

Chapter 4: Grandad and His Friends Entertain Themselves

In addition to his family, grandad had a number of close friends with whom he socialised. Mostly, he knew these friends through chapel and their families were also friends. These friends included Albert Robinson, Willie (later Billie) Clover and Len Teece. Grandad recorded walking around various local places including Balls Lane, the forest, the Quarries¹, Southwell Road, Summit and Wilson's Fields². They also rode their bikes together. For example, on 5th May 1915, grandad noted "at night I had a ride & Cyril's chain broke on his bike & Willie had to pull me home from Sutton". Places they cycled included [Annesley Station](#), [Creswell Crag](#)s, Daybrook, Huthwaite, Linby, Mansfield, Mutton Hill, Newstead, Nottingham, Nuncargate, Papplewick and Pinxton. On at least one occasion, Albert and Grandad took his nephew Leonard with them – "I took Lalla a ride round Cauldwell Dam³ with A Robinson". In July 1914, he noted "Albert & I had a ride round Cauldwell Dam had to hurry home because of the rain. Him and W Clover cleaned my bike. We all went to Kings Palace". Most of the places they went were within a 6-8 mile radius but some places, e.g. Nottingham and Creswell Crag were 15-20 miles away.



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Creswell Crag



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PORTLAND PARK, KIRKBY-IN-ASHFIELD

A postcard from Portland Park in Kirkby dated 7 September 1915. It was sent to a Miss E M Barratt in Leicester by George who said, "I am just about to set off for Selston again. I have had a very happy time here. Good meetings & fine people. Hope you are feeling happy & well. Am expecting letter tomorrow. Best love George"

¹ According to the book, "Kirkby & District from Old Photographs" (p36), this is a local term for Portland Park. Some [areas have been quarried for limestone](#) and so the park is known locally as 'The Quarries'. There are a number of postcards of Portland Park/the Quarries included in the book by David Ottewell entitled "Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Annesley on Old Picture Postcards" – see numbers 10-13, 17-19. Number 13 is the one shown above and Number 19 is the one overleaf that I licensed from Inspire. There are also photos of Portland Park in the book "Kirkby & District from Old Photographs" by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee (pp26-27, p29, p36, p39, p91, p106) and in their other book "Kirkby & District: A Second Selection" (p38, p40, pp69-76 and p124). Mum/grandad had some photos from the Quarries (see Chapter 31). According to Edith Searson, in her book(let) "I Remember" (p28), she and her family went for a walk in the Quarries with two other families after evening service on the first Sunday they were in Kirkby.

² I presume this is referring to Job Wilson – for an explanation of his fields see the article "Walking to Larch Farm" in Chapter 3.

³ See Chapter 52.

Lovers' walk in the Quarries in 1900



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Grandad only really cycled in the summer months, between March and October. During winter, he stored his bike away in the family coalhouse. He was interested in other forms of transport and documented the development of the railway and “motor buses” in Kirkby. In 1914, he noted several walks up to look at the new railway, including with his brother Cyril. In June 1914, he noted that motor buses started running from Mansfield to Bulwell and that, in July 1914, they introduced a new timetable which involved buses running on Sundays. His brother Jim had a motorbike and sidecar and grandad noted going out in the sidecar at different times.

The friends’ main social activity was attending one of the local cinemas, the [Star](#)⁴ or the [Kings Palace](#)⁵. They attended once or twice per week and, during this period, grandad saw more than 160 films. In July 1914, at the Star, he saw a film of the King and Queen’s visit to Nottingham the previous week. In August 1914, he noted seeing “war pictures” at Kings Palace. In September 1915, the Kings Palace started a continuous performance, that is, where the film looped continuously and people could enter at any point. This had already been happening at the Star. Sometimes, there were

The **Star Theatre** opened in January 1914. It was a lowish building of brick and iron construction. On 20th September 1930, The “Overland Telegraph” became its first ‘talkie’. In 1932, it was taken over by Kirkby Pictures Ltd. who also operated the Regent Cinema 100 yards away along Kingsway. The Star Theatre was closed in the late 1950s and later became a garage.

