

The Early Years

I was born at 8 Kimberley Terrace, off the Bristol Road, in Bridgwater, Somerset, on April second 1906. Mam always said that I was born half an hour after midnight, but I have always had the firm belief that I came into the world half an hour before midnight. Mam would not admit it. She was very superstitious and did not like the idea of her newborn son being an April Fool!

Bridgwater days are but a vague memory in my mind. I know we lived near, perhaps next door, to a family named Merrett and one of Mam's favourite stories regards one of the Merrett boys. A sweet lodged in his throat and Mrs Merrett sought our Mam's help. Mam, so she says, found him blue in the face and rapidly choking. She stuck her finger down his throat, groped a while, with fast-beating heart - and, by a miracle, she claims, hooked the sweet free and saved his life.

One of my earliest memories is of Grandfather Parkhouse's funeral from Rose Cottage in Puriton. It was on September 26th 1906, when I was only six months old. I close my eyes, remembering that day over seventy years ago. I see again BIG, BIG horses and a BIG, BIG hearse. The enormous driver sat on a seat, which was at least halfway to heaven way up in the sky. I have always found it hard to convince the family that the recollection is real, but I believe anyway, the dates in Roy's family tree prove it.

Later, perhaps on one of our visits during the Somerset/Wales - Wales/Somerset interludes, I recall walking along the banks of the river Parrett watching young lads slipping down the greasy slope into the water to recover what we then called "sea-apples". I suppose the fruit had been washed into the stream from the orchards when the tide was up or the Parrett was in flood. Quite close to where we lived there were some brickfields and at least one place where they manufactured "Bath Brick" used for cleaning cutlery, especially knives. The Blake statue in the middle of town is a misty memory and I am sure that my last visit to it was at Carnival time, complete with fireworks. I think it still goes on today.

Though I found out later that Mam's name was Mary Elizabeth Haynes Parkhouse, she was known as Polly to Dad and the other grown-ups and Auntie Polly to the children. Aunt Eva, Dad's sister, and her husband, Uncle Bill Redding lived in Bridgwater and I have confused memories of them coming to see us and of us visiting them. When we went to see Auntie Eva and family I quite clearly remember

climbing stairs to their living rooms, which were over a shop. Whether it was their shop or not escapes my memory, but I do recall that Auntie Eva was one of our favourites. (Sometime or other I gathered that she had married quite young - 16 or 17).

Taunton is far more rewarding, with a fund of memories. We must have lived in Taunton much longer than in Bridgwater. Where in the town? I remember Hayman's Buildings at one end of the town, not far from the tram terminus. I recall a small number of very tiny cottages built around a sort of courtyard, on one flank the dwelling-houses and on the other flank a group of primitive toilets. Grandmother and Grandfather Easton lived in one of these tiny houses. I remember a stone step outside their front door, upon which, our Mam told us, Granfy had been known to do his own special dance accompanied by his own special songs, when he could afford some beer.

He was tiny as I remember him, probably just over five feet tall. Granny Easton remains a vague picture in my mind - but I know I liked her. Inside the cottage, by a small window overlooking the courtyard, was a little table, upon which rested an opened family bible and a spectacle case. I am almost sure that Granny and Granfy used the same pair of glasses - except that, according to the marriage certificate of Mam and Dad, George Easton (Granfy) could only make his mark.

Jumping forward. Some years later, when we were living in Aberkenfig, Mam was visiting Auntie Rose and Uncle Bill at 74 Oakfield, Ogmere Vale. A telegram arrived to say poor Granfy Easton, our Mam's Dad, had been found dead. Charlie must have been in work (Like me, he started at 13), so Mrs Mainey, our next-door neighbour at Mount Pleasant, lent me some money, gave me strict instructions, and away I went. I walked to Tondy railway station, caught a train to Nantymoel, found 74 Oakfield, and delivered the awful news to Mam.

So, going back to Hayman's Buildings in Taunton, Mam took me with her for the funeral. I remember a dear old neighbour of Granfy's, Mrs Clench, providing me with a bed - and I'll never forget that, on a little bedside table, there was a real clock, unheard of before to me. I will never, never forget its fascinating "tick-tock, tick-tock", one of the sweetest lullabies in my young life.

While at this end of Taunton, among others, I had a friend about my own age. We would visit a nearby park together and, beyond the trams, walk through some large cider-apple orchards. Children were allowed to pick up the windfalls - and Frankie Wood and I would engineer our own special windfalls when other children had passed through before us. After dark (and I can't imagine how I was ever allowed to do this!) we sometimes played "Dickie Show the Light" with a candle-stub stuck in a jam jar.

Sometimes Frankie and I were given the honour of joining some local farm labourers. We'd take a slice of bread and jam with us and trudge out into "the country". The men would throw their jackets and breadbaskets in the hedge and then get to work hoeing the turnips, mangolds and swedes. When the time was right, Frankie and I would be sent to the farm on a ritual errand. Here we would be provided with a firkin (small barrel) of cider, which we carried back to the men by

means of a stick through an iron ring in the firkin, which we held between us. I remember being urged to have a taste of the raw, tangy liquid - and it was home time when I woke up!

While at this end of town, I attended Rowbarton church and Rowbarton church school. It was the same church where Mam and Dad were married on 26th June 1902. I get all mixed up about schools at this point because later, as I will try to explain as the tale unfolds, when we moved to the other end of Taunton, we attended Trinity church and I went to Trinity church school, where, among other things, I learnt to knit! Still, when we went back again to Wales, I attended the infant classes of Tondu Boys' school.

So, to come back to Rowbarton. Apparently, I was very slow at reading, so I was "kept in" during the whole of one playtime and given extra tuition. Curiously, from that critical point right up to now, I have been quite good at reading, spelling and composition. Many years later, at Mount Pleasant one Christmas, Mam received a half-pound fancy tin of her favourite tea from Auntie Lizzie. Mam made it last as long as possible and then - (surprise, surprise!) - when she came to the bottom of the tin, she found a bright new shilling. The smile on Mam's face at that moment was worth a whole tin-full of shillings.

While at Rowbarton, a very important person came into my life. Her name was Auntie Lizzie. She was our Mam's very closest friend. They had worked together for a number of years in a nearby laundry. One thing I recall about Auntie Lizzie was that she was nice in the best sense of the word. She always dressed nice, smelt nice (yes!) and, somehow it meant a good deal to me, she had a nice voice and a nice way of speaking. She was with us quite often and, later, when we were again living at No 1 Mount Pleasant, Aberkenfig, she spent a holiday with us. I think it must have been during the birth of one of the girls, Bertha or Doris, because, in one of the front bedrooms our lovely china bowl and jug were filled with steaming hot water and there was "scented soap" (toilet soap) in a lovely little china dish covered in roses.

I do recall going with Auntie Lizzie (who wore white cotton gloves) on the long walk up Mynydd Bach, sitting in the Devil's Arm Chair, and back home the "long way" around Court Coleman.

