

Memories of James Walter Wall

Handwritten Transcript on butchers paper, the life recollections of James Walter Wall. Original held by daughter Phyllis Gee of Griffith (never completed)

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Tuesday morning 6.40am October 15, 1971

I turn on the radio, just got up after another sleepless night. The first I hear on the radio is an old time song that I use to hear my dear mother often sing at parties and weddings. She was one of a very large family, I think of 10 children, 6 boys and 4 girls. I won't give you all their names here but in the course of this I will refer to them by their Christian names. I think they all came from Kentish stock and most of them (the uncles were self taught bricklayers but would take on any job that was offering, such as wharf labourers or any job that was available in those days and when things were going tough the women would have an open stall outside the local pubs and sell shell fish such as oysters, welks (?) cockells, mussels and, lo and behold!, pigs trotters. The shell fish were dished up in tiny saucers and the price 1 penny a saucer and the trotters at half penny. Granny May's stand used to be outside of a pub called Freemasons Arms at Custom House. Aunt Rose's stand was the Shipping Hotel at Canning Town and Aunt Liz/Lily(?) was outside the Custom House Hotel facing the railway station. But I am racing ahead of myself and I will have to refer to those days later if necessary and if any of my relations are still living today and read this, I stand to be corrected. But I am racing ahead of myself so I will have to start from the beginning and what I write is gospel truth and stand to be corrected.

I first saw the light of day in Liverpool, Lancashire, 49 Christian Street, Liverpool Lancashire and I was christened James Walter Wall. Where my father and mother were born I haven't a clue but mum I think was Kentish stock and as far as I can gather my father and mother's was a runaway marriage to settle in Liverpool where I was born on the 3rd Feb, 1899. I was told by my mother that we also lived in a street in Liverpool, Islington called Back Anne Street an I can remember wearing little long moleskins trousers and wooden clogs and I was about 5 years old, my father made a living of dealing in most anything such as collecting a sort of stone jars and bottles and selling them to the Jam Factory called Hartley's and I can recall lots of trips to the factory to sell them, because I used to delight in helping myself to plums and damsons(?) that were laid out in tray inside the jam factory and of course there was always a heated argument with mum and dad for allowing me to gorge myself because there was such a lot of cleaning for mum to do to my pants and although I was only 5 years I can remember that. Also I can remember that two boys a couple of

years older than me, their first names were Leo and Donnie their other names I do not remember but can recall they often took me with them and delighted to take me by my hands and race down hill over iron stone cobbles

In a large square and I think there was a large cathedral there called St Peters and think I was christened there. James Walter Wall the middle name being one of my father's who had settled with his mother Sarah and his father William Wall in Boston USA taking my father James his brother Walter and sister Nell and settled in a place called Fall River, Massachusetts. Of my father's life I don't really know much only what my mother told me but one thing she told me he was a wonder full man and loved him dearly as wild as he was. He was not a big tall man as far as I can gather but had a lot of what it takes. He never took to drink and was a real hard worker for his family. There was 4 children by the marriage, myself, and my sister Nell and William who died in Liverpool when a baby at what age I do not know. I think he was born in Manchester and where he was buried I know not. Finally I think my dear mother must have got homesick and my father returned to (East End of) London with his family, Mum, I, Nelly. Joe who was born in London after my Mum and Dad settled there after the reunion with my mother's family. But it was fate overtook my father. He took ill with an abscess on his breastbone so my mother told me and was operated on in London and died leaving my mother with 3 of us to rear and only a young woman. There was nothing like a widows pension in those days and it looked like black days for us. As young as I was I can remember when my mother went to the hospital to view my dads body. I was with her and my grandfather and grandmother and can recall my mother going into hysterics and throwing herself screaming on the floor of the morgue. For the next 3 years my mother struggled to rear us 3 children. Me, Nell and Joe. How she managed to do it only she knew. She got 3/- a week and 3 large loaves of bread and to make the best of it and rear us she used to take me by the hand and walk through the streets singing for pennies that were thrown to her which I used to run and collect for her. Now as I think back I wonder where she got the courage to do that for herself and 3 children Call me an old sentimental fool if you like. But I can recall that when I was a child that when anyone of my aunties or uncles at weddings or parties such as they were started singing sentimental songs every bodies eyes filled with tears.

