MY FATHER, MY HERO

By Ann M Edwards
Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours
in History
This thesis is presented for the Honours degree of BA History of Murdoch University, submitted in November 2012.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the life and times of my Welsh father who was born in 1904 and died in 1976. It is a personal story which sits within the contemporary public history of both Great Britain and Europe.

Supported by primary sources and secondary scholarship the work is presented in the style of a memoir which uses creative writing techniques. The use of this method is supported by an analysis of approaches to writing history posited by renowned historians and the work of contemporary writers of creative academic non-fiction. Note is also made of criticisms of memory recall and attitudes towards speculation.

This dissertation, supported by extensive and detailed research provides a solid foundation for understanding the constraints, boundaries and opportunities my father had within the broader context of significant twentieth-century themes such as class, attitudes towards marriage and divorce, World War II and post-war reconstruction. Central to this history is the process of discovering a Welsh family, their early twentieth-century working-class living conditions, education and career opportunities.

Conditions in pre-war Britain and the lead-up to the declaration of war on Germany in 1939 are explained before unexpected ways of contributing to the war effort are explored. Revelation of austere conditions in post-war Britain, the impact of the Beveridge Report and its effect on education precede the conclusions which reflect on the benefits of writing a personal history.

Finally note is made of the influence of the historical process and techniques involved.
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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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IN MEMORY OF

My dear friend Judy Condon who enthusiastically supported me to study at Murdoch University. It was an experience which led me to enjoy one of the most exciting and rewarding adventures of my life.

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From the ‘mother country’ I have been privileged to have had access to the records of the Buckley Society. Secretary, Carol Shone, sent me invaluable information and photographs. And what a superb gift it was to have discovered my Cousin Joan who provided me with a real link to the story of my father. Finally a big hug for my beagle Toffee who never let me forget the real meaning of life. Daily exercise is essential and tea is at 6.
1) INTRODUCTION – A TRICKY BUSINESS

This thesis explores the life and times of my Welsh father who was born in 1904 and died in 1976. John Willie Edwards married my Cockney mother, Florence Annie Curtis, on 12 September 1940 at the Methodist Church, Albion Way, Lewisham in the County of London. By May 1948 they were divorced. Subsequently I was raised by my mother in the south-east of England and my father and I lost touch.

It had never occurred to me that writing a history of the life and times of my father would be such a tricky business. I had simply thought that the process of unravelling his story would involve researching primary documents for definitive facts, reading secondary sources to learn what others have discovered and, if appropriate, conducting oral history interviews to explore people’s memories. Having garnered my material I would write a draft of my father’s life then edit it for syntax, irrelevancies and so on. My finished product would have a clear thesis statement; arguments would be clearly defined and the whole piece would be rounded off with a concise conclusion. Implicit to this process is the notion that throughout the development of my work, I would, as an historian, have maintained a neutral position. But this was not as it happened. The process was more complex.

Researching primary sources proved problematic because, with the expense of going to the United Kingdom to find reliable information prohibitive, I was confronted with the dilemma of writing a thesis supported by a few official documents, snippets of letters, bits of emails, memory, imagination,
speculation and photographs without captions. Secondary sources were not such a problem because historians at Murdoch University rallied to my cry for help. Any opportunity to conduct oral history interviews was also frustrated by the cost of going to Britain. Most challenging was my position as an historian because I have been looking to see if, by understanding something of my father’s life, I could enhance the meaning of my own. This means I have had a clear role in the focus of my research, the stance I have written from and the material, which as editor, I have included.¹

As a researcher I have conducted methodical work which has allowed me to make sense of my father’s experiences and locate him in historical and social contexts. As a writer I have told a story of an ordinary man who was at the nexus of numerous strands of history, which I have examined in their broader context. As editor I have filtered out self indulgence, intimate subjects and my feelings about my family, all potential emotive traps.²

What makes my father’s story so worth telling? Beyond the personal value of discovering who my father was and what he did, the telling of his story opens windows into a history that is both unique and common, local and international.

Within the constraints of academic history, how can such a story best be told?

² Ibid., pp.151-162.
1) SEARCHING FOR A GENRE

In pursuing ways to write my thesis and because, most significantly, I want it to attract academic historical kudos, I have undertaken lengthy, dedicated, arduous and sometimes frustrating interrogation of some approaches to writing history. The views of renowned historians which I have assessed are discussed below. This discussion is important for understanding why I have chosen to write a memoir. Firstly, I reveal why, after analysis I dismissed writing a piece of historical fiction. Then I explore the theories of historians including Leopold von Ranke, E.H. Carr, Keith Jenkins and the resourceful techniques employed by historians such as Robin Fleming, Jonathan Spence and Carlo Ginzburg.

As my work is a personal history, that I want friends and family to read, I also searched for a means to produce a creatively written paper that would also satisfy academia. With something of a leap of faith, I looked at the work of contemporary writers of creative academic non-fiction and the work of memoirist historian Elaine Tyler-May. Acknowledging that memory recall

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would play a part in the story of my father I paid attention to some of the criticisms associated with memory and attitudes towards the use of speculation. The first step in understanding why I decided on the genre of memoir is clarification as to why I have I discounted writing a piece of historical fiction.

I love historical novels and I think they are a way of interpreting the past with writers such as Bryce Courtney, persuasively making the uninquisitive believe their yarns. In a Preface to his *Australian Trilogy* Bryce Courtney claims that after trawling through Australian libraries his team of researchers produced ‘extensive and wonderful resources’ which, while not cited in his book, provided Courtney with a skeleton to which he has added flesh and blood. Although his book is a thumping good holiday read, for the curious it leaves questions as to what was an emancipist, what was a free settler and was Governor Arthur Phillip real or not? Kate Grenville is another convincing novelist and her book, *The Secret River*, is, like my thesis, inspired by research into her family history. Grenville claims that *The Secret River* is a serious attempt to do history, a value-added history: history given life and flesh by a novelist’s imagination sailing triumphantly beyond the constrictions of the formal discipline of history-writing.

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11 Ibid., p. 529.
12 Ibid., p. 529.
14 The central character, William Thornhill, is transported from London to Botany Bay. As a free man he claims land by the side of the Hawkesbury River. Aboriginal people are displaced and violence and murder follow. Nevertheless the ‘hero’ goes on to ‘make good’.
Glenville’s comments provoked the ire of a number of Australian historians. Inga Clendinnen, a prominent Australian historian, raises a number of these disciplinary issues in her criticism of Grenville’s book.\textsuperscript{16}

Clendinnen argues that novelists like Grenville stimulate our imagination so that we believe we are actually in the past. They loosen us up so that we might hop, skip and jump and presto there we are back in an exotic uncomplicated past where everybody does what the omniscient narrator tells them to do, say, think and feel. Historians on the other hand, keep the imagination on a short leash. No wondering permitted. Theirs is a world of ‘facts’ which, like prickly bushes, have to be ploughed through rendering the discovery of the past a slow and tortuous business and, when historians get there, they find the inhabitants may not meet their expectations. If that idea isn’t barren enough, Clendinnen discourages historians from admitting to understanding the emotions and assumptions of others, because those emotions and assumptions will have grown organically out of their own experiences and cultural milieux. In support of this argument Clendinnen, who spent more than a decade in the company of Aztecs, discusses how she witnessed a typical Aztec childbirth ritual.\textsuperscript{17} Physically she was there but, she concludes, that without long observation, cool thought and constant awareness of her own conditioning she knew she could not intuit what was in their minds.\textsuperscript{18} So, her logic goes, if it is not possible for outsiders to understand the thoughts and feelings of contemporary people, then it cannot be expected that people distanced by time, space and culture can be understood by

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 16-23.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 22.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 23.
historians or novelists. On that basis Clendinnen questions how Grenville
could possibly know the feelings of a nineteenth-century convict who sailed
from England to Australia, spent most of his life in precarious boats and then,
supposedly, was terrified of a storm in Sydney Harbour?\(^\text{19}\) It is, says
Clendinnen, unlikely that he would have had the same fears as those Grenville
describes because she is writing from the perspective of someone who
belongs to a society cocooned in a sense of physical security.\(^\text{20}\)

Next I began to explore Clendinnen’s claim that historians never use imagined
communications. They use only their own language in discourses and only
quote directly from contemporary documents. At that point I realised that
historical fiction was not the genre for my story. I don’t want to ‘make things
up’ about my dad; put words into his mouth or try to imagine how he felt. I
am trying to get down to some ‘brass tacks’ that will enable me to understand
his life and times. It was clearly time to look at what historians have to offer.

Leopold von Ranke successfully argued for the critical examination of
sources, the selection of particulars from authentic materials and the synthesis
of particulars into a narrative that would stand the test of critical methods.\(^\text{21}\).
The legitimate task of the historian was to ‘simply show how it really was.’\(^\text{22}\).
It seemed a forlorn hope when I began my research that I would be able to
uncover anything much in the way of authentic materials, diaries, letters,
court testimonies and so on. I am not the daughter of Lloyd George, Atlee or

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 24.  
\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 26. 
\(^{22}\) Carr, What is History?, p.3.
Montgomery or anybody with the power and ability to keep the kind of written records that would be preserved in museums and libraries and lent out to be read by people in white gloves. So telling how it actually was for my father, in Rankean style, with strict adherence to written documents so that I might produce a chronological narrative was out of the question. I have official documents — birth, marriage and death certificates; military and university records. But they provide only skeletal details about my enigmatic parent.

Thankfully, this strict adherence to written sources and the facts that they reveal has been challenged. Acclaimed historian E.H. Carr, writing in the 1960s, is one who acknowledges that the nineteenth century was a great age for facts and documents but he advises us not to make a fetish of them. They do not constitute history. It is historians who collect the facts then write what they think about those they have been studying. Historians have rummaged through the archives and then behaved like thrifty housewives of World War II who unravelled old knitted jumpers, picked out what they thought would be useful and then re-knitted these salvaged strands to claim ‘here’s a new jumper for you!’

Professor Keith Jenkins, a more recent theorist, argues that all histories are subjective and all histories are created by the historian. Jenkins claims history is always for someone. History and the past are separate, floating freely of each other with historians bringing their own ideas on how to use the

23 Ibid., p. 19.
material they have. History, claims Jenkins, is an aesthetic/literary genre that escapes facticity and interpretation no matter which historical theory is being followed – neo-Rankean, Marxist, Annale, feminist, fascist – they are all, in fact, self referencing. What Jenkins asserts is that we can never show a definitive example of history. He claims that history can be anything we want it to be. Mmmmm! With one mortal swipe has that discounted all I’ve said about Grenville? I don’t think so. Because Jenkins also believes that each historian, who is inescapably part of the picture of the historical past, no matter which part of the ideological/politically embattled terrain or social/economic group they are arguing for, (and this is the crunch) should be explicit about their own position.

Grenville admits that in writing *The Secret River* she used the third person as a way to tell the story because it gave her ‘flexibility to enter the consciousness of as many different characters as [she] liked and to provide narrative information that none of them could know. She chose a ‘smoke and mirrors’ voice – third person subjective because the main consciousness is the protagonist, which doesn’t leave much elbow-room for her as the author to whisper into the reader’s ear. Grenville hasn’t put herself into the story by explaining possibilities or pure speculations on her part. She has assumed an omniscient role. Integral to Jenkins’ interpretation of history is the

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27 Kate Grenville, ‘The Writing of The Secret River’, [This lecture was presented by the Sydney University Arts Association and the Department of English as the 2005 Herbert Blaiklock Memorial Lecture on 6 September (2005).] *Arts, 27*(2005), pp.74-86.
identification of the subjective position of the writer. That is what I am going to do. I don’t want someone to criticise my work as just wild ramblings – there might be wild ramblings but they will be a consequence of understanding particular types of knowledge. Clendinnen’s point, that people cannot assume how people felt or thought in previous times, is important, but Jenkins moves the argument on by saying if we do that we need to announce that we are doing it.

Encouraged by Carr not to make a fetish of the facts and by Jenkins’ notion that history is always for someone; that it can be anything we want it to be so long as you admit your position in the discourse, I began to look at how respected historians have used unconventional sources. For example, Professor Robin Fleming writes a ‘different’ kind of early medieval biography, not based on written texts but on inferences drawn from the examination and interpretation of skeletal remains and grave goods.  

Fleming argues that historians should not restrict themselves to written sources but be prepared to cross disciplinary boundaries; not just the more familiar ones that stand between history and anthropology or history and literature. They should be prepared, for example, to realise mutual and complementary interests between science and social theory. Another innovative cultural historian is Carlo Ginzburg. Often using the most modest collection of facts Ginzburg researches myths, customs and court records to

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28 Fleming, ‘Writing Biography at the Edge of History’, p. 608.
29 Ibid., p. 614.
30 Carlo Ginzburg is Franklin D. Murphy Professor of Italian Renaissance Studies at the University of California.
trace histories of common people. Other disciplines whose resources he uses to produce cohesive stories include anthropology, psychology and literary analysis.

I found the way Jonathan D. Spence uses primary sources in The Death of Woman Wang revealing. Spence uses a set of seventeenth-century maps so that the reader may locate the story, and three other primary documents; a local history, a personal memoir and a handbook on the office of magistrate and, intriguingly, the work of an essayist, short-story writer and dramatist who lived close to the centre of the drama. The way Spence uses his sources enables him to straddle fiction and history as he brings into play the work of the essayist to supplement the more conventional historical and administrative writings. This technique enables Spence to penetrate and reflect on the private anger, misery, loneliness, sensuality and dreams that were a part of the community. By combining some of these images into montage form, Spence aims to break out beyond the sources of that lost world and come near to the mind of Woman Wang, in particular, as she slept before death. Spence could be criticised for falling into the trap of trying to know Woman Wang’s thoughts and Ginzburg has concerns about the use of the


32 Jonathan D. Spence is Sterling Professor of History at Yale University.


The story is set in north eastern rural China in the seventeenth century. Amidst the crises facing farmers, farm workers and their wives is the harrowing tale of a woman named Wang who was unwilling to face an unacceptable present and chose to run away from her home and husband. When she returned she was murdered by her spouse.

34 Ibid., pp. xi-xiv.
fragments from the literary works to reconstruct what Wang was dreaming immediately before her violent death: Ginzburg writes that

We are therefore in an intermediate zone, pointing to historical possibility ("what might have been") and not hard evidence. But to recreate the dream of a poor peasant woman through the words of a learned essayist and storyteller looks like a somewhat gratuitous exercise. 35

So while Ginzburg does not dismiss Spence’s approach, he thinks it is just unnecessary for Spence to recreate Wang’s dream.

Quoting Clendinnen on Grenville, Spence’s work, is in my opinion ‘a serious attempt to do history, a value-added history: history given life and flesh by an historian’s imagination.’ 36 But unlike Grenville, Spence makes it clear to his readers when he is using the work of the essayist because he uses italics to define the fiction. It is such a simple technique and one which I will use in my thesis when I use fiction, like Spence, to enable my work to straddle fiction and history. So far, so good: Spence does have techniques which are useful for my thesis but he has used primary sources to construct a creative third party discourse; whereas I intend to write an original personal story supported by official documents and somewhat dubious sources. At this point in my search for a genre I took what may be considered to be a bold step.

Bouyed by Fleming’s advice to historians to cross disciplinary boundaries 37 and Jenkins’ concerns on the nature of history being massively impoverished

36 Clendinnen, The History Question, p. 17.
compared to adjacent disciplines,\textsuperscript{38} I looked at ways of using creative writing, albeit creative nonfiction: approaches to which are discussed in \textit{The Fourth Genre, Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Non Fiction},\textsuperscript{39} by Bob Root and Michael Steinberg.\textsuperscript{40}

Root and Steinberg define creative nonfiction as protean, mercurial, a series of intersecting lines which connect the poles of the personal and the public, as the writer's voice creates an identity that will take the reader on a journey into the mind and personality of the writer whose voice is individual, and not omniscient.\textsuperscript{41} This entails writing in the first person with language that is neither dull nor diffuse, but more expansive, more intimate and more literary.\textsuperscript{42} Root and Steinberg claim that the idea is not to give away any perceived authority an academic writer might have but to enable candour and personal honesty so that readers may connect with the writer's dialogue. It is not intended as a tool for 'confessional writing.'\textsuperscript{43} It is a style of writing which will enable me to prepare a narrative that I think will be acceptable to both academic historians and the wider community. So far so good, but the

\textsuperscript{38} The adjacent disciplines Jenkins refers to are ‘literature, sociology, aesthetics, and politics etcetera.’ He goes on to argue that the general condition of the discipline of history is intellectually backward with historians resisting the idea that history is a fictive process; 'an act of the imagination'; that there is no such thing as a 'true history' (any more than there can be a 'true story') because truth – at the level of text is just not an acceptable concept. Jenkins, \textit{Rethinking History} Retrieved from \url{http://www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43810} Accessed 13 April 2012.

\textsuperscript{39} L.R. Root, and Michael Steinberg, \textit{The Fourth Genre Contemporary Writers of/on Non Fiction}. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

\textsuperscript{40} Until retiring in 2004, Bob Root was Present Professor at Central Michigan University where he specialised in English Literature. Currently he writes creative non-fiction, writes about creative non-fiction and frequently presents at national, international and regional conferences. Doctor Michael Steinberg, teacher of creative writing at Michigan State University for more than twenty-five years, has won several national awards for creative non-fiction essays, directed national writing workshops and conferences and writes reviews for \textit{The New York Times Sunday Book Review}.

