

Philip Shucksmith's Memoirs Recollections and Memories

I was born on 26th June 1927 and my first recollection is of playing in the yard at Washdyke Cottage, the home of my maternal grandparents, Peter and Annie Hand. The River Lud flowed past the cottage, about 8 meters from the doorway. My home was in High Street, Alvingham, a little more than a quarter of a mile away to the north. I attended North Cockerington Church of England school from the age of 5. I have vague memories of having my dinner at Washdyke Cottage while at school, but this soon ceased because my grandmother was taken ill with bronchitis and died in early December 1932. My next memory is of my Auntie Dolly, my mother's youngest sister; her wedding to Clifford Laughton of South Cockerington. Weddings were not very elaborate affairs in those days; the reception was attended by very close relatives and friends. I can just about remember being present. The reception was held in the spare front room at my home, High Street House. School was a short mile away to the south. I would walk there with other children, taking our dinners with us. Mr Harry Brooks was headmaster, a good teacher and a man interested in the care of the children who attended his school. Many walked considerable distances with moderate footwear and arrived at school with wet feet. Mr Brooks had a box of spare shoes and boots for these children if necessary. He also instituted a "soup kitchen." Children who were able to took vegetables to make into a hot "starter", heating a large cauldron on the stove, situated mid-way in the "big room," with a class at each end. A mug of this hot mixture was very welcome. I walked to school for 2 or 3 years and then I got a bicycle and used it to cycle home at dinnertime, avoiding a packed lunch.

At quite an early age, we were given small tasks to do on the farm. As I got older, these tasks increased to feeding chickens, closing the huts at dusk, cleaning the huts and, in the summer, fetching the cows up for father to milk, separating the milk, getting kindling in to light a fire in the morning and sawing logs for the fire. On a Sunday, I attended chapel in the morning and Sunday School in the afternoon. Collecting various sorts of birds' eggs was a very popular pastime in the spring. I travelled miles to find species, searching hedges, waterways, trees and banks; there was a wealth of wildlife in the countryside. Holidays were rare occurrences. We had a few days at Mablethorpe when Basil had his tonsils out. Mother supplied the food which the landlady cooked for us. A day trip to Cleethorpes paddling pool was quite an event. Sunday School provided a day at the seaside with food or later in lieu, money was given to the scholars. These were quite good occasions particularly if the weather was fine. If it was raining, I couldn't think of anything worse and it occasionally was! A visit to Lincoln was the last day out before the War, with a visit to the castle, where we saw the dungeons and the prison chapel where the prisoners had individual seats, unable to see their neighbours, only the preacher. Visits to the cinema were rare and to the theatre even rarer, although I do remember going to Skegness to see a show just before the War. On the way to Skegness, we came across a motor car which had ended up in a dyke on a bend, so my father and a friend who was with us helped to lift the car out onto the road and we then completed the journey! Father did like a visit to Mablethorpe on a Saturday night to try his hand at the various sideshows in the amusement park; shooting at moving targets, coconut shies, swing boats, etc. There was one where one had to knock a 6" nail into a wooden sleeper. He was left-handed and fairly good at it and a prize would be given if

you could do it in less than a certain number of hits. I seem to remember we had 6 visits like that in 1939.

The War began in September 1939 and the routine of life was changed by restrictions which became more evident as time passed. Soldiers arrived on the night of the 1st-2nd September at about midnight with a searchlight. There were about 12-15 men. Not much happened in this area during the rest of 1939. The blackout was strictly enforced – no lights were allowed to be visible from windows, car lights had to be fitted with shades so that only a limited amount of light was evident, and only to show a restricted area. Ration books were issued to everybody, along with identity cards. My number was TNG43-3.

I read books from quite an early age, initially children's literature, but I soon got a taste for more adventurous and educational books. I remember receiving a book as a Christmas present which was about the world from very early times through to the present. Being 6 at the time, this was much too involved for my age, but I read it and some of its knowledge stuck in my brain forever! I read about early explorers in Australia who almost died on journeys "into the outback," exhausted by the heat, the long distances and the lack of water in this unknown land, and possibly only survived thanks to friendly Aborigines. When I arrived home from school, the first thing I did was to read the daily paper. I think it was the Daily Express. I wasn't tall enough to hold the paper open so I put it on the mat in front of the fire, opening and reading it. I distinctly remember the Spanish Civil War, the Abdication of King Edward VIII, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain meeting Hitler and Mussolini in Munich to beg for "peace in our time". He gained a few more months by giving a few million souls over to German rule before Hitler "lost his patience," a favourite statement of his, which meant another country or countries were about to fall under German domination, and he attacked Poland in September 1939.

