

Toby

A Bristol Tramp
Tells His Story



A Bristol Broadsides Booklet

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Glossary

A lot of words that Toby uses are Tramp words with special meanings. Here is a list of those that appear in the booklet.

Drum – tea can.
 Drum up – to light a fire and make something to eat or drink.
 Spike – casual ward, usually on adjoiment to the workhouse where tramps could get a bed for the night.
 Shakedown – laydown.
 Skipper – to sleep rough.
 Greenfields mission – the open fields.
 Bogies – police (CID).
 Johnnies – police in uniform.
 John Bull – police.
 Downright – on the beg or bum.
 Pitching the fork – to beg but offering 1d or 2d to shopkeepers to avoid being arrested for begging.
 Jake Wallers – Meths drinkers.

TOUGH TIMES

I was born on November the 9th 1907 in Gloucestershire. We moved from there when I was very small to Chessel St. Bedminster, in Bristol. I can remember the '14 war. My father was a sergeant drilling the young rookies in Ashton Park where the gun castle was.

I was about ten years of age and I remember picking up with a fellow who always seemed to have plenty of money. I was lucky to get a penny or tuppence off my grandmother. He used to go thieving, he'd walk into shops and whip something. I got in with him, but anyway as time went on we got caught. He was doing it in West St. in a bakers shop. He said, "I'm warning you to keep watch", and I said, "Alright". I was at the door while he was at the till. He finished and came out, then we walked up the road. I said to him, "Did you take the lot?"

"No", he said. I said, "You might as well have made a job of that, take the lot or nothing". So we went back, and I was on watch again. In comes a woman, a rough sort of woman, tough she was. I give him the byeword and of course I beat it. I mooched from school till just after twelve, then went in. There was a policeman at the door, he must have rounded on me. I was smoking fags and I threw the packet over the hedge because you could cop it for that.

I told my Mum and of course we got into a terrible row with father. We were charged with it and I was sent to a remand home for about four days, pending appearing before the magistrate. We got six strokes of the birch each – not half so bad as father's strap. I got into disgrace at Lockwell School and me and my mate had to be separated. They sent me to South St. to finish.

My Mum died when I was eleven and that was the breaking up of the family. She was overworked and overtired, she was what you call petite. Of course she had too many children, eight, and two died when they were babies. My Mum died in 1919, the year after the First World War.

After she died we were all sent to orphanage – Downend cottage homes. I was going to run away because I didn't like it. The food wasn't bad but it wasn't enough for me, you were rationed. When you went in at night you had to take your shoes off and walk about in your socks because it had polished floors. They were pretty strict there. You couldn't run out to play like other boys. After three months my father asked me to come out. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. My other brothers and sisters remained in the home.

My father, by then, was paralysed in the arms. He could walk reasonably well, though as time went on you had to support him. As far as I can gather it was a disease of the nerves, but they never understood any more about it than they know about cancer. I had to wash him, feed him, dress him, do everything. I used to do all the housework, keep the place clean and do the errands.

He was a very rough sort of a man, he'd swear at you and all. He was a bit cruel really. My Mum should have had a more refined man. She was passive and sentimental. I think I've got that in me because I'm easily hurt. My father was hard, a proper dyed-in-the-wool militarist. He'd been in the army and he was always talking about the South Africa campaign. He'd been at the relief of Ladysmith. I used to listen but there was a lot I didn't like about it.

The years went by and I was about 18. I used to see the lads going by on a Sunday morning on their bikes, for a swim at Saltford. I used to envy them. I could neither swim nor ride a bike. I was determined to do both. There used to be a butchers nearby. We were living then in a cottage in Somerset Terrace, Windmill Hill. They left the bike outside at night and I learned to ride it, in about ten minutes, though I had a lot of spills going round corners. Then I got an old second hand bike that I found and away I went. I taught myself to swim in the local open air baths in the park. I used to do a lot of walking. I would get a lorry out to Chew Magna, then walk back over the hills, winter time and all. I used to enjoy that. But I didn't have a lot of friends, I was too tied.

When I was twenty four my father went into a nursing home in Somerset. I'd looked after him for thirteen years. I had no home, so I took to the road. It was circumstances in my case. It was pretty hard at first till I got to know the ropes of the game.

I stayed briefly in a doss house for 6d. a night. It was in Lamb St. Clean bed mind. Jim Emmers kept it, he's dead now. He was quite a good man, he'd help you. There was a great big coke fire. He was always boiling water, as soon as you'd get in he'd make you tea. You could fry up your bits of bacon, or whatever you had, or you could go across the road, round the corner for a fourpenny dinner, or sixpenny dinner. You'd go over with a plate, come back and sit down at the wood tables and eat it.

You had one or two that had settled down there. Some would come and go. You had a job to get a proper job, but you might be lucky and get the odd one. I'd do odd jobs, anything that I could get. I did go on the bum at lot – on the downright as I call it. Its a tramp term of that time. We'd got two terms. If I said to a fellow, "I'm going to pitch a fork", that means you go into a shop with tuppence and say to the grocerman, "Two penny bits of bacon". That saves you from being picked up for begging.

My first initiation to the road was one morning in the summer – beautiful weather. I arrived at the top of Somerset Terrace and sat on a wooden wall outside a butchers shop. I hadn't been there long when a policeman came along. I knew who he was. His name was Blake. He approached me and he said, "Have you any money?"

"No", I said, "I haven't got a penny piece on me".

"Well", he said, "I'm going to take you in to be charged with wandering with no visible means of support", which was in at that time. I said, "I cannot go without my personal belongings".

"Where are those?" he said. "Someone's minding them for me, in a backyard, through an archway". I followed him round to the little shed. I said, "There's my belongings". They were in a small seaman's kitbag.

He said, "I want to see in there". I said, "Its up to you to do that". He tipped it out onto the floor, which I think was indiscreet. He said "You've got to come with me".

I said, "If I come with you, first you'll pick that up and put it back into the

bag". He done that. I was very reluctant to go, then he pulled on me. "Look", I said, "take your hands off me or else I'll knock you right through that hut". And I could have done. And he jumped back.

"Alright" I said, "I'll come along with you. Pick up that bag". And I made him carry it, because once he takes you in, he's in charge of that. Its laughable you know! Coming down over Windmill Hill, along East St. all the workers were going to work. He looked ever so dirty with the frying pan and all that hanging on his back.

He takes me into the station. It would be roughly about 7 o'clock in the morning. I had to wait about two or three hours before I was taken before the magistrate in Bristol. We went through into the court and he had all my things out. He had the knife, fork and spoon which I had. The magistrate's clerk said, "This man hopes to eat some time". Course I felt very angry then. My blood come up. I said, "I don't only hope to eat sometime, I get it every time, by hook or by crook".

They didn't like that. There was a frown on their faces. They said to me, after putting their heads together like they do, "We're going to give you the option of one month in jail, or three days in the institution or workhouse". Naturally I chose the latter. They conveyed me to the Fishponds Rd. Workhouse. They take me in and I had to change into the inmates clothing. The three days elapsed pretty quickly.

The master of the place saw me before I came out. He said, "Do you mind showing me your hands". Well, I thought it was a bit personal, but I did that. He said, "You're a very hard working sort of man". I said, "I have been".

The irony of it was, there I was penniless. I was open to be picked up again, but I never was. You'd break the law if you had no money. The law's scrapped now, same as the sleeping out law. A man had to lose his life for that to come about. I didn't know him personally, but I got to know about him. Apparently this man was an ex marine who done a bit in the '14 war, in unfortunate circumstances like myself, I suppose he came on the road.

Apparently he was sleeping under a steam roller 'cos it was warm under there. He was caught and he was taken in, in Birmingham. He was sentenced to fourteen days at Winson Green Jail, Birmingham. I don't know what went wrong, but anyway there was a scuffle, fighting, and he fell from one of the tiers of the cell blocks. Course he died.

There was a big enquiry in the House of Commons as to why he was arrested. A top brass in the army was up speaking. He said, "Today we have a good many ex-servicemen tramping the roads of England". The caravan people were just starting up then, in the thirties, it was just getting popular. He said, "They can pull in anywhere they like off the road, but they don't get molested at all. They've got the means whereas the tramp hasn't. He often has to sleep rough".

Anyway, they scrapped the law and they had to have a compulsory safety wire dividing the tiers of the cell blocks, so if a prisoner goes out and falls, he doesn't get hurt or killed. And that's still in today I think.

Course I had two brief spells in jail. One was for sleeping rough at South Molton. There were farmers on the bench there. They never liked the tramp. I was picked up in a shed, held overnight and then taken to Exeter, train ride and all. I was given seven days hard labour. Actually you only do five and a half. You get there in the afternoon and that day counts as one and so does the day you come out.

The hard labour consists of being deprived of your mattress for seven days and you do normal work of threading strings and waxing them. That's for mailbags and they throw two or three in your cell in the morning and you have to mend them. In the morning the warden — the screw they call him — opens up and comes round. He picks up the bag and holds it to the light, and if he can see a small hole he throws it back in and you have to go over it again.

