

Family History Research Group

Newsletters 6-10

Contents

6. War at sea – *Janice Parr*
What's in a name – *Ken Byrom*
7. Guest of the Reich – *Graham Jarvis*
8. Croston remembers *Kath Almond*
A young life lost – *Janice Parr*
9. After the war – *Christine Garrity and Janice Parr*
10. The happiest days of your life? (Memories of school in the 1950s) – *Anne Sheppard*

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Six



WAR AT SEA

Janice Parr

My dad Frank Parr didn't make it home from the navy until November 1945. Just before his return, he was seriously considering an offer of promotion and a teaching role at a Naval College but this would have committed him to a set period of service. When he was about to accept, he heard a rumour that Able Bodied Seamen were about to be demobilised so he rapidly joined the queue to leave, he just wanted more than anything else to go home.



In 1941 he realised that he was due to be enlisted so volunteered to join the navy, he was given a dispensation to stay at home until after the birth of his first child. My brother Frank decided to make an appearance in August and three days later my dad presented himself at H.M.S. Ganges at Harwich, a shore-based facility for new entrants. After initial training he spent the rest of the war on board H.M.S. Loosestrife, a Flower- class corvette used to escort merchant ships across the North Atlantic.

Corvettes were not the most comfortable ships to be on, they had the reputation of challenging those with the best sea legs and the strongest stomachs. Most of the time Dad was extremely cold, often very wet and there was always the constant threat of his ship being taken out by a U-boat. The design of Corvettes was based on

one used for fishing vessels which were then fitted out with war equipment. The early ones were small, carried a crew of eighty and were never intended to cross the Atlantic or stay at sea for extended periods.

Service on the Flowers in the North Atlantic was typically cold, wet, monotonous, and uncomfortable. Every dip of the forecastle into an oncoming wave was followed by a cascade of water into the well deck amidships. Men at action stations were drenched with spray, and water entered living spaces through hatches opened to access ammunition magazines. Interior decks were constantly wet and condensation dripped from the overheads. The head (or sanitary toilet) was drained by a straight pipe to the ocean; and a reverse flow of the icy North Atlantic would cleanse the backside of those using it during rough weather. By 1941 corvettes carried twice as many crewmen as anticipated in the original design. Dad was very grateful to have use of a hammock in the forecastle where the crew slept; the floor was usually awash with water. The inability to store perishable food meant a reliance on preserved food such as corned-beef and powdered potato for all meals. It was only when the ship was in port that diet became more interesting. Conditions on board deteriorated even further when large numbers of survivors were occasionally picked up mid-Atlantic.

Operation Neptune began on the June 5th 1944 when minesweepers began the extremely important task of creating safe channels through the English Channel. The Loosestrife was one of the ships used to escort them. Unfortunately, on D-Day itself she became grounded on a sand bank and until re-floated remained protected by a smoke screen.

A photo of my brother Frank and Mum taken in 1944, a copy was probably sent to our dad





*Frank Parr with the crew of
HMS Loosestrife*

Dad came home with a grand plan to restart his house decorating business and to open a shop selling paint and wallpaper. Little sprucing up of homes had taken place for several years so this would have been a great idea if only there had been something available to decorate with or sell. It would take some time for production to be fully reinstated.



The business eventually started to do well and the family finances began to recover when quite unplanned two more children came along. Mum always said that I was a mistake and John was an even bigger one but once it happened they had no regrets.

Even though V.E. Day wasn't celebrated as a family, there were many occasions in the following years when we did all party together.



Some of our members seem determined to find a genetic connection to nobility!

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Ken Byrom

All my Byrom ancestors back to 1841 lived and worked in the Haydock area of St Helens. I haven't established a definite link to earlier Byroms but in the 1500s, these Byroms were from Lowton, they had a Manor House called Byrom Hall. They bought Parr Hall, situated in Haydock from the Parr family. William Parr the 1st Marquis of Northampton was the owner at the time and was the brother of Catherine Parr, 6th wife of Henry the 8th.

