

GORDON HASSELL INTERVIEW

With

Stanley Kiaer

Summer 1975

CONTENTS

Introduction	
Early Years The Docks	Page 1
Schooling	Page 2
The Civil Service Social Services	Page 3
The Scouts	Page 4
Jordans	Page 5
Military Service	Page 6
The Tanks	Page 7
Some Extraordinary Experiences Coloured Pencils	Page 8
The Supernatural	Page 9
The Map	Page 11
Demobilised	Page 12
My Marriage Meeting the Oxford Group	Page 13
The Registration of The Oxford Group	Page 14
The Opposition	Page 15
The Institute of Directors	Page 17

INTRODUCTION

I first got to know Gordon Hassell as a fellow Trustee of the Westminster Memorial Trust in 1962. He was also its Secretary, and I took over from him as Secretary, when Moral Re-Armament began to use the Westminster Theatre much more for its work, and started a programme to double the size of the Theatre, 2½ years later.

He became my mentor in not only teaching me the art of being a Secretary – the taking of minutes, the learning of charity law, but also in sensing when the contrast with my previous life in a paid job in the City and Manchester Square proved too much. His instant cure was to give me lunch at the Royal Commonwealth Society, and it always worked!

Some 10 years later some of us went on a course to the Churches Television Centre in Herts. Amongst other things I was shown how to appear on TV, and how to record an interview. Fired with enthusiasm for my new found skill (rather limited as the recording may show), I asked Gordon if I could interview him on his life story. The result is this transcript of the tape, which has some of his miraculous experiences in the tanks in the 1914/18 war, his pivotal role in the race to register 'The Oxford Group' at Companies House, and his resuscitation of the Institute of Directors at a crucial time in its history after the 1914/18 War.

Stanley Kiaer
July 2005

Gordon Hassell Interview

With Stanley Kiaer

Summer 1975

Stanley Kiaer: Gordon Hassell has had a long, varied and distinguished career- an honorary life member of the Institute of Directors, a Founder Trustee of The Westminster Theatre, one of the officers who served in the first Tanks in the 1914/1918 War. These are but some of the areas in life where he's been a pioneer and here we are at his home in Hampstead, just after a very nice cup of tea. I think it would be rather good, Gordon, if we could start off at the beginning, and you tell us when you were born and where, and what your parents did.

Gordon Hassell: OK Stanley, it terrifies me this, I'll do my best. Scrub out anything, that you think is wrong, and stop me because I am a bit of a gossip. I am 85½, reasonably healthy but I know that my health will go down a bit. I will be as concise as I can and tell you all I can remember quickly.

Early Years

Well, I was born 2nd December 1889 in London. My father and mother and myself have been Londoners practically all our lives. I was born in Islington, and incidentally that was the year in which there was the very first dock strike.

SK: Was that under Ben Tillett? And for the famous "Docker's Tanner"?

GH: He fought for the famous tanner sixpence, and that affected me because my father was a civil servant, a customs official. From our house wherever we lived, whether Walthamstow or Leytonstone, we often used to leave home in the middle of the night. In those days 1890/1900, the first ten years of my life, I remember him going sometimes down in the middle of the night to get to the docks when he was on duty. Later on of course I became intensely interested in that dock strike. He told me then the kind of man he was, an Evangelical/Christian. He was a musician and used to play the organ at various churches and he founded a little mission all on his own down there. He told me of his first convert, in a cottage he played the harmonium, she was a woman, who was dead drunk and came to smash it up on the first night. He was intensely honest and he taught me that in the first ten years.

The Docks

I must have asked him a question, which always stuck in my mind about that strike and the social conditions of England in that last decade of the Victorian era. He told me how there was no regular work. It wasn't his duty but he saw the gates of the big docks close and a ship come in. The officials would say they wanted 200 men at less than sixpence an hour. The men would almost

fight to get through the gate, and then next day they would not necessarily be at the front of the queue again, so it was extremely cruel indeed. Of course, as history showed us, they won the fight with the help of people like Cardinal Newman. Later in life came the organisation which we know so well about (Moral Re-Armament) but in those days, you see, the small middle class home was salaried and we were extremely well fed, as we lived extremely cheaply.

Schooling

SK: What about schooling, Gordon, where was that ?

GH: The first school, was a Dames school in Walthamstow. Later at different times I found two of my greatest friends Don Blofield and his great friend, who was also at the Blue Coat School, Brian Robbins, also went to that school, so three of us, extraordinary enough, all went to learn our ABC in the same Dames School.

SK: At age was that at?

GH: That was up to about 6 to 7 years old.

SK: After that?

GH: After that I left, as father was the appointed the head of Tilbury Docks and we moved down to Gravesend . I had a year there, and with great joy I went to, what was called a modern school, which was a private school. There I learnt two of the things, which I absolutely love, which is music, where the whole school had to sing, and second, art. Father then found in the wintertime that to cross on the ferry for his night duty sometimes took him across the fog from Gravesend to Grays, and to Tilbury. That was quite impossible and he had to bribe men to row him across. One night there were 19 wrecks. That altered it and meant we had to move to the other side of the river, where I then went at about nine years old to the Grays endowed school, which was one of the old foundations. It was a real old grammar school and, being in the first form, I had to carry on my person a large sheet called a grammar sheet, with all the rules of grammar on it. "Syntax is the Science of Sentences". I had to repeat it.

Well in 1900 we moved back to London as Dad was promoted in his career and then I spent my main schooling in the Victoria Park, another foundation school called Parmeters School. It's still there and happens at the moment to be still fighting for its existence. It was a very fine school and I thoroughly enjoyed my schooling up to 16/17.

