

My Story by Cliff Turner.

Brigg, where I was born on 21 March 1925, is a small market town in North Lincolnshire. It stands astride the River Ancholme about ten miles south of Ferriby Sluice where the river flows into the River Humber.

Brigg has few claims to fame. Music lovers may be aware of Delius' rhapsody *Brigg Fair* but find it difficult to find Brigg on a map, and some devotees of the theatre may know that actress Joan Plowright was born in a Brigg council house. She is a few years younger than me so it is possible that I saw the future Lady Olivier in her pram.

Most of my father's ancestors came from North Lincolnshire. My great grandad Charles Turner, who died long before I was born, came from Barnetby. In the 1871 census he was living at Broughton in the house of a farmer, George Marshall, and was described as a servant. Two other young men were living in the house so it would seem likely that Charles was employed on the land. In 1881 he was living at 9 West Terrace in Brigg, married to Harriet (nee Maddison). They had a daughter, Annie, aged two. He was listed as brewer's drayman. I do not know how my great grandma regarded this employment as I remember she used to wear a little enamel brooch in the shape of a white ribbon. It was only after I came to New Zealand that I became aware that the badge was the emblem of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The 1891 census show Charles was still a brewer's drayman but living at 34 Grammar School Road, Brigg.

This house was known as Oakleigh House and not the kind of house that a brewer's drayman could have aspired to. At the time of his death from tuberculosis at the age of 42, in July 1895, he was a pork butcher. Family legend is that the pork butchers business, which persisted for four generations of Turners, was started by Harriet, so it seems likely that great granddad carried on working as a drayman for a while and then joined his wife in the butchers business.

After she was widowed, Great Grandma married Francis Richardson in 1898, so my brothers and I knew her as Grandma Richardson. I have a picture of Brigg market place early in the 20th century which shows a stall carrying the words "F Richardson, Pork Butcher, Grammar School Road, Brigg". Francis died in 1912. At the 1911 census my grandfather, also Charles, was still a cabinet maker.

The market stall mentioned above was described in *Nostalgia*, which is published by the *Scunthorpe Telegraph*, as "...a shed on wheels." One half of one side of the shed could be lowered into a horizontal position to form a counter. Most of the stalls in the Thursday weekly market were merely planks on trestles with a canvas cover overhead, and the stallholders were very much exposed to the weather, but the occupants of the shed on wheels were kept dry, and in winter were warmed by an oil stove.

For a short while, after my Uncle Fred was called up into the army in 1940, my brother Ken and I had to get up early on Thursday mornings to help Dad to wheel the stall from the yard of the Woolpack Hotel to its appointed space in the market place.

I think the main business must have been carried on in some kind of building in the

grounds of Oakleigh House. I do not know when the business moved to premises at the corner of Queen Street and Garden Street, but it was after my grandad took over. The new premises had quite spacious living accommodation.

Prior to that my grandparents lived in Redcombe Lane and Dad sometimes talked of the move but I never enquired about the time it took place.

I know from the 1911 Census that they were then still in Redcombe Lane with their five children, and that Grandad was still a cabinet maker. Any young person reading this is urged "Ask your Dad" (or your Mum) about their early days or as you reach middle age you will regret not doing so.

Similarly, I never asked when it was that my Dad joined his father in the business. I do not know if he left school at 13, as was legal then, or if he stayed a bit longer. I do know that during the First World War he spent some time in an organisation called the Coast Watching Scouts at Mablethorpe. I think they may have kept watch for the German fleet which on at least one occasion came close to the east coast and shelled Scarborough. At that time there were no reconnaissance aircraft or radar to warn of an enemy approach.

Grandma Richardson had four children: Annie, Walter, Charles and Arthur in that order. I had never heard of Annie, and it seems that she probably died at a young age. Arthur, the youngest, was a complete contrast to his two brothers, being a pillar of a non-conformist chapel and owning a boot and shoe shop which he later converted into a cake shop. During World War II he was in uniform as a full-time special constable; in the family he became known as "Specky", a corruption of Inspector. Soon after the war he and his family moved to Lincoln and I never heard of him again. It seems strange that I never went into the house of either of Grandad's brothers and they never came to our house. Neither can I recall ever speaking to any of Arthur's three children.

I did know some of Walt's children. Albert was in my class at Glebe Road School; Charley was a few years older and worked for a while in his uncle's butchery business. Ivy was almost my Dad's age; she lived with Grandma Richardson and also helped Nana in the shop. A younger sister, Rose, also worked for Nana for a while. In the war she was in the women's army (ATS) but died of TB during that conflict; her name is on the Brigg War Memorial. She is the only woman listed and the only person for whom the first name is given.

Grandad Charles started his working life as an apprentice cabinet maker with J T Kettle, a prominent Brigg citizen and undertaker; I do not know when he left that trade to become a butcher but it is likely that it was in 1912 on the death of his stepfather. He would have been about 29 when World War I started but was never conscripted. I have never heard any mention of how he avoided the call-up; perhaps it was because he had five young children by 1914.

Grandma Richardson had a pear tree in her garden and when the pears were ripe I would knock on her door on the way home from school and ask for a drink of water. Invariably she would ask "Would you like a few pears" and invariably I said "Yes". Strangely I was only thirsty when the pears were ripe!

A few years before World War II, Grandma sold Oakleigh House to her step-son Fred and moved to a little house at the corner of Bigby Street and Cross Street. Aged 85, she was still living by herself and coping well when the war came. In the early

hours of 4 September 1939 we heard the wailing siren of the air raid warning for the first time. Grandma went downstairs in her night gown, sat in a chair and died. My Nana Turner who lived nearby found her soon afterwards.

Nana Turner came from an old Lincolnshire family, the Leasons. Her father, my great grandfather Henry, died when I was 12 so I remember him well. His wife Rebecca died in 1910 and for many years he had a housekeeper, Miss Dawson. I hasten to add that the word "housekeeper" was not a euphemism. He lived on Bigby Road, about a hundred yards from our house in Princes Street, and when Miss Dawson left to look after a member of her own family he looked after himself for a while. My mother used to cook him a mid-day meal once a week and I used to take it to him. He would always give me sixpence which in those days bought three Mars bars. Later he went to live with his son Percy and died in 1938 aged 82.

Nana had three siblings that I remember: Alf, Mary and Percy. I have vague memories of another one, Charlie, who I think was a postman. He never married but lived with his father and died at a relatively early age. Alf prospered; he married a woman who had a grocery shop in March, Cambridgeshire. He used to come to Brigg occasionally to see his father and I know I met his sons but have no real memories of them.

Mary married a man called Joe Holmes. They lived in Doncaster but visited Brigg occasionally. Uncle Joe would always give my brothers and me a few coppers to buy "spice". For some unexplained reason "spice" meant "sweets" in South Yorkshire. I last saw Auntie Mary when I was in Brigg on compassionate leave when my mother died in 1944. She was visiting my Nana and heard that I was in the nearby barber's shop so she poked her head around the door to have a few words with me. I do not know whether or not Auntie Mary and Uncle Joe had any children.

Percy was the youngest and was an uncle as soon as he was born! My Dad, who was his nephew, was a few months older than his uncle Percy. Percy had four children who were of course my Dad's cousins but they were all younger than me. He worked for J T White, who had a small factory in Brigg making lemonade, and used to deliver to pubs and shops in the Brigg area by horse and cart. On 16 July 1953 the horse ran amok in Bridge St; Percy tried to hold on to its reins but was killed. At the time, I was working in the transmission department of the British Electricity Authority based at Keadby power station. Travelling to Grimsby sub-station my colleagues and I stopped in Brigg to buy a newspaper. On opening it I read about Uncle Percy's death on the previous day. Many years later I met Percy's son Ron in Christchurch, New Zealand, and he told me that Percy had received a posthumous award for his bravery from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

Uncle Alf died in the summer of 1954, trying to get his beloved Humber motor car out of its blazing garage.

Recently, I learned that Nana had two other brothers, John and Harold. John was killed in the 1914 war. He had two children, Les and Edna, who lived with their mother close to our house in Princes Street, both of whom I remember quite well. I had a vague idea that we were related but now know that they were first cousins to Dad. My niece Gill Greenfield knew Edna, who lived to a great age and who once told Gill that she remembered going to our house in Princes Street to see the new baby;

Gill is not sure if the new baby was me or my brother Ken. I know nothing about Harold except that at the 1911 census he was 17 and an apprentice cabinet maker. It seems strange that there was never any talk about my Nana's two brothers and that I have only learned of them late in life.

Nana and Grandad Turner had five children. My Dad, Reg, was born before they were married but he bore a strong resemblance to all his siblings so I am sure Grandad Turner really was my grandad. I was never told of this, but one day soon after we were married Nancy and I went to Brigg and as we went towards Dad's house we met him and step-mother. They were on the way to a small celebration of Nana and Grandad's golden wedding, and I knew Dad was more than 50 years old.

Next came Annie, who married Arthur Cross. Arthur's parents had a farm at the very end of Grammar School Road. Annie's first two children, Geoff and Charley Cross, were brought up by their Turner and Cross grand-parents respectively. Annie went on to have another seven children. Geoff and Charley were both older than me but are now dead, so I am the eldest living Turner grandchild and I have been since birth the eldest grandchild of Hannah and Charles Hills, my maternal grandparents.

Florence followed in 1906, then came Albert in 1908 and finally Fred in 1910. Flo married Chris Vessey of Barnetby and spent the rest of her life there. Chris worked on the railway as a plate layer. Flo had four boys: Reg, Ron, Fred and Keith, but I believe that Fred is the only survivor.

Albert's bride was Miriam Green; her father was a game-keeper on the Nelthorpe estate at Scawby. They had three children: Violet, Douglas and John. Douglas died when he was about six. I saw Violet at her home in Messingham in 2003; she was not in good health and died not very long after we returned home. I was never told why Douglas died in childhood, but looking back I think the cause was probably leukaemia. In contrast to his brothers, who worked in the family business until they retired, Albert was a restless soul. For a short time he had a butchers shop in Elwes Street, Brigg, and also had butchers shops in Grimsby and Sheffield and finally a grocery shop at Messingham. He and Mim lived for two separate periods in Scunthorpe but I do not know how he was employed on those occasions.

Fred was the last to marry; his bride was Joan Fuller of Poolthorne Farm, Cadney, one of three very pretty sisters. Their father managed the farm. This was the only wedding of the five children that I can recall. It took place in the Brigg church but the reception was held at Poolthorne and my chief memory is of seeing the cows milked. Weddings cannot remove the requirement of cows to be milked!

Fred and Joan had three children: Keith, Jean and Colin. Colin died at a fairly early age and Keith died when about 76. He was the last to run the family business.

It's time to turn to my mother's family. I know less about them because they lived in South Lincolnshire at Spalding, about 60 miles from Brigg. Grandad (Charles Alexander) Hills came from London and I know very little about his parents. I knew he had at least one brother, Henry, because he went to live for a while at Spalding at the beginning of the war when we all expected mass aerial attacks on London, but he did not stay for long. I know my mother had a cousin Katie, on her father's side, but know nothing about her.

Grandad had served in the Royal Marines. I have a copy of his Certificate of

Service; it says that he was born on 21 May 1877 (which was about 18 months before his actual birth date) and joined the Marines on 19 July 1895. His previous employment was as a telegraph messenger. The address of his father Joseph is given as 95 St Phillips Street, Battersea, London.

He served in HMS Victorious for more than two years. I believe he may have visited Japan as I was once shown a picture of a Japanese girl and Granny said "That might have been your granny". There must have been a good story in those words but, alas, we will never know. At my grandparents' house, 17 Queens Road, Spalding, a large picture of a warship used to hang in the front room and I am almost certain it was of the Victorious. His service certificate says he was invalided out of the Marines on 13 November 1903 as the result of an accident.

At the 1901 Census my grandmother, Hannah Musson, was in service with Lt Col John Britten in Kensington. When they married, early in 1902, Grandad was still in the Marines but it seems likely that he moved to Spalding soon afterwards. When I first knew him he was a postman but I think he got that job as a result of his service in the 1914 war. He had seven children when he voluntarily joined the army during the First World War (Regimental Number 8373, Lincolnshire Regiment). He was severely wounded at the battle of Passchendaele in Belgium in 1917, and was honourably discharged from the army. My cousin Shirley has his discharge papers dated 10 June 1918. It is only now, as I write these words, that I have realised he must have been 35 years old at the start of the war, and with such a large family it is unlikely that he would have been conscripted. Granny Hills died in 1943 and Grandad in 1957.

I know a bit more about Granny's family, the Mussons, and even vaguely remember my great-grandmother Mary Ann Musson, nee Doades. I have a "four generation" photo of her, Granny Hills, my mother and myself in which I look about three years old. Great Grandad Musson died in 1904, before I was born. My mother's brother Harry told me that he had committed suicide.

I remember four of Granny's siblings. Joe lived in Queens Road, Spalding, next door to Granny. Aunt Nell Turner (no relation to the Brigg Turners) lived a few doors away and Maud lived with Great Grandma just across the road and stayed on there after her mother died. Aunt Ada, after whom my mother was named, married a bulb farmer, Arthur Wade, who was as deaf as the proverbial post. Growing tulip bulbs was, and still is, a big thing in the Spalding area. On our trips to Spalding when I was a child we used to pay ritual visits to all of these relatives.

Hannah and Charles had seven children; my mother Ada Lydia was the eldest, born in 1903. Next came Charlie, Harry, Ernie, Joe, Dick and finally Nancy who was born in 1914. Joe never married and Harry had no family. In total I think I had eleven cousins on my mother's side but strangely I only have contact with the ones I first met most recently - Dick's daughters Shirley and Sandra. Nancy and I first met Shirley on a visit to England in 1988 after Uncle Harry urged us to call on her, but we had to wait until the end of 1998 to meet Sandra when she came with a large family party to New Zealand.

My mother left school when she was thirteen as was permitted then. The school leaving age was not raised to fourteen years until 1918. I think she went immediately

into service with a Mrs Sly.

Mrs Sly's daughter married a bank clerk called Maurice Dibben and when he was transferred to Brigg my mother went with them. At first they lived about two miles from Brigg at Kettlebythorpe on the Caistor road but later moved into a house in Albert Street. My parents never talked about their courtship so all I know is that they were married at Fulney Church, Spalding, in June 1923. I was middle-aged before it struck me how young my parents were when they married.

I am almost certain that they immediately moved into 5 Princes Street. A parallel street is called Albert Street which suggests that the house was built in the mid-19th century. A copy of an auctioneer's advertisement reproduced by *Nostalgia* shows that the land on which houses in Albert Street and Princes Street now stand was to be auctioned on 27 November 1851.

In his *History of 19th Century Brigg*, Dr Frank Henthorn describes the row of five houses as being superior accommodation for working class people, or words to that effect. That might have been the case when they were built but it was certainly no longer true by the time I came along. The five houses formed a single block and between numbers 3 and 4 a narrow passage at ground floor level gave access to a communal back yard.

The houses were one room wide; a door in the front room opened onto the street as in TV's Coronation Street. This front room was, as in most working class homes, a Holy of Holies used only on Sundays and at Christmas. Our only source of water was one cold tap in a porch by the back door. One side of the porch was open to the elements and another side had a door which gave access to the pantry.

On the first floor there were two bedrooms and from one of these another stairway gave access to an attic which was much more spacious than the two bedrooms below. It was sparsely furnished; the floor boards were bare except for a small rug between the beds. We children slept in the attic which had no form of heating; in the winter mother would wrap a heated iron shelf from the coal fired oven in an old sheet and put it into the bed a few minutes before bed time.

The attic had a dormer window in the roof; from it I could see the windmill at Wrawby which was at that time still working. In the summer months I used to watch swallows flying to and from their nests under the eaves of a house across the street.

In the small back yard there was the lavatory and wash house. The lavatory consisted of a seat with a hole; under the hole was a large bucket which was emptied by Council employees in the early hours of Saturday mornings into a large horse-drawn tank known as the dilly-cart.

We used to sing: *The Corporation dilly cart was full up to the brim,
The Corporation driver fell in and couldn't swim.*

Perhaps it is just as well that I have forgotten the rest of the ditty.

The wash house had a copper - a large iron cauldron set in a brick surround and having a fire grate under the cauldron. So on wash days (usually Mondays), the copper fire had to be lit and if it did not go at the first attempt my mother would get very frustrated.

Friday was bath night; this involved dragging a galvanised bath indoors from its hook on a wall in the back yard and filling it from large pans of water heated on the

fire or the gas ring. After we children had gone to bed my parents would have their weekly bath. We had no sink in the house; every drop of water used indoors had to be carried into the back yard and poured down a drain.

My mother never had a gas cooker; all cooking was done in the coal or wood fired oven or boiled or steamed on the gas ring. Downstairs lighting was by gas; upstairs, although there were gas lighting fittings, candles were almost invariably used. Electricity did not come to Brigg until the mid-1930's so I can well remember the streets being dug up for the cables to be laid by Yorkshire Power, a private company. I can recall only one substation; it was in Grammar School Road. Going by knowledge gained much later in life I think the transformer, which converted 11,000 volts to domestic voltage, would only have been of about 300 kVA. Today a transformer of that capacity might be enough for about 80 homes.

The local manager was Alfred Haddock; I learned this many years later when I worked for the Yorkshire Electricity Board in Sheffield, where Mr Haddock was the Area Manager. I think I only spoke to him once and that was at one of our annual engineers' dinners. He asked me where I came from and he then told me he had been manager in Brigg when the town first had electricity. I think he was astonished when I said that he must have been the optimist who put up a TV aerial at his house in Grammar School Road when television started in England in 1936.

He admitted that he had indeed been the optimist. In 1936 there was only one TV transmitter in use; at Alexandra Palace in north London. There was no hope of the signal reaching Brigg. The embryo TV service was closed down at the outbreak of war. I cannot remember when it restarted but by the time of the Queen's coronation in 1953 it was receivable in the Brigg area from a new transmitter at Sutton Coldfield in the Midlands.

I made my appearance on 21 March 1925. I was told that it was a Saturday and that it was snowing at the time. My brother Charles Kenneth followed on 29 September 1926 but I cannot remember when I first became aware of his existence.

I have few memories of my pre-school days but know that sometimes when my mother visited her parents at Spalding I would be left there for a while. One definite recollection is of bursting into tears on one occasion when my mother and father left to catch the train back to Brigg. I also remember going pea picking with one of Mum's brothers. The town crier used to go round town telling the public where pea pickers were needed and some people, although they had daytime employment, would go in the long evenings to earn an extra shilling or two. A large bag had to be filled for a shilling. On one occasion I ate so many peas that I was sick before we went home to Granny.

At that time I am almost certain that my Auntie Nancy and uncles Harry, Joe and Dick were still at home so it must have been a full house.

Some other pre-school memories are of our neighbours Aggie and Alf Draper and Clara and Harry Bedford. Aggie and Alf had only one son, Len, a few years older than me, and Clara and Harry were childless. Perhaps that is why I was a bit of a pet at both houses and spent a lot of time with these neighbours before I went to school.

It was at Aggie's house that I was first exposed to "art"; she had on her living room wall reproductions of *The Gleaners* and *The Angelus* by the French painter Jean

Francois Millet. Alf worked at the Yarborough Oil Mills where cow cake for winter feeding of cattle was made. Linseed oil was its main ingredient and consequently their house was pervaded by the odour of linseed oil. He was also the first person I ever saw rolling his own cigarettes.

Probably because she had no children Clara Bedford lavished attention on her terrier Tiny and Kitty her cat. They slept together in the same basket and at Christmas Clara used to give them each a chocolate fish.

I think I started school on my fifth birthday, at Brigg's only infants school in Grammar School Road. My mother had taken me there earlier to enrol, but on the big day I was taken by a slightly older boy, Peter Lyon, who lived near to us. My mother met me at midday and on the way home bought me a present at Albert Nettleton's shop. I forget the nature of the present.

School was a mile away but I walked that distance alone four times a day, as I went home for the midday meal. This meant crossing the A18, a major road connecting South Yorkshire with the ports of Grimsby and Immingham at the mouth of the River Humber.

That may sound horrifying to today's parents but in the early 1930's there was little traffic. Close to the school a farmer called Munday milked a herd of cows twice daily. The cows were pastured during the summer months about a mile away in a field on Westrum Lane and so the cows walked about four miles a day, crossing the A18 road four times and leaving abundant evidence of their passage splattered on the road.

School was a large wooden hut divided into three classrooms. My first teacher was Miss Kennington who lived until I was well into my sixties. Not many memories remain of my early schooldays; one I retain is of a girl called Phyllis Drayton persistently calling the teacher "Lady" and being told "Don't call me Lady, call me Miss." I also recall learning songs about Christopher Robin wanting a rabbit and going to Buckingham Palace to see the Changing of the Guard. I did not know then that Christopher Robin was a real person but in about 1960 I met him in his bookshop in Dartmouth, Devon.

The teacher of the next class was Miss Wilson and I have no memories of the time spent in her class before moving on to the top class taught by Mrs Twidale. During my time in that class Mrs Twidale retired and was replaced by Miss Hodson. Of the four teachers I suspect that only Miss Hodson had been formally trained as a teacher. Many teachers at that time had been pupil-teachers who learned their trade 'on the job' by listening to and helping older teachers who had probably started in the same way. About the only thing I remember of that class was learning about the Eskimos and I found that fascinating.

It was during my time at the Infants School that Ken and I were told one morning in October 1931 to go to Nana Turner at the midday break. We had no idea why this instruction was given but when we got to Nana she told us we had a baby brother.

It was typical of the time that we did not know such an event was to take place and it was also usual for a mother to have a few days in bed after confinement. A woman, I think her name was Miss Markham, came to look after us for those few days and I am almost certain she lived in for that period.

While John was still a baby I used to have the job of taking him in his pram around Princes Street and Albert Street in the hope of getting him to sleep. Not many parents today would ask a seven year old to do this but our walk did not take us across any streets and it did not seem extraordinary at the time.

I think it must have been while I was at the Infants School that I started going to Sunday School at the Congregational Chapel. Looking back it seems that Sunday School was invented to give parents a bit of peace on Sunday afternoons. The teacher was my Nana's cousin, Hettie Leeson, but I have no recollection of any words of wisdom I might have heard from her. One memory is of reciting a poem from the pulpit of the chapel but I have completely forgotten what the poem was.

Every year the four Brigg non-conformist chapels had a treat for Sunday School attendees. Horse-drawn decorated carts carried hymn-singing children round the town before returning them to their respective chapels for tea. Tea always included sandwiches of Nana Turner's potted meat and was followed by sports at a field near the cemetery on Wrawby Road.

When my brother John died my niece Gillian found a battered book, *Schoolboy Courage*, in his house and she sent it to me. It bears a label *Congregational Sunday School. Reward of Merit to Clifford Turner. March 19, 1933*. That was two days before my eighth birthday. I suspect that the only merit involved was turning up for Sunday School and I have no recollection of getting it. The Congregational Chapel was closed many years ago, sharing the fate of the Methodist Chapel in Bigby Street and the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Bridge Street.

One day I was talking near the Town Hall to a classmate, Billy Lidgett, who told me about the Church of England Sunday school in the Parish Hall in Elwes Street. I cannot recall why Ken and I changed our allegiance and there was no parental opposition. Perhaps this was because we went morning and afternoon, giving the parents a double ration of peace and quiet. This Sunday School did not join in the non-conformist chapels' annual treat; instead we had a a trip to Cleethorpes by train, or, in alternate years, sports at a field in Westrum Lane and tea at the Parish Hall.

At the age of seven children went on to Glebe Road School or, as we called it, Top School. When I started there it was still quite new, with eight class rooms and a woodwork shop and cookery room. My first teacher was Miss Elsie Stringer who had started off as a pupil teacher and had taught my Dad. There are few lessons of which I have a clear memory - one was about Solon the Athenian law-giver who lived about 500 B.C. When a pupil gave a good answer to a question Miss Stringer would sometimes say "A penny at 12 o'clock". I was occasionally the recipient of a penny which, in those days, bought a Milky Way or two ounces of sweets. I would spend it at Arthur Binns' tiny shop at the corner of Queen Street and Bigby Street on the way home at midday. Arthur's shop was demolished to make way for the new Post Office which was completed in 1936, and, according to local legend, was the only one to bear the Royal Cipher of Edward VIII who abdicated in December that year.

