

Down the Arches of the Years



Greengate, the poorest area of Salford, around 1898

by Jim Noonan

Foreword and Acknowledgements

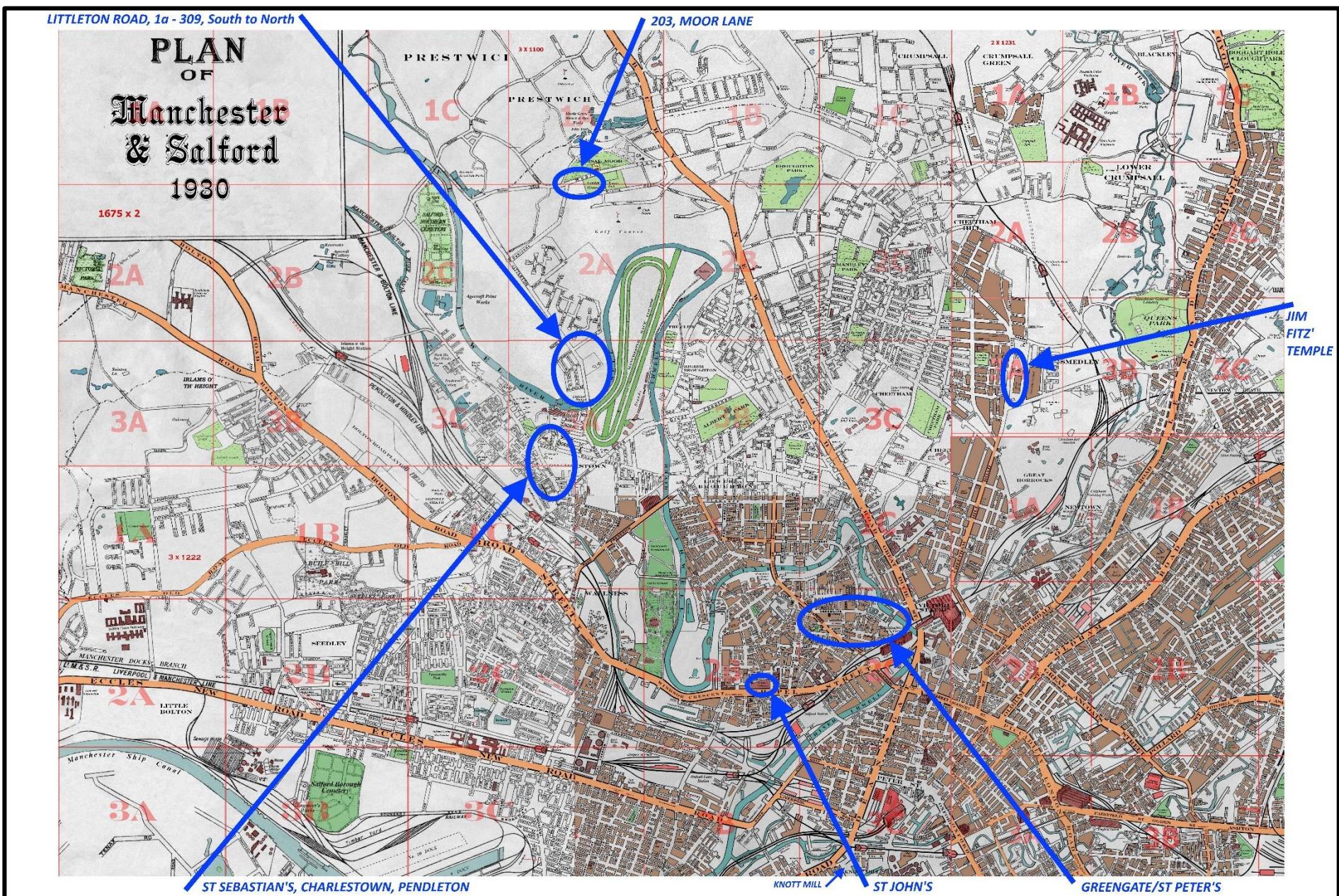
I write this foreword and these acknowledgements in the late April of 1999 and it is difficult to realise that it is over four years since first I set pen to paper. Frances must bear responsibility as the original instigator and the enthusiasm of Julie Scarsbrook encouraged me to continue . Julie also undertook the uploading or downloading (as the case may be) on to floppy or hard discs (again as the case may be) until circumstances made this no longer possible. Frances and also Peter and Angie then came to the rescue and further uploadings and downloadings (as the case may be) again took place. James and Lisa entered the scene at this point and James has undertaken the final production as well as having been the honorary acting unpaid advisor in all matters relating to floppy discs, hard discs, etc. Phil and Harry Scarsbrook have also contributed in advice and research particularly in respect of pre-war Salford. They also kindly provided the cover photograph which they tell me was taken circa 1898 [*Ed: by Samuel L Coulhurst of the Manchester Amateur Photographic Society*] when the buildings depicted were around two hundred years old and that they were situated just adjacent to the Arches. The pub was called 'The Flying Dutchman'. Of course my final thanks must be to Marion who has supported and assisted in ways too numerous to list in this brief text but is in no way responsible for any errors of grammar, memory or fact, these I reserve entirely for myself. Finally I propose to use the occasion of Sister Cath's 50th anniversary of profession when the 'clan' will be gathered at the Woodhall Carmel in order to distribute the book to all willing recipients.

Jim Noonan

Shrewsbury, April 1999

[Died Shrewsbury, May 2001, RIP]

The Venues



Chapter One

Whilst watching the redoubtable Newcastle United versus the struggling Middlesborough on television one night, the background conversation between Frances and her Mum was on the hoary old subject of family history and how we parents might possibly escape from this life without enlightening our offspring to their roots. Today, failing to complete the Times Crossword and casting around for something to do which did not have connotations of work, this little bit of eavesdropping came to mind, and it is thus from indolence that this narrative is commenced.

Having now as it were set pen to paper, I am, to mix metaphors, hoist by my own petard. (What is a petard by the way?). How to go about it? Frances is in favour of speaking into a mike. I think, however, unless speaking to a script, it would be too discursive and there would be many sins of commission and omission. Perhaps a combination of the two, refined and re-edited would give a more accurate picture of our family history. But then again, what is accurate? Whose accuracy is it, parent's or children's? Which parent and which child?

I think that since I am writing it, it will after all have to be my accuracy and it will have to be my versions of people and events. We also now come to problems of scope and range. Who am I writing for and where does history start, and, as importantly, where and when does it stop? Is it at midnight of 30th August 1995? If not, where and when? What will be the circulation of this opus magnus? Sons, daughters, cousins, nieces, nephews, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles in-laws?

Probably the final product will define its circulation. There may at the end be only a single repository - the dustbin! The starting point is also a little bit difficult to define. Since I am notoriously ignorant of birthdays and anniversaries, I can hardly start with my parents' birth and since information about both paternal and maternal grandparents is almost non existent, we must opt for a less personal starting point. I think that when I hear Frances, Peter, James, Lisa and Angie talk about this subject, what they want to hear is about the lives we had as children and adolescents with our parents and so on, as far back as one can go and perhaps this should dictate our point of departure.

Our parents' lives and our own cover, so far at least, almost the whole of the twentieth century and the defining events of the century are undoubtedly the two world wars. I was born on 21st August 1922, almost five years after the ending of the war in France and in the year of the ending of the Irish troubles. (How all the protagonists of that agreement must be turning in their graves). This starting point will allow me a little scope in ranging backwards and forwards in time and enable me to make the many little asides for which I am justly maligned. We have one remaining problem. This will necessarily be the Noonans' history and we have not yet consulted on how the Lees' history will be incorporated. Will Marion write a parallel history? This I think would be simpler, at least from 1953 the significance of which will become manifest.

Seventy three years and ten days ago I was born at 189 Greengate⁽¹⁾, Salford, Lancashire, the third son of Kate and Richard Noonan. I think it behoves us here to consider this address. As the street name, Greengate, implies, there is a rural connotation. My grandmother, Rose Anne Burgon⁽²⁾, who will make her official and chronological entrance later, used to tell us that names like Springfield Lane and Whitegate Gardens were no meaningless terms. She remembered when the whole area was fields and lanes.

In my time, Greengate started at Blackfriars Road and at the corner stood what was then known as a Board school and opposite was the Blackfriars Road Baths and washhouse, a facility sorely needed as there was probably not a bathroom within a mile radius. Blackfriars Road was a main road and thus a tram route into Manchester City centre and outwards to Broughton and Prestwich and Bury. From Blackfriars Road, Greengate went towards Manchester Town Centre under the arches to cross, via Victoria Bridge, the River Irwell which was the boundary between Manchester and Salford. The arches were very far from being arches and were in fact railway bridges which carried the platforms of Exchange Station over Greengate. The main platform of Exchange Station which crossed over Deansgate and continued into Victoria Station thus formed the longest railway platform in Europe. The arches performed also the secondary function of a Stygian covered bus station for Salford City. Between the top of Greengate and the Arches, the street was bounded on the right hand side by begrimed shops, a library, more shops, a pub and St Peter's Roman Catholic Church with an elementary school at the back in Springfield Lane. Opposite the school on the corner stood The Dwellings, Salford's answer to the Gorbals, and from thence to the Arches, a series of manufactories. On the left, all this was opposed by a series of mean narrow, cobbled, parallel streets with narrow pavements on to which the front doors of the two up and two down terraced houses debouched immediately from the parlour. These little houses had a privy in a small back yard which gave on to a narrow back entry which separated them from the next row of backyards. At the end of the streets and facing on to Greengate there were pubs, works, Baldwin's, an wholesale grocer, and between Springfield Lane and the Arches was a five or six storey mill called Frankenberg's. Even all these years later and young as I was I vividly recall how black and grime-laden all the buildings were. (Can blackness be vividly recalled?) I sit here typing this and looking out on to the garden of my house which backs on to open farm land and most of you who read this will at least be within sight of trees and greenery of some sort, and wonder amongst all the querulousness and 'rights' of the welfare state, if we realise just how far from the 'dark, satanic mills' we have come. As a matter of passing interest, Salford was the first city to introduce smokeless zones.

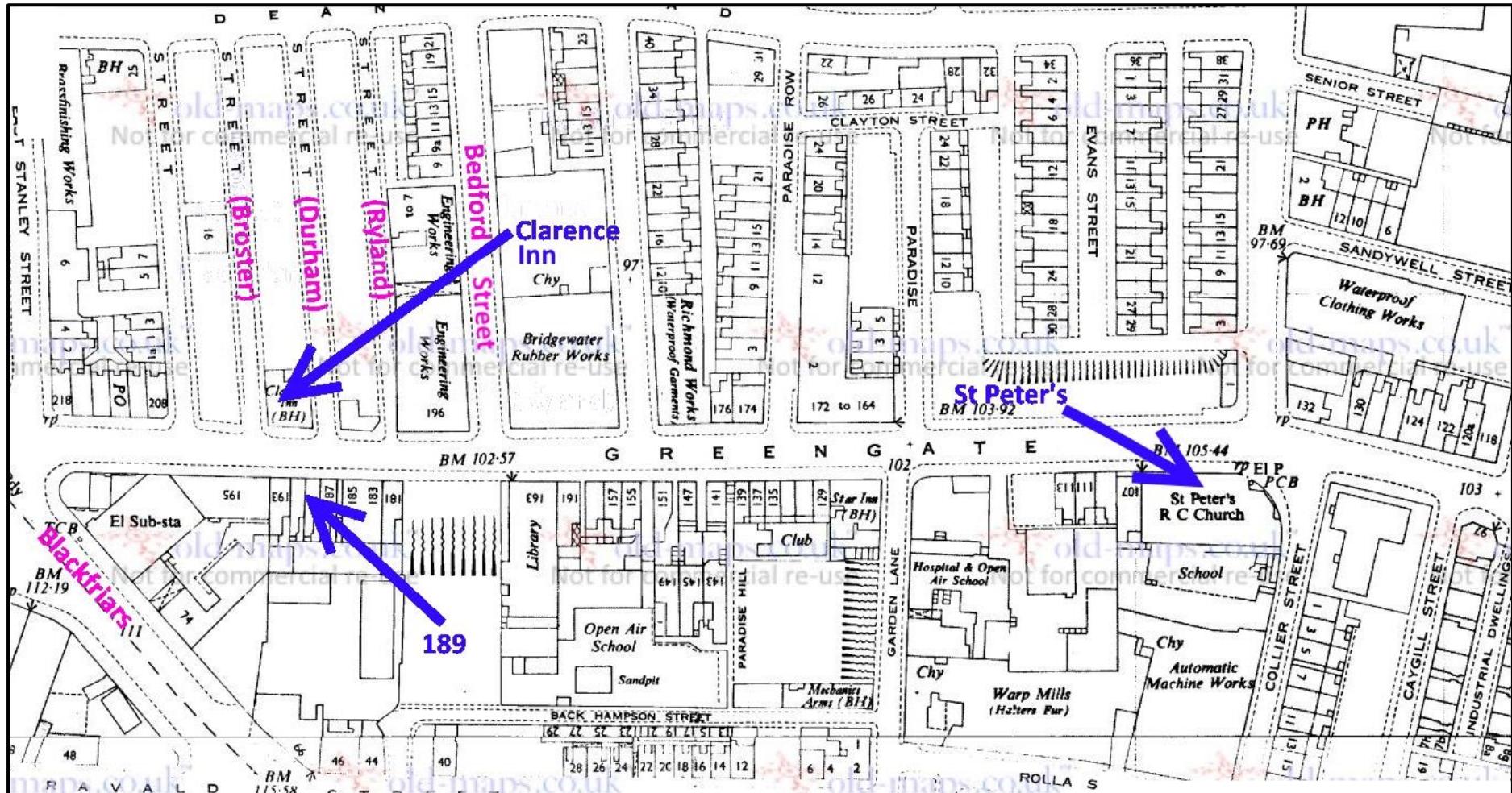
NOTES BY JIM'S SON PETER

August 2018

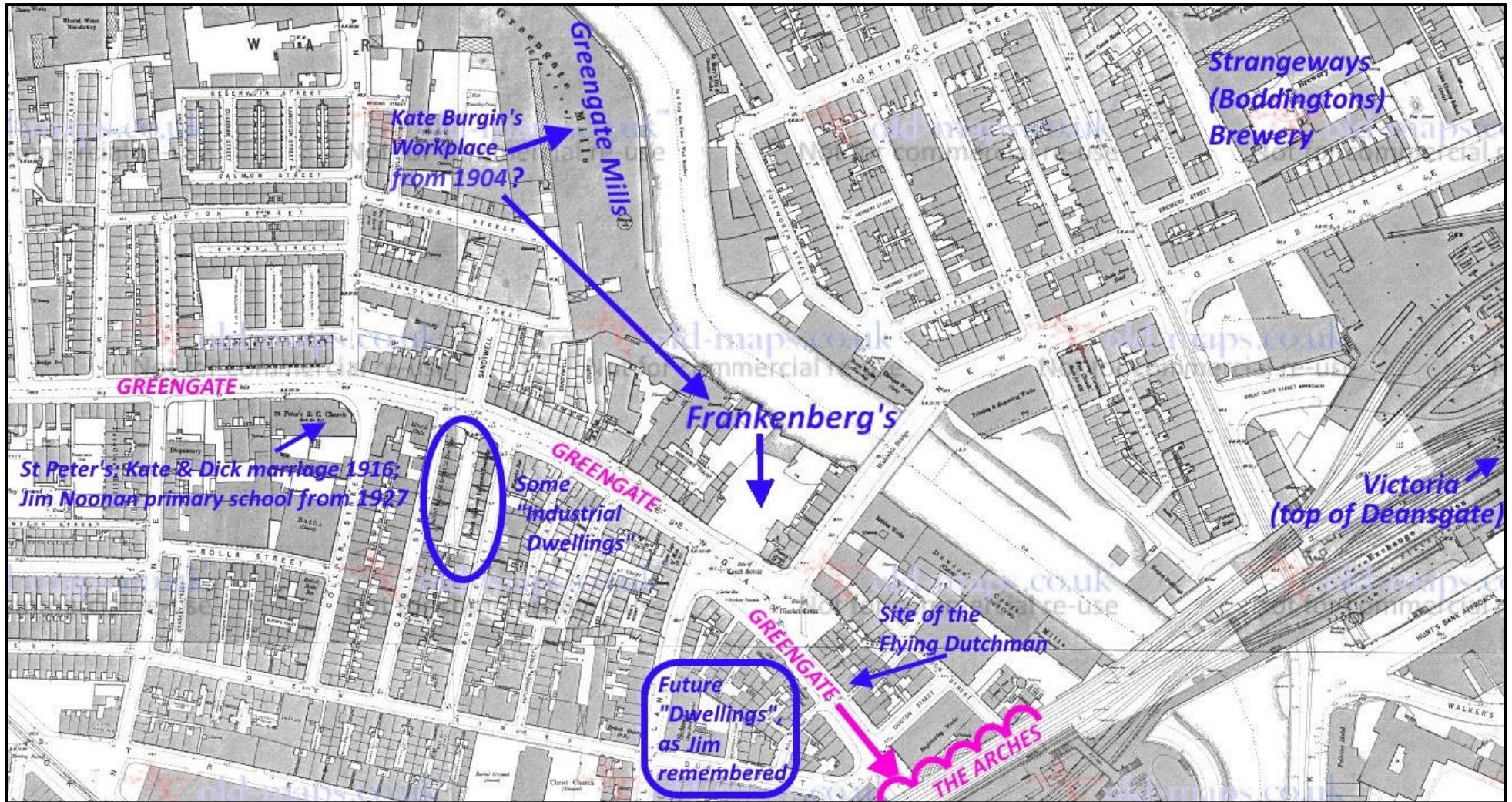
(1) No. 189 was on the southern side of Greengate near its junction with Blackfriars at its west end. As we discover later, it was opposite the Clarence pub, which lay between two side-roads of Greengate, Broster St and Durham St.

(2) Born Rosanne Dolin or Dolan, 1859 or 1860, Salford, or maybe Manchester. Her parents were very likely John Dolan and Mary Connelly, married in St John's Salford on 30 October 1858. They were both born in Ireland, she in Galway and he possibly in Cavan. Their parents' names are in turn given in their marriage record. Rose had a close younger brother Thomas who it seems married a Mary Jane Foy in Salford in 1886. I think we have to take Rose's memories of a rural Greengate with a pinch of salt as historic maps show it was already built-up by 1848.

Upper (west) end of Greengate



Lower (east) end of Greengate



Leaving, for the present, places for people, we return to 21st August 1922 and beyond this to the Great War and the years leading to it. Mam and Dad were married at St Peter's⁽³⁾ on 3rd May 1916, a great act of faith with the terrible battles of the Somme etc. still to come. It was what was known as a khaki wedding and there are photographs extant of the wedding couple, she in white dress and lace, he in khaki uniform, puttees and peaked cap and all. Dad had been in the 'terriers' (the Territorial Army) before the war, and as such was immediately called to the colours on the declaration of war ('Called to the Colours'! - what a quaint expression we use for such a bloody business!) He served in France with the Lancashire Fusiliers as a member of a machine gun company. He also played the clarinet in the Regimental Band. He was particularly proud of a band photograph signed by King Albert of the Belgians when they played before him on some occasion- I wonder who has these photographs now?

Dad was born at 102 Gill Street, Pendleton⁽⁴⁾, on 3rd March 1892. The birth certificate, at present in the possession of Phil and Harry Scarsbrook, reveals that his father was James Noonan, a 'Hawker of Fruit'⁽⁵⁾ and his mother was Mary Noonan nee Corcoran⁽⁶⁾. I have always wondered as to our exact connection with the Corcoran clan; now all is clear. Dad had an elder sister, Aunty Mary, and a younger brother, Uncle John⁽⁷⁾. Little is known of their early days but anecdotal history has it that they were orphaned whilst they were in their teens having lived under a severe disciplinary regime.⁽⁸⁾ The same history has it that Aunty Mary brought up Dad and Uncle John and that at one time, they had a fish and chip shop on Lower Broughton Road.⁽⁹⁾ Uncle John, as far as I am aware, also had a khaki wedding, his wife was Theresa Malone⁽¹⁰⁾. Their youngest daughter, Patricia Eltringham⁽¹¹⁾, who is one year older than I, or their grandson, Father Joseph Coyne⁽¹²⁾, at present Parish Priest of a Blackburn parish, may possibly know

(3) St Peter's RC Church was a short distance to the east of 189 on the same side of Greengate.

(4) 102 Gill St is the same address James and family had lived at almost a year before Richard was born on 5 April 1891, census day. Gill St was close and almost parallel to the original Whit Lane, north of the junction of Broad St and Broughton Rd.

(5) James' profession had changed since April 1891, but his Mum and Dad had previously run a greengrocer nearby in Charlestown Pendleton for many years.

(6) Mary Corcoran was born in Ireland, almost certainly in Dublin, around 1853 and brought to Salford before the age of five.

(7) Dad has the birth order wrong. Mary Ann was born on 27/9/1886, and John Edward on 25/1/1889 over 3 years before Richard.

(8) Mary died on 2 March 1894 and James died on 29 April 1906, both in Salford. RIP both.

(9) Mary Ann may have looked after Richard and John Edward from 1906 until John married in 1910, or for even longer if James' death was preceded by a protracted illness.

(10) Theresa Bridget Malone was born in 1886 in Farnworth, Bolton, the daughter of Kyran Malone and Christina Sunderland, who were married in Kildare, Ireland in 1876. It was not a khaki wedding, as it took place in 1910.

(11) Patricia Noonan was born on 20 July 1921 in Salford. She married Harrison Eltringham in 1947, and they had twin daughters Philomena and Patricia in Durham in 1948. She died in late 1999 in Salford, RIP.

(12) John Edward and Teresa's first two children didn't reach adulthood. Their third was Theresa W Noonan, born Salford 1915. She married Patrick Coyne in 1945 and they had Patrick and Joseph, but it was Patrick who was the priest, not Joseph. Father Patrick died young in Blackburn in 1997, RIP.

more of Dad's antecedents and certainly of the Malones than I. Dad never talked of his childhood, youth or war experiences. He was proud of his service and would always turn out in spats and wearing his khaki and war medals on Armistice Day. (To those of you who do not know what spats are - in this context - I will not deny you the pleasure of discovery). Members of the Malone clan will be popping in and out of our history as we go along.

For information on Mother's birthday, we have only a copy birth certificate dated 1952 which tells us only that she was born at Bedford Street⁽¹⁸⁾, Greengate on 15 August 1892⁽¹³⁾. This copy certificate is at Phil and Harry's, together with Dad's. Mother lived with her Mother, Rose Anne Burgon (or Burgin) and her step-sister Mary Wynne. From this we assume that Mary Wynne was the daughter of a previous marriage of Rose Anne Burgon⁽¹⁴⁾⁽¹⁵⁾. We have no idea at all what the maiden name of Rose Anne Burgin might have been.⁽²⁾ That mother knew and loved her father we know from her own words. Where and when he was born and where and when he died, we do not know. He was an Irishman⁽¹⁶⁾ and we know that he loved poetry which he would recite when in his cups and at which times also he did not always show normal Irish courtesy to Queen Victoria. She would say to me that I took after him, but did not specify in what respect. I think that in the words of Howard Spring these were 'Hard Times.'

Mother left school at twelve years of age and went to work in Frankenberg's mill from 6a.m. to 6p.m. six days per week.⁽¹⁹⁾ She told me that she and her Mother would go the mill on Friday nights to meet her Father and ensure that the wage packet did not go in fuelling recitation and abuse of English royalty.⁽¹⁷⁾ Their shopping would be done in Lower Broughton Road as late as possible on Saturday nights when butcher, baker etc. would, in the absence of refrigeration in those days, sell everything off cheaply.

We now go on in time and in a way start our Story proper, when Mam and Dad married on May 3rd 1916 and went to live in

(13) Kate's birth certificate may show 15th Aug 1892 but there was no entry into the register until the 4th quarter of 1892, after Sept 30th. Rose Ann Dolan had married Joseph Burgin at St Peter's on 2nd Jan 1892. There is an 18th Nov 1892 baptismal record from St John the Evangelist giving her date of birth as 15th Oct 1892. I think dad or one of his informants has swapped October for August.

(14) From her marriage record, Mary Wynne's maiden name was Foster. But her 1888/89 birth and baptism records state her mother's name as Ellen Foster. So far we can find no genetic link with either Rose Ann Dolan or Joseph Burgin. Earlier, we had found a marriage in Nottingham between a Rose Ann Dolan and a Samuel Foster, but a visit to Nottingham proved this to be unrelated. It seems pretty clear that Mary and Kate were brought up like sisters, but at present the balance of likelihood seems to be that they were more like adoptive sisters than step-sisters..

(15) Between Kate's birth and the 1911 census, Rose Ann bore four more children but they were all lost in infancy. So effectively Kate's only sibling, whether adoptive or not, was Mary Foster (later to marry into the Wynns).

(16) Whilst Joseph Burgin was very probably 100% Irish by parentage, he was in fact born in Manchester around 1855. The records we have show his parents as Fanton and Eliza, but he may have been a son of a previous marriage of Eliza. There is an entry in the 1917 Salford Register of Deaths in the right name but with a 5-year discrepancy in the age.

(17) Whatever weekend weaknesses Joseph may have been subject to, he held down a job as a calenderer (cloth finisher) for at least thirty years. His Dad Fanton's profession, dyer, was in the same industry.

Bedford Street⁽¹⁸⁾. Their first child, Richard was born in July 1917. Our old friend anecdotal evidence, has it that his first cradle was an orange box. Only the older initiates will know what an orange box looks like. However, not to worry. The same evidence says that he eventually, when times were better, graduated to a drawer. 1919 was the time for the next two major events in their lives. Firstly, the birth of their second son, Joseph, and secondly Dad's return from France and subsequent demobilisation. The thirty pounds gratuity that accompanied demobilisation was of critical importance in that it was the foundation of the family fortunes. It was this money which enabled them to move into 189 Greengate and open a draper's business there. We were to remain there through my own birth in August 1922, John's in 1924, the first girl, Cath's in 1927 and Phil's in 1929 and then in 1930, we anticipated the post-war social sciences term 'upwardly mobile' and moved house to Kersal Moor, Mother commuting daily to the shop.

Since the period up to 1930 saw the addition of four more to the Noonan menage, as well as business and domestic developments of some significance particularly in the context and conditions of the times, we should perhaps set the scene in a little more detail. The twenties, as well as being the years of the 'flappers' and the Charleston, saw the failure to absorb all the soldiers returned from the war and the sowing of the seeds of the great depression, the general strike of 1926, the formation and failure of the first Labour government, and the great Wall Street crash in America, all of which culminated in the fall of the Labour administration and the formation of the National Government under the arch Labour traitor, Ramsay MacDonald in the early nineteen thirties. Thus we have the anomaly of the Noonan family being upwardly mobile, whilst the rest of the country was very much on the opposite track.

We have already spent some little time in describing Greengate in general, we should now perhaps spend some time in describing 189 and its immediate surroundings in particular. Had we stood, in the twenties, at the head of Greengate, with our back to Blackfriars baths, we would be looking down a cobbled street, sloping away at first, and then in the distance, dominated on the left with the dark bulk of Frankenberg's Mill⁽¹⁹⁾ before the stygian blackness of 'under the arches'. On the left, before Frankenberg's marched a series of squalid streets at right angles to the main street and these were interspersed with a variety of shops and works⁽²⁰⁾. On the right was a high brick wall surmounted by advertising hoardings. Bisto, Colman's Mustard, Guinness is Good for You, cinema and theatre programmes would be a typical selection of the adverts displayed. This wall and hoarding protected a builder's yard and gave way to a three storey block of terraced houses with their narrow fronts converted into shops. The first of these was a chemist, Pickering's - not your modern day chemist by any means. His shop behind the counter was a wall lined with drawers painted a dark brown and on the top of which

(18) The references to Bedford St, in 1892 and in 1916, are strange, particularly as Kate's baptismal record gives an address on Crosley St, "off Brewery St". Only rarely did families stay at a single address for long, although they might return to a street where they had rented previously. Bedford St, Greengate, was a few minutes walk from No. 189. There was another Bedford St across the river in central Manchester (NOT Salford), quite near to a Crossley St, but with no Brewery St nearby. There was a Brewery St near St John's where Kate was baptised but no Crosley St off it.

(19) Frankenberg's on Greengate was actually a rubber works. Perhaps Dad was thinking of Greengate Mills where his mum may have worked and which backed onto the Irwell further north. Beyond Great Deric St on the other side of the river was Strangeways Brewery, founded 1778 and demolished in 2007. I can attest from experience in the late 1970s that this at that time produced a glorious beer called Boddingtons.

(20) Those squalid streets included the aforementioned Broster St, Durham St and Bedford St.

stood very large jars and bottles containing many brightly coloured liquids. Mr Pickering must also have practised as an industrial chemist. The row of houses backed on to a large enclosed yard⁽²¹⁾, which was reached by a covered entry through the centre of the block. At one end of this yard, he had a single storey, flat roofed building inside of which he stored 50 gallon drums and barrels. There was usually an overflow of barrels in the yard and our principal contact, or rather lack of contact with Mr Pickering was in being chased off whenever he caught us 'walking' his barrels, circus style.

(21) The yard is clearly visible on old maps.

Next door to Mr Pickering was a newsagent and tobacconist and sweet shop - I am unable to recall the name. A feature of a shop like this at this time, and never seen now, would be a coil of black material about a half inch square in section, standing by a small guillotine. This was either thick or narrow twist and was a peculiarly noxious and odorous tobacco. In the winter it was exciting when the newly motorised delivery vans of the Manchester Evening News or the Evening Chronicle would drive pell-mell to the brightly lit area around the shop window and throw out their bundles of newspapers without stopping. It should be remembered that the horse and cart was still the principal means of carrying goods. Coil ignition had not been invented and starting handles and magnetos were the order of the day. Passenger traffic was by electric tram, the last horse-drawn tram had run in 1905 and Salford did not purchase its first motor bus until 1921. However, we digress. Number 189 Greengate was next to the newsagent's and we should perhaps venture inside after looking in the shop window. Mother always took great pride in her window dressing and generally it would be completely changed weekly. Officially, it was a draper's, but the title was fairly comprehensive and as well as ladies dresses, underwear and so on sold household linens and shoes etc. The window was always dressed to a theme, be it colour or perhaps a national or royal event. Her father, dead by this time⁽²²⁾, was not permitted to inhibit royal pictures and Union Jacks in window dressing, and green and gold, the Pope's colours, was a fairly popular combination. Having passed through the door at the back of the shop, you are now in the living room. Behind this again was the kitchen which again gave onto a scullery in the corner of which was the 'copper' and a trap door in the floor which gave access to the coal cellar. At the front of the house a grid was set into the pavement and behind this was a window. With the grid raised and the window opened, the prudent housewife supervised the weighing of the large coal bags before they were tipped down into the cellar by the begrimed coalmen. The one hundred-weight bags were left on the pavement after tipping to be counted before payment.

