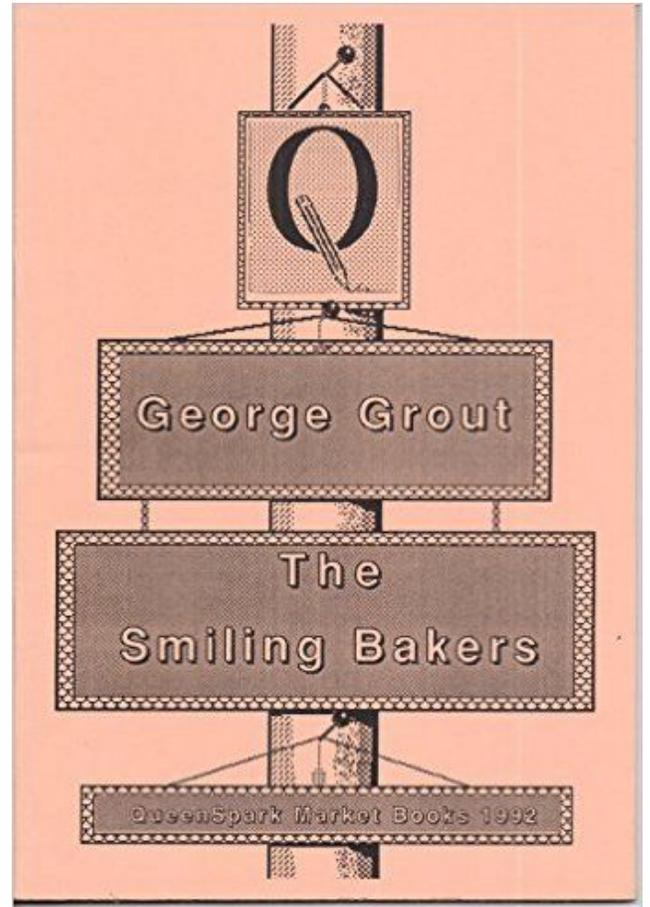


About QueenSpark Books

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

George Grout was a member of one of Brighton's best-known family bakers. He learnt the skills and craft of baking from his father and brothers at a young age, and can attest to hard times as well as recalling many happy memories of laughter and fun.

In this 1992 memoir, George recalls the years when he lived and worked at the bakery at 34 Coombe Road, where his bedroom was full of paper bags, there were horses in the stable and he had to get up very early in order to get to work on time. He reminisces about his ten brothers and sisters, his strong and gentle mother and the man who was his teacher, his boss and above all his father. In a nutshell he loved his work, stating that "being one of 'The Smiling Bakers' kept me going. That was the name that we called ourselves."

This book presents a unique and detailed picture of working lives in Brighton from 1900 through to the Second World War.

The Smiling Bakers

This book is dedicated to my Mother Lilian May, who was born in Brighton, and lived in Elm Grove with her parents. Her father was the Town Plumber. A very good position I would think. Mother had several brothers and sisters. I do not remember mother's father, as he died rather young, but her mother was a sweet person.

My father was born at Byfleet, in Surrey. His father worked on a farm, for not much money. Financially, things were very often bad. Food was short. With seven boys, and one girl it's no wonder. I once heard, when I was growing up, that he had said, "If I ever have a family I would make sure they were well fed, and shod". I must say, that he did exactly that. No fancy stuff. Just good plain food, and strong boots, not shoes. Until we were old enough to buy our own, anyway.

Father left school at 11 years of age. A few years before that, his eldest brother, Fred, had come down to Brighton. Why Brighton? I could never find out. But he came to open a bakers shop in Hampden Road off Elm Grove. Father gained some experience working in the village bakers shop at Byfleet when he left school. He was a bit of a skinflint, so scrounge and save he did. My older brothers told me later that he was so mean, he used to walk up and down Elm Grove delivering his bread and flour, and for boot laces he always used pieces of string, taken with care from the flour sacks.

Father came to Brighton to work for his brother. So he worked hard, and saved hard, with the idea, and ambition to open a shop, and bakery at Coombe Road. That was almost on the outskirts of the town in 1901, the turn of the century.

In those days bread was the main item on the menu. An average amount for a family of four or five would be five large loaves a day. The baker called every day. Bags of flour were delivered as well. On wet days it was a hard job to keep it all dry.

Father and Mother got married in 1899, while Father was working for his brother Fred at the bakery and shop off Elm Grove. They went to live with Mr and Mrs Jarrett in part of their house which was in Bonchurch Road while the shop, bakery, house and stables were being built in Coombe Road. Father had a loan from his brother Fred of £100. That was the price of the building, made to his own plan. This consisted of the bakehouse, a shop with post office, and living accommodation.

We were all born at Coombe Road apart from Jack. Behind the shop was a scullery with an indoor toilet, which was a luxury in those days. Upstairs there were three bedrooms. Mother and Father's bedroom, which was also used as an office for the bookwork. One for the girls' bedroom, and one for the boys. At one time there were six of us sleeping in two beds, with no room between them. How the beds were made was a puzzle. We were always in trouble for making a noise when we should have been sleeping. Outside there was a toilet, for the use of the bakery staff. Over the bakehouse, there was a large flour loft, and then came the stables which were large enough for two horses, and two carts. There was a loft over the top for hay storage. At the back of the stables was a

fairly large area for manure, which was always in demand for gardens. We also had a small garden, and always kept chickens so there was always a good supply of fresh eggs.

At first, when father opened his shop, post office, and bakery, he used to make the bread early in the mornings, and then take it and deliver it to the few customers he had. He used to walk around with a large bread basket on his arm, and he was after new customers all the time. You could imagine it was pretty hard work of course. After a hard slog, when he had more customers, he was able to take on a roundsman, and he soon had enough trade for himself to work full - time making bread. Cakes were a luxury. Only a few buns, and plum heavies, which were like big scones, but almost like a lump of pudding. All this was before my time, I'm pleased to say.