I took the 11+ examination in early 1938 and was awarded a scholarship to King Edward VI Boys' Grammar School at Louth which involved 6-day attendance, with two half-days for games, on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I had quite enjoyed my schooldays at North Cockerington and I believe I received a good basic education to help me face the future. To my great surprise, of the intake of 11+ boys that year, I had the second-highest marks. The 7 boys with the highest marks were selected to skip the initial class for entrants and were put in a class with some of the previous year's intake. I managed to cope alright and maintained a satisfactory high standard for 3 years and then in my 4th year, I was again destined to skip the year and was put in the 5th form to take the Cambridge School Certificate after 4 years instead of 5. This was too much for me and I was well out of my depth. I was physically not very tall and rather slight in build and felt very subdued, a new headmaster did not help and I took some comfort in the fact that the results in the School Certificate examination were very poor indeed. I attained one credit and 2 passes and of the 7 boys in the initial intake of 1938, only 2 scraped a pass in the School Certificate. The age of each boy was stated in the term report headings, together with the average age of the boys in the form. I was 22 months junior to the average age! Together with several of my peers, I returned to study the same syllabus, except for English Literature where the set books were different. I quite enjoyed revising the past year's work and in July 1943, I managed to get quite a good result in the School Certificate; 1 distinction, 4 credits and 4 passes. I failed in Latin.

I left school in July 1943 and started work on the farm. I found the work quite exhausting, not being very strong, but I did my best. I wanted to be a farmer. The soldiers were stationed in the field near our house and as time passed, some left and new faces arrived. My parents became friendly with many of them, one being a schoolmaster, who suggested that I might benefit from going to agricultural college. The result was that I sent for a syllabus for the Midland Agricultural College at Sutton Bonington near Loughborough. I applied for the certificate course of 2 terms duration. In March 1944, I received a telegram to go for an interview at the County Offices in Lincoln. I duly proceeded to be faced with a daunting row of very official-looking gentlemen. After the usual pleasantries, the questions began to be asked. I think I answered them fairly well. I managed to say almost on the spur of the moment that I would like to try the 2-year diploma course. One of the gentlemen who later I found out was the Principal of the Midland Agricultural College asked me what sort of a School Certificate I had attained. I told him and he replied, "I should jolly well think so too." A short time after my interview, I was informed that I had been awarded a Lindsey Scholarship to attend the college for the diploma course. So, on 25th September, 1944, I set off with a school friend who was also going. What an experience for me – a co-ed college of mainly late teenagers. Male and female students were about equal in number, although the various courses varied in their ratios. My trunk had not arrived when I did, so I was rather short of clothes, etc. I was fortunate to be accommodated in a Hall of Residence in a dormitory with 2 fellow students from Mansfield and Ilford. Many students lived in rooms at various houses in a nearby village which necessitated a bicycle journey in all weathers. Timetables and hours were a little longer than in school and lectures gave little free time during the day. I had lost the school atmosphere during my year on the farm, so I was a while settling down to study again; it was rather more intense than school. The food was quite good – well served in a large dining hall – and many staff members dined with the students at lunch. We had breakfast, lunch and tea, plus a glass of milk in the evening. Part of our sugar ration was provided in a jam-jar for personal use to add to drinks, the rest of our ration coupons were taken by the kitchen staff. Exams in all subjects were held at the end of term. You received the results whilst on vacation – working on the farm! When I went to college in 1944, there was little enemy air activity but, previously, students were required to join the Home Guard and have a fire-watching rota for the premises. My results were reasonable in my first term, much better in my second term and I was invited to return in September as a result of the June exams – no placings were given. The National Diploma NDA was an external exam held at Leeds University in July; we were to make our own arrangements for accommodation for 10-14 days. In 1945, I stayed at the Mount Hotel in Clarendon Road. Several students stayed there; it was rather posh! Exams took place in the Great Hall; most were 3 hours in duration. These were marked and you had to be there for an aural test and interview in a few days' time, swotting in the meantime if you were so-minded. Final results were sent by telegram if you paid for one! Five subjects were taken in the first year, all of which I passed. If you failed one or two, you were allowed to retake either at Edinburgh in April or Leeds in July. In September 1945, I returned – the world at peace. A few peers were missing for various reasons; having not satisfied the examiners, being too difficult or unsuitable. The routine was similar, the new students included some servicemen with guest visits by American GI's. Extra-curricular activities increased by former students and lecturers who gave talks on experiences and various representatives, anxious to push their products. My second year was quite a pleasant one; living in a single room, I worked hard and found lectures interesting and instructive, particularly engineering and

chemistry. I was not good at mixing socially; I saw too many friends get too involved with girls. I mixed with a group of lads of like minds, finding other pastimes. My second year passed quickly, I got very good results in my exams in December. I was the top male student. Two girls beat me; they were always top during the whole course! I was awarded the college diploma, being presented with it at the end of July 1946 by the Minister of Agriculture in the new Labour Government – the Right Honourable Tom Williams. In the meantime, I had taken my finals for the NDA in Leeds, this time staying in less salubrious circumstances in student digs with various ethnic races for company. I and my friend were in a basic, damp basement, while two fellow agricultural students were nearly cooked in an attic with just a skylight for ventilation; I took my four final written exams and aural exams, passing the interval between swotting and waiting in the queue for the interview. I arrived home in a taxi from Louth, closely followed by a telegram which just said, “Awarded Diploma.” I had paid the secretary for 10 words – he had an eye for business!

