

Hugh Illingworth, born Bingley, Yorks 1944 records the following: Here is the first chapter of a book which my grandfather, Ralph Illingworth (1868 - 1956) was encouraged to write by his children. My father related that Grandpa Illingworth wrote this in later life but did not get beyond the pages below; however, the end notes written by me provide the context for this preliminary account.

MEMOIRS

of

RALPH ILLINGWORTH ESQ.



of

NORWOOD
SHELF
HALIFAX
YORKSHIRE

I have often been asked by my Boys to write a history of my life, maybe owing to my habit of relating to them various episodes that occurred before they could remember. And also being born of poor but romantic parents with ancestors of almost noble birth, dating back to the year 1475, it might be wise now to give to them a short history so that they can continue telling the stories to their children.

Well, the very first thing I remember is the 5th of November, 1871, Plot night. I was sitting upon a wee buffet by a small fire, in proud possession of a Parkin Pig and it seemed so lovely to me that I dare not take the plunge to take the first bite. However, whilst I was wondering how and where I could take a bite without spoiling its appearance a neighbourly lady came from behind me and took a huge bite, which, I quite remember, nearly broke my heart and, of course, brought out my mother who took me in her arms to still my indignant cries and after scolding the lady took me off to bed. She then told to me wonderful stories so that I could forget my trouble.

Mother was a wonderful woman; full of love for us kiddies of which there were six and an adopted daughter - all healthy and strong and full of mischief. Poor mother - I often wonder how she could smile as she usually did with such a noise and always so crowded as our house consisted of one living-room a small kitchen and two bedrooms. And worst of all a very small amount of money to feed and clothe us. I believe about two pounds per week. Our food was very plain but always ample. We each had our own porridge bowl which mother saw was amply filled with porridge and treacle. When this was eaten we rarely wanted anything else. For mid-day dinner - usually stew made in a large pan to last for several days. This stew was cheap and good. 11b shin beef, cabbage, turnips, carrots, Pearl barley, peas and last but best about twenty suet dumplings made in various sizes according to our various ages. Also a ham bone from

the butchers.

For a change Mother made us on one day of the week what we all looked forward to _ dumplings made from ordinary dough and boiled. These were light, very bulky and wholesome. Served up hot with treacle, or, if we preferred it, beef dripping. This was a delicious dinner. Another delightful dinner was a real Yorkshire Meat and Potato Pie. It was made in a dish of a size rarely seen these days. Half a pound of meat and the remaining contents Potatoes with a dash of onions and carrots with a covering of pastry about one inch thick. What a feast! For tea (so called) unlimited bread with treacle or again beef dripping. On Sunday for dinner - a roast of beef and real Yorkshire pudding _ piles of it. The beef was roasted on the Jack before the fire with the potatoes in the dish put to catch the meat gravy. All this helped out with haver cake made a meal fit for a King. This kind of food along with home-made sweetcakes and old fashioned Pastries - all made at home - ensured a happy and very healthy family.

I must now describe my Father and his business as this affects my life to a large extent. In his early life, I believe about his sixteenth year, he left home and joined the Black Watch as a drummer and born of a musical family learnt to play various musical wind instruments, worked hard and eventually became one of the Band being stationed at Edinburgh Castle under a clever Band Master who took a great interest in him which helped my father to save a little money and at the age of 22 he got his discharge from the Army and married my mother. They were very poor but they faced their many hardships bravely, being determined to pull together and eventually surmount every obstacle.

For a time the struggle was terribly hard. Business was bad all over the Country. _ It was in the hungry Sixties. He was only able to earn a few shillings per week which with scrupulous care gave them food and shelter. Eventually a generous Mill Master who knew of their plight gave my father a regular job at the princely wage of 12/- per week. The work proved to my Father's liking and pleased him very much as he felt it would help him to start a little business of his own. His work was collecting from the Cloth looms and Spinning frames the wool threads and fluff made in the process of Cloth manufacturing. He sorted the waste into it's different qualities and prepared it ready for the waste dealers who came to the mill at intervals and bought the different lots at a price so low that my father thought that if he had the capital he could also start as a dealer and then most of his troubles and poverty would disappear.

