

BITS and PIECES recalled from the past for our three grandsons.

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“On the twenty-second of August eighteen eighty four

Such a coming and a going at our cottage door;

I had arrived - of course I'd been expected

Examined and approved and resignedly accepted;

But another great event made this a year of note;

As well as getting me my Father got the VOTE. “

Earliest years: 1884 to 1890

My first six years were spent in, North Rode, a Cheshire village about five miles from Congleton and Macclesfield; Congleton was the post-town but we used the railway to Macclesfield when we had to travel; there was no rail connection with Congleton.

North Rode station was the junction between the old Churnet Valley railway running through Leek into Staffordshire and the North Stafford railway running into Stafford; the London and North Western railway had running powers over the North Stafford railway.

The North Stafford guards were very dignified officials; they had frock coats; a broad belt round their shoulders holding a pocket, presumably for some good reason, and a

distinctive hat rather like the hats of French army officers, with a very high top (many years later we saw General De Gaulle wearing such a hat).

North Rode was not a village on the usual pattern; there was no village green or central point; there were two large houses, the Manor House – occupied by the Peel family, said to be connected with Sir Robert Peel, the one who "invented" policemen, called "Bobbies" – there were one or two cottages near the house and a lodge at both entrances to the Park ; the second large house was the Grange, where my Father was gardener; we lived in one of two cottages across the road from the back entrance to the greenhouses and stables; my uncle Will lived in the second cottage; he was the coachman.

Apart from these houses there were only the station-master's house; six cottages occupied by railway staff; the Smithy and house; several large farms, one or two tied cottages; the church, vicarage, school and school house; the school had from 40/50 pupils from age 5 to 13/14, school leaving age; there was only one teacher, the school master; he was also the organist for the church.

The Grange was occupied by Mr. Charles Conrad; with three children, whom we were trained to refer to as Master Roger; Master George and Miss Rosie; our family's connections with the Conrads] had begun many years before when Ann Parry (b. 1820) was able to achieve the ambition of many Welsh girls at that time; to get a domestic post in a "good" house; in this case the Conrads, living in a fashionable part of Liverpool; neighbours of the Gladstone family; in due course she was able to get mother into the same household.

In these houses girls received a training very similar to the present Domestic Science course; with more emphasis, possibly, on the practical side; there was the usual large Victorian family; some of the sons abroad engaged in the family business; they were in sugar; the sons in the West Indies and British Guiana areas; expecting good hampers of food from home; so in these kitchens and still rooms, the staff got a fine training in high class cooking; cakes; preserves; pickles; chutneys; to arrive in tropical countries in perfect condition; they also made all their own main simple remedies, linaments; embrocations; camomile tea; polishes - floor, shoe, furniture – (a firm Day and Martin had started to manufacture shoe polish, liquid, in a brown stone bottle; applied by a sponge on the end of a wire, sold with the bottle). All this stood our family in good stead in our housekeeping; Mother was a good manager; never mean but always careful; she seemed to get to know where the bargains were; (later in Macclesfield the barber charged 2d for cutting our hair; she found one who charged 2d but always gave the boys a ½d back; we went there!)

So that was our immediate circle: two cottages; the Grange; and the home farm, Bell Farm; we did not play with the children of high degree; there were no other children near so we had to play all our games by ourselves and we seemed to manage very nicely.

My first clear memory dates from August 1887; I can fix the date from the inherent facts; it concerned strawberries – which were in season about this time – and my clothes; I was in petticoats. My older sister and two brothers were at school; my younger brother, Joe only a few months old; so Father had probably taken me out of the way – or I had wandered across the road (there was no motor traffic in those days and only an odd farm cart passing at any time). I evidently knew where the strawberries were and was tucking into them quietly when Mr. Conrad passed along the drive, saw me and told my Father; I was taken, away home; I remember clearly I had a straw hat with a very wide brim; and was in petticoats; I had not been "breeched". In those days little boys were not put in trousers until they were "safe". The year before, when the strawberries would be in season I would only be two years old; the next year I would be four and wearing trousers; so the date is fairly firmly fixed and I don't think I invented the story.

So many memories come back as I am writing this; a cousin of the Conrads visited the Grange from time to time, a girl called "Nonie"; for some reason Joe and myself were scared of her; I can't remember why; but we were and always kept near home when she was about. Many years later the youngest son – born after they left the Grange – became Vicar. I asked him one day if he remembered "Nonie" and told him why I had enquired; he did of course remember her; she had married a naval officer who – I believe – was killed in the First World War. (The vicar was a little later appointed to Christ's Hospital, Winchester, the reputed original of Trollope's novel, the Warden.)

One winter the weather was so cold that the North Rode pool was frozen over and a lot of skaters came from Macclesfield and other places; mother made a big milk can of tea and carried it across the fields – $\frac{3}{4}$ mile – to sell; the tea would keep hot until she reached the skaters and would sell very quickly.

I was given part of a stick of toffee and told to eat it and not show it to little Joe – who was not to have any. Being contrary I did show it to Joe; he cried and they broke the stick in two and gave him a piece. I threw the rest away; but when I went to look for it a little later it had disappeared so I lost all my toffee.

When I was a bit older and before starting school I used to go to the station where I had made friends with the porter, Daniel Sillitoe – yes that was his name. I was fascinated by his job; he was booking clerk as well as porter. When he got the signal that a train was coming he rang a big brass bell – a hand bell – that all stations used then, and as the train came in sight he locked the booking office and ran across the line – in front of the train – up the steps provided to collect the tickets of incoming passengers and give the guard the signal to leave; although I don't remember the occasion, I was told that one day I ran across the line after him and was dragged up just in time.

Once the two boys Roger and George pushed me – being smaller – through the greenhouse window to get some grapes; they had brought cigars and matches and we adjourned to the apple loft – where apples were stored – and ate grapes and smoked cigars. I don't suppose I did much smoking but we were all given to understand that such conduct was not approved.

I spent a great deal of my time at the farm, Bell Farm; Mr. and Mrs. Hadfield, Joseph, James, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Thomas, Sarah and Lois; but they had a second farm at Shireoaks, a farm near Chapel en le Frith. Some of the family were always there, with Miles Hadfield, brother to Mr. Hadfield, always in residence; once or twice a year they moved sheep and cattle from one farm to the other – a 20 mile road journey, through Macclesfield, Hurdsfield, Rainow, Kettleshulme, Horwich End, (Whaley Bridge) Chapel, Chapel Milton, and Breck; then through about twelve fields to the farm on the hills.

The Hadfield's were Wesleyans – like ourselves – and the Sunday evening service was held in a room leading from the farm kitchen; the services being taken by local preachers coming out from Macclesfield and holding an afternoon service at another farm, Stoneyfold, near Fools Nook [Nock?]; they walked out (six miles) returning by train from North Rode in the evening. Sometimes the preacher had tea with us - then we had the best tea set out, the blue willow pattern set.

Mr. Hadfield had another brother, George, a farmer at Countesscliffe, Harpur Hill, outside Buxton. One of their daughters, Edit, married William Pilkington, a brother of Granny Hudson; so from very early days I often heard the name Pilkington with no knowledge of the association I was to have with that family.

The Hadfields were very reluctant to let their children get married and leave home; they were too useful on the farm. Joseph and James married in their early 50s; Dorothy and Elizabeth never married; a young farmer who came courting Elizabeth was chased off by Mr Hadfield with a horsewhip and ceased his visits; Sarah and Thomas did break away and started their own farms; Lois married very late.

One or two other Wesleyans in the neighbourhood came to the services – possibly 12 to 20 in all. In lambing time we often heard a cade lamb – a motherless lamb – bleating and occasionally, some chickens chirping; they had hatched out earlier than the rest and were being kept warm by the fire until they could be put back under the mother hen at night.

One of the families attending the service was the Rileys from Shellow Farm, $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away. When I went to school at first Mr Riley farmed the place near the school. There was a commotion outside the school room one morning; the schoolmaster left and a farm labourer came in and sat at the master's desk; he did not give any lessons only kept us quiet; it turned out that Mr Riley had got his hand in the threshing machine and had been taken to Congleton hospital in charge of the schoolmaster; he lost his hand and often used a hook fastened to his arm with attachments for various things; the hook always fascinated me. (I had not heard of Captain Hook at the time).

One Christmas Mother had an invitation to go to a party at the Manor House and on her return said the invitation had included the children; she told us all about a wonderful thing: a Magic Lantern which showed pictures on a big white sheet without leaving any marks on the sheet. I recall our disappointment when we learnt we might have gone and seen these for ourselves.

