, Mr Darby, would come in with his banjo and play for us.

One of the tenants was a stout lady we knew as Aunt Jane, although she was not related to anyone in our family. She was always kind to us and sometimes gave us sweets when we visited. There seemed to be a love, hate relationship between her and Aunt Jennie. They were both outgoing independent types, and seemed to have frequent spats. Aunt Jennie would regale our parents with the latest row, with sentences beginning, 'She said to me, she said' or 'I said to her, I said'.



Cousin Nell was a lovely person, friendly and outgoing, with a calm temperament. She was employed in a big insurance company in the City. One of the benefits of this was an ongoing supply of used foreign stamps. Nell was also an accomplished musician, playing the violin, cello, piano and flute. In her spare time she played in an orchestra formed by her local church, and periodically performed in public concerts. In addition she was a very good artist in watercolour, her main subjects being birds and flowers. I still have several of her paintings. Uncle Jim died shortly after the war. Aunt Jennie and Nell moved to a 1<sup>st</sup> floor flat in a better suburb.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Early Memories**

Memories are funny things: it's surprising just what sticks in your mind. Some are happy memories that you recall and savour, and others that you would prefer to forget. It seems that the most trivial stay forever, and the important ones, you struggle to recall.

For example; I was two years old when my sister arrived yet I have little memory of her as a baby. No doubt she was introduced to me shortly after she was born, and I was probably proudly told, 'Here's your little sister Edna, come to join you'. Maybe I was even allowed to hold her for a moment, but the earliest memory I do have of her is seeing her sitting in a high chair, being fed. Her birthday was the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1922, and she was christened Edna Elizabeth. I am happy to say, that apart from the occasional spats that all children have from time to time, we got on very well together.

An earlier memory was at a time when I slept in my cot in the back bedroom. The cot was in a corner next to the washstand. When bedtime came, I was settled in the cot with a night-light placed on the washstand. A night-light then, was little flat candle placed in a saucer of water. This time I must have been very lively, for I stood up grasping the cot rail and blew and blew my hardest until I eventually blew out the night-light. Then, being suddenly plunged into darkness, I yelled my head off until somebody came to relight it. I only recall this happening once, as I imagine, after that, the light would have been placed further away. A second memory was after I had graduated to the front room. The wallpaper had repeated patterns of two Japanese ladies with parasols standing before a background of an arched bridge and bamboo. I displayed my artistic talent by wetting my finger and rubbing out their faces.

I would rate my favourite memory as being taken out in my pushchair. I believe that's what it was called in those days; at least that's what I knew it as. The pushchair was made of timber with a strong, patterned canvas material seat and back, and could be folded flat. This was an event I always enjoyed. Oddly enough, I noticed that my children did too, when they were taken out. It must be being able to sit back and watch the world go by, and to see all the fascinating sights around you. My favourite trip was on shopping day, going in and out of the shops, and past the curb-side stalls, piled high with all manner of fascinating goods.

### **Growing pains, and all that stuff**

When children complained of aches and pains in their arms or legs, their mothers simply told them 'They're growing pains', and left it at that. I guess that they were probably right. It was our bones and muscles adjusting to getting larger. We went through the usual children's ailments. My sister Edna caught measles, and was put in quarantine, in hospital for a while. She recovered well with no further problems.

Having your tonsils out was a common operation for children in those days. I remember one day, sitting with my mother in a hospital corridor, along with other children and their mothers. I must have been fairly young as I don't think I had any idea why I was there. Eventually it was our turn. I was taken into a room and sat in a big chair, and an anaesthesia mask put over my face. The part over my eyes had a sepia transparency of two cowboys on horses which held my attention. The next thing I recall was lying on a bed in a ward full of children, many of them crying. My mother was sitting beside the bed holding a dish of jelly, which I found very enjoyable. I have no recollection of events after that point, except eventually going home on a tram.

A second occasion was when my parents were concerned about me not eating, and not putting on weight. They were talking about getting a 'Green card'. I knew what this was as they were in a health fund run by a benevolent society. The card, in my case, allowed me to be treated at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Mum took me there, early one morning. We were then sent to a big room full of long rows of forms. We sat down and gradually moved along the form to the end, where we became next in line to see the doctor. Then we were led into the doctor's room to be examined by a rather stern looking person wearing a shiny metal disc with a small hole in the centre, over one eye. Facing him was group of a dozen or so Asian students. The doctor asked my mother a series of questions, and then examined me, at one point tapping my back with two fingers. He then said to the students, 'There is nothing wrong with this child'. He then gave mum a prescription, and we left for home with two bottles of tonic.

## Chapter 3

### I Enter the Halls of Learning

Then came the big day when it was time to start school. My mother escorted me round to the local infants department. The school was a large brick building with the classrooms arranged around a central hall in which all the new arrivals were congregated. My first impression was of noise, lots of it, with people talking and kids crying. Then I was taken into a classroom, which had a big white rocking horse in one corner and a cubby house in the other. This, I thought, looks interesting, but sadly I was allotted to a teacher in another room. I don't remember any of the other children in the class, but I do remember the teacher; a very nice lady named Miss Henderson.

There was a chart of the alphabet on the wall, each letter with its appropriate picture. I can recall little bags of beans being given out, for us to learn counting. Our other important lesson was learning to write. I recall Miss Henderson reading us a story about a beggar in the market place and then asked. 'Why was he begging?' We had to write the answer in our books. I wrote carefully in large somewhat squiggly letters, and got the answer correct, although somewhat misspelt. 'Becos he was hungry'. I don't know why it sticks in my mind, but I can see it clearly, even now. Art was another subject that I liked. My crayon picture of a teapot was considered good enough to put on display on open day. Sadly I never achieved fame in the artistic world, although I'm not bad at photography. The approach of Christmas kept us busy, making endless paper chain decorations. We had one other teacher, a Miss Green. She was good too, although more academic than Miss Henderson, which meant that we had to work harder.

As Christmas approached, our term in the infants' grade ended. On going back to school in the New Year we were upgraded to the 'Junior mixed' class. I don't recall much of this stage but I don't think we were at this level for long because at the beginning of a new term all the boys were transferred to a boy's only school in Pretoria Avenue. The syllabus was on a higher level and extra classes were included. One good thing was that there were craft classes, woodwork and bookbinding. I chose bookbinding, and became quite good at it.

Then we were transferred back to Coppermill Lane Senior Boys' School. This of course was on a more advanced level with a teacher for each subject. My best subjects were geography and art; the same teacher for each, who had a very good presentation of both of them, and made them interesting. The same applied to the English and history teachers. I recall the English teacher giving us a lecture on the difference between 'Lay and Lie', and the history classroom with a long list of dates that stretched almost from floor to ceiling on the classroom wall. The one uppermost in my mind is 1066! Science and woodwork followed. Science was a bit boring until we got to electricity, then it sort of livened up, as you might say. Woodwork was in a long room full of benches. We started by learning to make different types of joints, progressed through small wooden articles until our last term when we teamed up with the teacher to make a writing desk topped with a glass fronted bookcase. We each contributed a small part towards it, while the teacher did the more intricate work. I cut some joints and sandpapered the sides. It was displayed in an exhibition of work from all the local schools. I think it won a prize, but I had left school by then. The most hated subjects and teachers were shorthand and book keeping. Book keeping I could cope with. We had two account books to keep at a not very advanced level. Shorthand didn't mean a thing to me, it was for girls. My cousin Ellen (Nell) worked in an insurance office as a stenographer; she won two prizes in Business College for speed and efficiency, and was highly regarded in her department. French was another lesson that I didn't like. When I found that I had to fathom out that some words were masculine, some feminine words, and some that were neither, I sort of lost interest.

We played sport on Friday afternoon. Football (soccer) was OK, although I mostly finished up in the left-over's, which suited me as we just kicked the ball around without worrying too much about the rules.

## **School activities**

In English schools, the classrooms were arranged around a central hall. At the start of the school day a bell was rung in the playground, and we formed up in our classes ready to be marched into the hall. There we lined up along the length of the hall. Halfway along one side was a dais where the teachers sat. The teachers took it in turn to lead the assembly, unless it was a special occasion, when the headmaster addressed us. We always started with a prayer, a bible reading and a hymn, followed by a short talk on some current affair and school matters. On Empire Day and Armistice Day it would be a much bigger assembly, with flags, and music from a gramophone. After assembly we would go to our respective classrooms. When it was time to change class, a bell would be rung, and we would move to the next class.

There would be a mid-morning break, and a long lunch period, during which, we went home. There was a sweet shop opposite the school, which was very busy before school started. We would mostly buy a halfpennyworth of sweets, or if you were well off, you bought a pennyworth. If you were a real big spender you got two pennyworth, (very rare in my case). There were also lucky dips and a sort of poker machine that gave out sweets as prizes.

Boys being boys, a lot of time was spent running around the playground playing a chasing game called 'Release'. Girls of course did girls things. A popular thing was making a long woollen tube through a cotton reel, with 4 small nails in the end. I never knew what they did with the finished article. One thing I think they made by coiling the woolly tube round to make little woolly dolls. I notice that the reels still turn up in toyshops even now.

PT classes were held in the playground. First we did exercises, and then played team games, which were very popular. On Friday afternoon we marched to the local playing field, where we played cricket or football according to the season. Once a year, all the pupils and teachers went to a much larger playing field to celebrate school sports day, with races, jumping, tug of war, etc. There were even goodies laid on, like cakes and cordial.

From time to time there would be educational excursions. Two teachers would take us to a place of interest, usually by public transport. In the early Primary years, it would be the London Zoo, then in later years, a museum. One afternoon, we were escorted to the local theatre to see 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by Shakespeare. One place, which seemed to get the most visits, was the Imperial Institute. This was a building in London devoted to displaying the wonders of the British Empire. The galleries displayed artefacts and information about each country in turn. There were also interesting dioramas of many places, some of which could be animated by pressing a button or turning a handle. These were very popular among the boys. The trip that most impressed me was to the British Museum. The items that stand out most in my mind were first, the hall devoted to the Elgin Marbles; statues and friezes from the Acropolis at Athens in Greece, brought to England by Lord Elgin. Secondly, the Rosetta Stone. We were given a short lecture on this. Then there were the Egyptian Mummies with all their trappings. Last, but not least, and perhaps more fascinating to schoolboys, were the skulls and bones of Ancient Britons. Back at school the next day we would have to write an essay about our day out. This was one instance where I received some praise for my work. I always liked writing essays. The best ones were displayed on open day.

Guy Fawkes Day was another big event for children, especially boys, but not encouraged by the education department. We would save up our pocket money and join a firework club at the local sweetshop or toyshop. They would be extremely busy on the few days before bonfire night as we crowded into the shops to select our fireworks. Guy Fawkes dummies would appear towed around in billycarts to raise money for more crackers. The evenings beforehand would be punctuated with boys letting off crackers in the street, often inside tin cans. We would collect firewood to build a bonfire in the back garden. Some folk would hold a bonfire party and invite their friends and their children in for the evening. Considering that our housing was high density, it was a very noisy time.

## Chapter 4

### Hazelwood Road

In my early years, Hazelwood Road was unsealed, although it had proper footpaths with curbs and guttering. The road itself was gravel, probably delayed due to WW1. I well remember the crunching noise as the horse drawn carts came along the road.

At that time, oil lamps provided the lighting. In the kitchen, a large brass lamp with a glass chimney and a white painted metal reflector, directed the light down to illuminate the kitchen. I remember watching my father cleaning it and trimming the wick at weekends. Other rooms were lit with smaller lamps or candles. Cooking was done on the coal-fired range in the kitchen. The streetlights were gaslights. They were turned on at dusk each day by the lamplighter patrolling the street, carrying a long pole with a gas lighter at the top. One day a gang of men came along and started to dig up the opposite side of the road in order to lay gas pipes. Soon we had a deep trench all along the road. At one end was a large square tent for the night watchman, with a brazier in front of it. You can imagine what fun we children had after school, playing fantasy games in and out of the trench when the men had gone home, or talking to the watchman and warming ourselves at his brazier while he cooked his supper. I must have been around seven at the time. Eventually the gas mains were laid, and work began on running the supply into the houses. This caused an upheaval as some of the floorboards were ripped up and slots cut in the bearers to accommodate the pipes for the downstairs flat. Finally everything was put back to normal and we were able to bask in the new gaslight.

It didn't seem all that long after, when another trench appeared, on our side of the road, this time for electricity. This was interesting as we could watch the men joining the house cables to the main via a connection box, which was insulated with hot tar. We swapped over to electricity for lighting, but kept the gas cooker in the scullery. More upheaval, as the floors were lifted again to install the wires, which in those days, were run in black metal conduit. Also the gas pipes had to be sealed off where the gaslights were removed. We were allowed one light in each room, and one power point installed in the kitchen. Sometime after, my sister and I bought our father a small electric heater for Christmas, so that he could use it on cold mornings while getting ready for work. The only trouble was that he had to pay to get another power point installed, but it was worth it in the long run. Electric irons were available too. They had a bayonet plug that fitted in the light socket. To use them you had to take the light globe out and put in a double adapter, and have the lamp in one side and the iron plugged into the other.

Prior to the installation of electricity, we had a battery-operated radio. It was a Cossor 'Melody Maker'. One of our uncles, who was a radio enthusiast, supplied and installed it for us. It came in kit form and had to be assembled by the purchaser. The case was metal sections that were screwed together, and then the components were bolted on to a timber baseboard. There was a coil of wire and a diagram showing each piece of wire in its correct length and the way it should be bent. The pieces of wire were then connected to the appropriate components. The set could be tuned to either the medium wave BBC stations, or long wave Continental stations. To change wave bands one had to change two coils inside the set, then adjust two dials on the front to tune to the stations. A large 90-volt dry cell battery supplied the power to operate the set. A 9-volt Grid Bias battery would drive the valves, and a 2-volt accumulator supplied power to heat the valve filaments. The accumulator was a small 2-volt lead/acid battery, which had to be recharged weekly. We had two of them, and it fell to me to take the discharged one round to the radio shop each week for recharging. In due course Dad bought a 'Philips' mains operated set, and the 'Cossor' was passed on to a relative. It was still going strong up to sometime in the 1950s.

Now that we were able to enjoy the benefits of gas and electricity, the council improved matters even further by sealing the road. This made life much easier for us when playing soccer or riding our scooters.



*This photo gives a general view of the street. Tables have been set up for the Coronation party. A small stage has been constructed a short distance up the road, for entertainment in the evening.*

At the bottom end of the road were two shops. On our side was an off licence where you could buy bottled or draught beer, and wine, probably spirits too, although I have no recollection of that. Dad used to send me down occasionally to get him a bottle of beer, or cigarettes. He would buy a bottle of wine at Christmas or for some special occasion. It always seemed to be Big Tree Burgundy from Australia. On reflection it does seem strange, but I am reasonably certain of it. As people became more sophisticated, bottles of cocktail in several different varieties, bearing exotic names appeared in the off licence. They were very popular too.

On the opposite corner was a general store owned by Mr & Mrs Todd. They were a very friendly couple. My sister and I used to splash out sometimes on the way to school and buy a Lyon's cupcake each. They were quite big, in different flavours, topped with coloured icing. Another thing we were fond of was cut out cardboard models of which there was a good variety. Our mother used to send us down there sometimes to get groceries that she was short of. Eggs were kept in big glass bowls and were 1d small or 1½ d large. In the late afternoon Mr Todd used to push a big tall barrow loaded with a selection of wares from his shop along the street. It must have been hard work.

The milkman came round on a large horse drawn chariot carrying a big milk churn. Housewives took a jug out to the milkman who measured out a pint or half pint as requested.

Another welcome caller was Mr Hayes the baker. His shop was in Coppermill Lane. I was sometimes sent round there to buy a cottage loaf baked on the premises. A cottage loaf was made up of a large flattened ball of dough with another smaller one on top. I must confess to picking off and eating the loose bits at the join on the way home. Talking of bakers, the best one was Rosins in James St. Their oven was in the basement with a big

grid in the footpath fronting the shop. You could stand there and feel the warm fresh bread smell rising around you.

During the winter the coalman would come round with a big flat top cart carrying sacks holding 1cwt or  $\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. of coal. Mum would buy a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. which would last us a week. He would carry the sack through the house on his back and tip it into the coal shed in the garden. (1 cwt. [hundredweight] was equal to 112 lbs. / 60 kg).

The top of our road led into the main road which was the tram route. The houses here were more imposing than ours, generally three stories, with steps up to the front door. The house on our side was a private house, but on the other corner was the local doctor's surgery. One entered it through an imposing front door into a hallway. The waiting room was a large ornate room on the right with all the doors and walls painted grey. Facing the door was a marble fireplace fitted with a gas heater, which was lit in the winter. I can still recall the hissing noise it made, as the room was generally pretty quiet, apart from the odd cough from a waiting patient. To the right was a bay window and to the left a double door leading in to the doctor's room. There were seats all around the room and a small table with the usual old magazines on it. You knew it was your turn to see the doctor by remembering those present when you walked in. As a child I was always impressed by the doctor's surgery. On one side of the room was a large desk with pigeonholes at the back, containing an assortment of medical papers. Opposite the desk was a bookcase full of medical books. The most interesting part, to me as a child anyway, was the room behind him. The door was always open. There was a window in the back wall, and in front of this were shelves holding large bottles of coloured liquids. Having examined you and made a diagnosis, the doctor would go into this room and measure out small quantities from these bottles, pour them into a medicine bottle, stick a label on it and hand it to your mother. The resultant medicines all had one thing in common. They were dark in colour, tasted awful, and cured you. Mother washed the bottle out for the next visit.

## Chapter 5

### My Home

My birthplace and my home for the next thirty years, less a six year break for army service, was a four roomed upstairs flat, at number 55 Hazelwood Road, Walthamstow, NE London, shared with my parents, younger sister, and a cat. The downstairs flat was occupied by Mr & Mrs Mustoe, their three children, and a dog.



*Number 55 Hazelwood Road decorated for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1953.*

The flats were in a long terrace. Some houses were occupied by a single family, while others, like ours, were split into two four roomed flats. Those on either side of us were flats. Dad's eldest brother, my Uncle Bill, and Aunt Daisy, lived upstairs in number 53. I have the impression that the better off families lived towards the top end of the road, and the poorer and larger families lived at the lower end. There were four other boys close by, with whom I had formed a close friendship at home and school, and several others who would join us, depending on whatever activity we were involved in.

The frontage of each house would have been around nine metres, with a small garden in front of each house about three metres wide, fronted by a low brick wall, with a decorative cast iron fence along the top of it. The houses were paired up, with the two front doors of each pair adjoining one another. An iron rail separated the front paths, leading to cast iron gates that matched the fence. Most houses had a privet hedge inside the fence. My father had put a timber-paling fence along each side of our front path.

The front door was common to both tenants, also the hallway that ran through the house to the back door. The two wives took turns in cleaning this area each week. The front porch had a stone step, which was kept whitened, and protected with a square of lino. The hallway had a flight of stairs on the right hand side ascending to a landing, and our kitchen door, then doubling back up another short flight to the bedrooms. The stairs were covered by a long strip of patterned lino, held in place by brass stair rods. In due course I was promoted to chief stair rod polisher. The landing led into the kitchen through

a half glazed door, covered on the inside by a net curtain. On the left of the door was a hat and coat rack.

The kitchen was our family room, where we had our meals and spent most of our time together. There was a built in dresser with three shelves displaying plates stood on edge, and cups and jugs on hooks along their front edges. On the cupboard was a brass tray that we had given our parents for Christmas, and two soup tureens. The drawers held cutlery in one, stationary and odds and ends in the other, then pots and pans in the cupboards. Set in the chimney alcove next to the dresser was the kitchen range. This was made of black cast iron and was regularly cleaned and polished using a black metal polish called 'Zebo'. In front of this were a metal fender and a wire fireguard for our safety. Above the alcove was a mantelpiece; a shelf with a decorative valance attached along the edge. These could be quite elaborate, often of dark red velvet with lace and bobbles along the lower edge. There was a hatch above the range for the chimney sweep to manoeuvre his brush through; the front of the alcove being first covered by a large dust sheet. A clock stood in the centre of the mantelpiece, flanked by two ornaments.

Also, in our case, there were four small polished shell cases that Dad had brought home from the war. Two stood on end and held spills for lighting the gaslight etc. The other two had been cut out to make miniature coal scuttles, complete with handles and feet, made from copper tubing from a French brewery which had been wrecked by shellfire. This sort of occupation was popular with the troops when they were out of the line, resting. A mirror hanging over the mantelpiece completed the décor. Two small fireside chairs, a sideboard and a dining table and chairs completed the furniture in this room. A window opposite the range looked out to the kitchen window of the neighbouring flat, which was of course a mirror image of ours.

Against the window and diagonally opposite the kitchen door, was the door to the scullery, what today would be called the laundry. First was the ringer with wooden rollers. I was always an enthusiastic helper when it came to turning the handle. Then in the corner was the kitchen sink. Only cold water was available in those days. Next, a workbench with an enamel top and cupboards below, which my father had made. This stood under the window overlooking the garden, and also the neighbouring gardens, and those of the houses backing on to us. At the other side of the window there was an alcove where the gas stove stood facing the sink. Next was the chimney breast with a small cast iron fireplace in it. This was never lit. It had a handy worktable in front of it. In the next alcove was a built-in storage cupboard. Against the remaining wall were two small cupboards. The lower one I was given to keep my books and toys in, and the upper one was a food safe.

The scullery also served as our bathroom. On bath nights a tin bath was brought up from its place in the garden and large saucepans of water were heated on the range or gas stove. The toilet was attached to the rear of the house, and was shared by both families. To get to it we had to go downstairs to our back door, then down the side of the house and round to the back. The downstairs tenants had their own back door situated in their scullery. The downstairs scullery had a built-in copper heated by a fire lit beneath it.

The two bedrooms were accessed up a short flight of stairs. On the left of the top landing was an inbuilt cupboard, which contained household odd and ends. The back bedroom was on the right, and was furnished with a double bed. Alongside the bed was a dressing table with a mirror attached, backing on to the window. The dressing table had a small drawer at either end of the top, one of which contained several old watches and my father's war medals. There were also two large bronze medals in boxes, commemorating two of my uncles who had died in action. One of the watches had a cover over the face to protect it from damage during extreme activities. The cover had a hole in the centre just large enough to see the position of the hands. This type of watch is known as a 'Hunter'. I

used to be fascinated by these things, and liked to see and handle them. At right angles to the dressing table was the usual cast iron fireplace. This was occasionally lit when someone was ill and confined to bed. In later years we had a small kero heater. The mantelpiece over the fire held a clock, which had been presented to my father after 21 years service to his firm. Next to the fireplace was a built in cupboard for clothes. In front of this was a folding bed where my sister slept when she was young. Finally against the wall by the door was a washstand. This was a long cupboard on four legs, with a marble top and a tiled back. It was complemented by a large china basin and jug. My mother was fond of quoting a phrase that the nurse had told her, when giving instructions in caring for her new baby. It was, 'Never put a hot baby on cold marble', which I assume was in reference to bathing the baby on the washstand.

The one remaining room was the front bedroom. This room extended the full width of the house, and was referred to as the 'Front Room', in our case. Sometimes it was called the Parlour. Although it had a single bed in it, it was the best room and used for entertaining. One entered the room through a door at the left hand end. Opposite the door, a window looked out into the street. Further along were two more windows together, situated over the downstairs bay window. To the left of the door stood a china cabinet containing a miscellaneous collection of souvenirs, china and glassware my parents had collected over the years. I remember a coronation mug, and another to commemorate the day that Walthamstow became a borough in 1929.

My bed stood along this wall with its head to the window. In front of the double window was a settee covered in imitation leather. Next was a plant stand holding an *Aspidistra*. The *Aspidistra*, a fern like plant, was very popular in those days. Practically every house had one in their best room. Mum gave it lots of TLC, keeping the leaves nice and shiny. Next was a small table set in an alcove by the chimney breast. The fireplace in this room was more ornate than usual, with tiles around it, and a tiled hearth and fender. The other alcove had a built-in cupboard. By this was an armchair that matched the settee. Along the back wall was a large highly polished sideboard backed with a mirror. This piece of furniture and the gramophone next to it were both made by my Uncle Bill, Dad's elder brother, who was a highly accomplished cabinetmaker. I have his apprentice certificate. The gramophone was my favourite piece of furniture. It was a console model, with a lid over the turntable, two small doors covering the horn, and a storage cupboard beneath full of records. In those days, records were made of shellac, were very brittle, and played at a speed of 78 rpm.

The record collection was quite widespread. It included popular songs and tunes from the shows of that period. There were also recordings of Peter Dawson, Paul Robeson and Gracie Fields. Other artists were, Leyton and Johnson, who sang and played pianos together and Flotsam and Jetsam, a singing duo. They were very popular. One of their songs was, 'Is 'e an Aussie, is 'e Lizzie'. Some of our favourites were 'The Three Trees', 'The Whistler and his Dog', 'Leaning on a Gate' and 'The Laughing Policeman'. There weren't a great many classical pieces, but Strauss waltzes featured highly. My favourite was a 12" record of 'The Blue Danube', which was also on my parents' favourites list, which included 'Handel's Largo', 'Barcarolle' from 'Tales of Hoffman', and 'Softly awakes my heart' from 'Samson and Delilah'. When either of the last two was played on the radio, I noticed that they would both listen to it.

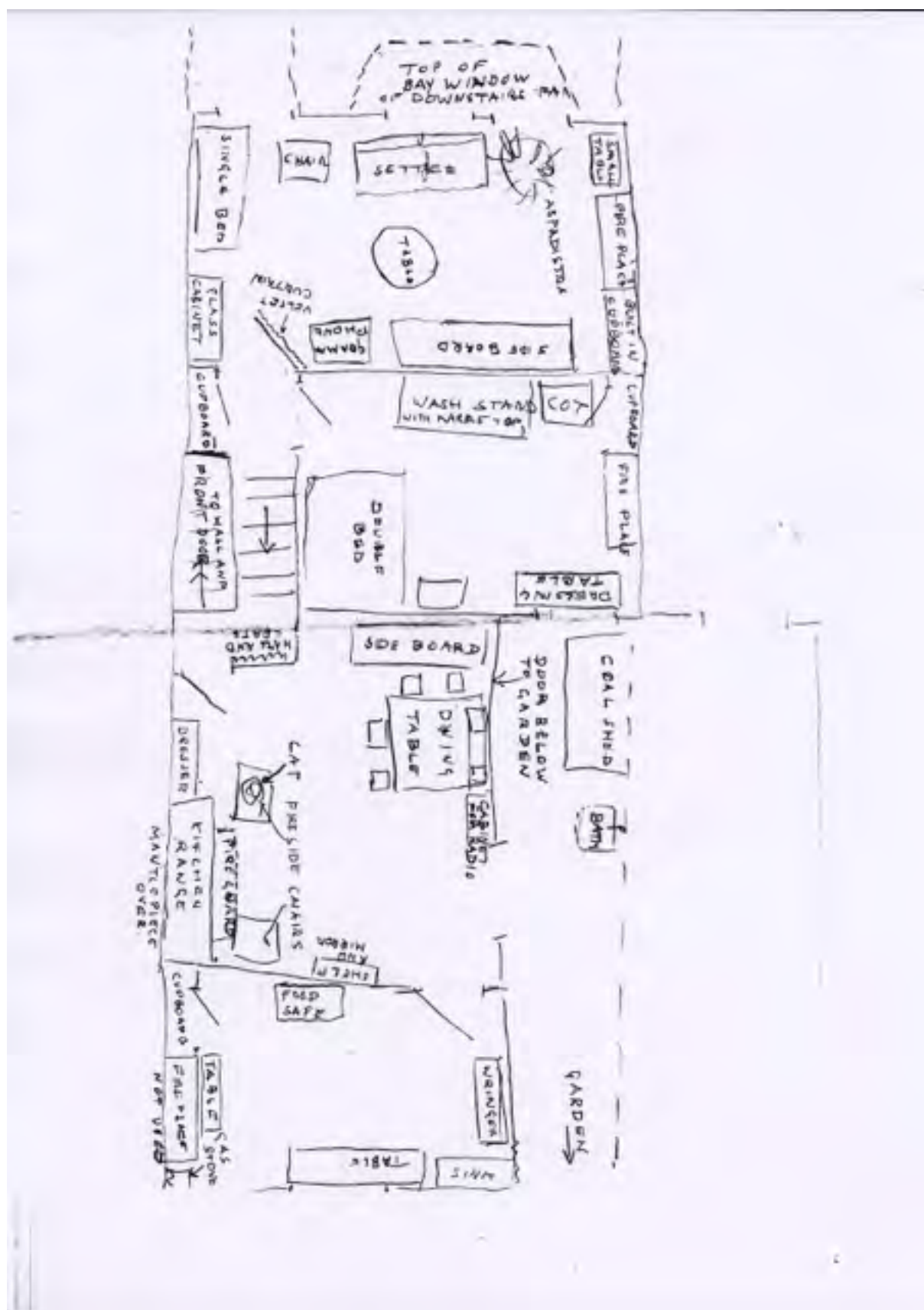
Another set of two twelve-inch records which was often played was titled 'The Kentucky Minstrel Show'. Now politically incorrect but still a good show in my opinion. One Saturday morning my cousin, Horace, called in all excited. He had bought a new Bing Crosby record of 'Dinah', and wanted to hear it on our gramophone. From then on Bing was added to our repertoire. The gramophone stood behind the door, which opened inward. At the top of the door was a curtain rail, which hinged on a bracket screwed to the doorframe. A dark red velvet curtain hung from this rail. Its purpose was to act as a draft

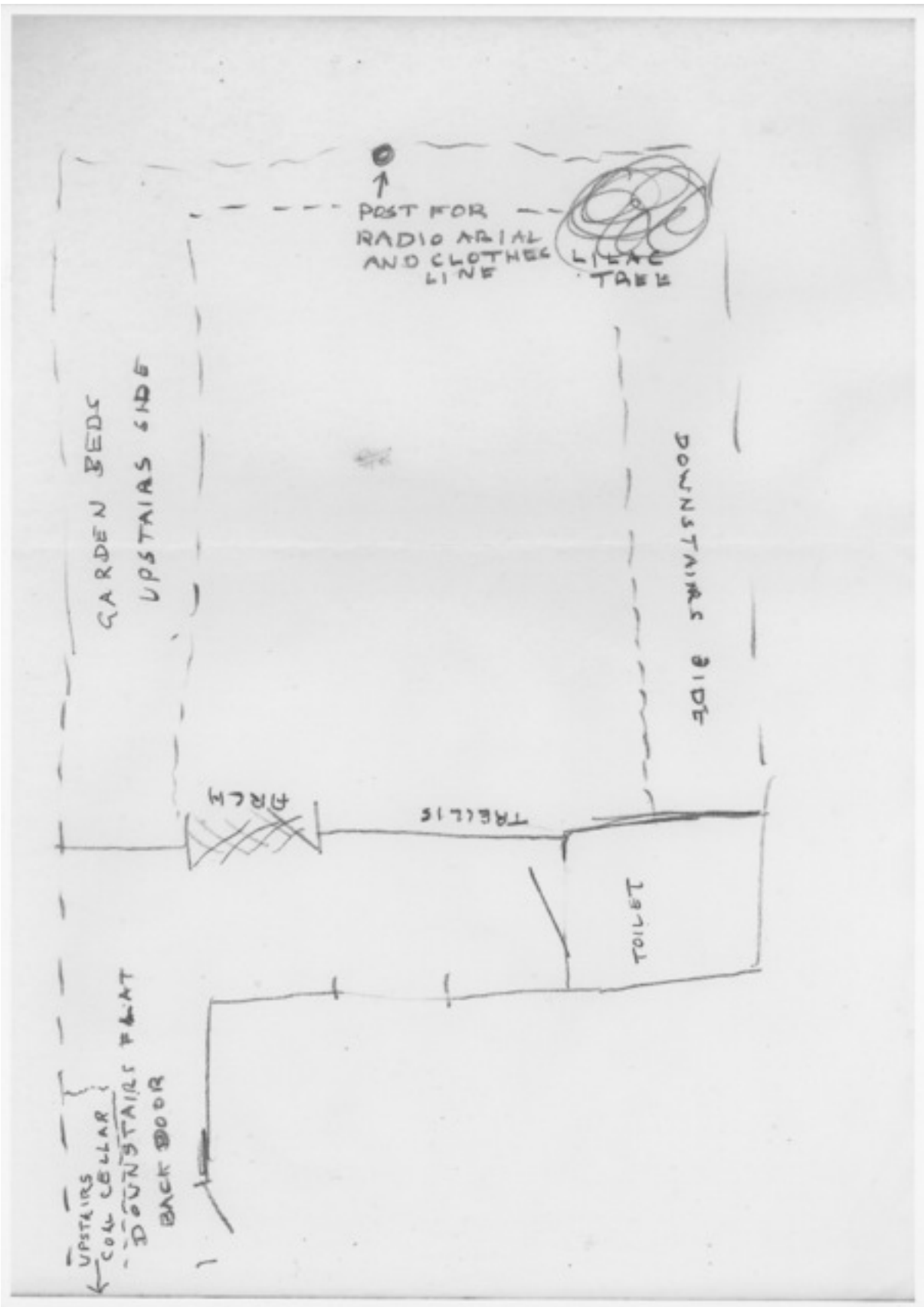
excluder when the door was closed. It seems to me that dark red velvet was in great demand in those days.

On the mantelpiece stood a chiming clock, which chimed the quarters and the hours. Due to its loud chime in the middle of the night, dad put a wedge of paper in the chiming mechanism resulting in a series of dull thuds on the hour. Two china vases complimented the clock. Above all was a large mirror. On the small cupboard next to the fireplace were two tall glass domes. In one was an arrangement of dried flowers, and in the other some foliage in which were perched two small brightly coloured parrots. When I was quite young, out of curiosity, I lifted one of the glass domes off its stand, resulting in the flower arrangement flopping out. I had quite a job to get it all back. It never looked quite the same. Even the ceiling in this room was papered. I don't know how Dad did it. I wouldn't dream of it. He would be up a stepladder with the wet pasted paper concertinaed in one hand, and Mum would be following him, smoothing it out with a broom. He certainly made a good job of it. The paper had a geometrical gold pattern on it and made the room look more attractive. The windows were covered in lace curtains by day and timber Venetian blinds at night.

This room was used quite frequently. We would relax there on Sunday, entertain guests, and use it for family gatherings and Christmas. At Christmas the kitchen was decorated with paper chains or twisted garland, but the Front Room was done with more elaborate shop bought decorations. The fire would be burning brightly, making the room warm and cosy. At these times the gramophone came into good use. The task of keeping the motor wound falling to me. When we got our first radio, it had a vertical horn with the speaker coil at the bottom. Dad would remove this part and use an extension lead to take it up to the gramophone and substitute it for the gramophone sound box, thus making an efficient radio speaker.

The garden was shared by the two families. We had the left hand flower bed, and half the end. In the right hand corner of the garden a lilac bush grew profusely. It had a lovely scent, and my mother would cut blooms from it and put them in a vase. On summer evenings we would be out tending the garden or just relaxing, and chatting to the next-door neighbours. On washing days, the clothesline down the middle of the garden would be in use. Before using it, the housewife would rub along the line with a piece of rag to clean the soot off. The clothes would then be pegged up, and the line raised by propping it up in the middle with a wooden clothes prop.





## Chapter 6

### Recreation

There were two cinemas in the High Street and another nearby in St James Street. Some genius had built it next to the railway station so that it was not unusual for the action in the film to be punctuated by the noise of a train puffing into the station. It seemed to be pretty well attended, although it closed and reopened a couple of times. It was a favourite place for children at the Saturday morning matinee. It was always full. The front seats were rows of wooden forms. A Beatles concert had nothing on us kids when it came to cheering on the hero, or booing the baddy. There would be a cowboy film and cartoons, Felix being prominent followed by the early Mickey Mouse films, all in black and white then. Also there would be a serial story, each episode of which ended on a cliff-hanger. The cinema was eventually converted to a factory making small pieces of furniture.

We usually went to the Princes, in the High Street on a Saturday evening. There would be two programmes a week, changing on Thursday. There would be a main film and a secondary film, plus a cartoon and a newsreel. At this time films were silent and a pianist would be down the front playing the appropriate music. With the advent of 'Talkies' in the early 30s the first local cinema to change over was the 'Carlton' at the top end of the High Street, with 'The Jazz Singer', starring Al Jolson. The cinema was lavishly decorated for the occasion. The 'Princes' was closed and rebuilt as the 'Dominion', on a much more lavish scale, with the entrance in a side street, off the High street. The façade was covered in bright multi coloured neon tubes, which could be seen from some distance away. They were eventually switched off, leaving only the awning lights on. The programmes were then changed weekly.

Cinemas then opened at midday. The audience queued in this instance, in an alley beside the theatre, entertained by the usual buskers and peanut vendors. I remember one busker who could make quite long ladders by tearing and rolling old newspaper posters. As for peanuts, every child had a bag of peanuts. The footpath where we queued was carpeted with peanut shells. Children would pass the time away by grinding at the brickwork with the edge of a penny, which eventually resulted in a pattern along the wall of penny-sized hollows. There were no set programme times. As seats became empty, people were allowed in. The commissioner would call out whether there were seats together or single, to give the people at the front of the queue in the foyer, the choice of waiting longer or splitting up. Ushers would then show you to the vacant seat. When the full programme ended there would be an interval and a big change over of the audience. Also the ushers would parade the aisles with trays of sweets and drinks for sale.

The interval now was enlivened by an organ rising up from a pit at the front of the stage to entertain the audience with a musical recital. On Saturdays this was augmented by a stage show. There would be singers and dancers, acrobats and contortionists. One act was two men and a girl dressed in spangled tights. They performed acrobatic feats in which the poor girl seemed to get thrown from one to the other of the two men. At one point she even got twizzled around like a skipping rope!

On one occasion at the Dominion I remember seeing the prototype of a tape recorder. It was called a 'Blattnerphone', after its inventor. It was about the size of a tea trolley, if not larger. The tape reels were mounted on the front of the machine, and must have been almost 50cms in diameter. The tape was steel wire. After explaining the machine, the operator recited a poem into a microphone, followed by a few short tunes on a selection of musical instruments, and then invited a member of the audience to come up and sing a tune. He then rewound the tape and intrigued the audience by playing the same sequence from the recorder.



Another interesting electronic device that appeared on the stage was called a 'Theremin'. It consisted of a black box with a tall metal rod projecting from the top and another shorter one from the right hand side. By holding his hands close to the rods, and moving them along the length, or varying the distance between hand and rod, the operator was able to play electronic music. It must have taken a lot of practise, but the effect was very entertaining. This device is still available from electronic suppliers.

At home the radio would be on frequently. There was only the BBC to listen to, either the national or the regional programmes. Commercial broadcasting was definitely not permitted. The BBC was broadcast on the medium waveband. On Sunday Dad would switch the radio over to the long waveband and we would listen to a commercial station broadcasting from Luxembourg in Europe. They broadcast what are now known as 'Soap Operas'. Palmolive would put on a melodrama each week. A bit corny by today's standards, but we enjoyed them. Then there was Ovaltine with a gang of children called the 'Ovaltines'. Their theme tune began 'We are the Ovaltines, happy girls and boys' etc. Another was for Betox gravy with 'Hurrah for Betox, what a delightful smell', then the football pools with 'We're in the money'. They would read out the winning numbers from Saturday's games. There were many more. We only listened to them on Sunday, so I don't know whether they broadcast all the week.

During the week we listened to the BBC. They had their own Symphony Orchestra, dance band and choir. When my sister and I arrived home from school Mum would give us some homemade cordial and cake and then we would settle down to listen to the Children's hour. Our favourite story was the weekly 'Toytown' episode. The leading characters were Larry the lamb, Denis the dachshund, Ernest the policeman, and Mr Mayor. Larry and Denis were always getting into trouble, being admonished by Ernest, and lectured by the Mayor. But everything came out right in the end. Ernest had the happy knack of being able to stop any criminal in his tracks by threatening to take his name and address. I wish it were still so. They also announced each day the names they had received of children whose birthday it was that day. If they were twins, everybody in the studio would chant 'Hello-o-o Twins'.

This programme was followed by the dance band. At first it was Jack Payne, whose signature tune was 'Say it With Music'. Later they changed to Henry Hall, but I can't recall his tune. In the evening it was either they or some other well-known band. One such was Harry Roy. He always played lively tunes. His very lively signature tune was 'Hold That Tiger'.

On Saturday afternoon there was a football match broadcast. The two teams were reviewed in the 'Radio Times', with a plan of the playing field marked out in squares

numbered 1 to 8. As the game progressed the commentator would name the players, and describe the progress of the game, while a second commentator called the number of the square where the action was taking place. The BBC put out their radio programme each week in a magazine format, the 'Radio Times'. Their logo would appear on the cover heading, along with their motto 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation'. This was deleted when war became imminent.

