

Philip Hoffbrand

Born 1896.

Biographical life story by his son Victor.

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This life story was extracted in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the autobiography of Philip Hoffbrand's son Victor, which is also in the Lives Retold collection.

1. Introduction

In the following introduction, Victor Hoffbrand, son of Philip Hoffbrand and author of this life story, describes his childhood memories.

My first memories are of the early years of the war. Iron railings were taken from in front of our home in Bradford to make munitions; the wireless communicated Churchill's speeches, and bombs fell on the city and its outskirts.

According to my 18 month older brother Barry, one hit the store Lingards, another Rawson Market while a third fell on the outskirts of the city in Heaton Woods. We all had our own large cumbersome gas masks, which fortunately were never needed.

Barry and I were evacuated away from the city for some weeks, with our mother and other families, to Threshfield near Grassington in Upper Wharfedale, our father staying behind to continue his business and act at night as a fire warden. I was inconsolable when I wanted to go in a lorry to school with the other children, perhaps the first indication of my need for an academic career. I was denied this early education because I was considered too young.

We lived at 42 Peel Square near the centre of Bradford. All the terraced houses, as well as most of the other buildings in Bradford, were built in sandstone but had become blackened over the years by a century of exposure to smoke from the many mill chimneys. In our childhood the centre of the city was permanently enveloped in smoke which could be seen from 15 miles away in Ilkley and Otley in Wharfedale.

Bradford was built in a river valley surrounded by low hills. The river, the Bradford Beck, known locally as T' Mucky Beck, was the filthiest river in England. Twenty per cent of the world's wool at that time went through Bradford, the water which flowed down from the surrounding hills being used for washing wool. In the 19th century the Beck became underground when building in the city centre took place over it.

At the front, Peel Terrace had faced the Infirmary Hospital. The main Victorian hospital building had already been demolished and we watched its remaining solitary tall chimney being blown up in January 1939. The hospital was replaced by the new Bradford Royal Infirmary Hospital in Duckworth Lane about a mile away.

The house had a cellar, an inside and outside lavatory and a cobbled street at the back. There was no fridge or freezer, or central heating. Coal burnt in open, black iron fireplaces which, with supplementary electric radiators, heated the house in winter. Food rationing and shortages meant we had little meat or chicken. Salmon came in tins. Dried bananas, dried eggs, Spam (tinned compressed meat, gristle and fat) were included in the rations, but grapes, bananas, oranges, melons, other fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and meat that needed to be imported were absent.

School was a State primary school, Green Lane, which we could walk to, up a cobbled street past Drummonds Mill, one of Bradford's large clothmaking mills.

Among my early memories are three in-patient admissions in the Children's Hospital near the school, the first into a cot, with a broken right arm; the second into

a bed, again with a broken right arm, and the third for removal of tonsils which seemed then to be standard paediatric practice. A general anaesthetic involved chloroform on a pad of cotton wool pressed on the face which, having experienced it once, I dreaded. After prolonged periods with my right arm in Plaster of Paris, I became and remain partly left handed. I also suffered badly from eczema with coal tar ointment spread over arms and legs at night and then covered in bandages to protect the bed linen from being soiled.

During and just after the war we read the comic magazines Beano, The Dandy, The Wizard and Hotspur with such characters as Desperate Dan, Keyhole Kate, Lord Snooty, The Great Wilson (who was an incredible athlete able to jump higher and longer and to run faster than anyone else in the world). The first books I clearly remember were King Arthur and his Knights, the Arabian Nights and Wind in the Willows and then the Richmal Crompton's Just William books. Later the Arthur Ransome books became top of my reading list, the descriptions of children's holidays in the Lake District being particularly appealing.

We listened on the 'wireless' to ITMA (It's That Man Again, Tommy Handley), Workers' Playtime, Housewives' Choice, to detective programmes such as Paul Temple and Dick Barton, and to comedians Max Miller, Tommy Trinder and Arthur Askey. We went to pantomimes at the Bradford Alhambra starring Norman Evans as the Dame, to black and white 'pictures' starring comedians Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, the Marx Brothers and George Formby.

