

## Carlton.

I was born in the early hours of the shortest day of the year, nineteen hundred and thirty seven.

My earliest memory involves a brightly sunlit bedroom of number three Arthur Crescent, Hooton Road Carlton. In the bedroom stood a crib and in the crib stood a toddler who was busy studying the room around him. Not much perhaps for my earliest memory, but it is a start at least.

Bear with me, it will get better, I promise.

### Illness.....

Another memory of the same youngster, this time suffering from some form of illness that necessitated his bed being brought into the living room and of a fire burning throughout the night. Regardless of the illness, I still recall a certain cosiness of a darkened room lit only by the light of the fire, with my mum dozing in a chair nearby. I was not even concerned when, on turning over, to find myself staring at a disembodied hand that had somehow grown out of the wall beside my bed. It was a hand, I touched it, it even felt like a hand. Now, hallucination, feverishness, call it what you will I swear this happened and swear also that the experience caused me no more than a child like interest.

### Painful memories.....

It was without doubt the largest boil that I had ever seen. At a very early age, you may think that I'd not seen all that many to make the comparison, but there it was, and it was on my right heel. I looked at the boil and then at the bowl of warm water resting on the floor at my mum's knees. I then looked at the cover of a desperately wanted book she'd promised me for letting her bathe my heel. I got the book eventually.

### Wartime memories.....

I was around two years old at the outbreak of World War Two but wartime memories there certainly are. Such as the time we could not get into our regular air raid shelter on account of an over zealous air raid warden barring our entry by declaring the shelter full. Fortunately, another shelter was situated at the top end of Arthur Crescent and we hurried our way towards it. I believe this must have been the night that Nottingham was bombed as the horizon glowed a dull red in the night sky.

### Flares.....

On another evening as we made our way to the shelter, I remember seeing three very bright objects slowly drifting down from the sky. It was a wonderful sight and I remember feeling very excited. I believe these two events relate to the nights of the 8th and 9th of May 1941.

Life in the air raid shelters are worth recalling. I remember a lot of ladies chatting away whilst doing their knitting. Some of the children were wearing their gas masks, a horrible colourful contraption made especially for children that caused it's nose to flap and emitted a funny noise with every exhaled breath.



Sometimes, we would not go to the shelters, preferring to sit out the air raid hidden under the kitchen table illuminated by candlelight. Blackout restriction were in force which meant that no house lights were allowed. The war had created food shortages and what there was, was mostly rationed. Everyone had a ration book and shopkeepers had to cut coupons out of these for most of the purchases made.

There was a government department called the Ministry of Food. They supplied certain essential foods to all mothers with children. I recall them supplying Orange juice, eggs and milk. The eggs and milk came in powdered form. One food we always welcomed was a health supplement called Cod liver oil and Malt extract. This came in a jar and a large spoonful was administered daily. The supplement was extremely sweet and had a consistency not unlike treacle, in that we were never quite sure as to whether it should be eaten or drunk. However, we loved it.

VE Day was good. The war was now over and a street party lasted for most of the day. A visit to the local Chapel produced free ice cream and an evening bonfire lit up the walls of the now obsolete air raid shelters.

Chapel memories.....

The Chapel I've just mentioned was the place where we received our religion. We attended Sunday School in the morning and also attended during the day. The daytime sessions were mostly populated by old ladies who would turn round in their seats with fingers pressed to their lips shushing us into silence. We spent the rest of the service swinging our legs and staring out of the windows.

Once a year, the Chapel held an anniversary event. At this event the children, as part of the festivities, stood and delivered a short piece of scripture to the congregation. These pieces were selected for us by our Sunday School teachers some weeks before the event, in order to allow us plenty of time to commit them to memory. My brother and I rehearsed our respective pieces until we felt

confident to face the audience. On the day of the anniversary, the children are allowed to occupy the rows of the tiered seating at the front of the Chapel. These seats are considered the holy of holies, as only visiting dignitaries or choirs were normally allowed to use them. Here we would sit until given our cue to stand up and deliver. I have to admit that in my turn, I delivered the piece in a loud clear voice. The only drawback being that I mistakenly delivered my brother's piece rather than that of my own. It caused quite a bit of confusion and it was a while before my brother forgave me.



Standhill Road School.

Schooldays.....

I attended the Standhill Road Junior and Infants School. Schooldays were not so good. I never liked school and left my mum in no doubt of this on my very first day. I didn't want to be left but leave she did so I protested in the only way I knew, until the sight of all those toys lying around mollified me a little. I even played truant once, I left the school and hid behind a wall close by, until a by passer spotted me and marched me back. I never liked school milk either, I drank it of course but I never liked it. For some reason the sight of all those crates of milk at the school gates used to fill me with dread. Then there was a time when the entire school was marched to the pavement outside the school where a large van stood. Some men opened up the back of the van which turned out to be a mobile cinema. We were then treated to some short war time films and encouraged to cheer for the allied ships and planes. The journey home from school was always an adventure. One enterprising schoolmate once informed us how to obtain free travel on the buses. All we had to do was to pick up a bus ticket, it had to be a clean one and this would allow us to travel the two stops we needed to take entirely free of charge. We gave it a try and it worked. I remembered thinking I must tell my mum of this so she would never have to buy a bus ticket again. On another occasion, we were on our way home and were attracted to a long queue leading from a sweet shop. I noticed my

grandmother in the queue and she invited me to join her. I can still recall the aroma of that shop and the taste of my very first ice cream.

School dinners.....

I stayed school dinners for a while. We diners used to sit at long tables seating six to each side. In the centre of each the table was a container for drinking straws. I've never forgotten these containers for they took the form of a telephone box with Santa Claus inside making a phone call. I found it very comforting, during the heat of the summer months, to have this daily reminder of Christmas. The meals were quite palatable as best I remember, except for one. I never asked for help, I don't even recall needing any help. But I'm getting ahead of myself. There was always a dinner lady on hand who would wander from table to table passing out water and suchlike. She would also help those she considered was in need, by cutting their meat up into more manageable pieces. Her way of doing this was to approach the needy from behind and removing the knife and fork from their hands, she would then attack the meat on their plate, handing back the cutlery after she had finished.

I watched her doing this and didn't like what I saw. I hastily attempted to cut my meat up smaller so that I wouldn't need her assistance, but school cutlery was never much use in those days. She made her way around to our table and it came as quite a shock to find the cutlery being removed from my hands. Her raiment that day included something that contained pom pom's attached to long strands of wool and I could only look on in horror as these pom pom's danced up and down in my gravy.

The quarry.....

At the side of the school was an old quarry, it was once the property of a brick manufacturing company but now lay abandoned and unused. The quarry floor lay at a considerable lower level to that of the school and was surrounded on three sides by steep cliffs. The young considered this area an adventure playground as it contained many ponds of various sizes, where frogs and newts could be hunted, and rafts and other water borne crafts could be constructed and launched. The school however, did not share our views and were constantly declaring it out of bounds, citing blood curdling stories of unfortunate beings who had fell down these cliffs reaching the bottom faster than they had intended (my own brother being one). It was also a common practice at the school to name and shame identified miscreants by placing them at the front of the classroom and given strong reprimands. For some reason, I always looked forward to these occasions and took a perverse pleasure in seeing the guilty parties squirm. That was until the day that my name was called out. I say now, with hand on heart, that I was entirely innocent and took no part in that which I had been accused, but my protests went unheeded. I didn't even know any of those that I stood accused with and offered this in my defence also, but to no avail.

Dad's letter.....

I remember receiving a type written letter from my dad. He was off fighting the war somewhere so we didn't see much of him. My brother received one also. I cannot recall the contents of the letter now but I was extremely proud of it and took it to school with the intention of showing it to my teacher.

Unfortunately, this never happened because somewhere along the way, I lost it. I remember being heartbroken and tearfully obtained permission to search the playground for it.

I did find it, but owing to the fact that it had been raining extremely hard, the letter had all but disintegrated and the typing had turned into an unintelligible mess. I threw it over the school fence but I never forgot it.

Bananas.....

One afternoon, I was sitting on the front lawn of the house. The two brothers next door were also outside and were eating something I'd never seen before. They told me it was called a banana and kindly broke off a piece for me to try. A short time later, my mum came in with a whole bunch of these wonderful things and I was able to impress her with my new found knowledge of them. I did the decent thing of course and returned two pieces of banana to the brothers.

In trouble.....

I recall seeing a marching band once. I'd never seen one before and found it very exciting. People were following it so my brother and I decided to follow it too. We'd got from Arthur Crescent to the bottom of Carlton Hill before our very harassed mother caught up with us. She gave us a real roasting on the walk back home accompanied by intermittent hugs. I found it all very confusing.

In serious trouble.....

There was another occasion when my brother and I found ourselves in deep, deep trouble. I believe we had inadvertently set fire to an old unused pram that was kept out in the garden. This pushed our mum to the limits of distraction to such an extent that she decided a visit to the police station was called for. She had threatened us with this punishment before but nothing usually came of it. On this occasion however, I knew she meant it for she made us wear our school caps for the trip to the station and all our promises and protestations came to nothing. I remember clinging desperately to my brother as the policeman decided what to do with us. It must have been our lucky day for after extracting a promise that we would never do it again, he let us go. We were both as good as our word for we've never set fire to a pram since.

Pastimes.....

I also have a memory involving hollyhock flowers and bees. This was a test of nerves for the young of Carlton in those days and in no way would I recommend its use today.

In summer times special attention was paid to these flower heads in the hopes of finding a bee inside going about its lawful business. Once discovered, it was simply a matter of closing the flowers petals around it and snapping the flower from its stem. You could now hold the flower to your ear or the ears of others to prove your skill as a trapper. The angrily buzzing bee would later be released.

An early Christmas.....

We weren't always bad. I remember my mum taking my brother and I to a neighbours house across the street. Blackout restrictions were in force so my mum and Mrs. B. had to converse by candle light. Our behaviour on this occasion must have been impeccable because Mrs. B produced a whole tin of biscuits, and wonder of wonders, gave me a colouring book and a yellow crayon. My brother got one too but I can't recall the colour of his crayon. I do however, recall thinking that Christmas had come early this year.

Christmas.....

Christmas was a magical time. We often had snow for some of them. The room would be festooned with paper chains and bell shaped trimmings. Our main toy was usually something dad had made. He made us a toy battleship one year. Other presents could include colouring books and reading books. There would be a cowboy outfit or Indian's headdress. I remember a tin dagger with a blade that disappeared into the handle. There was a sock containing nuts and fruit. There would be a bar of chocolate and a roll of Maynard's wine gums (not unlike the ones you can still get today). All in all, Christmases were great. I recall one Winter when the snow was particularly bad (or good for youngsters like us) when upon opening the back door, we found that the snow had piled up to within inches of the top of the door. Mum had to attack this with a sweeping brush to allow us access to the back garden, which then became a wonderland for us.

The Regal.....

The Regal was the local cinema. My brother used to take me with him on a Saturday to watch matinee programmes. I can't remember much of what we saw but I do recall a serial film called 'Don Winslow Son Of The Navy'. Afterwards there would be a short bus ride home to a bread and jam tea whilst listening to the radio.

The brickyard.....

At the bottom of the recreation ground was a large clay hill that we spent many hours upon. On the other side of this hill was another abandoned brickyard. This had an added advantage to the one on Standhill Road as it contained an old engine house. The engine house stood at a considerably higher level to the rest of the brickyard and because of this, a small gauge rail track ran down a steep incline terminating at a wheel like turntable. This was another attraction as the line still had an old open truck standing on its rails. It was a quite heavy affair but if there were enough volunteers, we found we could push this truck a considerable way back up the line before jumping aboard and enjoying a free train ride.

The 'things'.....

One afternoon, on our way home from school. Some friends asked us if we had seen the things on the field at the side of the rec. We said we hadn't but resolved to find out after tea. After promising mum we wouldn't be late home, we made our way to the rec. On arriving, we could not believe our eyes. There before us lay a jumble of thousands of torpedo shaped tubes. As best I remember, the tubes were about eight feet long by three feet in circumference, silver in colour with a red band passing around each end. They must have been made of cardboard or some such material for they were very light. There were many others there and just as many opinions as to what these things were. The most popular opinion was that they were fuel tanks, containers for extra fuel carried by Spitfire and Hurricane fighter planes. However, this didn't matter to us as they were already being turned into rocket's, castle's and things that defied description. My brother and I threw our lot in with a group of engineers who were busily constructing a system of tunnels. This new playground lasted a few weeks before disappearing as fast as they had arrived.

Dale Road Fields.....

There were many other places of adventure for the young of Carlton in those days. These consisted mainly of fields, of which there were many. There were fields at the bottom of Dale Road, one of which contained a large pond. We would sometimes collect frog spawn there or drag fishing nets hopefully to and fro in the water. However, this was not a popular place as it carried a legend of someone once drowning there.

China and Russia.....

There were fields that ran for a good length of Foxhill Road. For some reason, these were known as China and Russia. Only trees and hedgerows separated China from Russia. China for the most part lay undiscovered as it was under cultivation for most of the year. Russia was not however and this was another popular area. Russia had a stream running along its length which invited the

young to paddle its waters during the summer months. The stream had a shallow bank running along both sides lined with long grass, small shrubs and various wild flowers. There were often family picnic's taken here. The stream ended at a small pool where I once found one half of a tin cowboy pistol whilst paddling its waters. This may not sound much, but to me, it was a significant find as my imagination easily supplied the missing half.

#### The Man In Black.....

The Man In Black was a popular radio programme of the day. It was presented by a man called Valentine Dyall. The name still sends shudders down my spine. The Man In Black was a mystery programme guaranteed to scare the pants off anyone who listened, but this was of no concern to me and my brother as long as mum was in the room. At the time of which I speak, my brother and I had a baby sister and like all babies she had to be in bed early, and being the younger of the brothers it was my duty to accompany her to bed also. This did not rest well with me as it would mean that I would miss my programme. Fortunately, for me, mum compromised by telling me that if I went to bed, she would send my brother up to get me at the start of the programme. So off I went. As time passed, I patiently waited the arrival of my brother. Meanwhile, downstairs, I could just hear the opening bars of the music that foretold the start of the programme. As my brother had not yet put in an appearance, I was feeling rather let down. I then made the decision that if I left the bedroom very quietly, I would not disturb my sleeping sister. And this I did, on all fours, unbeknown to those downstairs. Unfortunately, unbeknown to him upstairs, my mother had despatched my brother, also on all fours, to get me. We met in the gloom on the stairs, he halfway up, me halfway down. I truly believe that the resulting screams could have been heard the length of Arthur Crescent. I tore back to the safety of my bed, my brother tore back to the safety of his mum. Mum found it all extremely funny. Fortunately, my sister remained undisturbed.

## Nottingham.

I was still very young when we moved from Carlton to Nottingham. This was quite a culture shock as life suddenly changed from one of peace and quiet, to one hectic but exciting. My parents went into the greengrocery trade and we moved into a shop situated at number twenty nine Robin Hood Street. I attended the Bath Street School, of which I shall write shortly. Robin Hood Street was a very busy thoroughfare in those days. It contained shops, factories, three storied dwellings and a public house on every corner. It was also heavily populated with kids my own age so I was not long in making new friends. There was an open air market at the bottom of the street and this reminds me of my first story.



Kentucky rifles and primates.....

It was a Saturday morning. There was myself, Johnny H. and Pat H. We were hanging out on a very busy Robin Hood street when we met a couple of interesting youngsters and stopped to have a chat. They told us they were on the way to the market to sell the items they were carrying. They also gave out some very interesting information which we decided to check out at the earliest opportunity. Now, although this brief exchange was all very sociable and natural to our eyes. I have often wondered how it must have appeared to any passing adults to witness five youngsters having a chat. One of whom was giving a shoulder ride to a full sized stuffed chimpanzee, and of another carrying a string-less balalaika. The other information they imparted concerned an air raid shelter further up the street, which according to our informants, carried a rifle on its roof. We took off at a dead run for the shelter, but no one was faster than me in those days. Gaining access to the roof proved no problem. Without breaking step, I threw myself at the wall, foot first, and centrifugal force sort of took care of the rest. I saw it immediately and the hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. There before me lay a Kentucky Rifle, I'd seen many cowboy films so it was easy to identify. It had a trigger and a trigger guard and something that I took to be a flintlock mechanism. I held it over my head to show my friends waiting below and they were very envious as I carried it home in the crook of my arm in true Red Indian style. My dad told me later that it was a handle of an upright vacuum cleaner.

The open air market.....

The market took place on Mondays and Saturdays on a car park opposite the Victoria Baths. It was very popular and both days would find it packed to capacity with shoppers and vendors. Anything could be purchased here but my main memories are of large rolls of lino stacked against a wall whilst a very vocal salesman offered bargains to the group standing round. Another group would be standing around the back of an open van as the vendor produced large quantities of kitchen crockery, assuring every one of the robustness of his wares by banging the edges of plates and cups and saucers, on the top of his tea chest counter. I also remember an old woman sitting on a blanket with a few magazines scattered around. She occasionally asked us to nip to a nearby cafe for a jug of hot water, giving us a penny for our trouble.

It was here that I helped a salesman sell his wares. It was an item that created a wood grain finish to any freshly varnished wood. So easy was it to use, he said, a schoolboy could use it, his eyes scanning the crowd for a suitable subject. Enter yours truly. I really believe I did him proud.

Pop.....

Bottles of pop was always a favourite, especially if you had one to yourself. You would always share of course, so the bottle would be passed around with a

stern admonition of three swallows only. The more fastidious wiping their sleeves over the neck of the bottle before taking their share. The bottles had a stone type of screw cap which if rapped smartly against the side of the bottle sent the aerated contents gushing skyward, sending everyone scattering to avoid getting soaked. A further benefit existed in your receiving two pence when returning the empty bottle to the shop. Shop owners were wary not to let any empties remain in view because it had been known for the same bottle to be returned a number of times.

#### Sweets and Cigarettes.....

Being just after the war, many of life's requisites were still in short supply. Two of these were sweets and cigarettes. I didn't smoke of course, but my mum and dad did, and this reminds me of another tale. Although cigarettes were scarce, that wasn't to say that they were impossible to obtain. Many tobacconist's at that time used to secrete their stocks under the counter and sell them only to their regular customers. This had to be done covertly of course as this practice was considered illegal.

#### Cigarettes.....

One evening, my mum asked me to nip up to Mrs. S's paper shop for her cigarettes. She told me not to ask for them directly if there were others in the shop, but to wait until the shop was empty. She gave me the money and off I popped. I arrived at the shop to find that there were customers being served, so I hung around the open door waiting for the shop to clear. There was now only one customer being served and Mr. S was serving him leaving Mrs. S unoccupied, and it was her eye I caught from my position by the doorway. Remindful of mum's instructions, I thought it would be a good idea to make her requirements known through the medium of mime.

Under Mrs. S's gaze, I gave a pretty fair representation of lighting up a cigarette and blowing out imaginary smoke. I did this twice more to confirm my mum's needs to Mrs. S, who appeared to be enjoying my miming immensely. The shop finally cleared so I went in and was somewhat surprised when Mrs. S asked me what I wanted. A little nonplussed, I asked for a packet of mum's Woodbine's. I recall Mrs. S smiling as she asked me if this was what my performance was about, and I replied that it was. "*Oh*" she said, handing me the cigarettes, "*I thought you were blowing me kisses*"

One of our hobbies in those days was collecting cigarette packets, we were all at it and constantly trying to outdo each other with the most impressive collection. There were two methods of collecting these. One, was to write to the various manufacturers asking them to post you a selection of their packets, which they often did. The other way was by raiding the dustbins of the scores of pubs that inhabited the town in those days. We would collectively go on our hunting parties on Saturday mornings and understanding pub owners would turn a blind eye to five or six youngsters rooting through their dustbins, giving

occasional delighted cries of *"I've got a Passing Cloud "*or *"I've got a Three Castles"* The collections could be very considerable owing to the amount of cigarettes available then. Some of which, I'll attempt to recall.

Park Drive... Dad's favourites.

Wild Woodbine's... Mum's favourites.

Pasha's... Turkish imports, very unpopular.

Joystick... Eight inches long with multi coloured papers.

Turf... Whose illustrated trays alone were collectable.

Dominoes. Passing Clouds. Sweet Afton. Du Maurier. Senior service. Robin. Players Weights. Craven A. Capstan.... and scores of others I've forgotten.

Spanish root, locust beans and bottom bits.....

Obtaining sweets was very difficult as they were still on ration for some time after the war. Sweet substitutes then, consisted of sticks of liquorice wood, or 'Spanish root' as we called it. These were bought by the ounce and looked like little twigs of wood, which when chewed produced a not unpleasant taste.

Overuse of this however did tend to turn your tongue yellow and send you to the toilet more often than usual. Then there was something called 'locust beans'

These looked similar to kidney beans but were larger and had a hard shiny brown shell. These were horrible and that's all I'm going to say about them.

Occasionally, we would enter Pop B's sweet shop and enquire, with fingers crossed, of any sweets 'off ration'. We didn't really know if such things existed but thought it worth a try, and sometimes it produced results. Pop would rub his chin with his hand whilst glaring down at us. He would then produce some boiled sweets or similar from somewhere below his counter. However, we had to be careful not to abuse his kindness too often, as a similar request, too soon, would often get us chased from the shop.

