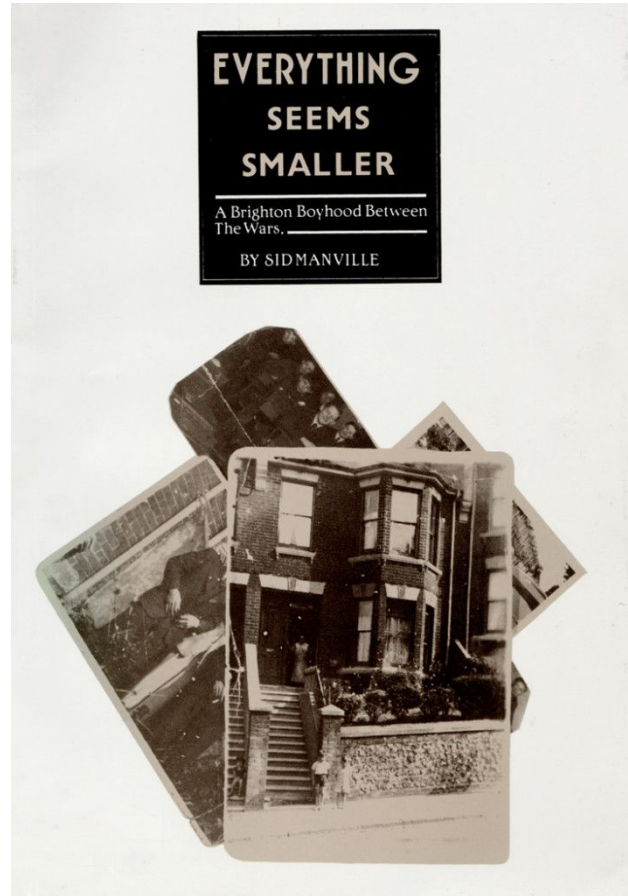


About QueenSpark Books

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.

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About this book

In this 1989 book, Sid Manville reminisces about his Brighton boyhood between the wars. This first-person account of growing up as one of ten children in Bear Road is a valuable insight into working class family life in Brighton in the 1920s and 30s.

Sid recalls local traders and characters, attending Coombe Road School in 1918, his childhood games and holidays spent at the Racecourse and on the Sussex Downs.

It's the companion-piece to Sid's Our Small Corner, also available as a pay-what-you-like download from our website.

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EVERYTHING SEEMS SMALLER

A Brighton Boyhood between the Wars

Original 1989 Foreword

It has never before occurred to me to write anything other than the occasional letter to relatives and friends. Perhaps that which I now set out to do falls into that same category because, when I have done, the main interest in what I have written will be to those in, or close to, the family circle. If it should have wider appeal, it will be to those of my contemporaries who may happen upon it. They may find that my story is very much their own story. I welcome them to my pages and hope they will enjoy the revival of some happy childhood memories. My real purpose, however, is to interest and I hope amuse those to whom the main characters may only be a distant memory, or who perhaps, although relatives of past days, they may never have known.

Most of these main characters, I am happy to say, are alive and well at the time of writing, but, of course, we are all going on in years so that today, family gatherings are infrequent affairs. When, however, a few of us are together, it is only a short time before the conversation turns to the 1920 period - that, of course, means Brighton and Bear Road. Then the laughter begins as the memories unfold and people and events of those days are recalled. Not that life at that time was all fun, far from it. Our old Mum's constant cry was 'If I get over this week I shall live forever.' Well, she got over each week somehow, and now, with the passing of time, the sad and the happy memories have blended together into a beautiful lake of nostalgia, from which, throughout our later years, we have frequently drawn for our delight and comfort.

I have often thought how good it would have been to be able to read about the childhood of my parents; the things they did when young, and what life was like for youngsters of their time. What a pity it is that I know nothing of my Grandparents, let alone their lives as children. Alas, in those far off days the moving finger moved on and wrote nothing, and although our modest education taught us much about Kings and Queens of the past, we grew up knowing nothing or very little of our own forebears. Perhaps the pressures of daily life did not allow time for such things; it could be that writing did not come easily to ordinary people or merely that no-one ever thought of it.

The inspiration to write came to me as I watched the faces of a few of my Grand-nephews and Grand-nieces as they listened around the edge of a circle of old 'uns reciting tales of long ago. It dawned on me that these kids were hearing of happenings in a world they never knew, they were hearing tales, true tales, far more entertaining than fiction: tales of Horn-Gramophones, Gas lights, Flint roads, Horses and Carts, Mangles in the back-yard, and all the things that made up life in a world where there was no T.V. or even 'wireless' for most of us; but where we, as kids, lived life to the full, and slept, albeit four-in-a-bed, like logs.

So then, because it would be a shame to allow the memory of events of our childhood to fade away with the years, I make this humble effort to put some of them on record. In doing so, I am relying upon memory, but with the help of a reminder here and there from my Brothers and Sisters, I hope to recall some of the worthwhile stories and some of the interesting folk who were part of our childhood and growing years.

I offer this composition to be read by Manvilles of today, and perhaps Manvilles to come, and of those future members of the family I hope there will be an Eliza Manville. Eliza was Mum's Christian name, and she used to talk of it as if it was an object of fun, perhaps because it featured in one or two of the comic Music-Hall songs of her girlhood. She often sang this song:

'Oh Eliza, Dear Eliza,
If you die an Old Maid
You've only got yourself to blame'

Perhaps Mum, more than anyone else, poked fun at her one and only Christian name because at the time, even in those days, it was old-fashioned. But now the years have brought it back, and it is now, as indeed it was then, a beautiful name. I would like to think that some young married Manvilles, blessed with a baby girl, will call her Eliza. It would be grand to know that Eliza Manville lives on and will one day read these words. Because if our Dear Eliza had died an Old Maid, there would be no words to read.

Sid Manville

Everything Seems Smaller

Going back is not always a pleasant experience. When we revisit the haunts of our youth, everything seems smaller and so much has changed. The size illusion is easy to understand, our childish eyes viewed the world from a lower level, and everything in those days loomed and towered above us. But it is the change that hurts. The Bear Road that was our playground where we trolled our Hoops and whipped our Tops, is today lined from top to bottom with parked cars, and dear old Lewes Road, of the tramcar, the bicycle and the horse and cart, is now the scene of a constant traffic snarl-up. It is called progress which cannot, and I suppose must not, be halted. Only in memory can we restore things to the way they were.

So I am going back. I am going back to Bear Road, and those cars will not be there. With my memory and my pen, I shall return for a while to the scenes of my childhood.

And when we get there it will be sometime between 1918 and 1930.

For many years of my early childhood I lived in fear that one day something dreadful would happen to the back wall in Harry White's shop and all the houses in our road would fall down like a pack of playing-cards.

If you live in Brighton, it is almost certain that you live on a hill, in a valley, or on a bank. Because the South Downs are Brighton's floor, and that is something that neither Man nor years can change.

Number 111, where we lived, is on the steepest part of Bear Road, which is, in turn, one of the steepest roads in the district. Not only are the houses - perhaps today most of them would be called maisonettes - built on a hill, but they are also on a bank. A sort of compounded aggravation. So that in the case of No 111, the pavement in the front ran upward West to East as a gradient of about 1 in 6, and the garden at the back was 20 feet higher than the bottom step at the front. It did not occur to us at the time, but a more awkward location must have been almost impossible to find. However, that is where our Mum and Dad faced the daily challenge of raising ten children in a four-room plus scullery and backyard downstairs flat. That was 'our house'.

Harry White was the local butcher, and his shop was at No 43, on the corner of Ewhurst Road. It always seemed to me that his shop was propping up No 45, and that No 45 was propping up No 47, and so on up and over the hill to No 335! Well, they never did fall down, but are standing today looking as solid as they did all those years ago. But in defence of my childish fears, I invite you, when you can, to stand at the bottom of Bear Road, look up, and ask yourself whether or not that shop at the corner of Ewhurst is holding all those other houses up.

While you are there, walk up a hundred yards or so and take a look at No 111. Even from the outside you will realise that a Mum, Dad, and ten kids could not, even under

the most appalling conditions of over-crowding, have lived there at the same time. Well, of course they did not have to. Service came to the rescue. Service was what my sisters and everybody else's sisters went into when they reached school-leaving age. It meant doing domestic work for a well-to-do family in return for a weekly wage plus bed and board. 'Living in' it was called. So that any working-class family that had a fair sprinkling of girls could cope fairly well with sleeping arrangements at home - with a little bit of organising - and we knew all about bedroom organising in our house.

No 111 had two bedrooms. Mum and Dad had one, which also contained a cot for whoever was the baby at the time. The other one, which was always called the 'backroom', contained a large and a small bed. The back room doubled as a playroom at non-sleeping times, and the big bed doubled as what is now called a Trampoline. During the mid-twenties, with Ivy and May in service, the order of sleeping at home was: Denis or Sylvia (whoever was youngest at the time) in the cot in Mum and Dad's room - Winnie and Grace in the backroom small bed, while Alfie, Ted, myself and Ronnie occupied the big 'un.

Although this big bed was a monster of steel and brass, there was no way that it would take us four-in-a-row with any degree of comfort, so we slept sardine fashion. Pillows or a bolster top and bottom, and we kids in head-to-toe, two-at-each end formation. I always thought this arrangement rather clever, providing as it did for sex-segregation. Room segregation, of course, was out of the question. But never get the idea that we suffered discomfort from this cosy packing. We did not. Mind you, there was always a bit of a scuffle during the initial manoeuvring for position, during which time the brass knobs rattled like mad; but when calm had settled, the closeness provided by this method of sleeping brought with it a cosiness which modern kids find only in cuddly toys. For many years my brother Alfie's big toe was my Teddy Bear.

It seems that before finally settling into No 111, Mum and Dad crept up on it in stages, because Ted, who is two years my senior, was born at No 95. I first saw the light at No 107, and Ronnie, three years younger than me, was the first to be born at No 111. None of the family can now give a reason for this. Nobody knows the story. How I wish that I had listened a bit more when old Mum used to speak of earlier times. But I did not, and much of our family history remains unknown.

Were it not for the stay at No 95 there would be an obvious answer, that of moving from an upstairs flat to a downstairs one to avoid stair-climbing. But as No 95 was downstairs anyway, bang goes that theory. I can only conclude that our parents were a bit choosy, and that the accommodation situation at the time allowed ordinary folk to be choosy. And that one desirable residence was seen to be a bit more desirable than the other. Or maybe it was merely that one rent was cheaper than the other; we shall never know. But I do recall that Teddy and I used to boast about being born in other houses as if we had arranged it personally, and that it was something to gloat over.

I have had to call upon the memory of my eldest sister Ivy for information about the family's earlier days, and although these memoirs are concentrated on the life and times at Bear Road, for the benefit of those who might be reading of their Grandparents, or Great-grandparents, I record what Ivy has told me.

Mum and Dad first lived in Aberdeen Road, a turning off Lewes Road. That is where Ivy and May were born. The family then moved to Hartington Road, where they shared a house with Uncle Punch (Walter) and Auntie May. It was there that Alfie was born. At this time Dad was working as a temporary postman and was transferred to the small village of Hurstpierpoint in Sussex, where he became the village postman.

Winnie was born in 'Manor Cottages' in this charming little place.

If it was a form of magnetism that brought the family back to Brighton, the centre of magnetic power must surely have been Bear Road, because as Mum and Dad settled in there, so Uncle Punch, Aunt May and family moved into No 133, a few doors up the road. In later years, when there were seven or eight of us, and five or six just up the road, it was frequent and, I must admit, fair comment that the district was 'lousy with Manvilles'.

Uncle Punch was Dad's younger brother, and they were as alike as two peas. How he came to be called 'Punch' we never knew. It was just another of those things wrapped in mystery. But the name came so naturally to us that if, as a boy, I had been asked if I had an Uncle Walter, I would have said 'no'. Quite handsome men, he and Dad, each sporting a military-type moustache with expression to match - a stern but kindly look. Except for the fact that Dad was seldom seen in anything but his postman's uniform, it would have been impossible to identify one from the other at more than ten yards. They, in turn, had the same difficulty in identifying their own offspring. It may be that as they walked (and it was an identical walk) their minds were on greater things, or it might have been confusion of numbers, but so many times, when meeting Dad in the street, was I greeted with a cheery 'Hello Jack' that I honestly believe that over a long period of time he thought that I was his nephew from up the street. There was a nasty rumour around at one time that the Manville Dads had a roll-call every meal-time to make sure they were not feeding the wrong lot. But that was just someone trying to be funny.

Auntie May was a little aunt. We had quite a number of aunts and we liked them all. In those days there was no such thing as an auntie you didn't like. Some of them gave you a penny when you went to see them, some gave you a ha'penny, and some only a home-made rock cake. But never mind, the gift was a symbol of affection (we thought) and was always welcome - especially the money kind. We had lovely chubby aunts, and lovely thin aunts, and could never, in our wildest dreams, imagine that a day would come when some kids would have aunties who wore bikinis and short skirts. No, ours were real aunts, and I make special mention of Auntie May because she lived in our road and becomes part of our Bear Road memories. In addition to caring for her family, this frail little old lady made a daily journey to the Brighton Parochial Offices near the

sea front to do a cleaning job in order to supplement the family income. Up and down that steep hill for more years than I can remember, and I never knew her to grumble. There was always a smile on that pleasant old face, which might easily have been a sad face if she had allowed it to be.

It seems that the Manvilles up the road gave those down the road two children start and then kept pace with them. Their first son Wally was the same age as our brother Alf. Then came Vic, somewhere between Winnie and Ted. Jack matched up with me; their daughter May with our Ronnie, and true to the last, Dolly was a year older than our Sylvia. So it was a pretty even thing.

The procreational habits of the working class appeared to be fairly uniform, and provided for every family to produce one new member every two years. Not at all a bad arrangement, because it assured every kid in the street several mates around his own age. I don't know if it is true that marriages are made in heaven, but it certainly seems that our street gangs were. Our 'gangs' got up to all kinds of mischief, and drove our poor parents dotty at times. But there was never deliberate wickedness or violence. When I was a child, gangs were crowds of noisy, happy kids.

So many children with so few years between their ages provided nice-sized groups for our street-games. Games that could be played in the days when fun, not fear ruled the streets. I will mention these games later. Perhaps some are still known to modern children. Most, however, have been driven off by the motor-car. and those that do remain will surely be killed by computerised entertainment. So it might be a good idea to write them down, and hope that they will live a while longer - if only on pieces of paper. But first I would like to tell you something about each of the family.

Beginning of course, with Mum.

Big in heart and tough as nails

Our mother was a little 'un. It is said that some people get smaller with age; but surely that is only if they bend or shrink. Well our Mum was never bent and there was not a wrinkle on her. It could be that over the years she compressed a bit, because she did become a little tubby; but there again, tubbiness was in her family. Her sisters Aunt Kate and Aunt Alice were both tubby; and so was her brother Uncle Albert who lived in Sheffield and who used to visit us with Auntie Agnes (she was tubby too) and cousin Sidney who was fat, and whom I disliked intensely. A sinful shame, I thought, to give him the same name as me. I used to think that he came from a foreign country - he didn't even talk like us! But to be quite fair to Uncle Albert, whenever he came to Brighton he would always drop in on his sister and her tribe. But I always got the impression that he wasn't enjoying it very much.

A little 'un in stature was our Mum, but big in heart and tough as nails. Mums had to be in those days. Most of them had large families, and all had seven days a week to get

through. Seven days a week with no electrical appliances, seven bucket-and-brush and bass-broom days, seven carbolic soap and hearthstone days per week. And Monday was the worst of the lot.

Monday was Washing Day. Monday was Stew and Steam Day. Monday was the day when you came home from school, and as you opened the front door a fog rushed out and hit you in the face. A stew-flavoured fog embraced you and drew you into its midst. The front passage was not wide enough for you to lose your way indoors. With one hand on each wall, you went along and up two stairs and into the kitchen. Then, if the fog had cleared sufficiently, you would see a figure moving about in the scullery.

You always saw Mum before she saw you. There she was with what was called a 'tuck-apron' tied at her waist. It was, in fact, a piece of sack cloth, and it always appeared to be soaking wet. She stood beside an enormous oval galvanised bath, which itself stood out on a duckboard-type table. One end of the bath was butted up against the sink, and a scrubbing-board lay slanting ski-slope fashion into the sudsy water.

It is easy to understand how, in later years, the washboard became a rhythm instrument - somebody's Mum invented it. Shoofta, shoofta, shoofta it went, with a slap and a flop here and there - one small pair of arms with sleeves rolled up to the elbow, soap in the left hand, scrubbing-brush in the right, beating out the wash-day rhythm. I honestly believed she enjoyed it - how else could she have done it? For hour upon hour she stood upon a duckboard in that scullery, wash-board in front, one tap (cold water, of course) to her left, and behind, a stone, built-into-the-wall copper designed by the Devil himself. This copper had a tub about two feet in diameter and perhaps the same in depth. The tub was covered by a circular lid made of wood, with a built-on handle. Heating was by a fire of wood and coal in a small furnace arrangement with a hinged door and latch.

'Lighting the copper' was an art in itself. The normal paper, wood and coal method always failed; and it was not before the paraffin can had been 'swung' in a couple of times, and a miniature explosion caused, that it really got going. I presume that there was a chimney somewhere at the back, but whether or not, most of the smoke managed to find its way out the front, and added its own special tang to the Monday mixture.

A small gas stove in the corner, being mainly commandeered by a large stew-pot, could give little assistance in heating additional water, and so in summer months when the kitchen range was not alight the organising of washing day was indeed a challenge. All the same the final output from that small scullery was one week's sparkling washing for the whole family and a whacking great stew - with dumplings - ready for the hungry troops coming home from school just after mid-day.

Think about it, you modern young Mum's. Think about it as you ponder whether to use

'Whizzo' or 'Brand X' in your automatic washing machines. Think about it as you press the buttons on your Electrical Wonders in your sparkling fitted kitchens; and try to realise what washing day was like for working class Mums of the 'Twenties. And, if you like, remind old fogies like me when we talk of the 'Good Old Days' that they were not all good for everyone. No posh powders or softeners, Mum's only materials were a twopenny packet of 'Hudson's Powder' and a whacking great bar of 'Sunlight' for the washing and a threeha'penny packet of Edward's Desiccated Soup, plus Sunday's leftovers for the dinner. The rest was just slog, scrub and sweat.

'And you come straight home from school mind, I want one of you for the mangle'. She always said it, the worst thing she could have said, because those words were the signal for Ted, Ron and myself to engage in a get-home-last race. But someone had to lose and come in first, and the first-home loser got the mangle. A monster of a thing was our mangle, it stood in the middle of the yard, and on the frequent occasions that I was first home, I'm sure it leered at me as it was unveiled from its tarpaulin. A cast-iron wheel with curved spokes had a wooden handle protruding from its rim, and it was to this handle that I was instructed to attach my small arms and turn. It wasn't too bad once you got going. It clanged and rattled and sang a song, and the more you slogged the more it sang - the damned thing seemed to be enjoying it all. As Mum fed the clothes through the front and collected them at the back, a deluge of water oozed from the rollers onto a sloping shelf and escaped into a bucket through a moon-shaped aperture. It was a good thing for the first-homer that the two losers, compelled by hunger, usually turned up before the stint was completed, and were commanded by the tuck-aproned boss to 'ave a go'. And the cogs and the gears and the rollers sang their song of triumph at having claimed two more victims.

Mum's idea of paradise was a sunny day, a westerly wind and a line full of washing. I'm sure that the first two of these featured prominently in her Monday night prayers; and if they were answered, Tuesday morning would see a large basket containing items spewed out by the mangle the day before, lugged up twelve stone steps from the yard to the back garden, where in short, swift movements they were pegged up, propped up and left flying at a great height. Mum's battle honours, and how proud she was of them.

There was no such thing as an ironing-board in our house. I don't even know if they had been invented at that time. One end of the table, covered by a twice or thrice-folded sheet, was the ironing-board; and an assortment of flat irons were kept warming on the gas rings or the kitchen range. Each doing its dashing-away bit. I liked the smell of irons, only flat irons had it, the later electric things could not capture it, it was warm and friendly. Sometimes I can lie back and smell those irons now.

After the ironing came the airing, and of course there were no airing cupboards or boilers or central heating, at least not in our house. The only warm air was that which floated around our heads. So that was where the airing was done. Four or five stout strings ran the length of the kitchen just below the ceiling, and the placing operation was a joy to watch. As each item was ironed, be it shirt, vest, knickers or whatever, it was

balanced on the end of a cane, lifted up, and with a deft flick was planted neatly and evenly over the line. The lines when full did nothing to improve the lighting of the room, which in the early days consisted of one gas mantle mounted on a swivel bracket over the mantelpiece, and even less in the cause of illumination when modernisation crept upon us in the form of one small electric bulb which, suspended from the ceiling centre, fought an unequal battle against the density of underclothes hanging all around. But we all knew and accepted with good grace that everything else made way for the week's washing.

It is quite fitting that in writing of our Mother, I should start with a report on washing-day. Because the main feature in the lives of all Mums was work. And the larger the family the harder the work. And the smaller the income the greater the worry. And a glance at the income and workload of 111 would indicate that Mrs M had little to sing about. But sing she did - most of the time. And her ability to remember the songs of the old Music Hall variety shows taught us kids some of the most remote and fantastic songs imaginable. Songs like:

'Lucy arrived at Euston by the midnight train,
When she got into the wicket,
Somebody wanted to punch her ticket,
The guards and porters surround her by the score,
She told 'em all she'd never had her ticket punched before.'