SK: How did the War affect you, Gordon? How old were you when the 1914/1918 War broke out?

The Civil Service

GH: Well just the before the War, as I mentioned, my father being a civil servant, it was natural for me to say that that would be my career. Then I joined King's College London, where they had these sessions preparatory to the examination for the Civil Service and at 18 I sat for my examinations and passed what was then called the Second Division of the Civil Service. May I mention that I took the sixth place out of 1300 competitors!

SK: That's fantastic.

GH: That in fact was for a post at £70 a year with rises of £5 a year to £120, I think it was, and against terrific competition, which shows the conditions of life, far more men than jobs. Be that as it may, my career then started in Victoria Street near Victoria Station.

SK: Just near the Westminster Theatre.

GH: Very near Westminster Cathedral, and the Westminster Theatre, which was then a church, and the road unmade. I always remember the winter when the horses and the horse buses could not go up and down Victoria Street. That was a temporary position in the first development of the Liberal government 1906 under Asquith, with Lloyd George as his Chancellor of the Exchequer. He then passed the first Old Age Pensions Bill and I was then appointed to Whitehall, which was then the Local Government Board. I was in fact with the only two other young clerks in a room on the mezzanine floor of the huge building, which was on the corner opposite Westminster Abbey. From there I was able to see the funeral procession of King Edward VII, in which there were 19 crowned heads of Europe on their feet including the Kaiser. He had a white charger and his famous dog.

Social Services

SK: I believe you were then a couple of years in that particular branch of the Civil Service and then you tell me you got interested in the first of the Social Services Bills, as we might call it today, going through Parliament and applied for a transfer. You then came to work in the setting up of the department, which really pioneered the Social Services under Lloyd George.

GH: It was the National Insurance Act of 1911, a colossal act establishing compulsory insurance, very much as we know it now, although the contributions were very small. The slogan was "9d for 4d". The man paid 4d a week and the employer another 4d, while the government put another penny on it. O there was ninepence revenue for practically every workman in the country. It was a very great act, tentative in the sense that we had practically a year to organise it all, before it came in to operation. It involved a bitter battle with the British Medical Association. All the Doctors, who were then asked to come on a panel, were offered 6/- a year for each person. They wanted 10/-. We finally compromised on 8/6d, but after having great battles and resignations, large sections of the

population found it difficult and therefore were exempted completely, like part-time workers. There were the fisheries to consider and all sorts of masses,

It was a very exciting year or so for me as for some reason (I was never quite clear about my experience in the registry) of what I call precedence came to light and formed an index. I could see that the Treasury authority for half a million pounds was on a Treasury paper, which got lost in this huge mass of papers, which others hadn't foreseen. I had a little bit of an initiative in creating what I call a precedence. It was an overwhelming task, I found. It was discovered by the legal section and then they took me out of the administrative floor and I become personal secretary of the Assistant Secretary of the whole Board. This led me into the secret sessions of the Commissioners. I always remember one occasion when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, turned to me when I was taking the minutes of that meeting, and the Secretary of the Treasury, Sir John Bradbury violently asserted that the Act did not provide for the using of the million pounds of public money, that the Chancellor insisted.

Then Bradbury turned to me, saying " Young man takes this down. I insist on this dissent of the Treasury being printed and circulated." That is a bit of private history but it is quite true. But any case the whole thing was that was an enormous public development which now, another 20 years or so afterwards, Bevan has expanded in to the state medical service which we know to this present day, as the National Health Service.

SK: That's fascinating.

GH: But it was for me anyway one of those instances of being at the centre of great social developments which set my mind thinking in one's ordinary work, living and earning one's keep and raising a family and so on. As probably you know, there's a great destiny in doing the things, which we feel to be right, as my father taught me. We do not know how God does in fact take that in enormous miraculous ways. You may be sowing the seed, of which you perhaps may be unconscious, and something develops, when one acts on the principles, on which one has been taught, for the sake of other people and for the country.

The Scouts

SK: Gordon, weren't you at this time also something to do with the Scouts? After what you have just said, this would be rather appropriate moment to say how you got involved.

GH: Go back a year or two during the time I was at Whitehall in my first job there in the civil service. My brother and I got very intrigued with the initiation by Baden Powell of his serial books on what he called "Scouting for Boys", and he lived in Wanstead, Essex near the Epping Forest then at that time. I think it was a lecture by some gentleman, who was obviously recruiting men interested, which we attended and we did then join a training force of enthusiasts in Epping Forest. We established the first, in fact, we became the founders of the 1st Epping Forest Troop of Boy Scouts. It was rather comic because in those days there was no settled uniform and in fact this was just before the actual book "Scouting for

Boys", the great manual was published and we saw pictures of Baden Powell himself at war.

So we went down to Houndsditch and looked at the shops and bought two slouch helmets that were used by the CIV, Civil Imperial Volunteers, in the Boer War. Then we brought red football jerseys for our tops, riding britches and putties and swaggered down to the station. Both of us, after our business, you know between 6 and 8 at night, eating large ham sandwiches that you could buy from the shops on the way, and learnt the elements of Boy Scouts. I've forgotten how long it was, but I found then my work was such that I ought not really give the time my brother was able to, but we established then a proper little troop in our kitchen. They came and to this day after 50/60 years they've still got in Wanstead the big hall that they built and they had an exhibition. We went down there . I did a certain amount of research in this because they wanted to print a history of that troop and in fact I go back earlier than anyone can remember.

Subsequently later in life, that is before my marriage when I came back from the 1914/1918 War, in the church which I attended in Finchley they told me that there was a little troop, run by ladies and wondered whether I would take it over, which I did.

