



**The Triumph  
of Siegfried Bettmann**

by

**Gordon H. Maycock**



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COVENTRY  
ARCHIVES

# THE TRIUMPH OF SIEGFRIED BETTMANN.

Mayor of Coventry, 1913 - 1914.

**Gordon H. Maycock**

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## Editors Note

### EDITOR'S NOTE

'The Triumph of Siegfried Bettmann' is in many ways an innovation in the Coventry and County Heritage Series of publications and Mr Maycock, the author, is to be congratulated on his careful and meticulous researching of the Bettmann memoirs and the skill with which he has developed them into an enjoyable and fascinating narrative. It is the first pamphlet in the new series which is biographical and the first to cover an aspect of modern history, namely the period in which Coventry became famous for its bicycles and motor cars. The publication breaks the long series of publications relating to medieval and early modern subjects and covers a period within the living memory of many Coventry people. It is hoped that its publication will stimulate further work on the industry, politics and social evolution of the city in more recent times.

The editor would like to thank the staff of the Coventry Archives and the Museum of British Road Transport for their help in producing this publication and most particularly she wishes to thank Mr L. Hulton for all the time he has expended in preparing it for printing. His advice on composition and his expertise in computing the text and illustrations, have been invaluable. The Coventry Branch of the Historical Association also thanks Mrs E. Gooder for her generous donation, given in memory of her husband, the late Dr.A. Gooder, which has helped so much to finance the publication of the current series of pamphlets.,

The publication of a pamphlet by the Historical Association does not necessarily imply the Association's official approbation of the opinions therein.

Eileen Castle, Series Editor.

## PREFACE

*'Let the reader who expects themes of adventure, lay down the book. There will be nothing related that will satisfy his appetite for excitement'.* This astonishing recommendation greeted me from the pages of Siegfried Bettmann's extensive and detailed Memoirs<sup>1</sup> as his life story began to unfold. Being reluctant to take his advice, I decided to continue, and I discovered that his misgivings were quite unfounded, for there is a lifetime of adventure within the text.

The main sources for this work are Bettmann's own writings ie: his Memoirs and note-books. Other works by local authors, in addition to newspaper reports and some personal reminiscences, have also contributed. Wherever possible Bettmann's own words have been used but in certain place-names, modern spellings have replaced the old German. In a few instances, a word has been changed to conform to modern usage and in such cases, the inserted word is in parenthesis. Bettmann's writings contain many digressions and insertions, many of which have been omitted to avoid disruption of the narrative.

Bettmann reminds his readers that the object of the Memoirs is not to write history but to record impressions made on him of events **at the time they occurred**, even though they may not have been incorporated into the Memoirs until many years later. It is important that his strong criticisms of certain of his contemporaries should be viewed in this light. This is particularly so with regard to his denunciation of C.V.Holbrook,<sup>2</sup> a man who, whatever his shortcomings in regard to the Triumph Company, cannot be lightly dismissed. Unless otherwise stated, all views and opinions expressed are Bettmann's own, as given in his Memoirs or other works

Gordon H. Maycock



## INTRODUCTION

The name 'Siegfried Bettmann' is invariably linked with that of Triumph; cycles, motor cycles and cars; a name of world renown. Much of the history of these great companies has already been written. But what of their founder? Who was this businessman, poet, traveller, Councillor, the widely acclaimed and respected Mayor of an important industrial city; later to be ostracised and abandoned by his colleagues, friends and fellow citizens during the most devastating war which the world had then yet known?

Often pioneers are quickly forgotten and only their deeds and achievements remain. Fortunately, Siegfried Bettmann was a gifted writer and orator and though he claimed never to have kept a diary, his written works, together with his legacies, help us to put together a sketch of the man. And he is a man who must rank among the greatest benefactors and most illustrious citizens of Coventry.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

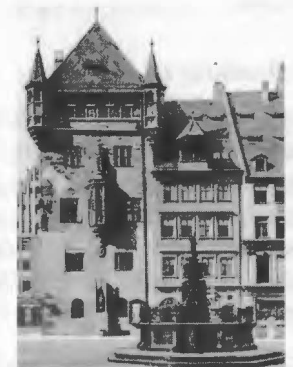
My thanks to David Rimmer, former City Archivist who long ago, introduced me to Siegfried Bettmann's Memoirs and papers, also to Roger Vaughan, Coventry Heritage Officer, and his staff at the Coventry Archives : also to the Coventry Branch of the Historical Association, its Publications sub-committee and secretary, Sheila King and Eileen Castle, Editor of the Coventry and County Heritage pamphlet series: my thanks also to George Griffin, for his insight on presentation: to John Kelly, The Annie Bettmann Foundation; Barry Collins, Museum of British Road Transport; Terry Reeves, The Western Front Association; Mr.W.Adams, for information on old Much Park St: Geoff Paine, The Veteran Cycle Club; Andrew Heapes, Collectionneur de Velos Anciens, France, for his specialist knowledge of the Triumph marque; Mrs Louise Madder and Ian and Jean Watson, for their help on 'Elm Bank'; and Mr.Peter Bones for his personal recollections of Siegfried Bettmann. Finally I express my gratitude to my wife, Mary, for her patience in reading and checking my script; and to all those not mentioned above, who have in any way contributed to this work.

# The Triumph of Siegfried Bettmann

## PART 1. THE EARLY DAYS

### The Bettmann Family

Siegfried Bettmann was born into a Jewish family in Nuremberg on the 18th April 1863, a son of Meyer and Sophie Bettmann. Sophie was Meyer's third wife. Meyer had a son and daughter by his first wife, a son by the second and five sons and four daughters by his third. By the time Siegfried was born, his father was almost sixty years of age and Siegfried was thus the youngest of a family of twelve.



Siegfried's parents were both Bavarians and initially they were wealthy. His father had been agent to Baron Hirsch of Gereuth but he was obliged to leave his service when the Baron sold his estate and moved to Paris. Meyer then moved to Nuremberg, in 1861, and became a timber merchant.

Bettmann claims not to remember much of his early life but nevertheless he recalls how, in Bismarck's German war of 1866, which had been an easy victory for the Prussians, a Prussian soldier, as a conqueror, had been billeted with the family but became a friend for many years. In 1870, French prisoners-of-war walked the streets of Nuremberg unmolested and the hatred that was to prevail in 1914-1918 was then unthinkable. The worst accusation made against the Germans by the French was of stealing clocks.



1 Two views of old Nuremberg

His childhood, it appears, was not particularly happy. Of the five brothers, only Sigmund, the eldest, helped his father. The others he describes as 'a *drag on my parents' prosperity*'. In so large a family there must have been many frictions and disputes. Even at this tender age, Siegfried noticed that '*mind and character were not equally shared*'.

### Schooldays

Long before the unification of Germany, the individual states had made education compulsory for all Germans and German-born children and parents with the means to do so were obliged to pay for it. Secondary school did not depend on the parents' social standing but on a choice between a classical or modern education. The school system in German education was, by Siegfried's time, well planned. Bettmann later describes this as '*an irony in a country of militarism and anti-semitism*'.

At the age of six, Siegfried was sent to the school of a certain Dr. Strauss, a young man who, in addition to teaching, lectured on 'pedagogic subjects'. It was his belief that a child over the age of five or six could not be taught by outside influences and that '*the chief trainer for a child must be his own mind, character and heart*'. '*Thus*', he tells us, '*I passed a miserable three years*'. Then followed five years at a preparatory school to enter the Real Gymnasium or grammar school. Here he matriculated and opted to enter a university although it appears he did not do so.

The school curriculum included long walking tours, often from 8 a.m. until 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. During the long summer holidays, he was able to go on walking tours with his friends, free of supervision. He visited Bayreuth, walked in the deserted royal palace and recalled hearing of the solitary performance of Wagner's 'The Ring of the Nibelungen', in the new theatre, for King Ludwig II and of the controversy aroused by Wagner's work. Despite this, he was restless and impatient to leave school. Meyer Bettmann however found this behaviour hard to understand and kindness turned to severity. The young Siegfried nevertheless hoped one day to repay parental devotion. In every achievement of his later life, he was conscious of this endeavour, to repay the debt he owed his parents.

Two days before his sixteenth birthday, he attained the grades necessary for him to leave school. A school friend and neighbour, Louis

Dormitzer, had gone to work in Frankfurt, and from him, Bettmann received letters, '*glowing of freedom*', and the attractions of this rich city. Siegfried wanted to savour this freedom for himself. His parents relented and he was allowed to join Louis in Frankfurt where he lodged with a sister of a friend of his elder brother, Sigmund. At Frankfurt, he entered the firm of Otto Meyer and Hamburg, as an apprentice.

### Frankfurt

His new life was not congenial. After a while, Bettmann asked his parents to release him from his apprenticeship, to return to school and hence to university. He describes his surroundings as '*limiting his mind and lowering*'. Nevertheless, his father insisted that he should stay for two years in Frankfurt. To this decision he resigned himself and looked forward to the day of release but he was now determined to further his knowledge.

Frankfurt was a rich, pleasant and developing city, with parks and a new opera house. It had been a city in the time of Charlemagne. It had also been one of the first German cities to offer asylum to the Jews, many of whom became rich citizens and invested in many public buildings and amenities out of civic pride and gratitude. Bettmann observes that, '*anti-semitism had been present in the German mind since the Middle Ages, until a more refined cruelty replaced it*', (a reference to the Nazi era). In later life, he recognised that he had been enriched by his compulsory stay in Frankfurt for it opened his mind to theatre and drama.

### Antwerp - A New Venture

His day of liberation finally arrived. Two years previously, he had wanted to go abroad, not only to enlarge his knowledge of foreign countries but also to become acquainted with foreign ways and customs. His older brother, Sigmund, came to his aid and arranged for him to work as a clerk at a firm of commission and forwarding agents, in Antwerp. Siegfried's main purpose was to learn French which at that time (as he later wrote), '*seemed to be a more respected language than today, in Flemish Belgium*'.

The journey necessitated changing trains at Louvain where he underwent his first experience of exchanging words in French with a Flemish-speaking railway porter. The baptism of fire was distressful. It



served to increase his loneliness and he regretted that he had not paid more attention to the study of language in the past.

In Antwerp Siegfried made no friends and found no opportunity to enter into the life of its citizens; he passed his time in reading and walking. In his own words, he imagined himself to be, *'a prisoner in a large town who was forbidden to talk and converse with his gaolers'*. He found little of interest in his work but great pleasure in the visit of his American cousin, Jefferson Bettmann, who had dropped the final 'n' from his surname.<sup>3</sup> A second visitor was Heinrich Hassberger, whose father had been with Meyer Bettmann, in the service of Baron Hirsch. Life in Antwerp was not particularly attractive to Siegfried and after ten months, he became restless again. He was anxious to see more of the world, to extend his knowledge and *'meet the people of a larger and greater country'*.

### **An Experience of Life in Paris**

After looking around, he found a situation in Paris and wrote, *'With my entrance into Paris, a fresh chapter, a more important chapter, of my life, began'*. Paris at this time possessed no Metro, only steam trams, but the young traveller was captivated by the river traffic and the omnibuses, drawn by three horses, along the boulevards. The excitement he felt, as he walked with Baedeker guide in hand, to gain a first impression of the Parisian scene, is best conveyed by his own words:

*'Never had I seen anything so impressive, so fascinating to a young and restless mind, (then) to crown it all, to read with patriotic pride, that this formation of splendid avenues, palaces, bridges and churches, had been conceived in this very Paris, by a German artist called Hittorf, a native of Cologne'*.

Frison, Siegfried's new employer, was a charming, well-educated young man who had recently taken over the small forwarding business though unfortunately he took little interest in it. Siegfried worked hard as his sole assistant but inevitably, all the business devolved upon this inexperienced youth and just as inevitably, it declined and dwindled, into nothingness.

Bettmann admits to a life-long reticence in making new acquaintances. His friends were but few; young men with whom he occasionally visited the sights of the city. The meagre room he rented was on the fourth floor of an old house in the Rue d'Hautville where often, at night, he would sit to write, read or study the politics of the time. France at that time was largely governed by 'free thinkers' and atheists. There was also, however, a remnant of the old aristocracy, augmented by a newer one, of more humble origin. These were the descendants of the great soldiers ennobled by Napoleon. Their aim was to destroy 'the Godless Republic', whilst the 'real' France, the France of the provinces, was hard-working, God-fearing and devoutly Catholic.

One day, a Mrs S.Minden, and her daughter, Emma, moving from Germany to Paris, sought the assistance of Frison's firm. Shy and lonely, Siegfried immediately lost his heart to Emma: *'Gentle in speech, of fair complexion, well-educated and high-minded'*, was the impression she made on him. Thinking that the young lady might need some support, he gallantly offered his services and companionship, which, to his surprise, were accepted! Siegfried adored her, wrote poetry for her and was, *'filled with a desire to be worthy of filling his place in the world'*. His new friend's influence was profound.

Meanwhile life went on: *'The humdrum work in the office, the frugal meals, innocent relaxation, meditation and contemplation, and the yearning desire of an innocent youth in love'*. He would frequent the cafes or walk the streets, hoping for a glimpse of Emma. Then a chance meeting in the street opened his eyes. We are spared the details of this encounter but Siegfried saw that his much-worshipped Emma was 'debased'. Disillusioned and his dreams shattered, Siegfried realised that there was no future for him in Paris and the time for departure was approaching.

A summons from Nuremberg brought his sojourn in Paris to an end. His parents had concluded that it was time for him to earn his living without further sacrifice on their part and his grant from them was withdrawn. Writing many years later, on his 70th birthday, and with his wide experience of human nature, Siegfried still preserved a grateful memory of Emma Minden, the Muse of his youth.

## An Interlude

Siegfried arrived in Nuremberg after a train journey of thirty six hours, involving many changes. At the parental home, where he was to stay for the next three months, he was warmly received. The year was 1883 and he was now twenty years of age. Whilst in Nuremberg he was not allowed to be idle. He continued to study foreign languages, read French novels, read Italian and began to study Russian without outside help. In this endeavour he did not succeed until some thirty years later, in England.

A family friend, named Dünkelsbühler had a small pencil factory. He was an eccentric and self-righteous man but methodical and industrious. So absent-minded was he that when travelling, he would forget not only his keys but he would also leave his luggage behind! For a time Bettmann worked in his office, doing clerical work. He wrote letters in English, French and Italian, which earned him considerable praise. Dünkelsbühler had connections in London and as Siegfried had been unable to find a job by correspondence, he decided to travel there with him. In late October 1883, he set off by train in company with this singular gentleman.

## PART 2: A BUSINESSMAN

### London

After a hazardous journey which involved many stops and changes, where Dünkelsbühler lost his luggage which Bettmann then had to retrieve, each party losing the other on two occasions, they arrived at 9 o'clock on the following morning at Holborn Viaduct Station. *'Here'*, he tells us, *'began the first chapter of my life's story'*. At this point Bettmann again warns his reader not to expect excitement or adventure, and tells us that, *'There is nothing but the story of a man who arrived in these islands; young, unknown and inexperienced but with a desire to create for himself a position of reliability in the future, based only on goodwill and to some extent, ambition'*.

