

Tear Vic,

Your "Face to Face" interview with Ian M-I was great. If you are contemplating something along similar lines in the future, I offer you a potted history of 'yours truly' which, if treated in the same way as you did with Ian, might make for an interesting and entertaining after dinner chat at one of our evening meetings....

Was born at home in July 1930, 2 months premature weighing "slightly less than two 2lbs bags of flour" as my grandmother later told me, the midwife telling my mother not to bother to clothe me but just to wrap me in cotton wool as it was touch and go whether I would survive... (I'm pleased to say that I did) *I'm not sure about that.*

I started school at ~~4~~ *My Mum told me I was 3 but no* all I remember ~~from~~ *from that time* was that we would all have a third of a pint of milk each day which had been warmed up on the hot water radiators, and in the afternoon we would all lay down for a sleep. I was a very poorly child in my early years, regularly in and out of the Bermondsey Medical Mission with all sorts of ailments, and at the age of 6 I had measles so bad I spent 5 weeks in the Carshalton Hospital (I remember having gruel quite often (it was awful but I was always told "it would make me better"), ~~xxxxxxx~~ followed by 6 or 7 weeks convalescing at the St Mary's Convent, Broadstairs. I think it was soon after returning home that my mother enrolled me to attend the Sohn Street Methodist Mission Sunday School, *morning and afternoon* and after the Sunday School *in the morning* we would all walk round the corner to the Central Hall of the South London Mission in Tower Bridge Road where we would join the "grown-ups" for their church service, with my mum and gran.

For 2 years on the run (1937 and 1938) we (that is my mum, gran, sister and myself) had a week's holiday at Birchington in Kent, staying at a council house some way from the sea and beach, and I remember the name of our landlady's daughter was Bubbles! At 8 I joined the 20th Bermondsey Scout Group attached to the Central Hall as a Wolf Cub and began my 50 plus years association in the Scouts. I soon forgot Bubbles!! and in August 1939 attended my first camp when the whole Scout Group (Cubs, Scouts, Rover Scouts, the lot) <sup>for</sup> entrained from Waterloo Station for Beer in Devon, a whole new and exciting experience/a just turned 9 year old.

A few weeks later I was on another train journey (this time with my sister who was nearly 6 with hundreds of other children) being evacuated from London - that was Friday 1st Sept. 1939. My mum and gran took my sister and I, each with a home made knap-sack with a few bits of clothing, and our gas masks in a square cardboard box, to the Boucher School where we were bussed to ~~South Bermondsey~~ *South Bermondsey* Station for a train to "an unknown destination". I remember all the "gear" I was carrying, having a brown label tied to a button hole with my name written on it, remember arriving at Worthing Station and then being assembled at Dominion Road School, and then with my sister walking with a Mrs Clifford to ~~Turners~~ *Turners* Road where we stayed until just after Christmas when we were moved to a Mrs Teague (who we called "Nan") at 93 Southdownview Road. With the fall of France, my mother decided it wouldn't be safe at Worthing with all those Germans just across the Channel, so she came down and took us back home.

I have no strong or lasting recollections of my father. Long before I came on the scene, I know he was under age when he volunteered to join the East Surrey Regt in 1915 and served in France, Belgium and Germany, but by the time I was of an age to remember him, he was in and out of work, sometimes he worked as a window cleaner, labouring for the borough council, as a casual dock worker, factory worker, but by the time we had come home from evacuation (just before my 10th birthday), he was working for Crosse & Blackwell as a loader. He was also an A.R.P. Warden, he later joined the Home Guard as well as becoming a Special Constable. For all that, he was often out, and when he was at home he would often go "out for a drink" so that I saw little of him. The Blitz on London began in the September of 1940 when I had just turned 10. My father (then a Special Constable) went A.W.O.L. one night and was missing for weeks, suddenly to be 'found' with a "loss of memory". He recovered his "memory" some while later, when he walked-out and moved in with a woman friend in Lewisham.

In modern parlance I suppose I was then of a "single parent family"!!

.....to be continued.



To my infant mind in the years before and during the war, it never ever occurred to me that we were deprived, and would disagree with many of my generation who would say we were. We were poor, certainly, as were hundreds of thousands of others, but deprived, no. What money we had was spent on the basic necessities of life - food, a roof over our heads and clothing, which in my case was nearly all home-made or acquired from the Sally Ann. Any money over at the end of the week (and that was a rare occurrence) was put by in a cup hanging from the mantel-shelf sometimes for a special treat, but special treats were few and far between. I remember one such treat which was a day out to Southend by paddle-steamer (the "Golden Eagle" and "Royal Eagle" were 2 of the boats which did day excursions to the coast from Tower Bridge pier during pre-war summers.) Once or twice a year we would also have a trip to the seaside by charabanc, the different coach firms having colourful names like Blue Belle Coaches, Royal Blue, Grey-Green and Orange etc. Less exciting, though now just as memorable, were trips in a motor vessel round the boating lake in Southwark Park - I have a strong recollection of the sign saying "Adults 3d, Children 11/2d (for mum or gran and my sister and I, by today's money it would be 3p. (mind you, the lake was about 100/150 yards long, and you did go twice around the island!!)

Living by the River Thames, which bounded Bermondsey & Rotherhithe on 2 sides, it was quite normal and usual for us kids to cross Tower Bridge and play on the beach by the Tower of London at low-tide (I have a News-of-the-World photo and blurb of me playing cricket on Tower beach when I was 7). At other times we would remain on the Bermondsey side and we could easily get down to the river by the steps (called stairs) between the wharves and onto barges tied-up alongside until we were chased off. People would have a fit if this was allowed to happen today, but then it seemed as if nobody was aware of the dangers. Otherwise we would play in the streets, playing cricket with a makeshift bat and the lamp-post as wicket, tin-can copper, knocking down ginger, jimmy jimmy knacker, hopscotch; the lamp-post was often transformed into a maypole, someone (not me) shinning up the lamp-post to attach some rope for everyone to swing around.

