

Pelton Fell History Group

This document was transcribed by Tom Hedley for Pelton Fell History Group from a hand written copy of the original, donated by Bill Pace, a relative of the author.

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A brief history of my life and family by Tom Morris, born Thomas Hodgson Morris at 12 Mission Row, Newfield, County Durham, in the year 20th March 1909.

Parents were James and Margaret Morris. I was their seventh child, of six boys and two girls. Their names being, Richard William, Desmond, Robert, James, John Edward, Grace, Thomas Hodgson and Ella Baird, in that order. At the time of writing I am the last one alive. My father was a coal miner and worked at the village of Pelton Fell, there were five coal mines named The Busty and The Low Main with various Drifts, namely The Five Quarter and The Tribley. A lot of coal was mined from these pits and it was an integrated village, with a mission church and various denominations of chapels. There were shops and grocery stores; the most important of these was the Co-op Society, with a grocery, butchery, drapery and milk departments. Other important stores were Walter Wilsons (grocery) Downey's (grocery), and a Chemist, Andersons a (paper shop) and other small shops. There were various Public Houses, The New Inn at Newfield, Favel's, Middle House and The Working Men's Club at Pelton Fell. The Miner's Institute was a favourite source of leisure, with a reading room, billiards room, dance hall and other facilities. A large War Memorial Park was situated along-side the Institute with games for tennis and bowls. Below this park was an industrial chemical complex extracting various things from coal.

My first school was at Station Road, Pelton Fell, and then we were transferred to Roseberry School at Newfield, over a mile away, there being an infants and a seven standard system, with an x standard for bright children with the possibility of a secondary education at Chester-le-Street or Tanfield. A great headmaster in my time was a Mr. Brodie, a great disciplinarian and a helpful friend.

A railway line split the village in two and there were about eight or ten streets each side of the line, which transported coal down from the mines in the higher country. All life centred around the coal industry and there were very little other centres of industry to compete. When I left school we tried the other two sources of employment, that was the local bus service or the sweet factory named Homers of Dainty Dinah fame, but they were more or less fully manned at any time and you were very fortunate to get one of those jobs.

I would like to name a few names of families who I remember and were prominent in the village, In Mission Row where I was born there were, Dixons, Bankhead's, Porters, Lashley's, Bell's, Kirkup's, Ball's, Rimmington's and Willis', just to name a few and there were dozens more who I find difficult to remember now.

I think I should now get down to my personal life and family. My early years before school were hazy, but I remember the beginning of the First World War when I was five years old. The First World War was hard on my parents; they had four sons who went away to war, two in the navy and two in the army. Dick and Jim were in the navy and Bob and Des in the army. Bob joined-up when he was seventeen and a half and spent his eighteenth birthday in the trenches in France with the Black Watch Regiment. Dick was a Wireless Telegraphist, Jim was in the Mine Sweepers in the Mediterranean, and Des was in horse regiments. They all returned safely after the war. Things didn't go all that well for the family after the war, Bob had to spend four years in India to finish his time in the army and Dick met a girl in Ireland during his service there, who went to America and Dick followed her out there with disastrous consequences, she jilted him. He tried to make it on his own but it was the time of the American depression and he all but starved to death. I think, but I never knew for sure that my parents scraped enough money to buy his passage home.