Among the Hollywood stars we were enthralled by (whether in black and white or Technicolor) were Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, Errol Flynn, Cary Grant, Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda, James Cagney, Bette Davis, Gary Cooper, Humphrey Bogart, James Stewart, Ingrid Bergman, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Dorothy Lamour, Danny Kaye and Alan Ladd.

The Disney films, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Pinocchio, Dumbo and Bambi remain as vivid in my mind as when I first saw them over 70 years ago.

2. Philip's Parents

Our father Philip had been born in Latvia on December 27 1896 and was brought by his parents, Wolf and Hannah, together with his older brother Abraham, sister Edith, and younger brother Sam to England in 1901. Pogroms against Jews were rife in Eastern Europe and many Jews were escaping to North and South America, Western Europe and other countries including Palestine. One of Wolf's brothers, Morris, went to South Africa and others to the USA.



Philip's mother Hannah Hoffbrand in about 1941.

The Bradford family was extremely poor with our grandmother Hannah selling chickens to maintain the family. Her husband Wolf (spelt Wolff on his death certificate and Wolfe on his wife Hannah's death certificate) had some unspecified mental problems which prevented him from working and for which he had been admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Menston near Otley. Wolf died there in 1934 at the early age of 64. My Hebrew name, Yehudah Ze'ev, remembers him, Ze'ev in Hebrew being a wolf.

Hannah was a real family matriarch, who seemed extremely old to me but was only 72 when she died during the War in 1943. My father, like his parents and two brothers, died of cardiovascular disease and it seems likely that a genetic risk factor to this is present in the family. This could be a raised low density (bad) cholesterol which both I and my son David show.

3. Philip's Early Life

All three of Hannah's sons left school at an early age to become tailors. In Philip's case this was at age 11. He served as a tailor in the First World War from November 22 1917 in the 3rd battalion of the Leicester regiment, sewing and mending soldiers' uniforms. His official demobilisation was October 6 1919 when he went back to live with his parents in rented accommodation at 56 James Street.

In 1920 he successfully applied for naturalisation. It is interesting that his surname is variously spelt Hoffbrand or Hofbrand. The Riga Holocaust Museum contains the names of six Hofbrands who died in the Holocaust, all spelling Hofbrand with a single 'f'. As we have never met a Hoffbrand or Hofbrand who does not belong to our family, it seems likely that these six Hofbrands who perished in Latvia during the war were also of the same family. His naturalisation papers mention that Philip was a warehouseman (it seems for two years at A. & S. Henry & Co.) as well as a tailor.

Asa Lingard, who wrote a letter supporting the application, was one of the owners of the Bradford general store, Lingards, and it seems rented the home at 56 James Street to the family.

Philip initially started a bespoke tailoring business in partnership with his older brother Abraham but as The Times recorded, the partnership was dissolved in 1926. The reason for the breakdown in relations between Philip and Abraham was never explained to Barry and me but the effect was lasting so that all through our childhood Abraham was never spoken about and we were forbidden to have anything to do with him. This was particularly difficult when we were close friends with Abraham's daughters, our cousins Maureen and Barbara.

4. His Own Tailoring Business



Front door of Philip's tailoring business in Drewton Street, about 1930. Note that the telephone number had only four digits.

Philip set up his own business, becoming a bespoke tailor with premises in Drewton Street close to the city centre and opposite Busbys, another large departmental store. He made high quality suits and coats mainly for men but also costumes and skirts for women, building up the business through his hard work and expertise. It brought him in contact with many of Bradford's richer inhabitants, often in the wool trade, who preferred his tailoring to that of his brothers or of Montague Burton, the large men's outfitter based in Leeds.

5. Marriage and Family



Philip and Minnie Hoffbrand on their wedding day.

In 1930 Philip married Minnie Freedman, daughter of Sarah and Morris, a cabinet maker in Leeds. Her family came to Leeds from Byelorussia. Minnie had no sisters but five younger brothers. As the eldest, she helped to bring up all of five of them.

