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Subject: *** SPAM *** Lionel Sole

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The Sole Society

Memories of an Octogenarian

Part 1

By Lionel Sole

(Abridged by Bob Sheldon)

This article was originally published in the April 2005 edition of Soul Search, the journal of The Sole Society

Introduction: Lionel is descended from Edward Sole (1798-1890) of Woodnesborough in East Kent. He has written a very detailed set of memoirs for the benefit of his family and future generations, which regrettably have needed drastic editing for the Journal, but hopefully the result does justice to Lionel's account of his long and eventful life.

Part I. The Early Years: 1916-28

My life began before November 1918 and the end of WWI, for I was born on 4 May 1916. Although I was to live in the Canterbury area for much of the pre-WWII period, I was born much nearer to London. The place was Fairseat, a small hamlet situated in the triangle formed by Sevenoaks, Rochester, and Gravesend in Kent.

Although in April 1916 Fairseat was undoubtedly a peaceful place in which to live, the inhabitants of the few houses which then existed would have been aware of the mounting casualties in France. My mother would have read the lists with great concern, for my father had just been conscripted for military service and my birth was imminent. By June my father was in France, serving as an ambulance driver on the Western Front and arriving shortly before the first battle of the Somme, when 30,000 Allied soldiers were to die on the opening day of the offensive.

Both my father, Albert (1888-1970), and mother, Blanche (1887-1978), were members of a large family, not uncommon in Victorian times, but in other respects their backgrounds differed. Father was born into a family who were agricultural workers whose ancestors had lived in East Kent, as my grandparents did, for centuries. My mother was the seventh child of a family of eight, four sons and four daughters.

My father, the son of a waggoner, was the fifth child of a family of six: three sons and three daughters. My father's eldest brother, Alfred, was apprenticed to a blacksmith, working first at the village smithy in Acol, near Margate, and later in the foundry of Tillings of Maidstone, manufacturers of heavy duty lorries and buses; William, the youngest, was severely handicapped by having a shortened left leg from childhood and receiving very little education, so that for the most part he was employed for menial work. All three sisters were to marry, one, Bertha, died tragically on Margate seafront when in her 'twenties'; Emily, the eldest daughter,

married a market gardener; and Ada, a retired sea captain of a Cross-Channel boat. Of my grandparents I know very little more than what has already been written, the only one I knew being Grandmother Sole who lived at Birchington, Kent and died in 1927, aged 72 years. The remaining three died before 1912 and before reaching their sixty-fifth birthday.

My parents probably met about 1905 in London when both were 'in service', my father as a groom and my mother as a maid. At the time of their marriage in 1912 my mother was the lady's maid at the French Embassy. Before their wedding, and realising the future importance of the motorcar, they decided that father should learn to drive, and this he did by attending a School of Driving, learning in addition the fundamentals of car construction and maintenance. The latter was most important, for in the early days of motoring, cars frequently broke down, necessitating roadside repairs. Despite his additional qualifications it was not until late 1914 that he obtained the post of driver at Fairseat House where I was born.

By April 1916 father, who had volunteered for military service on several previous occasions, was recruited as an ambulance driver and mother was asked to vacate their accommodation within six weeks after my birth. As a result, mother took rooms at Maidstone and these became our base, though we seem to have spent long periods with relations.



Albert Harry Sole & Blanche Gertrude Sole (nee Scanlan) with Lionel in 1917

When WWI ended in November 1918 mother and I may have been at Birchington, but by the summer of the following year we were living in the East Kent village of Bridge, together with my father, who was back in 'Civvy Street'. We were then staying with my mother's sister, her husband and small son, Edward (Ted), who was four years my senior.

As a soldier father had served in France, Belgium and Italy, and it was from Italy that he made his journey back to Britain, arriving four or five months after the signing of the Armistice. Although his demobilisation was later than that of most Servicemen, it proved to be to his advantage, for he found immediate employment at a time when work was difficult to find. Working for the War Department (WD) as a civilian driver, his job was to ferry vehicles being returned to this country from the Continent. As most of the vehicles were in a bad state of repair they could travel at low speeds only, and were driven on main roads which had a much poorer surface than today's standard, the time taken to complete each journey was considerable and father would be away from home for several days.

