

Growing up in Watt Lane 1925-1940



Dad, Mary and Joe c.1931

My father, Joe, but Jack to his friends, was a teacher in Sheffield, and after serving in the army during the war, in 1919 he brought his new wife and little son Willie, to a council house, 29, Fairbank Rd, one of the “Homes for heroes” built for the returning soldiers. Ma went home to Bellaghy to have Mary in June 1920, but I was born in Sheffield in November 1921, so I was rising four when we in 1925 we moved into a new house, 100 Watt Lane, Crosspool, Sheffield.

The House

The house was a three-bedroomed semi, one of the many thousand built in the years between the wars. It cost £700 (probably about three years of Dad’s salary), and they bought it with a loan from the Teacher’s Provident Society, and had paid it off by, I think, 1939. I expect they moved because they needed room for three



Ma at the front gate c.1935

kids, and also because Crosspool was a desirable area on the western side of Sheffield away from the smoky industrial east. Their friends the Pryors lived in Crosspool and probably told them of the new houses going up along Watt Lane. The sitting room and front bedroom had a fine view south across the valley, and there was a garden and behind it fields where children could play, with three trees where we had a swing, and a pond where we splashed and got muddy.



Mum and Dad, Willie and Mary at the three trees. 1929

In the kitchen was a black cast-iron stove with a back boiler, which heated a limited amount of water. Pipes rumbled and gurgled as the water rose to the cylinder in the bathroom “hot press”, and you could get a moderate bath if you waited long enough. Little children were of course bathed together or consecutively in the same water. There were fireplaces in the sitting room, the dining room and two of the bedrooms, but Mary’s tiny bedroom over the kitchen had none, so on Christmas Eve, when Father Christmas came down the chimney, Mary, Willie and I slept all three in the bed Willie and I usually shared. Mum and Dad’s bedroom had a gas fire, but the other bedroom fire was never lit, and the

house was bitterly cold in winter. There was an island of warmth within range of whichever fire was lit. But on winter nights the moonlight glistened on the ice that formed inside the bedroom windows as our breath froze. There was, of course, electric lighting and there were three two-pin power sockets and Mum ran an electric iron from an adapter on the kitchen light.

Electricity was cheap (3/8d a unit) and as the 20s moved into the 30s we acquired more and more devices, an Electrolux carpet cleaner, a fire, an electric kettle, an immersion heater, a cooker with oven and hob, and even a washing machine. On Mondays Mrs Smith came (from Pitsmoor for 5/-? plus her bus fare) to help Mum with the washing. Until we got the machine (1935?) clothes were boiled in a gas boiler that normally lived under the draining board, and then scrubbed on a zinc board and swished around with a wooden “dolly” in a dolly tub. Small children, like “wee Joe” could be popped into the warm dolly tub for an unexpected bath! Mum also employed a “day girl” aged 14 or so, who came every morning to help, and was paid 5/- a week or so.

Things to do – outside

There was always plenty for us to do, or so it seems in retrospect. We played hide-and-seek in the fields, and in and around the new houses being built. At the pond we tried to sail toy boats and from the clay made “touch-wood burners”. These were roughly shaped bowls of clay with holes in the side. You filled them with dry crumbling wood from a hole in one of the trees, and with luck you could get it to burn merrily in the wind. In the winter we went snowballing and sledging. We rolled big snowballs in the field and made snowmen. We had only one sledge but it was big enough to hold all three of us. The best sledging was down Darwin Lane, which ran steeply from Watt Lane to Ranmoor, and saw very little motor traffic especially when there was snow. When conditions were right there would be dozens of children speeding down and trudging up. On one occasion Council workmen appeared with a horse and cart to spread grit – to be met with snowballs!

