

# Staveley & District History Society

## Journal Winter 2014-15

---

### CONTENTS

- 2 From the Events Secretary  
*Don Morris encourages participation in looking after our local history*
- 3 The WW1 letters of Murray Crofts  
*A second letter, written to his home in Staveley from France in April 1915*
- 4 Extracts from the WW1 diaries of Abraham Lord  
*Notes from the diaries of the grandfather of SDHS member, Alan Lord*
- 8 Tales from the Tapes: Growing up in the Abbey orphanage. Part 2  
*The transcript of an interview of Conrad McNamara with Joe Scott in 1997*

The views expressed in articles in this Journal are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the Society.

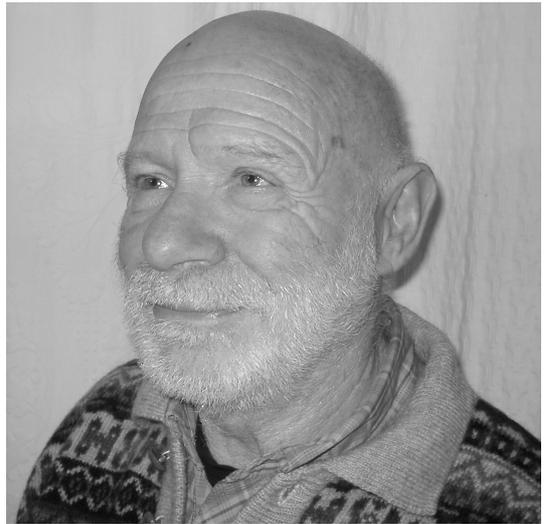
*Cover photo: Veterans at Staveley War Memorial. Date unknown.*

---

The next issue of the *Journal* (No 33, the Spring 2015 issue) will be published about the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2015. All contributions (letters, articles, etc.) are welcome at any time but should be with the Editor no later than early March.

## From the Events Secretary

This is my first contribution to this part of our Journal. Why me, just a semi-ignorant non-historian off-comer? Well, I first attended a society event as an interloper when I went on the visit to Burnbanks in August 2006. I then joined the society later that autumn. It was a decision I have not regretted. A couple of years later Marjory Hooson was looking for another home for the society library. I made the mistake of volunteering because I was immediately informed I was henceforth a committee member. Mind you it was nice having convivial conversation followed by tea and biscuits at Fell



Close. About a year later John Berry (may I mention here how much I admire John's indefatigable contribution to our society) wished to offload part of his portfolio and it was suggested I became Events Secretary. We now usually meet at Common Head, the home of our President. So that's how I got involved.

Now why do I mention this sad tale? It is because without committee members this society will wither on the vine. Except for Margaret none of the present members are spring chickens. If I can keep my head mostly above water surely a couple of other members can do the same. And, there are plenty of you, and that 'plenty of you' are mostly locals. This was evident when many hands were raised when Jean Scott Smith asked at the October meeting how many people easily followed the Westmerian dialect. Come on; if you want the society to survive then think about joining us. In particular anybody with an interest in the local buildings would be most welcome. Stephen Read of the Levens History Group, who has coordinated an inventory of most of the noteworthy properties in his village, attended our recent committee meeting to provide us with advice for starting our own group. Surely there is somebody interested in joining us as we hopefully prepare to do the same for Staveley and adjacent area?

In the current edition of the journal there is still a focus on events that occurred around the time of both world wars. There is another contribution from Clare and her cache of WW1 letters, and there are extracts from the WW1 diaries of Abraham Lord, the grandfather of a society stalwart, Alan Lord. Also in this edition John has included the second part of 'Tales from the Tapes' about life in the Abbey orphanage during and after WW2. Part one raised a fair amount of interest. I think some people were shocked at the standards of care that were suggested by the article. We are supposed now to live in enlightened times but one wonders when we read some of the current stories in the press. Aren't we supposed to learn from history?

*Don Morris*

## The WW1 letters of Murray Crofts

*This is a further letter contributed by our President, Clare Brockbank, whose mother-in-law was Murray Crofts' sister, Alice. He was killed on 9th May 1915 near Ypres.*



Still in billets; 29.4.15.

