

A Trip to Greenock 1945

August-September

At the end of the war my parents, with my sister and I, went to Greenock to see our relatives. I was very reluctant as I was sure I would be required to wear a kilt, a horrifying thought.

The residential area was tenement housing, continuous three storey facades right round the block, and built right out to the street. Open entries from the street, led to stairs to the landing on the next level. On each landing was a common lavatory to serve the two or three flats on that level. My grandparents flat had two rooms, one a very nicely furnished sitting room with a bed built into a recess in the wall and the other a kitchen eating room with a similar recessed bed.

In the centre of the block was an open area with common wash houses, where children played as well as in the streets. My grand parents were very kind to me. War time rationing had not ended and powdered egg, instead of fresh, as I was used to in Ireland, is one shock still clear in my mind. Double-decker ice-cream wafers and a visit to Well Park and Lady Octavia gardens are pleasant memories. I was taken to inspect a captured German submarine which was on display to the public. The inside was very cramped even for a child. I remember a leather upholstered bench seat. I also remember my sister and I waving little allied flags from the parlour window as a parade passed. The area, being close to the industrial area, had been heavily bombed during the war. On one occasion people were gathering debris and lighting bonfires in the street, I believe it was VJ day. The children with their challenging aggressive attitudes did not endear me. On one occasion I was challenged and then attacked by a boy of my own size. I tried to run away but he kept close on my heels. As I ran I was getting further and further away from Grandma's. Soon I would be lost, as to me, each street

looked almost identical. There was nothing to do but stand and fight. When I turned and we clashed he began to run back the way we came. Again we clashed and the fight continued from the street onto a bomb site covered in rubble. He gave up and I took off for Grandma's never to hear of him again.

We visited my paternal grandmother at the sanatorium in the Inverkip Road. She was lying in bed. I wanted to give her a present. I gave her my big white coins because they were the best. Dad told me off as soon as we left the sanatorium. I would have been age 6 and my sister age 4. My sister insists it was her that gave the coins. At the time I was upset, not realizing that Dad would have been distressed about his mother's plight and that the staff would take the money from her as soon as we left.