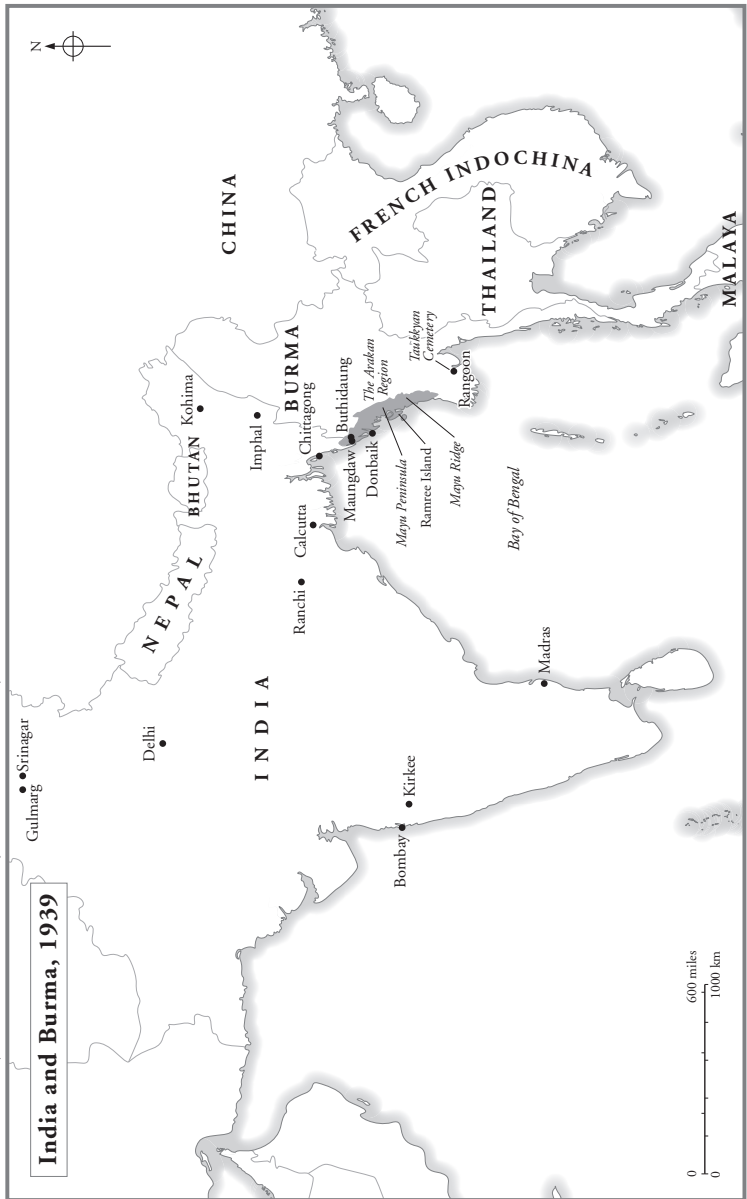


India and Burma, 1939





Prologue

I HEARD THEM LONG BEFORE I saw them, the throaty rumble of their Second World War engines reverberating in my hearing aids as I sat outside on the morning of my 100th birthday. With a blanket draped over my shoulders to protect me from the April chill and my face tilted to the sky, I spotted the valiant Hurricane first as it wheeled in from the west for my birthday fly-past. Then came the Spitfire, that gutsy little plane that captured the hearts of the nation and came to represent the British spirit.

As the aircraft came in low directly overhead, their two young pilots from RAF Coningsby's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight kindly dipped their wings at me before heading home. Raising a clenched fist, I punched the air and cheered along with everyone else, thrilled to bits by this timely reminder of all that helps make this country great. It is this very gumption that I knew would get us through the coronavirus pandemic that held us all in lockdown.

It was eighty years earlier that I saw my first Hawker Hurricane when three of them swooped low over our Yorkshire valley on the day war was declared. I was nineteen years old and I remember thinking to myself, 'So, this is what they mean by war.' I saw more Hurricanes and Spitfires later as a trainee soldier, both bravely fending off German Messerschmitts over Cornwall during the Battle of Britain. And it was Spitfires 5,000 miles away out in Burma that helped us defeat the Japanese as we rolled in to fight them with our tanks.