There was one other possibility we tried and this was at D's shop on Lamartine Street. Here we would ask for any 'bottom bit's', residual pieces of sweets often found at the bottom of empty sweet jars. Some times this would also prove successful.



### Spangles and Hoppy.....

The end of sweet rationing was a wonderful time as shop windows became full of sweets and chocolate. One of my favourites was a packet of Spangles, a fruit flavoured boiled sweet which according to an advert on the sweet shop door, assured me that they were Hoppy's favourite sweet also. Hoppy referred to my all time favourite cowboy Hopalong Cassidy. So obviously, if they were good enough for him, they were certainly good enough for me. (his horse was called "Topper" by the way.)

### Roy and Hoppy.....

There were many cowboy heroes vying for the patronage of youngsters like us. Two of these were Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy. Roy Rogers I dismissed as being a bit soft, as he wore fancy shirts and would burst into song at the drop of a hat. Hoppy however dressed only in black and I never once heard him break into song.

### The Range Busters.....

There was a three man group of cowboys that populated those Saturday morning matinees. These were known as the 'Range Busters'. The Range Busters consisted of Max (*Alibi*) Terhune. John (*Dusty*) King and Ray (*Crash*) Corrigan. Alibi, Dusty and Crash rode the old Wild West dispensing frontier justice wherever there was a need, and it never appeared in the least incongruous to us that Alibi always carried a cigar chomping ventriloquist's dummy.

### The Mystery Riders.....

They were about thirty in number. All I can remember was that they always appeared to be riding at a gallop down moonlit trails, capes flying and singing their song. Some of the lyrics which went ~ *"We are the mystery riders, you'll never find us, because we're never there"* or words to that effect. Some fifty years or so later, these words from so long ago rang out in a noisy environment of a GPO parcel sorting office. Needless to say, I had to find the singer in order to share experiences

I once had quite a collection of western books. Being an avid reader, I would buy a book every weekend after a visit to the pictures. I would buy the occasional war book but the majority of my interests lay in the works of such authors as J T Edson, Zane Grey and Louis Lamour. Over a period, I collected a goodly amount of these.

Deciding to sell them one day, I took them all to a second hand book dealer at the bottom of Carlton Road. The shop owner must have found me a shifty character for he insisted that I sign an affidavit stating that the books were mine to sell. Saying this was ok by me, I waited until he had finished scribbling something in a notebook which he then offered me to sign. I took up his pencil and was just about to sign when he brought me to a stop. Saying he wouldn't be a minute, he disappeared into the back of his shop and reappeared with his whole family. Asking me to continue, he then went on to explain to his family that there really were people who could write with their left hand and offered me up as a prime example.

Bath Street School.....

I still didn't like school so life at Bath Street was tolerated rather than enjoyed. We used to have dancing classes and had to select our partners before the start of



Bath Street School.

the lesson. Being a newcomer and rather shy, I tended to hang back until there was only Elsie left. I would liked to have asked either Betty or Ann, both of whom I greatly admired but this was not to be. Elsie and I took an instant dislike to each other, probably brought about by the fact that we were the 'last chickens in the shop'. It was an intolerable situation, one that I could not allow to continue. The following week ( with mum's expert bandaging ) I limped my way into the classroom with my left knee heavily bandaged. For added effect, I even arranged some telltale signs of blood seeping through the wrapping, courtesy of Waterman's ink. The ruse worked however and I was excused dancing.

Miss.J.....

Miss.J was the nemesis of the whole school in general and me in particular. She appeared to be about a hundred years old, a strict disciplinarian with a penchant for corporal punishment. Her method of dealing out pain, was to grasp the offenders wrist with one hand and hold it at arms length. She would then repeatedly bring her other hand sharply down onto the back of my outstretched hand until the tears flowed. To guarantee the tears, her striking hand sported two rings. I think my only crime was that the focus of my attention was more on a reproduction of Constable's Cornfield rather than on what she was saying. The painting hung on the wall behind her back and in my mind's eye, it was I who was lying on the bank drinking the water with my pet dog close by. Miss J obviously had no appreciation of art. The Cornfield is still my favourite work of art however.

The errant finger.....

It was playtime and having nothing better to do, I wandered over to see the cause of the commotion. A group of kids were standing around another who had a pastille tin in his hand. Before letting us privy to the tins contents, the owner warned us that what we were about to see was not for the fainthearted. He then went on to explain where and when he'd discovered the severed finger that had a piece of wire running through it. We steeled ourselves for the sight that was to meet our eyes at the opening of the tin. The lid was carefully removed and a chorus of "oooh's" escaped us. There before us, resting on a bed of bloodstained cotton wool was the finger. It lay in stark contrast to that of its surroundings, being a deathly white in colour, with tinges of green at the entrance and exit points of the wire. With the contents of our stomachs in turmoil we closed in for a closer look and shrank back in horror as the finger suddenly sat bolt upright and began waving at us.

Nit nurses and medicals.....

As with all schools of the day, a nit nurse would occasionally visit. The lesson was interrupted as she went down the line inspecting our hair for any unwelcome visitors.

There were also visits from the Education Authorities medical health officer who would give a brief examination to the pupils of the entire school. On these occasions, our mothers had to be in attendance. This being my first medical, I had heard rumours of what took place at these sessions but dismissed them as playground propaganda. With my mother beside me, I allowed the Doctor to sound my chest with her stethoscope. I did not object to her placing a spatula into my mouth before asking me to say "*ahh*" Neither did I object when she took a look in my ears. I drew the line however when she told me to remove my trousers. I remember like it was only yesterday when I said.... "*Oh dear mam, I've had it now*" Mum found this very funny and burst out laughing. The medical officer did not however, and attempted to remove my trousers by

saying that I was being a silly boy. My mum also came to the doctors aid, and telling me not to be silly, tried to assist the doctor with the removal of my trousers. I was having none of it. I clung grimly on to them as the doctor and my mum staggered this way and that. Finally, her patience having snapped, the doctor ordered my still laughing mum to *"get him out of here"*

Shiny Pennies.....

Another playtime pastime involved penny pieces. Penny's were much larger in pre decimal times. These edges of these coins could be scraped against any brick wall until a layer of brick dust covered the coin. Then, with the help of your handkerchief and a little spit, the penny could be polished until it shone like a freshly minted coin.

Paddy.....

Paddy was a childhood pet. He was a Heinz Variety terrier. He was small, nondescript, of uncertain colouring and parentage, with one bent ear and one straight. Paddy was loved by all who knew him and was a fully fledged member of the Outlaw and Blackhawk gangs, of whom I shall write later. Paddy accompanied the gang wherever they went and was an indispensable part of the team. Paddy was purchased as a puppy for five shillings and I can still recall the night he entered our lives. The team at that time consisted of Alan D, Johnny H, Dennis I, Johnny F, Patrick H, Malcom (Mally) H, Johnny A, David A. and of course Paddy. You are no doubt well aware of the views on pets and bonfire night. Well, Paddy wasn't. Paddy, along with the rest of us, loved bonfire night. We did attempt to keep him indoors fearing for his safety, but Paddy kept up a constant howling and scratching at the door until my mum got the message and let him rejoin the gang.

Bonfire nights in those times were hazardous affairs where every rule of the fireworks code was broken. In fact, there was no fireworks code. Bangers could be thrown anywhere and at anyone. Jumping Jacks were attached to long pieces of wire with which to chase the girls or Paddy. Numerous bangers were lit and covered over with a dustbin lid. We then stood back and made bets on how high the lid would travel after detonation. Paddy would closely regard a dropped banger until the explosion, after which, he'd run off to closely regard another one. On our trips to school, we'd often arrive to find Paddy accompanying us also. On these occasions, I would sternly order him to go back home, emphasising my command with a pointed finger. Paddy would then dejectedly go in the direction of the finger. I would then spend the rest of the day wondering if he had got home alright, but I needn't have worried. He would still be sitting on the step of the shop at the end of the day. Walking up the street, we'd give the call *"here Paddy"* and he'd leave the step at something like forty miles an hour, not stopping until he had crashed into us.

Paddy would also accompany dad on his trips to the allotment, and it was on one of these occasions when the incident occurred. We were out playing and were

astounded at the speed at which Paddy was coming up the street. Ignoring us completely, he shot straight through the shop and into the kitchen. I followed him in to find my mum doing her best to console him. He was bleeding heavily from his rear quarter, a patch of skin having been entirely removed. I immediately took him to the PDSA to have him checked over and repaired. Dad came home and told of what happened. It appeared that Paddy had got into an altercation with an Alsatian at the allotment. According to dad, the Alsatian picked up Paddy and shook him like a rat. Paddy quickly recovered from his experience however and was soon back with the gang, almost none the worse for wear. I say almost, for forever after, either running or trotting, his rear left leg would frequently miss fire causing him to give a little hop.

Other dogs.....

I don't recall a time when we did not have a family pet. Before Paddy came along, I remember us owning a Butch and a Brennie. I can't remember anything about Butch other than he was black in colour, but I do remember a little about Brennie. Brennie was a Golden Haired Cocker Spaniel, who like Paddy, would spend a lot of time sitting on the step of the shop. She also had a tendency for going walkabout, or so we thought. The first time she went missing, dad placed an advert in the missing pets section of the Evening Post offering a reward to the finder, and fortunately, she was returned to us. The selfsame thing happened the second time she went missing and was delivered to us a couple of days later. On the third occasion of her disappearance, a customer informed us that she had seen someone take Brennie from the step and walk off with her. At the offices of the Evening Post, dad was advised to add the words 'dettainer prosecuted' to the advert and after her return, her walkabout tendencies ceased.

Cats.....

We had cats also. I don't recall any names but I do recall it being my duty to take them to the PDSA whenever necessary. I can remember at least two occasions of having to fight back the tears on my leaving the premises alone.

Other pets.....

I had other pets at various times. We used to buy them with our pocket money from a pet stall on the Central Market. These included, at various times: mice, rats, rabbits, grass snakes, tortoises and terrapins. It was not uncommon in those days for the pets to accompany their owners, so my mouse accompanied me in my jacket pocket. I was mortally aggrieved when he went missing. I hunted everywhere for him but without success. It was a day later, during maths, when I felt a peculiar sensation running up my back. I identified it immediately and was elated. It had somehow entered the lining of my coat. The problem now of course, was keeping it hidden until school was over for the day.



Horses.....

Horse drawn transport was still a common sight in the fifties. Earlier still, whilst living in Carlton, I recall a weekly visit by a local merchant selling his wares from his horse and cart. A pair of scales hung from the back of the cart. Robin Hood Street days would find frequent visits of horse drawn vehicles ranging from milk floats to the great Shire Horse drawn drays of Shipstone's Brewery. Any horse found doing its 'business' in the street would invariably find an allotment holder emerge with bucket and dustpan, to collect up the 'business' to be scattered on his rhubarb at his next visit. So valuable was this commodity it was not unusual to see a bunch of kid's with buckets and pans following the horse in anticipation of its next delivery.

Mum's race.....

Our mum used to tell us a story of when she was young. Her father was the proprietor of a greengrocer's shop in South Normanton. He was also the owner of a horse and cart on which my mum had to make deliveries. Horses and carts were a very expensive necessity for rural shop owners and great care was taken with them.

A horse was always walked during its working day and on no account was it ever allowed to run for fear of accidents. My mum's story goes, that on returning home after a days work, she fell alongside a friend who was also on his way home by horse and cart. He challenged mum to a race and she accepted. Arriving home, mum found that her transgressions had preceded her and she was severely criticised for her recklessness. A little later, her dad enquired who won the race and when he heard the words "*I did, dad*" he replied, "*Good gal*"

Johnny's dad's allotment.....

The allotment was situated at the side of Colwick Woods. My dad also had one here for a while, but it was at Johnny's where we spent our time. His allotment contained a very old brick and glass structured building that featured a black lead fireplace on which we did our cooking. This would consist of food raided from the allotment, so we often enjoyed a pan full of boiled potatoes followed by a boiled rhubarb dessert.

An after dinner cigarette was also enjoyed on these occasions.

Outlaws and Blackhawks.....

Obviously, being part of a gang meant having your own identity. The Outlaws were born out of the Just William radio programmes of the day. We both had our headquarters and ours was situated at the end of our back yard. Both headquarters sported a flag. William's was a real one. Ours was manufactured from one half of a cardboard banana box, but both carried the skull and crossbones.



The Blackhawks.

Blackhawks.....

A change of identity came about after the release of the first issue of the Blackhawk comic. The Blackhawks were a group of international crime fighting pilots. All wore a black jumpsuit emblazoned with the head of a hawk and each piloted a Blackhawk fighter plane. They were the perfect role model for the recently disbanded Outlaws. The Blackhawks operated on a single creed, to bring help to those in need no matter where. It was often necessary however for the Blackhawks to help each other. True to their code of practice, any Blackhawk finding himself isolated and under threat needed only to call out 'Hawkaaaaaaaaaa!' Upon hearing this call, the rest would rally round the stricken comrade.

I was the one selected to be in need of help. The instructions from my fellow Blackhawks were for me to secrete myself somewhere unknown to them and put out the call. We were interested in knowing how quickly we could respond. I ran up and out of Noble's Entry and hid myself behind a low wall in front of a house on Lamartine Street. I put out the call.

*"Hawkaaaaaaa!"*

I waited, there was no response.

I called out again.

*"Hawkaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!"*

I waited, there was still no response.

A third time I tried.

*"HAWKAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"*

A door opened behind me. *"I'll give you hawka"* said a voice.

I turned and was just in time to dodge an open handed clout being aimed at my left ear. I took off and rejoined my fellow Blackhawks to find them falling about laughing. I too, saw the funny side of it eventually.

Toys.....

One of the best toys ever to come out of the forties was a cap firing pirate pistol. This was quite innovative to all that had gone before as this one came with a smoking barrel. We all bought one and spent the rest of the day firing at by passers through the front window of Johnny H's house.

The duel.....

Armed with these weapons and numerous rolls of caps, Johnny H. and I fought a long drawn out duel on an enclosed stone staircase in Bath Street School (my dad was the caretaker). With John lying on his stomach at the top of the stairs and me similarly positioned at the bottom, we fired at each other for two hours or more until the staircase became dense with fog and reeked of the smell from our smoking barrels.



52 Robin Hood Street.

On the move....

Our new address was number fifty two Robin Hood Street. Why we moved from number twenty nine to number fifty two I do not know, but move we did and this property was also a shop. My parents continued to run a greengrocer's shop from here, but in addition to this we now had a fish counter. This meant that we could sell all manner of sea food. Apart from fish, we also sold fresh crabs, mussel's, cockles and winkles (a particular favourite of mine). It could be quite entertaining to watch the events taking place here. A crab could suddenly come alive and decide to take a walk to the opposite end of the counter where the mussel's were happily bubbling and hissing away. The mussels also had a nasty habit of ejecting a stream of water that could catch the unwary shopper. I'm not quite sure how winkles are taken today, but in my day they would often accompany us wrapped in a cone of newspaper. A pin was also required to remove the winkle from its shell before being popped into the mouth. The empty shell was then discarded by seeing how far one could throw it. The shop occupied a corner of Robin Hood Street and Salford Street and weather permitting, vegetables would be displayed on a bench running under the window. Mum had also tried to display fruit here too, but this proved too much of a temptation to some passers by and too much of a drain on the shop's profits. My mum actually identified a young pilferer stealing some apples and went to

inform the miscreants mum of his thievery. His mum opened the door to my mum's knock and was found to be enjoying one of the apples.

My mum also sold rabbits, these being a popular and cheap form of meat. The rabbits arrived from the wholesale market gutted but complete with fur, and my mum had to skin every rabbit she sold. This was a very skilful process and fascinating to watch. With a sharp knife and some deft movements, she would both impress us with the speed in which she removed the skin, and turn our stomachs with the ease in which she removed the eyeballs. The skin was then discarded.

After hours.....

Even after the shop was closed for the day, customers used to disturb us by knocking on the door and asking for some carrots or an onion or suchlike. This could happen two or three times a night. It used to annoy mum intensely although I cannot recall her ever refusing anyone.

Rabbit skins and dodgy dealings....

The discarded skins became a valuable source of income for the gang, as they could be sold on to a local dealer. Mum allowed us to keep the money provided we took them to the dealer. We took the skins in a sack and upon arrival, the dealer would take a cursory look into it before directing us to place them on some scales nearby.

He'd then move some weights back and forth along a long arm, after which, he gave us some money. He would then indicate where we were to empty the sack. This transaction took place in a very large barn type of building containing huge piles of paper, old clothing, metal and of course, rabbit skins. I think it was Johnny F. who suggested putting a brick into the sack. I told him I wouldn't have the nerve and he told me not to worry. At the next visit, Johnny confidently but tenderly placed the sack containing the skins and brick onto the scales. Imagine our disappointment when the dealer told us he no longer bought them by weight, but that he now paid out on quantity. John hastily removed the skins from the sack before handing it to me.

In all innocence, I made pretence of carefully folding up the sack before tucking it ( and the brick ) under my arm. We would get either a penny or twopence per skin depending on its quality. It was still a good deal though.

Of Libraries, Castles and Smoking Parlours.....

The headquarters of the gang was a shed at the end of the back yard. We were very fortunate in that my mum let us use it entirely rent free. It stood in an angle at the end of the yard having two brick walls and two wooden ones. The roof of the shed had a slightly upward slope and terminated short of the tops of the walls, leaving a twelve inch balustrade of brickwork along two sides. The walls stood about nine feet high. This was the headquarters of the Outlaws and Blackhawks. It was also, for a period, Nottingham Castle and was home to

Robin Hood and his men. During this period, access could only be gained by those who supplied the password 'Loxley'

One would be entrant, clearly misinterpreting the password offered up a version of 'Two Boxes'. Access in this case was permitted due to the fact that the young lady in question was much admired by all. Rainy evenings would always be spent here.

Illumination and heating came from candles set in the walls at various places.

We would drive nails partially into the walls, heat the ends of these with a candle flame and push the candles on to the heated end which when cooled provided a perfectly safe sconce. All in all, it was quite a cosy place. From

here, we could conduct the business of the day, read out agendas or simply philosophise until an instantly recognised voice called someone home for the night. It also served as a reading room and occasionally, a smoking parlour.

The weekly comics had now lost their edge as we now preferred to read the works of a popular author of the day Hank Jansen. Hank's novels were always populated with private eyes, and beautiful blondes wearing Terry towelling bathrobes that would fall off with alarming regularity. I still recall part of one of these novels in that the beautiful blonde was suffering from a heavy cold and the private eye was trying to assist her healing by applying some 'Vix Vapor Rub' to her chest. I often wondered if this was the same but differently spelt remedy that you can get over the Boot's counter today. Occasionally, mum would pop her head round the door to see what we were up to, which meant hiding the books or extinguishing any cigarettes on hearing her approach.

Summer afternoons were often spent lying on our backs on the roof of the shed observing the blue sky and clouds passing overhead, or we could sit on the top of the walls watching the comings and goings of the street life below.

Up on the roof.....

Gaining access to the roof followed a particular code of practice. Opening the door of the outside loo offered the best way of getting up by using it as a ladder. On one of Johnny H's trips, he slipped and suffered a rather nasty accident.

Others behind him thought he had started yodelling for some reason, but closer inspection revealed that the latch of the door had entered his inner thigh necessitating a trip to the Children's Hospital to have the wound stitched.

Exiting the roof was a different kettle of fish. We simply jumped or dropped from the roof, landing in either Noble's Entry or on Salford Street depending on your point of departure. Another way of dismounting was by the far safer method of maintaining a hold on the top of the wall whilst lowering yourself down and dropping the last few feet. Even this was not without its hazards though as we found to our cost when we brought a section of the wall down with us. My parents were not best pleased as the searched for a bricklayer to repair the damage.

The outside loo.....

To the best of my belief, none of the properties of Robin Hood Street possessed an internal toilet. We had heard that such things were available in posh houses, but that wasn't for us. Ours, along with everyone else's, stood at the end of the back yard. This could be quite inconvenient in the depths of winter.

Containing neither light nor heat, it was up to each user to decide how best to tackle the problem.

Mine was to charge down the yard with a burning brand of newspaper in hand and hope all could be accomplished before the flames reached the end of the paper.



Back row l to r A Dury D Ingle. Front row J Abbot J Fountain.

The Gang.....

I shall now relate a little information on the Brethren of Blood Brothers. This was the name we intended to adopt after a specially convened initiation ceremony. We all nervously gathered in our headquarters, but no one had the nerve to go first. A few scabs and grazes were picked at but this met with little success.

John H.....

John feared no one or nothing. A good man to have by your side when in a scrape or when you needed a cigarette, which for some reason, he carried in his socks.

Dennis I.....

Dennis was a collector. Permanently carried around with him assorted bunches of keys, foreign coins and unidentified objet d'art.

John F.....

Small in stature but totally fearless. Christened 'Smasher' by my parents after walking into our shop and addressing my mum by saying *"I say, what a smasher"*

This was a popular radio catch phrase of the day.

Alan D.....

Committed cowboy fan and author of these memoirs. Most nervous member of the gang owing to a sheltered upbringing in earlier life.

Patrick H (Pat).....

Reliable and dependable. Pat was respected by everyone.

Malcome (Mally) H.....

Gang member in name only by virtue of the fact that he rarely left brother Pat's side.

Jimmy T.....

