



When my grandfather, Matthew Brown retired he built two joined houses in Greengairs, a coalmining village in Lanarkshire in the Southern part of Scotland.

He went to live with my granny in the one house, which was called “Burnhouse “ and the other house



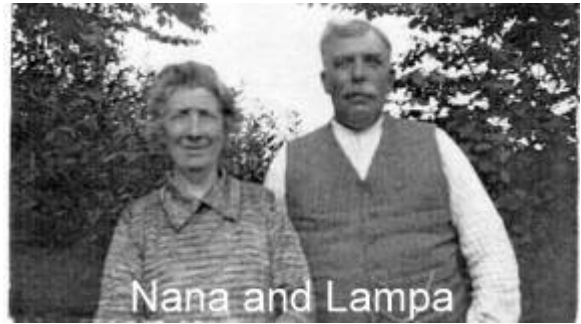
“Burnfoot” was given over to my parents Mamie and Jack Wilson.

The house was of granite stone and very solid with thick walls and a large coal stove in what was referred to as the kitchen. To get to the kitchen you had to go through a porch and a scullery with doors between each one. Scotland can be very very cold indeed in the winter. The two houses were identical in design. The only other rooms were the room used for visitors and entertaining always spoken of as “ben the room” and a small separate bedroom where my Aunt Isa (Isabelle) who was a nurse and single, came when not on duty.

The word ‘burn ‘ in Scotland means a creek or stream and appears frequently in names of places. At the back of the land the house was built on, was just such a burn and from as far back as I can remember it was both attractive and dangerous. It was easy to go over the burn using two thick, heavy planks laid solidly across from the time they moved in. As a little girl I became quite used to it and would run backwards and forwards without any fear at all but later when visiting as a school child always took a day to get used to it again. It was really quite dangerous and Aunt Isa in her nineties fell in the burn and lay there for several hours before her calls were heard. The access was through a wooden gate kept shut when I was very small, but the burn was a great attraction

and I would crawl down to the edge of the water and play in the yellow clay that made the banks, which I now know as terracotta.

It was wonderful stuff to me and a source of complaint to my mother and Nana who were not impressed at what the clay did to little pairs of white lace edged knickers. These knickers got me into trouble on more than one occasion.



In those days they were of soft cotton, made by your mother and the lace was handmade. Pulling the velvet curtains 'ben the room' one evening my mother saw the miners tramping down 'the brae' with their black faces and coal covered clothes to their homes and baths. They were happy fellows and would give a nod and a smile to a little girl fascinated by their appearance. However my mother was puzzled by the nods of the head and laughter they were giving and came to the outside and along the path and found the cause of the amusement was me standing in the gateway raising a little skirt to display the new knickers saying "mine's got lace on" My mother repeated this story for years whenever the tales of children and what they get up to was raised. I never lived it down. She was sharp my mother and nipped a risqué career in the bud.

I surprise myself sometimes that I can remember so many incidents that occurred while in that house in those early years. I remember quite well, the Airedale, Hector who was kept in the back yard. Hector and I got on very well together, I suspect he thought I was his because I could do almost anything with him and would go into his kennel while he was in it, even when he was chained up. I enjoyed doing this and was fascinated by the little window in the back of the kennel. I have no idea why it was there or how it was put there but the kennel was huge certainly by my standards and the incident I remember occurred when sitting in the back of the kennel (must have been a very doggy place) my mother called for me to come out for some reason. I remember well saying "no" to that and her remonstrance's to "come out of there". When she tried to pull me from the kennel Hector bared his teeth and gave a bit of a growl so Mum backed off while I happily sat in the back of the kennel and refused to move from behind my bodyguard. At this point she called my Nana and said, "the dog won't let me get her out". Nana went back into her house and returned with scraps of meat, which distracted Hector and I was hauled off. This memory, was reinforced when my mother was told years later that I remembered the incident.

The ground on the other side of the burn at the back of the yard, was part of a farm which was used by both families as the place where the clothes lines were and it gave access to endless moors. For years until I left for South Africa I visited my Nana at Burnhouse and would walk for miles over the 'back field' as we called it. Both my mother and Nana would scavenge on these walks

picking up wood for the fires, which burned endlessly all year round in the kitchen coal stove also lumps of coal found on the ground. Coal was cheap, and years later was still only sixpence a bag, a large bag at that but those coal fires were never really allowed to go out, just damped down at night with dross that kept them alive till the morning when a few sticks thrown on would set them off again.

The field though was a place for me to play, not just then but on all the very many holidays I went to Scotland and spent with my aunt and grandparents. There were beds of rushes to make pretend houses, walks by the burns, trees to climb, stone bridges to go through, blaeberrys to pick and rowan berries on the bushes. The lovely bell heather flowers, which are prettier than the common heather and of course I met and made friends with girls my own age to play with over the years.



Jean Ramsey was the daughter of a miner and Jean Ingles the niece of the local sweet shop owner. Jean Ramsey's older sister Lizzie became a friend until the day I visited Scotland for the last time. A happy plump jolly girl my mother paid her to look after me while she was busy baking and cooking. She was in her early teens when I was a toddler and I loved her. She grew up got married and had three children before I left for overseas. I had no letters though, I suspect her few years at the local school gave her no real ability for the written word.

All in all for me Scotland was a lovely country and the years as a toddler with five adults to relate to, gave me a great love for both the place and the people. Nana, obvious name for a granny in Scotland and Lampa my name for my grandfather a small child's version of Grandpa, which stuck till he died when I was about eleven. The last message from him was a letter to my mother saying how pleased he was I had got the scholarship for the county school. Living next door in Greengairs I was as much in their house as my own and remember well dragging a broken child's chair along the courtyard and up the steps into the scullery saying "Lampa fix it", I was not much more than two. He made little crowns out of the rushes and showed me how to plait them, helped me make clay models and walked me up to the sweetie shop for "a wee blether" with some of the old folk who might be there. The other activity my Lampa and I shared was his love of music or rather of songs. He had an ancient gramophone of the kind you would never see now that was wound up with a handle and the records pre vinyl had one song on each side.

He had a good collection, many of them given as presents and these he loved and we would play them together with Lampa singing the words and even getting up and doing a bit of a skip to the music. Once even getting Nana by the

waist and trying to give her a twirl. “ Och away with ye “ she said with a bit of giggling. I remember the songs well and sang some of those same songs to my babies when they were small. There are too many stories to tell them all. I was his ‘wee lassie’ and he was my ‘Lampa’.

There was a Church in the village and every Sunday morning Nana and Aunt Isa would go to the morning service. When I was older they would take me so that I would hear the story the minister told to the smaller children. Nana was worried that in the early part of the service I might make a noise and disturb other members of the congregation. For this reason she always carried a small bag of the mint imperials so loved by old ladies and would pop one of these in my mouth the minute she thought I was restless. For years afterwards, in our family mint imperials were referred to as ‘church sweets’.

Life was I think pretty uneventful from my point of view and the only thing I remember with any remorse was the day I had a bath and upset my mother very much. There was no bath in either of the houses and like everywhere else in those days we bathed in front of the fire in a large galvanised bath, which was dragged in and filled with hot water from the kettles on the coal range. On this particular day, I was lifted out and left wrapped in a towel while Mum went away to fetch something from the kitchen. In her absence I did what she usually did and threw all the clothes she had taken off me into the bath water. The big mistake was the clothes were the clean ones she had laid ready to put on me. I got a smack for that! That is the only time I remember being in any kind of trouble. I fell asleep crying and woke up being presented with a bag of sweets. Such is life!

The big event though I did not realise it at the time was when my sister was born. I was woken one morning and carried by my father from the big bed where I slept and told to look in a drawer, which had been taken from the big scotch chest and was lying on the floor. There was this baby, “look at the baby, this is your sister” says Dad. I remember very clearly looking at this tiny very new baby and saying “why did you put it in the drawer?” I was three and a half and it was two weeks before Christmas but I remember very little of what we did after that. The baby was named Jaqueline Kaye Wilson but I called her “Eline” getting the last part of the name as kids do and that is the name I still know her by. She however likes to be called Jacky. Eline, was delivered by Nurse Lamb who also brought me into the world, with Aunt Isa having a great deal to say about their different ideas of nursing!

At about the same period I began to develop a love for the written word! Visitors who came would bring a gift for me and it often turned out to be a little book with a cardboard cover, I think they cost about a penny. The ones I got were shaped as a figure of some kind such as a little soldier, fairy or other such. Inside the story would tell about the figure on the cover. I loved these books eventually having a range of them and used them as dolls, standing them around the bottom of the walls and would talk to them and



recite the stories as I had heard them from the grown ups. A lady who came one day heard me doing this and said to my mother "Can she read?" "Och no" said my mother "she just learns all the words".

I never forgave her for that!

I had a doll and I do not remember it but I do remember the golliwog.

Golliwogs are not now P.C. and I have not seen one for years but I pushed Golly around in his little yellow and red suit in my little pram and was very fond of him.