## Chapter 7

### The High Street Market

The main road at the top of Hazelwood was Blackhorse Road. It carried the tramline through Walthamstow. Just past the top of our road there was a double, right angled S bend. As the trams negotiated these bends their wheels made a loud screeching noise against the rails. It was not terribly noticeable by day, but at night when you were in bed it could be heard clearly. Occasionally, if the tram approached the turn too fast or the weather was foggy, it would keep straight on instead of turning, resulting in the tram having to be towed back on to the straight again. The fog situation was eventually alleviated by a string of bright lights suspended between the overhead power lines to guide the driver round the sharp bends.



The first bend lead into High Street, which was the home of Walthamstow market. The High Street was a mile long, and was reputed to be the longest market in Europe. There were shops and stalls almost the whole length of the street, and you could buy practically anything there. It was a popular place for couples to go window shopping or browsing in the evening. The shop windows would be brightly lit and filled with an enticing array of jewellery, clothes, furniture, toys, and of course, baby wear. Friday and Saturday were the busiest days of the week. Saturday evenings you could hardly move, as vendors were selling off their wares cheap, especially the butchers and fishmongers. The butchers would be standing in front of their shops alongside a bench holding an urn full of hot saveloys (frankfurts), and another full of faggots (a sort of large rissole), which were very popular on Saturdays. Meanwhile he would be calling out the latest bargain of meat on offer, punctuated with yells of "Buy, Buy, Buy!" all the time vigorously plying his butcher knife and sharpener. When I was a young child I couldn't bear to look into the butchers shop window at cut up fresh meat, but I knew that I would have to one day so made myself look and came to see it as fresh food.

At Christmas time the crush in the High Street was even worse, you could hardly move, sometimes coming to a complete standstill. Some stalls, particularly those selling china and drapery, would be surrounded by a crowd as they kept reducing the price of their wares to an apparently ridiculous price whilst adding even more pieces, all the time

calling out their sales pitch. They always seem to be doing a good trade. There were also a lot of individuals selling things from trays or small barrows.

At our end of the street, the first shop was Woolworths. A sign over the entrance proudly announced “Nothing over sixpence”. It was a fairly large shop, and it was surprising what was available in that price range, but of course, the cost of living was much lower in those days. Everything was laid out on counters then, with a shop assistant at each counter to serve you. There was also a “Marks and Spencers” further up the road, a smaller shop than Woolworths, but with no price limit. They are both now big retail chains. It also seems that Woolworths have abandoned their price ceiling.

Next door was a big draper’s shop, with several departments, ranging from linen and drapery to ladies dresses. I was always fascinated by their method of handling payments. The assistant would put the money and docket in a cup and clip it to an overhead carrier, then pull a lever. Your money would then zing along a wire to the cashier’s desk at the back. In due course it would zing back with your change and stop with a thump. All prices were then marked at “Something  $\frac{3}{4}^d$ ”, (Three farthings. A farthing being a quarter of a penny). But you never got the farthing change, it came as a small packet of pins. This was a common practice in draper’s shops in those days. There must have been millions of pins lying around in homes all over England.

There were two Sainsbury’s shops selling dairy products. Butter was bought by weight. The assistant chopped off a piece from a large block, then patted it into shape with two wooden paddles, and wrapped it neatly. Other dairies were “Maypole” where my mother would generally shop. They gave coupons with every purchase, which were exchanged for pieces of a china tea set. We eventually acquired the complete set, which was quite attractive, a floral pattern with a yellow border. Another shop further up specialised in coffee. They had a big coffee grinder in the window, and bins full of coffee beans all around. I didn’t like that shop then, I found the aroma too strong, but would probably like it now.

Then there was the fish shop, with the fish neatly laid out on marble slabs. Next door was Menzie’s eel and pie shop that served stewed eels and meat pies, eat in or take away. They had a stall holding two shallow tanks full of eels. The stallholder killed and cleaned them and chopped them into small pieces for you. Mum used to stew them in a sort of white sauce. We used to like them, but I’m a bit doubtful about it now. Further along was a stall selling rabbits, dead this time, which were skinned on the spot. Another item I liked then, but not anymore. Of course I mustn’t forget the pets’ meat shop. This was a little old shop further up the road where the proprietor carved up joints of horsemeat. In the late afternoon he would walk along the street calling out ‘Pets Meeeeeaaat’, and carrying a big basket filled with slices of meat on skewers. People would go out and buy a portion from him. A lot of people had standing orders with him. If they didn’t come out he would push the skewered meat through the letterbox in the front door.

There were lots of interesting characters along the way. The most outstanding one was Tony, a jolly little Italian who always stood on the same corner. In summer, he would be busy selling ice cream from a brightly coloured barrow, which he would push round the streets on Sunday. In wintertime he would have a tall coke oven on wheels, in which he would roast chestnuts and potatoes. There’s nothing better on a cold winter’s day than holding a bag of hot succulent chestnuts, peeling off the crisp skin and happily devouring them. As you can imagine, Tony had a huge following among the local children.

On Saturday evenings a man would stand on the next corner near the Princes cinema, selling comics, three for twopence. They were actually lift-outs from American newspapers. My parents would buy them for me, and I would share them with my sister on Sunday morning.

We rarely went to the “Palace”. Maybe because of the cost or the type of programme they put on. I occasionally went to a Saturday matinee with my mates when there was a children’s show on. We would queue at the side entrance to the ‘Gods’, and then when the door opened, pay our sixpence and race up an apparently endless circular staircase to get a good ‘seat’. The ‘seats’ were continuous benches across the theatre. From that viewpoint the stage was a long way down, no wonder they called it the ‘Gods’.



We did have a special day there when Walthamstow was declared a borough in 1929, and all the schools put on a pageant, about the history of Walthamstow. We sat in the good seats downstairs on that occasion.

Another interesting shop was the Ironmongers now called hardware, where you could buy anything from nails to stoves. The ceiling was hidden by shiny galvanised buckets, watering cans, chimney cowl, and other mysterious pieces of metal. I reckon if you could hang it from a hook, it was there. Then there were two fascinating toyshops, my favourite places for window shopping, a record shop with a stall in front holding boxes of records, and a stall selling American pulp magazines at three for 2<sup>d</sup>. In my primary school days I used to get cowboy magazines there, until I graduated to science fiction. My mother wasn’t terribly impressed with the somewhat lurid covers depicting Aliens.

The list goes on, in fact, you name it, and you could buy it either in a shop or from a stall. There was also a conveniently situated pub, a church, two schools, a baths, and the central library where I often used to browse for books, *Biggles*, being my favourite. This was a series of stories about an air force pilot who was sent to different parts of the world to overcome the ‘Baddies’. Over time, I read all of H.G.Wells’ science fiction novels, starting with ‘The man who could work miracles’, eventually arriving at ‘Things to come’.

*NIK STEPHENS gets up at 3am to discover what life is like ...*

# Behind the stalls

**I**T WAS 3.30 in the morning and a bumper sticker in the New Spitalfields Market said it all: "I'm catching up with yesterday. By tomorrow I'll be ready for today," it promised.

But Walthamstow High Street stall holder, Tony Bullock (54) has been rising long before the dawn chorus all his life.

For Tony, Spitalfields Market before first light is a familiar blur of colour and clattering noise – fast-moving vegetables on their way to market stalls all over London.

Forklift trucks and handcarts scuttle in all directions. It's not the best time of day to have your wits about you, but here you need eyes in the back of your head.

In the vast 280,000 sq ft hangar, an odour fills the air. It is sweet, not exactly pleasant but not a rotting smell, rather the mix of exotic and conventional fruit and veg.

Some of that produce would have been sitting on the quayside in Tenerife or the Caribbean only the day before.

And what about those early starts?

"It's more than just getting used to it. It's a way of life when you've known no other," said Tony.

He should know. He makes this 3am start six times every week.

After about an hour and a cup of something hot, which could have been anything as my taste buds hadn't woken up, we made our way to Walthamstow High Street with a full van. The haul included a mountain of mushrooms for the breakfast tables of Waltham Forest.

As a boy, Tony started selling fruit and veg in the borough from his father's horse and cart at the tail end of the 40s.

the High Street stall.

While Tony is socking up at Spitalfields, his wife Maureen (45) and son, also Tony, start setting up the stalls.

The family has pitched to the public from the same site outside the Pizza Hut (a Methodist Church stood on the spot when they started) since daughter Joanne was a baby.

"We used to wheel her pram up against the railings with a stack of boxes either side to stop it rolling away," remembered Maureen.

Joanne (19) spends less time on the stall these days. And with no pressure from mum and dad to follow in the family footsteps, son Tony (17) is also keeping his options open.

"Working the market is a hard life and it doesn't get any easier," said Maureen. "And there's so much competition from supermarkets these days."

But for all its drawbacks, Maureen wouldn't trade – places, that is.

"I've worked inside an office before but I don't know how I stuck it."

"You can go into other jobs with holidays and pensions, but it wouldn't be the same."

"On the stall, we offer the personal touch and most of the time we have a good laugh with the customers."

"Sometimes you get difficult people who think, because you work in the street, they don't have to be polite, or you get the lookers who just poke but don't buy."

"But there's nothing worse than being quiet."

"The day is so long when you're standing there with nothing to do. On a busy day, you don't have time to look at your watch."

There has been a market in Walthamstow High Street for about 100 years.

In the early days, traders would queue at the top end: a whistle was blown and they would run to claim a pitch pushing their two-wheeled, long handled coster's barrows.

Often mass brawls would ensue as rival traders came to blows over favoured sites.



of the 40s.

In the 60s, after a short spell on the same stall Tony runs today, the family operation expanded into a shop in Netley Road, Walthamstow.

This was later demolished to make way for flats, leaving the family with

## Market facts

- 1885. The first market stalls appeared in the High Street.

- 1891. The first flushing public loo was introduced to the High Street.

- 1895. The first library is opened in the High Street by Samuel Herbert, proprietor of the Walthamstow Guardian.

- 17 December, 1955. People were crushed in a shopping frenzy on the last Saturday before Christmas.

- April 1965. A one-way traffic scheme is started.

- August 1966. Market is deserted as England play Germany in World Cup Final.

- June 1968. Stallholders fear a 'trade drain' with the Victoria Line underground link soon to open.

- July 1972. The current post-office on the corner of the High Street and Hoe Street is opened. It cost £44,000 to build.

- March 1976. Plans are agreed to add 50 new stalls to the market.

- December 1976. Traffic is banned in the market on Saturdays.

A pitch on the market today can cost as little as 50p for the slow Monday and Wednesday or £20 for the more lucrative Saturday spot.

From there it gets a little complicated.

But a full Monday to Saturday licence also costs £20 to encourage traders to put their efforts into one market and not skim the cream from the best days of a string of markets.

Space is very limited and competition for the pitches is just as hot as before. But these days allocation is a little more civilised.

The rules of the market – laid out in the London Local Authorities Act 1990 – and the waiting list are supervised by the Trading Standards Office.

These include the commodity rule which dictates no new trader can sell the same goods as any stall within five pitches.

The traders' association – of which Tony is a committee member – are conscious of the market's image, especially in times of recession.

In an effort to return the market to golden days, when coach parties came from as far away as Leeds, the traders are working with council advice to promote the market.

And in eight days last week, they sold 300 tea-shirts for £2 each which declare "Walthamstow Market: longest shop in Europe" – 10 of them found homes in Australia and Greece.

And they're selling fast, so it's best to roll up early – shortly after 3.30 in the morning would do.



● Walthamstow Market – the longest street market in Europe. Photo: Metropolitan Police.

## Chapter 9

### Christmas

Perhaps the most important event of my childhood days was Christmas. School exams would be almost forgotten. School reports would have been studied by my parents, and hopefully, they would have been impressed, or at least satisfied.

The main topic of conversation in the last few days was what presents we were hoping to get for Christmas. The market was becoming increasingly busier, especially in the evening and weekends. The shops would be lit up and brightly decorated. The stalls lit by extension leads from the adjacent shop or by big hissing pressure lamps. We children would be closely studying the toyshop windows, writing lists and dropping hints.

Mothers would be planning menus and doing extra shopping. Chickens would be ordered. There were no frozen chickens in those days; you got the whole chicken, feathers and all. The butchers' shops would be crowded the day before Christmas with people picking up their orders. The children got the job of plucking them, a most enjoyable task, with feathers everywhere.

Then there were the decorations to organize. In the early days we made long paper chains, which were put up in the kitchen. The best room was honoured with more elaborate, shop bought decorations, also paper bells and balls. Pride of place went to a sprig of mistletoe, which was hung just inside the door of the front room. Then of course there was the Christmas tree, nicely decorated, with its base hidden by colourful boxes. We didn't have electric tree lights in those days. Small candle holders were clipped to the branches. The candles were lit by my father on Christmas night, and extinguished when they got too low. The fire would be burning brightly in the grate. Sometimes I would sneak around beforehand and peep in all the possible hiding places for Christmas presents, usually not successful, although on the rare occasion that I found anything, it didn't detract from the final pleasure.

Christmas morning found us waking to bulging stockings hanging on the bed head. Their contents were eagerly explored. There would be an orange at the bottom, along with a selection of sweets, and several small toys, and other items of interest to children. Dad's younger sister, our aunt Emma, worked in the east end of the city, where she could go to the warehouses, and get stuff cheaply, so there was always an attractive range of goodies for us to share. Our proper presents would be at the foot of the bed, waiting to be excitedly opened. As the morning progressed our relatives began to arrive. Aunt Emma and Grandma, who lived together close by. Mum's sister, Aunt Jennie, with Uncle Bill, and our cousin Ellen. Our other relatives, Aunt Ada and Uncle Harold, and their three children, Elsie, Ron, and Irene would already be with us as they had travelled down from Kettering a couple of days beforehand. Aunt Ada was another of Dad's sisters. She had married Uncle Harold, who was a Midlander with a broad accent. The children of course had the same accent. It was quite pleasant.

At dinner time the roast chicken would be taken from the oven to be carved and served with vegies. Grown-ups had beer or wine, the children had fizzy drinks. Then came Christmas pudding with threepenny bits tucked in here and there, covered in hot custard. The washing up and putting away was done, and the folk sat back for a rest.

At teatime there would be lots of tasty sandwiches, followed by Christmas cake and crackers and small presents off the tree. From here we would move into the front room, warmed by the open fire. There would be dishes of sweets and nuts to eat, things we didn't get often otherwise. Dates still on their stalks, packed in two layers in long flat boxes. Walnuts, brazil nuts, and hazelnuts. My favourites were brazil nuts. They were very hard to

crack open. There would be games and music on the gramophone or wireless, accompanied by lots of small talk between the grown-ups. During the evening everyone would sit quietly and listen to the King's Christmas message. Last but not least came supper, then into bed.

## Chapter 10

### Holidays

#### Southend

Southend-on-Sea is on the northern bank at the mouth of the River Thames, and is quite close to London. This made it very popular with East Londoners for day trips by train or coach, especially on weekends. In our case, we caught the train from the local station straight to Southend and back in the evening. We would walk from the station down the High Street to the pier. Here, we would board a toast rack tram, which took us along the promenade to Westcliff. Our parents liked it there because there was a good fish restaurant. Also there were shops where you could get a 'Tray'. This was a large tray holding a jug of tea, sandwiches, cakes and cups that you take down on to the beach. A refundable deposit was required.

Once we went by paddle steamer, which went from Tower Bridge wharf down the river to Southend and two other seaside towns, Ramsgate and Margate, further along the coast. The paddle steamers were the 'Golden Eagle' and 'Royal Eagle'. Our parents took us to Southend on the 'Golden Eagle'. I found it fascinating. This involved getting a train and underground from Walthamstow to Tower Wharf to board the steamer. It was a very pleasant trip down the river, with cargo ships coming and going, and Thames barges with big red sails. An additional pleasure was to go down to the lower deck to watch the engines working, with their big shiny brass connecting rods driving the paddle wheels. On reaching Southend Pier we would disembark and catch the pier train to the shore. The sea at this point is very shallow, so as the ships got bigger, they had to keep extending the pier. It finished up at 1¼ miles. (2 km). A train runs out almost to the end of the pier. On a nice day, it is pleasant to walk out, and get the train back.

The pier has had a chequered history. Around 1980 the end section which carried a number of shops and amusement arcades, and the mooring for the paddle steamers, caught fire and was completely destroyed. It was eventually rebuilt. Then a ship got out of control and went through the middle. Shortly after my last visit in 2006, the far end train station burnt down, which stopped the train running for some time.



*Southend Pier*

## Ramsgate

August each year was summer holiday time. Schools would be closed for six weeks, and factories shut down for two weeks. The majority of people went to seaside resorts, others to the countryside. Not many went overseas in those days.

When Dad's firm shut down we went to Ramsgate to stay for two weeks at a B & B. (Bed & Breakfast), boarding house. A reasonable walk took us down through the town centre to the beach. Life was much more relaxed before the war. Surfing hadn't been invented, which was just as well as there was no surf to speak of. Some people went swimming. Children dug holes and made sand castles, or splashed around in the waves. Nobody buzzed up and down on water scooters.

There would be stacks of deck chairs along the beach, which you could hire for a few pence. An attendant would stroll round checking that you had a ticket, and collecting the money if you hadn't. Grown-ups relaxed to read a book or doze. Now and then one of them would go up to one of the little cafes along the promenade to fetch a tray - well worth the cost as a reviver. There were also good fish and chip shops, cafes, and pubs with gardens at the rear, where you could eat in comfort. There would be an ice cream vender strolling along the beach, and kiosks along the prom selling soft drinks, sweets and seaside rock. This is a white peppermint sweet with a red coating, formed into a round stick with the name of the town threaded through it. These were very popular with children. People even took them home as presents I think, to prove where they had been. Also there were picture postcards on display, of the town and surrounds, or 'naughty' ones, with a double entendre. Very popular they were too. I think these are still around, but quite rare now.

There was no sunscreen then, so we all got sunburn and our skin peeled off here and there. Then mum applied chamomile lotion.



The harbour was embraced by a long curving wall wide enough to drive a ute along to unload fishing boats. There was also an inner harbour closed by lock gates, which held sufficient water at low tide for mooring boats. At the back of the harbour there were storerooms where the fishermen stowed their gear or stock of coal. Early in the morning one could see men carrying sacks of coal across the quayside to fill the boat's bunker. The

beach extended from the harbour to a tall headland, at which point a lift was installed. We used this at times as it was close to our lodgings.



*This photo was taken in Sept 2006. In August in my childhood days, this area would be crowded. The band would play on the nearest corner of the balcony.*

At the back of the beach at the harbour end, was a pavilion, which was a dance hall and concert venue. It had a wide balcony around it at the first floor level. For a few pence you could go up there to stroll around or relax on a deck chair to enjoy refreshments. Some mornings, the dance band would set up and play to entertain us. There was a popular tune at that time called 'Stormy weather'. They would play it, and the trumpeter would give a solo, which sounded great as it echoed around the harbour.

Occasionally, a small white van would appear, and park between the harbour and pavilion. The driver would then lift a flap on the side of the van to reveal a cut away working model of a colmine. The lift would be working, skips of coal moving along the galleries, men digging at the coalface, and at the bottom, a man lying under a heap of coal, jerking one leg. Having collected an audience, the driver proceeded to explain the workings of a colmine. Finally, he told us that the man lying under the coal was himself. After being rescued and recovering from his injuries he had been pensioned off, and had made the model to support himself. At this point, he collected donations from the people, and closed the van.

Further along the beach, there was a breakwater, and alongside it, an area of the beach fenced off. There were rows of seats facing a stage with curtains and a backstage section. This was the domain of the 'Jolly Yachtsmen', a lively and very popular group, who entertained holidaymakers every afternoon, with singing, dancing, and acting. You had to buy a ticket to get a seat; even so you could still get a fair view of it by standing along the promenade.

Across the road backing the promenade, the council had laid out an attractive park. They had also constructed a waterfall with appropriate plants, and carp swimming around. We always stopped to admire it, especially at nightfall, when it was illuminated by coloured lights.

## Excursions from Ramsgate

The closest place to Ramsgate was Pegwell Bay. Transport to there was by a big cart called a Brake. They had low sides and a row of seats down each side, and a striped canvas roof with rolled up curtains in case of rain. I would say that they probably held twenty people. There would be around half a dozen parked along the harbour side. They were pulled by two strong carthorses. The first part of the journey was up a long steepish hill. The council eventually introduced regulations controlling the horse's working time and load. Once up the hill we moved along the cliff top road to a hotel at Pegwell Bay. This had a big courtyard where refreshments were served, and children could play. The courtyard had cloisters around it, which sheltered a variety of slot machines at a penny a time. Some were the type where you fired a ball bearing to make it fall into a hole with a good score resulting in your penny returning. Others were dioramas, which a penny would cause to operate, like a circus ring with clowns, or a horse race, etc. I must have been a horrible child, since the one I recall most clearly was a hanging. At the back of the courtyard, at the cliff edge, was a wooden staircase that zigzagged down to a fascinating beach dotted with pools harbouring little fish, shells, and seaweed. Then it was zigzag up again with our treasured collection of shells and pebbles, to be hauled back to Ramsgate.

In the opposite direction from Ramsgate, is Margate, another seaside resort. Its main attraction to us was that it had an amusement park called 'Dreamland', with roundabouts, roller coasters, ghost train, bumper cars (my favourite), and all the usual sideshows, not forgetting ice cream and fairy floss.

A more relaxing and educational coach outing was to Canterbury where we browsed around the cathedral with its peaceful atmosphere, whilst admiring the stained glass windows, and absorbing its history, learning about Thomas a Becket.

We even got as far as Hastings on another trip to explore the ruins of Hastings Castle, and stroll through the old town where the fishermen lived, evident by their nets hanging up to dry or be repaired. Here we are with our parents in the castle ruins, circa 1930. This photo was taken by our Aunt Emma, on her Brownie box camera.



## Southsea

Another holiday was spent at Southsea near Portsmouth. I wasn't very impressed on the first day, as the sky was grey, and all I could see was an endless stretch of grass. It did improve though, and we were able to visit Southampton, where we had a guided tour of a new White Star liner. Then, another day there was a boat trip around Portsmouth harbour, cruising past imposing naval vessels, and Nelson's flag ship: HMS Victory.

## Clacton on sea

The next two years holidays were spent at Clacton on sea. This was in Essex, north of the Thames River. Not such a nice town as Ramsgate, but there were more places to see in the hinterland. The beach was soft sand but narrow. When the tide came in people would be moving their deck chairs back. The pier was good; it had all the usual pier things. The most outstanding was a theatre where, each afternoon, they had a show which included a talent quest for children to show off their abilities, followed by a vote for the best one.

There were two Martello Towers along the coastline, remnants of a defence against a French invasion in days gone by. One had been restored and fitted out as it might have been.

## **Flatford Mill**



A very picturesque bus trip took us to Flatford Mill on the river Stour, an old water mill which is now a museum and craft shop and to an old cottage known as Willy Lots cottage. The floor had quite a slope at one end. You could look over it then, but now it is a heritage building, and occupied. The countryside is pretty with a pleasant walk along the river. The artist, John Constable was famous for his paintings of this area, including the water mill, scenes along the river, and the surrounding villages.

## **Holidays at home**

This may have been the last holiday that we took as a family, as my sister and I were entering out teen year, and would soon be starting work. Of course we still had days out as a family. Southend was still on our list. Kew Botanic Gardens was very popular. Being on the west side of London, made it a long journey, but it was well worth it, there was always a beautiful selection of plants, in the open or in the glasshouses. Just being there was relaxing. We also never tired of going to the London Zoo in Regents Park where we would often see grey squirrels as we walked through. Sunday was a good time to stroll through Green Park and along the lake to Buckingham Palace. It was very colourful, with ducks on the lake, people and children moving around, or just sitting to admire the ducks while being entertained by the band music.

Then there was Aunt Jennie and Uncle Jim to visit in London. Occasionally we would catch the train to Kettering to spend a day with Aunt Ada and Uncle Harold, and our three cousins.

## **Spending time with my pals**

Being school holiday, there was still four weeks left to fill in. There were matinees at the cinemas with 'Laurel & Hardy', 'Tarzan', and 'Tom Mix' on his white horse, rounding up cattle and outlaws. I am sorry that you have missed the joy and excitement of all these films. You will just have to Google it, or whatever it's morphed into. These and other things

I did were shared with my mates, Reg Powley, and Phil Dormer. Luckily, we all shared much the same tastes.

Sometimes our mothers gave us sandwiches and a bottle of drink each, and enough money for a return ticket to Chingford Station to spend the day hiking through Epping Forest.

In those days you could get a 1/- (one shilling) all day ticket on a bus or tram to go sightseeing around London. It was a cheap day out for us. We would either go exploring the City, or mostly, to the museums at South Kensington. Firstly, to the Natural History Museum to say hi to the Diplodocus Dinosaur skeleton in the entrance hall. A popular character, a mere 26 metres (82 feet) long. It was a place that you could visit time and again, there were so many fascinating things to see and learn about.

No less interesting was the Science Museum, a short distance along the road. It had an area where children could learn the basic principles of physics. There was one display where you looked through small windows in the side of a long box that held a number of mirrors, prisms, and magnifying glasses. By turning handles, you could rotate them individually to see what effect they had on a narrow beam of light projected from one end of the box. Most interesting to boys, were models that could be operated by pressing a button or turning a handle. I remember being yelled at by an attendant when I was trying to see how a car gearbox operated by putting it into reverse at the wrong moment, thereby making a loud crash. We got thrown out of that particular room. There were five floors of exhibits that demonstrated almost every aspect of science at that time.

Occasionally we would walk up to the top of High Street to Church Hill. This area was also known as Walthamstow village. There we would browse through the Walthamstow museum. This had been built in 1730, and was originally the workhouse built to accommodate elderly and infirm people unable to support themselves. There was no pension in those days, so they had to earn their food and shelter by working for whoever owned the building, usually a religious organisation. In due course, with the improvements in welfare and the introduction of pensions, the building was converted into a museum featuring the history and growth of Walthamstow. Its star attraction to us was the Bremer car built by an engineer named Bremer in 1892, the first car in London. Also in the area is a timber-framed house built in the 15th century. Alms houses and the parish church of Walthamstow with an old graveyard, mark the origin of the borough of Walthamstow. All these are now on the heritage list.

In case this all sounds a bit too intellectual, we still played street games, board games or Meccano indoors, or just did our own thing.

Having been born, raised and worked there, I still consider myself a Walthamstowite, and have been able to visit friends there on three of my four trips back. Now, dictated by 'progress' we are drifting apart, and it is all becoming a memory.

## **Street Games**

There were about two-dozen children in our street. I had five particular friends who lived close by, and my sister had two or three girlfriends.

The boys favourite game was football, (soccer in Australia), which we would play with a tennis ball. Goalposts were whatever came to hand. There were no rules to speak of; anybody could join in at any time. The girls were mainly occupied with skipping, hopscotch, rounders and dolls.

There was very little traffic, as few people had cars in those days. There were two motorcycles and sidecars, one small car, and a small flat top truck. The only regular traffic was the daily baker and milkman, and the weekly dustcart.

Several of us had scooters. I had a shop bought one with rubber tyres. Some of the boys made their own from two lengths of thick timber, using old ball bearings for wheels, scrounged from the local garage. These made a shrill metallic noise as they rolled along the footpath. The area was generally pretty flat, but we were lucky to have a hill nearby, where an embankment had been built years ago to form a reservoir. We would congregate there to see who could coast down the hill and travel the furthest, or who could go the fastest. There were several billy carts too, their owners vying for the honour of having the fastest and best looking.

Other games varied with the season. There would be marbles and flicking cigarette cards, yo-yos, and whip tops. These were wooden tops that you started with a piece of string tied to the end of a stick. The string was wound around the top, then the stick was flicked smartly causing the top to start spinning, it was then kept going by flicking it with the whip.

In the autumn every boy had a collection of conkers. These were chestnuts that had been dried hard, and had a hole drilled through them, then suspended on a length of string. One boy would hold his conker suspended, while the other would swing his on the end of the string aiming to hit the other conker and break it. They would take turns at this until one conker broke. Then the winner would move on to play other boys. A conker was graded by how many others it had broken. Its owner gained a high level of prestige.

# Chapter 11

## Transition to Work

There was no such thing as work experience then. Shortly before school finished for us, a clerk came from the employment bureau. He sat at the teacher's desk, and then asked us each in turn what job we wanted when we left school. There were a lot of aspiring motor mechanics and electricians. Other requests were clerical work, and a toolmaker. The truth of the matter was that most of us had no real idea of what we wanted to do. There was never any discussion in class about employment possibilities, as there is now.

### Starting work

The end of schooldays was fast approaching. It was 1934, and I turned 14 in May. I don't know how my schoolmates felt about it. I suppose the general idea was to get out of school and into a new world. I don't recall any discussion amongst ourselves about what we wanted to do after we left school, I think the general idea was to go out and find any job, preferably one that paid well. The two boys at the top of the class wanted to get clerical positions, they certainly had the aptitude for it. My mate, Phil Dormer was very good at woodwork and went straight into a shop fitting business.

It was possible to go on to high school, but I don't recall any going from my class, although we were the A grade. You had to sit an entrance exam to get in. I think there were four high schools, two for boys and two for girls, to cover the whole area.

I chose electrician, although I really hadn't much idea of what I wanted, except that I wanted it to be a technical job as I had always been interested in science. My favourite reading was science fiction or books about scientific subjects. It wasn't until after the war that I achieved that aim by joining the then British Post Office Telephones, a profession that I remained in until I retired. I did begin a course in chemistry at evening classes, but that was cut short when I joined the army.

Finally came the day when school finished for the summer holidays. We were given our exercise books to keep, and the headmaster gave a farewell speech, and that was it. I kept in touch with my mates for a while, but eventually we all went our separate ways.

This was August 1934, and Dad's firm closed down for two weeks summer holiday, so as we usually did, we all went to Ramsgate.

After our return I went to the labour exchange to sign on. There was nothing to offer at that time, but the government had started up a school for unemployed youths so we were sent there for one or two days a week. There were four classes. The main one was where we were taught to write job application letters. Then there was a carpentry class, shoe repairing, and one where they had pieces of a car laid out around the room. Also there was a gymnasium. I did the writing and carpentry, and the gymnasium, but never got into the other two.

We would call in to the labour exchange from time to time. If there was a job going they gave you a card with the firm's address. If you didn't get the job, you returned the card. One card I got was to an engineering firm. There was a big sign over the door, 'Crockett Bros, Engineers'. I was accepted, and told to start on Monday.

Monday came and I began my first day's work. There were several other boys starting at the same time, one of whom I knew. The place was a big barn-like structure

filled with lathes, drills, and other engineering machinery. It had the looks of being an interesting job, but I was soon disillusioned.

All the engineering work was done by the two brothers. We boys were employed on their sideline, which was making propelling pencils and electric combs. My job was to put a screw thread on one end of a plastic tube, then operate a machine to push the propelling mechanism into the other end. Another boy would insert spare leads in the top, screw the cap on, put the pencils through a polishing machine, and then pack them in a box. Other boys were engaged in making the electric combs.

An electric comb consisted of a plastic tube large enough to hold two D cells. A slot was cut along its length, into which was inserted two metal combs parallel to one another with insulation between them. The positive end of the battery was connected to one set of teeth, and the negative end to the other set. The theory being that when you combed your hair the current would flow between the two sets of teeth and through your hair, thereby making it look and grow better. I have never seen any scientific proof of that, but they were very popular at the time.

We were paid 16/- per week. Allowing for inflation over the years, in 2004 this equals £45.19, at the 2013 exchange rate, \$AU 113.55. I believe that some firms paid up to £1, (20/-). I doubt that this would get you far these days, but one has to take into account the standard of living at that time. I recall that my father bought me a new raincoat, just after I had started, which he told me cost a lot more than my first weeks' wages.

The place was heated by a large coke-burning stove at one end of the room. In the winter we would sit round it at morning tea break and talk. One of us would clean out the stove and light it each morning. One day when it was my turn, I must have packed it too tightly, as I only succeeded in filling the place with thick smoke, and we had to open all the doors and windows until it cleared.

At midday we went to the local café for dinner. It had a homely atmosphere and served good meals. It was good to get out of the factory atmosphere for a while, and swap yarns with acquaintances from other firms.

At Christmas the firm closed for the holidays. At the end of the first week after our return, we were given our marching orders. It seems that we had been engaged on a contract that had finished at Christmas. So it was goodbye and back to the Labour Exchange.

My second job was with a furniture manufacturer named Harris Lebus. This was a huge factory, with its own railway siding at the rear, where truckloads of timber were delivered. I was employed in the sawmill, which was right at the back of the factory. To get there from the front entrance one entered a long hallway that ran right through the centre of the building from front to rear. On the left of the hallway were workshops where the furniture was assembled on small flatbed trucks. These were then towed across the hallway into the staining and polishing workshops. One's progress along the way was frequently impeded by a line of trucks carrying articles of furniture across to the finishing shops.

In the sawmill, timber was cut into the necessary sizes for the various articles of furniture. My job was to move the truckloads of cut pieces into a holding bay, from where they were transported to the appropriate department.

As you can imagine, this wasn't a very inspiring job, so after a few weeks I found a job in a printing ink factory. Here, I was in the packing and delivery department. Not much

opportunity for advancement, but it was more interesting, as I was often in the grinding mill picking up orders. The room was filled with rows of machines making printing ink in a wide range of colours; you could almost say that it was a rainbow factory. I was employed as a courier carrying documents between the works and the head office in the city each morning by bus. In between I would deliver small urgent orders to printers around London. I liked this, as I was able to see other suburbs of London. The down side of this was that I sometimes got lost, and tended to dally and look around. After three months or so of this, I was fired for taking too long on these trips. So there I was, on the road again.

The next job lasted for three years. It was more interesting, with better pay, and a good group of people. This was with William Britains, makers of toy soldiers, farm, and zoo animals, all made from lead. I was in the casting room. This might not sound much, but in fact it took quite a bit of experience to get the toys just right.

There were forty of us in the room, in four rows, each pair of rows facing one another. We sat on stools in front of a crucible containing molten lead kept hot by a gas ring beneath it, and mounted inside a metal box, for safety. The front of the box had an opening through which we ladled out small quantities of lead, and the rear of the box had a larger hole for topping up the crucible.

On one side of the room there was a long bench where the toys were checked for rough edges and faults. On the other side were two large vats full of molten leads, which were screened off from the room by sliding doors for safety purposes, also to keep the heat in. These were attended by a workman wearing a thick leather apron and leather gloves. When we required a refill, we would yell out and he would fill a large ladle from the vat and bring it down between the rows and fill our crucibles from the rear. The room behind these was a storeroom and also had a pile of lead ingots. As one vat got low the attendant would refill it with ingots and switch over to the other. This was a hot job and the ingots were heavy, but the attendant was quite a hefty man, and blessed with a happy temperament. Each of us had a hand mould, hinged at the bottom, and designed for whichever item we were casting. The bottom of the mould rested in a recess in the top of a circular block of lead, so that we could swing it easily back and forth. The toy was cast by holding the mould horizontal and pouring the required amount of lead into the spout, waiting a second or two, and then tipping the mould over to the right to catch the excess lead in the ladle, which was placed back in the crucible. Finally we opened the mould and removed the item with long nosed pliers. The mould was heated on a gas ring from time to time to keep it at the right temperature, to ensure that the lead flowed freely into all the nooks and crannies. It was also brushed clean now and then, with a wire brush and painted with stove blacking to prevent the work from sticking. The timing and temperature of the casting was a matter of experience and varied with the item being cast.

Beginners were started on solid items, like movable arms, baby farm animals and small wheels. They then graduated to the larger hollow item, like soldiers and horses. This took a bit more care. One had to tip out the excess lead at just the right moment, so that the toy wasn't too thin and perhaps have holes in it, or too thick and waste lead. Some things were quite complex, and required a pin pushed through the mould to allow for pieces to be added later, like an axle, flagstaff, or spear. The mould had to be adjusted correctly too, to ensure that the lead didn't leak out of the casting chamber, leaving a ridge around the toy.

There was a big flurry of activity prior to the coronation of King George VI in 1937, when we were turning out the gold Coronation Coach, plus Household Cavalry, Guardsmen, and Military bands. The Coronation Coach was a very complex piece of work, and required a special type of mould. Only the best and most experienced workers were employed on this. I was one of a group turning out guardsmen. We were all quite proud of

our efforts, as the finished carriage with its horses and guardsmen correctly painted and set up, looked very imposing.

Now, in this modern age all things are plastic, and lead is rightly frowned upon, making toy lead soldiers antique collectors' pieces. So I feel that I can consider myself an exponent of a long lost art.

The work was piecework. We were paid by the gross (144), although the management made it 150 for ease of calculation, the rate of pay being determined by the complexity of the item. This ranged from 6d for the simplest up to around 2/- for things like Cavalry. The boxes of toys were then checked and taken to the storeroom. The toys were painted and boxed in another much larger part of the factory staffed by girls, and separate from our section, their entrance being at the other end of the building. From time to time girls would come through to the storeroom to pick up a batch of toys required for the finishing line. We weren't allowed to talk to them, but they would occasionally drop off surreptitious notes to the person at the end of the bench, which were passed along to their boyfriends.

At that time we were working a five and a half day week. Some firms were beginning to switch to a five-day week. My mate heard of one such firm that was advertising for workers, so we took time off and went to try our luck, and were both accepted. It was a great feeling, not having to work on Saturday morning.

The firm was ASEA Electric, a big Swedish company that made industrial transformers and electric motors. The conditions were much better as they had their own canteen, and we got two weeks paid holiday. In those days not many firms gave holiday pay. In this case the firm deducted a percentage of our pay each week, and gave it back as holiday pay. My mate went into the transformer section, and I into the motor section where I was appointed assistant storekeeper. This entailed assembling the material listed for different jobs and delivering them to the work place. I worked here for about two years until we were mobilised.

## Chapter 12

### The Empire Exhibition

1938



*The Tower of Empire.*

The exhibition was opened by King George VI in May 1938 at Glasgow, Scotland. It was set in a golf course on the outskirts of the city, with the Tower of Empire built on the highest point. The tower was 470ft, (143.25m) tall. From the top deck you could see the new Cunard liner 'Queen Elizabeth' under construction. At that time of course the name was a secret until the launching ceremony. Her official title while under construction was 'Hull 552'.

During the summer the LMS railway, which runs from London to Scotland, advertised an overnight excursion to the exhibition. It was leaving London on Friday evening, arriving at Glasgow at 8am on Saturday morning, and returning home on Saturday evening. When my firm closed down for the summer holidays in August, I took advantage of this. Arriving at Glasgow on a bright sunny day, I left the station and caught a tram to the exhibition entrance. This was flanked by two pavilions covering the history of Scotland in one, and the achievements to date in the other, both very interesting. Then on I went along a wide plaza with gardens and fountains along its length, while stopping at intervals to inspect the pavilions of other countries of the Empire: South Africa and other African states, India, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Here and there along the way there were convenient refreshment stop.

At the end of this section, were the Palace of Engineering, and the Palace of Industry. What stood out most in the Palace of Engineering were models of ships, ship's engines, and other maritime machinery. Also heavy engineering like cranes and railway construction. The Palace of Industry was busy with lots of working machines doing things. One that sticks in my mind was filling packets of tea, with small metal fingers popping out to tuck in the ends of the packet. Another had small bottles passing through a machine, being filled, stoppered, and labelled along the way.

I had lunch in a nice restaurant at the bottom of the tower. Next to that was a big shop selling all things Scottish: ties, scarfs, socks, tam-o'-shanters, and kilts. I had planned to buy a tie, but there were so many clans that I found it too confusing. From there I found myself at the bottom of the lift, which soon carried me up to the lowest of the three decks at the top. I then inspected each deck in turn, looking at the view and the items on display. It was easy to see the 'Queen Elizabeth' almost ready to be launched. While there, a Scottish gentleman came up to me and asked 'Would you like me to take your photo?' to which I readily agreed and handed him my camera. He then took my photo with the ship in the background, although it was a bit too far away to show up well. He then returned my camera and said 'Now you take my photo. Here's my address'. Anyway, I took his photo and posted it to him when I got home, but didn't get any reply.

By then the day was almost over, the lights were beginning to illuminate the buildings and fountains. I took one last photo of the tower before heading off to the train and home.

