

A NOSTALGIC TRIP AROUND HEBBURN

Excerpts from the story, 'A Lifetime's Journey – Old Man of the Tyne.'

When they arrived back in Ovingham, Septimus was at the door to greet them.

"When you were out, a man called for you. He said he was a relation of yours."

"Did you catch his name?" Asked Geordie.

"Yes, his name was Davy Rigger." Septimus beamed.

"Davy Rigger?" Geordie clasped his hands with delight.

"Yes, he left this note for you."

Geordie's face showed such happiness, as he flashed his eyes fervently across the paper. He turned excitedly to the Captain, and held out the note. "Great news, Captain - I need to go to this address in Hebburn."

The Captain briefed over the note. "I understand, Geordie; we'll leave at once."

Before the taxi pulled away, the Captain turned to Septimus, who was standing at the gate. He kissed the note, and then waved it to him through the open window.

"Septimus, you're the best!" He shouted, with a smile. Septimus beamed with delight.

It wasn't long before the Captain and Geordie reached Davy Rigger's address. They parked at the front of the house: a humble semi-detached with a small fenced garden and a tight drive. Geordie eagerly left the car and walked down the drive, closely followed by the Captain. The Captain knocked on the door. It was opened by a small lady with a kindly looking face.

"Yes?" Can I help you?"

"Hello ma'am. My name's Robert Wiseman, and this here is my good friend Geordie Rigger; I believe your husband may be expecting us?"

"Could you excuse me a moment, please?" The lady smiled timidly. "I'll just fetch him."

A moment later, a pleasant looking, large and powerful white-haired man, in his early seventies, came to the door, wearing black shoes, dark trousers - fastened with a thick, brown leather belt - and a white short-sleeved shirt.

"Ah, hello there gentlemen, come in, come in. You must have just missed me at the churchyard." They all walked through the small, carpeted passageway, into the modestly furnished living room. "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse my wife;" the host apologised, as the lady left the room; "she gets rather nervous in company."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," said the Captain, sympathetically; "I hope we're not intruding."

"Oh, not at all - your visit is a pleasure."

"Oh, we didn't introduce ourselves." The Captain held out his hand. "My name's Robert."

"And mine's Davy." Said the host. "And this must be our Geordie?"

"It's unbelievable;" Geordie stared emotionally at Davy, "you're my grandfather alive again!"

Then tears began to run down his face.

"Come 'ere;" said Davy, warmly; "it's about time someone gave you a cuddle." Geordie opened up to the warmth of kinship - succumbed by enveloping love.

"I needed that." He said, happily wiping the tears from his face. "People usually treat me like a god - untouchable."

"It's your sublime beauty that overawes them." Davy's affection did Geordie well, for within a few moments, he seemed his old self again. "Take a seat Geordie; take the weight of your feet. You too Robert; make yourself at home; you're with family now." He then walked over to an oak sideboard and withdrew a blue folder from the top drawer, from which he took some pedigree charts and a few letters. "This is why I came to see you." He leant over and handed them to Geordie, who was now sitting on the settee. "You see, I'm the family genealogist, and the possibility of meeting you was a chance not to be missed - you're our link with the past. I'm the great-great grandson of Thomas Rigger of Hebburn; you're my 3rd cousin, 5 times removed."

Geordie put his hand across his mouth and closed his eyes, giving out a sigh of relief. After a moment, he reopened his eyes. "Davy, you don't know how heart-warming and consoling it is to hear that; it's fortifying news indeed."

"I feel just as excited." Said Davy, now relaxing into the armchair opposite Geordie.

"But, I don't understand why cousin George would claim he was the last of the Riggers."

"That's easily explained." Said Davy, "Cousin George didn't mean he was the last of the Riggers; he meant that he was the last of the Riggers, who were Free burgesses of Newcastle."

"Oh, I see." Said Geordie. "An ambiguous sentence so easily misconstrued. English grammar has changed considerably over the last two centuries."

The Captain looked over from the easy chair by the window. "Davy, how did you know we were at Croft house?"

"Now and again, I journey to Ovingham churchyard, to pay my respects to George and his family; mainly to keep in touch with the past. Today, after doing so, I called into the village pub for refreshments. Whilst there, I overheard two local men discussing your arrival at Croft house. 'Yes', said one - whom I later discovered to be a

servant at the house - 'it was definitely Geordie Rigger, the two hundred and ten year old man off the telly'. And as I say gentlemen, meeting you was a chance not to be missed."

"I'm so happy you did, Davy." Said Geordie, looking across from the settee. "To have a family, is to have a future; it's a wonderful feeling."

Geordie then looked down, picked up an envelope from his knee and studied the stamp and postmark. "Thirty-two pence from London to Hebburn... it's incredible. When I was a boy, my grandfather used to send a weekly post via the Newcastle to Sunderland Bye Post, at a cost of threepence per letter. The post boy rode a large grey pony, and carried the Bye letters in a small leather satchel slung over his shoulder. My grandfather used to give the boy a generous tip, and say, 'post haste, boy... post haste!' Ah, memories."

"Geordie, the habit of charging letters by the sheet was unique to Europe, and ceased in 1839. Writing was quite expensive for some folk, so they made full use of a single sheet with 'double writing'; that is writing from left to right on a sheet of paper and then overwriting it from top to bottom. I have examples of letters from that period upstairs."

Geordie smiled, then, once again gave his full attention to reading the letters and charts upon his lap. "You've done your research well; it's nice to see the old names still going strong." Geordie's ability to recall family relationships, plus the dates of their births, marriages and deaths, was at that moment, invaluable. He pointed out a few minor discrepancies in the more distant family lineage, and put them right accordingly. Geordie tapped the chart, "I'm sorry, but up to eighteen-hundred and six, is as far as I know, except for my family on the island."

"I'm absolutely astounded." Davy beamed. "The papers were right - you have a phenomenal memory. But how do you know so much about the family history before your time?"

"My Grandfather had a fondness for telling me stories of times gone by, told to him by his father, and so on. He once showed me a sea chest he owned, which was filled with old wills, deeds, certificates and the like."

"Did he take it with him on the fateful journey?"

"No, he left it behind at Croft house."

Davy sighed with relief, and wondered if the chest could still be there.

Geordie seemed to read his mind. "I could duplicate everything for word, and even draw any people or illustrations from any time in my memory, if you so wish."

Davy put his head back and laughed out with excitement. "I think I might be imagining this; Geordie, you're a genealogist's dream - a delightful paradox. The past isn't the past anymore, because you are the past - but you're here now - it's wonderful."

They talked together for an hour or more. Geordie was delighted to find someone that knew his past so well. The scrapbooks, pedigree charts and the videoed news and documentaries were a testament to that: to the past of the miraculous rarity that honoured Davy's home. The Captain reminded Geordie of the time, and the patient driver waiting in his cab.

"It's been an educational visit." Geordie shook Davy's hand. "When do we meet the rest of the family?" He added, pointing to a few photographs of Davy's grandchildren that sat upon the sideboard.

"Soon enough, Geordie, but I'll have to round them up first."

Arrangements were made for a private family reunion, in the concert room of the town's Elmfield Social Club, for 2 o'clock the next day. Davy's brother John is an organist at the Club, and an excellent one at that, as many people come from miles around to dance to his wonderful music. This large, flat-roofed club is one of the family watering holes. It has a large bar, a small lounge, and a concert room with a very spacious dance-floor and high stage, on which the club organ sits. Each room has many windows.

As the small group stood at the door saying their farewells, Davy suddenly realised something. "Oh dear, I'm sorry; I was so enrapt that I completely forgot to offer you refreshments."

"That's no matter," the Captain smiled; "we can make up for it tomorrow."

"Oh, you'll need directions to the social club." Davy raised his hand, just about to explain the route, when Geordie interjected.

"It's on the corner, where Finchale Road meets Campbell Park Road."

"I know from the newspapers that you were well acquainted with the eighteenth century Hebburn, but how on earth could you know of a building that is comparatively recent?"

"The A to Z street atlas."

"You mean you memorised it, page by page?"

"Yes," said Geordie, "page 65, E3 of my map book."

Davy stood open-mouthed. "Incredulous. Oh, that reminds me;" he added, inquisitively; "as you knew this area and its small community so well, as a child, it seems odd - class divisions aside - that you didn't come across your poor relations at some point."

"I'm sorry; the first I knew was when my grandfather told me of your branch of the family on the first day of our fated journey; which cousin George's words led me to believe was extinct."

"No apologies needed, Geordie. It's just one of those things that has puzzled me for years - how, somewhere along the line, families divide."