My first memory of harvesting was going with Basil and mother to take tea to my father in the field where the men were binding oats, cutting the crop and tying sheaves – 2 binders, one pulled by horses and the other pulled by a tractor and 4 men stacking the sheaves into arc-like structures of 10 sheaves, each for the straw and grain to mature prior to pitching the sheaves on to 4-wheeled wagons, taken to the yards and stacked in large stacks 12-15 yards long by 4-5 wide, generally with rounded ends. The sides were normally given a little more width as high as the eaves and then gradually reduced at the top until it was only 1-2 yards wide. Some stacks were magnificent structures, some were less magnificent! At harvest time, the workers generally had tea in the fields at about 5pm and then worked to about 7.30pm. It was always an attraction for us to go to the fields when they were being cut, where we would chase rabbits which escaped as the uncut area was reduced. When the crop was carried (lead) home to the yard on wagons, we would ride home on the back door of the wagon which could be let down on chains to make a horizontal shelf – health and safety was in the very distant future! As I got older and stronger, at about 11 years old, I could perform some duties helping to harvest peas. Peas were cut with a modified grass mower with a reciprocating blade running in meal fingers – every fourth finger modified to lift the crop (lifters) over the blade to prevent the pea pods being cut off. The crop was then turned with forks to weather the straw and pods so that in 7-10 days, the crop was carried to the yard. At about 12 years old, we were allowed to horse-rake – an implement 10-12 feet wide on wheels with close curved tines which collected the residue of the crop after the sheaves had been collected. This had a seat on it and you pulled a lever to lift the tines to leave the rakings in rows across the field. Later, I was put on the binder to manipulate various levers, the main object being to see that the sheaves were tied neatly in the middle of the sheaf longitudinally. This was easy in a nice standing crop, but if you had patches of laid crop, it was nigh impossible to do so in spite of my using the adjustable sails (‘waps’) to lay the crop on the revolving canvas table, before being elevated up to the packing table and sheaf-tying knotter – the twin was contained in a box which held 2 or 3 “balls” of twine from which the string proceeded to the needle, a long-curved casting with an eye holding the string. When an arrangement called the tripper had enough pressure of crop on it, it tripped a “cam” which activated the needle to complete its tying cycle. I was always fascinated by the knotting mechanism of a binder – it was not until I was at college that the machinery lecturer demonstrated with his fingers how simple it was! I helped my father on the corn stacks when I was 14, a task which developed my arm muscles. I did not drive a tractor until

I was 16, mainly because the worker who drove the tractor was jealous of his position and thought I would take over his job, so he left in 1944.

I was very keen to handle a shotgun; the maternal genes were evident. For some time, I used to accompany my father when he went out on the farm to see if he could shoot a hare or a few partridges to vary our diet. Dad was a useful left-handed shot – he was also ambidextrous. I was allowed to use a gun when I was 14. A lot of time was spent in those days keeping hordes of pigeons and crows off the crops at harvest time, particularly if some of the crop was laid (lodged). It was wartime and shotgun cartridges were scarce so I tried to get a kill with every shot. Pigeons, partridges and hares were saleable at the game dealers and at times, I had a useful income, sometimes more than my wage.

The everyday life in Alvingham during the War was quite pedestrian, ruled by habit and necessity. We were always aware of military presence, with about 50 soldiers in the field near the house. The searchlight generator in the yard just near our bedroom window was a constant reminder, particularly when it started during the night! The soldiers were, on the whole, decent chaps. I should think quite a few of our chickens became a wartime delicacy on the tables of men on leave – it is only human nature! Even more eggs improved the breakfast of men on camp! Their life must have been monotonous; killing time almost until something “big” occurred. Initially, there were changes in the units stationed here; about 4 before the Sherwood Foresters came in 1941 and stayed until 1944. Some attempt was made in the village to give some comfort to the men – a canteen in the Methodist Schoolroom was staffed by the ladies. I suppose there were a few liaisons; the airmen who slept at our house, the Grange and the Mill were all very young. Some soldiers had their wives visit, staying with co-operative families.

