

John James Broadhurst

Autobiography

Born 30 November 1908

Died 11 March 2007



A Life of Faith

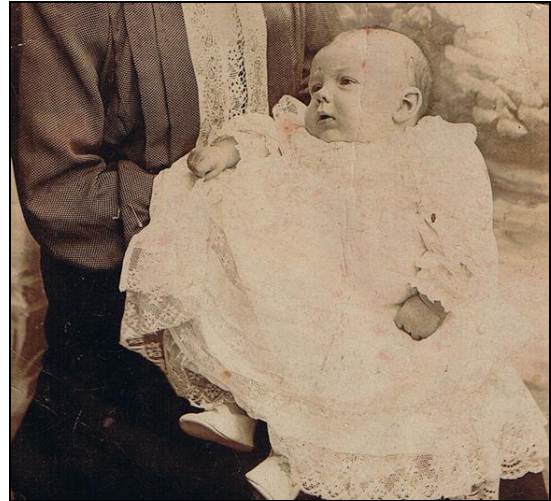
This autobiography was written in longhand between 1995 and 2000 and typed into the computer by daughter-in-law Lesley. Further information and photos have been added by son John.

Chapter 1 - Childhood

I was born at Padman House, No 7 Cape Street, Broseley, Shropshire on November 30th 1908 and was duly baptised John James Broadhurst in Broseley Parish Church. I assume that I was named John after my father and James after my mother's brother, James Davies.



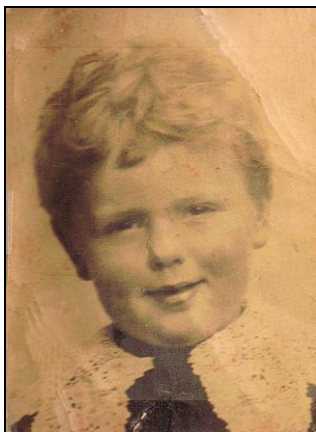
Padman House, 7 Cape Street



John James Christening

At the time of my birth the family resident in Padman House consisted of my grandmother, my uncle Thomas Henry Broadhurst, my father John George and my mother Minnie.

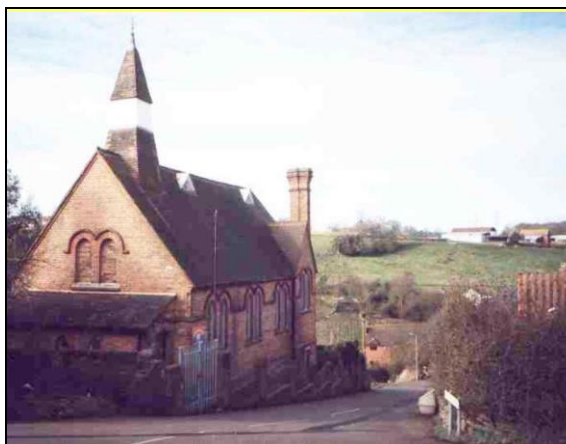
My earliest childhood recollection is being taken into the front corner bedroom to see, or perhaps more correctly to be seen by my grandmother. This must have occurred near the end of her life because another early memory is of getting into bed with my mother in the same room, into which my parents must have moved when grandmother passed on. *This was Elizabeth Broadhurst (Nee Hill), wife of Henry Broadhurst. She died on March 27th 1916.*



1911

I suppose my first clear memory is of walking to school. I must have been about six years old when I went to Leggs Hill Infant School. This School was situated just off the footpath road leading to Ironbridge and was almost opposite one of the many factories making clay smoking pipes, for which Broseley was still famous at that time. Clay pipes were very popular as smoking was altogether more common then.

The school was about four hundred yards from my home. My companion was Mary Shaw who lived almost opposite our house and I should think that we found it a long walk each day at that age.



Legges Hill School.

The building became the Infants Day School for Broseley Wood in 1892 and prior to that it was a Working Men's Institute. It was one of two schools in the town which closed in the 1960's when a new primary school was built at Dark Lane. On closure it became the headquarters of the local Territorial Army volunteers and it remains in their occupation. The hillside on the opposite side of the valley contained shallow mine workings. The mines worked for coal and clay and were in operation until the end of the last century. Their remains are indicated by the disturbed ground.

"I remember going to Legges Hill school. You went there until you were big enough to walk to the school in the Square" - Mrs Hurdley.

I cannot visualise the interior of the school though I remember that there was a single bell in a little tower near the front door. The number of pupils must have been fairly small as there was another infant school in the centre of Broseley.

My next move was to the boys' part of Broseley Junior School. This school was situated just off the square on the Bridgnorth Road. This entailed a much longer road walk, however there was a short cut which made it a bit easier.

I was there for probably about two and a half years and although I have no clear recollection of my time in this school I do however remember that punishment was commonplace and severe. Three strokes across the palm of the hand was the usual method. I managed to avoid this, but was kept in after school once or twice. Luckily my time there was short because I was fortunate to win a scholarship to Coalbrookdale High School that was the Grammar school for that part of Shropshire.

I must here make mention of a lady who played a significant part in this chapter of my life though she did not live long enough to see my progress, dying of cancer soon after I got to the Grammar school. Her name was Alice Wilkinson. She was my mother's dearest friend and one of my godparents and was the Head Mistress of the girls' section of the junior school. I had always felt that her presence in the school must have saved me from punishment. I know that she gave me some tuition in preparation for the scholarship exam. I called her Auntie Alice and every week we went as a family to have tea with her. It was a special treat for me for we always had a tin of salmon. I have, to this day, retained a liking for it, so different in taste from the usual ways of eating it. It was quite a luxury for we were in the early years of the Great War and rationing was beginning to bite.

This friendship with Auntie Alice may have been an early example of the truth of the saying that *'it is more important who you know than what you know'*. It has certainly been so in my case!

In addition to grandmother I have also mentioned Thomas Henry Broadhurst. Uncle Tom as I knew him worked for Uncle Jim Davies, mother's brother. He owned a garage in King Street and a filling station on the main road to Ironbridge. He also had an antique shop at his home in King Street and a china shop that was managed by Uncle Tom. The majority of his sales in the shop were of Coalport china, manufactured just across the River Severn in Coalport.



James Davies' Shop



Dad and Uncle Tom

King Street

This view on the left was taken in early 1900's shows the junction of King street and Duke street (we have a Queen street too). On the right is James Davies shop which at this time sold Coalport China. It later became Hancock's grocers shop ("The milky bar shop") which finally closed in the 1980s. On the left is the now demolished Duke of Cumberland Public House.

I suppose I did not realise how fortunate my situation as a child was. My father John held an unusual position that he usually designated as Estate Clerk of Works. Actually he was responsible for the upkeep and repair of the many farms and cottage properties belonging to the Willey Estate, owned by Lord Forester. In order to do this he had at his disposal a complete set of workmen employed in the building trade. The trade was much more self-supporting in those days. For example, a painter had to mix his own paints and to match existing colour which required a high level of expertise. Similarly, a builder would have to make up his own mortar. This procedure was undertaken in one of the sheds in which there was a large bath into which the limestone was placed, water stirred in and eventually left to 'slake'. Recently I watched a programme on television about the Durham Cathedral where a match was required for some of the original mortar. The method used there was just as I had seen as a boy.

When Lord Forester joined his tenants in mining coal at Benthall



Seated at the front; Honorable Cecil George Wilfred Weld-Forester, 7th Baron Forester with his terrier, who was Lord Forester when this journal was published in 1972, his aunt Lady Mary Whittaker, Cecil Theodore Weld-Forester, 5th Baron Forester. Standing back row: PC A. Edwards, Mr John George Broadhurst, Dr G.J. Boon, Mr Ted Smout, Mr C.R. Jones, George Cecil Beaumont Weld-Forester, 6th Baron Forester, Mr R. Blood, Mr J. Harrison. The 5th Baron Forester died in 1917 so this photo must have been taken prior to 1917.

This photo from the Bridgnorth Journal 11th February 1972 was loaned by Mrs A.M. Thomas, of Mill Cottage, Benthall. Her father Mr C.R. Jones actually mined coal at the Foxholes, Benthall during the first world war.

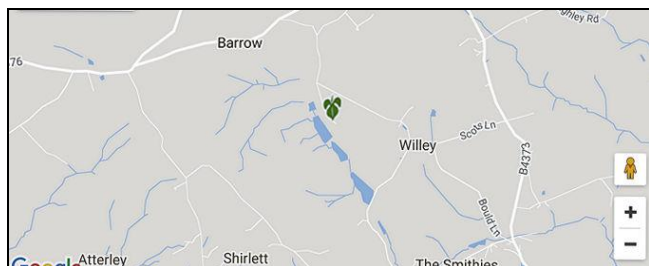
It was this position as Estate Agent, which resulted in his acquiring some property of his own. Due to a succession of deaths in the Forester family, Lord Forester was forced to sell all his properties in Broseley and some of his farms in order to pay the death duties. My father was called upon to manage the practical side of this, which entailed a lot of extra work. In recognition of this he was allowed to purchase Padman House and all that went with it for a nominal sum.

Further demands from the Inland Revenue forced the sale of further land and property including the Dothill Estate in Wellington. Once again, my father was entrusted with organising the sale and in recognition was given a hundred acres of land known as Benthall Edge. Of course, I was only a small boy when all this happened, but I was always able to go around to the Estate depot and watch the labourers at work. I also helped my father to put the weekly wages into packets for the considerable workforce under his command.



Willey Hall, home of Lord Forester.

His usual daily routine was to go to the Estate depot in Queen Square at about 07.30 hours to give the men their work for the day. On his return to the house he would make tea for mother and me. Most of his day was then spent visiting the farms and houses where work was to start or was in progress. It must have been an interesting and very rewarding occupation. My father established a cordial relationship with many of the farmers and especially with the Reynolds family at Arlescott farm situated on the way to Much Wenlock. This farm played an important part in the Great War that was to follow. My father joined with Uncle Tom and Uncle Fred Howells to rent the shooting on four farms, the Reynolds farm being the headquarters. I was allowed to have a .22 rifle for use on this farm and occasionally got a wild rabbit. I have, on many occasions seen the result of a days shoot laid out on the dairy floor. The members of the shooting syndicate took what pheasants they wanted and the remainder was sent to a poulterer in Shrewsbury, together with the occasional partridge, duck, hare and rabbit. It must have been a useful source of income at that time when rationing was severe.



One of the lakes referred to below and a map showing the position of the lakes.

Even the summer months were catered for. Near Lord Forester's home, Willey Hall, there were three large lakes. The two lower ones had course fish, tench, carp roach and eel in them, but the top one was reserved for trout alone. It was my father's responsibility to keep the lake well stocked and to this end he introduced a regular supply of small trout. He was allowed to fish this lake in the summertime and he usually brought home one or two fine fish, between one and two pounds weight. It was on this lake that I was taught to fly fish. It was my job to row my father to those parts of the lake where fish could often be found. My father fished for the love of the sport for he never ate a trout in his life. You will gather that with the supply of game and fish, together with what was reared at home, the wartime restrictions had little effect on our standard of living. Mother kept White Leghorn hens and runner ducks and also reared two geese for Michaelmas and Christmas. My father reared two pigs a year to be killed at half-year intervals.

By 1917 the Government call up had reached my father's age. He was summoned to attend a medical in Shrewsbury and such is the irony of fate that he was turned down because the doctors decided that his hands were too small to handle a rifle. Actually, they turned down a first class shot. We can take heart from the fact that our common deformity probably saved a life.

In order to appreciate my childhood life some brief description of the Padman House property may be worthwhile. The house stands on one of the highest parts of the town. The ground floor consists firstly of two reception rooms. As you enter from the street the one on the left is the dining room and the one on the right the lounge. Both were good size rooms where parties were regularly held. At the back was a very commodious kitchen diner, with a big bay window looking out on the garden. There was a large pantry and a scullery with washing facilities and back stairs leading up to my bedroom.

Underneath was a large cellar. In it were shelves for storing fruit from the garden. At the far end was a large container to hold the potato crop and on one side a large slate slab which my father used to cure ham and bacon when one of the pigs was killed. When the hams and bacon were cured they were hung up in the kitchen and cuts were taken from them as required.

The kitchen had a double cooker Eagle range made at Coalbrookdale which was very efficient. There were ample cupboards, a big corner cupboard and a large Welsh dresser.

The main staircase went up from the entrance hall to a landing. Opposite this was the bedroom which I occupied as long as I could remember. Next to this was the bathroom. When I was quite small my father installed running water, a bath and a flush toilet. Up to then the toilet had been in the garden about fifteen yards from the house. Luckily for me I was spared this or if not I was too young to remember it. Beyond the bathroom was another bedroom which was occupied by Uncle Tom.



Jeanette and I outside Padman House, 2007.

From the landing, a passage led to the two main bedrooms. I have already mentioned that the corner bedroom was occupied by my father and mother after grandma died. The other bedroom was kept as a guestroom.

The entrance hall continued as a wide passage until it reached the back of the house where it widened out to the size of the good big room. Here the pigs were hung up until they could be divided and taken down to the cellar to be cured.

Over the back door was an open porch and all along the back of the house was a wide tiled pathway. Tiles were easily available as they were made about a mile away in Benthall and were in common use all over Broseley. On this path I taught myself to roller skate. I had taught myself to ice skate on the several large ponds near Benthall Hall.



The left photo shows the rear of the house and the right shows the rose garden and Summer house.

Beyond the back door a path led down to the summer house. On one side of the path was an extensive rose garden and on the other side a variety of bedding plants. The summer house was large and in regular use in the summer. On the back wall my father allowed his carpenters to put up shelves on which I amassed a fairly extensive collection of birds' eggs, of which I was very proud. I suppose I could be fined heavily nowadays. It appears that the instinct to collect was already developed.