SK: So it was back to the Scouts again after the war.

GH: I ran the 4th Finchley and became the local Group Scoutmaster in this very district in which you are speaking until marriage in 1924, so I did about five years, and I can tell you the personalities which were quite fascinating. In fact there was one person here, who went to be a missionary in China, only a few weeks ago, and did a very big job and there were others that were quite a bit of social work which I did here.

Jordans

SK: We mentioned the 1914/1918 war. Back to your office career as it were. In 1914 you left the civil service and joined Jordans. What sort of work did Jordans do?

GH: Yes, I resigned from the civil service formally. I have forgotten the exact date possibly 1st January 1915, but there was a gentleman there, with whom I made firm friends and he had been invited to join this other firm Jordan and Sons, and he invited me and finally I accepted. I am not quite sure it was a wise thing to do but nevertheless I did it. It's a firm that later became quite nationally known, although it was a small one, that specialised in company law, publishing and dealing with the Government offices. Although I didn't know anything about company law, it did lead me in my subsequent career to a great many opportunities both of success and also helpfulness, which perhaps I will tell later.

SK: Well we will look forward to hearing that. In 1915?

Military Service

GH: So, I done two things. I had altered my career completely and ended my civil service pension by becoming a commercial director. That of course took away the reservation, by which one had a reserved occupation, and then became liable for military service, which I enjoyed and which I did in fact take. I was healthy and in 1915 enlisted in the Territorial Army of the London Rifle Brigade. I was called up, embodied in early 1915 for actual service, went to camp and for the four or five months in 1916 was in camp in Wiltshire learning as a Lance-Corporal of the London Rifle Brigade.

SK: Then, Gordon, you went over to France as a rifleman, what happened then?

GH: In early summer of 1916 I went to France and found myself in the Ypres Salient, preparing then for the third battle, as we dug trenches in a very hot summer, all night long. That was how I first met the bullets, which were not being fired by me at a target, but were being fired at me.

SK: As the target.

GH: It was quite an experience, very interesting, I will never forget it, standing there in the dark. We were not very far from the German trenches obviously, although we didn't know it. We marched to and from every night to dig these trenches, burying the telegraph wires and suddenly huge searchlights lit us up and I felt emotionally just like a naked baby. Then I heard "whiz, whiz, whiz", the bullets coming round my head. Instinctively I remember putting a spade up to protect my face then a thought again what I think is valid, "Heck what happens now? I might be dead", but the early training, which I instinctively had in the Christian religion, came to my mind, "Well what, I suppose I might be in heaven or not."

And I think that took away the fear for the whole of the war, which went right through. Not that I was any different to the people, except that instinctive reference to God in emergency. I remember telling that later to a dignitary of the Church of England, who was in my house when I happened to mention this experience. He said, "I wish I'd done that, I didn't and I have been suffering from nervous breakdowns ever since". Well this was a period in 1916 leading up to eventually the 1st July.

In history you will remember the opening of the Great Battle of the Somme, when all the British had that devastating experience on 1st July of attacking after weeks and months of bombardment and were thoroughly slaughtered and killed. My own London Rifle Brigade put a 1,000 men over the top and took 800 casualties. Now I was not there because it so happened, before leaving England my papers to become an officer were officially signed unexpectedly, just before my own colleagues were sent down to the Somme. I had a movement order, as it was called, "Lance-Corporal Hassell, you must now return to England and report to the War Office", which I did, rather sorry in many ways and glad in others. Then I was sent to the 5th Cadet Battalion in Trinity College Cambridge and had three or four months of the usual magnificent glorious heavenly weather in Cambridge, learning to be an officer. That was really one of the highlights of life.

SK: What happened? You were commissioned and then back to France- was it with the same unit?

The Tanks

GH: No, what happened was that I suppose technically I should have been sent to an infantry battalion but then it happened towards the middle of The Somme battle at Flers in the middle of September, Haig had insisted on using a few tanks, much against the will of the Tank Authorities. This was a new secret weapon they wanted to use en masse, to break the great impasse of trench warfare, But none of the then General Staff ever thought that could happen by what they thought were "toys". So they put a few in and one got through successfully and was written up that he was walking in to Flers, with the British Army singing behind him. There was some truth in that, but it gave away in fact the tanks' existence and had other effects on the Australian Army at that time.

But a pal and I were talking about these wonderful new things in Cambridge, when he suddenly said, "Well what about us being in this?" So again some little spice of adventure in me, I suppose going for new things, he and I put in an application, when we had passed our present courses, that we might be commissioned in the new Tank Corps.

The answer came "Yes", so we were transferred to Aldershot, and although we say now "The Tank Corps", then it was really what was called the Heavy Section of the Machine-Gun Corps. So at Aldershot the first thing to be done was to put us on a horse, to ride a horse as mounted officers! So technically I had a little horse training and then machine-gun work. Then I was commissioned in the Christmas week of 1916 at Bovington Camp, just opening for the mass production and teaching the new Tank Corps. I joined as a young officer with the Heavy Section of the Machine-Gun Corps, and that started another aspect of life which is very interesting and exciting.

I think I remember those two or three years in the Tank Corps and think I know the name of every person I was in contact with. That's a long story I must be careful not to tell. I have in fact recently been on the both the Horizon Programme of the BBC and again on another recording on the Tanks on the television. Last year I gave a lecture to Surrey University as they discovered, for the sake of American students of British Institutions, very few had lived long enough to be as they call them, "The veterans" of that first mass battle at Cambrai.

There we put in, in November 20th 1917 all 400 tanks in France and broke through 4 miles into German territory. So practically at the end of that day there was nothing between me and Berlin. That is another long story, because I was in fact blown up at the end of that day with three direct hits.

