LOOKING BACK

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Thorne and district Local History Association

Occasional papers 4

Looking Back By Frances Thorley

The year is 1979 - the place Thorne, near Doncaster, Yorkshire.

It is here I was born in the year 1903. How different it is now, and how times are changed.

The earliest I can remember is 1906 when I was three years old. It seems part of another world when I think of all the things that come crowding in.

I remember my mother as a lovely person with dark hair and rosy cheeks, and always singing – though I'm sure at times she must have had little to sing about.

We lived in a tiny cottage, two up and two down, no gas or electricity, only paraffin lamps and candles, with a tap in the back yard to serve three more families. We were three in family, my mother and a brother two years older than myself. My father, I never knew; he had died at the age of 31 with Bright's Disease, leaving my mother a widow with two children to bring up. There always seemed to be lots of washing about, with a dolly tub and peggy legs and a big wringing machine with great wooden rollers which took both hands to turn the wheel. I learnt afterwards that this was the way mother had to earn a few shillings to help support us.

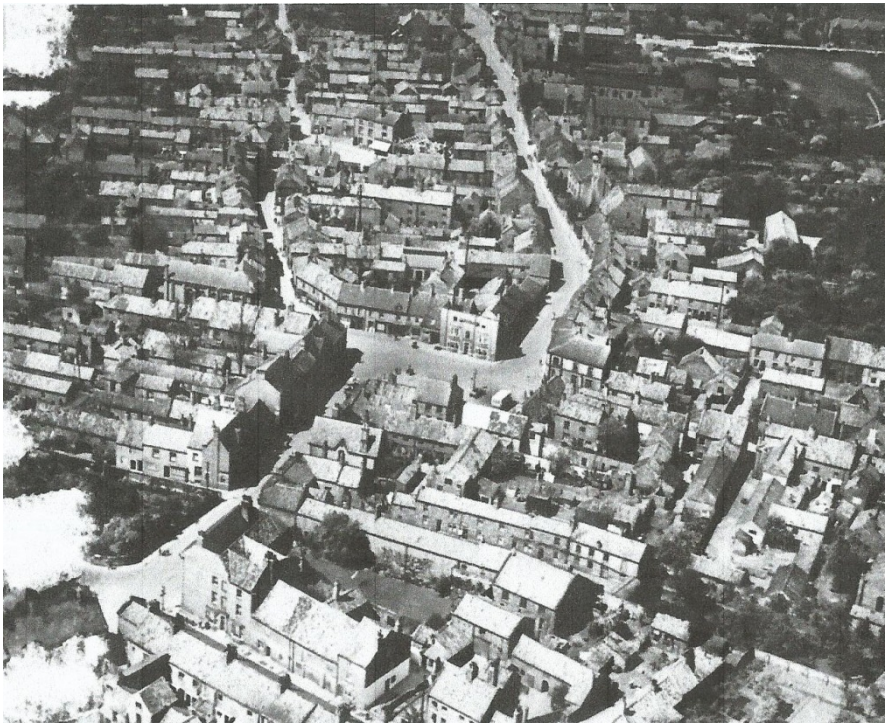
She also got 2s. 0d. Parish Relief. The rent for the cottage was 1s. 3d. per week. (The money was before it was changed from the old currency).

Thorne was then a quiet little township. The shipyards of Richard Dunston and Stanilands were the main industries. It was a common sight to see farm lads driving the cows along South End where we lived. Life progressed very slowly, nothing much seemed to happen.

My grandparents on my father's side were bargees and spent most of their time on the barge, plying from Hull to Sheffield. They were very kind to us and often had my little brother to stay with them. When I was five years old and my brother seven, my mother married again and Jackie went to stay most of the time on the barge with my grandparents. This meant he missed going to school and we were always having the 'school bobby' calling, but they did not seem to be very concerned, and nothing happened about it.

So life went on. Dad was a miner and worked at Cadeby pit and we seemed to have a better way of living, not so much washing about and more time for pleasure, such as walks together on Sunday evenings,

and during the summer the day trips to Cleethorpes, besides having more pennies to spend on sweets, etc.



There was a little shop on the corner which sold papers and pop and sweets. A halfpenny would buy a lucky packet or pair of liquorice boot laces and a long strip of toffee, called an everlasting strip. It was lovely and

sticky and lasted for a long time; it used to stick to the roof of your mouth for ages.

