Harry’s Memories

Harry Hudson

1921 - 2021

The memories of Harry Hudson, born in Stockport in November 1921.
The interviews were recorded and then transcribed by his son, David Hudson.
His words have been copied as accurately as possible and any additions, or comments, are shown in italics.

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I was born at 23, Peak Street, Stockport on 5th November 1921. I was the fourth of my family. I had a brother George, ten years older than me, a brother Sam, and a sister Edith, who we usually called "Edie". Before my mam and dad lived at Peak Street, they had moved from Stockport to live in Middleton. Our George was born at Middleton. My dad was working there. He used to be in the bleaching trade but he had a bad accident and moved back to Stockport. My dad got caught in a frame and it did damage to him. When he recovered he was still able to walk and do things but he had bad ulcers on his knee. They were really bad and he used to have them treated and wrapped up. They never cleared up and it was like a war wound below his knee. He had his accident before the First World War and he wasn't called up for the army because of it. Our Sam and Edie were born at Stockport. Sam was born in a leap year on 29th of February, so he only had his birthday every four years. They didn't remember much about birthdays in those days. Birthdays were just something that happened. There were no parties or nowt.

When they moved back to Peak Street, they were almost new houses and they could have bought them for a hundred pounds but they couldn't afford it.

At Peak Street, we lived six or seven houses away from my Grandma Bailey, who lived just round the corner on Bateson Street. My Aunt Edie and her husband, Bert Marsland, always lived with her, her mother. They never had a house of their own. My cousins Mona, Gladys and Marion Bailey, lived at 15, Peak Street, four doors down from us. Their dad, Uncle Harold, was a prisoner of war in the First World War and worked in the coal mines in Germany.

When I was young, my mam didn't work. She did cleaning and took washing in for people. There was a shop called Gambles' on the corner of Bateson Street and Newbridge Lane. My mam used to clean for Mrs. Gamble and do her washing and that. I don't know what my dad did at that time. I think he was just a general labourer. I remember my dad, later, always working for the council. He worked at the sewage works in them days, at Cheadle Heath where it still is. He used to come home stinking. He were only temporary and they stopped him one week a year so they wouldn't have to pay him superannuation. Later on, he got a job on the highways because it was cleaner and he got a full time job for the corporation.

Above: My parents, Harry Hudson & Elizabeth (Bailey)

We rented our house at 23, Peak Street, and the fella that owned it owned the whole row. My grandma's house round the corner in Bateson Street was owned by Mark Lane, the builder. He built the houses in Bateson Street and also in Alpine Road. He was a well-known builder in Stockport and he built some big civic buildings.

Our house at 23, Peak Street had a stairs up the middle with a room either side upstairs. The rooms were quite big but there was no water upstairs and the lighting was just a gas jet, no lamp on it. You used to light it with a taper or a candle. It had no mantle on. Usually though, we just took a candle to bed because it was too expensive, gas. Our Edie and my mam slept in the front room. In the back, George and Sam were in one double bed and me and my dad were in another double bed. There was very little other furniture in the bedrooms.

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Downstairs, we had the front room, the living room and the scullery. The scullery was where my mam did washing. There was a wash boiler in there, a mangle and a tub and other washing things. The big boiler was brick built, across the corner, with a coal fire underneath. The scullery had a shallow stone sink with one cold tap. I can't remember a stove in the scullery. If we wanted to boil water, we had to do it on the fire in the living room. My mam cooked everything on the range, which had a fire, an oven on one side and on the other side a little place for standing a kettle or pots on. All the water had to be boiled on the fire, even on Friday which was bath night. The tin bath was kept outside on the wall in the back yard. The toilet was also outside. That was one good thing about those houses – we had our own toilet. Some houses had to share a toilet between two or three families. When I was very little, I don't think it was a flush toilet. Later on, when I was young, we got a flush toilet. Of course, all the toilet paper was old newspapers cut up and threaded on to a piece of string and there was no light so you had to take a candle when you went to the toilet at night. It was fun trying to keep the candle alight, walking in the wind between the back door and the toilet door which was quite a long way – the full length of the scullery wall as the toilet was built onto the back wall of the scullery. In the backyard, there was also a small garden and our George used to grow flowers and vegetables.

The front room was only used on one day a year, Christmas Day. We had a fire lit in it on Christmas Day. We had our best furniture in there, a settee and perhaps a couple of chairs. We never came into the house through the front door into the front room. We always came round the back passage and in through the back door. There was a fire going nearly all the time in the living room and I think that it was sometimes kept going overnight by backing it up with slack (*coal dust*). My dad used to riddle the coal to get the slack which was used for the massive boiler in the scullery which was used to heat the water on wash day. The slack burnt slowly to keep the boiler going but not too hot. When I got to about twelve, my mam used to get up really early, about 5 o'clock, do the washing, and before I went to school I used to take buckets of boiling water down the passage to Grandma Bailey's so that she could do her washing.

When I was first born some relations of Grandma Bailey, who ran the Pig Muck pub in Romiley, wanted to adopt me because they said my mam had enough children, but she said no. I was ten and a half pounds when I was born!

Above: Me, a large baby, with my brothers, George & Sam

At Christmas, my Aunt Bertha, my dad's sister, and Uncle Harry used to come to our house. They had no children of their own. One year, they bought me a joiner's set, a box with a saw, hammer, all sorts in it. That saw were down in our cellar for years afterwards. One year, they bought our Edie a bathroom kind of toy and you put water in at the top and have a bath. Aunt Bertha and Uncle Harry were really good to us.Uncle Harry was a miner, originally from Stockport. He had worked in a pit near Stockport, probably at Bredbury, but he moved to live in Astley Green, near Leigh, to the West of Manchester. The pit was just across the fields from their house.

The back room or living room had a sideboard (*I remember a set of dominoes being kept in the drawer),* a kind of settee, under the window, with an arm at one end, and a table. That table we used to play push penny

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on it, the lads. We had little nails and knocked them into the table for goalposts. We played pennies for the players and halfpenny for the ball. We used to play for hours. The table usually had a thick red cloth with a cotton tablecloth on top. In the alcove by the window there was a small table which had a soda syphon on or batteries for the radio. We didn't have a radio until I was at least five or six. My cousins Mona, Gladys and Marion were posh, they had one. Uncle Harold used to make his own radios. There was a blind fella called Wellburn and he used to charge up the batteries for you. Accumulators they were called. He had a place on Newbridge Lane. You used to give him your old one and he'd swap it for a charged up one. On the stairs wall was my mam's rocking chair. There were wooden chairs pushed under the table, I've still got three of them. On the right of the fire were two built-in cupboards. When my mam died we found bags and bags of sugar in there which she had accumulated in the war. Next to the cupboard was a door which led to the cellar steps. There was a level area at the top of the steps where my mam kept the bread in a large pot, cream coloured inside. She made all her own bread. I think she usually baked bread just once a week and kept it in the big pot with a cloth thrown over the top. The cellar steps went down to the cellar which was only under the front of the house. The coal went down there through a grid just outside the front door. My dad had a bench down there where he used to mend shoes. I think he used to mend shoes nearly every week. He used to buy leather at a place in Mersey Square. He was quite good at repairing shoes. He had a last and I think that he used to nail the leather on.

My Grandma Bailey lived down the passage, about fifty yards from our house. My Grandad Bailey had died before I was born. She couldn't read or write and on her wedding certificate she had to make her mark while Grandad Bailey signed his name. She was good with money though. They used to get a Sunday newspaper with a comic part in it and I used to go down and read it for her. "Pip, Squeak & Wilfred", I can always remember. We went down to her house every night, me, our Edie, Marion, Gladys and Mona . We used to play cards with Aunt Edie and Uncle Bert who lived with Grandma. Dead on eight o'clock, she used to say, "Right, Gerroff Whoam!" She called home "whoam" (*pronounced with a definite "w" and rhyming with Tom).* Before he died, Grandad Bailey had a haulage and coal business. His father had the same business too but when he got married, Grandad Bailey started on his own. When he died, I believe that Uncle Ernie took it over first but he didn't stop long and Uncle Harold, Gladys's dad, took it over as a coal round. His yard was on Newbridge Lane next to The Stanley (*pub).* Between The Stanley and the grocer's, that's where the stable was with just one horse and the coal round.

Above: Me at the front of 23, Peak Street.

Uncle Ernie went to work for The Co-op, once again driving a horse and cart delivering coal. Uncle Sam was also a horse and cart driver for the Corporation Cleansing. The men in the family were nearly all involved with driving horses and carts, just as their father, my grandad, had. My brother, George, went horse and carting for my Uncle Jim who had his own business with horses and carts. He used to do a lot of work for The Corporation. His yard was on Fletcher Street off St Petersgate. He must have had about twelve horses there. Our George worked for Uncle Jim for quite a long time and he did a lot of work for the Corporation Cleansing and eventually he got a job with them, once again driving a horse and cart, emptying dustbins. Once, he even

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fell into the River Goyt at Wharf Meadow with the horse and cart. One time, when he was at Uncle Jim's, I went with him. There used to be a tobacco factory on St. Petersgate, Robinson's, and we went to the docks in Manchester to get some tobacco. We went all the way with a flat cart and I always remember that the bloomin' horse fell on the way back. We had to undo all the chains so that it could get back up again. At the bottom of Wellington Road, there used to be a water trough outside The Touchstone pub, with The George on the other side of the road. The railways had a goods yard in Heaton Norris and they used to keep somebody with a chain horse at The Touchstone. My Uncle Jim sometimes used to send a chain horse down when he knew that there was something too heavy for one horse to pull up Wellington Road. I used to go to Uncle Jim's every Sunday morning because all the horses had their legs washed and we used to ride bareback up and down Fletcher Street on these horses with kids that lived local. We rode up and down until the horses' legs and feet were dry and then we played in the loft that was above the stables.

When our George worked for The Cleansing, with his horse and cart, every year at May Day they had all their horses and carts from all over Stockport at Booth Street on Edgeley. The drivers used to get medals for the best groomed horses. Our George was very keen on grooming the horse and polishing the brasses and our Alan (*his son)* still has some of the medals that he won. Our George was based at Reddish and I used to go with him and sit on the dustbin cart and go to Booth Street. There were about four horses in Reddish and ponies that pulled small carts for sweeping the streets. After the war, George came back to work for The Cleansing but, by then, they had stopped using horses.

Above: My Grandad (George) Bailey leading a horse and cart at a Stockport Carnival.

Another uncle, Uncle George, used to work for Kitchen's in Andrew Square. He used to drive a lorry for them. They used to sell everything for farmers. He used to go to all the farms up Brinnington. He used to call at Grandma Bailey's and, if I was there, I used to ask if I could go with him.

Our George was quite a keen gardener and, later, he had an allotment across the passage. There weren't houses on the land across the passage. The builder who built the houses on Carlton Crescent built four houses then he stopped. My Uncle Harold had a garage on there, at one time, for his lorry. Going back down Carlton Crescent towards Newbridge Lane he built two more houses and one for himself. On the opposite side was a massive house that belonged to the mill owner who owned The Portwood Spinning Company where Kate worked. Later it was split and three families lived there.

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Behind our house was a cobbled passage, like a narrow lane. We always called it the passage, never entry, and the narrow gap between some of the houses was also called a passage. We played in the passage, cricket, football and hide and seek.

We often used to play in the gateway of the school girls entrance on Peak St, right opposite Aunt Ethel's house. We played hide and seek down all the passages and we even got down onto the river (Goyt). There was a little canal at the side of the river. It supplied the electric works. A family called Hayes that lived near had a boat and they used to go up and down the canal.

Above: My mam, brother George and me in the passage behind our house.

