

PART ONE

My first job when I left school in the summer I was 16, was with the Blackpool Rubber Company, a fine sounding name, but it was an inconspicuous shop fitted with wooden racks filled with car tyres of different sizes, and a small office in the corner with a wooden bench with typewriter and chair. The owner was out most of the time trying to sell the tyres and when there was a phone enquiry for an emergency sale I was too inept then to have checked properly which tyre sizes we had in stock. So by the end of the winter the shop closed.

It was a time of great unemployment and I lived at Fleetwood a small fishing town ten miles to the north of Blackpool and secretarial work was rarely advertised. My family was poor and I was the eldest of five children who were still at school. So each week I travelled to Blackpool to go to the library to read the weekly Blackpool Gazette & Herald issued on Friday and look at the "Situations Vacant". My father was an electrician on the old London Midland & Scottish Railway so I could travel at quarter fare which was 2 1/2d.

However this particular week I went to Blackpool on Monday - why I can't remember now - but perhaps because there was always a long queue of people waiting to read the paper, as that is where you went if you couldn't afford to buy one, and I was very surprised and pleased to find an advertisement "Office Junior required by Swallow Sidecar & Coachbuilding Company" so I set off as quickly as possible to find the place in Cocker Street.

Immediately inside the factory door on the left was the office. It had timber to desk height topped by opaque glass, and there was an "Enquiry" window. It was there I first saw Alice Fenton who asked me to wait. She had very striking colouring - a pink complexion with rosy cheeks and hazel eyes and (I thought) the most beautiful hair I had ever seen. Parted in the centre it waved down her cheeks into a long plait which ended in a curl stretching nearly to her waist. My hair was brown and very short, and I thought she looked very efficient and businesslike in a dark dress with small white collar. The ground floor of the factory had a large enclosed paint shop opposite the office. It was painted white, and I was told later that it had a special floor to make it dust-free for the painting of the Swallow car bodies. The sidecars were painted upstairs in a different part of the building. There was a big door at the back of the paint shop where the chassis were received. There was also a very large lift, I think the largest in the north of England, used to transport the bodies to the ground floor for painting and mounting.

Later I was asked to come into the office for interview by Mr Lyons who dictated a letter I had to type. He also tested me on percentages and decimals which I found very easy. At that time the school leaving age was fourteen, and those who stayed on further were taught shorthand and English as an extra subject, but I had to pick up typing myself, as my parents could not afford to pay for the tuition. Anyone over fourteen was also

able to go to evening classes so by the time I was seventeen I had been going to night school for three years. I took a Commercial course on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday and French on Wednesday. In April 1928 when I was interviewed by Mr Lyons we were taking exams for the intermediate diploma of the R. S. A.

I was very nervous at that first interview with Mr Lyons - in fact I was always nervous of him and felt unable to do my best on any occasion he asked me to do anything for him. I was very grateful when he asked me to start and offered me a wage of 10/- per week. Afterwards Alice Fenton told me that on the previous Saturday morning there had been a long queue of applicants for the job, and they were surprised when after I had left he told the staff that he had asked me to start and that at least I didn't "smell of scent"! I can only think that as usual he was very very busy when I presented myself and when I passed the test it was an easy way to finish the matter so he could turn his attention to more important business.

I found I was not to be in the main office with the others - Miss Atkinson who was a quiet mature 35-year-old, and Mr Lyon's Secretary, the Company Secretary Mr Lee, and Alice Fenton the general office girl. The smaller inner office where I had been interviewed was shared by Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons, but the one communal telephone was in the outer office. I was upstairs in the stores office where Mr Whittaker was in charge, which was a small piece of the stores partitioned off with a skylight for a window. Mr Whittaker had originally started as a sidecar salesman, but he had been brought off the road to attend to the buying side of the business which was increasing with the advent of car production. We also dealt with service and spares orders for the sidecar business. Purchase orders, advice notes and invoices all came within our sphere and this is where I found my experience at night school so very useful. For some reason I remember spare balljoints for the different makes of motorcycles always being in demand, and aluminium sidecar polish which Harry Teather made up to a "secret" recipe in a 5 gallon drum and which retailed at 1/9d per tin.

Harry Teather was one of the earliest employees having started at Swallow in 1923 in Bloomfield Road. His first job had been to make wooden crates in which the sidecars were packed for delivery by rail to the motorcycle dealers. He had just been moved from the sidecar paint shop to take charge of the stores. The paint shop was directly beneath the stores and manned by Cyril Marshall (Mr Walmsley had said that that was far too fancy a name for him, so everyone called him "Sam"). He was an accomplished pianist and member of an hotel orchestra in the evenings. Harry Teather played the violin and at lunchtime they would transcribe music, to save them having to buy it in town. I found that most of the apprentices were recent additions to the staff, probably after the move from Bloomfield Road, as also were Cyril Holland the draughtsman who had a large easel and drawing board in a corner near the window. He came from Wolverhampton as did the Marsh brothers whose families were still in the midlands who were in charge of the new car paint shop downstairs. On the anvil was Jack Beardsley, with a young boy nearby whose job it was to saw

off the starting handles received with the chassis kit, for them to be made suitable for the different Swallow radiators.

In charge of the shop however was Harry Gill, not then 21 years of age. He started with the partners in the very earliest days of 1922. In later years Mr Lyons was quoted as saying he started with "three men and a boy" and Harry Gill was the boy to whom he referred. He remembers that in the early days the firm was a very family affair, and he would often be asked to take Mr and Mrs Lyons Snr. out in the family car, a Clyno.

On one occasion there was a visit by a friend of Mr Lyons in the very early days, the owner of an Austin 7hp fitted with a two-seater Gordon England body. This had a "beetle" back which opened to display a fabric covered spare wheel. Harry Gill noticed that this coachwork made a great impression on Mr Lyons and is quite sure it gave him the first idea to progress further into the production of car bodies himself when the opportunity arose, and was a turning point in the development of the firm.

Alice Fenton had started in Bloomfield Road in 1925. She had previously been employed by Mr Lyons' parents who owned a large music shop near the Winter Gardens, though she had taken a Commercial Course at school. She was an accomplished pianist and would often be asked to sit in the shop window at one of the grand pianos to play, to attract the passers-by, as everyone then bought sheet music, whether it was "good" music or the popular kind, and it was Mr and Mrs Lyons Snr. who recommended her to their son when he was requiring an additional girl in the office.

I became very friendly with Alice and I remember the summer of 1928 as being a particularly happy one, with the sun always shining (though it probably wasn't). My train from Fleetwood arrived at 8.50am so I had to run through the streets to be in time for the office. I can vividly recall the buskers playing outside the small guest houses where visitors would be sitting in the bay windows having breakfast, often with the window open if the morning was fine enough, and throwing pennies to the buskers. It was the summer of "My Blue Heaven" and "Bye Bye Blackbird". Hearing them played on saxophone and trumpet always got the day off to a good start for me. I enjoyed working at "The Swallow" very much. It was a free and easy "young" atmosphere, though everybody was always very busy working. Jack Beardsley, in charge of the anvil, belonged to a choir and had a very fine voice, and I enjoyed listening to the men and boys in the "shop" whistling the popular tunes. It was common then for everyone to go home for midday dinner but I took sandwiches and Alice used to invite me to walk with her on the promenade part of the way home as she lived in Blackpool south and Cocker Street was in Blackpool north - so we would stride along to save bus fare talking and laughing and rolling round at something we found very funny.

Alice really opened a whole new world to me, because in between laughing, we would discuss music. I had had piano lessons, but she was far more expert and had a far bigger repertoire. We also discussed the shows in Blackpool. There was really a wonderful selection that year. I remember "The Desert Song", and "The

Student Prince", and I remember Raymond Massey at the Grand Theatre in "Merchant of Venice", as well as all the big music hall stars. One of the main attractions of Blackpool for holidaymakers at that time was the wonderful galaxy of shows from which to choose, when there was no television. Gradually Alice and I began to meet for Saturday evenings out. We went dancing together to the Winter Gardens in dresses 2" above the knees which was fashionable then. I don't think Alice had been used to going out on Saturdays either and had spent most of her time studying - "A den of iniquity" my father called Blackpool - but she was always careful we danced together. We also discussed books and literature in which she was more advanced and suggested better books that I might find in the library to read in the train on the way home. Agatha Christie was one of my favourite story tellers but Alice introduced me to Michael Arlen, Ernest Hemmingway and Ernest Raymond.

She passed on to me John O'London's Weekly, a contemporary literary review she had continued from school days (now out of print) which I found hard to digest. Alice and I became very close and I was very impressed and flattered to have her friendship.

It was a nasty surprise to see a notice on the time clock that autumn to say the firm was moving to Coventry, and would any employee who wished to go sign their names. It gave a list of addresses where lodgings could be found. Harry Teather said he would not be going as he could not live away from home on his present wage, and would join the navy instead! I just thought it was the end of my job. Alice confided in me that Mr Lyons had asked her (not Miss Atkinson) to go to Coventry as his secretary and that her parents had agreed. Poor Miss Atkinson was very upset. I had started night school again for the finals of the R. S. A with all my pals. When I worked late and missed the train I travelled home on the tram which ran along the coast, often enjoying the glorious sunsets over sand and sea, and thinking my days of enjoying Blackpool were numbered as was my life with Alice. I think it was at Alice's instigation that one day I timidly knocked on Mr Lyons' office door, and asked if I too could go to Coventry. "What!" he said, "come to Coventry? How old are you - 17? Have you asked your parents? No! Well go and find another job" - which I did, with the Boston Deep Sea Fishing Company at Fleetwood.

