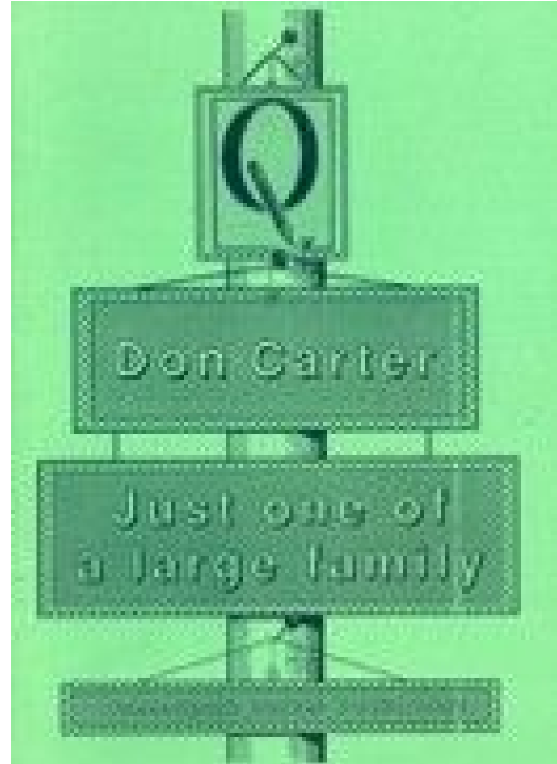
About QueenSpark Books



QueenSpark Books was founded in 1972 as part of a campaign to save the historic Royal Spa in Brighton's Queen's Park from being converted to a casino. The campaign was successful and it inspired participants to start collecting memories of people living in Brighton and Hove to preserve for future generations. QueenSpark Books is now the longest-running organisation of its kind in the UK.

More than one hundred books later, as part of our 45th anniversary celebrations, we are making the original texts of many of our out-of-print books available for the first time in many years.

We thank you for choosing this book, and if you can make a donation to QueenSpark Books, please click on the “donate” button on the book page on our website. This book remains the copyright of QueenSpark Books, so if reproducing any part of it, please ensure you credit QueenSpark Books as publisher.

About this book

This 1992 book is a personal account of living in the Tenantry Down neighbourhood of Brighton in the1920s and 30s. Don Carter describes his childhood in the Hartington Road area of Brighton, where nearly all the roads are named after places in the Isle of Wight. Don can claim to be a true Brightonian, having been born and bred in the city. His boyhood territory was the vast, almost rural, valley of the cemeteries and the allotments of Tenantry Down.

Life for working people in Brighton was hard, and Don and his many brothers and sisters were raised by their father after the death of his mother in a time when the poor had no electricity, there was no NHS and people worked long hours just to make ends meet.

Copyright QueenSpark Books 1992
www.queensparkbooks.org.uk

Just one of a large family

Home life

I was born in a flat at 97 Shanklin Road, Brighton. The house was near the top of the road. I was the tenth and last of my mother's children. The first three were boys, the last of which died suddenly at six months, as the result of some kind of convulsion. A neighbour was keeping an eye on him while my mother was hanging out the washing. She noticed a sudden change in the baby's appearance, called to my mother to come quickly, but he was already past human aid. Naturally there had to be an inquest which my father attended. The doctor told him that he was one of the finest and healthiest babies anyone could wish to see, it was one of those inexplicable tragedies that happen from time to time, and that no-one should feel that they were to blame in any way.

First three boys, then three girls, then three more boys. By all the laws of progression I should have been a girl. The family had no doubts about me being a girl, they had already chosen my name, I was to be Dorothy Rose. What a disappointment for them all when I arrived with all the wrong attachments. There had to be a quick re-think. Some names are regarded as being suitable for both sexes, for example Leslie, Tracy and Ashley. I once went to school with a boy named Evelyn, maybe he was meant to be a girl, but whoever heard of a boy named Dorothy? Eventually they came up with the name Donald. Don I don't mind, but Donald seems more suitable for someone living north of the border among all those wild clansmen who used to throw those massive curling stones over Hadrian's Wall at the marauding Sassenachs, and then had the cheek to ask for the handles back.

As children we had all the usual bickerings, petty arguments and squabbles common to all families, but as we grew older we became a very united family, especially in times of difficulty. We all married eventually, and went our separate ways. If help was needed it was forthcoming, but we never interfered in each other's domestic affairs, unlike some families, where a wedding or a funeral is an excuse to open up old wounds, or inflict new ones.

At Christmas time 1925 my mother collapsed, she had probably been unwell for some time. In those days people avoided going to the doctor. Doctors meant expense, an expense most families couldn't afford, and like the good mother she was she put her children's welfare before her own. Eventually she had to go to the doctor, who passed her on to the Women's Hospital in Windlesham Road. My eldest sister accompanied her. After she had been examined, the consultant told my sister that she was to take her mother to the Royal Sussex County Hospital where a bed would be waiting for her. It was there that they operated on her for cancer of the bowels. The surgeon told my father that her illness was terminal, and shortly afterwards she was transferred to the Infirmary, now the General Hospital. It was just six weeks from that first examination until her death.

It seems that those for whom the doctors could do no more were sent to the Infirmary, now the General Hospital, and older people would say to each other, "They've sent him/her up the Top," in a hushed voice. They dreaded "the Top", for it also housed the Workhouse, where those who had no-one to care for them in their declining years would in all probability finish up. They spoke of "the Top" with dread in their voices, but it was nowhere near as bad as they imagined it to be. They looked upon it as an affront to their pride.

I was just six years old at the time of my mother's death. I have heard people say in similar circumstances, "Oh he/she is too young to understand," and it is difficult to understand the workings of a child's mind. I have few memories of my mother, but I know a lot about her from what my father and my family have told me.

I would like to tell of those memories, and of how her death affected me. My mother died on Wednesday 5th May. I remember being brought home from school that sad afternoon, all those sitting in our living-room were red-eyed with weeping. As my two older brothers came in from work they just looked, they did not have to ask what had happened, and they also burst into tears. My mother knew she was dying and she had told my father that she wanted to see all her children for what was to be the last time. We were taken to see her on the Sunday prior to her death on the Wednesday. She had suffered physically, but one cannot imagine the mental agony that she, and my father, must have gone through on that occasion. She was just fifty years of age.

Motor cars were just starting to be used for funerals at that time, and one of the last words my mother said to my father was, "Whatever you do Tom, don't rush me up the cemetery in one of those motor cars, and try to keep the family together." He carried out both her wishes.

She was taken to the cemetery in a hearse pulled by the black horses with their black plumes, as was customary at that time. The horses used were a Belgian-bred horse, considered most suitable for that purpose. The younger members of the family, myself included, stayed with a neighbour, the older ones went to the funeral.

Death is something difficult for a child to understand. In my own mind I realised that some terrible catastrophe had overtaken us, and I can remember sitting in school years afterwards, and a feeling that some terrible event was about to occur would come over me. Always it seemed to me that tragedy was never far away. The neighbours had always had a great respect for my mother, and often they would invite me to their children's parties. Far from appreciating it, I seemed to resent it, and if it was possible to get out of it I would.

I can remember my thoughts on these occasions, they were, "They only invite me because they feel sorry for me." I resisted all attempts of people to make a fuss of me, I refused to be cuddled, and in spite of being told to, I cannot remember ever kissing any of my aunts. I was a most ungrateful child. It was as if I was saying "If I can't have my

mother I don't want any of you others." They say that no-one can really take the place of a child's natural mother, maybe this was it. I write this only to explain what can go on in the mind of a child.

I have never ever forgotten the mother I hardly knew. During the war as I lay under my mosquito net or stood on guard in the depths of the Burmese jungle, I would think of her and struggle to hold back a tear.

In such a large family it is necessary to establish some sort of law and order. To allow everyone, or even anyone, to have their own way, would inevitably end in chaos. We lived by a set of unwritten rules. Following my mother's death my two eldest sisters took over the running of the home. When my father was not at home, their word was law. My father insisted that they were not to be at a disadvantage because they had given up their jobs to care for the family. They had their half-days off and after Sunday midday, if they went out and did not choose to come home to tea, then it was up to the others to set the table and do the washing-up. My eldest brother was told to give my eldest sister her pocket-money from what he earned, and my next eldest brother provided the other one with her pocket-money. My two sisters were just nineteen and seventeen, it was a heavy responsibility, but they did their job well.

As for the unwritten rules I have spoken of, they were roughly as follows. Money was tight, whatever was available was shared equally, no-one was allowed to take any mean advantage of another, cleanliness and a smart appearance were a must, table manners had to be observed, meal times were strictly adhered to, anyone arriving late for dinner without reasonable excuse would find their dinner on the table getting cold. The greatest crime in my father's eyes was to waste food. He had experienced hunger after his own father died when he was only four. Any food left on one's plate at one meal would be served up again at the next meal.

The same rules that applied at home were even more strictly applied when we went out. Dad would inspect us before we left home, no hands in pockets, no running, no deviation from the set route. If my father stopped to talk to anyone we had to stand to one side and keep quiet. We had to respect older people, on no account were we to find any amusement at the expense of anyone who happened to be odd, eccentric or disadvantaged, as children are apt to do. My father would quickly remind us to count our blessings, if he even suspected such a thing was happening. It wasn't often we used public transport, but if we did we were always told to give up our seats to ladies, and the elderly or crippled, or to help the old or blind across the road.

When we were all young money was short, but we never went hungry. My father grew all his own vegetables, and he made sure we always had a good dinner, being a Sussex man. Suet puddings figured on the menu on most days, bacon puddings, meat puddings, stews with suet dumplings, apple puddings. On Sundays a suet pudding was cooked at the same time as the roast dinner, it was cut into slices and dipped into the fat of the baking tin, this was known as drip pudding, we loved it.