It seems quite unbelievable now but the beach by Tower Bridge was an official bathing place from 1934 and was used as such despite the serious pollution of the river until the 1950s. Such was the pollution which had got worse between the Wars due to the doubling of London suburbia plus ineffective sewage disposal, and made worse by bomb damage to sewage pipes during the Blitz, fish in the River Thames became almost extinct, in contrast to a period 150 years previous when 500 or more were employed in smelt fishing. Eels (jellied eels were at one time a favourite food of Londoners, though not of me) used to thrive in the river, but no longer do so due, it is said, to industrial pollution.

Another memory of pre-war days is of a friend, Derek "Fatty" Bacon whose father and mother owned the fish and chip shop in Tower Bridge Road. Mr Bacon was a rarity in those days - he owned a car! It was a Vauxhall because it had those fluted sides to the bonnet which was a feature of all Vauxhalls until the 1960/70s. It was also, as far as I remember, the only car parked in the street where they lived, which was just round the corner from me. Derek was an only child and on at least 2 occasions I remember being taken by the Bacon family in their car to Seaford for the day. Going on a long car ride was quite a thrill for me. The only other person I knew who owned a car was Mr Luck whose Luck's Garage was directly opposite. He also ran a London taxi, and it was in his garage that we held a street party for the 1937 Coronation.

It was always safe for us to play in these streets for there was little motor traffic. There were all sorts of handcarts, milkmen, chimney sweeps, shrimp & winkle man (on Sundays) and rag & bone men, although some of these might have a horse & cart. The "stop-me-and-buy-one" ice-cream man would have a pedal-cart, and the main users of horse-drawn vehicles were Southern Railway, the breweries, coal merchants, not forgetting funeral directors, because most funeral processions were with horse-drawn carriages.

Another vivid recollection is of the market stalls in Tower Bridge Road and other street markets being lit by acetylene lamps when it got dark.

Out of school, and sometime before the war, I would from time to time see men in a sort of procession marching by the Dunton Road police station, with a lot of shouting and jeering going on and sometimes some scuffles taking place. This I saw from our upstairs window, and as a 7 or 8 year old I didn't know what it was all about except my gran told me it was something to do with the "Black shirts" and Jews. Armistice Day (as Remembrance Day was then called) was always on the 11th November, whatever day in the week it was) and at 11 o'clock ships' sirens and factory hooters would always signal the start of the 2 minutes silence, at which all traffic would come to a halt, drivers would stand by their vehicles (even the horse-drawn) and....SEE OVER



with it's docks, warehouses, factories and railways, bombs fell on Bermondsey more often and more continuously than in almost any other place in the U.K. People spent night after night in shelters during the Blitz, which started on Sat/Sun 7th/8th September 1940 with the destruction of Surrey Docks. On 11th May 1941 a bomb fell on the Bermondsey Town Hall killing the Mayor who was helping extinguish fires from incendiary bombs that had fallen earlier. (Refer this to p.4)

During the London blitz, safety was not always the first consideration. The warmth of your own bed was of prime importance, especially in houses built simply to provide a roof over one's head, where draughts and damp were always present. My bed was always made warm by bricks heated in Gran's black stove oven, then place in my bed wrapped in a piece of old cloth. Even at the height of the bombing, it is said 6 out of 10 Londoners went to bed, making it countless thousands who gradually acquired the courage, or the fatalism, to ignore the air-raid sirens and bombing, spurn the shelters and sleep on (or try to sleep) in their own homes. Survival was more a matter of luck than of judgement, but by 1943 the overwhelming majority of London's population slept in their own beds preferring the snugness of what were then meagre home comforts, rather than chance the possibility of catching cold at night running for shelter.

~~The~~ During that period of some 9 months, there developed a nightly ritual for my sister and I. From the very first, we would automatically be bedded down for the night in ~~the~~ Anderson shelter in our back-yard, even before the air-raid sirens sounded. The air-raid shelter, by the way, was curved corrugated-iron sheets bolted together, about 6 feet square bedded down about 3 feet into the ground and covered with the earth and rubble from the excavation, with wooden duck-boards over the earth floor. Then we went down the shelter when the sirens sounded; later it was thought we need not go down until we heard the gun-fire from the ack-ack (anti-aircraft) battery in the nearby Southwark Park. ~~Then~~ <sup>later</sup> it was decided there was no need to go down the shelter at all - we would sleep on the floor in Gran's kitchen which was on the ground floor; ~~then~~ soon after, it was finally decided we would sleep in our own beds, bombs or no bombs. My bed was in a small room at the top of the 3 storey house, and my mother and sister slept in the double bed in the other room. I think mum's reasoning and logic was that if a bomb fell on the shelter, she would lose her children; if she was killed in the house we would be left orphans; by sleeping in our own beds, if the house was demolished by a bomb, we would all be safer in a bed and falling onto the debris from the top floor, than by staying on the ground floor and being buried under all that rubble. Fortunately her theory was never put to the test, but she could well have been right. One of my childhood mates Bill Pusey (11) was killed from an aerial mine explosion (some 1000lbs of explosives parachuted down to create damage over a wider area than the conventional high-explosive bomb). The mine destroyed Dunton Road Police Station, the Co-op Bakery, the Labour Working Mens' Club, an open-air school (for children with TB), a block of flats on the Stansfield Estate plus rows of houses, with blast damage to property streets away. When found, Bill was bodily intact under a kitchen table in a semi-basement, but had drowned in water from a fractured water main. Probably my mum was right?