Alice said Mr Lyons thought it would be a good idea for her to try putting up her hair, to make her look a little older and more mature. Poor Alice tried all week to put up her hair in various styles, all of which she thought were ugly, and because it was so long and heavy it kept falling down. In desperation on the last Saturday before she was to leave on the Big Adventure, she decided she must have it all cut off and bobbed. So I went with her that Saturday afternoon when she had made an appointment with one of the best hairdressers in Blackpool, and she wept as she was shorn. We put the big curl at the end of the plait in a box, and brought it home. Mrs Fenton had invited me and about six of Alice's other friends to a farewell evening. Most of them were from school days, and Alice's younger sister was there too. They

all seemed a very talented lot to me. One girl gave a piano recital, and Alice played "The Rustle of Spring" by Chopin, with very clever fingering. Another girl had a car - it was unusual for a girl to have learned to drive so young and she drove me back to the station with Alice to catch the train, where I said a final goodbye.

I still treasure the poem she wrote as a keepsake in my autograph book - from Ernest Raymond's book "Tell England" :-

"For all emotions that are true and strong,
And utmost knowledge, I have lived for these -
Lived deep, and let the lesser things live long.
The everlasting hills, the lakes, the trees,
Who'd give their thousand years to sing this song.
Oh life, and Man's high sensibilities,
Which I into the face of death can sing,
O Death, thou poor and disappointed thing,
Strike if thou will, and soon strike breast and brow,
For I have lived, and thou canst rob me now!
Only of some long life that ne'er has been
Is mine! I hold it firm beneath thy blow,
And dying take it with me where I go"

This was a faith Alice always lived by - to live life to the full. I didn't know that evening that within a fortnight I would receive a telegram asking if I was still interested in coming to Coventry.

PART TWO

I had been working for the Boston Deep Sea Fishing Company for a fortnight when on returning home at Saturday lunchtime, I found a telegram waiting "If interested Coventry call at Bispham Road Sunday 3pm. Lyons" (a telegram was nine words for one shilling). My Mother was away for the weekend, but my spirit of adventure was stirred, and in the six months I had known her Alice Fenton and I had become close friends. My father said if I really wanted to go to live in Coventry he supposed it would be alright if I lived with Alice whom my parents had already met on two or three occasions.

On Sunday morning I marched down the aisle to present colours at the annual Armistice Day Service, and told my fellow girl guides that I might be leaving home. I asked my sister two years younger to come with me, and after lunch we caught a tram to Bispham, a village to the north of Blackpool where Mr Lyons lived. Mrs Lyons greeted us, holding Pat her eldest daughter in her arms.

Mr Lyons asked me if I would like to join Miss Fenton (we never used Christian names) as she appeared to be lonely, and Mr Whittaker was so busy he still hadn't time to fill my post and what did my parents think about it? I replied that my mother was away for the weekend, and my father said I could go if I wished. I didn't say my father thought I would be back home again within a month. Then he asked me what wage I would need. My salary at Blackpool was 10/- per week, and this was a matter I had completely forgotten to discuss with my father, and I had not the vaguest idea of the cost of living. On inspiration I answered "35/- per week". The sum jumped to my mind because I knew it was the salary Miss Atkinson earned, and as Mr Lyons' private secretary she was the only real business woman I had met. "Do you think you can live on 35/- per week?" Mr Lyons asked, and I had to reply that I did not know. I didn't know either that Alice had been offered the princely sum of 55/- per week. She was 19 years old at that time with a strong personality, very attractive and also very ambitious.

It was arranged that Mr Lyons and Mr Walmsley would collect me at Blackpool North station at 9am the following morning, and from there we went to collect Alice (whom they had brought home for the weekend) from her home at Blackpool south.

I was not used to riding in a car and enjoyed the journey very much, though we were both very subdued and only replied when we were spoken to, but I remember exchanging glances of glee with Alice, thinking of all the fun we would have together. Mr Lyons pointed out the various towns as we drove through them, until we were near enough to Coventry to see the City of the Three Spires. Mr Lyons said it was a toss-up whether we would end up at Wolverhampton or Coventry, and he hoped they had made the right decision.

We were delivered to our lodgings, a terraced house with no bathroom just in time for lunch and met the young couple with

whom we were to live. At that time most workers went home for lunch and I remarked on the great number of men on bicycles dashing in every direction. It was about 12.30pm and we had covered the 150 miles in less than 3 1/2 hours, which was very good motoring considering the narrow twisting roads we had to use.

After lunch we walked quickly to the factory. We were talking, talking, talking and Alice pointed out the various big factories along the way, the like of which I had not seen before. We turned from Holbrook Lane up a narrow unnamed road very muddy and full of potholes, lying between the great Dunlop factory and White and Poppes, a big engineering firm which had expanded during the First World War for shell filling. It rained unceasingly - in fact it seemed to rain for weeks and weeks after I arrived and everywhere seemed damp and dismal. At the end of the Dunlop works the road was concreted and widened out to what was known as the "Dumps" - these were grassy mounds covering air raid shelters which had been built to accommodate the shell fillers. To the right, a little off the road was a series of four purpose-built factories, symmetrical but each separate from the other, built by the Government for special war work. On the left in the distance, could be seen the "tin-huts" - a development of small bungalows built to house the war workers, and still occupied. The first factory boldly bore the name "Holbrook Bodies" and ours was the second factory, but in those early days it bore no name.

The big doors were flung wide open in spite of the cold and wet to let out fumes rising from two red-hot road mender's coke braziers placed in the main passage. Harry Teather came out of the stores to greet us and say he had had to report to Mr Walmsley that the new electric cable that provided light and heat had been stolen over the weekend. The nearest electric service point had been on the main road, so an electric cable had been stretched along the surface of the muddy road so that work could proceed - but everything was now at a standstill until Mr Lyons could persuade the Electricity Board that Emergency Service was required. Harry Teather always maintained he thought the cable suppliers had stolen it back again so that the firm had to pay for it twice and we could tell this was a sad blow to the partners.

A new office was still in course of erection, just inside the large factory doors to the left, just as it had been in Blackpool, with the joiners hammering the finishing touches. It was much larger than the old place, with six offices altogether, with a dado of dark wooden panelling with glass above, and an "Enquiry" window. A wooden bench was fitted inside the first four offices. Like the floors it was covered with brown lino, but when I arrived we all sat on orange boxes, topped by a leatherette cushion made in the Trim shop, until office chairs could be delivered. A wide passage divided the office block from the stores where racks were still being fitted and Harry Teather was busy sorting out the stock he had carefully packed in boxes in Blackpool, but which had been unceremoniously dumped on the floor when it arrived.

Mr Whittaker and I occupied the first office. In one corner stood the tall steel Roneo filing cabinet, and I looked in horror at the huge pile of letters, invoices and files stacked on the bench, with the telephone and my old Oliver typewriter, waiting for attention.

The second office was designated "Secretary and Accounts" and was empty as the former company secretary had not transferred and had found another job. The next office was Alice Fenton's domain and marked "Sales Dept." while Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons shared the next. It was eventually furnished with a carpet square and a large desk and chairs. The end offices were left empty to be used as "waiting rooms" though there was rarely anyone in them. Most people who were waiting - representatives to see Mr Whittaker, or perhaps a customer who had expressed a wish to collect his car personally, were much happier standing at the front of the factory watching all the activity going on.

That week Mr Lyons and Mr Walmsley were in the process of appointing a new Company Secretary, and there was a long stream of applicants coming for interview. Eventually Mr Walmsley came out of their sanctum to announce "Well! we've chosen him - he seems to know the job and is the only B... who came up that filthy road without an umbrella". We met Mr Huckvale the new Company Secretary the following week. He was more mature than the rest of us, probably late thirties and came from the Singer Motor Company which then was a large flourishing organisation with a large pool of typists all working under supervision in one big room, and he must have found the atmosphere of hurry and scramble at Swallow very different to cope with. Harry Teather and myself were the youngest members of the "Blackpool" team and it was Mr Huckvale who looked after us, though we were always in Mr Whittaker's Department, and who came round to tell us we could expect an increase in our pay packets. Mr Huckvale was eventually made a Director of Jaguar Cars and stayed with the firm until his death.

In the coming days I explored the new factory with interest, and at the weekends Alice and I gradually explored Coventry, the city we were to make our home. In many ways it was very old fashioned, quite medieval in fact, and very fascinating - so very different from Blackpool, which was modern, and brash and bracing. After giving £1 to the landlady for board and lodging, I took my first wage packet to town and spent the remaining 15/- on a pair of rubber wellington boots to walk up the muddy road.

