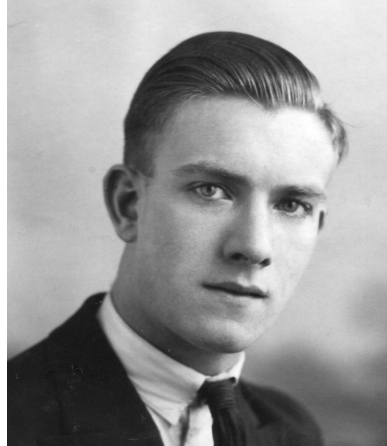




1918



1924



1931



1940

Boz The Early Years



1971



1982



2008

PART ONE

My Earliest Memories

I believe that my earliest memories are of my mother's father, I know that I was very young and was never allowed out of doors to play with the other children. At that time I was the fourth boy in our family, all of my brothers being older than me. My birthday was February 4th 1914, this was six months before the first world war started.

It must have been some time in the autumn of 1915, I had climbed onto a chair and was looking through the window to our backyard, when a big man with whiskers came through the garden to our backyard. He waved to me and called to me, and then held his hand out to show me the biggest apple I had ever seen. How big this apple was I really have no way of knowing, but I did hear in later years that all of our family had had a feed from this same apple. I can remember that I struggled hard when Grandad picked me up to kiss me, I did not like his whiskers one bit. I did see Grandad once more shortly after this, but never again. The fact that he had died was kept from me.

It was also about this time that I remember Bert (who, I was later told, had looked after me so much) came to say good bye. All of our family were present and they were making an unusual fuss of Bert. He had on a new pair of knickerbockers with buttons just below the knee. Bert was going to a hospital, but I did not understand that. Dear Bert never came home again. Whenever I asked for Bertie, I was told that he had gone to stay with Grandad and would be away for a long time. I had always thought that Bert was another brother but we cannot find any record of him. Just who he was I would very much like to know.

It was perhaps when I was two years old and wishing to go outside to play I asked for the door to be opened for me. My brother Bill, who was reading a 'Penny Dreadful', most reluctantly got up and opened the door for me when commanded to do so by our Father. When running out, I put out my left hand to swing round the door frame, thus making a quick left turn. Bill, annoyed at being disturbed, slammed the door hard to shut it. Either I was too slow or my brother was too quick but my fingers were trapped in the hinged side of the door and I was yelling my head off. I was soon released and then carried to see a soldier who was staying at my Grandma's house. He gave me first aid. The first finger of my left hand is still misshapen due to this accident. The soldier who had attended to me went to the war a few days afterwards and he never came back.

I remember a Miss Swain, who lived down the road, calling to see my Mother a number of times. I could not make out why I was always sent on some fools errand to my grandma at these times. Eventually I was told that the nurse had brought for us a little baby sister. How the nurse had managed to carry a baby girl in her little black bag was a mystery to me for many years. Freda's Birthday was September 6th 1916.



My Father and Grandma Taylor with Freda and Boz in the backyard of 124 Tower Road

Not really knowing what was happening at the time I, like other children, heard conversations that should not have been heard and was puzzled about all our soldiers going in the big retreat. My Mother, being busy with a new baby, was glad for me to be outside playing with other children. Whilst playing with older children, me and another boy named Bobby Brant had heard that the Retreat was in a direction down Upper Sutton Street. We set off to find this retreat. A long time afterwards I found out that we had been to a quiet Cul-de-sac named 'The Retreat'. We never found our soldiers. At this time of day the streets were deserted with not a soul in sight, everybody must have been out at work or at school. On hearing our voices an old woman opened a garden gate to see who was about. She asked us for our names, and where had we come from. She did not know us, but she did know that we did not live locally and she sent us back on the way to where we had come from. Her parting remark was "the Germans will have you if you don't go home to your mothers, and go quickly."

In those days we had never heard of 'the grape vine', and how it worked, but I do know my Mother found out where I had been.

My older brothers were at times asked to go across the road to a shop to fetch small items as needed. Most of these shops were only the front room of an ordinary dwelling house. Reg seemed to escape most of the errand running and poor old Bill caught more than his share. He always seemed to object when asked to fetch half a pint of milk. I was very young and thought not to be capable of carrying the jug and the money, but I volunteered to fetch the milk. Eventually I was allowed to do this and was instructed to carry the three halfpence in the jug and then I would not drop it and lose it.

I went across to the shop and feeling very important I entered the shop and awaited my turn to be served. Holding the big 'Kitchener' jug up high Mr. Wilcox took it from me and I asked for "half a pint of milk please". He brought the jug back and placed it on the counter in front of me, I reached up to take it. Mr. Wilcox quickly withdrew the jug and said, "Where's your money first". "It's in the jug," say's I. Mr. Wilcox took the jug into the back of his shop and found the money. He told me off so much that it was a long time before I volunteered to go again. All the jugs at our home had pictures of British Generals on them; we had Lord Kitchener, Lord Roberts and General Buller. The children used to sing the following.

Lord Roberts and Kitchener, General Buller and White
All British generals and all are willing to fight



Whilst playing in the Horse Road (what we called the street), and having upset some of the girls who were playing at skipping, I was chased by Ruth Gough, a big girl from next door. Not looking where I was going, as I was more interested in getting away from Ruth and being more frightened by the shouting that was going on behind me, I ran full tilt into a horse that was pulling a greengrocers cart, and once more I was carried back home, not really hurt but very frightened. The horse did look big when I was on the floor after bouncing off the horses legs. Fortunately Mr. Hunter had seen me coming and had reigned his horse to a standstill otherwise I may have been trodden on by the horse.

The next year our mother took Reg, Bill, Freda and myself on a holiday to Llandudno, where we stayed with 'Auntie Nellie', a friend of my Mother. To get to Auntie's house we had to go past the pier and get onto the cable tram to go up the Great Orme to the 'Halfway House' - Auntie lived just a short walk from there.

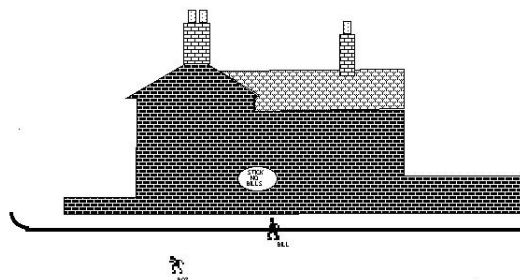
A second cable car tramway existed running from the Halfway House up to the top of the Great Orme (this section was closed for the duration of the war).

Next door to my Auntie lived a family named Jones. Little Willie was the youngest and was the same age as myself and was a great pal. Going to the sea shore was a wonderful experience, and we paddled in the sea and played on the sand. There were lots of big jelly fish in the sea and many were on the sands, we had been told to not go near to the jelly fish because they might sting us. It had been rammed into us that a sting from a jelly fish was something dreadful. When playing near the house with little Willie, (who started it I do not remember), we dared each other to walk through a bed of stinging nettles. We did walk through the nettles until we were oblivious to any pain. We trampled the nettles nearly out of existence. Poor Uncle Enoch had to go for a very long walk to find some dock leaves to treat our legs. Both of us were kept indoors the next day, but my brothers went exploring with the Jones' boys.

Little Willie and me we got together again, at first we were playing local to the house, then we wandered off in the same direction the bigger boys had taken. As I'd never been in the country before I found many things growing that fascinated me. What the two of us ate will never be known, but we were ill, we just stood and deposited black puddles of mess, all control was lost. I was put to bed for what seemed to be a whole week. Lying, in a quiet room I could hear my Mom and Auntie whispering together. They had managed to get a fresh egg and some new milk, I overheard Mom say "if I put the medicine in (a beaten up egg in milk) he will not notice". Not for any money would I drink that glass of milk and egg, I never knew what happened to it but I did not have it.

Once recovered I was taken with the rest of our family and Auntie Nellie to the sea front. Why could we not go to the sands? I was told that the tide was in, and I would have to wait. I did not know what a tide was, and I suppose I pestered. I was taken to the sea wall and lifted up so that I could see over the top, expecting to see the sands the view I got frightened me. It must have been a very high tide, the sands had been covered and the water was well up the sea wall. This was the biggest surprise of my life, I had visions of water covering everything, I have never trusted the sea since then.

Before we all went home Mr. Jones took us all for a ride, that I have never forgotten, in his motor boat. Why, I do not know, but the boat was not level. Mr. Jones was on one side with the water seeming to be nearly coming into the boat. The rest of us were on the other side and up in the air, holding on to the boat side to stop us falling off our seats. I was scared on this excursion and I held on to the side of the boat as if my life depended on it. Coming round the pier on the way back, we saw a lady ride her horse right into the sea until the horse had to swim while still carrying the lady. This was the first time that I had seen a horse that was not between the shafts of a cart, and to see a horse swimming, this was something to tell when we all went back home.



One day we all went for a ride on a big steamer, I believe it was called the "St Trillan". Still being afraid of the sea, I would not leave the middle of the deck to go and look over the side of the ship. My brothers teased me, but I had the last laugh, they were sea sick, but not me.

One day my brother Bill was instructed to take me for a walk, and to keep me out of mischief. He did not like this arrangement any more than I did. Coming home from Aston Park we passed the gable end of a house at the corner of Frederick Road and Upper Thomas Street, this was a big expanse of brick wall without windows or doors. One solitary notice board was fastened to this wall, and it read "STICK NO BILLS". Bill, knowing that I could not read, said "Do you know what that says?" "no", was my reply. He then said "it means THEY CAN'T STICK BILLS, but it don't say they CAN'T STICK BOZ'S ON THAT WALL." Boz was the name that I was known by, (after a well-known Percy Boswell) - and ever after that I walked on the other side of the road to make sure that this BOZ was not stuck on that wall.

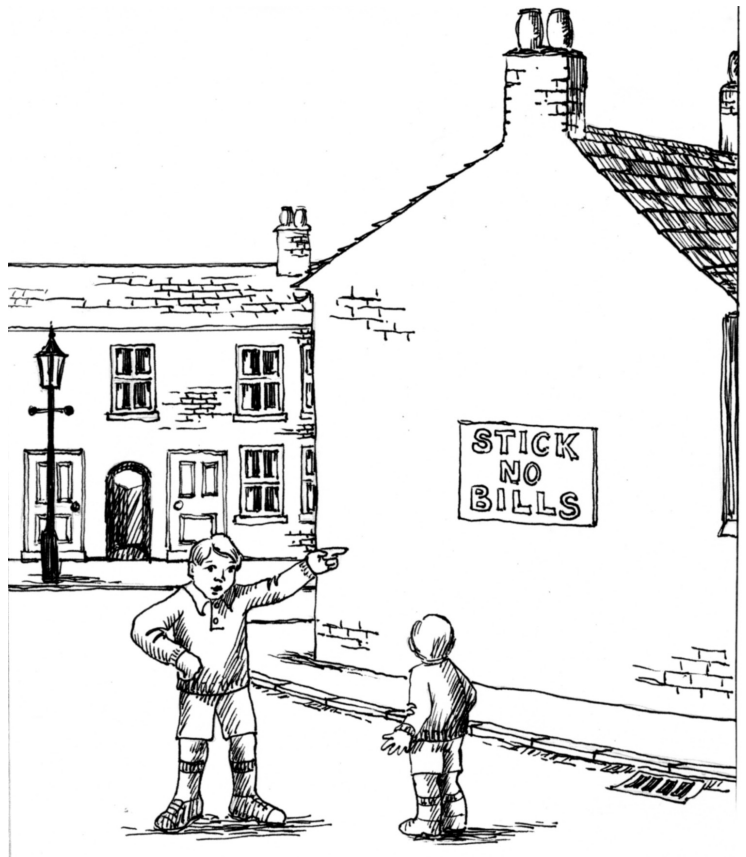
At our home we had a fire guard that we all called "The Bow". This was the usual fire guard of the period, being made from two shaped strips of iron with a number of metal rods set vertically to join them

together. The whole assembly was then hooked to the sides of the fireplace. Our bow was a posh one, it had a brass secondary rail on the top that we had to keep polished. This top was held in place by five brass knobs. Now I liked the shape of these knobs and took them off to play with. I remember hearing my Father, when talking to other grown ups, saying "I do not know how he can get them off". Until I had my bottom smacked it had been a constant war, Dad tightening the knobs with pliers when I was not present, and me undoing them by gripping a knob in my back teeth and then turning my head. This released the knob such that it was then easy to undo. I did this when Dad was hidden behind his newspaper and not able to see what I was doing.

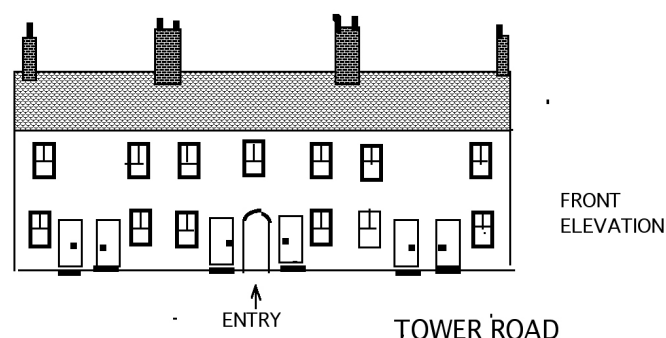
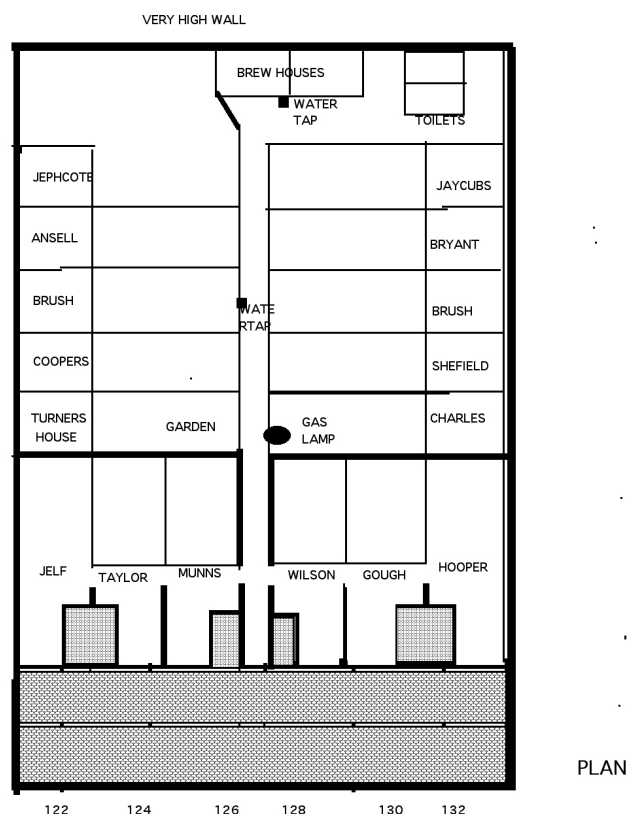
One day, it could have been my fourth Birthday for we did not have cards and parties in those days, I was invited to my Grandma's house for tea. I suppose I did not realise that food was rationed and that this restricted any entertaining that otherwise may have happened. There was Grandma, a soldier and me. We did not have posh carpets on the floor but my Gran had some very good hurden bags. They were not pretty but it was very much warmer to walk upon them than the cold quarry tile floor, especially in the winter. Grandma had been preparing the tea and had gone into the kitchen to brew the tea. Now Gran's teapot had lost its handle and she had to carry it, wrapped in a cloth and then in cupped hands. The tea made, she proudly carried it into the dining room, but she stumbled over one of the hurden bags and the tea, pot and all was tipped over my legs. Both of my legs had been scalded from below the knee to near my ankles.

Soldiers from my Grandma's house always seemed to come to the rescue and somehow they stopped me crying and made me feel comfortable. The tea party was definitely not a success, particularly when I returned home to hear that they had somehow got a small tin of pineapple for tea and I had only had toast.

My home address was 132 Tower Road, Aston, Birmingham. I forget the layout of numbers for the houses at the back of our house, but the inhabitants were as follows



No 122 Mr. and Mrs. Jelf, they had children but they had married and left home.
 No 124 My Grandmother, Mrs. Taylor.
 No 126 Mr. and Mrs. Munns. Mr. Munns wore a club boot. It was not until later years that I discovered that Mr. Munns had been mentioned in Dispatches for deeds done when in action in the Navy.
 No 128 Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and family as follows – Albert – Emily – Ivy – Jimmy – Walter – Leonard and Margaret.
 No 130 Mr. and Mrs. Gough and family - Albert – Pemmy – Martha – Ivy - Jimmy Ruth - Tommy
 No 132 Mom and Dad - Reginald - Bertie - William – Percy - Freda.
 Houses at back of No 126
 Mr. and Mrs. Turner together with with a married son Albert and a daughter named Cissie
 Mr. and Mrs. Cooper – Charlie – John - Margaret and Olive
 Mr. and Mrs. Brush – Rosie - Fred
 Mrs. Ansell together with son Charlie and daughter Rosie
 Mrs. Jeffcote together with her sister and one boy named Albert
 Houses at back of No 128
 Mrs. Charles with a married son and his wife - no children. It was this Mr. Charles that turned on the gas to light the lamp before the lantern had been replaced.
 Mrs. Sheffield together with sons Bernard and one other.
 Mr. and Mrs. Brush - no children, but related to the Brushes who lived opposite.
 Mrs. Bryant with three sons – Albert - Walter and Billy.
 Mrs. Jacobs and daughters - Cissie - Elsie and Gertie.