Although my father fared better than some of his war-time colleagues he found difficulty in obtaining satisfactory employment, so that in the space of six years he had six different jobs before being 'taken on' by a firm of timber merchants with whom he remained, with the exception of the period 1939-45, for the remainder of his working life.

When father's employment with the WD ended he worked briefly for a small firm of haulage contractors, owned by my cousin's grandfather, and it is this period that provides my first memory of him. He was helping in the unloading of a load of poles from a horse-drawn dray and was wearing his Army uniform.

About the same time we ceased being 'lodgers' and moved into our first home as a family, my parents having obtained the part-tenancy of an Elizabethan house. It proved to be very poor accommodation, for it lacked all three services: water, gas/electricity and sewerage. Nowadays the property would have been condemned as being unfit for human habitation but eighty years ago our living conditions were not unusual, in fact they would have been considered the 'norm' for working-class families in rural areas.

During our nine-year occupancy of the first of our three homes in Bridge, access was made from Primrose Alley, the door opening directly on to the living room. Being little more than twelve feet square there was little space for furniture, but standing in the centre of the room was a circular table upon which stood a paraffin lamp, our sole source of lighting after dark. Opposite the window which looked out on to the village street was an open fireplace, the sole source of heating for the entire house and, with the exception of a small stove, mother's only means of cooking. Access to the second floor was made by a staircase which led from the living room behind a partition wall and on reaching the landing one door opened on to the room above the living room, the other to the room above the cellar. This room above the cellar became my bedroom. A long, barrack-like room, it had a ceiling which sloped at an acute angle, so that on the street side it barely provided head room for a young boy. One small window provided natural light. Often intensely cold on a winter's night, I went to bed by candle light, the candle being quickly extinguished.

Housework was a drudgery. For my mother washing day meant carrying numerous pails of water from and to the yard, heating the required amount in saucepans on the open fire and washing the clothes in a zinc bath (used also for the weekly 'tub' on Friday nights). After washing, with or without the use of a corrugated washboard, the washing was mangled, itself very hard work, and dried in the yard if weather permitted. Ironing required the alternative use of a pair of flat irons heated on the open fire.

Shortly after my fifth birthday in 1921 I contracted diphtheria and was driven to the isolation hospital in a horse-drawn ambulance, the 'fever bus', driven by Uncle George. The hospital was no more than a converted residence located in a country lane a short distance from Bridge. I was to remain there for six weeks, enough time for me to retain a few memories, including the sickly medicine which tasted like liquorice and the trains which ran past the building, though the line, being in a cutting, meant that I could not see the trains from my window.

In the following September I started school. For me it was a traumatic experience and I protested loudly for a few days. The village school provided an elementary education for both boys and girls of all ages and was opened in the nineteenth century shortly after the Education Act of 1870. Known as Bridge C of E School, it provided for an intake of about 120 pupils. Children would start school in the September of the year of their fifth birthday and could leave, as most did, when fourteen years of age, the school leaving age having been raised from twelve by the Education Act of 1918.

With most children's full-time education being confined to less than nine years the curriculum concentrated on the three R's, less time being devoted to subjects like Geography, History and Art. Each day commenced with Prayers. Scant attention was paid to Sport. For boys, during winter months, football of the 'kick about'

kind was played on pasture land opposite the school, access being made by climbing along a fence which spanned the River Nailbourne. I had one advantage over many of the kids, for I had football boots, not that they did much for my game. During summer months we might go for a run along the country lanes, while the girls played netball on a nearby field. Swimming was not an option.

The school premises were divided to provide four classrooms: the headmaster's house, two playgrounds - one for the boys, one for the girls - and the usual cloakroom facilities. The curriculum for the nine years of study was taught by four teachers, each of the assistant teachers being responsible for two years, the headmaster for three.