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...till someone cracked a funny joke,...more eyes and smiles..am a real sentimental bloke and even now have tears in my eyes trying to put this together because my daughters Eileen, Phyllis and Nina have requested me to do before I pass on to join my dear wife. I cannot cry on the inside and laugh on the outside. I suppose I've been born that way and I suppose there is many more like me in this world. I ask you all to bear with me as it is a big effort I've taken on and I'm easily upset. So I will try and write something more of my life and get on the job that has been requested by my daughters as I think it is only fair they should know something of their parents past life and the struggle to survive. So I grew up and fell in love, not with the girl from another town or country but the kid next door in a dirty slummy part of London, the East End. We were neighbours on and off as far as I can remember. I grew up with her brothers and sisters, went to the same school. Played and fought in the same streets. Stole fruit from stalls and roamed the docks and wandered aboard the ships berthed there. A favourite with us boys would be to wait on the horse drawn carts and lorries coming from the docks loaded with tomatoes and bananas, belt in the cases of tomatoes, fill our pockets and caps and bolt around corners and eat them or take them

home. The green bananas - hide them away till they ripened and then gorge ourselves. Warnings from our parents did not bother us and many a belting I got for it. What else could we do as our fathers being dock labourers would only earn approximately 4-5 shillings a day casual labourers if they were fortunate enough to get work. To me it seems a mirical (sic) that we ever survived at all. Which we did. I suppose that whoever reads this will think well just a lot of hooligans, maybe we were but it was not our fault if we had to survive, it was our misfortune to be born to such hardship. What did I hear you saying "dead end kids"- right you are. But it was no fault of ours and in my opinion it was the survival of the fittest. In between school we sold newspapers, I can vouch for every one of us that any money earned was taken to our parents to help out at home, and amongst us all it was share and share alike. It was a common code and woe betide anyone that tried to cheat. It sort of became a code of honour with us. We would also gang up on any other kids from other districts and many the brick fights we had with them if they encroached upon our territory. I can only remember one open park area where we could play and later a swimming baths were built there and many a wonderful time we had there. But if I remember right it was only boys that were allowed there. I don't ever remember seeing any girls enjoying themselves like we boys did. It was only opened about 3 times a week and was strictly supervised. Woe betide anyone who broke the rules there. Well I can say us hooligans broke the rules a few times. How?, well it was like this. The baths used to close about 4pm at night so after dark we would climb the fence and swim around to our hearts content but that did not last long. Well they started emptying the baths each night after the usual swimming days our only alternative was to go back to the ditch that ran into the Royal Albert Docks and make the best of it. So much for my swimming lessons which at least help me save someone's life in Suva, Fiji Islands but I'll refer to that later. So I grew up, not a very big and robust boy but tough as they come. And with a wander lust, getting home at all hours of the night and sneaking into the house to crawl into bed and my mother and stepfather not knowing at what time I got in and as far as I can recall never asked me. I know my parents gave up trying to control me. I know my stepfather tried one way or another but Mum was always there to protect me. So I suppose he gave up to keep the peace and let me go my merry way.

Came the big dock strike I think 1911. All the dock labourers were out on strike and things got more tough for us all because most of the workers around the district were dock labourers (There I go jumping ahead of myself) Back to my early days. My mother always told me what a wonder full father I had for the short time that he was with us and I'm sure she loved him very much. She often told me of many instances such as the time after she came back with her two children myself and my sister from Liverpool my brother Joe was born my sister only a babe in arms when my father died in hospital and my mother always told me it was one of my uncles that he was instrumental in causing his early death. He was very jealous of my father for winning my mother from him as he courted my mother before he married my mothers sister.

