

**Memories of**

**John Bolt**

**who moved to Headington  
as a small child in 1927  
and lived at 27 Windmill Road**

I was born on 23 November 1925 at 336, Chesterfield Road, Mansfield. My father was Charles Albert Bolt and my mother was Dorothy Evelyn née Quenby.

The Bolts were Portsmouth people; my father's grandfather, Edwin, was born at Portsea in 1833 and worked in HM Dockyard as a 'Mechanic Writer'. His son Benjamin John was also born at Portsea, in 1864, and worked as a grocer, probably moving to different shops in the area around Portsmouth. His wife, May, came from Wittering and their first child, Winifred, was born at Chichester, as was their second child Benjamin Percival. Their second daughter, Elsie, was born at Fishbourne, while Archibald and Charles were both born at Portsmouth. Charles, my father, was born on 4 April 1895, his birth being registered at Fratton.

At some date Benjamin brought the family to Oxford. The 1901 census shows him as living at 47 Oatland Terrace (now Oatlands Road) in the parish of St Frideswide, Botley and his occupation as 'grocer's manager'. He was, in fact, the manager of Lipton's in Queen Street.

Charles won a scholarship from the Boys Central School in Gloucester Green to Oxford High School for Boys in George Street. He was very keen on sports, and a photograph shows him as a member of the school cricket team. Incidentally, standing at the back of the team in the photograph is Mr Badham, presumably the sports master, who was headmaster when I went to the High School in 1937.

In October 1913 Charles began studying at Jesus College, Oxford. However, his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of war and in September 1914 he joined the Army, becoming a signaller in the Machine Gun Corps (Cavalry). He served in Egypt, Palestine and Syria and was 'Disembodied' in 1919. ('Disembodied' was the term used in the case of Territorials or Yeomanry, instead of 'Discharged' or 'Released'. It implied that they could still be recalled at some future time. How and where my father enlisted remains a puzzle at present.)

He returned to his studies at Jesus College in 1919. To quote from his Jesus College records; "B.A. Hons. Standard (short course). Natural Science (Chemistry), 1921. M.A. 1921".

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My mother's father, Arthur William Quenby, was a railway clerk, his father being a farmer. On 19 October 1893 Arthur married Ada Hebb who had been born on 10 January 1865 at 36 Mansfield Street, Leicester. Her father, Edwin Hebb, was a "Master Bed and Mattress Maker".

During the period when Arthur was employed at Oxford railway station their only daughter, Dorothy Evelyn, was born on 21 November 1895 in a flat over 65(?) Botley Road, Mr Walkett's Chemist shop. After attending a private school until it closed, she went to the Central Girls School and then, after a year and a half there, gained a scholarship to Milham Ford School, at that time "a small select school" in Cowley Place.

While she was at Milham Ford School her father was promoted to become chief clerk at Bedford station, so they moved to Bedford. Dorothy, however, remained in Oxford, living with friends who were her legally-appointed guardians, so that she could continue at Milham Ford School.

She became a pupil-teacher, teaching at Cowley St John School in Cowley road. Then, after re-joining her parents, she taught at Sandy, near Bedford.

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In 1922 Charles and Dorothy, who had been childhood sweethearts, were married at St Mary's Church, Bedford. They moved to Mansfield where Charles became a schoolmaster at Queen Elizabeth Grammar School. Due to a reduction of staff there he had to move and when I was born in 1925 he was teaching at a school in Heckmondwike, about 45 miles north of Mansfield. Being snow-bound, he wasn't able to see me until I was two weeks old.

In about 1926 someone must have told Pop, as I shall refer to him from now on, that a new company was starting up at Cowley in Oxford and was in need of staff. Temporarily leaving his family in Mansfield, he joined the Pressed Steel Company as one of the first members of staff. So new was the factory that everyone already hired, including Pop, gave a hand unpacking the machinery from the crates in which it had arrived from the USA. (There was a strong link between the PS Co and the Budd Corporation in the USA.) Pop lived for a short time with his mother in New Inn Hall Street, where she kept lodgings for students, while he was arranging the purchase of no. 27 Windmill Road, Headington, for his family to live in. The purchase was completed on 11 June, 1927. There, my sister Margaret Mary Ada was born on 18 May 1928.

The house had been built in 1888 for Mr George Stace, the headmaster of St Andrew's School in London Road. The land on which it was built had been part of an area of fields, parts having been sold by the Reverend Ed Hill and John Lock Watson to Daniel Clarke, and by Daniel Clarke to J. Durran for the purpose of building houses. Nos.25 and 27 were the first pair to be built. Our house continued to be known locally as "Stace's house" for many years after we moved there.

The house had been enlarged by the Staces. They had added a garage at the side, with a bedroom and bathroom above. Access to these was via a passage from the landing, made by reducing the width of the second bedroom. A bathroom was, of course, quite rare in a house of that age.

Downstairs, the front door had been replaced by a window and the passage incorporated into the front room, making it a good-sized room. Entrance to the house was via the garage into the front room; the garage was floored with small black-and-white tiles in the front half, and red quarry tiles in the rear half. A scullery had been added beyond what had been the kitchen, with outside lavatory and coal-shed beyond that. So the house ended up with three reception rooms, plus kitchen downstairs and four bedrooms and bathroom upstairs. In

fact, when the house was sold after Mother's death, the garage was converted into one or two more rooms, for although we happily kept our Morris Eight in it, it was now too small for modern cars.

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In 1930, when I was 4½ years old, Pop was sent to Paris by his firm to reorganise the costing system at the Citroen plant. It was very rare for people like Pop to go abroad on business in those times, and Mother was very proud of him. They were very much in love, but I didn't realise how much until I read the letters which Pop wrote almost every day to Mother while he was in Paris and which she kept.

Just how we came to call our father 'Pop' I've no idea, but in a national daily newspaper in the 1930s there was a cartoon strip the central character of which was called Pop. However it began, we called our much-loved father 'Pop' as a joke to begin with and he would respond "Don't call me Pop! I've told you once, I've told you twice, I've told you a thousand times – don't call me Pop!" So of course we did and 'Pop' he remained until he died and still remains in our thoughts and speech.

We grew up having both grandmothers but neither grandfather. We called the grandmothers 'Big Granny' and 'Little Granny' Big Granny was Pop's mother, who was taller than Little Granny, Mother's mother (Granny Quenby, to be correct). Little Granny's house was still in Bedford but she spent a lot of time with us at Windmill Road; the bedroom at the top of the stairs was permanently hers. We had a much closer relationship with her than with Big Granny, obviously because she was with us so much, but by comparison Big Granny seemed more serious and even slightly stern.

I always associate Little Granny with remedies and/or preventatives. Red flannel next to the skin, goose-grease rubbed on to the chest, the smell of liniment, paregoric lozenges, Syrup of Figs, cod-liver oil. At one time I wore an iodine locket, a small Bakelite locket containing I know not what, and had a piece of Thermogene pinned on to my vest!