No 132 Tower Road was one of a long row of houses, the front door opening onto the street. To get to our back door entailed going up an entry between two houses (this entry had bedrooms built over it) and turning right, then passing through the back gardens of two more houses, we reached our own garden and home.

Further up the entry were ten more back-to-back houses, five on each side of the central pathway. At the very top of the entry were two water closets and two brew houses in which laundry was done, these amenities were for the use of the ten families in the yard. Paraffin lamps or candles were the only means of lighting in these houses and water had to be carried from one of the two water taps in the yard. All cooking was done on paraffin stoves or primus stoves.

The six houses that opened onto the street each had their own water supply and outside toilet. Being supplied with piped gas they had better lighting and cooking facilities. The lights in the main living room and parlour had gas mantles fitted, these gave a very good light. The back kitchen and the bedrooms had naked flame burners, the flame being in the shape of a fishtail.

Sometimes at Christmas Mom would cook a fowl in front of the fire in the living room. The bottom of the range fire was about one foot above ground level and some cooking was done using the fire. The range had an oven on one side and a hot hob on both sides, it also had fitted pot hooks to suspend a pot with a bucket handle directly over the fire. Different sizes of hooks were used to suit the pot and the size of the fire. At Christmas time we would have a fire, bigger than usual, and the roast was suspended in front of the fire. Attached to the mantle just underneath the shelf was a brass crane that would hinge out when required for use. From the crane we suspended a Meat Jack that, driven by a wind up spring, would slowly rotate, first about three turns to the left and then three turns to the right. The meat or bird, being attached to the bottom of the Jack would hang close in front of the fire. I remember being detailed to sit and watch this operation and I was to shout out when the Jack stopped turning, Dad would then rewind the spring and then the cooking would start again turning first about three turns to the left and then three to the right.

Grandma did not have a meat jack. She used a long loop of string and a house key. The string was hung from the crane and the meat attached to a hook at the bottom. The key was then attached to the loop at a mid position to keep the two sides of the loop apart. The meat was then spun round many times by hand, this caused the loop to twist both above and below the key. When released the weight of the meat caused the loop to stretch and unwind and then to rewind in an opposite twist. This kept the meat turning in front of the fire for quite a time but it demanded close attention to keep rewinding by hand.

In one of the gardens stood a lamp post that was just the same as others in the streets. We children had never seen these lamps giving light, we had just used them to play around or climb. One day we heard a lot of grownups talking in great excitement about an Armistice and that there would be a big party. Together with other children I watched a man, named Mr. Charles, put a ladder against this lamp post, and with the aid of a pair of pliers he turned on the gas and lit it. We younger children did not know that the lantern had been taken away. Imagine our delight when a tongue of yellow flame extended upwards from the open end of the gas pipe. Some of the grown ups were debating about the use of this gas light for the party. Wiser heads however talked them away from doing this and the gas was turned off again.

Chinese Fire Crackers appeared in the shops and older boys had long strings of them. They were lit one by one from a piece of smouldering boot lace, and once the fuse had been lit, the cracker was thrown before it went off with a sharp bang.

My brother Bill came to me saying, "Where have you been? I have been looking everywhere for you, you must come home at once". After tea I was out again very quickly not knowing what, but aware that something big was happening. At the top of the hill in our street there was a Mission Hall, and men who had come home from work early were bringing long benches and a piano from the Mission Hall into the street. The next thing that I knew was my Father catching hold of me and taking me back home. I, being the black sheep of the family and always meeting trouble, was the last one home. We were all forbidden to go out again that night. We did look through the bedroom windows and saw that a number of bonfires had been lit. Next day while walking up the street there was the remains of a bonfire at the top of our street, this had been so big and hot that the paintwork of houses on both sides of the road had blistered.

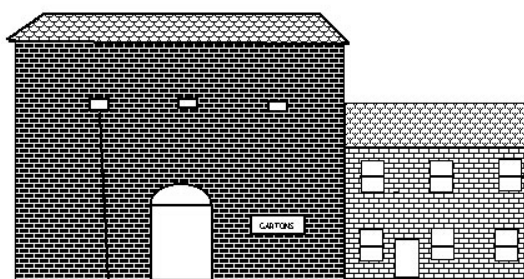
Tower Road had many little shops and one of them was called Beech's, a paper shop. Not being able to buy comics many of the local children just window-shopped with the comics in the window. This was not good for trade so Mr. or Mrs. Beech would come out to clear all the kids away, they were both very grumpy. Mrs. Beech seemed to pick on me quite a lot until I was a bit afraid of her. One day when I was alone in the street, the other kids must have been at school, I was enjoying playing with a whip and top. There were many puddles in the pot holes in the road so it was not long before the string of my whip became wet. Now a wet string will not do if you wish to keep your top spinning, and giving the top a good lash, guess what happened? I used to have a good follow through when playing whip and top, the wet string wrapped around the top, the top was lifted and sent as if from a sling and it hit Mrs. Beech's window, and I saw a big crack in the glass. This was the first time that I tried to do the 100 yards in less than 10 seconds. When I thought I was far enough away I slowed to a walk and, without looking back I continued to the end of the road to Potters Hill.

After dark and still being afraid to go back down Tower Road to go home I played in the light from the windows of a big departmental store named Taylor's. How long I was away from home I do not know, but brother Bill had the job to "go and find him". Confiding in Bill as to what had happened he said, "that window was cracked before, but not as much as it is now. But don't not tell anybody, say you have been for a walk and got lost", I often got lost after this.

When I was very young, before my Mother died, we were always dressed up and sent out for a walk on Sunday mornings. Now can you imagine three smart young men, each wearing a straw Brimmer hat, walking out. Reg could not stand this and always vamoosed at the first opportunity, but Bill always stuck with me. Now one day when walking past the old vinegar brewery at the bottom of Tower Road, the wind got a little playful. Bill was a bit too slow in grabbing his hat and it went, first along the floor to a big gateway and then it defied gravity and it actually rolled up the wall of the vinegar brewery and disappeared through a small ventilating window that was very high up the wall.

Bill tried his best to explain how he had lost it but he was never believed. Bill had to go to the vinegar brewery on the following day (Monday) to ask for his hat back. No one had seen the hat but one man took pity on Bill and listened to his tale of woe. He took Bill inside and showed him that on the other side of the wall was a very big wooden vat that must have been some 20 feet in diameter and higher than the guttering on adjacent houses. The space between the vat and the wall was too small to allow a man to pass and he would not let Bill try to get through. Bill never got his hat back and he was now the envy of Reg. Reg still had to wear his straw Brimmer but Bill could not. I think my hat got a bit bent somehow while in storage at home, how I do not know but it was only found out when Reg was told to fetch my hat one Sunday morning. It was strange that Reg never wore his hat again after that.

My mother had a sister, our Aunt Jesse, who had three children; Connie the eldest and twin boys George and Dick. It was only on rare occasions that we saw them, but when we did it was, "Stand back to back and keep still so that we can see who is the biggest." I remember once going to visit Auntie Jesse and while the grown ups were doing all the talking, I was allowed to go to the top of the road and into Aston Park. On returning I went up the wrong entry and into a strange garden, so back to the street I went. I had another go and was sure to myself that I had got the right entry. As I entered the garden for a second time and got near the back door, a lady opened the sash window and leaned out saying "what do you want little boy". I could do no more than just stare for the lady was undressed down to the waist and I saw something that I had never seen before. (It was confirmed afterwards that she had got a new baby and had been feeding it.) Leaving without saying anything I just had to try another entry and was lucky to find the right one next time.



Bill's hat went here

Mother had asked Auntie Jesse to ask if Uncle Dick could mend our wall clock, it had just got tired and refused to go. Some days afterwards I went with Bill to take the clock for Uncle for repair. He sent us home with a note to Dad saying that Dad must fetch the clock back himself when it was mended. Uncle would not trust us boys to carry the clock without doing some damage to it.

About two weeks later Dad took me with him to fetch the clock back home.

When walking home Dad did a little stumble and was afraid that he might have damaged the clock. Dad was used to doing heavy work and was afraid of touching the delicate parts of the clock so he had asked Uncle Dick to let him carry the clock with the pendulum bob still attached. Uncle did not like this arrangement but to please Dad he put some paper packing inside to stop the pendulum from moving too far and instructed Dad to carry the clock in a flat position with its back downwards.

The clock was hung on its normal nail but refused keep going when started, the beat of the pendulum was a big tick and a tiny little tock. By moving the clock a little out of vertical on the wall the tick was more even and would keep going for short periods. Dad did not like this and the clock was set straight on the wall and just left to run down and stop. Not liking to admit to Uncle Dick about the stumble and subsequent damage, the clock told the same time night and day for a very long time and was forgotten.

Freda

As far as I can remember our sister Freda had always been a problem to our parents. When she was very young she was bitten on the cheek by a cat and the wound took a very long time to heal. She also had some difficulty in learning to walk. When Freda also had the whooping cough I remember that Dad brought home a short piece of rope that had been treated with gas tar, - smelling the gas tar was supposed to be beneficial in soothing the cough. Freda was taken to see a doctor who instructed Mom to take her to a hospital. After treatment her cheek got better but she was left with a scar that remained visible for the rest of her life. Mom was also informed that Freda had got a TB hip and would need hospital treatment for a long time.

When back at home she was never allowed to go out to play, she had to give her hip as much rest as possible, and at the age of three and a half Freda was admitted to the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital at Northfield Birmingham. We always referred to this hospital as "The Woodlands". Freda was strapped to a Iron frame such that she could not move her legs and our parents were told that only complete rest for a long time could cure her problem.

Shortly afterwards Mother was sent to a sanatorium at Romsley Hill, in the Clent Hills. but after a few months Mother decided that she must come home to take charge of the domestic affairs so she signed herself out of the sanatorium and came home.

When Freda was first in hospital both Dad and Bill used to go to the Woodlands on Sunday afternoons but they were never allowed to see Freda other than on visiting days, once per month. When Dad was satisfied that Bill knew the way to the Woodlands he was grateful for Bill to go by himself to take the few sweets and apple or orange that Dad sent Freda every week. Dad would always go on visiting days, once per month. The other Sundays he went to visit Mother at Romsley Hill.

Mother also had a sister, our Aunt Eddie, who lived about a hundred yards away from our house. She had a married son who we were taught to call Uncle George and his wife was Aunt Mary. They had a boy about the same age as myself, and we were taught to call him cousin George. They also had another child named Olive. Cousin George had many toys that we never dreamed of. One day I was allowed to go to Aunt Eddie's house just to see his train go round and round on a small track but I was never allowed to get closer than about six feet from it, this was boring.

Cousin George (senior) lived in Geach Street, a good two miles away. Having come to visit his mother they had let George Junior ride his three wheel cycle to his grandmother's, but they went home without the bike and our aunt had the job of taking it back for them. When Aunt was ready I was sent for, and after being cleaned up was instructed to ride George's three-wheeler and to keep with Aunt who was walking to Geach Street. I had never seen a three wheeler before but I soon found out that it was hard work. "Keep going", I was instructed, "it will be much easier when you get to the top of the road". Half way up the hill we met someone who knew Auntie and she stopped for a long time talking. I was glad of the rest for my legs did ache. Eventually we started again and I was one penny richer, it being a gift from the strange lady. How long it took for me to ride that two miles I never knew but I never ever wanted a three wheel bike of my own after that.



Freda and Boz

One day there was only Mom and me at home and all other children were at school. Mom was lying down and I spotted that some washing up that needed doing. Having never done this job before I had a go. Mother must have thought that she must find out what I was doing. When she came into the kitchen I was drying a wine glass. Mother said "take great care with that and do not drop it, hold it tight". I did hold it tight and twisted the top away from its bottom. Poor Mom said "I do not know what I shall tell your Father because that was the only glass that we had and I used it for taking my medicine". Mother went away to Romsley Hill Sanatorium soon after.

It must have been about Easter time in the year 1919 when I overheard that a school was to be opened at 'Ellen Knox', a Mission Hall lower down our street, and that my name had been put forward to go there. Not being sure if this was a good thing I buzzed off and Bill had the job of finding me again. When I had been rigged out with a new pair of short trousers and a jersey I knew that I was growing up and had to conform and do what I was told.

The first two weeks at school were great, Miss Muriel, was the name of our teacher and we did as we pleased; they even supplied skipping ropes and wooden bowls for us to play with (bowl, is the old name given to a hoop). Better than the toys, a few of us explored and found our

way around. We climbed down a cellar grating, and then through a window into a big cellar, some stairs led from there up to our class room, but it was so much more exciting and gave a greater sense of achievement to climb round the back of the organ to reach the same place. Gradually they took us in hand, and before we knew it, they had started to try to teach us simple letters.

After Mother had returned, home was more like home again. I remember that Bill used to take a dinner that Mother had cooked to my Father at the factory where he worked. The dinner was nicely placed into an enamel basin with a inverted saucer on the top and then wrapped up in a big cloth. This was then placed inside a special basket that had a lid to it. When Dad received it he would warm his dinner up on a gas ring and eat it at his place of work. Canteens had not been invented at that time. Dad only had his dinner delivered like this on one or perhaps two days in any one week. Bill used to tell me of some of the wonderful machinery that he had seen at Dad's works so just imagine how I jumped at the chance to go with Bill on one of these errands. We dodged the gate keeper and went into Dad's workshop wanting to see the machinery working before it all stopped for the dinner break. I went with Bill a few more times after that and was carefully drilled to remember the way we went.

One day Mother told me that I now had got to start to take Dads dinner to him, all by myself, and I was not to stop on the way, and to hurry up back home. My Mother, she worried too much. I had learned well which way I had to go, and set off: - up Tower Road turn left down Potters Hill, continue forward past the Bartons Arms and Aston Hippodrome to Newtown Row, turn right by the Post Office into Asylum Road, then turn left into Summer Lane and go past a big timber working factory named 'Lillies'. Next turn right into Geach Street, then turn left into Guildford Street then turn right into Farm Street, turn left into Wheeler Street and go past St Mathias Church and continue to a right turn into Brearly Street and then sharp left into Hockley Street and then right into Barr Street. The back entrance to 'Barwell Bell Founders and Brass and Cock Makers' was now on the left hand side of the road. If the big gate was shut I just had to wait until it was opened. If it was open I used to spy where the gate keeper was and try to get past him without being seen. Some of the other men in the factory kept asking "when are you going to bring me my dinner"? Sometimes I was a bit early and was able to see some of the men working on large bells while they were spinning round on the lathes. I probably did this trip some twenty times before Mother was ill again and not able to do the cooking.

[James Barwell, Great Hampton St, Birmingham, bell founder making sizes from hand bells to church bells from 1870-1920. Barr St next to Gt. Hampton St.]

One day, I believe it was a Sunday, we had a knock at the front door, this was very unusual because people in our street always used the back doors. Father answered the knock - a policeman had been sent round to tell Dad that Freda was very ill and would he please go to the Woodlands Hospital as soon as possible. Mother was not well enough to go so Father had to go alone.

At the age of four Freda had appendicitis. In those days it was considered to be a very serious condition and Mom and Dad were very worried. It was many weeks before she got over this operation. Mother cried a lot at this time, she felt ashamed at not being able to go to Freda when she was needed, but poor Mom could not walk as far as the tram.

Shortly afterwards Mother was again admitted to Romsley Hill Sanatorium. I believe that she was expected to be there for some six months but she would not rest and came home again after two to three months.

Father had to pay three shillings per week towards the keep of our sister Freda while she was in the Woodlands Hospital. This contribution had to be paid to a lady who lived in Clifton Road, a distance of more than half a mile. Now this lady also had an interest in a dairy and sold milk. For at least five years, first Bill, and then I, had to take a can or a jug to fetch 1 pint of milk every day and to pay the 3 shillings every Monday. This had to be done each evening between half past seven and eight o'clock. Sometimes Mr. Barton, who was a lodger, served me with the milk and took the three shillings payment. Mr. Barton was a retired theatrical artist and he liked to keep me talking. He told me many stories about life in the theatre and the travelling that was necessary. As I had never seen inside a theatre Mr. Barton had a good listener.

