

MY LIFE AND TIMES – by Norman Green

Norman Green was born in Farnhill in 1906. He wrote this memoir in 1970.

I was born and spent the first eighteen years of my life at No. 33 Main Street, Farnhill.

I have no recollections of anything up to about 2 years of age which is not surprising but I would like to describe the house and adjoining property in which my earlier life was spent as this had a real bearing on the kind of person I and my brothers particularly became.

The property had in the mid 19th century been a weaving mill and I understand some wool sorting and spinning also took place there. It was built of stone, cement-rendered on the front which faced the main street and to the north. The south side faced the Leeds and Liverpool canal which was only about 4 feet from the foot of the wall. The slope of the ground was from north to south, consequently the property was two storeys on the north side and four storeys on the south side.

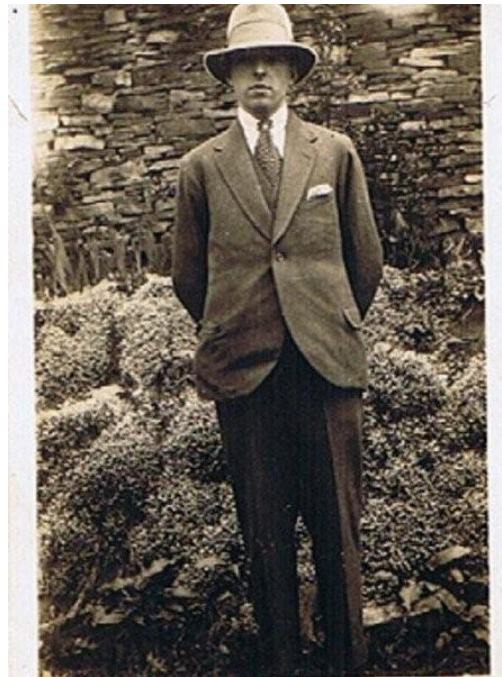


Fig 1. Norman in 1926

The living rooms were level with the street and therefore about twenty feet above the canal on the south side and a view of the Aire valley some 1 1/2 miles wide and stretching from Steeton in the East to Cononley in the West (about 4 miles) could be seen.



Fig 2. Farnhill Main Street at around the time of Norman's birth.
Number 33 is visible on the right.

Looking across the Valley was Crosshills and further away still the moors rose up to 600-700 feet above sea level and on top of this moor there were two structures, one was a round tower with castellated top and a winding staircase inside so that one could get a wide view of the Aire valley between Skipton and Keighley and over into the Worth valley (Brontë country) and over the 'Moss' into East Lancashire. This tower had been built by a Mr. Lund who lived down in the valley at Malsis Hall (a fine large house with extensive lawns, shrubberies and a long drive) and was in memory of his daughter Ethel who had died when a young girl. Hence the tower was called Ethel tower or more generally as the Lund tower. A quarter of a mile westwards was Cowling pinnacle, a column of tapering stone something like Cleopatra's needle in London and this was erected by the local people to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Returning to the description of my home, on the ground floor at canal level was a large space with glazed doors facing out on to the canal bank. This had an earth floor and the floor above was supported by cast iron columns about 6 inches diameter. There were about 6 of these columns. The space had been used to store coal for the steam engines driving the factory machines and was brought here from the coal mines by canal barge which was moved alongside and the coal was trundled by hand barrow over wooden planks from the boat into the building. A newer factory some 100 yards further down the canal had been built in the late 19th century and it was at this factory that we used to watch this operation of transferring coal from barge to mill when I was young and at school. My Uncle Bob (Robert Parker) was the engine tester at this Mill so I used to spend a bit of time in the Boiler House here as I was growing up.

From the large space described, there were two offshoots - one was a space about 20 feet long and some 10-12 feet wide. This space had an arched roof which was about 15 feet high and in fact formed the floor of the butcher's shop at street level. This space had held the horizontal boiler for the mill and at the far end there was a flue disappearing into the distance and upwards. As boys we made attempts to get up this flue but it was choked with fallen brick-work. We were told that originally it went up under the Main Street to a factory chimney built on the opposite side of the street and at a higher level.