The two youngest of Minnie's five brothers, Barney and Jack, who were privileged with higher education, trained as pharmacists at the Technical College in Bradford, living with us in Peel Square for some of their student careers. Their three elder brothers were Sam, a tailoring machinist, Harry who worked with his father as a cabinet maker, and Solly, a cutter.

None of their wives had a major career but Sam and Solly's wives worked part-time also in tailoring as machinists.

Philip had a stressful life establishing his own tailoring business, employing up to 10 staff (with various problems with most of them); with two major fires and one burglary at his business at Drewton Street, and the demands of his customers for their suits to be finished by 'yesterday' and altered to fit every irregularity in their anatomy. At home there was the loss of two babies before Barry was born. We tried to help with the business, sweeping floors, writing out invoices, carrying suits that needed a final pressing through the city to a presser when one was not employed

directly at Drewton Street. We also took vacation jobs at the Empire Stores, a national mail order business.



Minnie (centre) with her parents on her right; brother Harry is in front of his father Morris and Abe (Jack) on his mother, Sarah's, lap. Sam (the eldest) is on Minnie's left and Beryl (Barney) next to Sam; Solly is in front of Sam.



Philip and Minnie's sons Victor and Barry aged 3 and 5.

Minnie was no slouch when it came to mathematics, where she excelled. It is difficult to know what she could have achieved if her life had not been devoted to bringing up five brothers and then, after her marriage, coping with her first two sons

dying and then two sons to bring up. Derek born in 1931 died from meningitis at the age of two, a second baby was dead at birth, strangled by the umbilical cord. Then came Barry and me, the two sons who survived.



Philip and Minnie Hoffbrand on Blackpool Pier with their sons Barry and Victor.

Minnie provided daily lunches and dinners for the three males in her family. In those days supermarkets did not exist and shopping for food was done from specialised shops or from stalls in the covered or open Rawson market. Yoghurt, cottage and cream cheese were made at home from fresh milk which was delivered from large metal churns, measured out with gill and pint sized metal mugs. The kosher butcher had to be visited, and fish bought on the day it was to be cooked and eaten.

Passover was to be observed with a change of crockery and buying only kosher food appropriate for the Festival. Domestic chores included laying fires, with coal brought in from an outside coal hole, the fireplaces blackened with polish. Washing was done with a dolly (a disk on the end of a stick), washboard and manual wringer; cleaning was with manual Ewbank sweepers, dusters and brushes. We did have a series of 'maids' during our early childhood all from Ireland, all called Mary and distinguished only by their surnames.

Our parents' first son, Derek has a small grave in the Bradford Orthodox Jewish Cemetery where all the Hoffbrands of Bradford who have died are buried. Sadly, also to die prematurely, was Mostyn, the only son of my father's sister Edith and her husband,

In 1944, near the end of the War, we moved to the outskirts of the city to where Frizinghall meets Shipley, into a three bedroomed semi-detached house with small front and back gardens in Grove Road. Barry and I shared a bedroom. The move was a welcome change from the black and grey existence in central Bradford to one that seemed to be of glorious colour. Now we had trees in the road, flowers in the garden, a garage and only an inside lavatory. There were woods within a few hundred yards, Heaton and Northcliffe, where we could walk, cycle and play games

of hide and seek. Like Christopher Robin and Pooh Bear we raced sticks down the streams. We could get dandelion and burdock to drink from the farm we went through. As we got older we learned to cycle and to play tennis in the local Northcliffe public courts.

Within 30 yards of our home lived uncle Sam, auntie Betty and their son Eric, our cousin six years older than me. He was a delightful 'older, older brother' who taught me to ride a bicycle. With his parents Sam and Betty and often Richard Cope's parents Cissie and Alfred, Anne and Leon Salem (also close friends who lived in Grove Road) and sometimes our Leeds relations, we were often driven by our father to the Dales or even to the seaside at the weekends.