I wasn't the best of scholars and left school at fourteen years of age, I might have done better if it hadn't been for a teacher who kept me in standard six for three years. But even then I don't think I had it in me to make a scholar. I started down the mines at fourteen, the same as my other brothers, but none of us ever remained miners, we drifted into other trades and occupations. My first job down the mine was helping the man who sawed the pit props for the coalface. My next job was pony driving. There were three stages of transport; one was coalface to flat, flat to station and station to shaft bottom. My job with my pony was to take the tubs of coal from the flat to the station. A smaller pony was used to pull the tubs of coal from the coalface to the flat and the young men were called "putters", the men at the coalface were called "coal hewers". From the station to the shaft bottom a steel cable was used, as many as twenty or thirty tubs of coal at a time was pulled out and as many empty ones returned 'in bye' as the expression was then. Working down the mine wasn't the pleasantest of occupations and I had lots of hair-raising experiences. Once, one of my ponies got himself stuck under a small shelf of rock and it took several men to haul him out, when we got him out he was wet with sweat and trembling like a leaf. Another time all my mates had managed to grab hold of tubs going to the shaft bottom and I was left last without a lamp, how I managed to run and grab hold of a tub I'll never know. There were lots of accidents and fatalities in the mines, most of them caused by falling roofs not properly timbered. Well after twelve months down the mine I caught a disease called Para Typhoid and I spent several weeks in hospital in Newcastle on Tyne, when I was recovered I went down the mine again for a short time until my father persuaded the Engineer at the surface to give me a job in the blacksmiths shop and I settled down to a hard job that I really didn't dislike. I learnt to shoe horses and make coal-tubs, repair cages and hauling gear, pony harness, links and chains and when no one important was looking a few fire irons and trivets for home to show our parents how clever we were. But it was never to last long, when I was about eighteen the coalmine was

closed at the Busty Pit and The Low Main drastically reduced, I don't know the real number who lost their jobs but it affected the whole village and it came so sudden that people were really stunned and tears were seen in many people's eyes when the whole mining complex was sold as scrap and absolutely flattened. Many middle-aged and older people never found jobs again and many of the younger men and families moved out of the district and went as far as Rugby and Doncaster, Blackball and Horden just to name a few. After a few months of being out of work I found a job as blacksmiths helper in an iron works at Birtley, I must have spent a couple of years there but when I neared twenty and was hoping for men's wages we were given the sack.

There were three of us from the same village, all mates, Norman Rimmington, Joe Wilson and myself. I happened to be lucky again and found a job in a small colliery nearby called The Handon Hold. That lasted a few months and then the last job of all in the north was working for a scrap dealer demolishing old worked-out mines.

I should now talk about some of the nicer sides of life; there were always some things of interest going on. By now I was of manhood and strong and healthy, the result of working as a blacksmith, my weight was about eleven stone, I was five feet eight and well-muscled. I loved going to dances and that's where I spent my Saturday nights. My favourite place was Stanley, at the Palais, and that's where I met my future wife, Peggy Simpson. I also danced at various places in Chester-le-Street, mainly Graves's, The Mechanics Hall and other places; we also went to Durham and Birtley. My other hobby was poaching and I often supplemented the larder with the odd rabbit. I kept dogs and ferrets and was often out in the country enjoying walks. I have vivid memories of the General Strike of 1926. I was too young to get involved in the politics, but we were all good union men and as you may know we were out 26 weeks after Jimmy Thomas took the railway men back to work, it didn't do him much good as that was the end of his career. It didn't do us much good either, we went back to work for less than we came out for. There were the usual soup kitchens where you took your spoon and plate. There were never any good times, only hard times and we got used to them because we knew nothing else and that's how we lived. By now I was unemployed for a long period, it wasn't an unhappy time for I was courting my future wife and we spent some happy hard-up days together. I travelled miles around the district and local pits looking for work and it was heart-breaking. Mother had died at the age of 58, just worn out with child-birth and worries, my brothers and sisters were drifting off, some to get married, the girls to London and skivvies life doing domestic work for about £40 per year and keep. Des was the first to get married; he met Alice Laverick a local girl, not very bright but a good worker and companion. They had two girls, with a 20-year gap between them, 'Marge and Carol'. Marge married and had one son. I think Carol married but as far as I know had no issue. Jim was the next one to leave home and get married; he married a girl called Elsie Pickford who already had an illegitimate boy called Tom. They had two children of their own, Elsie who married a policeman and had no children and Jim who married a local girl and had one son Ian. Jack was the next to leave

and he married a girl Bessie Johnstone from Grange Villa, a very nice family, they had one son John who married a nurse and had three children. Jack had a hard life; he was the last one to leave the pits and who eventually went to Oxford and various other jobs. Jack died at the age of 66 just shortly after he retired. Bessie I'm sad to say spent a lot of her years in blindness and died a few years later. By now the family had broken up completely, Grace and Ella went to London and founded a home, where they were joined by my father. My eldest brother Dick through his efforts won a scholarship to Ruskin College for two years. He eventually married a local Oxford girl, they were both in their thirties and this is how I came to live in Oxford. Dick found me a job in a road construction firm making the northern bypass. Dick married a May Grace Ward of a large mixed family, she was a land-girl in the First World War and it is said went to London as a bat-woman and met Clara Bow the singer. We never got on together and after a few weeks of living with them I went into lodgings with a couple named Mr and Mrs King, a real nice old-fashioned couple, I stayed with them until I got married.