(22) We think Joseph may have died in 1917.

However - back to the scullery; the copper was a large open copper vessel set into a brick structure which formed a fireplace. The copper was filled by hand from the cold water tap in the kitchen, after which the fire was lit underneath it. As our number increased, Friday night, which was always advertised as "Amami" night (Amami was a famous hair shampoo) was our ritual bath night.

The copper was filled, the fire lit, the galvanised hip bath filled from the copper and then in ascending order of age, Dad would very vigorously scrub every single inch of each of us with a loofah and Sunlight soap after which we were wrapped in towels and sat as near as it was possible to get, given the numbers, to the fire in the living room. Sorry, I digress again. Back to the kitchen from which ascended an enclosed staircase which gave on to a bedroom. This bedroom doubled as a corridor, giving access to a rear bedroom and the front room, which ran the full width of the house and looked out on to Greengate and had a fireplace. This room was used as a sitting room or as the vernacular of the times would have it,

the parlour. The middle bedroom or landing also gave access to the staircase up to the third floor where the layout was the same as the first floor, but all three rooms were used as bedrooms.

The scullery and the two bedrooms above it were contained in a wing on the back of the main building thus forming an L-shape to the plan. In the corner of the L was a window which admitted light to the living room and the bedrooms above the living room. The scullery gave on to the back yard which contained a WC and the back door gave on to the large enclosed yard previously mentioned. We return to the living room which was the hub of the house. For some reason, I am totally unable to visualise any of the furniture. The window in the corner admitted very little light and I imagine it was mostly in shadow, so I recall it as a somewhat dark room. The fireplace, as was the practice at the time, was a black iron cooking range with a hob and kettle which was 'on the boil' the whole of the day and was the only source of hot water in the house apart from the infamous copper. The parlour was only used on Sundays and Christmas so virtually the whole of the family's living was done in the living room behind the shop. By 1930, when we left for Moor Lane⁽²³⁾, our numbers were such that this amounted to quite a lot of living! As a matter perhaps of interest, it was to be the mid-fifties before I had that Luxury Of Luxuries, an inside toilet! Finally, while still in the estate agent mode, the whole house was lit by town gas. Only those who have known the vagaries of dealing with matches and tapers and gas mantles will appreciate the joy of simply throwing a switch for illumination.

So much then for 189. Next door at 191 were the Coppings. Mr Copping was a cockney and went out to work at I know not what. Annie Copping ran the shop which I can only describe as a rather low grade delicatessen, boiled ham and all that. Their premises were of course a duplicate of 189. Their menage consisted of Mr and Mrs C, Gwen and Gladys who were, I think, sisters of Mrs C, and a boy, Tom, of the same age as myself. There was also Mrs Jones who was the Mother of Mrs C. Over the course of the years, 191 became a second home to me. I was from the earliest years an avid reader. I remember that their fireplace fender had two steel stools with patchworked leather cushions and I would sit there by their fireplace for hours reading whatever might be available. I suppose that I was escaping the numbers of 189. I was never particularly friendly with Tom despite our being contemporary. Gwen was, for some reason, very fond of me. Gladys was a secretary in town, dressed smartly and rumour had it that she was 'fast'. Grannie Jones, I have very clear memories of. She was a big woman who wore her black hair pulled severely back from her forehead and tied into a bun at the back. She always wore an ankle length dress of a black bombazine type of material over which she wore a voluminous white ankle length apron. She was a somewhat taciturn woman and spent much time in the kitchen at the back, and must have been addicted to cucumber, the smell of which seemed always to pervade the house and which I have always heartily disliked. As a footnote to the Coppings and a jump forward in time, I was recalled from embarkation leave during the war and went on the bus to Urmston to make my unexpected farewells of Olive, Richard's wife. Whilst on the deck of the bus, waiting to get off, I was recognised by Mrs. Copping whom I had not seen for some years.

(23) If the original No. 203 Moor Lane is not still standing, then some of its immediate neighbours surely are. It is difficult to be sure which house is which because they seem to have been renumbered and some (but not all) rebuilt. The location however is absolutely clear from the description in Chapter 2. Check out Google Earth Streetview at reference 53°30'49.04" N 2°16'44.24" W. It was less than 3 miles from Greengate, but a world apart being almost semi-rural. To get there you'd need to cross the river into Manchester and continue until you reached Great Ducie St, then turn left. This became Bury New Road which intersected with Moor Lane at Kersal Bar. Turn left along Moor Lane and continue nearly all the way until meets Littleton Road coming up from Pendleton.

When she learned that I was going overseas, she clasped me tearfully to her rather ample bosom and delayed the bus for several minutes much to my embarrassment. I never saw her again, RIP.

Next to the Coppings, was the entry through to the large enclosed yard and beyond the entry, Mays the pawnbrokers had the next two shops. In the winter, their windows were always very brightly lit and it was fascinating to look behind their barred windows at the fabulously 'expensive' pledges for sale. In fact, Mays and our shop became part of the Greengate eco-system. People would come into our shop on Monday morning and buy something on the 'slate' and immediately go and 'pop' it in Mays. This literally was their lifeline for food etc for the coming week. This patronising of the pawnbroker was viewed an ordinary way of life and incurred no obloquy or shame. As a footnote to this pre-war system of roll-over credit - even at the outbreak of war ten years after we left Greengate, I used to cycle some twenty to thirty miles each Friday and Saturday collecting threepences and sixpences from 'slate' customers who had been moved out in the slum clearances of the early and mid-Thirties.

Beyond Mays was a cook shop whose window at lunch time would be filled with great bowls of steaming hot pot, steak puddings etc and which was patronised by the local mill and shop workers. Then there was the greengrocer, the library and the butcher, baker and provisions with a pub next and beyond that St Peter's Roman Catholic church. Then across Gravel Lane, there were the Dwellings and believe it or not, the Greengate Hospital and Open Air School⁽²⁴⁾. The Greengate and Ordsall Lane areas of Salford were considered as amongst the worst and most unhealthy slums in Europe, the death rate and infant mortality rate being amongst the highest. Greengate must therefore surely have qualified as the worst possible site for an Open Air School!

(24) I'm not entirely sure Dad gets the geographical order perfect here.

I have endeavoured to convey a sense of the appearance of the area but whilst the sense of grime cannot be over-exaggerated, it would be quite wrong to apply a similar description to the atmosphere or feel of the place. From the time of the rat-a-tat-tat of the 'knocker up' and throughout the day and evening until the rapping of the policeman's nightstick on the pavements on his night rounds, Greengate would be pulsating with activity. From six in the morning onwards, the early morning pavements would be thronged with people going to work, many of them women and girls. Clogs and shawls were still quite common and the noise of clogs in numbers has to be heard to be believed. A little later, the streets would be full of children going to school. There were no school meals, so most carried a little parcel of bread and jam or whatever. The boys would usually be dressed in woollen jerseys with a collar which buttoned at the throat and some wore a knitted woollen tie, and short trousers were worn which came to just above the knee, stockings which almost met the trousers and then boots or, amongst the poorer ones, clogs. Almost all boys wore either boots or clogs, 'low quarters' were worn only by the more affluent and probably only for best. For the life of me, I am unable to remember what the girls wore, I suppose frocks, cardigans and skirts etc. Unlike Mr Wilson, our late prime Minister, I never ever saw any child barefoot, nor, I suspect, did he.

After the children had arrived at school, the streets would become busy with traffic though of a very different order from that of today. There was still a great deal of horse drawn traffic and cars and lorries did not yet predominate. Milkmen delivered milk from a low wheeled trap which carried several churns and milk was ladled out from gill or pint measures into the customers' own containers. Refuse collection was by drays with enormous wooden iron bound wheels and drawn by huge shire horses. Two men would heave the bins above shoulder height into the carts. Their

trousers were always tied with string below the knee. This was to prevent rats running up their legs and reaching the parts some lagers cannot reach. Then there were the brewers' deliveries, their carts were usually drawn by two horses. The draymen, as they were called, would throw down sawdust-filled sacks on to the pavement then tip the barrels on to them before rolling them down controlling ropes into the cellar. Gerald Manley Hopkins, in his poem about Felix Randal, the farrier, referred to the fetlocks of these great shire horses as their 'bright and battering sandals'.

These were of course the days of 'King Cotton' and there would be a constant flow of lorries laden high with bales of cotton en route from Manchester Docks for the mills. Also, there was a good deal of wheeled traffic which was hand, or should it be foot, propelled. Lots of stuff was carried by hand cart, lots of rag and bone men plied their trade by handcart - even ice-cream was sold from a cart with a red barrel of ice with containers of the ice-cream floating in the ice. I remember when Richard first started work in the early Thirties, he was placed with an electrical contractor and he spent his first six months pushing a handcart all round Manchester delivering from their stores to their various work sites. No light work for a boy of fourteen.

This then is a small sample of the bustle and stir of the streets. As young as I was, I have quite clear recollections of the excitement of all this multifarious activity. Perhaps I was too young to sense the underlying sense of foreboding which resulted in the General Strike, the Jarrow marches and the great Depression. But there were great occasions - Hospital Saturday Pageant, when all the lorries and horses and carts were dressed and decorated and paraded. The brewers' drays and horses used to be a very special sight, the drays highly decorated and the horses with brasses gleaming and plumed and beribboned. There would be May Day processions and the Church's Whit walks. And on royal or state occasions, there would be street parties when street would vie with street in the splendour of their party. So all was not doom and gloom, well, not all the time anyway.

We should now go from the general to the particular and take stock of the Noonans' fortunes. In August 1922, when I was born, Richard would have been five and about to start school. Joe would have been three and would start school around the time John was born in 1924. I, in turn, started school around the time when Cath, the first girl after four boys in a row, was born. Rightly or wrongly, I always felt that Cath had a special place in Dad's affections. I recall seeing him weep only twice, one of these times being at Littleton Road when Cath had diphtheria and he carried her weeping down the stairs to the waiting ambulance. Diphtheria was then a very grave and distressing illness now thankfully eradicated. The other time was when he embraced me at Padgate when I returned home from India after the end of the Second World War. Richard had returned from North Africa and Europe, Joe had returned from Greece and Italy and, finally, I was safely home. Phil, the second daughter, was to be the last of the family born at Greengate.

It is perhaps worth recalling that all of these were home confinements and perhaps with the exception of Phil took place in a house with only a cold water tap. The shop, of course, was always kept open. I think I am right in saying that Teresa and Agnes McGuinness, nieces of Aunty Teresa now make their clan's entry into the story in the role of shop assistants⁽²⁵⁾. And now we must also bring Grannie Rose Anne Burgin

(25) Teresa (b.1909) and Agnes (b.1912) were the first two children of Theresa Malone's immediate elder sister, also called Agnes. Agnes senior had married Henry McGuinness in 1907.

back into our story. During these times, she would be chief cook and bottle washer, nurse maid et al. Perhaps a few words about her would not be inappropriate at this stage.

We do not know where or when she was born. Harry and Phil have a burial certificate which states that she was buried on 22nd December 1936 and was aged 76 so she born in 1860. Where, we do not know. She was unable to read or write, so presumably had never been to school⁽²⁶⁾. She wore her silver hair pulled tightly back from her forehead into a bun as did Mrs Jones next door. Like her, she also wore black ankle length dresses over which she always wore an apron. For everyday commerce with the rest of the world she would throw a blue woollen fringed shawl over her head and pin it under the chin. I don't know why it should be, but it always fell to me to escort her to the Post Office to make her X mark for her pension. Later in life, I would also be her escort for other purposes. It came to pass that with our new upward mobility, on Sundays and Holy Days so to speak, she was strictly forbidden shawls etc., and would, under protest, have to wear proper shoes, a black hat with an upturned rim and decorated with a band of black fur and silk together with a full length black coat with a fur trimmed collar. One of her major and continuing duties was to baby sit on Wednesday afternoons. This was half closing day when Mother and Father would go in to town to visit the warehouses to do the buying for the shop. They would also take in a matinee at the Palace or Opera House or a Tea Dance at the Midland or The Grand. Haven't we come a long way from our humble beginnings.

(26) There is almost conclusive evidence that Rose Ann was born in Salford in 1859 or 1860, to John and Mary Dolan (nee Connelly), both born in Ireland. In the 1871 census, she was recorded as a "scholar", but it seems any schooling was insufficient and/or ineffective. Her parents were described in 1871 as a factory operative and a cap maker.

There were also major improvements on the domestic front. Probably around 1927, we had a bathroom installed in the rear bedroom on the first floor. This would have also entailed installing a new fireplace and back boiler for hot water. This was a great boon. Even now I well remember bow cruelly I suffered with chapped hand and knees. I still recall the foul smelling Melrose and how sometimes the hands would bleed. Alack a day and woe. I always put this suffering down to cold water and damp cold towels. About this time too, electricity was installed in the house. I suppose that electricity is now so commonplace to us that it requires a great effort of the imagination to realise what a great advance this was for us. At that time the Lamplighter with his long stick was still patrolling the streets switching the lamps on and off.

At this time too, wireless was coming on to the scene. Following the 'cats whiskers' and crystal sets, battery powered sets were marketed. The batteries were 'wet' and about four inch square and about eight inch high containers with a couple of red stoppers, two screw terminals and a carrying handle. Woe betide you if the battery was run down at the time you wanted to listen in, for they had to be carried to the wireless shop to be charged. Technical advances were very rapid and it was not very long before mains powered sets were invented. The wireless, as I still prefer to call it, swept the country and it is impossible to exaggerate its hold on the public through the twenties, thirties, the war years and so on until the arrival of television early in the 1950s. The wireless still is a great mystery to me.

We had also a wind up gramophone. This was a beautiful piece of furniture, a cabinet of highly polished rosewood with a lid which lifted to reveal the magic of the arm which folded over to carry the needle to the record and doors which opened to let out the sound. The needles were carried in

a little metal box inset into the deck. The lid of the box carried the famous picture of the gramophone and the 'His Master's Voice' dog. The box carried fifty needles and each needle required replacing after playing one record. Having a little concert at home was quite a busy time! Dad's favourites were The Slaves' Chorus backed by the Anvil Chorus and being a military bandsman, Colonel Bogey. Other great favourites were Caruso, Peter Dawson, songs from the shows and so on.

The other, and probably the major acquisition of the decade which marked us as twentieth-century people was the purchase of a motor car. This must truly have been epoch-making in that time and at that place. Cars were very few and far between. This our first car was a twelve horse-power Singer open tourer. This meant it had a canvas top which folded back. It had very high running boards with which to mount and grasp the brass handles of the half doors. The gear change was a gate change with a large lever with a big round knob at the top and on the right hand of the driver. The steering wheel had two brass levers mounted on it. One advanced and retarded the magneto and the other was choke cum throttle. The hand brake was a large lever with a brass ratchet release and was mounted outside the car behind the spare wheel which mounted into a well in the offside front wing. The whole was fronted by large brass headlamps below which was the starting handle. All that was needed to complete the Bonnie and Clyde set up was a couple of Thompson sub machine guns. We had now 'arrived'.

Meanwhile, life was proceeding for us children. I started school at St Peter's⁽²⁶⁾ in 1927, joining Richard and Joe who were already there. John would start in 1929 and Richard would leave in 1930 to start work. For some reason, I have only vague and disjointed memories of going to school and being at school and almost no memories of St Peter's Church. I recall the school itself as being a dark dingy place opposite to the mean Dwellings. These were what now would be called 'deck-access' homes and the Lord only knows why we have repeated such buildings in modern times. I seem to remember going up an outside staircase into the school. At the head of the staircase was the Headmaster a Mr McCarty, a man who seemed always to be in a state of restrained apoplexy. It was his policy never to ask any questions of latecomers, no excuse was tendered or expected, simply hold out your hand, receive two strokes of the strap which was always conveniently to hand. Another incident I remember here is with a Mr Flynn, a dapper little man, with sleeked down black hair and a small moustache to go with it, he was also the possessor of a somewhat irascible temperament. One day he hurled the wooden blackboard at an inattentive boy who promptly caught it and hurled it back at with rather more accuracy. A great chase around the classroom ensued, ending only when Mr Flynn became tangled with the blackboard and easel and had to be escorted from the classroom to have his bleeding head stitched. The recalcitrant had meanwhile fled the school. I never learnt what dire penalties were inflicted upon him.

However such failures of discipline were rare. If one complained at home after receiving punishment, it was quite possible that additional punishment would be added, on the simple principle that the original imposition must have been deserved. Dad was a fairly strict disciplinarian



(26) Attached to the church just a few minutes walk to the east along Greengate.

and expected not to have tell any one of us twice. A clip around the ear and bed without supper were not uncommon, I remember one major incident which had quite dire consequences. The outside yard at the back of the house was bounded by a very high wall, probably some thirty or forty feet high and capped with coping stones. It was possible to get up on the top of this wall via Pickering's flat roof and the roofs of a series of outbuildings and Richard and Joe dared to do this. Tom Copping told his father and of course, he told Dad. Dad and Mr Copping were scared to go up on to this very high wall and Richard and Joe were scared to come down to the retribution which they knew must await them. How they were eventually got down I do not know, but the upshot was this. One of the perks of our affluence at that time was that the annual August school holiday was spent on a farm at Whitegate⁽²⁷⁾ for the whole month. This offence occurred just before the holiday and their punishment was a good hiding and to be confined to their bedroom for the whole month and to forfeit the holiday. It took a very great deal of persuasion to get dad to relent in the third week of the holiday.

(27) Whitegate seems to have been just outside Burnley maybe 20 miles north. In 2018, Catherine Noonan the Carmelite gave us a photo of herself, then age 3, feeding the chickens there in 1930.



bets from the local punters. Again, coins of the realm were available for dogging out. Incidentally, in order that the Police might give the appearance of enforcing the rule of law, it was occasionally arranged that a runner be put up for arrest and appearance before the Magistrates. The runner was of course paid a fee and his fines and expenses were paid by the bookies.

Another acquisition which I have forgotten to mention was a piano. Richard was the unfortunate who was to learn to play. In the macho slum world of Greengate, piano playing was not a leading attribute of schoolboy masculinity. He had a set period of practice each day before being allowed out to play and many were the stratagems practised and excuses invoked to escape this chore without Dad knowing. There was a number of other activities which carried parental interdict. At that time, all gambling was illegal except 'on course' betting. In all working class areas, games of Pitch and Toss abounded and one could earn pennies for 'dogging out' for the police who were strongly against it, as it occasioned many arguments and fights. It was also the practice of local bookies to put a runner into the entries off Greengate to receive

I would imagine that the policing of those days would be of interest to the present day reader. The first and most obvious difference was that the police were on foot except that Inspectors and above might have bicycles. Each policeman had a beat which he patrolled on foot. He was known to the people on his beat and was expected to know them. Were any of us in trouble with a policeman, and it did happen, perhaps fighting or some such thing, he would escort you home to Father whom he knew, knowing that you would receive condign punishment, not least because of the shame you brought on the family. It used then to be a matter of shame to be brought before the courts and to have a police record, something which does not seem to apply today. At night the beat policeman would check every front door to ensure it was secure and occasionally, one would hear the sound of the sergeant's nightstick rapping on the pavement as he rendezvoused with the beat policeman.

Friday and Saturday nights were sometimes quite exciting for us children. Opposite to 189 was a pub called the Clarence, a Walker And Humphrey's (sometimes transmuted to 'Water for Horses') House. Most pubs at that time had a Vault, the sawdust and spittoon department where the beer was cheaper. There was also a Smoke Room or Saloon where there would be upholstered seats and benches and possibly waiters. Finally, there would be a Jug and Bottle where outdoor sales were made. These were often resorted to by old biddies with their jugs who would also snatch the opportunity to imbibe with whatever company might be present.

Like Robbie Burn's Tam O'Shanter, on Friday and Saturday nights, the clientele of the Clarence sometimes got 'unco fou' and we children would gather at the front bedroom window after bedtime to watch the arrival of the Black Maria, alas no longer horse drawn, and the police herding all the drunk and disorderly into the van. There was one regular client, a Mary Ann Healey, who was held in terror by Tim Healey, her enormous Irish husband. She would need several struggling policemen to get her into the Black Maria, except when a blonde young policeman was on duty. For him, unhelmeted, she would go quietly.

We were able to see down the length of Heywood Street⁽²⁸⁾ opposite, which ran down the side of the Clarence. Sometimes, the housewives in the street would emerge from their front doors and fiercely dispute with each other shouting the length of the street, sometimes hurling pots and pans and even fighting. Invariably, police were quickly on the scene despite the lack of 999 calls, and the lapse into Dickensian times would pass for the time being.

(28) I think Dad is confused here. It must have been Broster St or Durham St.

Such then were our life and times in Greengate in the Twenties. Around 1930, the Singer Tourer was exchanged for an Austin Twelve Saloon, a big 'sit-up-and-beg' job which was the precursor of car body styles in the Thirties. Dad fitted a silver plated flower vase to the dashboard and with the aid of couple of lengths of white satin ribbons, used the vehicle as a wedding car. I might mention in passing that Dad used to join in with other local car owners in taking local children on an annual trip into the country around Knutsford in Cheshire. Many of them had never seen a tree or a field or farm animals. Again in passing, I might mention that until the purchase of the Singer, Dad had never driven in his life. He just got into the car and drove it, no driving school, no driving test. Wasn't life simple?

Looking back all these years later, I am surprised by some of the things which I remember and what I am unable to recall. I am chiefly surprised at the very small impression that St Peter's school and church made. We were after all, cradle Catholics, baptised and made our first confession and communions there. Richard used to serve on the altar and there are photographs extant, inappropriate for him, of Joe regaled in white satin cape and knee breeches, silk skull cap, silk white stockings and white silk shoes with buckles for one of the May processions, so we were very highly involved in both church and school. Perhaps I expect too much. After all, I was only about eight years of age when we moved to the much more salubrious Moor Lane at Kersal and which shall be the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter Two

Readers of Howard Spring's novels of Manchester in late Victorian and Edwardian times will be aware of the phenomenon of the successful mill owners and managers migrating to the suburbs of Whalley Range, Levenshulme and Stretford in the first instance and then being pushed out by later waves of population as more work and the introduction of public transport and the advent of the motor car made travel increasingly easy. Thus we have an element of what I call horizontal mobility as well as upward or vertical mobility. In the period of the late twenties and early thirties, the public authorities were, despite recessions and slumps, engaged in slum clearances and the building of council housing. Mother, not to be outdone by either the bosses or the proletariat, migrated vertically and horizontally to 203 Moor Lane, Upper Kersal.

This migration is literally in the vertical mode inasmuch as Upper Kersal as the name implies is situated on a hill which overlooks the valley of the River Irwell. From Neville Road, which parallels Moor Lane, it is possible to look from The Cliff across the golf course and the racecourse (it was not all 'dark, satanic') across the convoluted route of the Irwell and its valley towards Irlam o' th' Heights and The Crescent with the skyline of Manchester beyond. Moor Lane ran from Bury New Road down to the Irwell at Agecroft Bridge. Littleton Road started at Agecroft Bridge then after a loop of the river crossed it at Littleton Road Bridge and continued to Gerald Road. Sorry for the boring geography, but all this is the 'backdrop' to the next fifteen years or so.⁽²⁹⁾

Compared with Greengate, we were now the inhabitants of the Elysian Fields. The Moor itself was directly opposite the House and was, I suppose around three acres of sand and grass. One side of the Moor was open country through which flowed Blackie Brook which teemed with wildlife in the shape of water rats. The brook wound along between unequal banks and endless hours were spent in jumping the banks, damming the stream and hunting the rats. From the other side of the moor, a path led alongside a dye works into Prestwich, which, as well as shops, contained an Odeon cinema and also a lunatic asylum. To walk along the pavement and pass the gates of the asylum was for a small boy an act of supreme bravery.

(29) Just about every location near 203 that Dad refers to in the following paragraphs is identifiable on one or more historic maps. In many cases, there seems to be substantial physical evidence left on the ground.

The house itself was one of a terrace of about twelve houses. The terrace was of 'modern' construction and all had four bedrooms, three reception rooms and dining room, plus the usual offices. With our numbers then at six plus Grannie and Mam and Dad, the change must have been most remarkable after living in one room behind the shop at Greengate. Between our terrace of houses and Bury New Road was the ground of the Manchester Rugby Union Club and we boys waged a continual war of attrition with the local constable in our efforts to gain free admission to the

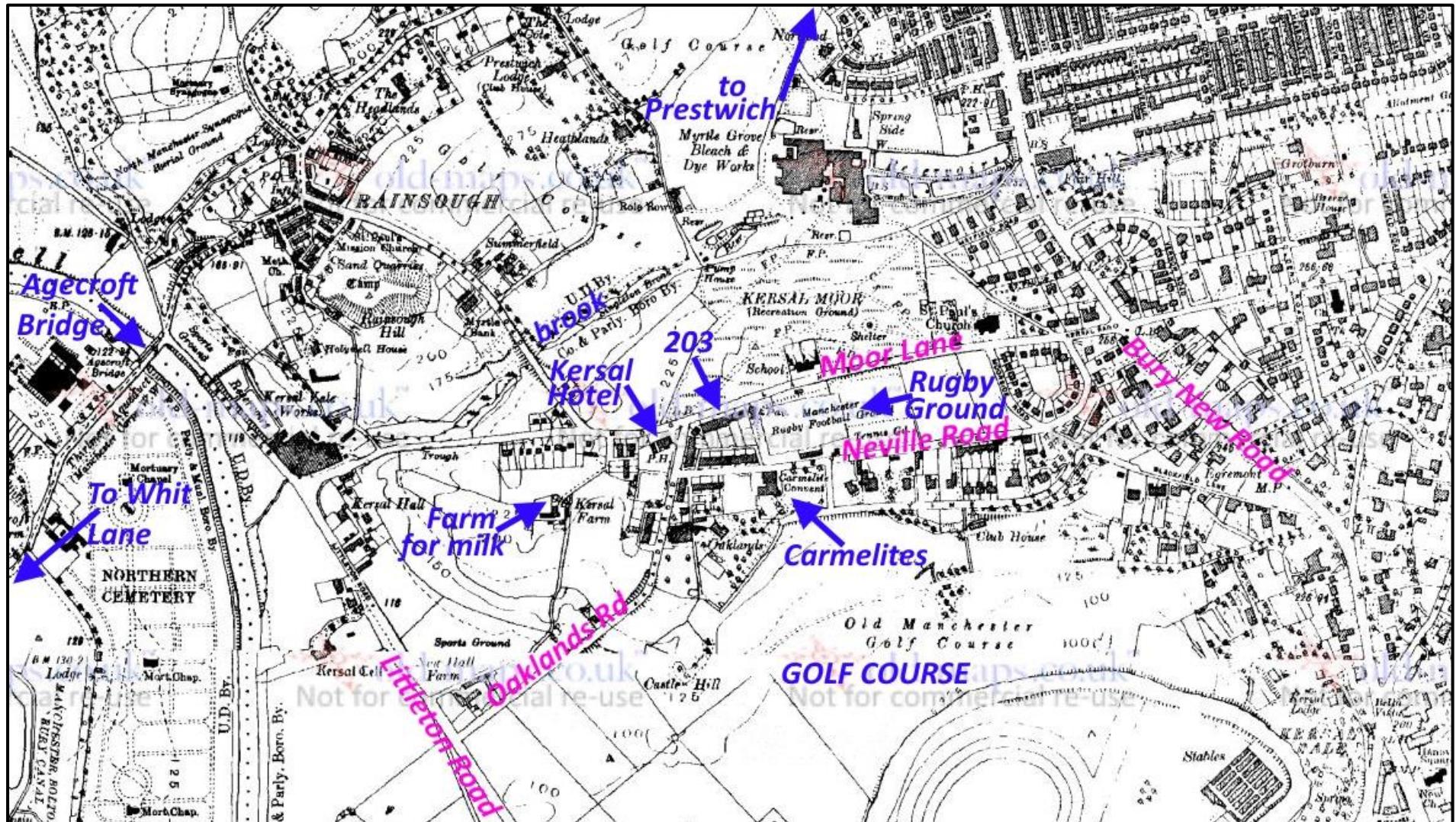
ground at the home matches. At the other end of the track, Oaklands Road went steeply down from Moor Lane to bisect Littleton Road. On the other corner of Oaklands Road stood, raised up from the road, the Kersal Hotel, our local hostelry. The cardinal sin, meriting complete and everlasting anathema whilst we were in Upper Kersal, was for Grannie Burgin to go to the 'outdoor department'. (Note: not the jug and bottle) in her shawl! Behind the hotel was a farm and it was my daily duty upon returning from school to take a quart milk can to this farm and buy milk. Many times this came directly into the can from the cow. So much for industrial Salford, and so much for pasteurization and all that.

The houses had small front gardens and very long back gardens, again a great difference from the pavement and yard of Greengate. These gardens backed on to the rear gardens of similar houses which fronted on to Neville Road and they were separated by an entry. Neville Road was the site of one of the establishments which was to exercise a pivotal influence on our lives over the next fifteen years and indeed up to the present day. Out of the entry at the rear and couple of hundred yards up Neville Road to the left was the Carmelite Convent. This was a mid-Victorian house of many gables and chimneys and outbuildings, old stables etc. Richard and Joe when they were free of depredating the countryside, were altar boys at the Sunday Mass in the Chapel which was open to the public at large on Sundays and Holydays. Thus began a connection with the Carmelites which has continued to this day in the person of Cath, now sister Catherine of Jesus at Wetherby in Yorkshire. More of this in the post-war chapters. I feel I cannot make this introduction to the Carmelites without relating this little anecdote. One of the extern sisters was Sister Mary. The duties of an extern were to answer the door and to conduct outside business and contacts with the public. Sister Mary was a downright Lancashire lass and was somewhat deaf. She had great difficulty in controlling her deaf aid which seemed always only capable of emitting the most horrendous whistles and shrieks to outer space. On these occasions, she would have recourse to a speaking horn. At the time in question, a family visit was going on and one of my young cousins was conducting a conversation with Sister Mary and upon being offered the speaking horn to reply and being a well-trained Catholic, promptly made a donation of one penny into the horn!

