

Albert Walbank

Born 1879.

Life story by his son Frank Walbank.

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This life story of Albert Walbank is extracted from the autobiography written by his son Frank W. Walbank, which is also archived at the Lives Retold website.

1. Albert's Parents

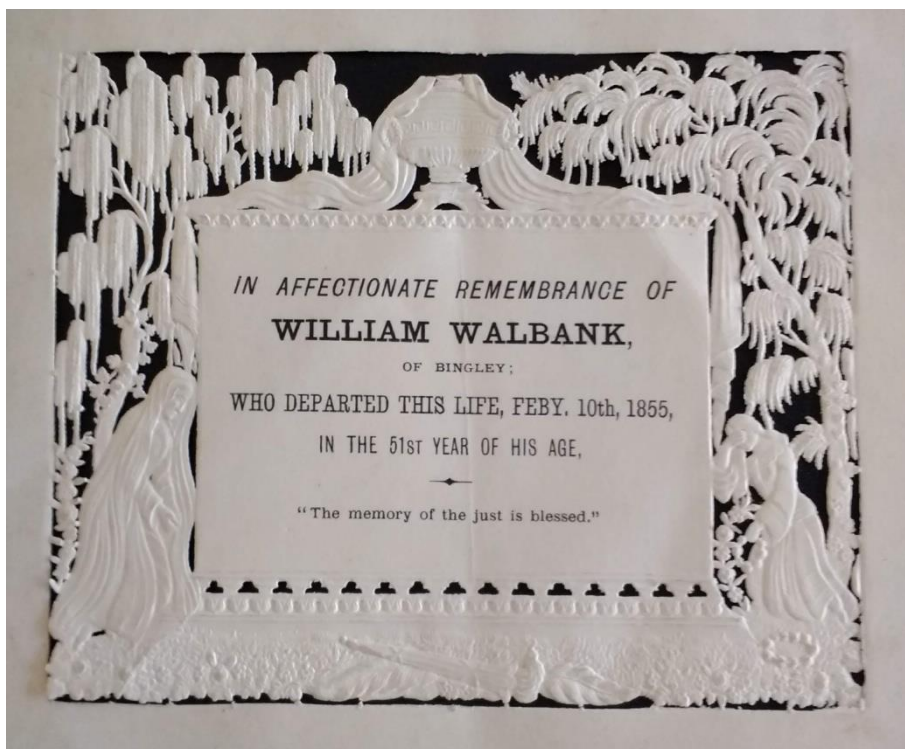
My grandfather, William Walbank (1840-1928), left a short memoir, written, I suspect, around 1910, some time after his retirement, in which he described his childhood and adolescence in fairly poor circumstances in the Yorkshire manufacturing town of Bingley. My father, in his old age, made a copy of this document (which had perhaps become dog-eared) and this I now possess; the original he unfortunately destroyed.



Painting of William Walbank in cobbler's apron by his son Arthur, Albert's brother.

My grandfather, William Walbank, the writer of the memoir, was the sixth child of a family of twelve. His father, also a William, was born in Bingley in 1804. His mother, Mary Briggs, was six years younger than her husband, having been born in 1810; she outlived him by over thirty years and died in 1888, the year before my own father was born. I mention these dates as they underline the long period which

oral recollections can cover – in this case going back at one remove to the time of the Napoleonic wars.



Death notice of Albert's grandfather, William Walbank (1804-1855).

This earlier William was an overlooker at Anderton's Mill in Bingley and, according to the short account written by my father's cousin (Willie Walbank), which I have mentioned above, lived in a house in York Street. His early death at the age of 51 may perhaps be ascribed, indirectly, to religious conversion. Till he was 30 or so he was reputedly a man who 'used to take his glass'. But then, inspired by a Wesleyan revivalist meeting, he signed the pledge, became teetotal and was henceforth a strong advocate of 'temperance', total abstention from alcoholic liquor.

William now had more money and time on his hands, and he therefore bought some land near the Granby Steps (between Chapel Lane and Wellington Street) and on it, with the help of two boys, he built two houses and a shed. While engaged in building houses three and four he unhappily caught a chill, from which he died. The last child of this William was Mary, born the year he died (1855). I can remember her death in 1919 because while digging her grave in Bingley Cemetery on Bailey Hills, the gravediggers unearthed a quern, which was subsequently placed on permanent display in a glass case in Bingley Public Library in Main Street. I felt considerable pride over this discovery, which I thought reflected very well on our family. My grandfather (the memoir writer) was a small, neat man with a white beard, a pronounced Yorkshire accent, and an ebony walking stick. He had retired from his job as a shoe-repairer many years before I was born, and now lived under and over the shop at 107, Main Street, where two of his sons still carried on the business. I say 'under and over' since his living quarters were in the basement-kitchen looking out through a back yard to Station Place, opposite Bingley Station, but his sleeping quarters were upstairs on the first floor. He dropped in on us fairly often and I have vague memories of his taking me and my cousin Kathleen

Walbank, who was about my age, on walks. But he was on the whole a rather remote figure. My uncle Arthur, who trained as an artist, made a rather good painting of him when he was still working and probably aged about fifty, which now hangs in my study. It is painted on board and portrays him in his cobbler's apron. More than one visitor has been misled by this garb and has asked me if he was a bishop, a confusion which would have given him no pleasure at all, since he was a firm agnostic.

