

On second thoughts

or Fings ain't wot they use't be

I decided when I was 63 that I would write an autobiography as a retirement project. Following the advice given at a pre-retirement seminar, I immediately started to plan it. Having done this, I wrote the first chapter, just to see if I could do it. Before I knew it I had written 13 chapters covering my life up to that time (late 1991). It took me nearly as long to iron out the difficulties. There were spelling mistakes, horrible grammar and many sentences on re-reading either did not make sense or conveyed a completely different idea to what I had intended. Madeleine, my wife was my initial critic, followed by a number of other relations and friends. Many of the readers were quite complementary especially about the parts where I had given background descriptions and historic/social observations. They persuaded me to see if I could get it published. This I did and I have received two rejection slips and one verbal rejection. On the latter, the publisher told me that in the previous year he had published five books, but had received over 700 manuscripts! That is not good odds, but at least I tried. Anyway I enjoyed both the writing of it and when I received praise, so I am now starting my second attempt as an author.

Obviously, there would be little interest in writing of the doing and daring of Don Joseph over the four years since the completion of my first "work". I do not want to write the Great Canadian Novel, so I think I will elaborate in a short article on the times and places that I have lived in. I have done some research so that at least the historic part should be accurate. My opinions will probably come to the forefront in many places; but where is there a better place to pontificate than in an article. The reader can always stop reading, while it is not always possible to cut off someone from a pulpit, or face to face.

The periods which I have lived through include; a depression, a post-depression , a world war, a period of reconstruction, a cold war and numerous "little wars and conflicts". I have experienced the change from gas light to electric lights, the change from horse vehicles to motor cars. Many things taken for granted now did not exist when I started school and even the movies had yet to talk when I was born. The twentieth century has brought to light more new inventions and technology than all of the previous nineteen. I will try to give you a picture of what it was like

growing up in London during the 1930s. London then was the largest city in the world. It had a population of over eight million and was the centre of an empire "on which the sun never set". Wandsworth, although not the poorest of boroughs, was largely made up, as Shaw would have said, of the working poor. The housing went from the old mansions near the common, through the new suburban homes near Putney, to the council slum-like flats. It was not uncommon for a whole family of 5 or 6 to live in a one room flat. There was even a street that was largely composed of caravans off Garratt Lane.



One room flat

Picture yourself a six-year-old boy. The year is 1933, King George V is on the throne of Great Britain, the economy for the London area is beginning to get better after the Great Depression and the General Strike. The shops are full of all kinds of goodies, and the London Theatre is in its heyday. There is still huge unemployment throughout the country but those with a job have a reasonable life. Some of the class barriers that had existed have been breached. Education is available and compulsory for all children. But there is no welfare state to look after you, if you get sick or lose your job. Few people own cars or even bicycles, transport is by busses or trams unless you live and work near a tube station. Most of the poorer people walk, as the fares start at one penny.

Your day starts at 7am, when you wash and have breakfast. You are from a middle class family but many of your local friends are working class, to some of them you are “that rich kid”. You go to a private school while your friends are at elementary schools. At a little after 8 o'clock you leave home to walk to school. It is almost a mile away but there are no busses or trams near-by. Carrying your school bag containing pencils, paper and your lunch, you walk slowly to school. You are in the school uniform of grey shorts, white shirt, with the tie, belt and cap in the school's colours. Depending on the season and weather you wear a pullover, or a jacket and of course your mac (not a computer; but a macintosh to keep the rain off). Your school is from 9 am to 4 pm the elementary school has longer hours, so you do not see your friends while walking. It just as well as you would get hazed because of your cap! "Only posh schools have caps!" As a six year old you are not allowed outside at lunch time but after eating your lunch you can play until school restarts. Discipline is upheld by punishments, such as standing in the corner for minor crimes or the cane for major ones. However you do not have homework to do. After school you met with your friends at the playground of the local rec` (recreation ground). There are seesaws, swings and a roundabout in the rec', but mostly you play games using your imagination , cowboys & indians, soldiers, aeroplanes. You: do not need any equipment or toys for these. Just as well, as most of your friend have few toys such as guns, but all have a hand which can be formed into a pistol and you can say “bang!”. At about 5:30, most have returned home for their tea or supper. Your bed time is before 7 pm, but sometimes you can get out for more play. You play almost entirely with other boys. The girls play together with dolls, often homemade. On the swings and seesaws you may push or be pushed by a girl



Elementary school kids



Gym slip

The clothing worn by children was fairly consistent. Up to the age of 14, all boys wore shorts, with a shirt and a pullover or sweater (except for the hottest of days). Girls generally wore a dress, although some wore a skirt & blouse. Jumpers were worn on the many cooler days. Many schools required the girls to wear gym-slips with a shirt & tie, but unlike today they were practically all dark blue in colour. Hand-me-downs and second hand clothes were common even in middle class families. Attachments were made by either buttons or hooks & eyes, as although zips had been invented, only the more expensive adult garments had them. Velcro, of course, had to await the invention of plastic in the 1960s. Shoes were fitted with either laces or a strap & buckle. Night wear consisted of nightdresses for the girls and pyjamas for the boys. Some, however, of the under-privileged had to sleep in underclothes.