Back at school we made little houses by cutting shapes out of paper, folding them, and pasting them onto another sheet of paper. These we took home with us, our first creations, carrying them using both hands to try to keep the thing flat, such that it would not fall apart, but a woman who lived near the school knocked it out of my hands and trod on it. I believe that I cried, but that was that, and I went home without it to forget it. Grape vines work in some queer ways, my Auntie Eddie, my Mother's sister, sent for me to find out what had happened (my Mom was in Romsley Hill Sanatorium). She then took me back to the school and sorted out the woman and I had to stand there and watch the biggest row that I had ever heard. The result was that I was never interfered with again near that school.

Mother had been home for some time when we finished school for the summer holiday and Bill had to have me tag along with him again. (I should say here that Bill was three years my senior, his birthday being on the 5th February and my birthday was on the 4th February.)

In Aston Park we went on the swings, I had one all to myself but it was not a proper swing, it was more like a trapeze bar. A young man came along, and with Bill's permission was allowed on the same swing as me. I sat on the iron bar and the young man stood on it and he did the pumping. We were flying through the air in no time, but too fast for me and I fell off. They told me afterwards that I swallow dived onto the gravel floor. I woke up some time afterwards in the Park Keeper's hut. I do not remember much of how we got home, but poor old Bill got it in the neck, as we used to say. I was taken to Grandma's again, she now had another soldier billeted with her. This soldier tweaked my nose a bit and made me cry again, he told my Mother that he thought that I should be all right, but it would be a good thing to keep me in the dark for a time. My nose had been squashed and my face eventually went all colours of the rainbow. One eye was closed and the other one was nearly closed. They tied a big handkerchief round my head just leaving me to peep with one eye. I had also lost some skin of my knees and one arm.

I was confined to the house for about two weeks, and being on my own, I went to peep through the front window into the street. I was seen by an old lady, named Mrs. Charles. She made her own way round to our back door and finding no one in, came through the house to me to find out what had happened. It was still difficult for me to talk, still having swollen lips. She came back later to see my parents. What was said

I never knew, but I was never left alone again. I was allowed out of doors for the first time on the Saturday, before starting school on the Monday. The whole month of holiday I had been kept indoors.

Back at school we started to do handicrafts. My project was to make a circular basket out of raffia. Starting to form a flat disc for the bottom, by sewing round and round should have been easy enough, but my effort got thicker, and harder. When my ball of raffia had grown to more than two inches the teacher found me something else to do. We played cricket with my ball. Apparently I did not have much idea of sewing!

In the summer of (about) 1920 my parents sent me to a convalescent home at Knowle for four weeks. This was a privately run home and my Dad must have paid for me to go. The total intake was about 20, and it was run by an old lady we called Matron, with one young girl, dressed as a nurse to help her. It is possible there may have been kitchen staff, but probably part time. We were bathed every second day. I well remember my first bath, being shoved into a bath of water that several other boys and girls had been washed in, and having a very large jug of water poured over me to swill the soap out of my hair. We were all sent to bed at about half past six and remained there until about eight o'clock in the morning.

One girl did have some scabs on her face when she came to the home, and after about two weeks I had a rash start to break out on my face. What happened with other children I do not know, but I was put into a walled back yard, on my own, every afternoon for about a week. Perhaps the woman was getting the wind up because more than half of the children had got this rash and she tried to segregate us. I heard that some of the other children had been isolated in different parts of the garden during the day time. She could not separate us at night time because we slept five or six to a room.

Sometimes the Matron would allow three of the children to go to her room and play Ludo with her in the evening until eight o'clock. I went twice but did not enjoy having to talk in whispers, and the Matron always liked to win.

When my Father fetched me back home he was very angry with the woman for letting me get into the state that I was in. Back home I was taken to a Doctor. This was something not known before. Impetigo was diagnosed. The woman who had run the Home got into trouble because other parents also complained about the condition of their children when they fetched them back home.

My Mother, who had always (in my memory) been a semi-invalid, was now getting worse. I used to be the first home from school and would find Mom lying on the couch with a bucket of water (with added disinfectant) by her side. She used to cough quite a lot and spit into a piece of newspaper before depositing it into the bucket, which was later flushed down the toilet. She was for ever saying, "Don't tell your Dad that you found me like this".

As Mother got worse, Dad arranged for the loan of an invalid carriage to take Mother for an outing to the park. The carriage (we used to call it the Bath Chair or the Basket Chair) belonged to Aston Parish Church and other people of the parish also could have the loan of it. The vicar used to make a list of who could borrow the carriage, and when, and for how long. (Three hours was considered to be a long time.) He would pin this list on a notice board at the Vicarage. Poor old Bill had the job of frequently going to view this list and to fetch the carriage and also to return it to the vicarage. When Bill's time of fetching and taking it back was subtracted from the allowed time, Mother did not have many outings.

At the top of our street, at number 64, lived the twin boys Bill and Phil Pitcher. As we were the same age group we went through school together at Ellen Knox and Burlington Street. They had a much older sister and brother. Mr. Pitcher had something to do with amateur football and went to a football field behind a public house in Grove Lane, Handsworth. One year for the twins birthday present he organised a football match for them. Bill was the captain of one team and Phil was captain of the other and they both played centre forward. Pals and acquaintances made up the rest of the two sides. I played with Bill's side and my brother Bill played on Phil's side. The match was to be at the Grove and transport had to be arranged. Mr. Pitcher arranged for two large horse-drawn vans to take the two teams and a few grown ups to the football ground. One team set off all O.K. but Bill's team did not.

The horses were used to moving furniture not a lot of children and the noise upset our horse. With most of us being in the van, the horse took fright and tried to bolt. There were men trying to hold the horse back by dragging on the harness, while other men ran behind the van lifting us boys out as fast as they could. From the load up point to where the last boy was safely lifted out was two to three hundred yards. How now

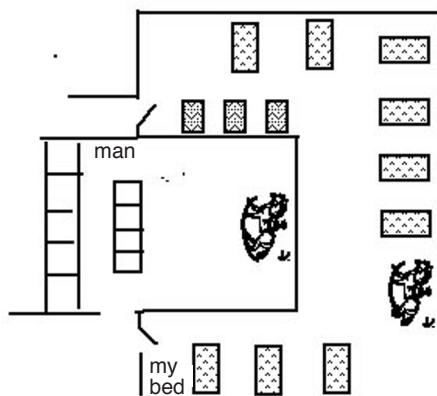
should we get to the Grove in time? We were told to all get a move on and follow some grown ups to Six Ways and we all managed to get on a tram to Villa Road. Walking into Soho Road we then had to get on another tram to the Grove. There must have been at least two hundred spectators waiting for us. We were rushed into the changing rooms and found the other team all ready to play. We hurried, and we played and our side won, I forget the score but we won, I did kick the ball about six times and was knocked over a few times but we won.

After the match the winning team was lined up to receive medals. As most of us were only nippers the crowd could not see us so benches were dragged out and lined up for us to stand on. They eventually let us go and we left in groups to go home. I should still have that medal somewhere in my treasure box, I must have a delve to see if I can find it.

In the winter of the same year I was sent to Moseley Hall, another convalescent home that was run by Birmingham City Council through the Education Dept. My stay there was four weeks. I was not as fit as I should have been, and I was kept in bed for about ten days. Doctors used to visit us nearly every day. On the bright side we could hear the Christmas waits singing in the distance. Santa Claus came and left me a big box of paints, but not being artistic I soon swapped them for a 'Big Wheel' outfit - something like Meccano. (I kept this and used it in later years with Meccano). On Christmas Day a long table was set up in the main ward and doctors and nursing staff had their dinner with the children. A big turkey was brought in and one of the doctors did the carving and several ladies did the serving. Dinner was taken to each child and we ate our dinner in bed. About ten adults sat at the long table with what was left of the turkey to have their dinner.

Also In the ward was a wonderful great rocking horse. Never having seen one before, I could not take my eyes of it. As I was confined to bed I could not have a ride but I watched every time someone else had a ride. Now one morning the horse was taken away and was I sorry. During the day 'Big Ears' heard two of the cleaners talking and I learned that the horse was in the next room along the corridor awaiting collection. It apparently belonged to a man who worked in the hospital but who was leaving and taking the horse with him.

After dinner (mid day) when all was quiet, and everyone was supposed to go to sleep, I tip-toed out into the corridor and opening the first door on my right I found the horse. I obviously had eyes for nothing else or I would have seen the man who was in the room. Creeping over to the horse I managed with difficulty to climb onto his back, he was a whopper. I had just about got him moving when I became aware that someone else was in the room and was singing. I started to slide off the horse but was commanded to remount. "Where is the other one" he asked, "are you on your own"? (I was dumb). "Then I must sing it to one" he said and he then sang : "Do you think I would leave you dying there is room on my horse for two" etc. In the far corner of the room stood a man in a white coat, he had very dark hair and it was plastered down with hair oil. This was before Brylcreem had been invented but he was the proverbial Brylcreem Boy. Trying to stop in a hurry I nearly fell off but I was told to stay and have my ride and the man finished his song, then I had to go back to bed. The next day I went to have another ride but the door was locked, I never saw that horse or the man again.



If you listen to the cleaners when they are working in pairs you can learn quite a lot. They were talking about the man who had sung to me, and I learned that he was leaving on the Wednesday and was going to Australia. All the nurses were very sorry that he was leaving. I have often wondered if this man was the same man that Rolf Harris learned his song from, about "Two Little Boys" I am sure that it was the same song that the man sang to me.

It was whilst walking with a few other children in the grounds of Mosley Hall (in the care of a nurse) that I saw my first red squirrel. It was on the floor under a tree in what was called The Dell. I now wonder how far from Birmingham we would have to travel to be able to see a red squirrel today.

*****Brother Reg, who was eight and a half years older than me, worked in a office at the Fort Dunlop and most of his friends also worked there. One friend, who also lived in Tower Road, introduced Reg to Christ Church at Six Ways Aston. Reg remained a member of that church until he left Birmingham to live at Charlton, near Banbury on his retirement.

During the bad weather in the autumn and winter, Mother used to have a fire lit in her bedroom some time before she went to bed, to warm the room such that she would not cough too much on retiring. Bill mostly lit the fire but sometimes he let me go with him to see how it was done. Now I found out why Bill used to keep all the broken bits of old shoe lace. He rolled a short piece in a bit of brown paper and smoked it. He gave me a go and it made me cough, but I got used to it. Dad always used to complain that the fire in the bedroom seemed to smoke a lot until the fire had got burning properly - this was despite the fact that we had taken care to blow our smoke up the chimney. Bill told me many a tall story when we sat on the mat in the fire light in Mom's bedroom. If we had no boot lace we just used brown paper. It smouldered better than newspaper which burned away too quickly.

Reg found out that the Christ Church also had a invalid carriage that was loaned out to members of the Church. The carriage was used mostly by one family to take their mother out and they objected to someone outside the church having use of this carriage. Dad, I suppose thinking that it would strengthen his case for borrowing the carriage, told me that I must leave Thomas Street Sunday School (an extension for Ellen Knox) and go to Christ Church instead. Reg made all the enquiries as to where I should attend and the name of the teacher who would be expecting me. I went to this Sunday School but the teacher was not there, someone else took me in charge. I did not know a soul and the other members of the group, (not a class) all much older than me were discussing passages from the Bible. I was right out of my depth. I stuck to this arrangement for a few weeks until one Sunday the group was not there. They had moved to another location but no-one had bothered about me. A strange man asked what I was doing in the church, he then took me to another room and left me in the charge of another teacher. Some of the lads in this class just picked on me and wanted to fight when we got outside. I was not having this with about five to one and quickly went home when the class had ended. I think that at that time I had made up my mind not to return to that school again.

Realising that objections would only mean trouble I dutifully left home at the appropriate time each Sunday and just went for a walk. Sunday afternoon was the time I used to go exploring some of the streets and districts that I had not been to before. Once I happened to be in Summer Lane, Aston, when quite a commotion took place. Two grown up men met to settle a grievance by fighting. In a very short time there was quite a crowd of people watching and urging either one or the other to "come on and settle him". Suddenly a cry went out "the Cops are coming - scam". The fighting stopped, the two men picked up their coats, shook hands and made a quick arrangement to meet again in another street (one I did not know of) at 3 o'clock next Sunday. Realising that I was now on my own, the crowd having melted away, I quickly walked away on the other side of the road to the two policemen. I have often wondered if the two men did continue the fight because they seemed quite friendly when they shook hands and parted?

I must have been about six or seven years old because my Mother was alive at the time, and having been sent out to go to a different Sunday school, (Christ Church) and not wanting to go, I dawdled. Imagine my delight when I saw a clean new cigarette box lying in the gutter. Cigarette cards were very popular in those days and my thoughts were, 'there must be a branny (brand new) in there'. I found my cigarette card and 9 new cigarettes. What should I do with these? My Father smoked a pipe, and had said so many times that he would not have a cigarette, that I could not give them to him. I called to see Bill and Phil Pitcher thinking that their big brother Bert would like them. I was turned away. Never having reached the Sunday School I arrived home quite early to find that Mom and Dad had gone to bed. Experience had taught me to keep quiet so into the back garden I went. No other children had come back from Sunday School, so I pinched a match from the kitchen and had my first smoke, in the back garden. How my parents knew I shall never find out, but I shall never forget the cross questioning that I had to go through. "Where did you get the money from? Which shop did you buy them from?" They just could not believe that I could find a packet with nine cigarettes in it, but I had. When clearing out at home some fifteen years later I found what must have been the remains of that packet of fags. Even a hardened smoker would have turned his nose up at them by then.

My Mother died, in January of 1925. Brother Bill now proved to be a big help to my Father, he took over all the shopping and preparation of meals. Brother Reg went to work and did very little in the house. I was detailed to do the brasses, clean the knives and forks, empty the ash pit every week and to help Bill as much as I



My Mother Gertrude

could. The ash pit was a deep hole in front of the fire that was covered by a metal grating. When lighting a fire the cold contents of the fire grate were poked out and sieved over the grating and cinders that did not fall through were re-used in lighting the fire. All the accumulated dust from the fires were emptied from the pit once a week. The grating was black leaded once a week when the whole grate was done. It used to look nice when it was well polished.

The ashes, together with other waste like pea pods and vegetable peelings, were put in a dustbin in the yard, and were collected once a week by the dustmen. The dustcart was pulled by a horse, and the men collected the rubbish from the bins in wicker baskets which they then carried on their heads to the dustcart. We did not have so much rubbish in those days.

One day I was stopped by Mrs. Brush, Mrs. Jacups and Mrs. Turner, they asked "What's your Dad going to do now your Mother had died? Was he going to leave? Who would look after us?" My reply was that we would look after ourselves. "How old are you"? said Mrs. Brush. "I shall be eleven years old, in a fortnight". "That's right" said Mrs. Brush "you are a big boy now". I told Dad what had happened. I later found out that the nosey neighbours had been probing to find out if by any chance we may move and thus leave the house free for one of them to move in. All of the houses in our street were rented, no one owned their own house.

One Sunday morning, soon after Mother had died, my Dad wanted to clean his boots but could not find the polishing brush and demanded that it be found. Now Reg had used the boot brushes the day before, he went to work and could go out on a Saturday evening and would clean his shoes before going out. Bill and I had to stay home so would not be likely to want the brushes. Father got a bit mad at being kept waiting and set all three of us to search for the missing brush. We followed each other round the house looking in the most unlikely places, like under cushions and under chairs. I know that I had looked under one cushion about five times before I found the lost brush, under the cushion. Who had planted it there I do not know, but I blamed Reg.

Dad, being upset because Mom had died, did something unusual, he wrapped the brush round my backside and it hurt, but what hurt most was the fact that I knew that I was not to blame for the brush being mislaid in the first place. At that age I would not have cleaned my boots unless told to do so.

Dad was worried as to why I could not go to Thomas Street, where my brothers had gone to school. The simple reason was that Thomas Street had a good name and all places had been allocated and I had to go to where they still had classroom space, Burlington Street. At the age of about eight I was moved from Ellen Knox to a proper school in Burlington Street. Being a very small fish in a big pond things were quiet.

The British Empire Exhibition was opened in 1924, and all of the children in Birmingham were given the chance to go to it. Special trains were organised to pick up the children at suburban stations. Of course the train fare had to be found - we took sixpences to school weekly and the teachers banked this until it was needed. Brother Bill was going, but my Father thought that I was too young and he did not want me to go. Thinking back, it must have been a big strain on my Father's budget to find the money for two of us to go. Pocket money also had to be found. Five shillings was my allocation, a princely sum, but I was threatened what would happen to me if I dare to waste it.

Our train started from Aston Station. The number of children waiting for the train was astounding, I thought that we would never get onto the train. The organisers did a very good job, and all school groups were kept together with no-one being left behind. At Wembley we were left to our own devices.

