

(Taken from 'A Family Mosaic', a biographical part of a detailed family history.

## **PART II                      Personal and Autobiographica**

### **The Keld Years 1935-1942**

I cannot write about Keld without emotion. It formed the backdrop to my life, was my spiritual refuge in difficult times during my girlhood, and has lived in my heart for as long as I remember. We moved there from Shipley in late September 1935. It must have been towards the end of the month because the Chapel was decorated for the Harvest Festival and I am alleged to have exclaimed: 'How kind of them to make it look so pretty for my birthday!' I'm not so sure that I believe this, but that was the story; it was my third birthday and life had really begun. I hope that you will forgive me for writing at length in this section and that you will understand that I carry with me not just a pocketful of memories but whole bags of them. So there follows a kind of continuous flow of experience here, not simply a chronological account. With my parents, and later on my own, I revisited Keld at least annually until 1950 after we left in 1942, then intermittently over the next fifteen years or so. At other times but rather less regularly we managed to get there until after my father's death in 1966, after which there were until recently only a few rare visits. (Better now when we manage an annual visit.) All these gathered memories have amalgamated into my knowledge of this place, hopelessly wound into my life. This is very personal, but in my defence I have also attempted to give an account of a world that has very nearly gone, so you may regard it as social history if you like.

Even in those days between the Wars this village towards the head of Swaledale was well loved and cherished among those who knew the Yorkshire Dales and already there were a number of appreciative books describing the landscape, villages and people. Enthusiastic walkers and campers, fishermen and writers, broadcasters, artists and professional families from the cities would come for holidays and recreation. They would generally stay in a farmhouse which took in visitors, or at the Cathole Inn, sometimes at Butt House which was also the Post Office, but one or two, like the Redmans from distant Rochester, bought a cottage for their own use, and a few actually retired there. These included two lady missionaries who had worked in India and called their home in the village 'Patna'. Another house less than a mile away near Thorns farm is said to have provided a refuge for a famous actress and the name Marie Tempest was, I think, mentioned although it may have been her sister who came there in the 1930s.

All these visitors and incomers, however interesting they may have been, were peripheral to the real life of village and dale which had for centuries and until relatively recent times been almost entirely devoted to the mining of lead and coal supported by some sheep and subsistence farming. Evidence of these mines is still to be seen but their earlier importance is easily forgotten. Coal from the Tan Hill Pits is known to have supplied Richmond Castle in 1384, and later it was transported from there to many places in Westmorland and Upper Wensleydale; the tracks which were created then can often be detected in present paths. By the end of the nineteenth century the mines had mostly fallen

into disuse and sheep farming had come into its own as the way of life there. Like mining it was a tough life, but it was a healthier one and most certainly improved the landscape. Nevertheless, in the 1930s people still remembered the mining days and in a BBC North broadcast in April 1939 which involved my mother one old and retired gamekeeper from Gunnerside commented that *"There's nothing like having a good steady industry like the old lead mines. I've seen when the bridge over the Gunnerside beck was black with men and boys in their best clothes on the third Thursday of the month."*

The third Thursday was the monthly pay day but when asked whether this may have led to hardship he pointed out that there wasn't much to spend money on then and that anyway if you worked in a good mine *"the masters paid on results and there are tricks in all trades"*, and recalled that one month his father drew forty pounds.

### **Place and People**

The Swaledale farming families, who lived in the villages or were scattered up and down the dale or even in lonely farmsteads on fell and moor-side, had lived there for many generations and spoke a dialect which still used some of the vocabulary left behind by their Viking ancestors, counting their sheep in the old way, which began 'Yan, Twa, Tethera' and a shirt was called a sark, a gate a yat. Once more Arnold had taken on a church which had been used to another and older minister: Mr. Gunton, now retired and living far away. The congregation, having made its choice, waited and reserved judgement, although Jeannie's rather delicate and youthful appearance led one of the farmers to remark: *"Ee! Tha's nobbut a li'l lass!"* These were the people, tough minded, courageous and hardy, close bonded in their still remote area, to whom Arnold and Jeannie were to commit themselves with heart and soul for the next seven years, years which also informed my young life.

Farming in Swaledale was tough, very nearly subsistence then. Keld may look sheltered in its hollow but is nevertheless nearly 1100 feet above sea level, and no month is reliably clear of frost even now at a time of apparent global warming. The climate was known for its severity in winter, one writer then describing how *'the deep drifted snow long overstay's its welcome, and the impassable roads imprison the dalesmen during long stretches in the winter months'*. One farm, Park Lodge, is actually within the village, and is still run by the Rukin family, but most were scattered in hamlets and on hillsides up to three or more miles distant, high in the fells or further up the dale, and most of the families were related to each other. Apart from the Rukins there were notably the Aldersons and Metcalfes, the Calverts and the Clarksons, the Whiteheads and the Thornborrows as well as one or two whose origins may have been further afield: the Hutchinsons, who may have come from Kirkby Stephen a century earlier, and more certainly the Haykins. A few of them were Methodists but the Congregational Chapel was in the heart of the village along with the school and the Village Literary Institute which were Chapel property. The Institute contained the Reading Room where there were books and newspapers provided on one floor, and in another large room above there was a billiards table. The building stands on a slight slope and beneath it there was room for a small garage, where we kept our car, and a work shed next to it; in the previous century the minister had kept his horse and trap there. The Manse, adjoining the Chapel, has a small railed garden in front and faces the Institute. At right angles to both buildings stood the village school and these four buildings form three sides of a small open space; the road then passes beside the Manse and downhill to where the rest of the village spreads out, and stops. The road which leads to the Dale Head and beyond into Westmorland by-passes the village on higher ground, so to arrive in Keld requires forethought. It would be trite to describe the

village as 'nestling' in its hollow, but it is true that it is almost hidden and out of sight, away from the main road, grey stone houses perched above a narrow ravine where the Swale plunges on its way towards the next lot of waterfalls. The houses that face you as you reach the bottom stand with their backs to the crag above the river, and I'm sorry to say that this provided a useful waste disposal route for some of the household rubbish, which included bags containing unwanted litters of farm kittens. That upset me quite a lot when I found out.

### **History of the Chapel**

My father liked to say that all the churches to which he had ministered dated back to the time of the Great Ejectment of non-conformists in 1662, but there appears to be no certainty about the foundation of the Chapel at Keld, for the exact date of its origin is unknown. The present building may be the latest to stand on the site of a mediaeval hermitage which preceded Chapel mentioned by Leyland in 1540, possibly one of the two mediaeval Chapels of Ease in the Parish of Grinton, at Muker and Keld, and a Diocesan Survey of 1563 recorded forty families at Keld. In 1560 Ralph Alderson of West Stonesdale left one shilling in his will to the priest at Keld, and in 1580 when the Chapel at Muker was replaced by a good Elizabethan Church (still within the Parish of Grinton) the people of Keld were expected to contribute to its maintenance and costs. There is another reference in the Grinton Churchwarden's Accounts in 1695 following an unseemly riot during which the then chapel had been demolished. Following its partial restoration it was said to have been used by nonconformists after the Great Ejectment from the Church of England in 1662. They were described as Calvinists but could well have been Independent Congregationalists as 'the good Lord Wharton' actively encouraged and welcomed them into Swaledale. It was he who built the first recorded specifically Congregational place of worship in the dale, a chapel adjoining his shooting box at Smarber Hall near Low Row, some time after 1689. It was registered as a place of public worship in 1691 but the building is long gone and is now commemorated by an inscribed stone. He endowed this chapel with some acres he owned in Ravenstonedale, a small coincidence which appeals to me, and he certainly did all he could to help towards the establishment of the denomination locally, so Keld probably benefited at the time, although any small chapel built then was later to fall into neglect and ruin.

Both the Chapel and later the Manse were built and rebuilt more than once, most notably by Edward Stillman. He was a remarkable man, educated at one of the Countess of Huntingdon's colleges, who had preached his way up Swaledale in barns and houses until he reached Keld where he was shown the remains of an old chapel. There, standing among the ruins and weeds, he planted his stick and declared: 'Here will I have my chapel built and here will I preach the Gospel!' and then went on to raise the money by walking to London and collecting both money and hospitality as he went. The entire journey cost him 6d, but he raised £700 with which he built a new Chapel in 1818 together with a house to replace an earlier and inadequate one. Now he had a dwelling place, one large enough for him to provide a simple education for the local children, and his wife became the teacher until her death in 1830. Once he had cleared his debts he went on to buy a plot of ground which became the graveyard, although when he died in 1837 his own remains were placed next to those of his wife in front of the pulpit. During his last years his strength dwindled and the congregation he had built so well dropped away, but he has a well deserved memorial in the present Chapel.

Stillman was briefly succeeded in 1837 by an ardent young man from Sedbergh, William Sedgwick, who formed the first Sunday School, attended by up to 40 children, before

moving on to the Church in Kirkby Stephen in 1838. Unfortunately (and here I have to thank Duncan Bythell for allowing me to use his research) he seems to have mishandled relations with the local people and left Keld quite soon after his ministry there began. Perhaps he was too young and inexperienced? He must have learned something from his mistakes for he later went to the High Chapel at Ravenstonedale, so well known to this family, and was a successful minister there. The unfortunate Mr. Sedgwick was succeeded in Keld almost immediately by his friend, the highly esteemed James Wilkinson, also from Sedbergh. Another energetic innovator, he became minister in Keld for twenty-eight years, and for many years afterwards was honoured for the benefits he brought to both the village and the dale. Deeply committed to education and self improvement he was responsible for the building of the village School in 1842, the further enlargement of the Manse to make room for a Mutual Improvement Society, which led to the formation of the Literary Institute for the young men of the neighbourhood, and the rebuilding and enlargement of the Chapel itself in 1861. All these familiar buildings are now in outer appearance much as he intended and as he left them.

*(Duncan Bythell has compiled a more detailed account of Wilkinson's life and achievements, a copy of which he generously gave us.)* Both School and Institute have ceased to fulfil their original functions but now appear to have a useful future in the plans of the Keld Resource Centre.