Dear Mother, Thank you very much for your letter dated April 25th, and please thank Alice for hers (dated April 2nd, but I think that must be a mistake). No, it's all right, we're nowhere near Hill 60, if you see any casualties of the Welch connected with that they will be of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. As a matter of fact 2 subalterns who left England at the same time as me have already been wounded there. We are still at the good old Estaminet, or pub. We have been employed lately in practising assaults on sham German trenches, which looks like a sign of 'something doing', but from something I heard today I fancy we

shan't be called upon to put it into practice for some time. Meanwhile life is very calm. Spring has come astonishingly suddenly, and the country is now full of green leaves and fruit blossom. In fact the heat problem is already beginning to arise; it seems queer that when I came out a month ago we were shivering in the icy grip of winter. I have already cast most of my cloaks, and still the heat in the daytime is quite fatigue giving.

I have been moving in high circles lately. Two days ago I was standing outside our little cabaret when a noble cavalcade of Brasshats approached; I faded silently within and, when I thought the coast was clear, I came out again, only to find General Sir Douglas Haig asking in a loud voice who that officer was. He then asked me my whole history and told me 'in future not to run away from the general' – so severe. That seems to be the kind of thing these big generals are for. I wondered how they spent their time.

The next day we met again and had another conversation, so if you hear of my becoming a general Staff Officer you will know what a good impression I produced. This evening we tried to get up a game of Rugger, but it was too hot to be a success. By the way, I've been having rather a hard month in the way of cigarettes, and I think it would be rather a good idea if I got you to buy me some. The sort I'd like are State Express No 222, sold by weight. I'd like a half pound tin to start with, I think it will be 7/6. I noticed the other day that I had my second star, which means another bob a day. 8/6 instead of 7/6, so that's rather opportune?

The latest news is that we shall probably stay here for another 10 days or so more, and are to do a lot of practice in route-marching. I must go now, because there is a

general coming round tomorrow, and it is absolutely necessary that I should get into 'Kendal' and get my hair cut. It is hanging all down my back at present. Did I tell you that we have been strictly ordered to grow a moustache? Mine is still in the microscopic stage; the worst of it is I keep nearly forgetting and shaving it off by mistake. Must stop now.

*Your loving son Murray*

## **Extracts from the WW1 diaries of Abraham Lord.**

*Alan Lord, a member of SDHS, presented some of the following material at our AGM last April.*

Abraham Lord, my grandfather, was a stone mason and a member of St Johns Ambulance. When WW1 was declared he was living in the village of Whitworth just to the north of Rochdale. During the war years he kept a daily record in a series of small diaries from which these extracts are taken.

Four days after the declaration of war the local St Johns Corps was alerted.....

***Saturday Aug 8th 1914:*** *Left my work at Timothy Ashworth Brookside new weaving shed being built for T Normanton & Sons Whitworth at 10-00 o'clock. Went home, got my uniform on. Went to the station at Whitworth. Left by the 11.30 train for Rochdale. Went to the Terriers Drill Hall. No news. Had to come to East St. to the Recruiting Serg. He was not in. We marched on to the Town Hall Stayed there 2 hours and then marched to Rochdale station. Came across first Officer Crosland of the Rochdale Corps. He sent us on to Manchester.*

Eventually he was enrolled in the RAMC and after two weeks drill at Aldershot he arrived at Le Havre to work on the hospital trains carrying the wounded from the front at Creil, NE of Paris, westward to Le Mans. From his diary the journey of about 180 miles at 5mph took 38 hours. A contemporary report from the internet states: *The heaviest station work was done in September at Le Mans, where nurses were required for constant day and night duty, and where the trains, usually cattle trucks, some with and some without straw, arrived at all hours with wounded in an exhausted condition, and who had received little or no attention and for whom so much was needed to be done in so little time.*

After a few days on the trains he was sent to Brunoy SE of Paris to join the 10th Field Ambulance.