My next teacher was Miss Saxby, daughter of the Brigg Station Master. She must have been pretty colourless as I cannot recall anything she said or did. Then it was on into Miss Rowbottom's class; she too had come from the ranks of pupil teachers and she too had taught my father.

At Glebe Road there were no specialised teachers apart from the woodwork for boys and cookery for girls whom we did not encounter until we were about ten years old, so we had the same teacher all day every day.

Miss Rowbottom was middle-aged and a strict disciplinarian who frequently used the cane to give one stroke on to an outstretched palm. I was not exempt but bore no ill-will towards her and as far as I can tell suffered no psychological harm. I remember quite a lot about her class. On the wall hung a large map of Lincolnshire and from that we had our first lessons of local geography, and it was in her class that I first heard the story of the boy who cried "Wolf".

Sometimes she would give away copies of the *National Geographic* magazine to those she thought of as deserving pupils and I have a vivid recollection of her once standing by my desk saying "Shall I, shan't I?" before giving me the magazine. In the days before TV this magazine was a wonderful window on the world.

I think the Gresford Colliery disaster occurred while I was in Miss Rowbottom's class. A local councillor, Alf Fairbanks, organised a raffle in Brigg to help the families of the dead miners. Somehow, at the age of nine, I was roped in to sell tickets from door to door and as a result my brother Ken and I were given the job of drawing the winning tickets. The draw took place in the front room of the Fairbanks' little house in Garden Street. The details of the 1934 disaster had faded from my memory but just before writing this, quite by chance, I read that 266 miners were killed.

My next teacher was Miss Dobson who was quite young and left during my time in that class to get married. It seemed to be the rule then that female teachers had to leave if they married. It was in Miss Dobson's class that we were taught Rudyard Kipling's poem *God of Our Fathers*, a doleful dirge set to music and sung on Remembrance Sundays. No attempt was made to explain the meaning of the hymn; it was some time before I knew what was meant by "reeking tube and iron shard."

Miss Dobson's replacement was Miss Ivy Sumpter who lived with her parents quite close to us in Princes Street. She was very young and it seems probable that we were her first pupils after she completed her teacher training.

It was about this time that a child was sent to look for me during afternoon playtime and to tell me to go to the Staff Room, where I found some of the teachers drinking tea. "Clifford" said one, "we think you should join the church choir". That was tantamount to a royal command so on the next choir practice evening I presented myself to Dr Rowbottom, the organist and choir master, for an audition. I was accepted as a probationer choir boy and soon afterwards my brother Ken joined too. There were so many choir boys at that time that we had to sit in a front pew, not in the choir stalls, and we did not wear surplice and cassock.

Then one Sunday morning Dr Rowbottom poked his head around the organ and beckoned us into the vestry where we were put into cassocks and surplices and, as the most junior choir-boys, led the choir from the vestry into the choir stalls.

I remember quite a few of the boys: Bruce and Alan Bratley, sons of the Glebe Road head-master; John and Pat Cabourne, sons of the Grammar School art teacher; Desmond Tingey and "Gent" Draper. There were at least four other boys but their names have left my memory. We received a few coppers for each attendance; it was paid to us quarterly.

I now wish I had enquired more about Dr Rowbottom. He was from a local family. I was told that he had worked with my Grandad Turner as a cabinet maker for J T Kettle, but it never occurred to me to ask how he achieved a doctorate in music. He cannot have been very ambitious as I believe he spent his life in Brigg teaching children the piano and as choirmaster and organist, which seems to have been poor reward for his studies. He lived on Bigby Road, close to our house in Princes Street. A brass plate by his door said he was Mus.Doc. This puzzled me for a long time until I found that it meant Doctor of Music. In 2009, my niece Gillian gave me a photograph of workmen which came from my brother John's house after his death. I am convinced that Dr Rowbottom appears on the picture with my Grandad Turner.

In 1938 I stood with some other boys listening to the radio through Dr Rowbottom's open window and heard Len Hutton make his record-breaking innings of 364 runs in a test match against Australia.

We had two choir practices a week. Tuesday evening was for the boys only and one for the full choir was held on Friday evenings. Most of the time was taken up rehearsing the Psalms scheduled for Matins and occasionally we rehearsed an anthem in which the congregation took no part. The only one I remember was "Nearer my God to Thee".

The vicar was Fred Burgess; I visited him in the autumn of 1951 to arrange the calling of the Banns of Marriage between Clifford Reginald Turner, Bachelor of this Parish and Nancy Jones, Spinster of Liverpool. Of the men choristers I remember Horace West, the licensed lay reader; Dick Leaning, the verger; GW Cabourne and Joe Neave. We also had women choristers, only two I think, who came to choir practice and on Sundays sat in the front pew of the church and did not wear cassock and surplice.

When Ken and I went home after one Friday night practice we found our parents had bought a radio, or, as we it called it then, a wireless. As we did not have electricity it was powered by a large dry battery, about the size of two bricks, and a low voltage battery called an accumulator which heated the filaments of the electronic valves. The dry battery lasted a few months and as a new one cost about ten shillings its expiry caused something of a financial crisis. The accumulator was similar in principle to a car battery but because it was only required to produce a lower voltage it had fewer plates and was consequently smaller. It was taken weekly to be exchanged for a fully charged one at a cost of sixpence.

At that time the BBC had its own dance orchestra conducted by Henry Hall so we soon had the latest songs by heart. *South of the Border; Red Sails in the Sunset, The Isle of Capri* come to mind.

Having our own wireless meant that we no longer had to go to Nana's house to hear George V give his annual Christmas Day speech - Dad was a great royalist. At that time the King's annual address to the nation was still something of a novelty, the first one having taken place in 1932.

To return to school days: from Miss Sumpter we passed on to Miss Alice Balls who was certainly the most enthusiastic teacher I ever encountered, and I remember lots about her. One day a load of books appeared in the class-room and we were set to work giving them brown paper covers; I am almost certain that Miss Balls paid for

them out of her own pocket. On another occasion she bought lots of bulbs, bulb fibre and pots and we spent a messy hour planting the bulbs.

It was in her class that I read *Lorna Doone* and *The Young Fur Traders* and learned the poem *The Highwayman*. More than eighty years later I can still hear her, in my mind, dramatically declaiming "... where Tom the ostler listened, his face was white and peaked... for he loved the landlord's daughter..." Sadly said daughter did not love Tom but loved the Highwayman and as a result came to an untimely demise. Miss Balls was very interested in what we used to call nature study and so was I. She used to buy a periodical, *Nature Lover*, and let me read it.

I remember her praising me for a composition I wrote about birds and she read it out to the class. One summer evening she took a group of children on bikes to see the medieval church at Somerby, a tiny hamlet about four miles from Brigg. I did not have a bike and was very jealous.

Every year Miss Balls would give two or three children extra evening tuition, at her lodgings in New Street, for the scholarship examination which, if passed, gave recipients entry to the local Grammar School or the Girl's High School. In 1936 Margaret Lofthouse, Joan Skinner and I were the chosen ones. They were the prettiest girls in the class; Margaret was dark with big brown eyes while Joan was the epitome of Nordic beauty. I was the thorn between two roses.

Miss Balls lived in lodgings only about 100 yards from my house in Princes Street, but the girls both lived about a mile away in different directions; in those days it was not regarded as dangerous for young girls to be out at night. I cannot remember how many times a week we went to these extra lessons or for how long we went. Margaret and I won scholarships; my case was borderline and I had to have an interview with an official from the Lindsey County Council Education Committee before getting the nod. Joan was at least as bright as we were but somehow missed out; happily she was granted a Governors' Scholarship the following year. My mother bought some perfume and handkerchiefs for me to give to Miss Balls as a "Thank you" gesture.

Miss Balls was probably into her late thirties and was never known to have a man friend and was generally regarded as an old maid. So it was a great surprise to me as I sat in the choir stalls one Sunday and heard the Vicar call her marriage banns. By that time I had been at the Grammar School for two or three years and we had moved to Redcombe Lane where our neighbour was the Lay Reader, Horace West. He said to my mother "Guess who's dropped off the shelf". This amused mother as Horace was about 40 then and a confirmed bachelor.

Miss Balls left Brigg when she married; I think she returned to her native Cambridgeshire where her husband came from and I never heard any more about her. I hope she was as happy as she deserved to be.

I think we knew the results of the scholarship exam fairly early in the year but we did not start at our new schools until early September, which is the beginning of the academic year in England, and so I spent some time in the next class with Mr Booth, my first male teacher. He was very much "old school"; he too had started as a pupil teacher and he too had taught my father. I think he spent his whole teaching career at Glebe Road and its predecessor, the National School in Princes Street.

In this class we had one lesson per week, known as "torture morning" from the

headmaster G W Bratley, probably the only staff member with a university degree. He took us for arithmetic about areas and volumes and I have a clear memory of the lesson in which we worked out the weight of water which one inch of rainfall produced if it fell on an acre of ground.

Two highlights of the Glebe Road year were the Crowning of the May Queen and the school outing. The May Queen was chosen by the vote of the whole school and each class chose one of its girls to be a maid of honour. We had a May Pole but if my memory is correct only girls danced around it. The Queen was carried to her throne by boys pulling her in a chariot much like the one in which Boadicea is often depicted. Proceedings were started by the whole school singing a song *See the day, the welcome day is dawning. Cloudless the sky this happy bright May morning.* Strangely, though I remember the song, I can recall the name of only one May Queen, Sally Yates, of the five who were crowned during my time at Glebe Road.

The younger children were not allowed to go on the school trips so I only went on two, in 1935 and 1936. For part of the year we took money to school weekly to pay for the outing. My first one was to Manchester and this was the first time I ever went out of Lincolnshire. Several national newspapers printed their northern editions in Manchester and we went to see the printing of one of them but I cannot recall which paper it was. We also went to what I now believe was the Manchester College of Technology and saw something of the technology of cotton spinning and weaving. At that time Manchester was the centre of the Lancashire cotton industry. We saw Egyptian students, probably the first non-Europeans I ever saw. Then it was off to Belle Vue zoo and amusement park for tea, followed by the long road home over the Pennine mountains.

The second trip was to Knaresborough, Leeds and York, all in Yorkshire. At Knaresborough we walked along a river to see Mother Shipton's cave. She is described in Chambers Biographical Dictionary as a witch who lived from 1488 to about 1562. My only memory of Leeds is of going to the museum and seeing oil lamps of the type which were used in the Mediterranean area in Biblical times. In York my main memory is of the girls covering their heads with handkerchiefs to go into the Minster which is the name by which the cathedral is known; it was considered bad form for females to enter churches bare-headed. Then we had a trip on the river past the Archbishop's Palace. It was on this Yorkshire excursion that I first crossed the River Trent at Keadby Bridge, little knowing that about seventeen years later I would be living there.

Every year an old builder, Zadok Clark in Glebe Road, would give a few prizes for essays about the school trips and I think it was after the York trip that I received sixpence for my effort. This was handed out at the annual prize-giving which took place in the evening and I spent my sixpence on the way home on "One of each twice" at Morris's fish and chip shop in Wrawby Street. "One of each" was shorthand for one piece of fish and a pennyworth of chips and "twice" meant I shared my bounty with my brother Ken.

Another annual event was the turning out to grass of George Brocklesby's horse. In the winter months the horse, which pulled the Brocklesby coal cart, was stabled in the owner's back yard only a couple of hundred yards from my Princes Street home.

Somehow a few local kids would learn when the horse was to be turned out after its day's work, in a field on Bigby Road. Every year the horse gave unmistakeable evidence of its joy on the first evening back in the field. He would snort, gallop up and down the field and roll on his back with legs in the air. All too soon the coal cart was replaced by a lorry and I do not know what happened to the horse.

Also in spring the swallows returned from Africa to nest in Grandad Turner's pig sty. The nest was made of dried mud and was in the form of a half hemisphere. For a few years I would be lifted up to see the eggs. Swallows reared two broods of chicks annually but the number of birds returning to England did not appear to increase so the mortality rate must have been very high.

Periodically, Glebe Road was visited by the somewhat intimidating Nurse Bull who scrutinised the head of every child for head lice. The names of infested children were announced at assembly so that they could get a letter to take the news to their parents. Imagine the fuss that would ensue if that happened today. Thanks to mother's frequent use of a small-toothed comb Ken and I were spared that humiliation.

In my young days lots of families had a custom of walking out together on summer Sunday evenings and my family had three favourite walks, each of at least four kilometres. One was to Scawby Brook, through Scawby Park to Scawby village and returning via the King William IV pub at Scawby Brook, where there was a garden with tables and chairs for families. Mum and Dad had a drink and we kids would have lemonade and crisps.

Another route was down Closehedge, then a rutty cart track but now called St Helen's Road, and then across three fields to Gravel Pit Lane which led into Wrawby. Here there was a choice of pubs: The Black Horse and the White Horse. We alternated between them, possibly because both were customers on my Dad's country round. On one occasion, while brother John was still in his pram, we were at The Black Horse when a violent thunder storm occurred. When the rain eased, Dad walked to Brigg to get the butcher's van to take us home. I can't recall if the pram was somehow put into the van or if it was collected later.

Our longest walk took us along Bigby Road, then we turned left into Kettleby Lane, over the level crossing on the Brigg to Grimsby railway and into Wrawby. There, refreshment was taken at one of the aforementioned pubs and then it was back to Brigg by the main A18 road. This must have been at least four miles.

It was on one of these walks that I first saw a baby cuckoo in a nest of a much smaller bird. It was close to the first milestone out of Brigg on the Bigby Road; I think I could go today and point to the spot within metres. Perhaps I should explain that cuckoos do not make nests or rear their own young. The female cuckoo deposits an egg in the nest of another bird, and when the baby cuckoo is born it ejects any eggs or chicks in the nest so that it receives the sole attention of its unwitting foster parents.

As a young boy I loved to roam the fields and hedgerows looking for birds' nests, gathering blackberries in the late summer and wild violets in the spring to carry home for my mother. One thing I took home was not so welcome. In Westrum Lane a field belonging to the Sumpter family had been left as a rabbit warren and there was a little hut, about the size of a telephone kiosk, just big enough to hold a man and his shot gun. One day we found a white ferret there; it was the practice to put a tame ferret into

a rabbit hole with the hope that it would drive out rabbits for the man waiting with the gun. Sometimes the ferret would stay in the hole until its owner got tired of waiting for it to emerge, and this is obviously what had happened. I took the ferret home; mother asked where it had come from and when I told her she said "Take it back". And so the ferret was liberated.

Collecting a jar of frog spawn was another annual event; usually we found our frog spawn in a drain we knew as Pig Pudding Dyke which was reached by crossing two fields at the end of Closehedge. I have no idea of why that name was given. The spawn always provided tadpoles but I was never successful in keeping one long enough for it to become a frog.

Two big days in the Brigg calendar were Mayday Thursday and the Horse Fair which was held on 5 August unless that date fell on a Sunday. The fair in May dated back to medieval times and was authorised originally by Act of Parliament or Statute, which is why we called it Status. It was originally a hiring fair where agricultural workers would be engaged to work for a year, but our main interest was the funfair in the White Horse Pub's paddock with roundabouts, dodgem cars, gypsy fortune tellers, coconut shies and other means of luring pennies from our pockets. There were also one-armed bandits - the name "pokies" was then unknown - and once my mother hit the jackpot of about eight shillings. At the time my Dad's weekly wage was fifty shillings so there was great rejoicing.

The gypsy fortune tellers - I think there were usually three of them - had little tents just inside the paddock gate and the thing I most remember was that they wore brooches of gold sovereigns. These gold coins had been in common use up to 1914, but in the 1930's could be sold to jewellers for thirty shillings; that was about one and a half times their face value. The gypsies used to park their traditional gaily painted caravans on Bigby Road close to the recreation ground and I got to know a boy and a girl about my age. Later in life I realised that their accents were probably Welsh and the fact that the boy was always called by two names, John Thomas, in the Welsh fashion, adds to the credibility of that belief. The girl, whose name I forget, once threatened to get her grandmother to put a curse on me! Although Mayday Thursday was the big day, the funfair went on for about a week.

The Horse Fair fell in the school summer holiday, so all the boys went to see the horse trading that went on in parts of Wrawby Street, Grammar School Road and Queen Street. At the end of the day the fire engine was brought out to hose away the material the horses had deposited.

Occasionally, circuses came to Brigg, to either the White Horse paddock or the Brocklesby Ox paddock off Bridge Street. Kids could wander around the grounds and get close enough to touch the elephants. One elephant killed its keeper at Louth a few days after the circus had been at Brigg.

The Grand Cinema played a large part in my early life. I think it was built in the late 1920's. When I first started going to the Saturday afternoon matinees the price of admission was one old penny but it was soon raised to two old pence. A big attraction for us was the serial. I think most of the serials had about 12 weekly episodes; every episode ended in a "cliff-hanger" situation from which the hero or heroine was miraculously extricated at the beginning of the next episode. The villain of the piece

was exposed in the last episode - it was usually some hitherto unsuspected person. When I was very young there were two cinemas in Brigg; the other one was called the Electric cinema and was housed in the Corn Exchange.

Not many of the films I saw have remained in my memory but I remember several of the actors: Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn; the trio of Will Hay, Moore Marriot and Graham Moffat. Films with George Formby and Gracie Fields guaranteed a full house. One vivid memory is of Charles Laughton, as Henry VIII, exulting "It's a boy" when he learned that his queen, Jane Seymour, had given him a son.

For a few weeks in about 1937 we had a repertory company in Brigg which performed at the Parish Hall in Elwes Street. I went to a few performances but can recall only one line of dialogue. In one play Ken Bell, whose Dad kept the Yarborough Hunt pub, and his girl cousin appeared as children and Ken's memorable line was "I've been playing hopscotch with Lisa."

For a time before going to the Grammar School I went with my Dad every Saturday on his country round to Wrawby and Barnetby. He had regular customers in those villages and while he went to one house I would go to a nearby house to ask "Anything from Mr Turner today?" Sometimes the woman would come out to the van before making up her mind and sometimes I would be given instructions about her requirements. Then back to the van to get what she wanted. We started at about 8:30 a.m. and by the time we reached the White Horse pub at Wrawby were ready for the cup of tea that Mrs Mumby invariably provided.

Ada and Laurie Mumby had been our neighbours in Princes Street for some time before they took the pub. Laurie was bandmaster of the Brigg Silver Band and as was often the case had been found a job in Brigg. In his case the job was at Sergeant's brewery and the White Horse was tied to the brewery as were several pubs in the Brigg area. Like so many little breweries in England, it was taken over by a bigger name after the war and was eventually closed down. They had a daughter Avis (later Tossell) two or three years older than me who made a name as a singer. I last saw her in Scunthorpe in 1952 or 1953 as I was going to the station to catch a train to Doncaster, where I was studying part-time at the technical college.

She was going to Leeds to make a recording for the BBC so we had half an hour to reminisce before I reached my destination. After the war she and her husband and her Dad played a big part in resuscitating the Brigg Operatic Society

After seeing all the Wrawby customers it was on to Barnetby, usually reaching my Auntie Flo's house about mid-day for more refreshment, and soon after that Dad would buy me a twopenny bar of chocolate at a nearby shop. The last call was at a farm between Barnetby and Bigby and then home along the Caistor to Brigg road. There was a long straight stretch and Dad would get the van up to 60 miles per hour, or a mile a minute, and I loved that. My grandad used to give me sixpence when we got back to the shop. The van was then restocked and my Uncle Fred would set off on a round of Howsham, South Kelsey and Cadney. In the winter it was dark before he finished.

I had to give up the job when I started at the grammar school as we went to school on Saturday mornings, so my brother Ken took over for a year until he too went to the grammar school. Dad also did a shorter country round on Wednesdays and I would go

with him sometimes in the school holidays.

After my grandad had his leg amputated in about 1933 or 1934 Dad got the job of going to the weekly cattle market at Barnetby to buy pigs. A train left Brigg about mid-morning and one came back at a convenient time in the afternoon; the trip to Barnetby only took about 7 or 8 minutes. I used to go with Dad occasionally. He would walk around the pens and decide which lot he wanted to buy. Pigs were auctioned and I never knew Dad was bidding, by the flicker of an eyelid, until I heard the auctioneer say "Sold to Charley Turner" in spite of the fact that it was Reg, not Charley, that now attended the market. Dad carried a thing like a shaving stick which contained a red substance which was used to mark the newly bought pigs with the initials CT.

Then it was off to find Mr Leaning who ran cattle transport trucks and who always got the job of getting the pigs to the slaughter house on Redcombe Lane. It was also necessary to get a license to move the pigs; I am almost sure this was obtained from the police who had a temporary office at the market.

The slaughter house was quite primitive; a little brick-built place no more than four yards square and two small adjoining pigsties. After the pigs had been killed by humane killer they were put into a large wooden bath of hot water and their hair was removed. The hot water system would have been regarded as a disaster by a time and motion expert. The pump from which water was obtained was about 30 yards from the slaughter house and the copper in which the water was heated was another 30 yards further away. This meant that every bucket of water used in the process was carried about 90 yards.

After the hair had been removed the pigs were lifted by the hind legs, using a block and tackle, and their internal organs removed. It took most of an afternoon for two men, Dad and Uncle Fred, to deal with two or three pigs. Liver and kidneys were saved and intestines were kept and sent away to a firm that processed them into sausage skins. Other innards were taken to a field in Redcombe Lane and dumped. Not very hygienic, but things were different in the 1930's.

One Christmas time, either 1938 or 1939, business was so good that more pork was urgently needed. Dad and Uncle Fred were so busy making pork pies and sausage that my Uncle Arthur Cross, who had been a butcher in his earlier days, got the job and I was roped in to help him. My main job was carrying the hot water.

Some of the pork was sold as joints and chops but a lot of it went into pork pies and sausage which were made in a little workshop off Cross Street. A single-cylinder petrol engine drove a big mincer from which the minced meat fell into big earthenware receptacles we called pancheons. Minced meat for sausages was flavoured with pepper and sage but if I remember correctly nothing was added for pork pie filling. Dad was the sausage man while Uncle Fred and Grandad did the pork pies. The uncooked pies were taken on a hand cart to a baker called Davis in Wrawby Street to be cooked. I would go occasionally to help in the workshop, cutting up meat ready for the mincer and linking sausage. I am sure I could still link sausages now!

Our shop, unlike beef and mutton butchers, never had to cope with ration books in the war years. When rationing started, probably in early 1940, butchers were no longer allowed to procure meat from wherever they chose; meat was delivered to them but I

do not recall how the system worked. In our case we were no longer allowed to sell pork as chops or joints; a certain amount of pork was allotted for making sausage and pork pies. The proportion of meat to rusks allowed in the sausages was drastically reduced. My naughty grandad used to get Dad to make a few pounds of sausages to the pre-war standard for the family every week.

Sides of pork were delivered by lorry; I do not know where it came from but it was often of poor quality and was often dumped on the pavement outside the shop. Because ration coupons were not required for buying our products, long queues would form outside the shop until stocks were gone. The country rounds made by Dad and Uncle Fred were abandoned. I had thought that the country rounds were never resumed after the war but recently my cousin Keith's daughter Melanie told me that a weekly round to Scawby was made when her Dad was running the business. The slaughter house in Redcombe Lane was never used again. The end of the war in 1945 did not bring an early end to food rationing. When Nancy and I married in 1951, meat, sugar, butter, cheese, bacon, sweets and chocolate were still rationed.

In early September 1936 I started at Brigg Grammar School, founded by Sir John Nelthorpe in 1669. The school had two streams, one for bright boys and one for the less bright; scholarship winners were of course put into the "A" stream along with chosen fee-paying boys and my first form was 3A. There were forms 1 and 2 but all the boys in those forms were younger fee-paying pupils, some of whom had started at the school at the age of eight. Boys in the "A" stream took the Cambridge School Certificate after four years while those in the "B" stream had to wait an extra year before being allowed to attempt it.

The big change from the elementary school was that we had different teachers for different subjects and one teacher was allocated to each form as form master. At the end of each 45 minute period a bell was rung, the teacher left for his next class and the teacher for the next lesson arrived.

Another big difference was that all the teachers were men and yet another change was to have French, Latin, physics, chemistry, algebra and geometry come into our lives. Boys in B forms did Biology instead of Latin. Looking back, I now believe that biology would have been of much more value than Latin, which brings me to the story of the Cecropian buskin.