\textsuperscript{41} Root and Steinberg, \textit{The Fourth Genre Contemporary Writers}. pp. xxiii-xxiv.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. xxvii.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. xxv.
genre for my thesis still remained elusive until, having browsed through The Fourth Genre, I found the work of Patricia Hampl and Elaine Tyler May. Tell Me True - Memoir, History and Writing a Life. The title gave me hope that I could learn what is meant by memoir and how it relates to historical discourse.

Historian Tyler May describes memoir as a personal history told with imagination and expressed in the first person. A lone voice telling a highly personal rendering of the past, refracted through private experience, feelings and relationships. It is an affirmation that the hegemonic ‘great man’ theory of history ignores the stories of the greengrocer, hairdresser et al. because it enables all our stories, which are as individual as wildflowers, to be told. Like history, memoir is an interpretive art as fragments of the past – memories, documents and events are carefully selected to tell a story. In that sense, memoirists and historians go through similar processes to construct their understanding of the past. But the historian claims the authority of documentary record, and charts a big picture detached from emotion whereas the memoirist offers an intimate portrait. They are a reversal of each other: memoir being personal history, while history offers a kind of public memoir. But whether the record emerges from archival sources or from personal memory there will always be blank spaces, as writers in both genres bring the

44 Regents Professor Patricia Hampl teaches in Advanced Literary Nonfiction, Memoir and History and her colleague, Elaine Tyler May, is Regents Professor in American Studies and History.
remnants of the past they select in telling their stories. This is clearly a genre that will work for me. By writing in the first person and using intimate literary language my piece of non-fiction will be a memoir, a personal history, told with imagination. Primary documents will provide a basic structure, but the narrative, will in part, depend on my memory which as I delve into the past will be stirred from a multifarious layering of memories, which as Lowenthal contends are complex, fluid, varied and often ephemeral in nature.

It is important to note that the subjective nature of memory doesn’t enable factual accuracy but as Cattell and Climo claim, memory recall does provide a personal truth. A truth which Portelli argues is credible, but it is a different credibility, which tells most importantly of the psychological costs on individual lives of certain events. This is a crucial point for me as I hope to show the impact of key events on both my father’s life and my own. Like oral historians I value the subjective nature of emotions, fears, fantasies and myths carried by metaphors. And ultimately my memories will be part of a

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46 Included in the compilation of narratives in *Tell Me True, Memoir, History and Writing a Life*, which influenced my decision that memoir was a suitable genre for my thesis, is Tyler May’s ‘Confessions of a Memoir Thief’, pp. 85-95 and Annette Kobak’s ‘Joes’ War: My Father Decoded’, pp. 26-42.


process that, as I engage with the historical record, will help me make sense of my father’s story.

During my journey to discover an academically acceptable method for my thesis I have considered and dismissed non-contemporaneous fiction because of its erroneous tendencies. I have acknowledged Ranke and his followers and their tenacious search for truth in facts and have found solace in the work of Carr and Jenkins. Fleming and Ginzburg reveal how unconventional sources can be used to produce history and Spence’s work shows how even contemporary fiction and creative writing might be used in historical discourse. Root and Steinberg elaborate on this process. Finally I have settled on the genre of memoir to write a story of an ordinary man because it is a way of writing a personal story through an historical landscape accessed through primary and secondary sources.

In writing my thesis I will simply tell you ‘how it really was’ that I discovered something of my father and what it was I discovered about him. It might be an uneasy balance between writing about him and me. I must remind myself that his times were not my times and his language is not my language. I may struggle with the conflicting claims of the story and the emotional truth I perceive. I will tell you what I think happened and the concrete details of history. When I speculate, I will say so and I will only speculate to infer information that may be missing or obscured. I acknowledge that any hypothesis I venture to make will be inherently subjective because it will be dependent upon my understanding, experience and knowledge of studied
situations. However, I will endeavor to ensure that any conjecture on my part will be carefully and explicitly grounded in identified reliable historical records relevant to the context in which they are being used.\textsuperscript{51} There is no guarantee, of course, that my reconstruction of some events will be correct, but it will represent, at least, a close reflection of original accounts.\textsuperscript{52}

My memoir will discuss what it has meant to be separated from a parent, grandparents and a culture. I will include in the landscape of my thesis the vast setting of our separated and common history: Wales, England and Great Britain. I will tell you what I know about the life and times of my father, the conditions of his childhood and of the opportunities he had as a young man, his marriage to my mother, his career in the Royal Air Force his interest in language, philosophy, and the arts. I will tell you about his university life, his second marriage and his ultimate career. I expect that along the way I will become detached from this story, that it will become a sort of changeling – someone else’s story. It starts with fiction, fragments of which appear through the thesis. So if you are sitting comfortably, I will begin.


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 70.
2) My Father, My Hero – A Mythical Tale

I was born under a gooseberry bush, in a nest of soft, white, downy feathers. The stork delivered me on a warm midsummer's night, whilst under the full silvery moon, the fairies danced. I know this is true, because it is written on my birth certificate.

I am the daughter of a hero. My father rode into Berlin on a white Egyptian stallion, with Hitler's head on a plate. Hitler's head was a symbol of my father's unparalleled daring. It was too incredible to believe, that a mere foot soldier had pulled off such a trick. His achievement was the envy of millions. They said my father had been called.

Called to the Bar?
Called to Serve The Lord?

"Called where?" Gran had demanded, "who needs him?"

No: my father was not called to the bar to defend the innocent, nor was he called to be a Divine HIM. Our Country had called my dad, because it needed him to be a lower case private in the army. England expected every man to do his duty and this included Private Him.

"Called Up," Gran yelled, when she'd learned the truth.
"Called to be killed, for that warmonger Churchill! There's nothing to choose between him and Hitler. They're as bad as each other. It's all very well writing fine speeches, sitting safe and snug in an underground shelter, smoking cigars, and getting fat. We'll fight on the beaches, in the sky and on the land; age shall not wither them... Indeed! It wasn't Churchill who was going off to die, and he certainly made damn sure he'd be around long enough to wither. Huh," she snorted in conclusion.

Yes: Private Him had been called to fight the Fatherland.

The Fuhrer was his enemy. They were about the same size, but only one of them had a moustache. Like Hitler, my father would kill, not as many perhaps, but he would never ask for anyone's forgiveness.

Unlike the Holy Father, my dad didn't wear a black dress. He was a Brown Policeman Plod, with a brass buttoned brown jacket, brown cap, and smart brown shoes. Like all good soldiers he marched, but his salute was discrete. His arm bent at the elbow as his fingers touched his cap. We all know how the Fuhrer saluted, and, just for laughs at the local pub, Private Him would ridicule the Nazis, thrusting his right arm out, with all the patriotic fervour necessary to hail the little Austrian upstart.

Private Him could speak German like a native. He had learnt the language whilst he had enjoyed the women of the brothels and bawdy houses from Hamburg to Munich. He knew his way through all the paths and hollow caves in the Black Forest, and, on occasions, when he had been caught by an irate husband or a
frustrated lover he had disappeared from trouble into the dark trees around Bertesgarten.

He had just the skills that MI 5 were looking for.

"We want you to go to the Bunker," they said. "We want you to become a German squady. Do you think you're up to it, Old Man? It goes without saying, it's dangerous." With an understanding wink they continued. "We can give you a cyanide pill; just in case, Old Chap! We'll be right behind you, and dashed grateful for your help. What do you say? Are you prepared to Do Your Bit, for King and Country? Stiff Upper Lip and all that."

"Great Stuff!" Well, here's the plan," came the response when my dad agreed to help out.

They promoted him to adjutant, a waiter in uniform, who would fetch and carry for the Fuhrer. For months he kept his head down, eyes alert. His life depended on his success. He had heard of the failed attempt of the German Generals, with their bomb under the table. Hitler had shot the lot of them, and my dad had no intention of going the same way.

He waited till the dead of night. Like a dark angel he had been ordered to guard the Fuhrer while he slept. There was one guard at the bottom of the bed whilst my dad stood beside Hitler's pillow. The tyrant lay on his back, so deep asleep that he already looked like a corpse. His drab pallor accentuated his
black hair, which was oiled down to a smooth swathe across his brow. His moustache looked as if he had spent the whole day stroking it.

Now’s a good a time as any, thought my Dad as, stealthily as a snake, he moved closer to Hitler. As he did so, he slipped his sword from its sheath around his belly. The guard at the bottom of the bed sensed movement, and turned. He saw my father standing, with the knife poised. He knew that if he sounded the alarm, he too would be accused of treachery, so he hovered like a ghost and watched, whilst the Royal Executioner prepared to strike. In the silence, time held its breath as the Fuhrer stirred. He rolled over to snuggle deeper into sleep and, as he moved, he sensed something was not quite right. His eyelids fluttered like a startled bird as he saw the knife above him. At first he froze with rage and fear, and then his eyes turned apoplectic as he realized his fate. He was trapped. His screams were snatched by the icy winds which blasted them away, spitting the poison out into the sinister crevices of the snow-capped mountains surrounding the bunker.

For a brief moment the two guards stood stunned and motionless. Then, relief began to find its way into their hearts, and their bodies began to relax. It seemed incredible that finally the despot was dead, and a hero had been born.

They polished the plate till it shone, and then placed the head in the centre. The German Cross Hitler had won at the Battle of the Somme, was placed at the base of his neck, forming a macabre necklace.

I wore my white organza dress with my black patent shoes, and my blonde curls
were brushed to perfection when I rode behind my father through the Brandenburg Gate and into Berlin.

There were wild celebrations, and my small ears were deafened by rolling drums, the trumpets, the clamour of the church bells, and above all the laughter. Yes: my father was a champ. The crowds had wanted revenge and my father had given it to them. The women swooned, kissing the ground as he passed. The men cheered, throwing banners and helmets in the air. Children danced whilst the elders nodded, knowingly.

Some shuddered at the sight of the head, as if they could feel the cold swipe of the sword across their own necks. But all rejoiced at the death of the tyrant.
Europe would consider its future and make plans to rebuild, but not yet. For the moment, there was complete euphoria.

The news had reached London. Everyone was out in the streets, hugging and congratulating each other. Some had tears rolling down their faces. Men with top hats threw them high into the air. Others raised their glasses in a toast.

"Long Live the King," they yelled. Singing swept through the crowd. The Queen was there, with the feathers in her hat, bobbing up and down in time with her hand, which she waved, in small circles at the crowd, as if they were a choir she was conducting. They said Hitler was dead. The war was over.

**Rule Britannia!**

She was changing the guard at Buckingham Palace, when my mother heard the news. At the top of her voice she was yelling:
"Stomach in, chest out, shoulders back, look straight ahead. Let your arms swing loosely by your side."

She commanded in her corporal's uniform, a flat peaked cap, brown jacket with brass buttons, a brown skirt, wide enough to march in, and ever-so-sensible, flat, brown, lace-up shoes.

Like my father, my mother had been called. Not to the bar, like my Gran for a good stiff glass of stout, nor was she called to be a hero like my dad. My mum's calling was a true vocation. With her natural ability for law and order, and getting things done, she had known the army was the place for her. She had swapped her apron for her uniform. Square bashing had more appeal than spud bashing. The cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing had been abandoned for a pay packet, a uniform, and nylon stockings.

Washing up, cleaning up — gone! Left. Right. Left. Right. Attention!

I'd gone with her to the Palace but all I wanted to know was, "Did the King know all about dad and me?" "Sure to, Dear" she'd said "but it's time for tea."53 Then, as if she'd turned to stone, she stopped dead in her tracks. "And just why would the King be interested in your father," she'd demanded. "A hero? Your father a hero? Don't be ridiculous. What bunkum! He had nothing to do with it. Hitler shot himself. " She'd gone on and on. "Just listen to me, your father wouldn't do anything he didn't have to. He wouldn't risk a

brain as delicate as his, so you can forget all that nonsense you've filled your head up with. Don't let me hear you talk such rubbish, do you hear? I'll say this just once, so listen carefully: Don't ever mention his name again".

So I didn't.

Yes, the war was over; all the king's horses and all the king's men came home. Mentally broken. Physically shattered. The women carefully folded their uniforms, wrapped them in tissue paper, and proudly tucked them away at the back of the cupboard, a souvenir of their contribution to the war. There were no more nylons, and certainly no pay packets for nurturing the fractured warriors.

It was my turn now to be called. 'C'mon, Europe needs you", was the government's rallying cry. "It's got to be rebuilt". So, I rolled up my sleeves and muscled in. There was plenty to do, and it took half a life time. As we finished cleaning up our inherited mess, our illustrious prime minister declared, "You've never had it so good!" How was that? I wanted to know, as I never found the fairies at the bottom of the garden?

By the way, they buried Churchill in Westminster Abbey, right alongside my dad. I didn't tell my mum.
4) SCENE SETTING

I bet you wish that hero was your dad. So do I: but the whole story has verisimilitude. Scene-setting, if you will. It could be dismissed from serious consideration, except that it contains three major elements that need to be unwrapped as within the narrative’s mix of personal memories and school girl history I can see the effects on my life of three significant historical themes; Britain’s class system, World War II, and mid twentieth-century attitudes toward divorce. Sitting on the beach watching the sun go down I came to understand that these elements connect me to my father.

a) All in the Same Boat

I’ll begin with Britain’s class system and my maternal grandmother’s angst towards Britain’s World War II Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. My gran was a pivotal character in my early life because together with my mother, I lived with her, during, and for a brief period after, World War II. That was when she taught me something of her binding set of working-class attitudes and culture manifested through her community – London’s Cockneys. She

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54 My grandmother’s address, which I clearly remember, can be traced through marriage certificates and war service records.

55 The British class system is complicated and there is widespread comment on the topic. Discussions on ‘class’ can be found in works that embrace ‘culture’ which is a sharing and binding of assumptions and values that a group of society manifest through its institutions, habits, rituals artefacts and art forms. Sociologist, historian, cultural theorist Raymond Williams sees culture as both a constitutive element of society, and a potential means for social transformation. For Williams, culture cannot be understood in isolation from the social ground from which it springs, or from the reciprocal effects it has upon the social environment.


taught me bits of rhyming slang and how to dance to songs like *My Ole Man said Follow the Van, and Don’t Dilly Dally on the Way*. She introduced me to the Pearly Kings and Queens who dressed in costumes of twinkling sequins and I watched while she ate jellied eels washed down with a pint of stout when we sat together in pubs near the Elephant and Castle. I also heard her make derogatory comments about the upper classes including Winston Churchill. She’d keep those prejudices till long after the war was over.

Churchill had all the attributes of the upper-classes. Born at Blenheim Palace, the son of Lord Randolph Churchill, Winston was educated at Ascot, Harrow and the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. As a young woman, my working-class grandmother, lived in Lambeth, an area described in the notes of two of Charles Booth’s diligent scouts as a ‘story of worsenment’; the remains of an ancient old established poverty where houses were, for the most part, two storied and stood almost back to back. There were no gardens, poor sanitation and overcrowding prevailed. If she had gone to school, rather than being sent to work, she would have attended lessons with as many as eighty children.

As the British class system is complex there are other ways of viewing the topic. For example Karl Marx provides a framework which, simply put, is based on ownership of land which generates rents; bourgeois capital which can produce profits and the proletarian workers who can sell their labour for wages. These categories translate into a three tiered society; the upper, middle and working classes. As well as discussing Marxist notions, Cannadine also addresses Feminist Historians’ attitudes towards class. He also provides insight into class as a social and political instrument covering the period from the eighteenth to the early twenty-first century. David Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, London: Penguin Books, 2000.


in a class. The middle classes straddle the social divide. I’ll talk more about them later. Suffice for now to say that they considered themselves to be distinct from the working classes. Just look at this from Joseph Kay:

They lived precisely like brutes to gratify ... the appetites of their uncultivated bodies, and then die, to go they have never thought, cared or wondered whither... . Brought up in the darkness of barbarism, they have no idea, that it is possible for them to attain any higher condition; they are not even sentient enough to desire. . . to change their situation. . . they have unclear, indefinite, and undefinable ideas all around them; they eat, drink, breed, work and die; and . . . the richer and more intelligent classes are obliged to guard them with police.59

Although the blood of these three disparate groups was mixed on the battlefields of Europe during the Great War, any egalitarian spirit that might have been aroused in the 1920s fizzled out during the 1930s as the elites, having suffered disproportionately heavy war casualties saw their position in society as vulnerable and used their power to reinstate their influence in British society. 60 To that end the media were invaluable as contemporary journalist

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Winter confirms Muggeridge’s observations. Winter argues that even though the spirit of the collective memory was egalitarian in the 1920s with the common soldier the object of homage, by the 1930s ideas as to what the Great War meant had become highly inequalitarian and class-conscious. While most of those lost to the war were overwhelmingly working class, the elites suffered disproportionately heavy causalities. This shook the confidence of the British ruling class in its belief that its hold on power was enduring and, Winter adds, the cumulative work of British conservative politicians, and the media looked to express the sacrifice of the officer corp and the social class it embodied and reassert older lines of continuity in British cultural life.