In our house we had no gas, electricity, cooking stove, nor running water at the sink; we used candles – made of tallow (mutton fat) which smelled badly if they were allowed to "smoke" so you had to keep trimming the burning wick with a special kind of scissors which cut the wick but retained the portion cut off to avoid dropping it on the table or floor. Later we used wax candles and also "tapers" – long thin candles we could carry about in our hands.; we also used "spills" – pieces of paper rolled out fairly compact in the centre but with a loose piece at the top to light; these could be carried from the fire to the lamp or candle but were always a bit risky; we did have matches (as I will mention later) but these cost money; the spills were free.

All our cooking was done on the kitchen range, the fire in the centre with the oven on one side and a small boiler on the other side. This had to be filled and emptied by "lading" cans, just big enough to dip into the boiler. Outside the back door was a huge rain water tub to catch the rainwater from the roof; this was all our cleaning water; we had to fetch the drinking water from a well in the meadow opposite the front of the Grange. That was one of the jobs the children could do; we used buckets and to stop the water splashing over we had pieces of wood floating on the top of the water. If Father or one of the bigger boys fetched the water they used a "yoke", a piece of shaped wood which fitted over the shoulders with two chains, one on each side, with hooks to hold the buckets, one on each chain.

Outside, at the back, was the pigsty where we kept the pig being fattened to provide the bacon and hams for the winter. We also had about 50 hens – Mother was very good at managing poultry; the eggs were put in lime when plentiful in the summer, for our own use, so that the winter eggs could be sold to the grocer at a good price.

Wages and cost of living, then and now (1973)

The purchasing power of the £1 paper note of today is 5 new pence in today's money [???]; so although wages were generally very low in those days the cost of living was also equally low; so in quoting wages and prices we must increase every item by 20 times to get a fair comparison.

Wages. The Conrads employed:

- Butler £40
 - Cook £30
 - Housemaid £20
 - General £15 £105 indoors
 - Gardener £52
 - Coachman £52 £104 Total £209 (x 20 £4,1080)
-
- Gardener £1 a week (£20)
 - Freehouse 4/- (£4)

- Free veg; we had no kitchen garden. 5/- (£5 a week)
- Free range for poultry; firewood from the wood; logs to go under oven;
- Milk 1d to 2d a **quart** today 5p a **pint**; I use ten pints a week; 55 p. (11 old shillings a week)
- The butchers cart called at the weekend from Congleton, the joint costing about 2/6 (£2.50)

We bought butter and cheese from the farm; probably 6d a lb (50p) and sugar, flour; oatmeal; rice etc from the grocer; the van came out from Macclesfield about once a fortnight; so with extras the £1 cash each week would represent about £30. to £35 at present prices; not a high wage but not anywhere near poverty level.

And the wages were regular; there was no lost time through bad weather or shortage of work; I do not think Father had many holidays; perhaps odd days off; but Mother and one or two of the children went almost each year to her old home at Stonebridge; fares on the railway were very cheap probably 10/- return for an adult, half fare for the children; £1 for three persons; if there was a baby in arms this would be free. We went from North Rode, changing at Harecastle, Crewe, Chester. I remember seeing horses being used at Crewe station to shunt the carriages from line to line in place of engines; I wondered if I had imagined this and about 1950 asked a porter if they had ever used horses; he said, Yes, but before his time. He then shewed me the raised stone places between the lines at one or two points where the horses stood to let trains pass.

A Day trip

One day Mother took Joe and myself for a day in Buxton. I remember it very well. We had tea at a shop in the market place, just opposite the yard belonging to the house where Granny Hudson lived at the time; I often wondered if she saw me – the little boy she would one day make very happy by consenting to marry him and the lady who would become her mother-in-law!

I went to North Rode school for about one year before we moved to Macclesfield but I do not know the exact date; probably 22nd August 1889, this being the legal age to start schooling. (When I visited the school in 1969 they turned up the old registers but they did not go back far enough to confirm the dates.) But I seem to have packed quite a few adventures and misdeeds whilst at the school.

It was about two miles to school past the railway station, through the private Manor House estate, along the unfenced bank of the North Rode pool – a reservoir built to supply the canal with water – through the Park and past the school house, a farm, and the church. One day I managed to get hold of the business end of a match, and dragged behind my sister and two brothers for a few yards, and set fire to a “copse”, a cluster of shrubs, small trees and very dry grass; it was quite a bonfire before we managed to put the fire out. The next day a policeman – in uniform – was at the Grange; I thought he had come for me and was very frightened but he had only come to see Mr Conrad who had forgotten to take out his dog licences.

There were a lot of waterhens nests in the pool, near the edge, in the rushes which grew near the side. One day I managed to get hold of a big table spoon, some string and a long stick, probably broken off a tree near the pool. I fastened the spoon to the end of the stick, undressed (all but my singlet, as we called our vests in those days) and was wading into the pool to get the eggs when I was seen and yanked out. I must have thought that adventure out very carefully beforehand.

As I have stated there was only one teacher, the school master himself; in these circumstances I believe the method adopted was for the master to have all-over control of the lessons but for the older boys and girls in the sections to teach the younger ones; in my case I certainly remember that I had a slate and pencil of my own and learnt to write in this way, starting with "pot hooks": rows and rows of them under the supervision of the boy and girl next to me.

There was only one big room in the school with a large stove – coal burning – in the centre with a strong fireguard in position (we used to put our dinners on the top of the stove to warm them up) so we could hear all the lessons the master was giving to the others; one day I saw him strike a match, and hold it behind a blackboard during one of his lessons; I was told later (when I asked a question) that he was illustrating how eclipses occurred; the match was the sun, the blackboard the earth or the moon which got in front of one another from time to time and so caused an eclipse of the sun, or the moon.

Looking back this corrects the popular idea of village schools being for country bumpkins. My older brother James went straight from North Rode school into a grocers shop in Macclesfield and he could hold his own with the town boys. Later on I got to know about other village schools where they had fine schoolmasters. One was at Sutton Lane Ends, Mr Buckley Moffatt, a Scot, who brought out some good scholars.

We had to take our "school money" each Monday morning, a penny a week for the youngest pupils (20p), 2d or 3d for the oldest. One Monday morning I gave the others the slip and went into the sweet shop – the lodge at the entrance of the Park, nearest the school – and I spent my penny there. I can't say why – I doubt if I had ever been in a shop before – when my name was called I answered "present". Where is your penny? Mother didn't give me one. My brother and sister said she had and I was soon found out; perhaps I had some toffee left in my pocket.

The Squire's family was named "Daintry"; they were all giants – well over six feet; the daughter was one of the biggest; she married the agent, named "Hogg" and she was always called Mrs Daintry Hogg; she often came in the school and did not take much notice of the school master: one day she came in in a big temper: some of the boys had been teasing "Lizzie Bowler" – a girl who was apparently a bit simple. She said if she heard of any other boys doing this she would thrash them herself; and I bet she could have done easily.

One morning Tommy Clayton had not come to school; we wondered if he was "twagging it" (our words for playing truant); and whether he would get the stick when he did come; then we all settled down to work. But at 11.0 Tommy walked in; he said the clock had stopped so they did not know the time; but reckoned he would be too late for the morning school so he set off to reach the school at 1.0 pm for the afternoon session; they were two hours out; he did not get the stick.

There was a large walnut tree in our garden; plenty of nuts; we pickled a lot before they ripened and the nuts turned hard; it was a funny way of pickling them: first we had to prick the nuts all over with a fork (our fingers got stained brown for days) then they were put in bottles or jars and boiling vinegar poured over: they turned black completely; they were quite good to eat with cold meat.

Because Father was the gardener the family had to take the post bag to the Smithy every night to hand to the postman; this was a locked leather bag in which the letters for the Conrad household – servants as well – were placed at the post office, the postman delivering it still locked. In the evening we had to get it to the postman to take to the post office; it was a walk through a dark wood and we were rather scared so two of us would go for company.

Some time before leaving for Macclesfield I began to go to Sunday school at Bosley, 2½ miles away, with the older ones. We left home at about 8.30 am for school at 9.30; then went [sat?] in the chapel at 10.30 am to 12 noon; had dinner in the schoolroom ready for Sunday school at 2.30 to 3.30, when we walked home. My teacher was a very big man, Daniel Massey – he married Sarah Hadfield - a strong beard and a very strong arm. We were singing the closing hymn "Jerusalem the Golden" and I had to stand next to him, my head against his thigh; for some reason I pinched his "bottom" (though this was a forbidden word then). I can't say why; he was a very nice man: I can still feel his strong hand propelling me by the neck to stand where he could keep an eye on me. But he did not bear any ill will; he gave me a whole 6d at the North Rode Fair later on. He was with his girl – Sarah – who knew how I had assaulted her young man.