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...mention any of their names as it may cause some embarrassment of my relations that are still living. She told me my uncle who was a very big husky man compared to my father and a natural bully, threw my father down on the pavement and pressed his knee into his chest which later on caused an abcess to appear and he died in London Hospital which he was operated on. I don't know but I think if it had

been in these day it would have been a simple operation and it may have been a different story, but I suppose you could call it fate that such a thing happened. So mum was left with the three of us to rear which bring me back to the paltry 3 shillings and 3 loaves of bread week.

Came the dock strike of 1911 or 12. Im not sure about the exact date but I do remember the name of the union leader, Benn Tillett and it seemed he was a very popular hero to us kids and I believe with the dockers. Without any prompting from the dock laborers (sic) I remember we kids, played merry hell and the (as we knew them in those days) "blacklegs". They were known in Australia by another name which I will not mention as you all probably know. The convoys of meat and fruit wagons started to pull out of the Albert and Victoria Docks loaded with meat and us kids use to pelt them with stones and anything we could get to throw at them, they were escorted by Mounted Police and many of them too came under fire and many a helmet (sic) was knocked off and horses made to panic. We would give them a barrage at every street corner, bolt up the side streets and repeat the dose all the way up to Canning Town station corner, double back and wait for the next convoy to come out of the docks. I don't know what good it done, but it must have caused the Police and black leg drivers a lot of worry as we never let up day or night and with anything we could for ammunition. We were chased time and again by the mounted police but I don't think any of us were ever caught or im..... That was our contribution to the strike and if it done any good Ill never know. The convoys would then turn off into Barking Road the main road towards Aldgate only to meet more throwers all the way to their destination. How it all ended I don't know, I suppose I was too young then, or to care, it just seemed a natural thing to do and so it went on, Every day when we were not throwing stones, etc we used to gather outside the dock gates outside of the Railway Station near the entrance to the docks and where there was a small portion of grassy ground and entertain the police and passers by with wrestling matches and a collection was taken up by the Police after each group and shared between us, until one of the policemen came up with an idea of changing that, he asked if anyone had a set of gloves, I happen to have that at home and I was asked to bring them, which I did, four of them but all different weight and sizes but they served the perpous (sic) and I can assure you that anyone seeing the action that went on and the efforts of us kids to win a share of the money that the police collected for us were not disappointed I myself made sure I got my share of the money as I always got a percentage of what was contributed after each bout and always counted it up with the seargent (sic) and he would give me my cut but I was not too happy with that so I suggested I get a piece of the action a do a lot of boxing myself as I did not like being the skinny end all the time. So I climbed in with a boy and gave more than I got and from then on I seemed to run out of opponents. I must have been a bit too good and keen, but I must say very sore each day. Black eyes, split lips busted nose etc my mum use to try to stop me to no avail. I still backed up and each day I brought home a cap full of money to my mum which she gave me a percentage and brought me a pair of boots that I would not wear. I was prepared to run along bare footed at all times even in the winter. I never felt the cold and the soles of my feet were believe it or not case hardened and so were my school mates including my now brother in laws (now all deseased (sic)) but I'll refer to that later and so it went on till the strike was over. How it ended I don't know but I do know the money I took home helped to keep us in food such as it was and that my stepfather and mother were proud of me and I'm sure my now brothers-in-laws parents were as proud of their son Fred then as he was tough and solid he took

the wrestling bouts and I the boxing we were one happy family. We are still a happy family although most of them are not with us now including my school day sweetheart and mother of my family who sad to say has just past(sic) away. Will continue later as my memories are beginning to hurt as I am very sentimental old bloke and get upset when of think of her.

4.