My spare time was mainly used hunting with a gun when I left school. Game was plentiful – the type of farming, then based loosely on the Norfolk 4 course rotation, really encouraged wildlife – there was an eager market for all types in London. I visited Louth on my bicycle to go to the cinema on Saturdays, often purchasing fish and chips for the family, much enjoyed when I got home, generally followed by a few games of whist. Some effort was made by individuals to entertain or educate the young people in the village. A youth club was formed – an extension of the Sunday School overseen by the Rev. Charles Hill and his wife Estella, a very precise lady. Rev. Hill was a retired Methodist Minister who bought the redundant Free Methodist chapel, demolished it and built a house with the material; he had learned the trade as a builder before entering the ministry. From 1935-50, they involved themselves in village life, having a very beneficial effect, particularly with the young. There was some social activity at North Cockerington, where the school was available, dancing classes were held in 1946 – very popular but curtailed in early 1947 due to the atrocious weather; 10-12 weeks of very heavy snowfall and low temperatures made conditions in all aspects of life very difficult.

While I was in Leeds taking my finals, I saw a showroom with a motorcycle which quite took my fancy. It was a Triumph twin cylinder 500cc Speed Twin, and soon after I returned home, I ordered a new 350cc twin cylinder model - I thought I was not built substantially enough for the larger model. It arrived in November 1946; it cost £154. I paid for it by reducing my bank account to zero and borrowed £50 to be paid back £1 per week, deducted from my wages. It was a little beauty; it sounded smooth and efficient and it certainly was! Petrol

was rationed, only a small monthly allowance allowed; a book of coupons made it difficult to get more legally. Now all I wanted was a girl to accompany me! During 1947, I went further afield than was usual on a bicycle; visits to Mablethorpe and Skegness, a Test match at Nottingham, to Uncle Jack on his farm in Yorkshire, football matches at Blundell Park to see Grimsby Town – then in the First Division. We were threshing oats in the White Barn yard in October, I was cutting the strings on the sheaves before passing them to the threshing assistant who fed the crop into the drum when he asked me if I had a girlfriend – I said “no”, to which he said “I know a girl who was asking me about you”. I asked him for her name and he told me. More than 2 weeks later, I noticed this girl and her friend in the street as I got my motorcycle out of the garage where I had left it to go to the cinema. My cousin was with me and as we went down Eastgate, I noticed these two girls so I turned round and went up to them. They claimed to be most surprised – I doubt that – so I said, “Miss Meanwell, I presume,” in true H M Stanley style when he found Dr Livingstone. I must admit it was a rather formal greeting! I made no date for the future but the next Saturday, we ‘accidentally’ met before going to the cinema. I had taken another friend with me who was on leave from doing his National Service. After the cinema, we met and went to the November Fair in Northgate and got to know each other a little better and, as they say, the rest is history! I think that in her enquiries, a friend had told her I had a motorcycle and probably this had improved the attraction, but ‘sod’s law’ intervened. The perilous state of the country’s finances after the War was evident when the Chancellor banned all private motoring from December 1947 to June 1948, so I had to buy a new bicycle!

In mid-November, Basil and I went to London for a few days – a different experience. Actually, the morning we went was Princess Elizabeth’s wedding to Prince Philip. In the afternoon we went into the city and everything was cleaned – not a sign of the crowds or the mess created by them. A relative chaperoned us a little but we had quite a good look round, visiting theatres, famous landmarks, a football match, broadening our vision of city life compared to life in Lincolnshire. We went on these visits in 1948 and 1949, accompanied by Edgar Hand, a close friend of ours. My life took on a new dimension. Molly and I got on well together – she was a talented girl in music, solo and piano, also a gifted elocutionist in contrast to my rather broad dialect. Molly, I found and realised, was very involved in music at the Riverhead Mission (Methodist) in Commercial Road, where her mother was the organist and her brother Alec was choirmaster. Born into a musical family, she performed from an early age; the first public performance was in 1937 when she was the youngest musician in Papa Tyson’s orchestra, playing the tambourine in Haydn’s Toy Symphony. This was the first broadcast on the wireless from Louth. School was Eastfield Road, followed by Monks Dyke, where she became head girl. The 11+ exam was avoided due to illness. She learned to play the piano practically on her own, her mother a piano teacher of considerable experience giving instruction from a distance. Molly said she never had a proper lesson, she heard a tune and played it when she came home and by the age of 9, she was playing hymns at Sunday School. The War brought a demand for entertainment; the cinema, dance halls, churches and chapels were well attended. Young people were keen to participate and Molly’s mother and helpers trained a large number of children to stage a pantomime in the town hall in 1941. The clothes were quite professional, mainly made of paper! Molly took the lead and her talent was recognised by people with some knowledge of the stage. Concerts by local organisations were popular, often supported by members of the forces stationed in the area. Molly left school aged 14 and after a short period of work in the

business world, returned to help her mother with teaching the piano and extending her musical ability. Tuition in singing meant a weekly visit to Grimsby and elocution to a teacher in Louth. The newly revived Louth Choral Society gave her an opportunity to sing the contralto solo in Mendelssohn's Oratorio, Elijah, in St James' church. A fortunate friendship with the Girls Grammar School's music teacher, Pamela Gauntlette, provided serious study of the piano, resulting in obtaining Grades VII and VIII in the Associated Board in rapid succession. Later, she studied under Harold Dexter, the L.B.G.S. teacher.