Looking at a man weaving on one stall I saw the first black face that I had ever seen - he had come from some place in Africa. The Exhibition covered a big area and internal transport had been arranged. The 'None Stop Railway' was a big success - single coaches moved very slowly past the pick-up points such that people could get on, or off as desired without the need to stop. Once clear of loading platforms they picked up speed very quickly. This was the first 'all Electric' railway we had seen, although the London Underground operated before this. However, we children had been banned from using this railway before we got there.

A Roller Coaster also ran from one end of the site to the other and this could be used, but a shilling was too much for me to pay. The Giant Switchback was the most spectacular ride. Some three carriages formed a train, and a number of men, strapped into their seats with long brake levers in front of them, controlled the speed of the ride. The steepest part of the ride was probably about 60 degrees from the horizontal. People under 18 Years were not allowed to ride. First Aid was necessary at the end of nearly every ride and a resident team of nurses attended to the people who had fainted.

Many of the stands showed industrial products and things that were too great for me to understand. When I handed back some 3 shillings and 7 pence to my Father, he was surprised, I had been too afraid to spend it all. The only food that I had all day was some bread and butter, that I carried in my pocket, wrapped in newspaper.

Cropwood Open Air School

In 1925 the authorities sent me to Cropwood Open Air School at Blackwell. I had the time of my life there. The total intake was 80 - all boys. The school was divided into three classes, I was placed in the top class, class one.

Miss Walton was head of the school, and she also taught class two. Miss Mcquire was the housekeeper. There were also kitchen staff, and Mr. Groves and Mr. Giles were gardeners. A Scottish lady was known as Sister, and Mrs. Keen was known as Nurse. Another Mr. Groves was the resident caretaker who lived in the lodge at the entrance to the grounds. Mr. Dix taught class one and Mr. Burbridge taught class three.

My introduction was to be lined up with about 10 more new boys to be fitted out with clothes and then sent to the nurse for a bath. Four at a time we were lined up, each standing in a large enamel bowl about a yard across, and underneath a shower head. Then the nurse turned on the showers from a master control. The mixing of the waters was very hit and miss. Sometimes we would yell and jump out because the water was too hot, at other times it made us shiver. Nurse just said "I am sorry", but she made us get on with our bathing. Bathing over they then had to inspect every boys hair and if necessary give treatment to delouse.

Cleaned and dressed, we were taken to join the other boys for dinner - this was taken in two large dining rooms. Other boys were detailed to show us round the school. After dinner was rest time, we all had to go to a big rest area consisting of a big lawn with a lily pond in the middle. This was bounded on two sides with long shed like structures, open on the one side nearest the lawn. It was in here that all the boys had to rest on camp beds for one hour every day, after dinner. When the weather was warm and sunny we would take our beds onto the lawn. The other two sides of the square were bounded by gardens and a hedge.

The sleeping accommodation was spread out, some boys in the main building, some in a building known as 'the extension' built in the grounds, and some in what was known as the Annex', this was a big house in its own grounds and named Rosemary. To sleep at Rosemary meant a walk of about half a mile. I was appointed to sleep in the extension.

For recreation purposes we were divided into three Houses, known as Clee, Clent, and Malvern, being named after the three groups of hills that could be seen from the school. I was in Malvern House. Attempts had been made to make each house as equal as possible such that competition was not too one sided. The games we competed in were Football, Hockey, Cricket, Stool Ball, and Rounders.

It was here, more than ever, that I became independent and stood up for myself. None of the boys were very strong but a few of them were bigger than the teachers. I had never seen so much green countryside, and I thought I was in Heaven. Some tennis courts, reserved for the staff, were out of bounds to us boys but we had a proper football field, a cricket field and acres of grounds in which to play.

I had not been at Cropwood more than about three weeks when a certain boy, named Everil, started to bully me, this finished with a challenge that I had to accept. With half the school watching we met at the back of the extension. Having been warned that he was a good fighter, I thought, 'If he beats me he will have something to remember me by'. At the appointed signal, given by an older boy, I did not stop to think but went in with both fists going like pistons. Maybe it was the surprise, in about 20 seconds flat he withdrew, beaten. I suddenly found that I was popular. Other kids who had suffered from Everil became my friends. After a few months Everil and I became quite good friends, no more bullying.

Life in the school:- I think we got up on being called at about 7-45 a.m. We washed dressed and removed all bedclothes from our own beds. Breakfast at about 8-15 a.m. After breakfast we were divided into groups, one to return to the dormitories to make all the beds and sweep and polish the floors and dust all window ledges. This was the biggest group. Another group had to clean the wash house and locker room, this included the toilets. Two boys only were detailed to clean all the taps, hot and cold, in the wash house. I seem to remember 32 taps to be cleaned. Nurse Keen was in charge of this area and at assembly asked if two boys, Redbourne and Hooper, could be detailed permanently to clean the taps, the reason being that we two did know what to do and made a good job of the polishing. (This request followed a couple of weeks when it looked like the taps had never been cleaned). We then set out to make a very good job of the polishing and it took us several days to really clean all of them. This all had to be done before we went to the classrooms for schooling, at about 9-15 a.m. in theory. In practice we never started school before 9-30 a.m. and sometimes as late as 10 o'clock.

School finished at about 12 noon. This gave us half an hour's free time before dinner at 12-30 p.m. After dinner two boys were selected to go to the kitchens to help with the washing up. Strange to say but this was popular, it meant losing some of the rest time lying down and sometimes the cook had a few goodies that never reached the dining tables. After rest period we had another free time period until about 2-30 p.m., then back to school until 4 o'clock or perhaps 4-30 p.m.

Breakfast was porridge, sometimes toast, otherwise bread and butter. On Sundays we sometimes had a bit of bacon. The mid-day meals were well cooked and varied and we even had pudding. Tea was bread and butter, occasionally with a bit of tinned fruit. On Sundays we had bread and jam. For Sunday tea, we had tea to drink, at all other meals we drank Cocoa.

At assembly, before going to bed, we had the opportunity to have a piece of bread and butter and sometimes a piece of toast. When all heads had been counted and no-one proved missing we made our way to our beds. The boys who slept at Rosemary had to march in crocodile fashion, no dawdling. This must have been rather hard in bad weather. For some strange reason the youngest boys slept at Rosemary,

Lessons at school were not difficult as most of the work we did was a follow up of what I had known from my previous schooling. There was one big exception, we did handicrafts. I made a couple of ash trays out of copper sheet. The tray was first marked out and then the outside edge was cut to size with tin snips. The indentation was made by constant hammering of the metal with a wooden mallet whilst it was resting on a thick felt base. Each boy had to go to the woods and find a hard wooden stick with which to smooth out the hammer marks. The business end of the stick was cut to a shape to suit the work in hand and the other end was left flat. The stick was then held against the work piece and pressure was applied by leaning a shoulder on the other end, the lower end of the stick was then pushed about the metal surface and surprisingly it did smooth the work piece. The outer part of the ash-tray was decorated by punching with a star or diamond

shaped marking punch, many times to form a pattern. The centre of the tray had to be polished. I also made a number plate for our house "132", from a piece of lead, but Dad did not like it and it was never used.

Gardening: - The bigger boys had the chance to learn a little about gardening and were each given a row to cultivate. Mr. Dix took this class. We first chose, or were guided into choosing, something to grow. I was coerced into growing some beetroot. The teacher, then having some kind of an idea what was being attempted, apportioned to each lad the piece of ground that he had to dig and prepare for seed sowing. Thinking that I had done a good job of my preparation I asked for some seed. "Not fine enough tilth", I was told, "Go and hoe it again," "and again", until I thought the soil could run through my fingers as fine as sand. The beetroot that grew on my patch were lovely, being big even shape, with no apparent skin damage. What happened to our produce, none of us ever knew. Peas, carrots, beetroot, radishes, lettuce, beans, they disappeared and no comment was given by the master. We all had the feeling that it went into a special cook pot for the staff at the school.

It was while at Rosemary, and supposed to be gardening, that other adventures became possible when the members of staff were temporally absent. Our garden sported a flagpole with a button on the top, the dare was, who could reach it. I reached it, and with both hands on the button rested my tummy on the top. Another boy, a lot littler than me, actually sat on the button, he was champ. Mr. Dix soon put a stop to our capers when he came back from his cup of tea and found out what we had been doing. I can't remember how many lines I had to write but it was hundreds.

Most of the boys had at sometime climbed a tree or two, but one day a lovely big pine tree lost its top, someone had broken off about four or five feet. This made the tree look odd and caused the headmistress to take notice. She did not ask who had done it, but we all had to go to bed early one night as a punishment for climbing. The next morning surprise, surprise, the pine tree had got its top back. I never found out who it was, but it had to be a very small lad who was also light in weight. He had carried the broken top back up the tree and tied it into place, it looked good until it began to wither.

The summer of that year was a scorcher. Most of the boys only wore a shirt when going to church on Sunday mornings, the rest of the time it was just shorts and pumps. During this hot weather the staff introduced us to a swimming pool that I did not even know existed, it was in a little glade in the woods. This was probably why these woods had been declared out of bounds to the boys. The water was not heated in any way and we all found it to be very cold. I remember I could not swim but stood at the shallow end, and holding on to the side ducked my head to see how long I could hold my breath. When I had had enough, I erupted up out of the water and my head went into the face of our headmistress, who had come to see if I was all right. She needed help to get out of the water and had a couple of days off duty to recover. She could not hide the black eye, and I did feel sorry that it had happened. Swimming was suspended for a time because none of the other staff would take charge of the swimming lesson. Perhaps it was the cold water that was responsible for this situation.



Cropwood. Boz is second from the left on the back row

Dares : - A craze went round the school to do a dare. After we were all in bed and the lights had gone out, I was one of a number of boys who had climbed to the tower of the main building and given the bell a little 'ting' just to tell the other boys that I had made it. For me this meant climbing through a window in the toilet block to be able to scramble onto its roof. Then by walking along the ridge tiles for some twenty yards I could then turn left and gain access to the roof of the main hall. From here, climbing up a strong drain pipe - (stench pipe) I gained access to another roof, this was where I had to be careful. I crawled up the tiles to the ridge, with the wall of the square tower on my left. By standing on the ridge tile it was possible to reach over the top of the wall of the tower. One ping and then back down again all the time hoping that the school staff had not heard the bell.



One night Mr. Dix had climbed the stairs of the tower to go for a breath of air. Something made him freeze, for on looking through a glass panel in the top door he saw first one boy, then another. He was too scared to show himself in case he frightened someone into falling, and he did not know how many boys had been out of bed and in the dark. After all the boys had returned to bed and we had started to settle down we had some surprise checks to see that all was well. When we were called the next morning, it was to a show of hands. I do not really know whether the inspection was for hands or pyjamas, I expect each told a tale as to who had been climbing. To our surprise nothing was said at the inspection. I should have said earlier that this escapade was confined to the boys in the extension block. At assembly we had a lecture about the dangers some boys had put themselves in when climbing, and that from henceforth any boy found climbing in the future, would be expelled. The climbing stopped and we were all good little boys again.

One night in July we had a thunderstorm and the wind was also blowing very hard, so the masters made several visits to the dormitories to make sure that all was well. The next day we were amazed to see that a very big elm tree had fallen during the storm, and completely blocked a lane on the boundary of the school. The trunk of this tree was so thick that when standing against it I could not see over it. It was many weeks before work was started to remove the tree. The school gardeners and a local farmer, Percy Ray, eventually cut the tree into logs and split them with big steel wedges driven home by sledge hammers. The split logs were then transported by horse and cart and stacked in the school grounds near the potting sheds. It was many weeks before all the tree had been moved. I remember hearing Mr. Giles telling the headmistress that the wood could not be burned for another year because it must first be dried out and then be split into smaller more handleable pieces.

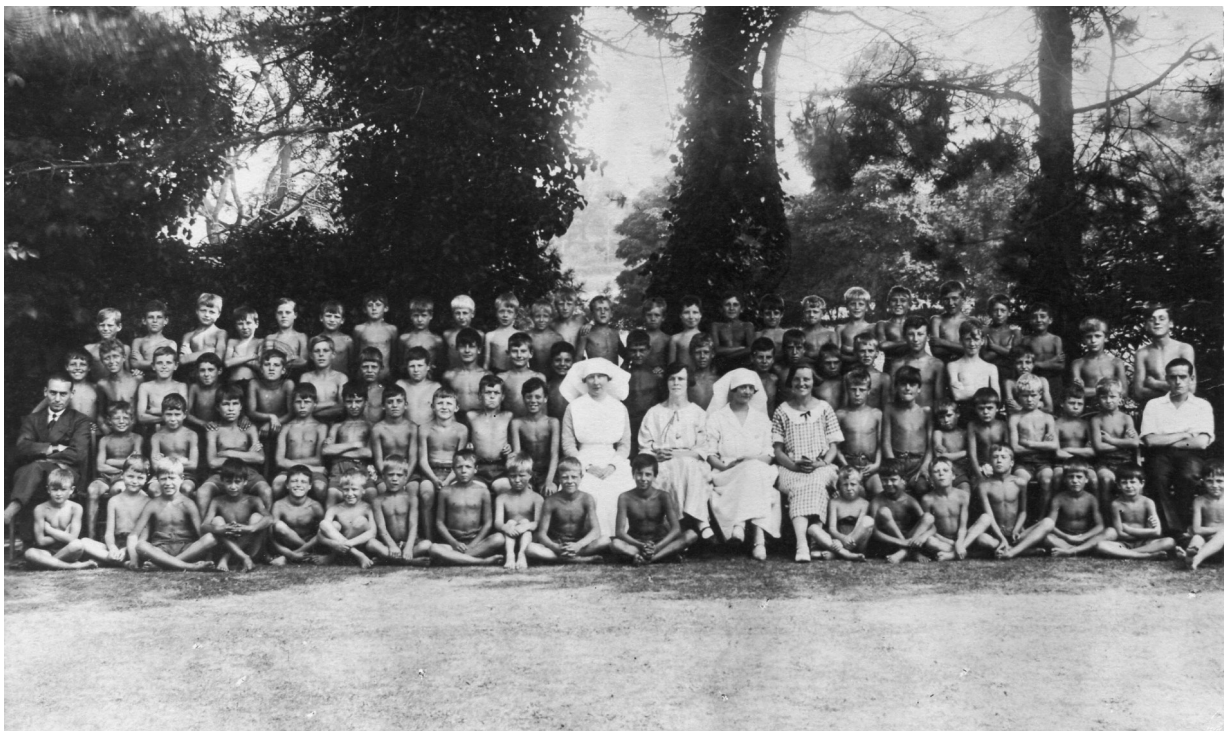
Sometimes we were taken on quite long walks, and I always liked to go when they went near to Blackwell Railway Station. One walk took us through the station and then alongside the track but going down hill. If there was a train coming up the incline, we all wanted to stand on this path, with the track at eye level, and watch the track movement when the engine went past. Some of the sleepers seemed to sink down into the ground about one inch and then come back again when the train had gone by. Sometimes the cry would be, "Big Bertha is coming", this was the name given to a very powerful engine that had been specially built for banking, or shoving other trains up the Lickey Incline. Blackwell Station was at the top of the Lickey Incline and Bromsgrove Station at the bottom, a distance of three miles with a gradient of 1 in 37 all the way. It was common to see two and sometimes three engines on trains climbing this hill. The trains going down the incline made the most noise, they all had to stop at Blackwell to make sure that the brakes were applied properly.

Goods wagons had a long lever handle on the sides and a porter had to release these weighted levers to apply the braking load and they always seemed to be bouncing and banging when the train moved off.

Sometimes a few of the more responsible boys were allowed to go for walks in small groups. It was with one of these groups that I first went to Percy Ray's farm and he showed us some of his machinery at work when preparing food for his cows. He finished off by cutting up a very big swede and sharing it between us.

Once we were taken for a long walk to see the Lickey Monument and to have tea at a big cafe. While at the monument we were given a few poles and some measuring tapes and then instructed how to obtain the height of the monument by measuring shadows cast by both pole and the monument. The answers given by all the boys varied considerably but I think the true height to be about 99 feet. To get to the Lickey Monument we had been granted permission to walk through some woods that I believe to be Cofton Woods. At that time, the woods belonged to Cadbury's and were not open to the public. In these woods I saw the greatest display of bluebells that I have ever seen. There were so many bluebells that when looking a short distance across them it was not possible to see any spaces between them. All these flowers and eighty boys and not one was picked. I am sure that I would have picked some had I not been given the trust to see that four other boys did not pick any. I have since wondered if it had been carefully thought out that if the likely flower pickers were asked to make sure that others did not pick flowers, none would be picked!