London, despite its insular aloofness, made a great impression on the young man. It seemed to him to be even larger and greater than it appeared in later years, when increasing travel had eroded some

peculiarly English ideas. He felt himself drawn into a whirlpool of millions, most of whom were struggling for existence. He was depressed by the *English 'Sunday', ill-famed on the continent for its monotony of church-going, parades, Bible and newspaper reading.*

He found accommodation in Church Road, Islington, at the house of two Jewish ladies, at the price of twenty one shillings per week for which they provided, *'bed, breakfast and meat tea, with full board on Sundays'*. Also resident there was one Maurice Johann Schulte, a fair and handsome young German, born in Papenburg. His parents were dead and after spending seven years in Holland he had come to try his hand in the capital of the British Empire. The two became friends and whilst Bettmann immediately began to search for work, Schulte, having spent three or four weeks without trying, expressed surprise but decided to follow suit. Also residing in Church Road was a Dutchman of similar age named Cordmeyer. The three formed a happy company with all the exuberant spirit of youth. They also met a fellow German, Phillip Schloss. These friendships endured for many years to come.

After two weeks of searching, both Bettmann and Schulte received offers of employment; Schulte with a wholesale ironmonger and Bettmann with the directory publisher, Kelly. Bettmann left after five or six months, having found the work monotonous and he could not accept the militant attitude of his fellow workers. He next joined the White Sewing Machine Company of America. There, at forty shillings a week, under the direction of a Mr. Sawyer, he progressed to the position of 'foreign traveller', (salesman). Schulte moved to a firm dealing in chinaware and pottery. Both improved their salaries by the changes. Bettmann moved to new accommodation where he made the acquaintance of Edith Hetherington, a student singer, studying at the Royal Academy.

Bettmann departed on his first continental sales journey to Holland. Although he made many friends, he made no sales and blamed his failure on his ignorance of Dutch and his inability to understand the Dutch people. He recalls plodding about in pouring rain, a porter following behind, carrying his sample sewing machine! He obtained orders in France, Italy and Switzerland but on his return he was offended to find his office position had been taken. He stayed on to make several more journeys.



During this time Bettmann thought constantly of Edith in whom he saw perfection. Orders however became fewer and whilst in the Tyrol, he received a curt note from Sawyer, dismissing him from his post! Hurt but undaunted, Siegfried went straight to his parents' home. He wrote an acerbic letter to Sawyer and, with the confidence of youth, decided to go into business himself.

The bicycle, by this time established in England, had begun to make its appearance on the Continent. Siegfried proposed to become a selling agent for German goods in England and for English bicycles on the Continent. Bicycles were only then emerging from the era of the 'Boneshaker'<sup>4</sup>, also known as the 'Kangaroo' or 'Penny Farthing' and they were used mainly for sport. Riding a bicycle was considered an act of agility and personal prowess. From these

precarious machines ultimately emerged J.K.Starley's pedal cycle with two wheels of equal diameter which gave rise to be the popular cycling boom. (Jerome K. Jerome<sup>5</sup> gives a humorous discourse on this).

Although both parents and his elder brother tried to dissuade him Bettmann began to look for agents in Germany. While searching, he undertook to sell sewing machines in England, despite the formidable competition of 'Singer'.



## The Birth of Triumph

On returning to London, Siegfried immediately called on Sawyer, his former employer, determined to reach an understanding but expecting the worst. But Sawyer was a just man. He expressed surprise at receiving '*such a rude and uncalled-for letter*'. Siegfried in turn expressed his own surprise '*at Sawyer's ungentlemanly behaviour and niggardly treatment of him*'. It appeared Siegfried's successor had failed to develop the business and had implied that Bettmann was not pulling his weight. After some discussion they shook hands and parted friends. Sawyer wished him success and offered to support him in his new enterprise whenever he could.

Then began the process of setting up a company. A small office in Coleman Street became the home of 'S.Bettmann & Co.' Siegfried added '& Co.' hoping that a colleague, preferably Schulte, might join him in the near future. The next task was to find a manufacturer. Siegfried's thoughts inclined towards Birmingham where Edith now kept house for her father but this was impracticable. After many fruitless interviews, the Coventry Cycle Company agreed to allow Bettmann to sell their machines under his own name. Hillman, Herbert, and Cooper allowed him to buy their cycles at preferential prices in markets where they were free to do so.

Selling bicycles through his continental friends under his own name made it important that he should have a trademark of distinction. He later commented that he thought it unlikely that 'The Bettmann' would have any enduring qualities. An English word was imperative; a word which would not only be easily understood by foreigners but which also implied certain superiority for the item bearing this mark. He adopted the word, 'Triumph', a brand name<sup>6</sup> which has survived for over a century.

Sales did not go well and after a time, Siegfried wrote to his mother in such despair that she assumed that he must be in trouble with the law: His father's reaction was more pragmatic. Meyer told him to persevere and that he could not expect setting up a business to be easy. Siegfried's first independent trip abroad was fairly successful. He also kept in touch with his family in Germany where there were problems with his brother, Emil. Emil had trained as a watchmaker but was

unreliable. He eventually emigrated to Australia but for the remainder of his life he was financially supported by Siegfried.

### Schulte Joins the Company

In July 1886, Bettmann returned to London. During his absence he had employed the son of a friend to maintain his office but this had proved to be a waste of money as he had done nothing to develop the business in Siegfried's absence. In November of that year however, Schulte expressed a wish to enter into partnership and this was a great support. Schulte had visited Siegfried's parents and had made a very favourable impression on them. Shortly before this, Siegfried's elder brother, Sigmund, had visited him in London and had been astonished at London's greatness. He likewise reported favourably to Meyer. Meyer wrote enthusiastically of Schulte in whom he saw *'an active, brave and far-seeing businessman'*. He expressed the hope that Bettmann would *'one day be at the head of a great and successful undertaking'*. This was one of the last letters which Meyer received from his father. Meyer Bettmann died on the 1st March 1887.

Slow but steady progress followed. The energetic Schulte founded a German cycling club that flourished for some years and Bettmann continued to travel for Whites while Schulte managed the business. They moved to 4, Golden Lane, which afforded more room to store cycles and sewing machines and they employed a 'town traveller' on a commission basis, to boost their sales. During one particularly good month, Schulte achieved a turnover of £1,200

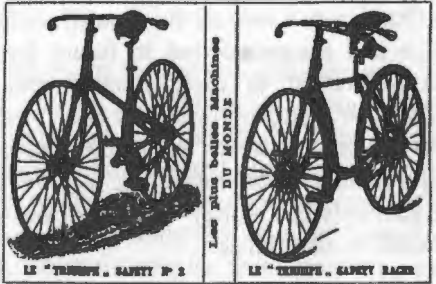
In 1888 cycle manufacturing boomed: new factories appeared everywhere and competition increased. During Bettmann's absence Schulte contracted with Andrews of Birmingham to manufacture cycles to their own Triumph specification. Nevertheless orders were difficult to obtain. They battled to enter into what had become a highly competitive market. In vain they went to the expense of displaying at a cycle exhibition at Crystal Palace. Visitors, finding the firm run by two young, struggling Germans with no factory and no facilities, were unimpressed. Visitors saw their machines as 'Made in Germany', *'at that time a byword for shoddiness'*. Two French agents withdrew their custom on seeing this!

Disheartened and near to despair, they sought ways in which they might manufacture their own cycles. With no money, and little technical knowledge, they decided to approach Andrews again. Andrews owed his success to designing better cycles than his competitors but with his small, under-funded factory and his out-of-date machinery, he too was struggling. Andrews suggested that they invest £500 in his company, Schulte to

become a Director and work in his factory for a few months, to gain experience. With heavy hearts they approached their respective families for a loan. Their fortunes were better than they expected for Bettmann's relatives contributed £350 and Schulte's sister, £150. Thus, as shareholders of William Andrews Ltd, they added to their notepaper the important words, 'Works in Birmingham'.

It was now 1889; the competition grew keener and their work more difficult. Partnership with William Andrews did not bring the hoped-for success and their market remained static. After much deliberation, they concluded that they needed to become independent manufacturers and to achieve this goal, they would have to set up a small, limited liability company. They also longed to be in Coventry which by then had acquired a world-wide reputation for its cycle industry. Bettmann once more approached Sawyer and put this business proposition to him. Sawyer was a sound businessman and agreed to invest in their company. It was decided that the new company would have a capital of £10,000 in £5 shares, with Sawyer as Chairman and Bettmann and Schulte as Managing Directors. This Company would take over the assets and liabilities of S.Bettmann & Co.; thus the Triumph Company was born.

The next problem was how to raise the capital. Sawyer agreed to subscribe £1,000 and Andrews agreed to buy back their shares in his company, enabling a further £500 to be invested in Triumph. A prospectus was sent to various businessmen with whom they had connections, both in England and abroad. Old friends also took shares;



**"VÉLOCIPÈDES-TRIUMPH"**  
**S. BETTMANN & C'**  
4, GOLDEN LANE, LONDRES  
3 The French Connection



Phillip Schloss invested £100. Bettmann's delight was such that he offered him a seat on the Board! Schulte did not altogether approve of this and suggested that in future Bettmann should give more careful consideration to such appointments. (Schloss remained with the Triumph Company for forty four years). Bettmann's family increased its investment which Siegfried generously distributed between his own and Schulte's shareholdings, in order that they remained equal partners. Eventually the money was raised even though other promises of capital failed to materialise.

### The Triumph Company - Coventry

Schulte next sought suitable premises in Coventry. He visited Iliffe & Sturme, publishers of 'The Cyclist', a weekly newspaper, and was advised to see Mr A.S.Tomson. Tomson, who had been Mayor of Coventry five times, had a factory to let in Earls Court, 11-13, Much Park Street, at a rent of £150 per annum<sup>7</sup>. Schulte immediately took up residence in Coventry to oversee the installation of machinery and to prepare for the manufacture of Triumph cycles. Two engineers were employed at £3 per week and the Directors' salaries were set at £200 per annum, plus 2½% of the net profits. Bettmann remained to clear up matters in London and to liquidate the sewing machine business. He joined Schulte in November at the house of a Mr.Baum in Barras Lane, then known as 'Bankrupts' Terrace':



4 Earls Court, Much Park St.

These events took place against the background of late Victorian England. People enjoyed the fruits of expansion; a burgeoning of the arts, the great popular appeal of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, of writers, poets and painters. Pears Soap had exhibited a picture for which the firm was rumoured to have paid the artist £50,000: 'Bubbles' painted by

J.E.Millais. Only the unsolved murders of Jack the Ripper disturbed the minds of people.

After London, Bettmann was not happy in Coventry. The Company's cash flow was causing problems. Often on Fridays they would not know where the money to pay the wages on Saturday would come from. Tomson, their landlord, was not accommodating and merely told them that, in lieu of rent, 'He had the right to remove their gas engine'. Siegfried wrote letters to his mother, complaining that he was, 'Lonely, friendless and full of worry'. Anxious for respite from problems in Coventry, he went to Nuremberg at Christmas and spent two happy weeks with his family. While on business in Lucerne, he was summoned home by a telegram from Sawyer and Schulte. A significant improvement in their fortunes had occurred; a prominent citizen, A.E.Fridlander<sup>8</sup> of Leigh Mills, had invested £1,000 in the Triumph Company as had also Tomson and a Mr.Everetts.

### Edith

Now that the future appeared secure, Siegfried sought after Edith Hetherington whom he had found an ideal intellectual companion to assuage his inherent loneliness. They had met in 1884 when he was twenty-one. They visited theatres, attended concerts and dined in cafes. The girl in the Paris street was soon forgotten. Edith was athletic and rode a tricycle (bicycles for ladies were not then in vogue). Gradually a mutual affection grew from their friendship and it continued after she had left the Royal Academy. Her father became ill and she was obliged to give up her career to look after him. After his death, in 1886, Edith, an Anglican, was persuaded by a friend to become a Roman Catholic. Siegfried strongly disapproved of this move, despite her assurances that it would make no difference to their friendship.

Siegfried wished to marry Edith but lacked the courage for by now he had started to realise the potential problems. Siegfried was a Jew and although it appears that in England he was never a member of a synagogue, he always remained loyal to his Jewish friends and his family background. The prospects for marriage to Edith were far from ideal. From Siegfried, Edith had acquired knowledge of the German language and through his business connections he found her a job in Germany as a governess and later, as an English teacher. During his

travels for Sawyer, Siegfried paid her occasional visits but with the growing fear that her religion would create a gulf between them.

About this time, in France, one Edward Drumont had published an anti-semitic book and founded an anti-semitic newspaper. It was called the 'Libre Parole' and it was avidly read by the French public. When he read the book himself, Bettmann's anger was unbounded. France had hitherto been regarded as a free-thinking country but this, he tells us, 'started the anti-semitic movement in France', also that 'Hatred engendered by Germany has now spread to France'. (In his Memoirs, written c.1933, he further writes: 'Today the Nazis, worthy successors to Drumont, rule in Germany'. Drumont's assertions of the superiority of the Aryan race were repeated by Hitler.) In a long letter to Edith, Siegfried poured out his misgivings but she replied, reassuring him that nothing could come between them.

At Siegfried's suggestion, Edith returned to England; she came willingly and took up residence with her brother in Birmingham. Despite his misgivings and the strong objections from both families, he still believed that the religious problems could be overcome. He presented her with a triple-diamond engagement ring, signifying love, faith and hope. His friends however constantly advised him against the marriage, insisting that he had misjudged Edith's sincerity. During a holiday, Siegfried stayed for three weeks with Edith's brother, as a paying guest. Although he was then in close company with Edith, he failed to perceive her slowly growing coolness towards him.

In April 1891, Bettmann received a letter from his brother, Sigmund, refusing to agree to his marriage plans. His mother was more sympathetic but distressed that he would not marry a German girl. It then began to emerge that Edith had an admirer in Berlin, a Roman Catholic whose name was Siepan. Soon after this, Edith wrote, doubting the wisdom of their union and although Siegfried did not accept this as final, she declined to see him again. The ring was returned by her brother. Siegfried was grieved and unhappy and blamed Edith's religious scruples for this failure. Edith returned to Berlin where she was married soon afterwards. The worst blow had been struck at his youthful naivety!

In July 1912 whilst Bettmann was on business in London, a curious incident occurred. He was about to leave a bus in Holborne Viaduct when he was hailed by a woman who introduced herself as 'Edith

Siepan'. At first Bettmann could not remember her but then he noticed the once-gentle features which now bore a somewhat virile expression. She insisted on telling him how both her religion and marriage had failed her and how she had earned her living as a newspaper journalist. She did not want her son to go into the army but she wanted him to come to England 'and be an English gentleman like you'. Siegfried, on the other hand, merely wanted to catch the train home to his wife. The encounter had almost been forgotten when some time later, a letter arrived from Edith, asking Siegfried to find a position for her son who was then seventeen. Obliging, Siegfried found him a job, for which he received a letter of thanks. The son never came for in 1914 war broke out and he never heard of them again.