Whilst in the religious mode, it may be opportune to set the scene of the establishments which were to play a large part in all our lives in the years to the war and beyond. Firstly we were in the Parish of St Benedict's which was served by the Servants of Mary more commonly known the Servites. The Church being, amongst other things a believer in competition, had the Servites who propagate the Seven Dolours as against the Dominicans whose speciality was the fifteen Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary. St Benedict's⁽³⁰⁾ had a Chapel of Ease behind 309 Littleton Road. I might mention in passing that some twelve years later I conducted a desultory wartime correspondence from India with Father Howard of this parish. He said I should become a journalist - any endorsements?

(30) I cannot locate the St Benedict's where the family attended Sunday mass from 203 Moor Lane. There is a St Phillip's shown on the maps near 309 Littleton Rd, and this may have been the chapel of ease.

203 Moor Lane environs and features



Later, we were to join the competition down the road in the shape of the Dominican parish of St Sebastian's. Meanwhile, we attended church at St Benedict's⁽³⁰⁾ and school at St Sebastian's down in Pendleton. The school was a two storey begrimed mid-Victorian building and situated between two macadammed playgrounds, one for girls and one for boys and the whole contained within a boundary wall. A staircase, one for girls and one for boys ascended from each playground to the first storey where the main school was situated⁽³¹⁾. The ground floor housed the Infant and Junior Schools. The whole was known as an elementary school, and the infants were aged from five to seven, juniors from seven to nine. A scholarship examination was taken at eleven and pupils who failed, as did I, remained at the school until fourteen.

The difference between going to school as distinct from what happened there is worthy of comment as against present day practice. School hours were 9.00 until 12.00 midday and then 2.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. There were of course no school kitchens and so no dinners - everyone went home to lunch, sorry, dinner in Lancashire. There were no such things as school buses, so it was Shanks's pony each way twice a day. I would imagine that it would be at least a mile each way, which means of course, four miles daily⁽³²⁾. I am not sure if Richard ever attended St Seb's or whether he started work from Moor Lane. At any rate, Joe and I certainly did. Going to school was always a marathon run to avoid being late, the return journey at midday never any time for schoolboy games and in no time at all, it was running back again for the afternoon session. At 4.30 p.m. there was time for fighting, football etc on the way home. One of our favourite sections of the way home was halfway up the steep Oaklands Road, which had no houses on either side and we could indulge our favourite passion of snicking out street lights with our catapults. Who said vandalism was a modern day affliction? Whilst making historical comparisons, it is noteworthy that we made these trips unaccompanied summer and winter. Should it be raining, we were given a penny-halfpenny each way to go on the No 2 bus. This was always a great treat. The No 2 was a rattletrap of a single decker bus and did this route because in those days, a double decker bus could not climb the steep Moor Lane. The route was a cross country one starting at Kersal Bar, down Moor Lane and then left along Littleton Road then right up Cromwell Rd and Whit Lane, then along Broad Street and right into Cross Lane and past the cattle market and the docks to Ordsall Lane. We used to get off at Gerald Road for the school but if you did the full journey you had traversed the city from boundary to boundary and my more vigilant readers will have noted the old rural connections in the number of lanes you have travelled on.

Now, as to the school itself, it was a tall, disproportionately narrow rectangular building with two small wings at each end which contained separate staircases to the upper floor. The ground floor housed the infant and junior classrooms and the holy of holies, the headmaster's office. The classrooms were formed by tall wood and glass partitions which could be slid aside to the walls to form a hall. The upstairs arrangements were

(31) Possibly the author didn't know that his dad, Richard, and his uncle and aunt John and Mary had been born just around the corner from St Sebastian's Church & School, Charlestown, Pendleton between 1886 and 1892. He surely didn't know that equally close was the site where his great-grandad and mum had set up their first shop after immigrating from Ireland and getting married in St John's in 1851.

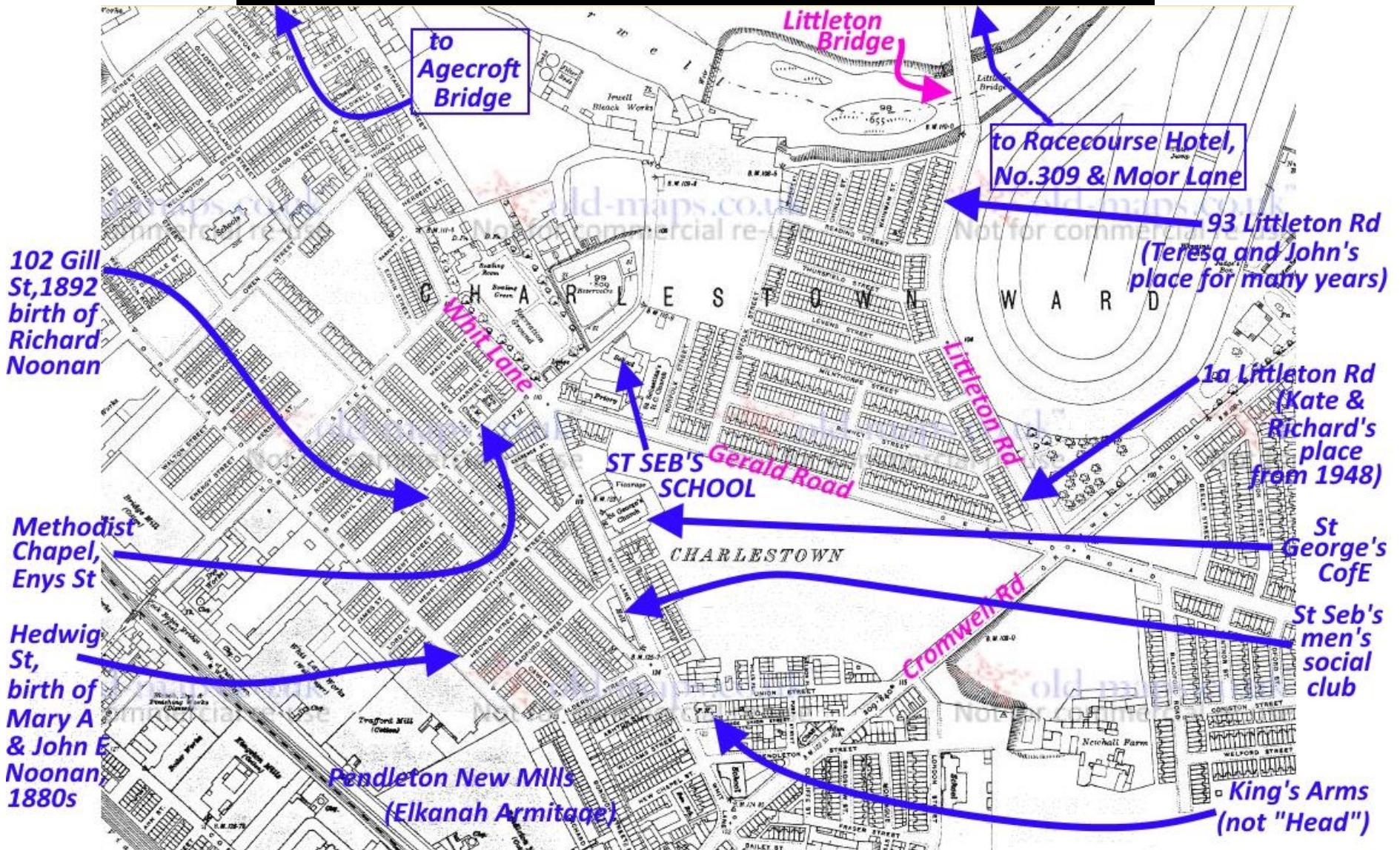
(32) I estimate that the walk was 1.5 miles each way, making a daily total of 6 not 4. Taking into account a round walk of 3 miles in one hour, there can have been hardly any time to eat any "dinner".

similar except that there was a stage and no headmaster's sanctum. The classrooms were furnished in a typical style, twin desks with hinged lids and inkwells and tip-up wooden seats. The desks were arranged in serried rows, side by side, and with a gangway up the middle to separate girls from boys. Let us not assume that the school was behind the times, the school made its genuflections to science by virtue of having a Lab bench complete with Bunsen burner rigged up at the rear of the stage, thus we had a science classroom. In all my years at the school, I cannot recall the Bunsen burner ever being lit.

St Seb's was very much a working class school in a very much working class catchment area. Across Whit Lane was an array of narrow streets of semi slum dwellings only slightly superior to Greengate. This area was distinguished by a great mill, Sir Elkanah Armitage's (a grand Lancashire name if you like), a coffin makers, a soap works, Enys Street Methodist Church, a Unitarian chapel (my mother always used to call them Urinitarians), a miscellany of corner shops, including a clog maker, Mr Critchlow's (still in business after the war). In the triangle formed by the school side of Whit Lane, Gerald Road and Cromwell Road was a council house estate together with the CofE Church, St George's, a large church with a tall spire. For some reason, I recall it as the most begrimed church I have ever seen. Next to it was a large unbegrimed pub in red brick and with handsome gables and chimneys, the King's Head, a watering place for my Dad in later years. In a further triangle bounded by Gerald Road, Littleton Road and the Irwell is another series of cobbled streets with the terraced houses abutting directly on to the pavement. These however are no slum houses. Doorsteps and pavements are 'brownstoned' and woe betide you if your step on to the pavement whilst it is still wet. In many instances, the brickwork up to upper storey level gleams brightly red as a result of many applications of Cardinal Red Polish. Finally, we cross over Littleton Road Bridge to a similar group of streets on our left. One of the row of shops immediately over the bridge used to buy the golf balls we found on the golf course (sometimes before they were lost). On the right over the bridge was a large pub, the Racecourse Hotel, which will figure further on in our story. Beyond the hotel in a large patch of waste ground stood the tiny St Aidan's church with its cracked bell which tolled interminably and dismally all Sunday mornings. Further on along the road was a large council house estate. Across Littleton Road were the playing fields extending to the banks of the Irwell and towards Agecroft Bridge. The area between Littleton Road Bridge and Agecroft Bridge lay within the parish of St Benedict's but within the catchment area of St Seb's school.

Back to school and about a quarter to nine, we find an almost Hogarthian scene of children beclogged and booted with long shorts and short shorts, stockings up to the knee and down to the ankle, boys in shirts, in pullovers with coats, without coats, some in braces, some in belts, with caps and without caps. All are intently and noisily engaged, some at football with a tennis ball, some playing 'Rallevo', some playing with marbles, the more fortunate having draw-string bags to contain their winnings. Into the pandemonium at five to nine, the duty playground master would emerge and blow his whistle. Instantly, magically all are transmuted into silent statues, not to be released back into the world until a second whistle - stand still there Noonan, stop talking over there, report to me when you get upstairs, Smith. Until all is silent and still and the second whistle permits everyone to line up with his arm on the shoulder of the next in line in class order. A third whistle is the signal to proceed into school in single file with a teacher on each landing to ensure that progress is rapid and non-violent.

St Seb's, Whit Lane, Charlestown & Pendleton



The same classroom and teacher was retained throughout the academic year, so one's progress, happiness or whatever, was totally dependent on the teacher, amiable and incompetent, strict and competent or any permutation of these qualities. The infant and junior school was staffed by nuns from Notre Dame(33) in Cheetham Hill. Their headmistress, who is the only one I remember, was a very patrician figure by the name of Sister Patricia if I may be permitted a little alliteration. I think I must have spent one year with her my class teacher when I joined the school, otherwise I would have no remembrance of her at all.

(33) Some years later around 1946, Dad's future bride attended Notre Dame briefly.

The whole school was under the Headship of Mr Craig, a man of somewhat sombre and forbidding presence. He would walk around the school, back severely straight, head set straight ahead and hands clasped behind his back. He observed the passing scene only by swivelling his eyes and had a dreaded habit of silently and menacingly turning his hand over ever so slowly and beckoning his petrified victim towards him. He also was so mean as to go about the school on rubber soles whereas any decent head would stick with honest and noisy leather. Each morning, the previous day's serious offenders would line up outside his office for him to perform his first and no doubt most enjoyable chore of the day which usually was four to six on each hand. The story is told of an unfortunate boy, a wee 'timorous cowering beastie' who was sent down to the head with a message; he joined the line outside the office and received six of the best before he could blurt out his message.

The teaching staff as I remember were not a particularly distinguished lot. There was Mr Plummer, a tough, compact man, strict but fair. He ran the school football team, his two basic dictums were 'draw your man and pass' and 'always pass to the space in front of your man'. Mr Venables take note. He did not object to being mobbed by a horde of youngsters when training for rugby league on 'Lickey Road Fields' (Lickey is the abbreviation of Littleton). He also apologised to me once when he unfairly caned me.

The other staff that I recall were the Misses McIntosh, Lawless, Clough, Roney, and a couple of men Wallwork and Buckley. All women teachers were known as Miss irrespective of their marital status. Mr Wallwork was a huge bulk of a man and lazy with it. His favourite ploy was to give the class a task then put his feet up on his desk and study form in the Sporting Chronicle. He would occasionally patrol the classroom and a heavy hand on the back of your head would be your first intimation of his presence. Mr Buckley was a slight man with very fair hair, a very high complexion and prominent cheekbones and staring eyes. He was very unpopular and his car, which he parked on ground behind the adjoining church, was frequently found with flat tyres! I was only in his class when my own class went to the swimming baths, an activity from which I was medically banned. He kept me behind after school on one occasion and started stroking my knee. I became alarmed, ran home and told my mother after which he disappeared forever from the school.

Of the women teachers, Miss Lawless was the least popular. She had a very acerbic disposition and enjoyed humiliating children in front of the class. I always felt sorry for those who had failed to attend Mass and Communion when register was called on Monday morning. Miss Roney was a tubby little woman with fair hair and somewhat fancied herself. She had a shine for Mr Plummer but he and Miss McIntosh eventually married.

Miss Clough was young, dark and handsome, and very modern. In a slum school, she undertook the Herculean tasks of getting us to learn Milton's Il Pensero and L'Allegro. I can still recite 'Come pensive nun, devout and pure' etc. The wearing of steel rimmed oval glasses gave Miss MacIntosh a gimlet-eyed appearance. She was a tall ginger haired woman and, like her husband to be, was strict and fair. She discovered that I was good at spelling and would send for me from a lower class to exhibit me to her class to demonstrate how easy spelling was. In a slum 'us and them' school, this sort of celebrity was devoutly not to be desired. Such then was our Alumni and this then is their product - despite or because of them.

To return to Moor Lane, I find it difficult to remember other children in the area. There obviously must have been others, for I recall numbers of us going on expeditions along the Irwell past Agecroft Power Station to the Thirteen Arches and to Rainscough Brow. Saturday morning matinees at the Odeon, Tom Mix on his white horse, Laurel and Hardy, pea shooters, spud guns, water pistols and a general pandemonium and mayhem prevailed. The cinema visit might be preceded by a 'sweetlifting' visit to the sweet shop if there were sufficient numbers. In the house also, we had much more room. We had a half-sized billiard table housed in the rear reception room, which had a French door set in a bay window to the garden. I remember the bay window particularly since I once climbed out on to it from the bedroom to recover something I had dropped and was unable to climb back. I was clad only in a shirt and suffered agonies of embarrassment in case I was seen whilst waiting for what seemed like hours for rescue. The billiard room also had a gas fire, luxury of luxuries, and I remember that Richard, probably as the result of a dare, set fire to Joe's hair. Joe wasn't burnt but he had to have all his hair cut off in order to match the burnt portion. A shaved head in a school environment implied a severe case of nits and the poor victim was an object of shame. These are some of the events I recall from our short time at Moor Lane.

To illustrate the difference between a child's eye view and an adult's view of what is important, one event which occasioned excitement, even alarm, was when mother left the week's takings from Greengate on a tram. After much telephoning and running up and down the tram route stopping and boarding trams, the bag was eventually recovered intact. I seem to recall the bag was recovered with its contents of eighty Pounds intact, a substantial sum for those days!. This was at a time when Mother was expecting Winnie who was born at Moor Lane in July 1931. I remember too that whilst at Moor Lane, we had a maid, Lydia. Such elevated circumstance however did not last long and Lydia departed under somewhat dubious circumstances, not entirely, I suspect, unconnected with Richard.

Our excursion into the Elysian fields was to be short lived. The hunger marches had continued, the depression deepened, a national Government had been formed and we must have been living against the trend. Probably the slum clearances in Greengate had led to a significant drop in trade and the upshot was that we were over-stretched and retrenchment was necessary. Thus it was that early in 1933 we moved from Moor Lane to 309, Littleton Rd⁽³⁴⁾.

309 was roughly in the middle of a block of terraced houses most of which were converted into shops. On our left was Thompson's the greengrocers followed by Chapman's, a grocers run by two maiden ladies, then Hewitt's a general hardware establishment, then a wallpaper shop and finally on the corner, the newsagent and tobacconist. Beyond the last of the shops

(34) 1932, surely. Once again, most of the geography in the next paragraphs is easily identifiable on maps, and some on the ground. 309 may still be standing in the form of a branch of "BetFred"!

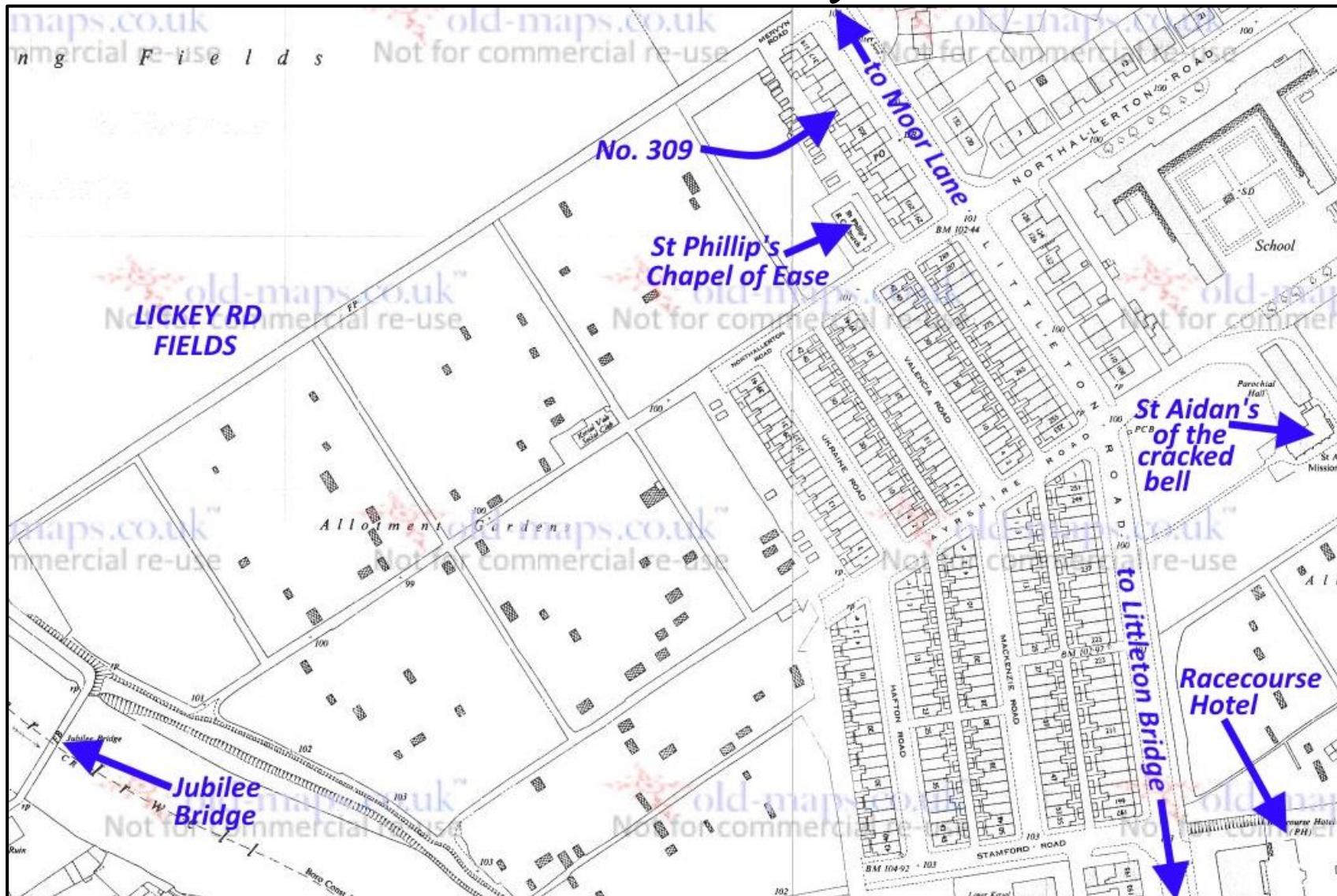
stretching almost to Agecroft Bridge were Littleton Road playing fields, hereinafter known as Lickey Road fields. The fields were bounded at the rear by the River Irwell and across the road at the front of the field was the Lickey Road council estate. On the right of 309 were a couple of unconverted houses with small walled gardens at the front, then O'Brien's the fishmonger's who also ran a wedding car service and for whom Sam Malone^(34A), a cousin, worked. Beyond were a further few unconverted houses with another grocers interspersed and at the end of the block was Longworth's, the local fish and chip shop. Behind the block at the chip shop end was St Philip Benizi, the Chapel of Ease from St Benedict's at Higher Kersal. This was a low asbestos clad building and next to it was a patch of waste ground, then about a half dozen lock-up garages (built on piles because of sloping ground and ideal for all sorts of nefarious gang activity). Behind all this were allotments which filled in as far as the river bank. In 1935, a lane was driven between the fields and allotments and a footbridge built across the river. The year will tell the historians amongst you that the bridge was named as Jubilee Bridge.

Whilst the move to 309 was a come down in social and economic terms it had a huge benefit as far as school was concerned. It cut the length of the walk to school by at least two thirds. The downside of the move was that we were back to a living room behind the shop. Next to the shop was a hall and staircase, the hall led to a small kitchen next to the living room. The kitchen was really only a corridor, one side of which housed a gas stove, a small table, a Belfast sink and a kitchenette. A Belfast sink for the uninitiated is a deep china clay glazed sink. The rear door of the kitchen led into a yard which housed a wash house and which had a 'copper' similar to that in Greengate. It was also equipped with a posser and a washing board which wasn't used for skiffle. These were soon superseded by what was probably the first washing machine in Salford. It was a round white machine standing on three legs. Hot water was bailed into it from the copper and then a reciprocating paddle did the rest. The machine was surmounted by an electrically operated mangle. Phil once got her hand in to the mangle which caused something of alarm and excursion. Believe it or not, the makers of the machine were Servis Ltd a manufacturer still making washing machines today. A novel and important use to which the machine was put on one occasion was when a barrel of beer, in stock for a party, proved to be flat. Having the miracle at Cana in mind, Mother had the beer tipped into the machine and a half hour's paddling put a very healthy top on it. Next to the wash house was the inevitable outside toilet. How the mighty are fallen, or at least seated. The back yard door gave on the rear entry and the lock up garages. Back into the house and the upstairs accommodation was two large and one single bedroom and a bathroom. At this time we were four boys, three girls, a Grannie and Mam and Dad. Neither Margaret, Winnie, Phil, Cath or myself can remember how we fitted as regards sleeping.

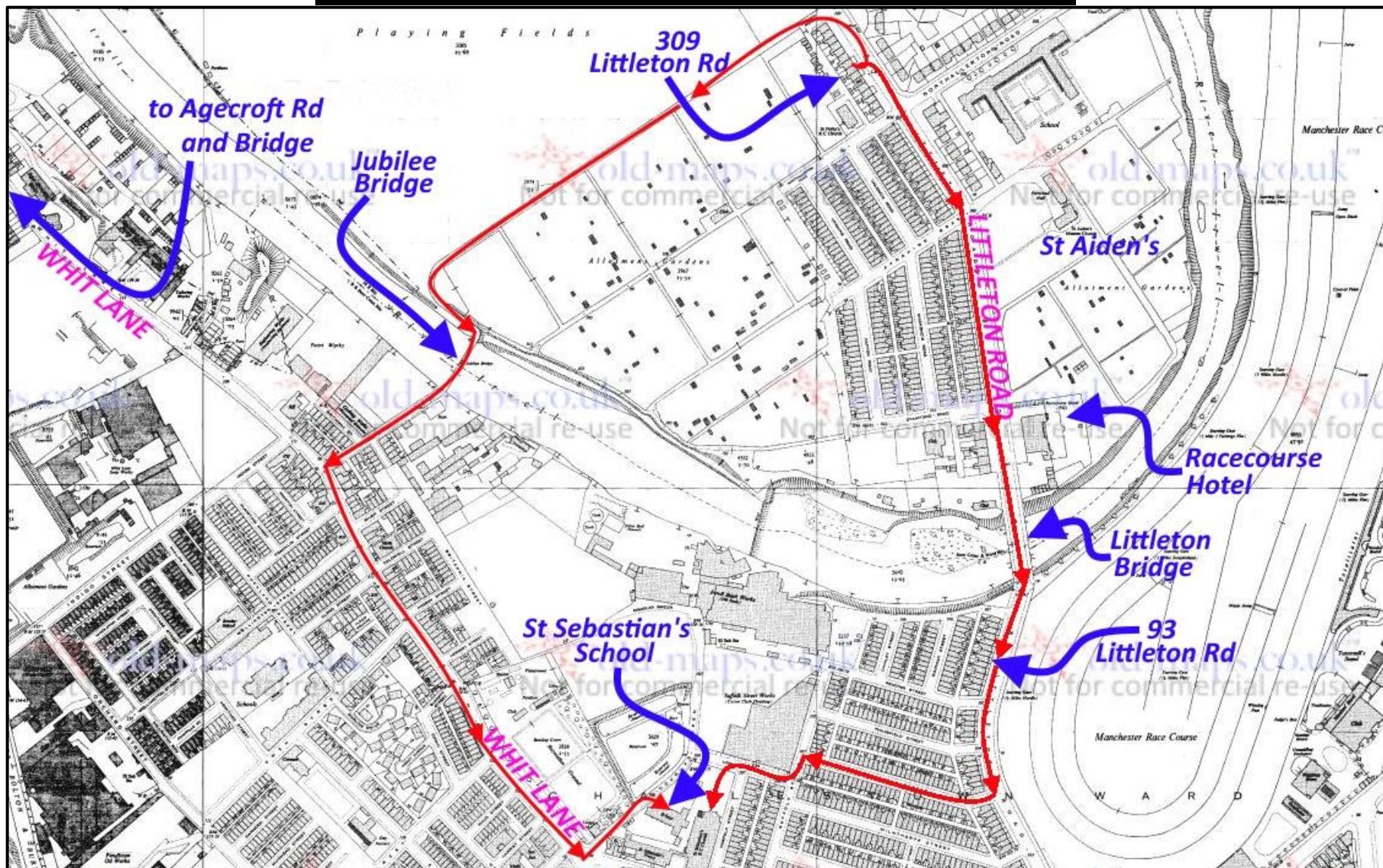
However, within three months of 1932 we were to lose one of our number. In March of that year whilst playing with a hoop at the front of the shop John ran out into the road and into the path of a car and was knocked down. The memory is still very vivid. Auntie Ada^(34A), an honorary aunt, was a tall gaunt woman who still dressed in long skirts and apron and drew her white hair back in a bun was at our house doing the weekly wash. She was a big strong woman and picked John up and carried him in her arms with me running alongside to Dr. Rosenthal's surgery in the next block of houses. It was of course to no avail. Back in the house I particularly remember Granny's terrible wailing and keening. I recall also the funeral cortege going to the cemetery via Greengate, where he had been born and started his schooldays RIP.

(34A) Teresa Malone's older brother was Samuel (b.1880). He married Ada (surely the "honorary Aunt"), and Sam jnr was born in 1907. In 1911 they had been living in Lwr Broughton. By 1939, Sam jnr was married & living on Winster Ave in the estate opposite 309.

309 Littleton Road & nearby surrounds



309 Littleton Road & wider surrounds



We have spent quite some time in setting the scene as far as St Seb's school and 309 Littleton Road are concerned. Perhaps we should pause in March 1932 and take stock as to where the various members of the family were at. The shop at 309 in general was run directly by Mother with the assistance from time to time of either Agnes or Teresa McGuinness who were considered cousins though actually they were nieces of Aunty Teresa. Agnes or Teresa looked after Greengate and the other relieved or assisted Mother as required. I remember at a later time that Teresa introduced her 'young man' to us in the living room behind the shop at 309⁽³⁵⁾. He was a barn door of a man, well over six foot tall and wide to match. We all collapsed into barely suppressed laughter when he was introduced as John Halfpenny. During this time, as far as I can recall, Dad was employed in generally running around between Greengate and Littleton Road, warehouses, debt collecting etc.

(35) It seems John Halfpenny in the event proved insufficient to requirements. Teresa eventually married an Archibald Johnston in 1939.

Richard by this time would have been fifteen and in the previous year would have started work with F W Furse and co., electrical contractors. He worked for the same company throughout his working life except of course for his war service in the Royal Engineers. His first wage went unopened to the Carmelites at Kersal, thus establishing a tradition which was followed by each of us when we started work after leaving school. Joe would follow Richard into the suffering proletariat later in 1933 when he was indentured to an Ardwick printing firm called Knowles. Like Richard, he would remain with the company through his working life apart from his war service with the Cameron Highlanders. In August of 1932, I would have been ten years of age, Cath about five, Phil around three, Winnie coming up to about two, and Margaret was set to arrive in December 1933. Grannie was in March of 1932 about seventy-two years of age.

