



Greater Wigston Historical Society

White Gate Farm, Newton Lane, Wigston Magna, Leicester.

TRANSACTION 66.

THE LIFE OF JOHN JAMES HILL UP TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. BORN AT SOUTH WIGSTON IN 1916, AND WRITTEN SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH AT OADBY IN 1992, WITH RECOLLECTIONS OF SOUTH WIGSTON IN THE 1920's - 30's.

The Life of John James Hill, up to the outbreak
of the Second World War. Born at South Wigston in 1916,
written shortly before his death in 1992.

My father was born on 28th May, 1883, to the best of my knowledge at Weedon in Northants. He was the youngest son of Thomas William and Annie Hill, who named him William John. There were four children, two boys and two girls, in order of birth as follows: - Lottie the eldest, then followed Henry, then the youngest daughter Emily and she was followed by my father William John, as the baby of the family. After my father's birth, the family moved to Nuneaton, Warwickshire. It was there that my father spent his childhood and early working life. He was an employee of the London & North Western Railway Company. As a boy, and on leaving school, he took a job in a signal box as a train checker, being then 14 years of age. At 16, he transferred to the locomotive sheds as a cleaner and progressed to the footplate as a locomotive fireman.

He married my mother, Maud Payne in 1904 and they continued to live at Nuneaton. My mother carried on with her job in Burbage, near Hinckley, and made the daily trip usually on foot. Around 1910 - 11, my father had a serious illness which caused him to give up his job on the L.N.W.R. and after this the family moved to Blaby, Leicestershire, where he took up lighter employment as a pump engineer with the local authority, being employed in the sewage pumping station in the district. Early in 1914 he went back to working on the railway and this time it was with the Midland Railway Company at their locomotive sheds in Wigston, Leicester. The family moved to South Wigston so he would be near his job. The house was 56, Garden Street, South Wigston, and it was the place where I was born. When war broke out my father's job as a loco fireman was considered a reserved occupation, so he did not have to serve in the forces.

Life started for me on the evening of Sunday, 30th January, 1916, when I was born the fifth child and third son of William John and Maud Hill. The date was to be remembered as the night of the zeppelin air raid on Loughborough. Much damage was done by the bombs dropped during the raid, which lasted through to the early hours of Monday, 31st January. The raid was one of the many carried out by the German Air Force over Britain using their airships designed by and named after Count von Zeppelin. Due to the fact that I was born during the raid, I was affectionately nick-named 'Zep', a name which stayed right through to when I left school. I was actually named and registered John James Hill, but throughout my life I have mainly been referred to as Jack, a name which is a derivative of John.

Of my early life up to starting at the infants school, I know very little except what my parents, brothers and sisters have told me, but no doubt it was little different to that of other children of the same age group. I was told that on one occasion when my elder sisters were taking me out in the pram, it was allowed to run freely near Crow Mill, South Wigston, between the canal bridge and the bridge over the River Sence. It came to rest against the river bridge after running down the steep slope between the two. The pram was damaged but luckily I was not hurt. Another incident happened one day when mother was doing the family washing, I climbed on a stool to look into the 'Dolly Tub', toppled over and fell into the tub head first. Again luckily I was retrieved, perhaps a little shaken but no harm done. These without doubt were just a couple of many such things that happened in my early childhood.

In all, I had two brothers and three sisters. The eldest was named Annie Taverner, Nance as she was called, born in 1905, then there came my brother Joseph William (Jo) born in 1907, he was followed by Thomas Henry (Tom) born in 1909, then Emily (Pem) born in 1910, myself and then my younger sister Gladys Ivy (Glad) born in 1925, completing the family of six children.

One of the first real memories that I have is just before I started school. It is rather vague, but I do remember mother taking me into Leicester to have my photograph taken at a studio which was in Granby Street, the name of which was Jerome's. I assume this was in 1920. The particular studio was still in business in the late 1940s under the same name. I have in my possession the photograph of mother and I which shows a backcloth which is exactly the same as photographs taken there of my eldest daughter and son just after the Second World War.

I started school in September 1920 at the age of four and a half years and recall faintly, my early school days in the Infants' School in Bassett Street, South Wigston. I remember the Head Mistress, Miss Lee. I can picture her in my mind, dressed in a long black skirt and a white blouse. I also remember a Miss Green who taught in the school. Although I do have some recollections of my time in that school there is nothing of any consequence to tell.

The Infant and Junior schools, both in the same building, were for mixed classes of boys and girls. There were four classes, two for the kindergarten and Classes 1 and 2 of the junior school. From here the children went respectively to either the Boys or the Girls school which were also situated in Bassett Street, but on opposite sides of the street and in which there were classes 3 to 6 and 6A. Attached to these were the respective Intermediate school sections with Forms I, II & III.

