

Celebrated writer and artist Alasdair Gray kindly agreed to write a foreword, as his father had been a friend of Wilfred's.

The best history is always local history. Only personal accounts of doings in a particular time and place convey what life was once like, so to understand people we need their letters, diaries, reminiscences, contemporary fiction. Their gossipy details show people like ourselves in a surprisingly different world more clearly than what we learn that governments did. State papers, official announcements, even declarations of war are the results, not causes, of how most people lived in a day-to-day, hand-to-mouth way.

Histories of almost any time suggest warfare and invasion was as much a national business as it is in our own time, but Sterne's *Sentimental Journey Through France to Italy* shows that when French and British governments were fighting to dominate North America and India, tourists from each country could travel through the other without referring to the war and without a passport. Wilfred's Travels especially interests me because it tells of a time and place and class of people to which my father belonged and which my childhood partly shared. I was born in 1935 and like all children grew up taking my world for granted.

Like many, perhaps most of my classmates at school, my father had survived fighting in the First World War, which did not interest us. We were too interested in our own lives to wonder about our parents' past, and although I knew one boy whose dad boasted to him about the Germans he had killed, my own, I believe like most other survivors, hardly mentioned it to his wife and children. He had the good luck to have a steady factory job between the two world wars, and was so unaffected by the depression that left a quarter of Glasgow's people jobless, that he acquired a weekend home in the country - not a hut at Carbeth like Wilfred's, but a converted wheel-less single decker bus in a field near East Kilbride.

And by the late 30s Clydeside industry revived in preparation for World War Two, a prosperity that lasted throughout the war and for over twenty years after it, despite the complaints of wealthier people about the austerities of Labour governments and greedy trade unions.

The world Wilfred and my Dad knew was a safe base for holiday excursions and journeys further afield. Until the 1970s their Scotland, their Glasgow produced and exported ships, steam railway trains, cars, lavatory pans, carpets and textiles, and built Britain's first nuclear power station at Dounreay.

Gradually, then suddenly, that Glasgow and Britain went away. Many young folk have never learned it existed, though some public facilities that can still make life better for us survive from then, although threatened with closure - schools, hospitals, libraries, social services.

In a grimmer way life here is as interesting as ever, but this book shows some ways in which it was lived better in the past, and should be lived better in future.