

# **Clog Clatters in Old Sutton**

*Being a series of recollections of a childhood spent in Sutton, St.Helens*

**By Frank Bamber**

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**Dedication**

*I take the liberty to dedicate this book “Clog Clatters” to my wife Elsie, daughter Rita, and sons, Brian and Frank.*

*Also to my friend Chris Coffey for the interest he has shown.*

*And to all my friends, both Committee members and all members of the Sutton Historic Society.*

*Frank Bamber  
1995*

### Introduction

*By word of mouth and through speech first, but far more by writing, man has been able to put something of himself beyond death.*

*In tradition and in books, people have been able to put something of themselves, and an integral part of their individualism in rows of small black marks on a page or pages.*

*So after the writer has passed on, something of him or herself persists:*

*about the people one grew up amongst;  
about the kind of world they lived in;  
A kind of reflection of conditions in that particular period of their lives.*

*Frank Bamber  
1995*



Wilf Wilson, Frank Bamber (centre) and Les Fairclough in Walkers Lane 1928



## **Old Sutton**

Smoke rising from copper slag and coal fires  
Screens all the past from view  
A chink of light my pen aspires  
To scribe Old Sutton True.

Ellam's Bridge that spans our brook  
Thro' Sutton we love so well  
Our historic society takes a searching look  
Of times we love to tell.

The shadows cast of loved ones gone  
Are etched upon the old day scene.  
Edward Borrows was such a one -  
He harnessed iron to steam.

And up our brook to the waterfall  
Was the old mill by the dam.  
A picnic place enjoyed by all,  
That miller's name was Lamb.

Another name comes to the fore -  
Michael Hughes to Sherdley came.  
He brought with him the copper ore  
And Sutton's coal brought him fame.

In flats to Runcorn he did sail  
And loaded wagons on the Runcorn Gap.  
His task of smelting did not fail.  
He helped put Sutton on the map.

Providence itself has left its mark,  
They talk of it as the Glacier Stone.  
Its resting place in Sutton Park,  
Silent and still it stands there alone.

Hugh Morris's gift to Mary of Cockersand  
From Eltonhead to stone which stands to the south,  
From Sutton came fully six acres of land  
For hospital and abbey at old Cockermouth.

The Lancashire engineers did a fine job.  
In 1871 they built the old Battery Cob.  
For a battery range they took such a measure  
It was loved by us kids, it brought endless hours of pleasure.

A variety of bird life our strappers did unfold  
The remarkable white blackbirds and sparrows of Bold.  
You'd glimpse them at Webster's if one tarried that long,  
The eerie call of peewit contrasts with larks' songs.

The old Sutton Moss would welcome us there  
To jump its wide ditches for challenge or dare.  
There were pyramids of cut turf left there to dry,  
We left them untouched as we ran and passed by.

And on the old tip we played football and cricket -  
An orange box became a fashionable wicket.  
Another game played was the old pitch and toss,  
Some lads would gain, at another lad's loss.

They've gone, the Convent House and Old Trip Shaws  
They've gone, Borrows House, The Phoenix and Old Sutton Moss  
The spoilers, the Council with unfeeling laws.  
Gone is part of our heritage - it's our Sutton's loss.

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## **Chapter 1: Grandparents and the Brewer's House**

I was never fortunate enough to know my grandparents, the Bambers, on my father's side, or the Chapmans, on my mother's side, and so I had to rely on what I was told by my parents and my Uncle Jim and my Aunt Jemima.

My grandfather Bamber was born about 1830. He covered the area around Addlington and surrounding districts on horseback to deliver the post and mail, and was called on at times to assist the police. According to my old aunt, who we called Aunt Mima, he was also called on to entertain by the local farmers, by reason of his prowess as a clog dancer. He was especially in demand at the end of the Harvest gatherings at the old public houses where the farm people and helpers came to celebrate the finish of their tasks at the famers' expense by drinking, singing and dancing until the late hours.

I know very little about my grandmother, apart from her maiden name, which was Cornish, and that she was mother to my six uncles, the eldest being my Uncle Jim and the youngest my father Joseph.

My Uncle Jim divided his working time between farming and looking after horses and ponies. Travelling into Derbyshire one time, he met a girl in service at some big house. Her name was Jemima Cresswell. He courted her and later married her, then moving around in search of a permanent job, he finally landed at the old Collins Green colliery as a furnaceman. The furnaces were at the base of the shaft, or draft, causing the hot air to rise, drawing the cool air down the other shafts, thus providing fresh air and ventilation. After this, on realisation of his skill with doctoring ponies at the colliery, they made him Head Pony Man, and eventually he moved from Berrys Lane, Sutton, to the Bank House Cottage, alongside Bank House, Bold, to serve as Farm Bailiff for Collins Green and Bold collieries. The farmyard stables etc. were positioned there, about fifty yards from Forshaws the Brewers along the lane.

Apart from farming, he was responsible for the horse drawn ambulance, which was kept in the carriage room, and on many occasions I sat alongside him on the high seat, going to Peasley Cross and Providence Hospitals. Gone now is the picturesque pebbledashed cottage with its low slung wooden beams straddling the ceiling where my Uncle Jim's guns hung either side; the shining black fireplace with its oven and the cheery coal fire; the crickets singing behind the fireplace; the back kitchen with its pantry with the great long stone slab where my Aunt used to divide and carve the pigs up, skin the hares and rabbits and clean the partridges and fowl. Gone too are the large garden with its vegetable patch and flower garden; the high south looking wall covered with Dorothy Perkins; the old well with its syphon pump; the three large water butts to catch the rain water off the cottage roof, standing between cottage and garden; the fowl and the tame rabbits in their sheds at the rear of the garden. From a tender age, I spent weeks there out of my school holidays. How well I remember it all - the gardens, the dogs, the pets, the fields, blackberrying, the rides on the farm carts, feeding the last of the pit ponies and Old Bill. He was almost blind and was returned to the field to finish his days off after a lifetime down the pit pulling boxes of coal. He was a great favourite with us all, and we all felt for him.



*James Bamber 1856-1917. Died aged 61 years and Jemima Bamber 1859-1944. Died aged 85 years*

*James Bamber was a farm bailiff for Collins Green and Bold Collieries, working there for 39 years. He was also the furnace man, head pony man and farm bailiff.*



My old aunt was more than that to me. She was more like a Grandmother. Although she was no more than five feet tall, she was extremely active. She dug and tilled the large vegetable garden and produced the sage to supply our neighbours around Edgeworth Street and Ellen Street. My mother took orders from them for bunches of flowers and bunches of sage. My brother Fred and I used to walk up Bold and back home again with the washing basket full at weekends. We delivered to the people around us.

My aunt's interest and activity in the garden never interfered with her housekeeping. The interior of the cottage was always spotless. She also had time to knit samplers which hung on the wall giving dates and names of her family and when they were born.

She was between eighty and ninety, living then at Yew Tree Farm, Penny Lane, Collins Green. On doctor's advice she had to be brought inside the farmhouse, out of her beloved garden.

In Addlington, in the year 1874, my father was born. At an early age, he went to school in the morning and worked in the mill in the afternoon. He left school at twelve years old and was later orphaned, coming to live with my Uncle Jim and Aunt Mima at Bank House Cottage, Bold around 1890. He started work at Bold Colliery as a hooker-on at the pit bottom. The hooker-on is the man in charge at the pit bottom. He sees that the cages are correctly loaded with coal boxes, withdraws the empty boxes and signals directions to the winder above. He also searches the mineworkers on their exit for contraband, cigarettes, matches, pipes etc... He also picked up the know how on rope splicing and later maintained the wire haulage ropes, inspecting and ordering wire ropes from Glovers Ropery at Liverpool Road, Greenbank. He later became fireman and Head fireman or Underlooker, and then Undermanager.

My father met and married my mother, Maud Beatrice Chapman. She was the saleswoman and manageress for Griffins Furniture shop on the corner of Westfield Street and Ormskirk Street., next to the Griffins Picture House called the "Scala", where Kwik Save now stands.

The sideboard, a lovely piece of furniture at home, was a showpiece from Griffins Shop. It was presented to my parents as a wedding present on the occasion of their marriage.

My other grandparents, the Chapman's, had their own glassworks in the last century, but Pilkington Glass works bought them out. The bill of sale was kept in a small mahogany set of drawers at our house in Edgeworth Street, detailing the sale of horses, ponies, floats, forges, furnaces and buildings. I regret I cannot find any trace of this bill but somewhere in the break-up of our family it disappeared. The lovely hand cut glass and tableware that was left to my mother and kept in the tall fireside cupboards, were brought out twice each year, washed and dried until they sparkled on the table. It was beautiful to look at. Some of it was coloured.

My Dad took it with him to Leicester, when he went to live with my youngest sister Doris. I believe it was sold in the city.



*Mrs Maude Beatrice Bamber (nee Chapman) 1875-1928. Died aged 53 years. Worked as a saleslady and manageress of Griffins Furniture Store in Westfield Street and Ormskirk Street, St Helens. This photograph was taken c.1900*

My parents lived in an old house in Orville Street, where a son was born named Harold. He died before he was twelve months old. They moved to 64 Edgeworth Street, a parloured house, where my brothers and sisters were born.

### **The Brewer's House**

Where was "The Brewer's House", the house where Jim Forshaw, the founder of the Burtonwood Brewery was born?. It now goes under the name of Yew Tree Farm and stands on the corner of the junction of Penny Lane, Back lane and Bold Road, just outside the Brewery itself.

The friendship between the old Forshaw family and my own goes back to the last century. The close proximity of Bank House and its two cottages with the brewery explains this. My cousin, Jim Bamber, who was foreman fitter at Bold, turner and locomotive fitter, maintained and repaired the pumps of the brewery when Bold and Collins Green colliery passed into the hands of Sutton Heath and Lea Green Collieries and later on became nationalised. The farming had ceased. My Uncle Jim had died, and Nellie Bamber married William Gleave, who succeeded my uncle as farm bailiff.

The Forshaws found a way out for them by allowing them to move into Yew Tree Farm as farmers. The land belonged to and still is Forshaws, and my cousin Nellie, known as Mrs Gleave, was told by the Forshaws that she could live there until the end of her days as she was the last one of her family. My father lived there after my mother died as we had all split up and got married.

On the wall inside the kitchen of "The Brewer's House" was a large picture of old Mr. Jim Forshaw, with top hat and wearing sideburns, portraying a real old English gentleman. He established the brewery in 1867.



*Joseph Bamber 1874-1946. Died aged 72 years. Worked as Undermanager and Underlooker at Bold Colliery. This photograph was taken c.1890*

## **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.

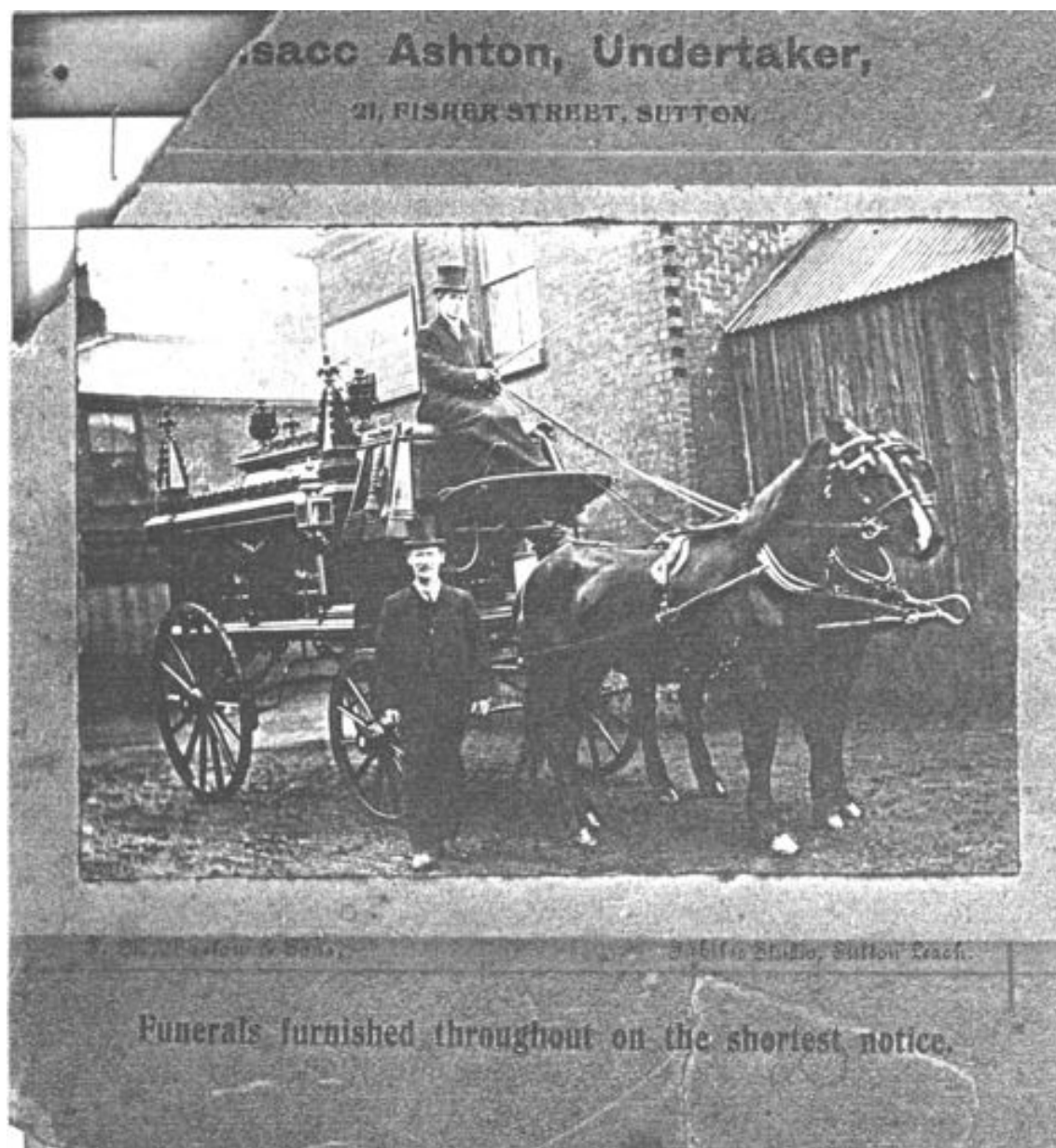
When ready, the dough would be taken out and placed on a clean wooden board sprinkled with flour, cut up and put in tins which were then placed on top of the oven to warm, before being put onto the shelves of a hot oven.

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.

### **Chapter 3: Sutton National Church of England Infants School 1914 - 1917**

There was an acreage of land lying between Ellamsbridge Road, Worsley Brow and Watery Lane coming around in a rough circle to Hoghton Road, Marsland Grove and joining up again to Ellamsbridge Road. The land thus encompassed was what we called the “tip”.

How did this large “tip” come about? First of all, the building of the railway from Runcorn running through Sutton Oak in a northerly direction called the “Runcorn Gap Railway”. It was opened in 1832, prompting a copper smelter, William Keats, to build a copper smelting works at Sutton Oak. The slag and clinkers from his furnaces were tipped there starting in 1833. The copper ore was brought from Anglesey by ship. The cargo was brought down the River Mersey and unloaded into wagons at Runcorn. The copper ore entered the district of the “coal pits”, which provided the fuel for the smelting. To get an indication of the amount of slag and clinker that was wasted, it took 40 to 50 tons of copper ore to produce 1 ton of cake copper.

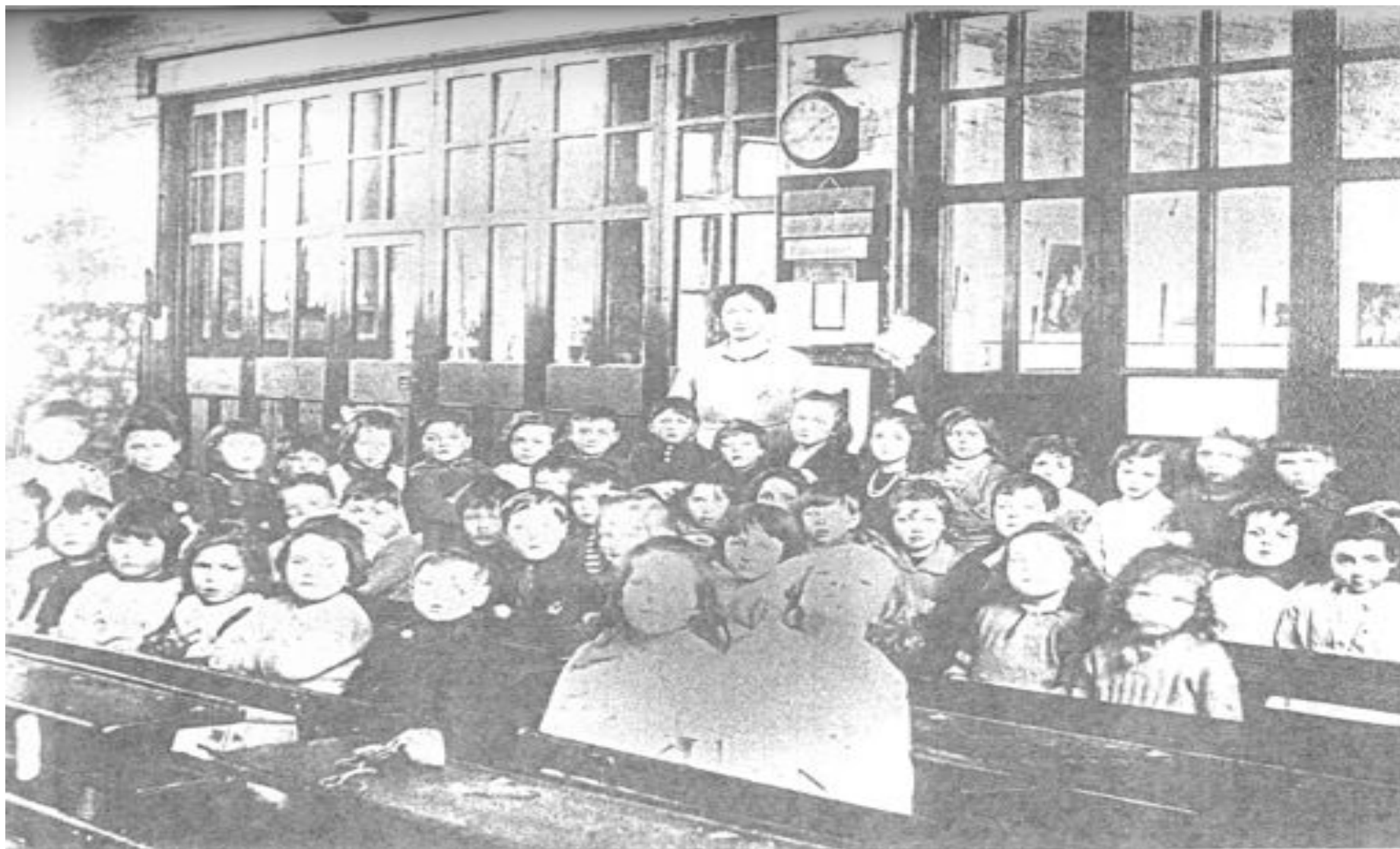
The smelting of copper commenced in 1883 and ceased in 1895. William Keats had formed a partnership with another copper smelter named Newton. The smelting firm was now known as The British and Foreign Copper Co.

The only reminder of William Keats’ influence was the “rolling mill” that he built on Watery Lane on land at “Sutton Moss”. He built it in 1860 and the firm is now known as “Thomas Bolton”. They have connections with BIC in Prescott.

“Newton and Keats”, the proprietors of “The British and Foreign Copper Co.” gave to the parish some land on which the “Sutton National Church of England School” was built. The foundation stone was laid in August 1863, and it was opened in February 1864. This was the senior boys and girls school.

Before this, “Newton and Keats” supported an infants school in 1850 (and probably before I believe) on the same land. It was this infants school that I first attended in 1914 with many other children. It was of different architecture than the senior school. It was built of bricks and stone and had high mullion windows, arched like church windows at either end. It had one large room divided up into four classes by wooden upright poles with iron bases. These carried horizontal poles which were ringed to carry green curtains. The curtains could be drawn at will.

Each class had ten to twelve wooden desks to seat four infants, making each class consist of about fifty pupils. Built onto the end of the infant class was a cloakroom and it contained four brown cold water basins. The toilets were across the schoolyard and infants shared them with the girls’ school. The schoolyard floor had earth and fine cinders as did the boys’ playground. Leading from the playground was a door leading to a school garden which was looked after by the girls and their teachers. Boys were not allowed into the garden or into the girls’ schoolyard. They were considered too rough.



*Sutton National Church of England School Infant Class, aged four and a half years, 1924*

Well, us infants progressed from the sand shaking to learning songs and chanting the “two times table”. When we had learned the two times table, we went on to our “three times table” right up to our twelve times table. It was winter time when I started school and I was taught some fitting songs:

1. The North wind doth blow  
and we shall have snow  
and what will the robin do then,  
poor thing.  
He'll sit in a barn  
and keep himself warm  
and hide his head under his wing,  
poor thing

2. A hole in a log is a squirrel's home  
and a merry little fellow is he  
he toils all the day  
and sleeps all the night  
and he's as happy as happy can be

3. A Carrion crow  
sat on a wall  
derry, derry, dingo

4. Tis hum drum, tis hum drum  
what nobody speaks  
here's one looks very wise  
and another rubs his eyes  
then stretches, yawns and cries  
hey, ho, hum.

I mention the song about the carrion crow because bird life around Sutton was much in evidence. Crows were very often seen on rooftops much to the annoyance of the people that lived there. People were still superstitious and the crow had things thrown at it to make it go away. The bird was still regarded as the “herald of death”.

We played many games as infants in the school yard. I think the earliest was called “Sheep, sheep come home”. The teachers would line the boys up at one end of the playground and the girls on the other. The boys would call “sheep, sheep come home” the girls would reply “we are afraid”. The boys said “what of?” the girls answered with “the wolf”.

The boys would then call out:

“The wolf has gone to Derbyshire  
To buy a pocket “ankicher”  
So sheep, sheep, come home.”

The other version was:

“The wolf has gone to London Town  
And won't be back till half past nine.  
So sheep, sheep, come home.”

Boys and girls would then run across the playground and exchange places and call out again.

### The Old Skipping Songs we sang as children

Skipping songs and their like must have been handed down from generation to generation. They often referred to the medieval age with songs about sheep and the dreaded wolf, the lady on the mountain, the farmhouse and so on. There was one song in particular that we sang at the infants school, not for a moment realising the importance and meaning of the words. Girls and boys would hold hands to form a ring whilst innocently singing this song :

Line of the song	Historical meaning
Ring a ring of roses	A tell tale symptom of the black plague was <i>a rose shaped patch</i> on the skin
A pocket full of posies	<i>A bag of herbs</i> was thought to ward off contagion
A'tishoo A'tishoo	A characteristic of the virulent pneumonic form of the plague was <i>sneezing fits</i>
We all fall down	a person lying down in the <i>posture of</i> <i>death</i>

The terrible Bubonic Plague, also known as the Black Death, originated in India. It swept across North Africa and Europe reaching Europe in 1348. In 1350, the country's population was decimated to the extent from 4.5 million to under 3 million . Between a third and a half of the population had died from the black death. From the fourteenth century, the dancing song has been passed down by one generation to the next for about six hundred and fifty years to our present day in the twentieth century.

Another skipping song which springs to mind is:

*"Nellie Bamber is a nice girl  
she can dance  
and she can sing  
but she can't show a wedding ring  
Oh for shame  
Oh for shame  
Turn your back around you"*

As we shared the playground with the girls, as we got older, we were allowed to join in with the girls. Rounders was played, and skipping, either singly or with the long rope with boy or girl taking the rope ends and turning it to various songs. The most popular one was:

*"On the mountain stands a lady,  
Who she is I do not know.  
All she wants is gold and silver,  
All she wants is a nice young man.  
So fall in, my dear friend  
My dear friend, my dear friend  
Fall in, my dear friend,  
While I go out to play."*

Bouncing a soft ball with the palm of the hand and after three pats, the ball was bounced under one of your legs, accompanied by the words:

“One, two, three, allery  
My ball’s gone in the dairy  
Don’t forget to give it me early  
Early in the morning.”

For three years we followed the same pattern at school. The register was called in the morning and we all assembled in the room with the curtains to say our prayers and sing a hymn. The headmistress then read out to us, or spoke about anything of importance.

Miss Whitfield, the Headmistress was always firm on discipline. On a Sunday morning in the infant school, She took a mixed class of children for religious teaching or “catechism”. Those who attended regularly and paid attention got prizes. I have kept some to this day in the form of a book. “awarded for regular attendance and good conduct”, signed by Miss Whitfield and the vicar. Miss Whitfield had the manner and the voice to command instant attention. I well remember her announcing to the school “it has come to my knowledge that a boy in this school has uttered a swear word. I have lectured him and I have told him that I will not allow anyone to swear in this school and if he uses that word again I will have no option but to wash his mouth out with soap and water”. If Miss Whitfield were alive today, she would need tubs of water and bars of soap, judging by the amount of terrible language by both boys and girls.

In those days, parents gave the teachers full backing in the correction of their children’s conduct. If you did complain at home, you got little sympathy and you risked further chastisement. In the main, you kept mum, so different to the world today when so called “do gooders” have upset the moral issues and the people’s conscience by assisting the wrong doers and neglecting the good people on the receiving end.

We miss the old type of policeman on the local beat too. He was familiar with the people of his district and knew where all the bad eggs were.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to describe the area of land lying in the main between Ellamsbridge Road to the South, Worsley Brow in the West and Watery Lane running from the North around to the East and running up Hoghton Road to rejoin Ellamsbridge Road, and the changes this areas has undergone from 1833 to 1986 - a period of 153 years. I was born in 1910, halfway into this period, during which it had three different aspects of landscape. So, to a certain extent, I can describe two of these aspects.

The present one is there for all to see, but it differs from the one I saw and played upon when I attended school. Gone are the boys and girls and infants schools. The “School Brook”, instead of leaving Henry Ellam’s Bridge built before 1796 and hugging the road and bending round to Watery Lane, has now taken a direct route from Ellamsbridge, crossing Watery Lane to behind Berry’s Lane. It was straightened and deepened by the Water Board to prevent flooding around the Watery Lane area. The tips have been grassed over and landscaped, way round to the eastern side, where a new infants school has been built, and where, behind All Saints Church, houses have been built.



*Ellam's House, Ellamsbridge Road, built in the early 1700s. During the late 1890s to the late 1920s, it was known as "Tripe Shaws". Clifford's Smithy was to the left, attached to the main building.*



But above all, the “powers that be” have taken away from us what must have been the oldest house in the village of Sutton, known to us as the “Tripe Shaws”. Could the “Tripe Shaws” be Henry Ellam’s house?

The second aspect was one which I knew so well as a child and growing lad. Many times have I run down Edgeworth Street into Ellamsbridge Road either to school, shops or to play on the tips, or visit the brook. Directly facing me across the road was an old farmhouse, the outside walls of which had been rendered in cement and were of a greyish green in colour. It was fairly large, and stood within a fair sized garden, fenced off in front. Over the front door was a large porch with an apex roof, and inside, along each wall, were wooden seats built into the wall. Each form was capable of seating a dozen people, and there was enough room to place a table down the centre. What was its use in days gone by? Was it to seat the farm workers at meal times and then used to sell vegetables etc. from? This old farmhouse was known to all us Suttoners as “Tripe Shaws”, and we went there to buy tripe and pig trotters. I have run down the front path into the open porch with its old stone flagged floor, knocked on the door and asked for a half pound of tripe off Mrs. Shaw, and then sat down on one of the forms. Mr. George Shaw was a very big man. He would be seen on a Saturday night climbing into his tripe trap, pulled by his pony named Charlie, and visiting the local public houses round the district to sell tripe, and possibly barter some for a good pint of ale.

Then, moving to the left clockwise, was the old red brick wall of the boys school, with the large wooden double doors which were opened on our field day when we all lined up inside the playground to form the starting point of the procession, led by a brass band. Past the small wooden doors, we used to enter the schoolyard, and the schoolhouse, where the caretaker, Mr. Rigby lived with his wife, three sons, two daughters and a grandmother, who later drowned herself in the Whalleys Dam (also called the “Glass House Dam”), opposite to where I now live in Gerards Lane. When I was quite young, this was a fairly deep dam, but now it is nothing more than a running brook. It leaves “Glass House Dam” and flows under a stone arched bridge into the “Waterdale Dam”, which we now know as the “Monastery Dam.”

This bridge is called Victoria Bridge. The bridge archway over the keystone has the following inscription cut in it: “William Blinkhorn Set This Keystone On The 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1851.” Next door to where I now live was a cottage called “Victoria Cottage”, now demolished.

Passing the schoolhouse and turning right we have to climb up a small brow to the infants school with its entrance facing the brook. This brow was solely comprised of clinker and copper slag stones. It forms a steep bank which we used to run down to the brook, and about forty yards away from this steep bank, were two man-made earth mounds about eight feet high, grassed over, and similar to the mounds at the “Battery Cob” in the “Strappers”. It is my opinion, but alas, I have no proof, that these mounds and the steep bank were used as a “Battery Range”, before the schools and houses round about were built, and afterwards moved to “The Strappers”.

Past these mounds, the brook winds along Worsley Brow roadway. This road is supported by sandstone blocks, and fenced off by four inch uprights, bird mouthed at the top, and four by four horizontal wooden rails dropped in and fastened by iron straps to prevent people or traffic from falling into the brook. On the right are large, brown

clinker mounds, all the way to Watery Lane, where at the rear of a small coalyard owned by Mr. Yates and his family was something which was quite rare at the time - a black lady called "Black Lucy", and two daughters with typical black woolly hair. A wooden bridge spanned the brook here, and looking to the right was a high yellow sand tip, standing about thirty feet high, sloping to the east, but perfectly level, where we played rugby and football, and where Sutton Wesley AFC played. This high yellow sand is similar to the "Burgy Banks" at Island's Brow, opposite the Lark Fields near Haresfinch. I believe this sand was the residue of the sand required for glassmaking at the London and Manchester Plate Glass Co. at Lancotts Lane, Baxters Lane and Ellamsbridge Road.

About one hundred yards past the wooden bridge, the brook disappears under the roadway in Watery Lane and emerges again behind Berrys Lane, where the Bee Hive public house stands on one corner. The Brook then winds around the "Owd Bonk" towards Parr.

Before the brook goes under the road, it is joined by another small stream coming in the opposite direction alongside Watery Lane and passing the Bowling Green Hotel. Following the stream, you looked across to "Nook Lane" and could see Billy Woods Pottery with its brick kilns and chimney and clayhole. Also, not surprising in that low lying part of Sutton, you could see a long flash of water, which we used to skate on in Winter. Still following the stream you came to Keats Street, named after William Keats, and the Copper Smiths Arms standing on this side of the stream. On the other side of the stream was the old copper works we called the "Rolling Mill", originally Newton Keats and Co., but taken over by Thomas Bolton and now Sid Graphics, a subsidiary of B.I. Cables at Prescott.

Alongside the Rolling Mill is Rolling Mill Lane, and reaching the end of the lane you came to Sutton Moss. This is a road I will always remember because I had to cycle there when I was an apprentice at Bold Colliery, to break the tragic news of the death of one of my workmates. Several times I was called on to deliver the sad news of loss of life at Bold Colliery.

This secluded corner of Sutton we called "Moss Nook", standing, as it was, on Sutton Moss, and at this point, the stream divided. One part went under Watery Lane and ran from here, across the Moss to alongside the Old Sutton Cricket Ground, now the St. Helens Town AFC, and disappeared under the L.M.S. Railway by way of a tunnel, towards Bold Colliery. It then turned right at the Colliery to the top of Bold Road, where it again went underground to take the surplus water from William Neil & Sons - the steel works. This stream now takes surplus water from Bold Colliery and Bold Power Station.

The other part of the stream ran behind a row of cottages with gardens and a terraced row of houses, and went under Houghton Road to emerge as an open stream down the Cinder Walk - an unpaved road which is now called Cecil Street. Underground it went again on the open ground at the lower end of Herbert Street and disappeared under Junction Lane to become an open stream again where Wilbur Street now stands. It then went underground again at Station Road and merged again in Allan Barton's Engineering Works, now used by Thornton Transport.

Carrying on behind Hoghton Road lay some terraced houses jutting out onto the tip called Marland Street, now demolished. A lad I knew as Jack Travis lived there and his first job was to help Old George Shaw, the tripe merchant, carry the big wicker baskets to town and back after picking up tripe and trotters from the abattoir and treating them. He then helped old Tripe Shaw to sell them around the pubs. This was after the old pony had died.

Looking across Hoghton Road was a row of houses called Taylors Row. This row has now been demolished, in common with a lot of the old property around there.

Leaving Hoghton Road and walking round Carnegie Street, there was a football ground where several teams played and shared the ground. Sutton Vics, Sutton Rovers and Sutton Casuals all played there. The playing pitch was hard packed clay, with a lot of small pebbles coming to the surface from time to time. It was incapable of growing grass, but for all that, we played rugby on it at times, when the rather softer grounds were being used. Present day players would die of shock if asked to play on such playing surfaces!

This football ground ran lengthwise at the rear of All Saints Church and between the sidelines and the church was our bare fist battling ground. In our schooldays, moving through the gap and into Goodban Street, we could see an entry. Moving through this entry was a smithy, and the blacksmith was a Mr. Pritchard. We went to watch him at work from time to time, busy shoeing horses, making the sparks fly. You could smell the burning of the hooves.

While on the subject of the blacksmith, I must relate what happened to Mr. Pritchard on one occasion - we had many a good laugh about it.

Opposite the Sutton National School in Ellamsbridge Road was a number of old dwellings and in one, which we called the Salvation Army house, lived a lady of very ample proportions. Her name was Mrs. Lawson. It sounds uncomplimentary, but everyone called her "Old Fat Lawson."

A lad about our age lived with her sometimes, called Tommy Lawson, or sometimes Tommy Dodd. He was always poorly dressed for those times, but he used to join us to make the number up when we played cricket or football. He was amusing, but always good-natured. When we had apples to eat, he would shout "Stump", meaning save him the apple core, which we all did, and we gave him butties from time to time.

When he was about fifteen, Mr. Pritchard, the Blacksmith gave him a job as a "Striker". The striker's job was to lift the striking seven pound hammer over his shoulder and hit the "hot set" of "Flatter" which the Blacksmith held to cut or shape the hot metal to his liking. He also showed the Striker where to hit the hot metal, by tapping it with his hand hammer.

The blacksmith forgot to tell Tommy that when he tapped the anvil with the hand hammer it was the signal to stop wielding his heavy hammer. So when they set to, to make the first shoe that morning, everything went according to plan until the blacksmith thought that was enough heavy blows. He tapped the anvil to show this and leaned over

the anvil to inspect his work. Tommy, however, carried on striking and hit Mr. Pritchard on the head. It was a glancing blow, but it caused him to cease work for a time.

Happily, the blacksmith recovered, but Tommy came in for a lot of leg pulling, and we used to tell other lads who came to play with us that the blacksmith said to him when he started work round the anvil "When I nod my head, hit it", and Tommy complied! But he took everything in good part.

And so, coming out of Carnegie Street, on the corner of which was Mr. Kenwright's plumbers shop, and passing a few houses which are still standing, we arrive back at the Tripe Shaws, the old farm house.

So, going back 153 years and more, before the copper smelting came to this area, I like to think that this old farm house was the place from which old farming people of Sutton farmed this particular land. There was clear water to be had from Pendleberry Brook, which we called the School Brook, running halfway round to be joined by a lesser stream coming from Bold and part of Sutton. This would be ideal land for cattle and farm animals and fertile soil, and what would be more tempting for the early Saxons than to settle down and make it their own town or village? There was wood to be had, outcrops of coal, water and fertile land. Could we divide the name "Sut-ton" into the "South-Town" of some early Anglo-Saxon kingdom? It is also recorded that the Saxon word for "farm" was "ton", making it "South-Farm". There is enough evidence of old Saxon words still used by the old Suttoners - may they never be forgotten.

There was another inducement for people to settle down here in Sutton, and that was the turf you could cut and dry for fuel from the Sutton Moss. It must have been very important in those days of turf cutting on the Moss, because it was divided into three parts. Parr Moss in the north, Bold Moss to the west, and Sutton Moss to the south.

Turf cutting was still a business in Sutton when I attended school, and I will cover this in more detail later, when explaining how we spent our spare time crodying over the mosses.

*Smoke Rising from copper slag and coal fires  
Screens all the past from view.  
A chink of light, my pen aspires  
To scribe old Sutton true*

The following page shows a picture of Sutton National Church of England School class Standard IA, taken in 1917. The average age of the class was 7. As far as I can remember them, the names of the people in the photograph (starting with the back row first and moving across the rows) are as follows:

C. Leach	W. Winstanley	J Lewis	Davies	J. Gerard	Mathews	Robinson	R. Naughton
Tickle	Twist	R. Edwards	L. Edwards	F. Bamber	Marsh	E. Appleton	E. Lawrence
I. Edwards	J. A. Davies	Heesom	O. Davies	A. Williams		J. McCann	G. Jones
Robinson		J. W. Jones		Evans		Kitts	W. Owen
J. Measures		J. Fleetwood	R. Jones	J. Woods	P. Lea	Dingsdale	H. Martland

The headteacher is Mr. F. Plews and the school teacher is Miss Wilkinson (later Mrs. Mills)



*Sutton National Church of England, Standard IA, 1917. Average age: seven years*

## **Chapter 4: 1917 to 1924 Boys and Girls School**

The senior school occupied by boys and girls was a red brick building and the plan of it was L shaped. The girls were on the bottom floor and the boys were on the top floor.

The girls had access to their school via the yard they shared with the infants, whilst the boys had access from Ellamsbridge Road, across the playground and through the large, inward-opening doors into a very large entrance hall which had a wide stone stairway about fourteen feet across and about eighteen steps onto a landing. The landing, in turn, had two stone stairways, one on the right and one on the left which was in a reverse direction to the main stairway. These led on to another entrance hall and then divided off into the various classrooms.

A feature of these classrooms in both the boys and the girls schools was the height of the ceilings from the floor. This, in turn, gave the school the appearance of a very tall building.

Under the stone stairs was the cellar, inside which was a large boiler heated by coke, which in turn circulated round the infants and senior schools.

Mr. Rigby looked after the heating of the boiler and I now mention that he and his oldest son were stonemasons and carried on a business of providing gravestones on the piece of land outside of Crone and Taylors, now occupied by the Esso petrol station just off Ellamsbridge Road.

Crone and Taylors, across the brook along Worsley Brow to the rest of the school, contributed to a large extent to the various noxious smells in Sutton. When they were in full song, in production of what we called at the time the “artificial manure works”, later claimed to be fertilisers and conveyors and light engineering, all windows in the school and the streets nearby were tightly closed.

In 1917 the Great War was still being waged and all us 7 year olds were assembled in the infants school, formed into twos and led by Miss Saunders. We marched into the senior school to meet our new teachers, Mrs. Mills and Mrs. Brown, who taught two classes, Standard 1A and Standard 1B.

Entering the classroom, after being divided, we took our places and sat in the combined wooden forms and desks. Each of these forms sat four of us together. The desks had a sloping top towards us, with four ink wells and a groove along the desk below the ink wells to position the ink pens and pencils. A shelf was also provided under the desk top to place our books and caps. And so we began our education as “Standard Ones.”