My friendship with Molly made her diary rather hectic, with her tuition, taking part in many activities including competing in several music festivals in Grimsby, Cleethorpes and Market Rasen, Methodist Youth Club, the Riverhead choir, accompanying vocal items at the Riverhead band concerts, accepting invitations as guest vocal soloist at special services in various chapels, particularly Marshchapel, where her maternal family established a long musical tradition. Her singing tutor, Percy Thomson, an ex-professional now resident in Keelby, had an annual list of chapels where he and his pupils gave Sunday afternoon concerts all over North Lincolnshire. Molly was a regular member at these efforts; I was rarely invited to accompany her – she said I would be bored! We met on Saturday nights to visit the cinema or occasionally a repertory company which changed plays weekly. I think that must have been hard work, Sunday nights after chapel, visiting a young people's self-entertainment evening, overseen by two willing adults. I was somewhat surprised and rather pleased to be asked to her home for supper within 6 weeks of meeting her; I was nervous but it was indeed a pleasure. The light nights and fine weather of 1948 gave us opportunities to meet on our bicycles. I really got to know the road between Alvingham and Louth intimately! On Whit Monday, we cycled to Mablethorpe and enjoyed the sand between our toes – the town had not recovered its pre-war attraction and crowds yet. June brought private motoring so I could enjoy my motorcycle. Molly visited High Street House at our Sunday School anniversary. I took her back to Louth at night; we ran over a black cat and it got up and ran away – was it an omen?! In the local paper, the "Louth Advertiser", it may have been Christmas 1947, the editor prepared a list of the well-known personalities in the town, together with a compliment, one of which was Maureen Meanwell – "a sweet singer of sweet songs". I was invited to Molly's auntie and uncle's at Marshchapel in September 1948 for their Harvest Festival where Molly was the soloist – a very pleasant occasion. I travelled on my motorcycle. When I left at night, it was raining, I did not know the road very well and on a bend, I got on the grass roadside; a combination of wet grass, correction of steering and braking resulted in the bike turning 180° and the rear end fortunately hitting a bridge brick parapet. If I had missed that structure, I would have gone into a deep drain; I believe I was extremely lucky. Life revolved around the chapel, Sunday School, lessons and performances, festivals, Youth Club and farming. Molly visited Alvingham, drinking a glass of milk straight from the cow with no ill-effects – a taste I did not share! A visit to the Lincolnshire Agricultural Show at Louth probably broadened her vision of future life. We married in November 1949, having a few days in London before starting life together in rooms with her brother and sister-in-law in Eastfield Road. In May 1950, we moved to a new council house, 1 Priory Row in Church Lane, Alvingham. By now, our first daughter, Patricia Anne, had arrived – Molly's pride and joy. We were a family. The move considerably eased my presence at the farm. Molly managed to arrange her commitments at Louth by lifts with my parents or using the bus. She did not let inconvenience deter her; she walked, pushing the pram (Silver Cross), to Louth with Patricia – later with Maureen and also David in 1955.

Besides teaching a few pupils at Louth, some came on the bus to White Barn when we moved there in February 1953. What a difference and a challenge moving from a new council house to an old farmhouse with no mod cons, not even cold water in the house!! The builder, electrician and plumber made considerable improvements, but damp walls and damp in general were a problem for years. The '50s could be described as a decade of consolidation; we celebrated the Queen's Coronation in June 1953 – an awful day weatherwise – but the Village Hall made a great venue with a television and village entertainment. Molly and I became a real family with David's arrival in 1955. Life was enhanced by Molly's work with young people who came from Louth and the village to sing, etc and she formed the Alvingham and District Girls' Choir in the mid-'50s, which gave her great satisfaction to work with an enthusiastic group who gave concerts in the district. I was called upon to help with transport; six lively girls in a Land Rover. Molly was asked to train the Sunday School children for the Sunday School Anniversary. She accepted and brought a refined musical quality to the singing, rather than a noisy rabble hitherto. The girls were a willing group under her and she enjoyed their company, teaching them elocution and acting as their hair stylist!

In 1958, father made Basil and I partners. I did not feel any different – we made a profit each year, nothing to make us feel well-to-do. In 1957, Molly's father died – he was quite a gentleman. Molly was very close to him and it was a sad loss in her life. I think he was proud of her achievements and of his grandchildren. Molly learned to drive and in 1961, we got a new Morris Oxford car which alleviated her transport problems. By now, she had quite a number of piano pupils; she did not teach her own children, they went to Grimsby including David learning the violin. In 1961, we took Maureen to Blackpool Music Festival to compete in two classes – she looked rather diminutive on the stage of the Winter Gardens, performing on a grand piano!

