

## WHITE KNOB ROW

by

Ruth Cox

### CHAPTER 1

I was born on the 20th August 1890, in a terraced house in White Knob Row known as Nelson Street, Hyde, Cheshire. The name of White Knob Row originated because every door had a white china pot knob. At this time there was six children, Jim, Ethel the twins, Tom and Sam, Alf and Bill and when I was born, Ruth, then there was seven. Afterwards there came Hannah and Fred, so in all we were 9. (My Mother and Father, Alfred and Hannah Banks were your Great, great Grandparents).

I can remember from the age of being three years when I started to go to School. Just a few weeks after my birth, the family moved to a terraced house in Globe Square, Dukinfield Hall. The School I went to was quite near to my home. I went with my brother Jim and sister Ethel. I Paid two pennies school money every Monday morning. We started school with a prayer then we went along to our own classrooms according to our age and was moved up into a different class every year. We were taught the three 'RS' Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. In our arithmetic lessons we were taught decimals and algebra.

My grandparents were landlords of The Railway Hotel, Globe Square. Can you imagine a square with terraced houses on one side and The Railway Hotel in the middle of them. Across the way on the other side was the school and my house was near the Liberal Club. Also in the Square stood the Old Hall Congregational Church where my Father was a Band of Hope Leader, and my Mother was in the choir. I only recently heard that a fire has destroyed the historic chapel, the chapel itself was the only historical building left in Dukinfield. Listed as being of historical interest it was once used by Lord and Lady Duckenfield. Returning now to my grandparents - James and Cathrine Banks, Cathrine was a French

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lady and James met her in France whilst on holiday. Her maiden name was Cathrine Plantagenet. My sisters and brothers used to go to our grandparents every day after school. At the back of the hotel, the canal flowed by with coal barges working on it on their way to Manchester Ship Canal. We always had a good tea at our grandparents. Grandpa used to hand us a knife to go down to the cellars where sides of beef and ham were hung and we cut the slices which we preferred, then Grandma used to grill them on an open fire in her kitchen. The smell was appetising and when they were ready we used to all sit around the large scrubbed white wooden table and ate it with relish.

In the summer months we were taught to swim. The canal at the back of the hotel was banked with sandbags on either side and we loved to swim and splash about after school. In the winter months, when the canal was frozen over, Grandpa and other neighbours used to test it and they knew it would hold to enable us to skate on it. The fashion in those days were long dresses and white cotton petticoats and long knickers to the ankle and cotton smocks over the dresses in the summer and in winter we wore fur bonnets and black tippet coats with fur muffs. Grandma used to take us to Leonardo's in Ashton under Lyne for our clothes. Our skates were a long piece of wood with a steel edge with tags and we would tie the tags around our high buttoned boots and glide down the canal to Captain Clark's Bridge about two miles and back again. We were all happy through our childhood and missed our visits a lot when we moved and came to live in Hyde. Just before we moved, we lost Grandpa and a few months later, Grandma. During this period my last sister was born, she was named Hannah after my mother.

## CHAPTER 2

I was now nine years of age and my father decided to take us all to live in Hyde. He worked as a Manager at Goodfellows in Mottram Road, Hyde. He was an Engineer. We lived at 201 Mottram Road. It has 4 bedrooms, 4 rooms downstairs and a bathroom. There was a lovely garden at the back where mother grew vegetables and a flower garden. We saw the first tram which went up as far as the New inn and came back passing our house each way. My youngest brother was born and was named Fred.

We were all still going to school but this time we had to be separated. My brothers Alf and Bill went to Hyde Lane (where the P.S.A. is now) My sisters, Ethel and I were sent to Hyde Wesleyans and my sister Hannah and eventually Fred went to school at Godley.

I am going to make a diversion at this point in time to when I was six years of age. It will be of historical interest to you both. During my sixth year 1897, Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee year. Her Majesty visited Ashton and we all saw her. She was riding in a landau, dressed in black and white. We stood in Stamford Street, Ashton and crowds of people stood on either side and as she passed she waved and we waved our flags. We wore red white and blue rosettes. We had been given a holiday to go and see the Queen. The day after when we went back to school we were taken to the Old Hall Chapel and we sang "Rule Britannia" and God Save the Queen and various hymns. On coming out we were given a New Testament in pink and a new halfpenny for the girls and for the boys a New Testament in blue and a new halfpenny. The day was very hot and sweltering and our boys held their testaments and halfpennies so tightly that the halfpennies indented their books which left a mark to this day. It was an

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exhausting day for us and we walked home tired but happy and when we arrived home mother gave us some lemonade and we rested on our beds.

Returning now to Hyde, we had some happy days and sad ones too. When I was ten the twins, Tom and Sam died.