In the classrooms we were taught the important “Three Rs” and to speak plain English, but we had a further unofficial education on the playground where we toughened up and picked up the Lancashire Dialect. One had to talk “Lanky” here unless you wanted to be mocked and laughed at by the older boys and called a “Sissy”.

A variety of games were played in the playground, handed down from one generation to another. The first one we encountered as newcomers was “The Lion’s Den”.

Coming out into the playground and turning right around the corner was the door leading to the cellar. The bottom of the floor was approximately twelve inches below ground level and three walls about four feet high were built around it with a three foot opening, initially forming a pit about six feet by four feet and flagged at the bottom. This was called the “Lion’s Den.”

Two big lads manned the opening and another two looked after the outside, while some more big lads got their orders “Gooan Fotchum”. These lads became “The Catchers” - they chased round the playground, rounding up us young lads and we were carried or pulled along and thrown into the “Lion’s Den”, where we all struggled and tried to get out. The lads on the outside did their best to keep you inside and you could be there all break if you were not quick enough to get out.

Everything was taken in good part. There were no complaints, and later on, as we got bigger and older, it became our turn to become “Keepers” or “Catchers”

The type of clothes we wore and the composition of the ground in our playground had a bearing on the type of games we played there. Some boys wore jackets and deep celluloid collars, short pants, stockings and boots and caps. Others from Sutton Road and Watery Lane wore jerseys, three quarter length trousers and clogs. Myself, and a lot of others where I lived, plumped for cap, blue jersey, short pants, stockings and clogs. The clogs I always wore were my Sunday boots. When they were too far gone to sole and heel I took them to the cloggers Mr. E. Whalley in Robins Lane to be clogged and have irons nailed on them. This type of boot clog was warmer in winter and supported your ankles when jumping, not like the slipper type clogs worn by some lads, and all the girls who also wore clogs. By the way, anyone who was presumed cheeky or hard faced was promptly told “Thi face ull stand cloggin’“. Girls were referred to as “brassy faced” or “brassy faced huzzy.”

The ground in the schoolyard was ideal for the games we played. It was unpaved and comprised of very fine cinders and soil. One could fall on it without hurting oneself. You could mark a bait line with your clog for you to jump from or set a strong bait.

From the bait line you could make a standing jump or a running jump. The hop, skip and jump was also a very popular competition to see who was the best jumper..

Then there was the handstand against the brick wall. Likewise the crab walk, which was very hard to do, with nearly all the school walking behind you, urging you on. There were quite a lot who could not master the crab walk.

The general procedure to decide who had to start a game was very simple, although rather crude, but was always used. The one who was selected was called out “You are it.” A ring was formed and the one who decided to chant and point in a clockwise manner began as follows:



“Inky Pinky Pen and Ink  
Who made that big dog stink.  
I say it was You”

The one who was pointed at as “you” was “It”.

Seven An O’er was a very popular game. The lad who was “It” bent down on the bait line as in leap frog, and the rest of the lads would jump over him. The best jump would be marked as the second position to jump over. It would now be “one an o’er”. This would continue until it was “seven an o’er”. If one of the jumpers overbaited or did not complete the jump, he became “It”.

### **Pie Crust**

Twelve or fourteen lads would divide up into groups of six or seven and toss up who was to take up position. Usually the strongest lad stood solidly in an upright position, grasping the first lad by his arms, who then bent down and grasped the one in the upright position. The rest of the lads bent down and grasped the one in the front,. When they had positioned themselves firmly, the leader would shout “Set”. The other boys would shout “pie crust coming” and one after the other, everyone would leap on the bent boys’ backs. When they had all jumped, the lad in the upright position would count up to an agreed number, say ten. If they held up, the other side would have to get down and take up the bent position. If, on the other hand, the boys who were bent down failed to support the weight, the lads on top would shout “Weak horse” and would be entitled to a further leap on their backs.

### **Tick**

The one who was “It” chased after the other lads, and when he touched or ticked one, that lad became “It” and it was his turn to chase and so on.

### **Rec’s Rugby**

As we got older and fond of games of rugby, we would play with any number and number off, say one to thirteen or more.

Number one would be given a few yards start and then the other lads would chase him around the schoolyard, either to tick him or tackle him according to the state of the floor in the yard. When ticked or tackled, the lad would shout out a number, and the one who had that number would run around, trying to evade the tick or tackle.

### **Very Cold Weather**

When conditions were very cold in the playground Mr. Plews, the Headmaster would come down the stairs into the playground for the fifteen minutes we had and make us all run round the playground like circus animals. If he found anyone shivering behind on the wall, he would produce his strap and use it on those not moving by hitting them on their buttocks or backs. But for all that, Mr. Plews was well liked and respected and his efforts were to get us all warmed up in the cold weather.

### **Raining**

It was raining, it was playtime and the bell had sounded. Everyone ran across to the toilets - there was no cover apart from the W.C.s - and ran back as fast as they could through the big double doors and into the stone floored vestibule or hall which stood at

the bottom of the wide stone stairs. These stairs led onto the first landing, which was about fourteen feet across. On this landing the Standard Seven and Ex Seven lads stood shoulder to shoulder waiting for the coming onslaught which would be coming up the fourteen steps. The younger boys from the lower Standards would all get together and crush up the stairs holding on to the handrails to gain a foothold on to the wide landing and then make a breakthrough up the other stairs to the cloakroom above.

These younger boys would, in most cases, be thrown back and caps would be snatched off and thrown down into the hall to make them go back to find them. It was all good-natured fun, and everyone enjoyed this fifteen minutes to let off steam.

### **Less Physical Games**

#### **Cigarette cards or “Fotus”**

Cigarette card collecting was very popular. There was plenty of scope to collect a full pack. These cards were very interesting and educational. Some of the packs I had were “Wonders of the World”, “Strugglers for Existence”, “Wild Flowers”, “British Birds” and many others. If you had a “twicer” you would go round the playground to try and swop it for one you still had not got. They were always called “Fotus” and you could play for them if you wished. When two of us decided to play, you shuffled your cards and then split them with the number side down. Your opponent would then bank a number of cards, say twenty, and you would say to him “Odd” or “Even” and hold your two sets of cards, which you had split in both hands, towards him. If he touched one of your sets of “Fotus” and called “Even”, you turned your cards up and if they showed an even number you gave him twenty cards. If he called wrongly, he gave you twenty cards.

#### **Marbles**

Summer was the time for playing marbles. We called them “Stoney” or “Stonks”. Your favourite stoney was called a “Taw”, and quite a busy time was had buying, selling and playing. The price we paid or charged was twelve a penny, the price we paid for “Attys Mint Balls”.

We always played and set our stoney up on the warmest wall. Some lads would stand with their backs to the wall and set their stoney up on a “Cockey” (a little mound of earth), and wait for the lads who would shoot their Taw at the stoney on the cockey. “Ar fare wilt gimme?” would enquire the one who was to shoot. “All gie thi theer”, said the other one, drawing a clog bait in front of his cockey, so he had to decide whether to shoot from there or move on to someone else’s stoney. Or then he would decide to shoot “Cully”. “Ar are wilt gimme if ah shoot cully?”, he would draw a line a bit nearer his stoney.

Now I must explain the two ways of shooting a stoney. The easiest and most forceful way of shooting was to rest the stoney in both your index finger and your thumb nail and rest your little finger, knuckle on the ground, turning the hand away from you. This shot was mostly used on “Ring Out” (a game we played away from school on firm, clayey ground and was of greater range and force.)

“Culley” position was to place your stoney on the middle joint of your index finger in front of your thumb nail with all your knuckles of the shooting hand on the ground, holding your hand in an upright position, without turning the hand away from you.

When the shooter was successful at hitting the cockey stoney, he received his Taw back and one of his stoneys. If he missed, he would get his taw back on giving a stoney for it.

I was fairly successful at using the Culley shot and the washhouse at home was my storeroom. I had lots of jam jars of stoneys. On leaving school I sold them at twelve a penny and realised five shillings towards a second hand bike I had my eye on.

There were other stoney games we played away from school because you needed dry packed clay ground. We played “Three Hole Stoneys”, “Ring Out”, “Chucky Hole” and “Bobbers”. You could also play along the pavement gutters.

### **The Cocks and “Feighting At Back Ot Church”**

There were times among the rough and tumble of the schoolyard when the urge became strong to prove to oneself that one was good enough to become either “Cock ot class” or before leaving school, to become “Cock ot school”.

Although us lads at school were all Suttoners, we had our “Come Froms”, like tribes. There were “Edgeworth Streeters”, “Showbackers”, “Herbert Streeters”, “Pen Lakers”, “Mossers”, Indian Villagers (Hills Moss Road”, Baxters Laners and Coal Yarders (Top of Peckers Hill).

All these lads knew who was the best man with the fists among their section, so some of the lads would approach the best lad of another lot and the conversation would go along these lines: “Heh sorry, Tommy Smith of ar lot sez “I con lay on thee”, so the lad approached either had to nod his head and agree if he did not want to be involved (which was a victory for the challengers), or say “Let Tommy Smith try it on an all knock ‘im as flat as a pancake”, or words to that effect. So then the challengers would go back to Tommy and repeat what Jody Moss had said.

Then Tommy Smith, if he fancied his chance, would go to Jody Moss and, tapping him on the chest, would say:

“One two three  
Ahm cock o’er thee  
An theers a thump fot prove it.”

Jody Moss could ward the thump off and say “Awreet al si thi at back ot church after school toneet”.

### **“Back Ot Church”**

“Back ot church” to our young minds was a grand place to go to and settle a “feight”. Very rarely did a fight take place in the schoolyard, because we were always under observation by one or other of the teachers, and it was woe betide the two who took part because Mr. Plews, the headmaster, would seize each one in turn and hold them with the scruff of the jersey or jacket and belt the living daylights out of them with his lecturer strap.

So, everybody kept mum when a scrap was on, and after school had finished we all poured through the gates, past the “little pig”, Tripe Shaws and the four houses and Kenwrights plumbers shop and into Goodban Street. Heading through the opening onto the “tip”, in half a minute we were at the back of All Saints Church.

The church did a grand job of screening the two battlers and spectators from the main Ellamsbridge Road and generally we had no interference from anyone except a very big woman who, at times, would rush across the field from Carnegie Street with two buckets of water and try to hurl the contents at us. This prompted us to either cheer, jeer or boo her. It was all good fun and excitement. Before the battle commenced, jackets were taken off and handed to seconds and short sleeves were wrapped up. If you wore a gansey, like I did, you just put your fists up and tried to get the first clout in.

A ring was formed with the two battlers in the centre using bare fists. There were no boxing gloves in the school and we never used our clogs for kicking or “purring”, as the old colliers used to do. If one went down he was given time to recover and carry on or give up, as the case may be. You could, if possible, get the other one’s head under your arm and pummel it. The way to get out of that situation was to trip or wrestle the other lad down. There were no rounds - you just carried on till one gave in and the victor would say “Ast ad enuff?”, and the loser would nod his head, or say “Ay”.

### **Cock Ot School**

The fastest fight I ever witnessed was when I was thirteen years old. The two lads who fought were ready for leaving school. They were both big lads, and one was called Mick Lilley. He was a Sutton Roder and he and his mates claimed he was “Cock ot school”.

He was big and rough looking, shock-headed, and he dressed in old, ill-fitting clothes - an older brother’s cast-offs, I should imagine, - and long trousers. He was the type who did not worry about his appearance.

The other lad came from Baxters Lane and he also was a big, strapping lad. He wore a suit and long trousers, a man’s cap and boots. He was fair-haired and something of a loner. He kept himself to himself and used to walk home with two girls from the girls school. He was not interested in sport and wasn’t interested in being cock ot school. But the matchmakers from Baxters Lane told the Sutton Roderers that Henry Lee could flatten anybody from Sutton Road “any day int week”.

And so it came about that Mick Lilley challenged Henry Lee in the schoolyard with the customary “One, two three, ah’m cock o’er thee”, but Henry Lee knocked his arm away and said “All sithee at back ot church, mek sure that tha theer at wom tarm.” That night at “back ot church” all us lads gathered there, with a few girls, to see the gladiators. We formed a ring and Mick Lilley took his jacket off and handed it to one of his mates. Henry Lee took off his jacket and cap and handed them to the two girls, rolled up his short sleeves and exposed two big muscular arms.

They both faced up to one another and Mick said “At ready?” Henry nodded, stepped forward and planted a great thump in the region of Mick’s stomach. Mick gasped and bent forward and Henry hit him again, this time on the nose. Blood spurted from Mick’s nose and he dropped his arms. Henry quietly said “Dost want some moor?” Mick shook

his head, Henry immediately turned round, put his jacket and cap on and walked off home with his two girlfriends.

He was acclaimed “Cock ot school” the day after and no-one disputed it, but Henry wasn’t bothered about it. The fight did not last above a minute from forming a ring to the finish. It was the fastest one we ever saw.

### **Owd Fletcher’s Abattoir**

The next best entertainment when coming out of school at night was “Owd Fletcher’s abattoir”. ‘Owd Fletcher was the local butcher and his shop then was on the opposite side of the road from the school, a little to the left in the centre of a block of terraced houses with the Post Office at the far end of the block.

At the rear of his shop premises across the entry was a rectangular piece of land where Mr. Fletcher kept his animals in line for slaughter. This slaughter yard was enclosed by a six foot high wall running round three sides, and at the far end, was a loft running across and one loft returning down the side. Under the far loft was the place where the butcher stood for scalding and scraping the carcasses and a low, wooden bench for bleeding and carving. Coming out of school at finishing time, the leading lads would turn around and shout “Cum on lads. Tha con ‘ert pigs squealin’. Owd Fletchers at it.” On hearing this, there would be a rush through the gates across the road, passing the “Little Pig”, up Edgeworth Street and turning left at the Ellamsbridge Road entry. Next was the problem of scaling the walls. “Leg ups” were called for, and, sitting astride the walls, we were soon giving pull-ups to those down below. Soon the walls were packed with us spectators. Owd Fletcher would indicate the pig he wanted to both his sons, whose job it was to bring it out and try and get it near the trestle, or bench, while he stood ready to swing at it with a long shafted big hammer, probably about seven to nine pounds in weight. He would aim at the top of the head, and the idea was to stun it. While this was going on it was pandemonium. Us lads were shouting and clapping - “Knock it bog-eyed” was the cry. Owd Fletcher was shouting and giving orders, the pig was squealing its loudest, realising its time had come, and this set the other pigs off squealing. At last, the blow was struck and they wrestled it on to the low table, where Owd Fletcher gave an extra sharpen to his knife on the steel. A bucket was placed under the pig’s throat to catch the blood when its throat was cut. This was used for Black Puddings.

That was the end of the pig’s life, but not the end of its usefulness. The pig was scalded, scraped, washed and hung up by rope blocks, and what an important service it could provide for us, especially in wartime. There was bacon, ham, pork, ribs, neck, trotters, tail, the head was boiled, liver and lights for “Savoury Ducks”. The left over bits and pieces were all boiled together and moulded into a meat and jelly like substance called “Brawn”. Slabs of fat bacon provided the fat, after frying, for “Dip Butties”. Everything about it was, and is, so very tasty.

It played its part in providing us lads with many an hours sport. We, who were customers of Fletchers, would ask him for a pig’s bladder which, when blown up and tied, provided us with a football. Sometimes the pig’s bladder was inserted into the outer cover of a football, blown up which we called a case ball, brown and leather and laced up. So different from the modern piebald football used at the present time.

Quite a number of people in Sutton at this time kept the odd pig or two, and as there were no canteens or restaurants in those days, the owners relied on neighbours to save all their household scraps, such as potato peelings, cabbage leaves and old bread - anything at all edible. These were put in a bucket and then us lads would take them back road, up the entries to the keepers. We would be rewarded with a penny for the contents and our trouble.

### **Owd Fletcher versus the Big Pig**

Oh, the laughter and excitement we lads had on this occasion! It carried on all that night and throughout the following day at school. We came out of school that night and raced to Fletchers slaughter yard, scrambled on top of the walls and waited for the show to begin.

All at once the lads nearest the pig sty started shouting "There's a whopper of a pig in ere. Its biggest grunter wiv ever sin." "Ar big is it?", shouted us lads who could not see into the sty. "Thall sken it when they let it goo", they shouted back. The two Fletcher brothers went into the sty, but they were having a handful with it to drive it out. Owd Fletcher shouted "Try and let its head come through the gate. I'm ready with the big hammer." He swung at the pig's head and gave it a hard blow, hard enough to kill the average pig, but not this one - its skull must have been abnormally thick. The pig came charging out at Owd Fletcher, who threw the hammer to one side and took to his heels around the yard, to the accompaniment of loud shouts and applause from us lads on the wall.

The two sons ran out of the pig sty to try and divert the pig from chasing their dad, but the pig soon had all three running around the yard. Now, the only escape from the floor of the yard, apart from the big double doors leading to the entry, which they could not open (as the pig would then have been running wild around the estate!), was a ladder leading up to the loft. It was the old fashioned type of box ladder, used in stables for access to lofts. It was perpendicular, fixed to the walls and had sides approximately six inches deep with a front board fastened to these, with stirrup shaped holes cut out for hand and foot holds. This, then, was the only avenue of escape for them, but only one at a time could take advantage of it. Meanwhile, the pig was still chasing them, determined to get its own back.

The two sons shouted "You get up the loft first, Dad". So Owd Fletcher made a mad rush to the ladder and just managed to climb and get clear of the pig and into the loft, where he sank into the hay, exhausted. I suppose he had not had such violent exercise for some time.

The big pig was still chasing the sons, but was slowing down, and first the younger son made it up the ladder, followed, next time round, by the older brother. They also sank into the straw and hay with evident relief, and were quite content to stay there for a while. Meanwhile, the pig, having lost its opponents, was quietly rooting round the floor of the yard.

Time was getting late, and the Fletcher family did not seem eager to resume, so we all dropped off the wall and made our way home, still laughing about the way the pig had turned on Owd Fletcher and his two sons.

### **The School Brook**

The fascination of water, especially running water, will forever be a source of wonder and delight for all children. For us at Sutton National School, our brook was a never ending source of changing moods during the ten years myself and others attended there.

Always early for school, and living close to both school and the brook, the weather had to be really bad for me and others to miss running down to the brook each morning to witness whether it was running high or placidly flowing sweetly along its course.

The closing down of the Manchester and Liverpool Glass Co. in 1903, and with it the cessation of effluent and adulterated water from the filter beds into the brook, meant that the stream ran clear again, and sticklebacks or jack sharps swam about in abundance. Down where the brook turned towards Watery Lane and Berrys Lane, flocks of tame ducks swam about.

The brook ran clear until the Nuera Silk Co. came, and when they finished, the British Sidac Cellophane Manufacturers came, and with these the pollution of the brook returned in 1926.

I refer to this, because from 1910, when I was born, to 1926, when I was sixteen years old, the brook ran clear and it would be about the year 1913 when I first recollected the brook and it was so unusual, it has always remained in my mind.

Across from the house where I was born at 64 Edgeworth Street was an opening between the house across the way and Davies Milk Dairy, which led onto the "Show Back" or "Show Field". This was a rectangular piece of ground about 100 yards long and 50 yards wide, lying between the rear of Edgeworth Street and the rear of Peckershill Road, bounded by the rear of Robins Lane, and at the opposite end, Fisher Street, with the other opening onto Taylor Street.

On this piece of land, the travelling show people came at various times in the year. There were wild beast shows, circuses, fairs selling all kinds of wares, and the fairgrounds, with merry-go-rounds, coconut stalls, clay pipe stalls and flying boats. People living at the Robins Lane end protested to the Council about the noise etc. caused by the wild beast shows - at night restless animals such as lions and tigers roared - so these were stopped from coming, but the circuses and fairgrounds carried on with their visits.

One particular morning, I remember my two older brothers hurrying me through the front door onto the pavement and holding me up to see the elephant with its trainer coming through the opening opposite our house. It walked ponderously down the street, stopping at times to take crusts of bread and cabbage leaves from people thronging the pavement, and then it made its way down the street, followed by a good number of people. It turned left at the bottom into Ellamsbridge Road and then up the 'brow', which led to the infants school and then into School Brook to sink its trunk in to quench its thirst, to the great enjoyment of all those who watched. So that is my earliest recollection of the School Brook.

When the warm summer days came round, all us youngsters would make our way down to the brook armed with a fishing net attached to a cane, and a jam jar, searching for jack sharps. Clogs and stockings would come off and into the clean stream we would wade, up and down without a care in the world.

And what warm summers we used to have. They seemed to last much longer than today. The “water cart” would work its way around the cobbled streets to deg the dry dust and the tar would melt and blister between the sets in the roadways, and these blisters would burst between our fingers. But alas, the seasons change and winter, following autumn, would remorselessly come upon us and the heavy rains and snowfalls, followed by thaws. Then, as we ran down Edgeworth Street, we could hear our brook, a strange mixture of sound, gurgling and roaring through Ellamsbridge Road. Down to the bridge we would all run and lean over the sandstone wall that ran from the gable end of the old public house called the Red Rat, and the water would have risen over the archway of the bridge and with the weight of water behind it would be fighting to go through the tunnel and then we would run across the road to see it emerging shooting up into the air and spraying all around, before racing down Worsley Brow to Watery Lane and Berrys Lane.

Going into school, the register would be called and some schoolmates from the Watery Lane area and “Rolling Mill” would be absent, and the cry would go up saying to the teachers “They can’t come today, teacher. It’s flooded all round Watery Lane.”

Some of the houses in this low lying area had both front and back doorways bricked up about two feet high to prevent floods in the lower rooms.



## **Chapter 5: The Boys School, Clergy and Religion in Sutton**

From 1917 to 1924, I attended the large school. I enjoyed every year I spent there, from Standard One to Standard Ex Seven. The teachers were kind and considerate with the exception of one poor man. I only realised later that he was neurotic and patience was not one of his strong cards. He was unhappy and the times that we spent with him were unhappy. Mr. Arthur Helsby was his name. He was the music teacher and the choir master. He taught arithmetic, mental arithmetic, composition, dictation, spelling, poetry, science, art, geometry, drill and exercising and scripture (both Old and New Testament). On a Tuesday morning, we all assembled in the schoolyard. We then went into school for prayers and the calling of the register. We then went back into the schoolyard where we formed into our classes. We were then marched off, two by two, to All Saints Church accompanied by our teachers. Once we reached the church, us boys filed off into the left hand side of the church, the girls to the right.

Hymn books were given out and shared between two or three of us. Looking back, the hymns appealed to most of us but I cannot remember a single sermon preached by the vicar. The vicar was known as “Owd Colegrove”. To my mind, he lacked the common touch. We never saw him smile. He was remote from us and there was a period where the parish split through his arrogance. He had decided to alter the church service to what we call high church. This led to two services taking place every Sunday at All Saints.

The vicar was to be seen coming out of the vestry followed by a man named Eardley carrying a candelabra. We referred to him as “Owd Colegrove’s Disciple”. “Owd Colegrove” would then commence his service from the pulpit end of the church whilst another band of worshippers conducted their own “regular” service at the font end of the church under the guidance of J. Thompson. These people called themselves the “Ironsides”

I knew Mr. Thompson from being quite small. He was the agent for the Collins Green and Bold collieries. He lived in the “Bank House”, Bold. I remember lengthy letters appearing in the St. Helens Reporter by the vicar in defence of his change to the service and the criticism by the “Ironside leader”. Mr. Thompson was in favour of retaining the old service. Mr. Thompson later retired from the colliery co. and bought Leach Hall. The vicar’s attitude caused quite a lot of people to stop attending All Saints Church. Instead they went to St. Nicholas or “top Church” at New Street. The service was not interfered with there.

### **My first Visit to the Vicarage, 1919**

It was Saturday and the day was hot and sunny. There were four of us lads aged eight to nine years old. We decided against going to the “penny rush”, the Saturday afternoon matinee at the “Sutton Empire” in Junction Lane, which was nick-named the Sutton Bug. We decided to walk to New Street to watch the cricket. There was always a match taking place. We could watch the match and when we grew bored, we could tumble and wrestle in the long grass outside the boundaries.

As the afternoon wore on, with the hot sun beating down on us, our thoughts turned to our thirsts. One of us said “I’m dying for a drink of summat”. “So am I”, replied the three of us together.

We had no coppers in our pockets to buy “pop” at the old wooden pavilion. We decided to walk down to the vicarage, to ask for a drink of water. One of us said hopefully “hey we might get a glass o milk iff wi show ar manners”.

We knocked on the front door, but there was no reply. We tried a couple of times. Eventually the door opened slightly and we could just see the vicar’s wife’s face. Before we could speak she barked “what is it?” We all spoke up together “can we have a drink of water Mrs. Colegrove please?” She then said “ where do you live”?. We said “down Sutton”. “Then you will have to manage till you get home”. With that final sentence, she banged the door shut, and left the four of us looking at each other. One of us then said “that’s goodbye to that glass of milk”, I said “never mind, with a face like that she’d have turned it sour”. With this, we Christened her “Owd vinegar face”.

### **My Second Visit to the Vicarage, 1923**

It was four years later that I had to visit the vicarage again. I was now in the top class called “Ex Seven”. In those days you could reach this class on “exam merit”. However poor progress and poor exam performance also meant that lads could stay down in a particular class. Some lads even at thirteen or fourteen never left standard five. I never remember anyone making a song and dance about this policy. It was looked on as the norm. If they were good at sport, this did not prevent them playing for the school. No fun was pointed at them. They were our school mates.

The headmaster Mr. Plews sent for me and asked me if I could ride a bike. I replied that I could. He said “I have some magazines that the teachers have finished reading. I want you to take them every week to the vicarage for Mr. Colegrove to read. You may take one of the teachers’ bicycles from the bike shed. When you have finished delivering them, put the bicycle back in the shed and see if it is all right”. I picked my bike out, one that I could reach, and rode off to the vicarage. When I arrived, I went to the front door and knocked twice. The door opened and that face showed again through the aperture. Before I could speak she hissed “take them to the parish room” and she again slammed the door shut. I thought to myself that Owd Vinegar Face had not improved before I started to think about the parish room. You see I, and the others like me, have always regarded the “Blinkhorn Rooms” as the parish room. The Blinkhorn Rooms were situated in Waterdale Crescent, but have now been demolished to make room for the curate’s or vicar’s house. The rooms had been presented to the parish in the nineteenth century by the manager of the Sutton Glass Works Wm. Blinkhorn. It was used in the early days for schooling and in my early days as a place for Women’s Fellowship to meet. After I had left school, it was being used as a gymnasium. We subscribed for three old pennies a week.

Having pondered such rude behaviour at the vicarage, I made up my mind to take the magazines down New Street to deposit them through the letter box of “Blinkhorn Rooms”. I then returned to the school, returned my bike to the bike shed after inspecting it and then went to see Mr. Plews. I explained what had happened to Mr. Plews who smiled and said “you probably did not know that the parish room she was referring to lies to the rear of the vicarage . Mrs. Colegrove should have had the courtesy to explain that to you. Never mind this time, you will know in the future”. I came to the conclusion that Christ’s way of teaching and examples had little impression on this unlovely pair - the vicar and his wife. They had so little love and understanding in their make up. The vicar himself, with his red owl like face always seemed to be



*Billy Hardy, Sutton Evangelist*

looking up over our heads whenever he passed us by. I don't think he was dwelling on Heavenly matters. I came to the conclusion that he had an unpleasant upper lip and if he and his wife reached heaven, then there would be a safe passage there for many of us. The vicar was assisted by two curates, Mr. Yorklodge and Mr. Garbutt. Yorklodge was an elderly man who seemed to be in poor health. He would sometimes stumble as he walked and he would often stutter when preaching. I never partook of communion when he was conducting the service. He had a permanent drop on the end of his nose "nuff said". Mr. Garbutt was a much younger man. He was well liked by his parishioners.

### **The Churches and Chapels in Sutton**

The two main bodies of religious following in Sutton were the Church of England Protestants and the Roman Catholics. Other smaller denominations held worship in small chapels. One such chapel was the Independent Methodist Chapel in Herbert Street. Here I have distant memories of "magic lantern shows" on winter nights. I recall Billy Hardy and Dick Kitts breaking away from the Herbert Street chapel to build the "Emmanuel chapel".<sup>1</sup> Billy Hardy later emigrated to America as an evangelist.

The Welsh people, as far as I can recollect, had three chapels. One at the bottom of Peckershill Road near Hoghton Road, a Welsh Baptist chapel in Robins Lane<sup>2</sup> and the "old copper slag chapel" at the corner of Sutton Road and Lancots Lane.

Then there was a small Methodist chapel at the corner of Edgeworth Street and Robins Lane known as the Tin chapel. Its outside walls and roof were encased in corrugated sheets. When support faded, it was taken over by St. Anne's R.C. Church for receptions. It has now been demolished. There was a Wesleyan church in Sutton Road, a large building where we used to socialize on an evening after leaving school. Here we played all sorts of games, blind man's buff, guessing games and kiss in ring. We greatly enjoyed ourselves here. This building has now finished serving as a place of worship. A smaller and neater looking building has been built in New Street. It will take a lot of faith and perseverance to offset the vandalism taking place in the neighbourhood.

St. Anne's Monastery and church were built and opened in 1852. They were largely built under the directorship of John Smith, a Roman Catholic benefactor. Unfortunately, due to subsidence, the steeple was removed and the church itself was later demolished. The new church was opened in 1973, a smaller model of the Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral. Adjoining this lovely modern church is the "shrine" containing the remains of Father Dominic Barbari.<sup>3</sup> Fr Dominic was an Italian born in Italy 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1792. He later died in Reading in 1849 aged 57 years. He was a very learned man and became a Passionist priest. It is believed that he had spiritual power which he used to comfort and heal the afflicted.

Two more bodies rest in the shrine. One is an English man named George Spencer, a son of Earl Spencer and uncle to Winston Spencer Churchill. He was a converted Anglican clergyman and a great friend of Father Dominic. Another conversion to the Roman Catholic faith was a Protestant girl named Elizabeth Prout, who later was known as Mother Mary Joseph. She was the founder of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion.

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<sup>1</sup> Later known as "The Church of the Nazarene" in Helena Road.

<sup>2</sup> Used as a food store and then taken over by East Sutton Darby and Joan senior citizens club

<sup>3</sup> Now known as Blessed Dominic after beatification

She died on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1864, after making great sacrifice in her life among the millworkers around Manchester.

Due to the fact that I and my wife have lived within the old curtilage of St. Annes for many years, we have witnessed the pilgrimages and changes made over the years around the monastery.

### **The Peacemakers**

When I was quite young, it was a common place sight to see the priests from St. Annes clad in their black robes and sandalled feet hurrying across the opening in front of our house and crossing the Show Field to the streets around Peckershill Road.

Could it be that someone was ill or nearing the end? Possibly, but that was not always what made them hurry. Sometimes it was the fact that a member or members of their parish were engaged in a bare fist fight or fights.

Coming out of school we would hear shouting and large crowds would be seen in Peckershill Road, outside the “Round House”<sup>4</sup>. The first lads out of school would shout “Come on lads, there’s a feight on again” and as fast as we could, we would run to join the crowd.

In the centre would be seen the two battlers. They might just be two locals settling an argument, or a local man fighting an Irishman. In most cases they would be inflamed, with drinks after being in one of the trio of local pubs - the Round House, the Alexandra Vaults in Fisher Street, or the Prince of Wales at the top of Junction Lane. Now only the Prince of Wales remains; the others have been demolished.

Most of the menfolk in the crowd would be shouting advice to one or other of the fighters, and some women or friends would be shouting “Stop ‘em”, but all to no avail. The local policeman on his beat would be notable only for his absence, so someone would be dispatched on a bicycle to St. Anne’s Monastery to inform the priests that another fight was on outside the Round House, and one or both of the fighters belonged to the parish.

So, the priest would come in his cloak and sandalled feet, and the crowd would open up and he would be in the centre of the ring with them, firmly rebuking them for their disorderly conduct, and telling one or both he wanted to see them at church. That would be the end of the fight and everyone would disperse.

On reflection, I never saw our Vicar at one of these battles. I think he lived on a different planet to us common, down-to-earth Suttoners.

### **The Local Preachers: John Kitts and Chippy Southern**

At the turn of the century there were the horse drawn wagonettes; later on the petrol driven, solid wheeled “charabanc”; and later still the “saloons”, with their pneumatic tyres. Whenever a party departed from Sutton on some visit outside and a sprinkling of Methodists were on board, one of the local preachers, a lay preacher would climb aboard to say a prayer for the safety of all passengers and for the safe return of everyone.

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<sup>4</sup> It was called this by the locals due to its curved front , but its proper name was the Locomotive Inn

They were devout men, sincere and easily understood - as we used to remark, "They have no edge about them."

And so I would now like to pay tribute to two men of this kind. They were two of a kind and of the same mould, both in their religious outlook and physically. Both were thickset, of medium height with ruddy features and generous moustaches.

They wore suits of warm, heavy tweed, and, above their strong boots, their trousers were gripped to their legs by two pairs of bicycle clips. They would be seen either riding abreast or in single file, coming up the road on their old-fashioned strong framed bicycles with a large carrier box secured over their rear wheels. After reaching a particular spot, they would dismount and either prop their bicycles against a wall or grassy bank and then, standing shoulder to shoulder, with a hymn book in their hands, they would raise their lusty voices and sing a hymn to all and sundry within earshot. Next, one would preach his sermon. They had no need of a pulpit. The ground or pavement they were standing on was good enough for them. They waged an endless war against the taking of strong drink and the excess of it. The spots they chose to preach would have daunted a great many, but they had the courage of their convictions. The ones that spring readily to my mind was one at the top of Junction Lane, opposite the Prince of Wales public house; Bold Road, outside the Farmer's Arms; Reginald Road, outside the Engine and Tender; the Pickled Egg in Sutton Road, and the occasion of the opening of the new Wheatsheaf at the bottom of Mill Lane in 1938.

The opening of the Wheatsheaf was a great day for the ale drinkers. Greenalls, the Brewers, promised to give a pint of ale, free of charge, to all who came to the opening. Before opening time a great crowd had assembled of men with great thirsts, waiting expectantly for the doors to open and opposite, standing shoulder to shoulder, were these two resolute characters, John Kitts and Chippy Southern. They sang and preached and warned about the perils of strong drink and said that when the men entered through those doors, they were entering the "House of the Devil", and that if they carried on with this way of life, they would eventually go to Hell. However, when the doors opened, the thirsty men all trooped into the New Wheatsheaf - a pint of free ale was more enticing to them than the thoughts of living an afterlife in Hell, and only John Kitts and Chippy Southern remained outside. But you could not dishearten this great-hearted pair of men.

The Old Wheatsheaf Hotel, now closed, was in Lionel Street, alongside the St. Helens Junction Station. The last landlord was Dave Rothwell. Sam Tickle was also at one time a landlord of the Old Wheatsheaf and a colliery winder at Bold Colliery when I started at Bold. He looked after the main ventilation fan in the Fan House at Bold, having been moved from the job of winding because of his age - he was then over 80 years old. He and his brother, Billy Tickle, both looked after the Fan House, continually walking round the bearings in the fan machinery. They both worked twelve hour shifts - 6am to 6pm and 6pm to 6am.

### **John Kitts**

John Kitts never did things by halves. His early life as a young man was spent in the ale houses, drinking, gambling and brawling. His dog used to accompany him wherever he went and in the pubs, for a bit of fun, he trained his dog to nose his way into fellow

drinkers' pockets for odd coins, causing much laughter. He was a collier, and worked down below.

Suddenly, he changed his way of life. He deserted the pubs and took to working on his plot in Sutton Road, where the Metaline firm now stands. He kept poultry, and the eggs they produced went, safely packed, in the carrier box at the rear of his bicycle.

Alongside these were collection boxes which he distributed around the district to various people to collect money for the missionaries, who went out to the Belgian Congo to bring Christianity to the black people out there. To the people who helped him to collect he would leave whatever eggs he could spare.

He carried on this good and Christian work to the grand age of 87 years, when fate struck him a cruel blow. He left his bicycle in Gower Street, and when he came to collect it, the bicycle was gone, stolen. He decided to walk home and slipped and fell on the cobble stones in the road and broke his legs. Complications set in and he died. In every sense of the word, he was a true Christian. From the Emmanuel Church, John Kitts' son, John, left Sutton in 1938 to take up missionary work in the Belgian Congo for a period of ten years.

### **Billy (Chippy) Southern**

Chippy Southern also was a collier and worked down the pit at Bold Colliery. His early life at Burtonwood was spent on the same lines as John Kitts, working hard and drinking hard at night, and game for a scrap anytime. He came home one evening worse for drink, and he beheld his wife and quite a lot of neighbours listening to a travelling preacher, who was appealing to his listeners for help to enable missionaries to be sent out to Africa to teach Christianity to the uneducated black people out there. He asked for people who were prepared to help to follow him and form a procession. Chippy Southern said to his wife "That man is a good man. I believe him and what he says. I am going to follow him." Chippy's wife said "Don't be daft, Billy. You'll make a show of yourself in your state." But Chippy was determined to follow the preacher and fell in behind the procession, and from that day on he never took any alcohol. He teamed up with John Kitts, preaching against the drinking in the pubs, and both of them collected for the missionaries.

### **The New Chapel**

Billy Hardy and John Kitts, strong Methodists, were fired with the ambition to build a new church on a plot of ground in Helena Road. They left the Methodist church in Herbert Street and, with Chippy Southern, they founded the Emmanuel Church on this piece of ground. Later they changed its name to "The Church of the Nazarene" and Billy Hardy left these shores to take up the work of evangelism in America.

### **Chippy's Son Tom and My Brother Fred**

Earlestown Market acted like a great magnet to people of all ages on Fridays, especially Friday nights. They came in coaches, some walked, and some came by train from the surrounding districts of Newton, Sutton, Clock Face, Sutton Manor, Parr and Haydock. In the absence of entertainments such as TVs etc., it became a meeting place for people to shop and look for bargains, a meeting place for teenagers, and the pubs were there for the drinkers.

It was somewhere to go, especially in the dark nights of winter. It had a special attraction of its own. The market stalls were all lit up, with naphtha flares making their sizzling and hissing noises, the cries of the stall holders selling their wares, and the “Lino Slappers”. The “Lino Men” auctioned rolls of linoleum - people were covering the old red and blue tiles in their homes that needed scrubbing and washing each day with these rolls of linoleum - and crowds of people surrounded them as each roll was placed on its end and the auctioneer shouted out his price and emphasised it by hitting the lino roll with the flat of his hand. He would bring the price down a bit to suit his customers’ pockets. Times were bad, and men stood by when a purchase was made by some housewife, ready to ask if they could carry it to the train for them, for a tip of some kind.

The age of the motor car had not arrived at that period of 60 years ago, and the problem of bulky goods being taken home was sometimes a difficult one to solve. The people who came by train could, for a small charge, put the goods in the goods van, and could leave it at their destination in the left luggage office, to be picked up later by their own menfolk. Those that came by coach, or charabanc as they were called in those days, were advised by the driver or proprietor how to get the goods home if they were too large for his vehicle. A firm doing such trips was Bridges in Ashcroft Street, who ran trips to Earlestown on Friday nights. They catered for the people round the Fingerpost area in Parr.