Mum and Gran never used the shelter, other than to settle us down, nor my father or grandad (my Gran's second husband, Alf Peasley). My grandad was an ARP warden, despite having chronic bronchitis from his time in the trenches during the 1914/18 war. His condition worsened from being out in all weathers helping bombed-out victims, and died early 1941 in his middle fifties. His son 'Harry boy' used to live with us but had married in 1939 and moved to Plumstead. My Grandad was a docile man, looking a lot older than his years, always wheezing and short of breath, which was not surprising as he continued to smoke and roll his own fags. I would go to the corner shop to buy his tobacco and Rizlas. He had a nicotine moustache which always got wet with tea, which he drank from a saucer, never from his cup, and always referred to me as "my little sparrow".

Bermondsey was one of the worst hit boroughs in London. The Thames was its boundary on 2 sides from the Pool of London to Surrey Docks, from almost every street in Bermondsey you saw railway arches carrying rail traffic to and from London Bridge Station, there was the 2nd largest marshalling yards in London, all distinctive and obvious targets for bombing raids. Many of the arches housed haulage vehicles of the many transport firms that operated out of Bermondsey, including Pickfords that had a large depot and storage places in Willow Walk. Apart from those obvious targets, Bermondsey had the highest concentration of food manufacturing and processing industries in London, possibly in the U.K. Crosse & Blackwell, Metal Box (tin cans), Hartley (jam), Peek Frean (biscuits), Pearce Duff (jellies & custard), Jacobs (cream crackers), Shuttleworths (chocolate), Paynes (chocolate), Courages Brewery, Liptons (tea blenders), Sarsons (vinegar & pickles), Gonzalez Byass (wine), Monk & Glass (custard), Spillers (flour & dog biscuits), with Sainsbury's head office just across the borough boundary. I have said this made Bermondsey an obvious target, but with the relatively primitive bomb-sights, hitting a target was more by luck than good bomb aiming, even if they could see a target to aim for. Having seen bomb craters, demolished homes, burnt out property and the general devastation near my house, it would seem not many bombs found their target, Surrey Docks and the railway sheds opposite which were burned to the ground being the exceptions.



Bermondsey covered an area 1 mile square, the same as the City of London (often referred to as the Square mile) which lay on the opposite side of the river.

Although one of London's smallest boroughs, Bermondsey had a host of voluntary organisations and clubs catering for the young through to their late teens, and in some provided club facilities for the not so young. Apart from the many church clubs for young people there were the Oxford & Bermondsey, Cambridge University Mission, Charterhouse, Clare College Mission (these 4 having been set up and being supported by students and others from those establishments.) There were the Downside and the Fisher clubs (catering for the large R.C. community in Bermondsey), Redriff, Dockhead, Lady Gomm Centre, Bermondsey Settlement, London City Mission and so on. Then there were uniformed organisations - Cadet Corps for the Navy, Army and Air Force, and a Marine Corps, Red Cross, Boys Brigade, Girls Life Brigade (of which my sister was a member), Church Lads Brigade, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, but more about the Scouts later.

The outbreak of war saw the closure of schools, clubs, missions, etc. but as the weeks and months progressed (and if there were leaders available) some re-opened for those youngsters who had remained and for those returning from evacuation. On my return in May/June and throughout that summer, there was not much for me and my few mates to do except play around in the streets. I returned to John Street Mission and rejoined the Boys Happy Hour; a sort of bible class. I still have the New Testament from the Boys Happy Hour given me in 1937, also the Bible presented me in August 1941 "for diligence in searching the scriptures". One night a week during that summer I went to John Street Boys Club, but all this ceased abruptly in September with the start of the Blitz which was to change our whole way of living.

All activities at the John Street Mission ceased during the winter of 1940/41, except for the Sunday School which I continued to attend, mornings and afternoons. About the spring of 1941 the evening club facilities for old and young were started-up once more and I re-joined the Junior Boys Club. The John Street Methodist Mission was one of many such places catering for the needs of the poor, especially the young, in what were often referred to as 'slum areas'. My gran often said, "It keeps the kids off the streets", but John Street Mission stood for much more, as did many other similar establishments in Bermondsey. Sundays were very special with Sunday Schools morning and afternoon, with an occasional invitation for some of us children to have tea back at 70 Abbey Buildings, the home of the Sunday School Superintendent George Tingle (a former Mayor of Bermondsey) with his wife and 2 daughters, Grace and Maud, all of whom were Sunday School teachers. During the week all age groups were catered for. For me it meant going to the Junior Boys Club (the next stage up from Boys Happy Hour) and being able to use the gym. Even by today's standards, the gym was very well equipped - vaulting horse, parallel and straddle bars, springboard, gym mats and climbing ropes, and although the John Street Juniors, Seniors and Young Mens' Clubs concentrated on gymnastics as opposed to boxing (as did the Lucas-Tooth Gym and the Fitzroy and the Lynn Boxing Clubs) it did have punch-bag, punch-balls, medicine balls, skipping ropes for boxing training. I steered well clear of boxing (one tap on the nose was enough to bring tears to my eyes) and I was never strong enough at that age, 10 coming up 11, to perform anything but the simplest of exercises on the gym apparatus. Unfortunately, because I was relatively small for my age, and a lot lighter than most, it was nearly always me who would have to climb to the top of the human pyramid which seemed to be a strong feature of any gym work at the Club, and in the gymnastic displays that were put on from time to time.

John Street itself was a narrow 'L'-shaped road between the Old Kent and Tower Bridge Roads. Going to afternoon Sunday School, I would cut through from Pages Walk Buildings to the bend in the street where 'pitch and toss' with coins was being played by men of most ages, and I would get to recognise the 'look-outs' on watch for the police. If police were spotted, it would result in a general 'free for all' to grab any money still on the pavement and then to dash off in all directions to avoid being caught by the 'coppers'.



