

My Earliest years In England !

By Bill Silvester

8/06/2023

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Bill Silvester

In the beginning!

When one is asked to pen life in England from 1936 to 1946, it really has to begin with my earliest memories. I have been told that I was born in Cambridge on the 24th December at around 11-50 PM in Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge. Another 11 minutes and I would have been a Christmas day babe. Whilst being born on Christmas Eve is now a bonus those I love or are my friends never fail to recall the birth date. As a child I always was given one set of presents to cover both dates. I thought that it was a little unfair. However, there was a war on, and presents were not easy to produce.

My mother Joan Silvester (nee Robertson) was actually quite upset that my father was so excited that he rushed off to register me as Bill Harvey without consultation with her. I recall her saying that she wanted me to be Keith. However, with Bill I have been given, and personally I am quite happy with the title. My only concern is that I did not know that I was not a William for many years. My grandmother Maggy always called me Bill. Only when I had done something wrong did I get William. More on that later. Maggy was born on the 3rd March 1890,

Understandably, my early years provide little or no memories. It takes going to school many years, when a young one's personality is allowed to develop that those memories can be recalled. My father John Vernon Bellis Silvester worked for the Beecham Group in a London Suburb. He was initially employed as a senior storeman. When Dad married my mother 21st March 1936, he always pressed the claim that I was born nine months and three days after they were married. I am considered 100% legitimate. This was a sensitive issue for my father as he had two sisters Elsie and Kathleen that were married in Wales, after they gave birth to their first child. Dad was just 22 when I came along. Most folk married young in those days.

Dad's Sisters!

My Auntie Kath was born third March 1911, Auntie Elsie was born 8th October 1912. Dad was the youngest of the Silvester family. On my grandmother Maggy's side she married Eli Reginald Silvester in 4th April 1913. You can see why my dad was sensitive to my being legitimate at birth. My grandad Eli was born on December 1884. He was the 8th child of George Littleton Silvester, and born at Sandon, Stone Staffordshire. I went to Stafford in early 2000's and met up with my Uncle also named Bill and spent a few days being shown around the beautiful Staffordshire county. More on that later.

Dad's work and his love of horses.

I didn't realise it at the time as I was too young to remember much at all . but Mum and Dad were living near to Dad's work in London. He worked for the Beecham Group in Brentford, London. A pharmaceutical company famous for Enos Fruit Salts, Brylcream, Macleans toothpaste and sundry other products. I recall one address where we lived as being at Baber Drive, Chiswick which is in the precinct of Hounslow. It must have been close to the Brentwood plant as Dad would cycle to work. This was before the war.

During his time in London Dad joined the Royal Horse Guards. He always loved riding horses and was an exceptional rider. To see Dad in his Royal regalia he looked very handsome. Possibly it attracted

mum to him in the first place. When George the fifth died on the 20th January 1936 Dad was one of the horsemen that rode along with the corsage. This was before I was born. He also worked in Buckingham Palace when Edward abdicated. Dad was always so pleased to recite that he was selected to be in the funeral parade.

Dad was on duty at Buckingham Palace when Edward abdicated. He witnessed and heard Edward shouting "I will marry Mrs Simpson!"

Whilst on the subject of my father. He was also a top athlete in his day. He competed in the British Modern Pentathlon and came in the first ten in the country. The sports were fencing, riding, running, shooting and swimming. Dad did exceptionally well in all events except fencing.

When the war began Dad was one of the first to enlist. He joined the Welsh Regiment. In the Africa campaign his battalion was shot to bits. He managed to escape with a bullet in his thigh. He faced this trial of effort walking the desert for over 30 days. This was quite remarkable considering he was wounded. Dad was in the desert protected by the Bedouin's for over 30 days. Owing to the assistance of these desert-living Arabs, Dad managed to make it to the allied lines. His exploits were written up in the records of Montgomery's report on the Allies Desert Campaign.

Because of the war, London was considered unsafe, which it proved to be. Therefore, Dad insisted that we move to live with my grandparents in Cambridge at 10 Warkworth Street. Mum stayed there with me for the extent of the war. My Auntie Elsie also moved in to the house with her new born son Robin, who was younger than me. I was just three.

Dad in the Royal horse Guards



The Welsh Culture

I lived in Cambridge for the extent of the war. I came to love my grandmother very much. She took great care of me and she ensured I had my scriptural learnings most Sundays. Nan worshipped at the Congregational church most Sundays. She had a wonderful soprano voice and when she grew up in Newtown in North Wales Nan had such a great voice, she was chosen to sing solos at each year's Welsh Eisteddfod's.

For hundreds of years Welsh culture has been celebrated at Eisteddfods. While the first inception is widely believed to have taken place in Carmarthen in 1176 it is also known that similar traditional gatherings and celebrations had long taken place in Newtown. Dafydd Llwyd had been the host at his home at Newtown Hall and made the town one of the cultural centres of 15th century Wales in a glorious period in Welsh literacy. However, the first recorded eisteddfod in the town came more than four centuries later, and even then, only a 'miniature eisteddfod', took place at Newtown Public Place Rooms in 1866. The Newtown Eisteddfod was first held in 1877 and became an annual festive event - held each New Year.



Grandma Maggie Silvester whom I loved with great fervour!

Dad sings at St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Maggie my grandmother was so proud of Dad's exquisite boy soprano voice that she was able to arrange for Dad to sing a Choir solo conducted by the supremo of the day Sir Walford Davies at St. Paul's cathedral in London. The very first time Dad went on stage to sing his voice broke on stage. All of a sudden Dad was no longer able to reach his high soprano range. Not only was Dad embarrassed, Grandma Maggie was so upset that she never forgave him for that night's disaster. Dad never performed as a boy soprano in public again. However, he developed an excellent baritone for which grandma had high hopes of his gaining a singing career.

When the war broke out in 1939 and when my father enlisted in the Welsh Regiment, I was but three at the time. Vernon (Jack) Silvester, as he preferred, decided it was better for my mother and I to go back to live with his parents at 10 Warkworth Street, Cambridge. That's where he took us prior to being sent overseas to fight for England with the Welsh Regiment in the Middle East. I managed to contract Whooping Cough which left me with bad asthma. This was just prior to the move to number ten. I remember the house very well as I lived there until the end of the war. I used to play outside in the street and I often had Razor the dog in company. Parker's Piece was also very close. This large common was made famous by the long-gone famous cricketer Jack Hobbs. He apparently made many centuries both on this and other cricket ovals around England. A true gentleman and much revered in his day, he was born in Cambridge in 1882, died in 1965. He was knighted and then named Sir Jack Hobbs. Hobbs scored **61,237 runs** with an average of **50.65**, and scored 197 centuries. He played in 61 Test Matches. No wonder they called the pavilion after him! I used to kick soccer balls there.

Poor Grandpa! My grandfather Reginald Silvester was a World War One veteran. However, I am unsure if he saw action as he was a cook in the British army. Nan and Pop had a strange relationship. They never slept together. In fact, Pop had a small bedroom on the top floor all to himself. Nan used to sleep downstairs in her own bedroom. I think they had a personality clash. Perhaps this was why they slept apart. I recall that on occasions, possibly because of a cold winter, being unable to use a home fire due to bans by the government, I was sent upstairs to sleep with Pop. I recall he always used long combinations to sleep in. Never pyjamas! I recall that Pop had a true male smell about him. Another aspect that used to annoy Grandma was his constant coughing. It used to drive her mad! Perhaps another reason to send him upstairs!

Living at number 10 Warkworth Street

10 Warkworth Street was a fairly long street that ran one street back from Parker's Piece. It had tenement houses on both sides of the street all joined together as you can see in photographs. I do not recall the red door in the photo, but it is the right residence.



I lived in the house with the red door. You can see that all the houses had a basement entry.

My grandmother Maggie had sensed that there was to be a war with Germany way back in 1937. In her wisdom she stocked up lots of tinned food in the pantry which was down at the basement level.



Grandmother Maggie Silvester with me when about three.

When food was rationed, she would keep us going with treats from the pantry. At the same level if I recall it, there was also a small windowless room where we were rushed to when the sirens went off. Nan and Grandpa indicated it as a safe place when the air raid sirens blasted their piercingly loud up and down sound. If a bomb hit the house, Nan felt we would be OK. We had a number of rehearsals so we knew what to do if an air raid siren told us to head to safety.