I should have mentioned earlier that my mother reared my, my sister Nell and my brother Joe, a widow for three years and then married again to Charles Watson a bricklayer who was a friend of my uncles. My stepfather I can remember (I was 8 years old) being introduced to me by one of my aunties. She said this "Jimmy this is your new father and can remember yelling back at her he's not my father and bolting into the street. After a few years my stepfather gave up bricklaying and took to dock labouring as far as I can gather he was a good worker when he was able to get work but he became a heavy drinker and at time was very harsh on me in particular I suppose he had his hands full too as I was a very rough and determined boy but I know he tried his best with me to no avail. I was just a rough and tough kid to hand and I now he was proud of me especially when I came home from the dock side with a cap full of coins from the boxing during the dock strike and handed it to my mother. Mum use to give him the price of a plug of tobacco and a couple of beers and the rest went to buy food for us such as it was and I do know that my stepfather always gave my mother the so called strike pay that my father brought home to keep us going. 1913 I was 14 years of age and decided myself I was finished with school and wanted to go out to work and my mum saw an ad in the local paper that a boy was wanted by a shoe shop up a place called Greengate. She cleaned me up the best she could patched my pants and bought me a second hand pair of boots that tortured me to wear. I got the job. 3 shillings a week. I lasted one day. My job was to stand outside the shop and watch the boots and shoes that hung on the poles outside and sweep up the shop. The man tied on a small black apron around my waist and then I was for about 1 hour watching for I don't know what but I soon found out. 4 kids rushed by the shop and let fly with a hand full of horse manure at me and the shop windows and bolted. I made not attempt to chase them as I quickly summed up I'd be no match for so many but also made up my mind that this job was not good to me and without one word to the shop keeper I took off the apron and threw it into the shop and walked off the job. My first job and my first strike against conditions, one of many that I was to be involved in later in life in Australia which were many. When I told mum I'd got the job and quit she wanted to know why and I told her she said "why didn't you go after them, that was your job". What I said 'and get by bloody teeth kicked in for 3 bob a week, not me. I took enough punishment when the strike was on boxing for the amusement o the coppers outside the docks. She just smiled at me and said I don't know what's coming to you or how you will end up but you will have to look around for another job somewhere. I said don't worry mum I know where I can do better than that and I surely did. I started wandering around the docks and going on board all the ships that I could dodge the gangway keepers, asking question from seaman and listening to their stories about other countries and deep down in me, I wanted to see for myself. I was fascinated by the prospect of seeing for myself and all the threats from my mother and stepfather could not stop me. After a few months of work (shift work I might mention of about 9 hours a day for 9 shillings a week, which to us was a small fortune and I at least got a pair of new trousers and a pair of boots

out of it and a bit more food. My stepfather still worked in the docks on occasions he was not a lazy man but jobs in those days were scarce. The work he got was not very regular and I believe if he had stuck to bricklaying he might have done a lot better. He seemed to like casual labour better and I think he had more time in the pubs and was often full and quarrelsome. I don't know how my mother ever put up with him. She had 5 children to him 4 daughters and a son and was far as I know 4 are still living. 3 daughters and a son. Incidentally the job I got for 9 shillings a week was at a glass blowing factory at Woolwich. All the men that worked there were German, Dutch and Belgian. They were the blowers of all kinds of bottles from half gallon to half pints, how those men stood up to the long hours they did, I'll never know but I guess that many of them died with consumption or lung cancer and they worked on a piece work basis. Our job was to collect the bottles from a meshed glo.. that the men put there after putting on the rim at the top of the neck and we took them in a meshed fork and then to a cooling out tunnel called a lear where they were gradually drawn out to the other end and stacked. But woe to any boy who dropped any on the way to the lear. I worked there for about 6 months and then went to another glass blower in Canning Town in a street called Fourty(sic) Acre Lane, but I did not work in the factory. I and another boy used to pull a small truck for about 50 yards down the street to a stacking yard where we stacked them till they were sold. I never knew who bought them. All I was concerned with was the extra tanner (sixpence) a week more than I got at the Woolwich place. I worked there I suppose for about 3 months when I met with an accident not so serious lucky for me and the blacksmith. The factory was closed down for the weekends and a few jobs had to be done. One job for the blacksmith was to put up a couple of brackets on the furness(sic). I was holding the bracket up with a pair of tongs whilst the blacksmith belted it in with a 7 lb hammer when suddenly the front of the furness (sic) collapsed outwards. How I escaped death or serious injury I'll never know.