On Newbridge Lane in those times there were a lot of little factories. One of them used to make furniture polish. We used to get the tins that he threw out and there might be a little bit of polish left in them. We used to set them on fire and have them for warming your hands. Another thing we used to do was to get Bournville cocoa tins and knock holes in the top and bottom and fill them with cotton waste from Renold's Mill and set it smouldering. You kept running with it and it kept alight and made your hands warm. We also played pin and button. There was a family called Marsland who lived right opposite the school gate. We used to put a pin into their window with a button on a thread which ran right across the street and into the school yard. If you pulled the thread, the button rattled on the window. We also played kick can. Going up Alpine Road past the school and the houses there was a piece of waste land called the "gassy". We used to play on there in a walled recess called the castle wall and on the wet parts, where springs of water appeared, we used to make things out of the clay and have shops and things like that and make little dams. In the school garden, which was behind the school, there was a pond. We used to dam that and then let it go and it came down a chute. Whooooosh! We could get out at the end of Peak Street onto a piece of spare land which ran over to Turncroft Lane and the National Schools on Hall Street. There were sand hills and a builder called Davis was digging out the sand and then building houses there.

My mam used to do most of her shopping at the Co-op. It was across the river in Portwood. She used to write out an order at the beginning of the week. When she got some money at the end of the week, we used to go and collect the order and pay. It was all parcelled up, in brown paper parcels, for you. We used to get divi for what we bought. It was as much as half-a-crown in the pound at one time. *(twelve and a half per cent or an eighth)* Everytime you bought something, you got a little paper ticket and you had to lick them and stick them on a gummed sheet. You had to add up the total when a sheet was full and every so often, they used to pay out, half yearly or quarterly. We only used to shop at Gambols, just round the corner at the bottom of Bateson Street, for odd things. There were three fish and chip shops on Newbridge Lane and the best was Billy Pickerings, opposite The Stanley Arms. Fish were two pence or three pence and a penny for a paper full of chips. Billy was well known for putting some chips on your paper, then taking some off, then putting some back and so on. At Christmas, Billy Pick gave us all a bar of chocolate. We had a paper delivered every day and, at Christmas, the paper shop used to give me dad a cigar, so he used to be posh at Christmas. My dad used to smoke a pipe all the time but he always used a clay pipe. He said that they gave the best smoke. He used to buy half an ounce of thick bacca, thick twist and cut it up with a knife.

The fish and chip shops sold fish and chips and green peas but a fella used to come round in a car sometimes selling black peas. When the fair was on, in Portwood, a stall there sold black peas and green peas. The market in those days had the same indoor building as today but there were a lot more stalls outside. There were stacks of stalls going up Churchgate and they used to open till 9 o'clock at night. They had paraffin lamps

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with just a flame coming out, no glass cover. There used to be two stallholders on the market brew (*hill*), one who sold pots and one who sold gents and ladies clothing. They shouted at each other and, of course, the crowd used to gather. It was funny that the son of the one who sold pots was at Oulton Park, in the army, when I was there.

When I was little, I went to Sunday School at St. Andrew's. We used to go to The Old Church two or three times a year, at Easter and so on. St. Andrew's was connected to The Old (*Parish)* Church along with another church up Hillgate. My mam and dad never went to church, I think they only sent us to Sunday School to get us out of the way.

My dad went for a drink most nights, at a pub up Alpine on New Zealand Road. A family called Gosling had it. He only had one pint and there was a fella who lived where the old houses finished at the top of Alpine who was an invalid and he used to stop me dad and give him a jug. My dad used to bring him a pint back in the jug.

On the sands at Blackpool. Back Row: Edie B, Our Edie, May Mitchell, Mrs Mitchell (a neighbour of Aunt Polly on Travis Brow), Mona Bailey. Front Row: Aunt Ethel & Gladys, Aunt Polly & Marion, My mam and me.

We used to go on holiday to Blackpool every year in Stockport Wakes Week which was about the second week of August. It was a family gathering. There was us, Mona's family, Auntie Polly and Auntie Polly's neighbour, Mrs. Ritcham, she had a daughter. Altogether there were four families. Grandma Bailey didn't come, she often used to go to her daughter's at Sandbach. I think we used to go on the bus, not the train, and we used to stay in the same boarding house on York Street, I've got a photograph of it. It was run by two sisters and we bought the food and they cooked it for us, it was very good. York Street was in the centre of Blackpool, near the tower and pier and straight off the front. The men didn't go, just the mothers and the children. Aunt Annie, from Sandbach, came sometimes and her husband, Uncle Fred used to pay for some of it. We didn't go anywhere special at Blackpool, we just played on the sands every day.

At Easter, we used to go to Middlewood for the day, on Good Friday. We used to catch the tram from Petersgate to the terminus in Hazel Grove and then walk up. There was nothing special there, just a house which sold jugs of tea, some swings and a stream to paddle in. At other times we used to go to Cringle Fields, a park in Manchester near McVities *(biscuit factory)*. It had a pool in which you could paddle and swim. As kids, we used to go there on our own, walking all the way. I used to go a lot to watch George and Sam playing football. On one Boxing Day, I was watching Sam play on a field, off Nangreave Road, belonging to Stockport Sunday School. It was near a reservoir for the John Horns toffee works, our Edie worked there. A group of us kids were kicking a ball about and it got kicked into the reservoir. I thought I could go in and get it but I couldn't swim and I nearly drowned. One of the lads that was playing football with Sam dived in and pulled

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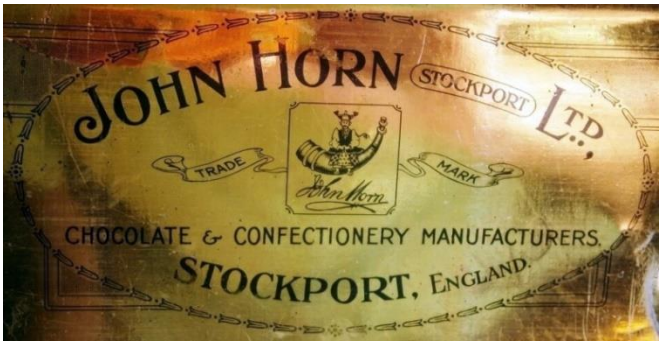
me out. There was a house where the Stockport Sunday School caretaker lived and they took me there and I sat in front of the fire to get dried out.



My older brothers, George and Sam were both very good footballers, goalies. They were both tall and played for Stockport Boys and Cheshire Boys and George played for Stockport County Reserves. He used to get a card, an ordinary postcard, in the week telling him where the match was at the week-end. He must have got some money for playing for them and he could have signed on as a full-time player but he had a good job on the corporation.

I started school when I was five at Vernon Park, just across the street from our house. At playtime, my mam used to bring me a drink and a piece of toast and pass it to me through the railings. We had good times at Vernon Park School them days. I remember in the infants, in the hall where we had assembly, that there was a copy of the words of All Things Bright and Beautiful with pictures. In the infants, we were mixed and there were about four or five classes. In the last two years in the infants I remember that the teachers used to change over so that you got the same teacher twice. I had Miss Ford, she were called, and I were a favourite of hers. I always remember that when I was in the army, and I came home on leave, I went into the school to see Miss Ford and she said to the children on the front row, “Get out of that desk, that’s where Harry sat!” When we got home from school, our mam used to make us dripping butties with salt on. After the infants we went into the senior school. There were boys’ classes on one side of the hall and girls on the other. There were six classes of boys and they went from about eight up to fourteen when you left. In those days they started school milk and we used to get one third of a pint in glass bottles with cardboard tops. The boys and girls schools were completely separate. The only time that we came together was for assembly. We sang hymns and when you got to the top class, you had to read a piece of scripture in front of the whole school, one day a girl and the next a boy. The headmaster was called Mr. Hughes and he lived in Heaton Mersey and he used to go home on the bus, he hadn’t got a car. Eventually, he died going home on the bus. He used to take the assemblies. He used to play the piano sitting on a swivel chair. If he saw somebody not singing he used to shout, “You, Out! Get in front of the whole school and sing!” Another thing he used to do was say, “Right, Five, Six and Seven stay behind.” You knew what was coming then. Everybody would be polishing their shoes on their socks. He had a desk on a platform and he sat behind this desk with a cane. You had to put your hands on the desk and then turn them over. If they were dirty, you got a clout. Your shoes had to be clean too, you had to be presentable. Every teacher had a cane. There was one teacher there called Swain who taught the next to the top class. One teacher was in the playground at playtime and Swain was renowned for being strict. He used to send you in to stand outside his room and then when he came in it was whack, whack, whack, along the line, caning your hands. He put up for an MP for Stockport at one time but he didn’t get in. I wouldn’t have voted for him! Eventually, he left to become headmaster of a school in Heaton Chapel.

We did all the subjects. We did Maths, English, History, Geography, etc. We even had a science laboratory with gas and bunsen burners and a woodwork room. Boys from The National Schools, St. Joseph’s on Petersgate and St. Paul’s on Portwood came for Woodwork lessons. Down in the cellar there was a laundry where the girls used to bring dirty washing, wash it and then hang it out on lines in the school gardens. We were all given a piece of land in the garden and we could grow what we wanted in it. We were supplied with tools and seeds and we had gardening lessons.

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Above: Vernon Park School in use as a military hospital in World War 1. I lived in one of the houses shown across the road, in Peak Street.

We also had a very good school choir. Mr. Hughes was a very good musician and the choir was very important. He didn't take the choir. Miss Bond played the piano and Miss Deville conducted. I first joined the choir when I was about eight. Miss Deville used to take you for a trial and if you were good enough you got into the choir. The choir used to go into festivals at Hazel Grove, Manchester, Alderley Edge and the big one was Blackpool. I went to Blackpool three times with the school choir. We used to sing in The Opera House. They had it set up in tiers and you sat on the stage and could listen to the other choirs when you had finished. My mam had to pay half a crown for me to go to Blackpool. We used to go by charabang. My mam used to pay thruppence a week. She couldn't afford to pay it all at once. It included our food and the visit. We used to sing "Nymphs and Shepherds" and other songs. We never won at Blackpool but we got highly commended. There were choirs there from all over the country. We won Hazel Grove one year and The Plaza Cinema had just opened so they took us there as a treat with the money that we'd won. We sat on the front balcony, I can always remember that. I was in the choir from about eight until I left at fourteen. There was another teacher who used to take plays and I was in that as well.

We were the first school in Stockport that had vaulting boxes and benches for gymnastics. It was a very go-ahead school. It had been built just before The First World War and, during the war, the school was used as a Military Hospital. The pupils went back to an old school building on Newbridge Lane that had been used before the new school opened and they went for half a day, either mornings or afternoons. My mam said that they had to pay a penny a week when she went to the old school on Newbridge Lane. We used to play football on Woodbank Park, at the top near where the greenhouses were. The teacher that took us used to get a dry spot and he never moved off that. He refereed the match off that spot. There was a football team that played against other schools but I wasn't good enough for that. It was a big school. We had enough to make two teams from the one class to play against one another at Woodbank. One day we were with a teacher called Swain. I collided with another boy and I cut my forehead on his teeth. They took me to the doctor's on Offerton Lane to get it stitched but he made a muck up of it and I had to go to a doctor's surgery on Hillgate while he cleared it up. With Swain, if it rained, we pushed all the benches back in the science room and we had boxing. There was one lad who was a very good boxer but I never fought as it happened. There were some who got regularly picked and Swain used to say, "Get the gloves on with him."

