



## 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

This is the sequel to *Poverty, Hardship but Happiness*. Brightonian Albert Paul, left school at the age of 14 and began work as a carpenter, rising from the position of apprentice to that of master craftsman. Albert remained in his job throughout his life, in an era when people usually continued to work for one employer throughout their working lives.

This book vividly describes how he supported his family during his working life as a carpenter/joiner in Brighton from 1917 to 1968. His autobiography demonstrates his hard work and commitment throughout his career, which lasted fifty-one years. This book was written in 1975, one year before the author died, and published in 1981.

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## **Albert Paul**

### ***HARD WORK AND NO CONSIDERATION***

#### **1981 INTRODUCTION**

*Only one other QueenSpark book has been produced without its author alive to work on the production. Albert Paul died in 1976, leaving a typed manuscript of this book with his family. The manuscript reached QueenSpark later that year.*

*We have wanted to reprint the first volume of his life story, *Poverty - Hardship but Happiness* for some years, alongside this sequel about his 73-year long life from the same Brighton house, 62 Southampton Street. Within 2 weeks over Christmas 1974, the first volume sold out; a second edition was again sold out within a year, with Albert himself selling 750 copies.*

*Those early days of the book and its publicity were the inspiration for much of the QueenSpark writing that has followed. Albert wrote of some of this publicity he received:*

Back in February of 1975 two large posh cars drew up outside my house. Three men got out, one holding my recent book - *Poverty - Hardship but Happiness*, and the other two had typewritten sheets of paper clipped together. After a consultation between one another, one rang my door bell. Upstairs I go, because I was in the downstairs front kitchen (dining room today) and opened the door. The gentleman said, "Mr. Paul?", I answered, "yes". "You see, I have one of your books. It is so fascinating and interesting we think you deserve a little publicity on BBC Nationwide. Can my chaps bring in the necessary lamps and equipment?"

I agreed. My word! the stuff they brought in: several drums of cable, tripods, boxes, lamps... while this was going on, the chief one said to me, "While they are fixing everything up, I will explain to you what to do and what not to do during filming". All his instructions were very interesting. After about three quarters of an hour, one of the engineers or cameramen indicated to the interviewer that everything was now ready for action. I turned round and saw the other cameraman on his hands and knees looking for something. I immediately said, "Have you lost something, mate?" He answered me, saying, "No, I'm looking for the power point". Well, I could have fallen through the floor.

I realised we were in trouble now... I had to tell him that I had no power points anywhere... You should have seen the three men's faces. I had to think quickly. "Could you run a cable out of the window into the house next door and plug in there?" Yes, they could. I knocked the next door neighbour up, explained what I wanted. Another shock - she had only electric light, but no power points, the same as me. My neighbour the other side of me had gone to work. The person living next door to her had only gas lighting with gas mantles, and next door to him was empty and up for sale. I thought to myself, what a predicament! To be in this mess, after all what these three men had assembled in my front room. I was determined to get some electric power from somewhere. I knew the next house had power, and spoke to the lady, who agreed that if

the cameramen could run a long cable to her house they could have power. I ran back to my house, explaining and pointing to the house I had just visited. "What," they said, "All that way?"

I pleaded with them to have a go. This they did, so a long lead was run from my bay window along the street pavement from no. 62 up to no. 57 and into this lady's bay window to a power plug on the skirting. I had to stand on the pavement outside my house and give the order to the lady to switch on. Inwardly I was praying, hoping that the power would come through all right. The order was given to me to signal to the lady at no. 57 to switch on. What a relief! My front room was ablaze with light, and the heat was terrific. I did as I was instructed, answering the various questions put to me with the cameramen doing the filming and sound. Everything went well, with the television team well satisfied, knowing full well that all their combined efforts had not been wasted.

Apart from all the upset, the trouble taken was an education to me. While the men were packing up their equipment, they laughingly remarked that the old house was still a little poverty-stricken, but apart from this they enjoyed being shown over the house, no bathroom, no power points, no hot water, outside toilet. Everyone remarked, "What a life!" I said this was what we were brought up with and accepted it.

*This second volume, in which Albert Paul remembers his 51 years of work as a carpenter/joiner, was written in 1975, only a year before Albert himself died. In these sad circumstances, we owe much to Albert's son John and his wife Nina who have helped to clarify events which Albert describes in the book as well as supplying us with family illustrations. Nina Paul's memory of her father-in-law goes back to the war-time evenings when he used to visit her parents' home in East London. She remembers coming back into the house from the air-raid shelter for toast and dripping and chocolate roll: "He was a great character - always made you laugh. Oh yes, we used to have great times with him".*

## **PART 1**

### **Hard and very strict men 1917-37**

I left school at the age of 14 years in 1917, one year before the end of the 1914-1918 war. I went out to look for a job and obtained one with a local builder, to learn the trade of carpenter and joiner. I had to have an interview with the two bosses (they were brothers). Both were very stern. They gave me to understand that I had to work hard and have no cheek. If I broke this promise, it was instant dismissal. The foreman was told of these arrangements and my word, he and the men under him kept their eyes on me and kept me moving - no thought or consideration, but hard and very strict men.

I had to commence work at 6 o'clock in the morning (this nearly broke my heart, after getting to school at 9am) and carry on until 6pm. (12 hours right off). We had half an hour break for breakfast 8-8.30, then carried on working until 1p.m. for dinner, commencing again at 2pm until 6pm. 10 1/2 hours a day plus 5 and a half hours on

Saturdays, making a weekly total of 58 and a half hours and paid 4/6d. I gave my mother 3/- and had 1/6d for my pocket, and then had to put 6d by every week to help me to buy my tools.

Before I was paid my first week's wages (4/6d – 22.5p), I had to see the boss. He told me that the foreman was very pleased with me, and should I carry on in this way he was sure he would make me into a carpenter and joiner in the course of 5 years. The workshops were situated in Richmond Buildings (now completely gone). There was also a stable for the firm's horse and cart. When the joiners wanted some timber the foreman would write out an order, such as:

100 ft - 9" x 3/4" prepared  
100 ft - 7" x 1" prepared  
10 x 12 ft - 4" x 2" sawn  
20 x 10 ft - 2" x 2" sawn etc.

He would say, "Here you are Bert, here's the order - now take that hand-barrow, go down to Beves the timber merchants in Church Street opposite the library". "What about some help?" I said. He replied, "Load up the timber and tie it on with this rope and come to the bottom of Richmond Hill, then come up here for some help". My word! What a heavy load. I was puffing. Well, all he said was, "Oh! you'll get used to it after a few more journeys". I was too nervous to answer him back but I felt like it!

After unloading all this timber into the joiner's shop, I was then given the job of cutting it into the required sizes, because all doors, window frames, door frames, sashes etc. were made by hand, as there was no machinery. All the firm had was a band-saw machine for cutting out circular work or fretwork. Attached to this machine was a large circular handle (like a mangle handle), and I had the job of turning this handle for the joiner to cut out the shape he needed. But oh! my arms and my back, didn't they ache. When I started slowing down, all I got was a stern shout, "Come on, keep turning the b..... handle". Again, more hard work, because after ripping up the 9" x 3" or 9" x 2" for doors etc., I had to use the jack plane and square up and get all this timber to size.

I well remember that when I was ripping the timber to size (with a large-toothed rip saw), I began to ache and was puffing for breath. So when the men weren't looking, I left the saw in the timber and slipped away to the toilet - more or less for a little rest. When I got back to continue the ripping, not noticing anything unusual, I took hold of the saw and felt a lot of slippery, sliding stuff. Someone had spread neatly on the saw handle, paint, soft putty and glue. You should have seen my hand. I nearly cried. When I got over the shock, a joiner came over to me and told me that this would teach me to take out the saw from the timber and put same into the sawrack on the side of the bench every time I left off doing the sawing.

Another time, I was planing some timber to size and again, being so short and young, I began to ache all over and so, once again, for a breather I left the bench and went off to the lavatory. After a few minutes I returned rather sheepishly to the bench and took hold of the jack plane handle (Oh! and by the way, I had only just bought this plane new).

Well! I could not move the plane because someone had driven a large-headed nail through the front of my plane (or so I thought). Anyway I inspected the plane (not attempting to look around). I nearly cried. After a few minutes over came a joiner and released the plane. He had fixed a piece of webbing (1 1/2" wide) down inside the large wooden wedge (which secures the cutting blade), then nailed the end to the timber. The large nail that I thought was driven through the front of the plane, was only the head of a nail glued onto the plane which gave the appearance of being driven through. Another stern lecture from the joiner; whenever I left the planing timber, I was to place the jack plane on to the bench stop which kept the sharp edge clear of the bench top and so not taking the edge off the cutting iron (or plane iron).

Well, as the weeks and years went by combined with hard work and stern lectures from all the workshop staff I progressed very well. Then to give me practical experience in carrying out general maintenance and property repairs also alteration work etc., I was put with a fully experienced carpenter. Of course my first job with him was to carry his heavy tool bag from job to job. Anyway! I was taught the hard way, but as I looked back over the years I realised the men had made me into a tradesman, giving me the necessary confidence to go out on to jobs and carry out the allotted specifications and instructions. At the age of 19 I became a fully fledged carpenter and joiner and had young lads of 14 years of age to teach them the trade. But I never put them through the tough and thoughtless way I was treated although, as I look over the years of my training, the hard and rough men taught me the right and hard way, making me a good and practical tradesman.

The hours of working, I have previously mentioned, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. only applied to summer time, but when winter set in, the hours were 7.30 a. m. - 4.30 p.m. Of course there was no breakfast break, only 1/2 hour for dinner, making a total of 8 1/2 hours per day, Saturday 7.30 - noon (a weekly total of 47 hours). This made a great difference to our pay packets - 11 hours a week less, and if I remember rightly our pay was 10 1/2d per hour. We never got paid for all Bank Holidays (Christmas day, Boxing day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whitsun Monday and August Bank Holiday), and no annual holidays. Should work become scarce the boss would never hesitate to tell you so, give you your wages earned and Insurance cards, and this could be any day of the week and any time. Oh! how times have changed.

I also remember the heartlessness of some builders, because in 1925, the year of my marriage, I was working for a local builder. I said to him, "I would like next week off." He said in a gruff voice, "What for?" I told him I was getting married. "Oh, this is where your troubles will start". Well, we got married, had our week's holiday and I returned to work, and do you know the rotter gave me my cards and wages up to the Thursday, saying, "I told you your troubles would start". So, ME HAVING GOT THE SACK, I gave him my opinion of him and a good mouthful, but it made no difference. He just smiled. What days!

## **I spruced myself up**

It was on May 10th, 1922 (at the age of 19 years) that I commenced my courtship with my wife. Her home was at Petworth, West Sussex but she was in private service in Brighton as a house parlour maid. This was where nearly all young girls went when they left school at 14 to commence their working life.

I intended to try and find a nice young lady, so I spruced myself up before leaving home and had a walk along the sea front.

There I came across a crowd of people leaning over the railing overlooking the Brighton Fish Market. Down below were some boys playing a game of so-called cricket, the bat being a piece of wood from a bloater box and the ball made up of paper and rag tied up with plenty of string. I stood well back eyeing the backs of the people watching and noticed a smartly dressed young lady with nicely shaped legs. Well, I fancied her and so took my place at the railings as near as possible to her. As the people gradually moved away I was able to get nearer to her. She was laughing and enjoying the antics of the boys down below. I finally got next to her, when all of a sudden, down below there was an argument combined with many swear words, between the bowler and the one he had stumped at the wicket. Of course the wicket stumps were chalked on the wall.

Well this boy wouldn't give in. I turned to this strange young lady and remarked that this boy should give in and 'come out'. She hesitated, saying yes, he should. This started up a conversation and we seemed to get on well together. Suddenly she looked at her watch and said, "I'll have to go now. I have to be in by 10 p.m." She then told me she was in service at Vernon Terrace, near Seven Dials. I plucked up courage saying,

"Do you mind me walking with you?". She agreed and so off we went. "When can I see you again?", I asked. "I'll be out Sunday at 3 p.m." she replied. Well! I wished her a very good night, anxiously waiting for Sunday.

I took up my position opposite the large house and excitedly, from the dormer window a hand came out waving and she shouted, "I won't be long". She came out of the side entrance and both greeting each other, we set off for a walk. From then on we became firm friends and got engaged after about two years. This encouraged both of us to save all the money we could and eventually we got married on January 17th 1925 at Petworth Church.

We had three children; the first a son (now 47 years old), the second a girl but unfortunately she was stillborn (a terrible shock), and the third, another son, now aged 43 years. We had a very happy married life, combined with joy and some grief, plus little money and unemployment etc. We went through and suffered two World Wars 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, finally being spared to live and enjoy over 52 and a half years together and nearly 50 years of married life.

I am very sorry to state that my wife passed away November 28th 1974, as we were looking forward to celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary (Golden) on January 17th of this year, 1975. Having told you of this very important event of my whole life, I will

return now back to the struggles of trying to get a job and unemployment etc.

## **To hold a candle to the devil**

Owing to the fact that during the 1914-1918 war no houses had been built and maintenance work on all large and public buildings had been badly neglected, the building trade became very busy. The Council decided to build working class houses on various vacant sites - such as Pankhurst Avenue and Queen's Park, Moulescoomb, Whitehawk etc. All good experienced carpenters, plasterers, brick-layers and plumbers would not work on these Council house schemes (unless we were forced to) because the various building contractors employed foremen (who wore bowler hats) who were terrible task masters and wanted 1 1/2 day's work carried out in one day.

Well, as the local work eased up, unemployment began to step up and the local employment exchange, which was situated in Western Road at the corner of Montpelier Road became very busy, with long queues of men all lined up to sign on for dole and also hoping to get a job.

In those days, men were not allowed to smoke inside the Labour Exchange. But sometimes one or two men would get daring and light up their cigarettes. When one of the clerks smelt and saw the cigarette smoke coming out among the crowd of men he would shout out, "Will those men put their cigarettes out". Being a little militant they would refuse, and so after another warning from the clerk and still no notice taken, he would signal to the policeman on duty to control the men about smoking. He would sort those men out who refused to refrain, and all of a sudden there was a nasty scene, because a fight would break out as the policeman was ejecting (or trying to) the men out into the street. The manager of the Exchange would phone the Town Hall for more police, and after about an hour's excitement, peace again reigned. This procedure would happen very often.

I have often seen a man being a bit quick tempered, leap over the counter and give the clerk a punch in the face because the clerk had said something in a nasty way. Some clerks treated you like dirt and knowing the police were around they sometimes took advantage of this. Of course, the clerk was always in the right according to the law and the man would have to appear in the police court.

Unemployment continued to get worse and all men had to sign the book at various times which they kept to all the time they were signing on. It might be 9 to 9.30 and each group of men would sign on every half hour. Over the counter was a letter A, B or C etc. according to the various trades and jobs. There was a certain counter devoted to handing out jobs. At the back of this counter was a large blackboard onto which the clerk would chalk up various jobs as they came in on the telephone. It might be a vacancy for a bricklayer/plasterer/plumber/carpenter or labourer and the various men would hesitate, because once you made enquiries and the clerk knew you were capable of doing the vacant job, it was no use you refusing. He would make out a green card for

you to take to the employer needing you, and after the employer had asked you a few questions on your capabilities, he would sign the green invitation card as to whether he had engaged you or not. He would then hand you back this card, for you to take back to the Labour Exchange to get your Insurance Card back to give to your new employer for further stamping.

After about 1924 unemployment stepped up considerably. Some men had been signing on for dole money for 9 or 10 months and found it hard to keep their families on the money given. They set up a scheme called the U.A.B. (Unemployment Assistance Board). There was a large converted house situated well up on the left of Montpelier Road.