5.

I wish I could write and understand shorthand. Well it was never taught to us in those days. Any way back to my storey (sic). The old man who was superintendent was about 80 years old and was related I believe to the owners of the Glass Blowers factory. We got both severely hurt but I don' know how he fared. I came out of it with a cut head and a lot of bruises took up in the seaman's hospital but my stay was only brief and remember the doctor saying how lucky I was. My stepfather thought I was entitled to some compensation and took it on to himself to have a go for something anyway and went to the trouble of taking me to the solicitor to see what could be done about it. So he and I had a trip up to the West End of London and saw the solicitor who I believe sent a letter to the firm and to make a long story short he managed to get the large amount of 8 pounds compensation. So he said and he gave my stepfather the 8 pound notes and my father gave my mother 4 pounds out of it. Me, I never got the price of a pair of boots which I needed badly. So much for that incident. The least said about it the better. But it done me no harm. But I had the wander lust and wanted to go to sea. I used to read lots of books mostley (sic) adventure stories which I think started me on the road to sea and the worked and I used to talk a lot with seaman (sic) from around my district and was fasinated (sic) by what they told me of their travels. From then on I wanted to see for myself what was over the horizons. I had quite a lot of experience of ships but not sailing them, by hanging around the docks and sneaking past the police at the gates and by talking to

seaman about the life at sea, the more I heard the more the urge till one day I was at a place called the Barge House, a pub at North Woolwich when I found out that a skipper of a barge was looking for a boy and was pointed out to him. I never hesitated but boldly walked up to him and said Do you want a boy to sail with you sir? He answered in the affirmative (sic) but stipulated that he would have to see my mother about it. I tried to take him out of that but to no avail he insisted in getting my mum's permission and made arrangements and came and say my mother but before he came I'd convinced my mum I would be OK and when he came and saw her she consented to let me go provided he looked after me. Oh yes he looked after me all right from the word go but before I go into that I must mention the type of boat I was going on. She was a cement barge on that usually plyed up and down the river Thames, called the Glen Rosa. She was rigged with extra sails such as a jib and flying jib sail. Up and down the river these boats only carried a fore sail and mainsail but this barge was not being used for the river she was going across the English Channel to Boulogne and although I never but only ever saw the sea such as it was, was from Southend-on-Sea and I was quite young then and could not remember what it looked like. Well the next day my mum packed a few things in an old canvas bag. I can see her now with tears in her eyes saying good bye to me up Customs House station. I made my way to Barge House Pub and it was not long before I was spotted by the skipper who picked me up and took me to the Glen Rosa. My bunk was forward with 2 other seamen and the skipper had all the after part of the boat to himself including the so called galley for cooking meals such as they were. My job was to cook for them and help on deck when it was necessary. We did not eat regular times only when we had a fair wind and all was going well across the Channel. One minute I was attempting to cook a meal and the next I was yelled at to come and give a hand with the sails and the back to the galley when things were going smoothley (sic). We reached a place called Deal and anchored for the night and at day break was on our way again. As usual I was in the galley making tea and trying to prepare some food for us all and was often complemented for my efforts such as they were but all the time I was pestered by the skipper yelling out for me to give a hand on deck and then ducking back to the galley to keep my eye on the cooking food. Occasionally I would duck up and take a peep at the sea and surroundings and was fascinated but strange to say I did not get sea sick and can honestly say I never experienced the misery of that. Any way it must be a miserable sensation for those that ever went through it because later in my travels around the world I saw plenty of people suffering from that. I use to sympathize with them as they must have been going through some kind of torture. Well I'll never know from experience that's for sure. I think I had too much to do and that's why I did not get sick, but I did get quite a shock on the way over. Incidentally (sic) it took us 3 days to reach Boulogne on the French coast. The day before we arrived at our destination the Skipper asked me if I could cook a current pudding and I said yes I could as I used to watch my mum make them. Well be sure to get busy and make one. I asked him if he had any suet? He said no suet. Make it with fat. I started on it. Flower (sic) water and currents in it all went and I started mixing next thing all I heard was Boy come up quick. I leave the mixing dash up on the deck to give the men a hand to change a sail then back to the pudding. After I got it to a condition that I thought was OK I looked around for something to wrap it and tie it in and I found an old shirt belonging to the skipper. It did not look too clean but i