When the first snow of winter arrived I marvelled at the fact that a few wooden sleds appeared as if from nowhere, and for the use of all the boys. (I later found out that Mr Giles the gardener had made these sleds for the boys, and in his own time). Four sleds between 80 boys meant that some had to wait a long time for a ride and others had to wait a very long time indeed. Now during our free playtime I had wandered off and found the remains of what had been a rose garden. Plenty of pieces of wood were lying about in the long grass and some of the wood even had nails in so I thought, "Just the thing to make sled runners, can I make my own sled?" I thought about this quite a lot and fool like, talked to others of the possibilities. After class I borrowed a tenon saw and a hammer from the craft cupboard and in a very short time I had what I considered to be the best sled at the school. Having tried it out and found it to be very satisfactory I had a whale of a time. My pleasures were short lived. What I did not know, was that the tools that I had borrowed had belonged to Mr. Dix. Others knowing of how I had made a sled, tried to do the same. Mr. Dix's saw lost a couple of teeth and also needed sharpening, and as I was the only one who had made a usable sled, it was me that got the blame for damaging the saw. This cost me many hours of work writing out another thousand lines "I must not use other people's tools without permission". I am sure Mr. Dix could read the first twenty lines but there was doubt about him reading the last twenty, he said he couldn't.



Cropwood School. Boz is second from from the back, fifth in from the left hand side

Some weeks later we went to the sports field and two teams were selected by Mr. Dix and Mr. Burbridge to play a new game of "Stool Ball". Two targets about 14 inches square were erected on poles at about four feet high, these being at opposite ends of a pitch, like at cricket. The game was something like cricket but the bowlers threw the ball at the square targets. The batters had a short version of the American baseball bat. Still being in Mr. Dix's bad books he did not, as normally, pick me to be on his side. Mr. Dix was batting, he looked around and when the next ball came he gave it an almighty whack. It should have gone over the top of my head but, from a bent position, I leaped straight upwards and with one hand above my head the ball stuck in my hand. Everybody else on the field saw this unusual catch but Mr. Dix, he continued running from end to end to score his Six. He did not believe that he had been caught out. When I saw the look he gave me, I began to wish that I had not caught the ball. He had his revenge when it was my turn to bat. He put himself on to bowl. I think I scored about three runs before he got me - I was pleased to notice that he softened a bit after this but I did try to keep out of his way.



With Bonfire Night approaching we all thought that there would not be any fireworks. We were wrong. Mr. Dix told the school that if any boy wanted some fireworks, he would get them the next time he went into Birmingham on his day off. We had a few weeks in which to save our pocket money before the big collection. On the appointed Wednesday two boys were selected to accompany Mr. Dix when he went to buy the fireworks - me and another boy name Shaunacy. Having bought the fireworks we were taken into a big Lyons Cafe and Mr. Dix treated us both to a cup of drinking chocolate and a cake. Mr. Dix then saw that we got onto the train with the fireworks, before leaving us. The train took us to Barnt Green Junction, then we had a long walk to the school.

Mr. Groves the lodge keeper also had the Job of looking after the electric supply to the school. In a building alongside the lodge was a big gas engine to drive a dynamo to charge a very big bank of accumulators (wet batteries). Three of us were invited to go into the battery house to see what was done. The other two boys went inside but I could not. After getting about four feet inside the fumes from the battery acid took my breath and I had to go back outside.

Many of the boys had flash lamps, powered by the old fashioned flat batteries. The fault with these, they never lasted long enough. Having heard others talking about recharging flat batteries by warming and getting some success set me thinking. What would happen if I screwed the cover of a light switch off and held my battery to the terminals so letting the real electricity go into my battery? This was tried, the battery showed no improvement but worse still the lights would not work either. Somebody shopped me and Mr. Groves gave me a lecture about the dangers of meddling with electricity even at 120 volts pressure. Mr. Groves told the headmistress but he did not give her my name. He just told her that one of the boys had caused his lights to fuse. We all had a lecture then, I never meddled with electricity again either. I liked Mr. Groves.

My stay at Cropwood was like a series of long holidays. All of the boys were sent home during what would normally be the school holidays, and they returned to Cropwood to do their schooling. Having made a friend of one boy named John, I was invited to go to his house one Saturday during a school holiday. He lived somewhere in Selly Oak not far from where the railway bridge crosses the Bristol Road. Having been to the Woodlands with Bill I knew where that was. When I got off the tram John was there to meet me. When we got to his home it seemed that there was a Family Gathering. His parents and several grown up sisters and a aunt were all in the living room. We were welcomed home and John's father said, "is he here? where is he? speak up I want to know where you are"? As the man was facing in my direction, the command seemed strange but with a bit of prompting I said "Hello", "say it again" came the command, I again said "hello". John's father then seemed to push all other people out of his way and walking round the furniture came straight to me. He held my shoulders in his arms and pulling me forward he kissed me. I must have looked what I was, embarrassed. John's father then said, "It is supposed to be lucky to be kissed by a blind man and I hope it is for you". One of the ladies present said to me, "It's all right, Dad always greets new visitors like that". It was only there and then that I found out that John's father was blind. He only wanted me to speak so that

he could locate where about I was, I thought that this was marvellous. Although we were good friends we lived too far apart to meet each other very often and we lost touch.

My year at Cropwood completed I returned to Burlington Street to continue my schooling. I was put into the same class as other boys who had been my school mates before I had been sent away. I remember working hard to be kept in this class. Fortunately I was able to show that I had been well taught during my absence from Burlington Street. I always managed to keep in the top dozen in a class of about nearly fifty.

The methods of teaching in those days were much different to the modern way. The poor teachers were stuck with forty to fifty boys for five days per week from 9 a.m. until noon and then again from 2 p.m. until 4-30 p.m. They must have been dedicated people to be able to teach all subjects from Maths to Singing, Poetry, Geography, History, English etc. We did have a mid morning and a mid afternoon break of about ten minutes, and we did let our hair down in that time.

One of the games that was very popular was "Release". This was a team game, the hunters and the hunted. The hunters had to keep one man to guard the den, the rest of the team had to search and find and then touch any member of the hunted team. Once touched it was considered a capture and the victim had to retire to the den to await the capture of the rest of the team. After some of the hunted had been caught it was then up to his team mates to release them. This was done by running through the den and shouting "RELEASE" without being touched by a member of the other side. Some of us developed quite a good degree of skill in stalking the hunters and when favourable go charging through the den to give the captives a chance to run free.

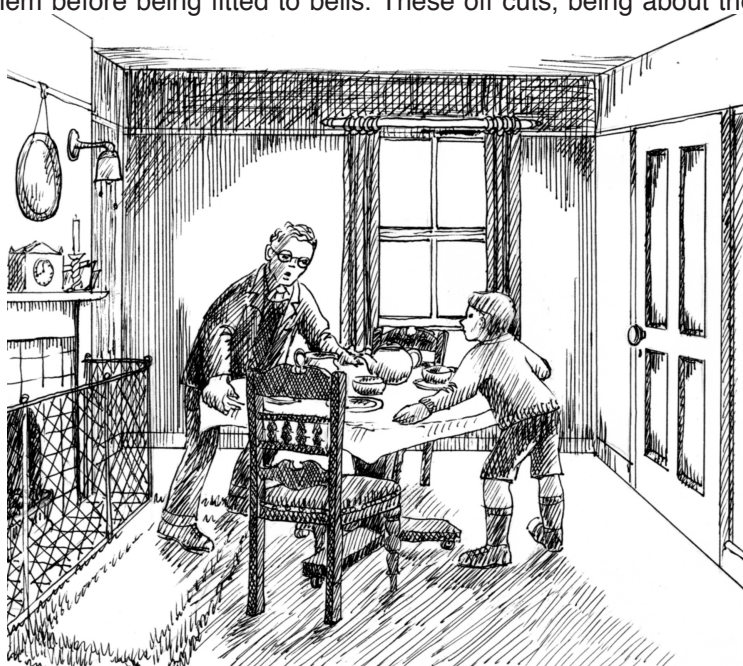
The school staff were as follows: Mr. Blakey - Headmaster; Mr. Edding - Standard Eight; Mr. Pover- Standard Seven; Mr. Hall - Standard Six; Mr. Davies - Standard Five; Miss Twist - Standard Four; Mr. Shipton - Standard Three

Mr. Pover, who had a club foot, in his own free time took on the running of the school football and cricket teams. His coaching must have been good for the school were champions at football and cricket for several years. I was never in the school teams, being considered to not be strong enough to take part.

At home I had to help my brother Bill to do the house keeping, running errands, washing up, peeling spuds etc. I was also detailed to clean the knives and forks. Our cutlery was made from a carbon steel and would rust if neglected. Our Dad was a bell turner and he sometimes brought home some emery cloth that had been very well used and discarded. This was what I had to clean the knives and forks with. Due to constant cleaning in this way the knife blades got thinner and thinner and more and more flexible but very sharp. Eventually some of the knives had to be discarded as being too dangerous to use. The blades actually bent very much when trying to cut meat.

Dad sometimes had to make hand bells that had handles made from 'lignum vita' a very hard wood. The handles always had a plain part cut off them before being fitted to bells. These off cuts, being about the diameter of a old penny and about 1 inch long, made smashing conkers. Real conkers (Horse Chestnuts) were rarely seen and most lads used cotten reels. My conker smashed a good many cotton reels.

Brother Reg seemed to escape doing any of the chores because he went to work. Dad was always first out in the morning, he used to leave at about 7 o'clock before I was awake. Reg, Bill and me all wanted to get washed at the kitchen sink at the same time and squabbles did arise. One morning Reg said that he had had enough of me and was after giving me a good hiding, but I was fast enough to keep out of his reach. It was easy to keep our round dining table between us, the more I dodged him the angrier he became. During all this he tried to reach me across the table and leaned his weight on the the table in doing so. Crash! we could not believe our eyes. One single



board of the table remained in position because this was directly above the one central support. All the rest of the table top was on the floor. It was unbelievable that passions and noise could be quelled so instantly, "What shall we tell our Dad?", someone said. Reg went off to work and Bill and I somehow managed to pick up all that had fallen onto the floor and put the table cloth into water to soak the spilled tea out of it. Then we somehow turned the broken table upside down and let it rest on the floor. With the help of a few hard knocks we managed to push the broken top back into place and then insert a couple of extra screws, but there were now two great cracks right across the veneered table. Bill said that all would be well providing we did not let Dad see the table without a cloth to cover it. This proved to be easier than we had imagined. It had always been a rule that the table should be protected by a green patterned table cloth when not required for serving meals. The traditional white cloth was used at meal times. Both Bill and myself became quite good at changing one cloth for the other while standing with our backs to our Father to hide the damage during the change over. Even Reg learned how to do this when he was forced to prepare the table.

Aston Hall

In Aston Park, not very far from where we lived, was Aston Hall, a Jacobean stately home used as a sort of museum. The first time that I went into Aston Hall was as a little whipper snapper, holding my Father's hand. I do remember seeing a number of stuffed animals in a huge glass case at that time. There was a lion and a tiger and others that I can't remember the names of. The case had been well decorated to represent a jungle scene. Having previously been told that lions would eat you if they caught you, I did not like to be too close to the one in the glass case.

Some years later my brother Bill (who was still at school) took me to Aston Hall to have a look round. I was told to just walk quietly and to take my hands out of my pockets, and the Keeper would probably let us in. I must have looked quite innocent when we walked past the Keeper who was sitting at a desk just inside the main door. I could not resist looking at him as we walked past and seeing him frown at us but we kept going and we were in.

The animals had gone and the entrance hall seemed to be a very big barn of a room. We walked round the hall as far as we were allowed. Bill told me that at some time there had been a war and that soldiers had been shooting cannon at Aston Hall, he pointed out a black ring painted on a wall at the bottom of some stairs, marking the place where a cannon ball had hit.

In one of the upper rooms were some mummies, standing erect inside glass cases. It was surprising what effect these had on visitors, they all whispered instead of talking normally and they seemed to try to walk past the mummies so quietly, just as if they did not want to be seen should the mummies wake up. The bandages on the head of one of the mummies had been disturbed and seemed to be ready to fall off. I don't think anyone liked looking at it.

We visited Aston Hall about four times while Bill was still at school and were only turned away once that I can remember. During our visits we saw the Keeper escorting some apparently important visitors round the hall, keeping at a discreet distance we saw things that the ordinary visitor would not see. The Keeper of course could walk the other side of rope barriers, and we saw him open a writing desk and show the many drawers that were in the desk, some of them were so well hidden that he called them "secret drawers". Near to this



Aston Hall and the Long Gallery

desk he pressed on a part of the panelled wall and revealed a secret door. Now Bill told me that there was supposed to be a secret passage from Aston Hall to Aston Church which was quite a long way off. We never found out if this was true, but we did think that we did know the entrance to one end of it.

Age was telling on the old building and the floors creaked and moved under our weight as we quietly walked through. Dick's Garret, I was told, was on the top floor, but we could not go to see it because the floor was not safe to walk upon. I could believe this because the floor in the long gallery felt a bit spooky. After Bill had left school I did go by myself to visit the hall and having talked with other boys had learned some naughty tricks. I remember seeing a young man and his girl quietly standing and whispering in front of a mummy. The floor being very springy would creak and reveal my presence if I walked too close, so I stood still. Now by doing a slow 'knees bend' and then quickly standing up straight the floor began to vibrate. The mummy case, which was free standing, also vibrated as also did the mummy. The vibration of course gave away the fact that someone else was about, but when they turned I was quietly looking at something different and not concerned with them. I remember the lady saying "I do not like this at all, please take me home". Shortly after this the hall was closed to the public for some necessary work and decoration to be done, the work seemed to take a very long time.

It was more than half a century before I again went into Aston Hall and was pleased to find that it was less of a museum and more like the house must have been when inhabited by its owners. Alas, times had changed and it was no longer possible to walk freely round the hall and to dwell on any item of particular interest. Visitors had to wait until others, sufficient to make a party of at least eight, had arrived when a steward would then escort them round and give a commentary on items of particular interest.

Sometimes the hall is now open to view by candle light, but then walkways are roped off to guide visitors on a set route through the hall. Stewards are dressed in old fashioned clothes as footmen etc. At these times many stewards are needed to keep the attending crowd on the move.

Sometimes Bill took me with him when he went to take Freda's parcel to the Woodlands. The first few rides on the number 70 tram was an adventure. After leaving the hospital we sometimes went for a walk along the country lane that joined the Bristol Road opposite the hospital. It was along this lane that I first saw and picked a few blackberries. I soon learned that blackberries are not available all the year round but only for a few short weeks. As soon as I had been 'conned' into knowing the way to go, I was given the job of taking the parcel more times than I wanted. The journey was all well and good in fair weather but not at all pleasant during the bad winter weather. It was impossible to read when travelling on the tram because of the rocking and bouncing motion of the tram. The faster it went the more rough was the ride.

February the 4th 1925 was my 11th birthday and Bill was 14 years old on the 5th of February. This meant that Bill would be leaving school at the end of the term in April. When Bill did leave school he found employment right away as office boy in the wages office at Perfecter Tubes, a tube making works. Taking over as general dogsbody, I enjoyed the responsibility for a time, but soon realised that I did not have so much free time. But not having someone to keep nagging at me had its compensations. The front room of our house was only used on rare occasions, we children were never allowed to go into this room to sit. I now had no one to stop me, and I looked over all the forbidden books. One book "The Sea" and also a complete set of weekly books about the Boer War were my favourites. The pictures were only black and white but I nearly read the ink of the paper with the times that I looked at them.

With Dad and my two brothers being at work, I was expected to do all the shopping and to have a dinner cooked for when they all came home. Dad used to put £1-10 shillings in a safe place that he showed to me, but I did have to account for every halfpenny that was spent at the end of the week. I would sometimes walk a couple of miles to get the potatoes at 2lb for three halfpence instead of paying the 2 pence required at the local shops. I never declared this thrift, thinking that I had earned the halfpenny profit.

Saturdays used to be the day that the ash pit in front of the fire had to be emptied and then the fire grate 'black leaded'. This was hard work and left little time for play. Most Saturdays we had about 3/4 lb of skirting and two pound of onions, fried in lard, for our dinner, we always had lots of bread with all of our meals.

On Tuesday mornings I had to take all of our dirty washing to a lady who lived in Clifton Road, the next street but one, this before going to school. The clean and beautifully ironed shirts, collars, sheets etc. had to be

collected on Thursday evenings (we never had pyjamas in those days, boys used to sleep in their shirts). The charge was dependent on the amount of washing and invariably was between 1 shilling and two pence, (written "1/2" in old money) and 1 shilling and 5 pence.

Friday night we did the main grocery shopping at the 'Home and Colonial Stores'. This was always a long job because we had to join a queue to wait to be served. The smell of freshly ground coffee was lovely, but we never had any of that, it was too dear, we drank tea. Butter had to be scooped from a big block and with the aid of two special wooden butter pats it was knocked into a rectangular shape after being weighed. The whole lot was finished with a special pat that left a raised pattern on one surface of our pound of butter. When my order was complete, the shop assistant used to make a brown paper parcel of all the items, and tie it with string. Just think of the people still awaiting to be served when the assistant had difficulty in packing the items to make the parcel.