As the relics of those dark days disappeared behind the clouds and my special birthday fly-past was over, I turned to the film crews back in our garden in force and said, 'I can't believe all this fuss is for me, and only because I went for a little stroll.' In fact, the previous twenty-five days beggared belief, because everything that had happened had sprung from what was started as a family joke when I was recovering from a broken hip. The idea for the fundraising walk that was to change my life first came to me a few weeks after I'd returned from another routine check-up at the local doctor's surgery and – as usual – had taken the staff some chocolates to keep them going.

'You're such an inspiration, Tom,' said Clare, one of my favourite nurses, after I told her I was considering ordering a treadmill. 'I can't think of many ninety-nine-year-olds who'd be thinking about buying a running machine!'

'It's you lot who are the inspirational ones,' I countered. 'For all the patience and kindness you've shown me over the last eighteen months, for the doctors who saved the life of my son-in-law, and for those who cared so wonderfully for my late wife Pamela. I only wish I could do more.'

Clare's parting advice to keep mobile was what sparked my mini challenge two weeks later, by which time we were all under lockdown. It was Sunday, 5 April 2020, the first really sunny day of the year, and my daughter Hannah and her family, with whom I live in Bedfordshire, decided to have a barbecue. Instead of doing my exercises in my room that day, I decided to take my walker outside for the first time and try a few laps of our 25-metre driveway. In what was a typical, fun conversation, my family began to tease me.

'Keep going, Granddad,' Benjie, sixteen, called as he flipped the burgers. Georgia, eleven, laid the table and Hannah said casually, 'Let's see how many you can manage.' Her husband Colin added, 'We'll give you £1 per lap, so see if you can do a hundred by your hundredth birthday.'

I thought they were joking because I hadn't walked that far since I came out of hospital eighteen months earlier, but as I kept walking, step

after step, I began to think about what they'd said. What if I did raise a bit of money and gave it to the nurses and other healthcare workers who'd looked after us over the years? Even £100 would be a nice gesture. And how much might I raise if I could manage enough laps before my 100th birthday to help them combat Covid-19? Maybe if Hannah could persuade enough people to donate then we might be able to make a small contribution towards our brave army of frontline carers to whom I owed so much. But first I had to manage one whole lap.

Two years earlier I'd have managed 1,000 laps or more, but after a silly fall in my kitchen I'd fractured my hip, broken a rib and punctured a lung, which almost did for me. I have to admit that my subsequent loss of mobility knocked my confidence and badly affected my independence. Before that I'd been fit and well – driving, mowing the lawn and managing much of the gardening myself, even using the chainsaw. In my nineties I'd travelled to India and Nepal on my own because I wanted to see Mount Everest. I flew over the summit and sent some postcards home, then came back. Life is to be lived and I've always believed that age is no barrier to living it.

Once I'd finished the first lap that Sunday and earned myself a pound, I turned my walker carefully and attempted lap number two. 'That's it,' Hannah encouraged, laughing. 'You might even make a fiver!' Secretly, I wondered if I could, but with the family egging me on, there was no way I was going to stop. They knew me well enough to accept that I'd do my best. A Yorkshireman's word is his bond. Before I knew it, though, they'd set up a fundraising page for me with a £1,000 target, contacted the local media to help drum up support for what they called my 'Walk with Tom', and left me to do the rest.

I find the events that followed hard to fathom, even now. All I did was go for a walk, but it seemed to touch a nerve. As I ticked off my laps slowly and steadily, step by step, ten each day, my modest little fundraiser went viral and my target was surpassed within twenty-four hours. Before I knew it there were journalists at the gate, TV crews in the garden, and

I was on breakfast television. As the money kept flooding in, so I kept walking. The entire adventure was so surreal and exciting that it really put a spring back in my step and I thoroughly enjoyed every second. Never in my almost 100 years on this Earth could I have imagined just how much we would go on to raise.

I am still so humbled and grateful for the love and gratitude I have received from far and wide. I'm in awe of the generosity and kindness of all those marvellous people who contributed to what started out as one old man's attempt to do his bit. It has gone far beyond my wildest expectations. I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart, not just for the amount we've been able to give to the NHS but for the wonderful boost you have given me and my family.

Before all this happened, I was a quiet little soul living out my days peacefully and reflecting back on my life with its long and happy marriage, two lovely daughters and four terrific grandchildren. I was preparing to mark VE Day and then VJ Day to commemorate seventy-five years since the end of World War Two, a conflict in which I'd served in India and Burma as part of what has become a largely forgotten campaign. And, of course, I was looking forward to marking my 100th birthday at a nice little party with friends and family before returning to peaceful obscurity.