As a family we often went on walks. There were routine and boring walks “round the lump”, but as we got older we went further afield, sometimes taking the bus to Rivelin Dams and then walking round the “sandy track”, or carrying a

picnic to Lodge Moor and following what was said to be a Roman road (it wasn't) to Stanedge Pole. Mary and I jointly owned a fairy cycle, a nasty little kid's bike with solid tyres, which was never any use. Then aged about ten, I bought for 7/6 (from Ralph Warrender who lived a few doors away) a real bike of middling size. When I was 13 Willie passed on his full-size bike to me, and I used it to ride to school and with school friends as far as Matlock or Castleton. We were lucky to have the Peak District on our doorstep.

Inside Activities

There was lots to do inside too. The most important toy in my view was Meccano. Willie and I shared this, and if Mary wanted to join in she was given some boring task like sorting out the nuts and bolts. Every Christmas we would get a supplementary set to increase our range of models. The Meccano book gave you plans for all sorts of things, but we made mainly cars and cranes. Then there were cardboard models to make. The plans for these came from the Children's Encyclopaedia, 1912 edition, which was a key influence in my education. Its eight volumes contained progressively more difficult "Things to Make and Things to Do" including a series called Modeltown. You had to copy the plans printed in the book at either half or one third scale accurately on to a sheet of stiff paper or card, cut and fold the pieces, stick them up and paint them so that they became houses, shops etc – even a railway station. They looked real enough to me when they were finished.

In the 1930s I moved on from paper models to wood. Someone gave me a fretwork set. It had a sawing table which clipped on to the kitchen table and it opened up a new world of small wooden objects. You bought patterns and packs of suitable thin wood from a shop called "Hobbies" in Chapel Walk. The designs aimed at intricacy rather than elegance and were mainly for useless things like watch stands, but the real end product for me was pleasure in making things. I did make a pipe rack for Dad and a wool-winder for Mum, and they loyally used them for a while.

We drew and painted in water colours using paint boxes with hard little cakes of muddy colours, encouraged by Mum. Drawing was fun and I spent a lot of time drawing horses and cars, and sometimes Mary and I drew each other. I didn't realise I was red/brown colour blind until I was

about nine. In Mr Higgins' class a stuffed bird was placed for us to draw and colour with crayons, and I chose an impossible green or maybe brown, much to Mr Higgins' surprise, and the amusement of my class-mates. Reading was much more important to me. The Children's Encyclopaedia had a bit of everything including science – I have a vivid picture of the solar system with each planet represented by a 1912-ish motor car speeding round its orbit. I also pored over the "Wonder Books" of various things – Motors, Soldiers, Why and What?, given to us on successive birthdays. Dad encouraged my taste for reading with books like Fenimore Cooper's "The last of the Mohicans", and Stevenson's "Treasure Island" when I was about 9 or 10. If I enjoyed a book I read it several times. Mum had a complete set of Dickens, formidably fat books they seemed to me and mostly I just looked at the pictures, but "A Christmas Carol" and "Oliver Twist" I read and re-read. Dad had a complete set of Scott, with no pictures and repulsively crowded print, which put me off. There was a children's library in Norfolk St which we used occasionally, but not until I was 15 or 16 and could use the adult library did I become a regular borrower. You could only borrow one fiction book at a time, but I discovered that plays counted as non-fiction, so as well as Wells, Priestley, Aldous Huxley, DH Lawrence etc. I read most of Bernard Shaw's plays.

There was always a wireless; a crystal set which never worked in my time, and then a changing mix of valves, batteries (which had to be charged and could spill acid), earphones and loudspeakers which crackled as Dad experimented. Then in the early 1930s we got an "all mains" set, a Marconi, which sat in a corner of the front room. Wireless (not radio) loomed very small in my life. I remember "Monday Night at Seven" (later at Eight) and "In Town Tonight" from the late 30's, and nothing much else till Neville Chamberlain on 3rd September 1939, telling us we were at war against "evil things." As soon as he'd finished sirens in Sheffield sounded the air raid warning - false alarm of course, but it sounded pretty evil to me.