Many of these preventatives were applied to me because it was perceived or believed that I was bronchial. Another preventative or cure was to fill the bedroom with the fumes of either smouldering herbs or a hated liquid (Friar's Balsam?). A small quantity of one or other of these was placed in a small pan which sat on the top of a little 'lantern' which housed a night-light. The heat from the night-light (now called 'tea-lights') caused the smouldering or fuming. That from the herbs was not unpleasant and the action was pretty to watch.

The one preventative which I loved and still remember with pleasure was extract of malt (was Virol the same?), recalled in the Pooh story as Roo's medicine. Delicious! ( I have just looked up 'paregoric' in the dictionary and discover that it's a 'camphorated tincture of opium used to reduce pain'!)

I think Little Granny must have been responsible for the wide use of condiments and pickles in our family. We had, for example, vinegar on our cabbage – but we sprinkled sugar on our lettuce. Both seemed normal to us and I was surprised later when other people were astounded! We had lots of pickled cabbage, pickled walnuts, pickled gherkins, pickled nasturtium seeds, pickled eggs – all home-made – as well as the usual chutney and mixed pickles, also home-made.

There was also always home-made jam – blackberry-and-apple, raspberry, plum, blackcurrant, damson, apricot – and marmalade. Not to mention home-made wine, mostly dandelion or cowslip.

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When we first knew Big Granny (i.e. Pop's mother) she had the boarding house in New Inn Hall Street; I assume she went there after Pop's father died. It was a tall house and her rooms seemed to be upstairs, but I recall very little about it except a very large vase standing on a landing. In fact I only remember one visit, although there may have been more. I just remember playing on the carpet with what must have been a new present, which memory tells me was a tin-plate clockwork toy based on a powered railway coach. I also remember a tin-plate clockwork airliner with red and green bulbs at the wing-tips powered by a battery inside the fuselage, so it may very well have been Christmas time.

Later, Big Granny went to live with Auntie Win (Pop's sister) and her husband, Uncle Bert, at their house in Stephen Road, Headington, along with our cousin Joan Gibbons. Joan's mother, Pop's other sister Elsie, had died in childbirth in 1920. Although their house was virtually only round the corner from us, I never felt I really knew them. Margaret and I liked Uncle Bert, who played with us and who, when we offered him a sweet, invariably replied "No thanks, I don't smoke", to our huge enjoyment. But we were, I think, rather in awe of Auntie Win and Big Granny. Joan was older than us and we were never close.

Pop's brothers, Benjamin and Archibald, both had pubs when Marg and I knew them, although one or both had previously managed Lipton's. Ben, or Uncle Perce as we knew him, was landlord of the Crown in Cornmarket until he retired, while Uncle Arch, I believe, first had the Druid's Head at the corner of George Street and New Inn Hall Street until that was demolished and then had the Black Boy in Old Headington.

Uncle Perce and his wife Auntie Doll had a daughter, Daphne who was a little older than I. Several years later they had a second daughter, Anne who was much younger than us. Uncle Arch and his wife Auntie Florrie had two daughters, Joyce and Barbara, whom we were never close to.

It seems to me, in retrospect, that we only visited those two families at Christmas or the very occasional party. Marg and I were usually sent by Mother to deliver and collect presents and we both hated it. It seemed that they had either just closed and were clearing up, tired out and grouchy, or were preparing to open, were busy – and grouchy!

To be honest, I think Mother was snobbish about having pub landlords in the family, and in any case was far more interested in her families, the Hebbs and the Quenbys, especially the Hebbs. Certainly she seemed to know little or nothing about the Bolts or didn't pass it on.

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The house at Bedford, no. 37 London Road, to which the Quenbys had moved and where Little Granny lived – when she wasn't with us in Headington – until her death, was a treasure trove to Marg and me, full of interesting old things. In the front room was a large sideboard, the drawers and cupboard of which were full of fascinating things, like bullets from the Great War, newspaper pages about the airship R100 which had been built up the road at Cardington, even a piece of silver fabric from the covering of the R100. There was a wind-up gramophone with a large green horn shaped like a lily flower, on which we played small (5 or 6 inch) records of 'Quick Marches of the British Army – The Grenadier Guards', 'The Coldstream Guards', etc., all played too fast. There was also a record of 'Bye-Bye Blackbird', said to be my favourite, which I could pick out from the pile before I could read! On a shelf high on the wall was a seagull with hinged wings (it could have been stuffed but I remember it as being light) and an ostrich egg.

In the back room stood an upright piano which sounded what would nowadays be called 'honky-tonk'. There was also a very early vacuum-cleaner, worked by vertical bellows with a long handle and standing on castors. On the mantelpiece and its ledges were interesting ornaments, like a monk with a nodding head and a figure of Bubbles. The white paint on the mantelpiece had never hardened so that all the ornaments stuck slightly. I don't remember the back room ever being used.

The dining-room, originally the kitchen, seems in retrospect to have been dark. If so, that would have been because outside the window was what was called a castor-oil tree, then a six-foot fence and the house next door. (No. 37 was one of a terrace.) The dining-room mantelpiece over the kitchen range was high and had a fringe with bobbles round it.

The kitchen, then called the scullery, also seems to have been dark. I remember little about it, except for the copper in one corner. Likewise, I remember little about the upstairs, except that we slept in the second bedroom, in a bed with brass knobs with a police whistle hanging permanently from one of them. Somewhere there was a bathroom.

I remember the house as being lit by gas, although Margaret can only remember electric light which, I believe, wasn't installed until the late 1930s. The gas lights gave a slightly greenish light and made a gentle hissing sound, as well as a 'pop' when lit. Instead of replacing bulbs, one had to replace the gas-mantle occasionally. These when new were like little flat net bags made of a silky material. The neck of the bag was fitted over the gas jet and when the gas was lit

the mantle became spherical and the silky material became incandescent, hard and fragile.

When we stayed at no. 37 when I was young, we went to bed by candle-light and the flickering shadows, in conjunction with the heavily-patterned wallpaper, made it all too easy to imagine hobgoblins and weird beasties lurking in the corners.

The garden was small and unkempt. It had an old see-saw made, I think, from railway sleepers. Around the bottom of the castor oil tree were many empty soft-drink bottles, some of them being the type with a marble in the neck.

We used to walk along the river embankment. On some occasions a band would play from a large raft moored in the middle of the river, although I don't remember ever being there when that happened. I remember that there was, at the entrance to a park or open space towards the far end of the embankment, a Great War cannon or field-gun over which we could climb.

There was an arcade of shops in the town and I bought, or had bought for me, a glider in the shape of Klemm Sohn, the man who in the 1930s used to jump out of an aeroplane and 'glide' by means of 'wings' of material between his arms and body, before opening his parachute. My glider had pivoted arms with triangular fabric (oiled silk?) 'wings'. When catapulted into the air by elastic band the arms stayed alongside the body but spread out as the speed dropped; there must have been elastic to cause them to spread.