No pills, no medicines, no sedatives or sleeping tablets - nothing! She was never ill, never had time to be ill - 'If I'm ill who's going to look after you lot?' - and so it was with housewives all up the road, and all around many roads. Being ill was a luxury that mums in our walk of life could not afford. So while Midwives for miles around were assured regular employment, doctors were a rarity. I know there was one somewhere along the Lewes Road, but be sure of it, doctors in the twenties made few dots on the map. The only concession to the possibility of any of the family being ill was an outside packet which had a regular place on the lefthand side of the top shelf of the kitchen dresser. This packet was labelled 'The Lion Drug Stores' and it contained licorice powder. At the first sign (or sound) of a rumble in one of the family bellies, some of the powder was mixed with cold water and all the kids, not only the patient, were made to quaff a dose of the horrible stuff. Any protest from the 'fit' kids was always dismissed with scorn. It was considered that, even if you wasn't bad, anything that kept your bowels open must be good for you.

It is quite usual for elderly folk to distrust the new and unknown. Mum was no exception. Terror entered her life on the day the houses in our road were converted from gas to electric lighting. That 'Swish' on the wall was going to kill somebody. Somebody was going to be 'Lectrified' one of these days - we were invited to 'mark her words'. And so she stoutly refused to go near the thing for weeks. After that, seeing that we had all managed to live through the experience she ventured a quick flick-and-jump-away operation. Slowly she graduated through to being nonchalant and even cocky about it.

Lightning, too, sent her scurrying into the coal-hole, a small cubby hole off the front passage and beneath the stairs that ran to the upstairs flat. There she would stand, hands over ears among the coal and meters until the storm had passed. The same little performance was played out when funds were too low to satisfy the demands of the landlord, the insurance man or the tallyman. Upon the knocking of any of these gents the hurried instruction was, 'If that's the old X I ain't in'. Whereupon she would stand in the furthest corner of the coal-hole and cover her ears, while the small message bearer was sinning his soul at the front door to a caller who knew damned well that he was being lied to. When the coast was clear, Mum would emerge knowing that the evil day was only postponed, but content in the knowledge that she had not suffered the pain of hearing her child tell lies.

In later years Mum took to having a 'fag' now and again. In fact, many women started smoking in the late twenties. But if you asked me what was our Mother's form of relaxation when we were kids, I can only think of the 'Evening Argus', a game of cards, and 'Losing meself for ten minutes'. Every evening a raucous voice ran out the length of the street announcing the fact that the 'Eeny Argy' was for sale, and one of us was sent out to buy the penny local. And when Dad was on the 'other' shift, Mum had first read. She seldom read anything which preceded or followed a column which was headed 'The Brighton Bench', which gave all the juicy details of cases heard by the local magistrates. I am pretty certain that, among the grown-ups, there was a permanent and sadistic hope of spotting a name that was known. We little 'uns didn't quite understand it, but I recall that on one occasion there was the name of a man we knew, and something about a 'paternity order' which caused Mum to rush out and call Mrs McNeil over the back wall, and they nattered for a long time.

I wonder if 'splarbing out' is still played in the family? It's a kind of card game. It was Mum's favourite game because, I hate to have to say, it required the minimum mental effort. A pack of cards was placed face down, and 'splarbed' all over the table. Each player, in turn, picked up two cards, and if the numbers or pictures matched they kept them. The winner - yes, you've guessed - the one to finish with the most cards. Simple enough, you may say, but when the youngest player is about two years old and has to sit among the cards to reach them, when sherbet-dabs are being licked during play, and half sucked gob-stoppers are rolling among the cards, it is surprising what complications can arise.

We did try Mum with the more sophisticated games like Rummy. But the picture cards presented such a problem that we had to give up. She would study her hand for several minutes and then solemnly ask, 'Does Jack come before King?' No, it was just too much. But although she was probably the world's worst card-player, she was always the first at the table when a game was suggested. Ready and eager to 'splarb' 'em.

Brother Alf, who always liked to be a bit superior in these things, said there was no such word as 'splarb' and the real name of the game was 'speculation' or 'concentration' or

something like that. But these posh names cut no ice with Mum, who had a talent for inventing her own names - names that described the action. So if you 'splarbed' out a pack of cards, what else could you be doing than spreading 'em all over the table. If the cards did not behave to her satisfaction, it was because they had not been 'scruffled' properly. If you kept on opening and closing a door and causing a draft, you were hollered at for 'flatticking the wind'. Easy enough to laugh at Mum's vocabulary but you always understood quite clearly what she meant.

'Losing meself', even for ten minutes, did not always come so easy, especially in winter times when the kids were confined indoors by the weather. But on a summer afternoon, when her work was done and there was a bit of quiet to be had, she lost herself. 'Losing meself' meant sitting on one wooden chair, with feet and legs on two wooden chairs, against a side and back wall, and closing her eyes. Sheer bliss - but seldom for long, because if it wasn't the return of one of the troops, it was Lou Field or Flo Knight from down the road.

Mrs Field was a dear neighbour who lived at No 91 and had been a good friend to Mum for as long as I can remember. Over a number of years she had looked after me while Mum did an ironing job at a local laundry. Mrs Field's daughter Rene was the same age as me and her elder girls were friends with our Ivy and May. Our two families had always enjoyed an affectionate relationship.

Mum was Eliza and Mrs Field was Louise - to each other they were Li and Lou - a circumstance which gave birth to a saying and a memory which has survived in the family until this day. Friends and neighbours did not bother with bells or knockers and when Mrs Field called on Mum the procedure was always the same. The front door was thrown open and the following exchange took place - 'Li-eye' - 'Come in Lou'. It was a two-tone 'Li-eye', the 'Li' being low and bold and the 'eye' was absolutely top 'C'. We kids loved it, and much to Mum's consternation, as her friend called 'Li-eye' a chorus of kids sang back 'Come in Lou', which caused our Mother to shake her small fist at us and complain about 'bloody kids showing her up'.

But it was our childish fun. We would never had been rude to Mrs Field. She was one of the world's nice people, and being looked after by her is perhaps one of my earliest memories. To this day I can see the great rocking-horse that stood on the landing at the top of the stairs in her house. That wonderful horse upon which, so often, my small frame was lifted and rocked with such care and tenderness.

Quite often our front door was thrown open and the arrival was announced of a 'Littlebitterfishferthe cat'. Flo Knight was a single lady who lived with her elderly mother at No 93, and her visits were more in the interest of a jawing session with Mum than the offering to our Bob. But Bob got to know the magic call, and by some animal instinct his tail shot up at the sound of the first syllable. Dear old Flo, she moved in the same way as she spoke - quick jerks and spasms, as if motivated by a series of electric shocks. Her visits, however, were always welcomed, because being a quick mover over a wide

area she was able to lay-in a goodly store of local chit-chat. And Mum, being much confined to home by her many chores, was delighted to receive her as a mobile news-vendor. So there was always an eager teller and an equally eager listener to all the local scandal as it was jerked and spasmed all over our kitchen. And Bob regaled himself with his 'Littlebitterfish' straight out of its newspaper wrapping spread out on the scullery floor.

Bob was the good looking one of the family. Bob was not just handsome. Bob was beautiful. He had a wide dignified face beset with magnificent whiskers, and a blaze of pure white ran from under his chin, across his broad chest, down his front paws and covered his complete 'underneath'. On his back a saddle of tabby colouring was broken here and there with white cloud patches. All this in long, smooth fur on a cat-and-half size body. That was our Bob.

He came to us from a big house in Moulsecoomb where Ivy was in service, and they told us he was a 'prize' cat. We did not know exactly what this entailed, but right away he surely was a prize to us. He came to us from lofty surroundings, settled into our humble home and accepted us for what we were.

There was no 'catto' or 'pusso' or anything like that in those days, but Bob accepted the remnants of our meals and ate them with relish; and with the occasional 'Littlebit' from Flo Knight, was always in the pink of condition. Remember too, that I am writing of the days when the man with a fish-barrow was a regular visitor to the streets, and with herrings (Brighton caught, he said) at 24 for a bob (a shilling or 5p) and mackerel at about the same price, working-class puss-cats belonging to large families did very well for a bit o' fish, thank you.

No matter how the rest of the family carried on, Bob always kept his dignity, and throughout his long life his breeding stood out a mile. Somehow, I could never accept that Bob was just a cat. Cats play with balls of wool, and chase mice and things like that; but in all his life I never saw Bob exceed walking pace. Bob commuted between the front doorstep, where in the balmy days of summer he would imbibe the south coast sunshine and sea air, and the kitchen fireplace, where in the dark, winter months he would permanently commandeer centre position - ignoring with lofty disdain the family of mice who had set up home at the back of the kitchen range, and who occasionally popped out one by one to see how he was getting on.

For twelve or thirteen years this lovely animal graced our home, and he died with the same dignity with which he had lived. I could not write of the family and not mention Bob, who was such a well-loved part of it.

The spirit of the Victorian family

The spirit of the Victorian Father dominated family life well into the Nineteen-twenties; no less in working class homes than elsewhere. Large families were ruled with varying

degrees of strictness, and Dad was law in his own home. With large numbers of children, and small houses, it is obvious that control had to be exercised, or anarchy would reign.

In all homes Dad was the boss and his authority was respected - or else! There were things in the home that were exclusively Dad's. Dad's chair, Dad's coat-hook, and so on. Our Dad had his own knife and fork. It was easy to identify these from the rest, because in the case of cutlery and crockery no two pieces matched. They may well have started out as canteens of cutlery, or Dinner and Tea sets, but the years had taken toll and reduced them to a weird and wonderful assortment.

Nobody used Dad's but Dad. The coathanger behind the kitchen door which looked like a treble clef, with a bit prodding up for a hat and a big hook below for the coat - that was Dad's too. So deep-rooted was this 'Dad's Law' that even when he was not at home, if ever I did sit in his chair it was with a guilty feeling that I didn't ought to be there. But nothing - nothing at all - ever occupied that hook but a bucket shaped hat with enamelled badge signifying that it belonged to Postman No 31, and a brown canvas bag with leather shoulder straps and marked with bold letters G.P.O. The bag contained nothing but string, which was supposed to be for running repairs to broken parcels. But such demands were made on that string for our kiddie games that we were frequently threatened with thick ears if we pinched it all.

When the hook behind the door was occupied, Dad's chair contained either Dad, or Dad's belt. A heavily buckled belt, curled up, as the sole occupant of his chair, indicated that Dad was 'out the back'. There was no such thing as an inside lavatory for miles around, and a call from nature could only be answered by taking a walk. Out the back door we had to go, along the yard, and in the little door at the end. I still recall the agony in the depth of winter - it was brave the elements or bust. I can tell you it was no fun, going to the lav in your overcoat, and trying to shield a candle from the icy blast. Later on we used a cycle lamp - at least we could keep one hand warm at a time.

To be quite fair to Father, in return for his claims and entitlements as head of the house he did take on certain duties as his own. One of these was to maintain a regular supply of paper for toilet use, and at various times he could be found at the kitchen table cutting newspaper into convenient sized squares and making them up neatly into a pack, which was then pierced in one corner with a meat skewer. This pack was afterwards impaled on another meat skewer bent to hook shape, and the whole assembly hung from a nail on the lavatory wall, so that each sheet could be neatly snatched off as required. It was a funny thing, but you could always find something interesting to read on the lav paper; and you could spend a lot of time searching through the pack for the sheet that your column continued on. This often led to skirmishes - 'I've been waiting ages to come out there - you've been reading the paper again ain't you?' I would just like to add that toilet arrangements such as ours were common in the neighbourhood, where bums and toilet rolls were complete strangers.

We all respected Dad's belt. That belt was a symbol of authority. That belt was the sword of Damocles that hung permanently over our small flappers. Even while it was holding Dad's trousers up, Mum would use it as a threat of what would happen to us if we 'played her up'. 'You wait till y'father comes in - you'll get his belt - that's what you'll get'. But poor old thing, we played her up so often that only the most outrageous cases ever got reported. And when y'father did get home after trudging the streets all day, all he wanted to do was to sit down for a bit of rest and quiet. But he knew that sparing the rod would not only spoil the child, but also get him a good old lashing from Mum's tongue. So justice had to be done.

The punishment procedure was always the same. The offender was invariably well out of the way when he knew he was 'for it' and Dad would come out onto the front doorstep and let forth a loud bellow. The front doorstep, by the way, was a sort of platform at the top of the fourteen stone steps, and the bellow that Dad let forth could be read as 'Ted', 'Ron', 'Alf or 'Sid'. They all sounded the same when Dad hollered. The culprit knew very well who was being called and, knowing better than to try putting off the evil hour, would approach the bottom step saying 'What's the matter Dad? What do you want Dad?' With a sweep of his head towards the front door, 'C'min 'ere me lad', Dad would say. He would be standing sideways on to the doorway, with his left hand swinging by his side. 'C'min 'ere me lad.' The best tactic was a slow approach to the top step and a smart dash for the door. But no matter what, you could never prevent the swinging hand from landing behind your ear'ole and Whoosh - up the passage you flew, usually finishing in a heap at the kitchen door.

So long as you were not the victim yourself, it was always good fun to watch the punishment performance. And never more than when Ronnie was 'for it'. Ron is our youngest brother, and at an early age had developed a talent for planning and scheming. Ronnie had worked it out that the best way to minimise the punishment was to reduce the target area, so he would duck his napper, go into a crouch, and make a wild dash for the doorway with his hands doing a rapid rotating movement over the back of his neck. But the unhappy result of all this was that instead of Ronnie's ear'ole getting it, the swinging hands would catch the arse of his trousers - and up the passage he would fly like the rest of us.

As the culprit was gathering himself together, Dad would follow along the passage, going through the motions of undoing his belt. But that was as far as it went, apart from the dire words, 'I'm warning you me lad - give yer mother any more 'old buck' and you'll get this - buckle end.' We never got it - buckle end or any other end. Dad was basically a docile old chap - like a friendly old labrador - with a loud 'woof' of a bark and no bite. Many kids meant much bother, but in our family, as indeed in most families of those times, Mum and Dad bore up with fortitude and affection.

We did not see a lot of our Father during the week. He worked what they called shifts. I suppose there must have been more than one shift, but the only one that I can recall is

the one that required him to be at the sorting office in Ship Street (the sawt'n orifice) at 6am. Dad was very conscientious about time-keeping and regularly rose from his bed at 4 o'clock in the morning to be there on time. There was no transport at that time and even if there had been it was against his principles to waste money on tram fares. And so each morning he would walk to the sawt'n orifice where he made up his round prior to plodding the streets delivering it. A great walker was Dad, he just had to be.

Even on Sundays, when he could be with his family, he never completely escaped from the sawt'n orifice, because much of the afternoon was given over to filling in his 'overtime docket'. With a low wage and a high demand on his money, Dad grabbed what overtime he could to help out. It was a G.P.O. rule that a record of overtime worked and money claimed must be submitted on a 'docket', and so, every Sunday afternoon the docket ceremony was performed.

Armed with a pen, a bottle of ink and a docket form, and surrounded by dozens of bits of paper, he would start. Each entry was preceded by a dip in the bottle and the pen was whirled around in small circles about four inches above the paper. Then, with a dive, A.J.MANVILLE. was written against 'Name:-' Another dip, whirl, dive and 31 went in against 'No:-' Date and Round were entered with ease and then came the dodgy bit - hours worked and amount claimed. After many Umms and Errs and shakes of the head, and dottings down, reckonings up and whirls of the pen, the family's help would be called for: 'How long is from ten to three, to five-and-twenty to seven?' Or 'How much is fifteen threeha'pences?' He invariably got three or four different answers to each question, and as he always insisted, when doing his mental arithmetic, that 'Nine eights are sixty-four', I imagine that his dockets presented quite a challenge to the wages staff at the G.P.O.

But as these worthies always worked it out amongst themselves and paid out on their calculations, I don't see why they had to bother poor old Dad at all. In any case he reckoned they were a swindling lot. When he got his wage packet he always said 'Well, that's not what I made it come to.'

There was no messing about with moustaches in those days. Your Dad either had a moustache or he didn't. There was none of that nonsense of shaving 'em off one week, and letting 'em grow the next. Most of the Bear Road Dads had moustaches so far as I can recall, and there was only one beard in the street - old Daddy Coleman's, and that poor old blighter had only one arm, so perhaps he couldn't shave very well. We never gave much thought to it as kids, but I have often, in later years, tried to imagine what our Dad would have looked like without a moustache. I'm rather glad I never knew.

Dad's moustache was on the bushy side, but it had been a nifty waxed affair when he was a young man. In his early youth he had done some army service in India, and it was then that his 'taz' must have been at its best. A large portrait of Dad used to hang in the front room. There he was with trim waxed moustache, and wearing a splendid jacket with stripes, crowns and all sorts of decoration. I thought he must have been a General

at least. What a blow to learn in later years that the packet belonged to the photographer, and the dignified look belonged to Private Alf Manville. We all wanted to be proud of our Dads in those days, but that was not the first time he'd let me down. He told me once that my Grandfather had been M.P. for North Brighton - then I found out that Grandad had been a road sweeper. Dad said 'I told you he was an M.P. - so he was - a mud pusher.' It slowly dawned upon me that my Papa was a bit of a leg-puller.

Throughout his life Dad retained an affection for all things 'military'. To him a large doorstep of bread-and-marge was a 'sergeant major's slice', a good dinner was a 'sergeant major's dinner' and to Dad that particular military gent was associated with anything big or good. You could not beat a good 'Murrtry hand', and he roundly scorned all this ragtime and bloody 'Jattz' rubbish. Dad was not a musical person and was not, like Mum, given to singing around the house. He did, however, have a favourite song - 'The Song of the Thrush' and would, on rare occasions, let forth with this one. But only, mind you, with a kind of Murrty band, bass-drum accompaniment. It was usually while he was engaged on some quiet job such as drying the dinner plates. With long intervals between each line, we were treated to something like this:

'Yurrs ago out in the Brrum-Brrum Australia,
Out in the Brrum-Brrum there once Brrum-Brrum-Brrum,
(cheeks would puff out and the old moustache would vibrate)
The miners were Brrum-Brrum, of all Brrum-Brrum,
Many a Brrum-Brrum and Brrum-Brrum-Brumm-Brumm.'

Giggles, winks and all sorts of mockery went on behind his back, but only behind his back. Otherwise there was the risk of getting the constantly threatened backhander. Or at least a 'smack round the chops'.

There is much that I could write about this gentle old chap who was our father. He can only be remembered with affection. A man who knew not the meaning of nastiness or spite.

How sad that I also recall the picture of a fine old figure reduced, in the end, to the utmost frailty. How sadly I recall that the old purse that he carried for years contained, at his death, the princely sum of one shilling and three pence. His worldly wealth. Society's reward to an honest toiler.

I have promised myself that I will write without bitterness and so I will not dwell upon the social injustices of those days. In any case there is no need to. Dad never bemoaned his lot and his family will always remember him for what he was, a happy man.

Lousy with Manvilles

When you are as I am, the sixth in a family of ten children, it is a sad fact that you cannot claim to have shared your childhood with your eldest brothers and sisters.

Especially your sisters, because as I have said before they were invariably bunged off into service as soon as they were fourteen years old, or so. And so, when I was only four or five years old, not really old enough to put memories together, our Ivy and May left home and became, to me, young ladies who came to tea once a week. An occasion which, I confess, embedded itself in my memory mainly because on those days we had cakes for tea.

Nevertheless, Ivy assures me that she remembers our childhood well enough. She doesn't actually say so, but I think it was because Teddy and I were such little sods and played her up so. Ivy was not an only child for long, and in her early childhood it became her burden to 'look after' the small brothers and sisters who followed her swiftly and regularly into the family. 'Looking after', Ivy tells me, consisted mainly of keeping the little 'uns from under Mum's feet while she got on with her work. I have a mental picture of poor little Ivy, with one kid in some sort of pram, and with three others in tow, pushing and pulling her way up to the top of the hill and through the big iron gates into the cemetery, which was our playground. A large bottle of water and a bundle of bread-and-something were the refreshments, and flower picking, daisy-chain making and butterfly catching were the pastimes.

In later years we boys would go up to the racehill to play our rougher games and to fight and whatnot, but there was something about the cemetery that made it favourite for picnicing. There was a table-thing with rollers on it - sometimes we sat on that. Yes, we liked the cemetery, the flowers were better there than on the racehill. But we never picked those on the graves, and we never trod on a grave - because Winnie said that was wicked.

Ivy entered service as a young girl and worked her way through the various duties. She became a proficient cook, but for many years she was a nursemaid to several different children. So what with looking after us lot, and then looking after other people's, it is easy to imagine that when Ivy married and had a family of her own she knew a thing or two about bringing up kids. And all the time she loved it.

I must not hurry too far forward before I tell you about those afternoons and evenings when our sisters were home for their, 'half-day', and I should hate to miss telling you the story of Toot Funnell and her Christmas cake. There was often a get together of Ivy, May and their friends in the front room, and sometimes we kids were allowed in. It was not really a party, but everyone would sit and talk or play games. At one time we had a piano and our cousin Gladys would come up from Kemp Street and play. She was a good pianist, our cousin Gladys, she used to play for the silent films in the Cinema-de-luxe in North Street. So we had a good old sing-song and there was general jollity. I remember when the Charleston was all the rage, the girls holding onto backs of chairs and kicking their heels around. We kids thought the grownups were all mad. But it was the latest dance, so it had to be done.

Toot (not as on trumpet, but as in foot) was a very good singer and we always got her to

sing solo. I remember 'Ramona', 'What'll I do', 'Shepherd of the Hills' and one that used to get great big balloon size tears down our faces, 'Old pal, why don't you answer me?' What with all that and then an emotional rendering by Mum of 'While London Sleeps', there was always the danger of a bit of melancholy setting in. That was where Alfie came to the rescue - or rather Hezekiah Johnson did. 'Hezekiah Johnson's Jubilee' was Alfie's party piece, and he had learned it - all seven or so verses of it - from frequent visits to Jack Shepherd's Entertainers - a pierrot group on the sea-front - and Alfie could always be coaxed to sing it, but only if we all agreed to join in the 'Toodle-oodle-oo'. But Hezekiah is worth a bit on his own, so when I am telling you about Alf I might give you a couple of verses. And then we can all join in the 'Toodle-oodle-oo'. But Toot's cake must come first. It was the story of that cake, and the way it was told, that was the highlight of one of those evenings.