Unfortunately I had rather a bad spell of being unable to get a job and was advised by various men, who had got a little extra money added to their dole money, to apply. I made a visit to this U.A.B. and had to wait my turn. After a wait of over an hour, a very harsh and stern voice shouted, "NEXT". No "Next please" - we were treated like animals, and no answering back. Into this room I go, another stern order, "SHUT THAT DOOR". The clerk looked at me with piercing eyes and said, "What do you want?" I said, "If possible, I would like a little extra money added to my dole money". After several personal questions (all taken down in writing) he gave me a large official form to take home and fill in and return it as soon as possible.

My word! What a Means Test. I answered all the questions to the best of my ability and took same back to the U.A.B. Another long wait. The clerk glanced at the form saying that an officer would be visiting me at my home. After about 10 days, I was notified that he was coming on a certain day at a certain time, and underlined in ink it said **AND WE EXPECT YOU TO BE AT HOME.**

He arrived at the appointed time, knocked the front door knocker and before I could get to the door, he had opened it and was inside, standing in my passage. I would like to have told him, "You've got a cheek!" but he knew that I had to hold a candle to the devil, as we used to say in those days. I took him downstairs into our kitchen. He immediately helped himself to a chair, sat down, opened his leather briefcase and out came the form I had previously filled in.

This is where he thought he might catch me having told a few untruths, which one could easily do when filling in the form at home. You never expected to be visited by an official, or even see the form again. His first question: "Can I see your rent book?" Wasn't I glad I had told the truth. Second question: "Have you or your wife a Post Office Savings Book?" My answer, "No". He said, "Are you sure?" My answer, "Yes". Third question: "Do you let any rooms to lodgers or take in visitors?" My answer, "No". Fourth question: "Do you do any part-time work, or the wife?" My answer, "No".

He kept on writing something down, he then had a good look around the room, and he noticed we had a radio set (no television in those days). I would like to add that there were no electric power sets. They were operated by 120 volt batteries and also



accumulators that you had to take to an electrician's shop to get recharged. Then he would give you on loan a fully charged one (if he knew you) until yours was recharged, and this was how we carried on.

Well, going back to the official looking around and seeing the radio set, he said, "What right have you asking for more money when you have a radio set?" I said, "You get up and see if it is working." He said, "What's wrong with it?" I said, "I cannot afford to have the accumulator recharged or to buy a new 120 volt battery". He hesitated and said that should I receive any extra money while drawing the dole, he would unexpectedly call at my house and make sure that the radio wasn't working. Should he find that I had told lies, it meant me going to court and being charged with receiving money under false pretences, meaning 6 months in prison, (how mistrustful those days).

All the while he was interrogating me, my wife and two children were there. When he had finished I said, "I hope that because you see my home, my wife and children are clean and tidy, this won't go against me getting extra money". He immediately retorted, "This is to do with me when I get back to the office".

Well, Friday morning arrived, (my signing-on day), you were given a white pay-chit and should you have any extra money to come, you were given a blue chit to sign, allowing the pay-out clerks to give you the extra money allowed. I never received the blue chit I expected. I told the clerk, so he gave me an appeal form to fill in to state my reasons why I thought I should have some extra money. I put down in words the way I felt about the visiting officer's attitude at my home. Also because as I was honest and straightforward, with my home and children clean and tidy, this had gone against my application.

After sending this appeal form in I received a note to attend. I was shown into a large room. Seated around a very large square table were ten men. When I had been questioned by each in turn, the last man said, "Mr. Paul, you have succeeded in your appeal. We have allowed you another 5/- per week". I immediately said to him, "What a paltry sum after all I have been through". He said, "Be satisfied, good morning", and turned his head away. More annoying to me was that after going through all this anxiety I only had this extra 5/- (25p) for one week, because I got a job. This one only lasted about 6 weeks and so back on the dole, only to find that nearly all my mates were still there signing on.

As the weeks and months rolled on, I had several long and small intervals of work. It was now getting into the year 1928, and seeing the number of men unemployed, I was anxious to get a job. I was forced to visit a large local housing scheme where the foreman and under-foreman were really devils. The building contractor of this site was blacked by the Labour Exchange, meaning that the general foreman kept applying for various tradesmen and then kept sacking them, and so the Labour Exchange receiving so many complaints of the working conditions etc. would never send any more men.

Well! I visited this housing site, saw this foreman carpenter and asked him for a job. He

said in a very gruff voice, "Are you a carpenter? Ah well, you can make a start on Monday morning at 7.30 and I'll very soon see if you are a carpenter". Monday morning arrived, I put my heavy tool bag on my shoulder, said Goodbye to my wife and was off.

I had a shock when I got on the site, because I thought I was the only carpenter making a start but there were another 8 or 10 carpenters, all with their tool bags on the ground, waiting for the foreman. All of a sudden we saw that the door of the hut was open, and out came a lively bloke. He came over to us like a Sergeant Major (of course he knew employment was bad and this is why he took advantage). He said, "You and you go roofing; you and you on fixing staircases; you and you on fitting doors, you and you on floorboard bashing".

I was put on door-hanging. I said, "Have you got any 4" x 2" and 2" x 2" timber?" "What for?" he said. "I want to make myself a cutting stool". He said, "We ain't got time to spare for that, just get three pieces of old floorboard, one piece for the top and two shorter pieces for the legs, with a piece of batten nailed across at the bottom".

I'd never had to make a thing like this before. I would have got the sack right away working with another firm, because in fact, when a carpenter started with a new firm, the foreman would ask him to make a carpenter's cutting stool (trestle) and he would know immediately by looking at the finished stool (plus the time it took to make it) whether it was suitable. If not, he would tell you to pack your tools and get off the job, because to make a carpenter's trestle is quite a lot of work.

I got started on the door-hanging, and after about 4 hours I had fitted and hung four doors and commenced on the fifth. Over came the foreman and stomped around opening and shutting doors I had hung. Then he came across to me and remarked, "You're not very quick, are yer"? He continued, saying, "Over here on this job, I expect to see 16 doors up and hanging with the back door lock on as well". I turned round and looked at him and said, "Who hangs 16 doors a day"?

He said, "I have two men doing this". "Well!" I replied, "They can hang my 16 doors as well because I shall never carry this out". "I can tell you are a good carpenter and not used to this sort of work. If only you can ignore being fussy and particular, I'll keep you on". Away he went and off I went to find these two men who were hanging 16 doors a day.

I came across them and stood back and watched. I had a shock. One would get hold of a new door and stand it up to the frame. His mate would be the other side and make a pencil line on one side of the door and perhaps there would be nearly 1/2" to come off. This door was stood against the wall while the same procedure was carried out on another door. They then left each other to reduce these doors to size. What an eye opener I had. They each got out their sharp axes and axed off a large chunk practically down to the pencil line, then they got their jack planes and put a final finish to the line they had marked, fixed the hinges, hammered all the screws in and up went the doors. No wonder they were hanging 16 doors a day. I was doing mine in the practical way: if

there was 1/2" to come off the new door, I would plane 1/4" off each side of the door and turn all the screws in well.

I had seen enough. I went back to the house I was working on, finding the foreman waiting for me. Immediately he roared, "Where have you been?" Not fearing him now, I told him what I had seen. He agreed with what they were doing, so I told him in no uncertain way, "You can't have quality and quantity". At the end of the day he gave me my cards and wages earned, saying he was sorry but I was too good a tradesman to be on a housing site. It was his job to make profits for the firm in order to keep his job. This same attitude went on wherever there was a job of work going on because the building contractors and their foremen took advantage of the unemployed generally.

Having mentioned a few of the struggles I had to encounter, we are now moving into the real Depression period, the 1930s. Nearly every trade and profession was affected, the building trade especially - building materials and jobs became harder to find and scarcer. I called in the Labour Exchange one morning to ask if any jobs had come in and I noticed on the blackboard, written up in chalk, the words "Carpenter wanted". I went up to the clerk asking him what and where the job was. He said, "I'm afraid it's out of the radius of Brighton and I cannot force you to take it". Being anxious to get a job and knowing it was hopeless getting one locally, I asked where the job was again. "It's over at a place called Balsdean". "Where's Balsdean?" I asked. He said, "You take a bus to Rottingdean, walk up through the village and then you'll have to walk about 2 1/2 miles over the hills until you come to a deep valley, and there looking down you'll see some Artesian well-boring going on".

He seemed very pleased that I was interested in the job, because then he read out to me the works engineer's requirements to encourage a carpenter to work over in the wilds (and it was winter time unfortunately). The job and work seemed all right and above all there was an extra 6d an hour. This was a lot of money on a full week's pay in those days.

The worst part of the job was getting there and coming home. I had to go to Rottingdean by bus (this was easy), walk north, up through the village as instructed and then walk eastwards over the hills. My word! When the cold winds were blowing, I had to put my head down and battle my way until I got to the top of this valley. Once down there, it was very calm and peaceful and how thankful I was, until it was time to knock off work at 4.30, and once again battle my way home against the wind into Rottingdean. More often than not, being winter time, I was wet through and cold and pleased to get inside the bus, arriving home tired out, but very pleased to have a job and a week's wages to take home.

It was a very interesting job and educational because they had bored three large well holes, the centre hole being the largest. I forget the diameter but I do know it was 250 feet deep. You see, they were digging for water and were very successful because today there is a large water pumping station built there. They had a water diviner come with his forked-hazel branch. I had the job of preparing and making about 200 (2" x 2" x

24" long) wooden stakes. These a labourer carried in a wheelbarrow and another labourer carried a sledge hammer. They then followed the water diviner. He was holding the hazel forked twig and he walked over the ploughed field and every time the hazel branch twisted in his hands, he would stop and ask the labourers to knock a wooden stake into the ground. He continued to walk in one direction and by the time he had walked about one mile, one would see a line of wooden stakes.

He carried out the same operation in two other directions where the hazel branch twisted in his hands, proving to him that well down below the surface of ground was water. So, when he and the Chief Engineer were satisfied you could see three lines of wooden stakes, and these stakes proved to the Engineer that these were the directions the miners had to tunnel to find water.

These tunnels were called headings and the miners were called heading drivers. When the heading drivers went down the well bore hole this being 250 feet down to the bottom of same, a very large circular platform I had made was lowered down to three miners. They had been lowered down to 220 feet in an iron skip attached to a thick metal cable and this passed over a large wheel at the top of some tall shear logs (these were three very long 6" x 4" heavy timbers that I had bolted together making three 24ft long 6" x 4" timbers called legs). These were hoisted into position and spread out to form a tripod. All three legs were well secured to iron stakes in the ground and lashed together at the top. From this the pulley wheel was hung with the metal cable passing over it. The long cable went down to a large heavy winch with the cable passing round a large drum with a handle at each side for five men to wind or re-wind any material or men in the skip working down the bore hole.

By the time they had tunnelled out they were then under the high hills, making them then about 700 ft down in the bowels of the earth. At 220 ft down the bore hole, the miners made heavy timbers secure into the chalk sides to support the large heavy 3" thick wooden circular platform. This left another 3 ft below the platform to form a sump to take the spring water, because as the leading drivers tunnelled their way into the chalk, they would cut through clear water springs and this water had to be got rid of and so it ran back to the bore hole and poured down into the 30 ft sump. The engineers had fixed a suction pump from the sump to the top of the bore hole, sucking up the water from the sump and so keeping the headings and bore hole from becoming flooded, otherwise the men would have been drowned. There was also an emergency wooden ladder that had been well secured into the chalk sides of the well. This ladder was made up of 40 ft sections of 4" x 4" pine timber bolted together (with 2" x 2" wood rungs bolted to it).

As the job and works progressed satisfactorily the engineer had to get more men. As these men had to be experienced in mining work and there were none locally or signing on at the Labour Exchange, the Ministry of Labour had to get a body of unemployed Welsh and Irish workers and bring them down south to work at this site. So this meant that the Artesian Well Boring Co. of London had to buy and erect some very large wooden huts (4 in all) to give these workers sleeping accommodation and also

somewhere to have their meals.

A certain firm arrived from away and supplied these large huts complete with single beds, 2-tier bunks and cooking facilities. When these huts were completed, in came an army of miners and labourers who were quite used to living and working under rough conditions - and the pay was good! Unfortunately the special combustion heating stoves hadn't arrived and so they asked the engineer to get some large galvanised buckets and 1/2 ton of coke. He did this and the men punched some very large holes all around these buckets to allow the air and draught to keep the coke burning.

There were two gangs of miners, one gang would work a day shift and the other gang a night shift (alternately changing over every two weeks). They filled their buckets with paper and wood and lit them up outside the huts, on went the coke and when the smoke had gone and the coke was burning well, they would take them into their hut for warmth (being winter time they needed warmth and because of the damp atmosphere etc. also to dry their clothes).

As time went on the doors and windows swelled up with the damp weather etc. and the miners reported this to the engineer. He asked me to go over to the huts to ease these doors and windows to make them open and close more easily. In one particular hut where the gang had been on night shift they had locked their hut door because when they had completed their night shift at about 6 a.m., they all took a stroll down into Rottingdean to do some shopping etc. Over I went to their hut with the door key, opened up after a struggle and in I went. I had a walk around the hut inside to ease the windows when suddenly, I began to feel dizzy and drunk. I went to hurry out and as I walked it was like walking up a very steep hill and myself shrinking shorter. I just managed to get to the door and fell headlong on to the ground. I shall never forget this nasty experience. Luckily the engineer was making his way over to me to see how I was getting on. Well! when he saw me fall, he ran up to me, turned me over onto my back and mopped my brow after soaking his handkerchief in a pool of rainwater.

Very gradually he got me round and stood me on my feet. It wasn't long before I was my old self again. He gave one look into the hut through the windows, turning round to me and saying, "Bert, don't you go back into this hut again, the silly devils have put the coke buckets inside to warm the place up, making the whole place full of carbon monoxide fumes. You were very lucky to get out as soon as you did, otherwise you would have collapsed on the floor and passed out and no one would have known for hours". The engineer left the two doors open and then smashed some of the glass in the windows to clear the air inside of the deadly fumes before the workers returned. Not long after this nasty experience the combustion stoves arrived and were duly fixed into position, giving the men the necessary heat.

After about sixteen months my particular job came to an end, and with a hand-shake, my insurance cards and my wages from the chief engineer I was back next morning signing on at the Labour Exchange again, but feeling very happy and satisfied that I had been working for over a year and had carried out a job, instead of being bored with

doing nothing. Also, my home, wife and family, all the better for the extra money to live on.

One morning a job came through from Beeding Cement Works, between Shoreham and Bramber. They were creating and forming some new chalk crushing mills and according to the plans and blueprints, my job would be to form in new timbered shuttering (which the trade called formwork), the barns, walls and a vast number of pipe ducts. These were filled with reinforced steel bars plus metal squared mesh, and finally, after the engineer and architect were satisfied with the construction of the timbered shuttering, the whole was filled with specially prepared quick-setting concrete.

Well, after all this briefing plus the offer of another 6d an hour, I decided to take the job on. This particular day, being a Thursday, I returned home by Southdown bus, but having to commence work at these cement works at 7.20 a.m. on the following Monday morning, the bus was of no use to me because the first bus out on this route was 8 a.m. This is where I had to do some quick thinking and so arrived at the decision of borrowing my brother's bicycle to cycle the whole way to Beeding (about 11 miles) which I did on the Monday.

The time came to leave off work (feeling very happy at having a job again). I then cycled back to Shoreham Railway Station. Just outside the station was a newsagent's and tobacconist's shop. I went in and explained to the shopkeeper that I lived in Brighton and had obtained a job at the cement works and could he find room in his shed (which I could see at the back) to put my bicycle in for the night and so allow me to continue my journey home to Brighton on the train. He listened to my story with interest and immediately replied that owing to the great unemployment problem and me having got the guts to come all this way to work rather than be idle and keep signing on the dole, he would carry out my wish re the bicycle. And so I did this procedure morning and evening, for 20 months.

