

My Parents

On the 11th June 1950, the world was blessed when I was born to parents Anne Rose Wheeler and Gilbert John Wheeler. My mother's maiden name was Spencer and she was always called Rose by everyone we knew. Prior to marrying my father she lived with her parents in Shoulton Lane, Hallow, and came from a family of four girls, her sister's names were Lillian, Kathleen and Violet, they are all



Back row from left to right - My father Gilbert and my Uncle Bernie.

Front row from left to right - My Uncle Tubby and my Uncle Michael.

dead now and I was never close to this side of the family. My father was called Sam by everyone we knew, and prior to marrying my mother he lived with his parents at 2 Rectory Lane, Shrawley, this is the house we currently live in. Because my grandmother was married twice my father came from a family of four brothers, two step sisters and one step brother.

My grandmothers Christian names were Florence

Ellen and before she married her surname was Spragg, she was

born in 1888 and was initially married to a man whose surname was Shepherd; by him she had a son called Donald and two daughters called Margaret and Violet. I have no idea why this marriage ended, but she then married a man called Victor Wheeler who was my grandfather, by him she had



My father when he was serving in the army during WW2

four sons, these were my father Gilbert who was always called Sam, Wilfred who was always called Tubby and Bernard who was always called Bernie, the fourth son was called Michael but he died at an early age. All of these are now dead with my grandmother and grandfather being buried in the same grave at Shrawley church, Michael is also buried at Shrawley church but Tubby is buried at the church in the village of Hallow. Both Bernie and my father were cremated and their ashes were

scattered in Shrawley Wood.



From left to right - My Uncle Bernie, my Grandmother, and my Uncle Tubby. I can only assume my father was taking the picture.



My Uncle Bernie when he was serving in the army during WW2

We were never close to the Shepherd side of the family, but Donald or Don as everyone called him, married and lived at Astley Burf. The two sisters, Margaret and Violet, both moved away to the Kent area.

Before I was born both my father and my Uncle Bernie served in the army during World War 2, my Uncle Bernie was in the Royal Engineers and my father was a lorry driver. As a lorry driver he drove a



My father with some of the other men he was serving with during WW2, he is second from the right. They are standing by one of the Lorries they used to drive during the war.

variety of vehicles including the large battle tank transporters, and I can also remember him telling us that he would occasionally drive a lorry making coal deliveries to the various army buildings. He said that delivering the coal could be very profitable because it was easy to short deliver when you got there, and then sell what you had left on the black market. Like most soldiers my father came



A photograph of my mother taken in July 1948, two years before I was born.

out of the army at the end of the war but for some reason he never asked to keep his driving licence, as a result he couldn't drive when he got back home, I could never understand why he had done this but never

thought to ask him. I can also remember as a child asking him how many Germans he had shot, but he replied that the only time he had ever shot his sten gun was at some flying seagulls. I am not sure when my father met my mother, but I would assume it was after the war had finished.

My Very Early Years (1950-1956)

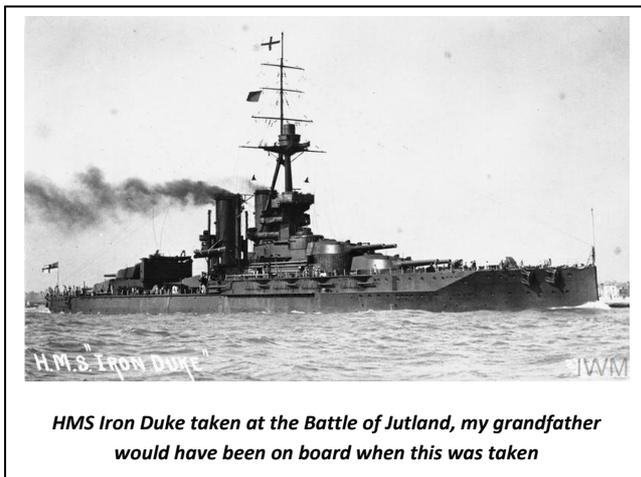
My earliest recollection was when we were living in a house at Shrawley called 'Shotgrove', we lived there until I was about three, and my brother Leslie, always called Les, was also born there. This house is located in the village just past Blacksmiths corner on the right hand side when travelling toward Worcester, it is still called 'Shotgrove' to this day, but instead of being a labourer's cottage as it was when I was young, it has now been converted to a private residence. There are incidents that I can remember from my time there, one of these being playing with my brother Les by the house well. In those days houses in the country relied on a well to get their water from, and whenever water was required it had to be carried in a bucket from the well into the house. Les was born two years after me and so I would have been between the age of two and three at the time when I have my first early memories. Not long after when I was about three years old, my parents split up, and while they would eventually get back together, for nearly three years I went to live with my father,