Later I remember leaving Scotland for England. My father had lost his job as a foreign correspondent and Lampa had written to an old friend in London and found a job for him. The day we left people came to say goodbye, there were presents and parcels being passed around. I had a toy chocolate machine in which if you put a penny a small piece of chocolate would be delivered. I went round the kitchen and invited anyone who would, to put a penny in the machine. I was old enough to recognise that it was not so popular and only later found out that the little chocolates were worth about a farthing. That was a quarter of a penny. I vaguely recall some hilarity at that point.

We left Scotland and only returned for holidays, although in the case of Eline and I, there were several weeks spent with Nana and Aunt Isa when war broke out and we were made to stay in Scotland and go to school there until London had sorted out its Air Raid Precautions.

That however is another story.

BEXLEY HEATH TO SIDCUP

I remember nothing of the journey and suspect most of it was spent sleeping as from then on we would go in the sleeping carriages on that long journey to and from Scotland. The travel always excited me and I loved it. Several times the journey was made on the Flying Scot, a train which did the whole trip in 8 hours & reached a speed of 100 m.p.h. as I remember it!

When we got to England my parents found lodging with an elderly blind lady called Miss Bradley and we stayed there several weeks while we looked for a house to buy.

The house we lived in there was old and spacious, quite antique in its style. I remember it as very large with a lot of rooms and from that point of view was comfortable. However it was not the best for my parents and I suspect Mum found it difficult with two small children one a baby and a lady who was not used to having folk live with her. I remember her talking to a friend and saying something to the effect "She is so quiet Miss Bradley doesn't even know she is there", that I suppose was me perhaps getting the old lady upset and afraid she might fall over me.

The only other thing I remember that was embarrassing was that the bathroom as they called the toilet was an outside privy. Although not at all unusual at that time, I at four was still learning the ropes so to speak, of using the adult equipment for this function. My worst experience in this situation was being a good little girl and sitting quietly doing what I was supposed to and suddenly being faced with a very large lady removing a very large pair of drawers and seeing an equally large bottom descending on me. I don't remember screaming but I did voice a protest, which brought my mother at the run.

Many apologies followed on my behalf and I don't remember any recriminations but I do think the incident did not go down too well. Another memory is of playing, as all small children like to do cutting up paper into little shapes. I don't know what I wanted to do with these scraps but do recall putting them into a glass jar and admiring the different colours. Mum was busy as usual getting ready to go shopping and collecting her purse and handbag and checking the contents. "Leila! have you seen the money I put here". "No". A short discussion followed but my normal truthfulness satisfied her and so she began to look around more carefully for the pound note that was to buy the shopping that morning. Eventually she discovered in my jar of scraps the cut up pound note. Very distressed but not saying much to me we set off after she had rescued the pieces and put them together with stamp paper. There was no such thing as sticky tape in those days. A tearful Mum faced the postmaster and explained what had happened making me admit to him what I had done. He very kindly took the note and replaced it, saying "it's all right Mrs Wilson as long as we have the number of the note". He had that and wrote it down, but Mum told this warning story about leaving money in front of small children for years.

I never lived that down either.

SIDCUP

My parents started to look for a house once they were organised and I remember many trips on the bus to places where we looked at new houses for sale.

It must have been hard for them as I do not remember if they were able to take the pram for my sister and I on the bus. The pram was huge with a front seat that turned over so that a small child had a sort of sit up pushchair in front of the handle. I think they walked and pushed the pram with the two of us in it.

Under the three sections of the pram that were used for the baby was a very large space and for years my mother used this as the place for the endless shopping she had to take home. We looked at quite a few houses and most of them did not please my Mum as they were so small in comparison to the large rooms in Greengairs. The gardens were too small and the space for storing a pram was something she was adamant had to be available.

Eventually I remember us walking along what was virtually a cinder track as the road had not been made in this newly developed part of Sidcup. The road

was covered in what was called clinker, the stuff left when the gas had been extracted, as gas was the only source of power at that time connected to the houses. They bought number 72, Valliers Wood Road and there we lived until the year 1940.

As with any new property there was endless work to do and my father started to make paths round the garden, plant vegetables and my mother worked on the part facing the road to make it attractive from the street with a rock garden down the side and they both spent many hours in the garden that first summer. Dad would get up at about six every morning before work and put in about an hour or so. The weather was warmer than in Scotland and my memories are of endless sunny days at that time.

I was even persuaded to help by pulling up weeds and collecting odd bugs that were not wanted and putting them in a jar for disposal. One of the things I got a bad reputation for, was winding worms round and round my finger and then complaining because "it broke".

Dad apportioned a small area in the centre and bought two yards of sand which he enclosed with wooden sides and for the rest of our childhood and later my brother Stuart's we had a sandpit. A great deal of Mum's kitchen equipment was absconded and used to make pretend puddings and jellies and so on.

She was very patient and hardly ever said very much except when it was needed for the kitchen when there was a bit of grumbling. Many years later this experience of the sandpit made me understand how much small children need to play in a medium that is indestructible such as water or sand. Much later on it gave me a very favourable insight into what "Playcentre" was all about.

Dad also set apart a small part of the garden to be made into a lawn and in the very hot summers he put up a little tent he had used as a lad for camping in when touring on his motorbike. There was an extension on the front of this tent and we even got to sleep in it once later on but it was cold so it did not happen very often.

In July that summer I turned five and had to go to school. Mum enrolled me at Lamorbey, a school that was probably built in the mid to late nineteenth century. It was very old, red brick and old fashioned in every way. The classroom I was taken to was large and there were roughly fifty children in it all about five to six.

Mum was told to leave me and come back at the end of the day she went off crying and later complained to the neighbour that I had looked at her with "big eyes".

Several of the children who started with me cried all day, and one of them did not stop crying for two weeks. I just sat and watched what was happening. Two teachers shared the class, working together and the one whose name I still remember was called Miss Chester. I liked her very much but did not like the other. She seemed to be cross all the time and the children she taught got smacked frequently. I was sat down next to a little girl called Polly who was quite friendly and with whom I got on until the day we were all being told to

stop talking (a common instruction) and Polly suddenly shrieked out in laughter at something.

“Who did that, was it you?” to Polly who pointed at me and said “no she did”. It was the ‘other’ teacher and she took me to the side of the room and made me look at the wall saying ”Stay there”. I was petrified and stood glued where I was staring at the wall, and wondering what would happen next. For how long I don’t remember but Miss Chester came and took me back to my seat and I had learnt a lesson about trusting people. It was a wee while before I felt good about Polly again.

We started learning to write almost straight away and the first writing tools were a slate each and a slate pencil. These horrible things squeaked when you used them and as I had already had pencils at home I was not very impressed. However, we were promoted to little blackboards fairly soon and chalk to write with. Polly and I got on fairly well after that and competed on a daily basis to see who could write the most words. We spent a lot of time copying out of the book from which we also read.

I had learnt to read in a limited way at home and in no time I started to read the stories in the book ahead of the ones in the front which we had to read together chanting in unison. I got bored quickly and was adept at having my finger in the page where we were all reading and holding open the story at the back which was always more interesting.

One afternoon a week we had a class of handwork where we each got a lump of plasticine, this we were allowed to play with. I had plasticine at home too. There was one set of wooden blocks, perhaps donated to the school and everybody wanted to play with that.

With about fifty of us in the class it was never my turn.

I went to this school for several weeks but I don’t remember how long it was. In the beginning Mum would take me all the way pushing Eline in the pram but then decided I could manage it on my own. I don’t remember the distance but it might have been as much as nearly a mile. I got into trouble for being late every day although surprisingly was never punished for it. In the end they complained to Mum, and she kept asking me why I took so long. I think it was because I was so interested in the things along the road in the hedgerows, flowers and berries we used to eat and spiders and bugs to look at. Everything fascinated me so finally Mum paid a bigger girl in the next street, Ellison Road to call and go with me every day. The houses in this street were council houses rented to folk who were not so well off so it may have been a help to the girl’s family. I think she paid her sixpence a week. Her name I’ve forgotten but she was good fun and would sometimes carry me on her back and play games on the way. I got very fond of her.

Our class and the school had more children than there was space for and the local council had plans for an new school to be opened in a road called Days Lane which went from Halfway Street at the bottom of our road to the next suburb Blackfen. Blackfen became the place to which many families were moved when the London County Council had a slum clearance and demolished large areas of London, which were declared to be slums, overcrowded and

ridden with rats etc. I remember the big fuss made about it at the time but for many of those children who eventually came to Days Lane School it was the best thing that could have happened to them.

Blackfen became a really good suburb with some wonderful stalls and kerbside selling of fruit from overseas and Mum would walk all the way to Blackfen, pushing the pram and fill it up with exotic fruit like peaches, oranges, grapes and so on. Those summer days we loved to go with her and found it quite exciting.

I only had a short time at Lamorbey when those of us nearer to the new school started there and to my joy my lovely Miss Chester came as well and I was in her class.

Mum would walk to the new school with me and other mothers would meet one another on the way. This was when my mother first met Mrs Hider who was the mother of Marion. Marion and I were still writing to one another 77 years later. She died on my wedding anniversary the 11th December 2007.

She was a good friend for many years while I still lived in England and we had many happy outings together.

