EARLY MEMORIES

I was born on 3 May in the year 1913 in High Bentham, which is in north west Yorkshire, fifteen miles from Lancaster. Sadly my father had died three months earlier from scarlet fever. Although my father came from a long line of Quakers, going back probably to the 1700s, my mother was not a Quaker at that time. My father was in partnership with his best school friend, Charles Ford; they had met at the Leighton Park Quaker School in Reading which they both attended. My father was an engineer who had started life working in Canada for the Canadian Pacific Railways, based in Montreal. While there, Charles Ford wrote to him saying that he was needing a partner in his silk mill in Low Bentham. My father gave up the Canadian Pacific Railway and came home. It was while he was working in Low Bentham that he first met my mother, whose bachelor brother was manager of the only other large works in the area, which was involved in making woven hose pipes and belting. Charles Ford's wife died just before I was born, and his little daughter spent most of her time with my mother both before my arrival and then later afterwards, so Betty Ford and I were brought up in adjoining cots for at least the first four years of my life.

I remember going to my first Quaker Meeting at the age of three, or possibly four, not in the local Meeting House but a mile or two away, at an ancient Meeting House called Calf Cop. The reason for the Meeting I don't know. My grandmother certainly was ill, or it might have even been a memorial service for someone. It was in the evening. The Meeting House was lit with two or three candles, and I, having walked further than I was accustomed to, promptly fell asleep. I can remember waking up and seeing the flickering candle light and a row of Elders (in every sense) facing me with a tremendous hush on the Meeting. This is something that I have never forgotten. Certainly in the burial ground was my father and grandmother, and later, my uncle and my mother's ashes, but this has nothing to do with my memories.

Probably due to bad war-time feeding, I started suffering from rickets at an early age, and I had support irons on my legs to keep them straight. Being taken to Meeting, a boring event for the young in any case, I found that if I swung my legs to and fro I would get a very good 'Bang! Bang!', which strangely the Meeting found rather upsetting. Betty, who should have known better, being two years older than I, would also do the same thing, and we were both rather surprised when on the following Sunday, large two foot high wooden stools covered in a blue cloth were provided for us to put our feet on so we couldn't swing. Those foot stools were left in the Meeting House over at least the next fifteen years, and I always felt very ashamed and responsible for them.

Facing the Meeting would be the Elders, of whom I only have clear recollections of two. One was 'Old Man Townley', who I suppose at the time I'm thinking of, can't have been more than forty. He was the local road maker, and one would often find him sitting on a heap of stones, breaking them up to fill the gaps in the road. The other was the local nurseryman. They were both bearded, and both would certainly speak or pray during the course of the Meeting. It may have been at a slightly later stage that the young of the Meeting used to run a competition, as, when twelve o'clock sounded (the clock on the Town Hall not being far away) the question was whether Old Man Townley would be

able to kneel down and offer a closing prayer, or would his companion shake his hand and close the meeting? Every Sunday it seemed to be a race between them, and this certainly added spice to a rather long session. There was a large clock over the entrance in the Meeting House, which I couldn't see, but the tick, tick, tick was regular. I always knew when eleven forty came, because adjoining one side of the Meeting House someone kept hens, and they would feed them at that time. The sound of clucking hens is something that I have always connected with Quaker Meetings. After the Meeting there was the Sunday School which I enjoyed. My chief recollection was something I'd never met before; playing with sand trays. I can remember what fun it was making the Sermon on the Mount with little dead matchsticks, making the crowds very thick, with one solitary figure standing on the top, providing of course that the sand was damp enough not to collapse in the operation.