I do not know if ten years of age is a peculiarly introverted time of life. All the above is a matter of record and I remember very little of it, whereas my own concerns and activities of that time are quite clear in my memory. I can describe the living room and its furnishings even now. The chimney breast was occupied by a black iron range, the edges of the oven doors were of highly polished steel and the black parts of the range had a high black polish as a result of years of black leading. At this time, it was one of my chores on a Sunday morning to clear the ashes, clean out the flues and thoroughly blacklead the range including the large cast iron kettle which was permanently on the boil. What price chimney sweeping? To the right of the fireplace was a built-in cupboard in which everyday pots, crockery and so on were kept. Below this a matching set of drawers and the whole was brush grained to simulate dark oak. In the space on top of the drawers and below the cupboard stood the beautiful rosewood gramophone, described in the previous chapter. Next to this was the cherished wireless (none of your radio in this tale). This was about twelve inches high and about eighteen inches long and was made of Bakelite in a pink marbled effect and ending in shiny black surround. I cannot now recall what the service was called at that time; I think possibly the Home Service and the Children's Hour with Larry the Lamb and Uncle Mac were extant with the Ovaltines on Radio Luxembourg in competition.

The corresponding space on the other side of the fireplace was occupied by a book/china cum desk with fold-down flap and drawers below. If I'm not mistaken, this now sits at the right hand of the fireplace in Phil and Harry's front room. It was not a great house for books and the space unoccupied by the best china contained a set of Butler's Lives of the Saints and a set of some sort of encyclopaedia. My own reading at this time

consisted of Monday - The Adventure; Tuesday - The Wizard; Wednesday - the Magnet; Thursday - The Rover; Friday - The Hotspur, and Saturday - the Skipper. I might say that these comics were obtained on an exchange basis. What it is to be ahead of one's time.

Around the space in front of the fire was ranged a three piece suite of two armchairs and a two seater settee. The suite was of brown cowhide with rolled arms and brass studs and velvet cushions. If one sat at the left of the fireplace, the piano was on the wall behind you, alas, now Richard was working, no longer in use. Perhaps things were too tight to afford lessons for anyone? Or again, perhaps no interest was exhibited? Behind the settee stood a table which seated eight. Perhaps it was well that it was not too often that we sat en famille. It will be obvious that there was not a great deal of space for circulating and indeed I wonder now how on earth we coped. None the less, I have memories of it being very cosy, particularly in the winter with everyone sitting round a blazing fire, or perhaps sitting at the table reading and inevitably listening to the wireless. I feel sorry for you people who have never thrilled to the delights and excitement of Dick Barton, Special Agent!

About this time, my own daily routine would be something like this. All the breakfast times in my life have been somewhat hazy and indeed not fit subjects for recollection. However, Granny would waken us all up, probably having called Richard at some unearthly hour to go on his contracting and sent Joe off on the way to start printing at 8 o'clock. She was the custodian of a large stainless steel alarm clock, the bell of which had a rating virtually off the decibel scale. Unfortunately, she did not know how to switch the bell off and so would wander round the darkened house trying to find some hapless individual to silence it. The upshot was that we all might just as well have been electrical contractors.

I had been by this time recruited as an Altar Boy at St Seb's so I had to be out of the house and into the sacristy in time to vest, to serve at the mass. I think that I should here establish my credentials as a fully paid up member of the Roman Church in that I served the 8.30 mass every morning including Saturdays and Sundays until I started work. Let me also add that being an altar boy meant attending on Tuesday night (Guild night). Thursday night was the Most Holy Rosary and Benediction. Sunday was 8.30 Mass, then 11 o'clock sung High Mass, Children's Benediction at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then finally sung Compline and Benediction at 6.30 p.m. I leave the reader to imagine a schoolboy's thoughts going off on a no doubt freezing, rainy morning to a cold and dimly lit church where perhaps half a dozen or so of the Faithful are gathered. It was recognised that some priests were slow and therefore I had standing permission to be late for school. Cath, Phil, Winnie and Margaret will perhaps recall Father Anselm Everest as the prototype of the Hare and Tortoise story.

Arriving at school, morning prayer preceded registration followed by RE every morning and this was always followed by arithmetic and then playtime. This allowed fifteen minutes to eat your 'snap' usually cold toast and if you were lucky some cake left over from the week-end. There was time also for a bit of football, marbles, ciggies etc. Ciggies were cigarette cards, which were to be found in every cigarette packet. Cards were of footballers, cricketers, soldiers, flags and whatever. Cards were propped up against the wall and the challenger would flirt a specified number of his own at them. If he failed to knock them down he forfeited his cards. A similar set of rules governed marbles or culls as they were known. All these games, whips and tops and so on, were seasonal. An inbuilt seasonal clock instructed every child which particular game was in season and when to change.

After play time, there would be an hour for reading writing, spelling, history or geography. Apart from handwork, which generally consisted of sticking coloured bits of sticky paper on to other pieces of paper, and PE, I think this totalled the complete curriculum. At midday, it was a quick run home to a cooked dinner - not lunch if you please. Lunch was something you ate at morning playtime.

School recommenced at 2.00 p.m and continued until 4.30 p.m. with a break of fifteen minutes for play at 3.00 p.m. The once a week PE usually took place in the period following afternoon play. If we were lucky, Mr Plummer marched us down to Lickey Road fields for football or rugby (league, of course - not union!). Have no illusions about the playing fields. Here were no smartly painted goalposts with nets and beautifully marked out pitches with warm dressing rooms and hot and cold showers. Lickey Road Fields was quite simply a flat green field with around a dozen or so football or rugby pitches each with a set of goalposts at each end and barely distinguishable white markings. One arrived stripped for play or changed at the touchline. As a matter of fact, we used to let our garage out a dressing room and I used to make a princely 'tanner' (sixpence to you) guarding the coats. In the case of the school PE there was no danger of changing into a strip. That was only for official fixtures. For practice, a coloured ribbon over the shoulder distinguished 'United' from 'City'.

At 4.30, it was time to run home from school and before one could go out to play, there were chores to be done. Firstly, I would pick up the already famous quart milk can. This I would take up the road to the co-op Dairy, where the auburn haired dairy maid as well serving quarts of milk, held the MC of St Seb's altar boys and his deadly rival Arthur the author of the Love on the Dole, respectively in thrall. What chance does a bus conductor cum MC have against a famous playwright – I ask you? After this, it was round to the bread shop which sold bread from Royles Bakery. "And mind they don't give you yesterday's. And make sure its a crusty one". Returning from this errand I might possibly have to go to the tripe shop. This I used to hate. It meant going all the way back over Lickey Road Bridge and the shop was a dismal place with all this (reputedly) white and black tripe lying soggily about. I might also have to go across the road to the Co-Op grocery. This entailed taking a 'check' book; no, I was no schoolboy upwardly mobile yuppie. The Co-Op gave a little slip of a cheque for the value of your purchases and this was stuck in your cheque book. Present day shop assistants would be amazed at the facility with which the counter assistants would then add up the columns of cheques in order to calculate your 'divi' and without the benefit of calculators. This errand completed, it would then be time to set the table for tea. Plates, cups and saucers, sugar and milk. In the summer sugar and milk would always be draped with a gauzy material with glass beads at the edge to keep flies at bay. Fly catchers were also always suspended from the ceiling. Horrible things they were. Back to the table, this being set, there would be bread to be cut and you will all be glad at this late stage to learn the secret of where I learnt my famous expertise in cutting bread; I just started at very early age. Tea was generally bread and butter and jam or some cold meat left overs together with any cake or scones left over from the weekends. Scones, coconut squares, jam turnovers and fruit cakes were generally baked on the Sunday. Very often the preparation of tea was an occasion of strife - "Mam, our Cath won't help me" or "Our Phil won't get the knives and forks" etc. Then finally the table was 'sided' after eating and there would be time to go out and play.

The area of play was usually around the entry at the back and under and around the garages and on the playing fields. The part of the fields with goal posts was forbidden and patrolled by a ranger or, as we called him, a Parkie. On the field we would place coats to simulate goalposts and if we were playing rugby, for a goal kick, the two tallest on our side would be selected and one would stand on the others shoulder to simulate a cross bar.

I cannot now recall all the boys I used to play with. There was Roy Thompson from the greengrocers next door and Ernie Hamer, our next door neighbour. He had spent many years on his back and in a wheel chair as a result of a spinal problem. He walked dragging his right arm and leg a bit and could not run very well, but he was immensely strong in the shoulders, no doubt as a result of his affliction. Two others were the brothers Dutton from across the road in the council estate. They did not really merit full membership of our coterie, but they must have been comparatively wealthy for they had real bats and wickets and a corkie (real cricket ball). They also had a real casie (football) and rugby ball. It was therefore necessary to suck up to them! There was also another lad from across the road whose name was Simpson and he had an affliction in that he constantly eructated. Inevitably he was known as Cracker Simpson! Our activities were multifarious, all the usual ciggies, cullies, whips and tops, bowling hoops if old bicycle wheels were available, footer and rugger, yoyos, at which I became very adept. Also we played our own version of Shinty. This required a six inch length of brush stale sharpened to a point at each end. A further fifteen inch length of the same stale was used to strike the end of the Piggy and when it rose into the air, the idea was to strike it again in the direction of the opponent's goal. Another favourite activity, especially when Jubilee Bridge was being built, was to take milk bottles down to the river, collect pebbles from the building sites, throw the bottles into the river and then see if we would break the bottles with stones from our catapults, before the current took them over the weir, You will see that between my sacred and profane activities I was a very busy Huckleberry Finn.

Thinking back from 1995, it seems, from my recollection at least, that after the move down to Littleton Road, we boys scarcely ever played together as a family, even allowing for the fact that Richard and Joe were near to working age. The girls were of course too young and anyway were they not girls? (No equal opportunities then). We seemed each to have our own coterie of friends and this would continue through to the war years.

Dad was a member of the Manchester Council 204 of the Knights of St Columba. The Knights had a junior section, the Squires, which we each joined as we reached the eligible age of thirteen, but even here, the same pattern in general obtained. The Knights was a mutual self-help and social association of Catholic men something akin to the Masons. The junior sections, the Squires, ranged from thirteen to twenty-one years of age. It was independent and self-supporting and self-financing. I found it far more educative than school. Monthly meetings were held under properly elected officers and business was conducted in a proper business manner to an agenda. Club premises were rented on a weekly basis. Dues were fixed and paid, fund-raising events, dances etc were organised. We had a hiking and a camping club with a bell tent and equipment and a site at Bollington in Cheshire. Proper accounts were kept and all transactions were audited. Every Sunday night a Social was held, admission sixpence. We had a state of the art Philips Gramophone and nominated people would go to town monthly to buy the latest records - Joe Loss, Harry Roy and the American big bands. We also had a debating group as well as a study group which studied Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno under the tutelage of a Catholic Social Guild Lecturer. I recall he wanted me to go for a scholarship to Ruskin College at Oxford. Through the years, I

held all the offices in the Squires and without doubt found it much more educative than school. All this at no cost to the public purse. I feel sure the provision of youth clubs by authorities is not the best way of occupying the leisure time and encouraging the development of our youth, though in this I may be failing to observe my self-imposed edict neither to moralise nor to preach, or to make invidious comparisons.

Reverting to my school life in 1933, I would have sat the scholarship for entry into a Grammar School in my case the De La Salle College in Weaste Lane. Since I had always been in the top three of my class, it was generally assumed that I would easily pass the Scholarship and everyone at home or school particularly Miss McIntosh were very surprised when I failed. Mr Craig's son went to De La Salle in the new term and it was never discovered whether he went as a fee paying pupil or not. There was, I think, some talk of sending me as a fee paying pupil but I think when uniform, kit etc together with fees were totted up, it proved too much. It is impossible to make any sort of judgment on what difference it might have made. I would imagine that there are very few ex-Grammar School boys who can recite "Come pensive Nun, devout and pure". If 1933 did not deal over kindly with us, at least it went out with a bang in that December 21 saw the birthday of Margaret, the youngest and last of our family.

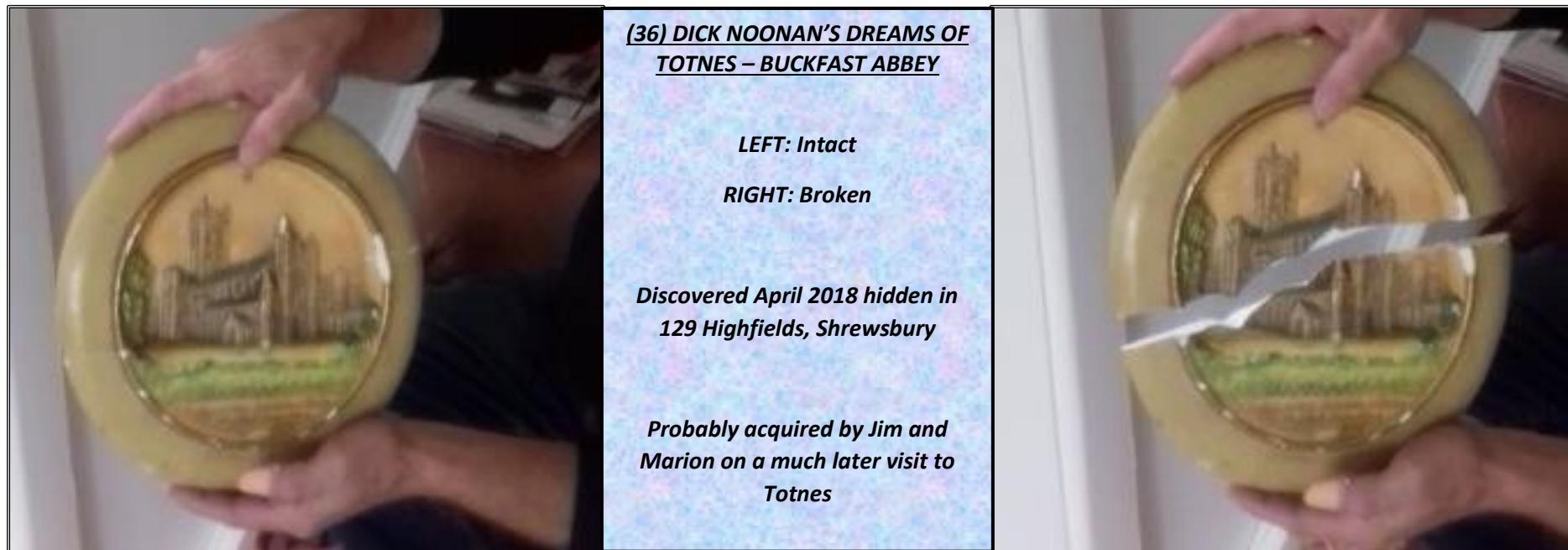
I was to spend a further three undistinguished years at St. Sebastian's before leaving school to start work. Trading must have started to improve in 1934 for we purchased a new Austin Ten. For people interested in such matters, Dad was able to go to Longbridge to collect the car and the cost of the car in 1934 was £125.00. I well remember Mam and Dad would select two of us to take on holiday leaving the rest behind in the charge of Grannie and Teresa or Agnes.

I remember two trips in particular. The first with Joe was to London and East Anglia in general and Walsingham in particular. The Tower of London and the Crown Jewels are a very clear memory as is the sight of a couple of soldiers in full marching order being drilled on the square. Dad remarked drily that they were on punishment. In my own service days it would be known as jankers. This I know from personal experience. We dined in what must have been a French restaurant. I recall Joe and I being full of suppressed laughter on seeing the waiters clad in ankle length aprons. The laughter became unsuppressed when a waiter arrived with this enormous silver tureen and with a very impressive gesture removed the dome to reveal a very minute serving of spuds which would not have been enough for either of us.

At Walsingham, we inadvertently went to the Anglican Shrine. Mother as always was very generous to such establishments and was far from pleased when she discovered that she had been supporting the 'enemy'. No phoney ecumenism in those days. Nothing would do but that but she find the local parish priest in order to be shrived. We stayed overnight in Fakenham in a very Pickwickian hotel, all corridors and corners and little unexpected stairs. Joe and I were permitted to go to the local cinema where The Invisible Man was showing, if that is not a contradiction in terms. We were of course completely terrified after seeing the film and most reluctant to negotiate all the dark passages and staircases to the bedroom in the hotel.

The other trip I recall was to Devon and returning through Wales. It was a great experience seeing the notorious Dartmoor Prison and to see squads of prisoners being marched about the roads under the escort of real warders with real rifles. We stayed in Totnes where Mam and Dad met some

KSC people and had a very good time. Dad fell in love with Totnes and used to say he would retire there but of course never did. We went to Buckfast Abbey whilst we were there⁽³⁶⁾. The Buckfast Abbey church was then still in process of building and I clearly recall the monks with their habits tied up, climbing ladders and working on the scaffolding, wooden in those days. It was on the return trip through Wales that we stopped in Tenby where we had a boat trip to Caldey Island, where earlier in the century, a community of Anglican monks had converted en masse to the Roman Church and become Cistercians. Dad and I were permitted to go round the monastery but not Mam. This would be construed gender discrimination these days. Whilst we were in Tenby, the aircraft carrier Furious anchored in Camarthen Bay on a courtesy visit. We were able to take a boat out and to go round the boat and below decks. You may imagine what a tremendous occasion this was to a schoolboy, the great guns, the aircraft, the engines, sailors in bell bottoms. You were supposed to spit and touch a sailor's collar for good luck (just a bit of esoteric information). I think the Furious was lost in action during the war. It was on this trip that whilst driving up the very steep hill into Fishguard, a bullnosed Morris in front of us missed his gears and started to roll back on us, great panic until the driver in front managed to bring his car to a stop. We had visions of calling the AA out (not Alcoholics Anonymous). In those days the scouts as they were called used to ride about on bicycles or motor bikes and sidecars and they were supposed to salute when they saw your badge (more esoterica). It was also where we made our first acquaintance with 'faggots', the chip shop types I mean, in Fishguard. When you consider that in the mid-thirties most school children had never seen the seaside, the trips were great adventures and obviously very educative.



Considering their backgrounds, Mam and Dad were very enterprising. At the time of the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin in the mid-thirties, together with the Doyles and Bradys, they took passage on the Mauritania for Dublin and the Congress. At that time the Mauritania held the Atlantic Blue Riband. Jack and Ginnie Doyle and the Bradys were great friends of Mam and Dad. Jack Doyle was a professional boxer and fought a final eliminator to meet Jackie Brown, the British Lightweight Champion. He was a 'cert' and a very big victory celebration had been arranged at the Midland Hotel, but Jack fell for a sucker punch and was KO'd. Having learnt at first hand the lessons of the sins of Pride and Presumption, he returned to the bosom of Holy Mother Church which he had left when he married Ginnie who was a non-Catholic. He attended Mass at St Boniface's for many years without going to Communion until his wife died and he ceased to 'live in sin'! Mr Brady was the biggest bookie in Salford and his wife was a big, noisy, jolly woman. She once, when they were on the sands at Blackpool together, set up in opposition to the Salvation Army who were busy saving souls. No doubt, to recover from her holy exertions, they would repair to the nearest hostelry for the appropriate number of G&Ts. Sometimes, there would be functions like a major dinner dance at the Midland or Grand Hotel and there would be a great huffing and puffing and toing and froing of preparation and finally Mam and Dad would appear, she resplendent in evening gown bejewelled and bedecked and powdered and perfumed, and Dad very smart in evening suit and dicky bow tie. Final instructions were left with Grannie, ie telephone number and what time we each were to go to bed, always a matter of dispute. Was it ever thus? As soon as they were gone Grannie was into a bit of light debauchery on her own account. The illegal shawl was donned and concealed beneath it was a jug. It was then my illicit duty to escort her down and across Littleton Road to the Racecourse Hotel where I would wait outside the outdoor department while she gossiped with like minded biddies, I, popping my head fearfully in the door from time to time to ask, "Will you be long, Gran? "How much longer?". Finally, having filled her jug with stout to carry back home, she would then fill an eggcup with stout for each of us. Disaster struck twice on two separate occasions. On the first occasion, Dad had pasted some heavily embossed Lincrusta paper on the ceiling. As the evening wore on, the Lincrusta slowly started to peel from the ceiling. It became necessary to phone for them and they had to endure the ignominy of having the chairman at the dinner announcing to all and sundry "Will Mr and Mrs Noonan kindly return home as the Lincrusta is coming off the ceiling". The other time was rather less comical. Grannie fell down the stairs and we were forbidden to tell Mam and Dad. It was some two or three weeks later that it was discovered that she had suffered a dislocated shoulder. She must have been very stoic.

About this time, Grannie's health began to deteriorate and Mother had recourse to the family for back up. The Wynne family enter the scene here. Mary Wynne was the step-sister of my mother⁽¹⁴⁾. Since the surname is different, Mary Wynne must be the daughter of a previous marriage of Grannie Burgin's, at least we assume this since we do not know the maiden name of Mary Wynne⁽¹⁴⁾. She married Herbert Wynne and they had four children, Annie, Herbert, Joe and Vincent in that order. They were a very different family in tone, style and general demeanour from ours. Uncle Herbert had been a Docker and of course had like all Dockers in the late twenties and early thirties endured periods of unemployment. Additionally, he had suffered a major accident which left him with a permanent spinal injury which doubtless accounted for his rabid unionism and socialism. Amongst my many and manifold duties, I would fairly regularly be sent to visit bearing gifts and discover Uncle Herbert's state of health. I used to dread these visits. Uncle Herbert, as he had every reason to be, was by nature not a cheerful man. He generally wore a 'union' shirt without

collar or tie. Like most Dockers he wore braces together with a broad leather belt with a big brass buckle to hold his trousers up. Aunty Mary was a small, thin woman and dressed in a somewhat old-fashioned style given her age. She had a rather sallow complexion and wore very thick lensed oval steel-rimmed spectacles and her hair was swept tightly back from her forehead into a bun at the back. They lived in a terraced two up and two down in a street off Lissadel Street in Pendleton and their front door gave immediately into their living room from the narrow pavement. The dominant feature of the front room was the mantel over the fireplace. This carried a big clock in black cast iron and two black cast iron horses reared up on hind legs on either side. These were accompanied by two matching horses in similar posture at either end of the mantel. On the wall opposite to the fireplace was a dark Victorian sideboard protected by an anti-macassar on which stood two vases containing coloured artificial grasses. A table covered with oil-cloth stood in the middle of the room and on the wall opposite to the front door was an Edwardian roll-head sofa and this was nearly always occupied by Uncle Herbert. They had certainly endured the full impact of the depression and unemployment and the awful burden of permanent ill health. I suppose I must have been embarrassed by the difference between their condition and our own. Whenever the children, none of whom were exactly contemporaneous with me, were present I always felt that I was somehow resented. At the time I did not understand it and I heartily disliked having to go there. Incidentally the 'Victoriana' from the mantel would bring a small fortune today.

To revert to the domestic scene at 309, I seem to remember that cousin Annie⁽³⁷⁾ was employed by Mother to help around the house and shop and sometimes to baby-sit and I think that situation carried on until the early years of the war. Teresa McGuinness married and moved to Liverpool in the late thirties and Agnes became a victim of rheumatic fever⁽³⁸⁾. The McGuinness home became one of my regular calls on my 'health visitors' round. A bit of fun, this though; Uncle Henry (everybody was an aunt or uncle) had been a conductor on the buses and he liked his ale and a bet. I hope this story does not calumniate him but he was supposed to have been invited to leave when the Corporation discovered that the bookies and landlords were receiving more fares than they were.

(37) We had thought that the cousin was Annie Corcoran, daughter of Theresa Malone's younger sister Winnie. She had married a Joe Corcoran in 1922 (note if Joe was related to James Noonan's wife Mary Corcoran, the link is lost in the mists of time back in Ireland). I have now been corrected – Winnie & Joe had no children. There happened to be another marriage of a Corcoran and a Malone around the same time in Warrington. By elimination, cousin Annie is most likely to be Mary Wynne's eldest child.

(38) The 1939 population register showed an "incapacitated" Agnes McGuinness living in Crosby with her sister and brother-in-law, Teresa and Archibald Johnston. So Kate had replaced two daughters of Teresa's older sister with one daughter of her younger sister. Uncle Henry was of course Agnes senior's husband.

So 1934 ran into 1935 and into 1936 and, in that year, I left school and on 23rd December of that year we buried Grannie Burgin who died aged 76, a good score for those times. She lived through the period which bridged the Industrial Revolution to modern times. She saw the aftermath of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, the Boer War, the First World War then the Suffragettes and women's emancipation, the Irish Settlement, the first ever Labour Government, the General Strike, the Wall Street Crash, the great Depression of the early Thirties, Ramsay McDonald's defection from Labour, the Jarrow marches. She saw the motor car, telephone, radio and electricity become commonplace. Looking back now over

the years, I have the feeling that all these great events did not affect her greatly, after all, she could not read or write and lived all her life within the purviews of Salford. Certainly, she always retained an integrity and simplicity, perhaps manifested chiefly in her attachment to her shawl. In those days, it was the practice for a deceased person to be 'laid out' at home so that neighbours and relatives could pay their respects. I recall mother asking me if I wanted to go in to see Grannie. I declined, preferring to remember her as I had known her, RIP.

Life of course had to go on and I had come to the watershed of leaving school and the big wide world of gainful employment. What use had the big wide world for a reciter of "Come pensive Nun, devout and pure"? How had my education served me? Might I be permitted from this vantage point in time a somewhat radical opinion on education. I am convinced that as far as Junior education goes, all else but the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic is just filling the hours of school opening. Virtually all other education takes place outside the school and after leaving. There my moment of sententiousness ends and we will treat of my initiation into the wage earning proletariat in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

By 1936, several factors were contributing to at least the beginnings of a gradual climb up from the depths of the depression. After the disasters of the Hoover years, Roosevelt's 'New Deal' in America was having some effect on international trade. Axis Powers were very active, Japan had left the League of Nations because of Manchuria, to be followed by Hitler's Germany when he repudiated the Versailles Treaty, in turn to be followed by Mussolini's Italy after the invasion of Abyssinia. The Spanish Civil War and Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland was the signal at home for a slow and belated start to re-armament on our part. 1935 had seen the Jubilee year of King George V. I remember standing for hours on Broad Street to see him and the Queen drive by to open the new East Lancs road. My reward for this involuntary act was a mug and those horrible little cakes and jellies which pass for food at school parties. In 1936, George V was to join Grannie (when all else seems lost, there is always the Great Leveller!). We then had the succession of Edward VIII and the crisis of his abdication for Baldwin and his National Government. Whilst all this may sound like a catalogue of horror, it all did give rise to an upturn in the economy and employment.

Of this upturn, I was destined to take my part and here my destiny became intertwined with that of one James Fitzsimmons⁽³⁹⁾. He was a member of the KSC and a friend of Dad's. He was to boot a Manchester Town Councillor, later to become an Alderman and later still, Lord Mayor. I do not in general agree with the denigration of all people in public life i.e. councillors, MPs etc. Nor do I now wish to denigrate Jim Fitz, but he was the archetype of the American Tammany Hall politician; meetings in smoke-filled rooms and so on, except as I remember, he didn't smoke. The upshot of this connection was that I was taken to Tom Garner's Limited in Knott Mill and was taken on ostensibly to learn the motor trade - whatever that may have meant.

Tom Garner Limited were distributors for Humber, Hillman, Sunbeam, Talbot, Commer and Karrier, marques which only the older amongst you will know of. They had showrooms in Peter Street and their workshops and stores were in Knott Hill where Deansgate left the Chester Road to descend into the hollow where their premises were either side of a rat infested canal. I was taken on as a stores boy to go into the workshops eventually. The stores was a double fronted building with two plate glass windows flanking double doors at the top of three steps. Behind the right hand window was the stores manager's Mr Appleton's office and behind this, the stores general office. The portly and pompous Mr Appleton and his bowler hat would arrive promptly at 9 o'clock each morning by which time I would have completed the first of my daily duties, namely the polishing to a brilliant high finish of the knobs and letter box of the doors and I would have been to the Peter Street showroom to collect the mail.

(39) James Edward Fitzsimons, born in Manchester in 1889 to William Fitzsimons and Ann Kelly. This looks like a long line of Mancunian saddlers, including Jim's grandad Edward, born 1827. The link to the motor industry is clear. Lord Mayor 1958-59.

The left hand window fronted the stores' counter and behind this the car parts were stored. The stores counter was manned by Ernie Skelly, who was the foreman and smoked Churchman's Aquifuge. Ernie always dashed about as if there were no tomorrow. He was assisted by Arthur Chadderton, a blond wavy haired fresh complexioned man in his mid-twenties who rather fancied himself. He wasn't my favourite, for having returned from an errand to Victoria station just in time for lunch, I would be sent by him all the way back down Deansgate to Godbehere and Scotts (yes, I've got it right!) just to buy a cream cake.

Below the offices and stores was a semi-basement where bigger items were stored and which was the goods inward and outward department and also served parts through a hatch at the rear to the workshops. This department was reigned over by Sam Hardcastle, a middle-aged and somewhat bellicose individual and I had the honour to be his assistant as well as general factotum to all the stores establishment. After returning from Peter Street with the post I would sweep the basement floor and assist with inward parcels. It would then be time to collect orders for cakes, sandwiches etc for the morning break. There were various shops and cafes around and sometimes I would have to go as far as Peter Street, where I had been already. Returning from this errand, it would then be time to brew up. This process would be repeated at lunch time. During the day, telephone orders would be received from all over the north, for parts to be sent by passenger train TBCF (to be called for). These I had to take to Victoria, London Road or Central Station as the case may be. Sometimes, the parcels would be quite heavy and bulky, sometimes wooden crates which I could scarcely lift to my shoulder. There were not many days when I did not go to Victoria Station at least twice. There were many other errands too for items wanted in the works or offices, so I came to know town and its environs very well indeed. Incidentally it is reputed to be exactly one mile from Knott Mill to the parcels office at Hunts Bank at Victoria Station⁽⁴⁰⁾. Incidentally also a trick question of the times 'where can you cross Deansgate without crossing over train lines?' the answer of course was 'at Knott Mill'.

(40) Hunts Bank and Victoria were in fact just across the river from the bottom end of Greengate. Where Greengate ran "under the arches", the railway line above spanned the Irwell to the north before terminating at Victoria.