A year or two after I retired I started out on a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, doing English and History. One day a lecturer asked me to read an essay I had written to the rest of the class and one of the students commented on the wide vocabulary. The lecturer said "Cliff probably did Latin at school". I said that I had done so and I then asked my fellow students if they knew what a Cecropian buskin was - nobody knew. I then asked if they knew what a tendon is and of course they all knew that. I then explained that the buskins were footwear with built up soles that were worn by actors in amphitheatres in Ancient Greece and which were named for King Cecrops, the legendary founder of Athens. I had learned this from one of Horace's Odes which I had studied for School Certificate Latin, but I was in my forties before I learned that a tendon is the thing which connects muscle to bone – a much more useful bit of information.

Jumping ahead I will now record that I passed six papers of the twenty-one required

for a B.A. I gave up when tuition fees were raised to an exorbitant level.

At the grammar school, we attended on Saturday mornings which when I look back seems to be a bit daft. One would think that the teachers would have preferred a longer weekend, and, since many boys travelled by bus to school at the expense of the Lindsey County Council, money would have been saved if buses ran five days a week instead of six. I believe Saturday morning school survived until well after the war. To compensate for the Saturday attendance there was no school on Wednesday afternoons.

My first form master was R W Pratt who always called me Clifford although surnames were used for most boys. He took us for geometry and I think arithmetic and certainly for singing which he taught throughout the school. For singing, he played a grand piano and I still remember snatches of the songs we learned. *On the Bank of Allan Water; The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls; Once a Boy a Flower Espied.*

One year a choir from school entered the Brigg Musical Festival, for which we had to learn two songs. One started *The sky's a fairy field by night, the wind's a shepherd gay*. This was long before the word gay acquired its present connotation. The other song was about pirates and started *Up with the Jolly Roger boys, and off we go to sea*. The only other entry was from a girls' school and the adjudicator did not endear himself to us by saying the girls sang the pirate song much better than we did. Guess who came second.

Mr Pratt was an accomplished pianist; he lived about a hundred yards from school and often as one passed his house out of school hours he could be heard playing for his own amusement. Pause now for funny story about Mr Pratt and his son Cyril who was a year or two younger than me.

The school song was about the Founder, Sir John Nelthorpe, Baronet, whose family motto was the Latin word *Fortitudine* which means "with courage". The last line of the chorus to every verse was "His motto ours shall be, Fortitudine." In the song the "ti" had to be held for a period, and when new boys were learning the song Mr Pratt would count 1, 2, 3, while we held on to the "ti" syllable before going on to "tudine".

One day Colonel Sutton Nelthorpe, a descendant of the founder and Chairman of the Board of Governors, visited the school and asked a boy if he knew the school motto. The boy was Cyril Pratt and he replied "Forty- one-two-three-tudine". The Colonel was not a baronet; the hereditary title had died out somewhere along the line due to lack of a male heir and the Colonel descended from a female Nelthorpe who married a man called Sutton. I do not know when the baronetcy expired - must look it up one day in Burke's Landed Gentry.

In Form 3A the Headmaster J T Daughton M.A.(Oxon) took us for algebra. Probably because of his headmasterly duties he was often late in appearing, but most of us mastered simultaneous equations during that first year. I remember him being very pleased with me on one occasion but the following week poor work led to a fall from grace. "How are the mighty fallen" said Mr Daughton. I guessed at the time that the words came from the Bible but only now, more than seventy years later, have I looked them up to find they are from II Samuel ch.1, v. 23.

Mr Daughton also took us for Scripture in our first year and, as with algebra, he was

often late. At that time, Scripture was taught in almost all, if not all, English schools. At Glebe Road we learned the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes by heart and although I had lost any religious faith by the time I was 18 I still remember some of them word perfect. It is perhaps illogical but I feel a little sad for people who were not exposed to some of the sonorous language of the Authorised Version of the Bible. Recently, on a TV quiz show, a man thought Solomon was the son of Abraham!

Unlike Glebe Road, where every teacher was allowed to use the cane, only Duffy, as we called the Headmaster, administered corporal punishment. It did not happen very often; most boys went through the school without getting six from a large plimsoll across the back-side. I was twice the recipient. We were supposed to change from our outdoor shoes into plimsolls before going into school; one day Duffy came into class and checked us out. About six boys, me included, went to Duffy's study for immediate punishment. My second taste of the plimsoll came after Duffy saw me writing on a wooden window frame for which I received another six. I have not indulged in graffiti since that day.

Latin was the subject of Mr Lamb, from him we learned *sum* - I am; *es* - thou art; *est* - he (or she or it) is; *sumus* - we are; *estis* - you are; *sunt* - they are. It seemed strange that one word embraced the verb and the pronoun. I think the first sentence we learned was *Britannia insula est* - Britain is an island. Again it seemed strange that the verb came at the end of the sentence.

I am almost certain that it was during a Latin lesson that we were called into the school hall one day in December 1936 to learn that King Edward VIII was to abdicate. When he came to the throne in January of that year the pupils walked from Glebe Road to the market place to hear him proclaimed King from the balcony of the Angel Hotel.

This example was not followed at the Grammar School and so I did not hear George VI proclaimed King in succession to his older brother.

Mr Lamb's interrupted lesson proved to be one of the last we had with him, as he died early in 1937. His replacement was called Kemp; I do not know where he came from but he was hopeless and disappeared after about one term. He was followed by T G Richards who was already at the school. Tiger, as he was known, lived in the boarders' house and he was our Latin teacher until we took School Certificate. He came from South Wales and like Mr Pratt was a first-class pianist. About 20% of the school's pupils were boarders. Headmaster Daughton also lived on the premises in a quite imposing house next to the boarders' house.

In the autumn term of 1937 Tiger was our form master in Form IVA, and with him we put on a short play for Speech Day. Speech Day always took place at the Corn Exchange, which had a stage and was also the venue for productions of the Brigg Operatic Society. I was part of a group of about six boys who made a brief appearance as carol singers. We sang *Here we come a-wassailing*. The school magazine *The Briggensian* for the following term contained a review of the play. The carol singers were described as being "Valiantly led by Turner".

It was in 1937 or 1938 that I made another appearance "on the boards" at the Corn Exchange.

Joan Lyon, daughter of a local baker, had theatrical aspirations but worked for her

father delivering bread. One day she asked my mother if I would be one of the Ugly Sisters in Cinderella and of course I agreed. My friend Billy Cade was the other Ugly Sister; Billy and I had one or two rehearsals just for our parts in the Lyon bakery but most of the rehearsing was done in the town hall with one dress rehearsal at the Corn Exchange. Billy and I had one song, *It's three o'clock in the morning. We've danced the whole night through.*

Only one performance was planned and when the big day came Jean Bell, Prince Charming, was too ill to appear and Joan stepped into her role. Before the performance, the chairman of the local council gave a short speech and mentioned this change. Somehow I saw his speech notes and noticed he had written Gene instead of Jean; perhaps he did not know that in pantomime Principal Boys are always girls. This had an interesting sequel in 1996 when we were on a trip home.

I was in the family shop in Queen Street when my cousin Jean's husband asked if I knew Mrs Dodd who was standing outside the shop. I went to her and asked "Are you Joan Lyon?" to which she replied "I was once". I reminded her of my part in her production and for some reason mentioned the miss-spelling of Jean. It then transpired that Jean and Joan had argued for years about who had played Prince Charming. I was able to settle the argument by reminding Joan that so many people came to our first performance, with many being turned away, that we did a second, originally unplanned, performance a few days later. By that time Jean was able to take her part.

Joan then said that she would be meeting Jean in the White Horse pub in a few minutes and asked us to join them. Joan's husband, a retired journalist, was also there and he asked us to go to their house the next day. There he took our photo and made a few notes with the result that Nancy and I had a story about us in the local paper. Joan went on to successfully produce many stage shows in Brigg.

Time to get back to school. Geography was the province of Mr Gregory, the only teacher in the school not in possession of a university degree. His nick-name was Prague; the story was that one day a pupil pronounced "Prague" to rhyme with "vague" and Gregory was reputed to have roared "Not Prague, boy, Praaarg."

I did not like G W Cabourne, the art master. Our first lesson with him was devoted to telling the scholarship boys how lucky we were to be at Brigg Grammar School and that we how we must conduct ourselves accordingly. It is now almost 76 years since that first lesson and I remember some of his words verbatim. Speaking about the school's lavatories and cloakrooms he said that probably many of us were amazed by *"the wealth of white porcelain"*.

John Rhodes, a Brigg scholarship boy, started at the school in 1941 a few months after I had left. In 2007 he published a book *"A Yeller-Belly Boyhood"*. In the book he made it clear that he shared my opinion about the arch-snob Cabourne, likening him to Captain Mainwaring in *Dad's Army*.

My first chemistry teacher was Mr Dodd. In the first term we did not have full-scale exams but tests. Mr Dodd gave back our marked papers in reverse order of the number of marks obtained; when he had only one left he said *"And this is the boss of you all"* and handed me my answer sheet. During the war I was returning from leave when I was in the Navy and found myself standing next to him in the corridor of a crowded railway train. He was then a major in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps but was quite

happy to talk to a lowly naval rating.

Mr Dodd was replaced by a man called Butters. He was quite a young man but seemed very unconventional and I suspect that he was invited to leave after a term or two. Next came Yorkshireman Mr John Bradley who was probably even more unusual than his predecessor but who had the advantage of being an enthusiastic and capable teacher. One thing I learned from him was that the stability of metallic compounds is inversely proportional to the specific gravity of the metal involved. Potassium and sodium are very light metals and compounds of those metals are so stable that the metals were not isolated until Humphry Davy did it by using electrolysis early in the 19th century. By contrast, compounds of mercury are so unstable that a little heat from a Bunsen burner will liberate liquid mercury from its ores; gold, an even heavier metal, can be found in the earth in its elemental form.

Mr Bradley made frequent mention of the Swedish chemist Jöns Jakob Berzelius whose name is pronounced as Bertselius. This became Mr Bradley's nickname which soon became abbreviated to Bert. Bert never married; he lived on Bigby Road with his mother and sister and could be seen walking to school, hands deep in his pockets and trousers at half-mast. During one bitter winter he was never seen in an overcoat until he appeared in one on the first day of the thaw. Bert played the violin and became choir master and organist in succession to Dr Rowbottom but by that time I was no longer in the choir. At about the end of 1940 he was conscripted into the air force as an officer in the educational field; I remember him telling me that he intended taking his violin with him.

In the autumn of 1940 I took the examination to go into the navy as an artificer apprentice. The exam took up most of a day. I did it at school and Bert got the job of invigilator; I hope the Admiralty paid him for that extra-mural work.

Bert's replacement was another hopeless teacher and I have forgotten his name as I was exposed to him for only a few weeks before I went into the navy on 24 February 1941. Bert had taught us Avogadro's hypothesis and he obviously thought of it as an inspired bit of thinking. About the only thing I recall of the new man was his dismissal of the hypothesis as "*a bit of a wangle*".

Mathematics was the province of "Bumper" Knight who was also deputy head master. I never heard any explanation of the derivation of his nickname. He was a good teacher who had been at the school for many years but I can recall little about him except that he was mad on cricket. As with most of the teachers we had no idea of where he was born or educated.

An exception was Dickie Thumwood who taught me physics all through the school, but I only learned of his early years sometime after 1961, the year we moved to Newbury. I decided to write to him to tell him of how much I valued his influence. We lived on Pyle Hill in Newbury and I was astonished to learn, when he wrote back, that he came from Kingsclere, close to Newbury, had attended Newbury Grammar School, and that he had cycled along Pyle Hill daily to and from school.

He was a good teacher and probably the one who had more formative effect on me than any of my other teachers. I think, but do not know for sure, that he had been in the army in World War I. Perhaps as a result he became an enthusiastic supporter of the League of Nations which was set up in the aftermath of that war and was replaced

by the United Nations after World War II. He might have been secretary of the local branch; when a meeting was arranged he would get me, to save postage, to deliver lots of invitations to members.

Mention of this and the fact that Mr Daughton and Mr Pratt called me Clifford rather than Turner might give the impression that I was a teachers' pet. That was far from the case; by the time I left school I am pretty sure that I had clocked up more hours of Saturday afternoon detention than anyone else in my form.

Mr Thumwood also taught biology and on a couple of occasions I went with him on the Wednesday half-day off to gather specimens for biology lessons. Once we went to Kettleby Washdyke about two and a half miles from Brigg. The occasion was made memorable by a hatch of mayflies that climbed up our rubber boots to take to the air. Mayflies spend most of their lives in water as larvae and emerge as flying insects, living only long enough to mate and lay eggs.

I went on yet another expedition with Mr Thumwood in about 1946 when on leave from the navy. I was out on a bike in Brigg and met him as he was going once again to collect material for a biology class and so I went with him.

At about the time I started at the grammar school I started going to the public library which was housed in the town hall and run by a retired school mistress, Miss Fieldsend. It opened for only about two hours on Friday evenings. Having just started physics at school I thought a book called *The Nature of the Physical World*, written by famed astronomer and physicist Sir Arthur Eddington, would be just up my street. When I started reading it I soon realised I was a bit out of my depth and after that stuck to Richmal Crompton's "William" books.

French was the province of Chips Morris; his nickname came from the name of the fish and chip shop mentioned earlier in these memoirs. I believe he came from North West England. He was a good teacher but for some reason which I cannot explain I did not have the same warm regard for him as I had for Bert Bradley and Dickie Thumwood. In my second term I did well in French, getting 98% in the exam.

One good thing I remember about him was his arranging a trip to Scawby Gull Ponds, about four miles from Brigg. Although at least ten miles from salt water the Ponds were the breeding ground of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of black-headed gulls, and in the breeding season they were quite a tourist attraction. On this visit I saw, in addition to nesting gulls, a dipper, a bird about the size of a thrush that is found near water; it was the only one I ever saw. During the war many American or Canadian soldiers were encamped in the area and the gulls left, never to return.

Another teacher I remember with gratitude was Frank Henthorn, known as Toddy, who taught me history for four years and taught English literature in School Certificate year. I could never understand why such a good teacher was a bit of a sneak - he would report to the headmaster any boy he saw not wearing the school cap going to or from school. He would also report to the headmaster any boy who did not turn up for "prep". Brigg boys had the option of going to school in the evenings to do their homework with the boarders. This was one and a half hours Monday to Friday and one hour on Saturdays. Teachers were rostered to take charge and Toddy would report any day boy who did not turn up. It happened to me once on a Saturday and the headmaster stopped me from going to school to do my homework. After a while my

mother went to see him and I was allowed back.

With the outbreak of war the headmaster stopped day boys from going to prep - possibly because it would have meant being on the blacked-out streets in the winter.

At the grammar school I played football and cricket without much talent and enjoyed swimming in the summer term in the primitive school pool which lacked a filtration system. When the water was a deep shade of green and had algae floating in it, the pool was emptied and refilled. I learnt to swim in this pool in 1937 and after that my mother allowed me to swim in the river. Looking back I realise that the river was probably polluted and I believe no-one swims in it today but many boys spent a good deal of time swimming at Castlethorpe Bridge during the summer holidays.

Towards the end of August 1939 we had the only family holiday we ever had apart from short stays with my Hills grandparents and, for Ken and I, a few days with our Uncle Harry and Auntie Alice at Whaplode near Spalding. The holiday was on the Lincolnshire coast at Mablethorpe; we rented a caravan and a tent from a Brigg cobbler called Melton. Mum, Dad and John slept in the caravan and Ken and I had camp beds in the tent. Mr Melton took us all in his car on a Sunday and brought us back the following Sunday, which was almost the last peace time Sunday. I think we had not seen a newspaper for the whole week and when we got home again we realised that war was a distinct possibility.

It was while I was swimming at Castlethorpe Bridge that my mother came along the tow path to fetch me home because the Germans had invaded Poland. Perhaps she thought Brigg would be singled out for immediate aerial attack.

We knew of course that war was imminent; I think it was in March 1939 (but it may have been September 1938) that every man, woman and child in Britain was given a gas-mask and I remember going to Glebe Road school to get mine. When school broke up for the summer holidays in July 1939 Headmaster Daughton told the assembled boys that he believed in "the power of prayer" and asked us all to pray for peace. On Sunday September 3rd at 11.00 a.m. we gathered round the radio to hear Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tell us that we were at war with Germany. Our neighbours Horace West and his sister Mary came to listen as their radio needed a new battery and the sight of their anxious faces is one of my most enduring memories.

In the early hours of Monday 4 September the air raid warning siren sounded; we got out of bed and dressed and went downstairs. Mother's reaction was to make a cup of tea; I cannot recall how long it was before the "All clear" siren sounded and we all went back to bed. It was this warning that caused Great Grandma Richardson to go downstairs and die in her chair. It later transpired that the warning was a false alarm; in fact it was several months before bombing started in earnest although a few bombs were dropped near the Forth Bridge in Scotland and at the naval base, Scapa Flow, in the Orkney Islands north of Scotland.

Later mother took a more optimistic view when the siren sounded, reasoning that the chances of a bomb falling near her was very remote and so she stayed in bed.

Similarly, not much fighting occurred in France where the British Expeditionary Force was sent soon after the war started. Conscription of young men had started in about March 1939, so there were few trained conscripts and the men that went to France were mainly regular soldiers and reservists. Reservists were men who had

served as regulars in the armed forces and had then had accepted a retaining fee to stay on as a reserve. Reservists were mobilised a day or two before the war broke out.

The air force carried out raids over Germany early in the war, but instead of dropping bombs they dropped leaflets urging the German populace to turn against their Nazi masters. The period from September 1939 to the spring of 1940 became known as the "phoney war" because so little happened in Britain, Germany or France.

By contrast, the war at sea started almost from Day One. The Athenia, a ship carrying lots of children to what their well-to-do parents thought would be safety in America, was torpedoed with considerable loss of life. A German submarine managed to get through the defences at Scapa Flow and sink the battleship Royal Oak, and in November came the cheering news that the German pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee had been destroyed off Montevideo in Uruguay by the cruisers Exeter, Ajax and Achilles. The Achilles was a ship of the New Zealand navy. The Graf Spee had already sunk many merchant ships and the crew taken prisoner were put into a ship called the Altmark. I cannot recall how this ship came to be in a Norwegian fiord, but while it was there it was boarded by men from HMS Cossack and the prisoners were taken back to England.

This story seems to be degenerating into a History of World War II. Winston Churchill covered that in about 5 volumes so I will not compete against him but get back to the original purpose of this *magnum opus*.

Mention of the Wests reminds me that I have not chronicled our move from 5 Princes Street to 4 Redcombe Lane. This took place, I think, in 1938. I know we were still in Princes Street when the Glebe Road headmaster came round in about mid-1937 to tell us brother Ken had passed the scholarship exam for the Grammar School and that we had been there quite a time when the war came. I do not know why we moved, but perhaps the new house was marginally better than the old. It had a separate kitchen and there were three bedrooms on the first floor. At Princes Street we kids had to climb two flights of stairs to our attic bedroom. The front door did not open directly on to the street; there was a fenced area about the size of two table tops between the house and the pavement. One advantage was that it was much nearer to school. An old man had lived there alone for several years and the house was filthy. The owner, Mr Clark, gave my parents two rent free weeks in recognition of the amount of work they put in to clean the place up. One disadvantage was the lack of tap water. Every drop was carried in a bucket from a pump which served the four houses in the block.

Unlike Princes Street, which did not have a square centimetre of soil, we had a back garden and a pigsty. The copper for washing clothes was not in the back yard but in the kitchen which meant that on wash days the house was filled with steam. Toilet facilities were as primitive as those in Princes Street. The house was very dark; the window in the living room faced north and kitchen window looked to the west. Any Southern Hemisphere readers are reminded that in England it is the north side of a house which never gets any sun. The house was at the west end of a block of four; that was why we had no windows facing east to the morning sun.

In 1939 and 1940, I ran in the school cross country race over about four miles, coming about thirtieth out of about 120 runners on my second attempt. As I was only 15 and there were 16 and 17 year old boys running I thought that was not a bad result.

I recall that as I approached the finish one teacher called out "Well done, Turner".

School Certificate came in June 1940. The Germans had just overrun Belgium, Holland and France so things were looking a bit grim for Britain but nevertheless the exams took place. When the summer holidays started my brother and I went working with several other boys, mornings only, in Colonel Nelthorpe's woods near Scawby, sawing pine tree trunks for use as pit-props in coal mines. I think we were paid 5 pence per hour. The summer holiday was shortened so that another two weeks off school could be given in the autumn for youngsters to work in agriculture.

Looking back to 1940 I realise that children at that time had little or no idea of the peril we were in. If the Germans had not attacked Russia but had concentrated their efforts solely against Britain the war might have had a very different outcome.

Soon after school restarted the School Certificate results arrived. I had credits in English, English Literature, French, Latin, Physics, Chemistry, Maths and History and a miserable pass in Geography. Of the boys staying at school after School Cert those who had done well enough progressed to the sixth form while others went into a form called Remove to have another attempt the following year. In the sixth form pupils had to make a choice between Maths and Science or Modern Studies. Modern Studies meant languages, literature and English. I chose Maths and Science.

When the autumn holiday came my brother and I went to a farm at Wrawby to pull and bag carrots. We were paid five shillings a day - riches to us - but most of it went to Mother.

I was not very happy in the few months I spent in the sixth form, probably because I knew I was likely to go into the navy. When the results of the navy exam came I was high enough up the list to be able to choose to go into the electrical branch. The other choices were engine room or ordnance. I also lost time at school because when I had my medical for the navy at Derby I was told that I had to be circumcised before I could be accepted. The job was done at Scunthorpe hospital. I did not know then that it was normal surgical practice to shave areas adjacent to the part of the anatomy to be operated upon, so you can imagine what I thought was going to happen when a screen was put round my bed and a man came in carrying an open cut-throat razor.

Looking back it seems silly that I should have stayed at school until two days before going into the navy; it might have been more sense to have taken a job, however menial, for a few weeks. Eventually I was told that I had to be at Torpoint, Cornwall, on 24 February 1941. That was a Monday and I went to school on the Saturday morning. It was mid-term so no-one else was leaving and I had to take my text books to the book room where headmaster Daughton said goodbye to me with tears in his eyes. I thought the tears were for me but as I grew older I realised that he was grieving for a whole generation. I wrote to him once or twice and I think he was pleased to learn that unlike many of my new acquaintances I had not started smoking. I still regard smoking as the eighth wonder of the world and cannot understand how anyone can take up such a foolish habit.

On 24 February 1941 I said good-bye to my tearful mother who gave me a ten shilling note. Dad and I set out for the station, calling on Nana and Grandad Turner on the way. Nana also gave me ten shillings. At the station, also waiting for the 8.13 am train, was George Hewson who had been recalled to the navy at the beginning of the

war as he had gone on the "reserve" after completing 12 years' service as a stoker. Mr Hewson came to Brigg on a painting contract, married a Brigg girl, and then had a fish and chip shop in Glebe Road. His house at the end of Colton Street bordered on land which, in the mid-1930's, was used to build a large number of houses for people displaced by the slum clearance programme. Seizing the opportunity, he turned the front room of his house into a little grocer's shop and he was prospering when war came. I bet he regretted going on to the naval reserve.

He sold the fish and chip business but his wife kept the grocery business going. After the war they continued to prosper, and Mr Hewson became quite a big fish in the small pond of local politics.

Mr Hewson was bound for Chatham in Kent but told Dad that he would see that I got the right underground train to Paddington Station when we reached King's Cross Station in London. On arrival at King's Cross, Mr Hewson gave me the right instructions and I found myself in the Underground which I thought was an astounding feat of civil engineering. And so I reached Paddington and caught the train for Plymouth. First stop was Newbury - the place I would go to in December 1961 to work for the Southern Electricity Board for six years.

It was still daylight when the train reached the South Devon coast and I saw for the first time the red sandstone rocks so typical of the area. It was dark by the time the train reached Plymouth; somehow I found my way from North Road station to the Torpoint Ferry which crossed the Hamoaze, the estuary of the River Tamar which separates Devon from Cornwall. The ferry carried vehicles; the fare for pedestrians was one penny. Then it was a bus ride of about a mile to the Royal Navy Artificers Training Establishment (RNATE). It was about 13 hours since I had left home. I presented myself at the Regulating Office just inside the gate where I met Engineer Lieutenant Commander Pillage. He was an elderly reservist who had been recalled for the war and I soon found that he was known as Boiler Bill. Soon afterwards he was released back to civilian life. He took me to Hut Watt 4 which was to be home for the next two years.