Stretching across the width of the property was the croquet lawn. This pastime was very popular and Uncle Fred and Auntie Harriet had a big croquet lawn so we exchanged croquet parties. I didn't come across this game again until I went to Newton le Willows and the fact that I had grown up with a croquet lawn increased my prestige no end.



Photo shows greenhouse with the chimney for Roman heating and chrysanthemums in Nov 1934. The door at the side of the greenhouse lead to the orchard. The photo also shows the croquet hoops.

My father's great love was gardening. In summer, it was geraniums and every year he had a long bed of them across the lawn. In the winter, it was chrysanthemums which filled the lower greenhouse and house plants in the top greenhouse.

The lower greenhouse had a Roman touch. A very small slack stove sent heat into a square flue which reached right round the greenhouse and was then led up to a chimney. It was a wonderful form of heating and very reliable.

Beyond the lawn was a sunken garden with mostly bedding plants. I was given permission to make a goldfish pond here. It took several months of hard labour but was quite successful and the fish flourished.

The two greenhouses were connected by a border which was used to grow early potatoes and outdoor tomatoes. Beyond this was the orchard. This had a row of henhouses. The orchard was planted up with plums and pears. Among them were two prune plums. The fruit was put on the flues in the greenhouse to dry off so mother had a constant source of remedy for constipation. She bottled Victoria plums for use throughout the year. The orchard was underplanted with late flowering white narcissus which when in bloom gave a wonderful effect.



Dad designed and constructed a rockery at the bottom of the garden. The photos also show the gate into the fields he refers to below.

The remainder of the property consisted of two fields, one acre each, and a kitchen garden. When I first remember it there was a big cart horse called Dragon. This was the only occasion I have been on a horse's back. It was comfortable enough but did not inspire me to become a rider. My father got rid of Dragon and hired whatever transport he required for the Estate. The stabling was then used for garden storage and the shed used later as a garage for visitors.

Beyond the fields was the kitchen garden, nearly an acre in extent and divided into four butts. There were about thirty apple trees, three mature pear trees and several nut trees. The garden, as its name implies, was given over to the cultivation of most of the vegetables that were in general use. When I was about twelve years old my father decided to give me the use of one whole butt with the apple trees on it. I was given one year's supply of seeds. My pocket money was stopped and I had to rely on what I could make from the land. It was a grand arrangement for I found a ready sale for the produce and was much better off than with pocket money. I recall that one of the things I used the money for was to buy the materials to build a crystal wireless set. On one occasion, I heard Yehudi Menuin make his first broadcast as a budding young violinist. He was only a few years older than myself.

You will gather that from different parts of the property there was a large surplus of fruit. Even the hedge between the two fields was planted with Shropshire damsons. Every autumn a man named Hall came down from Bolton and opened a depot in Willey Furnace. He readily bought the large surplus of fruit from my father which was a valuable source of extra income.

Peter has been to Broseley and he tells me that all the land, orchard fields and kitchen garden is now built up with Bungalows.



Padman House is hidden in the trees with the two chimneys sticking up in the centre of the photo with the bungalows in the foreground.

It was in these happy surroundings that my childhood passed away. Looking back on it I suppose that I must have been a very solitary little chap. My happiest days were spent wandering in the woods and I am sure I never felt lonely. My father was my chief companion – I helped to cultivate the garden with him, I went fishing with him, I went shooting with him and every Sunday afternoon I went for a walk with him. I suppose that in those early years he was my most important teacher which, when you consider that he was middle aged when I was born, is rather remarkable.

I think it is fair to say that my mother seemed to play a less important part in those early years, but I am sure that is an error of judgement on my part. I am sure she gave me every care that a mother can give and it was probably Mother who had the determination that I should succeed. We have seen that it was she who insisted that I sat the scholarship exam. I feel that as the years unfolded her influence became apparent.



Minnie, Dad and John George

I think that both my parents were good disciplinarians for I cannot recall that I was ever punished. On the whole mine was a very happy childhood.

Chapter 2 - Coalbrookdale High

I began attendance at Coalbrookdale High School in the Autumn term of 1917 when I was nine years old. The School was an impressive building with a large central hall which divided the school into two sections. The half nearer Ironbridge was the girls' school and the part nearer Coalbrookdale was reserved for the boys. Both girls and boys shared the use of the hall, which was equipped as a gymnasium.



The school as it is today. It is now the Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge Primary School

Owing to the demands of the Great War, the boys teaching staff was reduced to four regular men and a headmaster, with people coming in to teach music drawing and woodwork. Three of the staff were too old for military service and the fourth, Fisher by name, was severely crippled.

When I put the school uniform on I think I felt proud of myself. The school covered a wide area and even allowing for those who paid there was a fairly small intake from any given village. I have always felt that a uniform gives a school character. Certainly, we were made to feel more like individuals than we had done at Broseley School and we were very fortunate in having Mr. Fraser as an exceptional Headmaster.

I was not allowed to have a bicycle when I first went to Coalbrookdale, so I was faced with a trek of nearly three miles in all weathers. There was a road coming down from Benthall but the quickest way for walkers was down a very steep footpath leading to Ironbridge Railway Station, which in those days was our gateway to the world. Crossing the railway line we came to the toll bridge at the famous Iron Bridge which had been built at Coalbrookdale. We paid one penny to cross the bridge to Ironbridge and then followed a road beside the river called the Wharfage. In the days when the river was a busy commercial highway the Wharfage, as its name implies, was used to load and unload the river traffic, but in my day this had ceased. Coming to the end of the Wharfage I reached the outskirts of Coalbrookdale village and was still left with a walk of a quarter of a mile to the school.



TABLE of TOLLS.		
For every time they pass over this BRIDGE.		
For every Coach, Landau, Hearse, Chaise, Chair, or such like	}	s d
Carriages drawn by Six Horses, Mares, Geldings, or Mules.		2 0
Ditto by Four Ditto		1 6
Ditto by Two Ditto		1 0
Ditto by One Ditto		0 6
For every Horse, Mule, Ass, pair of Oxen, Drawing or harness'd		
to draw any Waggon, Cart, or such like carriage, for each Horse &c		0 2
For a Horse, Mule, or Ass, laden or unladen and not drawing.		0 3
For a Horse, Mule, or Ass carrying double		0 2
For an Ox, Cow, or neat cattle		0 1
For a Calf, Pig, Sheep, or lamb		0 0 1/2
For every Horse, Mule, Ass, or carriage going on the roads		
and not over the Bridge, half the said tolls.		
For every Foot passenger, going over the Bridge		0 0 1/2
<i>N.B. This Bridge being private property, every Officer or Soldier, whether on duty or not, is liable to pay toll for passing over, as well as any baggage, druggens, haul-cowcher or the Royal Family.</i>		

Dad's daily crossing on his way to school. Quite a journey for a nine year old.

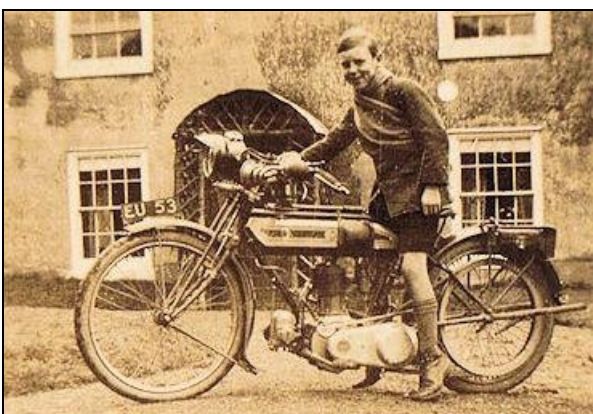
In the front of the school was a playground of about half an acre with a road on either side of it leading to the separate parts of the school. On this playground, the girls played netball and the boys cricket and football. As soon as I was old enough I went to school early so that I could take part in these activities.

Looking back on it, I realize that the provision of sporting facilities must have been a recurring problem and made more difficult by the fact that the teachers were not young men and could not have had much enthusiasm for umpiring cricket or refereeing football. The school did not have an official sports ground so we played wherever it could be arranged, often at some distance from the school. I recall that during one winter term we had no football pitch at all and had to rely on the playground for practice. A match against Bridgnorth or Wellington was a red letter day. I have no idea how we acquitted ourselves but as the other schools were twice the size of ours we probably lost consistently.

I have mentioned the long walk to school but this could sometimes be fraught with difficulty. The River Severn was a fickle stream and it flooded practically every winter, sometimes more than once. When this happened the Wharfage was impassable so, having crossed the bridge, I had to take the very steep road to Madeley. This road joined up with a road from Madeley to Coalbrookdale which I had to use. When I see television pictures of the River Severn in flood I can confirm from personal experience that they are only too true!

I referred earlier to the footpath coming down from Broseley to Ironbridge. On the high ground overlooking the station was a large house called Bridge House which I became very familiar with. Around the end of the War my uncle Frederick Howells and a gentleman named Mr. Tom Crompton bought the Craven Dunnill tile works at Jackfield. Uncle Fred came down from Pilkingtons to manage the works and bought Bridge House, so I had a very convenient port of call on the way home from school.

This daily journey was transformed when at the age of thirteen I was allowed to have a bicycle. Uncle Jim, through his garage and contacts, was able to get a Sunbeam free wheel three-speed cycle for me – one of the top bikes at that time. The footpath to Ironbridge was too steep for cycling so I used the main road which was longer but much quicker.



The registration, EU 53, would be valuable today.

My only recollections of events in my early days at the High School were connected with the Great War. The first was the signing of the Armistice on 11 November and when the news reached the school we all rushed out of the classroom and there was no more school that day. The other incident was also connected with the War. The school had a cadet corps to train the older boys for call up duty and every so often we had what was called a field day. Everyone had to take part and for the young boys it was a tiring experience. I remember that on one of the occasions I just collapsed from fatigue and one of the sixth form boys carried me on his shoulders back to school.

Growing up in a school is no doubt much the same anywhere and it is hard to remember individual events. When I was in the fifth form there was a prize for reading. I chose a poem by P. B. Shelley called "The Flight of Love". The reader had to show ability in diction, expression and clarity and I was fortunate to be the winner. Perhaps some premonition of how I was to earn my living later in life.

The highlight of each year was the Speech Day when the parents were invited and prizes were given for excellence in different subjects. The pupils were expected to provide some sort of entertainment. One year I had to sing a madrigal called "Cherry Ripe" which I thought was a silly song. Much more to my taste was taking the part of Sir Anthony Absolute in an extract from "The Rivals" by Sheridan.

I mentioned earlier the division between girls and boys at school and it seems impossible now to realise how strictly this division was maintained. If we were to get to know a member of the opposite sex the contact had to be made outside the school grounds. I was able to get to know a very attractive girl named Ena Ogle who lived just around the corner from Padman House in the High Street. Her mother was widowed and her father had been a doctor. I considered her to be my young lady until I went away to University when the relationship died a natural death.

Thinking of personal contacts, I realise that I made very few close friends. One such was Bert Moore whose home was in Madeley. He was a year older than me and he was one of the cleverest people I have known. The friendship ripened during our university years but afterwards, although we kept in contact, he became very unstable in mind and had to have treatment.



Dad, right, with Bert Moore playing cricket. In the tennis photo is the top greenhouse & dog kennel.

More important in relation to later life was my friendship with Frank Bowen. He lived at Bishop's Castle on the Welsh Border, just about the opposite end of the school catchment area. We often spent a weekend together when I would go home with him on a Friday and return with him to school on the Monday or he would visit Borseley in the same way. It so happened that as he was approaching his School Certificate examination his parents had to move. They were afraid that a change of school at such a crucial time might have unfortunate results so our parents agreed that Frank should live with us in Borseley until the exam was over. The happy result was that we lived as brothers for nearly six months. When I went to the University, Frank moved away with his parents and went to train as a civil engineer with great financial success. For a while we lost contact, but more of that anon.

It must not be overlooked that I had quite a full and active life in Broseley quite apart from activities connected with Coalbrookdale. When I was eight years old I joined the Broseley Church choir which entailed practice one evening a week and two services on a Sunday. Walter Davis was choirmaster and his 'lady love' played the organ. I was given a sound introduction to the principle of voice production. In addition to the basic psalms and hymns we produced an oratorio each winter, Stainer's Crucifixion being the most popular. The only lighter side to all this was on Halloween when we made lighted faces out of Swedes and candles and hid behind the gravestones so scare the choirmaster and his lady. I dare say they enjoyed it as much as we did.



Broseley Church and the position of the Broadhursts' Tomb. Dad's grandfather, Henry, whose name is engraved on the top and several other members of the family are buried there. Frederick Hill Broadhurst was Dad's uncle.

Change is very difficult to introduce into a congregation. It was decided that the offertory should be taken at the chancel steps and carried from there to the altar. I was chosen to carry out this simple duty and I remember that there was quite a "to do" about it. I was connected with Broseley choir for quite a long time for when my voice broke I moved into the back row with the men and even when I went away to University I sang in the choir when home on holiday. There is little doubt that I made up my mind during my early days with the choir to train for the Ministry if that proved possible. My experience with the choir was a great help to me in my future work.

There was a flourishing tennis club in Broseley and when I was about fourteen I became a member. As I grew older I was chosen to be a regular member of the team and played with other young members, many from Coalbrookdale School.

Another activity in which I took part was amateur theatricals. I remember that in my last year at school I took the leading role in a play called "Tilly of Bloomsbury" which was well received by the audiences in Broseley Town Hill. My efforts in the love scene attracted some ribald comments from my fellow players.

Altogether, my teenage years seem to have been very busy. Mother gave lots of parties and the Howells family helped to make these a success. Of course there was a close relationship because Mrs. Frederick Howells (Harriet) was Mother's sister. Uncle Fred moved from Bridge House up to Field House in Broseley. This later became the Cumberland Hotel but in those days it was a source of many happy times, with croquet parties at both our houses in the summer and whist parties in the winter.