And such a Friday night as this was when Chippy Southern’s son Tom, who was nicknamed “Tor”, came down Sutton from Burtonwood on his motorcycle to pick up my brother Fred to go for a ride out together. They rode around for a time and then decided to ride to Earlestown Market.

They came roaring up Market Square and came to a halt by the roadside alongside Market Square. Little did they know that, unknowingly, Chippy Southern and John Kitts had forestalled them and had set up their position alongside the market stalls to sing and preach to the people thronging the market.

Chippy was holding forth about the folly of drink when he heard the motorbike pull up and immediately recognising his son, Tor, he pointed an accusing finger at Tor and Fred, and shouted to the bystanders standing around “There’s an example of a young lad and his mate on that machine of the Devil. There’s only one place that they will end up and that is through the Gates of Hell.” Fred told me afterwards that all eyes were turned on him and Tor, and Tor said “Hang on Fred, let’s get out of this.” With that, he jumped on the kickstart and roared off to the Railway Inn, parked the motorcycle and went inside, where they both saw the funny side of it and started to laugh. The regulars wanted to know what was amusing them, and when told, they had a good laugh as well, for they knew as well as anyone the tactics Chippy Southern and John Kitts got up to in their ceaseless war against drink outside the public houses.



## **Chapter 6: Aspects of Sunday on Various Sutton People**

Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do. The seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

The appointed Rest Day for the Hebrews was the seventh day, which falls on a Saturday. It differs from the Christian day of rest, which falls on a Sunday, which is the first day of the week.

During the thirty years spanning from 1910 to 1940, the majority of people in Sutton looked on Sunday as a full day of rest. Most people gave it the respect with which they had been brought up to enjoy it. It was a day away from the day to day work occupation, a day for the religious to attend church and meet people outside their homes. But most of all, it was a day when all the family could be together to enjoy their meals together, to wear their Sunday best clothes and, weather permitting, to walk after Sunday's teatime around the countryside or to walk to the park, where brass bands came to play for them.

There was a sprinkling of maintenance workers who made their way to the local works and collieries, for work which was essential. Our father was one of these. He turned out to work every Sunday for seven o'clock, so we had dinner when he came home at half past one.

But most of us took advantage of an extra hour or two's rest. After breakfast and with the washing up done, it was a case of a good wash and change into our Sunday best to go, in our case to Catechism, which started at 10.30am in the old infants school under the guidance of Miss Whitfield. The quietness and lack of noise was so evident, apart from the church bells ringing at St. Nicholas and St. Annes welcoming and summoning the parishioners to worship. Not like the work days of Monday to Saturday, when the works and colliery buzzers were continually blowing at six o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, eleven and twenty past, twelve and half past, one o'clock, two and half past, three 'clock, four o'clock, five o'clock and half past, accompanied by the Sheeting Shed bell ringing at 8 o'clock, 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock and half past five. Also contributing to the noise were the engines continually shunting coal wagons and other rolling stock up and down the Runcorn Gap Railway and into the sidings. This work continued twenty four hours a day, and then there were the loud, explosive noises of the steam exhausts from the colliery, winding engines, especially No. 1 Pit at Bold. If you took the trouble to listen to these, you could tell which of the three pits was working. It was my pleasure to watch the giant steam engines at and inside No. 1 pit's winding house. It was larger by far than those at No.2 and No.3 pits.

But back to our routine on a Sunday. After catechism, we rushed home and the table was moved out from the wall of the kitchen so that all the family could be seated around it. Grace was said, and we used the following little prayer for thanksgiving.

*"Be present at our table, Lord  
Be here and everywhere adored  
Us creatures bless  
And grant that we  
May feast in paradise with thee."*

Dinner generally comprised roast beef and vegetables, followed by either a rice pudding or a Yorkshire pudding, washed down by ginger beer, poured into cups from the stone jar which was left each week by Edmund Barton. I have still got one of these jars. They were used at times in the winter months as a hot water bottle.

After dinner, and when we had all helped with the siding of the table and with the washing up done, we got ready again for Sunday School, held in the boys school, whilst my older brothers attended the Guild at St. Nicholas. Our father generally had a rest in the afternoon and my mother looked to the preparing of Sunday's tea. This generally comprised of blancmange, jelly with cream, bread and butter, cream crackers and a sandwich cake. Brother Fred, now fourteen years old, left higher Grade school, having passed his "Junior Oxford" and took up a position in the office of Wm. Neil & Sons, the iron foundry at Bold. I was expected, at home, to run all the errands and other small jobs which Fred had done before. One of these was, after Sunday School, to take the "Sunday Chronicle" to my aunt and uncle at Bank House in Bold. I was now nine years old and for five years, in Winter or Summer, I walked it there and back, apart from the time I spent with them at Bold in the school holidays, when I walked to Burtonwood for a Sunday paper. The reason for this was that there was no delivery of papers around that district.

Many a time in the depths of winter, having walked there, I ran all the way back home to try and beat the darkness. There were no lamps that way and no proper paths, and the only company I had was the eerie cry of the Lapwings, sometimes called Tewits or Peewits.

As one left Bold Road, Sutton and crossed the boundary between St. Helens and Bold, leaving Hills Moss Road and the Boundary Vaults on the left, you would enter Travers Entry. On your right was Travers Farm. After you had walked, say three hundred yards, standing in the entry with your back to the farm, you would see an expanse of open fields where Bold Power Station once stood.

Across the fields you would see the Bold Colliery sidings running parallel with the London Midland and Scottish Railway and at the other side of the railway was Bold Moss. On these fields, running from the boundary right the way to Bold and Collins Green, one would see great flocks of Lapwings. These graceful black and white birds, with a crest on their heads, are now practically all gone, apart from the odd pair I saw around the Gorsey Lane area near the old Clock Face colliery during 1986. The flocks were so numerous around these parts, that the Burtonwood Brewery used the picture of the lapwing on their labels on the bottles. It was referred to as the Tewit probably introduced by Old Tom Forshaw in 1839, over a century and a half ago.

Before I continue details of Sunday in Sutton, I would like to refer to the old road running to the Moss, just inside the Sutton boundary. It was called the Hills Moss Road. It became a cul-de-sac due to the advent of the railway dividing parts of Sutton.

Due to its blank end, very few people ever walked down it, although nearly everybody in Sutton passed by it when walking to Bold. Turning left from Bold Road and leaving the Boundary Vaults on your right, you would see a row of two up and two down houses with an unpaved road. In these houses lived quite a number of colliery workers, miners, surface workers and girls who worked on the Pit brow and in the screens at Bold,

Collins Green and Clock Face. They were a rough and ready lot and could be tough. They were almost like a tribe and everyone in Sutton referred to this last part of Sutton as “The Indian Village”.

Away from the pits, their leisure time was spent on a Saturday afternoon running whippet races, using an upturned bicycle to pull the cord with the white rag and rabbit’s tail to act as a pacemaker. These races were held at the end of the Sutton Commercial Rugby ground, between Normans Lane and Hills Moss Road. At night, they filed into the Boundary Vaults and any event concerning them was an excuse on a Saturday for a “Prater Pie Do” at night, cooked and served by the licensee, Mrs. Gladys Sutton. I visited the Village twice. The first time at the latter part of the 1926 Miners Strike for a Safety Worker to come back to work, permission being given by the Colliery Manager, Eric Richardson and Jimmy Dixon, the miners Secretary. The second time was to inform a family of an accident at Bold.

### **Powder Works and Charles Davey & Co.**

Lying between the Hills Moss Road and Normans Lane and between the Boundary Vaults and the Farmers Arms, which has now been pulled down, was an acreage of land, which a friend of our family, named Willis part owned. It was the Powder Works. The owners of the Powder works was Bickford, Smith & Co. Ltd, safety fuse manufacturers. I believe, according to my friend, Jack Willis, now departed, that Charles Davey & Co. had a small firm there making the old Davey Safety Lamps for the miners around these parts. Quite a number of girls were employed by these two firms and the ones employed at the powder works were often called “Powder Monkeys”.

As you walked down Normans Lane, you could turn in halfway on the right and pass two fairly large houses., I suppose these were, at one time, the residences of these firms’ employees. The road then turned to the right again and came out on Bold Road. I believe this was called Pye Street. Walking further down Normans Lane, there were four “double houses” occupied, when I was a boy, by officials of Bold Colliery, and the last one was lived in by a Mr. Swift, known as “Owd Mant Swift”, who looked after the Sutton Commercial & AFC. Later, in 1926, this became Sutton Commercial RFC, of which I became a player. The land lying at the railway end was an enclosed football ground, and further to Hills Moss Road was the ground on which the whippet racing took place. Standing at the bottom of Normans Lane and looking across the railway, you could see one of Stephenson’s old crossing gate houses. Leading to Houghton Road was the old Sutton Cricket Field, so one can assume that Reginald Road, Normans Lane and Houghton Road was the old road through that part of Sutton, before the advent of the railway.

Reginald Road, stretching from the bottom of Mill Lane, embracing Normans Lane, was, when I was a boy, called “Long Lane”.. This, I suppose, was the original name for it, before all those streets around the Junction were given “Christian” or first names, such as Reginald, Lionel, Liza, Francis, Norman and Helena.

### **Sunday Evening Walks. Courtesy and Consideration**

Spring had arrived and the chilly winds had disappeared. People took advantage of the warmth, and Sunday evenings were the time for families to walk out together to enjoy the countryside, to visit friends, to go to Sutton Park to listen to the band, to catch a tram to go to Taylor Park and take a row on the lake and enjoy the band.

And so people and their families left their home streets behind to turn into Robins Lane, the main way to walk in the direction of Bold or the Sutton and Sherdley Parks.

Families could walk through Sutton Park, but not through Sherdley. However, you were allowed to walk around Sherdley Park, taking the “Long Wall” in the direction from Sutton Park to Eltonhead Road and turning right, enter the “Score”, right round eventually to come out at “Green End” and into Marshalls Cross Road again. The sandstone wall on the main road was called the “Long Wall”. It was the wall on Marshalls Cross Road which enclosed the Sherdley estate. The trees around the Score were alive with songbirds - blackbirds, thrushes, finches - all doing their best to out-sing each other. As a child with my parents, I first heard the pure, unique call of the cuckoo, and my first sighting of it was in that part of the countryside.

Sometimes from the Score looking across the Park, you would see Colonel Michael Hughes’ racehorses being exercised, and what beautiful creatures they were in comparison with the horses and ponies we saw everyday, pulling carts, with the heavy breeds pulling the large, two-wheeled carts.

When the Sunday evenings darkened, the “Long Wall” was the habitual meeting place for the teenagers from the surrounding districts to “parade” - groups of boys and groups of girls walking continually up and down the path alongside the wall. Usually there was a friendly policeman slowly walking up and down to prevent these groups from joining up and causing an obstruction. It was all done in a cheerful way, and the police were given the respect which was their due - so different to the present day. The older boys and girls who wanted to dally made their way around the Score, where all was quiet, and there no-one interfered. It was a favourite place for courting couples.

To retain the right of way around and through the Score, gates were pulled across the red gravel pathway and locked at Christmas Eve for 24 hours to ensure Michael Hughes’ right of ownership.

The parading of teenagers on a Sunday night was an age old custom, and was peculiar to Church Street and Duke Street in St. Helens, as well as the one along the “Long Wall” at Sutton. These were also known as “Monkey Walks”.

Referring back to the families walking out on a Sunday night, it was as if you were in a different world. The women folk and the young children, some pushing a go-chair or perambulator, would always be on the inside of the pavement or pathway, with the men folk on the outside. People greeted each other by wishing a “Good evening to you”, accompanied by the raising of the men folks’ hats. Young men gave way and stepped off the pavement to allow families the right of way - a show of courtesy seldom displayed in the present times.

By half past seven and onwards and the evening drawing to a close, most families had retraced their footsteps towards home. The children had to be washed and put to bed, and in our home, my two younger sisters had to have their hair put into curlers. The strands of hair were entwined in strips of white cloths in the form of bandages. This was the period of time when the girls wore their hair long, and the shortening of the hair called “bobbed” had not arrived. Many a fond mother wept when this fashion came in. My mother kept my sisters’ short tresses in two envelopes as keepsakes. Then, there was

the inevitable preparing for work on the Monday morning. I remember my mother cutting three lots of sandwiches - four when I started work - and tea and sugar wrapped in paper. My dad took a bottle of water to work each morning - needless to say, you couldn't brew up down the pit. Porridge had to be made and placed in the oven to cook slowly overnight and was always warm when we got up for breakfast.

Another chore I did when I came in was to set the boiler fire in the washhouse with paper, sticks and coal and to make sure there was enough coal slack to keep the fire going while my mother washed. This was stacked in the corner by the boiler fire. Monday was washing day, the worst day of the week, especially if it turned out to be a rainy day.

Summer and Autumn passed us by, followed by the dark nights of Winter. Now was the time to build a good coal fire up, and its warm, cheery glow aided by the soft gas light did a lot to comfort us during the winter months. Sunday evenings were spent sitting around the fireside, reading a book or us younger ones playing Ludo, Snakes & Ladders or Tiddley Winks until early bedtime, and then the older ones played Whist or other card games. These were the times when outside entertainment was non-existent. I remember my older brother tinkling about with the "Cats Whisker Wireless". You wore ear phones to catch the sound coming through, and then there was the old type of gramophone with the horn. You placed a record on and wound it up by the handle on the side. People had to make their own entertainment.

## Chapter 7: “Bart A Dart” Old Sutton was Lancastrian and so was its People

Without a doubt, Sutton was an industrial mining Lancashire village. Its people were mainly mine workers, engaged in the production of coal at the many pits around this area. The minorities worked for the railways at the Sheeting Sheds at Penlake, the Engine Sheds at Baxters Lane and as Plate Layers on the railways. Others at the various Brick Yards and Clay Holes, Woods’ Pottery at Moss Nook, the Rolling Mill at Watery Lane, Crone and Taylors Fertilisers and Light Engineering, Wm. Neill & Son at Neill’s Row, Bold, the Powder Works at Normans Lane, and the Blue Works at Mickle Head Green. Discussing with my friend Ernie Proudlove, son of one of the old Sutton boxers of the same name, we covered as near as possible the names and locations of the old Sutton brickyards and clayholes. Starting from the nearest one to where we lived was the Nor West Brick Works and clayholes. It lay between the old Copper Slag, Welsh Chapel and the Sutton Oak Station with a frontage of the Old Colliers Square, a square of houses where a number of colliers lived. The works and clayhole ran to the rear of Sutton Road, running alongside to the St. Helens Junction to Shaw Street railway. That was No.1. No.2 was the Metalick Brickworks which lay between Egerton Street and Gaskell Street, known to us at that time as “Dark Lane”. The particular feature of this clayhole was that it was at each end of Sutton Road, and was connected with a tunnel running under the ground to reappear up the other side. No. 3 was the Sutton Oak Brickyard, situated in Baxters Lane to the rear of Robins Lane. One clayhole was there and another one to the rear of the St. Helens Hospital in the Manville and Cleveland Street area.

No. 4 was the Kurtz Brickworks at Jackson Street. Kurtz, who was of German descent, was a benefactor in St. Helens and founded the public baths at Boundary Road and also the Cottage Hospital at Peasley Cross.

No.5 was Horn and Kellys at Burtonhead Road.

No.6, which I include, though not in Sutton, but which still offered work to Suttoners, was the Bold Colliery Brick Works. I worked there myself as a joiner, sharing my work between the Brick works and the Colliery between 1924 and 1940. The soft stone from down No.2 pit was used for making bricks. The stone was thrown out of wagons to weather before being loaded into the mills.

No.7 was Roughdales Brickworks at Chester Lane, now known as Ibstock. This is the one remaining brickworks left round this area. The output now is on a colossal scale - if the old brickworkers could see the modern methods of production it would open their eyes to view the conditions of works, as opposed to the old heavy and miserable conditions they endured.

What kind of people were they who lived in Sutton in the early part of this century? I will leave out the ones who helped to minister to the wants, namely the policeman, doctors and ministers, priests and nuns who took care of the religious side. I remember three policemen who patrolled around Sutton and two doctors. One was Dr. Campbell, who lived and had his surgery at the Phoenix House, Peckershill Road, and the other one who I knew was Dr. Tom O’Keefe, who lived at New Street.

In my opinion, the majority of the people were working class, and yet even between this section of people there were divisions. On the one hand, there were the tradespeople, the clerks, the bosses at the local pits and works. These families strove to improve their lives by trying to save out of their incomes (“putting by for a rainy day”), improving their children’s education by sending them to a higher class school, looking to their religious education and dressing them up in a decent way. These children were taught manners and how to greet people and show respect. These families were the backbone of the catechisms, the Sunday Schools, the churches and chapels, the Sunday guilds, the men’s Bible classes, the Women’s Fellowships. They changed from their every day clothes to wear their Sunday Best on a Sunday. In those days, to do this, you were considered fortunate.

On the other hand there were the folk who, by misfortune, unemployment, or lack of ambition to improve their lot, lived a kind of “happy-go-lucky” existence. They lived from day to day - tomorrow could look after itself. A lot of the menfolk, regardless of their families’ welfare, spent all the money they could get hold of in the public houses and indulged in betting on horse racing. In some of the houses, betting slips were taken and money was placed on their fancy. Several of these houses were raided by the police at various times, when the Black Maria came and bundled all those in the house into the van, to search for money and slips. They were then driven to the Town Hall for fines or sentences as it was against the law to indulge in this kind of betting. A Bill for the suppression of betting in streets or public places was passed in 1906 and all offenders could be arrested without a warrant. When these raids took place, it caused great excitement, and people flocked to that particular street to see who had been caught. It was surprising how soon word of the raids was passed around.

It was understood by many on-lookers that the Bookmaker would help out unofficially with the fines and when they were settled, business would continue again fairly quickly at another house, always in the poorest of quarters.

What could the women folk do in these circumstances to improve their lot? Very little, I’m afraid. In these hard times, there was very little work available for them, and the girls and lads were hard put to find jobs.

### **The “Sheeting Sheds”**

These were in Penlake Lane. You could approach the Sheds from Lionel Street or through Pudding Bag and over the bridge over the main line. It was actually the London North Western Railway Stores. A train was dispatched every Monday, full of railway supplies for the stations and railway depots. The main work for the men and women was the making and repairing of the tarpaulin sheets for covering wagons and goods in transit.

### **The Engine Sheds**

Situated in Baxters Lane, these housed the many shunting engines in and around St. Helens, and their maintenance was carried out there. The engines pulled back and to up the Runcorn Gap Railway with its many sidings which contained hundreds of tons of coal and goods of all descriptions. It required two engines at times to push the wagons towards Clock Face. I lived for a time alongside the railway and witnessed the struggle these engines had to get a grip on the lines, sand being ejected from the sandboxes onto the rails.

### **The Plate Layers**

These worked in gangs under a gaffer, and different gangs had different lengths of track to look after. The one I was familiar with was the one from Collins Green Station to St. Helens Junction, as, at one point, I used to work on the light repairs to wagons. This particular gang numbered five in all. It was a troublesome length of track, due to it running over and across Bold and Sutton Moss. This was in the early 1930s. They showed me their take home pay - £1=19-6 (present day, £2 less 2<sup>1/2</sup>).

### **Billy Wood's Pottery**

This was at Moss Nook, off Watery Lane, towards Sutton Moss.

### **The Old Teapot**

Richard Davies was at Eltonhead Road. I still have a number of clay pots with the name and address showing plainly below the rim.

### **The Rolling Mill**

The old copper works at Rolling Mill Lane, off Watery Lane is still producing, although it is now known as Thomas Bolton and has connections with the BIC at Prescot.

### **Crone & Taylors**

Located at Worsley Brow, fertilisers and now conveyors etc.

### **Allan Bartons**

This was at Station Road. An engineering firm in the early days and manufacturer of light locomotives

### **Powder Works**

The Powder works lay between Hills Moss Road and Normans Road and made explosives for the engineering industry.

### **Wm. Neil & Sons**

At Neill's Row, Bold. Heavy and light engineering, soap frames, sinking gear for the pits. Noted for its high class work and its production of good engineering workers. My two brothers worked there under Harry Leather, a very strict engineer.

### **Reckitts Blue Works**

These works were at the end of Walkers Lane in Mickle Head Green. The firm produced the famous "Dolly Blue Bags", without which no washday was complete. The bags were used to blanch or make the white clothes whiter still. I believe smalt was the substance from which the cobalt blue was extracted. The Dolly Blue Bags were sold at Chandlers shops.

Some young women and girls worked on the pit brows, some worked in the "Screens" sorting the stone out from the coal on the moving belts at the local pits. Others worked at the Burtonwood Brewery and clayholes and brickworks round about, but the majority of these jobs demanded girls who were tough and not frightened of the adverse conditions. So, apart from these jobs which helped the family's income, a lot of women took in other people's washing, and helped the class of people who could afford to pay them a few shillings for housework and washing. Then again, it was ingrained in quite a





*Reckitt's Blue Bags were made by the Rickett's Blue Works in Walkers Lane*

lot of colliers attitude to take a few days off work even when they had the opportunity to work a full week. Then there were the times when the pits worked short-time.

So in these conditions, what chance had the majority of those children to improve themselves? The clothes they wore had to be worn every day in the week, including Sunday in the majority of cases. This could have been one of the main reasons why they did not attend chapel or church. I felt sorry for most of the lads and girls. They were decent enough, but I suppose they would have felt embarrassed standing side by side in contrast with those who wore their Sunday clothes. And so a lot of the lads and young men formed schools of gaming on the "Owd Tip", or the "Owd Bank" away from the houses. Here, they played "pitch and toss" and card games for coppers. They always had a "look out" posted on a high spot close at hand, where they could see any of the police coming towards them. When this happened and the alarm was given, the money and cards were grabbed and all and sundry would take to their heels as fast as they could run. I never recollect any being caught. I suppose breaking the school up was sufficient - it served as a warning that the law was being broken. Apart from these two divisions of the working class I can only think of three families of independent means which one could refer to as Middle Class - Colonel Michael Hughes, who resided at Sherdley Park, the Borrowes family, who lived at the big house in Peckershill Road facing Junction Lane, and the Thompson family at Leach Hall in Leach Lane.

### **Colonel Michael Hughes**

The first time I saw Colonel Michael Hughes was in church at St. Nicholas, New Street. He appeared to me to be a powerfully built man, over six feet in height. As his title implies, he was an old army man, and during the last century he was responsible, at times, for law and order, especially when the strikes took place at the pits. He was also interested in sport, especially cricket and he founded the Sutton Cricket Club at New Street in 1902, moving it from Hoghton Road where the football ground now is. The old Suttoners still refer to this site as "Thowd Cricket Ground". Michael Hughes was also interested in the running of Sutton Harriers.

The twenty acres of land containing the old Sutton Park were purchased, I believe, from the Colonel in 1903. The Colonel died in 1938, and after his death, Colonel Hughes Young succeeded him and disposed of Sherdley Park to the St. Helens Corporation, where various sports are held, and the annual St. Helens Show is held in July.

If I was asked which part of Sutton did I think was the centre, I would unhesitatingly plump for the area where Peckershill Road ran across the top end of Junction Lane. This was the place for all kinds of business to be run and where people converged from distant parts of Sutton, when I was a lad, to do their shopping.

At the far end of Peckershill Road on the left hand side, facing Pudding Bag, was Richard Evans' Coalyard, where the local coalmen with horses and carts, filled and weighed their bags of coal ready for delivery around Sutton. Here, you could go and fill a bag of coal for yourself and hire one of the sturdy little hand trucks. These trucks had two iron wheels, a wooden base just sufficient to place a bag of coal on, and a saw-necked steel handle. You could lean the bag on with a transverse steel bar across the top to pull or shove it along.

You first picked your truck out and placed a bag on it. Then you pulled it onto the weighbridge, where it was weighed. You then paid a deposit of one shilling for the loan of the truck and bag. You then paid for whatever coal you had taken, pulled the lot home, emptied the coal out, and went back to the coalyard and redeemed your shilling deposit.

Coming back along Peckershill Road, and crossing Robins Lane, you passed, on your left hand side, the Vulcan public house, around which were six houses with front gardens to them. This was where the nuns lived, before moving to Waterdale House. Next was the Phoenix House, where Dr. Campbell lived and had his surgery alongside the Phoenix Brewery which, when in the process of brewing, and with the right wind blowing, swept its aroma across the Show Field to our houses in Edgeworth Street. One of my friends worked there from the age of fourteen as assistant brewer. His name was Thomas Hand, and another, named Hugh Speakman, was a drayman there, delivering casks and bottles of beer.

Next to the brewery was a large piece of land, walled off on its four sides, containing the Borrows House, which in the last century was the headquarters of the Providence Foundry. Next door was a Chandlers or ironmongers shop, and then Bells Grocery and bakehouse. Crossing Fisher Street was Charlie Swift's Fruit Shop, with a chip shop alongside Royle's Shop, a few houses and then two Co-Op butchers' shops. One had fresh meat and the other had frozen meat. Then there were a few more houses before you came to the Locomotive Inn, which local people called the Round House - the frontage curved round from Peckershill Road to Ellamsbridge Road.

Crossing Ellamsbridge Road, you could see Peter Evans' barbers shop - the premises have now been altered and it is known as the Trustees Bank. The bank was followed by a row of houses to the end of this side of Peckershill Road. Now starting on the opposite side, we were confronted by a Welsh Chapel. Next came several houses and a grocery and sweets shop. A few more houses and then a greengrocers, owned by A. Williams. Then across the opening of Alice Street you came to Hunters clothiers and pawn shop. Next was an ironmongers, followed by the Sutton Co-Op, across the opening of Lee Street to Chestertons the watch repairer. Next was Aspinalls home made pie shop, some more houses, before you came to the Meadow Dairy. This sold butter and eggs and, during the 1914-1918 war, you queued up for treacle and jam with your own mug or jar, on the rare occasions when they received a supply.

Crossing Herbert Street, you could see the sole Chemist's Shop of Sutton and moving past Abel Pennington's butchers shop, you crossed Junction Lane and passed the Prince of Wales pub opposite Edward Borrows' house. Then came a house or two and a draper's shop. Again, crossing the opening of Powell Street, you came to a barbers shop, with the red and white pole pointing upwards outside the shop window. I believe that at one time it indicated that the barber could apply leeches, the blood-sucking work, to peoples' bodies, to suck the blood from them as some kind of cure for some ailments. The red and white spiral painting on the pole represents the bleeding and the bandaging. A small row of houses, of which the end one, Langfords, did photography, then crossing the road to Station Road, was a row of houses which led down to Richard Evans' coalyard.

**Bank House, The Farm, Bank House Cottages, The Steam Engine, The Thompson Family**

Very well did I know this family from my early days as a child when they lived at Bank House, and later at the old Leach Hall, Sutton Leach.

However, first I would like to describe the small community living at Bold. The Bank House itself still stands where the Thompsons lived next to it. It was an L-shaped building, comprising a Harness Room, two large rooms for horse fodder, sections for the big shire horses and the light heavy horse for pulling the ambulance. At right angles to this was the Carriage Room which had a wooden floor and had no windows in it. This room contained three different sized two-wheeled spring carriages, which we called traps or floats, and a governess trap with seating all round. Next was the horse pulled four wheeled ambulance, a splendidly coach built job, and lastly a loosebox for Tim the pony, who pulled the governess trap.

Walking through the Carriage Rooms and looking to the right was the Wash House and coal bunker, which was shared between my aunt's family and a family named Prophets. One family washed Monday and the other on Tuesday. In front was a fair sized piece of land for the drying of clothes, facing the open fields.

Moving to the left, you passed through a wooden gate and you would see two attached pebble dashed white cottages. The first one, lived in by the Prophets, was the smaller. In it lived Jim Prophet and his wife and daughter Ester. We called her "Essy". When, as a small child, I went into this cottage, an old woman would be sitting with long, black skirts on, a shawl around her shoulders, a man's cap on her head, and a clay pipe in her mouth, puffing out smoke, whilst rocking herself in a rocking chair by the open coal fire. I never heard her speak. She would nod to me and smile behind the puffs of smoke. I thought she was Jim Prophet's mother.

Jim Prophet was the Charge hand at Bold Colliery's timber yard. This cottage had only one entrance at the front door, and stepping inside was rather on the dark side, there being only one window at the front. To the rear of the room was the wall of the Carriage Rooms, allowing no chance of a window being fixed to give light. Under the front window was a cold water tap, and underneath was the old stone slop stone and a wooden draining board. The crockery was all stacked on an old Welsh Dresser or kitchen sideboard. I never went upstairs, but I imagine the room there was divided into two parts. If so, I would think the division to the rear would have been very dark indeed.

This contrasts with my Uncle Jim's house next door, which was twice the size, with windows at the front, rear and the eastside. My uncle's family consisted of his wife, my Aunt Jemima and my cousins: Bob, who first helped my uncle as farm bailiff and later was farm bailiff for Squire Banks at Winstanley near Billinge; Frank, the wages clerk at Collins Green Colliery and Bold; Nellie, dressmaker and a munitions worker in the First World War; and the youngest Jim, ten years older than myself, was, for a time, Fitter and Turner at Collins Green Colliery, and later foreman at Bold.

Among all other happenings, two things stand out in my mind connected with the farm. Around twelve o'clock on a Friday, my Uncle Jim would bring out the large two-wheeled trap and harness the big grey dappled horse named Paddy to it and set off to Collins Green offices, where the pay clerks and the local policeman waited for him to

arrive for the red pay packets made out for all the colliery workers from down below and all surface workers. The pay packets were all safely packed in boxes and then onto the trap. Then, under the protection of the local Bobby and my Uncle Jim's whip, they would set off for Bold Colliery, making it a Red Letter Day, as well as a Red Packet day at Bold.

What a different world we live in now. How far would a horse & trap containing four clerks, a driver, a policeman with a concealed truncheon and a consignment of workmen's wages get along a country road from Collins Green to Bold without being attacked and robbed? Not very far, I am afraid. What a difference there is for those of us born in the early part of this century, in comparison to the present day when murder and mugging attacks on women, children and old people are the order of the day, and the "Do-Gooders" rejoice in their smug way at the patterns of life they have wrought about. When will common sense return and make punishment fit the crime?

The second happening which will always be clear cut in my mind is the wrath of my Uncle Jim, the recklessness of my cousin Jim and my first experience of a working steam engine, and the calming down and deep interest of Mr. Thompson, the Colliery Agent. You see, my dad was brought up with my Uncle Jim and both our families were a close knit affair. My cousins, living at Bold, had their dinners at our house when attending school, and young Jim was like an elder brother to me. He was intelligent, strong and he could make you laugh by his wealth of story-telling. He was my idol, especially when my brother Fred told me he was the "cock of school" at Sutton National C. of E. School

Jim had a passion for anything mechanical, be it guns, rifles or motor cars or bikes. My uncle used to lock his cartridges up and pocket the keys so Jim would not get at them. For a time, he also maintained Dr. Campbell's first car and drove him around at weekends.

I had my first ride on a motor bike with Jim. It was an "Alldays Allan", and I would be about 8 years old, and Jim would be 18. It was a Saturday, when he wasn't working. My Uncle Jim had taken one of the shires and four-wheeled carts and set off for Wigan. He told my aunt he would not be home until early evening, The Thompson family had also all gone out from Bank House.

Jim said to me "Come on, Frank, I'll show thi something working with a bit of good luck, if they leave us alone, tha's never seen before."

Off we went to the farmyard and entered the Harness Room, in which was a large open fireplace, two wooden forms, two sliding glass framed doors in front of the cupboard which held the harness and cleaning stuff. Behind that was a working bench with a small door in the corner. I followed Jim through the door and then I was confronted with a horizontal steam engine fastened down to an approximately 18 foot concrete bed. Jim explained that it was used at one time to supply the motive power for chopping the hay for the pit ponies and farm horses. He said "I've examined it and adjusted one or two parts and oiled it. Would you like to see it go Frank?" I looked at him and nodded my head. "Well, come on then. First we'll have to get steam up. I said "What will your dad say?" Jim ignored this and said "Bring that box of sticks and paper.

Outside the harness room stood a vertical steam boiler about twelve foot high and four foot in diameter with a fire box in the bottom, with an iron door at the front.

Jim then said "I've checked the water inside and it shows on that gauge. That other gauge shows how much steam pressure we will get to move the engine. I'll fetch one of the barrows and you can fill it up with coal under the loft steps." The stone steps were built on two brick arches and led from the farmyard to the lofts above the harness room and stables. Underneath the steps was a rope attached to a bell which was rung at meal times by the maid at Thompsons and heaped under the steps were several tons of coal for use in the Bank House and for the fire in the harness room. I filled the barrow with coal and Jim wheeled it to the boiler where he had a fire going. He proceeded to spade more coal on and then shut the boiler doors to improve the draught. "Fill some more coal into the barrow, Frank. We'll need some more coal yet before we get enough steam." And so the time went by, coal and yet more coal going on. Jim said "Everything about it is stone cold. It will take quite a lot of heating yet." I looked at Jim apprehensively and said "Will it explode, Jim?" Jim replied "Leave it to me, Frank. Everything will be all right. We'll soon have that engine turning." Remembering, afterwards, the events of the afternoon, the only explosion was when my Uncle Jim returned and saw the boiler chimney smoking and the sound of the steam engine revolving.

Eventually, Jim, scrutinising the gauges, said "I think we have enough steam now. Let's go into the Engine Room and give it the once over." He checked different parts and made sure it was not on "dead centre" by barring the flywheel into the correct position, the main belt on the driving pulley had long since been discarded. There was only a gap in the wall where it had gone through to drive the machines.

"Now for it, Frank," Jim said, "I'm going to turn this valve and give it a crack of steam." I nodded my head and stood behind him, not feeling too sure about anything. I had never been so near a steam engine before - bear in mind, I was only eight years old - and I knew Jim had not got permission from his dad, and Mr. Thompson would have something to say.

The valve turned in Jim's hand and I could hear the steam hissing and the piston and connecting rods moved. The flywheel and pulley moved round and then she was running smoothly. Jim started laughing and said to me "We've cracked it, Frank lad." I started laughing as well as him in relief. But the laughter coming from us ceased when we heard a voice of thunder shout "James Bamber, I will not have this. Come here at once." My Uncle Jim, Jim's dad, stood there, framed in the doorway with whip in hand. I could see him, mad with rage. Then Mr. Thompson appeared behind him and put a hand on my Uncle Jim's shoulder and said "Half a moment, Jim. See what young Jim's been up to. If there's no damage done, a reprimand will be sufficient. We'll put it down to the lad's interest in steam engines. It is ages since this one ran."

And so we all stood by the engine, watching it run; the Colliery Agent, the Farm Bailiff, my cousin and myself, with Mr. Thompson asking my cousin different questions about the engine, which it seemed to me Jim answered with confidence. Mr. Thompson departed and the tension eased. My Uncle Jim gave his son a dressing down about doing things without permission, and then we all unloaded the goods from the cart and made ourselves useful one way and another. Whenever I heard my aunt or uncle addressing

Jim as James Bamber, I knew his wilfulness had offended his mother somehow or other. But that is the way he was throughout his life. We were always in touch with one another.

### **Bank House to Leach Hall**

The Thompson family was comprised of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, two sons and one daughter. The eldest son was Thomas Arthur. He was known as T.A.T. He became the engineer at the Sutton Manor Colliery. Alice, the daughter, was the next eldest. She never married, and came to live at Leach Hall with her father after Mrs. Thompson died and Mr. Thompson retired from the Collins Green Colliery Co. The youngest was William. I called him Billy, he preferred to be called that, while he called me Ginger - I didn't mind. They also had two servants. One, Miss Simms, did the housework, and another lady came and did the washing of clothes etc.

Swear words were taboo, both at home and at my aunt's home. I was very young, and staying at my aunt's during the school holiday period, when Billy came round, knocked on the door and asked my aunt if I could come and play with him. My aunt said yes, but as I went through the doorway she called me back and said "Frank, listen to me. I know you don't swear, but Billy does. He has picked it up from the workmen at the collieries when he has gone there on the farm carts. So don't let me hear you using swear words." I nodded my head and went and joined Billy. When we got round to the orchard, Billy said "What was that your aunt was on about?" I replied "I have not to learn to swear like you can do."

Billy started laughing and said "That's all right, but I will teach you a little poetry first. Are you willing?" I answered "Yes." I would only be about five or six years old at the time, and Billy would be about three years older. He then said "Let's see how quick you can pick it up. Just say this slowly after me:"

"I chased a bug around a tree  
I'll have his blood  
He knows I will"

I repeated it a few times and got it off by heart. He said to me "Now say it as fast as you can", which I did, and Billy started laughing and said "Now Ginger you know how to swear. You can tell your aunt you know a little poetry."

I looked at Billy and said "You know I could not say that to my aunt without both of us getting into trouble. Besides, she wouldn't allow me to come and play with you."

Billy said "Come on, below the strawberry bed, next to the greenhouses, there is a load of sand. We can go and make sandcastles." And so we kneeled down in the sand, busily making castles, when I heard the bell ringing out loud and clear. I had heard it before rather faintly, but I had never before attached any importance to it. But this time I did. Billy said "Follow me, Ginger" and led the way into the Bank House kitchen.

And what an appetising smell assailed our nostrils, the smell of freshly baked scones and steaming cocoa, set out on the table. Around the table were Miss Simms the maid, Alice the sister of Billy, and Mrs. Thompson. There were five chairs set round the table, and Mrs. Thompson said to me "Sit on that chair next to William. Would you like a

scone and do you like cocoa, Frank?" I said "Yes please." She then said "When you are playing with William and you hear the bell, you must come to the kitchen right away. That is mid-morning and mid-afternoon." Mrs. Thompson was a perfect gentle lady. She treated me, during those holiday periods I spent there, like one of the family.

On Friday mornings at 10 o'clock, I had to be washed and changed into my best clothes and ready in the farmyard, where my Uncle Jim had Tim the pony harnessed to the governess trap, waiting for Mrs. Thompson, Alice, William and myself to get aboard. When we had taken our seats and a balance was made in the trap, Mrs. Thompson took up the reins and, with a "Gee up Timmy", we were on our way to Earlestown Market. Those hours we spent round the market were full of interest, listening to the many stallholders shouting their wares, moving in and out of the stalls, following Mrs. Thompson and carrying the bags she brought with her and then loading them into the trap and jogging back home where Miss Simms, the maid, had cakes and cocoa ready for us.

I will always remember Mrs. Thompson and the way she treated me. My old aunt said that she had come from a very wealthy family, and that she had provided, as a gift, land in Sutton for a chapel to be built. I may be wrong, but I thought it could be the Methodist Chapel in Herbert Street.

Mr. Thompson was a man of singular appearance. The keen looking face with eyes that missed nothing, the waxed moustache and pointed beard, the black cap he wore on his head, the black suit and shoes and around his shoulders he wore a black cape. To my mind, he could have stepped out of one of the pages of the Victorian type of books.

You may wonder why the big house, Bank House, was so named. Well, originally, the man running the collieries for the owners was the Banksman. He was the main cog of the colliery. He was the surface manager, book-keeper and was responsible for all weighing of coal and sales. He was later known as the Agent. All undermanagers were subject to him.