PART THREE

Our lodgings were not very good - a small terrace house without a bathroom - though neither of us enjoyed a bathroom in our own homes either. Mrs Fenton had asked that Alice be accommodated in "a good Christian home". We found Joe who worked at Alfred Herberts, the large local tool manufacturing company, reputed to be the biggest in the world at that time, and his wife (another Alice) a childless couple in their early thirties, who were very welcoming when Alice arrived a fortnight earlier, and accepted me equally kindly, and I shared Alice's room and bed. They sang hymns round the piano and would not understand why we were not keen to join them when our leisure was so limited - and more than anything else could not understand why we came home from work so late - often after 10pm when we walked home. We would find them standing at each side of the mantelpiece with their mugs of cocoa in their hands, and would offer us nothing more to eat so late in the evening, even though we had not eaten since lunchtime - and from their expression it was easy to guess they thought we were up to no good.

However, Alice and I delighted in our companionship, and would roll with laughter along the pavements and up the muddy road on our way to the office - we were young indeed! Each day at work seemed full of excitement and challenge. Always there seemed to be a crisis of some sort, and we never seemed to achieve as much work as there was waiting. I spent the day answering the phone and the enquiry window, checking against goods received and filing invoices waiting to be checked before being passed to the "Accounts" for payment, and issuing buying orders for supplies and instructions to the stores for spares to be posted off, mainly sidecar parts, and attempting to answer any letters I could so that Mr Whittaker could pass them for posting to save time with dictation.

Mr Whittaker invariably spent all day standing in a corner of the office wreathed in smoke, arguing with one sales rep. after another. They were never invited to sit, as we had only two chairs and Mr Whittaker said it would encourage them to stay too long, and there was always a queue waiting to see him when he arrived at the office. These were the days of depression and we were an unusually very busy firm.

Alice inaugurated a card system for car orders received. When a body was mounted on a chassis, a card was issued to the works to be tied to that car, giving full details of the order - colour, any extras required and by whom to be collected, etc. A rack was also fixed to her office wall with a series of slits with a similar card for each car being mounted and the order to which it was allocated so that she could trace the progress of each order as it moved through the factory. All day long distributors and agents and customers would be phoning to enquire about delivery, and a glance at the rack enabled her to tell the position of the car. She became very adept at making excuses as invariably there were unforeseen hold-ups in the factory for one reason or another. This system all seems very primitive now, but it did work efficiently, and was in operation for many years even though

much greater quantities of cars were being produced. Alice soon had a clerk to help her with these important sales records and also a typist of her own to issue invoices for cars ready for collection and to acknowledge orders and answer sales queries, although she alone took dictation from Mr Lyons. Mr Huckvale in the Accounts Department also kept a record of all chassis received to check invoices for payment.

Dictation usually began about 5.30pm when the phone had stopped ringing, and often if there was a very urgent letter it would be typed and a boy despatched on bike or motorbike to the G.P.O in the city to catch the last 9pm post. Always we were deciding that "tonight we would leave earlier" in time to go to a film perhaps, and we even signed on to go to night school as we had both done at home, but inevitably we arrived as the class was finishing. We were studying French and German as occasionally letters from the continent were received at work which we tried to translate to save time instead of having to send them down to the Technical College where a master would do this.

Mr Walmsley always in the works would put his head round the office door as the evening wore on and ask "Aren't you ready yet?" and when we were, we would all walk down together.

Jack Beardsley (later Director of Engineering at Daimler) had been allocated a small brick-built building at the front of the factory which he gradually enlarged to accommodate the Blacksmiths Shop, and often in the still of the evening when we were working, we would hear his fine baritone voice ringing out - an old Victorian ballad -

"The moon has raised her lamp above,
To light the way to thee my love..."

He had married to bring his 19 year old wife down to Coventry and we knew Jack thought it was time to be going home. Harry Teather working in the stores adjoining the offices would also regale us with Chopin in a very musical whistle, and many other pieces he played on his violin.

Economy was practised in every field and nothing was ever bought out which could be made in the factory. Harry asked for a wheelbarrow to bring heavy material from the back of the stores. The men collected sets of material from the stores for each different operation on the cars. "Won't a bucket do? queried Mr Lyons, "No" said Harry, "two buckets won't do, it is all too heavy for the men to handle!" and only then did he have permission to order a barrow.

When the pangs of hunger became too strong, we would go into the works to the Mounting Shop to find Frank Morris who carried a supply of 6d. bars of chocolate in his tool box. He was one of two tool makers who had come from Triumph, but who had downed tools during their first week because there was no proper tool bench for them to work on. No experienced tool makers had been employed before and apparently this had been completely overlooked, so the carpenters had to be summoned from other jobs

to build what they required. We were grateful for Frank's kindness and in later years became firm friends of him and his wife. I seemed to be always hungry but it did me good as "Fat" was my nickname. Mr Walmsley once said "Has Fat made this putrid tea?", so I learned to make him a good strong cup, but the nickname stuck, though I lost more than 14lb during the first year in Coventry.

In those first winter months, Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons shared lodgings in a good residential road not far from where we lived and every three weeks or so would go home to Blackpool for the weekend. When Mr Lyons invited us and Mr Whittaker to go with them we were delighted. Before Christmas we would probably go home three or four times and our parents were very pleased, though my parents always thought I would be getting tired of living away from home and coming back permanently. We usually left the office about 7.30pm on Friday evening to arrive in Blackpool in time for me to catch the last tram to Fleetwood at 11pm about ten miles away. Then we would leave Blackpool at 9am on Monday morning (I would be waiting at the station) and would usually arrive in the office in time to open the post before lunchtime.

The Christmas holiday was eagerly looked forward to. During the week before Christmas both Alice and I were each given a box of chocolates by one of the agents, which was a very happy surprise, and we both saved them to take home to our families. Then imagine the thrill when we opened our wage packets to find a "Christmas" bonus inside - £7 for Alice and £5 for me. I'd never owned so much money before and we were very grateful. It never occurred to either of us to count the hours of overtime we had put in for this extra money as we were staff who were never paid overtime - and Mr Lyons again invited us to have a lift home in his car.

Many beautiful calendars were received in the post that Christmas bearing various trade names, many of which were printed in silk by a local ribbon weaver, "Cash's" now of world repute, with pictures of flowers, exotic birds and beautiful girls. I was fascinated by them and kept some for several years, and they would be collector's items now. On returning from the Christmas holiday I hung one near my typewriter, Then Mr Lyons hurrying through the office saw it. He swung round and shouted "Who's put that calendar up?" and I had to admit I had. "Then take it down at once" he said "don't you know it's bad luck to put up a calendar before New Years Day?". I didn't but have never done so since.

I thought little of it then, but now thinking back I realise what a strain Mr Lyons must have been under at the time with the worry of ensuring that his great venture would be a success.

PART FOUR

In the New Year everyone made a big effort to be more organised to reduce hold-ups in the factory to a minimum, though there were always unforeseen delays when goods were not delivered on time etc. Always there were innovations and new instructions to the suppliers to improve the product which resulted in delays in delivery of windscreens or radiators etc. and Mr Whittaker and I spent a greater time on the telephone urging delivery of material which was in short supply.

The previous summer when the Body Shop had been the first to move to Coventry, Mr Lyons had engaged a new Works Manager, Mr Etches who was experienced in bent timber assembly and large factory shop production, but who did not seem able to cope with the speed required for jobs to be done. At the end of January he quietly disappeared, and Cyril Holland came walking into the office to greet us again. He had been the Body Designer at Blackpool but had transferred to another job when the firm moved. Originally he came from Wolverhampton and his family were not particularly keen to move back again to the Midlands - but perhaps Mr Lyons had seen him during the Christmas holiday and persuaded him to rejoin the company again. Mr Lyons later said he owed a lot to Cyril Holland who was able to translate his design ideas to the drawing board.

Fred Gardner the Foreman of the saw mill came into the office to say that something must be done about a canteen and better working conditions for the men who were grumbling because ten minutes of their quarter hour tea break was taken up queuing to brew their mugs of tea from a kettle in the boiler house. There was quite a large wooden building standing off the rear of the factory so the carpenters were instructed to erect a gantry to give access, a counter was installed and a tea urn obtained and benches for the men, and Mrs Thompson engaged as "tea lady". She remained in charge of the Canteen at Jaguar as a personality until her retirement in the early '70s. Then trays of tea cakes and sticky buns were delivered daily by a local baker - and an extra lavatory was built, "Ladies Only" as by then there were extra girls working on machines in the Trimming Shop.

Our first New Years Eve in Coventry was not a happy one. In the north it was a great party night after the more quiet celebrations of Christmas. After seeing a film we walked home through the streets of the city. There seemed to be a pub on every corner from which laughter and bawdy songs could be heard, but when we arrived at our "digs" we found Joe and Alice as usual waiting to go to bed with their mugs of cocoa. We thought at least they would have had a few friends in to "let in the New Year" - so we went to bed too, and at midnight we sat up again and shared an orange and a bar of chocolate by way of celebration, and held hands and softly sang "Auld Lang Syne". Our New Year resolution was that in the spring we had better find another place to live.