During that war, a German propaganda newspaper, the 'English Gazette', was published in Berlin, a happening inconceivable in England. From its contents, Bettmann suspected that its Editor, or at least one of its main contributors, might well have been Edith Siepan. If so, it seemed that she had become a dedicated German.

### The Growing Cycle Trade

Business was proceeding satisfactorily. The Triumph cycle was immediately successful with the discriminating cyclist. The cycle trade was a seasonal business, with the winter given over to preparation and manufacture and the summer to selling. Sales always reached their peak during Easter week, culminating on Easter Sunday. In order to meet this demand, cycle factories adopted the practice of working on Good Friday, usually taking their holiday on the Tuesday following. This became a custom which has survived and spread to many industries in the Midlands.

About this time a dispute arose between the two Managers, Hayes and Hathaway. They were both excellent men, each accredited with full responsibility for his own department and some jealousy between them could easily have been foreseen. Although Schulte took Hathaway's part, Bettmann tried to adopt an impartial stance in order to promote an understanding between the two men and so bring about a reconciliation but Schulte's dictatorial attitude prevented this.

Schulte's great delight was in the development of the shape and form of the bicycle. He was himself a keen cyclist and sportsman. Hathaway's contribution was in simplifying the construction and improving the



mechanical efficiency. Their co-operation and mutual help contributed greatly to the success of the Triumph cycle. Whilst Bettmann was always reluctant to part with any employee who had served him faithfully, Schulte became daily more insistent that, in the interests of the business, Hayes must be dismissed. Regrettably, this incident marked the beginning of a rift between the two partners which would never be healed.

Hathaway remained with the company for almost twenty five years until shortly before his death in 1915 and he earned great respect as a mechanic, designer and organiser. It is nevertheless doubtful whether he would have withstood the climacteric social changes that were soon to burst upon the industrial scene for he was totally opposed to the use of female labour! In spite of all their difficulties, the success of the first year's working exceeded all expectations and to the great delight of the shareholders, the company paid a dividend of 10% gross. On this satisfactory note, ended the year of 1891.

### The Widening Gap

Once more Siegfried was in a state of melancholy and loneliness. There was some satisfaction in the achievements of Triumph which gave him a feeling of security. He also found comfort in the knowledge that his mother and brothers would be happy. His mother wrote to him often, especially now that his association with Edith was finally ended and the last days of her life were brightened by his success. Although he felt gratified by this, he was not happy.

Neither partner now felt settled in Barras Lane. Both felt the need for their own homes, both for their business and for their private lives. In any event, Schulte was considering the possibility of marriage and began to look for a wife; he wanted to marry a German girl. Siegfried was baffled. He could not understand why, in view of Schulte's heartfelt attachment to England, he could possibly object to leading an English girl to the altar!

Although Schulte was reluctant, being more far-seeing in such matters than Bettmann, they left Barras Lane and rented a house in Grosvenor Street, kept for them by a Mrs S. Bugbird and her daughter, Florence. Schulte's reluctance was vindicated. The experiment was not a success for the constraints of living in a house with these two ladies became irksome and impinged on their freedom.

Cycling was naturally the chief hobby of Bettmann and Schulte. Schulte and his friends could manage a hundred miles in a day but the less athletic Bettmann found this exhausting. They also took up shooting but, as Bettmann records, he '*always remained a duffer at the game*'. He does admit to having once shot a hare but that this was by accident!

### America

The cycle trade in Europe was flourishing and within it Triumph had established a reputation for sound design, quality and reliability. Furthermore, cycle sports had now captured the imagination of the American public and large numbers of cycles were being shipped from Europe to meet the demand. Following the success of 1891, the Board of Directors decided that Bettmann should visit America with a view to appointing agents there.

It was a fine afternoon, early in October 1892, when Siegfried boarded the SS Paris at Liverpool, bound for New York. At twelve thousand tons she was considered large at that time. He travelled first class but at the minimum fare of £12, six passengers to an inside cabin. The night before sailing, he stayed at the London & North Western Railway Hotel, where he spent the evening with the Triumph agent for the Liverpool district. Wherever he was, Bettmann never wasted an opportunity to further his business interests.

On his arrival in New York, Siegfried was met by Adolf Frankel, a brother-in-law, and taken '*by the elevated railroad*' to the house of an elderly couple, Leopold and Jette Wolf. They had a German servant-girl who spoke no English, hence all the conversation in the house was in German. In his Memoirs, he remembers seeing a great number of wooden houses in Brooklyn and he also notes that the combined population of New York, Brooklyn, Jersey City and Hoboken was then three million, and that '*now (in 1934) New York alone has seven million inhabitants*'. Siegfried was impressed by the people in New York, especially their belief in the invincibility and greatness of their country and its commercial and political independence. He was also impressed by the size of Central Park and by the ugliness of the elevated railway. Bettmann travelled extensively by train which he found to be all of one class.

Following his arrival, he called on the White Sewing Machine Company in New York and met the Manager, a Mr.E.M.Young. The bicycles which he had brought with him for demonstration had been impounded on arrival by Customs and Excise officers. With Mr. Young's help, he obtained their release but by the time they caught up with him, he was in Cincinnati, calling upon the editors of American cycling papers. The White Sewing Machine Company had asked to become the Triumph agent in New York and through Sawyer, Siegfried obtained an introduction to the founder, Mr. Thomas White, whom he later visited at his home in Cleveland, Ohio. He was immediately impressed by the man's straightforwardness in business matters. From Cleveland, he travelled to Detroit which was a twelve-hour journey across Lake Erie and from there into Canada.



WHITE SEWING MACHINE CO.,  
25, UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK.

5 White Sewing Machine Co.

Bettmann declares at once that *'business was fairly successful'* and he appointed agents in almost every city that he visited. However he soon discovered that appearances in America were deceptive. Warehouses crammed with bicycles and businesses with grand sounding names and resplendent offices could be recent creations, often without capital or on the verge of bankruptcy. Despite his assurance of success, the friendships made in America were soon forgotten and there is no indication that Siegfried ever visited his American agents again. Cycles were already being manufactured and sold there. Furthermore, Republican policies gave rise to ultra-protective trading.

In all, Bettmann spent two months in America, of which six weeks were spent in pursuing business for Triumph. The remaining time was largely taken up in contacting numerous emigrant members of the Bettmann family, now established in the New World. At a hotel in Cincinnati Bettmann was refused alcohol with his lunch as it was Sunday. Prohibition was beginning. Whilst there, he received a letter from his father's brother, now an old man, asking to see him. Some relatives still held an affection for their German family, although others

whom he met, he never heard of again. Reminiscing on these events, Siegfried recalls his admiration for Philadelphia's unfinished city hall which was apparently costing millions more dollars than planned. He was informed that it would never be finished *'because it was too good a business for the architects, builders and contractors alike'*. In particular, he remembers the 'Englishness' in the character of Boston. He was impressed by the grandeur of Niagara Falls and in Ontario he was pleased to find red pillar-boxes, bearing the royal coat-of-arms, with the initials 'V.R.'.

Siegfried returned to England in November, aboard the White Star liner, 'Teutonic'. This time he took a £15 ticket and had a cabin to himself as the ship was less than a quarter full. The voyage was uneventful. At Queenstown, English papers were brought aboard and eagerly read; news by radio was still some years away in the future. The ship docked in Liverpool some twelve hours later and Bettmann caught the first train for Coventry.

### PART 3: HOME AND FAMILY

#### Separate Ways

On his return, Siegfried once more attended to the business of Triumph; both he and Schulte, with their small staff, were daily and hourly occupied with the company's affairs. During 1892 business had continued to prosper, the capital had again increased and the company again paid a dividend of ten percent. In return, grateful shareholders voted the Directors a bonus of three hundred pounds. Cycle sports had also become increasingly popular on the Continent, particularly in Germany. In these early years Triumph did lucrative business in Germany. Bettmann made many friends there who became his agents but after a few years of British monopoly there came intense competition from German manufacturers.

Siegfried recalls an incident in 1892 which left an impression on his mind. German and Austrian aristocrats had arranged a race between Vienna and Berlin, on horseback. Although the winner covered the 380 miles in seventy two hours, the exhausted horses were shot. Society was outraged by such cruelty. The sportsmens' reply was to repeat the race but using only manpower. In June 1893, one hundred and



seventeen cyclists raced from Vienna to Berlin, a race in which Triumph was worthily represented. Joseph Fischer of Munich, riding a German cycle, won the race in thirty one hours but only minutes behind him was George Sorge of Cologne on a Triumph machine. This feat he achieved without either a change of machine or carrying out any repairs. The result was world fame for Triumph! In 1933, the 40th anniversary of the event was reported in the German paper, 'Angriff' (Attack), with a photograph of George Sorge but no mention of his British machine. Meanwhile Schulte, anxious to marry, continually focused the whole of his mind on Germany in all its facets; its wisdom, honesty, its discipline and sense of duty.

In 1893, the Bugbirds decided to return to Enfield and after their departure, Siegfried's relationship with Schulte relaxed a little. Nevertheless, they both needed their independence and after sharing a house together for ten years, Bettmann and Schulte decided to live apart. Schulte moved to 'Thorn Bank', Warwick Rd, which he continued to rent after his marriage some months later. Bettmann did not want to live with a family again and took rooms at the Craven Arms in High Street, then run on old-fashioned lines by Mr. and Mrs. Dan Claridge. Despite increasing domination by the railways, the Craven Arms was still a coaching inn. There Siegfried made, *'the acquaintance of Coventry, and of other people who resided there, or took meals in the hotel'*.

### **Enter Mrs Schulte**

In the Autumn of 1893, Schulte, pursuing his intentions, married the sister of a friend from Kiel. She was Marta Andersen, who was by all accounts, worldly and unsubmitive. Siegfried initially received this news with real joy for his hope was that Marta would become an intermediary between them, in favour of reconciliation and mutual friendship. Although invited, he did not attend the wedding but instead he sent a long telegram of congratulation, in the hope that their old relationship would be restored.

Alas, Siegfried's hopes were not to be. Mrs Schulte's character, her beliefs in German superiority, her reliance on her own wisdom and a mistaken sense of justice, only served to widen the breach. On her arrival in Coventry, she immediately made her presence felt and endeavoured to interfere in the company's business. This was an

outrage and Siegfried's tolerance was stretched to the limit but Schulte was too weak to prevent it.

### **Masons, Millie and Marriage**

During his time in London, Bettmann had become interested in Freemasonry and after some difficulty had become a member of a Lodge. In Coventry he was eventually accepted into the Trinity Lodge where he earned considerable respect. During one meeting he unwisely entered into argument with the Master which was outrageous even though he was right and the Master was wrong. He was rescued by a young man, Arthur Bones, who pulled him back into his seat, by the coat tails! Bones was a chemist who lived over his shop in Hertford Street. Afterwards he invited Bettmann home to meet his wife, Helen. The Bones' became his firm friends and he paid many visits to their modest home.

During one of his visits to the Bones' household, Siegfried was introduced to Helen's sister, Annie Meyrick. She was one of five Meyrick children and almost two years younger than Siegfried. From early childhood she had always been known as 'Millie'. He was attracted by her tolerant nature and uncomplicated attitude in religious matters. Always a welcome visitor, Bettmann was invited to spend Christmas with the Bones' at Mrs Meyrick's house in Shifnal, Shropshire. He accepted the invitation with pleasure for it provided a brief respite from his loneliness in Coventry; the friendship of Arthur and Helen Bones was a great solace.

Bettmann was attracted to Millie and this attraction deepened into mutual affection. 1895 was to be the year that changed his life. On a winter afternoon, when Millie was staying with the Bones', Siegfried managed to overcome his inherent indecision and shyness and asked her to be his wife. Millie consented, subject to her mother's approval, and his mother's ring, entrusted to him many years before, was placed on her finger. The wedding was arranged for the 31st July. He wrote, telling his mother of his decision and enclosed a photograph of Millie and in due course he received his family's congratulations. Their home was to be a modest semi-detached house, in Radford Fields.



6 Shifnal Parish Church

The wedding took place on the appointed day in Shifnal Parish Church. Siegfried's friend, Makepiece, was his best man and Schulte, in a few well-chosen words, proposed the health of the bride and bridegroom. On Mrs Schulte's introduction to Millie there was an immediate and noticeable aversion which served to increase the rift that was eventually to lead to the separation of the two erstwhile friends.

As he waited for the bride, Siegfried's innate loneliness overcame him once more. None of his relatives were present nor did he wish them to be there. They knew no English, neither

would they have understood the simplicity of the ceremony nor the meal that followed it. As he signed the register, he wept openly. Millie understood.

## Honeymoon



7 The Marriage Certificate

The honeymoon was spent travelling in Belgium and northern Germany where, as he was wont, Siegfried endeavoured to combine business with pleasure. They visited Waterloo and found the roads in much the same condition as they had been left on June 18th 1815! The shaking upset Millie and she became ill. They reached Cologne where it was necessary to summon a doctor who diagnosed the onset of a serious

illness. Millie was confined to bed in their hotel for ten days. In Cologne Siegfried was able to attend the annual reunion of German cyclists. In Berlin they met Triumph's Moscow agent but Millie again had a relapse. Despite Millie's illness, the honeymoon ended happily and they returned, to their new home.

The year ended well for the Bettmanns. There was however a little heart-burning within Millie; a tradesman's daughter, conscious of having been slighted by Schulte's wife; this had hurt her deeply. Siegfried explained to her that whilst such snobbish behaviour rarely occurred in England, the cult of titles and the worshipping of race were more decisive in determining friendships in Germany than whether a man worked in a retail shop or an office or a warehouse.

## Priory Street - A New Triumph

On the day following his honeymoon Bettmann returned immediately to business. Prospects were bright and the cycle boom had started. Two years previously, Triumph had met with a slight rebuff and although their capital continued to grow, the profits were down. Despite this, Schulte and Bettmann had felt themselves entitled to a new, modern factory to meet future needs and to this end, a deposit of one hundred pounds had been paid for a plot of land in Priory Street.

Trade improved and the new Triumph Works was completed in 1894<sup>9</sup>. The Much Park Street property was retained to house a side-car shop, the subsidiary 'Gloria Cycle Company'. All the Coventry cycle works were busy at this time. Works cycling clubs fostered the sporting side of the industry and there was fierce competition in races and long distance rides. Companies offered inducements to champions of the sport to ride their machines. Despite his age and the pressures of business, Schulte sportingly participated in these.

In 1887 the pneumatic tyre had made its appearance, the invention of John Boyd Dunlop who sold his patent to Du Cros, an Irishman, who in turn founded the Dunlop Company in Coventry. Dunlop made large profits and became keen to invest in the cycle industry. Bettmann visited Du Cros at his home near Dublin and after some difficult negotiations an agreement was reached. Dunlop would invest capital in Triumph to enable a new and larger company to be floated.