What kind of man was Mr. Thompson, the Agent of both Collins Green and Bold collieries? According to my dad, he was of inventive mind and introduced quite a number of his own patents to improve the production of coal. He was always interested in listening to a workman's ideas of how to improve the job. He also was appreciative of conscientious and hardworking men under him. One case in point was Bill Haywood, a hardworking collier down No.3 pit at Bold, where my dad was, at that time, the Underlooker. It came to Mr. Thompson's ears that Bill had purchased a horse and cart lorry, and his intention was to work it at weekends, or whenever he and his family could find the time. He started off by getting his coal from Richard Evan's coalyard at Peckershill Road. Mr. Thompson heard this and sent for him. Bill, fearing the worst about his job at the colliery conflicting with the coal business, was surprised when Mr. Thompson commended him for his efforts and enterprise and offered him the opportunity of buying the coal from Bold. A coal wagon would be shunted on the Shop Road line alongside the washed coal wagons for Forshaws Brewery. Bill gladly accepted this and it became a family business, Bill Haywood was the sole coalman at the Colliery. In later years, when serving my time as a colliery carpenter, I used to repair his coal wagons and was friendly with Ernie, Bill's son, who succeeded in the business.



### **Tommy's Gold Sovereign**

Another pointer to Mr. Thompson's character was told to me by my dad. Tommy Syviter was less than medium height. He was a wiry man. It would be a question whether he pulled the scales at nine stone, but Tommy had the will and guts to hold his own with men of greater physical attributes. Seven o'clock in the morning was the first winding of coal, but previous to this was the winding of men and the first winding was at approximately six o'clock.

This first winding of men meant quite a lot to Tommy and men like him to support their families. The old maxim "up with the lark" was too late for them. They were out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, then down the stairs and a poke at the fire which, in most collier's houses had been backed up the night before. Some coals were shovelled on and then off with his nightshirt and, from over the oven, his pit vest, shirt and trousers were hastily pulled on. Out of the oven, a bowl of porridge was drawn, milk and sugar added while the kettle was boiled and a couple of cups of tea made. Tea drunk, socks and clogs were put on. He then checked his "Tommy Tin", to see if his sandwiches had been put in. A lot of colliers preferred jam butties. Next, he got his tin water bottle (sometimes called a "Billy Can"), and filled it with fresh water out of the tap. These had a cord running round the bottle, with sufficient length to go over his shoulder. The Tommy Tin had a steel handle-like attachment for threading through his pit belt. When these were fixed in position and jacket, cap and scarf put on, he was out through the front door, door slammed shut and then his clogs would clatter up the street as fast as they could go. Other doors would slam and a tattoo of clogs would resound in that street and others like it. The time would be five o'clock, or possibly earlier.

Out of Herbert Street and up Helena Road and then into Bold Road, parting company at the Boundary where the Clock Face colliers from Sutton made their way up the Boundary path while he kept straight ahead into what was called Travers Entry, the old name for Bold, that is the road which ran to the T junction at the top left for Bold Colliery and right for Neills Road and Foundry.

Spring and summer mornings made it more bearable for Tom, looking ahead to his turn at the pit, but when winter came, bringing with it rain, hail, wind and snow, it was no joke up that road. There were no lamps after leaving the boundary, no cover to shelter in - it was a case of "Yed darn, keep gooin'" and he had to rely on "Shanks Pony" to get him as fast as he could to that warm pit bottom, where he could take off his clothes, and hang them onto a nail fastened in a pit prop to dry, ready for him at the end of the shift.

He would then turn left after leaving Travers Entry and then right, carrying on past the main entrance to Bold Colliery, which was then an avenue of hawthorn hedges just wide enough for two horse drawn vehicles to pass one another. Past the two semi-detached houses belonging to the colliery on his left and the brick chute, down which the Bold bricks came onto the carts, and then sharp left up the narrow path where he could see the lamp shop's lights twinkling at the foot of the great stuff rook. In the winter's darkness, this had fires burning round and down its sides.

On Tom's left now were the long brick kilns, which, Tom knew, secreted the hot and warm chambers and the archways, with their temporary brick wall knocked down, inviting him to take shelter in their warmth. But no, he must not yield to that temptation,

he must carry on and be one of the first to draw his oil lamp, which would be checked, filled up with oil and locked in the safety position.

Touching on the subject of Bold Brickworks and its position so close to the road, it was a favourite calling place for the roaming tramps to call and spend a night there, above the kilns, lying spread out with their kit alongside them. Indeed, I have seen many of them when working late at the Brickworks.

But now Tom had his lamp and, making his way along the pit brow to get his “kale” in the first winding, he and several others would be packed in that cage as tight as herrings in a box. The browman would signal to the winder, and down they would all drop, trusting to the alertness of the winder to stop it at the pit bottom.

Then, out they would come from the cage to have, one by one, their clothing searched for contraband such as matches, cigarettes etc., and again, a check on their lamps. He then moved quickly to his nail on the timber prop to divest himself of his clothes, leaving on his pit vest, a pair of shorts, socks and clogs. His Billy can over his shoulder and his Tommy Tin fastened to his belt, with a short travelling stick in his hand, he would be away, as fast as he could go to the coalface, about a mile and a half away, making his journey from his home to the coal face three miles, before he started to hew the coal.

Travelling to the coal face was where Tom had the advantage of the bigger men. He could run down the main haulage and leave others behind. Every so often on either side of the haulage way there were manholes cut into the sides. These were places where a man could stand safely when the haulage was running or from a runaway of boxes.

Suddenly he was aware of a light shining towards him and the figure of a man stepped out of a manhole. He put his hand up and said “Good morning. Why are you in such a hurry?” “What is your name?” Tom recognised Mr. Thompson and replied “Good morning, Mr. Thompson. I always run to work. The earlier I can get to the coalface, the earlier I can get my boxes, and the more coal I can get.” Mr. Thompson nodded to him in agreement and pressed something into the palm of his hand. Tom looked down at it and said, “Thank you Mr. Thompson”. That something he looked down at was a gold sovereign - equal to what was then half a week’s pay.

### **The Second Gold Sovereign**

Well do I remember my Uncle Jim. He was like a grandfather to me. The face full of character, he had a beard and moustache and on his head he wore a felt hat and always at his heels was his dog, a fair sized black & white fox hound named Bruce. He loved his horses and he loved us children. Many a time he had me perched alongside him on the farm carts and floats, or sitting on the hay at harvest time. I must have walked miles behind him in the furrows he ploughed when it was dry, and I had taken him a can of tea and his “bagging” to eat.

I well remember the flocks of gulls and lapwings following us on the newly turned earth, and in the spring he took me and showed me the lapwing’s eggs, lying in a small depression in the ground, like the imprint of his great shire horse’s hoofmark. You could hardly call it a nest, yet the mother bird used to hatch them out for all that it was so scant of straw or grass, so unlike the thrushes, hedge sparrows or robins nests. When the

swallows arrived in his stables, he would lift me up to see the eggs lying in the nests and later on the young ones. He would say to me “Never take the eggs from those birds’ nests, Frank. It will bring us all bad luck. They work hard catching the insects for their families and do a lot of good for us.”

I can see him now coming through the cottage door with his gun in his right hand, pointing down, with the butt under his arm and in his left hand, a hare or a brace of rabbits. He knew his countryside like the back of his hand, and old Bruce knew every word he uttered. He would lie still when commanded, and retrieve when he was told, he could toss pennies up, placed on his nose, and catch them. You could put a piece of meat on his nose and he would let it rest there until you said “All right, it’s yours.” He was the first dog I came in contact with and I loved both him and his master.

Uncle Jim ran the farm his way. If a man stepped out of line, there was no hesitation on Uncle Jim’s part to correct him, and yet he was absolutely fair and the men respected him.

He also had humour, wit and liked to tease. One incident when I was very young sticks in my mind. I was in the back kitchen at the time when he returned home with his gun and a hare. As he came in, my aunt called out “What is it you have for me today?” My uncle put his finger to his lips and winked at me, placed the hare on the slab and picked me up, seized hold of the seat of my pants with his teeth and walked into the kitchen with his gun in his right hand, together with me, hanging, arms and legs downwards while he pointed at me with his left hand. My aunt laughed, she could see the humour of it, but then there was a tearing sound - the seat of my trousers had given way and I fell on the cloth rug by the fireside! The rug was well made and broke my fall.

My aunt rushed forward to make sure I was alright, and when I was found to be sound enough, she pretended to scold my Uncle Jim, but it all ended up the three of us laughing, and my aunt had another job, sewing a new patch on the seat of my pants.

Alas, all good and bad things come to an end, and this was one of the good things which took a bad turn for me in my young life. It must have been about seven years after the above story of me and my pants parting company. It was Sunday and, after attending Sunday School, I set off with the Sunday Chronicle to my aunt’s, as I did every Sunday. When I got there, Uncle Jim was sitting in the old rocking chair. He looked ill, and my aunt said to me “The doctor has been, your uncle is not so good. Will you go to Dr. Campbell’s later on in the week and bring a bottle of medicine he will have ready for you. You can bring it with the paper next Sunday. Dr. Campbell has left a bottle for this week. I said “Certainly I will, aunt.” Two Sundays later, my Uncle Jim’s bed had been brought down into the kitchen and my uncle lay there, looking pale and haggard. He smiled at me and patted my head, and all I could do was to smile back at him. I did not think then it was so serious.

The next Sunday came round and I arrived with the paper and medicine. I walked straight in as usual and my aunt stood there looking at me. I knew then something had happened - she had no spectacles on and her eyes were red with crying. She said “Frank, love, Uncle Jim will not need the medicine anymore, come and look at him.”

We both stood together, my aunt and I, looking down on him. She said “He won’t feel any more pain now where he has gone, Frank, you may touch him.” I leaned forward and kissed his brow. I loved him, and now I had lost him to the dreaded scourge of cancer.

After this painful scene, the funeral took place, and it was the first and only time I saw my uncles and my dad together. The large colliery float had been sent to the station at Collins Green to meet them, and there were three of them - Uncle Jack, Bill and Tom. In that order, they walked forward to greet my dad and shake hands. I was eyeing them curiously because Uncle Jack, of slim medium build and Uncle Tom, stiff set, each had hold of my Uncle Bill’s arms and he had a white stick in his right hand. He was six foot tall, of powerful build and it was his ears that caught my eye. They were cauliflower ears. When I asked my dad about this at a favourable moment, he told me that Uncle Bill Bamber was a well known wrestler, and now was almost blind in his eyes, having suffered damage to them.

It was a month or so later when I came up to my aunt’s cottage to stay with her during a holiday period. We were sitting opposite one another at the fireside. She was knitting and I was staring into the fire, making imaginary pictures of the red coals and flames that licked round them and I noticed, hanging and wafting from the bars, a kind of black, cobwebby effect. How they built themselves up is a matter of conjecture. I said to my aunt “Look at those hanging from the bars” and she replied “They are called ‘strangers on the bars’, the old people used to say they foretold a visit from strangers.” Superstition dies hard, but nevertheless, she’d have a visit the next week from the vicar of St. Michael’s and women’s fellowship, although you could not call the bearded Mr. Mitchell, the vicar, a stranger.

My aunt placed her knitting down and reached for her purse. From it she produced a golden sovereign and said to me “I’ll bet you have never seen one of these, Frank.” I looked at it and agreed with her that I had not. She then said “It belonged to your Uncle Jim. It was given to him by Mr. Thompson for something he once did.” And then she carried on to explain how it came about.

There was a great sandstone horse drinking trough that was positioned outside the stables. When I was small I used to think to myself that, given the chance, I would swim in that trough, and when it was a really hot day and no-one was about, Billy Thompson and myself had taken shoes and stockings off and waded about in it.

My aunt said that it was not always there. At one time it lay out in the fields for cattle and recuperating pit ponies who were given a chance of grazing in an open field. The smell of fresh air must have been like heaven to those poor ponies. Mr. Thompson and my uncle were walking across the fields together when they came to the sandstone trough, whereupon my uncle remarked that as it was no longer used there, it would be very handy to put it in the farmyard for the use of the farm horses. Mr. Thompson agreed with this suggestion and promised that he would arrange for the Yard Men at the collieries, whenever they had a slack period of work, to come and remove it. It must be quite heavy and it would have taken quite a number of men to lift it, load it and place it in the farmyard.

The weeks went by and then the months, and still the trough lay derelict in that field. And now it was harvest time and the crops lay flattened on the ground after being cut, drying out. The night before my uncle decided to bring the flat carts in to clear the field, he took a spade and dug a channel of earth away from under the sandstone block, width ways, enough to place two hemp ropes and a chain underneath. Next day he selected his best sprung flat cart and loaded the ropes and chain plus the half hundred weights that were used for weighing purposes and set off with the other flat cart and two horses for the field. Arriving there, he backed the cart he had selected over the trough and placed the two ropes and chain across the cart and underneath the trough in such a position that he could tighten the ropes and chain at one side between the front and back wheels.

The next move was to load as much of the crop onto the cart from round about and then proceed to load the second cart with as much as he could with his right hand man Bill Gleave (who eventually married my cousin Nellie.) They then transferred this load onto the first cart over the trough and proceeded in this way till those strong springs under the cart flattened out as much as possible. Then, the ropes were tightened and the chain secured under the centre of the trough. Next, the crop was transferred from the first cart onto the other one, and taken to the farm under cover. When all the crop had been removed from the cart, the springs under the cart returned to their original upward thrust position. In doing so they had lifted the great trough from the ground and there was sufficient clearance to enable it to undertake its journey, steadily, to the farm yard, where it was backed into position, placed on bricks and was ready to be filled with water.

This completed, Uncle Jim went back to the harvesting and it was late evening when he called it a day and returned with the last load. When he turned into the farmyard he saw Mr. Thompson standing by the trough, whereupon Mr. Thompson waved him over and said "You have beaten me to it this time, Jim. How the devil did you do it?" After my uncle explained the method he had used, he drew the gold sovereign out of his pocket and said "Well done, Jim. I would never have thought of that way to bring it here". And so it became a keepsake in my old aunt's possessions.

### **A Peep Through a Telescope**

One day Billy Thompson took me upstairs in the Bank House. His mother and father had gone out, so it gave us a chance of exploring the upper rooms. Of course, Billy had been in Mr. Thompson's work rooms a few times before, but I had not - it was something special to me.

The first room we went in to look around was a workshop. There was a joiner's bench against the wall with planes and chisels lying on the bench, and evidence of Mr. Thompson working there, was the amount of shavings on the floor. There were also two machines. Billy said one was a bandsaw and the other a circular saw.

Leaving this room and going into the other, I saw an easel with a drawing board resting on pegs. A drawing was pinned on it. Then there was a very large assortment of pens and pencils. Finally, right by the window, looking towards Bold Colliery was a tripod with a large telescope resting on it.

Billy had a look through the telescope and said “Come on, Ginger. Have a look through this. I bet you’ve never seen anything like it.” I got a chair and placed it in position. Kneeling on it, I looked through the telescope and there, so close I felt I could touch them, were the lads and boxes on the pit gantries. The colliery itself seemed to be just outside the house.

I remembered this in later years when I started work as an apprentice joiner at Bold and another apprentice, who was older than me, told me that his dad, Arthur Heyes, the boss joiner, had been congratulated by Mr. Thompson for executing the fastest time in taking a winding rope off No.2 pit and replacing it with a new rope, when no-one knew Mr. Thompson was present at the colliery.

I recollected the telescope at Bank House used by Mr. Thompson, but I never made any comment about it, because it could have been thought of in an unfavourable light. I respected Mr. Thompson, knowing full well in my own mind, that he used the telescope for the betterment of the colliery and, as he was the responsible Agent, it was his business to know what was taking place.

And so both Mr. Thompson, the Agent, and my Uncle Jim Bamber, the Farm Bailiff, both bearded men born in the middle of the nineteenth century, have long since died, but they were responsible men who took a pride in their work and were interested in the people around them.

## **Chapter 8: 1917 to 1924. Sutton National C. of E. Boys School and Teachers**

They were a grand lot of teachers in our boys school. Now I think they will all have passed on. God bless them all. There was one exception. No one liked him, some even hated him. I suppose, looking back, he drove himself and others under him, too hard, to improve their teaching skills. He took the classes for music. He was the choir master for All Saints church and he was always referred to by us as “Owd Tolly”. The writing on walls, seen frequently these days, was seldom seen then. I remember coming to school one Monday morning to see the words “Tolly is daft” written in large letters with white chalk around the playground walls. After prayers that morning, Mr. Plews, the headmaster, thundered out that if he found out who the culprit was who had defaced the walls around the playground, he would flog him in front of all the school. The warning went home there and then. There was no further writing on the walls.

When you are seven years old, even the youngest of teachers look grown up. It was not surprising that several teachers changed their name due to marriage. Miss Golding became Mrs. Langford, Miss. Simms, the art teacher, became Mrs. Russell, Miss Wilkinson became Mrs. Mills and Miss. Smith became Mrs. Brown. Miss Saunders, daughter of the old Bold blacksmith, remained a spinster. She was tremendously fond of children and she was well liked. Mrs. Belshaw, a Scotch lady, was already married making the total number of ladies teaching in the boys school six. They taught the lower classes with the exception of Mrs. Langford who taught the XVII standard. Myself and others moved from standard V to VI, leaving the female teachers behind. We moved to be taught by Mr. Joseph Pritchard. In class we referred to him as “Owd Joe”. He was a great character and had spent a great number of years at the school. In fact, he had taught some of my classmates’ fathers. He was a good teacher. He had a good sense of humour and he told us a joke now and then. He was loved and respected by all my classmates.

I can see him now walking from St. Helens Junction Station with slow and measured tread, wearing a bowler hat, a clerical grey suit, a grey overcoat and carrying an umbrella tightly coiled, which he used as a walking stick. “Owd Joe” came from Liverpool but he spoke in plain English without a trace of a Scouse, Lancastrian or indeed any other accent.

Mr. Pritchard was of portly build His iron grey hair was thinning and it was on the short side with a neat grey moustache. I imagine he must have been sixty plus when I reached his class, Standard VI. He told us that he had come to teach in Sutton well before the turn of the century. He recalled his first day at the Sutton National School.

“I left the train at Junction Station and descended the steps outside, before crossing Station Road. I passed by the Junction Inn and looking across Junction Lane, I saw a group of men standing outside the Barber’s shop. The shop was situated at the corner of what we called “the Cinder Walk” (now called Cecil Street), due to it being an unpaved road. They looked a rough lot to me. Some were wearing scarves around their necks. Some wore a tie without a collar. All had cloth caps on. It wasn’t so much what they were wearing so much as the fact that they were eyeing me all over. I steadily walked towards them. One of them shouted “who’s yon?” to which the others replied “don’t know”. Others then shouted “let’s clod a brick at ‘im”. At this point, I held my hand up and asked “Can you direct me to the Sutton National Boys School? My name is Joe

Pritchard, I have come to teach there”. That inquiry dispelled any trouble that could have followed. “Up lane mister, turn reet and then left bit Round House<sup>1</sup> and its on’t reet pas tripe shaws thall not miss it” came the answer to my question. I thanked them and from that day on, I always got a cheery “good morning” from them and everyone I met on the way to school.

After prayers in the morning, the screens separating the hall into rooms were pushed into place. We assembled in the correct classroom to have the register called. “Owd Joe” would sit on a form to take us for a scripture lesson. His favourite stories were taken from the Old Testament. He told us about how the Israelites were in bondage and about their flight from Egypt across the Red Sea and the fate of the Egyptian hosts. He used to tell us about the customs and the way of life in Hebrew families, and about modern Jewish Life and traditions in Great Britain. We sat intent that we would not miss a single word. He had nicknames for us. Billy Critchley was called “Jody Moss” because he had taught his father Joe who had lived on the Moss.

Some of the lads were not too clever at spelling. Whenever we were reading, we had to stand up and read out loud. Some of the boys used to stumble and stammer over long words. Mr. Pritchard would shout “Call it Manchester if it’s too big for you.”

He was a good teacher. He took the trouble to explain matters and he had bags of patience. It was a rarity for him to use the strap.

Now it was the last day before the Christmas holidays. We had had our exams and a number of us had been told that we were going up into standard VII. That was the class Mr. Helsby taught. When I looked round at my classmates who were moving up, I could see nothing on their faces but gloom and in some cases, fright.

The ones who were staying down were full of glee, and we were wishing we could stay down with “Owd Joe”.

The Christmas holidays over, we were back at school. Prayers had been said, and we fled out of the main room, prepared for the worst. Before we came into school, those of us who were moving up into Standard VII had been taunted by others who were staying down, saying “Wait till Owd Tolly gets owd o’ yo with ‘is strap. Eel murder yo.”

Some people say there is a Devil, and we believed it then. I suppose the Devil can come in different guises, and we pictured him as “Owd Tolly”.

I remembered “Owd Joe” telling me to mend the case ball prior to games. I sat on the floor in the cloakroom, putting a patch on the bladder with a tube of solution, near the washbowls, when “Owd Tolly” came in and stood watching me without saying one word and no smile on his face. I remember thinking “What’s up wi’ ‘im? He doesn’t look so pleased. I think he must hate football and rugby.”

Well did I know it. The next music lesson, he switched over from singing out of the song books, and, after a brief explanation on the blackboard, he made us all stand up with music books in hand and he picked on me to begin. I was completely at sea. It was

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<sup>1</sup> Now called the Locomotive Inn.



foreign to me, and after a second or two, when he insinuated I was a “dunderhead”. He said “Hold out your hand, Bamber. I cannot waste time on you.” With that, he hit me across the hand and then said “Hold the other one out.” He hit me again, with force, and when I leaned forward to hold my hands together and then place them under my armpits, he struck me across the back. He continued along the class, giving others a single strap across the hand when they failed to describe the correct note.

I well remember that lesson. There was more weeping than singing. When we returned to our own class under “Owd Joe”, he could tell we had all been through it and said “Let me have a look at your hand, Bamber.” I showed him both hands, and on the back of one was a red weal, the shape of the strap. “Owd Joe” shook his head from side to side and said “Take it easy till going home time. You don’t need to write, with your hand like that.”

That was the difference between “Owd Tolly” and “Owd Joe” - the difference between good and bad.

I remember Tolly asking me if I would like to join the choir, to which I shook my head. I then said I would blow the organ for him when he played on Tuesday mornings for the school assembly in All Saints Church, a duty which I did until leaving school. It got me out of singing in the choir on a Tuesday, and also got me out of listening to the prattling of the vicar, another man I did not like.

“Owd Tolly” was devoid of all sporting instincts. An instance of this was whenever it was games time, he put sums on the blackboard and told us that they must be done before we could go out and play football, cricket or rugby. Some of the lads never got out to play because of this. This stopped us practising together and forming a school team. Standards VI, VII and Ex VII all had games time together and he had it planned to make most of the lads miserable, oh yes!

It was common knowledge amongst us lads how he came by his nickname “Tolly”. The older boys said that during a music lesson, we had to sing “toll for the brave”. Mr. Helsby told us that it was better to sing “toll” rather than “tole” and so with this, he earned his nickname. Empire day was “Owd Tolly’s day”. We would assemble in the long room. Some of us would have roughly made swords, painted with silver paint and wooden Roman shields. They would wear paper hats and they would wave their Union Jack flags. In the centre of the room was a piano with “Owd Tolly”. He would play with great gusto patriotic songs, which we would all sing. We sang such songs as “Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set”, “There’s a land a dear land that from East unto West” and “What is the meaning of Empire Day?” Everyone seemed to be proud of being British and the fact that the British Empire reached to all corners of the world. However, looking back, to when our country was looked upon as the wealthiest, that wealth did not reach the poor or the working classes. Many a time I had to stand on my seat whilst an inspection was made of our clothing and footwear. Many of my classmates wore cast off clothes from an older brother, regardless of how ill fitting they were. Often breeches were patched up on the seat so that they could still be worn. There were clog and stocking funds for those who had no footwear at all.

Head examinations for “nits” were also common. Notes to attend the clinic were made out for those who were found to be “suffering”. When we went home and told our parents that they were searching for dirty heads at school, talk about the Spanish Inquisition! We had to kneel down in front of our mother with a newspaper on her lap beneath our face. She then got busy with her steel comb.

One lad went through his schooling in a form all by himself, in different classes to the others. I suppose all of us lads were cruel in those days. We all addressed the lad as “stink”. This name calling did not seem to affect him as he had got used to it from a tender age. It was his parents that were at fault. He later left home, married and corrected himself. It is ironic that now our Empire has been ripped apart to exist as a small shadow of its former self our schools, are like palaces, our children are well nourished and our working conditions have improved beyond recognition. It makes one think where did the wealth of that Empire go in the early days of the 20th Century?

Back to school. As I have already described, “Owd Joe” took us for the “Old Testament”. “Owd Tolly” took us alternately for the “New Testament”. He used to set us a chapter or some verses from a chapter to learn off by heart. Two days later, he expected us to recite it from memory as best we could. We all had to stand and if we failed to recite it, we got the strap. There was more strapping than reciting! Some of us described this lesson as “murder lesson”. I recount one such time. We left prayers and filed into the classroom . Preparing for the worst, we took our places, standing up behind our desks . We hated every moment, expecting “Owd Tolly” to walk in any moment. To our joy, “Owd Joe” walked in. He smiled and said “Good morning, it’s quite a surprise for you is it not? I am now in charge of Standard VII, Mr Helsby has moved down to take charge of Standard VI!” We replied “Good morning Sir”. Everyone’s face was wreathed in smiles. We had escaped the dreaded “Tolly” - except for music and the New Testament that is!

Our good fortune continued. It was 1922, I had two years to go at school and I was tremendously interested in sport. I had already played cricket for the school team and I was looking forward to playing football and especially rugby league. The school had brought in a new master, a younger man than Mr. Pritchard and Mr. Helsby to teach Standard V and to take standards V,VI, VII and ExVII for sport. This altered a lot of things for us. His name was Mr. James Webster. Twice a week, we assembled in the schoolyard at 3.30pm. to be addressed by Mr. Webster. The first time we met he said “Are we all here?”. I replied “No sir, Mr. Helsby keeps his boys in to do sums before they can come out to play. He does not like sport and that makes it difficult to pick the best team”. Mr. Webster looked grim but he didn’t comment on it. He then said “Have we a football strip?” We replied that we had played Robins Lane in our own clothes and an assortment of jerseys that we had borrowed. We had two footballs, a rugby ball, a set of wickets, a ball and three sets of pads. Mr. Webster then said that he would inquire about getting a strip for us. The following week, he said that we shouldn’t hold out too much hope about getting our strip this season, perhaps next season we would have it if the authorities could be persuaded to help out. We were all disappointed but I was dead keen to have a football strip. Next day I put it to the lads, to see if they were agreeable to bringing their pennies into school. If Mr. Webster agreed, he could hold the money until we had enough to buy the strip. Mr. Webster went further than that. He went to see Mr. Plews the headmaster. Next morning, Mr. Plews said that anyone interested in contributing to the acquisition of a set of football jerseys and pants could hand it in to

their own teachers, who would keep account of it. In a surprisingly short time, the school had collected enough money to buy a complete set of jerseys and pants and weren't the lads proud and excited when the time came to wear them! We wore them to good purpose playing football and rugby. Our first game was against Robins Lane School, a council school, well equipped with sporting tackle by the council authorities. Not like us. We were a church school like St. Anne's School. We did not get the assistance that the council schools received.

We drew with Robins Lane, two all. We played on our pitch which was the sand tip that stood above the brook alongside Watery Lane. We were watched by a crowd of approximately 300 schoolboys. Matches in both summer and winter were watched by a good number of Sutton people. The goal posts belonged to Sutton Wesley who played there at weekends. The posts were left in position throughout the year. This in itself shows the differences in attitudes to this present day. Today, goal posts have to be taken down and put in a safe place to prevent breakage.

We played our first game of rugby on the "Saints" ground at Knowsley Road. They were a bigger and heavier lot and we lost 19 points to 0. I was asked, after the game, to turn up and practise with the town team. However, my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday was in September and I had two chances of a job. I left and I took up a job as an apprentice joiner at Bold Colliery. The other job I turned down was as an apprentice loco fitter at the engine sheds in Baxters Lane, near to the St. Helens to St. Helens Junction Railway line.

In conclusion, I moved up from Standard VI and left Mr. Pritchard to be taught by Mrs. Langford. She was a lovely person. She taught us science amongst other things. She used to come by bicycle from "Pecks Hill" where she lived. On our last summer holiday from school, she invited all the class to her home. We had a picnic there and she provided sandwiches, cakes and drinks of cocoa. I left behind me ten years of happy schooling, happy memories, good teachers and a good old school. They have pulled it down now to make way for new schools and different methods of teaching. That's the way it goes! Out with the old and in with the new. The old school welcomed hundreds and thousands of Sutton children through its doors. It has seen them make their exits into all walks of life. As I write this narrative now, I know that many of my classmates have departed this life and there are very few of us left.

I know the old school has gone, but what about our teachers? You lose touch with them when you leave them behind to make your own way through life. I have neither heard "top nor tail" of any of them, nor how they have fared. There is one exception, none other than Mr. Helsby, "Owd Tolly" teacher and choir master. He came to a tragic end. He was killed by an express train under Marshalls Cross Bridge, on the main Manchester to Liverpool Railway. He was, to my way of thinking, an extremely unhappy man. A man who never smiled or broke into happy laughter. He looked on the black side of life, never on the bright side. He missed the good things of life. May he find it on the other side.

## **Chapter 9 : Clothes, The Last Top Hats and the Funeral of the Soldier**

How times change, and fashions too. Up to 1926, when I was sixteen years of age, everyone wore some type of head covering. Some wore cloth caps, some trilbies or so-called soft hats, whilst others wore hard hats called blockers, and men and boys wore overcoats in the winter if they could afford them.

The girls in the winter wore Tam-O-Shanters and scarfs with matching muffs and gloves, with buttoned up boots which they secured with a boot hook. The hook was pushed through the eye of the boot and hooked round the button and pulled through to fasten.

Older ladies wore hats and veils. I well remember my mother going to town, on a Saturday afternoon, shopping, wearing her hat secured with a hat pin and wearing a black veil. The ladies clothes were worn long and reached down to their ankles.

Some of the poorer class of women and girls wore shawls around their shoulders, and when it was cold, over their heads. Some footwear had buttoned up boots, whilst others had neatly made slipper clogs. Girls at school, as far as I can remember wore ankle socks. Legs were bare, and often in the hard, winter months, they had chapped legs as well as us boys, because the majority of us wore short pants and often as not, our stockings were down, but it was something you were hardened to. Later on, the fashion for girls at school and those in their teens was to wear black stockings. Ladies hairdressers came into being, but, to help the customers and the hairdresser, clubs were formed. The girls paid so much a week and had a subscription card and lots were drawn. The first one out of the hat could have the choice of the first week, and the second drawn out got the second week and so on. This helped out the ones who could not pay in full. In Sutton in the early 1920s, there were four barbers' shops: Jack Heyes at the junction of Junction Lane and the Cinder Walk, Peter Evans, where the Sutton Trustees Bank is now, another in Peckershill Road at the corner of Powell Street, and one in Waterdale Crescent, owned by Lawrence Fowles. At present, there are none. The Barber in each shop cut hair at prices of six pence to a shilling, while he also shaved men's beards for the price of twopence.

Each barber employed "Lather Boys", two in number, to do the lathering. One boy was on duty Monday and Wednesday nights, the other boy Tuesday and Thursday, and both on Friday night and all day Saturday. School boys were employed, and for about twelve months or more, four of us boys in Standard EX VII did duty as lather boys. I myself worked for Lawrence Fowles. I received half a crown for three night's work and a full Saturday, and lads were waiting for half a chance to step in your shoes.

This was the way we went about lathering: we arrived at the barber's at five o'clock; we had to be clean and presentable. On the door leading into the kitchen were our white bib aprons, put there by our boss's mother, who made sure they were spotlessly clean. After putting on the aprons, we would check the water in the copper urn, which was coupled to a white water basin, was hot, and then adjust the tap to the gas ring underneath. Next was the soap powder in the tin holder, making sure it was not empty and that our two large lathering cups were clean and the shaving brushes alright and that pieces of paper, about 8" square were handy to place on the customer's shoulder for the barber to wipe the surplus soap and beard off his razor. In those days it was the hollow ground razor -

about three inches long, with a longer handle, which could be moved to suit the angle of shaving.

Looking round the room you would notice three large chairs, and each one had adjustable head rests, with a peg thrust through the support and located in a hole at the back of the chair.

One such chair was facing a table with a large mirror on the wall. On the table rested the barber's shears, clippers, scissors and combs. This chair was used for hair cutting and in those days electricity had not arrived for working tools, so everything was done manually.

The other two chairs were used for shaving. The customer would arrive and usually the barber would ask "Haircut or shave, Sir?" and then indicate his own chair for hair cutting or one of the chairs, usually the one nearest the wash basins, for shaving. I would step forward with a cloth to put around the customer's shoulders and tuck it in carefully around his throat and neck, so the lather would not touch his clothes. Next, I made sure his head was leaning back in a comfortable position on the head rest, fill my cup about three parts full of hot water, making sure it was not too hot, dipping the brush in the cup and sprinkling the soap powder on the brush and trying it out on my left hand for a good lather.

I then stepped forward with the cup in my left hand and brush in my right hand and applied the brush to the face, getting a good rich lather all over his face and throat. Next, with the right hand, the lather would be briskly, but carefully rubbed onto the beard and upper lip if he was clean shaven. This would be done for a couple of minutes, lathering and rubbing around the face until the barber gave you the nod and you would then relather the fellow's face again.

The barber would then break off his hair cutting and, with a few deft strokes of the razor on his strap, step forward and proceed to shave, wiping his razor on the piece of paper resting on his shoulder. This completed, you would lather the face again quickly, and the barber would go round him again for the second time. This done, I would step forward with a small clean towel and dry his face off and ask him if he wanted a puff of powder on his face. Most men said "No", so you would take the towel off from round his shoulders and brush his coat with a clothes brush. All this for two pence and, you know, on a Saturday, one or two customers would have a full week's growth of beard on their faces. This meant three lathers at times.

The barber returned to his hair cutting and I would say "Next for shaving, Sir", and repeat the process over and over again. Come a slack moment from shaving and you would brush the hair up off the floor and, with a clothes brush, brush down the customers who had had their hair cut. When it was busy, time would fly very quickly, and in no time at all, it was finishing time, time to say "Goodnight" to the barber and you were free again.

While on the subject of spare time jobs, two more lads in our class got jobs at the Co-Operative stores, delivering bread each evening. Their job was to load a small red van, which had two large wheels, a covered top and two drop supports from the shafts to keep it level when stationary, with unwrapped loaves of bread and deliver it to

customers round about. One worked for the stores in Peckershill Road, the other at Robins Lane Stores, lying between Oxley Street and Waterdale Crescent.

The half crown I received for my wage under the old monetary system, that was before 1971, was referred to in different ways. It was called half a dollar, two and sixpence, and in present day values, was 25p. The one shilling charge for a haircut was known as a bob and twelve pence - its present value is 5p. The shave which cost two old pennies was called tuppence and its value now would be 5/6p.

And now back to the wearing of top hats and frock tailed coats. As far as I can remember, there were only two people I saw wearing the top hats and frock tailed coats - that is excluding mock top hat weddings, clothes you could hire for the occasion. No, this was the real occasion when they wore the clothes on solemn occasions, not for photography and wedding mementos to be placed in an album.

I would be about five or six years old, and it was during the First World War when we heard people hurrying down the street outside our house and then we heard the sound of slow and solemn music being played. My brother Fred seized me by the hand and we ran to Robins Lane, where people were lining up each side of the road. All the menfolk had taken their hats and caps off and were standing bare headed. We saw a gun carriage being hauled along by soldiers in uniform and on the carriage was a coffin draped with a Union Jack.

The strains of music being played had a very sad and disturbing effect on the people standing in the lane; some women were weeping and the menfolk looked very sad. I looked up at my brother, as I always did, for an explanation, and he said "It's the dead march they are playing, Frank." There was quite a large number of mourners, all dressed in black, walking behind the gun carriage, whilst heading the cortege was Mr. John Duffy, the headmaster of St. Ann's school, dressed in his black frock tailed suit, and carrying his top hat in the crook of his left arm.

We watched them go under the railway bridges and turn left up Monastery Lane, making their way to St. Anne's Church. Who the soldier was, we never knew. These were the times when the two religions of Roman Catholics and Protestants remained aloof from one another.

Now, a few words about Johnny Duffy, as us lads called him. He was tall and of slim build and carried his clothes well. I can see him now, with his distinctive walk, walking down the lane, and a moving scene like this remains indelibly in your memories.

Johnny Duffy was keen on discipline. He was feared by all his pupils. He never spared the cane on the lads who did not try to learn, and to those who did not, his favourite expression was "When you leave school, you will be wheeling a wheelbarrow." The lads who did not attend church on a Sunday were kept back in school on a Friday night, and Johnny Duff and Father Felix, one of the priests at that time, would lecture them about not attending church. Father Felix did not wrap things up. He would say to them "You want a good sized boot behind you on a Sunday morning.", and that was the kind of expression the lads understood - soft talk and pleading would go in one ear and out of the other.

Mr. John Duffy, headmaster of St. Anne's Roman Catholic schools, was a local man, and his family lived in Robins Lane. The house he lived in has now been demolished. In the spaces where the houses stood, now stands the present doctors' surgery, near the Vulcan public house.

Mr. Arthur Helsby, schoolmaster, church organist, music teacher and choir master at All Saints Church, was also a local man. He lived at, and kept, a general shop in Robins Lane, next door to the Red Lion, also known as the "Glass Barrel", on account of a glazed barrel suspended at the front of the public house.

The first time I saw Mr. Helsby wearing a top hat and frock tailed coat was on a visit by the Bishop of Warrington to All Saints Church. Mr. Helsby headed the procession of all our schoolchildren - boys, girls and infants, plus teachers, making their way to their places in church. I also saw him on the occasion of the confirmation services at All Saints, when the Bishop did the laying on of hands. Although you know from my previous writing that I disliked Mr. Helsby, I was very friendly with his two sons, Arthur and Kenneth. They were of a different nature to their father. I liked the pair of them. The other son, Sidney, went to Cowley School and I knew very little about him.

And so those were the only two people in Sutton I saw wearing the top hats and frock tailed coats. It would cause a sensation in Sutton to see the old dress paraded down Sutton. It is hard to believe nowadays, with the majority of people of both sexes going around hatless outdoors, that at first, us young ones felt a certain amount of embarrassment on the first occasion we ventured forth without anything on our heads.

It would be about 1926, and we had all made arrangements to visit Sherdley Park, where the annual Field Day was taking place. A knock came at our front door in Edgeworth Street, and it was 1.30pm - the time we had all arranged to meet.

Much to my surprise, when I beheld the lads, none of them had any headgear on. I remember them laughing and saying to me "Come on Frank. Leave your cap behind. We are all going to the field as we are." With that, I turned out with them just as I was, with nothing on my head. And you would not believe the looks and stares we endured on that walk up Robins Lane and on the field itself. We had indeed joined the "hatless brigade", and in no time at all, other youngsters of our age joined in, and people accepted it.

As with all changing fashions, however, it took a short while to adjust to anything new. My two older brothers were in their early twenties, and still wore their trilby hats, walking sticks and gloves when walking out with their friends, but by the time myself and my friends reached eighteen to twenty years, we never used the walking sticks to walk out with, and that fashion died out, apart from the elderly people walking on a Sunday.

### **The Red Rat**

People have wondered about the odd sounding name given to the little public house standing at the end of a row of houses, with its gable end built on the edge of the school brook at Ellamsbridge Road. How on earth could it have been called the Red Rat?