I do remember being taken by my cousins to dances and events at the Mount and Bootham Schools, York, in particular, and I think I must have, on occasions, been at similar affairs with other young Friends, but I have no great recollection of being a very vital part of that. This was chiefly, I think, because we were always moving, either northwards in the summer or abroad, during all of which one did get to know a very great number of Meetings, even if slightly superficially. One time at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne that I clearly remember is when a Meeting ended, everyone issued out into the wide entrance passageway, and many Friends would come and put their hand on my head and say 'I hope you are getting on well at school'. But there was one man, whose name I can't remember, who used to come and say, 'Don't work too hard at school'. I have never forgotten him and have always thought he was wonderful. Also connected with Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Meeting, was one of my mother's friends, an elderly Mrs Gurney, and sometimes she would invite my mother and myself to lunch following the Meeting. Whether this was on the spot, and if my mother knew it was going to happen, I don't know. Mrs Gurney was the last person in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne to run her own private horse and carriage, and one went clip clop across the centre of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, saluting or cutting dead one's school friends; a very superior feeling. After a large and good lunch, served by her domestic staff, her daughter - who I believe was the first woman doctor in Newcastle - would be sent off with me into the small rather dark drawing room, where, from a cupboard, the special Sunday toys were produced for me. All I can remember is a very good farm set with little woosy sheep, which was thought suitable to play with on Sundays, although some better toys were completely banned. This was certainly very much a survival from the second half of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile my mother would have been taken upstairs by Mrs Gurney, and they would both lie on sofas in a large bay window with rugs over them, having a little rest.

While the urge to collect (something no matter what) is common to many although not all people, selection is perhaps different. I suppose that I, faced with more than two of anything - a flower, a chair, sweets or a dish of food - automatically arrange them in order of my preference. All this probably started when I was four or five years old. Betty's grandfather had died, and the break up and sorting out of his home was taking place. Over a series of Sunday afternoons she and I were invited to tea, and there in a large wickerwork clothes basket had been placed items that it was thought the young

might like. Admittedly my friend was older, admittedly it had been her grandfather's home, but why she chose first rankled with me and I must, I think, have mentioned my views, for on this visit I went first and immediately chose the family wax doll - very beautiful - only to be told my friend, who was a girl, could have it. Was this I wonder the start of my interest in old dolls, which have always struck me as a most collectable subject? That first sorting out and selection of items is something I have never forgotten.

The Valley of the Wenning where I was born is in the tip of north-west Yorkshire, adjoining both Lancashire and the then county of Westmorland, now part of Cumbria. A three mile walk could include the three counties, and before the coming of the motor car it was very isolated. It was hemmed in on the south by the Great Stone Moor, beyond which lay the Trough of Bowland, the second least populated area of England. Another track, not a road, could be followed on to Colne. Eastwards stretched the Pennines, dominated by the peak of Ingleborough, four miles away. To the west lay the Valley of the Lune and beyond, Morecambe Bay and Lancaster. One local farmer's wife had never ventured so far, despite an excellent train service, saying, 'Why should I want to see the sea? This district is enough for me.'

Around 1875, my grandfather in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne at the time of his marriage paid seventy five golden sovereigns for a good oak, solid top, seventeenth-century, panelled carved-front chest, which for most of my life, would have been sold with difficulty for a third of this sum. This was due to the small amount of good oak furniture then on the market when oak was fashionable, and so considered rare. At the same time a Scottish, serpentine, tapered leg, Sheraton sideboard, also acquired by him, cost seven pounds ten shillings; as it was still looked upon as second-hand furniture, not yet a hundred years old, it was not thought to be 'antique'.

My paternal grandfather, Metford Warner, was the owner of Jeffrey & Co., the long established wallpaper manufacturing firm of Essex Road, London, who printed all the wallpapers designed by William Morris, and who prevailed on artists of the day, such as Walter Crane, Edward Burne-Jones and Lewis Day to design for him. Certainly Metford Warner bought copies of the Kelmscott Press Books as they were produced by Morris, as well as pottery made by William de Morgan. He was an eager early customer at Liberty's, buying the newly introduced Japanese artefacts, but acquiring them basically for their colour and design, as were his purchases of textile rags when on holiday in Italy and abroad. This was certainly a taste I inherited from him. There is a record of his buying pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery and The Academy, as well as the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition, but, apart from textiles, all such items were modern.