Although never a gang member, I feel I must make mention. Jimmy was perhaps, the nicest guy ever to grace Salford Street. He was everyone's friend. Jimmy came from religious parents whose work took them away from the area for months on end, returning to the street a short while before taking their leave yet again. During this time, Jimmy became sweet on my sister and her upon him. I believe he took her to the pictures occasionally. Brenda took ill just before Jimmy's departure with him promising to see her as soon as he returned. I was in the shop with mum some six months later when he ran in asking if he could see Brenda. Totally unprepared, mum had to give him the tragic news. *"Oh, she's won the race then"* he softly said before turning and leaving the shop. On a lighter note, it was Jimmy who some years earlier, returned from America bringing with him a toy replica Colt Revolver. We all *"Oohed and Ahh'ed"* as it was passed from hand to hand. An immediate game of cowboys began with each of us having a ten minute go with the gun.

Edgar W and the medical emergency.....

Edgar W was our local barber. He had a shop on Alfred Street South. From here, he would offer you, (depending on your age) a short back and sides, a penny parting and a rather mysterious *"a little something for the weekend sir"*

School children would pop in every morning for a penny parting and emerge with a sleek Brillcreamed head of hair. My first visit to this shop is one that I will never forget. I went with my father and brother as we were all in need of a haircut. I was not particularly looking forward to the experience and adopted a 'the sooner I go, the sooner it's over' attitude. After my father and brother had received their haircuts, they waited for me to have mine. Edgar beckoned to me and I was in his chair like a flash, looking at a sulking image in the mirror before me. Edgar, sensing my unease, smiled with good humour and asked if I'd mind standing up. He then placed a short plank of wood across the arms of the chair and it was on this I had to sit. Whilst I was having my haircut, Edgar chatted to my dad. I recall this chat very well. It related to a young lad, *"not much different to this one here"* said Edgar. Apparently, this lad would just not sit still on the plank of wood, making it very difficult for Edgar to give him his

short back and sides. Towards the end of his haircut, just as Edgar was tidying up his hairline with his razor, the lad gave one fidget too many and Edgar accidentally sliced off the lad's ear. Edgar held up the actual razor and I caught a glimpse of it in the mirror. According to Edgar, he then bent to pick up the lads ear and because it was covered in hair, he had to blow on it a few times before popping it into a matchbox and sending the lad to the hospital to have it sewn back on.

I never moved as much as a muscle until it was all over.

#### Bulldog Entry.....

The residents of Bulldog Entry were our sworn enemies. Equal in numbers, we tolerated each other's presence but occasionally, hostilities would break out. Bulldog Entry was the given name to a very narrow passage that ran from the end of Salford Street. The passage opened out into a communal back yard used by a number of families. There was a barn type of building forming part of this yard which served various purposes. One of these was for the storage of the annually collected bonfire rubbish. It was this rubbish we used as an excuse to test our mettle for we would often try to set fire to it before its due date. They of course, would often foray into our territory bent on the same purpose. This was the cause of the fracas that followed. The challenge came through and was accepted. The rules of engagement were kept very simple. The opposing forces would face each other from their respective ends of Salford Street and at a mutually agreed signal, the two sides would throw themselves upon each other and unleash hell. It was not uncommon for these events to draw spectators from their homes to watch the battle. We, the Salford Streeters, faced our foe armed with clothes props and lariats. They were similarly armed. We planned to send in the clothes props first, and with these being used as pole vaults a tactical advantage would be gained as we were then able to strike from the rear as well as the front. It never quite worked of course but a scuffle certainly did take place. It must be said however, these were half hearted affairs with both sides withdrawing honourably at the first sign of blood.

#### Tea dances and Brillcream substitutes.....

Every now and then, the church halls of the area would put on tea dances. There were a lot of church halls back then so you would find them happening quite regularly. We would always attend the dances held in other localities as it gave us the opportunity to check out the girls, not that much dancing ever took place, none of us could dance anyway. You would find the girls sitting down one side of the hall, while we sat on the other, ogling like mad, whilst Victor Sylvester did his best to bring the two sides together. Of course, these occasions meant turning out in your Sunday best with the straightest of hair partings. This would mean robbing your dad's Brillcream jar, but if there was none available, a knob of butter rubbed between the hands and warmed before the fire before rubbing on your hair worked just as well



On the way to school.....

We used to pick up our comics from a shop on Flewitt Street. A large slot machine stood on the counter. It was a very ornately decorated thing carrying a red indians head complete with war bonnet, on the casing. This machine took half pennies so we would often try our luck. When these games were in progress, there was always gang members around and one of these, having nothing better to do, had his hand pushed up the payout slot as far as it would go. He made a remarkable discovery and told us about this on the way to school. It appears that when his hand was in the machine, he said he could feel the edges of coins. The following morning, a coin was inserted into the slot and a hand was inserted into another slot. The handle was pulled and the reels spun. The three fruit laden reels clunked to a stop and the inserted fingers jiggled at the edges of the coins. The hand was hastily removed to be followed by half a dozen coins. Smiles broke out from those gathered around as another coin went in. The joy was short lived however as there were no coins to be felt this time. It never worked again after that, although we would often send exploratory fingers into the machine whilst doing our gambling.

Mr. C and the wage packets..... (part one)

On Robin Hood Street, was an ice cream manufacturers premises. Ice cream was not actually produced there, it was more a storage facility and office complex. It belonged to the well known ice cream magnate Mr. C. Occasionally, very large wagons used to draw up outside this facility to off load frozen produce into two large cold rooms. Some of these deliveries used to arrive in the evening after the company's staff had gone home for the day. There were four of us gathered on the step of my mum's shop. It was about eight o'clock on a warm summers evening. We sat there talking over the day's events when this large wagon pulled up opposite. A man climbed down from the cab and went to talk to someone coming out of the building. They exchanged a few words and a moment later, one of the men approached us. He explained that a consignment of ice cream products had arrived which had to be transferred to the cold rooms as quickly as possible, and would we be interested in giving him a hand. He said also that we would be reimbursed for our efforts the following day. We told him we could arrange even more labour if he wanted us to, and he said the more the merrier. Two of us ran off to knock on various doors and returned with four more gang members a short time later. The cold room door was swung open and a human chain was formed from the back of the van and into the cold room. We off loaded the van passing suckers, choc ices and all manner of frozen confectionary from hand to hand. We ensured that the cold room staff was changed regularly to avoid the onset of hypothermia and the van was soon cleared. The next day, we gathered outside the offices sporting perfect hair partings and some even wearing their Sunday best. We were ushered into an office where a man gave each of us a wage packet containing a ten shilling note, a veritable fortune to us. This happened

again shortly afterwards, but this time we received no rewards. Plans were made.

I'll mention here, a little cultural detail of those times. On summer evenings, we always remained on the street as late as possible. The last hour or so being spent sitting on our shop step as already mentioned. We never broke up voluntarily, it was our mothers who ended the evening for us. It was the custom, in those days, for mothers to call in their offspring from their front doorsteps. Each mothers call was individual and instantly recognised; whereupon the one called responded instantly, often without as much as a good night.

Mr. C. and the wage packets..... (part two)

A van drew up opposite and the call went out for help. We responded favourably of course because plans had been made. The off loading chain was formed and the van began to empty. Suddenly, from two streets away, a call rent the night air. "*Johnnnneeeee*". The John summoned was on cold room duty. "*It's for you John*" someone in the chain called out. "*Coming*" shouted Johnny. He ran out of the cold room rubbing his hands together to get warm. We all ignored the box shaped outline that distorted his jumper. A little later, three of us (myself included ) sat on the kerb outside the Colin Campbell pub working our way through a box of twenty four choc ices. I often wondered if any trace of the uneaten ten still decorated the roof of the Colin Campbell's garage.

Spirit tapping.....

The two rows of terraced houses faced each other, with each house having a small front garden that ended at a low wall. Between the walls on both sides ran a narrow pathway that began at Salford Street and terminated at Lamartine Street. Such was Sprotborough Terrace. The hinging arrangements to neighbouring doors were such that it meant that each door had handles that were no more than fourteen inches apart, and this suited our plans ideally. A length of cotton was stealthily tied to a door knocker and manipulated in such a way that caused the knocker to rise and fall on the target's door. The front door would open and the householder found himself staring into the darkness. It was debatable whether he heard the sniggering coming from close by. Better by far, was the entertainment value obtained from tying adjacent door handles together with rope, before knocking on both doors and beating the retreat to observe the results. A refinement to this was discovered if you left a little play in the rope, which led to a period of partial opening and the sudden slamming of doors as the respective owners tried in vain to answer the knocks.



The Cavendish Cinema.



The New Empress Cinema.

The Cavendish and New Empress Cinema's both occupied St. Ann's Well Road. They stood about a quarter of a mile apart. The New Empress was the more upmarket of the two cinemas as they had a doorman called Cliff. Not that we called him that of course. Cliff, to us, stood about seven foot six in height. A man of military bearing with a neatly trimmed pencil moustache. Cliff did not like children. People often had to queue in those times and Cliff possessed a sixth sense that told him we were part of the queue. As we queued our way into the foyer, there he would be, grimly staring down at us from his seven foot six advantage point. He very rarely spoke, he didn't have to, the 'look' was enough. We found it all very intimidating. He never turned us away though. The New Empress held a Saturday morning children's matinee. It was a members only affair for ABC Minors. We weren't Minors, but we had our methods. Membership cards were very rarely checked anyway. At the beginning of the programme came the ABC Minors song. Sung to the tune 'Blaze Away' an organ would strike up from somewhere and hundred's of us gave voice.

*"We are the boys and girls well known as"*  
*"The Minors of the ABC"*  
*"And every Saturday, we line up"*  
*"To see the films we like and shout aloud with glee"*  
*"We like to laugh and have our sing song"*  
*"Just a happy crowd are we"*  
*"We're all pals together"*  
*"We're Minors of the ABC"*

We would then watch short films, serial's and cartoons. Halfway through the proceedings would come the birthday celebrations. Members having a recent birthday would make their way onto the stage. The organ would strike up again and a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday would ring out. The children would then receive a birthday card and shout 'Thank you Minors' into a

microphone before returning to their seats. It was a rite of passage for us non members to join those on stage in the hopes of being sung at and receiving the official ABC Minors birthday card. Sometimes, we would get away with it, but as credentials were often checked on stage, we could find ourselves being turned away with a flea in our ears and handed over to Cliff. Cliff would then read the riot act before letting us return to our seats.

The Cavendish.....

The 'Cavo' was more to our liking. There were no airs, pretensions or doormen here and certainly no membership cards required. We were practically encouraged to enjoy ourselves in whatever way we wished. During boring parts of a film, this would lead to lots of running around and rough and tumble behaviour, whilst others were trying to watch *Alibi*, *Dusty* and *Crash* or putting out calls for Mrs. Slack. There was however, one rule. Cowboy pistols were banned. We could never understand the reason for this, for how could you help out Hoppy or the Range Busters when they were in trouble. We did try to smuggle them in of course, but as we were often frisked by the cinema staff on entering, any pistols discovered were confiscated and left at the kiosk to be collected at the end of the show.

Regardless of this though, the Cavo was definitely the place to be.

Mrs. Slack.....

I never actually met Mrs. Slack. I don't recall the gang doing so either, but Mrs. Slack was an indispensable part of cinema history. The gang regularly went to the pictures. There we enjoyed whatever was being screened until the projector broke down. Projectors often broke down in those days and this would cause catcalls, whoopings and calls for Mrs. Slack. In the darkness whilst repairs were being carried out, amusing diversions would take place. Ice cream cups would be scrunched up and hurled aloft. Patrons in the cheaper seats would use the darkness to their advantage in seeking out the more expensive ones. Bottles of pop in the balcony seats would be unscrewed and their contents dribbled onto the poor unfortunates directly below. Above all though was the constant calling for Mrs. Slack. Her presence would be demanded in deep manly voices or high falsetto tones often ending in hysterical laughter. The callings would come from all corners of the cinema. Others would be calling out enquiring if anyone knew of her whereabouts. She must have been a remarkable lady.

Johnny H's nephew.....

Johnny had a nephew. He was about three years old. Occasionally, Johnny had to look after his nephew for a while so we made him a temporary member of the gang. On this particular day, there were three of us, AD, PH, JH and of course Johnny H's nephew. To keep him amused, we had placed him in

Johnny's dad's allotment wheelbarrow and chased up and down the street with him. It was a blustery day and I think it was Pat who came up with the idea. We repaired to the headquarters to get the necessary tools and materials. Pretty soon, with the help of a few pieces of wood and some potato sacks, we fashioned a pretty fair facsimile of a working sail. This we nailed to the rear of the barrow containing Johnny H's nephew. We then went back out onto the street, turned the craft into the wind and gave it a push. We then stood back with hands on hips to observe the results. It worked like a dream, the sail

picked up the wind and the barrow, sail, and Johnny H's nephew rolled down the street picking up speed as it went. The panic gripped us simultaneously. We took off after the rapidly retreating craft and after a good chase managed to catch up with it before any damage was done. The nephew stood clutching the front of the of the craft. I think he enjoyed every minute of it.



Salford Street.

Salford street was the centre of our world Most daytime and nocturnal activities began and ended here. On summer afternoons, the street would be packed with its young. Old ladies would stand at the end of Noble's Entry, arms folded over pinafore covered bosoms chatting to similarly attired ladies on the other side of the street. A game of rounders would be in progress. Another group of kids would be enquiring the time from a certain 'Mister Wolf' and run screaming should Mister Wolf reply '*Dinner time*' and give chase. A rope stretching the width of the street would be in full swing with two or three skippers nimbly keeping time with its rotations. A rope tied to the top of a gas lamp would be spiralling chair-a-plane style with a couple of youngsters clinging desperately on to its end. And finally, one could also find three or four youngsters sitting on the top of the wall of the fruit shop owned by Mr. and Mrs. D.



The Promenade.

The Promenade.

At the bottom of the Promenade was a grating. The Promenade was about four feet wide and sat between the Victoria Park and a long terrace of three storied dwellings.

There was a gentle slope leading from its top end which continued until it terminated at Robin Hood Street. We occasionally did our sledging there in the winter. In heavy rain, the water would rush down the 'Prom' carrying with it assorted flotsam which entered the grating at its lower end. We spotted the Half Crown lying on top of the flotsam, which was just out of reach of our probing fingers. The Half Crown was a small fortune to us and we were determined to make it our own. A discussion took place on the best method to adopt in removing the Half Crown from the grating.

A small lasso was suggested but rejected as being unworkable. The careful manipulation of two sticks was tried before conceding defeat. It was then suggested that the split end of a bamboo cane might provide the answer.

Two of us stood guard whilst the rest went in search of a cane.

A short time later, a cross cut bamboo cane was inserted into the grate and to cries of encouragement, we took turns at trying to extricate our prize but without success. We withdrew the cane and stood around looking down at that large silver coin whilst having a rethink and blowing the occasional bubble with our gum. Whilst pondering the problem, it was Pat who removed the gum from his mouth and packed it around the end of the cane. We caught on immediately and the cries of encouragement began again, which turned to cheers of elation as the gum gripped the Half Crown and lifted from its bed and into our possession.

Another Half Crown tale.....

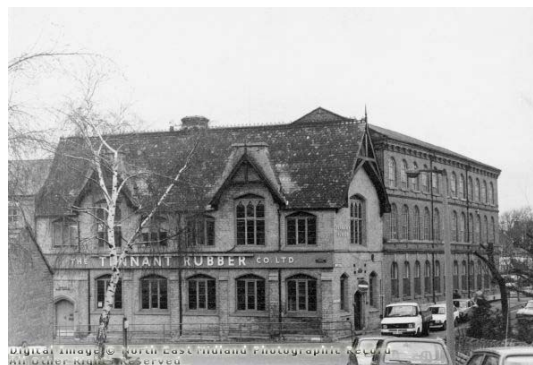
This was related to me by my brother, but as the event passed into legend, I did recall it and find it suitable to mention here.

It was during a woodwork lesson that the thief struck. He stole a half crown piece that someone had foolishly left lying around. The victim reported the theft and after a good search of the surrounding area, Mr. C. called the class together. He informed the class of what had just transpired and said that intervention by the police could be avoided if the money was returned to its rightful owner. To this end, he placed an empty cash box on a woodwork

bench and ordered the class to assemble outside. Once outside, he said that we were to enter, one at a time, and re-emerge. This would give the thief the opportunity to replace his ill gotten gains and retain his anonymity. My brother informed me that the cash box had gone by the time he entered the workshop.

The briefcase.....

It was during one of our sledging sessions on the Prom that it came to light. Halfway through my run, I spotted something lying under a holly bush off to my right. I bailed out of my craft, leaving it to make its own way while I ran back to confirm my findings. There under the bush lay a suitcase. I removed it from its hiding place and opened it up. The case contained some very important looking papers which we immediately took to a police station at the bottom end of Victoria Park. I handed in my findings there and an officer took the details. A short time later, I was contacted by the police who said that I was to report to a chemists shop on Mansfield Road, and suggested that a reward might await me. My brother accompanied me for this visit and I entered the shop to receive heartfelt thanks and commendations on my honesty. My brother reliably informs me that, that was all we took away with us too.



The Russell Boys Club (in the 1950s)

The Russell Boys Club, chessboards and doofers.....

There were many clubs available to the young of those times. There was the Boy's Brigade that was popular with many, not us though, we didn't like the pill box hats you had to wear. There was also the Russell Boys Club and this was the one we joined for a while. The Club occupied a two storied building at the junction of Carlton Road and St Luke's Street. On the ground floor was the 'quiet' room that contained books and magazines where one could read in a peaceful atmosphere.

This floor also had a room that contained a weaving loom. My brother did some award winning tapestries on this. A flight of steps then took you to the club room itself. This was where the action took place. There were table tennis tables, a snooker table and a dart board if I remember correctly. There

was also coffee tables scattered around where you could have a chat or enjoy a game of chess. There was also a small bar where you could purchase a cup of tea, a packet of crisps, a packet of biscuits, or a doofer. A doofer was the given name to a chocolate marshmallow biscuit and was the most popular item on sale. The whole shebang was presided over by Mr. P and his wife who would allocate tables, organise rota's for the weaving loom, check out the quiet room and also on occasion, restore peace among warring factions. They would also tend the bar selling vast quantities of doofers. Johnny H. was just about to enjoy his when he got into a disagreement with the fellow he was playing chess with. His opponent must have been quite rude because this caused John to place his doofer in his mouth before picking of the cardboard chess board and bringing it down smartly over his opponent's head. A cry of "*Scrap*" went out, bringing Mr. P out from the bar to restore peace before the fight could really begin. Ever the diplomat, Mr. P. said that exclusions would not be necessary if the combatants agreed to shake hands, which they did, leaving Johnny to continue eating his doofer in peace.



The Gospel Hall (prior to demolition)

At the bottom end of Salford Street was the Gospel Hall. This was a religious establishment and Sister F. was a member of the clergy. There were services held every Sunday evening and just prior to the service, Sister F. would emerge to round up lost souls to swell the congregation. This, of course, would include any member of the gang who caught her eye. Naturally, we were wise to her visits and always ensured that we were nowhere to be seen when she went on patrol.

Sometimes, we were not quick enough though. There was an occasion when we were out playing and missed the emergence of Sister F. from the Gospel Hall. She was almost upon us before she was spotted. We all made a dash for our back yard and held our breath as she entered. She left after a few moments and we breathed easier. Had she inspected the gang's headquarters, five converts would have increased the congregations numbers. A further inspection of the outside toilet would have produced four more. The Gospel Hall held a club event every week with the intention of taking the young off the



streets. I believe woodwork was promoted and other non threatening activities undertaken. One attendance by the gang was enough to convince us that it was not our cup of tea however, and we spent the rest of our one and only visit punching out power chords on the Gospel Hall's harmonium.

Bonfire night.....

Always welcomed, bonfire night's were eagerly awaited. Early in the day, bonfire rubbish would emerge from various back yards and be placed in the middle of Salford Street. Local residents would use the event to rid themselves of any unwanted furniture, so it was not unusual to find an old sideboard or mattress being added to the pile. Upon completion, the bonfire could stand fifteen to twenty feet in height.

A constant watch would be kept upon this throughout the day to avert any threat being considered by the enemy from Bulldog Entry. They could be quite inventive in their determination to pre ignite our fire, sometimes using arrows of fire to achieve this end. We of course would respond in kind and try to keep the enemy on their toes protecting their own fire. Around six pm, the fire would always, and without fail be lit by Mr. Stan B. after a hazardous climb to the top to place the 'guy.' My mum would respond to the festivities by producing bon fire toffee which she sold on the night. This was a wonderful stick jaw concoction that was so popular, it sold out within minutes of its going on sale. With the fire well under way, we would produce baking potato's and push them into the edges of the fire at points we could remember later in the evening. No tinfoil, the potato's went in unprotected and I'm sure they tasted the better for it. Next, came the fireworks, we all had pockets stuffed with them. They were all of the exploding variety, sparklers were for the girls. Apart from the bangers, we also had jumping jacks, it was these that we used to attach to pieces of wire to chase after the girls, or Paddy. Contests took place to see who could hold a banger the longest before the explosion took place. Later in the evening, some of us would tour neighbouring streets to check out their fires.