SK: The Tanks obviously takes up a lot of time and is very vivid in your mind. What would you say, if you can't tell us everything, are there a couple of stories that really stand out for you during that time?

Some Extraordinary Experiences

GH: The subsequent history when I came back in 1919. I must be careful because I cannot believe that one was specially favoured by Almighty God in being preserved. Yet I had some quite extraordinary experiences, which I firmly believe is part of the great fundamentals of life- that there is a beneficent God. That experience, for which I sometimes use the words, "miracle", "coincidences", "Extra Sensory Perception". These are many way of expressing the vital fact of some other life, magnificent life. Solzhenitsyn himself wrote. I put this in my lecture that one is part of the great eternal existence of humanity and there are more than one quite extraordinary experience I had, which are inexplicable by pure human reasoning.

SK: Now, Gordon, why don't you tell us one of them?

The Coloured Pencils

GH: Oh just one, well it was the occasion of November 30th and December 1st 1917 which was 10 days after the great victory of Cambrai. There was an enormous counter attack by the Germans quite secretly, when they encircled this salient of Cambrai and struck at the base of it, with 12 divisions to nip that off and capture the whole of us. I personally was in dungarees with my tank as we were coming back. We had done our job. 10 days after this battle we were being withdrawn. The tanks were back at a place say four miles from the fighting called Fins and to get a tank back on to the railway track as we had to do meant dismantling all the sponsons (that's the seating of the two great 6 pounder guns). We had to undo all the rivets and push them in, so that the tank was thinner to get through the tunnels, and yet still be working. I had noticed a good deal of bombardment coming in where we spent the night, but didn't think much of it.

Suddenly I saw a British Artillery Officer with the breech block of his gun under his arm and he shouted across at me, "Don't you know what has happened?" I said "No". He said, "The Germans have broken through, I've lost my guns" as he was passing. Very quickly up came the General, our General Courage with his Brigadier Staff Captain (His name was Stephen Foot), with their red bands on. They gave orders for us to get the tanks immediately ready for action, without any settled programme or plan or maps, and to go and stop the Germans. It was another three hours work to get all ready again. I didn't panic but it was hard work.

Then my own particular Company Commander Major Pratt (he become Major General in the Second War) a great man said, "Off you go, go up that valley and stop the Germans". (So there is a place called Goosoncours, now well known in history) "and if you don't see them before dark comes, turn to another valley and rally at a map reference. There is a lone pine tree in the middle of the field) which you will find and we will all try and assemble there." Well off I went. I happened to be leading these other tanks. We got ready and went off at 12 I think, and then it occurred to me that I hadn't got any map. So all one did was go up this kind of valley. It was open land, down lands into some woods, and then it was about half an hour driving. (Driving you know was very slow at a rate of 2 miles an hour like a huge old traction engine going along).

Then I saw up on a little hillock two staff officers with red bands again. I recognised one again, Staff Captain Stephen Foot. He became came DSO afterwards. He sent his aide Captain Cassalet down to stop me. He shouted up through the porthole, "Have you got a map?" I said "No." So he handed up a map, which I have to this very day and he told me afterwards (it was 15 years afterwards when I met him socially and I was a very great friend of Stephen Foot until he died. He was of the Foot family, which you know in Devon/Cornwall?)

Then I looked at this map and the thing to do was to try and orientate oneself, where one was at that moment. I remembered again this little idea we have in conscience always doing what any lecturers, old men, who had been to the front, and used to tell us tips what to do, quite apart from the official text books. I remember one saying, "Always go into action with a coloured pencil", so I had brought a few coloured pencils in my pocket and then I started what they call marrying a map. So the contour lines if you make them a bit brown, they turn themselves into hills, and green for the valleys. I found where I was. That did in fact save my life and I think some of the other tanks too, because I was able to orientate and keep down in the valley in the general direction, instead of over the tops of the hills.

I saw others of my colleagues, who did not do that and went over the tops and were blown up, which I had been 10 days before. Then finally, not having met, I had got near Goosencours. I recognised the ruins of the town, but it got dark so I turned and found the rallying spot of the lone pine tree. Others were assembling.

The Supernatural

What I was coming to is the supernatural, if you call it that. We had a few hours sleep, perhaps until 2 in the morning and then were told of a direct action going very much back to where we come from. It was to definitely attack a wood called Gauche Wood and that was a really historic place in that there was a mass of German machine guns like flies. We were actually leading the reserve of the Guards who were always kept in reserve and came up to trouble spots. We were to lead the Guards into the wood and establish them in trenches the other side.

Again I happened to be leading this dozen or so, what we call "Approach Mark" all night long in the tank, walking outside, going at a slow pace for many hours to get near this wood. Then Pratt came up to the tank and said to me, "Good luck, Hassell, off you go. If you go another half mile in this direction, you will come to Gauche Wood". I did and, I think I kept to the left of the wood rather than going right through it, found this trench and in fact my job was done, because the Guards came and established there. Then I went on to the plain and then saw the German guns had been firing at us. They saw me and panicked. You could see them getting their white horses, trying to limber up again and run away. I said to my driver, Callaghan, "Let's go and capture them, which was a ridiculous thing to do, because you never in those days could be sure to have a direct hit.

Anyway we went on a bit and then I discovered on my right others of our tanks that had been blown up. There was one called Lynn Scott quite well about 100 yards away. We got a few survivors. He was cowering behind. So I stopped my tank and put my head out and beckoned him. At last he understood

what I meant, to make a dash for my tank. So he did, came in with 2 or 3 other men and got inside. There wasn't much room for all my own tank crew. We went on. Then it happened- not another direct hit, but panicking a bit because the tank engine stalled- stopped across a little bump with our nose half way up in the air and for 7 minutes by my timed watch we were dead.