Just up the road, past the end of the terrace there was a garage where Pop had one day taken the car for some reason. Having driven the car into the building, he must have put his foot on the accelerator instead of the footbrake, or his foot may have slipped, for the car suddenly shot forward and knocked down a portion of a portion of brick wall (inside the building).

And there was also a handy fish-and-chip shop just over the railway bridge from no. 37!

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We, like most children then, had only a few toys, but they were kept for a long time. New toys had a low priority and in any case there wasn't the constant pressure on children from manufacturers and peers to buy them or have them bought. There were no toyshops in Headington, the nearest being in Oxford, where we seldom went. Any pocket money we had was almost certainly spent on sweets or, later, on comics! My first toy railway engine was bought for me by Little Granny, probably when I was 10 or 11. She bought it at Elliston & Cavell's (now Debenham's) and I recently discovered that it cost 7/6 (37p). It was a clockwork Hornby 0-4-0 tank engine in LMS livery and I still have it! But that was a very special present and our toys would normally have been much simpler and much less expensive. One reason that they had a long life was because they were not thrown away when they had lost favour but were put away.

In the cupboard under the stairs was kept a wooden box with a hinged lid, and in the box were kept the various toys we had stopped playing with for the time being. The box itself tended to get pushed deep into the cupboard and be forgotten until, probably on a winter's day, one of us would say "Let's get the toy-box out!" and out it would be dragged and all the old forgotten toys brought out to be played with again with fresh pleasure on the rug in front of the fire!

Fires – open coal fires – were essential in the winter months, there being no other method of heating the house. They were also sources of pleasure in other ways. One could toast bread or crumpets, for example, sitting in front of the fire and using a toasting-fork. The elegant toasting-forks were brass but we used an extending one made of steel wire; not so elegant but more comfortable, allowing one's hand to be further from the fire. 'Beef dripping' were not dirty words then and hot toast with beef dripping was delicious! It still would be, come to that! Likewise, toasted crumpets with lots of butter!

Talking of food, we seemed to have lots of things which aren't eaten now, at least in our part of the world. We had brains on toast or fried bread, collied head, pig's trotters which I didn't eat, tripe which I couldn't face, black pudding, cod's roe which I loved, soft herring roe which I couldn't tackle until I was older, and sprats which were fried whole, so it included heads with eyes. And of course we had lots of dumplings and suet puddings which are frowned on now. Rabbit stew with dumplings, roly-poly pudding with jam, plum-duff, meat pudding, apple pudding. We loved bubble-and-squeak, and we often had poor-man's-goose (our name for liver, onion and potato hot-pot). And there always seemed to be a home-made fruit cake to have a wedge of, kept in a Macintosh's Toffee tin in the larder.

There were no tinned foods in our larder and of course frozen food didn't appear until many years later. Some food was preserved, however, especially during the Second World War. Eggs, when plentiful, were preserved in isinglass in a large container; runner beans were preserved in salt, with a layer of beans, a layer of cooking salt (cut from a block and crushed), another layer of beans and so on; fruit was bottled if not used for jam. No fridge – again, many years in the future – so meat and fish was cooked after buying; the meat was kept for a short time in the meat-safe, a wooden cupboard with perforated zinc panels which allowed air through but kept flies out. Fish was eaten fresh, there being two fishmongers just up the road in Headington. Keeping milk and butter in hot weather was always a problem

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At age five I went to school, to St Andrew's C of E School in London Road, opposite what became Bury Knowle Park. The school was always known locally as the Field School, and a glance at an early Ordnance Survey map will show why. It was built on the London Road boundary of a large area of field, Quarry Field, which originally extended across to the Old Road and between Quarry

village and Windmill Lane as it was called then. At the bottom of the school playground was the footpath across Quarry Field and linking Quarry village to St Andrew's Church in Old Headington. By the time I was at the school Stile Road had been built, the footpath coming out into Stile Road and continuing on the other side of London Road, outside the boundary of Bury Knowle.

The headmaster of the Field School when we were there was Mr George Stace junior, always called Gaffer Stace by the pupils. He was the son of the original headmaster, the George Stace from whom Pop bought no. 27 Windmill Road. I discovered many years later that he, our headmaster, had been a pilot in the Great War, which explained a memory I'd had of seeing a four-bladed propeller on the wall of his study on the one and only time I'd been in that room.

I started, of course, in the 'babies', the reception class with Miss Baker. I have no memories of my time in that class, but the smell of a newly-sharpened cedar-wood pencil or a felt blackboard rubber with chalk dust on it takes me straight back to that time – we used small felt blackboard rubbers, like thick slices of roly-poly, when we wrote or drew on the small blackboards which were fixed to the wall at our height.

My first real memory of St Andrew's is of being in Miss Pritchett's class (she was the Head of Infants) and being sent down to Miss Baker's class as punishment for some naughtiness. I also remember that we used percussion instruments, and Mother felt, for some reason, that I should have my own cymbals. However, mine were smaller than the school ones and I was always conscious of that.

We all had school milk and I hated it, especially in the winter when, the crates having been brought to the class by the 'big boys', the bottles were placed on the hot-water pipes to 'take the chill off'. Ugh! The ½-pint bottles were closed by a card-board disc like the one-pint ones, but with a press-out circle in the centre for the drinking-straws, which were actually made of waxed paper. These discs with the hole in the middle could be used for other things; for example, by winding coloured raffia around them and then sewing them together, a shopping bag could be made!

About this time I was in love with a girl in the class named Pat. She can be seen sitting next to me in the group photograph of the Infants. I can still remember her clearly as wearing a white blouse and tartan skirt.

The Infants' playground was separated from the Juniors' by a railing fence and some of those 'big boys' really seemed huge to us. Of course, some were about 14 years old and were, in fact, truly big boys.

Another abiding memory was of being told by Miss Hill, one of the Junior teachers, to "do 20 lines", probably for talking in class. This was my first experience of 'lines' and I conscientiously began to draw twenty lines on a piece of paper! Of course, I was quickly put right by a more experienced neighbour, who told me that I was supposed to write 'I must not talk in class'. This was, I am sure, the only time I was given this particular punishment at St Andrew's, alt-

hough when I left the High School I reckon that I owed several hundred ‘lines’ to various teachers!

However, I did have my first caning at St Andrew’s. Gaffer Stace caned another boy (on the hand) in front of the class and accused me of laughing about it. So I got one stroke on my hand. Pop had once said that the first time I got the cane he’d give me sixpence, but the second time he’d ‘slipper’ me. In fact, Pop never used corporal punishment, or any other form, on us as far as I can recall and on the one time he tried to slipper us we were all falling about with laughter.

School time at St Andrew’s was happy on the whole. The only part of the school which I hated was the toilets. They were in a small building at the far end of the playground – and they stank! I would have died before I used one of the cubicles!

