

January 14th 1968

Little Common and me (mostly)

For sometime past when talking to various people about events that have happened during my lifetime they have said "You ought to write a book". That's easier said than done to my way of thinking.

I read in The Daily Express today that to understand fully just what anyone was writing about, one should know something of the writer's background, their antecedents, town or country bred, schooldays, and the kind of work they do, so let me start with my Forebears, = Paul to add dates later =

Peter Elliott

John Elliott

Charles Elphick

Alfred Henry Elliott

Harry Elphick

Richard Elliott (married)

Fanny Elphick

Walter E. Elliott

Paul and Michael Elliott

David Berkeley Elliott

Robert Harding Elliott

1890 - 1895

2.

Childhood

When I was a year old Mother had a ^{serious} ~~bad~~ attack of Bronchitis and was not able to attend to all my troubles, so Mrs. Matthew, a kind friend of my Parents, took charge of me.

Mr and Mrs. Matthew lived at 25 Melward Road Hastings, how long I was with them I just don't know. Mr. Matthew had been Chief Officer

of the Coastguard stationed at Sluice, and while there opened a Mission Hall. Pa used to go there often on Sundays to play the harmonium and Lily did too when she was old enough.

One of my earliest memories is of Jack Freeman the little common coalman who called every Saturday morning with a bag of coal.

He always paid him with a Florin - two shilling piece - which he held between his teeth while he was getting his money bag out of his trousers pocket, there was a leather bag, attached was a brass ring which fitted over the mouth of the bag and this ring used to shine like burnished gold.

I also remember before I could walk, going around the kitchen on my hands and knees, my favourite place was close to the fire grate where I could watch the red hot cinder fall and when they had cooled down, there was just room for me to get my hand through the grate, I picked one up and into my mouth it went and I crunched it between my teeth.

My Ma would say "Oh, you naughty boy, and with handkerchief over her finger would make it all out

A NEW YEARS RESOLUTION JANUARY 1 1968

LITTLE COMMON and ME

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I read in The Daily Express today that to understand fully just what anyone was writing about one should know something of the writers background, their Antecedents, Town or Country bred Schooldays and the kind of work they do.

Let me start with my Forebears.

PETER ELLIOTT

JOHN ELLIOTT

ALFRED LEANEY ELLIOTT

RICHARD ELLIOTT

See over

THE DESCENDANTS OF PETER ELLIOTT
(Compiled 27 December 1968)

PETER ELLIOTT

PETER ELLIOTT was born ca 1736

He was buried at Hooe Sussex 14 May 1823 aged 87

There is no Will indexed in the Archdeaconry of Lewes records at East Sussex Record Office.

He married at Hooe Sussex 21 April 1768 Sarah COLLINS

Sarah was baptised at Hooe 19 October 1746 dau of Thomas COLLINS and his wife Elizabeth

Thomas COLLINS and Elizabeth NEPHAM were married at Ninfield, Sussex 9 May 1745

Sarah was buried at Hooe 25 Feb 1821 aged 74

Issue

1	JOHN	baptised	St Peters Bexhill	29 Apr	1768
2	Sarah	"	" "	2 Apr	1771
3	Sarah	"	" "	13 Aug	1775
4	Susannah	"	St Oswald Hooe	6 Jan	1786
5	Mary	"	"	22 Jan	1787

1 JOHN ELLIOTT see over

2 Sarah - probably died young as 3 was also named Sarah

3 Sarah - there is a marriage recorded in Hooe Parish Register Transcripts - 26 Apr 1801 Benjamin BEAL married Sarah Elliott Benjamin beal buried at Hooe 19 Feb 1828 aged 52

4 Susannah - there is a burial at Hooe Jan 1806 which may be her

5 Mary married Robert STRIDE at St Oswald Hooe 1 Jan 1818
no known issue

Mary was buried 23 Sept 1832

Robert STRIDE died 6 May 1855 both are buried at St Peters Bexhill

Robert STRIDE left a Will Archdeaconry of Lewes Records at East Sussex Record Office Probate 10 May 1856. He left his Freehold (which was the village stores) which he called STRIDES CASTLE consisting of three dwelling houses and a warehouse together with a quarter of an acre of garden

- also a nearby house named Cannon Cottage - to his niece

Sophia STRIDE. He had a nephew Edward STRIDE, he was left nothing. The Elliott,s are not mentioned in the Will.

One year later Alfred Leaney ELLIOTT wrote his Will (which was probated in 1889), leaving what appears to be the same property - less Cannon Cottage - to his wife.

THE DESCENDANTS OF PETER ELLIOTT cont'd

JOHN ELLIOTT

JOHN ELLIOTT was baptized at St Peters Bexhill Sussex 29 Apr 1768
son of PETER ELLIOTT and his wife Sarah - formerly COLLINS

John died at Little Common Bexhill 10 Dec 1850

I searched for his Will at the Principal Probate Registry and also
at East Sussex Record Office without success

He married (date, place and maiden name not known) Martha (possibly
LEANNEY)

There is a Martha baptized at Burwash 1 Mar 1776 Martha dau of
John and Martha Leaney

Martha died at Little Common Bexhill 8 Jan 1852

Peter ELLIOTT witnessed his sons marriage at Hooe in 1835. He is
recorded in 1841 Census return and gives his occupation as an
agricultural labourer. He was resident of Hooe district 1810 to 1819
and as a resident of Little Common they lived close to Cannon
cottage which was topographically in the centre of the village.

Issue

1	Alfred Leaney	Baptised St Oswald	Hooe	13 May 1810
2	Thomas	"	"	15 Mar 1812
3	Edward	"	"	19 Dec 1813
4	Harriet Elizabeth	"	"	18 Feb 1816
5	Susannah	"	"	21 Feb 1819

1	ALFRED LEANEY ELLIOTT	see over		
2	Thomas married Faith	and had issue		
	a	María	Baptised	1834
	b	Thomas	"	1836
	c	Sarah	"	24 Jun 1838
	d	George	"	20 Dec 1840
	e	Edward William	"	11 Jan 1843

3 Edward married at St Oswald Hooe 30 May 1835 Jemima VIDLER
witnessed by John Elliott and Harriet Elliott AND had issue

a	Alfred Vidler	Baptised	3 Apr	1836
b	Edwin Stride	"	15 Apr	1838

all of whom were living at Hooe recorded in Census 1851

4 Harriet - witnessed her brothers marriage at Hooe 1835
nothing else known

5 Susanah

THE DESCENDANTS OF PETER ELLIOTT cont'd

ALFRED LEANEY ELLIOTT

ALFRED LEANEY ELLIOTT was Bapt. at St Oswald Hove Sussex 13 May 1810
 son of John ELLIOTT and his wife Martha
 He died 10 July 1889 at Little Common Bexhill and was buried in
 St Marks churchyard - no memorial stone
 Wrote his Will 1856 Probate p.p.r 1889
 He requested to be buried without unnecessary expense. He left
 his Freehold store and house (the village stores) value £1556 with
 stock in trade and furniture to his wife. Witnesses to the Will
 George Gillham and John Plumb
 He married at St Nicholas Brighton Sussex 21 July 1841 Sarah Ann
 CRAMP dau of Jury CRAMP a farrier, address given 41 Gardener St.
 The ceremony was witnessed by James Tate and Mary Harriet Cramp.
 Sarah Ann was born at Bexhill in 1815
 She was very generous to the church and Salvation Army.
 Sarah Ann died at Little Common Bexhill 2 June 1899 aged 84
 She did not make a Will.

Issue

1	Mary	Born	Little Common	1845
2	Martha	"	"	1847
3	Anne	Bapt.	St Peters Bexhill	13 Jun 1850
4	Richard	Born	Little Common	15 Apr 1853
5	Robert	"	"	ca 1854

1 Mary died unmarried

2 Martha married Benjamin BURTON and had issue

a Daisy Born 1872
 Daisy Burton married William PITT
 no known issue

Martha was buried at St Marks Little Common 20 Sept 1889

3 Anne died unmarried after 1919

4 RICHARD ELLIOTT SEE over

5 Robert married Annie CRUTTENDEN she died 1921 aged 62
 no known issue

Robert died 1931 aged 75

They are both buried at St Marks Little Common,
 there is a small memorial stone.

THE DESCENDANTS OF PETER ELLIOTT cont'd

RICHARD ELLIOTT

RICHARD ELLIOTT was born 15 April 1853 at Little Common Baptised at St Peters Bexhill 2 Oct. 1853 son of Alfred Leaney ELLIOTT and his wife Sarah Ann formerly CRA MP
Richard died 18 Aug 1922 at Ingleton Little Common and is buried at St Marks Little Common, there is no memorial stone
Wrote his Will 1910 Probate P.P.R. 1923
He left everything to his wife value £1123

He married in Eastbourne Sussex 20 July 1881 Fanny Elphic dau of Henry ELPHICK a farm labourer of Hooe Sussex. The ceremony was witnessed by Charles and Mary ELPHICK
Fanny was born at Hellingly Sussex in 1850. One of a large family
Fanny died at Hastings 11 December 1937
She wrote her Will 1925 Probate P.P.R. 1938
She left her estate to her four children

Richard Elliott lived in Little Common Bexhill all his life. He owned and ran the Village Stores, nearly all types of goods were sold, it was also the Sub Post Office for a time. After his marriage he took up residence at Eden Cottage The Twitten little Common close to the Village Stores. After the death of his mother Sarah Ann Elliott he moved into the living accomodation at the Store which was then called Ingleton after a distant relative, VIS 7 July 1800 Thomas INGLETON married Jane CRAMP at Hooe.

Issue

1	Alfred Henry	Born	Little Common	1882
2	Lily	"	"	1884
3	Edward Thomas	"	"	1885
4	Walter John Eugene	"	"	1890

1 Alfred Henry married Amy LEADBEATER and had issue
 a Ronald Born at Bexhill
 Ronald married Gladys and had issue
 a Christine Elizabeth Born 1947
 b Pauline Susan " 1953

Alfred Henry married Zadly Ada Naylor and had issue
 (a) Kenneth Born Dec 1922
 Kenneth married Barbara 1944
 Unknown issue

2 Lily married at St Marks Little Common Leslie FERRIN 1927
 Lily died at Little Common ~~25~~ 15 Oct 1967

3 Edward Thomas married at St Marks Little Common 27 Aug 1917
 Lillian Gillham dau of Thomas GILLHAM jeweller of Little Common
 Lillian was born 1889 and died 1951 no known issue

4 WALTER JOHN EUGENE ELLIOTT see over

CHILDHOOD

On the 27 of February 1890 at Eden Cottage The Twitten Little Common to Fanny wife of Richard Elliott a Son, a brother for Alfred Henry, Lily, and Edward Thomas. The above might well have been announced in the local Newspaper- The Bexhill Observer but whether or not I just don't know. Dr. Wallis at my birth told Mother that I had a slight defect but that I would probably outgrow it at about seven years of age - which I did. Dr. Wallis also said mother must watch out for any trouble when I began to run about - she did - so my troubles started straight away and sometimes when feeling a bit dispondent I think its trouble, trouble all the time but one fine day I hope to change all this. Mother once told me that as I laid in my cradle, which was on the floor, a cold draught affected my right eye, it became all swollen and inflamed and was closed right up for quite sometime, she bathed it with warm milk, Dr. Wallis said that a mild electric shock might help to open it but mother would have none of that as it would hurt me. Eventually between them they got it to open but it left me with a drooping eyelid. When I was a year old mother had a serious attack of bronchitis and was not able to attend to all my troubles so Mrs. Matthews a kind friend of my Parents took charge of me, Mr. & Mrs. Matthews lived at 25 Kilward Road Hastings, how long I was with them I don't know, Mr. Matthews had been Chief Officer of the Coastguards stationed at S luice and while there opened a Mission Hall, Pa used to go there often on Sundays to play the harmonium and Lily did too when she was old enough. One of my earliest memories is of Jack Freeman the Little Common coalman who called every Saturday morning with a bag of coal, Ma always paid him with a Florin - two shilling piece - which he held between his teeth while he was getting his money bag out of his trousers pocket, this was a leather bag, attached was a brass ring which fitted over the mouth of the bag, this ring used to shine like burnished gold. I also remember, before I could walk, going around the kitchen on my hands and knees, my favourite place was cloce to the fireguard where I could watch the redhot cinders fall then when they had cooled down, there was just room for me to get my hand through the guard, I picked one up and into my mouth it went and I crunched it between my teeth, Ma would say, "Oh you naughty boy", then with handkerchief over her finger would rake it all out. As a child in arms I remember Ma taking me to Ghapel one Sunday afternoon, when the sermon started she popped a sweet into my mouth to keep me quiet but unfortunately a wasp settled on my cheek, when I put my hand on it, it stung my cheek. Amid loud yells I was hastily removed to a cottage nearby where Aunt Longley - Ma's Sister - lived and had the 'Blue bag' applied that was the usual remedy in those days. One day when I could run around a bit Ma said she was going to skin a rabbit so of course I wanted to watch the proceedings, I was sat in a chair by the table and when half of the skin was off and the rear legs dangling I felt sick, so I dashed off to the bottom of the stairs to get away from such a gruesome sight, but the cat had been sick right there so of course I got well mixed up in it and started to cry so Ma had to wash her hands and me before she could finish her job. 'Peer Ma'.

CHILDHOOD - Continued

Pa must have had a horse and cart at this period of my life for I very clearly remember going in the cart with him once, and once only, to Bexhill and Sidley. Afterwards he used to take me on his bicycle, he did this several times to get the Shop orders from various customers. He took me to a house at the top of Belle Hill which had been struck by lightning also to a pair of houses near the Church in Old Town which he called 'Two Houses', here I saw a lady working a sewing machine with her feet, threading the needle with the toes of her left foot and turning the handle with her right foot, it was an amazing sight. I do not remember anything about her arms they may have been paralysed or missing altogether, my gaze was centred entirely on her feet, they moved lightly, speedily with precision and dexterity. When I really started running around both indoors and out I soon palled up with the boy next door named Fred Gillham, he was one of a large family of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Gillham. There was Harry, Francis, Nellie, Annie, Flo, Fred, Eadie, George, Daisey, Peggy and Len, I think that's all of them. Their house 'Peach Cottage' was joined to Eden Cottage but was much larger. On the far end was the Mangle house. The mangle was a contraption the like of which I have never seen in all my life since, it was a massive thing. The bottom part was a very solid table about twelve feet long and five or six feet wide with a very polished top, above was a big box or case the same size as the table about two feet deep which contained huge pebbles from Cooden beach. There was a handle on the side which when turned moved the big case to and fro, when it reached the limit of distance one end would tip up about one foot. There were three big wooden rollers all polished about five feet long and six inches in diameter. To do the mangling a big blanket was laid out flat on to a near by table, then the sheets on to the blanket also all of the smaller things, pillow cases, towels, shirts, pants, lady's under wear, the lot. Then a roller was put on at one end and rolled along with the clothes all round it. Then it was placed as near as possible on to the centre of the strong table under the end of the big case which was tilted up, now the handle was turned when the other end of the case tilted up another roll of washing was put under that end. One had to take great care to see that the roll of clothes was put the correct way round or you would find when the case came back and tipped up the roller would be exposed and the washing all spread out on the big table which sometimes caused a few giggles among the various wives who had brought their washing to be mangled.

CHILDHOOD Continued

On Sundays we all went to Chapel, it was a small building with a slate tiled roof and tared black walls outside, it was situated in Sea Road. Pa practically ran the lot. He played the harmonium was Superintendent of the Sunday School and was Leader of the Temperance Guide. The Sunday School met every Sunday morning, there was Chapel Service at 2-30 and again at 6 Pm so you see I was taught to go to Chapel three times on Sundays. The Preachers came from Bexhill, St. Leonards, Hastings, Ninfield, and one brave man from Dalington, 15 miles from Little Common and he walked both coming and returning, there were no buses in those days. After the evening Service some of the Preachers liked to hold an outdoor meeting on the Village Green in the summer time so the harmonium was carried there by helpful friends then we spent another half an hour singing hymns and listening to the Preacher. At one of these sessions Caleb Smith the Village butcher walked by on his way to the Wheatsheaf and I heard him say, "Who is that juggling lot", - that was his special swear word. On our way home from Chapel in the evening we often called in to see Grandma Elliott, she lived in the house adjoining the shop, it was named Strides Castle, she owned the shop too, which came into the hands of Grandpa, Alfred Leaney, after Uncle Stride died, Grandpa died before I was born. I have since been told that the Gillham Family have in their keeping a receipted Bill made out by Robert Stride for goods supplied to George Gillham Sen. dated 1818. Robert Stride owned Cannon Cottage - where the new Bank Building stands today - My Pa told me that he named the house Cannon Cottage because at about the time he bought it the Artillery arrived at Cooden Down and shot and demolished the Mattello Tower that once stood at Cooden, just for firing practise. My Parents, Aunt Marm, Aunt Annie and Uncle Bob, when speaking of Robert Stride, called him Uncle Stride but I am not sure if they were related. Anyway Uncle Stride erected a fence or hedge to enclose Cannon Cottage with the Shop, I suppose one would call it Squatters Rights, but this also enclosed the western end of The Twitten, - which was, and still is today, - a narrow roadway its Eastern end terminated by the school. He turned this land into a big yard for his merchandise, some of the things stored in the yard were Ropes and Yarn, Tallow and Bears grease. The Villagers would not be done out of their 'Right of way' and soon broke gaps in the hedge, in my young days there was no sign that the land had ever been enclosed, it was just a patch of grass. For the annual Sunday School Outing Pa usually took us to Herstmonceux Castle, where the Observatory is today, we travelled in Sargents furniture vane and when Mrs. Matthews children from Sluice joined in with us, we had Mittens van also. We boys soon found our way up the steps which went round and round inside of the towers and along all the underground passages. Pa with quite a number of others went on their bicycles, I did too when I was older. A huge country tea was always spread out on long tables which I am sure we did ample justice to. We played cricket and various games but sad to say at one of these outings Pa was hit on his foot by the cricket ball, he had always had a weak ankle and this was the beginning of the end for poor Pa, he had endless trouble with it later on during his lifetime.

CHILDHOOD Continued

I have mentioned Stephen Gillham, he had three brothers, George, William and Thomas, they all worked together as Builders and Contractors. One of the jobs they did was to put new groins - Brakewaters - in Cooden sea shore as the sea was encroaching and washing all the beach, cliff and road away, I mention these groins now as it affected me when I started my first job. The Father of Gillham Bros. was George Gillham Sen. people called him Shopman Gillham because of his building abilities, in his younger days he was well in with the Little Common Smuglers, he kept the account books. George Gillham Jun. had one son William, William his brother had a son Ralph and three daughters, Veda, Dorothy and Roma, Thomas had twin girls, May and Lily also Alice, so you see with all these Gillham's I had no bother to find playmates. We played hide and seek in Gillham's big sheds which contained ladders, planks, wheelbarrow and all such building materials not forgetting buckets of tar, tar brushes and whitewash, we got plastered with the stuff, Fred was sometimes afraid to go home in case he got a spanking so he made me go with him so that his Ma could see that I was in as bad a state as he was then she would laugh at us. Sometimes about mid morning Fred would suggest that we ask our Ma for a piece of cake, then we would change the cake over, he would eat mine and I his. One morning when I had got my cake I was holding it behind my back waiting for Fred at his back door, his Ma came out with him and said to me 'I suppose you want a piece of cake too', Fred said "No, he has got a piece of his Ma's, now we are changing over as I like his better than yours", then his Ma asked me which cake I liked, I said "Oh yours is much the best. On a Sunday morning I was all dressed up in my brown velvet blouse with lace collar and knickerbockers waiting to go to Sunday School when Fred's Pa came along and said "What little girl is this", you see Reader, Ma did my hair up in ringlet curls which hung about my face. Fred was nine months younger than me but he started day school before I did. My Parents had a photo of our family taken by Emil Vieler in Bexhill showing off my curls, soon after this they were all cut off and I started School.

SCHOOL DAYS - THE VILLAGE - and SHOP

Friday night we children used to call 'Bringing up night' when we could choose anything in the shop we liked such as Chocolate cream, Liquorice, Prize packets, Sherbert suckers, Czar's favourites etc. I expect Pa got his wage packet on that day. The new boys in the Infant Class were all given a Text from the Bible to learn which had to be repeated each morning to Miss Kate Hawkins our Teacher. Fred's text was "We love Him because He first loved us", what my text was I have not the faintest idea. The Infants were in the same building as the other scholars but there was a roll down screen to partition us off. We used slates and slate pencils to do our writing and sums, there is little else that I remember of my time in the Infants. It was a great day when we came out into the big schoolroom and started into Standard one. There was Fred, Frank Duke (ponky), Frank Cheal (the Barber's son), George Freeman, Jessie Mott, Gerald Lingham and others.

SCHOOL DAYS * THE VILLAGE * and SHOP

Gerald had three brothers who were left in the Infants named Reginald, Archibald and Donald. The girls were Phyllis Duke, the Gillham Twins, Elsie Wood and Polly Chester, the Lamp-lighters daughter. There were ten or twelve oil lamps round about the Village which Mr. Chester had to light, trim and extinguish, one could see him each evening starting out with his ladder on his shoulder to do his daily dozen. One night he had just put out the lamp near the Denbeigh Hotel when Jessie Spray the postman came round the corner on his bicycle and ran into the ladder throwing Mr. Chester to the ground, unfortunately he sustained a broken leg. Writing of Mr. Chester with his long white hair, beard and sideboards reminds me of another man who we called Old Jack, I believe he came from Hastings, he was a regular visitor to the Village. He had white hair closely crepped with a stubby beard about a week old, his head looked like a white football which is used now adays for evening matches. He carried a huge basket the shape of an onion with a strap over his shoulder. Sometimes his basket contained oranges which he sold twenty for a shilling, then in the Autumn it was crammed full with bloaters, Ma nearly always bought some of his bloaters at three ha'pence each, we kids went mad over them, but the trouble here was Alf always wanted one with a hard roe, should it so happen that there was only one with a hard roe out of the half dozen bought then Ted and I moaned a bit because we wanted hard roes too. Not long after I had started school we moved from Eden Cottage down to Grandma's house because Grandma died she was 84 years old. Before she died we grandchildren were taken to her bedroom by Pa and Aunt Marn - Mary - Pa's sister. Aunt Marn said the Dr. had asked Grandma if lying in bed so long was she troubled with cramp, Grandma had exclaimed "Cramp, I've had it all my life", the Dr. looked puzzled and Aunt Marn had to explain that Grandma's maiden name was Cramp Grandma called Alf up to the bed then said to him "I have got something for you, hold out your hand", she gave him five golden sovereigns, then Lily had to go to her and she received the same amount in gold and Ted too. Then it came to my turn and Grandma said, "Because you are the little one I will give you six only two of them are half sovereigns. Dear Grandma I loved her very much. - - Now that we had moved to Strides Castle, me, being an inquisitive kid, as most children are, I soon found my way into the Shop. Over the shop windows were the words GROCER ELLIOTT DRAPER, Pa had managed it for Grandma it was the Village Stores they sold practically everything except bread and meat. In those days most things came in bulk form, sugar and soda in one cwt. bags, vinegar and paraffin in barells, black treacle in casks, salt in bars about a yard long and a foot square, teain boxes, coffee came in whole beans so had to be ground, there was what was called the Spice room, in it were grinding machines for black and white pepper, cinemom, cloves and other spices, it smelt beautiful in there but in time these machines were all scrapped as the various things became obtainable already ground in tins and packets. Eventually this room was cleared right out, the floor was lowered to give more head room, then turned into our Parlour where Lily's piano stood, of course this job was done by the Gillham Bro's.

SHOP and AUNT ANNIE

Aunt Annie ran the Drapery side of the business. On numerable shelves were rolls of Flannel, Flannelette, Calico, - bleached and unbleached, Curtain material, Hessian, Green Baize, Tinsell, Ribbon, Buttons and bows Pins, Safety pins, Needles, Boots and Shoes, Hobnailed boots, Laces of all kinds, Wool, Mending wool, Brushes, Pots and pans, Crockery of all kinds both for under the bed and in the bed itself. One special in the bed kind was never sold but kept apart and lent out to all and sundry, rich and poor alike in cases of illness. Other things sold were Corduray trousers, Beehives and Gents Suits made to measure. There was a small Chemistry shelf on which stood Brisleys Cough mixture, Balsome of Anniseed, Friars Balsam, Rhubarb, Dandelion, Daffis, Tallue and Sqills, Ippicucuanna wine, Sweet spirit of Nitre and other remedys including Epsom Salts and Pills of every discription. After our midday meal Aunt Annie nearly always had a walk round the big garden, her Constitutional she called it, if it was at all wet and muddy she would put on her mackintosh, clogs and hat. Yes, her hat, how can anyone describe anything when it is undescribable, this hat of Aunt Annie's was let me say a lady's version of a Sou'Wester with a black ribbon bow at the side. One could hear the clack, clack, clackity clack of her clogs as she moved around the garden. I have mentioned some of my deficences, poor Aunt Annie was endowed with some too, I must tell you two of them. She had a slight affection of St. Vitises dance, her head moved forward then suddenly upwards and backwards. She also had 'Nightmares', Ted and I slept in the bedroom adjoining hers so we heard all about it. It started with a soft low tone sort of moan, then gradually got quicker and quicker with the tone getting higher and higher finishing with almost a scream. Aunt Annie had a fair complectio drank milk and water only, spoke softly putting great emphasis on the words she thought important. She left the shop before the first World War and settled with Aunt Marm in Bexhill.

SHOP and AUNT MARM

Aunt Marm ran the Sub Post Office for this too was in a corner of the Shop using part of the Drapery Counter. She was a 'Bit of a lad' as they say and talked a lot, men customers liked to talk and joke with her, if she was not about when they came in they would say 'Where's Marm. She must have been Post Master a long time before I was born. It was said she was the first and only Post Master in the Country. The Letter Box for posting letters was in the wall of the shop at the end adjoining Strides Castle it was the only one in the Village. Unlike letter boxes of today which are horizontal it was a vertical slot. On the ground beneath the slot was a big stone about eighteen inches square placed there to allow children to post their letters as the slot was four or five feet above ground level. Ted and I often watched Aunt Marm clearing the post box but we were never allowed to be her side of the counter.

SHOP and AUNT MARM

Aunt Marm had vivid auburn hair which hung in ringlet curls around her head like mine did before I went to school. She had a horror of creepy crawley things like spiders, beetles and catapillars. One late afternoon Ted found a big fat toad in the garden. he picked it up then started to walk away so I asked him what he was going to do with it, he said "Come and see". We left the garden by the big double doors where the horse and cart used to pass through then along the road a little way and across the front of the shop to the Post box where the big toad was succussfully poked through. As it was getting near the time for the Post box to be cleared we went into the shop and stood behind the Drapery counter, when Aunt Marm came to clear the box she said, "What are you boys doing this side of the counter you know you are not allowed here while I am sorting Her Majesty's (Queen Victoria) mail", of course we said nothing and stood still. She pushed us back a bit and said "Stand back there", then she unlocked the Post box door which was about eighteen inches square and put her arm down into the aperture which was all in darkness, moved her arm around to grasp the letters then she drew it back again a bit sharpish, "Something moved in there" she said "and it felt cold and clammy", she moved away from the box looking a bit frightened then she turned and facrd us, "What have you put in there" she asked, she was now begining to get into a panic. "You had better get it out quick Ted or Mr. Collins the Postman will be here before I am ready for him". Ted grinned at me he knew he had won the day, for he had been waiting weeks and weeks for Aunt Marm to let him take the letters out but she had always said "No you are not allowed to touch Her Majesty mail", Ted climbed on to the high stool then putting his head into the box reached in and brought out the toad, poor Aunt Marm was now in a real panic. I don't remember what happened to the toad but Aunt Marm was too frightened to put her hand into the box so Ted said, "Shall I get the letters out Aunt Marm", she had to agree, as Ted handed them out she could hardly hold them her hands were shaking so much. "Are you sure you have not left any in there Ted" she said, Ted said, "Yes I have got them all out, you feel", Ted was a 'Bit of a lad too'. Aunt Marm sorted the letters then stamped them with the Little Common franking tool, she tied them up into various bundles and into the bag they went. She tied the mouth of the bag securely and was putting the red sealing wax over the knot also franking it when George the Postman came in. "Evening Mary he said, "Evening George" was her reply, you are right on time it's all ready for you. "Is the seal set" George asked she put her finger on the seal then said "Yes it's set hard but still warm it will be alright. Then with another "Evening Mary" "Evening George" he went off on his cycle to Bexhill. As both Mary and George had been Sworn In - - that is taken the Oath before a J.P. not to disclose any private Post Office business, nothing was said of the little secret between Aunt Marm and Ted.

SHOP and AUNT MARM Continued

I could mention lots of things about Aunt Marm but I will only tell you of one more incident. She came in from the garden wearing a big wide brimed straw hat and I noticed a big spider on the brim so I said "Aunt Marm there's a big spider on your hat. The effect was electric, she snatched off the hat flung it on the floor then escaped from the room with a loud yell. I don't remember how long she kept on with the Post Office job but she eventually gave it up, then Uncle Bob took it over - more of Uncle Bob later -, Aunt Marm hung around for a bit then got a job at Mr. Cocketts provision stores at Belle Hill Bexhill as Cashier, not long afterwards she joined the Salvation Army and in time became their Secretary. I remember one Easter Sunday morning she got up verly early, walked two miles into Bexhill and joined in with the S.A. band which marched round the streets at six A.M. with the big drum banging singing Christians Awake salute the happy morn. Sometime after this she cleared off to the Isle of Wight and lived at Freshwater. After some considerable time she returned to Little Common and lived in a little rambling bungalow between the Village pond and the Chapel. There were two such bungalows, she named them Freshwater Cottages. She took in as a lodger Sid Pitman who worked at the Baker's shop. Aunt Marm must have owned these cottages for later on she sold them, Grandma must have left them to her in her Will, then she bought an annuity of the Salvation Army and with Aunt Annie settled down in Bexhill. How long they were there I just don't know. Aunt Marm must have knocked or injured her leg in some way for an open sore or abcess developed, she saw the Dr. but it hung on and on, then someone told her an Ivy leaf would cure it. Now there are two kinds of Ivy, the three pointed leaf and the five pointed, one of them is poisonous. Poor Aunt Marm must have used the poisonous one for she died of blood poisoning.

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THE SHOP

If Reader you are becoming bored with my scribbling let me brighten things up with this word, 'GUNPOWDER', Yes we - I say we because I was really helping Pa in the shop on Saturdays and after school hours We sold gunpowder, gun caps, wads, number 4 and 5 shot for muzzle loading guns, nails one incho to 4 inches, clay pipes ha'penny each, 4 apenny, rock brimston, sulphar, salt peter, Russian glue, Fullers earth, cream of tarter, flowerpots and saucers, light and dark Shag also Birdseye tobacco, snuff, cigars, cigarettes, we were beginning to become 'Up to date' even mending punctures for George the Postman and other villagers. I had seen in the shed two old bicycles which Pa used to ride, the rear wheels were inches smaller than the front ones, both had solid rubber tyres, the chains were one inch pitch, block not roller $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide, the pedals must have weighed three or four pounds each, the machines were mighty heavy, I asked Alf to try me on the smaller one which he did, after several outings I found that I could balance and ride but the cycle was too heavy for me to hold upright so he had to help me on, then when I got off the machine either fellaway from me or on to me and I received lots of bumps and scratches on my legs and arms.

THE SHOP Continued

Some little time after this Pa bought of Marchants Cycle Shop in Bexhill an eighteen inch frame second hand boys cycle with pneumatic tyres, fixe gear, plunger brake on front wheel, Ted and I bought it between us we paid £2 each. Here was trouble once more Ted wanted the saddle well up, I wanted it right down so the seat bolt was continually being unscrewed and done up, how many new belts we had to have I could not say. After some time Alf bought a secondhand freewheel cycle, Ted bought his old one, I paid Ted £2 then I was the very proud possessor of my first very own cycle, I was six or seven years old at that time and was soon riding to Herstonceaux Castle with the others on our Sunday School treats and ever since then Cycles have been my Life as you will realise later on. In the shop Pa taught me how to weigh up lump sugar in one and two pound bags, soda too, he showed me how to saw up the bars of salt and how to di out figs and dates from big wooden boxes, we used a big skewer for this job. Currants, Raisons and Sultanas were removed in the same way then put into a fine mesh wire sieve, then with clean washed hands were rubbed around to get the strigs off, this made the hands sore, half an hour of this job was quite enough for me. There was a big iron frame hanging on the Warehouse wall so I asked Pa what it was, he told me it was a Mantrap, it was shaped like a Gin trap for catching rats only very much bigger. He said his father - Alfred Leaney - used to set it up in the shop every night and attached a cord to a bell in his bedroom. Burgulars had broken into the shop in Grandpa's time, they got in through the pantry window and to deaden the noise of their footsteps they put the rolls of flannel etc. all down on the floor of the shop. Only a few coppers were taken from the cash drawer but they had a good grub up with a leg of lamb, potatoes bread pudding etc. Grandpa never found out who the robbers were. Ted found a pin firing revolver in the cheese room with a few cartridges he soon fired them off then dumped the revolver. One evening Mr. Hurst J.P. came into the shop and with "Good evening Richard" asked for one ounce of light Shag then put four pence on the counter, at another time Mr. Tom Gillham came in and asked for half an ounce of 'Mans ruination' then put down two pence. Alf left the shop and got a job at a provision shop at Bodle Street. He changed around several times, Eastbourne and Epsom were two of the places where he worked. He met Amy Leadbetter at Westonhanger and married her there, we all went to the Wedding. When they returned to Bexhill they had a son, RONALD. Alf entered the Army in the first World War serving with the Royal Artillery sixty pounders. After the war he was in the shop with Ted and Uncle Bob. Whenever Gipsy's came into the shop Ma always came in and stood at the corner of the drapery counter and peeped through the shelves of various merchandise to see what was going on. One day she saw a Gipsy woman take a pair of boots who slipped them into her apron which she was holding up. Ma immediatly came out and said "I saw you take those boots" but of course the Gipsy denied it, then Ma said "The policeman lives just up The Twitten", to me she said "You know where the policeman lives, go and get him". The Gipsy immediatly dropped her apron, the boots fell to the floor and she got out in a hurry

THE SHOP Continued

Another dodge these Gipsy folk had was at the grocery counter, they would say two pennith sugar, two pennith tea, three pennith cheese, two pennith butter. As each packet was put on the counter they picked it up and put it into their apron, then on they would go, two pennith cheese, three pennith sugar, two pennith tea, one candle etc. etc., it all went into their apron, they were trying to make Pa forget how much stuff they had got. Pa was pretty cuit, they never got away with it, he had a small card behind the tins of salmon on the counter and jotted down the figures then if there was any arguement he told them to turn out their apron, but they never did.