Fig 3. Aked's mill chimney, taken down in May 1906. The warehouse building in front of the chimney became the Kildwick and Farnhill Institute in 1911.

Norman's home at 33 MainStreet may be visible on the right (or it may be number 35).

The flue and the sides of this arched space bore obvious signs of being subjected to a great heat and the brickwork was crumbly. We were warned not to play in this tunnel (as we called it) owing to the danger of falls. The other offshoot was approached through a doorway (no door) and was very dark being underground with no direct light. This we understood had been the engine house and originally there had been external access from a pit built alongside the street. This pit was about 10 feet square and was probably constructed in order to get the engine down to its site but we were told that if coal came by horse and cart it was unloaded down this pit to boiler house floor level. I cannot think that carting coal by horse and cart could have been very practical or economical as the coal mines were at least 20 miles away and canal barge hauling was cheap. Each barge carried about 40 tons of coal and would come from the colliery in one day.

This pit had an iron fence around it at the top, one side of which was an iron gate which was always padlocked and I never saw the gate opened. Down one side of this pit to about the halfway point was a flight of stone steps. This led to a room which was built over the old engine house. This room had a good (new) wooden floor and a window facing out into the yard, yet at a sufficiently high level to get a good light angle from the sky. The door at the foot of the steps was also glazed. This room, for reasons I never knew, was always called 93, and it was in this room that all our youthful hobbies were carried out. This was generally tinkering with bicycles of which there were always two or three around in our family and other boys would bring theirs along for repairs, - mostly punctures and broken spokes. There was a bench there with vice and a garage tool box with a good assortment of carpenters tools which had belonged to my Grandad Clough. He had given up the carpenters business when he left Morecambe about 1915 when I was nine years old.

Now to street level. No 33 was a butcher's shop on the street side and to get to the living room one had to pass through the shop on the public side of the counter through a hanging curtain and then through a glazed door into the living room. This was a pleasant room with a window facing south over the valley as previously described. Both shop and living room had stone flagged floors which was understandable in the shop as this was built on the arch over the boiler house, but the living room was built over a cellar which came between the coal space and the living room and one wonders why stone paving had been used as it must have been a very heavy floor. In one corner of the living room was a sink and on the same side of the room was a large Yorkshire range with oven and hot water side boiler. The rest of the side of the room was taken up by upper and lower cupboards.

The staircase to the bedrooms started in the space between the shop and the living room hence the hanging curtain which allowed one to go up and down stairs without being in full view of customers in the shop. The best bedroom was over the shop and in between was a bedroom which had only light from a skylight in the roof coming down to a large window in the ceiling. This room was not normally used as a bedroom but a playroom; but as the family grew it was used until we got possession of No. 31 next door which was also owned by my father.

No 31 was the house nearest the pit and consisted of a living room on the North side, a sitting room with two windows on the south side, and two bedrooms and a bathroom plus a food cellar (also over the coal storage space) under the sitting room. This was let to the village constable (James Backhouse) and his family which consisted of his wife, two daughters, Gertrude and Eliza and one son, Albert. The son was killed in the First World War as were most of his contemporaries at that time. As children we used to run into and out of this house almost as freely as we did our own home and as the girls (Gertrude and Eliza) were some 18-20 years older than I we were rather fussed by them when we younger ones were toddlers. I well remember the girls having a party when I was about 3 years old and I went in when the party was on. I came back in home and was asked by my mother what the party was like and I replied "Girls laughing and singing and jeggy".

When the Constable retired from the Police Force they bought a house at Crosshills and Gertrude still lives there being the only one left of that family. Grandma Green (a widow) came then to live in the living room and the bedroom over and a door was made from the living room at No 33 into the sitting room of No 31 and we had the bedroom over and a bathroom – a very considerable improvement for a family of six growing children with their parents. Grandma Clough (also a widow) lived only two doors away and spent a lot of time in our home looking after us, cooking and washing and practically lived with us for many years.