The couple who kept the shop were known to everyone as Liza and George Williamson. They were good to all us children. I used to go in the house and wash a big pile of dishes for Liza, and I got a Lucky Bag out of the shop for it.

When I was six years old, I got a new little brother who was named Edwin, but was always called Teddy. He was a lovely baby, and I used to sit and hold him under my mother's watchful eye, but I remember the day he was to be christened, which nearly had a disastrous ending. He was all dressed up in a long white robe and shawl, with a little white satin bonnet with a veil over his face, and my mother let me hold him until she got ready. Outside in the yard, were two of my friends waiting to see us set off for the church, and while my mother was upstairs, I went outside with the baby to show him off. Not satisfied with this, I went into the next yard and from there into someone's back kitchen, which was empty except for two more of my school friends. We shut the door and laid the baby on the sofa so we could all admire his clothes and look at his feet in his tiny bootees. We must have been there nearly ten

minutes before we heard all the shouting outside and someone opened the door and cried, “It’s all right, she’s here,” and from then there was such a to do – my mother crying and holding the baby, and someone calling me naughty girl, and that I needed a smacking.

That was in the September, and my brother Jackie was still with my grandparents on the barge. In November they were at Hull taking on a cargo for Sheffield. The load was supposed to be scrap iron in barrels but, in fact, it was some poisonous substance. It seemed that the hatches should have been left open to allow the fumes to escape but were instead fastened down, with awful results. I remember it was Bonfire Night on the Friday, and on Saturday morning the police came to our house and asked to see my mother.

The barge had reached at stretch of canal in the Sprotbrough area and they had gone to bed. Grandma woke up feeling sick and ill, and she tried to rouse Grandfather, but could see that he and Jackie were in some kind of a coma. She went up on the deck and the fresh air must have revived her, and she was able to shout for help. It was fortunate that a man was walking along the canal bank and heard her. After going on

board he realised something was very wrong, but he told Grandma to stay on deck until he got some help.
It was breaking day when the police and doctor arrived, but my brother and Grandfather were dead. It would seem that they had inhaled fumes from the cargo which had come through the bulkhead into the cabin. I have since learned that the tragedy caused great commotion and made the headlines in the papers.

I remember the funerals; some girls from the Salvation Army came and sang round Jackie's coffin. He used to go to the Sunday School at the Army whenever he was at home. I can remember how people used to come to the house and try to comfort my mother. It was a very sad time for everyone.

When I was eight years old and Teddy two, we got another baby, a girl this time, who was named Edith after my mother's sister. She carried a lot at first, and needed a lot of nursing, so poor little Teddy got his nose pushed out a bit. I used to look after him quite a lot, and I was often told that I was an old fashioned little thing.

We moved into another cottage with an extra bedroom but still in the same area. Next to us was a farm, and

the farmer was called Lunn. I went to school with their daughter, Madge. Everyone was friends with Madge, because when her dad was boiling pig potatoes in a big copper in the yard to feed the pigs, she used to let us pinch some to eat on our way. They tasted better than our own breakfast and warmed our hands on a cold morning.

By the time I was eleven, we had another brother, John Wilfred, but always called Sonny, so we were quite a family by the time the 1914 – 18 war broke out. A German firm were sinking the pit at Moorends, and they were all taken prisoners of war. All at once we seemed to have soldiers marching through the town, and people cheering them; we children thought it exciting, but the older folk all wore worried looks as they said goodbye to their husbands and sons. The men who were miners were exempt from the army, but my father was transferred to a pit at Hemsworth and we moved from Thorne to Kinsley, a little village near the pit. It was a nice friendly place and the house was in a long row, called Longsight Terrace.
We lived next door to a family called Andrews, who became very good neighbours to us. They had four grown up sons, and then a much younger boy about my age. They had no father; he had died in a pit accident I

think. Mrs Andrews was older than my mother and she was a person who was always helping other folk. If anyone was ill, they used to say, “Fetch Mrs Andrews.”

My Grandfather on my mother’s side came to live with us from Scunthorpe, because they were getting air raids over there. I think it was the steelworks they were after. Anyhow, Grandfather came to stay and he made a big difference to our lives. He was only five foot one inch, and as bald as a bat; he used to wear a woolly hat to sleep in to keep his head warm. He used to treat my mother as if she was still a child, and he made us children jump to attention when he spoke to us. But he was a real comic in some ways; him and dad got on famously together, and that made it better. Mrs Andrews used to come and talk to him when he became ill and could not get out. The things they used to say kept us all interested; I’m sure half of the tales they told were all make–believe, but we enjoyed listening to them.