## **Chapter 13**

### **Outbreak of War**

#### **1939**

The 30's decade had been a time of turmoil and political upheaval. The Nazi party in Germany, led by Adolph Hitler had been growing in strength. By 1933 they had become a political party, and Hitler was appointed Chancellor by the then President, Hindenburg. In July 1934 Hindenburg died and Hitler became dictator of Germany. From then on Germany's attitude became more and more belligerent. They began to claim back much of the land that was taken from them after WWI. In 1935 they took back the Saar region which was a heavy industry area. Britain and France did not oppose the move. Germany followed this up by marching into the Rhineland, and began to build up their military strength.

Meanwhile, in the UK in January 1936, King George V died and was succeeded by his eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales, who became Edward VIII. The following December Edward VIII abdicated. The throne then went to his younger brother, the Duke of York, who became George VI.

July saw a civil war break out in Spain between the Nationalist government and General Franco. The Germans were quick to take the side of General Franco, and supported him with their air force, which gave them experience of aerial warfare and caused terrible damage and suffering.

1938 saw tensions increase as Germany annexed Austria. In May, Hitler made an alliance with Mussolini, the Fascist Dictator of Italy. This was called The Axis. They were later joined by Japan who had invaded China. The British Prime Minister, Mr Chamberlain, and the French President, Monsieur Daladier, went to Munich in September to sign a non-aggression pact with Hitler. Chamberlain returned home waving a signed agreement, and declaring, 'Peace in our Time'. Even so, all this time Hitler was making frequent impassioned speeches in the main square of Berlin to ranks of black uniformed Nazis carrying Swastika flags. He declared that the Germans were the supreme race, and that all their troubles could be blamed on the Jews. These speeches were broadcast around the world.

Although he kept repeating that he had no further territorial ambitions in Europe, Hitler annexed three more small states. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, the British Parliament introduced conscription for military service. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, Britain signed a treaty with Poland, pledging to go to their aid if Germany should invade them. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, Germany signed a pact with Russia. This was bad news for Britain as it gave the Germans access to the Russian oil wells. In August the British fleet was mobilised.

September saw the culmination of all the threats and negotiations. Germany and Russia invaded Poland in September. The British Government then gave Germany an ultimatum to get out of Poland within three day. Since they didn't comply, Britain declared war on Germany at 11.00am on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, and on the 11<sup>th</sup> British troops moved into France. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September Russia invaded Poland from the east. So began six years of horror and hardship.

#### **Preparation for War**

During the 1930s Britain and France were advocating a policy of disarmament. At the same time they were preparing for the possibility of war with Germany considering Germany's aggression in WWI, and Hitler's continuing threatening speeches. He accused other nations, especially the Jewish people of causing Germany's economic plight, and

asserted that the Germans were the master race. At the same time they steadily built up their armed forces. France was constructing a line of fortifications, named The 'Magenot Line' along their border with Germany. They did not get agreement with Belgium to extend it along that border to the coast, which was later to prove fatal to their defence. In early 1940 the Germans invaded Holland and Belgium, and then swept south into France in a manoeuvre which they called the Blitzkrieg. Sadly neither countries army was equipped to counter the onslaught, as Germany had more powerful tanks and a more mobile army. Britain at least had started to update their air force. They had built the Wellington and Blenheim bombers. The Spitfire and Hurricane fighters were in production, but had a problem with their propellers. This was resolved by the time the war began. I saw them displayed at the Hendon air pageant, where they flew low over the airfield. I think that the French also had new aircraft, but am not certain.

Although it wasn't made public until sometime after the war ended, the British secret service had obtained a sample of the German code machine called the 'Enigma' from Poland. This was to prove invaluable after the experts had worked out its operation, which took some time and concentrated effort by a group of mathematicians and code breaking experts. This was continued all through the war, and enabled us to intercept and decode a great many orders passed down from their high command, except for one period when the Germans had modified their machines, but this was eventually overcome.

On the home front, all the population was fitted with gas masks, adults, children and babies. We had to go to one of the local schools to be issued with them. They were to be carried around at all times in a small cardboard box fitted with a shoulder strap. In February 1939 air raid shelters were installed. Named Anderson shelters after the then Home Secretary, they were free to all households whose income was less than £5 per week, above that they cost £7. Assembled and installed by the local council, they were made of heavy gauge corrugated iron sections bolted together and buried 1.2m in the ground. The excavated earth was then piled on top of them. The overall size was about 2.5m x 1.4m x 1.8m high. My father put a floor in, a bed at each side and a table at the back and planted flowers on top of it. In March 1941 a strong metal dining table with a strong metal grill at the sides and ends was produced so that people could stay indoors. These were called Morrison shelters after the new Home Secretary. Trenches were dug in parks and school playing fields, eventually being replaced by above ground concrete shelters which were built at strategic locations around the town. The basements of large buildings were also put to use as shelters, and factories built their own to suit their requirements. Sandbag walls also appeared around important buildings like police stations council offices and Air Raid Precaution centres. When the air raids on London began, underground stations were also opened at night.

An Air Raid Precaution (ARP) network was established in 1937. The posts were staffed by air-raid wardens whose duties were to patrol the local area to ensure that householders had blacked out their windows properly to prevent any stray lights from guiding the bombers. Also to render first aid and give preliminary assistance in a bombing incident until the fire brigade, rescue and medical assistance arrived.

In 1936 the British government authorized the making of barrage balloons. These had been used successfully in WWI. And with the outbreak of war imminent, they were located in parks and open spaces all over London. They were 18m long and tethered to a truck by means of a strong steel cable connected to a winch which raised or lowered them as required. The operator was protected by a steel cage. The balloons were kept at a height of about 1500m, to prevent accurate bombing by low flying aircraft. Occasionally one would break loose and sail away trailing its cable over the rooftops, removing roof tiles and chimneys as it drifted along. We soon got used to their presence in the sky, and they eventually became part of the scenery.

Plans for the evacuation of children had been drawn up, and at the outbreak of war they were assembled at schools and taken by bus or train to safe havens in the country. Parents could go and visit them, which was not always easy due to cost and difficulties with reduced services. Over time, many of the children returned home due to loneliness or not being able to adjust to country life. Sadly, in quite a number of instances the children were ill-treated.

I recall at one time a truck cruised slowly along the street, stopping frequently to collect surplus aluminium kitchenware to make aircraft frames. They were doing very well too.

As I have told earlier in this history, all the houses on either side of the street were fronted by a narrow front garden bordered by a low brick wall. On top of the wall was a decorative cast iron fence about 60cms high. Each house had a cast iron gate opening on to the front path. The boundaries of each house were marked by two cast iron rods supported on iron poles. Most houses backed their fence with a privet hedge, some green and some yellow. Then in either '38 or '39 a truck came along accompanied by a gang of men carrying sledge hammers. They then proceeded to remove all the fences and gates and load them into the truck to be taken away and melted down for the war effort. My father replaced them with a paling fence which I painted green.

The factory where I worked had built a reinforced concrete air raid shelter alongside the works. It had several wide parallel corridors with a seat along each side. My part in the preparations was to stick numbers on the wall above the seats which were allocated to the workers. I don't know whether it worked, I was in the army by then.

The newspapers, radio news bulletins, and cinema news reels were always full of the events in Germany and the efforts being made to counter the possibility of war. I had found it hard to believe that any self-respecting nation would go to war, after the horrors of WWI, which was not all that long ago, but of course it was the one thing that the Germans wanted most. Lead by Hitler, a megalomaniacal man who had been a corporal in WW1, his sole ambition was to avenge the defeat of Germany in 1918. He was surrounded by a group of evil men whose lust for power in their particular spheres was equal to his.

## **Mobilisation**

In April 1939 the government brought in the National Service Act. All males aged 20 to 22 years had to do 6 months service and then be on the reserve. As war became imminent, conscription was introduced. Men from 18 to 40 could be called up for service in any of the armed forces. At that point we were given the option of volunteering for a particular unit or being sent wherever we were required. Women were also called up to the auxiliary forces, and then later on they were also drafted into factories doing war work. My sister worked in a factory making carbon paper. That turned out to be essential, for how can you run a war without carbon paper?

Certain industries were classified as being essential, and men working in those were exempt from call up. I was 19 years old at the time, and although my industry was essential, my job as assistant store man was certainly not. I would have been called up and replaced by a woman.

I had a friend who worked in the office who was in the same position. After some discussion with our respective parents, we decided to enrol in the local territorial unit. This



required attendance every Tuesday evening and a month's training camp each year. There was quite a crowd signing on that evening, and we were sent along to the local doctor where we were quickly passed fit, A1. Although we covered a wide social standing, we had the advantage of being well acquainted with the locality, and at least knew some of the men and their home life. The unit into which I enlisted was a searchlight company. I opted to become a searchlight operator, being interested in things electrical. Our job was to illuminate an enemy plane in the beam, then to be joined by two other beams, and track it across the sky, thus enabling a fighter plane to shoot it down. The beam was switched on and off by the searchlight operator, and positioned by a second man at the end of a long arm. He could rotate and elevate the light following instructions relayed over a telephone wire from two men manning a sound locator which could pinpoint the planes position by its engine sound. Two other men called spotters were set some way out on each side, lying back in swivel chairs, watching through binoculars to detect a plane by its exhaust flames. They shouted preliminary instructions to the controller. The light was powered by a mobile diesel generator parked at the edge of the site. Later in the war the searchlight was controlled by a Radar operator seated behind the light, watching a blip on a Radar screen. The aerial was mounted on top of the light.

We all met at the Drill Hall which was located on a large block of land. Here we had basic training and general instruction. Smaller huts were for group instruction and stores, and enough open space was available to set up the searchlight equipment. On training nights the RAF would arrange for a small plane to fly over for us to practice on. In due course we were issued with battle dress uniforms and equipment. We were known as 443 Company. There were two other Companies, 441 and 442 located in adjacent suburbs. Each company had six searchlights each manned by ten men, known as a detachment. Together the three companies made up a Battalion of the Essex regiment. August was the time for us to go off on our four weeks training exercise. This may have been timed to coincide with all the factories closing down for their summer holidays. In true military fashion we were scheduled to move off at 23.59 on a Saturday evening. (That's one minute to midnight). There was much activity all evening loading equipment into the lorries.

The transport to the training camp was provided by a convoy of London buses. Unfortunately their schedule was different to ours, and they didn't arrive until dawn, which meant that we were waiting around all night. A lot of our parents had come to see us off, but the delay meant that they couldn't wait past midnight, so we said our farewells, and they left for home.

After much confusion and passing of orders we were able to board the buses and took off for we knew not where, to eventually arrive at an estate called Milton Park on the outskirts of a small Midland town called Peterborough. We were then kept busy erecting bell tents for the men and marquees for the headquarters, officers, cookhouse, and stores.

There was ample room on the estate to set up our searchlight equipment, and we were soon into training. In our free time we were able to go into town. There were the usual shops and a cinema, also a number of historic buildings and a beautiful Cathedral.

At the end of August, our four weeks of training was almost finished, and we were anticipating returning home. The threat of war seemed even more likely. Then one morning we were told to pack our kits ready to move on. The convoy of buses appeared, and we were off again, this time to arrive near a little village called 'Walpole Highway' in the county of Norfolk, which is on the east coast of England north of London. Once again we were busy setting up camp. In the afternoon the local school children began to line the fence along the road, curious to see what was going on. As we were confined to camp we soon enlisted their aid in going to the local shop to buy bottles of soft drink, sweets and cigarettes, for which they were amply rewarded.

A few days after our arrival we were all called over to the headquarters tent, in front of which was a table holding a radio. It was 11am on Sunday morning, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September and we all stood quietly as the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain broadcast the sad news that we were now at war with Germany. They had invaded Poland with which we had a treaty of protection. The British Government gave the Germans three days to withdraw, which they ignored. At this point the Russians invaded Poland from the Eastern side and the country was divided between the two of them.

As we set about establishing the camp, we were divided up into searchlight detachments, each commanded by an NCO with a crew of eight men to operate the equipment. We were allowed to make up our own crews so that we were friends together. My workmate that I had enlisted with was allocated to headquarters. The next time I met him was well into the war when I was home on leave. He was then an officer. We had time to have a chat and fetch each other up to date, and then went our separate ways. That was the last time I ever saw him.

Lorries began to arrive, each loaded with a searchlight and its associated equipment, and we climbed aboard to be taken to our sites. These were spread out across the countryside, not too close together, often quite remote and away from built up areas. Our aim was to illuminate aircraft flying in from the east, then to get three beams on it and follow it across the sky passing it from one group of beams to another, so that our fighters could see it clearly and shoot it down. This went on until the approaches to London were reached, at which point the anti-aircraft guns took over.

The eastern half of Norfolk is low lying and flat, laced by canals and dykes. It gets very cold in winter and covered in snow. Once we were cut off by snowdrifts and built a makeshift sleigh to tow down the road to meet the ration truck. Fortunately, by this time our tents had been replaced by prefabricated huts.

There were two good towns close by, Kings Lynn and Wisbech, where we were able to spend our free time. There was always somebody willing to give you a lift. At the start of the war, all cinemas and public halls were closed in case they were struck by bombs resulting in many casualties. It soon became apparent that this law was unnecessary, and probably to keep up morale, they were reopened. We frequented them often during our leave. There was one instance in London during the blitz when a dance hall was struck by a bomb.

From going to camp in August until January 1940 we were not given any home leave. Then a roster was set up giving each detachment 14 days home leave depending on circumstances, plus 24 hours local leave each month. This was a very welcome break to be with my family and friends again for a while.

Since we were in the defence force we were not directly involved in any battles but we did our duty as best we could wherever we were stationed. We had to stand by at dawn and sunset in case of surprise attacks. As the days grew longer the stand by period became two hours. During the height of the Blitz we were sent to York in the north of England, and were put to work in a munitions factory cleaning and packing anti-aircraft shells. Fortunately nobody dropped one. It was obviously against the rules, but most of us smuggled in one cigarette, and a couple would have lighters. When the morning break came, everybody headed for the toilet block, which was set well apart from the main building. As you might guess, it was soon full of cigarette smoke. I was a non-smoker prior to the war, but early in the war people and charities would send us comforts, like scarfs, woollen gloves, balaclavas, sweets and cigarettes. I used to give the cigarettes away but eventually decided to try them for myself, although they were hard to come by at times. When we were stationed in India, we were issued with 50 each month. I never smoked very much and finally gave up when our first baby was due.

Apart from a failed attempt by the British to stop the Germans invading Norway, and several naval skirmishes, there was very little action. The newspapers dubbed it the phony war. Belgium had declared itself neutral, which prevented British and French troops from crossing their border, and the French from extending the Maginot Line across to the coast. Then on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, the German army supported by heavy tanks and dive bombers invaded Holland and Belgium, then swept down into France. The Germans called this the Blitzkrieg. By the end of the month the British and French were retreating and the Germans were advancing through France.

The British Prime Minister resigned, and the political parties were formed into a National Government lead by Winston Churchill. The British forces were ordered to fall back to Dunkerque, a seaside town 10 km inside the northern French border. Meanwhile, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, Churchill ordered all boats capable of crossing the Channel whatever their type, to set sail and rescue as many of the allied forces from Dunkerque as possible. The total number rescued including other nationalities was 338,000. All this was done under constant bombardment from German guns and planes. The Germans continued their advance through France. Paris was not defended to avoid widespread damage to the city. France was completely taken over on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. Italy, under the rule of the Dictator, Mussolini, joined forces with Germany and invaded Ethiopia.

Germany then conceived a plan to invade Britain called 'Operation Sea Lion'. First they had to destroy the RAF which was much smaller than their air force. They began by bombing our airfields and radar installations. Since this was in daylight they lost a lot of planes to our recently modernized fighters. This was followed by daylight raids on London. This period was known as the 'Battle of Britain' which culminated in a day long aerial battle of fighter planes and resulted in massive German losses. They then switched to night raids, firstly on London and then on to provincial cities, resulting in widespread damage and great loss of life. These raids lasted for 70 nights, and were known as 'The Blitz'. I had some experience of this when on home leave, sitting in the Anderson shelter in the garden with a background noise of guns firing and the occasional sound of bombs whistling past overhead. It was the one that you didn't hear that got you. Later on a woman who worked in the local Woolworths store moved into the flat beneath us, and we were allowed to spend our nights in the much more substantial shelter.

Due to the possibility of a German invasion, and our units being situated along the east coast, we were shown films and given instructions in sabotage and practiced unarmed combat which was already part of our training. In addition the land 3 miles in from the coast was closed to civilian movement, except for towns and large villages, places where a lot of people had left anyway.

Although it was kept secret until long after the war had ended, the government was eventually persuaded to release information about an underground army that had been established at the start of the war. These men were supposedly members of the Home Guard which was made up of men too young, too old, or unfit for military service. They had basic army training and were mainly used to guard bridges, railways, factories, and other strategic points. In the event of an invasion the men forming this secret force were to go to underground bunkers which had been stocked with food that didn't need cooking, ammunition and explosives. They would wait until the Germans had passed that point, then come out at night to perform acts of sabotage for which they had been thoroughly trained. More information about this can be found in a book titled 'Britain in Mortal Danger' edited by John Warwicker, and published by Cerberus. There is a copy in my bookcase.

Meanwhile, Germany gave up the attempt to invade Britain and swept into Russia on a wide front, almost reaching Moscow. This resulted in the bombing raids being much less frequent. At this stage we were moved back down south to the midland town of

Northampton to resume our searchlight role, where we stayed until after D Day on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944.

Shortly after D Day, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, the Germans launched their flying bomb which they called V1. These were launched from ramps in France and were designed to fly to London at which point the fuel would run out. This was followed by a heart wrenching silence while people below would dive for cover as the bomb silently glided on until it stalled, to crash on to the houses below and explode. I had experienced this situation whilst home on leave, but fortunately not been harmed. I also had them flying above me while on duty. They made a loud throbbing noise as they flew due to the jet pulsing, which earned them the nickname of 'Buzz Bomb'. They were easy to see due to the long flaming jet trailing. We would illuminate them, for the fighters to fly alongside them with the plane's wing tip beneath the bombs wing. This would spoil its aerodynamic lift causing the bomb to stall and crash. These bombs kept coming until our troops had overrun the launching sites. Then on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September the first V2 fell on London. This was a supersonic rocket that arrived without warning and caused massive damage and casualties. Since these had a longer range and mobile launchers it took longer to reach their launching sites.

British and American forces were now steadily advancing through France which soon made searchlight detachments obsolete, so we were all transferred to the Dorset regiment for Infantry training. We were at first billeted in what had been a big hotel overlooking the sea in the seaside town of Hastings in Suffolk. Behind was a wide hilly area called 'The Downs'. Like the 'Good old Duke of York's men' in the nursery rhyme they marched us up hills and marched us down again, the steeper the better! Our Platoon sergeant was a cheerful character. His favourite saying was 'We'll break for a smoke. If you don't have any cigarettes go through the motions'. There was also the usual obstacle course, rifle range practice, and learning about weapons. Then another move to a seaside town further west called Brighton, where we were billeted in a whole street of empty houses. Here, the training went up a notch, crawling under obstacles while instructors fired over our heads, and getting used to guns going off around us. We practiced throwing grenades and studied enemy weapons, and of course we did lots more marching where we stayed out for several days, and practiced manoeuvres at night.

Brighton had been a popular holiday destination, so there was plenty of social life, plus many American servicemen there. They were very friendly, and would give us boxes of their emergency rations. These contained packets of high protein food, sweets, five cigarettes, and several other items, even toilet paper. I can't recall whether we gave them anything in return. They seemed to have everything and their pay was much higher than ours.

Then the day came when we were all assembled in the main hall. The Colonel appeared and congratulated us on our success and proficiency. At this point we were all expecting that we would be sent to France to join the fighting there, but he went on to say that most of us would be sent to India while some would remain behind. He then went on to read out the names of those staying but we could volunteer to go if we wished. This resulted in my mates calling out, 'Come on Art, come with us'. Since I had lived, worked, trained, travelled, and been to the pub with them over the past five years it seemed better to stay with the Devil I knew than go I know not where. I knew that I might be fighting the Japs, but was more concerned about the creepy crawlies in the jungle. I don't know how many others volunteered, probably all. Looking back I believe it was a psychological move to bind us all together.

## **Embarkation**

We were then sent home on embarkation leave. I'm not sure how long for, I think four weeks. Then off on a train, bound for Glasgow where we boarded a troopship which

was a P & O liner named 'Mooltan'. Here we lived for the next six weeks in the hold which had had decks built into it furnished with long tables and forms. Hooks were screwed in the beams to hang hammocks, which in daytime were stowed in racks at one side of the deck. We were woken each morning by the PA system broadcasting, 'Ho! De! Ho! De! Ho! Wake up and stow!' Then you jumped down, rolled up your hammock and stowed it in the rack, washed then back to your table. Meanwhile the orderlies for the day went off to the galley to collect and ration out breakfast or whatever meal it was. After that routines were performed like tidying and cleaning. Then up to the deck for PT exercises and training. The rest of the time was your own for activities such as sunbathing, sleeping, reading, writing letters, playing cards, taking part in games on the upper deck which was marked out for several deck games and quizzes or listening to lectures. There was also a well-stocked library where I liked to browse.

As we neared the tropics we were issued with collapsible stretcher beds and allowed to sleep on deck at night. The ship stopped at Port Said to refuel, and locals selling souvenirs gathered round in boats. You put money in a basket and lowered it down to the boat, then hauled up your purchase. A group of magicians was allowed on board to entertain us, quite good they were too. Then off we went through the Suez Canal, then into the Red Sea. I had a camera and managed to get a few shots. Next, a short stop at Aden, then away into the Indian Ocean, finally reaching Bombay where we disembarked.

As we walked across from the ship to the train carrying our kit bags, the Indian heat hit us. It was like walking in front of a furnace. The carriages were long open cars with seats either side and a platform each end. At the front end was a large galvanized iron box filled with big block of ice for air conditioning. Off went the train, stopping at meal times. Cooks set up their kitchen next to the engine where the driver hooked up a steam pipe to provide heat and hot water for cooking. We all sat around by the line to eat. I think this journey took three days, eventually ending in Poona where there was a big army camp. We had been issued with tropical gear on the boat, so we soon got used to the heat. Then back to work and training. We now became members of a Welsh regiment, 'The South Wales Borderers'. They had already been in action, and had many stories to tell about it. They were very proud of their history. We had been sent to make up their numbers again. They were good men and very friendly, apart from their accent which was sometimes difficult to understand, especially when orders were being yelled, then I just did what the others were doing. The Regimental Sergeant Major was a horror, and the Colonel pretty severe. I don't think he was very impressed by his new intake. They had a Regimental brass band, and our Saturday mornings were spent marching around the barrack square. Poona itself was quite a pleasant place with roadside cafes where we could buy soft drinks and snacks and light meals. Eggs and chips were the favourite. There was also an open air cinema.

Later on we were moved to an area close by a wide river where we trained on landing craft practicing beach landings. It was here that we read in an Indian newspaper that the Americans had dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima, destroying the city and most of the population. Two weeks after, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, which resulted in the surrender of Japan.

Not long after we were transported to the port of Madras to board a tank landing craft and set sail down the coast to Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. From there we sailed east to anchor off the coast of Sumatra, where I imagine we had been destined to invade originally. We were then taken ashore by launch and trucked to Medan.

All the Japanese troops had been rounded up and taken to POW camps, although for some reason there were several living in a house close by that kept bowing to us whenever we walked past. Sumatra then was part of the Dutch East Indies, and our job was to help them re-establish their control of the country. The trouble was that the

Indonesian people had had enough of Dutch rule, and were determined to set up their own country of Indonesia. Although we had distributed boxes of Dutch money, the people refused to use it. Our duty now changed from rescuing the Dutch from the Japanese to protecting them from the Indonesians. There was some sporadic skirmishing between the two races, which resulted in us going on constant patrols and guarding strategic civic buildings such as the Town Hall, waterworks and electricity supply, and doing house to house searches for hidden firearms. On the whole, the people were very friendly, and we got on well with them. There were frequent little coffee stalls in the markets where they made great coffee. Cigarettes were the common currency within the army. Locals would trade us a bunch of bananas for a cigarette. They were also very keen to obtain any service clothing.

# Chapter 14

## Return to Civilian Life

### Demobilization

In due course, details of the demobilization programme based on length of service were circulated. I can't remember much of it, but recall that I marked off the days remaining to our turn. As our turn approached, we were moved to Singapore where we could just look around or do community work, which I chose, helping to fix electricity installations in the barracks. Then came the day when we climbed into trucks to head for the docks, where we boarded a lovely white vessel, 'The Andes', that had originally cruised from Europe to South America. This time we travelled back through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean. It was here that we ran into the northern winter which we found very cold after the tropics. Back in the UK we were taken to a big army camp somewhere up north, living in big huts as warm as toast with all you could eat. Here we were issued with some basic items and went through the paperwork. An officer welcomed us home and asked if we would like to sign on for a further spell in the army. I think there were two enquiries. The next morning we were on the train, finally back to our families.

We had been given 3 months demobilization leave, and I intended to take it all. The first thing we had to do was to get fitted out in civilian clothes. This was at Wembley, a big exhibition and sporting complex on the west side of London. Letters were sent out giving us a date and time for our fittings. Once there, we followed a path through a vast wardrobe where they started with size, colour, and pattern. The next step was to choose a suit, followed by shirt, underwear, tie, socks, handkerchiefs, cufflinks and trilby hat in a choice of colours. I chose a grey one, but only ever wore it a few times. We were allowed to keep our army greatcoat and battledress top for use at work, or we could swap the greatcoat for a raincoat, which I did. It felt strange going home all dressed up; young men everywhere, all looking much the same. I imagine the same applied to the girls, with their khaki skirts and blouses but with much more variety in their dresses I expect. In the meantime I visited relatives and friends, and was able to catch up with my younger cousin who had served in a Signals regiment in France. I didn't go looking for any of my army mates, although I often met one or other of them locally. I mostly enjoyed going up to London and walking around the city and Green Park along the Mall, and occasionally going to one of the cinemas or a theatre matinee.

### Back to work

Prior to the end of the war, the Government announced a scheme for training ex-servicemen to get experience as tradesmen. I went along to the local office and enquired about becoming an electrician, only to be told there was nothing doing in that line. This was a rather surprising statement, considering the need for extensive building work to replace all the houses and commercial buildings that had been destroyed in the Blitz. My job at ASEA Electric was still available so I went back there, this time along with another ex-serviceman, to look after the receiving bay where crates of small components were delivered, to be sent on to the appropriate department as required. We even had a small gantry crane to play with. This was an easy job, though not terribly inspiring. I had been hoping to get something a bit more technical. The down side of this was that I was shut in all day. I would go out walking at lunchtime and not worry unduly about getting back on time, even taking the odd day off. It was on such an occasion that I came across two men sitting on the footpath with their feet in a small telephone cable pit. Between them were the ends of two telephone cables with multi coloured wires fanning out from each. I thought to myself, 'That looks very interesting', and asked them how to get that sort of job, and they gave me the address of the head office of the 'Post Office Telephones' in the City.

So as soon as a suitable time came, I took a day off and went up there to try my luck. I was directed to the appropriate department to be interviewed, and after answering questions about my interests and experience, I was shown a piece of cable and asked to name the colours, which I did satisfactorily. The paperwork came next. I swore allegiance to the King, and I became an employee of 'Post Office Telephones' on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1946 as an adult trainee cable jointer. I was told to report to the foreman in charge of cable jointers at Larkwood telephone exchange, which was in the next suburb, north of where I lived. I then gave my notice in to ASEA, and on the following Monday reported for duty in my new profession. So began a career in telephony which lasted until I retired.

I was put with one of the senior jointers, of which there were two. This one was named Hank. He also had an apprentice trainee who was already quite experienced. Hank, of course had years of experience. His tool kit, which included a collapsible tent and guard rails, was packed into a trek cart and was towed to the worksite by a van. The days started early in summer to take advantage of the daylight hours, when we assembled in the jointers room and the foreman gave out the jobs. We then piled into the van which took us to a cafe in the shopping centre for breakfast. This consisted of thick slices of dripping toast, washed down with mugs of tea. Talk about healthy diets, but I reckon it did us good. Breakfast dealt with, the van took us to our jobs for the day. Once there, the apprentice and I would put up the tent and guard rails to make sure we weren't causing an obstruction, then open the cable pit, and if necessary bail out any water and brush dirt off the cables. Luckily, in England we didn't have to worry about poisonous spiders and snakes. The cables were lead sheathed at that time, and the wires were paper insulated. Hank showed me how to open the cable and identify the pairs of wires, which were identified by coloured bands on the insulation, and how to join and insulate the wires, which I practised in my spare time. Before joining the cables I had to slide a lead sleeve over the end of one of them. Having joined the wires, the lead sleeve was slid over the joint, and each end soldered to its respective cable.

Depending on the type of buildings in the area, the telephone wires could be fed into the building, either underground or from telephone poles erected at intervals along the street. In this case, the aerial gang would run a 20 pair cable from the cable pit up to the top of the pole. This was the next stage in my training. Hank put an extension ladder against the pole up to where brackets were bolted on each side. We each put a wide leather belt round our hips and then I climbed the ladder, with him following me. The brackets at the top of the ladder were spaced to make hand and foot holds. At this point I put the long extension of my belt around the pole and buckled it to make a safety loop, then climbed up to the terminal box. Here, I had to let go of the brackets and let the belt support me, which I did, hoping that I had got the belt on properly. The aerial gang would have run a pair of wires from the house to insulators on the pole, then into the terminal box. My task was then to connect the terminals of the aerial wires to those of the cable. I was very pleased to think that my first venture had been a success. You would normally be too busy to think about your situation. There were two instances where I felt concerned. The first was having to climb a very tall pole next to a railway embankment, the other was climbing a pole with a split in it. I got that job because I was the lightest of the three of us. After a good bit of experience, it was common not to bother with the belt, but to hook one leg around the pole.

At the other extreme, we sometimes had to work down a manhole. These were pits that had a number of different sized cables passing through them, some holding as many as 1000 pairs of wires. Access was by rungs set in the wall. In the case of a large cable two men would work down there, one on either side of the cable. Sometimes we had to call for a petrol driven pump to clear all the water out. If there was snow on the ground, we would have to sweep it away to find the pit.

In due course, my turn came to go on a training course, where I learnt about different types of cables, and handling and joining them, and in the case of large cables plumbing the lead sheathing on. I returned from this as a qualified jointer, and was issued with a basic tool kit in a Gladstone bag. I was then paired with another jointer and we stayed together for the rest of my time as a jointer. One morning when I arrived at the depot, there was a notice on the board, asking for people who were interested in working as technicians in an automatic telephone exchange. So I went upstairs to the local exchange which was on the first floor, and asked the technician there to show me round, which he did. I must say I found it very interesting, just what I wanted. I submitted an application, and then shortly after was called up for an interview, which resulted in me being appointed a trainee technician.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Love and Marriage**

#### **Meeting Hilda**

It was during this time that I met Hilda Turner, my wife to be. This came about in a somewhat roundabout way. We were of course friends with the tenants downstairs, as one should be. Their daughter, Ivy, worked with Hilda's elder sister, Iris. There was also a third lady named Phyllis Young, whose husband was in the Air Force. Ivy lived on her own as her parents had both died pre-war, so the three ladies used to visit each other now and then, and go out together. This was during the war. I was then away in the army, and Hilda was serving in the WAAF. (Women's Auxiliary Air Force), so I never met her until after the war.

My mother died early in 1940. Dad was still working, so my sister Edna, assisted by Aunt Emma, were able to take care of him. Aunt Emma worked in the East End of the City in a workshop, making artificial flowers. Then late in 1940 during the blitz, the building, along with many others, was destroyed. I was on leave at the time, so she asked me to go back with her to see the damage, no doubt for moral support. We found that the whole street had been destroyed. There appeared to be no possibility of the firm starting up again. Since she lived in the cross street at the bottom of our road, she was able to come in daily to do the shopping, and prepare meals for dad and Edna.

The next step in this account came when dad, Edna, and Aunt Emma were invited by Mr and Mrs Turner to dinner on Christmas Day. Dinner in England was then at midday. I don't have any details of that day, as I was still in India, but I can tell you that we had a very good meal, with an extra ration of beer and cigarettes.

#### **Getting acquainted**

In those days it was customary for the menfolk of the household to join their mates at the local pub for a round of drinks and a chat, while the ladies dealt with cooking the Sunday dinner for midday. This was always a roast with baked potatoes, batter pudding, greens, and gravy. There were no frozen vegs in those day so everything was bought fresh and prepared by hand. After I returned from the war, I would go with dad to the local pub, 'The Coach and Horses' to meet Mr Turner, Hilda's father. Not long after we had adopted this routine, Mr Turner came along with his middle daughter, Hilda. I had always been shy with girls, but found that I got on well with Hilda. Following this we would go to their home on Sunday evening to play cards with penny stakes to make it interesting. We were often joined by Hilda's two sisters and their aunt Ethel, a very jolly lady.

#### **Courting**

Cinemas, dance halls, and variety theatres were the main sources of entertainment. The part of the city around Leicester Square, known as the West End, was the location of several of the most palatial cinemas and theatres, and very busy at weekends. In 1948 a film of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' appeared at one of the West End cinemas. The title role was played by Laurence Olivier, a famous English actor who received glowing reports in the papers. I called on Hilda and asked if she would like to join me to see it, to which she readily agreed. It was certainly an excellent film that we both enjoyed, and which served to set our courtship off to a good start. This, of course, led to more visits to the cinema, mostly local, where there was a choice of seven, three within walking distance. There was an excellent choice of films after the war, as British films were becoming more highly regarded for their quality and good plots, with romance, drama, and comedy very popular. We also became members of the music club at the local technical college, which had been

built not long before the war, and had an excellent auditorium which was very popular for travelling shows and orchestras.

Later, when I was working in a telephone exchange, I was on shift work with Wednesday afternoon free, so Hilda and I would go to a matinee at one of the London theatres. We both had bicycles, and on nice days we would go for rides in the country, which was quite close. Also the traffic in those days was much less than it is now.

It was shortly after meeting Hilda that I applied for, and was accepted as a trainee technician in telephone exchange maintenance, and appointed to Stepney Green exchange. It was fortunate that I had a bicycle as it was a good half hours ride, partly through a big park, which made it more enjoyable. In the exchange I was paired with another more experienced trainee to help guide me. It was a pleasant surprise to learn the he too lived in Walthamstow, not far from me. Consequently, Hilda and I became very good friends with Frank Stone and his wife Ena, which lasted many years.

As I said earlier, Walthamstow had a very long market in the High Street with shops and stalls on both sides. In the evening, and on Sundays, it was customary for people to stroll along it window-shopping. This was a popular pastime for courting couples like us, pausing at intervals to gaze into the windows of jewellers, furniture, and dress shops. At the top of the road was a hotel with a comfortable lounge where we would call in for a drink, and on some evenings listen to light music. Not the stuff that's called music these days.

There was the Covent Garden Opera House in the West End which was up-market and quite expensive, although I did splash out on one show: 'Madam Butterfly'. Another more affordable venue was Sadler's Wells in the East End, nearer to home that did opera on a smaller scale, also Shakespeare plays. Our first visit there was to see *La Bohème* by Puccini. A very romantic story, summed up by Mimi singing, 'They call me Mimi', and the romantic exit of Mimi and Rudolph at the end of Act 1. Like most operas it has a sad ending. My other favourite opera was 'La Traviata', again a bit sad. Perhaps the best of all was one we saw early on. This was 'The Marriage of Figaro', a cheerful one this time in which Figaro, the Barber sings a very fast and amusing song.

Hilda had two sisters. Iris, the older one, was on the office staff of the local Woolworth's store, and Doreen worked in a publishing firm in the City. They were both members of the music club. A popular outing in those days was for people to go off on day excursions to the coast, or into the country by coach or train. Sometimes both our families would share one of these trips together. Sunday evenings were often spent playing cards at either of our homes, nothing serious of course, Penny Stakes were the most usual, as it added some interest to the game. We were often joined by Hilda's aunt Ethel, a very jolly lady, who added a spice of humour to the evening. Other outings saw us visiting each other's relatives. Then at Christmas, we were joined by our families to celebrate our engagement. I bought Hilda a diamond engagement ring, and she gave me an eternity ring.

## **Getting married**

Then came the wonderful moment when she named the day; the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1950. Now was planning time, a wedding dress to be made, a new suit for the groom of course, reception, church, photographer, bridesmaids, plus all the other things that make a wedding just right.

Of course, we must not forget that we had to have somewhere to live. This was the hard part in those days after the war, due to the big shortage of accommodation. A lot of newlyweds lived with one or other of their parents. There was Council housing, also the

Government were building prefabricated bungalows, but you had to be in dire need to get on their lists. The alternatives were, touring round the estate agents, advertising in the local newspaper or corner shop, or getting relatives and friends to look out. We did find two rooms over a shop and agreed to an arrangement whereby the shopkeeper would refurbish them and we pay for the work. About halfway through, he changed his mind for some unknown reason. He said he couldn't do it and refunded the money I had given him.

Luckily my aunt Emma was living in a bed sitter, so when I moved out of the family home, she moved in, and allowed us to set up in her place. This was very convenient for us both to get to work, me to the telephone exchange and Hilda to her job in the Ensign Camera factory, assembling camera shutters.



Meanwhile, we found a nice reception hall that would cater for fifty guests, and started making a list and arranging invitations. The ceremony was to take place in St Saviours Anglican Church in Walthamstow. Hilda had been a member of the congregation and the Girl Guides there since her teenage years, and knew the Minister and his staff very well. The wedding dress was made by one of Hilda's Guide friends who was a

dressmaker. The Bridesmaids were my sister, Edna, Hilda's two sisters, Iris and Doreen, and my two little nieces Jean and Hilary as flower girls. We gave the bridesmaids silver Ballet Dancer brooches as mementos and smaller ones for the flower girls. I gave Hilda a gold wristwatch as a wedding present, and she gave me a leather writing case embossed with my initials in gold.



The reception went off very well, with the MC being the Best Man, my friend in the downstairs flat, Eric Young. I didn't forget my speech.

## **Our Honeymoon**

We left for our honeymoon in the evening being driven to Waterloo Station to catch the overnight train to St Ives in Cornwall.

I had booked a comfortable sleeping compartment. When I sat down and pulled the handkerchief from my top pocket a shower of confetti followed.

St Ives is a lovely picturesque little town set on a steep hillside, as many Cornish towns are. The boarding house was named 'Carrack Dhu', which is Cornish, for 'Black Rock'. We spent time either relaxing on the beach or exploring the local beauty spots, including Lands' End, which was then in its natural state, not built up and touristy as now. The highlight was spending a day in the Scilly Isles. We flew from Penzance to St Mary's, the main island of Scilly on a De Havilland Dragon Rapide 6 seater plane. We were not separated from the pilot and could see through the windscreen. Once we were flying straight and level, the pilot started reading a newspaper. The airstrip was grass and appeared to end at the cliff edge, but all went well and we landed safely. Once down, we boarded a bus and were taken for a tour of the island, followed by a very nice lunch where we enjoyed our first taste of mead. Then we boarded a launch to the Isle of Tresco, which is famous for its botanical garden specialising in semi tropical plants not normally found in England. It was here that the guide pointed out a bed of flowers that formed a ball of blooms of either white or blue blossoms at the top of a stalk. He said we wouldn't see them anywhere else. Coincidentally, when we migrated to Australia some years later, we rented a house which had lots of them in the garden. They were called Agapanthus and are common on the east coast. Our honeymoon was a time to be treasured, a time to remember, and a good start to our married life together.

## **Chapter 16**

### **New Home, New Baby**

#### **A place of our own**

We settled down nicely in our cosy room with such of our wedding presents as could be fitted in. We were still able to keep in touch with our families, mine just up the road, and Hilda's 10 minutes walk away. Sadly, during the following winter, the elderly lady who rented us the room, passed away and the landlord gave us notice to quit, so that he could refurbish the flats and relet them. This was a bit of a blow as accommodation was very scarce in those days. Once again luck went our way. Hilda's parents had a builder friend who happened to be doing up a flat for reletting. He agreed to help us out. So, for 'donations' to the builder, the agent and the owner, we were able to move in as soon as the work was finished. I had to lay lino and do some minor work. We were in an upstairs flat but the two flats had separate front doors. The flats were lit by gas. Here again fortune went our way. The tenants in the downstairs flat, where I used to live with my father and sister, were good friends. Eric was the electrician in the local hospital, and he suggested we installed electric lighting. I had had some experience in wiring army huts in India, so would be able to help him. We would have to include the tenants in the flat below us in Brighton Ave. They thought it was a great idea too. Having got permission from the council and the owners, we went ahead and soon had it done, over one weekend.