For the first two years we were taught by an unqualified teacher and for a few months sat in rows on forms arranged as a terrace, wrote on slates and used a piece of wet rag for erasures. Later, the terrace was demolished, being replaced by small tables and chairs. To bring the class in to the twentieth century we were then given writing books. The classroom, like the other three, was heated by a solid fuel boiler, stoked when necessary by the teacher. One had to be sitting near the boiler to feel any warmth on a cold winter's day.

Although for the most part I enjoyed school, I liked better the time beyond the school gates. In addition to playing the popular games of the day, we would roam the many fields and woods in the district, sometimes playing 'soldiers', using the trenches which had been dug for practice during 1914-18, when troops would be stationed briefly at Bridge before going to France. In the same field we would make and light a fire, cooking half-a-pound of beef sausages bought with our pocket money for two-pence and baking potatoes brought from home.

As a child growing up in the 20s, I probably had more than the average number of outings, for there were some children who were lucky if they went beyond the boundaries of the village or saw the sea once a year. For me, in addition to the annual outing to the seaside, my cousin Ted and I were taken by our parents to places like Margate and Herne Bay, travelling in a horse-drawn wagonette driven by my Uncle George. Leaving home shortly after breakfast on a Sunday morning and returning late in the evening, the wagonette proved a most pleasant way to travel, for the country lanes were uncrowded, and what little traffic we met with was largely horse-drawn.

As a child I was involved in the picking of hops. For my mother and her sister picking hops in a local hop field was regarded as a social occasion, but I hated hop-picking, for I could think of far better things to do during my school holiday. Each year we would proceed to the same hop field about one mile from our home known locally as 'Baker's' where at the turn of the century my father had worked as a twelve-year-old following the death of my grandfather.

I spent the long winter evenings for the most part playing with my cousin Ted. Although he was my senior by four years we were firm friends and together we would play with toys which were 'simple' compared with those marketed today, among the most popular at the time being Meccano and steam engines. Combined, they gave us many hours of fun, for we would make with Meccano a windmill, or some other object, which we then were able to drive by the steam engine, using string as a driving belt.

Domestic matters apart, the most important development during the nine years in which I lived in Bridge was radio broadcasting which began in 1922. Soon, very long aeriols, held on tall poles, began to appear in the village. A year or so later I listened to the radio for the first time. At about the same time as I listened to my first radio broadcast, I saw - but did not use - my first telephone.

1925 was a momentous one for the Sole family, for in April my brother Desmond was born and soon afterwards my father changed his kind of employment when he went to work for a firm of timber merchants in Canterbury. Both of these events were of major importance to me, for I ceased to be the only child and from then on I saw more of my father. I was then nine years old and until that time we were little more than strangers, for following his three years' service in the Army father's work as a civilian kept him from the family home for very long hours. As a taxi driver he would leave the house before I was out of bed and would return long after I had gone to sleep. Apart from an occasional Sunday, on average once a month, it was a seven-days-a-week job. His new employment meant working a five-and-a-half-day week. Although he would still leave the house by 6.30am he would return shortly after 6 pm, unless overtime delayed him. This meant that we met one another for an hour or so before I went to bed. On Saturdays he would be home by early afternoon and was 'free' until Monday morning.

Possibly as a form of compensation he would frequently allow me to accompany him to work on Saturday morning, so that together we would travel around the district delivering quantities of timber. I really did enjoy those outings, for they provided further opportunities to see the towns and villages of East Kent. The form of travel could not be described as luxurious, for his first lorry was a converted private vehicle. I think the firm's carpenter must have made the conversion, for the 'coachwork' had to be seen to be believed. It was a credit to my father that he was able to keep the lorry in service for as long as he did, for it needed constant repair.