After my walk, though, it seemed that everyone not only knew my name but also wanted to know much more about me. I'm now known around the world as simply 'Captain Tom'. I am thrilled that I inspired so many people to undertake their own fundraising efforts, especially the younger generation, because they are the future. Everyone keeps saying that what I did was remarkable, when it was actually what everyone did for me and for the whole country that was remarkable. It has certainly filled me with a renewed sense of purpose.

Astonishingly at my age, with the offer to write this memoir I have also been given the chance to raise even more money for the charitable foundation now established in my name. Its goals are those closest to my

TOMORROW WILL BE A GOOD DAY

heart, with a mission to combat loneliness, support hospices and help those facing bereavement – all in the wake of the unprecedented crisis we found ourselves in. I am so deeply honoured to be given yet another opportunity to serve the country of which I am so very proud.

This, then, is my story.

Tom

I.

*'It is wonderful what great strides can be made
when there is a resolute purpose behind them.'*

Winston Churchill (1874–1965)



Scene from the 1918–1920 Spanish flu pandemic.

‘DON’T WORRY ABOUT OUR TOM,’ my eighty-one-year-old grandmother told my mother when I went off to war at the age of twenty. ‘I’ll be looking after him from Heaven.’ True to her word, Granny Fanny was dead within a year and I like to believe that she’s been looking after me ever since.

I almost gave up believing in Heaven, mind, when as a lad I watched agog while a huge hot-air balloon disappeared into the clouds above my hometown at the Annual Keighley Gala. Staring up at the summer sky, I saw the brave parachutists who’d hurled themselves from the gondola basket appear as if by magic and come floating down to earth. My delight turned to disappointment when the aeronauts were unable to report that they’d found the Heaven that I’d always been told was just ‘up there’. It was the first time in my young life that I questioned my parents and realized that sometimes children are spun a pack of lies.

Aside from that unexpected revelation, however, I had an extremely happy childhood growing up on the southern slopes of Rombalds Moor, West Yorkshire, in an area widely – but usually incorrectly – known as Ilkley Moor. Also renowned as ‘Brontë Country’, it was a place tourists flocked to by steam train and charabanc in their thousands to see where the three Brontë sisters had lived in nearby Haworth.

Sadly, none of those talented young writers lived to see forty due to complications from tuberculosis, and their mother also died young, of cancer. In Yorkshire and probably elsewhere, people used to say the secret to old age is to choose your grandparents and then your parents, and if that's the case then I did all right.

Granny Fanny Burton was one of eight children who'd been born and raised in Keighley. At the age of twenty-six, she'd married barber John Hird and in short order they had four children, of which my mother Isabella, born in 1886, was the eldest. Grandfather John, who died of cancer at the age of fifty-two, six years before I was born, worked in the family hairdressing and shaving saloon known as W. N. Hird's in Church Street. This was a grand double-fronted establishment, and an advertising flyer from the period lists it as a hairdresser, bookseller, newsagent and general dealer, selling everything from stationery and umbrellas, to cigars and slates for schoolchildren to write on. As a young girl helping out her father in the store, my mother used to lather up the faces of customers needing a shave.

My father Wilfred Moore was born in 1885, the youngest of four children – two boys and two girls. His father Thomas, who'd been born on a sheep farm in Hawes, Wharfedale, and couldn't read or write, incorrectly registered him at birth as Wilson. When Thomas arrived at the registry office, Wilson was the only name he could remember. Thomas had fallen in love with my grandmother Hannah Whitaker, the elegant daughter of a besom maker. For those who don't know, a besom is an outdoor broom fashioned from twigs. Hannah worked happily as a maid in service at a house called Club Nook Farm near Skipton, but resided with her family in a village called Hubberholme. With no other means of

transport, Thomas would walk or ride his horse ten miles there and ten miles back at weekends just to woo her.

Once they were married in Hubberholme parish church, the couple moved to Keighley where my grandfather, who'd trained as a mason in Bradford when he saw no prospect in farming, took up building work. One of his first jobs was to build a wall around the 300 acres of Cliffe Castle, a grand private home that later became a museum. This job took him four years and he was paid sixpence an hour. When it was finished the local quarry owner commissioned him to build four houses in the Parkwood area in order to use up his excess wall stones, and this eventually led to the creation of an entire residential district. Thomas's reputation and business grew and then he was approached by local baronet Sir Prince Prince-Smith who asked him to construct several shops in Cavendish Street. From this they went on to build some of the most prominent landmarks in the district, including several mills, the Town Hall, the Jubilee Tower, Strong Close Works, additions to historic Whinburn Hall, a block of stables, three schools, the Star Hotel and properties in Bradford.