Town was always busy and exciting to a fourteen year old boy only recently promoted to long trousers. You used to have to wait until you reached the magic age of fourteen before you graduated from short into long trousers. Knott Mill was close to Liverpool Street Goods Station. The railways still did most of their local deliveries by horse and cart and the area around the station was always a total confusion of horses and carts. The horses and carts taken in conjunction with the trams caused chaos to the motor traffic. There were other things of interest, too. At the junction of London road and Fairfield Street was a traffic policeman who ran his point duty as if on a military parade ground. Oh the public ignominy of his dressing down if you failed to obey him immediately and implicitly. I was also always fascinated by the man near Lewis's, who, having no legs at all, pushed himself about on his homemade trolley and sold matches. However, in the figurative sense, I wasn't going anywhere. In the literal sense, I estimate I walked anything between ten and fifteen miles a day. You already know that it is exactly one mile from Knott Mill to Hunt's Bank at the end of Deansgate where the Victoria parcels office was situated? (A bit of practical esoterica when you walk it). Sometimes I would go to Victoria Station four perhaps even five times in a day. My general duties of the day were to polish the brasses first thing in the morning, collect the day's post from Peter Street, generally sweep and clean up, serve parts at the hatch to the workshops, generally run errands and so forth and

finally to enter the post into the post book and take it to the Post Office. This involved perhaps making more than one journey with a postbag almost as big as oneself. Finally, when I developed bunions, I determined that I should give up the unequal struggle. For those of you who may be interested, I worked 8.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. each day and till 1 p.m. on Saturdays and for this received the princely sum of ten shillings.

We now resume the acquaintance of the ubiquitous Jim Fitz and through his good offices, I was put to work at George Wall and Co at Plymouth Grove in Longsight. Their business was in repairing and repainting smashed cars and commercials. This was from the frying pan into the fire with a vengeance. I was placed in the paint shop which meant I had acquired three times my previous clientele for brews and cakes and what have you. The taking and correct fulfilling of a miscellany of orders, plus giving correct change proves the quality or otherwise of elementary education, particularly in arithmetic. It may interest those of my readers who are too young to know or lack industrial experience, how a brew was made in those days. Firstly, a double half sheet of newspaper is laid flat on the table. In the middle of this is placed about five spoonfuls of sugar and then a spoonful of tea in the centre of this. Having done this, make a small well in the middle and into this, pour condensed milk to taste and then spoon the tea and sugar mixture over the condensed milk - rather like mixing cement - this will protect the milk and prevent it sticking to the paper, which you now fold over. The mixture is then decanted into a Brew can. This is a tapered enamelled tin container - usually blue - with a handle and a drinking cup which fits into the top of the can. Having poured boiling water on to the mixture, the can is then swung vigorously around to 'rnash' the tea. Dire is the fate of the boy who mismatches brew and can!

Motor car body construction was very much different then to what it is now. 'Monobloc' construction, where body and chassis were integral only began to be introduced about 1938 and it is the advance in pressing and welding techniques and the introduction of curved glass which has permitted modern car body shapes. Whereas now, damage is repaired by fitting a new panel, in 1936, damage would be beaten out, filled in with lead and painted over. The firm also did coach painting and both painting and spraying involved a great deal of rubbing down with wet and dry abrasive paper and copious amounts of water (more chapped hands).

In those days, it was the practice for commercial vehicles to be very ornately 'fine lined' and sign written. It was quite something to see a sign writer painting in complex patterns of lines and letters totally free hand. Perhaps the straightness of their lines was the reason why they were nearly always drunk. When the sign writing was completed, wet sheets would be hung around the vehicle and the floor flooded with water and only those people involved with the clear varnishing would be allowed within the sheeted area. My own duties, apart from the eternally monotonous 'flatting' and brewing up was the detested cleaning and painting of chassis. No high pressure steam or water jets here, just a simple wire brush and, in the words of the old song, 'he'd have to get under, get out and get under his little machine". You will appreciate that since much of the detritus of the roads was horse manure, chassis cleaning wasn't the most pleasant of experiences. Painting the chassis meant daubing the underside of the wings and all visible areas with glutinous chassis black with an encrusted small turks head brush. It may perhaps be imagined how much chassis black was shared between the chassis and a fourteen year old boy! It might also be noted that Geo Wall and co was not equipped with pithead baths or indeed any cleaning facilities at all. I cannot recall how long endured this before I summoned up the courage to insist that I resign the appointment.

Once more, Jim Fitz into the breech. It becomes necessary here to go a little more fully into his background. He was a shortish slightly stoutish man with a fleshy complexion. He usually dressed in a short black morning coat with black and grey striped trousers to match, the whole surmounted by a black homburg trilby with an upturned rim. He was always on his way to somewhere or someone and was always late. He owned a tyre business at the corner of Shudehill and Gt. Ancoats Street in the midst of Smithfield, a very busy site. About a mile and half out of town along Cheetham Hill was a block of stone faced buildings. These comprised firstly a small cinema, The Temple, then a pub, yes, you've guessed it, the Temple. Next to the pub, a house and where else would Jim Fitz live than a Temple! Next to the house stood a public garage, its stone frontage painted a beige sort of colour. The double doors of the garage were flanked by two petrol pumps on each side. The garage accommodated about sixteen cars and was equipped with a compressor and hydraulic ramp. There was a workbench at the back and a small office built upon stilts of three inch angle iron. The pumps, even then, were pieces of industrial archaeology. They had long arms, which swung out over the wide pavement and the nozzle hung down to deliver petrol to the cars which stood at the kerbside. The pumps were powered neither electrically or hydraulically, but 'handdraulically'. They were operated by a handle which reciprocated through an angle of about sixty degrees and drove a vertical toothed shaft up to a pre-determined stop. And, Hey Presto, x number of gallons were in the tank. And of all this industrial complex, young genius that I was, I was to be the great panjandrum.

And thus it was that it came about. Jim Fitz lived in the house with his wife, a self-effacing lady, and totally dominated by Jim and his two sons Gerald and John, each in their early twenties and each thoroughly self-centred and each employed in their father's business.⁽⁴¹⁾

There was also a daughter of school age but I am unable to recall her name. The Temple Garage had been moribund for some time and Jim Fitz resolved to lease and re-open it. To this end, he head-hunted Harry Jones from Tom Garner's. Harry would not agree to start at Temple unless he had assistance, which is where Jim Fitz had his brainwave and I came on the scene. I am not sure that I was the assistance which Harry Jones envisaged, but at all events, we started and it was to prove a happy partnership until the outbreak of war.

Harry Jones was a tall man, somewhat phlegmatic and cynical. He always wore a khaki cow gown and a cap. He had a son who was a steeplejack, a big tough fellow who used to tease me unmercifully. They lived in an obscure corner of Salford - if such thing there be - behind Lewis' recreation ground, off Frederick Road.

My duties here were many and various. I served petrol at the front and was responsible for the till. I took the petrol pump readings daily and reconciled the cash takings and ordered petrol as required and kept the petrol ration accounts at the start of the war. I wrote out and calculated the bills for car repairs before they went for typing to Shudehill. Additionally I swept the floor, kept Harry's tools clean and the bench and the whole

(41) The household at 282 Cheetham Hill Road was listed in the 1939 Register. Jim appears using both his own and his wife's space to describe his occupation "Managing Director, Motor, Tyre and Accessory Factor". He had been married in 1916 to – a good thing Dad didn't know the name – Gertrude Grimes. Gerard is listed age 17 (Dad's age exactly), occupation blank. John's record is blacked out, so he may still be alive approaching his century.

place generally tidy. It was what today would be called 'hands on' experience. I very soon was doing decokes, king pins and bushes, relining brakes and what-have-you. In those days, you actually relined the shoes and did not throw the old shoes away to fit factory relined ones. In all, I now look upon it as a valuable experience, not merely in the technical sense either.

Jim Fitz was very erratic in his conduct of business. There was always some crisis resulting from sins of omission or commission. Like the King, he was perennially short of cash. To bring some order to his life, Fitz got Larry Fallon, the Principal of Artingstall and Hinds, the Auctioneers of Albert Square to take over the accounts and banking of Temple Garage. Larry Fallon and I would meet weekly for this purpose and I was instructed I must never let the future Lord Mayor of Manchester have any money from the till. I suppose, in retrospect, it was all rather bizarre. Harry had nothing whatsoever to do but the repairing; and here was I, a teenager, refusing the owner the use of his own money! Gerald and John came under the same interdict and did not always take it with good grace. I often used to do work on their cars but here again, they assumed it as their right. They certainly never registered their gratitude in pecuniary fashion.

As time went by, I was gently easing myself into driving, putting the odd car into and out of the garage. One evening, Jim Fitz left his Flying Standard Twelve at the kerb outside and asked me to put it into the garage. Bighead Jim, nothing loathe, casually got into the car, started up and drove. However Big Head Jim got his pedals in a twist and went through and doors at a rate of knots and succeeded in concertinaing three cars against the office stanchion which bent into a U shape.

Another memory, an event which took place shortly before the beginning of the war. One of our customers was a staff photographer with the Daily Express and we had his car under repair. He came dashing in on this day and we had to put his car on the road pro tem. He had to go to Liverpool immediately, a Royal Navy submarine, HMS Thetis had sunk with all hands in Liverpool Bay. The sub was equipped with some new escape apparatus but as I remember, there was some malfunction and the crisis went on for several days but not all the crew were rescued.

The Standard Flying Twelve must have been a fated vehicle. One evening, not long after the outbreak of war, Jim Fitz phoned from Shudehill asking Harry to bring his car down to Shudehill on the way home. So with Harry driving, myself in the back and a front seat passenger - I forget who - we set off via a short cut to Shudehill. At one point in very narrow streets was a blind crossroads and two special policemen standing on the kerb beckoned us out and into the path of a beautifully newly-painted lorry out of the workshop that very day. The lorry hit us fully broadside on and we spun round a couple of times and finished with our undamaged side hard against a wall. Fortunately no-one was injured but Harry (who was no chicken) was badly shaken. I remember it fell to me to do all the names and addresses and insurance business and to get the car towed away. I recall too that it was almost 10 p.m. when I eventually got home and that I had a date to go dancing that night, the end, I suppose of a beautiful friendship. I also remember the next morning being stiff and sore in every muscle. The police prosecuted the driver of the lorry but they lost the case. They had no right to be directing traffic from the kerb!

Shortly after this, I do not now recall the reason, it was decided to close down the Temple Garage, so another episode in life's rich tapestry was closed. Harry retired, but I kept in touch with him throughout the war and afterwards until he died. I still think of my time there as being very happy.

In April of 1939, Chamberlain's government had introduced conscription, the first time in peacetime that this country had not relied on volunteer forces. Men from twenty years of age were liable to call up and the measure was passed despite the opposition of Labour and Liberal parties. This was reinforced by powers for the direction of labour. I cannot recall exactly when Richard was called up, but it was fairly early in the war, to be followed at not too long an interval by Joe. I mention this at this point because I was made to promise not to join up until I was called up. In the event, I was directed to work at Sir James Farmer Norton Limited in Silk Street. They certainly were not in the textile industry, in fact they produced the famous twenty-five pounder gun barrels. Our bureaucracy having seen my qualifications as a chassis cleaner in their ineffable wisdom sent me to Farmers as a crane driver! I drove an overhead crane, transferring the barrels from machine to machine. I recall the Germans were doing nuisance daylight raids when the whole of Manchester would be stopped just for the presence of a Jerry aircraft. To reduce the loss of production this caused, a system of coloured alerts was introduced. I remember an alert changing to red and power being shut down whilst I was marooned up in my crane. Shaken by this life threatening episode and being reasonably certain that crane driving was not my vocation in life, I directed myself to Leach and Seed in Liverpool Street and was taken on there. Leach and Seed were the northern distributors for Maudslay, heavy commercial vehicle manufacturers.

Commercial vehicles were a new departure for me but I quickly became au fait, though it proved to be very heavy physical work. In those days, I was classed as an 'improver', which is prior to becoming a 'journeyman', terms which are not in the industrial lexicon today. I was welcomed into the fold by the younger boys there. There was only one other improver on the staff and he was very unpopular, being a know-all and a braggart. That he was peculiar is attested to by the fact that he used to send out each day for chips which he placed between the bread and jam which he brought for lunch each day. We also had a fellow there who was known as Big Jack. He was a very lanky, taciturn Irishman who at all times wore a cap on his head and a Woodbine in his mouth. He did not smoke them, just lit one after another and let them burn in his mouth. He had a very violent temper and I was the only junior he would have working with him. On one occasion, we had a lorry stripped down to the chassis and Big Jack with a two pound ballpein hammer in hand chased our jam fetishist round and round the chassis. He would certainly have killed him had he caught him.

One of the wartime regulations was that commercial vehicle repairers had to have a heavy recovery vehicle. Leach and Seed had a 1913 Maudslay stuck out in the back yard and this was resurrected and I was charged with making it roadworthy. This vehicle required two men to drive it. The cam followers were of square hardened steel and ran in a brass cam box on top of the engine. On top of the box were eight brass cups containing eight wicks and because there was no oil pump, it was the duty of the driver's mate to lean out of the cab and fill these cups with oil from an oil can. There were a great many features of interest but recitation of them to the non-technically minded would be tedious. I overhauled the engine but when we tried it on the road, it put out water as exhaust and we found that the exhaust and inlet ports were corroded and leaked water under

pressure so it was never used. I must be one of the few people living who have driven a 1913 Maudslay. When I returned after the war, Leach and Seed had closed down and like so many other marques in the British Motor industry, the Maudslay marque had disappeared and is forgotten except by a few of the cognoscenti. I remained in my reserved occupation at Leach and Sands until my call up in 1942, having previously failed a medical for RAF aircrew. Apparently my eyesight and hearing did not meet the required standards.

We have spent quite some time on my CV. Perhaps it is time now to play a little and have a look at the domestic and social scene over the same period. Richard attained his majority in 1938 and this was celebrated by a major party at the Racecourse Hotel. I think it was also during this year that Dad contracted pneumonia. This was very often fatal in those times and I remember Dr. Fraser being in almost hourly attendance. We had for several days to remain absolutely quiet, no radio, records or anything. Dr Fraser secured a supply of the new sulphanalide drug, very rare and the forerunner of penicillin and antibiotics. So happily we had almost a miracle cure.

Taking the date of September 3rd 1939, the day on which Neville Chamberlain announced over the wireless that we were at war with Germany as a point to march from, and looking back to the time of my leaving school, life for the family had changed quite a bit. Richard was 22 years old, theoretically an adult, Joe was 19 and I was just turned 17 and we were considered then as young men. (I wonder sometimes if I've ever grown up). Cath would have been 12, Phil 10, Winnie 8 and Margaret 6, so all the girls would have been at school and the boys, if we may still refer to them as such, at work. Work in those days was generally from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. with an hour for lunch, Monday to Friday. No five day week in those days, so Saturday was usually 8 a.m. till 1 p.m. and if you went to Mass on Sundays, you never, ever got a lie in!

Richard, Joe and I had all continued with our membership of the Squires and we each drew our separate circle of friends and principal source of recreation from the Squires. The paths of myself and Ernie Hamer, Cracker Simpson et al had diverged after we had put 'schoolish things' behind us. By September 1939, I had ceased to charge Richard and Joe a tanner (sixpence) a time for cleaning their shoes whenever they would a-wooing go. Indeed, I sometimes had need of a similar service myself. To go back to 1936, from then to the late forties was probably the all time heyday of the Hollywood Cinema. Most suburban cinemas changed their programmes at least twice a week and most people went twice a week at least. Richard of course was to me a Man about Town. He took me occasionally to 'Variety' at the Palace theatre in town. I remember one time going to see the world famous American negro singing quartet, The Mills Brothers, and on another occasion to see one of Britain's leading bands, Harry Roy and his Tiger Ragamuffins whose famous signature tune was "Where's That Tiger?". Joe was also graduating in life's school and was establishing himself as a boy for the girls and no mean dancer. (It's easy to see where the bad influences in my life have come from). Actually, I can say with hand on heart that I cannot recall there ever being any cross words between us, apart from the "who said you could wear my best shoes" sort of thing. Discipline at home was fairly easy, but we had always to say where and with whom we were going. We all handed over our wage packets unopened to Mother and she would immediately return our spends. As I recall, she totally fed and clothed us. Later, of course, we paid an agreed sum for board and lodging. As far as I remember, when I started work I got ten shillings a week and received one shilling a week in spends. If I went out at night at that time, I had to be home for 9.30. It was possible to walk freely without let or hindrance pretty well anywhere and at any time.

So the years from 1936 to 1939, despite the almost continuous national and international tensions and crises and Dad's pneumonia episode, went along fairly quietly in a normal round of church going, the club, cinemas, theatres and what have you. On the national scene, MacDonald's administration gave way to Stanley Baldwin's which in 1937 in turn saw Neville Chamberlain become Prime Minister. Chamberlain is much reviled, I think unjustly, as the apostle of appeasement. Internationally, we saw the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the annexation of Austria by Germany, then the occupation of Sudetenland, followed by the invasion of Czechoslovakia and, finally, despite the 'peace in our time' visit to Munich by Chamberlain, the invasion of Poland and the start of World War Two.

Mentions of Dad's illness makes me think of health matters generally through the thirties. We all, I think, had the usual children's afflictions which in those days included mumps and whooping cough. Thankfully, these two are virtually erased. They are almost as distressing for the onlooker as for the sufferer. Cath, as I have mentioned earlier was stricken with diphtheria and this was very often fatal. I well remember the palpable air of anxiety at home until she had passed the crisis. Diphtheria was a notifiable disease and was treated in Ladywell Sanatorium, the local isolation hospital. I too had a spell in Ladywell, suffering from scarlet fever. We should all be grateful that these diseases have been banished from the medical agenda. I well remember Ladywell. Parents visits consisted of being allowed to peer at the range of beds down each side of the ward through glass panel doors at the end of the ward. After breakfast, which usually was a round of bread and dripping and a cup of tea, we would all have to lie straight and immobile in our newly made beds pending inspection by God! God eventually appeared in the guise of Dr. Edge who was a very tall florid gentleman in a long flapping white coat. His heavenly retinue consisted of Matron, Sister, Staff Nurse and the lowest of Seraphim and Cherubim, the humble nurse bringing up the rear as Dr. Edge raced up one side of the ward and back down the other, all without pause and waving his hand to the occupant of each bed and yelling out "Bettah? Bettah?".

When I got home, I was presented with this wonderful long chromium torch which could be focused and the colour of the beam could be changed - well worth enduring dripping and bread for. We all now pay quite hefty sums weekly for our GPs and hospitals. I think the hospitals then were all built and supported by voluntary contributions, would anyone of my vast readership correct me if I am wrong. GPs were, I think paid by the patient. Our doctor was Dr. Fraser, a tall stooped man with very bushy eyebrows- My chief memory of him is that he must have been eighty when he was born. He got around Pendleton either on his flying bedstead of an enormous 'sit up and beg' bicycle or a very old equally sit up and beg Morris. If he came on a house visit, he, regardless of who or why, would line us all up, borrow a tablespoon and inspect all our throats - "Say Arh" - all with the same spoon. He liked his infections in minimum quantities. He had two surgeries, one on Littleton Road near Uncle John's and one on Broad Street, Pendleton. In either surgery, one waited for hours on ancient bentwood chairs looking forlornly at the dreadfully dilapidated decorations relieved only by ghastly Victorian Daguerreotypes of doctors attending to the dying 'little Nell' with her distraught mother in the background. In each surgery, he had a massive roll-top desk, the drawer and cubby holes of which contained what can only be described as chaos of papers and whatever. During a consultation, he would claw frantically amongst these papers, only to be recalled to reality by the smell of burning toast. Each surgery was heated only by a single element electric fire and it was his habit to put a stack of books on the floor in front of the fire and

place on top of the books a loaf of bread. When the end of the bread was toasted, back to the desk to look for knives and butter etc. National Health Service circa 1930s.

I seem to have digressed. I think that before the digression we were busy with church, clubs etc. Richard and Joe had certainly been busy and not at church either, for it was during 1939 that Richard brought Olive home to tea and it wasn't long thereafter that Joe followed with Joan. All this sounds fairly innocuous, but the present day reader should not be deceived. To bring a girl 'home to tea' had very grave implications. Its importance was recognised by the timing amongst other things. It almost always took place on Sundays and 'tea' was not sufficiently important - it must be High Tea and this would require the full panoply of best china and cutlery, sponge cakes, trifles and what in other circumstances would be called 'funeral meats'. I have always felt sorry for the poor individual who has to endure these rights of initiation. Consider poor Olive, the cynosure of four young pairs of eyes, then those too of contemporaries (more or less) Joe and myself and then of course, Mam and Dad. And there is poor Olive on her own. Will everybody like her, is her hair straight, should she have put that other frock on and meanwhile, eight pairs of eyes are fixed upon her. At last it ends and she must have passed inspection or at least partly so, for some months later, after Richard had joined the army, she was the bride in the second khaki wedding in the Noonan family. Joe and Joan were to follow some twelve months later, the third khaki wedding in the family. A pity I subsequently joined the 'boys in blue'.

Olive was the youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs Brigg. Her elder sisters were Marjory and Flo in that order. There was also a brother whose name and age I cannot now recall. He was handicapped in some way and did not live at their home in Canterbury Rd, Urmston. Marjory married Dick Grimley who worked for the Salford Corporation and was a friend of Richard's. Flo married and subsequently emigrated to either Australia or Tasmania. Mr Brigg was a fitter and worked for Metro Vickers in Trafford Park. As there are cradle Catholics so also are there cradle cloth cap Labourites and Mr Brigg was a vociferous member of the species. He was also a follower of the sport of kings, to wit an expert on the turf. Mrs Brigg had at one time received what must have been a fairly substantial industrial injury award, so they owned their semi-detached house in Canterbury Road.

Joan was the only daughter of Mr and Mrs Morrison and she had two brothers, Vincent and Basil. They lived in a house in Peel St behind the Salford Royal Hospital. Joan lived for most of her childhood with her grandmother in Upper Cleminson St., because her parents' house was too small to accommodate them all. Mr Morrison was a pattern maker, a highly skilled trade. I remember that during the war he made a brightly painted working model of a fairground roundabout or carousel if you please, for his granddaughter Joan. I wonder if she still has it, a wonderful family heirloom. Vin and Basil were more or less contemporaneous with Joe and I. Like we were, they were interested in Manchester United and City and they were not averse to the odd bevy, dancing and so on. Morrison senior too enjoyed an occasional visit to the local. Because of these factors and because Peel Street was a great deal nearer than Canterbury Rd, the social and family interaction between the Morrisons and the Noonans was much greater than with the Briggs. Another factor too, though it probably lay beneath the surface and was not manifest, was that, like us, the Morrisons were cradle Catholics, whereas the Briggs had no religious affiliation.

I felt sorry for Olive, particularly after the wedding and after Richard was posted overseas. Certainly from their very first meeting, the relationship between both sets of parents was, to say the least, never spontaneous. So a curious inhibition characterised all the meetings, and Olive must have found it so, visiting on her own to Littleton Road, during all the time that Richard was away. Until my own posting overseas, I made such visits to her home as I could, though I must admit that even with the best will in the world I always felt some constraint.

We are now well into the war. After the dismembering of Poland by Germany and Russia and the debacle of Norway came the period of the 'phoney' war. At the beginning of the war, no time had been lost in implementing the long laid plans of evacuation of children from the major centres of population and the most likely bombing targets. If I remember correctly, Rawtenstall turned out to be the destination for St Sebastian's children. I think Winnie and Phil were billeted together in a stone built terraced house opposite a factory which I was told was a munitions factory! Margaret was placed on her own in a very substantial residence where her place apparently was below stairs in the kitchen. I can't recall Cath's place in this particular episode, Mother very soon removed Margaret from her exalted situation and the phoney war soon resulted in the breakdown of the evacuation scheme in many parts of the country. This period was a very odd interregnum in the war: rationing was not yet too severe, even the blackout did not seem all that necessary, air raids were not frequent and then generally by nuisance single aircraft. All this was soon to change. Within the space of a few weeks, the British Army suffered its greatest defeat in history. The impregnable Maginot Line fell, Holland and Belgium fell, France surrendered and the miracle of the evacuation from Dunkirk took place.

Immediately on the invasion of Holland, Chamberlain's government had fallen and Churchill became Prime Minister and formed a national government with the Labour and Liberal parties participating. I don't think many people realise that Lord Halifax might have succeeded Chamberlain as premier and if this had happened, we might have surrendered after the fall of France. The war was now on with a vengeance. Much stricter rationing and regulation were now possible following on Labour's adherence to the government. The situation now had two direct effects on the family. Firstly, Mussolini entered the war on the tail of the German victories and as a direct result, oil supplies from the Middle East were threatened and Richard was one of the reinforcements sent to the Middle East. Secondly, clothing rationing was introduced, naturally with fewer goods to buy, takings went down and the war from then on meant a lot of extra work with coupons etc for a lot less return.

After Churchill's appointment and following Dunkirk, the whole country was absorbed in anti-invasion preparations. The LDV, later to become the Home Guard of Captain Mainwaring fame was formed, rationing and armaments production was intensified, signposts, both urban and rural were dismantled, all premises had to have firewatchers. Joe was stationed somewhere in Norfolk on anti-invasion duty. He was billeted in an old warehouse and I recall him telling me of waking during the night to find a rat sitting on his chest. Public entertainment and gatherings were restricted. Football Club football was no longer possible, their players being dispersed throughout the forces, the clubs fielded teams of guest players who happened to be stationed nearby. All this continued until the Battle of Britain in September, where we came perilously close to defeat for lack of fighter aircraft. It was about this time that I found I was in a 'reserved' occupation and my failure to qualify medically for aircrew meant that I was unable to join up as most of my peers were doing.

During all this period, when overtime and firewatching permitted, I was still pedalling round at weekends collecting Greengate debts and going to the club which we kept open five nights a week plus the Sunday night social. My contemporaries at the club about this time would be Laurence Smith, Lod Reeves, Yosser Hughes, Jimmy Wall, Mike Brennan, Dennis Keene, Dizzy Brennan, Smudger Murray, Ben and Tom Plant, Matt McGann etc etc. We all finished up in the various forces. I lost touch with some of them but as far as I know, they all returned safely except Laurence Smith who was an Air Force navigator and was shot down over Italy, RIP. We all, together and variously participated, from camping, hiking, dancing etc. Jimmy Wall and I went to concerts; I went camping with the Plant brothers; hiking with Mike Brennan and so on and the Plants stayed at our house for a couple of weeks when they were bombed out. I met McGann for a short alcoholic leave in Calcutta in later years. Mike Brennan was invalided home from India and our paths, or rather ships crossed en route. We have all gone our separate ways now and are no longer in touch.

The pre-Christmas blitz was the next major event as far as Manchester was concerned. Whilst London was raided pretty well every night, with the blitz on Coventry, the Germans began a systematic series of saturation bombing of major centres. First Coventry, then Plymouth, then Liverpool and on the Sunday before Christmas, it became Manchester's turn. Dennis Keene and I had turned out early to prepare the Clubroom for the Christmas Social, still only a tanner admittance. However, the sirens went off just before we got there, so we adjourned to the Church just round the corner (yes, that kind of church!) When all the bottles and glasses were blown off the bars as a result of a near miss, we decided that we had better make our way to our respective homes. Neither of us made it. I could not get across the Adelphi footbridge and was ordered off the streets into shelter. Dennis took shelter in St Stephen's Street where volunteers were asked for to extinguish some incendiary bombs. Dennis volunteered and found himself on the top floor of a common lodging house armed with a stirrup pump and no water. His request at one of the rooms for water was rewarded with a full to overflowing bucket which upon use for extinguishing bombs, turned out to be urine. The all clear went at about midnight and I wended my way home to find that all were safe. The next night we were treated to an all night raid from 6pm to 6am. Again we came through safely, except that the shop window was blown in by a mobile anti-aircraft gun blasting away outside the front door. Mother's response to this was to put up a big notice "We are still open - only much wider".

So the war went on with air raids becoming the norm. Joe was posted overseas and everywhere the Germans defeated us. Churchill had an obsessive hangover concerning the soft underbelly of Europe and his Gallipoli disaster of the First World War. As a result of this, Joe finished up in Greece where the Germans had gone to the aid of the Italians who were being soundly trounced by the Greeks. The result was that we were chucked ignominiously out of Greece and retired to Crete, which because of our command of the Med was supposed to be unconquerable. It took the Jerry parachutists about three weeks to eject us from Crete and for us to lose control of the Med because Rommel was chasing us out of the recently regained Tobruk. I was to be in the first convoy that sailed through the Med when we finally regained control, thus missing the marvellous stay in Capetown or Durban that previous convoys to the Far East had enjoyed.

However, I anticipate myself. In early forty-two, I was called up into the RAF at Penarth in South Wales.

Chapter Four

As predicted in the first pages, this narrative has developed into a brief account of the Noonan family in the context of the nineteen twenties, thirties and forties.

Salford most certainly did not figure greatly in my service career and since the story of my military exploits smacks more of 'The Good Soldier Schweik' or perhaps a 'Carry On' film it does not seem appropriate to introduce here what would necessarily become a mainly autobiographical account. (For those who may be interested there is a detailed and lurid account of my service exploits in the Appendix.)

However in order to maintain some sort of a chronological sequence I give a brief resume of my various comings and goings under the aegis of the R.A.F. From Penarth in S. Wales I was sent to do squarebashing in Blackpool and from Blackpool to nearby Weeton for technical training, from thence to the warlike operations of a Balloon Barrage Maintenance Unit at Cardiff. After a few weeks there onwards to a similar unit at Whithall near Birmingham from where after a few weeks I was posted Overseas. Overseas turned out to be India and my first posting there was to be Rawalpindi, the H.Q. of the legendary North West Frontier Army. After training in parachute dropping we were then posted to Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) the 'Forward Area'. From there I was posted to Cawnpore which was to be my base unit for the rest of my sojourn in India and from which I had detachments principally to Bombay and Madras. My repatriation came through in late 1946 and we resume our tale of everyday Salford folk aboard the troopship Georgic and tied up at the quayside in Liverpool. 'Home is the Warrior!'