What I didn't like was the first morning when they open up all the cells, you all stand out along the tier. The screw comes along and said to me, "You don't want to come in here for things like that". So I said, "You've been reading on the back of my card what I'm in for". And I said to him, "Its apparent to me rather than being the preventers of crime, you are the promoters of it". And he never said a word. It doesn't make sense to me. He was as good as telling me to go out and do something, to break in — do a bust — and come in for something not nothing. To me it wasn't a crime to sleep in a shed, as long as I don't damage it.

I got the same thing at Gloucester, three days remand and fourteen days in custody. I was on the bum, begging and bumming. Course before you come out you see the D.P.A. — the Discharged Prisoners Aid. If you need a bit of gear you get a bob or two and if you're picked up miles from the job, you get a bus ticket to where they picked you up so that you don't have to walk all the way again.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

I remember I'd been on the road about a year. I had a chip on my shoulder at first. Whether it had anything to do with the hardness of my father, because he was a bit of a brute, I don't know. I remember I was up in the North country somewhere. I was drinking a lovely drum of tea and I had some handouts, a meat sandwich. It was called a handout. A little girl comes up to me. She was about five. She looked at me and said, "Are you a poor man on the road?" I said, "Yes".

She was only young and she went to offer me a penny. That was her sweet money and I wouldn't take it. She kept on and she said, "You've got to have it". Well I thought, "You can't argue with a lady". I took it and she went off down the road as happy as anything. I began to think. She said, "Are you a poor man?" and she was right, I was poor in spirit. I thought, "That child sacrificed her sweet money for me. I could do what that girl had done, and do you know I seemed to be a different man after that. I became at peace with myself, peace of mind and tranquility, and I never looked back.

I didn't like tramping over main roads. It was better over cross country. I used to do a lot of that, trekking over the tracks. I've got a good sense of direction. I'll know a certain town where I'm aiming for and I'll get there without a compass.

I once walked to London. I left Bristol and went the usual way via Bath and all the way up through Reading. I went into a spike at Maidenhead, but by crikey it was dead rough. Blankets never been washed, heavy with dirt. A spike is a tramp word. Its a casual ward, an adjoinment to the workhouse, added on only separte. This one was easy going, what the tramps called a home ruler. That means free and easy. I didn't mind. They had an old stone in the centre of a big fire. I'd get the old pan out and drum up, all night if I wanted to, with bacon and bits and pieces.

Anyway, when I finally arrived in London itself I was jostled by the crowds of people. I knew no-one and I felt as lonely as anyone, more than if I'd been on Dartmoor. I made for the embankment and had a night or two there along with all the itinerants covered with newspapers.

Round about midnight a van did pull up with free cups of coffee and buns and that. It was run by a woman who was known in the tramp world as the Silver Lady. She was a real Lady, she had money but her fortunes were dwindling. The reason she got the name was, if she was anywhere — don't matter if she was out in her motor with her chauffeur — she'd stop and she would get out and give you nothing less than sixpence, which was a silver coin at that time. She might give half a crown. So that's how she got that name. She was a real lady, a lovely lady, had no airs and graces, none of that. She wouldn't look at your coat. If you could meet any of the men of that time, you'd find I'm correct on that.

Anyway, I didn't care much for the company on the embankment so I decided to go in one of the M.A.B. Metropolitan Asylum Board, establishments, or spikes. It was at a place called Poplar. There were eight of these in London.

Being a young fellow and being there the first time, the head porter there



"I found a decent place to have a drum up"

said, "I want a word with you". I said, "What's it about. Have I done anything wrong?" He said, "Oh no. Would you like to go to one of our hostels?" I said, "Yes, I wouldn't mind trying it". It was at Grays Inn Lane off Grays Inn Road and of course I expected to walk two or three miles, but he gives me a tram ticket.

In I goes. I stuck it a week there but the food wasn't that good and I didn't get on very well with the staff. I had to stay in all the morning and work. In the afternoons I used to go round London on the downright. That's another name for tapping or bumming. Anyway I get round to the Jewish quarter. Its alright there. I went to the cakeshops and butchers. They do give you something, a small bit mind, but they all give you something.

After I got my bag - my peter - well stocked up with extra food, I started then, close to the gutter, looking for tobacco replenishments. I had a lovely tin full of three parts, some long, some half, some short. Often I looked at it and I thought, "Each end is a different person. If you could get all these different persons to talk, what an interesting story it would be". That's what went through my mind.

I had a good time and I run along to the embankment. I talked to one or two of the human flotsam and jetsam of life. Then I ambled back to the hostel. I thought, "It gets a bit awkward here with all this grub". I had a row of bacon, tomatoes, sausages. I had all sorts among the bric a brac.

I thought about cooking. In the hostel they had a largish room where you dine and a passageway with cells. I'll say this, you had a beautiful comfortable bed, and clean. Anyway there was gas jets from the wall and I thought, "Here, that's just the job". I get the old drum out, fill it with water and unload my peter. It was just on the boil when round comes one of the bosses. He didn't like that, he created about that.

I said, I'm hungry. Its not enough what you give me here. I'm going to get it to boil and make my tea now". He said, "Don't let me catch you doing that again". So I ambled about the place, went out through a door, and down into the yard. There was a fire there, a boiler for heating the place. I thought, "Just the job". I get the old bacon out, a couple of eggs and all that and I got really well pleased he didn't know.

But what I didn't like, every day the bogies came round, the CID, poking and looking around, seeing whose who. I thought, "Its about time I put my skates on". I said to the man on the night, "I'm off tomorrow". He said, "What you going for?" He seemed a bit cut up about it. I said, "I'm not happy here. I'm off". So I just got my bag and left the morning after.

I got outside and I said to this cockney chap, "Excuse me mate, which road out for Edmonton?" That's north London. "Edmonton?" he said. "You can get a so and so number bus". I said, "I'm not interested in the bus, I'm walking". He nearly fell down. He said, "What! Walking?" I said, "Sure, I've got all day, twelve miles, that's nothing".

So I ambled on. I arrived at tea time at Scarface's. They called it Scarface's

because the porter there was attacked one time and had a very bad scar. Scarface's was a spike. I was a bit tired like. It was hot weather, in the summer. I was terribly fatigued walking through London in the hustle and bustle. When I got there, what do I find? A queue of us waiting to be booked in and there's these chapel women there issuing tracts to the poor tramps. A woman comes to me with a tract. I said, "I'm not interested in them".

"Why aren't you?" she said. "Look lady!" I said "I've come a days march today. I'm tired. All I'm thinking of now is getting something to eat in there, and a bath and then to bed. The trouble with you people is your approach. You've got the wrong technique, you do it wrong. If you want to get a man to listen, if he's on the road, first ask him if he's hungry. If he says, "Yes, I could do with a meal", take him, feed him and when he's satisfied with his physical needs, he'll listen to you and your spiritual needs". I don't know if I left a mark on her. I know what it is to be really hungry, friendless, cold, wet, slept rough, all of it.

I never got depressed on the road. I get more depressed sometimes thinking about the state of the world to be truthful. Its a sad, sick world. I've got a feeling about it, it could be different. You could throw out all the greed and malice and selfishness, hatred and things like that. I can dispell it out of my mind. I'm like a child.

There is hope, but as the world is now you've got seperate governments, national barriers, prejudice and you've got industrial powers. As long as you've got that you'll never get peace in the world when mankind could walk in dignity and with humility. That's the way I see it.

When you're a tramp you're ostracised by people and they condemn you, I had all that but it doesn't worry me. If you meet only one good person it makes up for all the bad ones.

One woman looked at me. She said, "Why do you live a life like that?" The way she emphasised it with disdain, I could tell that she was against it. Well I said, "Its like this lady. I've decided to emancipate from the social vortex, from life's perplexities to the tranquilities of nature". Her eyes were popping out of her head. She didn't say no more.

Anyway, from London I set off down the road to Welwyn Garden City. I was bumming my way along and I got two miles outside a place called Baldock. Its in Hertfordshire. I found a decent place to have a drum up, cooking eggs and bacon, tomatoes, sausages and what have you. A lorry pulls up on the side and it says Hull on it. I thought, "I might get a good lift here". I had my meal and its still there. I collected up my pot, my drum and that and I went over. The driver was having a snooze, so I tapped on the window and woke him up.

He opened the door and he said, "What do you want?" I said, "You going up Hull way?" He said, "Yes". He said, "I'm waiting for someone, a mate. If he don't show up you can have a seat". I said, "Alright." So I hung on and anyway he didn't turn up, so I got a lift.

It was one o'clock in the morning and he dropped me off at a place called Bawtry, nine miles from Doncaster. I'd got a good lift. Then I had to look for a

skipper. I found a stack in a field, a straw one. I thought, "Well, this'll do. That night I got no peace, it was loaded with rats. There were so many of them. So I got off to sleep by the side of the road. I hung my peter in a tree off of the ground.

Next morning I came down to Maltby and I ended up in the Sheffield spike that night. They put spikes in every town then, even in country towns. Then I went to York and went in a spike there. Then I got to Huddersfield and there was a tramp major there at that spike, Sailor Jack they called him. A tramp major is usually an inmate that's got a little bed and everything that he needs. They give him extra food and they give him so many ounces of tobacco a week and he does that job and he lives in. Sometimes you get a man off the road who takes that job.

I get into Sailor Jacks and I book in. He said, "What's your name and where do you come from?" and "Where are you going?" Then you get your bath and your bread and butter and your shamrock tea. Well shamrock tea is three leaves to the gallon. Its more or less like water, still its drink for you if you're dry.