From then till September there was nothing much to do except play in the street. In the September we returned to the Boucher School where one of my teachers from before the war, Miss Muffett, was one of a small handful of teachers reopening the school which had been closed for 12 months, since the outbreak of war. There was a new headmistress, Miss Anderson, and the other 2 or 3 teachers also looked as old as my gran. They probably were, if not older, and had, no doubt, been brought back out of retirement to fill the places left by younger teachers who had been called-up for war service. I was now 10 and for the next 11 months I was given as regular an education as air-raids and warnings of raids would permit; when the sirens started, the whole school (about 40 of us between the ages of 5 and 14) would troop down to the school bomb-shelter which was a ground floor classroom where the walls and windows had been reinforced with an extra outer brick wall to protect against bomb-blast. It would have been of no protection against a direct hit, which could also be said of any of the many purpose-built surface shelters which had been built. While in the shelter, normal schooling went by the board, and took the form of 'educational' games and quizzes, like pictures of places and had to identify the country, spelling bees, paper games where you wrote down the answers to the teacher's questions. I also learnt how to knit - the most I ever achieved was a woolen tie. (Womens' Lib was beginning to make it's mark even then!). At other times we would amuse ourselves and each other with play-acting. I regularly played the part of Hitler in these playlets, because the front of my hair always used to flop forward to one side, in the same way as Hitler's was always depicted, but as a 10 year old, I could not oblige with the Hitler moustache!

The whole of my school life had been fragmented through illness and poor health, evacuation and now air-raids. However, in the April or May 1941, with still the ever present threat of daylight air-raids, I walked the 20 minutes or so to the Galleywall Road School to sit, in their school shelter, what was the fore-runner of the 11 plus exam. I failed that scholarship (presumably because I couldn't spell 'scholarship'!!!) but as fate would have it, there were so few children in London at that time, I was given a place at the Bermondsey Central School. The B.C.S. in Monnow Road was closed, but was now located at the Paragon Street school in Southwark, the other side of the Old Kent Road.

(The range and grading of schools was more varied then than it is now. From the Junior school (Boucher's) at 11, you would go to the elementary school (Bacon's School), leaving at 14. Depending how well you did at you 11 plus (or Scholarship exam as it was known), you would go to the Central School, and if you did better than a 'scrape through with just a 'pass', there was the Secondary School. If you did exceedingly well you would go to the Grammar School, which in Bermondsey was St. Olave's Grammar in Tooley Street overlooking the river.)

In 1942 Bermondsey Central School moved back into Bermondsey to the Aylwin Girls' Secondary school building, the girls' school pupils having been evacuated en bloc to Rickmansworth in Herts, which is where my sister Joan had gone. In 1944, we again moved school premises to Pages Walk school next to the Bricklayers Arms Goods-yard. It was here, when I was 15. I gained an Oxford University School Certificate with 1 distinction, 3 credits and 2 passes.

The only exam I failed was French (despite having completed the paper in 90 minutes, leaving the remaining 90 minutes to write it out all over again correcting my earlier mistakes!) which blew my chance to get 'matriculation' standard. The wartime teachers at B.C.S. were all 'ancients' apart from Miss Hewitt who was the girls' sports mistress and also taught French, and was a 'jolly hockey-stick' type in her 30s. However, my lasting memory of B.C.S. is of Miss Genise, a very large lady who taught English who, in my last term before our final exams called me "a bone-idle lazy good-for-nothing work dodger". It may or not have been justified at the time but, having gained a 'distinction' and a 'credit' in the 2 subjects she taught, I now believe it was a coded message telling me that I "must try harder".



X (6)

Since before the war, bath night was always on a Friday, and for me was always in a galvanised tin bath in front of the stove oven fire in my Gran's kitchen. I never liked baths from a very early age because it was customary for the face flannel to be made from old woollen vests cut-up, and I never liked my face being washed with one of those! When I came of age, about 13, maybe 14, I was allowed to bath myself in the 'privacy' of the stone floored scullery which had a stone and concrete copper in the corner which was the only means of heating water for baths and laundry. As it was also where the only tap in the house was located, and the only way to the outside lavatory, it wasn't very private. After the war I would go to the Grange Road Baths where I could luxuriate in a deep-sided bath plus a piece of soap and 2 towels for about 10d (5p), and for a bit extra (which I never had) you could even have 'pine essence'. The bath taps were operated from outside the bath cubicle by bath attendants who would respond to calls of "more hot in number 43" or "bit more cold in number 12" and oblige but it was often a joke to call out the number of your mate's cubicle, and wait for him to shout out to the attendant to turn it off! (or with words to that effect!!)

After the land-mine destroyed the Co-op bakery and surrounds, Polish (and maybe Czech) forces billeted at the S.A. hostel in Spa Road helped clear the area of debris, and it was they who introduced me (10) to my first cigarette, which I secreted away to a bombed-out house and shared with my mates. I have never smoked since. We would mill around with these men, sometimes sharing toast they made from the many fires burning timber from the bombed buildings. We would also sip some of the tea they made, although my sister (then 7) invited some of these Polish soldiers to come back for a cup of tea from my Gran, which they did. It was also at this time I recovered a large Co-op accounts ledger which I took home and kept a day by day diary of events which I kept up until about the spring of 1941 when it was full. It would have made very interesting reading now!