I remember distinctly once the older ones, with the boys from the station, were going somewhere and did not want me with them; so as we were all ready to start they sent me back to ask Mother for something or other – I can't remember what. When I came back they had all run off out of sight and I was left at home. I suppose all part of one's training to be alert all the time.

1890 We move from North Rode to Macclesfield

Then we began to hear our elders talking about things unusual in the Grange. Father had difficulty in getting his wages; he had to waylay Mr Conrad. We heard them mention that he had "lost a lot of money"; as he used to go shooting in the woods near the house it was quiet and busy at times looking for the money in the wood. Then came news that they were leaving the Grange to live in the Manchester suburbs; there was a sale at the house

and Father got the post as gardener at the Cemetery, Macclesfield, run by the Corporation.

This meant a great upheaval. I think we would have moved to a town sooner or later because there was little opening for employment in the village – farm labourer's work for the boys, rough farm service for the girls. James had left school and gone to work in Macclesfield but lived away from home on a few shillings a week. So Mr 's [Conrad's?] removal only hastened the move.

I have just been reading (31 Aug 1973) that Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, made his first speech in the House of Lords in 1884, his subject being the Housing of the Poor; in North Rode there were no poor and no housing problems because, as I have stated earlier, practically all the houses were "tied" houses. Living standards were

higher than in the towns generally - there were no slums and plenty of good fresh air but in the case of most of the smaller villages no work for the children. The movement to the towns was general and was hastened by the gradual introduction of machinery on the farms; mowing machines replacing the scythes; "reddying" machines to shake the hay up,

horse rakes to gather the grass together and so on; machines to cut hay for fodder, cut the turnips, and to spread the manure on the fields – time wasting job – all these cut the labour force down. Thrashing machines had been in use for some years earlier – to separate the grain from the stalks – and the same steam engines were used on some large farms for ploughing; two engines being used one on each side of the field pulling the plough backwards and forwards between the engines. (Milking machines came much later.)

So we left the country in 1890. I have a vague recollection of the furniture being loaded on one of the big farm wagons belonging to the Hadfields for the five mile journey to 22 Duke St, Macclesfield (the Duke being probably Wellington) a four storey house. The kitchen – and cellar at the back – being below the level of the street; a sitting-room and parlour on the street level; three good size bedrooms on the first floor and an attic – one long room – at the top. It was one of a row of four houses, with an outside toilet (we called it the closet) divided into two, one for each two houses; and each provided with two seats side beside - we were all supposed to be very friendly with each other and ready to share all the "services". The place was emptied from below from time to time.

All the household refuse – ashes, vegetable waste, scraps of food and so on – was emptied down the seats about fifteen feet to the ground below; every three months – about – carts made their way by a side entrance from Mill St – the main street – and loaded the stuff on to carts to be taken away to the town tip, a mile or so out of the town. The work was done at night and the men on the job were called night soil men. They had no washing facilities at their depots but went home about 9.0 am in their unsavoury working clothes.

Usually these "toilets" were stuck at the back of the houses; they were open to flies and rats; they were breeding grounds for scarlet fever, diphtheria and other infectious diseases; each town had an Isolation Hospital, on the outskirts of the town, and the "fever-van" was a regular visitor to our street – and to all streets – taking children with the fevers away.

About 1900 the Water Carriage system of dealing with household waste was introduced, with dust-bins for ashes and scraps, and the infectious disease ended and the Isolation places closed.

The change from the country to the town was complete. We had not a scrap of garden so had to buy all our food. Father's wages were 25/- a week; rent 4/0, school pence 1/6, doctor's society 3d, life insurance 1/6. (There was an endowment policy for £100 payable at 60 or death, if earlier, on Father's life.) This left about 18/- to meet all house-hold expenses. And it was not enough so Mother started a business: baking oatcakes; they were made from wet batter, meal, mashed potatoes, water, salt, and brewers barm, all mixed overnight in big "pan-mugs", we called them – large earthenware containers about three feet high; the mixture was kept warm (in the kitchen) all night and Mother was up at 4.0 am baking the cakes; the stove was about 4'6" long, 3' 6" wide, with about 100 gas jets underneath; the mixture was ladled out in a small tin can; six at a time on the left hand side of the stove-top; turned when set and then moved with a "slice" to the right hand side of the stove; the cakes took five minutes to cook, twelve lots each hour, so by 6.0 am there were enough ready to call the oldest lad up to go out to sell the cakes; then the next youngest until there were usually four of us out selling the cakes. Mother kept this up for about three years when it proved too much for her in addition to all the house work (except for Mrs Hoggins who came each Monday to help with the washing). She then started baking three mornings instead.

This must have been a terrible strain on Mother; it was the cause of the illness she had later on: phlebitis. We were much too young to appreciate what she was doing for us. One thing can recall with pleasure is that not one of us thought we were being "hardly done to" (a common saying then) and we never gave any trouble in taking our share of the early morning work; we took it in our stride. I suppose we would each sell about 60 cakes each morning at a halfpenny each – 2/6. It was a strictly cash we gave no credit and we had no difficulty in getting customers. The only thing we quarreled about was our turn to fetch the barm from the brewery about 200 yards away. Joe and I took it in turns to fetch the barm and were always arguing about our turns.

We went to the North Cheshire Brewery in Charles St, about 200 yards from our house; the clerk – quite a senior figure – had to leave his desk, take our tin into the brewery and bring the stuff back, all for one penny, occasionally two pence. I don't think he liked it. At odd times they had no barm there and we had to go much further to Lonsdale and Adshead's [Adhlhead's?] on Mill Green or even farther still occasionally, to Stancliffes brewery a long way off.

School in Macclesfield

There were three of us of school age when we moved and John and myself went to Mill St Higher Grade school, run by the Wesleyan Methodists and my sister, Alice, to Lord St school, run by the Methodist New Connexion; the school pence ranged from one penny a week for the lower standards to 5d for the highest.

There were six standards after leaving the Infants and when we had passed all our standards we had “finished our education” but could not leave school until we were aged 14; or a few months earlier if we had attended certain minimum times during the past 2/3 years.

So if we finished with the Infants at the age of 6 and did not have to stay an extra year in any standard we had finished our schooling when we were aged 12 and had about eighteen months in no special standard. We sat together on a long form near the head master's desk but we had no teacher. So long as we kept quiet no one bothered us. We each had a copy of Henry Bue's first French book but with no teacher made little progress. The head used to give us sums called “Compound interest”: find the sum due in twenty years of (say) £5,235,16[?] at 5% per annum; it involved twenty sums spread over many pages. We practised for the school concerts and wrote essays; now it seems a waste of time and opportunity; but that was the system.

The school had two storeys; one very big room for the infants, and two separate class rooms for standards one and two; and upstairs there were separate divisions: standard three behind a curtain which could be drawn back easily for school opening and closing on Friday afternoons; a separate class room for standard four with wide windows which were opened for opening and closing school, as required, and the two other classes in the centre of the room, five and six.

No one could leave standard one until they could read and write well enough to take part in the work of the second standard; one boy, Charlie Oldham, was not very bright and could not pass the standard; he would be about ten or eleven then, a very big boy to us sixes. Poor Charlie tried so hard to learn his “A B C” and write and I can remember now how sad he was when he had to stay down another year when we all left for standard two.

In standard 2 we settled down to the business of learning in earnest. Our teacher was Miss Bannister, in her early twenties; she was a remarkably fine teacher; she must have been to interest 40 or more boys and girls of seven in schooling; she was very patient with the boys – myself included – who tried to tease her; she stood so much until

we had gone too far, and then we had to go upstairs to the master's desk. In front of the two standards five and six; he knew why we had come but always asked, “Well, Willie, what do you want?” “Please sir, I have come for the cane.” Then he would say, “Oh well if that's what you want you shall have it”. We held out our hand and got a cut across the fingers, and went away trying to think whether it hurt. as much that time as the last. There was a theory that if you put a horsehair across the hand it would split the cane; but

somehow we were never able to test this – we never had the horsehair and the cane together.

Miss Bannister's skill as a teacher must have been great; I remember distinctly the morning when we learnt all about vulgar fractions. She put a figure on the blackboard and shewed us how its significance altered when you put a little line underneath and put different figures below the line: $\frac{1}{2}$ made half; $\frac{1}{4}$ a quarter; then when you added fractions you only added the top figure: $\frac{1}{4}$ plus $\frac{3}{4}$ made $\frac{4}{4}$ and that was 1 again. It's a strange thing to remember but the memory is distinct.