By the mid-1600s it seems that the Byrom family had been producing many lunatics, a condition which persisted, so that Samuel, the last of these Byroms squandered his inheritance and died in 1741 at York Castle.



Family History Research Group

Newsletter Seven



Graham Jarvis

This is an abridged version of Jan's grandad's time in captivity following his capture at Dunkirk on 28th May 1940.

He dictated it to Jan as part of a much longer school project that she had to complete in November 1971

A Guest of the Reich

My wife's grandad was born Richard Law on 1st June 1908. He worked from an early age as a driver at Leyland Motors Ltd. and was known to his friends as Dick. In May 1939 rumours of war were rife and Dick and some friends signed up to be drivers in the Territorial Army. He was 31 years of age with a wife and three daughters aged 7, 6 and 18 months at home.

Training began in early August and on Friday 1st September he was required to report for duty and things began to move on apace. War was declared on Sunday 3rd and on 25th his regiment left in convoy for a number of camps in the UK, before boarding their transport vessel on 26th and arriving in France on 28th September 1939. They spent their first three nights in Nantes before moving to the village of Gondrecourt on the Pas-de Calais near Lille. They were to remain there for 9 months through one of the hardest winters on record. In February Dick was granted two week's leave, returning to camp on 28th February. This was the last time he saw his wife and children for 5 weary years.

Finally, on 10th May they left camp in convoy, heading for the town of Louvain, about 15 miles north east of Brussels. Progress was slow as they met with Belgian soldiers and civilians travelling in the opposite direction in an effort to escape the advancing

German forces. It very quickly became apparent that the German advance could not be halted and a withdrawal towards Brussels commenced. The basic rank and file simply followed orders and only realised how bad things actually were when they neared Dunkirk and saw thousands of infantrymen waiting on the beaches to be taken off by boat.



On 28th May, whilst moving their battery through the streets of Dunkirk to find a better vantage point to fire on the enemy, Dick's troop ran into a German Panzer with supporting infantrymen. They were captured and made prisoners of war! The following morning all prisoners began the forced

march back to Germany at a rate averaging 30 kilometres every day. Prisoners were subjected to whipping, kicking, punching and beatings with rifle butts as German guards encouraged them on the march. At Cambrai they were piled into cattle trucks and taken to the town of St. Vith on the German border. A week later they were again loaded into cattle trucks and transported across Germany to the Polish town of Lamsdorf, and the infamous Stalag 8B (later renamed 344). This was to be Dick's home for the next 5 years. This part of Silesia was an industrial hub with coal mines, paper mills, cement factories, textile mills and the like, and the labour was drawn from the camp.



Stalag 344

Daily life in the camp began and ended with food which was largely inedible, but was welcomed as many men lost half their body weight within months of their arrival.

Each prisoner was supposed to have 300 grams per day but this was a rarity and malnutrition was commonplace.

For their first months of captivity the prisoners worked long, hard days doing physical, manual tasks. Then one day Dick and a group of 17 prisoners were loaded onto a train and travelled throughout the day, eventually arriving near Hindenburg to work in the Hermann Goering mine. They worked in the mine for almost two years. There were, however, benefits to this work as the men were better fed and received Red Cross parcels every week. They also had a shower every day, which was a real blessing for them.



Red Cross parcels arriving at the camp



Jan's grandad is the third from the right



Jan's grandad is on the back row far right, note the Canadian Air Force uniform

Early in January 1943 Dick fell seriously ill and was unconscious for seven days. When he awoke, he was told that he'd had pleurisy and pneumonia and had been nursed back to health by the German doctor who saved his life. When Dick was fit to leave the hospital the doctor issued him with papers which stated that he was no longer fit for mine work. He was 7 stone, and was returned to the main camp at Stalag 8B.

In the spring of 1943 Dick was once again fit for work and joined the prisoners working in the A. G. Paper Factory in Krappitz. His job was to repair broken and leaking pipes, but together with his comrades they took every opportunity to sabotage the machinery whenever possible. Fortunately, they were rarely punished as the German guards always blamed the Russians for any failings.