In September 1923, I was moved from Class 2 in the Junior school to Class 3 in the Boys school. The teacher was a Miss Gudgeon. She was a fairly determined person but could be very considerate to the pupils. There is little I remember about my time in this class except that it was of typical school routine.

In September 1924 I was moved into Class 4, the teacher in charge was a Mr. Bryant, who was referred to between the pupils as 'Specky', much to his annoyance because he wore very thick and heavy spectacles. As far as I can remember he was a good teacher in all subjects, but he was also rather a soft disciplinarian so often taken advantage of by the unruly type of pupil. At times necessitating the Headmaster, (Mr. J.H. Butler, who was referred to as "Percy" by the boys), to be called in to restore order in the class. I suppose it would be fair to say it was in Class 4 where I really got down to school work. I seemed to have a reasonable flair for both Arithmetic and English, which I assume gave me a good grounding for the other subjects that were to come later.

September 1925 I was moved into Class 5 and the teacher who was in charge of that class was a Mr. Eric Powdrill, a tall gaunt man who was a very strong disciplinarian. He taught the subjects of English, Literature, Geography and Music which also included Singing. Apart from these subjects he was engaged very much in the sports side of the school which included Rugby Football, Cricket and Swimming.

It was in Class 5, during the Spring of 1926 that I sat the 11 Plus exam. I was only 10 and was put in as an 'underage' with two other pupils in the same age group as me. I got through the examination with a good pass and on the merits of this, it was recommended that I should sit it again when I was 11 years of age and if my achievements still showed a pass I would be sure of a place in a grammar school in September 1927. This was discussed with my father by the headmaster, but sadly my father could not see his way clear to find the necessary extra cost it would take, in addition to the family budget. It was decided that I should go into the Intermediate School where I would receive a more advanced education than I would get in the ordinary classes of the Boys School. I was allowed to enter Form I of the Intermediate School in September 1926. The following year, in the Spring, after my 11th birthday, I

again sat the 11 Plus examination and succeeded again with a good pass. The examination I have referred to was the Associated Schools Examination, the A.S.E., which was at the time the Standard National Schools Exam.

The main teachers in the Intermediate School who were directly responsible for each class were: - Form I. Mr. Oliver Barnett, whose specialist subject was French, Form II. Mr. William Elliott who was a good all round teacher, and Form III. Mr. William Mews, who was a specialist in Mathematics. Mr. Powdrill took all the classes for English and Geography, Mr. Orson Kind was the history and science teacher and Mr. Davis was the handicrafts teacher for woodwork, metalwork and other ancillary subjects attached to the handicraft section.

I started my Intermediate School career in September 1926 in Form I. under the Form Master, Mr. Oliver Barnett. He was a very amicable person and easy to understand. He was a past South Wigston Boys' School pupil, who had passed through Grammar School and College before taking up teaching as a profession and I understand that this particular school was his first teaching post. He would teach generally in most subjects, although as I have said before, his specialist subject was French. In later years I heard that he was the Headmaster of a large, mixed comprehensive school in Nottingham.

Form II. of the Intermediate School, which I entered in September 1927, was overseered by Mr. William Elliott, who was also an old South Wigston Boys' School pupil, who had travelled through the Grammar School and College and was also fairly new to the teaching profession. He was an all round sportsman who played Rugby Football for the Leicester 'Tigers', and for a cricket side in the summer months. He was a great sportsman who inspired most school boys with the example he set. When the 'Tigers' were playing at home on their Welford Road ground, he would obtain a limited number of complimentary tickets which he would distribute to the boys who had merited in some way and so brought popularity amongst the pupils and at the same time encouraged them to work well at their lessons. He could take most subjects, but was more of a specialist in Mathematics and so became a co-teacher with Mr. Mews. In later years, actually the late 1950s, I met him again, he was Headmaster of Crown Hills Secondary Modern School in Leicester, the school where my son Michael attended, and I believe it was from there that he retired.

I was moved up into Form III. in September 1928 and the teacher in charge was Mr. William Mews. He was rather a small man, who stood about 5ft. 2ins. and of rather slim build, but his small stature had no bearing on his capabilities. He was an understanding man who set the standards that he required, a strong disciplinarian, but he would always give help to the pupils who really did have difficulties. All in all his word was his bond. An excellent teacher who knew his subjects well. He was very well liked both by the pupils and also their parents, and would in the absence of the Headmaster, take over the responsibility for the whole school. He was always ready to give merit where it was due, and if for some reason a boy seemed far behind in the class he would always try to find out why.

I feel that I went through a good education in the Intermediate School, and even now, sixty years after, fully appreciate what was done for me in my school days.