Well anyway, there's a policeman in there, an ordinary one with the helmet. I thought, "Alright, something's up." As I was passing he says, "Where did you come from?" I said, "I've come from York".

"And before that?" he said. "Well as a matter of fact, before that I got a good lift on the way up from London". And he became real interested then. I don't know what was done and he didn't tell me. He started asking me a lot of questions and I was answering and I got fed up. I said, "I'm not telling you no more". So I had a bath and got into the old rough night shirt that they give you and I got into my cell, where the bed is. I was just getting down to it when the foreman came along and said, "You're wanted".

I had an idea it might be a robbery or something. I had to go out, and out in the main entrance there's a car with two detectives inside and they said, "We just want you for questioning. Well I said, "That's alright".

"We won't keep you long", they said, so away we go. I can always remember the station, we went up a lot of steps. In we went and there were questions and they were hammering away. It was half past nine and two hours had gone by without them telling me why I had been questioned or detained. And I said, "Look I've had enough of this. I'm going to demand why I've been detained. And they said, "Oh, its something to do with a murder". And honest, I nearly fell off the chair, because it was a shock to me.

I said, "I don't know anything about it." And there they are hammering away. Anyway, I said, "I'm tired, let me sleep in an open cell". They needn't lock it because I'm not charged. They wouldn't do that. So I got down behind the switchboard, there's enough space. I thought, "That'll do", I takes my jacket off, rolls it up and takes my shoes off, put the shoes underneath, jacket on top and makes a pillow.

One of them comes over, shook me and says, "What's the name of that place you had a lift to?" Well I said, "I've answered that a dozen times, hop it, I'm not

saying no more". He never bothered me then. In the morning they give me tea. There's coppers sat there and I went and sat in a chair. One of the coppers said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "I'm not going to run away, I've got nothing to run for, I've done nothing.

They searched me for bloodstains on my clothes. This big copper said, "You look like a man who could deal a powerful blow". I said, "I could if I had to". Anyway in the morning they brought me breakfast, bread and butter and a pint mug of tea. He said, "Here's your breakfast". I said, "I don't call that a breakfast, where's the egg and bacon. If I was outside I'd have a real breakfast". He said, "Where would you get it from?" I said, "If you'll care to watch me you'll see how I do it. In and out of shops".

They had to let me go cos this lorry driver came to speak for me. And do you know what the detective said to me as I was coming down the steps. He said, "Where are you going now?" I said, "I don't know, anywhere, one place is as good as another. That's how it is when you're roaming". And he said, "If I were you for the next fortnight, report at each town you come to into the local police station". I said, "What! Am I a convict on licence. Like hell I will. If you want me you'll come and search for me". I never heard no more.

Anyway, they did find them. Two men were involved in it. They struck a garage mechanic over the head with what appeared to be a flatfile. It was in the paper the next morning. He died as a result of the injuries.

I was pulled up in Swindon once, suspected of knocking a woman out in Coombe Down. I'd given the right name, but If you give a phoney name stick to it or you'll get yourself in a spot. That was alright there, I wasn't long in the police station, about an hour I expect. I didn't stay long round Swindon, I went to the Oxford spike.

On the whole it was not bad at all. We even met one or two good coppers. They'd get you a mug of tea or something like that, or a sandwich. I didn't get to know any police. I didn't stay around long enough to get to know anyone for that matter. I was on the move all the time. I might stay two or three days in the woods somewhere and then be on my way again. I did that round Worthing. I did alright round there.

In the beginning I got hungry because I couldn't bring myself to face to ask most people. I suffered from - well I know now what it is - an inferiority complex. I thought if I went to a door everybody would be looking at me. I have whipped a bit of grub or used devious means to get some when I've been hungry. I speak the truth, I'm not hiding anything, I'd steal if I had to do it. You could get fourteen days or a month for bumming! But I have been real hungry - not exactly starving - but that was my first days on the road. I was only a greenhorn then.

The poorer the person the better, simply because they understand. The others don't. I remember coming from Newtown down to Knighton, it was a snowy day, it was covered like a blizzard. Anyway I went to this big house and polite I asked a woman. And you know what she said to me. "I buy my food". I just

walked away, I couldn't reason with that. Reconciliation with evil and baseness is useless.

You've got evil and you've got good, more evil than good, but it makes good significant. It stands out like a shining light in the wilderness, but if its all good then it wouldn't have that same significance. Whether its got to be a bit of both, the good and the evil, I don't know.

You can actually rise above your environment, it can be done, its mind over matter. I'm not particularly religious, but I'm not particularly irreligious. I read a book by Thomas Payne called the 'Age of Reason'. It deals with every chapter in the bible and it pulls it all to pieces.

I was talking to someone from a chapel, we were having a debate and he couldn't answer my questions. He saw me with 'Payne' coming into a cafe. He was issuing these religious tracts. Most fellows took it and when he wasn't looking they threw it away. Well I won't do that. I wouldn't accept one, and he started then on me. He saw me with the Age of Reason and he condemned Thomas Payne. He said, "That's atheist"!

I said, "You've not read the book. The opening chapter in the book says, "I believe in a God". He didn't say what kind, whether it was in a human form like me or you. I made up a little poem — an enditement of the so called priesthood or ministerhood.

The parson stood at the holy front
His collar turned from back to front
And with the piety then unfurled
He turned his back upon the world
"Ignore your trials and tribulations
And carry your cross till the day is done
And keep your eye on the heavenly mansion"
While he's got his on the earthly one.

And here's another one.

Pseudo Christians awake
and do not partake
of ritual and holy water
The church of Christ
is in the hearts of men
not in brick and mortar.

What you do, your actions, is important. The action is the continuation of the thought. I used to pull them up along the road, I told them, I come out straight. One minister said about heaven and a better world than this. I said, "You're a minister, why aren't you prepared to go to heaven?" I said, "I'd go now, if its better than this". And so would I have done, I had hard times, I had privations and things like that. Some of them would tap you on the shoulder and say, "Be good old fellow, be good".

"Its easy for you to say that", I'd tell them, "When your tummy's full". You see they've got the wrong approach these people.

It was some time after my encounter with the law over a little matter of vagrancy. It was the summer of 1932 and I was back in the Bristol area. I'd emerged from a haystack skipper and walking towards St. Johns Lane, I intended to make for Somerset Terrace. On reaching it I sat a while and a small fox terrier came towards me, and looked up. Looking into its eyes, its soft limpid eyes, I saw a touch of sadness. "Hello my little friend", I said stroking him. "You're just in time for breakfast". I pulled a bottle of milk from my peter, and a handout of cooked meat cuttings, that I'd got on a downright the day before. We shared this together. In no time at all the dog had eaten his.

I thought, "Well, it's about time I got on the move again". With brisk paces I set off to Ashton Vale. Not thinking of the dog, I just get going. All of a sudden he was up alongside of me. I turned and I said, "Go back, go back, you don't know what you're letting yourself in for. Don't come with me". And he looked with his eyes ever so strange as if to say, "You were kind to me just now. Now you're angry".

"Oh well", I said, "Might as well have you with me. I shall have to get two handouts now instead of one". Anyway we set off and were reaching the fields in Ashton Vale. The little dog was frisking, romping about, happy as the day is long. I myself decided to relax in peaceful serenity. I laid on my back and looked up into the azure blue sky. I slipped into the realms of ecstasy. I had a rude awakening, my little friend was licking my face. I got up. I thought, "The time must be getting on". It must have been getting towards midday.

I decided to make for the Ashton end of Bristol, to see what the good people had to offer by way of handouts. With this in mind, I picked up my worldly accoutrements and set to the place in mind. I took my well-christened tea can ready for action. I surveyed a rank of houses that was neatly kept. Taking my choice I made a frontal attack upon a doorbell. A few seconds had passed by and the door opened and a kindly middle aged woman appeared with a mumsy look. I thought, "I'm alright here, this is OK here".

"And what may I do for you young man?"

"Oh good morning ma'm. Would you be kind enough to make a can of tea for my mate and I?"

"Mate?" she said, "What mate?" I said, "Here". She looked down. "Oh whose dog is that?"

"Well", I said, "We had an untimely meeting this morning".

"Ooh, that poor little thing must be starving".

"Not quite lady, we dined together earlier".

"It not right, it shouldn't be like that, he should have a home, someone to care for him". By this time she was getting all sentimental. "Where are you going then?"

"Well ma'm, like most people to get my head down. The only difference is they put their heads on a soft white pillow. More often mine's on a green patch of mother nature's bosom".

"Shouldn't be doing that, a young man like you." she replied. "Oh well ma'm, you know how it is, the conditions and so on".

"Look give me your tea can", and she goes. Ten minutes or so must have gone by. I was beginning to get a little apprehensive. "Blimey", I thought, "She ain't on the blower to the Johnnies". I looked up in the eaves and saw no connecting wires and I felt relieved. She suddenly appeared with a drum of tea and what appeared to be a wrap of sandwiches. I looked at the tea and I thought "That's no shamrock tea, that's the real McCoy".

She said, "This is for your little dog". It was a miniature dumbbell, I believe they call it a biscuit bone. "And here's a half a crown for the dog".

"What, a half a crown! You mean 1s 3d. for him and 1s 3d. for me, we split down the middle, we're mates. Anyway, what's the use of money to a dog, I could short change him".