Prior to the war the RNATE was at Chatham in Kent, so it was decided to move it further from the possibility of being bombed. At first, temporary arrangements were made in Devonport while new facilities were built at Torpoint. The new place was obviously built as a rush job and the living arrangements for us were basic. In Watt 4 there were about 16 double decker bedsteads, two rickety steel tables and four wooden forms for us to sit on. Heating was provided by an iron stove in the middle of the hut. We did not have sheets on the beds. About 90 boys joined with me; we occupied three huts identical to Watt 4. There were four blocks of accommodation, each having six huts, and the blocks were named for pioneers of the steam engine - Watt (1736-1839); Trevithick (1771-1833); Newcomen (1663-1729) and Parsons (1854-1931).

I barely had time to take in my surroundings when it was "Lights out" and I got into bed feeling a long way from home. But not to sleep for long; we had an air raid warning. Before we could get to the shelters I was terrified by the sound of explosions but soon learned that these came from a battery of 4.7 inch anti-aircraft guns in an adjoining field. I cannot recall how long the warning lasted or even if bombs were dropped anywhere near us.

Reveille was sounded by bugle at 6.15 am and breakfast was soon after. The mess hall was a large building as was required to seat more than 800 apprentices and the food was quite good. After breakfast came assembly of all the apprentices on the parade ground for prayers. Compulsory religious observance persisted until about 1947.

Only hazy impressions remain of my first day in the Navy. I am almost certain that on that day we were kitted out with our uniforms, steel helmets and service gas-masks which were much bigger and heavier than those issued to civilians and had to be carried at all times. We had photographs taken for our Sailors' Pay and Identity Books. After these were issued we had to carry them whenever we left the RNATE and to lose the book was a serious matter. During the next day or two we had lots of instruction about the hierarchy at the RNATE, how to recognise the ranks of officers by the amount of gold braid on their sleeves, how to tackle an incendiary bomb with a stirrup pump...and hours of drill on the parade ground under the instruction of Chief Petty Officer Smith and Petty Officer Tom Coffey. Both were gunnery specialists; for some reason matters of drill and ceremonial were regarded as the province of the gunnery branch.

Two other Chief Petty Officers, Moore and Anderson, shepherded us from one thing to another. Both were quite elderly to our young eyes and had been recalled from the reserve after completing 22 years' service. People who left after 12 years' service had the option of going on to the reserve, but those who stayed on for a further ten years and qualified for a pension for life had to stay on the reserve until the age of 55.

I am almost certain that on the first Saturday we were allowed "ashore" and that I went by myself on the Torpoint ferry to Devonport. From there I found my way to Plymouth Hoe and had the pleasure of seeing Drake's Island that features in the poem *Drake's Drum*. The next day the Commander in Chief, Plymouth, Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Naismith V.C. visited the ATE for the Sunday church parade. When I wrote home about it Dad was able to tell me that the admiral had won the VC in a submarine during the Dardanelles campaign in the first war.

For our first year we were only allowed "ashore" on Saturdays and Sundays and had to be back "aboard" at 10:00pm. For the second year we had leave on Friday evenings as well, and for the remaining two years we had an additional evening's leave during the week. Sometime after I joined it was decided we could go out in the summer months every evening after supper at 7:30pm, but only to stay nearby for a walk in the country. This allowed us to get as far as a hamlet called St John's which had a tiny old fashioned pub and, when finances permitted, have a glass of cider. A creek from the Hamoaze ran up to St John's and at low tide it was possible to take a short cut there over stepping stones. I loved this because for the first time in my life I was able to see wading birds like curlew and dunlin.

On our first trip from New Zealand back to England in 1983, Nancy, Mary and I went to the St John's pub and I was a little saddened to find that at some time during the 39 years since I last saw it the old uneven floor of stone flags had been replaced and a general tarting up had taken place. On the same day I went to have another look at the ATE but the person on the gate said we could not go in for a look around. On a subsequent trip, I think in 1993, we found the ATE was closed down.

After two weeks of induction and hours of drill on the parade ground it was time to go to the workshops to really start our training. We were split into groups under Chief Engine Room Artificers who had been recalled from the reserve. We were given a cylindrical block of steel about four inches in diameter and with hammer and chisel and file had to reduce the cylinder to a hexagonal shape. The noise was deafening and many a thumb was hit by hammers.

At the time I thought it a bit pointless and I suspect we were set to do this because that was the way things had been done for generations. We were then set to making callipers. Two years were passed in making things by hand. Every six months we had a test job; I did not distinguish myself but did well enough to avoid "extra factory" on Saturday afternoons which was the fate of those who did not meet the required standard.

One full morning a week was spent in the classroom on maths and science. Once again I avoided the extra study on Friday evenings which boys who failed the six-monthly exams had to do. It was this tuition which enabled me as a civilian in 1951 to gain exemption from the first two years of part-time study for the Higher National Certificate in electrical engineering.

It was during my early weeks in the navy, on a Good Friday, that I first bought myself beer in a pub. One boy in my hut had got chicken pox or mumps and the rest of us were put into isolation, which meant we were kept away from other boys as much as possible. We had meals at a different time and were not allowed out. But the chaplain arranged for us to walk to Whitesands Bay for a picnic on the beach. On the way we passed through the village of Millbrook just as the Heart and Hand pub was opening. It was run by two elderly spinster sisters and they were a bit taken aback by the invasion of a dozen or so beardless youths but they still served us. New Zealanders may think me mistaken about Good Friday but in England the pubs opened every day of the year.

This was also the time that Plymouth suffered two devastating air raids; one in March and another about a month later. I will never forget coming out of the air raid shelter and seeing Plymouth burning, apparently from end to end. It was during the second of these raids that a bomb was dropped on the ATE, about 150 metres from the shelter I was in. It hit part of the workshops but no casualties resulted. Near to the ATE was HMS Raleigh, a training centre where new recruits to the seaman branches of the navy did their first ten weeks training. A bomb from the same cluster dropped there and killed some men. Later I learned that 44 sailors and 21 soldiers of the Royal Engineers lost their lives on 28th April 1941 as a result of this bomb.

It was the day after the second heavy raid that I had my first leave of 14 days. Torpoint ferry had been put out of action by bomb damage to nearby oil storage tanks so we were taken to the navy rifle range at Trevol where boats were waiting to take us to Devonport. On the way we passed close to a French submarine, the Surcouf, which carried an eight inch gun. I believe that this was the largest gun ever mounted on a submarine. The Surcouf had been brought to England by its crew when the French surrender took place in 1940.

A desolate scene met us on landing at Devonport. The streets were full of debris, some buildings were still smouldering and, a sight I will never forget, a child was

crying in a gutter. Strangely I cannot remember how those of us that needed to go to Plymouth's North Road station got there; perhaps the navy organised transport, perhaps we walked.

The station was still functioning but I am not sure now if I reached London in time to catch the 4:00pm train for Brigg or whether I had to wait for the mail train that left at about 11:00pm and got to Brigg at about 6:00am. I know I was very grubby by the time I got home.

It was lovely to be home but I remember very little about my leave. I know my Dad took me to the Queens Arms pub; the landlord, George Jobson, had known me since birth so knew I should not be there but said nothing. Mum, Dad and I had an evening in a Barnetby pub with my Auntie Flo and her husband Chris. I am almost sure I went to Spalding to spend a day or two with Granny and Grandad Hills which must have also involved going to see several relatives.

All too soon it was back to the ATE to count the days to the summer leave of three weeks.

With summer came swimming at Whitesands Bay, disregarding an order which prohibited navy personnel from swimming there as it was alleged to be dangerous. On one visit two or three of us saw some Plymouth girls who had got into difficulties. One boy, Ted Hawkins, got them to some rocks and we pulled them out. Afterwards we used to see them at the beach almost every weekend and they always brought sandwiches for us to share. Towards evening we used to walk with them to Millbrook where they caught the ferry back to Plymouth, and then we would go for a meal at a canteen for servicemen run by local women, followed by the long walk back to the ATE.

Mid-year 1941 brought an influx of new apprentices; we were no longer the lowest of the low. At about that time Britain's largest warship, HMS Hood, was sunk by Germany's battleship Bismarck which was in turn sunk a few days later.

I think it was on my second leave, in the summer of 1941, that I found a hostel for the Women's Land Army had been built across the road from our house. I got to know some of the girls and Mum had three of them to tea one Sunday. On a later leave I met a land girl, Dorothy; we did a bit of walking out during my leave and exchanged a few letters until she told me she was getting engaged.

The boy who had the bed under mine was called Frank Arthur; he was from a hamlet called Foxhole near St Austell. Boys who lived close to the ATE were allowed occasional weekend leave and Frank took me with him once. We hitch-hiked there but returned by train. I knew Frank had attended St Austell Grammar School but at that time did not know that a famous scholar, historian A. L. Rowse, had attended the same school.

After two years in the navy we took an Admiralty exam in maths and science. We were given an afternoon off on the previous day and I am almost certain I went with my friend Stanley Redwood to see the film *Holiday Inn* which launched the nauseating song *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*. Safely over that hurdle we moved over to the senior side of the ATE and were then required to attend schooling three nights per week from 5:30pm to 7:00pm. An instructor in electrical engineering was called Reeves; he too had been called back from the reserve. In 1958 I was working for the

South Western Electricity Board in Torquay when, in a way about which I cannot be sure, I learned that Mr Reeves had worked for the Board's predecessor in Totnes and had returned there after the war. My colleague Leo Horan took me to see him; on his side-board he had pictures of groups of apprentices he had taught and I was in one of them.

At about the same time I became 18 and thus eligible for "tickler", the name for duty free tobacco. It came in hermetically sealed tins each containing half a pound with a choice of tobacco for "roll your own" cigarettes or pipe tobacco; the allowance was two tins per month. In the first World War troops were issued with tinned jam made by a firm called Tickler and there was a song about a soldier having a dream he was "having my tea with Kaiser Bill and Tommy Tickler's jam." It was accepted wisdom that there was a connection between the two tinned products but I do not know if there was any truth in the explanation.

The tickler cost about a shilling a tin; I was a few months older than my friend Redwood so I sold him my tickler at a small profit until he too became 18. It was considered bad form to make more profit than that. It was permissible to take a half pound tin when going on leave so on occasion Redwood missed out and I bought pipe tobacco for my grandad Turner. Reaching 18 also made it permissible to buy beer at the canteen but most of us did not have the money to indulge in that luxury.

It was also about this time that I paid my first visit to a London theatre, and in Plymouth heard a symphony orchestra for the first time. With some other boys who travelled through London when going on leave I saw *My Sister Eileen* at the Savoy theatre in the Strand. We had got our tickets in advance by post. The only thing I remember is the name of the leading actress - Coral Browne. Going to the theatre meant that instead of taking the 4:00pm train from King's Cross I went home on the mail train which reached Brigg at about 6:00am. The Savoy theatre was built in 1881 by Richard D'Oyly Carte who was closely associated with Gilbert and Sullivan.

The orchestral concert was in a Plymouth cinema and did not start until after the last film show. It was probably our chaplain, with an interest in classical music, who arranged for several boys to go. I cannot recall which orchestra I heard but it was certainly one of the major London orchestras and I was astonished to find that it contained as many as 80 players. I am almost sure that Cyril Smith and Phyllis Sellick performed a piano concerto for two pianos, and I am certain that the programme included Antonin Dvorak's Ninth Symphony, *From the New World*, written in America during Dvorak's directorship of the New York Conservatory.

Two boys in my class had old-fashioned wind-up gramophones and a few records; it was from them that I learned of the existence of people such as Beniamino Gigli, Scottish soprano Isobel Baillie, and American tenor Richard Crookes. Talking of singers reminds me that I once performed for my class-mates. At one PT lesson our instructor Petty Officer Muir decided that instead of PT we would have solos from some of the boys. I sang *The Rose of Tralee* which PO Muir pronounced to be "very nice".

HMS Raleigh had a cinema and occasionally ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) concerts. I saw a few of the shows but missed Evelyn Laye who was a big star in the 1930's. To go to the cinema it was necessary to buy tickets,

costing three pence, in advance. If a group of us wanted to go one of us would get permission to cross the road to the Raleigh to buy enough tickets. We discovered that used tickets were kept in a bin and one of our number helped himself to a large handful. After that one boy would go to buy a ticket to discover what colour of ticket was to be used that day and we would then select enough tickets of the right colour from our hoard. We were never caught doing this.

In our last year at Torpoint we had two spells, each of two weeks, in the old French battleship Paris, which had been sailed to Plymouth when the French collapsed in 1940. It was too old to have any operational value and was used as a maintenance depot, serving small ships in Devonport dockyard. We went daily onto ships to get a bit of practical experience; most memorable were the few days on HMS King George V. This was one of five modern battleships whose construction started when Britain began to re-arm before the war; a sister ship, the Prince of Wales, had been sunk by the Japanese off the coast of Malaya a few days after the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. It was on the Paris that I first slept in a hammock.

My mother died in February 1944 at the beginning of the last year of my apprenticeship. I cannot recall exactly when she was first diagnosed as having tuberculosis but think it was early in 1943. She went into a sanatorium at Branston near Lincoln and I think it was during the summer that she came home, after the doctor at the sanatorium had wanted to send her to Brompton hospital in London to have one lung collapsed but she refused to go. I was at home on my summer leave when she decided that she would undergo the operation. She went back into Branston and was soon sent to Brompton but it was there decided that both lungs were so badly affected that the procedure would not be effective. She returned to Branston and soon afterwards returned home.

While Dad and John had been without Mum they had a live-in housekeeper, a widow called Mrs Taylor, a sprightly 70-year-old. She had been to Canada, I think with the intention of staying there with a son, but had not settled and returned to England needing a home. She told Dad that she would not be able to cope and would have to leave if Mum came home, but changed her mind and stayed to give Mum her devoted attention to the end. It was fortunate that Christmas leave for Ken and I coincided so the family was together for Christmas 1943. By this time Mum was confined to bed; as I walked up Station Road to return from leave I realised that I would not see her again and shed a few tears.

I was in the mess room at tea time in February 1944, and when the message came over the loudspeaker "Apprentice Turner report to the Regulating Office for a telegram" I knew what it would tell me. Arrangements were made for me to have compassionate leave and a railway warrant, and I left Plymouth late that night arriving in Brigg at about 3:00pm the next day.

Passing the shop on the way from the station I called in and Nana said "It's a sad home-coming". I recall little about the funeral and next morning I returned to Torpoint. My instructor at the time had a few sympathetic words with me. Apart from the chaplain, who had called me into his office soon after I received the telegram, he was the only person in authority to do so. This man was from mum's home town of Spalding.

The remaining months at Torpoint soon passed and at the end of the year we were promoted to Artificers 5th Class with pay of five shillings and threepence per day - comparative riches.

I did well enough in the final work test and examinations to get my choice of port division. All navy men were allocated a home port: Devonport, Chatham or Portsmouth; I had chosen Portsmouth. So just before Christmas 1944 about a third of the class of approximately 80 boys went off to Portsmouth Barracks (HMS Victory) laden with kit-bags, suit-cases and hammocks. On arrival we were given immediate leave so after dumping kit bag and hammock in a baggage store I caught a train to Waterloo Station in London then to Kings Cross and home to Brigg.

I remember almost nothing of my two weeks leave and then it was back to Portsmouth. Before the war, the training I was now about to begin was all done at another shore establishment in Portsmouth, HMS Vernon, but the need to greatly increase the number of trainees caused the Admiralty to requisition Roedean School and the St Dunstan's Institution for the Blind, both on the Sussex coast between Brighton and Rottingdean and some small hotels further along the coast at Eastbourne.

And so the day after we returned to Portsmouth my classmates and I were removed to Roedean, a school for upper class girls. It can safely be described as the female equivalent of Eton or Harrow. The thing I remember most is the pleasure of luxuriating in a hot bath as we only had showers at Torpoint. One day I saw a copy of the Scunthorpe Telegraph and enquiries revealed its owner as Tom Melton who came from Scunthorpe and was cousin to Tony Melton, my class mate at the grammar school. Later I met Tom's father who owned a furniture shop in Scunthorpe and he told me he had been an apprentice cabinet maker with my grandad.

The time was mostly spent in the classroom. We learned about the electrical distribution systems in ships; about the way in which information about enemy ships was processed in fire-control tables so that an enemy ship could be hit at a distance of more than 10 miles. Most electrical apparatus in British warships operated on Direct Current (DC) but we had about two weeks of intensive instruction on AC theory which served me well later in life.

Some boys of the class immediately ahead of us at Torpoint were still at Roedean and from them we learned of the Running Horse pub in Brighton which they patronised, and so those of us who had taken a liking to beer also made this pub our Brighton "local". It was run by a middle-aged couple known as Ma and Pa. Ma used to make us cheese sandwiches free of charge; I do not know how she obtained the tightly-rationed cheese. Ma was huge; when she laughed, which was a frequent occurrence, the floor shook. One night we went to the pub to find a tearful Pa who told us Ma had died suddenly.

It was while I was in Roedean that the German surrender took place and 8 May was designated VE Day. We were given the day off and with Stan Redwood and Sammy Mills, from Londonderry in Northern Ireland, I went by train to London to join in the general rejoicing.

I have only a jumbled kaleidoscopic recollection of that day. I am almost certain we went to stand in front of Buckingham Palace for a while and I certainly recall sitting in the back of an army lorry in Trafalgar Square. We also partook of liquid refreshment

during the day and somehow ended up sleeping on benches in Hyde Park. In the cold light of dawn three scruffy footsore young men walked to Hyde Park Corner, past Buckingham Palace and on to Victoria Station to catch the train for Brighton.

Soon after VE Day I saw an ATS girl in a services canteen and thought I recognised her as Jill Chuter who came from Greetwell Cross Roads near Brigg and on asking her that proved to be true. We had a few dates in Brighton and when I was moved to Eastbourne she came for a symphony concert conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961), a very flamboyant character who spent much of his own fortune promoting music in Britain. The fortune came from his father who invented Beecham's pills, widely regarded as a panacea. The programme included Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* and Delius' *Walk to the Paradise Garden* from *A Village Romeo and Juliet*.

After the concert we walked to Beachy Head and then went for a genteel tea which was totally unsatisfying so I asked Jill if she would like to go to Jax Snax, a rather rough cafe which served egg and chips for a very reasonable one shilling and ninepence. This turned out to be the last time I saw her as she wrote soon afterwards saying that she did not wish to continue our chaste friendship.

It was during this time at Eastbourne that one of our number, "Nellie" Wallis, came into the mess room and said he had just heard on the radio that the Americans had dropped a new kind of bomb on Japan. Within days the Japanese had, as their Emperor put it, "to endure the unendurable" and surrender unconditionally on 15 August 1945.

Some of the time near Brighton was spent a short distance from Roedean at St Dunstan's Home for the Blind which had also been requisitioned by the navy. This was closer to Rottingdean, an attractive village in which Rudyard Kipling lived for a while.

Later we returned to HMS Vernon in Portsmouth for a course on torpedoes which then came under the electrical branch. During this time I tried to get out of the navy without success and in the autumn of 1945 I was drafted to HMS Birmingham which was in Portsmouth Dockyard. The Birmingham was a six-inch gun cruiser built in about 1936. She had been damaged by a torpedo in the Mediterranean and went to the Norfolk, Virginia, naval dockyard in America for repairs. Many of my new mess-mates had been on her when she was damaged; three of them were ex-Torpoint boys who I had known earlier although they were all ahead of me.

Although I was still only a leading rate, the mess I was put into, called the Artisans Mess, also had people who were petty officers and we all got our rum ration neat instead of the two parts water to one part rum to which I had until then been accustomed.

The Chief Electrical Artificer was not a very nice man, but fortunately his 12 year engagement expired a few weeks later and he elected to leave the navy. His replacement was Ron Botterill who took a shine to me and he was still with the Birmingham when I left her more than three years later, when I had become the "oldest inhabitant".

My first ocean going trip was of short duration - from Portsmouth to Portland Harbour in Dorset. I found it exhilarating. Portland Harbour was the base for the Home Fleet; there were no jetties, all the ships were anchored out in the harbour and a

trip ashore to Weymouth meant a trip in a liberty boat. I know I went ashore a few times but remember absolutely nothing about the place; I cannot remember even one street or pub name. Soon after arriving there I went on a month's "end of war" leave which was given to all servicemen who were not "hostilities only" personnel.

A month's leave in November was not a very exciting prospect but despite my protest I had no option but to take it and I spent most, if not all, of it in Brigg. My chief recollections of the leave are of finding a vast quantity of mushrooms in a field at the bottom of Westrum Lane and putting a hand on a live electric fence in the same field.

We had occasional days at sea doing gunnery practice but it was soon time for Christmas or New Year leave. Half the ship's company had two weeks' leave over Christmas and the other half had leave which embraced the New Year. Scottish crew members preferred New Year or, as they called it, "Hogmanay".

I received an undeserved Christmas present from King Christian of Denmark. The Birmingham was the first Allied warship to enter Copenhagen harbour after the German surrender. The king arranged for a parcel of Danish butter, bacon and cheese to be delivered to the homes of the ship's crew. I had not been on the ship at that time but was included in the bounty.

In February 1946 the Home Fleet regatta came around in Portland Harbour. I cannot remember how many ships took part but as the Commander in Chief was a full Admiral it is probable that there must have been at least one battleship. Most of the regatta consisted of races for ship's boats called whalers which had crews of eight oarsmen. The Carley float race was a more light-hearted event and we entered a crew from the artisan's mess. Carley floats were life boats, equipped with paddles, hung around the ships superstructure in a way that allowed them to be quickly put into the water if the order "Abandon ship" was given.

I forget how long the course was or how many crews competed but I do know that our crew won and we were foolish enough and elated enough to jump into the sea. The seas around Britain are very cold in February! My mates decided I should be the one to receive the prize from Admiral Sir Neville Syfret aboard his flagship. The Admiral shook my hand and gave me an envelope; I saluted and said "Thank you Sir". The envelope contained ten shillings for each of us. At the time that was more than a day's pay.

March 1946 brought my first trip to foreign parts; it lasted about six weeks and we visited Gibraltar, Trinidad, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Bermuda in that order. My first purchase on foreign soil was in Gibraltar - a large bag of grapes for sixpence. I walked to the Spanish border but did not go to see the apes of which it is said that so long as they are there Britain will rule Gibraltar.

That is proving correct up to now; although the British Empire has withered away the people of Gibraltar have shown a strong determination to stay with Britain in spite of efforts by Spain to retrieve the Rock it ceded to Britain in the 18th century.

In the evening, like most of the men ashore, I visited one of the many places which catered for Jack Tar's thirst and which boasted a flamenco dancer with castanets. It was unwise to overindulge because the next day I was due to take the navy's Higher Education Test, a requirement for any man hoping to achieve commissioned or

warrant officer rank. It was scheduled for the day I spent mostly ashore in Gibraltar but somebody had decided that I could take it the next day. I was the only person in the Birmingham taking the exam. I took it because after failing to get out of the navy in 1945 I had decided to make the best of it and to aim for promotion.

I cannot remember with certainty how many papers there were; I think there were maths, science, English and general knowledge. What I do remember was that the sea was rougher than any I had hitherto encountered and at one stage I was hurled off the stool on which I was sitting. I passed the examination.

A day or two later we entered warmer waters and I saw for the first time dolphins and flying fish. The dolphins swam effortlessly near the ship's prow and like many of the crew I spent a long time watching them. Another few days went by and we arrived at Port of Spain, Trinidad where the Governor was waiting to welcome our captain, G W Simpson, ashore. Just before we reached Trinidad Captain Simpson had assembled the crew on deck to warn us of the perils of cheap rum; it must be reported that many did not heed his well-intentioned words. I do not think I overindulged on shore but I had my 21st birthday in Trinidad - in those days 21 was the age at which one came of age - and my messmates plied me "sippers". That was the navy's term for a sip of a mess-mate's tot. Tot time was about mid-day and I spent the afternoon sleeping it off.

No-one in the Royal Navy today will have given or received "sippers"; more than 20 years ago Admiral le Fanu, First Sea Lord, decided that modern ships did not need half-fuddled men in the afternoons and tot-time became a thing of the past.

Not many memories of Port of Spain remain; one is of going to some public gardens and seeing for the first time cocoa beans growing. I also saw the Earl of Athlone and his wife Princess Alice, who I think was a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria. The earl had just finished his term as Governor General of Canada and they were having a side trip on the way home to England. I also recall buying a coconut for a halfpenny.