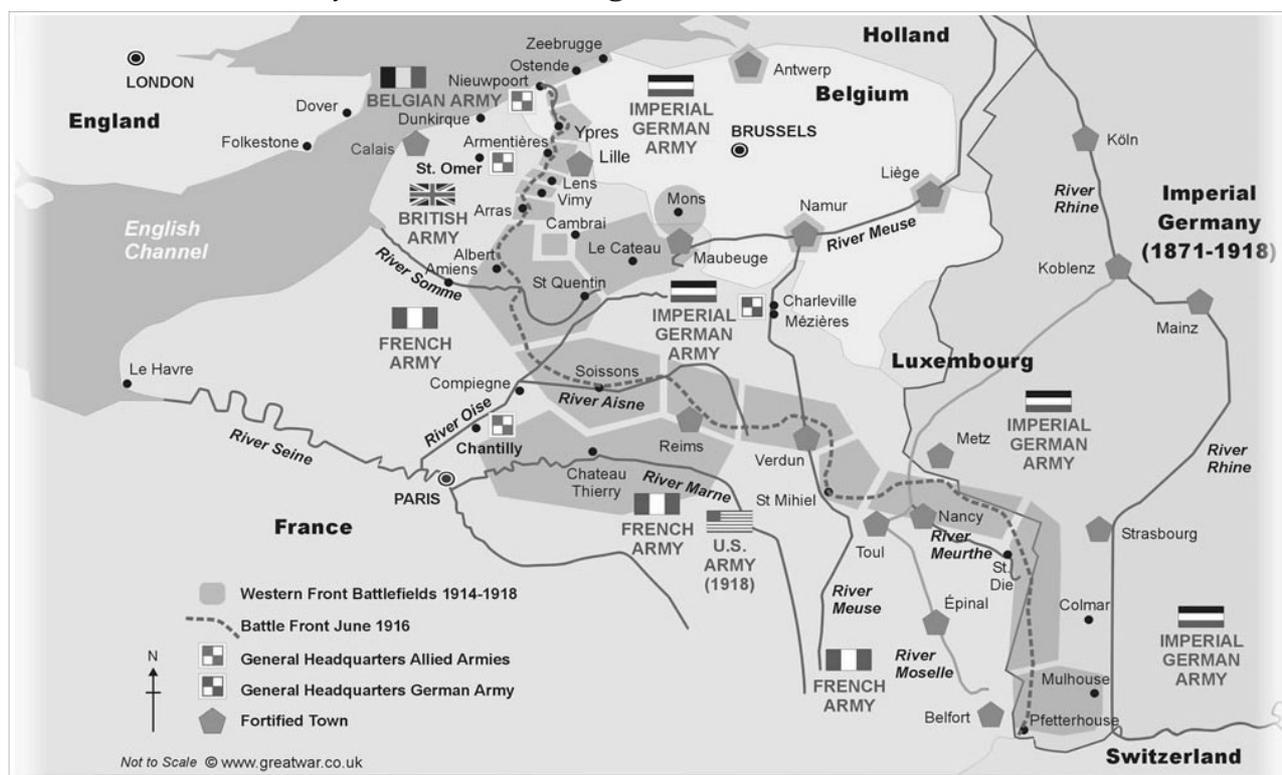
***Monday Sep 7th:*** *Left Brunoy at 12 o'clock for the front. Rode on top of a motor lorry loaded with oats for the horses in the field of battle. The country we went through was lovely. After we left the lorry we walked about 5 miles leaving 6.45, arrived about 9 at night. Slept in our overcoats on the ground all night.*

Here he is following close behind the front line during the Battle of the Marne:

***Friday Sep 11th:*** *It started to rain when we set out at 4 in the morning and rained all day. We had to sleep in a field all night, wet through.*

***Saturday Sep 12th:*** *It rained all day on the march as we walked along. The road was just like mortar. We walked 25 miles. When we got to our destination we had a big fire lit, Dried our clothes and slept in the open. It was just like quagmire. We*

covered all up with straw and then it poured down on the morning side. The cannons roared all day. There was a big battle. This was the Battle of the Aisne.