Alistair Reid’s argument is that World War I caused far less impact on social relations than has often been thought. Analysing the impact of the war on wages he notes that although there was a temporary increase in female unskilled munitions workers and a permanent shift in the bulk of women employed in domestic service to white collar and the service sector they were often, for patriotic reasons, prepared to tolerate low wages. He adds that although across-the-board cost-of-living increases were used in order to keep pace with wartime inflation there was no major narrowing of the gap between skilled and unskilled workers during the war. Alastair Reid, ‘World War I and the Working Class in Britain’ in *Total War and Social Change*, Arthur Marwick (ed.), London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988, pp.16-24.
Malcolm Muggeridge noted. He claimed ‘that social position and wealth had come to have an almost mystical significance, with newspapers reporting glamorous weddings of peers, and baronets, their clothing, catering, parties and so on.’\(^{61}\) These were the kind of images the press presented as Britain descended into war in 1939, a war which became known as ‘the People’s War,’\(^{62}\) a ‘total war.’\(^{63}\) The home front was the battlefront and civilians were on the front line. Novelist, playwright and broadcaster, J. B. Priestly told BBC listeners on 21 July 1940:

Now, the war, because it demands a huge collective effort, is compelling us to change not only our ordinary, social and economic habits, but also our habits of thought. We’re actually changing over from the property view to the sense of community, which simply means that we realise we’re all in the same boat. But, and this is the point, that boat can serve not only as a defence against Nazi aggression but as an ark in which we can all finally land in a better world. \(^{64}\)

This suggests to me that everybody was living on a par with everyone else during the People’s War; that class and privilege no longer prevailed. That debutantes and dukes linked arms to dance and sing with my grandmother and her mates – cleaners, labourers, dustmen et al – to tunes such as Knees up Mother Brown \(^{65}\) and that they all spent their weekends, like Churchill, in a country house similar to Chequers or Ditchley Park with everyone inviting

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\(^{62}\) Angus Calder, _The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945_, London: Panther Books Ltd, 1969. Calder introduces this book with this quote from Churchill: “this is a war of the unknown warriors. The whole of the warring nation are engaged, not only soldiers, but the entire population, men, women and children. The fronts are everywhere. The trenches are dug in the towns and streets. Every village is fortified. Every road is barred. The front lines run through the factories. The workmen are soldiers with different weapons but the same courage.” The people of Britain were protagonists in their own history in a fashion never known before.

\(^{63}\) Juliet Gardiner, _The Blitz: The British Under Attack_, London: Harper Press, 2011, p. xiv. Gardiner defines the ‘blitz’ as total war because it touched everyone’s lives, mobilised the population, put civilians on the front line and made the home front the battlefront. Its intensity and inescapability made it possible to call the Second World War ‘the people’s war’.


\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 87.
everyone to come along and join in watching a film. Similarly, one and all began the day going through their mail, telephoning and summoning people to see them. Churchill’s visitors would find him sitting up in bed in a dressing gown emblazoned with dragons, top-secret papers strewn over the bedclothes, and a favourite cat curled up at his feet. Over lunch, he would enjoy a bottle of champagne followed by brandy. By the late afternoon he was sipping whisky and soda ready for another round of meetings to be followed by dinner with more champagne and brandy. Hey, Mr Priestly, was there champagne for all? I don’t think so.

My gran might well have read the popular press which displayed hostility towards the ‘rich’ because it believed, and rightly, that they suffered less than ‘ordinary people’, particularly after food rationing was introduced in January 1940 when everyone got a buff coloured ration book with coupons which they could exchange for vital groceries. In 1940 there was an allowance, for example, of 4oz of butter and 4oz of bacon per person per week and these quantities would fall as the war progressed. To supplement diets people were encouraged to ‘Dig for Victory;’ to substitute lawns and flower beds for a vegetable patch. But London, like major cities such as Clydebank, Liverpool and Coventry, was subjected to bombing raids particularly during the 1940 Blitz. Growing vegetables as buildings tumbled seems a rather tall

Cannadine, Class in Britain, p. 146.
order. I think Mr Priestly forgot to mention that some people, like my grandmother, would be travelling steerage class in his boat.

When the Nazis bombed Britain the hoi polloi ran for their lives seeking refuge in public communal shelters or anywhere they believed safer than their own usually shelter-less, basement and cellar-less homes. There is a plethora of photos of smiling happy people cosily tucked up in the vermin infected tunnels of London’s Underground. Other commentary informs that some people dived into communal shelters such as vaults which were:

Unforgettable places where people swarmed, tripped, tumbled, crushed and fought for a place to sleep. Where sanitation barely existed so filth, which was ankle deep, was trodden into blankets on which people were to sleep.

‘In any case you’re well over the white line’

On the other hand many of the upper classes fled to the country with their respectful domestic servants while down in the basement at The Ritz in

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69 Ibid., p. 53.  
71 Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p.73.  
72 Ibid., p. 367.  
73 Muggeridge, The Thirties, p. 334.
Piccadilly, good bedding was provided for its discerning guests who knew they might not survive a direct hit but, ‘if you were a retired colonel and his lady, you might feel the risk was worth it because you would at least be bombed with the right sort of people.’ Against this background it is easy to sympathise with air raid wardens and fire crews who deliberately let houses in elitist areas like Knightsbridge burn. And when Churchill made a brief speech to the people of Camberwell concluding with a rallying call ‘we can take it,’ a voice shouted back, ‘what do you mean “we,” you fat bastard!’ Against this milieu my grandmother’s resentment towards ‘the fat bastard’ and his fine speeches, [made] sitting safe and snug in an underground shelter, smoking cigars doesn’t seem misplaced.

b) A Marriage made in Hell

For me the British class system had enormous ramifications. Their roots lie in the chaos and social attitudes prevailing during and just after World War II.

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74 Weight, Patriots, National Identity in Britain 1940-2000, p. 87.
75 Ibid., p. 87.
76 Camberwell is close to where my grandmother lived before and during the war. Weight, Patriots, National Identity in Britain 1940-2000, p. 87.
77 The Reverend Harold E. Eburne – Photograph scanned by A Edwards from a family album. I used to spend my school holidays with the Reverend Eburne and his wife Dorothy.

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It was amidst the destruction caused by a persistent Luftwaffe attack that became known as the Blitz, that on 12 September 1940, the Reverend H.E. Eburne joined my parents in holy matrimony in Lewisham in south east London. How they met I’ve no idea but it was a marriage made in hell. September 1940 saw 5730 Londoners killed and 9000 seriously wounded from the bombing raids. Although Stepney in the East End of London took first prize with 2160 houses demolished, Lambeth in south east London, where my grandmother lived had 1758 destroyed and Lewisham, where my parents married had only slightly fewer. There were rubber fires, paint fires, rum fires and even pepper fires, causing explosions and producing asphyxiating smoke. Incendiary and high-explosive bombs poured down on the flaming docks and streets. A tidal wave of refugees took flight after the first hideous weekend. Rest centres were overflowing, transport didn’t turn up so refugees were bombed to death in the rest centres. People flocked to the tubes while others spent days on end in coaches since there was nowhere to dump them. The bombing of London continued for seventy six consecutive nights. There were daytime raids as well, which were dangerous and disruptive, but it was the night raids that brought terror and devastation.

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79 Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage between John William Edwards and Florence Annie Curtis, 12 September, 1940, held by A. Edwards.
80 I had hoped to cross-reference my parent’s war records but the Army Personnel Centre, Historical Disclosures Section in Glasgow advised that my request couldn’t be dealt with until early 2013. I can only speculate. My parents wedding certificate confirms that my mother was a Post Office Counter-Clerk/Telephonist. She would have been as Calder informs part of the Post Office War Group who was essential to maintaining communications between radar stations, observer stations and the RAF. Between April to September 1940 post office workers were amongst some twenty to twenty-five thousand government employees who, with their state records, left London and were billeted across the country. Calder, The People’s War 1939-1945, p. 40. Gardiner explains that women were highly mobile during the war and it suggests to me that my mother met my father while they were on manoeuvres. Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, pp. 504-522.
82 Marwick, The Home Front The British and The Second World War, pp. 45–49.
With the benefit of hindsight it seems a crazy time to have married but at the beginning of the war the marriage rate went up.\textsuperscript{83} Couples were often driven by a sense of urgency – a drive to give status to wartime romances and wartime passions.\textsuperscript{84} Marriage held a promise of stability and a hedge against chaos, uncertainty and danger. As newlyweds they were married, yet not married. Setting up home was postponed with many wartime brides, like my mother, living with their parents.\textsuperscript{85} Like many other couples my parents would be separated for months and even years only meeting briefly as leave entitlements allowed.\textsuperscript{86} They’d have no idea how life together could possibly work out. And for my mum and dad, it didn’t.

My parents were amongst the growing number of petitioners who, after being separated from their partners during the war, found they hardly knew each other and consequently divorced.\textsuperscript{87} On 28 May 1948, when I was six years old, my mother married Gordon Herbert Higby who had been a Japanese prisoner of war for four years.\textsuperscript{88} My mother was, like most contemporary divorcees, ashamed of being divorced.\textsuperscript{89} Her attitude impacted me deeply.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} The marriage rate went up from 17.2 per thousand in 1938 to 22.1 per thousand in 1940, while the age of those getting married fell: nearly three brides out of every ten getting married for the first time were under twenty-one. Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch (RAF) 1940-1946 \textit{Record of Service for John William Edwards}. These records trace my father’s military activities during World War II and show his home address as 3, Belmont Crescent, Buckley and my mother’s address as 32 Ducie Street, South London, the home of my grandmother.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. 88. The military records also show that my father moved constantly throughout the United Kingdom and later through Germany. Statistics show that the number of petitions filed rose from 9970 in 1938 to 24,857 in 1945 to a post-war peak of 47,041 in 1947. Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ancestry.com.uk, England & Wales Marriage Index: 1916-2005, Retrieved from: \url{http://search.ancestry.co.uk/}
Family gossip has it that Gordon Higby was my mother’s pre-war sweetheart.
\item \textsuperscript{89} David Kynaston, \textit{Austerity Britain 1948-51 Smoke in the Valley}, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2008, p. 58.
\end{itemize}
By 1949 my mother, stepfather and I had left London. I was packed off to Great Holland Primary School in Essex. I was now known as Ann Marie Higby. My mother’s hero had usurped my father. There was no paper work, no adoption formalities just a big fat brush dripping with whitewash that wiped out Ann Marie Edwards, along with my Welsh grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Thereafter my father was taboo. Dismissed. *I'll say this just once, so listen carefully: Don’t ever mention his name again*. So I didn’t. Now living close to my mother’s middle class in-laws I was to be taught their middle class ways.

I could keep hush hush about my dad but my working-class Cockney accent let me down. I had no idea that the way I spoke would, according to post-modern literary theorists, identify me with a social and possible political group. Malcolm Muggeridge had warned, back in the 1930s that if the BBC ever began to drop its “h’s” then the nation had better prepare for trouble.\(^\text{90}\)

\(^{90}\) Muggeridge, *The Thirties*, p. 290.
That’s what I did and I was in trouble. I was to learn to speak proper. My Cockney grandmother’s rhyming slang had to go. Words and pronunciation of which my new middle-class family would approve became the order of the day. Professor Alan Ross of Birmingham University gets down to basics as he explains which vocabulary suited whom. Working-class people wore corsets, cycled, had homes, a mirror and if push came to shove used a serviette (rather than the back of their hand or their sleeve! – that’s me). Whereas, if you wanted to appear upper-class you would have stays, a bike, a house, use a looking-glass and a napkin. They, rather than us, would have a lounge, not a sitting room and they would eat sweets, not pudding. My mother was responsible for my elocution lessons. She taught me to pick up my “h’s.” Say ‘thank-you’, nicely, of course, and I was a grown woman before I ever heard rhyming slang again.

Other elaborate social subtleties were at play. Even eating habits defined the classes. Laying a middle class table for a meal was a science. Every piece of cutlery had its precise place. I can’t remember which piece of electric plated nickel silver was on the outer layer of the display surrounding the table mat. I think it was the soup spoons, then the fish knives, then the ‘big knives’ on the right and big forks on the left. A small knife was tucked up close to the right of the table mat for spreading butter on bread rolls placed on a small plate to the left. The sweet fork sat at the top of the table setting, with the sweet spoon above it. I think that’s right. Do you get it? And for

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92 Ibid., p. 38.
93 Ibid., p. 39.
God’s sake don’t eat your peas with the fork turned up like a spoon! ‘Nice people’ ate lunch at midday and had their dinner in the evening. Alan Bennett, playwright and broadcaster recalls that shame and humiliation would inevitably descend when his working-class parents visited him at Oxford University in the 1950s.

When we were at home, we inevitably had our dinner at lunchtime . . . But when I was at university and they came to see me, we’d go into the hotel dining room at night and the waiter would present the menu, and Mam would say the dread words, “Do you do a poached egg on toast?” and we'd slink from the dining room, the only family in England not to have its dinner at night. 94

I did eventually pass the language test but I am afraid my attitudes always let me down because I never passed the ‘respectability test.’ Wealth and occupation were irrelevant to getting on in this society. To be respectable and middle-class everything one did had to be done with moderation. No wild scenes of passion or debauchery. Discretion is a highly practiced middle class skill meant to supplant outspoken and therefore ‘rude’ behaviour. To attract complete scorn all one needed to do was ‘make a scene.’

I grew up a social misfit, an outsider. But somewhere tucked deep inside the crevices of my mind in recesses I didn’t know I had, I waited for my father to return. And when he did I knew he would be tall, blonde and handsome, riding an Egyptian stallion and, as a present for me, he would bring Hitler’s Iron Cross, First Class, on a silver plate. I would still be waiting if I hadn’t turned to historical sources to learn something of my father’s life.

94 Ibid., p. 39.
5) FROM THE CRADLE TO THE BATTLE FRONT

I began to research the life of my father by carefully looking at the details on the marriage certificate I had found in mother’s effects after she died. The certificate states that my father John William Edwards was 35 years of age on 12 September 1940. His rank/profession was 990005AC/2 R.A.F. His address was 3 Belmont Crescent, Buckley, near Chester and my grandfather, Alfred Edwards, was a coal-miner. Because the marriage certificate showed that my father was in the Royal Air Force (RAF) I approached Professor Michael Durey, an authority on British military history, for his advice. He suggested two lines of enquiry. Firstly, to search [http://search.ancestry.co.uk](http://search.ancestry.co.uk) for more family details and second, to write to the Ministry of Defence for a copy of my father’s military records. With nothing to lose except a subscription fee I joined ancestry.co.uk and just started looking.

I felt like a naughty child delving around the World Wide Web looking for information about a man who had been banished from my life since 1948 and was utterly confused when, serendipitously, Deirdre Griffith’s family tree popped up. Her genealogy included a John William Edwards. She replied to my 26 April 2011 email with details of the Edwards family and concluded by undertaking to contact Mrs Joan Dodd whom she confidently thought was my cousin. It had never occurred to me that my dad had any relatives and so it was with some trepidation that I sent Joan the few details I had, together with a photo of my elderly father.95

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95 I don’t know how I came to have it.
On 27 May 2011 Joan wrote ‘I am pleased to tell you something about your Dad, my Uncle John…’ Joan told me of my Aunty Catherine and Auntie Maggie who lived at 3 Belmont Crescent, Buckley and of Uncle Alfred and Uncle Len. This is my grandmother as she appears on Deidre Griffith’s web page with Ancestory.com

Nellie Badrock, always known as Nellie

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96 John Willie Edwards – photograph provided by A. Edwards.
97 The National Archives of the UK *1911 Wales Summary Books* for Mr A Edwards confirm the births of the Edwards children John Willie in 1904, Margaret 1906, Leonard 1907, Alfred in 1908 and Catherine in 1909. Their mother is shown as Nellie Badrock.
99 While historians remain critical of the sources and even though historical scholarship is increasingly being supplemented by images, there has been little thought given to the notion that photography is synonymous with fidelity in representation; despite the manipulative capacity of modern technology the camera, it seems, ‘simply shows it how it was.’ Museums, libraries, galleries, exhibitions, family albums, old shoe boxes… hold a plethora of materials which are available to preserve history which, with attendant captions, legends and inscriptions, seemingly bridge the past and present. Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera*, London: SAGE Publications Limited, 1988, pp. 121-125. Some images float across the World Wide Web and we believe the narratives that give them meaning. Some of my images are like displaced refugees crossing the boundaries of time and place; dislocated shadows of a former reality. They have come via
With growing confidence I contacted the Flintshire County Council to see if they could provide me with a copy of my father’s birth certificate. I received a certificate which

is the exact copy of the register so presumably it is just written in English. In North Wales Welsh has only had resurgence in recent times and most old birth marriage and death certificates are in English. \(^{100}\)

The birth certificate positively confirms the names of my grandparents as Alfred Edwards and Nellie Edwards formerly Badrock. Lane End, Daisy Hill, Buckley in the County of Flintshire\(^{101}\) is where my father, John Willie Edwards was born on 19 September 1904. \(^{102}\)

\(^{100}\) Jane Walsh, email on behalf of Registrars@flintshire.gov.uk, 18 August 2011.

\(^{101}\) J. Amos, Deputy Superintendent Registrar, 2011, Certified Copy of an Entry of Birth, Hawarden, County of Flint, North Wales, Certificate held by A. Edwards.

\(^{102}\) The 12 September 1940 wedding certificate showed my father as aged 35, suggesting a 1905 birthday. In fact he was born on 19 September 1904 making him 36 shortly after his marriage in 1940.