After a few days we left for Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, a voyage of more than a thousand miles. All I recall is a trip by rail across the island to Port Antonio where the local community treated a large party from the ship to food, drink and entertainment. As we left we were given stalks of bananas, one stalk for every two men. A stalk is the entire output for the season of the tree and all the bananas on it come from one huge flower; the stalk I shared with a mess-mate had about 140 bananas.

Next stop was Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas Islands. Nassau is barely 200 miles from Florida and the shops had prices in pounds and US dollars. I think it was in Nassau (but it may have been Bermuda) that two girls invited me and a shipmate, Buck Taylor, to their house. The sisters looked like Europeans but their mother was black. A party from the ship were invited to the house of a Major Simpson, a retired British army officer who lived permanently in Nassau, who with his wife entertained us to tea and possibly stronger drinks.

Nassau was the only place on the cruise where we were not alongside a jetty and so we had to go ashore by boat. As in every port, the ship was open to visitors and a crammed vessel brought out many of the locals to be impressed by Britain's naval might. I wish now that I had kept a diary because I no longer recall how long we spent

in each port; I think it was three or four days at each of them. The whole trip was only six weeks so each stay must have been fairly short.

Then it was off to Hamilton, Bermuda, where we were tied up at a wharf barely 50 metres from the main street. Sadly I have no recollection at all about Bermuda. When we arrived back at Portsmouth it was time for two weeks Easter leave.

In May 1946, the first anniversary of the end of the war in Europe was celebrated throughout Britain and the Birmingham was sent to Cardiff. As we were going through a lock to get into the docks I heard a broadcast of the One Thousand Guineas, a race over one mile for three year old fillies. The King's horse, Hypericum, bolted just before the start and ran a considerable distance before she was caught and brought back to the start. The preliminary gallop must have been beneficial as she won the race. Any other owner would have had his horse scratched.

A large party of us were given a civic lunch, which I remember as being of a frugal nature, at the City Hall and I think a party of sailors from the ship took part in some sort of ceremony. The ship was open for visitors and I was looking through the port in the artisans' mess when I saw two attractive girls coming up the gangway. A messmate and I rushed to the gangway and asked the girls if they would like a guided tour, an invitation which they accepted. Later I had a date with one of the girls; I have forgotten her name and cannot recall whether or not she was a blonde. If she was she would have qualified for the title of the dumbest dumb blonde of all time and so our first date was also our last.

Soon after Cardiff came the summer cruise along the east coast. First stop was Hull; entering the River Humber I saw our boyhood Mecca, Cleethorpes, from the sea. From Hull I was able to have a day in Brigg, catching the ferry to New Holland and then a bus to Brigg.

There was a beer shortage in 1946 but some of us found a pub called The Alma, named for a battle in the Crimean War, where we were allowed through the door which was locked for all but regular customers.

Then it was on to Scarborough where we were anchored some distance from shore. Every summer Scarborough puts on a musical show in the evenings in Peasholme Park and many of us were given free admission. On one occasion I was returning to the ship at night in bad weather and the officer of the watch decided it was too dangerous to allow us to board the ship, so we were sent back ashore to fend for ourselves. With several ship-mates I went to the bus station and stretched out for the night on the bench type seats on the top deck of a double decker bus.

The next port was Hartlepool, a town of which I remember nothing, but from where I went to Newcastle-on-Tyne to tour the factory of A.Reyrolle, makers of high voltage switchgear. Ron Botteril, my chief, was friendly with a girl he had met while on a ship being built at Newcastle during the war; her father worked for Reyrolle and organised the tour for a group of us. High voltage switchgear, up to 132,000 volts, was a subject about which I knew nothing. I did not know then that later in life I would become very familiar with the products of the Reyrolle factory.

The same evening we went to a variety show in Newcastle. Top of the bill was Ronald Frankau who described himself as a comedian; he flattered himself. I had seen him in Plymouth during the war and now, at least one and a half years later, his act

was word for word the same. He got the audience to sing a ditty;

It must never happen again,
No, no, no,
We must keep the Huns in Berlin,
And the Japs in Tokio.

Nauseating.

The final place on the cruise was North Berwick on the Firth of Forth in Scotland. Here again we were anchored off-shore and it was there that I had the experience of having two girls waiting for me on the jetty. I have completely forgotten how I coped with that but know I walked up The Law, a steep hill crowned by a pair of whale's jaw bones, with one of them.

About mid-1946 my father married a widow, Margaret Cooney, who had come to Brigg with a family that had taken over the Angel Hotel. She had two children, Agnes about a year younger than me and Michael about the age of my brother John. Later I was briefly engaged to Agnes but it became apparent that it would never have worked and the engagement was called off.

Soon after the summer cruise we went into Portsmouth Dockyard for a major refit which was to take over a year. Only a skeleton crew remained on board; Chief E A Ron Botteril stayed and wanted me to stay and so it was arranged. During the refit I was able to get to Brigg very frequently and usually managed to avoid paying the railway fare, for which I should be ashamed. Leaving Portsmouth about tea time on Friday evening enabled me to be in London in time to go to a theatre and then catch the mail train at about 11:00pm, getting to Brigg in the early morning.

During this time I saw some stars of the British theatre. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in *Antigone*; Anton Walbrook and Mai Zetterling in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*; Angela Baddely in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*. At the Palace theatre I saw a show called *Gay Rosalinda* which was an adaptation of *Die Fledermaus* written by Johann Strauss "the younger" in 1874. The orchestra was conducted by Richard Tauber, a famous tenor who had by that time given up singing. I also went to two performances by one of the leading London symphony orchestras, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. This was at the Coliseum theatre just off Trafalgar Square and one of these provided me with an unforgettable moment, the opening of the second movement of one of Tchaikovsky's symphonies - either the fourth or the fifth. I have since heard it many times on recordings but am still unable to remember which. The movement starts with a French horn solo and was turned into a popular song *Will This Be Moon Love*. On a less cultured note I went to the Windmill Theatre which produced continuous revues, many of the acts featuring scantily dressed chorus girls. It was there I saw Jimmy Edwards before he became famous.

In the summer of 1947 Dad, stepmother, Auntie Alice and Uncle Harry came to Portsmouth from London where they were on holiday. On the way they passed close to Sandown Park race course and could see the crowd there for one of England's big races, the Eclipse Stakes. The senior member of the artisans mess, Pat O'Kelly, organised afternoon tea for them in the mess and they had a tour of the ship which, in

the throes of the refit, was not looking its best. Dad had long had an interest in the navy and loved every minute

January and February of 1947 had brought one of the worst winters for many years. Electricity generation, still suffering from years of war-time neglect, was overstretched and much of industry was limited to a three day week. The King and Queen were on their way to South Africa in the battleship HMS Vanguard; when the King heard about the chaos he is said to have wanted to return. The Vanguard was escorted as far as Freetown in West Africa by an aircraft carrier in which my brother Ken was serving. I cannot remember now if it was the Indomitable or the Indefatigable, The crew were given shore leave in Freetown in Sierra Leone; Ken's first taste of "foreign parts".

As autumn 1947 approached, the ship was almost ready for service and it became known that we were to join the East Indies station, based at Trincomalee in what was then Ceylon. The crew increased to the normal complement and three new artificers joined my mess; Freddie Studwell (electrical), Pat Hannan and Bugsy Wheeler (both ordnance). They had been six months behind me at Torpoint and we became firm friends. An additional chief electrical artificer, Jim Stead, joined us and, as he was senior to Ron Botteril, Ron took over work which mainly involved gunnery control and kept me under his control.

Jim Stead was well liked but was a little eccentric. One day he came into the workshop rubbing his hands and saying "It's my wedding anniversary today". "Congratulations, chief" we chorused. "Don't congratulate me," said Jim. "I've left home".

On the first day at sea for post-refit trials, paint started to peel from one of the funnels and about the same time the diesel engine that drove one of the ship's four electricity generators suffered a serious fault. I do not know what caused the funnel to become so hot but it necessitated a further spell in the dockyard. Eventually the faults were rectified and after a period of leave we left for Trincomalee in October or November 1947.

First stop was Gibraltar, for only one day I think, and then we entered the Mediterranean.

For several hours we were close to the coast of North Africa and I spent some time in the gunnery control tower looking at the scenery through the huge binoculars which in action were used by the gunnery officer to direct operations. Soon we arrived at Malta and entered Valetta Harbour on the day of the celebration of St Paul Shipwrecked. St Paul was on his way to Rome when shipwrecked in AD 61 or AD 62 and spent about three months there. The event was (and probably still is) one of much festivity with brass bands parading in the streets. The Birmingham did not stay as long as St Paul; next day we were on our way to Port Said at the northern end of the Suez Canal.

About the first thing I saw in Port Said was a huge sign, **COCA COLA**. What a welcome to the mystic east! The second thing to strike me was a huge statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the Frenchman who built the canal. Small boats carrying Arabs trying to sell all kinds of merchandise swarmed around the ship. Ropes attached to baskets were thrown onto the deck so that goods could be hauled up for inspection; if

a prospective buyer showed interest haggling over the price took place and eventually the goods were either sold or returned.

Then it was into the canal. The west side of the canal was quite green and fertile looking but on the east there appeared to be nothing but desert; I thought of the Israelites and their 40 years of wandering in that hostile environment. At about half way along the canal are the Great Bitter Lakes which are big enough to allow ships travelling in opposite directions to pass each other.

Emerging from the canal into the Red Sea we spent a day or so at anchor to paint ship so that we would arrive on station looking spick and span. There was an oil refinery close by which had a terrible smell. Two or three days brought us to Aden, at that time a British possession. We were told it hardly ever rains in Aden and I know the streets were very dusty and the cinema did not have a roof. At the cinema I saw *Goodbye Mr Chips*.

Some of the crew were given a conducted tour into the old part of the town which occupies the crater of an extinct volcano; access is through a tunnel in the side of the crater. We also saw a place that was alleged to have some connection to the Queen of Sheba and her visit to King Solomon. In the evening with one or two mates I somehow met the local police chief; he showed us the cells which were full of shouting Arabs. He explained that he had rounded them up as they were known petty criminals who might prey on the Birmingham's unsuspecting crew. So much for *Habeus corpus*.

Then started the last lap - across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon and Trincomalee. It was said in the navy that Trincomalee is "Scapa Flow in technicolor" and so it proved. The harbour is huge, it is described in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as "one of the world's finest natural harbours", and it is surrounded by tropical vegetation. There were no jetties and so all the time we spent there was at anchor in the harbour. The town itself was then a shabby place with no buildings of any interest; even the Hindu temple looked in need of a spruce up.

We were now on tropical routine which meant a fairly early start in the mornings but work finished at mid-day. We had plenty of opportunity to swim: over the side of the ship, on Sober Island and at a beach on the open sea in Trincomalee. Sober Island was a small island in the harbour with a jetty, and every afternoon a boat left the ship with men wanting to swim there in an area enclosed by shark-proof netting. In Trincomalee there was a club on a beach for naval personnel where sandwiches and tea could be bought but going there meant a walk of about a mile along Trincomalee's main street from Pepper Pot Pier to where the ship's boats took liberty men. I never heard any explanation of how the pier got its name.

Quite close to Pepper Pot Pier was a canteen where meals and drinks were on sale. The beer was brewed at an inland town, Nuwara-Eliya, and was known in the navy as "sludge". I found the name well-deserved and consumed very little of it.

Apart from swimming at the club we were able to watch the Tamil fishermen at work close by. Outrigger canoes took a huge semi-circular net out to sea. The net was then dragged in by men on the shore and always contained a large amount of fish. The market was also close by and I used to buy mangos and limes there.

Soon after arriving at Trincomalee we went to Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar), for the Independence celebrations and to carry away the last British governor. It had

been planned that Burma would throw off the British yoke on 1 January 1948 but astrologers determined that 4 January would be a more auspicious date.

I well remember my first trip ashore in an Asian city. With three companions I entered the Volga cafe in Phayre Street, Rangoon's main street, and ordered four bottles of beer. I proffered a ten rupee note only to be told "Another four rupees, please." That meant the beer cost five shillings and three pence a bottle at a time when it might have cost a quarter of that in Britain. The beer was made by McEwans in Scotland and called Revolver brand which I thought highly appropriate - it was a stick-up. We did not stay for a second bottle. Fortunately, on the next night help was at hand from the British army.

Chief and Petty Officers were invited to the sergeants' mess at the army barracks. British army units were being withdrawn with the approach of Burma's independence and the sergeants were making sure their mess funds were well spent. I went with my friends Studwell, Hannan and Wheeler and we were greeted by each having two bottles of Bass thrust into our hands. Ladies were invited and we met three very pretty girls, sisters of Portuguese - Burmese descent. Food was provided and just after midnight one of the girls picked up a meat sandwich only to be rebuked by one of her sisters, "Philomena, today is Friday". The girls were Catholics and at that time meat was forbidden on Fridays.

It is probably that incident that made me remember Philomena's name; I have forgotten the names of her sisters. Later we were invited to their house and in turn we entertained them to tea in the artisans' mess. We asked them about the years of the Japanese occupation and were somewhat astonished to learn that the Japanese had not behaved badly and that the troops were confined to barracks from early evening.

Rangoon is home to the famous Shwe Dagon Buddhist pagoda and a large party from the ship was given a conducted tour. The pagoda has a large dome which is covered in gold leaf and according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has a height of 326 feet. My main memory is of having to remove our shoes to enter the courtyards of the temple and being careful about where we put our feet as there were numerous pigeons.

Another, more gruesome excursion, was to see the embalmed bodies of assassinated Cabinet members. In July 1947 a gunman had burst into a cabinet meeting and killed several of its members. Their bodies were put on view in glass coffins and were not buried until independence was achieved.

I was standing at midnight on the jetty where the Birmingham was berthed when sirens and hooters sounded to announce the end of British rule. A Burmese man was standing next to me and with the arrogance of youth I asked him if he thought independence would be better than British rule. His dignified response was "Self-rule is more important than good rule".

The Union Jack was lowered for the last time by Birmingham's Chief Yeoman of Signals; a picture in the newspaper carried the words "Ben Hilton lowers the Union Jack." Next morning the last British governor, Sir Hubert Rance, came aboard. He was accompanied to the dockside by members of the new government and soon afterwards we left Rangoon. I cannot remember now if we took Sir Hubert directly to Colombo or to Trincomalee but I know he sailed for home from Colombo in a Dutch liner, the *Willem Ruys* which was on its maiden voyage.

Soon after arriving back in Trincomalee we learned we were to go on a trip to Madras and Calcutta in India - the official name for such excursions was "good-will" but to the men it was "flag-wagging". In Madras some of my mess-mates met an Indian couple, Mr and Mrs Azariah, who invited them to their home for a meal and told them to bring another friend. So the previously mentioned foursome, Studwell, Hannan, Wheeler and Turner turned up at the Azariah house in the suburb of Vepery. Mr Azariah was a tax official and his wife Elizabeth was a lawyer but their house was, even by my working-class standards, very shabby.

But their hospitality was far from shabby and we had a great evening although I cannot remember what we ate. The Azariahs were Catholics and their four boys all had English sounding first names. The youngest was Eric and the oldest was Christian; I have forgotten the names of the other two. We did not meet Christian as he was in the army as an officer cadet. Later in the evening a friend called in; he too was a lawyer but Mrs Azariah explained that he did not practice in the courts as he came from the Bombay area and spoke Gujarati. That was the first time I had ever heard of that language but many years later I worked with a man who spoke it. In Madras the main languages were Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. We paid one or two more visits to the Azariahs and took the three boys swimming and gave them a tour of the ship.

In Madras we had a visit from Admiral Lord Mountbatten, Governor-General of India. He was the last British Viceroy and was invited by the newly-independent India to stay as Governor General after independence in August 1947. He gave the assembled crew a talk about the last days of the British Raj and told us of a Rajah whose hobby was breeding dogs and who gave his subjects a public holiday whenever he mated his dogs. Mountbatten noticed an Indian reporter standing on a gun turret and making notes. He gave an almost imperceptible hint to his aide-de-camp who confiscated the reporter's notes.

We were inspected by Mountbatten; I was standing near to my chief, Jim Stead, who was wearing the ribbon of the Burma Star. During the war Mountbatten had been Commander-in-Chief, South East Asia, and he stopped to have a few words with Jim about the war in that area. After leaving India Mountbatten resumed his naval career and eventually became First Sea Lord, the highest office a naval officer can hold.

A day or so later, 30 January 1948, came the news that Mr Gandhi, who for many years had been a leading member of those seeking Indian independence, had been assassinated. India was plunged into mourning and it was decided that we should return to Trincomalee, leaving our visit to Calcutta until after the mourning period ended.

When we did reach Calcutta I was appalled at the sight of so much human misery and degradation; many people had no homes and spent their entire lives on the streets. One night I was the Petty Officer in charge of the shore patrol; I think I had four ratings, maybe six. Our function was to look out for any of the crew who appeared likely to get into any kind of trouble but probably because of the high price of alcohol we did not meet any. We were accompanied by a similar patrol of Indian army men.

Although the patrol had no trouble from crew members I had a momentarily terrifying experience. It was full moon and the occasion to bring some kind of effigy from a Hindu temple and carry it through the streets. The effigy was carried on an

ornate platform; poles protruded from its four corners and about four men shouldered each of the four poles. There was a huge crowd, many of them were burning paper and rubbing the resultant ash into their foreheads; the noise was deafening. Suddenly one of the men carrying the platform stumbled and the whole thing tipped over and broke into pieces. A loud wail came from the throng and for a moment I thought that we white faces might somehow be thought to be responsible for the disaster. But the police using their sticks soon restored order and we returned to the ship unscathed.

Any trip ashore exposed us to multitudes of beggars and I was pleased when our visit of a few days came to an end and we left for Port Blair in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. This was the only place I have ever been to where it was necessary to take medication to prevent malaria. The island on which Port Blair is situated was at that time used by India as a penal colony and there was little of interest to be seen but it also provided one of the highlights of my life. A party from the ship were taken, first by motor boat and then by canoes, into the jungle to see a forestry operation. After being felled, the tree trunks were dragged by elephants to a railway line where other elephants lifted them onto bogeys which ran on railway lines to a river. When the laden bogeys reached the river more elephants were waiting to tip the tree trunks into the water. I cannot recall if the trees were milled locally or, after being floated down the river, they were loaded on to ships to be exported.

Soon after returning to Trincomalee we learned that we were to go to South Africa for about three months, with a few days in Mauritius *en route*. Mauritius was taken from the French during the Napoleonic wars and French was still spoken there; as previously recounted I was able to air my school-boy French. Most of the inhabitants were of Indian origin, descendants of workers taken there to work in the sugar cane plantations. Rum was produced on the island but I do not recall sampling it; what I do remember is some horrible locally produced sherry, the quartet Studwell, Hannan, Wheeler and Turner disposed of a full bottle in a shanty-like bar somewhere in the interior of the island.

The interior could be reached by steam trains which were wood-fired and the names of two townships, Quatre Bornes and Curepipe have stayed in my memory. There was a British army unit somewhere in the interior and several of us spent a few evenings in the sergeants' mess, sleeping there overnight and being returned to the ship by army vehicles driven by African soldiers. At the time this did not strike me as being odd but I now wonder why the British government felt it necessary to have troops on a speck of land of no strategic importance.

We arrived in Simonstown, South Africa, on the day that the result of the election that ousted General Smuts as Prime Minister became known. Simonstown was a British naval base known as the South Atlantic Station and we were to be on the station for about three months to replace another cruiser, HMS Nigeria, which had gone to Britain for a refit. Simonstown is about twenty miles south of Cape Town and is connected by a railway along which passenger trains ran frequently.

On the first evening after our arrival I travelled up to Cape Town with one or two messmates to find the place abuzz with excitement about the election result and many people bought us drinks. After the expensive drinks in Rangoon and India, and the horrible "sludge" in the Trincomalee canteen, South Africa was a drinking man's

paradise. Two breweries, Lion and Castle, produced drinkable beer at a reasonable price and, due to the vineyards in Cape Province, brandy was very popular when taken with ginger ale or other mixers.

There was a huge bar called Del Monico's in Cape Town with a ceiling that looked like the night sky with moving stars, and it did not take long for the Birmingham crew to make this our favourite night spot.

It was about now that I first went to horse racing. The ship's painter, a messmate George Nuttall, asked me to go with him on Union Day, a public holiday commemorating the union of Transvaal, Cape Province, Natal and the Orange Free State in the aftermath of the Boer war. Here I learned of "the double", which meant picking the winners of two specified races. George and I picked the first leg winner and I had dreams of a good win but our second pick did not perform.

Then came a visit to Port Elizabeth and East London. Going ashore in Port Elizabeth I encountered a couple called Munday who asked me to have dinner with them in a restaurant. They turned out to be English, working in Southern Rhodesia and having a holiday in South Africa. Sometime later, when back in Simonstown, I saw them in Del Monico's and invited them to the ship; I think they had a drop of rum in our mess and they certainly went away with some duty-free cigarettes.

At one of these two ports a party from the ship were given a tour of a car assembly plant - I think it belonged to General Motors. Apart from that visit and meeting the Mundayes I recall nothing of those two places.

Next stop was Durban, a much more attractive place. Again I went to the races to see one of the big events of South African racing, the July Cup. I did not pick the winner. Another enjoyable trip was organised by a seaman's mission to a place called Amanzimtoti. We had a boat trip on a river running through acres of sugar cane. On returning to the mission we were asked if we would like to go to the Sunday evening service. Several of the men went but I was not among them.

In Durban I went with my friend Pat Hannan, a rugby enthusiast, to my first and last rugby game. It was between Natal and Transvaal and seemed to me to be just a lot of beefy men pushing and shoving.

Captain Haines had reached the top of the captains' seniority list and as he was not promoted to rear-admiral had to retire while we were in Durban and his replacement, Captain Pakenham, joined us. He was to later play an important part in my life.

Then it was back to Simonstown for the rest of our stay in South Africa. When we left we were short of several crew members who had deserted. Years later, in New Zealand, I worked with Peter Trevett and in conversation found he had been in the navy at Simonstown at the same time, in the frigate HMS Actaeon. Peter told me one of the deserters, a gunnery petty officer called Chatfield, had been caught slicing bacon in a grocer's shop where he had found a job. He was reduced to Able Seaman and sent to the Actaeon.

On the voyage back to Trincomalee we called briefly at one of the Maldivé Islands where natives paddled out in canoes with fresh fish. In return they were given newly baked bread from the ship's bakery. At that time few British people could have pointed to the Maldives on a map but it is now a tourist destination. Nancy's great nephew went there for his honeymoon; when his mother told me this on the telephone I said

"I've been there - three hours on a Sunday morning". She thought I was joking.

Soon after getting back to Trincomalee I had two weeks leave at Diyatalawa in inland Ceylon. The journey by bus took all day; we had a stop in Kandy which was the capital when Sinhalese kings ruled Ceylon. I saw the Temple of the Tooth - the tooth being reputed to have been Buddha's - but did not go inside. The journey took us over the Ramboda pass which I think was 6,000 feet above sea level, and at one stage we were held up by a ceremonial procession of elephants; it may have been the Buddhist equivalent of the Harvest Festivals I attended and enjoyed as a choir boy.

For the first time I saw hillsides terraced into small flat areas for growing rice and saw tea plantations. Due to its elevation Diyatalawa was much cooler than Trincomalee and we wore our blue suits in the evenings rather than tropical whites. It was possible to hire a bike so I got into the surrounding country and one day I came across a school where there were some boys in saffron robes. An elderly man explained they were learning Pali, a "dead" language in which many of the sacred texts of Buddhism are written. Every evening, flocks of huge bats flew overhead and I was told they lived on fruit. I came across a dead one; it had a wing span of about 30 centimetres.

Later I had another trip to Diyatalawa, this time in charge of a prisoner going to the military prison there. Wee Jock, a little Scotch seaman, had been caught asleep when he was guarding a prisoner in the ship's cell. His offence was deemed to be more serious than that of the man he was guarding so he was sentenced to a few days in the military prison at Diyatalawa.. I had two sailors to help me and as we left the ship the Master at Arms asked me if I wanted Wee Jock handcuffed. Since Wee Jock weighed about eight stone I said we would not subject him to that indignity.