During the final period of our residence in Bridge, the villagers saw an increase in the use of cars in preference to horses. It was about 1926 when charabancs were replaced by buses fitted with a hard top and the two services, Canterbury to Dover and Canterbury to Folkestone were increased. From the same time onwards there was an increasing number of village traders who switched to cars from horses for delivering orders to their customers. The brewers who supplied the three public houses did likewise, so that beer was no longer delivered by drays pulled by pairs of magnificent Shire horses.

I am uncertain as to when the first garage in the village came in to being, but I do know that because there were relatively few cars the proprietor found it necessary to undertake other types of engineering. However he did provide a service for those who owned cars and sold petrol in returnable two-gallon cans.

Autumn is the 'shooting season' and in the autumn of 1927 a 'shoot', extending over several weekends, was held on Barham Downs, about two miles from Bridge. Local men and boys were recruited to serve as 'beaters', the men being paid 37p and the boys 12p. Despite my tender years I had an offer to participate and, having obtained the permission of my parents, I accepted the offer with alacrity, the prospect of receiving a sum equal to five times my weekly pocket money being too great to resist. So, armed with a packet of sandwiches, and in the company of friends, I set forth. Upon arrival I was positioned on the corner of a wood and there I stood alone. The procedure for the 'beaters' was to listen for a signal, the blowing of a whistle. This indicated that a 'shoot' was about to begin and the 'beaters' were then required to make as much noise as possible by banging a length of wood against a tree. This caused the birds to fly from the wood and towards the guns. About mid-afternoon the 'shoot' ended and, having drawn my pay, I returned home. I repeated this experience three times and in so doing became richer by 37p, a large sum at that time.

The New Year heralded my 'scholarship year' and the year when we left Bridge. In pre-WWII Britain the State provided free elementary education for all children up to the age of fourteen; secondary education being provided by independent fee-paying schools, most of which offered a few scholarships for the children of parents who were unable to pay the fees.

My father was fearful that I would be accepted for secondary education, thus placing an additional burden on his slender resources at a time when the family was facing a crisis. I was unaware of this, and it was not until many years later that I began to ponder on the possible reason and came to the conclusion that my mother had become tired of living in a house without services and wanted something better for her young family and for herself. She also longed for a daughter to replace the little girl who died as an infant before I was born, a secret which she kept for many years.

I am sure that my father worried greatly about mother's wishes, for he knew that he could not possibly obtain the tenancy of a house with all 'mod cons' for 12p a week, which was what he paid for 1 Primrose Cottages. He worked on the principle that one's rent should not exceed one day's pay, which meant a maximum outlay of 70p for rent, lighting, and heating. In the end he found a desirable house and in doing so exceeded his target and it must have been some relief to him that I did not pass the scholarship examination.

At Easter, 1928 the two families, the Soles and the Cowells (my Uncle George, Aunt Grace and cousin Ted) made a last outing together in the horse-drawn wagonette. That day we went to Herne Bay and while Ted and I played on the beach our parents engaged in several long conversations. A week or so later I learnt the reason: we were to leave Primrose Alley and move to 62 Roper Road, Canterbury. This is a very long road and the houses, built on one side of the road only, were built in several different styles.

We moved on a Saturday afternoon, my father having obtained permission to use his firm's lorry. The removal of our possessions required two journeys and for the second my mother sat in front with Desmond, then three years old, while I sat in the back, perched on some item of furniture and clutching the family's cat.

62 Roper Road was to be my home, with a few short interruptions, for nine years. My parents lived in the road, but not the same house, for the remainder of their married life, until father died in 1970. As for me I

have often thought that my childhood ended when we moved to Canterbury from Bridge, for I was then twelve years old and two years later I started full-time work.

Many people trace their roots back to their childhood and even now in my old age I still regard the village as my home ground. For many years I continued to make contact with Bridge, periodic visits being made until my uncle and aunt died in the '60s and my cousin had married and had moved to another district.

Part 2. The Teenage Years: 1928-1939

Canterbury, in comparison with most English cities, is small and during the pre-WWII period the population was about 25,000. Today the population has probably grown by another 7-8,000. I found living in Canterbury a totally different experience to that of living in Bridge, just three miles distant.