"I'm not going to argue with you", she said. I said, "Alright, no hard feelings ma'm. Thanks for the material sustenance to meet our physical needs". With that I went away.

After fortifying ourselves, I made for the shopping centre for the purpose of the downright. I dived into a shop, one here, one there, not to be too conspicuous. John Bull might be about and you've got to watch yourself. I'd reached a fair way along the road. By this time my bag was getting full of the bits and pieces of public rejection. By the time I reached the top of Horfield my bag was well filled. It was now I turned to the thoughts of fag ends. My tobacco requisites were running low.

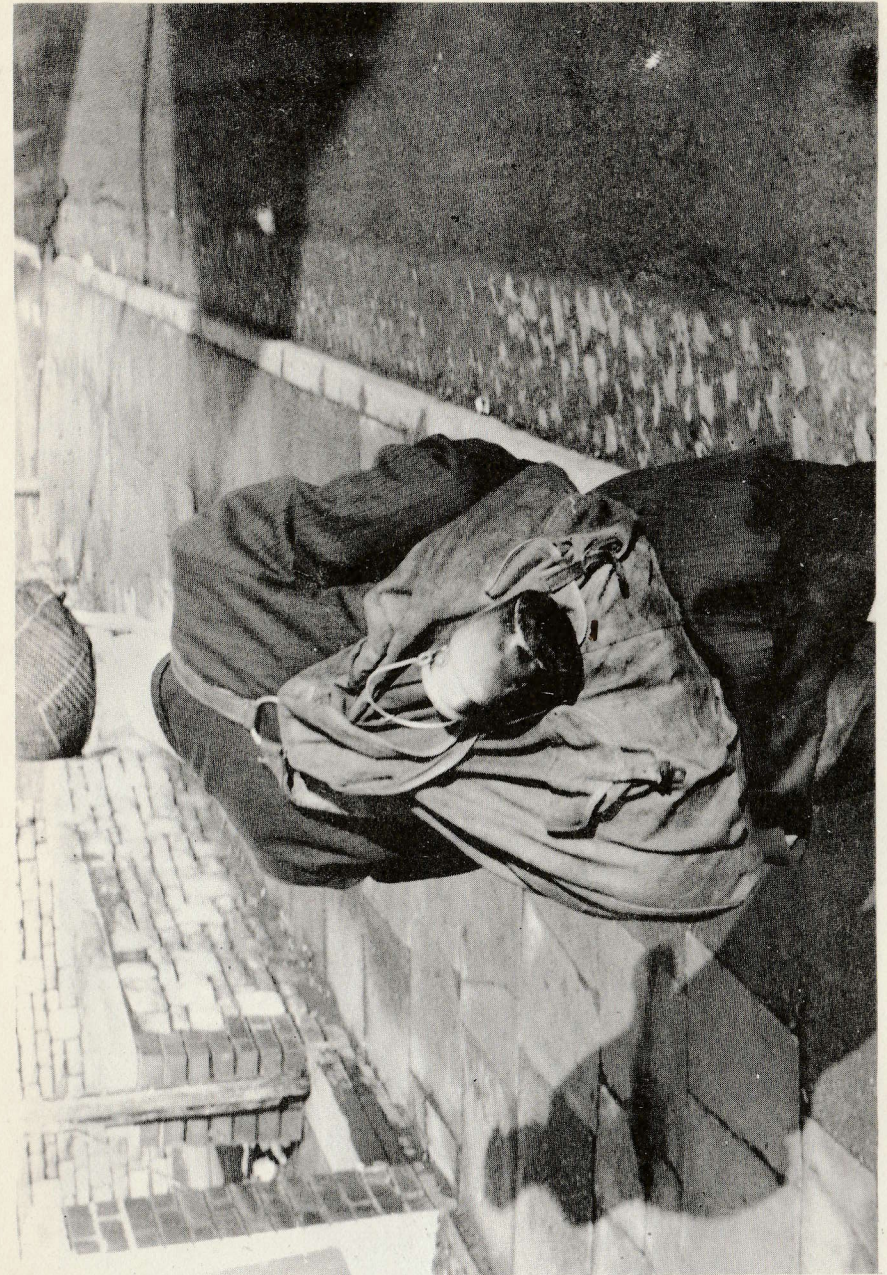
I decided to snipe at the gutter at hand for replenishments, with varying comments by the public at large. Treating them with indifference I set to the task at hand and reached the mark of sufficiency. Next I stepped into a side street with drum in hand, with thought of refreshment. I chose a house, went straight to it, rung the bell.

I was suddenly confronted by the granite expressionless face of a woman with a hard look. And what she said to me! I was convinced she had a total dislike for itinerants. I made a hasty retreat. House after house I called with no success. With resolution, tenacity of purpose, I carried on and obtained what I'd set out to do.

Selecting a patch of pavement for primitive comfort, I settled down to enjoy the proceeds. Back against wall, legs extended towards curb, leaving little room for the passers by. If John Bull had been there at that moment I would probably have been charged with obstruction. I decided then to make our way back to our abode, greenfields mission. It was several miles and I kept a steady pace, for my little friend to keep with me.

On reaching the suburbs of the city it was now growing dusk. My thoughts turned to my little friend. "I wonder if he'll be with me in the morning". On arriving, still with the thoughts in my mind, I settled down and I drifted into unconsciousness.

I was awakened in the morning by the dawn chorus from the feathered world. Peering over to where the little dog was, he was still there. He had no intentions to emancipate, that was obvious. Standing up, he looked up into my eyes with



"My tobacco requisites were running low. I decided to snipe at the gutter at hand for replenishments"



“Selecting a patch of pavement for primitive comfort, I settled down to enjoy the proceeds”

an expression that seemed to say. “What are we going to do today?” That day I kept to the fields and lanes and paths. We spent a happy day together. As the days went by the attachment grew stronger.

I was already getting the urge to tramp the highways and byways of England. That day was not far off, of the parting of the ways. That day did come. We had a last drum up and skipper together. We spent the rest of the day together, giving the dog a little more pleasure.

The time came to make for the place of incarceration (The Dogs Home) with my pet on my back and sadness in my heart, I set tracks to that place, towards the Bath Rd. My heart became sadder and sadder. On reaching it I went straight in, with mixed feelings. I explained to the man in charge the circumstances. He said, “You did the right thing”. But when I look back now, I often wonder whether I did.

I turned my back and walked away, with tears welling in my eyes. It was the saddest longest miles that I ever walked in my life, following a most disturbed night. Two or three days later, making towards the south coast, my turbulent feelings seemed to settle down. With the passage of time it became vague in my memory.

But I've never forgotten that deep bond of friendship between man and dog, I've often wondered whether dog's affinity to man is greater than man to man. I thought so then and I think so now.

MACHYNLLETH SPIKE TO ST. ASAPH

I made one trip from London all the way across to Warwick then on to Wales. I took about a couple of weeks to get to Machynlleth, Montgomery, and stayed there in the spike. I spent two nights there. The morning I was due to go out, I was suddenly awakened by the raucous voice of a tramp major. I jumped out of the apology called bed, stretched and went straight to the wash house for a refreshener. I came back into the day room of a Dickensian origin, eagerly awaiting the elegant breakfast, eight ounces of bread, one ounce of marg and a pint of shamrock tea that tasted like yesterday's dishwater. After that I was waiting patiently to go out and hit the road again.

We all collected our peters and drums and I went straight up the road to the International Stores for the hand out of bacon. There was only one, the first man there gets it. Someone had beaten me to it. "Well", I thought "That's it". I made my way along the rather long expanse of river bridge and turned left. I stopped, then made my way a few miles more. I thought I'd have a barn skipper that night on a farm.

I called at a farmhouse door and I said, "Good evening farmer, am I alright for a shakedown?" He said, "Yes", but he said, "I want your matches". I handed him the matches and he said "Give me your can". He filled it with the real Sargeant Major's tea. "There we are", he said, "I'll show you where you can sleep for the night". He put me in a barn over the cattle. He said, "Don't forget in the morning, come and get your matches and you can have your breakfast before you go".

I said, "Alright". Next morning I woke and did come down to the old farmhouse, collected my matches, had my breakfast and away I go. I made for Barmouth. The day is rather cold and its clouding up. It looks like rain. I had to cross a long toll bridge. I stopped in the middle and I was gazing down. It was a beautiful scene. I got to the other side and I was stopped at the toll by a woman and she said "Have you got tuppence?" I said, "I haven't got no money". She said, "Have you got a pocket knife you can give me?" I said, "No, I haven't got that, I've got an ordinary knife". There was a bit of an argument. I said "I'm not going to go all the way back now". She said, "Oh, all right", and she let me through.

I thanked her and away I go. I thought. "I'll stop in the gasworks skipper tonight". One of the old tramps told me about it. He'd said, "If you're ever up that way the gasworks is alright for a liedown, shakedown". Its now raining with sleet, it was a bit of a cold night. Anyway I goes into the gasworks where the retorts are. The fellow in charge, he said, "Wait till ten o'clock when the manager's gone and I'll take you over to the engine house, it clean over there". So I said, "OK".

I get there and there's free gas. I have a wash and I pass the night there. It was a hard floor mind. I had a wash in the morning, drum up some bacon, tomatoes and what I had in the bag there, and away I goes.