A little bit more about myself. I courted Peggy Simpson 6 years before we married, 4 years up north and 2 years in Oxford and the only reason we got married then was because Dick was moving out of his house and he wanted someone he knew to take the house over, this was 1936, we married at Oxford Registry Office a very simple ceremony, I felt sorry and a little guilty she didn't have a proper wedding, but there it was, I had no money and couldn't afford it. I eventually got a blacksmith job at the Oxford and Cowley Ironworks and stayed there for four years, I lost the sight of my left eye with a piece of steel and it knocked the bottom out of my world for a time. I spent a couple of months out of work and we were on our beam-ends, it was winter and there was 12 inches of snow lying around for a long time. My wife was in the house on her own with everything frozen up, it was a bad time for us, but it got better, but not very much. By now it was the Second World War 1940, I left "The Cowley Ironworks" and I met my brother Dick in Oxford, he said he was going to join the First Aid Party in Civil Defence; did I want to join with him? So we went and were accepted. I stayed in the Civil Defence until 1942 and when fear of invasion was over they discontinued the First Aid Party and combined it with the Rescue Party, a lot of us had to leave and we went into industry. I went to the Pressed Steel Co. at Cowley. Financially things went a lot better for my wife and I, she had various little jobs and eventually made a career for herself in the Potato Marketing Board and I stayed on at the Pressed Steel Co. till we retired. I was there 29 years I persuaded my wife to retire early as we had both worked hard and I retired at 62. We spent seven good years of retirement until she died in February 1978. My wife Peggy was an asthmatic and I spent many nights and days helping her to fight this awful complaint. She was a lovely girl of good disposition and we loved each other very much. We never had children because we never tried for them for the reason of her health and the hard times we had to put up with. We saw a lot of distress from young people who married and had children and we tried to avoid that. I should say a word about my sister Grace now. As I said she moved to London and made a

home for my father and younger sister Ella. Ella courted a boy from Pelton Fell called Joe Wilson but before they could marry Ella died from cancer and she was only 23. My father died shortly after, but before then my sister Grace married Joe Wilson and they had three children. Sometime before this Grace found my brother Bob through The Seaman's Mission and united him back into the family.

He married Joe Wilson's half-sister Emily and they had one son, who I never met. Grace died about the early 80s and her family have children of their own.

I will now go back and fill in some of the things that happened in my life that were of importance, and the people I lived with and knew. My wife had one sister Betty, she was younger than my wife. She married a man called Joe Shield, they never lived together but they had one son George. Betty had to work very hard to support her son and while she was working in Newcastle Co-op she fell down a lift shaft and was killed, she was a very nice person and she willed that George should live with us. Well we took George, he was about 14 at the time, we got him into a good school in Oxford and he turned out a very good scholar. He was interested in the Scout Movement and was a founder member of The Oxford Sea Scouts. He left school about 16 and joined The Oxford Electricity Department, he went to night school and was a qualified electrical engineer by the time he was 22. I won't say he was the best of nephews that could be imagined, we had a lot of ups and downs but we did our best for him and I suppose being a sort of orphan he didn't want to submit to all our ways. When he passed his exams he wanted to go round the world and he worked his way around, it took him four years. He shipped to Canada and from there all the Americas. From the Panama Canal he shipped on The Endeavour n to New Zealand and Australia with various islands in between, he went to Japan, India and other countries on the way home, as I say it took him four years. I sometimes think it didn't do him all that good in some ways, but in the end I was glad he did for he was shortly to lose his life in Argentina doing a job for a big electrical company and it was a very distressing time for us.