The pyjama trousers were held up by a woven tape tied around the waist. This was threaded through a turned-up hem, which gave great trouble when the tape had pulled out. To re-thread one had to use a bodkin as the tape was a tight fit.

Your friends are quite limited in worldly possessions and your football usually makes sure of your welcome to a group. At other times football is played with any sort of ball available or even a ball of paper or other junk. On some days you stay at home to listen to the Children's Hour on the radio. Few even middle class home have one yet, but some even poor families have crystal sets with earphones. These were usually home made by the scientifically-minded member of the family. Of course, in summer cricket was played with a wicket chalked on any available wall. a small plank of wood for a bat, and tennis ball. Some of the kids with older brothers were allowed sometimes to use the soap-box cars they had assembled. This was one occasion when the poorer ones could lord over those with more affluent parents.

Some games could be played by all as their equipment did not need to be bought. In the autumn Conkers was played. All that was needed for this was a horse-chestnut tree to be near-by and you had a piece of string. At other times, a game that involving cigarette cards was popular. There was several versions, one of them involved flicking the cards against a wall until your card covered one that had previously been thrown. The cards themselves were begged from any smoker that passed by. Hopscotch only required someone to have a small piece of chalk, and hide-and-seek had been played without cost for centuries. The cinema was popular for young un-married, who were working. Few married people however, and next to no children went to ordinary cinemas in the southern boroughs of London. The main entertainment for the married couples was the pub. On warm summer evenings the kids would play outside and listen to the singing or the street entertainers, who often gave performances outside. There were also band concerts in the larger parks in the early evening. Sometimes a child was given a coin to spend, usually a penny. For this, you could buy a small bag of marbles, five-stones, or two bars of chocolate, or four "Gobstoppers (large candies that changed colour as you licked them down to a smaller size). In south London many of the sweet shops sold both candies and small toys (marbles, tops, five-stones, jacks to name a few). When you went in with your penny, there was quite a decision to make. Fortunately most of the shop assistants were very patient with small children.



A conker

Two more years have gone by. It is the Silver Jubilee year. George V had been on the throne for 25 years and there were many celebrations throughout the kingdom. London was a mass of flags, red, white & blue bunting and even the poorest district had many planned functions. Wandsworth, being a poorer borough, had many streets that arranged street parties. These were open-air, but fortunately the spring and summer were, on the whole, sunny & warm. Every school child was given a gift (usually a Jubilee mug, and to this day you will find some in kitchen cabinets). Some authorities gave books. Others gave either a book on life of the king or a plate inscribed with the picture of the king & queen.



Jubilee Street Party

The street parties were held on side streets. Both ends were blocked to traffic and a series of tables were placed down the centre of the roadway. The tables themselves were often only trestles with panels of wood on top. Benches, seats and a hodge-podge of boxes & other types of seating were placed either side. The food (for kids) was jam, fishpaste, or meatpaste sandwiches. In the more affluent areas other fillings would be used, but most were restricted in cost. Cheaper fruit like apples were piled on the tables. Many of the local mothers had done some baking, so there were plenty of cakes and pies. For ‘afters’ (desert), it was mainly jellies and blancmange. A few parties made arrangement with the local “stop-me-&-buy-one” man to come to the street at a certain time. Then the kids had a special treat of ice-cream!



A Walls Tricycle

Ice-cream was not at all common in the 30s. In fact, many people only had ice-cream on the infrequent trips to the seaside. Of course no houses in the south of London had refrigerators, and very few even had an ice-box. Consequently ice-cream at home was unheard of. There were, however, a small number of tricycles and a few barrows set up for carrying ice-cream. Walls, a famous sausage maker, got into the business of selling ice-cream from tricycles using the motto “stop-me-&-buy-one”. You could get fruit-ices (frozen & sweetened fruit-flavoured water) & cones from them for ½d or 1d, but towards the end of their day, the fruit ice was soft & the cones unusable because of melting of the cooling ice in the tricycle.