The **Kings Palace** opened in August 1912 and was built for and operated by Sutton & Kirkby Picture Palaces Ltd. It was equipped with a Pictoretone sound system in 1930. The Kings Palace closed in 1961. It was used as a bingo club and then a garage which operated into the early 1990s. The building was demolished by 2016 and the land now forms part of a car park for an Aldi supermarket.

⁴ There is a photo of this cinema in the book “Kirkby & District from Old Photographs” by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee, p108 – and this photo also appears in Gerald Lee’s book “Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered” (p74). There is also an excellent description – with personal recollections – of the three cinemas in Kirkby by Gerald Lee in his book entitled “Kirkby-in-Ashfield Yesterday Remembered” in Chapter 15, p70. The third cinema, the Regent, opened in 1930 so was not open at this point.

⁵ There is a photo of this cinema in the book “Kirkby & District from Old Photographs”, by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee, p103. There is another photo in their second book “Kirkby & District: A Second Selection” (p94) (and this photo also appears in Gerald Lee’s book “Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered” (p73)). On the same page is a photo of the garage which replaced it and which operated into the early nineties.

variety shows/turns, particularly at Kings Palace. Grandad recorded seeing performing dogs, various forms of magic, an escapologist, a blind musician, boxing, a one-legged dancer and a man who could lift twelve men!



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Star Cinema, Kirkby in 1950



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Interior of Star Cinema, Kirkby in 1950

From 1917, it appears that granddad spent more time reading. He started recording the books he was reading, usually on a Sunday. Over the two years of 1917 and 1918 he recorded reading almost one hundred different books.

One activity that granddad and his family engaged in puzzled me for a while. For example, in October 1914, he records “*Mama Olive & Lalla went to Pinxton **wakes***”. I was baffled as I only knew the term “wake” in relation to funerals! However, [Google](#) once again came to my rescue, telling me that the term can be used as a noun relating to an annual festival and holiday in some parts of northern England. Granddad and his friends visited various towns and villages for their wakes. In July 1914, they went to Sutton Wakes and he touched a snake! They also went to the wakes in Kirkby which seemed to be held every October. In 1918, he recorded a serious accident at the wakes in which he claimed a six year old boy had “*his head cut off*”.⁶

Throughout his life, granddad was interested in music and musical instruments. The family had a piano and, in 1917, granddad started learning to play. In 1915, he spent time visiting the Waites family who had acquired a “*Zonophone*”.⁷ Towards the end of 1915, he bought a concertina. In 1918, he bought a new Edeophone concertina⁸ and traded in the old one. He bought music and a tutor to go with it and started practising with Minnie, an accomplished singer. In March 1918, Joe gave him “*a music book with empty lines in it*” and granddad started copying music out.



One of the things that I remember about granddad was that he was always making things, particularly out of wood, including things for us, his grandchildren. It is clear, from his diaries, that he started this from an early age. During this period he made a gate, windmills, a bench and a pulley (to lift his bike to store it in the coalhouse). He modified his bookcase by adding additional shelves. For his nephews, he made a rabbit hutch, a “*waggon*” and a crane from Meccano.

⁶ There is a description of wakes, fairgrounds and circuses on the [Huthwaite online website](#). Kirkby wakes on Pond Street are described in some detail in “*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered*” by Gerald Lee (pp49-54), in “*Horses, Herbs and a Cockatoo*” by Mark Ashfield (pp47-52) and in “*I Remember*” by Edith Searson (pp40-41 and p61).

⁷ Zonophone was a company, later [owned by HMV](#), which produced a type of what became known as gramophones.

⁸ Manufactured by [Lachenal](#) and distinctive because of having 12 sides.