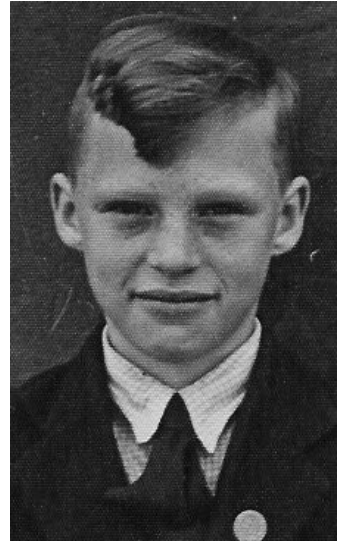


TRIPS AND OUTINGS

COACH TO LONDON (1945)

My first adventure by coach was in 1945 when I was seven years old. I seem to have been the youngest one in the party. My father (Cliff Willetts) organized the trip and people were there from all over Cradley. It was an early start, there were no motorways then, and the purpose of the trip was to visit our newly elected Member of Parliament, Arthur Moyle. Road speeds were restricted by the capability of the coach we were travelling in, 40 - 50 mph.



Barry Willetts (age 7)

After a comfort stop about the half way point we arrived in central London at mid-day. Our first excitement was a drive past Buckingham Palace. There was genuine enthusiasm to

see where the King and the Royal family lived and this was the first time anyone on the coach had seen such magnificent buildings and monuments.

We were greeted on our arrival at the Houses of Parliament by Mr Moyle MP and entered via Westminster Hall, which was the biggest room anyone had ever been in. I remember in later years seeing pictures of Winston Churchill lying in state and thinking I had been there.

Fifty of us sat down at a table for lunch with fifty place settings of matching crockery and monogrammed cutlery. What really amazed me was that we were served with fish and chips. I had been expecting something a little more exotic. After the meal the table was cleared in double quick time and we were offered minute cups of coffee, very strong and a new experience for everyone.

Following lunch there was a viewing of the House of Commons and then the House of Lords. A memorable day of new experiences for everyone.

TO THE SEASIDE

There were many adventures for us children on the annual coach trip to the seaside. For many it was the only time they had been on such a long journey. Very few families owned motor cars in those days or could afford the luxury of such a long family coach trip.

I remember a trip to Barmouth in North Wales and seeing ladies with their skirts pulled up above their knees and seeing my father with his trousers rolled up paddling in the sea and enjoying the moment. Not a spectacle seen in Colley Gate!



Clifford enjoying a snooze

We had started out with three coaches and I think we had a comfort stop at Church Stretton. Two coaches arrived at our destination and had to wait for the third coach that arrived late. The coach had suffered a

puncture which was not an unusual occurrence in those days. It had been arranged for the party to take tea at the home of Mr Jack Summers who had a large house at Barmouth. Everyone enjoyed having tea and cakes in the beautiful surroundings.

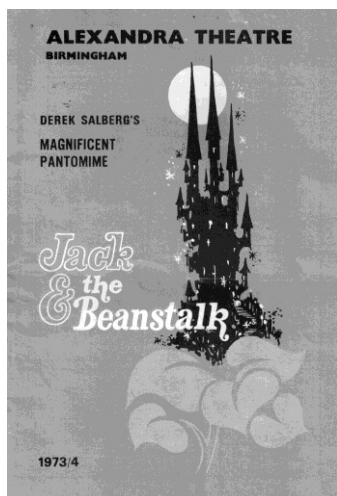
WALTER SOMER'S LORRY

A few weeks after the Barmouth trip a "Somers" lorry picked up men from the chapel, including me. This was on a Saturday lunch time in 1953. Major structural alterations to the chapel were underway using workmen from Walter Somers Ltd. We were all seated on the back of the lorry (who mentioned Health & Safety) and were taken to 'Belle Hall' in Belle Broughton to collect a large Italian organ. The organ was capable of playing by itself with the aid of large paper rolls. However, I can't remember it being played at the chapel using that facility. It was a beautiful instrument

and was regularly played by Percy Bate with much love until his death.

ALEXANDRA THEATRE

Each year as far back as I can remember Cliff Willetts (Superintendent) organized a trip at the beginning of the year in February to the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham.

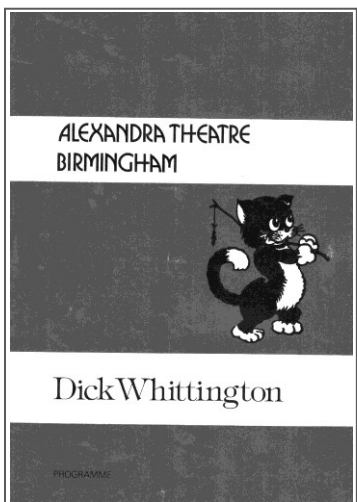


The extravaganza resulted with a exodus of a large portion of the population of Two Gates and surrounding area. Literally hordes of families made their way towards the Sunday School.