To set the scene, I must explain that all this happened at a time when there were no factory bakers, and all the local bakers had their own bake-houses. Mr Goldring was our local baker, and like all the others he offset his heating costs by allowing the local housewives, for a modest charge, to use his ovens to bake the Sunday dinner. This was very handy for Mums with large families and small gas ovens, and for those who, especially in summertime, did not want to stoke up the old kitchen range. It was a lovely sight, on a Sunday morning, to see Mums of all shapes and sizes carrying all sorts of trays covered with cloths of all colours, bobbing and shuffling down Bear Road and Newmarket Road to the Lewes Road, and disappearing down the steps of Mr Goldring's bakehouse. And there was a lovely smell for miles around when they called back later to collect. I don't know how much Mr Goldring charged for this service, but it seemed a good thing for him in as much as it kept his ovens hot for the Monday morning bake, and he probably made a little bit on top.

It was coming up for Christmas (I forget which one) and Toot decided to make a Christmas cake. The idea occurred to her that if old Goldring was prepared to let out his ovens for dinners, perhaps he would bung her cake in with the bread and things, so that it would get the right treatment.

So Toot gathered unto herself the finest ingredients - fine fruits and rare spices - and all was mixed into a concoction of rich and fragrant quality and, said Toot, 'I put it into me best cake tin and took it down to old Goldring and asked him if he would bake it for me, well you know he's supposed to be the Master Baker, ain't he? So he said yes he would and told me when to come back for it (pause for large intake of breath). Well,' went on Toot, 'I goes back for me cake and I thought old Goldring looked a bit funny when I asked him for it; he just said yes and walked away and after a while he comes back carrying me cake tin. Christ!' shouted Toot (her voice getting higher all the time) 'You oughter've seen me cake - it wasn't even flat, it was bloody sunk (apparently Toot's cake tin contained something that looked like a dried-up dew pond). "What've you done to me bleedin' cake?" I asked him. And yer know what he said? (it was a scream by now). D'yer know what that cheeky sod said? 'E said, "Well, after all, that wasn't really a cake was it? That lot ought to 'ave been put in a cloth and boiled.'" We couldn't help it,

we were doubled up with laughter as poor Toot, with eyes ablaze and voice at top pitch carried on. 'Cheeky sod, called me cake a bloody puddin', 'e did.' It was not that we didn't feel sorry for her, but we knew old Goldring and his bakery pretty well. And we had to admit that anyone who could turn out doughnuts and Swiss puddin's at a ha'penny a time, as he did, must know a thing or two about cakes and puddin's.

Dear Toot, I have often thought, since those days, that if your cake had been a roaring success, it would, no doubt, have been eaten, loudly praised and, like millions of other cakes - forgotten. But, failure as it was, your cake will live on. For whenever Manvilles gather and talk of old times, the story of your cake - the cake that should have been a puddin' will rise in all its glory.

My earliest memory of my sister May is of trying to pull the poor girl's hair out by the roots. She must have been about eleven years old at the time, and it was my first day at school. I think I must have been a miserable little perisher as a teeny - one who disliked everything - and I definitely disliked school. I had started in the morning, and by the time I got home to dinner had decided that was enough education for me. In answer to Mum's eager enquiry I said 'Well, it's alright, but I don't think I'll go any more.' Mum thought differently and poor May was detailed off to get me back in the afternoon. So with me riding pick-a-back, screaming and hollering like a mad thing and tugging at her hair all the way, she bore me down Bear Road, along Ewhurst and up the hill to deposit me inside the gates of Coombe Road Infants School.

The too few memories I have of her as a child are mostly as an organiser of our indoor games. Anyone who can stage a pantomime - in a medium-sized back bedroom containing two beds and a chest, played by two keen girls and two reluctant small boys (Teddy and me) dressed in about three packets of coloured crepe paper from the local sweetshop - anyone who can attempt that and get away with it must have some sort of organising ability. Well, that's the sort of thing that our May did.

With the aid of Mum's needle and cotton and the crepe paper, Winnie became the Fairy Queen and May the Princess. Teddy became the most hateful Prince you ever saw and I became a pageboy, or whatever there was enough paper left to dress me in. And so we danced our dances between the beds, we waved our firewood wands and we sang our songs. Our backroom became the Theatre Royal - a wonderland created by May with the help of our Win, and in spite of Teddy and me.

I am afraid that after those childhood times, I have lost a few of May's years. It is fairly certain that she took the usual route into service at the age of fourteen, and I have in mind that she worked for some time at the 'Sanny' - a sanitorium at the top of the road (to be known in later years as the Brighton Isolation Hospital) and that she did not care a lot for it.

I do remember, however, and quite clearly, the day she came home and announced joyfully that she had been offered a job at the soda fountain of the Regent Dance Hall,

the ballroom attached to the Regent Cinema in West Street. A few years earlier the old Regent had been destroyed by fire, and by happy coincidence the new one was completed with the coming of the new 'Talking Pictures': 'All Talking - All Singing'. A new era in cinema history had begun.

The 'soda-fountain' was a soft drinks bar, and May spent many happy years in a jolly music-and-fun atmosphere. Quite often she would bring home balloons, paper hats, squeakers and all the jolly remnants of the many ballroom parties - we kids were in paradise! She got to know all the latest 'numbers' and all the dance bands and musicians who played there. One day she told us of a new band that had come to the Regent - Billy Cotton and his 'boys'. 'They all wear schoolboy caps and they're a real lot of lads', she said. Billy Cotton - who in later years was to achieve such fame with his 'Wakey-Wakey' shows on Radio and TV.

May worked in the soda fountain and loved every minute of it. It was there that she met the young man who, later, she was to marry. Eric was the ballroom manager and they married when he was offered a higher position in the Palaise-de-Danse at Southport.

I will not dwell on the sadness that was to come; only to say that after a few years of married happiness tragedy struck, and suddenly, in the early stages of pregnancy, our dear May died.

There are things in the world that I do not understand and shall never understand. Why should this lovely girl, with everything to live for - a happy marriage, a good husband, and on the verge of joyous motherhood - why, oh why, should she be taken like this? How can you understand?

I am told that the only thing we are meant to understand is that true faith means accepting that which is beyond understanding. Our dear May died at the age of twenty-four. And the family mourned.

It seemed to be an unwritten law that the eldest son should be named after his father; so it was that our eldest brother was Alfred Henry. Alf was six years older than me, and that, at the time, seemed to be a very wide gap. And yet there was something about him that made it quite easy to recall his ways and habits as a boy. Alf was always a mixture of the serious and the comic. His own special chums always struck me as being a bit highbrow, and their games and pastimes were on a higher intellectual plane than those of other kids. Two of his mates were Bernards - Bernard Greenwood and Bernard Mann - and with Ron Baker they always struck us kids as being an 'uppish' lot.

They would take turns in visiting each other's houses and I remember some of the games they played when they came to our front-room - nothing that we lesser ones could understand. One game was called 'The priest of the parish has lost his considering cap'. I didn't know what it meant, or how they played it. In another game one of them had to chant:

'Godfrey Gordon Gustavus Gore,
Won't you remember to shut the door?'

I could not, for the life of me, imagine what it was all about, but that is how they went on.
And it was just too much for the likes of Teddy and me.

Their conversation, even the jokes and stories they exchanged, were beyond our understanding. When it came to carol time, I remember them singing one that I liked very much and would have like to have learned. But I had never heard it before, nor have I heard it since:

'There's a song in the air
There's a star in the sky.
There's a Mother's sweet prayer,
And a baby's low cry ...'

Perhaps it is a well-known carol, but Alfie and his mates were the only ones I ever heard sing it. It was like everything else they did, exclusive. Well, that's how it seemed to us.

Despite his serious and 'uppish' side our eldest brother was a natural comic. With trunk upright, backside sticking out in an enormous bump, and walking from the knees, Alfie did the 'Max Wall' walk years before Max Wall did. With this walk, or with one of the many comic songs, he knew he could break the ice at any gathering. His ability to learn and remember so many songs was truly remarkable, in so much as his main source of learning was from one or other of the pierrot shows on the beach.

We did not, at that time, call them 'pierrots', nor did they wear traditional pierrot costume. They were known as 'entertainers'. Jack Shepherd's Entertainers performed at the Black Rock end of the sea front and Ellison's Entertainers at the western end between the piers.

The construction of both 'Theatres' was the same. A raised stage in the centre and two dressing-rooms - a little hut at each wing. One piano and about six stools were the furnishings and the company of about six or seven sat on the stage throughout the performance, except when, one by one, they disappeared into the wings for a change of dress - maybe a funny hat, or whatever their song or act demanded.

A wood-and-wire fence enclosed a number of deck chairs for the paying customers - 3d at the front and 2d at the back, but the bulk of the audience stood around the outside and got their entertainment for nothing.

Jack Shepherd's was probably the most popular of the two, but suffered rather more interference than its rival because Volk's Electric Railway ran very close to the back of the stage and the regular service of trains was a bit of a distraction. Especially as the

drivers seemed to find delight in giving a few hearty clangs on the bell just at that point. And then there were the motor-bikes.

The boundary fence enclosing the seating area edged right up to the pavement of the Marine Parade, and while this was quite convenient for the standing or promenade audience, it was also convenient for the motor-bike straddlers. Very few youths of the day could afford motor-bikes and nobody in our walk of life ever bought a new one. And so Jack Shepherd's was the assembly point for the most decrepit, and certainly the noisiest bunch of machines you could imagine. And they attended every performance, the combination of the good tarmac road of Marine Drive (ideal for tear-ups) and a bit of free entertainment being much too good to miss.

They would sit astride their machines while the funny-man was doing his bit, or when the pretty girls were performing, and were all attention. Then came the announcement: Mr Jack Shepherd will now sing... 'Thora'. That was it. The signal for another tear up. And the unfortunate and slightly corpulent Mr Shepherd, with music held belly high and at arm's length, would launch himself at Thora to the accompaniment of the bang, crash and roar of half a dozen motor-bikes tearing up the Marine Drive. I always had the feeling that Jack was saying to himself 'I don't care, I'm going to sing - it's my bloody show and no-one's going to stop me.' It wasn't always 'Thora' sometimes it was 'Come into the garden Maud' or 'Alice where art thou?' I rather think he had a thing about the women.

Alfie usually chose Ellison's, mainly because it was situated on the beach almost opposite a slope which ran between the lower and upper esplanades; and there was a jutting-out bit where the kids could sit and dangle their legs. It was almost as if they had dress-circle seats for nothing. Here, Alfie learned his songs. A few visits and he had all kinds of comic songs off by heart, and none has lived longer in the family memory than 'Hezekiah Johnson's Jubilee'. No party or gathering was complete without Alfie's rendering of his masterpiece. But it was only sung upon the agreement of the entire company to join in the 'Toodle-oodle-oo' (I reprint the song as it was sung then, but recognise that it would be seen as racist today, and do not wish to cause offence).

'Hezekiah Johnson it appears,
Hadn't been born just sixty years,
When he sat down to write to his friends to say,
We're all a-gonna have a jubilation day,
Black and White...(Chorus) 'Toodle-oodle-oo',
Came that night... 'Toodle-oodle-oo',
Down they sat and didn't they gorge,
Puffin' and a-blowin' like a blacksmith's forge,
None of those coons... 'Toodle-oodle-oo',
Ever used spoons... 'Toodle-oodle-oo',
They might have used spoons at a mission tea,
But they all used shovels at the Jubilee.'

The story goes on to tell how the soup was brought up in great tanks, and all the guests dived in:

'Swam around... some got drowned,
They gobbled up all that meat in sight,
Sam got his ear chewed off that night,
Still they swam.... Parson Sam,
Offered up a prayer for those at sea,
With a mouthful of puddin' at the Jubilee.'

On and on it went, to a happy ending despite the fact that:

'The floor gave way and the company,
Went wallop in the cellar at the Jubilee.'

Verse upon verse, and song after song, Alfie could always be relied upon to keep a party going. Yet there was not a more serious, placid and steady lad in the street. And so he remained in later years. I cannot use superlatives in writing of Alf. Reliable. Honest and Consistent - such words would describe his nature. His consistency is reflected in the fact that from leaving school until retirement he worked as a printer with only two employers.

When he was eighteen Alf joined the Territorials and rose to the rank of Sergeant-Major, his service continuing until at one time he was the longest-serving 'Terrier' in the country. In recognition of this, our Alf was chosen to be one of the guards lining the processional route when our present Queen, (as Princess Elizabeth) was married to the Duke of Edinburgh. It was an honour he valued greatly.

We choose our friends and not our relations. If the reverse was the case Alf, I am sure, was the sort of chap that anyone would choose as a big brother. The few lines I have used as his pen-picture are vastly insufficient to pay full tribute to his memory. Alf passed away in 1979. His wife Lily, his children and many grand-children remember him with love and pride.

There was always something of the 'school-teacher' about Winnie. Even as a very small girl, there was nothing she liked better than to have gathered around her a 'class' of small children, and to teach them something. Songs, poems or stories - all the time the kids would listen, Winnie would teach.

There was, of course, the normal amount of little girl 'bossiness' about her, but the urge to take the little ones in hand was born of a love of children that was to stay with her, and is with her today.

When it became Winnie's turn to be 'looker-after' her luck was out. The kids immediately

below her in age order were Teddy, me and Ronnie, and there was no way that we were going to be looked after by a girl - sister or no sister. We boys had reached the age of independence, and had our own gang of mates to knock around with all through the summer.

Winter time was a bit different though. When it was dark and wet, and going out to play was out of the question, it was then that we were confined to amusing ourselves around the kitchen table.

At week-ends we had our comics to read. Our 'regulars' were the 'Rainbow' and the 'Funny Wonder'. 'The Rainbow', as its name suggests, was coloured, and all about Tiger Tim and Mrs Bruin and her family of animals - this one was mainly for the little 'uns. But that didn't stop the big 'uns looking at it. But we more mature ones liked the 'Funny Wonder'. Sometimes we did 'swaps' with our mates; then we had 'Chips', 'Comic Cuts' and Film Fun'. Most of them cost a penny, some twopence, but by the 'swap' system a whole world of jolly characters became known to us at a very low cost.

I remember Weary Willy and Tired Tim, Roland Butter and Hammond Deggs, and dear old PC Cuddlecook who was always after the baddie who pinched the pie that Cookie had made for him. Silly old thing - she always put it on the window-sill to cool - asking for it to be pinched that was!

My favourites in the 'Funny Wonder' were Handsome Harry the Hero and Vernon the Vile Villain. How Vernon survived from week to week I do not know; he spent all his time carrying around a whacking great bomb with a fuse-thing already sparking on it, trying to blow up poor Harry and buzz off with Mildred his girl-friend. But stupid Vernon only managed to blow himself up every week. Thank goodness he always recovered in time for next week's 'Funny Wonder', or I don't know what we would have done.

Comics seldom lasted more than a day or two, and then we had to find other ways of amusing ourselves. Apart from the odd scruffy-looking doll belonging to the girls, there was nothing in the way of shop-bought toys; and so our old scrubbed kitchen table was usually smothered with an amazing assortment of playthings. Paper, scissors, cotton-reels, pencils, crayons, matchboxes, lead soldiers, bits of string, sticky paste, hairpins, hatpins, marbles, fag-cards, winkle-shells, buttons, cardboard boxes, beads, bent nails, ribbon, thimbles, bits of broken clocks or watches - anything that used to be alright and wasn't now - it was all there to keep us quiet.

I remember my first invention - I found out that if you threaded a piece of cotton through the outside part of a matchbox, and then pushed the inside home, you could make the inside part pop up by pulling the end of the cotton. Many wonderful things were done around our kitchen table, and the accident rate was quite low - all things considered.

But there were, believe it or not, times when the general rumpus subsided and things calmed down. It was then that Winnie and her class came into being. I liked poems, and

most of the time Winnie taught us the nice gentle ones. But she did have a leaning toward those that were a bit sad. There was one about a little girl who had a doll and lost it. I remember part of it:

'But I lost my sweet little doll dear,
As I played on the heath one day...'

It went on to tell how the doll was found all ragged and washed out by the rain. It made all the kids feel miserable. Carefully sounding all her Ts and rolling all her Rs with exaggerated openings and closings of her mouth, she would sing songs like:

'I stood beside a brooklet, that sparkled on its way,
And saw beneath the wavelets, a tiny trout at play...'

I used to like songs like that, but once she taught us a song that I didn't like, and I didn't forgive her for a long time because it put the wind up me, and I think I had a nightmare or two over it. Goodness knows where she learnt it - certainly not at school - I don't know. It was about a boy who, somehow, got himself shot. I recall:

'A fair-haired boy from a distant land,
At sunrise had to die,
Alone he sat in a prison cell,
From his heart there came a cry...'

The ghastly thing went on to relate how the message that could have saved him came too late, and he was shot. Horrible thing. Shook my small frame it did, and upset me for many a day. In later years, Winnie denied knowledge of this dirge: 'I wouldn't have taught you a thing like that.' 'You did you know Winnie.' Even with my wild imagination I couldn't have dreamed up that horror story. And, outside of school, you were our only 'teacher'. I haven't heard it since, but I've never forgotten it.

Winnie followed the usual girl's course from school into service. First she went to the Sanny, and then into private service; and she always had a 'fun' attitude to her work. It seemed that all the 'gals' she met up with at work were a jolly lot, and she always gave us a lot of laughs about the goings-on among the staff (especially at the Sanny) when she came home in her half-day.

Later, when she went into service for Lady So-and-So at Kemp Town, she joined forces with our cousin Florence, who was a 'lad' if ever there was one. Winnie and she were identical in being completely incapable of displaying the seriousness and 'dignity' that was expected of working-class girls in service. I do not doubt that Winnie and Flo were good and hard workers, hut judging from some of the giggling stories they told, it did seem that they found great delight in taking the rise out of the snobby ones.

I liked the little story of when Flo was waiting upon the 'Family' at tea, when the

Daughter of the House addressed her in haughty tones, 'I say, Florence, tell me, do the working class have shrimps for tea?' and the snappy answer came: 'Yes Ma'am, they do, but they don't consider 'em a luxury.' By the way, in those days you could buy winkles and shrimps from the bloke with a barrow for a few pence a basinful. No doubt Lady So-and-So had hers delivered by MacFisheries.

The teacher urge never left Winnie, and it was no surprise that in later years she became a much loved teacher of the Infants' class in her local school at Patcham. Not surprising either, that the urge was hereditary; at the present time, Winnie's daughter Beryl has her own small school for Infants in Western Australia.

I may be an old romantic, but I like to believe that somewhere on the other side of the world, a few small faces are smiling today because of something that began in our house many years ago, when our Winnie loved to teach the kids.

Teddy couldn't help it, it wasn't Teddy's fault, he wasn't even there when it happened. Teddy would cross his heart with his right forefinger and spit, which was about the most solemn oath that anyone could swear. But the sad, indisputable fact was that no mischief, great or small, was committed within a large radius of our house that did not have the brandmark of Teddy Manville on it. And an endless procession of irate parents or neighbours presented themselves on the doorstep of No 111 to report on 'What your Teddy's bin an' done.' Windows had been broken, front gardens trampled, small daughters had gone home grizzling because of pulled pigtailed, apples had been pinched, someone's schoolcap had been chucked over the cemetery wall. It was a wonder he ever found time for school. But it was all an injustice - Teddy couldn't help it, really. It just so happened that he had been born with ten times the normal amount of 'Old Adam' in him. And the trouble he tried hard to keep away from had the habit of catching up with him. It was considered an achievement if we got to Sunday-school and back without him having a fight with someone.

Big or small, our Teddy would take 'em on. I remember one fight of his that started under the Arches in Lewes Road and finished halfway along Riley, three-quarters of a mile of non-stop battle. He once had a fight with a kid in the Arcadia, the local fleapit, where we went to see Charlie Chaplin and the rest of our heroes on Saturday afternoons. That was quite some fight when you consider that the other kid was two rows in front of us.

Yes, Teddy and trouble were constant companions. He was the 'Old Block' from which I was a chip; and there were few teachers in Coombe Road School who were not well and truly ready for me when I advanced into their class. Having just had a bellyful of Brother Ted, they knew just how to deal with the next Manville that came along. And I had to resort to a rare bit of crawling to square the books for the next one.

Teddy became the victim of his own reputation. It became easy to blame him for any mischief that occurred, because it was always more likely that he was mixed up in it

than not. He was the favourite whipping-boy for the locality, and sometimes the victim of a try on. One case stands out in my mind. Mum was on the verge of tears when I came home from school one day. 'What can I do about that Teddy? There's a woman came round from Ewhurst Road, says he broke her window, and her husband's coming round tonight for half-a-crown to mend it.' A chord was struck in my mind, and I asked, 'Do you know the woman's name?' 'Yes,' said Mum, 'Mrs Hawker'. Well now, I know the Hawker house pretty well, and I also knew that a pane of glass had been hanging on with the aid of a bit of sticking-plaster for months past. Perhaps Teddy's bouncing ball had not improved the condition of it, but the whole thing was an obvious try-on to get a long-needed repair paid for. This news cheered Mum up no end. 'Well,' she said, 'Dad'll be home when old Hawker calls, and he'll go away with a flea in his ear.' Finding a flea for dear Mr Hawker's ear would have been no problem at all, but for some reason he did not turn up, so the operation was not called for. I tell this small story just to prove that, devil though he was, sometimes our Ted was more sinned against than sinning.

I am not sure if the Band of Hope is the same kind of organisation all over the country as it was (perhaps still is) in the Connaught Institute, Lewes Road, Brighton, but its object was (perhaps still is) to fight the evil of drink, and to guide its youthful members onto the path of total abstinence. We all belonged to it, and every Monday evening deposited our ragged hums on the hard seats in the Hall, and to start the proceedings would chant the 'Pledge':

'I do promise, God helping me,
To abstain from all intoxicating drinks and beverages,
And I will encourage others to do the same.'