We didn't have a school uniform though I do remember that once we had a chrome badge with Vernon Park School on it. I used to do lots of jobs at school. I used to take the milk round. The milk came in crates and I used to put so many bottles outside each classroom. Later I used to go round and collect the empty bottles, I was never in lessons. Only living across the road from school, I used to go in early in the morning and open all the school windows. When Hughes died, the new headmaster had no telephone at school and he'd say to

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me, “Take this letter up to my wife”, and I’d have to run from school up to Dialstone Lane and back. On Friday, after afternoon registration, I used to go with the registers for the week, for the big school and the little school, to The Town Hall. I used to get a penny. Another thing was that they used to have dances there on a Saturday night and me and our Edie and Mona and Gladys and Marion used to go in and help the caretaker, Kirkham, to tidy up on Sunday morning. It was surprising what we used to pick up. They used to sell scent cards. They used to be a penny each.

When elections were on we always got a day’s holiday from school. We used to get a rolled up newspaper and tie it onto a piece of string and fight with the enemy. You used to stop other kids and ask who they supported and if they said the wrong answer you swung the newspaper round and tried to hit them on the head. One year a fella called Skouse put up for Labour and he had torches for going round to houses at night canvassing. When he’d finished with them he gave them to us for helping. My dad was a real Labourite. Skouse didn’t get in but his mother was high up, a JP. He lived on Peak Street a few doors down from us next to Aunt Ethel. He was a driver on the railways and when he got promoted to express trains, he got more money, and he moved from down there.

When I was fourteen, on 5th November 1935, the Duke and Duchess of Kent, or somebody, got married and we got an extra day’s holiday for it. (*Actually The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester married on 6th November 1935).* My mam said, “You’ve no need to go back to school now. You’re starting work!” You could leave at the first holiday after you were fourteen and if they hadn’t have got married, I would have had to go on to Christmas.

In them days, the school used to be painted, inside and out, about every five year and when I was about thirteen, I used to go into school and run errands for these painters. I even painted the railings outside Vernon Park School. They used to give me a wage packet. The boss gave me a wage packet on Friday. He said to me “When you leave school, come and see me.”, but when I went to see him in November he said that he was sorry but he couldn’t take me on at that moment. While I was at school, Bateson’s came plastering in the school and Bateson said, “If you fancy plastering when you leave school, come up to Reddish and see me.” I went up to see Mr. Bateson on the Monday and he said, “Come back on Friday and we’ll see if you can start.” And when I went he said to start on the next Monday and that’s how I got started with Bateson’s. My mam bought me a pair of blue overalls but, of course, plasterers wore all white. The first houses I worked on were near the white houses on Hempshaw Lane. There were a pair of houses just before you got there and a pair of houses in the field at the back. The builder went bust and Mr. Bateson used to say, “You were a good one you was. I plastered them houses and never got paid for it.” There were three apprentices working for Batesons. Me, Ernie who was two years older and Cliff another two years older, who volunteered for the army when the war started. He got killed in France. The plasterers were Jackie, Norman Schofield, Jack who had a little shop on Hillgate, Jack Bateson the son and Mr. Bateson himself worked full time then. We had two labourers, old Joe and another one. At one time, Batesons used to be painters as well as plasterers and they used to say that they had painted the first lamp-posts to go up Lancashire Hill.

One winter, when it was really bad weather for plastering, Mr Bateson decided to decorate his house, papering and painting, and he were a real expert at it. We had to go up to their house, on Birkdale Road in Reddish, for eight o’clock every morning. I walked from home to the bottom of Lancashire Hill to catch the tram. I used to get a tuppeny return, two old pennies. I always used to get there on time. Bateson had a car called a Super Essex, a massive car like a van, you could put all sorts of things in it. We also had a massive handcart, twice as big as a normal handcart. It had carriage wheels on it. I’ve pushed it from Reddish to Alexander Park School in Edgeley. We used to push it all over, up Heaton Moor, all over. Bateson got together with a newsagent called Collins and a farmer called Humphreys and they built an estate on the fields behind Bateson’s house. I worked on that a lot as an apprentice. The houses had steep staircases like ours in Peak Street and Mr. Bateson used to have us up on the scaffolding and hand us up handboards so full of plaster that you could hardly lift them. We also did a lot of corporation work in them days and Greg’s Mills and others in Reddish.

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Playing football with Cliff Humphrey during a dinner break when plastering on a house in Alderley Edge. Cliff was killed in France in late May or early June 1940 and is buried at the cemetery in Aire-sur-la-Lys, about 36 miles south-east of Calais.

A firm called Mortons in Manchester Road used to do a lot for the Lancashire Cotton Spinners in Manchester and we used to do work in their mills in Manchester. They were changing over from belt driven machines to electricity and there were old tin sheets over them. When you pulled the sheets down you got covered in all the rubbish that had built up over the years. We got home absolutely black and we had white jackets and trousers! I've never seen anybody plaster like Bateson, he used to be puffing away on his pipe while he was working. If a lump of plaster fell into his pipe he'd be puffing away as hard as he could to keep it alight. There was a shop on Greg Street and, every day before we went out to work, he used to ask me to go to the shop and get him an ounce of bacca. One day we were working above the boilers at Greg's Mill and old Mr Greg came in. It was so hot we were really sweating. Old Greg said, "What's making you sweat John, is it seeing me or is it the heat?"

Mr. Bateson was a very good draughts player and some Saturday mornings he used to say, "Do you want to come with us?" The team hired a big coach and they used to go to Wales and other places. There'd be about ten draughts players and I used to go for a walk or go to the pictures.

After the war when I was working for myself, I used to call in to see Mr. Bateson if I was in Reddish. One day he said, "I've got this pain in my chest, but they say there's nothing to worry about." On a later day, the family were going to a wedding and Mr Bateson said that he'd come along later, after the girls and Mrs Bateson had gone. He put the cat and the bird outside and he gassed himself. It must have been angina from doing a heavy job all his life and he was worried that he was seriously ill.

When I first started work, Mr. Bateson said, "We have no left-handed plasterers here," and it was difficult at first, but later I found it an advantage as I could use both hands. In those days we used to plaster with lime and sand. We used to dig a lime pit, same as those houses we built in Reddish, we dug a lime pit and they used to buy lump lime from Buxton. The labourers used to mix the lime with water in two big tubs and run it into the pit. The roughest lime was mixed with sand and horse hair and was used for the rougher plastering and the finer lime was mixed with plaster, which came in hundredweight bags, and was used for skimming. I also learnt to tile and cement render. They did everything.

Bateson's had no lorry of their own and a firm called Moore's from Cheadle used to do the carting for us. Jack Moore, the son, was a well-known racing motor cycle rider. Mr Bateson said "Would you like to come to The Isle of Man with us?" There was Mr. Bateson, me, Clara, his eldest daughter, and Mrs. Bateson's sister. Mrs Bateson didn't go because she had to stay at home to look after the other daughter, Ida. We went watching the TT race on the Monday and Jack Moore got killed while we were there. (*Jack Moore was killed on 13th June,1938. He became the 19th fatality on the Mountain Course first used for TT and Manx Grand Prix races in 1911).* Mr Bateson paid for all of it and I think I went as company for Clara who was just a bit older than me.

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When it got too cold for plastering in winter, Mr. Bateson used to keep all his old planks and bits of wood and me, Ernie and Cliff used to go into his cellar, saw up the wood and chop it into firewood. There used to be a cellar full of firewood. Before the war started, when I was about seventeen, I worked in The Stockport Workhouse for two or three months. I did patching and some quite big pieces of plastering. I used to have inmates as labourers because they wouldn't pay for a full tradesman or a labourer, and I used to be given one of the inmates as a labourer. They weren't very useful and you were doing it yourself most of the time but they could help tidying up and shovelling rubble away. It was hard to get water because the taps didn't have tops and they had to be turned on by keys which only the trusted inmates, or trusties, were allowed to have.

Left: Mr. Bateson, Clara and me at Castletown, Isle of Man

One day, a fellow came to help me in a civvi suit and he said to me, "How do I get out of here? I'm supposed to be working with you but my wife will be wondering where I am." He was from Bradford and he'd been to Belle Vue, to the dogs or something, and finished up in the Workhouse at Stockport. He said, "Can I get out?", so I put my ladder up the wall that led over into Our Lady's Church and he climbed up and dropped over into the church grounds. Tramps came in regularly. They had little rooms about seven or eight feet square with iron beds which were let down from the wall on two chains. They came in just for a night and before they left in the morning they had to work. There was a grill in the back of the room and they gave them a block of granite and a lump hammer. They had to smash it up and push it through holes in the grill and it was used for the roads then, filling in the gaps between the setts. Other times, they had to chop wood. The Town Hall and other council buildings had coal fires and they needed sticks for lighting. Old railway sleepers were cut into firewood lengths and the tramps were given so many to chop up before they could leave. The tramps couldn't have any money when they came in. Near The Armoury, there used to be an old brick tram shed and they used to hide any money in the brickwork there. When they went in at night, they used to shower them and give them soup and cocoa, always cocoa. In the morning, they used to give them porridge and then work before they could leave. They used to go from Stockport to Ashton, then Ashton to Oldham, Oldham to Rochdale, and so on in a circuit. Every fortnight or so, they'd be back at Stockport. The people in charge of the workhouse wanted to keep them in permanent but these tramps were wise enough to keep moving. There was a tramp ward, a male mental ward and a female mental ward. If a man and wife went into the workhouse, they were separated and didn't see each other. I used to get labourers from the mental ward, never the tramps. They also used to bake bread at the workhouse, there was always a lovely smell in the building, and the long loaves were supplied to Stepping Hill Hospital and other council buildings.

The master of the workhouse was very important. Even I had to bow to him when I walked past. He was like something out of an old film of a workhouse, a real boss. I always remember that there was a big stone staircase and they used to give two inmates a big piece of cloth and a bucket of water each. One used to start at the top and one at the bottom. They used to pass each other and they'd do that all day. I used to say to the attendants, "Can't you find them summat else to do?", and they used to say, "Well, they're happy!" That was it. If the inmates were too difficult to handle they were sent to Macclesfield.

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Left: A picture of the men's day room in Stockport Workhouse in about 1895. I worked there about forty years later and the scene would probably be very similar.

Once a year, the councillors that represented that ward took the inmates to Southport for the day. Stockport Corporation used to have single decker buses then. One day I went into work and they all had these new suits on. They normally had suits but they got new ones for the trip, a sort of black and white check with a red tie, a coarse shirt and a cap. That was the only time they ever got out. I used to get to work at about eight o'clock and they were all dressed up ready to go and it must have been about ten o'clock before they set off. They were back for about four o'clock so they can't have done much more than given them a ride down the front. There used to be a photograph of the trip in the local paper.

When the war started, plastering more or less stopped, and Bateson went lining Anderson shelters with concrete to stop them leaking but it didn't work properly. This was in late 1939 or early 1940 and I said, "Blow this!" and Norman Schofield had already left and started a firm with another plasterer. They used to do work for Kendal Milnes and Turners, the asbestos people. We used to use their asbestos tiles and saw them with ordinary saws. I was working with Norman when I got called up in 1941.

When I started working, I used to go to the pictures with Roy Fairclough and Norman Taylor, to The Vernon on Carrington Road. That's where I met Kate. She used to work in the mill during the week but as an usherette on Saturday night. She'd have a torch to show you to your seat and then come round selling ice-creams from a tray in the interval. In those days, they had a row of double seats at the back for courting couples.

Earlier on, when I was a kid, we used to go to The Vernon. There used to be wooden benches for us to sit on and they used to have a draw and pick out some tickets and, if you were chosen, you got in free the next week. I remember once that my ticket was chosen and I said, "I've won", but an older, bigger lad sitting behind me said, "That's mine!", and he pinched it.