Every Saturday after my mother died my father would get up at 5.30 and make a meat pudding, it was then placed in a cast-iron pot and it would simmer away until he arrived home at 1 pm. Saturday was his half-day, and a meat pudding was his favourite. One would think that a good helping of this and a plate full of vegetables would be enough to satisfy anyone's appetite, but not in our house. This was followed by a plain suet pudding on which we spread either golden syrup or jam. I am sorry, I forgot to mention spotted dog and another favourite, pond butter pudding. Where are the slimmers of the 1920s and 30s, they just didn't exist. Looking back I often wonder how my father managed to climb up the hill to his allotment after such a meal, yet he remained a steady nine stone six pounds all his life. The best slimming aid is hard work, and he certainly knew all about that.

Tenantry Down

The allotments at the top of Elm Grove known as Tenantry Down were brought into being during the 1914-1918 war, with the idea of boosting food production and giving those who were able a chance to provide their family with fresh vegetables. The Corporation laid out the main pathway and pegged out the plots, and agreed to remove the flints that were dug up. It was not exactly ideal ground for the purpose.

My father, probably with the help of my two eldest brothers, dug up thirty-two cartloads of flints. These were probably used for roadmaking. Flint knapping was a recognised trade in those days and there are still many fine examples of Sussex flint walls throughout the county.

By the time I was old enough to go to the allotment, my father, by copious applications of pig manure and compost, had nurtured the soil into a condition where he could grow most things successfully. Not just because he was my father, but because he was a good gardener who put every spare moment into the job, I am able to say that his two plots were among the best, if not the best, at that time. He could see a weed from a mile off. Often I have been walking up the path with him when suddenly he would be gone, and there he would be in the middle of the potatoes or cabbages. He had seen a weed. He always said he pulled up a weed to make room for the next lot to grow.

At one time, the whole of Craven Vale, Hollingbury and Hollingdean were either covered in allotments or smallholdings. There were also allotments at Whitehawk, Patcham, Wilsons Avenue, and other sites. Four thousand allotments in the Brighton area. This was in the days before men spent their Sunday mornings laying on their backs under motor cars.

My two older brothers followed in their father's footsteps. They became good gardeners. My oldest brother won the runners-up prize for the best allotment in Brighton one year. The following year he took first prize, and the year after that the Council took his allotment for building houses. For the next two years he was so upset he didn't want to

know anything about gardening, but he eventually came back to it. I regret to say that I didn't take the same interest in my father's garden as they did. I sometimes wish now that I had.

In the early thirties the various groups of allotmenteers began to form their own Allotment Societies. This enabled them to buy seeds, fertilisers and various other garden requisites in bulk and proved to be of mutual benefit to them all. It also fostered a community spirit among people with a common interest, who were able to swop information and ideas. Allotmenteers have in the main been unselfish people. A man whose cabbages were a little bit in advance would always give one to a man whose cabbages were not quite ready, knowing full well it would be returned perhaps in some other way.

The Tenantry Down allotmenteers lagged a little bit behind other groups when it came to forming themselves into a Society. My father was very keen on the idea, so during the course of two weekends he contacted as many people as he could to see if there was sufficient interest in the idea. He made it quite clear that he had no wish to be looked upon as the Big I Am in the organisation. He merely wished to get it off the ground and after that it was up to the members to conk forward with their ideas and make it into a good Society. A preliminary meeting was held and officers elected. Some felt that as my father originated the idea he should be on the Committee, and he agreed to take on the post of Vice Chairman.

Having a large family to feed, my father planted forty-two rows of potatoes each year, and in order to find space he planted his green stuff in between the rows. I never ever remember any member of our family having to go to the greengrocers. As he dug up his potatoes he laid them out on the concrete floor of his shed to dry, and when they were ready it was our job to put them in sacks. My father had built himself a hand truck. It had very stout wheels and long handles. When it came time to bring the potatoes home, two sacks were placed in the body of the truck, one across these two sacks, and one across the handles.

We did not come home our usual way via Hartington Road, that was much too steep. We came home via Elm Grove and Bernard Road, with Dad supplying a steadying hand when needed. At home the end of the garden shed was divided into three sections or bins. The potatoes filled two of these. In the early part of the year when the potatoes began sprouting, it was our job to remove the spears from them and transfer them to the empty bin.

My father's usual route home from Tenantry Down was via May Road and Hartington Road. Over the years he got to know quite a few people merely by passing the time of day with them. Sometimes in the long summer evenings an old age pensioner would be standing at their gate, taking in the fresh air before going to bed, and if my father had any produce to spare, there would be a cabbage for one or a bunch of flowers for another. Despite his own problems my father could always find time to spare a thought

for others. Being a railwayman, my father had a small plot of ground at London Road Station. It was nothing unusual for him to leave home at 5.30 in the morning and indulge in a spot of gardening before walking along the line to work.

On this plot of ground he had two or three rows of pinks, those flowers with a lovely clove smell. So many people passing over the footbridge asked him if they could buy a bunch that it became a job for two of us boys to stand up by the wall adjacent to the Springfield Hotel with a trug basket full of bunches of pinks. We were not allowed to approach anyone to buy our wares, that in my father's eyes was begging and, poor as we were, we did not stoop to begging. No going out on the streets with Guys or carol singing. Begging was a non-starter.

From the money gained from this little enterprise we were paid commission. I believe it was 2d in the shilling. This was stored away in a box and shared out equally when we spent our holidays in the country, but that is another story. My father's share of the money went towards paying his garden rent and next year's seeds.

Looking back to my early life I realise what a good father I had. I learned things from him that do not appear in any text book. One day my brother was introduced to a man who had worked with my father for many years. He shook my brother's hand and said these words: "I am proud to shake hands with you. Your father was the straightest man I ever knew." I think that says everything about him.

Our neighbours

It is quite possible that most of our neighbours had moved into the adjoining flats soon after they were built, and quite a few within a short time of being married. Most of them would have been in their early forties when I was a child, and although as children we thought of them as being old, there were a few who were older, and we regarded these as being ancient.

They were just ordinary decent working folk intent on earning a living, and doing their best for their wives and families. They were pleasant, sociable, honest, ready to help if needed, but for the most part getting on with their own lives and not in the habit of running in and out of each other's houses. I cannot remember what could be called a serious row between any of them. That is not to say they did not have the idiosyncrasies.

For the most part they all had regular jobs, but money was not exact plentiful. At the outbreak of the 1939-1945 war the rate of pay for craftsman would be about one shilling and sixpence (7 1/2p), and for labourer about eleven pence or at most one shilling (5p). Where I worked rates were slightly higher, one shilling and eight and a half pence for craftsmen, and anyone employed as a labourer there was the envy of all other labourers at one shilling and three pence an hour. This must be looked at in perspective. The very best butter would be about ten pence a pound (4p), a loaf or a bag of sugar about four

pence (say 2p) and a Sunday joint for somewhere between two shillings and three and a half shillings.

Many of our neighbours did summer letting. This was in the days before holiday camps and package tours. Many people never had a holiday. How they squeezed their summer visitors into those small flats I will always wonder. Often it was at considerable inconvenience and discomfort to themselves. One couple I knew who lived in a top flat used to wait until the visitors had gone to bed, and then they bedded themselves down on the landing at the top of the stairs.

The husband of one of our neighbours, who had a slightly better job than most, seemed to keep his wife short of the necessary. She would appear on our doorstep to ask for a cup of flour or maybe sugar, or sultanas, none of which was ever repaid. She also kept a few chickens, and I have lost count of the number of times she came to our door holding an egg in her hand and saying "Brownie has laid an egg today, would you like to buy it?" This visit always corresponded with the time of our midday meal. I think it ended the day one of my brothers called out "Oh gawd, Brownie's laid another egg."

Her husband had the habit of reading the paper in bed with a magnifying glass. She always referred to him as "Mr --------" or "my Henry". It would appear that when Henry had finished with his newspapers they were stacked up in neat piles under the bed. A sort of Reference Library of the Chambre de Lit. One day Henry dropped his magnifying glass under the bed. Apparently it was beneath Henry's dignity to look for it, he left that menial task to his poverty-stricken wife. Not being the proud owner of a torch, she looked for it with a candle. She was not short of torch for long. While all this was happening my two sisters were changing the curtains and cleaning the front windows. Suddenly they saw a very agitated woman in the street outside. Unfortunately she had come to our door once too often, and my sisters treated her as if she was the boy who kept on crying out "wolf" and when the wolf came no-one took any notice.

After a few more moments she again appeared gesticulating even more wildly than before. My sisters then relented and thought they had better go and see what was wrong. Fortunately an old man living up the street had dragged the burning mattress into the road and went back and dealt successfully with the fire. One wonders what Henry had to say about that lot.

Another neighbour who lived a few doors away was married to a plumber. The doorstep was communal to both the top and bottom flats, except that it was divided centrally by a railing. Lashed up to this railing on their side was a cast-iron bath of considerable dimensions, the legs of which protruded to such an extent as to make entry to the flat an awkward and dangerous venture. These railings were sacrificed as scrap metal to assist the war effort. I presume the bath suffered the same fate. The back garden, or what we could see of it, was like Steptoe's yard.

One day a parrot was seen flying about in the cemetery, and the son of the old lady who owned it climbed over the wall, and with somebody else's help he managed to catch it. Being an escaped cage bird I don't suppose its powers of flight were particularly good. My brother Arthur used to do the old lady's shopping which included buying the parrot food. Eventually my brother found himself a Saturday morning job with the local butcher and handed the purchase of the parrot food over to my willing hands. On the night before I took over the task he said to me "Now, don't forget to take the peanuts out of the parrot food and eat them." He had apparently been doing this for years. Now I couldn't let him down, could I? So if you hear someone walking behind you saying "Who's a pretty boy then," blame it on those peanuts.

The old lady had been born in Devon. Her Christian name was Lavinia. She had not lost her Devon accent and was sometimes difficult to understand. One day she was telling me what she required when she said, "I'll have a quarter of a pound of cuckoo," and I said "Cuckoo?" "Yes, cuckoo. You know what cuckoo is, don't you?" It suddenly dawned on me that what she wanted was cocoa.