A pretty safe bet this. The only intoxicating liquor in most of our homes was a bottle of Tarragonna wine at Christmas time, (closely guarded) and the furthest we got into drinking was buying an arrowroot biscuit in the Bottle and Jug department. But to be quite honest, whatever the objects of the Band of Hope, our object in belonging to it was to get enough attendance stamps on our cards to qualify us for the Christmas party and the Summer Pageant. It was at one of these pageants that Teddy besmirched his name in the Band of Hope for ever.

On a fine Saturday in midsummer, thousands of tiny Total-Abstainers would gather on the Level at the bottom of Ditchling Road. They represented Band of Hope groups from all the local districts, and to each group was allocated a Horse-and-Cart, or dray-thing, upon which to display a tableau illustrating the battle against the evil of drink. Connaught Institute, us, decided to depict the 'Demon Drink' being slain by the 'Good Knight' of abstinence. Choosing someone to play the Knight may well have caused the selectors a problem but when it came to casting anything in the way of a Demon, our Teddy seemed to be the natural choice - no contest really - and he accepted the honour, not with any vision of a theatrical career looming before him, but simply because playing the part would relieve him of the need to walk all the way like the rest of us poor little devils.

From the Level, down Viaduct Road, across Preston Circus and along Preston Road we traipsed, and into the gates of Preston Park, each group shepherded by a few adult 'workers' and following their own horse-and-cart, quite a walk for legs with an average length of eighteen inches or so. And there was our Teddy, wrapped up in some red creation that had been cobbled together by one of the lady workers to make him look like a Demon Dragon, grinning all over his face because he was riding all the way in exchange for being slain by a wooden sword every hundred yards or so.

After the judging of the tableau came the sports and races, followed by the feast. This consisted mainly of buns and lemonade, served by the workers to the kids who sat cross-legged on the grass; not the most comfortable arrangement, but grub was grub, and we took it in the spirit in which it was offered.

Teddy usually reckoned on two or three prizes at the races. This was not cockiness, our Ted could run like a deer, and age-for-age there was no beating him, especially when he was wearing his cap, the cap that won him prizes and got him into trouble. Our school colours were black and blue, but the 'racing cap' was red and black sections with a red peak and a button on top. The explanation is that Ted's cap was a reject from a posh family for whom one of our sisters worked, and was acquired for nowt, while Coombe Road school caps cost one-and-threepence each. That sort of difference might be of no consideration in these affluent days, it was then, I assure you. Wearing his magic cap, he said he couldn't run without it, the question was not if he would win a prize, but how many he would win.

We were all sitting on the grass, line upon line of kids, cross-legged with buns on a paper plate and glasses of lemonade in front of us. Our workers patrolled the ends of the lines to see that all was in order, and so we munched and guzzled our way through the feast. And with the memory of his Tableau success behind him, and with racing prizes to come, none munched and guzzled with more satisfaction than our Ted.

Whether it was for comfort, sentiment or just forgetfulness, I do not know, but as he munched and guzzled, his racing cap remained firmly on his head. This brazen affront to etiquette was spotted by one of the workers, no less a person than Mrs Churcher, the group leader's wife! Mrs Churcher was a kindly soul who devoted much time and sacrifice in our interest, but she was a lady of gaunt stature and starchy demeanor. Bright, sharp eyes peered through round spectacles perched on a small, reddish, turned-up nose, and this entire assembly alighted on Teddy's cap. Mrs Churcher, drawn up to full height, with arms crossed over her generous chest, stood at the end of our line, and in a loud, resonant voice addressed herself to the offender: TEDDY MANVILLE' she cried, 'WHERE'S YOUR HAT?'

I shall never forget it, you had to forgive him really, he was enjoying his food and it was cruel to shatter the idyllic mood he was in. Teddy couldn't help it, the answer came out loud and clear, like a shot from a gun: 'UP MY ARSE!!!'... I thought our Teddy had killed

her. Her eyes shot out, her chin sagged, and for an awful moment she froze. Then, to our relief, her mouth formed a small, round hole through which she drew a great amount of air, then her jaw sagged again and she seemed to return fully to life. With her right forefinger she replaced the specs which had travelled to the tip of her nose, probably pushed there when her eyeballs popped out, and staggered on her way, not knowing what else to do. She was a doubly unfortunate lady really, she could not report the full gravity of Teddy's offence because she did not use that kind of language, but I did overhear her telling another lady worker, 'I asked that Teddy Manville where his cap was, and he said 'Up my (nod of the head). Mmm.'

Mrs Churcher was a good soul, and her Christian nature allowed her to forgive our Teddy. But forgetting is another matter, and she was never quite the same to him. Sufficient to say, he never got another riding part in a pageant. Not even as a Demon.

Our family never put up Christmas decorations. Other families put up Christmas decorations. All over the world all sorts of Christmas decorations are put up by all sorts of families. Since the early nineteen-twenties, while everyone else is putting up decorations, Manvilles everywhere are 'Anging up the Appiness' - all because of Teddy. Well, it was Gracie's fault really. Our young sister was inconsiderate enough to arrive in the world, via our front room, on Christmas Day 1919. While the rest of mankind had been preparing to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ, we were preparing for the birth of Grace Noel Christine Manville.

It is not difficult to imagine then, that the atmosphere at home in the run-up days to Christmas was not exactly alive with tinsel, trimmings and toys; and the preparations for the front room delivery unit did not include the hanging of paper chains. It was, to be perfectly honest, the greatest non-Christmas ever, at least as far as we kids were concerned, and none was more upset about it all than Teddy. 'Ain't we goin' to have no paper chains up Dad?' he pleaded. And when poor old harassed Father pointed out in no uncertain terms that he'd got more to think about than bloody paper chains, that was the last straw, the final irony. Teddy was shattered, and at a time when births were foremost in our minds, he gave birth to words that were to become legend - words that have rung out at Christmas time in every Manville household since that day. With the tears not far back, he gave forth a plaintive wail: 'Gaw...w...d, we don't never 'ave a bit of 'appiness.'

From that moment, the word 'decoration' was banished from the family vocabulary. All paper chains, tinsel, coloured lights and other baubellery connected with Christmas became 'Appiness'. Christmases will come and go, Holy Nights may become less silent, bells may cease to jingle, white Christmases may no longer be dreamed of, even the Herald Angels may cease to sing, but one thing is certain: while a Manville remains to tread the earth, come Christmas time he will be 'Anging up the Appiness.'

Mum used to tell us that we'd all be sorry one day, sorry that we 'played her up' so. 'One day when I'm dead and gawn, you'll be sorry.' It was a frequent remonstration to all. But

it cannot be denied that she was looking more often at Teddy when she said it than at the rest of us. He tried so hard not to, but he probably contributed more grey hairs to her head than the rest of us together. We were all little sods in our way, but the condition was more severe in him than in anyone else, and being good required more effort. But he had a natural perkiness and humour that made him a kid it was almost impossible to dislike. He had a great sense of 'family' and although I, as his younger brother and natural target, got more clips round the ear 'ole than I cared for, it was woe betide any other kid who tried to bully me or younger brother Ron.

Yes, Teddy was a terror, and so often our Mum 'didn't know what to do about him'. But Mum knew, and we all knew, that despite it all none had a closer place in her affection than our Ted. It is perhaps inappropriate to strike a sad note in writing of Teddy. But I have a memory that lives with me. It is the memory of a middle-aged man, sitting on the back steps of No 111 silently weeping on the day that we followed our Mum as she left her old home for the last time. We understood: Teddy just couldn't help it.

Today, in the mid-eighties, there lives in a fine old thatched cottage in Devon a seventy-odd-year-old teenager who answers to the name of Edwin Charles Manville. If you should meet him there, yes, even today, I guarantee that within ten minutes you will be doubled up with laughter. That's our Ted, and you won't be able to help it.

You won't find 'Fainits' in the dictionary. I know you won't find it because I've looked in 'em all. So the brainy blokes who make dictionaries say there's no such word as 'Fainits'. Well, I can tell them something, there was such a word when I was a kid, and a mighty powerful word it was too. You could do anything with it, enterprises of great importance could be halted at the sound of the word. Supposing, just for instance, that in order to settle a small argument you and your mate were in the process of knocking the living daylight out of each other; and supposing, in the middle of the fray, you wanted to blow your nose or tie your boot lace, or something like that, all you had to do was to cross your fingers and shout 'Fainits', then your mate was duty-bound not to slosh you one before the repair had been made. Of course, if he got the idea that you were just trying to get a bit of a breather, he could shout 'Fainits Off' and fetch you a doughboy at the same time. Everything was done according to the rules.

It was the same thing with 'Halves'. If you and your mate were walking along and you spotted a penny, or a ha'penny or anything of value on the ground, you had to shout 'Finders Keepers' before he could yell 'Halves', otherwise the loot was split down the middle. Any argument and your nose might suffer the same fate.

It was somewhat in the spirit of these traditional words and sayings that once a month a peculiar ritual was performed by kids for miles around. On the first day of every month, hordes of them would dash around, inflicting damage on any other kid they could catch and shouting 'Pinch, Punch, First day of the month' and then, quick as lightning, 'No Returns'. Saying 'no returns' disqualified your victim from striking back, it was all a matter of honour. But honour can be pushed too far, and it was not long before

someone invented 'A pinch and a kick for being so quick'. With several variations on the same theme, it was not surprising that the second day of the month usually became ointment and bandage day.

There was not much 'fainits' in the lives of younger brother Ronnie and younger-than-him sister Grace, and 'pinch-punch' was by no means confined to the first day of the month for these two. Their young lives seemed to be fully devoted to carrying out a running battle of pushes, nudges, bumps and squeals; and at any time of the day screeches of pain and noisy scuffling could be heard coming from any part of the house. Nobody ever knew how it started or which one of them started it. But again, if anyone outside the family had tried to hurt Grace, they would have had our Ronnie to contend with. It almost seemed that he was intent on preserving the exclusive right to give her a larraping. But Ronnie will never forget, nor will any of us, the day of the burst balloon.

Where they got them from I do not know. It was probably from the man who pushed his barrow up Bear Road crying 'Jam-jar or Bottle for 'em', and who would give you a balloon on a string or a windmill on a stick in exchange for a jam jar. It might have been from this bloke, or it might not, but one day Ron and Grace each became the proud possessor of a balloon. Only the two of them know what really happened, but when Ronnie's balloon went the way of all balloons rather sooner than he would have wished, nothing on earth could persuade him that it was not Gracie who had popped it. So the great vengeance chase began.

The first that we, the rest of the family knew of all this was when Gracie, clutching her balloon as closely as she dared, and with furtive back glances behind her, scurried across the kitchen and up the passage into the back room, as if seeking a hiding-place. But all in vain, because within seconds, Ronnie's head poked in from the front passage, and a pair of shifty eyes scanned the area and alighted on the back passage escape-run... and, stealthy as a fox, he followed his sister into the back room. There was a scuffle, shout, scream, 'POP'... and we all knew what had happened. Ronnie made lightning exit, whooping in triumph... 'She done it to mine - She done it to mine.' Up the back passage he dashed, across the kitchen, - and CRASH!! Right into the edge of the half-open kitchen door. His roaring and hollering was terrible to listen to as his forehead gave birth to a bump which, over the next few hours, was to display the most wonderful colour-change programme imaginable, and which attained the size and shape of a golf ball. Many times since that day, I have heard sayings like 'Paid in his own coin' or 'Hoist by his own Petard' and that sort of thing, but never, surely, was there such an example of instant justice. 'She done it to mine' became a family chant, and poor Ronnie was never allowed to forget it.

Even as a kid, Ronnie was his own man, all Ronnie asked was to be allowed to do what he wanted, and for the rest of the world to mind its own business. I don't believe that his escapades and adventures were any different from those of the rest of us, but nobody knew what they were, and Ronnie wasn't telling. Mum would say to me 'Where's he bin?' or 'What's he bin doin'?' I could only answer 'Mum, so help me, I do not know.' And

it was always the truth. But there was nothing really furtive about our Ron, he was a bonny kid, and always seemed to have a rosier appearance than the rest of us. Like Teddy, our Ron had a favourite hat. He must have had it for years and it was his constant companion. I don't know where he got it from, but it was white, what we called a 'Po' hat. I suppose that was because it was the same shape as an inverted chamber pot, but with a wider rim, and it was made out of a liny-canvas stuff. I remember the sad loss of that hat too. I was standing with Ronnie on the Banjo groyne near the Palace Pier, when a gust of wind lifted it off his head and 'plop', into the briny. Unfortunately an offshore wind coincided with a receding tide, and a moist-eyed Ronnie could only watch his beloved hat as it bobbed out of sight on its long watery journey. I hope that if Ronnie's hat was washed up on a distant shore, it was dried out and lived on to give as much joy to some foreign kid as it had done to its sorrowing young English owner.

A 'few-years-later memory' of Ronnie is one of him, still much too young to have betting money, walking around with a large book under his arm called 'How to Bet and Win'. Losing close contact over the years, as, sadly, brothers do, I cannot say how good that book turned out to be. Sufficient to say, the most recent news of our Ron is that he has won a nationwide competition as 'Punter of the Year' - so perhaps the book was quite something.

Ironically, the kid that was his own man grew up to be surrounded by his own ladies. Ron and Jean have three beautiful daughters, one of whom is an accomplished actress of T.V., stage and screen.

So I guess we can call Ronnie a winner all right.

'It's because that Ronnie keeps aggerating me, that's why we're always fighting nuther-uther.' From the time she started to speak, our Grace could never quite command the correct delivery of her words. What was a 'verandah' to everyone else, was a 'gerandah' to her, and whereas other kids would buy a sheet of 'transfers' to make pictures in their scrap-books, she would buy 'stranfers'. It was a mixed up, topsy turvey way of speaking which I believe she partly inherited from her Mum. And not only single words - what could you do about a kid who would insist on singing 'Daisy, Daisy, what is your answer, do?' Nothing bothered her (apart from Ronnie) and all the scorn and chiding about her way of talking would be laughed off, or answered with the stock little-girl answer, the only word that could be spoken with the tongue sticking out, 'M, yaa...' So from babyhood to little-girlhood to bigger-girlhood, she carried on with her cheerful mutilation of the English language, but in such an innocent, dizzy, charming, crazy kind of way that she had no bother at all in winning over her big brothers, even Ronnie in the end.

The custom which sent so many girls 'into service' was rapidly dying away by the time Grace left school. More girls were going to work in offices, factories or shops. It was in an establishment that was something between a shop and a factory that Gracie spent

most of her working days. The shop dealt with golfing requisites, and I believe that her job was mainly concerned with renovating and generally tarting-up golf balls to make them like new. The right sort of crazy, happy job, I suppose, for a dizzy, happy gal.

Sad to say, our Gracie, now a widow, lives far away in South Africa. How often, and how loosely do we use the saying 'It's a small world'. Those who have a loved one living so far away know that it's a big world; a too, too big world. We have only seen her once in the last thirty years, but she will come home again soon. We know she will.

In this sad addendum to my original writing I have to say that I was wrong. Gracie will not come back to us again. The little sister that entered our world on Christmas Day 1919 departed from us on Easter Day 1987. Rest on, dear Grace, you never left the hearts of your family.

Dennis Patrick Manville. There is not a lot that I can write about you, little brother. You stayed with us for such a short while. Dennis was the popular name for a boy at the time, and we called you Patrick because you were born on St. Patrick's Day. I remember the high-low chair that you always sat in, safely boxed in on all sides and with a tray in front holding cotton reels, match-boxes, rattles, and even, I recall, winkle-shells to play with. High-low was not such a silly name, because we could press a bar-thing and down you went to sit just above floor-level, that was where you usually sat at tea time, just away from the table. I can see now, a tiny fist gripping a rather damp crust of bread, doing a tug-o-war with what may have been the beginning of a tooth.

I remember too, that fateful tea-time when your little head slumped, and you had what Mum, in terror, called a 'turn'. I remember that they took you off to hospital, and a few days later they told us that you had what they called a 'twisted gut'. I remember the family joy when they let you come home to us, but alas, the joy, like you little brother, was to be short-lived. I remember, on my way home from school one day, meeting Dorothy Copsey, Ivy's friend, and being told in a kindly and sad voice, 'Now, be a good boy and don't worry your Mum, little Dennis is dead.'

I remember the little white coffin being lowered into the grave, and the grief of your Mum and Dad, and your brothers and sisters. I remember a few weeks later, a small easel like board, beautifully painted and varnished by your Uncle Charlie, standing on a small, chalk covered grave:

'Dennis Patrick Manville
Age 1 year
"Safe in the arms of Jesus"'

I cannot write a lot about you, little brother. You stayed with us for such a short while.

Our Mother was not what you would call a religious woman. Perhaps if she had the time to spare, she might have been a churchgoer. But she didn't and she wasn't. But she

was what she called a 'believer', and the Lord, in whom she so firmly believed, was good. As if to comfort and console her for the loss of a loved child, the next arrival in the front room maternity unit was a little blonde bubble of a baby, and we called her Sylvia. We called her Sylvia, we kids, or rather Alfie and I did. Dad had used up all the names he could think of, and Mum didn't care so long as one name was Dorothy - after Ivy's friend Dorothy Copsey. So we decided we'd have a family meeting.

With Ivy and May in service, with Teddy out somewhere trying to keep out of trouble, and with Ronnie and Grace absent (probably chasing each other) the meeting consisted of Winnie, Alf and myself, with Dad a non-voter. Winnie was strong for Deidrie' - straight out of her latest girl's magazine - and Alf said he rather liked 'Sylvia'. It was as much to save our baby sister from being Deidrie' as anything else, that I threw in my lot with Alfie. And so, at odds of two to one, Sylvia Dorothy became the last of the large Manville family. With Deidrie (as Ronnie would say) also ran.

It wasn't really my turn to be 'looker after' but somehow, without even knowing it was happening, I earned myself the job of nursemaid to her. She was a jolly little thing, popular with her brothers and sisters, and even at her tender age, crafty enough to know it and to exploit it. I made the mistake one evening of walking up and down the kitchen floor with her in my arms, singing her to sleep; and thus earned myself a job which was to be mine for keeps. Every night after that first time she insisted on the same song and the same performance, and would not go to sleep without it. The music was to an old hymn, 'I do believe', and the words came automatically to me like this:

'Nam Nammy No, Nam Nammy No,
Nam Nammy No, Nam Nay,
Na-am Nammy No, Nam Nammy No,
Nam Nammy No, Nam Nay.'

Quite often I might taper off, thinking she was asleep, and one small blue accusing eye would open, look up, and admonish me. So on it went, 'Nam Nammy No...' What perishing luck! The only words that I have ever put to a tune, and all I got for it was a nursemaid's job. Never, I thought, was there a song with such stupid, monotonous words. Little did I realise that I was to live through an age when bunches of kids called 'groups' would become wealthy for songs made up of words quite as stupid and repetitive - mine only got the kid to sleep.

No doubt about it though, if baby Sylvia and big brother Sid had been born half a century later, we would surely have got one of those Golden Disc things. And 'Nam Nammy No' would have been - what do you call it? Top of the Pops? Yes indeed.

So our little blonde sister was last of the Bear Road family. It is a happy tail-off to report that in later years she herself became Mum to another little blonde 'bomber', her spitt'n image, and now Linda has two little 'bombers'. I cannot say it is a happy ending. Because happily, it goes on.

School days

Many people look back on their school days with nostalgia. I wish I could. But I didn't like school, and that was that. In all fairness I have to say that there was very little to dislike about Coombe Road School. It must have been the newest school in Brighton when I started in 1918. A neat, clean looking little school built on three levels, it sat happily on the north side of the road, with only sandy fields above, and opposite was a steep, grassy bank reaching up to Kimberley Road, which at the time consisted of only a few houses. Each level housed its own section of pupils and had its own playground around which the classrooms were set. The 'Infants' school was on the lowest plane, then came the 'Girls' and at the top the 'Boys'. To distinguish the others from the 'Infants' they were always called the 'Big Girls' and the 'Big Boys'. It was inside the gates of the 'Infants' school that I was left, screaming in protest, by poor, suffering sister May.

I realise now that I had not been mentally prepared for school. Parents of large families had to share their attentions amongst their flock and so, individually, most kids just had to get on with it. I suppose I was a rather weak, impressionable kid who scared easily and perhaps I fell prey to the cocky, slightly older kids who told me horror tales about school. By the time my first day came around, I was well wound up I can tell you. I was quite convinced that I was being led to the torture chamber, and that one of those ogres called 'teachers' would jump out on me with lashings of cane and strap. Although reality turned out to be quite different, I'm afraid that I had become imbued with a complex that was to stay with me for a long time.

Nobody on earth could have been further removed from being an ogre than my first teacher. Mrs Sturgress was a sweet little white-haired lady, everybody's idea, I should think, of an ideal Grandma. She must have been well on toward retiring-age then, and yet she carried on with her babies' class long after I had gone on into the 'Big Boys'. She should have won me over at once, but she was a teacher, and I had been told that teachers had to be feared. I remember quite clearly my first lesson. On each tiny desk was placed an arrangement to teach us to lace up our shoes. Two pieces of cardboard, each with a line of eyelet holes, were joined together with a piece of string, and we were shown how to do the crisscross lace-up. Most children wore high-low boots at that time, and although the high-lows were fastened by mainly passing the lace around a series of clips, there were also quite a few eyelets. The later boots and shoes were all eyelets of course. I have thought many times since what a sensible and practical lesson that first one was, shoe-lacing for beginners. Another feature of the babies' class that has always remained in my memory is the chalk-tins, each with a hinged lid, and all about the same size. Perhaps a few years earlier the chalks had been used on school slates, but we did our drawings on sheets of coloured paper. After each 'art' lesson, the tins were collected and stored inside a long cupboard in the corner. Funny how those tins always fascinated me, how I remember so clearly the one with the light blue lid: Allenbury's Pastilles, I think it was.

