

THE BRAMHALL FAMILY

My parents were William Bramhall and Henrietta Day Pigott. Shortly before her death in 1971 my mother gave us an old chocolate box containing some old photographs, newspaper cuttings, a number of "In Memoriam" cards and a simple family tree going back to her great-grandparents Hugh Pigott and Miriam Buxton. A faded sepia photograph of their tombstone in Faringdon Cemetery revealed that Hugh had been born in Faringdon in 1797 and Miriam at Alpheton in Suffolk three years earlier. Thus it was that our interest in family history was goaded into life and a clear indication given as to the area in which our Pigott enquiries had to begin.

But what about my father's family? I knew that my paternal grandparents had married in Sweden while serving there as "officers" of the Salvation Army, and that my father and his three sisters had all been born there. I had also heard that my grandfather, George Henry, had been "kicked out" by his father because of his determination to join the Salvation Army, and that great-grandfather John Henry had been a native of Sheffield but had ended his days in Stoke-on-Trent.

We had no supporting documents at all but we did not worry unduly as we were confident that my father and his youngest sister would prove a mine of information. Mother's box of odds and ends included a large photograph of John Henry and his family. This we showed to father. He had no hesitation in identifying his grandfather and went on -

"...that's grandma Ellen - can't recall her maiden name - and that's aunt Alice who married Luke Sant. That's uncle Arthur - can't remember much about him. Ah! that's uncle Sidney who lost the sight of one eye. I always liked him best - he was such a gentle man. I remember we stayed with our grandparents at their shop in Stoke after we came home to England - about 1905. We must have been an awful trial to them - we could hardly speak a word of English then!"

That was about the sum total of information we obtained. We were amused but unconcerned when father hinted ominously that we were "certain to find a skeleton in the cupboard" but a trifle apprehensive at his repeated assertion that there had been a change of name somewhere along the line. But no amount of probing - then or later - produced any further details apart from the fact that his mother's maiden name had been Eliza Ann Washburn.

But before describing our enquiries into the affairs of more remote generations it may be sensible to give an account of my father's life.