Back at Rowbarton, with Mam and Aunt Lizzie, we often walked to the big house adjoining the laundry where they had laboured so long together. Here there was a tennis court and Charlie and I were given a number of well-worn tennis balls, with which we later played for weeks on end. Also at Rowbarton, I dimly remember, was a bicycle factory, where Dad's bike, complete with solid, bone-shaking tyres, was made to measure, no doubt at some expense! (The same bicycle was raffled in Aberkenfig after Dad's death just before World War 1). [Ed: note that the photograph showing him with a bike has pneumatic tyres].

Now came a change, must have been an important one too. We moved to another part of Taunton, Alma Street (or Terrace?). The house was No. 54. It had bay windows in the front, gas, at least for lighting, and a nice, big back garden. Dad was then an engineer (?) in a brewery. As he was a strict teetotaler, Dad swapped

his allowance of free beer with a farm worker living nearby for his free milk. Dad was also entitled to a free supply of "pop". I remember seeing the bottles in a cupboard in the front room. Lots and lots of colours on one shelf and a smaller number of bottles on another shelf. These were for Stanley, who didn't like the others. Good old Dad!

Dad once took me with him to the brewery and he showed me his very own personal cupboard, opened the door, and there on the shelves were identical groups of bottles - the next consignment for Alma Street! Worth mentioning is the fact that St Mary's church must have been quite near, for I remember being enthralled with the soaring music of its peal of bells all the time I was with my Dad at the brewery

Dad was a Tory and I remember there must have been a general election while we lived in Alma Street (1912?). Charlie and I sported medals with a picture of the Conservative candidate, a Mr Wills. We sang with others: "Vote, vote, vote for Mr Wills. Drive old Shankey (?) from the land. If it wasn't for the law, I would smack him on the jaw and he wouldn't be a Liberal any more!" Election Day must have been a holiday, for we didn't go to school, and Dad walked us up to the brewery where he worked.

Entrance to the works was through huge double doors. These were now closed and entirely covered by some royal blue material. Dad was always straight and tall, but today, just then, he seemed at least a foot taller, his black curly hair glistened, his dark moustache shone, and his smile - well, what a memory! That night, when Mam had packed us off to bed, I was told that Dad had gone to the parade to see who had come top of the poll. Wondering, I fell asleep imagining lots of people climbing a pole which stretched way up into the night sky. I think "we" won, but I'm not sure.

Sunday mornings, presumably while Mam cooked the dinner, Dad took us to see the soldiers (redcoats then) on a church parade. As the soldiers marched along the street, Dad would hoist me on to his shoulders, where I proudly watched and listened to the band, way above the others. (I also remember sitting on Dad's shoulders watching a football match over the top of a fence while he did the same thing through a convenient knot-hole!).

We often visited Vivary Park, sometimes with Mam and Dad, sometimes with other children. Here was held the annual Flower Show, finished off with a fantastic firework display. My memory tells me that the whole of Taunton was there! Perhaps it was here; it was surely in some large, open space, that I was taken to see my first aeroplane fly. We watched while this strange little machine, with a whirring thing in front, coughing and spluttering, trundled towards a distant hedge. Time and time again it happened, but the thing stayed quite firmly on the ground. So, disappointed, somehow defeated, we made our way back home. Then the shout went up. "Listen. Look! Oh look!" We traced the unaccustomed sound, glued our eyes on that bit of sky, and there, fussily, bravely, triumphantly, the tiny machine crossed the sky above us. We cheered. I was thrilled. I had seen it flying!

(Here I must emphasise that, to add confusion to the muddled memories of one so young and small, some of them, and I don't know which, are divided by trips to

Wales and back to Somerset, or the other way round). Anyhow, Alma Street. We got our coal then from a yard at the top of the street, in wicker baskets mounted on a sack-truck, I believe in hundredweights. Norman Chinn, my friend, and I helped each other on this dirty errand. After delivery to his or our house, it was our duty to return the empty basket and sack-truck to the coal-yard. We had an excellent system of sharing the pushing or riding. First Norman rode in the basket and I pushed. Then we changed over. But we were both pushing when we finally entered the yard.

But, one day, our cherished system went wrong. On arrival at the yard, the coal merchant was checking the return of his property. One glance and we were in trouble. There, clearly visible in the sooty coal dust at the bottom of the basket, were the confused boot prints of Stanley and Norman.

Somewhere quite near (Duke Street seems to ring a bell) was a shirt factory. Wandering round the walls of the building, we boys could often pick up discarded elastic back-studs. Fitted in the correct manner around an empty cotton reel, with a matchstick as ammunition, we could sit in the gallery of one of the local churches and bombard selected members of the congregation below during the hymn singing. Another memory of the same galleried church comes to mind. Charlie and I were given a halfpenny each for the collection. On our way there we had to pass a little house where a plump old lady made delicious treacle toffees. Sometimes we would pause awhile. Then only one halfpenny found its way into the collection plate, and Charlie and I would be much too busy munching treacle toffee to join in singing "Onward Christian Soldiers".

Looking back, I am sure that Charlie must have been the leading light on these occasions. After all, he was three whole years older than I was, half a lifetime older at that age.

Money doesn't seem to have been very important in those Taunton days. Perhaps it was because my sole income was one penny a week pocket money. Remember that my "pop" was free. Then, as forever since, I was an ardent window-shopper and one day the item in the middle of the toy shop window display had me goggle-eyed. It was a fireman's helmet, a shining, almost real fireman's helmet. As the fire station was quite near, I had often watched the galloping horses belting out of the fire station on an alarm call. The driver wore a helmet and the man who stood ringing the bell like mad also wore a helmet. I wanted to wear a helmet. And there was one in the window.

So --. Well, for weeks I denied myself whatever I usually spent my penny on and then came the day. Fearfully, I gazed in the toyshop window. The fireman's helmet still gleamed and glinted there. Almost as brave as a real fireman, I stalked into the shop, opened my sweaty little hand and plonked fourpence on the counter. Then my heart almost stopped beating. Even when you are little people's faces tell you things, and I knew that what the shopman's face was telling me was bad news. And I also knew he was sorry for me. "Sorry, sonny," he said quietly "the fireman's helmet is sevenpence halfpenny. For fourpence you can have -".

But I did not hear any more. Making sure of my money, I hid myself somewhere

and cried my eyes out - and for the life of me I can't remember what I did with my fourpence. (Anyway, later, in Wales, and for free, I did have a fireman's helmet to play with - and a policeman's, a soldier's, a sailor's and lots of other nice things, but not for keeps. And all because Mam, by then a widow with six kids, took in washing).

In town, near the bridge over the river Tone, we often gathered to watch the trains. Sometimes they would stop outside the railway station, waiting for the signals, and we would say nice things to the passengers. Sometimes they would throw out a couple of coppers, for which we scrambled, not always. On one of these occasions, copperless, I met my Granfie Easton. He put his arm around my shoulder (I don't think he was much bigger than I was!) searched his pockets and put a halfpenny in my hand. I went into a nearby toy shop and asked what I could have for a halfpenny. I was shown a number of items, out of which I selected a water whistle. Outside, holding it in a small puddle, I tried the plunger - and it came apart in my hands.