Remote as it must have been even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Keld has long been thought of as an early centre of Nonconformity, and stories lingered of the persecuted puritans worshipping as they hid in the Cave behind Swinnergill Fall, veiled by the curtain of water from those who searched for them. Swinnergill is an even more remote little valley some two or three miles along a track into the fells above ancient lead mines, and would have made a good hiding place. From above the waterfall there is a wide view down the dale where the river takes a sweeping curve towards Muker and beyond, and the story went that a lookout would be kept there to warn the hidden congregation of approaching enemies, but I really do not know how authentic these tales are. Two other churches came under the care of the minister at Keld, a very small one in Thwaite, a village some two miles down the Dale, and the other at Reeth, a much larger village about ten miles beyond that towards Richmond. There was another Congregational cause at Low Row, roughly midway between the two, which had been sufficiently well endowed to have a minister of its own with a very pleasant Manse. These further villages always felt much softer than the higher end of the Dale: the primroses came out earlier and the sun shone more warmly. The Chapel at Thwaite became a private house many years ago.

### **Life and Farming in Swaledale**

I have no idea how many of the children who attended Keld school during those early years were the sons and daughters of miners but the mines had closed before we were there and by then this was entirely a farming community. I believe that nearly all these farmers were tenant farmers, a few may have been lease-holders, but families stayed in the same place for generations: surnames appearing in Tudor documents are still well represented there now. So far as I know nearly all the moors and fells and farms at the top end of the dale were then the property of Lord Rochdale. He was a Lancashire cotton magnate, hence the title, and had an imposing hunting lodge on the fell-side above Gunnerside where he would arrive in time for the grouse season and stay on to enjoy the dale. He took an interest in my father, perhaps finding him congenial and unusual company, and would occasionally invite us to the impressive and comfortable Gunnerside Lodge for lunch. The wide views and the stately dining room made quite an impression on me. He kept a suit of armour in one corner and

one day a maid mischievously decided to try it on, but she was quite a substantial girl (Hilda Alderson, I think), and was well and truly wedged inside it when his Lordship came back unexpectedly and found her trying to extricate herself. I don't think that either the girl, whom we knew quite well, or the armour was damaged but while she was deeply embarrassed he roared with laughter, and shared the joke with us.

The Glorious Twelfth (of August) marked the start of the grouse shooting, and on this day a remarkable procession would form just below Thorns farm where the track up Kisdon begins. His Lordship was very lame so at that point he would be helped out of his shooting brake and established on a horse drawn sledge to cross the beck called Skeb Skeugh and then go up to the moors, followed by the beaters and gamekeepers. Beating during the grouse season provided a useful source of extra cash then, and still does so. A splendid man called Dick Scott was Head Keeper. He lived in the village at a house called Birk Hill View and was always to be seen in his uniform of green tweed jacket and flat cap, breeches and leather gaiters. He was an immensely kind man and his wife had a phenomenal memory: she could always tell my father just which text he had preached upon on any Sunday at any time and, what is more, what he had made of it. His Lordship sometimes gave us a brace or two of grouse with strict instructions to my mother about the length of time the birds should be hung before cooking them, so they were obediently hung from a beam in the wash-house until they developed maggots, at which point she threw them away as uneatable. A second hunting box was built for him, standing alongside the road which passed above Keld, a gaunt and unattractive place which later became a Youth Hostel, but I don't know when it ceased to serve its original purpose. It has now become a comfortable guest house and restaurant. Some time after we left Swaledale the entire estate was sold to Lord Peel who kept up the traditions in the grouse season but is thought by some to have spoiled the moors by building extra tracks and is alleged to have ruined the fishing in some way.

Sheep farming is hard there, out on the high fells, and in those days all the work was done on foot. No quad bikes then, but there was always an accompanying sheepdog responding to the shepherd's whistled instructions, as there is to this day. The importance of the rapport between master and skilled dog cannot be exaggerated and although to an outsider the sheepdogs appear to have a rough life they are precious and much loved. But they are valued personal tools, not pets. The tough upland Herdwick breed which has for centuries roamed the fells of the Lake District was being replaced here by the locally bred Swaledale sheep, recognised in 1920 as a separate breed and designed to succeed in these particular difficult conditions. So in the 1930s when we were there it was a fairly recent breed and still being developed for champions. Now these sheep are both valuable and nationally famous for hardiness and suitability for the difficult terrain where it thrives. They are also 'hefted', meaning that they are bred and trained to know their own part of the fells, staying always within unmarked boundaries. In a hard winter, however, when the snow drives horizontally, they will find shelter behind walls and then have to be located and often dug out of drifts by hand in a scything and bitter wind. Sheep, even these it must be said, appear to have one aim in life and that is to die, which makes farming them difficult.

Lambing is much later in the high Pennines than in the softer south but even in April the weather can turn nasty and lambs be lost, and often the mothers hide themselves away in obscure places to give birth even if they have been brought down in time to the lower ground. Later in the year the sheep were 'dipped' in order to disinfect their feet and fleeces. For this they were gathered by man and dog into small stone folds, enclosures in the hills near a beck, and they hated being driven from there through the disinfecting trough. After that they

would do their best to get foot rot. In the warmer months came the shearing and I remember watching, fascinated, at the back of Park Lodge while Laurie Rukin dealt firmly with a wriggling sheep on a trestle, held down without dignity on its back. The fleeces came clean away and were then neatly rolled, while each offended sheep ran off looking white and thin and cold, bleating piteously. In those days, of course, all the shearing was done by hand, there being no electric power.

Next came the hay-making in the valley meadows, again much later than in the softer south. A bad summer meant a shortage of winter fodder so it was important to get in as much hay as possible. We all helped when the horse drawn mower had been through the field, using wooden rakes to get the cut grass into long rows, returning later to toss it into the air to help the drying process. Later a horse drawn wedge shaped sledge gathered up the hay into heaps so that it could be loaded into a cart and taken to the barn where it would be tossed with pitchforks into the loft. Marvellous in good weather but always an anxious watch on the sky while the hay dried and the days went by. One such haymaking day Jeannie was helping in a field down at Hart Lakes when she shrieked: she had raked a patch where frogs were hiding and they were trying to get away, hopping around her feet. Such delicacy of feeling was found to be very amusing by the other ladies in the team who were not at all bothered by unexpected wild life. I think that I was in a shady spot with a book and some Kia Ora orangeade at the time, the sun beating down on a rarely hot day. I remember being allowed on a similar day to ride on Charlie, the Rukins' great cart horse, all the way down to Hart Lakes as he picked his way along the rough and stony paths through the woods. Charlie is the only horse I recall at Keld but he was an important part of the livestock at Park House where the mowing machines were the only machinery in use, and only then on fairly level hay meadows. Tractors were expensive beside being too small and light to be safe on steep hillsides so the grass there would be scythed. But oh! The scent of the hay! It must be the most evocative of all smells.

An old empty farmhouse and the remains of its buildings stood in the flat meadows by the river near Muker, all of which had been deserted after a huge flood in 1899 which had left many such buildings and homes derelict in the high dale, but at haymaking time the women would take all they needed there to make a good meal, using the old kitchen as best they could. A number of those empty, deserted buildings may still be seen alongside the river up and down the dale, and for many decades much of the village of Thwaite stood empty and blind because of that flood. The bridge below Keld which crossed the Swale had been swept away and replaced with a wooden bridge on stone stanchions, still in use now. Plenty of people back then remembered that great storm and at Hoggarths the Calvert family lived in a newly built farmhouse well above the river which replaced their earlier home, destroyed by the torrent.

Autumn brought the sheep sales and yet more work, tidying and trimming, dipping and dosing, foot bathing and tail trimming, to attract good prices. Most important were the tups which, from a good pedigree herd and with a good record in fathering the best lambs, could bring a useful boost to the income as well as make the farmer's reputation. Rosettes and silver cups from important local shows were always proudly on display.

Although sheep farming was the main occupation each farm also had its herd of cattle. Every morning one of us would walk down from the Manse to the byre at Park Lodge with a can and pick up our milk straight from the cow after being milked by hand. These lidded cans were tinned with a carrying handle over the top. I remember watching Mrs. Rukin

or her daughter Jennie in the cool dairy making butter, turning the pale wooden churn over and over by its handle until the golden butter was ready. Then it was taken out, placed on the solid stone shelf to be shaped into blocks and patted with two small wooden paddles to put a pattern on the finished surface. Some farms had their own speciality among these crafts: the Whiteheads at East Stonesdale had particularly good cream, and although it meant quite a walk to fetch it the effort was well worth while, both for the cream itself and for the walk which crossed the river and climbed up the lane on the other side. It was while going up this lane one morning that I actually saw a cuckoo for the first time, close to me and still calling. Mrs Alderson at Skeugh Head beyond Angram made very fine cheese, the Rukins good butter, Lizzie Calvert at Hoggarths superb shortbread. All of these farmers' wives and daughters seem to have been born to be good cooks: their cakes and biscuits and potted meats would have made a proud French peasant jealous. Mrs. Rukin had a fine line in curd tarts, similar to a cheesecake and stuffed with dried fruits soaked in what she called 'a drop of good'. Rum, I think. Every housewife made her own bread for there was none on sale for miles, so Jeannie learned another skill and became an excellent baker of cakes and biscuits too. Church and village teas were magnificent, and even after the war came and there was rationing Mrs. Rukin managed to arrange extra rations because of the visitors' allowance and later those of the evacuees she took in at Park Lodge; my father chuckled after he met her one day struggling with a huge bag of groceries as she returned from the village shop, explaining to him that she had just collected her rations. As ours amounted to a few ounces of flour or sugar he found her unusual problem amusing. But everything about her was always on the generous side and it was quite in character that she should have arranged to have massive supplies of good food available even in difficult times. She didn't always know quite what to do with unfamiliar vegetables, though. One holiday visitor brought her some runner beans, something there was no chance of growing successfully at Keld, thinking these would be a treat for her. She was scornful later of the size of these unfamiliar beans once she had shelled them. Not much of a meal there.

I mentioned the Cat Hole Inn earlier, long a favourite hostelry for visitors, particularly fishermen. The building faces the road which divides there for you to choose whether to drive straight on or choose the lane down into the village, and it was then a welcoming sight. The landlord, Bobby Hutchinson, was later to teach my father how to drive and his son Billy went to the village school with me. The Cat Hole had cats, white cats all of them in every generation, and both the inn and the cats were famous among the aficionados. In 1954, many years after we left, the Cat Hole was bought by a local man who was a dedicated Methodist teetotaler, determined to rid the village of the demon drink. Some of the farmers were known to indulge on successful market days in Hawes or Kirkby Stephen or comfort themselves after a bad one, but so far as I know there had never been any trouble with drunkenness in the village let alone at the Cat Hole, and its closure was almost universally thought to be a disaster, many visitors from far afield deploring its loss in the press, both local and national. The Methodist Chapel, so enthusiastically supported by the new owner, has for many years been closed and stands empty and neglected. The lost inn remains a private house.