Callaghan, who was an excellent technician, worked like fury to try and get the engine going again. We had had practically 24 hours running with all the oil and the stink and dirt. It obviously had a defect and he found it was in the Bosch magneto, in what was called the breaker box. This distributes to the six cylinder engine that was all a mass of oil, and finally we managed. It was so hot we managed to get the breaker box out of the magneto and then again an extraordinary thing again I always remember from England- one old tank man said, "Never go in to action without a second breaker box." Now that was not on the establishment, because it wasn't one of the spares. But we had got a second breaker box. I had said that once to Callaghan and he had somehow seen that we had a spare breaker box. I don't know the morality of that, but any rate we had it, and he was able to fit it.

I said, "We have had enough now, home John" and told him to turn the tank round. We got it round 45°. He was so excited he jammed the great big gear in and broke the selector rod of the gear. Anyway we were in gear, so we got round 90° to go back home again and crawled back at the very lowest speed of about ½ a mile an hour. My colleague Scott was then a bit excited and overwrought, so I got him outside the tank and gave him a cigarette and walked in front but the point was we couldn't steer. And then there was the risk of coming up against a tree too big, which would stop us again. But believe me, we went straight through that wood. Believe it, but we did. Finally we got right round to the rallying spot. There was Major Pratt waiting and we all turned up.

Now the point about that long story is, I think, a miracle. I saved one officer, secondly we had come right through the wood and then I cannot understand, Stanley, what happened but I found myself saying "Sir, may I go back to the wood on foot?" I can't quite recollect why. Some people say perhaps I was overwrought. In view of what had happened. I can but only believe some will stronger than mine said, "Go back in to that wood", but I am not taking any credit for it.

SK: What happened when you did this, Gordon?

GH: Major Pratt said "Why Hassell?" I couldn't answer. I said, "May I go back to the wood?" I think I saluted. He said, "What about your tank?" "Well, Callaghan can take it back, he is very competent". He said "All right". So I went back. I took half an hour to get back into the wood, a lot of machine guns were going and I felt a bit frightened, but I just walked on again for about another ½ hour. I suddenly saw a young guy, our youngest officer, his first action, with one survivor, being blown up. He was in tears, wounded in the hands, didn't know which way to get out of the wood and staggered when he saw me, "Thank God Hass". That was what they called me, I know I was an Ass! I was able then in a fatherly way to comfort him and set him in the right direction., so he would find help.

Then I went on again, not consciously I would say to find another, but I went on for perhaps another ¼ hour and found a second young officer, Ogden, son of the Jeweller of Regents Street, very badly wounded in his tummy and one survivor again. In his case it was quite clear we had to carry him and I found a duck board and his survivor and myself carried him I think 3 miles through the valley, and then came across the first doctor who was hiding. He was the Indian Calvary doctor and he gave him a tetanus shot. He said that if I walked a bit further I would find an ambulance, which was in fact a horse ambulance with a canvas top. It must have been between 5 and 6 o'clock at night then and I got him back. In fact he was taken to the huge tented hospital some miles away.

SK: Did he survive, Gordon?

GH: I went some months afterwards. I was in that neighbourhood to ask. I saw the matron but he had died the next morning. What impressed me very much was her very fine way of saying "They don't know a great deal when they are going to die but they do recognise me when I say, "Would you like me to send your love to your mother?" and they would nod." I was able then to say his last thoughts of so and so and that he sends his love to you.

SK: Gordon, you did tell me of another case really of miracles happening. This one was the time of the March retreat in 1918 and the finding of the map.

The Map

GH: Yes, Stanley, that stands out in my memory very vividly because you may recollect that some 230 divisions, whatever it was, of the Germans had come from the Russian front and were going to push us into the sea. We as the Tanks, who were there retreating in the 5th Army day by day and night by night and finally on March 24th 1918 I was left with 2 other tanks, just the 3 of us. My tank was not moveable and I was told to wait further orders. When at last the orders came I was then instructed in writing to go to a certain map position. Now the tank was unusable because the petrol supply had failed, but when the written orders came, I was instructed go to a certain map reference. Of course I hadn't got a map, but sitting there I saw a bit of paper in the mud and pulled it out. There was the very map that I wanted. Having cleaned it, I was able to see some miles away where to go and in fact I said just now that the tank was unmoveable. The autovax system, which supplied the petrol, had failed. But I was able with my sergeant to arrange that a man sat with an open tin of petrol in the tank, feeding the carburettor with spoonfuls of the precious petrol and for a day and a night he drove that tank like that.

SK: Good heavens with someone spooning the petrol in!

GH: Spooning petrol in, and then we retreated that night right across the Somme battlefield westward. The whole of the British Army retreated some 25 miles. Ultimately I got orders to abandon the tank. Then we marched on foot with the remnants of our battalion and finally got to mid France, to a new line where the line was established.

SK: How many miles was that you must have marched then?

GH: Probably I think about 26. With regards to tanks, generally, Stanley, I was one of those who survived and took some leading part throughout 1918 in the re-establishment of our battalion. We drew the first of the new Mark 5 tank, which was a tank, which goes 10 miles and hour and can chase a man. It was used at the Battle of Cam Hamil in June of 1918, which was the model battle of all time. Special technical books have been written about it.