UNCLE BOB

Uncle Bob was the Village Baker, his shop was just across the road from Elliott's Stores, he kept his horse and van in the stables at the rear of Pa's shop. Ted worked as Saturday boy for him. One Saturday Ted delivered bread to Freemans the Coal Merchants at Pops Farm, Ted was always a bit deaf and when he was coming out Freemans collie dog jumped up his back and bit his right ear. It bled a lot so Ma sent for Dr. Osborne, he soon stopped the bleeding, the trouble was over. Uncle Bob had the Bakers shop for a long time but it was eventually taken over by Mr. Sherington. When Aunt Marm finished with the Post Office, Uncle Bob had a new house built on the site of the Village Hall called The Room. The Village Band practised in The Room, sometimes Fred and I crept in to listen to the playing. Stephen Gillham - Fred's father - was the Bandmaster he played the Uphonium, Tom Gillham the Cornet, Bill Mitten the Kettledrum, of course there were other musicians. The Room was demolished and Uncle Bob's house was named Brookfield. He took over the Post Office, then the Telegraph service was installed, His wife - Aunt Nancy - took in Paying Guests, his neice - Florence Booth helped in the house, she was also Telegram Messenger, when Flo. was busy Uncle Bob got me to deliver the messages on Saturdays and after school hours. I soon got to know my way around to where the various people lived who had telegrams sent to them, this was a new Post Office service for Little Common. There was Horton at Whydown, farmers Brand and Lemon AT Hooe, Mayor in Collington Lane, also Col. Lane at Broadoak to mention only a few, not forgetting number 55 Martello Tower away at Sluice, a frightful journey at night. 55 Tower still stands there today quite a distance beyond Sluice towards Pevensey. One evening at tea time Flo came into the shop, she had a telegram for Horton Whydown and would I please go with her, she said that the Village policeman had told Uncle Bob there were Gipys at Four Turnings also at 'Beggars Heaven', well known for Gipsy camps in the High Woods, Flo said she was scared to go alone, I lit the oil lamp on my cycle then off we went down Peartree Lane, past the bottom of Green Lane where Mr's Paul Head lived, where in the daytime her hundreds of chicken were all over the road, along and over the stream, along the curving road past Grinnes Farm, UP Colmans hill, then along to Four Turnings, now we are in the High Woods.

UNCLE BOB Continued

It's terribly dark, raining and very windy, no sign of Gipsy. Flo's lamp blows out, we dismount, I help her to light it, I can feel her hands trembling. We turn left here up a hill facing the wind, it's hard going. Now a gentle slope down to the Brickworks but just this side of the Works I see the red glow of a fire on the side of the road also the dim outline of a caravan. Flo is in front riding fast, I follow up the next slope we hurry past Perrins taking the right fork of the road, down the long hill, now we are at Hortons. The Servant says 'No answer', now we have to get back. We mount our cycles and start up the hill it's steep in places, we get out of breath but the wind is behind us. We pass Perrins then on to the Brickworks it's muddy with deep ruts made by the brick carts, the road narrows and I look for the Gipsy's fire but I can't see it, then suddenly I see just in front a horse standing broadside right across the road. Flo is on my left and swerves over to get past the horse's head but at that very second a Gipsy man steps out of the hedge right in front of her and shouts, Now I am struggling to get past the horse's tail and I am on the wet sodden grass verge, my tyres sink in so I push hard to regain the hard road, I glance across expecting to see Flo mixed up with her cycle on the ground but can only dimly see the Gipsy who is still shouting and swearing. Now Flo got past I just don't know, I pedal hard up the slope, then down to Four Turnings, I catch a glimpse of Flo's red glass side of her lamp as she turns right. It's very dark, I can't see where I'm going she must have better eyesight than me, I can't catch up with her. I see her red glass again as she turns at the top of Colemans hill, she is going like mad. Half way up Kiln Bank I catch her up. I'm breathing hard but find enough breath to say 'You are alright now, only just up The Twitten'. Flo says 'Thank you, Goodnight' and I am at the double doors of our garden. - Flo was several years older than I was, in later years she became Engaged and Married to George Collins the Village Postman. - - Eventually Uncle Bob gave up the Postmaster's job then took over a Small Holding in Kennels Lane, he kept pigs and chicken, he must have had it for sometime. After the war he helped Alf and Ted in the shop. He died in St Leonards Hospital and was buried in St Mark's Churchyard in the same grave as Aunt Nancy.

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 THE VILLAGE

In the early days the roads of Little Common were made up by having beach spread over them, the farmers dungcarts collected it from Cooden. When they returned empty to Cooden Fred and I often had a ride in them. We also walked up to the Denbigh Hotel, sat under the hedge to watch fireworks going off in Edgerton Park. I remember the funeral of the Lingham brothers, they died of lead poisoning because they drank stagnant water from lead pipes at Lower Barnhorn farm. Once when Fred and I with others were fishing in the Village pond we heard a strange noise approaching, one we had never heard before. We looked across the pond to the road where the pond railings were then saw a man walking along holding up a red flag with a Motor car behind him.

THE VILLAGE Continued

It was the first car we had ever seen, it was moving very slowly. THE passenger in the car said to the driver "Look at those kids fishing there can't be any fish in there", this distracted the drivers attention there was a bang as the car collided with the railings. Both men got out and looked at the front wheels, one of them went to the Blacksmiths, Jim Wymborn came back with him. They lifted the front of the car and faced it out into the road, the driver started the engine then got into his seat, the car moved forward, he struggled with the steering wheel but the car came round in a half circle and banged the railings again. Jim Wymborn dashed back to his shop and returned with a seven pound sledge hammer on his shoulder. They lifted the car clear then Jim gave the front axle several hefty blows with the sledge, but all to no purpose the car would not steer straight. Between them they managed to get the car along to the Blacksmiths, the next day one of farmer Lingham's cart horses was harnessed to it, then under very difficult conditions it was pulled into Bexhill. -- Sometimes Fred and I went to his Grandpa's - George Gillham Sen. - to borrow his prawn nets, then caught prawns and crabs at Cooden. -- One Wednesday - early closing day - Mr. Sherrington, who had taken over Uncle Bob's bakers shop, came to Ted and asked him to take Bob, our fox terrier dog, over to his corn and flour shed as there were some rats in it. We moved some of the bags and sacks out, Bob caught several rats, more sacks were moved, more rats killed. When the shed was empty two long poles were put under it then we lifted it up, seven rats ran out and Bob caught them all but he had not the time to kill them properly so one or two bit his lips. We counted all the rats we had caught, in the two hours we were hunting they numbered over sixty, most of them Bob caught, Bob was the best dog Ted ever had. Mr. Hurst J.P. had some cows in his field at the end of our garden, they broke through the hedge and were eating our cabbages and peas. Bob gave the alarm, so Ma dashed up there carrying our big yard broom, she hustled them back, as one ran past her she clouted it with the broom the impact was so great that Ma fell down. Mrs. Sherrington had witnessed all of these 'goings on' from her bedroom window so came over to see if Ma was hurt, she was laughing so much the tears were running down her cheeks. -- One hot summer afternoon when we were in Chapel a big snake came in and went under the stove, Ma saw it then went to Farmer Woods who was sitting well back half asleep and asked him what could be done about it, He said 'It will be alright if it stops there' and it did we turned it out after the service ended. The funny thing about it was that the lesson the Preacher was reading kept mentioning 'The Creature' he had to stop reading every few minutes to control his laughing. The Preachers name was Mr. Jewhurst a baker from Bexhill. On another Sunday I knew that the Preacher planned to come gave long uninteresting sermons so I took a Sexton Blake book with me, when the sermon started I pulled it from my pocket and read it. At the end of the service Miss Marther Weston told me I ought to be ashamed of myself doing such a thing, she told Ma about it but Ma said 'Well, it was a very long sermon', Ma was very sympathetic

THE VILLAGE Continued

Somewhere about this time Main drainage was put in all around the Village and up to date flint roads were laid down, then Diphtheria over ran us, Freida Spray and Daisy Medhurst both died, possibly others, I forget. All the children were asked to bring a bunch of flowers to school, I can remember that I took lovely scented violets also white violets which Ma picked in our garden. We were all taken to the funeral service in St Marks Church then afterwards we dropped our Poses into the open grave. - - One evening Fred and I were watching the Steam Roller at work, it was driven by Dasher Woods, I began to get a bad headache and felt rotten so I told Fred I was going home. When I got home I told Ma, she immediately looked down my throat and put me to bed then sent for Dr. Osborne. People said Dr. Osborn had a glass eye also a cork leg, but he must have been a good man and knew his job, for when he came that night he dipped a small brush into a bottle of liquid then removed the specks from my throat, Ma said the specks looked like small pieces of Chamios leather. My life had been saved by a man who people laughed at because he had one glass eye and a cork leg. - - -

I must now ask you to turn the pages back to School days when I was promoted into Standard one. Sometime after I got into Standard three Mr. Hawkins left the school, the new Master was Charles Agustua Bendall, Cab we boys called him, - very apt don't you think, - I was always told that I was the worst writer in the class but my Composition and Essays were always marked Excellent. When Queen Victoria died we had Dictation on the sad event, it touched upon Her very long reign and how sorrowful all the people were. One of the sentences was 'When the news was announced many people WEPT', I was the only one in my class to spell that last word correctly. Mr. Bendall soon spotted my bad writing, he wanted all upstrokes thin and downstrokes thick, he gave me an example to copy, the words were, 'The evil that men do lives after them The good is oft interred with their bones'. He told us to choose a woman by her head and her heels, Mrs. Bendall's hair was carrotty brown about five inches long, never brushed, her very old slippers went flippity flop as she walked. At sometime during Mr. Bendall's stay as Head Master, when I was in Standard five or six, Mr. G.H. Jackson visited my Parents. He came from Horsham in his motor car, with him were his Wife and son, Master G.C. Jackson. During his stay he took me for a ride whilst going up Church Hill he changed seats with me and told me to take the steering wheel, I drove on for a bit, when he took the drivers seat again he said, 'If ever you want a job you come and see me. Mr. Jackson had a Car and Cycle business at Horsham. I remember when Mr. G.H. Jackson's Parents visited us at Little Common long years ago, they came from Godaming, I acted as guide to them as they wanted to have a look at the sea at Cooden. At that time there were two wooden Shelters on the cliffs we sat in one of them and watched a ship out in the Channel. It was a rough windy day, sometimes the ship disappeared owing to the rough seas, once even the mast of the ship went down out of sight and Mr. Jackson exclaimed, 'Oh, Oh, its sinking', but after a few seconds it bobbed up again and all was well. Mr. Ernest Jackson came in his car, he wanted to visit his Uncle Mr. Charles Jackson at Upper Barnhorn Farm, again I acted as his guide, having another ride in a motor car.

SCHOOL DAYS Continued

When Mr. Bendall left the school Mr. Card arrived. I liked Mr. Card the best but he was the only one who ever tained me. It was like this, During afternoon break from lessons we were in the playground, I noticed a nice big lump of rubbish in his garden all nice and dry it only needed a match put to it. The temptation was too strong for me, so as the bell rang for us to go back into school I nipped over quick then applied that match. Just as we had settled down to lessons Mrs. Card came in and spoke to Mr. Card, he quickly drew us all up to attention, 'Who lit that fire in the garden' he said, 'all the smoke is making Mrs. Card's washing dirty.' No one answered, 'was it you Duke?' 'No Sir' Ponky said, Mr. Card looked all round with a very stern face, 'I'm sure it was you Duke' he said 'go out into the lobby'. Ponky was almost to the lobby door when I stood up and said 'I lit it Sir', 'Then you go to the lobby' he said to me. Ponky was going back to his seat as I passed him, we grinned at each other, soon afterwards Mr. Card gave me 'Three of the best' across my behind. I was in Standard seven, Fourteen years old with Fred, Gerald, Phylis and Elsie, it was the top class, Mr. Card put us into what he called Ex seven, to make room for others coming into Standard seven. - - Ralph Gillham had left school earlier and taken on the job of Telegram Messenger when Mrs. White took over the Post Office from Uncle Bob. The Post Office was now at Cannon Cottage where Mrs. White lived. About this time the Education Authorities took over the school which was Church of England, Fred, Elsie and the others left school so I was alone in Ex seven. Mr. Card soon found me a job, I had to make an Inventory of everything in the school, Desks, exercise books elates, pens, pencils, chalk, library books, ink wells, blackboards, maps on the walls etc, etc. Then Miss Hunniset, who was the Infants Teacher, was taken ill and Miss Jessie Medhurst, who was in charge of Standards one and two, had to take her place. Mr. Card asked me to take " " " " " , Two new girls had just come to school their name was Evans, Dorothy was in Standard one, Gladys in Standard two, I don't remember anything about Gladys but Dorothy always seemed to be miles away floating on some magic carpet, she had no interest in her lessons at all. I have a photograph of Standards one and two taken at school Mr. Card stands at one side, I am at the other. Emily Ockenden's writing can only be described as perfect. I don't remember how long I was in charge of them but after Miss Hunniset returned Mr. Card asked me to remain after school one afternoon. He said he had reported to the Education Authorities all that I had done to help him and they had sent a Cheque for me, the amount the Cheque represented was seven and sixpence. One day Ralph was watching the blacksmiths making spikes or big nails for fixing metal tyres on waggon wheels. This is a two man job, the Smith has a small hammer, his Mate a sledge hammer, the spike is made on the end of a rod of redhot iron, it is shaped, then the Smith replaces his hammer with a chisel, the sledge comes down, cuts the spike off and it flies away on to the ground, but one of them fell into the top of Ralph's spat and slid down his leg. Ralph ran away yelling so Jim Wymborne ran and caught him then cut the spat from top to bottom with his shoeing knife and so removed the hot spike. Ralph had a badly burned leg so was not able to carry on with his job so I tookover and became Telegram Messenger.

I was Telegram Messenger for about fourteen months. The morning I arrived at the new Post Office Mrs. White told me my hours of work would be 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. on weekdays and 8 A.M. to 10 A.M. on Sundays and Bank Holidays. She showed me the cycle Ralph had been riding, it was a 24 inch frame, I could see at once that it was too big for me so I said I would ride my own cycle, she agreed to pay me sixpence a week extra, my first pay packet contained seven and sixpence. Miss Bessie Thomas assisted Mrs. White, we were both sent together to E.E. Hurst Esq. J.P. to be Sworn In. Something must have gone wrong at this session because about a week later we had to go all through this performance for the second time, little did I dream at that time that in later years I should again swear my Allegiance to Queen Victoria's Grandson, King George 5 in October 1914. I sat in the Post Office the first few days, except when I was out with messages, it became a bit tame even with papers and magazines to look at so Mrs. White suggested I could be round about outside, she would ring a handbell when I was wanted. I soon found out that I could hear the bell when I was in the shop so I spent some of my time there which was much more interesting. One of my first messages was for Ricketts, the people who made Blue for clothes washing, they lived at Sandhurst Farm and had several Aberdeen Terriers who always dashed out barking at me, hanging around my heels all the way up to the house. I told Fred Barnes the postman about it, he told me to pretend to pick up a stone when I saw them coming then they would scam. I tried this dodge and it worked O.K. I worked this dodge on numerous occasions but one day Mrs. White told me Mrs. Ricketts had called and told her that I threw stones at the dogs and that I was to stop doing it I explained matters to Mrs. White and heard no more about it. Christmas Sunday morning I delivered a message to Sandhurst Farm, when the servant returned to the door she said 'Mrs. Ricketts thanks you for bringing the message', then she gave me four shillings, a very handsome tip in those days. I had a message for a house in Meads Road, I knew they kept a full grown St Bernard dog so wondered how I would get on with him, I had often seen him in the front garden. When I got to the gate I had a good look round but he was not in sight so up to the door I walked, the door was open and out he slowly came as we met he reared himself up on to his hind legs then put his front paws on to my shoulders and we were face to face, he was so heavy I collapsed on to my back, then he just walked over me down the garden path. Mr. Webb at THE Pages Collington Lane kept a fair sized black dog, I never saw him when I went in but when I came down the steps at the front door he always stood beside my cycle with his teeth showing and barking, when I mounted my cycle he dashed after me snapping at my ankle. One day seizing the right moment I kicked my heel back which caught him on the tip of his nose, he gave a yelp then returned to the house. I saw him many times afterwards and he barked a lot, but never again did he chase me up the long drive.

As I sat on Pa's high stool beside his desk in the shop a big tall soldier came in, it was Ted James in his parade dress of the Royal Sussex Regiment, a scarlet tunic with highly polished buttons and dark blue trousers with red stripes at the sides. He asked for a packet of Woodbines, he lit a cigarette then said 'I really came in to say Good-bye as I am off to the front tomorrow'. Heshook hands wwith Pa and me, we wished him Good luck and a safe return. He was going to South Africa, the Boer War was in progress. -- On a very stormey evening I had a message for farmer Brand Courtlodge Hooe. As it would be wellnigh impossible to cycle against the wind on Pevensey marshes I told Ma I was going to walk, Ma said 'What about the Tramps I'll tell Ted to come with you', Tramps as you, Reader may know are pretty rough chaps who wander about from place to place, sleeping in haystacks, barns or under hedges, knocking at cottage doors asking for food and hot water to fill their tea can. Ted and I started off and had almost reached Sandhurst Lane when we saw lights coming from behind us. It was a motor car, we could hear the pop pop pop of the engine, the road is narrow with high hedges so we keep well in to the side. The car passes us, then stops, we walk up to it, the driver says 'How far are you going' I tell him I have a Telegram to deliver at Hooe. He says 'Jump in the back'. The car was shaped like a Governess Trap with rounded corners, the driver says 'Turn the cushions over they are wet', we tried to turn them over but they were shaped like a leg of mutton, they would not fit the seats, then the driver said 'Turn the wet side down then change each over to the other side of the car', we did this and now they fitted O.K. 'Tell me when you want to get out, I am going to Eastbourne' the driver said. We stopped him at the Hooe road, turned the cushions back again, thanked him very much and said 'Goodnight', 'Goodnight' he said 'I would not have your job for all the money in the world'. -- Mr. Collins was the Sexton at St Marks Church. He came in one wet evening and asked for some Dandelion and Paffys, he said he had been filling in a grave. Pa put a certain amount of each into the glass measure, justshook it around then gave it to him, he drank it in one gulp. After he had gone I asked Pa why he wanted that stuff, Pa said 'I expect it does his back good you know how bent his back is, he works too hard'. -- Ted and I came down to breakfast one morning and Ma said that at half past six - Ma always got up at 6 A.M. - Mr. Coleman had come and asked for some red stuff. Ma asked him what he wanted it for. He said he wanted to make a red danger flag as his men were going to open a hole in the road, Mr. Coleman was the Ganger of the Council workmen, Ma packed him off with a yard of red flannel. - - George and Fred Dicks worked for their father, they had the Wheelwright's shop in the village. Fred burst into the shop with his wrist and hand roughly bound up all covered in blood, he asked Pa to put something on it and do it up properly. Pa sat Fred on the shop stool, had a look to see how much damage had been done, Pa said 'It wants a cobweb on it. He then got from the Chemistry shelf a clean handmade bandage and a bottle, then he went out into the Warehouse, unhitched the ladder and got up into the roof and came back with a handful of cobwebs which he put on to the wound, it was a nasty long cut made by a wood chisel. He then poured some of the contents of the bottle on to it and bandaged it, the bleeding stopped, then Fred went back to work.

TELEGRAPH MESSENGER Continued

When any little accident occurred in the village the people said 'Go and see Dick', also when any housewife had a mishap they said 'Go and get Dick's wife', - - Mr. James - Ted James's father - worked as gardener for Mr. Howard at the private school for boys in Collington Lane. When I had a message for him I was rather surprised as usually it was only the people with money who had telegrams. On my way to his cottage I thought about his son, Ted, and I wondered. Mrs. James answered the door, I gave her the telegram. She, poor lady, like a good many people in those days could not read or write, she opened the envelope, looked at the message, then with fear in her eyes she said 'Read it to me' then before I could speak she said 'Is he - is he' and I was speechless, I nodded my head. She rushed past me and along the road, I followed at a respectful distance. When she had found her husband in one of the big greenhouses I left them together to mourn the loss of a son, a Sussex Soldier who had given his life for King and Country. - - In my school days I had often seen Mr. Morton from Sluice arrive at the village in his horse and cart, then leaving his horse to graze on the village green, he went shopping also to the Wheatsheaf for a drink. He came one day with a new cart and various villagers crowded round to have a good look at it - you know what villagers are - It was rather long and low, something like a milk cart. The wooden part of it was stained and varnished, the metal parts - even the bolt heads - were painted black, it looked like a coffin. Someone asked him where he had bought it, he said 'I made it up all out of my own head and I've got enough wood left to build another'. Some 'Smart Alic' at the back of the crowd said 'You must have a big head'. - - Now Reader will you please let me take you on a visit to number 55 Martello Tower at Sluice. A Mr. Johnston lived here, he was experimenting in beaming radio messages to Tug boats stationed out in the Channel. People said the boats came from Littlehampton. He had a tall aerial mast also a big shed crammed full of equipment. I never knew what the messages were that I took to him, but I did know what he sent back as I had to read and count the words that he had written so that I could collect the right money. The address was always the same, just two words, 'Boomerang London', I think he was an Australian. He had a black beard with sideboards. The journey to 55 Martello Tower was not too bad in daylight on a fine day. I cycled to Cooden and passing under the railway bridge turned right along a rough grass path close to the railway fence, I have mentioned before that the road had been washed away by the sea, riding along about half a mile to the so called - Distant Signal, - Here I rode up on to the Chalk Bank which had been piled up to the level of the railway because the level of the ground fell away. In some places the rough beach was only a few feet lower than the Chalk Bank but in others it was twenty feet or more and as the top of the bank was only about two feet wide, and very rough, one had to ride carefully, when I reached the Signal Box and railway crossing about a mile distant my arms were aching. At this crossing one could see a part of the original road, on the sea side it ended into a mound of beach about fifteen or twenty feet high. Now I could continue my journey in two different ways, I could ring my bell and make the Signaller open the gate - he didn't like this very much as I was the only one who ever passed over the crossing because there was no through road.

If I did this I could ride round in a crescent, past the Star Inn then round to another crossing at Sluice. The other way was to cross the road at the Signal Box, then slither down a high bank into Mr. Mortons field. About half a mile along here was the Gate House where I climbed up a bank at the river Avon, then over or through the railway fence on to the actual railway. You now walk along a narrow path beside the rails for about fifty feet or more then turn left down a slope to a swing gate. Through this gate one is on a big patch of grass, now you pass Mr's Matthews Mission Hall, the Church and the Coastguard Station, then on a rough beach road to 55 Martello Tower a good half mile towards Pevensey. - - The London Brighton South Coast Railway - now called The Southern - put on a Motor train service between Hastings and Eastbourne making various Halts, two of these Halts, one at Cooden Golf - I suppose it was called Golf because Earl de la Warr, who owned all the land and seashore was at that time having the Golf Links laid out - and Normans Bay - Sluice - because of William's landing in 1066 and the Battle of Hastings. - - I have been to Pevensey, Hastings, Battle and Catsfield - a little village inland from Little Common - and I think Catsfield had as much to do with it as the other places I have mentioned but I am only 'Old man Elliott' living at Horsham, so I'm not supposed to have any opinion on such matters - - Well, now back to the Motor Trains, I remember only riding in them on two occasions as my messages came at the wrong times. Nowadays all of the big trains make a stop at Cooden because - dare I tell you why, yes I think I will, - - Before Princess Margaret was married the big train was stopped at Cooden at the Princess' request so that She and a party of young friends could have a look at the Golf Links - - My humble apologies to all concerned - -. It was my usual procedure to go to the Post Office at five minutes to eight each evening to say Goodnight to Mr's white. - Now please let me explain to you the ringing system of the four Post Offices at Bexhill, One ring for Bexhill, Two rings for Bexhill Old Town, Three rings for Sidley and Four rings for Little Common. - One very rough wet night in the Winter I paid my usual visit, as I closed the door the phone bell rang once - twice - three times, Oh no, not me, please not four, FOUR. Mr's White entered the Box but was soon out again, she looked at me and said 'I'm sorry Walter its 55 Martello Tower and on a night like this' I put on my belt and arm band, put the message into the belt pocket and said 'I must go home and put my leggings, mackintosh and cycle cape on before I start', Mr's White said 'You will have to walk, no riding on the Chalk Bank tonight, you won't be back untill eleven o'clock if there is an answer you will have to knock us up as we go to bed at ten, if there is no answer don't trouble to come back here tonight, bring the belt back in the morning'. I went home, the shop was still open and Ted was there, I said 'I've got a message for 55 Tower, coming', 'He said what tonight', 'Yes' I said. We put on extra clothes to defy the weather cycled to Cooden, put our cycles in Mr's Freeman's garden then started on the long trail which I have already discribed. The wind and rain was terrible, it buffited us about, one step forward and two back, it came straight off the open sea.

We reached the Chalk Bank it was very slippery, then on to the Signal Box, we scrambled down into Mortons field, it was begining to get flooded, it was high tide the sea was draining through the beach turning the field into a big lake. The water got deeper, up to our boot tops, we climbed on to the railway fence and went along it sideways, at last we reached the Gate House, climbed up the bank on to the railway. We looked for trains both ways but none were in sight so along the rails we went to the swing gate and on to the grass. It was a pitch black night so could not see the Mission Hall but bearing slightly left, and with a bit of luck we found it, then stumbled along to the Church wall. At last we found the white wall of the Coastguard Station. Leaving this last land guide we were in a wilderness, one of us must walk on the edge of the rough beach road, the other on the beach itself or we should be hopelessly lost. We struggle along and eventually see a glimmer of light in a partly curtained window of Mr. Johnston's big shed. Leaving the rough road and turning left we walk on to the beach past the shed to the handrail of the steps leading up to the door of the Tower. There was no answer to the message and the young lady - who I had often seen before - held the door open to light us down the steps, when the door shut everything was just blackness. We stood still a minute to consider our bearings then found the Coastguard white wall O.K. then came to another one, in fact we walked right into it. I asked Ted if he could reach the top of it, he could, so this must be the Church wall as the Mission Hall wall is about eight feet high. At last we found the swing gate and got up on to the railway, again we look for trains both ways but all is clear, Ted says 'I'm not going to clamber sideways all along the fence by Mortons field let's stop on the railway' and I agreed, the field must have been a foot - perhaps two feet or more under water by this time - so with Ted leading we walked along the narrow path beside the rails. The path was about eighteen inches wide with a bank three feet high on the sea side. Ted said 'Keep your eyes open and watch for the reflection of light from the engine's fire on the smoke and steam and for the green light on the front of the engine'. We walked in silence except for the howling of the wind and the crashing of the waves on the shore, we plodded on and on neither of us spoke, plod, plod, on, on, my mind went back to school days, I thought of the poem we had learned about Napoleon's retreat from Russia - it went like this -.

On in the snow, on in the snow

One by one the soldiers go

They march in silence with muffled tread

Till one of them stumbles and drops behind dead

And the others shudder and glance around

For they hear growing near an ominous sound

In the woods the dismal howl of the wolves

That after them stealthily prowl

By open waste by dreary wood

By rivers black with frozen flood

On in the snow on in the snow

One by one the soldiers go

But we are not walking in the snow, we are just blooming well wet through to the skin, I can feel the water running all down my back and legs the rain gets into my eyes too, I can just see Ted's form in front everything else is blackness. Then suddenly Ted stops and with his arm knocks me down on to the bank as the engine rushes past, his arm holds me down, the vacuum between each carriage seems to drag me away from the bank, the noise is terrific. The guards van passes but we lay still. Ted says 'Are you alright', and I answer 'Yes', we get on to our feet, ~~and~~ I'm trembling and my legs feel weak, has my life been saved the second time. 'That was a close shave' he says, 'didn't you see it coming, I only saw the green light just in time', I say 'I didn't see anything.' We start walking again and Ted says 'The driver must have shut off steam when passing the crossing that's why we didn't see the reflection, we must be near the Signal Box, yes I can see the gates, we might as well walk on this path and not climb over the fence on to the Chalk Bank it will be too slippery'. He talks on and on, is this his way of getting over the shock, off he goes again. "Do you remember when we had to go to farmer Brand's at Rose when the man gave us a ride in his motor, we must have been the first ones in Little Common to ride in a motor, - - Ted didn't know of the other rides I had been given which I have already mentioned, - - Ted continued, "What about when we put that big toad in the letter box", he even chuckles over it, "It was funny when we boys made up a parcel of brown paper with a long string on it and Trip Freeman put it outside the Wheatsheaf door, Goss Eastwood came out, bent down to pick it up and Trip pulled it away, then Caleb Smith came out and saw it then slowly bent down and Trip snatched it away and Caleb said "Juggering young hounds". "Do you remember that dark night soon after we moved down to the shop when we went out to the closet and took a candle to see the way, how we made our tongues sore smoking those pieces of cain. We sat beside each other on the long seat, I had never seen two places to sit in a closet before, wonder why Grandma had it made for two people. We nearly lost poor old Bob when we went to Turkey Farm that Saturday morning with Mrs. Moses Cramp's goods. We were resting because the baskets were so heavy, then we heard a sound, plop, plop plop plop, and found Bob had fallen down that well. There was no Danger board to warn anyone, no posts or anything, with long grass all round it. I leaned right over and tried to reach him but I couldn't, then Frank Cheal and you held my legs and pushed me over the edge, I caught him by his collar, then you two pulled us out, poor old Bob was nearly choked". - - Ted would have talked on but here we are at Cooden Railway arch, we get our cycles from the garden then ride home. We go in the back way, there is a light in the pantry window, Ted softly tries the back door, it opens, we enter, he bolts the door then off come our wet clothes and boots, through the Parlour to the livingroom we go and Ma is sitting in the armchair by the fire, she is just waking up. "You are late" she says, look its five past eleven, did you bolt the door", Ted says "Yes Ma", Ma says "I thought I would wait up for you, leave your wet clothes outside your bedroom door, there's some supper there, I'm going to bed", "Goodnight Ma" we say. We are hungary so tuck in to the bread and cheese and pickled onions.

I started at Marchants 52 St Leonards Road Bexhill a week or two before Easter 1905. Like a new broom I arrived on my first morning a few minutes before 8-30 AM. After a few minutes a young man arrived on a cycle who I afterwards knew as Henry Cox. He said "Are you the new boy" I answered "Yes", he rang the bell at the side door, entered then soon had the shop door open. He took his cycle in and said "Bring your bike in", he put his bike in a stand then said "Better put your old crock out into the workshop, come on I'll show you", We passed a big desk, through a passage way past the Office. On one side stood a dozen or more bikes, on the other various parts of bikes, a sack of cotton waste and an empty tea box which he said held the wood that he had to chop up for Mr's Marchant's fires. On both sides were raised platforms on which stood perambulaters, about twelve of them. The workshop was crammed full with bikes and bath chairs which had wicker work bodys. There was a small lathe, brazing forge and MR. Marchants Tricar which had two wheels in front, driving wheel at the rear, it had a water cooled single cylinder Stevens engine, two speed gear box, chain drive. These last remarks are solely for any of my motorist friends who may have the patience to wade through the facts of my life. Henry pushed a broom into my hands then said "I'll show you how to sweep the shop. He filled an empty carbide tin - carbide was used for gas lamps in those days - this tin had a small hole in the bottom, put his finger over the hole then filled it with water, then we returned to the shop. "Shift all those bikes out into the centre he said, when this was done he removed his finger from the hole in the tin and made a design of loops with the water all down one side of the shop floor which swept, then we did the other side and lastly all down the centre. On both sides behind the bikes were raised platforms on which stood, on one side 12 new prams, on the other new cycles. Henry gave me a handful of cotton waste then said "You dust the prams that side I'll do the bikes, don't spend much time over it because there are several bikes to clean for customers". Whilst we were doing this the Manager, Jack Perkins, arrived on a bike. When Henry and I had finished the prams and bikes he took me back to the workshop then said "We must take some of these bath chairs round to the front of the shop, there is no room to move", he clambered over the chairs and opened the double doors, I followed him out into a passage which led down into Sea Road, each of us pushed a chair round to the front, then he said "You get four more chairs round here, I must clean the shop windows", and ever after, that was my first job every morning during the nine years that I was at Marchants including cleaning the windows. When I was getting the chairs out of the workshop I overheard the Manager ask Henry who I was, Henry said "It's Mr. Elliott's son from Little Common", the Manager said "Hug! a country lout, he won't be any good." MR. Marchant called the Manager Perky but he was Jack to Henry and me. Jack pushed a bike into my hands and said "Clean it good and proper", when Henry had finished the windows he came to the workshop and saw me cleaning it and told me to brush some paraffin on it. You see Reader there were no Tarmac roads in those days so bikes got awfully dusty and muddy especially in the odd corners. Henry said "I will do the front part, you do the rear, we gave it a good clean up., He said "This is Miss Attwood's bike ,that one is Miss Rankin's they breed dogs.