Again I found somewhere to hide and cry, after throwing the useless whistle behind some newspaper boards standing outside the shop. While we were attending Trinity church and school, Charlie and I joined the Sunday school on a train excursion to Weston-super-Mare. We had hardly arrived when I spotted a toy tin trumpet on a nearby stall. By the time I had decided not to buy it the rest of our Taunton party had moved on and there was I, a little boy lost on the sands of Weston. I cried my eyes out. A man and woman took me under their wing, but it was tea-time before they were able to re-unite me with the rest of the Trinity crowd.

This happened in a hotel where the party was booked for tea. I remember being pushed into a crowded room, where Charlie was removing a pencil and rubber held to a show-card by elastic. I don't believe anyone had missed me!

In Taunton I first went to "magic lantern" lectures, and also my first moving pictures. Silent of course and, inevitably Westerns (cowboy pictures) and slapstick comedies. Two lantern titles I remember are "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight" and "The Signalman's Daughter".

My earliest clear memory of Wales is when I seemed to be starting school all over again! First Rowbarton, then Trinity, in Taunton, now it was Tondu Infants' school. Mam escorted me. From Mount Pleasant, past Chappel's stable and cartshed, down the gulley past Chappel's bakehouse and shop and on to the Bridgend road. We turned left, past the Star hotel, past the cinema, a big tin shed at the top of a steep flight of concrete steps. Down the Rock hill, through the village, up the Catholic hill, under the red railway bridge, past Evanstown brickworks (where later I went to work) and there was the school.

One awful incident remains in my mind of the early days of Tondu School. I was accused of saying a dirty word, pushed into the cloakroom, where my mouth was ceremoniously washed out in a hand-basin.

Perhaps to balance the painful memory, I clearly recall a Christmas party we had at which we all stood around a large canvas "ship", the most of which was a tall

Christmas tree, from which we kids received presents. Mine was a tin railway engine painted chiefly in a lovely green. I am sure our Mam was there among a lot of other parents.

Dad was a great one with his hands and he had a complete set of tools for one of his hobbies, which was picture framing. Talking of pictures, we had a lot of them when we lived at Mount Pleasant. In our living room, we had quite large ones, all about the Boer War. There was a portrait of Sir Robert Baden-Powell, one of General Redvers Buller, and one portraying either the Relief of Mafeking or Ladysmith!

We had a huge perambulator with a large undercarriage which we called "The Mailcart" and I can remember walking out with Mam one warm Sunday, pushing one of our babies in this. We went a very long way. We finished up at some pit-head over towards Pencoed way, where Dad fried an egg on a shiny shovel he was using to stoke a boiler.

Family Disaster

Quite suddenly, in January 1914, the bottom dropped out of our little world. At the age of 39, our Dad died, leaving Mam a sorrowful widow with six children. Charlie would be eleven in March - 3 years older than me. Jim was but a fortnight old, Bertha, Cyril and Doris sandwiched in between. We lived then in Dunraven Street, number 22. Soon Bertha was taken for a stay in Nantymoel with Auntie Rose (Dad's sister) and Uncle Jim Hooper. They shared a house with a doctor. (Years later they moved to 74 Oakfield).

I spent about 3 weeks with Auntie Emily (Dad's sister) and Uncle Jim Hunter, who was a French-Canadian. They lived in Aber Houses, a row of terraced dwellings, perched on a shelf of the Ogmere Vale. There were four Hunter cousins, David, Eddie, Gladys, and Rose, all much older than me. I can remember refusing to eat fatty bacon, and having my boots confiscated so that I could not go out.

Uncle Jim was a big, tall man, with one eye, and very, very gentle. He had an old-fashioned piano upon which he spent hours, laboriously picking out haunting French Canadian airs. Soon it was summer and - how and when it happened I can't recall - we were back at No 1 Mount Pleasant. I was brought back home and Doris went instead to stay with Auntie Em Hunter in Ogmere. Round about now I dimly remember the Great War starting in August 1914.

Another Uncle Jim came into my life - on a bicycle! He was Dad's brother from Bawdrip in Somerset, a man, I later found out, who never stopped working. He had cycled from his farm-market-garden to Weston-super-Mare, crossed to Cardiff on the Campbell paddle steamer, and continued on his bike to stay with the Hoopers in Nantymoel. It was arranged that I should go back to Somerset with him for an indefinite period.

So, early one morning, along came Uncle Bill Parkhouse on his bike and cousin Eddie Hooper on his bike. I sat in front of Eddie on his handlebars, Uncle Jim pedalling alongside. Before we reached Bridgend, I had managed to put my foot

through Cousin Eddie's front wheel! But, eventually, we reached the railway station at Bridgend, where a label with my name was pinned on my jacket and I was put in the care of the guard in his van, bound for Cardiff. On reaching Cardiff, I was collected by Uncle Jim (where had Cousin Eddie gone?) and transported to the docks on the top bar of his bike. When the old paddle steamer reached Weston, Uncle Jim again placed me in the care of the guard at Weston railway station, while he continued on his homeward journey on two wheels.

Finally, (don't ask me how!) I found myself dumped at the tiny railside halt, which was Bawdrip. There was nobody to meet me so I did what any eight-year-old who do when finding himself far from home without his Mam - I cried, and cried, and cried. After a while I was rescued by a very friendly signalman, who took me up a scary ladder into his box, where he pulled levers and rang bells so busily that I dried my tears.

And then I was claimed by my cousin Beatie, who seemed to be tickled pink because my name, like hers, was Parkhouse! A long walk through country lanes and we reached the farm. Uncle Bill (no sign of his bike!) was already hard at work digging spuds - and in no time at all I joined the labour force. My Aunt - another Emily - helped me change into some old clothes and soon I was busy loading potato haulms into wheelbarrows, which were carted away by Beatie and Rosie, a younger cousin. This went on and on until dark, and I can remember being more tired than I had ever been before in my 8 long years.

Like my memory of it, the farm was something of a mixture. There was a horse and a high trap. There were some cows and some chickens and an apple orchard. On at least two of the fields, there was a big, big hole; from these, Uncle Jim quarried stone, wheeling a barrowload at a time along planks, which looked very dangerous. One of these quarries, was a favourite of mine because it had a large pool of clear water at the bottom, in which I often bathed myself.

But my chief job turned out to be scaring the cows off the corn with a huge rattle and a shout. Very occasionally, Uncle Jim appeared with a shotgun, which he discharged over the field of corn, and then went on his way, reminding me to keep rattling and shouting. I can remember so well how I hated the long, lonely days in that blessed cornfield. On market days, Aunt Em and Uncle Jim would pile the high old cart with vegetables and take them to Burnham-on-Sea.

