

## The Early Years 1922~1940



MY LIFE BEGAN ON August 14th 1922 in Chestnut Road Twickenham, England.

I was to be later Christened in St Mary's Church in that urban district council (which was subsequently to become a Borough, amid great local rejoicing) and would live and be raised in several homes in Twickenham prior to the outbreak of World War II some 18 years later.

The streets in which I lived remain today – Ferry Road, Arragon Road, Norcutt Road, Heath Road and Twining Avenue. My schooling



*St Mary's Church, Twickenham, the place of my Christening.*

UPSIDE DOWN IN THE DARK



*Our house in Ferry Road, Twickenham.*

took place at the Briar Road Infant School, the Archdeacon Cambridge School and the Thames Valley County School.

My father, Thomas Henry Costley, was a veteran of 'The Great War' – World War I, serving in the Royal Field Artillery as a driver of a horse drawn utility in the 116th Battery of the 26th Brigade which was attached to General Haig's 1st Division.

He saw considerable active service in France and Belgium at Mons, Ypres and later at the Battle of the Somme. Father's service



*Dad, 1914.*

## THE EARLY YEARS



*Dad, 1914.*

concluded in 1919 when he returned to England and three month's leave. Thereafter he was posted to India until his return in 1921.

Prior to my own enlistment, I felt that I lived in the shadow of the Great War, for during the conflict my father lost his younger brother Daniel who was killed at Devils Wood and has no known grave. Father never recovered from the loss, though he remained



*Father's brothers and sisters.*

grateful that good fortune had allowed him to share eggs, chips and coffee with Daniel in a French café on the eve of his subsequent death.

My Auntie Min (Dad's older sister) was married to a Hammelton of the Twickenham ferry family who plied the ferry across the Thames at Twickenham. She was to share multiple sorrow when her husband was killed during army service in Mesopotamia in 1916.

My mother was Dorothy Margaret Costley,



*Me (at left with a troubled look on my face), brother George and my mother.*



*Dad's late brother Daniel.*

née Noel, the daughter of an Irishman. She passed away during July 1972.

My recollections of youth are perhaps typical ... playing on the edge of the river opposite to the "White Swan"; being taken to a fair held at Marble Hill Park on Charter Day 22nd September 1926. Cottage loaf bread for tea – the loaf came in two parts baked together. No electric light – illumination came from a protruding gas pipe from the wall.

Street lights were gas with



*With Dad's sisters at Ramsgate, Kent, 1927.*

In 1927 I went on holiday to Ramsgate with my two aunts; and on my return I found I had a tricycle for my fifth birthday.

I vaguely remember moving from Norcutt Road to Heath Road; it occurred in an evening when it was dark. I sat in a motor van holding a tin containing some of mother's home cooked rock cakes.

Our next address was Heath Road which had trams running along the road.

I can remember the Salvation Army Band from Church Street and going to their

the light turned on an off by a man with a pole on a bicycle.

Our childhood photographs. I remember the photographer coming at about 1.00pm and I became more concerned about my dinner in the frying pan on the stove cooking (Bubble and Squeak).

Norcutt Road, 1925. We moved in with father's two sisters. The house had been in the family for many years.

On my fifth birthday I commenced my schooling at the Briar Road Infant School.



*Holidaying at Ramsgate, 1927.*

RICHMOND AND TWICKENHAM TIMES

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October 1928

There was a distressing accident in Heath-road, Twickenham on Saturday afternoon. Three children were run over by a motor car driven by Mrs. Boreham, of Feltham, who collapsed. One of the children died later in the hospital.

THAMES VALLEY TIMES

Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 1928

THREE CHILDREN RUN OVER

ONE FATALLY INJURED: WOMAN  
DRIVER'S DISTRESS

There was a distressing motor mishap in Heath-road near the end of Clifden-road on Saturday afternoon, a lady from Feltham running over three little boys, one of whom died in St. John's Hospital.

It appears that the driver of the car, Mrs. Madeline Borcham, of 61, Hanworth-road, Feltham, was driving at about 15 to 20 miles an hour, when three little boys - John Costley, aged 6 and his little brother, George Costley, aged 4 of Heath-road, and William L. Woodcock, aged 6, of Lion-road - ran across the road in front of the car, Mrs. Borcham applied her brakes, but was unable to avoid the children, and, after stopping her car, fainted, her condition being such that medical attention was necessary in order to restore her to consciousness.

The boy Woodcock received a fracture of the skull, from which he died in St. John's Hospital during the afternoon.