A bakery business, with a large family of brothers and sisters who were destined to work at home, is not the best place in the world to be born. I would like to give the reader some idea of the working life of a young baker. I can recall the time, when I was approximately six years old and the jobs were sorted out. My first job, when I was six or seven, was carrying buckets of coal named 'Baker's Nuts' into the bakehouse to be burned in the furnace. The amount needed would have been about 2 cwt, so you see it took quite a few trips from the yard. My brother Sam used to help me finish off the coal job, but only after he had finished his job which was cleaning the bread tins of all shapes and sizes; long tins, square tins, sandwich tins, Coburg tins for cottage loaves and roller tins. The most popular shape was the Coburg.

We used to swear and curse when the fairy cake tins were due for a clean. It's rather difficult to explain the shape of these: they were around 2" across and 2" deep but had crinkly edges which had to be brushed separately. If they weren't cleaned properly dirty marks showed on the cakes and then there was trouble. We were made to do them all over again.

Every once in a while, the grease and mixture got caked on to the tins and they were due to be boiled. This was done by putting all the tins in a large iron pot of water with a handful of strong soda. The pot was then lifted into the oven by someone older because it was very heavy, and left there for a few hours. Then we used to clean the tins spotless and they were then rinsed off, dried and greased. Then the circle started all over again. Of course, these jobs were carried out when the oven wasn't being used for cooking bread or cakes. The oven stayed hot for hours after the furnace was shut down.

All sorts of things for the business were kept in our bedrooms. Father used to order from Gilletts a very large quantity of paper bags done up in packets of a thousand. There were all sizes to hold the different weights. The larger the size of each order, the larger the discount that was given. They were not strung up, so an extra discount was given. A good bit of buying I suppose. But not so good for us, sleeping amongst piles of paper bags. They were under the beds and stacked in every available space including Esther's and Mary's room which held more because there was only the two of them

sleeping in there.

We had the job of stringing up the bags in packets of a hundred. This was done with a block of wood, a four-inch nail, a hammer and a piece of string: select a packet of bags about the right amount, place on the block of wood, place the nail in position and give it a bloody good clout. Then pass the string through the hole and tie. Those to be used for one pound, three pounds and seven pounds of flour did not have to be put in bundles. We had two colours of flour bags; white for plain flour and yellow for self-raising. Also kept in our bedrooms were large bundles of tissue paper used to cover the bread which was sold over the counter.

Another job that had to be done was to make sure that the corn bins were always kept full. The corn was for chickens which a lot of families kept for a regular supply of fresh eggs. We also had eggs delivered. A very long box of eggs was called a long hundred, but contained about 130, which in the trade was a good way to buy. They were packed in straw, so we had to go careful not to break any. Large amounts were used for cake making, and sponge goods. We had to make sure when cracking them open for use, that the odd bad one didn't slip in. So each one was smelt separately, otherwise the whole batch would have been spoilt.

Along one side of the shop over the corn bins was a row of glass show cases containing items like rice, porridge oats, dried peas, haricot beans, butter beans and split peas, to be sold loose for a few coppers a pound. All these were stored in the loft. Mice were always around, often gnawing their way through the sacks. So we had to keep a sharp eye out to make sure none of their little droppings went in to the food. This sort of thing was not unusual as there was a lot of vermin about in those days.

We had few comforts. Our lives were work and bed, but we used to get up to a lot of capers and made our own fun. Mother was a wonderful person, she had so much time and love for all of us, but she had no favourite either. Sam and I used to sneak into the shop to nick a few biscuits to take up to bed and sometimes a bottle of lemonade. It was tricky opening biscuit tins and being quiet at the same time so that Father did not hear us or catch us in the evenings, as he was upstairs in his and Mum's bedroom come office, which was over the shop, and where any noise we made could be heard by him.

Sometimes, not often though, we had a bar of chocolate as well. We had to watch for the crumbs we made in our bed. Every evening Father was upstairs doing his books and Post Office accounts, which had to be kept up to date.

Mother used the oven for all her roast dinners, even for her boiled puddings, spotted dick and plain puddings to have with treacle and jam or sometimes with custard. If Mother had time between getting the meals ready, she served in the shop and the Post Office. Shop hours were 8 am to 8 pm. Most of the bread was made and cooked at night. We used to lay in bed and we used to know exactly what job they were doing by the different sounds. Bakers started at 10 pm and at 6 pm on Fridays.

As us boys got older, our jobs were handed down to the younger ones and so on. The funny thing about all this is that it seemed to work automatically. Nature being what it is, the others and myself used to swear about having to do all these jobs. Now that's something I got into trouble over. I had many a clout for that. At school I was once called out in front of the whole school. All the teachers and pupils had to line up in the playground and I was called up on to the veranda while the Headmaster, Mr Suckling, told everybody that I swore a lot. I expect most of them knew already. I don't suppose it cured me. I wasn't keen on school and just looked forward to when I could leave at fourteen. Boys and girls from school were always saying things to me like: "Does your Father go up to the Racehill to throw the currants in the buns and cakes?". And they would come into the shop and say, "Two pennyworth of stale cakes, and not too many wedding cakes"! We used to get young boys and girls of about seven or eight years old coming in as early as 6 am for six pennyworth of stale bread and cakes. Mostly bread as cakes were a real luxury. I recall one boy who came from North Moulsecoomb most mornings. Sometimes we never had anything for him and his sad face said it all. That meant he had to go further afield. Down on the Lewes Road there were several bakers shops where bread was made on the premises.

Some bakeries were underground which is not allowed these days. We used to get hundreds of beetles and crickets. We even had them in our bedroom. But of course, they used to breed where the heat was. The most favourable place for this was the prover, which was used for buns and rolls and all fermented goods, it was under the oven so it was always warm. Flat tins holding about thirty buns or rolls were placed on a trolley and pushed into the prover for fifteen to twenty minutes to help them rise. When they had risen enough they were cooked in the oven. We used to put beetle traps down on Saturday nights when there was no baking going on. We used to catch hundreds of them and kill them by turning the trap upside down into a bucket of boiling water. Mice were always around although we always had at least one and sometimes two cats. One cat had a litter of kittens on top of my suit. It managed to get the door of a cupboard opened where Sam and I kept our clothes in the bedroom. Father bought me a new one. We also used to put down mousetraps. Father used to give us a penny for each one we caught and to prove we had, we cut off the tails and showed them to him. Then he used to burn them on the furnace, he wouldn't let us chuck them on the furnace, he knew we would use them over and over again to get that penny if we could.