My wife's father was a chronic asthmatic and he was a miner, his condition was to curtail his working life. He was a bookies runner and was head man in his district for Collins and Chator who were prominent bookmakers in the North East. At the time when I married Peggy she came to live with me in Oxford and that left her father on his own. Well that lasted for a few years until he couldn't look after himself anymore so he came to Oxford and he stayed with us until he died a few years later. At the time of writing very few of that family are still alive. Stanley and the surrounding districts and County Durham as a whole was a lovely place to live, lots of hills and valleys, two nice rivers the Tyne and the Wear. In my day only the slag heaps spoiled the scenery, but I hear they are flattening them so maybe County Durham will come into it's own again as one of the loveliest counties. I think it could have been a lot better had more interest and money been spent after the coal had been worked out, a lot of hardship and heartache could have been avoided and families parted.

Desmond as I said married Alice Laverick, she came from an unfortunate sort of family, Alice's father was a small man of peculiar appearance, his nick-name was Mouter, I didn't know his first name, I think he had four children, two were healthy and two died of tuberculosis. Alice was healthy and she had a brother who joined the army and made it his career, I think he married but I don't know who, I know he made the rank of sergeant. Des and Alice left Co. Durham in the thirties and took advantage of an agricultural experiment settling would-be unemployed miners in, I think Norfolk on the land, hoping to make them self-sufficient, but whether the whole the programme was successful I never knew. Des opted out and took up farm labouring work among other things and that as far as I knew was how they ended up their working lives. Dick as I said married May Ward and he had many jobs, worked in Morris Motors in the early days, served part of his time as a blacksmith at Pelton Fell before the First World War, tried to make his mark as an early seller of Crystal Sets in the early days of wireless, to no avail. After his stint at Ruskin College, which didn't do him much good because he was too old to take in the subjects in his curriculum he went from job to job and I think, as far as I knew, was mainly lucky. He worked for himself at one time doing odd building jobs, and then they had a boarding house taking in students. I think he ended up in one of the colleges looking after animals; he retired and had a lot of good years in retirement. He died aged about 83, from a stroke. May lived a little longer and I think she was about the same age. Des died in his early 70s. Bob also died in his early 70s; as far as I know when he left the Merchant Navy he took up window cleaning. Jim worked in Pelton Fell at one time as a taxi driver with a Model T Ford; I had many a ride in it to school. He also worked as a park keeper but the most of his adult life was spent in Chester-le-Street driving a lorry for the council. He died in his eighties. Jack started work in the butchers shop at Pelton Fell for a time, and then started down the mines, he ended his working life in the pits as a wagon-way man. He came to Oxford and had various jobs in colleges, schools and Co-ops. Grace was a hardworking girl, post-woman and housework; in her married life she did lots of home help jobs. Her husband Joe Wilson was a blacksmith like myself. Ella the youngest of the family I liked best of all, we grew up together as children, she had a short life poor girl. She also worked in London as a housemaid apart from small jobs, as I said she died from cancer at the age of 23.

I had lots of nice mates and friends, my last until I started courting was a lad called Bobbie Keers. We did a lot of dances together and there might have been a chance he might have married Peggy's friend Agnes McDonald had there not been a discrepancy between their ages, she was some years older. Later she married a gardener at Stanley but they had no children, to their great disappointment. Bob married a nice girl from Chester-le-Street and they had two sons. Bob was an Overland Surveyor and sort of became a pillar of society and was honoured by the Queen for his services to the community. A great friend, his first wife died and he married second time round and they now live in Norfolk. His father was killed in a mine. Other pals by name, Arthur Sillet,

Tommy Harrison, Ned Wallace, Billy Purvis, Norman Rimmington and Daz Willis.

Villages in close proximity to Pelton Fell were Pelton, Ouston, Grange Villa, West Pelton, and Twizel, Beamish, Craghead, Waldridge and South Moor. The two main small towns were Stanley and Chester-le-Street, which has a historic past. Durham City also was an important town with a beautiful cathedral where I was confirmed as a child. I spent a few days there on Durham Big Meeting days, when all the miners and their families congregate to hear the local M.P.s and see the massed bands from the different collieries march in and out of town, a splendid sight. Newcastle was eight to nine miles away and just outside our bailiwick and we got there on odd occasions. Tynemouth, South Shields, Whitley Bay and Roker were seaside towns visited only rarely, I only went to see Newcastle United play twice, football didn't interest me much, I saw the great Hughie Gallagher and Dixie Dean play.