DAYS LANE SCHOOL

Days Lane Junior School was a very rewarding school to go to and I went there until 1936. I remember most of the teachers, as well as Miss Chester there was Miss Fleming and Miss Fuller. With the exception of Miss Fuller they were all very nice and friendly teachers but Miss Fuller was the one who was determined we would be good at what we were supposed to be learning. Spelling was one thing I was good at but even I got into trouble and got to write 50 times the name Arthur because I once wrote it with an e instead of a 'u'. We learnt the hard way. Miss Fuller ruled the class with a wooden ruler in her hand and used it. She had a very loud and carrying voice and could frequently be heard all over the school grounds to the point where even Mr West our headmaster would raise an eyebrow when he heard her.

Marion still maintains she was a good teacher but she scared me to the point where my mother came to the school and approached Mr West about her. He promptly called her into the head's office and Mum said I was calling out in my sleep, "don't hit me Miss Fuller". I was denying anything had happened but the teacher just said I was very quiet and no trouble. I heard no more and while still nervous got on in the class quite well.

I was very happy at Days Lane and joined in activities. Became a Brownie and visited the library in the school where I read books by the dozen coming home with a bagful of books.

I got a small size bicycle when I was about six and my Dad spent some backbreaking time holding me on while I learnt to balance. I was a nervous learner, but once I got the hang of it became an avid bike rider and was never without one till I left England at 22 years old.

I remember well the day my brother was born. As was often the case in those days my mother had all her babies at home. Early in the morning my father came into the bedroom and lighting the gas fire which was a fixture in the

bedroom told Eline and I we were to stay there and not come out. He brought us some porridge and a drink of weak tea and there we stayed (potty under the bed as was the norm)! For some time there were footsteps up and down the stairs with different people going into the other bedroom in the front of the house. My father came in from time to time to see if we wanted anything and brought us a few books to play with and toys for Eline who was only two. Of course later I found out it was the midwife and the very welcome Doctor Wood who came to see to my mother. Dr Wood was popular with all of us and Mum insisted on a great deal of respect being shown to him, always admonishing us "not to be rude to the doctor" (like we would)?

For us it seemed a long morning until Dad took us in to see Mum and show us the new baby. Later we were told his name was Stuart and the only time my father ever went to church when I was there was to have John Stuart christened. Auntie Isa had a great deal to say about having this event, (she and my father did not get on well).

There was an upsurge in building approximately close to Days Lane and these houses supplied children for the new school. I made many new acquaintances among these children and would visit them before going home it was wonderful to have so many to play with. I remember some of the names but not all and one who always made me welcome as her mother did also was a girl I remember as Florrie. We spent many hours playing together. I also remember the half circle of shops built not far from the school which was called The Oval and this friend lived close by. This was where we would go to spend our pocket money and even my mother would sometimes walk to these shops, which had greater appeal than Halfway Street. There was a small park nearby and we would go there with a sandwich and bottle of cheap homemade lemonade.

Then there was Madeline Durrant who sat next to me in class and of whom I was very fond indeed. She lived at Blackfen, too far to go to and when she passed the scholarship she went to Dartford County. This was some distance away but on the last day at that school we put our arms round one another and cried because we knew it would not be easy to keep seeing one another. I also had a little boyfriend called Leslie who would sit on the edge of the school steps and talk to me right through playtime. He did not pass the scholarship and got sent to the elementary school.

I never heard from him again after that.

The country round the school had orchards of apples and there was a little woodland with a stream running through it and I would go and find all sorts of interesting wild things to look at. English wild flowers like violets and primroses grew and I would take a bunch home to Mum who never complained about me coming home late from these forays into the world of nature.

The last two years were spent with the only male teacher I ever had in junior school. Mr Hartnup was young, good looking and popular with girls and boys. He had fair curly hair and the girls liked him. He had a happy camaraderie sort of a way of teaching. He stood no nonsense and the boys did

not get away with some of the nonsense they inflicted on the female teachers. We were approaching the year of the scholarship. This was when there were three examinations to determine who would be given a 'free' place at one of the County Schools. If you had parents who could not afford the fees and expenses of going to this secondary school you had to go to the school run by the education authorities called "The Elementary School". There you had to stay until fourteen years old and then you could leave and go to work or get further education at a technical school. It was extremely selective and there were three exams. The first was held at the junior school you attended and was called the Written Exam. If you passed this exam you went to an examination at the school you wished to be selected for and the school I chose to go to was called Chislehurst County School for Girls. Marion and I passed both these exams and moved on to take the Oral examination, which was really just an interview to judge for general intelligence and aptitude. If you passed all three exams you were put forward as an applicant to the County Council who awarded the scholarships.

The scholarship gave us money for the fees, uniforms, bus fares and school dinners, which were supplied by the school. My parents were very pleased when I was awarded this scholarship as it saved them quite a lot of money. There were three other girls I became very friendly with and they all lived in Valliers Wood Rd. Jean Harris whose father had died and whose mother would invite me to have tea (the evening meal) with Jean while she was at work one or two evening a week. I loved to do this as we shared a lot of interests at school and her mother made lovely puddings! Jean, Marion and I all made it to Chislehurst and when Jean was taken to live on the South coast we wrote to one another for about two years. Marjorie lived opposite, her mother died of lung cancer and then she was taken away from Sidcup. Irene Walton lived further down the street and I loved to play with her, she had a fantastic doll's house. Her father left her mother for another lady, which annoyed my mother no end and then Irene had to move away to live with her mother. Some things never change. I always hated it when I lost friends from close by.

It was a very exciting time for those of us who passed and it was largely because we were taught by the aforesaid Mr Hartnup for the last two years at Days Lane. The year before he took over the top class there were only three scholarships but the year he taught that class we got 25 scholarships to four County Schools all considered quite prestigious. That was a very happy summer holiday and the next year our education began in earnest.

CHISLEHURST

Going to Chislehurst County School was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to me and I took to it like a duck to water. Everything was so well organised. Timetables were adhered to and it was not a good idea to be late for anything. I think I thrived on the orderliness. Your own peg in the cloakroom, rules about lockers, and privacy, we changed our shoes from outdoor to indoor.

I loved the school uniform, which was really comfortable and we all had the same. There were four houses and I was put in St Mary's, our colour was blue and this was for inter house competitions where points could be collected for everything including school work. I got a new bike from Dad and was able to ride instead of going on the bus. It was about four miles but I preferred it as it gave me more freedom and also extra pocket money, Dad gave me the savings from not having to go on the bus.

I was able to call at the sweet shop on the way home and buy penny packets of sweets and the weekly paper about the latest films and stories of the film stars. On Saturday morning we would go to the pictures and see a whole range of items for only three pennies. News followed by a cartoon, a short comedy and an ongoing serial before the main picture. It was the best value for money there was for a Saturday and Mum enjoyed getting her cooking done in peace and quiet.

In the summer we would go to the swimming baths but I was never a good swimmer as I was too nervous. Loved the water though and would stay till my skin got wrinkly.

At school I was impressed with the fact we got to do chemistry and physics and loved the chemistry lab and the physics lab these were two of my favourite subjects from the start. I did reasonably well for the whole time at C.C.S., I got good marks and was always in the top class for each year but other than being a good all round student did not particularly shine. Perhaps, in poetry because I would sometimes be called to read them to the rest of the class. When we got to a higher class we had biology and in that I excelled as my name went up on the board once or twice for getting A in some of the tests. St Mary's house got points added which made the house captain pleased with me. There were about twenty girls in each class and there were three classes for each year. The subjects taught were different in the three classes with the top class (just a plain Upper III) having academic subjects like Latin, French and the aforementioned sciences. We did get one year where we had a term of sewing and another where we had a term of cooking. My mother liked that as the efforts of the class came home and were used as an addition to her cooking. Mum was a good plain Scottish cook but I like to think we shared some exchanges of methods I learned at school. She enjoyed the English scones, which were different from the girdle scones she had always made in the Scottish way.

Games as we called them were played every day. Netball and Tennis were popular and Dad bought me my own racket. In winter we played hockey and I continued with this even when I was working during the war. Kolster Brandes had a set of tennis courts and the social club formed a hockey team to play the army. That story is for later. My problem at school was that I was still very short, indeed small and the bigger girls had a big advantage. I frequently got called "Little Liliias".

In the gym however which we had twice a week I was able to climb the ropes right up to the ceiling. Freda Dear was the niece of our Assistant Head and we

competed for this honour regularly. We were also both good at the high jump and would be the last two girls fighting to be there for the final lift of the rope. It was about this time I lost contact slightly with Marion who was in Upper IIIa. Her class had more of the domestic subjects and others such as physiology and German. There were discussions between the Headmistress and my father as he wanted me to take German as well as French and Latin but because I was not in that class I could not. They were not able to resolve that one and I still regret not having been able to learn German. Dad had been a foreign correspondent and translated in at least seven languages where he worked. He was very encouraging with those subjects and I got a real kick out of doing translations, more in French than Latin. I made contact with a French schoolgirl and we wrote to one another for about two years till the war put an end to it. Her name was Paulette Labbe and I often wondered what became of her. Just before the war she sent me the gift of a small French new testament. Our French teacher made us all adopt a French name while we were in her class and would address us by that when she met us in the corridor or anywhere in the school. My French name was Louissette. Always the diminutive!