Mr Whittaker and most of the others who came from Blackpool had found lodgings on a new estate further away from the city than

where we lived, but nearer to the factory, and one weekend we went to explore this new district. The houses were obviously modern and quite new, semi-detached with neat front gardens, and we decided immediately that this was a better place for us to be. We also found an advertisement in a shop window "Room to Let" and there and then set off to find the address. The road was even nicer than the first houses we had seen, wide and very new with all the garden railings painted uniformly white which gave it a very smart appearance. We knocked on the door, met the owners, viewed the bedroom and bathroom and there and then arranged to move in the following weekend. Joe and Alice received the news with some concern, but we told them that the new lodgings were nearer to the factory and Mr Whittaker could see us home. When they asked the name of our new landlord Joe was even more concerned. Didn't we know the man was a drunkard and we were moving into a den of iniquity? he asked. But now we had made the decision, and Alice said we were quite able to look after ourselves and we did not feel like changing our minds.

We found life with Bert and Sue much more relaxed and light hearted and when we came in late in the evening there would be the sound of dance music from the wireless - the orchestras of the Savoy Orpheans, Cafe de Paris, The Ambassadors Club, or the BBC Resident Orchestra with Henry Hall. We could tell as we walked down the path who was playing, and we were encouraged to dance round the small dining room and into the kitchen, which we enjoyed very much, just to let off steam after the long day. Bert was also employed at Alfred Herberts and seemed to have a good job, reconditioning very large tools which were returned to the factory for servicing and reconditioning from all over the world, and although there was depression in Coventry we knew it could not be like the bleak poverty suffered in the north. Bert boasted that he could drink eight pints of beer each evening and twelve on Saturdays, which shocked us greatly as neither of our parents ever went near a pub, but always he was kind and good-natured and jovial towards us.

When they heard that Alice played the piano, the following week a beautiful baby grand appeared as if by magic in the front room - all on easy payments, as was everything else it seemed, so that with the velvet three-piece there was hardly room for anyone to stand. Alice was a very gifted musician and revelled in the piano, and at lunchtime for half an hour we would be regaled with music she knew off by heart, Chopin, Bach and Mozart, sometimes music I had not heard before though I had had piano lessons, so I enjoyed it all very much and I too learned them by heart. When we walked home from the Saturday night film we would try to creep upstairs stealthily as Bert was usually strumming on the piano. "Now you gels" he would shout, "we can hear you, come and give us a song". Then we would go in, and Alice would play all the popular hits for half an hour or more while we sang lustily - "Sonny Boy", "Charmaine", "Babette", "Dancing with Tears in my Eyes", and many more, until she came to "Madonna", a tune taken from a piece entitled "Poem", her favourite waltz, and we knew then it was time for bed.

By Easter Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons had bought new homes and were moving their families down to Coventry. Mr Whittaker had acquired a second-hand Morris "Bullnose" Tourer and offered to take us to Blackpool for 10/- each (he was saving to be married). By then too there was an extra girl in each office and a stores clerk. We were determined to start for the holiday as early as possible, but try as we might it was probably about 9pm before each was satisfied that there was nothing else that couldn't be left until the following week. Mr Whittaker suggested it would be sensible to go to bed and make an early start next morning, but he was cried down by the rest of us, saying that if we were off by 10pm we should be home by 2am and able to sleep in the next morning. So we piled in, Mr Whittaker and Harry Teather in the front, Alice and I and Irene Cronkshaw the stores clerk and daughter of the sidecar foreman behind, with Donald Brown from the Mounting Shop sitting on the floor at our feet.

We bowled along happily for about an hour, but out in the country the fog thickened, so that when we came to a crossroads we could not tell which road to take. With the only box of matches between us Don was sent to shin up a nearby country signpost with hardly decipherable directions, but the matches flickered out before he could distinguish the names, and Mr Whittaker decided there was no other option but for us to stay where we were until the fog lifted. We spent the rest of the night singing and joking and dozing, and when we were cold, running round the car, until dawn came when we were dismayed to find we were only about 20 miles from Coventry and had been driving round in a circle. We started off again and gradually the boys with motorbikes who had started early in the morning came roaring past us one after the other, laughing and tooting and hooting in derision.

After Easter Mr Lyons decided that there should be a Works Outing - perhaps to celebrate the achievements of the long hard slog of the previous winter, and the fact that we were gradually completing orders in a reasonable time. The date was arranged for Saturday July 6th 1929 and Mr Huckvale was asked to make all the necessary arrangements. Every member of the works and staff was invited at a cost of 5/- each, which included return train journey to Blackpool and lunch at the Palatine Hotel. The train left at 3.45am! and Alice and I didn't bother to go to bed. The whole enterprise was a great success and we left Blackpool again at 12.20am on Sunday morning and arrived back in Coventry at 4.30am. What a day! but it was voted by everyone an excursion to be repeated, and filled the workers with so much enthusiasm that the Annual Outings were continued until the outbreak of war in 1939. Here is a facsimile of the Programme, and also a reproduction of the back, which I think gives an inkling into Mr Lyons' philosophy. It makes me wonder if he passed this on to Sir John Egan when he took over in 1980 and started to pull the firm "up by the boot strings" with the slogan "Quality" which was hung in all parts of the factory with such great success.

The one person conspicuously absent from the outing luncheon was Mr Whittaker, who had decided it was a good date for his wedding - his fiancée had been ill and was now much better, and also perhaps because Mr Walmsley, Mr Lyons and Mr Huckvale would

already be up in Blackpool on that date. So after lunch a line of us from the office stretched along the promenade and walked out to the small village church at Bispham to witness the ceremony and smother the bride and groom with confetti. I cannot remember if there was time for a honeymoon - perhaps a few days, and then Mr Whittaker was back, and he too had a new home in Coventry.

During the summer it was decided to use the two empty offices which had been left as waiting rooms but rarely used. Mr Lyons and Mr Walmsley were moved into the end one with Alice Fenton and the Sales Department next to them, and Mr Huckvale and Mr Whittaker were each allocated a private office. There was also a new girl at the enquiry window and a telephone kiosk was erected just inside the office entrance with a new telephone exchange with four lines where Irene Cronkshaw from the Stores was installed. On one occasion in someone's absence she took an incoming call for Mr Lyons who came out after he had finished speaking to ask who had put the call through, and commanded that she be in charge of the telephone from then on as the timbre of her voice was so good.

An advertisement was also inserted in the local paper for a Storesman, and when we walked to work the next morning we could not get up the road for the seething mass of men who came to apply. Harry Teather was celebrating his 21st birthday in June 1929 and was appalled at all these mature men confronting him. He decided to ask in only the first six applicants and even then the choice was hard, as one had war service and three children, and the next five children, etc. and all apparently as capable. It was an incident which brought us down to earth with a jolt, as we were so busy and engrossed in our work we were quite oblivious of the plight of other people.

At that time all the factories closed the first week in August for the Coventry Holiday Week, and Bert and Sue excitedly made plans for a week at Blackpool. Alice decided it would be very nice if we too could be holidaymakers instead of going home as usual, and without much thought we booked at a boarding house in Llandudno which was advertised in the local paper. Neither of us had been on holiday before except to stay with relatives and we looked upon it as a great adventure.

When we arrived at the guest house we found our room was an attic and the "sea view" a far distant glimpse from a small dormer window. Nothing daunted, we met the other guests, welcomed the change of food, sat on the beach, played pitch and putt, walked on the Great Orme and enjoyed the concerts - all things we normally left to other holidaymakers when we were at home. One day we decided to "conquer Snowdon" and climbed to the summit but were caught in a heavy rainstorm and as we had only summer clothing we were soaked to the skin by the time we arrived back. Before the end of the week we had a day trip to visit our parents to assure them we were enjoying our adventure, and the fact that we had explored fresh fields added to our feeling of independence.

Before the annual holiday week at the end of July, Mr Lyons arranged for a photographer to visit the factory and all the employees were summoned to the front of the factory for a group to be taken. This was followed by a group of the staff, and these photographs have proved to be very useful mementos in later years. I think now Mr Lyons must have done this to record their first year of achievement and also perhaps to show to Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons Senior who were vitally interested in the project and its success.

Very many years later when Sir William and Harry were both nearing retirement he rang Harry in his office. "How many men Harry do you think came down with us from Blackpool" he asked - "was it about 30?". "Well I think I can run through them" Harry replied, "let me give you their names" and Harry recalled fifteen, "can you think of anyone else?" he asked. "No" replied Sir William, "Very good Harry, thank you".

PART FIVE

Mr Walmsley and Mr Lyons spent a lot of time in the factory during the summer of 1929 deciding on design modifications to improve the little Austin-Swallow, so that it was greatly improved from the earlier model. For the first time the radiators were chromium plated. Chromium plating was new in 1930 and this very much superior highly polished untarnishable surface was hailed as a modern phenomena, so that more or less everything that was plateable was given the treatment. The shops were full of chromium plated products in the same way that plastics were about two decades later. At that time a rust-proof finish could not be guaranteed unless there was a brass base, so that at far greater expense than the former nickel-plated radiators an order was issued for 500 brass radiator shells. When these were delivered in weekly batches they were polished in the works and then sent to a local chromium plating firm for finishing and polishing, and then re-delivered individually wrapped in tissue paper against scratching. The wrapping was an added bonus from the platers to steer the order in their favour.