\(^{103}\) Flintshire County Council Map delineating Flintshire and the immediate locality.
Flintshire is a small county in north Wales. Offa’s Dyke lies mainly to its west, the Irish Sea at its northern border and the River Dee to the east. Flint became a shire under the Normans and its close proximity to the English border saw Edward I strive to make the region subject to the great palatine earldom of Chester (just two and a half miles from the border). As a battle ground for conflicting ethnicities and, further down the centuries, Flintshire became a place where migrants settled, so it is not surprising that some Flintshire people speak Welsh and others speak English. In any event, lexico-grammatical transformations, accents, intonations, inflections and so on, have become absorbed into the local language and today a unique dialect is characteristic of the area – particularly in Buckley. Daisy Hill sounded to me like the sort of place Christopher Robin would play. Far from it!

In the early part of the twentieth century Daisy Hill figured prominently in Buckley’s industrial network of potteries, brickworks, lead smelting outlets and coal mines. Lane End, as well as being the street address of my grandparents was one of Buckley’s collieries. Pragmatically, I think it likely that that is where my grandfather worked as a hewer at the coal face.

107 Ibid., p115.
Housing in the area was primitive and overcrowded. Roofs leaked, walls were paper thin and toilets were in a row across the yard.  

Not only were toilets shared with neighbours, an outside tap supplied water to the street. Drains were open ditches which polluted local streams and waste disposal and sewage arrangements were primitive.

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110 Kindly supplied by the Buckley Historical Society www.buckleysociety.org.uk

A night soil cart cleared sewage until the 1920s. It was not until 1906 that the Urban District Council wrote to the owners of the houses in the area to recommend ‘that water should be laid on to these houses, owing to the fever which had occurred there, and that
Amidst this polluted environment were small shops and a plethora of inter-denominational churches.

The day would have begun early in the morning at the Edwards’ household. At four o’clock my grandmother would have been stoking the coal fire to cook eggs and bacon for my grandfather before he joined other men and boys in the neighbourhood, clattering off to work in their clogs. It was Nellie’s job to ensure the fire at home never went out. In winter it was needed to keep the family warm and it was essential for cooking, baking and for heating water in big cast iron kettles. Gallons of hot water were used to fill giant sized tin baths for bathing the family, but more particularly for washing my tired and very dirty grandfather when he returned home from the coal face.

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they would like the owners to have the cistern water laid on if possible’. 1909 Housing Act banned the construction of back to back houses


His damp clothes would have been hung round the fire to dry overnight. When Nellie did a ‘big wash’ the clothes would have hung on the communal line in the street. Meanwhile my dad would have been packed off to school.

It is clear that my Welsh family were, like my London relations, working class and as such had no direct route to or expectations of reaping the benefits of a tertiary education. Nevertheless, there was, under the 1870 Elementary Education Act, an obligation for Grandad Alfie and Grandma Nellie to send John Willie to school in 1909 when he was aged five.

They had a choice between two nearby Anglican Church Schools, Lane End and St. Mathews and, close to Lane End they had a choice between two nearby Anglican Church Schools, Lane End and St. Mathews and, close to Lane End the sectarian Padeswood Road Board School. Knowing which of these schools my grandparents chose for my dad is not as important, I think, as understanding which secondary school he might have gone to.

Since 1880 The Welsh had been pushing for a second tier of learning which saw the implementation of the 1889 Welsh Intermediate Act, which provided for places to be allocated to children in non-denominational grammar schools. These schools were managed by county councils who could increase the rates to fund building and ongoing costs. These laws enabled children of Buckley to access secondary education at nearby Hawarden Grammar School from the age of 12 or 13.

I’m speculating now, but I think my father went to Hawarden Grammar School having passed an entrance exam which would have qualified him for one of the free places provided by the Board of Education. My speculation is based on my father’s ability to speak German, a skill which apparently lay dormant for years.

The statutory regulations for a secondary school’s curriculum included English Language and Literature, Geography, History, Mathematics and Science; also physical exercise, drawing and singing and,

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117 Ibid., p. 245.
118 Attendees at both these school had to be fully baptized in church and, as well as the principles of the Church of England children were taught what became known as the 3r’s, reading writing and arithmetic; as well as English grammar, geography, history and music.
121 My research yielded no other opportunity for him to have gained knowledge of the German language sufficient for him to be using this valuable skill during World War II.
most importantly as far as my speculation is concerned – *languages, ancient or modern, other than the native language of the students*. On the assumption that my father went to Hawarden Grammar he could have left school at the age of 18 or 19. He could have gone to University but that doesn’t happen for some time as I’ll explain later. I am not certain what he did between leaving school and serving in His Majesty’s armed forces during World War II.

To fill in the gap I explored what career opportunities there were for the young men of Buckley between the wars. His options would have included working at the local potteries, a skill Buckleyites had been practising since the thirteenth century. Although a creative enterprise, this craft offered no long term prospects as by the end of World War I it could almost be described as a cottage industry. It is unlikely that my dad followed my grandfather down the coal mines as the local pits had been subjected to industrial disputes and closure. Anyway, in her 13 June 2012 letter Cousin Joan says ‘no’ to that idea. The brickworks would have offered openings. It was a labour intensive industry and building materials were in demand after World War I because the government, by way of the *1920 Housing and Town Planning Act*, sought to compensate for the lack of housing with its ‘Homes for Heroes’ scheme.

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122 Maclure, *Educational Documents England and Wales 1816 to the present day*, p. 158.
Flintshire County Council was not lethargic in taking advantage of the measures and was still committed in 1930 when slum clearance and improvements to sanitary conditions were the order of the day.  

Good roads and cheap day return tickets offered by the railways helped working people to travel to work in the interwar years, so it doesn’t seem unreasonable to presume that to find work my dad might have travelled to Flint just seven and a half miles from Buckley. Industries in the area included paper mills, fertilizer, tinplate, and limestone producers and Courtaulds, who manufactured viscose. In 1938, pre-empting World War II, aircraft assembly works were built between Broughton and Chester. My cousin Joan tells me that in 1934 my father applied and got work at John Summers Steel Works. A career with the John Summers enterprise did offer signs of promise, albeit erratic. Since the late nineteenth century John Summers had been hand rolling crude steel sheets and by 1929 his mills were considered to be amongst the five most productive plants in Great Britain. Their fortunes fell in the early thirties as home markets were swamped with cheaper foreign steel. But after successfully lobbying the government for tariff and import controls, production at John Summers’ increased and with World War II imminent, the government began ordering steel for, amongst other things,
air raid shelters. John Summers and Sons were working at full capacity.\textsuperscript{130}

Putting a spanner in the works, Joan’s letter of 13 June 2012 also records that my dad said to his uncle ‘You can have the job, Joe, as I don’t want it.’ In that case my father might also have looked to small local enterprises for work. There were sole traders such as the local bakers and boot makers and the Buckley Smelt and Foundry was another long-standing contributor to the local economy.\textsuperscript{131}

Alternatively my dad may have been one of Flintshire’s unemployed as the numbers of those out of work in the county soared in the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{132} If so he could have taken advantage of State assistance provided initially by the \textit{1920 Unemployment Insurance Act}\textsuperscript{133} and later augmented by the \textit{1931 Anomalies Act}.\textsuperscript{134} Unemployment benefits were seen by some as a disrespected and degraded act of charity but not everybody could necessarily choose between going on the dole or not.\textsuperscript{135} On the other hand between 1921 and 1940, some 430,000 Welsh people did successfully migrate to America,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Holloway, \textit{Industrial Flintshire in the Interwar Years}, pp. 55-64.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Pritchard, \textit{The Making of Buckley and District}, pp. 153-158.
\item \textsuperscript{132} County Herald, 22 April 1938 in Holloway, \textit{Industrial Flintshire in the Interwar Years}, p. iii.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Mowat, \textit{Britain Between the Wars, 1918–1940}, p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{134} J. Stevenson and C. Cook, \textit{The Slump, Britain in the Great Depression}, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2010, p. 83.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Cousin Joan tells an interesting story that my dad tried to migrate to Canada. But I have nothing to support the idea. In any event by 1940, as his military records show, my father was otherwise engaged.

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6) **WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR DADDY?**

In December 2011, I wrote to the Royal Air Force Headquarters Air Command at Sleaford asking if they could provide me with a copy of my father’s service record. Not knowing what to expect I was quite excited when I opened the big brown envelope in January 2012. I was disappointed with its contents, finding two A3 pages, one of them (below) meaning very little to me because it primarily depicts hieroglyphics.

The second page made personal details clear and confirmed the London address of my mother and the Buckley address of my father. His religion was shown as Church of England. I could see he was an interpreter at the end of the war and, by working off a list of common abbreviations which came with
the sheets of hieroglyphics, I knew my dad had served with the British Air Forces of Occupation in Germany. That was more or less it. As far as I was concerned it was thirty quid down the drain. Worse still I had nothing of any substance to use as research for a plausible thesis on my father’s life. Once I had recovered from my disappointment I re-read the RAF’s letter then did what it suggested. I wrote to the Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch (RAF) in Ruislip. I hadn’t bothered with stamped addressed envelopes or registered mail. I really wasn’t expecting an answer. Well, *why would the King know all about my Dad?* A week later I kissed the dog! I’d have kissed Anna Gibbs if she’d been in Fremantle. This is what she sent me: on 29 March 2012.
I appreciate you can’t read it. But I wanted you to see the level of detail she came up with. Anna’s annotations show the dates and places where my father served during the war as well as the squadrons or units he was attached too. Job titles and military rank are clear and so are the qualifications he attained while with the RAF. Before I unravel its story, I want to clarify why my dad had gone to war in 1940 because I understood the 1914-1918 Great War had been the ‘war to end all wars.’ So what was going on?

On 21 March 1939 the British government had threatened Adolf Hitler, the German Nazi Chancellor, that if he ordered German troops to attack Poland ‘His Majesty’s Government would feel themselves bound at once to lend the Polish government all support in their power.’\(^{137}\) Hitler ignored Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and on 1 September 1939 Chamberlain’s dream of ‘peace for our time’ was shattered as he was obliged to announce that ‘consequently this country is now at war with Germany.’\(^{138}\) Some eight months later, on 14 May 1940 at Padgate, a town just east of Liverpool, my father signed up for military service.\(^{139}\) What, I wondered, caused German troops to strut into Poland and why hadn’t my father signed up until eight months after war was declared. Was he as dilatory as my mother maintained?

Germany’s invasion of Poland was not the first time Hitler had flaunted the terms of the 1921 Treaty of Versailles, which obliged Germany to admit responsibility for the Great War, commit to abolishing its military machine,

\(^{137}\) Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. xvii.  
\(^{138}\) Ibid., p. 3.  
\(^{139}\) Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch (RAF) 1940-1946 Record of Service for John William Edwards.
pay reparations fixed by the victors and relinquish much of the industrial Rhineland to France, Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, Denmark and Czechoslovakia. Humiliated and stripped of national pride, the Germans suffered throughout the 1920s as a result of these measures which were compounded by the 1929 Wall Street stock market crash that triggered the Great Depression.  

The resentment the Germans felt towards the allies who had imposed punitive measures fuelled the growth of extreme nationalism and Hitler, through the National Socialists Party, the Nazis, led the way. As Chancellor, Hitler reneged on the Treaty of Versailles, rebuilt the German armed forces then in March 1936 marched his troops into the Rhineland. That same year the Rome-Berlin axis was agreed and Germany signed a pact with Japan pledging each to neutrality if the other was at war with the USSR. Britain and France condemned each of these breaches of the 1921 Treaty but took no aggressive action, preferring instead a diplomatic policy of appeasement.

While British Prime Minister Chamberlain attempted to mollify Hitler’s lust for power, the Nazis forced unification with Austria in March 1938 and, with Czechoslovakia in his sights, Hitler was on his way to fulfilling his goal to create an unassailable, self-sufficient German Empire that would last a thousand years. As Winston Churchill lamented that Britain was unprepared for what he saw as inevitable armed conflict, Chamberlain

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140 Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. xiv.
141 Ibid., p. xiv.
142 Ibid., p. xiv.
143 Ibid., p. xv.
continued to shuffle back and forth unsuccessfully trying to placate Hitler’s ambitions.\textsuperscript{144}

Whether or not these diplomatic manoeuvres by Chamberlain were designed to buy time while Britain and her allies prepared for conflict with the Axis powers, it came as no surprise to most British people when Hitler audaciously attacked Poland.\textsuperscript{145} The British had been able to keep abreast of current affairs by listening to BBC broadcasts, particularly its 9 p.m. news bulletin. As many as 40 million out of a population of 48 million had radios while the professional and clerical classes were able to afford television sets.\textsuperscript{146} Newspaper coverage was also prolific in reporting details of the build up to and declaration of war. This commentary in \textit{The Times} of Monday September 4, 1939 confirms that a state of war existed between Great Britain and Germany.

\textsuperscript{144} Calder, \textit{The People’s War Britain 1939-1945}, pp. 35-37.
\textsuperscript{145} Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. xiv.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 2.
“A STATE OF WAR”

THE ULTIMATUM TO BERLIN

A supplement (the third) to the London Gazette of Friday issued last night contains the following announcement from the Privy Council Office:


On the instructions of his Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, his Majesty’s Ambassador at Berlin addressed on 1st September a communication to the German Government in the following terms:

“Early this morning the German Chancellor issued a proclamation to the German Army which indicated clearly that he was about to attack Poland.

Information which has reached his Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government indicates that German troops have crossed the Polish frontier and that attacks upon Polish towns are proceeding.

In these circumstances it appears to the Governments of the United Kingdom and France that by their action the German Government have created conditions (viz., an aggressive act of force against Poland threatening the independence of Poland) which call for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance.

I am accordingly to inform Your Excellency that unless the German Government are prepared to give His Majesty’s Government satisfactory assurances that the German Government has suspended all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom will, without hesitation, fulfill their obligations to Poland.”

SECOND COMMUNICATION

At 9 a.m. on 3rd September his Majesty’s Ambassador in Berlin addressed a communication to the German Government in the following terms:

“In the communication which I had the honour to make to you on 1st September I informed you, on the instructions of his Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that unless the German Government were prepared to give his Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom satisfactory assurances that the German Government had suspended all aggressive action against Poland and were prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, his Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom would, without hesitation, fulfill their obligations to Poland.

Although this communication was made more than 24 hours ago, no reply has been received, but German attacks upon Poland have been continued and intensified, I have accordingly the honour to inform you that unless not later than 11 a.m. British Summer Time, to-day, 3rd September, satisfactory assurances to the above effect have been given by the German Government and have reached his Majesty’s Government in London, a state of war will exist between the two countries as from that hour.”

No such assurances having been received within the period stated, the German Chargé d’Affaires in London has been formally notified that a state of war exists between the two countries as from 11 o’clock a.m., 3rd September.

147 The Times, Monday, Sep 04, 1939; p. 5; Issue 48401; col B “A State Of War”: The Ultimatum To
The outbreak of this second war with Germany brought no wave of patriotic fervour as there had been at the outbreak of the 1914-1918 Great War. Instead, evidence suggests, there was a release from unbearable tension, of slightly fearful determination and of grim resignation.\textsuperscript{148} What people had expected was an all-out attack by the Luftwaffe and in preparation defensive measures had been initiated while Chamberlain had been yo-yoing back and forth attempting to negotiate with the Nazis. One-and-a-half million people – mostly children, many elderly and the infirm – had been evacuated from crowded cities to the country by the 3 September 1939. Initially theatres, cinemas, music halls and places of entertainment closed and any events attracting large crowds were forbidden, but only for a fortnight or so.

Meanwhile on 9 August 1939 a trial run for the ‘blackout’ had thrown London into darkness. Until people adjusted, ‘blackouts’ caused problems nationwide as not only lights from buildings but also street, traffic, trains, ambulances fire engines and police car lights had to be screened out. This made travelling at night fraught with danger. Traffic accidents doubled, people walked into canals, fell down steps and toppled from railway platforms.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{148} Three diary extracts demonstrate the mood.
\begin{itemize}
  \item A housewife wrote that ‘It has happened! My first feeling was one of tremendous relief that the awful waiting and uncertainty is over.’
  \item A young girl commented that ‘We turned on the radio and heard Chamberlain’s speech and felt slightly sick, and yet half relieved.’
  \item While another woman admitted that ‘now the thing was actually upon her, she had no heart to meet it.’
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{149} Calder, \textit{The People’s War Britain 1939-1945}, p. 73.
I have no idea where my father was in the early stages of the war but in Buckley, the home town of my Welsh relatives, fears and apprehension had been aired at a public meeting in June 1938. In response, 450 people volunteered for the Air Raid Precautions Services (ARP). ARP wardens would man air raid posts, be available at casualty clearing stations, work with decontamination parties in the event of gas attacks, and act as ambulance drivers. On the 24 August 1939 the government had warned them to stand by and, at the same time, military reservists were called up. Gas masks were issued and instructions given at public meetings held at the brickworks, the Palace Cinema, the Tivoli Theatre and local footballs grounds. On 1 September 1939, 650 mothers and children were evacuated from Birkenhead to Buckley in a ‘dirty and filthy condition.’ Reflecting much national prejudice, most Buckleyites had strenuous objections to housing these young evacuees from deprived areas because they feared being infected with scabies and/or impetigo and inconvenienced by children wetting their beds.

Meanwhile, on the 3 September 1939, at 11.27 a.m. air raid sirens sounded over London. ARP wardens swung into gear shepherding civilians off the streets into air raid shelters while the congregation in St. Paul’s Cathedral filed calmly into the crypt. The cause of the alert was an unheralded French plane. The Luftwaffe was nowhere to be seen and by January 1940 half the nation’s evacuees had returned home. This was a time that became known as the Phoney War, or as Chamberlain called it ‘this strangest of wars.’