In the hot summers we had when we were children, and we fished and bathed in the school brook, you would see men sitting, drinking and talking outside the little public

house. The public house closed down on the 29th January 1927. It was in the 1950s, at British Sidac, that excavations and pile driving took place in preparation for new buildings which were to be erected. These excavations revealed a number of old brick tunnels or culverts, that had carried surplus used water and other liquids out from the old works and under the railway and Ellamsbridge Road to the filter or settling beds, and so on into the old school brook. In some of these old culverts were residues of rouge, used in the process of glassmaking, which would eventually make its journey down into the school brook, and colour its water red. In later years, British Sidac also used a surface culvert for waste water and liquid dyes, in the same way as the old glassworks did, and after, when the dye was red and released into the culvert, it made its way to the brook and coloured it.

On one of the occasions when this happened, I was near the main gates when a man came to the gates and asked Mr. Bagot if he could see the manager about a complaint he had to make. Mr. Bagot, the gateman, asked him what was wrong, whereupon he produced a duck out of a cardboard box he was carrying. The duck at one time had been coloured white, but was now coloured red. He also said that his other ducks were coloured red, through swimming in the brook. I realised, on listening to the man, that other inhabitants of the brook would be that colour - namely the water rats. It did not need a great deal of imagination on my part to draw a parallel between the red colouring of the duck, and the appearance of a red rat or rats around that area of the brook when the public house was being built in the old glassworks days, during the last century, for the builder or landlord to call it the apt or odd name of the Red Rat.



Sutton Commercial Rugby League team, winners of the Warrington Observer Cup, Seasons 1919/28/9/30.

The club played at Normans Lane, Sutton, although this photograph was taken at the Warrington ground.



***Back Row Officials:*** Peter Low, Jack Heyes, Billy Cross, Ralph Charnock, Alec McVitty, E. Pointon

***Back Row Standing:*** David Baines, Albert Anslow, Evan Jones, Jack Woods, Frank Gilgrest

***Front Row Seated:*** Bill Connolly, Ernie Lawrence, Charlie Lightfoot, J. Lee, Ernie Kitts, Frank Bamber, George Newton, Peter Heyes

## **Chapter 10 : Freedom and Fresh Air for Free**

Away from school and our teachers, away from home and our errands to run, away from the watchful eye of our parents, we were left alone to follow our own ways, and how well we made the best of it. We organised our own games and pleasures, and in the making of these, boredom was practically unknown. Each day was a new adventure, and Sutton and the surrounding district was ours to be enjoyed.

My participation in these pursuits started at quite an early age, due to the fact that I was five, and seven years younger than my older brothers Fred and Joe, and Fred at this time was my minder. When I think back to the times and the miles he must have pushed and pulled me in my trolley to keep up with his mates, I readily forgive him for the cuts and bruises which I sustained when the trolley overturned and tipped me out, and the rough and ready cat licks he gave me with his or my handkerchief, dipped in a puddle, so that I looked presentable when I arrived home, and so avoided a scolding from my mother. My mother used to say that the scrapes I used to get into were due to the trolley upsets, but my brother Fred said it was due to the colour of my hair.

Fred and I always remained close to one another throughout life. He died at the age of 70 years in 1975, and I saw to it that he had a decent funeral. He lived on his own in one of "Stephenson's Crossing Cottages" at Collins Green. We had dug down in his garden and found the old mineral road or track, where the traffic of horse and carts used to approach the crossing of the main line Liverpool to Manchester. This was used before the bridge was built over the line at Broad Lane.

I write this down because I had an advantage over a lot of kids my age, due to this fact of being in the company of boys who were born around the turn of the century. What a grand lot of lads they were, and each one answered to a nickname. There was Braddy, Ek, Unikee, Elly, Appy, Turk, Nucky, and my two brothers, called the Bams. I was a sort of mascot, and they called me Ging.

Our meeting place was on the Ellen Street field, where Ellen Gardens and the East Sutton Labour Club now stand. Every type of game was played there: cricket, football, rugby, piggy, duck off, ring out, three hole chucky and single hole chucky, standing jumps, running jumps and hop, skip and jump. The grass never had a chance to thrive in the middle of the field.

### **Joe Doffs**

There was always a game of some sort being played there, and if it was occupied, we used to run down the old wooden steps which led to the St. Helens Railway, where the Halt was. You could, at times, catch a train there to Shaw Street Station, run under the bridges, and in less than a minute, you would be in Monastery Road and up the embankment and on to "Joe Doffs".

Joe Doffs, in our time, was not enclosed. It was rectangular in shape, but had two copper slag walls dividing it from the St. Anne's Curtilage, and so was open on two sides. This was our second playfield, and no-one ever interfered with us here. Now, it is fenced off with concrete posts and panels. No-one in our childhood days knew who "Joe Doff" was. It was a mystery then, and it has remained like that ever since.

One of our favourite pastimes when we were short of playing tackle, was to stand on the end of the embankment and wait for the tram cars to come rattling along from the Junction, past the Step Rows and under the bridge. One of us, in turn, would stand a little lower and watch for the conductor to go up the stairs to sell his tickets. He would then give us a signal and, as the tram car came clanking past us, we would run down the bank, grab hold of the vertical rod on the platform and swing onto the tram. You could then have a free ride, sometimes as far as the “Loops” by the Welsh Baptist Chapel.

Then the conductor would come down the stairs, shouting what he would do if he caught us, but we were experts at dropping off the tram at full speed. We had a few bruised knees at first, but later we became experts at this pastime.

### **Pudding Bag**

Leaving “Joe Doffs” and making our way up Monastery Road, we would arrive at Monastery Lane. If you turned right, you would then pass the St. Anne’s graveyard, with the old schools on your left, now transformed into the Social Club. The old church and monastery would be on your right and further down, before you crossed the bridge over the dam, was the old Social Club, and right behind this, the sports ground.

Looking directly ahead, we would see the narrow path, leading up to the “Intersection Bridge”. We will ignore this for the time being, and turn to our left and still be in Monastery Lane, and to enter into this small community, we would now pass under the Runcorn Gap Bridge and enter what we all knew as “Pudding Bag”.

Continuing down Monastery Lane and looking to our left, we would see a long row of terraced houses, which was called Railway Terrace. This housed mainly railway workers and “Sheeting Shedders”. Further down on the right were the plots or allotments, and on these, at one time, was an abattoir. Roughly about forty yards from the bridge stood the Golden Cross, a Greenalls public house. The last landlord before it was demolished was Joe Holland. To the left of the pub ran Woodcock Street, where there was a fairly large house, where an express driver called Mr. Marsh lived.

Further down, and on the right hand side stood the old Stephenson’s Crossing Cottage”, adjacent to the main L.M.S. Railway, which was used by the keeper before the new bridge was built over the main line for access to the sheeting Sheds and General Stores, by the Pudding Baggers, Suttoners, and people from St. Helens who came by tram.

There were three Stephenson’s Cottages along this main line - the one at Pudding Bag at the bottom of Monastery Lane, then one at Hoghton Road, where the crossing went across to Normans Lane, and the other one by the Collins Green Bridge at Broad Lane, where my brother Fred lived. I have been into two of these quaint cottages - the one owned by my brother and also the one at Pudding Bag, where a friend of mine named Jack Horrocks and his family lived. I used to go there at one time to take lessons on the violin.

These cottages had no upstairs. There were three rooms on floor level, a small back kitchen for cooking and washing, a fair sized kitchen and one bedroom. I reckon this one and the one at Hoghton Road were demolished in the 1960s. The other one at Broad Lane Collins Green, owned by my brother Fred, was destroyed by vandals in January 1976. My brother, who was 70 years old, had walked to Sutton to do his shopping, and

on his return, four men had demolished the chimney to steal the lead, and all the brass and copper fittings had been wrenched out, the fireplace taken away and water was running and flooding the rooms. The police were called and they brought him to my house. Although we did everything we could for him, he died a month later. I will always believe his death was brought on by these four thieves and vandals. The police never traced the culprits.

But back to Pudding Bag and its odd sounding name. One can but surmise that this small community was at one time part of the old mining village of Sutton, and its isolation was caused by the advent of the railways, causing it to be enclosed inside a triangle of railways. Firstly, the then L.N.W. railway, Manchester to Liverpool, now the L.M.S; the St. Helens Junction line to Sutton Oak, Peasley Cross and Shaw Street stations, and the Runcorn Gap railway, running from the north, through Sutton to Runcorn. When these railroads were completed, the only way in and out for the residents was under the Runcorn Gap Bridge to reach Sutton, or to attend service at St. Anne's church and schools. I know quite a few Protestants attended the Roman Catholic school when young, to cut out the long walk round to the C. of E. school at Sutton. I, myself, suggest how the peculiar name came about was the similarity of cooking or boiling the puddings in a linen bag, tied at the top, one way in the bag and one way out. Whether right or wrong, I do not know. Can anyone think of a better way of explaining how the old name came about?

The St. Helens Junction Station was previously known as "Sutton Bottom Incline". A peculiar feature of this line was, that on coming along the curved line to the north east of Pudding Bag, at a position at the end of Railway Terrace, it left the main line, tunnelled under the St. Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway, and made a detour over a bridge in Robins Lane joining the main line again on the west side, before coming in to Sutton Oak Station at Lancots Lane. The remains of the old Tunnel Bridge can still be seen by anyone taking the trouble to find them. However, there are no railway lines to be seen and the bridge over Robins Lane has been taken down. The line was discontinued in 1969.

The Tunnel Bridge Line was mainly used for passenger trains.

### **The Old Convent House, Fennys Lane**

Having just referred to the curved line enclosing Pudding Bag from the St. Helens Junction Station towards Sutton Oak Station, I cannot help but refer to the Sutton side of the line, which is now known as Smith Street. Standing in Robins Lane, in front of the railway bridges, facing in the direction of Sutton Park, as a lad, I would see, on my right, wooden steps with handrails, leading up to Ellen Street field, and the railway, where later it was used as the entrance to Sutton Robins Lane Halt. Looking to my left I would see another set of wooden steps leading up to a clay embankment. Climbing these wooden steps to the loft and following round the wooden sleepers used as railway fencing, I would see a fair sized sandstone and brick cottage which housed two families, the Cunliffes and the Cowleys. This was the Old Convent House, where the girl named Elizabeth Prout lived. She changed her religion from Protestant to Roman Catholic and later became Mother Mary Joseph, the founder of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion. She died, I believe in 1864.

Myself and several teenage pals spent a Christmas there in 1927 at the invitation of a lad of my age, who lived there. His name was Harry Cunliffe. I remember the stone flagged floor, the large chimney piece, a long corridor, and an old organ in one of the rooms.

I also remember an old work fellow of mine when I worked at Bold Power Station, Tom Cooney, apologising for taking a day off work to take part in the exhumation of the graves in the old churchyard at St. Anne's. The graves exhumed were those of Father Dominic, who died in 1849, Father Ignatius Spencer, who was uncle to Winston Churchill, the war time Prime Minister, and Elizabeth Prout, later known at Sutton as Mother Mary Joseph. Tom later told me that in addition to the church authorities, there were several medical people, including an orthopaedic specialist who took measurements of the bone structures to ensure there was no mistake incurred in the removal of the correct remains. It was known that Elizabeth Prout had a disability in her leg, and this was proved, to the satisfaction of all. These three good persons now lie together in the shrine at the new church of St. Anne's, and pilgrimages are made there from different parts of the country.

The area where the convent house stood was known by the old Sutton people as Convent Row, but it was also referred to as Fenny's Lane, probably before the railroads came and took possession of part of that area which extended to the old Richard Evans coalyard.

Whenever I remember the old places of interest in Sutton, such as the old Convent House, the old Tripe Shaws Farmhouse and others, I get a helpless feeling of frustration at the results of the borough council's vandalism - there is no other name for it.



*St Anne's Old Church 1851-1973.*

*The old Sutton glassworks can also be seen in the bottom right hand corner of the picture*

**The Old Church, St. Anne's at Sutton**

The church was silent, dark at night,  
The altar lamp alone shone bright.  
With reverence I walked the aisle  
Then knelt to pray a little while.

Alas, my thoughts then seemed to stay,  
Around the walls were wont to play.  
Those marble tablets cast a spell  
And spoke of names I knew so well.

Twas then the church became alive,  
Voices called from every side.  
A pageant passed from door to door  
Of those who'd passed this way before.

I knelt transfixed within my place,  
I knew most every passing face.  
The Grimshaws, Borrows, Nolans, Smith  
And sandalled, dark robed Passionists.

John Smith, a man of older times,  
Who planned and built our railway lines,  
Who built this church in grateful thanks,  
Bore the cross to lead the ranks.

The Grimshaws, Borrows, passed my pew,  
Their thanks to God, I also knew.  
They added altars here and there,  
That we might say that extra prayer.

And then a mighty hymn arose,  
For nurses Helen, Margaret and Rose,  
The whole assembly stood to laud  
Three handmaids of Our Blessed Lord.

They passed me, girls of tender years,  
On duty bound, they knew no fears.  
Then killed, whilst easing others' pain,  
Dear God, did these girls die in vain.

One more passed me by, one of passion so strong.  
She rose above her accusers, those of cruel tongue.  
Pure in heart and a life without stain,  
I saw the face of Mother Mary Joseph, radiant as a saint.

Trumpets rang in fanfares brave,  
Ignatius Spencer crossed the Nave.  
Titles, wealth, he'd tossed aside,  
To preach God's word both far and wide.

On they passed me, never ending,  
Each one bowing, genuflecting.  
I softly whispered, "Blessed are they",  
And sang with them "Ave, Ave, Maria".

'Twas then I saw a saintly face,  
A hush fell on this holy place.  
He paused to bless and comfort me,  
A blessed man 'twas Dominic Barberi.

He spoke of how his body lay,  
Where pilgrims in their thousands pray.  
That to ask, he might intercede  
With Jesus in their hour of need.

I heard the bells ring in the spire,  
That one time rang above the choir.  
I woke - my pageant passed away,  
Those bells were of another day.

The church was silent once again,  
In prayer, I spoke His Holy Name  
And promised how I'd ever pray  
To walk with them on Judgment Day.



**John Smith, Benefactor**

Like the bell of St. Anne's ringing out good and true,  
So the contents of my poem may interest you.  
True facts from the past I bring to you forthwith,  
About a true man of Sutton, his name, John Smith.

1792 in Viterbo to Sutton St. Anne's great delight,  
Dominic Barberi was born and saw his first light.  
1794 two years later was John Smith's year of birth  
Two wonderful men, both of outstanding worth.

Now these two great men born of older times,  
The one saviour of souls, the other builder of railway lines,  
They were chosen by fate each other to meet,  
To create church and monastery called St. Anne's retreat.

With generosity abounding on a scale ever so grand,  
1850 John Smith built church and gave of his land.  
A benefactor of Sutton, held in most high esteem,  
A man of true religion, of railway power and steam.

St. Anne's villa to live he built on this ground,  
No trace of it left, can now not be found.  
It was followed by Glynn's, who farmed the land,  
But in 1950, St. Anne's Junior School was built and planned.

So now Sutton's young ones come to enjoy this lovely school,  
And partake of education with pen, pencil and rule.  
And to read my poem, tis all truth, not a myth,  
About St. Anne's Dominic Barberi and benefactor John Smith.

**Frank Bamber  
December 1993**

## **Chapter 11 : Intersection Bridge; The Old Sand Hole; Runcorn Gap Bridges; Leach Hall: Sutton Leach District; Engine and Tender; Wheatsheaf Hotels; Long Lane**

### **The Path Leading to the Intersection Bridge**

Leaving Pudding Bag and standing in Monastery Lane with my back towards Robins Lane at the top of Monastery Road, you would see a 4' wide path, with wooden pen fence rails on the right hand side and wooden railway sleepers standing upright to prevent access to the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway. This path, still used, leads to the Intersection Bridge, and thence to Sutton Leach. As a lad, and looking to my right, I would see an open, cultivated field as far as Gerard's Lane, and near the monastery Dam were about six houses with quaint dormer windows. At the end of the Dam was a cottage which was called Victoria Cottage.

Then, at the extreme end, near the bridge which carried the main line to Liverpool, was St. Paul's Villa, where the nuns made their home at one time. But now, the St. Anne's junior school stands on the field, with a football field attached to the school. I now live on the outskirts of this field in my bungalow, and have done so for the last 25 years. This bungalow, with four more and a house, lies between the old Victoria Cottage and St. Paul's Villa. This cottage and villa were demolished in the late 1970s.

No steps are required this side of the intersection because the gradient path reaches up to the walkway, but on the other side are steps leading down to Leach Lane. The sides of the bridge are now blocked off with strong sheeting, but when I was a boy, it was a trellis work of strong iron bars, riveted to each other in diagonal formation. You could almost thrust your head through the gaps, and you had a good view of the engines and trains coming from the St. Helens Junction Station, and coming in from the direction of Liverpool.

Well do I know every inch of this bridge, because it was dare or "croddy" for us to climb on the outside of this bridge and make our way over the permanent way, and to cling on the outside of this bridge, with our eyes closed when the express trains thundered underneath. You shut your eyes because of the thick smoke and the mites of carbon coming from the chimney.

None of us ever came to grief, apart from one lad who climbed over on Sunday and tore his best jacket. He was very reluctant to go home that Sunday, to face the wrath of his parents. Clothes, especially best clothes, were not easy to come by in those days, and any mishaps like that ended in a good hiding when you got home. Parents were a lot stricter in those days, and young ones behaved themselves far better than the present day.

### **The Old Sand Hole**

In the years up to my sixteenth birthday in 1926, you could stand on the Intersection Bridge, overlooking the last part of Leach Lane, and look down on a deeply gouged out hole of red sand. One would stand and watch the boxes or trucks climbing slowly out of this great hole, laden with red sand, and watch the empty ones going down, all attached to a wire haulage rope by lashing chains.

In the 1960s, an elderly lady named Mrs. Hughes, who was well into her eighties, lived at no.50 Leach Lane. She used to visit my wife at our home in Gerard's Lane. She was a widow then, but her maiden name was Elsie Meadows. She informed me that the working of the sand hole went as far back as the late 1820s, and continued until 1926. Her father, on one occasion, fell down the sandhole and fractured his leg. First aid was given to him by one of the boss's wives - a Mrs. Carter who lived nearby at Pen Lake, at the LNWR supply sheds. He survived the fracture and shock, but always walked with a bent leg, due to these early days of medical attention.

Before the Meadows and Whittaker ownership, the hole was started by the Manchester and London glass Company, to provide sand for the production of glass at their works at Lancots Lane and Ellamsbridge Road. The sand hole also provided sand for the moulders and casting of metals at the surrounding steel works. When the works finished, it was being worked by as many as four work people. The workforce was never large, but still, a great many hours were spent in and around that great hole, when you consider that for over one hundred years, small teams of men laboured and gouged that great hole to obtain sand for the local industries.

When production finished, the work sheds were taken over by an undertaker who stabled his horses and cabs there, together with a joinery business. The hole was filled in by the railway people, who employed both men and women to empty ballast wagons into the hole. And now, levelled off, it supports Carol Close, which contains quite a number of houses.

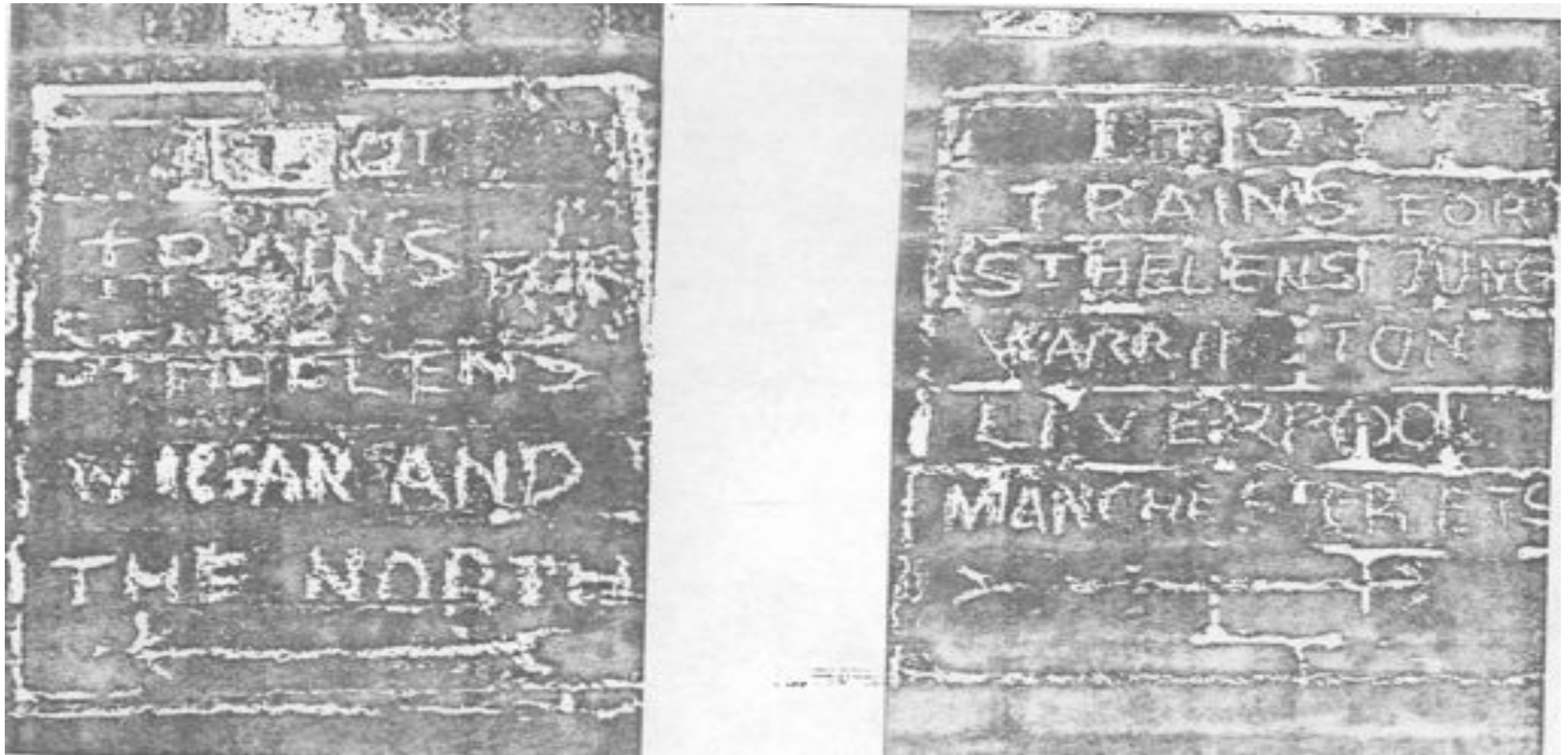
### **The Runcorn Gap Bridges, Old Leach Hall and Sutton Leach**

Coming down the steps from the steel Intersection Bridge (this was the one used by pedestrians to cross the line), and looking towards the St. Helens Junction station, you would see three brick pillars supporting the St. Helens and Runcorn gap lines.

Looking from left to right, the first and central brick pillars straddled the main Liverpool to Manchester line, while the centre pillar and the one on the right straddled the old roadway connecting Leach Lane to Penlake Lane, which has been out of use for many a long year. Up to 1986, it was used as a workshop, being bricked at the rear and boarded with doors and windows fitted to the front. Alas, in line with the present disorderly conduct, it has been severely vandalised.

Looking further along the main railway line, you would see, about two hundred yards in the distance, the old Stephenson Crossing Gate Cottage, at the bottom end of Monastery Lane Pudding Bag. On the right side of the bridge was a high brick wall, which I suppose was built to prevent any kind of landslide from the Runcorn Gap embankment falling into the red sand hole. Now, it protects Carol Close.

Turning to the right and proceeding along Leach Lane and looking to my left, after leaving the outside perimeter of the sandhole and looking to my right, you would see a triangular shaped field, cultivated for crops, before the houses were built along this length of Leach Lane, and returning again to the right down Gerard's Lane to the railway bridge in that lane.



*Details of trains leaving the Robins Lane Halt on railway bridge in Robins Lane. This short-lived Halt was in use from 12 October 1936 to 26 September 1938. Trains from St Helens Junction dived under the Runcorn Gap-St Helens line. This Junction-St Helens line closed on 2 March 1969.*

At this junction of Leach Lane and Gerard's Lane on the left hand side was the Old Leach Hall, with the main gate and winding carriage drive to the south side of the Hall, where the carriage rooms and stables lay.

According to the early records, Leach Hall went by the name of Toad Leach Hall as far back as the 1600s. There is mention of it being sold by John Yates to Hamlett Yates for £600 and an annual rent of £16. It changed ownership in 1724 and 1800, when Michael Hughes bought it from Edward Falkener for £2,700.

I visited the Leach Hall in the late 1930s and again in the 1950s, when the Thompson family lived there, and a Mr. and Mrs. Sharrock bought and converted part of it into flats. I saw the large banqueting room with the long wooden dining table and also the great iron cooking ovens. These, as far as I can remember, stood approximately 8'0" high by 12'0" wide. Also, the Hall was longer in length than at the present time. It was shortened at the north end by the young Austin Carol, son of Austain Carol, the farmer at Leach Lane, who spent considerable time and money in bringing it back into good shape.

Some of the land belonging to the hall has been retained and put in good heart, whilst the other land surrounding the hall on the north side and the Old Sand Hole, has a small community of houses, called Carol Close, built on it. On the south side of the hall, you will see a small, unpaved roadway coming from Leach Lane, up and passing Leach Hall Farm, which, at one time was a joint farm house and public house called the Engine and Tender. The farmer and publican was Mr. Garton. The public house closed in 1937, when the new Wheatsheaf was opened in Mill Lane.

I understand the New Wheatsheaf was to be called the Engine and Tender, but Mr. Garton turned down the offer of landlord there, so Mr. Dave Rothwell, the demolition contractor, who, by the way, was responsible for the demolition of quite a number of tall chimneys round Sutton, and was also the landlord of the Old Wheatsheaf in Lionel Street, took up the offer of landlord. He took with him the name of the Wheatsheaf, instead of it being called the Engine and Tender.

The small, unpaved roadway continued to be used as a short cut from Leach Lane to Reginald Road in the 1960s, and Reginald Road was known to us boys and the old ones as Long Lane. The unpaved roadway from Leach Lane and, crossing Long Lane, was part of the Abbot's Field Road before the railways came and it ran to Gorsey Lane and so on to Bold Hall.

Long Lane, known later as Reginald Road, ran from Mill Lane and continued through what was called Normans Lane, and came out at Hoghton Road, the way to the Sutton Moss, where the cutting of turf took place. This way was later cut by the Liverpool to Manchester line, and the Crossing Cottage was built to allow the road users to cross the line at that point.

Back to Leach Lane, and across the old, unpaved road was the old, fairly large cottage which housed at one time the Ostlers. When I was a boy, two families lived there, the Owen family and the Jones family. Mr. Jones was the Sutton Scoutmaster, and when I joined as a cub, the scout hut was the old pump house which had its entrance on

Ellamsbridge Road, opposite the signal box on the St. Helens Junction to Sutton Oak line.

You went in the front entrance at pavement level and then you entered into a platform with brick walls and slate roof. This was held up on a stilt-like steel structure high over the old filter beds belonging to the old glass works. A peculiarity of the old cottage was that one family used the front door, and the other family used the back door. Gaming used to take place at the rear of this old cottage under the trees. The old folk at Sutton Leach used to leave the old Engine and Tender at closing time and carry on gambling for money, and numerous old coins have been dug up in the garden of the new houses in Reginald Road, especially the one with the rear garden which ran under the trees. Of course, the old cottage has now been pulled down, together with the old tree at the front which had been struck and split by lightning.

After leaving the old cottage, there were two large detached houses, and these must have been built in the 17th or 18th centuries. The rooms in these houses were large and extensive. The families living there were the Bebingtons and Crouchs. On the right, there was just a large field, where the houses in Leach Lane now stand, and Belvedere Avenue had not been built. The only house in that direction was the one beside the Brooklands Dam, where Becky Riddle, the well-known singer, lived. Crossing Reginald Road we could go two ways, to the Water Mill along Dickies Bruk or keep to the road. We used to go along Dickies Bruk when it was very dry, due to it being on the swampy side.<sup>1</sup>

This swampy land beside the brook running from the waterfall and the water mill to the Brooklands Dam, gave its name to Sutton Leach. The old name Leach or Lache meant a stream running through boggy or swampy ground. It was also referred to as Toad Lache.

In the 1950s, the corporation deepened the brook and did quite a lot of tipping refuse etc. on this ground near the Wheatsheaf Hotel, so the boggy slate has disappeared, as has the Brooklands Dam. It is just a deep brook running to the main L&NW railway and through the tunnel, to come out as a stream into what we called Whalley's Dam.

This fairly deep dam has altered, and is now nothing more than a stream. It runs in front of my bungalow in Gerards Lane, and this place was once commonly known as Dyche Hillock. At the end of this dam stood Whalley Farm and orchard, and the farmland here ran as far as New Street. This has now disappeared and is occupied by Beth Avenue. A beautiful hillside of farmland and wild life has vanished, thanks to the progressive ideas of some of our borough representatives. People at one time came and leaned on the old sandstone wall in Gerards Lane, at the front of where I live, to look down into the stream and dam and catch a glimpse of wildlife. Sometime, you could catch a glimpse of colour when the kingfisher darted along the edges of the stream or look at the swans sitting on their eggs on the large structure of twigs and rushes, and see the cygnets, when they hatched out, swimming behind the proud parents. At sunset, I have witnessed the mother partridges coming down the meadow with their broods in single file, going to drink by the brook.

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<sup>1</sup> Dickies Bruk got its name due to the farmer there being called Dickie Rimmer.



Known as “The Waterfall” or “The Wash”, this was the site of the Lamb's Water Corn Mill from 1784-1894. The long shed to the right was Copes Tent Makers (“Export to all the world”). The left side shows the “waterfall”, the right hand side, the “Tail Race”. Also on the left hand side is the Mill Dam (the brook called Pendlebury Brook).

But all this vanished with the coming of Beth Avenue. It was goodbye to peace and beauty. In 1986 and 1987, a scheme called Ground Work Trust began trying to make it presentable again, but the irresponsible vandals are trying hard to undo all their efforts. Whether the considerable sums of money and labour will be successful in beautifying this small part of Sutton remains to be seen. It's a case of good sense versus these mindless morons.

In the early part of the century, we regularly used to cross Long Lane on our way to the Wash. The Wash meant a lot of things to us small children. It spelled picnics during the hot summer days, especially at weekends and holiday times. The Wash was the name of the waterfall, and the old water mill was known to countless Sutton children. Lads and lasses pushing trolleys and go-chairs containing toddlers and babies, and also packed in the trolleys were bottles of water, and sometimes (if you were one of the lucky ones), a couple of pop bottles (the ones with a stony in the neck of the bottle), together with jam and treacle butties, all to be enjoyed when we reached this haven of delight.

We would all cross the road, and on our left was Hawthorn Road, which led to the Strappers. At the bottom of Hawthorn Road was a long wooden seat, on which, during the warm summer days, sat the old men of the Leach nearby, all smoking their pipes and, I suppose, talking about their early days: the jobs, the pits, the Lloyd George, the name of the new-fangled pension.

We passed them by, and on the left was a low pebble-dashed shop, which sold almost everything of use to Leach people. We knew it later on as Damsons. On we went, past an old house on the left, about 40 yards further on. Then the shops, and then, perhaps 150 yards further on, a small row of houses, about 4 in number, where two families that I can remember were named the Carols and the Hamblings.

A grandson of the Carols is the latest owner of Leach Hall, and Mrs. Hambling was well known around that area. She was a tremendous worker for the farmers and would spend hour after hour, from sunrise to sunset, either pea picking, potato picking or planting, and at Christmas time, plucking all kinds of fowl. She was not a big person, but very wiry and her face was always tanned by the weather. She could tell quite a few stories about the old days around the Leach, especially the gambling at the Engine and Tender.

On we all went, passing the small row of houses, and a little distance further on, was Abbots Farm on the left. Then we could hear it. What was it that made us all excited? It was the noise of the waterfall hurtling down the stone steps. We turned right off Leach Lane and hastened down the old miller's cart track, leaned over the sandstone wall and watched the water rushing beneath us and out the other side to join Dickies Brook.

After watching the waterfall and looking at the old mill, we made our way on the slopes leading down to the brook. It was a lovely natural glen, and this was one of the places around Sutton where we could go in those happy-go-lucky childhood days to play, bathe and have our picnics. I doubt whether the children of today could grasp what happiness we enjoyed in the natural things of life.

Thinking back to those early days of this century, you could say that, when you turned off Robins Lane and passed by Joe Doffs, you were already in the countryside, and, on reaching the Wash, you had, apart from a few isolated dwellings, nothing but green



fields, with a brook running from and through the four dams. In fact, you passed St. Anne's Monastery, three farms, one public house, one shop, the Leach Hall and, in all, twenty two houses, excluding Pudding Bag, which we passed by on our left. I can also recollect a small brook running down from the old Runcorn Gap railway and moving down on the left hand side (facing the railway) of Wheatsheaf Avenue and disappearing under Leach Lane through a vertical grid.

## **Chapter 12: Pudding Bag Bridge, The Strappers, Battery Cob, and The Old Bridge Leading into Pudding Bag.**

### **The Old Bridge Leading into Pudding Bag**

How times change. I remember the times when I was a school boy, and later when I was in my teens. I remember the gathering of men folk in certain spots, usually on warm summer evenings. Money was scarce in the twenties and thirties. Entertainment like club artists and bingo halls had yet to come. For those who worked, wages were small. For a family man, the money was urgently required at home. Food, clothing and rent bit hard into those wage packets. About this time, the plate layers on the railway from Collins Green to St. Helens Junction took home £1-19s-6d. The equivalent today of £1.97<sup>1/2</sup> p. The yard men at the collieries fared a little better. They took home £2-0s-6d, the equivalent today of £2.02<sup>1/2</sup> p. They were a shilling better off. Then there were the unemployed. What a crying shame that was. A married man was doled out 20 shillings with 2 shillings for each child. A single man received 15 shillings (75p). I remember a pal of mine who had to leave home to get his amount because his father was working at the sheeting sheds. He had a sister who played the piano at home. The officer from the dole told him that he would have to sell the piano and live off the money he got for it. So my pal left home so that he could get the 15 shillings that he was entitled to.

Men used to meet in the evenings to chat about work or the prospects of getting work. Sport was also a topic of conversation. Any topic we discussed relieved the monotony. One place they used to talk was at the entrance of Pudding Bag Bridge. There were stones large enough to sit on there. Some stones had initials carved into them. Each man had his own stone. They had brought them to sit on whilst they leaned on the entrance wall to the bridge. They conversed and watched the world go by. "The world" consisted of St. Anne's churchgoers and people taking their pets to the intersection bridge, to the Leach and the countryside.

My wife and I have had a fondness for pets, especially dogs, throughout our entire married life. At times we had more than one, the sad part of this being the shortness of their lifespan in comparison with our own. Yet, there could be no better companion. I mention this because of the times I have spent with them exploring the countryside around where I live. Especially the old St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway and the old Pudding Bag.

On one of my rambles, passing under the old Pudding Bag Bridge, I noticed rather an unusual thing about the structure of one of the supporting pillars. Each pillar left and right, was divided into two parts, making four sections in all. Again I noticed that there was a difference in the quality of the stone. The first two pillars at the entrance were built of a lighter coloured stone. This is what we used to call Billinge Stone (rightly or wrongly). The second part of the bridge was of the more common red sandstone, probably from the Rainhill quarries. Then again there was a disparity in the height of the stone slabs. The first part of the bridge slabs were nine inches and the second slabs were eleven inches. This led us to believe that the two distinctive sections of the bridge had been built at different times. Later on, I learned that the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway had only a single line, due I think, to insufficient money. Half of the bridge was built originally to carry the single line. Later on the bridge was extended to house the two railway lines. So the old stone bridge running over Monastery Lane, must have been the original one standing now for 160 years. It differs from the three bridges

further up the incline - the one over the L.M.S.R. and the road from Leach Lane to Penlake Lane, the one over Long Lane (now known as Reginald Road) and the one over Hawthorn Road. These three bridges had been built by bricksetters and not by stone masons. The changes in bridge structure are clearly shown in the picture by T. Bury in the Science Museum in London. It shows the original stone bridge, built around 1830 carrying the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway, with a vertical boiler locomotive pulling a train of coal wagons. Under the stone bridge, it shows the Liverpool and Manchester Railway with a "rocket" type of locomotive on this line. It also shows the crossing gate cottage at the end of Monastery Lane, with access to the sheeting sheds and general supply stores. It also shows a horse with a laden cart and driver ready to cross the line to take the old cart track to Monastery Road. This was before the gradient footpath and footbridge were erected for a right of way. The old stone bridge must have lasted from the 1840's to the 1880's - a period of approximately 50 years. After this time, it was replaced by a brick work bridge, built on a larger scale to deal with the great increase of coal wagons, rolling stock and at times, the Wembley train specials in the Clock Face and Sutton Leach sidings.

### **The Strappers**

In the early days of this century, right up to the second world war, everyone in Sutton knew the location of the Strappers. Now if you mention the Strappers, people will look mystified. Children of all ages knew it. Tiny children were pushed there in gochairs and tansads. It was a favourite place in the summer for picnics. There were abundant wild flowers growing along the hedges, in the fields and the pastures, a yellow mist of buttercups with white starlets of daisies peeping out. The making of daisy chains and the holding of buttercups under chins to see the yellow reflection, always went with the saying "Do you like butter?" Those were the innocent days of our childhood, spent in the seemingly endless warm days of bygone times.

Then, The Strappers was popular with the older boys for bird nesting "brid neesin" as it was called. We generally only took one egg from a clutch if we did not have one of that particular kind already. There was one field lying at the end of the "magnum". The field was never cultivated. We used to lie there on our backs watching and listening to the skylarks. We watched their upward flight until they vanished out of sight. Even when they had disappeared, you could still hear them singing. We would watch them return to earth. They were very canny, never returning directly to their nests. They would return quite a way from it and then make their way towards it by running through the long, dense grass. You were very lucky if you ever found a nest. There were two kinds of lark, the large ones and the other smaller larks that we called the tit larks.

Then, making our way along the edge of the fields, we could hear the loud, heavy beat of wings. A covey of partridges would fly past, chest high, over the ploughed stretches of the fields. We would see flocks of lapwings, always standing facing the breeze. Occasionally a pair of lapwings would take off, wheeling in the sky above, making their eerie call "pee wit" before landing again to rejoin the flock. Next, someone would suggest that we should go to Websters to see if we could spot any white blackbirds. Mr. Webster was a solicitor practising in St. Helens. He lived in Abbotsfield House, a Victorian building standing in its own grounds at the junction of Abbotsfield Road and Gorsey Lane<sup>1</sup>. Our next move was to find a spot, around the edge of the grounds, to

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<sup>1</sup> Later lived in by Gil Bond, retired bookmaker and physical culturist.

conceal ourselves whilst we waited and watched for one of the birds to show itself. Sometimes we would see hedge sparrows that we called dunnocks. They were very light in colour, like a light fawn. I have wondered how it came about that these birds should be feathered white. Had some ornithologist in the past bred these birds at Bold Hall? I own a field two fields away from Abbotsfield House. Here my daughter built a bungalow. Now, sixty years later, she has seen blackbirds and hedge sparrows with white markings, when she has put food out for the birds in the morning. Unfortunately, due to new ways of farming and irresponsible youths firing air guns at anything that moves, the majority of bird life has been driven away. Gone are the old attractions of The Strappers.