Harriet, Fred Howells with Trevor Howells and Dad's mother, Minnie, in front of Field House and a Garden Party in front of Field House

Later on, Uncle Fred's son, Wilfred, came to live nearby at Hurstlea with his wife Margaret. He had been an officer in the war and was wounded in the heel in an operation of such importance that he was awarded the Military Cross. He married one of the nurses who nursed him, Margaret Bowness (known as Greta). After his death, Greta spent many holidays with us in Callington Cornwall. Trevor, Wilfred and Greta's son, would bring her down to Gloucester where I would meet her and take her on to Cornwall.

In 1924 I was approaching my last year at school. During 1923 I had taken the School Certificate exam. It consisted of the basic subjects of Maths, Science, English and History.

Whatever additional subjects were taken, these four had to be passed again in the same exam. A failure in any of the four meant that the whole exam had to be taken again. One that I had doubts about was the maths paper. It was based on the tables up to twelve times, addition and subtraction, multiplication and division and questions based on them. I must have shown proficiency in these, being awarded the School Certificate with matriculation. In the same year I was entered for the Higher School Certificate. I was allowed to drop Maths and Science subjects, concentrating on English, History and Geography. The final result was a distinction in English and History and a credit in Geography.



Above, a whole school photograph of Coalbrookdale Boys School in June 1927. Below, the enlarged centre section with Dad in the middle holding a cup. Frank Bowen is next but one to Dad wearing the light jacket.



When the results came through the Headmaster decided that it was worth trying for one of the two Leaving Exhibitions offered by the County Education Department. I was fortunate enough to obtain one of these which provided the tuition part of the cost of a University education. I was now only coming up to sixteen years old. I had either to do another year at school marking time or find other employment. At that time the County was offering a year as a student teacher, which meant teaching with no pay in a local County School with one day a week to be spent at the High School. I decided to do this and I have never regretted it as it repaid me many times over in later life.

The School chosen for me was Jackfield Junior School, situated opposite the entrance to Craven Dunnill's Tile Company. Here I was to learn how to prepare a lesson, how to appear before a class and how to impose and maintain discipline. I did not realize when I started the year as a pupil teacher that I was entering into a year of decision making which was to determine the course of my life.

Events began to unfold in the Spring of 1925 when Headmaster Fraser suggested that I applied for a place at Oxford University for the Autumn term. For a pupil to win a place at Oxford or Cambridge reflected on the prestige of the school so the Headmaster was very keen – and so was my mother, who was now the dominant parent in the business of my education. My father wanted me to go to work with the Sun Alliance Insurance Company in Shrewsbury and to please him I took an examination at their offices but I had already decided what I wanted to do and it was not selling insurance! The exam was not difficult to fail and so then my father fell in with my mother's wishes. My parents talked it over with the headmaster and it was decided that I should apply for a place at Exeter College, Oxford where the cost of living would be more within my parents' ability to pay than one of the bigger colleges. Even with my Leaving Exhibition it was going to cost my parents a lot of money and this worried me. Anyway, it was decided to go ahead and I applied to Exeter College.

Arriving in good time for the interview, I was asked to wait in an anteroom until my time came. On entering the interview room, I was faced with a long red carpet (the only time I have been so honoured). At the end of this was a large desk and behind it were three gowned gentlemen. I was not invited to sit down and questions were fast and searching. At the conclusion I was sent away to await the decision and when the letter came from Oxford I was offered a place but not until the autumn of 1926. Both the headmaster and my mother encouraged me to wait, but I realised that by the admission date I would have been out of school for two years. My school friend Bert Moore was starting at Birmingham University that autumn and offered me a lift on the pillion of his motorbike! What concerned me most was the break in my education if I waited for Oxford, added to the fact that if I went to Birmingham it would cost my parents a good deal less.

Here was a dilemma of such magnitude that it would affect my whole future life. In order to test the position, I decided to apply for a place at Birmingham University to read English as this was my favourite subject. The Principal of the English School there was the notable authority on William Wordsworth, Hugh de Selincourt. He, together with a colleague, conducted my interview. I was told to go home and await the decision and after a lapse of time a letter duly arrived offering me a place that coming autumn with a reserved place in the Hall of Residence. It was called Chancellor's Hall and had been the private residence of Austin Chamberlain.



Exeter College, Oxford.

Here then was the choice and I had to make it. After days and nights of anxiety I chose Birmingham and I have no regrets. From the purely educational standpoint I did not make the right decision as a degree from Oxford was worth more than one from one of the redbrick universities. Moreover, Exeter College offered a degree course in Literature alone whereas the one at Birmingham included both Anglo-Saxon and Middle English. I was never any good at languages and might have had more chance of a first class honours at Exeter college than at Birmingham where I had to be satisfied with a second.

However, academic achievement is not everything. When I think of the way my life unfolded I realise that it was not really the most important thing for me. No one can know what life would have offered if I had chosen Oxford but I am quite sure it could not have been happier or more fulfilling. If I had gone to Oxford I would not have met your mother and you would not be reading this. At the time it was a harrowing decision which disappointed my mother and my headmaster. It seemed to be throwing away a great opportunity but the future has only served to convince me that I made the right decision.

So ended a happy school time. By now, at eighteen years of age, I felt very grown up and ready to face the rigours of university life.

Chapter 3 - Birmingham

I was seventeen years old when I left home for the University in the autumn of 1926. It was a time when the University was coming to the end of an almost complete rebuilding on a site out on the Longbridge Road. It did not really affect me for the English School, of which I was to be a member, was one of the parts still left in the centre of the city, being situated in Edmund Street behind the Town Hall.



Birmingham University 1920.

The new intake of students was divided into units of three or four, each under a separate tutor who was responsible for his or her own group. My tutor was a young lecturer named Waterhouse. There were regular tutorials and once a week a seminar when one of the students read a paper on some aspect of the work being studied. Regular lectures were delivered by the Principal (or one of his assistant professors) and we were expected to take notes. At the end of the first year each student was assessed. If he or she was considered unsuitable material for an honours course he or she was expelled from the honours school and had to take a pass degree or leave the university.

In addition to the main subject of English we were required to take a subsidiary subject for the first two years, at the end of which we were granted a pass degree if our progress merited it. My chosen subject was French and I duly acquired the pass degree although I doubt if it was ever much use to me.

When I was accepted I was told that a place was reserved for me in the Hall of Residence, at one time the home of Austin Chamberlain. It was in the Hagley Road and had the most delightful grounds including a large lake which provided good skating in some winter terms. There was a very comfortable lounge and three or four bedrooms with very good 'shared' bathroom facilities.

The teaching schedules meant that those of us in the English School were thrown together and some close relationships developed. I made friends with a student named Henry Arnott from Hexham in Northumberland. He made a close attachment with one of the girls in the English School named Dorothy Whitely and on leaving the department he got a teaching job and married her. It proved to be a happy and enduring union. Harry died six years ago but I am still in touch with Dorothy and exchange Christmas letters.

At the same time I fell for a girl named Alice Mary Baxter, also in the English School. We went about together as a quartet with Henry and Dorothy. Alice's father was Headmaster of a large school at Idle near Bradford and she lived there. I cannot recall that we ever discussed marriage but I imagine that we must have considered it a likely outcome. I sometimes went to stay with her during vacations and I took her several times to Broseley. At any rate, the relationship was such that when I came to be ordained Alice came with my mother to the service. I sensed a change after this. Perhaps she realised for the first time what being married to a clergyman would entail and I realised that she had no religious conviction. Anyway, after I had been working for about nine months we met in Bradford and decided to call it a day.

I have often wondered what happened to her. Probably, with her father's influence, she got a good teaching post, but her great ambition was to be a poet. I may have a notebook with some of her poems in it but I do not remember ever seeing her name in any of the periodicals where poems are published. When we parted I felt a great sense of relief, feeling instinctively that we would never have been a good working team.

At the University there was every encouragement to take part in sporting activities and as soon as I found my way about I put my name down for football and was offered a trial at outside left in a reserve eleven, probably because it was a very unpopular position! Anyway, in my second year I had one or two opportunities to play in that position with the first eleven and I had high hopes of consolidating this position in my final year but as Robert Burns put it in his poem to the Mouse "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley ". In what must have been about the last fixture of the autumn term I was booked to play at Loughborough College. It was at that time not a university but it was considered so good at football that several universities offered fixtures. All went well until the second half when trying to turn very quickly my studs stuck in ground and I went down with a strained ligament. I suppose that if it had happened to me today it would have been operated on but in those days nobody bothered or perhaps had the necessary expertise. It never properly healed and it marked the end of a promising football career.

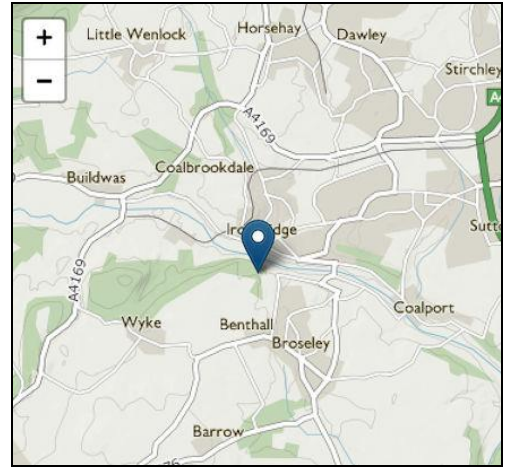
One thing my short experience taught me was the vast difference between amateur and professional football. I was billed to play against the Birmingham City reserves and it happened that the regular City right back was recovering from an injury and I found myself facing him. The ease with which he dealt with my efforts showed what a gap there was between us.

During the second year we were given an opportunity to take a course at The Birmingham Repertory Theatre on voice training and deportment. I realised how useful this would be and accepted without hesitation. I could never understand why something like this was not offered to us by the Theological College but it never was and we were not even called upon to preach a sermon. What I learned on the Theatre course was a great help to me in later life.

The necessity to learn Anglo Saxon and Middle English was a constant stumbling block to me. I could not see the value of it because there would never be an opportunity to speak these languages once we left the University. What literature was available could be read in a perfectly adequate translation. Knowledge of the spoken language was only of value to a language student. However, I had no cause for complaint as I should have studied the details of the degree course more thoroughly when making up my mind. I do not know what my marks were in these languages but apparently enough progress was made to allow me to continue in the honours school.

A very lively event took place in the winter term when the University held its Rag Day. Each school was expected to decorate a large lorry with some interesting theme. During my time, our lorry was supplied by the Bournville Chocolate Company. We picked it up in the evening before Rag Day and spent the night decorating it. There was a grand procession of all the lorries on Rag Day and people gave generously as the money went to charity.

The long vacations allowed time for interesting pursuits. I was now old enough to have a gun so my father bought me a twelve bore double- barrellled shotgun. With this under my arm I spent many a happy hour on Benthall Edge and at the adjacent farm. I never became a really good shot but got the occasional pheasant, pigeon or rabbit.



Benthall Edge looking down on to Ironbridge and the map shows the position of Benthall in relation to Broseley. Dad sold the land to Telford Council when he retired enabling him to buy their bungalow.

When I was seventeen I was taught by Uncle Jim's son, Harry to drive. The car was a gate change Sunbeam. The gear lever was outside the car on the driver's side and when changing gear the number of revs had to be exactly right or a clanging of metal resulted. Of course there was very little traffic on the roads. Indeed, a greater difficulty was when a really steep hill was encountered. It was a question of whether one would get to the top in one go.

Bert Moore lived in digs in Birmingham and made occasional trips home at weekends. He usually offered me a lift on his motorcycle pillion. I did not enjoy pillion riding but the temptation to get home overcame my dislike.

I made one or two contacts with people living near Birmingham. While on holiday mother and dad became friendly with a Mr. & Mrs. Humphries and their daughter Dorothy who lived in Bromsgrove. The two mothers obviously felt that a romance might spring up but neither Dorothy nor myself had any inclination that way. Another very happy friendship was with a young man named Jimmy Foster. He lived in Dudley where his father was Principal of the Dudley Training College for Teachers. He was a 'day boy' and on occasion we would go home together and spend a happy evening playing Mah-jong. Unfortunately, he died young.

There were two very good hard tennis courts at Chancellor's Hall. Fortunately for me, one of the medical students who lived in Hall played tennis for the County of Kent and I was often able to play with him which improved my game no end.

The third year came around all too quickly and with it the shadow of final exams. I recall sitting in the greenhouse at Padman House in the last vacation before exams began, trying my best to remedy the many weak spots. When the exams came I felt that the papers were very fair and with the exception of the language papers I had no difficulty with them. Henry Arnott and his Dorothy and Alice Baxter and I got the expected Second Class Honours so one could say that we did what we set out to do. My mother came up for the Graduation day celebration and I am sure that she was more proud of me than I was of myself.

I had already applied to Queen's Theological College and had been accepted. It was arranged that I should start there in the spring when I was twenty years old. The life at Queen's centred around the chapel. The Principal was very high church who expected us to attend matins and communion every morning and Evensong and Compline in the evening. Full vestments and incense were used but confession was by choice so I did not

need to avail myself of this. Everything was new to me but my first curacy soon showed me how necessary a knowledge of high church practice was.

I decided that the next two years had to be given over to acquiring the different branches of religious knowledge necessary to the passing of the two parts of the General Ordination Examination. My life at Broseley when on vacation went on as usual but when at Queen's I allowed myself a minimum of free time, working harder than I had ever done at the University. Fortunately for me, though I did not feel it at the time, Alice Baxter had entered the Education Department in Oxford to train for her teachers' certificate so we saw little of each other in term time and only occasionally during vacations.

During the second year at Queens I decided to try for the Gibson Scott Psychology Prize. Psychology was not taught as a subject but the prize of twenty pounds in books was a rich one and it was open to any candidate for ordination. I was thrilled to learn that I had won the prize which enabled me to buy books that I wanted and to make my mother and father a present of two of Thomas Hardy's novels, "Far from the Madding Crowd" and "The Mayor of Casterbridge".