As I got older I was given other jobs like sweeping and hosing down the shop forecourt, cleaning windows, scrubbing bread trays, helping on the bread rounds and taking the horses to the blacksmiths for shoeing. We did this before school, down off the London Road in Marshalls Row at 'Dawsons'. After a while we took them to a firm nearer home called 'Dobsons', which was next to the tramways yard, in Lewes Road.

I remember one occasion when Sam and I must have been on holiday from school and Father was having his afternoon lay down. We hired two bikes for six pence an hour each from a man in Melbourne Street by the name of Bartlett. We were riding around

the Avenue in Moulsecoomb and I suppose we were going too fast. One of us hit a garden post and busted a front wheel. When we got the bikes back to Bartlett's there was hell to pay; he knew our names and where we lived and said he would be up to see Father. We got very frightened and knew there would be lots of questions asked as to where we got the money and whether we had finished our jobs.

A big stroke of luck came our way when our oldest brother Jack came home on leave from the Navy. Sam and I had told Mother the situation and she would always help if she could keep us out of trouble with Father. We then pleaded with Jack to see Mr Bartlett if he turned up. About five-thirty that evening Esther came through from the shop to say that a Mr Bartlett wanted to see Father. Jack then said in a very stern voice: "I will see him", which he did. Jack told Mr Bartlett that if he let young lads take bikes for hire he was taking the risk of them being damaged and he should make sure that they were insured. We never heard anymore and, needless to say, we learnt a lesson there.

My father was a very hard man. I recall the time when I had an abscess on the back of my right ear and had to attend the hospital for it to be cut out. I had just a local anesthetic and had it done in the morning. I went to work in the afternoon. Unfortunately for me, after a few days it turned septic and the doctor said I should not be at work as the flour and the heat did not help. It got so bad that I had to attend the out-patients department every day for the dressing changes, although I was still driving a van at the time doing part round and part in the bakehouse. I had just turned seventeen. Father made me come back to the bakehouse, leave the van and go to the hospital on the tram and the bus. This went on for ten weeks. I had rolls of bandages around my head. It shows what a bastard my Father was! It dried up and left me with a scar behind my ear which I have to this day. Most of my customers felt sorry for me I'm sure, but being one of "The Smiling Bakers", kept me going. That was the name that we called ourselves.

I remember as a boy sitting down to lunch one Monday, to cold beef, or lamb, I'm not quite sure. But anyway, Monday was always cold meat day, with bubble, and squeak or mash, and a variety of sauces, and pickles. On this day, I selected some Worcestershire sauce, but the bottle slipped, and my plate was swimming in it. Father said I was skylarking, and made me soak it all up with bread, and eat it before going back to school. I was alright, and my mouth burnt for days. If ever you've tasted this, you will know how hot it is. I've never had any since.

One week of every month, Father used to go on one of his drinking sessions. Solid on the drink; whiskey and brandy. One, sometimes two, bottles a day. As kids, we thought it was something to do with the moon and we were really frightened of him. One of his nasty habits in the winter was to come downstairs and open all the doors when we were sitting in a lovely warm room with a log fire. Even the back doors. The cold used to rush in. Once, when one of us closed it, he got a four-inch nail and fixed it open. We used to make a joke of it all, but it wasn't funny.

Jack my eldest brother was born in 1900 while Mother and Father were living in

Bonchurch Road with Mrs Jarret, who later helped Mother at Coombe Road. Jack was destined to be a baker, and was a very good one. At the end of the First World War he was called into the Navy at the age of 18. I was then about 5 or 6. I can remember how smart he looked in his uniform and I used to say very proudly to the other boys and girls, "my brother fought the Kaiser, and helped to beat him". After that, he had two lovely daughters before things went wrong with his marriage. He had a pretty bad temper. When I became 18 years old, Father put me on night work, with Jack and Sam. Twelve hour shifts for six nights a week and 18 hours on a Friday night. We had four vans by then. There we were now, the three of us, slogging away, night after night, with Jack and his temper, and not a word spoken, just a cuss now and again from Jack.

Our hours were 10 o'clock Sunday night to Monday morning, usually finishing by about 10.30 am. But Friday night started at 5 o'clock-teatime, finishing Saturday, about 11 o'clock, after scrubbing all the benches clean. Jack used to say "Meet me down the Colonnade (New Road.) for a drink". He was a different person, really happy go lucky. But come Sunday night, it all started again for another week. After doing this night job for about three months, I'd had enough. After about six months, I told Father that I would leave unless he took me off nights. He then came up with the brainwave of me starting at 4 am in the bakehouse with Sam and Jack and then going out on a round at 8 am until about 4 pm before going back into the bakehouse to make some cakes and a special line in ginger nut biscuits. Father bought another van; an Austin 7. We had four vans by then.

What made Jack so bad tempered was always a mystery. Socially he was always good company. He lived in Hillside, Moulsecoomb. Some mornings, on his way home from work he used to meet me on my round as he wanted to do a bit of driving. This was before there were tests. One just obtained a driving licence for five shillings, and got on with it. After a while, he was quite good. Then he got the wondering bug again, and he met a nice and caring lady, and off to London he went. He obtained a position as manager for a large bakery and shop, near the Oval, with a flat at Tooting. Jack, being what he was, upset some of the staff. So most of the time, he found himself on night work. After a long while, he saw the error of his ways, and his staff stayed, and things went alright for him. Sadly, he developed a serious heart complaint and died at the age of 49.