He was frequently moved around N.France and Belgium to work in the Advanced Dressing Stations close behind the front line. Serious casualties were sent on from there to the Casualty Clearing Stations, Field Hospitals, then if necessary, to Base Hospital or repatriation to UK. These Casualty Clearing Stations were set up as required as the front line advanced. Abraham's son James, injured by a high explosive shell was, at a later date, sent to one at Agnes-les-Duisans west of Arras and there is another contemporary report of an inspection about the time he was there: *I went to Agnes-les-Duisans where Nos. 8, 41 and 19 CCS have recently been established. These units are in huts and under canvas. The dressing rooms and operating theatres were excellently arranged and equipped. The theatre at 19 CCS is especially well equipped and note-worthy, as it has a supply of hot and cold water laid on. That made it noteworthy!*

With the start of the First Battle of Ypres, Abraham was moved further north:

**Friday Oct 9th:** 11.30 Feet inspection before doing a big March northward. We left this place at 6.30pm. They had marched 46 miles to the railway at Longuiel by 2.15pm on the Sunday then load the ambulances and vans onto the train.

**Monday Oct 12th:** Left Longuiel at 4.00 am. We landed at St Omer at 8.00 at night after 16 hours ride. We got all our Wagons out of the train and left this place at 10.00 at night. Then another 27 miles march arriving about 4.30 pm on Tuesday at Hazebrouk. An hour later they are sent out in an ambulance nearer to the front line: *Marched about a mile to the trenches. When we got there a hail of bullets came hissing over us. We went on till we got a man. As we were coming back the Germans were firing volleys after volleys over us. We expected being hit any minute. We went*

*four times about two miles away. We were at it till 5.30 next morning. One man we saw had his head blown off and plenty dead lying by the road side. Awful sight.*

He mentions the Christmas Truce of 1914:

**Thursday Dec 24th:** *Great Battle raging in the early hours this morning till dark at night, firing very heavy in the afternoon.*

**Friday, Dec 25th:** *We had a good day. Our Officers and the Germans were smoking together and had a game at football.*

Civilians were not evacuated until 1916 and where possible, normal life continued for the local people:

**Friday Jan 15th 1915:** *Rose at 6.00 and lit the fire. The farmer's daughter came and churned at breakfast time and made butter. The guns were still at it.*

**Monday Jan 18th:** *Rose at 6.15 this morning. The farmer's daughter was getting the oven ready for baking and then the son came and fired it up. The daughter brought the muffins and the father put them into the oven with a long peal. When they were done they brought the loaves in little baskets and he put them in and left them for an hour - a week's baking.*

Gas was first used at 3 o'clock in the afternoon of 22nd April 1915 when chlorine gas was released by the Germans in the Ypres sector. There was no defence for this and 402 officers and 11,778 other ranks of the 27th Division alone had been admitted to the field ambulances by 30th of that month, which would account for the urgent relocation of the 10th Field Ambulance to Ypres at an hour's notice. That was the second Battle of Ypres.

**Saturday April 24th:** *Marched away at 8pm on to Ypres. The place was all ablaze as we came through. We had to run for it. We landed just above Ypres at 12.00. Some went out right away and we went out further in the morning.*

**Sunday April 25th:** *We went out for some wounded. It was horrible. The shells were bursting all around. We had a rest in the afternoon and then we went out at dusk and we worked then till daylight.*

**Monday April 26th:** *It was an awful sight to see all the way we went to the farm for our wounded. The dead were lying in the trenches, some with there head off and others in a mutilated state. We have had to carry them two miles and we have gone 3. 4. and 5 times: 12, 16 and 20 miles in all in a night time. Almost dropped asleep .... and shells bursting all around us. It was like hell, the worst I have ever been in. Thinking every minute our numbers would be up.*

**Saturday May 8th:** *Rose at 6.30. A big battle raging this morning up on the left of the line. We got hundreds of wounded in. It was just like a procession, pitiful sight to see. We got them all cleared by dusk. There were 610 went through our hands. That was about one a minute for ten hours.*

Then he is back to the Somme again. His last entry in Diary 4 reads: *Left Corbie. Pitched our tents the other side of Albert. Had our cook house in a German dugout. We did a move from here across country for miles to our Headquarters. It was very dirty. We went on to Ginchy, passing through Mametz, Mantoban, Bernafay Wood, Trones Wood, Gillimont. We went backward and forward. At last I was sent to Corp*

*Barnard and we are now in a dug out in Bernafay Wood....Sunday October 22nd 1916.*



British and German wounded, Bernafay Wood, near Montauban village, France, 19 July 1916. Captured on 3-4 July 1916 during the opening days of the Somme offensive, a dressing station was established there soon after its capture.

