



## A war child in Wreay

I was born in Rochdale, Lancashire in 1929 to parents with Cumbrian backgrounds. My grandfather John Hodgson and his wife Lizzie had been in charge of the Plough Inn from the late twenties. In 1940 my parents and grandparents decided that, because of the threat (and reality) of bombing by German planes around Manchester, we should be evacuated to live with our grandparents in Wreay. My brother, Brian, and I attended Wreay village school from 1940 until our returns to Rochdale, in 1941 for Brian and 1943 for me.

I have very vivid memories of Wreay village school. There were two classrooms each with one teacher. The existence of a curriculum was not apparent and instruction was somewhat perfunctory with marking of all tests delegated to senior girls, Monitors. Monitors also made preparations for lunch which pupils carried from home. One day they had to empty mouse droppings from the kettle before heating water for brewing tea.

Wreay School had a significant record as a winner of the percussion band contest at the Carlisle Music Festival. No music sheets were used during the rehearsals but, a few days before the competition music stands with sheet music were placed in front of the players.

Life in the pub was routine with very strict opening and closing times. Mostly there were very few customers, sometimes none during afternoon hours and one or two customers on weekday evenings. The pub was under "State Control" and the rules were very strict: no treating, no singing, no women in the main bar. It fell to my grandfather to ensure the rules were strictly kept because there were anonymous State Control Inspectors. My grandfather was a jovial looking man with kindly instincts but he had to enforce the strict rules. One Christmas Eve, I presume he assumed that no inspectors would be around, he allowed singing. The pub was packed with many star turns from normally silent customers.

Under wartime conditions life was fairly difficult with meat, sugar, butter, margarine and, later in the war, bread and cakes were all rationed. Oranges, lemons, bananas and all imported fruits and vegetables were not available. At one stage potatoes were also rationed but this was obviously a joke in Cumberland. Pigs were surreptitiously slaughtered with pork roasts, sausages and black pudding passed onto friends and local farm made butter was common. Putting meals on the table was a challenge to the housewife. Every Friday my grandmother went shopping to Carlisle travelling by train. She came back with only enough for a small shopping bag. Variety and quantity were limited by the necessity to queue for almost everything. However we were never hungry.

When my brother returned to Rochdale in 1941 it was a little lonely, particularly on Sunday when playing was not allowed as our grandmother disapproved. I filled the time by attending church, sometimes at both morning and evening services and Sunday school in the afternoon. Attendance at church was very sparse with as few as three at evensong. The Vicar, Reverend Sanderson, had the task of preparing and preaching a sermon. Not surprisingly there were repeats: three times I heard a sermon describing the Vicar's spiritual experience at the Durbar in India on the occasion of a state visit by King George V.

Next door to the Plough Inn was Jim Bulman's Blacksmith's workshop. I spent many, many hours watching him at work. There was a bellows controlled open fire used to heat the metal to be hammered into horse shoes and repairs for farm equipment. I particularly enjoyed watching the process for replacing a horse shoe. Each shoe was custom crafted starting with a rectangular bar of iron.

Next door were Jimmie Gibbons and his wife Mabel. Jimmie worked on the roads and Mabel helped others with housework. Each Monday my grandmother and Mabel did our washing, boiling the clothes in the "copper", an iron pot heated by a wood fire below. Before hanging out to dry, water was squeezed from the clothes by passing through the hand turned wooden rollers of a mangle.

In the post office were Postman Sherrard, Mrs. Sherrard and their daughter Cathie. Lister Sherrard was away in the armed forces. The Post Office was rather dark inside but stocked an array of tempting sweets.

Great friends of my grandmother were the Hodgsons, farmers at Ghyll House. There was a one week school holiday in the autumn, commonly called "potato picking week". One year, during this holiday, I was employed by the Hodgson brothers (sixpence an hour) to pick potatoes unearthed by a plough. The soil was heavy clay and the work dirty and very hard. I was mortified to discover that, working my hardest, I could only pick potatoes at less than half the rate of the brothers.

Bill Hodgson