As for our new home I found this most satisfying, for it gave me, as it did my parents and my three-year-old brother Desmond much better living conditions. 62 Roper Road could be described as modern, for the terrace of houses had been built at the turn of the century. Well built, and served by all main services, it provided an ideal home for a family of four - and soon to be five. Unfortunately there was no bathroom and no indoor sanitation, the outside WC being adjacent to the scullery.

At first my mother must have been well satisfied with our new home, for being a Londoner she never came to terms with country life. Our new home made for less housework and easier access to a greater range of shops was more to her liking. She enjoyed her daily shopping for fresh bread and sometimes meat and other perishable foodstuffs, for at the time there was no home refrigerator. For my mother shopping was a pleasure, for it provided an opportunity to chat with people she met in the street and with the tradesmen. Sadly, her early liking for 62 Roper Road was short-lived and in later years she was to describe the property as 'unlucky'.

She had good cause to do so, for during the next twelve years the family experienced a series of misfortunes, culminating in 1940 when the house was destroyed by a German bomb and my mother and Desmond were lucky to escape death. I can only guess at what my father thought of our new home. He was probably happy that his wife and family were enjoying living in better conditions, but equally concerned by the additional expense. For a few months the latter was offset by extra income provided by a friend who joined us as a lodger. Afterwards father relied on overtime, though the amount varied from week to week. Fortunately he was soon able to acquire an allotment, enabling him to indulge his passion for gardening, whilst providing the family with fresh vegetables throughout the year and thereby reducing costs.

For a week or two following our removal to Roper Road I continued to attend the village school at Bridge, travelling by bus. This provided time for my parents to find a suitable school for their elder son. Subsequently I was enrolled at the Wesleyan School, a mixed, all-age, elementary school. Situated behind the Methodist Church in St Peter's Street it remains to this day and has changed little in seventy years, the major changes being the change of name to 'Methodist' and status, which is now Primary.

In 1928 the school had an intake of approximately two hundred pupils who were taught by a staff of seven full-time teachers. It was, therefore, a little larger than the school which I had left and with a better staff-student ratio and dedicated teachers the quality of teaching was much better. I have always been grateful for the two years I attended the Wesleyan School, for during that time I made very good progress and this to a degree compensated for my lack of secondary education. Like the village school, the emphasis was on the three R's, but there were two additional subjects not previously encountered, Algebra and Science, though the latter was basic. At the time of my enrolment Algebra had reached the end of Year 2, so that I was hopelessly at a loss and never achieved an examination result above 10% - and this for trying !

Again, like the village school, there was no provision in the timetable for Sport, except during the summer term when for the second half of an afternoon session we went to the local baths for Swimming. The open air, unheated, swimming pool we attended had been constructed before WWI and the water was provided by the nearby River Stour. Cleanliness was not a priority and apart from filtering weeds and the use of chlorine, the water was no different from that which flowed in the river.

With the whole class in attendance, and with few of the pupils swimmers, learning to swim for the majority was almost impossible, for the tuition was confined to a few minutes. During this time a boy or girl would receive the full attention of the instructor who, standing on the edge of the bath holding a long pole with a

sling attached to one end, would instruct the pupil to wade out to a suitable depth and distance. At this stage the child would place the sling under his arms and while the instructor raised the pole to make taut the rope, and thereby support the swimmer, the child would attempt to swim. If one was fortunate enough to be one of the first to receive instruction the method worked, for the instructor was 'fresh', but his arms soon tired and consequently those who were among the last in the queue found themselves 'swimming' underwater !

Back in the classroom the lessons were more productive, for the teachers gave their all and expected the students to do likewise. Bad behaviour and lack of endeavour was not tolerated and as a reminder there was found a cane on each teacher's desk. Caning was an everyday occurrence and could be a painful experience as I found out on several occasions. Fortunately I never received the attention of the headmaster, whose 'swing' equalled that of Tiger Woods the golfer !