Leaving our fire behind, we made our way down Salford Street to see the fires on Manchester Street and Liverpool Street diverting only to lob a salvo of bangers up Bulldog Entry. At the end of the evening and after visiting many fires, we made our way back to retrieve our potato's. Paddy was sitting quietly by the wall and we joined him to enjoy out food. A short time later, we walked to the top of the street with the intention of saying our goodnights and were met by Mr. and Mrs. S ( of my kissing blowing incident ) who gave us all a handful of unsold fireworks. We weren't really inspired by this gift but gave our thanks and extended the evening another half hour.

I recall another bonfire night when we were entertained by three men who were rather the worse for wear. They were all Scotsmen and had come from the Colin Campbell pub. They were very sociable and produced fireworks of their own. I've always remembered these fireworks for they were nothing like the

ones we possessed, each one having a tartan wrapping. Totally oblivious to any pain, probably brought about by the liberal consumption of Black and Tan's, they regaled us with daring feats of bravery by letting the fireworks explode in their hands. It would have been interesting to know how they felt the next day.

#### Slides.....

Another wintertime favourite was the creation of slides. Victoria Park stood directly opposite Bath Street School and it was here that we used to gather before starting our lessons. Often, in winter, the park would be covered in a layer of frost that made a perfect basis for our slides. Schoolboy footwear in those days usually consisted of a pair of stout leather boots, reinforced on the soles and heels with studs and blakeys. The best possible combination for the creation of slides. Thus attired, it was simply a matter of sliding over an area of frost until it turned into a glassy pathway. With as many as twenty to thirty kids joining in, the slide could be anywhere up to fifty feet in length, constantly occupied with a chain of sliders. This would continue until the sound of the school whistle blasted out from across the road bringing our fun to an end.

#### Blakeys.....

These were semi circular pieces of steel that were hammered onto the heels of boots in order to extend the life of the heel. These were great fun in the dark, as we found that running at full tilt whilst striking down hard upon the heel produced a shower of sparks that illuminated our passing.

#### Camping nights.....

The gang occasionally went camping by the side of the River Trent. On this occasion we had decided to make it an all night affair. Packing tins of beans, eggs, bread and a packet of tea, we pitched our tent opposite the Pleasure Park. The reason for this was that the park contained a stand pipe and we would eventually require some water. It grew quite dark. Supper that night was to be beans and boiled eggs. We lit a fire on which to do the cooking and despatched Johnny F's brother to get the water. This had to be done at night after the Park had closed. Pushing a canvas bucket before him, Arthur entered the waters of the Trent and struck out for the opposite shore. We followed his passage across by listening out for his splashing and occasional grunts of effort. Off in the distance, we heard the barking of a dog and knew that Arthur had completed his task. He returned without the water saying that the weight was pulling him under.

#### Campfires.....

We were all imbued with a pioneering spirit when it came to the outdoor life. Living under the stars suited our lifestyles perfectly. We were expert in all aspects of living under canvas, even down to the finer details of building campfires. This could be quite inconvenient on wet nights, as finding enough

dry tinder with which to start the fire could prove somewhat of a problem. We would take a supply of newspaper with us of course, but if for some reason this was unsuccessful, there was always an alternative. Little known survival techniques learned in Cadet School taught us that most of us carry a supply of tinder, that may be harvested at appropriate times in the form of belly button fuzz. I feel I must report however, that occasional inspections of our own, and on occasion, each other's belly buttons produced no such combustible material.

Camp night incidents.....

Our camp night's were not always without incident. One occasion had us all terrified when we heard the sound of footsteps outside the tent. The intruder entered the tent and to cries of alarm, a torch was switched on which illuminated the head of a cow. The cow withdrew its head after being battered by a hail of shoes.

Another time found us in a state of pure terror as an accident with the hurricane lamp produced a panic stricken cry of "*C C Come it over ere the tents en fire*". I won't bother to translate this but it still gives me the occasional chuckle.

More cinema memories.....

The early fifties saw the introduction of 3D films. The first one we marvelled at was called 'Metroscopix'. This was at the Cavendish Cinema. After a long wait in the queue, we paid our entrance fee and were met by an usherette who gave us a pair of 3D glasses. They were made from flimsy cardboard and were a one size fits all variety that needed special care to ensure that they would remain balanced on the nose for most, if not all, of the programme.

Metroscopix was not a film in the true sense of the word, more an entertaining documentary on the wonders of 3D technology. For example, I still recall a portion of this film when an off screen voice informed everyone that there was a 'guy' in the third row front who was not laughing at any of the jokes.

Whereupon, a man walks to the centre of the screen and raises a shotgun to his shoulder, the double barrelled business end appearing to be wavering about four inches from the end of our noses. It was films such as Fort Ti and The Charge at Feather River that saw us and the U.S. Seventh Cavalry hiding behind driftwood, dodging arrows tomahawks and lances that came hurtling from the screen.

The Scala.....

It was in the Scala cinema where I enjoyed my first box of twenty Du Maurier cigarettes. The darkness of the auditorium concealed my obvious under age activities and I must have smoked about twelve of these before the end of the programme. I walked my way home hoping the sickness feeling would soon pass.

The Dale Cinema.....

So called because of its position on Sneinton Dale. This was never on my list of favourite cinemas although I did call there once. One of the gang knew the projectionist who worked there and we were invited inside and treated to an out of hours selection of Laurel and Hardy short films.

Conkers, marbles and silver sleeves.....

A nineteen forties schoolboy carried his whole life in his pockets, the ones without holes in that is to say. Among the conkers, marbles, assorted keys, the odd door knob and suchlike, you may come across a grubby handkerchief. These never did get much use because of the time involved in their usage. A better and swifter method of keeping a snotty nose at bay was by drawing your sleeve across the affected area. Over a period of time, the sleeve would take on a silvery sheen, thus giving rise to its name.

Conkers again.....

With the coming of the Conker season came the responsibility of finding them. Not an easy task for inner city dwellers but we had our methods. Armed with Conker gathering machinery, we'd make the trek from Robin Hood Street to Well's Road which carried huge Chestnut trees. The machinery mentioned consisted of a horseshoe tied to a long length of string. This was then twirled in a circular fashion, gathering speed before launching it skyward into the foliage of the tree. The horseshoe would then return to the thrower, often bringing with it conker bearing foliage. Sometimes, the horseshoe would anchor itself in the branches where it would take two or three of us pulling on the string in the hopes of dislodging it and perhaps, bringing more conker bearing foliage with it.

Colwick Woods.....

A recent mention of Colwick Woods brings to mind more memories. This was another favourite and well visited place. We'd normally go right after the Saturday morning matinee at the New Empress. We'd jump on a 44 bus, scamper upstairs until the bus terminated at Colwick. Then, it was a simple matter of crossing the road and entering through a gate and into the delights that awaited us. The Woods stretched up and away. We could always take the pathway that led to the upper reaches of the Woods, but we preferred the direct route which tested our mountaineering skills to the limit.

Red Indians.....

After an exciting morning's entertainment watching cowboy films at the New Empress and armed with hastily purchased hand mirrors and a box of matches, we'd eagerly make the trek again to try our hand at sending smoke signals and heliograph messages. We possessed copies of the morse code to make our messages more intelligible but this met with little success. The same could also

be said of our smoke signal abilities although we did manage to singe a coat or two in the process.

#### The Bowmen.....

We were pretty efficient at adapting to new environments and pretty soon we'd all be sporting bows and arrows. These were very professional to our eyes and we were convinced that they could be lethal in the wrong hands. Slender saplings were hacked away at with our jack knives and stripped of bark. We'd brought lengths of string with us to equip the bows and to bind around the centre to create a non slip hand grip. For our arrows, there was a ready supply of these growing all around. I'm not strong on botany so cannot tell what these came from. Suffice to say, they grew very thin and straight and suited our purpose ideally. One end of the arrow was split and into this was inserted a carefully selected leaf which gave a true flight to the arrow.

#### The Hunters.....

Thus armed, we'd set off in search of rabbits. Some of us would silently stalk the undergrowth for the prey, whilst others preferred a panoramic view of the surrounding terrain from halfway up a tree. Whichever, upon the sighting of a rabbit, a hail of arrows would rain at and down upon the fleeing target. An argument would then take place as to who came the closest. We never caught any rabbits by the way.

#### Galleys.....

An alternative to the bow was the catapult or 'galley' as we called them. We were also proficient in the manufacture of these. The Woods would be searched for a sturdy forked stick and stripped of its bark. The best elastic was a black square shaped variety purchased by length from Redmayne and Todd's. Two pieces of equal length were secured by wire to the arms of the galley. The open ends of the elastic were joined together with a strip of leather. This would usually be taken from the tongue of an old, or on occasion, not so old boot. Back home, the galleys would be produced and contests would take place involving tin cans and the tops of walls.

#### Ordnance continued.....

The most popular by far, was an un-named piece of weaponry involving a stout elastic band, the thumb and forefinger, and trays from cigarette packets. With the band stretched between extended finger and thumb and a missile made from a tightly rolled and folded cigarette tray, you were armed and ready. Easily transportable, these were the preferred armaments for use at home, at school, and at the Cavo or New Empress. Pat H. was in a class of his own with this weapon and could loose a volley of shots that caught the target every time.

Pea shooters and flutes.....

Colwick Woods provided us with pea shooters, grown from a certain plant whose hollow stems rendered them perfect for this purpose. The plant also supplied the ammunition in the form of seeds that grew from the head of the plant. In the hands of a marksman these seeds could deliver a tiny stinging blow to the back of the neck.

Armed with your pen knife, the plant could also be turned into a workable flute.

A game of dominoes.....

A tattooist opened up a shop on Alfred Street South. We would often gather outside his shop window to admire his artwork. At a group meeting in the gang's headquarters, we decided it would be a good idea to cement the bonds of brotherhood that bound us by having a corporate tattoo. A discussion then took place as to what the tattoo should portray. After a great deal of thought, Johnny F. suggested that a domino might be a good idea. We all thought this brilliant and adopted the idea without reservation. We decided that the tattoo's would be placed on the inside of the right wrist and that we could choose our own number configuration. I decided on a two-one because three was my lucky number. All that now remained was the matter of cost, so we made our way round to his premises. In all honesty, the tattooist did hear us out and said that he would undertake the work should we return to his premises in about nine or ten years time.



Manvers Secondary Modern Boy's School.

This was my third and final school. I didn't like this one either. Not all of the gang went to this school, some preferring to go to Huntingdon Street Boys School. The legends of the dark deeds that befell newcomers to Manvers was well known making my first day one of fearful apprehension. The legend concerned a rite of passage involving something known only as 'The Block'.

This was a projection in a low wall over which newcomers were held, in order to be given a severe drubbing on the rump by whoever wanted to take part. I didn't like the sound of this but having my elder brother close by, I escaped this initiation. The school was about half an hour's walk from the shop. I'd call for Dennis I. along the way and we'd make the trek together. Dennis lived on Alfred Street South and from there, we made our way up Flewitt Street and turned into tunnel type of passageway that had been incorporated between neighbouring houses. The acoustics of this tunnel were such that made it imperative that we traversed its length at a run whilst yelling our heads off. Emerging from the tunnel brought us onto Paxton Street which in turn brought us to Gordon Road. From here we'd turn into Pym Street which took us the rest of the way to school. On Pym Street was a toffee manufacturers premises whose door we would hang around in the hopes (unrealised) of getting a free handout of sweets. An alternative way to school was by Carlton Road. We'd take this route on occasion to take advantage of certain diversions. One of these, was a shop window that contained a large model of a trolley bus. On the insertion of a penny into a slot, the bus would run forwards and backwards behind the glass. Another diversion came from visiting a certain metalwork firm on Leighton Street and trying to scrounge one of their promotional letter openers. These took the form of a dagger and were much prized by all. Cast from a light grey metal, they were taken home and polished to a high gloss.

Dennis's dad.....

The rumour spread around that Dennis's dad had died. I went to call for him intending to convey my sympathies on the way to school. I went into his house and it came as quite a shock to see his dad having his breakfast. Dennis and his family were quite ignorant of the rumours.

Lessons.....

Lessons considered boring were spent sketching interesting scenes on the covers of our exercise books. These, for the most part, involved New York skylines with matchstick baddies shooting it out with matchstick cops. Upon completion, our artistic endeavours were covertly passed to and fro so that comparisons could be made.

Dirk and Joris.....

It was late afternoon. We had all had a tiring day and were looking forward to going home. There was however, a fly in the ointment. It was a poem entitled 'How I Brought The Good News From Ghent To Aix'. We had been studying it for the entire lesson. The ointment was the poem, the fly was the fact that teacher said no one would be going home until the first verse had been recited correctly. A groan escaped us as we buried our heads in our hands muttering silently to ourselves.

One or two attempts were made without success. I say, with a certain amount of pride, that I became the saviour of the afternoon.

Terry.....

Terry B. was the school bully and I was one of his victims. He ran a sort of protection racket whose motto was 'If you pay up, you will not be bashed up' Not wanting to be bashed up, I paid up. I was fortunate, in a sense, in that the cost of my protection was an apple. Terry obviously knew my parents owned a fruit shop so he'd adjust his fees accordingly. This really presented no problem for me as my mum always told me to collect an apple on my way out of the shop, which I duly handed over to Terry. It was Raymond P. Who offered me a way out of this predicament. He told me that Terry, basically, was a coward at heart who would cave in at the first sign of resistance. He'd tried this on Raymond but Raymond said he stood his ground, after which, Terry left him alone. Came the day of payment, Terry advanced for his apple. I told him, rather nervously, that I hadn't got one and further more, I informed him that it was my intention to tell the school authorities.

It wasn't a bad bashing up as bashing up's go. I did find myself suddenly sitting on the floor, but strangely, feeling no pain whatsoever. Terry never bothered me again after that.

Another Terry.....

Terry was a legend his own playtime. Admirers used to nod in his direction as he passed by. Terry possessed a talent that outshone any other at the Manvers Secondary Modern Boys School. He was proud of his ability and rightly so. It was his *raison d'être*. Terry's genitalia, it was rumoured, was within easy reach of his navel.

Trevor.....

Trevor was another pupil of extraordinary talent. Nothing like in the league of Terry mark you, but enough to set him apart. Trevor would put on demonstrations upon request. Trevor could make his eyeballs wobble.

Cinema visits.....

The school would occasionally organise trips to the New Empress cinema. The entire school was present. The feature was Scott of the Antarctic. The School was organised into four houses named after the explorers: Scott, Willoughby, Shackleton and Hudson, and being a member of Scott house made it of significant importance. We walked in pairs from the school to the cinema and rumour had it that the front of the line was entering the cinema, just as the end of it was leaving the school gates some half mile distant. Cliff was there and I swear he gave me a cursory nod as I passed him.



Music lessons.....

We were having a fine old time singing this song about a Zulu Warrior. Beating our fists on the desk tops in time with the music, I noticed teacher making the rounds of the classroom and putting his ear close to each musical mouth he passed. I was sitting quite close to the rear of the room but suddenly sensed beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was me he was after. We had just reached the line 'Hi Zimba Zimba' as he approached me. His ear came down to within inches of my best efforts and looking me straight in the eye, he ordered me to "*Shut up*". Something happened that day for I've never sang in public since.

Raymond.....

We were having a science lesson or something similar, when I noticed 'sir' making the rounds handing something out to everyone. He reached my desk and to my surprise, he placed a caterpillar before me. There was an air of general amusement in the classroom. Some pupils had their caterpillars cupped in their hands and were shaking them like a dice, others had begun caterpillar races, whilst the classroom comedians were making a great show of popping theirs in their mouths and chewing contentedly. That wasn't for me though, being a bit of a Buddhist at heart I had already christened mine Raymond. On his way round again, sir informed us that with there not being enough to go round, we would have to share the scalpels. I looked at my share of scalpel and then looked at Raymond, who had already made himself at home on my desktop. Sir, then told us to remove the head of the caterpillar, and placing the flat of the scalpel at the tail end, we were to squeeze out the interior. Feigning interest, I scooped up Raymond in my right hand and casually leaned my right elbow upon the sill of the open window behind me. The head had already been removed from my partners caterpillar and I found myself staring in fascination at the shiny green and red blob that he'd created. Leaning forward to get a better view of this, my right hand and Raymond passed out of the window. Opening my hand, I released my new found friend and returned my arm back into the room. I carefully divided one half of my partners blob to my side of the desk and slept with a clear conscience that night.

Art lessons.....

We were having an art lesson. Sir came round handing out a piece of wire to everyone. Returning to the front of the classroom, he then instructed us to turn this wire into something. I hated instructions like these. I turned it over in my hands a few times, trying to visualise what this could become. I gave up trying to produce a lion's head, a tiger's head, the head of a hippopotamus and straightened out the wire. I turned it over a few more times and for some reason, held it up to the light as if to seek inspiration there. Meanwhile, time was passing and sir was on his way round again, passing out a compliment here and making a suggestion there. I threw myself into the project again and redoubled

my efforts to produce something worthwhile. At sir's approach, the wire seemed to take on a life of its own as it bent this way and coiled that way. At sir's arrival, I was almost exhausted as he removed it from my hands asking me what I had created. I looked at the misshapen mess he was holding and gave him a hastily considered reply. His voice boomed.

"*A MOUSE!!* " he said, "*A MOUSE???*"

Had there been a mouse hole anywhere at hand, I would have willingly occupied it.

The Festival of Britain.....

This was a memorable visit that occasioned my winning of a prize at school. Accompanied by our teacher, we marvelled at the exhibits contained within the futuristic Dome of Discovery and offered varying theories on how the Skylon was erected. A little later found us grouped opposite Big Ben where I nipped into a shop near by and bought my mum a tablet of soap bearing the symbol of the Festival.

The essay.....

I once won a writing competition. It was an essay based upon a visit to the Festival of Britain. My prize was presented to me in the school assembly, where in a state of embarrassment, I made my way to the front of the hall followed by the sound of sporadic and half hearted applause.

Sport.....

The school possessed a well equipped gymnasium that saw us leaping over upholstered boxes, climbing ropes and hanging upside down on the wall bars to comply with our teachers instructions. Heavy medicine balls were passed over the heads, or between the legs of lines of pupils. These balls could also be thrown amongst each other, where a badly thrown ball once resulted in my rolling around on the floor in abject agony, with my hands clutching my crotch. Major infractions were punishable by making you stand facing a corner with your hands behind your back. The hands were so placed in order to cover as much bum as possible owing to the fact that your gym shorts had been pulled down around your ankles. I suffered this ignominy only once.

Football.....

Football practice was taken on the Forest Recreation Ground. A bus would turn up outside the school, we'd climb aboard and off we'd go. Each class had enough pupils to support two teams. According to ability, you were graded suitable for the A team, the B team, or the Dogs and Bones. I made up membership of the latter. A and B teams were pitted against their equivalents of the other classes. The Dogs and Bones were given a ball and left to their own devices.

Cricket.....

Cricket lessons were taken on a sports field beside the River Trent. I never really qualified for anything worthwhile despite giving it my best shot. I was always super sensitive at the wicket, striking at the ball long before it had reached the crease, or long after it had crashed into the stumps.

School pens\*.....

The only medium of writing in those days was by pen and ink. Each desk supported an inkwell and a pen. The annual account for the pens must have been astronomical on account of the fact that most of the pens were attached to the classroom's ceilings. They were put there by bored pupils as soon as sir's back was turned. There was a knack to turning a school pen into an efficient javelin, and this is how it was achieved. With sir's attention firmly fixed on writing something on the blackboard, those with acute hearing might have heard a series of soft 'clicks' emanating from different parts of the classroom. This was the sound of half a dozen pen nibs being pressed to breaking point on various desk tops. After this was done, the pen had been reduced to two vicious points. With sir's attention still distracted, the pens were then propelled in an upwards direction with enough force to ensure that they penetrated the ceiling. This was no mean feat given that Manvers was of Victorian architecture whose ceilings were a good fifteen feet above our heads. Over a few weeks the ceilings could contain anywhere up to twenty pens or more. Obtaining a new pen presented no problem as a pupil need only report that there was no pen on his desk, emphasising this by suggesting that a previous occupant must have added to the ceilings ever growing population. Of course, this was not without its hazards as occasionally a pen could detach itself from the ceiling and begin the return journey to earth.

\*A newly arrived Ballpoint or Biro pen was introduced around this time.

A bloody memory.....

It was during a technical drawing lesson when I first noticed.

I was sitting beside Dennis I. and on turning to talk to him, I saw that he was bleeding heavily from one of his nostrils. I asked him how this had come about and he said that he'd accidentally stuck the point of his compass up his nose. Being quite alarmed at the rate of flow, I alerted 'sir' to Dennis's predicament. Sir came over enquiring how this had happened and Dennis said that he'd done it drawing.

Sir, then looking over Dennis's shoulder at his drawing said that his ability for drawing blood far exceeded his ability for drawing technically. Everyone except Dennis and me thought this very funny.

Playground activities....

Mid morning and afternoon would find the playground becoming a hive of activity.

Football was a daily feature. A tennis ball was produced from somewhere and a fourteen a side match would continue, whose kick off started in the morning break. The players would skilfully negotiate the pitch avoiding non players who were inevitable in so small a playground. Three or four members would occupy the angle formed between the school wall and the gym that were the headquarters of the smoking club. Guards would be posted to look out for any patrolling teachers.

Terry B. Would be making his rounds collecting his protection fees. Three youths would be dragging a protesting victim towards the 'Block'. Over, in the toilets, Terry would be putting on yet another display to quell the doubts of the unbelievers whilst Trevor was wobbling his eyeballs for an appreciative audience.