The kitchen was at the back of the house fronting on to the small back garden. Grandad 'Reggie' used to breed rabbits as his hobby. They were his sole interest. At the back of the garden was a shed with rows of cages which backed on to the street at the rear. Each hutch had prize rare rabbits and I used to love seeing and stroking them through the wire front of the cages. Not one of them ever tried to bite me.

From the back door to the rabbit hutches was a green lawn which grandad attended and kept mown with a hand-pushed rotary mower. I tried to help Grandad one day, but I couldn't even get the mower to move. I just was not strong enough. In the spring, tulips and daffodils flowered profusely each side of the lawn. At the hutch end of the lawn was Grandad's vegetable patch. The back area was probably quite small but to a small boy it seemed big.

Mum was so concerned that Cambridge was in the flight path of the German bombers that after the war had started in 1939 and England was being bombed, she was pressured to take us to a safer place to live well north of Cambridge. I think it was called Peterborough near the north border of Cambridgeshire. I do not recall it at all. I would have only been about four. Anyway, I was still sleeping in a cot at that time. We would have only been in this country town a day or two when the house next door to the one in which we were living was bombed. After the bomb struck Mum rushed in to the room where I was sleeping. The roof had caved in and there was debris everywhere, dust filled the room, and the cot was barely visible with rubble all over it. Mum was terrified that I

had been killed and in panic rushed over to the cot. But there I was still sleeping happily, covered in debris but unharmed. I guess that was as close as it gets to losing one's life.

Mum then packed up and went back to number 10 Warkworth where once again she moved in with Nan and family. it was a strange setup! My grandfather Reginald (Reggie) slept upstairs near or on the top floor. Maggie slept on the first floor. My mother slept in the room with the bay window, the lounge room. I often stayed there too, as Mum was worried about my asthma.

I remember the house very well. I lived there until the end of the war. I used to play outside in the street and had a scooter to use. One day I actually rode my scooter into one of the common pillars in the street. I hit it head first and damaged my nose. It bled profusely! I cried all the way back to number 10. Razor, the Airedale, followed me back, I think wondering what I had done to myself. My 'Nan' sat me on the kitchen table downstairs and treated my injury. The dog sat quietly on the floor watching. I Should have gone to a doctor but there was a war on. Therefore, today's identifying features on licences say 'crooked nose'.

As a child I was always fascinated by the system of bells that were set near the bottom of the stairs on the wall opposite the staircase. They were designed to communicate with people living upstairs. I used to get into trouble for jangling them to make them ring. Nan used to get cross with me when I did so and I managed more to gain more than one cuff on the head when I disobeyed.

As I said previously, my paternal grandfather Reggie slept upstairs near or on the top floor, and my mother slept in the room with the bay window which was the building's lounge room. Mum drove her ambulance most nights during the bombing. I then had my Nan take care of me. I am not quite sure why but Nan for a while had me sleep in bed with Grandad Silvester. His nagging cough kept me awake at times.

My mother's mum Mable Grove came from Guildford in Surrey. I never met her as she died in 1929. The Scottish side of the family comes from my mother's side. John northern Robertson, my grandfather, was born in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. His father Henry Robertson was born in Crief near Glasgow, Scotland, and died in 1916. Grandad's father was an excellent clay pigeon marksman and was a warden at Bladon Castle, where Sir Winston Churchill is now buried. Legend says that my great grandfather Robertson's father is also buried in the grounds of Bladon Castle.

Why is Churchill buried in Bladon? Churchill's burial at Bladon was private, **in accordance with Lady Clementine Churchill's wishes**. It was Churchill's wish to be buried in a corner of this country estate churchyard, near Blenheim Palace, his birthplace. That is now where the great man lies. Following

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his brilliant handling of the Battle of Britain he deserved this royal privilege. His voice still resonates with me today.



Bladon Castle

My mother's father

During the war Mum's Dad, lived in a property in Cambridge. He was a severe Scot and I was a bit frightened of him with his stern appearance. He had very dark hair and it was that way when he died in 1946. Yes, I knew Grandad, but he tended to keep to himself. When Mum's mother died, he took up with a younger woman who hardly ever spoke to me. They lived upstairs in the dark brick-built home with small windows. and I hardly ever saw his new wife. I gathered from Mum that she was not a nice person and had little to do with us at all. Grandad Robertson lived in his own home in Cherry Hinton Road. I stayed there a few times during the war. The next episode in my life contains my experiences at Cherry Hinton Road.

The lounge room at granddad Robertson's home had a fireplace and a piano placed at the wall opposite the small bay window. It was carpeted in a drab colour, but had an unpleasant atmosphere. I used to muck around playing the piano until Grandad told me off for the noise. Mum had two other siblings, Madeleine and Peter. Both were lovely sensitive people but had early deaths. Firstly, Peter joined up in the war effort, but was captured and taken prisoner by the Japanese in a skirmish with them. Peter was taken aboard a Japanese prison of war ship which was a converted trading vessel. With other prisoners he was chained to the sides of the ship in the keel area. I think it was called the Lisbon Maru. The Lisbon Maru was carrying 2,000 British POWs from Hong Kong to Japan in appalling conditions when torpedoed by USS Grouper on 1 October 1942. 800 POWs died when the ship sank the following day.

Many of the prisoners were shot or otherwise killed by the ship's Japanese guards. I recall my mother saying that many of the prisoners were firmly attached in chains, and that the ship was not carrying any signs that she was a POW ship. It was common place for POW ships to paint signs on the sides and deck of ships that they were carrying prisoners but the Lisbon Maru had no such signs. The

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story that Mum told me about her brother Peter used to haunt me. Uncle Peter had to die in such terrible circumstances.

There was a room at the back of the house where Uncle Peter used to live. It had an old wind-up HMV record player, and I used to play his records, mostly classical. My favourite record was called *Sparky's Magic Piano* which I played over and over again. This room was where Mum taught me the power of classical music. I have loved the classics ever since, especially Tchaikovsky and Grieg.

Madeline loses her life

According to Mum, Madeline was a beautiful woman who did not enjoy the best of health. I barely knew my Aunt Madeline as she died at the age of 23. I cannot even remember meeting her, but then I was just a babe when she passed. Madeleine died of rheumatic fever. My mother spoke to me of Madeline's great love of God which sustained her right up until her passing. They were very close as sisters. Mum used to spend night after night when Madeline was close to dying and in hospital. Mum said she slept on the ward floor so that when the end came, she would be there to hold her hand. That is true love!

One evening as her sister lay dying, Mum experienced something wonderful. She was gently holding her sister's hand as she slept, when an amazing event took place! Mum observed Madeline in her final moments, and noted a big change suddenly come over her sister. As she looked at Madeline, she sat up abruptly, her eyes brimming with tears, but with a huge smile on her face. She then spoke these words to Mum.

"Joan, Joan, I can see him. There is a God!" Madeline then laid back on her pillow, her face serene. With that she breathed her last. The impact on Mum was so strong that the image of her sister at that last moment never left. Mum told me of the event many years later when I was married to Sharon and living in Byron Bay. That is why when told of how Madeline's life ended it left such an impression on me when Mum told me of Madeline's exit. ***There is a God!***

The Does!

Next door to Grandad Robertson's home were an unusual but very kind family. Two brothers and two sisters none of them married so they lived together in their 2-story home. They had beautiful gardens and I remember they had a magnificent dolls house in their back garden, built up against the side fence. It was so large that you I could stand beside it and still it topped my small boy height. The Does owned two cars both *Rovers*. I recall that the vehicles were the first cars ever to have a semi-automatic drive or freewheeling system. They could change gears without using a clutch when they set the system on. I recall going for drives with them to Ely where the famous Ely Cathedral is located. It is approximately 10 miles out of Cambridge. The cars were luxurious for the days they were made. Quiet, smooth and comfortable.

Not far from Ely is the little village of Reach, but that is another story.

Nan's daughter, my Auntie Elsie, Dad's older sister, also came back to number 10 to live out the war. She had a son about a year or so younger than me. Robin Callow was his name. Auntie Elsie slept in a double bed with her son Robin. Sometimes it was with both of us boys. We got on well as cousins, and played together whilst in Cambridge. I lost contact with Robin with the later move to Australia. I believe Robin grew up to be a British tennis star, and could have been a champion at the sport.