I do not remember so well all the other classes in the 'Infants'. We all advanced one class each year or so; the bright and the dull together. All the teachers in the Infants School were ladies, some were students on teaching courses, but in addition to Mrs Sturgess I can only recall Mrs Venal and Miss Dance. And what a fine old confusion Miss Dance threw us into! I knew that when we went back after one holiday, I would go into Miss Dance's class, and so I did, and sure enough there was Miss Dance. But she told us that we must now call her Mrs Jeffries. None of us could understand why, it was something about getting married. We didn't know what difference that made, but we called her Mrs Jeffries and she seemed to be satisfied. I was mad about it though, I thought that school was bad enough without 'em messing us about like that.

On into the 'Big Boys', and once again a journey into fear. Not only did the ogres become more fearsome, but each was given a name as his terrible nature was described in lurid detail: Old Pell, Old Coxhead, Old Thomas, Old Sammy Lawrence. They were all terrors, 'but just you wait 'til you get into Dicky Turner's class, that's bloody murder that is!' I was pretty sure there must be something in this because just before the holiday I had heard some big boys singing:

'One more day, and we shall be,
Out of the house of misery,
No more pens, No more books,
No more Dicky Turner's fiery looks.'

I would have joined the Foreign Legion if I had been able, sooner than go into the 'Big Boys'.

Each class was called a Standard, and they started at Standard 3. I never knew what happened to 1 and 2; but there were Standards 3 to 7, and top of all, Ex 7. This class was a sectioned off part of 7, to which only the brightest were elevated.

Dicky Pell took Standard 3. I'm sure his Christian name wasn't really Dicky, but all teachers had to have a nickname, and Dicky and Sammy were the most popular. Mr Pell was older than Billy Bunter and younger than Mr Pickwick, with a figure and general appearance which put him somewhere between the two.

Being quite a congenial old thing, some of the boys took him for being a bit on the soft side, but they soon learned the facts. When one of the 'clever dicks' overplayed their hand, Pelly put 'em right. The recognised instrument of punishment at our school was the 'Strap', a length of leather, handle-shaped at one end, and cut into strip lashes at the other. But this was not for Mr Pell. He had his own special weapon, a short, thick stick about a foot long. The miscreant was held firmly by the wrist while Pelly, bottom lip locked under the top teeth, whacked the stick down onto the palm of the outstretched hand. The rest of the class used to enjoy watching his spectacles jump about an inch off his nose as each stroke came down.

Boys who had tasted both Pelly's stick and the strap said they'd take the strap any time. I was lucky, I had never been whacked by Mr Pell. In fact I got along well with the old feller. It almost got to the point where I thought I might get to like the teachers. But then, Dicky Turner was to come.

Either it was a gigantic stroke of luck, or somebody up there was smiling on me when the dreaded time came around. No, I did not escape Mr Turner altogether, but due to some rearrangement of teachers, my term under him was not a long one. Long enough though to discover that Dicky was no fool, not by any means! He knew all about his reputation among the boys. Not only did he not mind about it, he did his best to keep it stoked up. The result being that whereas all the other teachers at the start of a new term were faced with 45 or so young perishers, each ready and eager to discover and exploit his weak spots, Dicky's class awaited him, each sitting bolt upright at his desk half-frozen with fear, wondering where the chopper would fall first. Dicky had 'em where he wanted 'em from the start. Dicky was 'the Master' in more ways than one, and all before he had said a word or lifted a finger. Dicky's reputation had done the job for him from the start, and all he had to do was keep it on the boil.

He was not a physically vicious man: he probably used the strap less than the other masters. He had no need for it, so attentive were his pupils. He had little real 'bite' but his bark was fearsome. Should one of his class dare to offend by talking or not paying attention, or trying to chew a gumdrop on the sly, he would get the 'treatment': the evil eye and the pointing finger, more devastating than all the straps in the world. The eye would descend upon the culprit, the arm would stretch and the finger would point. It was like a rifleman sighting a target, and a terrible voice would roar, 'BOY-EE, COME YOU OUT 'ERE.' On the 'out 'ere' the finger would drop from the rigid horizontal to the downpointing vertical, illustrating the spot upon which the offender must stand. The punishment was according to the gravity of the offence, but usually it was nothing compared with the horror feeling of being the bullseye of a target with the evil eye lined up on you. It was all 'come you 'ere, stand you there, do you this, and do you that,' all part of Dicky Turner's clever scheme to assure him an attentive class. We called him names behind his back, but by golly we learned our lessons.

So far as teachers were concerned, life at school was full of variety. In exchange for the ranting and raving of Dicky Turner, we got the ice-cool, efficient control of Mrs Funnell. The only lady teacher in the 'Big Boys', it seemed to me that she had been deliberately placed by the Education Authority to show that lady teachers were not the 'easy meat' that some cocky kid might think.

Cousin Jack and I met Bimbo Simmons on our way to school one day, and were greeted, 'Hey, Man'ole!' This was our nickname, a delicate corruption of Manville. 'Hey, Man'ole, look what I'm going to put in the question box.' Into our hands he thrust a bit of yellow paper on which was written, 'What is a fat *****? Signed, Mr Nobody.' It referred in slang language to a part of the male anatomy. 'You're never going to do that,' we

said. 'I am,' said Bimbo, and he did. A box with a slit in the top stood on the teacher's desk all week, and the class were invited to write questions and drop them in. And one afternoon each week would be given to answering them.

News of Bimbo's question had spread, and when the question time came around there was an electric, muffled, giggling tension in the air, and I have no doubt at all that Mrs Funnell could sense it. She placed the box in front of her and opened it. One by one the notes were removed, opened out, read aloud and answered as best she could. They were neatly stacked and smoothed down in a little pile to her right. 'Watch for the yeller 'un,' had been the whisper, and after what seemed an age, it came. Mrs Funnell opened it out, read it to herself, raised her eyes and just 'looked' at Bimbo, and without the slightest expression, placed it on the pile to her right, smoothed it down and passed on to the next. It was a masterpiece of strategy. Never was a 'lark' so deflated, and never had a 'daring' joke fallen so flat. She knew Bimbo had 'dun it', and we knew she knew, and she knew we knew she knew....

On another occasion, when walking idly between desks, she spotted one small lad with his hands beneath the desk, playing with something which was neither pen nor pencil. Calm as ever, Mrs Funnell tapped his shoulder and said, 'Put that little man away.' That was all. She knew her boys well, and all the antics and devilry that comes naturally with their age-group, and she had a way of dealing with 'events' which cancelled them out as if nothing had happened.

Mrs Funnell - I shall always remember her - a good, complete teacher who earned the respect of all her boys. And bearing in mind what a lot of perishers we were, that is surely saying something.

All the male teachers had walking sticks, although it was quite obvious they could all walk perfectly well without them. Entering the school through the Coombe Road gate meant that they had to cross the playground. I suppose the stick gave a bit of a boost to their ego or something, especially as the boys obeyed the golden rule that you must not run across the path of a teacher, or risk jostling him in any way, but you must stand 'respectfully still' as he passed by. Mr Coxhead was the youngest of the teachers and needed a walking aid less than any of them, yet his stick was the stoutest, and he carried it with more swagger than all the rest put together. You could see him enjoying himself as someone like Codger Beech or Wobbler Pierce or any of the known 'hell raisers' stood respectfully still as he passed. He would acknowledge them with a grin, and give the handle of his walking-stick a couple of wristy jerks as if to say, 'OK, me lad, I'm ready for yer.'

When I reached their respective classes, Coxhead regarded me with caution, and Sammy Lawrence with disdain. I had long since lost the fear-thing about teachers, and after good terms with Pelly and Mrs F, and with Dicky Turner turning out to be not so black as he was painted, the future looked almost bright. They told me Coxhead was 'cocky' but a bit of a lad; and 'Good old Sammy Lawrence', everyone liked Sammy, he

made them laugh, and on top of that he was the sports-master. I did recall the earlier warning about all masters being terrors, but ah well, if there was cause for optimism, I was all for it. But, 'twas not to be.

Teddy preceded me through school by a term or two, and had just about reached the peak of his devilry when he was in Coxhead's and Sammy's classes. Although he couldn't help it, his devilry wasn't his fault really, but by the time I reached them they'd both had a real bellyful of Manville. Sammy, it was, who Christened me 'Chip off the old block' before I'd said a dicky-bird. But Coxhead first. Instead of using the strap, which, no doubt, my worthy brother richly deserved, one day he resorted to instant punishment in the form of a clump round the ear. When Teddy got home he complained of a headache, and Mum found out that his teacher had clumped him. That got Mrs M's gander up. The next day, Coxhead had the frightening experience of being confronted by an irate Mum, drawn up to her full five-foot-nothing, warning him with clenched fist, 'You punch his 'ead again, and I'll come round 'ere and punch yours.' From that day Mr C treated all Manvilles that came his way with caution. It didn't make him like us much, but he didn't punch our 'eads.

If what I had heard was all true, I must have been the only kid in the school who didn't care much for Sammy Lawrence. He did make the class laugh sometimes, but the laughs were usually a result of his sarcasm at the expense of less fortunate pupils. All teachers had favourites, but most of them were very careful to be fair. But Sammy's favourites were always the best-dressed, best looked after boys; those who obviously came from the best-off families. Children in Elementary Schools at that time came from a range of differently situated families, from the well-off to the ragged-trousered, and it was at the expense of those at the lower end of the scale that Sammy got his laughs.

It could well be that I was rather over-sensitive, but it did sicken me to hear him 'Frankie this' and 'Frankie that' to one kid and then hear the surnamed scorn with which he addressed 'Ruston'. Bumble Ruston came from what was probably one of the poorest families, he was a nice kid really, but his general appearance caused him to be the butt of many jibes; the sort of thing that was normal from kids, but not what you would expect from teachers.

I must admit though, that what happened one day was very funny, although at the same time rather pathetic. Bumble appeared in class wearing the most atrocious pair of spectacles you ever saw. The lenses were the size of pigeon's eggs and the frames were made of black wire. Bumble did not usually wear specs, and the sight of him put the class into hysterics. Sammy exploded. 'Ruston!' he roared, 'What the blazes are you wearing?' 'Glasses Sir', said Bumble. 'They're me Mum's Sir.' 'Well what the policeman are you wearing 'em for?' demanded Sammy. 'Please Sir, me eyes 'urt Sir.' The class roared as Sammy ragged the poor kid mercilessly. It was funny, I know, we laughed for a long time and I laughed as much as any. But although Sammy did see to it that Bumble went to the clinic for an eye examination, I always had the feeling that the incident could have been handled with a bit more compassion than it was.

I am quite certain that if Sammy Lawrence had asked Frankie Warren how many degrees there are in a circle, and if he had been given the right answer, he would have patted Frankie's head, fawned all over him, and pointed out to the class what a brilliant lad was Frankie. But he didn't ask Frankie how many degrees there were in a circle. He asked me. Mind you, he wouldn't have asked me if he had thought for one moment that I knew the answer, and when, loud and clear, I chirped up '360, Sir,' Sammy was flattened, and took a while to recover. I was not patted on the head. Nor fawned upon, and the class was not told what a brilliant lad I was. I have never forgotten what Sammy did. He lifted his eyes toward the Heavens, threw up his arms, and called out, 'Praise the Lord! Sing the Te Deum!' as if a miracle had happened. I was not really hurt, after nearly a term with Sammy I had toughened up a bit and had learned to lump it. But I knew that something was happening inside me that I was too young to put a name to. Later I knew what it was, I was developing a cynical streak.

Those who teach children who are approaching school-leaving age should, I think, be more than ever conscious of a responsibility for preparing their charges to face the slings and arrows of the big outside world. Perhaps Sammy, without knowing it, was doing me a favour. Because although his 'Frankies' and his 'Bobbies' had an easier passage through school than some others, when it came to facing up to the 'Sarcky Sammies' of the big outside world, none was better equipped than the likes of Bumble and I.

Dicky Thomas took Standard 7, and shared Ex 7 with Mr Suckling the Headmaster. Mr Thomas was dour and unsmiling. He was stocky, bowler-hatted and moustachioed, and there was no nonsense with him. My opinion of teachers had been torn to and fro over the years, and after Coxhead and Sammy the balance was well on the debit side. Mr Thomas helped to square the account. It is true that just like the others he had his favourites, but there was no patting and fawning with him; step out of line and you were for it, favourite or no favourite. It was because of my compositions that I found favour with him. I was never a brilliant scholar, but I did like English, and could always write a fair composition. It gave my ego a rare boost when Dicky used to take my compositions home with him for his wife to read. I always scored top marks for English, which was just as well, as those marks were sorely needed to make up for those I lost on almost every other subject.

Apart from normal lessons, nothing much happened in Dicky Thomas's class. There was little excitement because, I suppose, he was not what you would call a 'colourful' man. Yet what I remember most about being in his class was the singing lesson. There had been singing lessons in all the 'big boys' classes and although we were not taught to read music properly, we were taught what they called 'Tonic solfa'. It was Dutch to me, but as we learned the tune, we sang it to something like: Do, Do, So, Fah, Do, Tee, Do, with a 'La' and a 'Ray' here and there. I didn't know a crochet from a quaver, but I did like singing. In Standard 7 we sang in 'Rounds' - and a right old mess we usually made of it.

Back in Mrs Funnell's class, we had sung what they told us was 'Alto and Treble' I wouldn't like to claim that they were the correct musical terms, but to us kids it meant high and low; or one half of the class singing one tune and the rest singing another and trying to make it sound good,

'Oh who will o'er the Downs so free,
Oh who will with me ride?'

Lovely stuff! Coombe Road school owed a debt of gratitude to Mrs Funnell. If it had not been for her, singing classes in the school might have been blighted forever. For quite a long time, every song that her class had ventured upon had been destroyed in its infancy by the most horrific groans and howling noises from an unknown source. Mrs Funnell discovered the source - Wobbler Pierce! She followed an ear trail and tracked him down, and when she demanded that he sing a few bars solo, it was Tarzan calling to his Mate to the life. From that day forth, whenever singing-time came around, Wobbler was made to sit reading a book at the back of the class. And harmony was restored. It was such a shame really - Wobbler was a jolly, always-smiling little chap, and I think he liked to have a good old bawl. But, sad to say, there was not a note of music in him.

I believe that teachers were allowed, within a certain range, to teach songs of their own choice. Give Sammy his due, he always taught us the rip-roaring, up-and-at 'em songs like 'Hail to the Chief, 'See our oars in feathered Spray' and the best one of all 'Up with the Jolly Roger, boys'. I remember when he was teaching us 'Charlie is me Darlin' he stopped to point out that some of us were getting the words wrong: 'Charlie's a young Chevalier - not a Cheffonier - that's a flippin' sideboard!' Coxhead did it on purpose - I'm sure he did. Every class he had, he would insist on teaching a song called 'Oh hush thee my baby'. If he had been a master in a Public School and had before him the sons of Lords and Ladies, it might have been all right. But imagine, if you can, a classful of snotty-nosed youngsters with 40 arses hanging out of 40 pairs of trousers singing:

'Oh hush thee my baby, thy sire was a knight,
Thy Mother a lady both gentle and bright,
The woods and the glens from these towers which we see,
They are all belonging dear baby to thee...'

There again, I suppose it wouldn't be much of a lullaby to sing about your Father working on the Corporation Dust Carts, and your Mum taking in washing.

By the time we reached Standard 7 it was considered that we were sufficiently musical to sing 'Rounds' and, dour old thing though he was, Dicky Thomas was remarkably keen on the singing classes. He deserved better results than he got. Never have I known a teacher to be so distressed and upset as poor old Thomas on the day that we cocked-up 'Patter Patter'. Of course, it had to happen on an 'Open' day, the one day in

the year when parents and friends were invited to visit the classrooms to see the work of their kids. 'Patter Patter' was a round in four parts, and was supposed to produce the effect of rain falling at the same time as the words were sung. What we did to 'Patter Patter' that day defies all description. After about four false starts, a sad and deeply embarrassed Dicky was forced to abandon it. He never forgave us, and we 'Patter Pattered' for many weeks after that 'open' day. It always went all right when we didn't have an audience.

The number of boys in each class was about fifty. Our desks were doubles, with a sloping, lift-up top; with book space (and marbles, catapult, and sweet space) underneath. There were four rows of six desks, and sometimes two extra desks at the back. This was a normal-sized class at the time.

'Massa' Flint sat at one of the back-of-the-room desks in the first row, and his main source of amusement was to make up his own words to the songs we sang. All the kids at the back could hear these 'special' words, but poor Dicky Thomas, being slightly out of earshot of them, was in a state of constant puzzlement about all the giggling that was going on. Flinty's favourite song was 'Hark, Hark, the lark' which we sang as a 'round', and as the rest of the row sang, 'Hark, Hark, the lark at heav'ns gate sings', Massa Flint would sing, 'Hark, Hark, the lark has let a fart.' With his words safely shielded from Mr Thomas's hearing, he bawled his way along happily - until the day we ganged up on him. It was all worked out. The whole of the first row sang, 'Hark, Hark, the lark' and then all except Flinty suddenly 'dried up' - and unable to stop himself in time, he sang his last four words solo. That was the end of singing for the day; the remainder of the time being given over to a lesson on moral decline, and Massa Flint getting 'six of the best'.

Funny things, nick-names. A lot of kids had them and they were acquired in many different ways. We had several 'Gingers' (or 'Carrots') and every kid who wore specs was called 'Four eyes'. By an easy corruption of our surnames my brothers, cousins, and I became 'Manholes' (what else?). 'Bumbles' and 'Lofties' spoke for themselves, 'Froggie' Coleman spoke with a croak, and 'Bimbo' Simmons was, rather cruelly I thought, judged to have a facial resemblance to a chimp character in 'Tiger Tim's Weekly'.

Some nick-names had their origin in a single work or event. How could someone named Smith become 'Ibba', and how did Alfie Bordon become 'Ruckery'? I will tell you. Both of these unfortunate lads paid the price of a speech impediment, and christened themselves at reading classes. It fell to Smithy to read aloud to the class a poem containing the lines:

'Come hither, Come hither, Come hither,
Henceforth shalt thou see no slavery....'

All Smithy's 'th's came out as 'b's and so he read, 'Come ibba, Come ibba, Come

ibba....' All Alfie's 'l's came out as 'r's and instead of us hearing that 'The boulder hurled down the hill and "luckily" missed the two', we heard it 'ruckery' missed the two. Thus Ibba and Ruckery were born; names which stayed with them throughout their school lives, and would not go away. I could understand how, with a certain stretching of schoolboy imagination John Risbridger became 'Razzo', but I never knew how Reggie Beech became 'Codger'. I never asked him because he was bigger than me.

Massa was the boss-man, the master. He was the unchallenged head of the 'Holy Drainpipe Gang', and along with some of the other big lads was widely admired for his ability to laugh off the effect of the strap with the bold declaration that it 'didn't 'urt'. Corporal punishment has always been a bit of an idiot, creating, as it does only martyrs or heroes.

Our playground was marked out with painted white lines, but I never knew why. So far as I can remember there were no organised games played there. But just about everything else happened there, all at the same time. At playtime there were usually two football matches and a few games of cricket all mixed up together with top-spinners, hoop-trollers, paper aeroplane throwers, chasers in and out of the lav, and swingers and balancers on the iron bars of the shed, a sheltered area in one corner which closely resembled the Black Hole of Calcutta whenever it rained. And among the playground throng were many easy targets for the Holy Drainpipe Gang. Massa's lieutenants were the big kids, and their eagerly-performed duty was to round up the little 'uns and yank them before a drainpipe that ran down one of the classroom walls. They were not released before they had bowed three times and said the chosen words to the Holy Drainpipe. Strange sort of game, but the onlookers loved every minute of it. Some kids were foolish enough to resist and struggle - not me! I paid homage to the Holy Drainpipe and got it over with, hoping that the Lord wouldn't put it down as idolatry. My old Dad used to say 'Never try to be a hero son. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.'

I suppose it would be true to say that I got to like school more as I got older. Nevertheless, the best time of the year was when we sang:

'One more day, and we shall be, out of the house of misery,
No more pens, no more books, no more Dicky Turner's fiery looks.'
Holiday Time! And especially August Bank Holiday Time! Hooray!!!

Holiday time

'And you keep away from them Charrybangs, mind.' Poor old Mum, eight kids at the time, and she worried about all of us. Not so much about Ivy and May, they were in service and fairly safe from the dangers of August Bank Holiday week, which, unlike now, was the first week in the month. It was also the first week of the school holidays, Brighton Race Week, and the week when there was a whacking great fun fair on the race-hill. These circumstances combined to provide enough hazards to imperil the safety, it not the lives, of human young for many miles around. And on top of all this

there was 'them Charrybangs'.

I remember feeling cocky for a long time because I knew the plural for Char-a-banc was Chars-a-banc. I had seen a notice on the hill 'Parking area for Chars-a-banc' and flaunted my superior knowledge, until Percy Collins 'took me down a peg' 'cos his Dad said it was not 'Bang', it was 'Bong'. That's how we used to go on. But however you said their name, the fact is that these dusty monsters formed part of history for many a ragged-arsed youngster who, in those far-off days, so eagerly awaited their arrival; for apart from a rare penn'orth on the tram, for most of us our very first mechanically-propelled ride was on the running-board of a Charrybang.

Although they were the great-grandparents of the luxury coaches that now glide along our motorways, they looked nothing like them. If you can imagine an enormous, painted, meat-baking tin on wheels, you have a rough idea of the body shape. Each had a great hood which, in use, was supported by bamboo looking wooden arches, but which now, being August and the weather fine (it always was then, you know), was folded and stacked up at the back in a great heap. Seven rows of bench-type seats in shiny leather held six bodies each. Access was gained through a door at the end of each row, and the bodies slid into position. Each door had an oval-shaped handle, rather like the pull-chain handles in municipal lavatories. These were our grab-handles.