The Strappers ranged from the Boundary Vaults where Bold Road meets Travers Entry<sup>2</sup>. This ran to the right of the old borough boundary footpath, running all the way to Clock Face Station bridge by Tunstalls Farm, known as Beesleys. The section of Bold Road running from the Farmers Arms (now demolished) at the junction of Normans Lane and Bold Road, had a row of vertical old railway sleepers erected as a fence, with a railway track running from Reginald Road to the boundary path to the left of the Old Sutton Farm<sup>3</sup>. Moving up the path from the vaults, you would pass the old Battery Cob and its three small mounds of earth. The cob itself was man made. It was approximately 40 feet high and 25-30 yards long. The smaller mounds were about 30-50 yards away.

The end views of the Battery Cob took the form of an equilateral triangle, with a 45 degree slope on either side, approximately 30 feet long, with a flat top of about 8 to 10 feet. When we visited the Cob, it was covered with grass, and when we were quite small (about 5 or 6 years old), it took quite a bit of climbing. We were helped by the long tufts of grass covering the Cob.

You may ask: How did it come to be there? It was erected by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lancashire Engineer Volunteers around 1870, as a rifle butt and battery range, for which the army paid an annual rent of £5. Myself and other children spent hours there, roughly fifty years later, gouging out the round shot in the warm summer months, with our scout or clasp knives.

And so for a great number of years, the Cob lay there like some great beast of the fields, drowsing and allowing generation after generation of Sutton children to climb all over it, tugging their way onto its back by the handfuls of hair on its sides and listening to their laughter. Nothing whatsoever disturbed its even temperament - it even allowed them to roly poly down its sides.

And so it continued as a playfield for countless Sutton children until that fateful day during the Second World War when the American 'Liberator' took off from the air base at Burtonwood, loaded with American GIs and nurses. The plane got into difficulties and tried to land in the fields across the boundary path. According to some reports, it flew low over Sutton at a height of 100 feet and shook some of the chimney pots off the houses in Junction Lane. And still losing height, it struck the old Battery Cob, with the loss of all lives on board. In those war years, news like this was censored. It was "hush hush", and so you had to rely on word of mouth about the destination of the Liberator. It

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<sup>2</sup> Later called Bold Road.

<sup>3</sup> The Old Sutton Farm was used as a place for the coaching of boxing by Ernie Proudlove and Bold Thomas during the late 1920's - early 1930's.

was the general opinion of most people, true or false, that the Liberator was returning to America.

One might ask: "How did the Strappers get their name?" This is what I believe, and is what I was told as a young boy by my uncle, the Bailiff at Bold, and my aunt. There were strips (or straps) of land running from the Boundary Vaults to Clock Face and from the old boundary path right the way across to Leach Lane. These straps or strips were farmed as small farms, and were there before the advent of the St. Helens Canal and Runcorn Gap Railway. The building of the railway split them up and the land was required for the use of the railway and sidings.

Then there were the copper smelting works which were sited on the Strappers, and belonged in part to Michael Hughes, who came to Leach Hall and Sherdley Hall. These smelting works caused distress by their noxious fumes and billowing smoke all around these parts. I believe Mr. Tipping, the owner of Bold Hall and the surrounding land, put an end to the smelting of copper in the Strappers because the prevailing winds brought the smoke and fumes to Bold Hall.

In 1865, another alteration in the local geography was caused by the Runcorn Gap Railway. The old road, running from Leach Lane, up alongside Leach Hall, past the Leach Hall farm and Engine and Tender public house crossed Long Lane and ran across to Abbotsfield Road and so on to Gorsey Lane, Hall Lane and Bold Hall.

Part of one of these strips of land in the Strappers - around 4,000 square yards - now belongs to me. It runs from the path which the colliers used to reach Clock Face Colliery. It follows the old borough boundary path and runs to Tunstalls Way and the old Clock Face station. It has been in my possession for a great number of years, and on the deeds, it is described as Long Field, with a cottage at the Tunstalls Way. I used it as a small holding for a period of time, but vandalism caused me to cease using it for that purpose. My daughter and her husband with my granddaughter now have a bungalow built on this strip of land.

Another feature, not now in evidence, is the two blocks of cottages in Abbotsfield Road - about six cottages in each block. These were built to accommodate the copper smelters who came from Anglesey, North Wales, to work for Michael Hughes. The Magnum Wall was set back and built around the cottages, which I believe were called Bold Cottages, Abbotsfield. The cottages were there when I was a lad. Some of the children attended the school at Sutton National when I was there myself.

## **Chapter 13 : Abbots Field, the Harstone Sutton Park, Marshalls Cross**

### **Abbots Field and the Harstones Sutton Park**

Moving along the old borough boundary path, taking the direction from Travers Entry Bold Road to Tunstall's Way at Clock Face, we pass on our left hand side a small wooden two-plank bridge over the ditch, which leads you to what we knew as Sally Fords, a small farmhouse from which she ran her milk business. In two places, you had to climb the stile - a wooden structure which allowed people to climb through, but denied cattle the way through. The small farm was called Rose Hill Farm, and you passed through the small hamlet called Rose Hill Estate, which led you through to Neill's Road. There was, at that time, a path before you reached Rose Hill Farm which went to the right, passing Northfield Farm, which as boys, we knew as Ratcliffes. We had quite a few exchanges with the farmer's family, who tried at times, when we were seen, to turn us back and disputed our right of way.

Retracing our footsteps and again crossing the two plank bridge over the ditch, we regain the boundary path. Continuing in the direction of Clock Face, we pass by the Battery Cob on the right hand side. Eventually, we come to Abbotsfield Road and, looking to the right in the shelter of the Magnum Wall, we see the Bold cottages, where the original copper smelters from Anglesey lived. Looking to our left, we see, at the end of Abbotsfield Road, leading into Gorsey Lane, a Victorian building called Abbotsfield House. This was a fine house, where, when I was young, the St. Helens solicitor, Mr. Webster lived, and later, Gil Bond, the retired Parr bookmaker and physical culturalist. He practised jumping with weights, whilst wearing clogs. He gave exhibitions of jumping at the local sports days - especially the sports days at St. Anne's Monastery Field.

Just before reaching Webster's, and looking to the left, was, and still is, Abbotsfield Farm, which we called Almond's. Standing by Abbotsfield House, and looking along Gorsey Lane towards Clock Face Colliery, was approximately where the miners' baths were erected. Now scrap merchants workshops stand there.

Retracing our steps again to the boundary path and still walking towards Clock Face, we again see on our left another path, running towards the Clock Face Colliery, and passing by the miners' baths. This was the path used by the colliery workers from Sutton and Clock Face, to reach the colliery. We then arrive at the field called Long Field, part of which belongs to myself, and on which my daughter Rita lives, with her husband Denis Kenny and daughter Elizabeth.

By the way, on the day I originally wrote this - 21st February 1987 - my daughter Rita, when feeding the birds early in the morning, saw a black and white coloured blackbird - surely a descendant of the white blackbirds of Abbots House and Bold Park. It was almost seventy years since I first sighted them at Abbotsfield House. I was seven years old at the time.

And so, we are still walking along the old boundary path towards Clock Face, and reach Tunstalls Way, and pass by, on our right, Tunstalls Farm. This was known to us as Beesleys. And then we come out onto the Clock Face Road, opposite the Clock Hotel, on our right is the angled stone arched bridge, straddling the old St. Helens and Runcorn

Gap Railway. Below this was the old Clock Face Station, where you descended some wooden steps to the platform. The station and the railway are now in disuse.

You may ask why I have referred to the large stone in Sutton Park, and wonder what connection it has to Abbotsfield. Well, to my mind, right or wrong, the stone is the clue, and so I will try to explain how it came about.

The large smooth-sided stone in Sutton Park, which is countless ages old, is supposed to have found its resting place during the glacial period on that particular spot - its side worn smooth during its crunching and grinding journey from the Lake District.

A delve back into the twelfth century to the reign of Henry II (1154-89) reveals that William de Lancaster gave orders that, to support a hospital and abbey in Cockersands, all those holders of manors from Cumberland to the River Ribble, and southwards to the Mersey, should donate land to support the cause. This dictate had a Sutton connection, for Hugh de Morris, landlord of the land known as Sutton, decreed that six acres of land running from Eltonhefet (now Eltonhead) to the large grey standing stone, known at that time as the Harstone Stone be donated. So, to my mind, the large Sutton Park boulder is the old twelfth century boundary stone, marking the boundary of the six acres or fields supporting the abbey.

In the earliest record of Bold in 1212, the land around Bold was ruled by Tuger the Elder, who died in 1223. He was succeeded by Adam de Bold. Before his death, Tuger the Elder gave half a ploughland to Albert de Quike and his son Henry de Quike. This ploughland was known as Quicks Fields. Now Henry de Quike was a benefactor to Cockersand Abbey, and he gave some land to support the abbeys. To my mind, this land was, from 1288, known as the Abbots Field, which was originally the Quick Field. From 1288 to the present time, seven hundred years later, it still bears the name Abbots, thus becoming Abbots Fields.

And so, the large boulder in Sutton Park and the land off the Strappers, which we call Abbotsfield, and the Abbey at Cockermouth all have the same connection. This I firmly believe. Can anyone else, who reads this, claim otherwise? I would gladly listen to reason.

### **Marshalls Cross**

For hundreds of years, Marshalls Cross must have been a place where the ancient travellers travelling from Wales and Cheshire stopped. Reaching the River Mersey, crossing it at Fiddlers Ferry and moving along Chester Lane, they might have stopped, rested and prayed at the ancient Saxon cross, before continuing their hazardous journey to the North. Perhaps the advent of the old Bull and Dog followed on the tradition of the old places where the travellers could partake of food and drink and rest for a while.

Although Marshalls Cross was, and still is, a part of Sutton, we, from Sutton, always looked on the Crossites as a small community of their own. There were stretches of fields between Sutton and Marshalls Cross in the early part of the 20th century, which included part of Mill Lane running from the Wash, where the Old Mill was, the houses by St. Nicholas Church, Graces Square, the top part of Mill Lane and part of Chester Lane, including the Bull and Dog public house. Marshalls Cross also had its own rugby

league team and ground, on which I have played. It ran along the top end of New Street to one side of Graces Square.

In the early days of the century, people did not move very far from their homes, and a surprising amount of families were related to one another in Marshalls Cross. One very common name you came across repeatedly was Lamb. The old miller at the wash was named Lamb. I used to deliver and collect money from a paper round at one time, and I used to call at a house where the Marshalls Cross island is.

Now, there were two elderly brothers named Lamb, both around eighty years old. They told me one or two interesting stories, and one was about the time when they were boys. They hid, with their father, one or two nights in the roof of the old glass works, to watch through holes made in the ceiling, where, below, some Frenchmen used some kind of method of producing glass, which was kept secret amongst themselves and would not pass to the local men. In this way, they were able to pass the information on to the management at the glassworks at Sutton.





*Polly Fenney of Chester Lane, Marshall's Cross , Sutton*

## **Chapter 14 : Bold Hall Estate and William Whitacre Tipping, Leoni de Vinci, Maypole Cottages, Cock Fighting, Bold Hall Treasuries**

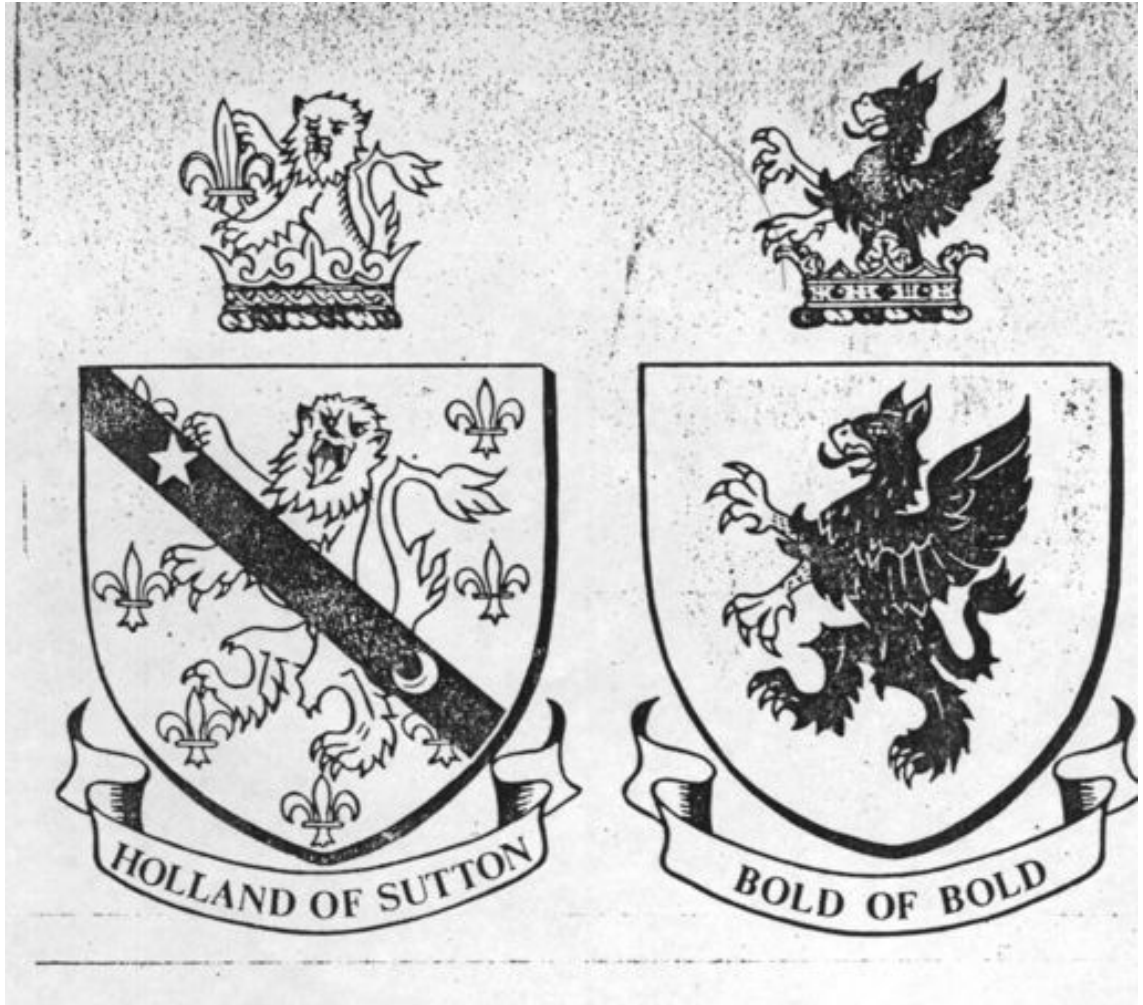
Although I was born and bred in Sutton and have enjoyed great satisfaction in so being, I cannot get away from the fact that Bold in itself has greatly influenced my life, from when I was born, to the present time, over eighty years later. As I have related before, my dad's brother, who was twenty years older than my dad, lived there with my aunt and his family, at Bank House Cottage, Bold. My dad lived there before he was married, due to him being orphaned, and so I travelled up Bold Road as a baby in a pram, until I was able to walk there myself, which I did from an early age. Never a week went by without travelling into Bold. I spent my school holidays there, and, strange to relate and a reflection on these times was that, although Travers Entry and Bold Road was unlit, I never heard of anyone being attacked or molested in any way. Nowadays, you could not allow any small child to walk up there on their own, and adults cannot be sure of not being attacked.

My schooldays were over, and at the age of fourteen, I started work at Bold Colliery as an apprentice joiner in 1924, and worked there until 1940, when I was sent to Burtonwood Aircraft Factory. There, I worked as a fitter in the aircraft propelling division, before I was transferred to Bolton, working on "props" for De Havillands. I mention this because of the fact that I still travelled through Bold to Burtonwood base and, on my motor bike, a Triumph Tiger 350cc, through Bold again to Bolton. I finished my working life at Bold Power Station at the age of 65, having worked there for ten years.

I have described how the Strappers and Battery Cob attracted us Sutton lads, being part of Sutton and Bold, but another attraction was Bold Park, and the stories we heard regarding the ancient place - some were probably mythical, others might have had a degree of truth.

As lads, we could never explore the place as much as we wanted. Many times we were turned back by the people who lived down Hall Lane. They resented us lads walking down there, and it was unsafe to climb over the walls round the park because of the game keepers who kept a wary eye on things, and you never felt like continuing where you would like when a man with a gun confronted you.

The Bold estate itself was fairly extensive, covering some 4,483 acres of land. It was divided by Whittle Brook and, from the north to the west Great Sankey and Camber Wood stood in the south east corner, while in the south was Bold Heath. It was flat and even and the countryside was divided up into pastures, plantations and numerous farms abounded in all parts of the estate. On this heavy clay soil thrived corn, potatoes, cabbages and beans. In the extreme north was Travers Farm, which we knew as Pembertons, and the land on this farm ran to Bold Moss. The Moss was divided from the farm by the Liverpool to Manchester railway. I believe the railway track caused many problems due to having a foundation of peat. Also, the great Stuff Rook at Bold Colliery was found to be adding its great weight to one side of the railway.



***Coats of Arms***

***The Holland Family*** coat of arms is truly representative of Sutton. The Holland's pedigree is traced from Matthew de Holland, who lived in King John's reign, during which the Magna Carta was signed in 1215.

***The Bold Family*** pedigree dates back to Ricardus de Bold in the reign of King Stephen (1135). The Bolds resided at Bold Hall in Bold Park for nearly 700 years, until 1859, when the Hall and Parklands were sold.

The Bolds of Bold Hall were, for centuries, the overlords and owners of tracts of land in Sutton, and one example of this was the gift of land to accommodate the building of St. Nicholas', the church at the highest point of New Street. We knew this as Top Church, to distinguish it from All Saints in Ellamsbridge Road.

The Bolds also governed the production of coal in and around Sutton and transfers of all kinds of land. Another instance of this was the decision to move the copper smelting works at Abbotsfield Road to Ravenhead, although Mr. Tipping was responsible for this. Still, he was the owner of Bold Hall and the estates.

The earliest record of Bold was in the year 1212, in the reign of Henry II, when the Saxon called Tuger the Elder held the land we call Bold. He was succeeded by Adam de Bold, although the pedigree of the Bolds commenced with Ricardus de Boldin the reign of Stephen (1135-1154). What connection there was between Tuger the Elder and the Bolds, I cannot say, nor how the land came to the Bolds (sometimes called de Biilds). Perhaps the domination of the Norman rule had something to do with it. And so the Bolds lived in the Bold Park right from 1222, when Tuger the Elder died in the old Hall, for 400 years, until Richard Bold rebuilt Bold Hall in 1616.

In 1730, the Bolds engaged Leoni de Vincent, the great Italian artist, to design a new hall for them. The fireplace was made of marble from Hadrian's Villa, and the interior was built on classical lines, and pictures and vestments of great value were installed.

The Bold family collections with Bold passed to Henry Hoghton in 1824 who, by royal licence, took the name Henry Bold Hoghton. He belonged to another old Lancashire family from Hoghton Tower, but within 35 years, the Hall and all estates were sold. The year was 1860 when William Whitaker Tipping, a wealthy but eccentric Horwich mill owner, bought the Bold Hall and properties and estate for £120,000.

Before Tipping moved in, there was a snag. The great collection of books in the library was not included in the price, and he was invited to make a bid for them. He was quoted as saying "I am not a bookman, but I know something about muck, and I will give you muck price for them." The books were loaded onto a cart and weighed, and he bought them for 10/- a ton - fifty pence in our new reckoning.

Once William Tipping moved into the Hall, he decided to use only four rooms, and it was rumoured he kept buckets or hesian sacks of mildewed sovereigns there. As lads, we believed the sovereigns lay somewhere around the estate. If they were ever found, no-one knows.

Tipping's main hobby or pleasure was the breeding and sport of cockfighting. What is left of the pits is still there. I believe the spectators and Squire Tipping, as he was called, sat on bales of straw around the pits. It was said that half a thousand birds were kept there for the purpose of cockfighting. He was also reported to take £1,000 with him to the Tipping Arms, but if this is true, and they were sovereigns, they would be heavy in his pockets, so this story could be exaggerated.

Squire Tipping died in 1889, but his eccentric habits caused quite a lot of amused comments, and one such story follows.

Every Friday, Squire Tipping would be driven by his coachman to Wigan Market, passing by Bank House Cottages and calling at the Pear Tree Hotel at Collins Green for a drink, while he left his coachman outside, looking after the coach and horses.

Twenty nine years after he bought Bold Hall, William Tipping died. It was 1889 and he was to be interred at Horwich, and the self same coachman took the body in the coach from the Hall. He took the same route, passing my uncle's (my uncle was now 35 years old and my dad 16) and called at the Pear Tree Hotel, but this time it was a different story. The coachman went in for a drink, and left the deceased William Tipping outside in the coach. It was reported that the coachman said to Dick Naylor, the landlord "Every dog has its day. The old so and so left me outside for many a year and I bet he never wanted a drink half as badly as he does this morning."

Squire Tipping died intestate, and the whole estate was left to a Mrs. Wyatt of Hampshire. Ten years later, she sold the Bold estate to a syndicate called Bold Hall Estate Ltd. The art treasures were sold and most went to America. Indeed, at one time, you could see where the wall had been broken down and later repaired. Through the wall was laid a railway track, and railway vans were used to transport some of the weighty treasures. I believe two stone fireplaces were transferred to Meols Hall, Southport. Bold Hall itself was pulled down in 1936.

It is said that the Park boasted the finest oak trees in the country, and that Squire Tipping had them cut down and sold the timber. Regarding his favourite pastime of cockfighting, Queen Victoria banned it during her reign, but I doubt whether it affected the eccentric Squire Tipping. I saw a picture of him once. He looked a formidable character, with his thick mop of grey hair and large spade beard.

And so now back to the time when I was a lad among other lads. Making our way up Abbotsfield, passing on our left Abbotsfield House and walking down Gorsey Lane, leaving May Pole Farm behind on our right. Again on the left, down their drive, was Abbotsfield Farm, and then we approached Maypole Cottages, which have now vanished, and turned right into Hall Lane, just a cinder cart track.

Continuing down the lane, we came to Dog Kennel Cottage, with this particular inscription in stone on the wall of the cottage (see next page) And then you could turn in, if you were allowed, to the Manor House Farm and more cottages.

At the end of the lane was another cottage, in which old Nanny Redhead lived. If she spotted us, she would give us a rough time with her dog, and she herself could be quite fierce. In her garden was a large goat, and she also fed a large buck rat, which would appear if she called it. She was a well-known character, and lived the life of a recluse at the bottom of the lane, barring us lads at times, the right of way. This bottom part of the lane was called the Ladies' Walk, and the pond to the left named on maps the Fish Pond, we called the Ladies' Pond.

Leaving Nanny Redhead's cottage, you bent left, and still following the narrow road, you would sight the Dog Kennel Plantation on the left hand side, and continuing, you would come to the site of the cock fighting pits.

The Kennel Cottage, built around 1732, was the home of the Hound Master, and the kennels were built on both sides of it; one side for the dogs, the other for the bitches, to keep them segregated. On the kennel cottage front wall an inscription, in German, was cut into the stonework:

*Denn Gottee, zorn vom Himmel word offenbart uber alles gotttidge wedim und ungarech Tigkeit der Menschen.*

I copied this down, and translated from the German, it reads:

*God's anger from heaven will be revealed over all godless beings and the injustice of people."*

This prayer was also carved on a tree in the Bold Wood. This leads me to believe the carvings on both cottage and the tree in the wood were the work of German Prisoners of War in the Second World War (1939-1945). Several groups of prisoners worked around the Bold district at that time, mainly German and Italian. I remember them clearing out and deepening the ditches around that area. You could recognise them by the large, yellow circular disks sewn into the backs of their tunics. They mainly worked around the farmland, helping the farmers, and seemed quite a contented lot of men. When I took the copy of the German prayer to Meini and her Dutch mother, they produced two medallions with the self-same inscription on them, together with a picture of the German priest Goetheolich which she wore around her neck during a serious illness when she was quite young.

My earliest recollection of visiting Bold Park goes back to the year 1915 or 1916, when I was with my cousin Nellie Bamber. She always appeared to me as a grown up, being, as she was, roughly twelve years older than me, She was proficient as a dressmaker. She visited quite a lot of people around Bold, and, for company when I was staying at her home, she took me sometimes. On occasions, this was for social visits, other times it was to do with her dressmaking. I can remember going to the sandstone built North Lodge, at the extreme north of Bold Park, and going through the large iron gates which faced Neill's Row, and being received with Nellie, and having a cup of tea and a biscuit. However, the names of the people we visited have evaded me after all these years.

I also visited farm houses with her. Sally Ford, who was left running the milk business on her own, was one of Nellie's friends. She lived at Rose Hill Farm, near the iron works of Bold. And then she would take me to Stephenson's small, quaint Crossing Cottage at Broad Lane, Collins Green. Mabel Adamson lived here with her parents. This was the very same cottage and land which my brother, who lived on his own, owned from the 1950s to 1975. Shortly before he died, the cottage was vandalised and burnt down. Then, a visit to Helsby's Farm in Penny Lane to visit Molly Helsby and fit her out with a new dress,. All these visits round Bold were taken on foot, because in those times, buses were non-existent.

**Bold Moss : Owd Aincient Moss**

Wot 'appened to the Owd aincient Moss?  
Tha' wert warm and covered wi flowers so gay.  
Wen't slag covered thee, wi all felt thi loss,  
Tha wert brown an 'now thar left drab an grey.

Gone was the white and purple heather,  
Gone were the birds of every feather,  
And paths caressed with thousands of feet  
A crime agen nature, it was owt but reet.

We know that scars weer turf was took,  
They run from Bold to thowd Moss Nook.  
But many a wom tha kept reet warm,  
From wintry blasts that spelt us harm.

Us childer, owd Moss, that welcome us there,  
To jump thi wide ditches for croddy or dare,  
An run carefree across thi ample breast,  
An lie close on't thowd mound for grateful rest.

An in't far corner reet opposite Moss Farm,  
Hives nestled there we'at bees did swarm.  
Busy they were, working all't hours,  
To and fro o'ert Moss visiting thowd Moss flowers.

Tha luct lifeless an cowl an grey was landscape,  
National Coal Board was responsible for this sad rape.  
Tha lay lark this for nigh on twenty years,  
Wot could one do, only shed silent tears.

So awaken owd Moss from a score years of sleep  
A full circle as turned, now new flowers will peep,  
An thi paths will appear where grasses brush wi knee,  
And bird song will be heard and the humming of the bee.

So now aincient Moss tha con live once again,  
Wi seeds sown to grow, under sunshine and rain.  
Thar't grateful to all who took such a measure,  
Thal bring forth to young and old most wonderful pleasure.

**Frank Bamber**



*(1) Turf cutters at work, one cutting and the other spreading the cut turf.*

*(2) Women working to sort and stack the slabs of turf.*



## **Chapter 15: Parr, Bold and Sutton Moss, Bold Colliery 1876-1986, the Old Cricket Ground, Mr. Barrow “The Firelight Man”, ‘Croddying’**

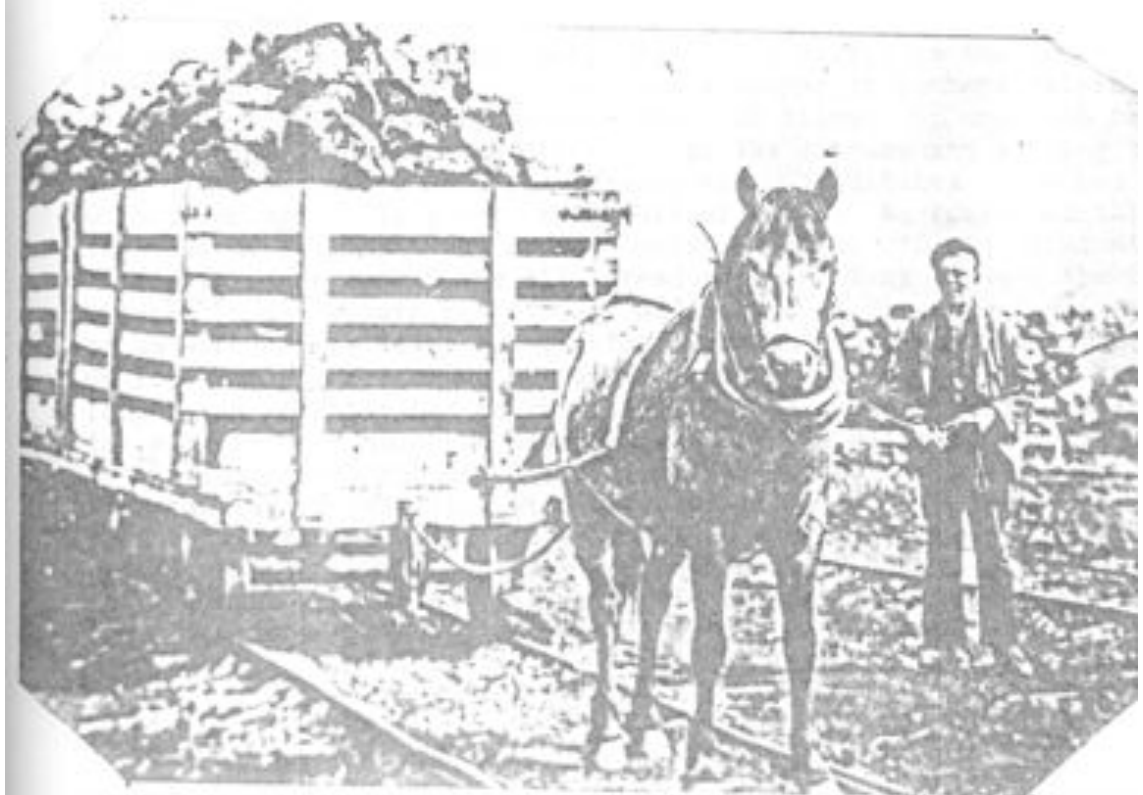
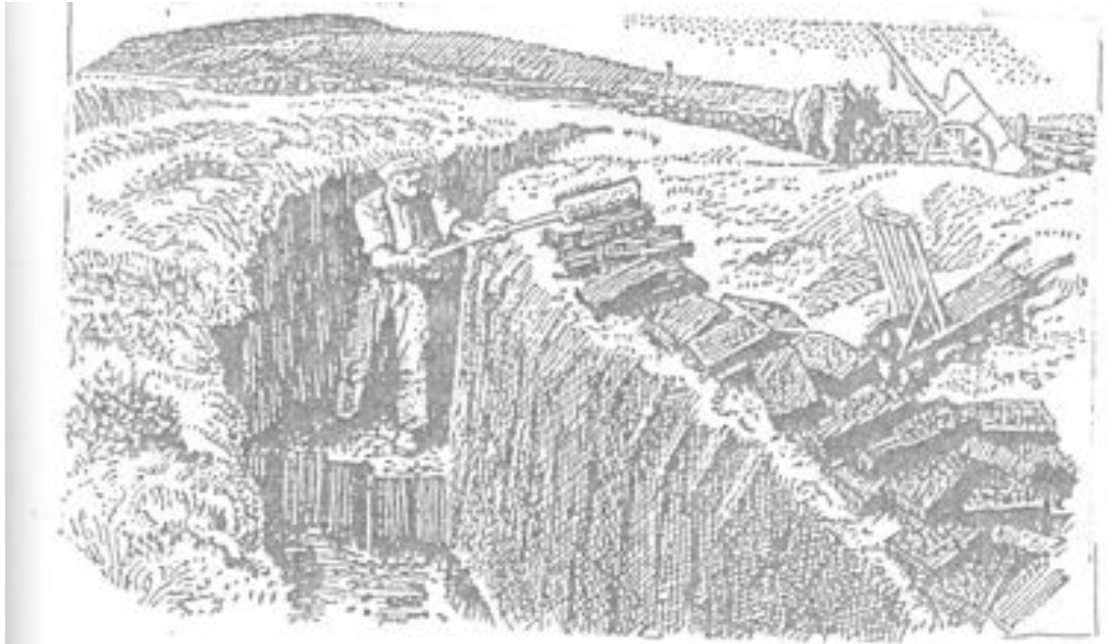
### **Parr, Bold and Sutton Moss**

In line or step with a great amount of changes around our Sutton, the warm, beckoning Mosses we knew in my childhood have disappeared. Bold Colliery, which in the past played its part in supporting many families from Sutton, Parr and Burtonwood for 110 years, kept its slag heaps or Stuff Rooks on the Bold side of the railway. Now, under the National Coal Board, it spews its thousands of tons of slag and rock over the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, and deposits over the warm, brown peat, exerting its great weight. This pressure, like some giant hand over a great sponge caused the peat to roll and rise in great waves, before succumbing to the unyielding pressure and covering of slag and rock.

I well remember one particular day myself and several pals spent on the Moss. It was during the school summer holidays, and the weather was beautiful and sunny. Four of us from around Edgeworth Street and Ellen Street decided to walk to the Moss. On the way, we called for Chuck Lightfoot from Station Road and crossed Junction Lane and made our way up Leonard Street, and passed by the old cricket ground, which was then a small holding belonging to the Unsworth family. This field was purchased by the present Town AFC, and a football pitch, changing rooms, a small stand, sauna baths and a social club, capable of holding 600 members now stands on it.

Leaving the cricket field, we made our way along a cart track which was used by the colliers on their way to Bold Colliery and also by a little, stockily-built man, named Mr. Barrow, who, with his sturdy, shaggy pony and two-wheeled float gathered the cut blocks of dried peat from the Moss to make naphtha-soaked firelighters. He used to arrive at Edgeworth Street every Saturday morning, selling his firelighters. I would go to his cart with a newspaper and he would sell me seven firelighters at a penny each; one firelighter for each day. He was an old world character to look at - short and thick set, with a heavy black moustache, a long jacket on his back, baggy trousers and clogs, and a face the colour of peat. But it was his hands that caught my eye. They shone like polished mahogany, due to always working with the peat and naphtha. After he had knocked on our door, I would smell him. The strong smell of his firelighters coming from him and his pony and cart, laden with firelighters, seemed to fill our part of the street. How I looked forward to seeing him every Saturday morning! He and his pony have long since died, and his business has disappeared, but I, for one, still remember him as the “Firelight Mon.”

Back to my story. We could follow the cart track which skirted the chemical tip, which thrust its way towards the Moss, or climb the grass grown tips. Standing on its edge, we would look over the three Mosses, Sutton, Bold and Parr. This tip was fairly high and steep, and when we were older - say, about fourteen or fifteen - we would shoot over the edge on our bicycles and freewheel for about two hundred yards along the firm part of the Moss. Then we would ride back again, and, with bicycles on shoulders, struggle to the top, and then down again we would go. We got our share of excitement, and exercise, out of climbing up the tip with the cycles.



*(1) An old time scene on the Old Moss, showing a turf cutter at work cutting trenches to be built up in pyramids to dry. Note the two-wheeled cart, or wain, the horse, and the distinctive wheelbarrow.*

*(2) Driver and horse with loaded slatted tram.*

Looking down at the Mosses, you would see the long peat ditches, with room for a pony and cart between them - in fact wider than that to make room for the pyramids - and the built blocks of peat, built up to dry with the sun and winds. The blocks were spaced to allow the winds to blow through them. So different from today. We never destroyed the pyramids. Even when the little 'Firelight Mon' was not in evidence, his hard work was left alone. In the present day, with all the vandalism that goes on, the little man would never have been able to carry on his business.

The peat blocks, cut to dry, would be approximately nine inch cubes. These were taken from the Moss to dry and cut into wafers of peat about four and a half inches by one and a half inches thick. the Firelight Mon would make roughly twelve firelighters from each block of peat. After soaking them in naphtha and delivering them, he would make a shilling a block.

When Mr. Barrow finished his business, it passed into Mr. Joe Robinson's hands, and he worked at it for a part time job. I knew Joe well. His regular job, after coming out of the pit, was to grind a certain type of rock into dust. This was done by filling a revolving drum, inside of which were cast iron balls with rocks. When fine enough, the dust was sent down the pits in a covered wheeled truck and used to dust the tunnels and prevent fire damp.

But back again to the top of the tip. Looking across the Moss, you would see, in contrast to the rich brown colour of the peat, the great patches of purple heather stretching in all directions. You would notice the yellow-coloured flowers of gorse and plants scattered far and wide, with cotton like tufts. We called them cotton plants. I was told that when the LNW Railway laid the track across the Moss, they had a lot of trouble stabilising the foundation on the peat, which went down to a great depth. So the peat was dug, cut and bales of cotton waste were laid on one another, and then ballast was laid on the top to give the railway track a good foundation. And this, we reckoned, was the reason for the cotton plants, the seed being blown from the bales across the Moss.

In the dry summer months, the Moss was used as a short cut from Sutton to Earlestown via Collins Green. But in the winter rains, you had to know your way through, otherwise you could sink up to your knees or waist, especially in one particular spot, which was extremely boggy. I used to accompany a boy who lived opposite me in Ellen Street across the Moss because his father was the signal man on the large signal box just below Bold bridge and before the Junction Station. Sometimes he had to work a double shift through not being relieved, and so we used to take him food and drink in a basket.

On one occasion, we were approaching the boggy part just below the signal box when we saw two girls, about fourteen years of age, in difficulties. They had sunk into the bog about halfway up to their knees. Then we heard Mr. Williams the signal man shout down to us from an open window "Don't go in the bog. Come up into the signal box first and hurry up." We went through the railings and up the steps into the signal box, where he told us to look under the signal box, where we would find a long plank. He told us to take the plank and lay it from what we knew as the firm turf and push it as near as we could to the girls. We then managed to pull one leg out at a time, crying "What shall we do? We'll get laid on when we get home. We've lost our shoes." Mr. Williams, who could not leave his signal box, shouted down to us all to come to the box, and when we arrived, he had a bucket of water and some cleaning rags. He told the

girls to sit on the bottom steps and to take their stockings off and rinse them and wring them out and he would hang them out to dry. When this was done, we said goodbye to the girls and my friend's father, and made our way home. We never knew how the girls got on - we never saw them again. But we guessed they would get a warm reception when they got home with no shoes on. In those days, shoes were not easy to come by.

But, back to our day on the Moss. The six of us ran down the tip into the turf. We knew what we were going to do. We were going to do "Croddying". Some people would ask "What's Croddying?" Well, it's a kind of adventure game where one takes the incentive at making some kind of challenge to the others, whether climbing a tree and dropping from a height to the ground, or leaping across a ditch when there was a danger of perhaps falling in. On the Moss, the turf ditches were just the thing. Up and down the Moss we went, leaping one after the other, across the ditches and sitting together, resting at intervals, until we came to the wide ditches which had not been worked for ages. These were half full of water. We looked at this ditch and then we looked at one another questioningly. "Don't think wi con croddy this one, lads." We all agreed, so going back between the two ditches to get a fair run, five of us managed it, and only just! The five of us were fairly leggy, but Charlie Lightfoot was just a bit shorter than us five. Several times he ran to jump across and drew back to get a longer run, and this led to his downfall. He went walking backwards too far, and giving a shout, he disappeared down the ditch he had his back to.

