

## **Chapter 2: Early Recollections from 1910; World War 1**

I was born on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1910 at 64 Edgeworth Street, Sutton. I was the youngest of four brothers. The eldest brother, Harold, died in his first year at number 8 Orville Street. The second eldest was my brother Joseph Chapman Bamber, born 1903. He attended Sutton National School and then attended the Higher Grade School at College Street as did my third oldest brother Frederick James born in 1905.

Then came my two younger sisters, Ellen we called Nellie. She was born in 1914. Then came Doris in 1917. They also attended Sutton National School and Higher Grade School.

I was the odd one out. I told my parents that I did not want to leave Sutton National and I never regretted staying there. I was happy there with my schoolmates and my teachers from 1914- 1924 - ten happy years that I can look back on.

One school morning I was told to go into the front bedroom to “see your baby sister”. Our Nellie was cradled in my mother’s arms. She whispered “Do you like her?” I nodded and smiled. I then noticed three neighbours on the other side of the bed. They all said “Now Frank, you are going to get your nose pushed out now aren’t you?”. I smiled again. They said, “He’s not saying anything”. I noticed a fire burning in the grate, and, realising that it was a cold November morning, I tried to look through the window. I could not see anything outside for the window panes were covered with a variety of frosted shapes of stars and ferns.

I suppose the advent of a new baby, our Nellie, hastened the decision for me to go to school. My mother must have still been feeling unwell because a kind neighbour, Mrs Sharples from across the road took me to school that first morning. She took my little overcoat off and my cap and hung them up in the cloakroom. She then took me through the swing doors and introduced me to the teacher. She took me to a wooden desk that sat four of us and then I started my first lesson. The teacher handed me a slate that had a wooden surround and on it she placed a handful of dry sand. She told us all to shake the sand without spilling it to get it nice and level. This was the first step in my education.

Going to school and talking among ourselves made us increasingly aware of a war being waged and the frightening stories that were being told of atrocities of the cruel Germans under Kaiser Bill. Pictures on posters showing big Germans in grey uniforms with babies at the end of their bayonets and others showing Lord Kitchener extending his arm and pointing to you with the slogan “Your country needs you”. Some time later Lord Kitchener was reported missing.

Then the boys and the girls from the Bold cottages at Abbots Field Road who lived next to “poison gas works” which we called the “magnum” told us that a Zeppelin airship had flown over and had dropped a bomb on the fields close by. They had heard it exploding.

A word here about the site on which the “poison gas works” stood. The site had undergone a series of changes of industry. From what I have been told, in the early part of the last century, it was a copper smelting works and then a steel works which was called the magnum. It was then a government works making and storing “poison gas”

before it became an H.M. research works. I believe William Tipping, the land owner who lived at Bold Hall, put a stop to the smelting and steel works as the belching of smoke and the prevailing winds brought smoke over Bold Park Estate.

My cousin Nellie Bamber who lived at Bank House Cottage in Bold came with a friend to our house for dinners. They wore blue overalls and dust caps. They were working at the "Sutton Bond Munitions" with brass shell cases. I remember having two reject shell cases and two reject hand grenades on our mantelpiece. We called it the "Cornice".

"Sutton Bond", as we called it, was the old "London & Manchester Plate Glass Co. It closed in 1903, and was left idle until 1914 when it was used for munitions. It opened in 1926, this time as the Nuera Art Silk Co. and later as the British Sidac Cellophane Manufactory in 1934. "Sidac" closed in 1982 and part of the site is now occupied by "Pakcel" and "Leathers".

In addition to munitions, the "Sutton Bond" was used as an army barracks. The "pals" had a barracks there. Horses and vehicles were stabled in a brick building we called the "quadrangle".