and hoped for the best. Every now and then there was a yell BOY! Come up here
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.....which I did and by the time I got back the water in the pot was very low so I put in more cold water and so it went on back and forth from the galley to the deck till finally it happened the water in the pot had boiled away and the pudding started to burn on the bottom of the pot I panicked and added more water and hoped for the best. Comes lunch time and the mate and skipper always ate together and they always had a slice of pudding before anything else I don't know why but I suppose it was some sort of custom they had so I took out the pudding and scraped the bottom to get the burnt part off hoping he would not notice it when he cut it. I stood with one foot on the companion ladder in case he got sore about the pudding but he stuck his knife in one side of it fork in the other and turned it over, gave one look and flung it at me. I turned to bolt up the ladder and caught the lot on the back of my neck Holy mackerel was that pudding hot as I dashed towards the after end of the boat clawing it off and seeing the man at the wheel laugh to bust at me. I went to the forward part of the ship and was not game to show myself until one of the sailors came and got me and said don't be afraid of him I won't let him touch you so plucked up courage and returned aft and sulked for the best part of the day and refused to do anything. Till one of the men promised he would not let the skipper take to me as he threatened to do and could have them all laughing about the incident and I actually got an apology from the skipper and was told to forget it ever happened which I gladly excepted(sic) Next day we arrived at one destination I forget now what cargo we carried but I think it was cement. Anyhow I was too thrilled and excited to see what sort of place France was and anxious to get ashore I was not allowed to get till after tea but the skipper gave two of the seamen 5 francs and told me them to take me and buy me a new pair of trousers which they did and then were in and out of several cafes mopping up cognac I just tagged along with my parcel of trousers the seamen getting pretty full of cognac and I sat with them with my parcel which I put on the table beside me finally they decided to go back to the ship and I turned around to pick up my parcel and found a different one there on opening it I found a pair of dirty old fisherman's trousers covered in fish scales and brother did it stink. My two companions thought it a great joke but I could not see the humour of it. I was five francs down the drain before I made any money at all. When the skipper heard about it he threatened to stop out of their pay the cost of the trousers but he did not but went ashore and bought me another pair saying he would stop it out of my pay when we got back I did not worry as I know as soon as we anchored at back at Woolwich I was off like shot and this is how I done it on arriving back at Woolwich. The mate and the two sailors were going ashore for the night as far as I could gather so the skipper told me to take them ashore come back and by that time he would be ready to go ashore with me and promised to give me some wages at the pub and then I could go home to see my mum and come back the next day. As far as I was concerned there was very little money for me it would not have been the price of a pair of trousers. He only gave me two francs when we were in Bologne so I figured he would not give me much more than then shillings if that so I never went ashore with the mate and sailors and when they went into the pub I tied up the dingy and started up the causeway at a gallop I looked back once and saw the skipper yelling and waving his arms at me to bring the boat back but made a rude gesture at him and casually walked away towards North Woolwich station with one penny in my pocket but it was enough to get me to Customs House home Needless to say my mum was overjoyed to see me but my step father asked me what