The poorer people of south London did not have holidays as we know them today. Some went down to Kent as a family to pick hops, camping out usually in a farmer’s barn. But for the majority, the holiday was just a char-a-banc outing to one of the south coast seaside towns, the most popular of which was Brighton. Outings were organized by pubs, by working men & other clubs and by some churches. Some were all male affairs, which tended to be very wet. Beer was loaded into the back of the coach, so drinking was on both journeys as well as by the sea! Most were all-family trips, with the kids placed on the beaches, the teens in the arcades, and the mums & dads spelling one and other at nearby pubs. Later, the whole family would eat food from the shoreline stalls.

One thing that was common to the seaside, both for holidays and outings, was the postcards. Some were of the scenery but the vast majority were the “Naughty Cards”. These were drawings, usually of grossly overweight women, or red faced & nosed men with situations and caption that were with two meanings, one of them rude. These were posted with gay abandon to family & friends, who under normal conditions would be disgusted by the innuendo, but would not take exception because it was a “holiday card”.



People living on the main roads to the sea were subjected to a stream of A “Naughty” postcard busses returning late at night with their passengers noisily singing of all the old music hall & pub songs. Still a good time was had by all.

The employment situation was not good for the married women of the poorer classes, especially those with children. Sales jobs tended to be given to the younger girls. Although all had elementary education, many were not functionally literate. Also at this time not many offices employed females except for typing (considered then a job requiring much training). This left only charring for the married, although some worked from home taking in washing, knitting, needlework or even clothes making. The latter was paid even worse than the sweat-shops as there was no control or legal obligations that applied to the employer. Some were able to do the jobs requiring penmanship, but this required a house where there was enough light. Most houses were lit by gas and the fixtures were mainly on the walls, not in a good position for writing.

The mobility of people that worked was very restricted. People tended to stay in the same borough or area that they were born in. It was not uncommon to have even four generations of a family living in the same dwelling. Marriage was generally at an earlier age, and the newly-weds would need to stay in their parent's home, as did their grandparents.

Over-seas travel was for the wealthy only and was time-consuming. Air travel to the east of Britain existed, but the aircraft only carried only one or two dozen passengers, and flight frequency was measured in days and weeks rather than hours. Regular mail planes service had not started on the Atlantic crossing, let alone passenger service. A boat was the only way to leave Britain. Even the ferry to France took 3 to 4 hours to make the crossing, and there was the long train ride at each end to & from the capitals. The trip to North America usually took a full week, while to destinations eastward the trip was several weeks.

Even travel in Britain was lengthy. The road system was poor, and the routes passed through many towns & villages with narrow streets and congestion. A visit to Glasgow from London could take three days by car, with overnight stays in hotels to ease the driving on badly & non-lit highways. The best way of traveling, both for out-of-town & long-distance trips, was by train. From London there was good service at a reasonable price. High speed steam trains ran to the North & West and electric trains to the South, The London-Edinburgh train took about 12 hours and was very comfortable. It was possible to travel almost anywhere, but for the majority of people, trips



Flying Scotsman

of long distances seldom, if ever, were made.

Today, it is difficult to imagine a world without electronic, but there was no such thing until the late 40s. Television, computers, copiers, and printers were things that were written about in science fiction stories. TV had been invented, but the idea that some day there would be a machine that took the news and entertainment into almost everyone's livingroom was laughable. In most districts there were print shops, where books, papers or posters could be printed by a press. These, however, were above the means of most shopkeepers. If a shopkeeper wanted to make a public announcement he would put a hand-maded poster in his shop window. Advertising was done by putting cards on a board, usually at the local newsagent. For pamphlets they had to rely on hand copying. Even in offices, the only way for keeping records was by using carbon-paper, or by copying out by hand.

The other thing taken for granted today is the telephone. Today, everyone has one at home and at the place of work, and many people carry a cell phone with them. This was not true in the 30s. Few shops and small businesses had phones. Telephones, even in suburban homes, were not common, and unheard of in older areas. There were phone booths on main streets for those with 2d for a three minute call, but who had 2d, and who had a phone at the other end! In a real emergency, one would go to the nearest Post Office. Here one would write out a telegram, which would be sent to the nearest office to the addressee. Then a telegraph-boy on a bicycle would ride to that address and deliver the printed message form by hand. This often meant that the sight of a telegraph boy was interpreted as a sign of bad news, possibly a death in the family.



Telephone 1933

There was very little credit available in fourth decade of the 20th century. Rent and insurance was collected usually weekly. In the less wealthy homes, gas (and electricity where it was available) was normally on a meter which required coins. These had to be inserted before the quantity paid for was delivered. Consequently most families kept a supply of pennies on top of the meter, so that they would not have to spend a night in darkness after the meter “ran out”. As pay day approached, all too often, the money also ran out. This resulted in a visit to the pawn-shop with one of the more prized, but not absolutely necessary, possessions. After pay day, this could be taken “out of hock” until the next shortfall. Life was not easy.