Keighley was heavily involved in the manufacture of woolen textiles, with large firms concentrating on every aspect of the industry, from sorting and spinning wool to textiles, manufacturing washing machines and allied contraptions. Alongside this was a massive engineering industry with huge concerns of up to 6,000 employees creating, building and installing the complex machinery, such as the tools, looms and lathes with which to make cloth.

Thanks to my grandfather's success the family had means, so Wilfred and his three siblings received the education that he had been denied, although they were what was known as 'half-timers', with half their day spent at school and the other

half in some form of employment. Having left school at fourteen, my father joined the family firm where his older brother William, known as Billy, was already employed. Thomas Moore & Sons was by then operating out of premises in Alice Street, from which shire horses pulled the heavy carts. Wanting a home that reflected his success in the town, my grandfather built a large detached house at 90 Banks Lane, Riddlesden, which was then a village on the outskirts of the town. Thomas named his new home 'Club Nook' after the farm where he'd first met my grandmother Hannah. When it was complete, the family moved from their previous home, a house called Hazelroyd on the Skipton Road. They never looked back.

With a partly castellated exterior and a small turret that carried a flagpole, Club Nook was a fine stone property that had several unusual decorative features, such as stained-glass windows, stone lintels and oak doors, all salvaged from other, grander properties that Grandfather had dismantled over the years. He'd always loved horses and owned a horse and cart for many years, until the advent of cars. It was Grandfather who'd purchased the finest shire horses for the firm's wagons and insisted they were looked after royally in an immaculately maintained stable. Such was their beauty that they were lent out to the town for the gala and other events. At Club Nook the garage for Grandfather's beloved De Dion-Bouton automobile was designed as carefully as his stables and he even had stained-glass windows installed. People said that he treated that fancy French vehicle much like he treated his horses. It was polished to within an inch of its life and was never allowed out in the rain. The family joke was that fresh water and hay had to be prepared for it each morning and at night it was bedded down in straw.

Once settled into Club Nook, Thomas built four more houses alongside it, the first next door for Uncle Billy and his wife Edith (known as Elsie), which they called Westville, and the next one along for my Aunt Jane and her husband. The others were sold and my father Wilfred, who was still single and living at home, was told that he would inherit Club Nook one day. The fourth sibling, his sister Maggie, received nothing, as she was the black sheep of the family who'd disgraced herself by eloping with a man against my grandfather's wishes and then asking for money to emigrate to America with him. Furious, Grandfather said he would pay her fare there but not back. This he did, but Maggie later returned – alone – and was never given a house. Instead she married a local joiner and was excluded from the family forever.

My father, who was always quite small in stature and an innately artistic person, loved animals, flowers and nature, history and craftsmanship. Despite being just over five feet tall he took up photography at an early age, using a heavy and cumbersome camera to take pictures of the town and its people, and – later – his prized hens and dahlias (for which he won all kinds of trophies). He had hopes of becoming a professional photographer one day, but at the age of twenty-one he caught a mystery virus that left him deaf in both ears. In an era when medicine was far less advanced than it is today, he was never told what exactly had caused his disability, only that nothing could be done about it. This news would have been bad enough, but he then realized that his debilitating condition would make a photographic career – in fact, any career – impossible, so he had no choice but to remain in the family building trade, constantly deferring to his relatives who could hear.

In his unexpectedly silent world, my father developed some skill as a lip reader, but this was entirely self-taught and very rudimentary, as there were no national associations for the deaf and very little help from the medical sector. Deaf people in the early 1900s were often seen as ‘defective’ or inferior, outcasts from normal society. There were even suggestions that they should never marry for fear they’d pass it on. Without any access to sign language, which wasn’t widely taught or even encouraged, he was only able to understand if someone shouted into one ear. This rendered all normal conversation impossible, denied him access to music or bird-song, and must have left him feeling very isolated.

The saving grace of Father’s disability was that it protected him from the horrors of the Great War, which he would otherwise have been expected to endure. The 1914–18 conflict with Germany that started when he was twenty-nine sparked a mass wave of patriotism across the land and thousands volunteered for Lord Kitchener’s ‘battalions of pals’ in which friends, neighbours and relatives were encouraged to serve together so that they could support each other on the battlefield. Joining in groups became especially popular in the northern towns, where entire streets signed up, most of the men dying together in the brutal four-year conflict that claimed the lives of 10 million soldiers.

