

# PREFACE



*“We might call it a probability that many improbable things will happen to me” — Agathon.*

---

In the following chapters, I try to give a balanced history of my working life prefaced by summary of my early days both before and during WW2 and my university training. The chapters cover well-defined periods and are more or less in chronological order. Some periods seemed to me to call for more words than others so the chapters are not of even length and the one about the Second World War could well have been split into two or even three chapters but I could not see where to make the breaks, so have simply broken the text into blocks divided by asterisks. In some chapters, I have wandered away from my title to cover some point or other that seems important in the context. If that practice strikes you as wrong, put it down to human frailty. I offer no excuse. In the later parts of my life there were sometimes several things going on at once which were not associated in any way except for my involvement. Where this happened, I have written separate chapters and can only hope too much continuity is not lost.

My hope is that perhaps some of my children and grandchildren might one day wonder what I did with my life and what I did in the various countries I visited. They might even be interested to know what conditions were like during my life. Well, here are the answers. I hope there is enough continuity of narrative to maintain the interest of whomever bothers to read it all and that they do not finish up bored and confused. I have tried to reduce what I felt were the boring parts and to describe more fully what I found at the time to be more interesting, or in some cases, humorous. I have also tried to give some background to the more technical aspects of events with which as a geologist, I was concerned. For the most part, I have skipped over the family side of my life because I intend writing about that separately.

Some experiences struck me as comical, either at the time or afterwards. I hope the reader agrees with me and does not find them to be tasteless. At the very least, the reader will come to appreciate whatever sense of humour I have and in any event, the stories are true.

During my life, I have had the good fortune to see a great deal of this world. When told of my travels, people have often felt prompted to ask which parts I liked the best. To this I can only answer that

everywhere has attractive features of one kind or another. Mostly I found this through the people. I have found few in this world who, despite differences in outward appearance, customs and language, are very different from any other in outlook and aspirations. I have met with many kindnesses and can only hope I have succeeded in returning at least equally in kind. I hope that in some small way I have conducted myself to pass on this outlook to others.

My ultimate hope is that I shall be able to illustrate these chapters effectively. Certainly, the technical ability to do so is much improved over former times. As I grow older however, the enthusiasm to complete these ambitions of old age tends to decrease so I beg forgiveness of the reader if I leave some jobs undone.

It is generally supposed that history repeats itself but I doubt the confluence of economic and political affairs that affected much of my life will occur again for a long time. Mankind can certainly do without the wars. Perhaps some basic principles will shine through and prove useful to someone.

I doubt generations after mine will have the opportunity to travel so widely at someone else's expense and to experience so many facets of mankind's behaviour. Ever since Ruth Hester, the sister of my great-great grandfather, married Rev. John Hawker and left her home in England in the 1860's with all her children for the mission field in India, successive generations of Hesters have found reason to move around the face of the Earth on business or pleasure. I should not be surprised if many in future generations do the same. I see nothing wrong in what I read somewhere, that parents should give their children both roots and wings. This particular work covers the 'wings' part of my life and I am grateful for my own parents who, like my own wife and family who accompanied me on our several moves, never complained about the wanderings abroad of their only child.

One of man's lasting ambitions is to be remembered after his passing. Leaving a lot of money, or building a huge monument does not serve this purpose. No disease or scientific discovery is likely to be named after me, not even a variety of rock. For most of us, any hope of being remembered beyond one's grandchildren is a dream. Perhaps these chapters will serve to inform some of those in my family what the life of one of their ancestors was all about. May they be inspired to go out and look at the world, and may they learn something from my mistakes and those of my generation rather than be obliged to learn them over again.

## CHAPTER TWO



# RECOLLECTIONS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

*“HISTORY ILLUMINATES REALITY, VITALISES MEMORY,  
PROVIDES GUIDANCE IN DAILY LIFE” — CICERO.*

WELL BEFORE MY TENTH BIRTHDAY IN APRIL 1939, I was sufficiently well aware of current affairs to know a war was expected, so I was not surprised when one was actually declared on September 3rd of that year. To a small boy, the concept was very exciting. The war would be a glorious success in which we, the British, would of course show Hitler the error of his ways in a very short time. After all, had we not won the previous “great” war with Germany only 21 years before?