Chickens roamed freely around the farms, and one flock lived in a patch of rocky ground down towards the woods where the hen house had to be visited every evening in order to shut the flock away from danger overnight and then opened again in the morning when we children would go along and collect the eggs. Rabbits were snared or shot for the pot and, of course, there were always pigs for family use. Pig killing time was a horrid business so far as I was concerned. It amounted to a community occasion in the lower part of the village,

and the squeals which were all too easily heard in my bedroom were horrible. But some very fine sausages and various other products such as black puddings and chitterlings went into the larders, and every farm had great sides of bacon drying on a rack beneath the kitchen ceiling. Every part of a pig could be used, I was told, except his squeak which died with him – all too audibly.

I also mentioned the shop. This was on the way into the village, part of Butt House and just below Butt Rigg where the road into Keld parts from the main road. I knew it well for I stayed there often. The shop was also the Post Office and the telephone number was Keld 1, the only one available. Urgent messages would come there by telegram. Mr. Jas. Waggett was the postmaster, helped by his kind wife and their daughter Chrissie. Wearing tweeds and a neat little moustache he was in his manner of deportment different from men who belonged to the long established farming community and I used to think that he may have come from Richmond. Later I discovered that he came from a little further down the dale at Melbecks but that he had been educated at Keld School before becoming a gamekeeper and a farmer, probably of a smallholding. He kept himself well informed and I remember him sitting in his chair beside the kitchen range, listening to the wireless or reading his newspaper. He had installed and then maintained a generator in an outside shed which provided Butt House with the only electric power and lighting in the village. In the kitchen there was a sideboard facing the range and it had a long scar down the front of a low cupboard: my fault, because I once rocked too hard in their rocking chair and fell backwards on to it, still in the chair. They were very forgiving, but they never let me forget it. That was Joan's mark, shown me on different occasions for many years after. There was a storeroom for the shop beyond the kitchen and in it a huge cupboard with a glorious smell all of its own composed of dried fruits and tea and spices and I never knew what else. The Waggetts kept their chickens enclosed in a field slightly below the well scrubbed flags and low wall in front of the shop and kitchen; when Chrissie had done the laundry in the wash-house and put it through the wooden rolled wringer she would peg it out to dry in the chicken field. The view then would have deserved an artist to paint it, the washing blowing in the wind, a glimpse of the village beyond the adjoining field and further still on the hillside the farm at East Stonesdale and the moor behind and above, with a little gap for a gate in the stone field-wall on the high horizon.

Mr. Waggett's generator, incidentally, may have been the only one of its kind in Keld but Swaledale farmers were ingenious, and old Kit Calvert a couple of miles up the dale at Hoggarths had harnessed the tarn near Hill Top and the waterfall just over the road from his farm to provide some electricity for the house. Over in Wensleydale at Hawes another Kit Calvert had done the same thing and created his own water driven electric power. It was his family who were later to turn the making of Wensleydale cheese into a seriously commercial enterprise, now a national success. Old Kit was a friend of ours who was later to broadcast on the BBC his renderings in the local dialect of the best known of the New Testament parables, first tried out on my father who encouraged him.

### **Walking about**

Everywhere around Keld is beautiful and there are many fine walks to be enjoyed. The track at the bottom of the village leads between pastures to the woods and eventually down to hay meadows called Hart Lakes and on to Muker village, or you can turn off down to the river where there are pools for swimming and waterfalls to play by, although I found High Kison Force intimidating. Or you can turn right and walk steadily up to the heathered



heights of the hill also called Kisdon, or go left and down again to cross the river and climb up again into other moors, or take the track up to Swinnergill, passing old lead mines and their spoil heaps, past an ancient building where lead had probably been worked although I assumed wrongly that it had been a blacksmith's hearth. Almost certainly it had been the smelting shop and the anvil and huge decaying leather bellows remained. That was close to a farmhouse called Crackpot Hall. I never questioned the name then, but years later when it was deserted because of subsidence I realized that it must always have been falling apart, probably undermined by lead workings. (I now know better: the name has a totally different meaning and is used elsewhere in the Dale.) The house was a very sad sight when last I saw it, but the view down Swaledale is stunning even if the wind always blows around it. Evidences of the old lead mines were visible in many places with great scree of waste washed down a hillside or piled high, and there were often closed shafts beside paths. Some of these appear to have been officially sealed off now, presumably for safety reasons. I was told that in the distant past the Romans had mined here and left some of their lead pigs behind, and I used to puzzle over what these creatures might have been and what the Romans might have done with them.

I have some photographs taken then of many walks together or with friends, although one special expedition went unrecorded except in my memory. My father thought I was old enough now, so he took me to the summit of Rogans Seat in July 1940, the highest I had ever walked (670 m. on the Ordnance Survey), and that was when I discovered the uncomfortable truth that when you think you have reached the top - you haven't; for above the rise you have conquered appears the next, and then the next, and then the one after that. But what a sense of triumph there was when finally we found the summit and looked across the bleak and peaty moor to behold the Durham side of the fell dropping gently away. Many of these walks, so personal and precious, have become part of the Pennine Way, signposted and nationally known, subject of television programmes like Alfred Wainwright's Coast to Coast path. These two meet and cross each other at Keld, and I do try, a bit, not to be too resentful of hearty parties of Ramblers tramping over my private memories and one time secret places.

Another favourite walk was along 'The Corpse Way'. This is a track, hundreds of years old, along which for centuries the dead were carried in wickerwork coffins for thirteen rough miles to the Parish Church in Grinton on the far side of Reeth for burial by Anglican rite in hallowed ground. Grinton was a vast Parish covering the whole of Upper Swaledale, almost certainly the biggest in England. The Way began about half a mile down the road from Keld, crossed the beck called Skeb Skeugh, and headed up and along the side of Kisdon, climbing steadily until going down again to Muker and then along the dale. There are occasional stone tables beside the track where the bearers could put down the heavy coffin and take a rest. Then in 1580, mercifully, a replacement Chapel of Ease for Grinton was built in Muker with a Bishop's licence enabling burial there, and the journey for the bearers must have become much easier. This very rare Elizabethan church in Muker was also the only remaining Chapel of Ease in the whole huge Parish of Grinton, that at Keld having apparently lapsed. When Muker was at last granted full Parish status in the nineteenth century the Vicar still had one of the largest parishes in the whole country, but by then Keld had its own burial ground behind the Chapel. The Vicar at Muker in our time was Mr. Dungworth, and he and his wife became great friends of my parents. They had served as missionaries in India, I think, but by then had settled happily into their new home, a large four-square Vicarage with wonderful views. In those pre-ecumenical days Mr. Dungworth, wise and Christian man, saw no reason why his ordained nonconformist friend should not take services in his Church at Muker, and my father was glad to do so.

*(The Corpse Way would have had other uses beyond funeral requirements and there is no doubt that lead and*

*coal from some of the mines were also transported by this route.)*

## **Other Occupations**

At Park Lodge the head of the farming household, in name at least, was Jack Rukin, a lean man with a splendid moustache who had other duties as our postman. Having collected his burden from Mr. Waggett at the Post Office his delivery round was formidable, calling daily by bicycle on every distant farm up the dale head and, furthest of all, right up to Tan Hill Inn. This, the highest inn in England, was four hard miles away beyond some disused opencast coal mines and on what still feels like the roof of the world. His wife was, as you may have gathered, a powerful character, and his handsome son Laurie did the bulk of the farm work. Jennie, their daughter, worked in the cowshed and the dairy, as well as the housework and all the myriad jobs demanded by such an establishment.

Not many doors away at the bottom of the village in a cottage called Tutil House lived Jack's old father James, born in 1847, and his daughter Sarah who looked after him. Known to all of us as Grandpa Rukin he had a crisp little white beard and I looked at him with awe thinking: "He must have been alive when the Crimean war was being fought!" He had, in fact, begun his working life mining coal in the William Gill Pit when he was nine before going to the Tan Hill Pit where he *'never saw daylight between one Sunday and another during the winter months. I would go down before daybreak and not come up again until after dark and then I had to walk four and a half miles to Keld.'* (That mine was thirty fathoms deep, nearly two hundred feet.) He talked about this in the 1939 broadcast when the BBC took a number of local people, including my mother, to Leeds to make a programme about life in Swaledale. Grandpa Rukin was then in his prime as village elder and he was not impressed by the city. "It's nobbut a bit bigger nor Keld", he responded when asked for his opinion. In later life he had worked on the family farm, Park Lodge, and only occasionally revisited the mines where he had worked as a child, but *"when I was ten years old I worked in Tan Hill coal pits for 10d. a day. I was there for about forty years and used to walk there and back, about four miles each way. And I had cows to milk and sheep to tend when I got home."* At which point Mr. Waggett chipped in *"I hope I can still milk a cow when I'm 91!"*

His daughter Sarah was lean and prim, her hair with its central parting scraped back into a bun, and she always made me think of a painted wooden doll. The headmistress of the school, Miss Marshall, lived in a cottage behind green iron railings in the row between the two Rukin establishments. I never knew how such a capable spinster lady came to her post in this remote place, but she was very good at it; she also gave me piano lessons. More about her later.

Herbert Metcalfe was a carpenter and joiner who lived at East View just over the road from the back door of the Manse, and his son Waller was one of my friends. We occasionally went up the stone steps into his father's workshop to pick up bits of wood and some nails to see what we could make in the way of small boats and such-like. (Waller married my friend Elsie Scott, one of the Park House family. He died last week at their home in Bishops Auckland. 31st January 2012)

Mr. Parrington was another man whose trade was necessary to the community. He lived and worked in a cottage about a mile up the dale, just beyond Park House and the turning at Park Bridge for Tan Hill, and he was a clog-maker and repairer of shoes and boots. Most farming people wore clogs around the yards and children wore them for school, though

I never had a pair. They were highly practical, comfortable and hard wearing, with metal tips and studs, all right on stone floors but highly unsuitable for anything less resistant. You could always hear someone coming along the road, and the clatter of the clogs was a characteristic sound when school was due to open. Once inside they had to be removed, and plimsolls were worn.