Father used to go to the Hunt in Woodhead and Holmfirth. He used to take us with him on the train from Godley Station to Woodhead and then we walked over to Holmfirth. He would wear his pink Jacket and cream breeches and black boots and black silk top hat. We used to follow the hunt. Sometimes when we came back, Father might bring a hare and Mam used to cook it, put black beer in it and make a maked made jugged hare - the flavour was delicious, it still makes my mouth water! My father was a member of the Rooters Club in which their meetings were held at The Star Inn in George Street (There is no George Street now in 1977 the streets having made way for a bus station and a motorway). Once we came back from the hunt with two beagle puppies which belonged to the Rooters Club. Father would train these puppies for the hunt.

I have another memory, it would be when I was about 12, I went to the Hare & Hounds in Fearnley Street where Joey Knuckle the Hyde Seal swimmer used to keep his cups and shields which he had won. I was asked by Ruth Bradley (a friend of the family) to come and clean them after they had been on show. Joey was a great swimmer and a good help to Hyde Seal. Ruth gave me half a sovereign as gold was plentiful in those days. I cleaned the cups and shields for two years.

### CHAPTER 3

I started to work at 13. The school board allowed children to leave school if their attendances at school had been fully completed.

I worked in Slack Mills in the weaving shed on three looms, weaving blankets and sheets and my wages were 5s.0d. per week.

Mother was in the Salvation Army and she played the concertina in the band, but she also worked very hard for the family. Her kitchen had a large range where she baked bread. The range had to be black-leaded each morning till it shone like ebony. The first to get up was Father at 4 am he always lit the fire and toasted a whole large loaf for us all who had to go to work. He would spread the butter on the toast and make a large pot of tea and we all came down for breakfast. Mother used to put ready our breakfast boxes and billy cans. Sometimes they contained bacon sandwiches and a jaffa orange, or bread and fried fish or sometimes bread and one penny so we could get a pennyworth of boiled ham with a pickle at a shop near Slack Mills. We had to be at work for 6 a.m.

Besides working at the Mill we all had our separate jobs to do in the home. Brother Bill had to do the shopping, brother Alf had to knead a dozen of flour to make the bread for us twice a week. I had to help with the cleaning with my sister Ethel. My eldest brother Jim went out to work with Papa. It was Ethel and I who started work first then followed our youngest sister Hannah and then Fred. We all came home for dinner time as Mother always kept a nice table for dinner. We had an hour for dinner 12.30 to 1.30 pm. We used to meet our pals, lads and lasses going back to work through Tin<sup>v</sup>ers Passage and had many happy times together. We had a quarter of <sup>an</sup> hour for breakfast, 1 hour for dinner and we finished at 5.30 pm.

As I grew older, Father allowed us to go dancing. We all went with our friends usually to Manchester. To the Waldorf costing

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2s.6d. or sometimes to sixpenny hops. We used to catch the train or sometimes a tram on Mottram Road. I usually went with my pals Jessie Kirkland and Minnie Butning. Arriving at the dance hall we found a skip (barrel) at each side of the door, one for men and one for ladies. Inside were white gloves and each lad and lass took a pair of white gloves to wear whilst dancing and after the dance was over we replaced the gloves.

In 1909 I was 19 years of age and I started courting a friend of my brothers. I had known him from being 12. His name was George Henry Cox. George asked my father if "he could walk me out" and my father gave his consent. We used to meet on Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday and we had to be home before 9 p.m. When I was 23 George and I were married on 21st June 1913 at St. George's Church in Hyde. I wore a blue costume and a 'picture' hat and I carried a bouquet of sweet peas. I arrived at Church with my father in a landau. It was very fashionable in those days to wear a navy blue costume with a cream blouse and cream roses in the large picture hat.

Our first house was rented at 86 Nelson Street (White Knobb Row) where we spent a happy year there but then we moved to 7 King Street where we had our first child, a son Wilfred born on 19th July 1915. (Wilfred was your Grandad Cox).

In 1914 the Great War started and George was called up and joined the Royal Engineers. I went back to work after Wilfred was born, my parents had moved and lived next door and looked after Wilfred for me. My parents moved after all their children and grown up. Hannah, Alf, Bill and Fred were still at home then. Wilfred and I never saw George again until after two years.

When the war was over in 1919, Wilfred was six years of age, and it took him a long time to understand that George was his Dad. Whilst working at the mill during these years we started at a

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quarter to eight and finished at 12 noon on Saturdays. As I said my parents looked after Wilfred and when he started school it was at the bottom of the street, called George Street Primary School. When he was little he used to 'pop' in the school and sit and listen to the lessons, he was three and if we could not find him we knew where he would be. The authorities then accepted him for school.

When George, Alf and Bill came back after the war there was great rejoicing because the family were together again. The years passed and we saved up. George was in work with my father. We bought a house at No.14 Tom Shepley Street, our very own. We had a daughter Ruth and later another daughter Doreen Emily. We had sadness because we lost Ruth when she was five through Diphtheria, Doreen was one year and Wilfred was working at 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ , he had finished at Hyde Grammar School but continued studying for the Master Coster Printers Examination. He was employed by The old North Cheshire Herald at Hyde and he studied shorthand, typing at Manchester School of Technology three days a week. He studied hard and when he was 24 he was the first man to win the Gold Medal for the North of England of the Master Coster Printers Examination for eight years. He was presented with the medal at Kelmsley Newspapers in Manchester because with the Second World War having just begun he was unable to accept it in London where usually the Medal would have been presented.