“We’ll see you tomorrow.” The Captain waved as he and Geordie exited the gate and headed towards the car.

Geordie turned back as he opened the car door. “I’m sorry to hear about your wife’s nervous disposition; I’ll send out sympathetic healing to her; she’ll be well by the morning. Please bring her with you tomorrow; we’ll see you at two.”

Davy looked a trifle confused. When the car had gone, he went indoors to see his wife, and to ring around the family - rounding them up for the great reunion.

The next day, shortly before two, Geordie and the Captain arrived at the car park at the back of the club. They exited the car and made their way round to the club entrance at the front. They were met outside the double glass doors by Davy and his wife, who led them inside.

Standing in the passageway Davy’s wife looked up at Geordie, reverently.

“Oh, thank you Mr. Rigger; thank you very much.” Said she, heartily. “I don’t know what you did last night, but whatever it was, it had a tremendous positive effect on me - you couldn’t begin to know what you’ve done for me.”

“Oh, I think he could, dear.” Davy put his arm around his wife’s shoulder. “Whatever it was, Geordie, my wife and I are deeply indebted to you; thank you very much.”

They all walked along the short passageway and then turned right, passing through the double doors into the concert room.

“I thought it was a private function.” Said the Captain, as he and Geordie looked around the large, crowded room.

“It is;” Davy smiled proudly; “this ‘is’ the family.”

“Son of a gun!” The Captain cried. “There must be at least two hundred people here.”

“Yes, that’s true;” Davy laughed; “I’m just sorry they couldn’t all make it!”

Geordie looked at Davy, contentedly. “And I thought I might be the end of the line! This is more than I deserve.”

Just then, the awaiting audience noticed the guests’ arrival, and cheered.

“Well, I think I had better say a few words.” Said Geordie, to Davy, through the roar of the applause.

Davy attracted Geordie’s attention and pointed over to two seats on the stage, where refreshments awaited them; nearby, stood two boom mikes and video cameras, operated by Davy’s sons James and William. The Captain and Mrs Rigger were ushered to a reserved table, near to the stage.

A moment later, on stage, Davy raised his hand for silence. “Thank you. Now we all know why we’re here; we’re here to welcome back into our fold, the oldest and wisest member of the family... ladies and gentlemen, Geordie Rigger.”

The crowd cheered wildly.

Geordie wiped a tear from his cheek. “You know?” He nodded as he looked around at the happy smiling faces. “Some say there’s no such thing as reincarnation.” The crowd laughed. “Davy, here - the granddad of the family - is the image of my grandfather.” Geordie looked lovingly into Davy’s face. “I thought my nose was all my own, but now I see I have it on loan.” The crowd laughed once again.

“You know?” Davy added respectfully, with a warm smile. “I thought I was the granda’, but I’m glad to say, you’re the granda’, now.”

The audience cheered in agreement.

Geordie glowed with exuberance. “My Granddad once said to me ‘Hebburn people are the most charming folk you’re ever likely to meet’, and with such a reception as this, I most certainly agree... it’s still so!” The crowd smiled and nodded to each other shyly, but proudly. “Is there anything you’d like to ask me?” Said Geordie, looking around at the audience as Davy poured him a soft drink.

“Aye.” Davy’s son, Tom, spoke up from the front row. “Apart from Hebburn Hall and its old peel tower, now part of St. John’s Church; and the Black Staithes - known colloquially as ‘steeths’ - are there any other man-made landmarks in the immediate town area, still extant from the days of your childhood?”

“Alas, no. Trees were the great landmarks back then - of greater significance than they are today. The Hebburn Halfway tree has gone - as are many other trees I climbed as a boy. I have noticed the absence of a greater feature - one which is a ‘manmade loss’ - the skylark and the peewit.” The older folk looked on thoughtfully, and nodded. “As an eight year old I often visited my maternal cousins at Hebburn Hall, and almost the whole area of Hebburn was our playground. Although many things have changed since that time, there is one thing that has always remained steadfast - which no amount of physical change could ever alter - that is the wonderful ambience of the town: a feeling that can be sensed strongest around the present Marina, and will be there for all generations.”

Tom spoke again, “Thank you, Geordie, that’s a wonderful sentiment. Your mention of the Marina prods me to further ask how you know so much about our recent local history in the short time you’ve been here.”

“Tom, your father is a very clever man, and has kindly filled in many of the gaps in my local history knowledge. And, out of this proud and happy town has sprung two remarkable local websites: <http://www.dunn247.co.uk/> and <http://hebburn.org/>,” united as one by mutual consent. The camaraderie between the regulars shines through, and my heart is gladdened to view the interesting messages and pictures they contribute.”

“Have you ever posted a message;” said Tom; “and do you know any of the regulars?”

“I have posted incognito; and being a daily viewer, I know all the regulars by heart, and if you’d like to know their names, they’re: Adam, Adrian, Alan, Alastair, Alex, Alf, Alfie, Alison, Alistair, Allan, Allison, Allyson, Alyson, Amanda, Andrea, Andrew, Andy, Angela, Angie, Ann, Anne, Anth, Anthony, Arthur, Audrey, Azra, Barbara, Barnie, Barrie, Barry, Bernadette, Berni, Bernie, Beverley, Bill, Billy, Bob, Bobby, Brenda, Brian, Bridie, Bruce, Bryan, Byron, Caberdeen, Caine, Carol, Carole, Caroline, Carolyn, Cath, Catherine, Cedric, Charles, Charlie, Charlotte, Cherie, Cherry, Chris, Christine, Christopher, Cindy, Claire, Claudia, Colette, Colin, Colleen, Corinna, Craig, Cynthia, Daniel, Danny, Darren, Dave, Davey, David, Davy, Dawn, Debbie, Deborah, Debra, Denese, Denise, Derek, Des, Diane, Dick, Dickie, Dinah, Doc, Dodie, Don, Donald, Donna, Donnie, Doreen, Doris, Dorothy, Dot, Doug, Dougie, Douglas, Dug, Ed, Edd, Eddie, Eddy, Eds, Edward, Edwin, Eileen, Elaine, Eleanor, Elizabeth, Enid, Eric, Ernie, Evelyn, Faith, Fiona, Fran, Frances, Frank, Frankie, Fred, Freddie, Gail, Gary, Gavin, Gaynor, Ged, Geoff, Geordie, George, Georgina, Gerald, Gerard, Gerry, Gez, Gil, Gill, Gillian, Glenn, Gloria, Glynis, Gordon, Graeme, Gwerngen, Harold, Harry, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Howard, Hugh, Iain, Ian, Irene, Jac, Jack, Jackie, Jacqueline, Jacquie, James, Jan, Jane, Janet, Janice, Jean, Jeanette, Jed, Jeff, Jen, Jennifer, Jenny, Jill, Jim, Jimmy, Jo, Joan, Joanne, Joe, John, Jon, Joseph, Josie, Joy, Joyce, Judith, Julie, June, Karen, Karl, Kathleen, Kathryn, Kathy, Katie, Katrina, Keith, Kelly, Kelsey, Ken, Kenny, Kev, Kevin, Kirsty, Lance, Laura, Laurence, Laurie, Layne, Leanne, Lee, Len, Leo, Leonard, Les, Lesley, Leslie, Less, Lilian, Lily, Linda, Lisa, Liz, Llyn, Lol, Lorna, Lorraine, Louie, Louisa, Louise, Lydia, Lyn, Lynn, Lynne, Lynda, Mac, Maggie, Mal, Malc, Malcolm, Mandy, Marg, Margaret, Marge, Margie, Maria, Marie, Marina, Marion, Marjorie, Mark, Marlene, Marshall, Martin, Martyn, Mary, Maureen, Maurice, Maxine, May, Meg, Mel, Melanie, Melvyn, Michael, Michelle, Mick, Mike, Moira, Monica, Moreen, Muriel, Murray, Nancy, Neil, Nicola, Niall, Nora, Norma, Norman, Olwen, Pam, Pat, Patricia, Patrick, Patsy, Paul, Pauline, Penna, Pete, Peter, Phil, Philip, Pm, Rachel, Ray, Raymond, Rhoda, Rhoda, Richard, Richie, Rick, Rob, Robbie, Robby, Robert, Ron, Ronald, Ronn, Ronnie, Rosalyn, Rosemary, Ross, Roy, Roz, Russ, Ruth, Sandra, Sandy, Sara, Sarah, Scott, Sharon, Shaun, Shaunio, Sheila, Shelley, Shirino, Shirley, Simon, Stacey, Stan, Stanley, Steph, Stephanie, Stephen, Steve, Steven, Stevie, Stew, Stewart, Stu, Sue, Susan, Suzanne, Syd, Sylvia, Tania, Terence, Terry, Tessa, Theo, Theresa, Thomas, Tina, Tom, Tommy, Tony, Tracey, Tracy, Trevor, Tricia, Trish, Val, Valerie, Vernon, Veronica, Vicki, Victoria, Vikki, Vince, Vivianne, Vivien, Walter, Wayne, Wendy, William, Win, Yvonne and Zeta.”

