

## **William YATES**

Written by grandson Percy SHIPPERBOTTOM

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### **PREFACE**

This is the story of an ordinary man.

A man, who was born to a working class family during World War I, lived through the 1930s depression, served in World War II in the Air Sea Rescue Service in the English Channel and the Burma Campaign, and raised a happy, reasonably successful family.

It is because of this happy childhood that I dedicate this story.

This story could have been told of millions of similar men and women, some more successful and survived greater hardship and danger, but this is the story of OUR DAD.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Dad was greatly influenced by his Granddad who raised, guided and mentored him. The story actually starts with Dad's great granddad and the reason for this is to provide some background to the attitudes and outlook on life for working class mining families in the North West from the mid-1800s to the start of World War II.

I hope you find this story as interesting and enjoyable as much as I have had in preparing Dad's notes. In doing this I have discovered an insight into my forefathers which I feel privileged to see and the details of which I am sure would have been lost in time had Dad not decided to put his memories down in print. I have written the story as though my Dad was narrating it and although I have prepared, edited and processed the text, they are my Dad's words.

After his retirement he spent many hours sat at an old typewriter patiently recalling his memories. I choose the word 'memories' carefully because these are not memoirs but simply an account of the first half of his life.

Dad continued to write as much as he could until arthritis in his hands (the result of over 25 years of gripping the steering wheel of an HGV before power steering was the norm) and the slow onset of dementia reduced his enthusiasm. Dad passed away quietly in a nursing home aged 89. He did not remember the last few years after Mum died of a stroke some 4 years prior to his death.

Unfortunately neither of them lived to see this finished product. A pity really, he would have enjoyed seeing it finished, as Mum would.

Our Dad – An Ordinary Man.

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## CHAPTER ONE – THE FOREFATHERS

In the early eighteenth century industry in Lancashire was booming. The damp climate and soft water favoured the cotton industry and cotton spinning and weaving was the main industry around Bolton. This in turn produced a thriving bleaching and dyeing industry to process the cloth which was produced at the vast number of 'dark satanic mills'. The Bleach works were usually situated away from town and industrial centres, in the valleys where a large supply of clean water was available, a few small ones still survive today. This variety of industry was powered by the close proximity of a large number of lucrative coal seams creating an equally large mining community.

All this industry was very labour intensive and each Cotton Mill, Bleach Works and Coal Pit employed hundreds of manual workers most on a barely sustainable wage. Most of the mills were powered by steam and this needed a good supply of coal. The landowners became coal mine owners and soon became rich and greedy and started to demand more output from the miners for less money. This soon led to industrial unrest and caused wide-spread strikes and the Lancashire coalfields ground practically to a halt. To break the strikes the coal-mine owners collaborated in a recruitment drive in Cornwall and recruited tin miners who were being paid even less than the Lancashire Coal Miners. This obviously angered the Lancashire coal miners and they took action. Many fights broke out and to make the Cornish strike breakers more easily recognizable the Lancashire miners painted the legs of the Cornish miners Black, thus originating the term 'Blackleg'.

A young Cornish miner by the name of Yates (Christian name not known), was one of these Blacklegs, he became my Granddad's father thus giving my family the somewhat dubious distinction of being a direct descendant of one of the original Blacklegs.

He settled down in the Starnell area (between Bolton and Bury near Cocky Moor Road, Ainsworth) and after a while he met a girl, a hand weaver, who lived in one of a row of three cottages. At the end of the row was an additional building which my Granddad always called "T'Loom House". The blackleg (Mr Yates) married the Hand weaver and raised a family of nine children and adopted another, most of them emigrated to Canada, Australia and New Zealand except my Granddad (William Yates) and his brother (Thompson Yates). Thompson made himself a reasonable amount of money in cotton and steel and financially helped his siblings emigrate to the then colonies.

Granddad's education was very brief, so much so that it finished at the age of nine almost before it started. The school he attended was in Cocky Moor [Ainsworth] and was quite a walk from the cottages. The headmaster provided a lunch for those that had a long way to go home (for a price) and so Granddad stayed at school for lunch, (or dinner as it was referred to at the time). This lunch always consisted of a bowl of porridge or broth and recipients charged one penny for the privilege, totalling five pence a week. This was no small sum at that time and with other siblings to pay for this proved quite an item. Granddad, even at this tender age, had already developed a shrewdness and he was not impressed with this value for money.