This was a retrospective account written in the dugout. Soon afterwards he is sent back sick to UK. The strenuous work and the affects of gas have taken their toll. From being a strong 41 year old man he is recategorised as Cii, only fit for light duties.

In amongst the diaries was a cutting from "The Saturday Review" dated 14 April 1917 which tells of conditions in that same dugout in Bernafay Wood during the late summer of 1916: *An early Somme Battlefield by a Sergeant in Kitchener's:*

*The trees of Bernafay Wood had long ago surrendered their midsummer leaves. Corpses of trees and men mingled... and their limbs lay equally broken. We came at last to a clearing and descended to a trench.... we had not far to go before we turned sharp, descended a little passage, and found ourselves in a good dugout roofed with three layers of tree trunks very solidly set. This was our new aid post. The dugout was soon filled with wounded, who came crawling along the trenches or who were brought in by the stretcher bearers for treatment. To get them in and out of the dugout was difficult enough, but the real struggle was getting loaded stretchers across the mud, roots, and fallen timber in the wood.*

*Down in the dugout the M.O. worked cheerfully, though he looked on the verge of collapse from fatigue. Albert, one of our bearers, who was an excellent dresser, quite unperturbed under such conditions, remained to help. Albert had plenty of work, but I fancy he chiefly remembers searching continuously for the iodine bottle, which in the crowd and semi-darkness, was always getting lost. Immersed in our work, we came to feel that time had stopped, and that we were engaged in a void of blood and mud and noise. The creepers hanging down over the entrance moved in the draught from shell after shell. The crash of falling boughs...faces wild with terror appeared and disappeared at the entrance of the dugout. I went out on one occasion into the trench and saw the troops. The strain of enduring for hours together the peculiar nameless horror of this place, without any allaying occupation, was too much for flesh and blood. Then it was that something wonderful happened. In a lull of a few seconds a bird sang three notes. They were notes full and unbearably sweet, and had an effect indescribable upon those who heard them.*

## **Tales from the Tapes: Growing up in the Abbey orphanage. Part 2**

*This is the second instalment of the interview of Conrad McNamara made by Joe Scott 20/9/1997*

JS: Was there a bright side to life? What were the good things about the Abbey?

CM: The bright side to life in the Abbey Home was going on holiday for a fortnight every year, and also Christmas where the local Mr Brockbank used to dress up as Father Christmas. He'd come on Christmas Day, "Yo ho ho!" with his sack. He was a big man anyway, and he'd dish out all the Christmas presents.

JS: Oh, did you get something worth having?

CM: Before he came we'd all hang a pillow slips on the end of the bed at night and when you woke up in the morning they'd be full of toys. Whether they were donated by local people or bought, I don't know, but it didn't ever get to morning, it was always 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and everybody would wake up, well, I don't think we went to sleep really. There'd be toys all over the floor and everybody would be swapping their toys and chucking them at each other, so we didn't know what belonged to anybody.

JS: I'm glad to hear a bright side.

CM: That was nice and then when you came down to breakfast in a morning, they always used to ring a bell and when you got out of bed your first job was to strip your bed, turn your mattress over, make your bed and you all had these counterpanes with a crown and anchor on it was. You'd have to re-make your bed. Then he'd come up, he'd even put his hand down the bed to see if it was still warm to see if you had turned your mattress. If your mattress was cold, that meant you'd turned it over. They were quite big mattresses, actually, for little lads it was quite hard work to do that.

JS: You had to leave it all nice and neat.

CM: All nice and neat, yes, always comers - hospital corners on the beds...

JS: ...like the Army?

