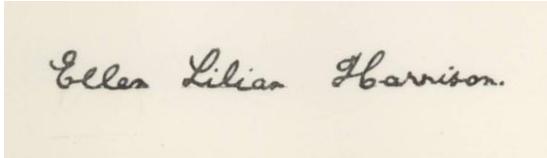


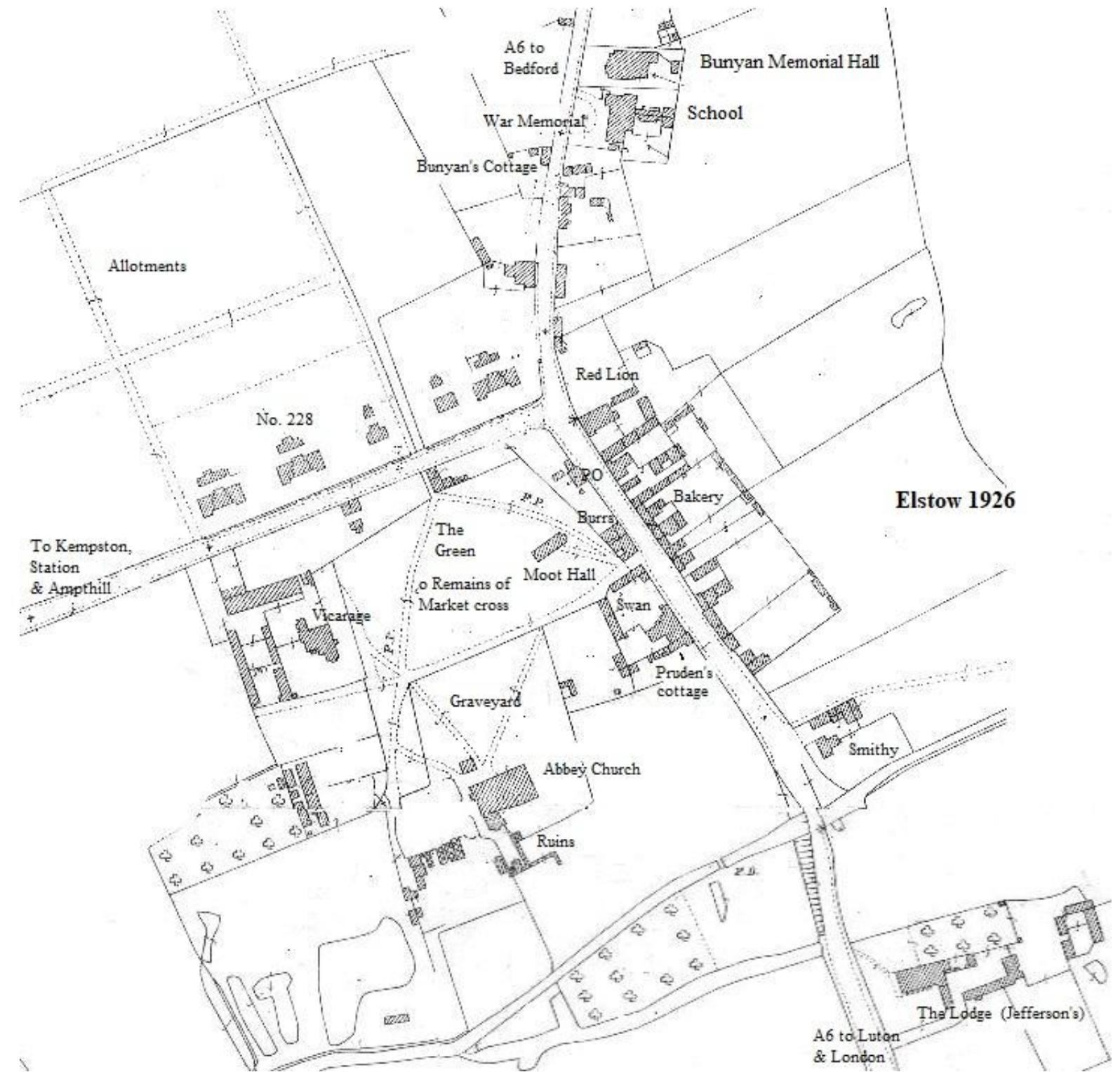
MEMORIES OF A VILLAGE CHILDHOOD



Ellen Lilian Harrison.

*Composed in 1983
by
Ellen Lilian (Nellie) Harrison (née Cox)*

(Lived 19th January 1905 to 12th May 1985)



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Foreword by Michael Harrison

It was in 1983 that my mother, then 78, was finally persuaded to set down her memories of growing up in the Bedfordshire village of Elstow.

The outcome was sixteen pages of closely-typed text which have remained in the immediate family ever since. In 2020, in my own retirement and with the time made available by the first “Covid-19 Lockdown”, I decided to put the document into digital format so that it could be available more widely in the family.

Returning to the account in the days of the internet made it possible to cross-reference some of the local and historical details, and that led me to the Elstow village website and contact with the webmaster. That, in turn, led to this document being made available through the website.

What follows is, therefore, a first-hand account of growing up in Elstow in the early years of the twentieth century. Household utilities were basic (no mains electricity or gas), transport was initially horse-drawn or rail and communication was by letter. It is clear that diseases that are now curable played a significant role in family life, and the impact of the 1914-18 war on the lives of ordinary families is apparent.

The text is essentially as my mother wrote it: I have added the section headings, along with a foreword, an afterword, and a few notes and pictures.

The Elstow.weebly.com webmaster (Clive Arnold, curator of Moot Hall) has been most helpful in sourcing other pictures and providing the annotated map. I am grateful for his interest and help with the project.

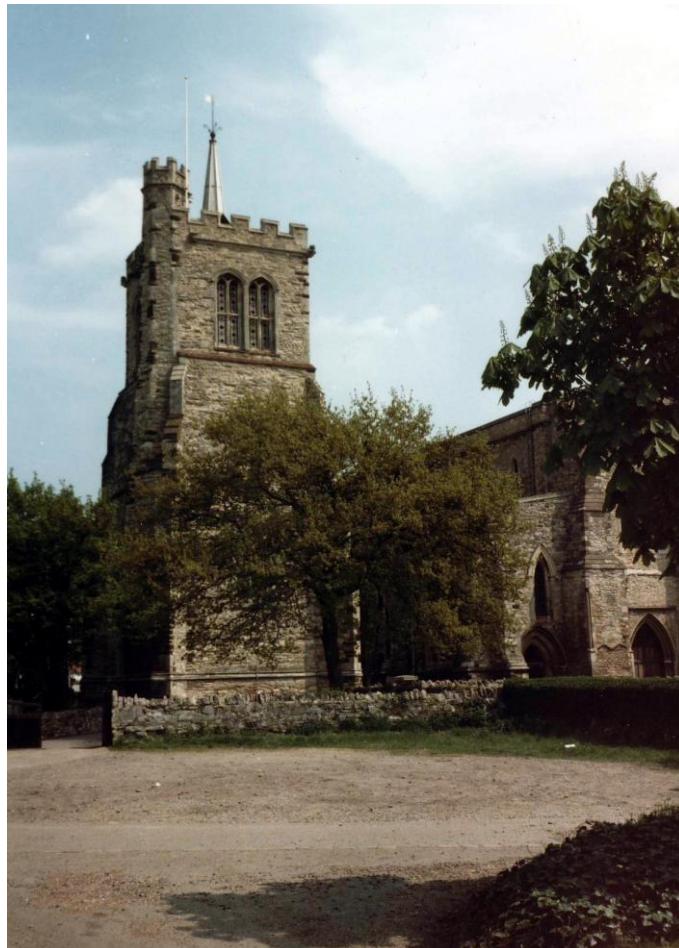
1. Introduction

I was born in January 1905 in the village of Elstow which lies one mile south of the town of Bedford, the youngest of my parents' nine children (five boys and four girls). In age order, and with their full names, familiar names and dates of birth, they were: Priscilla (Prissie) (1885); Ernest Charles (Charlie) (1887); Albert Ernest (Ernie) (1889); Louisa (Louie) (1891); Ethel (1892); Arthur (1897); Frederick William Lemuel (Freddie) (1898); Edward Lada (Ted) (1901) and me, Ellen Lilian (Nellie) (1905).

