

### Laundry Ladies and Mum Bunker.

Towards my first departure from Burnside I spent nearly one year working in the laundry in charge of a steam boiler, which was limited to 25lb per square inch steam pressure. I also loaded and unloaded the reciprocating washing machine and the belt driven centrifuge drying machine - a spin dryer in fact. Looking back on it now I realise this was more responsibility than a fourteen year old boy should have had.

Six or more laundry ladies folded, sorted and ironed ceaselessly. I remember little cast iron stoves, heated by coal which I had to refurbish constantly. These heated the solid irons which were held in many layers of cloth to prevent burnt hands. The irons were rubbed with beeswax to stop them from sticking, and their heat was tested by spitting on them. They smoothed the wrinkles out of countless hundreds of dresses and shirts and pants from Monday morning to Friday evening.

Every Home was rostered to supply the laundry ladies with a hot meal at midday, and it was my task to go to each Home in turn to collect this meal which was religiously prepared and always piping hot, served on a cloth covered tray. I dared not stumble.

There was nowhere to put it down, nowhere to rest the tray. From the outer Homes to the laundry it often became a form of torture. But the ladies were so sweet and kind to me I could not let them down by spilling their food. They earned every mouthful of their hot midday meal.

Helping with the ironing meant folding the sheets, stretching them from corner to corner, flapping out the wrinkles and then passing them through the mangle. There were three hundred boys and two hundred girls to wash and iron for week after week. No, I could never forget the laundry ladies.

Every Friday evening on pay day each one gave me sixpence, and the Head Lady gave me one shilling. Every penny was meticulously put aside and accounted for. I must have twelve to fourteen pounds when I left the Homes.

I can still remember their names. Mrs Robinson, Mrs Webb, Mrs Lutherburrow, Mrs Simpson, Mrs Lindsay, Mrs Crutcher and Mrs Bunker.

Most of all Mrs Bunker. Mum, as she became known to lots of boys from Burnside, who in the betwixt and between of gaining worldly knowledge needed a little stop over now and again. For fifteen shillings a week there was always a bed and three meals a day for Doug and Jack and me, Les, Ralph and countless

others. Besides this she looked after Jessie, Peter and Penny. She always had a brood of children to watch grow up.

She suffered the tragic loss of her only son, Jimmy. Doug, Jimmy, myself and a few other friends had been swimming and diving, and proving we had touched bottom by bringing up a handful of mud, a stick or a tin. Doug and I went home at one o'clock. Jimmy stayed swimming and at five o'clock we heard the sad story. Jimmy had collapsed on the bank and not recovered.

Dear Mum. No matter how I tried I could never replace your Jimmy.

Very many years later at her funeral Doug, Jack and I in attendance with all her relatives were asked "And who are you boys?" In unison we replied, "Just a few of Mum Bunker's chickens."

\*\*\*\*\*