



KEEPING STEAM

A Life on the Railways

- FRANK WALSH -

Excerpt from 'Keeping Steam' by Frank Walsh

Towards the end of the Second World War, while my dad was still away, I lived at 95 Webster Street with my father's mother's sister, Aunt Mariah, who was a Graley. She had been living in our house during the War. She was a lovely lady, but she was getting on and was about 78 at that time. She used to wear a plaid shawl, and clogs, and was flat-footed. Everyone wore clogs then and it was really noisy on the cobbles. You could hear them coming and you knew if they were late for work. Aunt Mariah used to go round to the back door of the Alexandra pub with a jug under her shawl, and come back with it full of stout. She'd have fought any man even though she was thin as a rake. She was tall, thin and straight as a die. She was the absolute opposite to my grandmother. Aunt Mariah had been married twice before, the first time to an all-in wrestler, Jack Thorpe. But he were killed in the first war. And then she married Charlie Adams, an ornamental plasterer, but he were killed in the second war.



Frank Walsh in 2017

When his father went off to war in 1939, 7-year-old Frank Walsh was evacuated to a school for children with TB on the moors above Oldham. At a safe distance from any bombing, and boosted by fresh air, simple food and spoonfuls of malt and cod liver oil, Frank survived both the War and contact with the highly infectious disease.

In 1945, Frank ran away from the school and headed back down to the smoky old town. He was now a fit young man with lungs strong enough for any job. However, neither the cotton mills, the foundries nor the coal mines attracted him. Frank was born in the Golden Age of Steam, and the railway at the end of his street had always fascinated him.