I had always kept a few chickens to produce eggs; in the 1950s, deep litter became popular. The birds were confined in buildings or huts and given extra lighting; improved laying stock poured the eggs out. On Christmas Eve of 1962, Molly was rather busy preparing for the next day's celebrations when she fell off the ladder going up to the old pigeon court, taking tasty green waste from the vegetables up to the chickens, and broke her wrist. I took her to casualty and she came home in plaster. Willing relative helpers came to the rescue and eleven of us enjoyed the day, although Molly was in some pain and handicapped. As time went on, it became apparent that Molly's wrist had not been set correctly; she had restricted movement which was very obvious when she tried to play the piano. My Uncle Henry arranged for her to see a bone specialist at Leeds and he said surgery was necessary so in June 1963, we proceeded to St James' Hospital and Mr Clarke removed some bone from her forearm and a trapped nerve which over time healed and restored her former arm and hand movement. The Louth Methodist Circuit held an annual music festival for piano, voice, etc and Molly supported it with items, solo and choir by the children with some success. In 1964, she was at the festival, obviously pregnant, so she trained Maureen, now 12, to conduct the choir while Molly accompanied on the piano – a chip off the old block! Kathryn Lesley was born in July 1964. David was 9 – quite an interval! Elizabeth and Greg married in May 1965, a very breezy day which tested the ropes holding the marquee adjacent to Southlands. Sir Winston Churchill died in 1965 and I took David to see his lying-

in-state in Westminster Hall and then some of the sights in London. In 1957, Harold Macmillan became Prime Minister and at the General Election, his slogan of "You've never had it so good," was a pointer to the changing mood of the electorate. The soldiers came home after the War, many were determined to not see a repetition of the depression, unemployment and poverty after the First World War. But first, the new Labour administration under Clement Attlee had to deal with a bankrupt economy and it really only became solvent in the 1950s. Employment was found in the nationalised industries, a move which produced positive results. Labour were replaced by the Tories in 1951 and they held power until the mid-1960s when a sex scandal involving ministers may have influenced the result. In the late 1950s, a change in the leisure of the young people emerged. It began in the type of music originating in small groups – one of the first were the Beatles – four young men in Liverpool – and it rapidly spread among the youth in the late '50s and '60s. With this new-found expression of thinking, freedom of youthful ideas became a powerful, unstoppable, almost religious element with the youth carrying all their ideas with it. To many older citizens, it was rather shocking, morality was disregarded and any wish for freedom was the norm. It was not really reproached, rather it was encouraged as it provided an industry selling music, records and instruments.

This change in musical attitude did not thrill Molly, but she saw talent in some of the groups. Her young friends grew up and scattered so she increased the number of piano pupils and re-joined the Louth Choral Society, where she found leisure and pleasure. Our family were also growing up. In 1973, Patricia married an airman, Leslie Ward, from Dunbar who was stationed at Manby where she worked as a secretary. He was moved to NATO HQ in Oslo and we visited them in 1974 and 1976. It was a 2-year posting and he was posted to Inverness Careers Information Office on return; Inverness was quite a journey for us to visit. Les decided to resign from the RAF and he and Patricia moved to Dalgety Bay on the Firth of Forth. Maureen had decided to further her career in music. She had lessons with a teacher in Surrey, travelling there and back on a Saturday on her own. I accompanied her to her Grade VIII exam, which she passed with distinction. She qualified to take a 2-year course, studying the piano at the Royal Academy of Music and after a crash course in secretarial work, she attained a position as the producers' secretary on the BBC radio junior music programme. Maureen married Donald McCanlis, also a musician, specialising as an organist, in 1976, memorable for the fact that that was the day (August 28th) that a long drought broke and dampened proceedings. They made their home in St Albans, followed by Wheathampstead and later at Studham in Bedfordshire. David attended the Lincolnshire Farm Institute at Riseholme after a year on the farm. It was a 3-year course with a middle gap year, which he spent on a mixed farm in Norway. We visited in 1974. David elected to stay on the farm – we built a new bungalow on Yarburgh Road which he named "Hassan" after the variety of barley that had grown in the field beside it that year. In 1979, he married Patricia Curtis from Lincoln whom he met at Riseholme.

Holidays were occasional and taken when opportunity and commitments did not clash. Visits to Bridlington in the 1950s to stay with John and Sally Atkinson, forays to Scarborough, the south coast, Bournemouth and Torquay and a tour round Scotland are memorable. Visits to family became almost compulsory as time progressed.