Referring to the "pals", I will always remember the Friday night when I and a little schoolmate Jackie Fleetwood came out of the infant school. We heard a band playing and the beating of a drum. We saw in front of the band a soldier with stripes on his arms. I learned later that he was a recruiting Sergeant. Behind the band were about a dozen men in ordinary clothes and cloth caps. They were marching in step to the army tunes. We thought they were "the pals". So Jackie and I fell in behind them down Ellamsbridge and then down along the school brook at Worsley Brow. Then we followed them left up Sutton Road, past and over the big clayhole, and right into "Dark Lane" called Gaskell Street into Parr. After numerous halts and many young men falling in, they marched back again to "Sutton Bond". This led us towards home. What time it was, we did not know and did not care. It was quite dark.

Back home, a search was being made for us by the local policeman "Bobby Adams", our teacher Miss Saunders, who lived in Robins Lane, our neighbours and my dad. We met him as we approached the "Little Pig" called the "Victoria Vaults". I remember him shouting at us for not coming straight home from school and he said "All Sutton and the police are looking for you."

When I got home, the zinc tin bath was by the centre of the rug by the fireplace, and I knew it was "bath night."<sup>1</sup>

My mother reproached me and then gave me a brief hug, but my dad said "Get undressed and get in that bath." I got undressed and put one foot in the bath and said "Water's gone cold, Dad." He replied by saying "It does not matter. Joe and Fred [my older brothers] have been washed and are in bed." So I had a cold bath, and after that I had a cold basin of bread and milk.<sup>2</sup> The lesson went home and I was always home at a reasonable time after this - I never wandered off again.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Loofah" was also used in common with the old zinc tin bath and was used as a flesh brush. It was grown on some kind of plant.

<sup>2</sup> Bread and milk eaten in this way was commonly referred to as "Pobs".

Running home from school one day, small groups of people were standing together looking sad, and some mothers were weeping. I asked my brother Fred what was the matter, and he said that a family in Fisher Street had lost two sons, and Mrs. Bradburn across the road from us had lost a son. It brought home to us the tragedies and grief that war can bring.

The shortages and problems of food supply would be felt more by adults than us children who, in the war years, did not know any different, and looked on the food we got as normal. At home, we had Quaker Oats cooked slowly in the oven in bowls overnight and sweetened with brown sugar and a drop of milk poured on. Sometimes, the toasting fork was used to toast bread in front of the fire, and dripping was used instead of butter. It was salty and tasty to me. Mother bought slabs of fat bacon for Sunday mornings. It was fried in the large frying pan and then rounds of bread were dipped into it. We called them "dip butties". In Sutton we could get treacle and jam from the stores - the Co-Op had two, one in Peckershill Road and the other in Robins Lane near the "Red Lion" public house. You took a clean jar and the treacle or jam came through a tap out of a barrel.

Quite a lot of people kept fowl in the backyards or where there was space behind the house to let them loose. They generally roosted on a small shelf over the coal in the coal shed. Potato peelings and household scraps were mixed with a little meal to dry it off after being boiled in a pan, and Karswood Poultry Spice was added to induce them to lay. If you had a surplus of eggs you could preserve them in a glass jar by adding "Water Glass" and then keeping them in a cool place such as the pantry floor. Water Glass was isinglass. When they had finished producing eggs, the hens were killed off, plucked, cleaned and cooked in the oven or in the case of old hens they were boiled. We referred to these as "Boilers."

Round about where I lived, we also kept rabbits. We kept them in hutches and several times a week we journeyed into the countryside for dandelion, clover and hay. When they were big enough they were killed off for food. Another source of food was young pigeons. They could be bought for anything up to sixpence. They were supposed to be good for those in need of nourishment.

If you went into Swifts,, the greengrocers' shop in Peckershill Road, you would see dozens of wild rabbits hung up on an iron rail that ran round the shop near the ceiling. While Mrs. Swift served the vegetables, Mrs. Swift's daughter, Lizzie, was kept busy sitting in a corner by a small table skinning and cleaning rabbits by the dozen, for it was a popular buy on a Saturday morning. They cost nine old pennies to buy. We all loved it for our dinners. "Rabbit and Stew" cooked in a large stewing basin with a pie crust on top, served with potatoes and Yorkshire pudding to follow on.