In May 1895, the new Triumph Cycle Company was born. Tomson and A.E. Fridlander joined the Board of Directors but George Sawyer resigned which was a great blow to Bettmann. Regrettably Schulte, against Bettmann's will, proposed some changes that were then carried by the Board. Inevitably, relationships on the new Board were soured.

### Expansion and the Cycling Boom

By 1896 the cycle boom was in full swing. New factories were being built, not only in England but in France, Germany, America and elsewhere. In Germany, in particular, thousands of English cycles were used by German riders, such that the Germans began to consider making them themselves. The Singer Company had sought British investment with which to float a company abroad and had approached Bettmann's German bank in Nuremberg. The bank approved in principle but suggested that it be associated with Triumph and not Singer.

In the Spring of 1896, Bettmann assisted in setting up the German Triumph Cycle Company. Both he and his brother, Sigmund, joined the Board. Bettmann soon found the German company antagonistic towards the interests of Triumph in England and resigned but Sigmund remained with the Board until his death, many years later. He was succeeded by Bettmann's nephew who was forced to resign by the Hitler regime [almost certainly because of his Jewish origin] although Bettmann does not say this. The German Triumph Company nonetheless started well. Nemesis appeared to Bettmann a few years later when Schulte suddenly proposed to the Board that Siegfried give up his position in Coventry and move to Nuremberg to help in the German company. Bettmann was stunned and hurt. He never found out whether the idea originated from Schulte or his wife but inevitably, the unease increased between them.

The growing popularity of the bicycle had an enormous influence on the development of Coventry's industry. Triumph had not as yet arrived at the zenith of its fame; this was to come with the advent of the motor cycle. Triumph's financial year of 1896 ended with a very significant profit on its new capital and Siegfried's caution gave way to Schulte's pressure for higher rewards; they were both now married men. Although the boom continued through 1897, Bettmann perceived a reaction. Many employers at this time neither knew what their production costs were nor how to determine them. Dire necessity soon

forced costing upon Triumph and Bettmann was obliged to devise a system, simple at first, but one which grew with the complexity of their products.

Both Bettmann and Schulte had been over-ambitious and over-confident. They had retained no monetary benefits but had re-invested all their profits in shares in the company. Bettmann wanted not only to be a Croesus<sup>10</sup> but also an important force in the industrial world. He had invested money in a firm of steel makers, also in Brett's Stamping Company; both were disastrous failures. There was a short-lived Stock Exchange boom, led by E.T. Hooley, a Nottingham stock broker. Many cycle manufacturers went public with the help of Hooley who appeared to make a lot of money. These flotations soon became disasters and many companies went into liquidation. Had he been more financially aware, Bettmann would not have tried to emulate Hooley. He tells us that, *'There was no foundation for the blind belief in the lasting prosperity of the cycle industry. The favour of the public is a fleeting commodity, the taste and inclinations of people are only fluid, a liquid asset'*. Short-lived glory was followed by disenchantment. In 1896 the factories were full but by 1898 they were deserted. Hooley, the financier, later served a term of imprisonment for fraud.

### The Gathering Clouds

At home, the Bettmanns were happy. When they were first married, Millie had insisted that, *'cycling was a sport for men and not for women'*. Later she relented in order to join Siegfried and his friends on their Saturday afternoon rides. Siegfried's peace of mind was only disturbed by a presentiment that there were serious problems ahead for industry.

At the end of 1896 a great sorrow befell Bettmann. During a Board meeting on November 29th, Schulte was called away from the room. He returned, evidently much disturbed, whispered to Fridlander and Tomson the Chairman, whereupon the meeting was terminated. It was explained to Bettmann that Schulte had received a telegram from Bettmann's brother, Sigmund, advising him of the death of Bettmann's mother. This was a terrible blow for he had loved his mother dearly. That night he departed for Nuremberg.

## Queen Victoria and Mayor Tomson

In 1897, Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. There were festivities in Britain and in every British possession throughout the world. In Coventry, Alderman Tomson became Mayor for the sixth time<sup>11</sup>; he was destined to serve in that office eight times in all. Tomson lived in a large house called 'Greylands' and he was an ambitious man. Keen to gain a title, he opened a subscription list for the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital and headed it with his own donation of £500. He also paid for most of the public festivities out of his own pocket. Tomson sent presents to the Queen on behalf of the citizens of Coventry; two silver-plated Triumph bicycles, a lady's watch supplied by Fridlander and a book containing examples of the skills of the ribbon weaving industry.

To the amusement of Coventry people, instead of the hoped-for knighthood, the only acknowledgement he received for his trouble and expense was a stereotype telegram informing him that the presents had arrived and that the Queen was very pleased with them. Alderman Tomson became the butt of many jokes on the matter:

*'Why is there always light at Greylands?  
Because there is no (k)night there.'*

## The Shadow of Recession

In 1898 troubles began to appear in the cycle industry, the industry on which Coventry's prosperity was based. Trade still continued but prices had fallen. Bettmann's companies were unable to make a profit and their large capital hung like a millstone around the Directors' necks. Schulte immediately proposed a cut of one third in the Directors' salaries which the Board approved. A dreary time befell the cycle manufacturers and their men. Supporting industries likewise suffered and in Bettmann's own words; *'The tragedy of a debacle was in sight'*. Many sleepless nights were to follow.

In 1899 came the collapse. However hard they tried, Bettmann and Schulte were unable to stem the tide. *'We thought out schemes to do work outside the cycle trade; we made shell plugs for the War Office, but all to no avail. Orders would not come in sufficient quantities to occupy the Works'*. The German company also sustained a considerable loss: The Directors' report at the year-end made dismal reading.

Bettmann explored every avenue to find work for the company, including the Public Offices and the Director of Army Contracts. He never forgot the haughtiness of the current Secretary of State, George Windham: *'Even the German Emperor, then at the height of his glory, could not express greater ascendancy over the worms of the human species'*.

To add to Coventry's troubles, the Boer War began in 1899. After the severe defeats inflicted on the British army during the early days of that conflict, many Coventry men enlisted. The disastrous beginning of the war destroyed any hope of an early commercial revival. Triumph's Directors were greatly disappointed with the results of the year's trading. Many of their friends had investments in the company, including Alderman Maycock and Mr. John Rotherham who was universally respected in Coventry. Tomson, *'conceited but concerned for the company's well-being'*, proposed that Bettmann and Schulte relinquish their Managing Directorships and be content as ordinary Directors. This was too much for both of them. Schulte expressed his anger in polite terms but Bettmann far less politely. Some of the shareholders called for their dismissal.

More charitably, Alderman Maycock proposed that John Rotherham be appointed to the Board to provide financial guidance. This was so enthusiastically received that Bettmann immediately perceived a pre-arranged conspiracy and he was furiously angry. Rotherham's gentlemanly nature precluded him from accepting a seat on the Board under these circumstances but he offered his services ex-officio. Bettmann did not resist and Rotherham proved a valuable friend in this capacity for one or two years. In 1900 he declared that he could not continue but expressed his confidence in both Managing Directors and commended them to the shareholders. Siegfried and Schulte were grateful for this support. Schulte however was as displeased with Bettmann as he was with his other colleagues, claiming that *'he was too excited, had lost his temper and made enemies, not friends'*. Bettmann on the other hand accused Schulte of being, *'impetuous and high-handed'*.

## The Bones Family

There was very little cheer for the next two or three years. The war went on and although trade continued, people were, on the whole,



subdued. Arthur Bones' business was in trouble and his affairs went from bad to worse. It seemed that he was unable to recognise that the problems were of his own making. He was ultimately removed from his business and became separated from his now-impooverished family. With the help of Henry Maddocks, Siegfried's friend and a solicitor of some repute, Arthur Bones left England in order to start a new life in South Africa. Millie's sister, Helen Bones, now living in very poor circumstances, worked hard to keep her family together but was eventually obliged to return to her mother's house in Shifnal.

Siegfried and Millie, denied children of their own, undertook care of the Bones children. With Siegfried's help, the oldest child, Meyrick, a boy of ten, was able to go to a Masonic school at no cost to the family. At senior school however this was terminated due to behavioural problems. Siegfried then took him into his own household and placed him at the Coventry Grammar School. As a result of Arthur Bones' progress in South Africa, his daughter, Dara, was able to go to a first-rate school in Wellington and later to a private school in Wiesbaden. Siegfried recalls rather sadly; *'Dara was the only one who faithfully and gratefully reciprocated our love'*. Stuart, the youngest boy, was also taken into the Bettmann household. He eventually went to Oundle School where he remained until the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War. The improvement in Arthur's fortunes was not sustained and he soon died. Bettmann was to visit his grave during a visit to South Africa, many years later.

### Tramlines - The Cyclist's Enemy

The recession brought hardship to almost everyone. By Millie's diligence the Bettmanns continued to live well but modestly. They visited Nuremberg regularly, allowing Millie to extend her good relationship with Siegfried's family.

Siegfried's relationship with Schulte did not improve and he had long since lost confidence in Tomson. He remained a close friend of Fridlander who was always preaching tolerance, maintaining that there were always faults on both sides. Another friend, Hutton, tried hard to promote an understanding between Bettmann and Schulte but failed. The intrusion of Mrs Schulte into the company's affairs was unthinkable to Bettmann: *'She walked through the Works as if she had been the Managing Director and even went with Schulte to the Isle of Man, to supervise the preparations for our teams for the TT Races'*.

An altercation one Saturday morning over a trivial matter, the cause of which was long since forgotten, provoked such anger in Bettmann that he took his bicycle and rode to Fridlander's house to unburden his mind. Fridlander was out. It was raining hard as Bettmann set off once more, intending to meander quietly home. He slipped on the wet tramlines and fell heavily on his left arm, immediately in front of a horse and cart. The horse was kind enough and clever enough to back away, thus saving him further injury but his arm was broken and he was in severe pain, exacerbated by the state of his nerves. After receiving medical attention, Millie took him to Brighton to recuperate. On the way, they called on Siegfried's old friend, Sawyer, who at first failed to recognise him because of his injuries and had to ask who he was!

### The End of the Tunnel?

Some time previously, Bettmann had proposed that Triumph should consider the manufacture of motor cycles but Schulte initially was reluctant to do so. Now, in 1901, during the period of disenchantment that followed the collapse of the cycle boom, Bettmann travelled the country in search of work for their near-deserted factories. As he journeyed, he remembered a letter from one Lawson, of the Beeston Cycle Company. This company was struggling to survive but in its prospectus it had promised facilities for the manufacture of cycles and motor cycles. For the purpose of exploring the market, Bettmann arranged for the manufacture of two motor tricycles, using engines and parts supplied by Lawson. The machines however were not a success and the market was unimpressed.

Very slowly, matters began to improve. Auerhaan, the Sales Manager, strove conscientiously for the welfare of the company. The improvement continued throughout 1902, possibly aided by the ending of the Boer War. To Bettmann's surprise, when in 1902 Triumph had completed twelve years in business, Auerhaan invited employees to subscribe to a presentation to the founders of the company. A banquet was held at the King's Head Hotel at which Bettmann and Schulte were each presented with a silver cigar box engraved with an inscription expressing the appreciation of their employees. Bettmann's speech of thanks was the first public speech of his life. He promised continual faithful service to the company and its workers and expressed his determination that Triumph should overcome its difficulties.

The difficulties were severe. To provide revenue for increased advertising, Schulte proposed further cuts in remuneration, along with other drastic financial measures which Bettmann could not entertain. On the Stock Market, Triumph shares stood at a paltry two shillings. Siegfried's friend, De Lattre of Middlemores, also struggling, bet him £10 that Triumph shares would not reach par in ten years. Three or four years later, De Lattre had lost this bet. By hard work and strict economy, a slow rehabilitation of the company's finances took place. Later, by the successful introduction of a motor cycle of practical and popular design, Schulte's draconian measures were rendered unnecessary.

## PART 4 : PUBLIC LIFE

### Councillor Bettmann

Since the early days of his desire to travel, Bettmann had greatly admired and respected the British nation. After many years of life in Britain he had come to regard Britain as his home and the land where his destiny lay. He applied for British citizenship and on 9th March 1895 this was granted. His naturalisation papers were signed by the Home Secretary, Henry Asquith, later to become Prime Minister. Siegfried was now, *'Proud to be an Englishman, not only by law, but also by marriage and sentiment'*.

Bettmann's political awareness had begun during his schooldays in Nuremberg when he followed with interest the fight between the Social Democratic Party and Bismarck's powerful autocracy; as a youth his sympathies had always lain with the underdog. In England he espoused the Liberal cause although at that time he took no active part. He perceived that, *'Britain's greatness and the root of her prosperity lay in her aloofness from the artificial trade barriers which afflicted other countries'*. The Tories had been in power under Lord Salisbury since 1886. Siegfried felt that the Liberals should be given an opportunity to govern. To local politics he was indifferent. He did not admire the composition of the Council, the authoritarian rule of the Aldermen nor the perennial mayoralities of Tomson.

As the year 1903 drew to a close, a belief arose among some of Coventry's leading businessmen that the best and foremost citizens were

outside the Council and had no wish to be part of it. Bettmann never expected to have the opportunity to enter the Council, as despite his naturalisation, he was still looked upon as a foreigner. He gave vent to his political feeling in conversation with his friend, Alick Hill, who, in his deceased father's footsteps, had recently been elected to the Council.

One day Siegfried was approached by Councillor West, an ardent Liberal. To his great surprise, West proposed that he should stand for election in the Bishop Street Ward where the party was anxious to contest the re-election of a Dr. Harley, one of two retiring Conservative members. He accepted enthusiastically but in his Memoirs confesses that he was not entirely free from selfish motives. He wanted to show Tomson, who had always declined to help him, that he could get on without him; he wanted to prove to Schulte and his wife that his standing in society was at least as equal as theirs and finally, he wanted to please Millie and her sister. His more altruistic motives speak for themselves.

The party committee members met at a public house in one of Coventry's slum districts and adopted Bettmann as their candidate. He formed an election committee; personal canvassing was just not within his capabilities. A dozen or so Triumph men co-opted themselves to the committee and avowed their determination that he should be elected. Some men even sacrificed working hours and hence their earnings, to this end. Millie canvassed harder than anyone, calling on hundreds of voters. Bettmann notes that at this time, *'Coventry was represented as one of the most corrupt constituencies in the Kingdom'*. His men were not entirely ignorant of *'how to play the game'*.

Friends were sceptical; Alick Hill believed that he stood no chance, Tomson smiled and Fridlander was sympathetic. At the close of the poll, his men were hopeful of success but Bettmann was, *'too frightened to go to the count in St. Mary's Hall'* and instead went to the Reform Club and waited. At about 9.30pm Councillor West rushed in and announced that Bettmann had defeated Dr. Harley by ninety six votes. Millie was delighted. Schulte declared that *'A Triumph Managing Director could not be beaten by a doctor or a publican'*.