Whole neighbourhoods were wiped out, leaving streets full of widows. Almost all of the 2,000 ‘Bradford Pals’ and 750 of the 900 ‘Leeds Pals’ – part of the West Yorkshire Regiment – died in a single hour on the Somme as they walked together into a hail of German bullets. Two hundred and sixty-nine young men from Keighley were lost in one year alone, and all 900 who were dead by the war’s end were commemorated on the imposing stone memorial that my

grandfather's company built and which still dominates Town Hall Square.

The other men in the Moore family were also spared the trenches, my grandfather Thomas for being over the age limit at sixty-three, and Uncle Billy, then thirty-three, for reasons I never knew. My mother Isabella would have been very relieved that Father was safe, as were her three brothers, Arthur, Thomas and Harry, who worked in munitions, two of them on airships in Cumbria and at Cardington in Bedfordshire and the third at the Woolwich Arsenal.

A headmistress at a little local school, Isabella Hird was even shorter than my father, standing at less than five feet, but she'd set her cap at my father early on and was determined to make him her own. They made a good match physically and had courted a little but then had a falling-out. Knowing his route home from work, she waited for him on the corner of High Street and Low Street, peering through the glass in a shop window so that she could step out and surprise him, as if by chance. Her ploy worked and they were married on 26 April 1916, in a church in Oakworth. At thirty, she was an age that many in those days would have considered made her an 'old maid', but I always thought it was brave of her to marry a deaf man, and she was right to pursue him, for they were very happy throughout their forty-nine-year marriage.

The newlyweds moved to 14 Cark Road, Keighley, a two-up two-down terraced house with a third bedroom in the attic and a good-sized cellar. The front was quite smart but the back sloped down to Flasby Street via a *ginnel*, a northern word for an alley between buildings. Next to the back door was a round hole through which the coal was delivered and poured. My sister Freda was born at home in 1917 shortly before the global Spanish flu pandemic that killed

millions, including more than 220,000 in Britain. The deadliest pandemic in history came in four separate waves – two in 1918, one in 1919, and the final one in the spring of 1920. As a baby, Freda would have been especially vulnerable throughout that period and, towards the end, my mother was pregnant with me.

Fortunately, none of my family was directly affected, but the horror of it was impossible to avoid. At Raikeswood Prisoner of War Camp nine miles away in Skipton, where almost 700 German soldiers were held after the Great War, the virus quickly took hold. Several guards died and hundreds of prisoners were infected. In 1919 ninety of them were brought to the Fever Hospital at Morton Banks in Riddlesden where forty-seven died. They were buried with full military honours in Morton cemetery.

I came along on 30 April 1920, a few months after the virus burned itself out. It was a year and a half since the war ended and the very day the British government under Prime Minister David Lloyd George ended military conscription. Like Freda, I was also born at home and Granny Fanny would have assisted, as midwives cost money, were few and far between, and had only recently been officially certified. Fortunately for everyone concerned, mine was not a troublesome birth and I caused my mother very little bother. In the year of my birth George V was on the throne, Winston Churchill was War Secretary, Rupert Bear was born in a cartoon featured in the broadsheet *Daily Express*, and the suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst was jailed for six months for campaigning for women's right to vote – something that wouldn't happen for another eight years. My arrival in the world was just one among 1.1 million live births in the country that year, the highest number since records began. It was also an important year for the Duke of

York who met Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, a lady who was to become our country's beloved Queen Mother.

I lived in Cark Road with my parents and Freda for the first eleven years of my life and was very happy there. There was no electricity but we had candles and some lighting by gas, the smoky smell of which can still take me straight back to my youth. In my small bedroom at the back of the house and below Freda's attic room there was a gas bracket with a naked flame, while downstairs in the kitchen – the main room of the house – we had incandescent mantles, which were unusual for the time.

Our house was relatively modern compared to many in town. It had a kitchen-cum-living room with a large built-in coal-fired range and a separate gas oven at the top of the cellar stairs. The washing was done down in the cellar in the 'set pot' or furnace pan. This heavy iron bowl was proudly made by The Rustless Iron Company (Trico) of Keighley, who sold them in their millions around the world. The range heated all the water for the house via a back boiler and this could be drawn off through taps in our bathroom, which had a proper bath for our weekly hot wash on a Friday night. Every house on our street also had an inside flush toilet, which was quite unusual as a lot of the poorer properties near the gas works still had blocks of shared outside privies. The tenants there used to wear heavy clothes to bed so that they wouldn't get too cold when they had to go out to use the lav at night.