Sometimes, very rarely, they took me with them. On these occasions, it would always be raining, and I would spend what seemed hours and hours under the seat, huddled up on some old sacks, while Uncle Bill and Auntie Emily visited a large building in Burnham. Remembering their smiling faces now on their return to the trap, it is quite obvious it must have been a pub!

One day, Rosie and I had to cut thistles in one of the meadows. Using reaping hooks, it was a backbreaking job, but Rosie had a wise head on her young shoulders, so that the job was completed under the apple trees in the orchard. At last, a lot of local help was hired, the corn was cut, the gleaning was done - and I lost sight of that stupid rattle. Then my Mam was on the scene, and I was wafted away to Granfie Easton's place in Taunton.

I'll never forget the look on the little man's face when he saw me. "Good gracious, Polly," he burst out, "Look at the boy's hair! First thing in the morning, haircut". And it was he who took me to the barber's shop on a sunny, lazy, lazy morning. And soon we were back home at 1 Mount Pleasant in Aberkenfig! Just like that. So ended my first taste of what came to be known as a working holiday!

Towards the end of 1916, when I was ten and a half years old, I began to become aware of the fact that there was a War on. Charlie passed what we called the "Labour Examination" and went to work at the local brickworks. I was to follow him as a spare-time lather boy in the barber's shop. Before that I had earned the odd copper helping Albert Talbot or Reggie McCann with their evening newspaper rounds.

Now I was a lather-boy. For a start, I called at the newsagents on the way home from school at noon to collect the barber's daily newspaper. Then at teatime, I called for his packed tea sandwiches at his home in Coronation Street. On Saturday, from 9 till 9, I was the lather boy. For this, I received one shilling and ninepence, plus a copper or two in tips. Later, Cyril took over this lower-order job and I spent evenings as well as Saturdays lathering scrubby chins. For this, I received five shillings, plus tips. The favourite topics of conversation between the barber and his customers, mostly miners, were the War and horse racing. As Mr Jenkins was an ex-jockey, he brought more know-how to the art of having a quick tanner on a horse than the strategy of trench-warfare.

The barber, Charlie Jenkins, did a lot of hair-cutting and shaving out of shop hours, chiefly for invalided Servicemen, and on his weekly half-day off, he visited local military hospitals to spruce up the patients. A few of these servicemen were able to visit the shop, dressed in the all-too-familiar hospital-blue uniform, and while I lathered, sponged, wiped and powdered all sorts of chins and cheeks, I would be thrilled by hair-raising tales of life (and death!) in the muddy, bloody trenches in France.

Charlie Jenkins was a member of our local Reception Committee, whose duty it was to meet, at Tondy railway station, the train which occasionally brought a hero home on leave. On this occasion, the welcomed one would be driven through the streets in what must have been the only motor car in the village. There would always be a show of flags and sometimes the local band led the parade.

Our own vital problems were quite simple (?). Dad was dead, none of us boys was old enough to serve in the Forces, there was no widow's pension then, and only Charlie (by special decree, at the age of thirteen) was old enough to go to work. Mam, so I dimly remember, would not apply for Parish Relief ("Charity!"), so where was the money to house, feed, and clothe our Mam and six children coming from?

So, calling on the experience of her younger days in Taunton, she took in washing. The younger ones couldn't have known, and even I could barely have guessed, the dour and grim battle she fought with the ever-boiling copper, the wash-tub and board, and the flat irons, big and small, for ever heating up on the hobs and trivets of the open fire. How our neighbours, the Mainseys, Joneses, and Maloneys ever

managed to get by her ever-full clothes line, strung and propped across the yard, I shall always wonder.

I can recall quite a lot of fetching and carrying in those days, warned by Mam not to get the bundles of washing - soiled ones, clean and ironed ones - mixed up and "Ee make sure now to get the money!" Mam never, never, lost her rich, Somerset accent, and, as far as I remember, none of us ever learned to speak or read Welsh, though, quite naturally, I suppose, we kids acquired a Welsh accent as broad and as long as any of our playmates and friends. Indeed, looking back over the years, I wish I had learned the local language. Some of my so-called poems, had they been written in Welsh, would have found a ready outlet in the "Welsh Column" of the "Glamorgan Gazette", then published in Bridgend nearby.

(Here I must add that, much later, I was to contribute regularly to that newspaper through the medium of my own (!) column, "The Tondy and Aberkenfig Paragraphs". I really cannot tell you how proud I was of this minor achievement - until the same pride made me give it up.)

Naturally, to all of us Parkhouses anyway, we were staunch C. of E. churchgoers. Sunday was Sunday, Mam saw to that. Holy Communion (when we were old enough to be confirmed), morning Sunday school, matins at eleven a.m., afternoon Sunday school, and Evensong at six-thirty. In addition, over the years, I was to be organ-blower, choirboy, lamplighter, bellringer, sidesman, and general dogsbody, and I even had one of my poems published in the parish magazine.

How Mam managed it is a mystery to me, but we all had "Sunday best" clothes, suits for the boys, dresses for the girls. On Monday, Mam would wash the girls' dresses, brush and sponge the boys' suits and put them away until next Sunday. But back to the War years. Rationing came in and I was elected family scribe for the necessary form filling for ration books. I dimly remember certain "off-ration" commodities. For these you needed money, and that kept us off.

But one thing I remember quite clearly: it was the birth of the "Queue", now so very well known. Word would come through "on the grapevine" (no "wireless or "telly" then) that there was jam (or whatever) at so-and-so's in Bridgend. Mam would call me aside. I was to have a headache, backache or tummy-ache. One of the younger ones would deliver a note to Mr Bird, Tondy Boys' headmaster, and "Ee remember now, Sssssssshh!" When the coast was clear next morning, my ache would suddenly get better. Mam, Mrs Jones, Mrs Mainey and Stanley, suitably equipped with shopping bags and baskets, and wrapped as well as possible against the icy winter wind, would set off on the three-mile trudge to Bridgend.

On arrival at the, then, small market town, we found and joined our queue. Looking back, it always seemed to stretch for miles. After, at least it seemed so to me, hours and hours of moving forward inch by inch, if we were lucky, we got a prize for the pantry - once, I well recall, it was a four pound tin of strawberry jam more often, it was black treacle. Our spirits on the three-mile dawdle home would vary. We were always cold and tired. If we had secured nothing, we would be dead tired and blue with cold. But if we had got something, however small, we would sometimes sing.

Although the War years were a bitter struggle against awful odds, we didn't always have our noses to the wall. (Indeed, I doubt if Cyril, Bertha, Doris and baby Jimmy even had the remotest idea what a War was). Of course, we had no radio or "telly". Very few people could afford a gramophone and records to match it. But we did have a tin-shed called a cinema (silent films of course) and before I became a lather boy, I was able to go to the Saturday matinee and sit goggle-eyed on the long, wooden forms for one penny. "Davies the Cinema" was both manager and pianist and (how he managed it I can't even guess) he would see that each boy or girl would receive a bag of sweets or, when available, an orange on the way in.