One day, however, on a busy London Road, Robin was crossing at a pedestrian crossing when a runaway car hit him. Robin was so severely injured he never properly recovered from his injuries. He later died very young.

The Silvester's had a very lovely fluffy dog, a large Airedale called Rover! He and I used to play a lot together. Nan felt that I was safe when with him. She didn't mind when I wanted to go over to Parker's Piece to play ball in the park. It was not far from number 10. Parker's Piece has been suggested that football (soccer) was invented on Parker's piece ground. The rules of football (Soccer)

were almost entirely adopted by the Football Association when drafting the FA rules in 1863. You could say that Parker's Piece itself is the birthplace of football as we know it. It is a very large piece of land



Photo shows me with the Airedale dog - Razor

My grandad's love of rabbits probably helped by the lack of affection given to him by Grandma. He spent a lot of time fussing over the rabbit hutches at the rear of the back garden. I used to love to play with them. They were so soft and cuddly. For a while I could not work out why the hutches kept being emptied of rabbits. When I found out that Grandma was using the rabbits for food and

making rabbit stew, I was so affected by the loss of grandad's prize rabbits that I have never liked eating rabbit to this day.

All the windows in the house were fitted with blackout curtains to keep out the light in air raids. When the air raid siren rang out at night time, the adults all rushed to close the blinds, and we lit candles. It was Scary for me! I recall going out at times when there were planes in the sky at night. The searchlights could be seen criss-crossing over the night-time sky trying to locate the enemy. When they did the Ack-Ack guns would belt off their shells in a staccato sound aiming to bring them down. Boom, boom, boom. Scary but fascinating for a small child. The drone of the many enemy bombers was clearly heard. Then one would hear a higher pitch sound as the Spitfires and Hurricanes went about their job. However, I don't recall seeing planes shot down. The enemy bombers were headed past for Coventry where females and older men were making parts for the many planes needed by the British. New planes were sent as fast as they could be finished in order to stem the tide of the German invasion. Grandma became very cross when she found out I had snuck out the front door to view the action.

I guess the scary part of the German attacks on Britain came when they built the 'Buzz Bomb'. This was a jet-propelled streamlined weapon that was designed to cut out over English territory. It would fall to the ground with devastating results. There was no thought but to scare us and take civilian lives. When they ran out of fuel the sound would cut out and the bomb would simply fall out of the sky. The problem for everyone was that just as the buzz Bomb seemed to have passed over a place people would think it safe; it was then the bomb was at its most danger.to the listener. It would fall in the very street where it had seemed to pass. The Buzz Bomb nearly turned the tide towards Germany, but they did not have enough material to make huge quantities and that limited the terror effect. Nevertheless, it put much fear into the hearts of many English people.

During the war my mother sent me to St. Faiths school in Cambridge and grandma would take me to the congregational church most Sundays. My Christian upbringing was valuable to me. We had virtually no toys during the war, but us schoolboys would gather up horse chestnuts and play 'conkers'. We would drill a hole through the seeds with a butcher's skewer, tie it on a piece of string, knotted at one end so the seed would not fall off, and take turns at trying to break each other's seed. When we found a boy who had an old dry seed and used it to play conkers it always broke our fresh ones. We used to keep count of how many times our conker could break other boys' seeds. It was fun!

Marbles were virtually non-existent during the war. However, all of us boys knew that the blood orange marble was the one most treasured. Tombolas were the large marbles, which were almost unprocurable, but there was one boy who seemed to have many of these large marbles, which meant he often used them to break up our limited supply. The other game we played was with cardboard bottle tops. The boys would collect the bottle tops off the milk bottles. We would then see who could get their top closest to the wall. Winner would take the other boy's bottle top. I was quite good at this game! A simple but exacting test of coordination. No financial cost to anyone either!

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An amazing escape from the Germans.

My father's battalion - the Welsh Regiment - was literally wiped out by the Germans in the North African campaign and had to surrender. Dad set up a plan to escape being captured along with what was left of his battalion. By agreement with his regiment commander, Dad was allowed to take two other men and escape into the desert, with a plan to re-join the allies which were believed to be nearby. With a bullet wound in his thigh above the right knee, he had to survive not only the pain in his body, but the advancing Germans. At every place he expected to find his allies, the Germans had pushed the British further back. The task was made even more taxing as his plan to re-join and get help was thwarted by enemy successes. One of the men with him spoke Arabic and this proved to be very valuable. Because of this the three men were taken in and protected by the Senusi Arabs, the desert wanderers. Each night they were sheltered by the Senusis as they did not particularly like the Germans. On one occasion the Germans strode into the camp where Dad and his men were sheltering overnight. The Arabs rushed the three men into the women's tent where they were covered up under blankets as though they were part of the female community.

The tent was inspected but left alone. Dad and his men survived. Dad said he had such admiration for his saviours. If they had been discovered the Germans would have killed every person in the camp as retribution for harbouring the 'enemy'. Eventually Dad and one other man made it back to safety, for which they were both mentioned in despatches for their bravery in surviving the ordeal. The third soldier who was of Arabian decent stayed with the Senusis.

Following Dad's rescue, he was sent back to England in early 1944 to enjoy a short furlough. This meant I would have been about 7 at the time. He brought with him a full chest of weapons he had been using and others he had removed from dead Germans in the field of battle. His favourite weapon was the German Schmiesler – shaped like the British Tommy Gun but much more deadly. Dad also showed me a brace of magnificent German-double barrelled shotguns that he had procured from I don't recall where. They were superb weapons with ornately crafted symbols on the breech. Quite magnificent!

One day he showed how he could shoot a shotgun gun by firing it at a bottle at the end of the Warkworth Street Garden. It made such a huge noise it was frightening! The bottle disintegrated! Glass everywhere. My grandfather was angry and horrified! He was concerned that the neighbours would complain, and his rabbits would die of a heart attack from fear. They didn't so all was OK. One could not do that today! It would be a gaol sentence.

My first ever timepiece!

I recall that Grandma Silvester bought me my first watch as a present. I had much interest and fun with having a watch. It was very special as it meant I was growing up. However, one day I wanted to find out how it worked. What did I do? I pulled the watch apart using fine screwdrivers, but then could not put it together again. I left it in pieces on the front door cabinet. It would never go again! When I told Nan what I had done she gave me the biggest

boxing around my ears. It hurt so much I can almost feel it as I write. The watch was consequently a write off!

I get boarded out!

At some time during the war Mum decided that with her ambulance work and the threat of enemy bombing, that Cambridge was not safe during the time of the London Blitz. I was boarded to a family in Reach in the country. It is near to the village of Ely. I recall the family's name was Williams. She had a son of her own who was truly a nasty piece of work with a cruel streak. There was another boy that was boarded there too. Mrs Williams son was a couple of years older than me and a true bully. He used to force us young boys to do things against our wishes. I recall when Mrs Williams asked us to clean out the old stables, the threat of being bashed up by this horrible boy was so great that he made us clean it all up ourselves. He just stood around giving orders on what to do. Even tried to force me to eat it!

It must have been late summer. The home was surrounded by a large stone wall. At the back of their property and on another person's garden there was a beautiful fully laden apple tree. Cox's Orange Pippin was the variety. A lovely apple and very tasty. The bully made us climb up on the wall, pick the apples and throw them down to him, which he took home to his mother. He got the praise but we did the picking. This meant that he also got to have a second serving of the pie. I do have to say that Mrs Williams made the best apple pie I have ever tasted. She put an egg cup upside down in the middle of the pie, and cooked it on one of those old wood fired iron stoves that farmers used in those days. The pies rose up superbly cooked this way, yet were also moist under the crust. Mouth-watering I promise.

One coolish summer's day we were given permission to walk along the side of a dyke that was built nearly 2000 years before. Amazing what the Romans could do so long ago. Dead straight with a similar path on the opposite bank the dyke was fairly full and quite deep. But flowing slowly. As we walked along the left-hand side of the dyke we came across a curled snake. It was asleep in the sun. Now the only dangerous snake in England is the Adder. And this was one by its markings. It had a V shade marking on its head with a mottled body. This young inhumane boy forced me to remove my jumper and carefully pick up the snake and take it home to his family. I can assure you that I expected this reptile to awaken and bite me. I was scared of the snake but more scared of Mrs William's son.