Near to the Home and Colonial Stores was a shop that had been converted into an office, the large windows had been covered from the inside with some black paint, this made the windows like a huge mirror. By standing on the shop step at the end of the window and only showing half of your body to the front, anyone coming along the footpath from the opposite end of the window could see half a body and its reflection, this looked very much like a full figure. Any movement of an arm or leg appeared as a pair, but moving in opposite directions. Our favourite trick was to hold a handkerchief by its diagonal corners and then to drag it across the chin. The appearance in the mirrored window was of someone swallowing and regurgitating a handkerchief.

The HP Sauce factory was in Tower Road and all deliveries in those days were by horse and cart. Having to climb quite a steep hill the horses went at a very slow pace. Some of the boys used to look on the dray to see if any of the crates had been broken in transit. Many a handful of compressed dates have been taken from such boxes. This could only be done if the driver was sitting up front, should he be walking and encouraging the horse, he would be able to keep a better look out over his load.

At the age of eleven people were always remarking that I was getting a big lad and I was inclined to agree with them. While playing in the entry I discovered that I could lean against one wall and put up my feet on the opposite wall and support my weight just by pushing with my feet. This progressed to putting one hand on each wall and lifting myself off the floor, then by holding my feet firmly against the two walls I was able to change the position of my hands and raise myself up still higher. After repeated practice I was able to climb up to the ceiling of the entry and then manoeuvre into the sitting position of back on one wall and feet on the other. While sitting up aloft I heard grown ups walking underneath and not knowing of my existence they said many things that I should not have heard. Getting daring I used to sit up aloft and drop small things like cherry stones on whoever passed underneath. How my Dad found out I do not know but I suppose that going home very dirty he put two and two together.

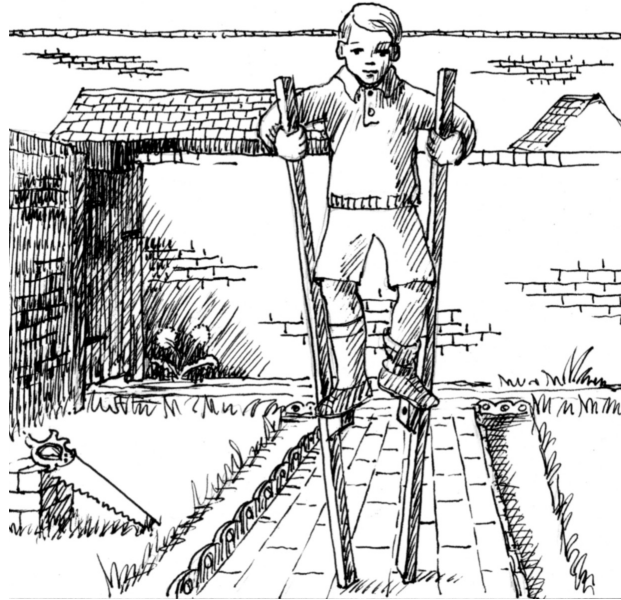
The Midland Vinegar brewery was also near the HP Sauce factory. The trade name for the Vinegar brewery was "Gartons". When any of the kids had any differences and passed by on the other side of the road, one could often hear the remark shouted, "Gartons to you backwards".



About the middle of 1925 the lady who did our washing gave us two weeks notice, she was finding it too much for her to do.

Grandma had died earlier in the year and Auntie Francis and family had taken over at Grandma's old house. There was Auntie Francis, Uncle Jack and three daughters, Francis, Mabel and Lillian, their surname being Taylor. Dad persuaded Auntie Francis to do our washing and to come and give our house a clean every Friday, this meant that I would not now have quite so much to do.

Some of the other children in our street had stilts to play with, and I longed to have a pair. Now in rummaging down the cellar, I found some long pieces of timber that had been part of the framework of spring beds, ideas came into my mind. Taking one length of this timber, approximately 3" x 2" and about six foot long I cut off two pieces about 5" long. Now Dad's saw was a bit ancient and a bit rusty, it took me about three weeks to cut the remaining length down the middle to make the two props for the stilts. Of course there was never any evidence of sawdust in our back yard by the time Dad came home, I used the broom well and often and dug the sawdust into the ground as far from the house as possible. Fastening the footrests on was now the problem, the longest rusty nails in Dad's tool box being only about 2", but I did find some screws also about 2" long. By burning with a very hot poker I made holes half way through the props big enough to clear the screw heads. At the bottom of these holes, by using a gimlet, I made starting holes for the screws. Holding the foot rests in position I tried to screw the two pieces together, but I did not have the strength. How many times I had to remove the screws to try to enlarge the clearance holes I do not know but it took me several days to get the blocks finally attached. I soon learned to get up onto these stilts and walk. Eventually I was able to discard one stilt and by hopping on the other one was able to go down our street some 50 yards before having to rest.



When Reg was at school he had a Meccano set and he and Bill made models. I was treated like a plague and they forever shooed me off and told me to never touch anything. Now that both of my brothers were at work, I assumed that I could have free access to this wonderful toy. Dad scolded me for taking it upon myself to take the Meccano, but he reasoned with my brothers and finally it was mine for keeps. For quite a long time I spent every penny I could get hold of in buying extra parts so that I could make bigger models.

One model was of a big aeroplane with two brackets on the top onto which were attached pulley wheels. Obtaining a long piece of string, one end was fastened to the wall at the top of our garden and the other end to the frame of my bedroom window. By threading the string through the brackets and resting the pulley wheels over the string the plane would be free to glide down the inclined string. Having built into the plane a light, powered by a simple flash light battery, another piece of string was attached to the plane in such a way that a pull of the string would switch off the light. The same string could then haul the plane back to the top for another glide. The abrupt stop at the end of its travel caused some trouble to the light switch. An improvement was made by incorporating a chain of rubber bands onto the end of the arresting string, to cushion the stop.

Another time I built a model of Blackpool Tower that nearly reached the ceiling. This had a lift that was operated by a clockwork motor and it also had a little light in it.

Flood

About 1925 father paid what he thought was a lot of money (more than £4) to have some new linoleum in the living room. I had been sent to see my Grandma, I suppose to get me out of the way. When I got back home it was to find that a man had brought and fitted the new lino. It did look nice but we were constantly being reminded to wipe our feet on the mat when we came in. This must have been in the summer time because we did not have a fire burning. About two weeks later Dad and Bill had gone out together to do some

shopping and had hurried back home to avoid getting wet because the sky was so very dark. They had just got back home before the rain started to fall. It thundered and lightening kept flashing and the rainfall got heavier. Looking through the back window we could see a big pool of water when Dad said "look where the drain is the water is coming up not going down". When the flood reached our back doorstep Dad did get very alarmed. He said that he had never seen anything like this before. The water level kept rising until water was coming into our house from under the door. Dad and Bill tried to stop the inflow with towels but the water still got in. When the rainfall got still heavier Dad gave up trying to stop the inflow and we all moved everything that could be moved off the floor. Our new linoleum now had a river flowing over it. Our efforts then were to try to divert this water down the cellar to save the front room getting wet. The water won, it eventually was flowing in at the back door and out at the front door. Within two hours the rain stopped and daylight came back again. Then the big job of cleaning up and drying out began. I did feel sorry for my Dad when he worried about all the money he had spent to buy the new lino. As the days passed by and the floors dried out so the new lino shrank until the edges were about one inch from the wall. On the day of the rain we kept hoping that the gas would not go out and need more pennies in the meter that was down the cellar. When we finally had to visit the meter it was to find every thing very damp but the floodwater had drained away.

During October when the local elections were held I, together with some of my friends, got a job at the Polling Station collecting numbers, for which we should have been given five shillings but I was never paid more than three shillings and six pence - 3/6 would however buy quite a lot of meccano parts. As Dad was at work he did not know anything about this until afterwards. The polling station was at Ellen Knox, and I ran home for a few minutes during the day to get something to eat. Dad had a late dinner that day.

Another time another boy, named Harry Lee, and myself went a walk to Barr Beacon. From Tower Road that was a long way, about 5 miles each way. While playing in a big sand quarry near the Beacon we found caves and discovered that some other boys had been camping out in them. It was quite an adventure to walk into a cave and then to come out again in another place. We also found a big plank of wood, about 8" x 2" and about 7 ft long and decided to try to take this home with us to burn on the bonfire on November 5th. We could not carry it so we tied some old bits of rope together (found in the quarry) and pulled it along. This proved to be harder work than we anticipated and when climbing the hill of Bevington Road (within half a mile from home) our strength gave out and we had to stop. Harry stood guard with the plank and I went home to get help from some of the other boys from our neighbourhood. Having expended so much energy to get the plank home, I was put out at not being allowed to go to the bonfire to see the plank burned.

It was getting quite close to bonfire night when the old tradition of having a firecan was revived. I had to play with mine when there was no-one to stop me from doing so. A firecan was an old milk or cocoa tin with holes punched in it and carried on a piece of wire bent over to make a handle. Paper, bits of wood and even coal were burned in the tin which needed to be swung about and round and round to get sufficient draught to get the coal to light. Accidents sometimes did happen. I remember using one treacle tin that was stronger than other tins available. What I did not know was that the heat of the fire would melt the solder that held the bottom in the can. There was quite a shower when the bottom did fall out. Happily no damage was done. The last firecan that I had was on a Saturday afternoon when Dad had gone to see Aston Villa play and I, of course, was at home on my own. Time must have gone quicker that day because Dad came home and caught me swinging the fire can. Dad was very displeased with me and he let me know it.

Water water

At the corner of Tower Road and Upper Sutton Street was a Public House called The White Swan, and the Publican was named Mr. E. Roberts. Every Sunday morning without fail he used to wash the outside of the building and the footpath by playing a hose pipe and using a broom. Most of the lads round about would have liked to do the hose pipe job for him, no-one had seen a hose pipe before that one.

Back at home I had ideas, can I make a hose pipe out of the number of old discarded inner tubes (cycle tyres) that were lying about at home? I cut one such tube and putting one end over the tap and tying it on with string, the other end was passed through the open kitchen window. When the tap was turned on the water passed through all right but it did not squib very far. Picking up the exit end and pinching it to restrict the outflow the tyre expanded quite a lot. By letting it out from only a small part at the end, a considerable jet resulted and I squibbed most of the yard.

On returning to the kitchen I wondered where all the wet had come from. I soon found out. Turning the tap on again then going outside and closing the open end of the tube I leaned through the open window to observe a fountain washing the kitchen ceiling. Now I knew what I had to do. Hide the hose pipe and clean

the kitchen before anyone came home. Dad actually thanked me for making such a good job of cleaning the kitchen and the yard. Another time I was able to join two tubes together and I could then reach round a corner and swill all of the yard.

How far would a tyre tube stretch before it burst? This was a question that I must have asked myself. I tied the open end with a piece of string and went into the kitchen and turned on the tap more slowly and watched the tube expand. I covered any leaking water with a dish cloth to avoid another flood in the kitchen. By the time that a part of the tube lying in the sink had reached a diameter of about twelve inches I turned the water off. This did not stop water from spouting from a leak near the tap, the pressure being maintained by the elasticity of the rubber tube. Going outside to release the open end of the tube I was amazed to see a number of balloons along the pipe with the biggest being probably 15 inches diameter. While trying to remove the string to let the water out more quickly the big balloon burst and the water did go quickly. I soon cleaned up and removed the evidence that I had been fooling about and noticed that the tube had split for about 15 inches, it was never any good after that and I abandoned hose piping.

Dad used to buy coal by the load, this was delivered and dropped down the cellar window that was let into the footpath. There always seemed to be a lot of fine slack left over that we could not burn in our grate. We had used to mix potato peelings with slack, and fill old sugar bags with this mixture and put them at the back of the fire. This burned well if the slack was not too fine, the dust would not burn. When I was wanting some money badly I would take a bucket of this dust with a bit of rough slack on the top and sell it at 2 pence a bucket, to any any of the washer women who lived in the area. Very few ladies had a second bucket from me.

When Pat Collins Fair next came we had to go to see what was on show. With no money to spend we could only just mooch around and look. In the front of one side show there was a tightrope and someone walking on it. This was new to us and we wondered how could they balance like that.

Back at home I had often stood on the top of the dividing fence at the top of our garden but I held on to the next door neighbour's shed for balance. The next time that I did this I tried to walk along the fence. The fence was a row of palings a little over three feet high. The palings had pointed tops but my shoes could span two of them and I practiced walking on them but only where I could hold onto the shed for support.

During the next few weeks I learned to walk a short distance without holding. I did eventually manage to walk twelve yards, the length of the fence. The next day I had another go but disaster occurred. One of the palings fell off and I also had a fall. In falling my chest had quite a nasty bump and it hurt me for days but I did not tell anyone. My wanting to be a tight rope walker vanished for ever.

Some of the boys in our road used to hire bicycles to ride around on. Depending upon the quality of the cycle, it was possible to hire an old rattler for two pence, three pence for a reasonable rattler and four pence for a good cycle, for one hour. During one school holiday Bobby Brant and myself hired a bike between us. Bobby could ride so he fetched the bike, it did not take me long to get the hang of riding. Not having the means of telling the time we must have kept the bike much longer than we should have done for we were told by other boys that the owner had been looking for us. We walked the bike up the entry to his yard and quietly leaned it against the wall and not being challenged we tip toed away.

Having learned to ride was one thing but I could not get much practice. I could not hire a bike or share in the hiring very often. However the second time I had a share of a hired cycle I found that I could ride.

Both of my brothers, who were now at work, had bought their own cycles and used them to go to work. Later when Reg did not like riding in the rain or spoiling his clothes by riding the bike, he decided to leave his cycle at home and go to work on the tram, when the new tram route to the Fort Dunlop was opened

One day I took Reg's bike into the back yard to see if I could ride it but the saddle was too high and I returned the bike.

Being a persistent moocher I found out where Bill hid his bicycle tools and I borrowed them. Yes they did fit the parts on Reg's bike and it was easy then to adjust the height of the saddle, and by using one of the spanners as a gauge it was easy to return the saddle to its original position

I thought that if I borrowed Reg's bike I must make sure that none of the local boys were in the road when I took it out. It would be too risky to let other boys have rides on it. For my first ride I went via Tower Road, Upper Thomas Street, Frederick Road, Whitehead Road, Albert Road, Upper Sutton Street and Tower Road back home. During the following weeks I ventured farther and wider until I felt quite confident riding Reg's bike.

Someone from the church said to Reg, "your little brother rides his cycle quite well". Reg said "you must have seen someone else, our Boz does not have a bike". The next time they met, Reg was again told that I had been seen riding a bicycle. Reg could not believe this and asked what kind of bike was he riding. When they described the bike Reg must have nearly had a fit, he told the informer that I must have been riding his bicycle.

Reg never said anything to me about this but he must have told our Dad. When I came into the house one day Dad and Reg were having an argument. Bill advised me to keep out of the way for Dad was trying to coax Reg to let me have some rides on his bike. Reg however did not like this and was objecting strongly. I was later told by Bill that it had been agreed that I could have a ride on Reg's bike but only if Bill came with me on his own bike. I now had to wait until Bill said he would take me for a ride. One weekend Bill said he was ready and off we went. Bill took me along roads that I had never seen before but we eventually got onto the Chester Road. Progressing along a quiet stretch Bill said "we don't always go as slow as this I will show you how we sometimes go". Off he went thinking he would leave me behind but he did not. After a short time Bill slowed down but I did not. I went faster and kept going until we came to a road junction and I did not know which road to take so I stopped and waited for Bill to catch me up. Bill said "I think that we should go back now" because he did not know where the other roads went to but we had just come through Brownhills. The fast riding was over and we had a quiet ride back home. My Dad always seemed to send me away when he was talking about me and into the next room I had to go. When I heard my Dad chuckling at Bill's report of our ride I knew I was alright. When Reg heard about our ride he changed his mind and said "that settles it and he can't have my bike anymore, if he goes racing like that my bike will be worn out in no time". I was never allowed to ride on it again.

My Father had at different times taken me for a medical check up. It seemed that the authorities were keeping their eye on me since Mom had died. During one examination my Father was asked, "what school does he go to"? When my father told them that I went to Burlington Street School, the immediate question then asked was, "what is the matter with him"? Now unknown to my Father, there were three schools in Burlington Street: the Elementary School for Boys (to which I went); the Elementary School for Girls; and another school for handicapped children, the doctor had questioned did I go to this latter school. During all the years that I attended school I had never seen anyone entering or leaving this school. I learned afterwards that the times of attendance had been specially arranged so that the two groups of children could not mix.