### **The Manse, and life without electricity**

The Manse itself was a comfortable home with a small garden in front facing up the only road into the village. The front door was painted in a grained pattern, popular at the time, and when it was renewed I recall watching the painter with his professional comb and three colours of dark gold and brown paint working upon it – and being warned against touching this masterpiece before it was well and truly dry. Behind that door was a dark little square porch with another door to the right which opened into the chapel itself, while immediately facing you was the door into the study where Arnold had his bookcases and desk and the big chair which he had been given by his parents for the Manse at Tockholes, covered then in wine coloured cut velvet, and now part of Clare's furnishings after being reupholstered at least twice. I used to snuggle up to him there while he read me a story. Next to the study was the sitting room where we played board games by the fire or listened to the radio and where we dined. Our upright piano was here too, often the centre of social occasions and music-making. Both these rooms were at the front of the house, so no-one came into Keld unobserved, while the kitchen was at the back and looked across the village to the fells beyond. It had a big iron range which heated the water and was used for all the cooking and baking. Upstairs there were three bedrooms and the bathroom, for even if we had no electricity in the village Lord Rochdale had ensured that his tenants had a common septic tank and running water. My mother always said that the best view in the house was through the small window beside the lavatory in the bathroom, and she certainly had a point even though it looked across the chapel graveyard first. Actually, it was a good place from which to watch a funeral, childish curiosity having been thwarted when the coffin on its bier was brought to the Chapel down the road at the front because, by unbroken custom, all windows had their curtains full-drawn on these occasions, and tweaking would have been unforgiven. I could see more of the ceremony from the bathroom anyway. This view was to the east and down the dale, closed off by the great shoulder of Ivelet Side, the moor which marked where the river turned. The sun rose over it, and some dawns were lovely. Beyond the kitchen and backing on to the road was the wash-house, still part of the Manse, and leading out of that the dark coal house, necessarily large because we all had huge quantities of coal delivered every autumn before the winter began and delivery might be impossible when the roads were blocked by snow, which was likely to happen. Percivals, the bus company from Gunnerside, also delivered the coal and recently my attention was drawn to a surviving entry in their accounts: *to the Revd. Mee at Keld, 2 tons 4cwt. coal on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1937 at a cost of £4 – 5s – 8d.*

He would have been a regular customer and occasionally took other deliveries such as potatoes and lamp oil. (Information gratefully received from Reuben Frankau who made a study of Percivals' business in Swaledale.)

Behind the Manse was a large garden surrounded by a high stone wall which also bordered the road into the bottom of the village. I used to get into trouble for walking along its top, visible to all from every direction and apparently alarmingly unsafe. The climate up there limited what could usefully be grown as frosts could come at any time and in any

month, so there was no point in trying to grow anything other than hardy vegetables. Apples and plums, for instance, had no chance but soft fruits did well and so my mother grew red and black currants, raspberries and gooseberries there and made pies and jams with them. Lower down beyond a small stone shed, where I had my small fossil museum, there was a grass patch between the graveyard and the lane down towards the river where my father played a very unorthodox kind of cricket with me and any small friends. (Six and you're out if the ball goes through the hedge and into the lane below.) And below that a rough slope towards the fields where I could lie in the sun, when it shone, and read and gaze down the dale.

*This patch has now been separated and is named 'The Well Being Garden' and provided with a seat for comfortable meditation and the enjoyment of the view. The authorised entry today is by way of the graveyard. Further developments, as of February 2017: the Keld Resource Centre is proposing to plant an orchard on what was our vegetable garden, and has just discovered the cobbled path we once used to get down to the grassy drying ground at the end - now the Well Being Garden! I wondered where it had gone. New varieties of apples etc have been developed which will grow in such conditions.*

I have given these earlier details in order to explain the way life had to be lived there and in those times. No electric power meant that all heating was by coal fires. The weekly washing was a tedious and complicated business and I'm not sure that I have remembered the procedure correctly, but the clothes and linens were taken into the wash-kitchen and placed in a big 'dolly tub' which had been filled with warm water together with powders such as 'Oxydol' or 'Rinso'. Here they were pushed up and down using a 'posser', a copper bell-shaped article with a flat pierced base fitted to a long pole, and this presumably loosened the dirt. After this the sheets, towels, handkerchiefs and any articles needing extra treatment were placed in the water already boiling in the great copper. This was a second great tub set permanently in a stone structure with a fire lit beneath first thing in the morning. When deemed to be properly cleaned these were fished out with big wooden tongs and returned to the 'dolly tub', now full of fresh water for rinsing but this time containing a bag of powder known as 'dolly blue' which was supposed to whiten them. Finally everything would be put through a hand wringer before being pegged out on a line on 'the cricket patch' at the far end of the garden. (See above.) My mother was more up to date than some of our neighbours: she had an Acme wringer with rubber rollers, not heavy wooden ones. Wash day, habitually on a Monday, really was a huge operation.

The ironing was no joke, either. My mother did hers on the kitchen table covered with a blanket, and the iron was of a type seen only in museums now. It was hollow with a lifting shutter at the back and it came with two iron-shaped metal lumps. These had a hole in the wide end and were placed in the heart of the coal fire until, when glowing and almost red hot, one of them was hooked out with a poker slotted into the hole, slipped inside the iron and enclosed by dropping the shutter down. While it was being used and beginning to cool the second lump was in the fire as a replacement. It needed skill and a careful hand: if the heated block slipped up the poker and on to the hand it could and did give a very nasty burn. (I still have that iron and you will find others similar to it in various country museums.) The freshly ironed clothes were placed carefully on a large wooden clothes 'horse' to air in front of the fire, sheets were folded and aired on a rack above the range, and the whole house smelt of damp washing. On a wet Monday the entire operation, including the drying, had to be done indoors.

Where there was no electric power there were, of course, no vacuum cleaners so we had a carpet sweeper known as a Bissle. Every housewife wore a big highly coloured cotton apron

wrapped right round her and fastened with a tie at the waist and at the back of the neck and I remember my mother wearing a kind of mob cap to keep her hair free of dust. There were no rubber gloves then and a housewife's hands became rough with work and badly chapped in the winter.

Every room had a fire grate, even the bedrooms, and one of the great pleasures if one were ill in bed was to have a fire glowing comfortably in the darkness at night. That really did feel like luxury! All the grates, including the kitchen range, had to be black-leaded, another tiresome chore. Lighting was by an Aladdin oil lamp in the sitting room, and by candles and torches around the house and in the bedrooms. The wireless was powered by big cell batteries and when they ran down we took them up to Mr. Waggett for regeneration. Winters in those years and at that height could be bitterly cold so stone hot water bottles warmed the beds, filled from a kettle which had first to be brought to the boil on the range..... Once as an experiment the Redmans, our neighbours from Rochester, brought their copper warming pan across to the Manse where it was filled with hot coals and then moved around between the sheets on my bed to warm up the bedding, which it did and it was very pleasant – for a few minutes. Incidentally, most of the beds in the farm-houses as well as those at Butt House were feather beds, and very comfortable they were.

Another comfortable bed warmer, if she could sneak in, was Frisky, our long-haired tortoise shell cat. She was a handsome, wayward creature who had learned from experience that new litters of kittens were liable to disappear without trace: my poor father was detailed to drown them in a bucket, a duty he hated. After losing her kittens on a few occasions she took to vanishing when her time was due then, after quite a few days and looking somewhat thinner, returned at regular intervals for something to eat. This happened on a number of occasions before my mother eventually followed her and was led a fair distance down through the woods to the foot of a limestone cliff above the river where, in a small low cave, she saw the kittens playing. They were several weeks old, utterly charming, and quite beyond death by drowning. Two at least were to follow their mother back to the Manse but I think the others probably became wild.

### **Life in remote places**

Almost everything we needed came from the immediate area but there were other requirements which were not readily available. My mother made our own bread, and a butcher's van came up the dale perhaps once a week and, as remarked earlier, large quantities of winter coal were delivered. Every housewife laid in huge quantities of dry goods ahead of the winter: according to Percivals' accounts Mrs. Alderson of Stone House at the Dale head would regularly buy 10 stone of flour during the year but 20 stone before the winter set in. She had a large farming family to keep fed and they might well be snowed in.

During the war there was an effort to restart the opencast coal mines near Tan Hill, and I remember that at the same time an experimental attempt to burn peat from the moors was made. It glowed rather pleasantly in the grate but I think that the hard work involved in its preparation made it less than worth while. So far as I know the deep pits in which James Rukin had worked as a boy were not reopened. Financial and business requirements were served by Barclays Bank which sent a representative to the Institute on stated days every week, which saved the bother of going down to Reeth or Richmond. On market days farmers probably used the banks in Hawes in Wensleydale, over the Buttertubs Pass, or over the county boundary in Kirkby Stephen in Westmorland.

We went by that same road to our dentist in Kirkby Stephen, a difficult eleven miles across the fells and down into the Vale of Eden, but should anyone need a doctor the nearest was Dr. Spears twelve miles down the Dale at Reeth. Now far from being a young man he had followed his father into the practice early in the century and boasted of using the old man's instruments, a boast which did not appeal to my parents although they had occasionally called him in when they first came to Keld. When they heard of a new young doctor, Dr. Cox, with a practice at Hawes they turned to him instead even though to go to his surgery, or for him to make a home visit, meant a journey by car over the Buttertubs. Public transport at Keld was provided by one morning bus down the dale to Richmond most weekdays, returning in the afternoon. Percivals of Gunnerside ran the service and any journey was usually full of conversation and interest while it took its passengers along one of England's loveliest routes. The driver delivered the newspapers to the local shop in each village by simply throwing the bundle on to the doorstep without leaving the steering wheel. Had he been in any cricket team he would have made an uncommonly useful bowler.