It seemed to me to take a long time to get to Mrs Williams family home. I expected the snake to wake up any moment and bite me. But it never did. When we reached home, the boy's mother advised me to place it over the clothes line and just watch for it to wake up. But it didn't! We left it there, the snake dangling over the clothes line. It never moved. We presumed it was dead. Nevertheless, it was a totally frightening experience for a young boy, and I have never liked snakes since.

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Boarding School

I recall that when Mum visited me that I told her I did not want to live with Mrs Williams anymore. The way the Williams boy treated me was really appalling and I was just miserable living there. She listened to my reasons, and took me back home for a while. The next move of my mother was to have me sent to a boarding school. It was just as bad. I recall crying for night after night in the packed dormitory which was on a shaded veranda and end to end beds. It was cold and hard to get warm. Poor mum! I must have been a real sook, because eventually she took me out of boarding school and enrolled me at St Faith College Day school. I really liked this school and wore a lovely blazer which made me feel very special. (See Pic).

The problem for me was the regular asthma attacks. Which were really bad and scary. It used to frustrate me that I could not play soccer because of the regular attacks. What I do

remember with some fondness was in the winter when there was snow and ice. We boys used to have so much fun making an ice path which was perhaps 20 metres long. We would shuffle our feet and slide over the snow to make a narrow path which would make the snow into ice glass smooth. We would take a long run and see how far we could slide along the ice path. We had to be very careful to keep on the narrow slippery path, because if we veered off one way or the other, we usually came head first crashing down into the snow. When we went into the class, our teacher knew what we had been doing because of our often-wet trousers and tangled hair.

It was at St Faiths that I began to learn languages with French being my favourite language.



Pic of me wearing the St Faiths school blazer.

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St Faiths being a top primary school in Cambridge was preliminary to entering into the higher education system in Keys college. I looked really smart in the St Faiths blazer, and I felt really proud to wear it. With red, blue and white stripes it was very smart. However, going on to the senior college was never going to be for me. At that age I never even considered going on to higher education.

I recall that my mother had an American boy friend whilst Dad was fighting for England. He was a pilot on the Super Fortress planes. Yes. I guess it was an affair, but life was so temporary that one tried to make the best out of a bad deal. On one very special occasion he bought me a fabulous present. It was a small very detailed model aircraft carrier. I used to spend hours in the first-floor lounge room of 10 Warkworth Street with the gift. It had special pull back bands that you attached to the small model aeroplanes on the deck of the

model. You stretched the band and then let it go. When the force was released, it would propel the little planes into the air and take them across the room. I just loved playing with it. Mum's boyfriend was very popular with me. Smart man! He must have known that to get to a woman's heart he needed to woo the young son too.

It may have been close to Christmas. I recall that one day the US pilot brought in a huge box of chocolates in the shape of a heart. To me it was fabulous to have chocolates when England was on tight rations. Mum let me eat a lot of the chocolates too. I still do not know how the affair finished. Perhaps Mum's boyfriend was killed in his plane I do not know. Not long after the gift of chocolates I never saw the man again. Perhaps he went back to America and never came back. Always a mystery when a nation is at war. Now back to the war with asthma.

The asthma which cursed me occurred very regularly and stifled my breathing to the point I wondered if I might have died. There were regular visits by the local doctor. In the early stages there was no relief. I recall both my mother and my Auntie Elsie would have me sleep in their double bed in case I needed help from an attack. It is hard to describe what it is to endure an asthma attack, wheezing so much trying to get air into one's body, they wondered if it was going to kill me. And that is the definition of fear! Both my mum and aunt could do little but watch me suffer. They were scared too, and so frustrated that their support could not make my asthma go away.

I guess when I was about 8 a drug came on the market that was injected to your body and for the first time my breathing could be normalised for a time. Epinephrine injections (adrenaline) became the first method to assist in breathing. I recall that they were

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performed almost weekly. I had so many hole points in my arms that the doctor had to resort to my backside to give my arms a rest. An ordeal to say the least! But it did help at the time. It was only when we came to Australia in late 1948 that the first inhalers were introduced – Aspaxadrene. Even today I am still amazed that I was able to go skindiving and use SCUBA. This was long before Asthmatics were not given a clearance to dive.

I reached an age where the sight of fire excited me. Most of the bedrooms had their own fireplace, but with the war on night fires in the home were banned because of the giveaway smoke from chimneys. I used to look at the empty fireplace in my room and wistfully want to see it burn warmth once again. Therefore, I decided to start my own fire. I found a box of matches, filled up the waste paper basket with paper and started my own fire in my bedroom. Problem! It burst into flame and whilst I thought it good, the basket caught fire too. Pretty soon there was a big blaze in my bedroom, smoke everywhere. I was so scared I

was going to burn the house down I raced downstairs to Nan screaming 'fire fire!' She crabbed a kettle of water, and raced up to the bedroom, and quickly quenched the fire. I was given a healthy cuff around the ears and a warning never again to play with matches. As a boy I never did! A lesson learnt!

My young life to that point was one fascinated by trains. Like so many other boys the thought of being a train driver and driving one of those fantastic steam locomotives was my dream. Thomas the Tank Engine had not been invented so it was the real deal that I admired. I would have been about eight, and often after school Nan would allow me to put on my heavy overcoat and golfing type cap and head off to the railway marshalling yards where I came home covered in soot as the steam engines passed under the overhead bridge where I was watching, Grandma would chide me but understood that I was doing what I loved. At weekends I would be gone for hours. My note book, that I carried in my pocket, carried the engine numbers of so many engines that I lost count. Of course, there were many that I saw frequently as they marshalled small trucks and carriages around to where they were needed most. The engines were only small somewhat squat looking, but they were very efficient around the yards. They could pick up railway vehicles at the back of the engine or push them from the front. We used to identify the class of the engines by the number of driving wheels. The shunters only had two or four driving wheels, plus two front wheels, whereas the larger engines which were the ones that were fitted to the passenger trains could have a 4 6 2 configuration engine that was required to drive the passenger carriages it was towing. See the pic!



The Flying Scotsman.

The Flying Scotsman was one of two massive engines that I always wanted to see. The illustration above shows the engine that for a while had the ability to drive at just over 100 MPH. The other engine that I absolutely worshiped was the Mallard. It was the most streamlined locomotive ever built and the only one to go faster than the Flying Scotsman. Therefore, day after day, notebook in hand I went to the Cambridge railway yards.

At that time in England the train companies were individually owned.

There was the London North Eastern Railway (LNER). The Southern Railways (SR). The Great Western Railway (GWR) and the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). I was infatuated with all of them. I mostly saw the LNER locomotives because of living in Cambridge. Because of the war it seemed that trains were a target for the Germans. The four companies worked as a whole to keep the trains both goods and passenger trains in service.

On 3rd June 1938: Fireman T H Bray and Driver R J Duddington made history by driving the LNER locomotive '**Mallard**' at 125mph. A fantastic speed for a steam train. On July 3, 1938, Mallard billowed out smoke as it reached speeds of **126 mph** – a little over 200 kmph. With that, Mallard became the world's fastest steam locomotive, a record that it holds till this day.

Some years back when Natalie was living in Leeds, I was put on a train to take me to the railway museum in York. I stepped into the Mallard engine control bay where the engine was once operated by engine drivers and relived my childhood experience. I loved it!



I guess you can see why I was so taken with these incredibly powerful locomotives which were all coal fired. I was just a young boy living a dream. To me they were just the most beautiful and most powerful of creations. When the diesel locomotives came along, they had nowhere near the grandeur and impact of steam, or the sheer look of power that only steam can bring. Polluting, yes, but beautiful creations of man credited to the imagination of Robert Louis Stevenson when he invented the Rocket steam engine in 1829.

The war ends!

After suffering 6 years of Hitler's madness, and with massive losses on both sides. Men, women, both fighters and citizens died in huge numbers Who could not be horrified to read that millions of Jews were killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Belson and other horrific prisons set up by Adolf Hitler and his cronies, especially Himmler. It has been recorded that it is estimated the Nazis systematically murdered six million Jews and an additional 11 million people during the war. No one wishes for that to happen again!

At the cessation of hostilities, Nan learned that my father had not died as reported but had been captured at the Battle of Arnhem in Holland and had spent 6 months in a prison of war camp. It was called Offlag 79. When released Dad had lost so much weight that he weighed some 6 stone – nearly a half of what he went to war weighing nearly eleven stone.