Of my grandfather's siblings I can remember only three – together with Fred Mountain, the widower of my great-aunt Annie (died 1889), who had some sort of warehouse just off Park Road. My father occasionally took me there as a small boy, to visit 'Uncle Fred Mountain' and to weigh me free on the warehouse scales. Fred Mountain had a son Frank, who was my father's cousin and a master at Sowerby Bridge Grammar School; but by a second wife he had a further family, all musicians. His great-grandson Paul Mountain later turned up as a violinist and acquaintance of my granddaughter Fiona Alexander in Leeds.

However, to turn to my grandfather's own brothers, the eldest of those I remember was John. (Later I thought of him, and indeed of the whole collection, as a kind of lower middle class provincial version of Galsworthy's Forsytes.) John, and next door to him his younger brother, Joseph, both lived in large Victorian detached houses just off Sheriff Lane, Eldwick. Eldwick is a village on the edge of the moors, separated by the valley of Eldwick Beck, which runs down through Shipley Glen, from the slope up to Dick Hudson's – a famous moorland pub – and the footpath over Rombald's Moor to Ilkley. John, born in 1831, seemed incredibly old. He had been a shoemaker, living in Wellington Street, but had later moved to the shop in Main Street where, on his retirement, my grandfather and another brother, Stephen, who had been apprenticed to John, took over the business. John, who was, I think, a bachelor (though he may have had a wife, now long deceased), was in his mid-eighties and was looked after by a formidable housekeeper, Mrs Dobson, whom all the family regarded with dislike, distrust and a certain amount of terror.

Aged, secluded at Eldwick, and fenced in by Mrs Dobson, John had little with which to occupy himself. He did, however, possess a medium-sized telescope, which he would set up at the bottom of his garden and with it carry out imaginary trips all over Shipley Glen. My uncle Francis had a story of making a surprise visit to Uncle John and, having been invited by Mrs Dobson to go seek him down the garden, finding him with his eye glued to the telescope. On spying Francis, Uncle John quickly adjusted the direction in which the telescope was pointing and exclaimed: 'Look here, Francis, you can see a party down the Glen quite clearly making a pot of tea!' But Francis was not deceived.

In his younger days John had regularly taken his holidays at Blackpool, where he was a keen frequenter of salesrooms. However, he managed to avoid the worst cheap-jacks and consequently his house was full of purchases of uneven quality but not rubbish. I am sorry to say that after his death (in 1919) many members of the family paid repeated visits to his house with large bags and came away enriched.

Whether as a result of one of these forays I am not clear, but the famous telescope was afterwards in our possession and I did not get rid of it until I left Oxton,

Birkenhead, in 1977. John's death produced a sense of outrage in the family on account of his will. He proved to have left his considerable estate to his surviving brothers and their offspring, which meant my uncle Joseph and my grandfather. Consequently all those nephews and nieces whose parents had been careless enough to die before John got nothing. And even my father and his brothers were aggrieved, since Joseph's daughter-in-law Edie (her husband Felix had already died) would eventually get four times as much as each of them! It was a will that could almost have been designed to sow the maximum amount of strife within the family.

Joseph, born in 1846, and so six years younger than my grandfather, had been a schoolmaster, and eventually headmaster of a small elementary school at Lees, a village on the hillside south of Keighley. I remember him as a small, pale man with a squeaky voice and a large curved nose. His wife, Aunt Jane Ann (née Aude), was of French origin, though I think from a generation earlier. She looked (as I later realised) entirely French; and judging from photographs, their son Felix (who died of TB in 1913) also looked very much a Frenchman. This was not however the case with his son, my (second-) cousin Alan, with whom I grew up fairly closely, so that he seemed much nearer to me than my (Walbank) full cousins. Uncle Joseph and Aunt Jane Ann lived next door to John at Eldwick in another large Victorian detached house, with a coloured glass staircase window of a type very common in the West Riding. Like John they had a large garden overlooking the Glen (but, I believe, no telescope). Part of the house was occupied by Cousin Edie, their daughter-in-law, widow of Felix and mother of Alan.

Edie (née Waterhouse) was truly awful. She employed a pretentious and affected manner of speech, with the kind of over-compensation which gives 'butcher' the vowel sound of 'butter'. Edie constantly talked for effect (which, however, eluded her). My parents exchanged visits with her regularly, as did my uncle Francis (my father's brother). All regarded her with mixed feelings, despising her pretensions but giving her good marks for her devotion to Alan's welfare. She had a job as a teacher, for a time at Myrtle Park School and later at Mornington Road School, where I was to encounter her in a new capacity. She paid great attention to Alan's diet, which was thought to be very important at that time, since TB was believed to 'run in families' and was the great bogey before anti-biotics were discovered.

This meant that Alan was regarded as under threat and every care had to be taken with his diet and health regime. One relaxation which Edie indulged in was to attend the Hallé Subscription Concerts in Bradford and my parents were very unreasonable and philistine over this. There is no reason to think that Edie did not derive genuine pleasure from classical music (they did not); but her snobbish talk about her concerts made a charitable interpretation difficult. Some years later Joseph and Jane Ann, together with Edie and Alan, removed to a house in Sleningford Terrace, Crossflatts (a village just up the valley from Bingley) and after the death of the old couple Edie and Alan came to live in Park Road, just round the corner from Bromley Road. Since Alan afterwards followed me at Bradford Grammar School and Peterhouse, we continued to be very close, although he was three years my junior.

2. Albert as a Young Man

My father, Albert (Joseph David), born in July 1879, was the youngest of the bunch and, as a child (I suspect), somewhat spoilt. It seems to have been decided fairly soon that the shoe-business was already fully loaded and that he had better do something else, in fact that he should become a teacher. From the Hill Street Wesleyan School he won a scholarship to Bingley Grammar School and then, in 1892, when he was thirteen, he became a pupil teacher at Mornington Road Elementary School.