wages I got but I told him nothing as I did not return to collect any. Well he hit the roof at boys(sic) fancy going all the way to France and not collecting his pay. But mum was not concerned so much about that she seemed content to have me home again but when I told her that I would want more clean clothes that what I had on were lousy she nearly fainted. Yes I was lousy crawling with lice. I had to strip off back and went to bed whilst she went out and bought some second hand clothes and shoes. My father wanted to go to Woolwich and see the skipper for me pay but mum talked him out of it. So much for my first trip to sea. The first of many that took me all over the world. Before I continue I must mention one more incident that happened in Bologne France. I had two sous in my pocket the equivalent of two pence in English money so I went ashore and walked up to the dock and over a cobbled stone road way and I saw several people mostly fishermen standing round a tall and very round and stout lady selling fried chips the aroma of the smell set my mouth watering. The a lady went on serving the men and kept giving me an odd glare now and then and when she had finished serving the men she beckoned me over and spoke to me in French which I could not understand. Mon petite I think she said and pointed to the pan that was sizzling on the stove and said Le pomme de terre meaning potatoes I just nodded my head and she gave me a large paper full of French fried chips. They were delicious. My first feed and last that I ever had in France. When I got back to the ship I told the sailor what I had and they had quite a laugh over it. and they said to me did you have any frogs legs with the chips and I said not and they told me that they cooked frogs legs in with the chip. I came over quite sick and went up on the deck put my finger down my throat and tried to throw up and for a couple of days I felt quite off but slowly my first French feed wore off.

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For the next few months I worked at various jobs such as boiler stoking, chipping from the furnace crowns of ships boilers and brushing boiler tubing the money was considered good in those days for boys particularly for small boys as I was 9/- a week for nine hours a day. I suppose it seemed good considering we could buy a two pound loaf of bread for approximately penny ha'penny I also worked at a cable factory at a place called Deptford, the Furnaces of Siemens Bros. running off copper wire from skeins onto bobbins that in turn were rolled into cable wages about 9/6 a week. I must tell you how I came to get that job. It took me about a week to get it but I had to get it the hard way. Boys used to congregate outside the factory gate each day and wait for the boss to come out and take us on. It took me about three days attending the pick up. But I had to get a job the hard way. It was like this I was an interloper as far as the other boys were concerned as I came across from the other side of the river (We used to cross by what we used to call the free ferry.) A couple of old paddle steamers used to ply back and forth North to south Woolwich and I spent a lot of time during my schools going back and forth just for fun and sliding up and down on the saddle back boilers on the ferry.) Incidentally I can honestly say that I never played truant from school once in my life which many of my schoolmates did. Incidentally I can honestly say I was never very bright but managed to reach the highest standard that I could go. I can only say that I was put up there to make way for other boys that were coming up behind me. Also I can recall the teacher used to put all the boys with no boots in the back row of the class. The reason ? to prevent us from getting chilblains. I suppose he was right anyway.) As I was considered and interloper at the factory I had be shifted out by the hard way so I copped a hard right to nose in fact I saw red in