Dad had a wind-up gramophone of pre-war vintage with a dozen or so records – Dvorak's Humoresque, John McCormick singing the Mountains of Mourne, some Souza marches, to which we listened occasionally. Peering in through the front of the wooden case you could just see the twinkle of light of the brass machinery inside,

and as a very small person listening to the Souza I fancied I saw little bandmen marching up and down! We must have listened to music on the wireless quite a lot, as I clearly remember the pop songs of the 30's "Red Sails in the Sunset" "Roll along Covered Wagon" "'Twas on the Isle of Capri that I found her" etc. etc. We had a piano, and Mum tried to persuade us to play, but I refused to do any practice, so it was Mary who was sent for lessons. She practiced with determination and I can still hear Beethoven's Minuet in G punctuated by Mary's "No!" when she hit a wrong note.

Rich and poor and going to school

Our house was nearly at the end of Watt Lane, where it joined Whitworth Rd. Here and on similar roads stretching down to Ranmoor Church dwelt an altogether posher sort of people than those in our new semis. Stone-built, mostly in late Victorian times, these houses had room for living-in servants and stood in large gardens with trees and high walls. We knew hardly any of the people who lived in them, but saw some when they went past in their cars, and others at church – we went to Ranmoor Church, and Mum gave our address as Ranmoor rather than Crosspool because it sounded posher. In the church the seats near the centre aisle were "private" – each bore the name of a family in one of the posh houses. We sat at the side in seats marked "free" – so learning our place in the class system.

At the other end of Watt Lane was Crosspool with a few shops and beyond that Lydgate Lane which led into Crookes. Here were terraced streets of working class houses, also of Victorian vintage. Lydgate Lane Council School was the nearest for us, and Willie and Mary went there when we first moved to Watt Lane. But it served the Crookes area as well as Crosspool, and when there were stories of "rough boys" from Crookes, Mum and Dad looked instead at Nether Green Council School, which was further away but not so "rough". Dad would know the reputation of both schools, particularly for winning "scholarships" (passes in the 11+ exam which won you a place at a Secondary School), and probably this was a factor. Anyhow, in September 1926 when I was a "rising five", we all three went to Nether Green.

I vaguely remember the year '25-6 when I was at home with Mum. She had to take me with her

when she went to be sworn in to the Mother's Union, and I always claimed that I too was a member. More important she gave me chalks to draw on the cork lino in the dining room. She was a former teacher (married women were not allowed to teach in schools) and I expect she was teaching me to read too. I was certainly taught to write at home, because when in standard one we were learning "joined up" writing I formed the letters my way. Miss Bradshaw objected..

Me - "But that's the way I've learned from my Daddy"

Miss B.-"Well you'll have to unlearn it!"

I felt pretty cross!

Nether Green school suited me fine, and I duly passed the scholarship in 1933. Other things I learned included how to be "one of the boys". At a tender age I was accosted in the playground with the question "Are yer a Wednesdayite or a Unitedite?" I had never heard of Sheffield's two football teams but I thought it best to fit in and I've been a Wednesdayite ever since. I also belonged to a gang led by one Brian Green, and when a fight with a rival gang after school was arranged I agreed to take part. What I should have remembered was that Mary would be there as we began our walk home up Storth Lane. When someone said "Joe Scott's going to fight Chick Abbot!", big sister firmly announced "No he isn't!" and marched me off home! Apart from fighting we boys played chariot racing in the yard. I vividly remember the silent film "Ben Hur" (1928?) which probably led to this game. Two of us linked arms, a third held on to them behind and a fourth sat on his back as charioteer. By charging and pulling the aim was to unseat the rival charioteer. It was a lot of fun.