Next morning, Tomson telephoned his congratulations and expressed his surprise. A relative from Nuremberg called on him; he was elated that *'A child of Nuremberg was thus honoured by the inhabitants of an old and famous city'*. He insisted that a long telegram be sent to



Nuremberg. The Midland Daily Telegraph, then a Liberal paper, welcomed Bettmann's election. The Editor of the Coventry Standard, W. Carson, wrote with displeasure and concluded his comments with, *'At the same time, it is impossible not to feel chagrined that Dr. Harley's seat was lost to the Conservative Party'*. In his speech to the Ward, Bettmann promised to *'discharge the duties of a Councillor for the common good'* a promise which within a short space of time, he put into practice.

Soon after Bettmann's election came the news of the death of Triumph's Chairman, Tomson. Bettmann was away on business at the time and was unable to attend the funeral but nevertheless he objected to the appointment of a new Chairman. As founder of the Company he felt himself entitled to that position but Schulte and his colleagues would have objected. No agreement was reached and Triumph managed without one. When the anti-German feelings of 1914 forced the adoption of a Chairman with an English name, Bettmann proposed Mason but he declined and took a commission in the Manchester Regiment.

At the time of Tomson's death, Triumph had not fully recovered from the slump and his shares were sold at low prices. Bettmann himself invested in these for public interest in the motor cycle was growing and after a few years Triumph had become one of the best Midlands investments.

### **A Developing City**

In the late 19th century when Siegfried Bettmann first knew Coventry, it was a small provincial town of less than 60,000 inhabitants. The streets were narrow and quiet, except on Saturday nights when the pavements were crowded with shoppers. There was little opportunity for intellectual entertainment. The Opera House was visited mainly by third class companies at that time. Nothing had been done for many years to raise Coventry to the standard of a prosperous and modern city. It had simply kept pace with most English provincial towns. A few progressive citizens had an ardent desire for improvement. Several projects were uppermost in their minds; widening the streets in the city centre, building municipal offices with a Town Hall worthy of Coventry's importance as an industrial centre, and a modern abattoir.

From the time of his election, Councillor Bettmann took an active part in the promotion of these improvements. The erection of municipal buildings, worthy in their outward appearance, was close to his heart, as travellers returning from Germany often extolled its beautiful cities. The outward appearance of German cities was worthy of admiration; magnificent school houses, theatres and opera houses, parks and railway stations, all testified to Germany's greatness and to the industry of the German people. In Coventry, the Corporation had for many years spent large sums of money on the acquisition of property in Earl Street for the purposes of a new police court and municipal offices. A police court had been built but although frequent discussions took place in the Council concerning the proposed municipal offices, the derelict site where old houses had been demolished, remained untouched. It was an eyesore and a disgrace to the High Street, then one of the city's main thoroughfares.

At that time, the General Works Committee had recommended that building should proceed but in order to save expense, the ground floor should be reserved for shops. Bettmann was vehemently opposed to such a debasement! In an impassioned speech, he referred to the ancient Greeks, the greatest worshippers of art, who strongly believed that the coming generations would be beautified by the contemplation of its masterpieces. He referred to the elegant buildings of other cities and asked, *'Whether any man in Coventry would exchange St. Mary's Hall for the richest store in the world?'* Finally he expressed hopes that Coventry would erect a building, *'Not to our incapacity of comprehending progress and beauty, but a memorial of times when Coventry struggled vigorously for its educational and industrial supremacy'*.

The Council was sharply divided and there were many acrimonious exchanges. It seemed that the case for shops had won the day but when the Corporation applied to the Local Government Board for permission to raise the necessary loan, the Chairman of the Board, Mr. John Burns



SKETCH MAP SHOWING  
LOCATION OF TRIUMPH FACTORIES  
(CIRCA 1906)

- NOTE 1. THE DALE STREET WORKS WAS  
ALSO ACQUIRED BY TRIUMPH  
2. TYPICAL HOUSING PLOTS SHOWN AS



MP, intervened. He knew the city well and expressed the view that the scheme was unworthy of Coventry. His opinion prevailed. A design competition was held, with the brief that a council house and town hall be designed as one scheme; the architectural style to harmonise with St. Mary's Hall and the parish church of St. Michael. The result was the Tudor-style building which is little changed today and it is one of the few buildings to survive from the period of the First World War. The foundation stone was laid on 12th June 1913, the year in which Bettmann became Mayor.

In 1904, shortly after his election to the Council, Bettmann was invited to lunch with Vernon Pugh who had for many years been the leader of the local Liberal party. The Pugh brothers had amalgamated their Birmingham firm of Whitworth Engineering with Danny Rudge, to form the Rudge-Whitworth Company, the oldest cycle firm in Coventry. The object of the lunch was to introduce A.E.W. Mason, a playwright and novelist, who was proposed as the Liberal candidate in the forthcoming election. Twenty years of Lord Salisbury's Conservative rule had promised peace to Great Britain and Ireland; instead there had been *'war, Chinese labour and concentration camps'*. The election of a Liberal government in 1906 marked a significant change in the country's political history.

Siegfried's influence in local politics grew and in 1906 he was elected, unopposed, in the Swanswell Ward. He worked hard, both in the Party's and in Mason's interests. He presided and spoke at Ward meetings; canvassing, however, remained one of his failings. Nor would he attend the counting of votes in St. Mary's Hall as *'I could never gather the courage to hear public declaration of my downfall'*. Although a strong parties man, Bettmann fought against the introduction of party politics into municipal affairs. On these grounds, he also disapproved of the election of Aldermen as these were political appointments by the party with a majority in the Council. Similarly, he objected to the way in which the Standing Committees were appointed but his efforts were fruitless and he made enemies on both sides, *'the political caucus was too powerful, the partisan spirit too potent'*. A new paper, 'Coventry Weekly Memos', nevertheless heartily approved of Bettmann's stand.

### The Chamber of Commerce

In October 1907, when he was elected President of the Coventry Chamber of Commerce, Bettmann perceived that for one who had come to the city as a stranger and a foreigner, a great honour had been bestowed upon him. He had been proposed by Mr. J.C. Band, a staunch opponent in politics but a life-long friend, and he held this position for two successive years.

Soon after his appointment, Siegfried proposed the setting up of a General Purposes and Finance Committee, with a full-time, paid secretary. This proposal was carried, to the lasting benefit of both the Chamber and the City. As Chairman, his concerns were the development of the Chamber and the services it provided; also the commercial education of the city's youth and civic and mercantile development. In this respect he sometimes envied Birmingham's advantages as a larger city.

In Coventry's fortunes, well-being and distress had replaced one another at almost regular intervals. Bettmann records, *'The cycle boom had earned Coventry a world-wide reputation but by 1907 bitter distress reigned. The watch industry was stagnant, ribbon weaving (had) gone and the majority of the cycle works closed. There were several thousand unemployed but no unemployment benefit. Responsibility for feeding the needy rested with the Board of Guardians who were the administrators for the workhouse and charity'*. In the Council, Bettmann proposed a motion to create work for the jobless, to be funded by the sum of £2,000 from the rates. After lengthy (and no doubt heated) discussion and political taunts, the motion was carried.

### The Changing Scene

Christmas 1900 had been spent with the family in Nuremberg after which business took Siegfried to Italy where he was accompanied by his brother, Sigmund. While in Rome, about 23rd January 1901, they saw a newspaper placard which announced the death of Queen Victoria. In this death, they recognised the end of an era. Victoria, by the length of her reign and her great experience, was, in the eyes of a benevolent foreigner, more than a mere sovereign; she was, *'The living expression of Britain's prosperity and greatness'*. In Britain things were changing and the new monarch, Edward VII, was regarded as *'a man of his times'*. As an Englishman and at the same time a Coburger, Edward VII

was not hampered by prejudices: *'Such was the opinion of the best German minds'*.

By 1905, prospects for Triumph were improving. The company was now producing motor cycles with engines manufactured entirely in the Triumph Works. Roads at the turn of the century were only suitable for light traffic but the increasing use of cars and lorries was rendering these ancient ways more dangerous to cyclists; they were no longer able to enjoy the tranquillity of former days, *'So I perceived the threat to the future of our industry - and the cycle industry in general'*. Schulte and Bettmann discussed the problem but felt that the introduction of the motor cycle was only a palliative and not a solution. To survive, Triumph would have to consider the manufacture of motor cars but they could not agree on a proposal. Schulte, with a single-cylinder De Dion, was one of the first car owners in the country. Siegfried recalls his difficulty in starting it and his wife blowing the horn(!) as he drove.

As Triumph could not see a way forward, Bettmann, who was clearly not an engineer, ventured independently into the motor trade with Hathaway as his technical adviser. With two others, they pooled their savings and founded Climax Motors Ltd. It imported 'Minerva' cars from Paris but they were found to be unreliable and after delivering two or three, the French company failed. After the early disappointments the public was sceptical and the future of a new motor car company, *'was in the lap of the gods and most uncertain'*. Climax then decided to make its own cars using White and Poppe engines but its employees were from the cycle industry and had no experience of cars; *'We could not see or would not see that even then, the motor car was a most*



9 The first all-Triumph motorcycle

*intricate object to make'*. After two years Climax Motors went into liquidation.

The motor cycle was growing in popularity and becoming a useful mode of transport. Bettmann felt that it should serve the community whereas Schulte and his wife were keen on the sporting aspects. They were frequently in the Isle of Man where Mrs Schulte delighted in 'directing' the racing teams. Although the T.T.races were good publicity, Bettmann felt that they were expensive. Triumph machines were trustworthy and reliable but others were faster and only once did Triumph take first place in any race. On account of Mrs Schulte's interference and posing as 'Team Manager', Bettmann never attended the races and came to dislike them utterly. At the same time, they paid well in terms of the company's trading results and the yearly output grew steadily, reaching some 3,000 machines by 1909.

Bettmann nevertheless remained active in the bicycle department. To the ire of Schulte, he still retained an affection for their original product. With no immediate plans to enter the car market, in 1910 Bettmann was persuaded to purchase Sir Charles Friswell's holding in the Standard Motor Company. This enabled its founder, Richard Maudslay, to regain control of the company and Bettmann was elected Chairman. New capital was raised, demand increased and the works was enlarged.

### In Council

Despite his business commitments, Councillor Bettmann always attended Council meetings and in 1909 he was re-elected even though his defeat had been widely predicted. He had been opposed by formidable candidates, Conservative and Labour (by then a growing power), but he won a majority over both opponents combined.

The London & North Western Railway's proposed extension of 1907 had been opposed by the city as, being a mile or more away from the city's centre, it would not serve the interests of the city's traders but only those of the railway company. Bettmann fought against this as a member of the Council's delegation to the Railway company. However, a Parliamentary sub-committee, formed to decide between the interests of the city and the railway company, ruled in favour of the latter. Bettmann noted that three or four of its members had vested interests in the railway!



Lloyd George's Insurance Bill, based on the German system dating from the time of Bismarck's social reforms, became law in 1911. It had been strongly opposed by the British Medical Association on the grounds that doctors' 'Panels' would ruin the medical profession. The law required that Local Insurance Committees be formed to manage the Panels and negotiate with the B.M.A. Bettmann as Chairman of the Coventry committee was totally successful and his success was subsequently acknowledged by the doctors themselves. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce during the same year, Siegfried upheld the improvement in trade which had resulted from the expenditure of ten million pounds in old-age pensions. At the same time he deplored the wastage of eighty millions spent on armaments which profited only a few and could only lead to disaster. He adds that, *'The shipbuilder's profit on a warship costing two million pounds was £400,000'*.

Bettmann asserted that religious life in England possessed one great advantage over that of other nations, in that, *'The helping hand for improving mankind is offered by all, to all'* and that, *'Social status, birth or even nationality do not count so much in the uplifting of peoples as character and inner worth'*. He was inundated with requests from the Church of England, the Roman Catholic church and Nonconformists of all denominations, to open bazaars, give lectures and make presentations. Siegfried, with characteristic impartiality, tried to help them all. His lectures covered a wide range of topics, including that of Anglo-German relations and their mutual importance for trade. Bettmann commented on one occasion after stressing this point, that the dangerous tension between nations appeared to be on the decline. He tells us that, *'I ended this address with the ill-founded prayer, "May the peace of the world flourish, may Britain prosper and may Coventry share in that prosperity."'*

In recalling these events more than twenty years later, Siegfried writes that, *'The death of King Edward VII in 1910 spread misgiving and even fear among the hearts of peace-loving nations. He was, in the German mind, the perfect constitutional monarch'*. Such was the observation of a German publication, commenting upon his short but successful career. It stressed the importance of the Sovereign within the constitutional system, expressing the view that, *'German political life should develop along the lines of the English institutions and would already have done so had the (old) Emperor lasted for another two years.'*

Always champion of the under-dog, a fervent believer in justice for all, Siegfried showed his tacit support for the Suffragette movement in a speech to the Chamber, recalling that, *'These ladies and their followers earned the sympathy of many men by their courageous and self-sacrificing ideas. In the House of Commons, these women had worthy followers in the ranks of the Tory opposition. The Prime Minister of the country was on such occasions, shouted down. The Speaker, with all his authority, was powerless to restore order and was more than once obliged to suspend the sitting of the House'*.

In distributing prizes at a commercial school, Bettmann was asked to speak on the adequacy of the education requirements, at that time, for a boy of sixteen, thought by many to be complete. He advised that at sixteen, education was just beginning and he stressed the value of enriching knowledge by self-education or by evening classes. He drew parents' attention to the facilities provided by the Technical Institute. In a later address, Bettmann emphasised that neglect of parental duty resulted in the work of teachers, and the expense incurred, being wasted.

### Mayor and Chief Magistrate

For a number of reasons, including monetary problems, the Council had often encountered difficulty in finding suitable candidates for the mayoralty, sometimes resulting in the same mayor serving many times in succession. Tomson had been Mayor eight times and Lee five, but in 1911 the Aldermen elected Colonel W.F. Wiley. He was not even a councillor but he was a respected citizen and by some means he managed to represent both political parties! Bettmann had stood against him for nomination and had received seventeen votes against Wiley's twenty three but in 1912 he proposed Wiley for re-election.

Another climactic change in Siegfried's life occurred on 9th September 1913, when a deputation from the Council, comprising Aldermen Drinkwater and Maycock and Councillor Poole, invited him to become Mayor for the next twelve months. In recalling his emotions on receiving this deputation, Bettmann observes that, *'Coventry's history is ancient. Its records date back for many hundreds of years. Coventry's community was always proud of its place in the sun and never could it be imagined that anyone born outside the British sphere could worthily fill the Mayor's chair'*, and adds, *'I am not ashamed to record that, especially when thanking the Council for the honour paid to me, I was*



overcome by tears. All understood my feelings, especially Poole, who said, "These tears are proof of the Council's wisdom". On arrival in the hall, he was greeted with a standing ovation.