He talked the matter over with my mother and they decided to work hard and save the necessary capital and see what could be done. My mother being a careful and godly woman, said it could only be done by prayer, hard work and constant care. So they began their task cheerfully and bravely; mother always busy until late into the night, making all our clothes, sewing, baking, washing and a hundred and one jobs so that she could in, every possible way help to save the needful capital.

My father besides doing his work at the mill doing almost any kind of work for his neighbours in his spare time. He confided in his Master his ambitious aims and was encouraged by him to attend a night school to improve his education and having a great desire to please such a kindly thought immediately acted upon the advice and seeking out all the books relating to wool and the making of cloth became wonderfully well informed with the subject which stood him in good stead in future years. So much so that he had gained a knowledge of raw materials that many by-products were easily recognised by him immediately and valued accordingly. My father was soon known, far and near for his sterling honesty. His word was always his bond.

After working for this Master for some two years and during all that time father was saving every penny possible, some £40/-/- in all father was so sure of his capabilities that he approached his Master who, on hearing all the plans, agreed it was time to make a start. As the capital was so small the room required for stock would be small. So father would have the use of wool scales and room free until father could find cheap rooms. This kindly action was never forgotten and I am glad to say was repaid in many ways later. To say life became easier would be wrong for it was only about 3 months later it was necessary for my father to get a warehouse and he rarely finished his work before 10 p.m. This did not seem to make any impression upon

him as he was blessed with an iron constitution and an indomitable will.

Well, he prospered. He got to be known as a man who would buy anything if the price was right. His army training had certainly benefited him in many ways. Discipline - short and sharp decisions - constantly on the look-out. He was of a kindly disposition, generous and lovable; fond of anything beautiful both in nature, old literature, fine Art, furniture, Antiques. Music took all his leisure time especially the Cello, being a teacher whilst in his thirties. He was a member of the Old Choral Society, being in the Band under Charles Halle also in Oratoria. A man of many parts liked by and wanted by almost everyone. This unfortunately was his undoing. He neglected his meals, took intoxicants instead and undermined his wonderful constitution. He contracted T.B. and died in his 52nd. year which was my 21st. year.

At six years I was sent to the Infants School. I disliked it very much as I was very wilful and I did not like being taught to do exactly as I was told. I frequently rebelled and was constantly being punished. On several occasions, between the age of ten and thirteen, I was brought before the head teachers and the Master and threatened with expulsion. However my schooling ended upon the day I became thirteen. What a glorious day that was to me. How I gloated over that day. I was free to go full time to work. Fifty-one years have slipped by since then. I am still working and enjoying each working day quite as well as ever. I ought to mention that I began working half days at the age of ten but I must continue my story. I had shown a great desire to become proficient and know as much about every kind of waste products made in every kind of textile manufacturing. I was told that could only be accomplished by studying the actual books written by textile experts. These I found difficult to acquire as my allowance was only a few coppers per week. However my father, seeing how anxious I was to learn, came to my aid and helped me to buy what I required. I carefully studied these and in time found the knowledge very useful, enabling me to recognise any class of waste material offered to us. I was not given any special work to do, but was recognised as the boy. I was errand boy and at that time this was not light work, as I often had to walk with messages as much as four to five miles to Mills in the country villages as telephones were then non-existent.