Fred Perry's sister worked in the cash desk at the cinema and her husband was the manager. We used to go regular to The Vernon because they changed the programme twice a week. We were there one Christmas Eve and Kate and the other usherette got a bottle of wine or something and got a bit tipsy. I took her home and it was only then that I found out that she lived on Mountain Street. That was only about a hundred yards from where I lived, through the stumps. I was just seventeen and Kate was still sixteen and that's when we started going out together. I didn't go into the army until I was nineteen and the biggest mistake we made was to not get married before I went abroad. Kate could have got a married allowance. We just got engaged. She did have a good job in the mill and was well paid. When I came home and we got married, she had a hundred pounds in the bank and I always said that I married her for her money.

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When we were courting, we often used to go to Belle Vue. We caught the train at Edgeley to the station at Belle Vue. We enjoyed watching the speedway and after the speedway, every Saturday night, there used to be a firework display. It was always based on something historical, like the storming of Quebec or some other battle. There was a lake and a big dance floor with seating around it. There was a zoo there then but we didn't often go because we went at night to watch the speedway. We nearly always caught the last train back and we'd call into Park Street, to an ordinary house just off The Market Place, where two sisters lived. They baked pies and were selling them late at night. They put them in newspaper for you and they were lovely. The gravy from the pies ran into the newspaper print.

Left: Harry and Kate, before the war, outside her house in Mountain Street.

When I was nineteen, I got called up into the army. I got a letter, which I've still got, with a travel ticket telling me to report to Ullswater, The Glenridding Hotel. I'd already had a medical. We were at Ullswater for a week while they gave us uniforms and inoculated us. It was an RASC (*Royal Army Service Corps – the transport arm of The Army)* Company and we were all going into the RASC. We were then sent to Garva in Northern Ireland. We were supposed to have army training but we just drove lorries. We never had the basic training, like how to fix a bayonet or owt like that. We learned to drive in three ton army lorries on the roads with the drivers teaching us. They'd show you how to change gear. It was all double declutching in them days – the noise that they used to make! We were delivering stuff to different troops that were in Northern Ireland. Every once in a while we used to go up to Londonderry Football Ground, they had a camp there. There was still trouble in Ireland then. We used to go to church on Sunday with our rifles with ten rounds in and there'd be a guard outside. Southern Ireland was neutral and more friendly with Germany than us and the IRA used to come over into Northern Ireland. Our camp had to be guarded and we were on duty every other night. I went to Garva in April 1941 and I was there until December. Then I volunteered to go abroad because I'd been in Ireland for eight months and I only got one leave to come home. It was hopeless. You had to come back from Larne to Stranraer by boat. When I went into the army you got a shilling a day, seven bob a week, but if you went abroad, you got an extra sixpence a day. That would be ten and six a week but they expected you to send some of that home. I don't know why, it used to be the other way round, my mam was sending me money. About three of us volunteered to go abroad because we'd got fed up of Ireland. We could have stopped in Ireland. The village that we were in had one main street and one cross-road. On all the junctions were big concrete blocks that you had to zig-zag through. There was a guard on the outside and one on the inside and they used to stop all the traffic that came through at night. It was horrible. If you weren't doing that, you were doing fire guard. By then I could drive a three ton lorry without any trouble. They were Bedfords.

They brought us back from Northern Ireland to Bradford and they gave us seven days embarkation leave. They said to come back on Christmas Day. We all refused to come back on Christmas Day so they said to come back on Boxing Day. At the end of December, we got kitted up to go to Egypt. The night before we left we were told not to tell anybody that we were going abroad but we had sun helmets on the back of our packs and we marched from where we'd been billeted in Bradford down to the station with all this gear. It was good in Bradford. Kate's cousin, Alma and her husband Stan, had a fish and chip shop there. Kate said, "Go down

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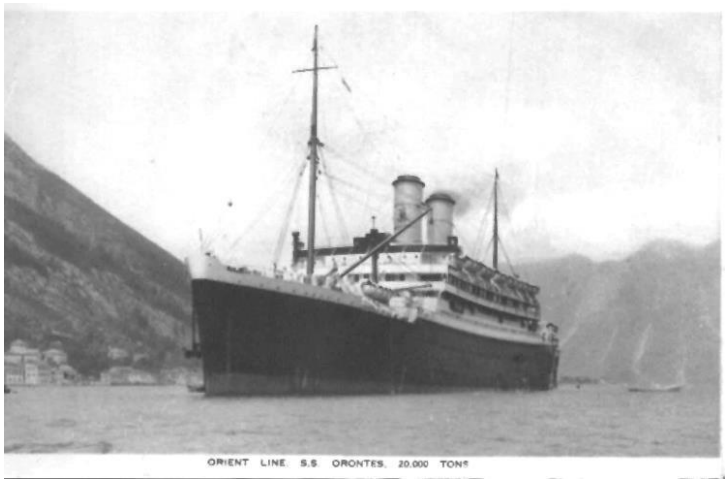
and see them!", so me and a mate used to go down every night and get free fish and chips. We didn't go abroad as a whole company, we were just a small group with two officers, lieutenants, in charge of us.

Right: The Orontes, built in Barrow in 1929 for the Orient Shipping Line. Used on the Australia run but commandeered as a troop ship in 1940. Returned to the Australia run after the war and broken up at Valencia, Spain, in 1962.



We got the train to Liverpool and then we got on the boat. We were on the boat, the Orontes, for six weeks. In peace time, The Orontes took about 700 passengers but there were 3,000 of us on it. We were on G deck, way below the water line. If it had been torpedoed we'd have had no chance. We slept on hammocks slung from the roof but, when it got warm, we used to go and sleep on the deck. With so many troops on board, there was a shortage of fresh water and we had salt water showers. They sold us a special soap for salt water. I believe that the ship went right out into the Atlantic, nearly to Canada, to dodge the U-boats. We first landed at Freetown (*Sierra Leone)* but we were there just for a couple of days while we reloaded with food and water. We didn't get off. Then we went round to Cape Town (*South Africa)* and we were there four days and they let us off at lunch-time every day. People who lived in Cape Town used to come to the boat and take us to different things, their houses and entertained us. When we got to Cape Town, we couldn't believe it. There was no rationing and it was like peace time, you could buy bars of Cadburys' chocolate. The locals were very kind and the family that I went with used to write to me in the desert for a while. They had a son who was in the RAF and already in the desert.

From Cape Town, we came up the coast of Africa, made a short stop at Aden, without disembarking, and into the Suez Canal. We landed at Port Taufik. From there we went into a massive transit camp and we were there for a few days 'til they sorted us out, took our English money and gave us Egyptian money. Every day we had to look at a notice board that said when you would be leaving. One day it said that it was our turn and we got on the train to take us up to Fort Capuzzo (*a fort on the Libyan/Egyptian border built by the Italians in the 1920s)*. There were just goods carriages on the train and a single railway line to take you up the desert. The train got machine gunned and we had to get off and run. It was at night and the German plane could see the light from the train's boiler. When we got there, a lorry was waiting to pick us up, about six or eight of us, to take us to 384 Company whose headquarters was near Fort Capuzzo. At 384, we were given American Chevrolet lorries, "Chevs". They had more equipment than Bedfords. They had front wheel gear boxes as well as rear, with about ten gears. The front gears were so low that you could walk faster than the lorry. You could get out of stuff if you got stuck. They had the engine in the cab so it used to get very hot, as if it wasn't hot enough already. The doors were metal with no windows and the front windscreen swivelled upwards in two sections. What we did was spray the windscreen with oil and chuck sand onto it so that you could drive with it up and it wouldn't reflect the sun. The back of the lorry had a metal structure, covered with canvas. We worked in platoons. There were six platoons in the Company, four working platoons, HQ and maintenance. I was in A Platoon and we had about thirty lorries. We used to go out in convoy, just for the day, or up to four days, before returning to our main camp. At night, we used to park up in twos and at least a hundred yards from the next pair so that, if we were attacked from the air, they wouldn't hit so many lorries. We used to sleep on top of whatever we were carrying. If it was petrol, we'd sleep on top of that in the back of the lorry. I only remember sleeping in a trench once, most of the time we slept with the lorry. It was bitterly cold at night.

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You couldn't keep warm. We had no mattress, just two or three blankets to sleep with and we'd put our overcoats on top. We'd roll up our trousers for a pillow.

Above: RASC 384 Company at a desert camp with Chevrolet lorries in the background. Harry is on the second row, with tilted cap, marked by the red arrow.

There was one main road up the desert, the coast road, that was tarmacked and had been put in by the Italians in peace time. After that, there were different tracks into the desert, "A", "B", etc. that were not surfaced and were marked by forty four gallon oil drums painted with letters.

Water was always scarce. We used to get two pints a day. The cookhouse got one pint for cooking and then you had one pint for washing, shaving, etc., so we used to wash our clothes in petrol. We used to open a four gallon drum of petrol and chuck our clothes in that. Then we used to hang them up on the superstructure of the lorry and within an hour you could put them back on again. It also kept them free of lice. I once remember that we were told that we had to pick the DLIs up, The Durham Light Infantry. We went to pick them up out of the line and they were lousy. We caught them, they were really itchy, so we had to be deloused. Normally, we were all right because we washed our clothes in petrol. There were wells that had been sunk in the desert by the Italians and they were fresh water. As the different sides went backwards and forwards, they kept salting the wells to stop the other side using them. Sometimes though, the water was quite clear and we used it for brewing tea.

In the desert, we occasionally saw groups of wild camels and dogs called "pie-ards", they were like Alsatians. Some of the lads had them as pets. There were plenty of scorpions and centipedes. When you went to bed at night, especially if you slept outside, you had to watch your clothes that there were no scorpions in them. You always had to have a search. If you slept in the lorry, you were all right. We would sometimes put a scorpion and a centipede into an empty four gallon petrol tin which was made from flimsy metal. They'd fight one another, just for entertainment. When we were at Benghazi, there were quite a lot of snakes in amongst the rocks. Occasionally in the desert, nomads would appear. They had camels, old camels and young camels, and they had hens as well. We used to get eggs off them and they wanted tea so we used to swap tea for eggs.

I had a very old Chev and Lieutenant Lee, who was in command of A Platoon then, always found something wrong with me. The platoon got a new Chev which was a bit posher and Lee said, "Hudson, I'm going to give you the new Chev, and you're going to be the cookhouse lorry." I did that job for quite a long time as we were in the desert for over a year. Every morning we'd have our breakfast and the officer would say to me to get going up the desert, to wherever we were going, and stop at half past eleven and, with the cook, get the lunch ready. When the lorries came, they had their drink of tea and sandwiches or whatever they were having. When

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we tidied up and got ready, he'd say to get going again and we'd stop at say five o'clock and cook a proper dinner. In the back of the lorry, we had the food and really good petrol stoves. At the end of the convoy, we'd return to our camp and fill up with petrol and go in for maintenance, if it was needed. We only got fresh bread occasionally. Most of the time we had hard biscuits. For our main meal, we often got tins of M&V stew, meat and veg. It was made in Newbridge Lane where I came from in Stockport! Each soldier got a tin so what the cook used to do was put them all in a five gallon container and add more water and flour to make it thicker and stretch further. The other thing we had a lot of was corned beef. We got bacon in tins and dried egg powder. For pudding, cook used to make a sort of "plum" duff with flour and water, a bit of margarine and the dried dates that we could get. We could get custard powder now and then but we never had fresh milk, just condensed milk. We also got tinned fruit. One fella in the camp used to go to the NAAFI and buy shaving stuff, toothpaste, soap, anything you wanted. It was one driver's job to go to the NAAFI and pick things up.