Under the pupil-teacher system quite young children were trained to teach as they learnt. How this fitted in with his work at the Grammar School I am not clear. At the same time, as a kind of insurance, he also seems to have served some sort of apprenticeship in the shoe business. In 1897, however, he won a Queen's Scholarship to the Yorkshire College (later Leeds University) and in two years passed the Preliminary Examination and what was then called the Inter.B.Sc. as well as obtaining a first class teaching certificate. At this time he was living at home and travelling daily by train to Leeds.

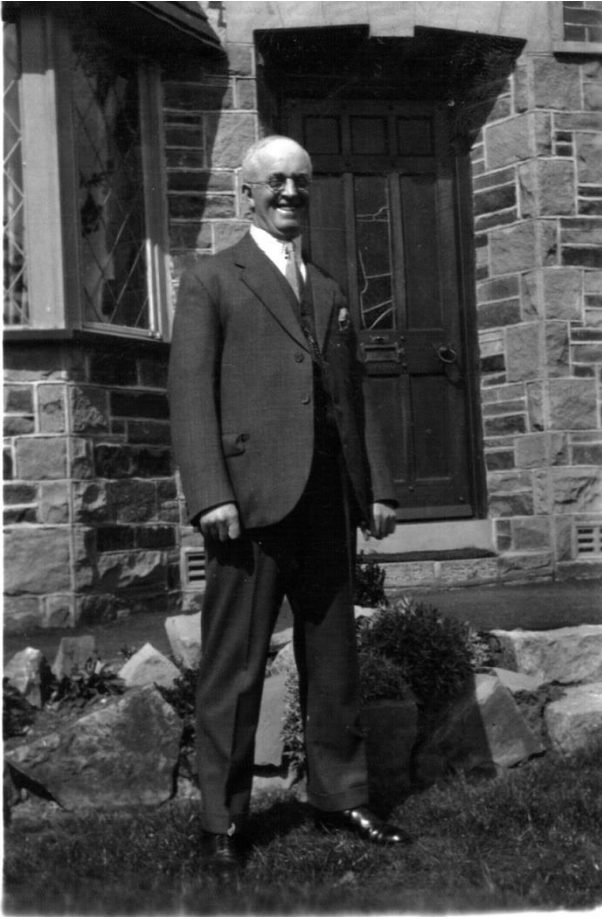
On 11 December 1899 the train on which he was returning to Bingley was involved in a serious accident near Holbeck. He was in a front coach and sustained serious injuries, a broken leg and a fractured skull.

Among the many casualties he had been put on one side as probably beyond aid, but fortunately his cousin Wilfrid (the son of Stephen Walbank, my grandfather's partner in the shoe business), who was also a student at Leeds and was travelling on the same train but in a rear coach, spotted him and put pressure on someone around to take him into care and get him to hospital. This event put an end to my father's university career. It was several years before he recovered.

For a time the family envisaged a job for him as a postman, but a friend, A.D. Slater, headmaster of Harden Elementary School, gave him the chance to come in voluntarily and try his hand at teaching. Gradually his memory and confidence returned sufficiently for him to revert to teaching, first in a job at Otley and later at the Eastwood Elementary School in Keighley, where he remained until his retirement in 1939.

But this accident scarred him for life. His quickness of mind had been lost. He found it hard to follow the logical thread in, for example, a problem in arithmetic and throughout his life preparation for the next day's teaching took up much of the previous evening. This disaster cast a shadow over the whole of his working life and often made him irritable. He received some rather trivial compensation from the Railway Company, but not on the scale usual today.

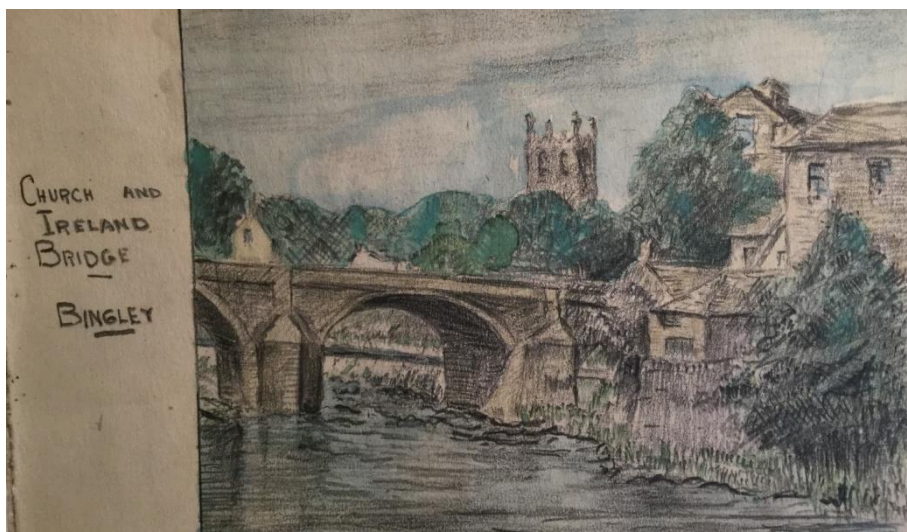
Already before the accident he had met my mother, Clarice Fletcher, and they were married in 1905, when he was teaching at Otley.



Albert Walbank on the doorstep of his home at 54, Bradford Road, Bingley in August 1934.