Like most women of the era, my mother operated to a strict regime and Monday was washday, which was always a nuisance if it was raining and the washing couldn't dry. Mrs Maskell, our home help, would arrive first thing to fill the set pot with water and light the gas fire underneath. Then she and Mother – sometimes helped by Freda and Aunt Jane – would

get to the washing. The hot water in the set pot would be poured into the washer as required using a 'ladle' – a wooden tankard with a handle. The washing would then be hung out to dry if the weather was fine, or draped over a clothes rack made of long wooden poles hauled to the ceiling by a rope and pulley system. There was a mangle with wooden rollers to squeeze the water out of the clean washing and one day when I wasn't home Freda caught the forefinger of her right hand in it, which had the effect of crushing it. By all accounts, she screamed and screamed, and it must have been extremely painful. As a largely unsympathetic little brother, however, I was more fascinated by the fact that it left her finger hooked like a little parrot's beak for the rest of her life.

Tuesday was ironing day, Wednesday was market day (my favourite), Thursday was baking, and Friday cleaning. Like all good Yorkshire housewives, Mother's front step was scrupulously scrubbed as this indicated that she was a good, clean woman. When I was five, my mother's weekly routine was upended for a while because she became pregnant, and one day she went into hospital to have the baby. Sadly, she came home empty-handed. It was never talked about other than that my infant sister's name was Wendy and she'd been christened. I didn't realize the significance of her absence or how sad my parents must have been until a lot later.

Not long afterwards it was my turn to go into hospital when I developed a high temperature. Our GP, Dr Chalmers, diagnosed scarlet fever and I was taken to the Fever Hospital at Morton Banks where the German POWs had died of Spanish flu after the Great War. My father was a kind man but we weren't allowed to be ill and he wasn't impressed. Generally speaking, if we were struck down with anything, then a bottle of medicine was bought from the chemist or doctor. When

it was finished, we were better – no arguments. If we had a cold we were given a wine glass full of the bitter and clear Fennings Fever Mixture – ‘The Family Medicine’ and it was so foul that we’d decide to recover quickly, which I expect was the point.

Scarlet fever, a virulent bacterial infection, was a bit more complicated than anything Fennings could cure. It was also highly contagious and there were several other children on my ward suffering from it. When my parents came to visit they could only wave at me through a window. I’ll never forget my dear mother’s brave smile of encouragement. She needn’t have worried as I was well looked after by the nurses, but I wasn’t allowed home until my skin was dry and the scabs on my rash had cleared up.

Scarlet fever sometimes killed people, but it didn’t affect me long-term and I was soon back home and running around as usual. Mrs Maskell used to say to my mother, ‘*Yr Tom tows a sel wi lakin*’, which was Yorkshire/Irish for, ‘Your Tom tires himself out with playing.’ And play I did, although I rarely remember being tired. I was active then and active all my life, and it would clearly take more than a little fever to carry me off.

2.

*'I avoid looking forward or backward,
and try to keep looking upward.'*

Charlotte Brontë (1816–55)



Arthur Burrows read the first
BBC radio news bulletin in 1922.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1925 I witnessed something of a momentous event – my father bought his first car, a maroon Rover 8. It was a four-seater, eight-horsepower vehicle, built in Birmingham, with just one door and a hood. The cost was around £130, equivalent to many thousands of pounds now, but to me it was priceless.

The door was on the passenger side because of the spare wheel, and the windscreen wiper had to be operated by hand. There were no windows in the back, but my sister and I had little curtains to pull across if it became too windy. My parents had raised me never to gloat but I was secretly a little bit proud of the fact that ours was the first car in our road, although the man next door had a motorbike with a double sidecar for his wife and daughter.

Unusually, my father taught Mother how to drive when the general feeling was that women shouldn't. She proved to be a better driver than he was, but if we were caught out during the terrible winter fogs, when the coal smoke from the factories made it impossible to see your hand in front of your face, it would still be Mother who'd get out and walk slowly in front of the car. In fairness to my father, it was a considerable advantage that she could hear another vehicle approaching. Once Father had that car our lives changed for the better,

because instead of remaining relatively local, or as far as we could walk or cycle, we travelled further afield. There were day trips up on to the moors, visits to Haworth and Bolton Abbey and, most Sundays, we went to Whitby on the east coast – a journey of about ninety miles each way in a vehicle with a maximum speed of 40 mph.