The absence of immediate medical care apart from a District Nurse, and I don't know where she was based unless it was in Reeth, presented a new challenge to Jeannie which she met with enthusiasm. Always interested in medical matters, she worked tirelessly to care for sick or troubled people in the immediate area and often became the first call when help was needed. To this day there are some old people, young then, who recall when she had stayed for nights to nurse the Aldersons at Skeugh Head, the entire family having gone down badly with measles. Another time she spent at least one night at Crackpot Hall with the wife of the farmer (Percy Metcalfe?† who then lived there, during a difficult labour and with the wind howling around, really rather frightened. I remember less happily an incident connected with that measles crisis at Skeugh Head; my mother was dreadfully sorry for the younger children as they began to recover and insisted that it was my Christian duty to give them one of my toys to help them to get better. She also selected the toy to be sacrificed, and for years I rather begrudged the loss of the little yellow toy puppy that I too had been fond of, made worse by being praised for my kindness. That part was even more difficult to handle because I knew that I hadn't really in intention been kind at all and deserved no plaudits.

My father really did see his position as Pastor to the people of upper Swaledale as an equal part of his vocation with his preaching. 'Visiting' was very nearly a daily activity and it took him right up to the remotest farms on the moors and in the Dale Head as well as down the Dale to Reeth and beyond. Walking almost always, his raincoat folded over one shoulder and Jeannie often at his side, he was a familiar figure wherever he went. As I grew older I would go too and also got to know the farms well. Sometimes we went to Firs where Mrs. Phyllis Metcalfe had been persuaded to make me an occasional summer frock, and I liked going there because I could play safely by the infant Swale. Her husband Jack was known for his heavy drinking at the end of a market day in Hawes, after which he would mount his motor bike and trust it to get him safely over the Buttertubs and then home several miles further up the Dale. Somehow it always did! It was not in his nature to say much of a thank you for the attention and care he and his wife had received from their minister but he made a walking stick for Arnold with a ram's horn for its handle as a gift, and I still have it. (*Jack o'Firs is to be seen in the sketch at the front of a recent publication: The Hefted Farmer. Decades later when Ben was a small boy we took him with us to camp beside the Swale just below Firs, and it was a delight to see him playing in the river there.*)

Arnold fulfilled one of his more unusual duties when Susan Peacock died. She was the

landlady of the highest inn in England, the famous Tan Hill Inn, and both were known right across the North of England. Born of a local family (there have been Peacocks in Swaledale for centuries) she was another almost legendary lady, large in life and character, and she had declared that when she died Mr. Mee should take her funeral service at Tan Hill among the moors and near the Inn, in the place she loved and where she had served for many years. He was proud to carry out that last wish and a great crowd attended the simple ceremony before her burial in the Chapel graveyard in Keld. Her name is to be seen carved into one of the large boulders standing behind the Inn, a quiet reminder in that bleak and windswept place of a generous landlady who always gave a warm welcome to travellers. The Inn remains in business, no longer now a source of fellowship and comfort to miners and drovers but still providing hospitality and a shelter for storm trapped wanderers, for walkers on the Pennine Way or for cyclists and drivers with a thirst and an eye for the unusual. When the winter blizzards are more than usually bad and the snow falls heavily while the wind builds drifts in the high Pennines Tan Hill Inn still becomes national news.

Back to the pastoral visiting.

We would walk to Stone House, the next farm beyond Firs and even further up the Dale Head as far as Eilers, getting closer to the source of the Swale. A long uphill track led from that isolated farm to the moorland road to Kirkby Stephen. Going back towards Keld on that road we would cross it and walk down another track to Hill Top where another Alderson family farmed. The views from there are breath taking, sweeping from horizon to horizon across fells and dale in almost every direction, except from the blank stone and almost windowless back of the farmhouse which is turned against the prevailing wind. (The outdoor lavatory there had a three holer seat. Very draughty.) Not far from there stand Harker House and Black Howe, and lower down and more sheltered is Ravenseat. Leaving out this diversion and staying with the road which passes Pry House and Hoggarths it would sweep you down a steep hill and unite with the road back to Keld. Apart from Firs all these farms had children, and all of them walked to school in Keld. Other children walked down from the hamlet of West Stonesdale along the road from Tan Hill, and so did those from High Frith across another small valley.

There were other families we used to visit in the other churches and villages: Angram, Thwaite, Muker, Gunnerside, Low Row and Reeth. My father was to acquire a car, a small Austin 7, and Bobby Hutchinson (Landlord at the Cat Hole Inn) taught him how to drive, taking him up and down the dale and along some difficult tracks; I suppose Arnold's experience of town driving was gained in Richmond so it can't have been very extensive, but traffic was light and he managed, and now he didn't have to use his bicycle for any journey not done on foot. Some of the farmers had motor bikes which in one case led to tragedy when the young son of Kit Calvert from Hoggarths crashed and he was killed and his pillion passenger was badly injured. The whole of the upper Dale went into shock and mourning and Arnold, deeply distressed, supported the family as best he could and carried out the massively attended funeral in the Chapel.

## **Keld School**

Just before my fifth birthday I started my official education in the village school, a hop skip and a jump away from the Manse. Here the formidable Headmistress, Miss Marshall, reigned with a strong personality, a small cane and firm discipline. This was an Elementary School where all ages were then taught together, the older children at one end of the school

room, the younger at the other. There was a piano, and we all sang hymns and the full range of songs set in the National Song Book, or something similar, while she played. There was a big basket where materials for needlework were kept, and a huge Tortoise stove with a big iron-railed guard around it. In winter the children who came down from the farms walked in with wet gloves and socks, coats and scarves which had to be hung over the iron fire-guard to dry out, and then the smell of drying wool hung around all day, mixing with that of the burning coke inside the iron stove. Their clogs were left in the cloakroom and changed for plimsolls. My earliest memory was one of childish annoyance: seated at one of the great fixed desks someone, and I can't remember who though it wasn't Miss Marshall, set out to teach me how to read. Mortally offended, I managed after a while to demonstrate that I already could. Odd how such an offence should stick in the mind, but I don't actually remember a time when I couldn't read.

I recall two particular occasions when Miss Marshall imposed discipline: one September day when the older boys missed school to go nutting in the woods where there were plenty of hazels hanging heavy and ripe for gathering. I don't know how she resolved it but there was a great to-do and it didn't happen again. The other was after a winter snow fall when at playtime there was naturally a snowball fight outside. One of the boys (it was always the boys) was a good shot and immediately scored a direct hit on the school bell in its turret. Out came Miss Marshall: "As the school bell has been rung play time is now over. Into your lines!" And they all marched meekly back inside. As I said earlier, I know nothing of her background or how such a cultivated lady came to her post in Keld, but she was well liked and respected, and always commanded obedience. I wonder now if she may have been another young woman cheated of marriage and a happy home life by a loss in the Great War and so had sought solace in a remote place. The school leaving age then was fourteen and the older boys were tough and could be wilful, working with their fathers on the hill farms they might have been difficult for her to manage and there was no back up for her other than the local community. She was superb, and I wish I could tell her so now in a very different world. There was no playground: when we turned out for a break it was into the little area between the Manse and the Institute, and our 'drill' we did in lines on the road. Try that now! Occasionally informality broke out, and I remember the day when an aircraft was spotted high in the sky through the big school window and we were allowed to stand on our benches to get a good look at such a rare sight.

I was an only child and there were very few children who lived right in the village but through School and Chapel I found friends and we were free to range through woods and over hills; sometimes we would buy a bottle of 'pop' - fizzy lemonade, or sarsaparilla, or dandelion and burdock - before we set out. I had been taken to Appleby Horse Fair one summer's day and come home with a small fishing net, so some of us went fishing for minnows and bullheads in Skeb Skeugh: not as easy as we had expected but a happy way of getting wet. On warm days we would play in the Swale near the wooden bridge leading on to East Stonesdale or Swinnergill, and sometimes there were games of make believe around the Manse garden or the ground around Park Lodge. I may have been an only but there I was never a lonely.

## **Visitors**

The visitors to the Dale brought occasional glimpses of the world beyond our horizons; I recall one very engaging man who came in his touring car to stay in the village. I



have no idea what make it was but it had a 'dickey' at the back for carrying hampers and other luggage, and on one thrilling occasion a couple of thrilled children. This was a car which could travel at sixty miles an hour, a mile a minute!! Dornford Yates or what? But I don't think that he could have attempted such speeds on those roads.

Thinking of visitors, a holiday diary kept by two young women from Leeds came recently into my hands. They were staying for a fortnight with the Waggetts at Butt House in the summer of 1937 and it is a record of long walks up and down the Dale and includes a few notes about the people they met, one of them being my father who they recognised as '*one of our boys*', coming as he did from Leeds. They refer to him as both Mr. Mee and as Arnold and went to the Chapel on both Sundays, '*it having quite taken our affections*'. Laurie Rukin was the organist and I rather think they developed a crush on him, for he was indeed a charmer and handsome with it. After morning service they went walking but on their way they met 'Lawrence' and were about to speak to him when '*Arnold came out and asked him ... about the music for the evening service. (We could have biffed him!)*' But later in the day, walking back from Kisdon they '*heard a rather charming tenor voice coming from high up in the hills, and looking up saw a youth (whom we guessed as Lawrence) rounding up the sheep and singing at the same time. Evidently he was practising for the evening service which was to be given by the Keld Singers assisted by Mrs.Mee.*' After an energetic afternoon they managed to get to the service: '*I had been looking forward to the service all week, nor was I disappointed as Lawrence's singing was most enjoyable as was that of the others, but his tenor voice rang out so melodiously that I shall always remember it.*' He is mentioned on a few other occasions and it seems that a mild flirtation may have been inexpertly attempted, but I am pretty sure that he knew quite well how to handle it, and they were wary of his mother. Among other attractions they noted was the number of rabbits everywhere and they did what I often did, clapped their hands to see them run. (Laurie will appear later in this account.)