Punishment remained brutal for even minor offences, but when two of the inmates sneaked out of the camp one evening to meet two Polish girls they were machine gunned on their return and their bodies left in the field outside the camp as an example to others who might have had similar ideas.

A few months later Dick and his working party were returned to their main camp at Stalag VIII B, now renamed Stalag 344. It was here that Dick met Hank Bertrand at Christmas 1943. Hank was a Canadian who joined the RAF to fly bombers, but was shot down over Northern Finland.

Infantry and RAF prisoners were always segregated in the camp because RAF prisoners were renowned for their escape attempts, and Hank was no different. As escape from a working party was easier than it was from the main camp Hank proposed to change clothes and identity with Dick in order to be allowed out of the main camp on a work detail, thus offering better opportunity to escape.



The Barrack Commander was informed of the proposed switch and on Boxing Day 1943 Dick became Sergeant Pilot H. L. Bertrand, having never even set foot in an aircraft! The two men spent a few hours together learning each other's family history and background and then returned to the other's hut and bed. Only a small group of personnel knew about the swap so if questioned Dick would simply answer that he was from 144 Squadron and then offer to brew up ... simple but effective! This was the happiest period of Dick's captivity and he was fully accepted into the camp's RAF community, even joining the RAF choir and performing in productions of Yeoman of the Guard and The Mikado.

However, one day the inevitable happened. The real Hank had made several futile attempts to escape, but following his last one he was to be brought before the Gestapo for interrogation. Hank got word to Dick that he was bound to fail the interrogation so both men agreed to swap back to their genuine identities, which they did one evening after lights out. Dick was taken before two Gestapo officers from Berlin for interrogation. All his papers and belongings were laid out on a table before him, but following a few hours of questioning and a few cuffs across the face he was returned to his hut and the camp officer who had sent for the Gestapo was reprimanded for wasting their time. When the fuss died down the two men swapped identities again.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1944 messages were filtering into the camp via illegal radios, and an air of quiet confidence was felt by the POWs. They cheered as squadrons of Flying Fortresses with fighter escorts flew over in broad daylight to bomb the German towns and cities. At night they watched the bombing of Breslau, about 40 kilometres away, as the sky was lit up by incendiary bombs and they heard the 'crumping' as the bombs exploded.

On 22nd January 1945 orders were issued by the Camp Kommandant that all POWs were to assemble the following morning with all their possessions and be ready for a long march back into Germany. Having experienced forced marches before, Dick discarded everything of no sentimental or practical value and carried only warm clothing and good footwear, as temperatures often fell to up to minus 25 degrees

centigrade. With a loaf and a small portion of cheese in his haversack he began the march, with every intention of conserving his rations for as long as possible. 250 miles into the march it soon became apparent that no more rations were available and men fell ill or exhausted and were left to die by the wayside. Dick felt that this was one of the worst periods of his captivity and only the thought of his wife and children kept him going.

Eventually they arrived at Gorlitz near Frankfurt in a camp that Dick described as a cesspool of humanity. Only quarter rations were issued, and for the three days they remained in that camp it was literally survival of the fittest. Next day an English officer informed them they were to be evacuated again in the morning, and march even deeper into Germany. He strongly advised that no attempts to escape should be made as they were in the line of the Russian advance and no quarter would be given, that's if the men hadn't already been slaughtered in the expected artillery bombardment. Dick and Hank decided to take their chance, and with a couple of other inmates they gathered all the food they could find and hid in the roof space of one of the huts.

After 12 days the men ventured out of their hiding place and came across a couple of Serbian Red Cross officers who took them back to their compound and offered them shower, food and clean clothes. They then arranged for Dick's group to be transferred to the Italian compound where an officer explained that if they were prepared to take the risk they would each be given Italian identities and Alpine Troopers uniforms. The Italians in the camp were to be released in a few days as the Germans had no more use for them. So once again Dick traded his identity, this time becoming Soligavic Armadayo. He was of Italian descent but had grown up in England and therefore knew little Italian, but had joined the Alpine Troopers when Mussolini had called for volunteers. Fortunately, Dick was never challenged about his lack of Italian because he was so proficient and conversed easily in German.