At the time, I did her shopping she was already a widow and she had also had a very bad fall while going down the back steps to her garden, which resulted in her having to have an operation on her head. Operations in that area of the body were very rare in those days, and she was always telling me how kind my mother had been to her, visiting her in hospital and helping her at home. This head injury of hers caused her to have violent headaches, and there were days when she just didn't feel well enough to do her housework. It got to the state when she didn't do any housework at all. I can see her now sitting in her front room with cobwebs hanging down from the ceiling to the floor like draped curtains.

The back of the flat and the back garden were the domain of her two dogs, and the smell of the place wasn't exactly environmentally friendly. My father always gave her enough vegetables to keep her going, but it was usually me who delivered them. The two dogs were mongrels bred from mongrels who were also bred from mongrels ad infinitum. Jock, the small one, had something of the tether about it. Bonzo was a great lumbering animal with a body of the size of a small calf and a long, thick tail. When that tail wrapped itself round my legs it was like being struck by a rhino whip as used by the South African police.

It was the old lady's boast that she was not like other dog owners. Her dogs were not allowed to roam the streets. However twice a day she would open her front door, once in the morning, once in the late afternoon. She would then release the dogs from their usual quarters and they came out of that door at such a pace that they were half-way down the street opposite before they could apply their brakes. I swear that I've seen sparks coming off of their paws.

At one time the family living in the flat above us took in a married couple as lodgers. They seemed to be an odd pair. They did not stop long, and when they moved out,

among their few belongings was, of all things, a small tombstone. It had writing on it. Who can say what the story behind it was. Perhaps they had lost a young baby, and had moved to Brighton from some other place.

My brother Arthur, who had a wicked sense of humour, reckoned they used it for rolling out their pastry on. I've never had a steak and kidney pie with RIP stamped on it, and I would think that anyone who used it for that purpose would be a candidate for lead poisoning. There is an old Dutch saying: the Lord has some funny lodgers. Perhaps our neighbours thought the same about us.

Outdoor games and summer holidays

Shanklin Road, where I was born, came to an abrupt end at the wall of the Brighton and Preston cemetery. It was not a cul-de-sac in the strict sense of the word, as one could leave it by four different routes.

If one stood facing the wall one would notice that the last flat, No. 121 on the left-hand side, had what looked like a tall chimney stack at its end. This was not a chimney stack, it was the ventilation shaft to the sewers. A few feet from the cemetery wall in the middle of the road was a manhole cover. On the pavement on the right-hand side opposite the manhole was a fire hydrant. Included in this fire hydrant was a pipe about four inches in diameter leading to the manhole.

Every Saturday morning when I was a schoolboy, two men from the waterworks would arrive, take up the manhole cover, and recover from the manhole a long chain on the end of which was a large wooden bung or stopper. This would then be lowered to block the outlet of the manhole. They would then open up the fire hydrant, attach a U-tube between the hydrant and the tube leading to the manhole, open up the valve and allow the water to flow into the manhole, some hundreds of gallons I would think.

When they considered they had sufficient water they would close the valve, pull up the bung, and the sewers would be well and truly flushed out. Although this was a regular weekly occurrence it never failed to fascinate us children. I can only assume that now nearly everyone has a bathroom, plus perhaps a washing machine or a dishwasher, there is sufficient water flowing through the sewers to keep them sweet.

At the time I speak of the roads in the area were not tarred, the surface consisted of flint chippings and loose grit, and heaven help your knees if you fell over. During the long hot summers which we seemed to have in those days, and never seem to get these days, the roads became very dusty.

The Corporation in their wisdom sent a man with a horse and cart carrying a large round tank of water to travel the length of Hartington Road sprinkling water as it went in order to lay the dust. It was a complete waste of time, it dried out almost as soon as it reached the ground. A case of too little too late.

The man in charge of this operation had a rather appropriate name, it was Mr Waterhouse. Invariably he could be seen sitting on the cart fast asleep and the old horse, which was only half asleep, would plod steadily on up the hill.

With the coming of the spring and the better weather we were able to enjoy outdoor activities. Many of the games we played are mentioned in Sid Manville's book, *Everything Seems Smaller*. The cemetery wall at the top of the road was handy for using as a goal when we played football, or for chalking a wicket on for the game of cricket. These games were sometimes interrupted by the cry of "Copper!" and the game would immediately cease. We didn't look upon the police as our natural enemy, just a temporary hindrance. He would have a few words to us about there being a law about playing football in the street, and he might even clip us on the ear with his gloves. He would then go on his way smiling, knowing full well that once he was round the corner all our activities would begin again. He had only to say "If I catch you again I will have a word with your father," and that was enough to put him in full control.

It was unusual for boys and girls to play together. Occasionally we would join them at skipping, but no self-respecting boy would join them, and their dollies and prams, to play games like Mothers and Fathers, Doctors and Nurses and, worst of all, Schools. We played games calculated by their very nature to convert us from boys into men.

Sex was a subject that was never mentioned in our young days, and we had probably left school before we noticed the developing figures of our neighbour's daughters.

Certain activities were connected with the seasons. Collecting birds' eggs from bushes on the Downs, which is now illegal, was a springtime activity. The art of this was to keep an eye on a bird that was building a nest and follow it up from day to day. We never took more than one egg from any one nest. The difficulty was blowing the egg. Making a hole at each end and blowing out the contents was a delicate operation.

Another springtime activity was collecting frogspawn from Falmer Pond and watching the tadpoles grow. Very few, if any, grew to maturity. Sometimes we would collect newts or effits. This word "effits" always remained a mystery to me until I discovered that the real word was "eft", another name for a newt.

Autumn was the conkers season and the coming of the time when most children began collecting rubbish and making guys. I was never allowed to indulge in this activity or in the business of going from door to door carol singing.

The winter was usually too wet for any outdoor games, but the snow gave us a welcome relief, although I can't say I welcomed it. One year I remember some of us made Winter Warmers, a cocoa tin with holes punched in it and stuffed with smouldering rag. We smoked the street out. Then we improved on this, using small pieces of wood and coal and a more open-topped tin.

Some games seemed to create their own season. Someone would produce a top and a whip, and for a few weeks it was the top season. This might be followed by the marble season. From the depths of a cupboard, or from some dark recess in the loft, a marble board was produced. This was a board with semi-circular holes cut out along one edge. Each hole was given a value. The board was propped up against a convenient door sill, each competitor given X number of marbles, and the one with the highest score was the winner.

Cigarette cards or tabs was another doorstep game. Each player flipped his card, and when it fell on another card, that card became his.

Yet another game was hoops. Girls had wooden hoops, boys had steel hoops which we controlled with a hook, or as it was known, a skeeler. Sometimes the steel hoops would break and we would take them to Dodsons, the blacksmiths just to the north of the Bear Inn at the bottom of Bear Road, for repairs.

One of my brothers had a pram wheel with a piece of wood where the spindle should be, and with the aid of a stick he would run around the neighbourhood guiding it around obstacles with great dexterity. He also had a short piece of broomstick with a short piece of cord attached, and would crack it like a stock whip. He was the one who said he wanted to be a jockey, but on one occasion when we were out in the country we passed a horse in a field. I say we passed it - he passed it on the other side of the field about fifty yards away.

Before the war not many working people had holidays. My own father never did, and even when Bank Holidays came round he lost his pay for those days. The best most children could hope for would be a day out to one of the other Sussex resorts or a trip to some spot on the Downs such as the Devils Dyke or Ditchling Beacon.

We were more fortunate in this respect. My father had a brother who worked on a farm at Cowfold. They were the only two survivors of a family of five children, who lost their father when they were young. All their mother had to keep them on was two shillings and sixpence (121/2 p) a week and a quantity of flour, which she earned by working at the village bakery. Three of the family died in their teens. When illness struck, they lacked the stamina to fight it.

There was a very strong bond between my father and his brother, and every year in August those of us who were at school went to stay with Uncle Jack and Aunt Polly, who lived in a tied cottage on a farm known as Homefields, the last house in Cowfold before one came to the Parish of Bolney. Farmworkers who lived in tied cottages were always wary of the boss. Loss of a job could mean loss of their home, and could mean having to find employment perhaps as far away as another county. I have the feeling that my uncle waited until his boss left for the grouse shooting season on the 12th of August, before we were invited to join them.

This worked to our advantage, because then we could join the men out in the fields when the harvest was being gathered in. My uncle's boss owned three farms. Brook Farm on the main Horsham road was where he lived, and it was there that the milking herd, all thoroughbred Guernseys, were kept. Many years later a Mr S.M. Tidy, a prominent Brighton contractor, lived there, and more recently Richard Thorpe, who plays the part of Allan Turner in Emmerdale, was the occupant. He is not however the present occupant. The other farm was Lylands Farm on the Cowfold-Haywards Heath road, which actually joined up with Homefields. Bert Ellis lived on this farm. He was a short man, responsible for looking after the farm horses. Extra horses were brought from Brook Farm at haying and harvesting and with them came the extra men needed.

The corn was cut, as it was then, by the binding machine. No combine harvesters in those days. That was the time to go armed with a stout stick to catch a rabbit. We never caught any. The farmhands did, they were a bit more wise to the ways of rabbits than we were. As the binding machine went round and round and the area of corn became smaller, the rabbits tended to withdraw into the middle, so that when the last few swathes were being cut they realised it was time to make a run for it, and there seemed to be rabbits everywhere. This of course was in the days before myxomatosis.

However an agricultural worker came to be called a farm labourer I will never know. These men were highly skilled, and in a bewildering variety of jobs. Besides doing all these various jobs, my uncle was also a stockman. It is true he only had two cows and four calves, but there were also many heifers in the various fields which had to be checked on and kept in good condition. Never once did I see my uncle ill-treat any of the animals in his care. When he returned in the late afternoon for the calves to be put to the cows, the cows would follow him up the field. He always had names for them, but usually he would stroke their backs and say "Come on, old lady".

My happiest days were spent at Cowfold. My aunt and uncle were a lovely couple. She was his second wife, his first wife died in childbirth She was actually his cousin who had left her job in domestic service to care for him and the children, and they fell in love and married. They were very good to us and will always be remembered with love and affection.