Next morning Ma calls us at 7-15, "Wake up and get up" she says", you will have to wear your second best suits today, your clothes are wet through, there's clean vests and shirts for you, breakfast is nearly ready", then off she goes. Good old Ma she thinks of everything. - - - Throughout all of my journeys to 55 Tower only on one occasion did I meet anyone between Cooden and Sluice and that was the man I least wanted to see. - Of course I had seen men working on the railway occasionally, once I saw two men with two greyhounds chasing a hare on the marshes, the hare made a dash up on to the railway lines, when the men saw that the dogs would follow they called them off.- It was a lovely sunney day when I met Mr. Morton, I had cycled along the Chalk Bank and reached th Signal Box and started down the bank into Mortons field when I observed him coming up. He saw me at once and waving his arm said "Go back, you are not going into my field", I hesitated, he quickly came up to me then grasping the front wheel of my cycle he snatched it round and dragged it to the top of the bank with me hanging on to the saddle, waving his arm again he said "You are not going across my field, you are trespassing", I saw blood on his wrist, I expect he had grazed it on the extension of my front mudguard. I said "I am the Kings messenger, I have a telegram to deliver", he said "I don't care who you are", he looked as though he was about to strike me so I walked to the railway gates and the Signalmen, who had seen and heard our little affray said "What's the matter with that ----- old fool", I said "He won't let me go across his field", He opened the gates, I passed through then along the crescent road past the Star Inn and round to the crossing at Sluice and on to the Tower. As I left the Tower I wondered if Mr. Morton would be waiting for me and I felt a bit frightened so I decided to return over the crossings. When I got to the Signal Box the Signalmen was waiting at the gate, he had seen me coming, I told him that I was very sorry to trouble him again, he said "That's alright son any time", I thanked him and the thought came into my mind that even a man with a stern face can act and speak kindly sometimes. - - Not so very long after this I thought there must be some better way to earn a living and i remembered what Mr. G.H. Jackson had said to me when he visited us before I left school, "Anytime you want a job let me know" I told my Parents I wanted to leave the Post Office and apply for the job that Mr. G.H.Jackson had offered me but they said that I would be homesick going so far away, it would be better to try to get a start with Mr. T.E.Marchant at his cycle shop in Bexhill then I should find out if I would like to be in the cycle trade. I was now fifteen years old, Pa asked Mr. Marchant if he could give me a start, As luck would have it, a boy was just what he wanted. I told Mrs. White I was going to leave as I had got a job at Marchants. She said she was sorry to loose me but would not stand in my way of improving my position

That big Gents Premier with 28" double truss frame and 30" / 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " beaded edge tyres belongs to Mr. Seaman we must make a good job of it because he is a regular and sometimes drops a tip. That rusty fixed gear lady's is Miss Ansell's we have been trying to sell her a new one for years. Those two over there have got to be cleaned today but we must do Mr. Seaman's first as I expect he is riding down to the Golf Links to play golf. This cleaning stunt was the bugbear all the time I was at Marchants, every day there were bikes to clean, sometimes as many as six or more, Henry poked all this on to me, only very occasionally did he - do the front part -. As the days, weeks, months and years passed it seemed to me I was always cleaning Mr. Seaman's bike, one morning he came in sooner than expected, I was just finishing it, Jack told me to bring it into the shop, as Jack handed it to him he said "All spick and span again", then he gave Jack half a crown which Jack put into his pocket and that was the last I heard of Mr. Seaman's tips. Even now at 78 I still have a bike to clean sometimes but not very often as people don't like paying twenty five bob, whereas at Marchants they were charged a shilling. By the way my wages at Marchants started at six shillings a week, As Henry and I were cleaning Mr. Seaman's bike I heard a whistle blown and Jack shouted out "Mr's Marchant wants some coal", Henry said "Come on I'll show you what to do", we went upstairs to the kitchen, got three empty scuttles, then down into the cellar where the coal was kept, we filled them up and took them back, this was another job Henry passed on to me also sawing and chopping wood to light the fires, when the whistle was blown I had to run to answer it. Mrs. Marchant often sent me out shopping for various things, once she sent me to Gammons for a penny packet of mixed herbs, I had only just got back downstairs when the whistle went again, she said the herbs were mouldy would I take them back and change them, I slung the packet over into the back garden, then got another one, if that had been bad I don't know what I would have done for pennys were pennys to me in those days. I also had to get Huntley and Palmers Frighton biscuits for the baby, no other sort would do, one day Mrs. Marchant asked me which shop sold them as she had been to every grocers shop in the town and could not get any, I told her it was the Star Supply Stores in Devonshire Square. Perhaps now I had better tell you my hours of work. The shop was open 8-30 AM to 8 PM on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, on Saturday it closed at 10 PM. On Wednesday (Early closing) in the Winter 8-30 to 2 PM, Wednesday Spring and Autumn 8-30 AM to 5 PM. Summer 8-30 AM to 8 PM, so it was 4 days of actual working of 10 hours Wednesday in Winter 5 $\frac{1}{2}$, Spring and Autumn 7 $\frac{1}{2}$, in Summer we each had evening off at 5 PM. Hours per week Winter 57 $\frac{1}{2}$, Spring, Autumn and Summer 59 $\frac{1}{2}$, we were often disturbed at meal times, Jack to attend the shop, Henry to fill up motor bikes with petrol and oil, they came up the Sea Road passage, I was often called to pump up tyres or oil a pram out on the front pavement, of course the nearby shop assistants rushed in at the last minute to have their gas or oil lamps filled up.

On Saturday nights some accessories were sure to get knocked off the glass shelves when we let the blinds down so me being the smallest had to crawl on hands and knees between the new cycles then put it all straight again with the correct price tickets. Now with our bikes outside the shop, with lamps alight, I had one more last job to do, that was to dash along the street to Shermans sweet shop, put my head and shoulder in the door, then give my head a back nod to Mr. Marchant which meant we were waiting for our wages. He would come along the street munching peppermint creams, give us our money, and we were away. It was generally nearer eleven o'clock than ten so you see we did more than sixty hours a week and people now talk of 'The Good old days', IF they had had 'um ' they would not boast 'bout um'. I have mentioned the number of prams there were about the place but I had not seen half of them. At the top of the building were four rooms, one was the paint shop the others contained prams, push chairs, pan chairs, cots, playpens and two spinal chairs eight feet long with wicker work bodys large enough for a six foot person to lay flat out. All of these things were let out to visitors to the town in the summer season and it was my job to deliver and fetch them back. I had an Edie back pedal brake hub fitted to my bike so that I could ride and push anything including the spinal chairs, I must have ridden hundreds of miles pushing these things to the Sackville, Metropole, Wilton Court and other Hotels also to the hundred and one Boarding houses in Edgerton road, Park road, Cantelupe, Wilton, Eversley, Amhurst etc.etc. I remember I took a new pram we sold to Ninfield, I got caught in a thunder storm where there was no shelter, both the pram and myself got thoroughly wet, the wheels and under carriage of the pram got covered with mud, the farmer said it didn't matter, he could wash it off. Henry once borrowed a hand truck of Mr. Gordon Harris, Painter and decorator, we loaded it with a pram, pushchair, panchair, playpen and cot then pushed it to a big house at Catsfield, six or seven miles on the road to Battle. The servant brought us a jug of beer, this was the first time I had tasted the stuff, I suppose we got a little excited for I remember Henry and I took turns riding and pushing all the way back. When we came out of the Catsfield road, by the Kings Arms a man standing there shouted out to us 'You are starting Christmas early.' I generally cycled home to midday meal - 2 miles - but on wet days Lily packed up sandwiches and a chunk of cake for tea, Henry always brought a good supply of food but Jack seldom brought anything, he would send me to Payne's the bakers for a small milk loaf and to Draytons provision stores for two penny worth of cheese with instructions to tell Bill Moovey to 'Let the knife slip' so that he got a big piece, he also sent me to Findlaters for a bottle of beer. On wet days at teatime, when I brought out my cake, Jack would say 'I've never tasted your Mothers cake' or 'That's a different kind of cake, what about a bit, he was a proper scrounger. In the summer time Mr. Marchant often took his wife out in the Tricar, generally on a Wednesday, Henry and I had to get it ready then take it down the passage into Sea road.

One day at Pevensey the back axle broke, he parked the Tricar in the Castle grounds then came back by train. Next day Henry and I cycled to Pevensey, took the rear wheel out and brought it back, we strapped it on Henry's shoulders. When we had done the necessary repairs Mr. Marchant told Henry to take the wheel on his shoulders back to Pevensey, - 8 miles - fit it into the Tricar, put his cycle in the front seat and drive back. Henry said 'I can't do that by myself, my shoulder still hurts through carrying the wheel the other day, you must let Walter come with me, we can go by train and coming back he can ride in the front". Mr. Marchant had to agree to this or go himself and get his hands dirty, Henry and I quite enjoyed ourselves on that stunt. A little time before Easter 1905 Earl de la Warr had opened what was called The Track, it was a broad roadway running parallel with the promenade up to the top of Galley Hill - a high cliff at the Eastern end of the sea front, terminated by the old Coastguard Station. The Track started some little way beyond the Kursaal Gates, which were at the bottom of Sea road. A small wooden building was erected here which was called 'The Shalst'. I think I am right in saying Mr. Pullham, who had a Garage and workshops in Sackville road - the first and only Garage in the town at that time - was in charge of it. As to whether a charge was made to use it I'm not sure but it was a private road a kilometre in length, car drivers were allowed to do what speed they liked, on the ordinary roads the speed limit was I think twenty miles an hour. Several celebrated enthusiastic car personalities came to Bexhill, I can remember two of them, F.S. Edge Esq. and a gentleman named Napier. Never in all my life shall I forget the name Napier, for this gentleman sold one of his six cylinder cars to some local people living in Hastings road and Henry and I had the job of carrying 16 - sixteen - gallons of petrol up to them much too often for my liking. Both of us fastened together two of the two gallon cans with a strong leather strap then grasping the two sides of the strap with our hands, lifted the cans up over our head so that we had a part of the strap over each shoulder, now we stooped down with one can hanging on our back the other on our chest, picked up two more cans, then we were ready to start on our evening's mile long constitutional carrying 8 - eight - gallons each. Workers in those days were not asked to do a job, they were told to do it. I remember one Saturday night I was told to take a five gallon drum of oil up to these good customers, when walking along Dorset road I kicked into something lying on the pavement, it was moonlight, I could see it was a lady's handbag, I walked on to where I knew there was a wall where I could stand the drum on, then back to the bag, thinking I was in luck but it contained stale stinking fish and chips. - Perhaps I should mention here that Mr. Marchant designed and built his Tricar. On Easter Monday car races were held at the Track, Mr. Marchant won the race for motorcycle with sidecar and tricars. Henry and I were often on the Track testing motor bikes, some with sidecars, as there was no speed limit. The fastest bike and sidecar we ever tried out was a single cylinder Red Indian, we did sixty all the way to the top, not bad for those days.

Mr. Pullham tested one of his cars up the Track and reversing at the top failed to stop, he jumped out just before the car went over the cliff edge and crashed on the beach below, many people went to see the wreck. Dr. Murdock had a Argyle car, he was often seen about the town and country, he was Pa's doctor, his Chaffeur was a young man with a deformed shoulder who had worked for Mr. Pullham. Mr. Pullham ran a bus service to Little Common, Sidley and Ninfield, before he did this he ran a private service, he charged a shilling for the journey Bexhill Little Common return. Ted had a shillings worth of this, they got back to Little Common then something went wrong with the gear box, he could not get his forward gears but the reverse worked alright so he asked Ted to stay in the car, then he drove backwards into Bexhill, Ted had to walk home, but he got his shilling back. One morning at Little Common I saw, in exactly the same place as I had seen the first ever car, by the pond railings, a posh new car shaped like an elongated egg, in fact it had the words 'Easter Egg' on the side of the bonnet, it was very low built, painted white, it's design was miles ahead of the times, no running boards, no step, no projections whatsoever, it was just a shell one could only see the bottom half of the wheels and when it moved it was almost noiseless, just a subdued hissing could be heard, it was steam driven. A young gentleman who was at school in Hastings road had a motor cycle and sidecar, it was a Zenith with Graduar gear. The pully was in two separate parts, by turning a small handle the sides of the pully could be brought closer together or further apart so altering the gear ratio, at the same time it moved the rear wheel forward and backwards in the frame to keep the driving belt in proper adjustment. The bike was a heavy twin cylinder model. This gay young Sport used to drive up and down the seafront sitting in the sidecar and driving with one hand on the handlebars but the police soon stopped him of this 'Show off'. He brought the bike only in to us for repairs with instructions that when finished it was to be taken up to the school and have the sidecar refitted. Henry said to me 'You had better come along with me to help with the sidecar, you can sit on the rear carrier'. We took the bike down the passage into Sea road facing it down to the seafront, by turning the small handle, opened the sides of the pully to the fullest extent, so giving us a free engine, he started her up and said 'Get on'. We started off with a bit of a jerk as he turned the gear handle and we wobbled a bit and the wobble got worse and worse a proper speed wobble, laying over at an angle of 45 degrees untill the footrest struck the ground, the bike swung round and stopped dead, I was thrown right up over Henry's head but landed on my feet then had to run like the dickins to keep my balance, when I stopped and looked back the engine was still running with Henry trapped underneath the bike. With some difficulty I raised the monster up and freed Henry, then we had another go which proved more successful.

Cyril Maud Esq. the well known Actor had a house in Barnhorn road Little Common named 'The Corners', I often delivered messages to him when I was Telegraph Messenger. He had a motor bike named Trafalgar and G.P. Huntley Esq., another popular Actor, had a house at Whydown, he had a car, we charged his accumulators. As I was starting off to dinner one day Mr. Marchant said 'Take Mr. Huntley's accumulator with you and connect it up for him', usually the battery was changed at the shop, Jack the manager did the job hoping to get a tip, I had never seen the position of the battery in the car. When I got to Mr. Huntleys I expected to find the rundown battery in its box, but when I opened the lid and looked inside there was no battery but there were plenty of wires, none of them marked not even plus + or minus -. I knew how to wire the battery up, positive to coil, negative to switch, that had been drummed into me often enough, but here I was with a boxfull of wires, none of them marked. I had a rare old job tracing the wires back to trembular coil, switch, plugs etc. At last I got the coil to buzz and all four plugs to spark, so left it at that, I didn't fool about with the lamps wiring as it was summertime. Mr. Horton of Whydown had two sons named Max and Rex, Max was in the Royal Navy stationed at Portsmouth, he had a twin cylinder Minerva motor bike which he brought to us sometimes for repairs. He came in with it one morning all covered in mud and oil and asked if he could leave it for a few days as he was on leave. Henry said 'It looks as though we ought to clean it up a bit' but Lt. Max said 'Oh no, don't touch it you never want to play around with a bike when its going alright or something is sure to go wrong, I have come up from Portsmouth in three quarters of an hour so it must be going fine' - - . Please Reader may I break in here to say Lt. Max during the first World War, took his Submarine into Keil Harbour, sunk at least one enemy ship and damaged others then returned to Portsmouth unscathed, later on he rose to the rank of Rear Admiral. I believe this keen and gallant Officer died in 1956 but I am not sure. - - Mr. Brooks the mineral water man rode a motor trike around to get his orders, it had a big round brass petrol tank all polished but the rest of the machine was all mud and grease. Mr. Green opened a workshop for repairing motor bikes, in his spare time he experimented in evolving a water cooled cylinder, I saw him once at Little Common on a bike with a " " " " " " it had eight or ten small copper pipes on each side of the cylinder about ten inches long, I did not notice any water tank but he passed by fairly quickly. Mr. Marchant had an old motorbike down in the cellar, I asked Henry if the carburettor had been taken off as I could not see one, he said 'That's an old Kitto bike, one of the first motor bikes on the road, it has a Surface carburettor in the petrol tank.' Staff Sergeant Moss who lived at Hastings came into the shop and noticed a sidecar we had for sale, he said he would speak to his wife about it so that she could ride around with him. After a time he came in again to tell us he was having difficulty in persuading his wife for him to have it. Some weeks later he came again and although his wife was nervous she had agreed with him. We sold him a Premier bike more powerful than his old one, fitted the sidecar then off he went. The next day he came in again and told us that the very first time he took his wife out he had an accident, his wife was seriously injured and would never ride again, the outfit was badly damaged.

About this time Ted got the craze for a motor bike, we sold him a secondhand Minerva which had belonged to a Curate at St. Barnabus Church I gave him a few early morning lessons. In those days the only control on the handlebars was the Valve lift, by pulling the lever up the exhaust valve was lifted so releasing compression. To start, you pedaled the bike along for a few yards, dropped the valve lift and you were away if you were lucky. On the top of the petrol tank were three levers, Ignition, Throttle and Air. Ignition advanced or retarded the spark, Throttle controled the gas from carburetter to firing chamber and Air the amount of air to the carburetter. Ted soon learned the best position for these levers and was soon riding around for orders for the shop also delivering the goods. Then I got the craze so bought a secondhand Rex twin cylinder 6 HP, the double front forks were all joints and springs. Four big long springs on each side and two bigger short ones at the top of the head. The saddle was hinged at the front and at the back had four big springs nine or ten inches long. No discomfort was felt no matter how big the bump or deep the depression that was run over. It is said that 'Open confession is good for the soul' so let me tell you the Registration number DY 126 was never transferred to my name nor have I ever held a driving licence or have I ever had an accident with a motor bike when riding solo, and Henry and I have ridden a good assortment of one kind or another namely Rex, Triumph, Douglas, Rudge, Indian, Fafner Minerva, Feaiand and Moore, BSA, Lincoln Elk, Levie two stroke, Premier, Enfield, Motasacouch etc. My Rex did not run so well as I thought it might do so I removed the plate cover of the timing and had a peep inside. The cam was in one piece and had two projections, the bigger projection worked the valve tappets, the smaller one the make and brake for the trembular coil. When you timed the spark right the valves were wrong, when you put the valves right the spark in one cylinder occoured before the piston was at the top. I asked Mr. Marchant which was best, to have the spark right or have the valves right, he said 'Golly Strikes boy, you want them both right', I said 'I can't do it', he had a look then said 'The cam is worn out put the valves right and let the spark take care of its self'. The result of this bad timing was bad for starting. If the advanced spark cylinder fired first the 'Wreck'? either back fired and bucked, or jumped forward, then you had to be a bit nippy in mounting. Sometimes my foot missed the footrest then the 'Wreck' went off without me and did not stop untill it fell over in the road or ploughed into the bank at the roadside. I might just mention that the footrest was a piece of two inch water pipe bashed throughthe bottom bracket where the cranks and pedals had once been. This pipe projected nine or ten inches each side and was made more firm by having blacksmith's shoeing nails driven in all round it on both sides, it made a pretty picture.

Charlie Mayer was one of the Little Common lads, he worked for a Mr. Baird an electrical engineer in Bexhill. Mr. Baird, on a Saturday afternoon, would sometimes take a dummy torpedo down to the beach near the Kursaal and would send it out into the sea then manoeuvre it about by remote control. I think this must have been the Mr. Baird who years afterwards invented a circuit for television. His invention was never taken up, a different circuit was used by the BBC. You all surely must know what happened to this unfortunate man. - Mr. Marchant had a brother Harry who had a cycle and pram shop at St Leonards, his Partner was Mr. Hunniset who came to preach at Little Common Chapel. Henry often had to call at the St Leonards shop for various reasons before he came to work which made him late. Mr. Marchant - Ernest - often rang Harry on the phone and when about to do so would say to Jack 'I am going to ring 'The other End' and sometimes he would ask Jack if the 'Other End' had rung up. One morning when Henry was late and I had opened the shop the telephone bell rang, I had never spoken over the phone before but I guessed it was Harry, so I lifted the receiver and said 'Is that the Other End' Harry said 'Yes you bally idiot its the other end and this end too, who is that' I answered 'Elliott' then he said 'Call Ern I want to speak to him. It was a long time before I heard the last of that. The roof of the workshop leaked like a sieve, when it rained hard the water ran all over the floor. Once, when the place had dried out after heavy rain, Mr. Marchant told Henry to fetch all of the nearly empty paint tins from the paint shop, put all of the fatty paint into one tin, regardless of colour, then paint all of the putty joints of the glass roof outside. Henry had been on the roof for sometime when there was a crash, he had put his foot through the glass and of course I was right underneath, a piece of glass stuck into my head. Ted Abbott who happened to be coming up the Sea road passage looked in and pulled it out. Mr. Marchant was soon on the scene then sent me to Dr. Duchars who probed the wound and said there was no more glass, he stuck a bandage on which looked like a cap worn by a dunce, this caused ten days of laughter in the workshop untill the Cap was removed. I have mentioned Ted Abbott, he was a Plumber by trade, he worked for Gordon Harris, Painter and Decorator, general house repairs etc. Ted came in wanting some petrol for his blow lamp soldering iron. He told us he was just off to solder up a coffin which had a lead shell. - - Here Ladies, I advise you to omit reading the next few paragraphs. - - Ted came back later to tell us it was Mrs. S ----'s body in the coffin, a well known fairly big stout lady, the body had swollen so much he could not close the lid, and that his mate, a big burly chap, had to sit on the lid to hold it down, but his weight was not enough. He told us what he had to do to enable him to do the soldering but I must not record the way in which he accomplished it as it might even make some hardy men squirm. As to whether he was telling the truth or only pulling our leg I don't know but what he said was really awful.

As I record my working days at Marchants fresh thoughts come to mind, things that I had really forgotten. There was a cycle tyre called Fluis or Flewis, it had beaded edges and was tubeless. One of the beaded ~~edges~~ edges was much wider than the other, the narrow edge had to be fitted on the rim first, then wrap the wider edge into the rim on top of the narrow one, it was difficult to make the tyre airtight. We solved this problem by smearing soft soap all along the edges where they overlapped. Another thing we did was to retread cycle tyres when the wired edge came into fashion. We had a circle of thin wood shaped like a drum but with no top or bottom, sawn across so that the circumference could be made small for 26" tyres or expanded for 28". At one end were two bolts with winged nuts, at the other two long slots to slide past the bolts, when the bolts were tightened it was all firm. The tyre was put on to the drum then the old rubber removed by applying a little heat from a gas jet being careful not to singe the canvas. Rubber solution was brushed on to the canvas and new tread, then the tread was stretched on at once before the solution became tacky. It was left to set for 12 hours before fitting it on to the rim. Henry was just finishing one of these jobs, he was pumping it up, and as Mr. Marchant came into the workshop there was a loud bang, he had scorched the canvas so making it weak. Mr. Marchant said 'Golly strikes Cox you have messed that lot up'. The Rev. Mortlock Vicar of St Barnabus Church had a car, Henry and I were sometimes sent to clean and polish it, check tyres etc. Dr. Scyurm also had a car, we did the same for him, but his outfit was a terrible old thing like you see nowadays in the Old Crock's run London to Brighton. Bowden casing and wire was used for the controls. As one of these wires broke, Mr. Marchant took me with him, we fitted all new wiring. As we had no blowlamp, my job was to heat up the soldering iron in the kitchen fire, run with it along a passage, across a grass patch to the garage, by the time one joint was fixed the iron was too cool to do any more. How many times I made that dash I couldn't say, but it took us several hours to get the job done. The steering was in a shocking state, the wheel wobbled about on the worm thread, so we took the steering down and in the workshop filed about an eighth of an inch off the side plates so that they could be brought closer together, then we put them on to the steering column and put the plates in the vice, we smeared the thread with grinding in paste then turned the column up and down tightening the vice up as required. It took a long time to do but the result was ~~as~~ surprising it tightened everything up OK. Sometime after this Mr. Marchant sold the Dr. a new Di Dion car, the body was in two parts so that it could be a two or four seater. As Henry and I were washing this precious new car down a cat walked along the garden wall and on to one of the garage gates, the other gate was open, the cat was hesitating before jumping the open space, so Henry brought the hose round to spray it but just at that very moment Mr. Marchant came through the open gate on his bike and received the jet of water right across his chest, he said 'Golly strikes Cox what do you think you are doing'

Another job we had was cycle lessons, teaching people to ride. Henry took the adults, unless it was two young ladies who were too nervous to come in by themselves, then I had to go as well. We taught many young ladies also lots of children. A high up Indian Potentate came to Bexhill and stayed for quite a time. It was the Marajahor of Cooch Be Har, Henry taught several of his children to ride, Henry told me that he had to go into the Hotel to arrange the times for lessons and found the various Mothers all reclining on posh settees. A Lady and Gentleman - not local people - brought their cycles to the shop to have a puncture repaired and Henry was called to bring the cycles round to the workshop. As he pushed the outfit into the workshop he said 'Have a look at this lot' I stood amazed at what I saw. The two cycles were joined or braced together side by side, the front forks had a contraption of flat iron and universal joints, when one of the handlebars was turned the other bar turned at the same time and at the same angle. The Gentleman told us his wife was a very nervous rider, by having the cycles braced together hoped it would give her more confidence so that in the near future she would be able to ride solo. A local Gentleman brought his cycle to us for general overhaul, it was called a Sociable, the machine had not been ridden for sometime. This outfit had only two wheels but everything else was duplicated, two handlebars, two saddles, two pairs of cranks and pedals, the handlebars overlapped so the riders sat side by side and arm in arm. When we had put the machine into ship shape order Henry said 'We had better try this lot out', I said 'You are much heavier than I am, we shall not balance', then he said 'We shall soon find all that out' so down the passage we went. He spoke the usual two words 'Get on' so I obeyed. He mounted and as we went down Sea road the machine seemed to be perfectly upright, I said 'Which way are we going', he said 'Hold the handlebars lightly, I'll do the steering. We went through the narrow Kursaal gateway close to the pavement, I said 'Now where are you going', he said 'The Track', we rode along to the bottom of Gally Hill then turned round without dismounting and started the return journey. Now only the railings separated us from the promenade and as the time was mid morning there were lots of visitors about. They stood and stared, hardly believing what they saw. Two young hatless chaps in their shirt sleeves with their ties flapping back over their shoulders, sitting side by side on one cycle and riding arm in arm. Mr. MERCHANT said his tricar was inclined to overheat on hot summer days especially on hills, The radiator was shaped like an arch over the engine, the water tank at the top was polished brass with nine inch cooling pipes at each side, we took the whole lot off and removed the pipes, then we soldered in new half inch copper ones eighteen inches long, and loaded them with furels. The petrol tank, which was under the bucket driving seat, we turned into a tool box. A new wide, but shallow tank was made which we fixed under the front passenger seat to get a better flow of petrol on the hills. Mr. Merchant said it gave the outfit a new lease of life, he was very pleased about it.

We had another tricar in for repair it had Tiller steering, there was no steering wheel, instead there was a bar in position in front of the drivers seat, the driver moved this bar away or closer to him to steer - just the same as it was in a Lanchester car - Of course we had to test it out so the usual words were spoken only a little differently, 'Get in' - instead of get on - Henry said. We went down Sea road to the seafront, turned left and naturally on to the Track, when we returned Henry did not stop at the passage but for some reason continued straight on up towards the Railway Station. The machine slowed down a bit and seemed to drag, so Henry opened her up and almost immediately the rear driving wheel jumped round to the right, then before you could say 'Jack Robinson' we went bump, bump, up on to the pavement, up the short incline, through the open double doors of the Post Office and stopped just before we hit the counter. The Clerk said 'What the ----- do you want', Henry said, 'Ha'penny stamp please', The Clerk said 'Take that ----- Thing out of here', Henry said 'Ok Ok'. We pushed the 'Thing' out backwards. People were beginning to collect some looked scornful, others who may have witnessed all of our escapade grinned. We took 'The Thing' back down to the passage and Henry said, 'Stay here I suppose I must go and tell Mr. Marchant'. After a few minutes they came back together, Mr. M. was saying 'You don't know how to drive with Tiller steering, I'll show you', then off they went down Sea road. About half an hour later Henry came up the passage grinning, he said 'He's done it'. It appears that Mr. M. turned right at the bottom of Sea road, they got as far as Devonshire road when a tramcar came round the corner, as Mr. M. turned away from it the rear wheel of 'The Thing' jumped round and hit the curb then callapsed on to the pavement. We had to fit a new rim and if I remember right the tyre burst so had to be renewed. I don't suppose people buy 'Ha'penny stamps at the Sea road Post Office nowadays. We had a Post Morton on 'The Thing' and found out the trouble, the driving chain to the rear wheel was too tight, after releasing it 'The Thing' went like a bird. - - In the early days of motor bikes the exhaust pipe was short, on the end of it was the silencer. The silencer was shaped like a large fruit tin but made of sheet iron, inside of it were a number of metal plates with small holes called Baffel plates, this reduced the noise of the exhaust. In time the fashion changed to very long exhaust or Pop pipes as they were called reaching right to the rear of the bike and they had no silencer. I had the job of changing the exhaust system to the new idea on a Triumph bike. The steel tubing I used was about 2" in diameter about 5 feet long, I drove a wooden plug into one end, filled the pipe with silver sand to prevent it kinking, then plugged the other end. I made a rough drawing with chalk on the workshop floor the shape the pipe was to be. On the brazing forge I made the pipe red hot then bent it to the correct shape, a fairly acute right angle. Then I brazed on the ring for the recessed nut on the cylinder end also made a support to fix the pop pipe to the chain stay of the frame, Of course I removed the wooden plugs and the sand. The young Gent who owned the bike came in to see how I was getting on and wanted the pop pipe plated. It was sent away then when it came back I fitted it on. The Gent started the bike up in the workshop and was pleased with the new noise it made, then off he went.

Unfortunately in ten minutes he was back saying the bike went on level ground but would not go uphill, there was a loss of power. In the work shop, he started her up, I stood at the rear and discovered hardly anything came out of the pop pipe so I poked a spoke into the end then found it only went in four or five inches. The Platers had put a wooden plug just inside to prevent the plating from getting inside the pipe, when I had removed the wooden plug with a length of red hot iron everything was OK. - - -

I have written a fair account of my working days at Marchants so now a little of my free time or can I say social life.

One more thing has come to my mind. Other than Sundays we only got two whole days holiday, Christmas Day and Good Friday. Boxing Day we opened for children to spend their cash Christmas presents, Easter, Whitson and August Bank holiday we were open untill all of our hire cycles had been taken out, if we got away by 2 o'clock we were lucky, we usually spent several days getting these blessed bikes fitted up, often when we arrived in the morning we found Mr. Marchant had got up early and slapped enamel over several of them. What a life. - - -

When I first arrived at Marchants I soon found out that Henry was a bit of a fisherman and bird fancier. He fished off the beach at St Leonards with other people, he often told me what a job they had to land big conger eels. I also went fishing with Frank Cheal the barbers son, the only day we could go was Wednesday. Bluff Pierce, who was Landlord at the Star Inn at Sluice when I was Telegraph Messenger took over as Landlord at the Denbeigh Hotel Little Common. He had a boat at Cooden which he let us use providing we went 2 miles out to sea and empty his whelk pots, then take the whelks up to the Denbeigh. Of course we had to know exactly where to find these whelk pots so Bluff took us out and explained how to get our bearings. The distant signal - which I have already mentioned - had to be in line with the Oast Houses at Upper Barnhorn farm and a Martello Tower in line with a group of Cedar trees on the Southdowns well inland from Eastbourne. When you got these factors in line at the same time you were at the correct spot, then by rowing round a bit we soon found the big flat pieces of cork floating on the water which were attached to the pots with a long rope. Before we pulled them up we fished for about 2 hours catching mostly Whiting also a few Bass, Lily liked to have some of the Whiting as she was on a diet and lived mostly on Bengers Food, she had a weak stomach. Bluff seemed to pull the pots up with the greatest of ease, he had worked for Gillham Bros. when they put in the new groins or breakwaters at Cooden, it was said of him that he could walk about the beach with a one hundredweight bag of cement under each arm. There were four pots pulled up and there were as many whelks hanging on the outside as there were inside, we got three sacks full. He baited the pots with stale, stinking fish which had been in the boat when we first started, then dropped the pots back into the sea. Frank and I knew now just how to manage things. We could row alright but were taking a bit of a risk when we went out alone as neither of us could swim.

We went out several times when the tide was right and often saw shoals of mackerel splashing about which was a glorious sight. We generally took our tea with us, once when we were eating, my line started running over the side of the boat, when I pulled it up a three pound Bass had caught itself. When the time came to pull up the pots we found it very difficult, we got them up to the surface, but to get them over the side of the boat was a different matter and generally lost half of the whelks which were hanging on the outside. I remember the last time we went out it was a bit frightening for the tide was not really right, it was a windy day and the sea was rough. I told Frank I thought it was too rough but he insisted and said 'Jack Barnes and Bill Ford are out there so it will be alright for us'. The two fishermen were only about a quarter of a mile out attending to their lines. After the third attempt we got away but we were pulling against the tide, it was hard going, we made very slow progress. We got I suppose about a mile out, Frank didn't feel too good, he was always prone to sea sickness, so we decided to return. To turn the boat broadside on to the waves was a dangerous manoeuvre, we counted up the waves as they came because every seventh is supposed to be a big one. We got three parts round when a big one hit us, part of it came over the side of the boat but we were round and running for the shore, the tide was strong taking us past Cooden in the direction of Bexhill. It was ebb tide, we grounded on rocks about one hundred feet from the sand, then we heard someone shout, it was Eluff's son and he came to our rescue. As he waded out to us we got out of the boat, between us we dragged it back to Cooden, I expect he told Eluff all about it for Frank and I never went fishing in his boat again. - -

Frank Cheal and Henry Cox both kept Canaries, Frank had several, I had often seen them in our school days, Henry had only one pair. When his cock bird died, I went with him to Mr. Tutts bird shop in Western road. In the window was a nice cock canary singing its head nearly off so we went in and Henry asked the price, Mr. Tutt wanted fifteen shillings for it. Henry asked him to keep it for a few days while he saved up the money. Very soon afterwards when one day I got back from dinner, the canary, in a small cage, was in the workshop still singing, it just never stopped singing. Henry said 'You ought to get a pair of canaries', I saved up fifteen shillings and Mr. Tutt sold me a cock bird for fourteen, of course it was in the workshop until I went home, it sang all the afternoon. Mr. Marchant said 'Golly strikes Cox how many more of these screechy things are you going to bring here'. Ah, if he had only known. When I got a hen bird from I fail to remember, she laid four eggs, hatched four young ones, both birds fed their young I couldn't do anything wrong so as numbers increased I partitioned off part of the store room over the shop and turned it into my bird room. Frank had a cock goldfinch, he tried to mate it up with a hen canary, it was a long time before he succeeded but he did eventually breed some young which are called Mules, two of them had such a lovely song so of course I wanted a goldfinch

Percy Dibley worked for Gordon Harris and was often up and down the sea road passage. He saw our canaries but he was interested in British birds so I asked him where I could get a goldfinch. He said 'Tutts bird shop', I said 'Yes I know, he wants ten shillings for one and I have spent all my money on canaries', Percy said 'Why don't you catch one, Tutt catches his on the cliffs near Cooden, you only want a pair of Clamp nets and a few thistle heads when they are full of seed'. Ted sometimes fed my birds if I got up late and was getting interested so between us we got the Clamp nets. They were ten feet long by four feet wide with a rod at each end. The rods had a metal eye at one end and attached to them was a metal eye bolt or peg. To use the nets we laid them out parallel to each other with the free ends of the rods and net overlapping about one foot, now we pegged the other ends of the rods into the ground. We tied a strong cord eight feet long to the free rods where they overlapped and at its centre tied a long cord which would reach to our hide about sixty feet away. The nets were now opened back flat so that we had a bare space between them of ten feet by seven feet where we placed the call birds in their small cages and also the brace bird. The brace bird was a linnet we had caught when we first started to use the nets. It was very tame and always eager to hop from its cage into a small cage which we carried it in on our excursions. We had put a double loop of very soft string, with a small brass swivel round its body under its wings. Cruel you say, well read on and think again. This bird was attached by a piece of string about eighteen inches long to a short stick which we could pull up or let down. The bird would pick up seed that we put near it but when we pulled the brace stick up it would at once fly up on to the stick and so attract other birds. We had this bird a long time, two or three years. When we had to pack up bird catching because of the War clouds we cut the brace off then released it. It hung about in the garden for several days, Ted put out seed for it, but it eventually disappeared none the worse for its experiences. Frank, Ted and I often got up at daybreak to go bird catching. Goldfinches and some other wild birds were protected by law so were not allowed to be caught. When we returned we boldly walked through the centre of the village past the policeman, who generally stood in the centre of the crossroads. He would smile, we said 'Good morning' and passed by, we had our nets in long canvas bags to make it look as though we had been fishing. We only pulled our nets when a bird we wanted would be caught, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Linnet etc. we caught dozens of Redpoles but released them straight away. One early morning when Ted and I were putting our call birds into small cages Ma told us there was a man in the yard, it was Percy Dibley, he lived at Sidley, but here he was at Little Common at five thirty in the morning. It was very strange that he had come on the very day we had arranged to set our nets in a field by Collington Avenue close to Sir John Blunt's house - built by Gillham Bros. - We had noticed a flock of Goldfinches feeding on thistles in this field. The four of us set off for Collington Avenue, we set the nets, put out the call birds, then set up the brace bird.