Nether Green School motto was "Not once or twice in our fair island's story, the path of duty was the way to glory!" We wrote this quotation from Tennyson on the first page of each new exercise book. We also learned poems about Nelson and Drake. The 1914-18 war was of course a living memory to our teachers and parents. Dad sometimes told us stories about it, and Armistice Day had an impressive solemnity, so we gained a strong conviction that the British were the goodies, with their "Empire on which the sun never set." Nether Green also deepened my awareness of the class system, because of the "Homes Kids". An orphanage presumably run by the Sheffield Poor Law Guardians was up Crimicar Lane not far from the school. The orphans all wore the same coarse clothing, the

boys had identical close cropped hair and they brought to school every day the same nasty-looking lunch of bread-and-dripping sandwiches – at any rate this was my impression. There were a few of them in each class, and they sat together, and we didn't mix with them much. Dad taught in Brightside, a working class district near the steel works in the east end of Sheffield, and he told us of children with no shoes and not much to eat, which reinforced my awareness of the social set-up.

One of the teachers at Nether Green was Miss Banister. She fancied herself as a singer and sometimes sang to the school in Assembly. At our first music lesson in her class, she told us to sing (probably a hymn) and went round listening to each of us. Then she picked out three or four, including me, took us to another room and told us to go there and read quietly every future music lesson - we were eight or nine years old! The message was clear - music was not for me! My musical self-confidence never recovered.

Cars

Hardly anyone we knew had a car in 1925. Dad's colleague Percy Roberts had a 1927 Singer and then a 1931 Riley in which we got an occasional ride. But even when Watt Lane's hundred or so houses had all been built in the late 30's there were only half a dozen cars – Willie and I knew the registration numbers of them all. Cars were somehow the gateway to excitement and adventure. When we went to Ireland for our annual stay with Granny, Aunt Mary Jane's Morris Cowley was our delight. We rode in it when she went to inspect schools, or took us

1995 Aunt Mary Jane's Morris Cowley 70 years on as lovingly restored by John. Joe 70 years on too, but not restored.



to the seaside at Portstewart on a Sunday. We polished it, Willie drove it illegally, and after 1934 when MJ bought the 10-4 to take its place, I drove it on Gow Loanin' and we decarbonised its engine. We had very little money and Willie would send me down to Bob Davidson's garage with a bottle for a pint of petrol! Back home in Sheffield we often went for a walk, as mentioned above – perhaps all five of us, or perhaps just Willie and me, and in the latter case we certainly went from Crosspool along the Manchester Road, the A57, where you were most likely to see cars, Model T Fords, Morrises Cowleys and the occasional Bentley or Lagonda. In 1933, when Willie was 16 he bought a motor bike, a 1927 Levis 250cc for 50/-. Mum and Dad had not been consulted and they thought it was dangerous, so he never taxed and insured it, but we rode it round the fields at the back, where new houses were being built along Dransfield Rd. Despite the complaints of the neighbours it was a lot of fun. Then in 1937? Willie started work as a teacher, and from his first pay he spent £10 on a 1929 Austin 7. It was on this that I learned to drive when I was 17 in 1938. Its body was a wooden frame covered with fabric which had



Willie's Riley was kept in the field behind 100 Watt Lane. Joe driving -1940?

various tears and patches, and when we went to visit Mary at her Leeds college, Willie and I stood in front of them so that her friends wouldn't see how tatty our car was. But it did good service for a year or so until in early '39 Willie part exchanged for a 1930 Riley 9 – cash adjustment £8!