It was interesting to hear him report to Nan that the first thing the released prisoners asked for was cigarettes. The next was eggs. Dad said that the ex-prisoners went to a local farm, and stole his entire stock of eggs. Eating at least six at a time. Later on, he said to Nan that none of her food parcels ever got to POW's. The German's intercepted all food and ate it themselves. Dad said the only food they ever received was potato scraps thrown over the wire compound, which they devoured eagerly.

My memories of Dad coming home were limited to the times he took me out. I recall that he took me to a Cambridge Fair in the local common. It was of course a very celebratory occasion. Typical stalls were the nature of the carnival including a boxing Troup which invited men to come on in and try out their skills with their own boxers. Dad could not resist this even though he was not yet fully fit. I recall him telling me to go on home to number 10 and tell my mum what he was planning to do, and why he sent me home.

Whilst Dad was giving me my orders, a huge roaring sound burst upon the crowd. Two Lockheed P-38 Lightning bomber planes suddenly roared into view and flew so low over the festivities that I could see the pilots in the cockpit. They were side by side, wingtip to wingtip, showing off their skills as victors in the war. These attractive planes are an American single-seat twin piston engine fighter bomber used by the USA in the war. A lovely plane to see for real. I could never forget the sight of these two planes almost side by side swooping the fair, and as they left they did alternate victory rolls and then soaring up into the sky in a few seconds they were gone. A fabulous experience for a small boy!



When I got back home I told Mum what Dad was doing, and she said he was crazy to fight just after he had come back from the war. Sure enough, Dad came home in a bit of a mess. He said that in the first two rounds he knocked 'shit' out of the bloke. After that in the third round Dad was belted all over the ring as his fitness gave out. He lost the fight and a potential purse. I don't think Dad ever fought again.

I do recall him telling me that before the war he fought under the professional name of Jack Silver. Apparently Dad fought a top fighter by the name of Manuel Lebrew. I think it was at Peterborough north west of Cambridge. It was for the British welterweight title. He lost and was also hit in the throat by the black man which damaged his vocal chords so that he could never regain the fine singing voice that he had before the fight. Once again Nan never forgave her son for fighting when he had a singing career in his sights. Such a waste of his Welsh talents. Pity I could never have enjoyed his great singing voice, Dad also loved Ireland and used to sing Irish songs. I recall him singing to me 'The Mountains Of Mourne' many times over the years. Such a shame that alcohol and the war changed his personality when he drank too much. That is why Mum broke up with him in the 1950's.

The war was now over for England, though it was 1945 before the Americans defeated the Japanese with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. Nagasaki and Hiroshima were obliterated, and the Japanese had little choice but to surrender. These two terrible bombs illustrated why they should not to be used in our world today.

Dad returns to live at 10 Warkworth Street.

It was really exciting for me to have my father come home after being released as a POW. I cannot recall just how much time he spent there before we moved to live in Watford and then Rickmansworth. As one could imagine everything was in short supply, so when I asked Dad if he would buy me a bicycle there was little available choice. Certainly no one had made any new cycles for years. New cycles were just not available. However, he purchased a second-hand cycle, probably 24-inch rims, I cannot recall exactly. Nevertheless, it was really exciting for me to have a two-wheel cycle for the first time. The name of the cycle make was a *Rodney*. I made good use of it, but the tyres were quite worn. However, tragedy struck one spring morning. Dad and I had gone for a ride together. He rode a full-size cycle, obtained from not sure where, to ride with me. I remember the incident so well.!

We were not far from home. In fact, it was on the far side of Parker's Piece. We both had to stop at traffic lights before continuing. As we waited, I happened to look down at my front wheel. To my utter amazement I saw this balloon effect at the left-hand side of the worn front tyre. It was the tube escaping from a hole at the side of the worn tyre near the rim.

The small balloon effect quickly got bigger and bigger. I could do nothing but watch in dismay. The tube expanded just so much in size then it exploded with a loud bang! This was followed by a noisy gasp. The tyre and rim then settled flat on the edge of the road. It was such a shock to me that I just bawled my heart out. Dad and I had no choice but to walk my wounded cycle home to number ten. Dad somehow managed to get another tyre and tube, and replaced the old tyre and he got me riding again.

Whilst on the subject of the bicycle, please remember I was only 8 years old, but having wheels was just heaven for me. I loved to go fast! This boyish attitude caught up with me one afternoon. Not far from where Grandad Robertson lived in Cherry Hinton Road was a dirt track with sharp corners. I had loads of fun racing the repaired Rodney along this track and cornering fast on the bends. This was to be my undoing one day. I was racing the bike standing up on the pedals trying to go faster when I came to a corner. As I turned the handlebars to steer around the corner, the back wheel gave way and I lost control. Over I went over the handlebars and landed in a big patch of blackberry bushes which included their sharp needle-like prickles. Ouch! This became the second time I cried. My arms and legs were badly scratched, bleeding as well, and again there were tears. I retrieved the bike and tearfully rode back to Grandpa Robertson's house. There was no one at home at the time, well his wife could have been upstairs but she wouldn't ever help me. Therefore, still tearfully, I walked next door and the Doe sisters patched me up and gave me a lemon drink and a cake. They were so good to me that family. The brothers then took one of the two Rover cars and took me for a ride in order to placate me for my having injured myself. I recall that the scratches took quite a while to heal.

Breaking the ice in the river Cam

Early one morning in early March, which is early spring in England, Dad decided he wanted to go to swim across the river Cam. I was a little unsure about going with him as he might have wanted me to swim too. I hate cold water! However, I was 'persuaded' that I needed to go with him, and take bathers and towel with me. The day dawned cloudless with a weak but brilliant sunshine. He made me get my bathers and towel because he had in mind for me to swim the river as well. I had some knitted cotton togs which were the go for that era. I recall that I had worn them when Nan took me to the Cambridge swimming pool to learn to swim. They were a blue colour with a vertical stripe if I rightly recall.

When we reached the river Cam, I was troubled to see that it was still frozen. A wedge of water had been cut into the river about a metre wide and went from one side to the other. Other men had been swimming across and back and were drying themselves in a small shed as we arrived. I guess that the river would have been about 15 metres wide. With natural

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bravado Dad duly dived in, swam across and then back in a flourish of arms and legs. When he emerged from the river and was drying himself, he then told me it was my turn. Imagine my hesitation! Here is a young boy of just eight, an asthma sufferer, being encouraged to go swimming in a frozen river, and knowing that if I refused my father would be ashamed of me.



The frozen River Cam in Cambridge

There was a ladder that went down into the water, but Dad said to just allow myself to fall in beside it and swim! It was easier that way than just going in slowly. Well, that is what I did and I can tell you the instant cold was like sharp needles on my skin. I just swim off along the unfrozen channel to the other side swimming as hard as I could as the intense cold closed all the pores of my skin. Using the breaststroke action which was the only way I knew, and swimming as fast as I could, when I reached the other side of the river, I had to swim back again. There was no exit on the other side. What an ordeal! I must have been about numb when I got back as Dad's hands lifted me out to safety. I had no strength left! Nevertheless, Dad was proud of his son that day.

Now here is the interesting part! As I was walking back up to the open shed to get dressed again with a towel draped over me, the bright morning sun flooded my body with the most amazing warm feeling bringing me back to life. It was a warmth that was so powerful even though it was weak. The pores of my body opened up to accept its radiance. I felt a blaze of achievement that I had swum across the river Cam when it was still iced up. I am sure that Dad was proud of me that day! I have never forgotten that day or the magic of the sun that rewarmed me on that early cloudless morning.

Meeting with Italian prisoners of war.

There is a memory of mine that really helps to understand the futility of war and its effect on the human race. Just as the war was ending the British captured thousands of prisoners, brought them back to England and put them to work in the gardens of cities. This included of course the parks of Cambridge. They were not handcuffed and were free to roam, but they had to do physical work in the many parks of Cambridge and report every evening to the authorities which fed, clothed, and housed them. They were all dressed in a special POW uniform in a sort of drab biscuit like colour. They were all Italians!