Looking back, I suppose my main source of information at the time was the newsreels that were shown as part of every cinema show I went to see. Television was in its infancy in Britain and was still nothing more than an experimental novelty enjoyed by the wealthy, and my friend across the street, Hugh Metcalfe, whose home was equipped with a set made by the firm his father worked for as an electrical engineer. Over the years of our childhood attendance at cinemas, my friends and I sat transfixed by the newsreels as we watched the Germans under Hitler invading first Austria then Czechoslovakia and finally, Poland. Interspersed with these were newsreels of the Italians under Mussolini invading Ethiopia and Albania and, a year or so earlier, shots of the Spanish civil war. There were also confusing newsreels of Japanese attacking Chinese. We did not always know which side to cheer for but we thought we knew what to expect when war came upon us, especially from the air.

In those uncertain times, my parents listened regularly to news programmes on the radio. The contents of these radio reports also did not evade me, and were the subject of regular discussion. I could relate particularly to Ethiopia because one of the Emperor Haile Selassie’s daughters was my nurse when I had my tonsils taken out at Great Ormand Street Hospital for Children in London during 1936. The other countries were nothing more to me than places on a map that produced stamps for

my collection. We encountered few foreigners in England at that time. To hear someone speaking a foreign language was most unusual.

I also remember hearing the first broadcast describing the treatment of Jews in concentration camps in Germany. That must have been about 1938 and there was a general air of shock that re-enforced everyone’s feeling that the war was not far off. When it arrived, the optimism of a child had me convinced that we would right all these wrongs; and of course, we would win.



My friends and I were very conscious of being British, the upholders of fair play, winners of the previous war, hub of the British Empire, on which the sun never set. ‘Empire Day’ was celebrated annually to remind us what the empire was all about. Children belonging to Guides, Brownies, Scouts or Cubs would wear their uniforms to school, and we would spend the afternoon in the school hall singing the patriotic songs we had been practicing for weeks — “Land of Hope and Glory”, “The British Grenadiers”, “Jerusalem” with its “And did those feet in ancient times...” and such. (It has always amused me that the tune of “Land of Hope and Glory” should have been chosen to be played at graduation ceremonies throughout the U.S.A., while the words never heard in that country, would constitute a much better national anthem for the British than “God Save the Queen”. ) Our headmaster, Tom Wilkinson, sometimes accompanied by the vicar, would stand beside the lectern on the stage beating time vigorously with both arms in a paroxysm of patriotic fervour. Our teachers, except for the one pounding the piano, stood facing inward along one side of the hall, ready to rush down a line of singers to thump over the head with a hymnbook any backslider who had the temerity to display lack of patriotic spirit by pulling the pigtailed of a girl in the row in front, or similar disruptive deed.

These were the days when Armistice Day, on November 11th, was observed with great dignity. Again, everybody who owned a uniform would wear it to school. This was the day on which the previous war had ended — the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Wreathes were laid on war memorials in villages throughout the country and there were parades at which the old soldiers would wear their medals. Everyone wore a red poppy cut from canvas mounted on a piece of green wire. They were supposed to resemble the poppies that grow wild in Flanders where much of the fighting took place in World War 1 and millions of British soldiers lie buried along with others from other countries.

The whole poppy scheme had been dreamt up and organized by a General Haig (of the whiskey distilling family fame) who had planned a good number of the mass slaughters which had gone on during the war under the misnomer of “battles”. Haig was a cavalry officer. His head quarters were in chateaux well back from the firing line. In his exalted position as head of everything to do with the army in France, he is reputed to have ridden his horse for a while every morning. On frosty mornings, soldiers were ordered out early to sand the field marshal’s route to prevent his horse from slipping.