

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RICHARD CARTER (16/11/1916 – NOW)

Go back far enough in our family history and you will find that on our paternal grandparents side our grandmother was descended from Huguenot stock, the name Bessant being from the French Besante. Our grandfather had a farming background, not originally in the north, but from the Norfolk area.

On the maternal side we have less information, but Mum's family were from the North West, Lancashire, and were associated with the Cotton Mills. Mum had an uncle who was Foreman at the Manchester Gas Works, and other members had connection with the bakery /confectionery trade.

Of the thirteen children born to our paternal grandparents three of the boys and five of the girls became Salvation Army Officers.

It was as a young Lieutenant that Dad met Julia Allman who was the Young Peoples Sergeant Major at Bolton, and this led to her entering the Salvation Army College and becoming an officer. They were married at Brixham, Devon in 1912.

It was while they were stationed at Camborne, Cornwall, in 1916 that I was born, in a small terrace cottage (2 up, 2 down) No4 Centenary Street, the humble quarters provided for the Officers at that time,

I obviously know nothing of that time except for the stories I have gleaned from my parents... for instance; Such was the persecution of the Salvation Army during those days that my father was sent to prison for 14 days because he refused to discontinue open-air evangelism in the streets. Fortunately some public official intervened and father was only "inside" for a couple of days.

By today's standards our home would have been considered poverty stricken. Salvation Army officers were provided with the bare necessities so far as furnishings were concerned, and they were paid an "allowance, which was calculated at the level of the lowest wage of the time. It was always made clear that it was not a salary and not guaranteed; it could only be received from the Corps funds if there was enough left in the 'Kitty" after all expenses were paid. If there were not enough funds it was considered by the powers that be that either the officer had not worked hard enough, or he had not prayed hard enough.

I have expounded this at length to illustrate the circumstances under which we were brought up for the first five or six years of my life. Despite these circumstances I must emphasise that I have never once heard my parents complain about hardship.

One of Dad's proudest memories was the personal request from Catherine Booth, wife of the Founder, that he should play euphonium in the band that headed the Founders funeral procession.

I was the third child in what was to be a family of nine children, six girls and three boys. Mia and Freeb were the first two arrivals, as stated, I was third.

The only thing I can recall of early childhood would be the remembrance of father taking me down to the Canal Docks at Halifax when he was dispatching waste Paper loads to go to Goole. By this time he had transferred to the Salvation Army Social work and the collection, sorting and disposal of waste paper was a very practical way of finding employment for men who would otherwise be unemployable. Many had come back from the first war with minds or bodies or morale shattered, and such programmes of work provided the prospect of rehabilitation for them. We moved to London in 1921 when Dad was appointed to take charge of Great Peter St. Hostel; which was at that time the largest in the country, accommodating about 750 men.

My main recollection here is of the lovely gooey iced buns that the cook produced. I loved to sneak down to the kitchen when I came home from school and there was always a bun to be had.

One other memory returns; One of the men who resided there was very clever with his hands, and he made me a beautiful replica of a red London Transport bus, complete with outside staircase. Unfortunately Dad entrusted it to another man who promised to fit a clockwork motor. Neither man nor bus was ever seen again.

I recall that at this time we used to attend school only in the afternoon. From 1pm to 3pm we all turned our desks upside down and hooked a hammock on to the legs. We had to climb into the hammock and lie there for an hour to ensure we got our "rest". I wonder if it was for our benefit or the teachers'.

It was during this period that father resigned from the Salvation Army sadly, with some acrimony. He could no longer co-operate with officials he could not trust.

He borrowed £100 and bought a small greengrocer's business in Islington. In my mind's eye I can see this shop today with the goods so beautifully displayed.

Behind the scenes it was not so beautiful. There were two rooms at the back, two rooms upstairs, and a large cellar. The property had been badly neglected and the first night no one could sleep because of strange noises behind the wallpaper. When dad stripped the paper he found the walls covered with bugs & had to get a blowlamp to burn them off. The Health Authorities had to be brought in to thoroughly cleanse the place and eventually it was quite pleasant. This was not an uncommon experience in those days, especially in the big cities, I recall dad speaking of similar experiences in Birmingham, and later, in 1936 I came across similar situations in Birmingham myself.

The cellar was infested with rats and we had a fox terrier, which was sent down to try to sort out the rats. It didn't work out; the dog was bitten by the rats, went rabid and had to be destroyed.

Mother never really came to terms with the risks of traffic in busy London streets and, eventually, in 1923/24 we moved to the country, to a village, Charsfield, in Suffolk, where dad bought a small butchers business. Sadly it was the very situation which mother feared in London, that killed my younger brother, David, in later years (see later page).

Before we leave the Islington scene there are two other prominent experiences that come to mind. One involved my first experience of bullying. I was on my way home from school (I was full time by now) when I was set upon by a couple of boys who pelted me with stones (they seemed like half-bricks) and I arrived home with a huge gash in the side my head pouring with blood.

The second was my first experience of hospital. I'd had a lot of trouble with breathing and eventually the medics decided to remove my tonsils. I was taken to Westminster Hospital where they removed my tonsils, and I think they sent me home forthwith. I have no recollection of staying in hospital overnight. I went home accompanied by a nurse who took me on the, top deck of an open London Transport bus. I bled all the way home, and I remember mother being very cross and, getting a taxi, took me straight back to hospital where I was kept in for a couple of days. When I was discharged I was unable to walk, and spent several weeks on a sofa in a downstairs room. For some time after this I was dosed with snuff to try to keep my nasal passages clear.

A number of memories return in the picture of London life. There was no electricity in our home; we had gas lamps on the walls and you had to be very careful when lighting them in case you damaged the very fragile mantles. Outside, the Lamplighter, a man

with a very long stick that had a light on the end, came round at dusk to light the street lamps one by one. Next morning he had to come round again to put them out.

The postman was always very smart in his navy blue uniform with its red striped trousers. He wore a peaked cap and brought the letters round in a big wicker basket on wheels. We would get deliveries four or five times a day, and he collected from the letter boxes also on his way round or you could give him letters you wanted posting.