Stomach trouble.....

Mr. W. was our Religious Knowledge teacher. He was black, a Jamaican. He always wore a Homburg hat, a raincoat, and carried an umbrella. Summer or winter, wet or dry, you never found him in anything else. It was during one of his lessons that my trouble began. To my everlasting horror and eternal shame, I passed wind, very loudly. Uproar broke out in the classroom, along with a few cheers. Mr. W. left his desk and stood before the class. *"Who has fouled the air?"* he demanded. It was pointless trying to bluff my way out of this as half the class were looking directly at me. I raised my hand and prepared an apology. *"Put it in a nutshell, boy"* ordered Mr. W. much to everyone's delight. That was all.

Supply teachers.....

Of all of the professions, the life of a school teacher must have been very difficult.

Even more so if you happened to be a teacher at Manvers, and even more so still if you happened to be a supply teacher. I almost felt sorry for him. The whirring started as soon as sir's back was turned. He turned to face the class as if to ascertain he was hearing correctly, by which time, the whirring had stopped. Turning back to the board, he continued with his writing and the whirring continued also. The noise had stopped by the time he faced us again. A third time it happened and he spun round again to confront a sea of innocent faces. To make matters worse, the innocent faces began looking at each other as if to query sir's constant turning. By the time the whirring started again, he seemed to be past caring. He did take a tour of the classroom to find the source of the noise, but without success. Had he seen the clockwork mouse under the shoe of one of the pupils, all would have become clear, but he didn't do this. By this time, and because of sir's couldn't care less attitude, the mouse on the loose game lost its edge and was picked up and pocketed to be returned to its owner a little later.

### The Strap.....

This was the guarantor of acceptable behaviour. You would find one of these hanging from most teachers desks. A strip of seasoned leather, the top half folded and sewn to form a handle, the lower half split to within inches of the handle. The whole could deal out unimaginable pain in the hands of the practiced, and the majority of Manvers teachers were well versed with its usage. If a wrongdoer was identified, one or two strokes from Mister Strap would easily restore order. A hand snatched away at the last moment would guarantee an extra strike. The wrongdoer not being identified would result in the whole class lining up for punishment and returning to their desks with burning hands clamped beneath their armpits. Legend had it that thirteen strikes was the maximum permitted amount. I always found that a single strike brought me into line.

### Private enterprise.....

Ways of improving ones finances were available to the enterprising. We entered the firewood business. Apple crates, tomato crates and suchlike were broken into firewood lengths and bound with string. We would then sell these, going from door to door until they were all sold. This was a very profitable venture. Another promising but short lived venture involved the selling of grapes to friends. When mum ordered grapes from the wholesale market, they arrived in wooden barrels. The grapes were packed in these barrels, which in turn, were packed with tiny granules of cork. The barrels were opened and the grapes carefully removed and transferred to the shop. The empty barrels and their cork contents were then of no further use. The gang however, found another use. This involved the use of three equally sized boxes and a wintertime sled. A stack of two boxes were placed a little apart from the single box and the sled was placed upside down on top of them. This formed a kind of chute affair. The process then became quite labour intensive. At the upper end, handfuls of granules were fed into the chute. These would then fall by gravity into the collection point below. Every now and then, among the flowing granules, individual grapes would appear whereupon members on each side of the chute would gather up these grapes. It was our intention to bag up these grapes to be sold on to friends, however, it proved a profitless venture as the grapes tended to be devoured upon discovery.

### Chilling out.....

It was a hot sunny afternoon. Having nothing better to do, I made my way to the Victoria Park intending to chill out a little. Removing my shirt to use as a pillow, I lay down on the grass with my hands behind my head and listened to the sound of the passing traffic and chirrup of the birds. The sounds dwindled to a soporific hum as I closed my eyes. I opened them and was surprised by a feeling of tightness that seemed to be gripping my face. I sat up and looked down at my chest but everything seemed to be in order. Rather concerned, I

picked up my shirt and made my way home. Mum almost screamed as I walked through the shop and she asked me how I'd got myself into this condition. Not understanding, I looked down at my chest again and there in the cool shade of the shop, my predicament became clear. My chest was a bright, almost glowing red. My face had suddenly become a ball of flame and to make matters worse, my upper body had decided to join in too. Mum rushed me through to the living room and started applying copious amounts of calamine lotion with handfuls of cotton wool. I vowed never to fall asleep on the Park again.

Longbows.....

Asking me what I'd like for Christmas, I replied that I would like a real bow and arrow set. My mum and dad did me proud, for on Christmas morning, I took delivery of a great looking longbow and three arrows that could only have come from Redmayne and Todd's. Taller than myself, it stood about six feet in length and had a fancy red tassel swinging from the top end. I wasn't particularly fond of the tassel but hadn't got the heart to remove it. I played out on the empty street with it but not daring to shoot it horizontally, I fired the arrow vertically into the air where it promptly disappeared. I dashed to the safety afforded by the brickwork over the back gate trying to track the arrow's flight back to earth. It bounced to a landing some twenty feet away. Taking it into the back yard, I opened the toilet door and practiced firing at some squares of newspaper hanging on the door. Becoming a little more proficient with it, I occasionally ventured onto the Park to hone my skills as a bowman, whilst keeping a constant lookout in the direction of the Park Keepers hut. I was on there with Johnny H. one day who had brought along his home made bow and an arrow borrowed from me. We stood about twenty feet apart firing the arrows in each other's direction, aiming the arrows to land at our feet. I didn't see the arrow that hit me on the nose. Fortunately, the arrow must have been outside its effective range and glanced off the bridge my nose leaving it pouring with blood. We made our way back to the shop and to a pair of horrified parents when we told of what had happened. Mum repaired my nose with some hot water, Dettol, and a plaster. Dad removed the bow to somewhere that was beyond my capabilities to find. I never saw it again.



The Oval.

The Oval and other stories.....

We were all good swimmers. We'd visit the Victoria Baths at least five times a week, sometimes more. There were three pools at the Baths. One was known as The Oval, on account of its shape. There was also a 'women' pool, we didn't see the insides of this very often although we did peep through its doors occasionally.

Finally, there was the Exhibition Pool, a rather grand affair that cost you more to swim its waters. On Thursday evenings, the Exhibition pool was boarded over and Wrestling events were staged. My dad occasionally took me and my brother to see these and we'd sit in the gallery seats shouting encouragement to our favourite wrestlers. I must relate that I did not see much however as the smoke laden atmosphere caused my eyes to sting and stream throughout the whole evening's entertainment. There was also a wash house, where our mums used to do the weekly wash. This was a very noisy and steamy room where conversations were held at the tops of ones voices. There was also a bath house where, for a small fee, you would get a towel, a small tablet of soap and the use of a bath cubicle.

The duet.....

There is something about bathrooms which compels me to sing. It has always been so. Thus it was on one of my weekly visits to the bath house. Sitting in a great porcelain bath with steam rising all around, I began a version of 'Shenandoah'

Entering the second verse, I sang.....

*"T'was six long years, since last I saw her"*

Someone joined in.

*"Far away, you rolling River"*

Feeling a little embarrassed, I stopped singing.

*"Carry on"* called out a voice.

We continued in unison.

*"Sent me sailing across the water". "Away, I'm bound to go"*

*"Cross the wide Missouri"*

I never did discover the identity of my singing partner.

The Oval was where we spent most of our time however. It was here that we learned to swim, dive, and fight imaginary crocodiles with home made Bowie Knives. There was a diving platform at the deep end where you could enter the water from three different heights. It took quite a while to conquer these for both jumping and diving. We'd stand there, rocking backwards and forwards and looking down into the water until the nerve came that allowed you to throw yourself off. Once done however, you became accomplished. Diving was something that had to be handled with care, as too steep a dive would find you swimming back to retrieve your trunks which had been removed by the power of your dive. This happened to us all at some time or other. Pat H's maiden jump from the top board was a memorable event as his trunks split on the way down. He finished off the rest of the session swimming in his underpants. I think our three pence bought us a half hours swimming, this was negotiable though.

On entering the Oval, the pool attendant ushered us to a cubicle in which to change into our trunks. He would then time our half hour from this point. Wishing to extend our swimming period however was a simple matter of moving your clothes to a cubicle further along the row, with someone keeping an eye on the attendant and giving the appropriate gestures. This manoeuvre was carried out countless times.

It has to be said that the attendant was wise to a lot of our tricks and could counteract our intentions with ploys of his own. On wanting to remove someone at the end of their swimming period, the attendant would blow his whistle and bang on the appropriate cubicle door signalling an end to the session. Of course, this was often ignored, and left the attendant with but one option. The whistle was blown again and the offender would see an item of his clothing dangling on the end of a long pole that the attendant had fed out over the water. This did tend to guarantee a quick exit from the pool, and likewise, was a manoeuvre that was carried out many times. In all fairness though, depending on the numbers in the pool, your three pence could buy you an hour's swimming, sometimes even more. On the way out of the pool there was a machine on the wall, where for the price of one penny, and a push of a button, you would get a splodge of Brillcream delivered into your hand. This was rubbed into the hair and combed in the fashion of the day. We'd then emerge from the baths with heads of shiny slicked back hair.

Inner tubes.....

Old car inner tubes were a much sought after swimming accessory. An inflated tube could be put to many uses. Stretching them between your lower back and extended feet turned them into workable canoes. The centre of one could provide a good bulls eye to aim for when jumping or diving from the platforms. You had to ensure that the tube was the right way round for this activity, as an



error here would leave you with a nasty graze supplied by the valve as you passed your way through.

#### Certificates.....

The Oval was the source of many swimming certificates. The majority being for differing levels of life saving. I loved training for these as it got me down to the baths more often. I was also allowed to skip lessons on hot afternoons in order to practice life saving and resuscitation techniques in the school yard. Examination days required you to swim forty laps of the Oval, fully clothed, before rescuing a volunteer 'drownee' from the centre of the pool.

#### A life saved.....

Johnny H. and I were fishing on the steps of the Trent. The Bridge was about a quarter of a mile to our left. We were chatting away when this young lad came running up to us shouting something incomprehensible and pointing behind him. His younger sister had fell into the Trent and was rolling over in the water. Being the nearer, I ran towards the girl and lowered myself into the water, I scooped her up and passed her to a man who had run down to assist. The man walked off with the girl and her brother leaving me to clamber out. Obviously, my saturated state put an end to our fishing so we packed away to make our way home, collecting a couple of "*Well done lad* " comments along the way. At the bus stop, and because of my condition, the conductor refused me access to the bus. Johnny steamed in informing the conductor of the derring-do's he'd just witnessed, emphasising them with overstated gesticulations. This had the desired effect however and I was allowed on the bus with a proviso that I wasn't to sit down.



The Exhibition Pool.

Return to the Baths.....

Once a year, the school would hold a swimming gala. These were held in the Exhibition Pool. Here, we would pit our swimming skills against each other. I was never much of a scholar but my prowess in the water made me much sought after at gala time. This was not so much because of my speed in the races, but more because of my ability to enter the water from heights that others would baulk at. Diving was my forte. Gala training sessions would find teachers asking me to perform swallow dives, jackknife's and backflips which I rarely refused. I was entered for the races but never achieved the correct co-ordination between arms and legs when it came to doing the crawl. I would do slightly better in the breast stroke events, but even then, in the fervour of trying to win my race, I could find myself crossing over and swimming in a competitors lane whilst people on the sides would be screaming at me to get back. Asking me to dive however, was a different matter. The top of a diving board was where I was best suited. On non Gala days when swimming in the Exhibition Pool, the top board was often refused, preferring to make my way up some stairs and launching myself into the water from the balustrade that surrounded the spectators gallery. This could only be achieved when the pool attendant's attention was distracted however.

I was once disqualified in one event. The aim was to see how many items could be retrieved from the floor of the pool whilst holding a single breath. Others before me surfaced from their dive and threw their collections on to the side of the pool to be counted by the referee. Came my turn, I sucked in a lungful of air and launched myself at the first target. The collectable items would occupy a good proportion of the pool's floor and I made my way from one to the next until my hands were full.

Still having much of my single breath at my disposal, I made up my mind and made my way to another item. After surfacing, I threw my handfuls of items on to the side of the pool and carefully clambered out. Whilst the referee was doing the count, I removed the rest of the items from my trunks and dropped these at his feet to be included in the count. I was disqualified. I thought it most unfair.

Oops.....

The Oval was packed. We were all having a fine old time, when the pool attendant suddenly blew his whistle and ordered everyone from the pool. We clambered out and went to our cubicle wondering what had happened. With the pool being empty, all became clear. Everyone there noticed the three 'swimmers' that continued to bob around in the water. Walking down both sides of the pool, the attendant ordered everyone to remove their trunks and place them over the cubicle doors. He then made another circuit to inspect these for any incriminating evidence. Whilst this was being carried out, another attendant entered with a large fishing net and scooped up the 'swimmers'. With the guilty party not being discovered, we were allowed back into the water a short time later.

PS.

I feel compelled to add that it certainly was not one of us.

There were other swimming venues available to us in those days. These were mainly situated at different points along the River Trent. Hot Sundays would invariably find one of us jumping off the Suspension Bridge, whilst others swam around in its shade. Another favoured place was opposite the Power Station at Wilford. It was here that we found dozens of crusted rifle bullets and empty cartridge cases lying in its shallow water. We also had swimming spots at Stoke Bardolph and Colwick but nothing worth reporting happened here.

Late night Poker schools.....

Weekends were the time the Poker players got together. Quite often, these would last well into the night. We always played at Dennis's house after his parents had retired for the night. We sat around the kitchen table, a battered deck of cards was produced and the cards would be dealt. Money would be riding on this evening's activities. We gambled our money at; Poker, Solo, Three Card Brag, and a nerve jangling game called Shoot. Once, during an all night session, Dennis surprised us by saying that he was going to bed and turned us out onto the street. There being nothing else to do, we wandered the deserted streets until we were approached by two policemen who wanted to know what we were up to. Johnny H. immediately owned up to our evening of illegal activity and we inwardly groaned and waited the arrival of a Black Maria. The policeman however, told us that he occasionally enjoyed a game of poker and sent us on our way. We spent the rest of the night sat in Johnny F's outside toilet until it was late enough and light enough to make our way home.

Basford and Bulwell.....

We all had a stint at train spotting. Weekends would find us purchasing Penny platform tickets and charging about the platforms to meet the next incoming train. The more enthusiastic among us bought special publications containing

the numbers of every train in the land. From this, it was simply a matter of finding the number before ticking it off. Sometimes, we would combine this hobby with a train ride. For a few pence, you could catch one of many trains and take a ride to Basford and Bulwell Station. On arrival at this station, we would then make the return journey back to Nottingham. This provided a perfect background to our number collecting activities. Other more nefarious activities were planned if we could talk any of Salford Street's fairer sex into accompanying us. This did happen occasionally but it must be said, our nefarious intentions always remained unrealised.

#### The Pleasure Park.....

This was a themed recreation area by the side of the River Trent. Representing a touch of the seaside, sand had been imported and laid at the rivers edge to create a beach where toddlers could build sand castles. To the rear of the beach stood wooden arcades. In here, you could gamble on many penny machines, have your fortune told or partake in many dioramas designed to curdle the blood. There were two ways of having your fortune told. One of these was a glass cabinet in which a fortune teller is seated. She is staring intently into a crystal ball. On the insertion of a penny, the lady comes alive and passes her hands over the crystal ball and delivers a card bearing your fortune into a slot below. The second machine is literally a hands on affair. You have to place your hand upon rows of studs and after delivering your penny, the studs rise and fall slightly thereby reading your fortune. Similarly, a card is delivered into a slot below. The more observant noticed that the cards from both machines were identical in size and wording. If you so wished, you could visit the Barber's shop belonging to Sweeney Todd. In the chair sits Sweeney's victim. On paying your Penny, Sweeney bends over the victim and suddenly, the chair tips backwards and the victim is nowhere to be seen. The light goes out ready for the next Penny. Another investment takes you to the beheading of Charles 2nd. The King is kneeling at the block, the headsman's axe falls. The light goes out just prior to the bloody bit.

#### Trent Lane.....

The Pleasure Park stood at the end of Trent Lane. This was an interminably long lane that had to be negotiated with every trip to and from the Park. It was after one of our visits and we were about half way along its length when we saw it. As one, we pounced, rolling and scuffling in the heat and the dust to be the first to set hands upon it. I came out of the scrum clutching the one pound note. An excited debate took place suggesting that the prize be equally divided amongst us. Five shillings each was still a considerable sum of money, which we each received after my mum had changed it in the shop's till. There was a sale at Mr. and Mrs. S's shop and my five bob bought me a working model of a slot machine.

The ferry and the fish....

A ferry stood at the side of the Pleasure Park. For a few pence, the ferryman would row you across the Trent to a landing area directly opposite. I used it once. I was having a day's fishing with my dad and having no luck on this side of the river, I scrounged the fare and took the ferry to the opposite bank. I cast my line in close by and gave my dad a wave. I ought to mention at this point, that my foray into the angling world was a rather recent affair, and up to now I had yet to catch my first fish. I caught it that day. The float disappeared and in a state of pure panic, I snatched at my rod. The float sailed high into the air bringing with it a small Gudgeon. Still panic stricken, I called across the river to seek my dad's assistance in removing the fish from the hook. Dad called back telling me to do exactly how he taught me, but I found that I'd forgotten everything he taught me. Fortunately, a couple were sitting on the bank close by and witnessing my distressed state, a young man came to my assistance and removed the fish from the hook. I thanked him and hastily took the ferry back to my dad.

Goose fair.....

Another eagerly awaited event was the arrival of Goose Fair. Starting at noon, it ran for three days. I recall the school's giving us the Friday off, also providing us with vouchers for free rides. It was a long walk from Robin Hood Street to the fair. The quickest route was by way of Alfred Street South, Alfred Street Central, and Alfred Street North from where it was but a short walk down to the fair. Our money and vouchers would run out very quickly and we then faced the long trek back home.

Back home, I would deliberately mope about with a long face, having 'nothing to do' until mum or dad got the message and gave me another five bob. Upon receipt of this, I would happily make the long journey again. Goose fair was also the occasion for my mum to make trays full of toffee apples which proved very popular with the customers.

On the Sunday's following each Goose Fair, the gang would rise early and make the trek again. This time, for reasons of finding any money that had been dropped over the previous three days. We would form ourselves into a line and walk over the whole area occupied by the fair, which had mysteriously disappeared in the night. All proceeds from this venture were by mutual agreement shared by the searchers. Sometimes, it proved quite profitable given the number of other gangs having the same intentions.

Assorted Sweethearts.....

I was pretty fortunate in having a few sweethearts. My very first came about at the age of seven when I was sort of adopted shortly after moving to Robin Hood Street. She then let it be known to all and sundry that we were an item, without any consultations with me. Hasty enquiries about this girl produced descriptions of her appearance along with the added information that she could

'wrestle' any boy to the ground. Hoping to avoid the necessity of having to prove myself in this manner, I decided to let the adoption stand. My second came about at Bath Street School by giving my daily apple to a girl in my class. This had the effect of sealing our relationship and it wasn't long before our initials started appearing in chalked hearts scrawled in various parts of the playground. I once had two sweethearts at the same time and, rather foolishly, invited them both to the New Empress Saturday morning matinee. Having arranged to meet them both inside, I spent a frantic few minutes locating them before dividing my time between the two of them and the rest of the gang. My first kiss was enjoyed one night on an unkempt cemetery on Bath Street. The place was strongly rumoured to be haunted and the gang spent many a night there ghost hunting. Tonight however, served a different purpose. With my back resting against a large gravestone, I gave it my all. It has to be said though, it was a hasty fumbled affair with both parties being glad when it was all over. Perhaps the fact that it was pouring with rain and blowing a gale had something to do with it.

Smog.....

We had some beautiful pea-souper fogs back in the forty's. Apart from these, we also had to contend with smog. This was similar to fog but smog smelt very unpleasant and had people scurrying about with handkerchiefs pressed to their faces. This never bothered us though. We even turned it to our advantage. We would gather under a street lamp, they were still the gas lit type on Salford Street, or stand in the dim illumination that came through the windows of the Colin Campbell pub. There would be very little to be seen. Even the street lamps had difficulty penetrating the smog. There was however, one anomaly. The fog, or smog, would magnify the sounds of footsteps, footsteps that we knew would soon be needing our help. It was simply a matter of asking someone if they were alright. The occasional one might answer that they were trying to find Lowdham Street, or Guy's Terrace or whatever and off we would go. We didn't need any visual aids to guide us, we travelled by instinct taking our passengers to where they wanted to be. Quite often, we would be reimbursed for our trouble which was exactly what we were hoping for. We would then unerringly make our way back to the Colin to compare notes and takings.

Coal and Coal holes.....

Much of the smog's polluting effects were caused by the chimney's of the day. Smokeless fuels were something for the future. Coal was the mainstay for heating your home. Your coal order would arrive in one hundredweight sacks, either by flat back truck or horse and cart, depending on your supplier. In either case, your coal would be delivered by two coal blackened leather apron wearing men. The sacks of coal were emptied onto the pavement at the side of your coal hole. All the dwellings of the area had cellars and all the cellars had

coal holes. A coal hole was the given name to an iron grille that allowed access from the pavement into your cellar. The grille would be opened from below and armed with a shovel, our dad's (or us) would shovel the coal into the cellar. The area would then be swept clean, the sweepings ending up in the cellar also.