After an all day journey we delivered our prisoner. I think we all enjoyed the journey and enjoyed a meal at a government rest house with the voucher I had been given; it was more like four pals having a day out than a serious business. This changed in an instant as we entered the prison and Wee Jock was spoken to as if he was a bad dog. I was disgusted that, for what I thought was a minor misdemeanour, four men and a Ceylonese driver spent two whole days travelling. The escort and I had a night at the leave camp and returned to the ship on the next day

Recalling this somewhat unusual job reminds me of another function totally unrelated to my normal work. I occasionally was Petty Officer of the Day and had to be present at the rum issue. Every day at 11:00a.m., the words "up spirits" came over the loud-speakers; the P.O. of the Day joined an officer of the watch and a man from the Stores branch in the spirit room deep down in the after end of the ship. I cannot recall how the exact amount of rum to be issued on any particular day was determined, or how the rum was stored in the spirit room, but enough rum was taken to give every eligible man one eighth of a pint and the P.O. of the Day had to be sure that no more and no less was taken. We must have had at least 400 men eligible which meant that 50 pints, or more than six gallons were taken onto the deck amidships.

The mess-men for each of the Chief and Petty Officers messes then collected enough neat rum for their messes and the remainder of the rum was watered down in a large wooden tub bound with brass rings and carrying, in large brass letters, "The King God Bless Him". Then a rating for each of the other messes came for their "two and

one", so called because their rum was diluted by two parts water to one part rum.

It was about the time of my trip as an escort to the prison that we went to Colombo to go into dry dock, mainly for a bottom scrape. Unlike merchant ships we spent a very small proportion of our time at sea and in the warm tropical waters in harbour weeds grew quickly on the ship's bottom. This was enough to cause a reduction in the maximum speed the ship could attain and also caused an increase in fuel oil consumption when we did go to sea. Colombo was a much more pleasant place than Calcutta or Madras and we were able to go swimming at Mount Lavinia on the outskirts.

During my time in Trincomalee I had gained a bit of a reputation as a quiz kid and as a result I was invited to join a team of the Birmingham's officers on the quarter deck in a quiz against officers of the County class cruiser Norfolk which was anchored near us in the harbour. The quiz was conducted via radio telephone and I cannot now recall who won or any of the questions asked. What I do recall was being given a bottle of beer which was definitely against regulations.

Towards the end of 1948 we went into Singapore Dockyard for a refit and what became a turning point in my life. Normally most of the crew would have been put into barracks while we were in dry dock but for some reason which was never explained the crew of the Norfolk remained in barracks after she had been refloated so we had to endure the heat, and our sanitary arrangements on the side of the dock were totally inadequate for a full crew. For obvious reasons the ship's bathrooms and toilet facilities could not be used while in dry dock.

When in Trincomalee I used to visit a library attached to the shore station there and took to reading *Hansard*, the record of Parliamentary proceedings in London. One day I read of a Scottish M.P. called Willis who said in a debate that boys should not be allowed to sign on in the navy as I had done. I wrote to Mr Willis and learned that in his youth he too had joined the navy as an artificer apprentice, served until he was 30 and then had gone into politics. I then started writing to M.P.'s using an alphabetical list and had got through about 150 before going to Singapore. My letters all had the same theme; that it was unethical to allow a boy not yet 16 to sign away 14 years of his life.

Many of the M.P.'s I wrote to referred my letter to a minister in the government, the Civil Lord of the Admiralty whose name I have forgotten. He had so many letters from M.P.'s that he used a duplicate letter to reply and so I had many of these letters sent on to me. They explained that the training of artificer apprentices was so expensive that it was necessary for us to serve many years in recompense.

The situation in Singapore put me onto a different tack. There were more than 100 Chief and Petty Officers in the Birmingham and the number of W.C.s and washbasins in the ablution facilities at the dry dock were totally inadequate so I wrote to about 12 M.P.'s about this. Sometime later I went ashore and bought a copy of the Singapore newspaper *The Straits Times*. I learned that one of them had raised the matter in Parliament and had been told that the conditions were indeed as I had described them.

Next day I was summoned to appear before Captain Pakenham and several other officers on the quarter deck. The captain opened the proceedings by saying "You will notice that you still have your cap on." By this he meant that I was not being dealt

with as a defaulter on some kind of charge. He asked me why I had written the letters instead of making a complaint to him as regulations permitted. I replied that I had no faith in the complaints system. After a while I told him that I did not wish to continue as I thought I might lose my self-control and say something I could regret.

At this he said "Come with me" and took me to his cabin. He offered me a cigarette (declined) and told me to speak freely. He also remarked that I had been in the ship for three years, longer than any other man, with an unblemished record and that my immediate superiors were highly satisfied with my work performance. I told him I hated the way we lived; no peace, no privacy. I also told him the stokers' mess-deck was a disgrace to a civilised country. After a while he told me that he could see that I was very unhappy in the navy and would try to get me out of it.

Eventually we did get into the barracks and it was while we were there that Prince Charles was born and the King ordered "Splice the mainbrace" so we all had an extra tot of rum. I remember the blacksmith saying "May she have another one soon". But by the time Princess Anne was born I was a civilian.

I was still in the ship at Christmas 1948 but soon afterwards was sent to the sick quarters ashore at Trincomalee. Looking back I think I should have not taken that without protest - there was nothing wrong with me - but I was so keen to get out of the navy that I accepted this. I forget how long I was in the sick quarters before embarking in HMS Sussex which was on its way home after a long spell on the Far East station based at Hong Kong. In the Sussex I carried out normal duties but as she was going home to be scrapped there was not a lot of work done. Strangely I cannot remember the name of any person I came into contact with in the ship. We called at Aden and I went ashore long enough to buy 1,000 duty free cigarettes but I cannot recall if we stopped at Malta or Gibraltar.

It was late February or early March when we arrived at Portsmouth where the band of the army's Sussex Regiment was playing *Sussex by the Sea* and wives and children of crew members were waiting to greet their husbands and fathers. I was whisked off to the Royal Naval Hospital at nearby Gosport to see a psychiatrist who had the rank of Surgeon Commander. We had a long talk; the only thing I remember is me telling him how I sometimes used to go to the Barnetby cattle market with my Dad and that the biscuits in the canteen at the market were always damp. I was able to telephone the Queen's Arms pub in Brigg to tell my Dad where I was. The Commander decided that I could not be invalided out of the navy on medical grounds.

My stay in the hospital was short and then it was off to Brigg for some leave. Only one memory of the leave remains - I went to Market Rasen races on Easter Monday, my first experience of horse racing over hurdles and fences. In the first race I backed a horse called Aces High ridden by Irishman and champion jumping jockey Tim Moloney. It won.

After my leave I returned to the barracks at Portsmouth fully expecting to be soon discharged but after a day or two was told I was to go to HMS Starling. I told the drafting Master at Arms that I thought I was about to get my "ticket". He said "You're going to the Starling." I went. The Starling was a frigate that had been adapted as a training ship attached to a shore establishment, HMS Dryad, a navigation training school on the outskirts of Portsmouth. We went to sea most days but returned to

harbour almost every night. We also used to take parties of Sea Cadets for a day at sea. They were brought to the ship by a Petty Officer who had his mid-day meal in our mess, and by adding a little water to the rum allocated to the mess, we were able to give him a tot. He told us he used to tell his colleagues at the Dryad that it was a horrible job so that none of them wanted to take his place.

Because we were in harbour most nights I took a room at the Salvation Army for a very small payment and slept there most nights. We were allowed to take 20 duty free cigarettes ashore per day so I was able to build up quite a pile in my room for my Dad on my next visit home.

Soon after I joined the Starling the captain sent for me and handed me a form. It was headed Application for Discharge and had two options, Free Discharge or Discharge by Purchase. Naturally I went for the free option. I do not recall how long it took for the wheels to go round but in June I was sent to HMS Collingwood, the navy's electrical school near Portsmouth and from there I was ejected into civvy street. I was given the kit of civilian clothes that people who had been conscripted into the armed forces were given when they finished their time.

Dad and step-mother were on holiday in London so I stayed there for the rest of the week. Still in uniform when I got to London, I was able to get a room at the Union Jack services club adjoining Waterloo Station. Then I took off my uniform for the last time and went to meet Dad and stepmother in my new clothes.

It was Royal Ascot week, perhaps the biggest event in British horse racing, which always takes place in mid-June. Thursday is Ascot Gold Cup day and we decided to go there by Greenline bus. Royal Ascot lasts for four days, Tuesday to Friday inclusive, and the Royal Family always entertains a large party at nearby Windsor Castle for the racing. There is a straight course of almost a mile at Ascot and after travelling from the castle by car the royal party transfers into horse drawn carriages and drives down the straight mile, past the grandstands into the Royal Enclosure. So we saw George VI, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth with husband Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Margaret and other lesser royals. My royalist Dad loved it.

The Gold Cup was won by Lord Derby's Alycidon. Lord Derby had three other runners in the race to act as pacemakers as so often races over two and a half miles were run at a dawdle for most of the trip with a sprint at the end. The pacemakers were there to ensure a truly run race. We had a good day betting-wise but I only remember the name of one of the winners I backed, Swallowtail, which had been second or third in the Derby in his previous race. Back in London we had a meal at the Strand Corner House. Stepmother was feeling so pleased with herself she gave the waiter a tip of half a crown which was a useful amount back then. Half a crown is two shillings and sixpence; Britain also had another coin, the florin, which was two shillings. I never understood why it was thought necessary to have two coins of such close value, or why we had half a crown but did not have a crown. After enjoying Gold Cup day we decided to go to Ascot again on the following day.

We then returned to Brigg. Soon afterwards I received a letter from the Admiralty addressed to Electrical Artificer C.R.Turner with a cheque for money due to me. As I did not have a bank account I could not cash the cheque so I sent it back asking for cash and saying I was now Mr Turner. The money came in a more negotiable form in

a correctly addressed envelope.

I had always enjoyed any stays I had in London and after a few days in Brigg I went back to London to look for work. But putting pleasure before business I was at Sandown Park race course within an hour of arriving at King's Cross. The Eclipse Stakes is one of the big events in the British racing year and I saw it won by Amour Drake from France.

The Victory Club for ex-servicemen had been recently opened close to the Marble Arch end of Tottenham Court Road. I joined this, took a room there and studied the Situations Vacant columns in the newspapers. This bore no fruit so after some days I went to a Labour Exchange and got a job as a clerk with the railways in an office near Marylebone Station. The job involved records of freight carried on the railway and was incredibly boring. At the same time I moved from the Victory Club to lodgings in West Hampstead. The landlady was a hard-faced woman. She had four other lodgers that I remember; we all had separate rooms so it must have been quite a large house.

The next few weeks were probably the most miserable of my life. I discovered that life in London was very different from the occasional visit and I had a financial disaster. I kept records of greyhound racing results at London tracks and came up with what I thought was a sure-fire system. One Saturday night I went to the dogs at Wembley to test the system and lost most of a week's wages. Monday saw me at a pawnbrokers shop near Charing Cross station where I pawned my watch and binoculars so I could pay the hard-faced landlady her week's rent. They were not in pawn for long; since then I have not visited either a pawnbroker or a greyhound track.

A young man at my work had been in the Merchant Navy and I think it must have been talks I had with him that made me think in that direction. I stayed at the railway job for only six weeks and went back to Brigg. I took a job with an electrical contractor; for most of the six weeks with him the main job was wiring new houses being built at an air force base at Swinderby between Lincoln and Newark. This involved travel of almost an hour each way in the back of a van and I hated this job too. At Dad's suggestion, I wrote to the shipping company Alfred Holt at Liverpool. I was called to Liverpool for an interview and given a job as ship's electrician. I did not know that a chance meeting in Liverpool would change my life.

At first I worked on ships at the Birkenhead docks where cargo for the company's ships was loaded, and I stayed in lodgings arranged by the company. This was with two sisters, the Misses Wolfenden, whose late father had been a chief engineer with the company. The younger sister, in her forties and working in an office, was the archetypical sour spinster but her elder sister who looked after the boarders was very different. The house shone and the meals, in spite of rationing which was still in force, were good.

I also did a spell on nights on a ship called the Deucalion. I lived on board and only had to get out of bed if needed. I was free during the day and during that time had two trips to Haydock Park races and also saw Laurence Olivier's film of Shakespeare's Henry V.

My first voyage for Alfred Holt's Blue Funnel line was only as far as Glasgow in the Astyanax; all Blue Funnel ships were named after the Greek heroes of Homer's Odyssey. When ships returned from foreign voyages their crews went on leave and

temporary crews manned the ships for coast-wise voyages. We went to Glasgow to load cargo for the ship's next foreign voyage.

I had to be in the engine room when leaving harbour and when the order to start the engine was given I nearly jumped out of my skin. The Astyanax was a motor ship driven by a diesel engine and to start the engine a blast of compressed air was driven into the cylinders and this created a very loud noise. All my previous experience had been in steam ships.

Thanks to my Seaman's Record Book, which I still have, I know the return trip from Liverpool to Glasgow was from 4 November 1949 to 11 November 1949. About all I remember of Glasgow was going to see Scotland play Wales in a soccer match at Hampden Park.

Then it was back to the shore gang, probably spending most of the time at the Misses Wolfenden, and having a few days at home at Christmas time. On 30 December 1949 I went to Glasgow by overnight sleeper to join the Peleus. Arriving about breakfast time on New Year's Eve I was whisked off to the shipping office to sign on. New Year's Eve is a time of celebration in Scotland and I was looking forward to a few beers ashore in the evening but by lunch time the Peleus and I were sailing down the Clyde bound for Liverpool where I signed off on New Years Day about 30 hours after signing on.

Life in the Merchant Navy was very different from that in the Royal Navy. On the ships I had my own cabin complete with a wash basin. A steward made up my bed and every evening left tea making material and sandwiches in case I had to get up during the night. The food was far superior to that in naval ships and as I soon discovered became epicurean when we had passengers.

On 31 January 1949 I signed on as second electrician in the Anchises, a sister ship to the Astayanax. They were quite new ships built after the war. Most of our cargo was destined for Labuan, a small island off the north coast of Borneo, and consisted mainly of bags of cement and galvanized iron window frames for an oil refinery which was being built there. The first electrician, there were only two of us, was in his forties and had been at sea for many years.

Ships of the Anchises class carried 14 passengers; most of them were not travelling for pleasure but were employees and families of various firms or government departments. This of course was in the days before air travel became so common. We had two other passengers - race horses bound for Singapore. They were housed in two large wooden boxes on deck and did not come out of the boxes until we reached that port.

Dinner on the first night out astonished me; it was real luxury. Course followed course; soup, fish, entree, main dish, dessert and cheese and biscuits were served by the stewards. We ate in the saloon with the passengers but at a separate table and we were not encouraged to fraternise with them. Drinks were now dirt cheap. A double gin, a tenth of a bottle, was sixpence; whisky was eightpence and a small bottle of Bass beer sixpence. My pay was about one pound a day; a pound was 240 pence. I took a liking to gin and tonic and the first electrician and I had one every night before dinner.

The first part of the voyage, as far as Gibraltar, was the roughest I ever encountered

but I was not sea sick. We had a young engineer who had been to sea before, had given it up, and was now giving it a second trial. He hardly kept down a mouthful of food and was looking very frail by the time we reached Gibraltar. He left the sea again at the end of the voyage.

Our main work in the early part of the voyage was overhauling the winches and the switch gear which controlled them. They would be used to discharge and later load cargo. We had one helper, a Chinese man. The engine room crew was Cantonese but the deck crew and stewards were British. From our Chinese helper I heard the only Chinese I ever learned. As 10.00am approached he would look at his watch and say "Yum cha" (tea time) and disappear to the aft end of the ship where the Chinese crew was housed.

First stop was Port Said, prior to entering the Suez Canal. In the Royal Navy we hired a searchlight and an operator from the Canal Company but Blue Funnel ships carried their own. The searchlights consisted of two carbon rods mounted in front of a large concave mirror. The rods almost touched each other and when a Direct Current voltage was applied to them they produced an intense light. A mechanism ensured that as the rods burned away they were moved back towards each other so that their tips remained a constant distance apart. The canal was lined close to each bank by floating reflectors much like the cat's eyes we see on the roads, and the light from the searchlight reflected from the mirrors enabled the pilot, a canal employee, to keep the ship in the middle of the canal. One of the two electricians had to be standing by the searchlight when it was in use. I learned that it can be very cold at night in Egypt.

After a brief re-fuelling stop at Aden it was across the Indian Ocean to Singapore and then to Labuan to unload the bulk of our cargo. We then went around to Tarakan and Sandakan on the north east coast of Borneo. Sandakan was in British Borneo but Tarakan was in what had been part of the Dutch East Indies and was now part of newly independent Indonesia. Tarakan was a poverty stricken place; at the end of the jetty at which we were berthed we sold cigarettes for fistfuls of paper money but when we reached the township about all we could buy was some vile sticky soft drink. Many years later I saw a picture in a museum in Canberra which showed Australian troops landing at Tarakan during the war. I think few, if any, of our crew knew of this engagement.

At Sandakan we took several Chinese workers on board and went up a broad river to load logs. I wish now that I had enquired about the name of the river; all I know is that it was in the British part of Borneo. The tree trunks were floated down the river from the interior, two trunks of a lighter wood were lashed to one which would not float; I think the heavier wood was more valuable. There was certainly a lot of fuss from the British forestry official when one was mishandled and sank.

It was a nightmare job loading the tree trunks; they had to be lowered into the holds at an angle and in the holds there were ropes and pulleys to get them stowed. The Chinese workers from Sandakan were employed on this job. The first mate, who oversaw the operation, aged visibly in the several days we were up the river.

The logs were guided to the ship by pygmies from the interior. Nothing could persuade them to set foot on the ship; once they had attached the winch ropes to the logs their job was done. We were told that their main reason for doing this work was

to get money to buy salt. Almost every day brought periods of torrential rain. When the rain stopped and the sun reappeared, clouds of steam rose from the dense jungle on the sides of the river.

The Anchises' captain limited us to four bottles of beer per day, and also limited the daily amount of spirits we could buy. The British forestry man told us we could have a case of gin at five shillings a bottle. For some now-forgotten reason I was the only one with ready money, so I bought the gin and the recipients paid me when we returned to Liverpool.

At last the logs were all safely stowed; we dropped the Chinese labourers, who had lived on deck in makeshift accommodation, back at Sandakan and headed for Singapore. We probably loaded cargo at Port Swettenham and Penang on the west coast of Malaysia. I have certainly visited those two ports more than once but am not sure of on which voyage I did so. Tin, which is mined in Malaysia, was an important cargo. Tin is very valuable and was exported from Port Swettenham. When we were loading it there were always armed guards watching. The port is named for Sir Frank Swettenham who was a colonial administrator in the area in about 1880.

Another important export of Malaysia was palm oil, extracted from nuts, which is used in soap manufacture. I think it was in Singapore that a large party of Chinese women, all dressed in blue blouses and shiny black trousers, boarded the ship to clean the holds which were to be used to hold the palm oil. They brought long bamboo poles which were lashed together to make scaffolding and from this scaffolding they thoroughly scrubbed the sides of the hold. It is necessary to keep palm oil warm, so pipes were laid in the bottom of the hold in which steam was circulated once the oil had been loaded. Long tubes accessible from the deck allowed a thermometer to be lowered to take the oil's temperature. The ship's carpenter had the job of doing this several times a day until the oil was pumped out in Liverpool.

But before getting to Liverpool we went to London to discharge the tree trunks. When the hatches were opened there was an appalling pong from the river water which had been unavoidably loaded with the timber. I think we arrived on a Thursday and on the next day I got permission to go to the races at Kempton Park on the outskirts of London. I had a disastrous day; the only winner was the bosun who asked me to back a horse called Eclat for him and which duly won.

In the first race I saw Lester Piggott who was to go on to be one of England's most successful jockeys of all time; he was then 15 years old. In that race I backed a horse called The Accused, ridden by champion jockey Gordon Richards. Close to the post he appeared to be well in the lead and I was getting ready to collect my winnings. Then a red shirt flashed past him. It was worn by Lester Piggott on a horse called Tancred.

I consoled myself for my bad day thinking I would go again on the next day and recoup my losses by backing a horse called Peter Flower in the Great Jubilee Handicap. Peter Flower duly obliged but I was not there to see him. By the time of the first race we were sailing down the Thames heading for Liverpool. The tree trunks that the Chinese workers had taken so long to load were discharged quickly by the London dockers who had the convenience of dock-side cranes instead of having to use the ship's winches.

I was paid off in Liverpool on 15 May; the trip had lasted about 10 weeks. I went

home for some leave, of which my main memory is of going to the races at York and Epsom. I must have been an optimist as I went to Brigg market place in the hope of somehow getting a ride to York. I met an old Brigg worthy there, Edmund Thorpe, a retired coal merchant. When I told him I was hoping to get to York he pointed to a group of men and told me they were going to the races. They said I could join them. When their transport arrived it was driven by an ex-school fellow, Frank Proctor, and was a hire car. I offered to pay my share of the car hire; it was one pound which was a very reasonable fare for a round trip of at least a hundred miles. The three men were all prosperous farmers; two of them had sons who had been at school with me.

Feeling flush with money after getting paid for the voyage, I went into Tattersall's ring at a cost of thirty shillings. This gave access to the parade ring around which horses walked prior to racing. There I saw Johnny Proctor, owner of the Lord Nelson pub in Brigg and also owner of Sheila's Cottage which won the Grand National in 1948. Mr Proctor knew my Dad and Grandad so I introduced myself and asked him if his horse, Keepatwoatwo, was going to win. He thought it would not and he proved to be right. The winner of the big race that day was Miraculous Atom owned by a man who farmed near Brigg.

A few days later I set off for Epsom to see the Oaks, a classic race for three year old fillies, and the Coronation Cup on the following day. I wish now that I had stayed one more day to see the Derby, England's most prestigious flat race, which Disraeli described as the Blue Riband of the Turf.

I re-joined the Anchises in time to sign on for the next voyage on 6 June. This was to be a shorter trip. First to Bangkok, where we lay off shore and discharged cargo into lighters and so none of the crew got ashore, and then went to Singapore, Port Swettenham and Penang. This trip I had a new first electrician from Newcastle. We were paid off in Liverpool on 29 August.

I cannot recall how I spent my leave in Brigg. It did not last very long as only two weeks later I signed on in the Peleus. This was one of the best ships in Blue Funnel's large fleet. It was powered by a steam turbine, was about 20% bigger than the Anchises and carried forty passengers. It also carried enough refrigerated cargo to warrant an extra engineer who did not keep watches in the engine room but looked after the refrigerating equipment. The first electrician, Clarrie Bentley, had been at sea for several years. I did not like him much and when we got back to Liverpool the electrical superintendent at head office was keen to know how I had got on with him. I learned that my predecessor had complained about him and had asked for another ship. I told the boss that although we were not bosom pals I found him a capable man and I would be quite happy to sail with him again. This all got back to Clarrie who told me that he was grateful for my words.

After leaving Liverpool we went to Rotterdam to load more cargo and I had a trip ashore. Back in England strict food rationing was still in force, but in Holland, which had suffered almost five years of German occupation, food appeared to be plentiful. From Rotterdam we went to Plymouth Sound for a brief stop to pick up mail and then left bound for Port Said. We had the usual short stay there and then through the Suez Canal to Aden where again we only had a brief stop for taking on fuel oil.

After Singapore it was on to Hong Kong, where we berthed on the Kowloon side

of the harbour. A ferry took me over to the other side where I went up The Peak by the rack railway but do not remember much else except that, as everywhere in the East, drinks were expensive so I stuck to my sixpenny double gins on the ship. Visiting Hong Kong again in 1996 I was amazed by the number of skyscrapers and the amount of building work which was still going on despite the imminent transfer from British rule. Only the ferries appeared the same.

Now came my first visit to Japan: Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagoya. From Yokohama I went by train to Tokyo which was still largely in ruins from the war but I saw the emperor's palace which appeared to be unscathed. At one place I bought Nana a pair of locally made vases; the last time I saw them they were in my Auntie Flo's house at Barnetby. She acquired them when Nana died.

Sitting here almost sixty years later I am finding it strange that I recall so little about Japan. One memory is of seeing a black American soldier with his wife and two little girls at the Yokohama railway station; Japan still had American occupation troops present. Another is of being in a bar and hearing the song Mona Lisa with the words "Are you warm, are you real Mona Lisa, or are you just a lovely work of art"

On one of the two occasions on which I went to Japan we also went to a port in north-east China to load liquid eggs, but I have no recollection of the name of the port or how the liquid eggs were handled. By this time the Communist government of Mao Zedong ruled all China; there were armed guards near the ship and we were not allowed ashore. Chan, our Cantonese helper, would sometimes say "By and by Chiang Kai-shek come back" but Chan and Chiang were both doomed to be disappointed.