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150 Pritchard, The Making of Buckley and District, p. 305.
151 Ibid., p. 305.
152 Ibid., pp. 305-306.
153 Calder, The People’s War Britain 1939-1945, p. 36.
154 Ibid., p. 65.
a time of rumour and uncertainty when, for a period of seven months from the
declaration of war ‘both sides appeared to be waiting – Great Britain waiting
for Germany to make a move… Germany waiting until everything is (sic)
ready – possibly including the weather,’ wrote the Observer.\textsuperscript{155} There were
no bombs; not yet.

In the early months of 1940 there was much talk in the press of the ‘creeping
paralysis’ affecting the British war effort under Neville Chamberlain’s
Government and, following Germany’s invasion of Scandinavia in April 1940
and the failed attempt to land and maintain British troops in Norway, on 10
May 1940, Chamberlain’s Conservative Government gave way to a National
Coalition under Winston Churchill. The phoney war was over.\textsuperscript{156}

Churchill had been amongst those politicians who had realised that any future
conflict would be a war of attrition demanding a level of industrial capacity
and trained labour that could not be attained until at least 1940.\textsuperscript{157} Because
the initial enemy attack had been expected to come from Luftwaffe bombers,
military spending had concentrated on building a defensive air shield of
fighter planes and radar.\textsuperscript{158} These priorities resulted in under-funding and
under-recruitment for the Regular Army, but in 1938 fearing the worst, half a
million people had enrolled into the ARP and others had enlisted as part-time
soldiers in the Territorial Army or had joined the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve.

Nevertheless by September 1939 Britain only had a ‘tin-pot’ fighting force

\textsuperscript{155} Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{156} Marwick, The Home Front The British and The Second World War, pp. 28-30.
\textsuperscript{157} Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. xiv.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p. 77.
with the regular army and its reserves numbering about 400,000 with a
roughly equal number of territorials.\textsuperscript{159} By comparison, in March 1939 there
were 8 million men under arms in the German Army.\textsuperscript{160}

On 1 September 1939, the day war was declared, the House of Commons took
action and passed the \textit{National Services (Armed Forces) Act} conscripting all
men aged between eighteen and forty-one into the armed forces. The process
was controlled firstly by the Schedule of Reserved Occupations which
catalogued the various full and part-time war jobs that were seen as essential
to the war effort,\textsuperscript{161} and secondly by grouping the conscripts according to
their age.\textsuperscript{162} The youngest registrants were summoned first, single men before
married men. On the 23 October 1939 the first draft of men registering for
service were aged twenty to twenty-three. By May 1940 registration had
extended to men aged twenty-seven and it did not reach those aged forty until
June 1941.\textsuperscript{163} This brief description of conscription procedures suggests that
my father, aged thirty six at the time, rather than waiting to be called up, had
volunteered for service when he showed up at the Padgate recruitment centre
on 14 May 1940. Volunteering for the war effort meant he would have been
able to choose the service in which he served.\textsuperscript{164} The Mass Observation
record of John Thornley, a twenty-eight year old Printers’ Agent from
Preston, Lancashire, in January 1940 supported this notion.

\textsuperscript{159} Calder, \textit{The People’s War Britain 1939-1945}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{160} Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{161} This included a vast range of occupations, from boiler-makers and poultry farmers to
\textsuperscript{162} Calder, \textit{The People’s War Britain 1939-1945}. p. 58.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 59.
I chatted to a customer about the new age groups – 20 to 28 – to be called up this year and said “Thank Goodness I have at least a year left in civil life!” Her nephew purposely volunteered for service in the job he wanted just before his group was called: It’s a common practice. I want to be anything other than an infantryman — cannon fodder — … My brother laughs at his friends who laughed because he joined up in September. Now they are pathetically eager to choose a position instead of being shoved into an unpleasant one.  

RAF Padgate in 1941  

Just six months after my father reported to the Royal Air Force Recruitment Centre at Padgage, Wilfred Hill an eighteen year old Lancashire lad, volunteered for the RAF. He describes his first day’s induction into the forces. On 4 September 1940 he went to the Recruiting Office

‘filled in enlistment papers, was medically examined and graded. I was to be attested eight days later with about fourteen other volunteers when we went down to Uxbridge arriving about 1pm. We were issued with knife, fork, spoon, mug and towel and then we were marched off to dinner after which we were stripped and the doctor looked us over (twenty in as many seconds). ’FFT’ [free from infection]  It took until 2pm on Sept 13 to finish all that had to be done which was:

2. Papers (5 mins). Insurance, next of kin etc.  
3. Attesting (3 mins). Taking the oath and short lecture on talking shop out of camp.”  

167 Margaret Hill, ‘Wilfred (Pip) Hill’s Diary 1940/1941 — Extract 1 Joining the RAF and BasicTraining at Padgate’, BBC History, Retrieved from:
It was the task of the training centres to turn these young civilians into fighting men, and ‘for the first time in their lives they were in a machine which a man could not quit if he didn’t like its ways.’ The recruits were treated like pre-war regulars, kitted out in uniform and put through a basic training. Every day there was marching and at the end of each day’s training they were allowed to relax by sitting aside the beds polishing and burnishing a bewildering array of equipment.\textsuperscript{168}

Wilfred Hill testifies to this routine.

**Friday 8 Nov (1940)**

Had to clean hut this morning. Gas drill in morning. Lecture in afternoon by Flt Lt on organisation of RAF. After tea had haircut and shower.

Day’s Programme
6.00 Rise  
6.30 Breakfast  
8.00 First drill  
8.30 Inspection  
9.25 Break  
9.55 Drill  
12.00 Dinner  
1.00 Drill  
4.15 Tea  
9.30 Roll Call  
10.15 Lights Out

And this photo shows a Padgate military hut which is certainly clean!

\textsuperscript{168} Gardiner, *Wartime Britain 1939-1945*, pp. 82-83.
\textsuperscript{169} Retrieved from: \url{http://www.rafweb.org/Regiment}

a) Air Force types that never flew

It had never occurred to me that there were men and women in the air force who did all sorts of jobs, some of which were quite mundane. I had only ever thought of men in the RAF as dashing ‘ok sort of chaps’ who roared through the skies giving the thumbs up sign to their mates as they fought off the Luftwaffe. As it turns out, flying in combat was not reckoned to be a job for anyone over thirty.\textsuperscript{170} Aged thirty-five, my father’s country did need him.


On 14 May 1940, my father, whose military records describe his character as ‘very good’ and his level of proficiency as moderate, was now numbered 99005, and ranked as Aircraftman 2nd Class with a job title of Aircraft hand/Balloon Operator. After spending three weeks at a Recruitment Centre at West Kirby on 7 June 1940 he was sent to the Balloon Centre at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Still there on 24 October 1940 he was assigned to 938 (Balloon) Squadron as a Balloon Rigger and Fabric Worker/Balloon Operator. The RAF was responsible for these fluffy non-aggressive cylindrical silver-coloured balloons designed to help protect Britain’s densely populated industrial cities and ports against enemy bombing.

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\[172\] This corresponds to information shown on my birth certificate.

These balloons were 66 feet long and 30 feet high. Filled with 20,000 cubic feet of hydrogen, they were hoisted into the sky and tethered not only to the ground, but also to barges, drifters and even mobile lorries. Floating serenely aloft they forced enemy aircraft to fly high above them so as not to get tangled up in either the balloons or their cables. Once airborne the balloons frustrated the accuracy of alien bombers and made it easier for Britain’s fighters and anti-aircraft gunners to attack enemy planes. A ‘Balloon Squadron’ was made up of 45 balloons with 10 people assigned to a balloon. Regional Balloon Centres acted both as headquarters for the units and storage depots. Balloon sheds or hangars at the Centres were where balloons were inflated and tested. The largest Balloon Centres included London and Newcastle-on-Tyne. Balloons were clustered around

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174 A Balloon Site, Coventry by Dame Laura Knight in Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. 371.
175 Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. 8.
176 There were other centres at Liverpool/Birkenhead Glasgow, Manchester, Sheffield, Humberside, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth, Avon & Bristol, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Southampton, Portsmouth, Derby and Tees Plymouth, Cardiff and Swansea, Newport, and Port Talbot and Harwich.
Tyneside’s roads, rail bridges, viaducts, docks, factories and power-stations all of which were prime military and strategic targets for German bombers.

Newcastle-on-Tyne was where my father was officially based from 7 June 1940 until the 30 November 1940. However, he wasn’t there on 12 September 1940 because that was his blitzkrieg wedding day. Nevertheless, he wouldn’t have escaped the mayhem of the Nazi bombers as Newcastle saw its fair share of major air-raids particularly in July 1940 and on the 15 August 1940 on Tyneside in the middle of the day there was a mass attack. On the 9 April 1941 my father fortuitously missed a five-hour, 120-bomber attack which carpeted the city with 150 tons of high explosives and 50,000 incendiaries.

Balloon Operators were constantly moved from squadron to squadron and station to station and on 28 December 1940 Cardington was my dad’s next stop. Cardington, in Bedfordshire, had been a major British site involved in the development of airships from 1915 to 1929. During World War II balloon crews were trained there. Its airfield and sheds were used by No 1 Balloon Training Unit to which 963 (Balloon) Squadron was assigned as was my dad in August 1941. As a Balloon Operator (Trade Group 2) in May 1941 for that role, he had passed, (or it might be said, that with only a 48% mark, scraped through) a General Trade Test Board examination demonstrating that he had

‘a firm knowledge of a vast range of aspects relating to the practical flying and
maintenance of barrage balloons.’  

In 1942 my father made a few more stops with a couple more Balloon
Squadrons. He was in London for most of that year firstly at Kidbrooke, then
in August 1942 at Clapham Common, South London which is close to where
my mother was living. Possibly he took advantage of the allowance made by
some RAF stations for personnel to live off base during training and
operations.  This would have meant that he was ‘especially close’ to my
mother which gave them the opportunity of making me a twinkle in my
daddy’s eye. I would arrive on a warm midsummer’s night in June 1943
under a gooseberry bush, in a nest of soft, white, downy feathers. The stork
delivered me, and fairies danced. I’m sorry. I’ll write that again. The Nazis
heralded my arrival with their doodlebugs. They had been making
preparations to drop their flying bombs, the V-1s, since April 1943. Then,
with all the high jinks over, my Dad was off again, in October 1942, to
Ipswich, the county town of Suffolk, twenty miles north east of London and
close to the docks of Harwich and Felixstowe.

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179 Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF), 1940-1946 Record of Service for
John William Edwards.
180 Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. 92.
181 Ibid., p. 641.

V-1s, pilotless planes or doodlebugs as they were colloquially known, were cigar-shaped
weapons just over 25 feet long. They weighed 2 tons – nearly half of which consisted of a
powerful mixture of TNT and ammonium nitrate. Their course was preset and, if the
missile deviated, devices attached to the fuselage could bring it back on track. The
distance was preset too – usually at 140 miles – and when this was reached a circuit
closed down and the V-1 plunged down towards the ground. The noise was different from
that made by bombs dropping from planes – the missiles had a whining, humming note
that grew louder as they approached, and then, when the engine cut out, there was an
agonising silence before the bomb plunged to earth and exploded.
Ipswich was a large country town before the war and very rarely saw members of the armed forces, but with the German invasion of Holland and Belgium, Ipswich, just twelve miles from the east coast and the North Sea, was one of the most important towns under military jurisdiction. Mass Observation reported during September 1941 that

> The siren goes nearly every night, often twice a night, and has done continually ever since the blitz-raiding started—there has never been a lull in the sort of air-war that Ipswich has experienced. So the fact of the war has been kept in people's minds all the time; and the people have very much a front-line mentality, with people evacuated, previously unheard-of numbers of troops in the town and surrounding countryside, and bombers passing overhead to the accompaniment of sirens every night.

I wonder if my mother knew:

> The soldiers have brought with them a gaiety which did not exist in the town's life before. There used to be only cinemas, and a very occasional meeting which attracted few people; but now one of the cinemas has become a music-hall (which it was once before, many years ago), there are at least two public dances every week, and during the three weeks that this investigation was being carried out in, there were three public meetings, a concert by the London Philharmonic Orchestra (Which packed the largest hall in the town, officers of British and Polish armies being much in evidence, and nearly 50% of the whole audience military), and the beginning of extra-mural evening classes held in the Public Library. In addition there was an RAF Photographic Exhibition in the Art Gallery.\(^2\)

Well! Didn’t they know there was a war on?\(^3\)

John Edwards’ final posting with a Balloon Squadron was Chelmsford. I lived there between 1957 and 1984. At first I couldn’t imagine why the town was of any military significance at all. It is just 30 miles to the north east of London, a Bishop’s see and an old market town. But looking at some video footage on the internet I was reminded of Marconi Road which, as a very


\(^{183}\) A battle cry I picked up from my mother.
young wife, was my first home. Adjacent to Marconi Road is New Street where The Marconi Radio and Telegraph Company had a large factory. Just outside of Chelmsford, at Great Baddow was Marconi Radar Research and Development. Radio, telegraph networks and radar were vital to the war effort. Interlocked and interconnected, these industries were the backbone of an essential system developed to enable constant observation and monitoring to provide early warning signals of enemy activity. This is what made Chelmsford a centre of war industry.\textsuperscript{184} This communication network effected a change in my father’s military career. It was enabled by women.

Women of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force had, since the start of the war, worked repairing seams and tears in the rubber proofed fabric of the barrage balloons. By 1942, these ‘young amazons,’ as the women were dubbed,\textsuperscript{185} were

\[\ldots\text{being trained in the handling of the balloon barrage. To help release more men for other operational duties in the RAF, a balloon section of the WAAF is enlisting these sturdy types whom we have habitually looked upon as cut out for gym mistresses, police women or mothers-in-law. These girls can fill a gas bag with the best of them and when it comes to pulling a few wires to get on in their job Sargeant Gerry is there to remind them that a woman’s work is never done\ldots. there she goes a pretty launching as you’ll see anywhere. What’s that saying about the hand that rocks the cradle?}\textsuperscript{186}

The barrage balloons continued to be used for the war effort until February 1945. The following newspaper article, laced with hyperbole, suggests that

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{184} Marwick, \textit{The Home Front}, p. 93. \\
\textsuperscript{185} Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain 1939-1945}, p. 509. \\
\end{flushright}
they were regarded with some affection, as it mourns their departure from the
air.

The Barrage Balloons

Only a few days ago the public was told that it must bid good-bye to its familiar and faithful friends the barrage balloons. It could not say in honesty that it was sorry to hear that they had gone; but even the debtor who has so far cleared his obligations as to have a house to himself may regret a cheerful and companionable bailiff. It is hard, therefore, to part from them without just one more kindly pat upon their broad and honest backs. Clumsy though they were, there was an engaging benignity about them and they will be remembered as quite the most amiable of all the contrivances of war. Nearly all the others, however impressive and inspiring, were bound sooner or later to go off or to start off and, therefore, to disturb our nights. These, on the other hand, like Esdras’s brooding figure over the St. James’s Park entrance to the Underground, extended a gentle covering above the slumber. Occasionally, of course, they ran amuck and carrying their tails behind them, played havoc with the telegraph wires; but on the whole they seemed models of obedience. They shared, moreover, the particular honour which attaches to the professional non-combattant upon the field of battle, for essential though their task was, no guinea-pig could have been milder or more inoffensive. So far as the mere civilian was aware, they were not furnished with even the weapon of the harried skunk. Only a highly strung contraption, like a hostile aeroplane would have paid attention to them. And yet, just as some kind, Pickwickian persons are able by sheer amiability to disarm the most evil scoundrels, so this air-cushioned cousin of the “blimp” successfully opposed his soft rotundities to the fiercest of night-plunging enemies.

Some may feel it time enough for praise when all the work is over: but only the saddest of necessities can justify the posthumous award. There is no point in waiting for the final deflation or until, like the tablecloths of some wild orgy, the last of the trailing draperies have been stowed away. Salute, therefore, to the memory of the barrage balloon on guard at his most dizzzy altitude! For thus he was best esteemed and will be best remembered. Somewhere, let us hope, his portrait will hang with other pictorial records of the war; but even so it is a duty to make sure that future generations shall know exactly what we have felt about him. Let us, therefore, describe him and his kind as flocks of huge silver rams at pasture in the upper spaces of the air. Just as the number of balls upon their coronets define some orders of nobility, so the war ranking of a city has been known by the show of pearly spheroids over it. Up in the rough and tumble of the clouds they were at home, catching the same light shafts as the clouds themselves and straining to be off to join the fun. If only they had been named a little more conveniently, they might have substance for the poets. Yet Apollo would surely be indulgent here. As the Trojans knew, he has been something of a military engineer in his time and will help with the defences of a favoured town. Possibly it was he, rethinking himself of his own fleecy charges in the days when he served Admetus, who flicked the fattest of them with the caduceus and shot them up aloft. Be this as it may, no scientists of the future, though armed with devastating rays or rockets, shall with impunity decry our bulbous guardians to those who knew them. It was in gratitude and confidence that we craned and crept our necks at them, and, even if it were a joyous day when they departed, they will be held in a very fond remembrance.

b) If I should die think only this of me, I served my country at BP

My dad had been released from operational duties with the barrage balloons because ‘he had just the skills that MI5 were looking for.’ He spoke German. But it was M16 and M6 that would use him.