The brothers Costley were not so badly injured, and are on the way to recovery.

The elder boy's leg was broken, and his brother George' received abrasions on the head and face.

Onlookers exonerated Mrs. Boreham from blame. A cyclist whom she passed near the scene of the accident stated that the car was almost in the middle of the road and going at about 20 miles an hour, whilst a gentleman who was following Mrs. Borham gives it as his opinion that her speed was less than that.

The inquest will be held today.

hall in May Road near Twickenham Green on Saturday nights and the Sunday newspapers which reported about the Airship R101 crashing in France on its way to India.

Sunday school in Queens Road - the young Worshipers' League. Mother was very strict about attendance at Sunday school and this continued until I was 12 years of age. At the end of 1929 I received a certificate for 52 out of a possible 54 marks for a period ending on 31st September.

A fateful day - Saturday October 6th, 1928.

From 1927 - 1930 we lived in one room over the top of a shoe shop. We shared a kitchen and a lavatory.

"This was

one of the “homes fit for heroes to live in” promised by the British Prime Minister during the Great War 1914 – 1918.

Both my father and mother were working on the morning of Saturday October 6th 1928 and as usual both my brother George and I went out to play in streets behind the main road.

We regularly met up with ‘Billie’ Woodcock and at that time there were large sunflower plants flowering in the waste ground opposite the garage.

Our attention was drawn to a small band coming along Heath Road and we followed it. My next memory was the band coming down Clifden Road towards Heath Road; we then decided to go to the wasted ground in Tennyson Avenue.

We set out to cross Heath Road directly opposite the garage. George had a set of reins attached to him which I held. I remember looking to the right before we crossed the road and saw a motor cycle with a side-car attached, a considerable distance away from us. I do not remember looking to the left.

My next memory is lying on the ground, a noise of a car engine close to my head. I do not recollect being carried into the garage showroom. Whilst lying on the floor I saw a policeman at the window who had chased us when stealing apples from an orchard during that week. I tried to get up to run away.

We were taken by ambulance to St. John’s Hospital in Amyand Park Road. Lying on the floor of the casualty room, George was crying. It appeared to be the doctors and nurses were working on Billie Woodcock. Later that day I recollect looking up to the ceiling and being asked to count to ten.

I awoke the next morning to find my left leg was in traction and I was to spend the next three months lying on my back with a fractured thigh.

At the end of 1930 we moved into a Council house in Twining Avenue which was part of the newly constructed Leeson Estate. From one room to a new two storey detached house with three



*1928 ... picnicking in Marble Hill Park.*

UPSIDE DOWN IN THE DARK



*Picnic in Bushey Park, 1932.*



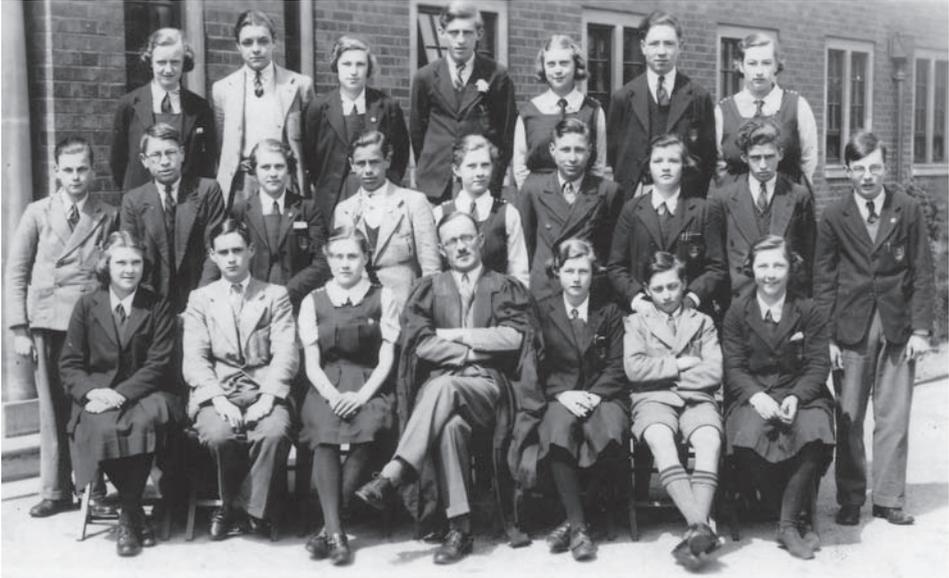
*Boy Scouts, Twining Avenue, 1934.*



*Twining Avenue, 1934.*



*Twining Avenue, 1934.*



*Thames Valley County School.*

bedrooms, kitchen and living room, hall and bathroom. My mother must have felt this was a palace.