Of the lessons given I still remember several in detail. One of these concerned America, when at one stage the teacher asked whether anyone could speak like our cousins. In a class of 25+ one boy only had the ability to do so, and he explained that he had a Canadian uncle. Oh, well, that was near enough.

Another lesson which I remember clearly concerned electricity and was given during my final year. The lesson was taught using the electric bell as an example. I was so intrigued that I made an electric bell at home. Unfortunately the teacher had made no mention of 'voltage', so that when the bell had been constructed and my parents were out shopping I decided that my bell should be tested by being connected to the mains supply! The result was a very large bang and I fell off the chair upon which I had been standing. Having found that none of the lights would then work I was faced with the problem of how to explain this to my parents - and I was fearful of the outcome, for when annoyed my father could 'blow his top'. Having decided that I should face up to the problem without further delay I went in search of them and soon I was to meet with them in the High Street. To my surprise the news was received without recrimination. They must have been thankful that they still had their eldest son!

During the final months of my full-time education I was one of several children offered free entry to an evening class at the local Art school, then known as the Sydney Cooper School of Art. One of my fellow students was Nancy Beckett, my principal opponent in my endeavour to obtain the highest overall marks in examinations. In the event it was very much a dead heat and we were finally regarded as the head students. I would have liked to have become a full-time artist, but having received advice from well-qualified people I decided that a career in Printing was a better route to follow.

The move from Bridge to Canterbury apart, the biggest single event of 1928 was the arrival of my brother Edward who was born two days after Christmas. I remember that day so well, for I was roused from my bed at 6am and sent to fetch the nurse who lived in the centre of the city. During the evening the baby was born - but not the girl that mother would have liked.

Soon after the New Year I decided that I should find myself a part-time job, whether I was motivated to help the family's finances or whether I wished to boost my meagre pocket money I have no recollection. Whatever the reason I was soon delivering newspapers for a local agent and soon found that to earn five shillings per week required a lot of effort. It took almost two hours to complete the round, and longer on Saturdays when I collected the money.

A few months later I was recommended to the owner of a small dairy to help with the delivery of milk. This job was more to my liking, for delivery was made by a motorcycle combination ridden by the owner's son, David. We got on well and from 6 - 8am we dashed around the city.

In 1929, while I was working part-time at the dairy, younger brother Desmond had the first of a series of serious illnesses. For several weeks he hovered between life and death and this was worrying for us all, especially mother. One afternoon she wished to go to the hospital and I was left in charge of Edward who was then seven months old. From the time mother left the house until she returned three hours later he cried continually - in fact, almost continuously. I was frantic, for nothing which I could do would pacify him.

It was in the same year, 1929, that I decided that I would enter the Printing Industry, though I had no idea as to how I could obtain an apprenticeship at one of the local firms. I had just one year left to solve the problem, for I was due to leave school in July 1930. During that year I attended the Art school for two evenings each week, and though the course was not well structured I gained from the experience and in later years my studies had greater relevance to Printing and, in particular, Typographic and Graphic Design.

When I left the Wesleyan School, having completed my full-time education shortly after my fourteenth birthday, I could not have chosen a worse time to seek employment. Late the previous year Wall Street had collapsed with disastrous results worldwide and in Britain, as elsewhere, the Great Depression caused mass unemployment.

Fortunately my father retained his job, though he had to accept a lower rate of pay, and as the building trade felt the effects of the recession, there were few overtime payments. The result of all this meant that my mother had difficulty in maintaining an adequate standard of living in terms of the food which the family ate, so that extra careful housekeeping was essential.

At a time when my parents would have welcomed a little extra income which I might have provided by taking some other form of employment they supported my application for an apprenticeship at a small firm of printers, and with the full knowledge that my weekly wage would be very small. In the event it was half-a-crown (today 12.5p per week) for working a fifty-hour week, though this rose to ten shillings (50p) by the end of the first year.