When Geordie had finished, the audience rose to their feet and began to clap and cheer at his incredible memory skills, and his appreciation and love of the town - the same town he knew and loved as a child.

When the applause had abated, Geordie was then asked to talk about his journey - which he did, giving a magnificently accurate recital. As he concluded, he was met once again with a volley of questions, such as, ‘were you lonely?’ and ‘how’s Charlie?’ and so on. One question, which caused much interest, was, ‘Could Geordie heal a mass audience?’ Geordie answered that he could, and would be willing to give a demonstration if so wished. Not one person in the room declined. Geordie stood facing the audience with his hands held high.

“Anyone with a malady, please close your eyes, relax, and receive the power, and your ailments will just float away.”

As Geordie closed his eyes, a band of light began to form around his head. He lowered his arms and stretched them outwards. As he did so, a surge of intense power left his body, floated silently over the heads of the responsive crowd, and fell upon them like a heavenly mist - absorbed by the sick and infirm. Five minutes later, the mist had gone, along with all sickness and ill-health.

Geordie lowered his arms, and sat down. Davy and the rest of the family, stirred, as if from a delightful dreamlike slumber.

“You might feel tired;” Said Geordie, affectionately; “but that will soon pass.”

A moment later, there were cries of wonderment, as the crowd became conscious of the miracle that had taken place.

A large lady held aloft her walking stick. “I can’t believe it! My leg’s healed!”

“I can’t believe it either, May;” said her cousin; “my back’s as right as rain!”

The air resounded with excitement, as the audience laughed and cheered. Davy smiled, as he turned to Geordie. “You know? I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it; and now I have, I wouldn’t have missed it for the world. Thanks to you, the family has never looked so fit and healthy. My heart feels as good as it did forty years ago, and the future looks rosy and bright. Geordie, you’re a godsend - let’s go down and meet the family.”

As Geordie stepped down from the stage, he was given a rapturous standing ovation, in honour of his ‘victory’.

Davy joined his wife and Captain Wiseman.

When the cheering had subsided, Geordie thanked the crowd, and then visited each table in turn, meeting his new family, one by one. By the time his round had finished - at his hosts’ table - he knew every name and face in the room, and had systematically matched them up, and connected them, mentally, with the pedigree charts that Davy had shown him.

Captain Wiseman looked up to the great, white-haired man who was standing by his chair, and reminisced of the time back on the island, when he first came face to face with this transcendental force.

“Geordie.” He whispered. “Thank you for the compliments you showed me during your narration.”

“They were well earned, Captain.” Geordie relaxed in his seat.

“Geordie, my wife and I have a gift for you.” Davy’s wife pulled an A4 envelope from a brown paper bag, and handed it to the appreciative old man.

“You may open it now, if you wish;” said she; “I hope it pleases you.”

“Thank you.” Geordie opened up the cover. He placed his fingers inside and gently withdrew a picture, which he then laid flat upon the table. “Home! It’s just as I remember: the beautiful white cottages and the fishing boats resting on the river. The cottage in the foreground is the place where I was born - and there’s the oak tree that my grandfather planted.”

Davy raised his eyebrows. “Absolutely amazing; that brings a totally new perspective to the picture.”

Geordie lifted his eyes from the picture and turned to Captain Wiseman. “I’d really like to go home.”

“There’s no wonder, Dents Hole looked such a beautifully, tranquil place.”

“No,” Geordie was emotional, “I mean home to the island.”

“But I thought you were here to stay.” Pleaded Davy, with a pained expression.

“No.” Geordie explained softly. “I hope you can understand. I have been reunited with a family whom I never knew existed. Loved, honoured and accepted as if I had never been away - what more can a person want? But, this land is not my home now, and it is regrettable to say, that I belong on another island, an island far away.”

“I’m surprised.” The Captain placed his hand on Geordie’s shoulder. “I thought it’s here you’d settle down. But if you want to go back to the Pacific, it’s your prerogative.”

“I will stay here with my family for another eight days - at the end of which I will head back home with Charlie.”

Just then, Davy’s sons, Peter and John, walked up to the table. Peter spoke up confidently.

“Hello Mr. Rigger - I forgot to tell you, my granda’ knew a man older than you.”

Geordie looked at him knowingly, with wisdom as great as his age. “That’s unbelievable, Peter; are you sure?”

“Yeah. My granda’ was born in 1898; and he told me - just before he died - that when he was five, he knew a man called Edmund, who was 108. And my mam says, that that means he was born in 1795; and that means he’s older than you.”

“It doesn’t, man!” Said John, in dismay. “You just don’t get it, do you?”

Edmund died about 103 years ago, man. I’ve told you again and again, but you just can’t get it into your thick head, can you?”

“Well, my mam said that 1795 is older than 1796, right! So there!”

“You’re illiterate, man!”

“No I’m not, our John - I’ve a mam and dad!”

“Oh go away, man, you gonk!”

Davy raised his eyebrows, and breathed out a sigh, as Peter and John stormed off in separate directions. “You’ll have to excuse them.”

“Yes,” his wife mouthed quietly, “Peter’s a bit slow.”

The Captain laughed. “What did you say, Geordie? Some people say there’s no such thing as reincarnation?”

Geordie nodded and smiled, and then looked at the pensive faces of Davy and his wife. “Please don’t be dismayed by your sons’ innocuous behaviour, or my imminent departure; but savour the moment for what it is, a charming celebration. Besides, I’ll be back.”

Geordie’s age put doubt on that, but somehow, Davy believed him.

“To Geordie!” Davy raised his glass, as his wife and the Captain did likewise.

The party went well, and the thought of Geordie’s leaving was pushed aside, to make way for a most palatable afternoon.

For the next eight days, Davy was in his glory, showing Geordie and the Captain around the area, with his video camera at hand. This sightseeing adventure included views of aesthetic, as well as genealogical interest: such as Saint Paul’s Church, Jarrow, burial place of the ancient Riggers, and once home of the Venerable St. Bede. All Saint’s Church, Newcastle, another family place of worship - witness to many family baptisms, marriages and burials. Saint Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle. Durham Cathedral; and Penshaw Monument, Houghton-le-Spring, home of the legendary Lambton Worm.

The Captain had heard mention of a ‘Longship’ in Hebburn, and being a nautical man, had longed to see it. He was quite excited about the whole venture, as he distinctly heard other ship names mentioned. Little did he know that they were all names of local watering holes, which Davy’s sons were ‘only too happy’ to show him. So, off they went, leaving Davy and Geordie behind in the sitting room of Barnard Crescent, discussing the website: <http://www.donmouth.co.uk/>; a diverse site, predominantly focused on Jarrow.

Later, after viewing the Hebburn website, Davy felt he couldn’t let Geordie leave without offering to show him Hebburn itself. Geordie was very keen. Together, they wandered on foot over every part, discussing the detailed history of the place, ending the tour at the parts of the town known as Hebburn Quay, and Hebburn Colliery. Standing on open ground, covered here and there by flowers, small bushes and the odd tree, Davy turned to Geordie.

"I don't have much to guide me, but I'd guess that my parents' house was somewhere round about here." He said, wagging his finger about in the air.

There was a landscape contractor standing nearby, hoeing round a small shrub.

"There's Jimmy, an ex-council worker from the parks. He used to be a neighbour of ours; one of the only ones I'm still in touch with. If you don't mind I'll go and ask him if he knows exactly where our row of houses was. Davy left Geordie and walked over to speak with Jimmy.

"Hello Jimmy; how are you doing?"

Jimmy lifted his head back and leaned on his hoe.

"Oh, hello Davy; not too bad, you know? Especially with my retirement coming up soon." He said, rubbing his nose with the back of his glove.

"You've worked in landscaping for quite a few years, haven't you?"

"O' aye, Davy, it's coming up to 47 years, now."

"My goodness, Jimmy, that's a long time, and worthy of anyone's respect - well done! You must have seen a lot of comings and goings."

"O' aye, I've seen it all." He laughed.

"Jimmy, I wonder if you have any idea where our street used to be; I've been looking, but can't seem to locate the exact spot with certainty.

"You're standing on it, Davy!"

"Never in the world!"