At the end of March 1945 Dick and Hank were put on a train and taken via Prague and Linz to Salzburg, with little or no food, and then marched a further 100 miles to

Innsbruck. Here the Italians commandeered a train and crossed into the north of their own country and on to the town of Bolzano. As they disembarked they spotted an American jeep and ran towards the Sergeant and Private who were in the vehicle, who gave them some sausage meat and a loaf. They were driven into Balzano where they were interrogated by an Intelligence Officer before being offered a shower, clean underclothes and a new American uniform before being whisked off for a very welcome meal.

On 14th May Dick's wife, Lucy May, received a letter from the Royal Artillery stating that, "I am pleased to inform you that your husband, Number 774744 Richard Law, has escaped from enemy custody, and is now reported to have reached Southern Italy. He is in Allied hands and will be brought back to the United Kingdom as soon as suitable transport can be arranged."

However, Dick's journey home was long and circuitous. He and Hank went their separate ways with Dick being flown to Florence where he was turned over to British soldiers who took him to Rome and then on to Naples. From there he was put aboard an old Norwegian cargo vessel, the Berengford, and sailed to Gibraltar and then on to Glasgow, from where he went by train to Bovington, near Bournemouth for a full medical examination. The final

leg of his journey was to Preston Station via London Euston where he was met by his wife and three daughters who had not seen their husband and father for five years. They had a lot of catching up to do!

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Eight



This was going to be the last of our V.E. Day/WW2 newsletters but I know there is at least one more article still to be written. This issue is dedicated to those who didn't survive to celebrate.

Croston Remembers US Pilot Second Lieut. Kenneth V Burnett 19.12.1921 – 15.01.1943

Kath Almond

On a cold winter's evening on the 15th January 1943, three planes prepared to leave Speke Aerodrome to fly to Burtonwood Aerodrome. The pilots were three young Americans, but only two arrived at their destination.

The Operations Officer left first in his P-47 plane, followed by Second Lieutenant Kenneth V Burnett in his P-38, and Lieutenant Luber also in a P-38. It is not known why, but Second Lieutenant Burnett lost sight of the other two planes. In the dark and not being at all familiar with the area, he would have been trying to find his way using the aircraft's instruments.

A local farmer, acting as Special Constable, saw the aircraft flying round, switching on his lights as if looking for somewhere to land. At approximately 18.00 pm he said the

machine came down in a field, crashed through a large thorn hedge on the river bank and came to rest partly in the River Douglas. There was a loud explosion and the machine burst into flames.

The Fire Service from Leyland attended at 19.15, and the fire was extinguished. Shortly after, the body of the pilot was recovered, and handed over to the RAF authorities at 21.00pm.

Second Lieutenant Kenneth V Burnett, born in Kansas, USA on 19th December 1921, was just 22 years old when he lost his life.

The Second World War was still raging. We had also lost many young men on land, sea and air. The plight of this young man was soon forgotten amidst our own troubles. That was over 75 years ago, and the incident has faded with the passing of time. The names of the men we lost from our village are named on our War Memorial, but Kenneth Burnett's body was taken back to America. In 1948 his father applied for the body to be placed in the grave of his mother, in Kansas. Kenneth Burnett had no siblings.



When it was mentioned that before the incident was lost in the mists of time, a plaque should be placed by our memorial in his memory, a local resident, who was 8 years old at the time of the crash, offered to pay for the plaque. Despite the Coronavirus lockdown, we put the plaque up for VE day.



A photo of the event will be taken when we can stand together again, and sent to Kenneth Burnett's nearest living relative, his second cousin, Nadene Snyder, in the USA.



A Young Life Lost

Janice Parr

One of the young men from Croston to lose their lives during World War 2 was Robert Edgar Snaylam. He was the son of solicitor Richard Snaylam, the nephew of my uncle Fred and the grandson of Robert Snaylam of Bretherton. Robert Snaylam is the man I told you rather a lot about at our last meeting, he made a fortune after securing the contract to clear out the manure from Irish cattle boats coming into Liverpool and then selling it on to fertilise the fields of West Lancashire and beyond.