During this period of the war, metal shrapnel from exploded shells and bombs, including the fins of incendiary bombs which frequently were lying around after a bombing raid, would be collected up by children and taken to the Rialto Cinema on Saturday mornings, for which we could go to the morning pictures for free. Most cinemas had opened-up again after an initial closure at the outbreak of war, but should anyone choose to go to a cinema, they would always be aware of impending air-raids by signs "Air-raid sirens have sounded", and later on of the "All Clear". The main source of information about the war was the wireless run on batteries, similar to but smaller than present day car batteries. One of my jobs as a child during the war was to take our wireless battery to be re-charged at a place in Reverdy Road. I used to earn myself 2d or 3d (1p or 1½p) to take bagwash to Maxwell's Laundry for Lily Fewtrell and Liddy French who lived opposite. Another chore I was required to do was disposing of the slops, which comprised washing and washing-up water, tea and tea-leaves, etc., not to mention the contents of our bed-pots (gazunders), which were emptied into the slop bucket kept under the table of our 1st floor kitchen and then taken down and emptied into the outside lavatory. I would also be asked by Mum to go down and fill up the enamel water jug from time to time.

With many areas laid waste by bombing, and the need to grow our own food (the "Dig for Victory" campaign started this trend), gardens of demolished houses were used as allotments. Mum took over a garden just round the corner from us in Dunton Road almost opposite where the Co-op bakery had been. Apart from the chores I have just mentioned, I had led a fairly carefree sort of existence but from the moment we had the allotment, I had to start working for my living and earning my keep! With my home-made 2-wheeled hand cart I had to go collecting horses manure, of which there was a regular if not plentiful supply 'dropped' by the railway horses as they plied up and down from their stables in Willow Walk to and from the Bricklayers Arms Goods Yard. I later built a 4-wheeled cart with rope to steer the front wheels, but I still had to use it to forage. Apart from horse manure, I would be on the lookout for roads that had been bomb damaged because many of the side roads of Bermondsey were made of tarry wooden blocks, and these would burn a treat in either my Gran's copper or her stove. (I remember during the very early part of the war, the tarry blocks in Alscot Road catching fire during an A.R.P. (Air Raid Precaution) demonstration of how to tackle incendiary bomb fires using the stirrup-pump. The ARP wardens had made a large fire on top of some sheets of corrugated iron which they eventually extinguished



The one thing that has had the greatest influence on my life and moulded my general outlook on life was being in the Scout movement. I do not forget the love and care of my mother, especially in my early years and the sacrifices she made right up till the time I married, nor Eileen, for it was through being in the Scouts that I first met my wife-to-be, who has given me cause to be more than grateful for every aspect of our life together. With no father to turn to, I was going to learn about growing up on my own, and if it wasn't for the training and guidance I received and the friends I made in the Scouts (who are close friends still to this day), I cannot imagine what sort of person I would be today. When I was 8 I joined the Wolf Cubs of the 24th Bermondsey (Central Hall's Own) and in 1939 went with the whole of the Scout Group to the summer camp held at Beer in Devon (I can visualise the camp field, the scrub-land where the Rovers found an old motor-bike which they would free-wheel down the hill by the camp-site, my being given a bath by the Cubmaster's wife - but not necessarily in that order).

There was a wholesale closure of Scouts and other youth organisations, etc at the outbreak of war. The 24th closed-down but re-opened for Scouts only. Sometime late 1941, one of my Sunday School teachers at John Street Mission/<sup>Bernard Farmer</sup> was also one of the young Scout leaders at the Central Hall. He lived round the corner in Alscot Road and asked Mum if she would like me to join the Scouts there. My former Cubmaster, Ted Francis, and Group S.M., Fred Lambert had joined the RAF but the Scout Troop (about 15 of us) was struggling along with young leaders who were soon to be called-up themselves. A clear recollection I have is that sometime in the summer of 1942

about 6 or 7 of us scouts with Ron Meyer and Bob Penney (they were both aged about 20 for they went into the Army later that year) went 'camping' in tents in a large garden near to Biggin Hill, a RAF fighter squadron base. I'm certain that air-raids on London and surrounding airfields had abated, otherwise no-one would have allowed us to go, certainly not with anyone as young and inexperienced as Ron and Bob. We were able to cook on an open fire, did some tracking, signalling, etc. but otherwise it was uneventful until the Sunday late afternoon when we started home. We missed the Green-Line coach which would have taken us back to the Old Kent Road. We hiked the short distance to Downe where there was a long queue waiting for the 47 bus which would have got us home. We couldn't get on the first bus because it was full, and the second bus, about 30 minutes later was terminating at Bromley bus garage. We made for one of Bromley's 2 railway stations to be told "no more trains to London from here", and to go to the other station, from which we eventually got to Victoria. By the Underground we got to Charing Cross for the Bakerloo Line to be told no trains went under the river at that time of night. From the Embankment, the last late-night tram going along the Old Kent Road had gone so we caught a tram as far as Lambeth Road, then started a 2 mile hike to our homes, only to be stopped by police in the New Kent Road because an un-exploded bomb from the Blitz had been discovered in a bombed-out block of flats, so we were escorted around the sealed-off area. I arrived home at 1.00am and got stuck-in to some apple suet pudding which mum had saved me in the pudding dish from their Sunday dinner. No-one had a telephone in those days, so what mum felt like waiting for me to come home I shall never know. I was only 12 or just turned 13 at the time.

About the end of 1942, the Troop closed down because Ron Meyer and Bob Penney were called to the Army. I transferred to the 22nd which met at St Lukes Church Hall in Keyse Road, where "Punch" Hunt was the leader, but this was bombed and I moved to the 20th, which met at the rooms attached to the already bombed-out Christ Church, Dockhead, but they also had the use of St Andrews hall in Abbey Street, which became their permanent H.Q. until well after the War finished. I was now 13 and it was here I learnt to play the flute (starting with the F (bass), then the B flat flute) in the 20th's Drum & Fife Band. Jim Hough, a very dedicated christian, was our Scoutmaster. He had been educated at Cambridge and had moved to Bermondsey as a graduate with the Cambridge University Mission. He had been inveigled into running the 20th to stop it from closing down, and his only knowledge of Scouting had been since he took over the Troop in 1940. Perhaps the debt we Scouts at the time owe Jim Hough can never be told. Any Assistants he had, Jimmy Ellis and Wally Whipps, ~~was~~ as soon as they were old enough, went into the Forces. "Pa" Smith was the Band Instructor. He, like Jim Hough, was in his late 40s or 50s, and also ran Air Scouts near Dagenham where he lived, but worked in the City or in Bermondsey so he was able to stay on for Band Practices on Tuesday evenings. We led church parades to Bermondsey Parish Church each month, and such was our reputation a contingent from the Queens Regiment would always march behind our Scout band at the annual Armistice Sunday parade. We were also good enough to play at the various wartime parades, "Wings for Victory", "Salute the Soldier" and eventually the VE Celebration Parade through Bermondsey, and on that occasion, the leader of the US Navy band that led that parade came and complimented us on our playing of "Anchors Away", the US Navy march.