CM: Yes, but I say, come breakfast time, this Mr Brockbank used to come in and you all used to get a little brown envelope with the next year's new coins, all the silver coins of the next year...like tanners, shillings, half-crowns, two bobs, and that was by your plate with your cracker and everything else.

JS: Oh yes, there was a touch of humanity then.

CM: There was a touch of humanity but then the down side was you had it and looked at it and then it was taken off you and then you didn't see it any more, but whether that went into a holiday fund for your holidays, I don't know, I've got a feeling it did actually. Your fortnight's holiday, and that money lasted you for the fortnight's holiday, which in them days it would have done. You could buy sweets for a penny a bag.

JS: So you got the money in the end?

CM: I think we got it in the end.

JS: Oh well that's something. And this holiday - you went camping?

CM: We used to go camping - Marske and Saltburn. And if you'd been a good lad you were allowed to go on the local cattle truck, I think he was called Tom O'Loughlin, a local farmer or something, and you were considered a good lad, and you got two extra days holiday.'cos you'd go there and put all the tents up, like the marquees and bell tents, you were given a job doing that, but if you misbehaved you were told you couldn't go on it. But we enjoyed the camping, it was all under canvas and we did that for quite a lot of years.

JS: Mr Jones was there running it?

CM: Oh yes, he was there running it.

JS: But he was more humane on those occasions?

CM: I would say so, yes. In this orphanage you all had jobs to do, and even when you were in camp you still had jobs to do like walking round the camp perimeter and



JW Jones and son Derrick in garden at the Abbey c1951

picking up litter and things like that, and I can remember one occasion where my brother well, he finished up with a TB hip and he used to limp and he finished up with an operation with one leg shorter than the other. His job was to pick up this litter round the perimeter of the camp and his leg was hurting that bad he said he couldn't do it and two of these other officers in charge literally forced him one on each arm and they ran him round this camp perimeter and every time they saw a bit of paper they made him pick it up and he was screaming in pain. So there was a down side to it.

JS: A down side to that, yes. Did you - when you were there – did you bathe?

CM: Oh yes, we used to have bath night on a Friday night whereby you sat on a form and each in turn just moved up.....

JS: This is back in the Abbey now?

CM: This is in the Abbey, yes. Oh yes, on the holiday, we had open wooden stands with washbasins in them and you washed in cold water and that sort of thing.

JS: What I meant was, did you go swimming in the sea?

CM: Oh yes, we went swimming in the sea, yes. Oh yes, there was a lot of happy things then.

JS: And you played on the sands?

CM: Oh yes, we played on the sands, yes,

JS: I'm looking for a bit of the bright side you see. Well then, what about school, was that good or bad?

CM: Well, my school-days at Staveley School were very happy days really. And I had the cane off J C Robinson, you know, 'cos he was a bit of a strict disciplinarian, and I was of the opinion sometimes that as good as he was, I thought he enjoyed giving it to you and there seemed to be a time limit between each stroke which made you sweat for the next one. Which made me think he enjoyed doing it, I don't know. No I don't know.

JS: He left a good reputation in the village.

CM: Oh yes, I think so, he was very fair. And then of course I went to Windermere Grammar School. At that time I don't think we had to pass an eleven plus exam, although I think I did sit it, but whether I passed it or not, I can't remember.

JS: This would be after 1944, wouldn't it?

CM: Yes, when the Windermere Grammar School went comprehensive, but the first few years there were...well it was all good really at Windermere Grammar School, but you seemed to get the cane an awful lot more there. Well I did, for one simple reason. This orphanage, I hated it that much I'd do anything to get out of there, so I used to purposely get in detention on Saturday morning and go to school to get out of this place and then, after detention I'd go back to the orphanage and you'd either get put in the garden on forced labour and then you'd get the cane for being on detention and consequently when you went back on Monday morning you were in the Headmaster's study and you got the cane again.

JS: You can't avoid the cane, can you?

CM: No, so I purposely did it knowing I'd get the cane, just to get a bit of freedom from the place where I was.

JS: You went to school on the train, I suppose?

CM: No we went on the bus actually. And I'm not sure, I don't know whether the buses in those days were called Dallam Bus Service before Ribble, and I seem to remember in the early days that the bus didn't have pneumatic tyres, it has solid tyres.