If we got time off, we could go into Alexandria or Ismalia. We usually went to the same bar. There was one in Ismalia that was owned by a woman. We used to help ourselves and pay her when we were coming home. We were paid in Egyptian money. One day in Alex, Windy (*Harry's close friend, Denis Hinde)* took about twenty odd of us in in his lorry. When it was time to come home, he had parked his lorry in a park and Windy said it wasn't worth us all going to the park and that he'd come and pick us up. He came back to the bar where we were supping and, of course, we told him to come in and have another drink. We sat there and when we went out, the lorry had gone! A corporal had got fed up of waiting for us and he'd taken the lorry back to camp and left us there. Me and Windy finished up staying in a hotel for the night and we got up at about four o'clock in the morning and got back to camp. He got away with it, I don't know what he told them, but I got fourteen days pay stopped because I wasn't back in time to drive my lorry. It was about the only thing they could do to hit you because there was always a shortage of drivers. If your lorry wasn't maintained up to standard, you had pay stopped. Once I came back off a four day convoy and we had a lorry inspection. My battery was dry so I got pay stopped for that even though I'd just come back off a convoy.

Once, they said that they needed an extra first-aid man in the camp so I volunteered and went to the hospital to train for a month. There was one man who used to do the medical duties all the time but if he were sick, or anything, I used to take over. We had a first-aid tent, just a tent. The soldiers used to get sand fly fever with a temperature over a hundred. They used to come in and they had to bring their own bedding. We just had stretchers and they had to sleep on them. I always remember "two whites and a brown" tablets. I bet the white were aspirins but I don't know what the brown was. We also used to get desert sores. They were terrible. If you knocked or cut yourself the wound would go septic. We used to get Vaseline on a piece of cloth and then sprinkle it with Epsom salts. It was a marvellous cure that used to draw the matter out. I told people about it after the war.

We were working picking up supplies from Tobruk and delivering them where they were needed. We were building up to attack the German lines around Tobruk but it happened the other way round. The Germans decided to push us back to El Alamein. When this panic was on, one of my mates, a lad from Bradford, with four lorries from 384, went out one day and saw some Bedfords. They went over to them and there were Germans driving these Bedfords and they were taken prisoner. I never saw him again. . We were all higgledy-piggledy and we were just ordered to make our own way back to Egypt as quickly as possible. When a few of us got to Marsa Matrouh, they said that they were going to blow the NAAFI up to stop the Germans getting it. They said you can go in there and load your lorry up. Tins of fruit were the main thing we took because we used to drink the juice and throw away the fruit because we were short of drinks them days.

When we got to Alamein there were Military Police who asked us where we'd come from and what Company and then they told us where we had to go to. We were only doing short runs then, picking up from the rail head and delivering whatever was needed. I wasn't driving the cook truck then because we were getting back to camp every night. We came back to camp at about lunchtime one day and a single Italian plane came over and bombed the HQ tents and killed about ten of 384 Company. I could see it clearly as I was parked only about a quarter of a mile away.

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Left: Off duty in Alexandria.

On one occasion they said that The Indian Division was trapped in a wadi (*a dry river bed)* in the desert. The Germans were on top, firing down on them. At night, we had to go in, four lorries at a time and get these Indians out. We had a sergeant, Sergeant Corbett, he came from Manchester. He was a reservist that had been recalled and was a bus driver for Manchester Corporation. We had two sergeants in A Platoon and Corbett said to Lee, the officer in charge at the time, "Don't send me, send the other sergeant, he's not married." I though the officer was going to shoot him. He said, "Get in there, Corbett!" There was no track, just sand but we managed to get them out.

Another time, we were carrying The Ox and Bucks infantry, doing a survey to see what the Germans were doing, with one of their officers riding with me. A lorry about two lorries in front of me hit a mine. Bang! The officer shouted, "They've spotted us!" but they hadn't. Nobody was killed but the lorry was damaged and we just had to drive around it.

When we got back to our camp just below Alamein, we were building up dumps in preparation for the battle. The distances were only short then and we used to be able to get into Alexandria some days and some days Ismailia. We could have a drink and buy things. It must have been about September. Auchinleck got sacked and Alexander and Montgomery took over. Alexander was very good but I didn't like Montgomery. He wasn't popular. We built a big line up at Alamein. The first do we got beat and the Germans got the better of us. The second one, we got that much superior in materials, men and everything, we couldn't fail. The night of the big barrage, we were just behind the 25 pounder guns, with extra shells in the backs of our lorries. They'd already got big piles of ammunition that we'd built up for them. The barrage went on all night with terrific noise and as bright as day.

The next day, we got attached to the Royal Engineers because we were a GT company. We weren't attached to any battalion or regiment, we were just a general transport company that could be sent here, there and everywhere. The Royal Engineers were clearing the German minefields, in a track just wider than a lorry, walking ahead with bayonets. We were the first through the lines after The Battle of El Alamein, with the REs, and the infantry behind. We came into an Italian camp where there were lots of dead Italian soldiers from the shelling. There was a dead Italian officer and one of the Royal Engineer soldiers took a Beretti revolver off him and said, "Look at this!", and pulled the trigger. One of our drivers was shot and killed. We were only yards away. Anybody could have been killed. They wouldn't have said that one of our soldiers killed a mate, they'd put it down as "killed in action" or summat. My birthday was soon afterwards on 5th November but I didn't get my birthday card from Kate until the middle of December.

When we were coming back to Alamein, Montgomery decided that every lorry driver could have two hand grenades. We were told that, if we saw the German tanks coming through, we had to drive alongside the tank and drop a hand grenade into the turret. What a daft idea! We had them rolling around on the lorry floor under the driver's seat. If the pins had come out, we'd have been blown up. We had them until we were pushing the Germans back and we'd reached Mersa Matruh. We were on the beach one day and we all decided to chuck these hand grenades into the sea. It was really dangerous. Nobody told us what to do with them.

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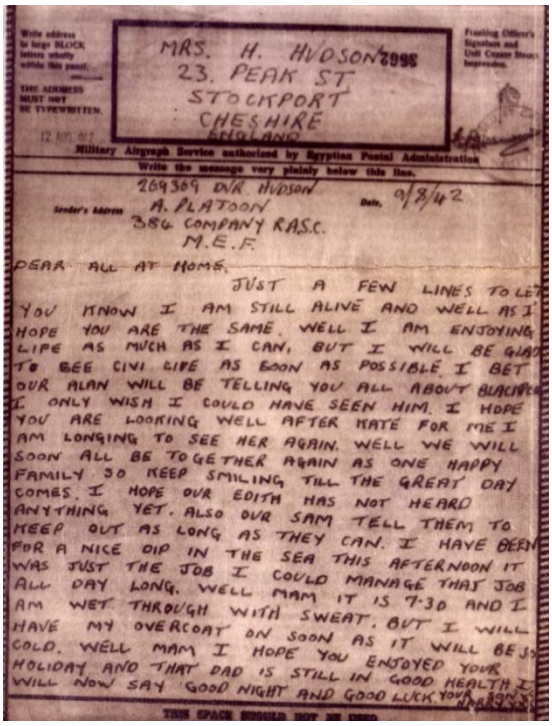
Outside The Oasis Bar in Ismalia.
Top: Ed Fletcher, Windy, Charlie Ward
Bottom: Ed Bryant?, A Cook from 384, Me



MRS. H. HUDSON 2998
23. PEAK ST
STOCKPORT
CHESHIRE
ENGLAND

Military Airgraph Service authorized by Egyptian Postal Administration

Write the message very plainly below this line.

269369 DVR. HUDSON
A. PLATOON
384 COMPANY R.A.S.C.
M.E.F.

9/8/42

DEAR ALL AT HOME,

JUST A FEW LINES TO LET YOU KNOW I AM STILL ALIVE AND WELL AS I HOPE YOU ARE THE SAME. WELL I AM ENJOYING LIFE AS MUCH AS I CAN, BUT I WILL BE GLAD TO SEE CIVI LIFE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I BET OUR ALAN WILL BE TELLING YOU ALL ABOUT BLACKPOOL I ONLY WISH I COULD HAVE SEEN HIM. I HOPE YOU ARE LOOKING WELL AFTER KATE FOR ME I AM LONGING TO SEE HER AGAIN. WELL WE WILL SOON ALL BE TOGETHER AGAIN AS ONE HAPPY FAMILY SO KEEP SMILING TILL THE GREAT DAY COMES. I HOPE OUR EDITH HAS NOT HEARD ANYTHING YET. ALSO OUR SAM TELL THEM TO KEEP OUT AS LONG AS THEY CAN. I HAVE BEEN FOR A NICE DIP IN THE SEA THIS AFTERNOON IT WAS JUST THE JOB I COULD MANAGE THAT JOB ALL DAY LONG. WELL MAM IT IS 7.30 AND I AM WET THROUGH WITH SWEAT. BUT I WILL HAVE MY OVERCOAT ON SOON AS IT WILL BE J COLD. WELL MAM I HOPE YOU ENJOYED YOUR HOLIDAY AND THAT DAD IS STILL IN GOOD HEALTH I WILL NOW SAY GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD LUCK YOUR

THIS SPACE SHOULD NOT BE USED

A letter home from the desert

When we were near the coast, we'd often go into the Mediterranean for a swim. There were no showers out there. When we were close to Alamein, we used to go to what was called The Bitter Lakes. I couldn't swim and one of the lads taught me, more underwater than on the top. Gradually, I got better at swimming on the top.

Once we got out of Alamein, we pushed fast up the desert again, pushing Rommel right back. 384 Company went right through to Tunis with The Eighth Army. From Tunis, we came right back to a transit camp in Egypt and we were there while they did the lorries up to make them waterproof. We got on a boat from Port Said, The Lancashire, it had been a troop ship in peace time, only a small boat. There were only troops on the ship. I don't know how the lorries were transported. We went to Malta and we were there a week, waiting for the invasion of Sicily. They never let us off the boat in Malta, then we sailed to Syracuse in Sicily. We were in Sicily for a fortnight at the most, camping in tents in an almond orchard. Then we went with the invasion of Italy, even though we had no lorries. After a few days, we got our lorries back.

(The following is a summary of the North Africa Campaign from the Spartacus educational website which gives a background to Harry's story after his arrival in Egypt in March, 1942: On the outbreak of the Second World War the British Army had 36,000 men guarding the Suez Canal and the Arabian oil fields. On 13th September, 1940, Marshall Rodolfo Graziani and five divisions of Italian Army began a rapid advance into Egypt but halted in front of the main British defences at Mersa Matruh. Although outnumbered, General Archibald Wavell ordered a British counter-offensive on 9th December, 1940. The Italians suffered heavy casualties and were pushed back more than 800km (500 miles). British troops moved along the coast and on 22nd January, 1941, they captured the port of Tobruk, in Libya.

Adolf Hitler was shocked by the defeats being suffered by the Italian Army and in January 1941, sent General Erwin Rommel and the recently formed Deutsches Afrika Korps to North Africa. Rommel mounted his first attack on 24th March 1941, and after a week of fighting he pushed Wavell and the British Army out of most of Libya. However, under Lieutenant General Leslie Morshead the British managed to hold a vital forward supply base at Tobruk.

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Left: In the desert near El Alamein at a visit, in 1995, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the battle.

Wavell attempted a counter-attack on 17th June, 1941, but his troops were halted at Halfaya Pass. Three weeks later, he was replaced by General Claude Auchinleck. On 18th November, 1941, Auchinleck and the recently formed Eighth Army went on the offensive. Erwin Rommel was forced to abandon his siege of Tobruk on 4th December, and the following month had moved as far west as Wavell had achieved a year previously.