The Silver Jubilee of the Queen was celebrated in 1977; as I remember it, a rather low-key affair – not much enthusiasm from the citizens! The village hall struggled for many years to become a real centre of activity. The new Parish Council elected in 1961 was a body with no teeth. The Village Hall housed the County Library, a snooker table, the W.I. monthly meetings, occasional whist drives and efforts to raise funds. I generally ran the tombola stall, having supplied most of the bottles! In 1966, three events occurred, two of which had a lasting effect on village life. Firstly, the chapel roof caught on fire – the centrally appointed coke stove overheated in a May gale and ignited the insulation in the roof – the resulting improvements being a revamped slate exterior, efficient insulation and electric heating at floor level. Secondly, the carpenter shop and petrol pulps were bought by Pru Green, a real go-ahead lady who set up a successful pottery business. It attracted many visitors, particularly at weekends and bank holidays when the local roads were packed with vehicles. Her business lasted about 15 years. Thirdly, Walter Pickering and his family came to live in the village – a Post Office engineer who entered into village life enthusiastically and whose influence encouraged other citizens to assist and invigorate social life in the village; He was a very practical individual and after a short period, coerced others to follow his example. He had access to ex-P.O. equipment and used it to fix heating in the chapel – a great improvement. He soon became involved with the Village Hall, which needed new life in the fact that it was an army hut from the War and was deteriorating. If it was to continue, it needed a brick 'skin' and new roof – where was the money?! Walter set about it with his team – novel ideas and grants were available. He came up with the 'Barnfeastfrolic' – a descriptive title, so our corn store was used – one side for the feast and dancing in the other side. This event was an annual 'do' for some years – variations of it being used in other villages. Concerts both solo and choir helped to swell the funds, as did craft demonstrations. In 1972, a plan by the NE Lincs Water Board to build a large reservoir to supplement the Covenham facility resulted in a Public Enquiry, with Alvingham Parish Council and the National Farmers Union objecting to it. For the first time nationally, the proposal was refused. Walter represented the Parish Council at the Inquiry. In 1977, Molly and I went to Nottingham to look at pianos. She had always dreamed of a grand piano. After trying several, she selected a Danemann 6'8" grand. In 1981, Walter had another 'bright idea' for social enhancement) he proposed to have a Social Club with a bar open on two evenings during the week and Sunday lunchtime. Perseverance paid off and it continued to provide a facility for the villagers. It is worthy of note that Alvingham had generally been regarded as a pillar of temperance, having no public house. There were no objections from the 'good' Methodists, society accepted the modern way of life; it could be described as broad-minded. Walter did not enjoy good health as far as mobility was concerned and was confined to a wheel chair which he adapted to allow a comparatively comfortable style of life when he moved to accommodation in Louth and finally a nursing home in the latter 1990s.

In 1989, my mother and John Atkinson died within the space of 10 days. Basil and I were John's executors and seeing to his affairs proved to be a very interesting exercise. He had a large library – he was very knowledgeable on the army and navy and in his final years, he had amassed a considerable collection of militaria – cap badges and insignia of all descriptions and had written a commentary to accompany his collection. I was pleased he left these to a friend – I did go to some bother to sell his library but I have a suspicion that I was a victim of the Bridlington 'mafia'. It is tragic I think, as was in John's case, that we were

practically his only living relatives. With Walters' retirement from the village, the Village Hall had the good fortune to find a willing and capable leader in Philip Davies who resided at The Mill. Like Walter, he was not a native; he bought the Mill at auction in 1972, after Mrs Bett moved to High Street House. A man of considerable ability, he worked for a firm with a factory on the Humber Bank; he was an engineer. Firstly, he set about bringing the mill back to its former glory as a working water mill. He then turned his interests to windmills – he made new sails for a mill and fixed them on it successfully. He became an authority on such work. The Village Hall was by now (mid-1990s) in need of new life and Phil took on this work. He designed a refurbished building using the old 'shell' with added toilets, kitchen and bar storage. He drew the plans professionally and obtained considerable grants that were available. He oversaw the necessary new brickwork, drainage, new wiring, new roof and redecoration, resulting in a permanent structure to meet present day demands of catering and safety. Moreover, he carried with him an enthusiastic committee to keep an active and desirable facility to be used for dinners, meetings and a wide range of pastime along with the associated Social Club.

The Millennium was celebrated nationally and individual groups in particular made efforts to make it a memorable occasion. Phil was again the leader of this; he designed and made a 'lovers' seat which was placed on a plinth in the churchyard adjacent to the canal – the base depicts the Alvingham coat of arms, ears of corn, livestock and sails of a barge as used in the canal's heyday.

A crowd of villagers assembled for the unveiling, including the oldest, 94, and the youngest citizens, 6 weeks. I had the privilege and pleasure of saying a little about the history of the church and village and thanking those responsible for his unique memorial. However, I believe Phil's greatest contribution to history was his research and production of the Millennium Book of Alvingham. He succeeded in delving into the past history of the village and brought into print a concise record and side-issues to elaborate his subject matter. Phil's contribution to the village of Alvingham cannot be overstated or over-praised. He was a pleasant, genial individual who 'got on' with everybody he met. His ability bordered on genius but his life was dogged by tragedy in his family and in his final illness – a heart attack unable to get assistance. He is remembered by a portrait in the Village Hall.