She would sometimes have an afternoon tea for us but it was a French occasion and we had to speak French the whole time inviting one another to “une tasse du chocolat” or “une brioche”. Getting slightly hysterical as we tried to converse in this ‘other’ language, which is used so much in English.

All in all I was very happy for the next three years, which preceded the war. School was not difficult and the summer was especially a happy time. I remember sunny days and picnics in the parks like Avery Hill and the Long Meadow, which was minutes away from where we lived. There was a stream through the meadow, which ran alongside the railway line and all three of us would go there to play in the water, building a dam and then we would catch minnows and tadpoles for Stuart to take home in a jam jar. Holidays once a year at the seaside at places such as Littlehampton or Angmering and usually in a converted old bus, which had been turned into a cabin of sorts. The last year we had our first holiday at Brighstone Chine on the Isle of Wight and this was the beginning of a love affair with that place.

Dad took us back there again and it became for us a really favourite holiday spot.

I also still had the odd holiday with Nana and Aunt Isa in Scotland, and Eline and I even went on our own with Mum giving the train conductor a few shillings to keep an eye on us for the long overnight trip from Euston to Glasgow when we slept in a sleeping compartment. I wrote a story about the trip for English when we got back and got a treasured “A” for it! All in all I remember life as not so bad and then came 1939 and another part of our life, which was to be so very different.

We went to Scotland in August and the wireless as we called it then was so busy with constant news broadcasts of the problems in Europe.

My mum wrote and told us we were to stay there for a while longer as there were a lot of changes and it would be easier for she and Dad without us underfoot. Then on September the 3rd we sat with Nana and heard that “We

were at War". Eline and I had no idea what it was all about, war was something in the history books. However we knew it was serious because Nana sat in the big chair by the wireless and cried for several minutes

and then talked to the various people who brought the bread and groceries and the postman and so on. Eline and I stayed playing together as we had done. I was just fourteen and looked after her as she missed Mum and got very homesick. A lady friend of Aunt Isa brought us some dolls as we had not brought anything like that and Eline took great comfort from having the doll with her.

The news was not good. A ship got sunk at sea, I think it was called "the Athena" and Nana was very upset at that as it was on the Atlantic crossing to America.

WAR YEARS

From now on everything changed and the first thing to happen was that Mum sent an enormous trunk with all our belongings and clothes and a letter to us and to Nana to say we must stay there as it was very worrying for them back home. Blackout had been brought in, shelters were being organised and there were even practise air raids so people would know what to do. Nana was very upset and felt that Mum should have come too but of course she would not leave Dad. The grown ups around us did a lot of talking and discussing what was going to happen. Mum said Eline must start school in Greengairs, which was just a village school and I was to go to Airdrie Academy, which was the nearest secondary school to where Nana lived. I had to catch the bus each day and take money for school dinner. I found the responsibility very worrying and seeing the affect it had on my Nana had me worrying too.

Airdie Academy was a revelation! For a start it had boys there! I had not been in a class with boys since junior school. Also there were more than a few male teachers, it was all very noisy.

Before I began school Nana took me to become enrolled and because I had never gone to a Scottish school of any kind it meant I had to be interviewed by the Rector (headmaster). This was quite something as he wanted to know just about everything I had ever learnt and what results I had got in exams and so on. He was an extremely kind man and spoke to me very nicely which was reassuring and then he personally drew up a timetable for me which covered all the subjects I had taken or wanted to take and meant I would not lose any ground with my own school when I should be able to return. We had no idea when that would be. I sometimes found myself in a class of only six students with our own teacher and assignment. I found when I started that I enjoyed the classes very much except for the very rough noisy behaviour of the aforesaid boys. In addition the masters who took some of these classes could make quite a fair amount of noise on their own! Banging the tables with loud and attention getting enthusiasm whenever they wanted to be heard.

This was nothing like the ladylike and decorous behaviour I had become used to at Chislehurst. It did not upset me however and to be truthful I found it quite exciting and became very enthusiastic, apart from the constant worry of getting

my homework done. I found we had to work much harder and there were no excuses recognised for any lessons not completed. Geometric theorems had to be learnt by heart and recognisably recited in class. There was a more masculine attitude in the science classes with the girls being pushed aside in the discussion groups. I did learn a great deal however and found it intensely interesting so that when I returned I was actually ahead of the other girls I had worked with before. I had never worked so hard and at times did not get bed till nearly midnight, which upset Nana as she thought I should be getting more sleep. She was probably right but I gained so much from having to live up to the expectations that I got a lot of confidence and it stood me in good stead for some time to come.

The social life of the school was fun too and I got on very well with the girls I was in class with. They admired my school uniform and wanted to hear what school in England was like. I loved their humorous and fun loving ways, also I adored the Scottish dialect, which was broader and not so anglicised as mine. All in all I enjoyed my time at Airdrie.

It was not to be for too long however, letters passed between Mum and Nana and one day a letter came that said Eline and I were to go home. Aunt Isa came on the scene from her apartment in Glasgow where she lived most of the working week and helped Nana to get the clothes washed and repacked and the train was booked back to London.

Within a week, Isa had booked us to go home and we were put on the train at Glasgow Central for the journey to Euston Station in London. We travelled on our own, making friends with other girls about our age also travelling to England from their Scottish relations. I was 14 years old and Eline only 11 and a half years. It was a very long day. We shared pancakes and tablet (a sort of fudge) with the little girls also travelling back to England and talked about the war and what it would be like.

We arrived back at Euston in the evening and it was dark. A blackout had been declared and we found it hard to understand that there were no lights anywhere. As Eline and I looked out at the platform we could not see a thing. We collected the hand luggage we had and got out and started to walk along with all the other passengers until suddenly I saw my father's hat and was overjoyed to find that it was our dad. Amazed that we could find anything in that complete blackness, we were so pleased to see him. He was as matter of fact as usual and got us on the train to Sidcup where we still lived. There had been air raid warnings but nothing serious and as yet no bombs had been dropped. The whole of London and everywhere we went was completely different. Sandbags at all the doorways and windows covered in sticky paper to stop the splinters of glass should there be a blast from a bomb.

This was our first experience of what it would be like for the next six years, we had no idea just how much our lives were going to change from that time onwards.

We went back to School and that for me meant Chislehurst. My parents decided to send Eline there too. Eline had not passed the scholarship from Days Lane Junior School, which she also attended but with the war on Mum and Dad wanted her to be at least at the same school as I was so they paid the fees for her to go.

Eline found it a bit of a struggle and was taken out and went to a technical school to learn shorthand, typing and bookkeeping a year later.

I again found myself having to cope with a new way of life. A lot of old rules had been thrown out and new ones brought in and it took some getting used to. Rules to do with where we kept our shoes and out door clothes or getting on buses or staying after hours for various reasons had all been altered while I was away. I was happy with the schoolwork as I found myself ahead of where our classes were for nearly everything. The tough time at the Academy paid off and I felt a little smug being able to prove I had already learned what was now on the curriculum. This was especially true for algebra and geometry and the experience stood me in good stead. It was a kick-start for the next year as the school year in England and Scotland begins in September.

It was also about this time that we got a taste of things to come in that we had a few air raids while at school and had to go in the shelters. This was the most talked about activity of course, as every home had to have a shelter of some kind. At home we were supposed to get an Anderson shelter. This was made of corrugated iron and buried quite deep in the ground with soil built up over the top of it. We were instructed to dig the holes and some people managed to get shelters dug and installed but in our case the hole started to fill up with water. We obviously had a very high water table and that was the last we heard of having an Anderson shelter.

The shelters at school were more like bunkers made of thick concrete and quite deep down several steps. They were usually very cold indeed with stone benches and sitting in one of those in the air raids trying to learn our French was not the most popular way of spending school time. The teachers were very nice and very thoughtful for our welfare. Some of them would carry little packets of Horlicks tablets in their pockets in case we got hungry or upset. They were as worried as we were and we felt their sense of responsibility for all the girls left in their care while the raids were on. The air raid warning was the worst part of it, to this day my stomach clams up and my heart thumps when I hear that sound, even though now it means absolutely nothing. Fortunately none of those raids seemed to be bombing raids for us as apart from the inconvenience we were not affected in any way.

Dad however was not happy with things in Valliers Wood Rd and he and Mum started to look for another house. Eline and I wanted us to go and live in Chislehurst where there were some very nice homes and near to school of course. However Mum and Dad thought they were too expensive and since they did not want to sell the Valliers Wood house said 'no' to that.

Eventually they bought a bungalow in St Mary Cray which meant we would be going to school through Pettswood which was the wood left to the National Heritage by William Willet the man who thought of "summertime" the annual changing of the clocks for summer or winter. This is now an institution of course, even here in New Zealand. I still remember the lovely cycle rides through Pettswood going to school, and we were even more in the country than we had been in Sidcup. I was happy living at 86 Hayfield Road in the new house was opposite a large patch of woodland where the three of us spent many hours

fossicking for nuts and brambles (blackberries) or picking the wild primroses and violets. Although the war was a fact, for the early part of our life there, not much happened for us to worry about. Dad joined the Fire Service at Unilevers where he worked and had to sleep in London for a couple of nights every week. It only became a worry if there was a raid and to begin with there were not many. Eline went to Sidcup Technical School and I stayed at Chislehurst and it was only when the Battle of Britain as it became known started that things got difficult.