After I had been full time two years I thought my job was a bit too slow. Things, in my opinion, wanted some ginger, so, of course, I explained to father that if I were allowed to travel locally, I could improve things. So it was arranged that I should travel three days per week, and as soon as I commenced my troubles began. An uncle, my father's youngest brother, a man of a totally different type to father; jealous, greedy, selfish, who, at the time, was acting for father as salesman also buyer, objected to one so young as I to be allowed to go out; not so well posted or competent enough to buy well. In this case, as I look back, I agree he was right. At the same time I could not begin younger. So he objected and, of course, I persisted as I felt it was all jealousy. So I got my way and the first lot I bought went wrong. I remember well calling upon a man called Dawson; a dealer about 70 years of age. He offered me a parcel, about 4/5 cwt., white worsted Thrums at 8d. per lb. Of course I wanted to appear big so I offered him 7d. per lb. He smilingly told me that I had made a very sporting offer and as he was anxious to begin business with me would accept. I got my bargain home and showed it to father. He just said they were nice but thought they were on the top for price. I disagreed. Well, I tried to sell to everyone I knew but I could not get within 1/2d of cost. This being my first deal, and a poor one at that, one can imagine my chagrin. My Uncle was delighted and went out of his way to ask me if I had sold my Thrums. Father sympathised with me and said "Now my boy, sell the Thrums. The loss is a mere nothing. Don't be downhearted. The man who says he never lost nowt never made owt. Try again, better luck next time. Let this be a good lesson to you. Just pocket your pride". This was the thing to do, but how? I felt so indignant but with the wrong person. I did not then see that I was the culprit. However, I sold and lost upon my first transaction, including carriage, 22/10. Oh! The shame of it. Father never mentioned it, simply when we met in a morning, "Good morning, lad. Anything good?" "Yes, things are a little better. Wool is rising slowly and I think it is safe to buy anything in waste."

However, I went along very carefully. I most certainly had a "Bee in my Bonnet." I had found out that in imagination it was easy to make money but in reality quite

different. Well, I had not made up my loss of 22/10 and a full week had gone by. I did not want my father to feel that I had lost my pluck. My Uncle was very quiet. I know secretly gloating at my early reverse. I felt this and had made my mind up to show special care and run no risk. However, one day I spent the whole of my time amongst the waste dealers we knew as I felt sure there was plenty of room on top. This is as true today as then. A few days after making my bad deal, I met a commission man named Fox, who told me he knew of a small dealer at Batley who, he said, had tons of waste that we would buy if we could see it. I mentioned this to father who said I might go over by train along with Fox to look at all the different lots and report this to him. I arranged with Fox to do this. I felt awfully important as we stepped out of the train at Batley. This was my first train journey on business. However, we soon arrived at our destination which turned out to be a well stocked waste warehouse. Fox introduced me to Mr. Hepp like this: "Nah then, Ah telled thi ahd come an ah hev anall. This young Illingworth. He's nobbot a little un but quality yer naw. Hahiver George, What do yer want for yer owd pickers and hah monny hah yer? "Abaht 3 tons" says he "An ah want 13/- per cwt. for em, carriage forrad". I replied with "10/- per cwt. is nearer my valuation." George replied "I knaw, tha mun try again lad, then we might get nearer." However, with a lot of haggling I bought the three Tons at 11/3 per cwt. Also about one ton of cotton ropes at 9/- per cwt., two tons of Old Cotton Bands 1/6 per cwt., about one ton of Old Cotton Gears with mails on at 7/- per cwt.. By this time I was getting a bit uneasy. I had bought about 7 Tons and I felt that I had to see how these turned out for profit. After paying our expenses and all carriages, including a commission to Mr. Fox., I had roughly £2/10/- per ton profit on the three tons of Old Pickers, which equalled £7/10/-

1 ton of cotton ropes @ £5/-/- per ton.....	£5/-/-
2 tons of Cotton bands @ £2/-/- per ton.....	£2/-/-
7 tons of .Cotton Gears @ £1/-/- per ton.....	£7/-/-
Total gross.....	£22/10/-

When I had got the result from my father I think I was tongue-tied. The amount seemed stupendous. I - a boy - had, in two weeks time cleared over £20/-/-.

I am afraid I got a bit I swelled headed, and maybe cheek. However my success totally effaced my first reverse and gave me any amount of pluck and made me very keen to get new business. My father had never had any travellers who called upon the cloth manufacturers in the woollen district so I thought I would remedy this and start right away and as my father I began. Of course this was, a very big undertaking for at that time there were no Autos, no electric cars neither horse or steam cars and the inconvenience was appalling.