Indoor pursuits and winter evenings

Playing games in the street came to an abrupt end at midday on Saturdays and did not resume again until Monday. To put it into my father's words, "The neighbours have had to put up with your noise all the week, and they deserve a break." We were given three options. We could either go to Preston Park to watch sport or play games, we could go up to the Race Hill, or we could go with father to the allotment. We did not often go to the latter. My father was a very fair-minded man. If he required any help he would probably say "I could do with a couple of you boys on two evenings next week. Have a talk amongst yourselves and let me know what evenings you're coming."

We were never allowed out after dark unless accompanied by one of our parents. Winter evenings were spent huddled round the kitchen fire, and an oil lamp burned on the kitchen table. One had to show respect to the oil lamp. Knock it over and the house would have gone up in flames. If one sat up to the table one could just about manage to read a book. Later on we had gas lighting, and even that had to be treated with respect or else the mantle shattered.

Living near the cemetery one would hear a low moaning sound. It was a ghostly sound, but had nothing to do with spirits. It was the wind blowing through the trees. One evening one of my brothers came in from the outside toilet and said there was a man sitting on a seat in the cemetery. It was a bright moonlit night and he said he could see him quite plainly. The question was, who had the courage to go to the bottom of the garden and investigate the matter? Eventually three of my brothers went together. It turned out that the man was the shadow of a tree, cast by the moonlight onto the seat. The tree and the seat had been there for years, and the moon was a regular visitor, yet no-one had seen the old man on the seat before.

In most houses the only source of heat was the fire in the kitchen grate. On cold winter evenings this became the focal point of family life. We huddled together like a flock of penguins facing up to an Antarctic storm, and sometimes it felt like that, because houses weren't exactly draught-proof. One could be roasted on one side and half-frozen on the other. To offset this, we had thick curtains to cover the doors and the spaces around them. How many times have I heard "Ooh! Shut that door and pull that curtain."

When the supply of coal for the fire ran low, a volunteer would be called for. The coal was kept outside of the back door in a recess formed by the steps which led from the top flat to their garden. In other words it was kept under those steps. The coal was held in place by two removable boards which rode in two slots fixed to the wall at either end. As the supply of coal diminished a board would be removed. When the coalman came he replaced the boards one by one as he built up the coal stocks. There were two reasons for not wanting to be the one to get the coal. In the first place no-one wanted to leave the fire, and in the second place it was not unknown for a neighbour's cat to take shelter in the coal cellar. As soon as one approached the coal with a shovel, a great furry monster with green eyes would come flying like a bat out of hell straight over one's shoulder.

We had a fair supply of winter games to occupy our winter evenings. Ludo was my favourite. We had draughts, dominoes, we played cribbage and whist, and we had a ring board. We were not allowed to have darts until we were older as these could be dangerous in the wrong hands. As time went by we acquired a shove-halfpenny board and a bagatelle board (one of those where you place a ball in a slot and it is propelled by a spring-operated lever). We also acquired a proper bagatelle board, one with green baize and a cue, and even later we had a small table-size billiard table.

After tea on winter evenings my father would sit back in his armchair and read the paper. After a few minutes he would fall asleep. No-one begrudged him his rest. He worked hard, not only for his employer but also for his family. Later on he would wake up. He often joined us. He liked a game of shove-halfpenny or dominoes mostly, but he would join us in most things. We would sometimes arrange a knockout competition between us. One thing that he did insist on was that we had to play fair and not whinge if we lost.

When we were older and had acquired a billiard table, one night was set aside for a billiard competition. I think it was Tuesday night, and sometimes Saturday. My brother Arthur, who was the one above me in the family hierarchy, I being the youngest, was working in the butchery trade. He would bring home all sorts of offal and bits and pieces, such as pigs' trotters, pigs' tails, odd bits of rabbit and anything that was too small to be put on display and sold, and this would be cooked in a pot with onions, carrots and anything else deemed suitable, and when we came to the end of the evening this was our supper, and jolly good it was too.

What would the modern food faddists think of that lot? We must have looked like pigs round a hogwash tub. It never did my constitution any harm. The other day I watched a health programme on the television. Everything within reason, maybe, but what are they trying to do, turn us into a nation of hypochondriacs?

We were not exactly a musical family. I remember at one time there was a zither in the house, but I cannot recall anybody being able to play it. One of my sisters had a friend who was learning to play the piano and of course she asked my father if he would buy her one. There was no way my father could afford to buy one. My father always seemed to have a logical answer to life's problems, so he turned to her and said "You don't want a piano, they're common things. When I can afford it I'll buy you a jews harp" (or jaws harp, to give it its proper name). What sort of instrument my sister imagined this to be I do not know. Maybe she thought it was like a Welsh harp or Irish harp. I only know that on the day my father came home with the jews harp he was not the most popular man in our household.

I also remember that at one time we had an instrument called a phonograph. This was the forerunner of the gramophone or what would be called today a record player. The records were cylindrical and slid onto a cylindrical drum. It was a clockwork instrument. When it was wound up a stylus moved along the length of the record as the drum revolved round slowly. We had a cupboard full of these records, at least a hundred or more, all in tube-like cardboard boxes. It would have been worth a King's ransom today. What became of it I do not know. I suppose we were like most families who, years after they have disposed of their unwanted goods, wake up to the fact that they have thrown out the baby with the bath water.

On one occasion I worked with a man called Ted Mears. He told me that when he was a boy his uncle was the landlord of the pub in Portslade Old Village. His uncle obtained

one of these machines, which was believed to be the first one in Sussex. The human voice had never been recorded until this date, and word got round that his uncle had a "talking machine". People just did not believe it. It seemed too incredible to comprehend. Ted told me that on Sunday mornings men walked several miles to the village pub to hear it from themselves, as they just couldn't believe it.

The first radios were known as wireless sets, heaven knows why, they were all wires. The very first were known as crystal sets, and reception was obtained by what was known as a "cat's whisker" which was moved around by means of a lever in close proximity to the crystal. Don't ask me how it worked. Anything of an electrical nature is not my line of country.

The first wireless we had required an aerial running the full length of the garden from a height of fifteen or twenty feet, like a high clothes line. It also needed a copper rod buried in the ground as an earth. The set itself was an upturned wooden box on top of which were several valves of different kinds (transistors had not then been invented). One of these valves lit up. There were two coils which could be moved closer together or further apart, as required. There were one or two more bits and pieces which were beyond my comprehension and two enormous tuning dials about the size of a large tea cup, and an "on and off" switch on the front of the box.

Under the box there was a tangle of wires connecting all the parts together. At this time I do not think there were any wireless sets connected to the electrical mains. Batteries and accumulators provided the power. In our home there was no electricity. The amount of power that had to be supplied by the batteries was something of the order of 120 volts. There were no 120 volt batteries at that time. However there was a flat torch battery from which protruded two metal tags, the metal tags being the positive and negative poles. They provided a current of 4.5 volts. As far as I am aware this type of battery does not exist today. A sufficient number of such batteries had to be connected together by brass clips to provide the equivalent power. The accumulator had to be taken to the local wireless shop for recharging about once a fortnight, and this would cost just a few coppers. As this process took a couple of days it was advisable to have a spare accumulator. This for a wireless set which was only used in the evenings.

There was no loudspeaker, just one pair of earphones. How then did the family listen in? They say necessity is the mother of invention, but how about this for a piece of inventiveness: the earphones were placed in a china pudding basin and the resulting resonance was somehow supposed to improve the quality of the sound. No wonder we were a very close family.

Reception was extremely poor by today's standards. There were all kinds of atmospheric interferences, whistles, crackles, long whooping sounds. It was as if we were trying to make contact with outer space. Despite all this, it still seemed worthwhile to rush home from school to book a place next to the pudding basin. After all, not many of your schoolmates had such a contrivance, and we would probably not have had one

if it had not been for the fact that one of my brothers, who was an electrician, worked with a workmate who was very interested in the subject.

In the early thirties wireless was the up and coming thing and two firms, Lissen and Cossor, began producing Do-It-Yourself kits for the price of roughly the average man's weekly wage, or perhaps a few shillings more. One I can recall was known as the Lissen 3. The "3" I believe referred to the number of valves. It seemed that every young man was building his own set, just as today every young man is to be seen probing the internal workings of the internal combustion engine.

There is one fact I would like to mention before I leave the subject of my winter evenings. It has no relation to them, but it is a point of interest. Few people know that there was a Woodingdean man named Earnshaw, who was employed on maintenance at the General Hospital, who worked very closely with John Logie Baird and was present when Baird produced his very first image. I went to school with Leslie Earnshaw, his son, who was killed while serving in the Air Force during the war. I believe he was an only child. It wasn't Leslie who told me about this. I learned of it from a man who worked with Mr Earnshaw for many years. He said he was an extremely clever man.

Church

The flat where I was born was within the boundaries of the parish of St Wilfrids. I was christened there, and all us children went to church there, usually to the 10 o'clock children’s service, and to the Sunday School in the afternoon. I believe my mother occasionally went to evensong. My parent's main Christian duties lay in providing their nine children with a loving home, and caring and providing for their every need. This left them with little time for anything else, and was no inconsiderable task. On Sundays we would put on our "Sunday Best" clothes to go to church, but immediately we returned home we took them off, hung them up, and changed into something more durable. My father was most fastidious about his own appearance, and he demanded the same standards from us. He always said that young boys had absolutely no idea of how to wear a collar and tie, they either left the top button of their shirt undone, or the knot was loose, or else the ends of the tie were flying in the breeze, or worse still the knot, instead of being secured at the throat, took up a position somewhere near the right or left ear.

To avoid such a catastrophe, we were equipped with what I can only describe as a "Choir Boy's Collar", a very wide collar sometimes known as a celluloid or rubber collar, made of the same material as a vicar's dog collar, worn outside of our jackets rather than inside, and finished off with a bow at the throat. We hated the things, we were the only boys at church to wear them, and we stuck out like sore thumbs. The worst thing was when some "Smart Alec" sitting behind you decided to write on the collar with a pencil. So if you are of the opinion that graffiti is a modern trend, forget it.