There was one room behind the shop in Coombe Road which was where we had our meals. There was no lounge or soft easy chairs. The room contained a large table which was scrubbed white, eight or nine chairs with hard seats, a dresser and a cabinet used for the business. There was a large board on the wall which was used for customer's special item orders. In the corner was a hob with a kettle on all the time. The room was taken for work when it was needed. There were no radios and even conversation was scarce. At Easter everybody mucked in for the making and packing of hot cross buns; hundreds and hundreds were made. When they were cool enough they were packed into paper bags and sold at eight for six old pence. Flour sacks were turned inside out and spread all over the floor. We were so busy at Easter that we had

to eat our meals as we worked. At the end of the day we were sick of the sight of buns. After the buns were baked came the big cleaning operation to get ready for making the bread. Over a usual weekend more than a thousand loaves were made, so over a holiday weekend about an extra five hundred would be required, plus brown breads like Hovis, Turog, Darren, Malt and wholemeal and also rolls and other fancy bread.

Christmas of course was another busy period. Every year about August, Father ordered his own special brand of calendar with twelve lovely hunting scenes in beautiful colours. The calendars were 12" by 18" and there was one picture for each month with Father's name and "Coombe Road Bakery" printed in lovely colours across the top. Every customer got one. The oldest customers also had either a one, two or three pound Christmas cake, or a two, four or seven-pound bag of flour as a gift, depending on how good a customer they were. Some of our customers went back to before the First World War.

Steve was born in 1903, making him second in line to work in the bakery. My first memory of him was playing in the Army Cadets Band, at St. Nicholas Church, near the Clock Tower. He played the side drum. On one occasion, the band marched from St. Nicholas Church to St. Albans Church in Coombe Road, just above the shop. Some of us were peeping out of the landing window as they marched by. Father did not agree with him playing in the band. Steve used to bring the drum home and take it up to the loft over the stables, and hide it under the straw, when he came home after a parade, or band practice. Father never found out, as he was usually upstairs in his office, doing the bookwork.

I used to go on the rounds with Steve as much as I could. He was always a rebel and he did not want to get down to being a baker, so he joined the Royal Corps of Signals stationed at Maresfield, Sussex, which to this day is still an Army camp. I was very young then, but I can remember him coming home at the weekends, and bringing a large box of apples, and Victoria plums. They were delicious.

After a while, he came out of the army. Father persuaded him to come and work at home again. That didn't last very long, and after some words, he left. This time he fancied himself as a fishmonger. Quite a difference from the baking trade. He got himself a two-wheeled cart (trolley would be a better word.) It was flat from front to back, nicely painted in white, with a proper section to hold the scales, and weights. And a lovely little pony. He was doing well, and got together a nice lot of customers. But one day, along Dewe Road, something frightened the pony, and it bolted and smashed up the whole outfit. Fish scales flying about all over the road. So that was the end of his try as a fishmonger.

About that time, a large firm of bakers from London opened up a bakery near our shop. It was a large laundry converted into a bakery, and stables. They had about twenty-two-wheeled carts which looked like cowboy carts going across the prairies in the wild west. For a while they did a lot of damage to other bakers in the town, as they

were going around the area handing out samples of bread, building up rounds. After a while, things got back to normal. Anyway, after Steven's calamity, he had to find a job. He knew somebody who worked at the new bakers, and with a word to the right person, he was offered a job with them. They were going over from horses to motors, so they said they would have him taught to drive. He jumped at the chance. Of course, Father was not very pleased about this. After a few months, "The old man", (by then we all called him that), asked him to come back into the fold again, as he was also going over to motors. Steve agreed.

In 1926, when the General Strike was on, I was 13 years old. Police escorts were put on the trams because the striking workers were trying to stop them going out. As we lived quite near to the tram depot in Lewes Road we saw it all. There was wire netting put round the trams to stop the stones and other missiles. It was on one of the bad days of trouble that Father and Steve went to collect our first van from the sign writers. They had to drive around the outskirts of the town to avoid trouble, but they got back O.K. The van did look grand with two shades of green and gold leaf writing.

Good horses became hard to come by and so after about two years we had no horses and carts. But then Steve had another bust up with father and left. He sold his house, and took a dairy. Just a one-man business, up at Loxwood, near Horsham. It was all a bit primitive. You would not get away with it by today's standards. Water from a pump. His wife Lil did not go much on all this no mod cons. It all caused a lot of friction. My wife, Dorothy, and I used to visit them when we were able to. Often we used to come home loaded up with logs, and mushrooms.

We had an old Standard 9 car. Although not all that old, we bought it for £13 in 1938. It was four years old, and would have cost £110 when new. Anyway, the war was on the horizon by then. Steve was called up for the army in 1943. His business was not classed as a reserved occupation. When he was demobbed, he took a job driving a crane down at the harbour in Portslade. Eventually he obtained a position as manager for a large tarmac company making material for tarmacking roads. This was his last job before retiring. You could say he had quite a variety of jobs. He's still going strong today at 87, and still as artful.

Dick was born in 1907. Now, somewhere or other he never seemed to mix in with us others. He worked in the business of course, but managed to avoid night work. He was never called up into the services for the war years, but I understand he was in the home guard, doing his bit. He worked in the bakery at Coombe Road all his life and later became one of Father's partners.

Esther was born next in 1909. The first girl. My parents must have been delighted, although Father never showed any emotion of course. When she was old enough, she was trained to take over the Post Office counter, which was a big help to Mother. But all credit to Esther, as it was quite an achievement. It looks easy to see a person selling stamps, and lots of other items. Also handling parcels, pension monies to be paid out. A

lot of money changes hands, and also keeping the accounts up to date, and perfect. She belonged to the girl guides, and also went to church. Playing tennis was also one of her hobbies. Later she joined the Rambling Club who used to organise hiking trips around the country lanes, where there was not a lot of traffic. To do that today, you would be taking your life in your hands.