Mayor Bettmann was installed on 10th November 1913, proposed by Councillor Vernon Pugh, seconded by Councillor J.Bates and carried unanimously. *'In proposing my election, both Pugh and Bates thought it right to draw the citizens' attention to the fact that I was foreign born. Vernon Pugh went so far as to express the hope that my election might, if only to a slight extent, influence the relationship between Germany and Britain. The fulfilment proved that this was an idle thought'*. In his speech of acceptance, Bettmann acknowledged the honour bestowed upon himself as a 'foreigner' and its (hoped for) implications for peace.

The election of Mayor S.Bettmann was widely acclaimed. The Coventry Standard, the opposition paper, gave its guarded approval, while the German press pointed out with pride to, *'the distinction paid to a British citizen, born in Germany, by one of Britain's most important industrial cities'*. It stated that, *Director S. Bettmann was a descendant of one of Nuremberg's most highly esteemed families, a pioneer of the motor cycle industry, and had for many years occupied onerous and honourable posts in Coventry's civic life'*. Letters and telegrams of congratulation arrived from all quarters: from old employees, a fellow apprentice in Frankfurt, even from the Lord Mayor of Nottingham who referred to *'the triumph of cycles'*, and many others.

Congratulations were also received from Ernst Kohn, his former German banker, as, *'Welcome proof of the international tolerance of the English people'*. His cousin in Munich wrote, *'A little bitterness is mixed with joy at your election, as I have to tell myself that such a thing could not, and would not, happen in Germany'*; also *'as regards impartiality, we could learn much from our English cousins'*. Siegfried was to reflect upon all of this with some bitterness when later, Vernon Pugh was asked to review his position as Mayor.

Bettmann and his wife, Millie, worked hard to raise the status of the mayoralty and to some extent succeeded. The Civic Banquet, held in St.Mary's Hall, in December 1913, was a great occasion. It was the last to be held there for many years to come. There were glowing reports of the high standard of the speeches. Many of Bettmann's friends were present: *'only one was missing - my partner and fighter in life, Schulte'*. Millie, as Mayoress, arranged a series of receptions in St.Mary's Hall

for Coventry ladies, which were favourably received. Siegfried never missed an opportunity to boost Coventry's image in speeches to schools and public bodies. His campaign for superannuation for deserving officials and employees however did not succeed until after his retirement from public life. Nor did he neglect the elderly. An article in a Coventry paper in December 1913 reported that Bettmann had distributed some two hundred and fifty hampers to *'aged citizens struggling against destitution and, in deserving cases, up to half a ton of coal'*. This was ultimately to lead to the permanent Christmas gift fund which still survives.

### A Civic Crisis!

In London, and in other cities of major importance, mayors were elected from among the ranks of the Aldermen. While admitting that this was not always possible, Bettmann held to the view that the dignity of the Mayor's position was best upheld this way. An Aldermanic vacancy occurred early in 1914 but although they could find no fault in Bettmann, the Conservatives, who then dominated in the Council, elected one of their own party. Bettmann felt slighted at this affront to the dignity of the mayoralty. Disgusted by the narrow party affiliations of those who paid him lip-service, he decided to resign. Later in life, Siegfried wrote of this event which, *'so far as my individual activity is concerned, forms the saddest part of my public career, and let me admit, many years after the event, the most stupid action on my part'*.

Vernon Pugh supported his stand but the Town Clerk tried to dissuade him. *'Coventry Sensation'*; *'Civic Crisis'*; *'Mayor Resigns in Protest'*: ran the headlines in both the local and national press. Party leaders were interviewed. The Liberals understood that the Mayoralty was removed from Party considerations but exonerated the Conservatives from the accusation of making a deliberate affront to the Mayor, and hoped to retain Bettmann in that office. Labour's view was that a serious insult had been rendered to the office of mayor. Councillor Poole expressed the hope that he would see his way clear to resume the mayoralty.

Despite the City's unanimous support, Siegfried felt that he had made a mistake. The *'Coventry Times'* declared it to be the Council's business to find the best way out of the situation. The Council made a deputation to the Mayor which *'hoped that he would give it an opportunity to show its continuing confidence etc'*. Bettmann withdrew his resignation



In the Spring of 1914, Lloyd George introduced a controversial measure to replace the system of (rate) grants by one designed to reward those districts *'which displayed the greatest public spirit etc'*. Bettmann saw this as an unwarranted intrusion into municipal affairs and protested strongly. He wrote at length to a London city paper which published his views and in addition called for the replacement of the Chancellor. *'All the civic institutions of this country'*, it wrote, *'will soon be as impotent and obsolete as feudal jurisdiction'*. The *'Coventry Standard'* chided Bettmann for his temerity but the Editor's view was that, *'His Worship has done an excellent public service'*!

Millie as Lady Mayoress worked hard to raise funds for the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. The population of the city at that time was around 120,000 and on Alexandra Rose Day 123,552 roses were sold, all due to the industry of Millie, her committees, sub-committees and helpers. From this success, the idea of a floral procession was conceived and many vehicles were transformed into floats. Siegfried and Millie threw themselves wholeheartedly into every request for support. *'My own car'*, recalls Siegfried, *'was transformed into a huge swan, occupied by six young girls, all dressed in white'*. All these duties were in addition to the management of Triumph and the Mayoralty was not a sinecure. The Mayor's remuneration at that time was one hundred pounds.

## PART 5: THE GREAT WAR

### An Empire in Decline

The long and complex series of events leading to the 1914-1918 War is not the subject of this work. It suffices to say that Siegfried Bettmann, with his intimate knowledge of German and European history, was acutely aware of the direction in which political events were slowly moving. In June 1914, Siegfried and Millie were to have joined Bettmann's brothers and sisters in Garmisch, Bavaria. On the last Sunday of that month, the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife, were murdered in Sarajevo. The international situation was deteriorating and after consulting his brother, Siegfried decided to cancel the holiday they had planned.

To every German it seemed that the hour of destiny had come. The manager of the German Triumph Company who happened to be in England at that time, remarked that, *'This time it will explode'*. Up to the last, Bettmann hoped that Britain would remain outside the conflict and told Vernon Pugh that, *'he was afraid for the peace of the world'*. Pugh tried to reassure him that, *'we did not enter into their political quarrels'*, but Bettmann feared the worst. Soon afterwards, Bettmann was asked to convene a meeting of motor cycle manufacturers. The War Office was in need of motor cycles and dispatch riders. Pugh asked where they were to be deployed and was told, in strictest confidence, that the Army was going to Belgium. Siegfried records that, *'Then I knew that the fate of Europe was sealed'*.

A beautiful August day was spent by Siegfried and his friends at Dovedale but, despite the brilliant sunshine, Siegfried was depressed. On his return to Coventry, he found a message from the Chief of Police, asking Bettmann to call on him immediately. He was informed that England would be at war on the following day. The Chief of Police was *'required by the Home Office to report on all Germans and naturalised (persons) of German origin'*. He was obliged to report that he, the Mayor, a naturalised servant of the King, was of German birth. The Chief of Police, Charles Charley, was a man who stood for justice. He assured Siegfried that there should be no fear of molestation and stood by him throughout. Siegfried remained grateful to him. The War Office acted swiftly. The Reserves were called up and on the following Tuesday, all offices were closed. An atmosphere of gloom prevailed.

Bettmann felt immediately that he perceived a change in people's attitudes towards him, *'I had a feeling of discomfort and decided to have a word with Schulte'*. Schulte's patriotic pride in the Fatherland evaporated with the speed of a breath. *"Germany will be beaten to her knees,"* was his prophecy, adding *"and she deserves it"*. Bettmann hoped that sanity would prevail. Appeals for help came from all sides. Some of Bettmann's former employees, now soldiers, called on him not to desert their mothers whose incomes were thus depleted. *'Gradually it dawned on people that Germany was a more formidable foe than any since Napoleon. Britain's standing army, though well equipped, was too small to fight such a foe'*.

One Saturday, within two weeks of the declaration of war, Bettmann received a request from a Staff Captain, C.V.Holbrook of the War

Office, for a hundred motor cycles, to be delivered in crates, to Coventry Station, by Sunday evening. Triumph had about this number in stock, but no transport. Bettmann and Hathaway rounded up men to take them to the station. A telegram from the Prince of Wales asked Bettmann's support for the National Relief Fund to provide for those in distress at home. Siegfried subscribed £250 and Schulte, £500. Triumph received a similar request from the British Red Cross Society, to care for the sick and wounded. For this Siegfried started a fund in Coventry, with Millie as its President. He also started a fund for the Belgian refugees who were received in Coventry and he arranged for them to be housed in the uninhabited mansion at Whitley. Some of the refugees later demanded free bicycles!

On August 7<sup>th</sup> the 'Coventry Herald' published an article by Bettmann on 'The true cause of the War'. It appealed to readers to differentiate between 'Prussianism' (militaristic disciplinarianism) and 'Germanism' (humanism). He warned the readers of the possibility of a long and terrible war with an aftermath lasting a generation. The people of Coventry expressed sympathy with Bettmann, hoping that the war would be short and that he would be re-elected Mayor and 'Herald of Peace'. But slowly '*distrust crept into the minds of many*'. On August 13<sup>th</sup> Siegfried convened a Town meeting in the Drill Hall, firstly to send a message of loyalty to the King, and secondly to promote the Prince of Wales Fund. He also appealed to the citizens to reject sinister rumours concerning his loyalty but despite the apparent support, he was attacked and slandered in the Press. Even the Triumph Company was attacked. The life of naturalised Germans became unbearable.

Legal action was taken against 'The Evening News'. Bettmann received an inadequate apology and though he sought damages, his solicitor advised him that '*a jury might be subjected to ultra-patriotic influences by a defending counsel*'. Ultimately a full apology was printed, written by Bettmann's counsel. The impecunious editor of 'World' had also tried to poison the minds of his readers. Maddocks, Bettmann's solicitor, advised against legal proceedings as that paper was unlikely to pay any of the costs awarded against it. Instead Bettmann approached the General Secretary of the Workers' Union and that paper, and others, were forced to apologise.

Siegfried took steps to put English Directors onto the Board of Triumph and appointed Lord Leigh as Chairman. The Press reported the success

of the Town meeting and praised '*the courage of a German Mayor to remain at his post*'. 'The Investor's Review', a London City paper, praised Bettmann and decried '*the unjustifiable and unreasoning antipathy which has suddenly developed against everything and every being, Teutonic*'. Charlsey, the Chief of Police, was a fair man. He knew, more than anyone else, of the underhand and even menacing machinations of some fellow citizens, but he prophesied that Bettmann would be '*the City's most popular and admired man*'.

Millie founded the Mayoress' 'Shilling Fund', to provide material for clothing for women and children. She formed sewing parties which worked at their house, Elm Bank. Donations to the Prince of Wales Fund were required to be sent to its London headquarters for distribution. Bettmann strenuously opposed this on the principle that the needs of Coventry people should be investigated and alleviated by a local committee. After some acrimonious correspondence, he succeeded and received the praise of the 'Coventry Times'. To maintain the fund, he instituted weekly deductions from workers' wages, according to their pay.

The toll in human lives in the first weeks of the war was so tremendous, so unexpected, that '*the military authorities soon found that continuous material for human slaughter had to be provided*'. Recruitment meetings were held throughout Britain and at the Drill Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> September, Siegfried organised a 'Grand Patriotic Demonstration'. There were minor disturbances and Mason, Coventry's Pacifist MP, was heckled but, on leaving the Hall, Bettmann received such an ovation that his persecutors were frightened into silence.

### The Plight of a Naturalised German

Although begun by a vociferous minority, a wave of anti-German hysteria began to grow throughout the land.<sup>12 13</sup> For Siegfried Bettmann a time of great anguish began. Although it was the custom to invite the outgoing Mayor to serve a second year in office, he felt that a second year of Mayoralty was an impossibility. In September 1914, he wrote to the Town Clerk that '*It would be in the best interests of the City if I retire on November 9th*'. The Council accepted this proposal with alacrity.

Councillor Makepeace had to be persuaded to propose the customary vote of thanks to Bettmann as the retiring Mayor because of the



disapproval of the crowd or through fear of it. Staunch Councillor Poole however accepted the invitation to second the motion without hesitation. Poole was not a man to fear the acrimony of the public. *'He made a long speech in which he expressed his sorrow, and even grief, at the treatment I had received. I had gained the confidence of the working classes and had gained what most employers failed to achieve - a real affection and love for his employees'*. By the end of that evening Bettmann was thoroughly disheartened. He tells us, *'Even now, looking back after so many years, I still feel the soreness that was in my heart and mind. I was tired, exhausted and almost ashamed of myself. I left the Chamber unseen and in silence, never to return'*.

He was later offered the post of Deputy Mayor, which he accepted. It was an empty compliment as it carried almost no responsibilities. A few days later, in a letter from the Town Clerk, he was asked to withdraw, *'due to the poisonous agitation of a noisy minority'*. The Midland Daily Telegraph welcomed his resignation for the sake of national unity but went on forcefully to denounce the evil doers at length, concluding that, *'Mr Bettmann is of alien birth but he is a far better Englishman than some of his detractors'*. Siegfried received many letters of support. Soon afterwards, Bettmann resigned from the Insurance Committee and from its Chairman received a sincere letter of thanks and appreciation for his services. Thus he retired from public life, *'relieved but proud of my own exertions for the city and at having gained the confidence of the citizens'*.

With his retirement, the evil doers and evil thinkers had achieved their first victory. Throughout the land, persons of German name were driven to despair, hunted out, their businesses ruined. In closing the door on this distressing end to his public life, Bettmann quotes from Milton<sup>14</sup>, *'(The public) are owls, cuckoos, asses, etc'*, but adds more charitably that, *'This was an exaggerated statement, the basic truth lay in the anxieties of the people'*.

Bettmann was zealously excluded from all forms of public life: social, political and economic. Nothing was left for him except the management of Triumph where the demand from the Allied governments for motor cycles provided business and remained the only way for him to serve his country. His German name increasingly gave rise to suspicion and even a short letter, received from his brother, led to his being regarded as a spy. The Chief of Police called with orders to,

*'demand an explanation'*. He and Millie refused all invitations and even the few friends who did not desert them incurred the contempt of their neighbours. In certain circles, however, some esteem remained and Millie received a gift from the ladies of Coventry. The Masonic fraternity passed a resolution banning all members of German origin from their meetings and Siegfried, dumbfounded and hurt, published a pamphlet in protest. The chief instigator of the ban had been the first to welcome him into the Brotherhood.

Bettmann continued to be attacked from all sides. The Cycle Manufacturers' Union, which he had founded, wanted him expelled although there were still some who supported him. Talk in the bar of the County Club (of which he was a founder member) caused him to resign. The committee would not accept his resignation but he never went there again. The persecution was unending. The 'Daily Mail' formed an 'investigation department'. It wrote to Lord Leigh regarding Germans on the Board of Triumph, demanding their removal. Lord Leigh's noncommittal reply merely confirmed that there were Directors of German origin. After one attack by the newspaper, on 4th September 1914, it was forced to pay one hundred and forty guineas in compensation for libel.