At playtime we played ‘Cowboys and Indians’ or ‘Robin Hood’. I can clearly remember watching, during one playtime, an aeroplane writing the word ‘Persil’ in the sky with smoke. I also remember all the children being taken outside to the front of the school to see the hunger-marchers go by on their way to London. Of course, it meant nothing to us children and I only realised much later what it was about.

School trips were not common in those days, and I only remember two. One was by coach to London to see the Silver Jubilee decorations – only we didn’t seem to be able to find the main streets so we didn’t see much of interest. The other outing was to White Horse Hill – only it rained at least part of the time, so my memories are of children sliding or rolling down slopes and then sitting in the coach with the windows all steamed up!

One other outing I remember took the form of a walk down Headington Hill to St Cross Church where our teacher, Mr Drewer, showed us a gravestone with the date ‘February 30th’ on it. I’ve no doubt that Mr Drewer showed us other interesting things as well but that is the only thing that sticks in my memory.

We were obviously taught very efficiently to read, write, and do arithmetic, but the only actual lessons which I remember were singing, especially with Mr Clibborn, whom I remember with gratitude for that reason, and craft. Probably in Miss Hill’s class I started to make, and failed to complete, a pair of slippers. The intention was to wind wool (green, in my case) around a U-shaped cardboard template and a brass curtain-ring, take the wool off the cardboard, sew the ends together, and then presumably sew on a sole. I finished one to the stage of sewing the ends together, but the other stayed on the cardboard and for many years the two items lived in the cabinet in the corner of the front room at home.

Academically, I seemed to do very well at St Andrew’s but there didn’t seem to be much competition. I ended up in a class higher than my contemporaries, where the only competition was from Norman Vallis of the timber-merchant

families in Windmill Road. He and I used to alternate between top and second in class, albeit without trying.

At that time, while in Mr Clibborn's class, we took the Scholarship exam, the equivalent to what was later called the 'Eleven Plus'. Those of us who passed, including myself, Norman, and presumably some others who would still have been in Mr Drewer's class, would at the beginning of the next school year go on to one or other of the local Grammar Schools.

Much of Quarry Fields still remained when I was at St Andrew's. The footpath from Quarry to Old Headington, as I said earlier, passed the bottom of our playground to come out in Stile Road – hence that name. The school dentists used a small building at the east end of Margaret Road School, then known as the Council School. So if we had to go to the dentist we went out of a gate at the bottom of the playground, walked a few yards along the footpath and the across Quarry Field to Margaret Road, which at that time ended at St Anne's Road. Quarry Fields, south of the footpath, was just a large expanse of grass with one small wooden swing. I seem to remember coming to a board fence with houses behind, so it's possible that Weyland Road and Mark Road had been, or were being, built. Certainly, from our bathroom window, if we looked across the nursery at the bottom of Stile Road with its gate at the end of Southern Road, we could actually see the belfry of Quarry Church before Wharton Road was built.

A feature of school life at that time which stays in my mind was the common use of nicknames. I still remember, and visualise, 'Hooky' Walker, who sat next to me in Mr Clibborn's class, 'Kicker' Trinder, who told my wife Phyllis a few years ago that he was supposed to have kicked a teacher, 'Pudgy' or 'Puggy' Jacobs of the removals family and 'Sh...y' Baker (Don't ask!). I didn't have a nickname at St Andrew's, and they were rare at the High School, their use having seemed to have died out.

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St Andrew's being a Church School meant that we went to church on St Andrew's Day and (I think) on All Saints' Day, which meant a half-holiday each time. St Andrew's Church was dark in those days and smelt of incense – not that I knew then what the smell was – and really the services meant nothing to us. The vicar, the Rev. Bird, came into school to teach us something about Christianity but all I've ever been able to remember about his visits is that we had to stand up straight with our arms rigidly at our sides to recite the catechism, nor have I yet found out what is meant by 'N or M' after the question 'What is your name?' No, the great advantage of going to a Church School was having a half-holiday!

So we boys tended to lark about in the pews, partly hidden as we were. In fact, I was once called to Gaffer's room to be questioned by a plain-clothes policeman as a result of the larking about. The offertory box at Quarry Church had

been broken into and a paint-rag with my name on (we each had a small piece of rag to wipe our brushes on) had been found there. I was able to convince the policeman that it had been taken from me during the larking about in St Andrew's Church and that I'd only been inside Quarry church once, with my grandmother. Gaffer vouched for my blameless character as well, so that was that.

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On our way to school each day we passed our 'tuck shop' – not that we'd ever heard that description. This was Williams', whose premises occupied the corner of London Road and Western (now Holyoake) Road. The building is still there at the time of writing although the frontage has been restyled. It is a long building which could originally have been a pair of semi-detached houses or one double-fronted house, or it might have been built with shops on the ground floor. As the Williams' premises it was two shops; the right-hand part, on the actual corner, was the 'mechanical' side, where Mr Williams built and repaired bicycles, sold parts and associated accessories, re-charged accumulators and sold paraffin and petrol. The latter was dispensed from a hand-operated pump on the pavement; a handle was turned one way to bring up and deliver some petrol, then turned the other way ready for another lift.

But it was the left-hand side of the building which concerned us. This was a sweet-shop, normally run by Mrs Williams, and it was there that we spent our pennies, halfpennies (pronounced 'haypnies'), or even farthings. In other 'words' 1d, ½d, or ¼d. There was a great variety of sweets to choose from but we were restricted financially to a few favourites. 'Gob-Stoppers' were popular but you could only afford one or perhaps two; 'Traffic Lights' which changed colour as you sucked them; 'Rifle Shots', like little coloured ball-bearings, because you got a lot for your money; 'Sherbet Dabs', small triangular paper bags of sherbet with a sort of small lolly on a stick to dip into the sherbet; 'Sherbet Fountains', a little cardboard tube containing the sherbet, with a liquorice tube sticking out of the top through which you sucked the sherbet; rolls of liquorice tape with a little sugar ball in the middle; liquorice tubes with a little wire basket on the end to hold a small, light ball (possibly made of pith) which could be made to hover by blowing through the tube.

Most of these could be afforded once in a while, but stuff like the flavoured toffee on show in the window normally had to wait until we were older and had more pocket money. The flavour was in a layer through the middle – pink for raspberry, yellow for banana, etc. – and the toffee was in slabs which had to be broken by Mrs Williams with a little hammer and weighed. Some of the pieces were big enough to make pretty good gob-stoppers!

Of the variety of sweets on display in boxes or glass jars very few were wrapped, let alone double-wrapped as today. Small items like 'Rifle Shots'

were poured from the jar into the brass pan of the scales to be weighed, then poured into a little triangular paper bag which became conical when filled.

As well as sweets, Williams's sold soft drinks, mainly Tizer. However, for our money there were 'Penny Monsters' – which we slanderously reckoned were made up from the dregs of the more expensive Tizers!