Going to Ireland—Bellaghy

Every summer we spent most of the school holiday in Bellaghy, Co. Derry. Here lived Granny Lee, already aged 80 when my organised memory begins about 1925, Aunt Mary Jane the School Inspector, and Uncle Arthur who worked the family farm. Before the war he had emigrated to New Zealand, but family pressure had brought him home again when the war was over to take over the farm from his dying father. It was a small farm with six or seven milking cows, perhaps a dozen young cattle, a few pigs and Dick the horse. For Uncle Arthur and for Dick it was a hard life of continual work; for children on holiday from a Sheffield suburban life, it was heaven! Helping with the animals or with hay-making, or getting turf (peat) from the moss was fun. You could ride Dick out to his grazing field, and when you were big enough you got to drive the two horse mowing machine and even to plough. (Uncle Arthur had an arrangement with another farmer to mutually borrow a mare called Nellie when needed.) Bellaghy was a place where everybody knew who you were, and you



Granny at the Stairhead c.1930

gradually got to know who they were. In Cross-pool you knew only your immediate neighbours. For Mum Bellaghy was always “home”, in a way that Sheffield never was, and this feeling of belonging rubbed off on to us. Willie and Mary, both of them born in Bellaghy, taunted me with being an Englishman, but I insisted that I was Irish too and tried, not very convincingly, to speak the Bellaghy accent! Our Bellaghy relations were bigoted Protestants, in an on the whole Protestant village set in a Catholic hinterland. The Orange Hall was a little way up “Billy St” (Billy = William III) but further along was the Catholic Church, so in the July-August marching season (just when we were there) there was plenty of drum-beating and banner waving. Personal relations with people of the “other sort” could be quite friendly- Mary and I played with the Catholic kids of the Hunter family next door. But one powerful memory is of playing marbles with a group in which there was just one Catholic boy. Maybe the trouble began over the game, but my memory is of the Catholic lad held down on the ground, his arm twisted behind his back. “Say To Hell with the Pope!” insisted his tormentor. I don’t remember if he did, and I had more sense than to stand up for him.

Joe and Nellie raking hay c.1937



Joe stacking turf (peat) at the Stairhead c.1937

Portstewart



M.J, Mum, Mary, Willie and Joe at Portstewart 1922?



Mary and Joe at Portrush 1939



Ma (I'm not sure when we switched from "Mum" to "Ma") had been the teacher at Portstewart until she married in 1915, and every summer we spent a week of our Irish holiday there. We bathed at the Strand, walked along the prom or round the harbour and over the rocks. We rode the electric tramway to Portrush or to the Giant's Causeway. If Aunt Mary Jane was with us we went along the coast road in the Morris Cowley. We took boat rides with fishermen whom Ma had taught, and who called her "Miss Lee". At Portrush in the '30s there was a fun-fair - "Barry's", with dodgem cars which delighted Willie and me. It was magic! One of my first memories of deep sadness is of the feeling a day or so after we had arrived back in boring old Sheffield - a whole year to wait! As the next summer holiday approached Mary and I marked off the days on a calendar.

Granny, Ma, Mary, Joe and someone else, at Portstewart 1931

Church, Sunday School and Cubs

Every Sunday we were dressed in our best clothes and taken to Church, hair neatly brushed and hands to be kept out of pockets. I enjoyed some of the music, and quite liked the stained glass windows but found all the rest of it pointless and boring, though I accepted without question what Ma told us about Jesus and we children certainly used to say our prayers at bed-time. Sunday school was a Sunday afternoon of pure boredom in the parish hall, without even stained glass or organ music. At about 13 I was sent to "Confirmation Class" in the Vicarage instead of Sunday School and then led before the Bishop to be confirmed. I gabbled through the creed without believing or disbelieving any of it in a personal sense. But being confirmed had one good effect - I didn't have to go to Sunday School any more. There were Church troops of Scouts, Guides and Wolf-cubs which we joined, and that was a lot more fun - I became "Senior Sixer" of the cub pack!



Joe and fellow cubs, 1931. His little case held his lunch—note finger carefully holding its lid on.

King Edward's

From September 1933 till Christmas 1940 I went to King Edward VII's School (KES). This was the top school in a pecking order of Sheffield secondary schools. It was basically a fee-paying school (fees six guineas a term)

and only one of its four forms in the entry year was made up of "Scholarship boys" - the 30 from the Sheffield elementary schools who had scored highest marks in the 11+. As we moved up the school, streaming by ability mixed us all together, but the impression of social hierarchy that I had gained from home and from Ranmoor Church was reinforced. Most of the 20% or so who survived into the Sixth Form were fee-payers or like me boys from middle class families.

