

Roy Sidwell's writings about his father.

John Willie Sidwell (known as Jack) was born on the 5th June 1897, the 5th of 6 sons born to John Henry and Sarah Jane. He was born in Nelson, as were his brothers, probably at 67 Regent Street. He attended Bradley school and a photograph shows his class of 1906.. I suppose he stayed at this school until 1909 at which time he left to go to work at 12 years of age.... his father had started work at 8 years of age!!!! I presume the work was in the cotton mill..where else??

There's little record of the brothers activities together..did they play football..cricket..swim ? The ages would be too different maybe. Was there much political discussion? I can't think it would have been with their Father somehow, and yet they arrived at similar conclusions. It's been put forward that Mother was the influence on their thinking..among her ancestors were Quakers at some point, so although there is no evidence of her belonging to any such movement did her thinking still run along those lines?

I don't know at what point my Dad's convictions were formed, but he decided to be a C.O. (Conscientious Objector). Nor do I know what happened at his trial, but he finished up as a non combatant in a camp in Ireland....Ballykinler,County Down (a place I cannot yet locate) Sadly we never discussed this, or if we did he wasn't too keen, the only thing that stays in my mind is my Dad saying that as an English working lad he had no desire to shoot a German working lad. Some C.O.s had the deepest motives, political or religious, with possibly many deep rooted feelings I'm sure, but it seems to me that my Dad (always very proud to be of the working class) made a quite simple decision. I'm sure he had deeper reasons, but I'm also sure that the statement was honest and heartfelt, so much credit to him.

After the war what?? He came back to Nelson I guess and took up the old life, but it must have been difficult. There are photos of him in a billiards team in which he won a medal I know. There are many photos of him on rambles with a variety of people though U Jim often appears, and maybe many of them were like minded people..the Independent Labour Party had some strength in those days, though they have since pretty well disappeared ...and there were various leftish movements, including of course the Labour Party which won its first election in the twenties....also the Peace Pledge Union, which Whalley had some part in,but my Dad I think not somehow..and while all this was going on, there appeared on the scene one Elizabeth Green from Barrowford, and from a family of eleven children ! Father a cotton weaver and Lizzie (as she was always known) also worked in the mill as a reacher-in for her Dad..this requires an explanation I'm not knowledgeable enough to explain, but it was something like reaching into the loom to tie broken cotton strands together..it needed nimble fingers and I would have thought a fair bit of courage though I presume there were guards of some kind on the machine, though of minimal protection in those days I imagine. Whatever it may have been that the job entailed, I have heard my Mother mention walking to the mill with her Dad on cold dark mornings at something like five o' clock, working a long day and of course walking home...this being a five and a half day week. On Sundays because of her abilities on the piano she played for the Church three times

a day...the rest of the week was her own !!!!!

So they were married on a date I am unable to find right now..probably about 1923, and I believe in September. They lived at 33 Tavistock St..my Dad worked in the mill and I arrived in due course on 15 March 1927. I don't remember my Mother working. My Dad had troubles with his ears due to the noise in the mill..I remember visiting for some reason on some occasions and it was LOUD!!!!So much so that lip reading was the thing as conversation was impossible.

The house was smallish with an outside toilet...I don't remember a bath ..it was probably a tin tub in front of the fire.

I remember the clatter of clogs on the pavements as the mill workers went to work I suppose around 5.30 am. There was also a knocker up ...a man with a pole who rattled the bedroom windows of the not so good getter ups...I guess he was employed at a small rate .

I'm not sure about their social life..I remember a few friends popping round..musical evenings sometimes, which was mainly my mother playing the piano.... Beethoven Sonatas were popular and various pieces of the day, though where the music came from I don't know, except some of it must have been from my Mothers student days...she became an Associate of the Trinity College of Music.She later did a fair bit of teaching at home to supplement the family income.

I guess it's worth noting that Nelson and similar northern towns were populated by people of equal status in a way...almost the whole town would be employed in or around the mill. Cars were way out of the affordable league, so if one arrived in your street it was noted with curiosity. I suppose people visited the pub as ever, but this was a bit out of my ken as the Sidwells were never pubbers at all..in fact as mentioned elsewhere they were to the best of my knowledge non drinkers all.

We moved to 67 Regent St for a short time, then on to Thursby Rd. My dad carried on in the mill...did a spare time job in the evenings collecting insurance .. probably 3d or 6d a week for some doubtful benefits later in life. This was hardly the job for him..I remember a story he told me about knocking on a door and the lady of the house hard pushed for the 3d or whatever finally came up with it and said to my Dad "Do I have to pay this ?" He understood the situation and said "No, you don't love" and gave it back to her....this must have gone down well with the bosses when he paid in.!! What happened????? I don't know....but one up to him in my book!!!!