She had boyfriends, but nobody regular. There was one who used to pester her: his name was Charlie. He used to hang about for a chat between customers. Sam or I used to slide into the shop behind the counter, and say to Esther, "The old man is playing merry hell about Charlie hanging about in the shop". And at that, she got rid of him sharply. Afterwards, we used to say it was only a joke. She went spare. She was always serious about life, and could not take a joke. But she always fell for it again next time we tried it. She used to try to have her own back by telling Mother tales, but she would have none of that.

Just after the last war, she met, and married a smashing chap named Len. I was demobbed from overseas a few days before their wedding. My other sister, Mary, was married the same day, so it was a lovely double wedding. Len had done his war service in the Navy. He went back to his pre-war job of heavy goods driver, for a local firm, Allen West. He used to travel the whole country. But as many times as possible, he used to work things out so his journeys came to be, or near Southampton for an overnight stay. You see, some of his brothers were living there. All ex - navy, and a better bunch of fellows you couldn't find. Darts, and a few pints was on the programme. Never over the top though.

Allen West was the only firm Len ever worked for. At the age when he was looking forward to retiring, the firm agreed to let him off long distance, and just do locals, so that he could be home every night. He had a heart attack, and died within a few days. But poor Esther's troubles weren't over. Michael, their son, caught meningitis, and was unconscious for quite a while. When he came out of it, he was paralysed from the chest downwards, and finished up in a wheel-chair. I and all his host of friends admire him so much for the way he copes. There isn't much that he can't do!

Sam was born in August 1912, and was only 13 months older than myself. I suppose we were almost like twins. We did most things together. We used to get paid nine pence a week for doing our chores. We had to save some of it. The old man encouraged us to be thrifty. We bought penny stamps to stick on a form. When it reached a shilling, it was put into the post office savings bank. Sam always managed to save more than me. I found out why when we went down to the sweet shop. He would always help me to choose mine, and then helped me to eat them. And when I said, "How about you spending your pocket money!" He would say "Later!" But he never did. So that's why he always had more savings than me. We had a lot of fun together. Always up to a few tricks.

Sam nearly always worked in the bakehouse, not very much out-doors, doing deliveries.

So when old enough, he went on nights, which he seemed to like. I must say he was a very good baker, and always turned out first class bread, and cakes. In fact, I could say we were all good at that kind of work. We received first class training. It seemed to come naturally. Anyway, Sam met Mabel, and was married in 1930, and they have been married now for 60 years. They had two children, a boy, and girl.

I remember when Sam was about 7, and I was 6 sitting around a large bath with other members of the family taking the skins off our potatoes. They were cooked with their jackets on after being washed in two very large pots, holding about half a hundred weight. These were cooked, and boiled in the oven. Our job started by taking off the skins. We had to work quick, so they never got cold. They were then put in a tub, and mashed down with a large masher, and then pushed through a large sieve to get all the lumps out. I will tell you what this was all about. Apparently, at the end of the First World War, flour was in short supply. So on instructions from the food minister at that time, a certain amount of potatoes had to be mixed into every dough to make the flour go further. But being only 6, or 7, I cannot remember how long that went on for now.

During the last war, on orders from the food minister, a loaf had to weigh one pound 12 ounces, instead of two pounds, after being baked. I think I am right in saying that we never changed back. Sam passed his roll round on to me, which was so named because we sold only rolls to houses and pubs. This was done on a carrier bike frame which was made to hold a large basket on the front with a smaller one behind. The round was done between 7 and 8.30 am before we went to school. Wet days were a big problem keeping the rolls dry, but somehow we managed it.

The bike was very tricky to ride when it was loaded. There was not a lot of traffic about in those days but the tram lines were hard to avoid; many a time I caught the front wheel in the track and went arse over head, rolls and all. I used to pick up the rolls with the help of passers-by and just carry on with the round. People used to help each other in those days, I think because things weren't going so fast and people seemed to have more time.

Coombe Road School was just up the hill from the shop, so it was usual for me to arrive at five to nine, all hot and worked up. I often wondered if that was the cause of my embarrassing stutter. One teacher used to make me stand up and read before the class and that made me stutter even more. He used to annoy me. I'm sure he picked on me; it was a good thing he couldn't hear me cursing him under my breath. I've thought about it since and perhaps he was trying to help me.

Arthur was born on Christmas Day in 1915, He died in 1917 when he was only 2. I'm sure he would have grown up to do all the jobs we had to do. We used to attend the cemetery quite regular with Mother to take flowers, and trim the grass. It must have been very sad for Mother.

Mark was born the next year. He was doing all the jobs we had all done, in our turn. His life came to a tragic end in 1931 when he was just 14. We all used to do some sea fishing when we had some time. Getting up early on a Sunday morning, about five, or six, making sure our jobs were done we would cycle over to Shoreham to dig our own bait. (Red rag worms.) A favourite spot was behind the church at Bungalow Town. It's still standing, and looks just the same. Sometimes we caught some Plaice. The beach there went down rather steep, so the fish used to come in quite close to the shore. This particular Sunday, Mark went over there with his pal George Hall, who lived with his family; just near our shop.

It was George's bike, so off they go, with Mark standing at the back, on the two steps, about three, to four inches long, one each side of the frame. They used to hold the wheel on. instead of the usual nut. Pretty dangerous really, but allowed by the law then, when there was not so much traffic about. When they had finished their fishing, and no doubt feeling quite tired, after a long day, they made for home. They strapped their rods onto the bike, and their other items on their backs, and started the journey back. They got down to the cross roads, when a car came flying along, and there was a dreadful crash. Mark was killed instantly. George was injured badly, and was in hospital a long time. But he was eventually allowed home, healed, but very shaken for a long time.

It was a very sad period for our family. As the saying goes, "Time is a great healer!" I'm sure Mother never really got over it. Mr and Mrs Hall never missed sending the most beautiful flowers to the cemetery every week. They were a lovely family. Mr Hall was a wholesale butcher with his own slaughter house. He used to go around the markets in Sussex bidding for and buying good quality cattle. In fact, Mr and Mrs Hall could not do enough for Mother, as for a long time they felt that they were partly responsible for the accident. Which of course they were not. I suppose it was one of those things that can happen in life.