I think it can be said that the first few years of the war were very eventful as far as London's population was concerned. I remember much of the trauma of those years although, at the time, I cannot recall ever having been personally concerned about the events that were happening around me, and whether I was ever frightened I just cannot say. If there was fear on hearing the sound of gunfire, bombs and enemy aircraft, it was probably accepted by me as being the quite normal experiences of a boy between the ages of 9 and 12. From 1943 onwards, life for me seemed to settle down to a more routine pattern. At school (in that year at the Aylwin) I think I was doing quite well, nothing very exceptional. That school had a large shale play area on which us boys played football and cricket. One lunch-time that summer (I would go home for dinner) there was a surprise daylight raid when I saw 2 German aircraft flying low over the rooftops, machine-gunning the railway goods-yard. It later transpired that in that same raid, a bomb had hit a school killing 12 children. At home, mum would often get out the cane to me for teasing my sister. In the restricted area of our kitchen (about 9 x 7 feet) in which there was a black gas-cooker, a wash-bowl stand, a long cupboard cum sideboard and a large kitchen table, there wasn't much room for mum to wield a cane. I think I must have chosen to tease my sister only when we were sat down for a meal (which was a stupid time to choose) because I was always trapped in the corner and mum would lash out with the cane across my arm and back; with me ducking, as far as I was able, below the level of the table to avoid the wrath of my mother. As a result, the cane took as much of a beating as was intended for me, often coming down on the edge of the table instead of on me. This was of no consequence to mum for, every time the cane needed replacing, she would get me to go to the hardware shop near Boucher's School to buy a new cane. I think I learnt the hard way, because the more mum caned me, instead of crying I used to start giggling, a sort of nervous laugh, which presumably only made mum all the more angry. This was from when I was about 11 or 12 through till I was older and sensible enough to stop annoying my sister. For all that, I have nothing but the greatest affection and admiration for my mother for the way in which she brought up my sister and I on her own during those turbulent years.

In 1946, within a few days of my 16th birthday, I left school. My Geography teacher (with who's help I got a 'distinction' in Geography) got me an interview with the Persian Gulf Oil Co Ltd but they wanted me to start work that next Monday. This meant missing 2 weeks holiday with mum, and 2 weeks Scout camp. I went to the Labour Exchange in Moorgate and got an interview with an Insurance company, and on Monday 2nd September, I started work in the City of London with the Midland Employers' Mutual Assurance Co for a salary of £100 per annum which was paid monthly in cash (something like £1.18s.4d per week) which I used to hand over to my mother in full, and right up till I joined the RAF, she gave me pocket money, to start about 5s.0d (25p) per week, for which to pay my bus fares to work, subs for scouts and the band, and to go to the pictures once in a while. My yearly salary was increased by £15 in December 1946, and I have a diary note that in April I was paid £9.11s.0d and the next month £9.13s.0d. ~~xxxxxx~~ I also recorded that I owed mum 2s/6d (13p) such was my financial state of affairs.

Sometimes I walked to work (about half an hour) or took 78 bus (fare 2d (1p)) April 1947 MEMA entered the Fire Insurance market, still to be based in Fenchurch Street, where the remainder of MEMA staff and departments moved to Savile Row in the West End. I was still designated a Junior Clerk but with added responsibilities for making the tea, getting the sandwiches, operating the switchboard and, once a month going to our main London office in the West End to bring back the pay-cheques for everyone. Saturday morning work was the norm and once I had established myself, I sought, and received permission to cycle to work and to bring it up the 2 flights of stairs and leave it in the office! 30th November 1948 conscripted into the RAF, 8 weeks square-bashing at Padgate, Warrington, but I spend most of my time as a bandsman in the RAF band based there. Posted to RAF Pershore, in Worcester for training in RAF Police, but again spend much time in the RAF band. Get good marks at end of my training, the top 5 (including me) posted to Air Ministry Records Office based and living quarters in Princes Gate Court along by the Albert Hall, London. Most weekends back home, attend Scout church parades, and even manage to fix few weeks leave to go to Scouts' summer camp at Watton-at-Stone, Herts. Return to RAF Police HQ Pershore for reposting. Typically, I arrive at RAF Pershore to find the camp is on a long weekend stand-down, and is suggested that I join the 'night-shift' of those RAF personnel still on duty at the local plum-packing factory where the firm's logo read "freshness caught in a can". It was quite OK for RAF personnel to work here, "because the station adjutant had an 'understanding' with the night-shift manageress". (Say no more!) From here was posted to Bristol, to RAF Filton. It was there, on the 4th Sept. 1949, that I was on duty for the first flight of the Bristol Brabazon aircraft, then the largest passenger plane in the world.