One day I decided to talk to one of the prisoners who was having something to eat on a park bench. Now remember, I am but a small boy who could easily have been grabbed by this prisoner if he so felt the desire. But no! He spoke in broken English and smiled at me. He started to tell me of the home he had left in Italy, and that he had been enlisted in the army against his will and forced to fight against the English on the side of the Germans. When the English took over Italy this man was taken as a POW, sent to England to work in the parks and gardens of Cambridge. He was a soft and gentle fellow, and was just so nice to me. I was a son of the enemy he had been ordered to fight but he had nothing but kindness in the discussion he had with me in his broken English. I guess that this man was obviously considered to be of little risk to anyone, and earned his conditional freedom by good behaviour. It reminded me of the futility of war, when the enemy was so nice, and was a decent human just like us.

A second trip to Wales.

Not long after the end of the war, Mum decided to take me on a trip to Wales. We did not have a car available so we went by steam train from Cambridge to London. We then caught the train to Wales at Paddington Station and on to north Wales to Caernarvon and Colwyn Bay. You can imagine my thrill just to be on a steam train again. I recall Mum allowing me to walk up to see the big engine before it left London. Steam engines have a unique sound when stationery and preparatory to leaving. The boilers make steam and excess pressure is vented off in a type of 'shtee, sthee; shtee

shtee; like sound. The unleashed power of the massive steel beast was, and is, so fascinating to a small boy. Have a relook at the Flying Scotsman I illustrated earlier. You will appreciate what I mean.

I think it might have been from London Euston station to Wales which stopped at Bangor, Gwynedd and Llandudno Junction along the way. These are the three principal stations in North Wales on the rail journey to Caernarvon. I loved to hear the sound of the train as it crossed over the rails at speed. It was sort of a clickety clack, clickety clack, repeating itself as it crossed where rails were joined together, or met a rail junction. As I stood at the train window, eyes glued on the scenery flashing past, I watched the hilly Welsh countryside whisk past as the train sped northwards. It was so green, and it seemed to be untouched by the war as well. It was to me a young boy a very beautiful country. Remember, where I lived in Cambridge it is very flat.

I was very fortunate to have the train pass the station with, I believe, the longest name in the world. I copied it from the internet as I would never be able to spell it.

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwylllantysiliogogoch

I do recall that my father used to take great pride in showing us how he could successfully pronounce the name. It has such a beautiful Welsh lilt to it when you hear it spoken, I never could speak it properly, and probably still cannot today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 3b2F-bkAdM>

If you click on this link there is a fun story about the longest name.

Dad also had a favourite saying –

“The mountain sheep are sweeter, but the valley sheep are fatter. We therefore deem it meater to carry off the latter”

He recited it with a very Welsh accent!

Well, we duly arrived at **Colwyn Bay**. It was a different time of year to when my grandmother took me to Newtown. I cannot recall about the accommodation. That seems to be lost in my memory. I know it was only a short visit there. Perhaps two, to three days.

I recall nothing of where we stayed unfortunately, but I do recall the beach where I played in the sand. However, I put in this photo of the beach at Colwyn because I remember making sand castles on it. Mum was a patient watcher until I threw a small bucket of sand over her legs. She was upset and very cross with me, and warned me not to do it again. Women always wore stockings in those days and the sand I threw at Mum was difficult to remove without taking off her stockings. I also recall that there were not many on the beach as it was still post winter, post the war.



The beach at Colwyn Bay

Caernarvon is located at the southern end of the Menai Strait between North Wales and Anglesey, 8 miles south West of Bangor. I do not recall much of my visit there, except that we had to go through a special large door to get in to see the castle. It is very old and built in 1283, which must make it one of the oldest complete castles in Britain.



Caernarvon Castle

The visit to Mount Snowden,

I guess that I recall more of my trip up to the summit café at Mount Snowden than I do of the above castle. It was a cold, overcast day when Mum took me on the little train – see photo. It is today just as I recall it. Unchanged. The little engine pushing the single carriage up the hill, and seemingly struggling to get there. In fact, it was so slow that I recall getting

out and walking beside the train and having no difficulty in keeping up with it. The café at the top is not what I recall as was there in 1947. I think it must have been rebuilt. I do recall the journey we did as it was conducted in bleak overcast conditions, and I was wearing an overcoat like in the picture with Razor the dog. It was to me an unforgettable journey after the war stopped all holidays for so many years. The picture shows a lot of green which was not apparent when Mum took me up to Snowden. I do recall there was snow on the ground. It was not deep but in patches. The hot chocolate drink Mum bought for me was very warming.



The Cafeteria at the top of Mount Snowden!

A visit to Newtown - Powys (Amazonwarrior77) in North Wales. County of Montgomeryshire.



The beautiful Welsh countryside outside of Newtown

I recall that my great Grandma Ellen Bellis was still alive in those days, but a very old lady indeed. (Born in 1867) The date I visited. would have been 1945. She lived in Newtown North Wales, but Nan Silvester wanted me to meet the old lady, so she and I visited my great grandma Ellen Bellis in her home in Chapel Street, Newtown.

Like most of the buildings in Newtown at that time, they comprised of tenement houses all linked up together with narrow front entrances and all two story. I recall the house was quite dark, but it may have been the time of the year. The kitchen was at the back facing a small back garden where one could go out and enjoy the sunshine when it occurred. Of course, it had a clothes line for the washing to dry on.

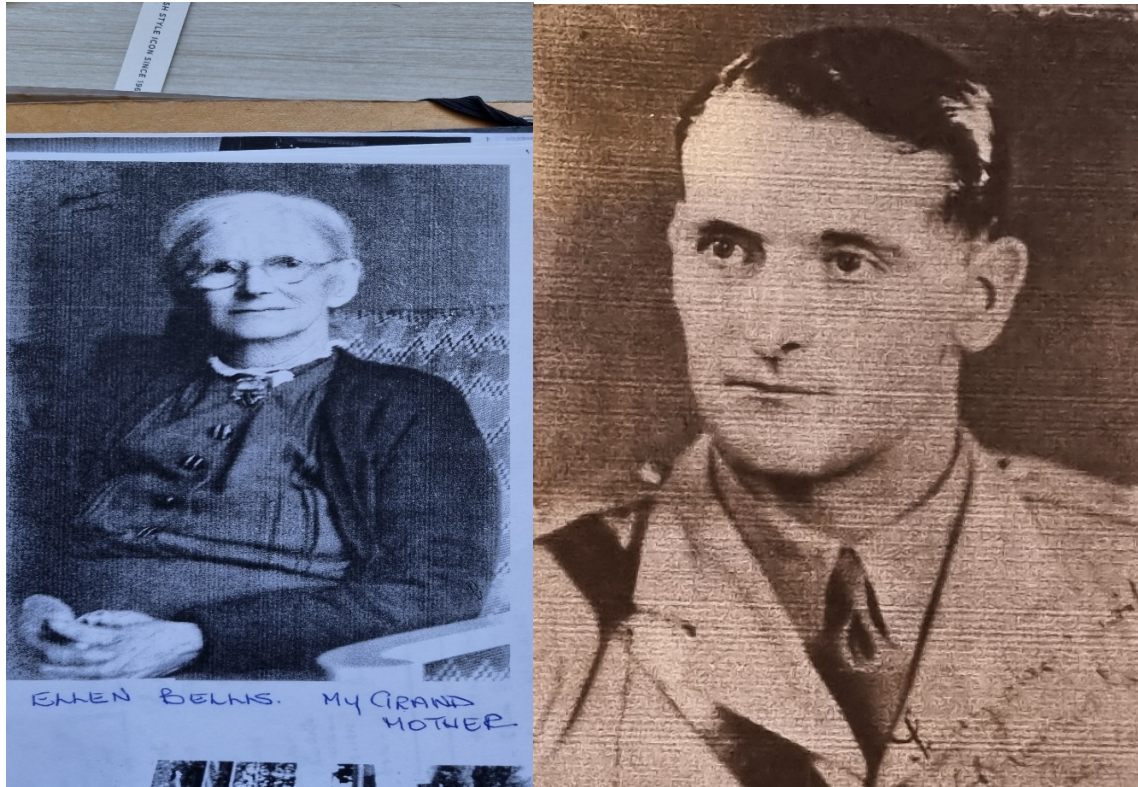
Being so narrow Grandma Bellis house had extremely narrow stairs in order to get upstairs to the bedroom and bathroom areas. The kitchen downstairs was where grandma spent much of her time as it warmer due to the stove aiding the warmth. I would have to say that as a now Australian used to the big spaces of Australia, if I went in to the house today it would be quite claustrophobic.