Aware that Wavell's supply lines were now overextended, Rommel, after obtaining reinforcements from Tripoli, launched a counterattack. It was now the turn of the British Army to retreat. After losing Benghazi on 29th January, Auchinleck ordered his troops to retreat to Gazala. Over the next few months the Eighth Army, under Lieutenant General Neil Richie, established a line of fortifications and minefields. Erwin Rommel launched his offensive on 26th May. The Italian infantry attacked at the front while Rommel led his panzers round the edge of the fortifications to cut off the supply routes.

Ritchie outnumbered Rommel by two to one but he wasted his advantage by not using his tanks together. After defeating a series of small counter-attacks, Rommel was able to capture Sidi Muftah. On 12th June, two of the three British armoured brigades were caught in a pincer movement and were badly defeated. Two days later Richie, with only 100 tanks left, abandoned Gazala. Rommel returned to Tobruk and took the port on 21st June, 1942. This included the capture of over 35,000 British troops. However, Rommel now only had 57 tanks left and was forced to wait for new supplies to arrive before heading into Egypt.

The following month Rommel and the Deutsches Afrika Korps were only 70 miles from Alexandria. The situation was so serious that Winston Churchill made the long journey to Egypt to discover for himself what needed to be done. Churchill decided to make changes to the command structure. General Alexander was placed in charge of British land forces in the Middle East and Montgomery replaced Auchinleck as commander of the Eighth Army.

On 30th August, 1942, Rommel attacked at Alam el Halfa. Montgomery responded by ordering his troops to withdraw to El Alamein and to establish a good defensive line from the coast to the impassable Qattara Depression. Montgomery was now able to make sure that Rommel and the German Army was unable to make any further advances into Egypt.

Over the next six weeks Montgomery began to stockpile vast quantities of weapons and ammunition to make sure that by the time he attacked he possessed overwhelming firepower. By the middle of October, the Eighth Army totalled 195,000 men, 1,351 tanks and 1,900 pieces of artillery. This included large numbers

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of recently delivered Sherman M4 and Grant M3 tanks. On 23rd October Montgomery launched Operation Lightfoot with the largest artillery bombardment since the First World War. The attack came at the worst time for the Deutsches Afrika Korps as Erwin Rommel was on sick leave in Austria. His replacement, General George Stumme, died of a heart-attack during the 1000 gun bombardment of the German lines. Hitler phoned Rommel to order him to return to Egypt immediately.

The Germans defended their positions well and after two days the Eighth Army had made little progress and Montgomery ordered an end to the attack. When Erwin Rommel returned he launched a counterattack at Kidney Ridge (27th October). Montgomery now returned to the offensive and the 9th Australian Division created a salient in the enemy positions, which they managed to hold.

Winston Churchill was disappointed by the Eighth Army's lack of success and accused Montgomery of fighting a "half-hearted" battle. Montgomery ignored these criticisms and, instead, made plans for a new offensive, Operation Supercharge.

On 1st November 1942, Montgomery launched an attack on the Deutsches Afrika Korps at Kidney Ridge. After initially resisting the attack, Rommel decided he no longer had the resources to hold his line and on the 3rd November he ordered his troops to withdraw. However, Hitler overruled his commander and the Germans were forced to stand and fight. The next day Montgomery ordered his men forward. The Eighth Army broke through the German lines and Erwin Rommel, in danger of being surrounded, was eventually given permission by Hitler to retreat. Those soldiers on foot, including large numbers of Italian soldiers, were unable to move fast enough and were taken prisoner. For a while it looked like the British would cut off Rommel's army but a sudden rain storm on 6th November turned the desert into a quagmire and the chasing army was slowed down. Rommel, now with only twenty tanks left, managed to get to Sollum on the Egypt-Libya border.

The British Army recaptured Tobruk on 13th November, 1942, bringing the battle at El Alamein to an end. During the campaign half of Rommel's 100,000 man army was killed, wounded or taken prisoner. He also lost over 450 tanks and 1,000 guns. The British and Commonwealth forces suffered 13,500 casualties and 500 of their tanks were damaged but 350 were repaired and were able to take part in future battles.

Winston Churchill was convinced that the battle of El Alamein marked the turning point in the war and ordered the ringing of church bells all over Britain. As he said later: "Before Alamein we never had a victory, after Alamein we never had a defeat.")

After leaving Sicily, the Eighth Army went up the Adriatic coast of Italy and the Yanks went up the other coast. Fighting was still going on and we used to carry petrol or whatever was needed from depots to the camps. We were still sleeping in our lorries. One of the big battles was at Sangro *(November 1943)* and that's where I saw our George. He was in the Artillery, firing twenty five pounder guns. I saw some signs from his company and I asked our officer if I could go and look for him. I found him just a few miles away and we had a couple of hours together. Later, he was demobbed from the artillery because it had affected his hearing. He was in hospital and, when he came out, he came and stayed with me for a few days at 384. He thought it was great because we had all the grub that we wanted and we had beds and mattresses that we'd taken from houses.

In 384, we had one fella who was a professional piano player. We'd been in Italy for some time and we went into a house and there was this piano so it came with us. While we were in Italy, he swapped it two or three times for a better piano. We used to lie in bed at night and I could hear him playing. He used to play for hours, all sorts of music. In 384, my big mates were Windy from Wellingbrough, Ed Fletcher from Pontefract, Sid from another mining village in Yorkshire and Charlie Ward from The Isle of Man, who drove the water truck. Most of them had been in 384 for quite a time before I joined them in 1942. Ed Fletcher had been in Crete and he'd been brought back to Egypt by boat. At one time, me and Ed went in my lorry to pick up some new lads for 384 from a holding camp. When we got there, he saw this soldier who'd been with him in Crete. When we pulled out of Crete, quite a lot of our soldiers stayed on in hiding. This lad was one of them and he'd been watching the Germans take over. They were sending him home from the transit camp.

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I remember one night in Italy that the Italians used wood to power the trains and a spark set alight the train which was carrying petrol. We sent for the Italian civilians to come with their fire engine but they wouldn't come so we had to put it out. One lad burnt his overcoat and they were going to charge him! The only way they could punish us in the army was to stop our pay. They couldn't stop us driving because they were short of drivers. On another occasion, I was driving a load of petrol from Campo Basso into the mountains. It was winter and the officer said to me, "Take your lorry up that lane." I said that it was dangerous but he replied that if I started slipping he'd put another lorry on with a tow rope to keep me going. I did what I was told and, of course, the next minute, I toppled over a fifteen feet drop and rolled right over. All the petrol was down below in the field. The officer left me there overnight with a corporal. There was a church nearby with a sort of morgue and we slept in there but the corporal wouldn't sleep. There were no bodies in there, it was just used as a morgue. The following day, The Royal Engineers came with big heavy lorries, got the lorry upright and pulled me through this field, up a ramp that they'd made and back onto the road. There was all this petrol in the field so we got the people from the village to help to load the lorry again. When we'd put so many on, we got fed up of walking through the field and up to the road so we gave up and gave them about half of the load. It was in four gallon jerry cans and they must have had gallons and gallons. They were really pleased. We had quite a lot of deep snow in the mountains in the middle of Italy and we used to put chains on the lorry wheels.

We slowly moved up Italy over several months and eventually we reached a place called Falconara where we were with a Polish Brigade who were fighting there. They'd been fighting at Monte Casino where they were the troops to break through and then they'd come over to the Eighth Army side of Italy. We stayed at Falconara for eight or nine months. We never seemed to move. Falconara was a few miles from the docks at Ancona where we picked up loads and delivered them to wherever they were needed. I used to visit one particular Italian family who used to do my washing. I was in HQ by then, I'd left A Platoon, and I was driving the lorry with the rations for all of 384. We used to go every day to this big depot and get rations for about six hundred men and deliver each platoon its quota. The Italian family wanted coffee and salt which they couldn't get. With all this stuff on my lorry, I could always fiddle some for them. In Italy, we had quite a lot of food, fresh vegetables and bread. We also used to swap petrol with the Italians for drink, vino, wine.

When we were on convoy, in North Africa and Italy, the corporal with us had to ride on a motor-bike. My mate, Ed Fletcher, he was a corporal, and in winter in Italy there was deep snow and horrible weather. On the sharp bends, he used to fall off the bike and he used to say to us, "Drive over the bike!" Then he used to chuck it into the back of one of the lorries. On one occasion in Italy, we were on convoy and camped on a beach. One of the sergeants borrowed a corporal's bike to have a ride on the sand but he came off and killed himself.

It was while we were at Falconara that there was a draw for three of us, out of three hundred and sixty in 384, to get a four week leave back home. I was in HQ and the captain said, "What's it worth, Hudson, to draw your name out?" Five minutes later he came out of the office and said, "You're going home in three weeks time." We sailed from Naples on The Duchess of Bedford. We stopped at Gibraltar for four or five days to make up a convoy but we weren't allowed ashore. The anchor on the ship got stuck on a rock when the convoy was due to leave and they left without us. We thought that we were going to stop there but they cut the anchor chain and we caught up with the convoy. When we got to Liverpool, there was a band playing on the quay side, brass-hats to welcome us home, we got free cigarettes, free cups of tea and cakes, an evening newspaper and they fitted us out with travel passes and money. I arrived in Stockport, early in the morning, at Tiviot Dale Station. It was about half past seven or eight o'clockish and everybody was going to work. The first thing I got greeted with was, "When are you going back?!!"

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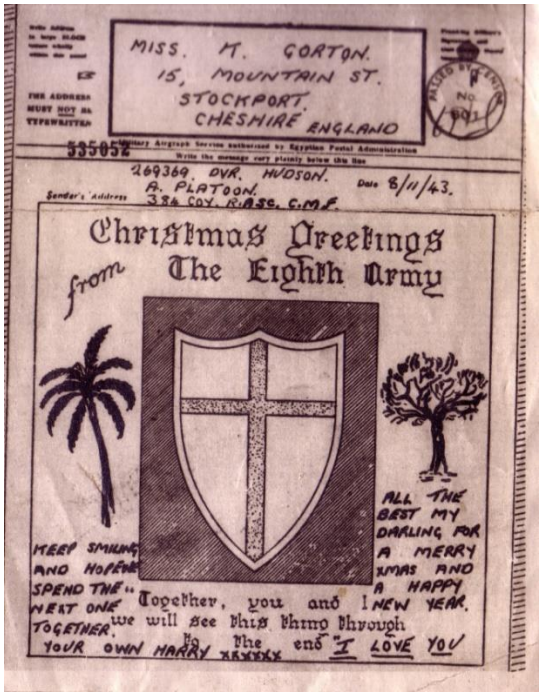

Left: A Christmas Card from the desert, to Kate, for Christmas 1942. The message was written out on a standard form and then photographed by the army. A film containing hundreds of messages was brought back to the UK and the messages printed out and delivered.

I got home on a Monday morning and we got married on the Saturday at The Old Church in the Market Place. When I knew that I was coming home, I'd written to Kate to arrange the wedding. We had the reception in St. Andrew's Church Sunday School. Our parents had both given part of their rations for the food and we managed a two tier wedding cake. Amongst our wedding gifts was an airmail envelope from some of my comrades in Italy and inside was £25 in postal orders. They must have sold some stuff to the Italian civvies. At midnight, we caught a train from Edgeley to Scarborough for our honeymoon. We stayed for about five days in an ordinary house but they gave us all our meals. It was really cold and snowed while we were there! While I was at home, the war finished, VE Day, and my wife and I took her younger brother with us to Belle Vue and everyone was kissing and hugging, a great day to remember. I thought that they wouldn't send me back abroad as I only had six more months to do, but they bloomin' did.

Our Wedding Day, April 23rd, 1945, at St. Mary's Parish Church, Stockport.