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Other shops in Headington held a fascination for me as a small boy. Up the road from us in Windmill Road was, on one side, the Home and Colonial and, on the other side, the Maypole. Both were grocers of the old type, with marble-topped counters, shining brass scales and weights and men assistants wearing clean white aprons. Very few items were pre-wrapped, so we could see butter being weighed out and patted into shape with wooden butter-pats, then expertly wrapped in grease-proof paper. Cheese was cut from a large block, using a wire cheese-cutter wit wooden handles. Sugar was already in packets which were actually always of blue paper (sugar paper?) Biscuits were displayed in large cubical tins with a glass panel in the lid so that the customer could see and choose the desired biscuits which were then taken out of the tin by the assistant, weighed and put into a paper bag. Tea, I think, was one of the few items to be sold pre-wrapped as nowadays.

The whole corner of London Road and Windmill Road was occupied by the Co-op drapery department; men's wear on the London Road and ladies' clothes around the corner. I can see clearly in my mind the old-fashioned dummies still used in the windows to display the suits and dresses even up to the time the drapery department was given up.

The shop as a whole continued into Windmill Road with a grocery, and later perhaps, a chemist's department. The attraction here for me was in the method used to deal with customers' money. The money and slip was sent to a cashier in a raised cubicle at the rear of the shop by enclosing it in a container which was then attached to a carrier above the assistant. He pulled a handle which released a spring which shot the carrier along an overhead wire to the cashier. The receipt with any change was returned to the assistant in the same way.

I believe the same system was used at Cape's shop in St Ebbe's in Oxford. Webber's in the High, on the other hand, used the pneumatic tube system to carry the money to somewhere totally out of sight. The money and paper-work was put into a cylinder which the assistant popped into a sort of metal box with a spring-loaded door on the end of piping. The container was sucked up the pipe and a few moments later it popped back out into a basket with the change, etc. inside it.

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Thinking of Webber's brought to mind the feeling of boredom I used to get if I was taken there by Mother when she was buying, say, a dress or curtain materi-

al. It seemed to be, and was I expect, a very large shop so we covered a lot of ground while Mother looked at examples and discussed them – not very interesting to a small boy! There was, though, the magic tube which took the money, and before that there was the gadget on the edge of the counter which measured the length of the material. It was a metal box with a slot through which the assistant drew the length of the material, and presumably a dial which showed the length passing through. I'm pretty sure that it also marked the desired length by making a small cut when the assistant pressed a button or small lever.

Cape's, for some reason, wasn't so boring, having a greater variety of stock to do with sewing and in a smaller area. I expect that for measuring lengths they had the more usual aid of a brass yard-stick screwed to the edge of the counter. They also had the overhead cable 'railway' to deal with the money *and* they had a floorwalker who directed customers to the department they wanted. I remember him as smartly, even nattily, dressed and awe-inspiring to a small boy. I mentioned farthings earlier, and at Cape's and other shops, if change included a farthing it was usual to offer a packet of pins, for example, instead of the little coin. An item might cost, say, 'one-and-eleven-three', that is one shilling, eleven pence and three farthings, so that change from, say, half-a-crown would include a farthing; it would be sixpence-farthing in that example. So sixpence and a packet of pins might be offered to the customer. Farthings featured very often in prices in those times, but the actual coins were small and fiddly and tended to get lost or overlooked.

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As I have said, children had far fewer toys when we were young. They used their imagination and created their playthings if they needed them. There was so much less road traffic and, although we didn't play in the street, most children did, using spinning-tops, marbles (along the gutter), hoops (often bicycle wheel rims) and trolleys. Most boys had a home-made trolley, using old pram wheels, bits of plank and a soap-box. The front axle was pivoted to allow steering using string 'reins'. We didn't have a trolley, of course, but I was allowed to play football in the 'rec' (recreation ground) at the corners of Windmill Road, Southern and Western Roads. This was an area of earth and patchy grass surrounded by a tall chain-link fence and containing two wooden double swings, one at each end. During World War 2 an air-raid shelter was built on it, although neither Margaret nor I can remember it. Later the surface was tarmacked and eventually, as fewer and fewer children used it, it was turned into a car-park.

We rarely if ever used Bury Knowle Park which was opened in 1931, and most of our playing took place in our garden. This was not large but contained four apple trees, a plum tree and originally a pear tree. This latter had been planted, or had been allowed to grow, against the wall of the house and had been trained against it but had to be removed because of its size and the damage it was causing to the brickwork. The apple trees remained, however, and were

very good for climbing. There was also the large shed – a workshop in the Staces' time and still serving as one for me, as well as being a den and headquarters and something else to climb on to. We also had a swing, built for us in wood, straddling the path to the shed. At one time we had bantams in a small lean-to against the side of the shed.

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Pop was no gardener and the privet hedge on the south side of the garden (there was one on both sides) grew so thick that we could make a den in it. I remember helping Pop cut it at last, using the long-handled pruner because it had become too tough for shears. We had a sandpit at one time which Pop made by merely taking of the topsoil because in that part of Windmill Road the soil is so sandy.

When I was little I had a pedal-car which, in the photographs, looks very crude by modern standards. The bonnet was plywood bent round into a semi-cylindrical shape and the seat was also of bent plywood. We had a trike, too, also very crude, with the frame made of half-inch rod, solid rubber tyres and the pedals fixed to the front axle.

Although the garden was small and the lawn even smaller, Margaret and I both learnt to ride a bike on a fairy-cycle passed down from a cousin. This was also crude, again with solid tyres and only a front brake, but we went round and round the lawn with Pop holding the back of the saddle – until one day he wasn't, and we were doing it on our own!

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There was, of course, no television and we didn't seem to listen to the wireless a lot. In fact, my chief memory of the wireless, apart from 'Children's Hour', was of Radio Luxemburg, a commercial station which broadcast football results which Pop had to check. He did the pools regularly and I sometimes had to buy his Postal Order for him. He must also have had occasional bets on horses, for he kept a foolscap-sized ledger in which he pasted the racing results from newspapers. But it was all on a mild scale.

We children regularly listened to 'Children's Hour' and I still think with great pleasure of Uncle Mac and Uncle David and such programmes as 'Toy Town', with Uncle Mac as Larry the Lamb; 'Wind in the Willows' with Richard Goulden as Mole; the Pooh stories with Norman Shelley as Pooh (to this day, the only possible voice for Pooh, although Alan Bennett makes an acceptable second choice) and the L. du Garde Peach series such as 'Castles of England'.

We heard dance music played by the bands of Jack Payne and Henry Hall and, of course, we all had to listen to the King's Speech on Christmas Day – very solemn and very boring to us children, plus having to stand up for the National Anthem afterwards!