The firm were stationers, booksellers and printers and their shop was situated close to St. George's clock tower in the main street of the city. Behind the shop was the printing works. I worked for this firm for three and a half years and during this time the windows were never cleaned! *Austen*

The class of work printed is known as 'jobbing', i.e., a miscellany of work, ranging from visiting cards, printed letter-headings, private and business, to small posters and booklets, in fact anything which could be produced by the plant and equipment. All the work was printed by the letterpress process, then the most important process in use and which accounted for 80-90% of total print production. Its position has now been taken by lithography. The type was set by hand from type cases held in 'frames'. Had William Caxton, first English printer (1476) applied for work he would have had no difficulty in working as a compositor, for the equipment and technique used for typesetting had changed little in four hundred odd years.

As an apprentice I was soon set to work setting type, and as there was no systematic method of training within the works, or day-release to a technical college, I learnt the skills by the method described as 'sitting by Nelly'. In my case it was by working alongside a man named David Prett. He became a very good friend and taught me much, not only about compositor's work but presswork also, for he was able to operate the four printing machines.

After working as a printer for three years I was capable of producing any of the various jobs, from copy to finished work; from composing to presswork and, if necessary, print finishing. This was a bonus for my employer, for when the foreman was taken ill I took over his job for a few weeks. I was then seventeen years old! When overtime became essential to meet customers' orders I was paid the phenomenal sum of 2 ½ p per hour.

After leaving school I had continued to attend the Art school and by 1933 I was a member of a class of senior students, all pursuing different aims and requiring individual attention by the teacher, a Mr Fedarb. Knowing that I was a printer he recommended that I studied Graphic Design and as a consequence the exercises which he set me to undertake would include poster design. It was the designing of a poster for P&O, the shipping line, which resulted in me experiencing a very enjoyable interlude during my long apprenticeship.

Persuaded to send the design to P&O for their consideration, I enclosed a covering letter, giving brief personal details and my ambition to work overseas at some future date. Although as I had expected the design was not accepted, I did receive an encouraging letter from the Studio Manager, together with an invitation to meet P&O's head printer. I continued to work for the Canterbury firm until April 1934 when I joined the staff of the *Herne Bay Press*.

My change of employment was due largely to a recommendation made on my behalf by David Prett, who had previously explained to me the advantages which the job offered, one being better conditions of employment. To some degree it was difficult for me to decide as to whether to apply for the post, for to earn the same weekly wage I would have to cycle daily for six days a week to Herne Bay, a distance of eighteen miles return. But I did apply and as indicated I got the job. Two months later I received a telegram from P&O offering me a job as a printer on the *Strathnaver*, one of their two flag ships, but when I discovered that this was temporary employment, being for the cruising season only, I had a problem. It was a tempting offer but it

was not permanent. Fortunately during my two months at *Herne Bay Press* I had done enough to convince them that I was the man for the job, so that after some very quick parleying the firm agreed to release me for up to three months.

It was with a mixed feeling of excitement and apprehension that I travelled down to Southampton the day I joined the *Strathnaver*, a modern liner of 23,000 tons. Once on board I was directed to my cabin below the waterline and in the forward part of the ship.

I soon found that the printing office was situated mid-ships, on the starboard side and just above the waterline. The work to be printed was largely a series of thirteen menu cards, together with a variety of programmes, etc. used during each voyage. As I remember the daily routine I reached the office around 7am and, apart from a break for breakfast, would carry on until lunch time. For meals I would go along to the galley and make a selection of the food and drink which was on the menu for First-class passengers. This I would then carry back to my office. Quite frankly I had not previously seen such food, for I had recently experienced the effects of the Depression, from which Britain was slowly emerging.

When at sea my afternoons were spent on deck, returning to the office in the evening, but when the ship was docked I would arrange my work schedule so that I could go ashore for a few hours. All the voyages I was to make during that summer of 1934 were to the Mediterranean and during a series of cruises I was to see a little of places like Malta, Naples, Monte Carlo, etc.