"You see those bunches of white roses there... placed at intervals in a row?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's where each individual front door used to be... my idea. In fact, most of the doorsteps can still be found a few inches beneath the soil. When the Quay and the Colliery areas were pulled down, we just covered the remaining streets and rubble with a few inches of topsoil.

"You mean the front streets and back lanes we used to play in as kids, and the layouts of our old houses are still there, just below the soil?"

"O' aye, Davy. Many times we hit roads just under the soil while trying to plant trees, and had to send for a drill to make some holes. It's astonishing what turns up; we've found just about everything you could imagine to be found - from doorknockers to chimney pots. Like I say, I've seen it all."

"I don't doubt it, Jimmy!"

"I remember one time, while trying to plant a tree, we hit an old white glazed sink. We had to smash a hole through it - it's still there!" Said Jimmy, pointing somewhere over yonder.

"My goodness, some mother probably washed her bairns in that sink!"

Just then, the conversation was cut short as a wagon pulled up alongside them.

"Well, Davy, it looks like I'm finished here for the day." He dropped his gardening tools and a few bags of rubbish onto the back of the wagon. "It's been nice talking with you."

"You too, Jimmy; watch how you go; and thank you for the nostalgic touch with the roses - you're a good man."

Jimmy climbed into the passenger door of the cab, pulled it shut, and poked his head through the open window.

"Thanks, Davy; I'll see you."

When the wagon disappeared from sight, Davy beckoned Geordie, then smiled and made little stabbing motions with his index finger towards the ground.

When Geordie came within hearing distance, Davy restarted the history lesson. "Geordie, in my childhood days, the Hebburn Quay and the Hebburn Colliery were vastly populated tight communities - buzzing with life and excitement. Now that the main industries have gone, these two communities have almost gone too. Many properties were razed to the ground, leaving the Quay and the Colliery looking desolate, underpopulated, and void of life and laughter.

Where did they go: the friends, the neighbours and the many characters? O' how I miss my companions and the familiarity of those surroundings. We never had a chance to say goodbye. Alas, I'm reunited with many of them through the death columns - it seems so unfair. I miss the old buildings too; they used to hold the memories of my family and friends - many of whom are long-gone. Our old Schools: St. Aloysius, St. Oswald's, the Quay School and the Colliery, are all gone; and so are most of the old friends we went there with. The shop windows we pressed our faces to; the rows of houses where we lived; even most of the public houses - gone! Our whole small world has almost disappeared. The memories in my head are often lost without something tangible to hold on to." Davy moved his hand through the air. "This very spot here is where my childhood home used to be - this used to be the front door."

Geordie placed his hand softly onto Davy's shoulder.

"Davy, breathe in the past; relax and remember once again your childhood memories." Davy breathed in slowly, and calmly closed his eyes. "Davy, go in through the door and greet your parents."

Davy stepped into the warm, sunlit passage, and was instantly met by his mother. She lifted him gently up off his feet, then hugged and kissed him, and asked where he had been all this time, as she had missed him. She set him

back down, and then led him by the hand into the parlour. The familiar aroma of baked bread and other delights filled the room. It was Saturday; the table was set for high tea. Davy looked around. The same oak-framed family portraits hung upon the whitewashed walls - walls decorated here and there with light green, hand-painted roses. The sideboard - dotted with ornaments and a crystal wireless set - backed against the wall opposite the chimney breast. The unlit paraffin lamp sat on the windowsill, framed by a half window net and two heavy green curtains, tied back near the centre. A row of small gold-rimmed ginger beer glasses sat atop the pelmet.

Davy noticed the green paint flecks missing from the skirting board, where he had once run his toy truck into it. Joey chirped in his cage near the full-length, dark brown wall cupboard, above which hung the empty clothes maid, pulled up to the cornice, out of the way.

The baking done, the fire still burned in the grate. The old black clock sat ticking in the centre of the mantelpiece, accompanied either side by two very old and cracked porcelain dogs.

Then, Davy was overjoyed with emotion, as there, looking over from the dark green, high-backed armchairs, either side of the old fireplace, sat his father and his favourite uncle, Tommy. They, too, were overjoyed to see Davy. They all hugged. The moment was heightened yet further, as Davy's dog, Laddie, appeared with wagging tail from beneath the table and proceeded to leap and jump up excitedly, spreading its paws onto Davy's chest. Davy hugged and fussed Laddie as much as he had ever done. Surrounded by so much love, Davy chatted excitedly, catching up, as his mother happily served tea. Davy was so very happy that he thought he must surely be dreaming.

Just at that moment, out in the open air, Davy opened his eyes, as if from a dream. "What happened? Was it a dream? How long have we been standing here, Geordie?"

Geordie removed his hand from Davy's shoulder. "We've been here but a moment."

"Thank you, Geordie. You must be an angel. I don't know what you did or how you did it, but I'm incredibly pleased you did. To meet my family again has been a blessing. My mother was a big woman, and when she put her precious arms around me, I knew I felt safe; oh how I missed that."

Davy and Geordie made their way to the top of the Wooden Bridge.

"Dear Geordie, the years are passing so quickly, and it is unlikely that I will see another decade; so before my time is up, I wonder if you will allow me to see one more time, this dear town as it was in my youth."

Geordie didn't speak, he just smiled kindly and placed his hand gently onto Davy's shoulder; Davy was immediately transported to the wonderful, carefree, summer world of his childhood days.

A moment later, Geordie took his hand from Davy's shoulder and smiled; all was as before - Davy was back in the present with Geordie, looking down once again from atop the Wooden Bridge.

"Geordie, that was an exceptional adventure; so incredible that I feel I the need to share the tale verbally with someone, just to make it sink in."

"Davy, although I was with you throughout your adventure, I would gladly listen to your narrative once more, if it would help you set it in your mind."

Davy began to recount his sentimental journey around dear old Hebburn.

"It was a Friday morning, and the summer sun was shining brightly. I was standing alone on the path, near the top of the Wooden Bridge, with one foot on the ground, and one resting on the foot-plate of my scooter - the one with the fat, white-walled tyres; my hands rested lightly on the handle bars. I was wearing a blue and white striped T-shirt, light brown shorts and black plimsolls. I breathed deeply and took in the familiar view before me. There was Campbell Street, ahead of me at the bottom of the bridge.

Before it was decided to build the Tyne vehicular tunnel at Jarrow - the Tyne Cyclist and Pedestrian Tunnel being a separate operation, opened in 1951 - Hebburn Council had put forward a proposal to have it built here. They had widened Campbell Park Road, on the other side of the Wooden Bridge, right up to Luke's Lane, where they had planned for it to join Leam Lane, giving easy access to the Motorway. They had also planned to scrap the Wooden Bridge - a steel and concrete construction, named after the wooden-built bridge that preceded it - and build a new, wider one, for both vehicles and pedestrians; and Campbell Street would have been the tunnel approach. When I saw the beautiful big cars lined up outside Henderson's taxi office, I was very glad the tunnel didn't come here, and thought of how different things might have been. Walter List's truck depot, with its red wagons, was at the bottom of the hill, to my right; and beyond that, further along Argyle Street, Thubron's Woodyard, Bygate Nursery School and St. Aloysius Infants' School. To my immediate right, down the bank, stood the allotments - rows of greenhouses filled with fresh-smelling summer bloom, with adjacent patches of land, packed with vegetation. I heard some light banging and tapping as gardeners busied themselves. A young boy was helping his grandfather to take plants and light garden tools from a shed and place them into a home-made box-barrow, made from wooden planks and old pram wheels.

There was much industry in Hebburn, but the familiar noises coming up the banks from the shipyards, dominated the lower parts of the town. The mighty, dependable cranes down at the river, hung over the town like proud, friendly sentinels. They gave off a safe and secure feeling of 'everything's alright'.

From behind me, I heard an old familiar rumbling - it was the sound of metal-rimmed cartwheels meeting with concrete. I turned around. A man headed towards me pushing a heavily laden flatbed cart, piled high with

household furniture - it barely fit through the bridge. He was obviously moving house - a common sight, as not many folk owned motorised transport. I moved off the path to let him pass; as he did so, I heard the sound of an approaching steam train. I was filled with excitement; I lay my scooter down, just off the path, then ran up to the railing, lifted myself up and popped my head over the side, just as a plume of steam rose up and enveloped me with a wonderful nostalgia. Seconds later, I ran to the railing on the other side, to watch the train hurtling away, down past the corn fields. Filled with content, I went back to retrieve my scooter, and stood again at the top of the bridge taking in the view before me. There were many pedestrians on the bridge, coming both ways. A lady passed me, pushing a well-built Silver Cross pram, which reminded me of a fairground shuggy boat. A smiling baby in a sun-cap and reigns was sitting up in the pram, happily biting a rattle, which it bounced now and again off the side. It chuckled each time the rattle hit the colourful string of plastic ducks hanging from the canopy.