I remember hearing the name Christopher Stone mentioned as being what would nowadays be called a disc-jockey; another name was Collie Knox who

was, I believe, a wireless critic in the *Daily Mail*. But it wasn't until the war that wireless had much impact on me. What it did mean to me earlier was taking the accumulator from our wireless set round to Mr Williams' shop to be re-charged. All wireless sets were battery-powered in those days but the batteries were 'wet', working more like a car battery. The accumulator was a square glass jar containing metal plates in acid and, like a car battery, became discharged. So the wireless owner had two accumulators, one in use while the other was being re-charged. The jar had a detachable handle with which I carried it round to Williams's. I have no memory at all of our battery wireless set which, I suppose, had a horn loudspeaker, but I can remember the later dry-batteries. The wireless used two; a grid bias and a high-tension (HT). The HT was a large thing, about the size of a large-ish biscuit tin, which I later discovered, by dissecting a spent one, to be made up of lots of no.8-type batteries encased in pitch. The grid-bias battery was made up of about six of the no.8-type cells, also in pitch. (I always liked to know how things worked, although I never could understand radio.) I remember the grid-bias battery having wander-plug sockets above each cell to give a range of voltages, which came in very useful when I went through my 'electrics' stage.

(In case no. 8 batteries are no longer produced, they were about ½ inch diameter by 2 inches long and were one of the most popular sizes and used in popular-sized pocket torches.)

The wireless had to have an outdoor aerial which was a wire from the set as high as possible extending from the house to a pole at the far end of the garden. In our case, this meant from a terminal at the back of the set, through a hole in the window-frame, up to a fixing below the eaves and across to a weather-vane above the roof of the shed. The set had also to be earthed, which meant another wire through the window-frame to a rod poked into the earth. In very dry weather we sometimes had to pour a bucket of water on to the earth round the rod to ensure a good 'earth'. And in thundery weather the aerial always had to be disconnected.

Later, we had a mains set, and that meant having an electric socket installed. It is amazing to recall that up to that time we had no sockets in the house. Although most houses (but not all) had electric light, electrical appliances were still rare. Smoothing irons, for example, were solid metal and heated either on top of the kitchen range, on a gas ring or on the coal fire and the temperature tested by spitting on the base – genteely, of course! And the toast was either made using the grill on the gas stove or, in winter at the open fire using a toasting-fork.

When such things as electric irons were acquired, one bought a two-way adapter to hook into the ceiling light bulb-holder and the electric iron lead was hooked into that. So the ironing had to be done under the ceiling light. As more gadgets appeared, so more two-way adapters were bought and sometimes one had a two-way adapter hooked into the side of a two-way adapter! So, for our

new mains wireless we had a two-pin switch-socket fitted on the wall in the front room, and for a long time it was the only socket in the house.

When I was older, of course, I learned to fit sockets myself, using the widely used do-it-yourself method, passed from person to person, of taking one wire from the live side of the ceiling-rose, across the ceiling, down the wall and along the skirting-board, and another from the live side of the light-switch, down the wall and along the skirting-board, to wherever the socket was to be screwed to the skirting-board at a convenient position. The only readily available wire was twin cotton-covered flex which we untwisted to obtain single wire, so the finished job hardly looked smart!

As I said, this method and other tips concerning mains electricity were passed from person to person. Such things were never published in books or magazines, domestic electricity being so new that it was considered that only a fully-trained expert could deal with it. The popular magazine *Practical Mechanics*, for example, *never* printed articles on making or modifying gadgets which used mains power, let alone house wiring. In consequence, people like myself took all sorts of risks. However, my accumulated experience enabled me many years later to totally re-wire no. 27 to the inspector's complete satisfaction.

Although we didn't listen to the wireless all that much, Pop played the piano quite often. He subscribed to a sort of sheet-music club and piano music of the latest popular songs arrived by post, rolled up in a small wrapper bearing the name and address. Songs like 'Tiptoe Through The Tulips', 'You're The Cream In My Coffee', 'Louise', and less-lasting ones like 'Wheezyanna', 'Jollity Farm', 'I'm On A See-Saw', 'Riding On A Rainbow', 'Happy Days Are Here Again', 'I Want To Be Happy', 'Isle Of Capri', 'Red Sails In The Sunset', etc. Pop would play the tunes on the piano and Margaret and I would stand beside him and sing the words – many of which I can still remember.

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In memory, summer always seemed sunny and hot. One memory is of the asphalt pavement being soft and tacky underfoot. Another is of us popping over to Whitchelo's, the confectioner and tobacconist across the road, to get penny 'Wallsies', a Walls fruit-flavoured water-ice shaped as a triangular prism in a cardboard sleeve. I can still taste the fruit-flavoured cardboard! These water ices were later superseded by a cream version called, I believe, 'Snofruit'.

However, another memory is of being on holiday at Hayling Island and having to stay indoors, cutting shapes out of the blue Cadbury's chocolate wrapper to fit the outline of a yacht printed somewhere, while the rain drove against the window and the wind moaned in the gaps! That sound still evokes memories of holidays at Hayling! So the weather was probably much the same as now.

In winter we always seemed snug at home. We had coal fires, of course, and although there were terrible draughts I never noticed them, although I remember playing with my toys on the rug in front of the fire. (Mind you, I certainly no-

ticed them in later years!) I always enjoyed watching through the window the people passing by outside in the cold and rain while I was warm and dry inside. The bedrooms at no. 27, though, were very cold. Each of the original rooms had a small fireplace but they were never used. So the frost formed fascinating patterns on the inside of the windows, while outside impressive icicles hung from the gutter under the roof.

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Summer holidays for us meant four wonderful weeks at Hayling Island. For two of the weeks Little Granny was with us, while for the second two weeks Pop came down. I've been wondering how we got to Hayling before we had our own car. The Island could be entered either by car across the toll-bridge, by train across the nearby railway bridge or by ferry from Portsmouth. I have no memory at all of arriving by train so I guess that one of our uncles, probably Uncle Bert, took us by car.

Until just before the war we always stayed with the Maunder family in their house on Eastoke Farm. Mr Maunder, who came from Devon, had been a carpenter but ill-health had brought him to Hayling to work for Mr Tickner on the farm, while Mrs Maunder had been born in Hayling and had been a school-teacher at the Hayling school she had attended as a pupil. They had at that time one son, Stuart, who was about Margaret's age and we all had great fun together. As well as going to the beach, we were able to watch the cows being milked by hand by Mr Maunder and the milk being cooled by flowing down over the surface of the cooler, a sort of 'radiator' filled with cold water.

We were fortunate in knowing Hayling before it became 'developed'. In front of the house, across the lane, was grassland and then the sea. There were already several bungalows, many of them built around a pensioned-off railway coach, and there were one or two old double-decker buses being lived in. Otherwise, during the summer there were just a few of the old-fashioned bell tents, so there was still plenty of open space.

We spent a lot of time on the beach, of course. Before the war, at low tide there was a wide stretch of flat, firm sand about three miles long, along which horses were galloped and sand-yachts were sailed and where, with Pop's help, we learnt to swim.