Although London was considered a cosmopolitan city, people with coloured skins were never seen outside the centre. Even in the centre of London, women of the coloured races were seldom in view. What a change from today! Coloured actors were never seen on the stage, except in the Minstrel Shows and in these, it was white people with black makeup! Some areas, like Limehouse for Chinese, and the docks for Indian sailors (Lascars), were basically native ghettos. Although there were contingents of native troops from the Empire at the Jubilee celebrations, with the exception of the three Dominions (Australia, New Zealand & Canada) and the Union (South Africa) all the officers were British. The rank & file, who were coloured, were not seen off duty!

Within Britain, regional accents were varied and there was not much interchange between people of the extreme accents. Consequently a Cornishman, a Londoner, and a Glaswegian would have the greatest of difficulty in understanding each other. The BBC did not permit regional accents on the radio, and a form of neutral speech was developed and called “The BBC Accent”. The distrust between the north of England and the south was great. Yorkshiremen thought those from the south were “stuck-up & snobbish”, While the man from Clapham said the northerner was “Loud, mean, & dishonest”. It was a wonder that the country survived, but a visit to a test match or an international would dispel this, showing all to be proper ENGLISHMEN.

Accents were not the only difficulty in communication between regions in Britain. Many areas had words that are specific to the county. For example, Yorkshire had many words similar to Danish, and Cornwall & Wales had completely separate languages. But even London was unintelligible to the rest of the country. Cockneys and many other inhabitants used rhyming slang.

There were many jargons developed for use by a particular group. Thieve's cant and gambling terms being in common use. In areas of London where there was a large Jewish community, some yiddish words were adopted by other Londoners.

Rhyming slang was probably the most interesting of all the slangs. It consisted of two words (or a phrase) where the last word rhymed with the English word that it replaces. "Apples & Pears" stood for "stairs". The cockney, however, took it one stage further and would "just go up the apples". Other words were rhyming slang for a slang expression. Thus, "Uncle Wilf" was slang for filth (pronounced "filf") which itself was slang for the police. Rhyming slang was limited to just a couple of hundred words, but when it was used, conversations were not intelligible to the non-cockney.

The British coinage consisted of three copper coins ($\frac{1}{4}$ d, $\frac{1}{2}$ d & 1d) and six silver coins (3d, 6d, 1s, 2s, 2s6d, & 5s) and there were two notes in common use (10s & £1). Most of them had individual names. These were: a farthing, a ha'penny, a penny, a joey, a tanner, a bob, a florin, a tosheroon, and a dollar respectively. One currency value that confused many visitors to Britain was the Guinea. This was seen in the price of many of the better class of goods. There was no such coin as a guinea, but its value was 21s. It is believed that originally this was the value in pounds with a 5% commission added on. But by the 20th century, it had become a ploy to make the customer think that an item was cheaper, very much like charging \$7.99 for an item instead of \$8.00!

The year is passing on and it is now September. For you, it is a time of stress. You had left the Private School you had been at for the last couple of years, and are now starting at a "proper" school, with formal classes in classrooms. This has all of the many subjects normally taught at secondary schools, and to your disgust, gives homework. Suddenly you are in an environment with many rooms and with 600 other boys. Discipline is fairly strict and is enforced, especially the no talking rule. Fortunately you adapt fairly quickly. It helps that you are the smallest (but not youngest) boy in the school. This, you suspect, gives you some leeway from the masters, and certainly much help from the bigger boys, to whom you were a sort of mascot. You are introduced to true sport. You had played football and cricket before, certainly not to the correct rules. You now have to contend with "Offside" rules in football or LBW (Leg Before Wicket) in cricket. The new subjects of Geography & History could be very interesting to you. You have not been taught script writing, which most elementary school boys are well able to use. Consequently you have a lot of catching up to do. This lack has leaves you with a suspicion of the advantages of private schools. Too many are for show rather than education.

The autumn in London was, at that period, the foggy season. The London 'peasoup' fog was terrible, both for seeing and breathing. Your journey to school is by the No 12 tram, which stops outside your home and goes to the end of the line in Battersea. You then have to walk the length of the High Street to where the school is situated. It normally takes 25 minutes. One evening, during a fog it took 2½ hours. The driver of the tram in front of the one you were on, could not see the signal which showed the settings of points. He started to go on the wrong track, panicked, reversed, got stuck and managed to block the tramlines in both directions . It was too foggy for



London tram

your father to consider going out to search for you. Fortunately, someone who had walked from the jam told him about it. You (I) had not the sense to try to walk home until someone recognized you and walked the four miles to your home with you. You are not certain that at that time that you could have found your way in the fog. It was not possible to see across the street and you had not become familiar with the route at that time. Today one could tune into the radio & probably found out about the delay, but not then. Fortunately today, due to smokeless fuels, these fogs are a thing of the past.