We had chosen a nice speckled pale blue linoleum for the kitchen. Hilda suggested that it would look better as though it were tiled, so I got down with a long strip of wood, a narrow paint brush, and a tin of cream paint and painted lines to resemble tile grout. I must say, it looked good and I was quite proud of it. The back door in the kitchen led out to an iron balcony from which a flight of iron stairs, with a gate at the top, led down into the garden. I then laid a concrete path along to the end of the garden, where I had erected a tall pole which held the far end of the clothes line and the wireless aerial. My next job was a coal bunker under the stairs. The garden fence between my garden and the downstairs neighbours garden was sagging somewhat, so we got together and replaced it with chestnut fencing. Finally we rounded off our possessions with a radiogram, a must have piece of furniture in those days. This was a cabinet with a lid on top, which held a radio and a record player. The record player had a turntable with a bent spindle and a bracket at the edge. You could put up to six records on it and they would each be played in turn. A new recording system had recently come out so that you could play the old 78 rpm records, made of shellac and easily broken, or the new vinyl type, which were more flexible and played at 33 rpm. The pickup head had a small lever at the end which you turned to use the appropriate stylus.



*28 Brighton Ave. The white front door opened on to a flight of stairs which lead to the upstairs flat where we lived.*

## Exiting news

One evening, when I arrived home from work, Hilda told me the exciting news that she was expecting. There was no way of knowing the sex of the baby in those days, and of course we didn't care. Just to have it happening was wonderful enough. Then came the planning stage: buying baby clothes, a cot, a pram, and other accoutrements required. Then the big decision, what names to choose. I have a feeling that was already decided. Then of course, came breaking the news to our families. The hallway of the flat had only enough room to open the front door, so I rigged up a hook and bracket system wherein I pulled the pram up the stairs three steps and clipped the hook on to the back wheel. Last, but not least, choosing the right wallpaper for the nursery.

Hilda had decided to have the baby at the Salvation Army Mother's Hospital, which was highly regarded. As her time drew near, she was diagnosed with high blood pressure, so had to go into the hospital a week early. I usually travelled home from work by train, but if I caught the bus, it took me past the hospital which was in the next suburb to ours. The hospital had a nicely laid out garden in front, where all the fathers waited, holding bunches of flowers or parcels of clean laundry. We had no difficulty in striking up a conversation, as there was only one subject on our minds. The front door opened at 7 o'clock, not a minute earlier, and then we all raced in along the corridor and up the stairs to our respective wards. Fortunately the rest had improved Hilda's blood pressure, and she was progressing well.

One evening, I arrived in the ward and was surprised to find it empty. The nurse there told me that it was due to be repainted, and told me where Hilda was, and she said that she had had her baby. I blurted out 'She didn't have it yesterday!' Into the ward I went, and there was my smiling wife with little Robert David snuggled in a cot beside her. (I bet you've been busting to hear his name.) I visited them for a few more days until they were both well enough to come home, and for us to settle into our parenting routine. No disposable nappies in those days, they had to be washed and hung on the line to dry. Quite often in wintertime they would be frozen stiff. Then there was the jumping out of bed routine, when baby cried during the night. No taking it in turns, it depended on who

surfaced first, but I must say Robert was a very cooperative little baby. He loved going out in his pram, strapped in of course, and was always interested in what was going on around him, especially in the street market with all the stalls piled with goods, and the vendors declaring their wares.



In due course, he graduated to a stroller, then reins that buckled around his waist and over his shoulders, with a long loop that the parent held in case he ran off. As he grew we chose toys and bedtime stories suitable for his age. There was one story called 'Charlie the Cat' which he was very fond of, and which I pretty well knew by heart. One Christmas we bought him a small sized timber slide. I set it up in the kitchen to make sure it was OK, and then tried it out. It's a good job the back door was closed, or I would have finished up somewhere down the garden, which is a good example of different weights having different kinetic energy.

When he was old enough, we sent Robert to the preschool run by the Anglican Church at St Saviour's, where we were married. We also added a lively little black kitten to our family circle. So there we were a happy trio, Hilda and me, and baby made three. Plus kitty, and of course, the mutual desire to see our family grow.

## Chapter 17

### The Festival of Britain 1951

This was an event held throughout the United Kingdom in the summer of 1951. It was organised by the government to give the British a feeling of recovery in the aftermath of war and to promote the British contribution to science, technology, industrial design, architecture, and the arts. Regional events and exhibitions were held in all the major cities, plus travelling exhibitions. The main one was in London on the south bank of the Thames which had already been devastated by the Blitz. In addition a Festival Pleasure Garden was set up in Battersea Park, upriver from the South Bank. This was very popular because it was dedicated to fun and happiness, including all the usual fairground rides, bumper cars, roundabouts, and switchbacks. Each day was dedicated to a London borough. Busses were parked at strategic points across the borough. Having loaded their passengers they all converged on Battersea Park, returning later in the evening with tired, happy passengers. Our day of course, was 'Walthamstow Day'. It was at the Pleasure Garden that we saw our first doughnut making machine. We bought them six at a time, threaded on a stick. They were very popular. The final item each evening was a firework display which concluded with a long piece of fuse tied to a frame which, when lit, spelt out the name of that night's borough, in our case 'Walthamstow'.



Another day both families got together to see the Festival of Britain exhibition. This time we went by train from Walthamstow to Victoria Embankment where there were two Bailey bridges set up by the army to get visitors from north London across the river and into the exhibition. We started at the Dome of Discovery, at that time the largest dome in the world, which showed off the scientific and technical developments in Britain over the years.

As we entered the dome we were confronted by a long, up escalator, along with a sign that said 'Up to outer space', so, up we went. Here there were photographs of the stars and planets, along with astronomical equipment dating from Newton to radio telescopes. One display showed a screen which was connected to a radio telescope. This was sending a signal up to the moon where it was reflected back to Earth causing a blip on the screen. This took about two and a half seconds. Further along in the dome we were

introduced to physics and chemistry, from chemical reactions up to nuclear physics. Progressing round the dome, we studied the weather, the sea from surface to the seabed, geography, and geology. This included the Polar Regions. Here there was a mock-up of an Antarctic explorer's camp, with two men dressed in furs, working around the campsite watched over by two beautiful huskies. This brought us to the exit and the next pavilion of the exhibition.

Please bear in mind that this goes back 64 years, so memories have faded somewhat. We must have browsed through a lot of pavilions. The home and gardens had the most attractions that we could relate to. We saw our first pressure cooker and electric cake mixer, plus a lot of nice furniture and light fittings. The 'Lion and Unicorn' pavilion was good, covering the history of the U K. I think it was in this pavilion that I saw an interesting feature. The back wall of the foyer was covered in a timber framework divided onto sections. Each section was filled with matches with brightly coloured heads, so that one only saw the heads. The final result was a geometric coloured pattern. The description at one side of the frame said that there were 1,000,000 matches. I thought it was very striking.

## **Chapter 18**

### **Another Move, Another Baby**

We decided that a holiday would be a good thing, so we chose to spend it at Teignmouth, a seaside town on the south coast of Devon. We also invited my father to come with us in view of the help he had given us in the past. We packed our bags, including baby gear for Robert. Then, leaving the house keys with Hilda's mother, we set off to catch the train from Waterloo Station to Teignmouth. On arriving, we were greeted by the landlady and who served us afternoon tea. We then settled in and relaxed till dinnertime.

The house was a two story timber building, and was very comfortable. It had a large garden with magnolias in bloom, and a good view over the sea. After breakfast next day, we went for a stroll round the town and hired a small pram for Robert. Some distance behind the town is Dartmoor, which is a national park now, quite rugged in places and popular with hikers. We went on a bus tour of the area, and walked one of the easier trails, followed by lunch in a picturesque little village. Another trip took us to Cheddar Gorge with a conducted tour through the caves. Robert's favourite outing was of course to the beach, building sandcastles, enthusiastically assisted by dad and granddad, then splashing in the sea to rinse off the sand. Other trips were to Wells to see the Cathedral with its imposing front, Bristol, and the north coast of Devon. All in all it was a very happy and relaxing fortnight.

Back home there were unfinished projects to catch up on, but the most important and pleasing news was that Hilda was pregnant again.

Hilda had an old school friend who had married some time before us. She and her husband lived close by. Their married name was Emmins, but I can't recall their first names. They had two small boys and a golden retriever dog. When we were all in the same room, it was somewhat crowded. We used to visit each other occasionally for an evening chat, or to listen to music on the radiogram. They owned their own house, which was a nice terrace house with the living area downstairs, and three bedrooms upstairs. One evening they told us that they were moving, and asked whether we were interested in buying this house.

We were interested of course, as that was our long term goal for which we were saving, but it was doubtful that we had enough for a deposit yet. Anyway we applied to the local building society, and they granted us a loan, which was good, but not quite enough. Fortunately my father stepped in and helped us out, which enabled us to go ahead. We made arrangements with him to pay the loan back in monthly instalments.

Once the formalities were completed, we moved in, in April 1954. I can still see the place with the furniture mostly in position, with odd pieces and boxes stacked anywhere. For a break, I plugged in the radiogram and put on a 12" 78 record which took 10 minutes to play. We got it all sorted out and Robert tucked into his cot, with us following not long after. From then on there was plenty to do, making minor alterations, painting and wallpapering. This was followed by me being loaned an extension ladder to paint the outside of the house. I painted the front door with glossy black enamel paint and tiled the front step. I must say that at the end, I was very proud of my work. I was recently able to see the house on Google Earth, March 2012, and found it still looks much the same.



*28 Chelmsford Road, Walthamstow. The house with the black front door, on the left of the photo.*

Hilda was almost due with our second baby. This time we had a bit of experience behind us. Robert now had his own bed, so we had a cot to spare among other things. It seems that our new baby was as keen to meet us as we were to welcome him, as we had to call the ambulance early in the evening. I learnt next morning that Hilda had only just made it to the delivery room. Now we had two sons, the second one we named Paul Richard. Both had their own individual traits and looks. Robert had light ginger hair, and Paul had dark hair. They had good temperaments, and generally got on well together as they grew up. At first we read them stories to suit their ages, but later they were both able to follow the same plot.



Shortly after we had moved in, my sister Edna married David Ley at St Michael's Church in Walthamstow, where our parents had married. David was a great help to me as he had been trained as a carpenter. A second wedding was celebrated when Hilda's elder sister Iris married Gus Margrie. Gus was a truck driver. He had started his working life driving a steam powered truck. He certainly had some interesting stories of his experiences to tell. His favourite account was being fined for speeding, exceeding 15 mph-24 kph.

## Chapter 19

### Working in the City

On considering the next chapter of this account, I find that my mind is a mishmash of memories. One that I recall as not being very pleasant was the London smog. The government released a lot of cheap coal on the market, known as slack in the trade. This was small pieces of coal mixed with a lot of coaldust left over from the good stuff which was exported. We were told to put a layer on top of the fire in the grate at night, so that it would gradually burn through and be a good fire in the morning. The downside was, that this produced a great deal of smoke that built up in a layer over the city. This then combined with the moisture in the air to make heavy damp soot, which also generated sulphur dioxide which somebody termed SMOG, ( **SMOKE + FOG**). This is what it became known as from then on. This considerably reduced the sunlight by day and the streetlights at night. Traffic crawled and buses stopped running at night. Trains were reduced to crawling at 5mph/8kph. My journey to and from work was by bus to the station, then the underground to the city. When the bus was unable to run, I had quite a long walk home from the station. Our clothes took on a dirty grey colour. The sulphur dioxide caused widespread respiratory trouble in sick and elderly people and young children. This smog lasted 5 days, and it was estimated that there were over 4000 deaths in the Greater London area.

There were other smogs, but this was by far the worst, which prompted the government to introduce the Clean Air Act in 1956, creating smokeless zones. It was during one of these that Robert got sick. The doctor advised us to keep him inside in the warm. So for several nights we took it in turns to sleep near him in the lounge, warmed by a fire with proper coal. We decided to look into moving out of London, to one of the smaller towns that were being established on the outskirts. I enquired about a transfer from our personnel department and was told, 'Yes, it is possible, but you will have to wait for around three years'. At that time I was on a five week shift roster. When it came to my turn to work on a Sunday, I would walk from Liverpool St Station, through the City to St Paul's opposite the Faraday Building, about 15 minutes. I noticed that the footpath was covered in a fine gritty dust, there being hardly any traffic or pedestrians at that time of day to stir it up. This led me to the conclusion that, during the week we were breathing this stuff in, plus exhaust fumes, so it's no wonder that so many people have bronchial trouble.

Shortly after getting back to work, another technician and I were sent to an exchange in the City, to help with a project to modify their equipment. This turned out to be a good thing, as when the job was finished we were asked if we would like to transfer to their staff. We both said yes. This was in the Faraday Building, the headquarters of the telephone service, situated in Queen Victoria Street in the City of London, between St Paul's Cathedral and the River Thames. It contained several exchanges, either serving the city or long distance lines to other parts of England. I was allocated to 'Toll A' exchange which handled calls from London to the south coast covering a distance of 60 miles/ 100 km. Calls in the opposite direction were handled by our neighbouring exchange, 'Toll B'. The exchange on the floor above us serviced the rest of England. This was a manual exchange staffed by female operators. The equipment in these exchanges was more advanced than the local exchanges, and meant more training courses. In addition, I attended evening classes at technical college to study for a City and Guilds telephony certificate. I passed three years out of five, before I migrated to Australia. When I went for my job interview in Sydney, they seemed to be quite impressed.

The thing I liked most about working there was that I could go out in my lunchtime and explore the City. I must confess that I didn't always get back to work on time. Sometimes I would go into St Paul's to look around or sit quietly. There is a flight of steps across the front of the Cathedral which terminates at a wide flat area in front of the

Cathedral entrance. On Wednesday lunchtimes, a brass band would assemble here, either military or civic, occasionally from another country, and play for an hour to the people gathered on the forecourt below. I could also stroll along Victoria Embankment, which ran from Blackfriars to the Houses of Parliament, too far to walk in a lunch hour. At that time trams were being phased out in London. The last remaining route had Victoria Embankment as part of its run. A special tram ran back and forth along this section, and tickets issued for this journey had 'Last Tram in London' printed on them. I have kept one as a souvenir.

My time at the Faraday Building opened up my outlook on life. It was easy to get to work by catching a train from the local station to the terminus, Liverpool Street Station. I then had the option of catching a bus or walking to St Paul's. The job was interesting and my workmates were a friendly crowd. On the next floor was an excellent cafeteria with a selection of two or three meals at lunchtime. Above that again was a roof garden where we could relax, weather permitting of course.

I joined the Postal Institute there, and the camera club where we did our own processing and enlarging, and also had the use of a studio. We were also allowed time for visits to factories and public venues to widen our experience. Outstanding visits were a behind the scenes at Covent Garden Opera House, and the newly opened Royal Festival Hall, which put on a wide variety of concerts and shows. A cigarette factory and a brewery were others. An especially interesting visit for me was to my old workplace at ASEA Electric, where I had worked pre-war.

I was later elected to the Postal Institute committee, and was responsible for distributing technical magazines on loan to other members in our department.

Whenever possible, I liked to go out exploring London as far as I could cover in the time available, and sometimes a bit farther I must confess. There was St Paul's close by, and several other Wren churches in the area, two or three of them burnt out shells due to the air raids. There was the Guild Hall with its own museum and art gallery, where I first became interested in art. There was also the Stock Exchange, the Law Courts and the Victoria Embankment. During the air raids, the Germans had concentrated on destroying the docks area and the City, so there were large areas of nothing but gaping cellars, with some cemented in and filled with water to make emergency water tanks for the fire fighters. On the far side of St Paul's, a large area had been cleared, and had become a very interesting open air market where I liked to browse. At that time a song called 'Sixteen tons' was top of the pops list and played frequently and loudly over the market's PA system. It is still on my favourites list. It went 'You load sAnother outstanding thing occurred in 1952. Ball pens appeared on the market. They were very popular. When the ink ran out, you took the pen back to the shop. The assistant would then take it into the back room and return with a freshly filled pen. Later, I saw a stall keeper do the same thing in the street market. He had a vertical stand on which he clamped the pen to the top of a tube connected to a cylinder of ink, then he pressed a lever which forced the ink up into the pen. Eventually this system was abandoned, and you had to buy a whole new pen. Considering the thousands of pens that must be used and thrown away daily, I wonder why some method of recycling the plastic could not be used, for the sake of the environment.

## Chapter 20

### A Step Forward

Hilda had a cousin, Grace Clements, who also lived in Walthamstow not far from us, with her husband, Jim and her Aunt Nell. Jim was a steward on the P & O steamship line, sailing between England and Australia. Jim was about to retire and he and Grace had decided to migrate to Sydney, Australia, accompanied by their two daughters and their Aunt Nell.

Aunt Nell kept in touch with Hilda's mother to tell us all of their progress. It seems that they settled down very well. One point that stood out was that it got very hot at times, and there were lots of flies. Aunt Nell did babysitting from which she earned enough money to pay for a trip back home.

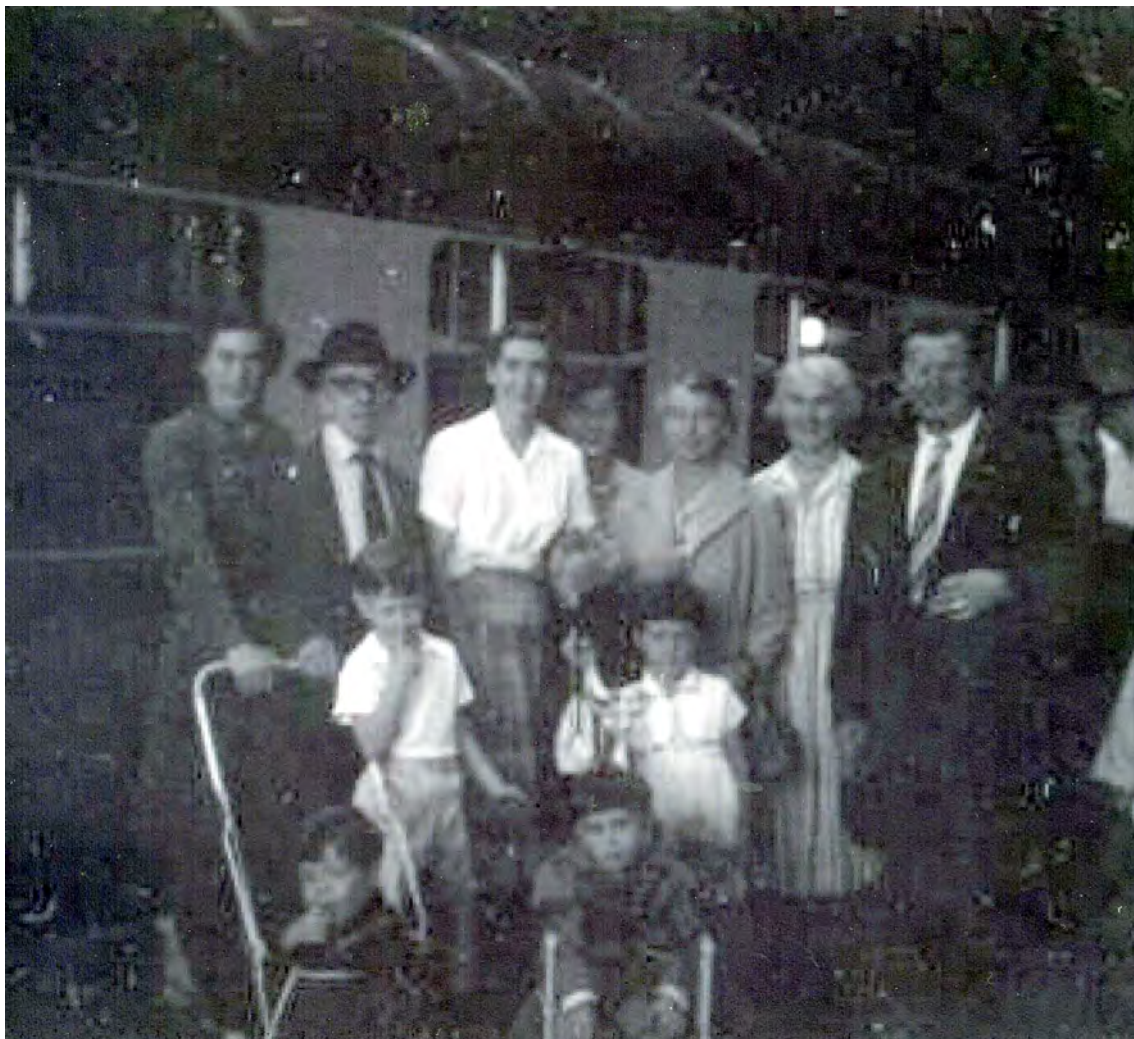
What with the smog and generally bad winters, we became concerned about the children's health. Seeing that there was little chance of getting out of London we applied to migrate to New Zealand, thinking that the climate there was similar to England, but less polluted due to the much smaller population. Their reply was that they didn't need my trade at the present time. On looking back this turned out to be a good thing. Then during one of my walks along the Strand, I came to Australia House. Might as well ask, I thought, so went in and spoke to the chap on the information counter about migrating to Australia. 'Okay' he replied, and handed me a form to fill in. Sometime later, I saw in the newspapers, that there were long queues of people there wanting to migrate. I took the form home after work and discussed the possibility with Hilda, to which she readily agreed. Then we consulted our families and got the seal of approval. I handed the form in, and surprisingly soon, we were told that we had been accepted. They had just started a scheme called 'Bring out a Briton' in which Australian families volunteered to take in a family until they were able to find a place for themselves. We went to Australia House for an interview and a medical check. Later a photographer came to our home to take pictures of us for publicity. A letter arrived telling us what we could take, which was quite liberal, and included small household items. My brother-in-law David made us four crates just the right size. We put the house up for sale, and advertised the furniture and gave some to the family. As it happened, the house hadn't sold when we left, but my cousin Ken acted as agent for us, as he had had some experience in conveyancing. It did sell not long after we had settled in Australia.

A few days later, a lorry came to pick up the crates to be stored in the hold and the larger pieces of luggage to stow in the luggage room, where we had access to it as necessary. Finally there came a paper giving us authority to stay in Australia, our boat tickets, and instructions for getting to the docks. The boat was the P & O liner 'Strathnaver', and the sailing date was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1957.

Hilda's parents Frank and Grace, put on a farewell party for us with all our relatives and friends present. That left us one day to clean up the house, and be there when the men came to turn off the water and electricity. Then we went across to Hilda's parents place for dinner, and to spend the night there ready for an early start next morning.

The day turned out to be warm and sunny. We were all up early to do the last bit of packing, have breakfast and say our farewells to the neighbours. It felt strange, as we walked along the quiet sunlit street, to think that we wouldn't be seeing these streets and houses again, maybe not for a long while. Hilda, pushing the stroller with Paul tucked in, Mrs Turner holding Robert's hand, and myself, dad, and Mr Turner, each carrying a small case, all coming to see us off on the boat train. Soon we were at St James Street Station to catch the London train. From there, a short journey on the tube to St Pancras Station, to catch the train to the P & O terminal at Tilbury docks.

## St Pancras Station



Here we are at St Pancras Station, standing by the train just prior to boarding it. In the photo are: Doreen, (Hilda's younger sister), Dad, Hilda, Hilda's elder sister Iris, Mrs Turner (Hilda's mother), and Hilda's Aunt Connie and Uncle Joe. Then, Paul in his stroller, Robert, Doreen's son Colin in stroller, and Iris's daughter Gillian. Excuse the photo quality, although a big place, the station was quite dark, no doubt due to the soot from the engines.

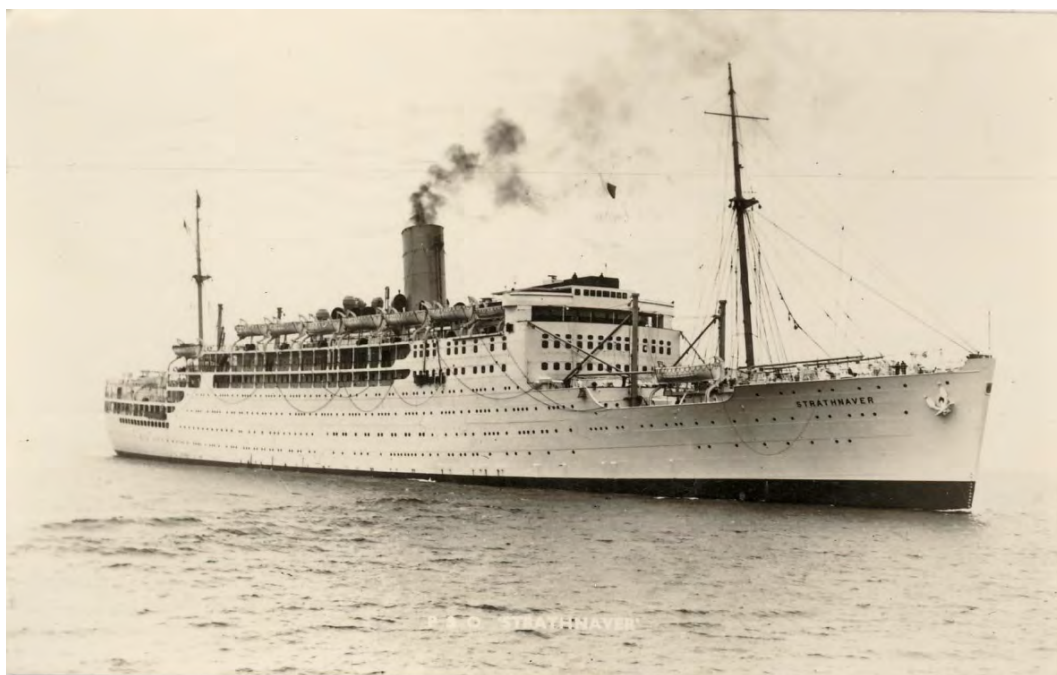
There were similar groups of people all along the length of the train exchanging their farewells, with excitement mixed with a degree of sadness no doubt. Soon the call came to board the train. We entered our compartment checking that we had five bags and two children, both of whom were absorbed in what was going on. Then we turned our attention to our family on the platform, waving to each other as the train steamed majestically out of the terminus, carrying us off to the biggest adventure of our lives to settle in Australia.

Coincidentally, the line to Tilbury also went through Walthamstow on a slightly different route than the Liverpool Street line, and we excitedly pointed out well known landmarks to each other. It was as if the suburb was saying goodbye to us too. Then we whooshed through Walthamstow station and into the next suburb, and were really on our way!

## We set sail for Australia

Arriving at Tilbury, we left the train and walked along the wharf looking up at the gleaming white vessel, which was to be our home for the next five weeks. Her name, 'Strathnaver' emblazoned on her bow. Then across a gangway that led us into a foyer, to be welcomed aboard, and handed to the care of a steward to guide us to our cabin.

The cabin on E deck was quite roomy, with double bunks on each side, a vanity, a wardrobe, and a table. An added advantage was a porthole that the steward opened when the weather was warm and the sea calm.



Having settled in, it was time for lunch, so we made our way to the dining room which occupied the whole width of the ship. It had large windows which looked out on to the Promenade deck. The sun was shining in, and my first impression was of snowy white tablecloths and gleaming dishes. We sat down, and the steward served us a delicious salad while we chatted to our newly met fellow passengers. There was a general air of comradeship and anticipation. Lunch over, we spent the afternoon unpacking, and organising our cabin, then exploring the ship, meanwhile keeping hold of Paul's hand, as he was inclined to run off ahead of us.

About five o'clock came the announcement that the ship was about to sail, so we went up on deck, along with other passengers, to wave goodbye to England. There were only a few people on the dock, as most goodbyes had been said at St Pancras. Tugs pulled us away and began to guide us down the Thames. Shortly after the dinner call chimed, it was an offer we couldn't refuse. We had hoped to catch a glimpse of the White Cliffs of Dover, but were unlucky as night had fallen. That was the cue to put the children to bed. We didn't stay up much longer ourselves. So ended Wednesday the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1957. It had been a long and eventful day.

The next morning we awoke refreshed, and got ourselves and the boys ready for breakfast. We had been given a copy of the ships programme which stated that children were to have their meals before the adults, then, they were to go to the children's play area at the stern. This was an area secured off all round by strong rope netting.



When we took them in and left them, they began to cry, but soon found that they were on to a good thing, as there were lots of things to play on and staff to mind and entertain them. There were also times allotted for lessons to suit their ages. After breakfast we went to collect them, and found that they had made friends with some other children, and were exploring the middle of a big coil of thick rope and a wooden tub. Later we strolled round the promenade deck with its ample selection of deck chairs. At morning teatime stewards came along with a trolley supplying coffee, tea, and soft drinks, with a selection of cakes. The ship was one class so we could go anywhere.



On the upper deck was the first class lounge, and above that the sports deck. For entertainment there were concerts and films, also lectures and discussions about Australia, which we found useful. For children, there was a sports day and a fancy dress parade. There were ten people at our table and we all got along very well. As time passed we formed our own routine. We had hoped to see Gibraltar, but when we reached that point it was again late at night, and we couldn't even see any lights. The weather in the Mediterranean was hot, so we were given camp beds and allowed to sleep on the deck, which was very pleasant, except that we had to be up and away before the crew came to hose the deck. For the next few days we cruised through a very calm Mediterranean Sea

taking life easy. We had two 'outings', one up to the ship's bridge, and one down to the engine room, both very interesting. It was in the Mediterranean, that I won the 'Miles sailed per day' lottery.

In due course we reached Port Said, where the ship moored, to wait our turn to go through the Suez Canal. We weren't allowed off the ship here, due to the fact that there had been a dispute in 1956 between Britain and France on one side and Egypt on the other. The dispute over ownership of the Suez Canal resulted in a war. This was brought to an end by the intervention of the U.N. which ordered the two sides to withdraw and then made the canal an international waterway. But tensions were still high between the two sides. While we were waiting, several boats came alongside selling souvenirs, pictures, carvings and leather goods. We bought a pouffe made of thin pieces of coloured leather painted with Egyptian symbols and sewn together. When we had settled down in Australia, Hilda stuffed it with rags and it lasted several years.

The next day it was our turn to sail through the canal at a slow speed so as not to damage the banks. There were several sunken ships around the entrance, half out of the water due to the shallow depth. The passage through the canal was interesting. There were small boats cruising along, a road on one bank, small cultivated fields, and here and there a village. A day's journey saw us through the canal and into the Red Sea. Then we sailed down to Aden, where we anchored, and were allowed on shore for a few hours. We didn't have time to see much of it. We had a rickshaw ride into the city, and found it to be a duty free area where I bought an SLR camera. Having left Aden we headed out into the Indian Ocean. Here we left the placid waters of the Red Sea and suddenly found ourselves in a pretty rough ocean. This was probably due to the coastlines of Africa, Arabia, and India, forming a bay that restricted the incoming waves, causing them to build up erratically. The ship tossed all ways and then some more. I must confess that I was not a very happy migrant at that stage. The inevitable happened and resulted in me feeling a whole lot better, and able to enjoy the rest of the voyage. Things calmed down and we sailed on to Colombo in Sri Lanka. We went ashore for one day on a coach tour around Colombo and surrounding countryside, a very pleasant day. From Colombo we were on the last leg to Australia. Not long after leaving we crossed the equator and were treated to a crossing ceremony presided over by King Neptune. Then we were all given certificates to mark our achievement. As we advanced south the weather grew colder with an occasional shower. We had all left the deck by now and were sleeping back in our cosy cabins.

Then at last we reached Australia. We docked at Freemantle where some of the migrants left the ship. The rest of us went for a tour of the city and surrounds, visiting Kings Park, which is a lovely garden set on a hill overlooking the city. Here we saw a colourful display of native Australian plants growing. When we eventually got our own house we filled the garden with them. While driving through the city, the driver proudly pointed out the G M Holden cars, which were being assembled at the first modern car factory to be built in Australia. Back in the city we strolled along the main street and browsed in the shops. At that time, 1957, I thought them a bit old fashioned. As we strolled along the footpath, a lady approached us and asked us where we came from. When we told her, she advised us very earnestly to go back. I guess she must have been very homesick. Off we went again, this time heading for Adelaide, sailing around the SW corner of Australia, then across the Great Australian Bight. The waves coming across the Southern Ocean made the ship roll continuously. The stewards clamped a narrow frame round the edges of the dining tables to stop the dishes sliding off. Quite a few people were missing at mealtime, but I was used to it by now.

Our next stop was at Adelaide. Here again more people disembarked, including a couple from our table. We could have caught a bus into the city, but the children were

getting a bit weary so we stayed on board and rested. We spent a holiday there some years later, and thought it a very pleasant place.

Back on the road again, as they say, this time to Melbourne, where we were due to spend three days disembarking passengers, unloading cargo, and having the funnel repainted. When we awoke next morning the ship was crossing Port Philip Bay, and after breakfast we found ourselves moored to a wharf at Melbourne.

Hilda's family had some close friends that lived in the same road a few doors along from them and the families had more or less grown up together. Their son Fred, with his wife Eileen and two young daughters, had migrated to Melbourne some time before I met Hilda, so I never met them. It was a great surprise when a knock sounded on our cabin door and they all appeared. After an excited greeting, they told us that they were going to take us to their home and look after us until we had to be back on the ship. They lived in a small town named Dandenong, in the hills about 40 km SE of the city. After we arrived at their house, lunch was served. It was then that I had my first taste of Australian beer. It was a bit of a shock at first, as it came straight from the fridge, not just cool as in England, but I soon got used to it, and never looked back. After lunch we were taken for a tour of the town and the surrounding countryside. Being in the hills, it was very picturesque with good views.

The next morning, Fred and Eileen took us to Belgrave, on the outskirts of Melbourne, for a ride on Puffing Billy, a famous old narrow gauge steam train, which runs for 17.5 km (10.8 miles) through the hills to Gembrook. The line is operated by a big group of volunteers supported by donations. It was a fascinating journey over undulating hills and bridges with spectacular scenery, a look round at Gembrook and then back to the city. There's nothing better or more nostalgic than a ride on a steam train. Back in the city, Fred took us to the art gallery to see their famous stained glass roof, but they were closed on Mondays. So we had a quick look at the museum, where there was an exhibition called 'Gold of the Pharaohs', displaying items from Tutankhamen's tomb. I could almost say it was very dazzling. That evening Fred took us all to a lovely old restaurant at Dandenong where we had an excellent meal in front of a big open fire. The third and final day we fitted in a trip to Melbourne zoo, then back home early, as we had to be back on the ship that evening. The return journey to the ship was by train which was quite another experience, as Fred had wanted us to see a train which was fitted out with lights, upholstery and decor in the old Victorian style. They were, at that time, being phased out and replaced by more modern stock. We exchanged goodbyes on the ship, and they left to catch the train home. It had been, to say the least, a very busy and rewarding three days. We had got on very well together, and remained close friends from then on and whenever the opportunity arose, we would visit and stay at each other's homes.

## Arriving at Sydney



*Will we make it?*



The ship sailed overnight as usual, and at breakfast time we found ourselves approaching Sydney Harbour. We were soon up on deck with many other passengers, most of us with cameras ready. There was a general air of excitement as we watched the panorama of the Harbour shores glide by, as we grew steadily closer to the Harbour Bridge. Anticipation increased as the Bridge drew closer and cameras became busier. We glided smoothly beneath it and turned to moor at the wharf. We had arrived!

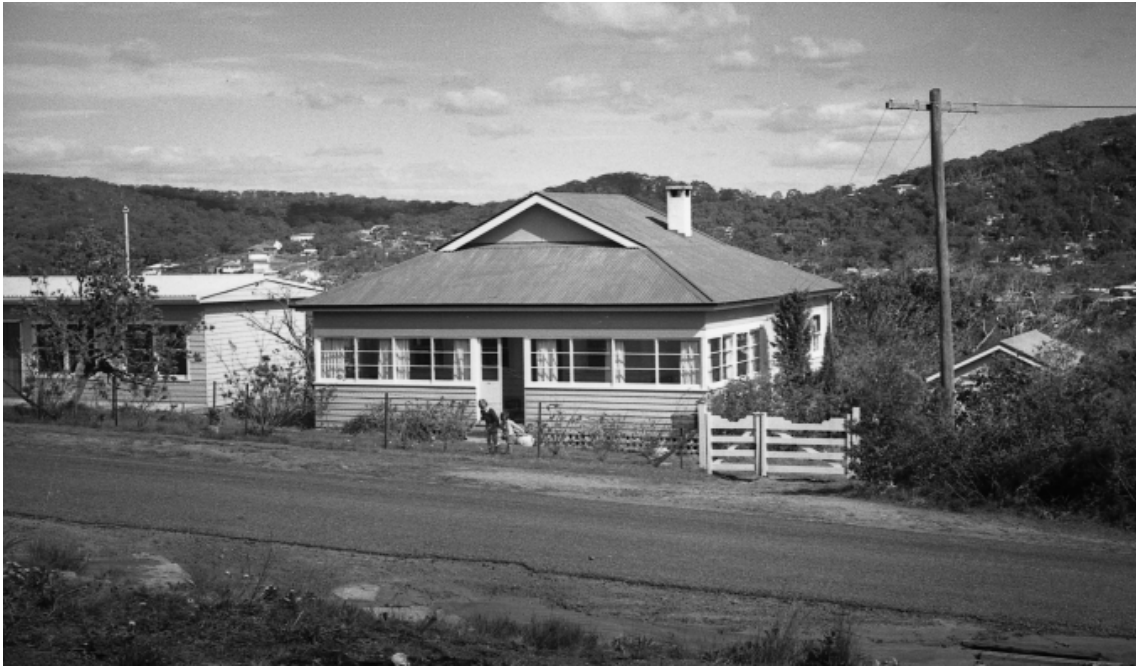
Then back to the cabin to ensure that we had packed everything, and wait our turn to assemble in the foyer for the final paperwork, and to disembark. Down on the wharf we watched as cranes lowered big rope nets bulging with cases and boxes from the baggage room. These were then spread out along the wharf for us to collect as they appeared. At this stage, an old Australian custom cut in. It was the wharfies smoko time, and they all

disappeared, and silence descended for the next half hour. We were waiting in front of a shed in which were tables manned by customs officers, set up along its length. When one became free, we took our cases in for inspection. The chap opened one that contained a tea set, which Hilda had bought some time ago. 'What's this worth?' he asked. Since I hadn't seen it for several weeks and was a bit overwhelmed by all that was going on, I told him I had no idea. It was obviously not expensive, so he marked the case as OK. Then we were allowed to enter Australia. Once out of the shed, on the far side, we were greeted by Grace's husband, Jim. He had a large ute. Then with Hilda and Paul in the front and me and Robert in the back with the luggage, we were off, after a short pause at the dock gate while the gatekeeper checked that we had the right number of items.

The journey from the docks to Avalon Beach was interesting, starting by driving over the Harbour Bridge. I didn't know where I was from then on. It was just a succession of streets, houses and shops which in due course, became familiar. We crossed another bridge which turned out to be the Spit Bridge. As we travelled more roads, it became apparent that Sydney was a big place. Then we glimpsed the sea and beaches here and there, and soon we were at Avalon Beach. Jim took us to his house to meet Grace, and their family. After introductions and refreshments, he took us to the house we would be renting from then on.

## Chapter 21

### Settling In



*52 Marine Parade*

52 Marine Parade was a neat little house with a wide veranda across the front, furnished with cane furniture, that led into the lounge and kitchen. There were two bedrooms and a bathroom. The back door opened onto a short flight of steps going down to the garden and the laundry which was underneath the house due to the land sloping back. A garage is just visible on the right.

Along the front fence was a row of flame trees. In the autumn they were covered in big bright red flowers, hence their name. At the back of the house was a passionfruit vine which provided a good supply of tasty fruit. The rest of the garden was covered in a tough sort of grass called *paspalum*. We were told that cattle liked it but I certainly didn't when it came to mowing it. It had ears at the top of the stalk carrying sticky black seeds. A child running through would get some stuck to their legs which could cause infection if not washed off. There was a push mower in the garage, but it was no good if the stalks got too long. A neighbour lent me a scythe which was very effective, and I got quite proficient with it.

The bottom of the garden was covered with lantana, a thick scrubby bush with small thorns and bright red and yellow flowers in spring. It had been imported from South America in the 1840s and spread very quickly to become a weed. It was easy to remove with a mattock, once you got to the main stem. A hybrid version was eventually grown suitable for pots or garden beds, due to its attractive flowers. I didn't have to worry too much about it as the owner arranged for someone to come in and clear it. All the neighbours were very friendly and often invited us in for a meal. One family lived across the road from us. They were Mina and Donald McVicar. Mr McVicar was generally known as Vic. We stayed friends with Mina and Vic for years, even after we had both moved away from Avalon.

The next day we went to Avalon Beach, termed The Village by the locals, with Robert walking and Paul in his stroller. This took about 30 minutes. We found it had a good selection of shops, a medical centre, cinema, infants and primary school, two service stations, and an excellent Chinese restaurant.