Chimney fires.....

Coal not only had the propensity to pollute the atmosphere, it also polluted chimneys in the form of soot. Because of this, it was necessary to have your chimney swept regularly. Failure to do this could result in some pretty spectacular chimney fires that entertained spectators whilst others knocked on your door to inform you that your chimney was on fire. As the fire was confined to the chimney, there was little you could do apart from dampening down the fire with handfuls of salt.

Most chimney fires burnt themselves out, although the more serious ones could bring down your chimney stack or require the local Fire Brigade to bring it under control.

Buried treasure....

We were playing on the Victoria Park one morning. We had gone to bury some treasure, which consisted of a small brooch that I had scrounged from my mum. The brooch took the form of a single masted ship, which to our eyes, was very reminiscent of a pirate ship. We dug a small hole and solemnly placed the brooch at the bottom before filling it in. We then drew a map utilising trees and carefully counted paces in order to return at a later date to recover our treasure from the area marked with a cross. PS must return one day.

Polly B.....

Polly was a recluse. She lived opposite my mum's shop on Salford Street. Because she was never seen, rumours abound. She was a witch, she was a ghost. She would never respond to our spirit tapping activities. The ghost part of the rumour was allayed one day when she suddenly appeared on her doorstep with a tumbler in her hand. The tumbler was full of urine and she was remarking on its clarity to anyone passing by. The tumbler stood in her window for the next three days before disappearing, along with Polly, back into obscurity.

Another, almost forgotten, sledging story.....

Lamartine Street began at Alfred Street South and continued past houses to The Lord Belper pub. Crossing over Robin Hood Street it went on its way, crossing over Hawkridge Street. From here it rose quite steeply until it reached its highest point where it then fell away, very steeply, until it reached St. Ann's Well Road. This was an ideal sledging venue although not without its risks. The risk was that St. Ann's Well Road was normally busy with traffic and the sledges would have to pass over this before terminating their runs on Curzon Street

opposite. We normally confined our sledging to night times when the traffic would be lighter. Even so, there was always guards posted at the junction of Lamartine Street and St. Ann's Well Road, who, with a system of shouts and hand signals, gave the go ahead to the next batch of riders. It was still a risky business however and the occasional near miss certainly took place.

#### Portsmouth.....

There were about twenty five of us on the bus. We had been invited to be guests of The Royal Navy at Portsmouth's Naval Base. The trip was for three days and we would be staying on the former royal yacht the HMS Albert and Victoria and that we would be sleeping in hammocks. We were also warned to be on our best behaviour.... or else. The trip to Portsmouth lasted for most of the day and on arrival we were delighted to find the Albert and Victoria at anchor in mid stream. Before boarding however, we were ushered off to have a meal after which, we attended a cinema showing films about the history of The Royal Navy. It was still light when we returned to the ship and illusions were shattered upon discovering that the tide had turned leaving the Albert and Victoria stranded and supported by huge blocks of wood. Once on board, we were then introduced to the Captain, and all hopes of having a good time deserted us. He looked rather like Brian Blessed with an attitude problem. He stood before us and gave us a stern lecture upon where we were allowed, and not allowed, to go on the ship. Much of these instructions were lost upon us though as we were fascinated with what he was doing with some string he was carrying. At the beginning of the lecture, he appeared to be fiddling with this string, by the end however, he was tossing a perfectly formed string cricket ball from hand to hand. He then took us below decks to be given instruction on how to enter your hammock. With deft movements born only from years at sea, the Captain took a firm hold of some beams at the level of his head and hoisted himself from the deck and into a hammock, telling us that was all there was to it. He also told us that 'light's out' would be happening very shortly and with there being no toilets on this deck, anyone wanting to go had to go now as we would be locked in later and unable to go. To reassure us, he told us an Officer of the Deck would be on duty all night to take care of any needs, but then informed us that this Officer did not take kindly to being woken up. I think this was an attempt at levity but if so, it was entirely lost upon us. Of course, it had to happen. After a great deal of trial and error, we were all gently swaying to and fro in our surprisingly comfortable beds. Out of the darkness, an unrecognised voice informed us that he was dying for a p-one-double five. A sympathetic voice from somewhere else helpfully suggested using the nearest porthole. This must have satisfied voice number one for the sound of a porthole buckle could be heard being unscrewed. Through the night, this sound repeated itself a number of times.



#### Shark attack.....

We were all out on deck, doing nothing in particular when a cry of abject horror broke out from someone at the side of the ship. We ran over and followed the direction of the pointed finger looking for the shark that had caused the outcry. The still alarmed youth assured us that it was definitely a shark he had seen circling the ship. We took up positions on both sides of the ship, waiting another appearance. A few moments later, the shark reappeared and was met by a hail of heavy chain links that were scattered about the deck. We reported the sighting to our teacher at the first opportunity only to be told that our attacker had been nothing more than a friendly porpoise. We didn't tell him about the chain links.

#### Heads.....

A visit to the toilet was an experience. I enquired where these were and was told that there were no toilets on the ship. There were however, the 'heads' and this was where I was directed. I entered a longish room, along one side was a run of two steps. On the top of these steps was another set at a higher level. Along the top of this step was a series of holes, some of which, were occupied by chatting youths. Fortunately, I had a comic with me so I was spared any social interchange.

#### Angling times.....

We were all keen anglers. With fishing rods and home made tackle boxes, we'd visit fishing spots along the River Trent. Other venues included Ironmonger's Pond at Wilford, and other ponds at Attenborough, Colwick and Farndon. If the fish were biting, all well and good. If not, well, there were other river bank diversions. Hot days would find us digging holes in the hopes of finding a few worms. Cold days could also find us digging holes in which to light a fire to keep warm. Our bait usually consisted of a half pint of maggots we'd purchased from Tom Watson's the day before. Alternative baits consisted of worms, bread, cheese, and on one occasion jelly babies, which if I remember correctly did produce results. One occasion at Stoke Bardolph saw Johnny H. taking ill and lying down upon the bank until our consciences stirred us enough to decide it was time to get him home. I remember he was quite poorly for a while.

#### In his Majesties Service.....

Our Science teacher, by act of fate, was also the Commanding Officer of a local Army Cadet Force. He recruited three of the gang into His Majesties Service. Our first duty was to gather at the Drill Hall on Derby Road to be kitted out with our uniforms. This done, we then went home to fit into them as best we could. I remember proudly parading up and down in front of my parents, trying to ignore dad's sniggering and the tear in mum's eye. Our basic training went pretty well, considering our Corporal's intense hatred of us. We had our headquarters in a wooden barrack room building in the grounds of the Jesse

Boot School in Bakersfield. Every Sunday morning would find us falling in, falling out, right dressing and marching up and down to the tune of our Corporal's strident voice. I cannot now recall his name, or indeed, repeat the name we had for him. After the square bashing, we'd repair to the barracks for a well earned cup of tea. Our science teacher/lieutenant would then deliver a lecture based on some military matter, or teach us to strip and reassemble a Bren Gun. On one occasion, we entered the barracks to find a Lee Enfield Rifle lying on the snooker table. We knew it was out of bounds to us but some could not resist running an admiring finger over its length. The Lieutenant and Corporal emerged from an office and called the fall in. After roll call, the Lieutenant gave a lecture based on careless behaviour with, and around, weapons. He said he had left the Rifle there by intention, as a test of our intelligence. He picked it up with one hand and rested the butt on the snooker table, its business end pointing towards the ceiling. He then continued with his talk relating to a previous occasion when certain others had failed his intelligence test and..... he squeezed the trigger. We all shot out of our skins at the report that filled the hut. The concussion from the blank brought down a huge quantity of whitewash from the ceiling which covered our heads and shoulders. Lieutenant C. then congratulated us on passing his test and said that as a reward, we would be live round firing the coming weekend.

Live round firing.....

This was why I joined up. We gathered in the Market Square the following Sunday and were brought to attention. Lt. C. said we would be marching to the Drill Hall and to remember that we were part of His Majesties Forces and to act accordingly. With chests out and stomachs in, we set out as one at our Corporal's command. Out of the Square and up Derby Road we marched. At the Drill Hall, we were taken downstairs to an underground Rifle Range. At intervals along one end of the range lay six long boxes, each topped with cocoa matting. At the other end hung six paper targets. On the top of each box lay a point 22 rifle and at the side of each box stood a soldier. We were given instructions on rifle range procedure and led out six at a time to the boxes. This was what I'd waited all my life for. At my tutor's instruction, I lay down on my box and picked up my rifle. My tutor then slapped the rifle down telling me to wait for it. He then went to great lengths telling me how to line up the sights with the target and, joy of joy's, placed five rounds of live ammunition in front of me. With blood pounding in my ears, I opened the breech and slid in the first cartridge. My target, for some reason, had now removed itself to the furthest distance of my range of vision, but I was too delirious to care. I hit the target five times.

Night manoeuvres.....

We went on midnight manoeuvres once. We marched up to Colwick Woods where the manoeuvres were to take place. We were marched to a large grassy

area that had an open shelter at its centre, where visitors could sit on sunny days. By the light of the Moon and a very large torch, we were given instructions on stealth tactics that we would soon be putting into practice. The Lieutenant and Corporal were to man the 'outpost' with the torch and we were to scatter into the surrounding darkness. Upon receiving three flashes from the torch, we were then to return by stealth to take the outpost without the torchlight falling upon us. *"No problem"* I thought. In my eagerness to be swallowed up by the darkness, it wasn't long before I discovered I was totally alone. I put out a few whispered requests to left and right hoping to hear a familiar voice, but to no avail. Fear took hold of me. This did not last long however as I saw the signal and dropped to the ground to begin my return. Hugging the ground, to take advantage of all the hollows, I began my return. The searchlight swung slowly back and forth across the open ground causing me to freeze now and then. I waited a while before I moved off. Occasionally, the Corporal's voice would ring out as his light picked out some attackers. I waited a while before starting off again, trying to judge my movements to the timing of his torch. The light suddenly swung in my direction and I froze yet again. The light moved on, picking out more attackers. I lay there considering making my next move, and thinking also that there could not be many attackers left. This made me feel excited for it could mean that I would be taking the outpost single handed. I gave it another ten minutes. I then offered up a prayer to the God's of war, and it was when I began inching my way the last few yards, that I heard the sound of marching along Greenwood Road.

#### The Enemy.....

I was still in uniform and talking to Johnny H. out on the street, when one of the elders of Bulldog Entry happened along. Taking one look at me, he burst out laughing and said that he did not know what the world was coming to. He didn't actually say that but I think you take my point. Grossly offended at his tirade, I answered in kind telling him where to go and offering instruction on how to get there.

He went away leaving Johnny laughing fit to burst, and leaving me, gently pushing a probing tongue into the corner of my split lip.

#### Salutations.....

We were on the way to Colwick Woods again. We were instructed to meet there. The three of us were chatting away and almost missed the member of the Women's Royal Air Force coming from the other direction. As we passed each other, a heated debate took place as to whether she was carrying any insignia of rank, for if so, a salute would have been required from us. Due to the fact that no one had noticed, we decided to play it safe. We took an immediate left turn and at the double, we raced for the next left turn. Still at the double, we headed for the next turning left. Just before the next left turn, we stopped and peeked

around the corner to see the WRAF heading in our direction. A silent call to attention was given and in step, we rounded the corner and executed the finest salute ever to have graced the annals of military protocol.

The Ambush.....

We were split into two groups. Lt. C marched his group out of sight, leaving the Corporal to explain what was about to happen. He said we were about to execute a perfect ambush situation and ordered us to hide ourselves nearby. The rest of my squad quickly disappeared into various hiding places, leaving me rather hesitantly searching out mine. The Corporal called over asking me what the hold up was and I told him I was selecting my spot. This did not satisfy the Corporal and he ordered me to hide myself under a nearby holly bush. Now, the holly bush was about fifteen feet tall and was a perfect cone of holly from base to apex, not allowing any space beneath it. I told him in no uncertain terms to get knotted whereupon he went quite red and advanced towards me with the intention of (I thought) killing me. Instead, he snatched my rifle and reversing it, he then beat the bottom of the bush until a small space had been cleared. He then rather sarcastically asked me if I would mind occupying the space that he'd made. I was still non to happy about this but followed his instructions taking great care to enter my hiding place. I then made myself as comfortable as possible and waited. The ambush was a great success and took Lt. C. and his squad totally by surprise. From my hiding place, I heard the sound of war cries as my squad rushed from cover to surround the captives. I took no part in this victory however, as it took me longer to extricate myself from my hiding place than it took to enter it.



A Gat Air pistol.

Gat's Webley's and Diana's.....

In hindsight, it makes me shudder to even think about it. As with most youngsters of the day, we all wanted to own an air gun and this we did. Air guns were readily available to those who could afford them. There were legal restrictions regarding their use but these were ignored for the most part. The most popular pistol, and the most expensive was the point 177 calibre Webley. There was also a much cheaper Gat, this was also a 177 and was the one I

became familiar with. I didn't buy it, I acquired on indefinite loan after one of the gang had upgraded to a Webley. I was determined to become proficient with it. I was fortunate in a sense in that I had my own shooting gallery, this was situated at the end of the back yard of the Colin Campbell pub. The back yard ended with a side wall of the garage which contained a small window aperture and it was through this that I practiced my shooting skills. To cock the piece, you had to press the end of the barrel against any wall. The barrel then withdrew into an outer cover and locked into place. From the rear of the barrel projected the firing pin. This was a small push rod attached to a spirally threaded knob. To load the piece was a matter of unscrewing the knob and placing a pellet into the rear of the barrel and pushing it home with the push rod and screwing it in. You were now locked and loaded. (hope I've explained that satisfactorily)

The Gat was an awkward thing with a kick like a mule. The ammunition came in the form of lead waisted pellets. The waist on these were to guarantee accuracy. It took many weeks of practice to become proficient. I took a handful of beer bottle tops and scattered them across the floor of the garage. The garage did not contain any cars, and firing through the window I adjusted my aim until the tops began to leap into the air. As said, this took many weeks to achieve. Alternative targets were beer mats pegged to the washing line.

Don't try this at home .....

Dramatic effects could be obtained if you placed a piece of a head of a match into the front end of the barrel. On firing the pistol, the pellet would ignite the match giving an impressive muzzle flash that looked great in the dark.

The Hunting Party.....

There was myself, DI, JH, and JF in the hunting party. We had decided to keep things legal by taking a trip along the banks of the Grantham Canal. The Assistant Chief Constable of Nottingham and his party had similar plans that day and our parties bumped into each other. Our weaponry, I recall, consisted of two air pistols, an air rifle, and a four ten gauge shot gun. I dropped my Gat into my raincoat pocket and prepared to bluff it out but handed it over a little later.

With our names, addresses, and weapons confiscated, we were sent home with instructions to report to West Bridgford Police Station later in the day. We made our way to the Station and were ushered into an unoccupied office and told to wait. On a table nearby lay our weapons, each one having a swing label attached to it. We feared the worse. A plain clothed officer entered the room and sat behind a desk studying us. Johnny H was quite indifferent to all that was happening around him and adopted a casual stance with his knuckles resting on the officers desk. This seemed to upset the officer who told John to stand up straight in no uncertain terms.

He then gave us a severe telling off, informing us of the punishment he could bring about if we were ever caught at it again. Suitably chastised, he sent us on our way.

Strangely, our weapons were returned to us.

The new rifle.....

We all envied it. Dennis had purchased a brand new point 22 air rifle. It was passed around and we all took turns in squinting down the sights and suchlike. We couldn't fire it as we were indoors at the time. However, being responsible people, it was decided that no real harm would be done if we utilised pellets of chewed up newspaper. This proved to be an excellent form of indoors ammunition.

Little soggy bullets were then shot this way and that across the bedroom. My upper arm unfortunately got in the way of one of these and I carry a small reminder of that encounter to this day.

It gets worse.....

Then there was a time that one of us obtained a small five shot pistol and a few rounds of cartridges. It was thought to be a starting pistol.

However, being responsible people, it was decided that no real harm would be done if we removed the powder from the bullets. With a pair of pliers and a lot of patience, we carefully removed the bullets from the casings and tipped out the powder. The bullets were then reinserted and tapped into the casings. We only shot one when it was discovered that even with the reduced power, the impact was still harsh enough to leave a largish crater in the plaster on the bedroom wall.

Sausage skins and sawdust.....

I was about twelve or thirteen when I first sought employment. I took over from John F. who worked as a butchers delivery boy. The butcher was an ex World War Two fighter pilot who had been heavily scarred about the face during his experiences in the war. This gave him the air of a true hero and I admired him greatly. I settled down to the life of a delivery boy and stayed with him until leaving school. I worked five mornings a week, four of them before going to school. For this, I was paid the princely sum of twelve shillings and sixpence per week. This was further enhanced by a goodly amount of tips from my customers. My working week began at seven thirty am where I would carry out various duties. These would include sweeping the floors and scattering fresh sawdust upon them. I would also assist Butch in the making of sausages, my roll being to mince the meat before handing over to him. With a stainless steel bowl full of my minced meat, 'Butch' would then add to this a plentiful supply of breadcrumbs and a little salt. This done, he would then knead the mixture until he was satisfied. Returning to the mincer again (after being thoroughly cleansed by myself) he would then place a spout over the end

of the machine over which, he placed the sausage skin. Butch would then feed the mixture through again producing the longest sausage I had ever seen. I could only stand and admire at the speed in which he turned this sausage into the links that we are familiar with today. In spite of this, I still enjoy sausages.

Geronimo.....

One of my favourite jobs was obtaining fresh supplies of sawdust. Butch would supply me with a sack and one shilling and sixpence and send me to a joinery and carpenters firm on Lamartine Street. After handing over the money, a man took me to the rear of the workshop and opened up a large trapdoor in the floor. A ladder led down from the trapdoor, its lower end disappearing into a sea of sawdust. Leaving me to fill the sack, the man returned to his duties. As soon as he had left the room, a silent "*Geronimo*" left my lips as I launched myself and my sack into the void and the welcoming bed of sawdust. Filling the sack with as much sawdust as it would carry, I then struggled to the top of the ladder and back into the workshop. With no one around, I placed my sack against a wall and did another leap ( just for luck ) before making my way back to the shop.

Deliveries.....

The delivery bike was a very heavy cast iron affair. It had a small front wheel, over which, sat the basket carrier. The rear wheel was a normal sized one. On delivery days, I would place newspaper covered bundles into a large wicker basket. The bundles had the names of the customers pencilled on them.

Manor Street and monkeys.....

Saturday was the busiest delivery day. My deliveries covered a wide area making it necessary for me to divide my customers into three different rounds. It was on Manor Street when my bike came to a sudden stop. Looking down, I was appalled to see that the rear inner tube had come adrift and wrapped itself around the hub. There being nothing else I could do, I placed my left arm through the crossbar and hoisted the whole of the rear end onto my shoulder before making the half mile trek back to the shop. With the day being very hot, and my bike being very heavy, it was necessary to make several stops before arriving in a state of near collapse. Fortunately, it was my last delivery of the day and Butch had my bike repaired and ready for my next shift. My Saturday morning also took me to a Doctor's residence on Shakespeare Street in the centre of town. Mum was never too happy about this and made me promise not to ride the bike in heavy traffic. This was ok by me as I never did that anyway, preferring to walk alongside my bike to make the delivery. I was well versed with all the short cuts the town had to offer, so it never took long. I always had to deliver the Doctor's order by the back entrance which meant navigating my bike down a narrow alleyway containing the back gates to many different properties. At the rear of the property opposite the Doctor's was a large glass

lean to. The inside of the glass was lined with chicken coop wire and this was the home of three small monkeys. They looked very lively as they swung this way and that in their strange surroundings. I would often spend a few minutes pulling faces at them across the alleyway.

Account 's department.....

Saturday's were the days that I had to collect cash from the customers. I was supplied with a cash bag and a note book containing the names and the amounts I was to collect. At the end of my busy morning, I returned with my bag of cash and upended it on my bosses counter. Butch then carried out a cross check between the note book and my cash returns. These were always tense times for me, as the conditions of my employment clearly stated that any discrepancy between book and cash returns would be taken from my wages, and twelve shillings and six pence a week did not leave much room for error. Fortunately, I never did get it wrong although the occasional near miss would occur. At these times, Butch followed a strict procedure. Informing me of the amount of discrepancy, he would end with the words "*where is it?*" Not knowing what to say, I remained silent, and as an afterthought I would pick up the empty cash bag and closely inspect the interior. Nothing forthcoming from me would cause Butch to do a re-check of the accounts in which 'his' error then became apparent. On this occasion, I received a large pork pie on top of my twelve and six.

Debt collection.....

I hated doing this, in fact, it was very scary. Every Saturday, without fail, Butch would send me round to Mrs. S's address with instructions to ask her to pay something off of the account that was owed. This sounded simple enough but Mrs S. was the kind of woman who did not take kindly to butcher's boys asking her for money. It was with some trepidation that I tapped upon her door. The outcome was always the same. The door would swing open and she'd stand there glaring malevolently at the cowering debt collector as he delivered his message. After hearing me out, she then told me where to go and ordered me to take the butcher along also. Mrs. S was not a pleasant woman. I believe my mum had debt issues with her, but at least, my mum fought her own battles. Butch on the other hand, was quite honest with me. He said he only sent me because he was scared to death of her

The Festival of Britain.....