We usually saw a "big picture", a two-part comedy, a newsreel and the serial. The latter were usually shown in fifteen two-part episodes, each episode ending on a breath-taking, nail-biting note - thus "cliff-hangers". Some titles I still remember, such as "The Broken Coin", "The Voice on the Wire", "Peg o' the Ring" and "The Black Box". At the War-time matinees (until I became a lather-boy) I joined "Davies the Cinema" at the piano and hundreds of boys and girls, singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary", "My Daddy's in the Navy", "Pack up your Troubles in your old Kit-bag", "There's a Long, Long Trail A-winding", and many other stirring and uninhibited War-time songs, like "Keep the Home Fires Burning". We had our own version of "Pretty Redwing":

"Oh, the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin,
His boots are cracking
For the want of blacking,
And his old baggy trousers they want mending
Before we send him to the Dardanelles"

And Mam, bless her great, big Somerset heart, liked the "pictures" too. Indeed, some of her cronies insisted on it, for our Mam was able to read out the sub-titles for them. She went twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, when the programme changed. Don't know how she managed it, but she also had some sweets to suck, or monkey-nuts to crunch. Yes, our Mam did enjoy her "pictures".

We were all great readers. I remember at No 1 Mount Pleasant, before the electric was put in, our kitchen (not the "back-kitchen") table, a large oil-lamp standing in the middle, surrounded by Mam and family, reading "The Christian Herald", "Peg's Paper", "The Boys' Magazine", "Chips", "Comic Cuts" and many, many more I cannot remember.

What I do remember though (but not the date) is when Woolworth's came to Bridgend. Better than a circus, for it came to stay. And what do you know? You could buy a book in hard covers for sixpence, a tanner! Gee whiz! Was I thrilled! I still found that even sixpence was hard to come by, but when I proudly bought my first "Readers' Library" volume at Woolworth's, I was at least half a millionaire. It was called "The Little Shepherd Of Kingdom Come", and I read and read it so many times that it finally fell to pieces. My second one was even better, a collection of Bret Harte's Western short stories under the title "The Luck of Roaring Camp", and among the great stories were some of his poems. One I shall never forget was called "Dickens in Camp" and began:

"The moon above the pines was slowly drifting,
The River sang below.

The dim Sierras in the distance were uplifting,
Their minarets of snow.”

Thrilling! We kids had to make our own fun outdoors, skipping, hop-scotch, ring-a-ring-o-roses, fox-and-hounds, catty-and-dog, rounders, cricket, football, marbles (several versions), leap-frog, and many, many, more. We felt no need of gear and special kit for cricket. We fashioned our own bats from the stout branch of a tree, sometimes faced with flattened condensed-milk tins, the handle bound with old inner tubes from bicycles. When you can't have a proper football, what's wrong with an inflated pig's bladder?

We played soccer and rugby, and often the same ball did for both. Who needs goalposts when a couple of coats will do? We had bags of pitches for cricket, soccer and rugby, on either the common alongside the Bridgend road or Pen y fai common. And teams could be anything up to thirty a side, depending on availability. Referees? Umpires? Never heard of 'em!

Whenever anybody was out at cricket, it was never clean bowled, caught or leg-before-wicket, but as a result of losing the furious argument which always ensued at the time. Of course, the ball was never a real cricket ball, but a wooden one “borrowed” from the cokernut-shy when a “show” visited Pandy fields. We had a fair supply in stock, and half a dozen or so would be soaked in a bucket of water overnight ready for the next day's game. Curious things cokernut-cricket balls. On a few occasions, the “out” argument would be further complicated by the fact that one of us would be held to be caught and bowled simultaneously, the ball having split in two.

Which reminds me. We had no pads or gloves and wicket-keeping duties (“stumper” we said were shared between us. One day, however, (when I was working in the pit) we had a real cricket bat and a genuine ball. The “stumper” picked himself simply because he had a pair of gloves with him. It all looked so very real to see that lad crouched and tense behind a huge pair of gloves. One of our faster bowlers was sending 'em down on our more than uneven pitch. He took his usual long run, unwound, missed the bat, the wicket, the stumpers gloves, and hit him clean between his eyes. When the lad at last came round, he insisted on leaving the pitch, taking his gloves with him.

About this same period, I remember playing football, soccer and rugby, on top of the old washery tip. This, for me at any rate, soon palled, because the ball was frequently kicked over the edge of the tip into the wastelands far below. What followed reminded me of the monologue “Sam's Musket” (“Thee knocked it down, thee pick it oop”). It was a swift and slushy descent and a slow, slow slimy crawl back up.

The end of the First World War, even to a twelve-year-old lather boy, was really something. It was the evening sessions at Charlie Jenkins', the barber, shop and we were dealing with only a few casual customers. It was getting on for closing time, a precious hour for me. Suddenly, there was a lot of noise in Aberkenfig's main street: the sound of children shouting and singing and banging tins. We had all heard rumours - rumours of the one thing that could bring smiles and laughter back again - the end of the War.

The barber, an ex-jockey, was only a small man, but as he dashed to the shop door, he seemed to grow in stature. As he opened the door, the clatter from the little street grew louder still as the marching boys and girls came abreast of us. He shouted something, I don't know what, and was answered in a chorus of shouted words that made no sense to me and yet my mind said the War was over. "It's over! It's over", the barber cried. Stanley, get your apron off. Quick! No sooner said than done. As I rushed towards the door, he dipped his hand in his pocket and passed me a threepenny bit, and in no time at all I was mingling with the mob of girls and boys and advised to get a biscuit-tin from the back of Perkins, the baker's, shop. I can't recall the next few moments. Whether I got the biscuit tin or not, I found myself marching, shouting, jostling along at least as far as the Red Bridge.

The noise, in a street usually so quiet that time of night, was almost deafening. Then, as quickly as the shouting had begun, it died down and further deadening, awful news filtered through. The War was not yet over. It was a false alarm. Again, my mind is a blank until next day, the 11th of November 1918. We were, as usual, at school, busy with our various lessons. Then, quietly, almost mysteriously, we became aware of teachers moving from one classroom to another, and odd whispers, excited whispers, and then we were summoned to the main hall. There, we were told, officially, that, at eleven-o'clock that very morning, an armistice would be signed between the Allies and the Germans.

While we were trying to come to terms with the word "armistice", the headmaster told us with a joyous smile that the War was over - and that we could all go home. Hooray! Hooray! I can't remember having any dinner at 1 Mount Pleasant that day, but I do remember that my friends and I walked to Bridgend to buy some fireworks. I completely forgot to call at the local newsagent's shop to collect the barber's daily paper - and when I saw him next, he threatened to sack me. That is the same man who blithely handed me a silver threepenny piece the night before! No, he didn't sack me after all.

After the War was over, I don't seem to remember any marked improvement in Mam's finances. We were always hard up. Lots of men we never saw any more. Some who came back were shell-shocked and shattered. In the barber's shop, the conversation shuttled between horses and a thing called "The Peace". In 1919, I took the "Labour Exam" in school, which Charlie had passed three years before. (He was now working down the pit).