We had to wait about half an hour before the Goldfinches came, there were hundreds of them but they would feed on the thistles outside our nets, the brace bird worked splendidly. At last they came to the thistles in our nets. Percy said 'Let me do the pulling' he waited untill all of the birds had settled, then pulled the cord, but the ditch we were in had a wet slippery bank, the nets reached an upright position then fell back to their original position as Percy slipped down the bank and away went all of the finches. - - - Frank was now keeping his birds at the new Barbers shop, the Freshwater Cottage where Aunt Mary had lived. A Mr. Ellis, who lived in Bexhill, got a job in Little Common, he was a carpenter and cabinet maker by trade. He visited the Barbers shop, saw Frank's birds and Frank told him about me. He came to see my birds and said 'If you can breed canaries like this why don't you get some better ones, prize birds like I keep, then you can join the Hastings Bird Club and show your birds and perhaps win some prizes'. I sold some of my birds, then on a certain Sunday afternoon went with Frank and Dan Thomas - another bird fancier - to Mr. Ellis's house to see his birds. His Norwich Plainhead canaries were all colour fed making their feathers a salmon - orange colour. I came away with five pounds worth of birds in a paper bag. I paid him a golden sovereign, he said 'Don't bother to pay any more now, any old time will do, you can now join our Bird Club and good luck to you'. Frank Dan and I joined the club and later spent many happy hours on Wednesday evenings at the Royal Oak Hotel Hastings where the meetings were held. Mr. Ellis had won the Cup at the last Annual Show and Dan wanted to buy the bird which had won it. At last Mr. Ellis agreed to let him have it for a sovereign, when a little Club show was held at the Royal Oak for Pairs matched for breeding, Dan won first prize and did we have a job to get him home. Several times I won prizes at our Annual Shows which Henry always visited. A Rev. Gentleman club member kept foreign birds and always sent colourful specimens, his lovely parrot was always on show and was always surrounded by visitors because of the words he said so plainly, any lady only had to say 'Pretty Polly' then off he would go, 'Pretty Polly, pot of beer, hurry up or you'll get a thick ear. - - - I caught a Greenfinch just before one of our Annual shows, he tamed down so quickly if I held the show cage up to his cage then open both doors in he would go, I could stroke his back with my pencil and lift his beak and head to make him stand upright and straight. I entered him in the class for Any British Bird, he got third prize, the first prize was won by a Hawfinch, a highly coloured bird. At this show I won three first prizes. I gave my Greenfinch his liberty the very next morning. As I had now won more than three first prizes I was no longer a Novice so would have to enter my birds in the open classes which meant I must improve my stock. Ted had got the bird craze now so bought a pair of canaries of Mr. Pennells a member of our Club who had a Gents Outfitters Shop in Station road - now called London road I believe -

I soon found out these better birds were much more difficult to breed. They would not mate up, the cock would drive the hen bird about or vice versa. If the hen laid eggs they were not fertile, then sometimes the cock would peck and break them if they were O K. To prevent this trouble I removed the egg as soon as I saw it, then replaced it with a dummy until the fourth was laid, then I removed the dummies and put the proper eggs back and took the cock bird away. Sometimes the hen would not feed the young, then I put the cock back. Sometimes he would feed them and after a day or two the hen would help, then all was well, but often he would pick the young up by the scruff of the neck and drop them on the floor of the cage. If the brood was raised there was more trouble ahead for before the young could fend for themselves the old birds would pull out their feathers and start making a new nest with them. This entailed putting the young into a Nursery cage and hanging it on to the old birds cage so that feeding could take place through the wires. Even this did not always prove successful for the old birds were ever on the alert to pinch a few feathers. It seemed to be trouble trouble all the time until one Sunday morning when I was cleaning out the cages - I had about 40 birds at this time - I noticed that my bset cock bird was exchanging calls with Ted's hen bird so I put the two cages close together so that they could see each other then I could see they were both eager to meet. On the following Wednesday I put the hen back into her appointed place then introduced the cock bird, they mated at once. I put a nest pan in, hung up building material and watched for results. They were in a terrible hurry and built a beautiful nest far better than any of my other birds. They had four eggs, I took the cock away as usual. Four chicks were hatched and I noticed when the hen was feeding them she held her head a bit sideways. Yes, poor dear, she was blind in one eye, but she persevered and brought them all up with no trouble whatsoever. When the young could feed themselves I took them away and soon noticed that one of them was a good one. Here was a chance to show a bird which I had bred myself, all my other first prizes had been birds which I had bought of Mr. Ellis. This special youngster I kept in a cage by its self and watched its progress carefully. I was particularly careful over the colour feeding. A young canary does not loose its wing or tail feathers in its first moult and is called an Unflighted bird. My youngster came through the moult well, the wing and tail feathers looked a lovely yellow against the salmon - orange of the rest of its feathers. Our Annual Show was in three weeks time and my eyes were on the Cup which Mr. Ellis hold. The Clapham bird show was in ten days time so I decided to send my Unflighted bird, also two or three others just to see if the Judge would be as impressed as I was. The number on the entry ticket was sixteen so my Unflighted would have at least fifteen other birds to beat exhibitors had to state on the cage table the amount they would sell the bird for, I generally put £2, Mr. Ellis always put £6, I copied Mr. Ellis and priced my Unflighted at £6. I took the case of birds to work with me, they were in the workshop until it was time to take them to the station, Poor Mr. Marchant.

MERCHANTS Continued

That night at eight o'clock as we were preparing to go home Henry dashed out into the workshop and said 'Mr. Ellis is waiting outside to see you, he says you have won first prize', I hurried out and there were Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, just back from the Clapham Show. Mr. Ellis said 'Your Unflighted was placed first in a class of sixty two birds, you didn't show it to me when I was looking at your birds the other day', I said 'No I hid it up in the corner, 'Im going to take that Cup from you at our next Show', He said 'You wont you know, because Mr. Baker my old Pal from the Isle of Wight bought your bird for the six pounds you put on it You lucky chap, I would like to sell a few birds at that price'. Myself, I was happy and yet disappointed, I had bred a prize winner, and lost it About a year later Mr. Ellis told me he had heard from Mr. Baker saying the Unflighted he bought at the Clapham Show turned out to be a hen bird and that it would not do this, that or the other, he had not bred anything at all from it, it was a waste of money. - - Ah well, I suppose we all have disappointments sometimes. - -

THE VILLAGE

Most of the Bird Shows were held in October, when the excitement was all over my thoughts turned to November The fifth, Bonfire night. Practically all of the villagers turned out to witness the Celebrations. The young working men of the village borrowed a cart of George Dicks the Wheelwright then, with the various farmers permission collected all of the hedge trimmings around the lanes and fields, these were placed on the green in front of Wymbornes the blacksmiths. The villagers brought out all of their discarded lumber, broken tables, chairs, anything that would burn. Sometimes the Gentry would supply the Bonfire Boys with fifty faggots so altogether there was a huge pile of material twenty feet high. The Guy was made up in the coach-house behind the Wheatsheaf Fred Gillham and I sometimes had a hand in this stuffing straw into a sack for the body also into the arms and legs of old clothes which someone had brought. The head was made up, then a mask was fitted, A long burning coloured flare was attached, everything was ready for the night Stephen Gillham - Freds father - had been having the band practising for weeks, all of its members wore costumes, Levi Cheal - Franks father - played the big bass instrument which hung round his body, he was dressed as a Scotchman with kilt and being six feet tall made a fine looking figure. The torch light procession, headed by the band paraded round about the village calling at the big houses to play a few selections, not forgetting Elliott's shop, at each stop repeating the old Rhyme. Remember remember the fifth of November the gunpowder treason and plot I know no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot Guy Fawkes guy 'twas his intent to blow up the King and Parliament Four score barrels of powder below to prove old Englands overthrow By Gods providence he got caught with a dark lantern and a light match Hollar boys hollar make the bells ring burn the Pope & God save the King Hip, hip hip, hooray.

When the procession returned, its numbers doubled, the band played its final items in front of the Wheatsheaf then the Rhyme was repeated for the last time. The Guy was brought forth and with the aid of a ladder was placed in someones old chair at the top of the mountain of wood and the coloured flare lit, the ladder was removed, then the fire ignited. Now the fireworks started to sparkle and bang, everyone seemed to have pockets full of them. Elliott's Fireballs were lit, they were made of old sacks bound up into balls about the size of a cricket ball, then soaked in paraffin, I have seen my Pa flinging these fireballs about with nakid hands and as soon as they landed other brave chaps would fling them up again, what did it matter if there were a few blisters on the fingers and sparks in the eyes, it was all part of the fun and frolic, the Leves squibs with their powerful charge would bounce about all over the place making the young ladies jump and scream. The Cannon was brought out, I never knew who it belonged to, it was a relic of some ancient sailing ship of the line, the barrel was three or four feet long mounted on a solid block of wood. It was charged with gunpowder procured from Elliott's shop, it was fired several times during the evening. I well remember one Bonfire night watching the men charging this old gun, someone said 'There's a bit too much powder for a charge' someone else said 'Bung it all in, its the last go, but save enough for the touch,' the powder was rammed down with a stout pole, paper was put in and again rammed well down, gunpowder was put in and around the touch hole, all was ready for firing. The firing stick was called for, it was a long cane with a fusee match at the end, but altho' a search was made it could not be found. Borney said he would use a squib to fire it, Borney was a relative of Wymbornes the blacksmiths, a well known village character, he was completely bald, not a hair on his head, he wore an old slouch hat with a wrinkled brim pulled down so that it made his ears stick out, Borney, I am sorry to say had had 'one over the eight' when the squib was merrily fizzing he applied it to the touch hole, there was a huge explosion and a cloud of smoke and as he staggered back I could see by the light of the bonfire that his face was covered with blood, part of the charge had blown back out of the touch hole up into his face Borney was assisted into the Public Bar of the Wheatsheaf and that was the last I saw of him that evening. -- Cutting from Bexhill Observer - QUOTE. The Duke Bros. found what is now called the off licence trade very profitable in the days when there was no limit on hours of sale. In fact on one occasion they were completely cleaned out of beer, wines and spirits by the Little Common Bonfire Boys the day after they had celebrated the Fifth. They still wanted to celebrate- and they did, in a cowshed belonging to Kewhurst Farm which then stood opposite Dukes Stores Little Common mennow in the autumn of life, but who were then at school still remember that day and night of their fathers. In those days the Bonfire Boys had a drum and fife band and for ever after, that cowshed was called "The Drummers Arms". It was pulled down about 40 years ago. There are now plans to build an off-licence premises on almost exactly the same site. -- UNQUOTE

In my young school days the cowshed the writer mentions was Galib Smith's slaughter - house. In those days humane killers were unheard of, I have seen Bill Smith despatch a bullock with a pole - axe, he had an unerring aim, just one stroke and the animal fell dead. Sheep were dumb before the slaughterer but pigs squealed a lot both before and after they had received the Coup de grace and were difficult to hold. On one occasion Tom Smith and Syd Barnes failed to hold a pig after the knife had been used and it ran out of the door into the field for fifty yards or more before it fell, Tom had to fetch it back in a wheelbarrow.

One Wednesday afternoon - early closing day - I went into the shop and found Pa packing up goods to be delivered in Bexhill by Mr. Mitten the village carrier. He told me some Government Officials had called. They wanted to know how many pounds of sugar, tea, butter, margarine, jam etc he usually had in stock, and how many cheeses and sides of bacon. Pa said 'It looks as tho'the war clouds are becoming blacker and blacker Poor Pa's foot was causing a lot of pain and trouble so Dr. Murdoch arranged for him to go into St'Leonards Hospital for a special examination. After about a week Dr. called and said the only thing that could be done was to amputate it. A week passed then when the Dr. came again he said the trouble was moving up the leg and amputation would have to be at the knee. This was done and Pa was on crutches for sometime, then he had an artificial leg which proved to be too heavy to drag around, eventually he became bed ridden for a long number of years. Lily helped in the shop sometimes and poor Pa had her hands full. Ted had various people to assist him in the shop.

The British Royal Navy held a Grand Review of the Fleet at Spit Head, I forget which year it was but various Heads of State were invited to witness it. As King Edward and Kaiser William moved up and down the lines of vessels in a launch, it was said the King gave the Kaiser a playful slap on his rump and said 'What do you think of it'.

The Kaiser took offence at this and returned back to Germany resolved to build a bigger and more powerful Navy, which he did.

I once read in a child's book that a firework is no earthly good to anyone until it has a match put to it, then it does what it is made to do, it 'goes off'. The Kaiser must have thought the same about his Navy and Army. for he applied the match that set the whole world ablaze, and on August the fourth 1914, Britain was at war with Germany.

When war was declared the local Royal Engineers Coy. Territorials were at their annual summer camp somewhere on the East Coast, they were probably not at full strength, so their Commanding Officer, Major Ticehurst - later Lt. Col. - returned to Bexhill and started forming a reserve unit. Several chaps that I knew in Bexhill and Little Common joined up and as I was a bit 'fed up' with cleaning bikes and pushing prams around I too joined up in October. Major Ticehurst asked me if I wanted to be a Driver or a Sapper so I said "If Drivers have to ride horses I shall have to be a Sapper as I have never ridden a horse or know anything about them". Then Major T. said "I ought to know you, don't you work at Marchants, you sometimes clean and repair my cycle and bring it down to the Electricity Works for me" I replied "Yes Sir", then he said "and you do motor bikes too, I have seen you going around, so I'll put you down as Sapper, and your trade as Motor and cycle Mechanic, you may get more money that way, I want some more good tradesmen". A day or two later I passed my medical, then left Marchants. In the Victoria Hall with many other men, swore my Allegiance to the King for the third time, but this time it was to King George V. For a week or two we went by train to St' Leonards Drill Hall nearly every evening, had a little drill, listened to talks then a Fife and drum band was formed, I had a fife. After a few band practices we were soon out of the streets making a show, but none of us had any uniform, well only the Sergeant. Then for a time we were billeted at St' Leonards. We moved to Clewer, a little village near Windsor and had the chance to look around the Castle. After one of our visits to the Castle our landlady, Mrs. Green, asked us if we had seen the 'Black Arse' we could not understand what she meant, she was referring to the Statue seated on a Black Horse at the end of the Long Walk. We soon left Clewer and arrived at Slough. One wet morning we had a lecture by a Staff Officer, one of the first things he said was "You needn't think that because you are R.E.s. you will go on picnics and beans because you will be first in and last out". I thought he meant that as we had joined up fairly early we should be last to be demobilized like it says in the parable in the Bible, The first shall be last and the last first, but that was not what he meant as you will understand a bit later on. On another very wet cold day we marched to Runny Mead in Windsor Great Park, where King John signed the Magna-charta, Lord Kitchener was going to inspect us. We had several miles to travel, we stood about out in the open with no uniforms for several hours, then some of the men fell down in a faint, the bigger, more robust men pulled them to their feet then walked them about to get a little life into them. At last two cars appeared, they stopped, an Officer emerged from one of the cars and waving his arm shouted "Take the men home", when we got back to our billet our landlady, Mrs. Self, said "You poor things" then provided us with hot baths also some of Mr. Self's shirts, coats and trousers, Poor woman, she must have been completely fed up with us. The Eastbourne Engineers were also at Slough, Lt. Waterhouse was one of their Officers, he took a party of us to Eton College, we saw everything even the Whipping Stool, his name with many others was carved on the panelling of the staircase.

A team of horses of the Eastbourne REs. ran away and just before it entered the main street Lt. Waterhouse jumped and hung on to the leaders' bridles, altho! he was dragged along for several yards, he stopped them, a very gallant action. A few days later we heard he had been drafted to France and before the week was out it was reported that he had been 'Killed in Action'. In the early days of the war an Engineer Officer's average time in the front line was fourteen days, he was then sick, missing, wounded or killed, a Sapper's time was two months. - Christmas 1914 we had Leave, but went in four groups. Group one went and returned before Christmas, Group two were home for Christmas, Groups three and four afterwards. I was drawn out of the hat for group two. Some of us had part of our uniform, some had a tunic only others trousers only, one or two had a cap, we were a proper 'Fred Carno's army but before we could go home we had to have full uniform. I got fitted up OK except that the overcoat was miles too big, the Quarter Master said 'It will keep you warm in the train but don't wear it in the street, it looks ----- awful. - - Our serious training began at Slough, each day we went to Langley Black Park digging trenches, sand-bagging the parapets, making hurdles and fascines, revetting the sides of the trenches then with gun-cotton blew it all up. We laid mines, blew up trees and had instructions with the Weststone Bridge. We did light and heavy Trestle bridging - - I have a photo of a heavy bridge in the making - - also of course we did a good bit of barb-wiring. We went to Henley for Pontoon training the weather had been wet and windy so when we got there we found all but one of the pontoons had been washed down the river and over the weir, they had not been properly secured by the RE Company who had been there before us. We were lucky to have several fishermen from Rock-a-nore and Hastings in our mob. By commandeering a few boats they soon had all eleven of them back, it was quite good fun playing about with them. Sergeant Major Edwards knew his stuff, we soon became proficient. We practised several times at night in the dark, then came the first test to build the bridge at night in the shortest time possible. The record time of twentyfive minutes was held by a Regular Field Coy. we did it in twenty-three, but I'm afraid we cheated a little. Instead of pushing the pontoons straight out one by one. we built the bridge all along beside the river bank then pushed the end of it out into the flow of the river, the current swung it round, then at a given signal by Jimmy Edwards the anchor men in the bow of the pontoons dropped their anchors and the job was done. The last test was in daylight, in conjunction with the Eastbourne REs who had been practising on the opposite bank, we had to bridge right across the river, it took twentyfour pontoons to do this. We put an extra lot of Road-bearers, Balks and Chesses - thick planks - on to the far end of our part of the bridge so that we could join up with the Eastbourne REs., it all went very smoothly under the watchful eyes of several Staff Officers. The bridge was joined up and almost at once we heard the Toot of a Tugboat drawing a barge up the river. The order was given, "Cut the bridge".

The roadway between the eleventh and twelfth pontoons of both sides was removed leaving the two number twelves joined together but free of the bridge itself, this free part floated away on the flow of the river but was held by two long ropes on our side of the bridge, we pulled on the ropes and got it clear, the Tugboat gave two Toots then with the barge in tow passed through the cut. Altho' there was some wash which made the pontoons bob about the bridge held. Our skillful boatmen now appeared then taking the ropes which we had been holding, fixed them to their boats and by rowing hard brought the pair of twelves back into position then they were quickly joined up much to the amusement of the Brass Hats. The next day we returned to Slough.-- We finished our musketry course on the Butts at Runny Mead, it was group firing at one and two hundred yards, then ten rounds rapid at three hundred. After my group had fired, the target markers came back, one of them asked who was on number nine "I was" I answered, he said "We markers had a sweepstake and I won four bob on number nine, you got six bulls, three inners and one magpie in the rapid. During the day Sapper Offord unfortunately failed to close the bolt of his rifle securely so when he fired the bolt sprang back and cut his cheek. Sometime afterwards, when we were in France this same man when using an Adze, cut right through the toe of his boot also cutting his toes. It's funny how these small incidents come back to mind, for that happened more than fifty years ago. It was in Windsor Great Park that we were inspected by King George V. He just rode by on his horse. He looked sad and worried. Years afterwards he had an illness and went to Bognor to recuperate, hence the towns new name of Bognor Regis. One day in early May 1915 when we returned from Langley the Sgt. Major drew us up to attention then said "The following men whose names I call will fall out on the right", I was one of them, we were being put on a draft for overseas, seventy of us. The total strength of an RE Field Coy is about 200 including Headquarters and Drivers. The original Coy. landed in France before Christmas 1914, and now it was May 1915 what awful casualties they must have suffered in five months to want seventy more men. We had our final inoculation and were given a few days leave. As my fiance was working as cashier with John Lewis & Co. in Oxford St. London I decided to brake my journey and meet her outside her place of employment when she left work. Gladys was very surprised when I told her it was my embarkation leave, she said "If you are going home, I am coming with you". She dashed back into the shop to tell the Manager but he had left, so she told the Manageress who didn't want anything to do with it. We had a few days at Little Common, Ted was now registered under the Derby Scheme so was liable to be called up for military service at any time, his assistant had been Henry Hart but he had joined the local Engineers reserve unit, so Ted had the shop all to himself, not at all a thankful job with all the business of rationing. Gladys and I returned to Slough and she was not a bit happy with the thought of returning to John Lewis so she packed up the job thereby breaking the contract and John Lewis informed her they would never recommend her for another job, but we didn't care two Hoots, because we had decided to get married. Gladys could help Ted in the shop and 'learn the ropes' before he had to join the Army, otherwise when Ted went the shop would have to close down, then what would happen to Pa and Ma.

Gladys saved the day and kept the business going untill Alf and Ted returned after the war. - At John Lewis's Gladys had food and sleeping accommodation, her wages were four shillings a week, paid monthly. If she was in the cash desk for silk, furniture or carpet departments many hundreds of pounds passed through her hands, when in the haberdashery desk it was a constant flow of odd farthings, she was not sorry to be rid of it all. - At this time I was billeted much nearer to our parade ground with Mr. and Mrs. Croft, the house was full of soldiers, beside myself, Henry Hart and Willie - a young chap from St Leonards - there were four RAMC lads but Mrs. Croft very kindly let Gladys have a small attic bedroom. I had no idea of how to set about getting wed, but MR. Croft was most helpful. He took me to see the Registrar, as Gladys was not quite twenty one, I had to send a prepaid-reply telegram to her Parents to get their permission for us to marry, and Gladys had to be Resident in Elough for three or four days. Mr. Croft fixed the wedding ceremony to take place at the Congregational Church, where he regularly attended, also arranged with the Minister to perform the ceremony after Sunday morning service, but I had another shock coming, when I asked the Sgt. Major if I could be excused Sunday morning Church Parade, as I was getting married he said "Have you got the C.O.s. permission", I said "No Sir, I didn't know that I had to have his consent", He said "Well, you must have it or your wife will not get any marriage allowance, you had better come along now, I'll see if we can get it fixed up", He fixed it up OK, but I had to go on Church Parade. When we got back to the parade ground there were lines of equipment lying about, we had to get it all put together properly before we were dismissed. I told the Sergeant about my plans, that my wife to be, and my Aunt and Uncle were waiting at the station, where we had arranged to meet, he told the Officer, then together the three of us got me fixed up. I dashed to the Billit, slung my equipment in the porch, then round to the station I ran like a long dog, they had been waiting for some long time. We got to the Church just as the congregation were coming out. Uncle Harvey gave Gladys away, Mr. Croft acted as my Best Man, Gladys and I both said 'I WILL', then with Aunt Polly and Uncle Harvey we walked all through Eton playing fields to Windsor and had our Wedding Breakfast in a Cafe in the main street, we only had to look out of the window to see the Castle in all it's grand Greatness. - Mrs. Croft very kindly let Gladys and I have our meals apart from the others, just the two of us together. On the following Thursday the Draft entrained for Southampton, Mr. Croft saw Gladys off at the station to start her journey home to Little Common. Before the Draft entrained we had a Pay parade, my Army pay was a shilling a day, as I had arranged to allow Gladys three and sixpence weekly, with her Army allowance of twelve and sixpence she had to exist on sixteen shillings a week, and I went to France with sixpence in my pocket, what I came back with I'll tell you later.

At this point, Reader, please let me explain and tell you that I had written FROM MEMORY all that had happened to me and around me from my birth up to the end of the first World War, when I was released from the Army in March 1919. Then Gladys found an old Diary which I had kept with an entry for every day that we were on the Somme, so I scrapped most of my MEMORY writing of the Somme and copied out the Somme Diary. Now, last week - JULY ~~1970~~ 1970 - we found another old Diary, the first date in it is Thursday 13th May 1915. It records that we are leaving Elough to go overseas. I shall call it my YPRES Diary and shall copy it out like I did my Somme Diary, but I have no intention of scrapping my MEMORY writing of Ypres, then Reader, you can check my MEMORY writing with the Diary, and perhaps you will believe all of my MEMORY writing is all true facts. - - May I please say that with the help of Gladys, Paul and Michael I bought this Typewriter on my birthday February 27th 1970 when I reached the age of 80, so please excuse all the errors I have made, also those I hope not to make.

THE WAR Continued from PAGE 44

We were in Bell tents at Southampton, the weather was fine. Saturday we went down to the Docks and on to a ship. Two men brought along some big heavy cases and when the lids were levered off the cases appeared to be full of thick brown grease. One of the men put his hand into the grease and took out a rifle covered in grease, he said 'Take it' to one of our chaps, then very soon all of us had rifles in our hands. The other man gave us a big handful of cotton waste so that we could clean the grease off. In one of the lectures that we had we were told to always remember the number of our rifle. I soon found the number on mine, it was 1919 so I said to the chaps standing there, 'The number on my rifle is 1919, thats the time when we shall get home again'. I must not and cannot record all that was said about my statement. Late Sunday afternoon we all got our kit together and again went to the Docks and on to a ship. We left the Dock as dusk was falling, when we were clear of the harbour I noticed a Destroyer on our starboard beam slightly aft. Our boat was tarred black all over, decks, hatches, masts, handrails, everything was smothered, in places it was still wet. The Captain and Chief Engineer were British, the crew were Chinese and Lascars, they never said a word. It was an uneventful crossing, we disembarked at Le Havre. We were only allowed 3 tents, usually it is about 12 to a tent but we Sappers were packed in 28 to a tent, the NCO's numbering 14 had a tent to themselves. There was plenty of mud about, all our equipment had to be left outside including our boots, I turned mine upside down as it had started to rain. Here Reader please let me tell you that it is not my intention to describe big battles lost and won, more informed persons with better brains than I have written the official history. My story is of the actual things that happened to me, a Sapper, in and out of the front line I ask your indulgence for my awful spelling of French towns and villages. We were at Le Havre for a day or two, then entrained and found ourselves at Bayeux. Here we had a chance to look around a bit. We saw the front door of a big building on which it was said the enemy had crucified one of our Infantry men.

We were billeted on the top floor of a large building, the floor was concrete, so not too comfortable. Through a small window we could see the star shells or fairy lights going up over the front line trenches. On the following Sunday - Whit Sunday 1915, one of the Officers of the original Coy. came to pick us up. We marched to Dickebusch near Ypres where we found the Coy. in shattered buildings of a farm. We had a high tea of Irish stew and bread which I enjoyed, we had been on bully and biscuits for a week. Most of the Sappers were sleeping rough, under the hedges, we did the same. Here I must mention L.C. Cecil Woods, Cecil was a dental mechanic, he had worked for Mr. Roby, a dentist and had actually made my dentures just before we left Bexhill. Somehow we got pally and good pals we were. We slept in the same blankets together, and where he was, I was, both of us were in number 4 Section, we were always together unless duty ordered otherwise. Nobby Clark referred to us as Mr. and Mrs. Jackie, I was always called Jackie in the Army. Cecil with part of number 4 Section went up to the trenches Whit Sunday night, my first venture was on Whit Monday. Our journey was across fields to the Krustat road, over more fields, past a group of tall trees called Shrapnel Corner, over the railway cutting with high banks on both sides. The railway was banked right across with sandbags, on the enemy side the water was eight or ten feet deep, on our side, embedded in the sandbags was a 5 gallon ginger beer cask with a screw stopper, this was the water supply for the front line Infantry. We crossed the rails then climbed the high bank. Then Nobby said to me 'Now you are on Hill 60 Jackie'. The Sergeant said 'You chaps know what to get on with', then to me he said 'You come with me'. You see Reader, I was a new boy, he took me to a communication trench where there was a shelter, the shelter was where logs of wood had been placed across the trench, covered with sandbags. The Sgt. told me to clean the mud and water out and drain it to a sump hole further down the trench, then told me I should be quite safe there, but I was all alone. Little did I know then of the endless times that I should find myself alone at night in places where I had never before been, even in daylight. At knock off time Sgt. came to see what I had been doing all day. It had been a hopeless task, for the mud and slush came in at the top end as fast as I slung it out at the lower end. As we started back to Dickebusch Sgt. said 'The usual procedure now in pairs, 40 or 50 yards apart, don't crowd together', then he started off with Ronnie Dennett. After a few minutes a Lance Corporal and I got away when we got to Shrapnel Corner the enemy opened up with a salvo of shrapnel, I could see the ground torn up in front of us. The next salvo was further ahead, the L.C. said 'That's just about caught Sgt. and Ronnie come on run', we ran to a gap in the hedge at the end of the field, as we passed through I saw Sgt. about 50 feet away kneeling beside the prostrate form of Ronnie. Sgt. had stripped off Ronnie's web equipment and opened his tunic, his shoulder and arm was bleeding badly. Sgt. and L.C. were putting on first aid dressings. Sgt. said 'Run to the First Aid Post for a stretcher and wait there until I come', at that moment two more Sappers arrived, so Cuthbert Harrison and I ran, he had longer legs than I had, so beat me to it. As I got to the Post two Belgium or French Red Cross Orderlys dashed off with a stretcher.

As we waited at the Post a Supply Column came by, they too had caught enemy fire at Hellfire Corner on the Ypres road. The Driver on the leading pair of horses had a dressing on his head, then came a team of six horses, on the leading pair the Driver was bandaged on his arm, the other two pairs were riderless, the poor animals were wounded, there was blood on their body and legs. In the waggon were several men, one was sitting up, the others lying down, all were bandaged. I thought to myself, if this is my first day up the line, what will the last be like. I was on Hill 60 lots of times, if I mention them all my story will never end. During the second battle of Ypres the enemy used Phosgene Gas for the first time, the Canadians had a terrible time, we were issued with so called Respirators, they were made of strips of black crepe 2 feet long and a foot wide folded over a lump of Kapok - sometimes used for stuffing cushions -, we had to dip respirator into a bucket of some liquid every morning or evening before going up the line, then tie them round our cap or tin hat, if they got dried out in the hot sun we were advised to make water on them, this was the only protection we had, it was not always successful. After a time we moved from the shattered farm into some vacant huts, during the night I seemed to get a continual itch round my neck and shoulder. In the morning, while waiting to parade, one Sapper kept shrugging his shoulder, someone asked him what was the matter, he said 'Its the lice, I'm lousey', I immediatly knew that I was lousey too. That evening Cecil and I took off our shirts and found the little beggers in all the seams, we killed dozens of them, and ever afterwards it became our daily routine. Sometimes we washed our shirts and hung them out, then getting buckets of water from the pond, went behind the hedge, took all of our clothes off and emptyed the water over each others heads, soaped ourselves all over, more water over our heads, a quick rub down, then we felt clean and hoped for a little respite. In the morning our shirts were frozen stiff as boards, when we got them dry enough to put on, found that the 'Chats' - as we called them - were more hungry than ever, finding ourselves in a worse condition than we were before. From the huts it was a farther distance to the line so sometimes our toolcart driver would meet us with a pontoon waggon on the Ypres - Krustrat road when we returned, when he drove at a trot over the cobble stone road it shook the inside out of me. On one occasion a shell passed over our heads, hit the road just in front of us making sparks but did not explode, then it bounced further on making more sparks and finally exploded, the driver never turned a hair, he just kept the horses trotting. As certain enemy activity had been observed number 4 Section were sent to drive a Sap out from a fire trench into 'No man's' land. We worked in shifts, in my shift there were six of us, Pop, Nobby, Punch Weeks, Ted Booth and myself, the job lasted several days. The last time I was there, as we moved along the fire trenches a Infantry man stopped us and told us to keep our heads down as the parapet was blasted and that their Sgt. had just been shot by a sniper

We crawled on our hands and knees by the collapsed trench, then a little farther on we saw the Sergeant, the bullet had entered his forehead and the back half of his head was missing. The sniper must have used a bullet which had it's tip cut off with pliers so causing it to spread. The Sap was now nearly finished, as Punch used the pick, I shovelled the earth back, Pop, Nobby, Weeks and Ted filled sandbags then carried them out of the way. Punch said to me 'Listen, can you hear it', I told him I didn't hear anything, then he said 'Come up here and listen', now I could hear it, Thump, thump, - thump, thump, thump, the enemy was driving a sap not far away. Punch said 'If we can hear them, they must hear us, go and ask Nobby for an India rubber pick, I had to laugh, serious tho' our position might become. We reported it to our Sergeant who told our Officer, he got an Officer of a Mining Coy. to listen, being a trained miner he knew exactly where both saps were, also how deep they were. His Yorkshire miners, by working day and night nonstop, drove a deep Shaft under both saps, then two or three days later, at seven o'clock in the morning there was a huge explosion on Hill 60, this was, I believe, the second mine explosion, the first one had been exploded some months earlier, some of our original Sappers had carried the powder up. - There was a front line trench on Hill 60 called International trench, so called I suppose, because it changed hands every fortnight or three weeks, sometimes only ten days. The Royal West Kents had just retaken it. We were sent up to reverse the parapet, that is, to take the best of the sandbags on to the other side of the trench so that it faced the enemy, and to strengthen it with new bags. At this point the enemy were extremely cautious always putting up lots of star shells to observe any movement. We were ordered to remain perfectly still like statues when the lights went up. If one was standing up we had to remain motionless, if the enemy saw the slightest movement his machine gun immediatly started up. We had a working party of Devons, and they, poor chaps, were probably having a few days rest after being in the front trenches for a week or more. They were annoyed and angry because they had been sent to help us. I had four of them to fill the sandbags. I asked them to only half fill the bags as I had to sling them over the trench to Pop and Nobby. I walked about 20 feet to the trench and lifted a bag, it burst open, most of them I tried burst, I only managed to sling a few over. This seemed to me to be a waste of time as I had to stand still when the lights went up, so I went to get some newly filled bags. I found they were much bigger than the ordinary bags, in the darkness they looked white. The Devons had filled them full up, I could only just lift them. I emptied half of the earth out and again asked that they be only half filled. I took two of them to the trench and tried to sling them over, they both fell back into the trench. I slid down into the trench and lifted them up to Pop and Nobby, as I went back for more the lights went up, I became a statue. Three of the Devons were sitting on a pile of full bags, the bags looked as white as snow. The lights went out, one of the Devons said 'What's the use of us filling them if you empty them, we do all the work and the REs get the money. This state of affairs went on and on, I was in and out of the trench all mud from head to foot.

Once when the lights went up, one of the Devons jumped about with his arms in the air shouting 'Kaiser Willie give me a Blighty one', The machine gun opened up and Sapper Fassell was shot through his shoulder. I was glad when we finished, I hated war. - My next story concerns number 2 Section, I was not there to witness it, but I fully believe all that a Sapper told me, because he was there when Sapper Bishop was wounded. It was at night, the wounded man was carried back a distance from a fire trench to have dressings applied. His comrades saw at once that it was a fatal wound and Sapper Bishop, fully conscious, seemed to realise the fact for he said 'Sing a hymn'. There was a pause, then someone started singing

Oh God our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come
Our shelter from the stormy blast
And our eternal home

The singing stopped, there was a pause, - Sapper Bishop said 'Sing the next verse', no one knew any of the other verses and the kneeling Corporal told him so, The dying Sapper said 'Sing the same verse again', After a long pause they sang the same verse again, as the singing ceased the Corporal stood up and said 'He is gone'.