On 16 January 1943 he was assigned to Air Ministry Unit, Whitehall Headquarters, London before being relocated to No 350 Signals Depot at Newbold Revel. The RAF Historical Society Journal describes an event at Newbold Revel which took place during the war and seems to reflect my father’s experiences.\(^{189}\) The Journal records that, just four to five months before my dad arrived at Newbold Revel, Sidney Goldberg, a German citizen who arrived in Great Britain in 1934, in August 1942 answered a request for personnel with German language qualifications to come forward. Goldberg reported to No 50 Signals Depot at Newbold Revel, where he met other airmen with similar backgrounds plus a few British-born German speakers, making a total of some fifteen German linguists in total. Goldberg became part of 381 Wireless Unit, networking with Bletchley Park outstations, whose task was to intercept German aircraft radio traffic including ENIGMA traffic. Similar to Goldberg my father was part of a Wireless Unit, probably 362.\(^{190}\)

Another piece in the jigsaw leading me to conclude that my dad was also


\(^{190}\) Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF 1940-1946 Record of Service for John William Edwards.)
connected with work concerning German radio traffic including ENIGMA, is that his military service records show that he was stationed at Church Green. I remember ‘Church Green’ from my days as a secretary at Marconi Radar in the late 1960s early 1970s. I used to address letters to Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), Church Green, Bletchley Park. And because the letters were all very hush, hush I had to sign The Official Secrets Act.

Until 1946, GCHQ was known as the Government Code and Cypher School, (GC&CS) or Station X. Anybody working there or at its outstations known as Y Stations was forbidden to talk or write about it – forbidden almost to remember it. Signing The Official Secrets Act was an absolute must. No one was ever allowed to tell anyone about their work, making any account concerning Stations X and Y problematic, because this covert work remained top secret until the 1970s.\(^1\) But here goes.

The objective of the specialist staff working at Bletchley Park was to break the encrypted messages sent through the Enigma machines. The initial Enigma machines were commercial models dating from the early 1920s. The machines, of which there were numerous models and variants, were used during World War II by the German army, air force, secret service and other government organisations such as the railways. The German navy used

Enigma for its U-boat traffic and this had a devastating effect on the allies. Enigma was also used by the Italians and the Japanese.  

These are examples of Enigma machines.

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192 Smith, Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park, p. 171.
The machines worked on a number of rotors and plugs; the settings of which were changed according to a daily codebook. Messages were typed using the bottom keyboard, and as each key was pressed, a different ‘code’ letter lit up on the top key board. The messages were then sent by wireless using Morse code. A more detailed account of the way Enigma worked is given below.

Early in 1939 Dilly Knox, a fellow of King’s College Cambridge and other equally qualified eccentric geniuses had begun to engage in a battle of wits to break the ever-changing Enigma codes. In 1939 they were joined by a staff of about 120. Not everyone was crypt-analytical.

By the time the Phoney War was over on 9 April 1940 a version of Enigma had been broken and there was a mass of detailed intelligence on the German operations in Norway. People were working round the clock getting the

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196 'The machine’s keys sent a series of electrical impulses through three rotatable wheels via a series of electrical contact and wires to produce the enciphered text. The machine was incapable of printing anything. The electrical impulse generated by keying in each letter of the clear text translated it into another letter which lit up on a lampboard above the keyboard. These enciphered letters were taken down and transmitted in four-or five-letter groups. By typing each letter of the enciphered version into the machine, the operator at the other end was able to see the deciphered message light up letter by letter on his own lampboard.
There were other intricacies concerning the movements and positions of the wheels but suffice to say that there were sixty possible orders in which the wheels could be placed in the machine, with a total of 17,576 different position settings for each wheel. The plugboard allowed 150 million million changes of circuit. The total number of possible settings for a basic German Enigma cypher machine was, therefore, 159 million million million. Smith, Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park, p. 15.
197 Smith, Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park, p. 3.
intelligence they received translated, typed, recorded, cross-referenced, indexed, copied, filed and ultimately sent either by teleprinter, or bagged and sent by van to M16 Headquarters, the War Office, the Air Ministry and the Admiralty in London.\textsuperscript{199}

When the Germans invaded France on 10 May 1940 the intelligence coming out of Bletchley Park was seen as being valuable to the troops on the ground and M16 set up mobile Special Signals Units to provide a secure link to the headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force that passed on Enigma intelligence to commanders in the field.\textsuperscript{200} By the end of September 1940, Bletchley was able to report that with the Luftwaffe’s failure to defeat the RAF in the ‘Battle of Britain,’ the Nazi’s intention to invade Britain, known as Operation Sea Lion, had been postponed.\textsuperscript{201} Cyphers were also providing indications of potential German targets and the numbers of aircraft involved in the 1940 bombing raids on Britain’s big cities such as London, Birmingham and Liverpool.\textsuperscript{202}

Another arena where the breaking of the Nazi ciphers proved invaluable was the North Atlantic. The defeat of France in 1940 had compounded the menace caused by the German U-boats which now had easy access to the Atlantic from bases in the Bay of Biscay. With Britain dependent on imports...

\textsuperscript{199} Smith, \textit{Station X: The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park}, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p. 41.
The system was in its infancy but it would support Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces from late 1943 until the end of the war.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p. 53.
Controversy followed as to whether or not Churchill allowed the devastating bombing raid on Coventry in November 1940 rather than risk letting the Germans know Enigma had been broken.
for half its food and all of its oil, British convoys had to cross the Atlantic from North America and they were easy prey for the U-boats who hunted like a wolf pack. It wasn’t until early May 1941 that there was a breakthrough in the Enigma codes being used by the U-boats, which saw the amount of allied shipping sunk by them fall from an average of 94,000 tons per month between March and June 1941, to 62,000 tons in November 1941. 203

These achievements were in part due to Bletchley Park Control Centre being staffed twenty-four hours a day. This ensured that radio frequencies were covered and networks coordinated. Personnel at Bletchley Park were in constant touch with the intercept sites that operated not just in the United Kingdom but overseas in places like Colombo, Singapore, and France. These intercept sites formed an intelligence web of wireless operators who logged enemy messages before sending them to the code breakers by teleprinter, or by motor cycle courier. Intercept sites were known as ‘Y’ Stations which were operated by the Foreign Office, the Post Office, the Metropolitan Police, the army, navy and air force. 204

Professor Sir Harry Hinsley205 is quoted as saying that without the work of CG&CS the war, instead of finishing in 1945, would have ended in 1948. Whether or not that is the case, breaking the Enigma codes was a great intellectual achievement that helped bring food to the table of millions and

203 Ibid., pp. 61-66.
204 Ibid., p. 23.
205 The late former Professor Sir Harry Hinsley was Master of St. John’s College and Professor of the History of International Relations at the University of Cambridge.
shortened the time fathers were separated from their children and husbands from their wives. Its greatest gift was that it saved lives.\textsuperscript{206}

My father was involved with signals and wireless units from January 1943 until October 1944. His job title at that time was Clerk/General Duties (Cypher). Presumably he had been using his German language skills and like other interpreters working within the Signal and Wireless operations he would be assigned as an interpreter to an Air Disarmament Wing.\textsuperscript{207}

He was to go to Germany to get Hitler’s head on a plate, but American General Dwight Eisenhower had other plans. So did Hitler, come to that.

\textsuperscript{206} Kahn, \textit{Seizing The Enigma The Race to Break the German U-boat Codes, 1939-1943} p. 282.

7) MOPPING UP

An assault against the enemy in Europe, known as the D-day landings of June 1944, had seen the formation of the Allied Expeditionary Forces with American General Dwight Eisenhower as Supreme Commander. Under Eisenhower’s command, the Allied Expeditionary Air Force formed part of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force; commonly known as ‘SHAEF.’ SHAEF, amongst other things, provided for the physical disarmament of the German war machine. 208 A section of SHAEF included people from the United States Air Force and the RAF. Both forces were obliged to follow the same general principles and procedures.

In accordance with these guidelines, in August 1944 Britain’s Air Ministry established its Air Disarmament Head Quarters which authorised the formation in September 1944 of the first Air Disarmament Squadrons. 209 As far as possible all personnel trained for disarmament were volunteers. 210 They were assembled at RAF Station Kenley which became the main RAF disarmament mobilisation centre. On 5 October 1944 my father, now a

208 Air Marshal Sir Philip Wigglesworth, Dissolution of the Luftwaffe The Work of the British Air Forces of Occupation Germany, London: HMSO, 1995, p. 5. First published in 1947, this has proved an invaluable source. This is despite Wigglesworth’s claims that it was impracticable to fulfil the intention of preparing a comprehensive detailed history of the disarmament of the German Air Forces, in accordance with the Potsdam and other international agreements and governmental policies. Nevertheless the book has been compiled from official records and papers and written by a number of RAF officers at the Air Headquarters British Air Forces of Occupation in Germany. Wigglesworth informs that further details can be found in records, papers and maps in the custody of the Air Ministry Historical Section. Following the advice of Air Historical Branch (RAF) I traced the Occupational Record Books applicable to my father’s squadrons. The two I downloaded from The National Archives web site yielded nothing more than a timetable of times and weather details of flights in and out of Great Britain and Germany. It is possible that The National Archives reference Air 55/163 might have produced useful details but I drew the line at paying £308 to get a copy.

209 Wigglesworth, Dissolution of the Luftwaffe, p. 19.

210 Ibid., p. 49.
Temporary Sergeant, was sent to Kenley.\textsuperscript{211} He would have been given three weeks training intended to provide trainees with some idea of the problems associated with physically disarming the enemy. The first part of the training course consisted of lectures by specialist officers to people of specific trades. For example, signal and wireless operators were advised on what they might expect concerning German signal and wireless operations. General lectures were also given on subjects such as conditions in Germany, health and general behaviour.\textsuperscript{212}

Assigned to the Air Staff of SHAEF in October 1944, my father was deployed to unit No. 320 ADMD (Rear Unit) – an Air Disarmament Mobile Detachment unit.\textsuperscript{213} ADMDs were specialist units formed to follow allied troops as they advanced across enemy territory. Primarily, the ADMDs were to destroy the Nazi’s destructive war material and identify and record valuable equipment which would be useful to the allies.

Before my father went to Germany in December 1944 he was at Bushy Park.\textsuperscript{214} His job title Clerk/General Duties (Cypher) with No. 320 ADMD was the same as when he was at the Signals Depot and the Wireless Unit at Bletchley Park. At Bushy Park two volumes of a Handbook were compiled to provide the signals disarmament crews operating on the continent with as

\textsuperscript{211} Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF) Ruislip, Middlesex, \textit{1940-1946 Record of Service John William Edwards}.

\textsuperscript{212} Wigglesworth, \textit{Dissolution of the Luftwaffe}, pp. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{213} Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF) Ruislip, Middlesex, \textit{1940-1946 Record of Service John William Edwards}.

\textsuperscript{214} Bushy Park was also the headquarters of the Eighth Air Force Established by General Carl Spaatz on 24 April 1942. It became the Supreme Headquarters for the Allied Expeditionary Forces in March 1944 and was where General Eisenhower and his senior team laid plans for D-day landings.
much information as possible about the German signals organisation. The
handbooks included a vocabulary of Signals and Telecommunications Terms
and Abbreviations in German-English, English-German, local maps of signals
and radar sites and as much technical data as possible. With his knowledge
of German and signal systems, I presume my father was involved with
preparing these invaluable handbooks which were used by the disarmament
teams in the field to identify and dispose of enemy radar, its aircraft
reporting organisation, land-line and wireless/telegraph communications, and
the rest of its signals equipment held in aircraft, in stores, or in factories.

On the 2 March 1945 my dad joined the disarmament advisers of Unit 85 in
Ghent, his job title was Interpreter and as such he was part of the
Intelligence Branch of SHAEF which worked in co-operation with Air
Ministry M6. Necessarily the work was confidential because as an
interpreter he would become one of the chief sources of intelligence
information. Before leaving Britain he would have been required to
undergo further training in the fields of interrogation, identification of
equipment, report writing, oral interpretations, etc. My dad’s rank as
Temporary Sergeant was in line with the authorities’ decision that
Interpreters of German should be of sergeant’s rank.

216 Ibid., p. 137.
217 Ibid., p. 139.
219 Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF), 1940-1946 Record for Service John
William Edwards.
220 Wigglesworth, *Dissolution of the Luftwaffe*, p. 95.
221 Ibid., p. 95.
222 Ibid., p. 95.
Disarmament Interpreters faced a task of some magnitude. Small in number they faced thousands of German military personnel as they interpreted for non-German speaking officers. In addition to their disarmament duties, interpreters from the outset became an important link with the German population and provided a valuable service collecting political and security intelligence. And, although theirs was often an invidious position, faced with requests and orders from different sides, cut off from larger units on small detachments, ‘the interpreters did work well, willingly and efficiently.’

My father’s military service record also informs that by June 1945, his unit had moved north to the province of Schleswig Holstein and Hamburg, by which time RAF bombers had cleared the way for the conquering allied ground troops. Commander-in-chief of Bomber Command, Arthur Harris, had been directed to demoralise the enemy civil population and in particular the industrial workers. In 1942 he had authorised the zealous bombing of Lubeck, Rostow, Cologne, Essen and Bremen. From 24 July to 2 August 1943 Hamburg, – ‘the anglophile city’ without Nazis – was the RAF’s target. And in February and March 1945 the allies ensured Berlin would

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223 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
224 Schleswig-Holstein is the northernmost of the sixteen states of Germany, comprising most of the historical duchy of Holstein and the southern part of the former Duchy of Schleswig. Its capital city is Kiel; other notable cities are Lübeck, Flensburg and Neumünster. Schleswig-Holstein borders Denmark (Region Syddanmark) to the north, the North Sea to the west, the Baltic Sea to the east, and the German states of Lower Saxony, Hamburg, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to the south. Retrieved from: http://www.schleswig-holstein.de/Portal/EN/CountryPeople/Geography/Geography Accessed August 2012.
225 Keith Lowe, Inferno: The Fiery Destruction of Hamburg 1943, New York: Scribner, 2007 p. 9. Lowe records that Hamburg’s Anglophile connections primarily developed through trade links over centuries were and remain deep-rooted. The destruction of Hamburg by Britain’s bombers saw Joseph Goebbels record in 1943, that ‘the city was at last learning to hate its English cousins.’ In Die Tagebucher von Joseph Goebbels vol.II 1943, Juliet Gardiner notes that Hamburg was the ‘city without Nazis’ as it had such a large Jewish and Leftwing population. Gardiner, Wartime Britain 1939-1945, p. 611.
suffer the worst air raids of the war. The virtual destruction of Dresden followed.\textsuperscript{226}

My father’s unit was one of three RAF ground squadrons that followed the advancing forces across northern Germany.\textsuperscript{227} Their objective was to completely neutralise the German air potential as smoothly and quickly as possible and concurrently identify and record equipment the United Kingdom or other Allies might be interested in. How this was done depended on the individual units and the conditions they found themselves in. Some units searched all buildings, woods and barns etcetera. Other units carried out house-to-house searches and/or demanded that the German authorities declare their supplies of hidden war materials. The Germans faced heavy punishments if they failed to comply. Key to the success of these disarmament operations was the interrogation of German military and industrial personnel by suitable British specialists and interpreters.\textsuperscript{228}

In the wake of the advancing allies the ADMDs observed chaos and confusion in the German forces. Normal supplies and administration had broken down, particularly after 4 May 1945 when the Nazis in North West Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark surrendered and as the British troops approached roads north of Hamburg they were met by

\begin{quote}
\ldots disorganised (Nazi) troops walking south. They appeared to be representatives of all Services and they looked as if they had had enough of the war. All of them seemed to be carrying blankets and rucksacks but few appeared to have any food and many of them were foot-sore and were travelling very slowly indeed. Almost without exception all of the many thousands seen on the road were drifting
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{227} Wigglesworth. Dissolution of the Luftwaffe, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., p. 35.
south and on no single occasion did we see a formed body of troops. Among this disorganised rabble were thousands of displaced persons whom we assumed to be Dutch, French, Belgian, Polish, etc. A few of them had handcarts containing all their possessions with tired and exhausted children piled on top. The day was hot and it was extremely hard going for these wanderers. There were no signs of depots of food or shelter anywhere along the straight and tree-lined main road, but we understood later that this great horde of people was obtaining food by raiding farm houses. Not one of the troops we saw was carrying arms.’

The sheer numbers of defeated Germans, prisoners of war and displaced people presented problems on account of the limited facilities available, while further chaos was caused by foreign workers who refused to maintain public utilities such as sewage, and electricity. Compounding the situation were food shortages with no bread or potatoes for days and a serious shortage of drugs and medical supplies. 230

On the other hand, British military commanders concerned about the welfare of disarmament personnel, even before they had left the United Kingdom for a strange and hostile Germany, saw it as paramount for morale that representatives of the Allies should be supported and maintained by the very best facilities. To this end each unit was equipped with moving picture apparatus, sports gear, libraries, photographic and handicraft apparatus and any other items the individual commanding officer felt would be useful. There would have been riding, yachting and gliding clubs. Unit newspapers

229 Ibid., p. 51 and p. 33. There was little relief from appalling conditions further south. Down along the banks of the Rhine, huge cages, open to the river, had been set up and in them were herded hundreds of thousands of captured German soldiers. Each cage was divided by barbed wire into strips twenty or thirty yards wide which were filled with Germans with nothing but what they carried and a pick and shovel. No accommodation of any kind existed and after four or five scorching days of sun the majority were burnt brick-red.

230 Ibid., p. 52.
would have been published and discussion groups formed. The YMCA, Malcolm Clubs, Church Army, and the NAAFI supported British personnel. WAAFs, who could not be employed in the disarmament units, were fully utilised in these support facilities and there was an unlimited supply of excellent Rhine wine supplied by the local burgermeister. With excellent facilities in place, the British commanders believed their forces would be efficient and content.