Mr Lyons announced that the works would close on the Saturday morning of Motor Show week and all employees could go to London for the cost of 5/-, which covered train fare and entry to Olympia. Alice and I looked forward to the day eagerly - she had worked hard, enthusiastically telling distributors and agents about the new model, and assuring them of its success. Earlier we had ordered new coats to be made in Blackpool, by Alice's cousin who was a tailoress. Alice decided on a royal blue face cloth with upright baby seal collar and mine was a maroon velour with grey sheepskin collar.

We found Olympia bright and bustling and we admired the many great imposing stands we passed before we came to the one with "Swallow Coachbuilding Company" above it, but we could not get near for the big crowd of people surging round all waiting to make a closer inspection of the cars. So we continued to explore the Show, returning later to find a very exhausted Mr Lyons and Mr Whittaker who had manned the Stand throughout the whole ten days with the help of additional car salesmen who had been loaned by Henlys.

We were introduced to Mr Henly and his partner Mr Hough, which pleased Alice greatly as they had become firm telephone friends during the past 12 months and they kindly invited us to tea in the South Restaurant. We were very thrilled to be chatting to these two mature businessmen - it made us feel sophisticated and "on the town" and when they shook hands to leave us we were each presented with a box of chocolates.

When we left a little later, we took a taxi to Piccadilly Circus, but we decided we were too tired for further sightseeing and joined a queue at a nearby cinema, only to find when we reached the box office it was "Standing Room Only". The film was "Singing in the Rain", and whenever I hear the tune I still see in my minds eye the diminutive screen far below from where we were standing at the back of the gallery on that first Motor Show evening.

After the Motor Show Mr Lyons suggested to Alice that it would give the firm a more efficient and businesslike appearance if all the office staff were dressed in black - "like Lyons waitresses" Alice had said, but nevertheless she passed on the message and we each gradually appeared in a smart new black dress, usually with a small light collar, and we all had to admit that we did look and feel a lot smarter.

During the summer the grass plots which had divided each shop in the factory had been filled in and roofed - they had been planned to minimise bomb damage in the event of an air raid in the First World War - and this provided practically double the floor space in the factory, and the empty factory next door was also acquired and cleaned and painted ready for expansion.

After the enthusiastic success of the Austin-Swallow I really remember 1930 as the year of consolidation, with order books full, production ever increasing and overtime an accepted normality. There was sometimes great curiosity on the part of new Swallow owners to visit the firm to collect a new car, though this was not encouraged and a collection firm was set up by Henlys for cars to be delivered to them and to their agents.

However I do remember on one occasion an Austin Coupe was ordered in snow-white with crimson head, wheels and interior. When the new owner came to collect, she was a young lady dressed in an outfit to match the car, white dress with red hat, shoes and gloves and a red car coat flung over her arm. That year there was quite a fashion for a young debutante to order an Austin-Swallow as a 21st birthday present. I happened to see her waiting to take delivery, and I wondered what kind of a wonderful life a person like that could have, who was so beautiful and young and charming, and obviously already had so much.

Another lady ordered a saloon with pale lilac base and the top in deep mauve with mauve upholstery and mauve umbrella to match - an umbrella fitted in the door pocket was an optional extra that year. This special order involved us in a great deal of trouble, procuring one sample after another from the paint and hide suppliers - the leather had to be specially dyed - and then special instructions issued to the stores for the material to be segregated to be sure it was available when the body went down the line.

One day I was in the Stores issuing orders for spares to be despatched when Mr Lyons came through with a letter which he flung on the desk. "Think you should do something with this boy Harry" he said and off he went. The letter was from a 17 year old Rugby School boy applying for a job in impeccable handwriting - Eric Russell. Harry started him in the stores making up car sets in boxes. This was equipment which had to be ready for the men to collect from the stores to fit to the cars as they progressed down the line and he had to work very fast. He cycled 18 miles to work each morning from the village where he lived, until he acquired a motorbike and then a car, and stayed with Jaguar until he retired as Head of Stores Engineering.

During 1929 with the factory working all-out by far the largest orders received were for the Austin-Swallow, although we were also producing bodies on the Fiat chassis and, later in the year, on the Swift and Standard Big Nine chassis. From the early days of 1928 Captain Black (later Sir John) had shown extreme interest in the firm. "The place next door", Holbrook Bodies was engaged in supplying fabric covered bodies on the Standard chassis, which were very fashionable at that time, and quite often when Alice Fenton and I were marching up the muddy road a car with Captain Black and Captain Stonehouse (Director of Holbrook Bodies) driving, would stop and offer us a lift as far as the cleaner concrete surface.

At Olympia in October 1929 these three extra models were displayed and these continued in addition to the Austin-Swallow during the 1930 season. Mr Whittaker (and I) were still "The Service Department" and dealt with service queries and complaints. Often these could be dealt with in despatching a modified part, or if there was a query I would go into the factory for advice and type a letter for Mr Whittaker's approval, and thus we were able to maintain an efficient and friendly service for owners which they always appreciated, without too much delay.

With more factory space available a portion of the Body Shop was partitioned off and so the "Experimental Department" was born, and from there in early summer emerged a completely new car built on the Wolseley Hornet chassis. We had issued various new orders of course but there did not seem to be the usual fanfare of publicity, yet I happened to be passing in the factory when I saw a little Wolseley Hornet Swallow two-seater finished in duo blue standing at the doors ready to be delivered, and I thought at the time that this surely must be the most attractive car the firm had yet produced.

It was during the spring of 1931 that Holbrook Bodies quietly gave up trading. It had been obvious for some time that the firm was not the hive of activity in the same way that Swallow was, and we did not see Captain Black and Captain Stonehouse driving up the road any more and before long that factory too was the property of the Swallow Company and also the factory at the other end of the group so that now all four belonged to the firm.

That Summer too Alice Fenton and I acquired bicycles and we spent many happy Sundays exploring the surrounding countryside - Kenilworth and Warwick and eventually Stratford-on-Avon revelling in our new found mobility. Also life in our bed-sitter was palling. A new road was being built near to where we lived and some of the semi-detached houses were standing empty. One day we enquired from the builder whether he was agreeable to let - "Yes" he answered "as long as you have a guarantor". We discussed this momentous decision lengthily and Alice asked Mr Lyons if he would be our guarantor to which he agreed and we arranged to rent at 17/6d per week. We then explored the furniture shops in town and were drawn to one which had inscribed over the window "Yours Today Four Years to Pay"! Neither of us knew what we would be doing in four years time and Alice wisely suggested we should

each be responsible for specific pieces of furniture so she bought the dining set and brown leather three-piece suite and mine was the bedroom suite. Mr Walmsley asked if we could use another bed which turned out to have beautiful brass and dark green enamel ends and looked very handsome. Fred Gardner asked if he should make up a kitchen table from wood surplus in the mill - this proved far too large for the small kitchen and the legs had to be sawn to get it through the back door. When news of our enterprise leaked out we had various visitors - mostly boys we knew in the factory, so we bought a table tennis set to amuse them and stretched it across the table even though it was the wrong width. We shared the cost of a carpet square and curtains and Harry Teather stained the surrounding floorboards. Then with Mr Whittaker's permission he fitted brown lino in the rear living room and the bedrooms.

During that summer in the Experimental Department, alongside the launch of the Wolseley Hornet models other "secret" work was in hand to provide a revised Standard 16hp chassis and a complete new body and I typed a long detailed contract with the Standard Motor Company for these special chassis to be supplied from their works, and they were christened the SS1. However the body seemed to pose many problems and suppliers would come again and again with different samples before a design could be agreed and an order placed. As time for the Motor Show grew ever closer the men involved "burned the midnight oil" and though they really needed much more time, and many decisions had yet to be taken, Mr Lyons insisted an announcement must be made by Motor Show time. He adroitly invited the Daily Express Motoring Correspondent to the factory for a preview with the result that there was a large front page spread of the car immediately prior to the opening of Olympia. The SS1 proved a sensation. The low slung body and sleek long bonnet was an entirely original conception and the Show stand was swamped the whole of the show with many more dealers clamouring to become distributors and agents.

That autumn Alice's younger sister Nancy came down from Blackpool to join us in the house, and she started work as a junior in Alice's sales office. Nancy had been a member of the Blackpool Childrens' Ballet Troupe from the age of 13, and the chosen girls were allowed time off from school for this special work. The Childrens' Ballet was a great attraction for summer visitors to Blackpool then, and Miss Rivers the teacher was a strict disciplinarian. As they grew older the best girls were transferred to the chorus of "On With the Show" on the north pier, which hosted the better known artistes of the time. However at age 17 it was decided it would be better for Nancy to join her sister instead of continuing in a dancing career, and we welcomed her to her new life with us. We bought a single bed which was installed in the corner of our bedroom so we could all be together, and we continued to have a very happy time. Nancy was shorter than Alice and more slightly built, her hair was a paler gold and her colouring not so vivid. The girls were usually together and became very well-known in the district and were nicknamed "SS1" and "SS2" and were very popular. By then we had discovered a small popular dance hall which we attended most Saturday evenings. It was low and inviting with a series of mock

stained glass windows along each wall which reflected coloured lights on the dance floor. The owner in smart evening dress used to greet us formally as we entered, and there were non alcoholic drinks on the premises. At interval we relaxed with coffee on red plush "cinema" chairs which edged the dance floor, and boys if they wished could go across the road to the local "pub".