Had I entered the Intermediate School after my 11th birthday, it would have been normal practice that I would have left school at the end of the summer term, completing my year in Form III., but as I was only ten and a half years old when I started in Form I., it was not until the summer after my 14th birthday that I could leave. I suppose I could have left on the Easter Break of 1930, but I was scheduled to sit the East Midland Educational Union Exam that year, so I stayed until the summer break of 1930. I took the examination

which was referred to as the E.M.E.U. and was at that time the Higher Schools examination. This entailed taking six or more subjects, two of which were compulsory, these being Arithmetic and English. Despite the number of passes gained a certificate would only be issued for a pass of five subjects which included the compulsory ones. I managed to get a pass in six subjects and duly received the E.M.E.U. certificate. The subjects being Arithmetic, English, French Language, History, Science and Drawing. I did not pass Geography.

So much for the general outlay of the school, teachers and my main achievements, perhaps now I should relate a few of my adventures experienced whilst in the Intermediate School.

When I joined Form I. of the Intermediate School, I found myself the youngest in the class, practically all the boys were eleven years or over and I was then ten years and seven months. I made fairly good progress despite the fact that there were some subjects that I did not really like. In Class 4 of the Boys School, I found I had a flair for mathematical subjects and to my benefit this continued, and much to my credit was always shown in my school reports. I found myself one of half a dozen boys who were also good at the subject, namely Henry Oldershaw, Fred Getliffe, Rupert Sharpe, Bernard Sharpe (these last two were cousins), Horace Kendal and myself, and because of our seemingly good marks we were referred to as the 'swots'. Of course this was the usual boyish way of showing envy of those who got good marks, but I must say we too often found ourselves in problem street in other subjects that we were not so clever at. No doubt we would be guilty of similar reactions to those who did better than us. After I took the usual summer examinations for the year's work in 1927, I found myself among the top pupils and this was repeated in both 1928 and 1929. I did not take any of the normal class examinations in the summer of 1930 because I was sitting the E.M.E.U. examinations.

After my success in the E.M.E.U., the Headmaster, Mr. Butler, once again discussed the situation of my possibly going to Grammar School to continue my education and again it was not in my favour as my father could not foresee where the extra finance was coming from, so I left school at the end of the Summer Term at the age of fourteen years and six months.

During my school years there were many excitable moments, both in class and outside. We regularly played Rugby Football in the winter months and also Cricket in the summer. Cricket was not exactly a game that I really liked, it always seemed too slow for me, but despite this I often played in the school matches. Swimming was an appealing sport for me. My efforts were fairly good but not exceptional, nevertheless I liked it. The swimming sessions were held in the open air baths, which were close to the canal near to the Park Road recreation ground, South Wigston. It was there, in the recreation ground, that we played our midweek matches. Inter-school matches were played on the Wigston Rugby Football Club's ground, which was just off the Spion Kop, between the two railway stations, Wigston Magna and Wigston South.

The school had a fairly good Rugby Football team, and with Mr. Elliott being a member of the Leicester "Tigers" team he gave much inspiration to the boys. During my time at the school we could 'brag' that we had a Schoolboy International in our team. One of the boys played for the English Boys team two years in succession and on these occasions Mr. Elliott organised a trip to allow the school to support their 'English Cap'. One of these international matches was played at Coventry and the other in Cardiff. The boy who was our star player and 'English Cap' was Fred Getliffe, who also had a place in the Schoolboys County Team, and of course, the school always turned out to give support.

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE.

South Wigston County Intermediate School.

REPORT for Term ending 31st July, 1929.

Name of Scholar *Hill, John.*

Form *11* Order *3*
No. *34*

SUBJECT	POSSIBLE MARKS	ACTUAL MARKS	PROGRESS	INITIALS
Spelling	30	25	} A splendid term's work. Has a very full & accurate knowledge of this subject & accurate work. An excellent term's work Good. Good. Very satisfactory.	} E.O.P.
Literature	30	24		
Composition	30	23		
Grammar	20	17		
Arithmetic	30	30		
Algebra	30	27		
Geometry	30	29		
History	30	20		
Geography	30	20		
French	30	22		
Natural History or Science	30	19	Good	OJK
Reading	10	8	Satisfactory.	} E.O.P.
Writing	10	7	Room for improvement.	
Art	20	16	Does some fairly good work	W.M.M.
Dictation	10	10	Spelling excellent.	E.O.P.
Music	30	23	Little Satisfactory.	O.C.D.
Domestic Subjects	—	—	WEEKLY MARKS POSSIBLE 220	
Needlework	—	—	ACTUAL 177.	
Physical Exercises	—	—	} Satisfactory, but must try <u>always</u> .	} E.O.P.
Total Marks	400	320		

Conduct	<i>V. Good</i>	Height	5 ft. $1\frac{3}{4}$ ins.
No. of times absent	<i>6</i>	Weight	6 st. 13 lbs.