It was in 1919, following the Armistice, that I had my first seaside holiday at Lytham St Anne's. In the boarding house where we stayed we met a Mr Bissett, who, on returning home, sent me a stamp collection. This developed over the years and was to play a very large part in my life. Years later I was to find Mr Bissett was one of the leading philatelists of his day. I can remember the excitement of letters coming from Ireland around 1922, with over-printed British stamps. Following the death of my grandmother after a long illness in February 1920, my mother decided to move back to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, to be near a school for me. It was when she was disposing of my grandfather's ceramic collection that I had my first sight of the antique trade in action,

albeit only of their legs. Against instructions, I crept upstairs to peep between their legs as they argued with my mother while looking at - and eventually buying - the china set out on the Sheraton sideboard standing on our top landing. Among those present were Mr Edward Neale of Preston and Mr Harold Tweed of Bradford, both dealers I was to get to know well some eighteen years later, when they told me that among the items they had purchased was a very rare piece of Chelsea porcelain. It must have been good for them to have remembered it after all these years. Sadly, I never saw this china, apart from broken items of pottery, odd blue and white cups and saucers, and nineteenth-century oriental porcelain not wanted by them, but which I got to know well - as well as the Delft plates, both Dutch and English, not sold by my mother.

In 1920, before leaving the home my father had built to marry in to, my mother wisely undertook restoration of an old stone built, four-roomed cottage which we rented on lease for five pounds a year, subject to its restoration to habitable use. This became our holiday home, and so kept ties with High Bentham, where I had been born, and where my bachelor uncle lived as Managing Director of George Angus & Co, the largest employer in the area, and now owned by Dunlop. My mother's younger brother Dennis Sowerby died within a few weeks of my father's death, while exploring near Nairobi in East Africa, so I never knew him. However, her third brother who was a solicitor and lived near Bristol, was to play a large part in my life, having three daughters, all a little younger than myself. It is probably only now that I fully realise the influence of his wife - my aunt Olivia. Between my ages of eight and eighteen, she directed me in matters of taste and colour. Their house had, in the early twenties, been illustrated and featured in the magazine *Homes and Gardens*. Their antique Sheraton grand piano stood at the end of the library room, and was later to be mine. They had purchased it for five pounds on the quay-side at Bristol. Aunt Olivia was a daughter of Alice Meynell, the poetess, who had a large family, and was sometimes not sure to which of her numerous children she was talking. I only met her once when I was seven years old. She was sitting under a black sunshade with a black patch over one eye. I just knew she was a pirate, and that the diving board in front of her was 'the plank'. I was terrified! One of her sons-in-law had run an antique shop 'The Serendipity Shop' near the British Museum. He had died young, but items from his shop, such as Japanese sword guards, Japanese prints and odd items of Majolica, had gone to my uncle and aunt, and I found that they were items you lived with, rather than looked at in museums or books. My aunt also liked painted furniture before it became popular, and the shape or colour of furniture was of more importance to her than its condition.

It was at the time of our removal from our first home that I saw my mother panic, perhaps for the one and only time in her long life of one hundred and five years. The reason - which I only understood later - was the removal men and van arriving twenty fours hours earlier than planned and I can now fully understand her feelings. The pantechnicons were horse drawn, and a field had to be found for the horses. Apparently the distance from their last job had been covered more rapidly than expected. Later these vans would be loaded onto rail, which was the usual method for long distance removals. The firm was Hoults of Newcastle, who later were to move us from Newcastle to Bournemouth, and who did antique transport work for me for the next thirty five years,

mainly from their Carlisle office where I became very well known. The chief reason for our move was to enable me to attend the same preparatory school my uncles had attended, which lay at the end of the terrace where my mother had found a house. I was seven years old, and Newcastle, my first introduction to town life, was not entirely unexciting, with cars, trams, a museum and a family friend who owned the last private horse-drawn carriage in the city. Up the stairs at the Hancock Museum along to the left, and in a case on the right hand wall, was an Egyptian mummy. This fascinated me so much that all future visits to London had to include the British Museum and The Egyptian Galleries, where I drooled over their mummy collection for as long as I was allowed. However, there was no one who was able to explain them to me. Shortly afterwards, the discoveries of Tutenkhamun's Tomb in The Valley of the Kings in Egypt took place, with pictures in newspapers and magazines, and I decided I would become a 'digger-up'.