The dancing was of very high standard and the crowd sometimes stood back to "give the floor" to a few expert couples enjoying the tango or the quickstep. A bus waiting at midnight would drop people home at various points of the city, but often if the weather was fine we would decide to walk, a distance of some five miles to the other side of the city, with no thought of "muggers" as is the case today. The very short fashion of the late 1920s had been replaced by much longer lengths and for evening we wore long evening dresses, copied from the film stars which we enjoyed very much.

PART SIX

With the announcement of the SS1 we were absolutely swamped - in every department both in the office and in the factory. Production was stepped up with grim determination though modifications were being constantly introduced for improvement of the car. Though he was always one of the last to leave the factory Mr Lyons would often sit up late re-designing some part of equipment which he thought would be an improvement, and the next morning with rough sketch in hand he would dash up to the Experimental with his new suggestion - and the men would groan at yet another innovation.

Originally the bodies had been moved along in the factory on triangular wooden trestles which had to be stiffened with a steel rod to prevent the bodies being distorted over the uneven wooden floors. In the mounting shop the men had to work on one knee to bolt the body to the chassis, and when the men complained that it was hard on their knees, the reply had been "Well change sides and use the other knee!". Harry Gill in charge of the mechanised section invented an ingenious track system. He says he has "always been a master of innovation" and it was certainly in the early days at Swallow that he could practice his expertise. An overhead track was made in the factory, the bodies were hung on hooks, and as the track moved slowly along the men could work in a standing position. It was motivated by a 1/4hp motor and a small ratchet. When we ordered the 1/4hp motor Mr Whittaker was heard to mutter that such a contraption would never work - but it certainly did and proved very successful.

In the Experimental Department work was put in hand on a smaller version of the SS1 - the SS2 and this was mounted on a specially designed low chassis and Standard 9hp engine. I remember there being a great deal of trouble and exasperation with the coupe heads on the smaller car. These were covered in leathercloth and many samples of varying quality were submitted by the suppliers as the material had to fit skin tight without a crease over the wooden frame, and it was much more difficult to achieve this on the smaller head. Many efforts were made to produce a satisfactory operation with frustrating failure as each one was declared not quite satisfactory, until Ned Carey the foreman trimmer on the Friday evening waved his hands in despair, swore profoundly and vowed he would have the weekend off and no-one would see him until the Monday. During that weekend Percy Leeson the chargehand trimmer worked again on the job alone, and when Mr Lyons came to inspect the SS2 head on Monday it was there trimmed to perfection. The result had been obtained by soaking the leathercloth and fitting it while wet so that it dried in position without a wrinkle, and this was the method used in the factory while the model was in production. Ned Carey was told he need not return and Percy Leeson remained the Trim Shop Superintendent until his retirement.

Also a new superintendent appeared on the scene, Clifford Dawtrey, whose job it was to organise a new Inspection Department to make sure a body was not allowed to pass from one shop to another with workmanship not up to standard, as was more frequently happening with ever increasing production.

I think this was the year too there were new letter headings and the Swallow Sidecar and Coachbuilding Company became a Limited Company. Mr Whittaker was still "holding the umbrella" over the Buying Department the Service Department and the Spares Department and depending on the content of a letter we used the appropriate department to finish. We now had a boy as an "assistant buyer" and two extra girls in the office, and a large bench had been set up in the stores to deal with the packing and postage of spares orders.

During the ensuing winter with more orders being received than the production could cope with, and the many hold-ups to incorporate changes and rectify faults in design, the SS1 and SS2 were given preference, fewer Austin-Swallows were built, and gradually by 1933 they were dropped. We were really sorry to say goodbye to the Swallows but were so very busy at the time we could not give them more than a passing thought.

During the bad wintry weather at the height of all the production difficulties the windscreen suppliers wrote to say they would have to cease any further deliveries unless some immediate steps were taken to repair the terrible road their lorries had to traverse to the approach to our factory, as during the past week an axle had been broken on two of the lorries due to the large potholes, and on one lorry some of the screens had been broken. The muddy Swallow Road had deteriorated considerably during the past four years since we first occupied the factory. Mr Lyons had previously approached both White and Poppes and the Dunlop Company requesting that they make a joint effort to repair "their" road. However though their high walls skirted each side of the road neither firm used it for any kind of access, so the request was just ignored. Wind of the complaint must have spread through the trade as other letters were received pointing out how difficult it was to deliver our orders, and in one or two instances Mr Whittaker had more friendly though equally pointed phone conversations to this effect - all this when it was vital for production to be kept flowing at all costs.

There then followed a bitter argument as to who was responsible for the road. Eventually Mr Lyons went to see both firms separately to tell them of our desperate position, and I think he must have charmed them into making a promise that each would contribute towards the cost of the repair.

The summer of 1932 I remember as the year of Lady Godiva. There was a hospital carnival each summer in Coventry in aid of the hospital, but the medieval legend was only celebrated every 21 years. We were very impressed by the care with which Lady Godiva was chosen by the civic authorities, and the honour and respect afforded her as she rode in pink skin-tight tights and flowing blonde wig through the city streets. We also enjoyed the Coventry fair, the Kenilworth Fair, and the Warwick and Stratford Mops with the kerosene lamps lighting up the large old trees, each place having a unique setting of its own.

As the evenings grew lighter there were murmurings among the men, notably in the Body and Trim shops that it was about time they

had some evenings off and "no-one could go on working at this pace for ever". They really had had four gruelling years of work for only a break for holiday the first week in August. Mr Lyons must have heard about this, as one evening as the men were leaving he went out and called them all together, and delivered what has always been known as the "swimming pool speech". He spoke friendly and urgently to them saying he understood how very tired they were (so was he) and what a marvellous job they had all done since they had joined the firm but -

"Forget your wives, forget your children, forget your gardens, and all the things you want to do - If we can just get this SS1 off the ground and make this our own car firm you will have big houses, big cars and swimming pools".

The thought of any of them owning a swimming pool filled them with amusement and they all laughed, the tension was over and the meeting broke up - and the men carried on working. I did not hear this speech myself, as I was in the office working, so it is only hearsay but it put the factory into a co-operative frame of mind again. They were earning good money but it was just the constant working six and seven days a week that was getting them down.

I often think how lonely it must have been for the wives who had moved down from Blackpool to share life in a new city when their husbands were endlessly at the factory, Mrs Lyons, Mrs Whittaker, Mrs Holland and Mrs Beardsley. I can remember one incident in those early years when one evening Mr Lyons came dashing into the stores "Harry" he said, "I'm supposed to be picking up Mrs Lyons and some friends at 7.30 to take them to the theatre. Do you think you can take the car and collect them and tell them I'll be along later" which Harry did. At 10.30pm Mr Lyons was still in the factory and called down to Harry "Will you go down again Harry, they must be out by now" and Harry found them huddled in a doorway under an umbrella, patiently waiting.

Another instance I recall is one November 5th when Mr Lyons and Alice, and Mr Whittaker and I were busy with dictation. Through the small high window in the office could be seen the occasional burst of colour from a rocket with the glow of the many bonfires alight on the "dumps" reflected in the glass, then out of the quiet the telephone rang "Is Daddy ready yet to come to light the bonfire?" It was Mr Lyon's young son John, and the phone rang two or three times before it became too late, and we were all still there. I thought then what a great sacrifice Mr Lyons was making to be missing so much of his children's childhood.

As time for the 1932 Motor Show drew near, Alice told me Mr Lyons had said "She must go too this year" and a small cubicle would be erected on the stand in which she could work so she could be on call to answer all the queries about sales and deliveries with which the sales staff were bombarded. Alice said that going to the Show cost the firm a lot of money, but she was very thrilled, and bought a new skirt and several blouses in readiness. She was booked in at a small private hotel in Bayswater and a car called to collect her to take her to Olympia each morning. I remember

her coming home from the Motor Show very very tired but still with face glowing and reciting to us all the exciting incidents which had happened. She had become very friendly during the ten day period with Daisy Garfitt who was an attractive blonde from Birmingham, the private secretary of Mr Sammy Myrams the Managing Director of Wilmot-Breeden. Wilmot-Breeden were the suppliers of bumpers and other equipment to Swallow and all the staff knew Mr Myrams who was a constant visitor and a great personality, as when a new contract was being arranged there was great competition for the business and endless argument about price with Mr Whittaker astutely suggesting we already had a lower figure than the one being quoted - and when they were at an impasse Mr Lyons would come along and stand in the passage with them and another long argument would ensue. But when it was all over and the deal arranged Mr Myrams would smile and shrug his shoulders and they would all shake hands. Alice greatly enjoyed her friendship with Daisy Garfitt that first Motor Show she attended - they had lunch together and talked of the motor trade in general and the elder girls experiences in the hub of the industry in Birmingham.

Before the end of the year Mr Whittaker told me it had been agreed for a new Service Manager to be appointed to take over some of our load, Mr Digby Paul came to take charge and a new Service Department was located in the fourth (end) factory and also the Spares Department moved over to them. In spite of our losing responsibility for all this work we found we were still very busy and still worked late.

One evening when we were talking in the office someone remarked how hard we all worked, and Mr Lyons retorted "Yes, but you are a dead weight on the firm, because you are non-producers!" (perhaps with tongue in cheek).