The Festival was advertised long before the event took place. I was in the shop when Butch was showing some customers a colourful chalk plaque bearing the symbol of the festival. They all said it was very nice, and then turning to me, he asked me if I would like to take it home. Quite flattered at his generous offer, I said I would love to. He charged me five bob for it so I went home with only seven shillings and sixpence that weekend.



Saturday mornings were very busy. The shop would be full of customers as Butch went around supplying their requirements. He would also regale them with numerous risqué jokes which always caused raucous laughter to ring throughout the shop. Of course, I was far too young to understand any of his jokes. I did once commit one to memory and relayed it to my mum when I got home. Mum quickly smothered her mirth before telling me she didn't understand it either.



Shop and Pub owned by my parents at different times.

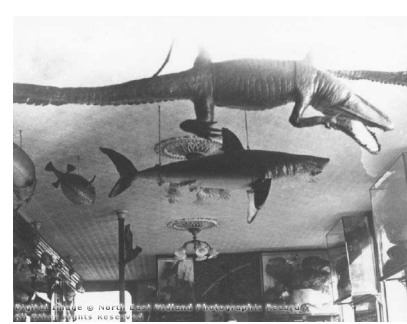
In September 1955, we tragically suffered the loss of Brenda to leukaemia. Mum suffered most of all, never really recovering from Brenda's death. Not being able to continue living at the shop but not wanting to leave the area, we sold the shop and took over the tenancy of the Sir Colin Campbell pub directly opposite. I'm not sure of the age of the pub but high up on the wall of an adjacent building was an old flaking sign informing that horses could be stabled there overnight. In those times, the pub was an inn containing any rooms. I know little of the history of the pub before our moving in but its crowning claim to fame was the fact that it was considered quite a museum in the early years of the twentieth century. Photographs and old artefacts stored in the topmost rooms attested to this. Rooms I took great pleasure in exploring. These artefacts were no longer on display but they were part of the inventory that went with the selling of the pub and thus became our property. The day of moving in was quite eventful. We were not allowed to close to permit us the time to make the transition from shop to pub. At 10am, with furniture being brought in the back way, my mum was in the bar serving customers whilst my dad was in a smoke filled boiler room trying to get the heating working. Suffice to say that in the end all worked out well and we settled down to our new life.

The hours of business.....

If my memory serves me well, the permitted hours of business was from 10am until 2pm lunch times, and from 4pm until 10pm in the evening. Sundays being a little different, the times being from 12 noon until 2pm and from 6pm until 10pm.

The Beer.....

The Colin was an 'Offilers' house. We sold the ales of the Derby based Offilers Brewery. We were the only pub in Nottingham to sell these ales, although I believe there was another establishment in Skegness on the east coast. Offilers ales were mostly found in the towns and villages of Derbyshire. Draught ales consisted of Mild and Bitter. These were still brewed in wood casks which were connected through a system of brass pipes to the beer pumps on the saloon bar. From here, dad would draw pints of Mild, Bitter, or half and half. More colloquial names for these ales could find you being asked for a pint of wallop, a pint of pigs ear, and on one occasion a pint of Oh be joyful!



Interior views of the Colin Campbell during its heyday as a museum. (Circa 1920)

Offilers produced their own bottled beer. I.P.A. (India Pale Ale) was the name given to the light ale, whilst the brown ale was simply known as Nut Brown Ale. We were allowed to sell the more propriety brands of Mackeson and Guinness. The only lager available were bottles of Carlsberg Lager for which, a tall glass was supplied. This was considered a ladies drink as no red blooded male of the day would be seen with one of these glasses before him.



My parents (seated left) and owners of the Sir Colin Campbell.

Celebratory photograph taken at the event of the Colin Campbell's winning of the Darts League Cup. (1957)

### Some Customers.....

#### Harry N.....

Harry was the local park keeper and on occasion, a gate keeper at the Notts. County Cricket Ground. Many are the times he'd chase the gang off of Victoria Park after the park's closing hours and many are the times he'd allowed my dad to slip into a cricket match when no one was looking.

#### 'Pop' B.....

Pop was the proprietor of a local sweet and tobacconist's shop. The same Pop who in earlier years we would enquire with fingers crossed, of any sweets "off ration"

#### Stan B.....

Local self employed window cleaner and official igniter of the annual bonfire.

#### Rose B.....

Stan's wife. Often participating in the weekend sing-alongs at the Colin.

#### Geoff G.....

Local wag and self proclaimed opera singer.

#### Tommy H.....

Salford Street resident.

### Dominoes again.....

Evenings would always find a domino school in operation. The players consisting of my dad, Harry N, Pop B, and Tommy H. They would play games

called 'Run Out' 'Fives and Threes' or a rather complicated game called 'Maltese Cross'. Gambling was illegal in those days albeit small stake flutters certainly took place. Each player would have a small pile of coins in front of him which would be hastily scooped up upon the arrival of any Policemen doing their rounds.

Pop's lighters.....

Pop B. was a constant source of amazement to all with his huge collection of cigarette lighters. Each night would find him displaying a different one. I recall one; a small round brass thing that had a half of a threepenny piece brazed onto each side of the casing. Another occasion saw him displaying, what he called, the world's first electronic lighter. This comprised of a small element of wire that glowed red hot as it was slid towards the petrol soaked wick. For some reason, the combustion was never immediate and the wick would smoke considerably before the flame appeared. This tended to hold up a domino game until ignition was achieved.

Harry's fingers.....

Harry had arthritic fingers which impeded his domino skills. He either had trouble in picking them up, or they would often fall from his fingers during the course of the game. Whichever, he took this very personally and holding up the recalcitrant fingers, he'd swear to have them cut off if they did not start to behave themselves.

Dad.....

Dad would often sit in to make up the numbers. This meant that he would constantly be up and down as the customers ordered their pint's. This would hold up proceedings somewhat.

The substitutes.....

The domino games always attracted a group of spectators, some of whom would 'sit in' when a player's toilet stop became necessary. I was sitting in for my dad on this occasion, when one of the spectators decided to take advantage of dad's absence. Addressing me, he said he would give me sixpence if I drew him a pint of bitter. I accepted telling him I would be delighted to do so before picking up some chalk and sketching a foaming pint of beer on the domino board. This caused considerable mirth among the players. I found it mildly embarrassing when the spectator insisted on my taking the sixpence.

Weekends.....

Weekends were a very busy time at the Colin. Apart from our regulars, we would also play host to weekend customers and those out on pub crawls. Mum and Dad hired a pub pianist and put on entertainment. The beer would flow and willing participants, egged on by the effects of mild intoxication, would regale everyone with song and verse. My dad would entertain everyone by singing a song about a Spaniard that stole his wife, much to mum's embarrassment. It was very popular and Dad was requested to sing it at most weekend sing-alongs. There was quite a lot of audience participation, and it went something like this.

A long introduction comes from George at the piano.

*"Quiet Please!"* someone calls out.

The bar room falls to a hush.

Dad begins.....

*"List to me, while I tell you of a Spaniard that blighted my life"*

*"List to me, while I tell you of the man who stole my future wife"*

*"T'was at the Bull fight where I met him"*

*"He gave us a daring display"*

*"But when I went out for some nuts and a....."*

Audience interrupts... *"Pickled onion"*

*"The dirty dog stole her away"*

*"Oh, no"*

Audience... *"Oh, no"*

*"Oh, no. But tonight I shall have my revenge"*

Audience... *"What will you dooooooooo?"*

*"If I catch Alfonso Spigoni the toreador, la la la"*

Audience... *"la la la"*

*"With one mighty swipe I will dislocate his Spanish jaw, la la la"*

Audience... *"la la la"*

*"I'll catch that bull fighter, I will"*

*"When I catch the blighter, the bounder I'll kill." "He shall die"*

Audience... *"He shall die"*

*"He shall die" "He shall die tiddly I ti, ti ,it ,ti, ti, ti, ti"*

*"He shall die"*

*"HE SHALL DIIIIIE"*

*"I'll raise such a bunion, on his Spanish onion, if I catch him bending tonight"*

Audience... *"That's right"*

In the hubbub and the smoke laden atmosphere, Harry would be dropping his dominoes and cursing his fingers. Pop would be trying to encourage a flame from his evilly smoking electronic cigarette lighter. The dartboard would be well occupied and the piano would be tinkling loudly whilst Rose B. sang about her namesake in a garden of weeds. Off in a corner somewhere, Geoff would

be delighting some listeners with arias from various operas in a tremulous voice constantly rising to a crescendo, after which, with public encouragement, he would try to shatter a glass set on two match sticks by the power of his voice alone. Adopting a 'stand back' attitude, Geoff would focus all his attention upon the glass whilst loosening his tie and unfastening his top shirt button. He then let rip. A note escaped his lips and immediately rose to the highest register he could manage, sustaining this until going red in the face. Despite his valiant attempts the glass always remained un-shattered. We had another Saturday night regular who would make his way round the pubs earning free pints, by betting that he could pick up a sixpenny piece from the floor using only his lips. I never got to know his name but I can certainly attest to his ability. Dad, by act of generosity would occasionally go around with a gallon jug topping up the glasses of the customers..... and then the police walked in.

#### The Police.....

We had real Police in those days. Night times would find them patrolling the streets, trying door handles and suchlike. They would walk into pubs to check that everything was in order. The bars would fall into silence on these occasions until the visitors had left when it would resume its former doings and commotions. Pub owners such as my Dad would have to pay special attention at these visits. Sometimes the police, normally two of them, would take a leisurely stroll through the bar and leave by the back entrance. Sometimes, they would take a leisurely stroll through the bar and remove their helmets at the back entrance. This was the signal for my Dad to escort them through to the living room and supply each of them with a free pint of beer. It was quite in order to leave them to enjoy their pints and they would later pop their heads round the door to the bar to give their thanks and say goodnight.

#### Birthday Celebrations.....

I once spent a rather interesting birthday in their company. It being my birthday, I told my dad that I would stand the bill for the drinks, should any police enter.

Two police officers spent a pleasant hour sat in the living room drinking their free beer and advising me to join the Police Force. They left a short time later after wishing me a happy birthday. They returned helmet-less a little later with two other bareheaded colleagues in tow. Dad was smiling broadly as he led them into the living room and I told him to bring in a gallon jug. The recruitment campaign began again with all the officers agreeing that I would be an ideal candidate for the Police Force. My state of intoxication by this time was such that I was actively considering enlisting, when my Dad entered with two more officers. I made them welcome and filled two more pint mugs from my gallon jug. We sat around chatting amiably as I topped up the glasses of my new found friends. The last policeman to enter was alone but he did not

stay long. He was well known to the others but left as soon as he had finished his pint. The others took their leave shortly afterwards, leaving me shell shocked and wondering if it had all been a dream. Dad told me that at one time, there were more police in the living room than there were customers in the bar.

Upstairs.....

Two flights of stairs led to two bed rooms and a large double room, that at one time served as a training room for a boxing club. This room was hired out on occasions as a venue for wedding receptions, meetings and various other club activities. Another double flight of stairs took you to four more bedrooms, three of which, were packed with objects from its days as a museum. I spent many evenings sifting through these rooms. Among the many objects, all randomly scattered around, were hundreds of horse brasses, glass fronted cabinets containing butterflies, moths, and beetles of all shapes and sizes. Amongst all this, sitting on a box, was an old valve radio. It had a mahogany case, the front of which had been carved in a delicate design. The radio still had its wiring and plug attached so I plugged it in and was surprised to see lights begin to glow. I started to turn the tuning wheel and was met with a howl of static, until it settled upon a radio station. A lot of the broadcasts were in foreign languages and I discovered that the radio also had the ability to transmit conversations between radio hams. These I found very entertaining, taking a keen interest in knowing that Aunt Betty was recovering nicely and that the weather was extremely hot in Wolongong. It was only in the night hours that the reception was at its best, so I would often sit amongst all these treasures in a room illuminated only by the light of the radio dial and the feeble light of the night sky.

Bayonets and a Pistol.....

Perusal of other rooms revealed many more horse brasses, and in addition to these there were also domed glass jars containing stuffed birds and the like. I recall seeing a stuffed Badger in a case and other cases containing various fish and wildfowl. Another search turned up a number of Napoleonic bayonets. The best find however, was a small dainty flintlock pistol. It was covered in intricate engravings and fitted easily into the palm of my hand. A guard-less trigger folded up into the underside of the pistol and the hammer still retained a genuine flint. Wanting to restore the pistol into working condition, I submerged it in penetrating oil for a while, but it was a futile attempt as I managed to break off a portion of the trigger. Taking it to a antiques dealer, he told me that it was a ladies pistol that would have been carried in a purse. He said it was unfortunate that my attempts to restore it had failed as it would have been worth a lot more had I left it alone. With that, he offered me five pounds for the pistol and two shillings and sixpence each for the bayonets. I accepted.

#### Licensing Laws.....

The licensing laws were very strict in those days. Last orders were called at ten minutes to ten and the towels had to go on the pumps at ten o'clock precisely. Towels on the pumps indicated no more beer would be sold.

#### Evening Shift.....

Across the road from the Colin was a firm of Silk manufacturers. They operated a three shift system. At five minutes to ten in the evening, men would gather at the doorway with clock cards in hand waiting for the end of the shift, which unfortunately coincided with the towels going on the pumps of the pub opposite.

At ten o'clock precisely a series of clangs rang out as the men clocked off and dashed across the street to the Colin hoping my dad was in a good mood.

Legally speaking, dad should not have served them but business was business and dad always suffered from a soft heart. To keep things legal, he would fill extra pints at the last orders call and leave them on the bar top until the sprinters arrived. This made him very popular with the workers.

#### Pubs.....

Perhaps I should mention a little something of the preponderance of pubs that inhabited the environs of Robin Hood Street in those times.

#### The Bath Inn.....

This pub stood directly opposite the Victoria Baths, which you may recall, was also the venue for the Thursday evening's wrestling matches. The rumour goes that by accident or design, the evening's entertainment always ended at 9-45 or thereabouts.

The reason for this was that by 9-50, all the wrestlers had crossed over Bath Street to catch the last ten minutes drinking time. The rumour continues that the wrestlers, who earlier in the evening had been trying to pummel each other into submission, now found themselves the best of friends in the Bath Inn.

#### Other long lost Pubs.....

##### The Sir Colin Campbell.....

A short walk up Robin Hood Street brought you to the Sir Colin Campbell. One of our homes for a number of years.

#### The Lord Belper.....

Stood at the junction of Robin Hood Street and Lamartine Street. It is claimed that the parents of D H Lawrence held their wedding reception here on the 27th Dec. 1875.



The Robin Hood.....

Obviously, the Street would have been incomplete without a pub of the same name.

The Blue Bell.....

The last pub on Robin Hood Street. Taking its name from Blue Bell Hill opposite.

The Victory.....

The Victory stood at the junction of Alfred Street South and Lamartine Street, taking its name from Nelson's Flag Ship.

Alfred the Great.....

On Alfred Street, naturally. Someone from here once said something very derogatory about us whilst visiting the Colin. Later in the evening, Jeff A. and I returned the visit to the Alfred with the intention of extracting revenge for the insult.

Upon arrival, the bar room was full so deciding discretion being the better part of valour, we postponed our plans.

The White Lion.....

Continuing past the Alfred and making your way to Carlton Road brings you to The White Lion.

The Vine.....

Turning right at the end of Alfred Street and making your way down Handel Street brings you to the Vine. One of the pub's that featured in our darts team league. (I believe the Vine is still in existence.)

Exiting the Vine and continuing along Handel Street brings you to the Bath Inn. The starting and finishing point of our walk round the neighbourhood.

Dodge City.....

Walking the length of Robin Hood Street on a Saturday night was always a pleasure. The tinkling of the piano's emanating from each pub you passed always put us in mind of a western film.

....and fist fights.

Fist fights occasionally took place out on the street. This was usually after the pubs had turned out and like as not, the combatants being man and wife. These events soon attracted a crowd of spectators, some of whom would immediately leap to the ladies defence by calling out from the crowd, *"Leave her alone"*

However, any physical involvement in parting the warring factions could prove quite hazardous and bring down the wrath of not only the fighting male but that of his wife also.

Smith's Crisps.....

It was also on a Saturday night that we would try to scrounge a packet of crisps from our dad's who were inevitably in one of the many pubs recently mentioned. There were strong laws relating to kids and public houses that resulted in the fact that we never saw the insides of any, but needing a packet of crisps meant knowing which pub your dad was in. It must be said, our dad's never did discover how we achieved this. A common denominator of those times was the fact that most pub windows were of a smoked glass variety that precluded anyone from seeing in from the outside. One of us, however, owned a well thumbed book called 'The Complete Master Spy', and this book told us how to locate our missing fathers. All that was needed was a roll of Sellotape. With a strip of this pressed well into the glass, an area of semi transparent glass was obtained with which to search for our dad's. Once discovered, it was simply a matter of asking the next visitor to inform our dad's that we were outside and requesting their presence. A mystified father would then come to the door and be met with a request for a packet of crisps. On a good night, our fathers might come up with the money for a packet of crisps each, which we immediately took round to the off sales to make our purchase.

The darts team and the yips.....

The Colin supported quite a successful darts team. Made up of players from our regular customers and Captained by my dad. My brother was also a member. I took no part in this owing to being too young at the time. Pub darts was a well regulated sport with stringent rules, and every Saturday, the Evening Post would publish tables giving the successes or tribulations of every pub in its many leagues.

Dart players came in many forms. Some would prefer the use of a heavy bulbous dart, whilst others used a slimline version. Whichever, the darts were highly prized and lovingly tended. We had one player who preferred the use of six inch nails, he was quite proficient with these, but given the amount of damage a nail could do to a regulation dart board, these were banned on match nights. Dart matches would take place weekly, the teams playing either at home or away. After the matches, the teams would be treated to trays of cheese or dripping sandwiches, any residue being handed round the rest of the customers.

The Yip's.....

The Yip's. What can one write about the Yip's. The Yip's was a failing common to certain players of those times. Brought about by the pressures of standing at the oche with all eyes focused on them caused some of them to snap and fall

victim to the Yips. This was a condition that resulted in the fact that the player would stand at the oche with dart in hand and after many repeated attempts to launch the dart at the board, would find that the dart simply refused to leave the hand. Severe cases of the Yips would cause players to leave the game. My dad unfortunately being one of them.

#### The Waiter.....

It was a Saturday night and the bar was in full swing. The bar was filling with customers and the room was filling with smoke. George was tinkling the ivories singing a passable version of Heart Of My Heart. It almost went unnoticed at first. The first customer to notice dug his companion in the ribs and nodded towards the object of his attention. Standing at the end of the bar was a waiter. He was tall, his hair was heavily greased and parted down the middle. He sported a handlebar moustache and full sideburns. He wore a blue and white striped apron and carried a tea towel over his forearm. He never said a word. He was now the talking point of the pub. Someone, entering into the spirit of the moment, called him over to place an order adding *"and one for yourself"*. The waiter went into action writing down the order on a notepad and taking it to the bar, returning a few moments later with a tray of drinks and the bill. The waiter was kept very busy after this, adding to the evenings entertainment. No one knows how much I suffered at the evenings end in removing the moustache and sideburns, which had been applied using copious amounts of theatrical spirit gum.

Finally, at the closure of the Colin, (caught up in the St. Ann's redevelopment programs at that time) an epitaph appeared in the Evening Post stating that the pub had had a "mild " beginning but a "bitter"end.

#### Leaving School.....

I left school at the age of fourteen. There were no protocols to be followed. We went to school, we went home. I do believe a school leavers assembly was intended but if so, we certainly didn't attend. Our barrack room lawyers stated that you were no longer a pupil after the school leaving certificates had been handed out.

We received our certificates in the early afternoon. In the early afternoon plus two minutes, we excused ourselves and went over the school wall and that was that.

#### Gainful employment.....

I have to say before going any further, that I long ago lost count of the number of jobs that I have had.

My very first job was obtained from the columns of the Evening Post. A well known book company required a trainee. On my first morning, I turned up bright eyed and bushy tailed and was taken to see the Company's head honcho who gave me a lecture on how fortunate I was to be working for them. He told

me how I should dress and behave and said I would receive One pound, ten shillings and sixpence per week. He then sent a messenger to find Arthur, whose trainee I was to become. Arthur came into the office and we were introduced. Mr. P then informs me that the use of Christian names was strictly forbidden and that I was to call everyone Sir, Madam, Mr. or Mrs. Introductions over, I left the office with my new boss who immediately ordered me to drop the Mr. whenever I spoke to him and to call him Arthur, although not in front of Mr. P. of course. Arthur then gave me a tour of the building, introducing me to everyone he passed. My working day consisted of making up orders from shops and libraries and acting as a gopher for various people.

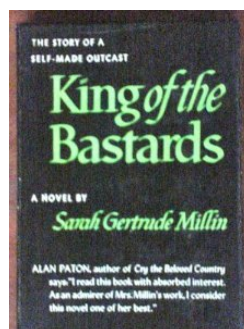
A tale of bastards.....

Once a month, the Company would receive a fresh consignment of the latest books.

Mr P. himself would join us in the cataloguing of these. Arthur handed me six books and retained six more for himself. Mr.P. stood at a desk with pencil in hand and ticked off the titles as they were called out to him. I looked over the titles of the books I was carrying and my heart sank. One of them was called 'King Of The Bastards'. And I didn't swear. I held out the offending title to Arthur in the hopes of being spared having to use such abusive language, but he appeared not to notice. I gave it my best shot. *"King of the... buh"* said I. *"Pardon?"* Said Mr P.