Across the street from the shop was a washhouse which later also housed a large refrigerator for the business, a coalhouse and up some steps again to a small garden with rockeries and two W.C.'s (one for each house). In the garden both families hung out their washing and we as children played when very tiny. As we got older we played more and more on the canal side or the Arbour (a hillside free space) and on the moors which extended for hundreds of acres and of which we knew every path and rock. We had fun climbing in the old and new quarries where the millstone grit was dug out and sometimes blasted out.

My first experience out of home was to attend Sunday School. This school and chapel (Primitive Methodist) was about 100 yards further up the street. It was held twice each Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. I was two years old when I started going but I think it was in the afternoons only at first. After singing hymns and the Superintendent saying a prayer all the scholars went off into classrooms which were separate rooms on two sides of the main hall. The number of children attending and aged from two years to about 16 years was about 80. We toddlers simply played with sand in trays. The older children read a section from the Bible, a verse or two each, going round the class and the children from 12 upwards would then discuss with the teacher what they had read. I cannot say that any of this, and I went to Sunday School for about 16 years, made any obvious impression upon me but no doubt, subconsciously it was a power for moral good. What I did enjoy was the singing and the fiction books which were read either by the teachers or by one or more scholars after the Bible reading.

I joined the choir in the Chapel when I was about 14 but even before then I was a very regular attender of Chapel after morning Sunday School and in 1918 when I was twelve I was awarded 1st prize for chapel attendance which was a leather pocket wallet – this prize was only given for 100% attendance. I never learned the theory of music although I could understand fairly well and after years of singing anthems and Latin choruses when I was a member of the Farnhill Institute Musical and Dramatic Society I was accepted as a member of the Crosshills Choral Society. This was a very exclusive choir and gave a concert once a year with a full orchestra of 30-40 players and the top soloists in the country – these always cost a lot of money and the tickets were 5/- and 7/6 each . All the men wore dinner jacket suits with black bow ties and all the ladies were in long white dresses. The choir would consist of 50-60 voices. The concerts were held in the Town Hall in Crosshills, some times called the Friendly Societies Hall as I believe it belonged to the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows. Anyway it was the largest hall available in the district. In the Musical and Dramatic Society I nearly always had a principal part – these were staged either in the Institute (which had a very small stage) or in the Sunday School which had a larger stage and often in the summer was given outside on the lawn of Kildwick Hall.

It was at Kildwick Hall too, only in the field at the back of the Hall that the Whit Monday sports were held. This event really began on Whit Sunday when the Children's Anniversary was held in the Chapel. Additional staging was erected on each side of the pulpit in the Chapel and extending the full width of the Chapel. Small chairs from the Sunday School were brought up (the Chapel being built over the School again by reason of the steep sloping site) and girls sat on one side and boys on the other. The great event of this to us children was that we had on new suits or new dresses and the girls had large white ribbon bows in their hair. The boys had very clean white stiff collars and hair plastered down with brilliantine. We felt very smart and somewhat embarrassed and shy sitting up in front of all our parents and elder sisters and brothers as well as grandparents, uncles and aunties. We always had to sing a children's anthem.

Three services were held in morning, afternoon and evening and on each occasion the Chapel became fuller and fuller – always as far as I can remember, additional forms were brought in and put down the aisles for the evening services. Folks would come for miles around – up to 50 miles – to attend these services, particularly if they had attended this Sunday School when they themselves were children and the collections mounted year by year. When I first remember them they were about £40 for the day but when I left Farnhill they had mounted to nearly £100 though of course the 1st World War had brought inflation and reduced the comparative value of money.

The following day – Whit Monday all the scholars and their parents with of course the Sunday School teachers and superintendents met at the Sunday School and an organ was placed in a cart (pulled by a horse) later in a motor wagon and the whole school started off in procession with a large banner in front with a banner bearer (this was my job in later life) carrying the banner pole in a leather socket which in time was borne by a leather strap round the neck.

Two assistant bearers in front held tassels of twisted silk rope from the cross bar of the banner and two behind did likewise. This was necessary as the banner measuring about 5 feet by 3 feet took a lot of holding when the wind was blowing. The banner was in dark red silk with large yellow letters 'FARNHILL PRIMITIVE METHODIST SUNDAY SCHOOL'.