Early in 1915, at a time when Siegfried still (theoretically) represented the electors of his ward, Councillor Jepson demanded that the Council make representations for his removal from that post and fostered noisy demonstrations outside the Council House. The Mayor replied that it was a matter for the ratepayers and their Ward committee, not the Council. Councillor Poole, this time with the support of Makepeace, roundly censured Bettmann's persecutors, saying that the former Mayor, *'was an Englishman of many years standing and had all the rights and the privileges of an Englishman. If not, then his naturalisation papers were merely scraps of paper. They were not to suggest that the Letters of Administration granted to him many years ago, were to be treated as scraps of paper!'*

A few prominent people, including Sir Edward Elgar<sup>15</sup>, showed great courage in opposing persecution. Prime Minister Asquith perceived the persecution of the innocent but was *'harassed step by step into surrender to the wild outcry'*. Britain interned German subjects and Germany retaliated and did likewise. The Rev. Bainton, a local clergyman, whose son, a civilian, had been interned in Germany, wrote

to Bettmann, asking for his help. All Siegfried could do was to write a letter of sympathy and consolation. Bainton, out of gratitude, published it in a local paper. The paper was then quick to accuse Bettmann of duplicity and brand him as a German sympathiser. Anti-German agitation grew as the war dragged on and with it, grew Bettmann's anguish. In his heart he felt that Germany, '*hungered for peace*'. He did his utmost to counter the ferment and published a letter from a friend, Max Schrader, a German pacifist, himself under police surveillance. In another letter, purporting to be from a hate-filled German, Siegfried observed the incorrect use of a German proverb. Careful examination proved that the letter was forged.

Bettmann was continually depressed by the unjust treatment of naturalised Germans. The First Sea Lord was forced to resign, despite the fact that he was responsible for the Government's readiness in 1914. He had the misfortune to bear the title of 'Prince Louis of Battenburg', (hence the Prime Minister's wife could not entertain him at Downing St.!). One member of the Privy Council had to defend his name in the law courts and a Birmingham University professor was forced to resign his Chair, became de-naturalised without trial or reason and subsequently was reduced to penury. In a desperate move to protect themselves, two thousand German-born citizens held a meeting in London in order to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Crown. Siegfried refused to sign, insisting that his naturalisation papers, signed by the Home Secretary, stated quite clearly who he was!

### **The Wilderness**

Triumph, now busy with Government orders, was all that remained to Bettmann. Time dragged, for troubled and distracted as he was, the work was not enough to occupy his mind. He could not just sit and think, either at home or in his office. To Millie's delight, he took up gardening though she maintained that, '*he did more harm than good*'. He also revived his interest in the Russian language, neglected for thirty three years. Siegfried had hopes of using his new knowledge to stimulate trade with Russia when the war was over but this hope was later to be disappointed. He found solace in the works of Russian poets. Feeling hopeless and forsaken, he endeavoured to translate from Pushkin while walking aimlessly through the streets, '*to the delight of Miss Hales, Head of a Girls' High School*'.<sup>16</sup>

Labour troubles began early in 1917. The workers were tired of the war-time sacrifices they had to make and went on strike; the initial reason for striking was quickly forgotten. Factories were closed, with pickets at their gates. Bettmann was dumbfounded that '*they would strike for more wages when their sons and brothers were prepared to fight in the mud of Flanders for a cause they did not understand*'. The strike spread to office workers and staff but Bettmann was determined to keep Triumph open. A deputation of workers tried to close his office and when he refused to do so, they threatened him with reprisals, pointing out the vulnerability of his position. Incensed, he told them that the office would remain open even if he had to stand at the door himself. He angrily told the deputation '*to go and do their worst!*' Schulte was worried by his uncompromising attitude, being more inclined to make concessions for the sake of peace, but when the strike ended, after a few days, the same deputation sought Bettmann's pardon.

With war work and careful management, the financial strength of Triumph grew. Schulte proposed that a bonus be paid to workers and staff to show the Directors' appreciation. Bettmann, however, with long-term needs in mind, suggested that a pension fund for old employees would be of greater benefit to themselves and their widows. A Triumph pension fund was established but Bettmann's successors, in an attempt to stave off a financial crisis, 'manipulated' the investment, leaving only debts and unpaid pensions.

### **The End of the Partnership**

The outstanding success and financial security of Triumph at this time was undoubtedly due to the dedication and untiring efforts of two men, Siegfried Bettmann and Maurice Johann Schulte. It was regrettable that the gulf between them, begun many years earlier, and subsequently fuelled by the influence of Schulte's wife, should become wider and wider. In July 1917 Schulte, for reasons long forgotten, provoked a quarrel with Bettmann. In his own words, Bettmann admits that he, '*during the war acted more independently than Schulte but even then, in the end, Schulte usually had his way, for the sake of outward peace*'. He adds, '*When Schulte was prompted by the envious and jealous disposition of his wife, he invariably gave way to his German upbringing*<sup>17</sup> and did not hesitate, by all means, to humiliate his opponents'.



Siegfried, in a fit of exasperation, wrote a letter to Schulte, determined to end their collaboration and entrusted Schloss with the negotiations. Unhappy at this drastic measure, Schloss told Schulte that he had no wish for any change, *'and would rather pay five hundred pounds from his own pocket than see the partnership broken'*. Schulte, dismayed at Siegfried's anger, wrote a long, conciliatory reply, explaining his actions and concluding that, *'It will not go into my old head that we, at the end of our careers and after being together for thirty-two years, should separate in a forceful manner'*. He was convinced that after the war, the situation would resolve itself in a manner agreeable to them both. He was, *'willing to apologise and withdraw anything said in excitement and for losing my temper'*.

Bettmann was adamant. He replied that in his view, dual management was harmful to the Company and asked how Schulte envisaged any improvement taking place. Things did not improve and with the end of the war approaching, both partners reached the conclusion that separation was essential in both their interests. Schloss, in conjunction with Schulte's solicitor, extracted from the Company a solatium of £15,000. Bettmann did not begrudge Schulte his financial success other than to express his view that, *'it was a little on the high side'* and writes, *'I knew that when my time came I would not be rewarded in the same manner, nor would I accept it'*. His sadness at the impending departure of his friend and colleague is evident in his thoughts. *'Although I was several years younger than Schulte, I knew that the burden of the business could not fall upon my ageing shoulders, and that I would have to look out for a successor'*.

Bettmann was then fifty five, wearied by war with his homeland and by the treatment meted out to him by his adoptive country. In later life one of his great regrets were his quarrels with Schulte and his impetuous dismissal of, *'that excellent and far-seeing man'*. One writer<sup>18</sup> has described Schulte as, *'the adventurous entrepreneur, often the driving force'*, and Siegfried as, *'the perennial conservative'*. Siegfried recalls that, *'After many years of contemplation, and now that my late friend<sup>9</sup> rests in peace, I must confess that most likely his was not the only fault. We both had to bear equal responsibility for the misunderstandings. The cause was most probably a mutual jealousy'*. On this note Schulte fades from the scene and Siegfried, in his Memoirs, does not mention his old friend, partner and colleague, again.

The war was not yet over and early in 1918, Ludendorf launched his final, desperate offensive. 'Air raids', almost unknown to the British public at large, became a reality. The manager of Triumph's London office reported damage to his premises and Coventry, previously thought to be immune, received a visit from a Zeppelin. Siegfried heard the alarm at about 2 a.m. and records that, *'We disdained going into the cellar and waited with calm for the end of the airship's journey. Next day we learned that bombs had fallen on Whitley Common - about a mile away'*. He adds, *'Like Ludendorf's offensive, the air raid was futile'*. The war seemed interminable and pointless. In his Memoirs, Siegfried found it impossible to describe his state of mind at that time: *'My position became more untenable from day to day. I do not know which of the two burdens is heavier: to be shunned by erstwhile friends or to be openly persecuted by people who cannot possibly have a grudge against you except that of having an honoured name and being born on foreign soil'*. He had seriously thought of giving up all that he had achieved and seeking a new existence in a neutral land. Only Millie's devotion and his own gratitude to her, prevented him.

### The Aftermath of War

When the armistice came, a new chapter began for the world but for Bettmann it brought no joy, only relief. In Germany there was revolution; the Emperor had fled to Holland and there were starving populations in his former country and in Austria. Bettmann could see only, *'a cruel peace, based on the triumph of tanks and weapons'*, and wondered what fresh disasters were in store for a suffering and bleeding world. These thoughts disturbed his mind on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918. Siegfried felt that the only way to peace was, *'to bring nations together, over the heads of the governments who had failed them'*. War had left its mark on everyone; very few benefited from it.

Sixty six of the Triumph workers who went to fight at the front, had been killed, including Bettmann's nephew, Meyrick Bones, and Hathaway's son, Sidney. Their fellow workers and staff subscribed to a memorial bearing their names which was erected in Coventry Cemetery and subsequently unveiled by Bettmann. Speaking at the ceremony, he said that the men of the Triumph Cycle Company did not lag behind in their sacred duty, and he likened their deeds to the heroic fight of Leonidas<sup>20</sup> and his three hundred Spartans who fell at the Pass of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. *'As the law did command'*. He posed the

question whether (for the peace which was to come) we were likewise doing 'as the law did command' and he referred to the resurrection of Christ as a message of hope for mankind.

Christmas 1918 was greeted with joy by the victorious and by the neutral nations alike but on reading the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, Siegfried was filled with misgivings. On 9th December, Sir Eric Geddes<sup>21</sup>, a Government Minister, had implied that Germany, '*must be stripped of all wealth and resources, including gold, silver, jewels and works of art, "as Germany has stripped Belgium"*'. On the day after the armistice, Lloyd George addressed the Liberals in terms of peace with magnanimity. Three weeks later he promised to, '*prosecute the Kaiser, punish German officers, expel Germans from Britain and exact the utmost retribution from Germany*'.

On March 19th 1919, Siegfried received the sad news that his brother, Sigmund, was dying. He tried in vain to obtain permission to visit him but officially Germany was still the enemy. He received a final letter from Sigmund, beseeching him to promote peace between the two nations. Bettmann strove to pursue this by such means as were available to him, right up to the rise of Nazism, by which time such efforts were futile.

### **C.V.Holbrook joins the Triumph Company**

After the armistice, every industrial concern sought to put its house in order and regulate its activities to the consequences of four years of war; depleted exchequers and an exhausted world. Triumph was no exception. It had been necessary to appoint a successor to Schulte whose departure had been arranged. During the war, a Staff Captain, Claude Vincent Holbrook, from the War Office, had placed orders for over 30,000 motor cycles with Triumph. Furthermore, he had personally befriended Bettmann and stayed with him and Millie at Elm Bank. Siegfried saw in him, an ideal successor to Schulte and ultimately, to himself; Schulte, Fridlander and Schloss agreed. Bettmann relates how, '*this began the saddest chapter of my story, the loss of a friendship and the destruction of my life's work*'. It had been his intention to close the Memoirs with the armistice but he realised that his struggles were not yet over. He cites the appointment of Holbrook as his main reason for continuing to write.

In November 1918, Siegfried asked Holbrook, now with the rank of Lt. Colonel, to Elm Bank, and during this visit, he invited him to join Triumph. Holbrook appeared flattered but agreed to consider the offer when his army engagement ended. He subsequently demanded a salary of fifteen hundred pounds, '*to match his army pay*'. This amount was far in excess of the salaries of Bettmann and Schulte and had in fact been grossly inflated by the War Office for his responsibilities at the new Ministry of Munitions. Furthermore, he insisted on being allowed one day per week to continue assisting the Minister, pending the appointment of his successor. (A knighthood was evidently expected). There followed a long delay while Holbrook's army affairs were wound up and he continued to live in London for some time, '*for the sake of his children*'; he demanded travel allowances for this inconvenience. Siegfried recounts that, '*from the beginning, from the day that Holbrook entered Triumph, I should have known (if I had not been blind) that his ambition was directed, not so much as gaining by honourable exertion, but towards usurping, a post in Triumph*'.

Holbrook entered Triumph, determined to instil a spirit of military obedience in place of co-operation. His orders were to be obeyed blindly. He belittled old colleagues and always took care to conceal his instructions from Bettmann who was blind and deaf to those who saw through this, until it was too late and the mischief was done. In his own words, '*I would not see, nor would I listen, to those friends who doubted his wisdom (and to whom he had taken an immediate dislike)*'. Holbrook set out to break the wartime relationship between the management and workers of Triumph. A strike soon began in the Tool Shop, where the most experienced and skilled men were employed. Although peace was soon restored, the old spirit of conciliatory co-operation was gone forever.



### An Invitation to resume Public Life

With the ending of the war, personal relationships seemed to ease and there were attempts, some of them shame-faced, at reconciliation, by some of Siegfried's erstwhile friends who had snubbed him. Some leading citizens suggested that he should re-enter the Council. He agreed to do so provided that he did not have to submit to an election. At that time an Aldermanic vacancy occurred. Both the Conservative and Labour groups agreed to support him if Gardner, the Liberal candidate, would stand down. Gardner agreed but his party would not sacrifice its own political interests. Siegfried did not seek to enter the Council again.

### The Annie Bettmann Foundation



10 Annie May Bettmann

Throughout his married life, Siegfried had been grateful for the untiring support and devotion of Millie and never more so than during the stressful and traumatic war years. *'I wanted to show the world at large my gratitude and joy'*, he wrote. He conceived the idea for a trust fund that would assist young people wishing to enter business, both as a tribute to Millie, and to perpetuate her name and so the 'Annie Bettmann Foundation'<sup>22</sup> was born. It is active to this day. Siegfried admits that the idea was not his own, that a similar fund existed in Nuremberg.

The Trust deed was drawn up on 29th November 1919, with an initial capital of three thousand pounds in Triumph shares. The Fund was open to both men and women between the ages of twenty one and forty who were beginning their commercial careers in similar circumstances to his own. Preference was to be given to men who had served in His Majesty's Forces during the 1914-1918 war. Later the Fund was extended to include grants for the purpose of further education.

### Changing Political Views

From his early days in England, Siegfried had been an ardent supporter of the Liberal Party which was then the champion of the underprivileged and working classes. At that time Coventry's Labour Party had practically no organisation and one of the tasks allotted to him was to develop an understanding between the two parties. Two Labour supporters, George Poole and Hugh Farren, worked for Triumph, and Bettmann became friendly with both of them and contributed to their party funds. He believed in both parties working in harmony, in both home and foreign affairs. During the 1914-1918 war, Bettmann became disaffected with Liberal policies and began to see Labour policies as the only way to ensure peace between nations.

Siegfried was later to develop a friendship with J. Ramsay McDonald who twice stayed at Elm Bank, on one such occasion, in May 1925<sup>23</sup>, bringing his daughter, Isobel. The Bishops of Coventry and Birmingham, the Mayor of Coventry and several friends and officials were invited to meet him (although Bettmann was afraid that this would be 'too middle-class' for the great man). However, 'Isabel', won all hearts and McDonald was delighted that (Labour) Party heads wanted to meet him. He gave autographs and also sat for a photographer. Bettmann even provided a bicycle for Alistair, McDonald's son. He contributed to McDonald's party funds in 1923 and was invited by the local candidate to take the Chair at an election meeting at the Opera House. Siegfried, anxious to re-instate himself in the eyes of the public, accepted with alacrity and he informed McDonald that he would speak on the party programme; it also provided him with an opportunity to speak on Free Trade. Millie was distressed and declined to attend.