Another memory of this class is the visit of two clerks from the post office to tell us about saving our money. The post office would not only save our money but pay us for doing so. They would give us interest, $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ for every £ we saved; or, to make it better understood, one halfpenny each month for every pound we had in the bank. If we saved a

penny a week for twenty years it would be worth £5; twenty years seemed a very long time but £5 was a fortune and many of us started out to accumulate this wealth.

We were given forms with twelve spaces and to save our money we had to stick a penny stamp in each space; when we had a shilling's worth of stamps on the form the post office would give us a bank book shewing that we had one shilling in the bank. Somehow I got my form full and then filled up another form applying for the book; on this I had to state my full name and sign it with my "usual signature"; I wrote "Willie Hudson", but the form came back: I must get my two initials in. That was my first introduction to government forms.

But what the post office had overlooked was that our regular income was one halfpenny a week paid about 11.0 each Saturday morning when we had completed our weekly task; mine was to wash the kitchen floor and do the hearth and fire-irons; whitening the hearth and polishing the top of the fender with fine emery paper. So to save a penny we would have had to carry one halfpenny in our pockets for a whole week and then go and buy a penny stamp; and Toffee Bob had a shop at the top of our street

enticing us to spend the halfpenny.

I did manage to get 4/- in the bank; each time I put a shilling in the bank I got a letter from London acknowledging the deposit, but I found at the end of a year I got no interest and would get none until I had £1 in the bank; it was disheartening and I drew the four shillings out and went back to the old money box; by a bit of smart work with a knife we could get our pennies out of this bank fairly easily.

In standard two the girls had a cookery lesson each week and we could buy cakes they made at a penny each; the school was quite up to date. [A line may be missing here.] On leaving standard two we had to go upstairs to standard three, our teacher was Miss Hall, an older teacher. here we began to learn history: how the Roman soldier waded in the water carrying an Eagle when they first invaded England; how King Alfred burnt the

cakes; how King John lost the crown jewels in the Wash and died of eating a surfeit of lampreys; how two princes were murdered in the Tower of London and about King Canute rebuking his courtiers who claimed he could command the seas and they would obey him by making them stand and get their feet wet when the tide refused to stop coming in at his command; and other interesting facts.

We also had lessons in "Composition". The teacher would read a story and we had to write it out in our own words. One story was of a woman who lived near a railway siding and encouraged her cat to sit on the wall; she kept herself in coal thrown up from below at the cat. When it died, she made a dummy cat to keep up the supply of free coal. We also had to write an essay on the "Adventures of a Penny".

We also took geography; we had to learn the names of all the counties and the name of the county town, and the names of all the capes and promontories around the coast; when the schoolmaster, or an inspector, was asking us questions Miss Hall used to stand behind him and try to "mouth" the answers if we did not know it ourselves; she used to send me out on "errands" sometimes and I had always to ask for a halfpenny in the change; that was for me, for running the errand.

For the last hour each Friday afternoon the curtains were drawn in standard three and the windows opened up in standard four and all the school joined in a spelling session. Difficult words were spelt out and then we always finished up with a hymn. One of the verses in one of the hymns was:

If upon the field of battle you can find no work to do

.....(can't remember this line)

When the battle is all over you can go with careful tread,

You can bear away the wounded, you can cover up the dead.

Once or twice a week the headmaster would give all the school a scripture lesson and these he made very vivid; [e.g.] the story of Joseph. I can remember how dramatic he made the discovery of the silver in Benjamin's sack and the story of Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac, and St Paul's missionary journeys. He could make all these things of compelling interest.

In standard four we extended our geography to Canada and other colonies; in standard five and six we began Geometry, Algebra, Art – we had a set of cubes and cones arranged in different patterns to draw and try to shade; but, curiously enough, we had no idea what use Geometry was; apart from giving us something to do, we had no idea of its relation to buildings or any other practical purpose. The same with Algebra: we did it but with no idea of its place in Maths.

We did in 1897 have a demonstration of “wireless”; a local electrician brought his apparatus to school and made a bell ring at the far end of the room though not directly connected to the apparatus. This was our first introduction to "Radio"; it was interesting but we had no idea of the fantastic future.

In my last two years at school I was errand boy for two shops, working out of school hours. One was a milliners shop, the other a draper. In those days buying a hat was a big event for a woman; she first chose the shape – a bonnet, toque or hat; this was a wire contraption covered with black material; then she chose the trimmings, ribbons, beads, imitation birds, fruit; then the things had to be passed upstairs to the workroom for the hat to be “made up”. When this was done I had to deliver the hat. I kept the windows clean, and was kept busy between the two places. I got 2/6 from each place – 5 shillings a week.

As most of the errand boys were full timethey had the Wednesday afternoon as a holiday and I wanted to have that as a holiday also so I passed the Labour examination at the age of 11. This exempted boys and girls from full time attendance at school; they became half-timers: one week they would be at the mill from 6.0 am to noon going to school in the afternoon; the next week would be at school in the morning working

at the mill from 1.30 to 5.30 pm. – there were about six in our class. The teachers did their best to help the half timers to keep up with the others but it was a big strain on both; in my case I merely took the Wednesday afternoon off each week.

Street games

What did we do with ourselves out of school hours? Well, looking back I think we had a very full life.

The street was our playground; both parks were a good mile away. The twenty or so houses could supply about 15 to 20 children of all ages. There was no street traffic; in the day time there would be a few milk carts (farmers came in their own carts selling milk to their own customers; they had whistles, bells or other signals and their customers came out with their jugs to the carts) odd coalcarts delivering coal; but in the evenings there was rarely any wheeled traffic in the street, so we had the entire street to play in.

So we got our tea quickly after school and played until dark; the policeman walked through about 6.0; they all carried small canes and if he got to you unnoticed he would give you a token cut across the behind, not too hard! just to let you know they were there. (Naughty boys taken before the courts were liable to be sentenced to be birched, so many strokes with the birch rod across the seat; but none of our boys or girls

had that experience. We had a great variety of games, some for individuals. Peg tops and whip tops; with the peg top you wrapped the string round the top (held in your hand) and then threw the top on the ground; if done properly the top would go on spinning on reaching the ground. With the whip top you wrapped the string of the whip round the top and jerked it loose; then you kept the top spinning by whipping the top along the flags.

Five stones was a girl's game; a complicated game played with stones about one inch cube which they threw up in the air and tried to catch on the top of their hands. Skipping was popular with the girls, with individual skipping ropes and with long ropes stretching across the road which the boys would often work; the girls would run into the moving rope, skip a few times and run out; or a number would skip together. Hop-scotch was another girl's game – still played – the flags were marked out in numbered squares – 1 to 10 – and the player had to move a flat piece of stone into each of the squares whilst hopping on one foot.

Boys had their own games. Kiffey or tip cat was one. A piece of wood about four inches long, pointed at both ends, was placed on the ground and one end struck by a stick; whilst the wood was in the air you tried to hit it with the stick as far as possible (this was one game which resulted in broken windows!) then you would challenge a boy

to cover the distance in so many strides; if he won he took the strike. Another was played by two sides of five. One boy was the "stump". He stood against the wall and the four others stooped down, head in the "stump"'s tummy, and the opposing side had to jump on the backs of the four and the last one say "2 4 6 8 10 and off again". If he did this they had another jump; if they failed they were "down".

We played many games together. Relieve or prisoners base was a good one. We divided the street into two and marked out a base about twenty yards away. One side was "down"; the other would let a boy or girl run to the distant base; one of the down side ran after them; if they caught them before they got to the base they were brought into the others' side; if they reached the base they stayed there but could relieve one of their number in the other base; the idea was to get all in one base.

If we had fourpence we could get a blacksmith to make an iron hoop. He would do it whilst we waited, bend the iron into a ring and then weld the two ends together; we ran this along the street and could get a big speed up.

We had many round games in which all joined in. Singing "Here we come gathering nuts in May" then "Who will you have for your Queen of May?" a girl would be chosen. There was usually a bit of kissing between the boy and girl chosen before going on to another game.

Religion for children

As most of the boys and girls belonged to some church (C of E) or chapel (Methodist) we were expected to attend the weekly meetings at our Sunday schools. Monday was Band of Hope night at our chapel. This was a temperance movement; we were asked to "sign the pledge" not to drink any alcohol – beer, wine or spirits. At our day school we had a series of lectures on the effects of alcohol on the human body given by a man named Chandos Wilson; he was a very good lecturer who got his points very effectively. He had a lot of bottles containing specimens of gin-drinker's liver and other grisly objects. Then at the end of the sessions we would all go to the Big Sunday School and sit for an examination to

see how much we had imbibed of the lectures, then we had a prize distribution in the same school. This building was erected about 1825 when the Sunday School movement started. Attendance at day schools was voluntary and many children got no schooling at all; so reading and writing lessons were given to the children attending these schools.