I think I should now say something about my later life. As I said I spent 29 years working at what was then the Pressed Steel Company, now called Austin Rovers. First they amalgamated with Morris Motors, then with the Austin Group, then all the other makes of cars such as Singer, Rover, Minx and Rolls Royce (bodies only). In the end it was a mix-up. We made bodies for Jaguar. Pressed Steel was a large complex company and when I first started there did a lot of war work. During the Second World War they employed a lot of local women, some of the things they made were sea mines, ammunition boxes, shell cases and a few other things that at the time were on the secret list. My job for a lot of years was in the transport of parts of cars, shipped in bulk, in lorries, to various other motorcar manufacturers. From being a first class fitter blacksmith to the jobs I did seemed a comedown, but as I said I lost the sight of one eye and I wanted to preserve the other as much as I could. I many times rued the decision to change my job, could have made foreman in the steel construction company Cowley Iron Works whom I worked with before the Second World War. I many times rued the decision, but there it was I hoped for advancement at Pressed Steel, but never got it. The last ten years there I spent in the pattern shop looking after the models of all the different cars they made, and there were thousands. As I said somewhere before, we retired early and I'm glad we did, we had never had a car in our working lives, and when we retired we took up motoring and it opened up our lives, we could stretch our wings as you may say, we had many nice holidays to Wales, Scotland, and most of all were the daily rides in the mornings and back for lunch which broke the day up very nicely and left plenty of time for gardening and housework, all in all until she died I think it was the best time in our lives. I spent nine lonely years without her until a good neighbour across the street a Mr Vallis died suddenly and left his wife Florence in an upset condition. She had been a very cosseted person, a very religious one too, it was a great shock for her at the time to lose her husband, and being the only one around who knew her well, I tried to help her over her difficult times and it resulted in us becoming very good companions, we helped each other with meals and I take the hard work out of her gardening, best of all which she loves very much, is being taken out in the car, in

the country. My wife and I had many nice holidays abroad in the sixties and seventies, mostly in Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Holland and Czechoslovakia. It was an opening time of our lives and I only wish we could have done more of it.

Other incidents in my life were during the Second World War when I was in the Civil Defence. I remember the German bombers crossing overhead, going to devastate Coventry, and it seemed at the time nothing was done to stop them, but there they were going across the sky one after the other, it made you wonder why. My wife Peggy had relatives in Coventry at the time and they told us the hardships and dangers at the time. We were lucky in Oxford; there were only odd incidents such as air raid warnings and the like. Everything was rationed in those days, for food, clothing etc. I think it was a better system than in the First World War, for then it was better to keep in with your local shopkeeper, with the stuff kept under the counter and everything was queued for, vegetables from the allotments were a must and the motto at the time was Dig For Victory.

Innovations from my young days came fast and furious, the gramophone was holding its own during the First World War and after, then came the wireless, the crystal set and then the valve set, that held sway until the middle of the thirties when television arrived and we thought that was marvellous. It was hurry home from work, have your meal and cut a few sandwiches so you weren't disturbed during the evening and watch till the end of programmes. Little did we know it was to change our life style? A lot of good neighbourliness was lost and I think the art of conversation. It was not until years later when you had the choice of four channels and various programmes that you could watch what really interested you. The sets got better and videos came in and this is about where we are at present. I think we are still being brainwashed, the style of music deteriorated from first the classics and then the marvellous songs of the twenties and thirties, with Bing Crosby and Grade Fields, the big bands of Henry Hall and his compatriots. I wish I had a good memory and recall the names of the bands and tunes and songs of my young days, but at 78 years of age you must take forgetfulness as normal.