The St Wilfrids Church that we attended was not the one they converted into flats in 1990-1991, it was its predecessor, a church made of corrugated iron and known locally as the "Tin Hut". How the children of the area loved to throw stones on its sloping roof and hear them rattle down to the ground!

The first vicar I remember was the Reverend Pemberton, a rather stoutish man who lived near the bottom of Elm Grove in Wellington Road. His means of transport up the hill to the church was by tram. He didn't ride inside the tram, and he didn't ride on the top of the tram, he rode on the step of the tram, and I have a suspicion he didn't pay either. The tram stop was at the top of Bonchurch Road on the lower side, but he didn't get off there, he jumped off right outside the church. If he didn't pay his fare, then he was breaking the commandment which says "Thou shalt not steal", for he was in effect robbing the Corporation. As he used it on Sundays as well, he was in effect aiding and abetting the tram driver to break that other commandment, "Six days shall thou labour, but on the Sabbath thou shalt do no work etc etc". However, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. I will not be casting any stones.

From the very first time I attended the church the main topic of conversation was the building of a new church to replace the old "Tin Hut", and the Reverend Pemberton's ministry was devoted to this end.

Every penny that could be raised by any means whatsoever was eagerly sought. People were invited to buy a brick for the new building. I cannot remember how much they cost. St Wilfrids had its own "Concert Party", probably one of the best amateur concert parties to be seen in the town, and they used their talents to raise funds. On "Race Days" the Rev. Pemberton could be seen accompanied by numerous helpers, standing outside the church in Elm Grove with a large collecting sheet and an old-fashioned hand-held megaphone. As the trams carrying the race-goers went up the hill (and many extra trams were laid on for the purpose) the reverend gentleman would appeal to those travelling on the open-top deck to "THROW YOUR PENNIES FROM THE CARS PLEASE". By the time the race-goers woke up to what was going on, the coins they threw missed the sheet, and his helpers were running about all over the pavement trying to prevent coins from careering down Elm Grove, or disappearing down the drains.

Not all vicars are popular, but the Rev. Pemberton's successor, the Rev. Wilfrid Westhall, was. He was well-loved and respected by all his parishioners, and later became Suffragan Bishop of Crediton in Devon. He returned to St Wilfrids on several occasions, and conducted services in the church, which were always well attended, for he had many, many friends. Many of them kept in touch with him right up to the time of his death a few years ago. He always said that the Church of St Wilfrids occupied a special place in his heart.

Although my father insisted that we were given a religious education, he said that when we were of an age to make out own decisions we could decide whether to attend church

or not. I am afraid that when we left school we all lapsed. Although I had a reasonably good voice as a boy, I was rather shy and self-conscious, and though I would have liked to have sung in the choir, I didn't fancy standing in front of the choir master making high notes and low notes while he made an assessment of my suitability or unsuitability to join the elite band.

At the time I am speaking of, I was very friendly with two of my wife's brothers. We went to Elm Grove School together, we went to church together and we played together. We made a joint decision to apply to become servers at the altar. Fred and I were the same age, George was two years younger. Fred and I became acolytes. It was our job to carry the candles during the Mass. George was the "Boat Boy". He carried the incense, which from time to time he placed in the censor (incense burner). Carrying the censor was usually a duty assigned to an older person, and to give him his correct title he was also known as the "Censor".

There was a short period of time during the service when the Censor and the Boat Boy stood near to Fred and I with their backs to us. Fred and I would be standing there with our candle holders standing on the floor, we would endeavour to ease these forward with our feet in order to make things hot for George, fortunately we never succeeded.

One day a young lady who was our next door neighbour's daughter said to one of my sisters, "You really should come to church to see your young brother - he looks like an angel." To which my sister replied, "It's a pity he doesn't act like one when he's at home. All I can say is, some angel!"

Schooldays

At the time I began my education the two main schools serving the area were known as Elm Grove School and Lewes Road School which is now known as Fairlight School. Those of us who attended Elm Grove School had the grand idea that we were in some way superior to those who attended the school down the hill. I've no doubt they had the same idea.

I commenced schooling when I was just past four years of age. One of the boys I met on that first day has remained a friend of mine ever since, and there are quite a few of my old school friends still living in the district. Elm Grove School at that time was divided into the following sections: Infants, Junior, Mixed, Senior Boys, Senior Girls. The Headmaster of the Senior Boys was a man named Mr Mulrennan and was known by the pupils as Mouldy Lemon.

Elm Grove School was built in 1893. Pupils who reached a high standard in the 11-plus examinations went on to York Place Schools, which were the forerunner of Varndean Sixth Form College. This rule applied to all elementary schools in the Brighton area. Some who were successful were unable to take advantage of this opportunity as their parents were unable to afford the necessary uniform or support them during their stay

there. With the opening of the Varndean schools the system changed. I think this was in 1928. York Place Schools became the Brighton Intermediate Schools for both girls and boys. It was a sort of half-way stage between the elementary schools and Varndean School. I attended this school from 1931 to 1935.

I was pleased when I heard that my examination results enabled me to go to the Intermediate School. When I took the necessary papers home for my father to sign, he agreed to sign them only on the condition that when I left school, I would attend Evening Classes at the local Technical College. I agreed to this and subsequently attended these classes, despite attendance being interrupted by the War. I was far more successful there than I had ever been at day school.

The changes which took place in 1928 resulted in Elm Grove School's and Lewes Road School's senior sections for pupils over eleven becoming girls' schools, and the senior boys went to either St Lukes or Coombe Road.

When I first attended the Infant School the Headmistress was a Miss Parks. Miss Parks had a glove puppet with which she amused the children. It was in the form of a monkey. Whether it was because I had always been surrounded by grown-ups at home, but I could see nothing funny in it. Other children were rolling about convulsed in laughter and I thought how stupid it was. I had the same attitude to ventriloquists and Punch and Judy shows. Was it that even at that early age I was able to see through the deception of it all? I really don't know.

In the Infants School we always had to have a rest in the afternoons. We laid down on mattresses on the floor and were supposed to sleep for an hour. I don't think many of us did. It was when I moved up to the Junior School that I first came in contact with Miss Bailey. Perhaps conflict would be a more appropriate word than contact. Miss Bailey didn't like me, but who was there who liked Miss Bailey? She had a cruel streak in her nature. The index finger on her right hand had been amputated to about half its natural length, and she must have had the stub hardened in some way because she used it as an offensive weapon. When she spoke, anyone within a circle of three feet got a shower bath. When she led any of the pupils out to the front of the class to make an example of them, she held them at arm's length in a way that suggested they were not quite nice to know.

She decided one day that I should sit in front of the class permanently so that she could keep an eye on me. If she had sat me next to a girl that might have subdued me, but she sat me next to a boy who had also incurred her wrath. On one occasion she pounced on me saying "I am fed up of looking at your grinning face," and promptly proceeded to tie my head up in the duster she wiped the board with. I couldn't help thinking how funny I must have looked to the other children and I laughed all the more, only silently.

One Christmas I surprised her by coming top of the class and this meant promotion to another class. I shall always wonder whether I really came top of the class or whether she added a few bonus points to get rid of me. I would not normally have gone up another class until the following September. At first I struggled to keep pace with my new class-mates but gradually I caught up with them.

Mr Tuck was my new master. He spoke in a broad Welsh accent which I sometimes found difficult to understand. The big advantage of being in his class was that he took us up to the Race Hill on fine Friday afternoons to play football. It was called football but it was really a mob of boys chasing a bit of leather. Mr Tuck was the proud possessor of an old attaché case. To say it had seen better days would have been to flatter it. It was only the strength of two boot laces that held it together. It was in a worse state than the Chancellor's Budget Box, but to be the boy chosen to carry that case up to the Race Hill was a great honour.

The Headmaster was another Welshman, a Mr Hughes. I had my first experience of seeing a Headmaster who wore a mortar board and gown.

The rest of the staff wore gowns, but no mortar boards. They each taught ' their own specialist subjects. French was one of these subjects. At first I was very interested, learning which words were feminine, which were masculine and which were neither, but after wading through French Grammar and studying the tenses of various French verbs it became a trifle boring, and on a day-trip to Dieppe with the school I discovered such phrases as "Les oiseaux chantent dans les arbres" (The birds sing in the trees) or "Le jardin est tres joli" (The garden is very pretty) were not a lot of use when one is looking for something to eat or bursting to go to the toilet.

At the commencement of the third year a decision had to be made. One could either study Technology or Commerce. Commerce to me meant being confined to an office, and I didn't fancy spending forty years of my life poring over balance sheets and lists of figures, even though Mathematics was one of my best subjects. I opted for the Technical section where we were taught Metal Work, Woodwork, Technical Drawing and associated subjects. I have always regarded being able to draw as a gift, for although I was very keen it never came easy to me. The only thing that came easy to me was drawing my wages. During my last month at school a number of firms sent round lists of apprenticeships they had to offer. With my father's approval I applied for a job as a coachbuilder with the Pullman Car Company. It was always my father's wish that each of his sons should have a trade to follow. After I had been accepted by the Company he received a letter offering me a job as a Plumber Pipe Fitter, and the choice was mine. Anxious to leave school, I took up their offer. I commenced work on the 29th July 1935. My work there after the War is described in another QueenSpark book, *Pullman Craftsmen*.

I thoroughly enjoyed my work. There was much more to it than plumbing and pipe work. It included copper work, brass work, iron work, lead work, sheet metal work, soldering,

silver soldering, lead burning, brazing, aluminium welding and most other forms of welding, oxy-acetylene cutting and even flame cleaning. Couple all this together with what I learned at Evening Classes and one had a pretty comprehensive knowledge of most metals.

One often hears young people, even older people, say "I'm bored." Bored! With all the things there are to do in the world, they must be joking. What they lack is imagination. Even when I'm old and past it I shall prop myself up in front of the fire, read and doze and toast my toes.