Passing the first part of G. O. E. in March opened up a tempting possibility. The Advent ordination for 1932 was fixed for the Sunday after Advent. I would be twenty-three years old then and twenty-three was the minimum age for ordination. To qualify for this I had to pass G.O.E. part two in the October. I studied harder than ever and much to my delight I was granted a pass. In these exams there was no indication of how well or badly one had done, only pass or fail. It was then possible for me to become a clergyman in that December when I was twenty-four

Contact had already been made with the Bishop of Wakefield, the very reverend Jimmy Seaton. The Rev. Charles Jackson, vicar of Broseley, knew Jimmy Seaton and agreed to write to him on my behalf. The Bishop agreed to ordain me if a curacy could be found in his diocese. It so happened that the senior curate of Heckmondwike had just been made vicar of Roberttown and I was offered the position of junior curate in his place. My prospective Rector was Canon John Longbottom, a man with a degree from Manchester who was to prove a very good friend to me.

I feel that this is an appropriate opportunity to say something about my decision to elect to work in the north of England and more particularly in the heavy woollen district. I think that my choice was heavily influenced by the Reverend Jackson, Rector of Broseley. He had been a vicar in one of the run down districts of Manchester and maintained that it was a real challenge to serve in this type of parish. My only contact with the north of England was through Alice Baxter and a family called Carter who lived at Illingworth, near Halifax, both of them a far cry from a parish like Heckmondwike. Anyway, I decided that I was fortunate to be offered this curacy and accepted with heartfelt thanks.

This was really the end of my formal education. I never completed the Master of Arts thesis. The demands of a parish left no time for the sort of research required for such a thesis. The only thing that suffered was my pride which no doubt was good for me. I can say that I left Birmingham with neither regret nor remorse.

I must set on record one thing that happened while I was waiting for ordination. I was invited to take the service and preach at Benthall Church. I have never forgotten the text I chose for my first sermon: "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help". I expect that it was not much of a discourse but at least it was a start and a preparation for what was to come.



Benthall Church where Dad preached his first sermon.

Chapter 4 – Heckmondwike

The Parish to which I was licensed as a junior curate proved to be an industrial town given over to woollen manufacturing and the weaving of carpets and fell naturally into three parts, each of which had its own church.

The main centre of population was served by a church of moderate churchmanship and known as the Parish Church. The Rector took the main responsibility for the overseeing of this. The northern part of the town was called St. Saviours after the name of its Church. This left a section beyond the Spen River called Norristhorpe which had at one time been a separate village with its own incumbent. In churchmanship, St. Saviours and Norristhorpe were poles apart. St. Saviours was very high church with all the appropriate vestments, whilst Norristhorpe was unashamedly low church with just a couple of candles on the altar.



St Saviours, Heckmondwike and All Souls, Norristhorpe. This picture is taken from the estate agents for sale literature. The asking price was £150,000, in December 2016. It cost £800 to build in 1888.

As the newcomer, it was no surprise that I was given the overall charge of this part of the parish, although for my first year as a deacon I was not allowed to administer holy communion. This limitation did not however save me from my first challenge. At St. Saviours Church was a large Sunday school of over three hundred pupils and apparently this had been taken by a well-meaning layman and was out of hand. The Rector decided that I should take over responsibility for this large body of children so I was very glad that I had been a pupil teacher in Jackfield. Even so, it proved a struggle for a time but finally order was restored. There were a good number of volunteer teachers. I persuaded these to meet with me once a week to study and plan the lesson for that week. This gave them the necessary knowledge and confidence to face their classes which often consisted of children not much younger than themselves. This preparation meant that all I had to do on the Sunday was to maintain discipline and keep a general eye on things.

The Rector was a great believer in house to house visiting and each week his two curates had to give an account of what they had each done in the time. It was in carrying out this task that one came to realise how hard life in an industrial town could be. Some houses had scarcely any furniture. In one house a child's cradle was a box suspended from the ceiling and quite commonly the children slept on the floor with hardly any covering. Anyone who is old enough will remember these years in the 1930s when the country was in the midst of severe recession. One of my earliest tasks was to organise a soup kitchen where women could bring a large jug and take away whatever we could provide.

(House to house visiting must have stuck in Dad's mind because when he went to minister in Callington he visited every house in the town to introduce himself. He was a great believer in visiting people in their own homes)

The senior curate and myself lived in rooms quite near the parish church where we were looked after by a housekeeper named Mrs. Sutcliffe and considering the general shortages we were well fed. My wage was £170 a year so I had to be careful. Our only luxury was a bullnosed Morris car which we shared. We really needed some transport to get to Norristhorpe which was about three and a half miles away from our digs.



The Bullnose Morris Oxford was in production from 1913-1926.

Looking back on those distant days I realise that the Rector took the task of training his two curates very seriously. Apart from visiting, he met with us weekly to plan services and required to see the sermon we had prepared for each coming Sunday. He encouraged us to deliver our sermon without relying on our notes, maintaining that was the only way to talk to a congregation. He was married to a delightful lady named Eva and they had twin children. I am still in touch with Ruth, the only surviving member of the family.

My responsibility for Norristhorpe brought me in touch with a man who was to become one of the best friends I have ever had. His name was George Blackburn. He lived in a big house near the church and was the owner of a shoddy woollen mill down in the Heckmondwike town. He was accepted by the villagers as their squire and was the chief supporter of the church. Luckily for me we seemed to have common interests. We were both fond of gardening and George had two big greenhouses where he grew flowering plants. We were also keen on golf and soon formed the habit of playing once a week when we were free. When I had a ten thirty service at Norristhorpe he usually invited me to lunch with him so we were two bachelors together. His support was a tremendous help to me in all church matters. George gave me one of the finest presents I ever received. While I was still a curate he made me a life member of the Royal Horticultural Society so all through my long life I have received all their publications free, together with free admission to all their shows. *(Dad received free tickets for each day of the Chelsea Flower Show right up to his death.)*



Uncle George, my godfather, was a regular visitor to Callington, as he had been to Newton, and often took us out to a meal in one of the posh hotels in Plymouth. He had always wanted to be a veterinary surgeon, but being the elder son he had to go into the family mill. Ironically his younger brother became a vet.

Another person who was kind to me was Dr. Beatty. His wife had died and his daughter Barbara kept house for him. They often invited me to have supper with them when we had been to evensong.

These few years as a curate were also to prove very decisive in my personal life. I mentioned in the last chapter that my relationship with Alice Baxter came to an end after I had been less than a year at Heckmondwike. In order to understand what happened next I must return to my final year at University. While on holiday, mother had made a friend of a young lady named Ivy Carter who lived in a district near Halifax called Illingworth. Ivy Carter had a younger sister named Lily who was married to Herbert Paget. During one or two visits to the Carters I became friendly with Lily and Herbert Paget and visited them in their home in Leeds. Lily's closest friend was Constance Ray Birch, who lived with her parents in Illingworth quite near to Mr. & Mrs. Carter. I met her at Lily Paget's house and on one occasion was asked to take her to have a game of golf. I realised that although she was a very good companion she was no great golfer and I don't think that I ever played golf with her again.



Ivy Carter on a visit Padman House.



The engaged couple

During my time in Heckmondwike we continued to meet at Lily's house and by the time I had been working some three years we both began to feel that things were serious. When Connie's twenty first birthday came along we decided to get engaged. I don't think that Connie's parents felt that the match was worthy of her but accepted with a good grace. I think that a visit to Broseley made them realise that the respective parents were not perhaps as far apart socially as might have been imagined!



The in-laws visiting Broseley.

Connie drove her father's car so after we became engaged she would come over to service at Norristhorpe. Of course that meant that she and George Blackburn met and obviously approved of each other. I think that Connie also had some encouraging words from Eva Longbottom when they met.

When the position became known to Bishop Seaton he made it clear that he did not approve of his curates marrying but that he hoped that before too long he would find me a parish.

With three churches there was always some event to celebrate. One that I shall always remember was Armistice Day. The Great War, with its devastating list of casualties meant that everyone had some loss to remember and the British Legion turned out in full strength, led by George Blackburn who had been a captain during the hostilities. A stage was erected in the centre of the town and a parade finished up at that point. The clergy mounted the stage and the Rector conducted a service. In the four years I was there we were drenched on one occasion and nearly frozen on two others.



Armistice Day Service. Captain George Blackburn in uniform. Dad on the right of the clergy with Rev Longbottom on the left.

I suppose it was inevitable that I should be drawn into the scout movement that was very active in the parish. I had never taken any part in this activity so I had a lot to learn. The highlight of the year was the annual camp. On one occasion we went to Cartmel in the Lake District but the most popular camp was in Buckland Rings near Lymington in Hampshire.



Rev Longbottom is standing immediately in front of the flagpole with Dad to his left.

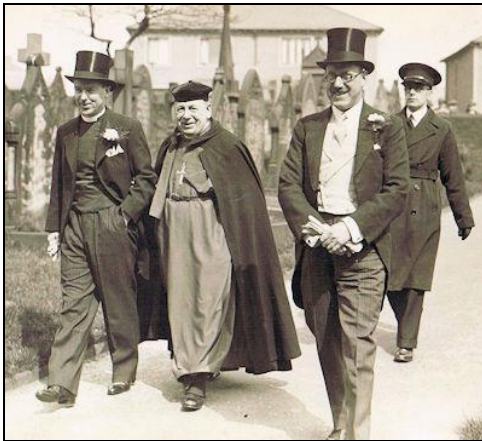
A very popular feature of this part of the world was Walking Day. This was a celebration of Whit Sunday. On Whit Monday there was a morning procession of all the different organisations in the town. Everyone wore their best clothes and the affair culminated with sports and plenty to eat.



Leading the procession.

It was while looking after a stall at the annual bazaar that a very pleasant surprise awaited me. Rector Longbottom stopped to see how things were progressing and asked me if I would be interested in Shelley. The only Shelley I knew of was the china by that name so I replied that I preferred Coalport. He laughed and went on to inform me that Shelley was a parish near Huddersfield that was due to become vacant and would need an incumbent. The patron of this living was the Rector of Kirkburton, the Rev. Sefton, and my Rector Longbottom had mentioned my name to him. In due course a formal offer of the living transpired and Bishop Seaton agreed to induct me into the living and even more importantly for me he also agreed to marry Connie and me. It illustrated how quickly one's status can change and it bore out what I had stated earlier, that it is more important who you know than what you know.

All this happened at Christmas time and it was decided that I should carry out my programme for Lent and Easter and then be married on 26 April 1927. The wedding was to be held at the Parish Church Skircoat Green Halifax. George Blackburn agreed to be my best man and I was well supported with clergy by the Bishop, Rector Longbottom and the Rev. Jackson, Rector of Broseley.



Main participants arriving for the Wedding at Halifax Parish Church. On the left: Dad, The Very Reverend James Beaufort Seaton, Bishop of Wakefield 1928-1938 and George Blackburn. On the right Mum with her father Norman Birch followed by Wilfred Birch, Mum's cousin.

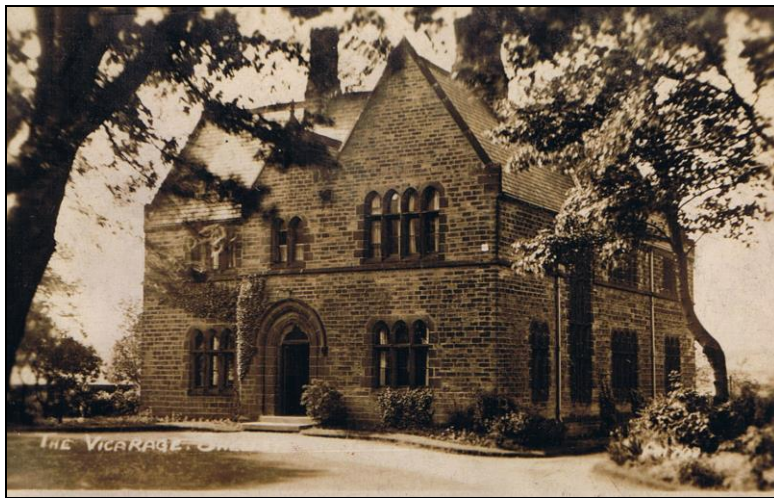


Back row: John Broadhurst, Trevor Howells, George Blackburn, Dad, Mum, Wilfred Birch, Norman Birch, Bert Moore, Leonard Whelan. Seated: Minnie Broadhurst, Oline Greenwood, Winnie Whelan, Lily Birch.

Connie and I decided to have our honeymoon on the Isle of Wight. It happened that one of the girls in the English School at the University lived on the island and was teaching in Doncaster. I contacted her and she arranged very comfortable lodgings for us near her home in Ryde. I had a little Austin Seven car just big enough for ourselves and our luggage, so all worked out according to plan.

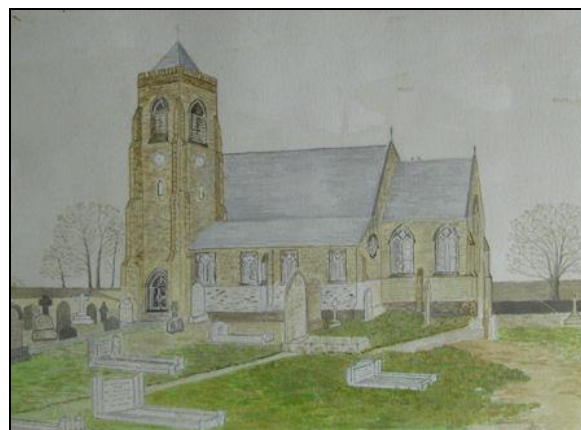
Chapter 5 – Shelley

The village of Shelley was one that could be duplicated many times throughout the Pennine region. It rested on the top of a hill, a thousand feet above sea level and was open to all the vicious winds that were common in that area. If asked to give a name to it I would say SNOW: I saw enough of it in five years to last a lifetime and although it has its own beauty it can easily be overrated in my opinion. It was to play quite a notable part in my life there.