Transport soon changed the face of things; in my early days the horse still held its own and shire horses still farmed the land, drew coal carts and delivered beer from the breweries to the pubs. Furniture vans, Fire Brigades and even hospital vans were horse driven; local transport was evenly driven by the bus service which during the First World War was driven by large gas bags on the top of the bus and, the large contingent of pony and traps, horse and breaks. All groceries, meat and milk were transported by the marvellous horse and what some marvellous animals they were. Our local man in the village who arranged weddings and funerals was a Bobby Bateman and he always had a pair of spanking blacks to pull the hearse or the wedding carriages, I can see him now, a fat ponderous figure sitting on top of his dickey seat with a half smoked cigarette in his mouth, a great character. He also had a shop hut as far as I can remember he sold only

potatoes or Swedes. The horse and ponies were prominent in the mines. Shires above ground and ponies down below, the shires were bought locally from farms that often had breeding mares and they were visited by the travelling stallion at the time. The ponies came from various places, Dartmoor, Shetland and even Russia at that time and one could at times see strings of ponies being driven, tied nose to tail, around the countryside. Of course steam was into its hey-day and coal and passenger service to the coast and Newcastle was very important. It got better, it was the time of The Flying Scotsman and other great names, steam lorries earned a living until the petrol engine arrived, steam ploughs were prevalent on the farms for ploughing and thrashing and then in a very few years the diesel tractor arrived and what with the petrol engine the end of the horse was near. At the time of writing a revival of the riding ponies came into being and lots of children, mostly girls, took to various shows, gymkhanas and jumping events and it's nice to see, next to the cow who supplied us with milk, butter, cheese, meat etc. it was one of mankind's greatest treasures, where would we have been without the horse? Who opened up America? The aeroplane came to life in my lifetime. I remember the Lindberg episode and of course the Sopwith Camels and Sopwith Pups of the First World War. We avidly read all about the First World War pilots and then after the war the Flying Circuses. Then came a stream of record breakers such as Amy Johnson, Amelia Earhart, Jim Mollison and lots of others. Then air transport really, they thought Sea Planes and Air ships would rule the skies but they were a disaster I saw the R38, R100 and R101 and then I think they went up in flames. Then Whittle invented the Jet Engine and that started the improvement of all aircraft engines, and planes got bigger and bigger. Then the finest plane of all time, "The Concord" which has never been bettered up till now. The motorcar came into mass production when I was in my teens and before that the Fords, the Model T must have been the finest car ever made, it was wood, nails and panels and, looked after, ran forever. Billy Morris, no relation I'm sad to say, went from bikes to producing motorcars, the Bull Nose Morris being one of the first. Austin brought out the Austin Seven in competition. Rolls Royce, Singer, Jaguar and Minx all got on the bandwagon; Pressed Steel Co. stepped in with huge press-shops, stamping out panels for nearly all of them. Well I played my part in the car industry, small as it may seem, The Pattern Maker, The Drawing Office, the Foundry, the Machine Shop and the Production Shops, they would have been at a standstill if the material they produced didn't reach the customer, and that was mostly my job shipping and transport.

So in my lifetime I saw all the greatest inventions known to man and the North East played a great part in that, the great shipyards on the Tyne and Wear, battleships galore and ships of all shapes and sizes. Coal that ran industry and all the bye-products from it, steam engines were invented there, it was the breadbasket of the country and in the end greed destroyed it, and don't forget it was still a great farming country. From coal, ships and iron ore, steel industry was supreme. Wireless, Television, Video, Telephone and nuclear energy, will it be for good or evil? How many Three Mile Islands or Chernobyl's will

it take to make the world uninhabitable for mankind? How many unstable hands are on the buttons of Atom Bombs? How many small countries with spite against the big countries and able to make these bombs won't use them indiscriminately? I think we're playing with disaster and somehow it will be in this way that the end of the world will come.

This year of 1987 had a wonderful spring, my friend Mrs. Vallis and I remarked on how the blossoms of the trees and shrubs were remarkably beautiful, farms, cattle and lambs seemed to be prolific and it was with great pleasure to be able to motor through the countryside and enjoy these sights. Not forgetting that in certain places in Wales and Scotland farmers can't sell their sheep for contamination from the Chernobyl disaster. The summit of invention must have been for man to put another man on the moon and return him safely to earth, the Russians are building space stations, the Americans are making preparations for star wars, how can peace prevail in an atmosphere like this? Well I'll try and wind up what I set out to tell you and that was something about my life and family.