Every year, in November, a celebration occurs that kids look forward to. This is Guy Fawkes Day (5th November) and is the day (or night) that fireworks are set off and bonfires are lit. It celebrates the discovery, in 1605, of Guy Fawkes before he could blow-up the Houses of Parliament & the King. It is also an excuse for the kids to beg money from everyone. Sacking is stuffed and old clothing placed on it. a mask and a hat is put on the head, which becomes the Guy. Cries of “a penny for the Guy” can be heard for several days before the 5th. The money collected was used to buy fireworks. You could get a dozen sparklers for 2d and a Catherine wheel for the same price. The Guy was burnt on a bonfire (but the clothes were often removed, to be used next year).

Winter was not a pleasant time of year in London, particularly in the poorer areas. The houses were old and not well built. All too often, they had a leak in the roof or around the windows, so there was dampness and draught to contend with. The climate, although not excessively cold was very much below comfort levels. There was no heating other than fireplaces existed in any home, not just the poor. Open fires gave the only heat available. An open fire, whether it be coal or gas, is very nice to warm your toes & feet, but your body tends to get roasted on the front, while the back is still cold. In addition, most people could only afford one fire in the house, in either the kitchen or the sitting room. Every other room was icy cold. Going to bed was a terror in itself. You would quickly remove your clothes and put on your cold nightwear (unless you were fortunate enough to have a hot water bottle and had wrapped your pyjamas around it). Next you dashed into bed and shivered until your body-heat had warmed up the bed. The next morning it was even worse! There was no heat at all in the house until the fire had been lit. Warm washing water was sparse as it had to be heated in the kettle. Few houses in Wandsworth had bathrooms at this time so the morning ablutions were made in the kitchen sink. The one advantage of the coal fire, was possible to roast chestnuts in the ashes in the grate.

The one bright spot in winter was Christmas. It had to be a very poor family where the children did not get some presents. Some gifts were home-made or even ‘recycled’ from an older child, but the excitement was still there. Most homes decorated their livingroom with holly and paper-chains, but, in London, very few had Christmas Trees. For the more affluent, there were crackers & paper hats. Christmas dinner tended to be a goose in the poorer homes, but turkeys were plentiful and not too expensive. Many families made Christmas puddings just before Christmas, with a threepenny bit added. As most puddings had plenty of brandy or rum in them, the puddings would be made, aged, and then saved to be eaten at the next years dinner. Many families used Christmas as a get-together occasion. After dinner, presents would be exchanged, and in the evening, there would be time for talking & having a sing-song.

The toys of this period were much simpler than those of today. Soft-toys, rattles, & blocks were available for the very young. The older child got games & toys. Only the rich could give bicycles and the bigger items. The toys themselves were very gender oriented. Dolls, Dollhouses, & other home imitating toys for the girls. Soldiers, Trains, Mecanno & sports gear for the boys. Of course, games & books were given to both and to all ages. Jigsaw puzzles were also popular. The games were those that had been played for many years; playing cards, dominos, ludo, Snakes & Ladders, & Draughts (solitaire) were the most common. Although Hornby had produced toy trains for many years, they were not very true to life. When the DoubleO scale was introduced (about 1937) the toys became more nearer true in proportions. Mecanno, which was an erector set (with plates, bars and nuts & bolts) had been available for years. A new construction set was introduced and was called “Minibricks”. It was made of rubber and was the forerunner of Lego. Train & construction sets were comparatively expensive, but some second hand sets were also available for the less wealthy.



Hornby toy train

What was the kind of food that we eat in the middle of the fourth decade of the 20th Century? As you were a middle class family most of the food was similar to what is eaten today. Pre-prepared food was limited to a few types of canned foods such as meat & vegetables, baked beans or corned beef. Eating out, however was much different. There were no fast food outlets, except for the Fish & Chip shops, which, in South London, was the most frequented ‘restaurant’. There were also jellied eel shops that sold eels and mashed potatoes with eel gravy. Other than this, there were the two chain teashops, Lyons & the ABC, which serve many of the traditional English foods. Some of these were; sausage & mash, shepherds pie, welsh rarebit, steak n’ kidney pie and deserts such as spotted dick, jam & custard, and rice pudding. In many places there were greasy-spoons serving such delights as; Egg & chips or baked beans on toast. All very substantial but not at all gourmet. In many places you could find coffee stall serving sandwiches, pies, tea and even what was called coffee, but would not be recognized today as such. The pubs had; bread n’ cheese, Pies, Crisps (potato chips in North American terms), and pickles. These were not available to kids as you had to be over 16 to enter a pub. The price were quite cheap, 1d for tea, 2d for a filled roll or sandwich, but for many even these prices were too much.