Waiting for them were up to 6 coaches each seating 52 people that spread along Two Gates from Auden's shop to High Park Road. Everyone acquired a seat and families managed to sit together. Everyone knew we were well on the way when the line of coaches began to climb Mucklow Hill. We travelled along Hagley Road and

as we approached the ‘five ways’ knew we were approaching our destination.

When we got to the theatre we entered the foyer. This in itself was a new experience. As we were directed to our seats in the stalls those who had been there before strove to get a seat on the back row knowing that it was possible to climb on the balustrade at the back of the theatre and have the best seat in the house.



As the show progressed there might be a reference made to Two Gates or to Mr Willetts, after all we were probably the largest single group in the audience. A tub of ice cream could be purchased during the interval. During these outing we were privileged to see acts such as Les Dawson performing in Robinson Crusoe. We saw Jack Douglas and Millicent Martin in Cinderella, and Terry Hall’s act with Lenny the

Lion. Other performances included Puss in Boots and Goody Two Shoes.

I will never forget the performance of Sir Norman Wisdom singing ‘Don’t laugh at me’. There wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

These were wonderful times and the memories have lasted my lifetime

MORE TRIPS TO LONDON

Some of the most memorable events I recall are the trips to London by coach, but on 2 or 3 occasions we went on the train. We’d arrive outside Buckingham Palace just in time to look through the railings to see the changing of the guard on



the parade ground in front of the Palace.

From there we moved was along Birdcage Walk and onto Whitehall to see the Guards on horseback, then through Horse Guards Parade to Piccadilly Circus to feed the pigeons, always a favourite time. I don't know how many of us took time to look up at Nelson standing on his column.

Then it was up to Oxford Circus for lunch at the Quality Inn and after lunch a ride on the Underground to see the 'Monument' to the fire of London (1666). If time allowed we climbed up the 100+ steps to see London from a different perspective. Then off to see the Tower of London and may be a Beefeater. Late in the afternoon another trip on the Underground or a walk along the Embankment took us to Westminster Bridge and a final view of the Houses of Parliament followed by a boat to Battersea Fun Fare.

After a short time on the fare the coach was waiting at about 7.00pm to get us on the road back to Two Gates with a traditional sing along and then a well earned sleep.

On one outing Barbara Harling crouched down to fasten her daughter Julie's shoelace. When she stood up they were in a packed London crowd with no friendly face in sight.

Fortunately we were able to retrace our steps and find the lost couple huddled together in a shop doorway.

One year after lunch the main party went down to the Underground and realised there were three young lads missing, the oldest being about 11 years old. The leader of the party went off in search of these youngsters while Hazel and Norman went on the Underground to the next stop and then to the previous station, and to inform the Police. I went on to the Tower of London and as I walked along the river embankment to Westminster Bridge I could see the 3 lads looking over the parapet watching the boats.

Only the youngest one was showing any distress, the others had enjoyed the adventure. Their account was, "We knew everybody was going to meet at Westminster so we asked someone where it was and decided to walk." Relief all round.

TRIPS ABROAD

In the late 1960's, Hazel and Norman took a party to Holland for a day tour of the bulb fields, Kookanoff Park being their destination. This was a major project of organisation, a coach from Two Gates to Birmingham airport, a short flight to Holland, another coach to view the tulips and windmills; everything was a blaze of colour. I



remember at one stop we were offered a local delicacy of raw fish that we sampled with some trepidation.

For more than half of the party it was their first flight experience and the first time they had left their homeland.

It was a memorable day and the forerunner of other trips to the continent.

One year there was a flight to Lido de Jesalo in Italy for a week's stay, with a visit to Venis. Again this was a new experience for almost everyone in the party and it was an incentive to make there own future holiday arrangements.

The final excursion I remember was a weekend to Majorca that was supposed to leave Birmingham early on a Saturday morning and return on the Monday evening. We arrived at Birmingham Airport to be told that our flight was delayed from 7.00am until about midday. A five hour portion of our short weekend was lost.

During the trip there were many instances of Black Country humour that were unique to our group. For example, on the airplane a rather squat portly lady who I used to work with commented in our local dialect about the seat belt, "I core get this belt round mi belly". And, at her hotel diner table she said, "This gravy tastes like tater water".

In later years many who went on that trip were to return again to enjoy the Spanish hospitality and weather.

The trip took place in November when the weather was not very good but people still talk about their memories of it.