The war seemed to go on for ever; Wibby Andrews, as he was called, used to go with me to stand in queues for jam when the shops got a supply in. Mrs. Andrew always knew the days when the extra goods were

delivered, so we were always among the first to get our places. Almost all the men in the street worked at the pit and everyone knew everyone else; it was the same with the children. We all went to the same school together, quite a little gang of us. I was one of the older ones and had to take care of Teddy and Edith who had started in the infants. I had a friend called Mary Parsons who also had a younger brother and sister to look after. She used to call at our house about half past eight each morning and off we would go with our little charges; we used to get a bit fed up sometimes at not being able to go off with some of the big kids, but we were on the whole happy lot.

At last the war ended. I had left school at thirteen, and had got a little job at a drapers, as maid of all work. I helped in the shop and in the house, and acted as nursemaid to their two young children, all for 2s.6d. a week. I was fifteen by the end of the war but I did not have a very exciting life. My dad did not believe in girls going out at night so I never went to any of the local dances or concerts. He called dance halls Hell Holes. In any case, I had to give up my job to help at home, because my mother never seemed to be well.

When I was sixteen we got twin girls, Ivy and Daisy, and mother didn't seem to be well after they were born. When they were 10 months old, Dad got a job back at Thorne, and we said goodbye to the Andrews and all the rest of the neighbours and flitted.

The only house we had been able to get was outside the town, at Waterside, by the River Don. From then we had a change in our way of life. Dad decided to go on the barges instead of working at the pit. Grandfather had died while we were still at Kinsley and we all missed him, but I don't think he would have liked going to Thorne anyway.

Teddy and Edith had rather a long way to go to school. They went to Board School, which is now called Fieldside. Sonny also started there. It is different now. At that time there were no street lights after you got under the North Railway Bridge and buildings of any kind until you got to Waterside down the lane leading to the river. Quite a number of families lived there so there were plenty of children all going to school together. Someone started a Sunday School in a hut and we had Sunday services there because it was a long way to go into Thorne. The teachers were very good and the children gave concerts and had parties

and generally enjoyed themselves. We had a mill up the river bank, which made cow cake and animal food. We called it the Locust Mill. We used to go to the chaps who were working there and get big fat sticks of locust; they were lovely to eat, but too many gave you the runs!

I was now seventeen but still living at home to help with the housework and the children. I used to go out doing odd cleaning jobs for other families to earn a little pocket money. It was about this time I met the young man who was to become my husband.

Here I must tell you a little about him. He was one of a family of ten children, he being the eldest. He had only recently returned from being a prisoner of war in Bulgaria. He joined the forces when he was only seventeen, having given a wrong age to get in. He had his eighteenth birthday in the trenches, was shot in action and reported missing, believed killed. The vicar of the church read his memorial service, and he was mourned as dead. It was a long time before he was found to be alive, and when at last he returned home, the people all rejoiced and made a great fuss, but he was very shy and for a long time stayed in the house.

When I met him, I found out that we were not unknown to each other's families. I had gone to school with his sister Gladys and a brother Albert. I have a photograph with our class taken in Church School, with the Headmaster who we called Gaffer Miller. His son still lived at Waterside when we moved there. My mother and his mother had been friends in their early married lives, so both families were interested in our romance.

When we were courting, my mother had another baby boy; he was called Cyril, and at the time of my writing he is living in Hull with his wife and family. He was only a few months old when I got married to Charles Thorley, and we got a little cottage on Ellison Street for 4s. 10d. per week – that is about 23p in decimal coinage. But wages were very small, less than £2 per week, so we had no luxuries, but we were very happy.

I remember the first two years as being very hard work just running a home. I was almost 19 when I got married, and my husband was 25. He would not get into debt so we had all second hand furniture to start with. One of the best things we had was a big horse hair sofa which was long enough to lie on, and had a shaped end like a pillow. It cost £1, and lasted us for

years. I did not have any washing things except a barrel from the brewery sawn in half; it used to serve as a wash tub and a bath. The first mangle we got cost 5s. 0d. from an old lady who was selling up. It had two big wooden rollers and a great big handle on a wheel. It took all the wind out of me. Life was a struggle in those days but somehow everyone seemed to manage, and what few pleasures we had we enjoyed much more than people seem to do to-day.