### **Lessons outside school**

I learned from my father how to look at the night sky, intensely dark in the war years when windows were blacked out and the only light was star-light, and how to recognise the more obvious constellations. I recall one glorious night when we stood together near Angram and looked at the Northern Lights playing over Kisdon. If we visited any new place we would go into the Parish Church and he would show me how to appreciate it; museums were always a draw for both of us. I learned about the Greek myths and classical tales from him, and of course the Bible stories, and all characters were as real as the events and people around me. In those days special Bibles, in the Authorized Version, were presented '*in accordance with the Will of Philip Lord Wharton*', known as the 'Good Lord Wharton' (mentioned earlier) who died on February 4th 1696, to those children who 'committed to memory' the 1<sup>st</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 101<sup>st</sup>, 113<sup>th</sup>, and 145<sup>th</sup> Psalms'. Arnold had won one of these when he was a boy, and I was presented with another while I was at Keld, on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1940. The money for these free distributions came from the income of properties the good Lord owned further down Swaledale and elsewhere in Yorkshire, Westmorland and also in Buckinghamshire. We also learned Psalms by heart in school and I liked both the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup>, while everyone knew the 23<sup>rd</sup> as a matter of course. Another favourite was Psalm 121, '*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills*', but it was only years later that I learned that it was not entirely a reassurance but a rather disturbing question from a threatened community which followed: '*From whence cometh my help?*' Then the answer: '*from the Lord.*' The Christmas stories in the gospels were easily committed to memory, and they are still with me in the language of the Authorised Version.

My father shared other enthusiasms with me and furnished my young mind with a love and a thirst for history and literature, and I am grateful. Another important influence was that of our very distant relative Arthur Mee, Editor and Author who, as I explained earlier, may already have directly affected Arnold's early career. His widely admired *Children's Encyclopaedia* was on the shelves of most middle class families along with many other of his publications; they opened horizons for children of my generation, not only educating us but setting our values. I read his *Book of Beautiful Things* and his *Book of Heroes* over and over again, and of course we took *The Children's Newspaper* to which Arnold occasionally contributed poems, and I still have a very small volume which he sent to me personally. Simultaneously he was also busily producing that impressive series of studies, county by county, which he called *The King's England*. It was an amazing undertaking and although by today's standards of local historical work it lacks detail of almost any feature other than Church, Manor and Castle together with any tales and legends thrown in, it was well written and is still admired and collected as well as being an example to me as we pursue our studies of the history of Burford.

Above all, it was Arnold's faith and example that furnished the foundation and permanent background of my own Christian faith, and the unconscious absorption of his ideals and values are perhaps above all others his most important legacy to me. I must not forget, though, that he could be very funny indeed as well as deeply serious, and I wish that I could recall even a few of the jokes and tales which made us roar with laughter and the quirky little asides which he would insert into a conversation. I suppose that it is only natural that I have entirely forgotten the really uproarious jokes and it is the silly fragments which stick in my mind, so that when I am putting on my make-up I hear '*Little drops of water/ Little dabs of paint/Make a girl's complexion/Look like what it ain't*'. Oh dear! And he would, with a chuckle, refer to the *Radio Times* as though it were a Greek word: radiotimes. (Try it!)

My recollection of national events from those years before the war is limited but I do remember a bit of a fuss about the Abdication of Edward VIII, then the Coronation of George VI in May 1937 when my father handed out Coronation mugs from the steps of the Village Institute. There must have been a similar handout earlier as I have a King Edward VIII mug given in expectation of the event which never happened. The Abdication was a tremendous shock to the nation, for in those days there was a tight self-censorship exercised by the press which meant that although the newspapers in Europe and America may have carried some royal gossip the ordinary English public were in ignorance until the story blew. I doubt whether the children in Keld school, though, had picked up the new version of the Christmas hymn which became current elsewhere: '*Hark the herald angels sing / Mrs. Simpson's pinched our King*'.

My grandfather (FWM) gave me a Bible commemorating the Coronation which bears the date on its cover. I also remember being told that there was a shortage of oranges because of a war in Spain: the Spanish Civil War, of course. It was the next war that I really do remember, but before it broke out fear was already abroad and any stranger was suspect. Our friends the Redmans had brought a German friend to live in their cottage opposite the Manse (I think he was called Herr Roman or perhaps Romanes) and the natives were not friendly. Almost certainly he was a Jewish refugee, but probably this was an unfamiliar concept in Keld where no-one else wanted to know this stranger with his heavy accent. Later, after hostilities had begun, my father was seen by someone down at Muker with a stranger in his car and word went round that 'Mr. Mee had a German spy with him'. He had simply given a visiting

rambler a lift, but suspicion was rampant and probably Arnold was regarded as a rather unworldly soul who would give a lift to anyone and might need protecting from himself. In a place where hospitality had always been generous this was a new and unsettling state of mind.

### **The War Years: Keld.**

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939.** The announcement of the war sticks in my mind because of the manner in which it was relayed by my father to his congregation in the Chapel. I mentioned earlier that the little dark box of a porch inside our front door had two inner doors, one out of the study and the other into the Chapel. That morning he took our fully charged and very heavy wireless set from the study into the Chapel as far as he could carry it and turned it up to maximum volume so that we could all listen there in deep silence to Mr. Chamberlain's announcement of the Declaration of War, a most solemn occasion followed by an appropriate service, one I don't actually remember at all. The previous war, or Great War, was still a close memory for most people, and the four names on the tablet in the Chapel and also on the War Memorial on Butt Rigg were those of well remembered local men.

Arnold was duly appointed as Air Raid Warden for Upper Swaledale and the Dale Head, which must have been among the largest areas coming under one man's responsibility in the entire kingdom. He was also appointed Billeting Officer for when the evacuees arrived. The first of these offices was an intermittent duty: the Germans were unlikely to bomb Upper Swaledale. When a warning was deemed necessary someone down the dale would telephone through to the Post Office on Keld 1, Chrissie would come down to the Manse with the message, and Arnold would mount his dimly lit bicycle to alert anyone he considered should be warned. By the time he got home there would be another message to tell him that the Alert was over – and then he would repeat his round and pass on the latest information. As the original warning may have come from Darlington, forty miles away and in a much more dangerous location, it was all a bit of a farce, but we took these things seriously. There were, of course, no sirens near us and enemy aircraft were the business of the Home Guard.

The evacuees were a different matter. The north-eastern cities with their docks and industries were in great danger and were to be bombed extensively. Our particular duty was to take in children from Tyneside and my father had to find homes for them, even billeting them where they were not wanted if necessary. Some of them were temporarily given rooms in Lord Rochdale's spare hunting lodge beside the road above the village, but generally they were found private hospitality. Most of the farms were willing to take them but not all of them wished to keep these children once they had arrived. A farmer's wife who took immense pride in her home, which would be impeccably clean, and who had taught her own children good manners, could not easily accept the very different ways and behaviour of strange children from city slums, some of whom were barely house-trained. And by no means were all of the Tyneside children happy to come to such a remote place. Some of them even refused to leave the coach which had brought them to such a wild area, having discovered that the nearest cinema was twenty-three miles away and that the nearest fish and chip shop was in the next dale at Hawes. The prospect of empty moors with only sheep upon them filled these children and any mothers who accompanied them with horror. Familiar streets were what they wanted and they would rather risk the German bombs, so they went home. But some stayed and learned to love it and the people who had taken them in, and there were at least a couple of boys who wanted to stay when the war ended and go on working on the farms. My 'best friend' Cicely was a Gateshead girl, billeted at the Post Office with the Waggets, and we

became a pair, helping with the hens, roaming the woods and the hills together, sharing secrets. She was my first close friend and she was another who kept returning. She lives in Newcastle now and we have occasionally met in recent years. One odd result of this evacuation was the development of a new dialect when 'Geordie' children acquired an overlay of 'Swardle' and created an interesting hybrid accent and language.

In addition to the Tyneside contingent from Gateshead and Sunderland there were a few private evacuees whose parents had made their own arrangements for their children. Two of these, Keith and Gordon Wilson, were the sons of a doctor in either Preston or Bolton who had been coming regularly for summer holidays with Mrs. Rukin at Park Lodge, and now they were there for the entire war. Mr. and Mrs. Redman, owners of the holiday cottage opposite the Manse, decided that their daughter Mary would be safer with us than in Rochester or Maidstone, so she stayed with us at the Manse for a few months. Many years later I was to meet up with Mary and her husband in Cambridge. The Wilson boys were responsible for the gathering of old Keld school pupils in 1992 when a photograph taken outside the school in 1942 was published in *The Dalesman* and at their instigation repeated fifty years later. Almost everyone was there.

One regular visitor from the days before the war had been Richard (Dick) Sharpe, a respected journalist and later war reporter for the BBC. He came mainly for the fishing, I remember, and rather liked to stay with us at the Manse. Once he brought his small son Timothy with him, who in turn brought his whooping cough, and I caught it rather badly from him. But that is another story. It was through Dick that Keld was put on the broadcasting map, not just the Keld Singers but my mother too, who delivered at least two broadcast talks about the effects of the war on our remote village.

There was one other temporary evacuee who came to the Manse: a small white Sealyham terrier. His owner, a lady of a nervous disposition who lived in Bradford, feared for poor little Sunny's safety if the town were bombed and begged for a refuge for him at the Manse in Keld. Laurie Rukin, his working collie Gyp with him, took one look at this creature and exclaimed scornfully: "Tha wants to put yon on wheels!" Sunny had the usual terrier nature, chirpy, yappy and not very biddable, and he wore out his welcome just in time for his mistress to decide that she could no longer bear life without him, and took him back with her to the perils of Bradford.

The sudden and sizeable influx of new children changed the school a great deal but at least one new professional teacher was sent with them to be replaced later by another. (I don't know what the system was for these changes, personal or official.) Both Miss Robinson and later Miss Audus came to stay with us at the Manse, the latter being quite a lively lady who took an interest in teaching me about literature and shared my mother's liking for Poole Pottery, which could be bought from a little shop in Reeth. Both ladies seem to have settled quite happily into their new surroundings, but neither managed to persuade me that I liked knitting. Later Miss Penny arrived and became a lifelong friend of my mother. That was a personal effect; the real change for the community came with the need for space in which to teach the enlarged school. This was when the Public Hall came into daytime use for education, and now Miss Marshall found herself in charge of two buildings and extra teachers, not to mention some very different children. Somehow it was all made to work and I recognise now just how very good the quality of teaching and expectation must have been in that remote village school under such difficulties. So good, in fact, that when I went away to my next school I was well up to the standards of my far more sophisticated contemporaries.