We were able to attack a certain position with about 60 tanks. We arrived there after breakfast, came home for lunch with no tanks destroyed and very few casualties. That set General Haig to be prepared to start the final great advance, which started on the 8th August 1918. We were in the centre and finally went on fighting from that time until the 11th November. Personally I happened to be appointed first assistant adjutant of the whole Battalion. Then in August 1918 to be the adjutant of the Battalion so I had very considerable experience and fun in organisation as well as actual battle. The last tanks my Battalion used were in September 1918 and we then landed up in the woods somewhere near Mons, when I received the telegram, which I have still got and show to people, saying that the Armistice, cease fire started on the 11th November 1918.

SK: That must have been a remarkable day. Were you actually at the front when that was received?

GH: No, Stanley, we were marooned, as I call it, in a wood, because we hadn't got any fighting tanks left and there I was in charge as adjutant of the Battalion. Another Colonel came and we were not withdrawn until near Christmas 1918, back to Brae, which was the central camp of the tanks. Then there was a very difficult period when demobilisation of individual men started under a national scheme, and I myself was given the choice of going back to Germany with the forces of occupation, but as I was one of those who had a job to come back to, I was demobilised in February 1919.

Demobilised

SK: You were demobilised in February 1919, and then did you go back to Jordans ?

GH: Yes, I went back to former firm, and spent a year or two clearing up the awful delays arising from the War. The Chairman simply said, "Oh well, just these several pages of things I've said you will decide what to do when you get back". So it was a very difficult time. Any rate there was reconstruction and then we had a boom and Jordans were concerned with company law, as laymen publishing and doing law agency work. This gave me very considerable experience, which became very useful later on in various other ways in life.

My Marriage

SK: So immediately after the War you took up Scouting, which we referred to earlier and also Christian work and a real interest in the missionary field and it was here you met the one to be your wife.

GH: Did you know Gladys?

SK: No I didn't, no.

GH: She was one I met through the Scouts. Strangely enough it happened that one of my Rovers, senior men, got very interested in idea of missionary work and said he ought to be a missionary. I said, "Do you know anything about it?" "No" was the reply. So I said, "You had better come with me to a conference. So I took him to an Easter conference of the London Missionary Society where I had a lot of very great friends. In any case he realised it wasn't for him. There I saw an attractive young lady. She was Gladys Ingham, and was graduating in mathematics at Bedford College London. She had come up the hard way. Her mother had died while she was at college. Therefore she got a Second instead of a First class degree, but she was then teaching at the Lady Hollies' School and after certain adventures, she agreed to marry me. We were married in the September of 1924. We moved and settled in a small house in Crouch End, where we came extremely fond of a certain minister, the Reverend Darleston, Ernest Darleston, who was a prophet, priest and king to us both. Then we moved to Hampstead Garden Suburb.

SK: Where we are now in fact.

GH: Where we are now. Not this house but where the 3 children were born and bought up, a nice house, no.1 Brim Hill. It's well known, in fact, because after a few years in 1932 a great friend of mine in the London Missionary Society, a businessman, Mr Stanley Toms of the store Derry and Toms lived in Wimbledon. He and I had worked very much together in the London Missionary Society and had a luncheon for businessmen. Then he said one day, "Gordon, I think you should come along to my board room on a Monday morning." So I said, "Why?" "Oh come and see", he said." Bring a sandwich to my board room, and ask for me. That was in Southampton Row, where he had his business. He had left the firm and was running a large business house.

SK: Did you say he was Mr Toms of the Store Derry and Toms originally?

Meeting The Oxford Group

GH: Yes, he was the last remaining. He had left that firm. The family had sold the firm of Derry and Toms to Harrods, but he had also been chairman of the London Missionary Society. In fact I didn't know it, but he introduced me then to the change of a person in the Christian religion where, as he said, "You had either to be out of it or you had to be a Christian absolutely". He introduced me on that Monday, when I went to his board room, to see a group of half a dozen to

a dozen of business men round the table, who were talking just the same thing. I found then that they were friends of friends or had met Dr Buchman, who was then introducing into this country, as was well known in history, the principle of absolutism in religion known as The Oxford Group.

SK: This was the 4 absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

GH: And around the table simple men just saying how they decided to be honest, This meant often just giving back money that didn't belong to them, such as taxes or what have you. But the kind of experience was staggering, and he invited me the next Monday. I didn't want to go. I went up, turned the handle and went away again. But of course it was so compelling and so real that I decided myself then to be one of them, in the sense that I didn't join any body, but made my restitution where it was necessary. In fact I to be quite honest, Stanley, I got a double commission of ten quid purely innocently from the chairman for this certain transaction. Then I remembered that I was a Sunday school superintendent and I wouldn't say pious. I think I was doing a good job. But that little ten quid niggled. It had to be given back to him. Then of course the question of pride arose, the breaking of pride. Afterwards I walked on air.

Then 6 months afterwards my wife did the same. Then we entered into that period 1932 to the next war 1939. It was a period of enormous expansion in this country. There were house parties, there were great events. Dr Buchman and his team were at Oxford. I went to Copenhagen, and to Utrecht. But chiefly it was the living personality of a revolutionary thought, based on a revolutionary practice. It would take me years to give the detail of personal experiences of men helped, of my office staff. I suppose a dozen must have come quietly and been helped on these spiritual issues. I could go on and on about an extremely rich period.

The Registration of The Oxford Group.

SK: It is very interesting to hear this. There is one story we would like to hear which is, I believe, that you had something to do with the registration of the name of The Oxford Group.