Once or twice a week my mother used to bake her own bread. I would go to the Co-Op stores with a clean pillow slip and buy a stone of white flour from the flour room. The flour came down a chute, as did the potatoes from another chute, where it was scooped onto the flour scales, weighed and then you held your pillow slip open and in it went. You slung the pillow slip on your back and carried it home. Then I would go to Turner's - a grocer's shop in Robins Lane for two penny worth of "Balm" known as yeast.

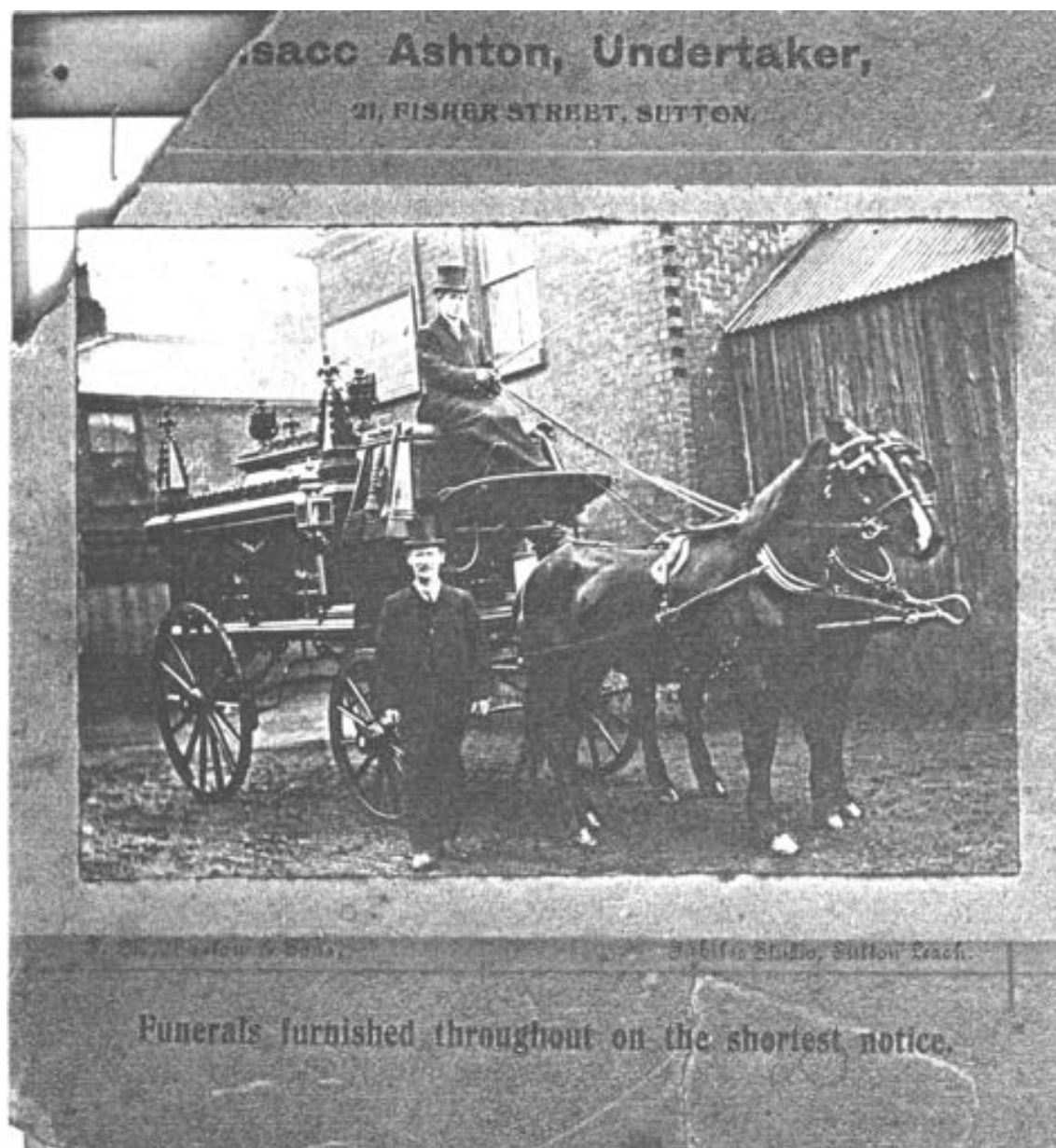
Then the large bread bowl was brought and placed by the fireside. The bowl was brown on the outside and yellow glazed on the inside. It was filled with flour and warmed, and then in the centre a hole was made and into it was poured a paste of flour, water and yeast, together with a little salt. It was stirred gently with a large wooden spoon round the sides of the hole, until the flour had all collected. Then a clean white cloth was placed over the bowl, and shortly the batter of flour and "Balm" would start to bubble and warm water would be added to make dough, which was kneaded for a time before two large cuts were made in the top. The dough was then covered again with the cloth and left to rise, and the cuts would disappear.