The August holiday came and I was a lather-boy full-time, Wednesday early closing. After shop hours and on Wednesdays after one o'clock I joined my gang (Sam Meade's) at cricket, football, tree climbing, swimming and so on. After dark, when I could elude Mam's motherly eye, we went scrumping in certain orchards that shall be nameless. As in Taunton so many years ago (it seemed) we also played "Dickie Show the Light".

We children were growing up. So were our appetites. Mam kept mumbling "I wonder if ee passed". Then she could wait no longer. Face shining, hair slicked down, best suit on, I was persuaded (commanded might be a better word, come to think of it) to walk all the way up to the top of Tondy to the headmaster's house,

take off my cap, and ask if I had passed the Labour Exam. I was always small and skinny and shy. That day, I was all these plus. I hoped he would be out. He was in. When I made known the purpose of my visit, he was in a temper too. When I crawled back home and told Mam (who was never a bold woman, not even pretending) she put her arms around me, consoling us both with the certainty that it couldn't be much longer.

Nor was it. First day back at school, myself and one other boy were summoned to the headmaster's office, handed a magic piece of paper, and sent home. Soon, my skinny legs and waist enveloped in a pair of Army-surplus trousers several sizes too large for me, and accompanied by Mr Mainey (back from the War), I was on my way to work. The job was tea-boy to a gang of men building a new by-product plant (whatever was that?) on the site of the old coke-ovens near Park Terrace in Tondu.

The water was boiled in a large copper placed in one of the old coke-ovens. The men were mostly Irish giants, each of whom could have picked me up with his little finger. The tea-boy I was replacing was a boy whom I remembered was not a "good scholar" at school. Only a little bigger than me, he had all the cheek and confidence I lacked. I was scared stiff. On payday, the other tea-boy made me stand with him as those awful men were paid, caps on the floor, shouting "Don't forget the tea-boy!" Poor Mam was shocked when I tried to explain such things as bad language, no proper WCs and so on.....

Three weeks later I was working in Evanstown Brickworks, where Charlie had worked until he was 14, old enough to go down the pit. There, I "made a go of it" until I, in turn, was old enough to follow Charlie down below.

Here, at the age of thirteen, one of the men of the family, earning twenty-seven shillings and sixpence a week, I worked on the elevators and screens which supplied the chutes to the presses on the floor below - and I began a life-long interest in seeing things being made. From a huge hole in the ground, the clay came up in trams, was tipped into the huge, whirling pans, where it was rolled and squashed until it was small enough to be squeezed through the little holes in the bottom of the pan and fed into elevator buckets up through the screens (which I kept clear), down the chutes, into the press, from where it was barrowed into the baking kilns. What a sight!

Drifting back for a moment to the tea-boy of sad memories (for me), years later I discovered that he was a traffic manager for an important bus company. So there! So anxious was Mam to get a bit of extra money that I found myself starting down the pit on a Thursday afternoon ("traffic" shift) and my next week was night work. I was to spend the next ten years in and out (because of strikes, stop-trucks and so on) of the mine until I followed Charlie to Oxford in October 1930.

Cleanliness was a major problem. I had never seen a bathroom. We bathed in Mam's wooden washtub on the mat in front of the fire in the "big kitchen". Water was boiled on the open fire, in buckets chiefly. If Charlie and I were on the same shift, he first knelt in front of the tub and washed to the waist. I followed, then the ladies retired to either the back-kitchen or the front room and we completed our

ablutions standing in the tub. Welsh old wives' tales said the back should not be washed every day because that would weaken it. Charlie and I disagreed with this, so we had our backs washed every day. We both seemed to spend a long time in front of the mirror, clearing our eyelashes.

(Some years later, when I was in Oxford, Jim washed in the pits. But he was able to come and go in his "tidy" clothes because they had pithead baths by then). The pit I worked in then (Coytrahen Park Colliery) was an open-light mine. We used oil-lamps and candles chiefly. We placed our candles in a "spike" stuck into a convenient post. It took some getting used to at first. As it was a slant as opposed to a straight up-and-down pit, we rode up and down on a train of low (very low!) wooden carriages. We lads reported with our mates or butties at the fireman's cabin. He, with his safety lamp (for gas testing) and stick (for sounding the "top" or roof) had already examined the working-places. His word was law.

It was the old stall-and -pillar system of coal getting, and when I started there, the heading where my mate's stall was already about a mile from that point, so I was almost whacked when I reached the coal-face. Payday for all shifts, men and boys, was on Friday. The three shifts were manned, then, each by one man and one boy. The man cut the coal and the boy filled it into trams, which made a "journey" drawn by a pit pony to the "parting" at the outer end of the heading, from whence they were pulled by rope to the pithead. The men were paid by the ton, so good, easy-to-dig ("free dig") coal meant good money.

I was paid six shillings and tenpence per shift - 6 shifts on days, 6 for 5 on afternoons and nights (if you lost a day on the latter, you lost a shift and a fifth). All the money was collected by one man for his shift mates and himself. When the money was good, he paid me seven bob a shift, no stoppages, and perhaps a five bob tip. Here and now, I swear I earned every last penny I got. In the language of the trade at that time, I "sweat my guts out". I was only a scrawny, shy, little whippersnapper but, by God! I must have been tough. Mam was pleased and, with Charlie also earning, her worries eased quite a bit, but it was still a fair old struggle, because the younger ones, Cyril, Bertha, Doris, and Jimmy, were, naturally, getting bigger, eating more and needing to be clothed as well.

As my years in the pit went by, I did a variety of jobs in turn, some of which carried only the minimum pay - stoppages deducted and no tips. I was brattice-boy, nailing up strips of brattice-cloth to supplement the ventilation system, dragging heavy rolls of brattice, a bag of large-headed nails and a hammer through the dark, damp, narrow workings. And towards the end of my spell in that seam, "Rock Fawr", I became assistant to a dear old man we called Morgan Gwaengwaddod.

Our job was patrolling the miles and miles of airways and return passages leading up to the fans on top. We had to keep the life-flow going at all costs, clear minor roof-falls and timber them up, sometimes crawling miles and miles in a single shift ("Days regular" now). It was a lonely job too. Sometimes, after reporting at the fireman's cabin, we would not see anyone for days and days.

Here I must remember to say that wages went down in the period from 1920, when I started, to October 1930, when I went to Oxford, that I was only getting

two pounds and five shillings after stoppages when I was 24. This dusty decade includes lots of Miners' Union activity, the 7-hour day, the 8-hour day, the 1921 strike and the disastrous 1926, soup-kitchen strike. Sunday for us was still the Sabbath day. Best clothes, church and Sunday school. How I loved the hymn singing, especially at Easter and Harvest Festival. We also had after-church sacred concerts, sometimes in the local cinema, silver collection please.