3. Albert and Clarice

I have no idea when my parents first got to know each other. Bingley was not large at that time and since they lived in the same area they probably knew each other as children. They certainly did not meet at church or Sunday School, a common recruiting ground, since my mother's family were C. of E. and attended Holy Trinity Church, the rather fine Norman Shaw building off Church Street (and now demolished owing to subsidence); whereas my father's family had lapsed from nonconformism. The cleft extended to politics.



Albert's sketch of Ireland Bridge over the River Aire, the scene of his dramatic rescue of a girl from drowning on 8th April 1898.

The Fletchers were conservatives, the Walbanks liberal-radicals. Clarice and Albert started 'walking out' when they were quite young. The first time they went out together in the day-time – which was evidently something in the way of a public declaration, in contrast to less formal meetings in the evening after work – was one Easter and they took their walk along the riverside above Ireland Bridge and the weir, an area highly popular for boating. Many parties came from Shipley, Bradford or Leeds to go on the river at Bingley, for it was renowned as a beauty spot. On this occasion some horseplay led to an upset and a young woman went overboard and was soon in difficulties. My father (who was a competent swimmer, having learnt to swim in the Leeds and Liverpool canal) promptly dived in and got her out, unconscious. He then went off with my mother to dry out in the boiler room of the adjacent gasworks.

My mother must have had very mixed feelings about the whole affair – pride at Albert's gallantry, some irritation at having this important occasion rudely interrupted by the misfortunes of some other young woman (probably silly), but above all her innate dislike of being involved in anything that might draw attention to her – an attitude which I believe sprang basically from her embarrassment at being illegitimate. The rescued girl was led by her companions to believe that it was they who had pulled her out; and having been unconscious at the time, she was not in a position to question this.

But later she learnt that her real rescuer was my father and she presented him with a gold medal, which he always wore on a gold chain across his waistcoat in the style common at that time. The medal (which I have before me as I write) has on the reverse an inscription which reads: 'Presented to A.J.D. Wallbank (sic) for saving life' and on the obverse a pattern made up of the letters A.J.D.W. and a date, April 8th, 1898. The complicated formula in my mother's Prayer Book – it involves calculating the Golden Number, the Paschal Full Moon and the Sunday letter! – confirms that in 1898 Easter Day was on April 10th. So all this took place on Good Friday, which is in fact what I recollect having been told. My father was 18 and my mother 17 (they were born on 8 July 1879 and 20 July 1880 respectively). The day, 8 April, by a coincidence was later to be the birthday of Mary Fox, whom I was to marry.

At this time my mother was working as a mender at (I think) England's Mill. She told me many years later that she would dearly have liked to train to be a teacher, but circumstances in the Fletcher household did not make that possible. Instead she had had to leave school at, I suppose, eleven or twelve and go into the mill. One attractive feature of my father may have been the fact that he was set for a teaching career. In 1898 he was in his first year at the Yorkshire College. After the railway accident occurred in December 1899 my mother remained loyal to him throughout what must have been a long and depressing convalescence; it cannot have been easy.

She was a strong-minded woman and a driving force in the marriage, often uncomfortably so. She gave him full support in often difficult times and she put up with the tedium of his long evenings preparing for the next day's teaching. Small wonder that she often gave the impression of hating books! Despite my father's problems my childhood was a happy time. Indeed it was only after I reached the Grammar School that I really began to understand the extent of his handicap.

4. Family Life



Albert and Clarice Walbank with their son Frank and Clarice's mother Phoebe, Bingley August 1934.

My earliest recollections seem to be connected with holidays. In particular, I have a strong memory of being shown a floral clock at Bridlington by my father and of howling my head off on the beach at Scarborough, somewhere outside the Parade, because I was lost (only temporarily, it would appear). I must on these occasions have been only two or three, since in 1914 we spent our holiday at St Anne's-on-Sea. I was then four and a half and I have a clear memory of that occasion (and one quite separate from all my later memories of a place where I was to live from 1941 to 1946).

I remember this earlier St Anne's as a place of wonder and magic, because of the little artificial waterway with its stepping-stones in the gardens along the beach and the coloured electric lights in the sloping gardens on either side of the railway bridge, which provided an alternative route to the prosaic causeway. All these of course seemed much larger than they did later.

The 1914 visit to St Anne's sticks in my mind also because it was on that occasion that my father told me, just as we were preparing to go home, that war had been declared and that the Germans were now our enemies. My reaction to this was a strong conviction that the Germans must indeed be a very wicked people to be at war with the English. Another incident connected with this holiday has often been recounted (to my embarrassment), but I have no recollection of it myself (having probably suppressed it by some Freudian mechanism). We were spending the holiday (as we commonly did) with my parents' friends Willie and Nelly Holgate. Their daughter Annie, a child of about my own age, was detected stealing an apple from outside a greengrocer's shop and was given a long moral discourse. It was only when I was observed to be weeping copiously that my share in her guilt was exposed.

It was in the following September (1914) that I first went to school. Belgrave Road Infants' School was a small sandstone building about ten minutes' walk from our house; it has now become a set of luxury flats. I was four and a half and the intention was that I should attend mornings only; but I enjoyed it so much the first day that I insisted on going full-time from the start. It was a small school with three classes, first, second, and babies'. I was placed in the second class, where the teacher was Miss White, a kindly woman and a good teacher. Indeed the other assistant mistress, Miss Lister, and the headmistress, Miss Denby, were both excellent with small children. I was here for about a year and a half (for one 'went up' at that time in March) and I quickly learnt to read. We used the phonetic method but also cards with letters in sandpaper on them, which we traced with our fingers and identified with our eyes shut – in that way giving us a useful physical apprehension of the various letters. I remember clearly the first time I read a word in a 'real life' out-of-school context. I was walking along the canal bank with my parents, when we passed a service boat with its name SAM emblazoned on the side. I read it: S-A-M.....SAM! In a moment I was on top of the world. I could read. And indeed I was very soon reading the small paper-backed children's books available at school at a great speed.