I think it was probably in 1932 after the avalanche of SS orders that Eric Warren came down from Blackpool, probably to man the Stand at the Motor Show. Before Mr Lyons first started in business, he was a salesman at Brown and Mallelieu, the largest car dealers in Blackpool. His boss was Eric Warren who could not understand his young friend leaving a secure job to start a "ramshackle enterprise like building sidecars" and Mr Lyons full of ambition and enthusiasm had promised he would send for Eric to join the firm when he was ready. Eric was employed as a salesman to visit all the distributors and dealers to check orders with them and attend to any grievances they may have regarding delivery. He had a most charming personality and was the ideal person to smooth out difficulties, and was soon a great favourite with dealers and customers alike, despite their long wait and disappointment with delivery.

However things gradually improved and new models were introduced to the range, the SS2 Coupe on the smaller Standard 9hp chassis specially designed, the SS1 and SS2 Tourers, and the SS1 Drophead Coupe all followed in succession, with difficulties being ironed out when they arose as quickly as possible.

We three girls lived happily in the house, and started a "work rota" one shopping, one cooking and one cleaning, which worked very well though Alice and I always worked late. Our talk was always about plays, or films or books, and she never mentioned any "private" business in which she had been involved with Mr Lyons so that I was always as much in the dark as everyone else of new developments. I think no-one really ever conjectured just how ambitious Mr Lyons was except Alice perhaps who was in his confidence. Always Alice seemed to have an abundant supply of nervous energy and when we arrived home perhaps by 9pm we would quickly change in half an hour and would be off to a dance for which we had tickets until 1am. Alice would make sure also we had tickets for the special musical events in the city, and we attended a violin concert by Kubelik, a piano concert by Horrovitz and also heard Joan Hammond the famous soprano sing at the Central Hall. She would bring home work at the weekend and sit up in bed checking contracts with the distributors and dealers to ensure there were no mistakes and every legal requirement had been fulfilled. Then when she had finished she would pick up her latest book and read us another chapter, and Nancy and I would listen enthralled.

For the 1933 Motor Show a "new" SS1 and SS2 were announced with a "major facelift" - a new cylinder head, improved radiator block and RAG carburettors, and performance was very much improved, and production had never been so high with 1500 cars sold. Car rallying was very popular at that time, and SS owners were some of the most enthusiastic, and provided good extra publicity for the firm.

The 1934 Motor Show was a great milestone for Mr Lyons as that year SS were admitted to the Main Hall as being the manufacturers of a complete car, instead of having a stand in the smaller hall as in previous years.

A new saloon the SS Airline was also introduced with a "futuristic" sloping rear panel, and better rear seat accommodation, though this model did not prove as popular with the public as the original SS Saloon and Tourers.

PART SEVEN

In the spring of 1934 Mrs Fenton came down to Coventry, and whilst she was with us arranged with Mrs Cronkshaw who lived nearby to provide us with a midday meal at the same time as her husband who was the foreman in charge of the Sidecar Department and his daughter who was the telephonist. I think Alice's mother must have been concerned for her health and the midday meal did fortify us against the long working hours before we came home to eat again. It never occurred to us to go to the canteen except perhaps to buy a bar of chocolate, as this was always assumed to be "works only". Mrs Fenton also made some enquiries and found a large house to rent not far from us, and after discussions with Alice it was decided they would move their home from Blackpool to be with us, in the larger more attractive house that was coming vacant. Mr Fenton was very partially sighted and finding it increasingly more difficult to carry on his business as a market gardener, so it meant that when they moved house Alice was supporting them.

Mr and Mrs Fenton made me very welcome in their home. We three girls still shared the same bedroom as we had done previously - it was a very happy atmosphere and I learned a lot about housekeeping which I did not know before. We still all three of us slept in the front big bedroom and with Mrs Fenton seeing to our every comfort Alice particularly was able to enjoy more leisure - more good literary books to read aloud to us and more than anything else she had her precious piano again.

For the Motor Show of 1934 other models were presented - the SS1 Tourer and Saloon and the same improvements made on the SS2 model. With the introduction of the SS range the Standard Motor Company had supplied special low-slung chassis. Now the engines had a special specification also. Captain Black, Managing Director of Standards visited the factory on one or two occasions, and agreed to supply the firm with some surplus track system to increase production, and also one of the Standard employees who was experienced in large scale manufacture - Ted Orr. Captain Black always seemed very friendly and one day as he and Mr Lyons were walking back to the office I did overhear him say "But you will never make a car of your own Bill!".

A new works engineer was appointed, Mr Heynes, and we heard there was now to be a new Engineering Department. We did not often see Mr Heynes down in our office - he was busy appointing new staff for the task before them - Walter Hassan and (later) Claude Bailey I knew personally, but their domain was up in the third factory. I do remember though Mr Heynes coming into Mr Whittaker's office one day and saying that no longer must he continue to buy "these rubbishy nuts and bolts" at a knock down price, and that if we were to have a quality engine we must have quality material in the future, and all such supplies would be ordered from G.K.N Mr Whittaker had become well-known as one of the most astute buyers in the trade, and he laughed as they discussed the pros and cons of good quality where necessary against price. Starting from scratch the new department had a formidable task, and we watched curiously when a new prototype was driven up and down the Swallow Road on test.

In those few short months between Mr Haynes' appointment in April 1935 and the organising of a new department, by the following October they produced the SS90 for exhibition at the Motor Show, the first two-seater sports model. This was very soon followed by the improved and now famous SS100. Mr Heynes always paid tribute to the great help he received from Mr Grinham of the Standard Motor Company in those very early days, in the same way that Captain Black had always given friendly co-operation, always hoping I believe that SS Cars would at some time become part of the Standard Motor Company, though Mr Lyons had more ambitious ideas.

In the early spring of 1935 came the sensational news that the name of the firm was to be changed to "SS Cars Ltd" and we were to become a public limited company. It had become common knowledge to the staff and in the works that relations between the two partners were not as cordial as formerly - in fact increasingly more and more strained, and often we could hear raised voices in their private office.

I really think Mr Walmsley had lost interest in the greater expansion of the company and Mr Lyons' constant urge to move forward. He was a designer by nature and was more and more taken up with a unique model railway he was building at his house. He would often interrupt the men on the production line to ask them to make him a special part, and call in at the stores and help himself to what bits of equipment he required. The stores inventory was very meticulous, and Harry Teather would make a note of everything that he had taken. On one occasion however Mr Walmsley came in demanding a special size screw, and Harry remonstrated saying we were still waiting for more supplies, and it would hold up production if he took them. Whereupon Mr Walmsley flew into a temper, unjustly Harry thought and Harry marched up to Mr Lyon's office to say he could "no longer serve two masters". Mr Lyons said "Now I must tell you a secret Harry - Mr Walmsley will not be with us for very much longer as he is retiring - but no-one must know. So just take a holiday and don't come back for a week".

The following week the news broke that SS Cars Ltd would be quoted on the stock exchange. We had new letter headings, and Mr Whittaker was made a director of the company. Mr Lyons presented each of us "in the team" with a small parcel of shares, though each one of us did not know what the others had been given. When the shares were quoted they doubled in value. Some sold them immediately, but others like Alice Fenton, Harry Teather and I put them away, and over the years they doubled in value again and again. Some members of the body shop left at that time, notably Clifford Dawtrey the Inspector and Lyndon Smith who had come with us from Blackpool as an apprentice and with Mr Walmsley started a caravan company, but this did not prosper for very long as Mr Walmsley soon lost interest and perhaps lacked Mr Lyons' business drive.

With Mr Lyons at the helm production carried on smoothly and a new office block was designed and built, immediately at the end of the Swallow (no longer muddy) Road, now occupying all the four

original factories it was situated immediately at the end of the Dunlop and White & Poppe boundaries. The entrance was a wide oak doorway proudly bearing the "SS" monogram above, which led up a broad imposing staircase in light oak. This opened on to a wide hall supported by pillars with a shiny light oak block floor, with the offices leading off. Mr Lyons office was immediately opposite the top of the stairs, and his large office windows overlooked the whole of the upper part of Swallow Road, so that he could see the fronts of the four factories at a glance and what was happening there. Alice Fenton's Sales Department was adjoining with three typists and Mr Blythe's sales records. Mr Huckvale occupied the next office with the Accounts Department adjoining. At the top of the stairs opposite was a waiting room - I used to send cups of tea to the suppliers and sales reps. endlessly waiting to see Mr Whittaker. My office came next with three typists and Tom Hope the assistant buyer, then Mr Whittaker's office and on the other side of him an "Invoice Department" where invoices were checked against goods received before being passed to the accounts for payment.

At the end of the hall were three other offices, and we found these were to be occupied by a new Advertising Manager who had been appointed. Ernest Rankin, with his secretary next door, and the last office was designated Postal and Filing, with a new girl in charge. Down the back stairs the space at ground level was used for stationery stores and files.

Rallying had become increasingly popular with SS owners, particularly after the introduction of the SS100 in the spring of 1936, and Mr Rankin was very active in organising these events in various parts of the country. SS cars were victorious in the Alpine Rally, the R.A.C. Rally, and the following year the Welsh Rallies, which pleased Mr Lyons greatly. All this produced very good publicity and a tribute to Mr Heynes and his team, and a foreshadow of the successes to come.