I have a very faded photo of Sapper Bishop's grave on Hill 60. There is a cross made by our Coy. carpenters, these crosses are very skilfully made, and I'm sure by loving hands. There is a circle of wood on the cross in four pieces tenoned and mortised to make the whole cross quite flat. I once saw a number of them in the Quarter Master's stores, they were painted pure white, just waiting for someones name and number to be painted on them. - - Now back to number 4 Section, but first, let me explain about Corporal B. and his 'Little Lamb' - as Nobby called him -, The 'Little Lamb', was a young chap, who like the rest of us had a few weak points, one of his was walking in his sleep, Corporal B. was like a father to him. Lots of times I had heard Nobby shout out in the night 'Corporal B. your 'Little Lamb' has gone again'. Then B. would dash off with blankity, blankity, blank words issuing from his lips. - After a time they would return, B. still swearing like this. 'Why the ----- can't you ----- well lay still in your ----- Kip - bed - how the ----- do you ----- well think I can ----- well find you out there in the ----- dark. I think Reader you now know a bit more of Corporal B. and his 'Little Lamb', - If any Lady or Church friend are shocked, I will just say, Ce la guerre'. - - The following must be my last story of Hill 60. A rumour went round that the enemy had poisoned the water supply, a guard was posted over our ginger beer cask, no one was allowed to use it, the Infantry had to go to the Ypres canal for their water. Number 4 Section were sent up to sink wells, 4 were started Our gang was the same as when we worked in the Sap. We dug a round hole, at the end of the first day we had excavated several feet but the water was trickling from the side or wall of the hole. Sgt. told us to make the hole square, and said he would have some long planks of wood and two by two battens sent up so that we could shore the sides up. The next morning the timber had arrived so Nobby started driving the planks down the sides of the hole with a big Mall - Malet -'

The rest of us made up square frames of the two by two battens and forced them down the hole to hold the planks in place. We took turns in digging at the bottom and filling up the buckets which were pulled to the top by a long rope. The stuff we got out was just slush, the one in the bottom standing up to his knees in it. By mid afternoon we were down about 10 feet and had got 3 of the frames in place. Nobby was still driving down the planks, Pop was down in the hole, and then it happened. A salvo of 4 heavy shells fell just short of us, everybody scattered like frightened sheep, I waited for Pop, he came up holding on to the frames like a monkey on a stick. I ran towards a gap in a hedge where I knew there was a ditch, as I ran I heard a big splinter of shell going 'thrall, thrall, thrall, while I ran the sound got louder and louder, closer and closer. The splinter and I reached the gap at the same time, I went through, the splinter struck an ash tree, I heard it hiss. In the ditch I lay gasping for breath, my heart going thump, thump, thump. After a minute or two, as no more shells came, I peeped through the gap, Nobby was at the well, so I thought I had better show up. As I went through the gap I looked to my left at the ash tree, there, about a foot away from me was the offending splinter of shell, the whole of the base was there 5 or 6 inches in diameter with a narrow strip 14 or 15 inches long sticking into the tree, just about head high. The Sappers often said if a shell had your number on it you would get it. My number was 534206 the number on the shell must have been 534205. As I joined Nobby he called out to Corporal B. 'Where's your Little Lamb', B. came across to us then said, 'A Corporal of the Infantry has just told me one of those shells made a direct hit on a dugout with five chaps in it, they were blown to bits', B. continued, 'As my Lamb and I ran, something fell down in front of us and my Lamb asked me what it was, when I told him it was the top half of a man's leg he fell down in a faint, I've left him lying down under the hedge over there'. I was frightened, I was no hero. Pop came back and said, 'I'm not going down that ----- hole again' nor did he for the rumour proved to be false. We went well sinking in other places, but we never went to that well again. Not long afterwards we moved from the Ypres Sector. - How many times the 5" Division took over different parts of the line from the French I fail to remember. In my war Album, after the picture cards of Ypres, are some of Albert, I think we must have passed it on our way to Bray-sur-Somme. The spire of Albert Cathedral was broken and hanging down, the 'Smart Alices' said who ever held Albert when the spire fell off would loose the war, this saying proved to be correct. As we marched into Bray during the night we met the French coming out. When they realized we were British they tried to sing 'God save the King', it was a poor attempt, when some of our chaps tried to sing the 'Marseillaise' it was a lot worse. Some of our chaps shouted 'Go back and fight we're only here to help you. - - Gladys has found an old delapidated Diary which I kept, the first date is the 3" of August 1915. There is an entry for every day to Tuesday 4" of January 1916, all the five months we were at Bray-sur-Somme.

1914 - 1918

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THE WAR Continued

THE SOMME DIARY

3" August 1915 - 4" January 1916

QUOTE

3" Aug. Rested nearly all day, was marching all last night, arrived Bray-sur-Somme about 3-30 AM. were billeted in empty houses.

4" Taube - enemy plane - dropped two bombs, killed one horse.

5" I reside at No. 6 Rue-de-la-Marseillaise Bray.

7" Went to wood, made pickets-posts for barb wire- and hurdles, loaded 1084

8" To wood, Taube dropped three bombs.

UNQUOTE We were 12 days, not continuously felling trees.

QUOTE 10" Worked at R.E. Park. 12" To Support Line, Billon wood and Bonfray farm, worked on communication trench.

14" Take over R.E. Park, Sapper Turner killed, Davis and Phillips wounded took load of timber to S.L. - Support Line -, slept in big hut, Sap Warren fell off top bunk, bruised & shaken, rat bit back of my neck.

15" Worked at front line. 16" Worked on dugouts, wounded Sappers died.

17" Report, Sappers not dead. 20" Taubes about, no anti aircraft guns yet

21" Short rations, little bread, parcel from Lily, thank goodness.

22" Cecil to front line, 4 shells on town, heard Will Ransome with 8" Sussex here, Church with Cecil P.M.

17" Me to front line, long march, hot sun. 29" To S.L., Church with Cecil P.M.

30" S.L. Billon wood shelled again, one R.F.A. wounded.

Sept. UNQUOTE

During September and October we worked 50 days or nights at S.L. Billon wood and Bonfray farm. I give a few dates.

QUOTE

Sept. 3" S.L., Phillips and Davis Officially reported dead.

5" Feeling rotten, 6" Reported Sick, Medicine (pills) and duty.

7" Eaten nothing all day, 3 planes shot down in two days.

8" S.L. OK today, been eating French mustard.

12" S.L. wood shelled again, one K.O.Y.L.I. - Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry - killed, Church with Cecil P.M., 14" Gladys's Birthday.

15" Bonfray shelled, one casualty. 19" shells close to Cecil's party,

Cecil front line P.M. 20" S.L. shells every day.

21" S.L., shelled out, ran to dugouts, trees knocked down, rifles smashed, shell in communication trench when returning, Sappers half

buried, Punch said ~~-----~~ a chap who Frows Fings at you when You's coming home from work. 22" S.L. Ordered to work at night, less shell fire, my work on new gun pit praised by Officer.

23" S.L. got wet through, Cecil damaged his arm. 24" S.L. 7-30 PM -1-30

27" S.L., Cecil to Corbie C.C.S. - Casualty Clearing Station =.

30" To river quay, 3 loads timber to S.L. A.M. and 3 loads P.M.

October 1" wood shelled, lucky escape, water in pump frozen.

3" To Carney with No. 2 Section, nearer to front line, worked in Sap under Church, unearthed skeletons, lots of bones, looked at front line.

5" S.L. wet through again. 6" Heard from Cecil at Rouen, he reports

Draft of 20 coming to join us, went to Whizbang Concert Party Show,

O.C. pays for five tickets for each Section.

7" Half day off, football, 30" RFA. we won 2-1, funny to watch as planes overhead and shells bursting a mile away.

8" Letter from Henry Cox, says Buffs - Royal East Kents - in bayonette charge, his brother Reg came out O.K. but George Hope is missing.

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THE WAR Continued
THE SOMME DIARY

3^d August 1915 - 4th January 1916

Oct. Cont.

UNQUOTE George Hope worked with me at Marchants, he was blind in one eye.

QUOTE Jessie Mott also reported missing. 13th Enlisted year ago.

14th S.L. Taube had hot time, Bray shelled 10 P.M. none exploded, Leave std

UNQUOTE In an empty building in the town we fixed up a bath house, Somebody borrowed or scrounged a traction engine, Dasher Woods was put in charge of it, whether he was the son of Dasher Woods who drove the Little Common steam roller I don't know, but he made it work, cleaned it up and polished all the brass fittings, it compared favourably with the tractors seen in Horsham Park on Fete Day. Our plumbers fixed the pipes leading into the building and fitted up 8 or 10 showers, to have an occasional bath was a luxury.

15th QUOTE S.L. front line trenches 60 and 61 blown up last night.

17th Loaded waggons for Carnoy, delivered special message for C.R.E., cold.

19th Baths with Corp. B. making screens, half day off, football, Q.V.Rs. - Queen Victoria Rifles, we won 2-1. 20th-26th at baths. 27th Pay parade.

28th S.L. wet through. 29th S.L. had bath P.M., double course dinner, bully stew, rice, currants all boiled together, Houghlan Croft came to our hut, he was with a party returning from baths, he couldn't stay, I enquired about his parents, we shook hands, I never saw him again.

30th S.L. shelled out, ran to dugouts, big trees knocked down, pickets smashed in trench we vacated. 31st S.L. shelled out, Church P.M.

November

1st S.L. Wet again. 2nd Wet through, hut leaks, had to move my kit, Fur coats issued, they were goat skins and smelt a bit high.

4th Received Queen Alexandra's gift parcel containing towel, soap, socks, handkerchief, bootlaces, tobacco, writing pad, housewife - needles, wool thread etc. - and chocolate. 5th Charge laid on walls Bonfray farm for road making. 7th Demolitions, cut three girders with guncotton, Church P.M.

8th Packed up kit, proceeded to Carnoy. 9th Uncomfortable night, made fire place and chimney. UNQUOTE Yes, I still remember that night we arrived at Carnoy. The same old gang of us - Pop Watson, Nobby Clark, Punch, Ted Booth, Weeks and I were poked into a dugout. It was dark and raining, we lit a candle, the place was only a shelter with 2 entrances, it had a fire step on one side. We sat on this step for a time, then put our ground sheets out and settled down for the night. I suppose we were soon asleep, we were used to roughing it, I woke up and found my shoulders and behind were wet, the others too were moving about and talking, The water was dripping down from the roof and running down the walls, we were lying in two or three inches of slush. Pop lit a candle which was hanging on a wire fixed to the roof, a lot of swear words were spoken. We spent the night standing in slush with our ground sheets round our shoulders, we didn't think much of Carnoy. The shelter was frightfully wet, we stopped up one entrance, scrounged some bricks, then made a fireplace and chimney and got a fire going. We also stripped off some of the earth from the roof outside and sloped it to run the water off, then covered it with sandbags which Weeks had 'borrowed'.

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THE WAR Continued

3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

Rev. Cont.

QUOTE 10th Better night, helped repair other Sappers dugout, whizbangs, mud to knees, scrounged wire netting, made double bed, short rations, no biscuits. 11th Revetting fire trenches, made second double bed, our shells making a hash of enemy trenches P.M., Sniper keeps potting every time we pass a certain spot so have to keep mighty low. 12th Started revetting a trench which went right through a buried horse half decayed, made third double bed, all fixed up now, Ration cart fell into deep trench horses and all last night, our own transport got stuck in mud, had to unload it to get it out, they had to shoot a horse of other cart it got so entangled in the harness in its struggles, fearful night, black, raining 13th Better night on new spring ? mattress, revetting trenches again, started to put corrugated sheets on roof of our dugout 5 P.M. worked till 9 P.M. only half finished so half is dry the rest leaking badly.

UNQUOTE L.C. Salmon, an old sailor, was the tallest man in our Section, he had been dumped into a small dugout with Sapper Tuppenny who was the shortest, many times Tuppenny had got stuck in the trenches at Ypres, the slush ran into the tops of his waders, so he called out 'Nobby I'm stuck' then Nobby would pull him out. L.C. Salmon often came to our dugout in the evening after it had got dried out, he said Tuppenny had made so much smoke with his fire that he couldn't breathe. Jessie Salmon wore a yellow ribbon on his chest, he said it was for action in China. One evening in our bath house I saw him stripped right off. Many times I had butterflies and hearts with an arrow through them tattooed on chaps arms but Jessie's tatoo amazed me, he had two snake heads on his front, the necks crossed, the bodies went up over his shoulders on to his back, then crossed again and the tapering tails were half way down to his knees.

QUOTE 14th Finished revetting horse in trench, we had smothered it with chlorate of lime, my mates unearthed 3 skeletons in Sap under Church floor today. 15th dug two sump holes, some snow today, very cold, mud slush up to our knees. 16th More sump holes, more snow, several Jocks down with frost bite. 17th Sump holes again, whizbangs about, frost last night, chilblains troubling me. 18th Sump holes, gradually getting rid of slush, many chaps down with frost bite. 19th Sump holes, big ones, it's mighty cold, number 2 Section seem to have made mistakes with work that is supposed to be finished. The C.R.E. has made a fuss about it, we have had to put it right, The Church here is very old and is now practically all knocked down by shells. It looks as though it has been enlarged, the date of the newest part is 1769. There are lots of papers and books about belonging to the Church, we found a marriage certificate the other day. The remains of bodies keep being dug up, we are Sapping under the Church to make machine gun emplacements, it dosen't seem the right thing to do, but orders are orders to us. 20th Revetted new fire trench, nothing particular happened today. UNQUOTE No, not untill the late evening. As I went on my usual short walk before going to bed I had a shock, for there on a corner of the trench, about 8 feet away I saw a skull and cross bones like the Jolly Rodger pirate flag, it looked as though a skeleton was peering at me over the corner of the trench, in the frosty moonlight it was most effective, I felt compelled to have a closer look, and some 'Smart Alec', with an indeleble pencil had written 'Little Willie' on the forehead, that's what the Kaiser's son was called.

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Nov. Cont.

22nd QUOTE Two Lt. Col's. inspected works today.

UNQUOTE When Sgt. came to dugout to read out Orders for the day it finished something like this, Will the man who put skull and crossbones on corner of trench remove it within 12 hours - or else -, Sgt. smiled and said "Who the hell put it there". quote To Bray, bath & changed shirt.

24th Artillery fairly active both sides today.

25th To 40 F machine gun pit, night work, took overhead cover off. Germans blew up a mine fifteen yards short of 51 Fat 5 AM, no one hurt.

26th To 40 F gun pit, revetting sides, snowing.

27th To 40 F, our guns smashed up enemy wire in front of 40 F and demolished big redoubt, it was a pleasing sight, they returned rifle grenades, 5 Jock N.C.O's wounded, hard frost last night.

UNQUOTE I well remember this 27th day of November. We had noticed that the enemy had for several days been putting some construction up and on this morning it was much bigger and easily seen. Lt. Bones was with us and he remarked about it, the two front lines were about 200 yards apart.

Suddenly an Artillery Officer appeared, he looked at the construction through his field glasses, then spoke to Lt. Bones. Lt. B. turned to us and said "There's going to be a Straff, I'm going to the observation post to watch results", the two Officers then walked away. The Artillery Officer was the 'Mad Major' he was O.C. of a field gun battery and made a habit of selecting certain targets close to the front line. His four teams galloped up to the Support Line, turned the guns round, fired a salvo then galloped back before the enemy could do a thing about it.

I was determined to watch the fun. This was quite a change for in the early days, if a couple of shells came up with the rations to our Artillery and they fired them., I got butterflies in my inside because I knew from experience that we should get ten, perhaps twenty sent back. I took my tin hat off, got up on to the fire step, held my head sideways then with one eye peeped at the enemy's construction, I told the others to come and have a look, Punch said "I'm not going to have my ----- head knocked off". After a few minutes the guns opened up, one shell fell just short but in the wire, one just too far but the other two made direct hits. As the smoke drifted away I saw that the enemy's wire was smashed up and the construction had vanished.

28th QUOTE To 40 F, fitted loop hole frame, severe hard frost last night and today, it's cold standing about here, enemy sniping all day with machine gun, 7 British planes over and back, fur coats called in yesterday

29th Worked in Sap under Church, want foggy day before we can do any more to gun pit at 40 F, very cold. UNQUOTE Where I worked in the Sap under the Church I could see the shape of the coffins, they must have been lying there for years and years, for what had once been wood just disintegrated with the earth. When Punch took over the pick and I did the shoveling I noticed pieces of bone crumbled to pieces when the shovel touched them. I heard some Sappers were on the lookout for rings, bracelets, anything of value, quite a number of pieces of candle were found.

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THE SONNE DIARY

3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

November Continued

28th UNQUOTE Cont^d I found a piece of candle two inches long and about two inches in diameter, half of it was yellow the other half green. Candles were like gold to us, there was not much fun being in a dugout for five or six hours every evening with only the red glow of the fire. My piece lasted for two nights, I even managed to write a letter to Gladys but what could I tell her beside the fact that I was well and hoping to get Leave before long, I could not tell her that I had been desecrating French peoples graves. It was about this time that Ted Booth went on Leave, when he returned he had three bottles, Whiskey, Gin and Rum. What a night they made of it, they scoffed the lot and were rather more than merry, Ted was K.O., Pop bet Punch a gallon of beer that he would not shave his moustache off. Punch took the bet and soon had his shaving kit out, dipped his shaving brush into a dixie of cold tea, - which had been ignored -, he got tea leaves all over his face, then with cut throat razor in his hand wobbled up to the small mirror which was hanging beside the candle. I was frightened so told Nobby to stop him, Pop, Nobby and Weeks were laughing their heads off. Punch staggered back, I thought he had changed his mind and I was glad, but he came back, steadied himself, then with one slash took the left side off, I saw blood running down his chin and dripping on the floor. He staggered back, Pop said "That's only half a gallon", Punch seemed to have more trouble with the right hand side but after two or three attempts he got it all cut off, he dipped his brush into the cold tea, smeared it round his face, then hurried out of the dugout. After a minute or two Weeks said "Where's that silly ----- gone", then he went out to find him. When they returned Weeks said "The silly old ----- was leaning down the well trying to wash his brush out. They stuck several cigarette papers on Punch's lip, we then bedded down, the place smelt like a Tap Room.

December 1st QUOTE Waders came up by transport, wet day.

2nd Carnoy shelled again. 4th Went with Lt. Bones as Orderly, first to Sap at 50 F, then all along front line to 40 F to inspect and report on dugouts which were all fallen in bar S.M. and Officers. Every trench knee deep or more in mud and slush, returned very tired and covered with mud, day off tomorrow. UNQUOTE This was another day which I must explain to you more fully. I was on my way to see if breakfast was ready when I met Lt. Bones, he said "You are number 4 Section arn't you, you can be my Runner today", We walked on the top for a time then into a communication trench. He said "I am going to have a look at the fire trenches from number 50 to number 40, I am working it this way because if I finish at 40 I shall not have so far to walk back in the dark". He led the way through all the slush and mud and eventually he said "This trench leads to number 50, what a frightful mess it was in, we worked our way along to our Sap at 50 F then a little further on came to a man, still on the alert, standing in the corner of the fire step gazing out into no mans land, several men who had been on 'Stand To' all night were lying on top of each other on the fire step, they had no where else to go, on dugout, no shelter, the mud and slush was almost up to the top of my waders.

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3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

December Cont.

4th UNQUOTE Cont. Lt. Bones said "You lead the way for a bit", I'd had job enough to keep up with him so I had to step out. The trenches were all in the same fearful state. We came to a trench where the K.O.Y.L.I. - Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry - were, here they had made a kind of shelf in the front wall of the trench, men were lying on it fast asleep, one man was on the fire step looking out into 'no mans land. At one place there were a double line of shelves the bottom shelf was level with the top of the slush in the trench, one man was on this low shelf and as we struggled past the slush just rolled in on to him but he didn't wake up. Further on we came to a series of Duck-boards, these slatted boards were placed over sump holes dug in the trench, these sumps lowered the level of the slush, but in wet weather the board floated partly away from the sump and woe betide anyone who trod on the end of one, for down into the sump he would go up to his waist in slush. This is what had happened to Tuppenny many times in the Ypres Sector because he had a short stride. These duckboards were a nuisance in daylight but at night, in the dark they were death traps, Kitcheners new troops taking over the front line lost lots of men in this way, possibly many thousands were reported missing. We reached 40 F at last, I'd been here several times before. Lt. Bones said 'Stay here' and after a time he came back with the S.M. of the Q.V.R. - Queen Victoria Rifles - and gave me a mug of tea, it was the first thing that had passed my lips since teatime the night before. It was now beginning to get dark, two chaps came along and asked the S.M. if they could go now, S.M. said 'Yes cut along', they got out of the trench then went over the top, Lt. Bones said 'Won't they be seen', S.M. said 'They know what to do', a minute later a machine gun opened up, S.M. said 'They will be alright'. After a few minutes Lt. B. and I got out on to the top, he to get back to Bray me to Carnoy. As I entered the dugout someone said "Where the ----- have you been, the Sergeant has been looking for you, he is reporting you missing if you fail to turn up by 'Lights Out'". I went down to the big dugout where all of number 3 Section, the cooks, and most of the N.C.Os. were billeted and reported to the Sergeant just in time to save myself from being reported missing. Back at the dugout I took my waders off, wiped the slush off my feet and found both the heels of my new socks were completely missing, all of the front toe part had also gone there was just a four inch strip under the middle of each foot, they were the thick white socks which Queen Alexandra had sent to me, I had put them on that morning for the first time.

QUOTE 5th To hut at Bray with Albert Turner, found a chap stuck in mud, just managed to pull him out, had long talk with Cecil who is now Post Orderly fetching mail from way back somewhere, could not find my souvenirs left in hut, listened to band, bought candles.

6th Worked in Sap at 50 F, we are in 42 feet, only 10 to go to reach mine crater, number nine listening post close by.

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THE SOMME DIARY

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December Cont.

6th UNQUOTE. These listening Posts were dreadful places, a narrow Zig Zag trench was made running out into 'no mans land' sometimes right out to the barbed wire entanglements, two Infantry men were taken by an N.C.O. and posted there for two or three hours, sometimes when the N.C.O. took two relief men out he found the Post deserted, the men had vanished. It was thought at first that the men had deserted, but afterwards it was found out that a party of the enemy who were patrolling between the two lines of wire - both sides did this - had surprised the two men, who were supposed to be listening, and had taken them prisoners.

7th QUOTE Bombing party out last night, quite a bombardment followed. UNQUOTE Here again Reader I must add a word or two. Most of you probably saw the film on T.V. called 'Journeys End' so you know what a bombing raid is like. The bombing party cuts through the enemy barbed wire, Mills bombs are thrown into his trench and if possible a prisoner taken, and that's that. But sometimes the R.E.s. are called in to blow up the enemy wire with Bangalore torpedo tubes. These were metal tubes charged with high explosive, they fitted together like fishing rods and were pushed under the barbed wire, then when the raiding party were all set, they were exploded, and that was the moment to keep your tin hat on tight for the posts and wire sometimes fell a good distance away.

8th QUOTE Discontinue Sap at 50F for time being, took tools away.

9th Worked in Sap under Church, Infantry having most awful time in trenches, waist deep in mud and slush, Kitcheners Warwicks first time in front line, whole Platoon stuck in York street had to be dug out, several in hospital, one died of exhaustion, very wet day.

10th Am expecting Leave any day now, Rested all day until 5 o'clock, went to 40F, started to put plates on machine gun pit, was up on top when I was warned for Leave, left at 7 P.M.

UNQUOTE In my diary on 29th November it stated the fact that we were waiting for a foggy day before anything more could be done to machine gun pit at 40F. Also before that on 25th November my diary records we worked at night and removed what was left of the overhead cover. By the 10th of December we had replaced the overhead cover, using the same kind of material as we did in the Saps at Carnoy, I.E. 12 inch square solid oak uprights, rails across the top, corrugated sheets and 4 layers of sandbags, the loophole frame was in position, only the loophole plates remained to be fitted. We had been working at night but we wanted that foggy day as some daylight was necessary to see that these plates were fitted in exactly the correct position. The work was urgent and Lt. B. had been experimenting down at the Bray hut. He set up a loophole plate, then fired at it with a rifle, the bullet went right through it. He then stuck two plates up and fired again, the front plate was fractured, the rear one badly bent, so he decided that 3 plates would have to be fitted, these could only be fixed by getting up on top where we could be seen by the enemy. When we got to 40F Lt. Bones said the loose earth would have to be cleared away before we could fit the plates. For some unaccountable reason Sapper Drowley was with us, it must have been because Ted Booth was still feeling the effects of his riotous night.

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THE WAR Continued

3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

December Cont.

10th UNQUOTE Cont. "Up you go" Lt. said to Drowley and me and with a push up by Pop and Hobby we scrambled on to the top. We soon cleared the earth away, then asked for the first plate to be handed up. While we were fitting it I heard a little commotion in the trench, Lt. called out "Is Drowley or Elliott up there" Drowley said "Yes Sir both of us", Lt. said "Come on down you lucky chaps, you are warned for Leave", as we scrambled down Lt. said "Now who is going to fit the other two plates". - - - I heard after I got back from Leave that Lt. Bones himself got up on to the top and was fitting the second plate when a machine gun bullet struck his hand and ricochet off the plate right up his arm. About a year afterwards, in England, I saw Lt. Bones when we were on parade, his right arm was missing, I've never seen him since then. - - -

17th Sat. QUOTE Packed kit, had bath and clean change, drew 100 francs, left Bray 6 P.M., went to Merricourt in our waggon, slept at Rest Camp, entrained 5-30 next AM. 12th Sunday detrained 12-30 midnight, rotten train journey, Embarked at Le Havre 1 AM. 13th Weighed anchor 1-30 AM. reached Southampton 7-30 AM., a very rough voyage, nearly everyone was seasick, Entrained at Southampton, arrived Waterloo 10-30 AM. taxied to Victoria, trained to Bexhill arrived 2-30 PM. met Gladys. From then untill 12 o'clock midday 20th Monday I had a most happy and glorious time Said Goodbye to Gladys at Bexhill station, arrived Waterloo via London Bridge and Underground at 3 PM., went and had hot dinner, beefsteak pudding, left Waterloo 4 PM. arrived Southampton 8 PM. embarked reached Le Havre 2 AM. 21st Entrained 3 AM. reached Merricourt 4 PM., much quicker return journey, rode in waggon to Bray arrived 6 PM.

22nd Paraded 8-30 AM, worked with carpenter in hut all morning, Parade 2 P.M. packed stores for Carnoy, went up on transport 6 PM. unloaded waggons at R.E. dump, got to dugout 8 PM. "23rd Worked on our dugout all morning, 2 PM. had carrying party of Q.V.Rs. took timber for dugouts to 40 F. , 39 F and 38 F were heavily shelled when we were going up, worked on dugout at 40 F. 24th Worked on dugout at 40 F. all day, Number 1 and 4 Sections gone to Bray but 4 of us told off to stay behind with number 3 Section.

25th Christmas Day. To dugout at 40 F, returned midday, did not have proper breakfast untill we got back and then all was cold, our rations are supposed to be with number 3 Section but it seems to be a rotten mix up, mistake to ration two Sections together, Dinner at 4 PM. boiled pork, cabbage and potatoes, Christmas Pudd, orange each and a few nuts.

26th Boxing Day. To dugout at 40 F, artillery lively. 27th To dugout 40 F.

28th To 40 F, revetted gun pit, then to 54 F, artillery very active.

29th To dugout at 54 F untill 10- 30 AM. then to 50 F, only just managed to get through mud which was up to our waist, Tuppenny got stuck, had to pull him out, finished work at 2 PM., lunch, then back to 50 F.

31st To dugout at 50 F, erected nisson hut in record time, suprised Infantry Officers, back at 2 PM.

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THE WAR Continued

3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

January 1916

- 1st To dugout 50 F twice with timber and sandbags, back early, raining.
- 2nd Feeling rotten, headache. UNQUOTE These dugouts, as I have called them in my diary, were in fact mission huts and a great deal of hard work was done in digging the cavities to contain them, holes 20 feet by 12 feet and 12 feet deep were dug, work continuing day and night, with Infantry partys carrying or dragging the various parts up to the front line at night with a Sapper guide to help them, we were all covered in mud from head to foot. The Infantry continued with the same old theme, "We do all the work and the REs. get the money. All of this work was the result of the little stroll that Lt. Bones and I took on 4th December when fire trenches 50 F to 40 F were inspected. Pumber 40 F was sandbagged and finished first and I had great satisfaction in seeing the dejected Infantry in this dugout, wrapped in their blankets fast asleep.
- 3rd QUOTE Packed up kit, cleaned up our dugout, left Carnoy 6-30 PM. slept on table in hut at Bray.
- 4th Parade 8-30 AM., packed for full marching order, cleaned up hut, Bray shelled this AM., six killed others wounded, parade 2 PM. full marching order, fife inspection, dismissed, slept on table. UNQUOTE Now Reader you can see by the lines above that we were about to leave Bray. I remember we were dumped in an open field at Merricourt for a few days, Cecil and I made a shelter with our groundsheets under a big oak tree, it was a good thing we did, for on the second night we were there a violent storm came up with thunder and fork lightning, hail, and the rain came down in bucket fulls. We were OK but most of the others were drenched, and don't forget this was in January, terrible cold weather. Cecil and I went into the town to get some hot coffee, when I went to the bar for an encore Cecil said "Tell him to put some brandy in it" so I leaned forward over the bar and said "Avec cognac sil vous plait". The man looked astonished and raising his hands said "Non Monsieur, la policeese", so I said "Ump de per", he put a little brandy in the cups, we got back to camp nice and warm. Now I have before me part of an old faded diary which Gladys has found, first date mentioned
- 15th January 1916 QUOTE We are at the village of Beaucourt and have taken over a small sawmills, sometimes I am felling trees, loading them on to pontoon waggons, stripping the bark off and working at the sawmill. UNQUOTE Now if you remember, I wrote of a Sapper Offord having an accident with his rifle when we were at Runny Mead, and that later, when we were in France he cut his toes with an Adze, well this is when and where it happened.
- 23rd QUOTE Went to football match at Corbie to play
- 14th Ammunition Column, we had motor transport and a free tea, Bless me, we must be miles back from the front line.
- 27th Sawmills all day, I could do with this job for duration.
- 28th Sawmills broke down, been using too heavy timber, felling trees
- 2nd February Built bandstand for Divisional Band then dismantled it after performance, we have been fitting up bunks in all the barns to accommodate lots of troops and stables for horses and unles.
- 6th Packed up toolcart, washed and greased waggons.
- 7th Packed up kit, cleaned billit, loaded pontoon
- 8th Left Beaucourt arrived Longpre. UNQUOTE Here my diary ends.

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THE WAR Continued

3rd August 1915 - 4th January 1916

9th February 1916 - 11th November 1918

With the end of my Somme Diary there is a blank in my memory, but in my War Album, after the picture cards of Bray and Carnoy is one of Amiens, we must be on the move. I would like to add this. When the enemy attacked on the Somme front, two Companies of Cornwells held the Carnoy strong point for two days and nights, then the enemy bypassed it. Two or three days later, when their ammunition and supplies ran out, they were taken prisoners, they had few casualties owing to the strength of the place. When we heard about it Punch said "Wonder what ~~-----~~ German pinched our dugout! The next picture card is of Arras, this brings my memory back with a flash, it is here that I hand in my cheques for a time. We go through a tiny village, its name is in three letters, is it ERI or RIE perhaps EIR, I don't remember. We pass on to some buildings, there is a rough roadway between them. In one of them all Sappers and Drivers are billeted, its big, it has walls 12 or 16 feet high and a plate glass span roof, there is straw on the floor. Across the road is to be the Quarter Masters Stores, not far away are two tall chimneys. Is it a brick-yard for making bricks? There is a row of small buildings, Cecil and I go to investigate, here is machinery, wheels, a crusher, and is that a pump. Now it looks like a gas yard, everything is covered with something which looks like tar. Then it suddenly dawns on me, this is all to do with Sugar - beet. Cecil and I go into the Q.M.S. building and up the stairs, the floor is concrete, there are two round holes in it about 15 inches in diameter, we look at the roof, yes, there's two holes up there too, the place has been shelled. We start back to our billet then hear someone shout, there at the top of one of the chimneys is a Sapper with one leg hanging over the side. Pointing with his arm he shouts "I can see the front line from here". I shout back "Look at those seven enemy observation balloons, there's fourteen pairs of eyes looking at you!" We leave him to his enjoyment and go into our billet to lay down on the straw, we are due to go up the line at 5 o'clock, when its dark. After a time Nobby calls out "Jackie go and see if tea is up there's a good chap, you are nearest to the door". I go to the cookhouse in one of the small buildings, yes, tea is ready any time. I start back and am almost at the door - - - - - I didn't hear or feel anything. When I regained consciousness I was in the act of getting up, my left foot and right knee were on the ground, I felt a bit dizzy, I couldn't see anybody, then I noticed blood running from my left shoulder all down my left arm and tunic, and dripping on to my left knee, I realised I was wounded. I stood up, wobbled a bit, no one was in sight so I shouted "Help, Heigh up, Help", Then I saw a face peeping round the corner at the rear of the Q.M.S. stores, I heard the words "Right coming" I noticed a pool of blood on the ground but that didn't matter, the rats would soon lick it up. The man who came to my rescue was Sgt. Baber. He snatched my first aid dressing from the corner of my tunic, tore it open, then put it on the left side of my head and over my ear covering my eyes and nose. Then I heard someone say "Why its poor old Jackie", I knew the voice, it was Doughy Baker. The Sgt. said "Give me your dressing Doughy". There seemed to be a lot of blood, I thought the jugular vein must be severed, if so I knew I had only minutes to live.

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THE WAR Continued

9th February 1916 - 11th November 1918

I said "Is the blood spurting out", Baber said "No, its stopped bleeding then the second dressing was put on my neck. The shells were still falling, I could hear them plain enough now, Sgt. Baber said "Lets get to hell out of here", they took my arms, we walked along beside the canal or river, I could see the shell splinters hit the water and hear them hiss. We reached the road, there was an ambulance waiting, one casualty had already been loaded and standing there was my cousin L.C. Percy Elphick, his hand and wrist was bandaged, he worked with the Q.M. in the stores. The next minute I was on a stretcher and loaded then we were away. - - I wondered why I was the last casualty to reach the ambulance, but months later someone told me why it was. When my comrades had scattered for safety, some of them saw me lying there, they saw the big gash in my neck and that my ear was severed, it was no good to bother about the dead, far better to rescue the wounded shouting in the Q.M. Stores. I must have been unconscious for some time. I also heard that my cousin was not badly wounded, he returned to the Stores and next morning he had three stripes and a crown up, he was promoted to Quarter Master Sergeant. - - - Now I must record the sadest part of all of my story. Some days later the place was again shelled, Cecil was hit in his back by a big splinter and killed. - - - The ambulance took us to the outskirts of the village of three letters. In a building my stretcher was placed on two trestles, a Doctor Officer and Orderly examined me, then asked if I felt pain anywhere else, I told them my left arm hurt. The Doctor, with scissors, cut my sleeve from wrist to shoulder, also my shirt sleeve, then asked if I could move my arm and said it was not damaged but that I had probably fallen on it. The Orderly rubbed some lotion on it, my arm was covered up, then the Dr. put a safety pin at the wrist, elbo and shoulder. I was left there for some time, then the enemy increased his range, shells fell in the village so they took me nearly all the way downstairs to a small landing. In half an hour the shelling stopped. a Nun passed by, looked at me, crossed herself and continued upstairs. The Orderly came and asked if I would like some brandy, I told him I would rather have water, when he brought it there was a little brandy in it, I drank the lot, I was thirsty. That night the ambulance took us on a long journey, I had guessed by now that my fellow traveller was our Q.M.S. When we stopped they took us into a long narrow building, there were casualties on both sides, I should say about 40 of us. I learned next day that it was number 9 C.C.S. - Casualty clearing Station.- A Doctor and Orderly came in then started examining the chaps on our side, a number had dressings applied or renewed. At last they came to me, after taking a look the Dr. said I needed a little attention but would leave it untill after he had seen the other patients. I waited a long time; the young chap at the far end needed a lot of attention, it must have been in the early hours of the morning before they came back to me. They lifted my stretcher up, something fell to the floor, the Dr. said "What's that", the Orderly shone his torch and said one word "Shrapnal", the bits were falling out of my clothes as they carried me out to another building.