Shelley Vicarage

The Vicarage was a large four bedroom well-built house completely cut off from the village but adjacent to the Church. We always kept a good supply of essentials as we were isolated as a result of the snow on occasions. The church, which stood in a large churchyard, had a central aisle and a side aisle with a very old pipe organ and a rather small chancel but was adequate for a community the size of Shelley village. The Vicarage had two entrances with drives leading up to the front door. There was an adequate lounge and dining room with a study, a large kitchen and scullery. Washing was done the old-fashioned way. On Monday mornings I lit a fire under the big tub where the washing was boiled and then transferred to a big sink to be rinsed before being hung outside the back door to dry.



Dad's painting of Shelley Church

Under the house were three big cellars. The one with steps from the kitchen had a big slate slab on which food kept very well. In the winter time the cellar would flood but the water was so pure and clean that no trace of flood remained when it ran away. In the far cellar we were amused to find a fine collection of empty whisky bottles – which of my predecessors emptied them I never knew!

Shelley was on a coalfield and coal was plentiful and cheap but big quantities were needed to combat the cold.

There was a big rose bed at the front of the house but the roses fought a losing battle with the elements. There was a big kitchen garden from which I managed to produce quite a lot of vegetables in spite of the weather. I have seen all the leaves blown off the runner beans in July! Things were helped by the presence of a good big greenhouse, a wedding present from mother and father.

I may as well introduce you to the first of my Churchwardens. His name was Robert Jagger and he was one of the biggest men I can remember having close contact with. He was six foot four and a large build. When we erected the greenhouse, which was sixteen foot by nine, he stood and supported the entire roof while I nailed it in position. His family did not come to church but he never missed a service and was almost a daily caller at the Vicarage. His only drawback was a tendency to stay so late at night that I had to say that it was time to take the dog out in order for him to go. He was too old for early military service so the coming of war did not affect him. It gave me great pleasure before leaving Shelley to marry him to a very pleasant lady who lived on the Isle of Anglesea. She was very gifted and did a number of the decorations on the Queen Mary. I had a card from her last Christmas but Robert died some years ago.

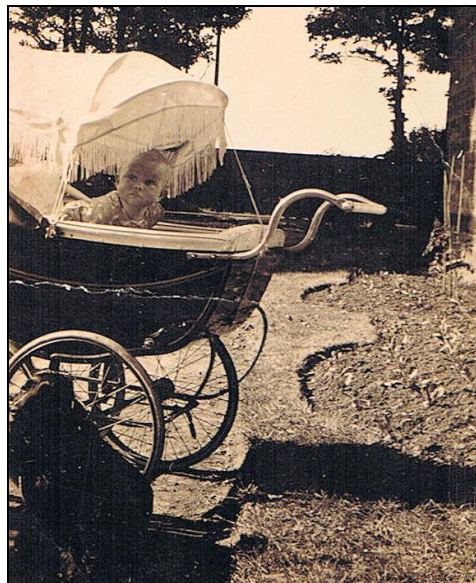
My other Churchwarden was Mrs. Norton, the wife of the senior partner in a big firm of solicitors in Huddersfield. Their home was Shelley Hall and they were very good to us, inviting us to a meal at the Hall on occasion. Mrs. Norton had been running the Mothers Union since the last incumbent left the parish and she continued until Connie settled in. She was a constant help to me in the garden for she gave her head gardener instructions to keep me supplied with young plants for the greenhouse when in season. I had young tomato and cucumber plants and different flowering plants. He was a Scotsman and seemed to think that the young vicar needed all the encouragement he could get. It was a very happy relationship.

One of the great church activities was bell ringing. There was a peal of six bells in the tower and I was duly instructed in the art. Once a year, all the towers in the area took part in a competition held in the Shelley tower. The judges sat in a bedroom window in the Vicarage so that they could hear all the ringing but could not see which team was responsible for it. The ladies from the congregation provided refreshments and a good time was had by all.

The weather was responsible for several incidents in which I was involved. On one occasion, a coffin was being brought from Skelmanthorpe to Huddersfield. As it approached the Church the vehicle went out of control on the icy road and deposited itself and the coffin in the ditch beside the road. It was too late in the day to get the vehicle out so about half a dozen of us managed to manhandle the coffin into the Church and put it on two of the pews until it could be rescued the following day.

A much more tiring incident occurred one weekend in January. A couple of friends, Clifford and Edna Culpan, came on the Friday to stay for the weekend. It was snowing steadily on their arrival and continued to snow all Friday night and all day Saturday. By Sunday morning we were completely cut off with no hope of anyone coming to Church. I had to call some banns or the couple would not have been able to be married on the date arranged. Clifford and I began to dig a path to the Church. We worked steadily until teatime and managed to get the Church door open. After tea, the four of us went to Church where I read the service of Evensong and duly called the banns. A similar incident occurred when John was a baby. The milkman could not get down with our milk so I had to climb over the wall behind the Vicarage and make a beeline for the farm, bringing back enough milk for a couple of days. On that occasion the snow was so deep that the 30 m.p.h. road sign outside the Vicarage was completely covered!

1939 brought changes. In the spring it was confirmed that Connie was to have a baby. In the early autumn we were at war with Germany and arrangements were being made to evacuate people to the village from Sheffield. When it was known that there was to be a birth at the Vicarage our name was temporarily taken off the list. As things turned out, the evacuees became so bored with village life that they took themselves back to Sheffield. The nineteenth day of the ninth month in nineteen thirty-nine proved to be the big day and Connie was duly delivered in the front bedroom of a male child who we named John Norman after his two grandfathers. Connie and Mother took charge of the household for the event and we had a nurse from Huddersfield for the confinement. I am sure that the weather conditions which John encountered were as harsh as any that his grandson Oliver with encounter in the Shetland Isles but he seemed to thrive on them. He was usually to be found outside the front door with the cocker spaniel in attendance.



Me, nine months old. You can just make out the dog bottom left.

I have alluded to the fact that congregations are usually strongly opposed to changes. The time came when the old organ was judged to be beyond repair and the question arose as to what could provide a replacement. To replace it with a comparable pipe organ would have cost a prohibitive price. I had heard that a firm was offering an electric organ called a Hammond organ for a comparatively low price and that such an instrument had been installed in a church not far away. I took a coach load of parishioners over to hear it being played. The usual doubts were expressed but most of the listeners were favourably impressed and it was finally decided to take the plunge and to buy one.

The job of dismantling the old organ fell to the lot of my verger Wilfred Ramsden and myself. I have never been so dirty in my life but we finally managed to clear it all out and the new organ was installed. Luckily the organist was a young man who revelled in the possibilities the organ offered so all went well. I felt well justified when some thirty years later the parishioners were so pleased with the service the Hammond organ had given that they invited me to go to dedicate a new Hammond organ in its place. The considerable space left vacant by the removal of the organ was used to make a very attractive children's corner and it also let a lot more light into that part of the church.

With the onset of war we were all encouraged to produce as much of everything as we could. We already had a little flock of hens and it was a toss-up between bees and rabbits, with the choice going to rabbits. I constructed a series of hutches in one of the outhouses. I started in a small way with a couple but rabbits breed quickly and I soon had a number of cages full and was able to offer tame rabbit as an attractive meal. I cured the skins and Connie made gloves for the baby and herself. As my choice of breed improved I even entered one or two for show and won prizes, so a hobby grew out of a necessity.

It was also very pleasing to have one's own eggs. We often had a surplus that I passed on to George Blackburn who was a regular visitor to Shelley vicarage.

About the time that John was born my Rector from Heckmondwike was appointed Rector of Warrington in Lancashire. When I congratulated him I did not realise the implications of the event. He had been a curate in Warrington so it spoke well for him that when a vacancy arose they wanted him back.

The war did not change life a great deal in the parish of Shelley. A Home Guard was formed and we used to meet in a cellar under a shop in the main street. At night it was often very noisy for an anti-aircraft battery travelled along the ridge firing at planes going to bomb Manchester. On one occasion they dropped two landmines on parachutes. One landed in a field in my parish and killed a cow and the other landed in Ossett marketplace and did a lot of damage but luckily did not kill anyone. The greater risk was from bits of spent shell falling from the anti-aircraft firing.

During my last year at Shelley, to our great regret the Nortons left Shelley Hall. The place was taken by Sir Gordon Kaye and the family were friendly enough but were not interested in the church in the way that the Nortons were. I really did not have the time to get to know the new people as things were moving on for me.

I recorded now Rector Longbottom had moved to Warrington. Here, among other things, he became a member of the Warrington Rotary Club. One of his fellow members was Charles Clark who was agent to Lord Newton. Lord Newton was patron of the living of Newton-le-Willows, almost five miles from Warrington, and the incumbent had left rather suddenly.



Charles Clark's house, opposite the church. His daughter Billie later became one of Peter's Godparents.

Mr. Clark, as agent for Lord Newton, was called upon to fill the vacancy and Rector Longbottom again recommended me as a possible candidate. I was informed of the position and was asked to go to meet Lord Newton at the War Office in London. After a very amiable meeting he told me that I could meet the churchwardens of St. Peter's Church Newton-le-Willows and if they were agreeable he would offer me the living.

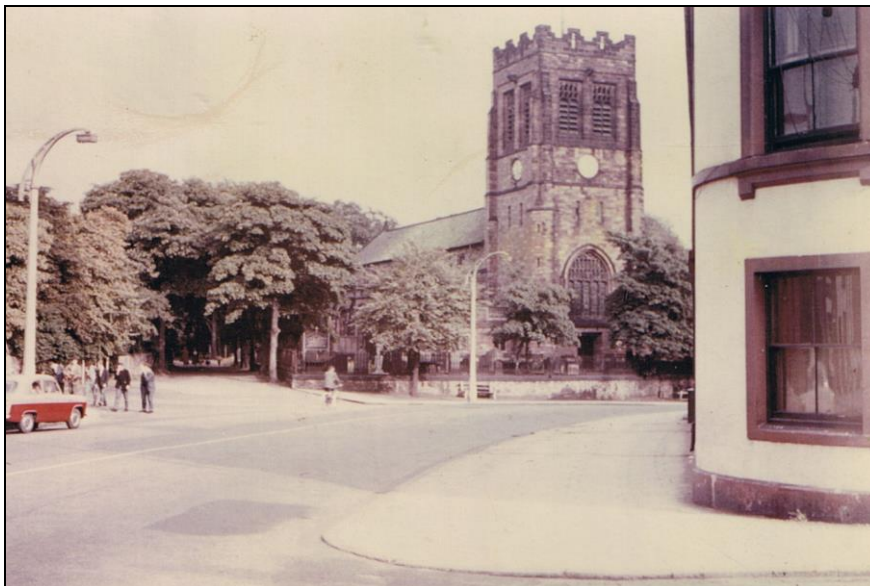
At Shelley I had been earning just over £300 per year but the living of Newton-le-Willows was £750. I met with Mr. Tom Howarth and Mr. Allen Gandy and had a long talk with them. Their only doubt seemed to be that they thought that I was too young, but I pointed out that time would soon solve that problem! Anyway, we came to an agreement and Lord Newton duly made me the offer of the living. Both my livings had resulted from the active assistance of Rector Longbottom and meant that I was independent and free from dominance of a Bishop. Here again it was "who you know" rather than "what you know".

Chapter 6 – Newton-le-Willows

On my induction into the living of St. Peter's Church Newton-le-Willows I was entering upon, what was to prove, the busiest and most rewarding years of my ministry. Shelley had been a good beginning but was too small to make any major prospects possible so I looked forward with keep anticipation to what the new parish had to offer. To begin with, the living carried with it the chaplaincy of a large reform school for boys, in reality a separate ministry having its own chapel and demand for pastoral care. The boys attended the morning service at the parish church so a strong link existed.

The parish had a Church of England infant and junior school where I was expected to attend and to give tuition in religious knowledge. With my previous experience this presented no problem.

There was a lay reader, a Mr. Collinge, but as he would not preach a sermon or even give an address he was not a very great help to me.

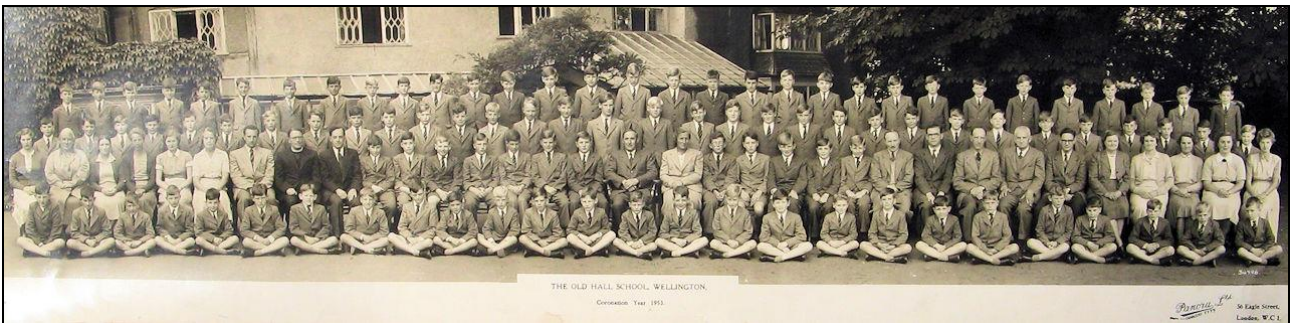


St Peter's Church. The second on this site. Entrance to Vicarage drive through the trees on the left.

The church had a fine peal of eight bells. I did not have much time to give to this pursuit but managed to ring a quarter peal of Bob Minor ringing the number two bell.