We all jumped the big ditch again and ran to Charlie's ditch, and there he was, standing in the ditch with water up to his waist. He had fallen backwards into the water, and he was like a drowned rat. We could not help ourselves from laughing at his woebegone expression, but we soon had him out, two of us pulling him up by his outstretched arms.

Now the problem was the drying of his clothes, and we decided to get to the warm mound. This mound of peat stood higher than the surrounding moss, and it was exposed to the sun and wind, and you could feel the warmth coming from it. In fact we had, at certain very hot periods, found the surface covering of peat smouldering. So this was our source of warmth to dry Chuck's clothing. Off came his jersey, shirt and singlet, pants, stockings and clogs.

Charlie decided to wring his stockings and his pants out, and to put them on again, with his clogs, and to rely on them drying out on his legs as we continued our jumping on this hot summer's day. After a short while, we came back to the mound and turned singlet, shirt and jersey over and we decided it would not take very long for them to dry out and be fit to wear again. Off we went again, across the Moss, Charlie standing out from the rest of us, with his bare body and his braces over his bare shoulders, holding his pants up, which now, with his stockings, were beginning to dry.

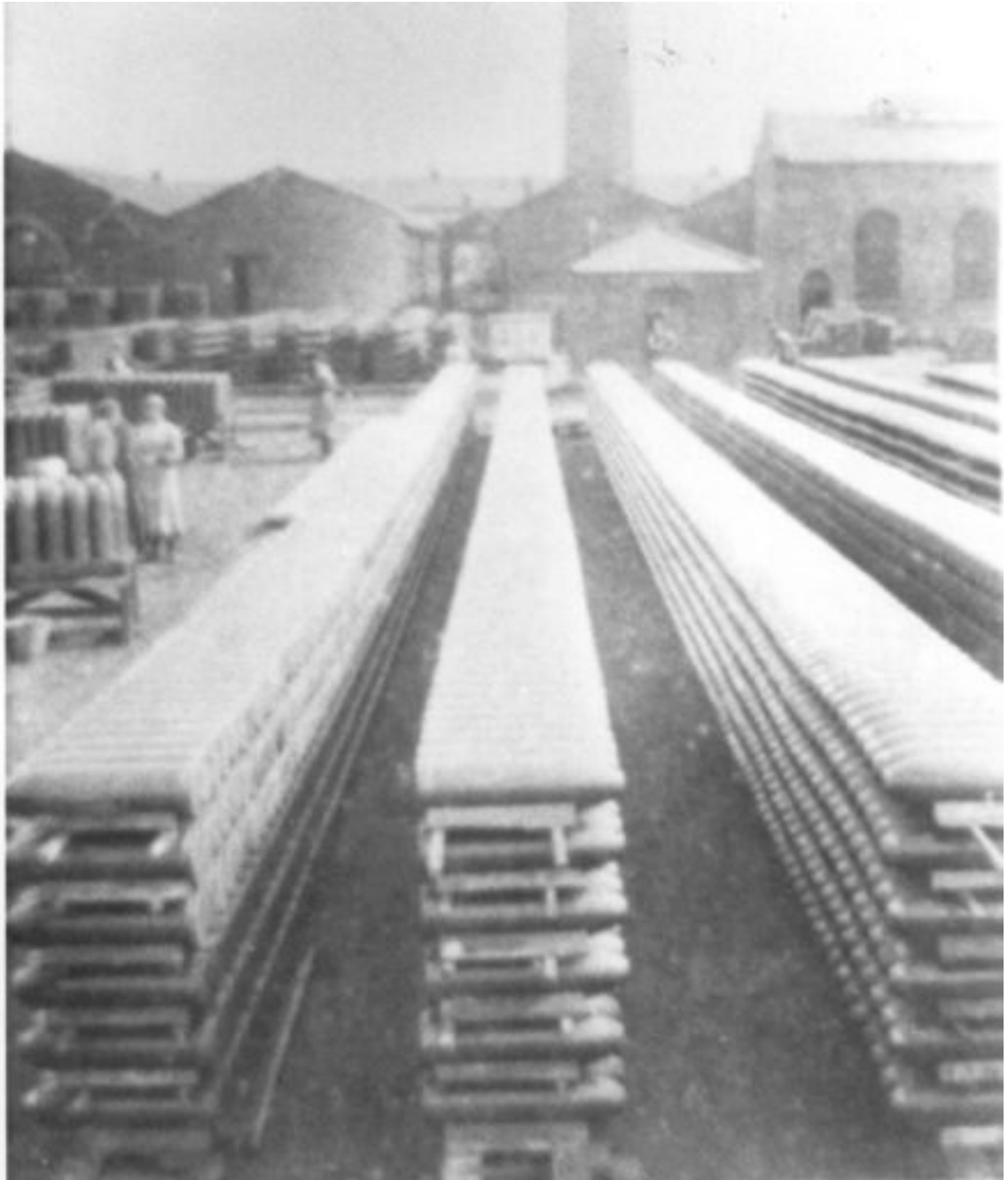
We must have been away from the mound longer than we should have been. When we arrived back to see if the clothes were dry, everything seemed to be alright. But, to our dismay, and especially Charlie's, when we picked the singlet, jersey and shirt up, they all fell to bits. They had smouldered away in the hot sun.

They all looked at Charlie, whose face was a picture. He said, "I can't go home like this, mi dad'll kill me." We said it could have been worse. It was a good job he had kept stockings, clogs and pants on. "Tha'd 'ave luct well gooin wom bout them on Chuck."

It was small comfort to Charlie, but it was better than losing them all, so we had a conflagration and decided that four of us would run home to Sutton and see if we could beg the articles from our homes, which we did. A cast off singlet, a shirt and jersey and we hurried back with these to a grateful Charlie, who promptly put them on. And so, at the end of the day, Charlie got off very lightly, when we went home with him and explained to his mother and dad what had happened.

The alternative way to Bold Colliery and Collins Green Colliery was across the Moss for Sutton Colliery workers when the weather was dry enough instead of going around the Bold Road. It joined the Parr workers a short distance from Bold Bridge and the boggy part around that particular part of the Moss was made that much more accessible by the planting of old railway sleepers and large flat stones. It must have created hazards, especially in the dark and early foggy mornings. Some of the early birds among the colliers were up and travelling to work as early as 4.30 in the mornings.

A few more facts about the peat moss. The twigs of heather which grew to a height of 18" could be used for brooms for sweeping up. I have collected peat from a corner of the Bold Power Station, near the Bold Colliery, which has escaped the covering over of slag and rock. This part is a remnant of the old Bold Moss. We used the peat for the hot house cultivation of plants and tomatoes at the power station in 1970.



*Rows of stacked shells ready to be sent to the “Front” during the First World War (1914-1918) at the old glassworks site called the “Sutton Bond”. This was later a silk works and the British Sidac Cellophane factory.*

## **Chapter 16: 1917 - The Race and Ice Cracking at Billy Wood's Pottery, Moss Brook. Our Nell's Jack and Arthur Mills.**

It was 1947, just after the Second World War. I was working as a maintenance joiner at British Sidac cellophane manufacturers, Lancots Lane in Sutton. Next to a low railway bridge, was the office building that was used by the old glassworks and the Sidac firm. It still stands to this present day, 1987. A similar brick building was used as a general store by the glassworks. In 1947, it was used by Sidac for many purposes. The ground floor was used for coke storage, for heating installations in the general office and for the building itself. The second floor, was used as a joiners' department. The top floor was the conversion department, where the printing machines were installed. These had been brought from the parent firm in Belgium and were worked by girls and older women. The workers were supervised by three to four men who set the print and supervised the machines. This large brick building has been demolished.

I was repairing the wooden floor in the conversion room, when I saw at the doorway, the small figure of a man standing there. He would be a little below average height, slimly built, neatly dressed and wearing a pair of highly polished clogs upon his feet. There was a familiar look about him, that I could not place at first. I studied his face. It was long. I would describe him as "lantern faced" with ruddy features. Behind his spectacles, were a pair of very sharp eyes. Over his left arm, hung several lengths of leather belts and in his right hand, was a bag containing a hammer, belt fasteners, and a couple of sharp knives. He walked towards me and nodded his head. I smiled at him and beckoned him to come over. "Hello, you seem familiar to me but I cannot place you as yet". I mentioned places that I had worked, but we drew a blank. Then he said "could it be skating?" "That's it" I said. It must be thirty years ago at Billy Wood's pottery at Moss Nook when the flash of water was frozen over. I was only a small boy near the end of the First World War in 1917. He told me his name. It was Arthur Mills, a figure skater from Haydock. On that Saturday afternoon, he had been approached to give a figure skating exhibition and to race against none other than Jack Hill from Billinge. Jack Hill was a champion skater of Carr Mill fame and was known as "Our Nell's Jack". Arthur then told me he would have been about 31 or 32 in 1917. Jack Hill would be about 58 years old, still of athletic build and a very fit man. He was very fast and a match for Arthur, whose strong point was figure skating. In the early part of the century, skating was a popular sport and pastime in the hard winters we experienced after the hot summers. In that year of 1917, my two older brothers came home and said that a poster had been pinned up in the window of Jim Douglas's chip shop in Junction Lane. It was alongside posters advertising other sporting fixtures. It said that a grand skating contest was to be held at Billy Wood's pottery between "Our Nell's Jack" of Billinge and the figure skater, Arthur Mills, of Haydock. After dinner that Saturday afternoon, we produced from a shelf in the back kitchen, three pairs of skates. One pair differed from the others. They were to be worn by me and were called the "dummy skates". They were for me to learn on.

All three of us set off that afternoon and what a sight that was to see. The flash was black with people winding in and out of each other on their skates. On the sides were braziers of hot coals, heating chestnuts and hot potatoes, cooked in their jackets. After a while, an official shouting through a trumpet, asked everyone to move off the ice. This was to allow Arthur Mills to give his exhibition of figure skating. Arthur skated onto the

centre of the flash. This was the very first time that I had set eyes on him. He was a very agile and skilful skater. When he had finished, he was clapped and applauded by all the spectators ringing the frozen flash. Then it was announced that in three quarters of an hour, the race would be on. The champion skater “our Nell’s Jack” versus Lancashire figure skating champion, Arthur Mills.

The time for the race arrived and all the skaters moved inward to form two lines, with a lane in-between them of about five or six yards. The two contestants could be seen with tight jerkins on and belted around the waist. At the starting point, we could hear shouting. The betting men were shouting the odds and it was announced through the trumpet, that Jack Hill would give Arthur Mills some yards start to make a race of it. The two contestants stood crouched, ready for the off. However, curiosity got the better of some spectators, who moved inwards to get a better view, concentrating the weight of spectators in the centre. A tremendous cracking noise was heard from one end to the other and self preservation took command as people fled to safety. It was pandemonium. People were falling over each other in frantic bids to get to the sides. The ice did not break, it held, but the interest of the people hadn’t. People took their skates off and made their way home to warmth and security including my two brothers and myself.

Very few must have seen the outcome of the race. It was thirty years later that I learned from Arthur Mills the fact that “our Nell’s Jack” had beaten him. Both of them had admitted that they had never skated faster than on that day. Fear and the loud cracking noise had lent them wings to reach the far point of the race at the finish.



## **Chapter 17: The Old Bonk “Thowd Bonk”, Barton Bank Colliery, Trench Digging by the Pals”**

The “Old Bonk” may have appeared to adult strangers to that part of Sutton as ugly and dreary, with its chemical tips and very old colliery slag deposits, but it appealed to us youngsters, for it was free to roam on, and it had two main attractions. Well one! Two flashes of water which we all knew as the Green Ocean and the White Ocean. The Green Ocean we kept clear of, because a number of our four-legged friends met a sad end there. In those times, old and unwanted pets departed life in those green waters. But now to a great extent, and with the intervention of the R.S.P.C.A, most people give kinder consideration to old and ailing cats and dogs.

The White Ocean was comparatively clear. It was deep enough to swim in, without the danger of drowning, and this is where myself and hundreds of other children of both sexes learned to swim. In the hot periods of summer time, it resembled a lido, and I never heard of any child losing its life there. There were always good swimmers to help out anyone in difficulties. We graduated there as we grew older and were too big to go wading in the old school brook. There was one flat piece of land quite big enough and grassed to stage a rugby or football match on. Ponies roamed the Old Bonk to feed on the sparse grass. They mostly belonged to the firewood dealers and hawkers who lived around those parts.

How did it get its name? No-one seemed to know, or care, when I was young. It just got taken for granted. But I learned that a colliery was once there called Sutton Bank Colliery, and it could have been referred to by the old Sutton people as the Old Bank or Old Bonk.

The area of land which we knew as “Owd Bonk” stretched from the old level crossing at Fleet Lane, past Gittins Pubs towards Sutton, behind Morris Street, and ran along Watery Lane and returned up to Berry’s Lane. The water flowed through it from Pendlebury Brook and what we called the School Brook and coursed its way and became the Sankey Brook. As lads, we travelled over the Bonk on our way to Carr Mill and Haydock; over the level crossings of the old St. Helens mineral railway and, passing over the old St. Helens Canal and locks. There was, I remember, up to the end of my schooldays, a chemical works chimney. That must have been around 1924.

Wild flowers of all descriptions grew there, and it was a common sight to see small children gathering bunches of flowers to take home and place proudly in jam jars in their backyards. First World War soldiers practised digging trenches there, as it was quite near to the barracks in the old glassworks we knew as Sutton Bond.

## Chapter 18: Our Street As It Was

*We were not born with silver spoon  
When I was just a lad.  
But my heart was warm as a day in June  
And so wealth untold I had.*

*I had the wonders of our street  
What wonders the pavements hold  
Top and whip and hop scotch at our feet  
And gutters where our marbles rolled.*

### Edgeworth Street

The Edgeworth Street of today differs from the street that I knew as a lad. The street then, as I knew it, contained six rows of terraced houses, in which were eight shops, one chapel and one public house.

First of all, the shops. Four of these were more or less front rooms of the houses converted into small shops, without any alterations to the front windows. They still retained the original house windows. They were mainly small grocery and sweet shops and also took orders for bread. There was one exception to this. It was the shop run by a Miss Price, who opened a small pork butcher's shop and sold cowheels, trotters and savoury duck. The people running the other small businesses were Mrs. Beasley at No.88, Mrs. McVitie at No.74, Miss Jones at No.58 and Miss Millie Price at No.51.

Mr. John Davies had a large dairy at No.73. This house was the only detached house in the street. It had a fair amount of ground, enclosed by a surrounding wall. It also enclosed stables for four ponies and an enclosure for several milk floats, with the cleansing dairy to the rear of the house. Both Mr. Davies and his wife worked the milk rounds each day, and Mrs. Davies started her round at the front of our house. She summoned the customers by sharp blasts on her whistle and people would come out of their houses with jugs in their hands, and ask for a gill or a pint. Mrs. Davies would then take the lid off the large churn of milk and measure out, by means of a gill or pint scoop, which had a handle attached to it, bent over at the top to rest on the lip of the churn. On receiving the milk, customers would pay there and then, and Mrs. Davies would give them change, if necessary, out of a leather bag which she had slung at her waist and leather straps over her shoulder.

As far as I can remember, the price of milk was 2<sup>1/2</sup> pennies for a pint and one penny and a farthing for a gill of milk. Their son, named Dick, who was a year older than me would go, after coming out of school, to collect the milk from several farms in Bold. I often went with him.

Our first call would be to the Moat House Farm. You reached this by passing W.M. Neill's Foundry and turning left into Gorsey Lane for about four hundred yards, and then turning right down a cart track to reach the Moat. When we got there, the farmer would manhandle a large churn of milk into the float, which we secured by means of a chain to the side of the float.

Coming out of the farm, we would make our way back as far as the North Field Farm, which was then known as Ratcliffes. There again, we would collect another large churn of milk, and attach that to the opposite side of the float to make an even balance. But we would carry on, and call at Travers Farm, known then as Pembertons, for a third churn. Travers Farm was at Travers Entrance, now referred to as Bold Road, opposite the Bold Power Station, which was not even thought of at that time. The fields belonging to Pembertons stretched from the farm to the main Manchester to Liverpool railway line.

With the three churns of milk safely attached to the float, we would make our journey back to Edgeworth Street, where Mr. Davies would lift the churn out of the float and rotate them to the dairy. We would then unharness the pony and lead him into his stall and, if he was steaming, rub him down, and put some food in the manger to keep him quiet.

Some of these journeys into Bold were quite arduous, especially in the winter when snow was on the ground. At that time, the roads into Bold were not kept in the condition they are today. Large potholes appeared in the roads, which were filled in by granite stones taken from the two old stone yards, which were on the left hand side of Bold Road. I really loved those rides into Bold, visiting the farms and looking round the shippens, stables and pig sties. I never grew tired of this. It ended when I started work at the age of fourteen.

Passing Millie Price's pork shop at No.51, you came, at the end of the row, to Fred Hill's grocery shop. It was the kind of shop in which you could buy anything in the food line and it also had a fine assortment of toffees, or sweets as they are called these days. Fred Hill took good care we youngsters were kept well supplied. There were Kayli Suckers, Atties Mint Balls, sold at twelve a penny, liquorice sticks and lucky bags at one penny, each containing charms etc. I suppose during Fred Hill's life behind the counter, followed by his son Harold, thousands of Friday night's pennies were handed over the counter. A penny was a luxury to hundreds of us kids. The shop at No.31 Edgeworth Street has now been pulled down.

When the winter nights closed in on us, several of us youngsters would gather at the front of Hill's shop window. One of us would be chosen to start off the game of guessing. Our noses would be pressed up to the window, examining every article which was on show. The one chosen to start off the game would give the first and last letters of something that was in the window, e.g. the letters K and I, which would be Kayli. The one who guessed it would be ready to call out the name Kayli and run across the road, touch the opposite side of the street and back again to the shop window. The winner of the two runners had the next chance to call out the first and last letter of the article he chose.

Leaving Hill's shop and crossing Fisher Street, you would then come to the oldest terraced houses in the street. There were fifteen in all, from No.1 to No.29. No.1 started at Ellamsbridge Road and No.29 ended at Fisher Street. At the rear of these houses was quite a wide space of entry, much wider than the other entries in the street. I remember seeing the remains of pig sties there, and across the entry, at the lower end was the Fletcher's slaughter house. This must have been very convenient at one time for the occupants of these houses who, I suppose, relied a lot on whatever the pigs brought for



*Sutton Conservative Club in Edgeworth Street and the Caretaker's house. The caretaker at the time this photograph was taken was taken (approx. 1900) was Sandy McKinnon. The club itself was demolished in 1987.*

them - either food or money. I suppose with the number of pigs around that area, and one or two roaming around rooting for food, that is why the Victoria Vaults was nicknamed the "Little Pig"

Across the street from No.1 was the public house, the "Little Pig". I have included this as the public house in our street because the rear outbuildings and the side of the public house, plus the yard and double doors were actually in our street. I also include Price's small dairy for the same reason. Price's shop window and yard were in Edgeworth Street. Price's traded mainly in milk and toffee and sweets.

Taking a prominent place between the public house and Price's Dairy was the Conservative Club, with a house provided for the caretaker. At that time, a Mr. McKinnon was the caretaker. His wife and family helped him to look after the club and the splendid bowling green at the rear of the club was Sandy's joy. It was kept in splendid condition. The members of the club affectionately referred to Mr. McKinnon as "Sandy".

The club itself had a ground floor which was licensed for dancing and music. Many wedding and birthday parties were held there and a Junior Conservative meeting was held every Friday night called the Sutton Junior Imps. This was very popular. After a short discourse was held, the night ended with music and dancing. Many friendships between girls and boys started at these meetings. The upper floor had a lounge, bar and a fair sized room with two full sized billiard tables in it, and tables and chairs for dominoes and card games.

It also gave access to a steel constructed balcony which, in the summer months, gave good viewing whenever the bowling matches took place. It also had a steel staircase, leading down to the bowling green and bowls house.

Further on, in the middle block where I lived, was an elderly man named Mr. Woods. He was a retired coffin maker and was also the local secretary for the "Odd Fellows". I used to take my father's subscriptions to his house. After knocking on the door, he would ask me into his parlour, which was very well filled with all kinds of Victorian furniture. I used to gaze around, taking everything in, while he marked my father's card and made an entry into the large book he kept there. The furniture and knick knacks would be very valuable now. The number of this house was 76.

Across the Robins Lane entry, with the length of it running along Edgeworth Street, was a "Primitive Methodist Chapel", which everyone called the "Tin Chapel", on account of it being clad on both sides, and having a roof made of corrugated iron sheets. Later on, the chapel was put up for sale and the St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church bought it and used it as a meeting place. You could also hire it for weddings and parties etc. It has now been demolished some years before the Conservative Club was taken down.

Now, parts of the street have died. Gone are the small front room shops where people, in neighbourly fashion, could go in and buy one or two items. Even more valuable, they could unburden their troubles to a kindly person behind the counter or a few friendly neighbours gathered in the shop. A worry shared is a worry halved. Gone are the dairies and the whistle of Mrs. Davies summoning all to the milk float and wishing a cheery

good morning to each and everyone. My mother used to say Mrs. Davies should not say what she does say. You see, Mrs. Davies used to ladle out the measure into one's jug and then she would add a drop more, over the measure into one's jug and say "That's not one of John Davies' pints." You see, Mr. Davies carefully measured out the correct amount asked for, but Mrs. Davies always gave you that little drop more and kept her customers happy.

Gone is the personal touch now, to be replaced by the early supply of milk bottles placed on the front doorstep, which, if not taken, might advertise the fact that there was an even chance no-one was in. I was on my way to the library today - it was 3.30pm, and on the step of the house where I was born were two full bottles of milk. They were still there when I returned home at 4.15pm. I thought "I hope the wrong type of person does not take notice of the length of time they have been resting on the doorstep." the old type of neighbours would have knocked on the door to enquire if there was anything wrong, and if there was no answer, they would have taken the bottles into their own homes so that no-one would be any the wiser that no-one was in. That is the difference. How people can become so isolated and strangers to one another. People tend to think "It's none of my business." This makes it easier for the thief, and so crime multiplies.

I feel it is part of my recollections to name some of the occupants of these houses. It might possibly interest some people who had their family roots around there in the early part of the century. The houses were numbered, as I have said 1 to 29. The first house was where the Burns family lived, then the Appletons and Ralph Charnock, who was the Secretary of the Sutton Commercial Amateur Rugby club. Then, Dick Charnock, who was one of the promoters of the Rolling Mill Sweep, which the greater part of the Sutton people contributed to. More information on the Sutton Sweep is provided below.

How times change. Gone is Fred Hill's shop - the corner shop, the spying out of words in the shop window. Gone is the Tin Chapel and gone is the old Conservative Club, where quite a lot of local businessmen used to spend their spare time and leisure hours. Now, the only business is a ladies and gents hairdressers in the street, replacing the Davies' milk dairy premises.

### **The Rolling Mill Sweep**

The Rolling Mill Sweep was promoted in the early part of the century by three men: Nobby Thompson, who lived in Ellamsbridge Road, opposite the National School and worked at the Rolling Mill in Watery Lane, the mill that gave the sweep its name; Dick Charnock of Edgeworth Street, who worked as a miner down below at Bold Colliery and was the President of the Sutton Branch of the Mine Workers Union and a member of Sutton Conservatives Club, which was opposite the house he lived in. The third man was Benny Morris from Leigh Street, who worked as a moulder at Alan Bartons, I believe. Benny Morris was also well known as the scorer at the New Street Cricket Ground. A fourth man was involved, known as Billy Lathom, the Barber. He had his barber's shop just around the corner of Edgeworth Street, next to Lathom's chip shop. Billy, I believe, lost a leg in the First World War (1914-1918). It was at his shop that you paid your subscription of one shilling a week to take part in the sweep. Having paid your shilling, you received a slip of paper with your name or nom de plume, and a number, starting from nil and running up to about a thousand.

The sweep was run during the rugby league season, and in those days, the “Saints” and the “Recs” played at home on alternative Saturday afternoons. The winning number was all of the points scored, added together. For instance, a draw of ten points each would give a winning number of 20, for which you would receive the sum of £20. Also, if you had 19 or 21, they counted as side prizes, for which you would receive £5 in each case. Furthermore, prizes called Jumpers were paid out for each repetition of the number 20 plus the hundred that followed, for example 120, 220, 320 and so on.

£20, £5 and £1 can be welcome even in these days of inflation, but in those times, when wages for six days work amounted to the meagre sum of £2 or £3, winning the Sweep was like winning a small fortune. When you realise that the three main prizes amounting to £30 took 600 paying members to cover, you would need another 200 members to pay out the jumpers of £1, making the total prize money almost £40.

Needless to say, in those days in Sutton, when almost everyone was known to one another, the news of winning the main prize soon flashed across Sutton by word of mouth, on the Saturday night following the match in the afternoon. People knew, especially those going to the matches, who had the favourite numbers. Everyone from 0 to 50 fancied their chances, and it created a lot of enthusiasm for many families in Sutton at that time.

The police must have been well aware of the existence of the sweep, but I never recollect them trying to stop it being run. I mentioned earlier that the average weekly wage was £2 or £3. I know that in the early 30s, a Yard Man at Bold Colliery took home two pounds and six pence (£2.02<sup>1/2</sup> pence today), whilst the plate layers gang on the railway running from Collins Green to St. Helens Junction took home £1-19-6 (£1.97<sup>1/2</sup> today).

## **Chapter 19: Knocks On The Door**

### **Thow'd Jew's 'Ere**

Bessie Haddock lived directly across the street from our house. Whether her name was really Haddock or not, people in the street did not bother to know. As far as I know, she was there, a grown woman, when I was born, and still lived there when I left the street in 1928, at the age of 18 years old. Jim Haddock was a tram driver. He drove the trams from St. Helens to St. Helens Junction in Sutton. The trams were driven to St. Helens Junction at Station Road along a single line track. Trams were then able to pass one another at various loops provided in the roadways.

Jim Haddock's wife was a very large woman who seldom went out, and due to her size, had much difficulty in coping with the household chores, and so Bessie came to live with them, to help Mrs. Haddock. Some say she came from a workhouse. She was rather taller than the average woman, slightly bent, and always wore a small shawl around her shoulders. Her hair was coloured auburn, and she spoke broad "Lanky". I do not think she attended any school, but for all that, she was a clean and good worker in the Haddock household.

There was no mistaking the loud knock on the vestibule door, followed by the opening of the door, and Bessie's voice was loud and clear. No explanation, just three words "Thowd Jew's 'Ere." And then she was gone, to embark on a similar errand round about our part of the street. It was the signal for my mother and other women in the street to pick up their purses and walk across to Mrs. Haddock's house, where Bessie let each one in to sit around in a circle in the kitchen. Who was the Old Jew? I don't think anyone ever bothered to find out his proper name. He was just, in everyone's minds and eyes, Thowd Jew!

The Manchester to Liverpool train would pull up at the St. Helens Junction Station in the early afternoon, and out from one of the carriages would step down the figure of a man different from his fellow passengers. He was dressed in black, from his flat topped, wide-brimmed black felt hat to his clothes, and down to his feet, on which were black laced up boots. His face wore a large, spade-shaped beard, which was grey in colour. He would make his way to the guard's van at the rear of the train, where he retrieved a very large bundle of remnants, wrapped up in a large sheet. Without much ado he would swing the bundle onto his back and, belying his age, would climb over the bridge, show his ticket to the porter and make his way down Station Road into Robins Lane, turning right into Edgeworth Street to knock on the door at Haddocks.

Bessie would open the door and the Jew, with his bundle, would enter the house, whereupon the table was moved back and chairs spaced around the kitchen. Bessie would then let the neighbours know, with her customary knock and shout "Thowd Jew's 'Ere."

The old Jew would sit on the floor with his bag open, and show his different remnants to the womenfolk sitting around him. He would then bargain with them for the remnants they fancied. My two younger sisters Nellie and Doris were often dressed in the materials the old Jew brought. I have a photograph of the pair of them dressed in Shantung frocks my mother made for them with her Singer sewing machine.



How the old Jew came to Haddock's house all the way from Manchester, I will never know. It would be interesting to know this and everything connected with him: his name, where he lived, had they a business in Manchester? Was he the founder of some large business? Alas, I will never know.

## **Chapter 20: The Stump, The Washdays, Jim Haddock's Savings**

### **The Stump**

The stump was to blame, or rather the cause of it. Across the street from where I lived was the middle block of odd numbers ranging from No.31 to No.65. The rear of these terraced houses, with their backyards, looked out onto the Show Field, opposite the Phoenix Brewery. The stumps, standing above the ground to a height of seven feet - all a clothes line length away from the rear wall of the backyards, stood like a row of silent sentinels, waiting from week to week for the wash ladies on Mondays and Tuesdays to embrace them with a loop of the clothes line around their necks. If the weather was too wet on those days, it would be done later on, on the first fine day.

The stumps were generally used by two houses to each stump, so it was left to the women to decide which day they would use it to fix the clothes line and hang out the washing to dry. The end one was used by the two households No.63 and No.65. Mrs. Sharples did her washing on a Monday, followed by Mrs. Haddock on a Tuesday, and so this routine was followed, month in and month out. This arrangement suited all the ladies, but unknown to anyone else, it suited Jim Haddock for a very unusual purpose. For years it had worked, and nothing had happened to disrupt his plans. Until something happened which upset the applecart, in a manner of speaking.

Jim Haddock, the old tram driver, after he had finished his day's work and had his tea, would stand on his doorstep puffing at his pipe. I can picture him now, standing there with boots on his feet, black trousers and waistcoat open at the front, where you could get a glimpse of his braces fastened over the shoulders of his union shirt, his moustache slightly grey on his upper lip. I only ever saw him on our side of the street once, when I heard a loud knock on the front door.

Jim Haddock would stand on his step, content to watch us children playing on the street, all the while puffing at his pipe. My dad was turning out to go to the Conservative Club and he would call out in Lanky "Everythin awreet Joe?" My dad would smile and nod to him, and reply "Fair enough Jim, is everything all right with you?" Jim would reply "Aye, everything's awreet", and that was that.

So, opening the door of our house after the loud knock, I was surprised to see Mr. Haddock standing there. He said to me "Is thi dad in?" I nodded and returned to the kitchen and told my dad that Mr. Haddock wanted a word with him. Then, as my dad went to see Mr. Haddock, I went under the kitchen table and sat on my buffet

Buffet is a word you do not hear spoken nowadays. It was similar to a hassock, and used for kneeling down on in church. I do believe one is referred to as a pouffe nowadays. When I was small, I often used to sit under the kitchen table when the leaves were taken out of their slots and placed in the cupboard under the stairs. We placed the table leaves into the table on a Sunday meal time, when we were all at home, so that we could all sit around the table, but generally, I was the one who had to stand to have my meals!

When the leaf extensions were taken away, the covering table cloth used to hang down close to the floor, and to my mind, it was as though I were in my tent.

On this occasion, my mother had gone out shopping, and I was surprised to hear my dad say "Come into the kitchen, Jim. There is no-one in. It will be better than talking on the front." And so I sat, concealed, and heard every word spoken by Jim Haddock, a story I never repeated to a living soul. A story I first heard in 1917, and am now writing down for the first time.

As near as I can remember, speaking in his Lanky way, the way Jim Haddock told it was like this.

"Tha knows Joe ah never larked takin my brass to work fer fear or loosin' it or getinitpinched so ah uset to leave it awom in mi pants pocket, and offen as not mi warf or Bessie wud farned it when they wor tidyin up an that wos the las ad see of it. So ah thowt ad better luk fer a 'iding place. Tha sees Joe, next door did washin on a Monday an wey washed on Tuesday so an used to set biler wi paper an sticks on a Monday neet an put some slack in't corner agin't biler so they could leet it fost thing on Tuesday morn. An it wer when ah wus putin' paper in't biler fire place an fond a space at top ot bricks betwin them ant bottom ot biler, an thowt that's as good a place as any, ahl put mi brass in a tin box and shuv it ont top ot bricks, an fer years mi brass wus safe. Well an cum wom tis Monday neet and sees washin 'ung up ont clews line an thowt to mesel thats awreet it's next door's clews. Brass ull be safe, it's toneet all tek box ant brass art when ah sewts paper an sticks fot Tuesday's washin. But wen ah geet int back kitchen an cud smell theat of fire an smell of soap an water, ah outs mi 'and int fire place and pulled it art fast. I knew nowt ud bi left in thee'er. I wus mad an I rushed int kitchen an sharted to't warf and Bessie "Wot the 'ell ave yer washed today fer, pair of yer knowsd it's washing day on a Tuesday." Warf sed, "wot's it mean to you whether we wash on a Monday or Tuesday? Wot's wrong with that an if you wants to know why, its becos next door went art early this morning to a funeral and they'l wash tomorrow. Wot are you getting you hair off for?" It dawned on me then, Joe, that ad better keep mum abart iding brass an not giving it tot warf for mind, else I'll never 'ear last of it, but ah cawnt get it art ot mind an cawnt tell anybody at ar 'ouse so ah've cum to thee Joe, fot get it off mi mind."

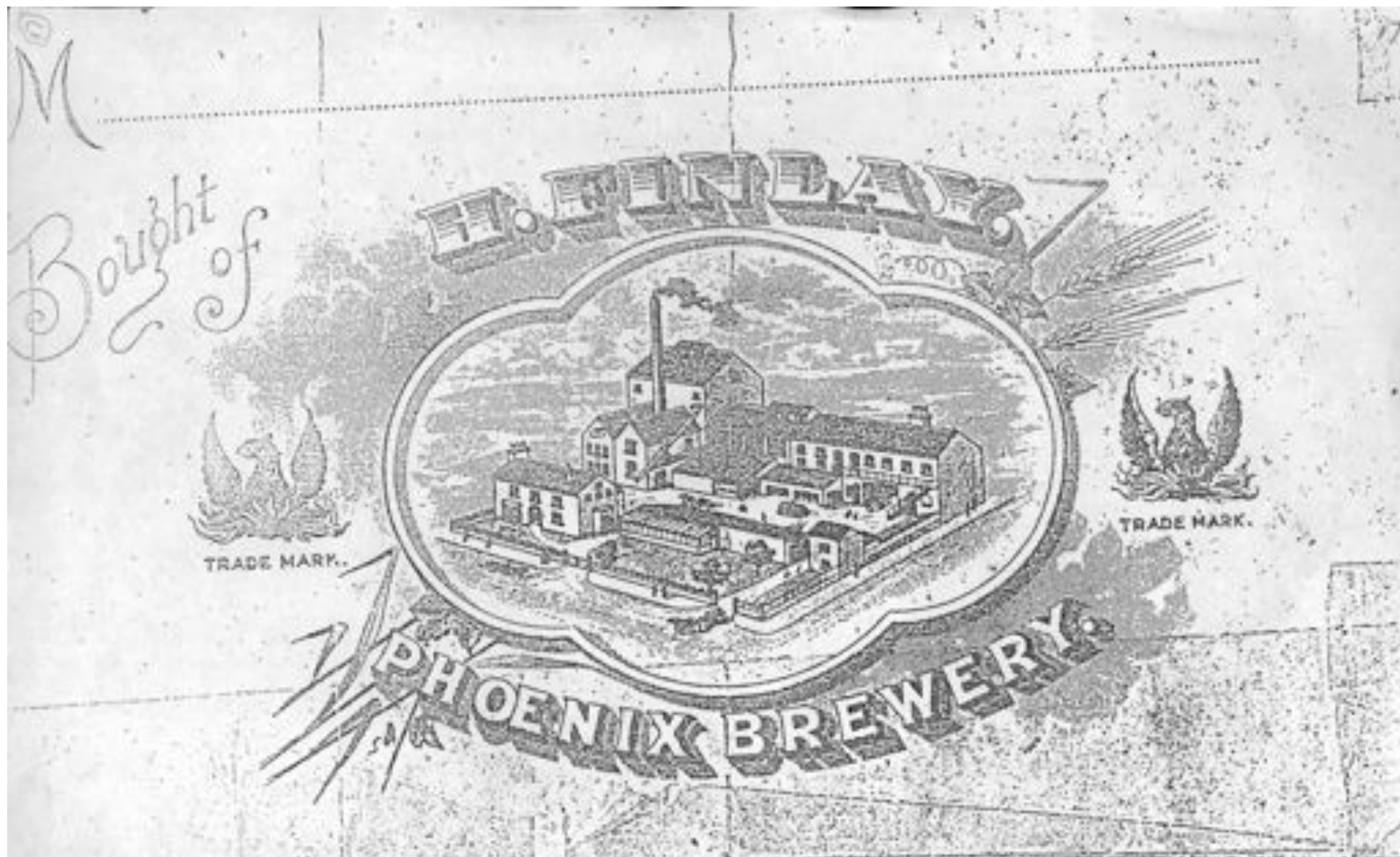
My dad said to Jim, "How much did you lose, Jim?"

Jim answered, "Three one parnd notes and three ten bob note ar recon, abart two wiks pay. Tha knows an don't spen much, just a couple o pints at wik end an sum bacey. Ah've allus sum brass left an it soon adds up." My dad then offered him some money, I don't know how much, with my being concealed under the table, but I heard Mr. Haddock say "Hay Joe, ah don' want all that, but five bob will do. It'l get me to't wik end an then tha can ae it back pronto."

Jim Haddock, after thanking my dad and saying he felt a bit easier after confiding in my dad, went home. When all was clear, I came out from under the table, and no-one was any the wiser for me overhearing Jim Haddock's tale of woe. I never repeated the story to anyone else, until today, when I write this story of Jim's brass, the washing and the use of the stump.

### **Children's Entertainment**

The cars now driving along the street and the cars parked outside people's homes, and the absence of children playing on the pavements is in marked contrast to my early childhood when we children played all kinds of games from end to end of Edgeworth Street. A popular game was top and whip. Flat tops with chalk coloured tops and streamlined flying tops could be seen spinning along the pavements,. Hop scotch was a popular game for the girls. Rings were drawn in chalk and a small pebble was placed in the centre. The idea was to knock the pebble out of the ring with the ball you threw from the pavement edge, catching it on the rebound. Long skipping ropes were stretched across the pathway and turned by either girl or boy, and a queue of would be skippers would form to take their turn. There was only the occasional horse-drawn vehicle moving along the street, giving children plenty of time to move to safety. Another diversion at Ellamsbidge Road was the drovers, driving cattle along Ellamsbridge Road towards Worsley Brow, making their hazardous way to St. Helens for sale or slaughter at the abattoir.



*The Phoenix Brewery*

## **Chapter 21: Edward Borrows, Locomotive and Steam Crane Builder**

From the front of the house where I was born, at 64 Edgeworth Street, and through the gap, adjacent to both Haddock's house and Davie's milk business was the Show Field. Directly in front of this was the Phoenix Brewery, founded by Jane Barrow and later owned by Charles Wilcox and Son. They produced Harvest Ale at all prices.

Next to the brewery was the home and enclosed grounds of the Borrows family. It lay between the brewery and Fisher Street. It was walled in on all sides and was extensive enough in area to provide space for Edward Borrows to establish his own Locomotive Engineering Works, which he called the Providence Foundry.