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THE WAR Continued

ARRAS

9th February 1916 - 11th November 1918

It was fairly well lit by an acetylene lamp hanging on a wall, they put me on to a table with a glass top. Dr. went to a bench and came back holding something in his hand, he told me to hold the Orderly's hands and grip them as much as I liked, the Orderly would not mind. I thought he was going to just snip that silly little bit of my ear at the top and have done with it but he didn't, he started putting stitches in. He put in five or six, then went for another needle and carried on round the back and in my neck, finishing off my neck with a third needle, I counted twelve stitches and then lost count, I'd had enough. They took me back with the others. The poor young chap at the far end kept calling out "Orderly, Orderly bring WATER"- water -, he was a north country lad possibly one of the K.O.Y.L.I., I sat up in bed ? to see if the Orderly was there, he was, but he saw me sitting up and hurried to me, he told me to lay down, the Dr. had given strict orders I was not to sit up. I asked him if the young chap was badly wounded, he told me he had a stomach wound, was not allowed water, they could not do much for him. In the morning I saw on the stretcher next to me our Q.M.S. we had a little chat, I could see he was in pain, his life was not in danger but he had a serious wound, I cannot tell you where it was, but you can guess. I was at number 9 C.C.S. two days, then after another long journey found myself at Le Treport on the coast. The Orderly helped me into a huge French bath big enough for three people my size, he told me that I was supposed to put my uniform on and get pyjamas in the ward, but he said "You can't put those bloody things on, I'll get some pyjamas," I was soon in bed and asleep. In the morning a Dr. came and looked at me, after he had gone a nurse came and said "The Dr. has ordered you back to bed!" The 'Smart Alic' of the ward came and looked at my medical card then told me the Dr. had put the letter E on it which meant 'Blighty' England. Next morning the Dr. said "There's a boat going tomorrow, but there is no room for even one more stretcher, if you think you can manage to go as a walking patient I can get you on it", I told him I could walk all the way, he grinned, At 7 AM Sister told me to get up as we were starting at 9 o'clock and she wanted to look at me first, a Scotch nurse said "Hoos tha wee heed" then took me out to Sister. I thought my dressings were to be changed, they were, but first Sister cut all of the stitches and pulled them out, I felt my neck coming apart. The screen was round my bed, my uniform on the floor, I put it on still all bloody, even my puttee and boot were stained, and on the left sleeve of my tunic there was a safety pin at the wrist, one at the elbow, one at the shoulder. The shirt was the same one with the sleeve cut, and my socks all in holes, that's all the clothes I had, I had lost my cap. In this awful state I got into a small coach with several others. We travelled eighteen miles to Dieppe and on to a boat, stretcher cases were being carried aboard. It was a dreadful day, raining and blowing a gale, I could see the white tops of the waves out in the sea, I knew well enough what it would be like below deck with casualties suffering from Mal-de-mer, so I decided to stay on deck and hide myself up somewhere.

1914 - 1918.

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THE WAR Continued
BLIGHTY

MARCH 1916 - 11 November 1918

I found a nice Cubby hole, up four steps just behind, or should I say aft of the funnel, it was nice and warm. The boat started, soon it was dipping and rolling, I felt fine, sea-sickness never troubled me. The waves came over the bow when she dipped, ran all along the deck, over the side and aft. It left off raining, I was quite enjoying myself in my warm cubby hole. The time passed, I noticed a nurse standing at the top of the steps from below deck, she waited the right moment then dashed across to the rails, I thought she was sea-sick but she wasn't, when the bow dipped she started back, then she saw me and changed her direction. Up the steps she jumped just as the water swept along the deck, she asked me what I was doing there so I said "I reckon its a better place than down below", she said "Your fight, its awful, I've come up for a breath of fresh air, the stretchers are one above the other, the bottom ones are in a dreadful mess, and the stench", she put her open hands up to her shoulders. She asked me if I was alright, I told her that I was never sea-sick, she said "Look at you, not even a cap, I'll get you a cap comforter", she was soon back with it, put it over my head and neck, She was a modern Florence Nightingale. We were supposed to disembark at Dover but it was too rough so we ran round to Folkestone. The boat was tied up, after a little while the stretchers began to go off, they went on and on, then a few walking patients appeared so I joined them. The train was waiting there, I asked one of the Orderlys where the train was going, he said there were two trainloads of casualties, the first would go to the midlands or north, the second not so far. As he was escorting the walking patients to a carriage I again hid myself among some packing cases, a lady appeared with postcards like we had in France with printed messages, such as - I have received your letter - Letter follows at first opportunity - Parcel received - I am wounded - I am wounded and in hospital -, I crossed all of the messages out except - I am wounded -. The train moved off, soon another backed in so I got in and after a time found myself at Victoria station. Someone put four of us into a taxi, it stopped at a building with about twenty steps up to the door, the others ran up the steps, I managed to get up three or four, then had to hang on to the handrail, I was stuck. A man dashed down and helped me up. He pushed the door open, a nurse helped me to where the others were sitting with their overcoats on, caps in hand. The Ward Sister said "I suppose you want something to eat", the others said "Yes please", I said "No thank you, all I want is to get to bed", She looked at me blood stained, a cap comforter on my head, a safety pin at my wrist, elbow and shoulder. The nurse took me to a bed, it was marked 'Queens Cot' she put screens round, pyjamas were there, I was soon in bed. Nurse was soon back, she picked up my uniform from the floor, I heard her say "Shocking. When she came again a man was with her, she took the dressing off, they both had a look. The man said "Can you sit up?" the nurse helped me, he said "Can you remain sitting for a minute or two", "Yes Sir" I said. He had a piece of board with paper on it, he said "Is it G.S.W., I told him I didn't understand the letters, so he said "Gun shot wound. It took him a few minutes to do some writing, he gave the nurse a slip of paper, hung the board up then went away.

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THE WAR Continued

THE ORTHOPAEDIC

MARCH 1916 - 11 November 1918

Nurse laid me down, just covered the wound lightly and said "I'll be back soon", I heard the trolley coming, she said "I have to put a fomentation on, the Dr. says as hot as you can bear it", she put it on and said "Now go to sleep, the fomentation has to be changed every four hours night and day." When the dressing was being changed at ten o'clock next morning a little old lady visitor came in, visitors were only allowed two hours in the afternoons, but here she was looking on. She said "It looks like a slash by a sabre". The nurse never took the slightest notice of her, I remained silent, was she really there, or was it the form of an Angel of mercy. The nurse pushed the trolley away, my angel came to the bedside. Oh, she was real enough, she said "Can I do anything for you, do you want anything", I told her I would be glad to have a sheet of writing paper, an envelope and a stamp so that I could let my wife know that I was in hospital in London, she gave me all I asked in triplicate. I wrote to Gladys telling her I was in the Childrens Orthopaedic Hospital in Great Ormond Street. I saw the little lady many times, she always seemed to know where to find the new entrants; her handbag must have been full of writing paper, the very things we most wanted, I still think of her as my Guardian Angel, she will be near at hand tomorrow 25 March 1969 when I go to Crawley Hospital to have my wound repaired. - - Of course the Orthopaedic had its 'Smart Alic' he came and looked then said "Have you seen your medical card", I said "No I can't turn my head", he took it down, on it the House Surgeon had drawn a sketch of my head, marking the wound in thick black ink, underneath was written, A deep, foul, septic guttering. - Yes, my neck had sort of burst open, with my long journey from Le Treport, first in the coach, then the rough sea crossing, the train to Victoria and the taxic ride, what else could be expected. I must confess that I didn't like the daytime Ward Sister, she was dominative, hustled the nurses around, the chaps got into trouble for making their beds untidy, nothing was ever right for her. Nurse Jackson, the night Sister, was entirely different, she apologised for waking me up to change the dressing. There was a chap named Charlie at the far end, I knew he had a bad wound, when he was taken out to the 'Theatre' the other chaps, to the tune of the chimes of Big Ben, sang Fourteen, fourteen, fourteen, fourteen. Yes, it was his fourteenth operation, he had plastic surgery on his face, neck, arms and everywhere it showed. Lady Overbeck, who lived at Little Common invited some of us to have tea at the Savoy Hotel, but Sister would not allow it. Another day, when she knew Gladys was coming right across London to see me, she sent four of us out in a car. I told her I would rather stay in as my wife was coming, but she made me go, Gladys was very upset. When I was well enough to get out in my hospital blue clothes, Sister said "You cannot go out without a cap", so Gladys bought one and an R.E. cap badge, it cost seven shillings and sixpence. I told the Sister I was not used to taking orders from a woman two days later they turned me out.

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THE WAR Continued

THE MICHIE (Red Cross)

MAY 1916 - 11th November 1918

I was sent to the Michie Red Cross Hospital Queens Gate. I still complained about my deafness, so a nurse took me to Charing Cross Hospital, she carried a letter from Dr. Child. In a big hall a hundred or more outpatients were waiting. A Sister came on to the platform and called out "Any letters", my nurse held the letter up and I was the first one to see the Dr.. He had a look then sent me out to a nurse to have my ear syringed, he looked in my ear again then said "Tell the nurse to put six drops of Peroxide in and syringe again, after this had been done I could hear a bit, I had to repeat a few numbers spoken by the Dr. then he said "You will always have trouble with it," which was exactly what Mr. Evans of Harley Street said when he saw me in the Orthopaedic, but he had also said that it was an honourable wound. The Michie hospital, I mean the building itself was owned or rented by Mrs. Michie, I believe she was a daughter of Lord Reading, for he himself sometimes came in to have a chat with us. Some of the Red Cross nurses were Titled Ladys, one of their jobs, beside waiting on us at mealtimes, was cleaning knives, forks and spoons, beside washing up all the dishes. Sapper Fox, who I palled up with must have been an Irishman for he was always humming the Irish Guard march tune. We two, nearly every morning, went down into the basement, of our own free will, to help these splendid Ladys, they said "If you gentlemen would kindly do the knives we would be most grateful, because none of us like that job", Yes, Titled Ladies calling we two ordinary Sappers, gentlemen, Of course we always got a cup of coffee and biscuits, perhaps thats all we went down there for. Then we would play a hundred up on the big billiard table before going out for a walk in the park, the chestnut trees were in full bloom. The Ward Sister could easily have been taken for Queen Victoria, she was exactly like the Queen in features, form and height. Fox and I cleaned and polished all of the brass edging which ran along each side of the grill over the hot water pipes, then this little queen would look at us and say "The knees of your trousers look a bit dirty", then when we got up in the morning, not only had we got clean trousers, but coat, shirt and tie at our bedside. There was a big massive electric organ in our ward which we were allowed to play at certain times, sometimes it missed a note and went 'Phitz'. One of the Sappers asked me if I knew anything about electric organs, of course I didn't, but I said it sounded as though the brushes of the motor were worn. He wanted to have a look so off came our coats, we opened a small door at the back, all we could see was cobwebs and dust, he crawled in then asked where the motor would be, I told him to find out where the wires went, he told me to come and have a look. Yes, he had found it O.K., his white shirt was no longer white, I joined him, we took the motor out, reversed the brushes, put it all back then started the organ up, we had cured the trouble. Then the little queen came along and said we looked disgraceful, told us to get washed, then a nurse brought us some clean clothes

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THE WAR Continued.
THE MICHIE (Red Cross)
MAY 1916 - 11th November 1918

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The Ladies organized a Whist Drive, I got a good hand of cards every time and won the gents prize, a box of fifty cigars, winning lady had a beautiful bouquet of flowers, I handed the cigars all round and after taking one myself found that I had three left so there must have been forty-seven of us soldiers there. A billiards handicap was arranged, most of the chaps put their names down. Sapper Fox and I joined in, we were pretty poor players, both of us received fifty start. Two very good players owed fifty, which meant that as it was a hundred up, they had to get hundred and fifty, while chaps like me with fifty start only had to get fifty to win. Funny enough, Fox and I got drawn together, I just managed to beat him. In the last match I had to play one of the best players. All the chaps seemed to want me to win, they were advising me what to do. Once when my opponents ball was on the very edge of a pocket someone said "Pot the white" which would have been bad sportsmanship on my part. I managed to get thirty nine before he ran out with a long break of over twenty. I was now feeling fairly fit and well but still deaf in my left ear, and was discharged from the Michie. In some ways I was sorry to leave as I had been happy enough there. One of the Ladies took several of us to Mill Bank near Victoria station to hand us back to the Army. I must have looked pretty awful sitting in the bus, the left side of me all covered with blood stains, with a safety pin at my wrist, a safety pin at my elbo, and a safety pin at my shoulder. The people stared at me, one lady just glanced at me then turned her head away and got out at the first stop, I felt sure she had not reached her destination but preferred to catch the next bus. The Major at Mill Bank looked at me and said it looked as though I needed a new outfit so I said "This cap is mine, my wife had to buy it because the Sister at the Orthopaedic would not let me walk out in hospital 'blues' without a cap", He said "Well you have got a cap and I can do nothing about it". I reckon the Army still owes Gladys seven and six, and as it was over fifty years ago, and the pound only worth about ten bob now, they ought to make it five pounds, what a hope. I got a railway pass to Bexhill and a return pass to Marlow also a few weeks Leave. A few days after I got home a small parcel arrived from R.E. Records Office at Chatham, a note enclosed advised me that it was my personal possessions, it contained a handkerchief, clean washed and ironed also a half empty tin of Harrisons Pomarde. This Pomarde was pleasantly perfumed and was supposed to keep the chats away. Now who else but Cecil would have gone through my kit before handing it in to the G.M.S. stores, He might well have been doing it a few days after I left the Coy. when the place was again shelled, while he was in the very act of doing me a kindness, and so lost his life. - - Here let me quote part of a poem composed by Gladys's Mother when news was received that her son Vernon was lost at sea. He was a member of the crew of H.M.S. Stephen Furness torpedoed in the Irish Channel on 13th December 1917.

QUOTE Why should we mourn the faithful
 Who lays down his life for his friend
 Could any deed be more worthy
 Could any life better end.

Now Reader, if you are still with me I should like to again quote from The Bexhill Observer dated 11th March 1916, just about the time I was wounded. The article covers five columns of print and a double column of ten photographs, I can only copy out a very small part of it, and please let me tell you that Edward Baker married my mother's Sister, therefore he was my Uncle Ted. He had a rifle bullet in his chest but refused to have it removed because it caused him no inconvenience.

QUOTE It is peculiarly fitting that the subject of our article this week should be the 2nd Home Counties Royal Engineers, that smart and soldierly Corp who have already had their baptism of blood and flame upon the stricken fields of France. For a good many years the Engineers have been well known to all local residents, and now they are turning their training and smartness to good purpose, they are looked upon by the townspeople with mingled affection and pride. Like the 6th Sussex Battery R.F.A. with which we recently dealt, the local Engineers Corp owes its existence to the enthusiasm and ability of a smart non Commissioned Officer. Sergeant Thomas Hunt was, as it were, the father of the local Artillery, and Sergeant - he afterwards rose higher - Edward Baker, who now lives at 12 Sidley Street Bexhill was the founder of the local Engineers and the first Volunteer Engineer on the coast between Bristol and London. It was in the year 1888 that the Tower Hamlets Regiment came down to camp at Eastbourne, and Fr. Baker, then an old soldier with a fine record of service was catering for the Sergeants Mess. Several of the visitors 'chipped' him on the fact that there were no Engineers Volunteers all along the South Coast. From little beginnings great results spring. The idea took root in Bakers mind, he consulted with one or two other old soldiers, and it was decided to test the feeling of the town. Letters were inserted in the Eastbourne newspapers calling attention to the absence of an Engineer unit, and stating that the South Coast was liable to invasion, and that in such an event Engineers would be needed for the Army. By means of these letters several influential gentlemen were interested, and a canvas made, with the result that about 160 men offered their services. UNQUOTE Here it mentions many Gentlemen and Ladies who guaranteed funds. QUOTE In 1889 application was made to the Government for permission to enrol one company of Engineers to be styled the Eastbourne Royal Engineers. The establishment of the Corp was not effected without hindrance from one or two of those carping critics who see failure written broad upon every new enterprise and it was prophesied by one of these Jeremiahs that neither sufficient money or men would be forthcoming to form the new Engineer Corp. In answer to this it was pointed out that there were already 160 eligible men to select from in order to fill only one company of Engineers. After a considerable amount of correspondence permission was given in July 1890 to enrol one company 106 strong to be designated the 1st Sussex Royal Engineers, (Volunteers). The title was looked upon with great pride by the members of the new company, other corps were designated Volunteer Engineers, and Volunteer this and that, but the Sussex men were first and foremost Royal Engineers by official warrant

THE WAR Continued

On Leave June 1916 - Uncle Ted - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.
How the Company was commenced

QUOTE Continued A meeting was called and on July 8th 1890, eighty men were enrolled in All Souls Schoolroom, plenty of men were waiting, but it was decided not to enrol any more that night. Mr. A. Oakden, an architect and surveyor, decided to take a commission, and became the first officer of the Company, and the first man sworn in was Edward Baker, who had previously retired from the Regulars with the rank of Colour-Sergeant. On Mr. Baker's suggestion, it was decided not to enrol any more than 80 on the first night, for his practised eye had noticed that the majority of the men present were between 25 and 35 years of age and he wisely considered that a number of younger men should be taken to fill up the Company, so that when the older men began to fall out the others would be come to their prime. The meeting was on a Monday evening and on the following Wednesday, 26 more men were enrolled, bringing the Company up to full strength of 106. The enthusiasm and intelligence of the new Engineers were vouched for by the fact that although they were only formed on Monday July 8th, they had a field day and march past on Saturday of the same week.

UNQUOTE Here it states appointments were made, Sergeants etc. The Coy. earned high praise from the General Officer Commanding for their work as infantry and scientific engineering work.

QUOTE The next Company to be enrolled was at Seaford, the third at Newhaven, and the fourth at Chalvington and Ripe.

The start at Bexhill

Sergeant Baker, having moved to Bexhill one month later, the last named Company, D. Company was removed to Bexhill and Sergeant Baker appointed Company Sergeant-Major. Thus the Engineers became established in Bexhill, and they soon became fairly fixed and successful in the town. During the first year the Company was in Bexhill 58 recruits enrolled, and the first camp from Bexhill was attended with 80 men who received valuable field training at Sheffield Park. At the first camp prizes were offered for the best drilled and instructed Company in camp, and these were won by D. Company and never lost. During the years that have come and gone since, the work of D. Company has been prominently before the public. A trestle bridge was erected at one time at the place where the Arcade now stands, and attracted considerable attention. This bridge was considered a very smart piece of work, and it is now used as a model bridge in the Chatham Engineering School. This was surely a striking honour for a Volunteer unit. With regard to rifle shooting D. Company -

UNQUOTE This ancient and valuable paper has been read and folded so many times that the next line of print is defaced and unreadable - -

QUOTE and on several occasions have produced the best shots in the Battalion, and the Company won outright, three years running the Bexhill Challenge Cup. The Company has been fortunate in its efficient instructors, Sergeant Baker was the first instructor, after him came Sergeant Rollinson, who was succeeded by Sergeant - now Lieutenant Kirby and then Sergeant Edwards took over the duties.

THE WAR Continued

On Leave June 1916 - Uncle Ted - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.
 QUOTE Continued The Founder of the Engineers

Sergeant - Major Baker has had a long and honourable military career. He joined the 34th Staffordshire Rifles in 1863.

UNQUOTE I cannot copy out all that is mentioned of Sergeant Baker's career, here are a few items. Uncle Ted enlisted in the 46th Regiment of Foot in 1865, transferred to 47th to go to India 1866. He was invalided home 1869. Transferred to Royal Engineers for Abyssinian War but orders were countermanded on the eve of sailing. He was then permitted to join any Regiment, he chose 58th Rutlands to go to India. He was there several years visiting Benares, Dargeeling, Allahabad, Amritsar and other places. In 1876 he returned to England with the rank of Colour-Sergeant. Discharged in June 1877.

QUOTE How this fine old soldier went back to the uniform has been told above. He remained doing useful work until 1905 when, at the Camp at Chatham the General Officer Commanding extended his services for three years. But on February 27th 1906, he was retired by the War Office on account of age, and a creditable military career extending over forty years closed. On his retirement Sergeant-Major Baker was presented with full equipment by the Officers and given the right to retain and wear the uniform of a Company Sergeant-Major.

UNQUOTE Here the article mentions the fact that the Company landed in France on 22nd December 1914, how they spent Christmas Day, and soon moved nearer to the firing line.

QUOTE The Engineers later took part in the fighting around Ypres, and did their part in blowing up Hill 60, the great German stronghold. Describing this fighting, Major Ticehurst writes, "At the end of March we moved to Ypres, (I can mention this as we are no longer there), We arrived there just in time to help in the Hill 60 show. We had the pleasure of carrying up by night the gunpowder for the mines, and also of seeing the actual blowing up. And it was a fine sight. The Huns certainly got a lift up. Two nights and two days we helped to make the place secure after the attack, and the amount of ammunition exploded by both sides was enormous. It was here we first experienced the German lachrymatory shells. They give off a black smoke on bursting, which affects the eyes and nose. The eyes smart and run with water thus making it difficult to see, but it all goes off in a few hours. Luckily we suffered very few casualties on the hill. Our luck left us on returning to our billets in Ypres, for as you already know, when the men were resting, several shells came into the building, doing a good bit of damage. I lost several of my best men, and men who had done some good work the previous days. The Huns fairly knocked the poor old town about, and this was the beginning of the second bombardment of Ypres".

UNQUOTE It was at this time that the draft of us 70 men joined the original Company at Diekybusch. - Major Ticehurst's letter continues - -
 QUOTE Things soon got too hot, so we moved away from the town and bivouacked in a field for a couple of days and nights and then went into huts.

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THE WAR Continued

On Leave July 1916 - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

QUOTE Continued We still had to go up to the hill to carry out work, and this necessitated a five miles march there and five back, and the Hunns having been fairly stirred up it was far from pleasant walking across the open with shells by day and bullets by night flying about". Later the Engineers had experience of the German poison gas attacks.

Made the Sacrifice

It must not be supposed that the Corps passed through their ordeals unscathed, several of those gallant Engineers who landed in France will not return and others were wounded.

UNQUOTE Here it mentions the names of eleven men killed in action, including Sapper Ronnie Dennett, who was struck down on Whit Monday 1915 my first day on Hill 60, also a number of wounded including Major Ticehurst. It also gives the names and rank of 239 N.C.Os. and men serving in the Company including O.C. A.C. Major Ticehurst and 2 Officer - - - Imagine my surprise when this issue of the Bexhill Observer was handed to me when I was on Leave. To learn that Uncle Ted was the instigator of the first Company of Royal Sussex Engineers, and here was I, a Sapper in the 2nd Home Counties Field Company R.E. of which Uncle Ted was the first Company Sergeant-Major. I remember, when I was a boy, seeing Uncle Ted at Strides Castle wearing his uniform, with a Pill-box cap, but to me, at that time, he was just a soldier. - - -

My Leave passed quickly enough, Gladys was with me when I reported to Coy. Hdqrs. at Marlow. Sergeant-Major Dann was in charge. I had met him at Rouen when the draft of 70 first arrived there, he was a Corporal with two stripes then, on his way home. He knew all about war, and altho all billiting out had been stopped, he kindly arranged for Gladys and I to be billeted at a cottage near the big house where all of the Company were. I really must skip over a lot of what happened here. I was made cooks mate, peeling potatoes all day long, preparing vegetables, patting up margarine etc. One day new potatoes arrived so I put some into a lead lined sink and scrubbed them with a bass broom, unfortunately I knocked the skin off of the second finger of my left hand, it turned septic, and I went into Haidenhead hospital so Gladys returned home. A two inch long piece of tough matter kept emerging from the top joint, Dr. Sparrow suggested taking the top of my finger off, then he thought it better to take it at the middle joint, then the bit left would only get in the way, so decided to take the whole finger off, but decided to leave it one more day. That evening a different nurse did the dressing, instead of using a .3 carbolic solution she used a 33% solution which was much stronger. My little Gardian Angel must have been there for in the morning my finger was all clean and dry, in two days I was back at Marlow. - - A medical inspection was held, I was sent to the Guards Command Depot at Seaford, every man here had been wounded. There was a parade every morning, Guards, Infantry, a very close inspection by Guards Officers, but they would not look at us, we were not fighting men. Some of us R.Es. had to form a mourning party at a funeral, the Sergeant Major in charge of us had five wound stripes on his sleeve

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THE WAR Continued

On Leave July 1916 - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

QUOTE Continued Then a silly thing was done, a number of conscientious objecters were put into huts adjoining ours and things hotted up. All the windows of their huts were smashed, doors bashed in, punch up's started, the guard had to be sent for to restore order, they were moved away next morning. Some of the wounded here were in a pitiful plight, we had men on crutches, arms in slings, dressings on heads etc. Some

of the Infantry were just mutilated gun fodder. Some had lost both arms others a leg and arm, the faces of some were half gone, they had just slits for eyes and mouth, noseless and ears missing. Why were these heroes being kept here, was Rowhampton so full of plastic surgery cases that they had to wait their turn? A friend of ours, Mrs. Mainstone, who lives in Pondtail Road will verify my statement, for good lady that she is, has in the past, nursed some of these heroes. - Before I left Seaford there was a medical examination, the Infantry man in the queue in front of me had a mark on the back of his neck which looked as though he had suffered from a big boil or carbuncle, when he turned right to face the Dr. I could see a redish blue weal all round his neck. He told the Dr. a rifle bullet struck his adams apple, glanced off, went round his neck and out at the back. Dr. said "You are alright again now", he said "Not too bad Sir". Marked A.1. soon to be returned to France, more gun fodder. Dr. looked at my wound, marked A.1. - - -

I rejoined the Company at Maidenhead and was made waiter in the N.C. Os. Mess. Donker - that was the only name I knew him by - waited on the R.E.M., Q.S.P., C.S.M. and other Sergeants, I had the other N.C.Os., we had about twenty each. The C.S.M. Major's batman and barman lost his wife and had compassionate leave. The Q.M.S. said I was the best one to take his place as I didn't drink, he knew that I usually gave my rum ration to Cecil or to Nobby, Punch, Pop, or Ted Booth. This job doubled my duties. Rising at 6A.M. to clean C.S.M. Darns kit, get hot water, shaving gear laid out, then put final touches to N.C.Os. breakfast table, serve breakfast, help wash up 40 dishes etc., then upstairs clean up C.S.M. room, make bed, a quick breakfast, straighten up N.C.Os. room, and prepare to open up Bar at midday. If my parents and Church friends had seen me they would have been shocked. Me, a Methodist, drawing the beer from a barrel, serving the drinks, whiskey, gin, brandy etc. always seeing that a plate of biscuits and cheese was replenished, opening oysters and scallops. The Bar closed at 11 P.M., then if my mates were still out I prepared hot soup from the meat oddments which had been cooking all evening, then served anyone who came for it. I was glad when the barman returned. We moved back to Marlow, and I was put into the Officers Mess, I hated it, my knees knocked together more than they had done in France when I had to wait at late dinner table. One day Capt. C. arrived and a lot of drinks went round among the Officers. Major H. always drank gin but Capt. C. slipped a few whiskeys into him then when he was well away, they all cleared off leaving him alone in the lounge. Both of my mates had the evening off, so I was alone too. It was a big house with civilians occupying part of it.

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THE WAR Continued

Marlow August 1916 - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

The Major rang his bell, the kitchen maid said "That's your bell", I went up and Major said "I want a hot bath", I told him it was rather late, but that I would do my best. I told the kitchen maid, she said "He went get a bath tonight, the water is not hot", I had to go up again to explain to him, then he said "Sit down", I sat down, then he said "Not there, sit by me here on the settee", I sat beside him in front of the fire, he was half asleep, then he said "Hold my hand", before long his head was on my shoulder, he was fast asleep. What a fool I felt, how the Officers would have laughed if they had seen us. I very gradually got away, he woke up twice when I moved, but at last I got away then went down and asked the maid if she had any idea where I could find my mates, she said "Up the Pub of course", I dashed up there, it was ten o'clock turning out time, we came back together and then the two of them went up and put Major to bed. Lt. Mills always gave me a sympathetic look when I waited at table, He came to me and told me he had arranged with C.S.K. Dann for me to be his and Lt. B's batman. This was a much better job as I had all afternoons off. New straw arrived for all the mens beds, I filled my sack up, then chaps waiting below slung theirs up saying "Fill mine Jackie!" I filled several then carried mine up to my room, where eight of us slept, then I noticed my wedding ring was missing. That afternoon I turned all of the straw out, after searching for an hour or more I found it, what a blessing it was in my sack and not in one of the others. Lt. Mills told me the Officers were going away on a weeks course and that the Major had told him to let me have the key of the garage while they were away with strict instructions not to let any unauthorised person have it. A day or two later Lt. B. came to me and said "I understand you have the key of the garage, can I have it as I want to get my motor cycle out", I told him my instructions were not to let the key out of my hands, so he said "I'll not be more than two or three minutes, so I foolishly let him have it, and he, rotter that he was, did not get his own bike out but took Lt. Holmans nearly new sidecar outfit. He took some girl friend out for a drive and smashed the outfit up and did not return the key to me. When Lt. Mills came back, he looked all hot and bothered, told me what had happened, and that the Major was going to have me on the 'carpet' for disobeying instructions. I said that I was sorry about it, but as Lt. B. was an Officer I naturally thought he was a gentleman. He said "Gentleman indeed, he is a dirty swine, ~~but~~ "I'll make him pay for it, I want you to come up to the lounge ten minutes before lunch tomorrow". I wondered what was going to happen, so next day I cleaned and polished myself up a bit smartish and went up as ordered. All of the Officers were there except the Major. Lt. Mills said "Lt. B has something to say to you Sapper Elliott". Then Lt. B. started cracking off about being sorry he had got me into trouble when it was not my fault at all, that it was all his fault. Then I noticed Lt. Mills was nodding his head at Lt. B. and at last Lt. B. said "I would like to apologize to you Sapper Elliott, you are a gentleman" and Lt. Mills, standing straight up, stopped nodding his head. Lt. B. put his hand out, we shook hands, I then took two smart steps back and left the lounge.

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THE WAR Continued

Marlow August 1916 - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

Later Lt. Mills told me Major was in a violent temper, but that he had calmed the Major down, and had persuaded him not to have me on the 'carpet'. I never saw Lt. B. again. Next day Lt. Holman joined Lt. M. in his rooms and I was batman to both of them. Sometime after all this there was a Medical Inspection and I, with many others, including Lt. M. and Lt. Holman were warned for overseas draft. Lt. Mills told me he still wanted me as batman and take him and Lt. Holman to France as I knew all about what they would want to take and what to discard. I had to parade with the draft, route marches with gasmasks on, filling in trenches where they had been working, also continue my duties as batman early and late, it was generally a long day. Then I thought that I had better go sick to get my ear syringed as very probably I should find myself in a sap, and a deaf Sapper in a sap is a liability to his mates, for if Punch had been deaf, we might well have been blown up on Hill 60. That evening it came up on Orders that no one on the draft would be allowed to report sick, so my good intentions were squashed. I helped my Officers to sort their stuff out, Lt. Mills got me a longer leave for me to see him home to Bexhill. We left Marlow sometime in May 1917 and arrived at Rouen. Lt. Mills got me excused all parades so that I could be with him and Lt. Holman. The first morning when I was getting them up Lt. Mills said "I suppose there's no tea this morning, what about hot water, go on you old scrounger, go and get some". Lt. Holman said "What a hope", Lt. Mills said "You don't know Elliott yet". I picked up the new canvas bucket which I had advised Lt. M. to get, then went and searched all around the Officers tents, hoping to find a batman willing to help me out. It was early about 6-20 A.M. there was not a soul about anywhere. Then I moved over to the outside line of tents, and there, before my very eyes, I saw, Fifty feet away, standing right out in the open, a cast iron boiler with a wiff of smoke issuing from the chimney, I boldly walked up to it, there was a white enamelled bowl on the lid, I quickly filled the bucket with steaming hot water, then away back to the tent I went feeling quite pleased with myself. Lt. Mills said "There, I told you so Holman, he can scrounge anything", Lt. Holman said "Thank you Elliott, thank you very much", I said "Its a pleasure to serve you Gentlemen." Then I told them to 'Wakey, Wakey' as it was passed 6.30, and left them. Later I went back to straighten things up, put their shaving gear away, made the beds and so forth. Next morning when I went to them, I slapped my hand on the tent and called out 'Wakey, Wakey', Lt. Mills said "Here he comes again, making all this disturbance I opened the tent flap, stepped in, picked up the bucket and went to get their hot water. Unfortunately I let the boiler lid slip, it went down with a bang, and I heard someone shout, then I saw a soldier running toward me, he said "That's not anybodys water", I said I had only taken a little for my two Officers, perhaps half a franc would put things right, he took the money and said "O.K".

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THE WAR Continued

~~Harlow~~ France 1917 - Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

Later when I went to straighten their tent up I found them still there, they told me they had orders to 'Stand by' and only leave the tent for meals. I told them I expected that to happen, as the Corporal of the draft had told me I should have to go on parade for the final Medical Inspection. Lt. Mills said "What are we going to do all day shut up in here", I told him perhaps we would not be here all day, I meant it as a gentle warning. He said "Can't you scrounge some papers or magazines and some chocolate to munch", I told him the Canteen would not be open till midday. He handed me a five franc note and said "Go on, go and scrounge something". I felt this was the last thing I would be able to do for them, I had tried to keep them lighthearted and cheerful, but this was a hopeless task. I went to the dry canteen, of course it was shut, the Church Army and Salvation Army huts were deserted, I wandered around hoping and hoping, I even got into the Australian lines, they always seemed to have much more than we ever got, I walked all amongst the tents. One Aussie said "Morning Digger" they always called us Sappers 'Diggers' they knew our job. At last I saw a big wooden building right at the far end of their lines, I quickened my steps, as I got nearer to it I saw the words 'Australian Canteen' there were some smaller words which I could not make out, but wonder of wonders the door was open. As I got to the door I looked up at the small words, it said N.C.Os. only, but I couldn't stop now, besides, 'Faint heart never won fair lady!'. The Corporal said "Morning Digger, you want something", I said "Good morning", "I know that I ought not to be in here, but I've got two Officers 'Standing by' way back in our lines, I expect we shall all be going up the line tonight, could you please let me have a couple of old newspapers or magazines to help them pass the time", he said "There may be some in the amusement hut, but it will not be open until late this afternoon". He saw I was looking at the bars of chocolate, cigarettes, biscuits, tins of milk and golden syrup. He said "Just say the word, Digger", I said "Chocolate and biscuits", he put some big bars of chocolate and two big handfuls of biscuits in packets on the counter. I had the five franc note in my hand and I said "You hav'nt any sweets I suppose, peppermints or barley sugar", he turned his back to me then said "I've got some chewing gum", I said "Thats it, the very thing, it will keep them chewing all day long". He put a big handful of packets of gum down, I said "How much", he looked at me and then at all the things lying there and said "Lets say four and a half francs", he gave me two twentyfive centimes change, coins with the hole in the centre. I thanked him and he said "I wish all three of you Good luck". I hurried back to the tent, they were both sprawled out on their beds. I dumped the gum chocolate and biscuits on to Lt. Mills bed and said, "I have not got much change". He said "Keep it", and I realised I had got my half franc back, which I had paid for their hot water. They started to munch the chocolate, I looked at them, two young Officers, how long would they last 'up there'. I remembered Lt. Waterhouse, killed in less than a week Lt. Donce stuck it for a year and then lost his right arm, I had lasted ten months, and then got my head smashed up, both Mr. Evans of Harley Street and the Dr. at Charing Cross hospital had told me I should always have trouble with it, and they were right.