At the side of the path, away from the pedestrians, was a well-worn rut, made by countless bicycles and scooters, leading down to the bottom of the bridge. I felt so energetic. I took my right heel from the foot-brake, and pushed off forcefully with my left foot. I excitedly whizzed down the bridge with the wind in my face, not afraid of falling in the least... wheeeeeee!

As I neared the bottom of the bridge, at Campbell Street, I noticed a lady up at a top window cleaning the panes, with her legs on the inside and her body outside. Mr Henderson came out of his taxi office - I waved and he waved back. I slowed down a touch and coined left at the old green, swan-necked lamppost and up Ropery Lane, which leads all the way up to the Station Bridge. I passed the heart-warming, old, terraced streets to my right: Dumhope, Usway, Swindon, Holystone, Barrow, Wreigh and Coquet, and the familiar factories to my left: Miles Druce; the Electric Power Station, where the Power House - an old dance venue - used to be. Then Frazer's steel yard, which ran to the end of Ropery lane - named after the rope works that once stood there. At the end, I reached the County Hotel - this bit being Bell Street back lane - and made my way to its frontage. I faced this splendid building; the Station Bridge and the very industrious Reyrolle's, the electric engineering works, with its winding shops, etc., were now behind me; and behind that once stood the just as industrious Bauxite Works, Tennant's Alkali Works and the Tharsis Sulphur and Copper Works - now home to Reyrolle's associate Company, the Bushing Company.

My thoughts were distracted, as a heavily laden bus, belched black smoke as it struggled over the bridge. There were people all about. Some walked down King Street, to the train station, and made their way over the metal bridge to the Newcastle side - that being the side that takes folk to Newcastle. I wheeled down to the station - the South Shields side - stopped and looked through the railing there. The porters were busy on the platform, as a train was in the station. I watched as bird owners handed over their baskets of pigeons to understanding Porters, who would look after them until they reached their intended destinations, where they would dutifully set them free to race back the many miles to their respective homes. Other Porters wheeled barrows full of parcels and other items to the goods carriage, many from the nearby Bitumastic and Pyrotenax works. Some folk put their bikes and prams into the goods carriage. The head porter came out of his office to oversee the situation, in his neat black suit, black tie, highly polished black shoes and his black, shiny, peaked cap. The big, old trains looked so relaxing, with their private, comfortable sitting areas, and the soft, gentle rocking and liling - which always seemed to soothe the commuters, old and young. I looked through the railings up towards the Newtown, on the other side of the tracks. There was the old library at the top of Queen Street to my left; with Craig's paint shop, Ritchie's bike shop, and the Newtown School and other shops beyond. The Station Hotel was just visible over Station Road - the Council Yard behind it out of view.

I felt so full of life. I turned around, put my scooter over my shoulder and hoiked it straight up the side of the bank, no problem. People passing on the other side of the railing didn't seem to acknowledge my presence. There was a rut, made by me and my friends, that followed the railing down to the bottom; it was so long since I had ridden it. Off I went... wheeeeeee!

At the bottom, I stopped, and bumped softly down, off the small step and made my way back to the County Hotel. On the other side of Prince Consort Road I could see the Newtown Nursery School and Lloyds Bank. A bin wagon passed Lloyd's, heading down to the Council rubbish tip, passed White's Marine Engineering works, with a gully sucker road sweeper not far behind. Down the bank to the left, over the road from R.W. Transmissions, was King George VI playing field, where Tyne View Terrace used to stand. Footballers played there, and jazz bands practiced; many buses lined the bank during competitions in which The Hebburn Heralds, The Hebburn Highlanders and The Hebburn Crusaders took part, against the likes of The Calf Close Kilties and the North Shields Grenadiers, the latter of whom always seem to win everything.

Ahead of me, across Bell Street, was the Rectory and St. Aloysius Church, and beyond, over Argyle Street, was Martin's Bank. I turned into Bell Street, and glanced into the rectory garden as I passed. I could see the garden surrounded by trees; also the greenhouses - one lean-to with a tefal roof - and the bell in its little tower, a relic donated by the old chemical works. I made my way down Bell Street, to the main church entrance, and paused at the big, brown, arched doors, as I felt I had to call in. I turned the heavy ring handle until it clunked, and then entered the church. To my left on the wall was the clamshell-patterned half bowl stoup, half filled with holy water - I dipped my fingers in to wet them and then blessed myself. A low, flat, glass case, full of beautiful jewellery stood

before me on my right. Behind it stood a beautiful statue of the Holy Mother holding our Lord, after his descent from the cross. I noticed Father Walsh appear at the chancel, at the far end of the church, so I felt obliged to leave.

Outside, back on my scooter, I quickly headed down Bell Street, and turned left into Coquet Street. I could hear children playing in the schoolyard. I peered through the big, metal gates. A few boys were playing football, using their jumpers as goalposts. There were girls playing skips, jumping in and out while shouting out rhymes. Other girls sang rhymes while juggling balls up against the side of a building; they laughed, as yet again, one of the balls became stuck in the cross shaped recess at the top of the wall. A girl came up to the gates and asked me why I wasn't at school - I didn't know. I thought about the repercussions if the school board man caught me, so I scooted off towards Argyle Street - the main road, which runs southwest-northeast. The Police Station - with the turquoise panda cars outside - and the Courts, and the Iona, were ahead of me on the other side of Argyle Street. Old Mr Wright, a retired man, was standing at his usual place, at the Coquet Street/Argyle Street corner of the school, opposite Audrey's clothes shop; he showed me an amazing sleight of hand magic trick - I was still puzzling over it as I pushed my way down the path, in the direction of the Colliery. I stopped at Swale's shop - opposite the clinic - propped my scooter up against the wall and called in for some spangles and sarsaparilla tablets to keep up my amazing energy. At the counter, I put my hand in to the right pocket of my shorts and felt some coins. I took out a shilling and paid for my sweets. I went outside, collected my scooter, popped a sweet in my mouth and walked to the corner of Wreigh Street. I noticed John Camara carrying his dog home over his shoulder - it had escaped again. Over the road was Albert Street, down which, was the Gem Bingo Hall, formerly the Gem Picture House. Further down was the Albert Hotel and the Co-op Store. Further down still, was Ann Street, with Renee's fish shop at the top left, and the Ballast Hill at the bottom. Back at the top of Albert Street, beside the red post box, was the Surgery of Doctors James Norman Swainston, Michael Norman and Peter Norman. It had a small, dark, oaken panelled waiting room, with long, hard, wooden seating all around the room, and a glass panelled reception area, which reminded me of the tardis.

The Doctors' was fronted on Argyle Street, by Lismore House; next was Stanharken House, then Kulsia House, the Hedley Schools and then the chemist shop.

I turned and walked up the front of Wreigh Street, a little, to take a look down the back lane, leading down to the Colliery - it seemed to go on forever. A ragman was walking his horse and cart up the cobbled lane towards me, trying to avoid some washing on a line that had been strung across the lane. A lady was using a prop to lift her washing out of his way. He showed me a Donkey Stone and some balloons, and asked if I had any old lumber... which he pronounced Loomba. I told him no, and then sped off, back to the Argyle Street main road. The drab colours of the passing traffic matched the battleship colours of the doors and windows of the tall buildings about me. To my right, still heading towards the Colliery, was the chapel, the scouts' hut, and then Barrow Street - at the top of which was Fraser's Steel Yard. On the corner of Barrow Street and Argyle Street, was Arthur Cook's, gents' tailor shop. After that was Gamble's paper shop and then the bookies - Michael, the blind man was just going in to place a bet. I crossed the road to the chemist shop, as I really fancied some liquorice root; I went in and bought some. I came out and stood with my scooter on the corner of Argyle Street, looking left, or northwest, down Ellison Street bank. Straight across from me, on the opposite corner of Ellison Street was St. Cuthbert's C of E Church. The traffic on both the path and the road was busy, so I walked my scooter down the left side of the bank as far as Lyon Street, passing the Territorial Army building on my left on the way. I was now at the junction of Lyon Street, standing outside the Commercial club, facing down Ellison Street. The fruit shop was opposite me, to my right, on the south side of Lyon Street; I crossed over to the north and faced the river Tyne down the bank. Donohughe's paper shop was on the corner to my right; and a little further downhill, on the same terrace, was the café - behind which was the old, obsolete pit yard. Further down the bank, was Leslie's shipyard, built by Andrew Leslie in 1853. I noticed Leslie's clock tower, and remembered my father telling me about the time an enemy plane knocked the top off it during the Second World War. On my left, a little way ahead of me, on the corner of Carr Street and Ellison Street, was the Progressive Club, adjacent to St. Andrews Church and Institute, which stands the next street down, on the corner of St. Andrew's Street and Ellison Street.