Our family home at the time of my birth was No. 228 Elstow, one of the recently-built "Whitbread" cottages in the road now known as West End.



At least three quarters, possibly more, of the land and property of Elstow belonged to the Estate of the "Lord of the Manor" who later became Lord Lieutenant of the County of Bedford, Samuel Whitbread, Esq. He did not reside in the village, but in a large house on another of his estates. Twice a year, on Lady Day and Michaelmas, his Estate Agent came to the Red Lion Inn, where all the tenants came to pay their half-yearly rents. As far as I know, he was a good landlord. I never heard any murmurings of discontent, and rent arrears were not known.



For me as a child, the three greatest attractions were the Village Green, the shop and the brook which ran through the village. This is the order in which I came upon them from my home and I will say more about these attractions later.

The most important buildings in the village included the church on the Village Green with its separate tower. Behind the church were the Abbey ruins, about which the historians could tell a tale or two.

Between the church and the imposing vicarage were a number of very old thatched cottages. These have since been demolished and replaced by modern buildings, rather to the disappointment of some of the villagers.



Elstow. The Moot Hall and Cross.

On the Green was the old Moot Hall, still standing and used now, I believe, as a Bunyan Museum. Also on the Green stood the old stone stump used for tethering the horses on the occasion of the annual Horse Fair in May.



Other buildings included the village school, with the Headmaster's house attached.

Next to this, was built the Bunyan Memorial Hall (opened in 1910) on a plot of land donated by Samuel Whitbread.

On the opposite side of the road stood the cottage known as 'John Bunyan's Cottage'. In fact this was the cottage in which he lived with his wife after his marriage, his birthplace being in a more remote spot across the fields.



Apart from the Red Lion Inn, there was also the Swan Inn, the little sweet shop and the Post Office all in the main street. The only other road, on which I lived, went westwards to join the Bedford to Ampthill Road.

To my child's mind there were several important inhabitants, apart from Day and Sunday school teachers (not all of whom lived in the village). These were: Joe Thorogood (the cobbler) and his wife; Mr. Southam and his wife (Postmaster and Postmistress); the shopkeeper (there were different ones during the course of my childhood); and the little lady, Miss Carrol, who lived in one of the two little cottages opposite my home. On fine days she used to sit in her doorway, which opened straight on the road, with her pillow, making the well-known Bedfordshire lace. I loved to watch her nimble fingers twisting and turning the pretty coloured bobbins, and watch the pattern of the lace taking place. Another lady with whom I spent quite a lot of time was Nancy Noble, the village dressmaker. She lived with her parents in a cottage which overlooked the Green. I used to pick up the pins for her that she had dropped on the floor.

I remember one occasion when my father had planted a lot of wallflower plants in our front garden, and put some in the small piece which was called my garden. I had told Nancy about these plants and she said how much she loved wallflowers. Without more ado, and without asking permission, I took up the ones from my garden and took them to her to plant in her garden. When my father passed her house on his way home for dinner, she went out and thanked him

for the plants. Rather mystified, he arrived home to find my plants had disappeared. He questioned me about it and I just said they were mine so I could give them away. He just smiled and said no more.

I also loved to watch Joe the cobbler when I had to take a pair of boots or shoes to be mended. It was amazing to me to see how he could have a mouthful of nails and still be able to hold a conversation. Sometimes, his wife would come across the yard to his little workshop and ask me to go across the road to the shop to fetch something for her. Crossing the road was no hazard in those days, no need to learn the Green Cross Code. It was also possible to give a child the exact money for the item required as prices didn't change as quickly as they do today. On my return, she would reward me with a sweet or perhaps a piece of cake. I must not forget Mr. Crouch the baker, who lived further through the village. He baked and delivered bread to most of the people at that end of the village. Another baker, Mr. Mortimer, from the village of Kempston, delivered bread daily to the people in my part of the village. Mr. Crouch walked to his customers with his big bread basket. Mr. Mortimer came with a horse and van. Mr. Pruden was the milkman. He arrived at our front door at about eight in the morning with his large milk pail and measuring can. There was no electricity or gas in the village at that time. Cooking was done on coal-fired ranges and lighting was by oil lamps and candles. Another man, Tom Smith, came round the village once a week pushing a truck with paraffin oil, matches, candles and fire-lighters.

Once a week, a Mr. Grant came from Kempston with a horse-drawn waggonette, which could seat twelve people, six on either side. This, of course, had no cover. I think the fare into Bedford was 2d. The people who wished to travel with him would stand at their front gates and he would stop and pick them up. My mother did not go into the town very often, only if she needed to buy clothes or boots or shoes for any of the family. It was only a short walk from our back garden, via a footpath over the step-bridge which crossed the railway, to reach some shops on the Ampthill Road, at the south end of Bedford. These included a butcher, grocer and Post Office. When I was nine years old, I went for piano lessons to Mrs. Boyton who lived near these shops. Sometimes I did some shopping for my mother on my way home.

2. Events through the year

The highlights of the year for the children, of course, were their own Birthday, Christmas, Easter, May Day, the Sunday School Treat, which took place in the summer, and the large fair which took place on the Green on November 5th. The November fair was entirely a fun fair, unlike the May fair which was mainly for the buying and selling of horses with just a few stalls in the afternoon for the children, perhaps including a Punch and Judy Show. The November fair carried on right through the evening and made a cheerful sight when all the flares were alight. Many children also had a bonfire in their own garden. My father always had amassed a large pile of garden refuse, for we had a very large garden, and we children would get him to put some potatoes underneath to bake. We didn't have much in the way of fireworks. The little ones might have one or two sparklers, while the older boys and girls would perhaps have a Catherine Wheel to attach to a fence. Soon after the November Fair, our mothers would start getting things together for the Christmas puddings and mincemeat. Mother made these in a very large earthenware bread bowl and we all had to have a stir and a wish. When the pudding mixture was ready, it was put into basins and securely covered and tied, then boiled in the copper in the wash-house. I think the little silver three penny pieces which were eagerly hunted for at dinner time on Christmas Day must have been hidden in just prior to their being re-boiled on Christmas Day.

There was no difficulty in getting us to bed on Christmas Eve. We hung up our stockings, knowing pretty well what we should find in the morning. All the same, it was very exciting. Before it was light, we would be feeling for our stockings and soon we would find an apple, an orange, a few nuts, a sweetie mouse and, possibly the only surprise, a small present. For me it might be a new doll, ball or book. For several years I cherished a wooden doll with lovely shiny black hair (black paint of course) dressed by my mother. The first time I received a breakable doll with real, or what looked like real, hair my excitement was immense. For Christmas dinner we sometimes had a goose which my father had bought from the market. The goose grease which resulted from this would be stored in jars for later use on sore chests. Some years, my father would breed turkeys on the smallholding which he took over from a man who died. His own job at that time was as horse-keeper to a gentleman named Mr. Jefferson. He managed to run the smallholding as well, by working very hard. Later on, he rented more arable land and became a Market Gardener, with the help of casual labour during especially busy times. At tea-time on Christmas day there was the special cake, made a few weeks beforehand and generally iced by my sister Louie. Louie was fourteen years old when I was born, so she was soon working and earning a little money. She was very good to me.