In the early days in Hayfield Rd the Council put up a brick shelter in our garden with six bunks in it. We had to make beds in them and when the raids started in earnest that was where we slept night after night while the planes went over us. My mother had to have the dinner ready early as there was often not enough time to eat it before the roar of the gunfire would start.

Mum was frankly terrified and Dad was in a state of nerves, chain-smoking just outside the doorway of the shelter where we had heavy curtains either side of the entrance. We had pooled our sweet rations for some time previously and these were kept in a little mahogany box, which had previously been used to hold a chamber pot!! This was kept in the shelter so air raids quickly meant sweets for us. Mum had no trouble getting everybody out there. Dad encouraged us to do this, surmising that sweets are a comfort for any child when the vagaries of life get difficult to understand.

The raids were on and we were living close to Biggin Hill a well-known airfield now, as many of the fighters, which were sent to attack the bombers that came to raid Kent and London were stationed there. When Eline and I were older we were allowed to go to dances at the Daylight Inn in Pettswood and there we met and danced with the young pilots who had been flying these planes.

That year in the summer holidays was when we had the first of many daylight raids and these had us all running to the shelter when the warning went.

One particularly eventful day, Stuart was fetching a loaf of bread from the shops at the bottom of the road when the sirens went, I was busy in the garden with the chickens and Eline was indoors, Mum in the kitchen. Mum called out to go in the shelter so Eline went out the front door and round to the shelter, found no one there so came out again and went in the back door. Mum went to see where Stuart had got to with his messages and I was closing the hen house.

There was a colossal bang as some kind of a missile descended from the plane flying overhead, we thought it hit a house lower down the next street. The anti aircraft guns were as deafening as they could be and a scenario that would have done Charlie Chaplin justice developed with Eline by now back in the shelter on her own and lying on the bunk screaming her head off. Mum going out the front door for the third time and Stuart wandering in quite unperturbed, saying "What's all the noise about". I was trying to get our usual pot of coffee that we kept on the stove for these occasions and the bag of doughnuts Mum also felt were a good substitute for the fear engendered by the raids.

Much later the whole episode became a source of humour but my sister did not get over it quite so easily. These daylight raids were more of annoyance than

anything else as we were not able to get work done and felt we were all wasting time sitting in the shelter when there were things to get on with.

On occasions there were times when the planes would drop incendiary bombs and we had fire extinguishers and water close at hand for such an event. At times they fell in the wood along the road from our house to the station right opposite where we lived. On one occasion during a Saturday one of these bombs set up a blaze in the woods and my Dad grabbed a spade and headed off to cover it with dirt, which was the easiest way to put an incendiary out. Mum watched anxiously and several of the men who lived came running up the street after Dad and as they passed our house she would offer a spade or shovel from the garden shed nearby. The fire was put out and Dad returned fairly soon and as he put his spade back queried the absence of so many tools. "I gave them to the men who came to help" says Mum. "Are you stupid Mamie" says my dad "they may never bring them back". Tools were almost unobtainable and expensive by this part of the war. Mum stood crestfallen and upset but as the men came out of the wood one by one they returned the shovels and spades with 'thank you very much' and other comments of gratitude until they were all returned much to my Mum's relief.

The other episode, which is burned into my memory, was watching one of the many dog fights overhead and seeing a Spitfire shot down by a 109. The pilot of the plane parachuted out and Stuart and I cheered as we saw him start to float down. The German pilot of the plane, which had been fighting him followed him down and proceeded to machinegun the pilot in the parachute. The parachute caught fire and the Spitfire pilot hurtled earthwards as we watched in horror. After the war there were many who said that this sort of thing never happened, but we saw it that day and others have told similar stories. It was a weird summer and not what any of us would have called a holiday. The war was on in earnest and we had to make the best of it. It amazes me that there were good things to remember. We all enjoyed living at 86 Hayfield and getting the best out of this new house and garden occupied us in many ways.

The garden was a large one for even this suburb and we had fruit trees growing and producing, plum trees, damsons, greengages, apples and pears. We were so lucky. Eline and I made friends with a young lad, Robin who loved animals and kept and raised chickens and ducks. I bought a puppy for her birthday from him and Rex became a real family friend. He was a foxhound cross but had all the instincts of those dogs and if Eline went for a walk he would find her in minutes. We tried him out several times getting her to elude him by climbing up on the tank traps and jumping from one to the other, or paddling up the stream and getting out higher up. He found her every time.

I also got a baby chicken, which he gave me and we named her Susie who became a spoilt chicken and was treated like any other pet. She grew very quickly, being extremely well fed since every scrap of food not wanted was put into a dish at the back door and Susie demolished more and more. She was a cross between a Rhode Island red and a White Leghorn and with Robin's help we all learned about the life of the laying hen.

Only one thing was wrong, as we were about to discover when the hen named Susie got bigger and bigger and we had to put her in the coal cupboard outside as she was constantly coming into the kitchen and driving my mother distracted. Finally one day much to my Dad's amusement, Susie started to crow and we realised she was a cockerel. No eggs coming from Susie!!

RATIONING

Before the War had even started my father was looking ahead and realising there were going to be shortages of all sorts of food, took advantage of the place where he worked and bought cheaply from the stocks held at Lever Bros various food items which were of use to us and helped us cope when the shops began to run out of items previously available.

Once the War was under way it became illegal to have some of these things as it was considered to be "hoarding" and against the law. In our attic he put a huge bag of white sugar and a very large wooden case of tea. Strict instructions were given to us "not to tell anybody". We never did.

Once in Hayfield Road we were in an enviable position as the section was the equivalent of about four properties and immediately Dad started to dig the garden and plant everything that might be beneficial. There already were about seven fruit trees, which proved to be very good varieties with apple, damson, Victoria plum, and a cherry tree among them. My mother took to making jars of jam and every type of chutney or preserve she could find in Mrs Beeton's Household Cookery Book.

Dad began at once with the lawns in the front garden being the first to be dug, within the year we had bins of potatoes and carrots in sawdust. Apples were wrapped in newspaper and later on eggs were preserved for cooking in icing glass (sodium silicate).

The whole chicken raising exercise started after we got Susie and continued with our young friend Robin selling us day old chicks. The chickens became very much part of our life and we three children had an ongoing job of providing extra food from the woodland opposite the house. Every day it was our job to go and fill sacks with green food collected and anything else that might feed the hungry hens. They were voracious and kept us busy.

Dad had an ongoing task; apart from the garden he built henhouses and wire cages that could be moved around the garden so the hens would clean up the grubs and insects that were always in evidence. As the cockerels were identified they were put aside to be fattened up for the table and these were fed separately. Mum kept peelings and scraps of vegetables each day and these were cooked and made into a mash with a sort of dry chopped up straw we bought at the local grain shop.

We also obtained some rabbits and with hutches to build for them, once again Dad was never without work. The rabbits bred very well and quickly and we would get wild carrots from the woods and harvest the acorns from under the dozens of oak trees. These we kept in containers handy to the hutches and the three of us helped Mum to clean out the hutches and hen houses every week.

Mum found it difficult when it was time for any of the bunnies to go towards a meal because she became quite fond of them. She would arrange the equipment

for the demise of the rabbit in the kitchen and as the butcher boy arrived with our miniscule meat ration she would call him into the kitchen ask him to do the dastardly deed for her. He got sixpence for this and was quite willing but was somewhat terrified of Susie who had become a watchdog for the household and patrolled the garden with a threatening air guarding us from all comers. The boy would stand at the gate and call out "please Mrs Wilson will you come and take your 'Cocky' away?" After all this however, Mum's rabbit casseroles were delicious.

We ate very well indeed at a time when a lot of people found the good things to eat were thin on the ground.

Quite soon after the start of the War we were issued with ration books and this was when we felt the reality of what it would be like, trying to feed ourselves. In the past so much had come from overseas, fruit from countries like Jamaica or butter from Denmark, ceased, as did the imports from every country invaded by Germany.

While in the beginning the rationing did not seem too bad, gradually the amounts allowed became less and less as the German U boats began to attack the merchant navy ships travelling across the Atlantic.

It was about this time, one very sad day there was a letter from my Aunt Lily to say that our cousin Johnny Mullen her youngest son had been lost on a merchant navy ship. Johnny was only seventeen when he joined the ship having become a wireless operator. The ship was hit by a torpedo from a U boat unbelievably in the Irish Sea almost on the coast of England. Johnny stayed at his post in the wireless operators room sending out the S.O.S. messages for help until the ship went down with him in it. I could hardly believe that my lovely, fun loving, teasing, mischievous cousin had gone. Last time I had seen him he had been pillow fighting with us in the bedroom at my Aunt Lily's. The reality of the War hit me that day.

BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER THE HOLIDAYS

We had a busy summer that year with the air raids almost part of our daily experience. During the holidays we were all kept busy by the various chores that fell to each of us. My father made chicken houses and was very inventive with their design, being careful for their welfare because they were such a good source of food both for ourselves and as barter for other commodities of which we were going short. I liked looking after them and would try to stop them fighting when they began to roost in the evening. They were like pets to me. The daylight in England lasts until well into the night time during the summer and when there were no raids on there was plenty to do. Produce to preserve and keep for later in the year and were all roped in to help with harvesting carrots, potatoes and apples while Mum kept busy with preserves of all kinds. However the holidays came to an end and we had to go back to school. This was my last year but one and next year we would sit the exams for General Schools Certificate and Matriculation exemption which was very important to all of us. The mistresses were all

determined we were going to do as well as we possibly could and the pressure was on from the moment we returned to the classroom.