Another job that was handed down to me was walking about a mile to my uncle Joe's allotment three or four times a week in all seasons to collect vegetables for the family. Summer was the worst when he loaded us up with potatoes, carrots, parsnips, cabbages, onions, tomatoes from the green house and cut flowers. By the time I arrived home I was about whacked.

The further you went, the heavier the sacks seemed to get and then I would return for another load. I was not allowed to use a barrow which I could have made out of a sugar box and a couple of wheels.

My sports master at school, Mr Coxhead, wanted me to play cricket because I was a useful player to have in the team. My Father said 'no' as the team matches were usually played on Saturday mornings and there was work to be done. I was very disappointed; who knows I may have turned out to be one of the best players in the country. Mr Coxhead wanted to call in and see Father but I persuaded him not to because it would have caused trouble for me.

On one occasion, when our school cricket team had a match and Mr Coxhead asked me to play, it happened to be an evening when I was due to go up to the allotment to collect the vegetables. The match was to start at six o'clock so I went off about ten to six. It was taken for granted where I was going, but I had made my mind up at school that I was going to play cricket. Mr Coxhead was pleased. We won and I scored thirty two. Bob Whenham, who lived up Mafeking Road, batted with me and scored twenty-three. And then came the hard part. I turned up at the allotment about eight thirty and there was hell to pay. After I explained to Uncle Joe, he decided to help me and say that I had been helping him with a few jobs around his shed and greenhouse. So all was well.

In return for the vegetables, tomatoes and cut flowers, my Father used to supply cash for all the seeds and also as much manure for the ground as Uncle Joe needed. Uncle Joe had a coal business next to the bakery but he failed to make a go of it. Although he had two sons and two daughters, he liked the Ladies and also, so the story goes, he liked to gamble. After that, Uncle Joe worked for Brighton Corporation as a dustman. Later, when the Coast Road was being built from Blackrock to Rottingdean, he worked on that.

About once a year, Father used to have a week's holiday and go and stay with his Mother, our Granny, at Byfleet. Uncle Joe went sometimes and a Mr Hider who was a friend of Father's and also a master baker with a bakery up Islingword Road. Father always took one of us with him so that we could run his errands. None of us wanted to go because we had more fun at home with the old man out of the way. Mother used to be easy with us. Father had one sister named Sarah who was married and lived in the village. She was nice and a lot younger than Father. Granny had a large family.

At Byfleet, I was taken on country walks only to end up at the first pub up the canal at Ripley. So I spent a lot of time waiting outside and used to think "What a bloody good holiday this is!" I don't know why he wanted a holiday, Mother could have done with one. The only breaks Mother had were during her many confinements. She always had some help from her very dear and life-long friend, Mrs Jarrett. She was always there helping with all the household chores. A lovely person who would always listen to a good joke from us boys - not too rude of course.

Dan was born in 1919. Myself being six years older, it seemed that I had the job of looking after him, whilst mother was always busy looking after the shop, or getting meals ready. When Danny was very young, he was frightened by someone with a 'poker face.' These were sold in shops to be worn on Guy Fawkes night, they were pretty horrid. Dan became scared of the dark. So for a long time, every evening, at his bedtime, Sam or I would have to take him up to bed, and tuck the little darling in, and stay with him until he went to sleep. After a while, thinking he was asleep, and settled down for the night, we would slowly and quietly make for the door and wait for the almighty scream. Sometimes we used to give him a little dig. But on the nights that the

old man went out, Dan seemed to be the worst, especially light evenings. During these light evenings, Mum used to allow us to go out for a couple of hours. No going out when the old man was in. Mother made us promise not to get into trouble, and let her down. That we would never do, in that I am sure. She was always so kind to us all, I always said, and I do now, that my Mum was always someone special.

Dan used to want to come with me when I took our horses to the Blacksmith for shoeing. At that time, we used to go to Marshalls Row off London Road. So I got him up on the horse's back. He used to like that. We had to hope that there wasn't a queue. Most times we were lucky. You see, we had to walk back to Coombe Road to have some breakfast before getting to school on time. In the winter we had a lovely plate of porridge.

In the summer we had a choice of bread, and dripping. Mother always seemed to conjure up wholesome dripping. You know the kind; lovely beef jelly at the bottom of the basin, sprinkled with salt, and pepper. I can almost taste it now. Delicious.

We used to take our baths in the shed and carry two or three buckets of boiling water and enough cold water from the bakehouse. There were no bathrooms in those days. Danny liked to take his bath, with his hat on, reading a book, and the gramophone playing *Old Man River* with his favourite singer Paul Robeson.

Just before the war, Dan decided that he didn't want to be a baker and went off to work for Harrington's, the engineers in Hove who were making parts for the war effort. Everybody sensed by then that we would soon be at war. Dan was called up into the Royal Engineers. One of my great wishes was to have met him and our Pete in Italy during the war. But after a lot of trying, we never made it. The three of us outside the Coliseum in army uniform would have been quite a picture. And I'm sure it would have made the Evening Argus, with headlines like, 'The Fighting Bakers.' "Ah poor soul", they'll soon be saying about me, "he's been out in the sun too long."

Dan is retired now. The last time we spoke, he still had a couple of bookshops in London, where he travels to, once or twice a week from Kent, where he lives.

When we were children we used to love the job of feeding the horses in the stables. At that time Father had three Horses Two were working at any one time. Each one had a break and a rest every few weeks. One was always turned out to graze over at West's Farm by the Racehill. When we used to see them in the fields and call their names they would come galloping over to us looking for titbits. Although they were working animals, it's surprising the attachment you have for them. Sometimes we had to walk the horses up and down Coombe Road and Riley Road when they had what we called 'the gripes'. A lump used to appear under their belly about the size of a fist and we had to keep them walking otherwise they would try and lay down. If you were to let them do that they would twist a gut, which would kill them. This did not happen very often. When it snowed, our horses couldn't get up the hills and over to the farms at Lower Bevendean,

and the Racehill; Alcorn's and West's, or to the two shops at Woodingdean who sold our bread and we had to take as much as we could carry and walk over to them. There's us trudging up Coombe Road in a straight line walking in the footsteps of the one in front, with baskets and sacks of bread. About six of us went out taking three or four hours. We were dead beat when we arrived back to the shop.