grandmother and Uncle Bernie at 2 Rectory Lane, Shrawley. When I reached school age I went to Shrawley School, but this changed when my parents got back together, and we went to live in one of the new council houses that had been built in the next village of Astley.

Because he died in 1951, not long after I was born, I have no recollection of my grandfather Victor Wheeler, but I do know that he was a bricklayer and I can remember his bricklaying tools being stored in a large wooden trunk in the outside lavatory. They were there until after my grandmother died in 1975.

I was able to find out a little more in later life about my grandfather, he was born on the 4th May 1894 in Droitwich to a John Wheeler, who was an agricultural labourer, and Rosa Ladbury who was the daughter of a builder. On the 6th April 1910 aged just fifteen he joined the Royal Navy where he served throughout the First World War.

While in the Royal Navy, he served on many ships including the Dreadnought Class Battleship the



'Iron Duke,' when it took part in the Battle of Jutland. The 'Iron Duke' was the lead ship in her class and was the flagship of the Grand Fleet in the First World War. During the Battle of Jutland which took place on the 31st May to the 1st June 1916, while my grandfather was serving on her, the 'Iron Duke' was the flagship of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, and it was reported that she inflicted significant damage to the German Battleship SMS Konig early in the main fleet action, at this time my grandfather would have been twenty two years old.

Following the end of the First World War my grandfather remained in the Royal Navy and took part in the Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War, this was a multi-national military expedition launched during the Russian Civil War in 1918. My grandfather left the Royal Navy on the 13th May 1920, at the age of twenty six having served on the following ships.

Ship Served On	Date Served From and To	
HMS Impregnable	6 th Apr 1910	21 st Jan 1911
HMS Donegal	22 nd Jan 1911	3 rd Feb 1911
HMS Leviathan	4 th Feb 1911	11 th Feb 1911
HMS Jupiter	12 th Feb 1911	6 th Mar 1911
HMS Berwick	7 th Mar 1911	15 th May 1911
HMS Mercury	16 th May 1911	29 th May 1911
HMS Duke of Edinburgh	30 th May 1911	18 th Aug 1913

HMS Excellent	19 th Aug 1913	9 th Mar 1914
HMS Iron Duke	10 th Mar 1914	31 st May 1919
HMS Ceasar	1 st Jun 1919	30 th Sep 1919
HMS Julius	1 st Oct 1919	21 st Nov 1919
HMS Iron Duke	22 nd Nov 1919	17 th Feb 1920
HMS Victory (I)	18 th Feb 1920	13 th May 1920

The above explains why my grandmother always had a large framed photograph of a sailor with the name 'Iron Duke' on his hatband hung on the wall of her living room, when you are young you don't think to ask, but now I realise it was a picture of my grandfather who must have lived through some pretty traumatic times during the war.