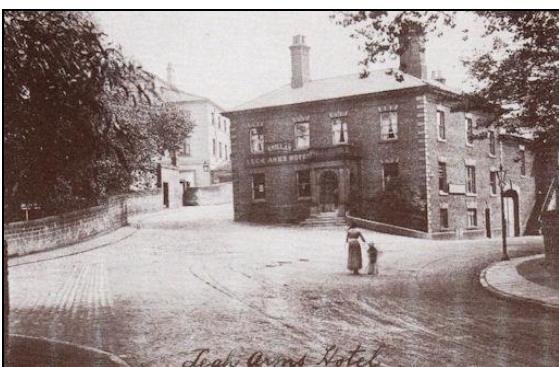
There was a fairly active Sunday School which of course was able to use the day school buildings for lessons. I set to work to build the numbers up and found a good response.

Unfortunately, the day school had acquired a poor academic reputation with bad scholarship results and this presented me with a very difficult problem. If John was to be educated locally with any chance of success he would have had to go to the very thriving junior school in Earlstown, the neighbouring parish, but this would have been impossible to explain to my parish head teacher Mr. Mason. The only alternative was to send John away to a private school. My mother knew of a very good one in Wellington called "the Old Hall" and offered financial help. It was a hard decision for Connie and I to make but it seemed the best for John's future. Luckily, about two years later, Mr. & Mrs. Green sent their only son Patrick to the Old Hall. This helped tremendously as the Greens were highly respected and their choice of school gave added weight to ours.



The Old Hall School, Wellington, Shropshire 1953. I am second from the left of the Headmaster, Mr Paul Fee-Smith

Almost immediately after I arrived in Newton, an event took place over which I had no control but which offered an opportunity to establish my reputation. The parish reached its seven hundredth anniversary. I saw the possibilities this offered and it seemed that fate played into my hands. In the heart of the town was the international printing company of McCorkadale and Company. I approached the manager and suggested that the anniversary could be good propaganda for his company. He agreed to produce a booklet worthy of the occasion. This not only gave me a free hand to organise the contents but also established a relationship with the company which lasted the whole of my time in Newton. Apart from the wide diversity of services worthy of the occasion I was able to print articles of historic interest and also letters from past visitors and notable people connected with the town. The event culminated in a thanksgiving service taken by the Bishop. Nothing that I could have thought up would have given my ministry such a rousing start.



The Leigh Arms at the front with McCorkadales behind on the road also leading to Newton-le-Willows railway station.

We were equally fortunate in our living quarters as the Vicarage was quite newly built. The old Vicarage stood at the bottom of the drive and when we arrived it was in use as an air raid warden's post. Newton had escaped virtually unhurt by the war which by this time was turning in favour of the allies and the German bombers did not come so far north any more. After the war the old house was demolished and became a car park for the church.



The old Vicarage on the left, the church on the right.

The Vicarage had a good sized entrance hall from which the rooms led off. On the right was the dining room and straight ahead was the lounge. This was a large room in which it was possible to seat seventy or eighty people. Connie held her Mothers Union meetings in this room each month. The Verger and I brought about forty chairs up from the church. Connie also used the room for rehearsals for the Mothers Union concerts which she produced. I think that this use of the Vicarage helped enormously to strengthen the life of the Church although it might have seemed an intrusion on the life of the incumbent. People got to know their vicar and his wife as individuals.



Newton Vicarage front showing flat roofed study. Back showing low hedge around the rose garden.

Situated on the left of the hall was the kitchen and a boiler house for central heating that we could not afford. Beyond the kitchen was a breakfast room that was very useful. *(My bedroom was immediately above the boiler room and one morning he awoke feeling very ill and it was discovered he was suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning which meant I was unable to return to boarding school at the beginning of term which, for me, made up for the discomfort.)*

Connected to the entrance hall by a passage was a separate unit designed to provide the Vicar with a means of interviewing people on parish matters. It was furnished as a library and had a separate toilet and an outside door.

The grounds consisted of a fruitful orchard alongside the drive. At the back of the house steps led down from the lounge to the terrace and a rose garden and on the west side was a useful kitchen garden. Beyond the rose garden was a large paddock leading to a large lake. Altogether a very pleasant place to live. *(Beyond the rose garden Dad built another rockery. Over the hedge there had been a tennis court which lead onto a double allotment and then a wooded area before the Newton lake. The lake froze sufficiently on a couple of occasions for us to skate safely on it.)*



Newton Lake on the southern edge of the property and beyond the field on the west side there was Castle Hill. The children frightened each other with haunted tales because this was an ancient barrow that had been opened in 1843 when a burial chamber with a semi-circular arched roof was found. There were no ornaments or urns found so it was concluded that the barrow was a very early one.

I had not been at Newton long before I realised that the church was failing in not providing any activity for the teenagers. There was no obvious leader for such a group so I decided to have a go myself. My first effort only resulted in attracting about half a dozen young people but I persevered and after another year or two found that the turn up for a weekly meeting had grown to about twenty. This decided me to produce a pantomime that I wrote myself with the possible characters in mind. I managed to interest a man with no church connection but a love of theatre to become my stage manager. This Mr. Linnell was a genius with props and his wife proved willing to design the necessary scenery for us. One of the teenagers had a brother who worked for the electricity board and he was persuaded to act as lighting manager. The Churchwarden's wife, Mrs. Howarth, was the pianist and Connie looked after the costumes. With this makeshift collection of talent we produced our first pantomime. Over the years the personnel changed but I am still in touch with some of those early performers who are now retired.



Jack and the Beanstalk – 1947. Dad in the centre



Dick Whittington – 1948. I am third, and Neville Harris is fifth, from the right

After I left Rossall in the 1950s I was Dame in the second production of Red Riding Hood and an Ugly Sister in Cinderella. The pantomimes were hard work, but very rewarding in their enjoyment and their ability to bring the young people of the parish together, playing every night to packed audiences. The pantomimes took place in St Peter's School, with the three classroom partitions drawn back and the Stage across the hall to form a letter T.

In addition to being a means of fixing the young people's interest the Youth Group had a still more important result as a means of causing young people to commit themselves to permanent service to the church as a whole.

Two of the Youth Group decided to become Lay Readers and three presented themselves for ordination so I feel that I replaced myself in good measure.

Another innovation was the forming of a men's group that met once a month for prayer and an address by a visiting speaker. Once a year in the summertime we had a men's outing to some place of interest, always arranging to finish up at a pub that had a bowling green.

The church had a thriving tennis club that gave me another opportunity to meet with people when off duty.



The Bishop of Liverpool, the Very Reverend Clifford Martin dedicating the St Peter's Mothers Union Banner. Also in the photo Mum on the right and Mrs Ethel Boardman in the middle and Dad

The north west corner of the Church seemed neglected and I was reminded of my experience at Shelley and suggested that we made it into a children's corner. A local craftsman agreed to make the necessary furniture including small chairs and a small bookcase. The entrance was flanked by two carved pillars. I had one of these made hollow and when the time of dedication came we inserted a roll with the names of all the Sunday school children on it to be opened at some anniversary in the future. The Bishop preached and dedicated the corner at a very enjoyable service.



The dedication of the Children's Corner by the Bishop of Liverpool. From the left: Tom Howarth, Churchwarden, The Bishop, Dad, Alan Gandy, Churchwarden.

At around 1940 one of the cinema companies decided to make a documentary about the work of the Farm School and, as Chaplain, I naturally had a part to play. I was surprised to find what a complicated business making a film was. Some of the scenes were shot time and time again. The result was widely shown; one local person was on business in Argentina and saw it in a cinema there!



Dad taking a service at Red Bank School.

The school, locally known as the Farm School, was a reformed unit for delinquent boys. The Head was Mr John Vardy, holding the football.



The School's staff football team. Dad front left.

In the centres of population around Newton-le-Willows there were a good number of church schools. The Bishop gave me the interesting but time-consuming task of examining these schools in Religious Knowledge. The examination of one of the bigger schools like the Warrington Junior School took a whole day and a report had to be produced and forwarded to the Diocese for each school visited.

I never had any difficulty raising money in Newton. Most of the parishioners were in well paid jobs, many of them working at McCorkadale's Printing Works or the Calico Printing Works, or had good jobs in Warrington or Wigan. Also, there were a few really wealthy families connected with the cotton industry or holding professional positions. These people held tennis and croquet parties to which Connie and I were invited. We continued to be friends with some of these families after we left Newton.

The biggest single undertaking while I was Vicar of Newton was the provision of a parish hall big enough to hold any local function. It was expected that at least £10,000 would be needed but the people tackled the challenge. Owing to the prevalence of mining subsidence it was considered advisable to build the hall on a concrete raft which of course added to the cost. The hall when completed was large enough to hold two hundred seats with a stage equipped for theatrical productions and with lighting that could be controlled from a balcony at the back of the hall.



Inspecting the Parish Hall during construction and Official Opening Ceremony in the company of Mrs Bryce, Mr Howarth, Mr Coleman, Mr Gandy, Mr Mittleburger, and Dad unlocking.

The project was only completed a year or so before I left St. Peters so I did not know what lasting use was made of it.

All these parish activities took up a lot of time over the years and naturally we had our own personal life to live also. We have seen that John was at the Old Hall School but he soon grew too old for this establishment and we had to decide on his next school. We had a look at Marlborough but found it rather forbidding. Finally, we decided on Rossall near Fleetwood. This was not too far away from Newton and we had friends living in the area.

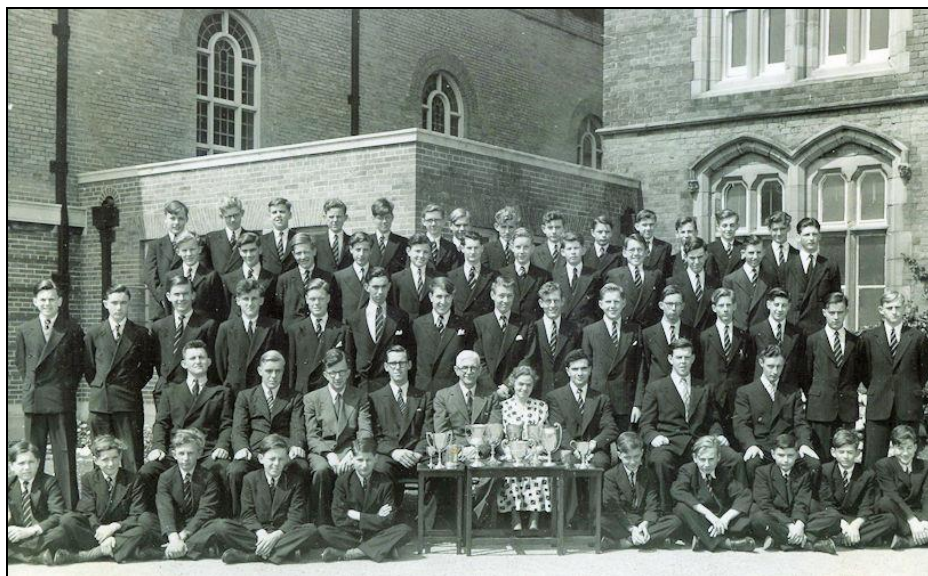


Photo shows Mitre House at Rossall with I am 4th from the left in the back row.

When John was approaching twelve years old we discovered that Connie was going to have a baby. John was very pleased about this for he felt deprived when his school mates talked about their brothers and sisters. I was unable to attend the birth, which was in Warrington Hospital, but we decided that as Peter was born during the second lesson at Evensong it was no surprise that he was to be named Peter.



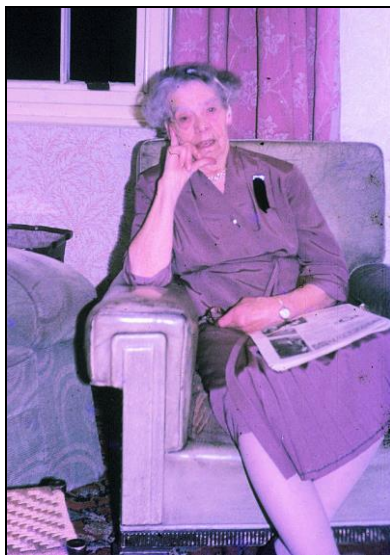
Peter's Christening. Family on the left with Ginger, the dog, and I'm in school uniform. On the right the Peter's Godparents, Rev Harry Lankey, Billie Clark and Ivy Hughes/Porritt and myself.

It was during this winter that my father died. He had a stroke and died without regaining consciousness. I had so many happy memories of him that I felt his passing as a real personal loss. The question arise as to my mother's future for it was obvious that Padman House and garden was too big for her as a long term project. I went down as often as petrol rationing permitted and gave Sergeant the gardener directions but it was obvious that the place would get out of hand. Connie's parents had moved to Morecombe on Mr. Birch's retirement and it was finally decided that mother should move into that area so we could visit all our parents at the same time. Finally, we found a bungalow for mother in Heysham which solved the immediate problem for several years.



Nanny's semi-detached bungalow in Heysham.

Mrs. Birch was living a bus ride from mother's bungalow in Heysham so it was fairly easy for her to keep an eye on mother. If she felt that there was a noticeable deterioration in mother's condition she would let us know. Whenever this happened we would bring her down to Newton and keep her with us until she was better again. This worked well until about four years prior to our leaving Newton. By then it was obvious that mother was no longer able to cope on her own so we sold the bungalow and brought mother to live with us. St. Peter's Vicarage was large enough to enable us to give her an upstairs sitting room with its own bedroom and bathroom and this worked very well.



Nanny is the lounge at Newton.

All through my ministry in Newton, George Blackburn was a constant visitor. He usually stayed for a few days at a time and became quite interested in the garden.

Naturally, with Warrington so near, we kept in close touch with Eva and John Longbotham who was now a Canon of Liverpool Cathedral. During the war we went down to Broseley together to collect fruit for bottling and on another occasion I arranged for his Scout Troop to hold their annual camp in Benthall Edge.