Sometime in 1921, a school friend showed me a small fragment of blue pottery. He told me it was Egyptian, two thousand years old, and I swapped my precious penknife for it. Encouraged by this transaction, he said that for sixpence I could have a piece of blood-stained wood from the coffin of St Cuthbert, who was someone I had not heard of, but blood-stained wood sounded interesting. I had saved up fourpence, when I was summoned to my Headmaster's study, where he pointed out that I couldn't buy things from my friends - something however that I still do - particularly as the friend had taken them from his father's 'cabinet of curiosities'. What wonderful words those were, never before heard by me. I didn't get the wood, and the blood stains were in fact iron staining, but the item was genuine and I regret its non-acquisition to this day, but I had become a collector, by intent, and I still have the pottery fragment. However, not all excavated items are Egyptian, and I can remember having to clamber over broken marble heads, slabs and Roman altars, all heaped in the back porch of the house where my Angus relatives lived, at Cumdurcum at the east end of the Roman wall. After lunch I would be sent out into the garden to play, with the grown-ups complaining about the vast marble fragments they had to dig out while gardening. Sadly there was no one interested in these things, or able to tell me anything I remember about the Romans.

Around this time the following words could have well been directed at me: 'This maxim he would firmly hold, it must be good because it's old'. I am uncertain if it was Christmas or my mother's birthday, but I decided to give her something we had seen together - a cream painted plaster figure of a boy (one of many I am sure) that appeared in the window of the Stone Gallery, just off Northumberland Avenue, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. It cost five shillings - a vast sum to me in those days - and I believe I bought it alone, but have an idea the price was really seven shillings and sixpence. Whether it was, unbeknown to me, underwritten by my mother, or if the shop keeper made a reduction for me to make the sale possible I shall never know, but it stood on my mother's bedroom mantelpiece for many many years until it was broken. The Stone Gallery, years later, was to achieve fame as so many of Lowry's pictures passed through it. This purchase can, I think, truly be looked upon as my first entry as a buyer into the art world. Four or five years later my purchase at a bazaar of a squat-shaped, bright orange painted (not glazed) mug, definitely not by Clarice Cliffe, was not as good. Although kept by me for years, it also became broken.

In homes visited when I was young, the mantelpiece decoration was often a row of three or five *Famille Rose* plates, many of which I would see slowly becoming chipped or cracked, unless replaced by similar ones from the old family dinner service, usually stored in a cupboard in the kitchen or housekeeper's room. Once, and once only, in 1947, was I able to buy such a set, which I found stacked under the staging of a greenhouse in a house some twenty miles from London. I had no more enthusiasm for school than my contemporaries, the making and remaking of crystal wireless sets being so much more interesting than homework. Then, later, when buying coils for early valve receivers, I discovered that they bore the words, 'What are the wild waves saying?' Little did I know that autumn Friday afternoon in 1924 when I came back from school and was put to bed, that my school days were over. I was aged eleven and half, and now believe it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Admittedly I was very, very ill, remaining in bed for months, but it had its compensations. Encouraged by my uncle from Yorkshire, I started serious stamp collecting. Stanley Gibbons stamp catalogues became my daily reading. I decided to specialise in the stamps of Canada, and approval sheets of stamps began arriving through the post. It was in 1931, after two previous efforts, that I won the silver cup at the London Schoolboys' Exhibition for my collection of Canadian stamps.