After an overnight stay on the boat we disembarked and entrained for the PDC (Personnel Distribution Centre) at Padgate near Warrington. Unable to get through on the telephone to home I eventually got through to the Thompsons next door to learn that we were flooded out but that I could reach Richard at Aunty Theresa's up the road. Couldn't make sense of it; if we have a burst pipe why doesn't Richard repair it? Eventually I reached Richard at Aunty Theresa's and it was then borne in upon me that the Irwell had burst its banks and Lower Kersal was under several feet of water and so I resigned myself to making my way home by public transport.

Two days were spent in re-issuing kit, documentation, the inevitable FFIs, leave passes, pay etc and we were ready for the very last leg of the journey home and floods or whatever when lo and behold Dad and Richard turned up with the car. After a somewhat emotional reunion (remember Dad had three sons away at the wars for nearly six years and now we were all home safely) I learned about the extent of the flooding. Apparently the flood water had lapped our front and rear doorsteps and the car had been standing in two feet of water. The car had also been laid up for 'the duration' so they had worked wonders in getting it dried out, tyres inflated, battery charged etc in order to bring me home in style.

So at last 'Home was the Wanderer' and very strange it was. It should be remembered that when I went abroad I hadn't seen Richard and Joe for a couple of years, Margaret was about eight years of age, Winnie about ten and Phil about twelve and now they were teenagers and it was all quite strange. Obviously one tends to recall people as they were rather than create an image of what they might be like but this did not apply to Mam and Dad who seemed to be exactly they always were.

I should mention that by the time I arrived home the floods had subsided and after I had been briefed as to the shortages of cigarettes and beer and other such essential supplies and after the inevitable party (no beer from the washing machine this time) my first visit was to the Carmelite Convent at Higher Kersal to see Cath.

From letters from Mother and from Cath herself as far back as my time at Aga Tala I had learned that Cath considered that she had a vocation to become a Carmelite. This was strongly opposed by Mother, I suppose she was thinking amongst other things of Cath's lack of years. Also the timing was inopportune to say the least. Consider, Richard was a 'desert rat' serving with Montgomery's 8th Army in North Africa, Joe was in Greece with a Highland Regiment that was being chased out of Greece by the Germans who had come to the aid of the failing Italians and I was in India in the path of the advancing and victorious Japs. Consider too that Mother was being asked to surrender her eldest daughter to one of the most austere and rigorous enclosed Orders of the Church. Indeed it is little wonder that she was so vehemently opposed at the time. I have a theory that Mother's thwarted academic ambitions for me were now centred on Cath. At all events her opposition led to somewhat strained relations in the family over quite a long period. Eventually a compromise was reached in that Cath would be allowed to go when we were all home from the war. Due to my extended tour in India she was allowed to enter Kersal as an Extern Sister after the Japanese surrender pending my return from India when she would join the Carmelite Convent in Exmouth as a novice.

Some of my readers might recall the record making winter of 1947 and the subsequent floods, so it was almost mid-summer before the 'Iron Lung' as we later christened the redoubtable AVR 36 was able to make the long journey to Exmouth. No M6 and M5 in those days and with a top speed of about fifty miles per hour South Devon was an eleven or twelve hour journey which we duly made and delivered Cath to her new family.

It was a journey we were to repeat some twelve months later for her 'Clothing', surely one of the most harrowing ceremonies in the Roman Church's canon. For the family the sight of the postulant being shorn of hair and divested of wedding garments for the brown habit and of the doors being closed on the outside world forever is not for the faint of heart. I think that along with relaxation of the rule of enclosure as well as other rules the clothing ceremony may nowadays be similarly ameliorated. Thankfully Mother became reconciled over time to Cath's vocation and became a very generous patron to Cath personally and to the Carmelites generally until the end of her days.

It is some time since we have mentioned Salford. How was it after the years of absence? Substantially, apart from bomb damage here and there all seemed very much as it was, church, club, pub and home were all standing and these were the essentials. On the public scene times were amoving. In 1947 the last No 70/71 tram service from Broughton to the Docks was run. It had been almost fifty years since the first Salford Municipal

Electric Tramway service from Kersal Bar to Blackfriars Bridge had been initiated. In 1947 Racing was resumed at Castle Irwell, the first race there having taken place in 1902. In 1946 along with my arrival home the first consignment of bananas since the beginning of the war arrived at the docks and again, coinciding with my arrival, the Irwell flooded for the first time since 1899. And finally in 1949, a change somewhat less trivial than it appears at first reading, the Cleansing Department decided to replace its remaining horses with lorries. Alas no more of the fetlocks, the drays with enormous iron bound wheels and the men with trousers bound below the knee with string to prevent rats reaching the parts they shouldn't reach.

So the almighty internal combustion engine was becoming master and trams and horse drawn traffic were to disappear completely. It is much easier to equate the change from 1939 to now rather than the change from 1939 to 1949. I have spoken in a previous chapter of the great sense of bustle and activity which pervaded the streets in the thirties. And whilst it cannot be denied that we all welcomed the demise of the tram and the horse I think that we had not the faintest idea of what would ensue in the eighties and nineties. Whenever I now return to Salford I recall the rows of terraced houses with their corner shops and pubs and the churches and schools in areas like Cross Lane and Regent Road and Greengate and Silk Street and Chapel Street, I think back to what it was really like and I have to say that whatever else it may have been at least it had the redeeming quality of being on a human scale. Today all those terraced houses have been demolished to make room for four-lane dual carriage highways undesecrated by human footfall. We really must find away to regain for ourselves the power to prevent these excrescences being inflicted upon us.

I appear to be mounting my soapbox. What now of the family? Cath was now set upon her lifetime vocation (and only this last Christmas we learned of her re-election as Prioress at Wetherby). I was of course still receiving 'the King's shilling' and after three months leave was posted to the RAF at Handforth, Cheshire. This really was just to while away the time to demob. Why on earth they don't leave you at home until demob is beyond me. However as is well known to you the devil finds work for idle hands and in my last few days I managed to get myself on a fizzer. I was wearing a blue uniform recently issued to me at Padgate, the stupid adjutant trying my case must have realised I was out in a few days but made me have stitched on all the gong ribbons, campaign ribbons, badges of rank, and I kid you not, two good conduct stripes to which I was entitled and I had to reappear before him looking like a pale imitation of Hermann Goering. A few days after this incident I was off to Kirkham for the last FFI of them all and the business of selecting a demob suit and should I have a trilby or not and then at the very last back to the real world somewhat in the manner of Kipling's "I'm 'ere in me billycock 'at".

In the first pages of this saga I debated at some length as to the purposes of writing it. I think that my first definition still holds good some five months later. I quote "what they want to hear is about the lives we had as children and adolescents with our parents and so on as far back as one can go". However this leaves the ending rather undefined. I propose therefore to quite briefly carry on the family history as far my own marriage in 1955 after which all events will be considered as contemporaneous with most of my readers' experience and no doubt each of you will consider your own view of such events equal, if not superior to mine, a view which I do not necessarily feel called upon to agree.

My own life between being demobbed and Dad's death in 1952 can be disposed of in very few lines, I quickly established contact with old cronies principally John and Jim Eckersley, Mike Brennan and Paddy Hines, and life fell easily into a carefree sort of routine. For instance most Friday and Sunday nights would be club nights; Friday we would play snooker and cards to the wee small hours, Sunday would be rather more in keeping with the Sabbath and the fact that it was work on Monday morning. In winter, Tuesday was usually a snooker club match night, either home or away, and on Saturday nights John and Jim Eck and I would usually go for a drink and then dancing at Broughton Assembly Rooms. In the football season John and Jim played for St Boniface' parish team and I together with 'our' Joe would load up the Iron Lung with about seven or eight adults and go to Maine Road where City and United played each alternate Saturday. Since support for each team was evenly divided between us there was a great deal of badinage and fun. These basic routines would sometimes be varied. There would be occasional Halle concerts and in those days Covent Garden used to come to Manchester so there were visits to the opera or perhaps Joe and Fred Davies would be playing a snooker match at Houldsworth Hall. Occasionally if some young maiden had been so foolish as to succumb to my engaging patter there would be mid-week jaunts to town to the Mecca or the Ritz Dance Halls or perhaps a film or a concert. In the summer there would be hiking in the Peak District, North Wales or the Lakes, mainly with Mike Brennan, and sometimes four or five of us would join together for the annual holiday, Torquay, Bournemouth, Scarborough and the Isle of Man being particularly notable occasions.

The reader should be aware that life was not totally a bowl of cherries and some at least of these activities were interspersed with work. I never had any difficulty in finding work and I had quite a few jobs but in the main I worked for two long periods on the docks. This almost equalled the RAF for ineptitude and futility which wasn't surprising since the Docks had gone from the extreme of the degrading system of casual work to the national dock labour scheme which meant permanent overmanning and jobs for life (when not on strike, that is) for the Dockers. Mechanical equipment was comprehensive, mobile cranes, fork lift trucks, in those days an innovation, Timber Carriers etc and this led to a totally Luddite situation on the docks. The same number of people in the same number of gangs but only half of the numbers out on the dockside working at any one time!

The Dock Authorities' lorries were of the rather ancient Dennis make and did not have starter motors and were fitted with Scintilla magnetos. Each morning it was mine and 'Garth's duty, as the 'heavy gang', to man the starting handles of the lorries and start them for the day. Garth, whose stature may be guessed from his title was one day working with 'Roger the Dodger' on a launch at the head of No 8 dock when he overchoked the engine and set it on fire. He called up to Roger to get some sand. Roger ran off and returned with a bag of cement which he dropped from the top of the quayside into the boat twelve of fifteen feet below. Yes, you have got it. The bag went straight through the bottom of the boat and sank it. At least it put the fire out and Roger had to be rescued from the attentions of the wet and furious Garth.

I would have thought it impossible for there to be two Sydney Topples (see war service appendix) in this world but Roger the Dodger ran Topple a close second. He was totally inept and acquired his name by hiding whenever anyone was required to go out to a breakdown which did happen quite frequently. It was reputed that he had a lifetime job as part of a compensation deal when his father was injured whilst working on the docks.

There is a whole raft of anecdotes from the Docks but I determined to be brief at the start of this chapter and therefore suffice it to say that working hours were 7.30am to 5.00pm and generally one worked to 7.00pm and usually alternate Saturdays and Sunday so you will perhaps agree that play was interspersed with a little work.

Whilst all this work and play is going on I have of course three handsome sisters growing up at home and in the fullness of time the bees (or are they drones) begin to gather round the honeypot. I need to be rather careful here, bees and even drones do become spouses so I do not to get into any character minutiae, so all the brothers-in-law may restore their cudgels to their cupboards. It would be interesting to discover the suitors' opinion of the resident ogre! Our suitors are not the only ones seeking to augment the family and by 1950 John and Christine⁽⁴²⁾ were additions to Richard's and Olive's family as were Joan and Anne to Joe's and Joan's.

(42) Not Christine, she was born in 1956

For reasons I am unable to discover, some time about 1948 we moved from 309 Littleton Road to 1a Littleton Road. I can only assume that mother considered 1a a better 'stand' than 309. 1a stood at the end of Littleton Road next door to a Pendleton Co-Op across from which was the Cromwell Cinema and also the No 13 bus Stop was immediately outside the front door. Mother's previous clientele which was almost exclusively from the Council estate opposite 309 had to pass 1a to go anywhere so presumably she considered that we would have the best of all worlds at 1a. The house itself was similar to 309 but a little smaller.

This was not the end of Mother's entrepreneurial exploits. She had sniffed out a small cafe business for sale in Pigeon St off Ducie Street in the heart of factory businesses behind London Road station (now Piccadilly) and close to Great Ancoats Street. It is perhaps worthwhile relating its history at this point of our narration. The shop was in the middle of a block of semi-derelict Victorian terraced cottages, some of which were occupied. I think that Mother's idea was to use Winnie's bakery experience and that Winnie and Margaret would run the place. However in the event it turned out that the major portion of the turnover had been in cigarettes on which there is very little margin and to increase the catering turnover it proved necessary to re-equip, so a new geyser and a small frier and a pie press and toaster were installed and very soon it became necessary to open the upstairs rooms to serve meals as well as meet a thriving take away trade. Dad used to take Winnie and Margaret and sometimes Phil in the morning and collect them in the evening. All of this involved a full scale renovation of the premises and I the only 'free agent' fell for most of this, calling on Richard and Joe for assistance as required.

All of this started about the autumn of 1950 and sometime in 1951 Dad was diagnosed as having angina to which he succumbed in March 1952. I remember only too clearly that Sunday morning. I was awakened early to be told that Dad was ill. For some reason we were not on the phone at that time and had to use the public call box across the road. I called the doctor and was told he would be with us as soon as possible. When he failed to arrive after repeated calls I tried the police who refused to send an ambulance because it was not a street accident and by the time the doctor did arrive it was all too late. Ironically the doctor was late because he had called on Winnie Corcoran who had flu and was a cousin of

Dad's⁽⁴³⁾. Dad was a man of very quiet presence so it was surprising how greatly he was missed. In fact Mother never ever recovered from or became reconciled to her bereavement.

(43) This can surely only be Winnie (nee Malone), wife of Joe Corcoran. So not a cousin, but a sister-in-law of a brother. Perhaps someone assumed she was a niece of Dick's mother, Mary Corcoran, but we can't – so far at least - find any called Winnie.

Life had to go on and I chauffeured the girls to and from Pigeon Street and went on to my own job which was quite nearby. I must say that particularly in the mornings they did not always appreciate that I had a definite time at which to start work.

This routine went on until the August Bank Holiday week end. It was a weekend of the most beautiful weather and normally I would have been hiking in the Lakes instead of which I was the only human extant in the industrial desert of Ducie St on a Bank Holiday and engaged in the soul destroying task of painting the shop front, when out of the woodwork as it were, crawled our little weasel of a landlord. He was there to compliment us on the success we were making of the business and to invite us to purchase the whole block of semi derelict cottages, otherwise he would terminate our tenancy which was only on a weekly tenure. He was a small narrow little man who doubled in life as a carpenter and coffin maker. Just my size and weight as I discovered when I picked him up and threw him out. None the less we had to do business with him and eventually agreed to proceed with the purchase.

It is here that Mother's entrepreneurial instincts surfaced again. Whilst the conveyancing was in progress she saw an advert in the Manchester Evening News. Now there was a chip shop round the corner in Ducie Street and it was owned by a very vinegary (no pun intended) lady and our success in Pigeon Street had created a very adverse effect on her business. Despite the advert having only a box number Mother was absolutely certain that it related to Ducie St and I was deputed to go and see our vinegary rival (again no pun intended) and find out. Very reluctantly I did this and lo and behold mother was right. Despite a very frosty reception we entered into negotiations and agreed to buy on condition that the sale was kept secret.

Few things have given me greater pleasure than what followed. As soon we had the completion of the Ducie Street deal, Richard, Joe and I started to strip all the equipment, fixtures and fittings out of Pigeon Street after business on Friday evening and had them all installed in Ducie St ready to open for business on the following Monday morning. I only wish I could have taken the paint off the shop front. As it was, I had the unmitigated delight in handing our grasping landlord the keys together with a version of Churchill's V for Victory sign. To add insult to injury, we had taken Counsel's advice and because we were 'unwilling purchasers' and because he had only a possessory title we were able to secure the return of our deposit on the cottages and he was left with a valueless asset.

We now had a somewhat larger establishment and also a full sized chip range to operate and it soon became evident we needed more staff. After due reflection I volunteered to give up my job and work for a nominal wage until things had settled down and we could see the way forward a little more clearly.

Thus it was I became chauffeur, potato peeler, fish and chip frier, book keeper, painter and decorator and general factotum. Also among my duties was buying fish each morning from the Smithfield. This reminds me and no doubt will surprise the younger reader but under our Labour government of the people for the people food rationing was still in force. In order to ensure adequate supplies I used to inflate the returns to the Ministry of Food and did this to such an extent that I was under investigation for possible prosecution when rationing ceased in 1953. We were the last belligerent in Europe to abolish rationing. Who do you think won the war?

Looking back it is evident that Mother was always the prime mover and initiator of projects. It is remarkable that in addition to giving birth to and bringing up eight children she opened shops at Greengate, 309 Littleton Road, 1a Littleton Road, Pigeon Street, Ducie Street and later and outside the scope of this story at Broad St and finally a stall in the New Salford Precinct.

When all this is considered with her feat in writing to Richard, Joe and me each week throughout the war it must be rated a very considerable accomplishment for someone who attended school only until she was twelve. What a great pity that her later years were troubled with tinnitus and she was so unhappy within herself. On reflection it is possible that we all disappointed her, possibly I more than the rest of us. None of us proved to be willing aides and abettors for her projects and not to put too fine a point on it, we all had our own fish to fry. (Sorry if that sounds like another pun , I promise you it was not intended). It may be that I failed her more than the rest of us in that I am sure she felt that I had the necessary attributes which she lacked and which would have sustained her in her entrepreneurial projects. These are of course speculations from hindsight and it is possible the more senior of my readers may disagree.

By 1953 bees and/or, dare I say it again, drones, were appearing on the scene, apparently with serious intent and the first of these was Desmond Doherty of a Catholic family from St Luke's parish and indeed he and Winnie were married at St Sebastian's in August some five months after Dad died. Others too were loitering with intent namely Harry Scarsbrook who married Phil, again at St Sebastian's, in April of 1954 and then the Haggis basher James Campbell Kincaid. Margaret and he made it a hat-trick at St Sebastian's in September 1956⁽⁴⁴⁾ which strictly lies outside the date parameters of this account. It should not be assumed that whilst all this was going on, if goings on there were, that I was idle. It was shortly after Dad died that Marion Lee appeared on the scene. Am I right in suspecting a stirring of interest? The way of it was this. Around 1950 Mam and Dad resumed an old friendship with Bill and Nellie Lee who were then living in Cleveleys near Blackpool. Dad and Bill had been members of the same Manchester Council of the Knights of St Columba. After Dad's death Mother grew much closer to Nellie⁽⁴⁵⁾ and I was called upon to drive whenever she went to Cleveleys. Marion at this time was working for Thomas Hedley on Market Research and was living with her Aunt⁽⁴⁶⁾ in Fallowfield, but her work took her around the country so she wasn't very often at Cleveleys, though we did meet once or twice.

(44) James and Margaret married in Sept. 1955, I think.

(45) Probably, Bill and Nellie attended Richard Noonan's funeral.

(46) Marion's aunt Nellie (nee Wilcox) was the wife of Joseph Longworth Heaton, elder brother to Marion's mother (also called Nellie).

And it came to pass that one Sunday afternoon I was reluctantly engaged in doing some book-keeping when this lovely apparition appeared at the door; there was a hiatus - she had a Hedley car which must be in Bury for the start of work on Monday; could I possibly be so kind as to follow her in AVR 36 in order to get her back to Fallowfield. I would and could and did. (I was never an enthusiast for paperwork). Needless to say, we stopped for a social drink on the return journey and thus were the beginnings of a beautiful friendship.

Within a relatively short space of time we decided we wished to marry - no 'partners' stuff in those days if you please. The news, I must admit was not received with uninhibited enthusiasm on either side. Marion's mother I think considered me a bit of a rough fly-by-night, whereas my Mother I think deemed Marion to be 'flighty', something of a gadabout. And who is to say they were wrong or at least partly right - nothing now but the test of time.

The decision however had more immediate and practical consequences. I was working at Ducie Street for only nominal wages, in fact for spends only. Obviously I would need to leave and begin earning real money as it were. I cannot now remember the details of how this was handled and how Ducie St continued until it was eventually sold.

I found some premises and built up a connection with second-hand car dealers, some of whom were also stock car racers. This was OK until one client considered it was my fault that he had lost a race and I was advised by Dick Perrin, a Police Sergeant friend that they were not the nicest of people to be associating with. Discretion being the better part of valour I took his advice and shut down.

At this time Marion's father suffered a heart attack in Brechin whilst visiting the family of Brian's fiancee. I therefore went and took a job in Cleveleys pending the outcome of his illness. Thankfully he recovered and upon his return to Cleveleys, Marion and I decided that I should go to Birmingham where the Motor Industry was thriving and to where she could be transferred by Thos. Headley when we were eventually married in May of 1955. Whilst these romantic matters were ongoing forward progress was being made by other suitors and Phil and Harry were married in 1954.

Mention of their marriage causes me to project this narrative forward and past my closing date of May 1955. I have already referred to mother's difficulties in her later years and I hope that no one considers it to be invidious if I single out Phil and Harry (particularly Harry as a son-in-law) for their loving care and attention for her during those years.

Other family events during the year prior to May 1955 were the birth of Catherine to Winnie and Desmond in July of 1953 and also the birth of Julie to Phil and Harry in February 1955. Just inside our time frame Desmond, Winnie and Catherine emigrated to America in April 1955 and going beyond our time frame had Bernadette in August 1956 followed in November 1957 by David and then Stephen in January 1959 before their return to the UK in April 1960. To complete the marriage record September 1956 saw the wedding of Margaret to James Campbell Kincaid.

Before we close our saga there must be some amongst my readers who perhaps wonder about references to AVR 36 and the Iron Lung. These refer to the Austin Ten car which was purchased new and unblemished in 1934 and was finally disposed of in 1954. Its original purchase price in 1934 was £125.00.00. which to the younger amongst you means no shillings and no pence, and its final selling price in 1954 was £25.00.00. The car served us faithfully over many miles and years though because of the rigours of petrol rationing it was laid up for a time during the war. Supplies remained very difficult for a long time after the war and until Dad found a contact on the black market (probably Jim Fitz) it was fatal to go out without jack, wheelbrace, tyre levers and puncture repair outfit not to mention the blessed foot pump. Over the course of time it began to consume oil and I well remember one trip to watch United play Preston North End at Deepdale Preston. We were fully loaded with five adults and whilst toiling up Belmont on the way home ran out not of petrol but of oil! Subsequent to this I took the engine out, stripped, rebored and reassembled it in the back yard of 1a. By this time its age was beginning to show, the floorboards were literally of plywood and were rotten, the door pillars were also rotten and I manufactured heavy steel brackets to attach them to the chassis. At this time there was an epidemic of polio and life support machines called Iron Lungs became famous. The supply of air for AVR 36 came in from so many sources that it seemed appropriate to christen it the Iron Lung a name which stuck. Another experience in the car comes to mind. I was stopped whilst driving along Broad Street by a very burly Police Sergeant. My rear windscreen being laminated was discoloured and I must fit an exterior rear view mirror. He decided also we should have a little road test and heaved his enormous bulk into the front passenger seat. I inwardly prayed that he would not notice the daylight which showed through the floorboard at his feet. Now the car had a braking system where the front brakes were operated by a mechanism which passed through the front axle king pins. All this mechanism was badly worn to the extent that when the steering wheel was turned to the left the nearside brake came on and vice versa for the right. Since spares were unavailable I cured this condition by removing the brake shoes and storing them under the front seats. I prayed that he would not ask me to do an emergency stop since the shoes had a tendency to slide from under the seats. Of course sod's law operated and I did have to do an emergency stop but my prayers were answered and the shoes remained discreetly hidden. Finally in 1954 the cost of maintenance exceeded its value and I considered myself lucky to obtain the twenty five pounds for which it sold thirty^(46A) years after its manufacture.



Not the iron lung - but a look-alike?

(46A)twenty, not thirty, Dad!

I note upon recapping this chapter that apart from weddings I have made very little reference to St Sebastian's, the church and school which played a significant part in the life of the family from the late twenties onward. The school we have commented on at length in an earlier chapter. The parish was unusual in that it was administered by a Priory of Dominicans which generally had twelve or more priests in residence at any one time, some of them like Frs. McNabb and O'Dea, nationally known figures.

The church itself was very tall, but without a steeple and was built of brick with a series of buttresses from ground level to the eaves of a steeply pitched slate roof and the gable at the sanctuary was semi-circular in plan. Inside there were three aisles, each of the outer aisles having confessional and side-altars alternating and surmounted by a clerestory aisle. About one third of the length of the church was taken up by the Sanctuary which was approached by a full width flight of six wooden steps on to a polished parquet floor and was flanked on each side by two rows of choir stalls before the richly carved high altar was reached by a further flight of full width oak steps.

I have described the church at some length in order to give an idea of the setting in which a very full Liturgy took place. It was my habit whenever my Sundays were free to go to the 11.00am sung High Mass. The Choir was all male and included counter tenors, one of whom incidentally was interned as a fascist during the war. It was nearly thirty strong, so together with about twenty altar servers and the friars in their black and white habits they made quite a procession at the beginning and end of each service. Of course in those days the mass was still in Latin and most masses were in Gregorian plainchant, very different from the infantile music and words we endure today. I am very pleased to hear on the radio nowadays that Gregorian plain chant records often feature in the 'top ten'. I used to love the Sung liturgy and used always to remain for the recessional voluntary.

Serious stuff this, so it was generally necessary afterwards to meet John and Jim Eckersley for darts and pre-prandial drinks in the vault of the Racecourse Hotel after the 11.00am mass. Sung compline took place at 6.30pm each Sunday and in winter with the roof and clerestory in darkness above the chandeliers and the altar aglow with candles and the church filled with incense from the thurifers it was a world away from the world outside to hear sung the evening prayer of the church culminating in the Salve Regina. Again serious stuff but a session of snooker and cards at the club soon effected a cure.

Work, play and business since the end of the war have been described without any background of local or national events so perhaps we should place them in some sort of context.

A glance at the local records tells us that there were other than physical developments in Salford in this period. August of 1948 was the Centenary of the RC Cathedral⁽⁴⁷⁾ and this reminds us that it was only a little over one hundred years since Catholic Emancipation. Did you know incidentally that to this day a Catholic may not be Prime Minister of this country?

(47)and the 97th anniversary of Dad's great-grandparents' (John Noonan & Bridget O'Neill) marriage there in 1851 shortly after their escape from the disasters in Ireland.

In March 1949 a session of the Divorce Court was held in Salford for the very first time and in May of the same year the Municipal ban on the employment of married women was lifted. Were the two events related or were they random harbingers of things to come?

Our Americanization of things English (thank God MacDonalds had not as yet arrived) continued when sirens superseded bells on Salford's fire engines in January of 1950. And where else than Salford would be scene of a record breaking 227 hour piano playing marathon by one of the redoubtable title of Syncopating Sandy Strickland.

February 1953 saw the closure of the Walker and Homfrays Brewery. Having regard to the quality of their beer (remember?... 'Water for Horses') - not a matter of great regret.

On to scientific heights now. In February of 1954 four Salfordians from Salford Electric Instruments were awarded £11,500 for their invention of the Radio Proximity Fuse said to be the most important invention of World War 2.

And finally in our final year of 1955, work was started on Salford's first skyscraper which was to be named Clement Attlee house; what a big headstone and eventual slum, to be remembered by. And perhaps fittingly 1955 went out in December to the biggest snowfall in living memory.

On the national scene we seem to have very little to relate except a catalogue of woe. July 1946 saw the introduction of bread rationing, which was to last for two years and had never before been rationed even in the worst days of the Battle of the Atlantic.

1947 at home was overshadowed by a continuing fuel crisis not helped by the NUM's refusal to allow Italian miners to work in our pits and abroad was disfigured by the carnage of communal strife in India after we unilaterally gave up power.

Things continued downhill through 1948 and into 1949 and culminated in a dollar crisis which resulted in Stafford Cripps' famous devaluation.

The Korean war started in 1950 and there was an uprising in Eastern Germany and only the Theory of Mutual Destruction prevented the Western powers from supporting the rebels. This year also saw the re-election of the Attlee government with a greatly reduced majority. 1951 was celebrated by the Festival of Britain, but why, I haven't the foggiest idea.

Still downhill all the way until 1953 when the Conservatives and the senile Churchill were elected and the slow climb to the "never had it so good" days of Mr. McMillan began and as an earnest of good faith all rationing was abolished in 1954. Will someone tell me who did win the war?

And so we come to the end of our little epic. The title of Down the Arches of the Years is something of a misnomer. It is the title of a poem by Francis Thompson, a drug addict who was twice rescued from the utmost squalor and degradation by the Meynells, themselves poets. The poem is about the soul's flight from an ever-welcoming but all-demanding God, inasmuch as I don't see my life in quite those terms, it is really not appropriate, but its relevance, as far as this narrative is concerned, is to the 'Greengate Arches'.

I think that since we are in poetic vein and since I have, however poorly, endeavoured to recall a Salford which no longer exists, a line from Browning's 'A Death in the Desert' may be more apposite. He tells of the death of St John and how he was the only survivor in the world who had seen and heard Christ and he asks 'How will it be when none more saith, I saw?'

Appendix (A Military Interlude)

From here on in my tale assumes something of the character of The Good Soldier Schweik or one of the Carry On films. My war tale was not to be an epic of endurance or heroics. I never managed to see an angry Jap or a German for that matter. But let me begin at the beginning. I duly reported to Penarth and in company with the rest of that day's intake was duly kitted out, uniform boots, cap etc all of which might possibly fit where they touched. Among the miscellany of equipment such as button sticks which were issued I learned that a housewife is not necessarily a lady who keeps house. I was amazed when as a result of my assessment I was placed in Motor Transport. I learned also and more importantly that one should be alert in the avoidance of fatigues and never to volunteer. In this instance, I amongst others was detailed to clean the HQ offices which were in a very large Victorian house. It became quickly evident that this would take forever so we evolved a method of sloshing a bucket of water over each floor and rapidly mopping up. This went well until we arrived in the CO's office to find his desk and carpet awash from the water dripping through the ceiling. The next morning on parade I stood fast when it was requested that last night's HQ cleaning detail should 'take one pace forward'. To remain obscure and unnoticed for the next few days was the object successfully achieved before my posting to Blackpool for eight week's squarebashing.