An alternative to going on the beach was a visit to 'Butlin's' which in those days was a small, permanent fun-fair (or, nowadays, amusement park) at Beachlands, near the Royal Hotel. Mr Butlin had a larger one at Southsea, where I saw my first and only Flea Circus. I can still remember clearly seeing tiny carts being pulled along by fleas and the man showing how he fed them on his arm! Presumably, these fun-fairs were from Mr Butlin's early days before he got into the holiday-camp business.

In 1938 or '39 we were unable to stay with the Maunders, and had rooms instead with Mr and Mrs Boniface, who live in what had been one of the Coast-

guard houses. The larger, end house of the row was still occupied by the Head Coastguard who, one day, allowed me to look through his telescope which was mounted on a tripod in the coastguard hut above the beach. It was an impressively powerful instrument and I was able to read the name 'Queen Mary' on that liner as it passed on its way from the Solent to round the Nab Tower en route to America. The sea in those days was full of ships of all sizes, from huge liners like the 'Normandie', going to and from Southampton, to Royal Navy vessels in and out of Portsmouth Harbour. We went to Southsea one day during the time of King George V's Silver Jubilee Review of the Fleet and the seafront was full of sailors from the ships of the foreign navies attending the review, while their ships and those of the Royal Navy were moored in the Solent.

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One advantage for me of staying at the Boniface's was that Mr Boniface kindly let me ride his bike. Cycling was still a novelty for me and I really enjoyed it. Like most other children at that time, we didn't have bicycles until much later. It was quite common to see young boys riding adult bikes with wooden blocks fitted on the pedals so they could be reached, because the parents couldn't afford to buy a child's bike.

We had been able to learn to ride on a Fairy Cycle, as I said, but of course we soon outgrew it and then we had to walk or use the bus. There were actually two bikes in the shed, men's, so presumably Pop's from earlier days. One was black with thin gold and red lining, the other pale green. They were, to my knowledge, never used in Oxford, although they may have been before I became aware of them.

I was probably about 13 when we both had our first real bikes – new Raleigh Gazelles with Sturmey-Archer 3-speeds. Having a bike gave me new freedom. I was able cycle to school in Oxford instead of having to use the bus. (Incidentally, for some reason the bus company sold books of tickets for the journey to school, but with no reduction in the fare.) Cycling then, in the late 1930s, was quite safe, there being far fewer motor vehicles on the roads than nowadays. One often saw boys on bikes hitching a lift by holding on to the tailboard of lorries as they drove along, unseen, they hoped, by the driver. Would I ever have done such a thing? I honestly can't remember!

Until it was 'tidied up', Old Road had a ditch, separated from the road by a raised grass verge with gaps at intervals to allow water from the road to drain into the ditch. These gaps made lovely 'ups-and-downs' for boy cyclists! Cheney Lane had similar attractions. All ruined by tidying-up! There was also a death-defying dive from one end of Aristotle Bridge down to the towing-path, which at first I could only tackle with brakes full on!

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Pop bought our first (and only, as things turned out) motor-car in 1935. He bought it new from Morris Garages in St Aldate's. It was a 1935-model Morris Eight two-door sliding roof saloon, green and black, and it cost £132 10s, less 10% supplier's discount. The number plates were aluminium with raised letters (BWL 806) and cost 12/6. Delivery date was 13 July and registration until the end of the year cost £3 3s. It came with 4 gallons of petrol costing 6/-. (I've quoted all these details from the original Car Order Form.)

Several of the car's features were common then but are not seen nowadays. For example, the windscreen was hinged at the top and could be opened forwards; the car had running boards on which we could stand while Pop drove along the Ridgeway on the Downs – just like the cops and gangsters in the films; it had a roller-blind over the rear window, controlled by the driver via a cord with a little catch over his door. It also had little mirrors, perhaps 1½-inch diameter at either side of the top of the windscreen, the purpose of which was never clear at the time, at least to me. However, thinking about them now I suspect that they were for use as rear-view mirrors when the rear window was covered by the roller-blind, for wing mirrors were not introduced until about 1960. Presumably the blind was for use at night to prevent the driver being dazzled by the headlamps of a following car. I don't remember it ever being used, but then, the car would rarely have been used at night.

The direction indicators, known as trafficators, were of the semaphore type which were recessed into the side pillars. The arms were made of orange glass or celluloid in a metal frame, with a small bulb inside, and projected to left or right when switched. Being solenoid-operated and being liable to rust, they were rather unreliable and the driver often had to resort to hand-signals – which were anyway still in use to signal, for example, “I am slowing down” or “You may overtake me”.

Small cars at that time had no boot for luggage or spare wheel. The Morris 8's spare wheel was attached to the back of the body and for luggage a folding rack could be fitted behind it. When we went to Hayling Island for the summer holiday the rack was folded down and a large portmanteau or cabin trunk was strapped on to it.

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Often on a Sunday Pop would say “Where shall we go today?” Sandwiches would have been prepared so we set off and sometimes we went to the Downs above Harwell aerodrome or perhaps down to Southsea or Hayling. Sometimes, too, we went to Bedford and once we went to Weston-Super-Mare - where the tide was out, of course! The car gave us a lot of pleasure in those few years before the war.

Even in those days there were occasional hold-ups and I remember Winchester, with no bypass yet, as being a bottleneck. Often there was a queue to get into Hayling, since every driver had to pay 8d to cross the toll-bridge over

Langstone Harbour channel. There was sometimes an additional wait at the level-crossing for the train from Havant to cross the road on its way to Hayling.

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In the 1930s shops generally sold only their own type of commodity; grocers sold groceries, not bread or vegetables, fishmongers sold what is now called 'seafood', butchers sold meat. There were no frozen foods. Central Headington had, for groceries, the Home & Colonial, the Maypole, the Co-op and Butlers; for meat, the butcher's Bowerman's; for fish, MacFisheries and Byard's; for milk, Burton's dairy. For cakes there was Cooper & Boffin's, for sweets there were Ruddy's and Williams' and for newspapers and magazines one went to a newsagent like Jennings' or Danbury's.

However, certain commodities were normally delivered door-to-door; these were milk, bread, and coal and in the 1930s they were still delivered by horse-drawn vehicles. Our milk came in a milk float, a light horse-drawn two-wheeled cart with the milk contained in churns with brass tops and lids. A jug was put on the doorstep outside the front door, with the top covered in the summer by a net weighted with glass beads around the edge, to keep out the flies. The milkman used a dipper to take milk from the churn to fill the jug.

Later, of course the horse-drawn float was replaced by an electric one and the came in glass bottles similar to present-day ones but with a wider top closed by a pressed-in cardboard disc.

Bread, from Vallis's bakery in Quarry or, in our case, from Berry's bakery in Old Headington, came in horse-drawn vans. The baker's man brought a selection of loaves and, possibly, cakes to the door, carrying them in a large wicker basket hanging from his arm, while the horse walked slowly on. Berry's new van was similar to the old one but smarter and with pneumatic tyres –and still horse-drawn. Later, of course, this was replaced by a motor van.