We did not make any fuss about New Year's Day and, for me, the next important day was my birthday. One year, Louie bought me a lovely big ball, almost as big as a football. It was shiny and decorated with lovely colours. It was too precious to take out of doors, but on wet days, when I had to stay indoors, I would spend hours playing with it, bouncing it up and down along the passage, which ran straight through from the front to the back door. This passage had a red tiled floor, covered with a strip of coconut matting. When I tired of that, I would bounce it to the top of the stairs, watching it bump down each step. The stairs were nice and straight, with a little window at the bottom and a sky-light in the roof at the top. Another time, Louie bought me a very large book, about two inches thick, with hard shiny covers. I loved the stories in this book and read them over and over again. One picture, which was my special favourite and which I can see as clearly today as then, was of a little girl in the prettiest pink dress, sitting by the sea-shore holding a shell close to her ear. Isn't it strange how some things stick in one's mind? At birthday times we looked forward to a visit from the postman. At that time, all the cards arrived on the actual day, not in dribs and drabs as at present. I had cards from older brothers and sisters who were away from home, as well as from aunties and uncles.

Easter was the next event of importance to us children. Good Friday brought Mr. Mortimer, or one of his helpers, with the Hot Cross Buns at about six o'clock in the morning. If we were not already awake, his knock on the front door would let us know he had left the buns previously ordered and it wouldn't be long before we were eating them. Easter Day meant we had a chocolate egg or, if we were extra lucky, more than one. Round about Easter time too, mother would be showing us a batch of newly-hatched baby chickens that looked like little balls of yellow fluff. We had a large hen-run on part of the back garden and mother had the care of these and also the money from any eggs she sold beyond what we needed ourselves. Father had bacon and egg every morning for his breakfast- he worked very hard and needed it. We children would probably get a boiled egg for Sunday breakfast. We were quite poor compared with today's standard but we always had enough to eat. Mother was a good plain cook and made the most of what she had. Father grew all kinds of vegetables and grew raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, black-, white- and redcurrants, rhubarb and we also had four apple trees.

There was another old custom which I enjoyed. I had a friend, who lived nearby, named Florrie Clark. Her mother was very good at making flower crowns and garlands. Although there were not so many flowers out quite so early, we used to go round the fields and gather as many as we could, mostly buttercups and daisies. We used to try to find a few pieces of May blossom - some years this would be fully out but other years it would be late. Mrs. Clark would pick some flowers from her garden and would make up flower crowns for Florrie, her elder sister Edith, her younger sister Jessie, and also myself, and send us off round the village to sing our songs. One, that I thought the best, went something like this:

*Buttercups and daisies, Oh the pretty flowers,
Coming in the Springtime, to tell of sunny hours..
While the trees are leafless, while the fields are bare,
Golden, glossy buttercups spring up here and there.*

3. Life in the village and the family

Apart from the people I have already mentioned as holding special memories for me there was, of course, the village blacksmith. No village or farming community could manage without him.



His smithy was situated near the road bridge which spanned the brook. Although I cannot truthfully say "under the spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands", there was certainly a beautiful chestnut tree near the bridge.

This came into its own in the springtime with its lovely candle-like blossoms and, later in the year, provided fun for the boys when the conkers were ready. A little outlet from the brook ran just near this tree and one year, when I was looking for conkers, my shoe came off in the mud and I could not find it. I hopped my way home and sat in front of the fire with my leg tucked under me. Of course, I had to admit the loss eventually and mother sent my brother Freddie to look for the shoe. On his way to the spot, he met a friend who was just bringing it home.

I cannot remember the name of the blacksmith. Unlike the boys, I did not spend much time watching him at his various jobs. I had to go close by the smithy, as there was a wooden stile by it which led to the fields which we called "the moors" and through which the brook ran. These moors were simply fields which did not seem to belong to any particular farmer and were favourite walks for families on Sunday evenings. People from the northern counties would find it difficult to understand why they were given such a name. During the summer holidays we children had a lovely time in this area. We seemed to have a great many warm days, when it was a joy to take off our shoes and socks and paddle in the cool, clear water. In winter time, the brook could be quite wide and deep but in August it was shallow and mothers had no qualms about letting the children spend all the morning or afternoon there. There were always older brothers and sisters to make sure everything was all right. Some of the boys would take jam-jars and catch minnows or tadpoles, while the girls liked to paddle along by the side and pick the flowers that preferred to grow in damp places. Kingcups were my favourite flowers because they were so bright and shiny. I was also fond of what we called "milkmmaids", which were pale mauve flowers that grew in clusters on slender stalks. We used to gather cowslips, pick out the flower heads and make them into a very pleasant drink.

Morning started early in the country, even during school holidays. Children do not believe in lying in bed long after they are awake, as all mothers will know. We used to get up at the usual time - our fathers would already have been working for some time. Mothers would make up bottles of home-made lemonade. They could buy lemon crystals, in small bottles, for this purpose if lemons were not available or were too expensive. Bread and cheese, or a jam sandwich, would be put in a paper bag and a crowd of us would gather to spend our morning enjoying ourselves. Watches for children were not thought of at that time but, for quite a distance along the brook, we could see the clock on the church tower. If we got out of sight of that, we could hear the clock strike the hours. By half past ten somebody would decide it was time for "lunch", which would now be called "elevenses". We would sit down, in groups, with our special friends and have what to us was a picnic. Those of us who could bring apples from our own trees would share them out. Even if they were only "fallers" they would be eaten with relish. Dinner time was always one o'clock, which was when the fathers would be home. Our tummies would give us warning that the time was approaching, even if the clock didn't, and we were seldom late. Punctuality was expected and, on the whole,

Of course, the Green was an ideal playground. It was on two levels. The part on which the Moot Hall stood was a nice flat area where the boys could play football or cricket, according to the season. There was a gentle slope down to the lower level where the girls played. The little ones would love to lie down at the top of the slope and roll down to the bottom. We would do this many times, running up to the top and rolling down again. When we got tired of this, we would have a change and perhaps pick daisies and make daisy chains to hang round our necks. Tig was another game we could play there and ring games. Many games we could play outside on the pavements. Hop-scotch was a favourite game and, of course, marbles. I was not very good at marbles and, more often than not, I would lose most of mine to somebody more skilful. But, if there came a time when I had completely run out, someone would be kind enough to give me a few to start up again. If there was only one other child playing, that was the only thing to do, or the game would not be able to carry on. A skipping rope offered a variety of games, by oneself or with a group.



One place I have not mentioned so far is the "Jetty". This gave us a bit of cover if we happened to be caught in a shower. This was originally the place where the pack-horses were changed. It consisted of cottages on either side of an entrance. In olden days, the cottages were probably an Inn, with rooms over the entrance, this making a covered way. The floor was cobbled stones and, at the far end beyond the covered piece, stood a water pump.



Here I should mention that piped water had not been supplied to the very old cottages at this time.

The row of houses where we lived was not built until 1903 and had been supplied with mains water, though this was only brought to a tap in the wash-house, which was across the yard from the house. All water for use in the house had to be carried across from there. However, it was an improvement on having to pump water from a well. There was a very large rainwater tank just outside the back door and mother used this water for all kinds of household cleaning jobs. This rainwater was much kinder on the hands than the mains water supply, which was very hard water. Of course, none of the cottages possessed bathrooms; mother used to say that only the people who didn't get dirty had bathrooms! When I was small, mother bathed me in a zinc bath in front of the range. Later, the bath was carried upstairs, as was the water. My father and the boys used the wash-house, making use of the long wooden bath which mother used for washing the clothes. It was much easier for them as they could draw the water and heat it up in the copper. The toilet closet was a brick-built building behind the wash-house. Thinking of these things makes one realize what a hard life parents had at that time, especially as most of them had quite a number of children.