Blackpool had literally been taken over by the RAF. There were boarding houses which had contracted themselves totally to the RAF and others who took the RAF personnel on an occasional basis. I was very lucky in the first instance and was billeted at a house in Bank Street near to the front and which in effect treated us as holiday boarders. All the carpets were down, tablecloths were on the table and the host served us all our meals which were very substantial. I had a single room with hot and cold water. Indeed the only restrictions were that we should take off our boots when we came in and that we should be in for 10.30pm which was curfew time anyway. Naturally sod's law operated and for some unknown reason I was moved to a billet on the seafront near Derby Baths. This was a very different kettle of fish. Every carpet had been taken up, bare boards everywhere. Forty watt bulbs in every room. We slept on six truckle beds to a room with only two winceyette blankets and a broken window to admit the October and November gales. The sole heating in the house was a single bar electric fire mounted on the wall in the 'dining room'. Breakfast, and I kid you not, was generally a single sardine on a single piece of toast. And as a crowning indignity we had to do fatigues such as peeling spuds and cleaning. Was ever Schweik treated thus?

Fortunately I was not there for long for I awoke one night with the most appalling ear ache and on reporting sick was very promptly placed in sick quarters with an abscess of the inner ear. I was immediately placed in bed and fell into an exhausted sleep to wake in the evening to find that the abscess had burst and the nursing sister was very displeased with the mess I had made to the pillow. My room mates were not very pleased either. The window of the room was against the fire escape and it was the practice to send someone sneaking down to buy fish and chips from the shop across the road - these were going cold on the fire escape whilst nurse attended to me. It was quite something when I was allowed out to be going round Blackpool with this massive bandage swathed round my head and in Hospital Blue, one of the war wounded! This again did not last long

for I had a recurrence and was sent to the RAF hospital at Weeton where I was to remain for about six weeks. The famous 'sulphanilide' was used in my treatment. I was discharged back to Blackpool to complete my squarebashing.

Wherever one went in the RAF there was always some odd bod. In this case we had a guy called Ellis. He was a timid seemingly middle aged man and the drill sergeant despairingly asked of him what he did in civvy street. He replied to gales of laughter that he was an undertaker. We looked after him, carried his kitbag for him, showed him how to fall out discreetly from the rear at the cafe when going on route march and how to cross over when on the assault course from those waiting to start to those who had already finished. Finally, when eventually on the passing out parade, I took the opportunity to complain in the strongest terms about the Derby Baths billets to the inspecting officer as he passed along the ranks. I wonder if it did any good? Mention of the Derby Baths reminds me of a little bit of esoterica which you may like to share. Because some billets were derelict in the matter of hot water, bath parades were a regular feature of life. If your imagination may boggle at the thought of three-thousand naked men cavorting in the baths, mine doesn't, because I was one of them. Two NCOs stood at the exit and felt everyone's head and towel to ascertain that they were wet when leaving and that they were thus bathed and clean.

With this little aside we leave Blackpool for RAF Weeton some ten miles or so inland where I was posted for an MT course of eight weeks duration. There is little to be said for or about Weeton. Row upon row of wooden huts heated by two iron stoves which had to be glowing red hot to be in any way effective and unless you were very quick off the mark you shaved in freezing water. It should be noted that pay at that time was fourteen shillings a week of which seven shillings was remitted home, so it was hardly worth taking the Saturday evening liberty truck to Blackpool. I passed out from this course with 80.5 marks. Had it been 81.1 would have been recalled to Weeton for a further advanced course which would probably mean NCO or commissioned rank. Instead of which I pursued my military career at RAF Ely in Cardiff.

My military training was over. I could do 'eyes right' and 'eyes front' and 'slope arms' and I knew the difference between a differential and an engine and thus I was ready to join the real war. And thus was I posted to the Barrage Balloon Maintenance Unit at Ely in the suburbs of Cardiff. In fact my time in Cardiff was probably the best period of my service. The Station was quite small, off the main road and near to an estate of council houses. The domestic quarters were wooden huts connected by a covered passage which also gave on to the ablutions. The whole station was very well kept, the CO was very much a hands on guy and the whole camp very thoroughly inspected each week and every Friday a full ceremonial parade took place. The nett result of all this was clean billets, hot water, good grub. There was also a liberal policy on late and sleeping out passes.

There were various clubs and pubs in the district and it was only a bus ride into the town centre. Working hours were pretty much the same as civvy street so it was difficult to avoid being caught up in the social whirl. I well remember amongst others my 'little lead acid girl'. She was the WAAF who looked after the battery charging room. Amongst other conquests was a bus conductress and a girl rejoicing in the name Jeanne Muriel - how could you resist it? We corresponded for quite some time until like many before me I was the recipient of a "mespot". This nasty little word derives from pre-war days when the RAF was garrisoned in the Middle East or Mesopotamia as it was then known. The tour of duty in those times

was for seven years (when I first went out to India it was four and a half years!). Now the seven year itch is not a new invention and a seven years tour and seven years fidelity were very difficult to equate and sooner or later the inevitable letter of rejection or Mespot would arrive: Then "Fly temptation, youth, refrain, refrain, each yielding maid and each presuming swain".

There is a law universally known and acknowledged as Sod's Law. Simply expressed it means that if you have a good time you have to recompense the powers that be by having a bad time. This bargain is of course imposed unilaterally and is completely involuntary. All of which is another way of saying that I was posted to RAF Wythall which is in the country about five miles east of Birmingham.

Perhaps I was now really going to join the war. I certainly thought so when I jumped down from the lorry inside the camp gates to let the tailboard down for everybody else to alight only to be placed immediately on a charge. My heinous crime? Wearing civilian shoes on duty. Not only that, both Bob Morris and myself got clobbered for guard duties. This was against the unwritten rule that MT personnel do not do guard duties or fatigues. Indignation counted for nothing and perforce we reported at the guard room at 1800 hours in marching order for inspection. But this was to be no ceremonial guard. We were issued Lee Enfield .303s and six rounds. Serious stuff indeed. We were to patrol round the perimeter where there were six RAF Regiment machine gun posts and book in at each. But wait, there is more; we were also to have on this patrol an Alsatian dog (I don't know if you know it but Alsatians are German!). I'm terrified of them. We duly arrive and are inspected guns and all. But where is the dog? A half hour's search finally discovers the creature cowering under the Officer's Mess. Apparently the WAAFs there feed it on scraps. It then takes four of us to drag it out. It transpires that the perimeter is about two miles long and each pair of guards does a two hour patrol once round the camp and back again, so between 1800 hours and 0600 hours the poor creature walks twenty four miles every night, seven nights a week. Bob and I tethered it at the first machine gun pit and left it there to collect on our way back. Now, I hear you asking, what, here in the dead centre of England were we guarding. Let me tell you. RAF Wythall did not hide any top secret weapons from the enemy but yes, you've guessed; it was a Barrage Balloon Maintenance Centre!

We did manage to get ourselves off the guard duty roster after a couple of weeks. A good thing too because we were always at the guardroom for the wrong reasons. Bob Morris was on the MT section at Cardiff and came from Salford. We were to go overseas together but were split up after arriving at Bombay. I was to see him nearly three years later with head shaven and doing jankers at Madras. Meanwhile we had dropped well and truly into the proverbial in being posted to Wythall. The CO was round the bend, reveille and lights out was sounded daily and on real bugles not on the Tannoy. There was a full size mirror outside the guardroom and you were supposed to check your salute and dress when you approached it. The guardroom Sergeant of Police was without father and mother. He would purposely delay in booking you out so that you missed the hourly bus to town at the end of the lane a mile away. Bob and I became well acquainted with him. He always 'let' us clean the latrines when we were on jankers. I got seven days jankers for wearing my civvy shoes. Later we both jumped it home for a weekend and didn't get back until late Monday. We were 'awarded' fourteen days for that. This jankers was not as simple as it seems; after work you were allowed one hour to eat, wash, shave then dress in full marching order, backpack, mask, tin helmet, the lot and then have about fifteen minutes walk to the guardroom. We solved this by borrowing a butcher's delivery bike. One of us would sit in the basket and the other would pedal and we would hide the bike behind the guardroom. This went well for a few days until we were unlucky enough to meet the Station Warrant Officer, the RAF

equivalent to the Army's Regimental Sergeant Major. He asked kindly enough if we were posted and when we replied that we were defaulters it turned out that like all his brethren he was of unstable and violent temper and when I being in the basket and Bob holding the bike were unable to come to attention when addressing an Officer, he became almost apoplectic. The incident cost us another seven days. We seemed always to be in trouble whilst at Wythall and it is worthy of note that in the rest of my time in the Air Works I was only once on a charge.

After a couple of months Bob and I and a laddie called Topple were sent on embarkation leave. Topple was to be with me until we went into the forward area and is worthy of further description. I have never met anyone who more fitted his name than Sydney Topple. His head was almost a pyramid, sloping down at the back via a scrawny and forward leaning neck to narrow and sloping shoulders. His hair sloped down from the crown with a narrow brow over steeply sloping eyebrows and his eyes were heavily lidded. The nose was quite protuberant and invariably wore a dewdrop. His mouth had a pendulous lower lip above a chin which receded sharply to a prominent Adam's apple in a scrawny neck. The shoulders also sloped steeply and there seemed to be no break between his shoulders and his arms which appeared merely to hang from him. His back was slightly stooped. The knees were always slightly bent and this together with his stooped back and his forward sloping neck head made his posture seem as though he would topple forward at any minute, hence I suppose why his name seemed so appropriate. The difficulty of fitting him with a uniform may well be imagined and most of his gear just fitted where it touched. We never discovered where he came from or anything of his family. He was a great romancer and lived in a fantasy world. How he got into the RAF and into MT the Lord only knows. However the soldiery is not only ribald but also cruel and Bob Morris and I inevitably became his protectors from the teasing and sometimes cruel pranks that were played upon him wherever he went.

So now we all three went on embarkation leave from which incidentally we were recalled early for which I was not totally sorry; I'm not into these fond farewell scenes. I was sorry for Mam and Dad. Richard and Joe had already been overseas for some time and now I too was going and nobody could put a period on it. I think it is appropriate at this juncture to pay tribute to Mother. She was not a highly educated literary person, but nonetheless she wrote to each of us every week without fail until we came home and by that time she was a very fluent letter writer. So back to Wythall to leave as I arrived on a fizzer. Then on to Blackpool to be kitted out with overseas gear. Is it going to be parkas and snowshoes or pith helmet and shorts? The rumours which abound. In the event it was tropical issue and we duly entrained for Liverpool where we boarded the Monarch of Bermuda a 22,000 ton P & O liner. The troopship perfectly encapsulates the class basis of our society. The ship was a luxury liner in peace time so it was designed for passengers, but the promenade decks were reserved to officers only and the thousands of troops had only limited areas fore and aft above decks, which becomes of some significance when in hot climates like the Mediterranean and Suez. We were fortunate in some respects in that we were placed in a crew's cabin just below the anchor chain locker. There were two negative aspects of this. Firstly there was only the steel sloping hull between us and the sea and secondly it was on Z deck which was just as far as possible to get below sea level.

A curious coincidence here. It was obligatory to do some sort of fatigue duty so I opted for the baggage party being the least onerous. In the middle of the Bay of Biscay I was detailed to go down to the baggage hold and locate a piece of luggage for Lieutenant Colonel The Right Hon. Lord Cholmondeley. Whilst doing so the roll of the ship caused me to fall and I cut my thigh badly. The point to this anecdote is to illustrate the class

difference. I had only a kitbag, he had enough to furnish a house; folding chairs, table, tents, beds. Perhaps he thought that the Japanese would be pleased to have him set up his camp and change into evening dress ready for his bearer to serve him his sundowner. There is a further point; his castle is just up the road from Shrewsbury beyond Whitchurch and I'm still here but he isn't for he died last year. Is he in a five star heaven, I wonder?

At this time the Eighth Army and Richard were doing reasonably well in North Africa and Malta was no longer under aerial siege so our convoy turned left into the Med and we became the first convoy to transit the Mediterranean since our inglorious ejection from Greece and Crete. The passage through the Med had not been without its tense moments. We had several times been brought to full alert so it was not without some relief that we commenced our passage down the Suez Canal. As we have our own ship canal back home in Salford, the concept was not completely new to me, nevertheless to be on this very large ship and gliding down the canal with desert on either side and being besieged by 'bum boys' was, I admit, quite foreign.

At Aden we transferred by lighter to another ship, again a P & O mailboat. The Ascania was its name but we quickly christened it The Altmark after a notorious German prison ship which had been captured in a Norwegian fiord. The Altmark was a fast passenger mail boat and was armed with a six inch gun fore and aft; she was also well past her 'sell by date'. Her conversion to a troopship had been relatively simple. They threw the hatch covers away and fitted fixed long tables and benches on each deck in each hold. Everyone ate, slept and stored their kit either on or under these benches or tables. The ship was totally infested with steam beetles which also appeared in all the bread and food. In the tremendous heat of our passage down the Red Sea the proles at last revolted and we swarmed all over the upper decks despite the dire threats of the army commander. Up the RAF. Mention of bread reminds me that when we boarded ship at Liverpool, our first meal aboard was of beautiful white bread and real butter in unlimited quantities. After the years of grey bread and margarine a veritable feast. Back to the Altmark, the only disturbance to an uneventful passage across the Indian Ocean being Kipling's flying fishes and the test firing of our two six inch guns which almost shook the old tub to pieces.

At last some four weeks from boarding ship at Liverpool we disembarked at Bombay. Here we made our acquaintance with the ubiquitous 'charpoy', a bed consisting of four wooden members and a post at each corner and the whole held together by coconut string. The camp was behind high rise luxury flats which fronted the sea into which untreated sewage was discharged, so it was all somewhat malodorous. However here we were going to war again and it was all very exciting. If one is going to war then one should be dressed properly for it and not like the cast of 'It Ain't 'Alf 'Ot, Mum', so the first days were spent in locating and bargaining with the dhurzi wallah, the nappy wallah, the dhobi wallah and so on. These gentlemen were respectively the Tailor, the Hairdresser and Barber and lastly the Laundryman. Finally having smartened ourselves up and drawn a little pay, Bob, Sydney and I hired a gharry and set off to see Bombay. A gharry is a sort of Victorian brougham, drawn in this case by an extremely decrepit horse. The junior to a gharry is a tonga which is akin to a two-wheeled trap. So we drive into the City. I have tried to describe for you how Market Street and Deansgate in Manchester appeared to me. Bombay is impossible, a maelstrom of noise and people and vehicles. Buses and trams full inside and outside too, cars and lorries all constantly sounding their horns, bullock carts totally unmoved by the pandemonium, vendors with

handcarts or with their wares on their head and all this compounded by a seething mass of pedestrians, indeed very exciting. It turned out we had little time for exploring and sightseeing. Every morning there was a 'posting parade' and very soon my own and Topple's names came up for posting to Rawalpindi in North West India and Headquarters of the renowned North West Army.

So Topple and I boarded a train for the long journey to the North West. We of course travel third class and I promise you it is not possible to get more than third class on Indian Railways. The carriages are rather like the trams and if you are lucky enough to be young enough not to remember, trams had seats of wooden laths along the length of each side of the tram and a similar back to back arrangement in the middle. I always found it best to sleep on the luggage rack, it avoids disturbance. We also discovered a new hazard (to us at least) of Indian travel. Now that we had got to the war, or nearly anyway, we were issued with rifles, the trusty Lee Enfields of course. The trouble was that about half of our trusty Indian subjects were also looking for Lee Enfields and if you lost your rifle it was court martial and twenty years to life in the glasshouse. All this and Topple too.

In the event we arrived at Pindi and found we were to form a new Wing Headquarters unit for parachute dropping operations. We were quartered in the Army's Victoria Barracks which quite literally dated from Victorian times. These were brick built with tiled roof and had a low verandah on each side. There was electric light but no fans. Instead the interior was kept cool by punkahs. These were something like racks for drying clothes and were suspended from the roof and cloths about six foot wide and a foot deep were hung from the racks. An arrangement of ropes and pulleys went from the racks to the verandah where the punkah wallah pulled and released the rope continually causing the racks and cloths to move thus disturbing the air in proportion to the vigour of the punkah wallah.

We were very soon in trouble. The time of the year was October and at that elevation it was cold at night. Indeed we had to be re-issued with blue uniforms and greatcoats. As I say it was October and the football season and in the interest of good relations we challenged the local Bazaar to a game. One of the problems was that we had not goalposts and to resolve this we manufactured a pair from a set of punkahs. So we had our game which we won and in which I kept goal. Now you are not going to believe this but I swear on my honour that it is true, our right winger was a lad named Steptoe and yes, you've got it, some of the opposition played in bare feet and I do not need to tell you the rest. The postscript to all this was a choleric NW Army Colonel on his tour of inspection and on finding his punkah's missing bellowing "Punkahs, sir? You can't saw punkahs!"

We established workshops at an airstrip about ten miles outside the town at a place called Chaklala. To establish our MT section we required about sixty vehicles and our MT officer decided to send Topple as mechanic escort to convoy the vehicles from Lahore some 300 miles away. I think he thought I had a vested interest when I asked him to send me instead of Topple. Topple did arrive back but had run out of tow chains and we had to send another party out to collect vehicles which had been left at the roadside between Pindi and Lahore. Topple was placed in charge of repairing bicycles ever after this.

Among the guys posted to us were two general duty men who had been escorted on to the boat having deserted to avoid overseas posting. Our adjutant in his wisdom promptly made them into SPS (Station police). Both of these guys had crises of conscience whenever it was necessary to salute an officer. This only applied to RAF officers, however, Army Or Navy were beyond the pale and warranted no respect or salute whatsoever. Since they were on duty on the main gate of the North West Army Headquarters each day there were more than an average number of Generals, Brigadiers and what have you passing in and out without being saluted. We all paid for this omission by having an hour's drill each night after work for fourteen days. We discovered that Our Squadron Leader Admin was an ex Regimental Sergeant Major and was not averse to exercising his larynx each evening to make us aware of it.

Topple had one of his more bizarre adventures here at Pindi. He was missing one morning and eventually discovered in the toilets where he had spent most of the night. The toilets consisted of a narrow brick building and the stalls on each side were simply a wooden seat with a bucket below, and the bucket was removed by the attendant sweeper through a trap on the outside wall. Over diligent sweepers had sometimes to be rebuked! Topple had answered a call of nature during the night and whilst lost in reverie had been interrupted by an ass which frightened by Topple had given vent to an horrific series of hee haws and terrified Topple out of his wits.

Our first Christmas abroad was spent at Pindi. There is a brewery at Murree up in the hills about fifty miles away, so the season was not spent in total sobriety. Our training went on daily. I remember there being problems with air drop containers coming adrift in mid-air. It was found that an Indian carpenter in our workshop was using matchsticks instead of steel pins in the hinges of the containers; we obviously were not universally popular amongst His Majesty's loyal subjects. In fact the most common cause of vehicle breakdown was a cloth stuffed into the petrol tank, the cloth disintegrated and blocked the fuel pipes. These anti- British sentiments were hardly to be wondered at. Each morning on our way out to Chaklala we would pass the prison and would see a file of prisoners fettered hand and foot and to each other and escorted by armed guards en route from the prison to the Magistrate's Court. Their crimes could hardly be so heinous as to warrant fettering hand and foot.

I have a regret that I never managed to get to Peshawar and into the legendary NW Frontier area. The nearest I got was to Kohat and the Attock bridge. The bridge was closed at night and if you didn't make it in time you were stranded in 'bandit' country.

Sometime about February we were told we were to move as a unit, destination unknown. It would be assumed that a Wing HQ responsible for parachute dropping operations would have travelled by air. Not on your life, we were to go by rail and this to rank as a train journey fit to be included amongst the BBC's 'Great Train Journeys of the World'.

I was to be one of the forward party and we duly boarded a train at Rawalpindi, with an officer and two NCOs in a second class carriage in the middle of the train, the rest of us numbering about ten at the rear and two goods wagons containing stores and our personal kit bags.

All went well until we reached Lahore where our carriage was detached and placed in a siding and we were surprised to see the rest of the train pull out. We thought that no doubt the RAF had everything in hand, that is until we approached the Station Master on the following day to enquire as to how long we might be in this siding. We were asked "Where are you going?". You have no idea how stupid you feel having to reply "I don't know". It was promised "enquiries would be made" and several hours later a locomotive appeared and we were on our way. Come nightfall however we were deposited in another siding and again repeated our approaches to the local Station Master. Again a loco appeared and again the dumping in a siding was repeated. We realised by this time that a basic principle of railways the world over was involved. This might be simply expressed (I really should not use the word 'express' in this context) as 'always dump your rubbish in next door's dustbin.'

No doubt you now are asking what we did for food and so on? Well, as it happened, we were carrying hard rations with us. These consisted of gallon sizes cans of corned beef, biscuits - edible when dunked and of course the inevitable tea and sugar. We also had five gallon size drums of McConochies stew. Also no airman with his knees brown would travel very far without his piala and irons which being translated means his knife, fork and spoon and the piala, an enamel mug not fully matured until heavily stained brown on the inside. It became our practice to light a fire between the tracks and heat up some stew or fry up some bully together perhaps with some eggs purchased locally. Boiling water for tea was obtained from any locomotive that happened to be around.

After several of these overnight stops we eventually arrived at a never to be forgotten village called Naihati. Here we were to remain for several days. Several guys established residence in the village, and I wouldn't deny the possibility of a permanent British influence there. Each morning the villagers would come to the siding carrying eggs and produce for sale. Having regard for their great poverty we must have been a real bonanza for them. At all events when we did eventually steam out the whole village turned out to wave us goodbye. Yes, rescue to hand, our officer had been located in Calcutta and two days later we steamed into Howrah station.

St James' College in Calcutta had been taken over by the RAF for use as a transit camp. After two days and a bath here we entrained again, complete this time with officer and NCOs and completed a two day trip across the Brahmaputra delta, then a day on a ferry followed by another couple of days on a train and a couple of hours lorry and we had arrived at our secret destination, Aga Tala in the State of Aukora which was ruled by a minor Rajah and is in what is known today as Bangladesh.

Of course when we had arrived in Calcutta the two goods wagons containing our personal gear and the unit stores had disappeared. We left two men behind to escort the wagons when they turned up. I met one of them some eighteen months later. The wagons had never turned up and as our destination was secret nobody knew where to send him! He got himself a job as despatch rider with the RAF post office in Calcutta, a very cushy number. The other guy (Steptoe, incidentally) we never saw or heard of again.

Whilst we were travelling through Bengal there was for some reason a shortage of rice and consequently famine conditions were prevalent in many places. We used to throw tins of bully beef from the train but to the Hindus the cow was holy and to the Muslim the meat was not halal and so they remained untouched.

So about four weeks after leaving Rawalpindi we arrived in the forward area. At that time we each had only one change of clothing and toilet gear and some time elapsed before it was accepted that our goods wagons would never turn up and we were re-kitted out. We were fairly smelly by that time. Thus ended one of the great train journeys of the world.

Aga Tala was in the middle of nowhere. At night it was possible to see the reflections in the night sky of the artillery fire at Imphal and Kohima. Our function was to airlift supplies over the 'hump' to Chiang Kai Chek at Chunking and also to drop supplies to the Chindits.

Accommodation was in bashas, huts built of bamboo and rattan and with thatched roofs. Not a single nail, not a bit of metal was used in their construction. Each section had a small site and each site was dispersed around the cookhouse. In our case the MT domestic site had two bashas and a small ablutions. Toilet facilities were fifty gallon drums with each end cut out and let into a pit with two bamboo poles for a seat. It was prudent before use to drop down some lighted newspaper which got rid of flies and snakes but, having done so, equally prudent not to sit down too quickly! All the domestic sites were separate from the HQ and work sites and we were one of many units dispersed around the Airstrip.

The country was generally bush country rather than jungle and there were snakes as well as puma. The climate was very hot and almost unbearably humid and one changed at least twice a day if possible. In the monsoon matches became too wet to strike if left out overnight and cigarettes would be damp and mould stained. Books and newsprint went mouldy almost immediately. Rats sheltered in the thatch and it was impossible to sit outside a mosquito net at night because of the insects one of which was the hard-backed flying beetle which we christened The Liberator after the largest aircraft in the world.

We soon settled into some sort of routine. Work was seven days a week with a day off on a rota basis. I used to enjoy the day off. One had the billet and the ablutions to oneself so after a leisurely breakfast (if it was worth going for), a leisurely shower and shave then a change into clean KD (Khaki Drill) and then all 'done up and dusted' to sit on the charpoy at your home made table to read and write. The mail plane from Calcutta used to fly out once weekly and drop the mail. Sadly on one occasion it came too low and crashed and all the crew were killed. It was so hot at the funeral that the guard of honour had difficulty in coming to attention because their boots stuck in the melted tarmac.

At first conditions all round were rather poor. Rations were awful. For several months they consisted almost entirely of soya links (sausages), corned beef, dehydrated potatoes and diced carrots with an infrequent egg thrown in, as it were. In India there is no NAAFI. All facilities - canteen, barber, tailor, laundry etc are let out to a contractor who sublets to the tailor or whatever and our contractor and canteen was equalled only by our cookhouse.

Writing of this reminds me that thereby hangs a story. The Fourteenth Army under General Slim was known as the Forgotten Fourteenth and indeed this was true of the whole campaign against the Japanese. Churchill eventually sent a personal representative Lord Moyne to investigate and report. As a result things eventually began to improve. For instance Australian frozen meat began to be flown in and tinned bacon appeared on our menu. More immediately our famous or otherwise Squadron Leader Fordham was posted (I don't think he had forgotten his old army tricks) at all events on his departure we also had the opportunity of a new contractor. Someone, I don't know who, had the brilliant idea, why don't we become our own contractor and so a committee was formed on which I represented the MT section. We really went to town, stole telegraph poles and miles of wire from the Ministry of Works, resurrected an old Chance Light, a mobile beacon used at the end of airstrips, and installed a lighting system throughout all the domestic sites. This enterprise was on a voluntary basis from dusk to 23.00 hours. On my duty nights I used to hate that late night walk through the bush to shut down the Chance Light. We opened up our own canteen, used Parachute silk for curtains and tablecloths if you please, we had electric light and we followed this up by installing a broadcasting system connected again to all domestic sites and broadcasting every evening, Family Favourites and all that stuff, we used to fly someone down to Calcutta every two or three weeks to buy the latest records available. It was better than Butlins - well nearly! One other benefit followed upon Lord Moyne; we were supposed to receive a beer ration, a bottle per man per month perhaps. In fact it only happened once before I was posted away.

And what of our own Sydney Topple during all this time. Yes, he is still with us. He went sick at one time and was put on light duties in the Officers' Mess. I don't think his shambling gait and undoubtedly clumsiness suited them and he was soon back in his little basha with his bikes where one day failing to surface for tiffin we found him collapsed on the floor. He was shipped out to hospital and I never heard of him more.

Recreation was mostly sport and despite the heat there was a football match nearly every evening. Most sections ran a team and sometimes games became a little acrimonious. I used to play at right half for our section team as did my mate Jock who was a professional and played for Third Lanark. He played for the station team as well and support was as rabid as for Man United or whatever. There is a natural amphitheatre near Chittagong and Jock was selected to play for a Services side against an International side. This had people like Compton, Bastin, Forbes, Lawton, Stan Pearson etc (memories of playing football with him as lads on Salford Fields) who became a United and England player. Only the geriatric amongst you will recognise these names now.

Another recreational activity was provided by our two recalcitrant policemen. They would recruit a 'patrol', scrounge a vehicle from us, don their RAF police armbands and go on 'vice' patrol to Aukora our local village. At Aukora was the residence of the 'Bibi (Lady) with the Golden Tooth'. The rest I need not explain further except that Aukora was strictly out of bounds and was regularly patrolled by real Military Police.

There were other rather odd but more innocent activities which were introduced to relieve the tedium, and the passions that these very often trivial pursuits generated was absolutely amazing. In our case a Ludo league was organised. This began as a bit of fun between two guys and then like 'little Alice' grew and grew and comparatively large sums were wagered on the results.

Speaking of large sums reminds me that very little money in cash was required as apart from the Canteen and the 'Bibi with the Golden Tooth' there was nowhere to spend it. However pay parades were held every two weeks, that is until the safe containing the money was stolen. The safe was kept in the accounts department basha and the night before pay parade a guard with fixed bayonet was stationed on the front verandah. However whilst our trusty sentinel is keeping faithful watch at the front our intrepid bandits are cutting through the rattan wall at the back and removing the safe. Crime did not pay in Bengal as elsewhere for the safe was eventually discovered inviolate in the bush.

To stress the isolation of a station like this it is perhaps worth relating the following little anecdote. In our guardroom cells we had incarcerated an airman awaiting court martial on a charge of murder. The story was that he had in a struggle knifed to death a Sikh officer who had made improper approaches to him. The point to my story is that it was quite common practice to leave this murderer in charge of the guardroom; there simply wasn't anywhere for him to go.

After a few months at Aga Tala I received a letter from Matt McGann, a friend from the Squires Club. He was in the Army and had been posted to India; could we arrange a leave together in Calcutta. We could and did. I cadged a lift on a kite going into Dum Dum the Calcutta Airport. We duly met and had quite a thrash between bars, cinemas and record shops where the latest hit was 'I'm Going to Buy a Paper Doll I Can Call My Own'. Matt was recalled from leave and I was left on my own and virtually broke with several days to go before I could get a plane back to Aga Tala. I used to fill my pockets with food at breakfast before skulking out of the Hotel for the rest of the day. All the itinerant hawkers from whom I had bought watches, pens, wallets declared 'nei, bohat karab, sahib' meaning that they wouldn't buy back from me, the goods they had sold to me were trash, worthless. But my guardian angel was near to hand. Whilst wandering hungry and disconsolate along Chowringee, Calcutta's main thoroughfare I chanced to meet Wilf Bond, a member of our unit back in Rawalpindi. He had been hospitalised and had found himself eventually in an Army hospital in Southern India. He had now been discharged and had been a couple of weeks in Calcutta trying to locate 177 wing so that he could rejoin us. He was in luck, I was probably the only man in Calcutta who could tell him and what is more get him on to a plane flying into the forward area. More important than this, having been in hospital all these many months he had only recently drawn pay and was lousy with money. To my eternal shame I still to this day owe Bondie five pounds, or should I say seventy five rupees.