This interview had rather disturbed my Father and I think he began to look upon me as being sub normal. He took me to my aunt and uncle at Coles Lane Sutton Coldfield. Father had a quiet word with aunt and I was sent outside down the garden and told to await being called back indoors. On return my aunt and uncle tested me out with some mental arithmetic. Auntie asked the questions and Uncle and I had to see who got the answer first. Poor Uncle, he never stood a chance, I was proved to be far quicker than any of the adults then present. Uncle turned to my Father and said that in his opinion there was nothing to worry about. I had sensed that all was not well and I remembered the doctor's question to my Father and I did try hard and in doing so I impressed my uncle with my prompt replies. I did feel somewhat degraded by this experience, and I made sure that I was not going to be left behind in school work.

At the age of eleven, whether for my health or just to keep me out of mischief I never knew, but during the summer holiday from school, I was taken to stay with my Auntie Harriet and Uncle Arthur who lived in Coles Lane Sutton Coldfield. I did not know until then that I had three girl cousins, two of them at school and one went out to work. I also had a cousin Sid who drove a motor coach and was often away from home when driving long distance. I was being allowed to sleep in Sid's bed for one week while Sid was away from home.

Auntie was a wonderful cook and I ever marvelled at the cakes and puddings and jellies that she used to make. She also made the first cake that I ever saw that had icing on it. Being doubtful, I remember watching others, before tasting the cake myself and was surprised to find that I liked it.

The open country was only part way down the lane and I went for many walks towards Walmley. The railway was near the road at the end of Coles Lane and I spent many hours watching the trains and the many rabbits

that lived in holes in the bank at the side of the track. Uncle Arthur went to the council offices and had me registered as a resident, living in Sutton, this meant that I could go into Sutton Park without having to pay the 4 pence entrance fee.

At that time there used to be a World War One army tank on show near the town gate. The old Crystal Palace was also near and was used for entertainment purposes. Dancing to records was very popular and from outside I used to watch the adults in wonder. I roamed far and wide in the park and often lost my way and was late home. In the evenings Uncle and Auntie sometimes played cards with us and I more than held my own at the games they taught me to play, Whist, Rummy, Old Maid and Spoof.

The girls and myself were very good friends and used to play together but sometimes they used to torment me and I did likewise. Uncle used to laugh at us but made sure we were not too rough with each other.

One evening after dark I had gone to the outside loo and they locked me out. I could hear them all laughing at me behind the kitchen door. I climbed up the drain pipe onto the loo roof, avoiding the rain water storage tank and from there into my bedroom, then calmly walked down the stairs crossed the dining room and locked the girls in the kitchen.

Uncle and Auntie were amazed to see me enter without using the door and in so short a time but laughed at me turning the tables on the girls by locking them in the kitchen. Next day when we were alone Auntie asked me to show her how I had got in through the bedroom window, I was then told to never do it again. Not wanting to offend Aunt and Uncle I did as requested.

Uncle was employed as a gardener in a big house somewhere in 'Four Oaks', I never knew just where but he had a wonderful home garden and a allotment where he grew lots of vegetables, lettuce and celery. I was very happy with Uncle and Auntie and was sorry when Dad came to fetch me back home when it was time to go back to school.

The following Christmas Auntie invited all of us to Christmas dinner at Sutton. Dad, Reg, Bill and myself set out to walk the six miles to Sutton because the trams and Midland Red buses had stopped running for the Christmas holiday. It was a nice day and I enjoyed the walk, I had never walked so far with my Dad before and it made me feel tall. Christmas dinner was great and the pudding had silver threepenny bits in it for two lucky people. Being without transport Dad was worried about what time we would get home. Auntie arranged to give Dad, Reg and Bill an early tea so that they would have plenty of time to walk home and I was considered to be too young to be expected to walk another six miles home so a bed was found for me. After Dad had left some other visitors came to Aunties house and everyone joined in a game of cards. 'Pit' was the name of the game and what a noisy game it proved to be. It was modelled on the corn exchange and all the players were swapping cards marked as different types of grain. Two packs of special cards were used to enable all present to join in the game. I soon cottoned on to what was expected and shouted "Two Two Two", or "One One One" as necessary to exchange cards, and actually won twice. Uncle told us that the first time that they had played 'Pit' the neighbours came round to see if all was well as they thought that a fight was taking place. The neighbours having been warned on this occasion said that if they had not had a prior engagement they would have liked to join in.

On Boxing Day my cousins all went out to tea with friends and I went with Uncle and Auntie (after tea) to the next door neighbours house to play at cards (Mr. Lewis and his grown up family). Being the only child in the party I was spoiled a bit when the grown ups kept plying me with chocolate. The game played was 'Spoof' and I did very well indeed, winning several games and a few pennies.

Holidays, when at my Aunties seemed to pass all too quickly but I had to go home eventually. I walked to the Erdington tram terminus, about 2 miles, and there got on a number 2 tram to Aston Cross, not very far from my home. The tram fare at that time was twopence halfpenny for adults and one penny for children.

At the age of twelve I again went to stay with Auntie and Uncle at Sutton Coldfield, and wonders, I was to stay with them for two and perhaps three weeks of the summer holiday from school, this was marvellous. Uncle must have wondered what I should do with my time and if he could do something to help me. After tea one evening Uncle said to me, "can you ride a bicycle?", to which I answered "yes". He then said, "I had to leave my bike at the repairers to be mended, do you think you can fetch it for me"? Was I proud to think that he would trust me to ride his cycle and he had never seen if I could ride it or not. The shop was not very far away and I was instructed to be there at precisely half past seven, of course I was a bit early. The man at the shop, who was expecting me, eyed me up and questioned me about cycles, then he said "get

on this cycle and ride it to the next lamp post and then come back to me", this I did. He then adjusted the saddle a bit and sent me off on another little trial run. On return he commented "that's better, you can reach the peddles now". He then began to lecture me about taking care of other peoples property and that I was a lucky boy to have Mr. Burton for an uncle. I was eventually sent on my way with the message that he had fitted new brake blocks and adjusted and oiled all bearings and that it should now be safe to ride. When I got back Uncle had had to go out and I delivered the bike safely to Auntie who then told me that Uncle had had his bike put in good order so that I could ride it, and providing that I took good care of it, it was mine for the next week. The next day I was introduced to Frank Barlow, the boy from next door, who was to go with me, on his own bike, and show me round Sutton Park. We soon joined up with other boys who Frank knew and played about with. This was all O.K. until one lad wanted to ride Uncle's bike, and this I would not allow and I rode off leaving them. Auntie wanted to know why I had not come home with Frank, she seemed satisfied with my explanation and was content to let me go out by myself from then onwards. I always liked to go to the Park via Wyndley Lane, the roadway was very narrow and I do not remember footpaths, but it was a very pretty and friendly village. Keeping to recognised paths I explored Sutton Park and found out for myself what a big park it was. I did clean Uncles bike and thank him for the use of it, before I returned to my own home at the end of my holiday.

At weekends, other young ladies, relations of Aunt and Uncle, came to visit them when they had a half day off, they all worked in service and lived in. Being introduced to two of them they were told that I was the boy who used to tease their cousins. One girl, I forget her name, said, "well he won't tease me", and picking up a whale bone hair brush she gave me a whack on top of my head with the bristle side of the brush. I nearly passed out and Auntie was a bit worried. My head was sore for days afterwards, I made sure that she never ever had the chance to do any such thing again.

While talking to Aunt and Uncle the visitors told of things they did at work. When the master and missus had gone out and they were left to do their work unsupervised, finding that master's and missus's clothes strewn about in the bedroom they had to gather them up. First one and then another started to dress up in the masters clothes. The remarks they made about the Plus Fours could not be printed. They also talked of the young master who had a habit of demanding six eggs for breakfast, when his mother was not at home, and of how they had to put him in his place!

Bill sometimes took me with him to visit Mother's grave in the churchyard of Aston Parish Church. When walking along Park Road on the way home we stopped to look in a shop with a small front window. On display were things that seemed strange to us, they were bits of electrical apparatus. Electricity was new to us, having seen but few electric lights and no other apparatus. One little bit puzzled us, it was labelled 'Shocking Coil'. This same coil was on sale for what must have been months, I always looked in when I passed by. One day I noticed that the price ticket had been marked 'reduced from 7/6 to 4/6' in old money (37½ p to 22½ p) new money.

On starting a new term at another school in Alma Street, I went with others to manual classes (woodwork). The teacher, Mr. Sykes, always at the start and end of a term gave all the lads a little diversion. Out of his private cupboard he got a Magneto from a old petrol engine. He fixed two wires to this and turned a crank handle that he had fixed. Whoever held the handles on the ends of the two wires had a electric current pass through them and could feel a tingle all up their arms. He got us all to link hands and form a horse shoe round the class room. The two end boys were asked to hold the two handles (one each) and he cranked the magneto. All of us could feel the electric current go through us, and we marvelled. At last I new what a 'Shocking Coil' would do. We were told that a little electric shock was good for all sorts of troubles, like rheumatism.

The cricket field in Aston Park was not open to the public every day, it being reserved for the use of organised cricket matches, mostly at week ends. Round the edge of this field were a lot of bushes and shrubs. We used to raid these when looking for suitable sticks for kite making and at the same time keep an eye open for the Park Keeper. Seeking such sticks one day I found some money in the grass right close to the bushes, a ten shilling note, folded up, and two one shilling pieces. I could not go and tell the Park Keeper that I had found it or he would know I had been out of bounds, so I kept it.

After a couple of days it began to burn a hole in my pocket and I went and bought the shocking coil. The man told me that I would also need a battery and he showed me how to use it. I tried this out with lots of my pals but I kept it secret from Dad. The battery cost 4½ pence and it did not last very long and the newness of the thing had worn off so I forgot it. At school a boy named Latham asked me if I still had a shocking coil and would I swap it for a Daisy air gun. We swapped. The air gun proved to be as bad as the shocking coil,

one had to spend more money on pellets to be able to use it. Our back garden was a good place to use this gun because the two gable ends of other houses acted as barriers if I missed my target. I shot many tin cans from about twelve yards range. I was always a bit afraid of having this and only kept it for a short while before selling it for about 1 shilling and ten pence. Nearly all of the other cash I had spent in buying extra Meccano parts.

Back at home and at the age of thirteen, having amassed some hundreds of marbles, and being too big to play with such things, I did not know what to do with them, I could not give them away. Walking near to Aston Villa football ground there in a shop window was some $\frac{1}{4}$ " square elastic. It took me several weeks to gather together the money to buy half a yard of it. Using Meccano parts to make a fork (three girders thick) and the tongue from an old boot, I made a super catapult. With marbles for ammunition I set to hitting the chimney pots on some of the houses round about. I had learned by this time never trust your best friend if you want to keep a secret, so I never told anyone about my catapult. Then, having heard a man talking in the street saying that somebody was throwing marbles over where he lived and that when he found out who it was what he was going to do to him, my catapult was then hidden away for a long time. The next time I got it out to look at, the rubber had perished and it broke when stretched. With the rubber burned and the fork dismantled I felt all innocent again.

Since the wall clock had been out of order for a very long time and the ancient alarm clock that we relied on was giving trouble, it sometimes stopped and had to be wound up more than it should need, Dad said I suppose we must get a new clock but I do not know where the money will come from.

Next day as soon as I got home from school down came the big clock off the wall. It was covered in dust on the top. I cleaned this and then set about finding out how to get at the works. I soon found out that the pendulum bob was only hooked on and not fastened in any way. Having undone some screws to remove the works I discovered that the works could not be removed until the clock fingers had been taken off. Not being able to get the fingers off I replaced the screws to put the clock back on the wall. I had remembered that Uncle Dick had told Dad that the clock should be hung on the wall before the pendulum bob was put on, so I tried it. With the clock on the wall and no bob the clock started to tick very rapidly and I had to hold it still while the bob was put into place. The clock was still running when I went back to school. When I got back home it had stopped again. I now had to turn the fingers by hand to tell the same time that it had been at for months, such that Dad would not know that I had been fiddling.

How many times I tried before I managed to get the fingers off the clock I do not know. I think it was with the aid of a Meccano screwdriver that I managed it. Removing the works, all assembled between three plates, I examined it and tried to clean it and oiled it with some old oil that had been kept for the sewing machine. Of course it had to be back on the wall every night before anyone else came home.

Each time The clock was taken down I dismantled a bit more of it, but had to remember that it must be on the wall again in good time. The whole of the works were eventually dismantled one day for a proper clean in a jam jar with some paraffin in it. This took so long that I did not have time to put all the parts back properly and for a number of days the clock hung on the wall with most of the bits in a paper bag in the bottom of the case. The fingers of course still told the same time. I eventually did reassemble the clock and by trial and error I bent the wire that pushed the pendulum and it worked. The trouble now was what to say when Dad found the clock going? I stopped the clock and set the fingers to the old time while I thought this one out.

We were sitting quietly one night when surprise surprise the clock started to strike, not the proper number of times but the clock had started on its own. I must have had a very innocent look on my face because Dad said, "come on, tell me what you have been doing". I said that I had only oiled it with a feather. Dad said "I believe you but thousands wouldn't".

After a time when I thought it safe to do so I started work on the clock again. I found out why a big wheel had twelve gaps cut out and every one was different, and how the position of one lever would let another lever with a flat end fall into one of the gaps and let the clock strike. (In later years I learned that this second lever should be called a detent.) When the lever fell into the narrow gap the clock struck one, and it struck twelve when it fell into the widest gap. The wheels being repositioned and most carefully set the clock gave good service for quite a long time. However it did take a long time to set the position of the bob in the right place. I just kept turning the little adjusting nut at the bottom the wrong way. On reflection I think that Dad did know that I had been playing with the clock. I believe my Dad thought that it was better to know what the little blighter was doing and put up with it than to drive me to do something else. I loved My Dad.



Dad and Freda at Forelands, near Bromsgrove

Some time in 1925 Freda was transferred to the Forlands Hospital at Bromsgrove to learn to walk and prepare to come back home. One year later she did come home and now our Father had another problem, how could she get the help and attention she needed to return to normal life. For the first week she stayed at home with us but I suppose we all seemed strangers to her and she was very withdrawn and refused to communicate.

Father had apparently arranged for Freda to go and live with Aunt Harriet and Uncle Arthur and the three girls Gwen, Miriam and Doris. This worked well for a time until Freda became very withdrawn again and it was difficult to have any conversation with her. Dad used to go to Sutton to see her every week and no doubt make some payment to Aunt for her generosity.

One Sunday Freda was worse than usual and Dad made his mind up to bring her back home with him. On the way back home he took Freda to see our doctor (Doctor Topping) at his home, at about 8 p.m. on the Sunday night. Poor Freda never got home that day but was taken on the tram to the General Hospital in Birmingham and was admitted at once. Freda had got Mastoids and was very ill and stayed in hospital for about two more years during which time she had a number of serious operations for mastoids.

Trouble had developed with our gas supply, the mantle light kept going nearly out and then lighting up full again. The same sort of thing happened with the gas stove which could not be turned to a low setting without the risk of it going out altogether. We obtained our gas via a coin in the slot meter, this used to consume pennies (the old pennies 240 of them in £1). The next time the gas man came to empty the meter he was told of our trouble, he said he would report the trouble when he got back from his round.

A few days latter a gas fitter arrived while I was at home from school at lunchtime. After inspecting the meter and the way the gas burned he made the statement, "This sort of thing often happens with what we call water meters. You have got water in the pipes, they need blowing and I do not have a blower". He then said he would see what he could do without a blower and down the cellar we went. I was not letting him work in our cellar without seeing what he did. Firstly he turned off the gas at the main by the side of the meter, and then we turned on the gas stove and a couple of lights. The man did have a big spanner and with its aid he removed a coupling and disconnected the gas meter. Then after wiping the end of the pipe leading into the meter he applied his mouth to it and gave a good blow. Repeating this about three time he said "ah, I think that has shifted it". He reconnected the meter, turned the gas stove and light taps off and then returned to the cellar and turned the main tap on again. He then turned on a ring on the gas stove and applied a light. That stove did not light for some time and I was told that it would not light until all of the air he had blown in, had come through. Wonders, the gas jet and the lights remained steady, well done mister gas man.

About two weeks later the light started to go up and down just as they had done previously. Dad said "They will not like it but if it does not improve I shall have to get them to come and clear the pipes again". Next day during the lunch break I went down the cellar and inspected the meter. We did not have a spanner in our

house that was big enough to remove the coupling. I tried it with my fingers and could not move it. The next day the gas supply was worse and I had a brain wave. I found a stick and tied a piece of thick string near to one end of it, just like the whip we used with our tops. Then I wet the string. Back down the cellar I wound the string round the coupling until the wooden stick was touching the brass nut. I had to repeat this several times until the stick was in the right place when it touched the coupling. Now by pulling gently but firmly on the stick the nut moved and I was then able to turn it with my fingers. I now turned off the gas at the main and repeated what I had seen the gas man do.