Doreen was six when the war started.

September 3rd 1939 was the start of the second world war and the call to arms came once again. Wilfred was called up on the 2nd January 1940 and on the same day I went myself and joined the Womens Voluntary Service (now called the Womens Royal Voluntary Service). George joined the A.R.P. (Air-raid Precautions). Nine weeks after I joined the W.V.S. there were certain examinations that had to be passed, i.e. we had to pass through the gas chamber, stay for three minutes and then come out. During the war we had to carry gasmasks in case nerve gas was sprayed by German aeroplanes, everyone carried a gasmask, it went everywhere with us. We had three months training in first aid which I passed too. Each day I went down to the Rest Centre and during airraids I was on duty at the Rest Centre to help look <sup>after</sup> the people whose houses had been bombed. Through the nights, the front door was always open in case I was called on duty and on the table in the front room, was placed my tin helmet and gasmask so that I could pick them up on my way out. One Sunday evening around nine o'clock there was an airraid, we had heard the siren, a lady on a bycycle called to tell me to come. She was called a courier in those days. Bombs had fallen on St. George's Church in Hyde, so I made my way there on foot and found a holocaust had struck the church and houses nearby. A.R.P. Wardens were helping the wounded and some were carrying the debris away. During airraids, when I was on duty, George would be walking up and down the street and Doreen set slept under the stairs on blankets. I was on duty the day when the last German aeroplanes came over England. My supervisor was Mrs. Jacks the Superintendent of the W.V.S. I met Lord and Lady Reading once when I was on duty. Evacuees came to Hyde from

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Cheam, Surrey and I was on duty through the night with the children. The children arrived one Friday afternoon and we took them to the Rest Centre in Union Street Sunday School. Cots had been made up in the large school room and each child was fitted out with two sets of underwear, stockings, pyjamas etc. We ladies of the W.V.S. looked after the children until they were settled into homes.

Salvage was required in those days too. Hyde had a Salvage Queen and Doreen was one of her attendants. The Salvage Queen, Jean Lomas and her attendants collected as much salvage, i.e. books, paper, magazines for the war effort. The salvage was taken to the A.R.P. depot and sorted and sent away to government departments. The government used everything they could make use of - the country needs all of us.

In the Rest Centre, we had a rota and we could call and collect anything that was required from this rota to give to the people who had lost their homes during the airraids. Shelters had been built for people to use when the bombs came down and on duty we took and looked after those people in the shelters. We had a kitchen staff in the Fire Station to look after tea and the A.R.P. men used to bring it up. We had a rough time with the bombers and our firemen needed the help of a cup of tea and sandwiches.

During the war we had one holiday. We went to stay with Mrs. Lily Whittaker (Aunty Lily) in Preston. We came to know Lily through Wilfred being billeted with her whilst he was stationed at Preston in the Royal Signals Regiment. After Wilfred was posted abroad, Lily and I used to correspond and we met for the first time on that holiday. Lily was manageress of the R.A.A.F.I. belonging to the Church she went to and whilst there Lily took me down to the canteen which was open all the time and through the

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night for service men. Preston was important because of the docks. Regiments used to gather at Preston before being posted abroad. Some Regiments waited at Preston and used to be gathered in Moor Park and the back of Amnty Lily's house waiting for ships to take them to their destinations. One evening I went down to the station with Lily to serve the servicemen with hot tea and sandwiches. We filled in a lot of time during that fortnight and even went to a dance and was introduced to Lordy Derby.

Whilst the war continued many people all over the British Isles suffered from injuries through bombings and air-raids, many too were courageous in their duties to help others and for their country.

Finally the day dawned when the war was all over, V.J. day 8th May 1945 and <sup>some</sup> fathers, sons and daughters returned home. eventually. In Tom Shepley Street, we had great rejoicing, one of the boys, Ned Booth was coming home from a prisoner of war camp and we had a great party in the street for him. We were all so pleased to see him safely returned to his family. There were bunting of red white and blue hung along the street, flags hung out of windows and on lampposts, it was a great day.

In the years to come, life settled down in to a pattern once more. I still carried on in the W.V.S. and on reflection find I worked for 17 years ~~from~~ for my home-town of Hyde.

I am now in my eighty eighth year and the years between have passed very quickly although I can remember them as though they happened yesterday. I have lost my husband and recently my son. I have been living with my daughter and son in law for eight years.

There is only my sister, Hannah and myself now and we are both looked after very well in different ways.

Both of you are only sharing a little part of my life but I wished you both to read about the historical events from the age of Queen Victoria to the second Elizabethan age in the 1970s.

White Knob Row still stands as far as I know and I have travelled along life's highway sharing my life with my husband, George, my children, looking after my parents and relatives with happiness and sorrow but that's life!

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I would like to dedicate this book to my greatgrandchildren, Oliver and Eleanor. May they know and reach the fullness of life and be happy.