I have several other memories of Belgrave Road School. The first is of a bright idea which I conceived one day when the weather was rather uncertain. At about 10.00 I noticed that outside there was a spell of sunshine, so I went to the teacher and suggested that it would be a good idea if we had playtime then instead of at a quarter to eleven when it might well be raining. I was rather surprised and disappointed when this extremely rational proposal was not taken up. The other event was a disaster. I caught ringworm. In those days such infections, along with squints, deformities, lice, sores, suppurating glands etc. were run-of-the-mill affairs and there were always one or two children wearing the special white regulation caps assigned to sufferers from ringworm.

My mother was naturally appalled at this prospect and she arranged with Miss Denby that I should wear a cream cap of my own instead. I was allowed to keep it in a box in her room and to change into it on reaching school. Even so, the infection caused my mother constant anguish until someone told her that ringworm could be cured swiftly by the application of acetic acid (but forgot to add, or did not know, that this should be diluted). Twice a day from then on my mother ruthlessly applied

undiluted acetic acid to my scalp and her anguish was nothing compared to mine. However, it did work. The whole area, inflamed, settled down at last into one vast scab and as the hair grew this was lifted off my scalp and could eventually be removed with scissors. I had suffered katharsis the hard way.

Away from school, in the evenings and on Saturdays and during holidays, I spent much of my time out of doors in a really excellent environment for small children. When I was very little the back street offered protection with houses all round and watchful neighbours (who included my great-aunt Martha Alice – pronounced Marth’Alice –, the widow of Stephen and the mother of the Wilfrid who had saved my father’s life immediately after the railway accident). Though I remained an only child, there were other children to play with: in particular Denis Wild, who lived next door at no. 5, about my own age and, when we were small, my closest friend, the result, I think, of proximity rather than shared interests or temperament. For small children, however, these are matters of little importance.

The Wilds were rather better off than the Walbanks. Fred Wild worked as a clerk at Steel’s Mills, Harden, which made springs and was owned by his father, Walker Wild, a rather impressive self-made man, who had overcome the disability of having lost an arm. Walker Wild was the source of many gifts to his grandson Denis, which – I am rather ashamed to say – aroused my envy; there was a splendid rocking-horse and a steam-engine which pulled a train, both kept in the Wilds’ attic, where we played together on wet days. The Wilds’ house was brighter than ours, too, since electricity had been installed soon after the war. And they had a pianola! Whereas we had only an upright piano and gaslight. Moreover, even after we too got electricity sometime in the twenties, the bulbs always seemed to be of low illumination.

Denis’ slight social superiority also came out in the matter of schooling. The ‘nice’ school for lower middle class people to send their children to was a rather primitive kind of dame school, housed in the Sunday School under the Baptist chapel in Park Road and run by the Misses Bygate. Anyone with any pretensions to gentility naturally sent their children there and this included Denis. These petty snobberies were quite prevalent. I still remember my resentment when a Mr Munday, a neighbour in Wilson Road, who was a clerk in the office at the local railway station, but who sent his daughter Kitty to Miss Bygate’s, having lost his temper with me for some reason which I do not recall when I was playing in the street outside his house, addressed me as a ‘Board-School brat’. The expression ‘Board School’ was by then obsolete, but had been retained as a term of insult. Denis Wild was later sent away to Lancaster Grammar School, which had a boarders’ wing.

There were other children besides Denis in our back street – Kenneth Murgatroyd, an amusing, rather light-weight boy, a year or two younger than me, whom I saw a good deal of after Denis went away to school, and Eric Milnes, whose parents were Christian Scientists and consequently allowed his younger brother Dennis to go around for several years with a suppurating gland in the neck, evidently refusing to acknowledge its existence.

As we grew older we went further afield. A street away and we were on the banks of the Leeds and Liverpool canal, with fields and woodland in which to play. This

was a stretch between the three-rise and the more famous five-rise locks. There was also a field on the other side of Wilson Road, adjoining and belonging to Platts' Mill, where we played in the evenings when the staff of the mill had gone home, sometimes at cricket and sometimes in imaginative games which involved making long and destructive routes through the middle of the hay. Later, as we grew more venturesome, we discovered ways to climb onto the roof of the mill. We had no concept of danger and fortunately our parents had no idea of what we were up to.

A central activity of this out-of-doors life, which – once the war was over – dominated several weeks during the autumn, was preparation for the Guy Fawkes night bonfire. Preparation for this began soon after the summer holidays were over and continued until November 5th. At the end of Wilson Road was a large walled kitchen garden belonging to the Misses Foulds, who lived adjacently in a large house. (Later this plot was sold for building and the new houses built there became an extension of Plevna Terrace.) At the lower end of this garden there was a large stone pit and this we annexed for storing 'prog', or wood for the bonfire.