I was Sunday school teacher, secretary of the Young Peoples' Guild, a Rover Scout and Assistant Cub-Master. We had enjoyable camps in the woods guarding the rustic hamlet of Merthyr Mawr. Oh yes, we had plenty to do if we didn't have much money. Of course, I was a strict abstainer, although I smoked as many Woodbines as I could afford. They were twopence for a paper packet of 5, fourpence for a "double" in a cardboard pack. Players were sixpence for ten. If you had money, you could buy a good suit (3-piece) for two pounds ten shillings in the Fifty-Shilling Tailors.

When we could afford it, we had a trip to Ninian Park to watch Cardiff City play; half-a-crown return on the Luxury Coach. We could treat ourselves, on special occasions, to a bob-special three-course lunch at R.E.Jones's near the railway station and watch the soccer on the "bob bank" for a shilling. A Hercules bicycle with 3-speed gear was £3-19-9d. and a Raleigh £5-0-0. Those were the days? Not a bit of it. Cheap as all these items seem compared to now, they were very hard to come by.

Times, as always, were changing. Horse-drawn vehicles of all kinds were gradually giving way to motorised versions. The brewery dray, the baker's and butcher's vans, the milk float, and even the sombre hearse, were losing their horses for other kinds of horsepower. We still had bicycles, but some had motor-cycles and motor cars, but, I well remember, the Parkhouse family stayed on "shank's pony" - until Charlie bought a second-hand bike from the Riggs's for 29 shillings. Somehow, it seemed he didn't want much to do with it, so I took it over.

I had almost forgotten the way we took a day by the seaside (Porthcawl or Ogmore-by-Sea) when we were young ones. We usually joined up with the Jones' or the Mainey's and hired either Chappell's or Moles's brake - single or double horse, according to how many of us were in the group. I can remember that we kids were expected to get out of the brake and walk whenever we came to a steepish hill. Of course, we always took our own food and drink, we could not afford to buy our meals, and anyway, all those years ago, I doubt if it would have been possible, at least at Ogmore-by-Sea, which was much, much smaller then (I suppose what I really mean is that it was much less developed then than now).

I also remember a rare treat when we walked to Tondu railway station to join a "cheap day-excursion" to Porthcawl. I recall that these trains were always packed solid with sweating, shouting humanity, chiefly women and children. Oh, yes! I almost forgot. I remember the charabancs, long, high, petrol-driven contraptions, hired for day-trips, in which the passengers sat 3 or 4 in a row, facing the driver. I went in one (after a day-trip in the train to Weston-super-Mare) with our bible class to Cheddar. When it rained, we passed the telescopic canvas top, hand-over-hand, along the seats. I can still see the steaming canvas when the sun at last came out.

Radio, which we then called “the wireless”, came slowly but surely into our lives, though we never had a set in our family. The early ones were temperamental gadgets which worked on a crystal. You just fiddled with something called a “cats whisker”, while you endeavoured to coax some music out of the ether into a pair of large headphones. Magic! My first experience was at one of our fetes in the rectory field. The Woodhouses, father and son, had built a set, which they housed in a tent. We paid threepence each to go into this hallowed place, fit on the earphones and have a tiny listen. I can still recall, quite vividly, fiddling with the adjuster thing - and hearing Big Ben, all that way off in London, striking seven o’clock.

The next time was when I pedalled furiously over to Bill Reek’s house in Brynmenin. Their lodger had a new battery set, on which we tried to follow the last few overs of what became known as the “body-line Test match” in Australia - Larwood’s Test. When the battery was fading, and atmospherics were competing with the commentator, it was sheer agony - especially as this was in the early hours of the morning and I had to carry on to work. The younger ones were growing up, going to school and leaving school.

Mam, Charlie and I had a real battle to keep Cyril from getting a job down the pit. Two miners in one family, two separate worries for Mam, especially when we were on different shifts, was all that Mam could stand.

Luckily, Cyril secured a job as apprentice to the India and China Tea grocery shop in the village and, as Mam said thankfully, he didn’t need a bath every day for that. Typically, as an apprentice, Cyril did a lot of work for little pay there, but it kept him out of the pit. When he finished his time, the only job he could get was manager of a cut-price grocery shop in one of the valleys, where he got very little more pay and had to do all the heavy work because his assistants were young girls. Eventually, he got a counter job in “our” Co-op in Tondy and, every word I write is true, I have never known anybody before or since handle the complicated shelving and booking system with such speed and courtesy. His reward was, when the Co-op started a so-much-a-week club in the area, he was given the job - and remained with it until he retired, by then married and living at Merlin House, Cefn Cribbwr.

I believe Bertha’s first job was a ward maid in Angelton asylum. I can’t remember what Doris did first, but by the time I went to Oxford, they were both in service, Bertha in Cowbridge and Doris in Bridgend. On the Sunday I had to bus to Cardiff to collect from Bertha the only suitcase we possessed. On the way, I saw hoardings outside newspaper shops with the headline “R101 CRASHES IN FRANCE”. (Later, doing my initial R.A.F. training at Cardington in 1940, I wrote a few verses called “The Altar Grave” and gave it to one of the local publicans, who was so pleased that he displayed my typed copy of it in the bar).

Because I had started evening-classes, I met Jimmy’s daytime teacher, Mr Anthony, and was told Jimmy was a bright boy. Again, I am not quite sure, but I think he was the first in the family to leave school as old as fifteen. His first job was as a stoker in Hurley’s Joinery Works at Brynmenin, but, alas, he too was doomed to go down the pit, which, pithead baths or not, I would not recommend.

Later, Charlie went to Oxford in 1926, I followed in 1930, and Jim came up in 1932 to become a welder in Pressed Steel. But I am too far forward. Back to the earlier days. I can't honestly remember how news items got around before the "wireless". It must, of course, have been the newspapers and cinema newsreels. I sold newspapers, but I can't remember us having a regular delivery. Anyway, news was filtering through about a pension for widows. The younger ones, blissful in their ignorance, were unaware of the family excitement shared by Mam, Charlie and me.

As family scribe, I wrote to the "South Wales Echo" in Cardiff and, without spending money on buying too many copies, we contrived to watch the answers printed in the queries column of that newspaper. When the big day came at last, we were happier than I can ever remember. I had asked whether Mam was entitled to a widow's pension under the new act, giving STANPAR as a pen name. And there, in black and white before our popping eyes was the answer: "STANPAR. Yes, your mother is entitled to a pension". What a load off our minds. Mam was so excited. Forms were obtained, filled in and despatched - and back came Mam's bright, brand-new pension book. All Mam had to do was sign her name to the chit and collect her pension from the Post Office on the appointed day, EVERY WEEK!

Somewhere about this time, the urge to write, especially verse, became a must for me. My English, naturally, after such an elementary schooling, was sadly lacking in the scope I now desired. So I began evening classes, and I discovered that I wasn't the only one who required further education in the mother tongue. Not many courses were available but all of them, including the then popular one for the Fireman's (underground) Certificate, entailed a written examination - and English was not a part of the course. My chief benefit from the lessons was the encouragement of an excellent teacher and the introduction still deeper into the world of books.