When I got back to Italy, three hundred and odd men out of 384 were entitled to come home on leave on account of their ages and I was told that I was going to drive a colonel about for a month. "When the others come back to Italy, you'll be able to come back to 384 again," but it never happened. When Windy and the others got back to Italy, 384 was broken up and they were sent to different other transport units. I never saw

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Windy again until after the war. I'd been with Colonel Adderley for a couple of months when I asked him what was happening with me. He said that I wasn't going back and asked if I wanted to stay driving him. Of course, I said, "Yes."

We were in a small village near Bologna and I used to take a forty four gallon drum of petrol to a local bar and get wine and vermouth for it. Colonel Adderley was all for it. We were sleeping in a really big house with a bedroom each. The officers had another house with the officers's mess. We even had electricity than ran through wires from one house to the other. The Germans had been in the house where we were at Christmas and, on one of the walls, they'd written the words and music of Silent Night and on a big long wall, they'd drawn a German firing a cannon with all presents shooting out. There were only six of us English, Adderley, a major, a veterinary major, a sergeant, a corporal and me. Adderley was in charge of an Italian mule unit. It had about a thousand Italian officers and men, with mules, and they used to go into the mountains, where normal transport couldn't reach, delivering supplies and retrieving bodies and equipment. Colonel Adderley had two horses and the Jeep. Normally, he would ride about on his horses and I had nothing to do. It was only if he wanted to go a greater distance, say to Bologna, that I'd take him. We were in a village three or four miles from Bologna so I'd take him in to meetings at the HQ there. We also used to go to the big HQ in Milan for three or four days at a time. I'd stay in a transit camp and he'd stay in an officers' place and I'd drive him about in Milan during the day, wherever he wanted to go. On one occasion, he asked if I would fancy going up to Lake Como for a week and I said that would be all right. We stayed in a hotel in a little village where they hadn't seen many troops. It was just a holiday break. He was quite generous. He used to say, "How are the funds, Hudson?", and of course I used to say, "A bit low, sir.", and he'd give us a few hundred lira. I used to smoke then and we used to get fifty a week. While I was away I wasn't getting any cigarettes so I told Colonel Adderley and he wrote me a chit to take to the quartermaster at the camp. They allowed me seven a day but there was a lad from Cale Green, in Stockport, lashing the cigarettes out. He used to ask how many I wanted and he'd give me tins of fifty. He would come out with me at night, for a drink in Milan.

Above: Harry with the colonel's jeep in 1945 and in Bollington, with the same model, in 2017.

One night, the veterinary major asked if I would mind taking him into Bologna. He said that he was going to a party for an old English lady!! I said that I'd take him and he asked me to come back to the house, at midnight, and pick him up. I got there at midnight and at least two o'clock in the morning I was still sat there. He came out at the finish and I got him back to camp. The next morning I stopped in bed. Colonel Adderley wanted me for summat and he sent one of the Italian soldiers that used to cook and look after us to ask where I was. I told him that I'd been out 'til three in the morning and he told Adderley what had happened. He sent

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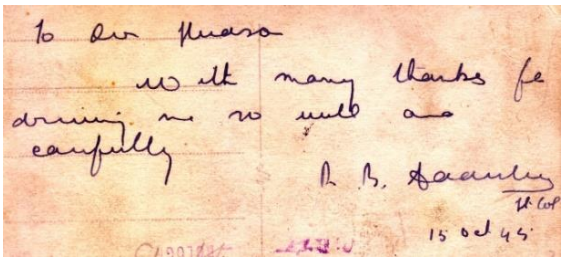
for the major and said, “Hudson’s my driver! Never ask him to take you out again!” in front of me and showed him up

In Bologna, Adderley used to say, “Nip down here, Hudson!”, even though it was a one way street. Nine times out of ten you’d meet the Military Police half way down, and, of course, they’d stop you. He’d be sitting next to me in this old Jeep. They never thought of a colonel being in a Jeep and they’d just about be ready to tell me off when they’d spot him and were then all apologies. Another time, when we were in Milan, Colonel Adderley was coming out of a meeting and there was a one–pipper, a second lieutenant, walking in front of Adderley and he said to me, “Don’t you salute officers when you see one?” I said, “I’m sorry, sir, but I’m waiting for the colonel who’s just behind you.” The officer got told off by Adderley, “You can’t expect him to look after me and salute you!” He was a great character. When I first went to his unit, I got there in the evening and a bloke came up to me, no ranks on, and asked if I was his new driver. I said, “I’ve come to drive a colonel.” And he said, “That’s me, I’ll see you in the morning.” That was Adderley. When I first arrived, he asked me where I came from and when I said Stockport he said that he used to come over there to visit Simon Carves. I don’t know what his job was, but he already had an O.B.E. from before the war. He was a nice guy, not stuck-up at all. He had two horses and he used to ride around the camp, visiting the various sections. I used to call one horse “The Bloody Butcher” and the other was a smaller white Arab stallion. With the red one, he used to say, “Hold the horse for a minute, Hudson,” and if you didn’t watch it, it used to stand on your foot so I used to give it a clout.

I joined the pack mule unit straight after getting back from leave, in about May 1945 and I stayed until November 1945 when Adderley was demobbed. They were asking officers of his rank to stay on and I said to him that I thought that he would stay but he said, “I’m as fed up with this army as you are, Hudson. I’ve had enough!” He went and they handed the mules back to the Italian government and I went to another GT (General Transport) Company for four or five weeks. At the end of the year, my four years abroad was up and I was due to come back home. I caught the train from Italy on New Year’s Eve. The train came over the Brenner Pass, through Switzerland and France to Calais and a ferry back to England. I didn’t go back abroad again. After a month’s leave at home, I was told that I was going to drive at Oulton Park in Cheshire. It was a very big camp with about twelve hundred troops. We used to take them either into Chester or Winsford or Crewe for a night out. We used to collect them at midnight so it was one o’clock by the time we got back and we used to go into the cookhouse and get sausage sandwiches as they’d already started cooking for the next morning’s breakfast. In the day, we used to pick up from the station. We used to drive from Winsford to Bury carrying stuff and I used to call into Stockport and pick Kate up and go back later at night.



A farewell card and message from Colonel Adderley.

I only had four or five weeks before I was due to be demobbed and I was told that I was being sent to Norwich. A lot of the drivers there had no experience of driving lorries and they were having lots of accidents in the narrow streets. After a couple of weeks in Norwich, I was due a seven day leave at home and after that they said that I was going to Lowestoft to drive an ambulance on the beach. The Royal Engineers were picking up mines that had been laid to deter attacks. It happened that the weather was really good and all I had to do was sit or lie on the beach, in case there was an accident. It came to the date that I was due to be demobbed but nobody bothered about me, just as if I wasn’t part of the army. On the Wednesday, I said to this Royal Engineer officer who was in charge of the mine lifting, “I’m going back to

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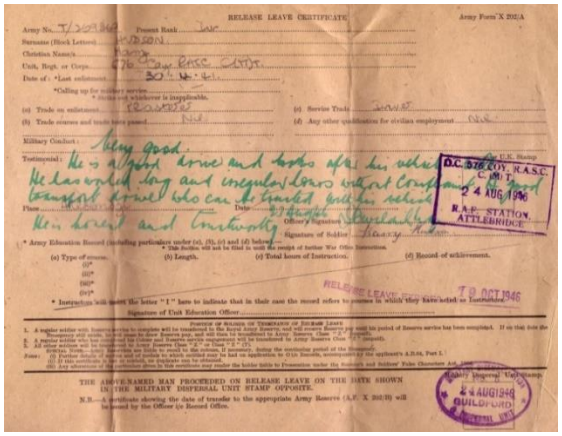
Norwich at lunch-time today." "You can't do that and leave us without an ambulance!" he said. "You watch me!" I said. I shot off, got back to Norwich and handed the ambulance over straight away. I had a medical that afternoon and, on the Friday, I was demobbed at Guildford. I was given a train pass to get home and another month's leave with pay to sort yourself out. That was it!

I got out of the army in September 1946. Kate had a word with her mum who said, "Don't rent a house. Go and buy one. I pay twelve *(shillings)* and odd a week rent but it will never be mine." Kate had seen these houses on Harleen Grove and some on Nangreave Road. These were eleven hundred and fifty pounds and those on Nangreave Road were just a thousand pounds. These had a half-tiled kitchen and bathroom. We came up to Offerton and saw Foulkes, the builder, and he was just starting to build the three pairs of houses. Four pairs had been built before the war. This was in December 1945 and he said that the houses would be ready in September 1946. We could choose which one we wanted and we chose this one on a corner as I thought it had a good situation. We got a mortgage from The Halifax and we used to pay twenty eight shillings *(£1.40p)* a month. The pay for a plasterer was half a crown *(12 ½ p)* an hour and we used to work 49 hours a week. *(That means that the pay per week was just over six pounds)*. We had been married in April 1945 and moved in in September 1946. The winter of 1946/47, just after we moved in was very bad. David was born in July 1947. Because we had hot water in the house, he was born at home. If you only had cold water, you were born in hospital. We decided to only have one child. Just after the war, you didn't know what was going to happen and a lot of your friends only had one.

I got a job with West, the builder, who was building on the Bridge Hall Estate at Adswood. I started on the Monday morning and on Monday night I came home with my tools on my back. Kate must have wondered what was going on. It didn't suit working on new houses. I'd been away in the army for five and a half years and it took a bit of time to readjust.



RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE

Army Form X 202/A

THE ABOVE-NAMED MAN PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY IMPERIAL UNIT STAMP OPPOSITE.

Left: My Release Certificate from The Army, August 1946

Then I went to work for Benny Blower who had a firm at Stepping Hill. He used to do work for lots of builders – he replastered the house that had been bombed on Montagu Road. One day he said that there was some patching needing doing in that house so I worked round the corner from home for a day. We did about thirty council houses at Marple. That's where I worked on the same job as Les Cocker. He was a few years younger than me and was an apprentice painter, just about finishing his time. He was painting full time but playing for Stockport County first team at weekend. (*He was in fact two years younger than Harry. After finishing playing, he began coaching at Luton then in 1960 moved to Leeds United, as one of the country's first FA Coaching Certificate holders. Leeds became one of the premier clubs in England under the management of Don Revie. Les was also Team Trainer with the victorious England squad at the 1966 World Cup and used to run on with the "magic sponge" if players were injured).*

We did some work at Lyme Park. The corporation bought Lyme Park and we went plastering there. The stables were built inside with blue brick that were really hard. I always remember that we painted the brick with cement slurry before plastering them. I left Benny and went to work for Norman Schofield at Manchester Royal. I was doing about a hundred hours a week, I was never at home. You got double time for Sunday, time and a half for Saturday and at night. I worked there with Norman for quite a long time. Then I went to see Jack Jolliffe, who I'd been in the army with and we decided to go plastering on Wythenshawe. That's where the money was. We did a hundred houses and another builder would give you a penny an hour more to go

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and work for them. Wimpey were doing a hundred houses and me and Jack decided to go to Wimpey. They brought bonuses in then and we were getting as much bonus as we were wage. When we'd done about ninety six there used to be somebody went into the office every Monday to tell them how much we'd done. The fella who had been doing it left and the lads asked me to go into the office. When I told them what we'd done, they said that according to us lot, we'd done a hundred and four houses but we'd only been paid for a hundred. The bloke who was paying the wages had fiddled the plastering for four houses! We came to do the second hundred but they had cut the bonus in half. I decided to leave, but Jack, who was older than me decided to stay. I went to work for Uncle Bert's brother, Frank Marsland. Frank had two lorries but only one lorry driver and so I used to drive for him and sometimes bring the lorry home.*(one of my earliest memories)* I remember we did some work for Manchester Corporation, turning some very big houses in Didsbury into an old people's home. The corporation had a ton of coal delivered and it was when the shortage was on and a very bad winter. Every night I used to fill my tool bag with coal. It was supposed to be for the house when the plumber had finished the heating but it nearly all disappeared, there was hardly any left.