Fig 4. A group of young men preparing for a parade, with the banner described by Norman.

At each group of cottages the procession would halt and form a semi-circle and sing hymns accompanied by the organ and conducted by the choir master. This went on from about 1:30pm to about 4pm by which time the procession had gone round the village and part of the adjoining village which was Kildwick. The funny part of this was – we thought it funny anyway – that the children of Kildwick Church Sunday School also went around in procession on the same afternoon and when we met – and the organisers tried to avoid this if they could – there was much booing and cat calling from the children of one sect to the children of the other.

As children we enjoyed and looked forward to going to Farnhill Hall where after singing in front of the Hall we all received an orange as we went out through the gates. Later another manufacturer who had done rather well used to hand out 3d pieces to all the children when we left his house which was much smaller than Farnhill Hall.

At 4:00pm we would arrive back at the Sunday School where grown ups handed out cups (pint pots) and currant buns, other grown ups would fill up the pots with tea ready sweetened and with milk from large tin jugs. We would sit about either in the school grounds or inside and have our tea. One could always get another bun or another cup of tea by asking.

After tea everyone went up to the field behind the Hall (Kildwick) where the local grocer (James Mosley) had a stall filled with sweets, chocolates, balloons and plenty of 'pop' (aerated water). Races were run for different age groups and sexes including grown ups, scrambles were held, and cricket matches were played. The scrambles consisted of a grown up official of the Sunday School throwing into the air handfuls of wrapped toffee sweets and you had to scramble about in the grass to find them. When dark came we all went home very tired.

When I was in the choir there were two annual events which were looked forward to – one was the choir trip and the other was Carol singing at Christmas. The choir trip would take place in June and consisted of a trip by waggonette drawn by two horses when we would go off into the Dales, have a good lunch at an hotel or restaurant and play games on the village green and come home singing all the way. This was all paid for by the Chapel funds. Later we had motor charabancs as they were called – solid tyre chain-driven and going at about 12 miles per hour. On them we would venture to Morecambe or even Windermere, often having to get out and walk up the hills. Of course with horses we always had to do this.