This building was used for special events by the day school scholars. We all went one day to hear a new invention: the Edison Bell phonograph. One of the items was a speech by Gladstone amongst a selection of songs and music. The titles were announced by the machine and the words "Edison-Bell record" were always recorded.

One of the highlights of the summer was the Sunday School Field Treat on the Saturday afternoon after the Sunday School Sermons. On the Sunday afternoon we all crowded into the Chapel and were joined by the scholars from the two other chapels for a special service – hymns learnt for the occasion and a speaker; then on the Saturday afternoon we all assembled in the Sunday School to walk in procession to Hammond's

field, headed by a brass band and the Sunday school banner. If it was a windy day, handling the banner was a tricky business; two men held the poles, resting in a socket in a belt fixed round their shoulders; four boys held ropes at each corner of the banner to help to keep the thing upright. It was a mile walk. When we reached the field we spread out and played games. At times, toffees would be thrown on to the grass – all unwrapped – and we scrambled for them; if there were any germs they must have been good 'uns for we came to no harm. It was said we had to eat a peck of dirt before we died. Some had buns and milk, our school had tea and buns. We carried on with the band playing until about 6 o'clock when we made our own way home again.

The great occasion at the day school was the annual school concert held in the Town Hall with the Mayor always present. So far as I know, ours was the only school to hold a concert in the Town Hall. There was a good deal of singing in the programme; once a small group took part in a discussion – rehearsed previously – on expansion of trade abroad or some such subject. We also had competitions for mental arithmetic; a dozen or so were on the platform with our slates; we were given a sum to do "in our heads", the answer to be written on the slates; we fell out as we gave the wrong answer. Another was to read aloud sentences jumbled together: "Caesar entered on his head; a helmet in his hand a sword"; and so on. All the parents were supposed to attend the concert and the place was usually full; the entrance fee was 4d. This was usually held in the early autumn.

As the dark nights came and it was not possible to play in the street we had some sort of meetings at the chapel each night almost: Monday, Band of Hope; Tuesday, Class – when we joined the church we were allotted to a Leader's class and were supposed to go to the weekly meeting. We paid a penny a week and a shilling a quarter for our membership card; I am not sure if we could always raise the shilling.

Wednesday was the night for the Wesley Guild, formed about 1896 to encourage the younger ones to go to a week-night meeting. There were several sections: Literary, when

members were invited to discuss some subject. The book chosen for one session was John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*; this was my first introduction to social problems. The book was an exposure of living conditions; up to then we had accepted that these conditions were almost divinely appointed; we ought to be resigned to the lot in Life it had pleased God to place us. This book made a great impression on me. On the first Wednesday in the month the Guild held a Social evening and this was always popular. We took part in so many of the round party games which were always enjoyable. Occasionally they had a competition evening; we all had to go representing some well known book – *The three musketeers*; Hymns (hims) ancient and modern; the Golden Legend (lower part of leg gilded) Golden Leg-end. There were usually some ingenious entries. On Thursday evening there was a full service in the chapel – lasting an hour but this gradually petered out, first moving into a smaller room and then ending. Friday night was bath night, and on Saturday we had the Penny Popular Saturday Concerts to keep folk out of the pubs but I think most who went would not have gone into the pubs anyway. The concerts were of a good standard and we had a cup of coffee and a bun, all for a penny.

I have often marvelled at the voluntary work which must have gone into this particular activity – the preparation and washing up, and then re-arranging all the forms for the next day Sunday school.

On Sunday, the first service was at 7.30 am – a Prayer meeting. Father often went, though he was up at 5.30 each morning. This also was beginning to fade out. Sunday school at 9.30 to 10.30 after which we went into chapel from 10.30 to 12 noon; Sunday school 2.30 to 3.30 or 4.0 – if we had a "speaker" after our class lessons. Chapel in the evening 6.00 to 7.30 was optional and we often stayed at home. As a treat, we read one or two Annuals which came at Christmas – *Chatterbox* was a favourite; *Little Folks*; occasionally *Chums* – and could play with some bricks or take to pieces and put together again the forerunners of the jigsaw puzzles. Ours were much larger pieces.

Sunday was a day set apart; we started it by putting clean clothes on; for the boys this was a clean shirt, singlet, socks, collar, shoes cleaned and a clean handkerchief in the left hand pocket in your coat, with the edge shewing above the pocket – all ready for Sunday school and with a penny for the collection.

Clothes for children

Apart from cricket shirts all shirts were sold without collars. When you began to take an interest in what you wore you began to experiment with collars. You began to wear "stand-up" collars, about 1½ to 2 inches deep. Some stood up all the way round, others had a corner turned down on each side. Then about 1900 we had the stand-up

turn-down collar, which gradually ousted all the others. You tried to get a collar as high as possible and risked the jibe: you look like a donkey looking over a whitewashed wall.

We also began to sport “cuffs”, pieces of starched and ironed linen which we put at the end of our coat sleeves projecting about an inch. When you wore your first pair of "cuffs" you thought you had arrived at the adult age.

As children we were fascinated by some of the preachers. If they waved their arms about forcibly their cuffs slipped down and we were always hoping that one or more would fly off the hands one day during the sermon.

Some used a separate starched front attached to the collar stud. This was referred to as a “dickie”. Some had a combined collar and front in two pieces. All these and the cuffs were apparently intended to give the idea that you wore a white shirt, a practice confined to the "gentry".

The Victorian Sunday

Sunday was observed very strictly. All shops were closed; any which opened were liable to prosecution. Pubs were open from 10 am to 2.0 pm and 6.0 pm to 10 pm; the parks were open but we were not allowed to play any games. We never bought a Sunday paper; we never played any games in the house on Sundays and were supposed only to read "improving" books and papers. We bought two papers each week, the Methodist Recorder and the Sunday Companion, the latter published by the Harmondsworth press. (They started the Daily Mail, the first halfpenny paper.)

If you went regularly to church or chapel the day was fairly fully occupied. If you "went nowhere" you might feel lost. There was a good deal of cycling on Sundays by various clubs – there were of course no motors so cycling was a very pleasant pastime.

There were some exceptions. We had a delivery of letters on Sunday mornings in most towns and every post office in the land – except town sub-post offices – was open from 9.0 am to 10.30, and there was a dispatch of letters in the evening. Railways ran a service and trams also ran on Sundays; as a rule this brought extra pay.

It must be remembered that most wage earners worked a 60 hour week. The mills were open from 6.0 am to 5.30 pm on five days and 6.0 to noon on Saturdays. Shops were open until 10 and 11 pm or even later on Fridays and Saturdays. A complete rest from work on one day each week was essential to maintain health.

As there were no cinemas, no radio, no telly, no gramophones, how did we fill in our time, especially during the long winter evenings? In two main ways: by playing games and by reading. We had a wide range of card games, **not** with packs of playing cards but with Snap – cards with pictures: the Baker, Butcher, and Grocer. We played these face upwards and shouted "Snap" when we played a card similar to the one immediately before. The first one to shout "snap" won. If the matter was not decided, the cards were placed in a "pool" so we had two to shout for, "snap and pool". Tiddley winks was another good game, flipping small plastic buttons into a cup with a larger button. Word games – letters turned upside down in the centre of the table; as we drew a letter we

might complete a word from our own hand or take another player's cards by making a word with his cards and our own. Then there were the snakes and ladders, ludo, and many other similar games with cards.

Reading

We had a very wide choice. There was a Free Library in the town. (When I joined I had to write my name, address and occupation in a book; the previous entry was someone who wrote "Clerk in Holy Orders". It was not until much later that I realised he should have written Clerk in Postal Orders, a good example of what is called "after wit".) There was a good range of books. Favourite authors were Henry Ballantyne, Jules Verne, Jerome K. Jerome (Three Men in a Boat), Barrie (just coming in) and a large range of Red Indian stories all about "scalping". There was also a wide range of stories with vivid descriptions of scenery and wild life in foreign countries.