*"That weren't bloody porridge, it weren't even bloody gruel. Ah seen 'im makin' it an' it worn't wurth a penny. A hondful o' thirds, an' more salt t'take taste away. Ah left skoo rieght away an' ah' ne'er went back"* he proudly told me. And he didn't. That same day he went to the local colliery (the Pretoria Pit), and got a job 'gal drivin'.

This involved caring for, and driving the pit ponies underground. In spite of the hardship the Pit Ponies were generally well looked after and although they were stabled and spent their working time underground they were given regular 'holidays' in the fields on ground.

That was the start of his mining career, from looking after the ponies he soon progressed to a fully fledged coal hewer, and apparently he was a good collier. Before the time of the Boer War he could earn 35 shillings a day, which in those days was very good money.

This career in the Coal mine was to last quite a long time and even though he could not read or write he gained a terrific technical knowledge of mining.

For many years miners have always been noted for their strong belief in upholding the tradition of 'Minus Monday'. They used to enjoy Saturday and Sunday to the full and recuperate on Monday, so on Mondays there were quite a lot of absenteeism. Granddad became a very strong foot follower of the local Hunt and during the hunting season he never worked Saturdays or Wednesdays, being the days the Hunt met, he would spend much of his remaining spare time poaching, and he became quite an accomplished poacher.

Ultimately it was his passion for the hunt which potentially saved his life. It was one Wednesday in the Hunt season of 1912 that a terrific explosion in that part of the Pretoria mine where my grandfather worked killed more than a hundred miners, most of the miners who were working in the area of the explosion. Fortunately Granddad was with the Hunt that day.

I heard years later that not all the bodies could be recovered and the that part of the mine was sealed off with the bodies inside but Granddad would not confirm nor deny, when pressed his retort was, "*That was before thea wor' born, so what the 'ell does it matter now*".

Why he was such a strong foot follower of the Hunt I could never understand but it seems to have got him well known. It appeared that when he was following the Hunt over various parts of the countryside he was in fact keeping an eye open for the most profitable places to go poaching. I discovered this when I started to look for work when my school days was over and discovered how well and widely known his reputation was in the poaching and hunting circles.

I never knew how all these people got to know Granddad, but they all seemed to have a great respect for him. But one thing I could never find out was why everyone called him 'Cherry'. The nearest I ever got to finding out this mystery was one day when Granddad was telling me about some escapade when he was younger, and someone called him a 'bloody cherry nosed bugger'. The only time I could get him to talk about his early days was when he had had a few pints of Granny's elderberry wine.

When he had partaken, not wisely but well, of my Grandmother's home made wine he would tell me of his days when he was younger, even Grandma would take a trip down memory lane with him. On one such evening he swore in all sincerity that one night when he was returning home from the Three Arrows Pub (on Bury/Bolton Road between Bolton and Bury) he swears he saw a 'Bogart' climb on the fence that surrounded a clough, appropriately known locally as '*Bogart Hole Clough*', and he finished this story with, "*An' I wurn't bloody drunk either!*".

Granddad was devoted to his wife who worked very hard to contribute to the household. She was a typical country woman who still had the nineteenth century way of living and outlook on life. I used to go with our Wilf (my Uncle) fishing a stretch of water near Leigh called Pennington Flash. The water was the result of mining subsidence and our Wilf told me that where that water was used to be a very good farm. That farm was where Gran was brought up. A farmer's daughter, I suppose that is why she was so knowledgeable about livestock. Many years later I passed that area but there was no Flash there then just a large housing estate. (DS. Pennington Flash is now designated as an area of beauty just off the East Lincs Road).