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I served my 18 months National Service in the RAF (having reached the heady rank of Corporal) my only service abroad being when we travelled from Bristol to watch international rugby in Wales. I returned to MEMA, the whole of the London office departments being located under one roof in Brettenham House on the Strand side of Waterloo Bridge. I also resumed with the 20th Bermondsey Scouts, Mondays with Cubs, Tuesdays band practice, Wednesday scouts, Fridays BMI silver band, weekends in the summer, camps, etc. Our summer camp that year (1950) was at Lymington, and in January, the Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Scout Association presented a new musical play by Ralph Reader, "We'll Live Forever" produced by Ron Meyer who, for a while, had been my Scoutmaster in 1942. In 1951 I, and some of my scouts, were in the 2nd annual District show, "Great Oaks", another musical play by Ralph Reader with a mixed cast of scouts and guides, which is where I met Eileen.

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March 1955 we married at Bermondsey Parish Church, with the Rector, Rev James Adams and the Methodist Minister, Rev John Davies, making doubly sure we were well and truly 'hitched'. We had 3 rooms and a kitchen at 175 Alderminster Road, for which we paid our landlady, Mrs Edwards who lived on the ground floor, 13s/6d rent, (and this included the use of her outside toilet!)

The Bermondsey Gang Shows (replicas of the famous London Scout Gang Shows) began in 1952, in which Eileen also became involved as make-up, costumes, etc, and with other Gang Shows being produced by Ron Meyer for other Scout Districts, from time to time I would be asked to 'gues' in sketches which I had already performed in Bermondsey. Consequently, I was in the Stoke Newington show in 1954, and the Islington Gang Show in 1955 and 1956, which I used to get to by bike! (it took about 40 minutes from home to the Islington Town Hall in North London.)

I was given the opportunity in 1956 of becoming the Fire Surveyor for the company at their Brighton Office, so on 1st November I began commuting to Brighton, and in March 1957 we moved to 73 Fairfield Gardens, Portslade-by-Sea. Eileen had been a Laboratory Assistant with Crosse & Blackwell's earning £10.10s.0d per week (having started 7 years previous at £3.6s.8d. per week). Some months later, she went to work in the laboratory of Southwick Hill Farm Dairy for half her London wage. On moving to Brighton my salary rose from £500 to £690 per month, so financially we were £70 a year worse off! It wasn't until January 1963 that my salary rose to £1050, by which time we had 2 sons, John born 31 5 58 and Peter 19 9 60.

In 1965 I qualified as an Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute and later that year was appointed Office Manager. The following year, I qualified as a Corporate Surveyor of the Incorporated Assn. of Architects & Surveyors, and in 1976 became a Fellow of that Assn. In 1971, the Midland Assurance (which had retained its name since being acquired by Eagle Star Insurance in 1959) merged offices with the parent company, when I was appointed the Regional Service Manager with special responsibilities for Building Societies in S.E. England. It was about that time that I was elected a member of the Council of the Brighton Insurance Institute with a particular interest in education, and on the social side, I took on (about 1975 or 1976) organising and being quizmaster for the annual general knowledge quiz. This proved very successful over the 12 or so years I ran it and, in the final years before I retired, had well over 50 teams regularly competing, with the finals being held in the Royal Pavilion, Brighton or Hove Town Halls.

Having taken early retirement in November 1988, I still retain an interest in the Brighton Institute, as well as maintaining contact through my insurance agency.

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On moving to Portslade, I had indicated to the Bermondsey Scout Assn. that I did not wish any details to be passed onto the Sussex Scout Assn. that a scout leader had moved into the area, as I would be fully committed with my new job, also I needed to do some work in our new home. While out working, and before we had moved in, I met up with the Brown twins, Harry and Stan. We were all wearing our Scout lapel badges, and before I knew it, on our move down to Sussex, I was helping out the 3rd Hove Scouts in Glebe Villas. Harry was the Group Scoutmaster and Stan ran the Senior Scouts - I just couldn't escape! About 1 year later, I moved to the 5th Hove Scouts on the Knoll Estate as a n Asst. Scoutmaster. By 1970, my job was becoming more demanding, and I was feeling I would need to resign from Scouting. Marjorie Pendergast, the wife of Rex who was Scoutmaster, ran the Cub pack, and in that year, died at the age of 50 from a brain tumour. I decided I would take on the Cub Pack (I had helped with Cubs before in Bermondsey) as it would be much less demanding than with Scouts. With Marjorie being in hospital and then her death, there were only about a dozen Cubs when I started up in the September, but by the end of the following year, I had enlisted the aid of Eileen, 2 parents Arthur Stillwell and Bernard Turner, and with the help of some senior scouts, had 40 Cubs and a waiting list of boys wanting to join, that I was able to split the Pack into two, the Apache and the Sioux Packs, with Arthur and Bernard as Akelas. It was impossible not to be enthusiastic over what had been achieved in just 15 months, so instead of doing less, as I had intended, I was being carried away<sup>9</sup> as Ralph Reader wrote in his song, I was "Riding along on the crest of a wave".

I achieved this turn-round in the fortune of the 5th Hove Cubs by organising a Conker Championship for my Pack but invited other Packs to join in. Dave Sexton, then manager of Chelsea F.C. who's son had been in the Cubs, came along and presented the certificates. Only 5 other Packs (out of a possible 16) attended, but the following year, every Pack in Hove & Portslade had a team entered, and we held the conker championships in the main hall of the then Hove Boys Grammar School when we had Steve Ovett, then only 18 or 19 having recently become European Junior Champion. Each year I arranged for a personality to come, Alan Minter (then World Middleweight boxing champ) John Jackson (Crystal Palace goalkeeper) ~~xxx~~ George Petchey, also of C.P.F.C., (both of these played cricket with me for Portslade C.C.) and Lord Royle, at the time chairman of the Alliance B.S.

With these successes behind us, we went on to win the Hove & Portslade Cub football shield in 1971/2 for the first time in our history.