Talking of home delivery, in the late 1930s we had 'Corona', a fizzy soft drink of various flavours, delivered regularly, by motor lorry. A wooden crate to hold four bottles stood in the corner of the garage. The bottles had stoppers held down against the pressure of the gas by over-centre wire toggles – still used today on some French drinks, I believe. And that reminds me that Mother, who had been making home-made wine (dandelion, cowslip, etc.) for years, chose to bottle some in a Corona bottle which of course, was designed to retain the fizziness of Corona. However, the bottle which was standing inside the larder, was not strong enough to retain the pressure from 'working' home-made wine. Pieces of broken glass were embedded in the inside of the larder door which fortunately was closed at the time.

Everybody used coal in those days and in cold weather smoke poured out of the chimneys of every house. In the early 1930s the coal, in thick strong sacks, was also delivered on open-sided horse-drawn carts, the coal being carried on the coalman's back to be emptied into the coal-shed or cellar. The coalman

would pile the empty sacks on the pavement to be counted by the housewife as a check that the correct number had been delivered. However, it had been known for an empty sack to have been put there beforehand to show an incorrect total and thereby leaving the coalman with a free sack on the cart for future sale. It therefore became standard practice for the housewife to stand and be seen to count the number of full sacks carried in.

Dustbins I remember being emptied into two-wheeled horse-drawn carts before motor lorries were introduced. There was far less rubbish to be put into dustbins then, most household goods being bought without individual wrappings and just put into the ubiquitous paper bags. Ash from the fires was probably a major item in the bin.

In all these cases of horse-drawn delivery vehicles, the horses were given a nosebag of feed at appropriate times. Attached to their harness, it allowed the horse to eat as it waited or ambled along. It goes without saying that the roads were quite messy!

A vehicle which remained horse-drawn for far longer than any of the others – in fact, virtually to the end of that trade – was the rag-and-bone man's cart. The rag-and-bone man was a common sight, probably everywhere, as he drove slowly along the streets hoping to collect unwanted bones and pieces of rag from housewives, and his call was a common sound. He probably thought he was yelling the three words but it came out as one word, "Ragabo-o-o-ne!" but usually more distorted than I can write, in the same way that newspaper sellers in streets of towns distorted the names of the newspapers they were selling. I believe that later some rag-and-bone men rang a hand-bell, and some collected jam-jars. I think I have read in children's stories of goldfish being given in exchange but it doesn't seem likely.

One vehicle that was never horse-drawn was the road-roller. These were always steam-rollers when we were young. The new road surface was applied by men who spread it with shovels and raked it level. The solid blocks of tar were melted in boilers which we called 'tar-babies' and, if I remember rightly, was poured on to the road from large 'watering cans'. If the work had to be left overnight there was usually a watchman with a little shelter like a sentry box and a coke fire in a brazier. The workmen – 'navvies' – always seemed to have their trouser legs tied with string below the knee.

Windmill Road was always a relatively busy road in the 1930s. For one thing it was the only road for traffic from the north going to the car factories at Cowley without going through Oxford. Car engines were delivered regularly to Morris Motors from Engines Branch at Coventry by huge curtain-sided chain-drive Scammel wagons with 'Engine Branch' painted on the sides in large letters. In the other direction up Windmill Road went what I suppose were the bases for vans or lorries – chassis, wheels and engine, with the driver on a makeshift seat with no windscreen, exposed to the elements, so well wrapped-up and wearing

goggles. It looked quite dashing to small boys but must have been a very unpleasant job in bad weather.

Other vehicles remain in my memory. The big Lucas van looking very modern, with rounded edges and corners, delivering electrical components to Morris's. The Smiths van bringing potato crisps to Whitchelo's shop in square tins and taking away the empties. These empty tins were stacked on the roof of the van, a man on the pavement throwing them up two at a time to be caught by his mate on the roof. The Wall's van bringing ice-creams to Whitchelo's and the 'Stop Me And Buy One' tricycle stopping there, apparently taking in a block of dry ice – for Whitchelo's ice-cream cabinet?

During the war there was a great increase in traffic past our house. As well as the normal frequent convoys of army vehicles, we had, virtually every day, 'Queen Mary's', the RAF's 60ft-long low-loaders, carrying damaged or wrecked aircraft to Cowley, either to Morris's for repair or to the MPRD (the 'Dump') for breaking up. I remember clearly an Airspeed Oxford minus its outer wings on a Queen Mary, with its port engine overhanging our front garden and its starboard engine forcing a bus to go on to the pavement opposite. Another unusual vehicle was the 'Neptune', a large amphibious carrier designed and built by Morris Motors and tested on the lake at Blenheim Palace.

Completion of the Eastern Bypass eventually relieved Windmill Road of most heavy traffic but not before our ceilings had been damaged by the vibrations.

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Our family doctor was Dr Watson Russell, whose surgery was at 217 Iffley Road, on the corner of Aston Street. This was quite a long way away, considering that we didn't have a car (until 1935), but it was normal for doctors to make house-calls in those days.

Dr Russell was a most dignified figure. In my memory he is, apart from being tall and thin, much like Sheppard's picture of the doctor in the poem 'The Dormouse and the Doctor' in *When We Were Very Young* by A. A. Milne. He didn't wear a top hat, at least when he called, and actually I'm not sure about the cutaway coat or the wing-collar, but I clearly remember the spats and I'm almost sure that he wore striped trousers. He had a deep voice and slender fingers, cold and scrubbed. Margaret and I remember his habit, if we had a sore throat, of gripping our throat and asking "Does that hurt?" I also remember with pleasure the tonics he prescribed for us after an illness, for there was a choice of flavours of which I remember the delicious pineapple!

The dispensary was upstairs in the Iffley Road house, two floors above the consulting-room, and communication between the consulting-room and the dispensary was by old-fashioned speaking-tube! On more than one occasion I've been in the consulting-room (as I think the surgery was called then) when Doctor Russell needed to speak to the dispenser. He would go over to the side of the

fireplace where a tube ended in a small funnel, remove from the funnel a plug which was, in fact, a whistle, put his mouth to the funnel and blow, causing a whistle to sound upstairs. He would then put his ear to the trumpet to hear a response and then pass his message, replacing the plug/whistle afterwards so that it was ready to receive a call from above. In that event, the whistle in the consulting-room would sound, the doctor would get up from his desk, go to the instrument, take out the whistle, put his ear to the trumpet and receive the message. These were the only occasions when I've seen one of these arrangements actually in use.

Sometimes, when we had to call to collect medicine, Mrs Russell would come to the door. She had a habit of silently forming with her lips the words which the other person was saying to her. This was unnerving when first encountered and could easily cause one to dry up unless one kept one's eyes firmly on hers!

*John Bolt*  
2005