I stood proudly, looking down the long, steep hill before me, ready to 'take the plunge' - as many excited children had done before on their bikes, scooters and go-carts, known locally as boogies. I pushed hard and was away, flying down the bank at a million miles an hour. I felt invigorated. I kept the handles steady with all my might, for the slightest bump could upset them, bring them to a sudden halt and throw me over the top - and at the rate I was travelling, I guess I could have smashed through the 'bomb-proof' wall at the bottom, and landed on the other side of the river! However, as expected, I pushed down hard on the foot brake and came to a steady halt, without dunching into anything.

I walked up to the railing and looked across the river Tyne - it smelled of seaweed. Although the air was still, the motion of the river traffic disturbed it slightly, and brought to my nostrils a smell of burning from the underground fires at the nearby tip, and a slight pong from the bone yard across the river. There was much industrious noise - clanging, banging drilling and shouting - from the workers on the many ships... the Sir Percivale and the HMS Norfolk being two. Sparks flew like fireworks from high up on the decks and down into the water. Buzzers of different pitches and volumes went off at certain times throughout the day, each one having a certain meaning.

Ships, big and small, passed up and down the river. I watched as the Tyne Queen ferry came over from Walker, and berthed alongside the ferry landing. The rope lad jumped off, quickly placed the securing rope around the capstan, lowered the gangway, and then unhooked the barrier chain, allowing the many passengers to alight. They came through the style and rushed up the bank.

Behind the ferry landing loomed the ballast hill - a wonderful vantage point from which to watch the great ships being launched; and there were many: RMS Mauretania 1906, and HMS Kelly 1939, to name a couple. At that very moment, a man appeared at the railing and began to take photographs of the ships, maybe with forethought to hold this moment for future generations. I made my way up the bank, stopping for a drink at the beautifully decorated, blue water fountain in the wall at Leslie's; I then carried on up to the top of the bank at Lyon Street, and passed a group of children with their teachers, heading down towards the ferry. I glanced left, down the low road, in the direction of Jarrow. I could see the Caledonian pub on the corner of Tyne Street, but the Quay Board School, also on the right, was just out of view beyond the bend.

I looked uphill again. I was so full of energy, that without a struggle I wheeled myself back up to the top of the Ellison/Argyle Street junction, outside St. Cuthbert's Church - near the red telephone kiosk. I stopped and looked down towards the Colliery. I watched as a group of ladies alighted from the bus ahead, and struggled towards me with many bags of shopping in each hand, chatting merrily away about their day out at Newcastle. Community shopping was a common ritual among many friends.

There were many people going about their business. The roads were usually fairly quiet, but at those peak times, the busy traffic - especially the buses and lorries - roared, groaned and shuddered past, giving off nasty, unhealthy smelling clouds of smoke. Danby's fruit shop was over the road, on the corner of Holystone Street. I wheeled slowly down Argyle Street, passing St. Cuthbert's church, and then the adjacent scouts' hut. On the other side of the road Mr Donnelly, the undertaker, came out of his shop at 58 Argyle Street and headed on foot up towards the St. Aloysius church. I crossed over the road and rode down to the shop on the corner of Swindon Street - opposite Jack's V.G. shop - for some aniseed balls. I was eager to view the lane at the back of the shops once again - these busy shops and the lanes still seemed never ending - it's a good thing I was on my 'magic' scooter. I pushed myself down the lane a small way and then turned right - I was now in the communal lane shared by Swindon Street and Usway Street. A lady came out of one of the back doors in the lane, stopped me and asked if I would go a message for her to the V.G. She told me she'd give me sixpence - it was common for children to be stopped in this way. Without hesitation, I stuffed the money and the shopping note she had given me, into an empty trouser pocket, placed my scooter against the wall and dashed off to Jack's shop, on foot. I was young and fit - there was no chance of becoming overweight.

Jack was standing behind the counter in his white shop coat. I gave him the money and the note, which had the prices written beside each item. He brought the bread, milk and small tin of cat food and placed them on the counter - there was no change. I picked the items up into my arms, thanked him and then headed back to the lady - she was waiting at her back door for me. She thanked me, gave me a toffee cake and a tanner, and then went indoors, closing the door behind her. I stepped onto my scooter and wheeled slowly down the lane; the sun was warm on my back. I noticed the old coal hatches, high up in the walls of each premises, and similar hatches low down in the walls - signs of where the dry toilets had once been. I turned with surprise, as a flock of pigeons suddenly flapped up out of a backyard, into the air, disturbed by a cat walking silently along the half round capping bricks on top of the wall. A few featherfeet climbed high, and then began to tumble back down - what a sight! I passed an open back yard door; a man with a familiar face stood beside a cree with a pigeon in his hands, inspecting its wings. At the end of the lane, I turned left into Swindon Street, and then right, back onto Argyle Street.

I stopped outside Morton's Dairy, on the corner of Dumhope Street, and rested my scooter against the shop wall. A local character named Robin came by, pushing his bike, which he very rarely rode - though when he did, it was in a strange fashion using only one leg. He blurted out to me three times in a manic fashion, 'You got any old tellys?' I told him that I didn't; so off he went, poor fellow, leaning over his bike as he pushed it up the road towards the tip - probably off fighting windmills! I went into the dairy and bought an ice cream... deliciously cooling on such a hot day. Oddly enough, any time I needed more money, it just appeared in my pocket. As I came out of the dairy I looked down Caledonian Street and saw the blue star sign, high up on the side of the Dock Hotel - trademark of 'Newcastle Breweries Limited'. I finished my ice cream and then made my way down to the Colliery, passing the Co-op and other shops on the way - also the Bygate Nursery on Bygate Street, and St. Aloysius Infants' School, which was opened in 1929.

Hebburn is made up of three villages, the Newtown, the Quay and the Colliery, all being separated by manmade boundaries - the Newtown being separated from the Quay by the Station Bridge. The railway barrier gates ahead - a dividing line between the Colliery and the Quay - had just been swung open across the road, when I arrived at the crossing. The signalman popped out of the open door of his signal box, looked up the tracks and popped back again.

Over the crossing was another world - the Colliery - so separate and distinct from the Quay. The traffic started to build up as a steam locomotive came slowly down from the main Shields to Newcastle line. The engine was pulling

beds full of steel plate, going to Hawthorn Leslie's top shop, or pit yard as it was sometimes called. The engine slowed - the brakes squealed, and the trolleys shunted into each other, then came to a halt. Moments later, the engine began to move again. The chains tightened one by one, clanking as each trolley took the brunt and shook a little before moving off. It took a few minutes before the engine was gone and the gates opened.

On the other side of the track, Argyle Street changed name to Brancepeth Road; I followed it. On my left, I passed Harvey Street and Arthur Street, and then turned next left at Frederick Street. The old, obsolete 'A' Pit was to my right. At the end of Frederick Street, was a T-junction, traversed by Wagonway Road. On the other side of Wagonway Road, to the right, I could see Patrick's shop - known affectionately as Nelly's. I decided to call in. The shop had double doors, with only access through one. I pushed down the latch. The narrow door was heavy, solid and thick. I opened it and entered; even at such a young age, I felt as if I was stepping into a different era. There was little floor space; standing area for about five adults, as the two counters - one with the till to my right, and one ahead - took up most of the shop area; these counters were joined by a hatch. The high shelves on the walls, were filled with wonderful things. For such a small shop, it seemed to sell any and every obscure thing: laces, fuses, plugs, fluorescent light tubes and light bulbs, etc. The lady customer ahead of me bought a light bulb; Nelly took it out of the box and tested it in an electric socket under the counter, before putting it back into the box - how thoughtful is that? I have never bought a fluorescent tube from the high shelf, so I can only guess if Nelly ever tested them... now that would have been service! The lady left and I was now the only customer. I asked Nelly for a quarter of jelly babies, a bag of beef Tudor crisps and a can of Coca Cola. Nelly weighed the sweets, and then came back to the counter with the pop and crisps. Although the shop had a till, Nelly preferred to reckon up from left to right with pencil and paper - an ability that fascinated me. As I counted the money out on the counter, Nelly's husband Joe came into the shop from the back room and started a conversation with me. Both Nelly and her husband were lovely, warm people; I always felt so welcome when I enter their shop, as they always had time to chat, and Nelly had such an infectious laugh. Mr Patrick was a very talented artist and photographer, and was often be seen, out-and-about, taking photographs of the locality. He told me he had a large collection of photographs. He talked about his artwork, and offered to show me his private art collection, but, alas, there were so many places to be and so much to do. I left the shop in a very happy mood. I ate the crisps and drank the pop as I slowly pushed the scooter.