One thing that struck me right from the start was the openness of the surroundings. After living for thirty years in streets that were serried rows of terrace houses built of bricks weathered to a dull grey shade, it was an eye opener to see all the houses set apart, and of different designs and colour schemes, and with colourful front gardens. Although the roads were sealed, there was often only a footpath and gutter on one side, sometimes neither, otherwise there would be a strip of gravelled earth on each side, and a grassed area fronting the houses, termed the nature strip.

Crossing the main road, which ran from Palm Beach to Sydney, took us on to the beach. The beach was backed by tall sand dunes with a rocky headland at the far end. At this end the surf club was on our left, and a refreshment kiosk on our right. The land rose up from here on, and was covered with flannel flowers. These are big white daisies with velvety petals which look beautiful with the sun on them. Sadly 'Progress' stepped in a few years later. The flowers were bulldozed and home units took their place. We soon found that our house at North Avalon was quite close to the north end of the beach, which had a rock pool for the children to play in. They also had much fun running down the sand dunes or sledging down them on flattened cardboard boxes. The boys soon made friends with the local children and had their own games and adventures together. That was generally our first impression of Australia and the new life we had chosen to live.

On Monday morning, armed with a bus timetable, a small tourist's map of the city, and my credentials, I set sail as it were, by bus this time, to Sydney. Once there, I went to the employment department at the GPO in Martin Place, where I met the person that I had been told to see when I was interviewed on the ship. After seeing my papers, he was quite impressed with my qualifications and sent me to the training school close to Central station. Here I was asked to do a short exam by answering several telephony questions which I found easy enough. Then it was back to the GPO with the result. At this point red tape stepped in. It seemed that I had not done their basic course which had to be passed before I could become an assistant technician. That meant a six week wait for the next course, so he made me a temporary cleaner at North Sydney in the meantime. Here, I was put under the wing of the resident cleaner, Alf Sharpling, and added to my qualifications by learning to use a floor polisher, dust equipment, wash up, clean the lunch room, and on the side, study telephony diagrams. I found that the Australian system was less complex compared to that in England, due mainly, I think, to the smaller population. None the less it did have its own complications, but once I got the general picture in my mind it became familiar.

The weeks passed, and I was heading for my first training course. I had been put in touch with a chap in Avalon, who would pick me up on the main road through Avalon with two other men, and take us to Sydney. He dropped us off by the Town Hall, and then picked us up again on the way home after work. Our contribution was half the daily bus fare each. I then caught the train from there to Alexandria, a nearby suburb. The School was interesting, meeting new people and learning new things, which included installing and repairing several types of phones, some of which required batteries, and running cables and wiring. We also went to see three of the larger city exchanges in operation. Being an older part of Sydney, the houses here were terrace style, perhaps slightly smaller than in London. The upper stories had balconies. At the end of the course we were allocated to our exchanges.

I was sent to Narrabeen, about a half hour bus ride from Avalon. This was a new exchange and the installation team were still fitting and testing the equipment.



*Narrabeen Telephone Exchange*

My task was running wires on the distribution frames linking the sections of the exchange together. On the day of the 'cut over' when the exchange was put into service, the insulators separating the subscribers from the new equipment were rapidly pulled out by means of a long cord, and the wiring to the old exchange similarly disconnected. Finally we made a series of test calls to ensure that the new system was working satisfactorily. Their work completed, the installation team packed up and went off to another exchange installation project, while I was left there as an acting technician along with a supervising technician, a trainee, and a cleaner, to make up the exchange staff.

Being a new exchange it had all the latest equipment. This was now the fourth version of step-by-step equipment that I had worked on since starting as a technician in England. Although all working on the same basic principles, this one, known as SE50 type was the most compact and easy to maintain of them all. There was one piece of equipment that I thought the circuit diagram could have made clearer. So I sent in a suggestion for an improvement, which was accepted, and I was awarded £5. One type of equipment that was new to me was the carrier system which used valve amplifiers to rout calls to Sydney. Fortunately, the instruction books came with it.

The back part of the exchange was the subscriber's installation and repair department. Linesmen were based at Avalon. They used to call into the exchange to get their work tested, so I was well acquainted with them all.

Each week we got the Commonwealth Gazette which listed positions vacant and exam dates, among other things. One such entry was the technician's exam which I immediately applied for. This was in two parts, theory and practice. The theory exam was held at Sydney technical college on a Saturday morning for three hours. The practice would be during the week at the training school. I managed to complete the theory paper in good time. The practice was a bit harder, as some of the things I hadn't done before. Then it was a matter of waiting patiently for the results. Eventually the day came when the results were posted out. Two of the installation men received phone calls from their wives to tell them that they had passed. At that time we didn't have a phone. At the end of the day, I caught the bus home, then, almost home, a strong feeling came into my mind that I too had passed. When I did arrive home, there was the letter to verify my intuition. Hooray! I was now a permanent technician, a good reason to celebrate.

This of course meant more pay which I really needed, but on the other hand, I now had to pay superannuation contributions, and since I was a new entrant without any past service, I would have to pay double to catch up! But we managed, which was a good thing as it helped a lot when I retired. Hilda was able to help out by taking a part time job in the Avalon general store. This was quite a hard job as some of the produce came in sacks which were heavy to move. The contents then had to be measured out into paper bags. She next became an assistant in the cinema milk bar. Finally, she found a job in Mona Vale working with several other women assembling souvenir boxes of Australian minerals.

We now sent the boys to the Anglican Sunday school each week, as we ourselves, had done as children in England. We also went with them to a family service each month, and I got roped in, along with other members of the congregation, to do odd jobs on the site. One job was helping to build a large shed. Fortunately two of our members were professional builders to make sure that things went right, while the minister cruised around making suggestions. I think he had been an engineer in his previous life, i. e. before ordination. I forget what the shed was for, might have been for the littlies to learn in. A proper two-story building was later erected, with the hall on the ground floor and the church above.

We had by now made a number of friends in the area, some of whom were in the Uniting Church. They had a social group called the 'Couples Club', meeting once a month on a Saturday evening, a stipulation being that we had to go as couples. There were usually several volunteers so that if one person couldn't go someone would baby sit for them. The programme, although not a fixed agenda, was generally, the current state of the club, a discussion, team games or a quiz, then a lecture by a member or visitor about their holiday, occupation, current affairs etc. One lady was an expert on Aboriginal art and came along with an Aboriginal artist who gave us a fascinating demonstration of bark painting. Once I was asked to give a lecture at the next meeting about my occupation, telephony. Firstly, I had to submit a copy of my lecture to the engineer in charge and request permission, which was quickly granted. I took along a dial, a subscribers meter, a final selector, a phone, and an eliminator to provide the required 50 volts supply. I was a bit nervous at first, but soon warmed up to the subject, and the lecture went very well. At that time the aboriginal singer named Jimmy Little was very popular singing a song called 'Royal Telephone'. The caller was connected to Heaven, so my lecture flowed into the short service which concluded the evening. I was asked to give the service at one meeting. I am not particularly religious, but wrote a short sermon based on my own humanistic philosophy, which was well received. At some point of course there had to be refreshments, I think after the games. We only went to the church services when there was something special on, or to help at fetes. To me, Uniting Church services were much simpler than Anglican which tended to be High Church, somewhat stiff and formal.

In the latter half of 1958 Hilda told me the good news that she was pregnant once more. This time it was much easier, but none the less exciting, as we still had baby wear on hand and offers of help from our friends. Everything went smoothly, then one evening in March, baby decided it was time to arrive. Our neighbour called the ambulance and arranged to mind the boys. It took a while for the ambulance to arrive to pick us up. From Avalon to the hospital at Manly was 25 km/15 miles. We had only got about halfway when baby decided this was far enough. I quickly signalled the driver who parked and delivered a lovely little girl. He wrapped her warmly in a towel and gave her to me to nurse the rest of the way. We named her Heather, which was Hilda's favourite girl's name, plus Mary which was Hilda's middle name, and Elizabeth after my mother. It was difficult for me to get to the hospital as I didn't drive then, and had to line up three bus connections to get there. At least I could talk to her on the phone. They didn't keep her in long. When the day came to bring them home, my neighbour took me and the boys in. Both the boys were pleased to have a little sister, and were allowed to hold her for a short while.



Christmas came with its school Nativity play at Avalon school. They always put on an excellent show. There was a stage, but the audience sat in the open under the stars. Parents and children could feel part of the celebration. At home, there would be homemade decoration and a tree made from a branch of Casuarina, a small fine leafed fir tree, generally known as sheoak and often used as a stand in for a Christmas tree in those days.



## **We buy a block of land**

Our house in England had finally sold, and the money deposited in our Australian bank. We had decided to buy a block of land, and have a house built on it when we were ready. We got down to a choice of three blocks, and chose one which was larger than normal and situated in a pleasant area close to the main road and Avalon. It was one of three the same size. We had put a deposit on it, and then the agent came to tell us that somebody had bought the other two blocks and wanted ours too. We refused the offer which was a good decision in the long run. The other buyer sub-divided the two blocks into three.

The block was covered in trees and scrub, but close to where we were living then. We would go there at weekends with our lunch and a barrow load of tools and cleared far

enough in to where the house would be built. Then we heard that the surf club was looking for jobs to earn money to improve the club house, so we promptly enlisted their aid to help clear the block, which made a big impression on it.



*In this photo, I had cleared the front of the block back about 50 ft. I am sitting on a log with Heather on my lap. As it happened this was approximately where the front door would be.*

The block measured 92 X 264 ft, (28 x 60 m), facing SW with a slight slope to the back, enough for the rear to collect rain water, very much appreciated by flocks of ibis who came to feed there. There were also koalas and kookaburras for company. Most of the scrub was cleared off, but there were four trees on the site of the house or close enough to drop branches on it that needed clearing. For this I engaged a tree feller. He came along one morning with a ratchet winch and some long steel cables. We positioned the winch close to the bottom of a big tree that was to stay, then anchored the winch to the bottom of the tree. Then a long cable was taken from the winch to the first tree to come down. The man climbed an extension ladder and looped the cable as high up as he could around the trunk. Finally a long steel lever was slotted into the winch to engage the ratchet. We both then swung it back and forth, each click tightening the cable attached to the trunk thus eventually pulling the tree over. The branches were piled up for burning and the trunks cut up and loaded on the truck and taken away for firewood. The children were kept at home as I thought it too dangerous for them. When the remaining timber has dried out and the weather conditions were safe I lit two big fires and spread the ashes over the ground. The root holes were filled with rubble and soil.

## Chapter 22

### A Permanent Home

Early in 1960 we saw an advertisement in our local paper, 'The Manly Daily', inviting people to inspect a display house that could be built anywhere in the Manly Warringah area. The accompanying photo looked attractive, so on the Saturday morning we went off to have a look at it. When we got to the house we saw that it was on the high side of the road so we were looking slightly up towards it, which gave us a good impression of it. It was a timber framed house with fibro cladding, timber panels at each corner, and a corrugated fibro roof. This type of construction was common then, but banned now due to health hazard in handling it.

An alternative method was a timber frame with a single brick veneer cladding on the outside. All houses had wallboard on the inside fastened to the framework. The lounge room had a raised garden bed in front of it set off by four timber slats. Inside were the lounge and dining room with the kitchen at the back, then the laundry and bathroom. There were three bedrooms, the main bedroom at the front with two smaller bedrooms at the end.

We were quite taken with it, except that we weren't keen on the kitchen position at the back of the lounge room. When we mentioned this to the builder he said that we could alter the plan to suit ourselves as the frame was made of three foot wide modules so as long as we stayed with this we were free to make alterations. Back home, Hilda began sketching a new plan. By turning the small bedroom at the front by 90° and extending the house length by three feet, she was able to move the kitchen along next to the laundry, thereby fitting the lounge into the full width of the house giving us a good view of the garden.



*The house shortly after it had been built on our block. Hilda and the children are sitting on the front porch.*

The house was finished shortly before Christmas, giving us time to move in, which wasn't very involved as we had very little furniture. Some friends from the Couples Club helped us move with the aid of their trailer. Other friends donated an old Silent Night fridge

which graced the lounge until one we had ordered from Anthony Horderns Department Store in Sydney was delivered. We had acquired a plastic topped kitchen table and chairs, and kitchen utensils. I had already made two wooden forms for seating, and beds for the boys using the experience gained from helping my cousin's husband who was an upholsterer. We already had a cot for Heather. Hilda was a great help. By scanning the for sale ads, she found us a dining table and six chairs.

Hilda and I slept on a double mattress on the floor until we could afford a bedroom suite. The bathroom washbasin hadn't turned up. So we had to wash in the laundry tub for a few days. Fortunately the bath and shower were working. I had requested that insulation be put in the roof, but that didn't get done either, so I had to do it myself a bit at a time, which was a very slow, constricted, and hot job due to the low pitch of the roof which restricted my progress to crawling. I started with bags of Rock Wool which you were supposed to tip out and spread, but it actually came out in large lumps which I had to break up and spread, so I continued with fibreglass batts that unrolled to fit between the rafters. Handling this meant wearing protective overalls and a face mask. My first job after we moved in was to make flyscreens due to the prevalence of flies at that time. The windows were large hopper type, hinged at the top and opened by winding a small handle which pushed the bottom of the window open by means of a flat chain.

At this time I had been promoted from a trainee to a permanent technician stationed at Narrabeen exchange. Now that the installation staff had left, the exchange staff consisted of a supervising technician, myself as technician, a trainee, and a cleaner. There was plenty to keep us busy, thoroughly testing the equipment and connecting new subscribers.

Meanwhile at home it was a busy time with Hilda busy making curtains, and me hanging screen doors, front and back. The lounge room took up the full width of the house, with big windows front and back, so that meant a lot of curtain material, and curtain rails to be put up. The back of the house was higher than the front so there were four steps down into the garden. Not long after, I noticed a house near the exchange being demolished. It had a similar flight of steps with a wrought iron railing. I approached the builder and he was happy for me to take it away. I had to shorten the top section, and get it welded back together. That was soon done, and the railing installed and painted.

The front of the block to about halfway down then the length had been cleared. In front of the house was a big Angophora tree, which we kept, and a gum tree close by was removed. I then laid an edging of thin logs to make a big semicircular bed. This was covered with a native ground cover plant and native shrubs. Hilda filled the raised bed in front of the lounge window with colourful flowering plants. The space beneath the house was utilized as a storage space for a mower, garden tools, and anything else that I didn't know what to do with.

We had very good neighbours. On our right at number 50 was one of Hilda's aunt's daughters and her husband. They moved away not long after to be followed by a mixed bag of residents. Outstanding among these was a retired Anglican minister, and a young artist and his wife, who was equally artistic at craftwork.

On our left were Mr & Mrs Hanson and their two sons, Richard and Lex. Our Robert and Lex soon became close friends. Richard was a teenager and was very helpful with some of my garden clearing jobs, especially lopping branches off tall trees. Mr Hanson had a chain saw blade with a rope tied to each end. To use it, we first had to tie a length of string to a rock and throw it over the branch. This is where Richard excelled. After a few tries he would achieve the task. It was then necessary to tie the string to the rope to pull it up over the branch until the saw blade was in position. Then we would pull the blade back and forth until the branch fell. I even cut down a couple of small trees, lopped off the

branches, and chopped up the trunk for firewood. I must say that I was quite proud of my achievements with an axe. Then of course there were the roots to dig out. I eventually finished up with a clear block with several good trees, one of which was home to a couple of koalas. Also, we planted a selection of native shrubs. In all, this took quite a lot of work and time, but was well worth the effort. Two busy gardeners.



One day a letter arrived from the telephone department in London to say that they were refunding the superannuation payments that I had made while working in England. Enclosed was a cheque for a very useful sum of money, which enabled us to buy a bedroom suite, thus making life more comfortable.

Another interesting piece of news was an announcement in the Gazette of the next senior technician's examination. This was a grade higher than technician. It involved, assisting the supervising technician, overseeing the trainees and technicians, and ensuring that the exchange as a whole, was working efficiently. The salary of course, was higher. The exam was harder, being three sessions of Maths, Principles, and Practise. This meant attending evening and some afternoon classes. There were two of us from my exchange studying for the exam. It was some time before the results were published in the Gazette, and it was good to see eventually, that we had both passed. I was appointed to Avalon exchange and my mate Ray, to Narrabeen, where I had been a technician.

The raise in pay and superannuation made life a lot easier for Hilda and I. We could now afford a few luxuries. Our biggest purchase was a new dining room suite, made by Parker furniture. It is still in use fifty years later, except for having new seats on the chairs. We also bought a second hand TV, only black and white pictures in those days. An added feature was attractive light fittings.

Wallpaper was coming into fashion then, as it had always been in England. I started off in our daughter Heather's bedroom with an appropriate blue pattern. The other rooms followed in due course. A friend, who worked for an insurance company, called in one evening, to say that one of their clients had had a fire in his house, and that the smoke had discoloured the carpet in some parts. It would have to be replaced. Would we like the old carpet? We agreed to that, and Cedric arranged for a carpet layer to come on the weekend. There was enough to cover the lounge and the hallway. The carpet colour was grey, so the discolouration hardly noticed.

## **Avalon exchange**

This exchange was close to home, a half hour walk. It had a satellite exchange at Palm Beach, about 15 minutes drive up the road, which was staffed by a supervising technician and a trainee. Some years later it was closed, and looked after by the Avalon staff.

Being a senior technician, I was put on a Sunday roster to look after the main exchange at Dee Why, at six weekly intervals. All other exchanges were closed at weekends. There was also a technician available for subscriber's faults. After a while I was approached by the area supervisor who told me, 'you will have to learn to drive, so that you can go out fixing faults if necessary'. The admin paid for the lessons, which were taken in a Telecom car. I enjoyed the experience, and got my licence at the first try. After having gained a good bit of experience, I began to think of getting a car for myself.

One of my friends in the Couples Club was a mechanic in the service department of a local car dealer. So I asked for his advice. He found me an Austin A70. It was quite old, but in good condition, and easy to maintain. I drove it locally at first, and then further afield, until I was confident that I could do longer trips. Coincidentally, the day I got the car, was the day that Australia changed to decimal currency. February the 14<sup>th</sup> 1966. So I had to pay for it with dollars.

## **Chapter 23**

### **Australian Holidays**

Up until now, our excursions had been all been taken on public transport. Going north from Avalon Beach by bus took us about 7 km to Palm Beach at the end of the Barrenjoey Peninsula. Then it was an easy walk along the beach to the headland and Barrenjoey lighthouse which was accessible by a rugged four wheel drive track to the top. We were rewarded by a 360° view.

There is a ferry that runs from Palm Beach across Pittwater to the Basin inlet, where there is a good beach, safe swimming for children, and a shop. We often went there. On one occasion we rented a cabin for a week.

Heading south, we could get to Sydney, 23 miles (35 km), or Manly, 20 miles (32 km). We had to change buses to get to Manly, or go on to Sydney, where we could catch the ferry to Manly. The ferry took a half hour, and is a very picturesque trip, as it cruises down the harbour. Approaching Manly, we cross the harbour entrance, and may run into a rough sea coming in from the Pacific Ocean, which can cause the ferry to toss and roll somewhat. On rare occasions, the service is cancelled.

Manly is a very popular spot for holidaymakers. The ferry docks on the harbour side of the town. Walking through the main street leads you across the peninsula to the Pacific Ocean.

### **Sydney**

The bus to Sydney finished up at Wynyard at the top end of the city. From there we could go to Circular Quay to catch a ferry, or walk to the Rocks area - the site of the original city with some interesting old buildings. The other side of Circular Quay led us past the Opera House, then under construction to the Botanic Gardens. This was a peaceful green area, with pleasant walks, where we would sometimes catch sight of a possum. Hyde Park was another oasis of peace. At the bottom end of town was a smaller park, and Central Station, the terminus of the state's rail network. Also close by, was the Sydney Technical College which housed the Museum of Art and Science. They had a small planetarium. The museum was later moved to the Power House Museum, and the planetarium to the Sydney Observatory.

At Christmas time we would take the children to see the decorations in the big department stores. There was one, 'Marcus Clark', opposite Central Station, that had a roof garden, and a small theatre where they put on an excellent Christmas pantomime for children.

The longest journey we did by public transport was to the Blue Mountains. We rented a cottage at Blackheath for two weeks. A bit risky you might say, with two lively small boys, and Heather in a stroller, but we explained the dangers, and they were very good. We only did the safe, level tracks. There was a small bus that took visitors around the area: the Zig Zag railway, Leura gardens, and other scenic points. Also, we caught the local bus to Katoomba to see the Three Sisters rock formation, and to ride the scenic railway. We were very much impressed by the grandeur of the scenery.

### **We begin to explore Australia**

It was school holiday time so we decided that after Christmas we would pack the car and have a look at the south coast region. I had joined the NRMA motoring association, and collected the necessary maps to guide us through Sydney, and down the coast.

Off we went one sunny morning, arriving safely at Kiama, about 200kms driving. We spent a day here, inspecting the famous Blowhole performing, strolling along the beach for the children to let off steam, and then looking around the town. Next day, we drove on to Nowra, where we stayed in a lovely old two story timber house, for B & B. (Bed and Breakfast). We spent some time here, exploring the area, and driving through Kangaroo Valley, all quite spectacular. From here we carried on to our final stop at Huskisson. After several more enjoyable days, it was time to head back home. So ended our very first touring holiday, which gave us the taste for more.

In the spring of that year, we joined the YHA, (Youth Hostel Association), and drove down to Canberra, through Mittagong, Bowral, and Bundanoon. This was when the old Hume Highway went through these towns. This way we were able to get a taste of life in a country town. We liked Bowral with its lovely park, and visited two grand old houses. At Bundanoon the YHA warden took us to Glow Worm Glen at night. One day we walked through Morton National Park. We saw several wombat holes, but no wombats, since they are nocturnal. We were rewarded by a lyre bird that flew up in front of us. Canberra hostel was new and attractive. There weren't all the museums and galleries as of now. The National Museum, I think, was then part of the university. We did a guided tour of Parliament House, which is now the old one, and is now the 'Museum of Democracy'. Another interesting visit was taking the lift to the top of the Carillon to see the console and bells. These are played twice weekly by a pianist using a large keyboard.

Our final tour was to the Gold Coast. How wonderful. In those days, not a high rise to be seen. This is where we developed a taste for mangos and avocados. Late in the afternoon, families would gather at the Bird Sanctuary Garden, to feed the lively flocks of parrots and lorikeets that flew in, to be fed by excited children, and just as excited grown-ups. Nearby was a nature park, where I stood close to a pelican, for the first time in my life, with no mesh or bars between us. Another wonderful drive was through the mountain range inland, where we discovered fascinating volcanic rocks called thunder eggs. We found so many new and fascinating things to see and do.

Since then, of course, we have explored quite a lot of Australia, but these were the first big, memorable adventures, in our new land.

## **Back to school**

When I returned to work, after our holiday, I read in the Gazette that another Senior Technician's examination was listed. Having already been appointed, I didn't take a lot of notice of it. This was followed by a directive from the area HQ to say that owing to the advances in telephony, and the fact that the government was considering changing to a new system, called Crossbar, from Sweden, it would be advisable for us to repeat the examination. So there we were attending TAFE classes every Wednesday. Maths and electronics formed a large part of the curriculum. We had to each buy a slide rule and learn how to use it. I must confess that I never got very proficient with it. It was later superseded by the electronic calculator. In due course I received a certificate to say that I had passed.

## **Chapter 24**

### **Cubs and Scouts**

#### **Our first cub**

In 1960, Robert turned 8 years. This made him eligible to join the Cubs, although it was a while before he joined. I think the two influencing factors were first that we had become friends with a couple, Mr and Mrs Crowley whom we had met during school functions. The wife was the cub leader in the 1<sup>st</sup> Avalon scout troop. The second was that Hilda had been a Girl Guide in the local Wathamstow group. After leaving school she had become a Ranger and had enrolled as a Brownie leader. Since Hilda had had experience in the Brownies, she offered to help Mrs Crowley, and became an assistant cub leader. She took Robert to a meeting, and he became interested, and joined the cubs.

There was a monthly parents' meeting where we were informed of the latest scouting activities, how the troop was progressing, and the need for new equipment. Working bees were proposed, and the financial state of the troop discussed. We raised money from a weekly fee from each boy, a good part of which went to State Headquarters to fund the scout movement. The remainder went to pay for hall maintenance, new equipment, and camping fees. Old clothes, newspapers and magazines were collected and sold to a rag merchant or a paper recycling business to add to our income. Looking after the paper collection was my task. The papers were made up into oblong bundles tied with string, and stowed at one end of the hall. When I considered that we had a truck load, I would ring the depot for it to be picked up on a Saturday morning, then be there with several other fathers to load the truck.

At the next AGM I was elected to be the Avalon troop's delegate to the Group Committee. This represented all six troops of the Pittwater Group, and met at Narrabeen Scout Hall. Here we dealt with requests from troop committees and discussed and voted on matters passed on from the Area Committee. I was later appointed as the Group Committee delegate to the Area Committee. This was located at Chatswood, and covered all the groups from Avalon to Manly.

Meanwhile Mr and Mrs Crowley had decided to move away from Avalon to the Central Coast area, where they planned to build a new house. This would result in Avalon losing their cub leader, so Hilda volunteered to be the new leader. There was time for her to do a training course before the Crowley's left. This entailed some study at home, visiting other cub packs to widen her experience, and attending weekend training courses. All of which she passed with flying colours. My part was to help find materials for games, and to make simple toys and presents that the boys could assemble and take home to their parents.

In due course the local council granted us a large block of land at Ingleside on which to build an area camp. We were fortunate in having a lot of willing parents, several of whom were builders, to help with clearing the area, laying paths and drains, and fixing fences. The biggest hurdle was that we had to build a road into the site. This entailed a lot of digging and clearing, but the heavy work was done by a road construction company, who donated the equipment and time. It was a great day when our scouts and cubs were finally able to assemble on the parade ground to proudly raise the Scout flag.

The camp was finally opened for business in 1963. This of course was not the end of the matter. There was still plenty of work to be done over the next few years with amenities and huts to be constructed, and the all-important cook house, set up. All was overseen by the permanent camp warden, Gunner Williams. At the next area committee

meeting I was elected as secretary of the camp committee, a task which I enjoyed for several years.

## **Our second cub**

About this time our younger son, Paul joined the Avalon pack, now led by my wife, Hilda, as cub leader. Robert meanwhile became a scout, having passed through the transition ceremony.

Every three years, the scouts held a Jamboree, in a different state each time. They lasted ten days from the day after Boxing Day, and were quite big and well organized events. Both sons went in turn, when they were old enough. Robert went to Jindalee in Queensland, and Paul to Leppington in NSW.

I was still involved in the Ingleside camp committee. The camp was now quite busy with weekend scout camps, and training courses for leaders, not forgetting working bees. There came a time when the facilities needed updating, and we decided to hold a fund raising event to help build a new amenities block. The event was to be a beach walk of 10 km from Dee Why to North Narrabeen on a Sunday afternoon. The adults and boys collected rubbish along the way, and each person donated \$5. It turned out to be very successful. My part was to organise the publicity, and to help at the starting point. Each entrant received a commemorative badge at the finish.

Our daughter Heather became a keen Brownie and Guide in the Avalon Girl Guides. The Guides didn't have jamborees on the scale of the Scouts, but did have quite large training camps. Heather went to one weekend camp, set up for Guides from the Sydney area. She had two of her paintings displayed in the craft show of work made by the girls. We went there on the Sunday afternoon to fetch her home, and were able to see their very entertaining closing parade.

Hilda was overjoyed to receive a letter in 1975, from the General Secretary of the Scouting Movement telling her that she had been awarded the Medal of Merit for her specially good service to the Scout movement.



# THE SCOUT ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA.

NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH

CHIEF SCOUT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR  
SIR RODEN CUTLER, V.C., K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.B.E.  
PRESIDENT  
THE RT. HON. SIR VICTOR WINDEYER, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., E.D.  
CHIEF COMMISSIONER  
W. K. PILZ

19th February, 1975.

Mrs. H.M. Parker,  
Assistant Cub Leader,  
The Scout Association of Australia,  
1st Avalon Group,  
48 George Street,  
AVALON BEACH. 2107.

Dear Mrs. Parker,

I have very great pleasure in advising you that His Excellency The Governor-General and Chief Scout of Australia, The Honourable Sir John Kerr, KCMG, K.St.J. QC, has awarded you The Medal of Merit for your specially good service to the Scout Movement.

The President, Chief Commissioner and Members of the Branch Executive Committee have asked me to congratulate you on this recognition of your service.

I shall be in touch with you again in the near future to advise you of arrangements for the presentation of your Award.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Maitland,  
General Secretary.

MGM/dh  
75/11

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY 283 CLARENCE ST., SYDNEY 2000  
Telephone 290-2322 (6 lines) Telegrams & Cables "SCOUTCRAFT", SYDNEY.

## Chapter 25

### Our Growing Family

In 1969 we decided that we needed more room. Heather was ok sharing her room with a blue budgie, but the boys, now teenagers, had accumulated a lot of stuff between them which sturdily resisted any attempt to be tidied. Also we were running out of storage space.

On top of this we had acquired two Siamese kittens - Rahna, a male, and Kimi a female. Both were very lively and each had their own distinctive characters. Their favourite game was to play chasings up and down the hallway, which ran the full length of the house.

We decided that the best solution was to add a rumpus room across the lounge end of the house which would also serve as a bedroom for Paul. I did the internal painting myself, and built in a storage cupboard along the lounge side, and make a comfortable corner for Paul, to hold a bed with two drawers beneath it. I owe many thanks to Hilda for her creativity in making the curtains and putting the finishing touches to the room.



To round it all off, we had new carpet laid right through the house. It all worked out very well. The rumpus and lounge rooms had full height windows at the back, with a glass door in each, to give access to a future deck overlooking the garden. So as soon as I could afford it, I got down to building a deck. The first thing to do was to go to the hardware store and pick up a pamphlet on how to build a deck. Then work out how much timber I would need, plus concrete for the post foundations, and the right paint for the timber. Apart from setting up the posts, which was a two man job, I did the rest myself, then made and installed two roll out awnings. Hilda rounded it off nicely by giving me a barbeque as a Christmas present. So there we were with a 4 by 8 metre deck for outdoor living and entertaining.

I reckon it would be reasonable to say that from landing in Australia in 1957 with 12 British pounds in my wallet, to owning a nice house in 1969 (mortgaged of course) was quite an accomplishment.

## Other things that happened

I was promoted to 'Acting Senior Technical Officer Grade1', so that whenever an STO1 went on holiday, sick leave, or a training course, I would take their place, thus giving me more experience and pay.

Robert now moved up to Pittwater High School, in Mona Vale. Paul still had three more years in primary to go. In the meantime, the education department built Barrenjoey High School at Avalon Beach. Paul was in the first intake.

After leaving school, Robert applied for, and was accepted for a position in the Department of Civil Aviation. He is still with them, having risen to a highly responsible position. Paul, in his turn, left school and went to TAFE to study architectural draughtsmanship, and is now involved in CAD. 'Computer Aided Draughtsmanship', which he uses in his building business. At one stage he and a friend owned a thriving hardware business, but like other small businesses it was eventually overwhelmed by the big hardware chains.

At the first P & C meeting of Barrenjoey High School, I was nominated to help establish the library. I contacted the manager of the local bookshop, and at each monthly meeting we put on a display of suitable books that parents could buy and donate to the library. In that way we built up quite a good collection. Eventually the department appointed a permanent librarian, and I became redundant.

Heather went to Narrabeen High School, but we later moved her to Loquat Valley Anglican School that had a much better teaching reputation. After finishing school she was employed by a firm making ladies' sportswear.

The days flowed steadily by, while we were occupied in our various pastimes. Me mowing grass, of which there was a lot, fixing things around the house, helping in general and playing board games such as Monopoly, Scrabble, Rummiking, and jigsaw puzzles, etc. In between, I still studied telephony, which was steadily getting more and more complex. Also there were scout and church functions and outings. Some evenings with the scouts we had a Scottish dancing session which got a bit exhausting. The troop leader was very much a Scot, and would wear his kilt on special occasions. Hilda and I also took up square dancing which we both enjoyed. Some of the steps involved the dancers holding hands and raising them above their heads. This was difficult for Hilda, as she suffered from arthritis. She did her best, but we eventually had to drop out. Then there was the monthly Couples Club, which had a very varied programme. One evening there was a lecture and recital by James Morrison, the famous trumpet player of jazz and classical music. Another was an Aboriginal artist, showing us how bark painting was done. Then there were evenings at the local cinema, or further afield at a theatre. On special occasions we would drive into Sydney to see one of the latest shows, or an opera or ballet at the Opera House.

The Opera House has recently celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. I well recall the day it officially opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1973. There we were, standing in Macquarie St, gazing at the Opera House, with its tiled sails gleaming in the bright sunshine. We were not far from the forecourt, which was closed off for the arrival of the VIPs and the Queen for the inaugural concert. First, there was a lively procession of civil and services bands interspersed with colourful groups of dancers from all the nationalities that had migrated to Australia over the years. These were followed by the VIPs. Finally, came the big moment when the crowd welcomed the carriage carrying the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh. As they were greeted at the steps of the Opera House, clouds of coloured balloons were released to drift over the building.



*Opera House opening on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1973*

## Chapter 26

### An Exciting New Chapter

In 1973 towards the end of his training, Robert was moved around to gain experience in the field. One place was at Ebor, a small town in the NE corner of NSW. It was here that he met Carolynne Jones, who had just finished her teacher training course at Armidale, and had been appointed to Ebor School. At that time, Robert had acquired a car, so was able to get home occasionally. This time he brought Carolynne to meet us. As it was school holidays we had time to get to know one another, and Robert was able to show her round Avalon and the Barrenjoey Peninsula, which is a very picturesque area.



Carolynne had applied for a transfer to the NT and she was appointed to a school at Yuendumu, teaching Aboriginal children. Robert finished his training shortly after, and was stationed at Alice Springs Airport. At this time they were 290 km apart, nonetheless it was a big improvement on the Sydney to Alice distance. Robert's car was a Datsun 180B, originally bought to get him from Avalon to Sydney airport each day and to other places around NSW. Then it took him to Alice Springs and Yuendumu, so it did very well. I had driven it myself several times, and found it ideal.

#### A wedding is announced

In 1974, Robert and Carolynne announced that they were getting married, and the date would be the 28<sup>th</sup> of December. This got us all busy making wedding arrangements, somewhat complicated by the fact that the bride and groom to be were in Alice Springs, the bride's parents lives in Cawongla some 800 km north, and we lived in Sydney. The wedding would be in Kyogle, 15 km from Cawongla. To make life easy, and to avoid a lot of driving, we decided to go overnight by a train which had flat trucks at the rear to transport passenger's cars.

The train stopped in the morning at Lismore to unload a very grimy car. Fortunately, a car wash was part of the service. Here we were met by Jack Jones, Carolynne's father, who guided us to his home at Cawongla.

Jack and his wife, Betty lived in a large house with a wide veranda along the front. The house also served as the general store and post office for the village, Betty being the postmistress. Robert and Carolynne were there then, along with her elder brother John, who was a photographer in the air force, her sister Dianne and younger brother Ronald. Since this amounted to a house full, we stayed with their friends, Laurie and Phyllis Drew who owned a farm nearby.

Jack had a truck which he drove round the local dairy farms each morning, picking up large churns of cream to take to the butter factory at Kyogle. I went with him one morning to lend a hand, finishing up with a refreshing stop at the local hotel. Another trip was to Nimbin, the colourful hippy capital of NSW. Carolynne showed us round Cawongla, and introduced us to her school friends. A very pleasant day was spent at Ballina, meeting Carolynne's aunt and grandmother.

Christmas came, and then the wedding day. We all drove to the Anglican Church in Kyogle to join the congregation of relatives and friends for an inspiring service. At the conclusion, Hilda and I went with Jack and Betty and the newlyweds to sign the wedding certificate. Following this we joined the rest of the guests in front of the church to give a big welcome to the happy couple as they came out, arm in arm. Now it was time to take wedding photos, and then move into the church hall for a very happy reception with music and dancing.

The next morning we were up early to farewell Robert and Carolynne as they left for their honeymoon.

We stayed for New Year's Eve, then left to drive across to Tenterfield on the New England Highway. From here we cruised home down the Highway, stopping at Armidale, to explore the city, and the university where Carolynne had studied. The next day we drove out to see Wollomombi falls, the highest falls in Australia. Returning to Armidale, we carried on down the Highway, looking round the towns we passed through along the way.

## **Our first grandchild**

One day early in 1976, Carolynne phoned us to ask if we could meet her sister Dianne at Sydney airport. She was flying from Alice Springs, back home to Adelaide. We could look after her while she waited, and see that she caught her plane OK. We thought it a rather odd request as the airport is the other side of Sydney, and we were twenty miles north. Anyway, off we went, and waited for Dianne to appear, which she did of course. Then we had a big surprise. She was accompanied by Carolynne, cuddling a baby boy in her arms. It was Scott, our first grandchild. What an exciting moment it was. He had been born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1975.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1978, Carolynne presented us with a second grandchild. This time a dear little girl named Jacqui. We didn't see her for some time until we went to stay with them in Darwin. We couldn't talk to them on the phone as there was no national phone network at that time. Carolynne would make a tape recording, giving us her news and getting the two children to speak. One day, we heard Scott say plaintively, 'Nana won't answer me'. We always looked forward to getting them, and played them straight away.

## Chapter 27

### Long Service Leave

In 1977 I became eligible for long service leave. There was no question about what to do with it. It was something that we had been dreaming of for a good while. That was to go back to England and see our families, relatives, and old friends again. In all, we met up with fifty people during our stay. Sadly, Hilda's mother and my father had both died since we left in 1957, but we had kept in touch with both of them with frequent letters and photos.

In the early days the journey was by ship which took five weeks, now it was by plane, a bit over twenty-four hours. We had saved up our fare and spending money, made arrangements for paying bills, and booked our tickets. Heather had been born in Australia, so had never met any of the family. Fortunately we had saved enough to pay her fare too, and were able to take her with us.

Paul stayed home to look after the house and things in general. He gave us an excellent set of three cases and a shoulder bag as a going away present which came in very useful. Robert and Carolynne were then living in Alice Springs. At that time Hilda and I had British passports, so had to apply for visas before we left to get us back into Australia.

When the time came to leave, Paul took us to the airport at Mascot. He stayed to see us off, and was very helpful in ensuring that all went well. We were soon through reception, and decided to go for lunch. As we entered the cafeteria we were enthusiastically greeted by Heather's class and her two teachers, Magda and Marie. They joined us for lunch, then we relaxed in the lounge until it was time for us to say farewell and head for the departure lounge. Eventually it was time to have our tickets checked and board the plane. We stowed our cabin luggage and settled in our seats while the hostess gave us a safety lecture, and the plane taxied to its take off point. I watched absorbed as the plane surged forward, and Sydney disappeared at quite a sharp angle. We eventually levelled out, and were on our way. This was of course, all new and interesting to us. There was no seat back TV then. A small screen was angled down from the ceiling, and a film was shown at an appropriate time, the sound being relayed through bud earphones. Alternatively we could listen to one of several music tracks. The hostesses came along handing out a selection of magazines. The evening meal was served, and in due course the lights were dimmed to enable us to sleep, a state which was easily achieved after the excitement of the day.

Some eight hours or so later we arrived at Singapore where it was late at night and very hot, and humid. No taxiing up to the terminal and walking through an extended tunnel as the terminal was still under construction. The plane parked way out on the tarmac. Then we descended a flight of mobile steps to board coaches which took us to the terminal. This had a large hall in the centre filled with small shops selling duty free goods. In one corner was a rock garden with a waterfall. We had an hour or so to browse the shops and stretch our legs before we had to assemble in our departure lounge.

Back on the plane we were served 'supper', then settled back to sleep until we caught up with daylight and breakfast. We were over Europe now, and had a good view of a range of mountains. Finally there came the order to fasten seat belts as we began to descend to Heathrow. Here, we walked straight off the plane into the terminal. While walking along the corridor, I thought '*The air conditioning is a bit chilly*', but soon realized that it was the English weather. We then proceeded through the customs to the carousel to collect our luggage, and wheel it on a trolley into the arrival hall, where we were eagerly

greeted by Hilda's elder sister Iris, and her husband Gus. It was the end of April, and Gus had an armful of very welcome woolly jumpers.

Iris and Gus lived at Elm Park on the eastern side of London. Heathrow is on the western side. Instead of taking us on the ring road round London, Gus drove through the centre so that we could get a glimpse of the West End and Piccadilly, Trafalgar Square, and the City, which was a very good welcome home gesture after twenty years absence. Arriving home, we settled down for lunch and a good talk, catching up on past memories. Hilda had served in the W.A.A.F. (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) during the war. She recalled that she had been stationed at an airfield in this location during the early part of the war. The airfield was now a housing estate and the streets were named after the wing commanders. She was pleased to hear this piece of news.