Before the summer holidays my form room had been the music room on the second floor so this was the room that was the 'home' room for the class I was in, Lower V. During the holidays there had been a raid in the area and our school had taken a hit and would you believe it was my form room that got the worst of it. Those of us in that class were very upset as we had left books and personal possessions in our desks. I was particularly annoyed because my very new and recently acquired silver fountain pen was just one of the things that was lost. It was a present from Mum and Dad and a possession I was very attached to, very precious and not as easily available to young ladies in those days. There was a real feeling of heartache for all of us about the items we lost that summer.

The weather was kind to us and with the raids less of a threat I would set off every morning to school cycling through Pettswood which had been donated to the nation by William Willett. He was the person who brought "summer time" to England so the clocks were put forward every year by an hour at the beginning of summer and then put back at the end so that we attained an extra hour of daylight during the summer time. He was highly thought of as a benefactor in England especially in Kent where we lived.

Pettswood was a lovely wooded area with trees, ferns and pathways, a sheer delight to cycle through every morning at that time of the year in a warm September. The ride itself was encouragement enough for me to get going to school. The pressure from the teachers for the exams the next year had us all worrying and planning routines for swotting up on the previous years work and there was a precursor called "mock matric" being held over us as a sample of what the next year would bring. My father had bought me a small alarm clock to help me be aware of the time before I had to get up. I set the alarm for 5.30 a.m. and each morning I would get up and do an hour of swot before the rest of the family were awake. My idea was to swot up on the subjects I was not so good in, the first being History as I had not done so well in that subject in the previous exam. This set the pattern for the rest of that year although I found it hard to keep up to my original early hours. I was busy and there was a lot to do between the end of the holidays and Christmas.

There were fewer air raids towards the end of that year and we settled down gradually getting used to life in St Mary Cray. The bombing continued but the planes were focusing on the greater London area and we in that part of Kent had some respite from what had been the heaviest raids during the Battle of Britain as it came to be known. In one of these raids there was a plane brought down just the other side of the St Mary Cray shopping area and many of the folk living in the village visited it to have a look when it had been cleared by the L.D.V. as being safe.

Some of the little boys were very excited about the plane as it was the closest most of them would get to a Jerry plane at that time. It was a fighter and as I

remember a Messerschmit 109. I had the distinct feeling there were some souvenirs being picked up by those boys and a few others. There was a gruesome story went around that one of them found a beautifully made airman's glove and looking for the partner of it found the other one but when he put it on found there was a hand from the dead pilot in it. Quite horrible to contemplate and the story drew mothers to the scene to drag home their offspring. Shortly after this the weather turned cooler and we had some respite from the bombing as London became the target for the air raids.

The exams became the focus of our lives at school and along with other girls in the class we shared the problems of swotting up on all we had learned in the previous two years. I had a friend Pamela with whom I got on very well and we shared the worry of how much to revise and what subjects to give the most study to. Pamela and I would go swimming on a Saturday morning at Eltham baths, neither of us was very expert but we would cheerfully cycle over to the baths and then have baked beans on toast at a local eating place on the way home. Pamela got into trouble for this as her mother said it took away her appetite of her midday dinner. I did not have the same problem at home so was probably eating everything served up to me. I was as thin as a rake anyway and perhaps needed it.

Very quickly the exams were on us and while I remember the time had no problems or anxieties, did as well as I could and left it to fate. Fate was kind and the day came while we were enjoying the summer weather that the postcard arrived informing me I had gained Matriculation exemption.

I ran up the garden where Dad was cleaning round the fruit trees and showed him the card with the results. He nodded and smiled, read it and said "Good for you" and went back to scything the grass. That was that milestone passed!

The last few months at school we were given talks by the mistresses handling the choices available for tertiary education. I had wanted to study chemistry but was intrigued by a new course at Northampton Engineering College in London. It was available to both boys and girls who had attained certain standards in secondary school and was a new subject in the study of electronics. This had not been available previously and I put my name forward and was delighted to get encouragement from the headmistress and my physics teacher. On the basis of these references I applied through the school and by the end of the summer holidays had been accepted as a student.

When the new term began I became one of thirty in a class taking this diploma, which was ostensibly to prepare young students for work in electronic technology, which was seen as important for the future in manufacturing and the effects of technical developments in the war.

The course carried a payment of 15 shillings a week and an allowance for train fare. This was the most exciting thing that had happened to me since Airdrie Academy. There were five girls in this class and I became friends with two of them, Beryl and June Whitcher. I remained friendly with Beryl until after the war

and was invited to her wedding when she married one of the boys she met at Northampton while studying. Beryl joined the Wrens on the completion of her course and flew as a radio technician in planes ferrying to Bristol. I wanted to go with her when she joined up, but my Dad would not sign the permission he had to give, as I was under 21. I never forgave him for that and was wildly jealous that she was able to get into the forces and I was not.

The time at Northampton was very different to school and again we had boys in the class. Some were very clever and took it in their stride but there were one or two who I felt were complete idiots. To this day I remember Dicky Butter and Freddie Freeman as two boys who were the epitome of stupidity.

I suspect they joined up and became just one of all those who fought for the country for the rest of the war.

The subjects we took fascinated me, it was all 'boy stuff' and I loved it. We took electronics every day with Mr Nelkon cramming up the previous night on what was a new subject for him as a tutor. We had Tech drawing, workshop practice where we learnt to braze and solder (one whole morning a week went into this) which stood me in good stead when I started work. There were several engineering subjects totally different from anything I had ever done at school. The course was not run as the college had been run in peacetime but as if it was a job with nine to five hourly days and Saturday mornings.

Our group of five girls did well and we were always in the top ten in the class exams, with the determination that the boys would not beat us at this very masculine type of activity. The final exams saw us getting the diploma as did most of the boys with one or two being quite outstanding. The exceptions included the two previously mentioned.

I enjoyed my time at Northampton, it was again a learning curve after having been cosseted through secondary school by some very caring dedicated women but I am grateful for the turn my life took because of the war, which opened gates that would previously have been closed to women. The cut and thrust of life in a classroom with 25 boys certainly provoked a different level of thinking and competing raised the heights we tried to climb.

E.M.I. (Electric and Musical Industries) Research Laboratories

The last week we were given a list of factories where students with our qualifications would be acceptable for work and left to apply for whatever we thought would be best for us as individuals. We all came from different parts of the country so there were many opportunities. On the whole the boys wanted to get into the forces but many of them were still too young so it was war work. I was keen to try my luck away from home and deliberately found a place at Hayes in Middlesex, which meant going into board with a private family. This too was organised for us. The Gramophone Company had pre war made and sold records but was now engaged in war work as was every factory which was able to do so. There was money to be made as no expenses were spared for the war effort and salaries improved for many people.

When I got to Hayes and met Mrs Trivett my landlady, she seemed very fair and very practical but I found her less friendly than I would have liked and I later moved to one of the women I found myself working with, Ivy became almost a second mother and we had a lot of fun together.

Once more I found myself on a new learning curve. This period of time was spent in the world of factory girls and some of them 'tough cookies' so to speak. After a short spell on one of the benches I was given a job doing a special test for tropical kits.

I worked with another lad about my own age, Alan Stewart and the two of us went round the entire factory, testing the wax used to seal the equipment.

It was a fairly mindless job and required little expertise, but we were free to do the job in our own way and we were quick and reliable so the manager was happy with us. We got on very well together Alan was also filling in time till he could join up. I liked the freedom and there was always good company and plenty of work mates to talk to.

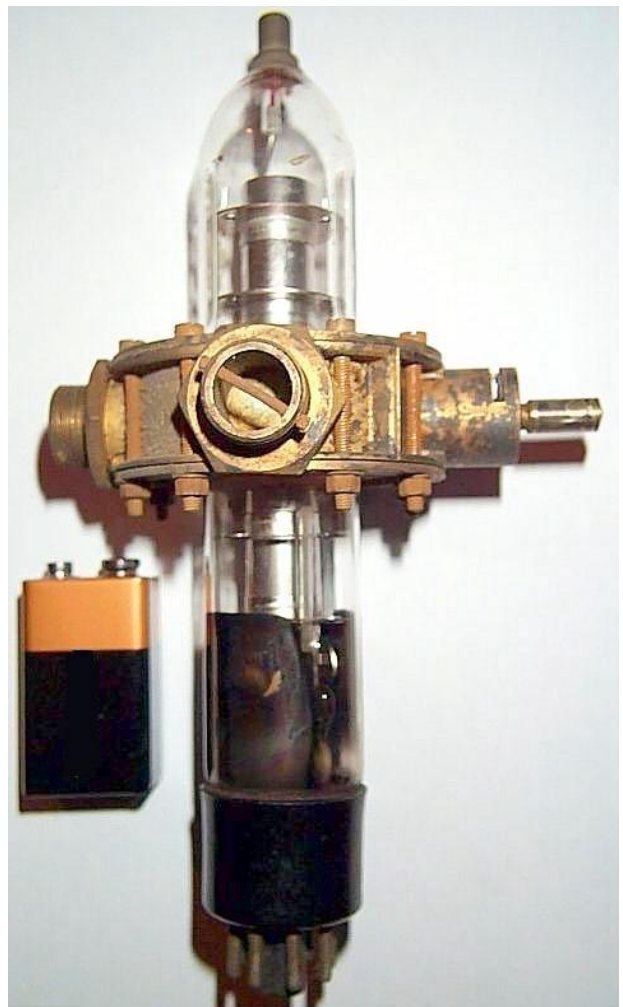
After a short time I was told I would be moved to another part of the building into a new department, where my training at Northampton would be put to better use. Again a change of scenery! No time to get bored!