Robert Edgar Snaylam was always known by his middle name, possibly to avoid confusion with others in the rather large Snaylam family living in the Bretherton and Croston area, his grandmother Magdalene gave birth to thirteen children!



Croston lost thirty-six men in World War 1 and twelve in World War 2, a lot for a small village with a population of approximately 2500 residents. Edgar Snaylam was one of the twelve who lost their lives in World War 2; his name appears on the War Memorial as R. Edgar Snaylam.

*Image downloaded from the IWM website
© R Whit Wham 2000 (WMR-564)*

Before the war Edgar had led quiet privileged life; while in his teens he visited New York twice with his family and was educated at Hutton Grammar School.

In 1939 he had a bright future ahead of him following his father into the legal profession. He was working as an articled clerk and was living with his mother and sister at 19 Highfield Road, Richard died the previous year.

Address	No.	Name	Sex	DOB	DOB	Notes
9. Heathhead Rd	267	Gawell James	M	14. 8. 73	74	Single & living in a...
		do Jack A	F	22. 4. 78	74	Unpaid domestic duties
6. Heathhead Rd	268	Blakeman Jane	F	16. 2. 61	74	Single & living in a...
		do Janet Ann	F	27. 2. 85	74	Unpaid & duties
6. Heathhead Rd	269	Blakeman William	M	26. 2. 79	74	Unpaid domestic duties
		do Sarah E	F	16. 2. 01	74	Unpaid domestic duties
1. Long Lane Heathhead Rd	270	Robinson Conway	M	24. 8. 01	74	Married & living in a...
		do Sarah	F	16. 1. 99	74	Unpaid & duties
17. Heathhead Rd	271	Edmond Jane A	F	8. 8. 00	74	Unpaid domestic duties
		Jones Ann	F	10. 10. 11	74	Unpaid domestic duties
19. Heathhead Rd	272	Hutton Winnifred Myra	F	26. 8. 78	74	Unpaid & duties
		do Robert E	M	1. 4. 71	74	Unpaid domestic duties
		do	F	29. 6. 79	74	Unpaid domestic duties

The 1939 Register is held at the National Archive but can be found digitised on Ancestry and Find My Past

Edgar’s mother Winnifred later became a WPC and his sister, also named Winnifred was a solicitor’s clerk.

As war broke out Edgar was a member of the R.A.F. Volunteer Reserve, it is likely that he joined while at university. In 1943 his Squadron was based in Pakistan flying cargo planes delivering supplies into Burma.

He became unwell and passed away within a short period of time; he was laid to rest at a cemetery in Lahore. The burial records note that he died of acute anterior poliomyelitis, a letter home dated only a few days prior to his death makes no mention of him being ill.

The record is digitised on Find My Past

(Being an extract from the Register of Deaths)

Serial No.	When Died			Cause of death	Place to which Buried	From to which Brought				
	Year	Month	Day							
1162	June	10	Robert Edgar Snaylam	1135719 A. G. 7. 307 R. A. F.	1943	June	10	Bygones and Buried in Lahore	W. F. Giddes	Chaplain Lahore
1163	June	17	Robert Edgar Snaylam	1135719 A. G. 7. 307 R. A. F.	1943	June	17	Bygones and Buried in Lahore	W. F. Giddes	Chaplain Lahore