There was also a wide range of weekly papers: comics at a halfpenny each - Comic Cuts featuring Weary Willie and Tired Tim, Chips – and at a penny Ally Slopers Half Holiday for adults. Also at a penny Answers, TitBits, and Pearsons Weekly published by Harmsworth, Newnes and Pearsons respectively. These were full of mixed reading covering every possible subject written in a popular style, and all ran competitions – towns represented by pictures (one which was not guessed by anyone shewed a Christmas pudding on a plate; the answer was Nuneaton); then there was a rage for Limericks, sending in the snappiest last line. Usually there was an entrance fee of 6d which sent the sales of the sixpenny postal order up astronomically. Other papers were Chums, Boys Own Paper, Girls Own Paper. In the more literary class: M.A.P. (Mainly About People) Truth (which exposed scandals), John O'London's Weekly; T.P's Weekly (T.P. O'Conner, M.P. for an Irish Division in Liverpool), a wide variety of religious weeklies: British Weekly, Church Times (C.of E.), Tablet (R.C.), Methodist Times (Primitive Methodist), Joyful News, War Cry (Salvation Army), Christian Herald.

There was a host of monthly magazines: Strand (publishing Sherlock Holmes stories), Windsor, Quiver, Review of Reviews (W.T. Stead), Wide World, Blackwoods Magazine. There were also a number of highbrow Quarterly magazines which did not often come my way.

Barnaby and Wakes fairs and circuses

We had two great fairs each year, one in early June – Barnaby (St Barnabus) – and one in October. The fairs were held on the Waters Green, an open space about 15-20 acres; all the space packed with tents, hobby horses, swingboats, coconut shying stalls; freak shows – dwarfs, bearded ladies. One of the most popular was Wall's ghost show, where plays were put on: the Murder of Maria Martin in the Red Barn; Todd Sweeney the Fleet St barber whose hobby was cutting throats; East Lynne; and one or two shows in which ghosts took part. But about 1896 or 1897 they shewed the first Living Pictures – the

cinema. The pictures shewed a train coming into a station with the people moving about in jerks; a fire in New York (on Monday night) but changed to one in London at the week end – a big fire having been reported there. The apparatus was in the middle of a crowded tent; the risk of fire was not apparently appreciated. They had two dwarfs who did comic turns on the stage outside to attract people to go in. Nearby was a menagerie, Lorenzo the famous lion tamer who put his head in a lion's mouth; a tent where they sold boiled peas – with plenty of vinegar; shooting galleries, using air guns to shoot at moving birds and animals (dummies) passing along the wall at the back of the tent.

The hobby horses, flying boats etc all had steam organs playing popular tunes with figures beating time all worked, apparently, by steam engines generating electricity on the spot. As the standard charge for most things was a penny increased to twopence on the Saturday nights, I have often wondered about the economics of the shows, though the show people always seemed to be prosperous.

Occasionally we had a visit from a travelling circus. Lord George Sanger's was one; here they had a huge tent with trapeze artists in addition to the performing horses, elephants, dogs, etc; we had a visit once from Buffalo Bill's circus, a feature being a fight with

Red Indians.

The milkman and other street cries; street music

From about 9.30 each morning we had a succession of farmers' "floats" selling their milk to regular customers – and new ones. Each had a different signature tune – one a bell, another a whistle, another rapped on the mudguards with his whip – and the

customers came out with the milk jugs for a pennorth, a pint or a quart, paying for the milk on delivery. I think it was twopence a quart.

The rag and bone men came round regularly collecting rags, bones, scrap iron. They hired a handcart for ninepence a day and sold the stuff to the dealers; they usually paid by giving the folk "rubbingstones" or whitening, used to rub over the flags and steps to the front door on Friday evenings when all respectable folk swilled their flags for the weekend. The whitening was used to whiten the hearths when they were being cleaned. Occasionally we had the watercress men; and men came round selling salt, in big lumps fourpence a lump. Sometimes the fish man came through the street; all these worked on an income of pennies everything was incredibly cheap.

From time to time we had the hurdy gurdy man. He had a rather wheezy organ carried by a strap on his shoulder with one leg to rest when playing. He was always an Italian and had a monkey with a tin can for the coppers. Occasionally we had a one-man band; he had a big drum on his back with the drum stick on his elbow, cymbals on the top of the drum worked by a cord on his heel, a recorder fastened to his mouth from which he produced some sort of a tune, and bells and a triangle. He played for pennies. The street piano organ was just coming in; this was a full size piano on wheels pulled by two men;

they had a good repertory of popular tunes and usually got a good collection. All this was before the days of the motors.

Boots Cash Chemists and the cost of living cheaply

When they opened their shop in Macclesfield about 1898 they hired about twelve sandwich board men who walked in the gutters morning and afternoons each carrying double boards "Boots are coming". They got the standard rate of pay 1/6 a day; could they live on that? Well in Stanley street, I saw a notice in the window of one of the many common lodging houses: "Single beds 6d, half a bed 4d"; a four pound loaf cost 4d; margarine was 4d a pound and fish and chips twopence a time. As we respected the Sabbath he had to make provision to live on that day; so his bed would be 4d, bread 2d, margarine 2d, fish and chips 2d, for the Sabbath day 2d; total one shilling, leaving him with 6d to spend – as so many were afraid – in "strong drink". These were the **casual labourers** who lived in the slums in Macclesfield. When out selling oatcakes I had to pass a pawnshop every Monday morning about 6.45 and always saw a pathetic little group of women waiting for the placeto open at 7.0; they had the Sunday clothes in a bundle to pawn for a few shillings to start another week: 1/- or 1/6 for rent; 1/- for

the man who let them have clothes for a shilling a week; 9d for the handcart; and something far food. General Booth – Salvation Army - called them the "submerged tenth".

Old people, workhouses and paupers' funerals

The government of those days had no special problems of old age. The wage earners were well trained; they expected to work from the age of 10 so long as they were fit and could get a job; then they quietly died off. They were no trouble to anyone. Of those who survived the great majority ended their days with their own folk; there was usually a corner for granny - grandads then, as now, die off first. A few were able to keep going in their little houses, rent 1/- to 2/- a week; on their small savings and with the odd shillings

from some Friendly Society into which they had paid all their lives. A comparatively small number ended their days in the workhouses, or just managed to keep out of these places by the parish relief - about 3/- a week. Everyone dreaded going into the workhouse; they were virtually prisoners, not often allowed out, leading very dreary lives.

Rattle his bones over the stones,

He's only a pauper whom nobody owns. (Thomas Hood)

I saw many paupers' funerals with going to the cemetery so often. The double doors of the workhouse would open and the little procession emerge. There was a long black box

on four wheels with shafts but in place of the horses there would be six men, three on each side of the shaft with two more steadying the box from behind. They walked to the

cemetery about 400 yards away, wondering if they would be inside the box on another journey soon. When I went to Chapel/Frith in 1910 the coffins from the workhouse were carried through the street – half a mile – by four or six bearers in charge of one man who walked in front. As a general rule the coffins were placed in graves reserved for those who could not pay for a separate grave. In Macclesfield the graves were left open – after soil had been thrown over to cover the coffin – with a wooden cover on top, awaiting the next funeral.

Sport

We had two parks about a mile and a half apart fitted with swings and with plenty of room for games – cricket and football. There were a good number of junior teams; we were in the Cheshire League for football but had teams from Wrexham, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Lancashire playing at the Moss Rose ground a mile from the centre of the town; admission 3d to 6d for adults, a penny for boys – I never saw a girl at a

football match. There were very good swimming baths; a small and large bath for swimming and a number of private baths for washing; women used the baths on one day – or part of a day – each week.

Industry, strikes and holidays

The main industry was silk manufacturing. Macclesfield silk was famous. We had spinning mills and many weaving mills. This brought a lot of ancillary works: engineering, millwrights, iron foundries. The surrounding countryside was rich fertile soil; on Saturday there was a large open market in the Town Hall square, overflowing into the Waters Green. Farmers and growers from the country brought in cheese, butter, eggs, chickens, fruit, vegetables and so on and one farmer did a roaring trade selling his own potatoes retail.

We had one big national Dyers strike, about 1896, for a minimum wage of 6d an hour. (They were out at Perth – Pullars – as well.) Our Sunday school superintendent was a master dyer and some of his workers were scholars; a bit awkward.

Holidays

There were generally no paid holidays in the mills or works but all places closed down on Barnaby Monday, and hundreds went to Blackpool for the day, fare 4/- return, leaving at 4.30 am, Blackpool 6.30, spent up at 10.30, home again at 8.30 pm arriving at

Macclesfield about 10.30 to 11 pm; work again at 6.0 am next morning. A few lucky ones had a few days extra; we paid one shilling a night at the boarding houses including the cooking of the food we bought in.