Prog was obtained by 'propping', going out prospecting for tree branches and dragging them back to the lair. (In the Bradford area, I later discovered, this activity was known as 'chumping'.) For propping purposes children of different neighbourhoods organised themselves into predatory gangs, part of whose recognised activity was to locate and mount raids on neighbouring hoards of prog. Consequently, as November 5th approached, it was essential to arrange for constant guards over one's hoard outside school hours and as late at night as one could reasonably hope to stay out. The fire itself was a grand affair, usually held at the bottom of Wilson Road near the canal. Young and old all attended and everyone brought fireworks, potatoes to roast, and toffee. As a device for lighting one's fireworks preferably one carried a piece of 'mill-band' consisting of oily rope, which smouldered at one end and contributed a characteristic pungent smell.

On one sad night a spark from the mill-band got into my box of fireworks and all went off at once in a grand conflagration. Once November 5th had passed, the great thing was to see how many days the remnants of the fire could be kept burning.

Towards the end of the war it became necessary to bring Nana to live with us. She was getting too old and difficult to stay at Crownest. My grandma had to go out to work and Nana could no longer be left at home alone. So she moved in with us and I migrated to the attic, where I had a single iron bedstead and she occupied my back bedroom.

I rather liked this change. But there were now difficult times ahead for my mother. Nana suffered from a breast cancer which had, I was told, first appeared after the birth of Harry, her last child, about forty years earlier! This was generally known about and accepted as 'one of those things'; it was referred to as 'mi ma's cancer' and as far as I know was not treated in any way – though it is hard to say what treatment it could have received at that time. It was an ugly sight and the doctor warned my mother to do all the old lady's washing separately from ours and to be sure she had no cuts on her fingers while doing it.

This cancer clearly caused Nana some discomfort, but over forty years she had grown accustomed to it and preferred to attribute any pain which it might cause to imaginary constipation, for which she dosed herself, often disastrously, with a patent medicine called cascara sagrada (which appears to mean 'sacred bark' in Spanish) and a copious intake of hot water. The sacred bark (in a bottle) was kept in a cupboard and my mother tried to modify its effects by diluting it, a device which Nana happily never detected.

When we were on holiday Nana used to go and stay with Frank and Becca Bracewell, my uncle and aunt, until we got back. There was always a feeling of slight resentment that Nana's son Harry never offered to help by having her to stay on these occasions and that the whole burden fell on her grandchildren. While staying with the Bracewells in 1920, however, Nana, who was now 88, became ill, grew worse and died before she could return to our house. On the day of the funeral I was solemnly taken to see her in her coffin: it was the first corpse I had seen and I did not find it particularly upsetting. In fact, a couple of days earlier, as she already lay in her coffin in the Bracewells' front room, slightly visible through the intermediate door, my cousin Ethel had pointed out to me with a frisson of horror and some glee that one could just see her nose projecting above the level of the coffin, and this made a greater impression on me than the formal viewing.

During these years and afterwards my grandmother used to call in pretty regularly, once or twice a week during her dinner hour. We had a much closer relationship with her than with my grandfather. She was warm and imaginative and from an early date, about 1913, she used to buy me an 'annual' called Chatterbox for Christmas. She would buy the previous year's volume at a reduced price, which was clever, since as far as I was concerned, the 1913 volume was just as acceptable as the 1914 one.

Phoebe was of a very different temperament from Clarice. She appeared to have weathered what might have seemed in those days the disaster of two illegitimacies unscathed and was now a much respected member of society, a pillar of the Mothers' Union at Holy Trinity Church and, one sensed, pretty self-satisfied about her role and her achievements. She had a job as taker-in at Wright's Mill, which stood just above the present-day Damart establishment at Bowling Green Mills. Wright's was later taken over by a French firm, which may have been a forerunner of Damart; but at this time it was a family mill and the two active bosses were Matthew and Tommy Wright, generally so known, though with 'Mr' added on the proper occasions. There was a third, younger brother, but his only connection with the mill seemed to be a room which he occupied with one of the first wireless installations in Bingley; it had a vast aerial from a mast, but I don't know whether there was a transmitter as well as a receiver.

As taker-in, it was my grandma's duty to hand out and approve the work done by the menders, which meant that she exercised considerable power. I suspect she made many of the girls tremble on occasion. She would visit our house with lots of gossip and my mother's reaction was rather mixed. She could see through the rather obvious self-glorification which shone through much of my grandmother's monologues, but at the same time I think she may have felt a little envy of Phoebe,

going out and sharing in the life of the mill, while she worked indoors alone at her housework.

For me, however, these visits gave a glimpse into a strange and exciting world and I listened to my grandmother's chatter with some fascination. It was probably a little later that she brought a continuous serial of information about the strange antics of the small Fred Hoyle who was, she claimed, badly spoilt by his mother and constantly in some sort of trouble. Very many decades later, when reading and reviewing Fred Hoyle's Autobiography, I recalled these stories with some amusement, for they shed quite a different light on his behaviour from the one that appeared in his narrative.

My grandmother's cottage was also a place to visit at the weekend and for several years I used to walk up there on Sunday mornings, share an early Sunday dinner with her and then return for a second dinner with my parents. Because eating at my grandmother's was something special, I used to find meals there much more exciting than those at home, though in fact they were probably very similar. They did, however, include occasional very acceptable novelties such as nettle broth.

I have suggested that our house seemed ill-lit compared with the Wilds'. And that fits in with my recollection that I found it a little cheerless. Or is this a judgement passed in retrospect? Certainly, as I grew older, I was more conscious of the burden and feeling of inadequacy that my father always carried. But apart from that, it was a teetotal, non-smoking atmosphere with many of the repressive elements of a religion which he had long ago thrown off – even including a strictly conformist attitude towards Sundays, when I was dressed differently and never allowed to play outside (since this would have been thought outrageous by the neighbours).