Me in my first grown up suit, aged about 4 years

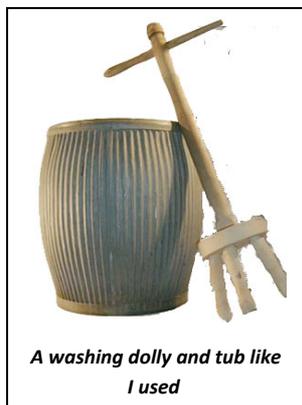
As for me, the highlight of the year for me though was the village fete; this was always held in the field by 'Wood House', and my grandmother, uncle Bernie and father would all give me pocket money to spend on the many sideshows which included, the coconut shy, tombola, guess the weight of the pig and my favourite the hoopla, at these times my uncle Bernie could always be found in the beer tent. It was at the time of the village fete that I was given what I thought of as being my first grown up suit, this consisted of a matching pair of short trousers and jacket; I can remember feeling really proud wearing it to the fete. In those days all of the young lads wore short trousers, and I would be eleven years old and about to go to secondary school before I had my first pair of long trousers.

There were a limited number of other children to play with at this time, the main two being Steven and Richard Walker who lived at number 5 Rectory Lane. Steven was a year younger than me and Richard was a year older, and our friendship continued into our late teens. There were six houses in our part of Rectory Lane, at number one was Billy Barker who was blind, but despite this he went by himself on the bus shopping every week to Stourport. During the summer I would go walking with him around the village to pick dandelion flowers, from these he would make dandelion wine and give me a small bottle for helping him, all of this despite him being blind. In the evenings before I went to bed, my grandmother would give me a very small amount of the wine as a treat and she would have a glass of Mackeson. In those days many things were delivered to the door, every couple of weeks she would have crates of Mackeson and Corona pop delivered, and every other day we had a delivery of bread and milk.

They were pretty austere times but no one seemed to complain, although the war ended in 1945, rationing did not completely end until 1954. At the age of four I can clearly remember my grandmother having the ration books in her hand when having a conversation with my father and Uncle Bernie, and her saying they would no longer need them.

During those days we only had an outside toilet which was basically a bucket with a toilet seat on, this had to be emptied on a regular basis and was the job of my father or uncle, the toilet smelt and the outside shed was very cold in the winter, I hated using it. If you wanted to go to the toilet at night you had to use a chamber pot, or as it was more frequently called a 'Guzunda', this was kept under the bed hence its nickname. For fresh water all six houses had to use a pump that was in the garden of number four, we would go up with empty buckets and fill them from the pump, the pump is still at number four to this day although now of course it is no longer used. Having a bath was another trial, this tended to be once a week at the most and consisted of a galvanised tin bath in front of the fire. Water for the bath would either be heated on the cooker or the fire, in those days the house still had a black lead range for the living room fire, this had hooks to hang pots on and an oven.

Monday was always washing day for my grandmother, in the kitchen there



A washing dolly and tub like I used

was a large brick built boiler with a fire grate underneath. We would walk up and down to the pump with buckets of water and when the boiler was full she would light the fire under it to heat the water. In those days there were no washing machines, once the clothes came out of the boiler they were put in a tub and were bashed up and down with a dolly to get them clean, that was my job, although I was barely tall enough to reach the top of the dolly. Following this the clothes were put through a

mangle to squeeze most of the water out and then hung on the line to dry.



A mangle similar to the one we used to squeeze the water out of the clothes.

I can remember seeing sides of cured bacon hung on hooks from the ceiling beams in the living room, my grandmother would cut a slice off to cook and then rub in salt where she had cut it to ensure it remained preserved. We were fortunate in that I can always remember us having electricity and my grandmother had a television even when I was young, it was rented as most of them were in those days, had a very small screen, poor picture quality and was only in black and white, I can only assume that with two sons living at home bringing in money she could afford the rental, whereas many other families could not.

At this time my grandmothers garden was a little larger than it is today and she kept chickens for the eggs, in addition there were several fruit trees in the garden, these included, damson, pear and yellow plum and we also had black current bushes. For most of his life my uncle Bernie would use the plums for making wine.

At house number three lived Mrs Greaves, and at number four was Fred and Sally Harris, at number five were the Walkers and at number six the Powicks.

The following is a photograph take in the front garden of 2 Rectory Lane, Shrawley.



Photograph taken outside 2 Rectory Lane, sat at the rear in the grey suit is my father Gilbert (Sam) Wheeler, and sat second from the right is my Uncle Bernie Wheeler