My Wednesday journey was usually as follows: Leave Bradford Station lumbered with samples weighing 35-40lbs. Arrive at Heckmondwike about 8 a.m. and call upon Factories. Then walk to White Lea and Birstall and make various calls. Dinner about 1 p.m. - cost 8d. Begin again about 1-40 and walk to Batley, make many calls and then on to Dewsbury. Train about 6 p.m. to Bradford (tired). I will try and illustrate an actual working week at the age of 16. "Ralph, do you know what time it is, etc.? This is the third time I have awakened you. It is 6-30. Your porridge is poured out and don't forget Calvert will be ready with his horse and Lorry at 7 a.m. so hurry up or you cannot go. So I called back to my sister "All right, coming." and just turned over and missed Calvert as my sister kept her word and let me sleep until 7-30a.m. Of course I was annoyed and told her that she was a duck-egg because I knew this would annoy her.

At eighteen I felt I was getting quite a good buyer and salesman but as I look back I can now see that my intentions were good but my knowledge was very small indeed but I was very optimistic. Everything seemed possible to one who would work. This feeling has never left me and now, as I write, I have still the same feeling. I could now feel that our business was not progressing as well as it had been doing. This was a trouble to me. I could see that my dear father was somehow failing. He had been, all my life, a real live wire, always working and planning to build up a prosperous business; giving me every encouragement; taking me about with him; talking to me and explaining everything he could about business and always impressing me that the only way was to always realize the importance of honesty. He repeatedly told me "Whoever you do

business with let them feel your intentions are always a fair deal. Don't sell a man anything at any time that he cannot make a profit on if you know it as his living depends upon this. However, at 20 I was working very hard but found that something was radically wrong. We did not seem able to sell. (1888) Everyone seemed inclined to sell and that meant stagnation. Values were coming down with a rush and we found we had an accumulation of stock which was not wanted.

And the worst blow I had was the loss of my dear father in May of that year. I had no one to advise me. Everything was left to my mother who, unfortunately, had no knowledge of business. And so we decided to try and carry on the business. Well, business did not improve and it seemed a hopeless task; prices falling lower and lower. I felt it imperative to sell out and begin in a small way on my own so, in 1891, I made an end of everything and with a few pounds, started on my own.

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The early days after this are sketchy but Ralph Illingworth spent a year or so in the United States before he returned and went on to found E.Illingworth & Co.(Shelf) Ltd. which first started in Bradford and then was on a large site in Shelf, Nr. Halifax for many years. His children, Eric Illingworth, Ronald Illingworth (my father), Cyril Lane (son-in-law.)and Ralph Lane and Geoff Oxley (Ronald's son-in-law) managed the business into the 1980s following Ralph Illingworth's death in 1956.

The business prospered in the early part of the twentieth century in wool waste, manufacturing surgical dressings and axle box packings during the second world war and emerged as a prominent manufacturer of needlepunch underlay, floorcovering and carpet tiles in the 1950s onwards.

Like many family firms of the time, whilst there were profitable and happy times, they subsequently ran into trouble on the death of the founder and E.Illingworths' had to sell out and subsequently became Illingworth Carpets, part of the John Crossley Carpet Trades manufacturing organization of Halifax, a family company, who in turn became part of Carpets International.

The last thirty years has seen the demise of the textile trade and the wool carpet industry and the remnants of the many popular brands of companies such as Kosset Carpets and Crossleys are now owned by a Hong Kong conglomerate.

I remember Grandpa Illingworth, when as a young child, we would go and see him at 'Norwood', a rather grand mill house adjacent to the Shelf Mills, near Halifax and the village of Illingworth, where the business was situated. The house was full of some terrifying antiques (Grandpa was a keen collector) and I remember having to run past antique screens painted as figures on the way past the billiard room to the toilet. This in itself was something, being situated like a throne on a pedestal! The house had an impressive central staircase branching off to right and left with a gallery encircling the hall below. Outside, there were two impressive stone stags adjacent to the central door from the hall to the garden. Alas, this house was burned down in the nineteen eighties and the area is now covered by residential housing.

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The family tree of our branch of the Illingworth family was researched extensively by Cyril and Doris (nee Illingworth) Lane some forty years ago and is available on the www.illingworth.net web site.

