

## Glimpses of a childhood

By Geoff Brown



I was born towards the end of World War Two in a small fishing port on the river Lune in Lancashire. Until the end of the eighteenth century this village of Glasson Dock was a more important port than Liverpool, receiving large imports of American cotton. The unhappy coincidence of the advent of larger vessels and the silting up of the river Lune saw a rapid decline in its importance. Liverpool with its deep water port became the main importation point provisioning the voracious appetite of the Lancashire cotton mills and other engines of the industrial revolution.

A brief picture of Glasson Dock. It was a village of circa 300 souls located around three miles from where the river Lune empties into the North Sea. It was surrounded by water. In

addition to the riverscape it had a salt water dock and a freshwater basin into which flowed a spur of the Preston – Kendal canal. For us kids it was a watery paradise as we swam and played by the canal and river. For our parents it was more like a nightmare and several children drowned as the notoriously dangerous tides swept in from Morecambe Bay.

My mum, Myra Brown, ran an open-all-hours general store. In the summer the shop would be open from 6am to 10pm. One of my earliest memories is being dragged back up the hill from the dock where I'd been seen walking across the top of the lock gates. Someone had seen me and rushed up to the shop. "Myra, your Geoff is playing on the lock gates again." Mum left a shop full of customers and ran a couple of hundred yards to get me. I vividly recall having the backs of my legs smacked all the way home. I must have been about five at the time. It's incredible to think that back then we were allowed to roam free even at that age. Mum's worries ended when I learnt to swim at the age of six after my older cousin Keith threw me into the canal so I had to flounder across to the other bank. Until then I'd only dared doggy paddle close to the side.

In my pre-swimming period, my pal Joe said that someone had gone to tell my mum I was playing near the water again. To avoid another smacking I scuttled back home and crept in through the back door. I secreted myself under the settee in the front parlour and nodded off. In those days the front parlour was kept in pristine isolation but for a few special occasions. Hours later I woke up to the sounds of weeping and many raised voices. I twigged they were talking about me so I started to cry. Mum heard me, dragged me out and hugged me so tightly it hurt. You see, they had assumed I'd fallen into the river and had organised search parties to scour the marshes while I was fast asleep under the parlour settee.

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