The tradesmen

Unlike today, in my early years, one could have almost anything delivered. Bakers, milkmen, greengrocers, butchers would deliver daily. Grocers perhaps once or twice a week, fishmongers according to the availability of the product, coalmen when required, and when there was a glut of any item, such as oranges, apples, strawberries, plums etc, itinerant hawkers would arrive. The streets always seemed to be busy on weekdays. Even on Sundays there was the winkle man calling out "Fivepence a pint, bar winkle", or the muffin man carrying a long tray, about five foot long, on his head, and advertising his wares, muffins and crumpets, by ringing a bell as he went.

There might be as many as three or four milkmen and three or four bakers serving the same area. There was one particular milkman who ran a one-man business. This was in the days when milk didn't come in bottles or cartons but was carried in five-gallon cans and ladled out on the doorstep. His name was Laurie Lade, a popular local man who seemed to be delivering milk at all hours, even into the evening. I can hear him now calling out "All the ladies with their babies want Lade's milk." We always had the Co-op bread at home, and the baker's horse would move from house to house without any prompting from the roundsman. That horse knew that round better than the man himself. It also knew the houses where it was likely to be given a carrot, an apple or a knob of sugar.

One particular baker we had, had an invalid wife who was confined to a wheelchair. He could not afford to take her on holiday. Her wheelchair was of the old wicker basket variety. He made an attachment so he could fix her wheelchair to his old bike, and he pedalled it all the way down to Kent where they had relatives, left her there for the week, and fetched her the following weekend. He said "I get some funny looks at times, but at least it gives the wife a break." One has to admire a man like that.

One man I would like to pay tribute to is John Lee. He was one of the old Brighton fishermen. I believe he still has relatives in the area. Let me say here and now he was a gentleman. Our house was at the end of his round, yet he always saved something for my mother in case she wanted it. During the war a customer of his was expecting a child. As often happens with pregnant women, they have a fancy for certain types of food. The woman fancied a nice haddock. She mentioned it to him and he said "I don't

know if it's possible to get such a thing with the war being on, but if I can get one you shall have it." A few days later he knocked her door and there was the haddock, and he would not take a penny for it. I can remember when herrings were in season, they were sold for as little as seven for 6d (2 1/2p), or as the man used to call out, "seven for six, fourteen a bob."

The dustmen always seemed to call on a Saturday in our area. Following on from the horse and carts, they had motor vehicles, known as Vulcans. They were nothing like the modern vehicles, they had solid tyres, and the section that held the rubbish was made of wood. There were no plastic sacks in those days, and in the winter the bins were heavy with ashes from the coal fires. The dustmen always wore a piece of leather over their shoulders to stop the bottom edge of the dustbin cutting into their flesh. To deliver the dust into the dustcart it was necessary to run up a small wooden ladder. It was a hard dirty job, especially in inclement weather.

Another tradesman to call was the coalman. If he dropped any lumps of coal into the road, these were quickly scooped up. It was almost the same as following the baker's horse, and I have seen many a woman with a bucket of manure and a shovel hurrying indoors before the neighbours saw her. My brothers and I would sometimes play a game called "Sack of coal." It was one of those daft games that children make up out of their own heads. The one who was to be the sack of coal would stand on a chair, drape himself over the coalman's shoulder, and the coalman would grab a lock of his hair as though he was holding a sack, and then he would carry him round the room and dump him down in the corner. Daft as the game was, at least it was innocent fun. It had more to recommend it than mugging old ladies, or vandalising someone's car.

A little way up the road from where I lived, there lived a German. He had been interned during the whole of the first war. There was a great hatred of Germans following the first war. His name was Schmidt. Later on he became naturalised and took the name Gibson-Smith, Gibson being his wife's maiden name. She was Welsh. One could not be in any doubt about his Teutonic origins: his whole appearance, his ginger heard, his guttural accent, his broken English. Life must have been very difficult for him. Like all Germans he knew the value of hard work. He started by selling household sundries, polishes, brushes, etc, the sort of things useful to any household, and he carried his goods in a small case from door to door, often getting the door slammed in his face. However he persevered and his business prospered. He went from a small case to a larger case, from a larger case to a donkey and cart, and when his son was older they had two ponies and carts, and eventually they had two motor vans. On the side of these vans he fixed a wooden framing, and from it hung brushes and mops and sundry items. One could hear them coming a good way off by the rattle they made.

One evening a few days after my mother died there was a knock on the door. One of the children answered the door and came back in to say Mr Schmidt wished to speak to my father. I doubt if my father had ever had occasion to speak to the man before.

He had come, he said, to offer my father his condolences in his sad loss, and he felt that it was up to him as a neighbour to do all he could to help, although he was at a loss to know what form that help should take. He then said he hoped that my father would not be offended if he asked him to accept what he had brought with him. It was a suitcase full of all the useful things he sold. My father accepted it in the spirit in which it was given, and he never forgot that man's kindness.

I sometimes wonder whether perhaps when Mr Schmidt himself was struggling, my mother had helped him by buying his wares, and he had returned to repay the compliment.

As his business expanded he began selling paraffin oil from the house, and the family meals were all cooked in the oven of a large oil-burning stove, probably of German origin. Out in his back garden he had a large oil tank holding at least two hundred gallons or perhaps more. Every now and again a small British Petroleum tanker would arrive and the driver would fill two tapered cans holding about five gallons each and carry them through the house to the tank at the back. One cannot imagine that any Chief Fire Brigade Officer would allow any such thing to happen today. It would have been a case of heaven help the neighbours if that little lot had gone up in flames.

Another man came round the streets selling oil which he trundled round on a handcart. He was short and had a distinct Mediterranean appearance about him. He wore breeches and black polished leggings. On Sundays he became transformed. He appeared in a smart double-breasted navy-blue suit, white shirt, bowler hat, and he carried a bible. He would then take up a position in the middle of the road on the brow of the hill in Hartington Terrace, place his hat on the road in front of him, and in a very clear and distinctive voice he would deliver his sermon which would last for maybe twenty minutes or half an hour. He would then replace his hat and go on his way. As far as I am aware no-one ever came out to listen to him. This however did not deter him and he performed week in, week out, for years.

Laundry Land

When I was a schoolboy the area was festooned with laundries. In Shanklin Road there were three, the Princess, the Bonchurch and the Burlington. In Brading Road there were two, the Model Laundry and the Devonshire. In Bonchurch Road, as far as I can remember, there were four, the Ferndale, the Sunny Bank, the Ivy House and the White I leather. The Sunny Bank was half way up the lower half of Bonchurch Road on the left-hand side proceeding from Hartington Road. A block of flats now stands on the site. Whether this laundry changed its name I am not sure, but I can remember a laundry called the Parisienne. A block of flats now stands on the site of the White Heather laundry, they are the ones with the iron stairways. There is a piano works where the Ivy House laundry stood. The Ferndale occupied one of the houses, which has now been reinstated as a residence.

It was not in any sense a hand laundry, of which there were many in the area. There was some pretty hefty machinery in that house. The Princess, the Model and the Bonchurch became industrial premises. The Burlington was in some ways a family affair, operated by the Wells family in the basement of their own home. The Devonshire was at the top of Brading Road, at the rear of what is now Kingdom Hall, premises of Jehovah's Witnesses, in Bernard Road, and is probably part of their property. Laundries may not be a very exciting subject to write about, but there is one very amusing story to tell about the Princess Laundry.

This laundry was a sort of up-market laundry. In the early days of its existence deliveries and collections were made by horse and cart. The drivers were all liveried, peak caps, smart jackets, riding breeches, polished black leather leggings, and the word "Princess" on their caps. In the twenties it was decided to dispense with the horse and carts and invest in a fleet of Model-T Fords. The younger men soon adapted to the change, but among the older men was a man named Jenkins, and driving a Model-T Ford was a frightening prospect to him. Getting down to the bottom of Hartington Road was not too bad, the problem was how to venture into that stream of traffic using Lewes Road. Mind you, cars were few and far between in those days and the twenty mile an hour speed limit applied to all vehicles regardless, but then of course there were the trams. I have seen him stop his van, get out, look up and down in both directions, hoping to find a break in the traffic, then when he considered it was safe to turn the corner, he hopped back into the cab and hoped the situation hadn't changed in the meantime. One wonders what would have happened if he had been driving today, one doesn't dare think of what language the modem driver might have used in such a situation. In today's circumstances it seems incredible, but that is a true story.

Another story concerns the owner of one of the many hand laundries. Sharps Laundry occupied the property known as 95 Hartington Road, which was the only house between Hartington Terrace and the cemetery gates. It has been considerably altered since, an extra storey has been added and it has been divided into flats. The entrance to the flats at the rear of the building is via an open space which was originally the drying ground for the laundry. Mrs Sharp was a heavily built, robust-looking woman, her husband was the exact opposite, less than average height and thinner than most. One of his jobs was to collect and deliver the laundry on a hand cart. By the time he had struggled up Hartington Road he was about at the end of his tether. That is when we kids went into action. One of us would bend down in his path and pretend to be tying up his shoe lace. Mr Sharp had no strength to go round us and was too out of breath to tell us to clear off. He would simply sit on the handles of the hand cart and wait for us to move, then when he had moved another few yards we would do it again. Perhaps he enjoyed the rest, because I do not ever remember him complaining.

Stonemasons

Often when people asked where I lived I would say "Oh I live in the dead centre of Brighton." They would then conclude that I lived in the centre of the town. Nothing could

be further from the truth. What I really meant was that our home was surrounded by cemeteries, and we could hardly step out of our front door without tripping over a stonemason. Lewes Road and Hartington Road, with their close proximity to the cemeteries, were the natural home of these craftsmen. Many of the names of the old stonemasons are now missing, and the ones that are left seem to have been amalgamated.

Skinners, the funeral directors at the bottom of Hartington Road, were originally stonemasons. They had a small workshop adjacent to the top gate of the Brighton and Preston Cemetery and lived in the house next door, the last one in Hartington Road, number 243. The number is forever etched in my memory. I was their paper boy at one time, it was the last one on my round. On Saturdays there were always extra papers to carry, the *Brighton and Hove Herald*, the *Brighton and Hove* Gazette, not forgetting the *Sussex Daily News* and other local newspapers from around Sussex. Skinners had them all, I think it was seven in all up to the top of the steep hill. One day I said to my employer, "Surely they don't read all that lot," and he replied, "Only the obituary columns." Business is business.