GH: That period 1932/38 was an enormously rich time, but as you know things get in the public eye and if you have to deal with practical affairs, publishing and so on, in its own way a kind of propaganda. Money is involved. You remember to how in the East End, when Frank had his 60th birthday, he had placards up saying "It's not an institution, it is not a point of view. It starts a revolution, by starting one in you." Now the Christian revolution Frank was talking about is not organised. It had no corporate body behind it, and he said, "You cannot join the Oxford Group. It's a way of life".

That's perfectly true, but in the South after many years there was a law case concerning us. In the sense that a lady had left a legacy (I am not sure about the amount of money) to The Oxford Group, which was well known with a Secretary but not any statutory organised registered body. I attended the law

courts, which had the case and for various reasons the auditors report was misinterpreted and I think there was judicial evidence shown, but in fact the legacy was not allowed, because in essence The Oxford Group did not exist. It was a band of friends who had adopted a way of life. At the same time there was in fact organisation and it was evident that the acquisition of premises, with which to carry on this worldwide work, would be necessary. So in fact we were advised by the secretary, Roland Wilson, that the Council should be registered under the Companies Act as what's called "An Association not for Profit", that is a guaranteed company that is not allowed to make any profit in any sense. It is a Limited Company. The company has a Memorandum and Articles, statutes of a registered body and becomes a legal entity in its own right.

Tape Side 2

The Opposition

SK: Gordon, you just said the nature of the body that had to be registered and why The Oxford Group had registered. Now we are really coming on to what actually happened when you set about registering it.

GH: Yes. The decision having been taken, the legal advisers of The Oxford Group then prepared a set of Memorandum and Articles and the papers were submitted for registration. But there was a kind of national interest being taken and there was some opposition from a certain quarter on the frankly ideological issue one would think, about the name "Oxford Group". That became quite a national issue in the papers. Now the President of the Board of Trade would have to give his consent to that name if it didn't have the word "limited" and that was in his power. So an application was made to the President of the Board of Trade.

The name "Oxford" was well known as used by South Africans, when a party first went there years earlier. A certain train was labelled the Oxford Group of people who came, and that was why the name was adopted as a name, so that people would know to whom you were referring. The President of the Board of Trade then gave his consent and it then just became the question of the registration. Now the papers on which the signatories had to sign (There had to be seven signatories) were in America. Certain members, who would be members of the Council, were there and they had to sign this document personally. It was a deed and that was going from place to place, where they happened to be in America and this delayed the actual registration.

SK: This was in 1938?

GH: 1938, during that summer. Now strangely enough it became apparent to me, who was helping Roland Wilson on matters of just the pure technique of companies, that even then there was no power in the department called the Companies Registry of the Board of Trade. Although the President had given his consent to the name being used, there was no priority given to any person to register that name until the papers were finally put on the table and the fees paid. The Companies Registry then would grant their Certificate of Registration. It seemed to me that days went by, even weeks, on the assumption that they had

received the consent. But there wasn't in law still the power to have that reserved to these people.

I had a hint then from a paper called "Truth". Luckily they rather let the cat out of the bag on a certain date that the Independent Member of Parliament for Oxford, (A.P. Herbert) proposed to register a small limited company with the same name "Oxford Group", in which he rather sarcastically suggested it be limited to members of the "Society of Oxford", I think was called, a certain body in Oxford. They would pay a shilling a week subscription and have "a noisy time". This was slur at the then current thought that members of The Oxford Group did in fact have "quiet times", in which they received guidance from God. So I brought this to the notice of Mr Wilson and he convened the legal advisers and some of the members of the post Council. I attended late one evening and this is where I am convinced, Stanley, that there is a divine hand guiding those, who take action for this control of the world by God himself.

Well anyway the story is that we discussed what to do if in fact this small company were registered, which would then in fact take the title "Oxford Group", and would bar the genuine Oxford Group, that had received the consent to use that name if they registered. It seemed that the only possible thing to do would be to forestall this negative action by a positive one, of having a small limited company registered at once called The Oxford Group Limited for some purpose relative to the whole movement. So that was drafted, high legal council approved it and those documents, prepared at midnight, were put on the table of the registering officials of the Companies Registry. The actual fees were not paid for a day or two, which could be done at any time, but it meant that that little document by our side, as I call it, was head of a queue. If any other of the same name came, it would be put behind it, thus forestalling the forestaller.

Well this is what was so convincing. That was done. I think it was on a Thursday of one week. Then I had sudden news that the Member of Parliament for Oxford had in fact taken down this small company, and was furious to find that he had been forestalled by this other small company, which we had prepared. Then within 12 hours or so I heard the news from Mr Wilson that the papers of the great Oxford Group Association not for profit, was on its way back to this country finally by aeroplane post. It was the first post that had crossed the Atlantic and it would arrive at the General Post Office at 7am on the Saturday morning. Now Mr Lawson Wood, one of the Council, attended the General Post Office at 7 in the morning and paid a fee, which you could then pay. I don't know whether you can do that now. I think it was 10 shillings, searched the mail and received these documents which he did, and that meant that that big company be registered, but even then it required in company law the signature of the President of the Board of Trade to his final consent, one of those technicalities.

We were told that the Board of Trade usually take about three weeks to get that done. We were very anxious to get that registration as quickly as possible, because of publicity of a certain press agency. This in fact I ran in my company, giving the newspapers news of every company that was registered. We would rather not have the small company, which we put for publishing, using the name but have the proper one. So on that Saturday morning I was able, through my certain knowledge with the facts and with the law, to get the small company we had just registered for one night, liquidated. It was done quite legally by

passing a resolution, by printing that resolution, by myself being appointed liquidator, and by the liquidee giving his consent to the registration the company of same name which was the big Oxford Group Company. Mr Wilson and Mr Wood taxied to the President of the Board of Trade and induced him to sign the papers instead of waiting three weeks. This he did and the main Oxford Group itself was then brought to the Companies Registry department and placed on the counter with its fees just before 12 o'clock, the time when they closed.