It worked but not for long. I suppose that I was not able to blow through the pipe so strongly as the man had done. At intervals of several days I repeated this procedure and kept the gas going, and I never told a soul what I had done.

I was fighting a losing battle when a letter was put through our door saying that a man would be coming to fit a new meter and would Dad be sure to see that someone would be at home to let the man in. I wanted to watch this man fit a new meter but after looking suspiciously at the coupling that I had undone, he sent me packing while he did his work. We never had any more trouble with the supply after that. I have often thought how much of my breath had I blown into the system which had to go through the meter and be paid for by my Dad.

By the time Freda did get back home she was past school leaving age and it was time for her to seek employment. I believe that her first job was at the Telson Radio Company assembling radio parts. She took to this quite well but the work was very seasonable and in about six months she was out off work. She eventually settled down at a factory sewing 'Swallow' macintosh coats. It must have been a very difficult time for Freda for it took a very long time for her to realise that she had to live with her Father and three older brothers.

When she first came home she just sat in despair and would not acknowledge any of us. She just would not speak when we tried to make her welcome. We just tried to carry on as normal and prepared our food and asked Freda to join us. We just muddled through although Freda's manner was exasperating. For a time Freda went to live with another lady, a member of Christ Church with whom Reg had arranged the introduction. Freda was much more happy with this arrangement. Thank you Miss Austin.

One Saturday just after my fourteenth birthday there was only Dad and myself at home. I was busy dismantling a very big meccano model of Blackpool Tower when someone knocked at the front door. I went to the door to see who was there. It was a lady and gentleman. The lady knew what she wanted and quickly pushed me aside and ran through our front room to the back. I was in two minds what to do, should I chase the woman or stop to hold the man from entering. Then I heard "Bill, your hair is just as curly as it ever was, a little bit grey but it is still lovely". Dads reply was, "Why Lydia, what on ever brings you here"? The man I had kept waiting was then invited into the house. I thought that they must be an Auntie and Uncle that I had never met before. The lady talked a lot to Dad and the man asked me many questions. I told him that I was 14 years old but that I still had to go to school until the end of April, then I intended to start work. He saw enough of the meccano model to say that I must find a job in the construction industry. I have forgotten the man's name but he told me that he was an Inspector in the New York Police Force. His words "Some Cop hey". They had come to England for a holiday and to look up old friends and relations. When they had gone I asked, "Which auntie was that Dad"? He replied "She is not your Auntie". "Then who is it?" I asked, "Never you mind" was the only reply I got.

Starting Work

I attended school until I was 14 years old. My birthday was February 4th but I had to continue to attend school until the end of the term, Monday April 30th 1928. In an interview at school I had expressed a preference to do outdoor work and I was told to report to the Kynoch Works for a job as a groundman's assistant. I was also instructed that I should report to a school in Whitehead Road on two nights per week to continue my education.

I reported to the Labour Bureau (with Aunt Francis) early on the Tuesday morning and I was told that no such vacancy existed. Knowing full well that many thousands of men were out of work and I did not want to join them, I asked if any other work was available. I was told that the only work available was in the Fitting Shop so I asked if I could have the job. A messenger was then detailed to escort me to the Fitting Shop Manager for a further interview.

When I was first taken into the machine shops I stopped dead in my tracks. The noise and the vision of hundreds of leather belts all across the workshops was more than I expected. Recovering, I was escorted to see Mr. Mackie the manager and Mr. Abrahams the foreman. It was obvious that I was expected and I had to answer a number of simple questions.

I was told that I could have a job and would be trained as a 'tool mecker' (toolmaker) but I would have to work hard. This I promised to do. I was then instructed to report to Mr Abrahams at 8 o'clock on the following morning, and that my pay would be 7 shillings and 6 pence per week of 47 hours. I then had to sign a form to agree to 7 pence per week being deducted from my pay. Part of this was for the upkeep of the Social Club.

Wednesday morning the 2nd of May 1928 was a very big day for me and I made sure that I was early. I was soon put to work on a shaping machine and Mr. Walter Cousins, who worked on the next machine to me, was detailed to look after me. He gave me the work and directed me how to operate the machine. I had never seen a shaping machine before but I soon mastered the simple controls and machined some hold down strips and a pair of parallel strips for my own use. I soon learned that hold down strips and parallel strips of various sizes were essential equipment for a Shaper. As my confidence grew and when my machine was traversing over larger areas I was able to look around and observe what other men and machines were in the workshop.

One solitary electric motor, via line shafts under ground and counter shafts above ground, supplied power with leather belting driving some 50 lathes, 11 shaping machines, 7 milling machines many drilling machines, a very large boring machine, two slotting machines, two grind stones and other ancillary pieces of equipment. I thought that there was enough leather in the belting to reach all the way to my home, one and a half miles away.

For my first week at work I did not have any overalls and not having long trousers I had to stand a lot of ribbing from the men in the workshop. Thinking back I now realise that I was growing out of my shorts and they were very tight. Mr. Cousins informed me that I should get a couple of boiler suits to work in and that these could be purchased from the company but only on Friday afternoon. I was also told to get a one inch micrometer of my own. Dad did not like this but he did give me the money to buy the overalls on the Friday, and at last I was able to cover my knees. Some people wondered why I walked home still wearing my overalls.

At six o'clock on Friday of the second week I lined up with all the other men to receive my pay of about four shillings for a short weeks work. I had to wait another week to collect a full weeks pay of 7 shillings and six pence less seven pence stoppages. In those days it was common for workers to work a week in hand. Dad insisted that he should see my pay packet so I gave it to him, unopened. He then wanted to know how much pocket money I expected out of such a large sum. I settled for one shilling and Dad grumbled and insisted that I must not waste any of it. He did, however, give me two pence each day to buy a pudding from the works canteen. It was possible to buy a dinner but most of the men could not afford this outlay and settled for sandwiches from home and sometimes followed by a pudding from the canteen.

Mr. Cousins kept daily reminding me that I should get a Micrometer of my own and suggested that I could buy a second hand one from Pawsons, a Big Pawn shop in the High Street, Aston. I told Dad that I could not work without one and he said he would see what he could do. Dad would not trust me to go to the Pawn Shop to make my own purchase and detailed my brother Reg to do the shopping. Unfortunately neither Dad or Reg knew what a Micrometer was and Reg came back with a micrometer that was made to measure screw threads only and it was no good to me. Dad was annoyed when I told him so and he insisted that I took it to work and asked Mr. Cousins if it would do.

Reg then had to pay a second visit to Pawsons to exchange his purchase for another micrometer suitable for measuring flat and parallel surfaces, he came back with a winner and it served me well for many years. I also had a one foot steel rule.

After a few more weeks the men started teasing me with stories. All the roads in the works had a railway track and one had to be careful when the engines were moving coal trucks to the power station, and other heavy goods. I was told that every August Monday they used to scrub out about ten trucks and they used one of the works engines to take workers on a trip to Blackpool. I was sent to man after man who always told the same tale but I refused to put my name forward to go on the proposed trip. I was soon learning to never trust any of the men when such stories were put forward to me and to some other lads who had started work on the same day.

I signed in at night school and attended regularly but, after two whole terms at night school we had only revised work that I had already done at school and I then decided to stop going. It was at work that my real education started. I started to ask questions such as "Why can one piece of steel cut another piece of steel and not wear away in doing so"? I found out that Carbon steel and High Speed steels can be heat treated to give them added hardness. I was to learn much more during the following years.

On my 15 th birthday my wage was increased to ten shillings per week.

Having started to work at ICI Metals Division, along with a number of other boys, it was not long before I made a friend of Joe Parks. We did not have the means to do a lot so we just went for long walks. I think it was Whitsuntide when we excelled and went to Lichfield Bower

and Sports Day. I do not remember any Procession but Lichfield was really full of people when we got there. We wandered round the town waiting until about 2 o'clock when the sports started. Not knowing Lichfield we just followed the crowd to the sports ground, this must have been in what we now know as Beacon Park. This was the first time I had ever known that such sports events took place other than at schools. The speed of the cycle racers was impressive, particularly on the bends where quite a number fell off, skidding on the grass. At about six o'clock we left and again followed the crowd back to the railway station. The railway staff should have been congratulated for dealing with so many people. When we got to the station we could not get in, the station was just full to overflowing. I think half of Brum must have gone to Lichfield that day, but we did get home without too much delay. This must have been in 1929.

I have forgotten the name of the road where Joe lived but I think it was 'Cattle Grove.' I know that I had to walk up Holborn Hill, then turn left and then right and that his house overlooked the railway. This meant that I had a good two mile walk every time that I called for him.

Joe had an elder brother named Jim and he was married but always went back to his Mom's house on Saturdays. He also had three sisters, Margaret, Minnie and Gertie. It was here that I learned to play the card game called 'Newmarket'. We spent many happy hours in the winter time at Joe's house. I recall that Jim had a gramophone and that he had been saving up to buy a special record that he badly wanted. Jim wanted someone to go with him when he went to make the purchase because he was a bit afraid to walk in the dark to get to the shop, you could be mugged even in those days.

Joe and I went with him. Walking home with his precious record with Joe and I either side of him, he stumbled. Clutching his record more tightly so as not to drop it, it cracked. It did upset him and I did feel sorry for him. Four shillings and six pence was a lot of money to lose.

During the 1930 era few people possessed a motorcar. Now a Mr. Twohig and a Mr. Illife, who worked elsewhere in the factory, were friends. They bought a small car between them – Mr. Twohig had the car as his own for a period of two weeks, then it was Mr. Illife's turn. When at work the car was always parked outside Mr. Twohig's office and as Mr. Illife did not have a parking spot where he worked he was content with this arrangement. We all wondered why Mr. Twohig had blinds fitted to the car. Now while out cycling at the weekend, someone at the works came across Mr. Twohig's car on a grass verge out in the country, and they stopped and watched. The blinds on the car had been pulled down, but Mr. Twohig was prowling along the hedgerow. Shortly afterwards the blinds were withdrawn, a car window opened and a small jerry pot was handed out for Mr. Twohig to collect and empty. The jerry must have been used by the two ladies in the car. News of this happening spread like a prairie fire on the following Monday.

On my sixteenth birthday Mr. Abrahams came to me and said, "I believe you are sixteen today", "yes" I replied, "then you will start working nights next Monday and I will arrange for work to be left for you". This was short and sharp but I did not mind because it meant that I would be paid time and a half, and money was always very short in those days. My wage then had risen to fifteen shillings for a 47 hour week.

I think it was 1931 when I was told to report to Mr. Mackie one morning, this troubled me as I had not a clue what I was needed for, but I soon found out.



ICI Metals Kynoch Works
main office building

ICI Metals Division had decided to send some of the younger workers to Aston Technical College on two half days per week to further their education and I was included in the list. It was conditional that all who went to the college in day time must also go to evening classes as the course required. We all signed on at the college to work for a National Certificate in Mechanical Engineering or Electrical Engineering. Because we had all been educated at council schools and had left school at 14 years of age we had to do a one year preliminary course to prove that we might be capable of doing the necessary hard work on the engineering course. The next year I was sitting for year one of a three year course and found the going to be easy. After a few months Mr. Mackie sent for me again. He told me that my report from Aston Tech was very good and as a reward and to encourage me further he was awarding me a half crown rise so long as I kept up the good work at the Technical College. Several other boys also had a half crown rise at the same time. How often the college issued reports of progress I did not know but it was not very long before I had another half crown rise.

The night classes started at 7-15 p.m. and ended at 9-45 p.m. and when working nights we had to report back at work by 10 o'clock. We also had to attend the daytime classes. The morning classes from 9 o'clock to noon with afternoon classes from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. These arrangements made it difficult to get our necessary sleep.

When working days only, the lunch hour was from 12-30 until 1-30 p.m., and we had to go back to work for a quarter of a hour and then ask Mr. Abrahams for a Pass Out, to be able to get past the gate keeper. Mr. Abrahams apparently did not agree that we should go back to school and be paid for it and he was nearly always missing when the pass out notes were needed, so we were often late in getting to the college. A report came back from the college to the management and passes were then issued bang on time by Mr. Coutts the wages clerk. How I managed to go to work and keep up with my college work and do my share of house work and still find time to go cycling I now can't imagine but I went out with the cycling club nearly every Sunday.

I did pass the National Certificate Exams and I had kept receiving half crown rises at frequent intervals for having good reports come through from college.

The inevitable had to happen and Mr. Mackie sent for me again. "How much bonus do you get"? was the demand. "27 shillings and sixpence Sir" was my reply. "Well you can't have any more" he said "go on and keep it up". Apparently some higher management had queried the amount of bonus that I was getting, (much more than anyone else) and they wanted to withdraw some of it. However Mr. Mackie, who was a rough and ready man who called a spade a "Bloody Shovel", had stuck up for me and I did not lose my bonus, which at that time doubled my basic pay.

I was eighteen years old when Dad unexpectedly died from pneumonia. Dad had taken me with him when visiting Aunt Laura and Uncle Archie who lived somewhere in Bearwood. Dad had not been feeling too well and he was seated in a chimney corner where it was too hot for him. He did not complain but he decided to go home earlier than expected. Dad went to bed expecting to get better in a day or two, this was on a Sunday night. On the Monday we called the doctor to come to see Dad who had got worse. Tuesday Dad had deteriorated so we called the doctor again. The doctor called an ambulance and Dad was taken to hospital, Bill went with him. Visiting was on Sundays only so Bill telephoned from a call box each day to enquire about Father. Thursday Bill was told that Dad was most seriously ill, and to call again in the morning. When Bill next phoned he was told that "Your Dad has died from a heart failure".

Reg got married soon afterwards and made a new home for himself and Phyllis, his new wife, this left Bill and myself.

I do not remember why, but Freda came back to Tower Road to live with us. She spent quite a lot of her spare time in doing things for the Church (Christ Church at Six Ways Aston). Knitting was a speciality of Freda's and she made lots of jumpers, cardigans etc., where they all went to I do not know. She did however remember me one birthday and flung at me a beautifully knitted fairisle sweater that gave me good service for many years. I have often wished that I had taken more care of it.

I remember one time Bill wanted us to redecorate our main living room. Neither of us had any experience of decorating but we decided to have a go between us. It was a Friday night and I had to go to Technical



My Dad in about 1930

College so Bill said he would start to do the stripping off and then we could have a good start for the Saturday. On returning home at about 10 o'clock, there was Bill with one leg propped up and only half of one wall stripped of wall paper. He had fallen off the steps and badly sprained his ankle. It took me until after tea time on the Sunday to finish that room. Poor old Bill he hobbled about for weeks before his ankle got better. Olive, Bills fiancé, came round to tea on the Sunday to inspect what was supposed to be our handiwork. Surprisingly she approved. Shortly after Bill and Olive got married and set up a new home of their own. This left just me and Freda to work out our own salvation.

Freda was difficult to live with. Some times she would go a whole week without speaking to me. I did what I could to make conversation but she just did not want to talk. She would sometimes do a bit of house work or wash some of her smalls and I knew I had to keep out of the way at such times. She spent the minimum time at home, most of her free time was at Christ Church at Six Way's Aston. My homework had to be done but it was impossible to do this until after Freda had gone to bed. It was often as late as 2 a.m. before I retired.

I eventually passed my exams and gained my Higher National Certificate in 1938. I well remember going to the Prize Giving ceremony when all the certificates were handed out. My invitation to attend duly arrived and I was requested to be early. Ten minutes before the opening ceremony I arrived and just found room to stand in the very back row of the crowded room. It seemed that all the Moms, Dads and Aunties had turned up as well. Just in front of me were a group of four ladies and they seemed to clap and cheer at every presentation. They turned to see me, alone, and looked so strangely at me that I had the feeling I should not have been there.

The presentations started with the first year pupils and progressed through to the fifth year at the end. There were five Higher National Certificates In Mechanical Engineering to be awarded and these were the last in the programme. My turn came with two more left to go. When my name was called I had to fight my way from the very back. People were standing in what should have been a gangway and everyone looked to see who was coming. My papers received I then had to push my way back again. The group of ladies standing in front of me turned and searched to see who had come with me and of course could not find anyone. I know I was not as well dressed as all the other people present and some of the looks I received gave me the impression that I must have just crawled out of the woodwork and was now expected to go back again. I did not have long to wait and then I could go home.

Having done the hard graft in passing my exams it was suggested that I take a course in English and then apply for a A.M.I.M.E. I did not start the course but I suppose that I had been trying to do too much and my health deteriorated. My doctor, a Scotsman named Mr. Topping, advised me to have all of my teeth out. The extractions were done a few at a time by the works dentist and was spread over a whole year. I thought that I would put off my English Class for a year and start again when I had got some new teeth. Mr. Hitler put paid to that Idea.

Boz and his descendants



Above:
Back row: Hannah, Nathan, Roger,
Richard, Becky
Front row: Cai, Ianto, Pam, Box, Val

Right: Boz with Sophie in 2007