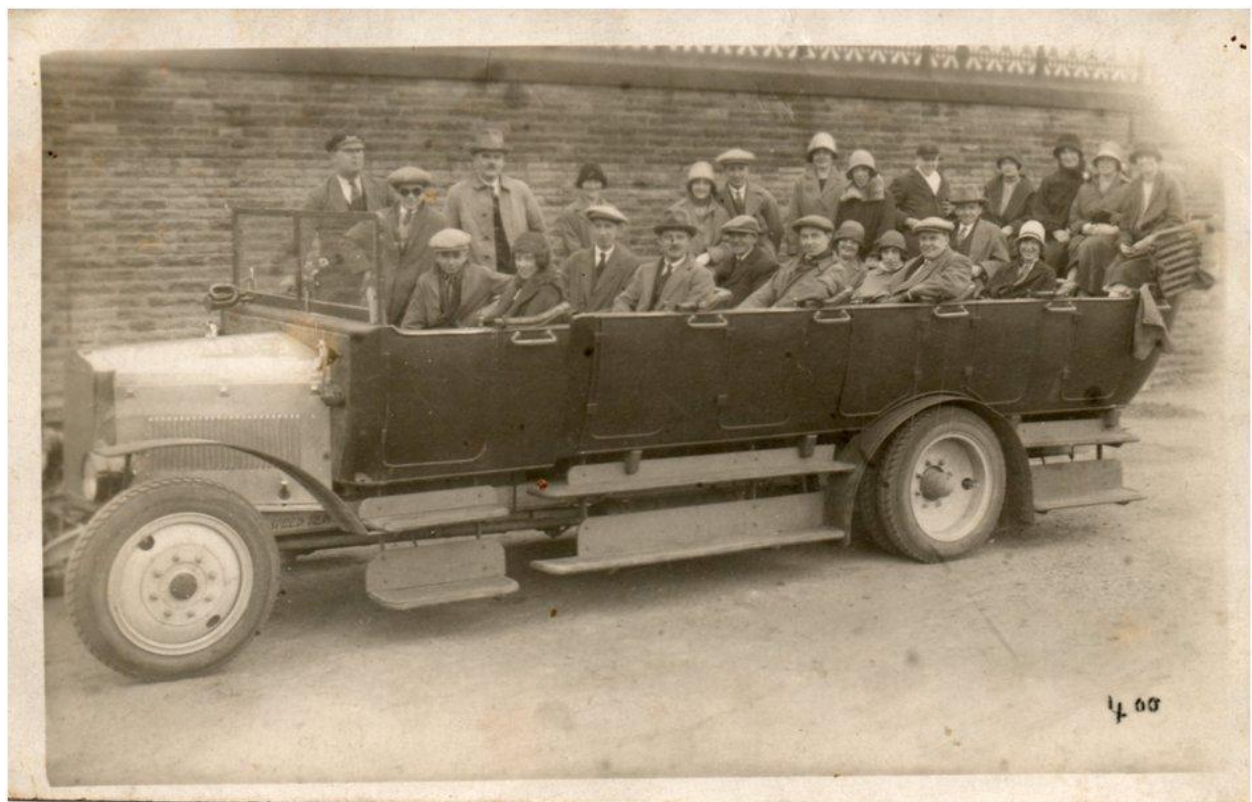


Fig 5. Farnhill Methodists on a charabanc outing.

On Christmas Eve the choir would sing Carols in the street in much the same places as the Sunday School did on Whit Monday and at Farnhill Hall we would be invited into the Great Hall where the Reddiough family and their Christmas guests would be sat round the huge fireplace with logs up to 5 and 6 feet long burning. A grand aroma of cigars and whisky was around and after singing Carols and Christmas hymns we would all be invited into the huge kitchen where the choir of thirty or so hardly began to fill the place and standing around the large kitchen table which from memory I would say measured about 12 feet by 6 feet, scrubbed white, we had hot coffee and warm mince pies. At Kildwick Hall the singing was done outside in the courtyard and there warm Porter was handed round.

I went to week day school when I was three years old, a mile walk each way and of course came home for dinner – 12 noon to 1:30 – there was no school dinner then. I was six before I left the Infants then 7 in Standard 2, 8 in Standard 3, 9 in Standard 4 and so on to Standard 9. When I was 12 and in Standard 7 I went half time so that in one week I would go to school every morning and to work every afternoon and the following week the reverse would apply. At 13 everyone left school and went to work unless you had a scholarship at 10 and went to Grammar School or your parents could afford to pay the fees and send you to the Grammar School without examination. I failed my Scholarship exam – there were only two places allocated for my school and only one attempt was allowed.

I would have liked my parents to have paid for me to go but in 1916-1917 I could not blame them for being a bit careful as the Great War was then in its worst phase and it looked very much as if my father would be forced to go in the Army leaving my mother with six children and a business and the eldest son only 16. Father had to appear before a number of Tribunals but eventually they agreed he should stay home and look after the business. By the time the war was over I was too old for Grammar School but I decided to make up for this by attending evening classes very much encouraged, I believe, by my mother.

My father was in business as a butcher in Farnhill and our slaughterhouse was a building in a field. I was only about four years old when helping to pull a cow on to the floor ring (where it was pole-axed) I was pulled down by a jerk in the rope and cut my forehead which was marked slightly for the rest of my life. About 1912 my father built a new slaughterhouse which at the time was considered a model and many other butchers came to see it. After the 1st World War (about 1924) my father sold the slaughterhouse etc. to a wealthy horse slaughterer and after that we either shared with others or used the Public abattoirs at Skipton or bought meat in the wholesale market. Meanwhile other businesses were bought at Cowling and at Cononley where at the latter was a house, buildings and about 20 acres of land.

We then moved to the farm house at Cononley (Bradley's Farm) and converted part of the buildings to a slaughterhouse. My eldest brother who had been apprentice butcher at Skipton Co-op took over the shop at Cowling and my second eldest brother took over the shop at Farnhill – he had previously been a Clerk on the Railway.