My particular job coming to an end, I was once again given my wages and insurance cards, and the following Monday I was back on the dole line. I would like to say that the newsagent in Shoreham was very pleased he had helped me out of a travelling difficulty and, at the time of mass unemployment, he never charged me anything at all.

Again searching around for work for short periods, I found work that other carpenters wouldn't take on. After weeks had gone by with no work I noticed a big demolition job was going on in North Street, Brighton, also to shops in Queen's Road. After a few enquiries I learned that a large cinema was going to be built. As the demolition came to an end and the rubble and rubbish was cleared away, the building contractors moved in, plus tons and tons of steel girders, stanchions and all the necessary tools and equipment. I kept my eye on this job as the steel work was being erected and eventually when I thought they must be ready to employ carpenters I got an interview with the foreman who asked me many questions. When he was satisfied with my answers (of course these foremen are experienced and they can tell by the way you answer if you are a tradesman or not) he said I could start the following Monday week.

My first job was to make up four carpenter's trestles (cutting stools). This was the test which I have previously mentioned. I carried on working on this site for many months, working in rough and wet conditions. Eventually this site became the well-known Regent Cinema in Queen's Road (the year being somewhere about 1921). Up till about 1974 when it was demolished, the cinema and dance hall continued to function and was very popular.

As the various jobs came to an end, the workers were given their wages, and Insurance cards. This was and still is the way of the building industry. We accepted it. I must now go back to 1926 because this was the year of the General Strike, again adding further hardship on those who were working. I had got a job but was forced to come out in sympathy, but I was able to return to my job when the strike ended. I was working on a very long and interesting job at Boots the Chemists in Western Road. The reason it was an interesting job was because all the tapering columns (one can see them today inside) were formed in wooden shuttering and then filled with reinforced concrete. The sunken panelled ceilings were also formed in timbered shuttering filled with concrete. Before the concrete was poured into the ceiling panels a continuous run of heating pipes (spread over a large area) was placed in position to warm the shop and show-room below, the heat coming down from the ceiling. As one can see today the building is built of architectural stone, forming a very imposing and interesting appearance. Again this job came to an end but I was very fortunate in getting a job on the railway, in the Brighton area.

After many talks and plans, the electrification of the railways - London to Brighton and London to Eastbourne - was to go ahead. The fine and grand steam engine called "Stephenson" hauled the last regular steam-worked train from Victoria to Brighton on December 31st 1932. Next day, January 1st 1933, the Brighton railway line became the first electrified main line in the country, the first section running from Three Bridges to Brighton. Preparations had to be made in advance for the repair and maintenance of the rolling stock and so the engineers had made plans to construct the twelve repair roads (or tracks) at the railway repair sheds just off New England Road, forming seven pit roads and five flat roads. These pit roads allowed the men to walk under the whole length of the train and the five flat roads were ordinary railway tracks where the trains and coaches would run into the repair sheds awaiting attention. This was another very interesting and educational job.

I well remember November 11th at 11a.m. (as we all know it is called Remembrance Day - 2 minutes' silence as relatives and friends remember their dead folk, killed during the 1st World War). On this particular morning the siren sounded at two minutes to eleven and everyone took off their caps and bowed their heads. The silence was broken by a labourer still carrying on working, knocking nails in the used timber. Of course the knocking magnified through the great silence. Then, as soon as the "All Clear" sounded, a few very hot-tempered men rushed over to this labourer. He immediately put up his hands and shouted to these men, "Stand back, stand back, and I will tell you why I went on working! It is my belief that we should all remember the living and not the dead;

because due to unemployment and labour troubles there are thousands suffering from poverty". All the men returned to their jobs saying - perhaps he is right after all!

Fortunately, while working for the railway, the builders locally had become very busy and so before signing on at the Labour Exchange (which I hated) I had a run around and got a job with a local builder. He had a long job in Worthing and asked me if I'd mind travelling to and from Worthing each day. I said no so I got the job and started the following Monday. Of course, the builder paid the fare and one-way travelling time.

The job was an inside one (no time lost for wet weather). It was an alteration job to a large bakery business, and also they were having built a large bakery bread oven, complete with white glazed bricks for cleanliness. The bricklayers (or oven builders) had erected a scaffold about 6 feet high, and while they had been doing this I had erected a matchboard partition to prevent the dust from entering the shop and café.

In the very big old fashioned bakery, the owners in the past had erected a large metal oven to use when they got extra busy and this particular morning, in came the baker and said, "Would you mind clearing the timber away from this large metal oven as I want to bake a load of extra loaves?" I cleared everything away, but I could smell a very strong smell of gas. Over came the baker, wearing his long white apron, bent down, opened a large metal door and pulled out some swivelled gas pipes containing hundreds of holes. I rushed over to him and told him about the strong smell of gas. "Ah!" he said, "it'll be alright". But was it?

I was wearing a trilby hat at the time, when all of a sudden, without any warning there was a terrific explosion. The sudden blast blew open the oven door, just missing my face. He was blown against the opposite wall, his nice white apron and his shirt were well alight. My saw was literally blown by the blast around the bake house, first hitting one wall, bouncing off and crashing against another wall.

After all this commotion and chaos had died away, I found myself up on the scaffold and a bricklayer holding me tight, because he could see I was panic stricken. Well! how I came to be on the scaffold, 6 ft above the bake house floor I do not know. The other workmen declared that I must have been blasted up there, because there was no ladder handy, and apart from this queer experience, I was covered from head to foot with a black-looking substance, like black lead, with my hair standing up straight. When I had been calmed down, with my ear drums hissing and ready to burst, I found my trilby hat was missing, and do you know, we all searched and searched but we never did find my hat. And so where it went, no-one will ever know.

The baker was taken to hospital badly burned about his head and arms - they kept him in for observation for about three days. When he had got over the shock he came along to the bake house and said to me, "Bert, if I had only listened to you about the gas smell, this would never have happened, and as for you going through what you have, I am very sorry". I shall never forget these vivid and unforgettable memories.



Recently I have found a postcard size photograph of the true community spirit which existed back in 1938. The photograph is of two streets combined together, Southampton Street and Islingword Street. The feelings among several people were such, that owing to so many children living in the two streets, and to break the monotony of continual playing in the streets, they formed a committee. The outcome of a meeting was that they decided to contact every house-holder in the two streets and collect a few coppers (1d, in those days 12d = one shilling), now one shilling is 5p today (new pence). This they did, with every parent giving what they could afford open heartedly. The amount collected was made out on paper. Again the committee got to work, working out the various foods, sweets and drinks required. The necessary foods were bought, with the different men and women (parents of all the children living in these two streets) setting to work making various fancy cakes, jellies, custard, various fruit cakes, lemonade (home made), several gallons of tea also milk, also all the householders lending out cups and saucers, plates, jugs, knives and forks and spoons. Each end of Southampton Street was blocked off. The trestles, table tops, chairs and table cloths were lent by the Mission Hall in Islingword Road and also St. Luke's Hall and other organisations. The arranged day arrived. What activity, plus excitement. Along came handbarrow loads of trestles, table tops, chairs (talk about happiness among the poor) with all the mothers and fathers working together in harmony, out came the various cakes, jellies, custards, sweets, in fact the lot, from all the various households who had arranged to do their bit. When everything had been set in place, hand bells were rung, letting all the children know that the time had arrived for them to take their places at the tables.

My wife and I were very proud to see our two young sons among the other children enjoying their company. What a time we all had and enjoyed. The photograph has been through many hands over the years, combined with sadness because so many have passed away, also including my dear wife, but time and life still has to go on.

## **An impending war**

I am now getting into the year 1938 and there seems to be a great unrest among various nations of an impending war, especially Great Britain, because every town and council was forming an Air Raid Precaution Group. These were being trained to assist and advise the general public to keep calm, also to move or evacuate families should they think it necessary. These groups were given no uniforms, only wide arm-bands with the letters A.R.P. on them, plus steel helmets. Then the Fire Brigades asked for volunteers to join the A.F.S. (Auxiliary Fire Service).

I reported to the Fire Station (Preston Circus) offering my services. After about three weeks I was told to report for training twice a week and was surprised to see such a lot of men had joined the service. I did notice that several builders had joined and immediately they were made Auxiliary officers in charge of us men. This never went down very well because we knew they were as inexperienced as we were, but we accepted it because we knew someone had to be in charge, to carry the can should anything go wrong.

We were trained in the station by experienced firemen. First they taught us how to do the various knot-tying such as the reef knot, sheep-shank, bowline and many others. But we all found doing the fireman's chair knot the most difficult.

As you passed these various tests, they were noted down in a book and your progress watched. The Fire Chief told us as we gathered round him on our next meeting night, "I am now going to teach you all how to deal with an unconscious person, overcome by smoke or fumes in a room or office high above the ground. The staircase is well alight and the only way out is the window". He got one of us chaps to lie on the floor in a very limp and relaxed condition (as if unconscious). He bent down, turning the man's body flat on his back with his face turned gently to one side. He then pushed the man's feet hard up against the wall at the same time half lifting him across his shoulders, placing his hand and arm through the man's legs, lifting him bodily while he hung limp. When they can't help themselves they are twice the weight. Now, in the case of dealing with a woman, the procedure is exactly the same with one difference; instead of putting your hand and arm through her legs, you grasp both legs together then lift her across your shoulders taking the full weight.

At the next meeting the officer said quite calmly, "I am very proud and pleased with the way you all carried out the last week's training of doing the fireman's lift. Tonight you are coming with me over the fire-fighting tower to carry out the fireman's lift in a practical way". We all looked up at this training tower (which is still there today). "I want you all six men to go up the iron staircase inside the tower up to the fourth landing." Of course he followed us up. "Now what I want you to do is to choose a mate you think you can manage to lift and when you have got him safely on your shoulders (of course, he has to hang limply), go to that opening which represents a window, get on to the ladder and take him down to the ground."

We all looked at each other, then looked down to the concrete ground in the yard from the window. After a few seconds he shouted, "Come on then, get cracking". We then said to him, "What about having a safety net to catch us should we fall?" "Oh no!" he said, "If you see a safety net down there, you'll get careless. Now come on, I want to pass some of you out tonight".

There were van drivers, shop assistants, clerks and when they found out I was a carpenter and joiner in the building industry and was used to climbing ladders between them they all wanted me to take them down. I could only take one down and so I made my choice. He was a van driver and my word, he didn't half look heavy. I got him off the floor and across my shoulders and made for the window. Out went my left leg, then my right leg. I was now confident of getting down that ladder. But half way down my knees and legs were trembling with the weight (plus a little nervousness I suppose) and wasn't I pleased to reach the ground. My mate was more pleased and relieved than I was. After a long period the others succeeded in getting down.

But another shock came. The officer said, "I want you all to return up into the tower and

let the man who carried you down change over and be carried down. Oh dear, my mate being a van driver I begged of him, "Take care and don't get panicky, have confidence and we'll be alright". But were we? He got me across his shoulders, and me hanging very limp I could look down and see the ladder and the ground.

Out he comes from the window and the first thing he does wrong is he brings his right foot out from the window and places it on the left hand side of the ladder, having no rung of the ladder for his left foot to rest on. I could see all this happening and so before he took his left foot out of the window, I lurched forward into the building and we both fell in a heap on the floor of the landing. I knew this was much better than falling headlong down on the concrete yard below.

We had a serious talk and he said he would be more careful and so with more confidence he eventually got me safely down the ladder to the ground, giving us both full marks. Two more men were passed out with full marks after a lot of encouragement. The other two gave it up and refused to go down. This being a voluntary service, none of us could be forced to do anything against our will. It was only our interest in the Fire Service that encouraged us on. We were taught First Aid, the construction of fire extinguishers, how to crawl and enter a smoke-filled room having our mouth and nose covered with our handkerchief tied at the back, how to lift patients onto stretchers, fire hose drill, street Fire Hydrant drill, all being carried out at speed. We were given a white metal badge to wear in our jacket lapel, with the letters A.F.S., finished and covered with dark red enamel, and very smart they looked.

In this same year, September 1938, the Women's Army was formed, known as the A.T.S. (Auxiliary Territorial Service). Their work and duties were carried out on gun sites, also searchlight batteries; others drove cars and lorries. In 1949 the A.T.S. became the Women's Royal Army Corps; total strength then was 230,000. In June 1939 the Women's Land Army was formed, and had 1,000 volunteers by the outbreak of the War. In 1941 the Government brought in conscription, this adding another 20,000 girls. Their uniform was a green sweater and brown breeches. Their job was to keep the farms going during the War. They were not so highly paid as the women in other services and had no privileges such as free travel vouchers.

## **PART 2**

### **A Job - not without its dangers 1939-45**

Everyone began to believe that a war was inevitable and suddenly on September 3rd 1939 war was declared against Germany. My word, talk about activity and excitement (combined with a certain amount of nervousness). All us volunteers in the services became alive with discipline and us men, being members of the A.F.S. were quickly measured and supplied with a complete uniform: Wellington boots, steel helmet, service gas masks, axes etc. In came several motor-operated water pumps.

After a very quick and intensive training, the officers became very strict and military shouting out orders. We were then sorted out in particular batches.

In the meantime, the regular fire service had taken over some various large garages in different parts of Brighton to send squads of firemen complete with these motor-driven water pumps, hoses and ladders etc. for us to be on call at quick notice should any enemy action cause a sudden explosion or fire in that part of Brighton.

My station was in Eastern Road. Of course us Auxiliaries were part-time and still carried on our normal jobs, but we were on call should our services be needed. An alert system was erected in all British towns. This was a siren signal with a powerful rising and falling sound. Thirty minutes after declaration of war, the siren sounded. Over the wireless came orders for all Fire and Air Raid precautions personnel to report immediately to their stations. There was great activity, plus excitement, not knowing what was going to happen next when all of a sudden to everyone's relief, the "All Clear" sound was switched on. This was a sustained high note. So in a very few moments everything and everyone returned back to normal.

An interesting fact was that London alone had, throughout the war, 1,224 Alert signals. In some coastal towns, (Brighton was one), where a great many enemy aircraft would cross to bomb London, a local alert system (a cuckoo sound) was introduced and inhabitants took shelter (if possible) because this indicated imminent danger. In August 1941 the Government paid the Auxiliary firemen £3 a week, and these Auxiliaries outnumbered the regular firemen 10 to 1.

During the war years, housewives played a great part in extinguishing fires caused by German aircraft dropping incendiary bombs or Molotov baskets. These were a mass of incendiary bombs that burst into flames as soon as they dropped on buildings. These housewives formed themselves into groups in the various streets and roads where they lived. They were on duty throughout the day and night on a rota system. They would get together, making one a leader. The fire brigade supplied these women with water buckets and stirrup pumps also giving them training of how to use them. Wherever a private house had the water buckets and stirrup pumps - for the women to know where to go in a hurry- there was printed on the wall in black paint a circle with two lines crossed at the centre. In fact, there are still two houses in Grove Street, Brighton numbers 17 and 28 where this sign can still be seen.

My wife and her street party would use Finsbury Road School for their assembly point, plus sand bags. I also remember the various councils had a full sand bag hanging on all the street lamps in case of emergency. This was the case in every town throughout the country. This sand was used to smother flames more quickly than water.

A complete blackout was imposed on Britain by night from September 1st 1939 until September 17th 1944, for fear of air raids. Motor car headlights were masked, all windows of houses were shuttered or heavily curtained, railway carriages especially were blacked out tightly. Now came the great call-up of men of military age and a continual

registration of all other ages from 1939 up to 1942.

I myself was busy fitting and fixing up black-out frames, secured by turn-buttons at night, in large houses in Brighton, Hove and Portslade in preparation for large numbers of Canadian soldiers.

