

Chapter 2: Work and Family Life

Grandad's diaries start on 1 January 1914. He had just turned 16. The diaries open with him already working in his father's shoe shop and workshop. But, it seems he had just started as, on 17 January 1914, he noted that *"I soled and heeled my first pair of boots myself"*. The diaries are full of the language of shoemaking – *"finishing"* and *"pressing"*, *"split"* (leather), *"inking"* and *"cutting tops"*.

There are also a litany of minor injuries. On one particular occasion, he noted that Joe, with whom he worked, dropped a boot with the last still in it onto his foot, right onto his little toe.

While grandad worked mostly in the workshop, his brother Cyril staffed the shop. Grandad frequently noted how busy Cyril had, or had not, been. Sometimes, when Cyril was not in, grandad would look after the shop. The business appeared to be thriving and growing. It employed a number of other staff, including some who worked in the workshop, and an errand boy. In 1914, grandad noted that a youth from Huthwaite had come about a job and he must have been taken on. But, grandad's father sacked the boy in less than a week. Grandad did not say why. Various friends and family members were also involved in the business, including Joe, Minnie (Cyril's wife), Len (another of grandad's brothers) and Albert Robinson, who was a friend of grandad's and was also Minnie's brother. Grandad and Joe seemed to work particularly closely together, sometimes on benches side-by-side. I don't know if Joe was particularly chatty (or if he played the violin!) but in March 1918, grandad noted that Joe had earned a violin string *"by not speaking in the workshop in the afternoon"*. Grandad not only worked in his father's business but, in 1917, began to invest in it. In 1918, grandad's brother Len went out on his own with the business in Pinxton.



Cyril and Minnie with mum



Early picture of grandad

Grandad's early diaries are also full of detail of his family and their involvement in the local Primitive Methodist¹ chapel. On a Sunday, they would attend services morning and evening with grandad also attending a class² in the afternoon. There were also other activities at chapel during the week, including for example class on a Monday, with grandad and his family interacting with other Methodist families, including ministers, outside of chapel.³

His parents provide the background for grandad's diaries, both his work and home life. Their house was often full of families and friends so it was unusual in March 1914 when it was *"only mam, dad and me for tea."* Len appeared to be living and working in Pinxton but he and his wife Ethel were frequent visitors to the house in Kirkby. On

¹ The Primitive Methodists were a major offshoot of Methodism in the UK in the 19th century. There was a growing sense that the Wesleyans were moving away from what John Wesley had started in the 18th century. They were led by Hugh Bourne after whom the chapel the Parkins attended was named. According to Barrie Smith, in his book *"Noah's Ark - A Century Before and After"*, they were also known as *"Ranters"*. The Primitive Methodists joined with the Wesleyans in 1932 to form the present day Methodist Church.

² The Methodists were organised into societies and classes.

³ A R Griffin's book *"Mining in the East Midlands 1550-1947"* contains a lot of information about the important influence of Methodism in mining communities.

occasions, Len would stay over and then shared grandad's room. They sometimes did things together, e.g. attending the local fair. Cyril and grandad were particularly close. They shared a room and worked together. They cycled together and lent each other their bikes from time to time. Grandad considered it particularly noteworthy when Cyril (and Minnie) got a dog in 1917!

Grandad was close to both his sisters. He often went to Olive's house for tea after work. Olive was a noted singer and often gave concerts, e.g. at chapel. Eva gave grandad his first diary and they did a lot of things together. For example, grandad records going on a [steamer to Colwick](#) in June 1914 with Cyril, Joe and Eva. Eva and grandad walked and cycled and sometimes went to the cinema together. In addition, grandad was very close to Joe. They worked together and socialised outside of work, e.g. cycling and sharing bikes. Joe cut grandad's hair on at least one occasion and they sometimes shared a room.

On 28th March 1914, grandad records that several of the family, Eva, Olive, John, Joe and Leonard all went to Nottingham by football special train. It [appears](#) that they went to see Notts County play Hull. Notts County won that game 4-1⁴ and also [won the second division title](#) that year.



Olive – Grandad's sister



Various views of the Colwick steamers on the Trent from postcards of the time. The one on the lower right has been annotated with glitter writing "with love from Florrie to Lily". On the back is a message written in 1905 to Lily Wherrett who lived in Matlock.

⁴ The [scorers](#) for Notts County were Jack Peart (2), Allsebrook and Bassett.