Gradually too I became aware of the rift that my father's agnosticism had caused in the house, for my intensely conformist mother still hankered after the church services and activity which had been part of her youth (and may have given her some emotional support). She had insisted on my being christened, with Uncle Harry as godfather; and there had been some sort of a row at or after the ceremony, in which my father (who could be very tactless) had been offensive to Harry, who consequently became a rare visitor at our house until Nana came to live there and he had to come in order to visit his mother. This was a cause of grief to my mother, who was fond of Harry. I sometimes used to wonder if it was this unfortunate incident that had led my parents to decide against having any more children; but this is probably quite wrong. Indeed it is altogether more likely that, as was the case with several families in our area, they decided to have one child and put all they had into giving him full support. If that was so, it would be churlish of me to criticise their decision, for they certainly gave me every support.

It must however have been pressure from my mother that led to my being sent to Sunday School. Not indeed the C. of E., for Holy Trinity Church and Sunday School were too far away and the Fletchers had no truck with the rather 'high' Parish Church. Instead I was sent to the nearest religious establishment, which was the Baptist Chapel in Park Road, to which my mother's friend, 'Auntie' Janet White, belonged; indeed Janet was probably a main mover in the decision to send

me there. I enjoyed getting my attendance card stamped and also the social evenings organised by the Sunday School.

At some of these I performed recitations – loyally coached by my father. There were also choir performances for special services and this meant rehearsals – which led on one occasion to my utter discomfiture. At the end of one meeting we were told that the final rehearsal would take place in the chapel the following Thursday at 5 o'clock. This announcement filled me with horror, for it implied a reversal of one of the main laws of the universe and in a great agony of mind I cried out 'I can't come then. We have our tea at 5 o'clock.' Agony was quickly replaced by shame when the whole assembly roared with laughter (I couldn't see why) and the choir-master suggested that my parents might perhaps manage to postpone my tea for half an hour on this one occasion.

It was also as a member of the Sunday School that I attended the Whitsuntide 'walks', which ended with tea and sports in some hired field. That was very enjoyable; but Sunday school itself never gave me any satisfaction. The superintendents on alternate Sundays were Mr Dawes and Mr Duxbury. The former was a small, colourless man, who has left no impression. Tom Duxbury, however, was a much more forceful character, whom I cordially disliked.

He was the manager and owner of a firm called Magnet Firelighters, which he had built up out of an original business consisting of simply a donkey and cart, from which he had sold firewood etc. Later he diversified into window-frames and a couple of years ago (c.1990) I read an article in a journal which described Magnet as a vast multi-million pound public company with Duxbury's sons as directors. This was social mobility on an unusual scale, even for the West Riding (famous for its silk hats on Bradford millionaires); but it took place long after my brief association with Tom Duxbury. Before I leave him I have three things to add.

First, although he was narrowly religious (he used to give lantern lectures on 'My visit to the 'ooly land'), Duxbury was very mean. The Fox family, my later in-laws, used to employ his sister-in-law, who lived at Cottingley, to come and do the wash-up after the Sunday dinner. She had a son whose emigration to Australia she was trying to finance. It was only after great pressure from Mr Fox that Duxbury, who was by now pretty rich, could be persuaded to contribute.

The second concerns Ellen Hargreaves, a naive and foolish Sunday School teacher, who told us that she had a great admiration for Joseph (the biblical Joseph). 'I often lie awake at night,' she confessed, 'thinking about Joseph'. When Tom Duxbury, now a widower, married her as his second wife, this memory assumed ribald overtones and led to curious speculation as to whether she still lay awake thinking about Joseph.

Thirdly, it was through Tom Duxbury that I eventually severed my connection with the Baptists, since he literally propelled me down the middle of the schoolroom and out through the front door, in the false belief that, despite warnings, I had continued to make a humming noise. The culprit was in fact Ernest Lancaster, who was sitting next to me (he was also ejected), but evidently Duxbury's hearing was impaired.

My father's attitude towards religion, derived from my grandfather and encouraged by my uncle Francis, was crudely intolerant. He strongly admired Charles Bradlaugh, read (or at any rate possessed) rationalist pamphlets and, when he joined a class for book-binding, chose a selection of these to bind. It was a rather shallow agnosticism – perhaps a fairer word would be atheism – which found no place for the central and more positive role that religion has occupied throughout recorded history, inspiring the creation of art, music and literature, to balance the long catalogue of horror that must be laid at its door.

All the same, I am grateful to him for the fact that I cannot remember a time when I believed the Christian myth or the Bible version of creation to be true. My first visit to Israel and the sites associated with the biblical stories of both Testaments was a very moving experience, but only in the same way that my first visit to Olympia, Athens, Delphi and Delos was a moving experience. I have therefore never suffered the emotional anguish felt by those who have a faith and lose it. On the other hand, I cannot, as he did, regard religious people as fools or their beliefs as a subject for cynicism.

I also owe a great deal to my father in other positive ways. When I was still quite small he encouraged me to borrow books from the Bingley Public Library, naturally the ones he had himself enjoyed as a boy – Ballantyne, Harrison Ainsworth, Henty, Jules Verne (I still think of him as Jools). Many years later I was amused to be told by Frank Adcock that he had passed an important examination in English history, while at school, on the strength of his acquaintance with the novels of Henty. Ainsworth was for a long time my favourite. His books were very exciting and catered for what I later recognised as a sadistic feeling with their normal component of a mass execution of a bloody kind in the penultimate chapter. My father also took me on walks in the Bingley neighbourhood and showed me flowers and trees (he was interested in botany) and ancient tracks and footpaths; and he would point out features in the landscape such as Rivock Edge and Ingleborough (which, I seem to remember, one could just discern on a favourable day from a point near the Druids' Altar).

