

William Bramhall 1896 - 1981

All four of my grandparents were officers of the Salvation Army in its early pioneering days. After various wanderings which will be described more fully later they had settled in Walthamstow and had become members of the Salvation Army's "Corps" in High Street. Thus it was that my parents met.

My mother, Henrietta Day Pigott, was born at 4, Verulam Avenue, Walthamstow in 1892 and my father at Oskarshamn in Sweden in 1896. William's education must have been a very sketchy affair since the family was constantly moving from one Scandinavian town to another before returning to England in 1906. He and his sisters then had to adapt to a different style of schooling conducted in a language over which they had - by all accounts - an indifferent control. My father attended the William Morris School in Gainsford Road, Walthamstow but as far as I can gather demonstrated no great academic ability. But he had considerable sporting ability and was a natural ball-player - which I saw demonstrated in cricket, hockey and tennis.

On leaving school he contemplated a career in librarianship and worked at the Walthamstow Library until, on May 20th 1915, he enlisted in the Third East Anglian Field Ambulance of the Royal Army Medical Corps. From November 1915 to May 1916 he served in Egypt. He then returned to England for training as an officer and on 22nd November 1916 he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment.

In March 1917 my parents married. Almost immediately afterwards father went to France. He was mentioned in despatches during the third Battle of Ypres but on 20th July 1917 he was wounded in action and invalided home. He was demobilised at Purfleet in May 1919.

Like countless other men father had difficulty in settling down to civilian life. He embarked on a course at the School of Librarianship presumably with some form of government resettlement grant. On the strength of this my parents moved to a rented house in Howard Road, Walthamstow. But this did not last long. Father could not settle to academic work and abandoned the course. Having no income my parents were forced to give up the house in Howard Road and to move to 71, Greenleaf Road, Walthamstow where mother's parents lived.

Mother's elder brother John William was instrumental in getting father a job as a teacher at the Woodford House Preparatory School at Birchington in Kent. For reasons which I have never been able to divine I went there as a boarder - although under the age of five - my teacher being the headmaster's daughter - Elsie Erlbach. Father's indifferent education hardly suited him

for the life of a schoolmaster and it is surprising that he stayed there for three years.

Returning to Walthamstow father embarked on a course in salesmanship. In so doing he found a career well suited to his talents and tackled it with enthusiasm. With his undoubted charm and good looks, his fluent tongue and meticulously tidy appearance he was well equipped for this kind of work. He became a highly successful representative of the Dusmo Company of Edmonton - his task being to secure contracts from education authorities in all parts of the United Kingdom for the supply of cleaning materials to schools. As a result of his efforts the Dusmo Company flourished and the family's financial worries disappeared.

At the end of the Second World War father left the Dusmo Company. For a considerable time father had been responsible for all the Company's work in the educational field and had reason to believe that he could expect further promotion. But he was disappointed. He joined the Farinol Company of Manchester - one of Dusmo's competitors - but realising that the new flooring materials being introduced would lead to a decline in the demand for Farinol's products he began to look around for a different job.

As a result of talks with a Mr. Winter of Spinney Chemicals he was placed in charge of a small firm manufacturing art materials for school use in competition with such "giants" as Reeves, Winsor and Newton and Rowneys. A formidable prospect but the challenge appealed to him while the contacts he had made in the educational world while working for Dusmo proved invaluable. But Spinney Chemicals ran into financial difficulties and were taken over by Hamburgers - a large firm which had supplied Spinneys with most of their raw materials. Hamburgers decided to manufacture artists materials themselves and with this in mind they set up a subsidiary company called Margros. Father was appointed manager of this company and did remarkably well. But Margros was based at Send near Woking in Surrey and it quickly became apparent that father could not effectively run the business from Roslyn Gardens, Gidea Park. Thus it was that they moved to "Three Trees", West Clandon near Guildford. This proved to be mother's last home.

Father continued his work with Margros until he retired.

His ability as a salesman and his standing among his business associates was demonstrated when, as a result of a meeting of representatives of the many firms exhibiting at the N.U.T. Conference at Aberystwyth in 1933, he and others were instrumental in founding the Educational Exhibitors' Association. Father served this organization as Treasurer, Honorary

Exhibition Organizer and Chairman until his final retirement in 1973. He was something of an expert in this aspect of commercial life and was closely involved with the administration of educational exhibitions all over Great Britain and even as far afield as Australia and Reykjavik in Iceland. His interest in the Association he had helped to found continued right up to the end - in fact the present secretary of the British Educational Equipment Association (as the E.E.A. is now called) told me that father was in telephone conversation with him from his hospital bed in Exeter only a fortnight before his death in October 1981.

William and Henrietta's children

We were all born at the home which we shared with our maternal grandparents in Greenleaf Road, Walthamstow :

Godfrey Hugh William in 1917
Olive Westburn in 1921
Douglas John in 1924
Joan Henrietta in 1925
Joyce Megan in 1927

Douglas John was a beautiful baby who died of bronchial pneumonia at the age of eighteen months. This sad episode I remember well - no doubt because of the bitter grief my mother felt at what she believed was a totally avoidable tragedy.

Needless to say much could be written of our childhood at Greenleaf Road - of my fondness for the grandparents whose home we shared,

- of helping my grandfather to bath when extreme weakness made it impossible for him to manage on his own, and of the consequent increase in my pocket-money - and all done with no loss of dignity on his part or, as far as I can recall, any embarrassment on mine,
- of summer holidays at Westcliff, Swanage or Great Sampford which our parents contrived in an era when the "Salary plus Commission" of even a gifted salesman was modest in the extreme and holidays with pay were virtually non-existent,
- of the keen anticipation with which we awaited father's return from his business trips to all parts of the United Kingdom when there would be occasional mementoes or stories of places he had visited - although it must be admitted that the anticipation was all too often preferable to the event.

Reference has already been made to the easing of financial worries which attended father's undoubted proficiency as a salesman. This led to the removal from Walthamstow and the purchase of a newly built house in Roslyn Gardens, Hidea Park, Romford in 1938. By the end of the Second World War both Olive and I were married and settled in our respective homes. Bunty and Joan married in the years that followed and it was in 1957 that our parents moved to West Clandon in Surrey to be closer to father's place of business.

The new house in Felix Drive was detached and pleasant enough and had a very large garden which, due to mother's untiring efforts, always looked a picture.

But father's work for Margros and the E.E.A. involved much travelling and so mother found herself constantly alone in a detached house in a quiet cul-de-sac off the main street of a well-heeled commuter village. Superficially all very pleasant - but far too lonely.

Mother died of cancer in hospital at Caterham in 1971 and her ashes were interred in the churchyard at Roydon in Essex where her son-in-law was the parish priest.

Very soon afterwards father married a widow - Mrs. Georgina Hamell.

For many years father had wanted to move to South Devon and had been looking for a suitable property in the Exmouth area. After several near-misses he eventually bought a house in Dagmar Road, Exmouth - an immaculate property ideally suited both in size and location to his needs. He moved into his new home in August 1981 but, sad to say, he was denied the time to enjoy it for his health, which had been so good, was deteriorating rapidly. After two short months he died in hospital at Exeter following an unsuccessful operation for cancer in October 1981.

Sources: Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, St. Catherine's House
Mr. G. Groves of the Educational Exhibitors' Association
Ministry of Defence Archives.