KLYSTRONS

Thanks to *Jeremy M. Harmer LL.M. MBCS MIET MIEEE* for the photo
<http://www.tubecollector.org/about.htm>

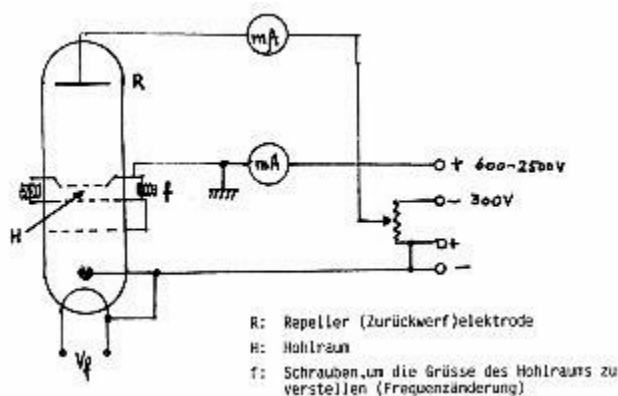
I settle into this job fairly quickly and got on very well with the women I had to work alongside. This was where I met Ivy who later took me in as a lodger where I shared a bedroom with her fifteen years old daughter. George the husband worked at the Fairey Aviation works and would greet each day at breakfast with the words 'roll on night', he also managed to burn the toast on a regular basis, which was his contribution to breakfast. The smell of burnt toast reminded me of them for years afterwards. George and Ivy were good fun and I liked living with them. They were really good to me and I was always grateful for the home they allowed me to share.

The Klystron department was under development and there was a



great deal of experimenting with the production of this very new valve, which was required for the newest technology known at that time as 'radio location'. Later the Americans changed the name to Radar and so it is known today.

The production of these valves was quite complicated with two glass tubes and a smaller one joined together and annealed to copper discs. They were completely different from the ordinary valves in a domestic wireless. They had a cathode and an anode but the beam from the cathode had to be very finely directed through the tiny apertures of the copper discs.



The whole department was in the stage of trying out different methods and the managers were continuously altering the production to keep up with the research. One of the ladies, Bea got herself into serious trouble although she did not suffer because of it. Bea's job was to test the inside of the glass tubes, which had three dimples, with a go, no go gauge. At morning teatime Bea developed a habit of stirring her tea with the gauge. It took some time before the manager discovered that the sudden surge of faulty glass sleeves was because the gauge was heated up by the tea and gave incorrect measurements. The bins of broken glass had increased daily at this time. Bea confided "I hate that brasted glass all I want to do is get home to my kids".

I settled down quite quickly and did not find the work arduous, loved the ride to work on my bicycle along Cherry Lane every morning, the weather was fine and I was happy. About this time I decided to join the Girls Training Corps, G.T.C. it was a sort of preparation for going into the armed forces, the female equivalent of the A.T.C. which catered for boys wanting to go into the Airforce. It was a sort of military girl guides but more adult.

We had sergeants from the local Air force base at Uxbridge who came and taught us marching and drill. There were classes to learn the morse code and air craft recognition. We were kept busy most evenings and some weekends. We also had a very active social like with dances in which we were joined by the A.T.C. Altogether life became both active and interesting and there was always the hope you would eventually be acceptable to the armed forces.

At work I was promoted to be a tester, which was much more complicated than the simple inspections we had so far been asked to perform. By this time the klystrons were coming off the production line increasingly each day. There were two testers operating and the charge hand had just been given a third and it was this tester I was going to work on.

Each klystron was fitted in the tester one at a time and connections were made to the array of meters. Adjustments had to be made to the clamps around the centre

so there was a correct reading on each side of the valve via the large and small screws and when correct the nuts were tightened to hold them in place securely. It was not a difficult job but we had to work quickly and accurately as by the time the klystron had reached this stage it had a relatively high cost. The manager of the production team was on tenterhooks watching every step and every valve at this stage.

The three of us who were testers and the charge hand felt a great deal of responsibility for the output of the whole department producing these valves was on our shoulders. Everyone was involved in trying to increase the production with the thought that we might be helping to save the lives of some of the members of our forces.

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Each klystron was fitted in the tester one at a time and connections were made to the array of meters. Adjustments had to be made to the clamps around the centre so there was a correct reading on each side of the valve via the coarse and fine screws and when correct the nuts were tightened to hold them in place securely. It was not a difficult job but we had to work quickly and accurately as by the time the klystron had reached this stage it had a relatively high cost. The manager of the production team was on tenterhooks watching every step and every valve at this stage.

The three of us who were testers and the charge hand felt a great deal of responsibility for the output of the whole department producing these valves was on our shoulders. Everyone was involved in trying to increase the production with the thought that we might be helping to save the lives of some of the members of our forces. The klystrons were for the navy to use in the equipment for detecting submarines. Later known as radar.

The next few months were uneventful and I worked very hard with the other two women testing box after box of valves which came at a greater speed as the department got into its stride. The hours were quite long and the manager of the production side was determined to show he could deliver the valves faster than ever. We were called on to do do more and more overtime for which of course there was extra pay. I continued with the G.S.T. which was often my only social activity and which apart from work was the only time I was able to meet friends my own age. I enjoyed swimming and went to the local baths with a girl from work. We got on very well until she borrowed my swimming costume one day (having earlier admired it) and then kept forgetting to give it back until one day she said it had been damaged. It was two coupons for a pair of togs at that time and I resented the deception as I was sure she had kept it.

I was finding things a bit lonely and difficult and decided to take a weekend at home. Dad had taken me to see "Gone with the Wind" at a cinema in London where I travelled up on the train to meet him. The film we saw was the first film ever made in colour and ran for four years at that cinema. I had a chat with Dad and he suggested that I take a break. I thought about it and decided it was just what I wanted to do. A weekend at home seemed a great idea. I told Ivy and made plans to leave work early as I could.

I set off from work one Saturday afternoon on roads I had never travelled before and felt it to be quite an adventure. I remember cycling through Croydon over the river and thinking what a nice place it seemed to be. I later discovered it was home to many well known people.

The cycle ride home was quite long, about 55 miles I think but I enjoyed it and the fact I was able to have the weekend at home without having to spend a penny on bus or train fares pleased me. My Mum had been called up for war work and had been sent to a gas works and put in charge of the office as the boy who had previously run it had gone into the army. Mum loved it, it was the first job she had had since before she was married and she apparently was very competent in the office doing all the pay slips for the men and some younger boys who were employed there. She became the office 'mum' and gave them advice when they came to her with their problems. My parents told me they were worried about my health which I did not totally understand as other than being very tired (hardly surprising) I had no health problems I could see. They persuaded me to apply for permission to leave the job and return home to stay, when I went back to work I did so but my application was turned down as they said I was in essential war work. The National Service Officer took the side of the firm and my application was declined. I wrote and told them this and Dad made an appointment for me to see a consultant in London in Portland Place as I remember and Mum went with me to talk to him. It was the end of summer 1942 and I had just turned seventeen. The Doctor we saw was a very kind man and sympathetic and quite angry at the way the factories were treating the employees working on essential services. He wrote a letter to the authorities at the War Office with a copy to Dad after he had seen me, pointing out that longer hours did not always make for increased productivity. He also sent Dad a copy of the certificate which he sent to the N.S.O. giving me permission on medical grounds to leave the job.

Towards the end of the summer I was able to leave and go back home, tired and a bit depressed about the turn things had taken but ready for a rest. Mum was happy for me to be home again and I slipped into helping with the housework.

RETURN TO ST MARY CRAY

To start with I was I must admit very tired indeed. The doctor had found me very anaemic and recommended iron tablets and a diet which included liver. Mum was at her best in a situation like this and I was fed liver ad nauseum. I gradually began to feel more like my old self and catching up with friends and neighbours

made me feel at home. Eline was not thrilled to have me back in 'her' bedroom and I sensed a slight jealousy which was understandable as she had been the only daughter of the house for some time while I was away. We got on as well as most sisters with three and a half years between us and I took her along to some of the local hops at the Orpington town hall and other social activities which she enjoyed and cheered her up no end.

With Mum and Dad both at work and the other two at school I had the house to myself and began to help out with shopping and cooking and other general duties. I had always been so used to working at something or other that it was not difficult for me and I was happy being in charge. Stuart especially appreciated getting special attention. He was very hard on his footwear and a pair of shoes would only last a week before they required mending. Likewise his socks had holes in the heels very soon after he put them on. I found a whole drawer full of socks which required darning and took over this job from Mum and found it quite therapeutic although at the time was not aware of the fact. I just liked darning.