Mary was born in 1920. I used to have to take her out when she reached the age of 2 or 3 in a push chair, Mary was always a good sport, and always ready for a good laugh, and she still is. She never lost her sense of humour. Mother always said she was very good at helping out with the chores always so willing. She hasn't changed. Even now she's always helping someone out. During the war, she was called up into the Women's Land Army. She looked the part too, in the natty uniform: corduroy britches, stockings, brown shoes, green jumper, and a cocky hat tilted to the side. The farm she went to was at Danehill, just up in Sussex. On leaving the land army through ill health, she went back home to work on one of Father's bakers rounds, driving one of the vans.

Mary met a Canadian fellow in the army and got quite fond of him. But, after the war, he went back home, which upset her for a long time. Eventually she met Horace who had been held by the Japanese for about four years, and had a rough time of it by all accounts. He did not want to talk about it much, but I got the impression that the Japanese were not exactly friends of his. He married Mary in January, 1946. The double wedding, being with sister Esther, and Len.

I had been de-mobbed at the end of December, 1945. My wife, Dot, had sent my suit to the cleaners to be ready for the wedding. What happened then was that some rotten so-and-so stole my trousers from the cleaners. After a big fuss, they offered to pay for a pair of trousers. Now wasn't that nice of them? I was never going to match them with the jacket, so there's me buzzing around Brighton, trying to buy a suit. I managed it in the end. The hardest part wasn't the cash, but the shortage of suits. I also needed a stack of coupons. I managed to get one in the end at Lupers, at the top of Trafalgar Street, near the station. I'm sure they're still there. They must have been there a hundred years, or more.

Mary had a boy, Graham. He is now married, with a son of his own, Nathan. Graham runs his own business, and funnily enough, it's called, "The Bakers Dozen!" It doesn't produce bread though.

Christmas Day at Coombe Road was always a happy day. We could always be sure that Father was going to be good tempered. We had a gramophone with the large horn. This was the only day of the year that it was used. Some records stick in my mind: *How many pimples on a pound of pickled pork?* *The Laughing Policeman* was another. We were only allowed to play the gramophone out in the bakehouse so we either had to stand up or sit on the troughs where the doughs were left to prove.

We all did our Christmas shopping. I always went with Sam and the first present we

always bought was the one for each other. We always kept what we bought each other as a secret. We used to come back from shopping and hide them in our bedrooms and we had a strict code not to go looking, and nobody ever did. Mother wanted a new teapot one year, so early on Christmas morning, after asking Father if we could have the light on for a while, we all filed into Father's and Mother's bedroom where we always used to give out the presents we had got for each other. Mother always opened hers first: the first one was a tea pot, the second one was a tea pot, so was the third, the fourth, fifth, sixth and yes - she finished up with seven tea pots. Mother never forgot that year. We laughed about that for years afterwards.

We each had a pillow case full of toys and games for Christmas. Also an apple, an orange and some nuts which we used to eat first thing in the morning. Father was never bad tempered on Christmas Day and after he'd had a few drinks he used to tell a few jokes. The trouble was, we heard the same jokes each year.

Also at Christmas time, we used to cook customer's own cakes. What a caper that was. The oven had to be cooled down and the cakes had to be in the bakehouse by 2pm and collected at any time after about 6 pm. Sometimes the cakes either sunk in the middle or spewed over the side of the tin. When they came to collect them there was hell to pay. Of course, they blamed us.

It was always the same people but they came back the following year. They used to ask us what they had done wrong but it wasn't up to us to tell them as we were in the business of selling cakes of our own. We had sets of round numbered discs; two sets of sixty to a customer's round. One of these was put in the cake and the customer took the other one. The customer had to bring their number when they came to collect the cake. This avoided mix - ups. And all this for three pence in today's money which was one and ha'pence in those days.

Also on Christmas morning, customers used to bring their turkeys and joints to be cooked and basted. We used the same numbered discs as we used for the cakes and charged sixpence. Mostly the customers put on too much lard or fat and what a job we had cleaning up afterwards.

We made strict rules for their dishes to be picked up by one o'clock Christmas Day and nearly everyone complied but there were always some jokers who would turn up late and sometimes not too steady on their feet. They used to say "How can I get this home?" and we used to tell them that all we wanted to do was to get rid of them so that we could tidy up and have our own bit of pleasure. Sometimes we would hear that some of the late ones had spilled grease all over their suits. I won't tell you what our comments were. Some of them had quite a distance to go. Some even had the cheek to ask one of us to deliver it, and that was one thing the old man wouldn't stand for.

Once, when I was courting Dorothy, my brother Jack and I were going to London for Christmas. He was going to see some friends in Wandsworth and I was going to Putney

where Dorothy's family all lived. So, after finishing with the turkeys and cleaning up, I got the tram to the station, they stopped running at five o'clock. Anyway, we caught a train about three, they also finished about five. I got to Dorothy's at about half past four. I had a lovely time although it was very short. The evening was especially enjoyable. It was a real eye opener for me and the party went on past midnight. By then I had had one drink too many. I never drank much in those days as Mother always told us that if any of us ever drank like our Father she would come up from her grave and haunt us; none of us ever did drink much.

Anyway, Boxing Day came too soon, I went to sleep laying across some beer crates and did I ache in the morning? After breakfast, we went to Craven Cottage to see Fulham play football. That evening I had to make tracks for home just after tea time as I was due for work the following morning with a four o'clock start. I might as well have been a bloody milkman. I never had much time off though nobody ever complained. We just got on with it.