The baker used to come round with a basket similar to the postman but bigger, and his trays of cakes were set out attractively to tempt the customers. You could smell the fresh bread and cakes long before he reached you.

The milkman came round, sometimes on foot, with a big tank on wheels. At other times he would have a pony & trap with a larger tank between its wheels. He would ladle your milk into your jug according to your request. You knew when he was in the vicinity when you heard his call "Milk-O".

The buses, and most motor vehicles of that time ran on solid tyres, they also had solid seats or rather, wooden slatted seats. Few buses had a roof on the top deck and it was a pretty grim journey in bad weather. The roads were often constructed with what were known as 'Setts'. These were blocks of wood about the size of house bricks and they were let into the ground and "sett" by pouring wet hot tar over them.

Other features were the "Ice Cream Man" who came around with various appliances. My earliest recollection is of a man pushing a home made wheelbarrow type of vehicle in the centre of which there was a milk churn. This was set in a large box, which was filled with ice to keep the contents of the churn cold. He scooped the ice cream out with a large spoon, usually spread it over a wafer and stuck another wafer on top. The usual price was two pence for a large one and one penny for the small. Today's equivalent would be one penny for the large and 1/2p for small.

Very little shopping was carried home in those days. Only such things as small packages, e.g. half-pound butter, packet of tea etc, or something you wanted urgently, were carried home by the shopper. Most shops - Butcher, Grocer, and Greengrocer etc. employed a lad with a carrier bicycle to deliver your order. In those days you didn't have to buy bulk like today. Often a poor person, or someone living alone would go into shop for "one pennyworth of tea" or butter, or an ounce of sugar. You could buy loose biscuits, and if you chose your time at week-ends, just before closing, you could buy off-cuts of cheese, meat, fruit etc. very cheaply as there was no provision for cold storage as a general practice. You could buy huge blocks of ice about 15-18 inch cubes, but you needed a very big storage room to make it worth while.

While dad had the greengrocers shop at Islington he bought a horse & covered wagon with which to collect from the market and later trade door to door. Every Monday & Thursday he would go up to Covent Garden Fruit & Vegetable Market to buy fresh produce. He would be on his way by 4.30 a.m. to get best choice of goods, and if I were awake, he would take me with him, always back in time for school. I loved this, and also when I could accompany him on his door-to-door rounds. On one occasion, it was a Saturday and we were trading in one of the posh districts, Dad was following up his usual customers and had gone down to a house a few yards down the road. I was left in charge of the horse and was sitting proudly holding the reins when a chimney sweep came along carrying his black brushes. He came too near to "Nell" our horse and she bolted. I hung onto the reins for dear life and tried to put all my weight on the pedal that applied the brake. I didn't have much success, and if it had not been for a very brave gent who saw what was happening, grabbed the horse's bridle and brought her to a halt, I don't know how this tale might have ended. As it was there was no permanent harm although I was certainly shaken up at the time.

One other thing comes to mind; there were no heavy lorries as such in those days. Most heavy haulage was carried out by Traction Engines that were similar to railway steam engines but not quite so enormous. Most big hauliers had a fleet of these that were used to pull trailers with very heavy loads. They were the first to replace the old SHIRE HORSES, not only in town but on the farms as well.

I mentioned our move to Charsfield in Suffolk and it is to that period and area where the next scene shifts. The butcher's shop which dad had bought was also our home. It was on the edge of the village, next door to a small holding, and fairly adjacent to the local school. It was the only butcher's shop and there was obviously a fair amount of trade. I have memories of making sausages, cutting up steaks, sweeping up sawdust which was the common "floor covering" of those days. There was also a fairly large "cold store", probably four or five feet square, inside of which were huge blocks of ice that had to be replaced frequently to preserve the meat carcasses. Dad used to breed pigs as well in a sty at the back of the house, and in those days' he was permitted to kill the pigs for sale in the shop. Sometimes he took me to the abattoir at Ipswich where he used to buy his meat "on the hoof". In other words he selected his animal alive, then waited for it to be slaughtered before taking it back to the shop. It was a gruesome business. He had a pony & trap initially for transporting the meat, and he also delivered to distant customers. Most of the local customers had the meat delivered by a lad with a carrier bicycle.

Later dad bought his first car. In those days (1924) there was no such thing as a driving instructor, or driving test. You bought a car, the seller showed you the controls and you got in and with a bit of luck you drove away. His car was one of the early Ford "T" models. It had only two pedals, accelerator and brake. It had ignition control and throttle lever on the steering column, and woe betide you if you had not got these settings right when you turned the starting handle. None of your easy starter motors on these cars. A wrong ignition control setting and the engine would kick back, which could result in a broken arm or sending you flying.

One memory of this village is the postal bus carrier service. The local Coal Merchant, cum Garage Proprietor, had a small bus that would seat about 15-20 passengers. They got on at the front where there was a compartment that accommodated parcels for local delivery. He would take any parcel for delivery on payment of a small charge. He also had a Post Office sack from which he delivered or collected letters. His office was also a "postal point" for parcels, letters, and sale of stamps etc. At the back of the bus was a separate compartment where one would often find other things for delivery such as sacks of coal coke, cans of paraffin for the oil lamps that were the source of light in those days.

The roads in Suffolk were not metalled roads such as we have today. The majority were simply a development of the old bridle ways widened and straightened a little then hardened or "firmed up" by rolling "Hoggin" into the surface with a steamroller. This hoggin was a mixture of sand and gravel and large broken stones. It produced a fair surface in fine weather, but when it rained everything was covered with this golden yellow mud, and of course there were puddles everywhere. Of course, the pneumatic tyres, which were just coming into vogue, were frequently punctured. These tyres were attached to a rim that bolted on to the main body of the wheel. So when you got a puncture you removed the outer rim with the tyre and simply bolted on a spare rim and tyre in its place. You always carried a gallon can of petrol on the footboard, as petrol pumps were not so plentiful as they are today.