After my illness winters were spent in Bournemouth. Where the Pavilion now stands opposite the pier there was a small pub, really more of a country inn, in front of which was a pine tree with a bench round it on which, on a sunny morning, the regulars would sit. To the left, at the bottom of the East Cliff, was a large one storey building, a toy shop, which gave the impression of still having stock unchanged over the past fifty years. At this same period, but closer to the pier was a row of six or ten large wheeled bath chairs drawn by ponies, and with elaborate glass fronts to protect the inmates from the elements. The men in charge of these did little trade, and must all have gone a year or two later. It was after 1918 that Bournemouth became a particularly favoured place for those retiring from the North of England. In many instances this was the cause of the enormous number of auction sales in Bournemouth during the 1930s, with sometimes, on the same day, three or four such sales taking place. Many of these I viewed, seldom going as a buyer as I had no money. However, they did much to make me an experienced auction viewer.

It was in the early 1930s that my mother undertook the regular visiting of two elderly blind sisters, the Misses Hawkins, reading to them, doing their shopping or other small jobs. They told her that their brother had, some sixty years earlier, been the leading photographer in Bournemouth. On occasions they would send me photographs of celebrities, such as Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Treasure Island*. They also told how this same brother had once been lost overnight in Branksome Chine, so untouched was the countryside surrounding Bournemouth. After several winters spent in Bournemouth hotels, my mother gave thought to our moving to the town, and buying a house. So most of our walks incorporated collecting keys from agents, and inspecting all types of premises both old and new. One property I liked so much I remember sowing seeds in its neglected garden. However, in the end we rented a large maisonette, and our furniture was moved from Newcastle. During the summer months we were able to let the flat, when staying with my uncle in Yorkshire.

By that time I was well briefed on the philatelic scene, and, if asked, would have probably said that I intended to become a postage stamp dealer. All my visits to London included stamp auctions. My free time was also absorbed by gardening, my other great interest, but only possible during the summers in Yorkshire, as it was found I could not stand the northern winter climate. Winters were spent either with my uncle and cousins near Bristol, or in Bournemouth, or abroad, with visits in 1926 and 1931. Travelling by the 'blue train' to the French Riviera I can recollect our leaving it at Cannes and getting into a little - what seemed to be almost a toy - train, that slowly wound its way up through olive groves, with soft warm air, yellow mimosa branches brushing the carriage windows, and red anemones under the trees. Then arriving at Grasse, getting into the funicular and so up to the town level where miraculously our heavy luggage, registered through from Victoria Station, London the previous day, was standing waiting for us, with no real customs examination. A few weeks later we moved down to the coast near Cap Martin, where I disgraced myself by fainting in the garden. I had to be in bed for several weeks, looked after by a very costly English doctor from Monte Carlo. Then, in 1931, we again went to the south of France, followed by a visit to Italy. I celebrated my eighteenth birthday in Florence, before going on to Rome, and back via Paris. There I first became acquainted with the Hotel Drouot, the French Governmental Auction Rooms, which I got to know long before I had visited Sotheby's or Christie's in London, as well as the open air stamp market in the Champs Elysée.

It had been in Bournemouth in 1928, when getting books out from the library of Boots the chemist, that I came across *Confessions of a Dealer* by Thomas Rowan. He had been an antique dealer first in Southampton, and then, in semi-retirement, had opened a shop in the Post Office Arcade at Bournemouth, where I was to meet him and his son. When I got to know Thomas Rowan slightly better, he kindly, in October 1929, lent me a book on English furniture. This proved to be Strange's book on English furniture, made up almost entirely of line drawings of eighteenth-century furniture taken from the pattern books of that period. Though not particularly helpful, this book appeared to be the main source of information on furniture held by most dealers and certainly cabinet makers throughout England at this time and earlier.

