

## Gl glimpses of the past

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### *1915-1917 Experience with Print*

Another extract from the memories of Budge Adams.

I have said earlier that 1915 was a year of great significance for me and it is certain that our return to Castle Street set the pattern of my adult life. The shortage of staff resulting from my half-brother and Charles Southey going off to war and 'Nimble' Burton being called up for war service early in 1916 was more than critical. It left my father almost on his own (a frail Miss Wells was still with him) and in a business such as ours, with its dual base, one man working almost alone cannot earn enough to support a family. And so I began working in the shop - if what I did can be so described. Whether I was pressed into it, persuaded or enticed I cannot remember - I like to think that I went into it of my own volition.

By the end of 1915, at 6 years old, I was capable of doing Miss Wells's job, feeding the hand-striker ruling machine, and to do so I stood on a box nine or ten inches high. In no sense was this the exploitation of child labour; it was an activity requiring only a moderate degree of manual dexterity and it was something that I wanted to do. I 'worked' in very short snatches, ten minutes or so at a time, and this also suited my ailing father who amongst his other jobs was the pen ruler. As he became more and more unwell the work he was able to do became less and less and the business thus declined until it was forced to close down. The workshops below the living quarters then again became my playground and so continued until we

opened up again after Charlie Southey's return from the war.

During this time I would play with quads and spaces on a 'stone' in the comp shop, mostly building castles and getting my fingers very black with the lead of which the quads were made and the ink - black, of course - that adhered to them. Very soon I was aware of the inter-relationships within the 'American' points system (I questioned why it was called 'American' when it was used in England. ~ later I knew why) and also that pearl and mignon, burgoise, brevier, great- and longprimer, pica and double-pica, type sizes that had been used for hundreds of years, had no inter-relationship and were by then anachronisms, though I am sure I didn't then know either the meaning or the use of that word. My father, I am sure, realised the value of all this and could see that I was subconsciously absorbing much of the knowledge that would be so necessary to me in the life that was, apparently, already mapped out for me. When my father could again get about, he taught me to set type and to find the 'nick' in the letter without looking for it so that, again without looking, I could put the letter in the composing stick both right way up and right way round.

The box I used to stand on to feed the ruling machine, about two feet square and say ten inches high, had a hinged lid and was known as the 'Stationery Box' and it contained the shop's entire stock of visiting and memorial cards in all their sizes and varieties. Later my father bought a lovely

mahogany cupboard with five shelves and panelled doors and the name was upgraded to 'Stationery Cupboard'. It had originally been a cupboard for the storage of revolvers and signal pistols in a ship's captain's cabin, and was recovered from a ship being broken up by the Stanlee Shipbreaking Company at East Cliff, Dover. At that time the names 'Eastern Docks' and 'Western Docks' had not been invented. Sometimes the eastern area was referred to as the 'Admiralty Dockyard,' but mostly the term used was 'The Dockyard'. The cupboard was fixed to the wall immediately inside the old forwarding shop, the back room on the ground floor at No. 37. For many years I kept the 'Stationery Box' because of my sentimental attachment to it. It was the first item of ancillary equipment I ever used to help me to do a job and although it was still at Castle Street when I returned from the war, I lost sight of it and don't know what became of it.

Towards the end of 1915 there began a chapter of accidents that was to have far reaching effects on the family business. The young woman who worked for us and whose name I cannot now recall, left the firm 'to go into munitions'. Early in 1916 'Nimble' Burton was called up and towards the end of that year Miss Wells died. My father was thus left to manage alone, and with disastrous results. He worked hard and for long hours in an effort to support his family and around about March 1917 when I was approaching eight years of age, he collapsed and spent the next two years on a sick bed. Possibly the skills of modern medical science would not now allow this to happen but it appears that at that time 'the state of the art' looked upon retirement to bed as normal. To this day I do not know the actual nature of his illness

though in later years my mother, without actually saying what it was, implied it resulted from gross over-working without any assistance.

To me it was doubly tragic because though I still played in the shop I was forbidden to move or operate any piece of machinery - my one desire - and an eagle eye was kept on me to prevent me 'pie-ing' a case of type. But then, as my mother became more and more occupied with looking after a very sick husband I was left very much to my own devices. I wonder if my father worried himself about what I was doing in the shop below. I can't remember doing anything particularly catastrophic but I was really learning the whys and the wherefores of paper and ink, of type and ruling pens and leather and glues and all the things covered by the wide diversity of activities in the workshop of a jobbing printer and bookbinder. Whilst sick in bed my father contracted pleurisy and at one time his life was in the balance. Dr Kent, who daily monitored my father's condition, called one day and finding him very sick, took off his coat, his waistcoat, his collar and alternately massaged and watched his patient. I know little of the facts of pleurisy, or indeed of any other illness, but as I watched Dr Kent's diligent and exhausting efforts I realised he was saving my father's life.

My mother kept the doctor going with frequent shots of whiskey and I can see him now, after all this time, flopped back in an armchair, shattered (exhausted is the proper word), after this very long period of intense physical and mental effort. Always my father had a half-bottle each of Dunville's V.R. Irish Whiskey and Holland's De Kuyper's Gin at his bedside but this was the only occasion when I saw either bottle touched.