By the middle of September I was back home and returned to work at Herne Bay. After such an experience at sea it was difficult to come to terms with the situation, though my work as a ship's printer had enabled me to accrue a small sum of money which was to make the remainder of my apprenticeship a trifle easier.

During the winter of 1934-5, when the weather was very bad and when I took lodgings to avoid the daily cycle ride from Canterbury, I received a communication from P&O offering me a 'permanency' as printer on board the *Chitral*, which was sailing to the Far East. The offer was very tempting, but I had the good sense to realise that if I was to make a career in Printing I would have to complete my apprenticeship. I therefore refused the offer.



When the Spring of the following year came I returned to cycling daily to and from Canterbury until the Autumn when I was transferred to the parent company, *The Kentish Gazette*. This move enabled me to live at home and to attend classes at the Art school, where an evening theory class in Printing had opened, being helpful at a time when I had decided to enter for City & Guilds examinations. My objective was to obtain a Full Technological Certificate, then the highest award and requiring a minimum of six years part-time study. Eventually I reached my goal but, with WWII intervening, my final exam was not sat until 1950.

To study part-time for any subject requires a great deal of effort and my enthusiasm was certainly tested to the full when in the Autumn of 1936 practical classes in Printing opened at the Thanet School of Art (TSA) in Margate. Finishing work at 5.30 I cycled the 22 miles from my home to Margate to attend the two-hour class which was held twice weekly.

Jubilee Day, Summer 1935

1937 was for me a milestone: I sat and passed the first of a series of City and Guilds examinations; I completed my apprenticeship; and two weeks later changed my place of employment, going to work for

Thanet Press, Margate. I also left the family home and went to live in lodgings.

I quickly settled to working for Thanet Press but finding suitable lodgings proved more difficult. My arrival in Margate coincided with the heyday of the English seaside resort and Margate, together with Ramsgate and, to a lesser extent Broadstairs, were among the most popular holiday resorts. During the summer months many thousands of visitors came to Thanet, arriving by all methods of transport, including the paddle steamers which provided a regular service from London (Tower Bridge), Southend and the Medway towns. All the hotels, guest houses, etc. were full to capacity and on the sands it was difficult to find space to sit. As a

consequence finding lodgings at a price which I could afford was not easy, except during the winter months, when accommodation could be obtained for a 'song'. But by Easter the landlady would want you off the premises, for the holiday rate was much higher.

By the early Spring of 1938, and after I had experienced two indifferent lodgings, a friend, Cyril Plater, suggested that I call and see a Mrs Fletcher who, together with her husband and three children lived at Westbrook, a residential part of Margate. A few days later I saw the 'lady of the house' who invited me in to the lounge and when she left the room to make me a drink my eyes focused on the photograph of a pretty young lady which stood on the mantelpiece. Two weeks later Mrs. Fletcher's niece came down from London and stayed for the weekend and we were introduced. Her name was Lilian Roffey and seven years later we were married. Had it not been for the War we would have married sooner.

The next eighteen months was a happy period for us both and would have been happier but for the constant threat of WWII. After my long apprenticeship when I had very little money for leisure hours I suddenly found that money was no problem. I bought a small car, a four-year old Morris Minor, and this provided much enjoyment.

It was at this time that I joined the Territorial Army and in June 1939 attended the annual camp held in Somerset. In July Lily and I toured Devon and Cornwall and on the 24 August I was 'called up'. On that Thursday evening I left my lodgings for the last time, leaving behind my car, bicycle and other possessions, 'Aunt' Lil (Mrs Fletcher) stood at the gate to see me leave. I walked down the road with my kitbag on my shoulder and before turning the corner I looked back to see 'Aunt' Lil still standing at her gate. She waved and I waved back before heading for the Drill Hall. At that point I ceased being Lionel Sole, civilian and became Gunner Sole, L H, 768873. I was to keep that number, but not that rank, for six-and-a-half years. It is a number which I will never forget.