The next stop was Harlech. There's a castle there. I walked round because I'm interested in old buildings. I stopped to have tea and I thought I'd go into the

back. Well I was mighty surprised. It had a lovely frontage but it was just a cover up. In the back it was a filthy, terrible place.

I thought, "I'll hit the mountain road now, I'll spend two or three days up here on my own, away from it". It was in the middle of winter mind. I got well into the mountains and I was looking for a shepherds hut. You get them up there, lovely little huts built of solid stone. I spent a happy time on my own just with the sheep.

One morning when I'd had a good look round, I decided to climb crags. I put my peter down and started to climb about and I lost my footing. I'm rolling down into a ravine. My body was bouncing against stones and I finished up crowning my head. I must have been momentarily pretty stunned. I collected myself, but I wasn't half dazed.

I thought, "Well I'll never make the shepherds hut tonight". It was two or three miles away. I found some gorse bushes and I got in between in a bit of a shelter, but it was getting very cold. I took my little jacket off and my shoes, to put under my peter for a pillow. I slept for a short time, but the night seemed an age. All I could hear was bleating of sheep and when dawn came I was so cold I could hardly get up. I thought, "What am I going to do now?" I was a good way off the beaten track. After a while I heard whistles. One whistle, then another, then perhaps two short whistles. Of course I knew what that was. That was a shepherd with a dog to round up sheep. I shouted out and I whistled myself. I could do it then when I had teeth. I attracted the dog's attention and he came over. He ran away from me as if he was going back, then he stopped again. He looked around again to where I was.

The shepherd came over then and he found me. He said, "What have you been up to young fellow". I told him. I said, "I can't walk".

"Well", he said, "We'll have to get help for you. You stay there, don't move, don't try and crawl away". I said, "No, I'll stay". After what seemed an age to me, he came back and he had two fellows with a stretcher. He gave me a shot of whiskey and he said, "Have a drop of that, it will warm you". They had to carry me for some way to the ambulance. Then they took me to Penrynudraeth Spike Hospital. I spent a week there. They put me to bed and gave me hot drinks. I was suffering from exposure as well. In a week I was alright.

Away I went on the road again. I went through a little village and I stopped at a little cottage that caught my eye. There was an inscription there that said, 'This is where the honorable David Lloyd George spent his boyhood days'. Well Lloyd George was the premier during the 1914-18 war. With that in mind I set off for Caernarvon, I had a couple of skippers in between.

I was a day in Caernarvon spike. Dinner was what we called a cowboy's dinner, bully beef, dried peas and potatoes with their jackets on and a bit of bread and cheese to finish up with. No tea. A very monotonous diet I might add.

Anyway I comes away from Caernarvon, it was a lovely day, rather cold but very bright and I thought, next stop is Bangor, only nine miles. I thought to

myself as I trudged up the road, "I'll look in on Llanfairfechan tip, see if there are any occupants there skipping". A titled lady owned the ground and the black farm and she let the tramps use it.

I looked across and I could see a half barn door open and smoke coming from it. I thought, "There's somebody in residence". So I trecks over the tip to the door. I peered in. My word, there must have been about twenty of them. There's little fires all on the dirt floor inside and mattresses up against the walls. It looked like they were having a right old drum up in there. I looked around the collection. They'd loosened their hold on life and slipped into the depths of depravity. I felt sorry at the same time as abhorrence with it.

There was one in there, in his pan he had a pile of something, it looked like an apology for a mixed grill. And another one was frying up his gay bits of bacon, judging by the froth on top. Then my eyes went round the room and there was a hard faced looking individual. He looked like he'd been in the nick more times than he'd had skippers. He was stirring something in a tin. It seemed to be conditioned to porridge.

One looked up and he said, "Have a drink of tea mate". I said, "No thanks". Those hard staring eyes with a glassy look. I thought, "Uhu, I've stumbled on a bunch of Jake Wallers here. I think I'll be off. I won't get no mental stimulæ here". So I turned and went back across the tip. "The bum's out here", I thought. They must have had a right hammering by that motley crowd, from the big black barn, judging by the banquet that was in progress.

The next stop was Llanfairfechan, then on to Bangor. There I started to downright, mumping shops for bits of bacon. I got my bag replenished. I thought I'd have a trek over the Menai Bridge, over the Menai Straits to the Isle of Anglesey. I stayed in Beaumaris, the capital of it. I was sitting there looking north to Puffin Island. There were puffins down there. I came back and I thought, "I'll have Conway tonight". That evening with a couple of drum ups on the way, I reached Conway spike. It wasn't too bad there, it was by the sea, I liked the bracing air. Then I went to St. Asaph - there's a spike there. By the way St. Asaph is the smallest city in Britain I should think. I remember going to Pantasaph monastery for a hand out. The monks would give you a lot of cooked meat, so I was well replenished. Then I went to Holywell, Chester, Delamere Forest, and making from there to the north of England.

STOWAWAY

I met an old mate when I was travelling round North Wales. He'd been to Australia, he'd told me a lot about that. He'd been to the Yangtze River of China and he'd been to the United States of America. His name was Oswald Osborne. He'd been to Spain as well. He was telling me a lot about that - how he was in an open prison there. He said it wasn't bad but when he was in Australia, he got sentenced for something and he got sent to Maitland Jail, New South Wales. A right B. . . . of a place he thought it. He'd been in sheep shearing stations. He had a stack of references, he'd worked, as well as being on the bum. He was quite a fellow, a real good mate.

We decided to go to Canada. We made for Liverpool to see if we could get a boat from there. We did get one bound for Montreal. Three or four days out we showed ourselves. The skipper wasn't too fussed, he was a Norwegian, he was a bit sharp at first but he said, "You're going to work your passage, the rest of the way anyway". So he put me and him down below, in the stoke hole. Course its hot down there lugging the coal from the bunkers to the boiler for the man to shovel in.

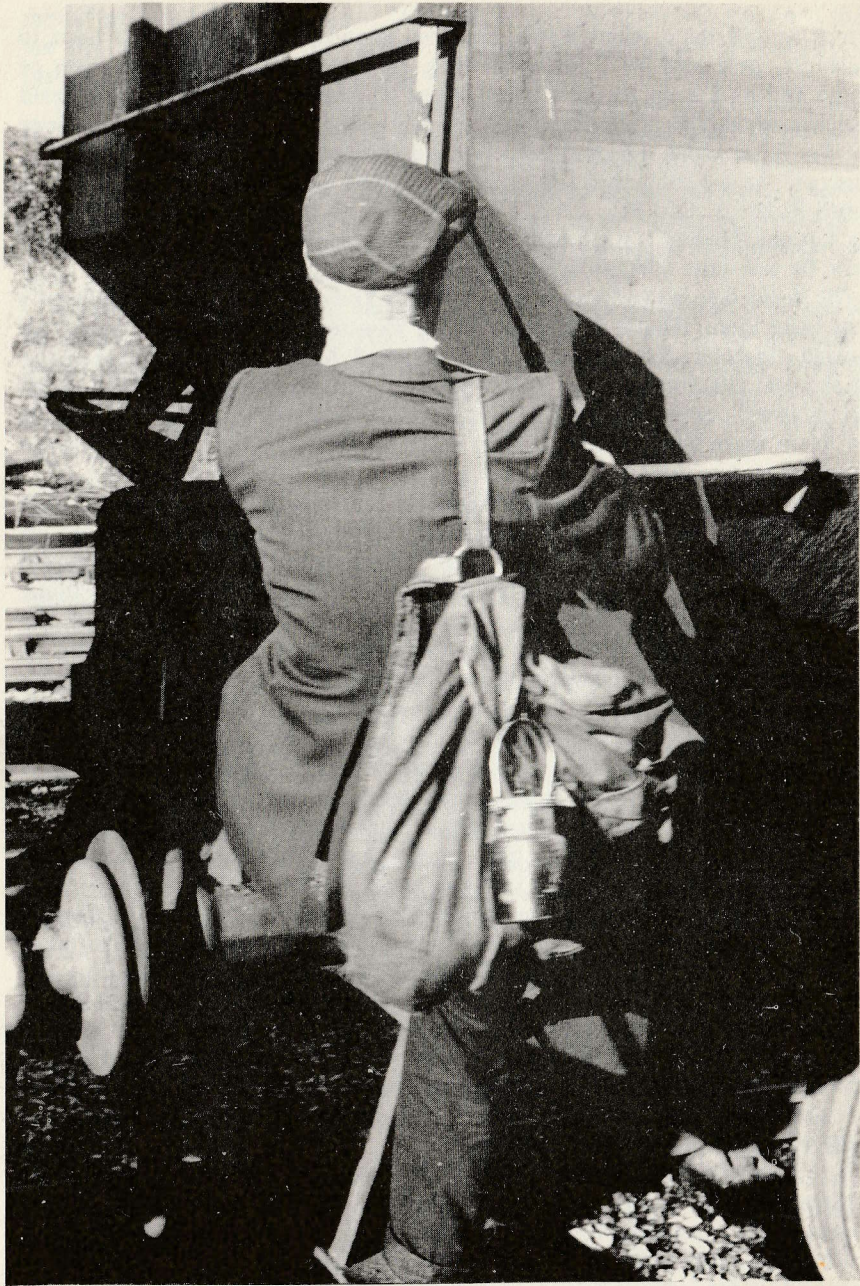
When we got to Montreal we went to the freight terminal to get a train out across Canada. We went to Toronto, Port Arthur, Fort William. Of course we had spells when we'd get off to get grub. If you were lucky you had the choice of sharing a box car. If it was fully loaded you had Hobson's choice of nothing, or getting on under the framework, between the bogey wheels, underneath the body of the box car, which is very dangerous really. Its a bit dodgy. I've been on my back or on my side looking across, but never facing the ground. If you're watching the ground from a fast moving train, its liable to make you dizzy and you fall off. There's been more than one accident like that.