Coming mostly from London, but some from outlying Sussex villages, the Charries would descend upon Brighton in large numbers on the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of August week, bearing a cargo of human hopefulness to try their luck with the 'Osses. Most of the vehicles carried a plentiful supply of beer in crates and, in any case, had pulled up at various hostelrys en route; so that by the time of their arrival the spirits were high and the noses were red.

So, with Mum's plea still ringing in our ears, we would take up position on the top step outside our front door and wait for them to come. We could see down to the bottom of the hill, and at about one o'clock they started arriving. Around the corner from Lewes Road they came to start the Bear Road climb - neat blocks of 42 cherry-red noses in seven rows of six. Roaring, grunting and straining, the old Charry, with the foot of its white-smocked driver well down onto the boards, and followed by great cloud of dust, would be holding a steady four or five miles an hour as the noses reached 111. That was our chance, a quick hop onto the running-board, a grasp at the handle, and we were on our magic carpet. The only thing we had to be sure of was to hop off again just before Harold Funnell's house, because the hill flattens out a bit there and the old gal gathered a bit of speed. So if you didn't do it right, you had to hang on for dear life until you reached the next steep bit where the racecourse proper began, and as there was usually a copper on duty there, you were likely to deliver yourself into the arms of the law. But, doing it right, you could manage five or six rides a day.

Most of the noses belonged to cheery old geezers with waxed moustaches, bowler hats, or ever the curly 'quiff. But now and again you might hop up alongside a miserable old

sod who would shove you off with a 'Git orf, yore break yer bleedin' neck,' giving no thought to the fact that his push was more likely to produce that unhappy condition than if he had left you alone. When we got one of those, we just wished him well, in our own way, and waited for the next ride, and the next, until all the Charries had gone and Mum breathed again. Then it was 'heigh-ho and away' to the races for the gang.

There were usually about six or seven of us in the group that made its way up the hill to the half-mile post. That was always our 'base', and of all the people who went to the races, we were among the few who could be sure not to lose money, for the simple reason that we didn't have a bean between us. But winners we well might be, and whether we won depended not upon the horses, but on the beer-bottles.

In convenient places all around the course, whacking great marquees had been erected for the sale of beer, most of it in bottles. There were also large barrels propped up on tressels from which the draught stuff was served in thick, breakage defying glasses. These glasses were left lying around on the grass in such profusion that there was scarcely a house in Bear Road where you could have a drink at any time of the year without being reminded of the races. But it was the bottles that really mattered to us: Tamplins, Kemp Town, Bass, Worthington and many others were no good. What we were looking for was a 'Smithers' empty, and if you could pick up one of those - Bingo! That was your winner; because you could take it to the Bottle and Jug department of the Allen Arms in Lewes Road and collect money on it (penny on the bottle).

The landlord of the 'Allen' must have realised that during race weeks he had twice as many bottles to return empty as he had sold full, but that was not our worry, all the while he paid up we took it. Our intention always being to spend it at the fair later on. This good intention, alas, was seldom ever realised, due to the fact that the whole atmosphere between the bottom of our road and the 'Allen' was dominated by the smell of Mr Goldring's Swiss puddings and doughnuts, and very few of those 'pennies on the bottle' survived the return journey. But back to the races for a while.

Walk straight up Bear Road to the top and you come to the racecourse at the half-mile post. To the right you can see up to the Grandstand, and the little ring-on-a-stick that is the winning-post silhouetted against the sky. Over the horizon on which the winning-post stands, the small black specks that had, a few seconds ago, thundered past us in a blaze of colour, disappear out of sight and on to the unsaddling rings. Now look away to your left, and you see the course forming a rough horse-shoe pattern on the crest of our beautiful South Downs, to give a total running distance of a mile and a half. Much about Brighton Races is, I suppose, unchanged from when we were kids. I have not been back for a long time - I don't think I will. Better, perhaps, to keep in memory the excitement and the colour that the races put into our young lives in the twenties - an excitement that cost nothing - colour that was not confined to the jockey's silks, and characters the like of whom will not be seen again. Characters like the Ice Cold Lemon Man.

At every meeting he was there. With a large, white enamel bucket in one hand, and a smaller bucket in the other, he paraded the inside of the rails calling in a high-pitched musical voice, 'Here's yer Ice-cold Lemon, don't forget yer Ice-cold Lemon at two.' He was referring to a bright yellow coloured liquid in the large bucket which was supposed to be lemonade, at a temperature which, he claimed, was zero. When a customer was found, the method of serving was thus: a thick drinking glass was removed from the water-laden smaller bucket, flicked in the air to dry, and filled with Ice-cold Lemon. The vendor awaited its consumption for the return of his one and only glass, and with another swill around the small bucket and a couple of deft flicks in the air, he went on his way. The smock he wore was pure white, and a piece of net curtaining, bedecked with glass beads, hung daintily over the large bucket, to testify to the fact that nothing had been spared in the interest of hygiene.

Our small, parched lungs often yearned for Ice Cold Lemon, but as the 'at two' denoted that the price was twopence a glass, that luxury was not for us. It did occur to me that only an exceptional concoction could be carried up and down a racecourse on a hot mid-summer day and still remain Ice Cold - but I supposed it to be due to some skillful brewing process. Or could it be that racecourse vendors of the period possessed special refrigeration powers, because there was also old 'Chuckit'. That is the word he shouted, and that's what we called him. He walked the course carrying a strap-over-the-shoulder tray; and with the aid of a single piece of cloth, could produce penny bars of unwrapped chocolate with only the slightest kink in them, against the efforts of the strongest August sun.

No such magical powers could be claimed, however, for a certain Mr Assenhiem, whose vans, equipped with cold cabinets (large blocks of ice in metal-lined boxes), arrived in numbers on the hill. Mr Assenhiem's vendors caused the length and breadth of the course to ring with 'Here's yer luvly Joe Assenhiem at two, they're luvly, try 'em.' I think Joe must have held auditions to select his salesmen; there was not the slightest variation in volume or tone. But give Joe his due, his ice-cream, a block wrapped in a single piece of white paper, could always be consumed in good condition so long as you didn't keep it hanging about too long. These and a few others were 'regulars'. Among the others were the multitudinous 'Daughters of the Original Gypsy Rose Lee' who swarmed the hill offering to tell the fortune of any nice 'Lady or Gennelmun' who would cross their palms with silver, and who, for the slightest rebuff, would tell them a few things about their character for nothing. All part of the adventure and colour of race-day.

Brighton racecourse today has a double rail on each side (I am told), but it is still a single rail from the start to the seven furlong mark, or thereabout. In our childhood days the rail was single for its entire length. The bookies on the free part of the course extended from the Grandstand right down to our place at the half-mile, and sometimes a little way beyond. This amounted to a large number of bookies, and there was fair business for all, because Brighton Races always attracted an enormous number of people. Mounted police patrolled the last five furlongs, and it was their job to clear the

course, and to make sure that it remained clear from the time the horses left the paddock until after the race was run. And a very strictly-enforced rule this was. If, after the policeman calling 'clear the course' had ridden by, someone decided to dash from one side to the other, and was 'spotted' doing so, he was galloped after and brought back, dragged if necessary, to where he had started. I remember thinking at the time that this was a bit severe, but in later years, learning of how, many years previously, a suffragette had thrown herself under the horses at Epsom, I realised that the tough measures were justified. Suffragettes were long since gone, but I suppose there will always be people who need protecting from themselves. In any case, notwithstanding the efforts of the police, with open rails thronged with people, there was always a strong danger element as the horses thundered by within a foot or so.

A clear course was a fine sight. A wide, green ribbon winding across the downs, with a bees' nest of activity at one end, tapering off into yellow gorse and countryside at the other. The starters were out of sight when the race was of one and a quarter or one and a half miles, and all that could be seen was a small white flag on a distant hill. The flag was raised when the runners were 'under starters orders'. We knew all the racing terms without having the faintest idea what they meant. But we did know that the little white flag had magical powers, because at the moment it was seen a fantastic hush fell upon the throng, and as the flag fell thousands of voices in unison declared, 'They're off.' It was more than a murmur and less than a shout, something like a gasp, so difficult to describe. I have never heard anything quite like it anywhere else, only at our races. So many things happened only at our races. So many things became custom and habit only at our races. For instance, as the runners raced by the public would rush out onto the course right behind them, and the wide, green ribbon would take on the appearance of a progressively impregnated flypaper. Why they did this no one will ever know, because the only point from which the finish of the race could be seen was the Grandstand. But it seemed that the thing to do was to run out onto the course, and everybody did it.

We kids had all the summer holidays, all the long evenings, and every weekend to do as we wished, and the racehill was only five minutes away, but it was only on race-days, between races, that we would dash out onto the course and perform the most ridiculous antics you could imagine. Headstands, handstands and any other stands, we would wrestle, fight, and jump around like madmen. If anyone had suggested that we should go onto the race hill and behave like that at any other time during the year, we would have called them barmy. But there it was, this race-day compulsion. Perhaps our Dads and Grandads did it before us, I don't know.

It was a fine example of 'Jungle telegraph' that brought the race result to the 'down the course' bookmakers and punters. The frame upon which the winning numbers were hoisted was visible only to the well-to-do people in the stands, but a Tic-tac man would signal the numbers to a comrade on the course and a series of Sergeant-Major voiced runners would shout the winners as they ran, until all the bookies were covered, and so, after every race we would hear, 'OY-OY, OY-OY, Number Five, Fourteen and Seven' or

whatever. This would be reduced to, 'Five's won the races,' as the bookies paid out and the winning punters collected. That was another funny thing, it was never 'the race', always 'the races' - custom and habit again I suppose. To this day, brother Ted calls a race 'the races'.

We kids were very proud to be on intimate terms with all the great jockeys of the day, well sort of intimate terms. When a race started at the five-furlong mark we would congregate there and shout things as the horses gathered behind the starting-tape. And it was at the five-furlong start at the Brighton Races, one August day in the early nineteen-twenties, that the Wonderful Thing happened to me, and I will never forget it. The great Steve Donaghue winked at me. He did. Steve, the greatest Jockey in the country, no, in the world!!! And he winked at ME. My mates got narky about it, they would! They said it was not just me, but all of us that he winked at. I said I was the one that shouted, 'Come on Steve,' to him, and it was me he winked at. They said people all over the country were shouting, 'Come on Steve,' to him, and you couldn't expect him to wink at 'em all one at a time, which might sound reasonable enough, but I know jealousy when I see it, and I know what I know. I was the one who shouted, 'Come on Steve,' and I was the one he winked at. So there.

Tommy Weston, Charlie Smirke, Freddie Fox, Fred Rickaby, Pat Beasley, Joe Childs and an up and coming youngster named Gordon Richards, we knew them all by sight, and it did our cockiness a lot of good to realise that to so many people they were merely names in a newspaper. The brown and green racing colours of Aga Khan, the black with red, white and blue sash of Lord Glanely, the yellow and blue chevrons of Dorothy Paget, these were not the only colours - there was colour in the sounds, colour in the smells, colour in the very atmosphere and colour in our young lives. Colour, colour, it was all colour at the marvellous Brighton Races.

The day's racing ended, the bottles collected (if you were in luck), the Charrys departed, the many losers and few winners melt away, and it was home for tea. But not for long. Soon the lights and the music and all the noise of the fair would call. And it was back up the hill again.

The Race-hill fair

There was a strange fascination in standing a short way off from the roundabouts and reading, as they came around, the words on the gaily-coloured board which skirted the tent-like roof. Words like: Wm Beach & Son - Amusements - Galloping Horses - Flying Cockerels - All Ages Catered for - Wm Beach & Son.... And below, a blaze of glittering metal, rotating mirrors, lights of all colours, and a wooden circular platform upon which these wonderful creatures, impaled upon spiralled poles of flashing brass, galloped and pranced on their endless journey. Beautiful horses with flying manes and bared teeth. Cockerels with enormous legs in the trot position; even the odd ostrich with its natural stupid expression so well captured, they were all there, and the lucky riders could choose their mounts by name. There was: Beauty, Princess, Fair Lady and Sally. We

kids all agreed that if we had all the money in the world we would never ride on a Cockerel, anyway, they were two-seaters and meant for the little'uns who had to be held on by their Dads. No, horses were for us daredevil (would-be) riders. On top of everything else, horses were on the outside and went the fastest.

The centre-piece around which the animals galloped was an organ. But it always seemed to me that 'organ' was much too humble a word for such a wonderful creation as this: cream and gold and figures, red and gold and scrolls, gold and blue and pipes, and Cherubs and more gold; and the figures moved their arms and tapped on drums, and a lady-figure in a long gown (gold) played a pipe-thing. It was all music and movement, and a square window in the middle of the pipes revealed an ever-descending something-or-other that looked like squares of hinged brown cardboard with holes in it. As each square reached the bottom it folded itself up to make a neat pile. They told us that this was the record that made the music.

It was all magic, that's what it was. The fair being there was magic, because if you stood on the top step outside our front door and looked over to your left, you could see the racehill. One day you would look and see just the green hill with the corner of the Grandstand roof peeping out, and as if a fairy had waved a wand in the night; the next day it was there, this wonderland had appeared. Not only the roundabouts and flying Cockerels, but all these other wonders around us. The brightly-lit circular stalls, the coconut shies, swings hooplas, chair-o-planes, helter-skelters and a hundred others; and all of them dependent for their life-blood upon two or three massive traction-engines, now stationary, but with engines roaring and their coloured fly-wheels connected by driving belts to huge dynamos which, in turn, were connected by entrenched cables to where light and energy were needed. These life-giving monsters stood just down the hill on the outside edge of the fair; and strangely enough their constant roar, plus the slapping and flapping of their great belts, provided a not unpleasant accompaniment to the music and merry noises all around.

Any first-time visitor to the Race-hill fair could quite easily be fooled into the belief that the entire population of Brighton was named George. Every stallholder and vendor took the liberty of putting himself on first-name terms with any male person who looked as if he might have money to spend (that did not include us, they had a special name for us). So George was hailed from all directions and invited to 'try his luck', 'have a go', 'show the lady what he could do' or 'get his own back'. The lady vendors (or vendoreesses) in fruity, mock-cultured voices pointed out to 'Ge-arge' that he could not possibly fail to win, and extended their generosity to allowing him a trial go for nothing. The beautifully-suntanned lady at the hoopla stall, forearms bedecked with wooden rings, loudly announced to George that they were 'five for six, and all you win you have berrymine'.

There, before George's very eyes, was a wonderful array of watches (pocket and wrist), necklaces, broaches and trinkets, all diamond (?) encrusted, and each item adorning the top of a coloured wooden block, like a small log standing on end. George's task was

to throw a ring and encircle the log and the prize - simple! But what does the little notice say? It says 'All rings must lay flat to win.' Aye, there's the rub, because each log stood on a square block, about five inches by five, and an inch deep, and getting the ring to lay flat over that was quite another matter. My mate Georgie Cooper and I watched that stall for hours, and came to the conclusion that the only ring capable of laying flat over the block was the one the lady used to show how easy it was. Our long observation was noticed by the lady, who demanded to know, 'wot you kids 'anging round for?' (cultured voice abandoned) to which we replied, 'Waitin' to see someone win somethin' - ain't seen no one win nothin' yet.' We were then advised to 'Bugger off, which, when the lady's husband got one leg over the barrier, we did.

A display of wealth attracted many Georges to another kind of hoopla, where the rings were thicker and smaller. Here George was invited to 'Roll 'em on, and all you ring you have' and was reminded that 'Every one's a cash winner, berry mine'. Hundreds of coins from half-crowns to threepenny bits were laid out on a circular table, to be ringed and won. Let me say, in all fairness, that threepenny bits and even sixpences were often won; but of course, the larger the coin the less were George's chances. And as the diameter of a half-crown happened to be slightly larger than the inside diameter of the ring, that particular coin-of-the-realm remained in no danger at all. But George enjoyed himself.

'Ere y'are George, five balls for two, and we change all bad 'uns' - that was the offer and guarantee of the gent in charge of the coconut-shie; where against a gaudy, strong, pole-supported backcloth of canvas sheeting stood dozens of coconuts defying George to knock 'em down. Standing at the front, on what looked like Long John Silver's wooden legs, were two rows of half a dozen or so nuts which, fair's fair, could, possibly, be dislodged. But in the main display, standing at the back and sprouting out each side of stout poles, the nuts were so securely wired into little cages that only a major engineering operation could get them out.

There were always several coconut shies at the Fair, and each one provided show-off George with a welcome chance to display his strength and skill. Divesting himself of his jacket and handing it over to the care of an ogling girl-friend, George would flex his muscles, prance and pose a bit, and let all hell-fire loose at the milky targets. Status symbols, that's what they were, brown, hairy status symbols and it was an amusing sight to see smug, smiling George leaving the Fairground with an armful of 'em. Only the Good Lord and George knew what they had cost in energy and ball-money.

'We gotta git a livin' ain't we?' That's what the coconut-shie man shouted at Georgie Cooper and me when we loudly remarked that the wooden balls were so light they must be 'oller. We were further told to bugger off or 'you'll git my boot round yer arse, berry mine.'

It was not often that we had money to spend at the Fair, but if we had been lucky with the Smither's empties, and if we had exercised enough restraint to get past Mr

Goldring's Swiss puddin's, it was the Lucky Spinner for us. There were many varieties of Lucky Spinner, the most attractive to the eye being a wonderful display of coloured lights and magnificent prizes. Loud speakers hung all around, and a loud voice warned George that he must hurry if he wanted the chance to win as there were only two tickets left, and the lucky winner had the pick of the stall, berrymine. After the last two had been sold about ten times, a great arm which had been revolving slowly from the centre of the stall during the ticket-sale, ablaze with light and powered by an electric propeller, was given a final boost and, with an impressive roar, increased speed and passed over contacts. This caused a light to race furiously up and down an indicator board. The propeller slowed, and stopped, and all eyes were on the light on the board. Against a chorus of groans, and one small squeal of delight, one small window remained alight; and the Boss-man announced, 'Tishy's the winnah' or 'Number 49's the winnah'. And the holder of the lucky ticket, under the eyes of the many losers took 'the pick of the stall'. It was not often that numbers were used on the lucky spinner tickets, more often the names of racehorses in order to give the thing the right atmosphere. In later years it became the names of towns or cities; and as there were many tickets to sell for each spin (to show a modest profit) it was a common thing to find a strange mixture of the mean and the mighty. Your tuppence could entitle you to be represented by New York, Venice, Moscow, San Francisco, or maybe Southend or Margate. Say what you like about fairground people, he is a great leveller who can put Fowey on a par with Florence.

But so far as spinners were concerned, we kids did not allow ourselves to be dazzled by the bright lights. If our pockets jingled at all they jingled only as far as Jerry's spinner. Jerry was a regular at the Fair, and had the gift of the gab if ever a man did. It was chocolate and money with Jerry, and with only enough light bulbs to illuminate his stall, and not a coloured one among 'em, Jerry could hold the biggest crowd at the Fair. A tanned and handsome man, Jerry simply oozed personality, and always warmed his crowd up with a few risque jokes. He could always find among his audience a jolly, plumpish kind of woman whom he would address as 'Gal', and in no time at all would get her and the rest of his customers rolling with laughter. With the atmosphere created, Jerry would address the assembly something like this: 'Ere, I'll tell yer wot I'm gonna do,' the right hand slapped the left palm as he swiftly turned to his partner. 'Ere, Lil, 'and us up one of those specials.' Lil would stand with her arms cradling an enormous box of chocs, and Jerry, with patter running furiously, would pile on an assortment of boxes. 'Ere, not three, not four, not even five, 'ere, six boxes of the finest Swiss Chocklit assortment, and, wait a minute, 'ere I must be mad, 'ere's ten bob on top.' And Lil secured, under her chin, on top of a pile of boxes, a ten shilling note. What a prize! What wealth! We never won, but was there ever such a twopenn'orth of excitement and hopeful anticipation?

'Come along George, everyone's a cash register berrymine.' Cash register?! Yes, the wonders of electricity had finally ousted the old roll-'em-on stall, where the coins had to settle bang in the middle of a numbered square and 'clear the lines' to win. No longer the arguments about whether or not the lines were cleared. What George was required

to do now was to roll, toss or chuck his penny onto a board covered with brass plates. Each plate was about four inches in diameter and had a small, domed button in its centre, and if George's coin came to rest touching both the button and the plate, a circuit was completed and a small panel lit up to indicate his winnings. This could be as much as 6d!!! Our estimate was that 90 per cent of the winnings were 2d, 6 per cent 3d, 3 percent 4d, and the rest 6d. My mate Georgie, who always had a burning urge to 'take a look round the back' of things, said he was willing to bet that the number of wires going up to the tanner window wouldn't take a lot of counting.

If it had not been for Georgie Cooper, I might have gone through life believing that 'berrymine' was a special word, used only by fairground people, and meaning 'old man' or 'old chap' or some such thing as that; but no, Georgie explained, it was not a single word, but three words rolled together, and what all George's were being advised to do was to BEAR IN MIND that all he ringed he had, and that every one was a cash winner. I also recalled with alarm that I should bear in mind what the coconut-shie man threatened to do with his boot.

He was an exceptional lad, this young mate of mine, with an intelligence and powers of perception far beyond his years. But far from being an asset, Georgie's qualities only served to put the pair of us in constant danger of gathering thick ears; you see, he would insist in 'rumbling' and exposing every fiddle that went on around the fairground. What is worse, he would explain to me 'how it was done' well within earshot of the Bunco Booth proprietor who usually declared in a rather threatening manner that 'I'm only tryin' to earn me livin' ', before advising us, in his own words, to go. So every one of Georgie's revelations called for a hasty retreat. It is a cruel irony, and a sinful shame, that with all the bogus Georges on Brighton fairground, my old mate, who was really and truly christened with the name, should be told to 'bugger off' at every turn.