### **Seven days a week: Under orders**

Being a carpenter and joiner, I and a large number of various tradesmen in the building industry were mustered together in the centre of Brighton, complete with all our tool boxes and bags and told we were all going to be taken into the country by a fleet of motor coaches, morning to the job and back home to Brighton at night.

The name of the place was kept secret for security military reasons. Along came the motor coaches and in them we all got, the drivers having been told to keep the distance of three coaches in between each other, should enemy aircraft unexpectedly appear over-head, and should they try to drop bombs or machine gun the coaches, we all had a better chance of being missed. Not one of us workers knew where we were going to, because all direction boards, signposts and village name-plates were removed in 1940, to frustrate an invading army should they have landed by parachute.

But we had some idea where we were because after several weeks of building a large military camp, the Battle of Britain started, and in the distance we could hear the sound of planes, zooming and diving, the sound of machine-gun firing, and many a time the planes were driven and forced towards where we were working.

We could see the Royal Air Force Spitfires, Britain's finest single-seater aircraft, which could out-maneuvre the German Messerschmidt 109. The Spitfire carried eight .3-3 machine-guns, and had a top speed of 361 miles an hour. A later model, called the mark XIV, carried two cannon and four machine-guns. The Battle of Britain was fought on the borders of Sussex, Surrey and Kent during the summer and autumn of 1940. The German Luftwaffe set out to destroy the Royal Air Force as a prelude to invasion, but fortunately they were beaten. The Germans admitted 1,733 aircraft lost. Royal Air Force losses were put at 915. Fighter pilot's names Cobber Kain, Paddy Finucane and Johnny Johnson became the heroes of the Battle of Britain. The bombing of London began on September 7th 1940, the Germans calling it the Blitzkrieg (translated into English this means lightning). We called it the Blitz. Hitler conquered Poland in 18 days, a Blitzkrieg or lightning war.

The Government were anxious to protect the general public, householders and their families from bombing and blast, so they supplied a very thick gauge of corrugated steel bent in a circular shape. The householder dug out the ground in his back garden, setting the corrugated steel cover into the dug out ground. Then he would cover the whole with all the earth (and more if he had got it) and so make a large mound to protect the people and children inside the shelter from the effects of bomb blast. This particular shelter was called the Anderson shelter, because Sir John Anderson was the Home

Secretary in 1939 and 1940. Two and a quarter million were made and distributed free to people who were earning less than £250 a year. Those earning over this amount were charged £7. Many families in London spent every night in their shelter during the heavy air raids.

There was another shelter for use in the home, called the Morrison shelter (I had one in my home). This was a large heavy gauge steel top about 48" x 36", complete with four heavy angled legs 30" high, bolted to the top. On completion this formed a table to have your meals on. When the Alert siren went the family would crouch down and get inside for security. Around the two ends of the shelter and along one side, was a squared sheet of steel mesh wire, bolted to the legs. Also a wire mesh to form a spring-wired mattress was bolted to the bottom and an ordinary bed mattress was placed on top of this for comfort. The children were put in this shelter at night to sleep, making sure there was enough room for us parents should we have to leave our beds and get inside same for a little safety. These also were supplied free to low income families. When the end of the war came the councils were ordered by the government to collect these shelters and pay the householders £1 if they were complete.

There were also brick and concrete shelters built in a great many streets in Brighton and other places all over Britain. I worked on a great many of these, building, making and erecting wooden two or three tier bunks for people to lie down on, and so, allowing other people room to stand in between same, also these sort of concrete shelters were built and erected in a large number of schools throughout Britain, and some still remain today.

Brighton, according to records kept, had more enemy aircraft pass over loaded with bombs to bomb London than any other seaside town. When these bombers were driven off course by our aircraft or from our gun sites they then headed back home, releasing their bombs on various parts of Brighton indiscriminately.

Many houses and streets were hit around the Gas works at Black Rock, Kemp Town, Pankhurst Avenue, Albion and Carlton Hills, Cambridge Street, Ashton Street, Dinapore Street, Liverpool Street. Many of these streets are now demolished although all these houses at the above time had to be repaired and made habitable for the people to continue to live in them.

I worked on dozens of these houses (that were not beyond repair) seven days a week. I would like to mention that the guts and spirit of these people were magnificent, making us workers cups of tea and so encouraging us on, because at times we were really beat and on the point of exhaustion.

Bombs were dropped on Sylvan Hall (Ditchling Road and Upper Lewes Road) which was then the Army Records Offices, and continued to drop in a line across to Lewes Road, finally dropping on the public house at the corner of Franklin Road called "The Road Inn", totally demolishing the building. There were six people killed including the publican and his wife, and several injured. Many other parts of Brighton suffered the

same fate.

I was too busy on this very important work as a carpenter and so, although I was still a member of the A.F.S., the job I was doing was just as important as assisting the Fire Service, because carpenters were scarce, owing to so many having been called up for Military service.

All civilians and children were issued with gas masks in 1937, and very special ones for young babies. The ordinary ones were packed in strong cardboard boxes with a stout piece of string attached so that they could be slung over the shoulder leaving the arms and hands free.

As the bombing became worse, the local authorities decided to evacuate thousands of children into the country to live with kind-hearted people for safety and comfort. They had their names and addresses on labels fastened to their jackets, their gas masks over their shoulders, and suitcases large and small packed with their clothes, etc. A good many children struggled along with this luggage to the various railway stations, from many large towns in the South and many more from the London area. It was a very pitiful sight to watch as they kissed their mums and dads goodbye.

All this happened in September 1939 and onwards, and a good many of these children, who are now young men and women, made great friends with the people who took them into their homes.

Lord Woolton was appointed Minister of Food in 1940, and was responsible for the food rationing system and the issuing of ration books. While all this was going on, also the various jobs of repair work that I was carrying out in and around Brighton, the various age groups of men continued to be called up. My age group was the last to register: ages 36 to 40.

In August 1942 I was notified by an official letter to report to the National Service Officer at the Labour Exchange. I reported to him on the day and time asked. He was a very stern military man who looked at me saying, "Mr Paul, you are due for your call up, but nearing the age of 40, and also being a carpenter and joiner, I am going to give you a job, not without its dangers, knowing also that you are already carrying out bomb repair work." He told me that Hitler was bombing and blasting English towns of beauty and architectural merit. These bombing raids were called by the Germans "Baedeker Raids" named after the German series of guide books, because they were ordered by Hitler in 1942. The targets and towns included Exeter, Bath, Norwich, York and Canterbury. The inhabitants of these towns were suffering heavily from the indiscriminate bombing of their homes. Streets and roads of houses had had their roofs stripped of tiles and slates, also their windows and front and back doors blasted out.

He told me (plus a few other men my age) that the government and the Trade Unions had called a meeting and decided to form a building force of building tradesmen (too old for the Forces) to be sent to any part of Great Britain, including Northern Ireland at a

moment's notice. We would be under orders the same as the servicemen in the Forces, but not in uniform. After about two weeks the postman delivered another official letter with O.H.M.S. printed on the top of the envelope. I said to my wife, "This is it" and it was. Inside was an official railway warrant, a letter telling me to report to Tavistock St. Covent Garden, London with my tools, ration book, a change of clothing, insurance cards and doctor's card, and report to the above address three days later.

September 1942. I packed my bags and tools, kissed my wife and two children goodbye, not knowing where I would be going.

What a terrible state I found various parts of London in, buildings and houses bombed and blasted. I eventually found Tavistock Street and the large building was a Labour Exchange. There was great activity with swarms of men standing in groups surrounded by their tool boxes, tool bags and luggage. The roads around the building were packed with lorries, covered vans and motor cars. We were, after a time, ordered inside into a massive room. The men had travelled from all parts of Britain to this meeting-place to receive instructions. All of a sudden, out came a very military man, clapping his hands for hush. He then shouted out for all carpenters and joiners to follow him into another large room. We found, sitting around a very large table were six clerks each one asking different questions. Before we got to the last clerk, we had lost our names, but were given a number to be used at all times in our correspondence. Mine was B.V. 1571. The last clerk told us carpenters they were sorting out the various tradesmen to form a well-balanced squad, comprising carpenters and joiners, bricklayers, plumbers, plasterers, roofing hands and labourers, complete with master builders and general foremen, who would control us men. The complete squad of men would be 60. We were introduced to our Supervisor, three general foremen and three leading hands to assist the general foremen (one to each).

They had already looked into our past working life. As I had a vast experience of practical building maintenance and repair work, this clerk asked me would I be prepared to be a leading hand. The pay would be an extra 6d. an hour and I agreed to take the position on.

We would all be kept together, work, live, and sleep together. Being prepared also to be moved at a moment's notice; at any time, day or night to where our services were needed. One final instruction from the Head of this dispersal point was that wherever we were sent, it would also be our job to try and cheer up the families whose homes had been badly blasted. We should tell them of the terrible suffering that the people of London were having to put up with, hoping to boost up their morale. So this Supervisor, wishing us all the best of luck, formed us into our groups of sixty men. This group were for Exeter, this group for Canterbury, this group for Bath and so on.

Bath (Somerset) had just had their Baedeker Raid (two nights of indiscriminate bombing) and my squad had been directed there. So up we all got into four large, covered vans and were taken to Paddington railway station. We unloaded our luggage and tools into the train already waiting. After a final check-up the train moved off, us



men all wondering what we were going to find.

At the same time as we were travelling to Bath by train, there were four lorries on their way to Bath loaded with extension ladders, scaffold boards, tarpaulins, rolls of white linen, rolls of roofing felt, 2" x 1" battens, coils of rope - in fact, everything needed for property repair work.

We arrived at Bath and were all bundled, tools, luggage and men out of the train. We were met by the billeting officer and were given the names and addresses of people who were compelled by law to take us in. Some families had to have three men, some two men. Should these families be short of blankets and pillows, they applied to the Town Hall and received the number they required. I was billeted in a small house, the family comprising husband, wife and one daughter aged six.

After a shave, a wash and brush up and something to eat, the time now being somewhere about nine in the evening, out we all went, walking around Bath, and my word! What a devastation we found. Many homes demolished and hundreds of houses needing a lot of attention. Roofs blown off, windows and doors blasted off, bomb craters in the roads, everywhere was in chaos. We met several local people, telling them what we had come for. After a tour round the town, we all returned back to our various billets.

The next morning at 7 a.m. we all commenced on the mammoth task of pulling down dangerous walls, tying down tarpaulins on damaged roofs until we found time to make a complete repair, covering all windows where the glass had been blasted out with a white waterproof linen to let in daylight at the same time as keeping the wind and rain out. We re-hung the front doors (and back doors if they had one). All this was called first-aid repairs and the people were very pleased with the comfort until we were able to carry out complete repairs at a later date. And so the work went on from dawn to evening, seven days a week until we got everything under control, with the inhabitants a lot more happy.

I had made friends with a very homely family and would visit them of an evening to have a game of cards and darts. This particular evening I stayed on till about 12.30 a.m. having had supper. I wished the family goodnight, but on opening the front door to leave I had a shock; a thick dense fog had set in, combined with the complete blackout. My friends said, "You can't go under these conditions". I replied that I would be alright, and away I went.

The road they lived in had a curve in it, like a crescent. I kept trying to walk straight but kept tripping up off the kerb. I tried then to get back on the pavement. This time, falling over after catching up against the high kerbstone. I kept picking myself up and began to get a little bit panicky what with the unearthly hour, the fog and the blackout. I decided to try and find my way back to my friends' house.

Well! what an experience. I steadied myself up and thought if only I could find the garden walls of the houses I could feel my way back. I eventually found the garden

walls, being quite pleased with myself when all of a sudden there was a terrible commotion. I found that I had fallen over a dustbin with the tin lid rolling away into the darkness, hitting a wall, then bouncing off, only to hit another. What a state I was in. I was wearing a luminous watch and I peered very hard to see the time this being a quarter to two. After settling down again I came to the conclusion that I had wandered up the side entrance of a house.

I thought at the time whoever was awake and heard all this noise and commotion must have thought that the German raiders had returned; away I went still feeling my way in the darkness and making progress I thought, until I wandered on to the edge of the pavement. Without any warning I bumped heavily into a sandbag hanging on the street lamp. This immediately swung around the lamp giving me a terrible thump in the back, knocking me over. I thought at the time some unknown man had clouted me. Again, picking myself up, with my knee and shoulder very painful, I at last found my friends' house, my eyes smarting with the fog. Of course, they had all gone to bed, I had left them about two hours before. I rang the doorbell. After a few minutes, a man's voice said, "Who is it?". I said, "It's Bert". He immediately opened the door, his wife shouting, "Who is it Ern?". He shouted back, "It's Bert". She came downstairs, gently saying we told you not to go. All of a sudden they both burst out laughing, saying, "Look in the mirror Bert". I had two eyes peering out of a black sooty face. I then settled down for a sleep, feeling lucky I thought to be alive. I have told this story to many people and friends. It has created a lot of laughs because anyone with a good sense of humour can imagine and see the funny side also of what I went through.

The Government officers in London who were in charge of these repair squads got in contact with Bath Council and the architects' department, and asked them how us men were progressing. The reply was that they were very satisfied with all the first aid repairs carried out. The outcome of this was that the Government quickly decided to form us into a mobile unit to be able to be sent at a moment's notice from here to there, without making arrangements with the railways.

We were all called together one morning and told by the supervisor that in a few days' time there would arrive from London four large articulated vans with 16 sleeping bunks (2 tier) in each. One had been altered to 12 two-tier bunks, because in the other half of this articulated van they had installed a coal-feed cooking range, complete with the full equipment of crockery, cups and enamel mugs, knives and forks, large and small saucepans - in fact, everything needed for feeding and cooking, making our squad a self-maintained unit.

One of the foremen was made a Welfare Officer, whose job it was wherever we were, to do the necessary catering and buy enough food to keep us men satisfied and happy. A cook and an assistant were elected, and when everything had been settled and arranged, we all left our billets and made ourselves comfortable in these vans. The next to arrive were three large lorries loaded with the necessary equipment and materials the same as when we first arrived in Bath, for the carrying out of all first aid repairs. As we were now a self-contained unit, we were known as the Ministry of Works Flying Squad.

One morning early, about four o'clock, we were woken up by the police who told us that they had just received a message from London, telling us to be prepared for a long journey North. So in August 1943, we left Bath and never knew where we were going, owing to secrecy. The drivers were told to report to the police at a certain town, and get further instructions. There were no signposts to go by, but the drivers had their secret maps and were not allowed to let them go out of their hands and had to sleep on them at night. We were on the road three days and four nights, of course sleeping and eating on the way. The drivers kept in contact with the police and received instructions where to continue every so often.

Eventually we arrived in a large town in darkness, outside a very large building. We found it was a brewery and when the night shift men in the brewery heard us outside, they came out and wondered who we were, especially when they saw these large articulated vans and lorries. After a little talk in the darkness outside, they asked us inside.

Having been travelling on the road from Bath for three whole days and four nights, us men needed a shave and a proper wash. The men in the brewery lent us towels, soap, also lovely hot water. While we were sprucing up they had made us pots of tea and slices of toast. Daylight was breaking, and after a thoroughly good breakfast, also a talk on who we were and where we had come from, we showed these men from the brewery our cooking arrangements on wheels and our two-tier bunks in the large articulated vans. Suddenly the police arrived to tell us we were in Sunderland. We were supposed to be at the next town, Seaham Harbour, Co. Durham, because they had just had a bombing raid, the raiders coming in from the North Sea. We all got together, had a roll call, thanked these men at the brewery for all they had done for us, and moved off, being led by a police escort to Seaham Harbour (a coal mining town).

More devastation and chaos. Streets and roads covered in debris, houses demolished with some families trapped in their Morrison table shelters.

We quickly unloaded our tools and got to work, first removing heavy timbers and brick rubble from these shelters, and so releasing those families from their prisons, where some had fainted. While we worked on, the ambulance men were doing their wonderful job. We went through every street releasing and digging out trapped families. After we were satisfied that no more people or children were trapped in shelters or debris, we then set to work doing the first aid repairs. These people up north are wonderful sociable people, making us men happy with their hospitality, also plenty of cups of tea during daylight hours.