Another wartime experience was the fitting of the gas masks with their perforated porcine snouts and peculiar rubbery smell; each came with its own cardboard box, and was supposed to be carried almost everywhere one went, carefully labelled with name, address and identity number. Some of us acquired canvas cases to take the wear and tear, and they were worn with the leather strap across the chest. There were also special 'gas cradles' for babies but although I saw one and wondered whether a baby would like it I don't remember ever knowing of one in use. It was a horrid thing, a bit like a small mummy case with a transparent (celluloid?) mask inserted. Another very obvious memory was the blackout, of course. Not a chink of light must show once darkness fell no matter what the circumstances, so thick black inner curtains must be made and hung inside every window. Large windows in public buildings such as schools had brown paper strips gummed across them, criss-crossing in diamond shapes, in case of bomb blast and to prevent injury from flying glass. Keld had no electricity so there were no bright lights anyway and the risk of showing an illegal crack of light was minimal, but cars had their headlights masked so that only a narrow slit or a tiny cross in the middle would let the light through, and that can only have been to allow other drivers to know you were there: as an aid to seeing the road they were just about useless. Then there were the Ration Books and their tiny allowances, then Clothes Coupons, and Identity Cards which remained compulsory until the autumn of 1950. My number was JHOB3226.

Farming was a reserved occupation and as the family farms had always managed with few, if any, unrelated workers almost no-one could be spared to go to war, although there were some volunteers from further down the dale. Nevertheless the men of Keld in common with the rest of the country wished to serve somehow in this, the Darkest Hour. The Local Defence Volunteers, formed in May 1940, were later named The Home Guard by Winston Churchill, and Keld had its own platoon. It wasn't entirely Dad's Army because some of them were comparatively young men who were eager to join and spend their nights on guard duty watching the skies and looking out for possible enemy planes and paratroopers. Initially without guns, except for the gamekeepers, they brought what weapons they could, including pitch forks, but once armed they got in some good practice shooting grouse with ammunition also provided by the gamekeepers, and they met in the gamekeeper's lodge beside the track up Kisdon. I am not sure how many men belonged to the Keld Home Guard and I do not know much of what they did, and least of all of just how they planned to hold back Hitler's troops if they ever made it up Swaledale., but their shooting was good enough to win the Buchanan Cup in a competition with other units at Catterick. It may have helped that two of these men had served in the First War. It is only recently that I have learned that it had been particularly necessary to watch for and report the flight path of the Luftwaffe's bombers along the east-west line of the Swale: the German pilots used it to guide them by moonlight towards the west coast ports such as Liverpool and even Belfast.

### **Entertainments and Activities**

The Public Hall is a solid and remarkably useful building, perhaps unusual in so small and remote a place, and carved into the stone tablets set into the front are the names of some of the local benefactors who contributed to its building. It soon became the centre of village and dale life and during the War it was indispensable. Pressed into use as an extra school room on weekdays it was open to all kinds of activities on most evenings. I remember a visiting drama group, one that presented Dickens' Christmas Carol to my enthralled eyes, ghosts and all, but more often there were dances, the music provided by a local farmer with his accordion or by a small visiting band. It was my mother, though, who got a concert party

going and presented entertainments in the Hall. This was a voluntary group of cheerful local girls and farmers' wives, and they called themselves The Blackout Belles. They would rehearse their songs and routines downstairs in the Manse with my father playing the piano accompaniment to songs such as *'There'll always be an England'*, *'Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye'*, *'There's something about a soldier'* and various other pieces of the time, often made famous by Gracie Fields who sang them on the radio. My mother was always ambivalent about 'our Gracie', not quite sure whether she was a vulgar representative of Lancashire or, being famous and well loved, she should be accepted, admired and emulated. It certainly didn't stop Jeannie from singing her solos. One she particularly liked was *'Little Old Lady'*, which she sang with a slight sentimental crack in her voice which most of her audience loved but which embarrassed me. I was daft enough to tell her so once; but she did ask. The rehearsals all floated up to me in my bedroom. Sometimes she and Arnold would sing a duet, often *'I'll walk beside you'*, and he would sing *'Jeannie with the light brown hair'* by Stephen Foster, and Handel's *'Passing by'*. To this day there are friends up there who recollect their times with the Blackout Belles and reminisce with me when we visit Keld. They certainly had a high old time together, and the concerts were always a great success. It should be said that there were other dances in other villages, generally reached by motor-bike, although I don't recollect any other concert parties, perhaps because no other village had such a suitable hall. Even at the head of the Dale some dances were occasionally held in other buildings, one of them being the hay-loft at Hoggarths Farm.

I will write later about musical traditions but this may be a suitable place to mention the singing of Christmas Carols around the farms and villages. I was considered much too young to go out with the singers but I heard them around the village before they set out for the outlying farms and hamlets. Goodness knows what time they all got home again, but there must have been some rather belated milking times the following mornings.

I suppose that the Chapel tradition of the Sunday School Anniversary should be included under this heading. My mother brought with her some memories of her own background in Lancashire Congregational Chapel life and introduced these events to Keld. A theme would be chosen from a publisher's catalogue with some not very memorable songs and readings put together to make a celebratory service for all the members of the Sunday School to present to an admiring congregation. The boys dressed smartly and the girls all wore bonnets for the occasion and there was a special tea to follow. Photographs were taken, of course. The Sunday School meetings were generally held in the back pews of the Chapel and not many children were able to come as most of them lived well outside the village. The Scots from Park House often stayed with their grandmother, old Mrs. Scot at Rose Cottage, and came across the road, a few came from as far off as Angram, and numbers grew when the evacuees arrived. We studied Bible stories and collected pictures in small albums as well as performing in the Anniversaries.

Another activity which went on in farm houses and in the front room of the Manse was quilting. A group of six or eight ladies would gather round a temporary trestle table upon which was stretched a double fabric sandwich enclosing a kapok padding. They would sit, three or four a side, and stitch the patterns already pencilled and pricked out on the fabric, using neat little running stitches which held the fabrics together and finished the quilt. A large number of patterns existed, varying from place to place, but the one I remember best is that which was made at the Manse using a fine feather motif; it was a pleasant blue on one side and cream on the reverse. The quilting party would move from house to house finding an evening's entertainment and an opportunity for gossip while making these rather beautiful

and warm bed covers which were a feature of the Yorkshire Dales. (I never thought to ask how the fabrics were available at a time when such material was rationed.)

Rugs, rag rugs, were another contribution to the households, but these were the product of thrift, well practised from before the war when waste of any sort could not be afforded; during the war such a habit of mind was even more necessary. Again a trestle table would be erected and hessian, sometimes taken from used sacks, stretched over it. Bags came out, full of old fabrics from used clothes and anything else such as curtains or even stockings, all cut into short strips. These would be pegged into the hessian, sometimes into neat loops but just as often with one end sticking up, sometimes in a pattern and at others at random, probably depending as much on the variety of colours available as on ingenuity and time. These made good hard wearing hearth rugs to put in front of the kitchen range, but they were by no means exclusive to the northern farm houses and I have seen examples in other parts of the country.

As farming was a reserved occupation there was a good mixed community throughout those difficult years, and many of the young men who were not called up found their relaxation and pleasure in music when not on guard duty. I still don't know whether there is a special gift for singing bestowed upon those who live in the hills – the Welsh seem to think that they have a very particular and exclusive gift – but if there is it certainly flourished in Keld then. Perhaps shouting across the moors as well as whistling to their sheep dogs trained a powerful voice. Making music was a shared joy so both Brass and Silver Bands were as popular in the Dales as in the industrial towns and there was always a Band available to play at the War Memorial every 11<sup>th</sup> November and on other special occasions, but singing was important to everyone and the male voice quartet calling itself the Keld Singers, mentioned in the holiday diary, was well loved outside Swaledale and a cause of pride within. Straightforwardly and simply they would sing from Messiah or the hymn book with such sensitivity and beauty as to bring tears to the eyes; The Old Rugged Cross was a favourite. Unsophisticated and delighting in their blending of voices in a most pleasing harmony the music they made is for me a treasured memory. There was one local song they always sang for us and for others outside the dale: Beautiful Swaledale. The verses were hardly great poetry (so what national anthem falls into that bracket?) but we loved them, and the tune that went with them. I can remember some of it and will look out for the rest, but the first verse went thus:

*Beautiful Swaledale, Land of my rest (!)  
Beautiful Swaledale, we love thee the best.  
We keep our land in a cultivate style,  
Th'extension of Swaledale is twenty long mile.*

Then the refrain, which began:

*Beautiful Dale, Home of the Swale.....*

But it really does need the tune! And that's all I can remember just now although I think that I was given a copy by Mabel Calvert, and if I find it I will put it into the Appendix. Another of their songs was a hilarious account of the Ghost on the Buttertubs Pass, but that is one that I have completely forgotten in any detail.

In the early 1990s the Wilson boys discovered a school photograph from 1940 among their father's possessions and sent it to The Dalesman. Following publication someone suggested that they should try to repeat the scene with all the original people there, outside the Manse and beside the School. We were all very much older, of course, but the gathering

was a great success, almost nobody was missing and new photographs were taken with everyone in their original positions. Among those who joined us afterwards in the Public Hall for a hefty tea, Keld style, was Laurie Rukin now in his wheel chair. He had been very nearly crippled in a couple of farming accidents but the merry twinkle was still there, the welcoming warmth and Swaledale accent, and his voice. There was one other surviving member of the quartet present and when somehow we got round to singing they were persuaded to start us off, a little unwillingly at first but then with less of a quaver as certainty and pride returned. Then we all joined in, but it was difficult to do so. Emotion betrayed me in the dying whisper of past delight. Now both of them are dead.

Occasionally the war beyond our sheltered world broke through, such as the night when an RAF plane crashed on a remote part of the fells and the crew were brought down to the village. I have no idea how long these men stayed among us, billeted around just like evacuees, but although it seemed then to have been for a long while they must have rejoined their units as soon as possible. This would have happened in 1940 or perhaps 1941, and quite possibly it was the weather which caused the accident and then kept them in the village, for these were two unusually bad winters in a place where bad winters were the norm. These young men certainly livened Keld up as we enjoyed singsongs round the harmonium at Park Lodge and older girls found new partners for the village dances. I don't imagine that the wreckage of their plane can have been well guarded for small pieces began to circulate around the school, and 'aeroplane glass' became a prized material. An evacuee boy called Ronnie made me a ring from one small fragment, and I was very proud of it. (I have often wondered what became of Ronnie. He was a sparky lad and popular, and should have done well back on Tyneside after the war.) There were a number of other crashes on the moors, one of them near Skeugh Head where two Dutch airmen were found dead after their parachutes failed to open in time.