Of course you have fights as well with the train crew when they stop at watering stations. They had steam trains then. The brake man-shack they call him, or brakie - he'd come around and go right along seeking the dossers. He'd lay into you, and you'd have to fight. I often had a fight with them, I was very strong. I threw one of them right across the track once.

I spent one winter in a lumber camp at Prince Rupert on the Skeena River in British Columbia. I learned a lot about how to use an axe and a lot about trees. In the lumber camp there's the river men. They see to the logs, log floating and they see to log jams. Then there's the high rigger, which is a very skilled job, they are highly paid. He climbs up the tree with spikes and ropes and he takes an axe and saw, and he may have to cut twenty, thirty, forty feet off of there. Its very dangerous. When he's nearly through, the tree might split and pull him off. I've seen more than one killed there. Then you've got the ones clearing the brush, clearing for skidways.

Its a lovely life, hard work but lovely. They were a tough bunch of men. A lot of loggers were single men. After a period in the logging camp they'd get a break, move away to a town and have a right good time. I was never like that though.

I never thought of settling down in a place. I had a real bum itch then, more so than I've got now. In Canada, freighting, riding, walking, I got as far as the



"If you were lucky you had the choice of sharing a box car"

Arctic Circle. It was in the summer. We went through, Norman Wells, Fort Good Hope, Fort Independent, Fort Rigley, Fort Resolution. That brings you on the Great Slave Lake and you've got Yellow Knife which is also on the Slave. Over the top of the other side is the Great Bear Lake.

There were a lot of hobos in Canada. We all used to get together. We used to have a tramps convention sometimes and you'd share your grub in a fry up. We had a grapevine system there so that if you wanted to contact someone the word got round and you'd find him.

I had an uncle who went there to start a farm. I knew his name, but where he went and what province he went to I didn't know. Of course they do farm in British Columbia, but the wheat growing country is Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. You've got the plains or the prairie there. You get plenty of glimpses of it from the side door pullman — that's the name they called the box car.

The people there were pretty good. They'd put you to work chopping wood or something like that, but they'd always give you your meal first, so that you had something to work on. Then they'd give you a dollar or something, according to what you'd done.

It was over forty years ago. The population wasn't much then, even in 1951 the population of all Canada was something like 15 million. It was only about 10,000 in the North West Territories, which covered over one and a half million square miles. Out there you'd get the Eskimos and the Ejjibui Indians.

I've seen black bears and I've seen moose with six foot wide antlers. And there were other animals up in the McKenzie, Muskeg country they called it. There was the caribou. The trappers used to shoot them for meat. I never thought of doing any trapping, only because my outlook is humanitarian. It goes against my nature. I look a little rabbit in the face then I melt. I know I've got a rough exterior, but I'm soft at heart.

I was over there about a year. I had one winter there, of course you get the snow and it's very cold. It's forty below. It wasn't particularly that that made me decide to come back to England. The funny thing is I can stand the cold, especially dry cold, more than I can the heat.

I came back from Canada in 1935.

We got down to Port Arthur and got a boat there back to Liverpool. It was easy enough to get aboard. My mate knew the ropes and I followed him. You sneaked up to the galley when there was nobody about, to get a bit of food, then you give yourself up when you're way out, at the point of no return.

Back in England we came from Lancashire into Cheshire. We got to Chester then to Wrexham and after staying in the spike, the following day we made for Oswestry. I remember we had a drum up and got on our way again. I was walking outside him and we were laughing and joking. He had a wonderful sense of humour. Next thing I felt a dull thud to my head, but it didn't seem to hurt. I don't remember after that, till I was in Oswestry spike hospital.

In the morning I collected myself and he came in to see me, and he said, "I don't know how long I'll be here, I'll have a roam round and I'll come back".

He said, "A motor bike hit you, caught you in the machine and dragged you along the road". They were treating me for a gashed knee three or four times a day. I was concussed and I couldn't remember much.

In a week I was up. Of course I was young and strong. I recuperate quick, I do now. I was up walking around but my right leg swelled big. I didn't say nothing. I should have really, but I wanted to get going.

Anyway I got on the road and I thought I'd go to Wem, that's about eighteen miles I suppose. I got walking and after about a mile I had to sit down, then get up and go a little bit more. I had a lift on a farm cart about three or four miles. I reached a place by the evening called Ellesmere. I thought, "This'll do for the night and I found a little tin shed. It had hay in it but it was very cold. I had my old little jacket but I never had no blanket. I passed the night there and I had a job to start up in the morning because of my leg's stiffness.

I went on the downright round the town, got some bacon, bits and pieces and made for Wem. I was all done up by the time I got there. I reported to the spike and told the porter what had happened. I said "I had a bad accident, and there's something wrong with my leg". In the morning I had to follow him down town into a private doctor's place. He pressed all round it and it didn't half make me jump. He didn't say nothing.

Then he said, "We'll be sending you to Crosshouses". I said, "Alright", and he gave me a letter to give to a nurse. I always remember the nurse's name, she was Irish, Nurse Fayne. They kept me there a month. I had a fractured leg and I'd been walking on it. I was in bed a month, that helped the winter over.

When I came out I worked my way back to Oswestry and I asked when I got there if the fellow I was with had shown up. They said, "He'd been but you were gone". I never ever ran into him again.

HOME IS A HOLE IN THE GROUND

I tramped up till 1938. I knew the war was coming. I used to say to the other dossers, "They've built new casual wards outside of towns, a mile or two out, all on ground level". I thought, "They're not spending thousands of pounds for tramps". Tramps would use them, but as soon as the war came, they'd use those for the base camps for the troops. Well I was right.

In 1938 I was back in Bristol and I decided to come off of the road. In the Ashton area of Bristol I'm known as Toby by those that know me well. My real name's George Harris. Forty years ago that was dubbed on me. Alf, the fellow that helped me get a window cleaning job, he gave me that name. When I used to come through Bristol I used to see him out doing windows. I used to talk to him because we both had views in common on life. He used to say, "Where are you going?" I'd say "I'm going Tobering around". Then he called me the word Toby from that.

Well, when I came off the road I met Alf who asked me to help him out. That's how I got to do window cleaning. So I thought, "I need a regular place to stay". My thoughts turned to Leigh Woods because there were some remote places in there and its near the city. I went to live in Leigh Woods in 1941.

When I first went there I'd sleep under the arches of the railway line that ran between the river and the woods. Then I found a place that I thought was well hidden away. I found a piece of canvas, biggish piece, rolled it up and brought it back. I cut some ash props and jammed them up under this canvas, tacked it, nailed it and stretched it over the top and down the backsides. I left the front bit open so I could make a little fire against it. It was a tiny place up above the river. It was a rock formation with a curve and I noticed how dry it was. I had a log fire, built in a biscuit tin with bricks and cooked a dinner every evening.

I was in that for about two years. When I was there I went up and down the river looking for bits of timber. The river brought up good bits of timber. I brought up a bit at a time, hid it away and built a tiny little hut under the same place. It had a little sliding door at the front, and windows. I was in that hut for years.

There were only two other tramps in Leigh Woods then. An old man called Ike and a tall thin man called Douglas. He had an education that one, he was a rather quiet sort of a man. The other was a man of about 68. He was a pipe smoking individual and he was fond of beer; he used to get drunk a lot. He was a bellicose individual. I had little to do with him, but I used to talk to the other, he was intelligent. He used to have a terrible antipathy towards the ladies. He was jilted. I didn't ask him direct, but he admitted that to me himself.

Later on there were about ten tramps down there. Most of the men that were in the woods were there because something had gone wrong in their domestic lives. They weren't living in the woods because they liked it, but I did.

Three or four of them lived together in the 'commune'. That was Sid, Jock, a character called Mark and a little Irishman that came along later. They all seemed to stick together, they weren't lonely. I like to be alone. Well not altogether, I'm not exactly a recluse. I like to commune with nature. I like the sky above me and the road below me.

That Sid was a character in himself. How he used to get the food he had down there I just don't know! I've seen him down there with sausages, he had a long string of them, they looked like they had eczema, the skin was bursting out. I said, "You're not going to eat that". He said, "I am". He washed them in a bucket of water and he wiped them on the tail of his shirt. He had a brown loaf down there, it had whiskers round it. I said to him, "I wouldn't eat that". He said "It will be alright if I can cut it off". I said, "It goes right through the loaf". I couldn't convince him.

I've written poems about Sid. Here's one of them.