Before we left home we had booked a camper van for a month to explore the country. This was due to be delivered in two weeks time after we had got over our jet lag and settled down. We had time to meet their friendly neighbours, and to look around the town. Gus and Iris also took us for a reunion with my sister Edna, and her husband David, who lived in Enfield, a north London suburb. It was quite a contrast to see the rows of terrace houses and narrow streets which had once been our environment.

## Chapter 28

### Our Campervan Tour

The first week was spent recovering from jet lag, looking round the locality and lots of reminiscing. The next week the van was delivered. We were very impressed to see that it was brand new. The agent showed us where everything was and how to set it up for camping. Then we got busy loading our gear into it. We decided to leave in the morning, after the rush hour. Since I did not know my way about London, Gus said that he would lead me out to the A1 road to the north. Off we went, farewelled by Iris and her neighbour. Driving was a bit strange at first, but I had practised on a friend's Kombi, so soon got used to it. Once we got out of the built-up area, Gus pulled over, and made sure that we were OK, then waved us on our way to our first stop at Cambridge. Arriving there in the late afternoon we settled in at a nice camping ground. I set up the van, and then Hilda cooked dinner.

The next morning we set off to explore the university area of the city, concentrating on Kings College Chapel. Having parked we strolled along, and went into St John's College which had a lovely garden to wander through. Leaving there, we came to an interesting open air market with lots of craft stalls to browse through. That took us to lunch time. After lunch we went straight to Kings College Chapel, a very beautiful and impressive building. We spent some time there, and took several photos, finally strolling along the towpath of the River Cam, and then heading back to camp for dinner.

#### York

Our next stay was planned for York. On the way we looked over the colourful fields of tulips at Spalding, with another stop at Lincoln to see the cathedral.

I had been stationed at York for a while during the war so knew the city fairly well. In addition, the van was due for its first service, so I had to book it in to a service station. I tried to keep off the arterial roads as much as possible, and follow the byways which were more picturesque.

York is a very old city dating back to the Vikings. The Romans and Normans also had a hand in its development. For instance the Minster, dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, has in front of it, a column erected by the Romans in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

We were lucky to find a small and comfortable hotel with good parking. Our first day was spent admiring the Minster with its beautiful stained glass windows. The organ was being played, and we were able to spend some restful time sitting in the pews to enjoy it.

Leading from the Minster into the old city is a narrow street called the Shambles. The buildings are medieval style where the upper stories project out over the street. It was originally a centre for butcher shops, shambles being the term in those days for odd pieces of meat. Now-a-days it is lined with up-market shops selling antiques, ecclesiastic items, books and giftware. At the end was a square where a Punch and Judy show was entertaining an audience of enthusiastic children.

York is also the centre of the west coast railway network of the LMS. (London, Midland, Scottish). There is a big, very interesting railway museum. One exhibit was a copy of the first passenger train engine named the 'Rocket' which travelled at 28 mph. The original is in the Science museum in London. In the next section, stood the shiny blue 'Coronation Scot', a streamlined engine that held the speed record of 115 mph on the northern section of the LMS route from London to Glasgow.

From York we drove up to Hexham on the road that crosses England parallel with Hadrian's Wall which was built by the Romans to keep the Picts and Scots out of England. I had been looking forward to seeing the Wall, but the weather at that time was very wet, windy, and cold. We thought it best to have a nice hot lunch and carry on to the west coast. As it happened, we returned some years later and were able to inspect it in much better weather. We carried on to Carlisle, and then turned south into the Lake District.

## **The Lake District**

Here we stayed at Windermere. I thought it advisable to keep away from the mountains. We did have a lovely cruise on Lake Windermere, browsed through the home of the poet, William Wordsworth, which is now a museum showing how he lived, his study and much of his poetry. Then took a vintage train ride through some beautiful scenery.

## **Wales**

Next, we drove into Wales, along the north coast through towns whose names I can't pronounce, to Caernarfon where we visited the castle ruins. This is a big castle, some of it still inhabitable. It is where the sovereign's eldest son is sworn in as Prince of Wales. The current prince is of course Prince Charles, Queen Elizabeth's son. Another picturesque trip was to see the very pretty swallow falls near Betws-y-Coed. The next day we went to Mount Snowdon (1065m) (3493ft). Although the weather was fine there was ice on the track higher up which delayed the train for some time. Finally it cleared enough to get to the last but one station where we were allowed off the train. The wait was well worth it, as the view was fantastic. Luckily, this was another instance where we were able to return several years later and make it to the top.

The following day we cruised down the coast, stopping at places of interest along the way until we reached Swansea. This area was familiar to Hilda, as she had been stationed at a nearby airfield on the Gower Peninsular, where she was an aircraft instrument repairer. The airfield of course was long gone, but the area is on the heritage listing for its beautiful scenery.

## **Bath**

We now crossed over the Bristol Channel to Bath in Somerset. This city was established by the Romans. It lies on the site of a natural spring and they built a complex series of baths fed by the spring. A great many Roman artefacts have been found there. It is now more of a tourist attraction. The baths have been reconditioned and are occasionally used for their original purpose. It became very fashionable during Georgian times for parties and dances. The author Jane Austin often stayed there. A 'Pump room' was built where people could sit and listen to music, and drink spring water which has a slightly sulphurous taste. It was then considered good for your health. These activities were the Georgian style, not that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Coventry**

The next day saw us heading for Coventry. This has been a centre for car making, and aircraft engines and components before and during WWII. In November 1940 German bombers had made a prolonged raid on the city, causing severe destruction and many fatalities. The Cathedral was set on fire and burnt down, leaving just the walls standing. The rubble was cleared and a small altar built holding a cross made of 12" nails (30cms) recovered from the burnt roof beams, tied together to form a cross. More of these were subsequently made and sent to other cathedrals around the country and the world. After the war, the Cathedral was rebuilt in a contemporary style, incorporating the remaining walls of the old building. The west wall and the main entrance were made up of big clear glass panes with biblical figures etched on them. The nave was awe inspiring. A big bright

open area, the ceiling being supported on tall thin columns, seemed to float above us. On either side of the nave were tall stained glass windows in a modern design, and angled to face the altar. Above the altar was a ceiling high tapestry of Christ. From the outside, the building was relatively plain yet had a reassuring air about it. The city had all been rebuilt by then, but I can't recall much else about it.

## **Bourton-on-the-water**

Bourton-on-the-water is a pretty village in Gloucestershire famous for the fact that a shallow river runs through it, splitting the High Street in two longways, each side lined with a variety of cafes and gift shops. In the summer it is a very busy place. Having inspected the shops, we had lunch, and then went to 'Birdland' which has an interesting collection of native and foreign birds. Then to the model village which is a scale model of the real village, and also includes a scale model of itself. Having had an easy day, we drove on to Stratford-on-Avon.

## **Stratford-on-Avon**

Stratford-on-Avon is Shakespeare's birthplace, so we began at his childhood home in the town, then walked a short distance out of town to the home of Ann Hathaway, his bride to be. She had lived in a small whitewashed cottage which had been furnished as it would have been when she lived there. The garden was filled with traditional colourful English plants. Following this we went back into town to their house, known as New House. This was a large two-story house, with a well laid out garden that you could stroll around in and admire.

## **Devon and Cornwall**

We drove along the north coast of Devon, stopping at Combe Martin and Tintagel. Tintagel is reputed to be the birthplace of the legendary King Arthur. There is a ruined castle on the cliff top where it is said, he was born. It didn't look very safe to me. Our next port of call was St Ives, where we had spent our honeymoon. It hadn't changed much. We drove around the area to explore the places we had been to then relaxed on the beach, and walked the paths that we had followed before. I thought that the service in restaurants and shops wasn't what it used to be, an attitude that I think had become general since the war. Lands' End was disappointing. When we first went there it was a peaceful open space with two houses, one that sold light refreshments, with a sign on it saying '*First and Last house in England*'. We found it had become an amusement park. That was in 1977, let's hope it's been improved or better still, demolished. I checked it on Google to see what had changed. It was all much more modern and neater at least. I think it may have been moved further back from the coastline too. The house was much bigger, and there is now a hotel. Plus a gift shop and an entertainment centre which I wasn't sure about. I think when one goes to a place like Lands' End, it is to feel the grandeur, the isolation, and the wonder of it. It should have been declared a heritage area long ago. Next was Penzance, where we had taken off on a flight to the Scilly Isles on a small fixed wing aircraft in 1957. Now it was by a big, very noisy helicopter.

We stayed at St Ives for a restful three days then left to see Polperro and Looe along the south coast. Both of them pretty fishing villages, but much busier now, with tourists.

## **Stonehenge**

Leaving Devon we went into Wiltshire to visit Stonehenge. This was my second visit there, but the first for Hilda and Heather. My first time was shortly after the war ended. I was working in a telephone exchange in London, when a notice was put up asking for people to volunteer to work on a farm for two weeks due to a shortage of workers. I

volunteered to go with another one of our staff. We were sent to a farm near Salisbury where we were told to follow a tractor digging beets and scattering them alongside the furrow. We each had a sack and had to pick up the beets and fill our sacks. It was a bit hard on our backs for the first few days. At the weekend we were free to do as we pleased. My mate knew that we were close to Stonehenge, so we caught a bus that took us there. It was a lovely day, and there was just us two there. We spent a good while browsing around examining the stones and marvelling at the effort it must have taken, considering their size and construction. Then sat quietly on a fallen stone to recuperate and absorb the atmosphere of our surroundings.

The second time with Hilda and Heather, we were included in a busload of tourists. We were split into two groups, one on either side of the circle. Each group was accompanied by a guide, to lecture us about the monument, its history and assumed purpose. Both of the guides were outgoing people, and from what I could hear, they embroidered the subject somewhat, still, it was all very interesting. It was a beautiful day, and everyone was happy. Even today, archaeologists are still debating the reason for building the circle. The site has now been declared a national heritage area and protected by a wire netting fence to save wear and tear on the ground and the stones.

## **The New Forest**

The New Forest was declared in 1080 by William the Conqueror to be his personal hunting ground. It was quite a large area. All buildings were demolished, the people were moved out, and the forest stocked with deer. It held a wide variety of landscapes, birds and small animals. It is now famous for its New Forest ponies which are beautiful creatures with warm brown coloured hides. There are also a number of Shetland ponies. Over the years it was encroached upon, then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was declared a national park. It currently covers 566km<sup>2</sup>, (219 m<sup>2</sup>). Being late spring it was very quiet, and we found it relaxing.

## **Winchester and home**

Leaving the New Forest we were on the final leg of our tour, heading for the depot at Winchester. Gus and Iris had arranged to pick us up and take us back to London. Even so, we still had an interesting day before us. We handed the van back in good order, then went off with Gus and Iris to explore the city which was very old. In the Great Hall built in 1238, there was a round table top hanging on the back wall. It had been painted in segments and bore around the circumference the names of King Arthur's knights. In the centre was a painting of King Arthur on his throne. It was supposed to have been used by the king and his knights for meetings, but had been proved not to be that old. There is also a lovely cathedral which is the largest in Europe. There was some celebration going on in the town, with flags flying, bands playing and folk dancing in the main street. Then Gus took us home to dinner and a quiet evening to talk about our adventures.

## Chapter 29

### The Rest of our Holiday

The first thing we did after we got back was to contact our relatives and friends to arrange a time to see them again. For some it was just a day or an evening, but for our closer relatives, it was to go and stay with them for a while. There was one lady that Hilda had served with in the air force. They had kept in touch ever since the war ended. She was Jo Penny who with her husband Rod, lived at Kidlington near Oxford. We went to stay with them, and we got on very well together. They showed us around Oxford which is a university city. One point of interest was that the BBC had put on a very successful TV series called 'Morse'. It featured a detective named Morse with his assistant named Lewis. All the action took place in Oxford. It was so popular that you could go on a bus tour of the city to see the places where the action was recorded. We saw some of them and remembered the episodes in which they appeared. Jo and Rod also took us to see some of the beauty spots and picturesque villages in the area.

A memorable trip was when we went back to where we had lived as children. I had lived with my parents in an upstairs flat. We went to see the couple downstairs, whom we had known for years. We found that they had bought our flat, and made the two flats into a very nice house. Hilda's house hadn't fared so well, it had been demolished to make way for a new school.

Another special occasion was for Hilda. Before the war, she had been a Girl Guide and a Brownie leader, (Brown Owl) of the brownie pack in St Saviour's Church, where we were married. She was now helping with the brownie pack in Laurieton where we lived in Australia. Before we left for our trip we arranged to visit the pack at Walthamstow to exchange scrapbooks. A very happy and reminiscent evening followed, attended by a photographer from the local newspaper.



AN EX-LEADER of a Walthamstow Guide and Brownie Pack was honoured by its current members when she visited them while on holiday from Australia, where she now lives.

Hilda Parker was leader of the 21st Walthamstow Guides and Brownies more than 30 years ago.

She moved to Australia with her husband after the war, to make a new home.

When she visited one of the girls' regular meetings at St Saviour's Youth Centre in Verulam Avenue, Mrs Parker was presented with a scrapbook of the activities of the pack.

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The next step was to stay with our more distant cousins, where we spent several happy days together. This resulted in four of them coming to Australia for a holiday some time later. In between we went to see the familiar spots in and around London, spending time at Kew Gardens, the London Zoo, Madame Tussauds, plus museums and art

galleries. One of our visits was to Westminster Abbey which is used for the Coronation ceremony and other royal occasions. Many famous people have been buried there, or have a memorial dedicated to them. A row of colourful heraldic flags hangs on either side of the nave. Close by to the Abbey is St Margaret's church which is the parish church for Westminster. We found that they had set up the crypt for people to do brass rubbing. There was a selection of brass plates to choose from. These were copied from the originals set in the floor or on the walls each having an embossed drawing and text praising the person who had passed away. You laid a sheet of strong black paper over the plate, and fastened it down with sticky tape, then rubbed a lump of gold wax over it which resulted in an image of the raised parts appearing on the paper. Hilda and I chose a large one, 60cmsx 90cms, each working from opposite ends. Heather chose a smaller one. It took quite a while, but they came out very well. We still have them.



One very nice trip which we had not done before was when we went with Hilda's sister Iris on a boat cruise up the river Thames from Westminster Bridge to Greenwich. Here we saw the Cutty Sark, an old sailing ship that was renowned for its speed in carrying bales of wool from Australia to England. Next, we browsed through a very comprehensive maritime museum, followed by an inspection of the 'Painted Hall' in what used to be the Royal Naval College. Its walls and ceiling are covered with paintings of naval scenes and people, including Nelson and the architect Christopher Wren. There is a tea trolley carrying a mirror to enable viewers to see the ceiling paintings in comfort. We were unable to visit the observatory as it is further up the hill, and we had to get back to the boat. As we travelled up and down the river we were given an interesting commentary on the passing scene, over the PA system, by a chap with a pronounced Cockney accent.

Gus and Iris were a great help all throughout our stay, taking us to places on the coast and in the country. Southend with its mile long pier was high on the list, being a sort of Mecca for East Londoners. Greenstead village was a beauty spot in the country, with its thatched cottages with flowering window boxes. There is a lovely old wooden church there with walls made of logs stood on end. We bought a ceramic model of it.

There were two very special events that we were able to enjoy. The first was the 'Trooping of the Colours'. This was a military ceremony, held every year on the sovereign's official birthday in June, on the Horse Guards Parade by Green Park. This is a tradition dating back to around 1700. When there was no regular army, it would be formed by

groups of men organised by the local Lord, or whoever they owed their allegiance to. In the event of a forthcoming battle, they would be gathered together and the colours paraded before them so that they would have a point to rally round and defend. Now-days the guards regiments are formed up on Horse Guards Parade and the Colours carried through their ranks. Following this the bands play while the guards form up in ranks to march round the parade ground. The salute is currently taken by Queen Elizabeth II. The Royal Family and other dignitaries are seated to the side. There are also stands for the public to sit and view the parade, a ballot is held for the public seats. We all applied for seats, and it turned out that Heather won a seat for the rehearsal in the week before. She was very excited, and took lots of photos. Hilda and I stood on the footpath along the road with the crowd to watch the guards marching in behind their respective bands. It was still very impressive and memorable.

The second event was even more impressive. It was a celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee. She was going to travel in the gold coach from Buckingham Palace to St Paul's Cathedral for a Jubilee service. We went up to the city and stood on Ludgate Hill which leads from Fleet Street to the forecourt of St Paul's. People were already gathering along the route. Music was playing over the PA system. A truck came along spreading sand on the road to make it safe for the horses to walk on, and the workmen got cheered. As the time went by, detachments of servicemen marched along the road to stand in line in front of the spectators. Then personnel from the three services came marching smartly along with bands playing and flags flying. At last the guests began to arrive. At first, people who had been invited for their service to the state, then business leaders, politicians, high ranking diplomats and officers from the three services, followed by heads of state from overseas countries and the Empire. Many of them that people knew from newspapers and radio, received an appreciative cheer. Finally, the sound of cheering could be heard in the distance and getting louder. Along came the Gold Coach, drawn by eight white horses, and escorted by the Household Cavalry, carrying the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh smiling and waving. The cheering continued to the Cathedral steps where they were greeted by the Archbishop and other dignitaries. The service was relayed to us over the PA system. Then at the end the Queen and Duke left to return to the palace amid more cheering.

All over the country there were street parties, with strings of flags draped across the street and decorations around windows, and tables set up along the street, laden with goodies. The residents got together with games for the children, and there would be a stage set up for entertainment. What one might call a right royal celebration!

All in all it was a wonderful holiday, meeting all our family and friends once more, and seeing the places that we knew so well and others that were new. But I must say one thing, after twenty years in Australia, I couldn't live in an English suburb again. The distance between us is a bit discouraging and the time difference takes a bit of getting used to. Now that we have a worldwide telephone system, computers and Skype, it is much more bearable.

## **Homecoming**

'Fasten your seat belts' came the command from the PA system as the plane began its descent, and we craned our necks to catch a glimpse of Sydney from the air. Then, 'thump-rumble-rumble. We had arrived. We exchanged goodbyes with the cabin crew, and then proceeded through the customs, to gaze in anticipation at the baggage carousel, prepared to grab our bags off, and on to the trolley, then finally entered the arrival hall to be greeted by Paul.

Back home, everything was in good order, a backlog of post to check out, the garden to inspected, and a couple of left over jobs around the house, to finish. In the next

few days we caught up on our family and friends, and spent some evenings showing my collection of slides. Back at work, I caught up with the latest developments and jobs to be done.

At that time Paul was working at a wedding reception venue. One of his duties was being the bartender. As the functions were held in Sydney, he moved into a flat closer to the venue. It was during this time that he met Keiren McLeonard, and they became partners. We used to see them occasionally, then one day they came to visit with a lovely little baby girl named Aimee. In the course of time they parted, but we still keep in touch with them, and also became good friends with Keiren's parents in Orange. They owned a thriving apple orchard.



In 1978 I received a call to attend an interview in our exchange area headquarters for a likely promotion. All went well, resulting in me being promoted to a Senior Technical Officer grade 1 (STO1), in charge of Avalon telephone exchange.

## Chapter 30

### An Exciting Adventure

Robert and Carolynne had moved from Alice Springs to Darwin, where Robert was employed by the education department maintaining the electronic equipment in schools. Two years later he applied for, and was accepted, for a position maintaining the equipment in Charles Sturt University in Bathurst NSW. This was a good step up as the university had its own radio and TV studio.

The only problem was getting from Darwin to Bathurst, some 4800 km, in time to take up the position. They had two cars and two small children, Scott nearly 4 years old, and Jacqui 18 months. They were each going to drive a car with one of the children with them. Hilda said to me that would be a big strain driving all that way while keeping a check on the children; why don't we fly there, so that I could share the driving, and she could help mind the children. I thought that was a great idea, it would be a special holiday for us too. Robert and Carolynne were very pleased as it would take a lot of weight off them.

I took some long service leave. It took us 4 hours to fly there and two weeks steady driving to get back home. We arrived the day after the removal men had taken their furniture and personal belongings. They lived in a government house so the beds, dining and lounge room furniture, frig, cooker and washing machine belonged in the house so it was liveable. The spare room was filled with things to be packed in the cars.

The next few days were divided between looking round Darwin and helping clean up the house. All the walls were painted so had to be washed, also the flyscreens, ceiling fans, and big windows. All the time Carolynne's friends kept calling round to say goodbye, bringing all their children to add to the general confusion. Scott put texta colour all over the bar between the kitchen and dining room, so that had to be painted, then Jacqui kept getting her hands on the paint and transferring it to the polished timber kitchen cupboard doors.

On Thursday evening I had some farewell drinks at the local pub with Robert's workmates. Then on Friday evening his boss arranged a B.B.Q. It was a beautiful evening; we sat around eating freshly caught barramundi (a very nice tasty N.T. ocean fish) and drinking Darwin beer. They gave Robert a nice clock for a present.

The next morning we were up early and started packing, everywhere was heaps of luggage, tents and camping gear. Robert and I started to load the cars and gradually the pile got smaller. We began to wonder if it could possibly all fit in. They had a Datsun 180B and a Land Rover, both with roof racks. They had managed to sell the third car, a Suzuki, the day before and on the same day found a home for one of their cats and her kitten. The other was boarded out with a friend and flown down later. We had planned to leave early but the packing took a long time and we had drinks with a neighbour and lunch with another. Finally everything was stowed including the children, and all the farewells were said. It was 4pm and we were heading for Katherine 215 miles away.

We were soon out of Darwin and headed down the Stuart Highway which goes down through the centre for 1,880 miles to Adelaide. It is mostly a straight road running through the bush with gum trees and termite hills on either side. There were magnetic termite hills and others that looked like fence posts. Also we had to look out for cattle and kangaroos straying on the road. At intervals on the side of the road there were emergency airstrips. We drove on through the night and about 9pm we suddenly drove into the brightly lit town of Katherine. We left the town and went another 20 miles to Katherine Gorge and into the camping area. It was a beautiful night, with a full moon, Jacqui was asleep so we laid her on a mattress under a tree and while Robert and I got the tents up,

Carolynne and Hilda got a meal ready. Scott was full of beans and it was hard to keep him quiet, everyone else in the caravan park was asleep.

The next morning we went for a boat trip up the river. At this point the Katherine River flows through a 200 ft deep gorge of red sandstone. The boat goes for two miles up the river, then the way is blocked by rocks so you have to walk over the rocks then get another boat for another two miles. The gorge goes much further but that is a two day hike. The scenery is very imposing in the morning sunlight with some sheer red cliffs, and some covered with trees. Where we walked across the rock fall there were trees and Aboriginal paintings on the cliff face. Some must be the original splatter painting that kids do now with a toothbrush. They would put one hand on the rock, chew up some red ochre rock then spray it out of their mouth over their hand and the surrounding rock, then remove their hand leaving the shape of their hand. There were also paintings of men and animals.

As it was now mid-morning we had coffee then packed up and moved on. This was a long straight road and not much traffic. It was a relief to come to a bend. The traffic was mostly tourists or goods trucks, sometimes a road train. This is a long semi-trailer in four sections about 150ft long, mostly carrying cattle on two levels.



Towards evening we turned off to Daly Waters, famed for its hotel - about all that was there. The hotel is full of relics of the pioneering days, from a steam engine in the yard to a mangle in the bar.

We had a rest there and then carried on. It finally got dark and we came to a service station/motel. We asked if we could camp there but the man said the ground is too hard to get a tent peg in but you can sleep in the shed but look for snakes first. Luckily there were none. It had no doors but sheets of corrugated iron across the doorways to keep the cows out. Meals were cooked on a primus stove and Carolynne has a jaffle iron which made good quick meals with all kinds of filling. We never stayed up very long after driving all day. We just got our meal and had a drink at the motel (hot, thirsty weather) and then to bed. Opposite the motel there is a memorial to the men who put through the overland telegraph from Adelaide to Darwin. The place is called Dunmarra.

Off again next morning to Tennant Creek 200 miles away. On the way we passed the memorial to John Flynn who started the Flying Doctor Service. We passed through a

range of hills where the soil is deep red, the scenery was changing all the time. Tennant Creek was 15 miles past our turn off but we needed to stock up on food. When we got there we found shops empty. The road and rail south of Alice Springs was flooded. It is a bad road and that is why we were not going that way. We missed out seeing Alice. We had nothing for dinner because there was only some revolting looking meat in one shop.

We back tracked to the turn off and went on to the next town 70 miles away! Fortunately most of the road was sealed. Once on a dirt road the car was completely smothered in red dust, commonly called bulldust. I couldn't see a thing for several minutes. We finally arrived at Frewena having travelled 258 miles that day. This was another country hotel (pub), a pull in for the road trains and very old fashioned. Behind the bar are jars full of preserved snakes – probably locals but we never saw any. Everybody was very friendly and they invited us to a B.B.Q. that was on for the staff meal so after we got the tents up, we had a good meal of steak and onions and salad. When we went to pay they said to put something in the charity box.

It was good not having to cook that night because we were very tired. Here we met some of the biggest Aboriginals we have ever seen. They all slept out in the field with just a blanket and this far inland the nights were quite cool. Next morning we found it to be a very pretty place with trees and flowering creepers. There was another ancient steam traction engine. This was one place I didn't shave as the water pump had broken down.

We were well organised at this stage. We would soon have the tents up while Carolynne and Hilda were getting the dinner. In the mornings after breakfast the tents were packed and everything stowed away, both cars were well packed including roof racks.

We would start off with Robert driving the Land Rover and Carolynne driving the Datsun. At coffee time I would take over the Datsun and later one of us would relieve Robert. The Land Rover was much harder to drive than the Datsun as it was high and you had to hold onto the steering wheel. The children were sometimes both in the Datsun or one in each car depending on what sort of mood they were in. They usually had a nap in the afternoon. They had a box of their own toys. Also Hilda brought a bag of little presents for Scott. Each one had a number and a clock face drawn on it. He got one each day. The clock told him when he could open it. He always looked forward to them and they kept him amused as they were things he could do in the car. There were several children's tapes of songs and stories. As Jacqui was much younger we bought her a brightly coloured rattling toy that stuck on the car door so she could play with it while strapped in her seat. Whenever we stopped they had a good run round.

This day we were heading towards Queensland. The country was a succession of low hills and clumps of trees. Occasionally we would pass a radio tower carrying telephone and TV channels. Sometimes we saw a few stray cattle. You had to watch out for them on the road. About lunchtime we crossed the border into Queensland and soon arrived at the first town, Camooweal. It was a quiet place with the usual wide main street and a few Aboriginals strolling around, also two large emus. The emus followed us to the hotel veranda where we ate our lunch. Fortunately they could not climb the steps or they would have soon gobbled our lunch. They kept poking their heads through the rails to try to get it.

We were having trouble with the front wheel brake on the Land Rover so Robert adjusted it here. Off we went again and after a few miles, steam came from under the bonnet. The radiator had sprung a leak so back we went, but the plumber had finished work and gone home. Fortunately the leak was at the top so we filled a drum full with water and left again for Mt. Isa. We had 117 miles to go and it got dark before we were halfway there. Driving in the complete dark is quite a strain as you cannot see anything on either side, only the road immediately ahead. It seemed to go on for hours. As we got closer to

Mt. Isa, the road twisted and turned through a range of hills and the moon began to rise, making a bright halo of light above them. At last we saw some red lights ahead. They were on the mine chimneys, almost 500ft high. It seemed we would never get close to them but at last we did. Then we found the caravan park and pitched our tents. We were all pretty tired by then so we all packed into one car and went to a restaurant for a good meal. We had travelled 506 miles that day. We decided to stay a couple of days and get the radiator and brakes fixed.

Since its discovery, the mine has grown as big as the town. The main street runs between the two. At night the mine is lit from end to end; with lights on the main shaft building, pipelines and chimneys it looks like fairyland.

That afternoon we went for a surface tour of the mine. We were driven slowly around in a small bus as the guide described the workings and showered us with facts and figures. It was very impressive. They produce silver, lead, zinc and copper. The veins run close together almost vertical. As they take the ore out, the space is filled with a mixture of crushed rock and cement. We saw the original open cut mine which is 500ft deep. I think the mine goes down to 900 ft. The elevator goes down in one minute! The lead is poured into 1 cwt. ingots with several ounces of silver mixed in it. It is then shipped to England where it is separated. This is to prevent the silver being stolen. Most of the mill is computer controlled. You see big crushing machines working with nobody around. The ore is transferred automatically by conveyer belt or through pipes. There are three shafts - the newest and biggest has a three level lift which takes an ore truck or 90 men down at once. There are two other lifts which run a regular service. The buses even drive through the big training workshops. There is also a tour that goes down the mine but you have to book in advance, and a mining museum full of old equipment. The mine chimney has several rooms in its walls. It is made of poured concrete and went up 10ft per day.

The next day the car was fixed. The master cylinder had the wrong type of valve in it, and the radiator was soldered. Meanwhile we looked around the shops, some of it old fashioned and a big new shopping mall. Then we were off again. Out of Mt. Isa we passed through the eastern range of hills, in daylight this time, and we could see the rugged scenery. Further on we passed through Mary Kathleen, a little town built for the first uranium mine. Then on through Cloncurry. Now the hills changed to wide dead flat plains for grazing. The road ahead was dead straight. On the left was a wire strand fence and on the right was a row of telephone poles and the Mt. Isa to Townsville (on the coast) railway line. They all met at a point on the horizon. In all directions, right to the horizon was tall dry brown grass. In all this time there was little traffic, just an occasional car or truck. We saw two trains, one by day going east with a load of ore, a long train chugging along at 20 miles per hour. The other was at night coming towards us. We saw its light a long time before we met it. We arrived at our stop for the night, but we took one look at the caravan park and drove out again. It was just a fenced off patch of dirt. As we were all getting weary we went into the restaurant for dinner, then decided to pass on to the next town 72 miles on.

Off we went again, in the dark, nothing to look at but Robert's rear lights. Fortunately I had taped a lot of lively music and this was a welcome distraction. Soon we arrived at the next town, Hughenden, 503 miles from Mt. Isa. Here was a very nice camping ground, lots of grass and trees. While we were erecting the tents a big, grey Persian cat came along and made friends with us. The only trouble was he wanted to come into the tent, and kept rubbing round the sides all night. It turned out that he was a stray. Carolynne wanted to take him home with her, but it would have been too awkward in the car. Carolynne went to buy something for breakfast, but no luck. All the shops were closed because it was their annual show day. Nothing for it, but to finish up our stale bread. We had just started on our way down the main street when Carolynne found the cat hiding under the car seat, so she had to take it back.

From now on the scenery began to vary more as we were approaching the Great Dividing Range, mountains that run all along the east coast - 2,000 to 3,000ft high in places. Also there were more rivers. You could always tell when you were approaching a river on the grassy plain as there would be a line of trees along it. We passed through an old country town named Charters Towers. It was Friday and there were quite a lot of people shopping. We hadn't seen so many people for the last week. Two more hours and we drove round a hillside and caught a glimpse of the sea.

Soon we were driving into Townsville, back to the world of traffic and people and department stores. 1,580 miles from Darwin on the north coast to Townsville on the east coast. We found a camping ground overlooking the beach and while we were getting set up the children found a small slide and roundabout. They had great fun until bedtime. The next morning we went to a lookout high above the town. You could see for miles all around, from the mountains inland over the town and out to sea. Magnetic Island was named by Captain Cook and is now a national park and koala reserve.

After shopping and some morning coffee in Woollies, we set off for Shute Harbour, only a short run this time, 197 miles. We were now on the Pacific Highway or Highway 1 which goes almost the whole of the way round Australia. We were now entering the sugar cane area of Queensland. The countryside was low hills covered with sugar plantations. A lot of the cane was in full bloom, purple feathery plumes like grass seed on cane 5ft high. From the distance on the hillside, it looked like a deep blue sea. In between the plantations are narrow gauge railways that run alongside the main road and across the towns to the sugar mills, carrying the cane to the mills for crushing.

We arrived at Shute Harbour and set up camp in the national park, a beautiful area with lots of trees and birds, and very peaceful but no power and no hot water. That evening we cooked fresh fish over a wood fire, delicious, and then we sat round talking to the other campers. Up until then the weather had been hot and dry so we hadn't been using the tent fly. At 2am it showered so I had to jump out and put the fly over the tent as the rain came straight through the thin material.

The next morning was dry but very windy as we set off to go for a boat trip across the Whitsunday Passage, also named by Captain Cook, that being the day he discovered it. On the mainland side there is a range of steep hills and on the seaward side a long chain of islands. Further out is the Great Barrier Reef. When we got to the harbour the wind was blowing and the sea was choppy and the boat did not look very big. It held about 3 dozen passengers and we were down in the cabin which was very comfortable with a good view of the scenery. Once clear of the land the islands seemed to shelter us from the worst of the wind, and although the boat bobbed up and down a bit the sun was shining. Coffee was served and it was very enjoyable. As the trip progressed the guide told us about the islands. One was privately owned; some had holiday resorts on them. The two biggest are national parks, and lots of them small and uninhabited. About lunch time we got to Hook Island to see the underwater observatory. We went across a bridge and down into a big tank under the sea and you are in a different world. Fish ranging in size from huge to minute many of them brilliantly coloured swim amongst the coral which is just as varied as the fish. Some were grey and rock like and others were delicate with red branches. I knew coral was alive and growing but I never knew that it could move. It sways like grass in the wind.

After this we should have gone over a coral reef in a glass bottomed boat but the sea was too rough so we strolled along the shore to a wide golden sandy beach and lay back and relaxed in the sun with a cold can of drink. Soon our idyllic existence was interrupted when we were called back to the boat. This time we were on a much larger boat with a large dining room and a bar. We had lunch while we cruised to our next port of call. After that we relaxed on deck while the ship cruised past Hook Island, and some small

tropical islands with golden sand and palm trees to Hayman Island. Here we moored at the end of a long wharf, where we boarded a small train with open carriages and were taken to the shore and through an avenue of palms to the centre of a highly commercial tourist resort. First there were rows of cabins set along the beach, surrounded by flowering shrubs, then a big hotel with its own shops, swimming pool, restaurant, tennis courts etc. Behind, the island rose up to a central peak with walks through the bush. There is a beautiful beach and boating; a lovely way to get away from it all. We only had time to stroll around before we went back to the boat where afternoon tea was served while we sailed for home, back past the islands (one named Daydream) to arrive back in harbour as the sun was setting. A beautiful day.

Off again next morning. Monday was a public holiday – Queen's Birthday, no shops open, also more traffic on the road. The hot sunny weather we had been enjoying was beginning to cloud over. The run took us over hills, past more sugar, through little towns to the city of Rockhampton. Here we camped at a lovely spot on a riverbank and phoned home to let them know how we were going. Next morning we awoke to hear Carolynne saying it's going to rain, so we all scrambled out and packed up very quickly and just managed to get the tents rolled up when the rain arrived. No time to get breakfast but two kind people in a caravan gave us all tea and toast. It was very welcome. This was to be our last night of camping.

Then came a day of driving through sunshine and showers. The hilly country gave us continually changing scenery. After 345 miles we arrived at Nambour, the central town of the fruit growing area, mainly pineapples, avocados and nuts. We arrived in the dark and the rain and booked into a rather expensive, low grade motel. Then we went out for a pizza for dinner that wasn't very good either.

Next morning we sat on the bed and ate jaffles for breakfast, then off in the drizzle to see the giant pineapple. We had been here before on holiday. It is a building three stories high, built in the shape of a pineapple. On each floor is the illustrated story of pineapple growing and you come out at the top onto a balcony to look out over the display area. In the valley a little train tours round the plantation while a guide explains how the crops are grown. Also there is a large souvenir shop and restaurant designed to look like an Hawaiian hut. A pity it was raining. Have you ever seen a dripping wet giant pineapple?

Then on to a little seaside town, Caloundra, to visit some old friends who used to live in Avalon. We only meant to stay a short time but we talked so long we stayed to lunch.

Off again, our destination was to Carolynne's parents at Cawongla near Lismore, 195 miles. But first we had to get through Brisbane. We got there in daylight but caught the rush hour. Brisbane is a narrow city with a river across and you have to get the right bridge. It seemed ages getting through. I stuck as close as I could to Robert but we got separated by a truck just before the river. I kept heading the way he went and finally found him waiting for us. Once through Brisbane it was 60 miles to the border through a holiday area known as the Gold Coast but it was dark and raining most of the way. We crossed the border tired and hungry so we stopped by an Italian restaurant and had a lovely hot meal of lasagne and a bottle of wine. Much refreshed, on to Cawongla. After a few miles we turned off the main highway onto a dirt road. Robert and Carolynne were driving this time as they both knew the road well. By this time it was pouring. We went over a wooden bridge just a few inches above water level. There were 25 miles of this and it seemed endless. At 10pm we pulled up outside Carolynne's home to be welcomed by her parents. We all crowded into the kitchen for a nice hot cup of tea and toast. Next morning the rain had gone and the sun was out so we unloaded the cars and aired the damp gear and clothes. The house is a small timber one built on a hillside on the edge of a banana

plantation where Jack works. There are three houses in the valley. It is 5 miles to the nearest shop and 15 miles to Lismore.

Scott now had two sets of grandparents at once. Jack and Betty are Grandma and Grandpa and we are Nan and Grandad. It got more complicated when we took him to see his Great Grandmother. What a day that was with masses of Carolynne's relations all coming to see them. That was at Ballina. Another day Jack drove us round the district for Carolynne to meet all her old friends. One Italian friend gave us homemade red wine. It was super.

We went for a drive through the state forest following a winding road through the hills, sometimes high up in tall gum trees and sometimes down in a valley in the rain forest, among moss covered trees and surrounded by tree ferns and creepers. At a look out high above the valley we were standing on the rim of an extinct volcano and could see Mt. Warning, 15 miles away in the centre.

Our plan had been that we should all come home to Sydney and Robert and Carolynne would have a few days with us before heading for Bathurst. But there was a bad petrol strike on so they could not risk getting stranded in Sydney. We stayed an extra couple of days before setting off for Bathurst by a different route. On Thursday morning we packed the cars, getting extra petrol and a new tyre. Then we said goodbye and left Jack and Betty in peace.

Our next destination was Armidale, 290 miles away, the centre of the New England district where the climate, trees and country are a bit like England with oak and beech trees. We drove along the quiet country roads, through Grafton, the city of jacaranda trees. Then we climbed steadily on to a high plateau, and arrived at Ebor. It has a hotel, a general store, post office, service station and a tiny school where Carolynne had her first teaching job and where she met Robert when he was working for the D.C.A. So we stopped to renew old acquaintances. Nearby is a lookout, 5000 ft above sea level where you can see for miles - rolling hills and valleys. Further on we saw a big mob of kangaroos, the first on the trip. Armidale in winter is too cold for camping so we booked a family room in a motel - heaters, colour T.V, luxury, and then we went out for a Chinese meal.

Carolynne did her training at Armidale Teachers College so on Friday morning we were taken on a conducted tour. It is a long white building with wide steps and marble columns in front, very regal looking. It stands on top of a hill with a beautiful rose garden in front. We saw an exhibition of student's craft, some lovely work.

We stayed longer than we should. We had to get to Bathurst that day for Robert to report in, and that was 350 miles away. The first half was a good run along the New England Highway with pleasant hilly countryside enough to make driving interesting, and two steep ranges of hills. Lunch was a quick hamburger in a country town. Some of the place names were unusual, like Moonbi, Goonoo-Goonoo and Wallabadah, even Aberdeen.

At Muswellbrook we turned off the main road and headed cross country on an unsealed road following a river through a beautiful grassy valley as it continually changed direction. Years ago the government started to build a railway and got to a place called Sandy Hollow and then abandoned the idea. We were on a road following the route and would find bridge piers, station sites and embankments. As the hills got steeper we came to a railway tunnel, one of three. The road now goes through, single track and saves miles of driving round the hills. It is a long tunnel so you have to switch on your headlights before entering. If you see lights in the tunnel you must wait for them to get through. After emerging, the road climbed into the hills and as we climbed, darkness fell. Pity because we wanted to see the view from the top. Scott thought the tunnel was great. We had a

short rest at a small town, all shops shut, and then I took over the Land Rover for the last 70 miles.

The last stretch had been a good sealed road which went on for another 20 miles, then changed to a rough dirt road that twisted and turned, rose and fell for miles. At one stage we came to a long curving hill and could see the lights of a town below us. At another we zigzagged down a loose gravelly road into a valley and across a wide river. This was Sofala, one of the first gold mining towns. Then up the other side, the road was much better.