When ready, the dough would be taken out and placed on a clean wooden board sprinkled with flour, cut up and put in tins which were then placed on top of the oven to warm, before being put onto the shelves of a hot oven.

The smell of newly baked bread takes some beating, and I would sit by the fireside and pinch a little dough when my mother turned her back on me. I'll never forget it - it was great. If we ever ran short of homebaked bread, she would go to Fred Hills, the corner shop in Edgeworth Street and Fisher Street and order loaves of bread. It was baked at Samuel Royles with the frontage in Peckershill Road and the bakehouse at the rear on a small street called Royle Street, running out onto Taylor Street. The bread was delivered unwrapped. I cannot remember dough being prepared at homes round about and taken to Royles, but I can remember it being taken to William Bells whose frontage was on Peckershill Road and the Bakehouse ran along Fisher Street. They took the dough in a pillow slip to him and it was taken out, cut up and placed in baking tins. Two tallies were produced, one was handed to the customer and the other was stuck in the dough in each tin. The tallies were identically marked and later on, when the bread was baked, they produced their tally and paid for bread.

The other bakehouse that took dough in was Lennon's at the bottom of Junction Lane, just lower down than William Haywood's coal yard. Mr. Bell was a Liberal Councillor. He was a gentleman and well liked with everyone, but the two miners strikes in 1921 and 1926 led to the rundown of his business. He was too soft-hearted. He helped those in need to the detriment of himself. He was never paid for goods that he allowed out, and it all ended when the poor man hanged himself in the bakehouse.

As far as I can remember a 2lb loaf cost four old pennies at this period.



*Isacc Ashton, Sutton Undertaker and blacksmith*

### Owd Ike Ashton

Owd Ike Ashton wer ar Sutton Blacksmith best as yo cud see,  
'Is place o' wark deauwn Fisher Street wer a marvellous place to me,  
'Fer as a child ah've spent sum tarm, fo't 'ear 'is anvil ring,  
Fettlin' 'orses wi' new shoon, i' Summer, Autumn an' Spring.

Seed 'im eave up 'orses legs, geet 'em between 'is knees,  
An clap on't 'oof, thot iron eed shaped, smell made me cowf and sneeze,  
Nails knocked in, then rasp um off, wi' skill ee showed un't job,  
Thid cum in aw sizes, plew 'orse, cart 'orse on cob.

Edwin Garton browt in owd sowdger who poo'd thowd tater cart,  
Ort childer made a fuss oh' im, ee played in't big war a part,  
Lark draggin' cannon an' near lost 'is seet,  
Walked wi' full o' pride as ee cum for new irons on 'is feet.

Owd Haywoods coal 'orses, swifts fruiterers mares,  
An' Owd Ike's own mares, Belgian Blacks to funerals in pairs.  
Every 'oof thi wanted shod, an' all ad bin knocked in shape,  
Owd Ike, a born craftsman, never needed a tape.

Lots o' jobs eed ammer eaurt, often patched up mi trungle an' bow.  
At tarms ah see 'im in mi mind, I can see 'im now just so,  
Leaning o'er 'is anvil mekin sparks fly for me,  
But Isaac Ashton's smithy is gone, no longer theer fot see.