We lived just round the corner from my husband's parents. They had a house in Bridge Street. The land is now a car park, but at that time there were houses from the top end right down to the bottom, all occupied with families well known to each other. At the top lived Squire Elmhurst in a big house. It's still there; not quite as it was, it has been modernised. At the bottom a big house standing partly in Bridge Street (and being on the corner) partly in Silver Street. It also is still there, but now it is flats on the top and a Ladies and Gents Hairdressing Salon on the ground floor. This was the home of Doctor Taylor, a much loved family doctor, and his family. After he died, his son took his place; he still lives in Thorne, but has almost retired.

To get back to my husband's family, my father–in–law was a tin smith employed by Raynors in the Market Place, now Hursts, the Ironmongers. He was a craftsman and is remembered for his high class workmanship, and was a very much respected member of the community. He was a member of the Bible Class at the Wesleyan Chapel for many years. There were ten children altogether, my husband being the eldest. Next came Jennie, who had married before us. She lived at Fishlake with her husband Herbert Kirk, and they already had a little girl called Cynthia. Living at home were Lilian, Albert, Gladys, Ernest, Harry, Marry and James. Ena was born later when it had seemed as though there would not be any more family.

I had my first baby, a boy, just a few months after. Ena was a very small dainty little girl, but grew up into a fine young woman, married and had two children. Sadly she is not with us now, she died about 1972.
Going back to those early days of our married life, I sometimes sit and wonder however we coped with things and still managed to keep fit and well, able to get quite a lot of pleasure out of our lives. My mother was not in very good health, but she still made the effort to go on the barge with dad for some of the trips to Sheffield.

My mother–in–law was very kind to us in all sorts of ways. I remember her stews which she used to make. She nearly always sent a big enamel jug full round to us; it was lovely, but she had a very heavy hand with the pepper pot, and it used to burn my throat so that I had to drink lots of cold water after it! Many's the loaf of bread we used to have on her baking day.

My husband worked on the screen on the pit top so we got pit coal once a month, which was a big help. The yard where we lived had five houses, the first one being a little shop with the front on the street; the others went back and the last one ending right at the top near someone's orchard. Also up there were the toilets and a wash house. These were very primitive and five families had to share two toilets. They were fairly big and had a large wooden seat with two holes, one large and one small, each with a lid to drop down. At the side was the ash pit where we emptied the ashes and other things.

On a dark night it was a bit frightening to go on one's own, even with a lantern with a bit of candle stuck on. Even in the daytime it was not always safe. We had a butcher's shop at the bottom of the yard, just across the

road, and this shop had its own slaughter house, and when it was killing days it was nothing new to have a beast or a pig or sheep run up the yard and into the toilets. I have even had them in the house, if the door was open.

By the time the 1926 Strike started I had three lovely baby boys. We had all three in three years and three months, so it was quite a handful. The eldest was

called Charles after his dad, then came Harold, then Teddy. I am lucky enough to have all three still, although of course they are all married with homes and families of their own. I lost my dear husband in 1962 at the age of 64. However, going back to 1926, it was a dreadful time for everyone, the men used to go on the coal tips to pick coal and soup kitchens were set up at various places in the town. It was good stuff too, the butchers and farmers were very good. It also had an effect on other jobs, and my parents were having a hard time as well because they used to carry coal in the barge, so they were laid off work too. At home there were Teddy and Edith, Sonny, the twins Ivy and Daisy, and Cyril, so times were bad all round.

I think everyone must have owed money to the trades people who let them run bills up, so the shops were hard hit too. To be poor is nothing to be ashamed of if you cannot get any work, it's not like being idle. My husband had an old sit-up-and-beg bike and he and his brother James used to go for miles trying to get a job, and often all they had was a bottle of cold tea and some bread and marg. Mind, they had some funny experiences and many's the good laugh we used to have afterwards. One day, when James and he were out trying to find something, Charles lost the sole off his boot and he said he tried to tie it on but it kept

flapping open like a fish mouth, and while they were walking through the street at Selby folk kept turning round to look at him.