Electric lights on cars were unknown. Some had oil lamps, which were pretty useless as they regularly got smoked up and you had to keep cleaning them. They showed no real light on the road, serving mainly to warn someone else that you were on the road. They were soon replaced by acetylene (carbide) lamps. These were gas lamps and showed a bit more light if you could control the gas and keep the reflector and glass clean. They

consisted of a two-compartment container at the back of a lamp. The bottom compartment contained carbide, a flint-like substance that smelled awful and produced a gas when it got damp. The top compartment contained water, which dripped on the carbide and produced the gas, which then seeped through a pipe with a special burner on the end and gave you some light when you fit it. It was important to get the ration of water drip to carbide just right or you could never control the flame.

Back to the shop and our home. There was no running water, no flush toilet, no gas or electricity and of course no central heating, unless you can count an oil stove in the middle of the room as "central". Water was obtained from a hand pump standing in the garden, our only source of supply. Sanitation was an "earth closet" alongside the stable the bottom of the garden. Waste from the "loo" had to be emptied into a pit in the garden which was in turn emptied periodically by a sewage tanker, a service which had to be negotiated between the contractor and the householder.

The time came when dad became frustrated with business life and longed to get back into the ministry in some form. He had kept up some involvement and often used to take services at the Baptist Chapel where we attended Sunday School. It seemed to be God's leading when he was approached by the leader of the C.S.S.M. (Children's Special Service Mission) and asked if he would consider working as a peripatetic minister with the Caravan Mission to village children. This was a Mission designed to reach out to the villages where there was no established church or where the residents were so scattered that the gospel was not reaching them.

Dad was delighted to accept this challenge but it meant another move of home and so we moved to another Suffolk village, Tunstall. During all these upheavals Mum never murmured, she just accepted that if this was God's will she would support dad all the way.

This new venture, however, meant that during the summer months dad was away from home quite a lot. He also had to travel quite a lot as the work entailed something like three or four weeks in a village, then moving on to a new village. He was provided with horse drawn caravan, a large tent for meetings and a small tent for cooking etc. He was dependent on kindhearted farmers to loan him a horse when time came for the caravan to move on. But initially he was dependent upon a bicycle to travel between home and his mission venue. This naturally limited his ability to come home often.

Dad loved auction sales, and one day during a vacation period he was attending an auction at Wickham Market. Here he came across some motorcycles for sale, and he thought it would be a good idea to buy one and thus enable him to visit home more often and easily. The bidding reached £5, and he came away feeling very pleased that he had obtained a motorcycle for £5. It was a Norton 3.h.p. with no gears, just a belt drive which was in continuous contact with the wheels. You set the throttle and ignition controls then set off down the road pushing as hard as you could until the engine fired. When you were satisfied that the engine had fired properly you jumped on the moving cycle, opened the throttle and with a bit of luck you were on your way. He was thrilled with his purchase, but imagine his surprise some weeks later when he got a letter from the auctioneer telling him to remove the other machines or he would be charged for storage. He had bid for one motorcycle but had not realised that the four were being sold as one lot. Business man that he was he did not, remove them but put them back in the next sale. There were obviously more bidders second time round as they sold quickly and he got more than his money back.

Tunstall was a village somewhat larger than Charsfield, and there was a kind of "core" to it. A Pub, Church, Sports Field and a small collection of shops. There were a few streets but they followed the pattern of other country roads consisting of the usual "Hoggin" with its-consequent ruts, mud, and flints. We attended the local church (C/E) which also governed the local school. The school however was quite a distance away and involved

about a half-hour walk. No free bus rides in those days, but you could walk safely and parents did not worry. It was at church that I got my first taste of choir singing. There were several of us 10 year old or thereabouts, and we occupied the front row of the choir on the men's side. Opposite were the ladies of varied ages, one in particular who came in for some, ribald remarks from the boys. She went by the name (rather naughtily) of "Fish Face", due to the way she used her Mouth when singing. Her name did not help her a great deal for she was Mrs. Herring, of the local general store. Incidentally I went back there recently, and would you believe it a Mrs. Cod now owns the shop.

As I have said earlier, dad spent quite long periods away from home in the summer months particularly and during school holidays I used to stay with him, and it was great fun when we moved from one village to another, pulling down and re-erecting the tent, hitching the horse to the caravan, arriving at a new site and pumping up the primus stove to boil the kettle for tea. We cooked in the open mainly on a contraption that was supposed to be a stove, but consisted of a couple of primus stoves under a metal box thing. Alternatively we would gather sticks and light fires to cook on. These experiences were great fun and helped greatly when I joined the BP scouts later.

One of my experiences was, not so funny. The caravan had two bunks and we often had a Bible College student with us for experience practice. Consequently I had to sleep in a hammock across the middle of the caravan that was simply a sheet of canvas with about half a dozen eyelets at each end. These eyelets were hooked on to a series of coat hooks attached to the sides of the van. I must have turned over awkwardly one night for one of the hooks broke off and I was dumped on the floor, fortunately suffering no more than a few bruises.

I have referred to Mum being left to cope on her own in dad's absence but it is the background to that commitment which is so remarkable in the light of modern resources and technology.

There were seven children at, this stage, four girls & three boys. The cottage had four bedrooms one of which was an attic where even a child could bump his head if not careful. We slept top to toe and it never caused any problems. There was no running water. All water had to be drawn from a well in the garden. Toilet facilities comprised a shed at the bottom of the garden that housed a bucket under a wooden seat. The bucket had to be emptied by a tanker under similar arrangements as to those described for Charsfield. On one occasion my younger brother David & I were playing in the garden when he teased me and I started to chase him. He ran straight into this pit, sinking to his armpits. Without thinking I followed to try to pull him out and suffered the same fate. Mum managed to get us out. What a sight! And what a state Mum was in. Imagine having to cope with such a situation with no ready hot water and no bath or washing machine.

Water had to be drawn from the well as I mentioned, and bucket by bucket it had to be tipped into a "copper", a big metal tub built into a brick construction with a big cavity underneath to accommodate wood for a fire. When the water was hot enough it had to be ladled out into a tin bath set in the middle of the kitchen floor. I leave the rest to your imagination. Incidentally, all downstairs floors were made of red quarry tiles and Mum made all the rag rugs that covered some of them.