My father’s ability to speak German together with his experience in signals and the wireless unit at Church Green, Bletchley Park, must have made him very useful to No. 8302 Air Disarmament Wing to which he was assigned on the 23 March 1945. This unit was responsible for dismantling the German listening stations, which equated to the British ‘Y’ Stations. German technicians and labour, under the supervision of RAF Radar officers, carried out the work at stations in North Schleswig-Holstein. The process was hampered by a number of factors; an acute shortage of qualified personnel and the sheer logistics of dismantling, crating, storing and recording details of major and valuable equipment which would be handed over to Reparations, Deliveries and Restitutions Division for dividing amongst allied controllers. Even when sites had been cleared of transmitting towers, arrays

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232 Wigglesworth, Dissolution of the Luftwaffe, p. 48.

233 Ibid., p. 51.

234 Ibid., p. 49.

235 Ibid., p. 141.

The ‘Y’ Stations formed the intelligence web of wireless and signal operators who logged enemy messages.
and turning gear, the demolition work continued into 1947 so as to enable the complete and final clearance of bomb disposal targets. My Dad wasn’t kept in Germany until the end of the dismantling operations because, on 17 September 1945, after nine months in Germany, he was back in Britain.  

\[236\]  

\textit{a) Auf wiedersehen to all that}\n
Leading Air Craftsman, John William Edwards now aged 41, was returned to Stapleford Tawney, Essex. An aerodrome since 1933, Stapleford Tawney was requisitioned by the RAF shortly after the war. In 1945 it was a British Air Forces of Occupation Personnel Holding Unit. My Dad was now one of over five million Britons in the armed and auxiliary forces waiting to be released from military duty. Ernest Bevin, Churchill’s wartime Minister of Labour, was the architect of the demobilisation plan. It essentially divided service men and women into two categories or classes. Nine out of ten were in Class A. The order in which personnel were demobilised was calculated according to their date of birth and the month in which their war service began. Two days after arriving in Stapleford Tawney on 19 September 1945 my dad was sent to the Personnel Holding Centre at Uxbridge for release. His records show that he was Class A and the effective date of his demobilisation was 14 November 1946.  

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 142.
\item Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF) Ruislip, Middlesex, \textit{1940-1946 Record of Service John William Edwards}.
\item Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch, (RAF) Ruislip, Middlesex, 1940-1946 Record of Service John William Edwards.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 7.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
I guess he would have known this date as an official forces guidebook was distributed so that individuals could work out for themselves when they were due to be demobbed. Most were discharged according to their Release Group Number, which they could calculate on a table set out in the booklet by looking up their age and the number of months they had spent in wartime military service. 244

It is possible that from September 1945, when my father was sent to Stapleford Tawney until November 1946 which is when his records show he was officially demobbed from the Personnel Holding Unit at Uxbridge, that with literally nothing to do, my dad hung around at Uxbridge separated from friends and family, uncertain about the future with boredom and inactivity

243 Ibid., p. 118.
244 Ibid., p. 23.
punctuated by daily routines of spud peeling, saluting and parades.\textsuperscript{245}

Contrary to that notion the following newspaper article records that he served as an interpreter with the British Control Commission in Germany from 1945 to 1950.\textsuperscript{246}

\textbf{MR. J. W. EDWARDS}

The funeral took place recently at Pentrebychan Crematorium of Mr. John William Edwards, of 34, Stancliffe Avenue, Marford, Wrexham, who died aged 71 at the West Shore Nursing Home, Llandudno.

A graduate of Bangor University College of North Wales, Mr. Edwards retired from teaching at the Grove Park Grammar School for Boys in 1970.

He served as an interpreter with the British Control Commission in Germany from 1945-1950. Mr. Edwards is survived by his wife, Mrs. Menna Carrington Edwards.


Family mourners were: Mrs. Menna Carrington Edwards (wife), Mrs. D. Edwards, Mrs. M. C. Cadwaladr, Mr. and Mrs. F. Roberts (brother-in-law and sisters-in-law), Mr. E. H. Jones (father-in-law), Mrs. Joan Dodd (niece), representing Mr. and Mrs. J. Allan (brother-in-law and sister), Mr. and Mrs. A. Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. D. Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. R. Thomas, Mr. and Mrs. T. van Delden, Mr. R. Cadwaladr, Mrs. M. Salmon, Mrs. C. Williams, Misses Helen, Bethan and Rhian Roberts (nephews and nieces).

Family flowers only were received and donations were for the Dolywern Cheshire Home, Glyn Ceirlog. Bearer were: Mr. Alies Richardson, Mr. Daydd Edwards, Mr. Ray Thomas, Mr. Tony van Delden.

\textbf{MRS. T. HUGHES} \textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid., p. 33.

\textsuperscript{246} This Obituary sent by my cousin, Joan Dodd and received July 2012 is undated but my father’s death in 1976 is recorded by Jones, J.A. Registrar, 1976, Certified copy of an entry Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, County of Gwynedd, 1976, Death of John Willie Edwards, Certificate held by A. Edwards.

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid., Obituary from Joan Dodd.
b) *Once more into the Breach*

The notion of Control Commissions had been mooted in the early days of World War II, as part of a plan that Great Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations had considered. Central to the plan was the destruction ‘for ever’ of the military potential of Germany and other Axis powers when the war was ultimately over.248 The British envisaged that all aspects of commercial, political, economic and military life in former enemy territory would be controlled by Allied Control Commissions. By 1943 the three main Allied powers, the United States of America, Great Britain and the United States of Soviet Russia (USSR) had accepted the general plan that they would be liable for executing the orders of their respective Control Councils in that part of Germany which would eventually be occupied by their individual forces.249 The idea still had currency on 11 April 1945 when British Cabinet memoranda noted that planning for the control of post-war Germany was a cardinal feature of the inter-Allied Control Commission which then comprised the forces of Britain, France, the USSR and the United Sates. Their respective national commanders were to assume complete responsibility for their nation’s allocated zone.250

At the end of the war, the British zone, which included a ruined industrial area with little agriculture and a large population which it couldn’t support, was aided by civil affairs staff from SHAEF.251 With SHAEF’s cessation,

249 Ibid., p. 45.
251 Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.
some of their staff was merged with the Allied Control Commission. The British section, established in Berlin, in October, 1945 became known as the Control Commission for Germany, British Element. Its role was to terminate Nazi civil organisations; its laws and judicial systems, taxation methods, rationing of essential supplies; the control of scientific research, prohibition of military activities, and confiscation of Nazi propaganda, regulation and management of employment and so on. It…

… had to face the fact that the soldiers who were largely running the business at that time were running out under demobilisation, or were on short term extensions pending demobilisation, so that in a very short time we would find that, unless we replaced a very large staff very rapidly, we would be entirely unable to cope with the situation. Therefore, we had to get on with an improvised job of recruitment. 252

The reference to soldiers interests me for two reasons. The first may cause some professional historians’ toes to curl. Although primary documents confirm that from May 1940 until the end of the war my father was in the RAF my cousin wrote that ‘she remembers a photograph of him (my dad) on the sideboard in an Army Officer’s Uniform.’ Unsolicited she reinforced her recollections in a second letter to me.253 I believe what she says. My belief is not just based on the above archival quote, but on the understanding that de-mobbed members of Britain’s armed forces were returning to military life because they missed the comradeship of the services.254 They were disillusioned with scarred post war Britain; its landscape shattered from bombing, shops and houses dirty and unpainted, tank-traps and barbed wire littering the countryside, parks defaced… ; the people pasty, washed-out.

253 Personal correspondence from Mrs Joan Dodd dated 27 May 2011 and 13 June 2012.
254 Allport, Demobbed Coming Home After the Second World War, p. 213.
exhausted and cynical. On the other hand, post-war Germany offered so much more to a conquering hero. So it seems reasonable for my father to have been part of a ‘steady flow’ of ex-servicemen who rejoined the Forces. And on this occasion he served with the army. Having been employed by SHAEF during the war as an interpreter, he would have been an asset for the army in Berlin.

Jobs with the Control Commission were an attractive and popular career move for many as British Parliamentary debate in 1947 confirms that 15,000 people a month were applying for jobs with the Commission in Germany. I don’t know which particular section of the British Element of the Control Commission my father was attached to. Family hearsay has it that he was an interpreter at the Nuremberg trials. He might well have contributed to the execution of a few war criminals and that would have kept him in Germany at least until April 1949 when the last judgment of the one hundred and eighty-five accused was delivered.

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255 Ibid., p. 111.
257 Both Joan Dodd and my ex-husband, who never met or spoke to each other, both recall that this was my father’s role at the end of the war. I have no documentary evidence to support this notion.
c) *The Margot Affair!*

In 1948 while my father was in Germany my mother remarried. Clearly my parents’ marriage was over. My mum and dad were amongst many whose lives had been dislocated in ways that had been unimaginable before the outbreak of war in 1939. Millions of families had been abruptly broken up, with men, women and children scattered across Britain and the world. Of the five million Britons who were in the armed and auxiliary forces in 1945, many had served since 1941 and most had served overseas. My father was one of a lucky minority who had spent almost the entire war on ‘home’ service duties. But throughout the war he had been, like half of all British civilians, separated from everyone and everything familiar including my mother, so it is hardly surprising their relationship didn’t last. It could be argued that at that time I joined other children who like me, understood the concept of ‘Daddy” as purely abstract. But my father was no abstract concept. He was, as my mother repeatedly and painfully reminded me, ‘a womaniser’. This led me to imagine, as my opening mythical tale suggests, that my dad had enjoyed the women of the brothels, and bawdy houses, from Hamburg to Munich.

My cousin gives credence to this suggestion that my father was not a devoted husband.

She wrote

‘…he (my dad) lived with a German woman for 3 years. I remember he came to see us with the German lady. Her name was MARGOT. She had a son with her. I remember her going to Chester to look at the


260 Allport, *Demobbed Coming Home After the Second World War*, p. 69.
shops and she said to my Mum “you would not think that the English – the poor appearance of the shops…” 261

How dare she! Not only would the knowledge that my father lived with Margot have been insulting for my mother, Margot’s presence would have been confronting for the British people.

Sixty-two thousand British civilians had died in conventional bombing raids and attacks by V-1 buzz bombs and V-2 rockets with over 200,000 homes totally destroyed and millions more extensively damaged. Secondly, beyond the fear and the homelessness caused by the war with Germany, lay the grinding privations of life in a country where everything was in short supply and the most basic services suffered from interruptions. 262 The situation would have been compounded for women like my mother, by the news that ‘German Girls Rob(bed) Allied Wives of Happiness: Fratting Wrecks British Homes’ was a British Sunday paper staple. 264 On the 4 November 1945 The People depicted occupied Germany as swamped in sensuality. Go into any of their deserted houses, as I have done, and examine their literature – ordinary houses. The man in the street type. You will find books in all of them containing pictures so disgusting you are stunned with horror. Pictures of degeneracy, sex perversion, abnormalities, tortures. The women of Germany understand nothing outside sex … they are deliberately contaminating our soldiers… Germany is like a foul octopus reaching out its destroying tentacles. 265

Added to this, there was resentment at the apparent plethora of nylons, perfumes, cosmetics and other feminine paraphernalia in the British

261 Joan Dodd, Personal correspondence of 13 June 2012.
262 Allport, Demobbed Coming Home After the Second World War, pp. 74-80.
263 Fraternising – sleeping with the enemy.
264 Allport, Demobbed Coming Home After the Second World War, p. 100.
265 Ibid., p. 100.
Occupied Zone at a time when there was nothing like this for British women.

I wonder, did anyone slap Margot’s face?
8) STRUGGLE STREET

It is shocking and distressing to realise that both my mother and father lived through these cataclysmic times and that amongst it all I was born. When my father returned to Britain in 1950 he would have found people whose values and habits I grew up with. It was

a land of orderly queues, hat doffing men walking on the outside, seats given up to women and the elderly, no swearing in front of women and children, censored books, films, plays, infinite repression of desires. Divorce, for most, an unthinkable social disgrace. Children in the street ticked off by strangers. A land of social and hierarchical social assumptions of accents and dress as giveaways to class. Of Irish jokes and derogatory references to Jews and niggers. Expectations low and limited but anyone in or on the fringes of the middle class hoping for a ‘job for life’ comforted by the myth that the working class kept their coal in the bath. A pride in a Britain that had ‘stood alone’ and even pride in ‘made in Britain’… . A sense of history however nugatory the knowledge of that history.266

Instilled in my mind was the notion of thrift. Waste-not-want-not; make-do-and-mend. Utility furniture and utility china. Turning the cuffs and collars on shirts, sheets to middle and elbow patches on jackets. Darning socks. Books printed so as to save paper. Cut up newspapers instead of toilet rolls. Stinging nettle soup, homemade cheese and pickled eggs. I could go on… just one more – I had to take my ration book with me if I went to stay with friends because bread and potatoes were rationed till the late 1940s with meat, butter, tea and sugar rationed till 1951. Today I still put on a ‘jumper’ if I’m cold before I put on heating – part of my mother’s post-war conditioning gifted to me because all fuel was rationed through the bitterly cold winter of

With rationing and income tax at almost 50% there was a feeling of despair.\(^{267}\)

The British were ready for political change. At a General Election held on 27 July 1945, Winston Churchill’s government was ousted in favour of the Labour Party led by Clement Atlee. The Labour Party which had explicitly presented itself as ‘the guarantor of the hopes of the ordinary soldier, whose welfare it claimed to hold in sacred trust’\(^{269}\) was elected to fulfil the public’s demand for social reform as outlined in eminent economist and civil servant Sir William Beveridge’s 1942 Report.\(^{270}\)

\textit{a) From the Cradle to the Grave}

Beveridge summarised his proposals as ‘first and foremost, a plan of insurance – of giving in return for contributions, benefits up to subsistence level, as of right and without means test.’ This meant that the social insurance provided – essentially against loss or interruption of earnings due to unemployment, sickness or old age – would be universal. Under the Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, the government planned to eliminate want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. There were four main prongs to the plan. The National Health Service which entitled everyone to an all inclusive programme of free medical care; a non-means tested individual entitlement to sickness and unemployment benefits, old age pensions, widows’ and orphans’

\(^{267}\) Kynaston affirms my reminiscences p. 59.  
\(^{268}\) Kynaston, \textit{Austerity Britain 1945-48 A World to Build}, p. 45.  
\(^{269}\) Allport, \textit{Demobbed Coming Home After the Second World War}, p. 28.  
\(^{270}\) Gardiner, \textit{Wartime Britain, 1939-1945} p. 676.
pensions, maternity allowances and death grants to help with funeral expenses; all to be paid for through the National Insurance Scheme.

In addition education would be free for children until they were fifteen years of age. There would be free milk and free school dinners, (oh no, not swede again!) Housing was to be provided by local Councils – at least three bedrooms, inside toilet and bathroom. Whoopee – at last things were looking good for the working classes even if the British government was deep in debt.

My Welsh relations benefited from the Government Housing Acts of the 1930s which had legislated for slum clearance. In 1937 the Buckley Urban District Council had demolished condemned cottages at Daisy Hill. Despite wartime difficulties in the supply of building materials these insanitary dwellings were replaced by council-built housing. According to my cousin Joan, when my father finally returned from Germany in 1950 he went to

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272 Alan Baudelier, ‘What you never knew about WWII’s Lend-Lease Program’ *Sea Classics* 45.8 (Aug 2012): pp. 50-54, 56. The Lend-Lease Act of 1941 had allowed United States President Roosevelt to authorize the transfer of military materials to Britain with the understanding that they would ultimately be paid for or returned if they were not destroyed. There was no charge for the Lend-Lease aid delivered during the war. Lend-Lease was terminated by President Truman on 2 September 1945. To finance its Lend-Lease obligations to the United States, in 1946 the British Government accepted a loan of £1.075 billion from the Americans. Payment was to be stretched out over 50 annual payments, starting in 1951 and with five-years of deferred payments, at modest interest. Final payment of $83.3 million (£42.5 million), was due on 31 December 2008. Retrieved from: [http://0-search.proquest.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/docview/1022300937?accountid=12629](http://0-search.proquest.com.prospero.murdoch.edu.au/docview/1022300937?accountid=12629) Accessed August 2012.
274 Joan Dodd, Personal correspondence dated May 2011.
live with my Aunt and her family in their Council House at 3 Belmont Crescent, Buckley. While he was there he went to work at the Capenhurst nuclear plant, just over the Welsh/English border in Cheshire. My cousin also claims that while at Capenhurst he was ‘picked up for questioning as he was thought to be a spy because he spoke German fluently.’ This proposition has some merit because it was a time when it was not uncommon for the police to cordon off areas and check people’s identity cards. And it was not uncommon for anyone who couldn’t satisfactorily account for themselves to be taken to the police station for questioning.275

The idea that my father worked at Capenhurst is not something I would give him a big tick for because in the twenty-first century the place has absolutely no kudos. Perhaps, in the late 1940s early 1950s, my father still thought he had to do his bit for King and Country, as since 1946 the Capenhurst uranium enrichment plant was initially used for the production of a British atomic bomb, despite the expense of manufacturing.276 In 1946 the British Cabinet had hoped that its atomic bomb would be successfully tested during the early 1950s, and that Britain would be regarded by Washington as a valuable ally enabling it to play a large part in influencing American policy in directions which suited British interests. It was also hoped that Britain’s progress in atomic development might persuade the United States to resume the exchange of nuclear information broken off in 1947.277

275 Kynaston, Austerity Britain 1945-48 A World to Build, p. 112.
277 Ibid., p. 139.
Whatever his reasons for going to work at Capenhurst, my father was amongst a ground swell of Welsh people who, at the end of the war, relentlessly moved towards England to live and work, despite growing opportunities in Flintshire, particularly in the mainly anglicized eastern part close to Cheshire. 278

North East Wales was no longer dependent on declining coal mines, steel or brick-making. In 1946, just fourteen miles south of Buckley, at Marchwiel, the huge Royal Ordnance279 plant had been replaced by a government created Welsh Industrial Estate Corporation280 which attracted large corporations such as British Celanese, Firestone Tyres and Kellogg’s. At Broughton, de Havilland still had its aircraft factory. The Courtauld rayon plant had grown steadily and the John Summers works at Shotton had increased its steel-making and tinplate industry.281 These industries were amongst those that contributed to an extraordinary economic upsurge that the post-war years brought to Wales.282 They would help underpin a pervasive sense of confidence and optimism and see an immense surge forward in the general quality of life for the Welsh working population.283

Thankfully my dad did quit the Capenhurst nuclear plant. It was Cousin Joan who pointed me towards a significant change in the direction he took. She

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279 Former World War 2 Ordnance Factory, covering 1,400 acres (2.5km E-W by 3km N-S) and employing 13,000 workers. The site was served by an extensive internal railway system branching from the former Cambrian railways line between Ellesmere and Wrexham. Retrieved from Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. [http://www.cbhc.gov.uk](http://www.cbhc.gov.uk) Accessed August 2012.
281 Ibid., p. 322.
282 Ibid., p. 314.
283 Ibid., p. 338.
wrote ‘he was a young man when he finished at Bangor University,’ which turns out to be verifiably true. But whether he was ‘young’ is a matter of opinion. He went to the University, from October 1953 until June 1956 when he was aged 49-52. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts Third Class in German. How, I wondered, did he manage to do that?