After passing Quality Row and the Banks O' the Tyne public house, which stood next to Carrahar's Field, I stopped on the path outside the Colliery Club.

Ahead, towards Blackett Street, was the Staithes: a conveyor belt that carried coal over the Road, and down to the awaiting ships - opened 28 July 1936 by the Duchess of York; next to that stood the Durastic. I could also see the roof of the Royal Hotel - known as The White Lead, because of the dust that fell onto it from a local smelting works, Foster, Blackett and James.

I turned right into High Lane Row, heading uphill. On my left was Roy Austick, electrical and civil engineers, who occupied part of the Simpson's buildings; then there was Simpson's Hostel; there were some foreign gentlemen standing outside in deep conversation. On my right, still on High Lane Row, I passed Witton Road, then Auckland Road, then the Primitive Methodist Chapel; next was School Street; I stopped at the corner and glanced towards the United Methodist Chapel on the corner of Auckland Road. Still travelling uphill, I came immediately to the Colliery Board School, and then passed it. I made my way to the thin path under the railway bridge just as a train thundered overhead. An old man wearing a flat cap came down towards me pushing a box barrow, so I hugged the white safety rail with my back allowing him to squeeze passed. When the path was clear, I made my way out of the bridge; the road name had now changed to Black Road. On my left - over the old stone wall, on the other side of the road - was St. Oswald's vicarage; and further up, on the corner of St. Oswald's Road, was the church.

Still on the other side of the road, but on this side of the vicarage wall were the tin garages and wooden pigeon crees. On this side of the road, to my right was the cut leading to Railway Street; then St. Oswald's Infants' School. I passed the boys' entrance gates. Then, a little further up, I could see Mr Main the lollipop man, standing on the corner of the school at Ralph Street - where the Girls' entrance was - talking to Sammy, in his wheelchair. I stepped off my scooter - afraid he might tell me off for riding on the path. Further up Black Road was the CWS building, the 'Co-operative Wholesale Society', with a butcher's shop at the end, a drapers, a grocers, a bakers, a greengrocers and a hall on the first floor. Further along was what we called 'Fireman's Hill' - a wide hill about 35 feet high, with allotment gardens and chicken coops at the top. At the bottom of the hill, on the corner of Hedgeley Road, was the garage, where the fire station once stood - formerly the pit manager's house.

Mr Emmerson, the head master, came out of the school with a double line of children behind him, so I scooted over the road, down passed the Church - then on passed Nightingale's shop on my right, and headed further down St. Oswald's Road, passing the old streets: Peel Terrace, Peel Gardens, etc. When I reached as far as the allotment gardens, on my left, I stopped and looked back; the headmaster and the children had gone - probably to watch a live safety demonstration at the Colliery Board School. I turned around and headed quickly on towards the old metal bridge.

Standing beside the metal pedestrian bridge, with its loose, thin, metal plate steps - which traversed the railway

lines - I watched as some men 'shunters', came out of an old railway box at the side of the track. They loosed the brakes on a few stationary wagons with the aid of hooks on long poles, and, still coupled together, fly-shunted them - that is, gave them a shove and let them run down-hill. Once in motion the men walked alongside them, uncoupling and braking them as the inertia took hold and carried them to a siding off the main South Shields to Newcastle line.

The railway lines travelled from left to right as I faced them. Just over the other side of the lines, and parallel to them, was Oak Street. Leading downhill, away from Oak Street - at right angles to it - was Beech Street and Birch Street - both leading down to Hill Street. Inside this oblong of streets, that is Beech and Birch, and Oak and Hill, was the Jarrow Central School, and the Jarrow and Hebburn Cooperative Society buildings.

Looking down Beech Street, I could see the spire of Christ Church on the horizon and hear the Angelus bell peal; and though the air was clear and warm, now and again I could detect the faint, acrid odour from Lennig's - the Rohm & Haas plastics factory at Jarrow. I turned the scooter around, and instead of going back up St. Oswald's Road, I veered left slightly, and pushed my way up, over the old pit heap, towards Hedgeley Road; sulphur and coal dust from the old pit industry, stuck to the wheels. Way over to my left, I noticed that Freddie Culline's fair had arrived on the land behind the Clock Hotel, and the Employment Exchange - a bit early in the year I thought. There was a lot of noise as the men put together the rides and stalls.

When I reached the corner of Till Street, I could see the structural remains of the old, abandoned 'B' Pit mineshaft, at the back of the houses on Black Road. I went over to investigate. I picked up a stone from nearby and dropped it into the narrow shaft. I listened intently; it took a while before it hit the bottom; when it did, I was so excited that I did it again. After a bit more fun, I headed off.

I was now standing at the junction of Black Road and Hedgeley Road - Fireman's Hill was across the road to my right. An Alsatian dog barked at the gates of the garage. I turned left along Black Road until I came to Victoria Road East. Ahead of me was Jervis Street. To my left, in the direction of Jarrow, was the Clock Hotel, the Employment Exchange, the petrol garage and then the Bowes line level crossing. On the opposite side of the road to the Clock Hotel, heading towards Jarrow, was Short's sweet shop, then Ashman's butchers. And diverting one's attention right, up Frobisher Street, was the barber shop and Pratt's shop; opposite those was the betting shop and Jessie's chip shop. Heading back down Victoria Road East, was the laundrette and then the corner shop at the end of Northbourne Road, Jarrow, near the level crossing. Across from me was the bookies. Then, after that, heading up Victoria Road East in the direction of the Newtown, was Fishwick's fruit shop. Much further up, on the left was Hall's Garage - near the Ambulance Station on Usher Road - then on the right, near Byron Avenue, was Clegwell School. I crossed Black Road, scooted up to the crossing, walked over, and made my way down passed Fishwick's to Short's sweet shop. Outside on the wall was a bubblegum machine. I took two pennies from my pocket and pushed them into the machine, and turned the round handle at the right side - once, then again. A packet of Beechnut chewing gum was dispensed into the little, metal, half cup below - it was so much fun that I bought some more just so I could do it again.

With my mouth full of beechnut, I made my way up passed Fishwick's, left into Eton Square and into the cut, which splits either left into Jervis Street, facing the Welcome Hall on Gladstone Street, or right - the way I went - through the cut, out onto Oxford Crescent, and then left, out onto Red House Road. Over the road, ahead of me, surrounded by a wire fence, was Baker Perkins Sports Ground, with the factory further down to the left, where my mother and other ladies made ammunition during the war. Beyond that was the Tube Works, and over the railway lines was Jarrow Park. Looking ahead again, beyond the Sports Field, was the Slag Heap: a mountain of black slag, which towered over the surrounding houses; for many years, the hot slag had been carried by train from Jarrow Steel Works, and dumped there, forming the heap. I turned right, up Red House Road, and left into Cambridge Avenue, which I followed all the way round to 'the cut': a pathway leading through the houses, to Bede's Well, the Dip and the Slag Heap. I passed through the cut and stopped on the road, which travelled the whole length of the back of the houses, all the way from Campbell Park Road to the rear of Baker Perkins.

Across this road was a narrow path, which led down to the 'dip': a beautiful, small valley, at the bottom of which was a clear stream: the Bede Burn, full of freshwater crayfish, sticklebacks and newts, etc. The burn came from the Burn Heads, through the lakes, through the culvert under the Campbell Park Road, through the dip as a tributary to the River Don at Jarrow, passed St. Paul's church, into the River Tyne and then out to sea. Bede's Well stands some distance from the burn, and it is presumed that as a young boy, St. Bede lived at Monkton Village, and passed the well on his way to St. Paul's church, Jarrow - thus giving fame to the well. Therefore, it would seem logical for Bede, at such a tender age - so as not to lose his way, and to be in easy reach of drinking water - to follow this natural map down to the church.

I followed the path down to the well - a square hole in the ground with a stream running through it. It was surrounded by a small, square wall, four bricks high, with a railing fixed all around on top, secured with a padlocked gate. The well is famous for its health-giving properties, and in times passed, many children were escorted there together on Sunday afternoons, and dipped in the well to be healed. I threw a silver coin into the well for good luck. In times passed, people would throw silver coins into wells, as silver is known to have healing properties.