I have one very outstanding memory, a story I and a good many more will never forget. During the course of carrying out the repair work, we came across a badly damaged church. Between us, we said this would make an ideal place to have our meals in. Also, we could spend our evenings here, write our letters, read, play cards, etc.

One evening I and a few of my mates, after removing more rubble and timber, came across a stage and the church organ. We very soon found after clearing away the dirt and dust that by working the bellows at the back the organ played, but unfortunately not one of the men could play. I sat down, being able to play by ear a little, and I very soon after a few evenings mastered this lovely organ, with one of my mates operating the bellows behind by an up and down movement with a wooden lever. We were very pleased with our home-made community centre.

As I was exploring around the Church one Sunday, I came across a cupboard, forced open the door and found a pile of hymnbooks. Before the men left the church, after having had their breakfast, I gave a hymnbook to each. This was my idea of livening up our life a little. I then went on to the stage, found the number of the hymn "Fight the Good Fight", which I knew was a favourite, open came their hymnbooks (combined with a laugh). My mate went behind to operate the bellows, then I played this hymn. My word! The men, having a bit of a laugh, settled down singing at the top of their voices.

It was time now for us to commence work, because being Sunday, and knowing all the inhabitants were comfortable after their ordeal, we took work a little easier on a Sunday. When we went outside we were greatly surprised to find quite a crowd of local people standing in groups. They immediately came up to us, saying how much they had enjoyed listening to our hymn singing. In fact, the word went around that the church had opened up again. How thankful us men were to know that we had livened the surrounding district up a little, because after all they had gone through they were all down in the dumps.

After us men had completed the first aid repairs, the Government recruited more building trade workers to carry on completing more definite repairs, so as we were drafted to another bombed town, or work of emergency, we became known as the Advance Party. This procedure carried on throughout the war, trying to keep the people happy and their homes under repair.

In 1943 all civilians had to register at the local Labour Exchange, irrespective of age. After a few questions a card was made out with your surname in one space, all Christian names in another, a code letter (mine was A) in another, also your home address combined with your personal signature. After all this procedure was completed, the officer would get a circular rubber stamp and stamp the card in the space arranged with these words around the edge "National Registration Office". Everyone went through the same procedure and was given a folder card. On the outside of the front cover was the Royal Arms, with 'National Registration Identity Card'. When the time came for everyone to get a ration book, you had to show the above card. The same applied to getting ear plugs (to push in your ears at any time of bombing or gun fire), also to getting clothing and sweet or cigarette coupons.

This registration card you had to carry around with you everywhere. There were six divisions for new addresses - on my card I have five addresses: Brighton, Bath, Seaham Harbour, Co. Durham, Dover, and back to Brighton at the end of the War.

These Registration Cards were in existence up to May 5th 1952 and then they were discontinued (I have still got mine).

In the year 1944, all boys and girls reaching the age of 16 had to register at the local labour exchange, receiving their National Registration Cards. This was done to keep a check on the manpower, the Government knowing at a glance who to send for should the war have carried on longer.

### **Some poor devil's got it**

On our way down to London we heard on the radio that London was being bombed by pilot-less aircraft, which afterwards were known as the Flying Bomb.

These flying bombs had a range of 200 miles, carrying one ton of explosives. This was also named the V1, the first of Hitler's "revenge weapons". The British called them Doodlebugs and Buzz bombs. As soon as their fuel was exhausted, their jet motors stopped and the missile plunged to the ground. You should see the damage and devastation, should it fall on any buildings or houses. The first were launched against London from sites in the Pas-de-Calais and Holland in June 1944. The attacks stopped when allied forces captured the launching sites in March 1945. Bomb Alley was the name given to the strip of Kent and Sussex in the path of the V1 flying bombs aimed at London.

Our articulated vans and lorries were parked in the Gaumont cinema car park at North Finchley (North London). From here we were taken into London by our own lorries to carry out the usual first aid repair work on important buildings, also on houses in various parts of the city. While we were working, these terrifying V1 Doodlebugs would come over and all the while the motors were working we knew they would keep going, but as soon as the motor cut out, one never knew where the thing would fall. Us men would crouch around a large circular concrete and brick static emergency water tank, so that, should the V1 Doodlebug drop near us, we hoped we would miss the blast, and many a time it did prevent the terrific rush of hot air from hitting us, because many a time we felt it pass over us. Offering up a prayer of thanks and relief, we would carry on with the repair work, until the horrible Doodlebug sounded again. This went on day and night, blasting property, killing and maiming people.

Very soon after we were ordered to pack all our tools and materials, ladders, etc., up into the lorries, get aboard ourselves and return to our depot at North Finchley. We were told to have a quick wash and shave, a hurried tea of sandwiches and be ready to move off in two hours. After a lot of excitement sending off telegrams and letters to our wives and families, telling them we were on the move again, but where we did not know.

We moved off and finally finished up at a place called Soham, Cambridge. More devastation met us. Country cottages collapsed like a pack of cards. There must have been about 150 cottages in heaps of stone and rubble.

Not all the damage and devastation at Soham was caused through enemy bombing. An ammunition train, loaded with shells and small bombs, blew up passing through the railway station. One of the axles of the railway truck became red hot with friction, causing red hot sparks to fly out. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion. Some of the shells and bombs blew up blowing up the station, some of the railway track and of course demolishing a good number of cottages.

We had another sudden call to pack up once again and return to London where we were escorted by the police to Leytonstone, East London, where the bombing had been very bad. All our convoy was parked on a large, bare piece of land which had been, before the bombing some months previously, several streets of inhabited houses. Backing on to this piece of derelict land were the back gardens of a road named Lansdowne Road. Of course, when the convoy of vans and lorries had finally settled down, out into the back gardens came the people, wondering who we were because this Mobile Flying Squad of sixty men was not very well known. It wasn't very long before we all became very friendly.

We had just settled down when the alert siren sounded. All the people disappeared suddenly, leaving us men wondering what was going to happen. It wasn't long before the police arrived to give us a bit of confidence. They told us to listen to a powerful humming noise. This was becoming louder and louder, when all of a sudden not very far away from us there was a terrific explosion, followed by clouds of dust and large pieces of timber (joists) and debris blasted high up into the air.

The police told us that this was another of Hitler's inventions called the V2, the world's first rocket missile and the second of Hitler's V-weapons, travelling at 3000 miles per hour. There could be no warning before the 2000 lb. warhead exploded. The first V2 fell at Chiswick on September 8th 1944 and another 1000 followed, killing 2,754 people before the last one fell at Kent on March 27th 1945. More V2s fell on Antwerp than on London, while on their way over.

One Sunday morning during a lull, also being a nice and sunny day, I decided to air my blankets. I took these out from off my bed inside the van, laying them out on a rough broken-down fence. A voice behind me suddenly said, "Having an airing mate?" I turned round, seeing a couple who wished me success with the airing of my blankets (no sheets naturally - a good job too, because they wouldn't 'arf of shown the dirt). They were interested in the sleeping vans, asking me questions. I took them inside showing them the sixteen bunks, also where the cooking was carried out. They were very surprised to see a coal-fed kitchen range, with the flue pipe going up through the roof of the van. "Aren't you afraid of a fire here?" The cook and his mate showed them the fire precautions that had been thought of and carried out. After thanking us they went on their way.

The next evening, after having a wash and brush up, also a meal I decided to have a little walk around and came across some underground Air Raid shelters on the Wanstead flats (a vast expanse of open country). These shelters had rows of three-tier bunks.

When I told my mates we all made up our minds that when the bombing became a little too hot at night, we would leave our sleeping vans and make full use of the safety of the underground shelters.

I was having another walk around the area one evening (because of the bombing I never wandered very far away from these shelters) when I came face to face with two ladies. The older one said, "I have met you before. You took my husband and I around your vans last Sunday. Now that I have met you again we would like you to come round home and spend the evening with us so as to give you a little homely comfort". This I did. We played darts and cards but when 'moaning minnie' sounded (the alert siren) we all ran down the garden to this air raid shelter. The V2s were coming in fairly frequently, but luckily they passed over our heads.

We watched a good many with the sheet of flame roaring out at the rear, then a loud explosion in the distance. "Some poor devil's got it!" we would say. What a relief when the "All Clear" sounded. Back indoors we all ran, the family getting the supper, with me enjoying the company, plus a good supper. Then just before midnight I would wish them all a very goodnight, returning to the van hoping for a peaceful night. (Strange to say this family were later to be my son John's parents-in-law.)

In 1944 when France fell to the Germans, us people in all the coast towns, including inland to London expected a lot of bombing and fighter planes invading England. In preparation for this all the seaside resorts with piers: Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings and Worthing had their piers severed and a portion removed to form a wide gap to prevent the Germans from landing on the piers from the sea.

Also the authorities had large oil tanks on the sea-front with pipes running from these tanks of oil to the seashore, and should the Germans have succeeded with an invasion from the sea, the military would have turned on the oil, allowing it to flow to these pipes on the seashore (these pipes had thousands and thousands of holes bored into them) and set the whole lot on fire to prevent the Germans landing. At the same time this would allow the troops on the beaches to mow them down by machine-gun and rifle fire. All these active preparations were going on and they called this the First Line of Defence.

Further inland there was the Second Line of Defence made up of concrete anti-tank traps, concrete and brick pill-boxes, also large blocks of round and square concrete blocks, all made to hinder and stop an invading army on wheels. This second line of defence stretched right through Sussex, Surrey and Kent. These anti-tank traps were solidly built of reinforced concrete being cased in by rough brickwork. This brickwork would extend higher outside than the concrete walling inside, then when the mortar and brickwork settled hard and solid, the brick-layer would get his heavy club hammer and deliberately hit the parapet of brickwork smashing and bricking it anyhow to give the building the appearance of having been there for years. Then the painters would give the brickwork no set pattern of brown, green and grey paint to camouflage it in keeping with the existing countryside. A good many of these anti-tank buildings they even painted trees on and imitation matchboard doors. They would get bundles of faggots (or

twigs) standing these against the walls to deceive the Germans, should they ever have landed on the coast with the invading army running wild all over the country. But what a shock they would have had, not knowing these strong camouflaged anti-tank traps would have had our soldiers inside, manning and firing the powerful heavy tanks, piercing shells into their tanks apart from rifle fire.

The pill boxes which were also very difficult to detect would also have had our soldiers inside. I myself worked and helped to build these anti-tank traps, also pill boxes. All this was very interesting, apart from what they were meant for.

We were taken by lorry with all our necessary equipment and tools, bricks and cement right into the country, through orchards, wheat-fields, hop fields and farms, to build these war-time buildings in the most hidden away places. But thank the Lord they never had to be used. Even today some of these buildings can still be seen.

These concrete anti-tank traps were well planned by the War Office. The way the firing apertures were constructed was simply marvellous, because they had to remember that should the Germans have invaded they themselves would have fired their guns into these anti-tank traps once they got to know them. And so the gun apertures were constructed in concrete in three sections, each section tapering into a smaller section (like square loudspeakers) complete with a bevelled small wall around each tapering section, to allow the small shells or bullets to ricochet or bounce off these apertures and so prevent them from going inside and blasting the guns or killing the soldiers. All well thought out.

## **Those wonderful people**

After about 10 months in East London, we had orders from the police to pack up and prepare for a long journey East. Again we did not know where we were going and were met by the various police forces as we approached the big towns, telling the drivers where to proceed to. Eventually we could tell we were heading for the sea coast. Yes! we were right. The police here told us we were at Dover. We would have the shelling from France to deal with, because already there were streets of houses in ruins caused through the shells. None of us felt very happy about this but here we were, having to carry on making the usual repairs to the houses and council buildings.

Time had moved on rapidly, us men arriving in Dover in September 1944. There was such a vast amount of repair work to be done and these articulated vans and the equipment were so valuable the Government H.Q. in London decided that owing to the unexpected shelling it was too risky to have them exposed. So they were taken back to London. The local government authorities billeted us sixty men in an unoccupied school (all the children had been evacuated), supplying us with mattresses, pillows and blankets to make ourselves comfortable on the hard floor-boards. We settled ourselves in. The cook got busy and gave us a good meal. We were unable to go for a walk round,



owing to the darkness so we played cards, finally half-undressing and getting in between the blankets on the floor, hoping for a good night's sleep. Luckily we did. Next morning we had our breakfast, loaded our tools and equipment into our lorry taking us into the town centre where once there had been shops and houses.

We set to work carrying out the first aid repairs. Everything was going well us men not knowing what shelling was like. Suddenly there were vast explosions with the ground trembling beneath us. The air raid warden came running up to us workmen, telling us to follow him. He took us into the cliffs where they had dug out the chalk, and formed caves about 100 ft in from the hillside. We all bundled ourselves in, a little out of breath. He then told us that with shelling one got a salvo of shells, because with aircraft they got the warning of the engines humming a long way off and so were able to sound the alert warning - but with shelling no one knew when the shells were on the way until they exploded somewhere. Then the wardens would sound the alert siren making the people run to the shelters. Some were surface shelters and others if you were near were in the hills or cliffs. The "All Clear" sounded and out us men would come, going back to the damaged houses we had left, carrying on the good work until darkness set in. Along came our lorry, up into it we all got, taking us back to the school, which was our home - a quick wash and shave and down to a good hot meal. Afterwards some would write letters home, some would play cards or dominoes, while a few would go out and find the nearest public house.

We were settling down nicely in this school and after a few rough days at work again the police arrived, telling us all that they were very sorry but we had all got to clear out of the school because in two days' time there would be a large number of soldiers moving in. We would be moving into a very large house where a contingent of the Pioneer Corps had been billeted, but had now been drafted overseas. And so another move, with more upheaval.

We were taken through the town to the main Dover Road. Just outside Dover was a big house called "Westmount". In we all went, taking our bedding and tools in, made our beds up (on the floor again). After a wash and a meal we all explored this great large gentleman's house. We found our way down to the basement and into the wine cellars, with thick heavy slate shelves all round the walls where years ago they stored and placed their bottles of wine and spirits. Over the years the whole wine cellar and the slate shelves were covered in thick dirty cobwebs, in some places hanging down like curtains. We very soon left to let the spiders carry on, closing the heavy door behind us. After our supper we had a few games of cards and darts, finally half undressing and wishing each other a very goodnight. Out went the light.

We must have all dropped off to sleep for a few hours, when suddenly without any warning we were woken up as if a very bad storm had broken overhead. There were very loud explosions, also bright flashes of light, like lightning. The whole house trembled. The heavy wooden shutters at the windows were blown in, with the glass from the windows shattering all over us men laying on the floor. Thank the Lord! we were laying down on the floor. Otherwise, as we knew after all the commotion had died down,

some of us would have been injured with the flying glass.

We were so frightened and nervous as we attempted to get up, that we found we were unable to get up because in our fright we had twisted our blankets around us. When we did finally get to our feet, we gathered up our trousers and ran downstairs into the basement, the time being half-past two and dark, of course.

This was our first baptism of being shelled. As soon as daylight came, we got brooms and shovels, opened up the wine cellars, swept up all the cobwebs and dust, thoroughly cleaned the whole place up, went upstairs to where we had been sleeping, gathered up our bedding, took these downstairs, making our beds up on the slate shelves, hoping we would be more safe here, should there be any more shelling (and there was, naturally).

It was really terrible. Talk about being in the front line. We spoke and thought about our troops, what they must have been going through. We did get a lull every so often. You see we in Dover had three sets of heavy guns pointing at us from across the water with only 22 miles of sea between us and France. There were the guns at Calais. When these got red hot they would then open up the guns at Boulogne. Then to allow these two large gun sites to cool off, the Germans would roll out the big guns at Cap Gris-nez. This procedure went on until the Allies smashed the gun sites to pieces. The shells went miles inland.