My brother John and myself had a week at Llandudno in 1901, leaving home with £2 – two golden sovereigns – for the week; we worked everything out very fine but were sunk on the last day, we had not allowed for the charge "Cruet" 1/- each; we got home with a penny between us; but we had a fine holiday.

Good Friday. On this day crowds of boys walked to Alderley Edge, seven miles there and seven miles back (it often seemed like 17) to go into the old copper mines. We bought candles in advance and wandered about the old workings. It was a bit dangerous and after a boy had been accidentally killed the mines were closed but we had many other places all around to visit. On Good Fridays the men whitewashed the entry leading to the four houses in Luke St – see photos – they put on old nightshirts and had a field day.

Beggars

There were a good many beggars, men and women who went from door to door – though begging was illegal – others singing in the streets; on our occasional visits to Manohester we saw the main street with dozens of beggars standing in the gutters, selling matches, laces or other odd things but hopefully not expecting to hand over anything for the coppers they got. Some had slates round their necks claiming to be victims of accidents.

Winter

About 1895 we had a very severe winter, no outdoor work possible for about seven weeks. This caused a lot of distress and soup was distributed every day from centres set up. Mother would not let us ask for "tiokets for soup" as the loss of work did not affect us. Later I learnt that they had the same distress at Buxton, and that the frost was so severe there that the water pipes were frozen in the streets. At Granny's house they had to take buckets out once or twice a day to get water from a water cart. When the frost went away their cellar was flooded by burst water pipes.

Clothes

When we were growing up we rarely got new clothes bought for us specially. We wore clothes passed on from the older children or from other sources; so the memory of one suit bought for me myself is very vivid. I had to have a new Sunday suit, so one Saturday night Father took me to the "Stores" as we called our Co-op society, to the tailors

department with authority to spend up to 6/- for a sailor suit, blouse, collar and trousers. It did not take long to find the one of right size, but I was nearly in tears as it was being wrapped up and the manager saw my distress and realised what was troubling my little mind: the suit chosen had no whistle and cord. He was a kindly looking man with a beard

and spectacles which gleamed in the gas light. He did something wonderful to me: he took the whistle and cord from another suit and put it with my suit. I remember the impression it made on me – I thought he was a God.

Vandalism

We had never heard the word. We were up to all sorts of mischief but we were not destructive. We had little chance of doing any damage and getting away with it, even if we had any inclination, partly because we were not very mobile and could not run away very easily and we lived in a very disciplined society, at school, in the home and in every part of our lives; but most important of all, we had plenty of outlet for high spirits – street games, walking in the country, games in the park – and plenty to occupy any spare time. The main difference between then and now is the coming of the motors; the streets

and roads were safe for cycling and walking and playing games, and our streets were living communities, old and young being all part of the street life. Often in the summer the older folk would sit on their doorstep or bring out a chair to watch us playing.

1898 My first job after school

These are my recollections of the first fourteen years of my life. Looking back I think they were happy days. We had little money but we had plenty to occupy our lives. Now school days were ending and I had to think about the future. I decided that I would be a gardener; I had helped Father a good deal. He had to take hundreds of cuttings for budding out plants and prick out seedlings. In summer he had often to make an evening call to close the ventilators in the greenhouses or, in winter, to see to the boiler fires, and had to go twice on Sundays, with no extra pay. I often went with him or sometimes on my own and got an idea I would like that kind of work.

Gardening was considered to be quite a good line. There were openings in the Stately Homes and in many private houses on the outskirts of all towns, and there were also a growing number of jobs in the municipal parks. What I needed was a year or two training at somewhere near home. Father had a gardener friend who was looking out for a boy; I interviewed the owners of the house and was accepted. My starting wage would be 3/- a week working from 7.0 am to 5.30 pm six days a week. If I gave satisfaction I would get a rise in a few weeks.

I would be employed by a bachelor son and three maiden ladies, the family of a man who started as a working man, set up in the silk manufacturing business and made good. He owned a mill with about 200 workers when he died. He was a Methodist and made enough money to open a new chapel – Methodist New Connexion – known as Jackson's Chapel. But this was a case – fairly common – where “clogs daren't and shoes won't” an old Lancashire saying: working men daren't go courting the daughters of the

owner of the mill where they may work and the “upper classes” had not yet accepted them; one sister had in fact defied the family and married a local shopkeeper and had a son and daughter (after a year or two they sold up in Macclesfield and moved to some new place where the family history would not be known) but Miss Mary, Miss Helen and Miss Maria remained single with the brother Mr William.

They kept a carriage and pair, with coachman, and three indoor servants: cook, housemaid and general. There was a drive wide enough to let the carriage get in and out; a lawn large enough to take two full-size tennis courts; a greenhouse full of choice flowering plants.

A hedge separated the kitchen garden from the lawns. In the top

right hand corner was a Dutch stone house for melons. Miss Maria seemed to be in charge of this house; we only kept it tidy. In the bottom left hand corner were two large greenhouses, extending beyond the boundary of the Jackson's house (they owned the adjoining house); in one there were the vines and in the other two or more peach trees. The kitchen was about one acre. We were responsible for the hens – about 50 - and the pigeons; we never knew to half a dozen how many pigeons we had got but once a month we got an order from the kitchen to kill six. These we hung, for a few days until they were "high"; I then had to pluck the things and take them to the cook.

There was a good variety of gardening to practice on, and I enjoyed the work. As the gardener agreed after a few weeks that I was giving him satisfaction, I spoke to Miss Maria one Wednesday morning asking respectfully if I could have my rise – sixpence a week – if I was pleasing them; she gave me a reply the following Wednesday, agreeing to the increase which would begin "next week". I think Mr William was a bit ashamed for he gave me one shilling – quietly – in the conservatory on the Saturday afternoon.

I saw a bit of life "below stairs" one day. The Jacksons came from Kettlethulme, a village about ten miles distant, and on one day each year all the family went in the carriage and pair to the village to look up their relatives and friends. The three servants dressed up in Mr Williams's clothes and paraded round the garden; this was considered to

be very daring. It was certainly comical as Mr William was medium height and the cook unusually tall.

I get the Sack.

I expected the job to be permanent and was therefore taken by surprise when I was told in late September that they would not want me during the winter; there would not be enough for me to do and they could not afford to pay my wages. They did offer to put an advert in the local paper recommending me as a gardener's boy "fond of the work" or "fond of work" – I can't remember which words they used.

A funny interview.

I had one reply from an eccentric lady who lived alone in a big house, Ryles Park, in the centre of a rookery. A man and wife lived on the estate. I was asked to call and was engaged but got a letter the next morning saying I was not wanted. I was relieved; when this lady went out she put a big umbrella in front of her face – with a peep hole at the top – and I was a bit scared of working for her.

Hovis Floue [= flour?] Co.

A boy in my Sunday school class, who worked at Hovis in their printing dept, told me they wanted a boy in the advertising office. There were several applicants and I got the job. The company had just been formed; the bread was called Smith's Patent Bread and they ran a competition for a new name; a man got £25 for the name "Hovis" from "homo" – man – and "vis" – life. The patent was the preservation of the germ in the flour. We ran advertisements asking folk to send for a sample loaf. My job two or three times a week was to go to a local baker for a number of loaves to send out; I took the batch to the Manager who cut one open; if it was up to standard we sent them out otherwise we sold them to the staff.

We also issued rubber stamps to bakers with their names and addresses surrounding the word "Hovis"; we got an application from J.T.Slogget Hawker, Baker and Confectioner in a Cornish town; but when the stamp came back "J.T.Slogget; Hawker, Baker and Confectioner" he was not amused.

Another change. Refuge Assurance Co

After three weeks another friend of Father's – Primitive Methodist – wanted an office boy in his office. He was Superintendent for the Refuge Assurance Co, and the office was in his house. Hovis were very annoyed when I left. I found this work very interesting. We had thirteen agents who came into the office on Friday mornings – in succession – to have their collecting books checked and hand in their money; they brought in a large number of new proposal forms each week – 30 to 50 – which I had to enter in our big register, send to the HO, and on the return of the policies, enter the policy number in our record and give the policies to the agents. The policies were mostly for a penny a week and at that time, anyone could take out a policy on anyone's life and no one was very particular who signed the proposal forms; legislation was introduced a little later to stop this.

The Superintendent and the Assistant Supdt were out every day with one or other of the agents seeking new business and if an agent got in touch with anyone likely to take out a bigger policy (an Endowment policy) he sought the help of the Supt.

We started a new agent [with] wages £1 a week dropping by 3d a week which he was expected to make up in new business; his employment ceased when his wages dropped to about 17/- a week. The average wage was 30/- a week. The senior man got about £3. They could sell their books to a new agent by arrangement with the Company when they retired.