Lack of running water was not the only problem. There was no gas in the village and electricity was as far away as Mars. Heating was by a coal or wood fire in the living room only. There were small fireplaces in the bedrooms but only in cases of sickness could the expense of an extra fire be justified.

Lighting and cooking were dependent on candles and oil, We had one oil (paraffin) lamp which served the living room, candles sufficed elsewhere. Mum had a "Valor Perfection"

stove which was a well-known make of oven in those days. It comprised a row of three oil lamps built into a metal stand, and it had a tin box on top that served as the oven. To boil a kettle on this took ages and you can imagine something of the problems when it came to baking bread etc, or cooking a joint. Dad would not eat bought bread or pastries, and Mum always sent him off with a good supply of "home cooked" after his weekly home visits.

Washing day involved the process described earlier of filling up the copper to heat the water. The difference was that soap was added to the water in the copper and the clothes were washed in it. Drying involved putting clothes through the "mangle"; big wooden rollers turned by a big wheel to which was attached a handle. We youngsters were recruited to turn the handle while Mum steered the clothes through the rollers. You hung clothes out to dry if possible; otherwise they were draped over a clotheshorse and placed in front of the fire. To iron clothes we had "Flat, Irons" which were placed on the fire until hot enough. You tested by lifting the iron off the fire wetting your finger and dabbing it on the iron. If it sizzled it was OK if not you put it back. No washing machine in those days, no spin-driers or tumble-driers, and no thermostatic electric irons. Incidentally, to ensure that you did not mark the clothing being ironed you rubbed the iron on the floor rug first hence the rugs were frequently replaced.

It was while we were at Tunstall, "Rose Cottage" was our home, that dad splashed out and bought three bicycles. One for Mum, and one for each of my two older sisters. The idea was that the two girls could cycle to school about five miles. My school was nearer, about 11/2- 2 miles, so I could walk. The bicycles cost £1. 19s.6d each. In today's currency One pound and Ninety-Seven pence.

It was at Tunstall that I first "fell in love". I was about eleven years of age and in the scouts. My scout mistress was Miss Florence Smith, I've no idea how old she was but I remember I was crazy about her. The scouts went on a trip to London, and we were keen to see the sights, St. Paul's, House of Commons, Madam Tussauds, and then to a cinema, something which did not exist in the country. I remember I clung to her and at that time I didn't care what happened in the world. When we moved from Tunstall to Aylesham I forgot all about her and I suppose she forgot all about me. We moved to Aylesham in Kent in January 1928, If I remember right, it was 13th Jan 1928. It came about like this:

A Welsh coal Magnate, by the name of Glyn Vivian lost his sight as the result of some disease. While in hospital he came in touch with a Christian and gave his heart to the Lord. Not only did he give his heart but he also gave the millions he had made out of the coalfields. He testified that God had taken from him his physical sight but had given him his new spiritual sight. As a consequence he set up and financed a chain of missions throughout the world wherever mining was taking place. He also financed welfare facilities for miners all over the world.

One of these missions was to be opened in Aylesham Kent, which was a fairly new coalfield, and they wanted someone to pioneer the work. There were also coalfields at Betteshanger, Chislett, Tilmanstone, where new communities were being developed. Two of the Glyn Vivian committee, a Solicitor, (Mr. Barker) and Lord Radstock approached dad and asked him to consider taking on this commitment.

After some thought and prayer he agreed, and Mum, although very reluctant to leave Suffolk, felt that if this was God's will she had no alternative but to go along with him.

So, in January 1928 we packed up and made the move. The family and some of the packages were transported in a small bus. Dad & I traveled on his Norton motorcycle. I remember that periodically we had to stop to pump oil by hand through to the engine. I also remember the exciting experience of pushing the machine along the road to start it, and then as soon as the engine fired dad jumped on & I had to be quick and sprint the

next few yards before I could jump on. If you stopped in traffic the engine automatically stopped.

We arrived in Aylesham and had been allocated one of the mining company houses, 106 Kings Road. The whole village was one colossal building site, a mass of mud and bricks. There was no church, or suitable building, not even a site allocated and the only place of recreation or relaxation was the Greyhound Pub. Few houses were occupied and roads were still unmade. Families were still arriving from all over Britain, Scots, Welsh, Geordies, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Notts. You name it someone came from there. It was, of course, just following the industrial strife of the early/mid twenty's.

It was pitiful to see families arriving having tramped from Scotland, from North East, from Wales etc. with the women pushing all their worldly belongings on a perambulator, maybe two if they had enough goods and some older children to help with the pushing. Very often father had left several days earlier to get down and stake his claim to a job. Allocation of a house depended upon having a job. They slept anywhere, hedgerows, barns, wagons, railway sidings; anywhere could be tolerated on this new road to Utopia.

The houses were among the most modern of the day. Flush toilets, Hot & cold running water, separate coalhouse, the toilet within the building if not actually in the house. Electric light and gas cooking were standard equipment, and to most it must have been Utopia indeed. There was a modern school in its own grounds. Modern, that is, in the fact that it was newly built. It was in fact a wooden structure erected on "stilts", brick piers that would be easily demolished when it was time to rebuild or replace the school. "Tortoise" coke stoves heated the schoolrooms, one in the middle of each classroom. If your seat was near the stove in winter you were lucky, if not you froze, but no one ever thought of closing the school, you just wrapped up and put up with it. No time for "softies" in those days. Back to the Mission. As always, when dad had an idea and incentive he lost no time in getting on with the Job. I mentioned earlier that there was no place to worship and no suitable building. But he would not be deterred. He approached the builder and got permission to use the workmen's hut cum store in the evenings and at week-ends. In us he had a ready-made army of cleaners, and on the evenings he wanted to use the building we were assembled with brooms, buckets etc, to clean up and make ready. The same thing applied at the weekends. Initially we opened for children on Tuesday evenings, for a social evening on Saturday, and for Sunday School and two services on a Sunday. He bought folding chairs that could be easily removed and stored.