At the beginning of each trip Father gave me the map and asked me to navigate, which was nerve-wracking until I got the hang of it. He or Mother would only go where I told them (yelling into his ear if he was driving) and he'd constantly ask me and Freda questions along the way like, 'What river are we crossing now? What's the name of that mountain?' If I didn't know the answer I was in trouble. He wanted to make sure that I was competent with a map because navigational prowess wasn't common at all. Not many people travelled far from home and even fewer had cars. It was a skill that I never lost and one that proved vital to me later.

We'd usually stop halfway for a picnic lunch at Sutton Bank, part of the Hambleton Hills, which offered spectacular views over the Vale of York all the way across to the White Horse at Kilburn, a huge figure cut into the sandstone by a schoolmaster and a team of volunteers in the 1850s. At a gradient of about 1:4, Sutton Bank was so steep that many cars weren't able to make it or could only go up in reverse. Sometimes my mother, sister and I would have to get out and walk, but it was always worth the climb. Once we reached the coast we'd make our way to the beach at Sandsend where Father would hire deck chairs for the day and he and Mother would settle down with a Thermos flask of tea and a rug over their knees.

Freda and I would put on our knitted swimsuits to swim and *lake* or play all afternoon. A word to the wise, woollen swimwear sags woefully once wet. If it was very hot, Father

would roll up his trousers to paddle and – in an act of great ceremony – unbutton his stiff white collar, something he only ever did on holiday. Mother, too, would paddle, but the pair would never swim. Instead, they'd watch us playing happily and treat us to ice creams. Freda and I loved it there. If we weren't swimming we would hunt for crabs or little fishes in the shallows left in the sand. But our greatest delight was to search for pieces of the local black gemstone called lignite, and better known as jet, to take home and polish. Those were innocent, happy days indeed.

All thoughts of beaches and swimming and jet had to be forgotten when I went to school because, from the age of five, I attended the fee-paying Drake and Tonson junior school in Temple Street, Keighley, cycling the one and a half miles to and fro to take my place behind a little wooden desk.

A good little boy who learned to read and write well enough – using sharpened HB pencils and paper and not slates, like my predecessors – I never misbehaved or was sent to see the Scottish headmistress, Mrs Kirk. Instead, I did as I was told in my class of about twenty, chiefly because of our very kind teacher Miss Ruth Moffitt who was in her twenties and wore 'kiss curls' in her hair. There are a couple of photographs of me in school pageants beating a drum and blowing a trumpet and, although I look a bit miserable, I remember it as a happy time.

Freda attended the same school but was in a class above me along with a lad called Denis Healey, who'd moved to the area with his family and later became Chancellor of the Exchequer and then a lord. He was pleasant enough and his father was principal of the local technical college, but his mother was one of the nicest ladies you could ever meet. She

was what we would have called ‘a treasure’ and she often invited Mother and us for afternoon tea at her house, which was unusual. Everybody loved Mrs Healey for her kind and open disposition.

School was fine but the lunches weren’t a patch on my mother’s fare, so I usually came home for them. She was a very good cook and an excellent baker, and the one who taught me all I know in the kitchen. Her Victoria sponge was outstanding and her moist ginger parkin the best I ever tasted. Even later, during periods of rationing once war broke out, we never starved. Although my father was progressive for the era and of the belief that women should get a fair deal, Mother was still expected to provide three meals a day. I never had the sense that she resented her role, though, or missed being a headmistress. Having married late, she’d found the perfect mate with never a cross word between them – mainly because she knew to keep her mouth shut. And she looked after us all very well indeed.

For breakfast (pronounced *brake-fust*) we had porridge and bread, then there was a meal of meat and potatoes at ‘dinner time’ – twelve o’clock sharp – that had to be on the table ready for when my father walked home for lunch. There was a hot supper in the evening, and a roast of beef or lamb every weekend. Granny Fanny, who’d always seemed old to me, usually joined us for that. Oftentimes, Mother would take us the mile to my grandmother’s house in Queen’s Road, Ingrow, by tram (which we called a ‘tracker’). I didn’t mind the noisy, rattling carriages that offered a special reduced rate before 8 a.m. for factory workers, but what fascinated me most was the conductor, in his peaked cap and uniform, a leather bag for tickets and change strapped across his body. At the end of the line he would step out and, using a very long pole with

a hook, he'd unhitch the tram wheel from the overhead cable and connect it to the opposite one so that the tram could return to Keighley. It was a delicate operation but, with all the passengers watching, he never missed it once.