Skinners also had another workshop and display area on what was once railway land, where Gladstone Court and St Martins Infants School now stand. Even the premises they now occupy was formerly a stonemason's by the name of Deal.

The railway bridge carrying the former Kemp Town railway crossed Hartington Road at a point where Gladstone Court stands to approximately the end of Old Viaduct Court, and the line continued up through Nobby Clark's Park, as it is now.

Between the houses at the foot of Bonchurch Road and the arch there was just enough room for Mr J.H. Trill to erect his stonemason's workshop, where he and his son Leslie ran the business. They lived in the adjacent house, 2 Hartington Road. On the lower side of the railway arch Mr Trill had a piece of ground he used for storing masonry. He also had a shed, open at the front, where a man he employed used a hand-operated saw, something like a large bow saw that carpenters used to use. It was used for cutting the curbstones for the graves in the cemetery. The man would sit there on a box, pushing the saw back and forth, a slow and tedious process.

He was rather an unusual looking man, with slightly bulging eyes, a sort of Red Indian type nose, a small mouth which I can only describe as running from north to south rather than east to west. He walked bent forward, probably caused by years of lifting heavy masonry, was about medium height and was known locally as Old Cod's Eyes.

Part of his work was to help erect tombstones and curbing in the cemetery, and to clean and renovate those that were already there. One day my eldest sister was attending to our mother's grave and he was working on a grave nearby. His wife had brought their two young children to watch their Daddy working. Two women tending a grave nearby seemed to regard him as an object of ridicule and fun, and were having a quiet laugh at

his expense. Unfortunately for them his wife realised what was going on and she very soon went over to put them in their place. My sister heard her say, "I don't know what you find to laugh at, but he is a damn good husband to me and a good father to his children, and I hope that satisfies your curiosity." Have you ever seen two woman's faces go red? After all it is what is behind the mask that matters, and how many of us could claim to have been standing in the front row when the good looks were being handed out?

There were two other stonemasons in Hartington Road. Sargents in a small shop adjacent to the lower entrance of the Brighton and Preston Cemetery, and Rookes opposite, at the bottom of Bernard Road. Rookes was a tall single-storey building with enormous glass windows. How those windows never got broken when they were chipping stonework I shall never know.

In Lewes Road I can remember two: Phillips, established as far back as 1847, whose business is still there but is part of the group which amalgamated, and Bennets, whose workshop stood on the north side of Gladstone Place at its junction with Lewes Road, and closed down before the war.

There is an interesting story to tell about the Bennets. If one goes to the rear of what is now Fox's the Estate Agent at the bottom of Elm Grove, one can see part of an old house that has been converted into flats. This at one time was the Bennet's residence. There have been so many alterations in this area over the years that it is hard to imagine that this house once stood in its own grounds, hidden by bushes and trees and surrounded by a high wall, making it almost impossible to see, except perhaps to get a glimpse of the chimney stacks.

As far as I am aware there were only two children, both girls. My story concerns the two sisters. They were both unmarried, very religious, seldom seen and reclusive. They wore long black Edwardian dresses down to the ground and hurried along as though they had no wish to be seen. They did not seem to have any friends. When their parents died they were buried just beyond the chapel in the Brighton and Preston Cemetery and one of the largest stone angels I have ever seen marked t heir grave. I can find no trace of it today. It was rumoured that every day the daughters placed a meal on their parent's grave, and it was also rumoured that the men employed in the cemetery made short work of it. I cannot verify this but I would not be surprised if the daughters did this. Please don't ask me what happened when the workmen weren't there on Sundays.

Apart from collecting their pensions from the post-office opposite, and doing a bit of local shopping, it was doubtful if they ever left their home. It was Mrs Bunney, who ran the post-office, who realised one day that something was wrong. Their pensions had not been collected, and they had not been seen for several days. On investigation one of the daughters was found dead, and the other had fallen and broken her leg, and she died shortly afterwards.

The Cemeteries

Not many of us would have the courage to walk the full length of one of our cemeteries during the hours of darkness. Yet we have nothing to fear from the dead. If we have any enemies they will be found among the living. It is said that there are only two things certain in this life, death and income tax, and some might find that income tax is the worst of the two. Most of my life has been spent almost within a stone's throw of the main Brighton cemeteries. The garden of the flat where I was born was bordered by the Woodvale Cemetery, which was known then as the Parochial Cemetery, and today I live only fifty yards as the crow flies from the Brighton and Preston Cemetery.

There has been a great change in the public attitude towards death since I was young. Every Sunday, weather permitting, my father and the whole family would proceed to my mother's grave to replenish the flowers put there the previous week. Hartington Road would be thronged with people making the pilgrimage to the graves of their loved ones, the widows all dressed in black, some with veils, dressed in what would be termed "widows' weeds", the men dressed in sombre clothing, usually wearing a black armband.

It was almost as if one had to advertise to the world at large that a death had taken place in the family. I can remember wearing a diamond of black cloth on my sleeve for some considerable time. Any widow who dared to wear a coloured dress within a twelvemonth of her husband's death would be deemed not to have shown proper respect to his memory and would probably have been shunned by her neighbours.

Some people prefer not to talk about death, as though they could put off the evil day. When one walks through a cemetery one should remember that each grave represents someone who was loved. Some were loved by a few, some were loved by many. It would be a very hard world indeed if anyone buried there was not loved by someone. On nearly every headstone one sees the letters RIP: Requiescat in pace, or as we know it, Rest in Peace. I was once told it meant Rise if Possible, and to back up this version I am going to tell you a little story.

Many years ago a very old friend of mine was taking his little boy for a walk through a cemetery. He was explaining to the boy that this was a "garden of memories", a place of quiet reflection, not a place for little boys to run about in or play games. Suddenly the boy said "I know what those big stones are for, Daddy." The father thought, I wonder what gem of wisdom I'm going to hear now, so he said to the boy, "What are they for then?" and quick as a flash the boy replied, "It's to stop them jumping out." That boy is still alive today.

Much local history can be gleaned from old graveyards. The graveyard of St Nicholas Church, which was once the Parish Church of Brighton, known affectionately as "The Fisherman's Church," is probably the oldest, but many of these old burial grounds have made way for modem developments. The graveyard at the top of North Road, and the

Quaker Burial Ground which was in Rifle Butt Road, have gone, the latter to make way for the approach roads to the Marina.

The Extra Mural Cemetery and the Woodvale are probably the two oldest of the non-denominational cemeteries in the town. For all intents and purposes they are one. In the spring, when the daffodils on the banks and the candles on the horse-chestnut trees are in bloom, and the wild primroses are to be seen among the trees, one could almost imagine one was on a country walk. It is the only place within the town boundaries where it is possible to escape from the roar of the traffic.

At one time the Extra Mural Cemetery was a mine of information for anyone studying the history of Brighton as it was in the previous century. Unfortunately many of the old vaults have fallen into disrepair and a lot of the graves of prominent personalities are covered in ivy. The Victorians seemed to show the dead more respect than the living. The rich families erected enormous and costly monuments to their dead, often depicting the deceased's achievements in lines of lettering, and many such monuments are to be found in these two cemeteries.

The Brighton and Preston Cemetery was opened in 1885, but even here there is much that is of interest. The other day something unusual on a tombstone caught my eye. It was a small black eagle on a red background. From the inscription on the stone it was obvious that this was the grave of a man driven from his homeland by war, who had come to this country, fought alongside of us during the war, had married, raised a family and was now buried a thousand miles or more from his native land. It was I believe Rupert Brooke who wrote those immortal words "There is a corner of some foreign field that is forever England." Should we not say of this man, "There is a comer of an English field that is forever Poland"?

The inscriptions on tombstones can provide us with much that is interesting. In the Brighton and Preston Cemetery there is the grave of one

Walter Alexander Humphreys
England and Sussex County Cricketer

who died aged 74 on the 23rd March 1924. He was a "lob bowler." I doubt that in these days, when the fast bowlers seem to be aiming at the batsman's head rather than the wicket, there is anyone who has actually seen a lob bowler in action. I certainly haven't. A lob bowler was a bowler who bowled underhand, the kind of ball one delivers to a little lad who is holding a cricket bat for the first time.

Walter Humphreys' tombstone is a tribute to the stonemason's craft, but before I describe it I would like to quote the words written on it:

The stumps are drawn, the final over bowled

The game is o'er, the players one by one
Retire to rest. Shadows of peace enfold
The grass-green fields of honourably won.
Well played, well done.

The left-hand side of his monument shows a cricket bat and ball, the right-hand side shows a shattered wicket with a bail and a ball lying at its base, and the words beneath say "There's a second innings."

This is not the only tombstone of interest. I came across one to

Henry Holden
Medal of Honour
Company D
7th US Cavalry
Indian Wars
1905.

It would be interesting to know how a man who chased real live Red Indians across the plains of America came to be buried so close to us who live in this locality. What a story that would be.

There is just one more I would like to mention, although I am sure there are many others just as interesting. It is the tombstone of a man whose main interest in life was concerned with the welfare of horses. It shows a horse looking out from its stable, and close by a pair of riding boots and a riding crop. One has to marvel at the skill of the stonemason who produced this masterpiece.

In one part of this cemetery are the graves of men who have died while under the care of St Dunstan's. The Borough Cemetery, which is adjacent to the Bevendean Hospital, contains the graves of many soldiers from the First World War, and included among these are many German graves. On the Sunday nearest to the 11th November it used to be the practice of the Salvation Army to march with their band to this cemetery and hold a service at the War Memorial there. They certainly did prior to the Second World War. Whether they do now or not I couldn't say.

Most of the neglected graves in our own cemeteries are neglected because the generation who tended them have passed on themselves. It is doubtful if we shall see any of the large monuments erected in future. Modern cemeteries tend to follow the pattern set by the Lawn Memorial Park, where memorial stones are laid flat to enable modern mowing machinery to be used and thus keep the place neat and tidy. Some people may not like this idea, as there are also restrictions about placing flowers on the graves. It is my opinion that we should pay our tributes to the dead by keeping their memory alive, and by remembering them with love and affection. When someone close dies, I try to forget my own grief and think how privileged I was to have known them,

and how fortunate I was to have had them for so long.