EXAMINED.
[Signature]
 Head Clerk
 District Registry Lahore

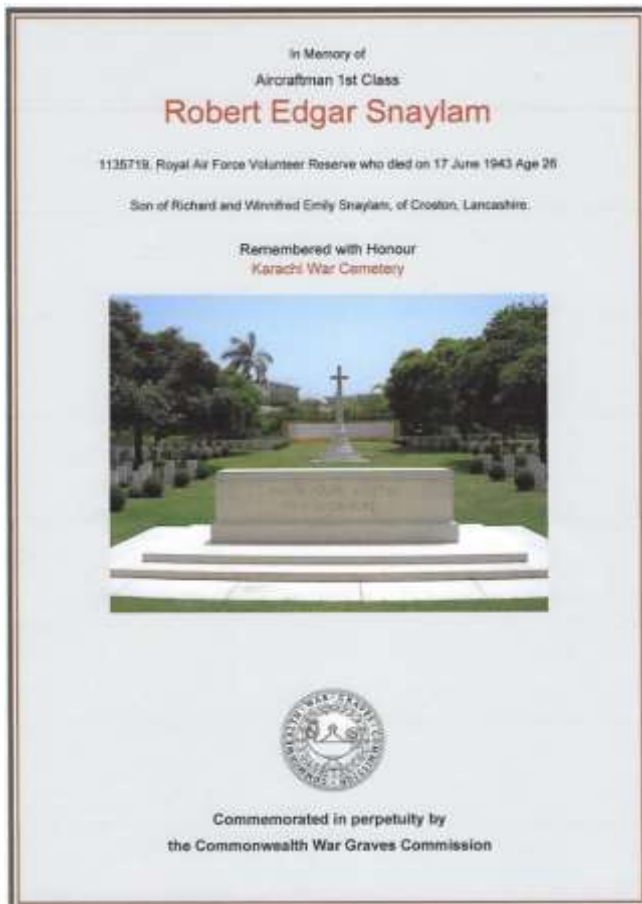
I, J. A. Mee, do hereby certify that the above are true and correct copies of all the entries in the above register and made between the 1st day of April and the 31st day of June in the year 1943. The names of the deceased are for by these.

Place: Lahore Cantonment
 Dated the 7th day of July 1943

Signature: J. A. Mee
 Designation: Chaplain of Lahore Cantonment

R. F. W. - P. O. No. 10757-10-10-43-100

His remains were later transferred to the Military Cemetery at Karachi where his name appears on the War Memorial.



Re-internment record for Robert Edgar Snaylam

The certificate was downloaded from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website

Graves Registration Report Form.					
COUNTRY: PAKISTAN		REPORT No.:		SCHEDULE No. 42	
PLACE OF BURIAL: KIRACHI BAR DISTRICT					
Land belongs to: _____					
The following are listed here: _____					
				Signature: _____	Date: _____
P.R.C. No.	No. and Rank	Initials, Name and Honours	Unit	Date of Death	For work on
1	1007 Captain	A.M. CHALICE	The Seaforth Highlanders, Attached 10th Frontier Force Regiment	6.6.43.	C.H.
2	11007 Lieut.	J.N. DUNN	Royal Engineers	12.5.43.	C.H.
3	518241 Pte.	S.G.M. SMITH	The King's Own Royal Regt.	22.5.43.	C.H.
4	Major	T.W. GARFIELD	5th Punjab Regiment	18.3.45.	C.H.
5	1101131 Opl.	A. JORDAN	Royal Air Force	6.12.43.	C.H.
6	1635204 A.C.F.	H.J. DEAN	Royal Air Force	7.1.44.	C.H.
7	1506753 A.C.F.	D.W. PIPPER	Royal Air Force	23.5.43.	C.H.
8	11001 Captain	H.V. JACKSON	Royal Army Service Corps	10.6.43.	C.H.
9	1155715 A.C.F.	H.E. SHAYLAN	Royal Air Force	17.5.43.	C.H.
10	10677922 Sgt.	G. WILLIAMS	Royal Army Ordnance Corps	25.7.43.	C.H.
11	2151692 Sqr.	R.L. WILCOCK	Royal Engineers	26.10.42.	C.H.
12	2151954 Sqr.	J.E. MATTHEWS	Royal Engineers	26.10.42.	C.H.

Grave registration form - the record can be found on the CWGC website

Edgar's name also appears on the Roll of Honour displayed at Hutton Grammar School; forty-eight former pupils lost their lives in World War 2.