JS: I'd be surprised at that in the 1940's~ - It would be a very old fashioned bus, then. So on Sundays you went to church?

CM: Yes, we'd go to church. Church in the morning, Sunday School in the afternoon and then church again at night. And if we didn't go to church for any reason, Mr

Jones used to either do his own service in the orphanage or we'd go to the local chapel.

JS: That's the Methodist Chapel near the War Memorial?

CM: Yes. He used to preach hell and damnation. If you did anything wrong, you'd go to hell. If you were OK you'd go to heaven. But it was more a case of frightening you than making you at ease, I thought. If something was forced on you...



Abbey children dressed for church c1951

JS: You had no choice....?

CM: You had no choice, no. I think it turned most people off ideas of the church, that it

was too sort of strict and later in their lives, I suppose not many of them went to church. I certainly didn't, although I still believe in God, but I don't go to church.

JS: You've not said anything about the food in the Abbey.

CM: Oh yes, the food was very basic - in the mornings you'd get... .

JS: Did you get enough?

CM: Oh yes. You got enough of what you had. And if you didn't like it, well you know, you were forced to eat it anyway. You weren't allowed to leave anything.

JS: Well, go through a typical day's meals.

CM: Well, a typical day's meals would be in the morning you'd get up and you'd have cold porridge and it always had lumps in it and you had to have salt in it....

JS: Not sugar...?

CM: Sometimes you had sugar, but that seemed to be once a month. You'd get a hot dinner at dinnertime - various vegetables and meat and what have you. The meat always seemed to be fatty and I could never eat fat, but you had to eat that and he sort of stood behind you and clouted you round the head if you didn't eat it, so you'd eat, but you'd be struggling - it used to make me feel sick did fat - but I'd still have to swallow it, We'd get maybe tapioca or sago pudding, which was another thing that made me feel sick. But tea times consisted of bread and jam mainly, I seemed to

have bread and jam all my life, didn't seem to be anything else. And you had a cup of tea, we had tin mugs and tin plates and we all sort of sat on one big communal table and before every meal you had to stand behind the chair and put your hands together and say Grace, which any member of the orphanage was picked on to say Grace. But there was one boy in particular there and he used to have epileptic fits and he used to stammer and one of the men in charge there always used to pick on him to say Grace and of course the lad couldn't get it out, 'cos he used to stammer. But children can be quite cruel and I suppose at the time we thought it was funny. It didn't bother us, but it obviously bothered him. We later on found out that the chap who used to make him say Grace, was also molesting this lad...

JS: Sexually?

CM: Sexually, yes. How long it went on for I don't know, but one weekend, when he punished him by putting him in the garden and he had to weed some carrots and things, and he didn't know a weed from a carrot so he pulled everything up so the chap started hitting him and he just sort of snapped and said he was going to report him for interfering with him. This bloke's name was Mr Burgess. But Mr Jones did sack him on the spot.

JS: Oh, he believed the lad then?

CM: Oh yes. He probably knew about it - perhaps there had been other examples. Yes, well, it was tried with me once - I can't remember the chap's name - he took me to his room and showed me various things he'd got in the Army, like commando daggers and this and that, and said 'have you ever seen any other sort of dagger?" and I said, "No", and he said 'Well, I'll show you a different one now" and he got his penis out of his trousers and started to touch and I said "I don't want to know anything about that", and I just ran out of the room. But whether anything happened to him I don't know.

JS: It happens today and it happened in those days, didn't it. So you were going through the meals and you got tea - any supper later on?

CM: Yes we used to get supper - you either had bread with lard on it, well, it was bread and dripping, but it was lard really. But once a month you had, what they called, flapjack or nutty flip, which was some sort of pastry with syrup and cornflakes on it.

JS: I know the stuff - and that was a treat?

CM: That was a treat, it was good yes. And always I can remember at Staveley School we used to make the treacle toffee and bring that home from school

JS: Oh a "toffee join"?

CM: Yes, a toffee join. We used to bring that home and always enjoyed that. So that was quite a happy moment.

*To be continued*