Us chaps came back one day, only to find that a shell had dropped not far away, and exploded. The terrific blast had brought several ceilings down all over our bedding and blankets. After being out among this sort of devastation all day we were all very fed up, and so we set about finding the caves in the cliffs that had been dug to form protection shelters for the inhabitants who had refused to leave Dover and their homes. (Over half the people had been evacuated).

After a few enquiries, we were told that at the back of "Westmount", where we were living, we would have to climb a steep grassy bank, then we would see the large cave entrance. We all went to find this cave. After a climb we looked down the hill and saw the cave entrance.

We found that the authorities had dug a tunnel about 50 ft into the steep hill. Then we found two staggered concrete walls, called blast walls. The tunnel continued for about another 100 ft in, then two more staggered blast wall. My word! we were surprised to find several roads branching off into a massive cave.

We continued to walk in and eventually came into contact with many local inhabitants who were sleeping and living here. There were three-tier bunk beds fixed at one side of the tunnel with a gangway. At the other side were long wooden batten forms, secured to the floor. These were used by the people to put their clothes on, also to sit and talk. After a time we were shown around by a gentleman. The place was honey-combed with various tunnels. Some had shops selling the necessary foods and clothing etc. Then he

showed us the hospital where they would bring in the wounded from outside, who had unfortunately got caught up with the shelling, or had been dug out of blasted buildings. The wounded and dying would be attended to by doctors and nurses, washed and made ready to be evacuated when there was a lull in the shelling. They were then taken out of the caves on stretchers, put in to waiting ambulances and rushed off to hospital further inland.

Everything in the caves was well organised and controlled by the wardens. All us men asked the warden if it was possible for us to come into the caves and sleep on any vacant bunks because being out all day on repair work and having to put up with the daytime shelling, we needed a good night's sleep. He fixed us all up, this making us more settled and content.

When we returned to the cave at night, the people in the caves would gather around us men asking us about the various streets (where their homes were). Had they been shelled? Naturally they were all very anxious. Some would run out of the caves quickly and visit their homes to satisfy themselves. A good many returned brokenheartedly, telling the other people that their homes were in ruins. We did our best to comfort them.

As us men left the caves to commence work we would pass the nurses going on day duty to the hospital inside the caves. On returning at night we would meet the night nurses going on night duty. After several days us men became very friendly with the others, stopping and having a little chat, also a laugh or two, trying to make our drab lives a little more happy.

The people living in the caves dug out of the cliffs would pass the time away doing knitting, crochet work, embroidery, painting pictures, reading library books from a library in the caves, talking and having a sing-song (now and again).

There was one most interesting pastime carried out by one or two people. The older men would leave the cave, in between a lull in shelling, making their way to some of the blasted houses, not very far away from the cave. They would search among the rubble, picking out the largest pieces of glass, which had been blown out of the windows.

While these men were searching another man would volunteer to cycle down to the town and buy three or four small tins of black paint, also one inch paint brushes. They would return to the cave, wash and clean the glass, cut the glass to the required size, about 9.5" x 14". They would then make up in their minds the picture they wanted to paint on the glass. It was only the outline they would paint with a small paint brush - the most popular pictures were a Dutch girl and boy, because they would make an ideal pair of pictures. Over a long period they had also collected tin foil of different colours, taken from cigarette packets or chocolate wrappers. The clothing of the Dutch boy and girl were completed with the usual patches on the boy's baggy trousers. Of course both wearing large wooden clogs. After completing the filling in with tin foil, they would paint the whole piece of glass with black paint, making the Dutch girl and boy stand out well, with the glistening foil forming their clothing.

When I left Dover, an old lady and gentleman gave me a pair of these pictures, which I am very proud of, bringing back memories of these wonderful people who suffered so much.

All of a sudden, to everyone's dismay and delight, on May 8th 1945 the war came to an end. This day was called VE day because it meant that the war in Europe had ceased, the Germans giving in on an unconditional surrender the previous day. Bonfires were lit, church bells pealed out and crowds celebrated by dancing in the streets throughout Britain. What a joy it was to us men at Dover to see the people flock out of the caves hugging each other, although many brokenhearted people returned back to the streets only to find that their homes were a mass of ruins. Of course, these people had to return to the caves in the cliffs and carry on living until the authorities could find them more comfortable accommodation.

Dover itself became alive with excitement, the pubs doing a roaring trade. Us men were gathered up into the arms of the excited women because we became well known for the work we had been doing during the shelling. All the various services, doctors, nurses, ambulance men were invited to a civic reception held in Dover Town Hall. This was an unforgettable event. I will never forget the Mayor and the councillors who gave us a wonderful time.

After VE Day, us repair men were called together to be told to carry on the same as usual until we received further instructions from London as to future arrangements. Myself, being a charge-hand, also two others, had orders from our Supervisor to pack our cases and to proceed to Fareham to take over an ex-Army camp and supervise sixty German prisoners of war who were being drafted here, to live in the Nissen huts. But the camp had to be fenced in with poles and barbed wire so as to keep any Germans from escaping. This was the job they had to carry out and we had to see they did the job right.

We eventually arrived at Fareham, made ourselves comfortable in a Nissen hut. The same day two large lorries arrived loaded with all the necessary materials for fencing the camp in. The two drivers plus their two mates unloaded the lorries, us charge-hands checking everything and signing the necessary papers, because as we were still working for the Government (Ministry of Works) everything has to be in triplicate. We had been handed a sealed envelope from Headquarters (King William St, London) telling us that the German prisoners would be arriving under armed guard two days later, also the armed guard would be staying until the Germans had completed fencing themselves in.

There were already the necessary kitchens and living quarters left by the Army who had vacated the camp, meantime a welfare officer arrived, also a cook and kitchen staff of six men (civilians). The cook and staff got to work and before darkness set in we were enjoying our first very good meal. We were all set now for the great and difficult task of the arrival of the German prisoners of War. We were not looking forward to this new experience - but it had to be carried out.

The morning arrived when in the distance we could hear the powerful noise of Army lorries getting nearer to the camp. Eventually four covered lorries arrived. Out jumped the armed guard. The Germans alighted, lined up, being marched to a large double Nissen hut, where they were all given a good meal, and after settling down, we found them very co-operative. A register had been handed to our supervisor by the sergeant of the guard.

The interpreter called the names from the register, handing this book to the sergeant proving all was correct. The prisoners were shown to their allotted huts, then told that the rest of the day they were free to have a wash and brush up. At 9 o'clock, they were given a good supper and the hut doors were then locked until the morning with the four armed guards on duty being relieved by another four guards every four hours.

The next morning us charge-hands were to take over with the guards still patrolling. Again the Germans were lined up, again the register called. Through the interpreter we asked the Germans if there were any carpenters and joiners and if so, would they step forward? Five came forward. All the rest were told they would have to do the ground work, digging holes for the posts to go in, labouring generally, assisting the various tradesmen.

We found them very good workers. There were set times for lunch and dinner. Finally at the end of the day, having had their tea they were free to do as they wished (of course, within reason). Before we left them the tradesmen were told that they would receive a small amount of money at the end of the week for their knowledge and experience. I wish to add that to each tradesman we issued a complete set of tools - the tools necessary to carry out the required job and all these had to be checked in at the end of each day and the next morning, the same procedure was carried out. The very next morning when the German interpreter asked for the various tradesmen to step forward to receive their tools, us charge-hands had a shock because we expected the same number to come forward as the previous morning. Instead of a total of 13 tradesmen, we had a total of 23. We could not understand this, but through the interpreter we very soon found out the reason: during the evening the various tradesmen had told the others that they were getting some wages because they were doing skilled work. After questions we very soon decided who were the tradesmen, reducing the number down by well over a third. This being settled, we issued the tools to the various tradesmen and the day's work commenced.

Within one month - the prisoners had worked hard - the wooden posts had been set in place (complete with an over-hanging bracket) the barbed wire fixed to same, forming various small compounds to break up the number of Germans getting together so that, should there have been any trouble, a smaller number of men could be dealt with rather than a large number.

Before the completion of the entire camp, all the prisoners were receiving wages which made a complete change in their attitudes to us, also their mates.

The war with Japan was still being fought until the American Atomic Bomb was produced. This was a bomb in which nuclear fission provides the explosive force. A laboratory to develop such a bomb was set up in Los Alamos, New Mexico in 1943 and produced the bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945. Each bomb was equal to about 20,000 tons of TNT (tri-nitro-toluene). German attempts to develop an Atom Bomb were frustrated in 1943 when R.A.F. mosquitoes destroyed the heavy water plant the Germans had set up secretly in Central Norway. The Bomb eventually brought the Japanese to a complete surrender in August 1945. This day was known as VJ-Day, victory over Japan. Us civilians were asked to join the celebrations at Fareham, and Porchester, with the church bells pealing out and the local inhabitants dancing and singing and giving us men a wonderful time.

Soon after this I was unfortunately called home by telegram because my wife had been suddenly rushed to the General Hospital in Elm Grove, suffering from a strangulated hernia, leaving my two sons with no parents to look after them.

I had to see the National Service Office at Fareham to get permission to leave the camp because us men were still controlled by war-time regulations, although the war was over. I showed the officer the telegram I had got from my wife's doctor in Brighton. This being sufficient for him to grant me leave of absence, he issued me with a railway warrant to Brighton also telling me to take all my belongings with me, in case the war being over now I would be unable to return. If this were the case I must contact the National Service Officer at Brighton and get my final release, also he would notify the Ministry of Works in London and obtain my Insurance and Employment cards, combined with all my back wages.

After having settled this, I eventually got away saying goodbye to the German prisoners of war, also my mates, then making my way back to the railway station, anxious to get back home to see my wife and children, and take over control of my home until the wife arrived home from hospital. I had already sent a telegram to my eldest son telling him I would be arriving home sometime in the evening, which I finally did. In fact, my two sons had been waiting at Brighton station for about three hours and weren't they pleased to see me, especially as I hadn't been home for about eight months. I decided that we would all go up to the hospital, although the time was about 9.30 p.m. We all got the bus up to the General Hospital, went in, saw a nurse who asked me if she could help. I told her the reason of my visit. She went to the ward and after a few minutes the matron came along telling me I was unable to see the wife as she wasn't in a fit state having, a few hours before, been through the operation. On telling her where I had come from and that I hadn't seen her for about eight months, she said, "Ah well! in those circumstances you can certainly see her, but be prepared, she probably won't know you". She took me into the ward, which was in half darkness, put the screens around the bed and left me, but I was happy and satisfied I had seen my wife. We all left the hospital, arriving home about ten thirty p.m. Us three mucked in and had some supper, all feeling a lot happier and then off to bed.

The wife made rapid progress and after about two weeks she was back home, making us a complete family again. After about a week, she was getting about quite well and gaining strength every day. Today, hospital life and attention is far different to thirty years ago, because all this happened in 1945 (December). At the time of writing it is 1975. After having been home for five weeks, I had to start looking for work again and pick up my trade. Fortunately, work was very plentiful. A lot of repair work still had to be done as the war had only just come to an end, quite apart from other important building work that had been put off owing to the war.

### PART 3

## **You can't win in the building trade 1946-68**

I am now returning back to civilian life to tell some interesting and true stories up to my retirement on May 10th 1968. In 1946 the Government introduced the Conscription Act, compelling all young men of 18 to report for active military service. Our own son John reported and at the age of 18 years and 3 months he received his call up papers, details of where to report, plus a railway warrant. As he wished to join the RAF he eventually reported to the prescribed RAF depot. He went through a very tough training, and had the usual passing out parade, being made a corporal. He moved around to many different camps in various parts of England, thoroughly enjoying the life for two years, from May 1946 to May 1948.

He then received his demob papers, was fitted out with a complete suit of clothing, underwear and shoes, and returned home with a manly outlook on life, well-disciplined and upright. After one month's holiday he once again returned to his job as an upholsterer. He met and corresponded with the daughter of the family who gave me hospitality in their home during the dark days of the bombing, in Leytonstone in East London. They eventually got married in July 1949, and have three children: David born September 1951, Robert born June 1954, and Sheila born February 1959.

Our other son Kenneth was called up under the Compulsory National Service Act to serve two years in the armed forces. At the age of 18 years and three months, in July 1950, he also joined the Royal Air Force. Both brothers had been in the Air Training Corps before being called up. Kenneth did very well, taking great interest, and finally passed out as a wireless operator, under Air Traffic Control. He returned home in May 1952 upright and full of ambition, ready to face civilian life. He also met a young lady while serving in Uxbridge (a large RAF depot) and continued to correspond with her on his return home. He eventually got married to her in May 1953. They had three children. Unfortunately they lost the first baby. The second, Colin, was born March 1958, and Barbara was born February 1960. Between them we have got five grandchildren.

## **I was very lucky**

As I have already mentioned, work in the building industry was very plentiful after the war ended (quite a change to the years before the war). In fact various practical

tradesmen were becoming scarce, this creating competition, with many builders offering a penny or 2 pence up to 6 pence per hour more than the local rate of pay to get the men they wanted. Now Trade Unionism was very weak in the South and so there was more freedom for builders and workers to please themselves.

I was working for a local builder who had the job of removing all the old asphalt from a large roof on a very high building at the corner of Waterloo Street. When the men were removing and breaking up the old asphalt they found the boarding underneath same was rotten and in some places had fallen through. They notified the builder and he sent me there (because this was a carpenter's job) to inspect the job, also to measure up for the materials needed.

I left the yard with my tool bag and made my way down to Waterloo Street. Well! when I got there I saw a sixty foot ladder and on top of this was roped another ten foot ladder to get to the top of the building. As I was weighing up the job, one of the roof repair men was coming down this ladder. As he got near the middle the ladder sagged and sprang into the building and out again.

I don't mind admitting, I didn't fancy going up this long sagging ladder. This roofing hand said, "Hello! carpenter, you've got a right job up there. I'll send your tool bag up on the Jenny-wheel". He put my bag on the hook, shouted up to his mate on the roof (this roof was a flat roof, with a parapet wall around it) to take my bag off the hook, up went the bag, and me wishing it was me going up. Ah well! I thought to myself, I mustn't let him think I am nervous about going up this ladder.

I put my foot on the first rung boldly and up I climbed, not looking one way or the other. To look down would have been fatal. I was nearing the centre of the ladder and this, with my weight, started springing in and out again, giving me an awful feeling of fear because it seemed as if the building was coming and going away from me. Keep going Bert, I said to myself. Keep going, don't look down! Eventually I arrived at the top, leaned over the parapet wall and fell head first over and onto the flat roof, thoroughly exhausted with fear. The two men who were working didn't see me fall over - wasn't I pleased! After a few minutes I settled down and was able now to talk to these roofing men just as if nothing had happened.

I set to work inspecting the work to be carried out, also measuring up and ascertaining the amount of boarding needed. Suddenly, the man down below who had been taking the basketfuls of rubbish sent down off the jenny-wheel, shouted up to us men on the roof, "Dinner-time - come on, let's 'ave yer". Oh dear! looking down the long sagging ladder, my heart jumped into my mouth. Over the parapet and on to the ladder went the two roofing men. When they had reached the pavement they shouted up to me to come down. I looked down nervously and shouted that I was coming - but Bert wasn't - although I wanted my dinner, which was cheese sandwiches and an apple in my jacket down below. I looked all around the various flat roofs, clambered up one slightly sloping roof, looked over the other side, and spotted a roof skylight open about three houses away. I immediately made my way to this open skylight and on looking in I saw a lovely



thick carpeted landing at the top of a large carpeted staircase.