Lyons Teashop (70d) a week at this time, and that was one of the higher paid professional jobs. Many families had to survive on less than a pound a week.

Work people had a much harder life than those of today. The standard work week was 54 or 48 hours a week. The postmen made at least two deliveries a day and seven days a week. Most pillar-boxes (Mail-boxes) had four collections a day. The postman had to walk for his round more or less continuously. Shop Assistants six days a week, but had one day “early closing”.

Busmen (& tram-men) Generally did six days of eight hours, but had to do it in three different types of shifts, “early”, “late” & “spread-over”. The latter was the worse as they worked from 7 am to 7 pm with an unpaid 4 hours off in the middle of the day. The crews consisted of a driver & a conductor, whose job was to collect the fares. As both busses & trams were double-deckers, this required a lot of running up & down stairs. This in addition to the difficulty in taking fares ranging from 1d to 1/- (1s) depending where the passenger got on & off.

The school leaving age had been raised to fourteen in 1918, but the level of education was not high. Many youths, over 14, after doing a day's work, went on to the 'tech' or 'poly' to take trade and semi-professional qualifications. The outlook for those without "a trade" was poor wages for their entire working life, which could come to an abrupt & early end due to an accident or illness. The Unions had lost much of their strength after the great strikes of the 20s. Also most service industries did not even have unions. Even in the engineering & mining trades, many companies did not allow unions to be formed.

People in general, and especially those in what is now known as "the service industries", had a very much harder time. Both the money system and the Imperial measure system complicated selling & shopping. The decimal system was used on the continent, but Britain held onto a system that had 16 ounces making a pound, 14 pounds to a stone, 8 stone to a hundredweight, and 20 hundredweight to a ton. All very logical! The length and capacity measures were respectively; 12 inches to a foot: 3 feet to a yard: 1760 yards to a mile. 20, 2, 4 being the factors for ounces - pints - quarts - gallons.

It is easy to see how a shop assistant could have quite a calculation to do the pricing, followed by a difficult addition of the various coins (see elsewhere) given to pay for an order. There were no bar-codes and scanners, so she would have to know the price of every item and often have to added up totals of various purchases in her head.

Supermarkets did not exist, so the housewife had to visit the grocers, the butcher, the chemist and, except in the more affluent areas where milk and bread were delivered to the homes by horse & cart, the dairy and bakery. Fortunately most shops were centered on the local High Street, but it was time consuming and she had to carry all of her purchases from one shop to the next and finally walk home with the full bag. Because of this, purchases were kept small and made on a daily basis.

There was no health scheme if the wage earner should fall sick. The very heavy unemployment rate meant that workers were easily replaced, so the fear of losing one's job was very real. Although there had been unemployment insurance (the Dole) for many years, the introduction of the "means test" in the 1930s had effectively taken this payment away from many workers. Some employers took advantage of this and cut the low wages paid even lower. "If you don't want to work for me, there are plenty who do!" Of course, most employers were reasonable and at least paid a living wage. However the frills and luxuries of life were seldom seen by the unskilled worker. Also there was a generation of men now in their forties that spent their formative years, not learning a trade, but fighting in the trenches. Many of these had been wounded or had chronic conditions brought on by the inhuman existence of the fighting men. One common scene in London at this time was groups of ex-servicemen begging on the streets, or playing together in an improvised band. The women of the same age had the frustration of having been persuaded to work and praised and well paid during the war, then told "get back to your kitchens & let the men have their jobs back!". Not a happy situation for the poor!

Although many things had improved for women & girls there was still a great amount of sexual inequality. It started in the home, where girls were expected to help out with the housework and often look after their younger brothers & sisters, the boys could slip out and play. At elementary school, much more effort was put into teaching the boys, even when some girls were more capable. The subjects taught at secondary schools also put the girls at a disadvantage. Sewing & cooking were taught at the expense of science & technical subjects.