With permission from the property owners, it is planned to place a small plaque on the houses of each of the men from Croston who lost their lives in WW1 and WW2. The project is funded by donations to Croston Remembers via the Croston Together charity set up after the great Boxing Day flood of 2015.

World War 2 was the deadliest military conflict in history. An estimated total of 70–85 million people perished. This estimate includes military deaths from all causes, civilian deaths directly from military action, crimes against humanity and civilian deaths from famine and disease directly attributed to the conflict.



Family History Research Group

Newsletter Nine



Post War Memories

Christine Garrity

My husband Mike has been telling me about one of his earliest childhood memories.

He was born in Horwich in 1950 and vividly remembers being taken on the bus as a 3-year-old child, to Horwich Council Offices. Here, he would have to strip down to his underpants and sit in a circle with about a dozen other children of a similar age, around a UV lamp.

They would face the lamp for several minutes and then turn their backs for a further few minutes. The only acknowledgement to health and safety was that the children were given goggles to wear to protect their eyes.

This strange ritual happened on a number of occasions, ostensibly to help prevent rickets, which was rife following the deprivation suffered as a result of shortages during the war years.



Mothers would then queue to have a thick orange concentrate decanted into bottles which they brought along with them. Mike believes the orange was imported from America.

Still on the subject of fruit, he also remembers his mother giving him a banana for the first time, but he had no idea what to do with it and had to be shown how to get inside.

Don't Forget the Cod Liver Oil!!!

Janice Parr

Oh, how I dreaded having to take that vile cod liver oil even though my mum would have a spoonful of jam at the ready to take the taste away. In Leyland it was collected from the baby clinic along with powdered milk and orange juice. The cod liver oil was superseded by cod liver oil and malt, not as nasty but still unpleasant. The experience began with a sweet stickiness but followed by a fishy aftertaste.

The Welfare Food Scheme was introduced by the Ministry of Food in December 1941 to supplement wartime rations for all children, expectant and nursing mothers and also certain elderly people. The foods concerned were cod liver oil, concentrated orange juice and vitamin tablets. A National Milk Scheme to ensure, with Treasury aid, the supply of milk for mothers and babies had already been introduced in July 1940.

During the post-war period, the Welfare Food Scheme continued for young children and mothers whilst rationing was in force. After rationing ceased in July 1954, these services were provided through the Family Allowances Scheme as "benefits in kind", and the Milk in Schools Scheme which was introduced in 1934 and administered by the Board of Education. This Scheme eventually became the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and later the Ministry of Education.

In April 1955 the Ministry of Food and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were amalgamated to form the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. As from 1st

October 1955 the Minister of Health assumed responsibility for welfare foods, but the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods acted as procurement agent.

The information was taken from the National Archive

Poster for the Welfare foods programme (which entitled all infants and expectant mothers to free milk, orange juice and cod liver oil) c. 1950

The image is from The People's Museum website



School Days



This is a photograph of one of our members, who do you think it might be?

There will be a story to go with it next week.

Can you remember anything interesting about school in the 1950's and 60's or a school photograph you are willing to share?

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Ten



THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE? (Memories of school in the 1950s)

Anne Sheppard

I have a photograph of me aged five with my little brother John aged two. I am dressed in my school uniform which was bottle green, ready to start school at the convent prep school in Preston. I can't imagine why my parents thought it was a good idea to send me there. It was a ten mile journey by bus and they were struggling financially as they tried to make a go of running a smallholding and paying a mortgage. A "big girl" who attended the grammar school on the same site would take me to school on the bus and bring me home. I will never forget the first day. The building was cold, dark and gloomy and these strange creatures, certainly not human, were the nuns. Dressed in long black robes and veils which flapped in the draughts, they spent their days shouting and slapping the small children in their charge. Although I could read and write a little I was always in trouble. Writing was done with a dip in pen and ink from an inkwell at the corner of the desk. Invariably I smudged and blotted my work and a swift blow across the knuckles with the edge of a ruler followed. School dinners were disgusting. On one particular day the "Irish stew" consisted of lumps of fat in watery grey potato slush. I couldn't eat it and was made to stand on my chair. All the other children left and I