Following the path I came to the bottom of the slag heap; tar lay all about, as if it had oozed down like lava, from the summit. The watchman's cabin - known locally as the watchy's cabin - was empty, as old Hector only worked nightshifts. Some men were working. A man was sitting in a dusty dumper truck, waiting for another man to move an oil drum from the path, while noisy conveyor belts carried substance overhead. At the top of the slag heap was a little cave, known locally as the owl's eye, or the owl's wing, as it looked like a wing with an eye peering over the top. It was a very difficult place to climb to, and manoeuvre into, as one had to do it from above; so the older boys would dare each other to the challenge; not many did it, but those that did were my heroes. I followed the little walkway over the stream, around the side of the slag heap to the rear. The rear of Windermere Crescent was to my right on Campbell Park Road, and Monkton Village was ahead. I followed the path until I came out at Monkton Lane in Monkton Village. I turned right and followed the path, passed the Lord Nelson Inn and then round the bend by Monkton Hall Hospital. I then turned right at the cut, through to Campbell Park Road. Ahead was Elmfield Road. To my left was Luke's Lane Bridge, which spans the Newcastle to Sunderland railway, and beyond, to the right, I could see plumes of steam from the Coke Ovens.

I turned right and pushed my way down Campbell Park Road as far as Finchale Road junction, and stopped to view the beautiful flowers in the garden of the bungalow, over the road on the corner. There were wonderful flowers - the alluring smell of red roses, white roses, Nemesia, red hot poker and many more filled the air. I love the simple things, and there are many which can bring instant happiness: buying Matchbox cars, and jubbies that freeze your mouth blue, from the top shops on Finchale Road. Watching a puppy at play; having a friendly little bird appear beside us while tending the garden; a baby's smile; maybe remembering them is akin to positive sentimentality rather than a sorrowful nostalgic yearning.

My thoughts were distracted as a lorry came by and obscured my view, so I headed off all the way back down Campbell Park Road to the dip, near Cambridge Avenue shops, and then crossed the road to the lakes. I stopped at an opening in the fence. There was a path before me, leading through the lakes up to Hebburn Park. The lakes, which once belonged to the Ellison family of the nearby Ellison Hall, had once been home to many birds, pond life and other wildlife, but had been drained a few years previously. The original Hebburn Hall was a small, fortified keep - or pele tower - home to the local lord and his family. During times of siege, water was badly needed. To assure a fresh, plentiful supply, an underground passage was built from the tower house, following the perimeter of the ancient quarry, down through where the park gates are at present and down the path towards Bede's Well. A few brave and trusted servants, or retainers, would crawl the entire length of the tunnel, to procure the precious water. Some speculate that the tunnel came from Jarrow monastery to the pele tower as an escape route for the monks. That is not feasible, as not only would it be too far to crawl on one's knees, in the 13th century - long after the Viking raids - the Jarrow monks were now well capable of protect their rare books, endowments and other treasures, behind their studded doors and thick-walled monastery; also, and more importantly, they had Papal protection.

To my right, at the far end of the field, I could see the roofs of the bathhouse and the ancient lodge house, standing in Leslie's Sports field. Apart from the pele tower - now part of St. John's church - the lodge house was the oldest building in Hebburn. It would be feasible to suggest that this 'oldest building' on the quarry - likely built by the quarrymen as a dwelling - was there long before Hebburn Hall, and had once assisted weary travellers on the ancient carriage and foot roads to the equally ancient Jarrow, Monkton and South Shields.

In front of it stood a cycle track, leading from Quarry Road, to Campbell Park Road. This track was once part of the old, original Shields Road - the main road from Newcastle to South Shields - which travelled down from Newcastle, on what is presently known as Victoria Road West, around the back of Ellison Hall, down the present cycle path, through where Witty Avenue now stands, down Red House Road and down into South Shields.

I pushed off again and headed up towards the large metal gates hanging from large brick-built posts, at the park, some distance before me. I could hear children playing.

When I passed through the gates I was immediately overcome by a feeling of calmness and beauty. The varied trees and plant beds all about were in full bloom; the beautiful green field to my left looked as lovely and inviting as a lawned garden - many people sat about there having picnics. I lay down on the grass and rested a while, looking up at the fluffy white clouds, making pictures in my mind. Later, I sat up and made a daisy chain, and hung it around my neck.

The playing area to my right was in full swing. There were parents and grandparents - young and old - playing with their excited children and grandchildren; some were being pushed on the baby swings, some on the big swings; some on the rocking horse and some on the witch's hat. I was hot and thirsty, so pushed my way to the water fountain, on the triangular piece of land near to the baby swings; I leaned over, pressed the button and took a cool, refreshing drink... ahhhh! Then wiped my wet mouth with the back of my hand. After that, I followed the dene hedge round to the Boer War memorial on the top of the hillock, which had a canon just below it. From the dene below, I could hear a brass band playing. Looking down the path, to my right were the greenhouses full of colour, then the Carr Ellison Memorial; and further down, inside the beautifully designed high metal gates was the park house, on Cannon Street. The toilets were beside me, so I thought it wise to nip in. When I came out, Jimmy, a council worker, was sweeping up leaves and putting them into the yellow dustcart beside him; he caught my eye

and then called me over. He showed me his large sweeping brush, and asked me if I knew what the extra hole was for in the head. I told him that I had no idea, so he told me that it was for putting a candle in for nightshift.

My scooter was lying against the hedge; I stepped onto it, about to set off, when I noticed the park keeper coming out of his house, so I stepped down, quickly, in case he reprimanded me for riding around the park. I bade Jimmy farewell, and walked my scooter quickly back to the Boer War memorial, around the hillock, up passed Ellison Hall and Infirmary, passed the cenotaph and out into St. John's Avenue, across from Hebburn cemetery, where the brave men of the HMS Kelly lie. At a respectful distance from the cemetery, I stepped onto my scooter again, and whizzed down St. John's Avenue, over Canning Street and down to Victoria Road West. I was young and fit, and rode from place to place so quickly it was like magic.

I carefully crossed Victoria Road West, then ahead down Thistle Street, across Tennant Street, continuing down Thistle Street and out at the Glen Street Methodist Chapel. I then passed the Council Yard, turned left at Station Road and down over the bridge, back to the Quay. It was now teatime, and I was standing back on the top of the Argyle Street, Ellison Street, junction, looking left towards the Colliery. A very loud buzzer sounded. A short while later I could hear a great stampede behind me. I turned to look down the bank; hundreds of workmen were bustling each other as they ran towards me, like ants from the shipyard and out onto Argyle Street. They gesticulated with their newspapers as they shouted their farewells to workmates before heading for home - what an incredible site it was! Then they were gone, just as quickly as they came. Silence.

Somehow, in the blink of an eye, it was Sunday morning, and I was still standing outside St. Cuthbert's church. Sundays always seemed to be sunny... everything stopped... no shipyard noise, no buses - hardly any traffic on the roads really. There was a stillness - a quietness as old as time. It might seem strange, but the flowers, the roads and even the houses seemed to relax in the mid-morning, summer heat. I made my way up to Coquet Street, and watched very old, kindly looking ladies - probably in their 90s - slowly walking by on their way out of St. Aloysius Church, dressed in their beautiful outfits. They wore immaculate dark suits, black shoes, and lovely hats covered with net - and some with feathers and brooches. The lovely old gentlemen behind, wore their Sunday best, too: plain suits, ties and highly polished shoes.

Later, after the church had empty and everyone had gone, a lady carrying a baby in a christening gown, walked towards me, flanked by two attendants: a lady and gentleman of about the same age. I was hoping the baby was a girl, as it is a tradition while carrying the child to church to be christened, to give the Christening Piece from the Christening Tea, to the first male one meets if the child is a girl, or to the first female one meets if the child is a boy. The lady was very happy to see me, and for good luck, gave me the parcel, which I accepted gratefully and respectfully. I put my hand into my pocket, pulled out a silver sixpence and put it into the child's hand for good luck. The lady, very much content, thanked me and then carried the child into the church, followed by the godparents. I opened the parcel; there was a piece of cake, two biscuits and a half crown. I put the money in my pocket, and tried to steady my scooter with one hand as I walked down Ropery Lane, towards the Wooden Bridge, whilst eating the cake and biscuits. Old John passed me, wheeling his ice-cream cart and blowing his whistle to attract customers. I caught a glimpse of Thomas and William in the distance, wearing their cadet uniforms, on their way down to the sea cadets."

When Davy finished his narrative, he spoke to Geordie.

"I don't think I've ever been as happy as I am now, Geordie; I have learned more from you in our short time together than I could ever learn from any history books - it's been a wondrous experience."