Being the youngest of the family, I had a big advantage over the older ones as regards possessions, since the older ones would be working either away from home or contributing to the family budget. They didn't have the opportunity of learning to play the piano, for instance, as we didn't possess a piano earlier. I daresay some of them would have done better at it than I did, given the opportunity. At the same time, I don't think I was "spoilt" in any way. My parents were quite strict about behaviour and teaching us about right and wrong; bad language was never allowed. With my youngest brother Ted, who was nearly four years older than me, I played the usual games of snakes and ladders, dominoes, draughts and other games of that sort. Mother was always too busy making or mending clothes to have time for games (my mother made most of my clothes and also the boys' shirts and my father's working shirts), but she would be sitting at the table with us to make sure there was no cheating! They were very strict about keeping the Sabbath. When my father was working for Mr. Jefferson, looking after the horses, he had to do quite a lot of work on Sundays, as well as weekdays, but that was a necessity. Then, when he had his own animals to look after that meant Sunday work as well, but that didn't mean we could do the same things on Sunday as we did during the week. No games were allowed. We went to the Bunyan Meeting Sunday School morning and afternoon which accounted for a good part of the day. Father took the *Sunday Dispatch* and Mother had the *Sunday Companion* and, later on, the *Sunday Pictorial*. The children were not allowed to read comic papers on Sunday but only school prizes, of which there were many at home. All the children of the family were good scholars and won prizes. My brother Ted was not a very strong child. He was five years old before he started school; the only one who did not start at three. He always won a prize for regular attendance as, once he started school, he kept in reasonable health. Only four of us had our schooling at Elstow: Arthur, Freddie, Ted and me. I think my sister Ethel had one term there before she left school. As my parents had lived on the Bedford - Goldington boundary before moving to Elstow, the older children went to Goldington Road School. We had an Auntie and Uncle who lived in a cottage next to that school.

My brother Freddie was very fond of animals. He kept some rabbits in a hutch by the side of the wash-house wall. Later on, when he was working, he bought a little pony which he kept in father's paddock. He was a very good artist and spent a lot of time during the winter evenings with his paint box and paper on the big table, while Ted and I were playing games. Another of his hobbies was collecting birds' eggs. Sometimes, for a special treat, he would take me with him, round the fields, looking in the hedges for birds' nests. He would lift me up to have a peep before taking an egg out, at the same time pointing out that he was only taking one. These eggs he carefully preserved after blowing out the inside. He then named them and, eventually, mounted them on a board. Naturally, I thought a great deal of Freddie. He had dark, curly hair - kept short, of course, as was the fashion at that time. He was nice looking and was very gentle. When he left school, he went to work for Mr. Mortimer, the baker at Kempston. My brother Arthur had worked there but had moved on to Barnsley, I presume to a better job. My sister Ethel was only eighteen months younger than Louie. They were very different in looks and disposition. I have said that Louie was very kind to me. She was also rather inclined to "boss" me which I somewhat resented as I grew older. Ethel was more like Freddie. I think they must have inherited mother's nature, she was always very kind. Ethel was pretty with curly hair, dark brown with an auburn tint. She was very popular with the young men of the village, although at the age of twenty-two she married an "outsider".

While Arthur was working for Mr. Mortimer, he brought home a young man, Bob, who also worked there. Like the village boys, Bob quickly took to Ethel. They were married at Elstow Church in August 1915 and they went to live at Hebden Bridge, in Yorkshire, where he was then working. Their wedding turned out to be a sad day for me, as I was taken ill the day before. Louie and our cousin Dorothy Gough were the grown-up bridesmaids and cousin Ivy Gooding and I were to be the small bridesmaids. When the morning came, it was decided that I was not well enough to take part, so another cousin, May Reynolds, who was coming to the wedding, was asked to take my place. My dress fitted her and, much to my disappointment, she had to wear it and take my place. The following day the doctor was called and I was diagnosed with scarlet fever and a diphthitic throat. I was sent to the isolation hospital, where it was discovered I had indeed got both scarlet fever and diphtheria and was put in a ward, on my own, where I stayed until the end of November. Although there was an isolation hospital quite near to my home for the Bedford children, the one for the rural area was at Clapham, some three miles away. I was very seriously ill for a long time - in fact my parents were

warned that I would probably not recover and they were told they could visit me in the ward. Visitors were not normally allowed inside the wards but could only see the patients through the windows. As they did not want to risk carrying the infection outside, they did not accept the offer. Most of the children of the village had one or other of these diseases during the summer but I was the only one to have them both together. Eventually, through the devotion of the doctor and the patient care of several nurses, I recovered. I had a nurse to myself who slept in one of the beds in the ward. She had two or three nurses who relieved her during the daytime and the hospital matron used to visit me several times a day. For about six weeks I could not move at all, as the illness had caused paralysis. The doctor (Dr. Coombs) had a small white moustache and, of course, wore a white cap and a long white coat. I always thought of him to myself as Father Christmas, though the coat was the wrong colour! My special nurse was Nurse Stevenson, who later became the hospital matron. During the time I was there, my father and sister Louie came to visit me each evening after their work, by bicycle, to look at me through the window. After some time, Louie got rheumatic fever through getting wet during the journeys and was very ill at home. My mother had a very hard time looking after her but, like me, in time Louie recovered. There was no N.H.S. at that time, as we know it today, but nobody could have had better care than I had in that hospital. During the whole of that time, the young lady, Ethel, who was engaged to my brother Ernie and who, in a little while, became my sister-in-law, sent me a picture postcard every day. They were very beautiful ones. The nurses and the ward-maid, who was also very kind to me, used to read them to me and hold them up for me to see. Ernie and Ethel were both working in London at that time. Ernie had tried to enlist in the army but was turned down on health grounds. After Ernie and Ethel got married in December 1915 he was eventually called up for army service though he was never sent out of England. During the time I was in hospital, there was an epidemic of measles amongst some soldiers who were stationed in the area and they were housed in a temporary building in the grounds of the hospital. One of the last to leave used to come into my ward, I suspect to see the nurse, but he would spread all my cards out over the bed. The day before I was to leave hospital, the ward-maid told me to pick out some of my favourite cards. She thought it would be a shame to leave them all behind though, of course, you were not supposed to take anything out of the hospital. I picked out a batch and she took them and put them in an oven overnight. Just when I was leaving, she handed them over to me. My brother Freddie was still working for Mr. Mortimer and he said he could fetch me home in his little buggy cart. This was a horse-drawn trap, where the driver and passenger sat inside. Needless to say, mother was waiting to welcome me when we arrived home. I knew they had all been praying for my recovery and when I later returned to Sunday School, I was told that they had prayed for me and had given thanks for my recovery. It was a few weeks before I could walk properly but I returned to school for the January term, just before my eleventh birthday. After this, the war began to affect everybody a great deal and changed the village life completely.

When recording memories, I find it impossible to keep to any kind of order, since a memory of one person or event immediately reminds me of another person or event. I think I will now go back to the start of my schooldays and try to keep that in some kind of order.