In 1973 I was awarded the Chief Scout's Medal of Merit (and in 1986 a bar to the M.of M.), in 1974 became District Cub Scout Leader, and in 1976 appointed District Commissioner for Cub Scouts in Hove & Portslade, a position I held for 3 years, before becoming Chairman of the 6th Hove Scout Group (and also Treasurer for a while) until 1988, the year I retired from work. During that period 1970 to 1988, I organised many functions on behalf of Scouting in Hove & Portslade primarily to raise funds for the local Association but, as important, to raise the profile of Scouting in our District. Apart from the Conker Championships (which nearly always got a write-up and photos in the local press), we (Eileen, myself and a few friends) ran 3 or 4 dances a year in the Portslade Sports Centre and at (Cardinal) Newman school; Kingsway Karnival was originally a Cub Scout display with side-shows in which most Packs in the District took part, and which was held on the Kingsway lawns near the K.A. In subsequent years I enlisted the help of Alan Eatock to devise an "It's a Kingsway Karnival Knockout" to which we invited local firms to enter teams: Alliance BS, Besson's, Caffyn's, Eagle Star, Hove Police, Hove Rugby Club, Kayser Bondor, Legal & General, Sussex Mutual, etc which really turned out to be great publicity for us. Two dinner and cabaret functions at the Hove Town Hall, a concert by the band of H.M. Royal Marines, also at Hove T.H., and the Dance at the Top Rank Suite when I booked the Joe Loss Orchestra, with the Ronnie Keene Band all of which raised public awareness. The South Coast MARCHING Band Championships have been an annual event of the 6th Hove Scouts since 1980 in which I have played a minimal part over the years.

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In 1970 a friend, Roy Smith asked if I would take over his position as Secretary of the Worthing branch of a friendly society which would entail twice monthly meetings, collecting contributions, taking minutes and keeping accounts, etc. Having just started-up the 5th Hove Cub pack, I still felt I could take on this new job, and this quite easily proved to be the base. With rationalisation of friendly societies, in 1991 all lodges in Sussex were combined and my role for members in the Worthing lodge became that of an almoner in regard to those elderly and infirm members (of whom there are quite a few) to ensure their well-being. In 1992 I was elected chairman of the Sussex Lodge with it's 16 affiliated lodges.

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I was appointed a Justice of the Peace for East Sussex in May 1975. My involvement in youth work obviously had been drawn to the attention of the Lord Chancellor's office through whom appointments of magistrates are made. I have served in Juvenile and Family (formerly Matrimonial or Domestic) Courts, as well as Probation, Betting & Gaming Licencing committees. I now served on the Brighton & Hove Bench at the Law Courts in Brighton, the Hove Court building now being used as a Crown Court. From time to time I sit at Lewes Crown Court for appeals and sentencing. Part of the on-going training of magistrates is to visit penal establishments, of which I have visited a number in the past 20 years.

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I have mentioned the part played by the Scouts movement in shaping my life and my general attitude. I would point to 2 scout leaders who helped show me the way. Skipper Jim Hough, educated at Cambridge and a hospital administrator (before and after it became NHS) who, ~~some~~ with the ending of the war, introduced us to 'eating out' (whenever we camped in the New Forest all us Patrol Leaders would go to Plummer's restaurant in Bournemouth) at Lyons Corner Houses in the Strand or Regents Street, where we got used to dining with the 'toffs'; classical concerts at the Bermondsey Central Hall, all very new to us, but very exciting; tennis was Skipper's main sporting interest but the only courts were in Tanner Street, 2 courts under a large wire cage with a tarmac surface which would 'bubble' here and there under prolonged sunshine. My first attempt at badminton was due to Skipper Hough providing about 5/6 rackets for us to play with and after my return from the RAF, I used to play with him, doctors and nurses at the New Cross Hospital. The 'noble art' of boxing was not one of his sports but, he would always encourage us to enter for the District Scout Boxing tournament (boxing always had been part of the tradition among youth organisations and schools in Bermondsey), not because he could teach us much about boxing but, as he used to say "I know all about first-aid, and know how to ~~to~~ treat cuts and bruises and bleeding from the nose".

Harry Carter was another man for whom I had the greatest admiration. Harry had been medical officer out of the Army in 1944 and came to the Scouts and taught us woodwork. This was an unusual feature for scouts, but a couple of small work benches were found on which we learnt to make toys and other small items. After the war Harry became a tutor at a technical school. He lived with his wife Nan at 6 Slippers Place; I remember it well for it was one of the only houses in Bermondsey that had a TV set, and I was a frequent visitor. Harry ran the Senior Scouts section and was our Rover Crew leader. He helped Eileen and I restore and redecorate our rooms when we married, and although a 'rough and ready' sort of guy, could quite properly be described as a 'gentleman'. A great honour for all of us came when Harry was appointed Clerk of the Works for Westminster Abbey, and some of us were greatly privileged to visit him from time to time to be shown parts of the Abbey that even TV cameras cannot reach!!

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Something which Jim Hough instilled in us Patrol Leaders was the need to always keep in touch with members of your patrol, by visiting them at home and meeting their parents - in other words to show an interest in their well-being. He would also require his Patrol Leaders to take a turn at leading the worship at our S.O.S. (Scouts Own Service). This would entail choosing the hymns, the reading and giving a talk (it was never referred to as a 'sermon', but that's what we used to call it among ourselves).

At the time, I sometimes didn't see the sense in either of these duties, but I have come to realise why I should now be grateful.

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Whether it was because he was a batchelor and had to fend for himself, Skipper Hough was a first-rate organiser, particularly when it came to <sup>to</sup> cooking at camp, and he obviously passed on hints on how to feed a camp full of hungry scouts. I learnt a lot from him. Despite my ability to provide (and devour) meals cooked over a camp fire, I have never been able to transfer those cordon bleu skills to the domestic scene, so that all my married life I have relied upon, catered for and fully nourished by the unsurpassed talents of my beloved Eileen, chief cook and bottle washer.