'Come along Gee-arge, now's the time to get yer own back, and every one's double-loaded, berrymine.' Thus she spoke, or rather yelled, as she sat at the most remarkable sales-counter imaginable. It comprised a long draining-board-looking table, which sloped gently down to a metal-lined tank full of water. She looked remarkably like a 'Daughter of the Original Gypsy Rose Lee' who had been plying for trade at the awning of a fortune-telling tent a few hours before. But, as we said, there was no reason we could think of why the 'Daughter of the Original Gypsy Rose Lee' should not flog water squirters on the side when she was not following in Mum's footsteps. So at the draining-board she sat, calling her message to Georges everywhere. Her wares looked like tooth-paste tubes in grey, zinc base looking metal, with a screw-cap at one end and open at the other. Miss Lee's assistant immersed each one in the water and double-loaded it. They only looked single loaded to us, but we thought we might be a bit too young to know the difference. A couple of deft jerks with a pair of pliers, and the fearful weapon was ready for action.

As the evening wore on, the crowd became really dense, and before long it was shoulder to shoulder between the stalls and amusements. Several groups of girls, older

than us, teenagers usually, giggled and screamed their way through the throng and provided George with the means by which he 'got his own back'. Armed with his double loaded squirter, and assisted by other Georges, the action was to isolate one of the girls from her mates and squirt water down the back of her blouse on top of a handful or so of confetti. This ritual was performed many times all over the fairground, and the struggles and screams were all part of the fun. What happened to the girls was exactly what they hoped would happen anyway, so no harm was done. I always had the feeling that the fun of the fair could be enjoyed so much more without what must have felt like a cold rice pudding down your back. As I said before, we were only young, and perhaps we didn't understand much about romance - ah well!!

The Fair stayed with us for the whole of Bank Holiday Week, and the lights blazed on until late on Saturday night. On Sunday it was gone. Whisked away in the night by the same magic that had brought it just a short week ago. And we were sad. But sadness was a brief and infrequent intruder into our young lives. What time for sadness? We had the sea to the South, and the countryside all around, three weeks of the school holiday left, good mates to play and fight with. What more could we ask?

Anyway, the Charrys and the Fair will be back next year.

Out on the Downs

When the choice was between a ride on the tram and a penn'orth of 'broken' sweets the sweets always won. The walk to the sea-front didn't seem too far, and it was generally agreed that spending money on tram fares was a wicked waste. Funnily enough though, considering the fine beaches Brighton has to offer, sandy too at low tide, and considering all the 'life' and goings-on around the promenades and piers, we didn't spend so much of our holiday time at the sea-side as you might think. Perhaps it was a case of familiarity breeding contempt (mind you, we didn't know what that meant at the time). Perhaps it was that, I don't know. But Bevendean, Falmer, Happy Valley and the hills around were our most frequent haunts, and there were few days during the latter weeks of the holiday that did not see a gang of noisy, dusty kids heading over the hills and far away. And if you asked any one of them why he chose to be sitting by that small dew-pond at Bevendean rather than on the beach, it's ten to one his answer would be 'Effits'. They were newts really. I believe the proper name was 'Efts' but we weren't sure about it, and Effits was easier to say without spitting. Effits were like little water-lizards, and there were some bigger black ones which we called 'Tritons' and were like miniature dragons. Along with other small creatures they all lived happily in Bevvo pond - until we lot turned up.

With only brief intervals to swig at a bottle of water or to gnaw at a hunk of bread-and-marge, we would concentrate our efforts on trying to lure Effits and Tritons from their watery home. Much skill and hard work went into this venture. First, you had to get yourself a worm. This meant getting a stick, or some form of digger, and pounding away at an already severely damaged part of the nearby hillside. When you had your

worm, the next thing was to attach him to a bit of cotton that you'd pinched from your Mum. That was the tricky bit. You had to tie a knot that he couldn't wriggle out of, but at the same time one that didn't slice the unfortunate thing in half like a cheese-cutter. With line baited, you stalked craftily around the edge of the pond until you spotted your underwater prey. Then you dangled the worm and dropped it right in front of his nose until he grabbed it. When the worm was halfway down his gullet to the point of no return, you hauled him ashore.

They were useless. You couldn't eat 'em, and they wouldn't look very good in a tank if you had a tank, which we hadn't. We often tried lining them up for a race, but the stupid things always went in different directions. So it is true to say that the attraction about Bevvo pond was digging up worms and catching Effits. Now that I come to think back, I'm pretty sure I liked digging up worms best. Not much of an attraction you may say - but it was an attraction that took us back again and again.

Someone discovered another pond 'over the Newmarket Hills', a pond that had fish in it. Not Effits - real fish! This called for a greater degree of sophistication in our fishing methods. We improved our tackle to include a hook (a penny from a shop in Lewes Road) and with a bit of cork for a float and some tough dough paste for bait we set off to do some high-class fishing - real fishing! And we caught quite a few, tiny roach I think they were. We kept them for a while in jars but never took them home. Kids can be cruel little devils, but I am happy to recall that at the end of each day's fishing we always put all the little fellers back into their pond and watched them swim happily away.

Catching Effits in Bevvo pond was my introduction to fishing. I grew up to like it very much, and in later years spent many pleasant hours fishing in rivers, with an occasional dabble in the sea. I have from time to time watched the 'big' angler fellows, wearing waders and handling expensive rods, casting their lures over salmon and trout streams, and I have often wondered if it were possible to ask all these gents how it all started for them - how many of them would look you straight in the eye and say 'Effits'.

It was a long trudge home from Bevendean or Falmer. We usually took the 'over the hill' route. We were always hungry, and quite a bit weary; but as we trudged we sang, we always sang. One would start a song, and all the others would take it up. Our songs covered a wide range, from the airy and lyrical to the downright rude with bad words, but one song was always reserved until we sighted the five cottages. Just one row of five cottages at the very top of Bear Road, and from miles around they stood out on the horizon; and to a gang of weary kids they conjured up visions - visions of cups of tea and hunks of bread-and-jam. When we saw the five cottages, we saw home. And we all sang with gusto:

'It's a long way no longer, it's a long way no more,
I can see the turning in the lane,
I can hear the old refrain,
Rule Britannia, it rings from shore to shore,

Never, never fear, Victory is near,
It's a long way no more.'

One day during the August holiday, one day every year, was planned well ahead. Camping day at Happy Valley. There was always one proud owner of a four-wheeler among the gang; a four-wheeler being a crude assembly of a wooden box, a plank, two axles and four pram wheels. One or other of these creations, steered by a stout rope attached to the front axle, and totally unaffected by the efforts of a home-made brake, could be seen striking daily terror into the hearts of local residents, as it careered at high speed down the middle of the road. I honestly believe that there would have been a death-toll of four-wheeler victims in our street but for the many deep ruts in the road (one of which was bound to be hit en route) and but for the certainty that the contraption would fall to bits on impact. Anyway, one of the gang would have a four-wheeler, and onto it would be loaded the gear for Happy Valley Camping Day.

Everything was organised and a list was made: broom handles and an old blanket for a tent, hammer, ball of string, frying pan, kettle, teapot, matches, tin of 'Jolly Boy' milk, jack-knife with a can-opener on it, 'taters, sausages, lump of lard or dripping... everything you can think of and more. A shopping list was made of the comestibles, and our pence and ha'pence were clubbed together in advance to cover the cost. Every year the shopping list bore, right at the bottom, a mystery item: X...4d. 'X' was a packet of fags, entered on the list in secret code in case one of our Mums got an eye to it. Once the connoisseurs of tobacco had agreed on whether 'X' was spent on Weights, Woodbines, Bandmaster or Star, everything was bagged up, loaded up, and we were off to Happy Valley.

The first time I went to Happy Valley I thought it was a bit of a let-down. I don't know quite what I expected, but to my mind it was no happier than any other valley. Perhaps it got its name in a negative kind of way, because most of the other valleys were supposed to be haunted, or had, at some time in the murky past, had a murder done in 'em. Plenty of juicy stories went around, and they got riper with every telling. So maybe Happy Valley was considered happy because it wasn't so miserable as the others. Whatever the case, it was all a misnomer to me because on my first camp, when it came to handing out 'X' I was only allowed half a fag. Teddy said 'Any more will only make you sick - and you only put a ha'penny in the kitty anyway.' Happy Valley? I should say so!

I've got to be fair though, in spite of the shocking treatment I received over the fag hand-out, Happy Valley was not at all a bad place for camping. There was one part where the trees and bushes were just the right height for tying two corners of the blanket to, and with the broom handles stuck into the ground holding the other corners up - there was our tent. Mind you, it always looked a bit on the low side when it was finally up, but it could be crawled into if you went down on your hands and knees. And you could even sit up straight without your head poking the blanket up - at least us little 'uns could - yes, there was plenty of room under the tent, so long as we kept the

numbers down to two at a time.

I sat under the tent when it came to my turn, but after a while I got to wondering what the Dickens I was sitting there for - it was much more fun getting the fires going and cooking the grub. But frustration again! I was not allowed to help cook the grub. The biggest and eldest cooked the grub, so I was right out of it. Getting the twigs and firewood - that was my job - well, me and a couple of others. It was soon discovered that one fire would not heat a frying-pan and a kettle at the same time, and so two fires were lit. Two fires call for a lot of firewood, and, when your grub depends on it, a shortage of firewood calls for desperate measures, and more often than not, the owner of the four-wheeler had to rush his vehicle out of sight for safety. But the cooking always got done - well done.

Have you ever tasted a raw potato that has been sliced up and 'fried' in a mixture of marge, lard and dripping, in a red-hot frying-pan, and served with half a million black smuts? Have you ever known the joy of a cremated sausage that looks like a bar of chocolate flake and which breaks your teeth as you eat it? No? Then brother, you've never lived! At least you've never been camping with the Bear Road gang at Happy Valley. We were lucky that our camping site was a long way from human habitation, because having polluted the atmosphere over at least two-thirds of East Sussex, anyone living within a few miles might have been led to suspect that Happy Valley had finally got itself a murder, and that someone was trying to dispose of a body. The very least we could have expected was the Fire Brigade.

We played our games. We did a bit of 'tracking' like all good campers do. We did enough fire-fighting after the cooking was done to prevent acres of the countryside being laid to waste. We laughed at Gordon Harrington as he went into a meadow with a tin mug in his hand, saying he was going to milk a cow (same joke every year, but we always laughed), and, as the sun lowered we 'struck camp' and made for home.

The route homeward from Happy Valley actually passed the five cottages, and it was there that we called in for a glass of water. The second cottage along was the best one, some of the others were a bit grumpy, but she was a nice old gal in the second one along. So, as a reward for its nice, kind nature, the Second One Along spent the best part of the summer-time doling out drinks of water to a succession of grubby juveniles who presented themselves on its doorstep looking like something off the label of a marmalade jar. But even the Second One Along had its limits, and the nice old Gal refused point-blank to dole out glasses of water on race days - much to the delight of the Ice Cold Lemon man.

Our journey home would conclude with the owner of the four-wheeler disappearing down the hill in a cloud of dust, while the rest of us covered the last half-mile gulping in great volumes of air, and blowing it out furiously so that our Mums didn't detect the smell of 'bacca' on our breath.

I have not done any research for the writing of this memoir - it isn't that kind of thing. So for all I know to the contrary, Happy Valley might now be a housing estate. But I have wondered if, like all the other valleys, it has inherited a ghost. If, by any chance, Happy Valley now has residents, and if, by any chance, those residents should be worried by noises in the night, they must not be afraid. They are probably being haunted by eight or nine small Bear Road campers of a bygone age. Fear not! Ghosts do not eat, and they don't bring their smells with 'em.

You can't play cricket on the side of a hill. Everyone knows that. At least, you can't play cricket on the side of a hill in any sort of comfort. We did. We played cricket on the steep bit between the Race hill road and the course. The only reason we were able to do so was that years before our time someone, for some reason, had gouged two large 'bites' out of the hillside and formed two flat, rectangular areas long enough and wide enough to pitch a wicket. We called them the first and second pitches. We only played one-end cricket, but there was enough room for two wickets if we'd had enough stumps - which we hadn't. It was on either of these pitches that we played when we wanted to play with a hard ball.

There came a time when we couldn't use the first pitch any more, because a family who had been evicted from their home in the poorer part of the town pitched a bell-tent on it and lived there. The husband had, by way of drainage, dug a circular trench around the tent. We felt very sorry for the family who, because they were so poor, were forced to live like that. We did not understand much about social conditions, but even as kids knew we were witnessing one of life's little tragedies. But life's little tragedy or not, it bugged up our cricket pitch. For the mark remained long after the tent was gone. And you can't play cricket with a dirty great trench running from first slip to extra cover.

So the competition for possession of the second pitch became keener, and we often found it occupied when we went up the hill for a game. Not so bad if it was only Moses Walsh and his sister with their tennis bats - we could shoo them off - but if the Newmarket gang had beaten us to it, it was war first and cricket afterwards. There was limited room for fielders on the actual pitch, and the outfield around the second pitch was all gorse and other bushes. But there was one thing about being sent to field in the 'deep' - you could pick blackberries and do a bit of bird-nesting at the same time.

If Sammy Lawrence and Co had taught us a bit more about local history and a bit less about Henry the flippin' Eighth, we might have got to know how the pitches came to be there in the first place. It was many years after my school days that I read in a book of local history that the area about where the Grandstand is, at the top of Whitehawk Hill, is the site of an Iron Age settlement - probably the oldest known to man - what about that then! So it might well be that the first and second pitches were dug out by some of those ancient Johnnies with skins round 'em. Maybe they were Brontosaurus parks or something. But I mustn't get carried away. It's just that I wish they'd taught us these things at school, and not so much about the goings-on at Hampton Court.

One Saturday afternoon, brother Teddy and I walked all over Brighton looking for a gramophone record of 'Yes, we have no bananas'. In the end we found one in Edward's music shop in London Road. We must have saved a long time to buy it because a ten-inch record cost one and threepence (6.5p) in those days. But we had heard someone sing the song, got 'stuck' on it, and the sacrifice had to be made. That is the way we came to learn our songs. Most homes had a horn gramophone in the front room, some even had the latest posh cabinet ones, or even only a portable with a carrying handle on it; and families would have a 'splash-out' now and again for the latest records. Kids would learn the songs and pass them on to others - there was no other way. In the days before transistor radios, and before people walked around with plugs stuck in their ear 'oles, it was kid-to-kid communication that did the job.

Most of this communication was made on our 'gang' outings over the hills. We sang on the way out and we sang on the way back. We sang all the way and we sang anything. Harold Funnell was a good singer; he had two sisters Gladys and Toot (who's cake was a puddin') and all the family were keen on the 'latest'. Harold often took the lead, and taught us many of them. None of your 'Tipperary' or 'Pack up your troubles' for us. We learnt songs like 'Ramona' and 'Brown eyes, why are you blue?' even some of the soppy tear-jerkers like 'What'll I do?' It didn't matter. If it could be sung, we sang it. When things got a bit weepy we would brighten 'em up with a few old favourites from Jack Shepherd's, 'I do like a dumpling in a stewd'll-ood'll-oo,' or 'I do like a s' nice s'mince pie.' Songs about something to eat were always popular. Singing was a good alternative to fighting, or kicking an empty tin-can along. Singing played a big part in our young lives. Our songs turned the miles we tramped into yards.

There is a song that I shall never forget. I learnt it on a day I shall always remember. It was sung to us by a kid who went to York Place school, and we never forgave him for it. York Place was a secondary school in London Road, and the kids who went there were all snobs. They wore school uniforms and they all tried to sound their aiches - and one way and another they put on airs and made themselves hateful. We all agreed on one thing about York Place jobs - we didn't like 'em. So how it came about that one of them attached himself to our crowd on one of our outings, I do not know; but there he was and to be quite fair about it he did his best to be chummy. He even joined in the singing and behaved almost human. But we were not prepared for what was coming. 'I say you chaps,' he said. 'Have you heard this one?' And right away, singing to an up and downy tune, he let forth these words:

'He knew all about Allimology,
Hebrew, Zebrew, Ju Ju oligy,
Sintack, Santack, Hob nail boot tack,
He was as full as a Pickford's van,
Folk who hacked and cracked on Edison,
Said he ought to take some medicine,
Simply because, the people said he was,

A darned, learned, scientific man.'

We didn't believe it! We didn't know what to make of it! After a while Cousin Jack whispered to me, 'This bloke's taking the rise out of us. This bloke's throwing our poor education up in our faces.' So we got him to sing it through a few times so that we could learn the words, and that was the finish of him. We never had that bugger along with us anymore.

Out on the street

In the winter time we waited for the lamplighter man and every evening, at dusk, he came. Always the same man, a short, stocky little fellow, wearing a battered trilby and leather leggings. Whistling the same shrill tune and carrying a long pole with a hook at one end, he came and brought the light by which we played our street games.

To our minds there was no such thing as a lowly job. A man with a job was a fortunate man; it did not matter what the job was, if it was 'regular' he was privileged to have it. We held the lamplighter man in awe and respect - this man with power over light and darkness! We gathered by the lamppost and waited for him to come. Starting at the bottom, at the Lewes Road corner, the lights would wink into life, and in zig-zag pattern our road became progressively flooded with light. As he approached we could see him, walking with a smart jerky gait, and swinging the pole from its middle, he took the steepness of our hill as if it wasn't there. As he approached each lamppost the rod shot forward in his fist and was gripped and arrested at the very end. It was lifted, the hook engaged in the lamp's trigger-switch, and kerplonk - on came the light. Then down came the pole, back it shot to be gripped in its middle again, and the man and rod jerked and swung their way onward and upward towards the next. The remarkable thing was that all this was done without halt or hesitation, even the whistled tune flowed unbroken. Yes, he really was somebody, was our lamplighter man.

Mind you, there was not a kid among us who could not have shinnied up the post and put the light on. And Bear Road, with our help, could have been bathed in light while the lamplighter stood at the bottom. But there were things we did not do - didn't think of doing. It was nothing to do with conscience and doing a man out of a job. We were sods enough and daring enough to do anything but we didn't light the street lamps, that was a job for our skilled and marvellous lamplighter man. So we waited for him to come and he never let us down.

All the front doors in Bear Road had a knocker; most of them had the good old heavy knocker which was shaped like a dolphin. Whether upstairs or down, the living room (kitchen) was far back from the front door, so the knocker needed a good clout to stand any chance of being heard. Some of the doors had the newfangled electric bell. But knocker or bell, we kids didn't use either. We oo-eyed. If your mate or any of the usual gang were not present when games-time came around, you oo-eyed him. This meant that you went to his front door, lifted the letter-box flap, and bawled up the passage

'OO-EYE JACK' or Bill or whoever. The result was always interesting. Of course your mate might come out right away, and that was that. But there was a nice variety of replies that might come back at you down the passage. It might be your mate, 'Jissa Minit' or his Mum in sing-song terms, 'He won't be lo-o-ng' or, if your luck was out, his Dad. 'Ee ain't bloody comin' aht,' which indicated that the paternal displeasure had been incurred, and that was one less for the evening's games.

If there had been such an event as an Oo-eye contest, Bear Road would surely have had a world champion; this is in the form of Albert Rudkin, a small ginger-haired lad with leather lungs and a voice that would strip paint at fifty yards. And one night Albert came to our door to oo-eye brother Ron. The family was at tea, and all was silence except for the champing of jaws when, without warning, up the passage and into the kitchen came the blast, 'OO-EYE RON'!!! Mum gave a scream, Dad dropped his knife and fork, and Teddy jerked his bread and jam up his nostrils. Our Dad was never a violent man but there was murder in his eye as he warned Ronnie, 'Tell that kid if he does that again, I'll come out there and bloody Oo-eye him'.

Albert was a rough tough full of go little chap who had to be on top or in front of everything that was going on, a lad with boundless energy and a burning zest for living. How tragic that in a few years' time this young life was to be ended on a 'whiplash' chair ride at a local amusement park.

Living opposite a cemetery was something we took for granted. Never once in my childhood days did I consider it spooky that we overlooked the dense blackness of a burial ground on dark nights, or in the outline of gravestones by moonlight. No, to us the Simbo Wall was an old friend who took an important part in our games and pranks. Most of our games were noisy but harmless - the same I'm afraid cannot be said for some of our 'larks'. One, in particular, I have always felt a bit ashamed of. It was an exceptionally dark night that two of our gang climbed over a part of the wall where they could stand on tombstones or crosses. Each of them had a flashlight torch which, shone up from below onto their faces, presented a pretty ghastly sight. There, in the darkness, they waited until someone came up the road; it happened to be a girl. With a loud, piercing scream the illuminated faces appeared over the wall, and the effect on that girl was devastating; she screamed and cried hysterically and ran out of sight around the nearest corner, and we never knew how she recovered from the shock. In later years I realised what a cruel and dangerous trick that was. The poor girl could have died with fright. I am so thankful that none of our pranks really went wrong, some could quite easily have done.

The Simbo Wall showed many signs of chalked wickets in various stages of fading, but no goalposts or crossbars - it was not necessary to chalk these in because on the houses side of the road, fate and the Brighton Corporation had kindly provided a lamppost and a fire-call post to be erected about three yards apart, a ready-made goal for the use of teams representing 'The Albion' (Brighton of course) and 'Arsenal'. Sometimes 'Aston Villa' would turn out there. It was all according to the taste or fancy of

the captain, who was, of course, the owner of the ball. The ball, by the way, was more often than not a home-made affair consisting of several old newspapers compressed into a near enough round shape and tied up with string. This arrangement had the advantage of not running off down the road every few minutes, but of course the game was frequently held up for emergency repairs.

The Pitch itself was a severely pitted flint road which took a heavy toll of boots, ball and kneecaps, especially soon after it had been resurfaced. Resurfacing was carried out by gangs of men who, working from horse-drawn carts, shovelled out a wicked looking flint mixture to fill in the holes and ruts, thereby easing the task of unfortunate horses whose job it was to pull the vans and carts of various tradesmen up that cruel incline. I could never quite make up my mind which was best for the poor old horse, going up or coming down? Because each cart carried with it a couple of wedge shaped steel skids. These were channelled out for the back wheels to fit into, and they prevented the wheels from turning when the vehicle was going downhill. The downward journey, therefore, was a mixture of pulling down and holding back. We always felt sorry for the poor old horses and subjected them to a lot of petting and mauling, which they would probably have rather gone without.