I decided to chance it and jump down on to this landing, knowing full well that once I was on this landing I could walk down the stairs, letting myself out by the front door. I opened the skylight wider, letting my legs go in first and hanging on to the frame-work for dear life. I let myself go, swinging in mid-air until I gained enough courage to jump. I landed in a doubled-up position on the carpeted landing. At the same time there came a lady's voice, shouting nervously, "Who's that up there?". I looked down over the hand-rail saying, "Don't worry Madam, I am working on the roof at the corner where that very long ladder is. I went up it nervously and can't face coming down it to have my dinner". I suppose she could tell by my white face, also the way I spoke that I was speaking the truth. Wasn't I pleased when she said, "Now look here, from now on I give you my permission to use the front door at any time when you are working on that high roof".

Another interesting job I carried out was in a very old Parish Church with a lot of history attached to it. A large section of old oak panelling had come away from the stone-work inside the church, being very dangerous for the people sitting in the pew at this point. I had rather a lot of hard knocking to do, drilling the stone work and filling the holes with wood plugs to screw the oak panelling back into place.

I would be banging away when a voice would whisper in my ear saying that the service for a funeral would be carried out in about ten minutes and would I please sit down and take part by listening. But not only would there be a funeral, there would be a christening ceremony too. One day a lovely wedding took place and the guests saw me sitting down watching the proceedings. They could see I was surrounded by timber and sawdust, also rubbish on the floor. The service came to an end, when over came the Best Man and gave me a pound note to buy a bottle of drink and remember the young couple I had seen get married. I never expected this, but it was very acceptable.

I eventually completed fixing the panelling but during the week I was there, the Vicar carried out five funerals, two weddings and one christening. All very interesting during my working hours, but my work had to be done as well.

During another quiet spell in the building trade (these would set in very unexpectedly) I was unemployed and signing on at the Labour Exchange as usual. I would read the "Evening Argus". A reporter had got to know that there would be various repairs and alterations also a large decorating programme to be carried out at the Regent Dance Hall, which I had helped build around 1921. Having read the reporter's story, I said to my wife that I would keep my eyes open. As soon as the lorries drew up loaded with ladders, planks, steps, bags of cement and plaster, and large cans of paint I knew they were going to start work. This was after going up and down North Street every day, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon for a week.

I managed to have a chat with one of the men. I told him I was a carpenter and joiner by trade and needed a job. He introduced me to the foreman, who took me inside. We had a very interesting talk and after asking me a few practical questions, he said he was

going to make an appointment for me to see the architect next day, at about 11 a.m. As I was the first carpenter to make inquiries about the job, I might stand a chance.

The next morning I met the foreman who after a few minutes called me over to the interview with the architect. He sat at a table covered with plans and specifications of the work to be carried out, and shook me by the hand saying, "You are a carpenter and joiner I suppose". He then showed me the plans, pointed up to the semi-circular ceiling saying, "You see those three large glass chandeliers. Well", he said, "the two end ones are coming down because the cables and electric wiring are getting old and I consider they are not safe. After these are taken down there will be two large blank bays in the ceiling, one at each end. What I want you to do is to look at the plans with me." My word, everything looked alright on paper!

One plan showed the existing ceiling as it was, the next plan showed the two blank bays after the two end chandeliers had been removed and on the final plan the architect had drawn how he wanted the two bays to look. After I had pondered over the plan, trying to imagine the finish, as I looked up at the ceiling which was a long way up, he said, "Do you think you can produce up there what I have drawn on the plan?". I answered him by asking a few questions, saying yes I would. He said, "Well the job is yours. There will be no actual hurry because you will be working on a high adjustable tubular scaffold which will be on wheels, so that you can arrange it to suit yourself.

I commenced work in the afternoon to allow me to settle down and also to get used to the plans and read through the specifications. In the meantime, the other men were busy erecting the adjustable scaffold (on wheels). By the time they had built it up to the required height I went over to have a look. Well! I had a shock when I saw the height of it; the scaffold, as far as I can remember, was about 30' square and about 45' high at the centre because the whole ceiling was a slight semi-circular shape, which made my job a little more difficult. Up the ladder I went, having had my tool-bag and cutting stool pulled up on a jenny-wheel. I now had to measure up for the necessary materials and so with the help of my mate, also working to the plans, I eventually wrote down the materials required.

After working out, plus looking up at these black empty square bays (the large chandelier having been taken down) my mate said he would have to sit down for a while because the sway of the high scaffold as we walked about had made him come over giddy. After a time, I began to feel the same symptoms. I sat down with him for a while before it took hold of me. I completed the measuring up so we decided to get down to the floor. He went down the ladder first and after a very steady descent he arrived on the floor and waited for me. I got down the ladder alright, but when I went to walk across the dance floor I was swaying, feeling slightly drunk. My mate was still sitting on the floor. I was told by the foreman not to worry, because after a time we would get used to it. He said he had to pass through this stage while having to work on swinging cradles and so he gave me confidence - and he was right - because this was proved later.

The timber was ordered plus the various screws and nails and all arrived the next day

because as the builders were very slack, the timber merchants were able to deliver the timber on time. Half of the amount ordered was hauled up and onto the scaffold. Up we both went, knowing the feeling we might get, but after a time we were able to cope.

I cut the necessary fixing blocks, driving these tight in between the iron work. I then had to make and form as frames various shapes such as large and small squares, oblongs, triangles, crosses, diamonds, also squares ricked out of square, screwing all the above alternately on to the 7" semi-circular criss-crossed boards.

Of course all the above work looked very massive being so close to same on the scaffold, but after all the woodwork had been painted various pastel colours, and the scaffold removed, on looking up now, one could see the artistic finish of the two end-ceiling panels completed. The architect plus the heads of the Regent staff were well satisfied with the work I had carried out, and I was thanked by one and all. I have obtained an actual photograph of the dance hall ceiling that will give the reader a more detailed impression.

While men were pushing and wheeling the heavy scaffolding over to the other end of the dance floor, the architect came in and looked straight up to the large bay I had just finished. He went around in circles thoroughly inspecting my work. All the while he was looking up I was sweeping up the odds and ends of timber I had dropped, also the sawdust and when he wasn't looking at me, I was looking at him, just wondering what he was thinking of the job. He then called the foreman over and had a good talk with him, pointing at this and that. I thought to myself, I don't want to have to get up there again, but thank the Lord, he came over to me saying how pleased he was with the whole set up, also how well I had carried out the work according to his plan.

All this praise and thanks never made my head swell because us tradesmen in the building industry very rarely get any praise apart from the builder saying, "You've made a good job of so and so, but haven't you been a long time doing it?". And should you answer back (and work was a bit scarce) they would say, "I think you had better finish up tonight". But they would always wait (before saying this) until a very tricky job was completed. They were proper inconsiderate devils in my day. But all us men were mates and quite used to this treatment.

After the two bays on the ceiling were completed, the painters and decorators painted the whole of the ceiling and the artistic designs were painted in different colours. Anyone remembering the dance hall as it really was would be staggered with the marvellous transformation. The bandstand itself was set in an alcove and this alcove wall at the back of the stage had a lovely picture (I think at this time it was an Eastern scene, complete with palm trees, sand and an oasis, also, a bright sunny sky complete with fluffy white clouds.

This was carried out by an experienced artist. The way to set the picture out on the wall was very interesting. He would draw the various objects on this cardboard, get his

scissors, cut around the outlines, placing each one at different positions and sticking same lightly on the wall, getting a spray gun with the required coloured paint and spray the paint lightly around the cut-out objects, taking away and replacing them again when required on top of other cut-outs.

He had about 15 different cut-outs to complete the picture. As to the spraying the technique he used was spraying very heavy on one spot, then gradually fading out lightly into thin air with many different colours. After removing all the cut-outs, and filling in where necessary, with various coloured paints, the whole scene he had produced was outstanding and had a wonderful peaceful appearance. But I am sorry to state, that after 4 months in the dance hall, there was no more work for me there.

I would like to add that after about 25 years, when the dance hall, and the Regent Cinema were getting well attended audiences, also giving value for money, this fine building is now demolished (1974) and will be replaced in about 22 years' time with a large block of offices.

In the four months whilst working at the Regent, I am glad to say that building work in Brighton and district had greatly improved and from about 1950, a tradesman could get a job anywhere.

My next interesting job I would like to write about was when Tom Arnold the great musical play producer set up his own building and contracting business at Worthing (Sussex). He had the contract of general repairs and redecoration of the West Pier, also taking up a large part of rotten decking and renewing same.

I got the job there with quite a number of carpenters, carrying out the necessary woodwork repairs. We all worked together in pairs. After about five weeks working on the Pier, my mate and I were called into the office. The foreman asked us, did we know who we were working for. We said we weren't quite sure. "Have you heard of Tom Arnold the play producer who puts on the Christmas Pantomimes at the Brighton Hippodrome and the Ice Shows in West Street?" (The Hippodrome is still in Middle Street being used now as a Bingo hall, but the Ice Show building has been pulled down.) We said we had heard of him by name but had never seen him. "I don't suppose you will ever see him", he said, "He has now bought the old Badminton Hall, at the Hove cricket ground, a massive big building, and after you both have finished here I'll take you out there, showing you what you have to do".

We had been working there for about 3 weeks when a smart-looking gentleman came in looking at some papers and plans. He saw us two carpenters and came over to us telling us that he was the general manager for Tom Arnold and that he would be coming down now and again to see how the work was progressing. We thought that the next time he came we would ask him what the place was going to be when the repairs and alterations were completed, because the foreman hadn't been told. We never saw much of the foreman, he simply left us to it. This suited us, because some foremen were a proper nuisance to the workers and were never satisfied.

Unexpectedly this Works Manager came in again and called us two carpenters over to him saying that Tom Arnold had his wood-working and scenery workshops at Stratford, East London, which made and repaired scenery for the local pantomimes.

He told us that Tom Arnold had bought this old Badminton Hall to transfer some of his staff, and also most of the scenery from Stratford to cut down expense. He put a proposition to us, asking us that when the building was completed, with the necessary woodworking machinery brought down from London would we be prepared to work with him, under a new foreman and his staff, who were going to train us to make and repair scenery? There would be an increase in our pay, another 3d per hour and after we had proved we were able to cope with this new situation, we would be on probation for twelve months. Should we prove to be satisfactory, we would have to join the Theatrical Workers Union. We already belonged to the A.S.W. (Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers) but would have to switch over to the new union because, apart from being members, the rate of pay was a lot more than in the building trade. With all this being told us by this manager, probably we would have a more settled future so we readily agreed. He seemed very pleased because as we were carpenters and joiners he knew there wouldn't be any difficulty for us to adopt our wood-working experience to the new conditions. He gave us a large form to fill in, making us members for a probationary period. Also this encouraged the union members who we would have to work with to feel more helpful to teaching us their trade.

In the meantime, after our interview in the afternoon about nine men came in, all looking like fishermen, because they were wearing the usual fisherman's jersey. We learnt afterwards, they were going to be part-time scenery shifters, working for the firm in between their fishing business at the Brighton Market.

Eventually the Hall was ready for the scenery and machinery and other materials. From now on the large lorries were arriving day after day, with lorry loads of scenery and other materials. The new foreman was very strict and stern, having everything arranged for the removal of certain pieces of scenery for a particular show at a certain time, because like all stage shows, everything is timed. In came six carpenter's working benches, complete with drawers to put your tools in, and vices for holding timber, allowing you to shape and cut the various designs. All scenery was joined up on the stage by hinges with the centre pin removed - when placed into position you would inter-sect these two pieces of hinge, then slide a special shaped pin through the centre to connect them together. You see, all this was done to allow for speedy erecting or dismantling.

We both found, as the weeks went by, being taught the trade by the other three joiners, that we were settling down well. When a show was being put on at the Hippodrome or an Ice Show at West Street, we would go out to these places with the other men and help to erect the scenery. Apart from the jobs we had to carry out it was very interesting to be on the stage and to look up into the flies which were a terrific height combined with all the various wire cables, wheels, ropes and metal tracks where all the necessary canvas backs were painted with country scenes, trees, cottages and houses.

We both well remembered an incident that happened on the ice. The show was a Christmas pantomime on ice. We had to screw a very large angel into the corner of the canvas proscenium. On the ice they had erected an extending high platform on wheels, with a wooden handrail fixed around the platform for safety. The sceneshifters, who were fishermen, said, "Here you are, Bert and Jack. Here are the angels and the screws, up you go while we hold the platform from moving on the ice". We both looked up at the platform and also at the two high corners of the canvas. Neither of us fancied going up to fix these angels, but it was our job and it had to be done.

My mate said he would go up. He took his screwdriver and two large screws up with him, and here we were standing on the ice looking up at Jack, watching him fix one of these angels. They weren't heavy, being made of very thin plywood. He took hold of the large angel, leaned over to the canvas to put the screw in, when all of a sudden, he gradually went down on his knees. After a few seconds, he shouted down, "I can't do it Bert, you'll have to have a go". Well, Jack came down looking very white and the other men asked him what was the matter. He said that as he went to put pressure on his screwdriver the large canvas very very slowly swung away from him, giving him a terrible feeling of giddiness. Well, come on Bert, the two angels have to be fixed, and so up I go with my screwdriver and two screws. I got onto the platform, took hold of the angel quite boldly, put the screw through the hole, leaned over and before I could use my screwdriver the canvas swung away from me very very slowly. My, what a terrible sensation. I didn't know whether the platform was running away on the ice, or whether the whole building was moving, and so I did the same as Jack, crouched down onto the platform until I got my nerve back again and got back down on the ice.

The men laughed. One of the fishermen volunteered to go up and fix the first one because he said he was used to the roll of a boat and the sea, and he didn't think there would be any problem if it was only a matter of screwing two screws into the holes already drilled. Well up he went, got onto the high platform, got hold of the lovely angel, simply leaned over the handrail and with the canvas slowly swaying to and fro he screwed the two screws in. With the offending angel in position, he said, "Now, while I am in the mood, let's wheel the high platform over to the other side, and I'll screw the other angel into position". We all pushed and shoved the platform into the required spot, up went our fisherman friend, with the angel, screws and screwdriver, and he finished the job in no time. My mate and I gave him a packet of Woodbine Cigarettes for all his help.

We were settling down well in the workshops. As the place was roomy and massive, Tom Arnold got an ice engineer to construct an ice rink in the Hall, right opposite to where we were working, so that the ice artistes could carry out their rehearsals.

What us chaps saw made us realise what a hard life acting can be. We hear today how hard the stage life is for men and women when they reach the top. They have worked hard and rehearsed three or four times a day to get there. They earn every penny they get. How fortunate us joiners were, working on the benches and at the same time

seeing these ice rehearsals going on and listening to the lovely music that had to fit in with the gliding on the ice.

As time went on we said to the foreman how did he think we were progressing as theatrical tradesmen. He asked us how long we had been there. We said 10 months. He then said he'd have a talk with the men we had been working with and he would tell us the verdict. We had only got another two months to serve and were looking forward to joining the Theatrical Workers' Union which would give us another shilling per hour and also, the great thing was, have a more permanent job.

We carried on for another three or four days, anxiously waiting for the foreman to give us his opinion. He called us into his office, telling us we had made great progress, but (we thought here it comes, something has gone wrong) the governor (Tom Arnold) had had a good offer from the C.A.V. (a large engineering firm who already had a large factory unit in Portland Road, Hove) to buy the entire Badminton Hall, as a further extension to their factory, owing to a large increase in their business. The offer we heard ran into thousands of pounds, so Tom Arnold had definitely decided to accept and sell the entire premises, taking the whole stock back to London, and us two carpenters and joiners unfortunately getting our Cards, a hand shake all round, with them saying how sorry they were that our job had come to an end suddenly.

My mate and I said you can't win in the building trade, no matter how one tries. Ah well, this is life, and so back to the Labour Exchange, not knowing how the unemployment situation was. We found it not too good unfortunately, and so I had to look around once again.