GENERAL REPORT: *V.G. indeed. Note remark on Phys. Ex.*

J.H. Butler L.C.P.
Head Master.

South Wigston County Intermediate School.

REPORT for Term ending Christmas 1929

Name of Scholar John Hill

Form IV

Order 1
No. 24

SUBJECT	ACTUAL MARKS	POSSIBLE MARKS	GRADE	REMARKS
Scripture	22	30	Li.	Has been very attentive.
Literature	22	30	Li.	
Composition	16	30	Li.	
Grammar	15	20	Li.	
Arithmetic	24	30	Very	Will do quite well at this subject.
Algebra	21	30	Very	
Geometry	21	30	V.G.	
History	21	30	G.	Very satisfactory
Geography	18	30	G.	A noticeable improvement.
French	18	30		
Natural History or Science	18	30	G.	Is much more careful now
Reading	9	10	G.	Needs attention
Writing	8	10	Li.	
Art	18	20	Very	
Music - Spelling	6	10	Li.	
Handicraft	19	30		
Domestic Subjects				
Needlework				
Physical Exercises				
Total	246	300		
Conduct <u>V. Good.</u>				Height 5 ft. 3 1/4 ins.
No. of times absent <u>4</u>				Weight 7 st. 10 lbs.

WEEKLY MARKS
118 OUT OF 140

GENERAL REPORT :-

Very good indeed. He should do well in the E.M.E.U.

J.H. Butler L.C.P.
Head Master

GLUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

South Wigston County Intermediate School.

REPORT for Term ending Easter 1930

Name of Scholar J. Hill

Form 11 Order 2
No. 30

SUBJECT	ACTUAL MARKS	POSSIBLE MARKS	PROGRESS	REMARKS
Scripture	17	30		} I am delighted with his work this term.
Literature			V.G.	
Composition	65	100	V.G.	
Grammar				
Arithmetic	30	30	Gr	A very careful worker.
Algebra	24	30	V.G.	Most satisfactory.
Geometry	63	70	Ex.	He shows marked mathematical ability.
History	22	30	V.G.	A very satisfactory result.
Geography	15	30	S.G.	Satisfactory.
French	19	30		
Natural History or Science	18	30	G	Has worked well.
Reading	8	19	} S.G.	Quite satisfactory.
Writing	8	10		
Art	11	20		
Music Spelling	7	10		
Handicraft	Not taken			
Domestic Subjects				
Needlework				
Physical Exercises				
	171	200		WEEKLY MARKS 171 OUT OF 200
Conduct	7 1/2			Height ... 5 1/2 ft. 5 1/4 ins.
No. of times absent	14			Weight ... 7 st. 11 lbs.

GENERAL REPORT :-

Very good results indeed, he is showing marked ability in his work, & making excellent progress. He should do well in his exams next term. J.H. Butler L.C.P.
Head Master.

South Wigston County Intermediate School.

REPORT for Term ending July 31st 1930

Name of Scholar John Still Form Order
No. 26

SUBJECT	ACTUAL MARKS	POSSIBLE MARKS	PROGRESS	REMARKS
Scripture	23	30	V.G.	} A splendid term's work.
Literature			V.G.	
Composition			V.G.	
Grammar	16	20	V.G.	
* Arithmetic				
* Algebra				
* Geometry				
History	23	30	Ex.	Very satisfactory
Geography	25	30	G.	Quite satisfactory.
French	19	30		
* Natural History or Science			Ex.	Has worked very hard indeed.
Reading	8	10	F.G.	Indistinct pronunciation
Writing	8	10	G.	} Quite satisfactory
* Art				
Music Spelling	8	10	G.	
Handicraft	23	30	G.	Steady, industrious & careful.
Domestic Subjects				
Needlework				
Physical Exercises				

WEEKLY MARKS 135
OUT OF 140

Conduct	V. Good	Height 5 ft. 6 1/4 ins.
No. of times absent	9	Weight 8 st. 2 lbs.

* Passed the E.M.E.U Exam.
GENERAL REPORT :-
He has again done a very satisfactory term's work, & we are pleased that he has been successful in his exams.
J.H. Butler L.C.P.
Head Master

When I was twelve years of age, I obtained a job delivering newspapers, both morning and evening, for a newsagent in South Wigston. My round however was in Wigston Magna and as it was a fairly large round, I received 3 shillings and sixpence per week. From my wages I bought my first bicycle. This was from Huddlestons Garage on Blaby Road, South Wigston, whose premises were situated at the side of Wigston South railway station. The newsagent I worked for was Ronald Holland, whose shop was also near the station on Blaby Road. His father and mother kept another shop on Kirkdale Road and his brother Harry, had a part time business in Clifford Street, filling in his time working for J.W. Black the boot and shoe manufacturer in Saffron Road.