1899 I finally join the Post Office

After six months I made another change. The chief clerk at the head post office at Macclesfield, Mr J.P.Flanagan – an R.C. – told a friend of Father's that they wanted a boy to take charge of their ten telegraph boys with the idea of sitting for the Civil Service

exam to become a clerk. This friend knew nothing about me but he knew Father well and knew he had one or two boys so passed on the invitation; I went to see the Chief Clerk and the postmaster, Mr Niel Daniel Stewart, and started at the Post Office. This was my fourth job in twelve months and I finally left the post office sixty years later in 1959.

Although I did not know it at the time four boys from Macclesfield entered the civil service about this time. One – who lived opposite to our house but who was not allowed to play with us – went in the Foreign Office; we lost touch with him. A second – a son of the man who owned a mill in our street – John Abrahams – went to London as a Boy Clerk; he became Under-Secretary at the Air Ministry, gained a knighthood but lost his life, along with some other VIPs, when flying across the Atlantic in the second war. The third was actually a clerk in the Macclesfield P. O. – Morton – when I started. He too went to London and when I met him again, forty years later, he was Regional Controller Ministry of Labour at Leeds. These three were all grammar school boys. The Boy Clerk exam would be above the standard of our school. I, like the little piggy, stayed at home.

Getting in the post office was quite a procedure. I had first to fill up a double foolscap application giving details of my life from birth: schools attended and jobs held; then answer several funny questions: Did I ever suffer from spitting of blood? Well no, only when I had a tooth out. Did any member of my family die of T.B.? Certainly not. Had I flat feet? Of course I had, my feet were like all other boys and girls – they were not hooves; I had not heard of flat feet or fallen arches at that time. Was there any insanity in our family? Again certainly not. Much later the old hands explained that they could not understand at St Martins-le-Grand – the P.O. H.Q. why people should be so daft as to go into the P.O. and work such awkward hours for small wages; they wanted to see if this “daftness” was congenital. I then had to give references as to my character and I did what all boys did then: gave the name of our minister and my Sunday school teacher. We all went to Sunday school in those days; if there was any good in us they would know. When all this information had been received and verified, I was notified that I had been accepted and must now go to be sworn in before a magistrate. I had to sign a Declaration which meant that I must "see nowt; hear nowt; pinch nowt" in the course of my Post Office work.

I was then told that if I was a good boy and passed the Civil Service entrance examination and, also, became a skilled telegraphist, I would be appointed as a clerk. The title was Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist, wages from 12/- rising 2/- a year to 42/- with free medical attendance and medicine, and a pension at 60.

Father seems to have realised the importance of my passing the examination and arranged with a man running a private school to take me in hand for six months to prepare for the ordeal and in May 1800, I sat and passed out; the fee for the examination was 10/- paid for by purchasing a Civil Service stamp from the post office.

In addition to passing this examination I had to undertake to become a skilled telegraphist in the next year; I managed this also but had to wait two years before I got my promotion and this was preceded by an interval of a few weeks; I was called in by the

postmaster one day and told I was to be appointed an “Unpaid Learner” for a period preliminary to being appointed Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist; I remember hurrying home to tell Mother (our Chancellor of the Exchequer) of my promotion to a job without any wages but she took it in her stride. My tuition took all of five minutes, from 1.55 pm to 2.0 pm. I was shown the post office guide which I was told to study and directed to the thirteen rule books dealing with Letters, Parcels, Telegrams, Inland and Foreign

Money Orders, Inland and Foreign Telegraph Money Orders, and so on. from these I would learn all I had to know; I then started my duty, 2.0 pm to 10.0 pm, as the second “man” at the counter of a busy head post office in charge of a stock of stamps and stationery valued £20. I had to balance my stock at the end of each day. As I never put any money in the drawer and certainly never took any money out I presume I must have balanced satisfactorily during the next six weeks or so, when I was again called in to see the postmaster who gave me an official note confirming my appointment as S. C. and T. (May 1901).

To go back to the beginning at the post office my rank was Indoor

Messenger at 6/- a week with a uniform; my place was in the instrument room – immediately above the public counter – my duty to keep clearing the “Shute” – the box used to bring the telegrams from the counter to the instrument room – and return the shute; to place the telegrams on the proper circuits for transmission and to keep clearing

the racks on which the incoming telegrams were placed; transfer those for transmission to some other office to the right circuit; and take those for delivery to my table where I date stamped the two copies, top for retention in a file, the bottom copy to be enveloped and sent out on delivery. To do this I rolled the envelope up and put it in a leather cartridge like container to go in a tube. I rang the bell to the telegraph boys’ room and they worked a pump which sucked the telegram down. The boy taking the telegram out called back his number and I had to enter the number and time of despatch on the top copy. On his return he called his number up the tube and I entered the time of his return on the top copy.

We had ten boys on duty. They were paid a flat rate of 5/- a week. An eleventh boy – without uniform – was allowed to stay in the room all days – if he wanted to – on the off chance of there being no boy available to take a telegram out for delivery. He was paid according to the distance he travelled in delivering the message. We would have from 200 to 300 telegrams during the morning, mainly business telegrams to the mills; they cost a minimum of 6d plus ½d for each extra word over the twelve. There were a considerable number of betting telegrams; cash betting was illegal but betting by post or telegrams legal.

Telephones. The National Telephone Co provided the local telephone service in the various towns. But the post office had reserved the Trunk service for development but in 1900 there were very few trunk lines and the quality of the conversations over the long distance lines was poor, so very few firms attempted to use the trunk service until the technical difficulties had been overcome a few years later.

Telegraph instruments. There was a duplex circuit direct to Manchester (by altering the position of a switch two clerks could send and receive messages over the same line) and a circuit Macklesfield, Chestergate B.O. [?] and Manchester. These were Morse sounder circuits. There was one single-needle circuit to three sub-offices; these signals – in Morse – could be read visually and by sound – and a second-needle circuit to Hibel Rd Station, Macclesfield. The post office had an agreement with the railways under which the great majority of stations in the UK – those having telegraph instruments in use – would accept telegrams on behalf of the post office – and, I believe, keep the fees. In return for this service the railways could send free their own internal telegrams, mainly enquiries between stations of delay. to goods in transit.

There was also a Wheatstone A.B.C. instrument, which was very simple to work after a few minutes instruction; you looked down at a glass-covered ring with levers projecting from each letter in the alphabet marked on the rim of the circle. By turning a handle and depressing the keys you spelt out a word which was reproduced on a smaller dial standing up from the table and also reproduced on a similar dial at the distant office. This worked to Wincle (one ring) and Wildboardclough (two rings); these instruments are now museum pieces.

The work was interesting but exacting; you had to be on the alert all the morning, to see that telegrams were not delayed and, before filing the telegrams away, to be sure they had all been sent and initialled by the various clerks; and you had to be very alert to keep track of the boys coming back from delivery to avoid delay in sending out the messages.

Leading from the instrument room was a small room with a skylight which had been used for stores but in which had been placed the one and only telephone trunk fixture. We attended to this if anyone rang, so there could not have been much business. I had to learn to operate the instruments as best I could; there were no practice sets. I first learnt the morse code and then began to practise first on the single needle sets. The most difficult was to master the sounder. As there was no practice set I had to learn to read by sound by listening to the key; but I stuck to it and within the year, I had become proficient on all the instruments.

We had two tipsters in the town; they sent telegrams most days giving tips for one or more races. About 10 they would bring batches of addresses which we would transmit to Manchester as so many addresses from Nolan or Sefton, await text [?]; then often they would get the tip ‘straight from the horse’s mouth’ and we would advise Manchester of the text to be added to the addresses. Many punters got tips direct and the messenger boys often had to wait and bring back a telegram to their bookie with their bets; the boys had to reckon the cost and collect the charge. One boy made a mistake and charged the sender ½d short; instead of going back for the halfpenny he crossed a word out and this happened to be the name of the winning horse; there was a fine row about this. The bookie would not admit the bet.

After my six weeks as Unpaid Learner I was employed on Sorting office duties mainly, working funny hours: from 4.30 am to 7.0 am and 5.30 pm to 10.15 pm. Work

that out! I did not see Father during the week – I had gone to work before he got up and went to bed after he had retired.

A few weeks after my appointment I was asked to sign for 2/6 which it was explained was the late attendance fine money; each quarter the money was divided between the staff but any clerk late more than three [times was?] “exempt” from their share of the money!

[This is the end of the account; it ends at the very bottom of the sheet, but the last few words are written in pencil on the back of the sheet, so it probably is the end of what he wrote.]