When it became time to leave school and find employment, the girl had fewer possibilities. They could go into service and become a maid or waitress. Most restaurants, however, only employed waiters, The girls would have to be satisfied with a job in a café or teashop. The top level of the latter was at Lyons where a classic uniform was used and the waitresses were called “Nippys”. The shop assistant was also a possibility, but it often meant working as a helper in a corner store while the better paid expensive shops employed girls who were better dressed and better spoken than the average school-leaver. The factories took the majority, but there the work was often tedious and the conditions bad. The few jobs open in offices were usually in the filing departments, but those that were accepted there tended to get better positions later, in the more progressive firms.



For the girl willing to take further instruction, there were openings in typing, being a nanny, teaching and nursing. The nurse was often the preferred profession, but it was one that required discipline more severe than the army: It had long hours, poor working conditions and low pay. It was often described as a “calling” rather than a job, which meant that it was a great advantage to everyone but the nurse herself!

Even those women that after years of training became professionals, (lawyers or doctors), found their standing and salaries were at a disadvantage compared with their male associates. The foregoing has been discussing women starting a career. The young were further disadvantaged by the result of the Great War. Between 1914 & 1918 nearly a million young British men were killed. Consequently, nearly a million young women, now in their thirties & forties, were left to bring up a family as the bread-winner or were without a husband, requiring them to support themselves. This left even less jobs open for the youngster just starting out.

The music of the period gives an indication of life. The songs written in 1935 include “All for a shilling a day”, “Anything goes”, “Everything stops for tea”, “You’re the tops”, & “No, no, a thousand times no”. Noel Coward was singing “Don’t put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington” and Shirley Temple was praising “The good ship lollipop” (and thousands of six-year old girls were trying to imitate her). On the classic scene, the first modern opera, “Porgy & Bess”, was telling us “I’ve got plenty of nothing”. Even so, it was an improvement from “Brother can you spare a dime” written two years earlier.

As an eight year old, you did not go to the theatre, but you were starting to develop a taste for the cinema. Every Saturday morning you would go, with a friend, to the local “flea-pit” cinema or to a church-hall where films were shown to an audience of children. It was called “the tuppenny rush” as its cost had originally been 2d. This was still the charge at the church-hall, but the cinema had risen to 4d. There were few animated cartoons then, so the program consisted of a number of short films; Chaplin, Our Gang, Keystone Kops, Laurel & Hardy, and other both silent & sound films. The main feature was a serial, often a detective, a cowboy, or Tarzan series, which always ended with the hero (or heroine) in some dire circumstance. The idea was that you would have to come next week to see how they survived. A ploy that was successful, at least in your case, even although you usually came away with a headache from looking up at the screen.

The attitude towards children, at this time, was quite different from that of today. Children were expected to ‘know their place’ and the maxim “Children should be seen and not heard” was applied in many situations. Consequently, the dialog between child and adult tended to be only for orders or instruction. The child was seldom asked for an opinion. In addition, smacking for misbehavior was the norm. Such attitudes today would be considered abuse, however the stress of modern times was much less for the child, and childhood was more happy-go-lucky.

The general health has greatly improved over the decades, with the expectancy of life for men rising from about 65 to nearly 75. This does not give the complete picture. Diseases like TB and Polio have been all but wiped out, and there are many less-fatal diseases that can be treated giving chance of an early recovery. On the down side, social diseases like AIDS have become a large problem. Other social aspects, often caused by gluttony, have increased the number of overweight people. Many of these are subjected to diabetes, heart troubles & lower fertility at an early age. The style of living that avoids exercise, is practiced by the majority today. Because of this, the people of the 1930s were better prepared to fight some diseases naturally. An examination of the photographs shows, that in the first part of the century, people were smaller and slimmer, with a less stocky shape, than today. It is probable that diet is mainly responsible for this change. Life was tougher in 1935, but some things have worsened over the nearly 70 years.

This ends the recollections of the period 1933-35. Two years later, there was another celebration. This was the coronation of George VI, with even more public participation than even the Jubilee. Two years after this, it was the start of the Second World War. Then life changed in Britain almost beyond recognition. The war entered every home in the land. Not only did the men and women fight and work, but everyone, including children, came under fire. The Elizabethan age started in 1952 with great hopes, but unfortunately there were many disappointments. So many changes occurred in this reign that it caused the style of life in Britain to change completely. A person coming from the 1930s to the 21st century would not be able to believe his eyes. Not all the changes were for the better, but these are stories for another time.

Below, and on the next page, you will find a selection of photos and drawings which illustrates life in the period 1933 to 1935. They have been extracted from various books about this period, and from internet sites.

To give an idea of costs in 1935, on the final page you will find an article that has been copied from a “Good Housekeeping” magazine of that year. It consisted of a description of a family’s situation & dwelling by the wife, followed by the annual & weekly budgets. Some prices have been included in the box. they were extract from newspaper adverts of this period.