My delivery round started at 6:30 a.m. every morning and it took until 8:15 a.m., after which I would go home and get my breakfast and then off to school for 8:55 a.m.. If I had a bad morning, I would most likely be eating my breakfast on the way to school. In the evening the round would start at 4:45 p.m. and would finish at about 6:00 p.m.. This would be from Monday to Friday with Saturday times being similar except that on Saturday mornings I had to collect most of the money in and I would perhaps finish a little later. On Saturday evening, after finishing the evening round, I would take an armful of the Sports Mercuries, and sell them on the street. These papers had the football results in. For doing this my 'bonus' was one halfpenny for each dozen I sold, a princely sum in those days and especially to a schoolboy.

After my fourteenth birthday, I also took on a Sunday morning paper delivery round and for this I got an extra one shilling and sixpence, thus making my earnings to five shillings a week. This round took about an hour or more. When I eventually left school at the end of the summer term in 1930, I gave up delivering papers because then I was to start in full time employment.

I learnt to ride a bike quite a while before I had my first bicycle, and my first attempts to do so proved something of a calamity. A school friend and I had got hold of an old bicycle frame and a couple of old wheels, we fitted them in the frame with a couple of bolts through the hubs to the wheel forks. It had handle bars but no seat, pedals, or driving chain. For a seat we improvised by tying a rolled up sack to the cross bar, and of course there were no brakes. We took the bike to Crow Mill with the intention to sit on it and ride down the hill between the canal and the River Sence bridges. This proved to be great fun and gave us a sense of balance for when we could really have a bike to ride. One day when we were enjoying ourselves, and were then managing to both be able to sit on it together, a real problem was to arise. I was steering and confidently pushed off from the canal bridge wall, and then a Midland Red bus came over the river bridge from Countesthorpe, coming towards Wigston up the slope. I'm afraid I panicked and tried to turn off the road and down towards Crow Mill, but alas, I could not make the turn, so we bumped over the bank down to the river, (actually we called it the Brook) and finished up in the 'drink'. Badly shaken, but not actually hurt, we afterwards had many laughs about it. It was at least an initiation to riding a bicycle.

There were many 'haunts' around Wigston where we, as children, would spend most of our so called 'leisure and play' time. The Brook (River Sence as it ran down to Crow Mill) where we would go paddling and fishing for tiddlers, and we would often picnic there as well. Also quite near to Crow Mill was the viaduct that carried the railway line to Rugby, over both the canal and the river. The viaduct bridge was some 40 - 45 feet high, and the railway line was carried along from this with the embankment, and this too was a favourite place for the more daring children.

The viaduct section which passed over the River Sence, had three spans. The centre one directly over the river, and looking from the main road, the right

span was over a track which led into a dairyman's field where he kept his herd. The field was actually split in two by the river and the other part was where the Wigston 'Imps' football club had their pitch, being rented from the dairyman, Mr. Ezra Clarke. The other span was over the bridle road which led to Blaby, this road being a favourite haunt for many children. It passes through fields, allotments and also by the Osier Beds, situated at the side of the river as it approached Blaby Mill. On leaving the viaduct one passed by a gate on the right hand side, this gate was the entrance to the football pitch, which when not in use was used as grazing land for Mr. Clarke's other animals. Moving on towards Blaby, one then passed through a gate and on through the centre of a field known at that time as 'Gamble's Field', which did actually belong to a farmer named Gamble who farmed on the north end of South Wigston on ground which is now the Fairfield Estate. This field was a haven for children as it was a mass of flowers of all descriptions, buttercups, celandines and around the edges, dog daisies, just to mention a few. It was always mown for hay in early summer and again in early autumn. At these times the children had much enjoyment playing in the hay as it was left to dry after being cut. Moving on from here you would pass 'Blunt's Field'. Mr. Blunt lived in a farmhouse on the opposite of a field where he kept several hunting horses. That field was 'taboo' for children, they had to keep out in case the horses were let out. Then one passed the allotments where many men from South Wigston had a plot on which to grow their family's vegetables. My father had one of the plots, but apart from being escorted with one's parents, children were not allowed to wander around the allotments. From here you passed through another gate which led into another of Mr. Blunt's fields, but for safety sake that field was fenced off along the roadside. On the opposite side to this field were the osier beds, at that time obsolete, but in the past it had been a thriving proposition for whoever owned it. This was more or less a general playground for children, despite its proximity to the river. Beyond this one passed through another gate where the bridle road changed into a more generally used road into Blaby, and from which a side road went to Blaby Mill, which at that time was still used and driven by a water wheel. Before reaching the village of Blaby, it passed by the Blaby Cemetery. Just beyond the cemetery there was a small woodland area where we would go. In early spring this area was covered with snowdrops, violets and other spring flowers and in the summer, along the hedgerows one could find dog roses, crab apple trees, sloe bushes (wild damson) and other things like brambles from which we would get blackberries in September. There always seemed so much that we children could take advantage of to fill in our time.