I am now 78 years of age, in the backwaters of my life as it were and the only son of James and Margaret Morris left. So I won't end this with any bitterness towards anyone in the hope that bygones shall be bygones, and I hope someone somewhere may say, "Well I knew Tom Morris" and leave it at that.

A few reminiscences about people I knew, which has nothing to do with this.

In Pelton Fell I knew a man called Shifter Gray, a part cripple, who was a local wag with all kinds of funny sayings.

Billy Purvis, a great shotgun man whom I spent many hours out poaching with.

Jack Dinning, a great Booler, not to be confused with Bowling.

Sammy Heslop, who we plagued by knocking on his door and being chased all over the village.

The great blacksmiths I worked with, Joe Robinson, Harry Armstrong, Arthur Lonsdale, Jimmy Lightle, Nut Wild, Mat Wild, Bart Porter and many others. A good horse-shoer Fred Taylor. There were a lot of good pitmen that I knew who hewed great amounts of coal and were famed for it.

The parsons I knew at the mission were Mr Scudamore and Mr Brazier. Lots of girls who made my nights at the dances, Gracie Fawcett, a beautiful girl, and lots more, I can see their faces now but their names escape me.

My worst illness was a few years after my wife died, when my smoking went up to sixty a day and I woke up one night and couldn't breathe. I called the Doctor in the morning and I was sent to hospital where they did their best for me, but that was the end of my smoking after sixty years. I now enjoy reasonably good health for my age and can do most things around the home and garden.

Apart from my niece who keeps in touch with me through letters and a visit once a year

from Newcastle I have no contact with the rest of my other nieces and nephews and my only nearest friend and companion is Mrs Florence Vallis who herself is partly infirm. I shan't conclude this story yet; there may be some snippets of old time happenings that may come to mind.

I should say something about my forebears. On my mother's side her maiden name was Pace. I can't go back any further than her father whose name was William. I don't remember my grandmother or anything about her. I know my grandfather had five children, their names being, Harry, William, Jack, Margaret and Ellen (called Nellie), probably not in that order of birth. Just before or just after the beginning of the century my grandfather went to South Africa to work in the diamond mines at Kimberly, he specialised in shaft-sinking and mining, by all accounts he was an expert miner in his day.

Now for what I know of his family. I think Harry was the eldest. He first had an illegitimate son but married the mother and had four more children. They lived in a village called Chopwell, we knew very little about them. I think his wife's name was Emmerson. Jack Pace a miner lived at Twizel, he married a Madge someone and had two girls, their names I forget, they emigrated to Canada in the early twenties. William was a butcher at West Pelton Store, and then turned to mining. He had three children, two girls and a boy, the boy turned out to be a successful miner as an overman. He was called William, the girls drifted out of my knowledge.

Margaret my mother, married James Morris and had eight children, I think I've covered them in a previous page.

Ellen (called Nellie) married my father's brother Robert and had five children, their names being William, Robert, Richard, Nancy and Mary, but not in that order of birth. Sometime before the First World War my grandfather sent for uncle Bob and aunt Nellie to work and live in Kimberly, South Africa and that's where they mostly lived and died, apart from a brief period when they returned to try and retire in the thirties, and finally returned to Africa where we lost any contact with them. I don't know whether there is any issue left of that family, but I did hear that one of the girls married someone of Dutch descent. William the eldest son was a successful miner, he married but I don't know who. Mary the eldest daughter married someone called Norman Ready of South Africa, the other two boys we lost touch with.

The only thing I know about my father as I said, is that he had a brother Robert and they came from a village called Spennymoor.

Little bits of information I gleaned came from my mother who, she claimed, came from Scottish descent. Ella and myself were given second names relating to her forebears, my name being Hodgson and Ella's being Baird. Where they fit in with the past I don't know. Somewhere or other I think my father's people came from Ireland, I'm not sure of this but we were always brought up in The Church Of England and for a number of years were caretakers of the Mission Church at Pelton Fell until it was dis-ordained in the thirties. I

and some of my brothers were choirboys there and, as far as I know, we were all christened and confirmed in the Church of England. I am sorry to say that I know of no one in my family who carried on in this way of life, myself included.