Summers in Yorkshire with my uncle, usually from June to October, provided little in the way of excitement but I was often to be seen outside The Brown Cow pub, not, I would say, waiting for it to open, but hoping for a fresh auction sale bill to appear on the board outside. The larger farm sales were advertised in the local paper, but sometimes the only indication of small farm or cottage auctions, of which there were many, would be on local billboards. It must be remembered that this was at a time when collections of small items would be put on a tray, with bidding starting at one penny, and the lot usually knocked down to a buyer for sixpence or under: I became hooked on auctions. A feature of those farm sales were the free teas with food provided. These, I am told, after the deduction of auctioneers' commissions and expenses, often cost the farmer more than he received for the whole realisation of his stock and possessions. It was during this time that I started putting small advertisements asking for antiques in the Lancaster paper. One reply received was from a farmer in the Sedbergh area who said that his farm was so remote I would never find it, but that he would meet me at a stile along a certain

by-road. I arrived, but there was no one there. After a wait, suddenly the farmer and his son arrived. They did not want to take me to the farm; all they wanted to know was the value of gold sovereigns. Gold and jewellery was something on which I knew nothing, and I was quite unable to help them, but still feel I may have missed a gold mine.

My education, such as it was, was provided first by a governess when in Bournemouth, and then by a series of tutors either in Bournemouth, Bristol or Yorkshire. None I feel was very good. The one positive result was that I absorbed or acquired a smattering of Latin which proved useful later on. 1929 proved to be a very important year for me. I celebrated my sixteenth birthday, and my mother's uncle, Joseph Angus, died leaving me an untouched Chippendale tea caddy with a secret drawer, which I was to discover later. Other tea caddies left to great-nephews and nieces had been scraped and French polished by him in his workshop, which was his great joy, where he repaired and ruined many antique items. These were mostly acquired on his regular visits with his wife to Harrogate to take the waters. It is now largely forgotten that, first thing in the morning, the roads around the Pump Room in Harrogate were closed to all but pedestrian traffic. The antique shops around would have opened their doors by seven a.m. or earlier, and had usually done the bulk of their day's trading by nine. Also from Uncle Joe, because they were unwanted by anyone, came his collection of old children's books and chapbooks. These were the little paper-bound booklets sold at farms and cottage doors by itinerant packmen. Most had woodcut illustrations, many by Thomas Bewick, in whom my uncle had been very interested. These certainly did much to increase my interest in old books generally, and I can remember spending a shilling on another chapbook, one of many such lying in trays outside a bookshop opposite the British Museum, after a visit to the Egyptian mummies.

For Christmas 1929 my mother was given by her Somerset brother an old open Morris touring car that he had acquired to fill a gap in family transport. My mother could drive - remember there were no driving tests in those days - but she was not what in any way could be described as a natural motorist. Jumping into the car, she started down the sloping drive, and should have turned right in to the garage yard. Realising that she had left it too late, she bumped into a tree. No serious damage was done to the vehicle or passenger, and a day or two later she drove us safely back to Bournemouth, now our winter home.

It must have been three months later, and we were driving through Wimbourne. In front was a small open truck with a wooden frame on the side, stacked with sheets of plate glass. Two men had just lifted one off when my mother, realising that there was a car coming towards us in the opposite direction, put her foot on the clutch pedal instead of the brake, and our car slowly and silently drifted forward into the van. There was little real impact, but pushing the glass delivery van in front of us, we stopped some three yards ahead leaving two men holding a sheet of glass on the pavement wondering where the rest of their load had gone. Miraculously no damage was done, but I was severely shocked. Sometime in the next two months I started taking driving lessons, and, within a day of my seventeenth birthday, held a driving licence, and in future preferred to drive. A car enlarged the possibility of antique hunting to an unbelievable extent, and in many ways altered our lives.