I did two voyages in the Peleus. On both trips we called at a European port on the way home but I cannot remember in which order. Going to Genoa we passed through the Straits of Messina which separate Sicily from mainland Italy and there was something of a panic as we got too close to a ferry but all ended well. The docks in Genoa were close to lots of bars and although it was quite late when we berthed several of us went ashore to be introduced to new names in the drinks line. *Marsala all'uovo* was a sweet wine with eggs somehow incorporated and another tippie I tried was *lacrima Christi*, tears of Christ. I went ashore next day and heard a man singing for money in the street; perhaps only in Italy would one be likely to hear a busker sing *Che gelida manina* (Your tiny hand is frozen) from Puccini's opera *La Boheme*.

To reach Marseilles we passed through the Strait of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia, so I had a glimpse of the island where Napoleon was born. I had one run ashore in Marseilles but remember little of the town.

My first trip in the Peleus ended in Liverpool on 17 December 1950; the return trip to Japan had taken just over three months. I spent my leave in Brigg and re-joined the ship at Birkenhead soon after Christmas. The company gave a Christmas bonus of a month's pay and I think it was on 9 January 1951 that with two shipmates I went over to head Office in Liverpool to collect it. We then went to a pub which had the rather incongruous name of The Temple.

Later that evening I briefly met a beautiful young woman and arranged to meet her the following evening. We spent it at the Stella Maris club for seafarers and told each other our life stories. I learned that her name was Nancy Jones and that she came from Bangor in Caernarvonshire. She was 21 years old and teaching in Liverpool and living

with a cousin in the Anfield area. The next evening we went to the theatre and next day I sailed away, after we agreed to write to each other during my absence

My second voyage in the *Peleus* was very much like the first one. Top up with cargo in Rotterdam; call in briefly at Plymouth; Port Said; Suez Canal; Aden and on to Singapore. Hong Kong and Japan followed and we were back in Liverpool on 14 April.

As soon as I was able I telephoned Nancy and we met up that evening, although I cannot recall where we went or what we did. I went home to Brigg and Nancy came for a brief week end, arriving in Brigg by train at about mid-day on a Saturday. Since we passed the family shop on the way from the station to Redcombe Lane we called in so that Nana and Grandad could meet Nancy. After a meal at home we went for a walk along the river bank to Castlethorpe Bridge and in the evening Dad and stepmother took us for a ride in the country to Brocklesby Park where we had a look at the mausoleum where Earls of Yarborough and their families are buried.

On Sunday I asked Nancy to marry me and she said yes and that evening returned to Liverpool. It was not a protracted courtship! During my leave we met up in London; I arrived there from Brigg in time to meet Nancy's train from Liverpool at Euston Station. We went to the hotel in Russell Square where Nancy was to stay and I went to the Victory Ex-Services Club where I was still a member. Next morning, Saturday, we met up and went to Lyons' Corner House in the Strand for breakfast but I do not have much recall of how we spent the morning except that a street photographer took our picture with Admiralty Arch, at the Trafalgar Square end of The Mall, as a background.

In the afternoon I introduced Nancy to the thrill of horse racing at Hurst Park, a few miles from central London. Nancy picked more winners than I did; my sole successful pick was Eastern Emperor owned by Lord Rosebery.

That evening we saw a play at the Criterion Theatre in Trafalgar Square; a totally forgettable piece called *Who Is Sylvia*. The next day we met up with my brother Ken and his wife Janet; they had been married only a short time and were living in Hampstead. All too soon it was time for Nancy to catch the train for Liverpool while I caught the mail train that arrived in Brigg at about 6:00am.

I had expected to do another voyage in the *Peleus* but while still on leave I was told I was to be first electrician in the motor vessel *Dymas* which was in Le Havre; I went directly there from Brigg via ferry from Southampton. The *Dymas* was an old motor ship which had discharged a cargo of copra at Le Havre and she was crawling with insects that I was told were copra beetles. My discharge book shows that I signed on on 2 May 1951. I think I only went ashore once in Le Havre before we sailed for Rotterdam to load cargo for Indonesia and Australia, but fate intervened.

The ship was due for a survey and it was found that the main engine crankshaft was cracked. To remove it for repairs was a huge job involving the removal of much of the ship's superstructure in the area above the engine room. We went to a repair yard at Schiedam close to Rotterdam.

While there I burned my hand badly between forefinger and thumb when a fuse I was replacing on the main switchboard blew. I had to go ashore for medical attention and made several visits to the same doctor to have the burn looked at and new

dressings applied. I began to realise that I did not want to spend all my working life at sea, and that the sooner I tried to make a career ashore the greater would be the chance of some success. I told the captain that I would not sign on for the next voyage; the company's chief engineer was in Rotterdam on company business and came to see me to try to get me to stay on but I stuck to my guns and I was paid off on 17 May. I travelled to Harwich by ferry from the Hook of Holland and caught a train for Sheffield.

Nancy and I had written lots of letters during my time in the Dymas and she was able to meet me in Sheffield and go on to Brigg. Father and stepmother were away so Nancy stayed at the Angel Hotel. The following day Nancy returned to Liverpool and I had to start thinking about finding a job, but first I went to Bangor to meet Nancy's parents and younger brother Bill, going to Liverpool by train one Friday and meeting up with Nancy at her cousin's house and then on to Bangor by bus. It was obvious that Nancy's family was not well - off but equally obvious that they were a very happy family and I was made very welcome and felt very much at home.

Much of the older part of Bangor lies on a narrow strip of land with the Menai Straits on one side and a very steep ridge, which with a degree of exaggeration was called the mountain, on the other. A road ran up the mountain to St Mary's College where Nancy had obtained her teachers certificate and on the Saturday morning we went to see the College. Somewhere along the way we had bought a bag of cherries and we leaned against a farm gate eating cherries and spitting out the stones. I was blissfully happy.

We only had two full days in Bangor and on one of them we went to Caernarvon and visited the castle. It was here, legend says, that in 1284 King Edward I, who had built the castle, told the Welsh he had conquered that "He would give them a prince, born in Wales, who speaks not a word of English". He then showed his newly born son, later Edward II. That is how the title Prince of Wales was instituted.

Another visit was by bus to Penmon on Anglesey which involved crossing the Menai suspension bridge built by Thomas Telford between 1818 and 1826. It is described in *Brittanica* as "the first important modern suspension bridge". The road from the bridge was lovely, running along the Anglesey side of the Menai Straits and having trees on each side forming a canopy. A road sign "Narrow road and winding" amused me; it was probably devised by someone who had Welsh as his first language. Some years later the road was widened and straightened which was probably a desirable move but nevertheless was a bit saddening.

At Penmon we saw an ancient ruined priory and a huge circular dovecote. Close by was the primitive shelter in which an early Celtic saint, St Seriol, is reputed to have lived. A short walk brought us to the shore and a light house and a view, across a narrow channel, of Puffin Island. There was once a coast guard station at Penmon and two substantial houses remain but some much smaller cottages which we saw that day have since been demolished. One of the cottages offered teas and we enjoyed a snack and had a look at a huge Welsh bible that was on display. For me it was an enchanted day and we have rarely been back to Bangor without paying a return visit to Penmon..

All too soon Sunday evening arrived and it was time to catch the bus to Liverpool. At the last minute I asked Nancy's Mum and Dad if they would allow me to marry

their daughter and they both said "YES" in spite of the fact that at the time I was unemployed.

After delivering Nancy to her cousin's house I was able to get to Brigg by train on the same evening. It was time to look for work and I approached the Appleby Frodingham steel works at Scunthorpe only to be told I would need to join a trade union as they had a "closed-shop" policy. I attended a meeting of the Scunthorpe branch of the Electrical Trades Union and was admitted to membership. My chief memory of the meeting is that when it finished I found there would be a long wait for a bus home so I walked the eight miles (about 12 km) to Brigg.

I cannot remember exactly when I started work at Appleby Frodingham as an electrical fitter; it was probably late June or early July 1951. I had bought a new bike and at first I cycled there from Brigg; starting time was 7:30am so I had to be up early. When winter approached I used the bus. A lot of my work was repairing control gear for big electric motors and I was not exactly enraptured by it. From some of the apprentices I learned that they attended Doncaster Technical College one full day per week to study for the Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) in Electrical Engineering. This was a three year course and success in it allowed one to do another two years for the Higher National Certificate (HNC).

I arranged to see the works' education officer. Fortunately I still had much of my written work from my Torpoint days and showed it to this man. He thought my earlier studies could get me exemption from the first two years of the ONC course and that I could be allowed one day a week with pay to attend the technical college. He was right on both counts and so when college started in September I was there. I owe a lot to this man whose name I never knew.

To get to Doncaster from Brigg meant catching an early train at Elsham Station, about three miles away. I used to cycle there and, leaving my bike at the station, catch the train for Doncaster. It was a long day since we were required to attend the college in the evening as well as all day and so it would be about 10:00pm when I got back to Brigg. Luckily, Doncaster boasted a very good cafe where we had an excellent lunch and tea at reasonable prices. As well as the full day at the college we had to do homework which occupied about three hours a week.

Between arranging to continue my education and the new academic year starting in September came the school holidays and Nancy spent about three weeks with me in Brigg. Although we had agreed to marry we had spent very little time together so this was an opportunity to become better acquainted.

At Doncaster I found the course fairly easy; in mathematics we did differential and integral calculus which I had covered in my navy apprenticeship and most of the electrical course covered familiar ground. At about this time I spent a weekend in Liverpool and we made our engagement "official" by buying a ring at a jewellers called Boodle and Dunthorne. We also told the world by notices in the Bangor and Brigg local papers.

Nancy had a break from school early in October so we fixed 9 October, a Tuesday, as the big day and we had the banns of marriage called on three successive Sundays at St Columba's church in Liverpool and St John's church in Brigg. Neither of us wanted a big wedding and in the event Nancy's father was not well enough to travel to

Liverpool to give away his daughter to a man he had only seen for a weekend. Father and stepmother travelled to Liverpool with me on the previous day; Nancy's cousin Jenny had arranged for them to have bed and breakfast with a nearby friend and I stayed with another cousin, Hughie, and his wife, Phyllis. Hughie was to be best man and, in the absence of Nancy's father, Jenny's husband Stan was to give the bride away. Cousin Jenny was to be Nancy's attendant. Nancy's mother also arrived on the Monday and stayed with Jenny. Nancy's brother Bill stayed at home to look after his Dad.

Father and stepmother seemed to hit it off well with Jenny and Stan and Hughie and Phyllis and enjoyed a convivial evening and were soon on first-name terms while Nancy and I took a walk in a nearby park. Then, for me it was off to Hughie's house for my last night as a single man. Soon after I had breakfast in the morning I heard an appropriate song on the radio, "*O Happy, Happy Wedding Day*" from the operetta *The Chocolate Soldier*, and that is exactly what followed.

Later in the morning I was waiting at the altar; when Nancy arrived she looked lovely in a brown suit and a blue feathered hat. She put her hand in mine and I found she was trembling. We had a very simple service and exchanged the vows that we have kept, at time of writing, for more than sixty years. A photographer had been engaged but we did not have the elaborate series of photographs that seem to be *de rigueur* nowadays. The only people present were the relatives I have already mentioned plus Jenny's daughter Pamela who gave the bride a lucky horse shoe. One or two of Nancy's teaching colleagues were waiting to see us come from the church.

Stan worked in the kitchens of Liverpool's premier hotel, The Adelphi, and had contrived to put on a very good lunch for the whole party at his and Jenny's house and had also organised the wedding cake. The photographer came to take a picture of us cutting the cake. I cannot remember whether or not I thanked Jenny and Stan properly for doing so well for us but I do know that many years later during one of our trips to England we called on them and we made a point of telling them how much we had appreciated their efforts.

After lunch, Hughie took us in his car to catch the train for Llandudno where we had accommodation booked in a hotel. Now I can recall neither the name nor the precise location of the hotel. In the late afternoon we walked up the prominence known as the Great Orme. I think we must have seen seagulls because whenever I hear the song "*This is my lovely day*" from the show "*Bless the Bride*", which mentions "*seagulls crying*", I am immediately transported to the Great Orme.

The following day we made the bus trip to Bangor for the day so that Dad could see his newly-married daughter. Looking back, and with the advantage of being the father of daughters, I can well imagine that Nancy's parents could justifiably have had a few reservations about a man who had known their daughter for only 10 months and during that time had been to Japan and back by sea. Dad died in 1955 but I am happy to believe that by then he was quite satisfied about the choice Nancy had made. During our visit Mam surreptitiously gave me an envelope addressed to Nancy which I was to post without Nancy knowing. Somehow I managed to do that and so Nancy received a card at the hotel for her 22nd birthday, three days after the wedding.

I think we had three nights at the hotel and then stayed with Mam and Dad until

returning to Liverpool on the Sunday. Nancy had to finish the term at her school so I returned to Brigg from the honeymoon by myself; until the term ended Nancy travelled to Brigg on alternate weekends, arriving on Friday evenings and leaving early on Sunday evenings.

At Christmas Nancy went to Bangor where I joined her for a few days and then we returned to Brigg. I had arranged to rent furnished rooms in Ashby Road, Scunthorpe, so after a day or two in Brigg we went there. We were not very happy with our accommodation and soon moved to rooms behind a fish and chip shop in Digby Street. The fish and chips were delicious; a speciality was a haddock for ten pence, which we often had for supper. Our landlady, Mrs Starkey, used to ask Nancy to make Yorkshire puddings for her on the grounds that Nancy produced a better result.

After Easter Nancy started work at Priory Lane Infants School. During the Easter holiday weekend we had been to Bangor and we brought Nancy's bike back with us so that she was able to cycle to school. The bike was very old so she soon bought a new one. We did a lot of cycling around Scunthorpe and when the evenings became lighter we sometimes went to Brigg, a distance of about eight miles.

I had never learned to dance but Nancy loved it so to give her a surprise I announced that we would go to Campbell's dancing school; this was an institution in Scunthorpe and many married couples in the town had first found romance under the eagle eye of Pop Campbell. There must have been at least forty people attending the weekly lesson; it cost two shillings each. I was never going to be a Fred Astaire but eventually could do a passable imitation of the waltz and quickstep.

In mid-1952 I took the exams for the National Certificate with good results. Travelling from Scunthorpe to Doncaster I used to pass the 360 megawatt power station being built by the Central Electricity Generating Board at Keadby on the River Trent, about four miles from Scunthorpe, and somehow I learned that houses were being built for the staff. I wrote to the station superintendent who gave me an interview but referred me to the engineer of the transmission department. This department was responsible for 132,000 volt substations at Scunthorpe, Hull and Grimsby as well as Keadby. At that time 132,000 volts was the highest voltage in use in Britain. The department was based at the Scunthorpe substation but was due to move shortly to Keadby. I was offered a job as an electrical fitter which I accepted and so left the steel works after about a year there. My new job also allowed me to attend the technical college without losing a day's pay

When I gave my notice at the steel works my foreman told me that he knew my new boss, Lesley Biggin, and advised me that he was not a very nice man and so it proved to be. However I have never regretted the move as it set me on the path to what proved to be a quite successful career in the electricity supply industry.

At the time I had very hazy ideas about how the national electricity grid operated. I soon learned that most power stations generated electricity at 11,000 volts and that transformers at the stations stepped up the voltage to 132,000 volts and supplied the national grid which linked all the power stations in the country together in one huge network of 132,000 volt transmission lines. At substations connected to the grid the reverse procedure applied and transformers stepped the voltage down to 33,000 volts or 11,000 volts to supply the Boards that distributed electricity throughout Britain.

These Boards, I think there were eleven in England and Wales, had 33,000 and 11,000 volt networks which supplied transformers which further stepped the voltage down to domestic voltage. The electricity supply industry had been nationalised by the Labour government that had been elected in mid-1945.

The group I joined looked after 132,000 volt substations in Scunthorpe, Grimsby and Creyke Beck on the outskirts of Hull, as well as the switchgear in the much bigger switching station at Keadby power station.

One job I did not like was going into the huge oil tanks of the 132,000 volt circuit breakers which controlled the overhead lines. These breakers were opened and closed during normal operations by a control switch but opened automatically, almost instantaneously, if a fault occurred on a line. A fault resulted in large currents flowing through the breaker and when the breaker opened a large electric arc resulted. This arc was extinguished by the oil which surrounded the breaker's contacts. A record was kept of the number of times each breaker had cleared a fault and after three faults the oil tanks were pumped out so that we could get inside and examine the contacts for burn damage and clean them. The tanks were big enough for two men to get into. It was not a job for the claustrophobic.

At Keadby a different kind of circuit breaker was installed. They used a blast of compressed air to extinguish the arc caused when opening for a fault. This was all very new to me so I spent time reading the instruction manual supplied by the maker, A Reyrolle, whose works I had toured in 1946.

One incident I recall is of an RAF aeroplane flying into one of the transmission lines; quite a large piece of wing was torn off but the pilot managed to return safely to wherever he had come from.

Soon after starting my new job we were allocated a brand new house, 4 Mill Road, Keadby. It was a much better house than those in which Nancy and I had lived in as children and we thought ourselves very fortunate. Young people now will perhaps not realise how acute the shortage of housing was in Britain in the early post-war years. No new houses were built during the war and thousands of houses had been demolished by German bombs.

We had, thanks to Nancy's earnings, saved enough to buy a new lounge suite and dining room suite which were duly delivered on the day we moved in. The downstairs floors were of Marley tile. We bought a carpet square for the living room; in those days working class people did not aspire to fitted carpets and we knew that we would probably move on once I had passed my exams so fitted carpet would have been an extravagance. The only thing bought on hire purchase was a television; it cost about 70 pounds. I cannot remember when it was bought but know we did not have one in time for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in May 1953.

I continued to have one day per week with pay to attend the technical college. Fortunately our house was quite near to Althorpe station where I could catch the same train as before, with the advantage of leaving home a few minutes later, and getting home a few minutes earlier, because home was now about four miles closer to Doncaster. In July 1953 I passed my next exams, but only just scraped in by 2% in one electrical paper as I had spent far too long on one question and did not finish all the questions. I knew I had done badly and spent a many anxious hours worrying about it.

After about a year with the Generating Board Mr Biggin told me I had to go into lodgings at Grimsby because contractors were working at the sub-station there and had to be supervised. I told him I would not go and he invited me to give my notice. I obliged him immediately. At this time we were expecting our first child and I thought Nancy would be upset about this but her immediate response was "I wondered how long you would put up with that man."

Within a day or so I got a job on site with the English Electric Company. The power station was only about half built, only three or four of the planned six generators were in commission, and my new job was installing 3,300 volt switchgear which controlled many of the large electric motors associated with the generators. The Generating Board could not evict us from our house but was able to double our rent, and English Electric would not pay me for the days I spent at the technical college. These disadvantages were more than offset by my receiving a lodging allowance and the equivalent of daily bus fares from Scunthorpe although I was living a five minute bike ride away.

We were in fact much better off and I took great delight in paying my rent three or four weeks in advance. One day the Station Administration Officer asked me when we would be leaving the house. "Maybe next week", I said. He looked pleased so I said "Maybe next month", and he looked a little less pleased. And then I said "Maybe when we are good and ready". We did not leave until January 1956.

Soon after moving to Keadby Nancy was given a transfer to a school at Belton, a few miles way. Teachers travelling from Scunthorpe to the school picked her up near home and brought her home in the afternoon. Nancy taught there until the birth of our first child was imminent.

Our son John was born at Scunthorpe Maternity Hospital in May 1954; we were elated but our joy was soon clouded by the knowledge that he had a heart defect. He and Nancy were taken to a children's hospital in Sheffield but he died a few days later. My most enduring memory of that sad time is of looking through the kitchen window after we had returned home and seeing Nancy's Mum and Dad coming towards the house. We did not know that they were coming; it was touching that although neither was in good health they had made the long journey and then had to walk quite a long way from Althorpe station.

John was buried at the Althorpe cemetery; only Nancy and I, the undertaker and the clergyman were present. Nancy's parents stayed a few days and I was grateful that Nancy had company while I was at work. They visited Brigg so Nancy's Dad met mine for the first and last time.

Nancy was soon fortunate to get a teaching post at Keadby, about five minutes' walk from home. The headmaster had a daughter in Nancy's class and he was delighted with the progress she made during the time Nancy taught her.

I now had a garden for the first time and grew some of our vegetables. Although for most of my boyhood we had not had a garden at home, there was never a time when Dad did not have a bit of land somewhere and I had absorbed some ideas about growing vegetables from him. The best garden we ever had was a piece of land that had belonged to Great-Grandad Leeson. Grandad sold this, when he became older, to a farmer called Munday and Dad rented it from Munday.

It was about half an acre, totally surrounded by a hedge, with a lockable gate, and had a glass house and two pigsties as well as two plum trees. It was only about five minutes' walk from our house in Princes Street. We kept pigs; they were bought, usually two at a time, when they were eight weeks old. They needed to be fed twice a day, a job shared by Ken and me. When the time came for them to be converted into pork they were driven through the streets to the slaughter house in Redcombe Lane and Grandad Turner would pay Dad according to their weight, as ascertained by a steelyard at the shop.

We also started keeping hens for the first time. Somehow we acquired a broody hen, we called her Biddy, and a dozen or so fertile eggs. After Biddy had sat on the eggs for three weeks we had fluffy chicks that could run and peck up their food almost from birth. As they grew they were carefully scrutinised for the first signs of their gender. Pullets (females) were prized more highly than stags (males) as they would grow up to lay eggs. The stags were destined for an early demise when they reached a size that made them suitable to be turned into roast chicken. A couple were kept long enough to make our Christmas dinner and Sunday dinner on the first Sunday of the New Year. Later we would buy day old pullets; their gender was determined by highly skilled people and they were sent out from hatcheries in cardboard boxes which each held a dozen chicks. They came by rail and had to be picked up at the station.

We usually had about 20 hens and they produced far more eggs than we could use so mother acquired a few customers close to home. On one never to be forgotten day 20 hens produced 20 eggs - the only occasion we had a 100% result.

It is time now to return to Keadby. In mid-1954 I passed the Higher National Certificate exam; this time I did not have the anxious wait for the result as I knew I had done well and so it proved as I had good marks in all subjects. I could now start looking around for a job that would be a start of a better career. I had an interview for a job in Brighton, with the transmission section of the South Eastern Division of the Central Electricity Generation Board, but did not get it. However, it provided us with a little holiday in London, as Nancy went with me to the interview at Kingston on Thames and we went straight from the interview to the races at Sandown Park. It was during the jumping season and we managed to show a profit from our wagers.

I also had an interview for a post just north of London with an electricity board; again I was unsuccessful but again it gave us a weekend in London.

At work, when the fifth generator at the power station was about to be put into service, I was given the job of testing the parts of the system for which my firm, English Electric, was responsible. Normally a specialist from the firm came to do this work but it was agreed by the testing engineer for the Generating Board that the members of his staff that witnessed the tests would "hold my hand". This was a lucky break; the experience I gained from the guidance I was given enabled me to get my foot on the ladder to my later career.

Early in 1955 we knew that Nancy was expecting another baby in October. But in September we had a telegram to say Nancy's Dad was very ill. By this time we had bought an old car but I had not passed my test. One of our neighbours took me to Barnetby and I got my brother John out of bed to ask him to drive us to Bangor. It must have been about midnight when we set off and drove through the night, arriving

just in time to see Nancy's Mam and her brother Bill walking towards the house. We realised immediately that Dad had died. Mam had spent the night with Bill and his wife. After some breakfast John started on the return trip to Barnetby.

We did not have a church service for Dad; the vicar of nearby St Mary's church held a short service in the house before the burial. Only close relatives came to the funeral, including Dad's brother Tom who travelled from Sidcup, Kent.

A day after the funeral we travelled home by a hire car, taking Mam with us. Our daughter Ruth was born at home, after a long labour, on 7 October. We were very glad that we had Mam with us at the time as she was a great help. If she had not been with us I would have had to have taken time off from work.