Molly and I moved into Southlands – a 'modern' house built in 1955 – in 1991 after structural additions; a music studio which doubled as extension to the lounge, utility room, with a bedroom and bathroom over, re-wiring and central heating. I took a less active interest in the farm and David moved into the White Barn farmhouse. For some years, I had been quite active in the NFU and the Louth Drainage Board – both unpaid positions. At various times, I had given time to the Parish Council after being ignored at the inaugural election – I was co-opted within 5 years and served for almost 40 years. I was a member of the Village Hall committee in various capacities, some of which gave me satisfaction; some not so much!

For some time, I had toyed with visiting New Zealand where we had some distant relatives. We had never flown and the prospect was quite daunting. However, we made preparations and in late January 1997, along with Hedley, Molly's cousin, and his wife, Anne, we set off from Heathrow in a New Zealand Air jumbo jet. We held each other tightly as we soared

upwards – it was a great experience for us. We travelled west via Los Angeles, Honolulu and Nadi (Fiji), where we spent two days and then on to Auckland. Our route and accommodation were all booked – Rotorua – Napier – Wellington – Cook Strait – Nelson – Greytown – Fox Glacier – Queenstown – Te Anau – Dunedin – Omarama – Mouth Cook – Christchurch – flight to Auckland – Dargaville (home of Christine and Bruce) – Bay of Islands – Ngunguru - Takapuna. We met Binkie and her friend, Pat, at Christine’s bungalow in Takapuna. We used Singapore Airlines for the return flight, enjoying a 2-day stopover in Singapore and completed a round-the-world journey – an event I had never before contemplated. We repeated our visit to New Zealand in 1999. We again had all arrangements made before we left and travelled business class – a little ‘luxury’ – our timetable was less hectic this time and we visited various places that we had not managed in 1997. We used Singapore Airlines and had a week in Singapore on the home journey, visiting many places which I had read about – Sentosa Island – the Metro – Changii – Kranji War Memorial – visit to Johore (Malaysia), Raffles Hotel, everything modern with luxuriant plants and trees, wide avenues and modern vehicles to control pollution. A week in my life which thrilled me.

I have been very fortunate to have enjoyed a comparatively healthy life. As I have mentioned before, I was not very strong and hardly average height. My working life could be described as a ‘Jack of all trades’ individual, with much physical labour in conjunction with machinery. I was ‘young’ when I started work in a labour force of comparatively old men who had not grown up with machinery. In that respect, I was fortunate that I left college, having gained some knowledge in theory of farming at a time of the demise of the horse and the advent of the tractor and machinery to use with the power involved. Since then, the progress in mechanical power has never stopped, and the sophistication in machinery used to produce the quality of food demanded by today’s consumer is unbelievable and remarkable. So, I have had the good fortune to take part in this revolution. I have driven machinery for a considerable part of my time but on a mixed farm, there are many other facets making up the picture. During my life, I have kept poultry, sheep and cattle, which I found very rewarding, if trying at times, but life has rarely been ‘plain sailing’.

I worked more or less full time until 1992, apart from my extra-curricular activities and gradually arthritis in my right hip became more pronounced. In January 1995, I had a total replacement which was quite successful, although I had a pulmonary embolism about three weeks later. Another pulmonary embolism in June resulted in my treatment being a life-long sentence to take Warfarin – I wonder how many rats I could have controlled! My left hip replacement in September 2007 was rather more traumatic than my right, but has over the 4 years since gradually improved and I believe is as good as I can expect.

Over recent years, Molly and I have tried to continue the lifestyle we have enjoyed for over 60 years. The family take up the first half of married life, then looked-for enjoyment of later years can be interrupted with problems both anticipated and otherwise. Then, later, the vigour of life begins to recede so that holding your former ability is difficult both in health and mobility. I have had the pleasure of having a great and loving partner on this journey. We were both brought up in Methodist families with a sense of ‘serving’ and promoting life, respecting others and using our ‘talents’ to give help and pleasure in the process. I don’t believe that either of us had a conversion experience like Saul on the road to Damascus as

related in the Act of the Apostles; our belief seemed to grow as the years passed, admittedly with a little pressure from our parents in adolescence. The fact of attending worship to take a little time off the daily routine is good therapy, respecting the efforts of preachers who must put in considerable time and thought in preparing services to further the teachings in the Bible. I can honestly say that it has 'grown' in my life over the years and principles of business and contact with colleagues and friends has been enriched by the experience of worship, to think of others who are less fortunate than myself. Molly, I am sure, has similar feelings about worship – her musical ability has been rewarded by the congregation of Alvingham Chapel, noting her interpretations of the music and words of the hymns, resulting in 'almost a choir'.