At this time my mother became very ill. We had had an awful tragedy by losing Sonny. He was on the barge with dad at Sheffield and mother was at home with the rest of the family. Dad had gone ashore, leaving Sonny on the barge. It was Whit week and they were coming home on the Saturday to be at the Whit Parades which we all took part in. On the Friday, about 5 o'clock, Dad had gone to the Barber's Shop for a haircut, and when he came back Sonny was missing. He was 12 years old and a good swimmer, so at first Dad thought he may be on the dock somewhere, but what had happened was that he had fallen overboard and struck his head on something. He was found drowned, clutching a little wooden ship in his hand. He must have been trying to float it and over-balanced. I think that started my mother's illness in the first place, but she later became ill with cancer and she died when I was 23. Teddy was 17 and Edith 15, the twins were 7 and Cyril 5. So it was a very sad time for everyone, more so for my sister Edith; at 15 she had to become a little mother to the rest. She was clever with her fingers and used to sew and make most of the

dresses for the twins, and she could bake and do housework like a little woman, but it was no life for a girl and it got worse as time went on. Dad got involved with a woman who made life a misery. Teddy left home and came to live with me. We had not a lot to offer, but he was happier with us than at home and we were glad to have him.

Here I must tell you a little about ourselves as we were. Charles, my husband, was a very keen bell ringer, also a member of Thorne Town Band. He played the E Flat Bass and when he practised at home he nearly lifted the roof! All the family on the male side, his brothers and his father, were ringers and bandsmen, so it could be said they were a musical family. It was a good thing that Charles had these hobbies, because it did make life a bit more interesting; and when his father finished as Captain of the Ringers, Charles took over and it was known all over the Yorkshire Ringing world what a high standard the Thorne Ringers had for good striking. I myself belong to the Wesley Sisterhood and we had a good concert party of the ladies. We used to put two concerts on each year and I used to be the coach, because I was always very interested in play acting, and such like.

We used to do a lot of Yorkshire Dialect plays about Anastasia and Nathanial Blenkinsop. I was Anastasia and Mrs Wadsworth, who used to be Jessie Hirst (a school master's daughter) was Nathanial – she was marvellous. She made a bald head out of a pig's bladder and made some whiskers for her chin.

They were good times in spite of everything. As the children grew bigger, we found the little house too small, so we moved to Bank End, near the station. Really the house was not much bigger and we were not so happy as we had been in the first one, but we had a yard at the back where the children could play, which was better. We did not stay there very long though, and the next move was to a house at Fieldside right opposite the school, which was very nice for the children and near the shop for me.
Times were better by now with the strike in the past, and the children getting bigger. I was able to go out working as a charwoman. I used to paper a room for 3s. 0d. It was hard work with a family to look after as well, but I was fairly fit and used to manage.

About 1926 the Council were building Council houses to let to overcrowded families in small cottages. They seemed like palaces, with bathroom and water closet,

even though the toilets were all outside at that time. By the time it came to our turn in 1930 we moved to Lime Tree Grove. It was marvellous, 9s. 0d. a week seemed a lot to pay but it was worth it.

We had some happy times but we were still very poor and did not have many luxuries. Charles had a long spell out of work along with hundreds more. There was no work and the dole queues were long. They brought the means test in, and things were very depressing all round. Still, the children and ourselves kept well and we struggled along with the next.

Here I must tell you about Great Grandma Martin. She was my husband's mother's mother, and lived at Swanland Cottage over the canal at South End, and down a track between two dykes. There were two cottages. They are just about derelict now, but still there. She was a wonderful old lady, very small, only 5 ft. but she just looked like Queen Victoria. She was as upright as a girl and always dressed correctly. She wore a black bonnet with flowers and a veil, a black skirt and cape all trimmed with jet. She was a well–known figure in the town and very highly thought of. I was a bit afraid of her when first I knew her; she had been a widow for many years so I never knew her

husband. Mind you, she was kind and good, it was just her stern outspoken ways used to put you in your place. Anyhow, she was very old and she became too ill to stay in the lonely cottage by herself and came to live with my husband's mother in Bridge Street. The reason I am explaining this is that when she left the cottage it was suggested that we leave that 9s. 0d. per week Council house and take the cottage which was only 4s. 0d. per week. We did this, but it turned out to be a very big mistake. We were on the means test at that time, so when we got a house 5s. 0d. cheaper, they knocked it off us so we were worse off because we had to carry our water from over the canal, and we only had paraffin lamps and the children had to walk a mile and a half to school.

We did not stay very long, about 2 years, and then we got a farm house cottage at South End belonging to Mr Muscroft. He lived in the big house and let us have the cottage round the back for 7s. 0d. weekly. It was very old, but we had gas and water, and it was near the town and the school so it was better all round for us.