Then things changed. I think probably due to my Dads health(ears) a move came up . My Mother had a sister in Morecambe(more properly Heysham) ..Her husband worked for Servis, the washing machine people and we moved there to a house in Fairfield Road, and my Dad commenced working for or with my Uncle Harry...I went to a new school and so it was for a while. I don't know exactly what my Dad did as he was not an electrician or mechanic, and again things went wrong though I believe my Dads health was better.We moved again to Hawksworth Grove. He and my Uncle started making soap powder, to go with the washing machines I guess, but things didn't work out, and

although I knew nothing of what was going on, I think in retrospect things were tough, so another move. This time another sister of my Mothers called Hettie who lived in Blackpool suggested a move there to work with Uncle Tom(her husband) who had stalls in the amusement arcades. So off we went to Blackpool..another house ..another school..another job for Dad..again hardly his cup o' tea!!But things went O.K. for a while..I realise I missed out some chronology...Nelson to Heysham would be 1934/5...Heysham to Blackpool 1936/7.

My Dad worked the amusement stalls for some time but never happily I believe..I went to Devonshire Road school.

This went on for a couple of years..Dad working the stalls. I was, I suppose, coming up 10..this meaning that the following year I would have what is now the "11 plus exam". I would have to sit an exam to decide where I would go ...be it Grammar or Central or ordinary senior school. On top of this(I can't remember the exact date of the move)but the War would be approaching. Then we moved again..48 Torsway Ave..not far.. same school, but for some reason unknown to me, my parents made the fairly extraordinary decision of baking at home, my Dad to tote the stuff round the streets to sell and build up some sort of business working from home. In retrospect this was a heck of a decision. Be it said that my Mother was a really great pastry cook and my Dad and hard work no strangers but.....!!!!!! So off they went...my Dad got a bike with a carrier on the front..they were up very early, and he went off on his rounds, leaving my Mother baking the next batches of cakes and pastries, ready for his return and a refill and away again..and it worked!!!!..they built up a regular bunch of customers. they then added an evening round with meat and potato pies..my Dad on his bike riding round the streets calling... "Hot meat and potato pies".Things went O.K. but again it went wrong, this time caused by a war, and rationing.Of course my Mum made good stuff with good ingredients..nothing else would have done, but sugar for one thing went on ration..how it worked with them pursuing a business I don't know..what allowances they may have had I have no idea, but it finished them anyway, leading my Dad to apply for a job on the trams, and here he stayed until his retirement around 20 years later. He was a conductor at first, then a driver. He was probably 42 when he started on the trams. So this was a kind of settled down period..I think he quite enjoyed the work on the trams, at least when he became a driver, except possibly for the shift work,which he'd had experience of and this was the nature of the job like many others, and I imagine he settled pretty quickly.My mother worked too, at least in the summer, in Uncle Harry's (her brother)boarding house, just generally helping out. There's little else to say..I pursued my education, went to work in a bank (Ouch)...found an interest in music and that was that. The bank fired me at the end of the war as I was only temporary anyway. I went to work in Nutbrowns , well known in the area as makers of kitchenware, left there to do a summer season in the Isle of Man in a band, and that was that. My parents always liked Blackpool..my dad enjoyed his work driving along the whole length of the sea front.

He stopped work at 65 and was as happy a retired person as you would find....sometime after he retired, he read in the paper that people who turned up on time for work received a bonus..his comments I leave to you!!!! Another one which R ichard reminded me of was that Pop (he was always Pop to my boys) when talking about the old

days.....a much too rare event sadly, told them he remembered the time he could buy a packet of Woodbines (cigs), pie and peas, a bottle of pop and a box of matches, and still have change from 6d(a sixpence). Another one from Richard was "We worked from 5am to 5 pm, 5 and a half days a week..church 3 times on Sunday...and all for 7 shillings."

That's pretty well the main points of Jacks life. I think I mentioned before that I have much more knowledge of my dad(obviously) and Jims life because they were the youngest and lived long past the other brothers.

We took my Dad to Grange to see Jim on a few of our Blackpool visits, and they were always pleased to see each other and it was a real nice day out. Had a trip round the Lakes sometimes, and they enjoyed each others company a lot.

I am reminded of other stories by Richard and Anne..illustrating the times. For instance there is one of Uncle Rennie who holidayed in the Isle of Man, and discovered to his horror on the boat on the way back, a halfpenny piece in the bottom of his pocket. This was terrible because you had to spend ALL your holiday money as a matter of pride, and come home broke, so he threw it over the side.

They did manage the occasional holiday, which surprisingly enough depended on Grandads luck on the horses I was told!!!!!! I believe it was usually Blackpool, but grandma did all the baking and rented a room, carrying their own food,including umpteen loaves.