My parents

I cannot believe that my mother at the age of forty-four, was overjoyed when she realised that I, her tenth child, was on the way. Neither can I believe that my father at the age of forty-seven was over the moon at the thought of having another mouth to feed.

Large families in those days were quite common. Family planning was not in vogue, and open discussion of sexual matters was taboo. Practically all the children of my generation, and the children of many generations past, and some even now, were born, to put it politely, as the result of what might be called one of "nature's little accidents." I am convinced that I was definitely one of those accidents.

However I am sure that on that morning when I first saw the light of day, I was given the same loving reception as had been accorded to all my brothers and sisters.

I was not the most lovable of babies. I was a terrible screamer. My father once told me that I made more noise than all the others put together. He also said that the neighbours must have thought blue murder was being committed in our house, and that I drove everybody to distraction. Even now some seventy years later I have not been allowed to live it down. One of my brothers, whenever the subject crops up, always points an accusing finger at me and says "He was a s-d." I counter that by saying "Ah, but look how beautiful I've grown up."

Our parents did their best to treat us equally. Some of us may have endeared ourselves to our parents more than others, but generally speaking there were no favourites. Whatever we had was shared equally. I f sacrifices had to be made they were shared too.

During all the conversations I have had with my brothers and sisters, with relatives and family friends, I have never heard of any unpleasantness between my mother and father, and I have never heard anything said which was to their discredit. On the contrary, I have heard many things said about them which have made me feel proud to be their son. No doubt they had differences of opinion at times, but if they did they were never discussed in front of the children. Many times I have heard parents say, "The only arguments we have are over the children," and this probably was the case with my parents.

My mother dying when I was just six years old, my memories of her are few and somewhat dim. I was twenty-nine when I lost my father, and in his latter years I got to know him well.

On occasions such as my mother's birthday or the anniversary of her death, we might

be sitting round the table having a meal. Dad would look up and say in his quiet way, "You know what today is, don't you?" There was no need for an answer. The look on the faces and in the eyes told the story. On these days and no doubt on many others Dad would go to his room and shed his silent tears.

My father revered my mother's name. She had a very unusual Christian name, not one that is heard very often. Her name was Avis. Her second name was an old-fashioned name which seemed to complement the first. It was Amelia. Avis Amelia, a lovely name for a lovely lady. Her maiden name was Coleman.

Children know whether they are loved or not, even if we do not understand the depth of our parents' love for us until we reach an age when we are able to look at the world through their eyes. As children, everything is taken for granted. As teenagers we are sometimes rebellious, preferring to ignore the advice of our parents, failing to see that it is an expression of their love for us. We are inclined to regard them as old-fashioned and out of touch with so-called modern thinking. We blunder on through our teenage years, failing to see that we are our own worst enemy. And who is it that comes to our rescue? Why, good old Mum and Dad.

The first time I fully realised how much my father loved me, and how much I loved him, was during the war, on the day before I left for Burma. We said our goodbyes at the bus-stop. He was turned seventy at the time and already had two sons serving abroad in the forces. As we clasped hands I could see by the look in his eyes he was thinking, "Will they come back to me, and if they come back, will I still be here to see them?" And my thoughts ran on similar lines: "Will my father be here to greet me on my return?" I am pleased to say we did all come back and my thoughts will always be with those parents whose sons did not return.

I suppose I could say that I come from good old Sussex stock. My father, Thomas George Carter, was born at Nuthurst, a very old village four miles south-west of Horsham. My mother came from Chichester and was born quite close to the Cathedral.

I would like first of all to talk about my father. He was born in 1872 in Yew Tree Cottage in the village I have mentioned. Unfortunately it has been pulled down and a modem bungalow stands on the site. As I have said it is a very old village. Inside the church there is a tablet on the wall giving the names of the clergyman going back to the year 1131. I think that is the correct date. It is certainly very early.

One day when he arrived home, his mother said to him, "The vicar has just called to complain that when you passed him in the village you did not raise your hat to him." My father stored this piece of information away for future reference. On the next occasion when they met , the vicar was driving through the village in his pony and trap with his wife. My father stepped into the middle of the road and waited for the pony to get near to him, whereupon he made an exaggerated bow, raised his hat well above his head and flung it down in the dust, causing the pony to rear up and almost shoot the vicar

and his wife out into the road. Perhaps after that little incident he realised my father was past redemption.

There were five children in my father's family, my father being the youngest. His father died when he was only four. There were no pensions of any kind and the total income for the family was half-a-crown and a quantity of flour, which was his mother's wages for a week's work in the village bakery. Two brothers and his sister died as teenagers. My father attributed their deaths to the fact that, owing to the impoverished state of the family following the death of their father, they were undernourished, and when illness struck they had not the stamina to fight it. Their deaths were probably due to pneumonia or tuberculosis.

This meant that the two youngest members of the family survived. Could it be that it is the natural instinct of a mother to protect her babies, and that they received just that little more attention than the older ones? I have no doubt that my grandmother loved them all equally, but the cards were stacked against her.

My father attended the village school. His education was very basic. I t mainly consisted of the 3 R's, Reading, Riting and Rithmetic. There was one subject they taught in that school which should be added to the curriculum of every school in the land. That subject is Common Sense. My father had more common sense in his little finger than some people have in their whole bodies. His writing was far better than my own. He could write a letter that was clear and concise, and he could not be faulted when it came to mathematics. When a child in that village school reached a certain standard, he or she was considered fit and ready to take their place in the harsh world outside.

My father reached that standard at ten years of age. His first job was in a brickyard. His hours of work were from six in the morning until six at night. That however is not the whole story. He had three miles to walk to get there, and the same three miles to walk home. By the time he got home, had a wash and something to eat, his only thought was to get into bed to replenish his energies for the next day's toil. One would consider that this was a good day's work by any standards, let alone for a boy of ten years of age.

There was one person who did not think so. She was the choir mistress, who was also the vicar's daughter. She demanded to know why my father did not come to choir practice. It so happened that my father had a very good voice and had once sung solo at a big Choirs Festival at the Crystal Palace. She was not prepared to accept any excuses, and told my father that if he did not come to choir practice he would not be allowed to sing in the choir. She was very adamant about this. She had met her match. My father could be adamant too. My father's word was his bond. He never ever went back on it.

The following Sunday he did not attempt to join the choir but sat in a pew with the congregation. The squire of the village was a man named Henderson. One of his sons

later became the British Ambassador to Berlin at the outbreak of the 1939-1945 war. Mr Henderson demanded to know why my father was not with the choir. He was prepared to overrule the choir mistress, but my father was not to be moved. It then got to bribery, starting at a shilling and moving up in stages until Mr Henderson made his final offer of a guinea. A guinea in the 1880s, a fantastic sum. They say every man has his price. It is my belief there was not enough money in the world to bribe my father. He was incorruptible.

I come now to the subject of my mother. As I have said before she was born at Chichester. Her father was a sailor and had sailed before the mast in the old wooden ships. On my father's first visit, it was in January, he stayed the weekend. When he got up to use the outside toilet, he saw her father standing by a pump in the garden in only a pair of trousers and slippers. With the snow falling all around him he filled a small bath with water from the pump and with nothing on above his waist he splashed about as happy as a duck on a pond. My father once said of him, "He was the hardest little man I ever knew," and little was the operative word. I have seen pictures of him, a short man with a white beard.

His last days were spent at Steyning. I have heard my cousins say that when grandad drew his pension he met them all from school and took them all in the sweetshop. There is a newsagents shop in Steyning where at one time it was possible to buy a post card featuring my grandfather and my cousins standing outside the Tudor Cottage where they all lived. The Tudor Cottages are still there on the sharp bend as one leaves Sleyning to go to Horsham or Midhurst.

My mother had lovely black hair which stretched well down below her waist and she would sing as she went about her work. Songs that had nice melodies and words which meant something. Sentimental they may have been, but they were much preferable to having some untrained female voice belting out the words "I lurv yer, I lurv yer," or that gravel-voice Charles Asnovoice, sorry about that, Monsieur Charles Aznavour.

The songs my mother sang were *Give Me the Right to Love You all My Life, After the Ball*, *It’s Only a Beautiful Picture in a Beautiful Golden Frame.*

As have said, my memories of my mother are few, too few. It is said a boy's best friend is his mother. I am sure this is true. Fate decided my mother was never going to live to see her family grow up. If she had, her family would have shown her the same love and loyalty they did to their father.

Some people say it would have been nice to be born rich. I was born poor in the material sense, but rich in other ways. It is a wonderful experience to be a member of a large family. One is never alone, there is always something going on, there is laughter, and in times of distress or sadness there is support and togetherness. I have no regrets about being one of a large family. One learns to give and take and not to get upset when your leg is being pulled.

It must have been a terrifying experience for any girlfriend, or boyfriend, when they had to meet our family for the first time. My father had a good sense of fun. One of my sister-in-laws' maiden name was Smith. When my brother was courting her my father said to him one day, "When you go to your young lady's house, do you knock on the door and say to her mother, "Mrs Miff, can Miff Miff come out tonight?" My brother was not amused.

This same sister-in-law was always dressed immaculately and well groomed. It was the custom in those days for ladies to wear hats with a wide brim. She had a good dress-sense and her hats always matched whichever outfit she was wearing. Sometimes my brother would bring her home on a Sunday and while the washing-up was being done my father would whisper to me "What is she wearing today?" He would then creep into the bedroom, put her hat on, take out his teeth or pull a face and say "How do I look in this one?" Some years later I told my sister-in-law about these little episodes and she laughed her head off.

Sadly neither my brother nor his wife are with us now and one by one we pass on. Life is a mixture of good and bad. If we accept that which is good, we must also accept the reverse side of the coin.

Copyright QueenSpark Books 1992
www.queensparkbooks.org.uk