Things got a lot better all round for us about this time; Charles got a job on the pit top of Moorends and the eldest boy, Charles, went into farm service at Walkers

at Moorends. After a while he left there and got himself a job down the pit. I did not want him to work in the pit, but he went and got himself signed on without telling his Dad and me. He was a good worker and so proud when he brought his pay packet home. Harold and Teddy were growing up and talking about going to work as well. We spent some very happy times in the cottage.

Old Mr. Muscroft just had a son living with him at the time, his name was Fred. He had three brothers in the area, one was a coal merchant named Jack, who later became the landlord of the Victoria Inn (it is still there). The other two, named Harry and Joe, were farmers, but they all worked for their Dad and every Saturday they all sat round the big kitchen table and gave an account of all the week's work.

The horses which were used both for farming and for taking the coal round were kept in stables down the yard. They were big heavy horses and well looked after. One of them used to walk into the kitchen to Mr Muscroft and he would give it an apple and then it would back out again. It never bumped into anything, and was real tame and gentle. He was a very kind old man to me. I used to take washing in to help out a bit

and he used to say to me, “You want to let folk wash their own, me lass.” If he thought I looked a bit tired he used to give me a glass of milk (they had their own cows and Freddy did the milking) and two Doctor Cassels Tablets. He set great store by them, and swore they did him good.

In 1939 when we were on the verge of war, we got another Council house, this time in Highfield Crescent. It was lovely to have a bath again, and electric lights.

I have forgotten to say that my brother Teddy got married while we were still in the first Council House in Lime Tree Grove. He married his childhood sweetheart, Kathleen Lindley. They had kept company right from their school days, and were very happy. My brother died about 1973–4 at the age of 63 or 64. He left one son, Peter, and two lovely granddaughters. Kathleen is a very dear sister–in–law to me and we still see a lot of each other. We live about 20 minutes walk away. Edith also had left home and she is married to Percy Roberts and lives in Mexborough. She has three married daughters and eight grandchildren. The twins, Ivy and Daisy, also are working away from home by the time we moved to Highfield Crescent. The youngest boy, Cyril, was living in Hull by this time.

About this time I had an audition with Carol Levis in Doncaster and I later went to Leeds to do a broadcast on the forces programme presented by Richard North. The war had started and it was quite an experience to go into Broadcasting House. It was heavily guarded by troops and police and I had to sign all sorts of documents about who I was and if I had any connections with any other nationality. I did a Yorkshire dialect monologue which I had written myself. Charlie, the eldest boy, had just joined the army and I still have the letter from him which I got the morning I set off in which he said "Chin up for the broadcast, Mum."

Now we were really beginning to feel the effects of the war. The blackout was awful and the air raids were terrible; Hull was a real target for the planes and we were taking evacuees in as fast as we could cope. The Grammar School was a reception place and it was pitiful to see so many children standing around with their gas masks and little parcels and cases waiting for someone to take them. By this time my sister Daisy, one of the twins, was living with us and working in the lab. of the Oates' Dairy. Harold and Teddy were working and both wanting to go into the army like their

brother. I went to the school to take a little girl evacuee and ended up with a crippled mother of two, one 3 years old and a baby 6 weeks. The mother walked with a very bad limp owing to a hip disease and nobody seemed to want to take all three. I let my heart rule my head, and although we really had not enough room I took them home with me in a taxi.

I shall never forget the look on my husband's face when we all trooped up the garden path. He was busy digging our air raid shelter and he just looked up at Teddy who was helping him and said, "It's just like your mum, she goes for one little girl and comes back with a whole tribe." Anyhow, it turned out to be a very unfortunate episode. The baby got very ill and died and we had to have it buried in a grave belonging to my family because the raids were too bad in Hull for them to go there. The woman's husband turned up one day to visit them and he stayed for eight weeks. He was a seaman and had been injured slightly in his arm and hand. It was a terrible time for us, they practically took over the house and made life very unhappy for us all. Talk about swearing – I had never heard such language in all my life! They seemed to have plenty of money but we only got the allowance from the government and they fed themselves. I nearly went mad at times,

they always had the frying pan on and didn't mind how much mess they made. They were not very particular, but they were also happy and couldn't understand how we worried about the state of things. Their motto was, "Have a good time while you can – never mind tomorrow." Anyhow, during a lull in the raids they decided to go back to Hull. They thanked us for having them and I don't think they realized how relieved we were although I did wonder how they would fare. We never heard from them, so I don't know if they came safely through the war or not. I hope they did, because they were the victims of the war like anyone else and, in their own way, were kindly people and could not help the state of what was happening to all of us any more than we could.