With blood pounding in my ears, I tried again. *"King of the b..b..b..buh"* I said again. *"Pardon?"* said Mr. P, this time looking at me over the top of his glasses.

*"King of the Bastards"* interceded Arthur on my behalf. My racing pulse returned to normal. I really liked Arthur.



The offending book.

and pencils.....

I was putting up a customers order, when Mr P. stuck his head round the door. Go and tell Mr. S. (Arthur) I want to see him in my office. Yes sir, I replied. Under these instructions, I always found it best to start on the third floor and

work my way down. All the rooms were very large and contained multiple bookcases which made it an arduous process when tracking anyone down. I found Arthur talking to a woman on the second floor, she had a clipboard and pencil in her hands. They both looked in my direction as I approached them. Feeling myself going red in the face, I stammered out my message whilst watching the other end of her pencil being juggled about in Arthur's flies. I worked for the Company for about a year and sought pastures new when they refused my request for a pay rise.

Car Jacks and free toast.....

My second sojourn took me into the engineering trade. I went to work for a Company that specialised in the making of Car Jacks. This was the best job I ever had and would have remained in it for ever but for the cruel hand of fate. The pay was excellent for someone of my tender years and every Friday, along with my wages, I also received a handful of plastic coins to be spent in the Firm's canteen. My first job was at a cutting machine. Nothing could have been simpler. The jacks main lifting screw was manufactured two to a rod and it was my task to cut this rod in half. To do this was merely a matter of clamping a rod in my machine and pulling on a handle which cut through the rod. After doing this, the handle was returned to its upright position which supplied a chamfered edge to the screws. I was told that I would be expected to produce x number of screws per hour and that any increase in this would result in enhanced pay. From my cutting machine, I graduated onto huge turret lathes where I would perform a three stage procedure on a turning of unknown employment. This I considered a crucial component as constant checks were made on my work by scientific looking people bearing micrometers. The working environment at the factory was very noisy and any attempt at conversation was held either at the top of your voice, or by yelling down the ear. There was a generous tea break that allowed me to spend my plastic coins on the best tea and beans on toast that I have ever tasted. The fickleness of fate however, soon reared its ugly head when I discovered my hands were becoming red and painful. A visit to the doctor's confirmed my fears when he stated that I had some form of dermatitis. After querying the nature of my work, all became clear and he decided my complaint was Industrial Dermatitis and advised me to change jobs.

Peach, Aqua, and Sky Blue ladies things.....

An advertisement in the Evening Post took me and my mum to a company on Granby Street in the heart of town. They were manufacturers of ladies underwear. The company had requested the presence of my mum at the interview. There, I met my new soon to be bosses, Mr. G. and Mr. H. Mr. G. conducted the interview and began by asking what my thoughts were on working in a predominantly female environment. I said something to the effect that it presented no problem for me. He then jokingly asked if it was likely that

I would be spending any of my time chasing his girls. I found this question very embarrassing in front of my mum and answered a curt no! This must have satisfied Mr. G. who then asked me if I could start the following Monday. My role at the factory was that of 'Chief Packer'

This was on account of the fact that I was the only packer. On the following Monday, I was inducted into the packing department with Mr. G. himself instructing me in the arts of packing parcels. I took to this like a fish to water and pretty soon, my packing skills rivalled that of Mr. G. himself. I loved my new department and took a particular pleasure in sitting at my desk, which carried a large Imperial Typewriter that was just begging to be used. My duties also included packing large cartons and tea chests that were to be exported to other parts of the world. Mr. G. was a kindly, religious man, who for reasons best known to himself took to calling me 'Charlie'. During my time under his tutorship, I was soon to learn and take on board a fastidious respect for the materials I had to use. Waste not, want not, became our motto. Anything that could be re cycled would be carefully saved to be used another day. On one occasion whilst struggling to untangle some heavily knotted string, Mr. G. offered me the benefit of his philosophy by remarking "*Charlie, if you can't untangle string, don't ever think of getting married*"

At fifteen years of age, I found this too profound for my liking, but I can still untangle string. The use of my typewriter came into good effect when I decided it would be a good idea to keep a record of my daily output of orders. After a few weeks, this resulted in my having to create a filing system with all my dealings being kept in strict date and alphabetical order. I was particularly pleased when Mr. G. complimented me on my new office lay out and querying what the box files were for. Opening one up, I proudly presented it before him letting the details speak for themselves. He went quite red in colour before gathering up my files and transporting them to his office. He returned a short time later thanking me for my initiative but stated that the files were far too sensitive for a packing room and said that he kept identical lists under lock and key in his own office.

The Girls.....

Mr. G. called me Charlie. The girls called me Dreamboat. I did not have a lot of contact with the girls. I would occasionally be called to clear the off cuttings from under their sewing machines but that was about it really. One of them, a lass called Ivy, would often take to chasing me about the room, much to my chagrin. I would beat a retreat back to the sanctity of my office slamming and locking the door behind me.

Seven pounds ten shillings.....

The off cuttings I've just mentioned were placed into sacks, whereupon I would transport them down two flights of stairs into a back yard, and then down another flight of stone steps to a kind of outhouse where I had to empty the

sacks. I believe a dealer came along periodically and cleared it out paying money for it. On this particular morning, I was emptying the sack when I spotted a pound note lying on top of the mound of cuttings. Another one lay nearby, and yet another. I snatched them up, and glancing around, another four came to light, and a ten shilling note. I ran back to the office clutching the small fortune and arrived at the top of three flights of stairs totally out of breath and in a state of near collapse. Mr. G. took me into his office and got me seated before asking me what had happened. Still breathless, all I could do was to point to the wad of money in my hand whilst sucking in great gulps of air in order to give a verbal account. A little later, when all had settled, it transpired that the money had been dropped by Mr. H. on an earlier visit to the outhouse. He was very vociferous with his thanks and insisted on my keeping the ten shillings for my honesty.

#### Lunch hour.....

I used to take packed lunches to work, but once a week dad would arrive with a pack of hot bacon and tomato sandwiches, with another pack for my brother who by chance, worked for a printing firm on the floor above. Occasionally, I would be given some money with which to buy my lunch. There was a shop round the corner on Friar Lane, where I would purchase four buttered cobs and a quarter of potted meat. I was quite sparing with my potted meat on the first three cobs, saving most for a luxurious fourth. I was sitting at my desk with my feet up and my chair pushed back onto its hind legs as I bit into my fourth. Whilst luxuriating in my heavily packed cob, I became aware that a hind leg of my chair had developed a wobble, something unnoticed at previous lunch times, so I looked down to see the cause of this. Like most of the factories of the times, many had their own mice in residence and one of these had somehow managed to place itself under the leg of my chair. I shall spare you from the rest of this story, suffice to say, that it was a long time before I was able to enjoy potted meat again.

#### Car valeting.....

Whilst being a partner in the underwear company, Mr. H. was also a General Manager of a company of his own whose premises were in the Lace Market. Every Saturday, I had to visit a nearby public car park to wash his car. He told me he didn't care how long I took providing I did a good job. Not only did I do a good job on his car, I did good jobs on other cars too and had myself a good little business going.

#### Steamy stories.....

Another job lasted only a few days. I attended an interview for a vacancy in the packing department of a company that was much nearer to home. I was told that the company operated a three shift system and that my first week would begin at two pm. and end at ten pm. On my first afternoon, I arrived to be told

that owing to an administrative error, the packing job had been given to another and that I had been allocated a job in the factory. I was then escorted into a very noisy and steamy room and supplied with the details of my work. It was, I was assured, the most sought after job in the factory. I was placed in front of a large cast iron oven which had a single door and a pressure gauge above it. From the top and sides of this ran lagged pipes of varying thicknesses. Nearby, was a stack of trays, each containing a dozen spools of thread. All that I had to do was to open the door and slide in three of the trays, which fitted neatly on some runners. Closing the door, I had to push a button and keep an eye on the gauge and ensure that the needle did not pass the vertical. This had to be done for a period of fifteen minutes, and that was all. I was even allowed to sit down for this period having had an empty tray placed at my disposal. My trainer then returned to his duties. I recall thinking this was money for old rope as I slid in the first three trays. I closed the door and pressed the button. I then sat down on my tray and timed the fifteen minutes from the clock on the factory wall, not forgetting to keep my eye on the gauge of course. The fifteen minutes elapsed and rising from my seat, I opened the door and was immediately enveloped in a thick, viscous, and very hot steam. The mist dissipated and I found myself running with sweat with my clothes sticking to my body. I there and then decided that this life was not for me. I intended leaving at the weekend but left after three days. An amusing post script to this tale comes to mind when I found that for three days, I stood at the doors of the factory with clock card in hand waiting for the ten o'clock dash to the Colin Campbell, as told on page 71.

Same steam, different machine.....

If anyone ever tells you that lightning never strikes twice, just listen politely. It was the same textile trade but a different company. I arrived on my first morning to be told that the packer was serving his notice and for that period, I would be found something else to do. I followed a supervisor into the workshop and stopped at an ironing table. A steam iron stood on its base, its wiring stretched upwards towards the ceiling. At the side of the table lay a huge pile of jeans. Asking me to watch closely, the supervisor picked up a pair of jeans and turned them inside out. Laying one leg of the jeans along the table, the supervisor directed my attention to a little v shaped section of denim that ran along the length of the leg. Flattening out the v with her fingers, she picked up the iron and placed the tip of this on top of the v. She then pressed a small red button on the iron and a little puff of steam rose from the iron as she skilfully ran it along the length of the seam leaving a perfectly straight flat edge in its wake. She did this three more times with the remaining seams and placed the garment to one side. She then took her leave. Feeling very vulnerable, I looked around the room and at the machinists who were singing along to the music on the radio and doing their level best to ignore the young lad standing at the ironing table. There being nothing else for it, I picked up my first pair of



jeans and turned them inside out, laying one leg along the table. Carefully flattening out the little v, I placed the tip of the iron on the top of this and pressed the little red button. I let out a scream of pain as a great gush of steam escaped the iron enveloping my left hand and sending it seeking out the comfort of my right armpit. I carried on as best I could until the dinner break, when I and my sore hand went home never to return.

Three days later, I received my half day's pay through the post.

#### Paint and Wallpaper.....

I once spent some time working in a paint and wallpaper shop where I was employed as both warehouseman and counter hand. I saw the job advertised and rang for an interview. They told me an interview would not be necessary if I could begin work immediately. Finding employment was as easy as that in those days. My new boss was George, a pleasant chap who escorted me round the firm introducing me to other staff members. It also transpired that he was an accomplished pub pianist and later supplemented his income at the keyboard of the Colin Campbell's piano every weekend.

#### Bomb disposal.....

We received an emergency telephone call from head office requesting us to check out the stocks of our water based paint. It appears that some form of chemical reaction had taken place in certain cans and as a precaution we were to inspect our entire stocks. I was allocated the work. The gallons and half gallons of this product was stored in the basement, and on checking these, nothing out of the ordinary was noticed. Turning my attention to the quarter gallons however, turned out to be a different matter. As these cans were displayed at a high level in the shop, I had to begin my inspection at the top of a ladder. I think it was the vibration caused by my climbing that caused my jaw to drop. Reaching the top of the ladder, I was appalled to notice that the entire stocks of emulsion were gently rocking to and fro on semi circular bases. To make matters worse, as these cans were stacked in piles of three, the second and top stacks were gently rocking to and fro on the lids of those below.

I called out my findings to those waiting below and a discussion took place on the best way to tackle the problem. From the comparative safety of the shop floor, it was suggested that I test the integrity of the tins by lightly tapping one with a paint can opener. On reflection, this was not a good idea but orders were orders. I removed my can opener from my pocket and shifted my position on the ladder in order to select which gently rocking can I was to tap. Making my selection, I ever so gently, tapped the can which immediately blew its lid off showering me with liquid and scattering those waiting below. The lid of the can spun its way across the shop landing by the door. For safety's sake we had to close the shop for a period in order to defuse the rest of the stock. I made numerous nerve wracking trips up the ladder bringing down the cans, one at a

time, which was then covered over with a tea towel before carefully releasing its internal pressure.

Requiring more space for our dealings with the industrial trade, the firm occupied some premises nearby.

Harry K. and William Francis Cody.....

Expansion into this area meant having to employ extra staff. It was here that I met Harry K. a pensioner with whom I was to 'show the ropes'. I considered Harry an honoured friend when I later learned, that as a boy, he had shaken the hand of the legendary Buffalo Bill.

The Grand National.....

We had a travelling rep working for the company who brought in orders from the commercial side of the trade. One morning, along with his orders, he also brought with him a hot tip, which he assured would benefit those who liked the occasional flutter. A couple of punters took an interest and took their leave for a few moments to visit a nearby bookmakers. The horse won, leaving the rep and the punters very happy indeed. A few days later, a little more interest was shown when the rep entered with yet another tip. Believe it or not, over the next few weeks, the rep produced a number of tips all of which came in first in their respective races. Regardless of much questioning, the rep never revealed the source of his tips other than to say that he had paid for them. Thereafter, it got so that every time he produced a tip, the warehouse would empty, leaving me in charge and calling out "*Put something on for me*" to the backs disappearing out of the door. No one ever heard me so I was probably the only one never to have benefitted from the generosity of our rep. Something must have transpired between the rep and the rest of the punters for he suddenly ceased giving out his tips. I did not know the reason for this but I do know all this happened the year that 'Sundew' won the Grand National, for this horse was one of his tips. I've always looked with suspicion on the racing game after this experience.

The Wallpaper department.....

Stan M. was the man in charge of the wallpaper department. His office was situated on the topmost floor of the shop and because of this, his working life was isolated from the rest of the staff, a surprising fact given for what was to follow. Deliveries of wallpaper could only be made via the shop floor making it imperative that they were transferred to the stockrooms on the fourth floor as quickly as possible. As an alternative to carrying these bundles up numerous flights of stairs, Stan would lower a rope to the shop floor where we'd tie this around two or three bundles and give the thumbs up to Stan who would then haul them up into his keeping. Occasionally, these bundles would part company with the rope sending everyone below scattering to different parts of the shop. He caused a great deal of surprise and delight one day after returning

from his lunch break with a female member of staff, announcing that they had just been married. A hastily arranged wedding reception took place to celebrate the happy event. I went home a little squiffy that day.

#### The accident.....

Behind one of the shop windows was a small sealed off area that contained a stripping machine. This small room was used for the storage of large coverings of sacking material and a hand barrow. Rolls of wallpaper, at this time, used to carry an extra half inch of edging along each side of the roll which had to be removed with scissors. As an extra service, the shop would undertake this laborious task for a few pence extra per roll. It was in the execution of this duty when my accident happened. With my arms full of rolls of wallpaper, I entered the room to find the floor covered with sacking up to the level of my knees. Treading carefully on this, I made my way to the machine and inadvertently stepped upon a completely hidden hand barrow. The unseen barrow went one way and I went the other, scattering my load of wallpaper in the process. Unfortunately, the route the barrow took sent it through a very large window with an almighty crash. George came rushing in to find me flat on my back, covered in rolls of wallpaper and sacking. I spent the rest of the morning standing in the freezing cold in order to warn any entering customers. It was just prior to Christmas when this happened and I was somewhat consoled to learn that the window was about due to be kicked in anyway. This apparently was an annual event undertaken by vagrants wanting to spend the Christmas festivities in the warmth of a prison cell.

#### The Boot.....

I lived quite near to the shop so I was often the first one to arrive, there to wait in the doorway until George came to open the shop. On this particular morning, it was still dark when I arrived and spotted an unidentifiable something placed up against the shop door. Moving through the gloom to get a better look at the object, I was horrified to discover that it was a boot----- and it still had a foot and half a leg in it. I staggered out of the doorway, struggling to hold on to my breakfast and bumped into a man wearing a Homburg hat, a raincoat, and carrying an umbrella. It was Mr. W. my ex religious knowledge teacher. I advised him of my gruesome discovery and he told me to contact the police as soon as the shop was opened. He declined my offer of seeing it for himself and continued on his way to school. When George arrived, I warned him of what was lurking in the doorway and he went forward to investigate. He started chuckling and called me to join him. It was a little lighter by this time and my discovery turned out to be a no more than an old boot with a large bone standing in it. For added effect, the bone had been partially wrapped with newspaper. Practical joke or not, it was a while before I got over it.

The local policeman.....

On occasion, the local beat bobby would call in to scrounge a cup of tea, or to use our toilet facilities. It was the latter, on this occasion, when I discovered that he had left his handcuffs lying on the floor. Informing George of this, he told me to try and find the Constable in order to return them. I left the shop and did a tour of the neighbouring streets where I found him heavily involved with directing traffic. Not daring to call out or distract him in any way, I stood by the roadside until I caught his eye, whereupon I removed the handcuffs from my pocket and jiggled them before his gaze. He beckoned me over and took them from me, thanking me for my trouble and sending me on my way.

Arthur.....

Another change of employment was the cause of my meeting a certain Arthur. Arthur was my immediate boss who had to teach me the basics of my new position.

Arthur was an amazing fellow whose military experiences far outnumbered those of someone of his apparent years. He had (according to Arthur) taken place in the D Day landings seconded to the American Forces who stormed Omaha Beach.

He had also assisted Alan Turing and those involved at Bletchley Park in cracking the Enigma machine. He was no stranger to submarines and could relate hair raising tales involving torpedoes and depth charges. Other times found him deep behind enemy lines making contact with local partisans. Slack times during our working day would always find a crowd around Arthur as he regaled us with yet another detail packed wartime memory. Such as the time he made a midnight meeting with the leader of a Russian Convoy deep in the heart of enemy occupied Russia. Armed only with the facts that his contact was named Grigory and that he had a gold tooth, Arthur once again came to the aid of the war effort. One of his listeners, hoping to catch him out, enquired how he identified Grigory given the fact that it was midnight. Not to be outdone, Arthur replied that identification was easy as he saw the dimmed lights of the trucks headlamps reflecting off Grigory's gold 'toof'. Duties in the arctic found him stripped to the waist, digging furiously with an entrenching tool to rescue two comrades who's snow hole had unfortunately collapsed and buried them. He was awarded a medal for this rescue which he promised to bring in to show us.

Another snow related adventure saw him feeding a Polar Bear from the side of his ice bound ship. According to Arthur, the ungrateful bear took hold of him and pulled him overboard and on to the ice. Arthur said that it took him the best part of half an hour to dispatch the bear with his sheath knife.

We helped him move home once and he said it would be a perfect opportunity to show us the medal and other wartime memorabilia he'd collected. Sitting on an empty orange crate, Arthur rummaged about in a cardboard box unwrapping little parcels, none of which contained the medal. He did reveal a little

something he said he'd picked up in the Kasbah in Casablanca. It was a small brass camel which he claimed, held a sample of genuine camel hair in the hinged hump of the camel's back.

Holding it forth for all to see, he ceremoniously swung back the camel's hump to reveal three very old cigarette stubs sitting on top of the camel hair. Blaming this on his wife, Arthur flicked off the stubs to reveal the singed hair, it was not a pretty sight.



A Vincent Firefly.

I was about sixteen when I joined the motorised cycle brigade. These were the latest fashion and everyone had to have one. I was a rather latecomer to the trend as the gang was already proud owners of theirs. J.H. had opted for a BSA Bantam. D.I and JF. preferring Power Packs if I remember correctly. Came my turn, with dad standing as guarantor, we visited Clarke's cycle shop on Alfred Street Central to see what second hand motorised cycles were available. They only had one in stock, something called a Vincent Firefly. And this one became mine. A great deal of interest was shown when it was displayed to the gang. With cries of almost disbelief it was proved to contain a quarter pint oil sump, which now meant my bike was powered by an engine rather than a motor. The bike ran on two stroke petrol and a shot of something called red-x, it was then necessary to shake the bike vigorously to ensure the petrol mixed with the red-ex (whatever that was) With a provisional license in my pocket, I climbed aboard for my first ride. Pedalling furiously, I gathered enough speed to engage my clutch lever which then gave pedal free motoring at something approaching (to me, anyway) sixty miles per hour. Reaching the end of the street, I jabbed at a little button on the clutch lever that disengaged the engine from the rear tyre with an ear splitting roar.

The time came when we were expecting to be called up for National Service. Something we did not particularly look forward to. Obviously, discussions took place on the best way of dodging this if necessary. One suggested way of beating the required medical was by drinking a whole bottle of sauce prior to attending. This, I gathered, pushed the bodies temperature upwards to such a degree that future heart attacks could not be ruled out. Another suggestion made was by swallowing little balls of silver paper which apparently, created all sorts of problems on the required X-rays. I must point out though, these remedies were never actually introduced and most of the gang went on to proudly serve their country for a couple of years. Me? I failed the medical owing to defective ears.

Well, I think that's about all I can remember so I'll bring these ramblings to an end.

I hope they are found enjoyable in the reading. The memories recorded took place up to the age of eighteen or thereabouts, with the exception of the tale headed Birthday Celebrations which took place on the evening of my twenty first birthday. I have taken the liberty of applying a little artistic license here and there to bolster a flagging memory.

After all..... It was a long time ago



Photo of an event taking place on the Victoria Park (circa 1948)

Alan Dury extreme left looking at camera. Pat H immediately behind.