At the top we could see a bright glow in the sky, this was Bathurst at last. After a while with the glow getting brighter we could see the city lights. Then suddenly street lights were around us as we entered the outskirts. Robert took over as he knew where to go. We got to the college hostel and they had forgotten we were arriving that day but they finally found us rooms. For dinner that night we sat on the beds and ate fish and chips with a can of beer. Robert and Carolynne said "We couldn't have done it without you."

On Saturday morning we booked our train tickets to Sydney then Carolynne shopped for the weekend and we returned to the hostel for lunch. In the afternoon we looked round the city, then drove one lap of the race track, hardly a lap record. At 4pm it was time to catch the train home, after three weeks of living and travelling together without a cross word between us. Scott wanted to come with us. We settled back in the train to relax and watch the countryside passing and read or dozed for the last 150 miles. Paul picked us up at the station to run us home. Heather was pleased to see us home as she had been housekeeping and getting herself to work for four weeks, and she did it very well. That was the end of our trip, 5350 miles and suddenly it was all over.

On the whole this was a good move for us all. Robert got promoted, and had also moved much closer to us, a bit over 200 km separated us now, which made it possible for us to visit each other for a week end. Plus that there was some interesting old towns and picturesque country to explore.

## **Back to normal**

Everything about the house was OK, and the garden was thriving. We exchanged greetings with our neighbours and caught up with the latest news, unpacked our gear, and had a lazy week end.

Monday morning, it was back to work. At the exchange, life was getting a little more complex as we were busy modifying the new and old equipment to work together. Boxes of components and instructions arrived at intervals for us to install and test. On top of this there was talk of computer controlled equipment. Although it was a while before it got to our level, I still had to attend training courses learning about hard drives, memories, and computer logic etc. Telstra had built a nice new exchange next door, ready for the new equipment, but it was still empty when I retired.

## **Chapter 31**

### **More Change**

#### **1981: and all that**

The arrival of 1981 saw Robert on the move again, this time to Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, maintaining the air traffic control computer equipment at the airport.

The distance from Sydney to Alice was 2700 km. You could go by train which takes 2 days, or fly, taking 5¾ hrs. We did both, returning by train. The train was very comfortable and the catering was excellent. Plus you got to see a whole lot of the outback. Rocks, sand, scrub and occasional camels. The camels of course, are not native to Australia, but were brought out by the early explores to help them get through the arid interior which is largely desert. Alice Springs grew up around the Telegraph Station, one of a series of relay stations that transmitted Morse code signals across Australia from Adelaide to Darwin, then by undersea cable to the rest of the world.

The town lays astride the Todd River, which was normally a wide sandy dry river bed with trees scattered here and there. When the rainy season began we were able to stand on the sandy bed and watch as trickles of water began to flow, filling each sandy hollow in turn as it meandered along. We of course, retreated to the river bank, as the water rose to eventually become a torrent. There are two bridges for traffic. The town had much to explore, and the surrounding country even more with impressive gorges, pools of water, and native plants in bloom.

#### **Heather goes to Alice Springs**

At that time, Heather was living at home, and working at a ladies sportswear factory. At the end of 1982, the factory closed due to competition from bigger manufacturers. Heather had arranged to spend a holiday with Robert and Carolynne at Alice, so off she went. When the time came to return home, she decided to stay. She found a job in a local nursery, and moved into a cabin in a caravan park. Here she met Nick Stankovich. They became friends and married on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1983. One interesting thing was that there were no shops in Alice that sold wedding dresses. She would have to get one from Adelaide, 1500 km south. So using Heather's measurements, Hilda bought a pattern and made the dress. It fitted perfectly, and Heather looked lovely in it. The wedding was at John Flynn church, followed by a very happy and enjoyable reception.



## Retirement

From about 1980 onwards retirement was the main subject of discussion among the older members of the staff in our local area. Avalon exchange had a bit over 4000 subscribers connected, the next, and last exchange on the Barrenjoey Peninsula was Palm Beach. This had about 1000 subscribers. It was staffed by an STO1 and a trainee. The department decided to transfer them, and make the exchange a satellite of Avalon. This meant that I had to send a technician there as necessary to do any maintenance work. The next big change was when Telstra decided to switch over from the Step by Step system to Swedish crossbar which was a much faster relay system. This meant several more training courses, and a lot more work getting the two systems to work together efficiently. Then along came an electronic system, this was only installed in the larger exchanges. At that stage it was quite basic compared with the current system. I managed to cope with all this.

During this period Telstra organised a series of lectures about retiring, pensions and investments. One of the lectures was sponsored by a new cash trust. It was held in a theatre owned by Chatswood council, and was well attended. As we entered the theatre we were given a cloakroom ticket for a lucky door prize, a \$1000 account in the cash trust. At the end of the very informative meeting, the door prize was drawn. It turned out to be mine. What a wonderful feeling that was, as I walked down to the stage it was like walking on air. The money gave us a good start to our retirement fund. The event was reported in our local newspaper, The Manly Daily.



At the same time, at home, Hilda and I were negotiating with our neighbours, the local council, and a bevy of tradesmen regarding our subdivision plans. I was then 62 years old, and had intended to stay at work until 65, which would give me a larger pension. I had visions of pottering along in the boy's room which was now spare, making electronic kits sets. But that was not to be, we had also to make plans to sell up and move away, but that, as they say, is another story. I announced my intention to retire, and finished work on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1983. I retired with a very happy send off and a presentation from my staff. I liked my job although there were problems at times. The interesting part about it is that my job no longer exists, as the advent of electronics meant that faults could be fixed on line, and only the largest exchanges need staffing.

## True Blue Aussies

Back home we decided to become Australian citizens. I had always considered that British and Australians were the same, but it did have some advantages, so we put in our applications, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1983 we were welcomed at a ceremony conducted by the local MP and the Mayor. There were 41 people welcomed. At the end of the ceremony we were each given a certificate of citizenship, and an Australian native plant. Both plants flourished nicely in our garden. Finally, refreshments were served while we all got acquainted.

## Chapter 31

### Moving On

**1985**

Prior to my retirement we had been approached by our neighbours at number 50, suggesting that we made a joint application to the council to subdivide our two blocks with the two existing houses at the front, and two lots at the rear for sale. This would entail us selling them a strip down one side of our block to become a driveway to their rear block. After much discussion between us, and with the aid of a surveyor and a valuer, we came to an agreement, and submitted an application.

The whole process took almost two years, and was very stressful at times. First we had to have a detailed survey, then, because the back of our block was too low, we had to get it filled to a specific level. That meant finding somebody to supply the filling, and a contractor to run a roller over it. Next we had to get stormwater drains laid and connected to the public system. Another directive from the council required curb and guttering across the front of our existing blocks. This was followed in due course for fences to be erected around all the blocks. This was something that my neighbour and I were both capable of doing, which put the finishing touches to the project. All this of course, meant much correspondence, phone calls, and visits to the bank. At last it was finished, and passed by the Shire Engineer in April 1985. Then we had to sell the house and the back block. I had always kept the house in good condition, and Hilda had played a big part in the décor, so it sold quite quickly. We were negotiating with a possible buyer of the block, but had moved before the sale was finalised by our agent.

#### **New pastures**

We had decided to move to Laurieton near Port Macquarie. Having spent a holiday there, we thought what a nice attractive place it was. It had the essential shops, a cinema, an RSL club, and a local bus company that ran day trips around the area. Plus we already knew two couples who had moved there from Avalon earlier. As luck would have it, a small development of six blocks came up for sale at a reasonable price, one of which we purchased and we looked for a suitable house to build on it. After I retired we moved to Laurieton and rented a small cottage from one of our friends, until our house was built.

The nearest big town was Port Macquarie, 24 km north along the coast road. It was very popular as a holiday resort and had a good shopping centre with a cinema, a theatre, and two theme parks. There was a sheltered cove where a remnant area of rainforest was growing. This had been listed as a heritage area. It has an elevated walkway that you could stroll along observing the plants, native animals and birds, including several brush-turkeys and their nests. At the end is an excellent restaurant. Further inland is Wauchope, (pronounced Warhope), where they have built a replica of a timber cutters town. In the meantime, in Avalon, we would go to inspect newly built houses in display villages, so we had a good idea of what we liked. It was a matter then of choosing the right house to suit the block, with the features we considered essential. We eventually chose a plan with the added advantage of being able to make some alterations. Then came the exiting bit, going around choosing bricks, fittings, and other innumerable things that go to make a house a home. With the guidance of a friend who owned the local nursery, we established a native plant garden, which turned out very well. I was kept busy laying paths and borders to suit.



Then we were able to relax and socialize. We joined the local Pensioners' Club. I took up golf with my next door neighbour on the low side, and Hilda helped out with the Laurieton Brownies.

Above us was the mountain, known locally as Big Brother, 487 m (1562 ft) high. You could drive up on a good road built to celebrate the bicentenary of Captain Cook's discovery of Australia, or walk up along a picturesque bush trail. We have done both, sometimes driving up with family or friends, or walking up with the more adventurous. At the top there is a picnic area and a short bush trail. The lookout gives a view over Laurieton, the Camden Haven River, and the coastline. The mountain also had a rather nasty habit of collecting storm clouds and dumping their contents on Blackbutt Crescent, and down the side of our house. I overcame this with the cooperation of my neighbour on the high side of the block, laying storm water drains to guide it out to the street.

There was one big national event held in 1988 to celebrate the bicentenary of the discovery of Australia. It was marked by the lighting of a chain of bonfires, lit in turn all around the coast of Australia. Ours was on top of the mountain; to be lit as dawn approached. We watched for the light from the bonfire north of us, then lit ours to pass the signal to the south. It was a huge success, and was accompanied by a sausage sizzle with tea or coffee. Champagne was also on the menu.



## New Zealand holiday 1986

The next year, the local travel agent advertised a tour of New Zealand for 21 days in September 1986. We booked right away, and eventually had to meet at the agency to see a video of N Z and be briefed on our travel arrangements. Christchurch was our first stop to explore, and then the next day we set off to see the beautiful and impressive sights of both islands. When we had all settled on the coach, the driver announced: *'There are forty million sheep in New Zealand, and you're going to see them all'*, a statement which caused a good deal of amusement. Of highlights, there were many, but the most impressive to me was flying over the Franz Joseph Glacier in a helicopter, looking down into deep crevices glowing in shades of blue and green.



For the North Island it was the Geysers at Rotarua. We had a grandstand view of them from our bedroom window. In all it was a wonderful holiday, in spite of a couple of days of rain and mist. We rounded it off by having a get together and BBQ at our place to share memories and photos.

## **Chapter 32**

### **Sunshine and Shadow.**

#### **Leaving Laurieton July 1990**

We thought that we were nicely settled in our very comfortable house. The garden was thriving, and we had won second prize in the local area garden competition. Hilda became interested in jigsaw puzzles, and I was busy in the garden, building an open display shed for pot plants. The down side was that we didn't see our Laurieton friends so often, as they were working. Our nurseryman friend had moved much further away to enlarge his nursery. Heather was living close by, in North Haven on the other side of the Camden Haven River, Paul was living in Sydney 360 km south, and Robert in Canberra, another 280 km away. So, to see either of them meant a long drive.

We had two very good long-time friends, Henk and Jan Van Altena from our Avalon days. Although we had both moved house from time to time, we kept in touch, and visited one another whenever convenient. On this occasion we were returning home from Sydney, and had been invited to stay with them in Nelson Bay for a few days. This was a very welcome break that gave us time to catch up on all our news, and look around.

One place we inspected was a new retirement village at Salamander Bay, a short distance along the coast. Although only half built it looked very pleasant. We were shown a freestanding two bedroom plus a bedroom/study unit. At one end it had a patio and small garden. There were five levels of accommodation available, this being the most expensive. But we decided that we could afford one of the level three units, yet to be built. So we went away to consider the possibility. Salamander Bay had the advantage of being a good 200 km nearer Sydney and of being able to share more time with Henk and Jan. We knew that they could also move at any time, which they did eventually, but only a short distance to the nearby town of Gosford. The rest of the week was taken up between them showing us the points of interest around the area, and relaxing in their cosy home and garden.

Sometime after arriving home, we received a letter from the village to say that owing to a delay in building the new level three units, we could have the level five unit at the same price. We had heard that they were short of money, and had had to sell some of their land to get by. Further enquires revealed that the village had been taken over by the Westpac Bank, and was up for sale, but it would be alright to buy the unit. We moved in in July 1990. A short time later, the village was bought by the Uniting Church. After some discussion with the residents, work began on completing the village.

At that stage the village was quite small, so we soon knew most of the other residents. There was a display unit which also served as a recreation and meeting room. A Residents Committee was formed with me as secretary.

We also shared time with Jan and Henk. Later my daughter and family moved down to live quite close to us. We had also made friends with other people outside the village.

We settled down very well in our new home, and so did our two Siamese cats. Rhana the male came home one day with a small back snake and left it curled up under the buffet. Fortunately it was still comatose, so I was able to get it into a plastic ice-cream carton and release it in the bush. Kimi, on the other hand was very sociable, and could often be seen strolling around the village visiting people.

We had two good friends in the next unit, and would often visit one another for a chat and to play cards. Every week we joined the group in the recreation room to play scrabble and Mah Jong. The spa was also a favourite spot. In addition we could share

time with either Heather and our three grandchildren or Henk and Jan. Or even all of them to make up a very happy circle.

## Sunshine

At the beginning of 1990 Robert made another change in his job. The Civil Aviation Authority had established a school for air traffic controllers at Launceston in Tasmania. Robert became a member of the IT team. It was quite a complicated set up. The trainees each sat before a screen depicting aircraft within their airspace. The trainee controllers directed pilots so they knew where to fly to maintain separation. As trainees grew more experienced, emergency situations were introduced for them to cope with. Carolynne worked there too, simulating the pilots in all the planes that were being controlled.

In April 1992 they invited us to spend a holiday with them. They also invited Carolynne's mum and dad, Betty and Jack, as it was Betty's and Hilda's birthday during that time. Robert and Carolynne's children were there too, they were both at high school, so it made one big happy family.

During the week, Carolynne showed us round Launceston which lies on the Tamar River. The river flows through an impressive gorge on the western side of the city. The city itself has some very interesting shops and arcades to browse through. It is set off by a large, well laid out park.

Carolynne told us that she had planned to take us on a tour around Tasmania, stopping each night in comfortable cabins. There would be Jack and Betty, Hilda and I, with Carolynne driving. We saw some wonderful things like early colonial houses decorated and furnished as they were originally and picturesque scenery. Some beaches had striking rock formations along them. One, laid down by a volcano millions of years ago, looked like tessellated paving. Another had a cliff face formed by many layers of compressed sediment. The next day Carolynne led us down a quiet bush track into a wide gorge to see a beautiful two tier waterfall plunging over a cliff top high above us. Another fascinating adventure was through a long winding cave with a stream running through it, reflecting the stalactites above it.

Next we travelled south along the Tasman Peninsula, heading for Port Arthur. We passed through one very narrow section called Eaglehawk Neck then arrived at Port Arthur Gaol. This was built in the 1830s to house convicts deported from England. They were treated very harshly, and had to work in extreme weather conditions. Those who died were buried on an island called 'Isle of the dead'. There are over 1000 graves including the Military and guards. Eaglehawk Neck was guarded by a line of fierce dogs tethered across it. What is left of the ruins is being restored. There is also a church there which I believe is still used. The surrounding area has been landscaped with lawns and shrubs.

We then moved on to Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania, where we stayed for three days. Hobart stands at the mouth of the Derwent River, and has the honour of being the finishing line for the Sydney to Hobart yacht race, which starts on Boxing Day each year. Depending on the type of yacht and the weather, the race can take anything from five to ten days. There is much excitement. The shoreline of Sydney Harbour is crowded with people wherever there is a vantage point, and the water has many spectator craft wherever they are allowed. Some even follow the yachts out to sea.

It was Saturday morning, and Carolynne took us to a wide quay on the right bank of the river. At the back was a long stone warehouse. In the old days sailing ships would tie up here to load or unload their cargo. Now the warehouse is home to upmarket shops with two or three handy pubs thrown in, and the quay is a busy open air market. Later when

everybody was resting, I strolled along to the end of the shops, and found a postal and telecommunication museum showing racks of equipment that I once used to work on.

Hobart is situated at the bottom of Mount Wellington, 1270m high. What better way to spend a Sunday than to drive up a mountain. So off we went zigzagging up to the summit to arrive at a glassed in shelter. We stepped out of the car into the teeth of a gale. Clinging together we made it to the shelter, where we were able to relax and admire the view. Regaining the car was easier as we had our backs to the wind and some shelter from the slope. Then back down to Hobart to look around the city.

Leaving Hobart, we drove NE, climbing into a range of mountains to eventually arrive at Queenstown. This is a popular tourist spot due to its unusual aspect. Copper had been found in the nineteenth century and the early settler had chopped down the trees to burn for smelting the copper ore. The result was that the area became denuded of trees, and the fumes from smelting killed the vegetation for miles around. The topsoil then got washed away resulting in a bare rocky terrain of multi coloured rocks. Now that modern methods are being used in mining and smelting, the vegetation is starting to regrow. This has upset some people as they rely on the tourist trade for income, but there are areas where it is too late for any regrowth so there is still hope for them.

We carried on to the north coast and the interesting little coastal town of Stanley which has a large flat rock headland called 'The Nut'. You can ascend to the top by chair lift. From here we drove through several small coastal towns. On the way we inspected an interesting looking gift shop where Carolynne bought Hilda and I a lovely clock made of Huon Pine. Before long we arrived back home in Launceston ready to relax with afternoon tea.

## **Happy birthday for two**

It was now unanimously decided it was time to celebrate Hilda's and Betty's birthdays. So a special dinner was planned, two birthday cakes baked, wine cooled, cards written, and presents wrapped. Needless to say, it was a very happy occasion. At the weekend, it was time for Jack and Betty to fly home, and we saw them off at the airport.

## **Shadow**

This was our final week and we were preparing to leave. Hilda got up during the night to go to the bathroom, and collapsed. I quickly woke Robert and Carolynne and they called the doctor. We got her back into bed, and the doctor gave her something to settle her. In the morning she was worse, so we rang the doctor again. This time a lady doctor came. After a quick examination, she called the ambulance. Hilda was taken straight to Launceston hospital, and put into intensive care.

The nurse told us that she had Diverticulitis which had burst, allowing poison to enter her system. It was very serious, and she was in a coma for several days. Carolynne or I would go in each day to sit with her. As a consequence our return home was cancelled, and I had to notify everybody concerned.

In time she began to get her bearings, and was transferred to a ward. I took a Scrabble game in, which helped a lot. Finally came the day when she was allowed home. This was very well organised by our health fund, with five star treatments all the way. We were picked up at Newcastle airport by our special friends, Jan and Henk.

This wasn't the end of it. We had to frequently go to the John Hunter hospital in Newcastle for a check-up until the specialist considered that she was ready for another operation to repair her bowel. From then on she got back to her old self, and we were able to resume our normal activities.

## **Chapter 33**

### **Relatives from England**

**1993**

Early in 1993 we were very thrilled to receive a letter from my cousin Ronald, to say that he and his wife Ella, were coming to Australia for a holiday, along with their daughter Linda, and her partner Steve. They planned to visit us, and also spend some time at a resort in Queensland. Ron was a close cousin, slightly younger than me. He was the second child of Uncle Harold and Aunt Ada. He had an older sister, Elsie, and a younger sister, Irene.

#### **Our visitors arrive**

Ron and his family were due to arrive early in March, so we went down to Sydney to meet them. It was great to see them come out into the arrival hall. Having got over our greetings, we set off for their Sydney hotel, where they were booked in, then it was time for lunch and a chat. They were quite tired after their long flight, so we left them to catch up on their sleep, and arranged to call back the next day. We arrived next morning in time for coffee, to discuss their plans. They had already booked the first part of their holiday before leaving home. This was to fly up to Queensland to stay at Silky Oaks Lodge in Daintree National Park, Queensland. Here they were able to join guided walks in the rainforest with time to relax in between and also take a cruise along the Barrier Reef. They returned to Sydney very impressed with all they had seen.

#### **Sydney**

We already had the next part of their stay organized. Paul and his friend owned a hardware store in Annandale, a few minutes bus ride from the city. Paul was a great help in organizing this part of their stay with booking accommodation, and advising us about where to go. One evening, he invited us to his place where he had cooked an excellent seafood combination dinner, set off with a good wine. We spent a very happy memorable evening together. On another occasion he took us to a local Greek restaurant where we were entertained by a small, lively, Greek band.

Each day we would set off to explore a part of Sydney. I can't recall the order in which we visited each highlight, so here is a general outline. Probably the first would have been Sydney Tower. The observation deck is 250 m. (820 ft.) above ground level, and gives a wonderful 360 degree view over Sydney. Others were Circular Quay, a terminal for the ferries that travel to destinations around the harbour and up the Hawkesbury River to Parramatta. We had a very pleasant day trip on one that travels to Manly on the northern side of the harbour entrance. The ferry wharf is on the harbour side of Manly, you then follow the main street through the town to arrive on the Pacific Ocean side. This is a popular spot for holidaymakers, with lots of attractions. We had an excellent fish and chip lunch, and relaxed on the beach in the shade of the palm trees.

Another day was spent at Darling Harbour strolling through the peaceful Chinese Garden with its lake fed from a small waterfall fronting a Chinese Pagoda. A convenient teahouse was set on the lake shore, where we had an appetizing lunch. Following this, we walked through Darling Harbour with its fountains, cafes and gift shops.

Still in Sydney, we planned a day at Taronga Zoo which is situated on a hillside with scenic views of the harbour. Near the top of the hill is an amphitheatre where they have a daily display of birds of prey that fly around the audience picking up morsels from the keepers.

I must include here, the day we spent exploring the Botanic Gardens. We had just had lunch, and Ella was carrying a left over roll, when a cheeky possum ran down from a tree and across the grass to us, looking for a feed. Ella was fascinated, and threw it pieces which were soon consumed.

Then we took them for a day trip out of Sydney by train to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains are part of the Great Dividing Range that runs down the east coast of Australia. They are called blue because they are covered in a forest of eucalyptus trees. The leaves give off a haze of eucalyptus, which gives a blue tinge to the air from a distance. The mountains are sandstone that has eroded over millions of years, leaving deep gorges and rock falls. They were an impenetrable barrier to the first settlers, but were finally conquered in 1813 allowing the colony to expand to the west into much better grazing land. The train leaves Sydney and climbs 1017 m, (3337 ft.) up to Katoomba. Here, we transferred to an explorer bus which took us on a circular tour of the scenic lookouts. Firstly we went through the town to Echo Point overlooking the Jamieson Valley. To one side is a rocky escarpment of three tall spires, known as the Three Sisters rising from the floor of a wide deep valley, some 300 m below us. Having studied the view and the information display, we were taken to lunch.



Back on the bus, we were taken to see the Scenic Railway. This was built in the early 1800s to haul coal and shale up from a mine on the valley floor. The mine ran out in 1895 and was abandoned. It had been used occasionally during its later days to bring up tired bushwalkers. It was restored in the 1920s, and much improved over time, to become a tourist attraction. The railway now travels down for a distance of 178m at an incline of 2.5°. It would be too confusing to list everything we saw. I will just mention Bridal Veil Fall, with a sheer drop of 180m, (690 ft.), and the very attractive Leura Gardens planted with a wide variety of shrubs and flowers. Our bus then finished its circular tour at Katoomba station to catch the train back to Sydney.

We had asked them earlier on whether they would like to see a performance at the Opera House to which they readily agreed. We all decided on the ballet, 'The Sleeping beauty' by Tchaikovsky. We went to the Opera House restaurant for dinner accompanied by Paul, although he wasn't able to stay for the show. Our guests were very impressed by the beauty of the Opera House and the wonderful performance by the Australian Ballet.

One memory sticks in my mind, and I am sure, in their minds too. During the interval we went up to the rear lounge for refreshments and stood at the huge rear window sipping champagne while gazing down the harbour lit by a golden sunset.

Soon it was time for them to return home. We had had a lovely time together, with many happy memories and souvenirs.

### **October 1994**

It was sad to hear in October 1994 that Ron had passed away on the 15<sup>th</sup>. He and I had a lot in common, we were both interested in science and mechanics. I feel very sad when a member of my family, or one of my close friends passes away, and my close circle gets smaller.

### **Salamander Bay 1996**

Ella came out on her own in October 1996. Paul met her at Sydney airport and saw her safely onto the plane to Newcastle, where Hilda and I met her, and took her to our unit in Salamander Bay Village.

Salamander Bay is part of a larger area known as Nelson Bay. The main community is also known as Nelson Bay, and is the main shopping centre of the townships flanking it along the coast. We began by proudly showing Ella the attractive coastline and countryside from Soldiers Point to Anna Bay. The area is famous for its oysters, and two pods of dolphins. We all went on a dolphin cruise. It was a lovely sunny day, and we were rewarded by possibly a dozen dolphins leaping out of the water all around the boat. The numbers vary of course, but you can see them most days. It is a sight worth seeing. There is also a botanic garden, a very good open air market on Sundays, and a cinema.

### **Canberra**

It was time for our next move. The next day we packed the car and set off for Canberra to visit Robert and Carolynne. We all got on very well together. I took our visitors to the tourist spots in the city including Parliament House, the National Art Gallery, the National Archives and Questacon which is an interactive display linking science with everyday life. Robert and Carolynne took us further afield. We went on bush walks, to Tidbinbilla, a big nature reserve with lots of kangaroos bouncing around, and to a radio telescope observatory. Not forgetting a couple of wineries to sample the local vintage.

Ella passed away from cancer on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1998. I remember her as a very lively and outgoing person.

Linda and Steve came back in April 2005. I met them in Sydney, and we caught the train to Canberra to stay with Robert and Carolynne. Then we drove down to Candelo to stay with Paul for a few days.

Their last visit was in March 2008. I met them at Circular Quay in Sydney where we had an enjoyable lunch and reminisced over old times, followed by a short walk in the Botanic Gardens. Then I left to catch my train home.

## Chapter 34

### Westward Ho!

Back home, we settled down to the things retirees do. We had quite a nice garden around the unit, where we planted a variety of native plants. Also we went out on day trips in the village bus, got together for lunches in the recreation room and played card games and Mah Jong. We tried croquet at the local croquet club. I always thought it was a gentle game, but it seems that you can clout your opponent's ball and put them out of the game. A more restful pastime was reading a book or doing a jigsaw puzzle, Hilda's favourite occupation. She favoured the more complex pictures like 'Blue Poles', or the tapestry hanging in the New Parliament House.

As September approached, the local travel agent announced that she was taking a group to Perth to see the West Australian wild flowers. So we immediately added our names to the list. Then later we had to all get together at the shop to see a film of the tour, and get our departure instructions.

We flew from Sydney to Perth, arriving in time for lunch. The next morning we were taken on a tour of Perth, then followed the Swan River to Freemantle at the river mouth. Here, we were lucky to see and look over the recently built sailing ship, 'The New Endeavour', a copy of Captain Cook's vessel in which he discovered, and explored the east coast of Australia. After lunch we did our own exploration of Freemantle.

The rest of the fortnight was spent exploring the South Western corner of Australia, including several displays of beautiful wild flowers, many of which only grow in this part of the country. I was very much impressed by the colourful displays in Kings Park botanic gardens. There were several other display areas around the countryside, both natural and cultivated. In between we were taken to Wave Rock, an impressive weathered cliff face, and also visited three very tasty wineries. Then we drove south to Albany on the southern tip of W A, to inspect the lighthouse, and explore the coast with its impressive scenery. After leaving Albany I had much pleasure in following my favourite pastime; riding on a vintage steam train for part of the way back to Perth. The next day we headed north from Perth to a popular seaside resort where we relaxed on the beach and strolled along the pier. We even fitted in some more wildflowers.

Towards the end of the holiday, Hilda had a brilliant idea. She asked if we could swap our plane tickets for train tickets, and go back to Sydney on the Indian Pacific. Lo and behold, the answer came back 'Yes'. On the departure day we said goodbye to our friends in the group, as they were leaving early, and we in the afternoon. On the train we had a comfortable compartment for two and slept well as the train ran very smoothly. At meal times we were joined by another couple who had flown down from Broome after a holiday in the north western area. We got on very well, exchanging our experiences.

The journey took three days. I must say that the meals were five star, and very well served. There was a variety of things to do, joining other passengers in the lounge car for a chat, playing cards or a board game, or watching the world go by. Halfway across WA we heard that we were travelling on the longest straight stretch of track in Australia, 478 km. Later, as we moved into SA we stopped at a station named 'Cook'. This was established as a base camp for the fettlers laying the new line. It is now a staging point for the train crews, and to take on fresh water. Passengers are allowed to alight for a short while. There is a general store, and a gift shop which was kept busy. Travelling on we crossed into NSW and stopped at Broken Hill. It was late in the evening, so everything was closed. We were allowed to walk around the station and use the refreshment bar. Travelling from Sydney, we would have been there in the early morning and taken on a bus tour of the city. In this case we settled down comfortably in our sleeper, and woke up

in NSW. Now steaming through the familiar scenery of the Blue Mountains to finally arrive at Sydney Central, where we were met by Paul.

## **Chapter 35**

### **A Double Move**

**June 1996**

At this time Heather was living in a house in Raymond Terrace, receiving rental assistance from the Housing Commission. They called her to say that they had a commission house in Gateshead, a suburb just south of Newcastle City. We in turn decided to move to Newcastle, as Hilda had already had several hospital visits there for check-ups. We took Heather down to inspect the house, and found it suitable. The next thing was to help her pack and to book a removalist. Now we were only 14 km apart.

After she was comfortably settled in, we began to look at retirement villages in that area. After inspecting half a dozen or so, we settled on one at Swansea. Although it was only half built, it had all the right facilities. It was on both sides of Wallace Street. On the west side there were two bedroom units either ground floor or first floor, with a recreation hall. On the east side was a row of five units fronting the road, and another row under construction, of eight set at right angles to the road. We chose number six, which had two bedrooms and a sunroom, which we thought just right for our purpose.

As it happened, all the eight couples moved in within a few days of one another. Jan Lees at number three invited us all in and suggested that we got together for morning tea now and then. This suggestion was eagerly adopted. It was agreed that we would meet in each unit in turn every six weeks, with each contributing to the menu. We always had an enjoyable time, especially if it was a birthday or something special to celebrate, then we would have a more appropriate drink.

In the Village, a larger meeting hall was soon built for concerts, monthly village lunches, Christmas parties, meetings about village matters, indoor bowls, and films on the big screen TV, hairdresser, and the manager's office. The small hall holds a library, table tennis, two billiard tables, and dartboard.

Our unit, of course was ideal. We soon made it homely, getting the furniture in place, curtains up, and pictures hung. We soon made friends with our neighbours, particularly those in 5, 7, and 8. Bill and Joan in 5 had started a computer course, so I was able to help them with any problems. I think Bill was in building. We sometimes went to the club together. Ken and Joan were in No 6. Ken had been a primary school headmaster. I was most impressed by the fact that he had done a wine tasting course, and was very clued up about whiskey. Ivan and Daphne lived in No.8. Daphne had been an accountant in Woolworths. Ivan had been a coalminer, and was highly regarded as a rugby player. The other four couples we had less contact with, but we were still well acquainted with especially at morning teas. Now in 2016, Joan in 7, Daphne in 8, and I are the only three left. Of course we are still good friends with the newcomers, but the morning tea routine has faded in spite of Joan's attempts to revive it. We still get together with other residents at the regular village functions and our own circle of friends.

It seems to me that there is something about village living that is beneficial to longevity. I am almost 96, two nearby residents are 98, and two more 99 out of 170 residents, and they're only the ones I know.



When we lived at Laurieton we bought Natasha a doll's house. It was quite basic with holes for doors and windows, and no front. Sometime later she asked could I put a front on it. I brought it home and put it in the garage while I thought about it. After we moved to Swansea, Hilda suggested I get on with it. First I removed the sloping roof and cut the sides down level with the upper floor and made two doors to fit. Next was to make a gable roof with a dormer window to make an attic on one half and a sun room with sliding glass doors (Perspex) on the other half. Then off to a shop that sold doll's house components, for doors and windows not forgetting the front door. And bits to make stairs and banisters. Then I installed a fireplace with a concealed flickering light to simulate flames, followed by light fittings. I was very proud of the finished project. Needless to say Natasha was very pleased with it too. She followed up by buying tiles to stick on the roof, more furniture and flowers.



## Chapter 36

### Our First Great Grandchild

#### Fanfare

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 1998, Scott and Janna presented us with our first great grandson, Lewin. Lewin was born premature at 30 weeks and only weighed 1.2 kg. He spent his first two months in hospital. He was so small that they dressed him in dolls clothes.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March we went to Charles Sturt University to see Robert get his Masters Degree in Information Technology. The first thing we did was to drive to Bathurst and book into a motel close to the university. Robert and Carolynne joined us there later. The next morning we assembled in the main hall of the university along with other students and their families, and waited while the tutors and dignitaries, dressed in their ceremonial gowns and hats, took their places on the stage. After the opening ceremony each student was called to the stage in turn to shake hands with the Chancellor who presented them with their award, accompanied by a round of applause from the audience. Robert got an extra clap from us. After the presentations, there were refreshments, and stalls in the grounds selling plants and gifts. We bought a university tea towel which, after a period of use, we have kept as a souvenir.

The following day we headed to Canberra to stay with Robert and Carolynne, and to at last meet our new great grandson. Due to him being a premature baby, he still had to be cared for in a humidicrib. We were allowed to sit with him on our laps. He was very tiny. Then the nurse declared him fit to be taken out. He was settled into a pram so that Scott could push him on his first outing, plus a photographic session.





*Lewin as a newborn*



*18 years later*

## **Chapter 37**

### **An Expedition to South Australia**

#### **September/October 1998**

We both thought it was a good time to take another holiday. There had been a lot of discussion in the media about the conservation of the Murray River which was beginning to run dry due to the demands of irrigation from cotton growers and other water dependant crops along its course. So I suggested that we drive down through country NSW to Victoria, follow the Murray River into SA to see for ourselves, and then go on to Adelaide. First we headed to Dubbo where we spent a very interesting day at the Western Plains Zoo, driving round seeing the animals in their free range enclosures. At the end of the day we called in to the souvenir shop. Here we saw a collection of owls on display. Hilda bought one that she liked, and then spotted a clay one with a surprised look on its face. So he had to join us. That was the start of our owl collection which now numbers fifty. We didn't buy any old owl; they had to look a bit special.

Next morning we set off again heading south. It wasn't long before we arrived at Peak Hill to look down into a fenced off open cut gold mine left from the gold rush days. It was a huge dusty hole with tunnels cut here and there. The temperature was around 40° C, so we didn't dally. Across the road clinging to a tree trunk, we saw our first goanna. I took his photo, and then we ducked back into our air-conditioned car, and drove on to stay the night at Parkes. The next day we inspected the Parkes Radio Telescope with its 64 m dish. It was an awe-inspiring sight, as we turned into the driveway, to see the dish full on in front of us. After parking we were able to see the control room with its racks of equipment, walk through to explore the museum with a working model of the dish, and to learn about radio astronomy.

Travelling on another 100 km took us to Cowra. This was the site of a Japanese prisoner of war camp. In 1944 a suicidal attempt to escape resulted in 231 Japanese and 4 Australian guards being killed. A special cemetery was set up for the Japanese dead. In 1971 in cooperation with the Japanese government, the site was converted to a beautiful Japanese garden. Also an avenue of cherry blossom trees was planted. On then to Wagga Wagga, a town famous for its name. We stayed in a pleasant riverside cabin park, and made a point of strolling through the botanical gardens.

On we went, to cross into Victoria, then head west to Echuca where at last, we were able to catch our first glimpse of the mighty Murray River. Echuca was once a very busy port. It has a two tier wharf built out of heavy timber. The paddle steamers would tie up to load or unload their cargos. The wharf is now a heritage structure, and the warehouse on it, a museum.

Our next port of call was Swan Hill, which had been another important paddle steamer port. Now it has an open air museum of old colonial equipment and furnishings. One building housed a large round polished timber structure with seats round the base, each with a binocular viewing lens in front of it. This was a stereoscopic theatre. We sat before it and looked through the binoculars, while inside, rotating arms holding stereoscopic photos moved round to hold a pair of photos before each position for a while. This was very popular. In the evening there was a light and sound show. We sat in a small bus which drove slowly through the village, stopping now and then in front of a building which then lit up inside while an audio clip played out a scene of what was supposedly happening in it.



Something different now: off to Red Cliffs 60 km away to meet Big Lizzie, a huge tractor which was used to clear scrub by dragging a heavy chain behind it. The back was fitted out for two men to live on it. It travelled at 2 mph, these days it would travel at a steady 3.2 kph. It was quite impressive to walk round, and then climb aboard to see the view from the driver's seat. It had been another 40° day, so we carried on to Mildura for an overnight stop. The next day we went on a paddle steamer, downstream, through a lock and back. Here I relived my childhood days, watching the big brass connecting rods moving majestically back and forth, carrying the engines power to drive the paddlewheels. The next day we drove 300 km to Adelaide. As we drove through the Adelaide Hills they were glowing golden from the setting sun.

## Kangaroo Island

Our first task in Adelaide was to book two tickets on the ferry to Kangaroo Island. Early the next morning we drove to the ferry terminal at Cape Jervis. On arrival I was told to go to the top of a concrete ramp that sloped down to the bow of the ferry, and then back the car down the ramp on to the ferry, and continue until I got to the stern. Having achieved this manoeuvre safely, I was quite pleased with myself, and considered it a good start to the day. Several more cars came aboard, and a number of pedestrian passengers. I saw afterwards that one of the crew was available if you preferred him to do it. Finally we cast off, and headed for Kingscote, the main town on the island. Having landed we looked for the tourist bureau, to find accommodation, and booked tickets for a day tour of the island. The weather was just right, and the tour excellent with beautiful coastal and inland scenery. At one point, the cliff top sloped up to a peak. At the top was a pile of huge granite boulders known as 'Remarkable Rocks'. These had been eroded over millions of years into amazing shapes. Some are half gone, so that you could walk beneath them, and others had sharp spiky edges, looking altogether as though they had been placed there by some celestial sculptor. After all our walking, admiring, and photographing, it was time for an excellent lunch in a pleasant rural setting.



Then on again, to the western end of the island which is a nature reserve, home to several species of native animals. From here we drove south to the coast, to Admiralty Arch, the remains of a collapsed cave, leaving a wide rocky cleft which is home to a colony of NZ fur seals. We stayed for a while, watching them coming and going. Then it was time to head for Kingscote and home, via the lighthouse.

Our final outing was to Seal Bay. This is a wide stretch of sand favoured by Australian Sea Lions, especially at breeding time. When we arrived they were mostly out at sea, but there were 3 or 4 small groups. There was an exhibition building where you could learn about them. To go onto the beach you had to be accompanied by a Ranger. We did that, and were taken to sit on the beach about 20 m away from one group, while the ranger told us about them. Suddenly two of the younger ones started to fight, and began to get close, so we all thought it advisable to leave as they were pretty hefty creatures. We rounded off the day in Kingscote. The next morning it was time to head back to the mainland.

## Homeward bound

A bit of a premature statement I suppose, as we still had 1530 km to go. Leaving the ferry we were soon at Victor Harbour where a horse drawn tram takes you over the causeway to Granite Island. Having explored the island we returned to Victor Harbour where we found an excellent tea shop. Much refreshed, we carried on a short distance to Goolwa. Goolwa is a small town at the mouth of the Murray. It was planned to be an important sea and river port, but turned out to be unsuitable due to the varying currents at that point. Instead, a railway was built to Port Elliot on the coast to transfer goods between the river paddle steamers and ocean going vessels at Port Elliot. Goolwa is an interesting old town with several old stone buildings to look over.

As it was almost Easter, we called into a travel agent to see what was going on, and found that there was a three day paddle steamer return trip to Murray Bridge. This turned out to be a very pleasant relaxing trip. We embarked in the evening to be welcomed by the captain, and served a very appetising dinner and wine. We set sail the next morning, or should I say began paddling. The first day was spent crossing Lake Alexandrina. After our busy time on Kangaroo Island it was good to relax accompanied by the steady splashing of the paddles, strolling around the deck, being served refreshments, and joining other

passengers in shipboard activities. Late in the afternoon we entered the Murray, and moored for the night to prepare for dinner.

Cruising up the river was restful. There had been a rainy spell, and the low-lying left bank was partly flooded, resulting in a wide variety of water birds swimming around. A few of the passengers were allowed to fish from the stern. There were plenty of other activities to join, and occasional commentaries over the PA system. I won a prize in a quiz game. It was just good to sit back on a deck chair with a good book, and watch the world go by. Once again we moored for the night. Next morning it was back downstream to Goolwa. I collected our car which had been safely stored in the company's car park.