4. Schooldays: January 1908 – January 1919 (age 3 to 14)

My first real memory of the village school was when my mother took me to the annual show, which was held there in November. This was when the pupils were asked to take along their various hobbies and the best pieces of their schoolwork were put on show. This was the November before I was three in the January. The children's paintings would be put up round the walls. I have mentioned that Freddie enjoyed painting. He also used to plant some daffodil bulbs in September in a large bowl which then went under the stair cupboard. Towards November, we would all be allowed to have a peep to see how they were coming along. Sometimes he would bring them out into the warmth of the living room for the last week or so, to hurry them up in time to be in flower. It was an anxious time. This was the first time, of course, that I had been to the show and I found it very exciting. One boy, Guy Pestell, had made a model of the Eiffel Tower in fret-work. I was very attracted to that - in fact that and the daffodils are the only things I remember. I was sitting on a seat with mother and Mr. James.¹ She told him that I wanted to start school to be with the others and he said, if there was room for me, I could start after Christmas. He evidently found room, as I started with the other children after the holiday.

A very nice lady, named Miss Vincent, was in charge of the Infants' Department. Apart from at times having the help of a pupil teacher, she ran the department on her own. She had all the children, from the age of three to seven, in one big room. The youngest sat in long desks on the ground floor. The two higher sets were seated in the other part of the room - their seats went up by steps, so that every child could see, and be seen by, Miss Vincent. For the youngest children, Miss Vincent used a very large ball-frame, with the aid of which she taught us our numbers and simple sums. Before I started school, I had learnt the alphabet from Ted, so that was no trouble for me. For those who did not know it already, Miss Vincent printed large letters on a blackboard. The older ones would be on with spelling and harder sums. One day, when I had moved to the higher level, Mr. James came in to see us - he usually came in once or twice a day. He wrote the word "NEPHEW" on the board. He said he had a prize for the first one to pronounce the word correctly. My hand shot up. Mr. James said, "Yes?" and out I came with "NEP-HEW". Mr. James said, "No, that's not correct". Another girl put up her hand and pronounced it correctly. She received the small prize but Mr. James gave me another one for trying, so I didn't feel too ashamed.

As I progressed through the various classes, I liked each of my teachers. Mr. James was the only male until I was about eight years old. Then we had a teacher named Mr. Hopkins. When I moved up into his class a year later, I soon decided I didn't like him! For composition lesson one day, he went round the class giving each child a letter and told us to write about something beginning with that letter. My letter was "N". Now normally I enjoyed writing compositions but I simply could not think of a subject beginning with "N". Mr. Hopkins, seeing me gazing blankly at an empty sheet, told me to write about a Newt. That left me as badly off as before. What did I know about a Newt? Absolutely nothing. I know very little to write about one now. If he had left me a bit longer, I might possibly have thought about something that I could write about. I expect I must have written something eventually, although I cannot imagine what. I do not remember getting punished. It was after that episode that I decided I did not like Mr. Hopkins. I cannot remember anything more about him - he didn't stay very long. On reflection, and comparing dates, I think the reason Mr. Hopkins did not stay long at the school was probably because, like my brother Arthur and thousands of other young men, he had rushed off to the recruiting office to offer his services for King and Country. If that was the case, I only hope he returned safely. I am sorry I disliked him but, after all, he did nearly sink me with his 'NEWT'! The previous mention of punishment reminds me to say that only Mr. James ever used the cane. He kept one on the harmonium at the front of the class. I think he was a very fair man, though strict. There were a few boys who made a nuisance of themselves at times. They would get a few strokes, across their backsides, if he thought the occasion warranted it.

There was a boys' home at Kempston, the next village. I think this was an orphanage and the boys seemed quite well-behaved. About a dozen of them came to our school. The girls from the same home (I think it catered for boys and girls) would be sent to Kempston School. The Home was about a mile and a half from our school and the boys used to run past my house every morning, just in time for 9 o'clock. One morning, I was waiting for my friend Florrie to call

for me, as she usually did, but she didn't turn up. After waiting as long as I dared, I set off and the boys were just running along. We arrived together, just as the children were singing the assembly hymn. Of course, we waited until that and the prayer ended before trooping in. It was very naughty of me. They each had to hold out a hand to be caned. I tagged along behind the last one but calmly walked to my seat. Mr. James must have seen me but he didn't say anything. Afterwards, I must say I felt rather mean. These boys were always dressed in the same clothes - winter and summer - dark blue short trousers and the same colour woollen jerseys. They must have been very hot in the summer. They were very strict with them at the Home. They all had to do various jobs before setting out in the morning. I used to feel very sorry for them, as they seemed to be very nice boys. Sometimes, on Friday afternoon for the last lesson, Mr. James would be busy with various things and he would ask Florrie Clark or myself, when we were in Standard 7X, to go round and mark the sums of a particular class. If I got to one of the Home boys who was a little bit slow with his sums, I would secretly put the answer book on the desk by his side, so that he could copy in the answers. I didn't want him to be punished for not getting his sums right. I knew it was wrong but, at the time, I felt sure I would be forgiven.

We had separate playgrounds of course, for the boys and girls, with two long cloakrooms separating the two. Toilets, like the ones in the cottages, were of the bucket type. There were no washbasins and only a water tap in the playground. Unless it was raining, we did "drill" in the playground. If it happened to rain, we managed to do it standing by our desks. 10-45 to 11-00 was playtime, dinner time was 12-00 to 2-00. This was a long time for those of us who lived near the school but it meant a long walk for those who came from Fenlake, another village on the outskirts of Bedford. The far end of Elstow, towards the village of Wilstead, which was four or five miles away, was called "Bacon End". When you know that a man kept a pig farm there, you will realize why! There was a row of cottages just before you got to the farm. A number of the larger farms and farmhouses were situated between the bridge over the brook and Bacon End. The first one over the bridge belonged to Mr. Jefferson, the man my father worked for when he first came to the village. This was a very large house, surrounded by a high brick wall so that you could only see the top part of the house from the road. There was a solid gate, which was the tradesmen's entrance, at one end of the wall and a drive-way at the other end, for the horses and the various vehicles to use. Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson had a son and two daughters. Mrs. Jefferson used to take the two girls into Bedford to school each morning, in a little buggy trap. There was a great distinction between the farmers and their families and the workers and their families. None of the farmers' children attended the village school or Sunday School. They went to one or other of the very good public schools, for which Bedford was noted. On Sundays, they probably went to the Parish Church with their parents. There was no Church Sunday School at this time. The Vicar was an older man, Rev. C. B. Hawkins, who used to walk into the town most days. The boys had to touch their caps when they met him but he rarely spoke to them. His wife was a nice lady, who appeared to me to be younger than her husband, but she didn't go about the village very much. I remember one Christmas, when I was quite small, all the village children were invited to tea with her and we each came away with a small bag of sweets.

School Prize Day was a great event. One of the farmers was Mr. Alfred Prole and he was also one of the school governors. Prize-giving generally took place on the last day of the summer term. Before the war, practically every child received a prize. There were 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes for each class, then prizes for merit and good attendance. During the war, prizes were first cut down to the top three and in my last year at school only one prize per class was given. When we assembled at two o'clock on that occasion, it was quite evident who was going to be the lucky recipient, as one girl was wearing a cream skirt and silk blouse never before seen at school. The wearer was the girl who had bowled me out with 'NEPHEW'! We realized she had received advanced warning. She left school that day, while I stayed on until I was fourteen the next January. So she was six months older than I, which was some slight consolation.