THE WAR CONTINUED

France 1917 - Two Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

I hurried back to my tent, washed, shaved, put my kit together, cleaned my rifle then at the appointed time, went with the draft for medical examination. The Dr. was quite young, in his early twenty's, he just walked along the front rank and then between the ranks, I was in the rear rank and he never even looked at us he seemed more concerned to see if anyone in the front rank needed a hair cut. He walked along the back of us then stood out the front. He said "If any of you have a complaint or any reason why you should not go up the line step out to the front. I thought this is my last chance to get my ear syringed, so out the front I went, and there a chap named Eddie joined me. The Dr. said "You men of the draft are the hero's, these two men are the cowards, march the draft off forward". When they were gone he asked me what my complaint was so I told him I had my ear smashed by a shell splinter in March 1915 and that if he could arrange for me to have it syringed, as I was deaf, I was prepared to rejoin the draft and go up the line. He then asked Eddie what his complaint was, Eddie cupped his ear with his right hand and said "Big garden Sir". The Dr. made no arrangement to have anything done, he just simply walked away. I asked Eddie what he was going to do now and he said "I'm going to the Canteen as soon as it's open, then off he went. I wandered back to our lines and eventually met one of the Sappers who had been in the first draft with me in May 1915. He was by trade a sail maker, he was one of the skillful boatmen when we were pontoon bridging at Henley. He had a bag of tools so I asked him if he had a lace job, he said we probably only temporarily, I'm patching up the damaged tents. I told him of the fix I was in and he told me I could sleep in his tent that night, but he had to go to the other side of the camp and I would have to sleep over there. Late that afternoon I went to see if my Officers were still there, the tent was empty, but on the tent pole was something which looked like a wasps nest I stepped inside, there two young Officers had played a joke on me, what I thought was a wasp nest was all the chewed up gum they had stuck on the pole, I left it there, I never saw either of them again. Next morning I went to the Medical Sundry but and asked him to syringe my ear, he had no syringe but put coffee wool on a pair of tweezers, then lost the wool inside my ear and had a fine old job to get it out. Here Reader is missing his ear again, but eventually I found myself in the Wessex Lines. Reader had made a mistake, someone had blundered. Me, not to mention my
He, just to be a pig

In with the Wessex men I went

To being the lead was my intent

I paraded with the other men and each morning a Staff Corporal attended he asked for carpenters, painters, plumbers etc. as they fell out our ranks were thin, he asked me my trade, I said "Fitter, motor and cycle", he said "you'll do", he took us over to the workshops, dropping the various trades at different places until I was the only one left, by then

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THE WAR Continued
France 1917 - Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

"Your job is to keep an eye on five Prussian Guard prisoners who are tarring the roofs of the hospital Nurses huts. They are docile enough, all are six feet tall or more, one is six feet five", I was five feet four and a half, any one of them could have given me a back hand blow and knocked me out. The Corporal asked them if they liked the job, the tall feller said "Nein compre job", the Corporal hesitated but walked away. The day passed with no trouble. At knock off time the tall feller dumped his tar bucket and said "Corporal parley job, nein compre job". Yes Reader, he wanted me to explain the English word 'Job' in the French language, to him a German, it seemed to me to be too much of a Chinese puzzle, so I said "'Op it", they all stood and stared, then I said "Compre alley", he said "Compre alley", and I said "Then Op it", and off they went with the other prisoners to march back to their tents. Another day I had five other prisoners, their job was to paint the inside roof metal girders of an extension to one of the workshops, I just sat on my behind all day and watched them. A plumber and I had the 'Job' - that silly little unexplainable word creeps in again, - of extending the water pipe to a new building, the trench was already dug, the plumber was a skilled tradesman, I acted as his mate. He cut the thread on the end of the pipes and joined them up, I just did the carrying. I sometimes wondered what the rest of the chaps had to do when we were taken off to do these various jobs and one morning I was one of them left behind. The L.C. marched us off to the outskirts of the Base Camp to a munition dugout, it was marked 'Explosives, no smoking'. The L.C. unlocked the door and the chaps who did this job every day entered and brought out two cases of .303 rifle ammunition also some targets. We then marched off to a miniature range, opened the cases, then put the targets up. A lot of Infantry soon arrived and in groups of twelve fired five rounds each. This went on for several hours, when the Infantry finished we moved over to a smaller revolver range and a number of Officers fired their revolvers under the instruction of a Major. When they finished we picked up all of the empty cases, cleaned the place up. Then our L.C. said that it was too early to return to our lines so we hid ourselves behind some gorse bushes and laid down in the sun for about an hour and a half before returning. This was another job I could have done for duration, like it was at the saw mill which I have written about, but all good things come to an end. One morning when the Wessex Orderly L.C. was shouting "Wakey, Wakey" I heard him saying something more, when he came to our tent he shouted 534206 Sapper Elliott I answered, then he said "Parade at the Orderly Room at eight o'clock, I knew at once that my 'lead swinging' was over. The Sergeant at the Orderly Room told me to attend at the Medical Office at nine o'clock and then return to the Orderly Room in full marching order as a number of Sappers were to draw blankets and go on a week's course pontoon bridge training. The Medical Officer was a Major, he smiled at me, I knew that he had full information about me, also I knew that his job was to mark me fit for 'up the line' but I could see he didn't want to do it. He said "Are you feeling better now", I said "Not too bad Sir". Marked A.1.

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THE WAR Continued

France 1917 - 2nd Home Counties Fld. Coy. R.E.

All I remember about the pontoon training is that we existed on tins of beans and tomato and dog biscuits. When we returned we were put into the draft lines and paraded each morning at eight o'clock to hear if our number and name was called out. The second morning my name with six or seven others was called, we were told we were going to the 2nd Monmouth Siege Coy. in the Ypres sector, back to that awful place again. The Monmouth's were a Pioneer Coy. with few tradesmen, they had been in the Ypres sector for two years working on the pipe lines, that is the water supply. We soon learned that not only the men but the O.C. also had had enough. With the continuous shell fire the pipes were broken and blown up day and night, it was a never ending job. The O.C. had for sometime been replacing his pioneer casualties with Sappers to enable him to apply for a Base job. We did not remain up there very long after I joined them. The Coy. got a Base job near Le Treport, there were a lot of workshops here and my job, - no lets say my work - was in the huts and cook houses. The stoves in the huts were fairly close to the wall, with the smoke pipe running up outside, so losing a lot of the heat. I had to bring the stove well away from the wall, make new pipes then take them up through the wooden roof which necessitated cutting an eighteen inch square hole, then fix the top pipe to a metal plate two feet square at the correct angle of the sloping roof, and make it weatherproof. I had two chaps to help me, one came from Northumberland a tall young lad who had been in an ironworks factory, the other, a much older little man came from Essex, he was a bricklayer. I had a job to understand what either of them said, they argued the toss all day long accusing each other of not speaking the Kings English. In the cookhouses we had to fit new grills and fire bricks in the big cooking ranges and boilers. The Stores never had the right size fire bricks so my bricklayer used a hammer and cold chisel, he said he could do the work in half the time if he had his cutting tool. I asked him to describe this precious tool. He told me it was shaped like a pick only much smaller with a tip at one end and like a chisel at the other with a handle about a foot long. I had palled up with a Sapper named Christian, he was a blacksmith, so I asked him if he could make a tool for me, and he did, he made a fine job of it. Next morning when we were at the Stores, drawing our firebricks my bricklayer said "They are not the right sort again" but I told him to bring them along, he moaned all the way to the Australian cookhouses, then I took from under my tunic this special tool. His eyes goggled, he soon cut the bricks to an exact fit and whistled all the time, then when the Aussies, who were pleased with our work, invited us to stay to dinner, his day was made. We also changed the position of the stove and made new pipes for the Orderly Hut, they gave us a hundred Woodbine cigarettes. Just before Christmas 1917 the Monmouth's packed all of us Sappers off to Rouen. There was no R.C.O. amongst us, a Senior Sapper was put in charge, he was not a young man, he had bad feet.

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THE WAR Continued

France Christmas 1917 - - 1918 - 231 Fld. Coy. R.E.

When we walked on to Bouen parade ground just any old how, and did not form up in two ranks the Adjutant nearly had a fit, he tried to hustle us about, then asked where the N.C.O. in charge was. Someone said "We 'aint got no N.C.O.", the Adjutant said "Where are you from", he got the reply, "The 2' Monmouths at Le Treport don't want us any longer", Adjutant asked who was in charge of us and someone said "The Senior Sapper is in charge, but he won't be here just yet, he's got bad feet. Adjutant was in a fine old rage, his face looked redhot, when the Senior Sapper arrived we were marched off direct into the draft lines. Christmas evening it was raining hard so I went into the Y.M.C.A. hut to see a film. It was Dicken's Christmas Carol, all about Scrouge, the Ghost's and Tiny Tim, I didn't know then that in a few years time I should be taking part in several of Dicken's Works on the platform at many places. Before the end of the year another Sapper and I were on our way to join 231 Field Coy. R.Es. We travelled part of the way in lorry's, at number ten Corp Headquarters we were told 231 Coy. were somewhere near St. Quentin. We passed many miles of old trenches and rusty barbed wire, trees had been blasted by shells, there were no villages or farms even, everything was in a state of desolation, and we were hopelessly lost. Late in the afternoon we came to a small town, a ghost town. There were pavements but all the houses were empty. At the far end of the street we saw a board standing on the pavement, two words were painted on it, 'TOWN MAJOR' and suddenly a pavement slab opened and out popped the Major. He said "Do you want me", we told him we were trying to find 231 Coy. then he said "Don't go any further in this direction or you will find yourselves in the enemy lines at St. Quentin, turn right here and walk parallel to the line and you should find someone who knows where they are". So on our weary way we went, at last we came to a village and saw a soldier coming on a cycle, we stopped him, he was a Sapper, we asked if he was from 231 Coy., he told us he was RUNNER - messenger - of 229 Coy. he didn't know where 231 were but told us if we continued to the end of the village we should find 224 Coy. someone there might know. Some 224 Sappers told us 231 Coy. were at Mory, and we found them at last, it was beginning to get dark. I was put into number one Section, the other Sapper was put into a different Section so I didn't see much of him. I soon found out most of the men came from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, therefore I was more or less a foreigner, but one chap soon got friendly, it was Bill Benneston, he wore one stripe like poor Cecil had done, and after a time we really palled up together. We had little front line work, it was always quiet, hardly any rifle or machine gun fire, but one night, when we got back to camp it had been shelled. The Pioneer Coy. who were in huts next to ours lost fourteen killed and twenty wounded. We were not at Mory long, if I remember right, we moved to Hondégum, here we did a tremendous amount of barb wiring and laying out new trenches, it must have been a new Support line. Actually there were three lines, nearest to the enemy was the Blue line, some distance back was the White line, and still farther to the rear was the Red line. From the Red line there was to be no withdrawals or falling back, a fight to a finish.

We did miles and miles of this work, and generally, when we worked at night we had an Infantry working party of a hundred or more. A Sapper Guide was sometimes sent to the Infantry billet to show them the way. One night I was told off to be the Guide, I was given instructions as to the whereabouts of the farm buildings where they were, I had never been there before. The Password for the night was 'Wellington', so once more I found myself alone, on a dark night with an urgent mission to fulfill. I had been told to watch out for the Sentry who usually stood at the farm gate. At last I reached the gate but could not see the Sentry, but as soon as I stepped on to the hard rough road inside the gate he shouted "Halt, who goes there", I stopped and said "Sapper Elliott of 231 Coy. R.E. guide for your Working Party", he said "Advance three paces and give the Password", and I, fool that I was, had forgotten it and said "Napoleon". He shouted "WHAT", and I heard the bolt of his rifle open and shut, and knew he had me covered. Then I suddenly remembered and said "No, No, sorry I mean Wellington", he said "Advance three paces and be recognised I obeyed, then I could see him, He came up to me his rifle at his hip, then said "Now, who are you", I repeated what I had first said "Sapper Elliott of 231 Coy. R.E., guide for your Working Party", he said "Come with me", We walked past some farm buildings, then he called out "Corporal Elliott", I said "No Sapper Elliott", but the figure of a man came out and the Sentry said, "Corporal Elliott here is your R.E. guide for the Working Party", then Corporal Elliott said, "Right, I'll go and tell Lt. Elliott." Now Reader, I know you will not believe the lines above, but it did happen because I was there. The Working Party were 'K.O.S. Bs' - 'Kings Own Scottish Borderers' ---. Our Sergeant's name was Buckby and a 2nd Corporal Huggett was exactly like Bainsfather's 'Old Bill' which he used in his sketches, and we had a Lt. Sidebottom pronounced Siddebotham, we called him Siddle, he was a good and popular Officer. At night, even after 'Light's Out' Buckby would come to us and say "There's an urgent dirty job up the line that's got to be done quick any volunteers", someone would say, "Who's the Officer, is it Siddle", if Sergeant said "Yes" the whole Section would want to go. I went on Leave two or three times whilst with 231 Coy. but as I have no more Diarys, I cannot state the date or tell you where the Coy. were when I went. I remember Buckby was with us, he wore wellingtons and washed the mud and slush off of them when we started, but my putties were all wet mud, and I had no chance to get cleaned up. Of course we had a long rail journey in cattle trucks marked 'OMES - men, 40. CHAVOU - horses 8 During the journey an Infantryman got out his game of Crown and Anchor, I expect most of you have seen it. On a sheet of thin cardboard six squares are marked, I.E. Crown, Anchor, Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades, Money is placed on any of the squares and dice are thrown, so of course players win or loose. One young man lost all the money he had drawn before he left his Unit, 400 Franc's. Remarks were made by some of the men, then the Banker - - the man who was running the game - - said, I will give him half of the money back, but he must not play again.

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THE WAR Continued
France 1918 - 231 Fld. Coy. R.E.

The game went on for a time, then the young lad came back and put some money on the card and the Banker said "You fool, your luck is out, pick your money up", then the silly lad said "No, I can't loose all the time" The game continued and of course the lad lost nearly every throw, the Banker said "You had better pack up, I'm not giving you any money back this time". The silly lad lost all of his money in the end. At the Docks two boats were waiting for us, the chaps all crowded to get on to the first one, I let them go, I had been on leave before and I know the second boat was S.S. Snipe, a much faster twin screw vessel. We left an hour or more after the first boat but arrived at Southampton long before the other one. I reached Victoria station about 9.15 P.M., looked up the platform and time of train to Bexhill and was standing near the big clock when a Red Cap - Military policeman - came up and said "What are you doing here in such a dirty state", then he realised I was on leave from France, then said "Oh hell, my Officer is about, if he sees you he will have a fit" He asked how long I had to wait for the train, I told him about half an hour. He took me over to some big cases and milk churns, the people stared, then he said "Hide yourself up untill the last minute", London was ashamed of me. At Little Common one of the first questions people asked was how soon I had to go back, they all asked the same question. Gladys and I took a walk down to Cooden beach, when we were going down Cooden hill a R.S.M. - Regimental Sergeant Major - emerged from the gorse bushes, he stopped us and said "A General is inspecting us today, why are you here walking in that manner", I said "I am on leave from France", Gladys tried to take her arm away but I held it tight and walked on. He followed us for a few steps then said "I thought you were one of my chaps", then he went back to his 'hide'. I was getting fed up with these stay at home loud speaking guys.

Back in France 231 Coy. moved to a little village called Le Mott. The Chateau had been damaged by shells, we had to repair the roof as General Gough intended to make it his Headquarters. The crossroads had not been blown up by the enemy -- a thing he always did before leaving a place -- Sergeant Buckby was searching every cellar door looking for the enemy's sign. This sign was a streak of blue paint like a flash of fork lightning, denoting the entrance to the sap. When on the roof I noticed there was a fair sized lake at the rear, with a boat allround the building. Sergeant came and told me that the General's cook wanted his stove fitted up in the cellar, and that he would send Percy - a brick-layer - with me. Buckby gave me one elbo pipe and told me I would have to make another also I had to make the straight pipes. The chimney breast was huge, about twelve or fourteen feet wide at the floor, six or eight at the ceiling, there was no fireplace. Percy said "I wonder where the chimney is", then he started tapping the brickwork with his hammer to try to find a place that sounded hollow, I got on making the pipes. After about an hour's tapping he picked up the cold chisel then cut half a brick out, he had found the right spot. We soon fixed the pipes. The cook was there so we told him to light a fire because the chimney might be damaged or stopped up but it worked O.K. and he said "I wish you two chaps were always around when we move, I generally get stuck into a -----smokey dugout".

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Sergeant Buckby said that he had found the house where the sap started and that they had removed the cellar door with the blue paint on it but the sap was flooded with water level with the cellar floor, he said he had put some Sappers there to pump it out. How many days and nights they were pumping I really forget, but they could not get all of the water out. Sgt. took me over there and said it was a small sap, too small for him to enter. He had drawn a pair of long waders from the Q.M. Stores for me, Oh yes, he had got it all worked out, I was the one who had to enter the sap to investigate. As I pulled on the waders he told me to beware of 'Booby traps' as he could not understand why the enemy had not blown up the crossroads. Several times before, he and I had removed charges left behind by the Germans, and some of them had contained a trap for any unwary person, but because I was small it was my job to look around first, then he would squeeze himself in and cut the wires and so isolate the trap. We once found a huge shell all wired up, it must have been fifteen inches across the base and four or five feet long. After he had cut the wires, he stood it up on end, put his shoulder to it and carried it out letting it flop down on to all the mud, then he grinned and said "Someone else can carry it away. -- I am sorry Reader for this interlude, I read in 'Readers Digest' of March 1966 the following lines. 'A man only 99% careful is a danger to a Bomb disposal Squad' -- Now, back to the sap at Le Mott. -- I knelt down on the cellar floor, then Sgt. switched his torch on I could see three wooden steps, I very carefully ran my hand all along the bottom of the first step, then all round the ends of it, and so on to the second and third, feeling for any wires, but could find none. The fourth step was under water but I served that in the same way as the others, there were six steps, and when I stepped off the last one I was standing in water well above my knees, and I had to crouch down to prevent my head from touching the roof. Sgt. directed the light of the torch along the length of the sap, it looked a long way to the end, about twentyfive feet, I carefully watched for any wires as I slowly moved along. When I reached the end our conversation went like this, Sgt. - 'What is it, any shells -- "No, there is four big cases, I expect it is Aminal",-- "Can you see any detonaters",-- "Yes, two",-- "Well, pull 'um' out",-- "I can't get this one out, it's stuck",-- "Wiggle it about, push it to and fro and up and down",-- "When I pulled it down it broke in half, And the broken end has got two wires on it". I knew at once that half of the charge was safe. Buckby came splashing along the sap like a water rat, making waves that ran over the top of my waders drenching my feet. He told me to hold the torch, then taking his pliers off his belt, cut the wires off the broken detonater, then he said "What, are you frightened" I said "Not now I'm not, -- you see Reader, I knew that he knew the danger was passed. I shone the torch on the other detonater, he cut the wires and said "Let's get to hell out of this hell" which sounded a bit nonsensical to me.

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It was at Le Mott that I almost met my brother Alf, he was in the R.F.A. with a battery of sixty pounders I heard his battery was at a village about four miles from Le Mott. Bill Benniston came with me, we found the battery and were told that Alf had gone to a village five miles further on, we just never had the time to go any farther. We moved from Le Mott and reached a place, the name of it was spelt with several double S's and C's with a diphthong, ending with css or sec, to describe it more fully is beyond my ability. The Coy. left here one morning, but eight of us with Sgt. Buckby were left behind as Rearguard, we had to wait for the ration cart. The hours passed, we waited and waited, then it started snowing. The chaps asked Sgt. if they could eat their 'Iron rations', - we always had to carry a tin of bully beef, dog biscuits and a small bag of tea and sugar, - he said 'No'. Late afternoon Sgt. sent of Scouts to find the ration cart, they found it O.K, it was a G.S. waggon with a team of six mules, stuck in a snow drift. Mules can be very stubborn animals, we had to unharness them, take the horses from our waggon, hitch them to the ration cart and they pulled it out as easy as kiss your hand. Then the teams were changed back and we started on our journey, and believe me it was some journey. We had not gone far before we got stuck again and had to clear the snow off the road. It was dark and our rifles and packs had been put on our waggon so that we could use our shovels better, but we were so loaded that they kept falling off. How many times we had to dig the waggons out I fail to remember. It was still snowing and cold. In the end I was pushed up on to our waggon to hold the rifles and packs on, I was well nigh frozen. We reached a main road at last and met the French coming out riding in motor transport. I told Buckby that I would have to walk or die. Like the others I slung my rifle over my shoulder to leave my hands free but I was frozen stiff and fell down on the slippery cobble road, I fell several times, then Chas. Bryan went down so I said 'I'm not the only one that's drunk', Chas. said 'That's the first time I've fallen, you have been down six times', I kept on falling and every time my rifle butt hit the ground the barrel banged the back of my head, I counted the times - seven - eight - nine - ten -, I fell over sixty times and felt quite knocked out. We came across a number of French lerrys which had skidded off the road, then noticed some of the British horse and mule teams drawn off on to the grass verge, in the end the verges on both sides of the road were chock a block with the teams unharnessed, some of the drivers were laying under their waggons wrapped in their blankets. We came to one man with a team of six mules stuck right across the road, he was thrashing the animals with his whip. We told him if he would put his whip away we would help him, he put it away, then we pushed on the spokes of the wheels, they turned round on the slippery road, the mules stood sullen, they made no effort at all. The driver unharnessed them then took the poor things on to the verge, we pushed the waggon to the side of the road, there was not room for it on the grass verge.

We struggled on and came to a fairly big building, there were lights in the windows, it was a Salvation Army Canteen, if ever I blessed the Salvation Army it was that night, they were serving hot drinks and giving it away to those of us who had no money, we were in there for about half an hour, but our waggon drivers would not stop. Then on our weary way we went. The transport stuck on the verges got thinner untill they were all stuck, one of them was our ration cart, the drivers were lying on the ground under it wrapped in their blankets. Not so very long afterwards we found our Rearguard waggon by a big building and I heard Bill Benniston call out 'Is that you Jackie" we had made it at last, we were at Doullans. Of all the Coys. transport only our Rearguard waggon got through, the following got stuck. Headquarters waggon, three Section waggons, two pontoon waggons and water cart. Bill advised me not to go inside the building as it was crowded, not room to lay down, he said he had found a place outside. He held my arm, we crossed a yard, through a small wicket gate, then he said "Bob your head down, the roof is low, he struck a match, we were in a pig sty, he had put the dryist of the straw in a corner, and that's where we slept. We heard that all the top class Generals were in town including Earl Haigh also the French General Foch, and Lloyd George. They held a 'Get togrther' to decide how the war was to be won. I remember Doullans well for it was here that I broke the last tooth off my top denture plate, and the bottom plate in half. I also remember when the Germans broke through our front line and 231 Coy. were sent up, not to fight, but to find out how far he had advanced, keep in contact with him and try and join our broken ends. We went up at night and found him easy enough, he was in a village and had big fires burning with lots of smoke. He hung about the place all night, some of us dug a shallow hole with our bayonets to get into and pushed the earth out with our hands. When I had finished my hole I found my wedding ring was missing, as dawn broke I searched all through the turf and earth that I had pushed out and eventually found it. Soon after this we saw someone come out of the village down the road towards us. It was a Frenchman, dressed rather rough, he was carrying a basket, he came through a gap in the hedge and began handing out eggs to us. I did not take any, but told our chaps he was a spy, the Royal Scots, who we had made contact with, hustled him out of it and he returned to the village. There was a Decavill - - narrow gauge - - railway track close to the hedge, we were about twenty feet clear of it back in the field. Suddenly a salvo of four shells came from behind us, one burst between us and the railway, one went just over the road the other two made direct hits on the rails and up they went, rails and sleepers, falling all amongst us, no one was seriously hurt, I reckoned it was the Mad Major up to his tricks again.

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Our Section Officer, Lt. W. ordered "Number one Section fall back fifty feet", then a Royal Scots Officer dashed up and told Lt. W. that he was not in charge, there would be no withdrawl, we were all at sixes and sevens, but the issue was quickly resolved, the enemy opened up machine gun fire down the road, swinging it to and fro across our front, we all had to get out quick. Our Section drew back across the field in open order, three yards apart, a thin khaki line, back to the next hedge we went and laid down flat. After a few minutes two machine guns started firing bursts, it got too hot, we had to move back again. We were on higher ground here, the enemy put up two verrey lights, one white and one green, we wondered what the signal meant, there was a lull for several minutes, then someone called out "There he is, I can see him in the ditch by that hedge", then he pointed to the spot, some of the others said they could see him. Then someone said "Can't we have a go at him Sir", I looked round and saw three of our Officers, one of them was looking through his field glasses, he passed the glasses, the others had a look, then he called out "All right, it may delay him a bit, load five rounds", he looked through his glasses again and said "Sights up to three hundred yards, - five rounds - rapid - Fire". Some of the chaps were standing up, others on one knee, the rest of us lying down. There was a tidy racket for a minute or two, some of them must have fired ten or more rounds. The Officer ordered "Cease Fire", then two verrey lights appeared away to our left flank, and quickly afterwards two on our right flank, then we realised what the signals meant, the enemy had secured his first objective, we knew he would soon be after the second. Our weak effort to delay him was like poking a stick into a hornets nest for he attacked savagely, we were driven back to the next hedge, but it was a big high one with trees at intervals, there was a wide gap about half way along it, we knew we should soon be driven out again. Our thin line converged towards this gap, it looked as though the farmer used it to get his cows through, or perhaps our Infantry used it to get to and from the front line. As some of the chaps crowded through the machine gun swung round and I saw several of them fall, whether they had just stumbled or been hit I didn't know, but I realised it was no place for me, it was a death trap, so I got close up to the hedge where I was, looking for a thinner place to break through. There were four lines of barbwire, the top one about four feet high, all were fastened to the trees and between the trees thick posts holding the barbwire, it was all covered in brambles and sting nettles. As I stood there I saw in the adjoining field on my left, number three Section Sergeant, he was a big tall man. At that very moment the gun swung round and I saw him fall, then I saw Bill Benniston and another Sapper run to his aid. I took hold of a low branch of an ash tree, put my foot on next to the top wire, slung my rifle over my shoulder then pulled myself up and stood on the top wire. My heart was thumping, I was getting left behind, and the enemy were at hand. Standing there I was a 'Sitting duck' so I jumped, but a bramble caught my right instep and spoiled my effort, I landed in the ditch the other side up over my knees in nearly black slush, as I dragged myself out I could tell by the frightful smell that it was an open drain from the pig sty's of the farm we had just passed.

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As I looked across the field I saw my fellow Sappers lying down near the hedge so I hurried over to them and laid down. Almost immediately Chas. Bryan said "Where is that stink coming from", I told him it was me as I had tumbled into an open drain when I broke through the hedge. He said "Get to hell out of here then", so I moved some distance away. The Royal Scots were moving back and some of them got between me and the other Sappers, then Chas. called out "What, have you joined the Infantry Jackie", I told him I would join anything to get me out of this lot. The day wore on, I will not bother you Sapper with it. Then the enemy packed up, we were at another farm and Sgt. told me, as I was a 'Stinker' I could be guard at the farm entrance in case the enemy attacked at night. After two or three hours a Sapper came and asked me if I would like some milk, "MILK", I said, he told me there were twenty or thirty cows in one of the buildings, some of them were lying down and moaning with pain because they had not been milked for twentyfour hours or more and that the chaps who knew how to milk were milking all of them and trying to get them up on their feet. He brought me some milk, it was quite hot straight from the poor cow, you see we had no food since we left camp the night before. The next day we had it all over again, the very lights, the machine guns and got out quick. When the enemy packed up the second day Sergeant told us we were being relieved. He took us across fields to a road, then to a farm building on the other side of the road, it was dark, he said "There don't seem to be many of you", he took his note book out and said "Strike a match", he looked at the book and said "When we started out on this stunt the section was twenty eight strong, I had better 'Call the roll', seven of us answered our names, then he said "Where the hell are all the others, seven out of twenty eight, by - - -. After a long pause he spoke softly, it was a whisper to his usual loud voice, "Did any of you see any of them, do you know anything, tell us". No one answered, so I told him that I saw Bill Hamiston go to the aid of the Sergeant when he was shot down. Buckley said some of the men were sure to show up in the morning, then he ceased down for the night. I could not get to sleep, I was too wired, I thought of Gladys, my parents and Lily, should I ever see them again, but I was still alive, another day of the war was over, and I had earned another two shillings, a bob for Gladys and a bob for me. During the night Bill got back, he laid down beside me, I told him why I sneezed of pig manure, he said "Never mind Jackie", he didn't move away, I didn't ask him how he had managed to find us, one doesn't ask silly questions at times like that. Several of the others turned up next morning but our ranks were terribly thinned. I asked Bill how he had got on with the wounded Sergeant, he told me they got him away just in time, he was shot through both thighs, he bled like a pig, they had to carry him, it was Tommy Dewby who helped him.

As I looked across the field I saw my fellow Sappers lying down near the hedge so I hurried over to them and laid down. Almost immediatly Chas. Bryan said "Where is that stink coming from", I told him it was me as I had tumbled into an open drain when I broke through the hedge. He said "Get to hell out of here then", so I moved some distance away. The Royal Scots were moving back and some of them got between me and the other Sappers, then Chas. called out "What, have you joined the Infantry Jackie", I told him I would join anything to get me out of this lot. The day wore on, I will not bother you Reader with it. When the enemy packed up we were at another farm and Sgt. told me, as I was a 'Stinker' I could be guard at the farm entrance in case the enemy attacked at night. After two or three hours a Sapper came and asked me if I would like some milk, "MILK", I said, he told me there were twenty or thirty cows in one of the buildings, some of them were lying down and moaning with pain because they had not been milked for twentyfour hours or more and that the chaps who knew how to milk were milking all of them and trying to get them up on their feet. He brought me some milk, it was quite hot straight from the poor cow, you see we had no food since we left camp the night before. The next day we had it all over again, the verey lights, the machin: guns and get out quick. When the enemy packed up the second day Sergeant told us we were being relieved. He took us across fields to a road, then to a farm building on the other side of the road, it was dark, he said "There don't seem to be many of you", he took his note book out and said "Strike a match", he looked at the book and said "When we started out on this stunt the Section was twenty eight strong, I had better 'Call the roll", seven of us answered our names, then he said "Where the hell are all the others, seven out of twenty eight, Hy - - -. After a long pause he spoke softly, it was a whisper to his usual loud voice, "Di any of you see any of them, do you know anything, tell me". No one answered, so I told him that I saw Bill Benniston go to the aid of the Sergeant when he was shot down. Luckby said some of them were sure to show up in the morning, then we dosed down for the night. I could not get to sleep, I was too tired, I thought of Gladys, my Parents and Lily, should I ever see them again, but I was still alive, another day of the war was over, and I had earned another two shillings, a bob for Gladys and a bob for me. During the night Bill got back, he laid down beside me, I told him why I smelt of pig manure, he said "Never mind Jackie", he didn't move away, I didn't ask him how he had managed to find us, one doesn't ask silly questions at times like that. Several of the others turned up next morning but our ranks were terribly thinned. I asked Bill how he had got on with the wounded Sergeant, he told me they got him away just in time, he was shot through both thighs, he bled like a pig, they had to carry him, it was Tommy Newby who helped him.

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Now Reader, may I please take you back to the time we arrived at Slough, when we were lectured by a Staff Officer who told us that because we were in the R.E.s. we need not think we should go on picnics or beano's, because we would be First in and Last out. What I have just been writing about was one of our 'First In's, we were called upon to do this job several times, I will not bother to describe any more of them, they were all much the same, just horrible. I well remember once when we were relieved, marching back all mixed up with various remnants of Infantry, the only thing that I was carrying was a bandolier of fifty rounds of .303 rifle ammunition, I had lost my equipment and rifle, but I did have my tin hat on, some of the Infantry had lost everything. Generally if we lost any kit we had to draw replacements from Q.M. Stores and it was ~~not~~ entered in our paybook to be knocked off our pay when the war was over. Nothing at all was ever entered in my book, so I suppose 'The Powers that be' considered it was not altogether my fault. - - -. We moved back I don't remember where, had to draw fresh kit and were told to get ourselves cleaned up, we were to be inspected by a General. Our Officer who was in charge of the parade was Capt. Dawson, he was transport Officer so knew very little about drill, there were no other Officers on parade. He drew us up to attention. The General told us we had done a fine job, how firm we had stood, it had been expected that the enemy would advance eighteen or twenty kilometers, we had done almost all that had been asked of us. We had located him, kept in touch and joined up one end of our broken line, and that the enemy had only advanced seven kilometers and taken five villages. He spoke to Capt. Dawson then we got the Order, "Fix bayonets, slope arms, Present arms", then the General said "Dismiss the men" and Capt. ordered "Dismiss", and there we were standing at the Present. He should have given four Orders, 'Slope arms Order arms - Unfix bayonets - Slope arms - and then Dismiss. We didn't know what to do, some of us stood perfectly still, hoping the mistake would be rectified, some turned right and saluted, others unfix bayonets, the rest walked off with bayonets still fixed, I was flabbergasted. That night it came up on 'Orders for the day', The men did an excellent and efficient piece of work, More could have been expected of the Officers. Ah well, it was another day of the war over. A few days later our Coy. received four decorations, two British Military Medals and two French Croix de guerre, - Cross of war, -. Sergeant Buckby and L.C. Benniston got the Military Medals, a Sapper in number two Section got a Croix de guerre, I forget who got the other French medal. - - . I will now write about our 'Last Out', we were only called upon to do this once. We were moved to the Armentieres Sector, it was supposed to be a quiet part of the line. We were taken out of the Fifth Division and put into the fourtieth, the fifth had been knocked about, and I believe reformed. The fourtieth was called a Bantom division because most of the men were small like me. We kept the same divisional sign, a white diamond, but we only had it in outline. In the centre was a white Bantom Cockerel with two oak leaves, one each side of its head to represent Billon Wood. We were at Bac - san - More, number one Section were billeted at a farm nearer to the front line. The farmer and his wife were still living there but I didn't like it, it smelt of death,

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Our job was away back at the river, I believe it was the river Lys but I'm not sure. We put pontoon bridges across, barrel pier bridges, and used any kind of material to bridge it. We practised putting the primers and detonaters in the guncotton charges which were under and over the road suspension bridge. There were two of these road bridges, one at each end of the town about a mile apart, number two Section were playing with this other one. One afternoon Corp. Holden came to me and told me there was a little job to be done. We walked on the river bank about half way towards this other road bridge and found two piles of posts, some were four or five feet long others shorter, all were painted white at the top part. He picked up a big armfull of the long ones and told me to pick up what were left and as many of the small ones as I could carry. Then he walked away from the river into a field which was flooded with water. He said we had to put the posts in a long line up to a road. He stuck a post in and told me to follow him, he put them in about twelve or eighteen feet apart, then the water got shallower so we put smaller ones in, but the ground was uneven, he was soon up to his waist in water so he had to change his direction to find higher ground, and so it went on shallow and deep with the result our line of posts were all Zig Zag, and we ran out of posts before we reached the road, he said 'It will give them a bit of a guide'. In fact we were pretending that we had to get our troops back across the river, then when they were over destroy all of the bridges. We played about for two weeks, our Section was moved to Bac - san - More into a terrace of houses with all the others including Headquarters. The Padre had a Canteen hut in our back garden, he slept there, everything was fine and dandy, then one morning the enemy started a bombardment, it got closer and closer. A shell hit the Canteen, exploded, the walls fell flat outwards and the roof collapsed, then out popped the Padre in his pyjamas, carrying his uniform, he shouted "Help yourselves, I am leaving". Some of the chaps dashed out there to see what they could get, but I had my dixie in my hand and went downstairs to get my breakfast. I heard Buckby blowing his whistle, as I reached the bottom of the stairs he came in the door. I said "What about breakfast", he said "- - - - - your breakfast , get your kit on and fall in outside. We quick marched back to the river, then took up our appointed positions. I was on the pontoon bridge next to the road bridge with Corp. Huggett with an axe ready to destroy it. Most of the others * were working on the road bridge, underneath and climbing up on to the metal girders fitting the primers and detonaters, I had nothing to do but just wait for any Infantry that might come along, but what we had been pretending had now become very real. The enemy started sending over what we called sausages, they were heavy , big mortar bombs, you heard the gun fire, then if you looked up in the right place you could see them turning over and over like a sausage .