As it was the end of the war, Grandma Bellis like so many in England had little money and her food rations just kept her going. She used to tell me that her grandson – my father – used to spend many hours fly fishing for trout in the River Severn which was not far from the end of the street some 200 hundred metres away. At times it was a very fast flowing river. However, it was also quite reliable for obtaining an evening meal. Dad used to tell me he fished the river for trout when he visited Newtown. Dad loved fishing and even did so when we lived in Melbourne.

For interest, the River Severn stretches 220 miles (354 km), from its source in the boggy peaks of Plynlimon in the Cambrian Mountains, to its mouth in the Severn Estuary. Newtown benefits from this long river.

I spent quite a few hours down at the river catching tadpoles in a net. I would take them back to Grandma's back garden and watch them change as they morphed into frogs. I noted they created their back legs quite early in their development. Dad used to tell me he would have fished the river for trout when he visited Newtown. Dad loved fishing and even did so when we lived in Melbourne.

Hillary was born into the Bellis family and married into the Owen dynasty. She is a true Bellis in her attitude and is very enthusiastic about chasing the family history – if you ever want to know. I am not sure when the next photo was taken but Granma Bellis was at least 78 in 1945. She was born in 1867 and died in Newtown in 1959.



The photo of my father, Vernon John Bellis Silvester was taken in his wartime digs. This makes Ellen Bellis to be Dad's grandmother and therefore she was my great grandmother.

The following link takes you to my father's experiences in World War 11 when he escaped capture by the Germans.

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGrcFpMqtwrSQQZvqJKHgcNDGrL?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

I did like my great Grandma Bellis but gee she was Strict with me. I had to do everything she asked or I would get a smack on the face if I disobeyed.

I recall that we visited Newtown twice whilst living in England. The second time I visited Newtown was with Dad. He had a cousin Tom Bellis who was the local postman. He drove a red van which had an opening on the passenger's side with no door. That was the way they delivered the mail in Newtown and surroundings in those days. The postman needed to have a motor vehicle due to the mountainous country. A bicycle was out of the question!

Uncle Tom like Dad loved to play golf. As it was summer at the time Dad took me to Newtown, I recall Dad, Uncle Tom, along with me going to the local golf course late at night. At 10-30 PM it was still broad daylight such a long twilight. However, Uncle Tom loved to catch and eat rabbits which must have been plentiful at that time. Right at the golf course there existed a rabbit warren, and Tom Bellis had a pet ferret which he kept in a cage. First,

he covered up all the exits to the warren with nets and left one open. He took the ferret out of his cage and let it travel down the one free warren. It duly disappeared down the burrow. Dad and Tom just waited. Some minutes later a couple of rabbits flew up the netted burrows and got caught in the nets. Tom broke both their necks and they became rabbit stew for the family including Dad. However, the ferret must have liked furrowing in the burrow because it seemed ages before the animal came back out to be caught by Uncle Tom and be replaced in his cage. I did not witness the stripping and cooking of the rabbits however. I remembered my Grandpa Reginald Silvester's 'rabbit hutches and how his prize rabbits gradually disappeared during the war when food was so scarce. It still repelled me!

I guess I should repeat a story that Dad told me of when he was a young boy. Probably about the age in the photo. There was a local Welsh tramp that was well known in the district – a true loner. Dad said after the following incident the vagrant was called 'Iyunt' When I asked Dad why the name he said one day he and his young friends found the old tramp asleep under a tree. His mouth was wide open, snoring. Dad said the boys found a 'turd' and placed it in his wide open mouth. This caused the tramp to wake up with a start. The boys laughed and laughed and told him to take the turd out. The tramp replied " IYUNT, IYUNT. I wait until the 'Bobby' comes. He was forever called *Iyunt* after that. PS. I never heard how long he left the turd in his mouth!

The following picture was taken over 100 years ago. I would suggest about 1918. It depicts the Bellis Welsh family at that time. Dad is the small boy on the left sitting on the ground. Fascinating to think that all of us here in Australia in the 21st century are descendants.



The war ended in 1945 and as I have written Dad came back to Cambridge to live again in the family home in Warkworth street. In September of that year Ray was born. Dad then moved us all to live in *Holland Park* London to reside in the home of the parents of his best friend David Delacour. David was killed in the ill-fated Arnham drop by British paratroopers. His parents lived in one of the houses which was a side road off the main London road, and next to Notting Hill Gate. I guess one of the indelible memories of my short time living there was the first Christmas celebrated after the war's end. This must have been Christmas Day 1945. When the plum pudding was brought out for desert at the large dining table, it was round, large and flaming with brandy. The lighted Christmas pudding was laid in the centre of the table with a flourish. It arrived with a large bowl of hot custard as well. The Delacours had also placed shiny sixpenses in the dark rich pudding. I remember having two helpings just to try to find more sixpenses. I found two! I felt rich! Not sure but I possibly ended up with a tummy ache afterwards.

Mum trusted me and the post war circumstances, by giving me tuppence to go to Queens Park and play there for as long as I wanted. Queens Park had an artificial lake, and I used to see old men with model yachts, sailing these beautiful boats on the lake. It was very cold there so I had an even better idea how to use my tuppence. Travel the underground!

Notting Hill Gate underground station was close to Holland Park. I would not go to the lake every day. Instead I would walk to the station to get the underground train. I recall that the station was deep underground. It required a lift to get there. Around the lift were emergency stairs going in circles around the lift well. It was fun to run down but I took the lift to get back to the top as it was a long way! When the train arrived I would stay on past the Queens Park exit and ride it all the way to Liverpool Street Station in London. When it turned around I would stay on the train and ride it all the way back to Bakers Street where the train surfaced to run in the open air. At Bakers Street I would stay on the train and go all the way back to Liverpool Street station in London. When I had enough I would ride back to Notting Hill Gate and walk back home to Holland Park I just loved doing this. One day the inevitable happened !! An inspector asked to look at my ticket. When he saw I had only paid for two stations he warned me off staying on the train or I would get fined. I was shaking with fear, believe me.

Another trick of mine was when the train was in the London area, and where the underground met the *Inner Circle* line above it, I would get off, climb the stairs and board the train and go on that until it circled back to where it met the train station that took me back to Notting Hill. Mum never seemed to know where I was, or if she did she felt that I would be safe. Personally I always felt safe!

The Rotunda at Queens Park, London.





It was in one of these tenement homes that the Delacours lived.

Moving to Watford and then Rickmansworth.

I am unsure the reason that Dad went to live in those towns except that they are close to London where he originally worked at the Beecham Group prior to the war's outbreak.

Hertfordshire is situated on the northwest periphery of London, on the river Colne and the Grand Union Canal which is the main water transport of England. The train takes about 40 minutes to get to London. and is accessible by vehicle too of course. I recall that in the home we rented in Watford joined up with the park behind. Of course it has changed greatly since 1945 but this pic gives a bit of an idea of how pretty it was there. I

It was here and at Rickmansworth that I first decided to set up a birds egg collection. It was spring of course. We would wander the tracks beside the streams and when we saw a birds nest one of us would climb up and take just one egg out of the cluster and carefully pass it down to the other who had a small carton lined with cotton wool. We then had to remove the contents. By using a fine pin at each end, we would blow into the egg and push its contents out the second hole. We had to be careful not to break the egg.

We collected a few eggs, thrush, cookoo, blackbird mostly. However, I feel glad that we stopped after a while, and later on went out with fine nets to catch butterflies. We used to lay them out on a flat piece of paper, and I recall that we gave these samples to a local butterfly collector. I do recall that he would not take any specimens that were damaged in the catching.



A general view of the Watford Park known as Cassio bury. It is a large park and quite beautiful with huge chestnut and oak trees. Paths and smaller shrubs.

I am reminded of a journey that Mum, Nan and I did around this time. We travelled by train to Brighton on the Southern Railway. We stayed at a hotel on the beachfront. It was not far from

Madame Tussaud's waxworks which I wanted to see. By my pressing the ladies they decided that I could go through there, and so we did. Recall now that I am not even 10, and I have to say it was one of the scariest decisions I ever made as a young boy. As I walked though there were the usual wax impressions of famous people that were so realistic. There was however, down in the lower reaches of the museum the scariest scenes that I can ever recall as a small boy. Tussauds had recreated a 17th century prison and torture chamber. They had a man being stretched out on the Rack. Another scene where a victim was being cut up by a circular saw. Yet another showed a man tied to a large panel and being whipped until he bled. It was so foreboding.