Granny Fanny's house was little more than a one-up one-down – a tiny property periodically shared with my mother's favourite brother, Arthur. It had no garden and an outside privy. I loved going there because Granny Fanny was such a kind, sweet woman who saw the good in everybody, no matter how badly they might treat her. She was the most Christian person I had ever met and a devout churchgoer at what was known as a 'Primitive' Methodist church, just as her late husband John had been. Although she didn't have any sweets, she used to feed me sugar lumps, something that would be frowned upon today. She was also a wonderful cook – not the kind who used weighing scales, mind. She made the best rice pudding and always in a large enamel dish, the same one she used for her traditional Yorkshire pudding.

Fanny wrote all her recipes beautifully by hand into a little book which my mother inherited and which I still possess. Aside from my favourite, her oatmeal biscuits*, which I became quite proficient at with her guidance, the book includes dishes

* **Oatmeal biscuits**

Cook in the oven at 180°C for 15 minutes. You can use butter instead of lard.

6 oz of oatmeal	2 teaspoons baking powder
6 oz of flour	1 egg
4 oz of sugar	¼ teaspoon carbonated soda
3 oz of lard	a pinch of salt

Mix ingredients into paste. Roll out very thin. Cut into shape and bake.

like roast ox tongue and boiled tripe, jugged hare or rabbit pie. In the days when people ate every part of the animal, including the 'lights' (lungs), brains, liver, kidneys and heart, there was one recipe for something called French soup that involved boiling an entire sheep's head. We never had that but I'm not sure I'd like it, as I've never been one for offal. The book also explained how to make every kind of lotion and potion for ailments from lumbago (lower back pain) to gout, because people were minded to take care of their own health. Free healthcare to the masses was a long way off and if you went to see a doctor or called one out then you had to pay.

I remember once being on my bicycle in Bingley when my wheels got caught in the tramlines. I fell off and cut my cheek quite badly and someone helped me back on my bike, whereupon I cycled the four miles home, dripping blood. My mother took me to Dr Chalmers who stitched up the wound. I can't recall how much it cost but it was probably £1. I was lucky that we could afford it as many people couldn't and would either have to patch themselves up or find a poorhouse somewhere run by an ex-nurse.

If I wasn't at school or it was the holidays then my favourite day of the week was always market day. Keighley had an open-air market in the High Street every Wednesday morning and Freda and I would happily go with Mother to help her with the shopping. The market was always buzzing with noise as people arrived from far and wide, on foot, by bike or in a pony and trap. The stallholders called out the prices for their wares, which were laid out on trestles resting on barrels, and the women of Keighley, all in hats, would parade up and down beneath the awnings, deciding which fruiterer to patronize or which cheesemonger to buy from, as they chatted to friends

and neighbours. All the while, around the fringes of the market there would often be the poorer children of the town, watching and waiting hollow-eyed for a stray apple or a dropped loaf.

I have always adored butter, and this was kept in round, insulated tubs two foot high. There was a choice of several different types so samples would be handed out on the end of a wooden lollypop stick – salted, unsalted, farm butter or ‘foreign’. Once Mother had chosen the one she wanted, the woman at the stall would scoop it out and then pat it into a little square with special wooden butter pats before wrapping it in greaseproof paper to go in Mother’s basket. Flour, sugar and every kind of dried bean and pea were kept in big sacks and scooped up into paper carriers whose bottoms fell out if they got wet when we carried them home (Freda would be the first to laugh if the bottom fell out of mine). The brown peas Mother used in stews came in a more durable cardboard tube so I was always happy to carry those. There was also sago and tapioca, duck and hens’ eggs and plenty of fresh vegetables, but only ever local and in season. We’d never heard of things like bananas or pasta, and meat and fish would only be bought from the butcher’s and the fishmonger’s and never a stall, as there was no refrigeration. My favourite store was called Home and Colonial, which sold tea and general groceries and was a bit like a modern-day department store. And I also liked the hardware store Gott & Butterfield where one could buy anything from a fireplace to a box of matches.

On special occasions and only ever on a Saturday, Mother would put on her best hat and take us to Lingard’s on the corner of Kirkgate and Westgate in Bradford, the grandest store I had ever seen. The feature that fascinated me most