I now live in Oxford and have done since 1933; it's a beautiful city and the architecture is as wonderful as ever. But as the years have passed what a deterioration in the habits of the people. We now see undergraduates going about in disreputable clothes, unshaven and looking unwashed. The city has had an invasion of ethnic communities with their habits that are alien to British standards I'm sorry to say.

At the time of writing this we are in the middle of a re-election of government, the Conservative Government have been in power for ten years and they have split the country into the haves and have-nots. We have three and a half million people unemployed and young people leaving school that will never have a job. I came through the trauma of the thirties which were a lot worse than the present days examples, but I still feel for them, for the reason that we had The Second War to overcome our troubles, with plenty of jobs to keep our families together. Will there be another great war to cure unemployment? I don't think so. Now it only takes countries to have a few nuclear weapons to threaten each other with extinction, which results in a sort of Mexican Stand Off, 'you do and we'll do'. I have no idea how it will end, but somehow I think with the perversity of human nature, travesty will occur and unless we have a re-awakening of people with clear thinking and justice we may just avoid total extinction.

What a way to conclude some simple man's way of trying to explain his family and their way of life.

All my life I've been an avid reader. I've emptied the shelves of various authors, apart from Dickens and Shakespeare I would have liked to read more classics, but the most part of my spare time life was spent in activity. The house repairs and painting, the garden, took up a considerable part of my spare time, and in the later years the television. I still kept my hand in with reading Westerns; I think I must have read thousands. I think I will always be remembered as a blacksmith. The wrought iron work that surrounds 51A William Street was made by me in the back garden from a portable forge and an old anvil, with only a breast drill to make holes. Providing someone who takes over the house after I've gone keeps putting a coat of paint on, it should last indefinitely. Last year there was an Oxford in Bloom competition and I entered with trepidation, but lo and behold they rewarded me with three certificates for a nice front garden, a window box and a hanging basket, which made my year horticulturally.

Well lots of things have happened in my life and lots of friends and others have been and gone, and I suppose that's the way of life.

In the next few years I hope to live a quiet existence. I don't ask for much, just enough food to sustain me, a drop of whisky to liven me up, a good bed to sleep in, enough exercise to keep me mobile and a good friend to keep me company. When I look back I don't seem to

have had a bad life considering, I've had my share of troubles, hardships and illnesses but I've had pleasures too, and a certain amount of happiness. It's hard to compare what has been or what could have been. I think we make of life from the circumstances confronting us from each phase of time we experienced at any given time. I only hope as the years go by that I retain clarity of mind and a good memory of things past, and most of all, of people past, after all they're the people that for good or ill, made things happen.

June 1987

While repairing my outside shed and cleaning the roof I stupidly slipped and fell about twelve feet, breaking my upper leg and having to be taken to hospital, where I spent about six weeks in traction and, coming home, spent another six weeks in plaster cast.

Sept. 14 1987

I am hoping to go back to hospital in a week's time to have the plaster removed. I am hoping that my leg will be as good as before, but at my age anything could happen. My friend Florence was very kind and let me stay in her home most of my convalescence, and now that I can negotiate stairs I must try and do for myself again, but I did appreciate staying and being cared for. My time in hospital was very enlightening, the nurses, doctors and physios were very caring and most helpful. The worst part about it was wasting a whole summer's activities at my time of life when I could ill afford it. At this time Florence was having her house rewired and I had to help in cleaning things up. So whatever we are and whatever we do there's always jobs to be done. One thing in our favour was that the summer was one of the worst on record weather wise. But at least the gardens benefited for the veg and flowers were very good.

Sept.22

Went to hospital yesterday and was very disappointed, I can't have my plaster cast off for another six weeks

Oct. 15 1987

Worst storm damage in the south of the country in living memory. 13 people died, lots were injured, hundreds made homeless, road and rail services disrupted, weather department got it all wrong and were blamed.

In the month of September 1987 a catastrophe happened in the town of Hungerford only a few miles from Oxford, a man called Michael Ryan ran amok with guns and killed sixteen people and himself and injured others, the worst case of murder in history.