His first priority was to get to know the people, and he vowed that every household in the village would personally know him. He maintained this purpose to the end and despite the growing community, eventually one thousand houses, when he left Aylesham 20 years later he could claim honestly that he was known in every home in the village.

There was obviously no ready-made congregation, so he set out to "evangelise". His method was to take his concertina and a hymnbook or two, and accompanied by my older sisters & myself to form a choir, he would stand outside the Greyhound Pub Friday night and Saturday night and conduct an open-air service. He never compromised in his message, and never faltered despite the abuse and opposition.

Meanwhile, to capture the children, he obtained a "Magic Lantern" and located a library of slides that were produced and published by the 'News Chronicle' of that day. The slides were a mixture of cartoons and Bible stories, there was a charge of one-penny entrance and if the children were well behaved they got a sweet known as a Gob stopper on leaving. These do's were always packed to capacity.

Saturdays were for all ages, but mainly adults, and the programme consisted of songs, recitations, and sometimes small plays. Not much, but in those days that's all there was, and it was from this that greater things grew.

On his door-to-door visitation dad discovered that there were a few brass bandsmen, some from town bands, some from disbanded colliery bands. It was not long before he got two or three of these bandsmen together and was able to lay the foundation for a brass band. Their music however was not the crucial factor, dad insisted that they be practicing Christians, and sometimes the standards he required were an obstacle. There were two families who were of great support, one from the Church Army and one from the Salvation Army. It was not long before he had started a learners class, and we had to practice in the workmen's hut when it was available. Within about fifteen months a site had been allocated and a mission hall built, complete with "modern" central heating. By the time of the Official Opening of the Mission, which I believe was about March 1929, there were enough semi proficient learners to form a band that could play simple marches and hymn tunes. By the first anniversary in March 1930 the band was in a motley array of uniform. At least the tunics and caps matched even if they were not a perfect fit.

Within four years the band had grown and developed to a level where we competed in several contests, winning various local championships at Tunbridge Wells and Margate. Our greatest prize was the Junior Championship at the Crystal Palace, on the last occasion of a contest being held there.

It was shortly after this contest that the Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire.

Shortly after this dad ventured to open up another branch of the mission at Elvington village adjacent to Tilmanstone colliery. It was about 10 miles from Aylesham and he commuted between the two by cycle, the old Norton motorcycle having given up the ghost. He later opened up another branch at Deal near Betteshanger colliery and for some time, two or three years, kept the three units active and effective. He even gathered a collection of lads together at Deal and taught another band.

Eventually he was able to purchase a small van, fitted it out with a tannoy system and used it as a one man evangelisation unit to tour the collieries and hold Pit Head services as the men gathered on Fridays to collect their pay.

There are families scattered all over the world who bear witness to conversion as a result of these meetings. Some have gone forth as missionaries to South America, Africa, India, and some have gone into ministry in the home country. When I left Aylesham at the outbreak of war you could expect a congregation at the mission in the order of 80-100 in the morning and 150-200 in the evening. There was not a home where dad was not known and if there was a problem the cry was usually "send for Mr. Carter" or more often it was just "Pop-Carter". If there was a tragedy of any sort, often the case with colliery accidents, he was the first they turned to.

Poverty was stark in those days, but rarely did you hear people grumble. Many is the time that dad would come home from visiting a miners home where the breadwinner was sick or injured, or in some cases killed in an accident, leaving the family with no food or clothes etc. Mum would usually have a pot of stew or similar on the stove but it was often diverted from our table to meet the need of a family in difficult circumstances. Many is the time I have had to clean dad's gardening, boots to take to a family where the man could not work because his boots were past it.

As a family we were not well off, probably not as well off as the best paid miners or farm workers of the day, but we never thought in terms of poverty. Mum and Dad were committed to their work for the Kingdom, and material things did not count for much. One example of the general situation would be Sunday breakfast. On Sunday morning dad always had a boiled egg for breakfast. He would neatly slice the top off and one of us children would receive this as our turn came round. This was always considered a treat. (Later on we used to breed our own chickens and eggs were more plentiful) It

should be emphasised that Mum was as much involved in the community as Dad was, always available to comfort sick, bereaved, or otherwise sorrowing villagers.

Dad was a very practical man, and when he bought me my first bicycle he insisted that I dismantle it and rebuild it before I took it on to the road. When I was sixteen and old enough to have a driving licence he bought me a second hand B.S.A. 250cc motorcycle and likewise I had to dismantle and rebuild it before I was allowed to ride it.

Radio (or wireless as it was known in those days) was just progressing from the cat's whisker stage to valves and condensers. Dad decided that it would be a good idea to make our own. There was a magazine "Practical Wireless" published at the time and one of the contributors was a wireless 'buff' named Peter Scott. He produced a blue print, which was available for the princely sum of two shillings and sixpence. In addition to the print, the various components were listed and these could be bought piece-meal as you could afford them. We eventually acquired all the parts and built the set, soldering circuit by circuit until it was ready for trial.

In those days you had to have a long aerial outside, and required a pole at least 25ft. high to which the aerial wire was attached. It had to be copper wire, and was attached to a porcelain insulator at each end. You were advised to have the aerial sloping down as steeply as possible as at that time it was thought that the "waves" slid down the wire, and the steeper the slope the stronger would be the "waves". There had also to be another wire that "took the waves back to earth" and this had to be attached to a copper tube driven into the ground. The set was powered by a dry battery (120 volts) accompanied by a "low tension" battery of about 2.5volts. This was a wet battery and had to be re-charged every week. ,

Ours was the first radio in the village and we often had a housefull crowding round two pairs of earphones trying to share in the programme.