One other episode is perhaps worthy of telling before we leave Aga Tala. The Forgotten Fourteenth was beginning to be remembered and Vera Lynn was the first star to come out to SEAC and she came to Aga Tala. Now there was a small cinema of sorts near the Strip and this together with all the operational installations was powered by an Indian Army generator and this generator chose to break down on this particular night. Hundreds and hundreds of men from all over the area were queuing outside the cinema and Jock McCann and I were detailed to tow an old RAF generator to the scene and hook it into circuit. We towed the infernal machine to the cinema. It had stood derelict through many monsoons and had no intention of foregoing its retirement. Finally all systems were checked and, urged on by the 'plain language' encouragement of the crowd, I overtightened the filter retaining screw of the petrol pump. All was lost, only a replacement pump would now do and where could we possibly cannibalise one of these in the time available?. The opening time for the performance was now well past and again our guardian angel came to the

rescue. The Indian Amy generator came back on stream to a huge cheer. Jock and I were too tired and dirty to see the show but later the unit was moved for a time to Camilla and we saw her there performing at night from the back of a four wheel drive Thorneycroft lorry. Actually it was quite a performance; she stood for two hours in the humid heat with insects falling from the rigged up arc lights, streaming with sweat and singing her heart out. She was received rhapsodically, and whether or not it be racist and sexist to say so, many of the men who saw her had not seen a white woman for perhaps one or two years and possibly this may have added to the enthusiasm of her reception.

I cannot remember how long it was after all this that in the RAF's wisdom I was posted to Cawnpore. The RAF Cawnpore was the biggest Maintenance Unit in the British Empire and was divided into two sections, one on each side of the town. One section was at Chakeri and maintained air frames, the other, TP1, where I was destined to be, serviced and maintained Pratt and Whitney aircraft engines. TP1 was divided into two parts, the domestic site, and some three or four miles away, the Technical or Works site.

But I anticipate my tale. The RAF is different from the Army and Navy in that the RAF very often moves individuals rather than units around so having been with 177 Wing from its inception it was quite a break to leave it and make my lonely way to Cawnpore. I scrounged a lift on a plane to Dum Dum and travelled there together with a load of Australian frozen beef. Found a Charpoy in St James College having decided to spend a few days in Calcutta, see the famous Black Hole and all that. The trick is to slip into the College without booking in, find an empty charpoy and put some gear on it and then to clear out avoiding the SWO at all costs. In this way, providing you avoid the SWO in his everlasting search for guard and fatigue duties, I am sure it would be possible to sit out the entire war. I only wanted a few days until the rupees ran out, after which I reported to the RTO at Howrah explaining my late arrival as being delayed en route and got forward papers to Cawnpore.

The sheer size of TP1 at Cawnpore was somewhat daunting and my early days were unpropitious. I very soon began to feel unwell and as always thought it would soon pass. Two weeks or more passed like this. I could not face food and heaped my bed with extra clothes in an effort to get warm. Finally on the day I almost collapsed it turned out that the duty corporal was in my billet and he booked me on to the sick parade. When I eventually saw the MO I was too distraught to tell him what was wrong with me. He put me to the back of the queue and later examined me and forthwith despatched me to hospital as suffering from yellow jaundice. It took several days before the array of doctors decided that I had malaria. The hospital of course was an army Military hospital and each morning the Colonel MO accompanied by his Major and Captain colleagues together with a civilian woman doctor and believe it or not a German civilian doctor did their round of the wards.

Truthfully I felt and was really ill by this time and I wasn't greatly reassured when the Captain came back one day to tell me I was going to be alright. It sounded more like a death sentence to me, not that I greatly cared. However I was put on a regime of massive quinine injections as well quinine by mouth together with ice baths every half hour. It must have worked and to prove it I'm here! I was in hospital for around six weeks and I had no idea it was possible to become so weak. I had always been reasonably regular in writing home and after some four weeks or so thought

that the folks at home would be getting anxious and it was time for me to be writing. However when I took up the pen to write I found that I was too weak and totally unable to control it and it was some ten days or so before I was strong enough to write.

A couple of weeks of light duties after being discharged from hospital was followed by fourteen days sick leave at an Army leave camp in the hills at Rhaniket. Rhaniket is about six thousand feet above sea level in the foothills of the Himalayas. From Cawnpore there is a rail trip to Bairelly and then by bus winding up through the hills to Rhaniket. Why, oh why have I never managed to return there? The buses are literally square wooden boxes set upon a lorry chassis and with unglazed openings for windows. On top is a luggage rack laden with miscellany of boxes, bags, bundles, goats and what have you. One forgets one is sitting on a wooden unupholstered seat amongst all these bodies and farmyard produce and animals as the bus winds slowly up around hairpin bends, up and down valleys, through forests and along raging streams and waterfalls and always in the distance, a sighting of the eternally snow capped peaks of the Himalayas.

The camp was set on a tree clad 1 in 4 slope above the town and the billets, built in Victorian times, had massive three-foot-thick stone walls under tiled roofs and had 'walk in fireplaces'. The camp was theoretically closed for the cold season so only one billet was open and we messed with the sergeants of the permanent staff. Didn't some people have a lovely war! The loo was an open fronted 'kiosk' about fifty yards down hill. I guarantee I beat Roger Bannister's time up hill when one night sitting there freezing I beheld two unblinking orbs gazing hungrily upon me. I didn't wait to establish whether it were panther or puma! I had a good time there, the local club ran a dance which wasn't completely overrun by servicemen. I must have had a good time because I had to perforce spend one night in the cells. All good things must come to an end and our previously mentioned sods law still operated; the day I went down back to Bairelly it started to snow. Had it been one day earlier I would have been marooned up there, probably through January and February. The drive down was very exciting, the Indian drivers are quite without fear. On this occasion a chico (boy) squatted on the floor of the bus by the driver and immediately the driver engaged third gear the chico had to thrust his shoulder with all his might against the gear lever in order to stop it jumping out of gear. When the driver wanted rapidly to change down to second gear he just threw the chico on the floor out of the way!

So back to TP1. Whilst in hospital I had at one time retched so badly I injured my ears and was almost deaf. On discharge from hospital I was told that I would be sent to Lucknow to an ENT unit to go before a repatriation board. Instead of this I and Ginger Cooper were sent on attachment to Bombay. This story I think epitomises military establishments the world over. Off Cooper and I go to Bombay having been told that we will neither be able to send or receive mail and will be sworn to secrecy. At long last the real war has arrived! We arrived at Bombay and report to the RTO who of course knows absolutely nothing about us. We are placed in a tented camp in a field surrounded by high rise luxury flats and day by day our numbers are augmented by arrivals of other bodies from all over India. Eventually a Flight Lieutenant appears. He knows not why he, or we, are there. Then one day he parades us, tells us all this is top secret and we are to be taken to a Fleet Air Arm unit where all will be explained. So we board lorries and are taken to the FAA base which is situated on the beach at Juhu, a world famous beach just north of Bombay. There are dozens of vehicles parked up and these we are to waterproof in readiness for a seaborne landing. This is a doddle - naval rations are far superior

to RAF and their cooks are better, they have to be or they get tipped over the side into the briny. Additionally we will be able to swim every evening and consume sundowners from the many kiosks on the beach. This is better than Butlins.

So we continue for a couple of months with this highly secret project until it is completed and all the waterproofed vehicles are neatly parked up in rows - in full view of the main north to south road which runs nearby. An Air-Vice Marshall comes along, thanks us for our services, tells us not to tell anyone anything and as a reward sends us on a day's outing to Elephanta Island on an RAF Sea Rescue launch. And so back to our unit at Cawnpore. I wouldn't mind taking even money that those vehicles are still there. Back also to three months arrears of mail and incidentally a 'Mespot' which you already wot of.

After only a few weeks back at Cawnpore instead of the expected referral to a repatriation board three of us were sent on detachment to Madras. The other two were Ginger Cooper and Alan Mackay who in civvy Street was an Elstree cameraman and also a paid up member of the Communist party. We used to have great Catholic/Communist arguments but none the less were good friends.

I began to wonder if I was unwanted at Cawnpore for I was away a good deal. I did several convoys to Calcutta. I remember meeting a white Chief Inspector of Police who took me around Howrah the centre today of Mother Theresa's operations. The poverty, squalor and the numbers are completely indescribable. On another occasion instead of pulling into a camp for the night we camped by a river. Very romantic, a silvery moon and across the placid stream a fire burning outside a village. We all had a swim and the inevitable MacConochies before bedding down in the back of the vehicles. In the morning we found a herd of cattle defecating in our stream and the fire across the stream turned out to be a funeral pyre, the remains from which were now floating downstream. Romance is always ephemeral. Another time I towed a vehicle over three hundred miles. In this instance we had Indian civilian drivers and they took it in turns to be towed. The reason for this is we were on dust roads and it was impossible to see the towing vehicle. We arranged a code of signals on the horn for brakes on, brakes off and so on.

Another time we had to take a flight simulator to Bhopal. We had two vehicles, an escort vehicle and a four wheel drive Thorneycroft. Since the simulator was on the secret list we were all armed with revolvers. The fact that none of had ever fired a revolver was irrelevant. So also was the fact that no one knew where Bhopal was and we had no maps. So we set off south and after three days happened to see a sign for Bhopal. The simulator was safely delivered and our secret did not fall into enemy hands. But the return journey did not go smoothly. Descending a very steep hill we had to negotiate a landslide which had left just sufficient road to edge oh so slowly past. When we got down on to the plain we discovered that our brakes, including the handbrake had failed and we had to drive over two hundred miles without brakes to a repair depot. Driving through an Indian village presents all kinds of hazards, stray cows, bullock carts and goats to name but a few so it became our practice to keep the horn going continuously whenever we reached a village. For the more technical among you, it is not possible to change down quickly on a non synchromesh gearbox in order to slowdown. One has to wait for the revs to 'die'.

But we digress and should now be on another famous rail journey en route to Madras. In this case we had to board a local train for a 250 mile stretch to Jahnsi where we should board the Delhi - Madras express which came through once a day. Unfortunately the express was always full so

the options were to wait at Jahnsi for the next day's express or to take a stopping train on to the next main station and try for the express further along the line. After three days and several bottles of this that and the other we decided to take the second option and boarded a local train. It proved not very successful but we did see Wardha, the home of Mahatma Ghandi (if he wasn't in jail, that is) and on another day we woke to find ourselves in Secunderabad a mere couple of hundred miles off route and we had to return to our route in an Indian Army troop train. By this time we were running short of cash and our alcohol tolerance was seriously impaired. We secured passage on the next express train by the expedient of unscrewing the label from a second class carriage which indicated that it was reserved for Muslim women. Can't stand this sexist racist stuff! Another two days of luxury and we were in Madras and aboard lorries to a camp twenty miles away. En route to the guard room to book in we met a group of janker wallahs in marching order, one of whom proved to be none other than my old opo from Salford and Cardiff, Bob Morris, last seen at Worli. He had been with an MT unit doing supply runs from Cox's Bazaar into the Arakan. I forget which particular misdemeanour he was doing jankers for.

This camp which was to be our abode for the next few months was what is colloquially known in the RAF as a paper bashing unit. That is they stored and distributed the multifarious forms without which no bureaucracy can function, a nice cosy little job. Their lovely little war was now severely disrupted by the arrival of several hundred men into tented accommodation. The capacity of the camp was exceeded several times over in number whereas the cookhouse, ablutions, toilets, canteen, water supply remained the same, all of which was to have consequences in the circumstances of the great events which were to come.

Shortly after our arrival at Madras, the war in Europe came to its long overdue conclusion. Celebrations in Madras were very muted, extending if I remember correctly merely to a Saturday afternoon off work and Liberty Gharries (Lorries) into Madras.

Our function was to waterproof vehicles and to take them to the docks and load them onto ships in preparation for a major seaborne landing, rumour having it that our final destination was to be Sumatra. For this purpose we worked from dawn until dusk seven days a week with a half day on Saturdays. This was OK except that sometimes at the end of the day there would be only a couple of inches of rusty water at the bottom of fifty gallon barrel to shower in and sometimes the rations were gone by the time we finished work at dusk. The canteen was very overpressed so latecomers were often unlucky in the matter of food and drink. All this created lots of tension so there were lots of disputes and sometimes fights.

As always we soon evolved a routine to deal with the situation. We were billeted in a tent which held six charpoys and we jointly employed a bearer. He was a Madrassi with virtually no English but his duties though vital were very simple. He straightened up the tent each morning and made up our bed rolls; he took and collected our washing each day to and from the dhobi wallah and then most importantly filled all our chattis and a large enamel bowl we had acquired with water. The enamel bowl was specially important in that Mackay had the foulest sweatiest feet you have ever sniffed so it was ruled that he must wash his feet every night. A little water was always saved to rinse the bowl out after his feet washing and we then took the bowl to the canteen, where by rota, one of us would take a place in the long queue before the tiny hatch from which was served the contents of a one hundred gallon barrel of Bangalore beer. The others meanwhile would secure a table and hopefully egg sandwiches

or whatever. When the famous enamel bowl arrived at the table we each dipped our piala (you remember, enamel mug) and we each would wonder that perhaps we were drinking the water from Mackay's sweaty feet. Without doubt it was the most horrendous brew, but like most alcohol it marginally improved on acquaintance.

The other main recreational activity was football and each Section had a team. The parent unit despite being only coggis wallahs (paper bashers) had a very good team and it was the ambition of each section to beat them. In this they would very often be assisted by the spectators who being gathered along the touchline would think nothing of sticking a leg out to trip the opposing winger if he seemed to be making progress, all of which sometimes led to a free for all and was not conducive to good order and discipline.

My daily routine suffered a severe interruption in that in jumping down from a lorry cab I jammed my right foot into a drum of waterproofing compound and damaged my ankle very badly. There were no medical facilities on the camp and I was given three days excused duties, Years later a Birmingham casualty department told me that I had indeed suffered a fracture of the shin bone. However at the time I soldiered on with a grotesque limp getting myself to ablutions and cookhouse as best I could. In fact was unable to kick a football for some three or more years afterwards.

The individual event was soon to be overshadowed by the public in a way beyond our imagination. We had thought that shortly we might at last be seeing angry Japs and that we might end up in Asian archipelagos, instead of which thanks to the good offices of President Harry Truman and the A bomb came the news on August 15th of the Japanese surrender.

It is impossible to describe the impact that this news had upon us. It was quite incredible that going home was now a practical reality whereas until the end of the war in Europe going home had become merely a very slightly less remote prospect.

In the event everything went out of control. Everyone by tacit agreement stopped work and DROs (Daily Routine Order) promulgated the following day as an official holiday and we were to have a special meal and a beer allowance in the canteen together with an official bonfire. We did indeed have a party and a bonfire. The station dance band played in the canteen until someone dived through the big drum. The orderly officer was so foolish as to appear and try to restore order and was chased off. The closure of the bar was frustrated by breaking into the front window, forming an orderly queue, filling one's receptacle and exiting through the rear window, and it was not thought appropriate to sully this transaction with any sordid financial implications. Meanwhile the official lighting of the bonfire had been anticipated despite the futile efforts of the duty officer. Indeed it was only with difficulty that myself, Mackay and one or two others managed to rescue him from being thrown on the fire. By this time the bonfire was being fuelled by the canteen furniture and by common consent it was decided that the bonfire be augmented by igniting the canteen itself. The canteen burned well despite the efforts of the Madras Fire Brigade to extinguish it, rather difficult when your hoses are being continually cut. This mayhem continued throughout the night with various parties rampaging through the camp generally threatening that 'if you weren't with them you were agin them'.

At last all was quiet and after a day to allow the temperature to subside there was a Group Captain's parade where there were two discordant notes. Firstly someone had defecated on the Groupies pennant and secondly the Army would be called in if there were a repetition of the previous scenes. He also announced that since our invasion preparations were no longer required we would all be dispersed to our units of origin as soon as possible. This happened much more quickly than would have been the case had there been no riot and within the space of a week or two I was back without further incident in Cawnpore. Here despite continually going sick with my gammy ankle I got no further than being eventually sent to Lucknow for an X-ray which did not reveal anything amiss and which led to my being threatened with a charge for malingering.

Shortly after arriving back I was detached to Chakeri our airframe section on the other side of Cawnpore. At this time the Dutch were having trouble in Indonesia where the Indonesians did not want the Dutch back again as their lords and masters. We were reconditioning aircraft engines for the Dutch Air Force to fight the rebels. A little unit of vehicles and cranes to load these engines on to aircraft to be flown to Indonesia had been formed and I was to look after it . A nice little job. Weeks about on morning and afternoon shifts and my own master.

By this time the RAF had reverted to peace time tropical hours which were 07.00 hours to 13.00 hours. The food at Chakeri was much superior to that at TP1. There was beer available at the canteen and Blighty could not be far away. I very quickly became the fourth member of a quartet which foregathered at the end of the billet each night having stocked up with beer and played cards until the wee small hours. The other three were Jock Lamb, a bookie from Glasgow, Joe Markham a publican's son from Barnsley and another Yorkshire guy whose name I cannot now recall. We never took the beer bottles back and not very gradually acquired a substantial bottle bank on a vacant charpoy.

Now it was very nice, when on the afternoon shift to have a very leisurely breakfast then to shower and shave without the madding crowd and then back on to the charpoy to read, write or whatever in peace and solitude. This I was doing one morning, lying on my charpoy covered only by a towel across my midriff when two guys walked in. The two guys turned out to be the Station Warrant Officer and the group Captain Commanding Officer.

I propped myself on elbow and looked at them in enquiry. The SWO looked at me and I looked at him and he literally exploded; "Who are you, airman, why aren't you at work? Get to attention when you addressing an officer!" - this last at a crescendo of fury although I hadn't said a word I rapidly jumped to attention and of course my towel fell off so there I was rigidly at attention and stark naked whilst the SWO kept shrieking "Cover yourself, airman" and I was shaking with barely suppressed laughter (sorry, no pun intended!). Finally I got a towel round me and managed to tell them that I was off shift duty. To the enquiry as to what were the beer bottles doing there I solemnly replied that I was here on attachment from TP1 and had absolutely no idea and to the stern admonition to see that they were got rid of replied "I certainly will, Sir," at which fawning assurance they proceeded on their tour of inspection.

This next paragraph relates to a rather more major and little known breach of discipline and the sequence of events must be preceded by a little exposé of the political situation at the time, which I think would be about November 1945. The Labour Party having had their landslide victory in the general election were now in power and their touch was not very deft. The European war had ended in May and the Japanese in August and there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with both the rate of repatriation and the rate of demobilisation. For instance, a youth of eighteen who had only been in the RAF for six months and in India for two was repatriated and demobilised in October whereas I who had been overseas for more than three years was still there and with no signs of going home. This particular case I know at first hand because the guy was in my billet at Chakeri.

Thus then we have this very general dissatisfaction, but I would have put it no higher than that. This however is what actually happened and is at first hand from a participant: - passing along the servery at breakfast everybody was asked to attend a meeting in the recreational hangar that evening . Just that, neither more nor less than that. Of course everyone's curiosity was thoroughly whetted and at 6.00pm everyone was streaming to the recreation hangar. When we arrived, there were three guys in the boxing ring and very soon proceedings commenced, but not before the hangar doors were locked and guards posted with instructions to admit no officers. After this we were harangued as to the injustices of demobilisation and the iniquity of the government and whilst there was no direct accusation it was implied that we were being kept under arms in case we were needed against the Russians. The proposition being put to the meeting was that we should go on indefinite strike until the government had agreed our terms in respect of demobilisation. I forget now the precise terms, but the strike was to commence after pay parade on the next Friday, and only cookhouse, medical and radio personnel would be permitted to work. The reason radio personnel worked that all major RAF bases throughout the Middle East and Far

East were to strike at the same time, and radio personnel were required to maintain contact with other striking units. The word 'strike' in this context is of course a euphemism; action by three or more men is construed as mutiny under military law and can carry the death penalty in time of war.

The Officers' Mess had evidently become aware of the migration to the sports hangar and now came en masse and with side arms and announced their presence by thundering on the hangar door. The response inside was for our three mentors to instruct us to break up into parties of not more than two and to turn away from the boxing ring so that there would be no focus to the meeting and to disperse to our billets as soon as the hangar doors were open and to make only non committal replies if spoken to directly by an officer. When all was ready the doors were unlocked and the officers surged in demanding to know what was going on and despite my erstwhile friend the Group Captain addressing the assembly from the ring nobody would respond to him.

And so after pay parade on Friday all work ceased and my Indonesian rebels had a clear run for about three weeks after which work was resumed. One of the most unwelcome results of the strike was that beer sales were suspended for the duration of the strike but it did allow us to get rid of our bottle bank! It so happened that at this time the Minister for War was in India and he came to Cawnpore and addressed us from the famous boxing ring. He lost on points and was heckled quite severely. His name as I remember Lawley or something similar. However one result of his

visit was the formation of 'Welfare Committees'. The COs obviously could not treat with mutineers but they could with Welfare Committees. Another result was that the Committee was given access to the demob and repat records and it was discovered that a ballet dancer with only a little over twelve months service had been released on the grounds that his 'working' life was short, honest, I kid you not. The final outcome was that a class A and a class B release with points for length of service and time overseas was introduced. I honestly think it all made not the slightest bit of difference.

I have gone into this at some length in order to make two points. Firstly when I did eventually get home I found to my amazement that no one at home had ever heard of this event. Imagine it, the whole of the Air Force from the Middle East right through India and down to Singapore had mutinied and not the slightest hint of it had appeared in the press, nor has subsequently, so far as I know. It always behoves us then to consider what does not appear in the press! The second point is the aftermath. My friend Mackay back at TP1 took the place of someone from the MT section on the Welfare Committee, but apparently the minutes were never altered accordingly. Some few weeks after the strike three RAF Special Investigations Branch arrived, an officer and two NCOs and interviewed all the committee people. Now Mackay was a fully paid up member of the Communist Party and as he was already under orders for repatriation he was worried. When it became his turn for interrogation it turned out that these SIB guys knew his party branch number, his party number, how long he'd been a member and so on, so he was a lot more than worried when he came back from his interrogation. His repat went through and nothing further happened as far as he was concerned, but I think only the omission in altering the minutes saved him. Shortly after the departure of the SIB the station police went through the camp at night rousing selected people who were sent to Bombay under escort. The ringleader at Chakeri went home on repatriation but was arrested when he came down the gangplank from the ship in the UK.

There can be little doubt that this was a Communist conspiracy, the scale of organisation was such that it was impossible that it could be considered being spontaneous and for myself after this I never took reds under the bed allegations lightly. Shortly after the strike excitement there was a major disaster at TP1 and the way of it was this. The layout of the domestic site was a large rectangle of brick built billets on brick bases the walls having shutters and with a door at each end exiting onto a verandah, the whole under a thatched roof. In the centre of the rectangle were two cookhouses and dining halls and at the back of the rectangle were sick quarters. At the gate of the site was the guardroom and next to the guardroom was the lorry park and the MT billets were on the corner of the rectangle abutting directly on the lorry park. When I was in residence at TP1 my charpoy was in the first MT billet. Now there was a tree by this billet which was home to a tribe of monkeys and on this particular morning one of my cronies in the billet, Paddy Gillard found a monkey in his charpoy. The monkey was evidently sick and Paddy and the bearer had great difficulty in getting it to move out of the billet and the bull monkey became very hostile when he found them chasing one of his tribe. Finally Paddy's charpoy was changed and he proceeded to grab some shut eye. The next he knew he was being roused and barely had time to get on to the verandah before the roof collapsed in flames. I believe that the flames move along the thatch faster than a man can run. The flames swept diagonally across the camp totally destroying fifty per cent of the billets and one of the cookhouses. The footnote to the story is that according to the Indians a dying monkey is unlucky. The second footnote is that being only on attachment at Chakeri most of my gear remained at TP1, books, letters, a civvy suit bought against repatriation, all went up in flames and nor was there any compensation of any sort.

A couple or three weeks after the fire I was recalled from Chakeri to TP1 and the recall was a result of peacetime reorganisation. Whilst I had been away the MT section had been put in the charge of Pilots Officer Trim and Warrant Officer Garnet who I'm sure must have been the inspiration of the 'Carry On' films. Trim was a tall thin ineffectual man who couldn't say boo to a goose. WO Garnet was a long serving general duties regular and had the worst squint that I have ever seen in my life and was inclined to be somewhat irascible. Under the peacetime regime we had a lot of aircraft engine fitters surplus to requirements and Messrs. Trim and Garnet thought that they could be used in the MT section. Now we must have had around two hundred vehicles of one sort or another all of which were supposed to have their five hundred, one thousand mile and so on inspections. The idea was to have a production line where the vehicle drove in at one end and someone took the distributor off and then at the next point someone took the petrol pump off and so on. Of course aircraft engine fitters know nothing whatever about car and lorry engines much less about clutches, gearboxes, back axles etc and the nett result of this 'line' production was serviceable vehicles were entering at one end and going out on the end of a tow chain at the other. The immediate reason for my recall was that Jock Hamilton, who actually came from Hamilton in Scotland, and who besides myself was the only competent MT wallah on the strength was posted home and in addition to a very high rate of unserviceability they had a mobile crane with a thirty foot jib slewed and stuck up in the air and immovable in the middle of the yard. So back I came and sorted out the worst of their disasters as a result of which Messrs. Trim and Garnet invited me into the office and invited me to take a 'board' after which they would make me up to sergeant. Upon being asked who would constitute the 'board' they replied that they would and seemed quite hurt when I cast doubt upon their competence and refused their offer.

WO Garnet was a smallish square set man with a bucolic complexion and this awful squint and a somewhat worse manner of expression. I remember being in his office when an Indian airman (a Pathan, one of the north west tribes) asked for a chit to get some money from pay accounts. It emerged that the airman had just returned to duty after doing time in the glasshouse for desertion. The reason he had deserted was because he had been refused leave to go home and kill a man who had dishonoured his sister. Mr Gamet's response to the request for a pay chit was one of classic simplicity. He said to his clerk: "Give this airman a chit to say that he has been inadvertently prevented from attending pay parade".

I think that Pilot Officer Trim's supreme solecism "I'd never get a job like this in civvy street" is fitting comment to end our account of the Mutt and Jeff duo.

It was about this time that I rescued a white civilian couple from a roadside breakdown and it turned out that the man was no less than The Collector. I have to advise you that the Lord Mayor, The Chief of Police, The Chief Magistrate, The Treasurer and the whole panoply of power in and around Cawnpore are embodied in the person of The Collector. In this case he appeared to be a modest and unassuming man and I was rewarded for my rescue by an invitation to tea at the Residency, an imposing white building with a verandah and cool marble floors and yes, the odd tiger skin strewn around and hunting trophies on the walls. Tea was served by men servants in turbans and white knee length tunics buttoned down the centre from the collar and wearing wide crimson cummerbunds. He spoke very openly of the difficulties of exercising his powers and responsibilities in the prevailing political climate in India. An interesting glimpse into the stark realities of power.

I am reminded by this of an incident which occurred whilst I was at Chakeri. One of the Roustabout Crane/Tractors required repairs which could only be carried out at the Central Repair Organisation in Cawnpore so I duly trundled down to the town centre at a speed of ten miles per hour, the maximum possible. As a direct result of the ending of the war the British Government was implementing its promise to hold elections to the provincial and national governments and the contest, principally between the Congress Party and the Muslim League was in full swing. In fact, as I discovered at CRO, they were in such full swing that four Europeans and their bicycles had been tipped into the canal and inter-communal violence was such that the town had been placed out of bounds to British troops and CRO was closing down and I had better get the hell out of it ASAP. There was nothing for it but to mount my ‘chariot of fire’ and hope for the best for my two hour journey. All went well until I was stopped at a level crossing and a Jai Hind vehicle with a hundred or so electioneering wallahs clinging on stopped right next to me. So there I was sitting on an open tractor and all these guys are leaning over and shouting and cursing at me and I'm trying to pretend that they are not there. Had the hook of the crane not been tied up I would have slewed the jib and cleared the lot of them off the lorry. Luckily a squad of police with their lathis at the ready came by and stood between us until at long last the train came and the crossing opened and I could go. However as if to prove the even handedness of the British Raj, some miles down the road I met a Muslim League procession and without benefit this time of police protection had to endure a hail of stones from them until safely past and out of range. From these incidents have concluded that firearms can escalate dangers, I am quite sure that had I been armed I was frightened enough to have fired and who can say what the end would then have been. I sympathised with my Collector friend in having to deal with such situations on a much larger scale. I wonder what happened to him when Attlee and Mountbatten so pusillanimously abandoned power and left the sub continent to its blood bath.

We are now nearly at the end of our Indian Saga and indeed of our military history. I am not sure that it has parallels with the Good Soldier Schweik except in its futility. RAF India however had one nasty little trick up its sleeve. After returning from Madras, two of us booked a safari from Rahnicket to a glacier in the Himalayas. This was in effect a week's trek there and a week's trek back all complete with bearer, guides, tents and what have you and was to take place early in 1946. In November '45 my repat came through and the safari had to be cancelled. I went through all the routine of clearing station, had collected my travel warrants etc and on the morning of my last breakfast in Cawnpore a notice in the cookhouse said that airmen proceeding that day on repatriation would not.

From that day on until I was repatriated in August 1946 I conducted my own one man strike. I never went to work or attended any parades except (yes, you've guessed it, pay parade). Circumstances have always conspired to thwart a lifetime's ambition to return to Rhanicket and do that safari and now even were it possible, my health would not permit, so I find it hard to forgive the RAF that unnecessary cancellation.

So not with a bang but a whimper did I while away my time in Cawnpore and India until in August when I embarked upon the troopship Georgic at Bombay at last really en route to the UK.

Very different to the voyage out. The Georgic was newly built and specifically designed as a troopship. The accommodation was in two tiered steel bunks and catering was on a self-service basis. All very much more civilised than the outward trip and I suspect owing much to American example.

The voyage passed without incident except that we had a man go missing overnight in the Bay of Biscay and the ship spent several hours circling in the fog with the foghorn mournfully sounding off at short-spaced intervals. Perhaps the guy couldn't face the forthcoming socialist Utopia.

We left the unavailing search and awoke the next morning to find the Welsh mountains on our starboard and the Liverpool Pilot Boat bearing down upon us from the North, and in the course of a few hours were docked within sight of the famous Liver building.

The account of my return to Salford and the closing weeks of my military saga are related in Chapter four of 'Down Arches of the Years' and so finally it is, Attention, Right turn, Dismiss!