One of the few ways of finding out what objects were worth was their price at auction, but often one came across items never seen before, and then it was that wonderful twopenny paper, *Exchange & Mart*, that came to my aid. They offered a free valuation service, if the details - but not the object - were sent to them. They also carried some of the best short articles about antiques that I have ever seen. It was not very often I was a buyer of items advertised for sale in *The Bazaar*, but on one occasion vellum documents - priced at five shillings a pound weight - provided me with useful facts on the purchase of a boat wrecked in Poole Harbour towards the end of the eighteenth century. I did, however, fall for an antique oak gate-leg table priced at twenty five shillings, but the promised delivery did not take place Eventually I was forced to track down the owner who proved to be a very, very old antique dealer, living in a cottage near Langport in Somerset. He told me the table was in his shop, now closed, and he could no longer walk, so with great difficulty I got him into our car, and unlocked his premises to find the table was a seventeenth-century one, but lacking one leaf. The discovery of an eighteenth-century shipping water-colour, however, more than made up for the lack of the table leaf.

It was through him that I was introduced to a local widow, Mrs Forshew, with a large family, who had just started as a dealer a few miles away. This contact was so good that I became one of her regular customers for the next twenty five years, and saw her family grow up. I can remember buying a burr yew wood octagonal work box for fifteen shillings from her in the 1930s, that she herself had found at a jumble sale and also an eight foot long elm farmhouse table and a bacon cupboard settle for seven pounds ten shillings each.

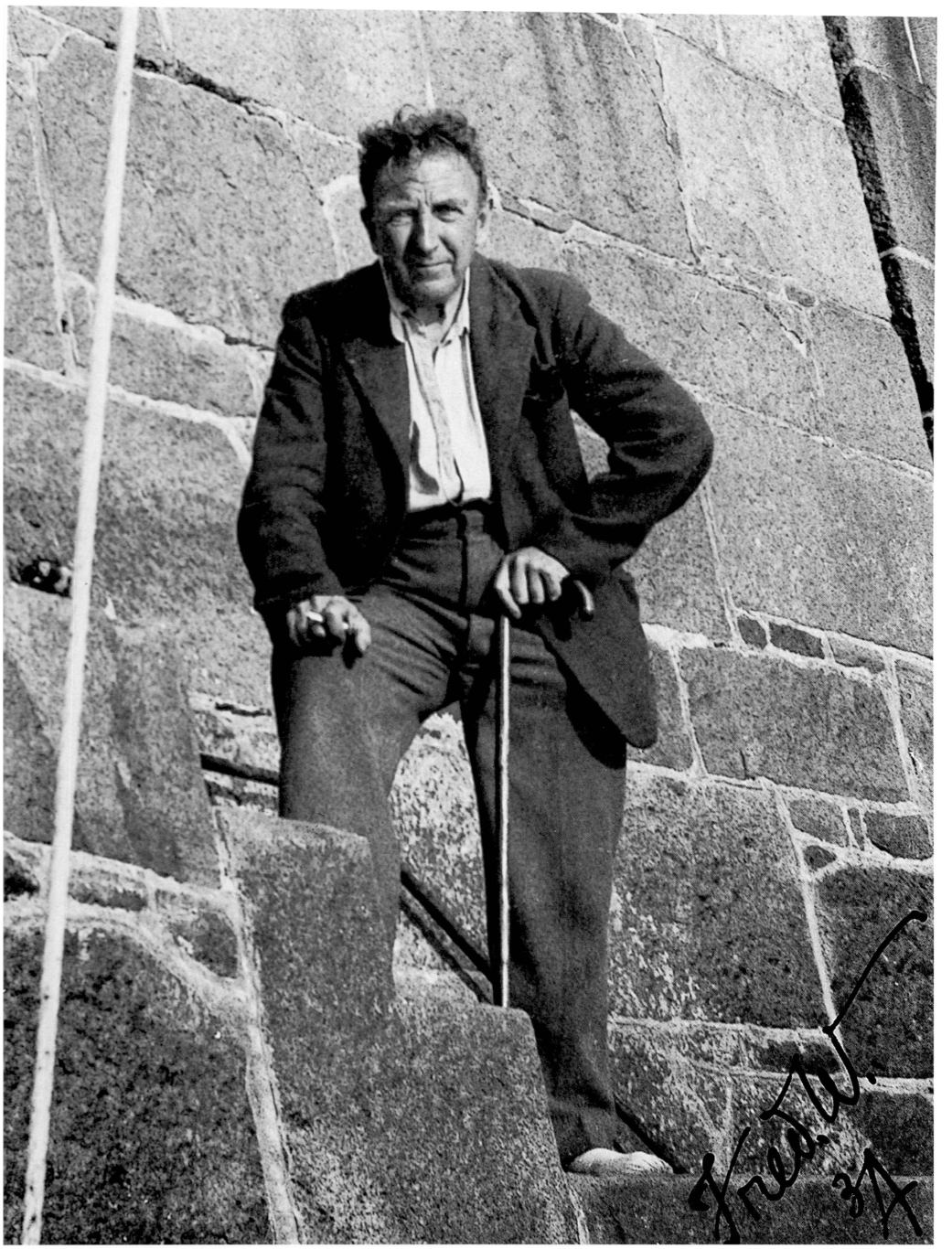
It was while on summer visits to Yorkshire that I started acquiring old stone troughs. They were just coming into fashion as the ideal containers for growing alpine plants, and numerous friends and neighbours in Yorkshire were asking me to buy them. I think that the going rate was about two shillings each, but a condition of purchase by me was that the trough should be got down to the farm gate and left on the side of the road. I then arranged with the local coal merchant that whenever he saw troughs lying by the road side, he was to pick them up and bring them back to me, or occasionally to the home of the buyer. I would pay him half a crown for the transport, and sell the troughs for ten shillings each. Most of these were very rugged and fairly small compared with those found in other stone areas, but I fancy they were often very much older. In the red sandstone area of Carlisle, the cost of making a trough was charged on the weight of stone chipped out, which may explain the thin bottoms of many of these troughs.