The canal towpath was another place along which we would walk for miles. It was interesting to see the barges as they made their way along, some being towed by horses and others with motor power. At this time water transport was a regular form of moving goods. In the winter months when the canal became frozen, we would go skating, providing the ice was thick enough and safe. Near to Crow Mill, on the opposite side of the canal, Mr. 'Mowey' Thornton had his farm, he was mainly a dairy farmer who grazed cattle in the fields surrounding the farmhouse. On the south side of the farmhouse he also had an orchard, which was a regular place where we would go 'scrumping'¹, provided that we did not get caught by him. Sometimes, Mrs. Thornton, a very kindly person, would catch us and would give us a gentle 'talking to' and then give each of us a glass of milk and nearly always an orange, in the hope that we would not go scrumping again.

As the main road left South Wigston for Countesthorpe, it passed under a railway bridge just before reaching the canal. This bridge was a very special place, locally called the 'Cuckoo Bridge'. This was due to the acoustics, and seemed to echo every sound that passed under it, children, and in some cases adults, would shout 'cuckoo', just to hear the echo. Which always seemed to be louder than the original sound. From the Cuckoo Bridge and running parallel with railway lines back to Wigston South station, was a path known as

the 'Handgates', this was because it passed along unfenced fields that bordered on the railway embankment and so that animals, which belonged to Mr. Thornton, could not stray, there were small gates fitted with a fence barrier which were operated by hand and always kept the gate in a closed position. This was a favourite walk for many people.

One place that had an attraction for children, despite the precautions taken to keep them away, was the old and redundant brickyard pits which were situated off the Saffron Road. There were two pits, the big and the little pit, which were both not only very deep but they were also full of water. Now they have been filled in and built over. Standing at the side of the big pit was the old brickyard chimney, which was at the time, one of Wigston's landmarks, standing 180 feet high. Having not been used for many years, and for lack of repairs it had become unsafe, so a decision was made to take it down. This as near as I can say was around 1929 - 30. I remember it was just before I left school. The method adopted for its removal was to 'fell it' and this entailed taking away a wedge shape of brickwork and replacing each brick separately with a wooden block that fitted very tightly. When the necessary shape was completed the blocks of wood were soaked in paraffin and then set alight. When the blocks had burnt away and weakened the chimney, it would lean and fall just the same as a tree when a wedge shaped section had been sawn out. This entailed an amount of accurate calculations so that it fell the desired way, which in this case was along the then disused rail track, formally used to convey the bricks from the brickyard. It was a sight that sticks in my mind, being the first and only time I saw it smoke, for it had never been used in my lifetime. The smoke from the burning wood blocks enhanced by the upward draught of the chimney, found its way out of the top. Then as the blocks weakened, it leaned over in the direction of the old rail track. It leaned to about 60 degrees and then suddenly broke just over half way up, collapsing in a huge heap of rubble. In all the 'death' of the old chimney was a regal and fantastic sight, for me a 'once in a lifetime' experience.

When I left school in the summer of 1930, I managed to get a job with the Blaby Tomato Nurseries, which were owned by G.F. Shoults and Sons. It was not a suitable type of work for a lad leaving school, but it was a job. They were so scarce at that time and continued to be right through the 1930s.

In the Autumn of 1930, I had several chums, namely Fred and Maurice McGarry, William and George Coleman, George Dewick and Logan Gilbert. The McGarry brothers lived in Garden Street, George Dewick who I worked with at the Tomato Nurseries, lived in Moat Street, Wigston Magna, and Logan Gilbert, who was a school chum in the Intermediate School, lived in Irlam Street. During our outings and trips into town (Leicester), which were sometimes by bus, or perhaps by walking (a distance of about 4½ miles), we met up with several young ladies who were about our own ages. I became attracted to Eva (Frances Eva Cave) and we remained good friends on a 'on - off basis for a couple of years. When we were both sixteen we started going 'steady' and eventually married in 1937.

In the spring of 1931 I left the tomato growers and took up a situation with the London Electric Wire Company at their warehouse in Albion Street, in Leicester. When I was sixteen I got a job with the Dryad Works in Leicester, training as a Carpenter and Joiner and Wood Machinist but when I was about eighteen Dryad closed down their woodworkin g section and I was recommended to go to W.H. Scott & Sons Ltd., joinery manufacturers and timber merchants to finish my training.