In November I had an interview with the Yorkshire Electricity Board in Sheffield. About 18 people were interviewed for six available posts. The Yorkshire Board differed from most other Boards in telling candidates the result on the day of the interview so it was a long day before I was told that I was among the chosen six, at a salary of 635 pounds per year.

Sheffield is about 60km from Keadby. For the first week or two I would drive, unlicensed, to Doncaster Station and buy a workman's day ticket to Sheffield. Then I realised I could catch the same train at Thorne which was much nearer home. At that time of year the morning and evening trips were both made in darkness.

Soon after I started at Sheffield Nancy came over and we bought a house in Hurlfield Avenue in an afternoon. It was not a very good choice as the kitchen was minute, but otherwise it was quite a nice house in a quiet street on the southern edge of town, close to the Derbyshire border. We were young and green in such matters and at the land agent's suggestion agreed to use the same solicitor as the vendor. Consequently, we did not stipulate a date for vacant possession. This led to delays and frustration but we eventually moved about late January 1956.

Moving day dawned cold and foggy. After the removal van was loaded, Nancy, Mam and baby Ruth got in with the furniture and I set off in the car. It was a nightmare ride through the fog; somewhere near Rotherham I went twice round a roundabout. Unknown to me the furniture van driver had seen me do this and on arrival at the new house had told Nancy of it. The last two or three miles to the new house involved climbing a hill and as I neared the house the fog in the valley was left behind and I arrived, in brilliant sunshine, soon after the furniture van. I put the car in the garage and there it stayed until I passed my driving test a month or two later.

My first job in Sheffield was to arrange the installation of metering to measure the maximum demand of many industrial consumers. Hitherto they had only been charged for the amount of electricity used so that a consumer who used, say, 10 units per day in the space of an hour paid the same as a consumer who used 10 units spread over several hours. The Board has to provide plant and distribution equipment to meet maximum demand so it was in the Board's interest to keep down maximum demand.

I travelled all over the city by bus to visit industrial premises and decide how to treat each affected consumer. A group of men in the workshop then made up panels carrying the new equipment and I would arrange a time for the work to be done on the premises. Most firms were reluctant to have the work done in normal working hours as it involved an interruption to supply, so much of the work was done at weekends. I did

not do the installation but had to turn out to check that it was done correctly. Time off during the week could be taken to compensate for work done at the weekend.

Soon after the move to Sheffield I passed the driving test and in the spring we went in the car to Bangor, passing on the way the fairly new radio telescope at Jodrell Bank. The car played up on the journey and after our return we sold it at an auction for thirty pounds. It had been an expensive lesson and we did not have another car until 1961.

Soon an opportunity for promotion occurred, and although there were several candidates I was the man chosen. I knew this by lunchtime on the day of the interview and so was able to go home and give Nancy the glad news. We bought a hand operated sewing machine as a result of the rise in pay, which I think was at least 15%.

My new job was in what is known as "protection". This word describes the means by which any part of the electrical network that has incurred a fault is automatically disconnected from the network. The experience I had gained in testing at Keadby undoubtedly helped me at the interview. I also learned the techniques for pin-pointing faults on underground cables and later in my career I did many successful fault locations.

During my time at Sheffield I was given one afternoon per week to go to the Rotherham Technical College, which I also attended for two evenings per week, to study mathematics and physics. Passing exams in these subjects enabled me to become a Graduate of the Institute of Electrical Engineers.

From Sheffield we made one or two day trips by rail to Brigg. On one occasion we went to the White Horse pub; the landlord Cyril Young looked at Ruth and said "She won't get lost in this town", meaning she looked like a Turner.

In early 1959 I successfully applied for a post with the Torquay District of the South Western Electricity Board. This did not bring a higher salary but meant a move to Devon, a lovely part of England. We arranged to stay in self-contained accommodation in a large house, Hotel Walcot, which had been converted for short stays for holidaymakers. At first we had quite a spacious room, but as the holiday season approached and earlier bookings had to be fulfilled we were moved to a different room and were not so comfortable. Ruth was now three and a half and the manageress of the Walcot took a shine to her. One day Ruth told a visitor "Mr Foreman owns the hotel but Mrs Edwards and I run it".

The hotel was close to Meadfoot beach so as the weather improved we were able to go swimming there. At weekends we went further afield by bus, for example to Brixham and Totnes and Buckfast Abbey. We also went once to Buckfastleigh races which were run over fences and hurdles; this was only a minor racecourse and it did not survive for long after our trip there.

Soon after going to Torquay we arranged to buy a house that was then being built and we moved into it at about the middle of the year. Our furniture had been in storage so it was good to be back with our belongings. It was a semi-detached house, one of many built by a firm of two brothers who had built dozens of identical houses in the area called Chelston. We showed only a very small profit on the Sheffield house; the new one cost about 2,000 pounds.

Living in an attractive seaside town meant visitors, and in the fairly short time we spent there we had four lots, including my brother John and his family. At that time he

and wife Vera had only two daughters. He had hired a car for his holiday and took us to Plymouth and one evening to Dartmoor. In Plymouth we swam at the lido on Plymouth Hoe where I had often been in my early Navy days. Nancy's mother also spent quite a lot of time with us. Mothers-in-law are often the subject of jokes but I was always pleased to see mine. She helped in the house and Nancy and I could have the occasional evening out with mother doing the babysitting.

We also had one trip to Plymouth by train. On arrival there we took the Torpoint ferry to Cornwall and then the bus to the Royal Naval Artificers Training Establishment where I joined the Navy in 1941. The training establishment was still functioning and in fact still existed when we made our first trip home from New Zealand in 1983.

From the RNATE we took the short cut to the village of St John's which meant crossing an arm of the Hamoaze estuary by stepping stones. We were lucky to be able to do this as it was not possible at high tide. It was a very nostalgic walk for me as it took me back to the time I used to go there to look at the wading birds, curlews, dunlin and others which I had never seen in the Brigg area. We then took the long walk to Millbrook where I had bought my first beer on Good Friday 1941. I cannot remember now if we had a drink at one of the pubs in the village before getting the ferry back to Devonport and then to Plymouth to catch the train home.

In the autumn term of 1960 Ruth started school at the Sherwell Valley Primary School which was only about 100 metres from home and soon afterwards we knew that we were to have another child. Mary was born at home in June 1961 and, unlike Ruth, made a very speedy entry into the world.

Later in 1961 itchy feet caused me to successfully apply for a job with the Southern Electricity Board at Newbury in Berkshire. It meant an increase in salary but, more importantly, required me to provide my own car for which an allowance was paid.

We hired a car and went to Newbury for a day to look for some temporary accommodation and settled on Yew Tree Farm in Highclere, a few miles south of Newbury. This was an old house but was no longer a farm house. Nearby was Highclere castle, home to the Earls of Carnarvon, which became well known many years later as Downton Abbey in the TV series of that name.

Once again the furniture went into store, and off we went to Newbury, staying at first for a few days in a boarding house. It took a few days to organise buying a car with the help of a loan from my employer. The car was a modest Morris 1000. Ruth went with me to collect it and thought we were to have a very posh car she saw in the showroom so was very disappointed.

Now we had transport we were able to move into Yew Tree Farm in late December. Ruth was enrolled at the village school. Fortunately a child with some kind of disability lived nearby, and the education authority provided a taxi service to take him to and from school. For a small contribution Ruth was allowed to travel in the taxi.

Our move coincided with some very cold weather. On the first weekend after moving we went to Winchester and visited the cathedral. It was bitterly cold in there so we did not stay long. On one occasion soon afterwards I went home from work for lunch and by the time I wanted to go back enough snow had fallen to make the long

driveway from the road to the house impassable.

The people from whom we rented the house could be described as upper class and it soon became apparent that they shared the upper class tendency to treat debts in a cavalier fashion. When I rang the local coal merchant and told him where the coal was to be delivered he wanted to be assured he would be paid, as the owners of the house owed him money. The hot water system gave trouble; when I rang a plumber he told me that he had not been paid for previous work. Until the land agent who had organised our lease told him that he would guarantee payment, the plumber would not do the job. Quite late one evening came a loud knock on the door. I opened it to find a very burly intimidating man – he was a debt collector but we were able to convince him that we were not the culprits.

While at Yew Tree Farm we drove to Brigg and back in one day to see my Dad; we had not been to Brigg since before leaving Sheffield.

We looked at a few houses in Newbury before settling on 9 Pyle Hill. This was not in Newbury borough but in the rural district area. The other side of the street was called Greenham Road and was in the borough. The house was a typical semi-detached built during the 1930's; part of its attraction was a large garden and the fact that there were open fields over the back boundary. Newbury race course was visible from the back bedroom; the Queen often attended and we would then see the Royal Standard flying from the grandstand.

On one occasion we took Nancy's mother to the races where she saw Prince Ras Monolulu (real name Peter Carl Mackay) who frequented race courses selling tips. He was a native of the Danish West Indies but dressed as something like an Abyssinian and was a well-known character with his cry of "I gotta a horse". I suspect that the envelopes for each race contained names of different horses so that at least some of his customers would get a winner.

On a bitterly cold day in 1966 I took Ruth and Mary to see Arkle run in the Hennessy Gold Cup. He was one of the best steeplechasers ever to race in England. We took up a position on the side of the course opposite to the grandstands and later Dad told us we had been shown on the TV coverage of the race. Arkle did not win; he was beaten by half a length by Stalbridge Colonist who was carrying 35 pounds (14kg) less than Arkle. The cold weather drove us home after seeing that one race..

After moving into Newbury Ruth attended St John's infants school and later moved up to St Nicholas' school from where she won a scholarship to the girls' high school but my itchy feet meant that she only spent one term there. One of her teachers at St Nicholas said in a report that '.. she looked forward to hearing of Ruth's university achievements'. On reaching the age of five Mary started at St John's school.

Having a car enabled us to do more sightseeing. We visited Blenheim Palace, Windsor Castle, Longleat, Ashdown House near Lambourn. We also made trips to London going as far as Clapham Junction by car and then catching a train after leaving the car in a convenient car park. We went to the zoo and the Tower of London. Lyons Corner Houses provided several of our meals; it was a great disappointment to find they no longer existed when we made our first trip home from New Zealand in 1983.

Oxford was also visited, and we went the Ashmolean Museum and also the Pitt-Rivers Museum, but I have little recollection of what we saw in those places. Yet

another trip was to the Slimbridge Wild Fowl Trust in Gloucestershire. It was founded in 1948 by Sir Peter Scott, son of the Captain Scott who died in the Antarctic.

We made two visits to the Haymarket Theatre in London. One was to see Sir Ralph Richardson as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. We were a bit anxious about how Mary, aged six, would like it but she sat spellbound. The other visit was to see Sir Ralph as Sir Anthony Absolute and Margaret Rutherford as Mrs Malaprop in *The Rivals*. I especially enjoyed that as I had studied the play for School Certificate English.

Soon after seeing *The Rivals*, Ruth went into hospital for removal of her appendix. I wrote to Margaret Rutherford enclosing the theatre programme and a stamped envelope bearing Ruth's name and the hospital's address and asked her to sign the programme. She did this and asked every member of the cast to sign. Ruth still has this memento. Only recently have I learned from the internet that ill health made Margaret Rutherford leave the cast shortly afterwards and she never appeared in the theatre again.

I had joined the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) which gave access to "members' day" at the Chelsea Flower show, and I had also joined a gardening club in Newbury which hired a coach to go the show. Very young children were not allowed entry to the show so only Ruth and I went. I think our visit was in 1967. Membership of the RHS gave also free admission to the Society's gardens at Wisley in Surrey and during our time in Newbury we made several visits to the gardens.

I started growing and showing chrysanthemums in Newbury. My first show was at Reading and my one vase got a second place. Soon afterwards I won a large certificate for Best Vase in Show at Newbury with a variety called Martin Riley. I also won all the chrysanthemum classes at Chieveley, a village near Newbury. Chieveley man Mike Pocock, who like me worked for the Southern Electricity Board, had given me a few tips. I repaid his kindness by winning the cup for chrysanthemums which Mike had monopolised for a some years. He had his revenge within days at the Newbury show when I showed there for the second time.

Nancy's father had been gassed in the 1914 war and subsequently spent some time in a sanatorium in an area called Nine Mile Ride in Berkshire. Nancy's mother went there too and stayed with a family called Large. One day we took Nancy's mother there without telling her of our intention, so she was delighted when she recognised the place. I cannot recall now how we discovered that the Large's daughter still lived in the village and we knocked on her door. We were made very welcome and stayed for tea; needless to say it made Mother's day. The day was made memorable for another reason. Mother had been a smoker for many years and had tried several times to quit the habit. On this evening she ran out of cigarettes so I said I would go to the nearby pub to get some. Mother said she would not buy any more and she never smoked again.

Mother died at home at Easter time in 1964; we had been to Bangor to see her a few days previously and on our return had brought Nancy's brother Bill's two children to stay with us so that their parents could care for Mam. We intended to return to Bangor on Good Friday but just before leaving had a phone call to say Mam had died so we postponed our journey until Easter Monday.

In Newbury I met again one of the boys with whom I had joined the navy more than 20 years previously. An engineer called Bill Smith worked for the electricity board and in conversation I learned that he had been in the navy and had risen to the rank of Warrant Electrician. I knew that Ronnie Smith's dad had been a warrant officer and on a hunch asked Bill "Do you have a son Ronald Alfred?" My hunch proved to be correct. Sometime later Bill rang me to say he and Ronnie would be in the Railway pub that evening. He had not told Ronnie about me so it was a surprise for him when I walked into the pub. We had a pleasant evening and I also learned how several of my former class mates had fared in the years since I last saw them. Several had attained warrant or commissioned officer rank. Ronnie was at this time a lieutenant.

In mid 1967 the New Zealand Electricity Department (NZED) advertised vacancies for electrical engineers. I applied and some time later was called to New Zealand House in London's Haymarket and was told to bring my family. I thought I was going to be interviewed about my suitability but found I was already accepted on the strength of references from former employers. This meeting was to give us information about New Zealand. At that time NZED ran about 95% of New Zealand's generating capacity and the entire National Grid and most of the country's electricity was generated by water power.

All our travelling expenses were to be paid and a generous allowance given to pay for shipment of some of our furniture. I had to sign a bond to repay the money if I failed to stay for three years. We delayed our departure to January 1968 as we still had an almost new car. We had been told that cars were very expensive in New Zealand and were told it would be prudent to take one. By waiting until it was a year old we legally avoided payment of customs duty on arrival.

We sold the house to the first people that looked at it and were delighted when they asked if they could have our cat Whisky. He was a magnificent animal and came with a written pedigree when we took him from an elderly lady who could no longer keep him.

Then came farewell trips to Bangor and Brigg. My Dad was only 67 so It did not occur to me that I might never see him again but I was wrong; he died suddenly just before becoming 70. Many years of smoking were no doubt a contributing factor.

Just before sailing day I drove the car to London where it was loaded onto the motor vessel Rangitane of the New Zealand Shipping Company. Our last few days in Newbury were spent with a friend there and we went to London the day before what should have been sailing day. I have almost no recollection of that day apart from buying Mary a teddy bear coat from Liberty's shop off Regent St. In the afternoon we joined other passengers at Waterloo Station and from there were taken to Tilbury to join the ship. The Rangitane carried about 400 passengers and also had holds to carry cargo.

Soon after the passengers were all aboard we had life-boat drill and I noticed a woman who looked as being likely to be part Maori. At dinner we found she was to share our table and we learned that her name was Ephra Garret and she did indeed have some Maori ancestry. She and her husband Denny were both university lecturers from Palmerston North and had been in Britain on a sabbatical. They were about our

age and like us had two children. These two were both under twelve and like Mary had meals separately along with all the other young passengers but Ruth had meals with us. There were just the five of us at the table for the entire voyage. We were fortunate in having the Garrets as companions as they were able to tell us lots about New Zealand and we found them to be very agreeable companions.

The weather had turned bad and sailing was postponed until the next day. After dinner a game was organised in the saloon to allow the passengers to get to know each other. Each person had to do a drawing to illustrate the title of a well known book; we then circulated to try to guess the names of the books. The only one I remember was a man's drawing of a bull in the sale ring of a cattle market. 'Buy bull' – 'Bible'

It was still too windy to leave on the following day until it was almost dark and we then slipped down the Thames into the English Channel. It was to be 15 years before we saw England again.

The first day at sea was still windy and a several passengers were missing at breakfast time. But as we sailed southwards the weather began to improve and flying fish and porpoises began to be seen. Ice cream was served on deck mid-morning; for the first few days it was British made stuff but later we had our first taste of Auckland made Tip Top ice cream and decided it was better than the British. The first port on the voyage was Willemstad on the island of Curacao, a Dutch colony off Venezuela on the northern coast of South America. This stop was for refuelling with oil for the ship's diesel engine.

We went on an organised tour; the only thing I remember is that it included visits to a Jewish cemetery and to see the manufacture of the liqueur Orange Curacao of which we had a free sample.

Then it was on to Panama where we went ashore again. We visited the cathedral there but on the way back to the ship were stopped by police in a car. We were told that the area was not safe for tourists and we were given a ride in the car back to the ship.

Next came the passage through the Panama Canal; a very interesting day. Lunch was served on deck so that we did not miss a minute of the passage, much of which was through verdant forest. Unlike the Suez Canal, which is at sea level throughout, the Panama has to surmount higher ground by means of a series of locks which raise ships to 36 metres above sea level. We did not stop at the Pacific end of the canal but set course for Tahiti.

Earlier in the voyage the swimming pool, filled with sea water, was brought into use and of course was much used, especially on the day on which we crossed the Equator. I cannot recall if all passengers were subjected to the ministrations of Father Neptune and his assistants or if it was only the children and I think only the children were given certificates. Mary declined the treatment by Neptune's assistants but nevertheless received a certificate I was exempt because of my Navy voyage from Sri Lanka to South Africa.

Quiz nights for teams of four had been instituted and Nancy and I teamed up with our table-mates the Garrets. We won on two occasions; the prize for each person was a Rangitane sailor doll. I remember one wag answered the question 'What is Limburger?' with "An arm in a bread roll'. We did not know, but the Garrets knew it

is a cheese. But they did not know that brassicas are members of the cabbage family – we did.

It was a Sunday when we reached Papeete in Tahiti and we were able to have most of the day ashore, returning to the ship for lunch. In the morning we bought a few things but found prices were high – so much so that Ruth and Mary shared a glass of orange juice.

In Tahiti we received a cable telling us that instead of working in the NZ Electricity head office in Wellington I was to be sent to its Hamilton office. The Hamilton District covered about a third of the North Island, it contained eight hydro-electric generating stations and one, Wairakei, which used steam issuing from the ground to drive generators. During my time with the department two hydro stations were added as well as a large steam station at Huntly which could use coal or natural gas as fuel. A large find of natural gas had been discovered off the west coast of New Zealand at about this time. The Hamilton office was also responsible for those parts of the 220,000 volt and 110,000 volt transmission system lines contained within its boundaries.

The stage from Tahiti to Wellington was uneventful. On 6 February we learned it was Waitangi Day. On hearing me ask ‘What is Waitangi Day?’ the Garrets’ daughter, aged about ten, said scornfully ‘Don’t you know what Waitangi Day is?’

I then learned that it commemorates the signing of a treaty between Britain and several Maori chiefs which took place at Waitangi in the north of the North Island on February 6, 1840.

We reached Wellington on 19 February and were met by one of the head office staff and taken to accommodation on The Terrace. We had brought a car on the ship and had to wait until it was unloaded and registered. During that time we went to a dahlia show at Trentham and had a swim at some public baths. Nancy had known a young Polish man, Leon, who emigrated from England soon after the war. We contacted him and paid him and his family two or three visits and also met a family member who was a senior engineer at NZ Electricity Dept. One of our first purchases in Wellington was a pint of milk as we had for so long had only the tinned variety. Milk was 4 cents a pint – less than an English sixpence. Later we found that milk was heavily subsidised by the government

On February 28 we set out for Hamilton and made a small detour to call on Ephra Garret in Palmerston North. After a cup of coffee and a chat we resumed our northward trip. Compared to England there was not much traffic but it was dark before we reached the B and B accommodation that had been arranged for us in Anglesea St, Hamilton. At that time New Zealand did not have Daylight Saving and even on the longest day in December darkness fell at about 8.30 p.m.

The next morning found me at the NZ Electricity Dept (NZED) offices in Peachgrove Rd. As I was about to go in a man spoke to me and realising that I was English he told me that he too was English. I found he had lived near the road leading to the Torpoint Ferry in Devonport which I had used so many times during my navy apprenticeship so we immediately had something to talk about.

The day was spent in meeting many other staff members. The boss was called the District Engineer Bill Shanks, but a lot of the day to day running was left to his

assistant Peter Chapman who was about my age. He was well above me in the hierarchy but I narrowed the gap to two steps before we both retired in 1985. Peter told me that after about a year in Hamilton I would be transferred to Wellington. I think by the end of that time he had taken a shine to me and wanted to keep me in Hamilton and the move never took place.

As is the case with all new jobs there was much to be learned. I found that the NZED had eight districts, four in each of the two main islands. The Hamilton District operated eight hydro electric stations on the Waikato River which flowed from the Lake Taupo in the central North Island to the Tasman Sea and the Wairakei geothermal power station that ran on steam that issued from the earth. Another small hydro station was Matahina near Whakatane on the east coast.

We had been allotted a State House in Croall Cres, the stuff we had brought was delivered there and we were able to borrow some necessary articles from work and so we moved in a few days later. In New Zealand the state played a bigger part in providing houses for rent than was the case in England where local authorities owned many rental properties. The housing was administered by a government agency, The State Advances Dept which also, as the name suggests, lent money at a low interest rate to people wishing to buy their own homes.

A day or two later Ruth was excited to see what she thought were native birds. I quickly recognised that they were goldfinches feasting on the seed heads of weeds. Like us they were immigrants. Early settlers had been encouraged to bring out other British birds so we also have thrushes, blackbirds, starlings, chaffinches, house sparrows and mallard ducks.

The house we were allocated was new; carpet-less and curtain-less. We did not want to spend money on what was to be a short stay so within six weeks of arrival bought a house, 149 Bankwood Rd. We had enough for the deposit from the sale of the Newbury house; the aforementioned State Advances lent us the rest and we moved in about two months after our arrival. The house was across the street from the school Mary was to attend and not very far from the one for Ruth.

The house had a large garden but the previous owners had not gardened it and most of it was in grass. One of our first knocks at the door came from a girl who had grazed a pony on it; she was hoping to continue to do so but she was told the ground was to be used more productively.

Nancy had never learned to drive in England and we found the local bus service was not very satisfactory. After a few paid-for lessons she passed the driving test at her first attempt. One of her first forays into town was to a sale of fruit trees and she came home with a plum and three apple trees. They each cost the equivalent of about six British shillings and were producing well two or three years later. There was already an old peach tree and I thought we would get rid of it but after discovering that a fungus disease, leaf curl, was easily prevented by using a copper based spray we kept it and were rewarded with good crops of Golden Queen peaches. One year we bottled 40 quart jars.

We also inherited a grapefruit tree which bore more fruit than we could eat so we used to make lots of grapefruit marmalade. We had not realised when we decided to come to New Zealand that the climate in northern parts of the North Island allows

oranges, lemons and other citrus fruits to be grown. We have had three sets of visitors from home and they have all enjoyed being able pick a grapefruit for breakfast.

At work my first job was to plan and supervise the installation of load-shedding equipment. The South Island has a much smaller population than the North Island but is better endowed with opportunities to generate hydro-electricity and so cables were laid under the Cook Strait between the two islands to transfer electricity to the North Island. A failure of the link meant that an additional load would cause generators in the North Island to be overloaded. Local power boards were asked to nominate parts of their distribution systems which could be almost instantaneously disconnected in such an emergency. This was a good introduction for me as it involved meetings with staff of the many power boards within the Hamilton District and visiting many substations owned by the boards or the Hamilton District of the NZ Electricity Department.

About two months after our arrival I learned that there was to be a chrysanthemum show in Hamilton and of course we went to it. I discovered that the kind of chrysanthemums I had grown in England were not widely grown here and that varieties which in England were grown in pots, and moved under glass a few weeks before flowering in October and November, were favoured here and were grown to maturity in the garden. I joined the local society and I was given lots of cuttings in the following spring and from these grew flowers that won several classes at the 1969 show. I continued to grow and show chrysanthemums for eleven years until a move to another house at the wrong time of year meant abandoning my stock of plants and did not make an effort to start again.