I have one or two other memories of the early days of the war, first from June 1940. My Mee grandparents were staying with us, perhaps to get away from Leeds when the bombs began to fall there. It was June 1940 and a summer's day out was planned in the Lake District, the car already out of the garage and waiting, when the news of the Fall of France reached us. I have a small vignette in my mind, the five of us standing in front of the Manse door and the grown-ups debating what they should do, and me not quite understanding why this should affect us but knowing that it must be serious. In the end the trip was cancelled, and I suppose petrol rationing would have prevented any further such outings although my father would have had an extra allowance for his work which shortly included lectures to the troops down at Catterick Camp. I really don't know why these lectures were arranged, perhaps to give the servicemen something else to think about before going into action. Neither do I know for certain what his subjects were although I am fairly sure that one of his themes was the development of the local dialect and its Norse origins, but there must have been more than that. He may also have done some speaking for the WEA in Northallerton. What does amaze me is the fact that he drove, in the dark and with almost no lighting and very nearly blind, to these engagements. So far as I know nothing ever went wrong. One small anecdote from those dark days: Arnold was visiting an elderly church member in Reeth whose eye-sight was at least as bad as his, and she generously made him a cup of coffee using the instant dark liquid called Camp Coffee which was then available. Her larder was in darkness, the kitchen light dim, and when he came to drink it ("With sugar, Mr.Mee?") it was awful: she had used a bottle of gravy browning. Bless him, he never told her, just drank it meekly and said 'Thank you', working out later what had happened and sharing the joke with us.



My grandparents in Leeds may well have sought occasional peace with good reason: I have another memory of carefully peering through the blackout in my bedroom on a visit there and seeing tall buildings blazing after the sirens had sounded, so there must have been alarms and damage. On another occasion we went to stay with our old friends in Dronfield shortly after the blitz on Sheffield and hearing descriptions of the collapsed and shattered buildings, homes with the sides blown out and personal possessions laid open, and then seeing some of them, and later trying to imagine what melted glass must look like on the floors of the big stores that I had been told about. It is clear in one of my grandfather's letters that he was well aware that they might die in an air raid and was prepared for it.

### **Paradise Lost**

It was almost certainly the difficult winters of 1940/42, when lost aircraft were wrecked on the moors, which led to the end of our days in Keld. The cold was extreme, and I never did like that, weeping with 'hot-ache' in my hands when other children were revelling in snowballs; but the fallen snow was spectacular forming great drifts the size of barns while the roads were blocked for miles. One spring\* at the bottom of the village never froze, so there were long queues with buckets to get sufficient water for immediate use. Narrow passages, perhaps four or more feet deep, were dug out to connect houses, then extended to reach the tap at the spring head like rabbit-runs and formed an interesting pattern. The waterfalls, and there are many of them at this end of the dale, froze solid into the likeness of sculptured organs, and the landscape became magically transformed, the white fells sweeping away into the sky, the black trees picked out in white frost. Every morning I would wake into silence, snow had crept in through the window frames, their panes thickly covered in frost patterns, a grey light filtered in and all outside sounds were muffled. While the bedroom was fiendishly cold. These were the winters when farmers suffered serious losses among their flocks, for the sheep would seek refuge in the lee of walls during a blizzard and stay there. With any luck a small group might keep each other warm with their breath and woolly coats, and an experienced man with a good dog might look in the right places and find them before digging them out, but it was tough for everyone and meant financial losses which could not be afforded. Such occasions are not confined to what might be regarded as the depth of winter. The lambing season in the high Pennines is much later than in lowland areas and a wicked Easter blizzard can still leave a sad trail of lost lambs.

*\* That Spring: It fed a tap set in a small alcove beside the turn into Park Lodge farmyard. It is closed off now, I notice. 'Held' is apparently the old Norse word for a spring, and I wonder whether this unfulfilling source of water is what gained the village its name.*

It was in the middle of the winter of 1941/2 when I developed appendicitis, which was not a good move. By that time my father had acquired a slightly larger car, a Morris 8 I think, and somehow he had to get me down to the Royal Hospital in Bradford eighty miles away. The alternative hospital in Darlington was only half the distance, a mere forty miles, but was even more difficult to reach and if we could get to Bradford my parents could stay in Leeds with my grandparents. This was an emergency when the local community really excelled. All the men who could do so turned out to clear the roads, which the snow plough had failed to keep open, and slowly Arnold with his awful eyesight crept down the dale until the more important roads were open. Fortunately for me all went well and I recovered, and I had a much pleasanter time there than when I had had my tonsils removed in the Childrens' Hospital in Bradford years earlier, aged five. At that time there was some sort of assembly line

taking children through from Ward to Surgery and I am certain that the anaesthetic was not properly administered: for years the black fright and pain stayed with me. This time in the Royal, however, I was in a ward for grown ups and got spoilt. Among my visitors was Lady Hill, a philanthropic member of the Congregational Church where my father's old friend Leslie Hall was minister, and she came bearing gifts which included a set of Venus pencils in all their pleasing crackled green paint. My father also brought me the very first of the newly published Puffin books. So, not a bad time there at all and then home to the guest bedroom with a coal fire in the grate. One thing I well remember about car journeys in those winters is just how cold they were. Cars had no heating then and however well wrapped up one might have been the cold always won.

Sadly, that was not the end of the misfortunes which hit us that winter, for only a week or so after I left the hospital my mother was taken very ill indeed. I was left behind with the Waggetts at the Post Office and once more my worried father drove down in difficult conditions to Bradford and back to the same ward. As he helped my mother, who was small and always looked young for her years, to her bed one lady who had been there when I was being looked after was heard to say "Oh, that poor clergyman! He's got another of his daughters here!"

I didn't help matters all that much when I slipped on the ice while she was away and twisted my wound, which had to be attended to again. (I wasn't disobediently and playfully sliding. Honest!) So what with my mother's hysterectomy, her difficulties with the harsh climate, my complications and, most of all, the problems connected with the next stage of my education, it became clear that Arnold must look for another church further south.

The climate and my education. I suppose I had never imagined that things would change, although I did know that while most children stayed in the village school until they were fourteen a few others would go to Grammar School down in Richmond where they would lodge with friends or family. We had one good friend, Doris Wilson, who belonged to the Church there and was, I understand, prepared to take me in. Whether that would have been a good idea I'm not sure: an only child with a kind but middle-aged spinster lady as sole company? Not perhaps very life enlarging. It was at this stage of discussion that my Grandfather Mee stepped in. Milton Mount College, a school well known in the denomination, founded in about 1870 for the daughters of Congregational ministers, attended by girls whose parents we knew: this was where he was certain that I should go. Although the fees were funded to some extent by endowments there would still be considerable expense and he would largely carry the financial burden. It is difficult now to realise just how little money a minister received by way of stipend, and I will come to that later, but without Grandpa's generosity Milton Mount would have been impossible. The other problem attached to my enrolment there, made worse by wartime conditions, was the distance between Keld, in a remote part of North Yorkshire, and the school which was supposedly based in Sussex but had just been evacuated to Lynton in North Devon. So I took the entrance exam sitting at one of the desks in the Public Hall, and passed, and my father sought advice, looked at churches where a new minister was needed in a likelier area, and put himself forward for one in a village only twelve miles from Cambridge. Bertram Smith had for some obscure reason gone to live there when he retired, and another old friend, Norman Armstrong, was minister at the Victoria Road church. An added inducement was that Norman already had two daughters, Andrea (Ray) and Joy, attending MMC. Another country church, a world famous University quite close, older girls who would travel with me and look after me when I made the first journey: I can see why it appeared to be the answer.

So the decision was taken and the congregations were informed, and that meant that the news ran down the dale and further like wildfire. These good friends had obviously felt as I did that nothing need ever change. There might be a war on, visitors and such would come and go, but some things and people were fixtures, and that included my parents. I learned later that it was years before my father's name was replaced by a much later successor on the painted Notice Board in front of the Chapel although other men had replaced him in Manse and pulpit. For so reserved a community there was such a spontaneous and sorrowful reaction that my parents were quite unnerved, for none of us wished to leave anyway. Round and round we all three went, up and down the Dale to moors and farms, into even remoter Arkengarthdale where some of the Reeth congregation lived, tears everywhere. And then my mother was taken ill again, and Doctor Cox decreed that she should not travel for some weeks.

I recall nothing about the packing up of the household goods, which my father must have done more or less on his own. All that I do remember is what seemed to me the vast railway container which was parked in front of the Manse being loaded up with our possessions before disappearing into the unknown. This was in the middle of the war and removals for any distance must be done by rail, and I suppose that you just hoped that your load would eventually arrive intact and unbombed in the right place at some time in the future. My mother took to the comfortable feather bed provided for her at Butt House after an emotional last service in the Chapel and then my father and I set out in the Morris. Not surprisingly this was to be the last major drive he ever made, and that last journey down the top end of the Dale sticks in my memory. It was August and the haymaking was being finished, so there were plenty of people out in the fields as we passed. They were watching for us and came to the walls by the roadside between Angram and Thwaite to wave good-bye while others stood in the front of their houses to make their farewells. It seemed right at the time to a small girl but on reflection it was quite a tribute, and I have never forgotten it.

It was to be a long journey and not without its problems, there being no signposts because of the war, so good map reading was essential. My father had taught me how to understand Ordnance Survey maps and between us we managed. The only place I remember where we broke the journey was at Rothwell in Northamptonshire and we stayed with Auntie Annie (Grandpa's sister) and Uncle Lou. Finally we reached the Armstrongs' house in Cambridge and on the next day found our way to Burwell, though not yet to our new home. One last memory of that journey: we had come to a very different place and landscape and all was quite unfamiliar. Burwell is twelve miles from Cambridge in the fen country where everything as far as you can see is flat, a complete contrast to the Pennines in far away Yorkshire. At last we had to ask for directions. "Burwell, you say?" came the answer in a totally unfamiliar accent. "Keep straight on then turn right up the big hill, then left and straight on again for a couple of miles." Big hill? It took us months to identify it, an insignificant slope on the edge of Swaffham Prior.

So we left Keld and went to Burwell, and there could not be two more different places.