On completion of my trade training at twenty one, I like many others journey men tradesmen, found myself on the "dole" but after about a fortnight I was

sent for a job at the Cascelloid Company in Abbey lane, Leicester, to work an automatic wood lathe. This entailed making rollers, knobs and other small wooden fittings in the production of their calendar and household goods, together with various toys they produced. This job meant working 12 hour shifts, six days a week, alternately each other week. The job was interesting enough, but it was long working hours for not much more than one could get on the 'dole'. However after a few weeks, I saw an advertisement in the local newspaper for coachbuilders at the Morrison Electric Vehicle Co. in South Wigston. I applied and was lucky and got set on. I worked there until the Second World War broke out.

As I said previously, Eva and I started going 'steady' when we were both sixteen, (incidentally we were almost exactly the same age, Eva was born during the same night of the 30th/31st, my birth date being the 30th and Eva's the 31st, January, 1916), Eva had a few girl companions, Clara Young, Queenie Holland, who she worked with and I had a few 'mates' like Fred and Maurice McGarry, Logan Gilbert and others. At times we would spend our leisure time in their company but Eva and I would see each other more or less every day. We both worked in Leicester and our lunchtimes were the same, so I would cycle to Hinckley Road where Eva lived and walk back to Corah's where she worked, with her. It was when I was sixteen and on one of these trips that I met with an accident on the Narborough Road / Hinckley Road junction. I woke up eight hours later in the Royal Infirmary with concussion. Eva did not see the accident and wondered what had happened to me until a few days later when Fred McGarry went into town to tell her. I was off work for a few weeks following that incident.

Eva and I were the only couple of the original acquaintances that kept together although both saw some of our original chums from time to time. Eva worked with Queenie Holland who lived at Thringstone and Clara Young who lived in the Hinckley Road district. For myself, I often saw Logan Gilbert and when we were both eighteen in the March of 1934, we decided to join the Territorial Army. We joined the 4th (City) Battalion of the Leicestershire Regiment, whose place of training was The Magazine, The Newarkes, Leicester. We attended parades at least once a week and twice each year would attend weekend camps at Stoughton, on the city's outskirts and at Kibworth on the firing range. On top of that we attended camp for a fortnight each year.

We were both attached to 'D' company of the battalion. This was the machine gun section and we were trained to use Vickers and Lewis types, which at that time were in use throughout the British Army. Each year we would spend a couple of weekends at Kibworth on the firing range to perfect our skills. One weekend in the use of rifles and the second with the machine guns. It was on one of the weekends with the machine guns, that after passing my test, my score was so good that I was selected to represent the Battalion in the Inter-Battalion Competitions. The Battalions in this were the 4th and 5th The Leicestershires, the 4th and 5th The Lincolns and the 4th and 5th The Sherwood Foresters (Nottingham). These efforts were of a 'knock out' basis and the final was held at the annual camp. It was in 1935 when we spent the two week camp at Redcar, North Yorkshire and we were in the final with the 4th Lines. We won with a clear lead. It was also at the same camp we won the Battalion Guard Mounting competition for 'D' company, and I was in the guard selected. I was incidentally the 'stick' man and because of being the best turned out at the guard inspection was allotted the easier job of H.Q. orderly for the next day instead of the 24 hour guard duty. This of course was really achieved with other members of the company, making it possible by the work they put in to prepare my turn out, and of course in the spirit of the company.

In August 1934 we went to Gandale Camp, Catterick, memories stand out regarding this camp as it rained and rained, with thunderstorms for most of the time we were there. We were camped under canvas and had to dig trenches around the

tents to stop us being washed out. The following year at Redcar the weather was excellent and after training manoeuvres were finished each day, providing you didn't have any specific duties to do, one could go out of the camp and enjoy this seaside town. In August 1936, the camp was held at Haltwhistle in Northumberland. It was on the Scottish borders, thus a very interesting camp, as our training programme took us over the borders and along Hadrians Wall and its surroundings. August 1937 found us in camp at Ripon in Yorkshire. This was little other than a purely military camp and being close to Catterick was scheduled to be part of a very large military scheme with both regular army and territorials engaged in it, leaving little time for leisure.

It was at the camp in Ripon that the news came through that the 4th Battalion was to be disbanded and all the personnel were given the option to transfer to the 5th (County) Battalion, to a new company of the Royal Engineers which was being formed in order to operate a searchlight unit, or they could take an early discharge. As I had only a matter of three months before my normal discharge after 4 years service and due to transport difficulties getting to the drill halls for the training sessions and coupled with the fact that I was then married, I decided to take an early discharge. Many others also took their discharge, mainly because of transport problems.

During my service with the 'Terriers', I was 'on parade' at several special events. One in particular was for the Silver Anniversary of King George the Fifth's reign (25 years) in 1935. This was held in the Victoria Park in Leicester and detachments of the 1st and 2nd Battalions (the regulars) of the Leicestershire Regiment, together with the 4th and 5th Territorial Battalions of the Regiment. I was also 'on parade' at several civic functions which called for a detachment of the local army to be present.