Now it seemed to me, in reviewing this sometime afterwards, that none of us knew that those papers were across the Atlantic. None of us knew, at the time I did, certain facilities I happened to know, which enabled me to suggest that you could liquidate a company in one day that had just been registered. On the Monday that company was in fact registered, that is to say The Oxford Group itself. On the following Thursday I think The Times announced through what's called Jordans Register of Companies, the facts of the registration of the full names of all the 12 members. I think it was 12 members of the Council, most of them were graduates of Oxford University.

SK: That was fascinating.

GH: It was a very technical point that perhaps some people wouldn't understand. For those who know the extreme difficulty, it was perhaps an act one wouldn't always advise, namely of using ones inner knowledge of how to act in technical matters to what appears to be one's own advantage. But this was absolutely clear there were other people trying to undermine, when the President of the Board of Trade himself had agreed to it. I don't suppose there is one in a 1000 of those who lived the life of the Oxford Group or Moral Rearmament who would know these facts. There needs to be considerable care using this story. It convinced me. In principle I call it miracle. There are factors one cannot know about in the spiritual world, which affect the good judgement and the good action of those who believe in God. He should control everything if given the right-of-way

The Institute of Directors.

SK: Gordon, another of your distinguishing marks, is the fact that you're an honorary life member of the Institute of Directors, can you tell how it came about that you should have been given this position. How did it all begin?

GH: Well Stanley it really began because in my position at Jordans as a director of the company. I had the usual kind of bankers orders to various societies, and advised by my Chairman joined one of them, the Institute of Directors. This was when I found a body, which received its Royal Charter way back in 1907 by a party of directors when the Companies Act in 1907 was formed. It was what you might say, "a boss's trade union or just a society of directors for their purposes. They had apparently in those early days before 1910 and onwards, so I discovered later, had quite a large body. They had their headquarters in Pall Mall and did, I should imagine, some a very good work. In 1920 up to 1932 I think again I became interested. I found that for my subscription, I think then only 2 guineas a year, what I received was very meagre. I had never been summoned to any meeting. They must have had an Annual General Meeting, which I didn't go

to. Then I saw a Balance Sheet that was very small indeed. So one likes to check accuracy and, I remember, I think it was 1931 or 32, I presented myself to the Annual General Meeting in the City of London.

I found in a basement some saddle bags, very old furniture in a dusty room, several very old gentlemen came and sat at this old table and the members attending the meeting was me only. I was the only person attending. In other words it was moribund, quite moribund. Very graciously the chairman came and afterwards asked my name, invited me to his private lunch room at the top of the building. He was in the rubber and East Indian trade and he told me at lunch how sad he was that he had let the Institute with its Royal Charter fall into He asked why was I interested and why had I come, and I said simply because I was in the business of forming companies. It had interested me and it had occurred to me to come. He said, "You may be the one I am looking for". The other director present was his son, who rather said, "Oh dad let it die".

But in fact I promised to give some assistance, which I did. Perhaps a few hundred members came from my introducing newcomers, as they became registered, and so it went on. I took some interest. He asked me to serve on the Council and up to the start of the war in 1939 we had then had a room given us at the back of the FBI in Broadway, Westminster. We got a part-time lady barrister secretary and we had a new member Chairman of Council. I myself produced the first paper at my expense, called "The Director", just a few pages.

I got a question asked in the House of Commons, which was very informative. The present Lord Errol, who is now Chairman of Council, had a lot of correspondence from the question about that very good work which was just beginning to formulate. War came in 1939. Everything was put away in cupboards to wait for the war's end. After the war it was evident that there was need for a proper reputable and powerful body one day, who would in a sense protect the interest of directors, but rather more to formulate this educative information for conferences to help companies. It would enter into an entirely new phase of the great reconstruction of the country in the opportunities there.

It so happened then a General Spears, a friend of Churchill and with a great French reputation, became Chairman of Council. I attended with many others a luncheon where what I call the big boys of industry decided that it would be good that a reconstruction were made and they decided accordingly. Well in brief because of the past work, they asked me to take on a completely honorary position, with a title of Trustee. There were certain little duties but it was apparent that a proper Treasurer would take charge of that and a trusteeship was merely an honour. So I attended the Council meetings in an honorary capacity for almost up to the present, when I retired as a trustee a few years ago.

During that time, folk would not know the progress how extremely good I found it. A great deal they did of publishing books. They had their own premises in Belgrave Square. They went up progressively to well over 40,000 members and gave a service, as all these great institutions do, including the Annual General Meeting in the Albert Hall every November, where 5,000 directors sit all day. It has had tremendous publicity. When the Chairman of Council Sir Robert Renwick sent me the letter telling me that the Council were making me this Life Honorary Member, he was very gracious and said it was a signal honour which I very much appreciate. I also perhaps should have mentioned much earlier that at the time General Spears was reconstructing the

Council, he asked me if I had any special commendations to make. I proposed to him that George Becker, who was fully identified with the work of MRA and Leo Exton might be invited and they become members of the Council and did a great deal of fine work, before both of them in fact died, while members of the Council. The last thing I would say also is the fact that throughout my trusteeship of the Westminster Memorial Trust, that was well known to the fellow members of the Council. Many of them supported our work like Sir John Reiss, friend of Dr. James Dyce, Jimmy Dyce. Sir John, whom of course you remember was president of the Associated Portland Cement Corporation and in fact gave us some rooms in Portland House, when the theatre was being rebuilt, at a very low cost.