Another special day in the school year was the celebration of Empire Day on May 24th. The school stood well back from the road, with a brick wall along by the path with an opening at either end, one for the children and the other for the School House. Inside the wall was a semi-circular lawn, in the centre of which stood a large pear tree. On Empire Day the flag flew over the school and, instead of the usual assembly at nine o'clock, we all trooped out of school and stood round the lawn. We sang "God Save the King" and "God bless our Native Land". On one occasion during the

war, we were each asked to bring a penny in aid of some fund or another, I can't remember which. When we gave up our penny, we were each given a piece of paper, about 8" by 4", on which was printed the map of the world, with all the splodges of pink denoting the various parts of the Empire. The map of the world does not look nearly so pretty now but that, I suppose, is progress.

Of course, the war had meant alterations to our curriculum. Miss Pestell used to take the older girls for sewing, while Mr. James taught the boys some woodwork. Instead of making articles like pillowcases, in which we learned to make all kinds of seams, all by hand of course, now our efforts were turned to knitting. With khaki wool, we learnt to master the intricacies of making socks and balaclava helmets, to send out to the troops. During my last summer holiday, Miss Pestell had offered a prize for the best collection of wild flowers, so I spent a long time searching round the fields and hedgerows. Hilda Goff and I were the only ones to complete and hand in our collections. We both collected over 100 specimens. Miss Pestell took a long time to decide which of us should have the prize. Hilda left school at Christmas and in the new year Miss Pestell gave me the prize: "Arabian Nights". I think Hilda deserved one too.

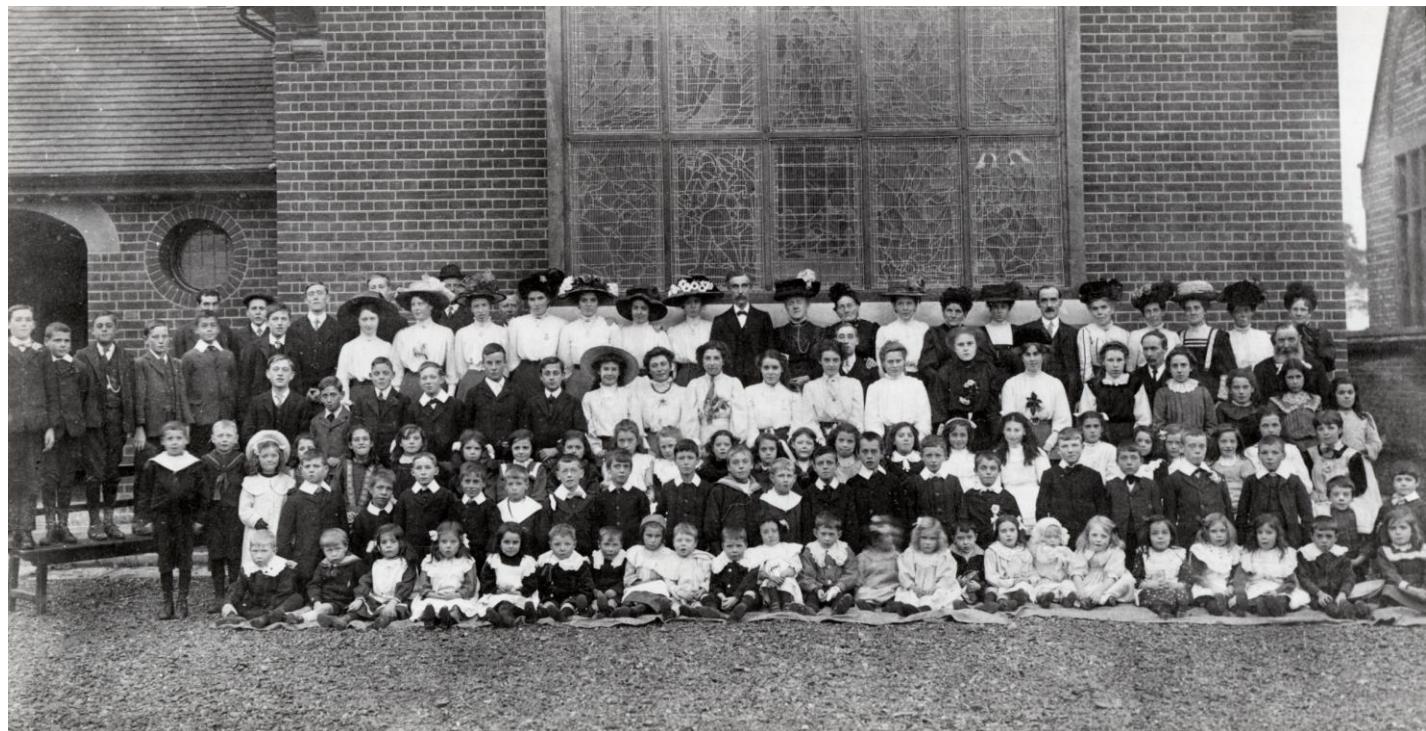
When I left school at age fourteen in 1919 I went to work at Meltis Ltd. I shall write more about how the Meltis factory came to the area in another section but, before that, I want to write about another important part of my childhood.

5. The life of the Sunday School



The “Bunyan Memorial Hall” was opened in 1910, on land donated by Mr. Whitbread, opposite “Bunyan’s Cottage”. The hall was built for use as a chapel and Sunday School and it was well designed for such a purpose. There was an entrance, or vestibule, through which one passed through to the main hall. There was a beautiful stained-glass window in the front of the hall. It consisted of separate panels each depicting a scene from John Bunyan’s “The Pilgrim’s Progress”. Off the main hall, were two

classrooms which were used for the older Sunday School pupils. The junior children had their classes in the main hall and the infants had a separate room at the far end of the building, alongside another room which was used as a library and where the secretary looked after the registers etc. Further along, was a good-sized kitchen. The main hall was used for chapel services on Sunday evenings. I was five years old at the opening and had my picture taken on the occasion of the opening ceremony. The picture used to hang up in the vestibule. I was one of the children sitting on the floor in the front row. This was taken outside the building.



At the opening, each child was presented with a copy of "The Pilgrim's Progress" and a leaflet describing the window. I still have the book.

Before the new hall was opened, two ladies, Miss Hill and Miss Howard, from Bedford, used to run the "Band of Hope" in the Moot Hall. I attended there until we transferred to the new building. In those days, people had to make their own entertainment and we children loved taking part in concerts and I am sure our parents enjoyed coming to see us perform. Miss Hill and Miss Howard spent a long time preparing us for these concerts. I remember one year, we were giving our concert in the Bunyan Meeting Church in Bedford. A day or two before the event, I fell over and hurt my knee very badly. It was impossible for me to walk with the others to Bedford and one of the Sunday School teachers pushed me there and back on the saddle of her bicycle, so that I should not be disappointed.

Almost all the village children attended this Sunday School, apart from the sons and daughters of the farmers who probably went to the Parish Church. They did not mix with the labourers' children in any way, though some of them would smile at us as they passed in their traps. One girl used to ride into Bedford on her bicycle and most of the boys did the same. Mr. Poynter, the Sunday School Superintendent, came from Bedford. He always wore a black long-tailed coat, with a handkerchief in a tail pocket. He and his wife used to walk to and from Bedford twice each Sunday and they lived a good two miles away. His wife took the older girls' Bible class. Mr. Poynter was very much loved by the children and was very good with them.

We were also fortunate in having three very good Christian families in the village. From these families we were able to staff the Sunday School with teachers, an organist, and other officials necessary for the smooth running of the Sunday School. One idea they worked out, which was a great help to the mothers, was a Clothing Club. Each child would take a small amount of money each week (provided, of course, the mother wished to take part -which most of them did) which was entered on the club card. At the end of each March, the amount, plus interest, would be entered on a card and this could be used at any of four shops in the town. These shops covered boys' and girls' wear and the shop would also give a small discount. This meant we could all have something new in the way of dresses, suits or shoes and was a really good idea - much better I think than the present way of "buy now, pay later".