The number of small farm and cottage sales before 1940 was very much greater than one would now realise. I can remember at one such buying two boxes of books for sixpence, in which I discovered a paper-bound copy of the first edition of a book by Charles Reed. I eventually sold it for eight shillings and sixpence to Douglas Cleverdon, a Bristol antiquarian book dealer, only to find it advertised in his catalogue some months later for forty five shillings, to my wrath and amazement. This did much to increase my interest in antique dealing and in books.

Looking back to the autumn of 1931, my mother and I travelled from Bournemouth to Oxford for an interview with a friend of a contact in Yorkshire. She, with her husband, was running a highly profitable antique-cum-handicraft shop in Taormina,

Sicily. They were lacking staff, and hence our interview. It appeared that nearly all their customers, mostly Americans, came off cruise ships in vast surges for relatively short spells, when the shop was in chaos. I doubt if any of us looked on it as a lifetime job, but it sounded interesting - perhaps not least because of the opportunity for buying expeditions around Sicily when the shop was not active. No final conclusion was reached, but a letter was promised. However, when it arrived it stated that the slump had virtually put an end to cruises, and so the shop would be forced to close. If Sicily had materialised, this book would probably never have been written.

Mr Hawley, a dealer with a small antique shop in Southbourne near Bournemouth, had tried to persuade my mother to buy it - lock, stock and barrel - for five hundred pounds. I still possess a blue and white Delft plate I purchased from this shop for fifteen shillings. Its origins were confirmed as being made in Wincanton, Somerset. No doubt the shop would have been a better proposition than the chicken farm eagerly offered us by another person as a suitable future occupation for me. By this time I realised that antique dealing was a much wider field than postage stamps. On October 20th 1932, I rescued a paper folio of prints of the engagement between the Shannon and the Chesapeake boats from a fireplace at the time of an auction in Yorkshire. I purchased these for sixpence, and sold them for twenty pounds to the Parker Gallery of Berkeley Square in London. Elated, I walked back to my South Kensington boarding house, twenty pounds being a vast sum in those days. I think this finally made me decide that antique dealing should be my future.



6. Fred Wilson, Lecturer at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, on holiday in Sark, Channel Islands, 1934