Besides the dustbin Sidney stands
and hovered like a snide
with trepidation he lifts the lid
and prepared to dip inside
His fingers work meticulously
first to left then right
To his astonishment
a string of bangers came in sight
He lifted them most tenderly
and placed them in his bag
and bent towards the pavement
for some choice curbstone shag
Then he made a roll up
went down the road in glee
down to the layabout cafe
for a drum of shamrock tea.
He drank and drank to slake his thirst
neath the setting sun
With happy visions of tomorrow
and another dustbin run.

Sid used to pick up the tab ends. I was doing that in Gloucester once. I'd just come out of the spike up there and I was picking up these fag ends on the main road. There was a chap who came out of a shop and said, "Don't do that". He gave me enough money to buy twenty Woodbines, that was eight pence then. Of course after I got the fags I still went picking.

Sid's Xmas is three days after mine and yours. He got all the brica-brac from the Xmas tables. Here's a poem about it.

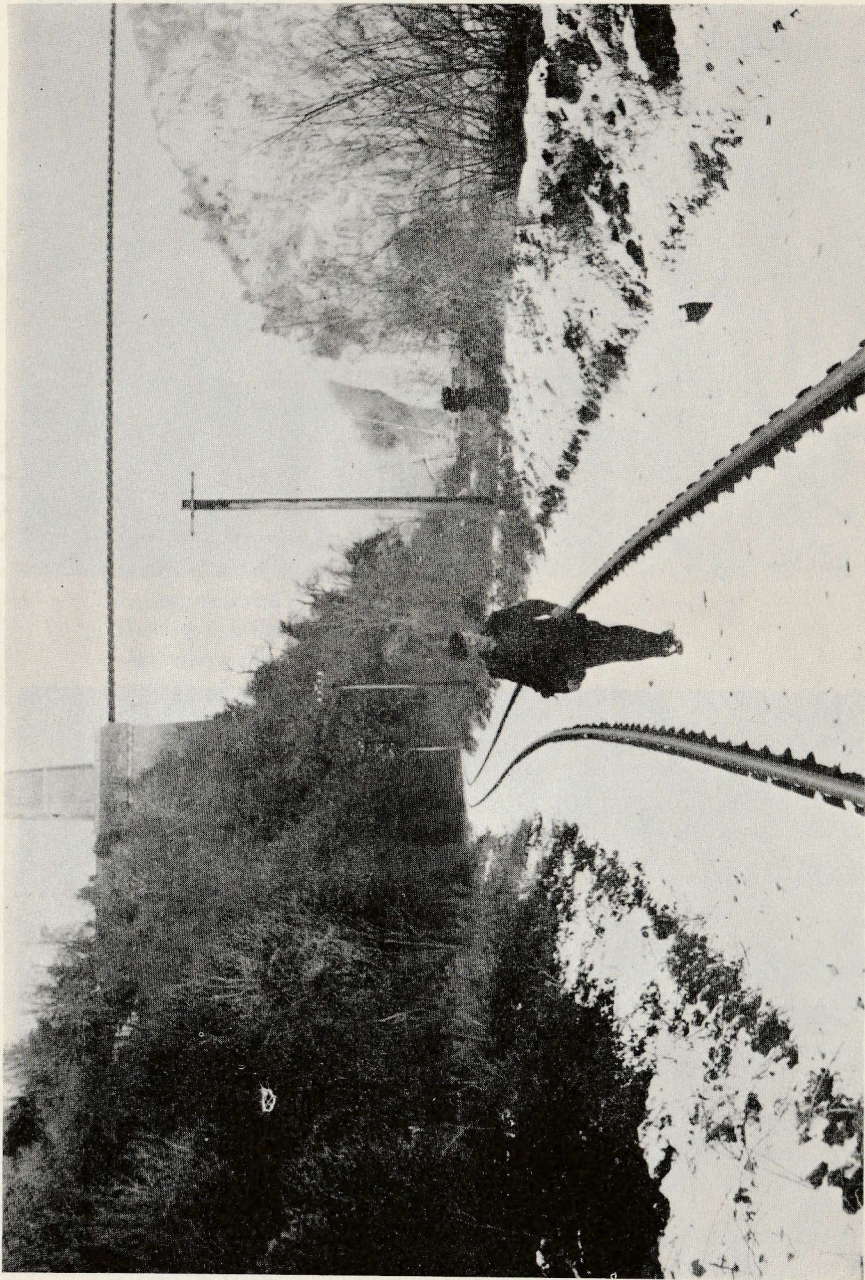
From Arch number seven
a tall figure appeared
About that character
I'll begin my dirge
With fast rotating peddles
at a terrific rate
from Westward Ho
to Ashton Gate



"That's where the commune was"



One of Sid's relics



The daily walk into town

with eyes a popping
 bins galore
 mince pies and pudding
 by the score
 with well filled bag
 that crafty cove
 had completed his Xmas treasure trove
 but alas danger appeared on the street
 for an Ashton bobby was on the beat
 "Now then Sid, I'll be bound
 to charge you with bin diving
 round the football ground."
 The end of the story
 tis a sad sad tale
 for the beak threw the book
 and Sid in jail.

And he did live rough, he had rats for his mates. He had a bad bite from one of them. What he thought was good would be bad to you or me. But he was pretty well knowledgeable. He'd been to Canada. He used to read some good books. He used to pick them up or get hold of them somehow. He used to read all sorts. He was pretty well versed and he was good with words. He had a book down there I've never read and he was drying it out. It was one of Marx's, 'Dialectical Materialism'. I said, "You'll not read that". He said, "I am".

I've read some of his books – Karl Marx. He's fair, pretty good like. Marx believed that the workers would take over. From hand mill to steam mill, to a highly developed state of capitalism, its ready then for the workers to take over and utilise the machine age to their own benefit. Or production for use instead of profit. The Marxian philosophy on socialism is this. A system of society based on the common ownership of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interests of the whole community. That's it in a nutshell. That's what Marx said.

I got really serious on reading when I was in those Woodlands. I've read all kinds of books, Sigmund Freud, the German psychologist, Plato, Socrates, ever so many in my time.

The daily pattern was more or less the same in the woods. During the day I used to come and do window cleaning to earn some money. Once I was cleaning windows in Bower Ashton and this window opened. I was pulled backwards and I hit a concrete ledge at the bottom. After a while I managed to get up. The woman came out and sat me in a chair, and after a while I managed to straighten up and walk. I walked to my bike and went to the cafe at the top of the road. Then I fell down and I had to go to the General Hospital. They put me on a trolley, gave me an X-ray and said, "You've fractured your spine". Then they sent me to the Infirmary. I stayed there about a week before they put me in plaster. I

had three bad nights and days in there with pain. I was there about five weeks. They wouldn't let me out because I couldn't bend to tie my shoes. When they let me out, I still had a plaster cast on. I was out a week and I was getting fed up. I thought I'd get to work. I was doing it with a plaster cast on and all.

There was a murder in Leigh Woods when I was there. The fellow they found murdered was the Bristol rat catcher, a little man. His name was Hopper Chinnock. He was together with a youngish fellow and as far as I can gather he'd been in a mental home. Apparently Chinnock tipped up his basket of blackberries. He must have been furious, but he wasn't a fellow that would tackle you face to face. When this Chinnock was asleep he dashed a stone on his head. Of course there was an inquiry and we all got questioned about it. The policemen barred the path. No one was allowed to go down there, only us. Eventually they caught up with this fellow. I heard they sent him to Broadmoor and he died there as far as I know.

I stayed in Leigh Woods 29 years and 4 months, all through the war. And there were two cold winters as well. They were pretty sharp mind. I could stand it, I felt wonderfully fit. I lived alone but I never felt lonely. To me loneliness is a state of mind. That's how I see it. When I'm alone there are no distractions. I can sit and go so deep in thought that I become impervious to my surroundings.

After living there 29 years I didn't feel so secure in the woods. It was through all that publicity. What happened — the newspapers came out to see the community. There were stories about Sid and pictures in the Western Daily Press. Following that the television came out and they had a television thing on it. With all the publicity they were getting, the Social Security people went out to see them and offered to help them, provided they agreed to be rehabilitated.

Sid went to live in a hostel. He used to go to the woods in the day and drum up and I did meet him going back when I was going home. I said to Sid, "What's it like at the Church Army?"

"Its alright" he said, "It's clean but they want to build a wall round me". Well I said, "You're the bricklayer", but I don't think it penetrated. He built that wall round himself, he didn't have to go in there.

He used to be seen downtown wrapped in a blanket. I've heard three accounts of what's happened to him. You can't come to any definite conclusion. Some say he went back to London, which could be right. Others say he's in a home at Glenside and some say he died. What are you to believe? He'd be about 74 or 75, he's about three years more than me. When they got him to come and live in the city, he seemed to break up. I think if you live a hard but tough life, for years, especially when you go into elderly or old age, its a mistake to come out of it. You don't live long.

Could you imagine me going to the Social Security and acquiescing to subjugation. You couldn't imagine me doing that, it would be all typed and filed away and you'd get a number. That wouldn't go down well, not for me.

The Social Security once suggested to me that I go to Winterbourne Rehabilitation Centre. I said, "Gentlemen, I have neither the desire nor inclination

to form an alliance with such an establishment, with its misfits who have taken a retrograde step into the morass of moral degradation. It would be tantamount to a social indiscretion". A statement like that would leave them somewhat impervious.

This is one of my rhymes called Tramp versus Welfare.