I was very lucky, and was only out of a job for one day, because I met a mate of mine (a bricklayer by trade) who was working for a local builder who had just secured a contract from the Brighton Town Council to build on at the back of 31 council houses in St. Helen's Road (leading off Elm Grove) to form an up-to-date bathroom with an indoor toilet - something the tenants had never had.

This bricklayer told me to go to this builder's offices, mentioning his name, because work in the building industry was now beginning to get very busy, and a lot of strange men were coming into the building trade saying they were carpenters and bricklayers - what us tradesmen called "chancers". Unfortunately one could never tell if they were tradesmen or not until one gave them a start and it wasn't very long before they were rumbled. The most aggravating thing was the builder had to give these men a day's pay plus the cost of an unemployment and insurance stamp. These "chancers" were a terrible expense to any builder and so, if any practical employee working for a builder could recommend a certain tradesman, he was welcomed, also promising this tradesman an extra one penny an hour (this was a lot of money those days) should he prove himself a tradesman. So through this bricklayer friend of mine I found a job and got a start.

Of course all the tenants had been warned of this addition being built on the backs of

their homes. Between all of us men mucking in together, we formed a complete working platform right from the first house to the last house. From this construction of steel work, the bricklayers built the walls, setting in a window frame. When they had got to roof height, about 7'6" high, us carpenters had got all the roof timbers cut to length. These the bricklayers built in. Also, before the walls were laid on the frame of steel wood, the ends of each 6"x 2" joist were automatically built in.

There were four bricklayers, four carpenters and seven labourers. The four bricklayers were split up. Two would carry on building the walls. Of the other two, one would be inside house number one, the other in house number two. The staircases were fixed to the outside wall, a small flight of stairs went up to the landing, and from this landing a doorway was cut out of the brickwork with the floor of the landing being the level of the new floor in the addition. Us carpenters had worked this out in every house, because sometimes there was a variation in the measurements and levels, and we had to make sure there was no step formed. That's why we had to be careful that when the bricklayers broke through the landing floor it was level with the floor in the new bathroom.

While the bricklayers were busy knocking out the brickwork to form new doorways, and the labourers were clearing away the brick rubble, us carpenters were busy cutting and nailing down rough boards on the roofs and preparing boards forming the floors in the new bathrooms. Everything was working well with no holdups. As each house became finished structurally, the roofs were made watertight by the plumbers, covering same with sheet copper. One length of rainwater guttering was fixed on the front fascia board complete with the necessary rainwater pipe going down into the drain in the yard.

These houses were built in blocks: the first block was numbered 1 to 6, the second block 7 to 20, the third block 21 to 26, the last block 27 to 31. To each house had been added a bath/toilet and wash-basin, giving the tenant a great improvement to their living standards, with a new doorway leading off from the staircase landing, allowing them access to the toilet instead of having to go outside in all weathers. All these bathroom additions were built on in pairs, with a parting wall in the centre.

Yet again when this job came to an end the builder had no other work for us to follow on with, and so, the same old system - our cards and wages, having once again to look for another job. What an unsettled life! But with all our ups and downs, also meeting fresh mates and different people, we accepted the life and had to make the most of it. I am writing about our struggles and the unemployment we had to put up with. The building industry all over the country has gone right back, over the years, to the days of vast unemployment. This year, being 1975, I must add, the outlook for the present unemployed is much brighter because they are getting Social Security benefits and other assistance, whereas we only had the dole money. But I suppose, as the old saying was, "What you never had you never missed".

As the years went on most local builders had no large contracts to carry out, only a lot of maintenance and jobbing work, and most carpenters do not like jobbing work



because you have quite a lot of walking around to do going from one small job to another, measuring up, going back to the builder's yard and getting the materials required. I myself have never disliked jobbing and maintenance work, because the builders or their foremen would have many phone calls, also customers calling in at their offices, and every request for a carpenter was written down on special jobbing sheets in triplicate or duplicate. I have been given many jobbing sheets (probably ten to fifteen) going from one job to another, and never once going back to the office until I had completed the whole lot.

Of course, apart from this, jobbing work entailed a lot of writing because for every job carried out I had to write in detail the work carried out and the materials used. This is what other carpenters hated, or they couldn't put into words what they had done. All the writing had to be done by you because no one else knew what had been done, and so from the jobbing sheets that I handed in the office staff were able to make out the typed statement of the work done plus materials used, letting the customer know what they were paying for as they read the bill.

From 1966 onwards, work became very plentiful. Various people were buying dilapidated old houses and modernising them. In fact, there was so much work to be done a lot of chancers got to work. A lot of these men had run out of the dole money, and they didn't care how many builders they worked for, because the law was on the chancers' side. All they wanted was 13 insurance stamps on their cards, giving them the opportunity of going back and picking up the Dole money again. This was the way they sponged on the genuine workers.

### **As I write one story another comes to mind**

I remember working for a builder who had a contract to build fourteen high-class houses near the Seven Dials. The foreman in charge of this job had already completed nine of these houses, with the new owners in full occupation. In the second house a doctor had bought it, reporting to the foreman that the mirror which had been fixed on the wall in the bathroom had cracked across the top right hand corner, making it unsafe, and he was to send another carpenter down to this house to take down the broken mirror and to refix a new one - at the same time telling the carpenter to take great care and not break it because he had only got one left and they were very difficult to obtain.

Away went this carpenter with the new mirror, but he was unlucky. He had the misfortune to accidentally break the new mirror. When he told the foreman what had happened he really lost his temper, using a lot of swear words which I dare not write. He even went so far as to sack him. He got his wages and cards from the office and gave these to the carpenter, who swore at the foreman and left the site. I myself was fixing the roof rafters when up on to the scaffold came the foreman, and he said to me in a very stern manner, "Bert, I want you to go down to the doctor's house to fix the mirror. He had two other carpenters and each has broken a mirror, so I want you to take great care". I packed my tool bag, the necessary tools required, also the last new mirror under my arm.

I arrived at the house and rang the doorbell, and the doctor's wife let me in. I went upstairs to the bathroom, unfixed the broken mirror from the wall, replugged the wall, and placed a rubber washer at each corner where the dome head screw had to go, so as to keep the mirror clear of the wall. How pleased I was I had the new mirror screwed to the wall. But unfortunately the mirror was still a little loose, so very gently I screwed each screw a little more to stop the mirror from chattering as you cleaned it. Oh dear! What a shock - it had to happen - from the screw hole right across to the corner the glass had cracked. I kept calm because I had this gift of keeping calm under any circumstances.

I packed up my tool bag, saying to myself, well, I won't unpack these tools again. I left the bathroom door open for the foreman to see the mirror on the wall, as he got to the top of the stairs. I picked up my tool bag and left the house, walking back up the road. I had just got to the hut which was the foreman's office, when he saw me through the window and came out saying "Everything all right Bert"? I answered him firmly, saying "Yes, I think it's all right this time, Dave, but would you come down with me to make sure you're satisfied".

So we strolled down again to the doctor's house. He had a key, opened the door and we walked in. I let him go in first. Up the stairs we went. My word! when he saw the broken mirror the language was terrible, with the air turning blue. "Ah well, Dave," I said, "If you sack me, you can't sack my brother." He turned round to me and said, "I don't know your brother". "Well you can't sack him then can you, he don't work for you!" He saw the funny side of my remark and burst out laughing, saying, "You don't seem to worry or care, and so for your cheek and calmness, I'm not going to sack you. Go on, get up the road and back to your roofing job". So that was that.

The job lasted another eight months, the builder not having any more work to carry on with, and the cards and wages were handed me once again. Leaving the foreman with a handshake, home I went, having to look for another job next morning. In these days, they stood you off, any time or any day. No such thing as two weeks' notice as there is today.

Going back over the years, as I write these different stories, other memories return.

Everyone knows and has probably at some time or another used the underground arches leading off Trafalgar Street, up and into the railway station (via two flights of steps). These arches were strengthened, and the floors of the above booking office were supported by solid concrete beams. All this work was carried out and the two wide flights of steps were constructed long before we broke through the floors above. Everything had to be completed, all the tiling plus the many gents' toilets with electric light leads. The strain on our eyes was very great, more so when we went out into the daylight. Carpenters, bricklayers, labourers, concrete gangs, were working unbeknown to the general public for weeks and weeks, plus tons of chalk was dug out.

When the day came to break through the above floors, crowds of people were amazed to see the magic opening-up of a grand tiled entrance and arches that are used today by many thousands of railway travellers making their way either down to Trafalgar Street or the other way round up the steps into the station. I myself very often make use of this entrance, at the same time thinking back over the years when for days and weeks I worked in the dark with the strain of electric light, helping to construct this short cut into the station. The old staircase is still there with the Trafalgar Street heavy door locked.

I also remember when I worked for an Eastbourne building contractor constructing a new large hall in the Masonic Temple situated in Queen's Road, Brighton. Us workers lost our freedom of going out or coming in because everything was secretive combined with a different password every day, also speaking through a grille let in to an entrance door. Seeing the completion of this massive and wonderful hall, no expense was too much.

During a spell of unemployment in the 30s, I decided to get out of the building trade. I applied to the Cooperative Milk Depot and was fortunate in getting an interview with the milk supervisor. He asked me several questions. I also told him I was a carpenter and joiner in the building industry, but was fed up with the uncertain conditions and the unemployment. I had to fill in a form to test my writing and having passed this test, he then gave me a few sums to write down. They were all to do with money, additions and subtractions. After a certain time, he took my paper, and examined it telling me that I had satisfied him. He also told me that I would work at the Whitehawk branch. I would work with an experienced milkman for about four weeks. I thought how lucky I was to get a more settled job, also to be able to say goodbye to the building trade.

I had to be over at Whitehawk by 5.45 on the Monday morning (I would like to mention that I am going back a few years ago when all milk-men had a three wheeled hand-barrow to push around). I duly arrived at the Milk Depot, met the foreman (a very efficient man too) who introduced me to a certain milkman who was detailed to train me.

I helped him to load up the barrow with a large number of crates loaded with full milk bottles (half and one pint bottles). After about one hour, out came the foreman in an agitated attitude, shouted to my mate, "It's time you were gone" and so off we went, and I had to push the barrow.

We had a long way to go before we started to deliver any milk. From the Milk Depot it was a long and slight incline. My word, me not having pushed a three-wheeled loaded milk barrow before, I was puffing and blowing with my heart pounding away, because as I was pushing my mate was taking off four to six pint bottles of milk and placing them on the customers' doorsteps. Well I had to keep stopping to get my breath back. This upset my mate because he was so used to it, he had very little thought for me. When he wanted some more bottles, I was away back down the road resting. He wasn't very friendly with me. After a time and me being a lot older than he was, I couldn't accept his insults. Eventually after doing a very hard and long round, we returned to the Depot,

about seven hours later.

What made matters worse, all the other roundsmen were back and had checked in to the foreman and gone home. I went home, tired and aching all over, with my wife saying, "How have you got on today, Bert?" I told her all about my very funny tempered and unfriendly mate, also the heavy loaded barrow I had been pushing around up the hills plus the very long roads. She did her very best to console me and encourage me, saying that as the days came and went I would gradually settle down (inwardly I thought different).

Well! each day was agony to me, because I had to keep on looking at the book to see the amount the customers wanted. He was so experienced after doing this for so many years, he only had to look at the various houses and knew the amount of milk to be left.

Friday arrived, this being the day the customers had to pay for their week's milk. What a to-do. We told various customers what they had to pay, then there were arguments - I never had two pints on Wednesday - I never had any milk at all on Monday - I only had half a pint on Tuesday, and so on, although the majority never queried, but paid up there and then. Of course, all these queries held us up and by the time we had delivered all the milk and collected the money we were back at the Depot about two hours late. After putting up with a lot of abuse, and knowing this was going to happen every payment day I began to lose interest.

I put up with this for about four weeks, completing the month's probationary period. One day, I was unexpectedly called into the foreman's office, and in front of him were some milk delivery books. He told me that according to the books, plus the amount of milk sold, the money collected in over the period of four weeks I had been with this particular milkman, was over two pounds and four shillings short.

This milkman had already been questioned about this shortage of cash (I learned this through another roundsman who was a very nice chap, also considerate). I had already had my suspicions about my mate. Another thing he would do was every so often take a pint bottle of milk and drink this down. I had known him to have drunk three pints of milk on one round. I said to him one day, "You've got to give me the money for the amount of milk you have drunk". "Oh," he says, "That's all right. I managed to work out from the Depot an extra five or six pints." After he had been questioned about the money he had passed the blame onto me (being a new man, but he forgot I was noticing a few things). I had made a few notes on paper because I knew he was fiddling, what made it easier for me was the complaints from various customers that they had been paying for milk they never had (no wonder there were all these arguments on Fridays). Anyway to end this long story, we were both interrogated by the foreman, also the Milk Manager; my mate had his say and then came my turn. Combined with the evidence I had written down of what happened on different days, I was eventually cleared of the shortage of the money, also they had had suspicions about this milkman fiddling in the past.

After all this happening to me, as I would from now on have to carry on with the hard

work pushing the milk barrow around, also deliver the milk, I decided to give up the job and go back to the building trade.

I went to the Unemployment Exchange on the Monday morning and was surprised to find so many building trade workers signing on the dole. Why us building trade chaps immediately signed on the dole was because you had to give them three waiting days. Not knowing how long you were going to be out of a job, if you did not sign on you were wasting three precious days, and all the while you were signing on you were three days less in your first week's dole money. But when you got a job, after say two or three weeks, you got those three waiting days back money. All these true stories come into the long period of fifty-one years of my working life.

## **A long job ended**

Finally in 1968 I was sent to repair and renew a long closely paled oak wood fence around the outside garden of a large house in Dyke Road. The lady who owned this was a widow, and very business-like. She had already had another carpenter. She would watch him from behind the front window curtains. She had every right to complain - apart from the time he wasted, sitting down smoking, getting up and doing a little more work, also the work he had done was disgusting. She phoned my governor, he came up and of course he agreed with her about the small amount of work done, also the rough way he had done it. She demanded that he should be taken away and replaced by another carpenter that she could rely on because she was paying the bill. All she wanted was satisfaction. My boss had to have his say, telling her that experienced carpenters were very scarce and this one, he had only just started, not knowing if he was a tradesman. This so-called carpenter got the sack and I was sent to carry out the job.

The days came and went, and on Friday May 10th I had completed and creosoted the fence around the garden. In the afternoon I was having a general clear-up when a car drew up and out got my boss. (This was very unusual to see him, but I thought that perhaps he had come to say goodbye, also to give me a 'golden handshake'.) "Hallo Bert, I hear you are leaving us today," he said, "Yes sir, I am," I answered. "Must you retire Bert?" - I said "I haven't got to, but I have been working for 51 years (from the age of 14 to 65) and I think I am entitled to retire!" "Yes, you are entitled to," the boss said, "But we can't replace you old 'uns. These present so-called tradesmen are no use. Ah well, should you think of starting again, please come and see me."

He gave me a good handshake, but it wasn't a golden one. No one in the building industry ever got one of those. A gold handshake means they shake your hand, at the same time placing one, two, three or four one pound notes in it, but no such luck! I packed up my tools in the tool bag, went in the house to say goodbye to the lady. She thanked me for doing a reliable job and gave me £10 (what a pleasant surprise).

As I made my way to the bus, I couldn't realise that I had finished with the building trade. When I arrived home, the wife gave me a lovely kiss and a hug, and in the eve-

ning all my family gathered together, giving me and their mother a wonderful celebration. I did realise now that I was 65. The wife and I looked forward to many years of being together, no more sandwiches or flasks of hot tea to get together, plus a little longer to lay in, not having to get up so early.

Some men cannot seem to adapt their life to retirement, but thank the Lord, it didn't take me long to settle down after all the years of being unsettled and the fear of unemployment. I do hope and trust that the stories I have related, will be found interesting.

**Albert Paul, 1975**

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