It was a pretty good school for me. The Sheffield Education Authority had in 1927? decided, in a moment of leftish pacifism and against the Head's wishes, that the school should no longer have an "Officers' Training Corps". The Headmasters' Conference supported the Head, who resigned, and the HMC responded by blacklisting KES from the list of "Public Schools". The new Head was RB Graham, a Quaker, and he started a troop of Boy Scouts to take the place of the Corps. He had lots of faults, but he did appoint a lively collection of young teachers. Many of them sported the red tie which in the 30's was the badge of the left, and as I began to think about history and politics, some of this rubbed off on me. When I was 14 or so The Head took our form for "Divinity", and taught us about the various different and often contradictory chunks that, put together, make up the authorised version of the Bible. Maybe, I thought, the Bible was all made-up and not the Word of God as I had been told!



Joe and fellow scout cooking 1938

About this time I became leader of the Stag Patrol in the School Scout Troop. One Sunday a term there was a "School Chapel Service" to which we all had to come, and at a

Scout meeting one of my fellow patrol-leaders suggested that the Troop should come in uniform and so have a "Church Parade", as other troops did. The Head, who was Scout-master, warmly welcomed this. I was horrified at the idea of coming to school on a Sunday in scout uniform and marching about and I said so. Nobody else agreed with me, but afterwards one of the red-tied teachers (Mr Thomas) who was an assistant scout-master congratulated me on the stand I had made. It was 1934 or 35, a good time to move to the left, and from this time I took up what I thought was a socialist stance in arguments. I had already stopped going to Sunday School and found increasing excuses for not going to Church, but I avoided arguments with Ma, a devout Christian and a convinced Conservative, and kept my new ideas for my school world. I had never heard of Marx and Engels, but I didn't like what I'd seen of the class system.

I learned some useless things at KES - for instance how to translate into Greek "The King's black lions have toothache in the winter." But I learned useful things too. One very important one was the idea of logical proof, which I met first in geometry - I felt much more convinced about the square on the hypotenuse than about the existence of God. Another important lesson was that gambling was a mug's game. We played pontoon a good deal during breaks, or behind our desks during lessons. There was a 2d. limit, and a good deal of credit was acceptable, but there came a time when I owed some enormous sum, 1/6 or so, and had no way to pay it off. Many of my friends seemed to have far more pocket-money than me, so I decided that those with the longest purse could take most risks and were bound to win in the long run. Another useful thing was a basic knowledge of woodwork - I learned how to sharpen a chisel or make a mortice and tenon joint - skills which lasted rather longer than the bookstand and clock-case I produced at school.

I also developed at KES a taste for poetry which probably went back to nursery rhymes. I only needed two or three readings of a piece of verse I enjoyed for it to stick in my memory - much of it is still there. English classes gave me a taster of the leading poets from Chaucer to Housman, and an appetite for more which has stayed with me. Joe Clay was

head of both English and History, a gifted teacher who taught me far more than any of my teachers at Oxford. The main thing was that his subjects were interesting and exciting, but you had to write clearly, argue logically and support your opinions with reliable evidence. At lunch-time Joe Clay was to be seen in his room with two or three other teachers doing the Times Crossword. Somehow this rubbed off on me too.

In 1938 we started a "Sixth Form Discussion Group". We argued a good deal in some lessons, and one teacher, Mr Petter, suggested that we meet after school to go on arguing. We took it in turns to begin and the topic could be anything - politics, religion, history, art, poetry. A German Jewish refugee, Helmut Stoeker, was in our group. In his German school they'd done some philosophy and he had lots of interesting arguments. Members of staff often came to join in. When the War began we couldn't use the school building until its air-raid shelters were built, and we had lessons in various private houses. The Discussion Group went on meeting on Friday evenings in Mr Petter's flat. It was a really important intellectual influence for me.