He never showed the slightest hesitation in taking me trespassing, if that was necessary for us to reach something he had set his mind on showing me. For example, on one occasion he took me along the railway track so that Mr Sexton, the signalman, could show me the inside of the signal-box. (Mr Sexton was the father of Walter Sexton, later to become one of my closest and most lasting friends.)

My father was closely involved as treasurer in the local branch of the Workers' Educational Association (the W.E.A.) and some of my earliest memories are of his making very elegant notices – he had a skilful hand – to be put up in shop-windows, announcing forthcoming W.E.A. lectures in the Technical School in Clyde Street, and of my attempting copies of these, which my mother allowed me to put up in the 'back room' window (no-one ever came to look at them there!).

Briefly, he gave me a great deal that my mother could not have given me. She also read novels, but of the popular, Ruby M. Ayres type and she did not know or care very much about plants and flowers or wild things in general.

On one sad occasion the three of us were taking a walk up the hill to the Prince of Wales Park and had reached a point about halfway there, when my mother let slip the information that before leaving she had put my jar of tadpoles onto the kitchen window-sill so that they could have the full benefit of the sun. I knew that this would be fatal and pleaded to return at once. But plans once made could not be disrupted for the sake of possible discomfort to tadpoles and when we eventually got back all the tadpoles were indeed dead. This story illustrates my mother's rather inflexible and perhaps slightly insensitive character. She was a much stricter parent than my father, though always basically kind and affectionate. They both gave me a childhood marked by a sense of security; but my not infrequent smackings always came from her and never from my more soft-hearted father.



Clarice Walbank with her son Frank. Frank's father Albert was unable to get a day's leave to attend the event.

5. Postscript on the Duxbury Family

Frank Walbank describes above Tom Duxbury, a superintendent of Frank's Baptist Sunday School, who owned a firelighter company which grew into great things. The following history of the firm is of interest in showing another parallel Bingley family story. It was archived in 2020, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.imfromyorkshire.uk.com website.

Magnet is one of the most prosperous joiner and kitchen manufacturers in the country. Starting out in Yorkshire, Magnet now have over two hundred shops across the UK.

The Duxbury family had lived in Bingley since the 1700's. Thomas Duxbury opened a greengrocer shop close to the town's parish Church in the 1850's. Thomas' son, Robert, later opened his own shop in Ferncliffe, Bingley. Robert's son, Tom, inherited the shop in 1907 who then sold it to his father-in-law for £7,000. Tom Duxbury was very religious and used the money for a trip to the Holy Land.

When he returned to Bingley, he traded his horse for a firelight company and named it after his horse, Magnet. He set up his headquarters in one of the six houses that Robert had built in Bingley. This was a few streets away from the greengrocers. During the First World War, Tom earned his living by breaking up old barges. He chopped them up and made them into firewood and firelighters.

After the war, Tom purchased surplus stock from the Government. He converted old ammunition boxes into hen houses and furniture. Magnet pioneered the mass production of joinery in the 1920's. They began to sell doors and windows. In the following decade, they delivered joinery and components to large construction companies.

Soon, Magnet began to develop from Bingley. Their new sites were established in Keighley and Knaresborough. This was to meet demands. Their new business provided building materials for the local governments. While the Duxbury's worked for Walsall Council, they realised they sold windows in standard sizes. Magnet soon created a catalogue of their own bespoke products. Magnet was floated on the stock exchange in 1936. The Duxbury family continued as the majority shareholders.

Around this time, Magnet opened a site in Birmingham including a new door factory at Grays in Essex. This enabled them to transfer their products across the country. In the 1960's, the business opened twelve depots situated across the country. They sold their ready-made products to both trade and the public which cut out the middle men – the builder's merchants. Magnet's depots became successful. This led them to build another manufacturing plant in Darlington throughout the early 1970's. Soon, they extended their product range. It now included cupboards and patio doors.

By 1975, Magnet had 115 branches across the UK. In the same year, they joined with Southern-Evans to create Magnet-Southern. This brought their total number of depots to 250 nationwide. In the 1980's the company became successful, including

being a founder member of the FTSE-100 Share Index in 1984. Magnet-Southern expanded the business with new manufacturing sites in Rotherham, Thornton, Penrith, Burnley and Deeside.

After they had gained Thomas Easthams kitchen business in 1985, they opened their first culinary showroom. Although they were the country's largest joinery suppliers, their success was short lived. In the late 1980's, the economy declined. Tom Duxbury failed to lead a management buyout of the company in 1989. The banks took over.

Several of the company's manufacturing plants closed in the early 1990's. This was before they agreed a takeover deal for a reported £629 million with Berisford – a catering equipment maker. In corporate history at the time, this was the largest management buyout. Berisford, later Enodis, failed to revive the company.

In 2001, Magnet's fortune changed. Swedish kitchen manufacturer Nobis purchased Magnet for £134 million. The Scandinavian company have built the business back up to the trade and retail giant which it remains to this day. There are 170 showrooms nationwide selling kitchens to the middle market.

Magnet also sell accessories. These include taps, worktops and electrical appliances. Their trade arm supplies local builders, joiners and kitchen fitters.

Magnet is still growing with showrooms in Beverley, East Yorkshire. Not bad going for a business that was bought with a horse.