Another showed a man having his feet and fingers removed. I can honestly say it has a long term and profound effect of man's cruelty to man. Even today I have never been back to Madame Tussauds. The Brighton exhibition now uses a later Tussaud name.



Grand Union Canal, Rickmansworth. Batchworth Lock.



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In latter years, Sharon and I have revisited Rickmansworth, walked along the Grand Canal, viewed both of these locks. It was and still is very beautiful. I can see why Dad liked to live in Rickmansworth. It is quite stunning and yet similar to my memories.

In writing this memoir I have given much time to Wales and the Welsh connection. I feel it's now wise to mention the Silvester family. Reginald Silvester, my Grandad was born in Staffordshire. I believe he was one of many children, descendants of George Littleton Silvester married to Elizabeth Harvey. There were eight in all. Elizabeth was probably the 'tartar' of a woman that dad used to tell me about. Apparently, the Silvester's owned stables in Stafford and I was able to confirm when I stayed with and met another descendant whose Christian name was also Vernon. I recall an occasion that his grandmother would line up all the children to give them a present of money. She gave each of them a shilling (ten cents). It was worth a lot in those days. When she came to Dad, being the youngest she only gave him sixpence. Dad said he was so upset that he didn't get the same as the other children, and never forgave her for that. I do believe, however, that that is where Dad learnt to ride a horse.

There was another Vernon in the Silvester line. However, he was known as Bill, which he preferred to be called. I met Bill when I was working in Neways and living in Teakwood Drive. I had been writing to him as I was working on the family tree at that time. Bill lived in Stafford and he was really terrific to me and spent time showing me around the district which was where I got an idea of the county which borders on Wales. I have a Christmas card of the main street in Stafford sent to me by Bill. It has not changed much from the horse and cart days.



Reads - The Swan Hotel, and ancient High house Stafford.

One of the aspects of the buildings which intrigued me was that each story up of the buildings was created to be in front of the level below. When I asked the question of 'Bill' Silvester he said that in the previous centuries the only way people could empty their pots was by throwing the waste over the balcony to the street below. Therefore, each story upwards had to lean out more than the one below so the toilet waste would not land on the levels below them. UGH!

Bill has a son named Trevor Silvester. Trevor with whom I used to correspond, and it was Trevor that wrote and said that he had traced the Silvester lineage to the 15th century and were connected to the Huguenots. He claimed that was when he lost the connection. Nevertheless, he did report that the name was well known. I did a search on the Huguenots. Read ON!

The **Huguenots** were a group of reformers in France. They challenged the power of the Catholic Church and the French crown. Huguenots argued and fought for religious freedom. Freedoms were difficult to practice through the Wars of Religion and at the beginning of the Thirty Years War. They faced harsh persecution and forced conversion as a result, especially at the hands of Louis XIV's dragoons.

Under strict control in France, many Huguenots fled the country. French Huguenots were generally literate and skilled workers and so were welcomed in communities around Europe, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, England, and the Netherlands, as well as overseas in South Africa and the North American colonies.

As the Huguenots spread, they brought their beliefs with them. The tenets of **Calvinism** to which they adhered became the foundation of many further Protestant sects and the knowledge and skills of their labour force established many of the industries in textiles and winemaking outside of France.

The Huguenots had a strong impact on the communities into which they eventually assimilated and their influence can still be seen in them today.

So where do we find the latter-day Huguenots, Silvester's buried?

Elizabeth and George Littleton Silvester are buried in the little church at High Offley, Staffordshire. They are my great grandparents. Dad's grandparents. See the gravestones and the picture of Trevor Silvester and Meryl at the side door of the church.



The church at High Offley which has the

When my uncle Bill Silvester took me to visit this very old church known as Saint Mary's, I remember the view very well. As expected, it stands at the top of a hill overlooking prime pasture land. There were a large flock of sheep grazing the fields which fell away below the church. The view over the land to the other pastures in the distance was really quite fabulous! Very Rural!



Now to the gravestones.!



You can read the epitaphs. George Littleton Silvester at the top Aged 68 and Elizabeth Silvester underneath aged 69. Going backwards from there it tells us that Elizabeth died in 1930. Cannot read the death date of George but I would estimate roughly would have been a few years earlier than 1930.

Now as I wandered around the grave stones, carefully picking my way through the grass so as not to disturb other graves without headstones, I discovered more interesting family data. Previous clergy at High Offley were also related to us. Abraham Silvester was a minister at the church, as was his father also named Abraham. That means my great, great grandfather and my great, great, great grandfather ministered there. Good Christian men ! The good thing to know was that they both died in their mid nineties. Wow!

So now we have data for you on both sides of the family, and I hope it makes interesting reading.

Planning for the immigration adventure to Australia.

It was in the second quarter of 1946 that Dad was advised by the Beecham Group that his job as Warehouse Manager in the company had been filled and was no longer available. However, because of his war service he was offered the choice of two positions in the company if he wanted to stay with them. The posting was to be as sales manager for the company in Cape Town or Melbourne, Australia. I am so pleased that Dad chose Melbourne. It was the most wonderful life-changing decision of my life. I write of this in my book *Down Under Magic*. My great disappointment in saying goodbye to Grandma Silvester was that I knew that I might never see her again. Mum, Ray, Grandma, my Aunt Elsie and my cousin Robin and I were on board the train at Cambridge when it set off for London.

As we neared the city, I noted the complete devastation that occurred from the German blanket bombing. In the process of trying to cut transport in Britain they indiscriminately destroyed mile after mile of residential and business properties. The impact on me was almost overwhelming. It was just a mass of rubble, and one wondered just how many actually died in the bombing of London. A city of 20 million people had suffered the cruel desires of one madman, Adolf Hitler, to dominate the world. Many more millions had died in this terrible war that afflicted the entire world.

After we left the train, we were taken to another platform with Mum, Nan, Ray. We boarded a Great southern Railway train and took off to Southampton. Another exciting steam train journey. Nan was rather quiet on this trip. I believe that she was feeling that she might never see us again. We were her family! She loved us all so much!

Mum was concerned that we had too much luggage and she told me to leave some of my many books behind. She insisted that my Stamp Album and my favourite book 'One Man Wallopan' had to stay behind. It left me sad.

However, I was excited to be going on a big ship. It was the liner Asturias. Formerly a two-funnel ship, it had been damaged and then grounded during the war and was raised and refitted out in Belfast. The rest you can read about in Down Under Magic!

Ray and I when living at Frankston



Mum Silvester!



To end this short writing of my early life in England, I added Rudyard's famous poem as it is the most inspirational poem and advice ever given to a son. I recall that my father used to use this poem as his guide to living. Kipling's words have always been an inspiration to me.

Kipling speaks of truth and virtue as transcending in its importance to mankind.

I do not have a poem to offer but there are aspects of my journey that have been important to me. I guess my attitude can be summarised in words that are not poetic but still have impact.

Not in any order of priority. Take what you feel may be appropriate to you.

- 1) Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.**
- 2) Loyalty to a principle or concept.**
- 3) Be true to yourself. We have but one life to lead and if we cover up mistakes with lies and misdeeds it will always come back to hurt.**
- 4) Be honest in all your dealings with your fellow man. Honesty is always the best policy.**
- 5) Always consider the other person's feelings and endeavour to understand their 'why'**
- 6) If you put others feelings before yours then you will receive kindness back.**
- 7) Being a servant has its rewards.**
- 8) Maintain an enthusiastic approach to life. Its contagious!**
- 9) Strive to be a leader not a follower. Do not let others negativity effect your beliefs.**
- 10) Adversity is a challenge to be overcome.**
- 11) Set goals for achievement in every phase of life.**
- 12) Look after your body. It's the only one you have.**
- 13) Do unto others as you would have others do to you.**
- 14) Look for opportunity, and when it occurs take it boldly.**
- 15.) Love is everywhere if you practise it yourself.**

16.) Have a strong work ethic in all that you do.

Page 40 'IF' by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,

And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!