I continued to work at Morrison Electric Vehicles and life continued fairly well. I married Eva in July, 1937, and we lived in a rented house in Florence Avenue, South Wigston, and in May 1939 our first child, a daughter, Ivy Maud, was born. In September that year however, everything was to change, the Second World War broke out. Had I still been in the Territorials I would have been mobilised immediately but when I hadn't been called up by January 1940, I decided to volunteer. I hoped I would be able to join up in my trade, carpenter, joiner and coachbuilder. I was enlisted in the Royal Army Service Corps as a Wheeler and actually mobilised on 24th January, 1940, exactly a week before my 24th birthday. I was sent to Cliftonville in Kent for my initial training. Eva and our daughter were to live at 23 Florence Avenue throughout the war and our second child, Michael, would be born there in April 1944.

Recollections of South Wigston.

South Wigston could show a very good cross section of trades people during the 20's and 30's including many well respected families, descendants of which may well still carry on the established business, although with modern investment creating multiple stores, family businesses are noticeably few.

Blaby Road was then, and still is the hive of the retail trade, but much trade was carried on by the old shops which were situated at the corners of most streets and of course there were other shops which could be found in various areas.

Among the trades people one remembers family names like Underwood; - Mr. Underwood senior ran a shop in Station Street, which was a small grocers and off licence. His two sons were also in business, one had the barbers shop in Canal Street and the other son named Amos ran the local bus concern which provided passenger transport between Wigston Magna and Whetstone. At the corner of Station Street and Blaby Road, Mr. J.J. (Johnnie) Bruce had his pawnbrokers shop and on Blaby Road opposite his shop was Huddlestons Garage and cycle shop. Next door to the garage was Mr. and Mrs. Battersby's drapery shop, then came the newspaper shop ran by Ron Holland, next the fish and chip shop which was served by Mrs. Battersby's son. Ron Holland was one of the family of small business folk living in South Wigston. Mr. Holland senior and his wife had a newspaper shop in Kirkdale Road opposite Clifford Street, and Harry Holland lived in Clifford Street and from his house, ran a newspaper delivery service. Another brother had a shop next door to his father in Kirkdale Road where he carried on the trade of barber. Writing of barbers, next door to the Wigston Co-operative Society Grocery shop on Blaby Road, Mr. Allsop also carried on this trade. Another barber to be mentioned was Billy Bown who carried on his business as part time in the front room of his house in Canal Street. Through the day he worked at Dummores biscuit factory, almost opposite his home, and in the evenings and Saturday after noons he filled his time in with the clippers and the razor. Four pence for a haircut and two pence for a shave, and the young boys could get an 'over the top' clip for two pence.

Charlie Moore will go down in history not just as the man who had the music shop at the corner of Canal Street and Blaby Road from where instruments of all types were sold, but as the man who founded and was also the conductor of the Wigston Temperance Prize Band, which over the years took part in and gained distinction in the brass band world. After his retirement his son took over the business and carried on with the band in the tradition which his father set.

Looking along Blaby Road, one could find the furniture shop and warehouse of W.L. Freeman & Son, there was the jeweller shop of 'Ticker' Payne. Between the jewellers and the house of Charles Moore was Mrs. Andrews' shop which seemed to specialise in children's wear and drapery. Penney's florist shop was near to the Co-op Grocery, this was owned by the Penney family who had nurseries in Aylestone Lane, Wigston Magna. The old Post Office was at the corner of Fairfield Street, Mr. and Mrs. Deeming being the Postmaster and mistress. Next door was established the dentist, Mr. Holmes, who later moved into a house in Saffron Road.

There were two butchers shops on Blaby Road, one owned by Mr. Rawlinson at the corner of Dunton Street was equipped with its own slaughter house, and there was the pork butcher at the corner of Blaby Road and Countesthorpe Road. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace had their shop where cooked meats, cakes and pastries were prepared and cooked in their own bakehouse. This latter shop was later taken over by the Rawlinson family. Writing of butchers, one thinks of the Higgs family where father, mother, two sons and daughter all helped in their shop in

Canal Street, they also had a small slaughter house. Not to be forgotten are Mr. and Mrs. Crompton, who again traded in Canal Street. These folk were noted for their tripe, cow heels, chitterlings, faggots and many other delicacies, which one could collect, especially on Friday night, all hot, with plenty of 'gippo' providing you took a jug or basin along.

Returning to Blaby Road, on the corner of Dunton Street, opposite Rawlinsons the butchers, was the greengrocers shop of Sam Culley. A little lower down and next door to the cinema, was Garnetts newspaper and tobacconists shop where sweets and confectionary were also sold. The other side of the cinema was the fish and chip shop of Mr. Whitehead, with a fresh fish shop alongside. Harry Whitehead was later to become a leading figure in Wigston Urban District Council affairs.