That's when I met Frank Grieve. He came to work for Frank. Eventually, we joined up together and started doing work for a price. *(The earliest memory I have of going to work with my dad was to some flats he and John were plastering for Frank on Didsbury Road)*. John got some work from a well-established builders in Denton who had built some civic buildings. Tricky Dick (*Seddon)* worked for them. We did work for them at a butcher's in Manchester and some council houses for another builders in Stalybridge. We could do about two houses a week. John had been a navigator in the RAF in the war and he used to go to this place near Southport at weekends and I was left working. He came one day and said we can do a hundred council houses at Denton. I said right but Kate put her foot down and said "You're flogging yourself!" so I said I wasn't doing them. We lost about £200 on the partnership which was quite a lot of money in those days. He said that he'd plaster-boarded the first four but he wasn't doing any more so I said I'd finish just those first four and of course, when I went, who turned up as the builder but Norman Greenhalgh, who I'd known before the war when he was a joiner. Then, who turned up on the site but Irene, sat in the car with him? She'd been married to Jack Bateson. So that was it and after that I did houses all over for Egertons. Norman used to say don't give me a price but do two or three, see what you think and we'll have a talk and agree a price. Eventually I did thirty houses at Hollingworth, near Glossop. I said I wasn't doing any more new houses and I stopped the blokes working for me.*(I went, as a teenager, helping my dad with the last few of these houses, mainly mixing and boarding)*. Norman asked me to go and work for him as a manager but I said I didn't want to do that, I'm fed up of new houses. So I packed it in and went property "dodging" (*repairing)* doing all sorts of jobs.

Before the war, I didn't often go to watch Stockport County as I used to play football on Saturdays. After the war, a whole gang of us used to go. Our George and Sam, Uncle Harold and Uncle Sam. We all met up behind the goal at the railway end. Later on, when we had a van, Kate and I used to go to a lot of away matches, Rochdale, Bradford and so on. Kate and I even went to the really long match when County played Halifax in the cup in 1946. We were still there at nearly seven a clock at night. It had to be decided so they kept playing on. Some of the spectators who lived nearby went home for their tea and then came back in again. There were no floodlights in those days and they had to stop in the end because it was going dark.

The following is part of an article from The Guardian on what is still regarded as the world record for the longest competitive football match:" With replays unwanted during the Second World War, a Play to the Finish rule came in. On 30 March 1946 Stockport County hosted Doncaster Rovers in the second leg of a League III North Cup match. The first game had finished 2-2, as did the second. So they played out extra time and, with no further goals having been scored, continued. And continued.

After a little under three hours Les Cocker, the Stockport striker, turned the ball into the net. The crowd spilled on to the pitch and headed for the delirious scorer – and then they heard the whistle. The referee, a Mr Baker from Crewe, had spotted a handball, disallowed the goal and waved play on. "In the final minutes the players were collapsing with exhaustion and the crowd was calling upon the referee to stop the game," wrote the Yorkshire Post. Eventually the sunlight, like everybody's enthusiasm, faded. "Finally in the dusk and with a haze of smoke from the railway settling over the ground, Mr Baker decided that light was too bad to continue, and 22 weary players and three tired officials hobbled off the field," wrote the Post.

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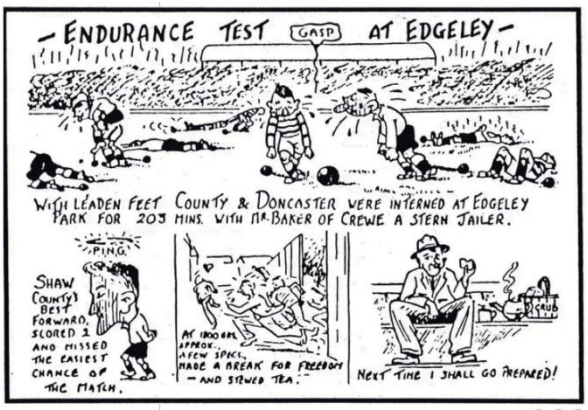

A cartoon about the 1946 match between Stockport and Doncaster and Ken Shaw scoring for County in that match.

At 203 minutes, excluding intervals, the match had pipped an earlier Cardiff game by three minutes. The teams were instructed to toss a coin for the right to host a replay; Doncaster won, and four days later they met again. After nearly 400 minutes the sides were finally – and emphatically – separated. Ralph Maddison scored a hat-trick as Doncaster romped to a 4-0 win, and amid widespread criticism – "Nothing," the Guardian concluded in their report of the game, "could be more absurd" – the Play to a Finish rule lasted only a few months longer."

When David was young, we often went on holiday at hotels run by The RASC Association. They had hotels at St. Annes, Weston-super-Mare and Hastings. We particularly liked the one at St. Annes and we went there a lot.

In the 1960s I was a member of Stockport Male Voice Choir and Kate came to one of the concerts and there was somebody there talking about The Co-op and Kate got really interested in The Co-op. Kate became a member of the Members Relations Committee which included going to the quarterly meetings and then I became a member of the Members Relations Committee. This ran the social side of the movement. Kate later became a member of the board of The Norwest Co-op. We used to go to courses and conferences all over the country. They had a lovely college near Loughborough and we used to go to Scottish Coop Conferences at St. Andrews. At one meeting, Kate heard about The Labour Movement's centre at Wortley Hall, near Sheffield so she said, "Right, we'll go there!" Various unions, including the fire brigades union, had put money into it and the Co-op had some shares.

When I was fifty, I had to stop work because of angina. I was very bad at first. I was at a house down a country lane near Jimmy Jackson's Ford garage at Newton when I first got it. I wondered what was up. I thought I'd got a bad cold. I sat on the stairs, I couldn't move. I managed to get home. I felt alright the next morning. Kate said, "Where are you going?" and I said "I'm going to work!" but she said, "You're not, you're going to the doctors." The doctor sent me to the hospital and it was angina. The doctor said that I had to stop working. Anyhow, after a while, I went back two or three times but I could only manage a couple of weeks at a time. The doctor at the finish, after the third time, said "Harry, if you don't pack in now, you'll kill yourself!" So I finished. I could still do little bits in my own time. I got a disability allowance and Kate went doing odd jobs. One of the women at The Co-op was boss of The Shopworkers' Union Office and Kate went working there for a few months, while someone was on maternity leave. She'd learned shorthand and typing at Stockport College. She also did a few months at Victoria Wines.

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Building a fireplace and plastering. Bollington, 1990

After I had stopped work, I became a member of The Manchester Branch of The Eighth Army Veterans Association. When I first joined, we had about forty members who had been soldiers in The Eighth Army. Later on, I became the chairman and I did that job for about fourteen years. The Eighth Army Association nationally had a magazine and it had invites for various events and I went down to Westminster Abbey and met up with my grandson, John, who was living in London. There was a service for the sixtieth anniversary of The Battle of El Alamein. At that time, I also went out to El Alamein. We flew from Manchester to London and then on to Alexandria where we stayed in a hotel. There were four of us from Manchester including Mary Blood whose husband had been in the desert and John, our association standard bearer. We travelled about in coaches and went to the battle site and there were services at the memorials for all the different countries that had been there in the war, including the Italians and the Germans. It was very different where the battle had been. Then it had just been desert but now there were motorways and lots of houses. The day before we went, the BBC rang me and asked if they could come and have a word with me. They came to my house and I'd already packed my case, as it was so close, but they asked me to unpack it and put my medals on. They interviewed me and it was on the national Nine O'Clock News. Eventually, we got down to just three members in the Eighth Army Association so we decided to wind it up. We put our standard in the church at Ladybarn where we used to meet.

At one time, Kate started going to Dialstone Lane Methodist Church for painting lessons. She went with Bill Johnson, a neighbour. Then we both started going to services there. When Kate died, we had her funeral service there and I have carried on going right up to the present day. I go to services and they used to have meals, lunches, on a Wednesday.

2009 was the centenary of Vernon Park Primary School. Before the event, the school was looking to invite former pupils and a woman that Marion knew asked us. After I went in, as one of the oldest former pupils, I was asked to read my memories of the school at the service in The Old Church and then to cut the centenary cake with two present day pupils at a celebration in school. It was in the Stockport Express) (*article following*). I still go in when I can but that's all stopped with this lot (*the pandemic).* They send me a Christmas card and I sometimes ring them up and speak on the phone.

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Centenary celebrations bridge generation gap

Ex-pupil Harry Hudson (above) cuts the centenary cake with pupils Pheobe and Danielle; long serving teachers Lynn Anthony and Janet Wilson (centre); Ann West (far right) looks at the very first register with Year 6 pupils Casey, Leighs and Maryam and ex-pupil Margaret Clare and (bottom right) ex-pupils enjoy the day (sxn1357b/h/f/d09)

A STOCKPORT school has celebrated its centenary, 100 years to the day after it first opened its doors.

Vernon Park Primary School welcomed the first batch of eager youngsters through their doors on January 12, 1909.

And 100 years later, the school welcomed current pupils and parents as well as former pupils and members of staff to celebrate a century of education at the Peak Street site.

The celebrations kicked-off with a service for pupils, parents and staff at St Mary's Church - with current pupils getting the chance to meet more than 150 former Vernon Park students who had gone before them.

The celebrations then moved back to the school where former pupils and members of staff - including past headteachers Paul Dolan and Marlene Laurence - got the chance to reminisce about their days in the Vernon Park halls, looking back through year books, photo albums and registers.

Ann West even got the chance to see her dad's name, Frederick Phythian, on the first ever Vernon Park register, taken on January 13, 1909.

Afterwards, the oldest ex-pupil Harry Hudson, who attended the school for nine years between 1926 and 1935, was invited to cut the centenary cake with current pupils Pheobe and Danielle.

Headteacher Helen Mastrolonardo said she was delighted to welcome so many ex-pupils back to the school, adding: "The children were fascinated to hear what life at Vernon Park had been like over 80 years ago.

"It was a wonderful day and the success of both events was a tribute to all the hard work of everyone involved."

Kate first became ill one day on a walk at Etherow. We were walking along and, all at once, she just collapsed. I got her up and sat her on a bench. After about twenty minutes she said, "Let's go on with the walk but she stopped again. There was a couple going past so I asked them to stay with Kate while I went to get help from the wardens. They came with a trolley and got her back to the car. They asked if they should ring for an ambulance but I took her home. I rang the doctor and he came and looked at her and said to take her straight to hospital. At first she was in Stepping Hill Hospital, then Cherry Tree and finally at St. Thomas's Hospital, which is where she died. This was the old workhouse where I had worked as an apprentice and the staff in there were very good to her. She died in November 2000, from complications after a stroke, when she was seventy eight.

These "Memories" were finished in October 2020, during the Covid-19 crisis, a month before Harry's 99th Birthday. He had always insisted that he had told Kate he would live to a hundred. He was still living at the same house in Harleen Grove, cooking and looking after himself and occasionally driving in the local area. He had driven down into Stockport, to buy a calendar for friends, a month or so after his 99th birthday. Sadly, Harry died peacefully, in his sleep, at home, on 8th April 2021. He had been slowly deteriorating for about three weeks after leaving hospital. His GP arranged for him to be nursed at home and we had fantastic support from the NHS with carers, District Nurses and a hospital bed downstairs.

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My family at Dave's 70th Birthday in 2017: son Dave, grandson David, daughter-in-law Mary, grandson Rob and his two children Isabella and Poppy and partner Helen, grandson John