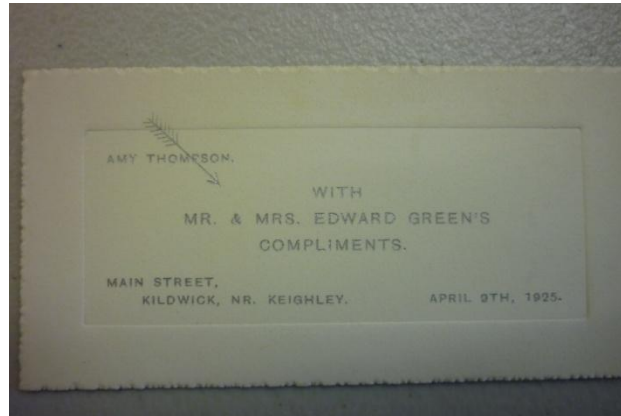


Fig 6. Edward Green, Norman's older brother married Amy Thompson in 1925.
For many years he was the Farnhill butcher.

My third brother was at Cononley and went round the villages with a motor van, also lent to my other brother on certain days, with me mostly driving.

My father became semi-retired and did a bit of farming with help in the shop at Cononley. It was about this time that I was encouraged to take up Meat Inspecting and my courses at Bradford and Leeds were all from Cononley which was handy for the railway station. I got my first job (before qualifying) at Sidmouth, Devon at £2 per week and from there went to Bristol in November 1926 and qualified.

My eldest brother was the only one to join the Army in the war. He went on his 18th birthday or perhaps before that in 1917 and after having trained, went to France early in 1918. Almost immediately the Germans started the last great battle of the war in March 1918 called "The Big Push" and thousands of British troops were overrun and captured. He was put to work in the coal mines in Westphalia and had little to eat. The Armistice came in November the same year. The prisoners broke out of prison in Germany and walked across Holland (a neutral country) and came back to England in a hospital ship from Rotterdam. I remember going to meet him at Kildwick station on his arrival with my carrier cycle and carrying his kit bag home.

KILDWICK AND FARNHILL

HOME AGAIN.—Private Eric Green, Durham Light Infantry, eldest son of Mr. William Green, butcher, Farnhill, arrived home on Tuesday. Private Green was taken prisoner on March 21, 1918, and was imprisoned at Paderbion, Westphalia, where he worked as a miner. He returned to Hull on the steamship Londonderry.

RETURN OF PRIVATE E. GREEN.—Pte. Eric Green, eldest son of Mr. Wm. Green, butcher, Farnhill, has arrived at Hull from Paderbion in Westphalia, Germany, where he has been a prisoner since last March. Pte. Eric Green joined up in February, 1917, and served with the Durham Light Infantry. He was taken prisoner on March 21st this year, and has worked as a miner in Germany. He does not complain of harsh treatment and says he is in good health. Before enlisting he was a butcher in the employ of the Skipton Co-operative Society.

Fig 7. Keighley News, 7th December 1918 (upper) and West Yorkshire Pioneer, 13th December 1918 (lower).

The Armistice was a tremendous relief to everyone after all the losses and near starvation for over 4 years and I was still at school. The signing was expected at 11:00am on November 11th 1918 and just before 11:00 I was dispatched by the Headmaster to a Coal Merchant's office about a quarter mile away to await a telephone message. After receiving a message that the Armistice had been signed I ran back to school with the news but long before I got back all the factory hooters in Farnhill, Junction and Sutton were blowing, so my journey was an anticlimax. The factories blew their whistles (steam) so long that there was not enough steam left to run the mill and they were closed down for the day and all the schools closed too. The 2nd World War, though brought nearer home by the bombing raids and the V.I.s was not nearly so memorable to me as the 1st war and I think that would go for most people of my age group.



Fig 8. The Green family in 1948 at the Golden Wedding of Norman's mother and father. Norman is on the back row (wearing glasses); his brother Eric is next to him, in the centre.