Mining wages were low, they were paid by the shift with a subsidy if they worked a full six days. If they were off work for only one day, no matter what the reason, they lost not only that day's pay but the whole weeks' subsidy as well. The payment system was via a "ButtyMan". He was a kind of gang leader and he collected the wages for the whole gang and decided who got what according to their contribution to any productivity bonus that had been earned. If you were not in the habit of standing the ButtyMan a pint of beer in the pub you could lose out on your bonus. There was much corruption in the Miners Union but this is too intimate and detailed to enter into here. I have referred to the stark poverty, and if you fell into the poverty trap, (not estimated on a national level, but very much personal) you could apply for Public Assistance. This became essential in many cases because unemployment benefit ceased after six weeks. You then applied for Public Assistance and eventually a visitor would arrive to assess your needs.

No matter how many there were in the family it was considered that only the parents needed a bed or a chair to sit on, unless of course there were elderly or infirm relatives living with you. Consequently, if you had more than two chairs and a table, and if you had more than one bed you were expected to sell the surplus before you qualified to receive Assistance.

You could in any case only receive it for a- limited period and then you were referred to Parish Relief, a panel made up of local parish people who were usually farmers or property owners.

I have written a fair bit about dad and the mission. I turn now to situations that affected me more personally.

When the mission hall was built a manse was built adjacent to it. This manse was built across the only bit of road that existed in the village, and that road formed the basis of our front garden. Being the oldest son it was probably taken for granted that I had some muscle available. Where that idea came from I have no indication whatever, but it was appointed to me to dig up this road, transport all the stones away, and refill the space with soil. My youngest brother Godfrey, 5 years old, with his tiny wheelbarrow made up the labour force. Across the road and over a field was an old disused railway siding and for weeks, probably months, I do not know, we wheeled barrow loads of stone down to this siding, and found loads of soil from areas where building was going on to eventually produce a garden. Mum took a special delight in cultivating roses and some of her blooms had to be seen to be believed.

We had not been in the manse long (May 1929) when tragedy struck. My brother David been to the Tuesday evening Christian Endeavour meeting, and dad was standing at our gate talking to the C. E. secretary. Some of the children were playing around and a lad snatched David's cap and ran off across the road. David naturally ran after him right into the path of a local delivery van. He was knocked unconscious and brought into the house and put to bed, never to leave it again. He died from extreme brain damage & I doubt whether Mum ever really got over it. For the whole family it was terribly traumatic but for Mum it was unbelievable. She already had two other children, Marjorie and Godfrey in bed with measles or chicken pox, and I was unable to walk owing to a leg injury from a cycle accident. It was the only time I have ever heard Mum cast any doubt on her faith or say anything that could be construed as a complaint.

Incidentally, I could not walk for several weeks, but I did not escape open-air duties with the band, I played the cornet in those days and dad used to carry me on his back to the open-air service and prop me up against a lamppost so that I could play my part.

There were some very traumatic experiences. At school I was bullied mercilessly, simply because I was "the parson's son". Generally miners saw parsons' as parasites, and despite dad's input into their lives, and despite the respect he had won, his son was a target for venom and spite.

Yet although I obviously hated these experiences I really enjoyed my school days, especially when I became part of the drama team and the cricket team.

Unfortunately?? I was not so successful academically. I was always considered by the teaching staff to be one of the bright ones, and through normal school exams always top of the class. This did not add to my popularity with the others, but when it came to sitting my scholarship exams (11+ for entry into Grammar school) I failed completely. So, as soon as I could I left school. My parents could not afford to finance my further education. So I had to find a job.

I had no desire to work down the mine, and the alternatives were farming the railways or the Foundry. I obtained an apprenticeship in the latter at Dover Engineering works and commenced work on January 1st. 1931. I literally started at the bottom. My first job was to take a broom a shovel and a wheelbarrow to sweep up horse droppings from the streets. This had to be brought back to be dried off then mixed with sand to make a loam that would bind together to make cores for castings,

Dover was about 12 miles away and a railway season ticket cost 10/- (ten shillings) per week. My apprentice pay was ten shillings and sixpence per week (fifty two and one half pence in today's currency) for which I worked 50 hours per week. I could not afford the fare by rail so had to cycle. It was no fun getting up at about 5am every day to get to work and if you were one second late you lost half an hours pay.

After the first year, when I had progressed from cores to actually moulding we were allowed to do extra hours and earn overtime, but even then you were lucky to make £1

in a week and there was the official deduction of 10 pence per week for unemployment insurance and sickness insurance. During the summer the weather was so hot that it was impossible to work normal hours with the furnaces going, so we used to start work at 5am, which meant I had to leave home at 4am. It was hard work, but the hardest part was when during bank holiday times we had to climb into the furnaces to strip them of their brick linings and reline them with new bricks. The most risky part was the stoking of the furnaces, loading a blazing furnace with scrap metal, and the physical carrying of ladles of molten metal from furnace to the mould and then pouring it into the small aperture without pouring it over your feet.

About 1932 there were ominous rumblings in the industrial world and Germany & Japan were flooding the world with cheap goods. It has to be said that much of this stuff was of inferior quality, and much was just a copy of our own products.

The spectre of the unemployment of the twenties raised its head again and in 1934 the foundry closed and we were all laid off. As I was under 18 years and living at home with my parents I was not eligible for unemployment benefit. It was considered my parents responsibility to cater for me. So I got no "dole" and had to resort to any kind of work I could find.

It was not easy, but I did find occasional jobs to do. I would go round building sites and occasionally found a day's work mixing cement or carrying bricks where perhaps a man was off work sick. A day on the farm putting up a fence, or any odd job I could find. They were not many and eventually I "got on my bike" and cycled all over the country. The story was repeated again and again, Factories closed, no vacancies, it was like a broken record.

Eventually I got to Birmingham, Smethwick to be precise, and obtained a job in my trade at Avery's Scale manufacturers. Here I started in March 1935 making the scale platforms for industrial weighing machines. It was not to last. In a few months they began to shed staff, and on a last in first out basis I had to go, Meanwhile I had bought a new bicycle costing me Two pounds twelve shillings and sixpence, £2 65p in today's currency. I had linked up with the Salvation Army and played the trombone in Birmingham Citadel band under bandmaster Bertie Burford. I got lodgings with the Deputy B/M Sydney Bennett, and he and his wife gave me wonderful support through very difficult times.