Arguing was fun, but got me into difficulties with the Irish relations. With a cock-sure sixth form knowledge about the history of the Plantation of Ulster and a strong tendency to air my own opinions, I found, probably in the summer of 1937 or '38, that in Bellaghy I ran quickly into an intense barrier of sectarian certainty. I decided it was best not to argue.

There were no "teen-agers" in those days

Even when I was in the Sixth Form (1937+) I still looked on myself as a schoolboy, expecting to become a grown-up perhaps when I went off to University. There wasn't in those days a separate status for those in between. As far as I remember there were no magazines, music, or other consumer products for a "teenage" market - I never saw any anyhow. Mary and Willie and I all went to single sex schools, and boy-girl emotional relationships were pretty well unheard of. Of course Mary's friends came to our house and so did mine, and there were birthday parties etc. where we

played games, which could have embarrassing penalties like kissing someone you didn't like. We also played tennis a bit in mixed groups and sometimes went to the flicks. But the nearest I came to a girl-friend was when I was about ten and had for a couple of days walked home from Nether Green School with a girl in my class called Elizabeth Jones. I expect we just talked about school or something, but I was unmercifully teased by Mary and Willie for being soft on Elizabeth Jones, and the teasing put me off girls for years. The general opinion at KES was, I suspect, that girls were soppy things. There were, of course plenty of sexy jokes and we all joined in dirty talk, and we enjoyed the sexy bits of Chaucer etc. I also knew, being Mary's brother, that girls could be nice people, competent, determined and fun to be with, and I vaguely knew that sometime in the future I'd get married, but that really was the distant future. For now, as I got older and began to do less and less with the family and more and more of my own things, I did them in the all-male world of my school friends. You could buy five Woodbine cigarettes for 2d, and a pint of beer for (I think) 11d. Ma would have been horrified if she'd known what we did when we went off on our bike rides, specially if she's heard Polly Rogers (a boy - the "Polly" was his nick-name) say one Sunday as we rode along, "I suppose we ought to be in Church now, praying to that bugger God!"

Some time in 1938 I began to go off hitch-hiking for a camping week-end with my friend Abe Davidson. We went one weekend to Blackpool (I didn't think much of it compared with Portstewart) and another weekend to the Lake District (thus beginning a life-long interest). It was easy to get a lift if you carried a rucksack and didn't look like a beggar, and it cost only the occasional bus fare, and felt like an adventure.

The War - I grow up

I was still at school in 1939, sitting Oxford entry scholarships, and I left when I won one in November 1940. The "phony war", before May 1940, made little impact except that Willie was called up. We had to put up blackout curtains and observe other air raid precautions and were given an Anderson Shelter to bury in

the back garden. In December 1940 Sheffield was bombed by the Luftwaffe, and we spent most of that night in the shelter, but no bombs fell near, though the shopping centre of Sheffield was badly hit and an incendiary bomb fell on the school, but it didn't go off. The school was used afterwards as a reception centre for people bombed out and we sixth formers went in to help. It was rumoured amongst us that one girl from a bombed out family, if led into the air-raid shelter, would do all sorts of interesting things. I didn't check the veracity of this rumour.

Finally in January 1941 off I went to Oxford. Most of my stuff had gone "luggage in advance" in a trunk, and I clearly remember waving goodbye to Ma and walking down from Watt Lane to catch the bus to the station. I expect it was an emotional occasion for Ma, seeing the last of her little ones leaving the nest, but I don't remember any special feelings about that moment of transition. All sorts of things lay ahead, but I expected that I'd manage. I was grown up now.



Taken at Oxford 1941. I was wearing a suit of Willie's, known as the "interview suit". (It was the only smart suit either of us had and he was in the army.)