Edward Borrows was born in Parr of humble parents in the year 1823. He must have shown an ability in engineering early on, so he was apprenticed to a Liverpool engineering firm, called Mellings. When he was approximately 44 years old, he became acquainted with John Smith, a building contractor, and a big name around those parts involved in the early days of locomotive and railway building

John Smith was also the benefactor responsible for the creation of the old St. Anne's church, now demolished due to subsidence, and the land surrounding it, on which the schools were built. John Smith lived in the old building called St. Anne's Villa, which was situated to the rear of where I now live. The building has since been taken down to make way for St. Anne's Junior School.

Several branches of the Smith family resided in Sutton, and I remember one of the old people saying that John Smith had only to lift and open his windows at his villa for £1 notes to come floating in. John Smith was looked upon as being successful, wealthy, and mainly responsible for putting the Roman Catholic Church of Sutton on a firm basis.

In 1871, Edward Borrows was 49 years old, and was Chief Superintendent of the St. Helens Canal and Railway Co., later to become the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway, which in turn was acquired by the London and North Western Railway in 1864.

The engineer for the St. Helens railway was a James Cross, who formed his own company and built the first two locomotives for use in the railway sidings around Sutton. They were named the "Ant" and the "Bee". The last named did a period of seventy years shunting work around the local sidings.

Edward Borrows, however, took over the firm of J. Cross & Co. He had a workforce of 26 men and 7 boys and his three sons, Thomas (aged 25), Edward (aged 23) and William (aged 20), making a total workforce of 37, including himself. One of these workmen was a moulder, so moulding must have taken place in the grounds of his house.

Two years later, in 1873, he produced his first locomotive, and was also reputed to have invented and built the first steam crane. One of these was in full use at Bold Colliery when I worked there in the 1920s. Having become the leading locomotive builder

around this area, he decided he wanted a new location close to the St. Helens railway, so he moved to Station Road. This enabled him to have railway sidings inside these new premises, and to run west to the St. Helens Junction to Shaw Street Railway. He also called this works the “Providence Foundry”.

After years of striving to perfect his business, Edward Borrows died at the age of 58 in 1881. He was succeeded in the business by his son William Borrows, who carried on the business until 1900 at the age of 50 years.

Augustine Borrows succeeded William and formed a joint partnership with H. W. Johnson & Co., a name I was familiar with when I was young. I knew it as “Johnsons”, and later “Allan Bartons”.

Around about 40 or 50 locomotives of the Borrows type were built, in addition to the Borrow Steam Cane. The last two were supplied in 1921 to Pilkington Brothers. They were the Kelvin and Patience. Patience because of the lengthy period it took to produce them. I also had the privilege of seeing some of the old wooden patterns used for moulding shown to me by Richard Dean, known in Sutton as Dick Dean,. He was the Chief Foreman for Silk Worms and later British Sidac Cellophane Manufacturers at the site of the old glassworks at Lancots Lane. I should imagine he was the last link in the production of the old Borrows type of locomotive at Sutton.

The Borrows house had its frontage in Peckershill Road, opposite the Prince of Wales public house. Although the four boundary walls remain, the house itself has been demolished, as was the old Phoenix Brewery some years previously. Phoenix House still stands. It was occupied by Dr. Campbell. A great many years he resided there, and held his surgery there. Later, Mr. A. Thomas took the house over and lived there. At the entrance to the old St. Anne’s churchyard lies the vault belonging to the Borrows family, where all members of the family lie interred.



*John "Owd Bally" Whittaker, born 1824, Died 3 July 1894, aged 70 years. Buried at St. Nicholas Church, Sutton, St. Helens.*



## **Chapter 22: “Owd Bally” John Whittaker, Neill’s Row, Bold, “Bally” 3 companions.**

### **Mr. John Whittaker of Neill’s Row**

The first time I heard the expression “Bally” used was when I was about seven years old, during the First World War. It was due to a boy in my class at school named Sidney Ellison. He lived in the caretaker’s house at the Neil’s foundry, where his parents were the caretakers for the offices and foundry.

When I found out that he lived at Bold, not a great distance from my Uncle Jim’s cottage at Bank House, we decided that when it was holiday time and I was at my uncle’s, we would visit one another to play together, and it was on one of my visits that the word “bally” was used.

Sidney invited me into his home and I was struck by the extraordinary width of the doors and frames in the house. When I asked Sidney about this, he said that a man named Mr. John Whittaker built it for himself to live in, and that he was very fat and weighed over thirty stones. He had very great difficulty in squeezing through the average house door. This made us both laugh at the thought of it.

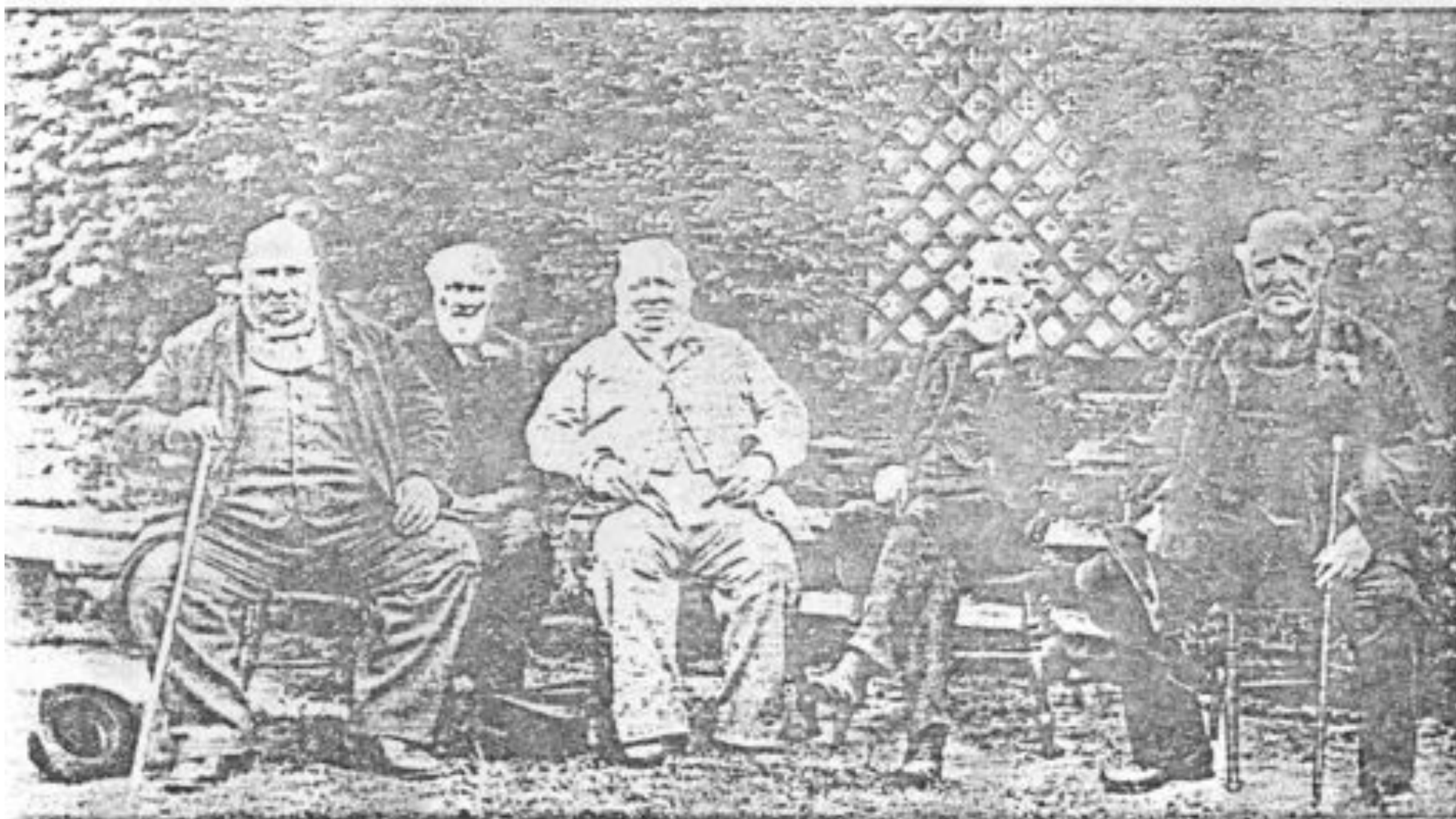
When I returned to my Uncle’s house, I asked him did he know a man named “Owd Bally”. My uncle laughed and said that he did know him and that he lived in the house at Neill’s foundry. My uncle, being a horseman, told me about the strong pony and the specially built and very strong trap he rode about in. He said props were used to steady the trap; one for under the step for Old Bally to climb up, and two for supports under the shafts until John Whittaker was comfortably seated and nicely balanced to take the weight off the pony (or you could call it a small, well-built horse).

Bally, in Lancashire dialect, means belly, and no-one around Bold or St. Helens had a bigger one than John Whittaker. For all his size and great weight, John Whittaker was a very industrious man. He was a builder and carried on his business from Foundry Street in St. Helens. He left his mark on the many buildings and works which are still, in some cases, in evidence around Bold, Sutton and St. Helens. According to the records, he built many of the tall works chimney stacks which figured on the skyline around St. Helens. He was also responsible for the following buildings and works around the St. Helens district: Daglish’s Foundry, Sutton Glass Works, Brown Edge water softening works, the pumping station at Sutton Road connected to Collins Green Colliery pumps, Boundary Road Baths, the Lingholme Hotel, St. Helens Junction Station, the Borough Sanatorium at Peasley Cross, which we all knew as the “San”, where patients with contagious ailments were admitted, St. Mary’s C.E. Schools and mission church, and Neil’s Foundry at Bold. He also built several well known hotels: The Saddle, Pear Tree at Collins Green and the Huntsman at Haydock.

John Whittaker was of a jovial nature, and had two companions - Mr. Joseph Jackson, who was a wheelwright and blacksmith in Jackson Street, Parr. Jackson Street was named after him. He pulled the scales at 22 stones and 2lbs. The other man, Mr. Charles Rigby, a wheelwright in Warrington Road, weighed 18 stones 2lbs. The combined weights of these three heavyweights was within 2lbs of 1,000lbs.

John Whittaker heard that Lewis' in Liverpool were offering suits to measure at 30 shillings (150 new pence). He persuaded Mr. Rigby's brother, a man of average size, to go into the shop and ask would they provide him and his three brothers with suits.. The shopman was delighted to take the order, and invited him and his brothers to be measured. The shopman was staggered when he saw the tremendous size of the three brothers. He was so taken aback that he called his manager, who took one look at the three brothers and realised it would be a great advertisement for the sale of the suits from his establishment. The manager said "Certainly we will provide you with suits. We advertise our suits at that figure and we will be pleased to serve you all." The suits were made, and the fame of them spread to St. Helens.

In the summer of 1987, my daughter took me for a ride around Bold. I visited Bold Park and the Kennel Cottage in Hall Lane, and next carried on to visit John Whittaker's house in Neill's Row, where I measured the doors and frames for width. I found them to be 37" in width, which is near enough 6" wider than the average doors of 30 and 32" used by average people. The house was being used as conference rooms by Capper Neill's of Bold.



***From right to left: John Whittaker (30 stones), Joseph Routledge, Joseph Jackson (20 stones), William Gardner and Charles Rigby (18 stones). John Whittaker (alias “Owd Bally” Whittaker) was famous for being the heaviest man ever, in St Helens. This picture was taken outside the White Lion’s “long parlour”, Church Street, St Helens, c. 1880***

# Bygone Times: As We Once Were

*Being a series of poems:*

*Some in the Old Lancashire dialect;*

*Some I have composed myself;*

*Some I have collected.*

*A reminder of the big changes and contrasts in our lives showing us  
"As We Once Were"*

Frank Bamber  
16th September 1995

**A Walk O'er Thowd Moss**

Walking out o'ert Moss that's called Bold  
With grandchildren everything seems fine  
Brings problem as one's getting old  
Walking out with their hands in mine.

It's sometimes a job to make 'em do as they're told  
As o'ert Moss slowly at times we wander  
Lots of explaining at things we behold  
I'm not given time enough to ponder.

Look up in't sky a lark fair singing to bust  
More wind than your granddad I'd say  
And watch yon peewits skim in't next gust  
They've babies in't grass hid away.

"Alright, pull some buttercups, leave daisie abee"  
Small hands cannot grasp them short stems.  
They gather some clover and dandelion with glee  
Making sure their pet rabbit never clems.

Then off we trudge home - they are happy - me too  
"I can't carry thi' luv you mus walk."  
Some flowers for their mother, red, white and blue,  
And I listen to their prattle and talk.

"Now all wash your hands, wipe mud off your shoes.  
You can't go in there with them feet.  
Eat up your butties your grandmother made,  
I'm most glad to get down on my seat."

Bonny young brids young lives to live as yet  
Out 'ot nest you will flush up into the air.  
Then tell all your children if children you may get  
About thowd Moss, and nature and creatures that live there.

**Frank Bamber  
1995**

### As Time Goes On

Just a line to say I'm living,  
That I'm not among the dead,  
Though I'm now more forgetful,  
And mixed up in the head.

I've got used to my angina,  
To my dentures I'm resigned,  
I can manage my new glasses,  
But, good God, I miss my mind.

At times I can't remember,  
When I stand there and just stare,  
Have I come here for something,  
But can't think just where.

And beside the fridge so often,  
My poor mind is filled with doubt.  
Have I just put some food away,  
Or come to take some out.

And sometimes when it's dark,  
With thoughts running thro' my head,  
I'm not sure if I'm retiring,  
Or just getting out of bed.

And if it's my turn to write,  
And if you are waiting by your door,  
I may believe I have written,  
So please do not get sore.

I'm standing here by the post box,  
With my face blushing red.  
Instead of posting this letter,  
I've opened it instead.

And so it affects all of us,  
As times itself marches on.  
It's an effort to climb on the bus,  
"Good God, I hope it's the right one!"

**Owd Ike Ashton**

Owd Ike Ashton wer ar Sutton blacksmith best as yo cud see,  
'Is place o' work deauwn Fisher Street wer a marvellous place to me,  
Fer as a chilt ah've spent sum tarm, fo't 'ear 'is anvil ring,  
Fettlin' horses 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 Haywood's coal 'orses, Swift's fruiterers mares,  
An Owd Ike's own mares, Belgian Blacks to funerals in pairs,  
Evry 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.

**Bold Moss: Owd Aincient Moss**

Wot 'appened to thee owd aincient Moss,  
Tha' wert warm and covered wi flowers so gay,  
Wen't slag covered thee, wi all felt thi loss,  
Tha wert brown an now thar left drab and grey.

Gone was the white and purple heather,  
Gone was the birds of every feather,  
And paths caressed with thousands of feet,  
A crime agen nature, it was owt but reet.

We know that scars weer turf was took,  
They run from Bold to thowd Moss Nook,  
But many a wom tha kept reet warm,  
From wintry blasts that spelt us harm.

Us childer, owd Moss, thad welcome us there,  
To jump thi wide ditches for croddy, or dare,  
An run carefree across thi ample breast,  
An lie close on't thowd mound for grateful rest.

An in't far corner reet opposite Moss Farm,  
Hives nestled there we'at bees did swarm,  
Busy they were, working all't hours,  
To and fro o'ert Moss visiting thowd Moss flowers.

Tha luct lifeless an cowd and grey was landscape,  
National Coal Board was responsible for this sad rape.  
Tha lay lark this for nigh on twenty years,  
Wot could one do, only shed silent tears.

But then came two lasses, environmental rich,  
One named Janet Sparrow, thi other Olive Romich,  
And behind these two giving of its utmost  
Was the grand operation of Ground Work Trust.

So awaken owd Moss from a score years of sleep,  
A full circle as turned, now new flowers will peep,  
And thi paths will appear where grasses brush thi knee,  
And bird song will be heard and the humming of the bee.

So now aincient Moss, tha con live once again,  
Wi seeds sown to grow, under sunshine an rain,  
Thar't grateful to all who took such a measure,  
Thal bring forth to young and old most wonderful pleasure.



**Four Score Years in Old Sutton Town**

Greetings to you Old Sutton Town  
The place where I was born,  
Where first of all my childish eyes  
First saw the golden dawn.

Changes I have seen in Old Sutton Town  
Since that fair September day  
And heads that once were black and brown  
Have meanwhile turned to grey.

Many happy years I did enjoy  
At old Sutton National School  
Masters have gone I knew as a boy,  
Who taught us the Golden Rule.

Courtesy, discipline held firm in daily life  
Vulgarity, ignorance is the latter day phase  
Trampled with Jack Boot and present day strife  
To crush finer feelings of bygone days.

Looking down the years, lives are only short stays  
It seems our days are only lent  
Both happy and content I am to end all my days  
Where my old boyhood in Sutton were spent.

Perchance someone, someday in later years  
Is reading these lines with a smile not a frown  
Do not dwell on my absence and shed any tears  
But think of me, content in Old Sutton Town.

**Frank Bamber  
1990**

**John Smith, Benefactor**

Like the bell of St. Anne's ringing out good and true,  
So the contents of my poem may interest you.  
True facts from the past I bring you forthwith  
About a true man of Sutton, his name, John Smith.

1792 in Viterbo to Sutton, St. Anne's great delight,  
Dominic Barberi was born and saw his first light.  
1794, two years later was John Smith's year of birth,  
Two wonderful men, both of outstanding worth.

Now these two great men, born of older times,  
The one saviour of souls, the other builder of railway lines.  
They were chosen by fate each other to meet,  
To create church and monastery called St. Anne's retreat.

With generosity abounding on a scale ever so grand,  
1850 John Smith built church and gave of his land.  
A benefactor of Sutton, held in most high esteem,  
A man of true religion, of railway and power of steam.

St. Anne's Villa to live, he built on this ground,  
No trace of it left, can now not be found.  
It was followed by Glynn's, who farmed the land,  
But in 1950, St. Anne's Junior School was built and planned.

So now Sutton's young ones come to enjoy this lovely school,  
And partake of education with pen, pencil and rule.  
And to read my poem, tis all truth, not a myth,  
About St. Anne's Dominic Barberi and benefactor John Smith.

**Frank Bamber  
December 1993**

### **Sutton Empire - Junction Lane**

Greatest treat when we wus kids was fer't go ter't Sutton Bug,  
When't cares of lyfe was cast aside an' everthin' seemed good,  
Each wik we was treated ter spectacles as 'uman eyes n'er saw,  
Of romance, luv an' adventure, of 'eroes an' villuns annor.

There wus Tom Mix, Bill Cody, Ken Maynard, Biggles an' Tarzan as well,  
An girls wi' eyes lyke saucers, who knew aht treat their men well.  
Er course it wusn't aw serious, tho every wik saw a narrer escape,  
As somebody geet tyde ter't railway lyne, er a sailing ship tugglin rahnt Cape!

There wus plenty er funny's too, ah recall, lyke Ben Turpin' an' Chaplin er 'Ope,  
Not fert mention Bing Crosby an' Lamour; an' Charlie Chan, chasin' smugglers wi't  
dope!

But even them wusn't aw't pictures we saw as wi paid ower pennies thro't grill.  
Fer sometymes we geet edukated abaht religion, lyke battles wi't Christian fot Pope!

Nah one such occasion was Crucifixion, which most of us knew fer't be true.  
As Jesus, wi 'is cross on is showders, staggered as he climbed a steep brew.  
One Saturday owd Mrs. Dyas, ooh alus went ter't kids' matinee  
Tuk er seat in't front row as usual, wi' a jug er staht on 'er knee.

Nah, whether it wus faith or 'er bottle, wi couldn't quyte make aht,  
But sight of Our Lord bein' ill-treated, compelled poor woman fer't shaht aht,  
An lurchin' unsteady to 'er feet, ahf chocked it seemed wi despair,  
She chucked er beer mug at Pilate, near causin' screen fer't tear!

"Leave lad alone." she cried, wi awt thinstinks of a lovin mother,  
"Tha wouldn't der tha if I wus theer, tha rotten little b-----!"  
Picture awse wus in uproar, as they tried fert quihten 'er dayhn,  
Tears rowlin dahn 'er oller cheeks at sight of er Master in payn.

Burr at last they managed fert cahm 'er, wi thay'd of a bottle er staht,  
An she sat theer singin awt hymns to 'ersell, till at last it were tyme fert go aht!

### Just a Cowd Tap

We met 'an we wed just me an' mi lass,  
Wi worked lung 'ours for very little brass.  
No T.V., no radio, no baths, tarms were 'ard,  
No 'ot water, just a cowd tap, and a walk darn yard.

No 'olidays for us, no carpets on floors,  
We 'ad ar coal fires, an left open doors,  
Big families there were, no pill in them days,  
'Ow did wi all manage, wi no 'and art pays.

Safe wus ar children playing in't park,  
Safe wus al't thowd folk gooin art in't dark,  
No valium tabs then, no drugs, no L.S.D.,  
Wi cured most ills wi a good cup 'o' tea.

Vandals were rare, there wus nowt much to rob,  
In fact wi felt rich wi a couple 'o' bob.  
But folk seemed 'appy back in't thowd days,  
Thi were caring and kinder in so many ways.

Wash days were 'ard with a rub a dub dub,  
Thowd Dolly swished rarnd in thowd Dolly Tub.  
Clothes came out clean, then straight thro' mangle,  
And art thid come, free of a tangle.

Folks who 'ad jobs would whistle and sing,  
One neet at pictures wus ar weekly fling,  
Bad tarms there wus, an trouble an' strife,  
Folk put on a brave face, t'was part of ar life.

Folks showed good humour an all due respects,  
An example to young uns so easy to detect.  
An thowd folk 'ad nothing but were reet full 'o' pride  
But todays 'carry on, some met well 'o' died.

**Frank Bamber**

### **Will They Fade Away With The Passage of Time?**

Thinking aback when I was ever so small,  
Tales told to me that now seem ever so tall,  
Warnings handed down by some very old wife,  
Sometimes have directed the path of my life,.

Remember this bad luck, the spilling of salt,  
What one must do to remedy this fault,  
Before you age and grow one minute older,  
Throw small pinch of salt, over your left shoulder.

Take heed, do not walk under that leaning ladder  
Less kith and kin become so much the sadder.  
Suffer not a kiss from the Angel of Death,  
Nor embrace of the rope that robs one of breath.

Come, run away children from that luscious green pool,  
So inviting to small ones the waters so cool,  
Jinny will catch you with her large teeth,  
You'll be lost forever in the waters beneath.

April Noddy is with us, the day of the God,  
Armed with pencil and paper, please give us a nod,  
Twelve noon its all over, Noddy's past and gone,  
Don't be branded a Noddy with thinking it's still on.

A break for old housewives round table they sup,  
Eagerly waiting for that last twirl of the cup,  
Upside down is the cup, then the reading of leaf,  
Some may doubt teller, but for others its belief.

Encourage him not this old bird of woe,  
Hand in hand is misfortune with wily old crow,  
Upon one's house he must never be let stay,  
Unwelcome he is, you must chase him away.

Pancake Tuesday, man and maid takes a turn,  
The tossing of pancakes for fear they may burn,  
The day upon which both the rich and the poor,  
Every stomach is filled and can hold nothing more.

Customs and beliefs from time long ago,  
Some are forgotten, some you may know,  
Rekindled in memory in this my fond rhyme,  
Will they all fade away with the passing of time?

**Frank Bamber  
2nd April 1990**

### Em's Corner Shop

Aa'm glad we've still geet corner shop,  
Wheer wi con spend time o'day,  
An' chat abeaut our neighbours,  
In a friendly sort o' way.

An' it's nice when Em as keeps the shop,  
Sez, "Ello luv, how are you,  
'av yer 'erd ow Mrs. Breawn is,  
Aa believe her's deawn wit' flue?"

Then 'erl ask about our Bill an' Nell,  
An' ow t'babbys gettin' on,  
An' did aa know as Cissy Jones  
'Ad geet another son.

Then owd Sam Shaw as lives alone  
Comes slowly shufflin' in,  
He'd like a slice o' bacon,  
An' would she cut it thin.

An' he's geet a letter from abroad,  
He thinks it's fro ther' Jim,  
Would her kindly read it,  
His eyes ave gone reet dim.

Of course Em' reads the letter,  
An' I, it's from his boy.  
He sez he's comin' whoam quite soon,  
An' we all share in his joy.

An' if yer runnin' short o' brass,  
Yer know wer' find a friend,  
Her'll say, "Now then doant worry lass,  
Tha can pay mi at wik-end."

These friendly little corner shops  
Are disappearing fast,  
As Council teks thowd houses deawn,  
They'll be a thing o' t' past.

An' th'owd folks gooin shoppin'  
A'll wish shop wer' theer once mooar,  
For yer met as weell be deaf an' dumb  
In a supermarket store.

### **Tripe Shaws Pup**

At Ellams 'Ouse in Ellamsbridge Road  
'Owd Tripe Shaw has a dog,  
It's only small and black and white,  
But jumps up and down like a frog.

You can see it there from first daylight,  
Until it's nearly dark,  
If you can't see it, you can certainly hear it,  
'Cause this bugger can't half bark.

It's tied up on some kind of rope,  
Just behind 'owd Tripe Shaw's shed,  
And the only time the bugger shuts up  
Is when the bugger's being fed.

It has a pretty little face,  
With a long and fluffy tail,  
And it jumps for joy, when 'owd George comes  
home,  
After being on the ale.

Many years ago, we had a man called  
"The Knocker Up"  
We don't need one now, this present day,  
We can rely on this bloody pup.

It might be better, after rabbits  
Or rounding up some sheep,  
I wish he'd take the bugger there,  
So then we'd get some sleep.

### Weer Tha Be Gooin Owd World?

Owd world spinnin' thart mixed up false glitter an underneath gray,  
Wi'aw thi changes good an' bad altrin ar larfs way,  
Owd on, owd world ast fergeet Judgment Day.

Owd world, slow lark, thart being kilt wi' and o' man,  
Oo'see no wonder or marvel at thowd cosmic plan,  
Tha wert creator made, wen't world began.

Weer dus us be gooin neaw, to wot distant sphere,  
Wot'll 'appen to us wen wi goo away from 'ere,  
A lot o' foak tha noes ev cause fot fear.

An aw't little child er us do leave behind,  
Cawn't find dacent livin', good will an no peace to find,  
Amid aw these apless 'uman kind?

Tergether aw't foak will wreck this place,  
An'swing ar clod o'earth swirlin' in't space,  
Wi ort mixed up colors o't 'uman race.

Dost recon, science an edication rings art true,  
Meks snob foak idle an less to do,  
An lots moor tarm fot mischief to pursue.

Is self control, owd fashioned? Ne'er 'erd today,  
They's no tarm fot ponder, no time fot pray,  
We'at gooin owd world? Tha loosin thi way.

Tharsand years ago, wunnerfull words wur writ,  
Ten Commandments fer good livin ort world did fit,  
A way o' larf, lark a breet beacon lit.

Fer thousand o' years them words stood secure,  
Gayin us 'onest guidance an th'ills o' larf to cure,  
One big family aw't gether, God's way to endure.

Ne'aw leaders ot churches, shout these laws wi' due deference,  
Foch back thowd core o' worship wi'thowt full reverence,  
Afore us an't world dees in foul decadence.

Turn back owd world afore its too late,  
Turn back owd world afore God shuts 'is gate,  
An afore ort th'evil overflows God's slate.

**Frank Bamber**



### **Thatto Heath**

*A theory put forward concerning the unusual name Thatto Heath, as put into Rhyming Lanky. It is also known as Donkey Common by local folk.*

Many life times ago, gooin' back many years,  
It's abart the little beastie, the one with long ears.  
Sum cor it a donkey, some cor it an ass,  
But it favors ort same to me when it's eart to grass.

Tha con see um in't picture in't window at Browd Edge,  
To ferrit art truth is my earnest pledge.  
A part o' Sentellin is caed Thaaao 'eath  
An aw it was then cawd is my solemn belief.

O'er faced wi heavy burdens which man began to shirk  
So 'e collared an ass fot do aw 'is donkey work.  
When it wur dead beat and before it came to grief  
It was put art to graze an' eat grass eart on't Heath.

An it was to th'asses on't Heath iff lost making thi way  
But Lanky folk shortened it after mony a long day,  
Thatto 'Eath wus much better on a Lanky mon's tongue  
But iff tha asks for Donkey Common tha'll not go far wrong.

**Frank Bamber**  
**August 1994**

### **Mi Owd Two Up Two Deawn**

Ya can see it 'appenin' every day,  
Slum clearance so thi caw it,  
Of course ya gerr a fine new place,  
But here's my version of it.

Ther' wer' just a row o' cottages  
Th' outsides owd an' mean,  
Burr if ya took a peep inside,  
Ya'd find 'em neat an' clean.

An' folk who lived ther' you'd agree,  
No kinder lot you'd meet,  
They'd never pass yer by without  
'Ello luv, or good neet.

An' Mrs Breawn who lived next dooar,  
When I wer' ill, she cleaned mi flooar,  
An' Mrs Smith across the way,  
She browt a meal in every day.

That little street, it's empty neaw,  
Th' 'ouses aw pooed deawn,  
An' t'neighbours separated,  
To different parts o' teawn.

An' me a've geet a little flat,  
It's very nice I'll own,  
It's modern, an' a bathroom too,  
But aa spends long 'ours alone.

An' thinks about that little 'ouse,  
Five minutes eawt o'teawn,  
Aa'd swap this flat reet neaw,  
Fer mi own Two Up, Two Deawn.

### **Elephant Lane**

*How did Elephant Lane get it's name? Some would say it was due to travelling circuses visiting Donkey Common.*

*But according to past lore of 'Old Uns', at one time there was a Holy Well in the area. It went by the name of the "Holy Font", and in true Lank dialect, as spoke by the 'Old Uns', it was called "The 'Olly Funt", and so, the following poem:*

In days of 'owd' so we are towd,  
Saint Ellen was a holy place  
An't land around Thatto Heath,  
Were lark a moorland space.

Thah noes in't middle o this land,  
There wus a Holy Well,  
All't locals cawd it "T'holy Font",  
Abart it "Thowd Uns" could tell.

The Holy Font was "Olly Funt",  
To folk as lived quite near,  
Ant Lane to this fountain went,  
Ant water was bright and clear.

T'was "Olly Funt Lane" to thowd folk,  
In gradely lanky spent,  
So when maps come by learned men,  
And spoke to thowd folk then.

"Olly Funt" to them was Elephant,  
A corruption they would say,  
But neow it's cawd Elephant to this very day,  
Not "Olly Funt" but Elephant iff tha' asked the way.

### **My Flag's at Half Mast**

The clatter of clogs on cobble stones,  
Is lost to footwear of softer tones,  
And clogger had names that belonged to the past,  
Like Weltin, Clog Irons and a Cast Iron Last.

The grocer's brass scales were polished and shone,  
And all his staff wore a clean white apron,  
Wrapped in brown paper and tied up with string,  
An order is parcelled for errand boy to bring.

The ironmonger sold all tools of the trade,  
No "Do It Yourself" for those without grade,  
And pawn shops with three brass balls on display.  
Kept all the hardship and poverty at bay.

At pork shop and butchers, fresh meat was sold,  
Not meat frozen solid and a few weeks old,  
The Post Office worked with no sign of a queue,  
But 'winds of change' altered that too.

The chemical waste heaps are faded out,  
Robots take over, now no-one's about,  
Collieries are closed and foundries have gone,  
Who are the next victims, as time marches on?

Breathing fire and steam was the old steam train,  
Tremendous with power, now look in vain.  
Houses of God were built for people's prayers,  
Now some are converted for selling of wares.

Every park had a notice "Please keep off the grass",  
Our parents taught us, we should not trespass.  
Vandalism was a word seldom reaching the ear,  
Law was respected and filled us with fear.

Schools and work sites were left in peace,  
No need for fences and security police.  
You were thought well off if you rode a bike,  
Majority were hard up and so had to hike.

Hiking too, brought people much pleasure,  
No need for rangers to keep within measure,  
From local plots the crowing could be heard,  
"Time to get up", crowed that early bird.

Our school playgrounds were then not man made,  
Pot holes full of water, round which we played.  
From outside our houses the swallow dived and skylark rose,  
And wild rabbits roamed with keen twitching nose.

Bees and butterflies and birds in song,  
Frogs and newts lived round the pond,  
Sadly all these are a thing of the past,  
My mind's eye for these flies a flag at half mast.

**As it was Around Our Street**

I was not born with a silver spoon,  
When I was but a Sutton lad,  
But my heart was warm as a day in June,  
And so wealth untold I had.

We had the wonders of our street,  
What wonders, the pavement did hold,  
Top and whip and hopscotch at our feet,  
And gutters where our marbles rolled.

Our tastes so simple and happy our play,  
Belt horses and trundles we enjoyed to the full,  
Ducky stones an piggy they all made our day,  
Boredom was unheard of, our childhood never dull.

When daylight was chased by oncoming night,  
The guessing game was ours, at the old corner shop,  
Shop window and kind gas lamp provided our light,  
Till bedtime beckoned and our games had to stop.

T'was Friday bath night, alas! One remembers,  
From yard walls and nails came faithful old bath tins,  
At front of coal fire and its cleansing embers  
Lifebouy and loofah cleansed us like new pins.

And donkey stoned steps at every front door,  
Our mothers did toil to make street look best,  
Spars from our clogs as they met flagstone floor,  
And Clogger Rothwells Irons were put to the test.

Time marches on but nostalgia returns,  
The bobby on beat that someone called a clod,  
At Ashtons, the Smith, smell of horse shoes that burns,  
Smell of leather and tanning at old Cloggers shop.

I hear the street vendors and voices from the past,  
Line props, rag bone and tubs to be mend,  
Bring jugs for your milk, shrills the milk whistle blast,  
"Scissors and knives to grind" was that long ago trend.

The Show Field is deserted and stands so forlorn,  
For wild beast show and circus in vain you may look,  
The roar of lion and tiger at the coming of dawn,  
The walk of the elephant to our Sutton Brook.

The appetising smell of home baked fresh bread,  
Jack Sharps in a jam jar we caught in the stream,  
Remember Jinny Green Teeth that filled us with dread?  
That's just as it was, not just a dream.

**Frank Bamber**

## **The Colliers and the Witch**

### **The 1920s and 1930s**

20s and 30s times were never so bad  
Small money coming in made people right sad.  
A knock on the door, a voice shouted "Rent",  
Behind that shut door, a voice shouted "Spent".

Three days work was a poor collier's lot  
Twenty seven and six was the grand sum he got.  
For his walk to St. Helens, he was up with the lark,  
To write in his signature, or just make his mark.

To arrive one day late or miss just one day  
He'd forfeit his three days and nowt was his pay.  
He'd beg for relief and pocket his pride.  
For a few crusts for family o'er a few days would time.

The government and owners worked this foul racket,  
A collier for three days, just £1 in his packet.  
His three days from dole ran 7<sup>1/2</sup> times one shilling,  
He'd sign on each day, to show for work he was willing.

The collier and family prayed to Our Lord above  
For help and compassion and for children some love.  
Remove greedy men, please, Dear Saviour of my soul  
So we work all six days and no longer beg from dole.

### **The 1950s to the 1970s**

At last every collier was paid what he's worth  
For toiling in darkness underneath Mother Earth.  
For a third of his life, he lived like a mole,  
His single endeavour was to bring out more coal.

Unfettered and free from capitalist yoke  
Life was worth living for all colliery folk.  
But plots were hatched and plans were writ  
To kill off the good life and close every pit.

### **The 1970s to the 1990s**

The witch from Westminster flew north on her broom  
She shadowed each pit to bring disaster and gloom  
She spelled out hatred in a black cloud of hate  
And cackled with glee at the coalfield's dire fate.

This creature of hate was spawned in the South  
Vehemence and spite poured from its loud mouth.  
She bid one of her creatures, its name was MacGregor  
Destroy pits and Union, and make each collier a beggar.



Collieries are closed and the foundries are gone.  
Who will be the next victims as the Tories carry on?  
Back will come pawnshops, three balls on display,  
A means to keep living and poverty at bay.

Thatcherism and the Tories have closed most pits,  
For colliers the dole, and to live on their wits.  
No work for our young ones under this government of greed,  
More money for the rich is the Thatcher creed.

**Frank Bamber 1992**

### Pit Brow Lasses

Thas eard tales abart coal minin, disaster pits afire,  
Of 'eroes an endurance and other thing we admire,  
Weer ever coal wer getton, weer ever coal wer wound,  
Women allus tuk the place wi menfolk underground.

Wen an't laws wer awterd, dearn pit for them ad t'stop,  
Gaffer geet chep labour, employ um aw on top,  
Fro draggin coal i'baskets, wit childer darn below,  
To pushin tubs on surface an workin in screens just so.

They toiled from seven in't mornin, till very late in't day,  
A pickin up great lumps 'o' coal, for very little pay,  
Th'owners payd um afe a crown fer every day thi worked,  
Fer shovelin coal in boxes an separated dirt.

Just wot them wimen went thro in't struggle just fert live,  
Ah wonder iff God on heigh bad owners will forgive,  
This showed up at church a Sunday, with carriage an dressed so fine,  
Ah wonder iff they ever prayed for them poor souls a workin in ther mine.

So bless aw Pit Brow Lassies, yer worked lark any a mon,  
Went wom fot kids to luk after no tarm fot sit in sun,  
Wi picks in hond, shawls closely tied, bonnets cleanan fine,  
Thi worked in't screen, an at Pit Brow, but neow, not down in't mne.

### **You Must Not Quit**

When things go wrong, as sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high,  
And you want to smile, but have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer, with its twists and turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about,  
When he might have won had he stuck it out,  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,  
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell how close you are  
It may seem near when it seems so far:  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

**Frank Bamber**  
**1984**

### Farewell

When I must leave you for a little while,  
Please do not grieve, and shed wild tears,  
And hug your sorrow to you thro' the years,  
But start out bravely with a gallant smile,  
And for my sake and in my name,  
Live on and do all the things the same.  
Feed not your loneliness on empty days,  
But fill each working hour in useful ways.  
Reach out your hand in comfort and in cheer,  
And I in turn will comfort you and hold you near.  
And never, never be afraid to die,  
For I am waiting for you in the sky.

*The article below came into my hands recently, and I hope you find it amusing.*

**We Are Survivors  
(for those born before 1940)**

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic, contact lenses, videos, frisbees and the pill. We were born before radar, credit card, split atoms, laser beams and ball point pens; before dishwaters, tumble dryers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes, and before man walked on the moon.

We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?) We thought “fast food” was what you ate in Lent. A “Big Mac” was an oversized raincoat, and “crumpet” we had for tea. We existed before house-husbands, computer dating, dual careers and when a “meaningful relationship” meant getting along with cousins. And “sheltered accommodation” was where you waited for a bus.

We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, electric typewriters, artificial hearts, word processors, yoghurt and young men wearing earrings. For us “time-sharing” meant togetherness, a “chip” meant a piece of wood or fried potato, “hardware” meant nuts and bolts, and “software” wasn’t a word.

Before 1940, “Made in Japan” meant junk, the term “making out” referred to how you did in your exams, “stud” was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and “going all the way” meant staying on a double-decker to the bus or train depot. Pizzas, McDonald and instant coffee were unheard of. In our day, cigarette smoking was “fashionable”, “grass” was mown “coke” was kept in the coal house, a “joint” was a piece of meat you had on Sundays and “pot” was something you cooked in. “Rock music” was a Grandmother’s lullaby, and nothing more, while “aids” just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.

We who were born before 1940 must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder we are so confused and there is a generation gap today.....BUT

**By the grace of God, we have survived. What a hardy lot we are!**