I got on my bike again searching for any job that would pay for my accommodation and obtained the promise of a job at Austin Motor Works, Longbridge, but I could not find suitable lodgings and had to let it go. I had interviews for trainee manager at Woolworths, Fifty shilling Tailors, and various others, but without much success. Eventually I obtained work at Moss Gears, Erdington where they manufactured gear boxes for the motor trade. My pay was £1.5s per week from which was deducted my 10 pence insurance. I then had to pay £1 for my board and lodgings and 2 shillings and sixpence for the H.P. on my bike. This left me with one shilling and eightpence, approximately 9p to cover any other needs that may arise.

By Easter 1936 I could no longer survive at that level, and, learning that Dover Engineering Works was re-opening, I returned south and got employment there again.

Whilst at Birmingham, and involved with the Salvation Army I felt that I should apply to S.A. for training and full time service. I was turned down by the Divisional Y.P.S. Adjutant Will Cooper, his reason being that I had a crooked smile which he put down to me having had Bells Palsy. He accused me of lying when I denied that I had any such thing. However this conviction of a calling for full time service did not leave me, and while working at Dover Engineering Works I applied to Emmanuel Bible College at Birkenhead. I was accepted and entered the college in January 1937-1938. It was here

I met Edith Buckeridge, and despite some very brutal interviews and condemnation the relationship continued. We were married in May 1940.

Having left college in December 1938 I again found difficulty in obtaining employment. It been my intention to apply for training for overseas service, but because of Hitler's actions the government put a ban on all such projects. So, I applied direct to the Commissioner in charge of the S.A. Men's Social Work; and was appointed as Sergeant Major to the Hostel at Jamaica Row, Birmingham, where I remained until instructed by the Ministry of Labour to report for work at the Naval Dockyard, Sheerness. I started work there in November 1939 and remained there for the duration of the war. Judith and David were both born while we were at Sheerness.

While I was working and living at Sheerness we again linked up with the Salvation Army. It was only a small Corps worshipping in a corrugated iron building in the centre of the town. There was a Songster Brigade of about fifteen, and a band of about ten. I was soon recruited to play the euphonium and to take over the responsibility of the songster brigade. There were a number of young people in their early teens and Edith took on the responsibility of Corps Cadet Guardian. Later on, with the B.M. being away because of the war I found myself responsible for both band and songsters.

During the War years we often visited German P.O.W. camps with the band etc. and these were soul-searching experiences. Some of the POW's were no older that 16-18 years, had no idea what the war was about, but strangely still felt that there was a kind of holy crusade about it.

Sheerness was a strategic base during the war with the Naval Barracks & Dockyard, the Royal Marine Barracks, and a couple of miles up the road was Eastchurch R.A.F. Fighter base. Consequently we had quite a lot of servicemen and women in the area, and many linked up with the S.A. and were very useful in the local Corps. We had open house for any service men or women and left a door key hanging on a piece of string behind the front door and accessible through the letter box. Many times I came home from work to find the living room full of service lads and lasses, somebody usually playing the piano, and a good old sing song going on. It was remarkable that during a time of rationing and queues we never had to queue for anything and even with the extra entertaining of the forces we never went short of anything.

At least three of the couples that met in our home eventually married and one couple became S.A. Officers; we met again in the training college.

It was a wartime regulation that in addition to your daily employment you also had to take on some voluntary service, i.e. Air Raid Warden, Home Guard (dad's army) fire fighters or Police. I was in the Special Constabulary for the duration.

On one occasion, August Bank Holiday Sunday 1943 we were called out to search for two escaped German POWs They had escaped from Canadian Forces custody and stolen a Jeep, driven it from somewhere in Hampshire until it ran out of fuel, then pinched another one and they were suspected of being on the Isle of Sheppey. My Inspector, Bill Williams, and myself were allocated to the muddy cliffs and woodland between Minster & Leysdown. It was pouring with rain and we were plastered with mud from scrambling up & down the cliffs. Eventually we came across two bedraggled fellows hiding in the woods top of the cliffs. Bill called out "Halt. You German?" They both shot their arms up and shouted "Yah. No shoot". They came quietly and we had no further trouble.

During the latter part of the war Germany resorted to "doodle bugs", bombs that were driven by petrol engines scheduled to travel so far, then cut out and fall to earth. They were officially the V1 bombs. We could often hear them before we saw them travelling through the air with their exhaust flames trailing behind them. We often laid in bed watching them come up the river estuary on their way to London. We learned

eventually that it was only when the engine ran out of fuel and cut out that there was any danger and rarely did they fall in our vicinity.

One of the most remarkable experiences was the arrival of the men escaping from the Dunkirk catastrophe. All the little boats, many designed to take a dozen or so trippers were commandeered to rescue men from the Dunkirk beaches, Many of these boats had so many men aboard they literally had to hold each other "en masse" to avoid falling overboard. They were landed on the beaches adjacent to the dockyard, some literally in shirt and underpants, wounds bleeding and some not even bandaged. Yet there was never a murmur; they were joking about their journey and when they would go back again. It was a miracle unknown for the sea to be so calm and it never happened again.

Eventually we came to the conclusion that we had a calling to work with S.A. either in Social Work or overseas. We applied and were accepted to enter the S.A. College in 1946.

Because I was in a "reserved occupation" I had to obtain release from the Ministry of Labour. I went to see the manager of the local Labour Exchange and put my case to him. He was totally unsympathetic, even to the point of being insulting. I came away very despondent, but we talked it over and decided to Pray about it. I felt that I had to follow up prayer with action and wrote to the Minister of Labour at Whitehall. I had only a brief communication in reply inviting me to go and see the new manager at the local exchange. Apparently the original man had been moved. The second manager was both sympathetic and helpful and we were soon on our way to Denmark Hill Training College.

After training we were posted to Walsall, to assist the managers of a Hostel and Public Restaurant. After three months we were transferred to Hull, which was a much larger Hostel accommodating 450 men, plus a much larger "Civic Restaurant". Other appointments which followed were Cambridge, Plymouth, which involved Prison Chaplain work at Dartmoor, Nottingham, Coventry and Liverpool, which also involved prison chaplains work.