We used to enjoy getting ready for, and giving, concerts when the partitions, which separated off the two classrooms, were folded back to make room for the large audience of parents and friends. These concerts were given during the winter months and in the summer we had the Sunday School Treat. This took place in a field belonging to Mr. Pruden and we had a lovely time. First of all, we would have races and various games. Then the ladies would bring their wicker clothes baskets, filled with sandwiches and home-made cakes. We would all sit down on the grass in rows and they would come along each row handing out the eatables. Some of the young men would carry the tea urns and we would have a mug of tea. Everybody had as much as they could eat. After tea Mr. Poynter would bring a large box of sweets and scatter them on the grass. We would scramble to collect them up and then, after singing a hymn, it would be time to go home. The Sunday School Anniversary was another important date in the year. For several weeks beforehand, we would be practicing special hymns and learning pieces of poetry. On the day, all the children would be dressed in their Sunday Best. As it was held in May or June, the girls would be in their summer dresses and, when standing up in front of all the parents and friends, would look very pretty. Hair ribbons, in pretty colours, were also the order of the day.



At Christmas time, we had a Sunday School party, when Mr. Poynter made use of a Magic Lantern, lit by light from an acetylene generator. Mr. Poynter would tell the story that was illustrated by the slides. Since he was the Probation Officer for Bedford, and also concerned with the Temperance Movement, most of the stories were of children waiting for their fathers to come home from the pub and we usually finished up sobbing. After this, we would have a cup of tea and a bun to cheer us up!

Although I finished with day school when I was fourteen, I did not leave the Sunday School. I enjoyed Mrs. Poynter's Bible Class because she made the lessons so very interesting. When telling us about the journeys of St. Paul, she drew maps on the blackboard to show us exactly where he went. We were about a dozen girls in the class and, when I was seventeen, I was asked to help Mr. Cirket in the Infants' Department. I was very reluctant to leave Mrs. Poynter but, as I was the oldest girl, it was pointed out that it really was my duty. I really enjoyed helping with the little children and carried on until I was married, with a baby of my own.



I was married in the Memorial Hall on July 20th 1929 to Ernest Harrison, who lived in Bedford but was also involved in the life of the Hall. The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Cockett, who was then the Minister at Bunyan Meeting, Bedford.)

I enjoyed my days in the Sunday School very much. I still correspond with one of the teachers. She is 93 now and, I am sorry to say, she tells me that the Sunday School has closed for lack of pupils and the Chapel congregation has dropped to less than a dozen and she expects it will have to close altogether shortly. It makes me sad when I remember what it was like when I was a child.

6. More memories of village life

Thinking some more about life in the village, I remember that Mr. Whitbread employed two brothers as gamekeepers to look after his game coverts. Mr. Ernest Burr lived in the lane near to us and Mr. Joe Burr in the main street near to the larger farmers. They used to walk through the village with their guns and large bags. They would have to shoot the surplus rabbits, hares and other undesirable wildlife in the woods. Mr. Ernest would sometimes give my mother and other neighbours a rabbit, which was gratefully received. A man used to come round buying rabbit skins for 1d. each. When the shooting season began, Mr. Whitbread would bring a party of his friends for a day's shooting. The farmers would supply men to act as beaters and my father often went. If it turned out to be a good day, the beaters might be rewarded with a pheasant or a brace of partridges.

I mentioned earlier a Miss Carroll who lived in a cottage opposite my home. In the next cottage lived an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Smith. They did not have much to do with the other village people; perhaps they were newcomers. I only ever saw Mrs. Smith in her garden and she was quite pleasant to me. Mr. Smith used to walk into Bedford. I suppose he did the shopping. I always thought of him as the Bible Abraham because he had a big grey beard. A little farther along, just with the gardens in between, lived Mr. and Mrs. Ernie Benson. He was the village road sweeper. They had two young children. Mrs. Benson was a very kind lady, who used to be glad to do extra jobs to make a little money. When it was pea-picking time, she was one of the ladies who would help my father. They did not go along the rows picking the peas in the field, he used to collect the pea straw in his cart and bring it to a patch of ground outside the stable doors. He tipped the whole lot out and they would strip the peas off while sitting down. Of course, in a village everybody knows everybody else. This may have its drawbacks but I think, on the whole, it works very well. People would know if somebody was ill and would be willing to do little things that might help.

A lady named Miss Fox lived in Bunyan's cottage. She used to sell picture postcards of the cottage, the Moot Hall, the Church etc. and also of places of interest in Bedford. Another well-known person in the village was the Church Sexton, Mr. Vernon Cooper. When a person in the village died, "Verny" would toll the bell for a minute, then pause, then ring the person's age out on the bell so that people would know if it was a young or old person who had died.

There was a railway halt called 'Kempston and Elstow' which was opened in 1905 and was on the branch line from St. John's Station, Bedford, to Bletchley.² It was situated on the west of the village, where the main Midland main line from Bedford to Luton crossed over the branch line. The only train that stopped at this halt was a steam railcar, which we called "the tram". The vehicle was equipped with retractable steps, which were linked to the brake system by a safety device which prevented the brakes being released if the steps were not retracted. The people who lived in this end of the village, used this tram for going into Bedford. Mr. Benson, father of Mr. Ernie Benson whom I have already mentioned, lived in a cottage near the railway and worked on this section of the line. There was a cottage at the halt where the man in charge lived. He was responsible for keeping the halt tidy and lighting the oil lamps at night. Near the railway halt was a small factory called the "Sanderson Engineering Co.".

On the other side of the railway, on the Ampthill Road, stood a very imposing building. This was a well-known public boarding school for the sons of gentlemen. It was known locally as "The College"³. The Principal was the Rev. F. C. Farrar. Every Sunday morning, the young men walked across, two-by-two, along the footpath and across the Green to the Parish Church. The school was run by a private company and closed down in 1916. The buildings became the Cosmic Crayon Co, until they were demolished in 1965.

7. Celebrating a national event: The Coronation of King George V in June 1911

The Coronation of King George V caused great jubilation throughout the whole country, not least in our small community. We were very patriotic. Everybody looked out Union Jacks, carefully stored away since the last occasion when they had been required. A flag hung from almost every window or some strategic spot. One hung over the Church, another from the flag-pole on the village school. I cannot recall any kind of street-party teas; the main thought in our minds was a visit to Bedford in the evening. Bedford has a beautiful river - the Great Ouse - not to be confused with the Yorkshire Ouse. There was a very long embankment ,with well-kept gardens and rows of trees and seats. We heard that the trees were to be hung with electric lights. For we village people, who relied mainly on the sun to light us by day and the moon by night, this was something worth walking some distance to see. My mother had recently had an operation so knew she would not be able to attempt such a long walk. My sister Louie, who had a bicycle and was always willing to have a go at anything, offered to take her in a type of basket chair which was in use in that period, though we had not seen one in our area. I think my mother refused the offer because I can't remember seeing her in such a chair. At that time, my father had not progressed enough to be able to purchase a horse and trap, as he did later on. After tea, all the walkers started out. I suppose it would be getting on for two miles to the embankment from the centre of the village. Although I was only six years old, I considered myself a big girl. In fact, many children of that age walked to our school from as far away and went home for dinner (maybe this is why we had two hours for dinner break, as I have already mentioned). Of course, being June, the lights would not be turned on until about eight o'clock but, to our eyes, how lovely they looked. I am not sure whether coloured lights had been invented at that time. I rather think they were just plain but, in any case, as they stretched across from tree to tree they made a lovely sight. There were also lights all over the suspension bridge that crossed the river. There was a band-stand on the river and, during the summer months a band - probably the Bedford Town Band - used to play on it regularly. On this occasion, the Band was playing for the Coronation celebration. People were out in the boats and canoes and there was a great amount of singing and dancing. I do not remember the walk home. I daresay some of the younger children would end the journey by pick-a-back, but I'm sure all had enjoyed the celebrations. Of course, the only sight we had of the Coronation itself would be the pictures in the papers, on the following Sunday. We didn't have daily papers - I don't suppose we could afford them. How lucky the present day children are who, through the aid of television, can see all the important events as and when they occur. But, as my dear mother would say, "What you never have, you never miss". To mark the Coronation, every school child was presented with a commemorative mug and a medal.