I would make Stuart's bed every morning, properly and clean his bedroom feeling very smug hearing his satisfied "huh!" when he came home and found everything neat and tidy.

I enjoyed learning from Mum the routines she had for cooking and how to make the dishes she was good at and this stood me in good stead later on in life. It was time well spent and I was contented as there was time to listen to the wireless and do some knitting and just a feeling of having 'time out'. A real change of lifestyle from the madness of the factory.

Shortly after returning home I joined the W.J.A.C. (Women's Junior Air Corps) as there was no unit of the G.T.C. in St Mary Cray. It was not nearly as much fun or as interesting as the other unit had been and I missed the girls (and boys) I had come to know there and also the jollying we got from the R.A.F. sergeants who were assigned to us from Uxbridge and trained us.

Time moved along without any disasters and Christmas was coming and I was "home" so I was happy and ready to fit in with anything happening. Dad's lungs had not been very good since the first world war where damage was caused by the mustard gas attacks. He got frequent bouts of pleurisy and when his age group was called up he was not considered medically fit for active service so joined the fire service at Unilevers and twice a week would stay at work for the night in case there were air raids and fire caused by the bombing. Mum was not altogether happy when he was away on nights and worried terribly if we heard any air raid activity in the London area.

The Blitz as it was called, was aimed at London and other parts of the country, notably Coventry which was severely damaged in the raids. In St Mary Cray we

would see the planes going over but other than off loading the bombs they had not dropped on the way back after the raids we did not have too many raids to upset us.

Not so happy a time for the poor people in the city. Every night for months they were forced to sleep in the underground stations using them as air raid shelters. The devastation in London was immense.

Christmas came and I do remember this as a very happy time. Mum was at her best at Christmas, loved all the celebrations and we all joined in. We hunted the shops in Orpington for those things in short supply and helped Mum with the Christmas Pudding and Cake. The garden was still the source of most of what we needed and Dad was unending in his efforts for the table. Dad had the opportunity to buy extra goodies from Unilever Bros where the department he worked in imported exotic foods from overseas. The U boats were doing their worst and it was very sad to hear that another merchant ship had been sunk. More and more of the food we needed was allocated to the ration books and we had to use coupons for a lot of what we needed. Gradually as the shortages made them selves felt the list would be added to.

With Christmas behind us Mum was concerned that I should find a job and go back to work. I was feeling so much my old self that I was keen to find something that would give me some money. Living on Dad's generosity was not my idea of how I wanted to go on.

Morphy Richards had a factory which was producing irons and toasters before the war so I went to see what was available but no luck and for the first time I was told I was "too qualified for what they were doing". I was not upset but it would have been convenient as the factory was within walking distance of our house. Mum and I went to the National Service Officer in Sidcup. He was the equivelant of the officer in Hayes who had stopped my request to leave E.M.I. I was not optimistic but he gave me a letter of introduction to Kolster Brandes.

KOLSTER BRANDES

K.B. was in Footscray and only a short distance from Sidcup High Street so we went straight there and I was interviewed by the head of the Personnel Department. K.B. employed somewhere in the region of 3,000 people and their arrival and departure from the front of the factory was a daily event. The buses were housed across the road from the gates of the factory and as the hundreds of workers streamed out they filled one bus after another in an organised and efficient exodus.

The interview was also efficient and well orchestrated. In no time I was told I would be employed and to report to the Advance Development Department the following week. I had to sign the papers promising to observe the "Secrecy Act"

and confirming all research or development done at the factory by myself as the property of K.B. There was very little to do after that except to turn up for work the next week. Which is what I did.

K.B. was made up of three factories quite simply, Factory A, B and C. The Advance Development Department or A.D.D. was on the second and third floors of factory A. The Engineering Dept was on the second floor and A.D.D. was to one side as you arrived on that floor. From the moment I arrived I realised that this dept. was something very special. There was no traffic in and out of A.D.D. except by those who worked there. You were not allowed to talk about any of the jobs or to remove any papers or equipment; everything was very 'hush, hush'.

The office of the chief engineer was on this floor as was the office with all the desks of the senior engineers. Mr Chatterjai, chief engineer was an Indian and spoke to me very politely. We hardly ever saw him apart from the odd P.R. journey up the stairs to see how we were getting on. He was nicknamed 'the Bird' by most of the engineers in the Lab but well respected and I came to like him for his sensible approach to everything. The total complement of staff must have been about thirty but they were not all working in A factory. The third floor was the one I was directed to on the first day and I found myself in a small room at the head of the stairs next to which was 'The Lab'. I would work here for the next three years, most of the time in the lab and with this same group. I was the only female on the staff other than Miss Sage, secretary to the Bird. I think she was a little terrified at times of the 'boys' but managed them very well. A lady however, who kept herself to herself.

Other than the senior engineers we had undergraduates still working on their degrees or diplomas, a qualified draughtsman and three or four junior draughtsmen. Several operations were under way with periodic supervision by engineers employed by the Air Ministry at Farnborough Research Station. Each operation had a number and again we were not supposed to talk about anything. I was introduced to Mr Scully on the first day and he asked Mr Guest to look after me. I was told to work at a desk in this outside room with my own drawer and place to store belongings. I was given a full set of tools all brand new and had to sign for them, and very quickly told to wire up a chassis using a circuit diagram that was part of an experiment. The chassis that had been used before and then taken apart again. What I later learned to call a 'bread board'.

The first week passed uneventfully with one or two small wiring jobs and I got to know the boys who worked upstairs and with whom I would be associated for the rest of the war. Shortly after I had started, I was joined by a young man about a year younger than myself. His name was Herbert Alfred Showell and we called him Alf and later Has. He became a buddy eventually but that first day all we had to do was put a circuit together and solder it.

From then on we worked on many jobs occasionally meeting socially. The group who were aged between sixteen and eighteen, congregated in the lab.

For much of the time and we got to know one another well as the war progressed. John Cope, Derek Lincoln, John Bateman, all junior draughtsmen. Tony Fitzallen who had lost an eye, by a pellet gun, a senior draughtsman. It was rather sad that several of the younger group had some kind of physical disability. Tony had lost one of his eyes, Johnny Cope was missing his left arm below the elbow, a birth defect. Fletcher; was an engineer, born without an elbow and a shortened forearm. Dermot Ambrose, who gave me away at our wedding was in a sanatorium for several weeks with tuberculosis when I was first employed.

Many men were kept out of the armed forces because they had physical disabilities, hence the preponderance of men on the home front who had physical problems but were fully employed in war work.

I started at K.B. in January 1943 and found myself in a situation I was very pleased with. The work was not difficult and the facilities afforded to anyone working there were available without restraint. There was a very good canteen serving a good hot meal every day which pleased Mum as it saved the coupons required for dinner and with Dad doing the same where he worked she found it easier to make the food coupons go round. The Company cared for the staff and provided social activities for anyone interested. We had a hockey club catering for both sexes, two tennis courts were available at any time, there was a swimming bath installed as a source of water and a preventive measure (at the government's expense) against the possibility of fire. There was a well supported social club and even a photographic club which I joined eventually and became the secretary for.

After a visit from the Air Ministry Research from Farningham, Mr Scully got me to wire up the first part of the latest piece of equipment being developed. It was numbered "43/7" and was to occupy me for most of the rest of the war.

It was an eight channel pulse modulated transceiver and most of my work involved wiring and assembling the build backs and other circuits. There were many changes and redevelopments which went on for months until eventually the entire equipment was connected together and loaded into a van with the whole gamut of power packs etc. and was taken to France on D day as part of the invasion against Germany. There were several engineers working on different parts of the project and we were constantly reminded of the secrecy of this activity and encouraged not to discuss it with anybody at all. Which was difficult for some of our engineers for whom this was an intriguing operation.

I think the next three years were the most rewarding I had ever spent and I have never ever regretted the time I was at Kolster Brandes.

As D Day got closer there was a certain feeling of excitement and tension among the staff in the department with all our engineers testing and retesting each part of the assembly. Several days before the van was to go a young Canadian corporal

from the Air Force arrived in the department and we were told he would be driving our transceiver to the coast for the invasion. By now we were working down in the yard at the rear of the factory constantly checking and altering parts of the various circuits. For several months before this I had worked with Mr Montgomery who took over from Scully with me as his assistant and I answered to him right up to the day the van left. One of the incidents that I do remember clearly was when one of the power packs was having some adjustments to it and Mr Houghton who had charge of them wanted to alter the value of a large condenser and told me to "take it out quickly Maggie and replace it with this one". It was I think charged to 1600 volts and when I grabbed the pliers quickly and cut the connection to the power pack, the condenser discharged itself through my thumb and forefinger with a bang and a flash. So severe was the discharge that I had a hole in my thumb and my finger for quite some time. I think it was HAS who got the job of replacing the condenser and I was sent off to the medical office to have my hand looked at. The nurse gave me Sal volatile for shock and made me lie down for a rest but I couldn't wait to get back to see what was happening to "My Job".

Things become very personal at times like these.