"Come into my official parlour",
said the spider to the fly
"And I will take your independence
and leave you high and dry".
"Not I", said the wise old fly,
"I know your kind",
I dropped the shackles of society
and left them far behind.
You are as cunning as a fox,
you move with deadly stealth,
then you want to brainwash me
and keep my records on your shelf.
You are a contradiction,
we have nothing in relation
and I think the day of long ago,
when I sought emancipation".

I certainly don't want to have any contact with officialdom. They take your independence away from you. They want to destroy the finer qualities. No man's going to take away what I've got. Not many men emerge from that life like me. I benefitted from it. A lot of them end up in a lodging house drinking. Once you start drinking that's it. I'm very strong willed, I don't give up easy and I keep young in mind.

I would still be in the woods but my hut was set fire to by hooligans. Here's a poem about living there — its another one about Sid.

Dawn broke o're the forest scene
a tall dark figure emerged
neath the woodland green,
"Now then Jock, show a leg you mutt
and get the sticks kindled
for a good drum up".
For I'm as happy as can be
when I'm Ashton bound on a dustbin spree
Then off I go around the bend
for choice tobacco
curbstone blend
Then back to the woodland
safe and sound
In sweet repose
to my hole in the ground.

It wasn't long after all the publicity that my hut was burnt down. I was only there for nine days after that. In that time I met the boss of Freightline Transport in Bedminster. I remember the date of that, 29th of September 1970. Tom wanted me to be a nightwatchman, living there rent free. I said, "Alright, I'll think about it". In about a week or so I said, "Alright, I'll come". I live in a caravan there now, its a bit rough, but I keep myself tough.

My privations, hardships and humiliations have given me a full understanding of life. To help one another, man's bond of friendship from man to man, a returned love of a man for his wife, patience, tolerance, forbearance and understanding, above all compassion, these things are the fulfillment of life. If you have these, hold firm. All I ask is kindness, to take with me along the highway of life and to extend it to all I may meet. To share the little I have, to console and comfort the sad, to expound my knowledge to all those who have ears. With these things in mind I feel a deep sense of invigoration, a pure evocation of the mind, an elevation to higher thoughts. If these words can be of consolation to any one, I shall be well rewarded.

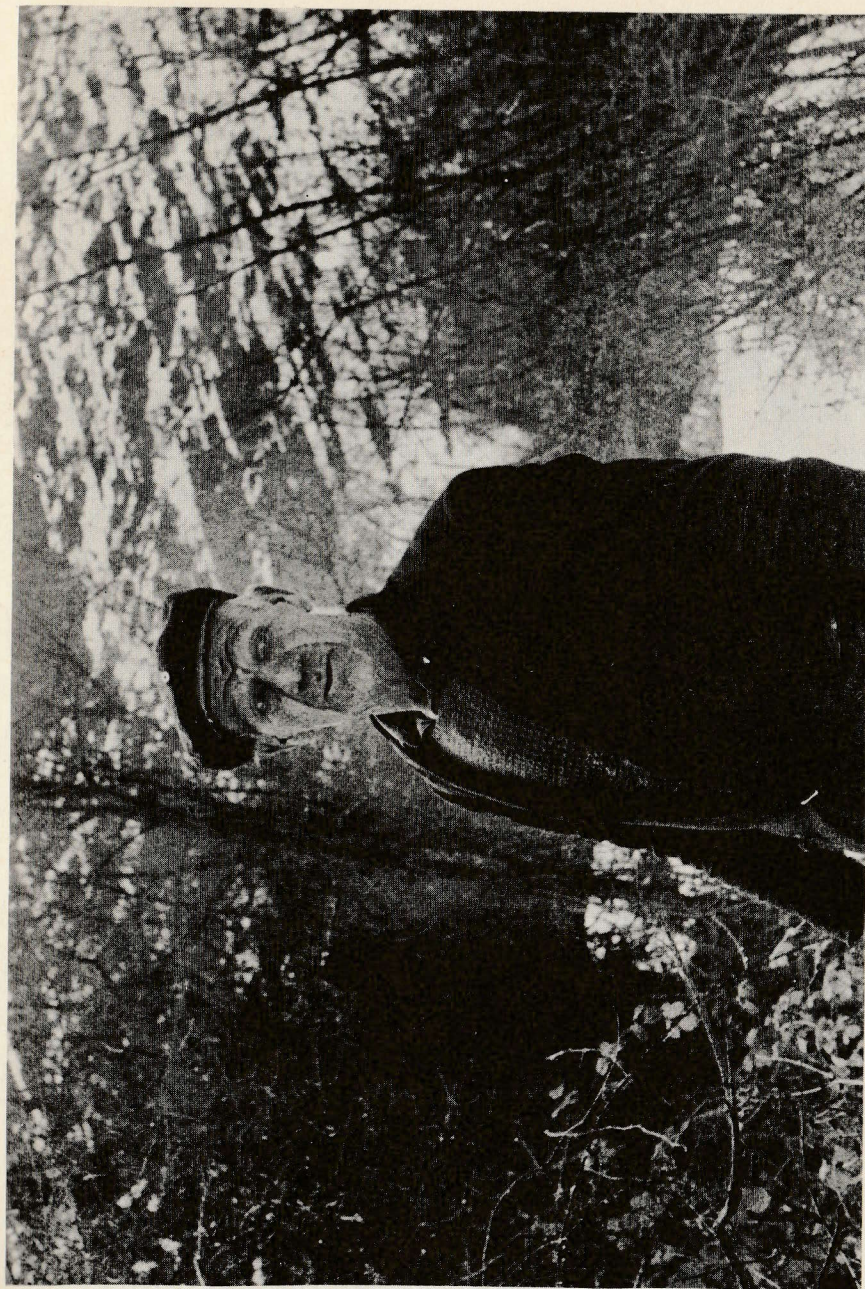
You've not met a character like me. I'm one on my own. I still want to acquire knowledge; he that acquires knowledge is on the road to wisdom and wisdom is the application of knowledge. I like words. You can't learn too much but not to keep to yourself, to pass it on to other people. To keep it to yourself is like throwing a seed down which won't bear fruit.

I don't talk to just anybody, I want someone whose got ears to hear. I was talking to a fellow while I was window cleaning, about words and the way I express things, and one of my customers came out. She came to talk, then she stopped and looked up with fixed eyes. I looked at her and could see her half understanding and half not. After I'd finished she said, "I've got more than a bloody window cleaner". I said, "Lady, you've got a poet and a philosopher". I said, "I've cleaned your windows for many years but you didn't know me".

I'm a loner but I've always talked with people. They always thought that I was what you call an introvert, but an educated chap once said, "I don't think you are". He said, "You're more extrovert than introvert".

I don't mind the solitary sort of life. I told the boss of Freightline Transport, "I don't like going with ladies, with women". Course you know what drivers are, he used to torment me. He used to come in with a book with semi nude ladies on - nice figures. He said, "What do you think of her", in a rough way. So I looked at her and said, "She's not bad looking, but she's heavily made up, she's got a nice figure though, symmetry of figure, curvaceous lines. "What you talking about", he said. I thought I'd let it go at that. But after, he kept doing it. One day I said, "Here a minute. Its quite apparent that you have an insatiable appetite for the essential pleasures, leaving a marked discrepancy in your moral perception". Oh, that did it. He never bothered me no more.

In the evenings when I go back to my caravan I listen to the radio for a while. I don't like pop music, mine's classical. I listen to concerts, Beethoven, Brahms,



"I don't mind the solitary sort of life"



“Lady, you’ve got a poet and a philosopher.”

Bach, Tchaikovsky. Then I go into deep thinking. I sit and picture the world, how it should be. I can picture it like that and it gives me a wonderful feeling. I think of the world as a place where everybody’s living for each other.

I still skipper to keep myself hard. I fill my peter and go up the Malvern Hills, or I go down on Exmoor, or over Wales, over the Brecon Beacons, or the Cotswolds. At times I just want to get away from the maddening crowd, to commune with nature.

As for me now, what holds for the future is purely a matter for conjecture.

"You've not met a character like me," says Toby in this booklet about his life. He was born in 1907 in Gloucestershire and came with his family to live in Bristol when he was very young. His mother died when he was eleven, and he was sent to an orphanage with his other brothers and sisters, but after three months his paralysed father brought him home. Toby looked after him till he was twenty four when his father decided to go into a nursing home. Toby was left no choice but to go on the road and become a tramp. He travelled round the country, sleeping rough or sleeping in spikes. During one of his trips he met an old friend and together they stowed away on a ship to Canada. After coming back to England, Toby tramped again for a while then decided to start window cleaning in Bristol. He chose to live in Leigh Woods on the edge of the city and he stayed there for 24 years. When the hut that he built was burnt down he came into town to live in a caravan.

Once, Toby was cleaning a customer's windows and at the same time having a discussion with a passer by about words and the way he expresses things. The customer was listening and said, "I've got more than a bloody window cleaner." Toby said, "Lady, you've got a poet and a philosopher."

This booklet is published by Bristol Broadsides, a locally based publishing co-operative. We are a non-profit making group, run by members of the organisation. Our aim is to give local people the chance of putting their words and writing into print. So far we have produced six booklets, (see inside for details).

Don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you would like more information. Our address is 110 Cheltenham Road, Bristol 6. Tel. 40491