Costumes of the 1930s



Fashionable Lady



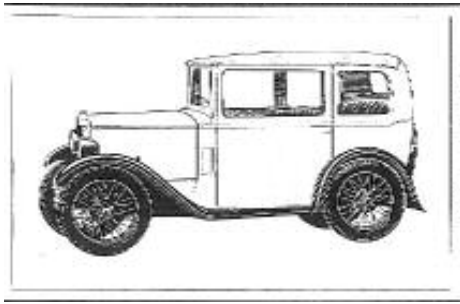
Country Gentleman



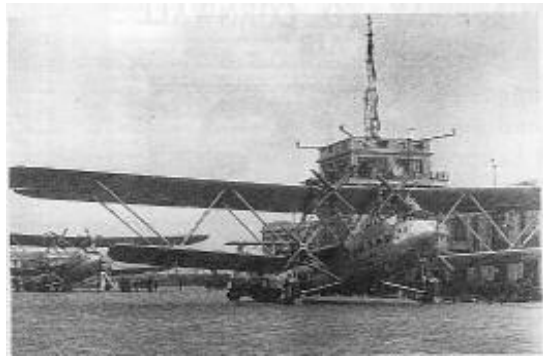
Swimwear



Working man



Austin 7



Croydon Aerodrome



Oven 1933

Everybody agrees that
THE NEW "EAVES" HOUSE
 is the **BEST VALUE** at the Price offered in Blackpool.

These new type Dwellings are of Beautiful Design, Semi-detached, First class Materials and Workmanship on Sandy Sub-Soil, in the best Residential part of North Shore, Near the Bus, Schools, etc.

Just the House for the **HOME-BUYER** or the **INVESTOR**.

PRICE
£675 No Conveyance Charges. Floods made. Mortgage arranged.

BUILDERS- WM. EAVES & CO., LTD.
 DAGGERS HALL SAWMILLS, MARTON.

Agents on the Site: **W. HOGARTH & A. GOMSTIVE**, or
 348, CENTRAL DRIVE, Phone 4288.

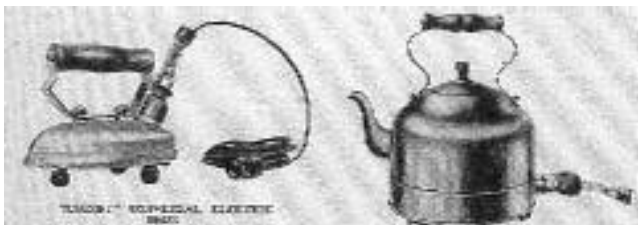
Home Advert 1934



Radio 1934



LCC Council Flats (Slum clearance)



< Electric Iron & Kettle

A Business Man's Home

Income: £263.

Family: Two adults, two children

Our income is not large, we are of those who have suffered and had to "mark time" during the industrial depression, but we hope that my husband's position and income will improve in time to give the children the higher education and start in life they may need.

We live on one of the housing estates and have a good house of three bedrooms, bathroom, 2 living-rooms, scullery and garden. There is a good elementary school on the estate. I do all my own work, cleaning, cooking and washing (all with the aid of as modern equipment as I can afford), and knit and sew for myself and the children and still have time to read and keep up-to-date so as to be a companion to my husband.

Yearly Budget	£	s.	d.
Rent and rates . .	35	0	0
Coal and logs . .	10	0	0
Electric light and power .	5	0	0
Housekeeping . .	117	0	0
Insurances .	26	0	0

Note £1 = 20s = 240d = approx \$5 in 1935

Allowing for the increased cost-of-living, now approximately equivalent to \$400

Prices in 1935

	£	s	d	
Subscriptions . .	3	10	0	New Austin 7 car = £130
Clothes and renewals .	30	0	0	Gas (lights & heat) = 9.2d per therm
Holidays . .	20	0	0	Electricity (for lights) = 4½d per Kw
Doctor and dentist .	4	0	0	Radio = £15 4s 0d
Husband's pocket expenses	12	10	0	Pressure cooker = £3 12s 6d
	£263	0	0	10 cigarettes (Players) = 6d
				Semi-detached house in North London Suburb = £680

Weekly Budget	£	s.	d.
Grocer .	0	16	0
Greengrocer and fruit.	0	6	0
Butcher . .	0	8	0
Milk and eggs	0	8	0
Fish .	0	2	0
Laundry . . .	0	1	0
Newspapers and library .	0	2	6
Chemist . .	0	1	6
	£2	5	0

I hope this short article has given some indications of the difference in both material & social conditions over the years from my childhood until today. The period is 70 years ago, but the changes have immense. Don Joseph January 2004