fact I was covered all over with it my own and my opponents. Finally he quit just before I made up my mind that I had had enough. The next thing I remember was that the boss had us both by the ears taking us to the office cleaning us up and giving us both a job from then on we were firm friends as we both got our first job the hard way. I stayed there for a little while and then going from one job to another but I still had the call of the sea and still haunted the docks as often as I could till one day I was as usual snooping around a ship called the Highland Pride belonging to the Nelson line that used to ply between London and Buenos Aires in the Argentine carrying chilled meat from there to England I think there were about ten ships that were in the fleet then I later sailed on another one of these the Highland Glen as an Able Seaman. (records can be obtained from the Board of Trade, Tower Hill London- still in existence. Back to my story.. The bosun spotted me hanging around and asked me what I was doing aboard and did I want to go to sea. I never hesitated. Yes I said but he insisted on getting permission from my parents so I arranged with my mother to see him. I could tell my mum was not too keen going but finally agree to see the bosun and finally gave permission for me to sail and had to meet him at the shipping office the next day. I could hardly wait for the next day and eventually signed on as deck boy bound for the Argentine. I can see my mother now crying as we pulled out from the dockside as I know she had a fear of the sea I know but I was too excited to worry much that day but thought a lot about it later on in life as she was a good and brave mother in my estimation. But I suppose I was born for the sea and was as proud as a peacock with my woollen jersey on with Nelson line across the chest and felt at last I had found my destiny and I was gong to see what was over the skyline that I often dreamed about. So down the English channel and on to the coast of Spain via the so dreaded by many the Bay of Biscay to the coast of Spain via Corunna and Vigo where we picked up migrants for the Argentine all were poor and lowly peasants mostly farm labourers with their families and were herded together like cattle between decks and mostly fed on beans of some kind and lots of olive oil bread and some meat in fact they used to wait for any food that was left over from the crew which was not much better mostly stew which was commonly called by us "sloppywash". Of course we had first class passengers and they faired a bit better than the migrants and crew. In fact the 4-8 watch engineer staff used to get the leftovers from the saloon passengers which was a little better than we go and what was left over from us was given to the migrants who fought over it.

They made their own entertainment each night on the deck they would hold a party and sing and dance the fan dango(sic) I used to join in and quite a lot of fun out of it and quickly got in the way of imitating them and picked up a bit of their language. In fact the sailors used to get me going when we were homeward bound going through the motions and tap dancing. I suppose I was gifted so to speak and I had what is called rhythm and I really enjoyed doing it and the bosun used to call me Charlie Chaplin because I used to imitate him I supposed I could be called a mimic. Anyway we had lots of fun and of course I had lots of work to do. I had to carry the sailors meals to the forecandle put it on the deck and each man had to help himself and if you were late in getting your share that was your bad luck as no more was dished out from the galley. Each man had to carry his own eating utensils wash and clean them and make up his own bunk and so were the firemen and coal trimmers who were accommodated on the other side of the forecandle and many a rough house I saw there and the ships officers had to come forward with guns to settle them down. A mixed crowd, British, Irish Spanish and what have you except coloured men who mostly sailed in the West Indian bound ships on deck and down below in the stoke hold and

engine room. I sailed in one of these ships called the Tagus to Kingston, Jamaica and even then the firemen and trimmers fought amongst themselves with knives and razors. They often carried on like that when they got ashore in Jamaica and more often than not the captains had to go ashore.

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On the 11th Feb 1921 I signed on a ship belonging to the New Zealand shipping company the SS Whakatane as a trimmer We had a full crew compliment including eight apprentice officers for a voyage to New Zealand via Las Palmas, Norfolk VA USA, through the Panama (Canal) to Suva, Fiji Islands. We carried a general cargo for Suva and New Zealand. In number three hold were a number of cast iron pipes about 2 feet in diameter for Suva all went well until leaving Las Palmas when we ran into a violent storm lasting for about three days when we took quite a battering. The cargo of pipes in No. 3 hold then started to shift. The pipes that were stowed fore and aft slewed around and thwart ship and began to crash into the bulkheads on either side as it was dangerous as it was liable to stove in the plates and sink us. All hands were alerted except the watchkeepers and we proceeded down into the holds to lash the pipes to prevent them moving around. Some men were detailed to the coal bunkers to fill bags of coal to be thrown in between the pipes to prevent movement. Whilst others passed steel hawsers through the pipes and secured them. It was no picnic as each time the ship rolled pipes would go in all directions and it was every man for himself. We would jump as high as we could and reach up and grab anywhere and hold up our feet and when the roll eased hop down and start.