At the end of the war in Europe in 1945 celebrations took place in the streets around Grove Road on VE Day. I remember Eric announcing to us later that year that the Americans had dropped a bomb of immense power causing enormous destruction and loss of life in Hiroshima.

Eric and his parents, Sam and Betty as well as Abraham and his daughters, Maureen and Barbara, and my parents, Barry and I did get together for the wedding in Leeds of Maureen, the oldest of mycousins, to Ted Gould.

Eric was to qualify as a dental surgeon, marry Joyce, a beautiful teenage girl from Manchester, and they produced two sons, Andrew and Paul. Sadly Eric at the age of 50 developed renal failure due to the genetic disease, polycystic kidneys, and died at the early age of 58 despite a kidney transplant (which was rejected). Dialysis caused fatal aluminium poisoning. Fortunately for both his sons, Andrew and Paul, renal transplantation for the polycystickidney disease they inherited from Eric, has proved successful.

When we moved home, we transferred our primary school education from Green Lane to a State primary school, Albert Road School, in Saltaire, easily reached by trolleybus from Grove Road. Saltaire is a village built by Sir Titus Salt, a Victorian industrialist, for his workers in the enormous mill he had established on the banks of the river Aire. Large numbers of the local population were working in the Mill, many wearing clogs. Enormous lorries laden with bales of wool lumbered through Saltaire to and from the Mill. Salts Mill was bought by Irene's son, Jonathan Silver in 1987.

From Albert Road School both Barry and I gained entrance scholarships to Bradford Grammar School (BGS) which happened to be one of the best schools in England. To our parents' relief we would have the rest of our school education free. I started in the primary section, Thorneville opposite Manningham Park, in 1945, joining a class that included Israel Silman and Alan Jerome, both to become close friends. We transferred to the senior school in Manor Row, near Drewton Street in Bradford in 1946. This was an old broken-down building in which one day our schoolroom ceiling fell in, covering our desks in rubble and dust, fortunately at lunchtime when the room was empty.

In 1949 we moved to the splendid new BGS in Frizinghall, an easy walk there, and back home for lunch, which we did most school days. Playing fields surrounded the

school; there was a large indoor swimming pool and the building was light, the sandstone not yet blackened.

To my surprise I found that my results in class at Thorneville placed me at or near the top of the form. My competitive spirit and academic development kept me there until I left the school in 1953. Our father initially offered Barry and me financial rewards for coming first, second or third in end of term examinations in any subject but soon stopped this when it became too expensive. Needless to say, our parents were tremendously proud of our academic achievements at school and later at university, although they were sad that we never returned after leaving school for university, to settle in the North.

I knew from an early age that I wanted some form of academic career but it was when I was 14 or 15 that I decided on medicine. At age 11 the pupils at BGS were divided into those studying the classics such as Greek and Latin and those studying more modern subjects including chemistry. English, maths, history, physics and a modern language were core subjects in both paths. Barry chose the classical route and I chose modern, already knowing that my future career would be in science of some sort.

6. Chess, Music and Literature

Like many Jewish immigrants from Russia and the Pale of Settlement of the Jews at the beginning of the 20th century, my father Philip had no opportunity for formal education after the age of 11 or to learn a profession. He was, however, highly intelligent. Selftaught he played both bridge and chess well. He had a keen interest in classical music and opera, taking Minnie to such operas as 'Cav and Pag', Tosca and La Bohème. He was a Puccini enthusiast. Minnie did not enjoy opera and she later was to admit that these outings were boring experiences and that she would rather have gone to Bournemouth.

Philip read poetry by Robert Burns and the Victorian romantics; geography books about Africa and other underdeveloped countries, and history books including five volumes with sepia-coloured photographs of the First World War. He had a large collection in 20 volumes of the world's greatest short stories and all of Shakespeare's works. These are now at our Suffolk home, Green Farm.

It was presumably from our father that Barry and I inherited our enthusiasm for music, poetry and literature as well as the brainpower to achieve the academic success that he had been denied.