After they went we had some relatives to stay who were from Hull and whose menfolk were gone to war. It was a very crowded house, but we got along all right and felt we were still doing our bit along with others. Charles, the eldest boy, had been sent overseas and was among the bad places in the thick of things. We were very anxious for him, and when we got a letter from him it was such a relief; we were often long weeks without any news.

The 1914 war had been awful, but this one seemed worse – perhaps because I was older and more involved in it with my sons, and with more understanding than when I was only a girl. The ration books and identity cards were now a way of life for everyone.

I got a job with the Ministry of Food, and worked for 3 years with them. Some comical things came about during this time, although it was a very real and necessary service; we had some very entertaining things happen. We had clothing coupons in the rations books and half the poor folk couldn't use them because they hadn't enough money, so they used to sell them to the folk who were better off. Also, the butter rations were changed for margarine, and even though the meat coupons were very small they also went to the better off. It was real "Black Market".

Of course, somebody was always reporting somebody else and I've seen quite a few angry women get to blows sometimes. I remember the very first time we got the job really going, 16 of us went to Fishlake and we set up the office in a chapel schoolroom. We were all sat behind our desks with the books and papers in front of us, looking very business-like. Fishlake was

only a very little farming village, and we never had more than two customers at once all through the day, but we had quite a few children standing round the doorway watching us. It was very embarrassing and we were all glad when 5 o'clock came. But as time went on things got under way and went along just as a matter of course.

In 1945 the youngest boy, Teddy, joined up. He was 18 and it upset me to see him go, because you never knew if they would come back. Daisy was still with me and also my cousin from Hull with two children. Almost every night the sirens would go; the blackout was carefully kept and we seemed to be living in a world of darkness. Thinking back, I don't know how folk kept as cheerful as they did; it was an awful time, I hope it never happens again.

I belonged to a concert group and we used to go out to camps entertaining troops who were waiting to go overseas. I enjoyed it very much, but my husband did not like me to be out with them at night, so I gave it up. I could understand it, he said we should all be together in such times, and he was right I'm sure. It was a

terrible time for everyone because nobody escaped from the danger, it was war for civilians as well as the armed forces but it is an amazing fact that one adapts even to such awful circumstances, and rationing and blackouts and air raids seemed to be part of life.

Daisy stayed with me all during the war. My cousin Hilda and the children went back to Hull when the worst of the air raids were over, and by the time it ended we just had Daisy with us. Harold, the second boy, had been on the barges, but he joined up later and went to Hong Kong for 3 years.

The night peace was declared, I shall never forget it. It was very late at night when the announcement was made on the radio. Daisy was in the bath. She jumped out and wrapped a towel round her and joined us in the living room. My husband and Harold got the tandem and rode up to the church and put the flag up. Lights went on all up and down the streets; someone shouted for Harold to get the piano out which we did on the front lawn, and he played all the old songs for hours to an ever increasing crowd. We had a huge bonfire and everybody fetched a mashing of tea and a mug, we even had roasted potatoes. The police came round but they were just as happy as everybody else. I think it

was the same story everywhere; the relief was in everyone's face and voice, it was like a black cloud being rolled away.

Party for peace celebrations, Ash Tree Road, Thorne.
Courtesy C. Hobson

Photograph taken from 'No Sugar in the Tea' Life in Thorne and Moorends in World War II
by Allen Darfield 1989

Of course, things did not get better all at once. A war must always leave tragedy behind and some families had suffered great loss from which they would never

really recover. And all the places which had been bombed looked like great devastated areas, you had to see it to realise how bad it had been. Hull was a good example as to what it had suffered. Great spaces of complete ruin, all smashed up and laid waste, and all of it a sad reminder of hundreds of lives, lost among all the debris. I had a cousin, Lawrence Armitage, who was a rescue worker in Hull, and the sights he saw and the sad jobs he had to do turned him from a fine young man into a nervous wreck.