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284 Formerly known as University College of North Wales.
9) EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Seen as the greatest and grandest educational advance since 1870 the historic Education Act of 1944 enabled ‘secondary education, of various types, to all.’\textsuperscript{286} It introduced a tripartite system of grammar schools, technical schools and secondary moderns. The method of determining which child would go to which school was achieved via an examination known as the 11 plus. How this system was to operate is the prime content of the 1944 Act but tucked within it are Clauses 84 and 100 which affected my dad. They gave power to local councils to provide financial assistance to any university to improve its facilities and to enable pupils to take advantage of any educational facilities without hardship to themselves ‘by way of scholarships, exhibitions, bursaries and other allowances in respect of pupils over compulsory school age.’\textsuperscript{287}

The University College of North Wales, which during the war had safeguarded the treasures of the National Gallery and welcomed 75 American soldiers, who had taken up its offer of free places in 1945/46,\textsuperscript{288} had reconstructed its academic infrastructure to take advantage of the 1944 Education Act. By the 1950s, it had put together a sizeable shopping list of redevelopment work, including new buildings for Forestry and Botany, a new women’s hostel, an extension to the Chemistry Department, and a Marine

\textsuperscript{286} Kynaston, Austerity Britain 1945-48 A World to Build, p. 28.
Biological station. Contemporary politicians and social commentators endlessly repeated the mantra that the country’s economy depended on training hundreds of young scientists, linguists, engineers and inventors. *My dad’s country needed him – once more.*

The consequent increases in government grants to universities and state scholarships to students meant that student numbers rose exponentially. Bangor University which offered substantial assistance to students by means of scholarships and other awards saw its student numbers climb rapidly from the end of the war throughout the 1950s. With funding and educational facilities at his disposal and with financial support from his sister Catherine, this was an opportunity for my working-class dad. It was an opportunity that would ultimately provide him with secure employment.

The *University College of North Wales Prospectus 1953-54* provides valuable details of the terms and conditions of entry. The University was open to men and women students above the age of 17 years and on registering matriculation certificates had to be produced. My father may have stayed at the ‘Neuadd Reichell, Hall of Residence for Men Students’ which had been extended in 1950 to accommodate the rise in students at that time. The Hall had its own refectory (with lunch provided except on Sundays) a library, common-rooms and sick-bay. There was an annual fee of £125, ‘caution money’ of £2 and an annual subscription of £1/1/0d towards the cost of the

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289 Ibid., p. 60.
290 Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, p. 426.
291 Roberts, *Bangor University 1884-2009* p 64.
292 University College of North Wales Prospectus, 1953-54.
292 Joan Dodd, Personal correspondence dated 13 June 2012.
Junior Common-room. On the other hand my father may have found alternative lodgings through the Superintendent of Lodgings. If he found his own lodgings they would have been approved by the Superintendent before he accepted them. Students were not to be absent from their lodgings for a night without the special permission of the Vice-Principal. In any event being out after 11p.m. was not allowed. If they were ill, involving continuous absence and requiring a doctor, the Superintendent had to be informed.

Students were not at liberty to register after the lapse of a fortnight from the first day of Term nor attend a Lecture or Class before registering and paying the prescribed fees. Students had to submit themselves to X-ray examination of the chest.

All students had to have their courses arranged and approved by the Dean of the Faculty. There were fees not just for registration, but for lectures, tuition and examinations, which for a B.A. totalled £10 per term. The behaviour of the students was regulated too. Quiet, orderly manners were the order of the day with punctual attendance at lectures and classes and, if a student wanted to absent class, a Professor or Lecturer’s permission would be needed. It seems a quaint, yet somewhat romantic notion to me in twenty-first century Australia, but my father in 1950s Wales, would have been obliged to wear his academic gown in the Main Building at Lectures, Examinations, in the Library and on ceremonial occasions. Smoking was prohibited.

293 University College of North Wales Prospectus, 1953-54, p. 21.
294 Ibid., p. 29.
295 Chest x-rays were given to trace tuberculosis. In the 1930s Welsh medical officers of health gave alarming accounts of squalid unventilated or damp houses that were infected with tuberculosis and other disease. The ‘white scourge’ as it became known was still prevalent in the 1950s. It was not until the seventies that it virtually disappeared. Morgan, Rebirth of a Nation A History of Modern Wales, p. 233 and p. 346.
gatherings and entertainment were not allowed on licensed premises without
the permission of the Senate.²⁹⁶

An Arts degree comprised two parts. Part One, normally occupied the first
year with Part Two, normally occupying the second and third years. Part
One, which was not examined but assessed by the Faculty, consisted of a
course in Philosophy based on Plato’s Republic.²⁹⁷ Three other subjects had to
be chosen according to the handbook, but my father’s academic record shows
that he studied English and German. In his second year he took a German
Honours course with Philosophy as an auxiliary subject. Some of the
prescribed books for this syllabus included the work of Thomas Mann,
several books by Goethe, Herder, Pascal and a wide selection of German
grammar and philology works.²⁹⁸

The Old Bangorian: The Magazine of the Old Students’ Association of the
University College of North Wales dated December 1955 reports, not just
where and what their alumni were doing it also gives details of marriages of
recent University students which led me to wonder if my father met his
second wife at Bangor. He was at Bangor University College until June 1956.
On 20 August 1956, aged 51, he married 33 year old Menna Carrington Jones
at The Registry Office in Wrexham.²⁹⁹ Menna was the daughter of a coal
miner and, like my father, her occupation is shown on their marriage

²⁹⁶ University College of North Wales Prospectus, 1953-54, p21.
²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 66.
²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 60.
²⁹⁹ Certified copy of an entry in the Register of Marriages in the Registration District of
Wrexham, 2011, Marriage solemnized between John William Edwards and Menna
January 2012.
certificate as ‘Secondary School Teacher.’ This reflects a passion demonstrated long before the 1880 Education Act of the upwardly mobile Welsh to become school teachers because teaching was seen as a classic escape route from poverty.300

It was the last pieces of evidence included in the newspaper announcement of my father’s death which brought me to the realisation that I had found what I was looking for; that my research had fulfilled my yearning to understand the life and times of my father. I had come full circle because I had known, since the late 1960s, what the obituary and the marriage certificate claimed.

My father and his second wife Menna had come looking for me in the late 1960s. They found me at 52, Marconi Road Chelmsford, Essex. They said they lived at 34, Stancliffe Avenue, Marford, Wrexham, and that they both taught at the Grove Park Grammar School. Menna taught music and my father taught German.

300 Morgan, Rebirth of a Nation A History of Modern Wales, p. 23.
301 Menna and John Willie Edwards and 34 Stancliffe Avenue, Marford, Wrexham. Somewhat different to Daisy Hill where my father was born. Photograph taken by A. Edwards in 1969.
10) EUREKA

I have now come to understand something of how my father lived. I have gleaned details of my grandparents and the conditions under which they raised my father. I have some idea of where my dad might have gone to school, where he learnt to speak German and what career opportunities were open to him between the wars. When I discovered how old he was at the outbreak of World War II I was dubious as to what he could have possibly done for the war effort. And, because my mother used to make such derogatory comments about him I had wondered if he had done anything at all. I am glad he was able to be useful because I think fighting the Nazis was, without doubt, essential. That he spent the first part of his military career zipping round Great Britian hoisting balloons defied my expectations that the only way he could have been a ‘hero’ was to have been involved in aggressive action.

I must admit I’m not really certain of his specific role with Signals and the Wireless Unit or what exactly a German speaking Clerk (cypher) would have done given the complexity of the operation at Bletchley Park. Joan says his exploits in Europe began when he was parachuted onto the Continent and I like that idea because it has movie star status. But there is no doubt that he did go to Ghent and onto Schleswig Holstein and I found nothing to suggest that the experience was in the least bit glamorous. On the contrary. But if I’m ever asked what my Daddy did during the war, I will act all mysterious and say he worked with the Secret Service and that when I’d banged on the door of M16 demanding details I was told that ‘it’s still hush hush.’ What of
Margot? Surely any discussion about that affair has to take into account the bizarre circumstances under which my parents married. As for settling down to married life, well come on, what chance of that? Why my mother carried such a grudge towards my father is a mystery to me but then I belong to a different generation. I’m just very grateful that out of those apocalyptic times, amazingly enough, my working class parents found time to give me life. While I have no time for the British class system at least when I eat in a posh restaurant I know which cutlery to use. And it’s probably been beneficial to me to pick up my “h’s” rather than leave them trailing behind like Alf Garnet.

I was hoping to discover that my father had the Welsh characteristics of my step-mother who joined in local Eisteddfods and understood the Welsh clergyman who ranted and raved in black robes while she played the organ in the chapel in the valley. But unlike Menna who came from Wrexham my dad was from Buckley, a town so close to the English border that some people speak Welsh, some English and out of the mix of all the chatter, there are some who speak a unique Buckley dialect. My Dad’s native tongue was the same as mine – English. And he chose to learn German not Welsh.

My Welsh grandparents like my Cockney grandparents ‘did it tough,’ as we say today. So my father had working class roots – just like me. He spent some of the war defending cities in England, including London the city I call home, and he went to Ipswich and then to Chelmsford where I spent a good deal of my life.
I think he left his heart in Germany. He taught the language and when I went to his home in Wrexham I listened, while he sang love songs in German, accompanied by my step-mother playing the piano. We went on holiday together. He chose Salzburg, the home of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and when my father spoke German, that guttural language, he purred. With the British currency de-valued by Harold Wilson’s government we found the pounds in our pockets weren’t what they might have been and when we went to listen to Mozart’s *Magic Flute* we could only afford to go to the Saltzburger Marionettentheater.
We would walk up and down, through and over the top of the mountains and the forests near Berchtesgaden, where Adolf Hitler had had his retreat, and where *My Father, My Hero, killed the little despot.*

With the demands of my husband and two children, the connection with my father fizzled out and the next thing I learnt was that my dad had died. His legacy to me as I perceive it was not anything to do with Wales per se. It wasn’t his house or his money. He had, during those dark years of the war, left with my mother a gramophone player and with it a collection of 78 records.

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303 Berchtesgaden Village, Photograph held by A Edwards.
304 Florence Annie Edwards, later Higby. Photograph scanned by A. Edwards from a family album.
The records included the works of Verdi, Sibelius and Paul Robson crooning

*Oh, my baby, my curly-headed baby,*  
*We’ll sit below da sky and sing a song*  
*To the moo- oo-oo oo-oon.*  
*Oh, my baby, my little darkie baby,*  
*Your daddy’s in da cotton field,*  
*Workin’ for the fo- oo-oo oo-od.*  
*So, la-la la-la la-la lullaby-by.*

*Does ya want da moon to play wid?*  
*All da stars to run away wid?*  
*They’ll come if you don’t cry.*  
*So, la-la la-la la-la lullaby-by,*  
*In da mammy’s arms be creepin’,*  
*An’ soon you’ll be a-sleepin’.*  
*Laa-laa la-la la-la la-la lullaby.*

My father left his body on 6 April 1976 at West Shore Nursing Home, Llandudno in the County of Gwynedd. He is buried alongside Churchill in Westminster Abbey. I didn’t tell my mum. Cousin Joan went to the funeral and in 2011 she sent me Palgrave’s *The Golden Treasury a selection of the best songs and lyrical poems in the English Language* which my father had given her. Someone has scribbled the year ‘1948’ on the inside of the cover.

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11) A LESSON FROM HISTORY

Although I used a whimsical tale, a mythic construct of my memory, to set the scene of my thesis, at no point did I feel I wanted to slip into the genre of fiction but I was surprised to see how some of the events in my yarn, corresponded to my research as details of my father’s life unfolded.

*As it happened* primary documents did slowly emerge during my research which, after critical examination I used in true Rankean style to ground the story of my father in time and place. But for the most part they didn’t reveal anything of how his life might have been. I couldn’t imagine from their skeletal details how my grandparents lived nor could I intuit my father’s childhood at Daisy Hill. I certainly didn’t have any understanding of the conditions under which my parents married. I needed secondary sources to value-add to my father’s story: to give it life. When the postman flung Juliet Gardiner’s *Wartime Britain 1939-1945* into a puddle in my courtyard one stormy afternoon I knew from the moment I started to carefully pull apart the soggy pages, that I had found a friend because she told of things with which I was familiar. She stimulated my memory as I read about rationing and ‘digging for victory’ and Morrison shelters. Her accounts of the barrage balloons and conscription gave me some meat to put on the bones of my father’s military records. Similarly David Kynaston became another one of my paper-mates with his accounts of austerity Britain. Reading the work of these and other historians reminded me of my experiences as an oral history
interviewer\textsuperscript{306} when, with a carefully prepared list of questions I’d gone to meet my interviewee, an English woman who could have been my older sister. After initial nervousness on both our parts, the list was forgotten and we just chatted, batting back and forth our memories and experiences. I mention this because there was a point in the oral history exercise when I saw the connection with my own past. That’s how it seemed to me as I began to see my solid connection to the content of my father’s history.\textsuperscript{307} The more I read of Gardiner et al the more curious I became as I understood my relationship with my father’s past. I also recognised the oral historian’s technique of triggering memories not by an interview with my cousin Joan but through the correspondence we had. I gained confidence in using her input because it seemed to me that if I had put in place oral history ethical procedures, grabbed some recording equipment and gone to Britain to conduct an interview with Joan then the information she shared with me wouldn’t raise too many historians’ eyebrows. Only I didn’t ask Joan any questions; she simply volunteered information. She volunteered extra detail after I sent her a copy of my paper \textit{The Land of My Enigmatic Father}\textsuperscript{308} which explored the conditions of my father’s childhood and the opportunities he might have had as a young man. It was clear to me that she had read my work because she confirmed some of my findings and continued to insist that my father was in the army. A point, as my thesis records, I pursued. Joan

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also had time to deliberate on her responses because she ‘doesn’t do computers.’ So there was no rapid reactionary firing of emails.

I used our memories, Joan’s and mine as signposts in my research and incorporated them, where possible, into my thesis having authenticated them against documentary archival sources and secondary discourse. Even though there are still gaps – details I don’t know – I feel confident with my assumptions because they are carefully and explicitly grounded in identified reliable and relevant historical records.

I doubt if I have fulfilled my commitment to write a memoir as defined by Tyler May that is; memoir being personal history, while history offers a kind of public memoir. I believe I have created a personal story about my father which sits within the public history.

But most importantly this personal story has enabled me to learn something of my father and through the process learn something of myself. I have learnt from history. I didn’t learn about a Hollywood Hero. I discovered an ordinary man, who like all ordinary people was, as we all still are, restricted in choice throughout life because of the decisions of the hegemonic ‘great man.’ I say three cheers for personal histories, not simply those recounting the lives of remarkable people, but those that tell of ordinary lives. They are amongst other things, an aid to avoiding judgment of others including our parents and ultimately ourselves.
I would like to end with a quote from a nineteenth-century historian, Thomas Carlyle. In my view, what he is saying about the value of biographies in history is just as relevant in describing the value of personal histories:

We have a chance of recovering some extraordinary lives – the kinds of lives, in short, that we will never know if we refuse to look beyond our chronicles and charters. And ironically, we historians may, in the end, be able to write more convincing life stories about people than we have about those whose names we know and whose deeds are enshrined in texts.  

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E-mails of 15 December 2010 and 18 August 2011 Registration Officer, Flintshire Registration Service @flintshire.gov.uk on behalf of Registrars@flintshire.gov.uk.

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