We journeyed on to Mount Gambier. Here there is an extinct volcano, which is now a deep lake. In the summer, the water takes on a deep blue colour due to changes in the mineral content and the growth of algae. We were lucky to see it in this state. It was quite impressive. From here we drove down to the coast at Warrnambool, where the Maritime Museum had built a replica of an old sailing ship port complete with the appropriate stores and agents of that period. In the harbour were moored several types of sailing ships that you could board and inspect.

Onward we went, with some anticipation, to travel the Great Ocean Road. This was built to provide employment for returned servicemen from WW1, and to serve as a memorial to those who died in the conflict. The first impression was good, driving down hill on the approach road, with the sun shining brightly on red rocks with waves breaking over them, and then it was round the first point into the first cove. This process was repeated often, each turn presenting a new vista. There was one section where the sea had eroded the cliffs leaving twelve columns known as the Twelve Apostles, one of which has since collapsed. Further along was an ominous looking gorge, known as Loch Ard Gorge. It was named after a sailing ship that was wrecked there, with only two survivors. Among the items from the ships cargo washed up on the shore was a large crate holding a porcelain peacock made in England to be displayed at the Melbourne International Exhibition in 1880. It was completely undamaged.

From here on the road began to descend towards sea level, and the pleasant town of Lorne where we stayed overnight. The next day we carried on to Geelong to catch the ferry to Sorrento. Here we were met by our friends Fred and Eileen Roberts and spend several happy days being shown around and catching up with old times. Much refreshed, we exchanged goodbyes, and then left to follow the coast road back to Swansea.

## Chapter 38

### More Welcome Visitors

The next year we received more good news. My niece Gillian was coming out to see us, along with her husband Malcolm and their two young sons, Joseph and Joshua. We had met them previously on our trip to England when we had stayed with Gillian's parents, Iris and Gus. Iris was Hilda's elder sister.

They said that they would like to visit Malcolm's cousin who lived near Adelaide. We had a station wagon that held six people. We planned to stay at caravan parks along the way. I had a large roof rack to stow bedding and cases of clothes. Malcolm's naval experience came in handy for lashing all the gear down on the roof rack. In the car Hilda stowed boxes of food and cooking gear. She also made up a box full of small toys, puzzles, and books. Each day she would give the boys one of each to amuse them along the way.

First, we went to Canberra to stay with Robert and Carolynne. They showed us all the tourist places. Questacon was popular, as it is set to explain science to children, with an accent on circus acts. We also went to a nature reserve to see lots of kangaroos, and to the zoo to show them Australian koalas and other native animals.

After leaving Canberra, we headed towards Victoria, calling in at a couple of old gold mining towns on the way. We took them to Echuca and Swan Hill, which I have covered in my trip with Hilda. Then to Mildura, where we did a return cruise down river and back, and also had a ride on a vintage train. Then through the Barossa Valley to inspect some wineries. Finally to a caravan park in Adelaide. Gillian, Malcolm and the boys went off to stay with Malcolm's cousin while Hilda and I stayed put to get the car serviced. After a few days, we were on our way again, heading for the Great Ocean Road. We had a short stop at Warrnambool to see the old Maritime Port and lighthouse. Back at the car, Gillian said that she could smell hot oil. We opened the bonnet, but could see nothing wrong, so went on our way along the very picturesque coastal road. We had almost got through it when a horrible grinding noise came from the engine. I pulled over and parked, and decided that we had better call for roadside assistance. I called at a nearby house to ask if I could use their phone. They had seen that we were in trouble, and were very sympathetic. At least we had broken down in a spot with a nice view of the beach. In due course the breakdown van arrived, and took us to the nearest town, which I think was Lorne. The car was left at the service station, and we were taken to a motel, and loaned a car until mine was fixed. All repairs were covered by my breakdown insurance. They found that the drain plug of the gearbox had not been replaced properly, and had vibrated out, releasing the oil. The gearbox was replaced at no cost to me, and we were soon on our way again.

We drove through Melbourne, then to Bathurst and the Blue Mountains, where we showed them a beautiful park full of azaleas in bloom, Bridal Veil Falls, and the Three Sisters. Finally, back home to spend their last week in Australia. They came back the following year. This time they hired a campervan, and went up to Queensland, so we didn't see much of them. We were hoping that my sister, Edna, and brother-in-law David would come out, as they had spoken about it. But it never eventuated.

## Chapter 39

1997 – 2002

### A long hard road

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1997, Hilda noticed a lump on the inside of her cheek, so she made an appointment with her GP, Doctor Fenton. She referred her to Doctor Bowler, a specialist dentist. He did a biopsy and sent it off to be analysed. Several days later we were called into the surgery to hear the result. It had turned out to be Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. We then had to make an appointment with the cancer department of Mater Calvary hospital. This was a hall sized room with a lot of cancer patients with their partners, parents, or carers all waiting their turn. We were amazed to see so many people. Also there were several volunteers who supplied us with cordial, biscuits, and magazines. When our turn came, a nurse led us along a corridor where the specialist's rooms were, and introduced us to Doctor Stewart. He interviewed us and prescribed a Gallian scan for Hilda, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March. This, in turn was followed by a bone marrow test on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and confirmation by Doctor Stewart that it was Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, but it was localised and had a good chance of being cured.

After the necessary preliminary preparation, Hilda began a six week radiology course on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1997. She attended every weekday, under the care of Doctor Back for radiology, and Doctor Stewart for surgery. This was at John Hunter Hospital. I would take her there each day, and park in a special car park reserved for radiation patients. I must say at this point that these two doctors and the dental specialist, Dr Bowler, looked after Hilda very well, and explained everything to both of us.

Hilda coped with the treatment very well. She was an excellent seamstress, and had made Heather's dresses and a pretty embroidered top, also several dresses for herself. As we moved into each new home, you would soon find her busy making curtains. She had earlier on, made a patchwork quilt, and so decided to take this up as a pastime. My part in all this was to drive us to the various fabric shops in the Newcastle area, help select patterns and colours, and carry bolts of fabric around. Back home, I set up a bench in the spare room, big enough to lie out and cut up the material. The big moment came when I helped spread the backing and the finished top on the floor to be pinned up ready for sewing together. In all I think, Hilda made seven quilt covers, two of them are double bed size, one for Robert and Carolynne, and the other for our granddaughter Aimee's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. The last one was for our granddaughter, Natasha, but Hilda had got too sick to go on. She was due to see Dr Bowler who had her admitted to hospital straight away. The quilt was completed in April 2002 by Daphne Wolfe, one of our similarly talented neighbours.



*This quilt was the one we made for Jacqui.*

Hilda had kept a small notebook outlining her appointments, doctors, and treatment as she progressed. This chapter is a condensation of all the tests, scans, appointments, radiation, chemotherapy, and hospital stays that she was subjected to.

Just as we began to feel that she was in remission, Dr Bowler found an ulcer on Hilda's tongue. This led to more radiation and several days in Lingard Hospital for chemotherapy. This treatment was pronounced successful.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2001 a lump appeared on the left side of her neck. This time we were sent to a different specialist, Dr L Fenton. She removed part of Hilda's lymph gland on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November. Everything seemed to be going well, we were able to stay with Robert and Carolynne in Canberra, also of course, spend time with the rest of our family and friends. As I said earlier she was obviously very sick. Her next appointment was with Dr Bowler. She really wanted to see him, hoping that he could help her. He settled her in a comfortable armchair in a spare room, and then ordered an ambulance to take her to Lake Macquarie Private Hospital where she was admitted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2002. I left in the evening knowing that she was settled and comfortable. After a few days we were informed that she was to have an appraisal at Calvary Mater Hospital on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> to determine her further treatment. On arrival we were seated in a small room. Then, after a while we were taken into the next room where there were several doctors waiting. Hilda was shown to a chair on one side, and one of the doctors came over to examine her throat. I don't recall any other doctors following up. We were then conducted back into the first room. After a while doctor Fenton came out to inform us that there was nothing more they could do for her. Although we knew the cancer was spreading, she gave us no specific reason, nor said what might happen next. Hilda was then taken back to Lake Macquarie hospital, and I drove home. When I arrived back at the hospital the next day, I found that they had put a plastic tube through her nose into her stomach. The tube was connected to a small portable bedside machine which pumped small quantities of nutrient into her stomach at regular intervals.

May 12<sup>th</sup> 2002 was Mother's Day, so the nurse said that I could take Hilda home for the day, which made a nice break for her as she could spend some time in her own home with our daughter Heather and her children there.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, the results of the assessment came up. Hilda was transferred to the Palliative Care section of Calvary Mater. She was given a good sized room, with the wall on her left being sliding glass doors looking out to a lovely garden. The feeding tube and pump were removed and replaced by a small unobtrusive automatic syringe which injected morphine occasionally to sooth the pain of the cancer. I was given a small bedroom so that I was always nearby. Heather and family came every day, as they lived close by. Robert, Carolynne, Janna, Lewin and Aimee came up from Canberra and Scott from Brisbane. Paul came up from Candelo and they all stayed in our Swansea Village unit or the motel. Carolynne had taken a beautiful photo of a waterhole in Ormiston Gorge near Alice Springs, one of Hilda's favourite places. She had had it framed, and hung it facing the bed so that Hilda could see it clearly. Hilda passed away about 11.30am on Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2002. She suddenly stared as though she had seen somebody that she knew, and then was gone. I stayed alone with her for a while in the quiet sunlit room.

The funeral service was held in St Peter's Anglican Church in Swansea, and she is buried in the rose garden of Newcastle Memorial Park. Anderson Drive. Beresfield. NSW.



On account of her long and outstanding service to the Scout movement I arranged for a plaque to be placed in the open air chapel at Pennant Hills Scout Camp. It was well attended by her many companions in Cubs and Scouts.



*Scouting friends and my family at the Pennant Hills Chapel*



*The circle with a dot in it is a Scouting symbol for “gone home”.*

## Memorial service

At that time there was a convent attached to Cavalry Mater Hospital. One day, not long after the funeral, I received a letter inviting me and my family to a memorial service in memory of the patients that had died over the past year. The chapel was quite big, and we were seated near the back. As we went in one member of each family was given a slip of paper with the name of the deceased person written on it. Set on the altar, there was a demijohn sized glass jar. Just before the service began, we were told that the names would be announced, starting from a year ago. The selected person from the family would then walk down and drop the name slip into the jar. In this manner, all the people who had died in that year would be united in peace. Being at the back of the hall, I found it difficult to hear the voice of the Nun calling the names, so asked my grandson to tell me when Nan's name was called. The list went on, and then suddenly Hilda's name rang out loud and clear, as though over a P. A. system; or as I like to think, an angel announced it. I walked to the altar, and then held the paper over the mouth of the jar, and strangely, found it very hard to let go of it. I don't suppose it was noticeable to the people around me, but it seemed like a fair while to me, and then walking back I felt very much alone. I felt afterwards that it was a special event that achieved the purpose of binding us all together.

Another occasion was when I was selecting some of Hilda's belongings. Some items I gave to chosen peoples, other things, I let them choose. One thing that I picked up was a soft toy snow owl that I had bought in Tasmania for her birthday. I held it to my chest, and it was quite warm. So I kept it.

## Chapter 40

### Adapting to Change

It was strange, being on my own, but I got a lot of support from my family, friends, neighbours, and the Anglican Minister who kept in touch after the funeral. There were financial and legal affairs to be changed to my name.

Then came a time when I thought, 'What should I do with my spare time.' I had heard a lot about the U3A, (University of the Third Age) so decided to join it, and enrolled for a Creative Writing course. As it went along, I found that it stirred up my imagination and struck a spark, and I learnt to write short stories and poetry, an achievement that I was quite pleased about.

The tutor, Mrs Rhonda Byrne, was enthusiastic, and very clued up on English Grammar. She started us off on a serial story, where one person had to write a chapter, read it at the next lesson, then give it to the next person to write the following chapter, resulting in some quite interesting twists and turns in the story. Other times, she would give us a phrase or a word to write about. For example, 'What if there was no moon', or our thoughts on the word 'Green'. As Christmas drew close, our branch of U3A put on a Christmas lunch and entertainment at Swansea RSL Club, where Rhonda introduced me to her husband, Peter. We three became good friends from then on.

This is the first poem that I wrote in Creative Writing. It had to have metre and rhyming in a predetermined order. I forget what the style was called.

#### Inky

Picture a cat,  
A male, black cat.  
Sleek of fur, sharp of eye,  
Exploring nooks around the house,  
Ready to pounce on ball or mouse.  
Time to eat, hear him cry.  
Looks up at me  
Expectantly.  
Eats; then curls up.  
Bye, Bye.

This poem is written to convey a sense of disorder due to the gusty wind. I entered it in a competition and it was highly commended.

#### *Nature's allegro*

Twisting, turning,  
Rising, falling,  
Autumn leaves drifting by.  
Breezes scurry though the tree tops,  
Scattering the falling raindrops.  
Swirling clouds cross the sky.  
Ever flowing  
Always changing.  
Nature's beauty awry.

This is my favourite poem. It came to my head and I wrote it down. I was so pleased with it. It was like being on a high!

### **A poet's dream**

If I were a poet: I would sing  
Of bounteous nature. Joyful spring,  
Summer's dalliance, harvest moon,  
Winter's chill that comes too soon.

Of lover's trysts and tender vows.  
Stolen kisses 'neath the boughs.  
Of children's laughter, babies' smiles.  
Companionship to smooth life's miles.

I'd be up there with Robert B,  
And William S. Just you see!  
Use words that rhyme, and some that don't  
Like time and chime; and will and won't.

Sonnets, ballads, by the score,  
All of these, and plenty more.  
Soulful dirge, resounding epic,  
Heartfelt ode, or cheerful lyric.

Oh what a happy man I'd be,  
With people clamouring for me.  
I'd hang a sign upon my gate.  
'Here lives the Poet Laureate!'

The next year I continued with Creative Writing, plus Basic Computers, also tutored by Rhonda. Later courses included Science, Ancient Greek History, advanced computers and my own Personal History.

## **Computers**

After I retired I bought a Commodore 64. The programmes were stored on a tape cassettes and loaded into the computer through a tape drive. The monitor was your TV set. There were two good games on it, and I think, a basic word processor, but I couldn't afford a printer. Then we saw a Microsoft desktop computer displayed in a shop window. WOW! You could play solitaire on it, we were both hooked. The instructions were on two sheets of A4 paper, plus a book in which you looked up the command you needed to make your computer do a particular task. This one was a 386, I think DOS6. We did lots of letter writing on it.

Eventually the internet appeared. Although it was quite slow, but it made life more interesting. I did a course run by the local computer club. Just to make life a bit more difficult, computers evolved and Windows appeared and became more and more complicated until I have now reached Windows 10. In the meanwhile along came the internet with clouds in it. Then Apple brought out iPad. Well, what could I do but buy one. I just wanted to download a few books. I must say that I also get some great photos of my grandchildren on it. Now, at 95 I can use emails, Facebook, Skype, YouTube, iView, and save and manipulate photos. Goodness knows what I would do without Google, and, of course, a little help from my children and Carolynne. I must confess that I have a sneaking suspicion that it's going to get away from me sometime. My first desktop computer cost \$2010 in 1991, and the Dell laptop cost \$800 in 2011.

## Sasha

Our cat, Sasha missed Hilda very much. Her favourite thing was to be curled up on Hilda's lap. She adopted the same procedure with me. It was alright when I was reading a book, but I was often going to and fro doing this, that, and the other. When I had a spell in Canberra with Robert and Carolynne, I would board her at Pat's Cats where she had a strong affinity with Pat and her assistant Sharon. I always knew that she was safe and well cared for. She lived for 21 years, finally succumbing to kidney failure. Pat was caring for her at this stage and took us to the vet with Sasha on my lap. Once there, the vet gave her an injection, and she died peacefully while I held her. Pat asked that she be cremated, to which I agreed. I had the casket for some time, then gave it to Pat who put it alongside one holding the ashes of her own Siamese also named Sasha. I still keep in touch with them, and join them for morning coffee occasionally.



## Chapter 41

### Independence

#### The beginning

When I was in the army I had to sew on buttons, regimental badges, and darn socks. The last task is no longer necessary. At home I would help my parents with odd jobs. After I was married I had my own house to maintain. Since we both worked I shared with cleaning and housework. Later I added skills like minding our children, from nappy changing to reading stories and fixing toys. When Hilda died I was on my own, the children had grown up and left home. I was able to do basic cooking. Hilda had kept a book in which she saved her favourite recipes, from which I selected the easy ones, then established a routine of housework and shopping, and caring for Sasha.

#### Robert moves again

At this point I backtrack. Robert had obtained a position in Airservices Australia, providing software support for air traffic control which required him to live in Canberra, the capital city of Australia. When they had settled in they invited us down. This was a very good time to go as Floriade was on. Floriade is a flower festival in Commonwealth Park on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin. It features beds of many different coloured tulips set off by other varieties of spring flowers and attracts a large number of people, especially photographers. There is a market which sells things for the garden, and another selling giftware. Hilda and I went there twice. When I was living on my own I would go there each year in October.





There were also other things on at that time. One year the National Museum put on an interesting exhibition about Charles Darwin and his theory, 'The Evolution of Species. Another was of paintings by an Aboriginal artist named Emily, in her eighties, who lived in the Northern Territory. She had never been away from her community. The paintings were her depictions of nature seen through Aboriginal eyes. And they were very absorbing.

One place that I visited frequently was the National Art Gallery. It had an Aboriginal section that includes four paintings by Emily. There is also a wing devoted to Asian art and sculpture. Other rooms held Australian, European, and contemporary art. The last category includes Blue Poles by Jackson Pollock, and one by his wife Lee Krasner. Rothko was another artist who held my attention. My favourite one of his works is Brown. Black. Maroon. It seems to absorb me, I just stand and gaze at it across the room, maybe because one of my favourite colours is brown, the other is orange. Blue Poles was bought in 1973 and was circulated around the state galleries. Hilda and I were in the long queue that filed slowly past it in the NSW Art Gallery. We have also sat and studied it at the National Gallery. This is another painting that makes you think, particularly about its size and variety of expression. He doesn't seem to have painted it with any goal in mind, but it has turned out to be striking. Not being an art critic I can't give an educated comment on it. I have only seen his other works in print. I still lean towards Rothko.

Each year the gallery puts on an exhibition, one in summer and one in winter. I have seen Degas, Toulouse - Lautrec, Turner to Monet, and Renaissance. The last one impressed me the most as it covered the development of art over the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Originally, the majority of pictures were not painted as works of art but as religious guidance for the illiterate church congregations. They were generally of the Madonna and Baby either alone or with one or more Saints, or of individual Saints, sometimes aiding people along the way. In those days the pictures were painted on wooden panels using a substance called tempera, being a mixture of egg yolk and pigment. The paintings had no background and the figures were outlined in gold leaf. Larger panels were hung over the Altar while smaller ones were used as portable altars, having flaps on each side to protect them. As the century progressed, oil paint was invented in Holland and its use spread across Europe to Italy. This allowed much more

variation in colour and subtlety of the work. Gold leaf was eventually discontinued and backgrounds painted in which gave the pictures more depth and realism. Another big improvement was that the art of perspective was discovered which gave a 3D effect. Added to this, canvas became the preferred media for painting on, offering a more stable surface. Artists now began to assert their own personality by including their names in some decorative feature, finally establishing the convention of signing their name in the bottom right hand corner. Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century individual artists became more prominent, among them being Leonardo da Vinci, famous for his Mona Lisa, and Michelangelo, commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Portraits were now no longer the realm of Kings and nobility, any well off merchant could afford to have their portrait painted, often with their wives to celebrate their marriage, not forgetting their children. There is one portrait of a beautiful well-dressed little girl. Considering the odds against anyone getting old in those days, one hopes that she survived to a good age. She has at least attained a degree of immortality as a fridge magnet! I was in two minds about going, but I am glad that I did. It was something special to stand before a 500 year old painting and know of its importance in people lives at that time.

It is fortunate that we can see beautiful reproductions of all these wonderful masterpieces in art books and prints, but to see the original is the ultimate experience.

When I came to Canberra, I would stay with Robert and Carolynne. They would be at work, and I would go off on my own each day exploring Canberra, from the central shopping district to the museums, galleries, and parks, with one eye open for appetising coffee and lunch stops. I was also able to share an enjoyable lunch date with either Paul's ex-partner Keiren and their daughter Aimee, or Scott's ex, Janna and her son Lewin. It was good to be with them and hear how they were getting on, and their plans for the future. Robert and Carolynne would take me to dinner with their friend, Penny. At weekends they would take me to browse round one of the weekend markets, or further afield into the countryside.

I could go on and on about my adventures in Canberra, but that would get me into volume two, so I will finish with one more outstanding evening. This was the Enlighten Festival when the public buildings from the Art Gallery, past the Old Parliament House to the National Library were all bathed in laser light. The light shows either depicted their use or made brilliant patterns over them. For instance the Art Gallery had an exhibition of Parisian celebrities in the 1890s, so they were featured, Questacon was showing deep sea fish that were swimming along the external walls, the National Library showed shelves of books and fictional characters, while the Old Parliament House won hands down with graffiti comments on politics. I was very much impressed with it all. It was a pleasant mild evening with groups of happy, fascinated people strolling from one display to the next.



## Chapter 42

### Holiday with Edna

**2005**

In 2005 I decided that it would be good for us both if I went to England to spend a holiday with Edna. Her husband Dave, had passed away, and she too was living on her own. She was very pleased to get my news, and had a spare room available for me. Her younger son Stephen brought her to Heathrow to meet me, and drove us back to her house at Hatfield. After settling in I caught up with my jetlag. The first evening was spent catching up on each other's news, and planning our future outings.

Our first outing was with our niece Jean Cox, the eldest daughter of our cousin Winnie. She had a younger sister Hilary, and a younger brother David. Their father, Ken, was an upholsterer by trade. When we lived in England he gave me some good instructions on making and repairing sprung furniture, which came in very handy when we migrated to Australia. I was able to make divan beds for the boys.

Jean asked us to meet her at Kings Cross Station, which was the London terminus of the line through Hatfield. She was waiting at the platform gate, and guided us to the underground station to Waterloo Station. There, we walked a short distance, and turning a corner came upon a huge ferris wheel called the London Eye. It is situated on the south bank of the river Thames, near Westminster Bridge. We queued for our tickets, then waked across to the boarding point. The wheel moved quite slowly taking half an hour for one revolution, giving sufficient time for people to alight from one gondola which then moved on to the boarding point. Each gondola had a seat down the middle, was air conditioned, and had a PA system which broadcast information about interesting places coming into view. The interest was heightened for me as I knew a lot about this area. Having reached our alighting point, Jean led us up on to Westminster Bridge to the 'London Explorer' bus stop. This was an open top bus which had bud earphones at each seat, so that we could listen to a commentary along the way. The bus carried us along the south bank of the Thames to Tower Bridge, then crossed to the North Bank, where we stopped off at the Tower of London for lunch. We strolled around the outside of the Tower, but didn't have time to go in. Finally we caught the next bus back to Westminster. It was now time for us to part and head for home.



For our next outing with Jean, we met at Covent Garden Station where we browsed around what was once the principal fruit and vegetable market for London. It had now

been converted to an up-market market, with smart clothes shops, gift shops, bookshops, and toyshops, etc. It also had a wine bar and several restaurants. There were wide aisles between the shops that held rows of stalls, selling craft goods, and second hand goods. We bought some Christmas presents to take back with us. Having seen most of it, Jean suggested lunch, so we went to the wine bar and ordered sandwiches and coffee. We had hardly begun when Jean's daughter, Marette greeted us. Jean had arranged for her to join us for lunch, as she worked nearby. We were very pleased to meet and got on well together. We finished up by arranging for Jean's husband Tony, to pick us up from Edna's place and take us back to spend a day with them in their home at Buckhurst Hill.

## **The British Museum**

Our next outing to London was with our cousin's daughter, Linda and her partner, Steve. They live in the heart of London and are both keen walkers, well acquainted with the streets, museums and art galleries of the city. We met them at Kings Cross too, then set off for an interesting walk through the back streets to the British Museum. Linda gave us a commentary on the places we were passing, not forgetting to stop on the way for morning coffee. We arrived at the back entrance, and walked through to the very impressive entrance hall, where the roof had been replaced by an arching glass dome, which gave it a bright airy atmosphere. I must say it quite took my breath away. The last time I had been there was in my school days. It then had a mezzanine floor of glass cases holding prehistoric skulls, and was not well lit. The souvenir shop was here too. I just had to have a souvenir mug with the Rosetta stone inscriptions printed on it. The adjacent hall was similarly roofed and displayed the marble statues from the Parthenon, as they would have been mounted originally. I had only ever seen these as a child on a school outing, many years ago. Then they were in one of the back rooms with other things. Here they were much more prominent and natural looking. I spent some time wandering around studying them.

After this, Steve led us to the hall dealing with the history of money, a subject I have often wondered about, as I find that money becomes history all too soon! Anyway, we started at the beginning with clay tablets and notched sticks, and progressed through rudimentary coins and notes through the ages, up to the present highly crafted coins and plastic notes. At that point things got technical, as we entered the credit card era, EFTPOS and internet banking. Maybe we'll wind up going back to bartering. Finally, we all paid our respects to the very old and very well decorated Mummies, before heading off to lunch at a wine bar in a courtyard just along the street.



*The front entrance of the British Museum. (Postcard)*

Lunch was followed by a walk to Trafalgar Square and the National Gallery. Quite a long walk this time, but with interesting things to see along the way. In the gallery we picked up a map showing the layout of the rooms. It highlighted the more important paintings, so that you could have a potted tour, resulting in a very interesting visit. That led us to afternoon tea, followed by a trip on the tube to Linda and Steve's home. They have a very neat little flat in what was once a warehouse in the docks area. Here, we relaxed while Steve cooked a very tasty dinner. After a pleasant evening, they took us back to the tube to make our way home.

## **Shetland - Land of Rainbows**

We met Robert and Carolynne at Heathrow, and flew up to Aberdeen, then changed to a very noisy propeller driven plane to Sumburgh airport in Shetland. This was Edna's first flight in an aeroplane, which she found very enjoyable. As luck would have it, when we arrived at the airport, it was closed due to fog, so we had to fly around for 20 minutes until it cleared. Robert then picked up the hire car and drove us to Swarthoull, where they had rented a very warm and comfortable house.

Our reason for going to Shetland was to meet Scott and Jacqui, and to help celebrate Scott's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was very well attended, and celebrated with a very good Scotch whiskey and bannocks cooked by Claire's mother, Evelyn. In the evening a bonfire was lit, away from the house, and Scott let off some good fireworks. It was also Guy Fawkes Day (cracker night in Australia, but now no longer observed here due to the risk of bushfires.)



We spent a busy week, seeing the sights and visiting Scott and Claire, and Jacqui and Kevin, and being welcomed by their families. All were lovely, friendly people - it was Claire's parents who had hosted Scott's party. On Saturday we all had lunch with Kevin's family, then went out with them to Eshaness cliffs and lighthouse, where I took some photos.



Next, Kevin's mother, Nanette, took us to a very interesting folk museum, called 'Tangwick Haa.' Shetland people use a lot of Viking words, and observe some Viking customs, since they were the first people to colonise the islands. I was impressed by Lerwick, the administrative and main shopping centre of Shetland with its mix of old and new buildings, and a really good fish and chip restaurant. It is also a busy port for fishing and oil company boats. At one point along the rocky shore, one could observe seals basking on the rocks. The scenery, too was very impressive with rugged sheer cliff, and eroded columns and arches resisting the ocean's onslaughts. On land there is an almost continuous strong wind blowing which resulted in a shortage of trees.

We finished the week with me treating everybody to dinner at Busta House, the grand hotel where Scott worked as a chef, and finally, a happy evening at the Hillswick Hall to round off a great week, seeing some very impressive and interesting places and meeting some very friendly and interesting people.

## **Woodbridge and Southwold**

Back home in Hatfield, we went to Woodbridge, to spend a relaxing weekend with my nephew, David Cox and his wife Jean. I had only seen David once since leaving England. That was in 1988, then, for only a few minutes. Hilda and I met Jean for the first time in 1977, so you can see we had plenty to talk about, plus the fact that David and I were both into telephony. They picked us up from Hatfield on Saturday morning and took us back to Woodbridge in time for lunch. In the afternoon David took us all on a tour of the town.

Woodbridge is a very nice little town on the river Deben, and is a popular boating area, with boats moored all along the waterfront, and a large number stored on dry land. Our first call was to a very old Tidal Mill. When the tide came in, it was allowed to fill a basin at the rear of the mill, and then the gates were closed. The stored water was then allowed to flow out through the mill, thus turning the gears and grinding corn. The original timber gears can be seen through a window, and demonstration runs are held at intervals. We next walked through the shopping centre. A quite narrow street lined with interesting shops. I thought that I could very easily live there.

On Sunday morning, we had pleasant drive through the countryside to Southwold, a small seaside town. An attractive place with a neat pier, on which there was a good restaurant where we had lunch. An outstanding feature on the pier was a most unusual water operated animated clock, which two men had made from scrap iron. It 'chimes' every half hour, and always attracts a very attentive audience. I took a short movie of it. Also there was a room full of zany homemade arcade types of amusement machines, all very ingenious. An instance of seeing is believing.

Following this, we looked round the town. Then took a short run to Framlingham, where we looked over the ruins of the old castle. The timber part, of course, had long gone. Where the main hall had been was a huge open fireplace, and the souvenir shop. It was also possible to walk along the battlements at the top of the walls; now with iron railings on either side for safety. I thought that the structure was very well presented and maintained. We left there, with a last look back, to head home for dinner at the end of a very pleasant day.

## Chapter 43

### Second Trip to UK 2006

There was still more that I wanted to see and do in England, so off I went again. This time, we decided to revisit the places that our parents had taken us to when we were children to see whether we still liked them, and how they had changed.

#### Southend on sea

Southend had improved a lot, and was a lot more upmarket, with modern shops and department stores. It is likely that East Londoners are now more mobile, and travel further afield for their holidays. The toast rack tram that once carried us along the promenade to Westcliff was now in a museum. Gone were the cheap gift shops: buckets and spades were rare. The prolific displays of bawdy postcards on rotating wire racks had almost disappeared. They were very popular pre-war. There must have been hundreds sent through the post every summer. We went out along the pier on the train. There was now a thick metre high concrete wall along the front edge of the promenade to guard against the increasing high tide level.

#### Ramsgate

Ramsgate didn't disappoint us. The shopping centre was as busy as ever, although more modern of course. There weren't many picture postcards or children's buckets and spades on sale, but plenty of Ramsgate rock. The inner harbour was full of private yachts and cruisers. Some of the fishermen's store rooms at the back were now gift shops and cafes. On the left side of the harbour was a big old stone building that had been converted to a maritime museum. The dance hall with the balcony was now a casino. The brakes, a flat top cart with rows of seats, and the 'Jolly Yachtsmen' concert party were gone. It had been decreed that although the carthorses were very strong animals, the effort required for two of them to pull a cart load of people up a long steep hill was excessive, so they were discontinued. I expect that the Jolly Yachtsmen were now out of fashion due to the change of tastes since the war. The waterfall was still splashing away, as strong as ever. There were still donkey rides on the beach, this time followed by a boy with a shovel and sack.



## **Clacton on Sea**

The next trip was to Clacton on Sea, another seaside town. This was one of the places that Dad used to take us to, when his firm closed down for the summer holidays in August, coinciding with school holidays. The beach would be crowded with families relaxing on deck chairs, while the children played in the sand or the sea, and generally ran around. There would be a kiosk nearby selling soft drinks and ice cream. Mum and dad liked it there because you could get day trips on a coach into the countryside, which was very pleasant. The coach would stop at an Inn with a tea garden adjacent, for us to have a pleasant English lunch. Their favourite trip was to a place called Flatford Mill, a big old water mill and Manor House much favoured by the artist, John Constable. He was very much admired for his paintings of country scenes and of sunsets.

Our trip was on a Sunday, late in the season, so it was fairly quiet. Sadly we found the town somewhat dull and rundown. The pier was still going, but that too was looking rundown, not much like our memories. We walked along the promenade to look at one of the Martello towers. On our way back we found a very good café. There was a predominance of American style arcades, with electronic games and loud noise.

## **Paris**

Our trip to Paris turned out to be an extra. I had an ambition to go through the Channel Tunnel, but didn't know whether it could be achieved. When we went to the travel agent to book our coach trip to Clacton, I asked if it was possible. We found that you could book the train and two night's accommodation, with an extra night free. The cost was £476.00, about \$1150.00, for the two of us. I thought this was quite reasonable. The hotel was the 'Grenelle Tour Eiffel', situated close by a park that leads to the Eiffel Tower.

The park was a long park with a long name, 'Park du Champ de Mars'. At one end of the park was the 'Ecole Militaire'. The park had originally been the parade ground. It took us about 15 minutes to walk each way, although we were never in a hurry. There was too much to see and admire. Being a weekend there were always people strolling about, children being children, and families relaxing on the grass. At one point there were several men playing boules. We watched them for a while, they were pretty good at it.

At the top end of the park, they had just finished erecting a Peace Memorial. This consisted of two walls built on a stone platform, and surmounted at the top by a wide canopy. Sixteen columns had been erected on either side. Across the back was a glass wall with the word 'Peace' inscribed on it in several languages. The inner face of each wall had three glass panels, with touch screens on which you could bring up information about peace. Behind the memorial, and in front of the Ecole Militaire was a big marquee, which I assumed was going to be used for the dedication ceremony.



Our stay in Paris was for three days, so we decided to see as much as possible. We had bought 3 day tickets for the Metro and museums before we left London. We did quite well, seeing most of the places along the Seine. We bought 3 day tickets for the Batobus, which cruises up and down the Seine, with a number of stops along the way. On Saturday we visited the Musée D'Orsay, and Notre Dame. Sunday was the Louvre, where we called on Mona Lisa, a very attractive lady, then inspected Napoleon's apartment.

The afternoon was spent strolling in the Tuileries Park. Being a Sunday, it was quite crowded. We found the boating pond fascinating, with the ducks manoeuvring their way between model boats with colourful sails. We had hoped to get to the Arc de Triumph, but it was too far.



We hadn't visited the Eiffel Tower over the weekend as the queues were far too long. It was much quieter on Monday morning, but we hadn't time to go right to the top as we had to catch our train after lunch. We dallied somewhat in the custom free section of the Gare-du-Nor and just made it to the train on time, arriving back in London at 4pm, very tired.

## **Other things we did**

I found that this time I wasn't in so much of a hurry to keep on the go. Here is an account of some of our outings, but not necessarily in this order.

Top of the list was the London Eye again. Then a day at the London Zoo in Regents Park. We had been taken there quite often as children by our parents or Aunt Emma. We always enjoyed it there, and had joined the zoo club to learn more about natural history.

Our cousin Jean called us. She and Tony said they would like to take us to a show and asked if we would like to see one called 'Billy Elliot'. We thought that would be a good one, so we arranged to meet at the theatre. We all enjoyed it. I thought it was lively, thoughtful, and contemporary. After the show, they took us out to dinner at an Italian restaurant. Another very nice day out was being invited to lunch with Jean's younger sister, Hilary. She had three daughters, and they had little children of their own. So we had a very jolly time together. They all wanted to know about Australia, and our living conditions.

Another interesting day was with Linda and Steve at the Royal Academy to see an exhibition of sculptures by Rodin. I had only ever seen them as photos, and was very impressed to see the actual works.

One thing that I was really keen on seeing was the Babbage Difference Engine. He had designed it in 1823 to automatically compile mathematical tables, but the level on engineering accuracy at that time was not sufficient to build such complex mechanisms. In 1985 the science museum decided to build the machine to celebrate Babbage's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1991. They achieved it just in time after a number of hold ups due to its complexity. When I went there, they were working on a second one, the first one having been sold to an American computer museum.

We managed to fit quite a lot into that holiday, but also made time to relax and take life easy. It was soon time for me to fly off home, but we made arrangements to call each other weekly, by phone or skype.

## **Back into routine**

First thing was to sort out my photos, get back into U3A and village events and continue writing this history.

Newcastle busses had laid on a daily bus to the nearest station, Morisset which made it possible to catch the express train to Sydney and back. It gave me time to do some exploring, to look round Darling Harbour, Hyde Park, and the Botanic Gardens or browse through the Art Gallery, or the Australian Museum, among other things.

## Chapter 44

### The Fringe Benefits of Old Age

#### Downside

In August 2013, I woke one night with a very fast heartbeat. I called the ambulance, the medics gave me a check-up, and took me to hospital. The next day I was examined by a heart specialist, and admitted to be fitted with a pacemaker. This improved my heartbeat, and kept it at the correct speed.

Early in 2014 I went to my GP for a check-up. He noticed a sunspot on my nose, which turned out to be melanoma, so I had to go into hospital to have it removed and a skin graft done. I woke in the recovery ward with a thick white dressing over my nose. When I saw it in a mirror later, I thought I looked like a rabbit walking backwards. The community nurse took care of the medical side, and my grandson Philip did the housework side. So I didn't need to go out until after the dressing was removed.

Shortly after arriving home, I discovered a small hard lump on my left thigh. So it was back to the doctor, who sent me for an ultra-scan. After a series of tests, scans, X-rays, etc. my lump which had been growing steadily, was found to be a Sarcoma. I was then referred to a surgeon who had me admitted into hospital and removed it. This left a wound the full length of my thigh held together by 32 staples. These were removed when the edges of the wound had bound together. I was almost due for discharge when it was found that the wound had become infected. A variety of antibiotics were prescribed, but to no avail. That left no option but to clean out the wound surgically. I was somewhat shocked and depressed when I saw the size of the wound.

When the time came for me to be discharged, the Registrar came to discuss my home care facilities and the provision of a carer. My younger son Paul, was free and volunteered to help me. He did this for over twelve months and was very helpful and supportive. He did the shopping and cooking, ordered and assembled the equipment I needed, took me to my various medical appointments, and kept me company. We played lots of Scrabble. Later on he took me to exercise classes.

Owing to the size of the wound it was very slow to heal, and suffered two setbacks. My care was then taken over by Dorothy, a community nurse. She is a very competent and resourceful person. In addition she has a cheerful personality which helped a lot to raise my spirits at each of her visits.

I was then referred to a nurse practitioner who firstly treated it with ultrasound, and is now following up with Negative Pressure Therapy. This is a small device, rather like a vacuum pump which connects to the wound through a tube. The wound is sealed off from the ordinary atmospheric pressure by a plastic dressing. The pressure in the wound is then reduced to about one third atmospheric pressure. This helps the new tissues to grow much faster than normal, which is already evident. I am looking forward to its removal and getting back to normal.

Now Paul has returned home for a while to conduct his own affairs. His place has been filled by Carolynne. We don't have a car so have to depend on the walker, Community Services and the bus to get around and to get to medical appointments. Encouraged by Carolynne I have been to the big shopping centre at Charlestown Square and the Newcastle Museum. I can walk with the aid of my walker to the local doctor, the chemist, the library and Coles. Carolynne has also helped me develop my social contacts by inviting people in for morning or afternoon tea and getting me in touch with functions run by the local age care group. In addition one of my neighbours took us to a wonderful

display of photographs by Ken Duncan who has travelled widely taking very scenic pictures. At home, she has improved my diet with new dishes and cakes.

Never a dull moment, you might say, I don't doubt that there will be other surprises in store, and hope that I can handle them satisfactorily. On the upside, I have my wonderful caring family, always ready to help and support me. They, each of them, seem to have some talent to fix the problem that is bothering me at the time. I love them all, and I wouldn't change any of them. Let me introduce them.

Firstly, of course, there is Hilda's and my three children, Robert, Paul, and Heather.

Robert married Carolynne Jones. They have two children, Scott and Jacqui.

Paul's partner was Keiren McLeonard. Their daughter is Aimee.

Heather married Nick Stankovich. They have three children, Nick, Natasha, and Philip.

Scott's partner was Janna Horsburgh. They have a son, Lewin.

Scott is engaged to Claire Herridge. They have three children Hannah, Fraser, and Hayden.

Jacqui married Glen McAlister. They have two daughters, Ellie and Ciara.

Nick partner was Katrina Trustrum. Their daughter is Anna.

Nick is engaged to Bronwyn Evans.

Well folks, I have now brought you up to date with my history, so from now on I will broadcast to you live. Just to round things off, I am proud to present the oldest and youngest members of the Parker family. There's me, Arthur William Parker born 26<sup>th</sup> of May 1920, 95 years, 9 months and 20 days and Hayden John Arthur Parker born 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, 1 year, 3 weeks and two days, as of 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.





*Dad, Edna, David, and baby Martin (left). Me, Gus, Iris and Hilda (right).*



*Heather's christening (left). My family (right)*





*Robert*



*Paul*



*Heather*