It was around the Spring of 1932 when I started courting Dorothy. I used to serve her Mother and called every day. I had seen Dorothy several times when calling at her house and I had an idea that she used to go along the sea - front. There was a lovely beach at Paston Place for bathing where I did bump into her but she had her bike with her. So after chatting for a while, we started walking towards the Pier and as I lived in Coombe Road we walked the rest of the way to her home and I was the one pushing the bike. We went all the way to Bevendean. The following day I asked her Mother if I could walk out with her daughter. She said she had no objections and that was how it all started. Dorothy used to work at J Lyons and I used to meet her on her way to work. Every day, she used to have two lovely cream doughnuts for her lunch which she never paid for.

We got married on Boxing Day in 1936 after a very good courtship. My mum, God bless her, warned Dot not to marry me. Not because she didn't like her, quite the opposite, she loved her. But she didn't want her to have the life she'd had. I had a terrible temper, and I knew it, but I did love her. If she had said "no" I don't know if I could have coped. Anyway, I promised to be good, and here we are, 50 years on, and hoping for a lot more. In November 1937 we were delighted when our daughter Ann was born. We didn't waste much time did we! Something to do with the yeast perhaps!

My brother Dan and his pals started to come to our house in Bevendean around this time. Dot used to meet me after work and Dan was always around but was very shy and always used to wear his white baker's hat, even when he had his bath. After a lot of persuading, Dot and I managed to get him, Jock and sometimes Tom Rose and Ron Hall to come up and play cards two or three times a week. They were sods, never a dull moment and we couldn't get rid of them.

Our son George was born on May 26th, 1939, which was Whitsun Bank Holiday that year. By then I was working at the Brighton Co-op, after a few words with Father. I was

doing a bakers round with a horse and cart and doing less hours for more money. I was home and finished by four o'clock with five shillings a week more in my pocket. For Father I had worked until seven in the evenings, nine o'clock on Saturdays and then on Sunday mornings and every other Sunday evening making dough for the night shift. When George was born, Dan, and his friends Jock and Ron had been to France for the day. Steamers used to go from the Palace Pier. On the Monday they arrived home to wet the baby's head. Nurse Ryman, the midwife, was a grand lady who everybody knew and liked. She lived in Rose Hill Terrace but she was out all hours on her bike. Although she was strict, she had lovely ways. The lads arrived with their duty free champagne, a gesture which Dot and I were delighted with. A very sad thing happened to George, our son, when he was a young man. He was killed in a car crash, which ended his career as a marine engineer. I don't think we shall really get over it, but life goes on.

My youngest brother Peter was born in 1923, and followed in the footsteps of all the boys, doing the same old chores. Mother used to give Sam and I the job of taking him out in his push chair, when I suppose he was about 2 years old. Now this push chair was made of wood. Peter was facing the front. The pushing handle was fairly high, and Sam, and I in turn used to get our head, and shoulders through the handle, with our feet onto the axle. We were then ready to travel to the bottom of Coombe Road. By the time we reached the bottom, we were going pretty fast. We enjoyed that, not realising the danger. This went on for quite a while. But it was on the cards that someone would go into the shop, and tell Mother what was going on. Someone did just that, so it was into deep water. Lucky for us it was Mother, and not the old man. It's daft, but capers like that stick in one's mind.

When Peter left school at 14, he was destined to become a baker, and I must say a very good one. His speciality was decorating wedding cakes. So after coming back from the war, he returned to Coombe Road, to live, and work. Just before, or during the war, the old man took Dick, and Sam into partner-ship. So of course, when he died, the business was theirs. Mother was left alright, with a comfortable way of life. In my eyes, she was the one who worked hard in her younger days, to have kept the business together. Peter went in with Dick and Sam. When they retired they sold out to Peter, who then ran everything, including the Post Office, with the help of his wife Peggy and their daughter Diane and her husband, Chris. Chris had a flair for film making, taking it very seriously.

He made a film about the Grout family, and the bakery, going back to 1901. It was a great success, lasting about three hours. He got us all in turn to have a chat on the film, about the things we could remember over the past years. We've all got together a couple of times, over a few drinks, and snacks. I must say, we really enjoyed the evenings. It's so nice to get together, although the numbers are getting smaller. But that's something we have no control over.

Peter decided to retire in 1982. Things turned out terrible for him, and his family. So unfortunate. He managed to find a buyer for the business, and property, and within two weeks of the transfer taking place, he had a heart attack, and was taken into hospital.

He died on the very morning he was to come home. It was a hard shock for us all. Peggy was so frustrated that they had no retirement together at all. Life can be so hard at times.

The people who Peter sold out to didn't want to make bread, and cakes on the premises. They had other ideas. The flower loft over the bakehouse was converted into the living accommodation, and the bakehouse itself is now an estate agent's office. The oven, furnace, and hot water tank are in full view to people walking by. You see, there's a glass bakehouse door now fitted. If at any time you are walking by, stop and have a look. It's amazing to think it was built in 1901, and until a few years ago it baked bread the old way. A special loaf called "Cooked on the hearth", was very popular, it was baked on the oven bricks. No bread tins used. It had a nutty flavour, and was very tasty too.

I took our grandson for a look, and also explained to him the layout of the rooms. Where I slept, and worked for all of my young life. He was very impressed.

It's time to end this little story, and I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read it. And also I am hoping that some of it has brought a smile to your faces. I must say a very large thanks to Ann, and Sally for the way they urged me to put together this little story, and I hope that it made sense. I really must say I found it easier to remember things that happened 60, or more years ago, than things from just a few years ago.

Which brings me back to the subject of cleaning tins; when Dorothy and I go shopping, which these days means supermarkets with in-store bakeries, sometimes the smell brings back some old memories. I've often sought out the bakery manager to complain about dirt or old grease on the bread; I usually say, "You should get your bakers to make more cake and make sure the tins are clean". Every time he says "Yes Sir, very good Sir, I will look into it". When we go in for a loaf now, I find that Dorothy goes over to the other shelves, because I make her feel so embarrassed. And if the bakery manager spots me, he does a vanishing trick!