After two years at the Briar Road Infant School (1927–1929) my education was continued at Archdeacon Cambridge School (opened 1842) having been built by the Church of England. The school buildings with boys and girls being taught separately were located alongside the Holy Trinity Church facing Twickenham Greet in Vicarage Road. My father and his brothers and sisters had also attended Archdeacon Cambridge School.

In year seven (standard five) the teacher, Mr Buttram, had been at the school with my father, both of whom had played cricket and soccer together in the school teams.

Mr Buttram had been in the Army during the Great War and trained to be a teacher after the war. Naturally, and fortunately for me, he took a great interest in my education and privately coached me, enabling me to sit for a scholarship at Thames Valley County School. Obviously he had a great influence on my education.

In sport I played soccer and cricket for the school. I enjoyed my school life and once I learnt to read, I read a great deal.

I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the Thames Valley Country School from 1934 until 1939. This school was opened in 1928 to provide a grammar school of education.



*1938 – Rugby First XV.*

Note: ‘Grammar School’ – a state-maintained secondary school providing an education bias for children who are selected by the eleven-plus examination, teacher’s reports, or other means.

The construction of these government schools in the 1920’s by the British Government was brought about by the loss of 38,834 young officers in the First World War.

This slaughter of the nation’s elite was widely regarded as the most tragic and damaging aspect of that war.

These young officers came from fee-paying ‘public schools’ such as Eton and Harrow to name a few. Schools which could only provide a secondary education to a select few.

The British Government in 1924, by Act of Parliament, set up these new county schools to provide a more secondary school facility for the youth of the country.

In the First World War Britain lost 950,000 of its youth and to avoid such a thing ever happening again, Britain looked to the Air Force rather than the Army.

In the Second World War British Commonwealth lost 490,000 of which 70,000 were aircrew, that is one seventh; and it was from the grammar schools not from the established public schools that this youth came.

“It is salutary to see how the pursuit of a “cheaper” policy



1939 - First XI Hockey.

brought in its train only a much higher cost. The education of a member of a bomber crew was the most expensive in the world; it cost some 10,000 pounds sterling for each man, enough to send ten men to Oxford or Cambridge for three years.”

(A quotation from the RAF Chief of Bomber Command in 1944.)

Note: 10,000 pounds sterling in 1940 would be \$1,250,000 Australian today.

My years at Thames Valley County School were full of sport, particularly Rugby and Athletics. Mathematics was my great interest in my studies.

I spent the summer of 1940 in Athletics training with the Thames Valley Harriers and working part time (odd jobs). I was very pleased with my modest successes during this period, which included: First in under 19 years One Mile Middlesex County Championships; Third in Shot Putt; Third in Under 19 years One Mile Southern Counties in England; Second Open Mile Thames Valley Harrier’s Championships.

We all knew that the war was coming during the late 1930’s. I had already settled on a career; it was to be a pilot in the Air Force. My mother was totally opposed to this.

I left school in July 1939 then the war came. I had applied to the Royal Air Force and it would have been likely, if there had not been

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a war, I would have sat an examination for a scholarship to the RAF College at Cranwell.

My father, when it seemed possible that eventually I might be "called up" into the Army, something he was totally opposed to (memories of ground forces in the Great War) signed the necessary papers in June 1940 and the RAF placed me in the recruits for the Fleet Air Arm, Royal Navy.

I joined the service on 16th September 1940, the day after the Battle of Britain Day.

**Middlesex County Council**  
**Education Committee.**

**THAMES VALLEY COUNTY SCHOOL,**  
**FIFTH CROSS ROAD,**  
**TWICKENHAM.**

Telephone: POPESGROVE 3244.

Head Master:  
H. W. BLIGH, M.A. (Camb.)

July, 1939.

JOHN H. COSTLEY has been a pupil of this school since September 1934 and is now in the Fifth Form, where I have no doubt he has done well in the General School Certificate Examination of the London University just taken.

His intelligence is distinctly above the average; he does particularly well in Mathematics and Science, and also has a very good athletic record, and sound physique.

He has been found punctual and reliable and can rely on himself and hold his own views, and is quite popular with his fellows.

In my opinion he will be successful in business or, if he can find it, some career which utilizes his ability in Mathematics.

*H. W. Bligh*  
HEADMASTER.