I had been unwell for some time without successful diagnosis, and in 1962 I was advised by the medics to seek less stressful employment. Thus it was that I entered Local Government social work as a Child Care Officer on 1st Jan. 1963

My next move was to Turners Court, a Farm and Industrial School for maladjusted and delinquent boys, and from there to Newcastle University to gain my Child Care qualification In 1966-67. From there to Norfolk County Council, and then on to West Riding County Council 1972, parts of which joined with Leeds, and I was Divisional Social Services Officer until I retired, in November 1981.

Significant changes (sociological) that spring to mind

Development of roads from virtual dirt tracks where punctures were a daily norm and footpaths non-existent.

Progression from steam to oil for propelling machinery, vehicles etc. e.g. steam wagons replaced horses for heavy haulage purposes, and for many farming purposes. Instead of horses drawing ploughs there would be two steam tractors, one at either side of a field with hawsers attached to them on great pulleys. The hawsers would be attached to a plough which would be drawn by them back and forth across the field. Later this was the operation for reaping also.

Progression from oil lighting to gas and then to electricity.

The "lamplighter" would walk around his district at dusk and light each lamp individually from a long pole. In the morning he would walk round and extinguish the lamps.

Electricity in the early days 1920's 1930's was very unreliable. The supply was DC and the system allowed for very limited storage of supply. So, if any weakness developed the whole area would be without, and restoration was a major exercise. You could count on failure at least one night in two.

Railway lines were very susceptible to buckling in the heat, and Sunday was usually a day when the line gangs were out straightening the main lines. In the summer we spent many hours just watching the straightening.

In most industrial areas there was a "knocker up" for those who had to go to work on the early shift. This was usually a man who was unable to do physical work for some reason. He would be paid so much per household as he went round usually knocking on a bedroom window with a long staff.

Local transport buses and most vehicles were fitted with solid tyres and wooden lath seats. Trams were operated by electricity supplied either by overhead wires or a live rail in the middle of the road. These were very noisy and uncomfortable but very speedy for the day.

Postal services were far superior to what we have today. For instance, when I was working in Birmingham mid 1930's I could post a letter in New Street Post Office at 3am and it would reach my parents at Aylesham, Kent, by lunchtime the same day. There were also at least four deliveries a day except for Saturday and Sunday when there were two deliveries. Depending on whether it was country or town there would be anything from four to eight collections daily. 1 penny for a postcard, 1 ½ for a letter.

One of the greatest problems for transport (road) was the danger of your engine boiling up on a long steep hill. R.A.C. and A.A. supplied strategically placed water tanks to enable you to top up if necessary.

I mentioned punctures earlier. Anyone with a bit of initiative who could find a suitable spot to place a shed by the roadside could make a reasonable living by setting himself up with patches and solution and a "PUNCTURE REPAIR" notice at the roadside.

I often took my inner tube out and stuffed the tyre with grass to get me home.

We often used a candle in a jam jar hung on the handlebars if we got caught out without a light.

It is interesting today to hear cries from the motoring organisations for tax to be taken off the vehicle and to be put on petrol so that he who uses most will pay most.

What they fail to remember is that in 1946 the government did just that. Prior to 1946 a vehicle was taxed on its engine size (horse power) and petrol was about one shilling to one and three pence a gallon. About £200,000 was in the road fund kitty, accumulation of taxes paid by motorists during the war. The government of the day took that money, abolished the road fund as such and used the money to finance the National Health and Social Security budgets. They then put a "nominal" registration fee on every vehicle regardless of size and set that fee at £5. The price of fuel was immediately trebled to something like three shillings and nine pence, and the stated policy was to tax the fuel and not the vehicle. That "registration fee" has multiplied over the years, as also has the price of fuel. Now they want to do it again.

Holiday with Pay this was an unknown experience prewar. There were some of the larger employers who operated a holiday scheme for employees who had been with them for a long period (usually 10 years). The employee paid a sum out of his weekly wage, and, if he survived the year without time off for sickness or other reason, the

employer would add 50% to the total accrued and the employee could take two weeks holiday. It had to be taken at a fixed period often known as "laikes week" or "wakes week".

Sunday School outings were usually to the nearest seaside resort or to a convenient park if there was one. We usually travelled by Charabanc - a single decker bus with solid tyres and a canvas roof which could be turned back if it was a suitable day. We often had to stop after about 10 miles to allow the engine to cool down and replenish the water.

I recall one holiday in Suffolk when we travelled by a farmers hay wain towed by a steam traction engine. It was great fun but our only seats were the wooden forms taken from the Sunday school room.

I may not have mentioned it but almost anything would be obtainable from door to door salesmen, usually with a bicycle; herrings, three for a penny straight from the nearest coastal area; oranges, bananas, cabbage etc.; Onions: the sellers from Brittany usually strings of onions hanging from their handlebars. Buttons, cotton, all kinds of haberdashery from a box attached to the rear of the bicycle.

The chimney sweep was a regular visitor, and if you didn't have your chimney swept regularly you were in real trouble if it caught fire.

We had regular road sweepers, known as "length men". They each had a certain length of road to sweep and keep clean. No litter left around in those days.

Referring back to holidays; apart from Sunday school outings I never had a holiday until, as a Salvation Army Officer I had three weeks official leave. The first occasion was 1947. Prior to that any holiday was without pay and, unless you had been employed long term it was just not affordable.

"SIGNIFICANT CHANGES" is a summary of salient social and industrial experiences common to most people in the 1920/30's.

The war changed society and circumstances dramatically, but this is not the time to detail or itemise the individual effects upon my life. Neither is it appropriate here to develop the picture of Salvation Army and social work experiences.

The purpose in recording the earlier experiences is to provide for my grandchildren a picture of life as it was in the days of their forbears.

Much history has been handed down by word of mouth or by personal record. I should have kept a detailed diary, but I hope this effort will be of interest to the young folk.

Richard Robinson Carter
June 1998