Alice told me she had to go to the library to find some books on bird and animal names, as Mr Lyons wanted to christen a new model which was being built. He poured over these for some time before making a decision and announcing that the new name would be JAGUAR. He said it had a "powerful ring" and perhaps it best portrayed his vision of "space grace and pace" which he was striving to embody in his cars.

The new Jaguar saloons launched at the 1935 Motor Show were a different concept from any previous models. Beside the new engine, chassis and cylinder head a completely new body was designed with four doors, of much more solid and distinguished appearance. Orders poured in and it was "full steam ahead" for production and many more cars were exported. This happy state continued into the late summer of 1936 when Motor Show time was again approaching and models for 1937 were under review.

Mr Lyons was anxious for even greater production and at that time the bigger car firms were turning to all-steel bodies. Mr Whittaker was in touch with Pressed Steel of Oxford who supplied all-steel bodies in quantity for various firms. Pressed Steel

were adamant however that a twelve month period was required for tooling up and no matter how much Mr Lyons and Mr Whittaker remonstrated and cajoled they would not improve on this time. So a contract was issued for tooling to be put in hand for complete steel bodies to be delivered in twelve months or less if at all possible.

With the announcement of a steel-bodied Jaguar at the 1937 Show emergency measures had to be taken and hurried jigs were sent to our previous panel suppliers, and in order to expedite manufacture, to other panel suppliers for delivery as quickly as possible. However, when these were delivered there was great consternation in the factory as these different panels would not fit together on the bodies to an acceptable standard. The Inspection Department rejected large numbers for return and alteration or replacement with consequent long delays. Instead of the usual hum of busy activity the factory was more or less at a standstill with only a trickle of cars passing down the line for despatch. As the weeks passed I remember receiving letters from various firms pointing out that invoices for goods supplied had not been paid. Mr Huckvale was very worried and said that if we paid all the money we owed we would be bankrupt, and in reply to say the matter had been passed to the accounts department for attention, just to gain a few more days grace.

Many suppliers had been faithful friends over the years and had enjoyed increased business as a result of Jaguar's success so were loyal, and waited for what they were owed. Eventually Mr Lyons went down to Briggs Bodies (a subsidiary of Pressed Steel) and arranged for a few experienced panel-beaters to work temporarily in Coventry to use the materials we had available. Some of the Jaguar men were appalled by their methods but gradually bodies were brought up to an acceptable standard and were able to be forwarded to the paint department and down the line for finishing.

Pressed Steel were well aware of the terrible production difficulties we were experiencing and hurried forward delivery of the complete steel bodies as urgently as possible so that by the late spring continuous production was swinging again and before the end of the year the near-catastrophe we had all anticipated was averted.

In the early spring of 1936 Digby Paul the Service Manager celebrated his wedding. I had become much closer to Harry Teather since I lived in the Fenton family, and we went out together regularly. By then Harry had exchanged his motorbike for an old "Bullnose" Morris open-tourer and Alice had acquired a Morris Minor Tourer. Her initial driving lessons had been with Harry in the factory, but on one unfortunate occasion her foot slipped off the clutch, and the Austin-Swallow went bang into the wall. After confessing to Mr Lyons he suggested it would be better perhaps if lessons were taken out on the road and not on a car which some customer had ordered.

Harry and I talked things over and decided we would be married in June 1936. Mr Whittaker seemed very startled at this news

"You're not even engaged yet" he said and I loftily replied that we were too modern to believe in engagements. My father was very ill though I did not realise how seriously, and when my mother suggested it would be better if perhaps we were married in Coventry, I agreed as this was where all my friends were. So I was married from the Fenton home, my two younger sisters were bridesmaids and also Alice and Nancy Fenton. We rented a house which was vacant just round the corner from them and furnished it hurriedly so my family could stay there, though my poor father was too ill to attend the ceremony and died exactly a month later.

I continued in my job of course, I enjoyed it so very much as something was always happening at Jaguar to make life interesting even the worrying year of 1936 after all the good and successful times we had enjoyed. I knew though when I agreed to be married that I would not want to spend all my life "tied to the office" and that eventually I would find much more happiness and a more worthwhile job in raising a family. I was thrilled though to still be there when the first Jaguars were announced and during all the years I was a housewife continued to be vitally interested in all that was happening at the firm.

Once supplies of complete steel body shells commenced and production was flowing, nothing springs to mind that is particularly memorable. The SS100 was achieving a great name in rallies both at home and abroad and Ernest Rankin's organisational talents were in great demand. With the Jaguar marque being brought more and more into the public eye Alice Fenton must have been very relieved that all this work had been passed to another department.

Now that the new offices were more removed from the factory we did not see as much of the activity in the works. During the warm summer evenings I can remember feeling a little resentful to be still stuck in the office after 8pm waiting for Mr Whittaker's return from the works when it would have been so much more pleasant to be in my new home, though it never occurred to me to leave without having seen him.

It was early in 1938 I had to tell him he would have to find a new secretary, because I was expecting a baby, and in April I said a fond farewell to all my colleagues, and I acknowledged how much I would miss no longer walking up the Swallow Road after doing so for the past ten years. Mr Lyons wrote me a nice little letter with a £10 note enclosed. At the time I was earning £3 per week and Harry £5 per week but when I left Harry found his wage had been increased to £8 and of course we were very grateful.

With a new addition to the family expected Harry and I looked for another house and decided to buy one on the other side of the city - a small semi-detached in course of erection. The Fenton family also decided to move, but Alice decided to go further out into the country on the same side of the city as the factory. However Alice made a point of seeing me regularly and we used to enjoy Saturday afternoon shopping trips together or go to any

concerts or plays in which she was interested. She always kept abreast of the job and was instrumental in persuading several police Chief Constables to equip their teams with Jaguar cars, and as Jaguar gained in repute and prestige it became a status symbol for the successful business man.

It was a sad blow when war was declared - the factory came to a standstill, and then cars could only be finished for which material was in stock, and Mr Lyons said he didn't know what would happen to the firm. However Howard Davies was by then in charge of the Sidecar Department having replaced Dick Cronkshaw who had left for health reasons. Previously Howard Davies had been the proprietor of the HRD motorcycle firm which had had to close. He told Mr Lyons he had a contact in the war office and suggested it would be a good idea if they both went down to London so he could introduce him. This resulted in a very welcome order for "box" sidecars for despatch riders and from then on to many other orders and considerable expansion of the machine shops for the repair of Whitley bombers, and also the supplying of four-wheel trailers.

Though the factory was on a war footing and staff and workers worked seven days a week, during the bombing raids of 1940/41 work finished at 5.30pm with the exception of a skeleton staff of fire fighters so that Alice was able to enjoy a respite from the continuous long hours daily and from arranging the delivery of cars and placating customers. But in spite of the war there was plenty of social life to brighten things up and Alice and her sister would often be out attending a dance or a party.

After the war Alice continued her position as Head of Sales Department and was eventually appointed Home Sales Director. She did not however foresee the great surge in exports for the company after the war, though I remember a broadcast by a solemn Sir Stafford Cripps, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Labour Government warning the nation that we "must export or die" due to the great losses we had suffered as a country, which did not go down well with a victorious England. So the Export Department became a busy separate entity.

In later years as our sons were growing up, we made a point of meeting Alice and Nancy each Sunday evening for a drink and a chat - sometimes there would be five or six of us, I always looked forward to this, and she used to confidentially impart one or two snippets of what was happening in the firm which Harry would not bother to tell me. But the early years had taken their toll and I could tell that Alice was becoming increasingly tired. She never seemed able to rest and relax and was always "on the go" and never seemed to have a restful relaxing holiday.

After the war great lip service was given to the "equal rights of women" in acknowledgement of the great contribution they had made to the war effort, and in fact a high civil service post was offered to Alice during the postwar reconstruction. This she refused - she could not change her loyalties after so many years and expected that she would continue to climb in the continuing expansion of the company - but only she knew the warning signals

her health was giving her. As far back as the early thirties when her parents first came to Coventry her mother had insisted on consulting a doctor who diagnosed "a tired heart" and when Alice refused to have time off to rest had suggested a glass of burgundy at lunchtime to help her to relax. Increasingly she became more worried about the future, and eventually suggested to Sir William that it would be better for him to have another private secretary. He could not understand it and was hurt and very angry - but she was still doing three jobs - as well as private secretary and Home Sales Director she had no support from Eric Warren who was excellent at personal contact with the distributors and dealers but made no attempt to cover the desk work required of a sales manager.

Alice Fenton was really "before her time" - the only woman in an executive position in the motor industry which was traditionally male dominated and eventually she was heart-broken when she realised she could not surmount the great barrier of being "just a woman". It is only after another thirty years that it is gradually being broken down.

It was a terrible blow to the firm and many many people personally when on Saturday 17th March 1960, after having been at the office the day before, she became ill and died the same day, a fortnight before her 50th birthday.

Harry Teather after the war progressed from Stores Manager to the Material Control Department and later when the post became vacant he transferred to the Purchasing Department, where he retired as Purchasing Director after completing 50 years service, in 1973.

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