was alone. Periodically the nun returned to try to make me eat it, telling me that I wouldn't be allowed to go home until I did. Eventually I forced down some of the congealed mess and was promptly sick. I was then smacked for being sick on purpose. I hated school and then I was ill with a persistent cough. Mum took me to the doctors who diagnosed "schoolitis" and said that I had to be made to go. The cough got worse and eventually Mum took me back to the doctors. I had pneumonia. While recovering at home another mother spoke to Mum and told her that every morning I would stand screaming and clutching at the railings outside school until a nun would drag me in slapping me as she went. I never went back to that school but was sent to a fairly local primary school in Kirkham - still a bus ride away but a complete contrast. The school catered for children from aged five and, if you didn't pass your eleven plus, you remained at the school until the age of fifteen and then you left school. The reception teacher was lovely. She was kind and we wrote with chalk on slates so mistakes could be rubbed away. There were sand trays and wonderfully a bookcase full of books I hadn't read. As I was already a good reader, on fine days I was allowed to take three non-readers out into the playground to hear them read or read stories to them. I was in my element! The next year was a big shock. The teacher was a small, stocky, grey haired woman with a strict manner. Maths, and in particular times tables were my undoing. Every day she would make the children stand in a circle while she prowled round the outside with two rulers at the ready. She would fire tables questions -6x4, 8x5 etc. at each in turn and if you hesitated or got it wrong, which I invariably did, you were hit round the back of your knees with the double ruler. I was so frightened I just waited to be hit and I still don't know my tables! The teacher in the next year was deranged; these days she would have been sacked. A youngish woman with an evil temper, I can still see her dragging a boy out of his desk and knocking him to the floor and then kicking him repeatedly. All for some minor misdemeanour! My brother also attended the same school after me and she locked him in the PE cupboard for the afternoon when he corrected the name of a dinosaur that she had written on the board. It was the only time that my parents went to the school to complain. Then there came the chain smoker. I say that with hindsight. She was forever leaving the classroom for a break appointing one of her favourites in charge to report on anybody who spoke. Needless to say, this "teacher's pet" always named those she didn't like or had quarrelled with and then they were caned. The injustice of it rankled! All of the teachers had canes which were displayed on their desks for action at the slightest provocation. I feel quite sorry for

the next teacher who had two years to teach in a large classroom; the eleven plus year and the year below. A peroxide blonde of uncertain temper, I can only remember being caned twice, once for doing a painting she considered messy and once for accidentally cutting a hole in a doll's dress I was sewing. Occasionally I was selected to wash out the paint trays, a responsible task as it involved going into the teachers' toilets where there were washbasins. Our toilets were outside across the yard and had no washing facilities. Another memory at the Christmas party was being chosen to carry a hurricane lamp across the yard to the toilets to provide enough light for a group of younger children-no Health and Safety then! In the eleven plus year the headmaster, a reasonable human being, took an extra session after school for those deemed capable of possibly passing the exam. I was included. We did practice papers in Maths (hopeless!), English (reasonable and enjoyable) and General Knowledge (I loved it!). I still have a ragbag mind full of useless snippets of general knowledge but useful for pub quizzes! The school served a poor area and many children were malnourished and poorly clad. I can remember poorer children in torn and dirty clothes with bare feet in clogs though they could make impressive sparks in the playground with them! The children who remained at the school quite frequently bullied the little ones. My little brother was obviously very clever (still is!) and got picked on regularly by one particular girl. He would come crying to me and I would get into a fight with her. We both often got caned but I never said anything at home. When I passed my eleven plus, which was something of a surprise, I ended up back at the same convent school that I had attended at the age of five. I was now in the grammar school and less afraid of the nuns though I still hated school. So "the happiest days of your life" which I was repeatedly told by adults when a child-not for me they weren't!



So, who do you think this is in her Whitsun outfit? The photo was taken in the late 1950's. Find out in the next newsletter.