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The French had been clearing the junk out of the river, old buckets, bedsteads, bricks etc, one of their waggons was standing all loaded up not far from us and a sausage dropped right on it, then up the lot went. I could see a lump of it would fall close to us so both of us quickly got down the bank and under the bridge, I was all under except my head when half a brick hit the brim of my tin hat and into the water it went, I just managed to grab it before it sank. These blessed sausages kept coming for sometime but stopped at last. Then soon afterwards I heard a Sapper call out "He is coming down the street", I got up on to the road, looked up the street, yes, there he was about twenty of them, moving about, crossing the road from house to house. Where then was our Infantry, had he broken through our line again. The enemy fired a few rounds with their rifles, then disappeared. Buckby told Leggett and I to stand on guard and report any more movement, the rest of them went up the road our side of the bridge, into a house where the charge wires went to the discharger. Leggett and I waited and waited, then the sausages started again but they fell on the road near the bridge so Leggett and I moved into the porch of the house next to the bridge and peeped out. A bomb fell on the road in front of us and Leggett called out "I'm hit, I'm hit, I saked him where he was hit, he said "In the neck, in the neck", I lowered his resperator, undid his tunic and said "Stand your gun down so that I can have a look", I couldn't see any blood and told him so, but he got all worked up, and I was not looking out for the enemy, I could see he was getting the wind up so I took him back to the others. Lt. W. and Sergeant Major Stead werethere, - we called him Steady -, he told me to go back on guard, so there I was alone once more, in the porch. After a long, longtime I saw movement at the back of the houses, men were coming down the back gardens, and in the field. I could see it was not our Infantry because of the colour of their uniform. It was a blueish grey, not blue like the French had, and it was not the colour of the Germans. I hesitated before reporting it, as I watched I suddenly rumbled who they were. They were Portuguese and what a state they were in, no kit, norifles, no tin hats, they were all covered in mud and slush, some had no tunics, some without trousers. I saw an Officer among them but they were beyond his control. I dashed up the road and called out "Sergeant, come and look", by the time Sgt. and I got to the bridge some of them were starting to come across, and across the pontoonbridge. Then the enemy opened up his machine gun, some went down, others turned back and went along the river bank on the enemy side. Some of the Sappers came out, crossed the pontoon bridge and brought in the wounded, I saw one with a neck wound, I will not describe it, he died. Buckby told me Leggett was wounded in his leg. They all cleared off back up the road, I waited in the porch, I heard gunfire in the direction of the other bridge, Bill was there somewhere, I wondered how he was getting on. I heard a motor cycle coming down the street, it was a Dispatch Rider on a twin Douglas, the enemy fired at him from the bedroom windows, but he crossed the bridge, saw me and stopped.

Don't fire the bridge yet, we are trying to get two naval guns out, I will be back shortly", then away he went back up the street through the enemy fire, he went out of sight, he was a brave man, I hoped he got through alright. Time passed, then I heard a horse nearly at a gallop, the farmer and his wife dashed over the bridge their waggon all loaded up with bedding, pots and pans. I kept looking out especially at the back gardens and at last I saw what I had been hoping to see, some of our Infantry were coming, an Officer was leading a perfectly straight column of men, as they rounded the last house to get to the bridge I motioned them to come over the pontoon bridge as it was lower and in line with the houses. They got across O.K. and came to me. I told the Officer what had been happening, any movement we made drew enemy fire, how he moved over the road from house to house and that we were waiting for the two naval guns, there were less than twenty men with him. He looked round and said "What's in those barrels over there", I said "Concrete" then he turned round and looked up the road and pointing to one of the houses said "Two of you go and get that Lewes gun". Now, did he know it was there or could he see that hole where half a brick had been knocked out a few feet from the doorway, any way they brought the gun out, then he said "Three of you take the gun and ammunition and get behind those barrels over there. They had to cross the bridge, as they went over the enemy opened up a machine gun and one of the men fell two other men ran on to the bridge, one helped the wounded man back, the other took his place behind the barrels. The enemy were getting less cautious collecting together and started walking down the street. The Officer called out "Hold your fire, - - wait for it, - - wait for it, - Prepare to fire, - - Fire", I had been watching all the time and I saw a blank space among the enemy, some of them ran into the houses, about half of them lay in the street. This rumpus brought the Sgt. and Sappers out, when Buckby saw the Infantry he came down to us so I reported to him the visit of the Dispatch Rider and as I spoke I heard the motor bike coming back. He rode up to me and said "We can't get the guns out but we have destroyed the breach blocks, the catapillers will be here any minute, as soon as they are over blow the bridge". Buckby heard all this and said to me "Tell Huggett to destroy the pontoon bridge", I dashed away and there was Huggett, I had not seen him for hours, he must have been under the bridge all that time. He started slashing the bottom of the first pontoon, enemy side, with the axe, the water came flooding in, then the axe jammed and he couldn't get it out. I was throwing the chesses overboard, he got the axe free and came to the next pontoon stroddle leged over the road bearers, I dislodged them, the^aall that lot floated away down stream. This we repeated untill all of the pontoons, chesses and road bearers were floating away, some of the pontoons sank quickly, others went a long way.

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As I reached the road I could hear the catapillers coming. The enemy had been very quiet for some time but as the catapillers came down the street the enemy fired at them from the bedroom windows but they continued on their way and passed over the bridge, the drivers faces were grim and set. All that had to be done now was to blow the bridge. The Infantry Officer ordered his gun crew back over the bridge, then we all went up to the house where the discharger was. Who pressed the handle down I didn't see, I expect it was Buckby, the detonaters and primers blew but not the main charges. Steady said "What do we do now", Buckby said "We have no more electric detonaters, we must use slow fuse but the detonaters and primers will have to be fitted to the main charges". The gun crew were sent back over to their station to give covering fire, the Sappers had to climb all over the metal girders again and underneath to do the necessary work. During this interlude I noticed our Lt. W. was not there, someone said 'he had done a guy', meaning that he had deserted us. When all was ready, and the gun crew brought back, Buckby lit the fuse. I had my doubts about the charge blowing so I peeped round the corner of the house, the detonaters and primers blew but not the main charges. Steady said "Now what can be done" Buckby said "We have only instantanious fuse left and shall have to try it, of course the detonaters and primers will have to be fitted", Steady said "How many feet per second does this red fuse burn", Buckby said "Sixty feet", Steady said "How much of it have you got", Buckby said "Sixty feet". All of the previous proceedings were repeated, the gun crew moved over, the Sappers did their job, then the red fuse was stretched out, it only reached half way back to our house and Buckby said "I will light it". I knew that he knew the main charges would not blow and I suppose I did a silly, a foolish thing, for I walked part way down the road with him and watched as he went to the end of the red fuse. At the same second as he lit it the detonaters and primers blew but not the main charges, now we were sunk, nothing more could be done. After Lt. W. had gone, Steady had been in charge of us, and of all the Sappers standing there, he came to me and said "You must be my Runner". We walked up the road away from the bridge which had been the scene of all our endeavours, in which we had failed. I suppose I ought to have felt honoured to have been chosen, but he was following in the footsteps of Lt. W. , I looked upon him as a deserter, he was making me one too, I hated the man, I was leaving my comrades to their fate, to get out of it in the best way they could. We walked on and on for several miles, then rounding a curve in the road, I saw ahead something laying in the road, it looked like a bundle of sandbags, as we drew nearer I could see it was a soldier. I stopped but Steady walked on then turned his head and said "Step out", I looked at the lad lying there in the middle of the road, he had webb kit and tin hat on, I could not see any blood, he did not seem to be damaged in any way . I said to Steady "Can't we lift him over to the grass verge", Steady said "You know the orders, no dead person to be touched, be they friend or foe", I told him if a Ration cart or supply column came along in the dark he would be run over, Steady said "Do not touch him, the charge would be serious.

But I still pleaded, the horses would see him, they might smell death, they would refuse to pass, the Drivers would have trouble, someone might get killed. I looked at Steady, he looked furious, I really believe he would have reported it if I had touched the poor lad. Much to my sorrow we left him lying there. On we walked again, Steady asked me for a cigarette, then he wanted a match, the chap was a scrounger too, I felt like shooting him down and leaving him in the middle of the road. How far we walked that evening I cannot say, its too long ago to remember. Steady stopped at a gateway, then pointing across the road said "There's a trench over there", and he was gone. I got into the trench, laid down on half of my groundsheet, pulled the rest of it over my body. I was in battle order, my pack, overcoat and blanket were in my billit at Bac-san-More, now in the hands of the enemy. I woke early, frozen stiff, there had been severe frost that night. I gradually moved myself about, sat up, then stood up, after a minute or two I heard voices, I walked across the road to the gateway and found some of the Sappers, I looked around for Bill but could not find him. I asked Chas. Bryan where he was, he told me that Bill got shot in the neck, right through his double chin, he said he told Bill he ought to have kept his head down and Bill had said if he had he would have got it through his brain box. Chas. continued, I was with Bill along on the river bank, it was alright for a time, then a machine gun opened up at them. they thought the gunman was half way up a tall round chimney which had a round shell hole in it. It got too hot, they had to get into the field flooded with water and follow some white posts stuck into the ground. The water was deep in places, some of them swam for it, but Tug Wilson the Snob - boot repairer - was drowned, others too perhaps. Chas. also told me that when the bombardment started Headquarters got out quick. One of the cooks told him, Charlie, number one Section cook found a jar of rum and had said "I'm not running anymore, I've had enough, but I'll be home before you silly - - - - -", the cook said Charlie was half drunk when he left him, and Charlie was still drinking. Now Reader, please remember Charlie, because the tale is only half told. The Coy. moved on again, I forget where we landed, but I do remember being at a place named Rolst. Our Section was billeted in a big dugout in the bank of a sunken road, it was the biggest and deepest dugout I was ever in. It had twentyfour steps down into it, 'twas all bunked out two tiers high, the roof and walls shored up with timber. One night we had to go to Bullycourt, about a mile distant, to straighten and clean up a fire trench, there had been fierce fighting, I found it well neigh impossible to use a shovel, the place seemed to be littered with half rotten sand bags, so I used a pick. We finished the job at daybreak, and as usual I pushed the mud off the pick with my foot but there was a piece of sand bag stuck in the hole where the handle goes through. I pulled it out with my fingers and found it was a piece of a Scotch lads kilt, had I been disturbing our own soldiers graves.

We moved some little distance away into some huts and were told we were 'Standing by'. The day passed, nothing happened, orders were, 'no clothes to be taken off, puttees and boots to be worn day and night'. The second day passed, nothing happened, so that night I took my puttees and boots off. During the night Buckby bashed the hut door open and shouted "Stand to, fall in outside in double quick time" I was the last one out boots and puttees only half done up. Cyclists had to get their cycles, then Buckby took us to some crossroads, the roads were not at right angles, the main road split into two or three roads leading to the front line near St. Quentin. I was sent along one of these roads and told to find the C.S.M. of the K.O.Y.L.I.s. and enquire if his machine gun posts were intact. We had withdrawn from our proper fire trenches and left a series of machine gun posts. I rode along for half a mile or more, then I heard a horse walking in front, I knew it could not be the enemy, so thought it was a stray broken loose. I slowed up, kept to the side of the road as I did not want to ride into it. It was in the middle of the road and I saw a figure mounted on it. The horse stopped then the rider said "Is that a Sapper", I said "Yes Sir, Elliott number one Section", he told me he had been a mile up the road and that there should be a road turning left but he could not find it. Continuing he said he had found a rough track, but there was a trench and barbwire, it was no place for a horse, perhaps if I was careful I could do better. I found the track O.K. pushed my bike past the barbwire but had not gone far before I came to more barbwire and so I carried on. The trench was not straight, how far I walked, dodging the trench and wire I don't remember, as dawn broke I came to a road so up the road I went very slowly, I rode for about a mile then the road curved round to the left and widened into a sort of lay by and what a shock I got, for there stood a German, I rode straight into the ditch out of his sight. When I had got my breath and wits back, I crept along until I could see him again, he had now got his tunic off and was washing his face and neck. As I watched I wondered if I had missed our gun posts and if the enemy had got a patrol through so I very cautiously moved along the ditch so that I could see more. There stood another German drying himself with a towel, so I moved a wee bit more and was greatly relieved to see a K.O.Y.L.I. private, his rifle at the ready. I stepped out into the road. There were about twenty Germans with three K.O.Y.L.I. watching them, the Huns were prisoners. I saw the K.O.Y.L.I. C.S.M. and told him it looked as though his gun posts were intact, he told me he was about to bring a prisoner down for questioning. As I stood there a Sapper brought a German out then the three of them walked down the road together. I rode back and reported to Buckby, he told me to get back up the road some little way and join the rest of our Section who were in a trench. It was a fire trench, but what a long way back from our machine gun posts.

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During the day patrols were sent out to patrol up and down the barbwire entanglements and so the day passed. The patrols went on during the night, we were doing exactly the same as the Infantry did in the front line. In the early hours of the morning I was still standing on the fire step, gazing out into no-mans land when I heard a movement behind me and saw a big tall soldier go by, then another and another. The third one stopped and said "What regiment are you", I said "R.Es.", he said "Bejabbers, R.Es. holding the front line, I've never known it before", I asked who he was, he said, "Irish Guards". Yes Reader, the trench we were in was a front line trench in front of St. Quanton, the date, the twenty second or third of March 1918, we were being relieved by the Irish Guards, and on that day the Germans made their final attempt to win the war. The enemy started his bombardment about daybreak, it got closer and closer, when we could see the shells bursting we were withdrawn from the trench. Cyclists had to collect their cycles. Our Section had four bikes but only three riders were there, Buckby said "You will have to take all of the bikes, you can ride and lead Jackie so you take two of them". I took the two bikes out on to the road and had just mounted when L.C. Sharples called out and said he would take the spare one. By this time the two other cyclists were away up the road. It was not a sunken road but had high banks on both sides eight or ten feet high. I caught up with the other riders, as I did so a shell burst on the top of the bank, right at the feet of two Infantry men, they were flung about twelve feet into the air and landed all mixed up together on to the road. I slowed up and called to Tommy Newby but he rode on saying "They are dead", I told him I thought I saw a foot move, he said "That's only the nerves!" We rode on and got to Gommecourt but the road here was jammed up by a transport column, we had to stop. As shells were falling round about we got behind a demolished building and waited. The horses were getting restless, the column was stationary, the leading team of six were getting out of hand, two drivers dismounted then stood at the heads of the two leading pairs, leaving one driver mounted on the pair harnessed to the waggon. The leading pair of greys became unmanageable they pawled with their front feet and suddenly reared up and threw the driver off, then away the lot went in a wild gallop with an N.C.O. galloping after them, the rest of the column got started and we followed I asked Tommy where we were going, he said he didn't know as nobody had told him. We rode on for a mile or more and came to some big huts, I noticed some of the men in front left the column, went to one of the huts then returned carrying something in his arms. When we got to the hut we found loaves of bread and cheese were being given out, so we stopped, Tommy went to the hut and came back with a loaf also some cheese, I asked him how he had worked it, he said a' chap asked him 'How many' Tommy said 'Three'. You see Reader, the Stores were clearing out before the enemy could get there, we sat down on the grass, then ate the lot. Off we went again and after a time met Hemingway our Headquarters Runner on his bike, he told us where to find Headquarters,

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Percy the Orderly Sergeant asked what we were doing there, told us to wait and said an Officer was going up the line when it got dark so we could go back with him. When the Officer collected us it was Sidde, we did not go back up the road but across fields then crossed a sunken road. At the top of the bank there were bushes, Sidde said "Crowd around me I want to look at my compass, crowd around like a Rugby Scrum, we are under observation he must not see my torch, he looked at his compass and said "It is this way", then we eventually found ourselves back at Gommecourt. That night we stuck up barbwire, but first we piled our rifles in a long line, I was in a carrying party, we had to go to a shattered barn for the posts and barbwire, it was dark, I couldn't find anything, the others picked up something and were away. Just as I was leaving empty handed I kicked into a roll of wire, I picked it up and hurried out but had not gone far before a machine gun opened up behind me, I flopped down and crawled into a shell hole. The gun fired another burst, I could see the flash, then I heard Buckby's whistle, I dashed back to the others, they were all lined up with rifles so I groped about to find one. Someone shouted "Fall in there" I joined the others but with no rifle. Huggett was behind me so I told him, after a minute or two he handed me one. Our O.C. Major B. was saying he did not know quite what was happening, it might be an enemy patrol had got through, so "Load five rounds", I knew the rifle I had was not mine so I opened the bolt part way, slid my thumb across the top of the magazine to find out if it was loaded, it was full up with ten rounds of ammunition, I closed the bolt, I soon realized that some of the others had not got their own rifles for someone let a round off. Major said "Who fired that round", and almost immediatly another round was fired. Major ordered "Unload, everyone unload, if he comes you must get into him with your bayonets". We moved back fairly close to the shattered barn then flopped down three yards apart. Scouts were sent to investigate, they found no one. We lay there all that night, but nothing happened, the next night we had to finish the wiring. Next day we moved off on to a road and after marching a mile we halted, word went round that we were being relieved. Whilst we waited I looked about to see if anyone had my rifle, it was not the colour wood as most rifles but like the colour of a horse chestnut that boys play 'conkers' with. I soon spotted it, Nobby Clark of number two Section had it. I told Huggett I wanted it back, he took me over to Nobby, then asked me the number of it, of course I was able to run the six figures off quickly and correctly, so got it back. In days past when going on guard duties I was almost always made 'Waiting man' not because of my smartness but because my rifle was new. Steady always inspected the new guard and 'Waiting man' only had to fetch the meals for the guard, no sentry duty to do day or night. One or two chaps asked to borrow my rifle and I foolishly let them have it. To one of them Steady said "Is this your rifle", he said "Yes Sir", then Steady asked him the number of it and he could not tell him but said that he must have picked up the wrong one in his hurry to get on parade. What a yarn to tell Steady when he had rumbled what was going on, both of us only just missed the Guard room by a hair's breadth.

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A Coy. of R.Es. relieved us and we moved off at eleven o'clock and stopped at some huts, Yates, our cook made a dixie of tea. Whilst drinking I noticed one of our observation planes flying to and fro, the enemy fired at it constantly then at last it lost height and came down a hundred yards from the huts so I ran to it, there were so many wires I had difficulty to reach the Pilot who was lurched forward his head resting on the instrument panel. I pushed him up into a sitting position then tried to unbuckle his wide belt but it was very tight, I held him up with my left arm but wanted both hands at the two or three buckles. Oil and water or petrol was running out on to the ground, his face was turning an awful bluish colour, I could not do anything for him, I was not strong enough, then shells began bursting all around everywhere and I heard Buckby's whistle, no one came to help me, so I was forced to leave, after letting his head down gently on to the panel. As I joined the others we moved out on to the road, we marched on and on with five minutes halt in every hour. We came to a small aerodrome the hangers and every building and hut had been set on fire it was all ablaze, the scorched earth policy. We heard that the R.E. Coy. who had relieved us had all been taken prisoners by two thirty, Headquarters and all. We marched all that day and night also part of the next day, the shelling continued but we were generally just out of range. I didn't know if we were moving back from the line or parallel with it. During the night, when we were resting, I must have gone to sleep for when I woke up the chaps were tripping up and stepping over me as I lay in the road and I heard someone say "Come on Jackie we are off again". How far the enemy advanced I cannot say nor do I know the place at which we stopped, but I do remember number one Section had to straighten up an R.E. park or dump, this is something else you will never believe, for our working party were Chinese coolies. They had no idea at all how to manhandle long, heavy bulks of timber. I had six of them, by hand motion I at last got them facing each other with the bulk of timber at their feet, then the two at one end got it on to their shoulders, I had to dash to the other end to assist them while the middle two stood looking on and saying "San goo de lah", that's all they said all day long, "San goo de lah" it was enough to drive a chap 'bonkers'. I got them moving at last, but instead of resting the end of the timber on to the pile the end two dropped it and the vibration dislodged it from the shoulders of the others. One was rubbing his shoulder, another hopping about holding his foot, I looked at them to see if any damage had been done, it was nothing serious, then I noticed two of them were missing. I looked behind one of the high stacks of timber, yes, there they were, sitting close together with a square of paper on their knees, the paper had squares marked on it, and two small pebbles lay on it, it looked as though they were playing the game that my Pa called 'Fox and geese'. I shouted, the paper and stones disappeared as if by magic, but one of them dropped a knife which flashed out of my sight. Before the day finished I discovered that all of them had a knife up their sleeve and we parted company with a chorus of "San goo de lah's, as to whether they were swear words, I don't know, but it really was Chinese to me that time.

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Bill Benniston got back with us, we moved several times, at one place I remember we were in a tent in a shattered barn, a shell splinter hit the roof and something small hit between the second and third finger of my left hand, it bled for a bit but it was only a scratch. We heard that when the enemy attacked at St. Quentin, he came over in columns of eight in massed formation. Our machine gunners mowed him down like ninepins until the guns got too hot to handle, the guns ceased up, but the enemy overran them like a steamroller. I saw some of the gunners coming back when they were relieved and in the column of tired marching men were a number of Irish Guards. We moved into huts, but I have no idea where the place was. When the enemy's lines of communication were stretched to their limits, the British counter attacked. I had heard, seen and experienced more than one enemy assault, but this affair of ours was extraordinary, the ground trembled, our hut shook and wobbled, everything fell off the shelves and it went on and on day and night. When it calmed down a bit our Coy. sent out patrols, just to have a look around. One day a patrol returned and reported they had been to a village which had been in enemy hands and that the few villagers remaining there told them the enemy had cleared off six hours before they arrived. Other villages were visited, the French people told them the same story. We moved to Hooplins near Armentiers, every evening it was shelled with mustard gas, the place reeked of it, we had to use our respirators almost continuously, several times I slept with my gasmask on, we were not supposed to do this, We were not long at Hooplins. On a certain afternoon Sgt. Buckby told me I was wanted at the Orderly room, Percy the Orderly Sergeant gave me a special message to take to the C.R.E. his Headquarters were at Winne seal, Percy told me I had a good long way to go, in places the crossroads had been blown up and that I would have to cross trestle and pontoon bridges, but I must keep to the main road as much as possible. It was late in the afternoon, dusk was falling when I started, and here I was alone again, on my old bike with a special message to deliver at a place I had never before been. I rode a good distance, then lit my oil lamp, I knew that the enemy was falling back. I crossed the bridges but had some difficulty to regain the road because of barbed wire entanglements. Winne seal was all in darkness, the C.R.E.'s Office was in the main street, the hands of the clock pointed to ten minutes past nine, and there stood Lt. W. who had left us in difficulties at the bridge at Bac-san-moore. He smiled, took the message into an inner room. He came back and asked me if I had had anything to eat, I told him not since breakfast, he brought me a mug of tea also bread and cheese, then told me 224 Coy. Runner was there so we could go back together, he also said they had a report saying our Infantry were on the outskirts of Lille.

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As 224 Coy. Runner and I were coming out to start our return journey Lt. W. said "There is just one more thing, 224 Coy. are still at Armentiers but 231 Coy. have left Hooplins and are moving along the main road to Lille", then to me he said "You will probably find them near Warcouin", I asked 224 Runner if he had been to Winneseal in daylight, he said "Yes", so I asked him to lead the way. At the bridges he got back on to the road much quicker than I had done on my outward journey. I left him at Armentiers and leaving Hooplins on my left continued along the main road to Lille. How far I rode I do not remember it was a long way, then I found transport halted on the grass verges, so I stopped and looked for the Divisional sign, it was a square half was red the other half blue, on good to me, I was looking for the white diamond with the white Banton on it. I rode on stopping every little while, at last I found it, I was looking at number one Section Tool-cart then I heard Yates our cook call out "Is that you Jackie" he told me he had saved some hot stew and that I had better get my head down as we were moving off at three AM. I reported my return to Percy and asked him the time, it was just turned one AM. Yates gave me a blanket, then I laid down beside his fire. I suppose I slept for about an hour, when I woke up Yates was busy preparing breakfast and I soon heard the Drivers harnessing up their horses and mules, so I got up then had my breakfast. Soon I heard Buckby telling number one Section to fall in, cyclists to parade with cycles. He called the Roll and reported "All present and correct" to Major B. who was standing there with a cycle, then Major ordered "Cyclists follow me", and off he rode at breakneck speed with we four Sappers after him. We went through Warcouin non-stop and reached Roubaix, here we found the main road bridge over the river blown up also a footbridge not far away. Major said a trestle bridge would have to be built across, then told us to scrounge all the heavy timber we could find. There were a number of telegraph poles round about with the wires all broken and hanging down so I asked Major if they could be used, he said "Yes, yes, anything". Some French people were cheering and waving, I went to two of the men and said "Ally avec moir, veet veet - go with me quick quick -, I took them to one of the poles and by hand motion pretended to saw it down, one of them compressed straight away and dashed off quickly returning with a big cross-cut saw, we soon cut it down and started on the others. - - Please Reader forgive me for this short break in my story. - - I have a Picture card showing the Germans retreating from Dullens, the printing on it is as follows. No. 1. Guerre 1914 - 1915, Somme. Depart des Allemands le Mercredi 9 Septembre A 6 H¹ Du Matin. This means the Germans departed from Dullens on Wednesday the 9th September at 6-30 A.M. - - It must have been about this date that we were chasing him out of Roubaix and Lille, but we should never catch up with him now because of this blown up road bridge. When the Sappers and toolcart arrived, Buckby took me to the foot bridge to clear it away so that a pontoon bridge could be put across. It was an all metal bridge, we used about 16 slabs of guncotton in small charges to break it up, it took us all day.

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We all returned to Warcouin and were billeted in a big barn. That night after Duckby had read out 'Orders for the day' he told us Yates had gone sick and called for Volunteers for the cooks job and a cooks mate, no one volunteered, then he said to Tommy Newby "You were matey with Yates and sometimes helped him out so you must be cook and Jackie your mate", we both said we didn't want the job but were ordered to do it. Breakfast was at six A.M. then the Section went to Roubaix to get on with the bridge. The second or third day, when they got back they told us that during the night the bridge had been shelled and part of what they had put up was knocked down, this happened several times but they got it finished good enough to get the Infantry over. Then one day they said that an Infantry man had called out "There is an Armistice" but his Officer stopped him saying "Stop that loose talk, there is no Armistice, we fight on". The Sappers also told us two Staff Officers had arrived at the bridge and altho the transport was piling up, they would not allow it to cross saying it was not strong enough to carry heavy vehicals. Then a battery of fifteen pounders turned up and the Major O.C. in charge had an argument with the Staff Officers. He told them if columns of Infantry four abreast could cross in safety, then the bridge would carry his guns, then on his horse, he rode on to the bridge and ordered the first gun crew forward. They crossed O.K. with horses, limber and gun then the second crew crossed, as the third gun crew crossed one side of one of the trestles sank about a foot into the bed of the river, slightly canting the roadway but they crossed, the fourth also got over. When I heard of all this I reckoned it must have been the Mad Major up to his tricks again. The Sappers had to raise the ledger of the faulty trestle to level up the roadway, then all of the transport got over and there was no more trouble. Our Coy. was offically complemented on the strength of the bridge and the speed in which it had been erected. - - Now Reader, This bridge must have been a replica or copy of the trestle bridge that the local Sussex Royal Engineers built which was taken to the R.E. training school at Chatham, I have already written about this in my quotation of the issue of the Bezhill Observer dated 11' March 1916. - - We moved to St. Maurice a suburb of Lille, the Sappers were billeted in the School, the N.C.Os. in private houses, Bill arranged for me to be with him. He told me we were billeted with an elderly lady, a widow named Madame V Diplanck - pronanced Diplong - at 72 Rue Fourmental St. Maurice Lille. When this good lady heard I was the cook she called me 'La Quiseen', on the wall of the living room was a picture frame enclosing a Certificate of Merit, stating that Monsieur Diplanck had for a long time served his country faithfully as Minister of Interior, which was equal to the British Home Secretary. Mama Frances, as we called her often spoke of the enjoyable times she and her husband had spent in London going to Banquets and Offical Affairs, but here she now was living on 'Petit Tarteen, - small loaf of bread,- and 'La grezz Americ'- colourless margarine,- - augmented with dandelion leaves from the small garden. How this elegant and dignified lady must have suffered during the war, no wonder she welcomed us with open arms and called us her liberators, when she learned both of us had been wounded, the tears ran down her cheeks for several minutes.

An aged woman came in every day to do the 'Chores', how she managed to see to do anything I don't know for her eyes were crossed like Ben Turpin the American film Actor, she looked terrible poor soul. Her name was Celine, Madame ordered her about a lot, every evening when she left Madame told her to be sure to have a cup of coffee ready for Monsieur John in the morning, I had to rise early to help Tommy prepare breakfast for our Section. Tommy and I soon got fed up with our job so arrangements were made for all Sections to Mess together and other cooks were appointed. One day Madame had visitors arrive, there was Clemas a woman aged about forty, her sister Marie, a little younger and their Mother very old. Clemas was always busy about the house but poor, frail little Marie sat knitting all day long, her hands full of needles with several more stuck into her waist belt and she used them all in a most elaborate design, the wool she used was very dull, black or brown. Often in the evening we played Napoleon with cards like the English game of Nap, probably that's where we got the name Nap from. We had counters or chips of various shapes and colours, I very often finished up owing Mama or Clemas two or three hundred francs, it was fine fun and passed the dark evenings pleasantly. Number one Section had one last job to do, the enemy had blown up the double arch that carried the main double railway at the outskirts of Lille. The wide Boulevard was completely blocked with rubble and the sixteen rails were all hanging down like long fingers. We had a gang up on the railway track with acetylene blow lamps to sever the rails, we used the sleepers to build up a pile to take the weight of the broken rails to make them fall flat to prevent them from sticking into the road when they fell. Also we had a Traction Engine with a revolving drum on which was a long steel rope to drag the rails away up the road. It took us about two weeks to clear the place up, then the trams and transport got moving. Soon after this some of the Sappers who were coal miners were released and sent home to Blighty, lucky chaps, Bill Benniston was one of them and others who were going to work for their old employers gradually left us. One morning as we were standing about at the school we saw a column of soldiers coming along the road, they were prisoners being repatriated and in the front rank one of them was waving his arm and shouting "I told you so, I told you so", Yes Reader, it was Charlie our old cook who had got drunk with the rum he 'pinched', who had said he was not running any more at Bac- san- Moore. One evening when we were playing Napoleon there was a knock on the front door, the women looked startled so I answered it, it was Sergeant Buckby he wanted writing paper and envelope, oh yes he knew where to come when he wanted anything. I never saw him again, I could almost say thank goodness. About this time I got my last Leave and visited Mr. Jackson at Horsham, he applied for my release from the Army but because I had not worked for him before the war it was refused, I had to stay on to the bitter end. 231 Coy. was made up to 'Cadre' strength to go forward with our Army on the Rhine, I was transferred to 229 Coy. and came home with them in March 1919. And Reader I was quite right when I told my mates at Southampton that was when they would get home, because it was the number on my first rifle.

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There was just one more thing to do and that was to say 'Good-bye to Mama Frances, what an ordeal it proved to be. I had to kiss her on both cheeks, she shed a few tears, Clemas was trying to say something, half in French, half in English, then at last I understood what she meant, "Would it be wrong to say I love you", Gosh; was she just trying to be friendly or was she proposing to me, I kissed her hand and hurried to poor, frail little Marie who had been weeping all the time, I patted her hand, also Grandma's, picked up my kit and left.

The remnants of 229 Coy. landed at Folkeston, we were billeted in big empty houses opposite the parade for two nights, then on to the Crystal Palace. As we lay on the grass near the Big Wheel I noticed it was a mass of rust. We soon got our 'Ticket' and standing there beside me was the Sapper who had been with me when we were trying to find 231 Coy. at Mory. He said "How far have you to go", I said "Victoria, then change trains for Bexhill", He said "I shall be home in ten minutes, I live at Penge. - - -

With the war over, I regretted the death of Cecil and the others of 2nd Home Counties Coy. and 231 Coy. also my school day chums whose names are on the Little Common War Memorial. George Hope's name should be on the Bexhill Memorial I have on two occasions looked for it but failed to find it, possibly it is with the other names of the Buffs entered in the sacred book in Canterbury Cathedral. - - - In years past I have looked at this Book two or three times, I understand a page is turned each day but I have never seen George Hope entered. When on holiday this year, September 1970, Gladys and I visited Canterbury Cathedral again, we found the Chapel where the Book of the Buffs who fell in the two World Wars is kept but the Chapel gates were closed. - - -

I still wish that I could have helped to build the Trestle bridge at Roubaix instead of being cook's mate, I console myself with the fact that it was my idea to use the telegraph poles.