

1923 - 1929 Early Days

For centuries the Wrights lived and worked in the little village of Asterby near Louth in Lincolnshire as weavers, labourers, ratcatchers and gamekeepers. I have traced them to 1750 but suspect they go back at least another two centuries.

The first world war was to change this ancient pattern. My father served in the Machine Gun Corps and did not return to his home village. When discharged he became a lorry driver on Grimsby Fish Docks, and then a driver for the Silver Queen Bus Company plying between Louth and Grimsby. A tough job, no windscreen and solid tyres. He lived in digs in Lee Street, Louth, and married Jessie Maddison from Donington on Bain in 1923. The following year they moved to 26 Kidgate and I was born on 18th November.

My father's brother, Alf, had previously been a miner in Australia, and a game keeper in Scotland and Wales but had now married Dolly Cambrai and lived at 7 Nichol Hill. (Dolly was later to take over the nearby corner shop.) He worked as a furniture remover but agreed to invest £100 to set up 'Wright Brothers' as bus proprietors. Profits were to be shared equally and Fred was to be paid a weekly wage of £2.50. On the 10th February, 1925, they signed a hire purchase agreement with Grimsby Motors Ltd., for the purchase of a 14 seater Renault Charabanc Reg. No. BE 3982. The total price was £175, being £75 down plus ten monthly instalments of £10.

The photograph shows the charabanc full of passengers outside the Wheatsheaf Inn in Westgate. Fred is the one wearing the white cap. Wright Brothers appeared to have launched a thriving business but all was not as it seemed. Aunt

Dolly insisted that Alf withdrew from the partnership in August 1926. This may have been because my father had approached a local businessman, Mr Kemp, for financial support, Aunt Dolly did not like Mr Kemp and she and Alf appear to have taken the Ford Model T bus as their share of the partnership assets. In a conversation recorded in the 1980's she recalls their attempts to operate a bus service on their own.

After the split there was an overdraft of £19.02 and John Wright, their father, was still owed £32. The total income for this period had been £766 and it seems sad that a small increase in charges could easily have turned a loss into a profit. On the other hand it must be remembered that there were numerous horse drawn and motor carriers operating in the Louth area and competition for passengers was probably very keen.

However the bus company was resurrected on the 1st September, 1926, as 'Wright's Bus Service' with the financial backing of Mr E Kemp, owner of the East Lincolnshire Motor Company. It appears from the accounts that Fred Wright took a weekly wage of £3.50 and the balance of receipts over expenses was paid weekly to Mr Kemp. A partnership agreement was drawn up with Fred Wright taking a 25% share of profits, the balance going to Mr Kemp. (My brother Les thinks the split was 50/50.) Expansion was rapid and the red and cream buses became well known throughout a large part of North Lincolnshire.

This was the backdrop to my life for the next 25 years, but I can recall little of the early days of the company, except that in the late 1920's my father had a car with a dicky seat at the back. You opened the boot and a seat folded upwards. It was a little draughty for the rear passengers.

I do remember a little about our life at 26 Kidgate however. It was a two up/two down terraced house with stairs up to an attic bedroom and a pavement about two feet above the road. Brother Leslie was born in 1926 and I have a vivid picture of him riding his tricycle down the passage at the side of the house and diving headfirst from the pavement into the road. Immediately opposite was Strawson's banana ripening store, a heated warehouse containing hundreds of bunches of bananas.

The long back garden was reached by a steep flight of wooden steps and in the summer my father erected an old army bell-tent for us to play in. I remember my father once going fishing and bringing me back some live fish. I kept them in a bucket and fed them with sugar beet. Why ???)

This was the time of 2LO, the beginnings of radio. My father had a crystal set and in later years my mother told me that reception was so poor that he used to put out the fire as the crackling of the coal interfered with his listening.

Two final pre-school memories.

I clearly recall the thrill I experienced when Grandpa Maddison took me to see a silent picture at the Palace Picture Theatre in 1929.

At Uncle Harry's wedding I had my first introduction to the funny ways in which grown-ups react. At the reception, aged 4 or 5, I crawled underneath the table groaning with food and ran my hand up the ladies legs as they helped themselves. I thought this was hilarious but the ladies (and my parents) were not amused.