(I can remember when I was a boy staying with my grandparents in Broseley, and the Rev. and Mrs Longbottom came from Warrington to collect damsons from Grandad's field. They only had an old 1936 Morris 8 and having loaded so many damsons into their car they were concerned that the car would not get up the steep climb of Jiggers Bank outside Ironbridge on their way home. As a young boy I was fascinated by the prospect of Mrs Longbottom having to walk up the hill behind the car.)

When the 1940s began to draw to a close I realised that although still hale and hearty I would not be able to keep up the heavy list of duties that I had compiled. Moreover, when one is over fifty years old, parishes are apt to look for a younger man. It seemed that the time had come for a change and so I began to take an interest in livings that became vacant.

I heard that the Marquis of Northampton had a living in Cornwall called South Hill with Callington. There were a lot of people interested in this post but I decided to apply for it and see what happened. The Marquis apparently made a short list and wrote to request testimonials. Perhaps my connection with Lord Newton was a help to me. Anyway he offered to meet me at a hotel in Chester where he was coming to look at a horse which he was interested in. The interview lasted over an hour, at the conclusion of which he told me that he was to interview the others on his list and he would let me know his decision thereafter. Imagine my delight when I had a letter from him informing me that he had decided to offer me the living and suggested I made an appointment to see the Churchwardens of the two parishes. *(South Hill with Callington.)*

It was a long journey from Lancashire to Cornwall but I managed to drive there and back in the day. The interview with a churchwarden from each of the parishes was pleasant enough. One was a farmer and the other a local chemist. The churches were typical of country parishes, Callington apparently being heavily in debt. A very attractive feature was the Rectory that was comparatively new and standing in quite spacious grounds. We agreed that I should become their new Rector and that the Bishop of Truro should be approached to fix a date for the induction.

I had grown very fond of St. Peter's, Newton and I found it very difficult to get up into the pulpit to tell the congregation that I was leaving them. At least we were parting very good friends and the people showed their feelings my making us a handsome present. We were surprised to find that quite a number made the long journey to be present at my induction. *(I remember being in the congregation on the evening when Dad announced that he was leaving and overhearing an elderly lady sitting nearby as he began to speak she whispered 'He's leaving.' They were indeed very sorry to hear he was moving on. He told them he was going to a place called Callington and suggested that they should think of it as 'calling town' and he hoped they would look upon that as an invitation to call any time they were in the area and many did)*

Chapter 7 -South Hill with Callington

This parish was an example of the child outgrowing the parent. South Hill was a very old parish that originally had a vast Rectory adjacent to the church but as time went by the population centred itself two miles away and grew into a thriving market town called Callington. When I went to live there, the Rectory at South Hill had been pulled down and substituted by a new house built in Callington where the population was. South Hill remained a small farming community as it had always been. The living was well endowed, producing an income twice the size of the one I had been used to in Newton, so for the first time since my ordination I was no longer in debt to the bank.



This is Dad's painting of Callington church. He only took up painting when he retired and when he moved to Bristol we discovered that he had completed 175 watercolours.

Three or four years before leaving Newton my mother had reached the stage when she could not manage on her own so we brought her to live with us. There was plenty of room in the Newton Vicarage and we were able to give her a private sitting room where she could entertain friends that she made. John had decided that he did not wish to continue at school and got a post in the office of the Town Treasurer in Warrington with a view to making a career in accountancy, so he was now living at home. When we moved to Callington Mother of course came with us and soon got to know some ladies of her own generation. John applied for a transfer and was given a post in the Plymouth Council offices. Peter went to the Callington junior school so Connie had her family all together for the first time.

The two churches each had a morning and evening service with an additional early communion service in Callington. This was done with the aid of lay readers. I alternated between the churches, South Hill having Communion when I was visiting them. The provision of lay readers was a constant problem for they came from different places and often I had to find transport for them; it was some years before I found a suitable young man for the position in Callington.



Dad taking a wedding in Callington Church

I was naturally confronted with the problem of the debt hanging over Callington. It was over seven hundred pounds (£700) which was a considerable sum in those days. I had not forgotten what a fine start the seven hundredth anniversary had given me when I went to Newton and whilst I realised that there was no prospect of anything so dramatic coming to my aid here yet I felt that a gesture of some kind might help. After some thought, I made it widely known that on a certain day I would sit in the Church entrance for twelve hours to receive any donations that people felt inclined to give. I realised that the whole thing might be a flop but by midday there had been a steady flow of people. There was also a pleasant surprise, as Mrs. Gale, the hostess of the pub opposite the Church sent me a generous lunch with her best wishes. My gesture paid off and nearly enough money was given to pay off the debt. More important was the psychological effect because the newspaper reporter was amongst the callers and I earned a good deal of free publicity.

I had resigned from Newton le Willows because I was finding the workload too heavy and I had to accept with regret that I could no longer run an active youth group. Parish activity was restricted by the fact that the church had no hall or meeting place and I saw no immediate possibility of providing one. The only place of any size belonging to the church was the church building itself so I began to consider whether any use other than for worship might be found. I began to contemplate the possibility of producing a Passion Play using whatever young talent I could find in the choir and the Sunday School. The script presented no difficulty for it was simply the Bible Story.

After thinking for a year or two I decided to give it a try using the Chancel as the stage. It turned out as well as I could have hoped for and while I was in Callington we produced several Passion Plays, thus keeping young people attached to the Church.

When 1960 approached, Connie and I decided to fulfil one of our abiding ambitions that was to attend the Oberammergau Passion Play. When our intention became known we were besieged by requests to organize a party of churchgoers. Finally we decided to make a little holiday of it with a couple of days in Salzburg and three in Vienna. A coach took us to Stanstead airport and met us there on our return. Everything went according to plan and it proved a means of building up a friendship with a number of the more mature members of the congregation.



The group ready to set off on their trip to Oberammergau. Dad and Mum 2nd and 3rd from the right.

On going to Callington we had frequent visits from George Blackburn. He became especially interested in the people of South Hill church who took him to their hearts and called him Uncle George. We felt that his liking for the parish was such that he could consider retiring among us but this happy outcome was never realised as he was taken ill suddenly and died. I went to his funeral in Heckmondwike feeling very sad.



Uncle George joined the family on several occasions at Christmas.

On the edge of the Tamar Valley we were in the midst of a flower and strawberry growing region where the clement climate made early crops a profitable undertaking. I suppose that this stimulated my interest in growing flowers for show. Daffodils and Gladioli were my favourites and these flourished in the Rectory garden. In this activity I was encouraged by Frank Bowen, himself a very successful showman. He and Lottie were frequent visitors to Callington and together we visited the daffodil shows in the spring and the gladioli shows in the summer. Together we went as far down Cornwall as Falmouth, usually with good success. Some of the finest gladioli I ever grew I was able to put on show in Plymouth Town Hall. We were able to continue this interest with success after my retirement and had a fairly frequent visit from a Dutchman named Zandbergen. One holiday Peter went to work in his bulbfields but I do not think that Peter enjoyed it.



Winning exhibits at Plymouth Gladioli Show and some of the blooms in Callington Rectory Garden.

PRICE LIMIT CLASSES

Class 193. A collection of six cultivars, one stem of each. *First Prize:* The REV. J. BROADHURST, Moonstruck, Galway, St Keverne, Trouseau, White Lion, Ceylon. *Second Prize:* J. G. BODY, Golden Rapture, Passionale, Ave, Glacier, Enniskillen, Pretoria. *Third Prize:* W. COLLENS, 25 Randall Street, Maidstone, Kent, Kingscourt, Trouseau, Buncrana, Revelry, Greeting, White Lion.

Class 194. A collection of six cultivars, three stems of each. *First Prize:* The REV. J. BROADHURST, Moonstruck, Statue, Kingscourt, Ardour, Trouseau, Galway. *Second Prize:* J. G. BODY, Golden Rapture, Merlin, Court Martial, Tudor Minstrel, Ormeau, Cape Horn.

Class 195. A collection of six cultivars, three stems of each. *First Prize:* The REV. J. BROADHURST, White Lion, Kingscourt, Spellbinder, Ceylon, Galway, Snow Dream. *Second Prize:* J. G. BODY, Golden Torch, White Lion, Preamble, Cantatrice, Arbar, Enniskillen.

The Rev. Broadhurst's six in Class 193 included a quite exceptional 'Trouseau'. Unfortunately the standard of staging as well as the price was limited in this class. The Rev. Broadhurst also produced very good collections in the 10s. and 5s. classes. His winning entry in the latter showed clearly what admirable garden plants for a modest price are to be found amongst the modern daffodils.

PRICE LIMIT CLASSES

Class 196. A collection of six cultivars, price limit £1 a bulb. *First Prize:* REV. J. BROADHURST, Moonstruck, Statue, Trouseau, St. Keverne, Ardour, Maiden's Blush. *Second Prize:* G. NOAKES, Toreador, Kingscourt, Bayard, Dunmurry, Foggy Dew, Border Chief. *Third Prize:* R. B. WHITE, Slieveboy, Chungking, Trudy, Preamble, St. Keverne, Masaka.

Class 197. A collection of six cultivars, price limit 10s. a bulb. *First Prize:* REV. J. BROADHURST, Ardour, Statue, Snow Dream, Ceylon, St. Keverne, Moonstruck.

Class 198. A collection of six cultivars, price limit 5s. a bulb. *First Prize:* REV. J. BROADHURST, Moonstruck, St. Keverne, Statue, Ardour, Trouseau, Fury.

These classes, it seems, are rapidly becoming the perquisite of the Church, the Rev. Broadhurst having repeated his triple triumph of the previous year, and having displayed commendable economy of effort by winning all three with nine varieties in all. It does not seem so very long ago that 'Empress of Ireland' was being offered at £50 a bulb, and the fact that it is now eligible for a price limit class makes us feel our age.

These extracts from The Royal Horticultural Society Daffodil and Tulip Year Books show some of Dad's successes in the 1969 and 1970 RHS Daffodil Shows. He also had an article entitled The Clergy and the Daffodil published in the RHS Daffodil and Tulip Year Book 1968. I remember driving Dad to the RHS Daffodil Show at the RHS Hall, 80 Vincent Square, Westminster, arriving in London at 4 o'clock in the morning and driving straight to the hall. We became slightly lost and were heading the wrong way up a one-way street when we were stopped by a policeman. He merely pointed out our error, which if I remember rightly was deliberate because we couldn't think of any other way of reaching the hall, and directed us to our destination. I always felt that Dad wearing his dog collar had something to do with the policeman's lenient attitude.

During one or two winters I did a series of lectures in Liskeard on Horticulture for the Cornwall County Council that proved very interesting to me at any rate.

John did not find his work in Plymouth as rewarding as when he was in Warrington and one day he asked me if I would be very disappointed if he gave up the idea of accountancy and applied to become a teacher. I was very pleased and gave all the encouragement I could. An application was made for entry to Chester Training College and in due course John obtained his teaching certificate and secured a temporary teaching post in Stoke Climsland and then a permanent post Looe Primary School in Cornwall.

By this time Peter had reached the age of eleven when he had to take the eleven plus exam to decide whether he went to a Grammar or a Secondary Modern School. He did not want to go away from home so I made a bargain with him that if he passed the eleven plus he could go to Callington Grammar School and remain at home. Mr Trevorrow, his headmaster, gave all possible help and encouragement with the result that Peter duly passed the exam and settled down at the Grammar School.

I had quite a lot to do with Education in Callington. For most of the time I was Deputy Chairman of Governors of the Grammar School Board. Towards the end of my ministry there the Government decided to introduce comprehensive education which meant that the Grammar School and the Secondary Modern Schools were to merge with a newly elected teaching staff. The Chairman of the Grammar School Board and myself took it in turns to chair the appointment board for the new teaching staff which took up a lot of time. Luckily Peter had finished at the Grammar School before this upheaval happened and was now at King Alfred's College in Winchester training as a teacher.

One of the most time-consuming of the tasks which fell to my lot was that of hospital visiting. All the hospitals were in Plymouth. In my early days in Cornwall the only direct way to get to Plymouth was across the Tamar by ferry from Saltash. In summer time this meant a long queue. There were four main hospitals to be visited when my parishioners were in them. We usually killed two birds with one stone by my dropping Connie in the town to do her shopping. It was interesting to see Plymouth being gradually rebuilt in a crisscross Roman pattern of streets. The large car parks were one by one rebuilt with either houses or shops. The only local sick visiting was to the two old people's homes in Callington or in private houses.

There was a very friendly relationship between the churches. There was no Mothers Union but there was a brotherhood and a sisterhood open to people from all the churches. I took turn about with a 'free church' member for the brotherhood and Connie did the same for the sisterhood. One of our favourite speakers on big occasions was the late George Thomas, a much admired speaker of the House of Commons, who later became 1st Viscount Tonyandy..