She had three sisters, two I met every year. They came to stay with us at Xmas and New Year. The third one I only very vaguely remember, it was midsummer and I can just remember this lady, all dressed up, and getting Grandma and my mother very angry about something, being a child I didn't know what it was all about, but I do remember Grandma swearing at her because of something she (Mum's Aunt) had said to my mother. I remember Grandma telling her sister to go with the words, "*get back to bloody Australia, where you belong, and don't ever come here again*".

Gran must have been mad at her because the strongest language I ever heard her say was 'blast, or blasted'. I suspect it was something to do with my mother and father's separation, in those days husband and wife were only usually separated by death.

Whenever I visited Granddad's mother's house (my Great Grandmother) I was always intrigued by the trophies hung on nails knocked into the beams in the living room of her cottage. These trophies took the form of copper kettles and I always wondered why there were so many. On one of my Granddad's 'wine evenings' I took the opportunity to ask why there were so many copper kettles hanging from the beams in his mother's house. I had to pick my moment otherwise I would get the sharp response, "*mind thi' own bloody business*", which was his standard response to anybody who asked him a question he did not want to answer.

However I had picked my moment correctly and to my great delight and surprise he told me that every kettle was a 'trophy' of a fight, and went on to explain.

His father (Mr Yates from Cornwall) fought in organized fights using fists and feet, known as 'Puncin Matches'. These fights did not follow Queensbury rules and the combatants wore a special clog, very light with no irons on the bottom as ordinary clogs had, and the upper leather work was usually a work of art, the owner taking great pride in his appearance. The 'purse' to the winner was £5 pushed into the spout of a copper kettle but heavy betting on the side would occur with sums reaching £50, which was obviously illegal. At the time, mid-late 1800s this was quite a sum for a working man, even the £5 was a fair return for a few minutes work in spite of the risks.

When I asked him if he took part in any such fights he gave me a look which made me wish I hadn't asked such a silly question. He then replied, "*Aye, Ah did, not so much as mi dad but enough to learn to fight and to learn it wor' a mugs game. If mi dad 'ad learnt it wor' a mugs game as well, he might have lived longer, he weren't so old when he died*".

I never discovered how old his dad was when he died but Granddad, his brother Thompson, and my Great Grandmother all agreed that his dad's early death was due to taking part in these fights.

When he died, great grandma collected all the £5's and set herself up in a chip shop. Once she had set up the chip shop she would work very hard for about three months and then would close the shop for a week and go to Bury. For a week she would then try to drink all the pubs in Bury dry. An exercise which generally finished up with the arm of the law taking her in charge and making sure she got home. She would then be strictly off drink until the next time.

Apparently when she fell ill with an illness which eventually claimed her life, she complained to the doctor who had been attending her for some time, "*don't bring me no more of thy buggerin' medicine, I know what's wrong wi' me*", "*why what do you think is wrong with you?*" the doctor replied, "*I've getten cancer, and next time thee comes, fotch mi a hafe 'ance o baccy an a bottle o' Guinness*", which he did!

Whilst working at the Pit Granddad took a shine to a talented young mining engineer by the name of Percy Shipperbottom and mentored him, completing his mining skills. Granddad brought this young man home and introduced him to his eldest daughter and so romance blossomed between my parents.

Percy was also from a working class mining family, apparently my father worked with Granddad in the pit and he helped my father pass his under-manager's papers. He was a successful and talented mining engineer and when I was a baby he secured a good job at a pit in Yorkshire. Once settled he apparently invited my mother along with myself to join him in Yorkshire, but my mother being a very stubborn woman refused to leave her family and hence they parted and we (my mother and I) lived with my mother's family.

The only mention my mother made of the Shipperbottom family is that Granddad Shipperbottom was a 'real gentleman'.

And so I was brought up by my Granddad.

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Family Tree - Yates Scholes chart 008-009 – on website [www.lynly.gen.nz](http://www.lynly.gen.nz)

\* \* \* Thomas YATES (1835-1856) England m Ann SCHOLES 1837-1913) England  
\* \* \* **William YATES** (1868-1940) England m Catherine Ann NUTTALL (1870-) England  
\* \* Henrietta YATES (1892-) England m Percy SHIPPERBOTTOM (1894-) England  
\* **Percy SHIPPERBOTTOM** (1915-2004) England

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