Here I must go back in time again to tell a little of my many years with the Thorne Women's Adult School. In the early 1930's I became a member and still am with the school. It is only a small schoolroom in Church Street and we are just a bunch of women who have grown old together, although some of the members have joined the school much later. All during the war we did much to help in all sorts of ways. We raised money for any number of charities, and we gave hundreds of pounds to deserving cases. We had a really good choir, and a wonderful conductor in Ron Davies. I was president for a number of years but just recently I have given up the chair to another lady, owing to not feeling very well.

I must mention Doris Nicholson, a founder member, now in her 80's. She gave her life to the movement; it originated from the Quakers and there are many schools all over the country. Ethel Phillipson is still with us, and a few others, some of them well in their 90's. In fact, we still have Mary Dennis. She is about 90 and the mother of thirteen sons and daughters, and has dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and she can recite poetry and tell a good yarn; she is wonderful and well loved by everyone.

After the war, Charles came home. He married and lived with us for a while, then Teddy came home and met the girl who became his wife, Rosemary Ollsen. As I have already said, I am lucky to have very good dear sons and lovely daughters-in-law. Teddy and Mary have Teddy and Mike; Charles has Susan, Charlotte and Charles and Michelle. Harold, who did not marry until later, has Harold, Peter and Wendy.

In 1951 we gave up the house in Highfield Crescent and went to live as caretakers to the Adult School in Church Street. It was only a very small cottage but we were very happy there for 11 years. It was while we lived there that Harold and Sylvia got married, so we were back where we started – just the two of us.

Charles was working at the Thorne pit on the screens and I also worked in a dry cleaning shop on King Street and times were much better all round. But the pit had to close owing to water, and all the men got sent to other pits to work. I always think this hastened my husband's death because they had so far to travel it meant getting up about 3.30.a.m. and it was too much for many of the men who were getting on. In 1962, just 11 weeks before he was to retire, he had a fatal heart attack. It was very tragic as we were due for a bungalow at the time owing to a clearance order on the old cottage, and it is where I live now and in the Church Balk just where Charles always wanted to be. It's a bit of old Thorne and he used to take walks down here every Sunday. Of course, by this time we had seen a lot of changes. Both my husband's parents had died and some members of the family had moved away from Thorne. So in August of 1962, following my husband's death in March, I came here to Coventry Road on the South Common Estate.

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January 1982 – it is quite a while since I wrote anything down. October, November and December saw lots of changes. The world is in a sorry state, such a lot of violence and unemployment.

On 13th December 1981 we had a very heavy snowstorm and the bad conditions lasted for 6 weeks. The floods were awful, York and Selby were very badly hit.

We have had the intercom system installed in all the bungalows this week, and it is a very good thing for people living alone.

January 2nd 1983. It does not seem a year since I last wrote an entry in this book, but it is. We have had quite a few events during the year. Harold has bought his house and made some very nice improvements. I am very pleased for them.

We have got a bus now for the elderly and disabled people and it is such a big help for getting out and about. It takes us to do the shopping and also runs outings in the fine weather. I enjoy the company as well. The drivers are all voluntary, also the escorts, and very helpful they are too.

1983 also brought the water strike which made one realize how much we rely on our water supply.

April 1985 – the last time I wrote anything was in January 1983. It's unbelievable how the time flies. I will have to look in my diary to check up on all the events.

Looking back to 1984, a lot of things have happened. Three of our Adult School members, Doris Nicholson, Ethel Phillipson and Ada Peach have had to go into residential homes, but seem very happy.

In March on the twelfth day the pit strike started. I thought the 1926 one was bad, but this was to last a full year, not being over till March 1985. What a very troubled year it was, scenes of such violence and unrest, it didn't seem possible that it could happen in our country. Having lived through two World Wars and seen all the distress and heartache which follows, it doesn't seem possible that people still can create such havoc in life. People were very brave in face of the hardships and everyone helped each other. But I hope it never happens again. Young people are not very happy about the state of things. No work for them,

even with good school reports. I'm sure things were not as bad in our younger day, even though money was very scarce, and life was not very exciting, it was more settled and family life was very happy on the whole. Now it's so sad to see so many young folk taking drugs and getting into trouble. Perhaps if there was more work for them they would not need to act as they do.

I still get the bus for the disabled. What a big help it is to the elderly, and, how good are the ones who run it, all for nothing, except a thank-you.

Now in March 1986 I think I have wrote as much as will be of interest.

Looking Back By Frances Thorley

Published by Thorne Local History Society
Supported by Thorne Moorends Regeneration Partnership
2013