The lamp post firecall area became the popular rendezvous on dark evenings; and as there was usually a dozen or so kids assembled there, the noise was quite something. It was probably a good thing that the Victorian idea of the front parlour still prevailed in most families, and the front room was only used on Sundays, Highdays and Holidays, and during confinement periods when a bed was installed and it became a temporary delivery unit. At all other times, with street games going on, front rooms up and down the street were untenable, and families lived in the back rooms where there was a certain amount of noise insulation provided by the long front passages. Even so, it was not unusual for a Dad to appear on the front doorstep, with braces dangling, to announce that 'someone would get a smack round the bloody chops' if they didn't quieten it down a bit. But most Dads were like ours - all threat and no action.

Most of our games were for an unspecified number of players. Very few of them were governed by rules, or if there were any rules nobody could agree on what they were. One thing the games had in common is that they all ended up in complete disarray, so rules didn't matter very much.

I don't know if the street games we played were played by kids elsewhere, I know nothing of their origin except for 'Hoppo-Bumpo', which I'm sure we invented. Other games had names like 'Tin Can Copper' and 'Little Japanee' or even 'Grandmother Grey'. All that we knew about them was that you started playing them at an age when the older kids let you join in, and you finished when you started smoking or going out with girls. In our time these games were handed down through the age groups, and must have, I am sure, been handed down through the generations. I should be surprised to learn that any survive today. They were essentially street games, and alas, streets are no longer safe for games.

We were quite proud of Hoppo-Bumpo, because, unlike other games, there was a chance of someone finishing up as winner, and the chance of serious injury was minimal. It was played on knock-out basis, and one pair of opponents operated at a time. One boy approached from each side of the road, jousting style, hopping on one leg. The contestants met in the middle, and the object was to shoulder-bump your opponent and force him to put the other foot down. By a process of elimination a winner finally emerged, and as we all knew it would be Gordon Harrington anyway, the game usually ended with no injury to body or pride.

Little Japanee was quite another matter. Physical contact and flying boots were the order of the day here. Teams of three would take turns of being 'it' and would form up, one standing with his back to the wall, the second in a semi-leapfrog position with his head pushed into his mate's belly, and the third, also semi-leapfrog, with his head against No 2's backside. The three, therefore took the form of a six-legged horse looking backwards. Then one of the players from the other team would dash from the opposite side of the road, and with a flying leap, land as heavily as possible on the 'horse's' back, and the chant went up:

'One Two Three, Little Japanee,
All brave fellers, all fall off...'

Well, of course, the horse held up easily at that stage, so the next kid flew over and landed, and the little Japanee chant was repeated. Then came the next, and the next, until the poor old horse collapsed. If the game had gone on for any length of time, I suppose a winning team would have emerged, being the one who held up for most 'Japanees,' but long before that sort of result could be reached, either an injury had been suffered, or a fight between contestants had broken out. 'You done it on purpose,' and all the other kids were quite content to stand by and watch the punch out.

Tin Can Copper, now there's a name for you! This one certainly had no ending, and nobody was quite sure what went on in the middle. But the start was quite definite, and required the performance of such a quaint ritual that, except for the fact that it's basic requirement was an empty condensed milk can, might have originated in the Middle Ages. What happened was this: one boy, voluntarily or by election, was 'it', and stood on a mark or base surrounded by as many as wanted to play. 'It' then threw the tin overarm and behind him, and had to run backwards until he found it, and then bring it back to base. Meanwhile the other players had scattered to hiding places, and 'it' had to go in search of them, leaving the tin can on the base. When 'it' spotted a hider, he would call out his name, rush back to base, and bash the tin on the ground three times shouting 'Tin Can Copper'. The captured one was then in honour bound to remain at the base. The game might have ended when all the hidere were found, but for one snag: one of the few known rules of the game provided that while 'it' was out searching for the others, one of the 'unfound' could rush to the base, give the cry, and that would release

all the 'captured'. If you can understand all this (and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you can't) you will realise that the odds against 'it' were just too much. That is why I can say in all honesty that I never knew a game of Tin Can Copper to be finished; the players usually breaking off to pursue other interests. Or being called in doors by a small sister with such a message as 'Dad says you gotta come in at once. You ain't 'arf gonna get it.'

Grandmother Gray, I must confess, I never played: It was something for the girls and their small charges, and here again, was a bit of a mystery game. As I remember it, 'Grandmother' was surrounded by all the others who cavorted around her singing:

'Grandmother Grandmother Gray,
May I go out to play,
I won't go near the waterside,
To drive the ducks away...'

'Grandmother' then said 'yes' or 'no'. But I don't think it mattered a lot what she said, as the inevitable outcome was a lot of screaming, scratching, and pulling hair, which they all seemed to enjoy very much. It all proved to us lads what a daft lot girls were.

'Ree-leese' as we called it, was the noisiest and most rowdy game of all. It was like Tin Can Copper without the tin, and played between two teams. I cannot say 'equal' teams, because it was a foregone conclusion that the team with Bertie Mellors in it would come off best (I can't say it would win, because here was another of those games which 'broke-up' rather than arriving at a win-or-lose conclusion). One team scattered and hid, and the others set out to find them and bring them all back to 'prison' - an area formed by the lamppost, fire-call and back wall. Any prisoners incarcerated therein could be released by one of their team-mates dashing across the prison area and shouting 'REE-LEESE'. Bertie was an oversize lad, weighing, I suppose, something in the region of twelve stones, and sporting an enormous size in boots. The sight and sound of this great mass thundering down the hill was something terrifying. The Brighton Belle leaving Clayton tunnel had less impact on the atmosphere than Bertie in full flight.

To the deafening roar of 'REE-LEESE', Bertie's mates were freed and the defenders scattered. If it had only been the defenders who were scattered, no doubt Release would have endured as a game. But Bertie did not discriminate, and following the scattering of several innocent pedestrians, and the loss of one old lady's half pint of stout-in-a-jug, and under the threat of 'I'm goin' ter get a bobby up to you lot,' the game's popularity waned. We kids were a law-abiding lot, but there were few among us without some unpunished mischief on our conscience. And the grown-ups knew that the threat of a 'copper' usually had the desired effect. Bear Road was not on a regular beat (perhaps the climb up the hill did not appeal to the force), so when we did see a policeman we made ourselves scarce.

At one time we were dead keen on the 'doorknocker' lark. The theory was, that with the

knockers of two adjoining doors being joined with a bit of string, the opening and closing of one door would raise and lower the other knocker with a bang. But it didn't work. And the thick ears we collected through being caught in the act of tying soon put a stop to that one. The only near-success we ever had was when two doors were opened at the same time and one of the knockers got pulled off its hinges. A punch-up between irate neighbours was narrowly avoided when they recognised the set-up and agreed it was all the fault of 'them bloody kids.'

Dares, too, were popular and one inventive mind in the gang thought up the following: we would move into a street where we were not known, and each, in turn, knock at a door and ask 'Does Mrs So-and-so live here?' (any name we could think up) The test was, how long you could keep up a conversation with a straight face. All your mates, of course, kept out of sight. Or they should have done. But I became the victim of a dastardly bit of treachery when doing my 'dare'. No sooner had I put the question than half-a-dozen heads poked round the corner of the gate shouting 'He knows! He knows!' So it was cut and run, and the end of that game for me.

Most of these pranks, like the knocker-tying, were of unknown origin, just 'handed down', but many were of our own invention. Some were stupid, some tough, and some downright dangerous; and all of them, I am sure, a darned nuisance to our elders who were seeking a bit of peace and quiet. But none were intentionally malicious. Remember, we had no 'trannies' or sophisticated plastics in those days. We had much time on our hands, and nothing in our pockets. But we had our street and our lampposts. We were lucky, and happy.

We liked Easter. Most of all we liked Good Friday. Even on the day before Good Friday there was excitement about seeing those big, white paper bags, full of hot cross buns, coming out of the baker's shop. All Mr Goldring's cakes were good, but at a ha'penny each, twenty-four for a Bob, his hot cross buns were a must in households for miles around. Good Friday was skipping day, and the one day in the year that all the Mums and Dads joined in the fun. A 'scaffold rope' reaching from one side of the road to the other was manned by two Dads. Sleeves rolled up, leather belt around the waist and with braces dangling, they swung this great rope - about an inch and a quarter thick - kicking up clouds of dust. And all the kids who wanted to, or who dared, would skip to the song:

'Hot cross buns, one a penny, two a penny,
Hot cross buns all hot,
One a penny poker, two a penny tongs,
Three a penny hot cross buns all hot - all hot...'

Several changes of Dads at the rope-ends took place, and the relieved ones would show off their youth and agility by joining in the skipping. Not to be outdone, other Dads joined in the fray, and the fun was fast and furious. Then the Mums would have a go, usually starting with the shout 'Here comes old mother So-and-so', and when that

worthy lady, with her husband's cap hatpinned on and skirts gathered up in a bundle in front, jumped into the flying rope, so the mothers took up the challenge to the screams of laughter and ribald remarks of the onlookers. Many a lady who, all year round would not say 'boo to a goose' displayed her knees and undergarments at the Good Friday skipping session in Bear Road.

Good Friday morning also brought a great crowd together on the Level to play Bat and Trap. It may be that Bat and Trap is a real game, played by teams of even numbers, to a set of rules. It may even be that there is a method of scoring, and that one team wins and the other loses. Bat and Trap may well be an orderly and regulated game in the right circles, but that was not the Bat and Trap as played on the Level on Good Friday when we were kids. The bat had a round handle bound with twine, and a blade about ten inches long; the whole thing looked like a sawn-off cricket bat. The trap was a wooden block affair, looking like six inches of three by three, containing a small see-saw arrangement on a centre pivot. Without going too deeply into mechanics, what happened (roughly) was this: a small ball was placed at the front end of the block over the lower end of the see-saw, and when the back end was clouted with the bat, it (the ball) shot up into the air, and the batsman had to slosh it as hard as he could, and run somewhere. The fielders had to try to catch the ball, or if not, to chuck it back and try to hit the trap, or something like that.

As I say, it is quite possible that in some places the game is played to rules, but with the batting side lined up behind the trap and extending about three parts of the way around the circumference of the Level, all waiting for a 'bash', and with the fielding side seeming to consist of the remainder of the population of Brighton, I don't think the Level game would have been recognised by any Bat and Trap Association and Control Board. But it was a great game. Mind you, if you wanted to be a 'batter' you would have to line up at about 9.30 am to get a bash at 11 o'clock. I think that's why the majority were fielders.

The only other time of the year that the Level attracted us Bear Road kids was bonfire night. The Guy Fawkes celebrations provided an excellent chance for the local population to get rid of all the old rubbish they had collected all the year round. Old beds and mattresses were favourite, but whatever it was, it went up in flames on the Level on bonfire night. I doubt very much if there could be a greater concentration of smoke, flame, sparks and dirt to be found anywhere. Burns and injuries there were by the hundreds, why there were never any deaths I do not know; but nothing I am sure could come nearer to be Hell on Earth, and we loved it.

'Little Demons' - they were the fireworks we liked best: a ha'penny each and a terrific bang to 'em. Most of the local sweetshops had lured us all through the months since Christmas to 'Join the Firework Club' and would accept pennies and ha'pennies and mark your card. None of us had a lot to stash away weekly, but by the time the great day came around there were usually enough pocketfuls of 'Demons' to scare the living daylight out of any poor old soul foolish enough to be caught out after dark. Sparklers

were very nice, and at a penny for a packet of five, the price was right; but there was no bang to 'em, and they didn't scare anyone, so we left sparklers to the little pansy kids. First we let our own fireworks off, and then we made for the Level to enjoy everybody else's; so November the Fifth was a pretty good night. But there was always a reckoning when we got home filthy black, smelling like a glue factory, and swearing solemnly that 'We ain't bin nowhere near the Level...'

Our world, as children, did not extend far beyond the boundaries of Brighton, and we knew little of what went on elsewhere. So it may have been that towns all over the country had large numbers of street singers and musicians. Perhaps Brighton was no exception in having so many. But wherever you went through the town, you would come across a variety of banjo strummers, violinists, mouth organ blowers or barrel-organ grinders.

Wild rumours went around about the amount of money they collected, it was even whispered that some of 'em were millionaires. Comparing their takings with the average working man's wages at the time, perhaps some of them did very well. But by the look of them, I don't imagine that many looked far beyond tomorrow's beer money. A notable exception was the two Italian gents who toured the streets with a full sized harp, a stool, and a violin. These men were real musicians, and covered a wide area of Brighton and Hove. During the summer-season they played the pleasure-steamers that took trips from the Palace Pier. It is easy to believe that these two made lots of money. They made beautiful music, and were worth every penny. The rest were mainly sympathy-wallahs, and worked in a limited locality.

Bear Road had its own street singer. No one knew his name - we called him The Old Chap from the Workhouse. So far as we knew he never sang anywhere else, and he only sang on a Tuesday. Walking with a limp and on a stick, the Old Chap would leave the Workhouse at the top of Elm Grove during the late afternoon or early evening, cross the road, limp his way along the Race-hill Road (now called Tenantry-Down Road), turn down Bear Road to where the houses start just below the Sanny, and there the performance would begin. He would lean on the stick with both hands, and somehow swivel round it. Then he would take a couple of steps and swivel again. This action seemed to get him along at the desired speed.

There are houses on only one side of the road, so he was able to keep an eye open for any offerings as he set off down the hill, singing in an agonised croak:

'Oy do bee-leeve, Oy zhall bee-leeve,
That Jeezuz doyed vover mee...
And awn that crawz,
E-ee zhed ees blud,
Ver-romm zin to zet mee vree...'

That was it. His complete repertoire. Repeating that one verse over and over, he

swivelled and croaked his way down the middle of the road quite oblivious to the one or two scallywags who walked on the pavement along-side him singing, to the same tune, that they bee-leeved:

'That bugs are bigger than fleas,
As on the wall,
They play football,
Without any referees.'

You could say what you liked about the old chap's voice, but you simply could not fault his timing. He always managed to arrive at the Newmarket Arms at the precise moment that the doors of the Public Bar opened, and it just so happened that by that time he had managed to collect at least the fourpence required for a pint of mild. It was a tribute to the restorative power of Kemp Town Ales that he left the pub with a much-improved gait - totally ignoring the houses below the 'Newmarket' as he made his way home. Along Lewes Road, up Elm Grove and into the Workhouse. Until next Tuesday.

Hoppy was quite different. There was nothing melancholy about Hoppy. His sphere of operation was Lewes Road, between the bottom of Bear Road and the Arches. Providence, and the Brighton street planners, had provided for four pubs to be situated one at each corner of a roughly rectangular area. This was Hoppy's pitch; and the 'Gladstone', the 'Alexandra', the 'Allen' and the 'Bear' were Hoppy's pubs. They say that musicians are born and not made and this was certainly true of Hoppy.

Unlike the Old Chap who pulled at the heart-strings, Hoppy plucked at the banjo-strings, and coupled with his singing, the sound that he made was the sound of a born musician. Unfortunately, Hoppy, as his nickname might suggest, had been born with a physical defect, one leg was shorter than the other. But by a remarkable coincidence, the difference in the length of his legs exactly matched the depth of the kerb in Lewes Road. So that by keeping to the left, with one foot on the kerb and one in the gutter, he could move smoothly from pub to pub on an even keel. And on his way he sang:

'She's mad, She's mad, She's fairly off her dot,
Drank a pint of paraffin oil and thought it was a whiskey tot,
The doctor came to feel her pulse, she'd paraffin on the brain,
She's mad, mad, fair gone barmy, and she'll never be right again.'

There were variations such as:

'All the kids ran after her, they called her crazy Jane,
She's mad, mad, fair gone balmy...'

Several verses, interspersed with that wonderful high-speed strumming and vamping that good banjo-players do so well, and Hoppy made his way from pub to pub; and a little bit of Brighton was a happier place for it.

I cannot believe that he took a lot of money en route. First of all the inhabitants of our part of the town were not an affluent lot, and secondly, the route itself was not a 'likely' one. For instance, between the 'Bear' and the 'Gladstone' he would pass: a grocer's shop, Goldring's bakery, the bottom of Newmarket Road, a sawmill and a Monumental Mason's. On the other side of the road, the route between the 'Alexandra' and the 'Allen' was just as attractive and about as lucrative. I suppose it was the Extra Mural Cemetery being nearby that gave rise to so many monumental masons in our district, but their displays of stone crosses, angels and the like did little towards cheering the place up, it was a wonder we didn't all have a touch of the melancholies.

No, it was at the four corners of his 'beat' that Hoppy made his money. With the door of the public bar wedged open, his high boot on the doorstep of the lower one outside, he would give forth with what must have been the most cheerful dying wish of all time:

'And when I die, don't bury me at all...
Just pickle ma bones in alcohol,
Raise a barrel o' beer, at ma feet and head,
And if I don't move, you'll know I'm dead...'

Then came the stuttering bit:

'And when I d-d-d-d, d-d-d-d-die
Don't bury me at t-t-t-t-t-t-tall
Just pickle ma b-b-b-b-b-b-b-b-bones
In alco h-h-h-h-h-h-h-hol...'

I don't believe for a moment that these were Hoppy's only songs, but they were the most popular. There was hardly a child over the age of eight between Elm Grove and the Moulseccomb Highway who did not know them off by heart.

There can be no doubt that Hoppy finally went to the place where all good street-singers go. Perhaps he didn't get his dying wish. But I wouldn't mind betting that when he got to the Golden Gates, he put one foot inside and gave 'em a couple of choruses of 'she's mad'.

Making memories

We made boats that sank. We made kites that didn't fly, and we made four wheelers that seldom clocked up more than half a mile before falling to bits. But we made 'em and we did it ourselves. It is quite true that we bought our spinning-tops for a penny or a ha'penny (according to model), and it is also true that the smaller kids had to renew their stocks of marbles (12 a penny) quite often. Our marbles were the painted clay kind with a short life-span. They did not take kindly to being trodden on, and those that survived this fate soon found a home in the marble bags of the big, cocky jobs, to whom the little

'uns quickly fell victim in fair or foul play. That is why it was always the little 'uns who had to replenish their stocks. Yes, marbles and tops could be bought at the local sweet shop. If you were lucky and had tuppence to your name, you might even be able to get a rollerskate from Joe Maguire's junk-yard in Hollingdean Road. Nobody ever owned more than one skate at a time. We didn't even know they came in pairs. But a skate was a proud possession - especially a 'ballharyan' one.

Shops that made boats and kites and the like were beyond the reach of our finances, and so, in the days when DIY had not been heard of, before DIY shops and magazines existed, the only way to get most of the things you wanted was to Do It Yourself.

None of the Dads in our road had anything that could, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, be called a 'Tool Kit'. Our Dad had a large, rusty old tin box tucked away in the scullery cupboard, and apart from a generous supply of rusty dust, all that this 'Tool Box' contained was a hammer with a wonky head, a pair of pincers, and a pair of pliers rusted tight in the open position. But with these, plus a few odd bits of wood, and with the unauthorised loan of Mum's breadknife, I created HMS Sinbad on the backyard steps. I chose the name Sinbad because of Sinbad the Sailor, and I hoped that my Sinbad would be a sail-er (clever play on words, you see). But sail-er it wasn't. And half a minute into its maiden voyage on Newmarket pond, during which time it wobbled and bobbed like a mad thing, 'HMS Sinbad' heeled over and down and was never seen again.

If we had known anything about the Theory of Flight or aerodynamics (which we didn't) we might have realised that two lengths of cane, lashed together to form a cross, with a cut-to-shape copy of the 'Evening Argus' stuck to it with flour-and-water paste, was hardly likely as a finished article called a 'Kite' to perform graceful feats of flight at the end of a bit of string. I never knew one of our home-made kites to get off the ground. We tried brown paper and we tried stiff gummy paste; but the inevitable result was always a rapid return to the original condition, two bits of cane and a mass of crumpled, gummy paper.

Yes, we made our schoolboy playthings, and most of the time they let us down - but we would try and try again, and always managed to make, at the very least, a good laugh at our failures. We did it ourselves and we made things. But although we did not know it at the time, we were to be well rewarded for our efforts. For we were making not mere material things - we were making memories. We were making for ourselves something that we would enjoy for the remainder of our days. God, how I pity the youth of today! What are they going to do for memories? How many of today's youngsters will, in sixty years' time, remember the pop records that they now buy in such profusion? How many of today's ten-year-olds will, in the evening of their days, recall to mind all the sophisticated electronics and printed-circuit wonders now being showered upon them? Can they possibly be expected to lay up a store of memories that will give them the joy that I now experience as I witness again in my mind the fate of HMS Sinbad? I doubt if there exists today many pairs of brothers who, as men in their seventies, will sit in a

country garden and recall with joy the events of their childhood as Teddy and I so often do now.

Whatever blessings modern children might inherit in their closing years, I cannot help thinking that, sadly, they will have missed out on memories. They may scorn my sympathy, they may well be able to deal with each year's problems as each year comes. For my part, I shall always be grateful that I was born at a time that gave me a childhood in the good old bad old days of the twenties. I am grateful to have been young at a time when, although we could save little else, we were able to lay up a store of the greatest treasures of all - happy childhood memories.

Perhaps I shall never really leave Brighton. Nostalgic fool that I am, I am sure that while memory remains strong some small part of me will always be in the Bear Road area with my family and the chums of my boyhood. But there must always be an awakening from dreams, and in shaking myself back to the real world I return to a peaceful retirement in a beautiful corner of Devon. I have enjoyed every moment of my journey back in time, as with each stroke of the pen I have relived so many of the happy and sad moments of the past.

Back in Dicky Thomas's class I learned a poem which I did not fully understand at the time:

'I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!'

Thank you Dicky Thomas. How well I understand now ...!

'I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.'

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