So I read and read and read. I bought a cheap notebook and pencil at Woolworth's and wrote and wrote and wrote, blithely ignorant of all the mechanics involved. Mam and the family couldn't help noticing. I was dubbed a dreamer reaching for the stars. There was nowhere I could sit down and write in peace and quiet. I sat on the floor at the foot of the stairs, but the cold wind whistling under the front door soon discouraged me. I retired to the outside lavatory, stuck a candle on the wall in a lump of clay. I wandered along the river side or up to Mynydd Bach, making up verses in my head and, when I thought no-one was looking, I would take up my note-book and pencil, squat down somewhere, anywhere, and write down my brain-children.

I said before that we had a front room, which we hardly ever used, except when some Uncles and Aunts came down from Ogmere or Nantymoel. Sheer waste it must have been but --. After the usual bath and feed one never-forgotten day, Mam had that lovely twinkle in her eye and seemed to hover over me somewhat. It was lovely and warm in the front kitchen, though a wee bit steamy from the bath water. When I had finished with the usual sigh and a fag: "Stanley", Mam said, "I want to show you something".

I followed her through the front kitchen door, into the passage at the foot of the stairs. She paused at the front room door, slowly opened it and said, "There!"

I was dumbfounded. The best lamp was lit and standing in the middle of our lovely table, the paper blinds were rolled down - and there was a lovely fire in the grate. "M-M-Mam!" I gasped. "Wh-what?" "For you to do some of your silly writing", she whispered, and closed the door behind her. Mam, if you can hear me now, ta very much!

From then on I could read and write in comfort. But, of course, it didn't always have to be done in the front room. I could now join the family circle around the front-kitchen table with their magazines and games - and take out the little notebook and pencil without being laughed at.

It seemed quite soon after this, but it must have been longer than I imagine, the Rector called me into his study and told me he had recommended me to take over a spare-time job of writing the Tondy and Aberkenfig Paragraphs in the Glamorgan Gazette. It was a weekly column, reporting local news, concerts, meetings, lectures and so on, but chiefly funerals and weddings, because a long list of names of mourners at one and guests at the other sold copies.

After work, I visited each of the local parsons (and there were quite a number of them), secretaries of this and that society, and kept my eyes open for possible local news of interest. After all my self-appointed homework at my literary efforts, it was pleasing to note that very little editing of my bits and pieces was deemed necessary. It gave me valuable experience and a great deal of pleasure. The money wasn't much but it was extra - and for doing something I liked.

While Charlie was at work in the pit, Mam being a widow, we were entitled to a monthly load of "cheap" coal, but during strikes, lock-outs, and periods of unemployment, we scrounged wood from anywhere we could get it and kneeling in horrible, sliding, slushy mess, picked coal on the washery-tip. I was doing this one freezing Saturday morning, surrounded by other pickers, including a couple of hefty Irish housewives. Suddenly, I picked up the trend of their conversation. They were describing what they would do, if they ever caught him, to the so-and-so who put that bit about them in the "Gazette". I cannot describe the absolute joy I felt at that moment.

Memories of my Dad, both in Somerset and Wales, are few, and sometimes vague, but I recall a few incidents now and hasten to write them down. He must have been about six foot tall and "nicely" built (certainly not fat). He had a thick mass of black, curly hair and a neat moustache. Looking back with hindsight of my feelings today, he was "all man". He was very strict and used his belt - a wide leather strap with a brass lion's head buckle. When I say used his belt, I don't mean as a chastisement, more of a clarion call. If he wanted us (we were aware of this and kept within range!), he would stand in the yard outside the back door of No. 1 Mount Pleasant and shake it until we had heard the buckle ring, which never took very long.

However, there was one well-remembered occasion when he did use it to punish me. It must have been one of our earliest occupations of No. 1 Mount Pleasant. Charlie, three years older than I, had outgrown his overcoat. Mam, who, of necessity, was handy with her thimble and sewing needle, made the necessary adjustments

to suit my skinny frame. Came a cold day and, when Charlie and I were washed and fed, Mam held up the coat for me to put it on to go to school. I refused to wear it.

After much persuasion and argument, when Charlie had gone off on his own, Dad appeared on the scene. I was forced into the topcoat and forcibly moved across the yard, past Chappell's stable and cart-shed to our gulley, which led to the road to Tondy School. For me, it was easy. The cart-shed hid me from Dad's view, so I crept into the small passage between the shed and the bakehouse, scrambled up the little stone wall into the shed, and up into one of Chappell's horse-brakes. As I lay on the floor of the brake, trying to get my breath back, I couldn't help wondering what was going to happen when Mam and Dad discovered that I had "mitched" from school.

Dad must have been suspicious, because all of a sudden I am being roughly pulled out of the brake, rushed across the yard, dragged upstairs, actually belted with that awful lion's head strap, and thrown into a spare bedroom covered all over with potatoes drying out. (Great. This establishes (spare room) that the family was incomplete and that my Dad was a gardener).

Another side of my Dad: we children were allowed sweets, but only at his bidding. The walk was only a few minutes, but Dad would never go out without wearing his white tie. He would go across the road at the bottom of our gulley to Mrs Habbefield's sweetshop. There, he would select a large jar of boiled sweets and a supply of pointed paper-bags. Then, as he or Mam decreed, we children would be given a bag of sweets. I now realise it was an early example of economy by bulk buying.

I think I have already mentioned that he was a teetotaller (beer for milk in Taunton) and I cannot ever remember him smoking. He must, somehow, have managed to save some money, because after he died in 1914, I remember hearing that he had one hundred pounds to his name in the Post Office Savings bank - which helped our Mam keep off the dreaded "Parish Relief". Young as I was, I understood, somehow, that my Dad was not just a common labourer, and that his job entailed a certain amount of skill. Nevertheless, his wages were very small.

I remember Mam telling me once (after his death) that in one job he had while we were at No. 1 Mount Pleasant, he was paid only 35 bob a fortnight. So how on earth did he save? Church going was a regular habit with us, but I am not sure about Dad. I remember Mam telling us once, discussing Holy communion and confirmation, that Dad, when approached on the subject, would always protest that he was firm enough already. It seemed quite natural to Mam, Charlie, myself, Cyril, Bertha, Doris, and Jimmy that, as our age allowed, we would kneel before the Bishop for the ceremony. And here, to contrast with today's inflated monetary values, I must mention church collections. At matins and evensong, we would quite proudly put a penny in the plate, but at early-morning communion (taken before breakfast), we would slip in a silver threepenny-piece.

If Dad was a teetotaller, Mam wasn't. I remember quite clearly (Perhaps Charlie had started work) taking a jug to the pub called the Swan, just down the road, and

getting Mr Sweet, the landlord, to put in half a pint of what she called her “supper stout”. And here I should mention that I can’t remember going into a pub after those occasions until I was in the R.A.F. and 34 years old!