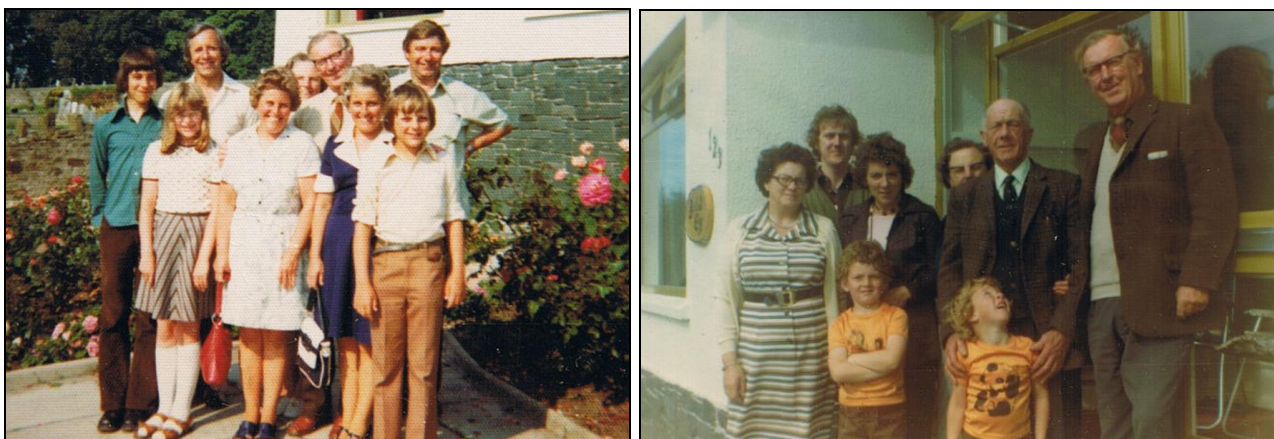
As one would expect in a largely rural diocese there were parishes with pieces of glebe land scattered all over Cornwall. The Bishop asked me to join the glebe committee, the members of which were responsible for overseeing the different glebe holdings and dealing with any problems that arose. This entailed a lot of travelling for Cornwall is a long county and the diocese extended over a hundred miles from the Tamar in the east to Lands End in the west. I had some experience as I had presided over the sale of glebe land in my own parish. A consortium from Bristol bought it for building and there is an estate there now.

Raising money is a challenge that few clergy can avoid so I will set on record a method I employed which was simple and effective. I took my camera with me and went round the parish taking a photo of everything that cost the Church money. On the basis that the big majority of my parishioners had a weekly wage packet I worked out what each item I had photographed would cost per week. A firm in Plymouth transformed all these photos into slides together with a slide showing the weekly total of all the individual items of expenditure.

That was the first step. I then persuaded someone in each district in the town to hold a little party in their home, inviting as many friends and neighbours as they could manage. I took a projector and the slides I had made and showed them to the people at the party. I had a quantity of envelopes, fifty-two in a pack, for anyone who cared to take them, and the weekly theme came home to most of the viewers with gratifying financial results. Simple but effective!

I had now spent fifteen years in Callington and was approaching sixty-five years of age. The age for clergy to retire was sixty-five so I decided that after forty-two years' ministry it was time to retire. We had not much family left alive. My mother had died soon after we

came to Callington and Connie's parents died also, but Connie still had a sister and an aunt living in the Morecambe area so we bought a bungalow just north of Morecambe in Bolton le Sands in the hope that we could help them.



There were constant visitors to Bolton-le-Sands from Newton-le-Willows, left and Callington, right.

This proved to coincide with a change in all our circumstances. Within a year or two of our retirement John applied for the post of deputy head of Callington Junior School where I had been deputy chairman for so many years. He was successful and moved with his family to Westover in Callington. For Peter it was also a time for change. While he was a teacher at Winchester Trevor Howells decided to expand Craven Dunnill by opening a tile shop in Bristol. A site was found in Gloucester Road in Bristol and Trevor asked Peter if he would make some fittings for it. Not long after Peter came to inform me that Trevor had offered him the management of this new venue. I felt that he was unlikely to make much progress in education agreed with his decision to accept on condition that he retained his pension retirement contributions for three years in case the suggested change did not succeed and he wished to return to teaching. Peter then moved to a house in Braemar Avenue in Bristol. Events proved that Peter had found his metier and he never looked back. It was "all change" for all of us and was to be the beginning of a success story for both John and Peter.

As at Newton, but on a lesser scale, I replaced myself. I was able to encourage a young man who was a computer designer to train for the ministry. His name was Noel Baker and he served a valuable ministry in the Gloucester area. I heard at Christmas that he was about to retire.

This ends a brief account of a long and active ministry.

Chapter 8 – Retirement

My retirement began with an interesting coincidence. A significant part of my active ministry was spent in Newton-le-Willows. Our retirement home was in Bolton-le-Sands. Where the French influence in these two place names came from I never found out. Both were happy places to live in and both were left with regret.

We were fortunate not to need a mortgage as the sale of Benthall Edge Wood covered most of the cost of the bungalow. We were very fortunate in being able to buy this property that was so ideally suited to our needs. Its situation was breathtaking, commanding as it did a panoramic view of most of Morecambe Bay and the Lakeland hills. We could sit in the lounge window and enjoy this view.

The immediate prospect was interesting as the road to the village passed the bungalow and just beyond it was the Lancaster canal which was alive with Mallard ducks and other wild fowl. When the tide was suitable we could watch the shrimp and cockle fishers going out into the bay. These men knew the Bay extremely well which was essential as it could be a very dangerous place. Anyone wishing to cross the bay needed to employ the official guide to help them to find their way. Shrimps were always available for sale in the village.



The front of the bungalow, Mum and Lottie Bowen. Mum, Jeanette, Steven & Tony feeding the ducks

The bungalow had a commodious kitchen area, a large through lounge, a separate dining room and three bedrooms. Peter used his carpentry skill to modernise the kitchen and create a doorway between the lounge and dining room both of which proved to be a great help to Connie.

The garden was on two levels. At the front on the lower level was the flower garden, planted with roses. There was a steep drive leading to the upper level on which the house, a double garage and the kitchen garden were situated. There was ample room to grow all the vegetables we needed and to grow flowers for show.

The bungalow was about a quarter of a mile from the Church and the village. There was an adequate range of shops, a good library, a bank and a surgery, but if anything more was needed then Lancaster and Morecambe were both a short car drive away.

We were naturally keenly interested in the religious life of the village. It soon appeared clear to me that the vicar needed all the help he could get. In addition to the parish church he had the care of a hamlet about two miles inland, a set up very reminiscent of South Hill and Callington. There was a mission church that needed to be staffed and I soon found myself taking the occasional service. Unfortunately, the vicar did not enjoy good health and while I was in Bolton-le-Sands he had two lengthy periods in St. Luke's clergy hospital in London. On these occasions I was left in complete charge of the parish with all the responsibilities that this entailed.

My religious life was further complicated. Next door to our bungalow was the United Reformed Church. When they were short of a minister to take a service, they came to ask for my help. Their form of service included an address to the children in addition to the sermon so quite a lot of preparation was required, but I never had the heart to refuse. Except when the vicar was in hospital I only had the Sundays at work so it was not a great burden.

An attractive feature of the bungalow was the yearly habit of house martins to build under its eaves. We could almost set our calendar by their coming and going on the annual migration. They came with regularity on our wedding anniversary.

Our expectation that we might be of some help to Connie's remaining relatives proved to be correct. Winnie was quite happily settled in a nice house in Heysham but Auntie Gertie was glad of help with her shopping and her simple financial affairs.

This went on for three or four years but then came a major upheaval. News came that Ted Corner, a friend of Winnie's had lost his wife. After the funeral Ted came to Morecambe seeking consolation. After what seemed to us to be a rather indecently short period of time Winnie and Ted decided to get married. I would imagine they were both seeking companionship but what really worried Connie and me was that we felt that Ted was unreliable. However, there was nothing we could do about it. A year or two went by and then without warning Winnie was taken ill and was rushed into Lancaster General Hospital where she died. I said that Ted was unreliable and the sudden death of his wife seemed to unsettle him completely. After a few months of very peculiar behaviour he decided to go back to his old home in Redcar and we lost touch with him.



Winnie's and Ted's wedding photo at the back of the bungalow . Auntie Gertie is 2nd from the left at the front. Ted's daughter, Joan Bill, is 3rd from the right with her son and daughter either side of her.

We continued to give what help we could to Auntie Gertie but she gradually grew frailer and was found dead in bed one morning.

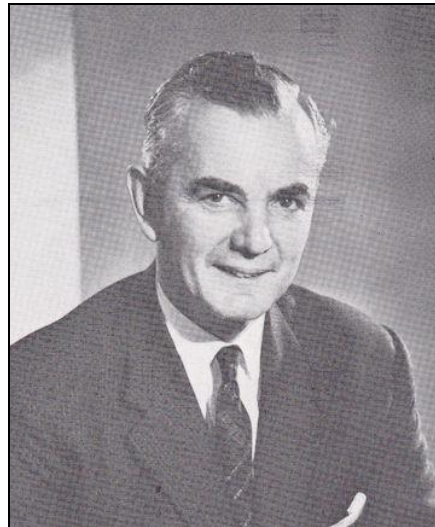
All this makes very unhappy reading but actually it all happened within the space of about four years and did not much affect our life in Bolton-le-Sands which was full of interest. While living in Callington I had become interested in growing daffodils and gladioli for show and this was extended when I settled in Bolton-le-Sands. I inherited a garden full of roses that were obviously very happy. Seeing this I bought a number of bushes suitable for show. Frank Bowen was treasurer of the Royal Rose Society and was a very successful exhibitor. Each year the Society held a northern rose show at Holker Hall that was within easy reach of Bolton-le-Sands so we quickly established a routine. Frank and Lottie came up bringing with them Frank's roses for the show, I cut and prepared what blooms I had and the next morning we set off for the show.

In addition to his exhibiting Frank was a judge so altogether we had a busy day with one or two trophies to gladden our hearts. There was also a flourishing horticultural society in the village and the annual show offered another chance to go for the prizes.

My main interest was growing daffodils for show. This began when I went to Callington which was in the centre of a daffodil growing area. A Dutchman, Matthew Zandbergen, persuaded me to take some blooms up to the national show in London and much to my surprise I did well. This was repeated for several years and after a string of successes I was asked by the daffodil committee of the Royal Horticultural Society to become a judge, a post which I was happy to fulfil until I came to Beaminster to live.



Matthew Zandbergen



Frank Bowen

Judging was done in teams of three so that there was a casting vote. A thorough knowledge of the many varieties in commerce was required together with practical experience of growing the daffodil to show standard. It was a relaxed affair and the judges were given a good lunch. During the years I was an active national judge I got to know the major growers, both professional and amateur, in the different parts of the British Isles. The most notable ones were situated in Ireland where a generous supply of rain suited their cultivation.

The daffodil shows were of course in the Springtime. However, both Frank Bowen and myself had an affection for gladioli. I know of no other flower that remains at its peak of perfection for such a short time. In hot weather this can be as little as six hours. I think that it was this challenge to the exhibitor which tempted us to grow gladioli. My first efforts were directed to the local show when I was Vicar of Newton-le-Willows but it was not until we moved to Callington that I made a serious attempt to grow blooms worthy of the showbench. The conduct of national shows and the characteristics of a show flower were controlled by the National Gladiolus Society. The society holds an annual show which moves to a different venue in England and Scotland each year in an attempt to give growers in different areas of the country an equal chance. I have taken flowers to places as far apart as Whitley Bay in the North, Hastings in the South East and Exeter in the South West, usually with Frank Bowen as company. We usually avoided entering in the same classes which was not difficult as Frank specialised in the miniature gladioli while I grew the large flowers.

My greatest success was at the annual show in 1978 that was held that year at Leeds. I was fortunate enough to win the Grand Championship of the show together with a number of other awards. As in the case of the daffodil I became a national judge, in which capacity I continued to officiate until coming to live in Beaminster. Here the garden was far too small to grow the considerable number of flowers needed for show.

When we moved to Dorset I toyed with the idea of continuing to grow my show daffodils as these could be grown in pots. With this end in view I accepted an offer from John to plant the daffodils, many of which were varieties I had reared myself, in his kitchen garden until we were established in our new home. The heavy soil, together with a very wet winter did not suit them and an insufficient number survived to make it worthwhile to grow for show. Although my hobby as a showman came to an end I can look back on it with great pleasure and satisfaction. I visited a good many interesting places and met many interesting people.

Growing daffodils and gladioli was not the only hobby that I abandoned when I left Bolton-le-Sands. Many years before, when I was in my first living of Shelley I became interested in lepidoptera especially butterflies and moths which were plentiful on the moors which surrounded our home.

From boyhood I was aware of the great beauty of this family of insects. While on honeymoon on the Isle of Wight our walks were enlivened by the many butterflies which had their home on the island. Throughout my ministry in Newton-le-Willows and Callington my knowledge of the species continued to grow but it was not until I returned to Bolton-le-Sands that time and opportunity enabled me to expand my hobby. The large double garage made it possible to breed many of the more interesting moths. In addition, I had a moth trap which yielded many species and often the females laid eggs. It was a constant course of interest to see what had settled down in the trap during the night.

Over the years I had built up a modest collection and in Bolton-le-Sands it expanded quickly. I made two cabinets of twelve drawers each. Since I had decided not to pursue this hobby when I moved to Beaminster I was wondering what to do with the wealth of interest and beauty which the drawers contained when the whole problem was solved for me. A young man who was on the staff of the museum in Wigan came regularly to visit his parents in Bolton-le-Sands and he usually called to see what I was doing. When he learned that I was leaving and wondering what to do with my collection he asked if he could have it to put on display in Wigan. I happily made the Wigan Museum a present of the whole lot. I hope it has been of interest to the many people who visited the museum over the years.

You will know by now that I try not to overstay my welcome. After some eight years on Bolton-le-Sands I began to see that it might be wise to move on. Several factors indicated this as the sensible course of action. I have mentioned that the bungalow was on high ground and this meant that the approach to it was very steep. There were signs that Connie was finding this steep approach increasingly difficult to handle and we were later to find out that it was really the onset of Angina. We had no longer any family ties to make it necessary to stay in the North for both Winnie and Auntie Gertie had died. In addition, the boys made it clear that with such a long journey from where John and Peter were living it would be very difficult for them to help us in time of need. With my five visits to hospital and mother's increasing attacks of Angina the wisdom of our moving nearer to them became very apparent.

After nearly two years of house-hunting John at last found us the bungalow in which I am now living and we moved down to Dorset in May 1983.

Much as I enjoyed living in Bolton-le-Sands, the decision to move was obviously the right one and we never regretted it. So ended the somewhat prosaic phase of our retirement.