8. Wartime

The [1914-18] war caused rapid changes to our village life. We had to be very careful about not showing the faintest glimmer of light at night-time which might attract the attention of the Zeppelins. Certain foodstuffs were also in short supply: butter, sugar and meat in particular. There was also a manpower shortage and, in 1916, Mr. Mortimer's bakehouse, where my brother Freddie was still employed, was working day and night shifts. Freddie was on night shift and, coming out of a hot bakehouse to cycle home in the early morning, he caught a chill which quickly turned to pneumonia and he died at the end of the week. This was in March 1916, a few weeks before his eighteenth birthday, causing much sadness at home.

Our lovely Green was no longer a playground but more nearly resembled a battlefield. Battalions of soldiers were billeted on people in Bedford and Elstow and the Green was used for horses and various kinds of equipment. Soldiers from Scotland and Cheshire found themselves in new surroundings. During route marches, we sometimes saw the Scottish soldiers marching through the village wearing their kilts, which was an unusual sight for us. It was a worrying time for families who had sons or husbands in the army and, from time to time, we had the sad news of someone missing or killed. Towards the end of the war, we had the terrible experience of a Zeppelin dropping its bombs quite near and giving us a small taste of what other people had suffered. It was thought the Zeppelin actually got off course but, in any case, it dropped five or six bombs in our area. Quite miraculously, they missed the populated spots and landed on fields or open spaces. One did drop quite close to the Sanderson Engineering Works.

My brother Arthur, who had volunteered at the beginning of the war, had been wounded in France and was then sent back to Italy. Later, he went back to France and was killed there during the last weeks of the war. Arthur's grave is one of many war graves in the Communal Cemetery Extension in the village of Romeries in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, northern France. My parents were not informed of his death until after the Armistice, so it was a very hard blow. My eldest brother Charlie, who was married and had two small boys, went when his call-up came. He was badly wounded and suffered a great deal after he came out. Ernie was not sent out of England and returned to his wife and small son.



Needless to say, everybody was glad when the war was over although many families were touched by loss of one kind or another, as was ours. Later on, the villagers decided to have a War Memorial, to honour those of the village who had given their lives in the Great War. This was erected on the lawn in front of the school, where the pear tree had once stood. The memorial contains eleven names for the 1914-18 war, including that of my brother Arthur. Other names were added later after the 1939-45 war.



9. School to Employment

In 1913, Messrs. Peak, Frean & Co. Ltd., Biscuit Manufacturers of Bermondsey, London, opened a factory, newly-built on vacant land between Bedford and Elstow. This was given the name "Meltis Ltd." and was used for making chocolates and other confectionery. This created a large number of jobs for people in the town and the villages round about. The work was mostly for girls, though a certain number of men were employed to maintain the machinery etc.



shaped like a small handbag, with a ribbon handle over the top. Another confection I remember, that took my fancy, was a sweet made in the shape of a banana, about half the size of a real one and in a sugary substance. My sister Louie worked there for several years and all the employees were allowed to buy the goods at a discount, so she often treated me to some. Every week, large boxes of broken biscuits came from the London factory and were sold in the canteen for 6d. per pound. The vans that brought these would return filled with the boxes of chocolates that had been made here and the vans also took the goods to other parts of the country.

Soon after the war started, they had to stop production of all the fancy sweets and chocolate and just make plain chocolate. This was made in 1 lb. blocks and most of it went to the army. During the war, the Government started a savings scheme because the war was costing a great deal of money. They brought out War Savings Certificates. Most factories and schools took part in the scheme, and Meltis was no exception. Mr. C. H. Dixon, who had come from London and was the Chief Engineer, took charge of this operation. Stamps to the value of 6d. were sold and, when the amount had reached 15/-, a certificate was issued which, in five years' time, would be worth £1. The Government raised a great deal of money in this way. Now, in 1983, the certificates are still issued but are called "National Savings Certificates" and I think are only issued through Banks and Post Offices. The chocolate factory kept going all through the war, though I know some of the men joined the armed forces. Mr. Dixon tried to make things as cheerful as possible and started up a small choir, which met at his home. Meltis was a very good firm to work for. Until things got too difficult because of the war, the Bedford employees were invited to visit the London factory and were given lunch. There was also an exhibition of hobbies, within which prizes were given. The visitors then had the opportunity of going to a Show which, in those days, was quite an event.

Many girls cycled five or six miles each day. About a dozen key men and women were transferred from the London factory, to act as foremen and forewomen, also the Secretary, Manager, Chief Engineer, Production Manager etc. In time, Guy Pestell, who had made the model of the Eiffel tower and who had taken up carpentry when he left school, became foreman of the carpenters' workshop.

One of the specialties at the beginning, I remember, was "King George" chocolates, in honour of the new king. I remember them being made up into half-pound cartons,

When I left school in 1919, Louie asked Mr. Dixon if he could find me a job in the office. There was a large block of offices, separate from the factory buildings, but Mr. Dixon had his own small office attached to the factory. He sent word for me to go for an interview with him. He gave me some tests and said I could start work in his office the following Monday. The firm was just building up again after the war. He taught me how to trace drawings and I had to learn shorthand and typing. One of the jobs I had to do for him was to take round the Savings Certificates to people in the various departments. In this way, I got to see quite a lot of the work that was done in the factory. I was very lucky to be given a job as soon as I left school and I enjoyed working for Mr. Dixon. The days of my village childhood were over.

Afterword by Michael Harrison

Over the ten years following her initial employment with Meltis in 1919 my mother became increasingly skilled at secretarial work. She was eventually employed at the Royal Airship Works at Cardington (Shortstown), travelling between home and work on a motorbike. On her twenty-fourth birthday, 19th January 1929, she sat and passed the examinations that qualified her as a “Pitman’s Certified Teacher” of shorthand and typing.

At Cardington she worked as secretary to Lieutenant-Colonel V C Richmond (who was director of design of the R101 airship) and Major G H Scott (who was director of flying and training). Both these men were amongst those who died when R101 crashed on 5th October 1930 so, for my mother, this was a personal as well as a national sadness. By that time, however, my mother had resigned from her work as a civil servant in order to get married. She was never in paid employment again. For a pupil who left the village school at age fourteen, and who had spent several months seriously ill in an isolation hospital, I think she did well for herself. I can only wonder what her career path might have been in more recent times.

My mother never intended for her memories to be published beyond the immediate family, but I am glad that this little legacy can now be made available for others to reflect upon and enjoy.

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Notes

1. Thomas James was the 2nd headteacher of Elstow school. We do not know when he started but he was succeeded in 1925 by Bob Wadsworth.
2. Kempston and Elstow Halt was on the London and North Western line from Bletchley to Bedford. For further details see disused-stations.org.uk
3. For further details see “[The Bedfordshire Middle Class Public School](http://bedarchives.bedford.gov.uk)” at bedarchives.bedford.gov.uk