Once on the way to power, however, McDonald's friendship cooled. Influenced by newly acquired, aristocratic friendships, he distanced himself from those who had helped him. His letters to Bettmann became impersonal and were signed by a secretary. Even these letters diminished to a formal Christmas card which eventually ceased.

## PART 6: "THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH, YIELDING PLACE TO NEW."<sup>24</sup>

### An Empire in Decline

Before the outbreak of war, Bettmann had also acquired an interest in the Standard Motor Company Ltd and had joined its Board as a Director. Unfortunately, the anti-German agitation which arose with war, had forced his resignation. Both Bettmann and Schulte had considered that they would have to enter the motor car business if Triumph was to survive. By 1923, this had been achieved and a small car had been produced which proved both reliable and popular. While Siegfried's aim was to satisfy this market, Holbrook aspired to greater things and inclined towards more powerful and sporty models. More and more of the Company's resources were poured into his projects.

In 1924, Bettmann, accompanied by Millie, visited South Africa where, among other duties, he made a tour of the Triumph agents. On his return, he found that instead of progress, the firm was struggling to survive. In the years following the Great War, there had been increased prices, greater competition and a boom in trade that Bettmann realised could not continue. *'I had consulted with Holbrook many times on how to resist the storm, to avoid the blizzard which threatened our existence'*. Then the first step to the inevitable debacle was made. The balance sheet for the year should have shown a loss but Holbrook persuaded Bettmann to utilise valuable reserves that had accrued during years of prudent management, in order to show a healthier state of affairs. *'Otherwise (Holbrook entreated) everyone will say that the business has been mismanaged in your absence'*.

The struggle continued and a small, economical car, the 'Super Seven' was successfully produced in 1927 but Triumph found it difficult to compete with Austin in that market. Holbrook saw Bettmann as an obstacle to achieving his ambition and sought to displace him by devious means. It seems that he prevailed upon Siegfried's old friend, Schloss, to suggest to Millie that, *'because of Siegfried's failing mental abilities'*, he should consider resigning. Undeceived, Millie wrote down all of Schloss' words and reported them to Siegfried. Schloss later claimed to have been misunderstood but Millie's interpretation was proved to have been correct.

### Retirement

In 1918, under Bettmann and Schulte, the firm had paid its shareholders a dividend of twelve and a half percent but by 1932 this had turned into a disastrous loss. Despite Siegfried's protests, Holbrook used the Pension Fund assets to improve the balance sheet with the result that retired Triumph employees were deprived of their pension rights. For those who had striven to build the Company, enough was enough; Auerhaan, Sales Manager, and a loyal friend for thirty years, asked for his pension. Bettmann felt that he could struggle no longer, for he wrote, *'At last I found, having been deprived of the hearty co-operation of my fellow Directors, especially Schloss - Hunter was tired and had years before, thought of retiring, - my mission had reached its end. I decided to retire'*. With this resignation, Schloss and Hunter retired from the Board together.

Bettmann recalls that, *'At the Board meeting at which these resolutions were passed, while I handed in my resignation, I shed hot tears. I could not restrain them when I found that after nearly fifty years of hard work, I was unceremoniously relegated to the ranks of the unemployed'*. Only Schloss did his best to make the bitter pill easier to swallow, by reminding the Board of Bettmann's great service to the Company and to Coventry. Holbrook had achieved his goal and he was now the Managing Director. *'From the moment I resigned, Holbrook was left free and unhampered in his course of dreams and unrealised desires'*. Although the Board had implied that Bettmann would be consulted on significant financial matters, he was ignored, and finally he severed his connections with the Company in November 1934.

Siegfried was hurt that not a word of appreciation or regret had been expressed either by the Board or the staff. Indeed, some of Bettmann's associates were angered by the lack of courtesy shown by those with whom he had been most intimately connected. They formed a committee and invited both personal and business friends to subscribe to an Address which was then presented to Bettmann at a luncheon held in the Grand Hotel, Birmingham, using the occasion of his 70th birthday. The leather-bound volume contains over five hundred signatures; the text of the Address is given in Appendix 2. The celebration was chaired by Mr.A.Brampton, Chairman of Reynolds and Coventry Chain Company and among those attending were the Mayor of Coventry, Councillor Flinn and the Town Clerk, Mr. Frederick Smith. The event was widely reported in the local and national Press. In his speech, the



Mayor referred to Bettmann's early struggles in companionship with Schulte, building, from small beginnings, a business of considerable proportions and world-wide interest.

### **A Triumph yet to Come.**

Freed from his responsibilities, Siegfried resolved to come to terms with the past; *'After my retirement, I endeavoured to make peace with the world. A world of disappointment and disillusion had arisen from the bones of the millions of men who sacrificed their lives in the cause of freedom and democracy in the greatest of all wars, and from the vindictive achievements of the men who dictated the peace terms of Versailles'*.

Millie thought it desirable that Siegfried should take a holiday; *'A rest from the site of my former occupations'*. In late February 1933, the Bettmans boarded the liner, 'Duchess of Atholl', at Liverpool, bound for a Mediterranean cruise. On this, as on his many previous journeys, Siegfried kept a closely written account of the minutiae of life on board. On March 3rd he observes that, *'There is great unemployment in all industrial countries. Shipping suffers as a result but has invented a new industry - cruises. First class for all at thirty shillings a day'*. While in Italy, he learned of the Nazi party's election victory and the rise of Adolf Hitler, *'Germany's evil star'*. He saw this as portending yet another war, with disaster on all sides.

Despite Holbrook's earlier disdain, he wrote to Bettmann in January 1935 seeming, *'almost at his wit's end'*, telling him that it was, *'difficult to carry on with the present limited overdraft'* and of the appointment of a new Financial Adviser. The firm was now in financial straits and the Bank had refused to increase its overdraft. Some assets, including ground acquired by Bettmann as a sports field for Triumph employees, had already been sold to reduce the debts. A note among Bettmann's papers referred to a conversation with Holbrook in which the latter implied that he might have to resign if the outcome of the recent stock-taking was unsatisfactory. Early in 1936, the financial adviser, concerned at the increasing debts, arranged for further assets to be sold and these were to include the City centre factory; the manufacture of cycles, motor cycles and gears, would be discontinued. Only the motor car business would be retained and it would be moved to a smaller factory in Holbrook Lane.

This was too much: Siegfried and Schloss, with the support of shareholders and former colleagues, purchased the cycle business, the subsidiary, Coventry Bicycles Ltd. They decided that manufacture would continue, as the new Triumph Cycle Company Ltd, and colleagues insisted that Bettmann become the Chairman. Regrettably Schloss had lost confidence in Bettmann, possibly a consequence of his unfortunate experience with Holbrook; he limited his involvement and soon withdrew altogether.

Consternation arose in industry and in the trade when it was announced that the manufacture of Triumph motor cycles was to cease. Both Bettmann and Schloss felt that they were now too old to think of buying that part of the Company. Triumph motorcycles were saved for posterity by the intervention of Ariel, once their greatest competitor, which bought the business. The new owner, Jack Sangster, prevailed upon Bettmann to become Chairman of a new Triumph Engineering Company Ltd, and Triumph motor cycles were again produced at the Priors St. Works. It had been Siegfried's greatest wish to see the manufacture of Triumph cycles and motor cycles succeed in the City. His re-instatement caused surprise and sensation. Articles praising his courage, (he was now 73), appeared in 'The Times', 'The Daily Telegraph' and other national papers. Workers and citizens rejoiced that the name would continue in Coventry. A luncheon was held at the King's Head, Hotel, to announce the future of the motor cycle business.

Siegfried's last meeting with Holbrook occurred around January 1936 in the Company lawyer's office when finalising the purchase of the gears business. *'He (Holbrook) did not look happy. He had lost his 'provocativeness' and so it seemed to me, intimated that his star was sinking'*. Two or three months later, he was ousted by the very men he had himself appointed. He had believed that they would support him through thick and thin but instead, they were soon compelled to dismiss him from his high pedestal. Bettmann concludes his story of Triumph: *'Thus I dismiss the old Company from my mind. It has fallen from glory to decay, due to mistakes made by me. The principal mistake was that I placed unlimited confidence in the abilities of the man whom I fondly hoped would one day be my successor'*. He concludes that Holbrook's, *'unlimited ambition and love of intrigue led to (his) mistakes and unworthy acts'*.

## The Later Years

With the future of Triumph cycles and motor cycles once more secure, only two matters disturbed Siegfried's mind. The first was the matter of Millie's health which had been deteriorating for some time. She had taken no part in public life for several years and at one stage had been referred to a private clinic at Ruthin Castle, Wales. The second matter was the insidious rise of National Socialism in Germany.

Bettmann was a Jew and although he was non-practising, all his life he had felt the oppression of the Semitic people. His Memoirs are punctuated with condemnation of their persecutors, brought to a head by the cruelties perpetrated by the Nazi regime under Hitler and his followers, in which Christianity had become an enemy of the State and the worship of Odin and Wotan was fostered. *'Gangsterism and National Socialism are identical, synonymous terms'*. With the peace of mankind once more threatened, he makes a final appeal to Britain and the other democratic powers to, *'stem the flood before it is too late'* and to, *'continue the path of tolerance, offering asylum to the persecuted and dispossessed'*. As a warning to nations who would follow Hitler, he quotes from Schiller's drama, *'Don Carlos'*<sup>25</sup>, and with this long and heartfelt denunciation of the growing menace, Siegfried Bettmann's Memoirs are brought to a close.

## House called 'Elm Bank'

Elm Bank still stands in Stoke Park although the house no longer bears that name. It was built at some time during the 1870s, at a time when there were very few houses in the park and the house acquired its name from the large number of elm trees which once grew there. In its extensive grounds, an earlier occupant had built a two-story cottage, allegedly for the purpose of smoking as tradition has it that his wife would not tolerate smoking in the main house.

In 1905, after ten happy years at their first home, in Radford Fields, the Bettmanns moved to this imposing Victorian house, of generous proportions. Such a move was consistent with Siegfried's standing in the business world, allowing them space in which to live and entertain visitors. Many friends and important visitors to Coventry were guests at Elm Bank and apart from a brief period during the second world war, it was to be Siegfried's home for the rest of his days. The house is large and required two or more indoor servants, plus a gardener; Siegfried



11 Elm Bank

regime. Here, as Lady Mayoress, Millie on one occasion entertained over one hundred children from various schools in the district.<sup>26</sup> They came from the Saint Barnabas Home, the Coventry Industrial School and the Bluecoat School; they had a tour of the grounds, tea in the parish rooms and afterwards they played games on the lawn.

## War again Intervenes

During the second world war, the Bettmann household moved to the village of Hanley Castle, Worcestershire and Elm Bank was closed. At that time the household comprised Siegfried, Millie, and Olive, the wife of Stuart Bones who had again been called up to serve his country. The army had posted Stuart Bones to India where he subsequently died. There was also Miss Reynolds, the companion-housekeeper.

During the school holidays, Peter Bones, the son of Stuart and Olive, also stayed with the Bettmanns at the Hanley Castle vicarage. He recalls his great-uncle's orderly regime where punctuality and tidiness prevailed. Books could not be left lying about, either they were put away or surreptitiously kept out of sight. Peter Bones has no

also employed a chauffeur. Access was via the two wide carriage entrances with wrought-iron gates or through the pedestrian gate, said to have been made for Siegfried by a Triumph Company blacksmith.

At Elm Bank, the Bones children lived and played, in the care of Siegfried and Millie, following their father's departure for South Africa. The household ran under what was an orderly and probably typical Victorian



12 The Wrought-Iron Gates





13 An antique German chair

recollection of Millie other than that she was kind and organised a children's tea party for him at Elm Bank when he was four years old. He remembers seeing letters of thanks from the party guests but remembers nothing of the party, other than hiding under a table for the duration because he was so shy.

Millie was not destined to return to Elm Bank but died on 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1941<sup>27</sup>, at their temporary home in Hanley Castle Vicarage, having suffered poor health for many years. After she returned from Ruthin, Siegfried does not mention Millie again, but in a later obituary to Siegfried, she is referred to as, '*A most gracious and charitable lady*'. We know that she

was a kind and generous person and it is certain that she and Siegfried were devoted to each other.

In 1946, Bettmann returned to Elm Bank, to find all its windows blown out by a bomb which had landed in the grounds. A fellow German, Walter Frankel, and his family, returned with him. Walter was probably a descendant of Alex Frankel, a cousin of Siegfried by marriage. The Bettmanns had evidently given shelter to the family at Hanley Castle and they lived for some time at Elm Bank, later moving into the cottage. Peter Bones, then aged eleven, lived with Siegfried during his holidays from boarding school. To Peter, Siegfried was 'Uncle', but the great disparity in age made contact between them difficult. Peter spent much of his leisure time in the kitchen in the company of Bettmann's genial cook, Mrs. Sweet. The kitchen still retained its Victorian row of bells which would summon the staff when required. Peter helped to take food parcels to elderly former employees of Triumph, among whom was a Miss Fridlander who kept cats. At this time Bettmann employed a gardener, Henry, who cycled each day from Kenilworth despite his artificial leg. He also employed Anderson as his chauffeur but when Anderson retired, Olive Bones drove his car for him.

The Bettmann household ran to a rigid routine. Gongs sounded for meals according to a daily schedule. At breakfast 'Uncle' would read

'The Times' and at prescribed times, he walked his dog, retired to his study to work, smoked, listened to the radio and retired to bed (where he kept a supply of sweets!). In his study he would sit for two hours each day, often studying Russian. His library was extensive.

Although long retired, Bettmann was no recluse. His many visitors were always entertained well; among them was Charles Barratt who had succeeded Frederick Smith, Bettmann's friend, as Town Clerk. Peter Bones remembers being shown the splendours of Cambridge by Siegfried and being taken on holiday by him, to Eastbourne. Peter also accompanied Siegfried to church, at St. Michael's, Stoke. He enjoyed these excursions but felt that the age-gap between them, prevented him from really coming to know his great-uncle. Bettmann was a Vice-President both of Coventry City Football Club and Coventry Rugby Football Club. The young Peter was able to enjoy matches, using the complimentary tickets provided by Siegfried.

Reminiscences of acquaintances and former employees help to complete this picture of the older Siegfried Bettmann; from a business associate, '*a livelier lunch-partner I do not know - known to his employees, some many years his junior, as Papa Bettmann or Uncle Bettmann*<sup>28</sup>. A former Triumph employee, F.J. Wicks<sup>29</sup>, remembered meeting Bettmann at Triumph Engineering on leaving school in 1936. He retained his schoolboy's image of Bettmann, seen in the distance as an, '*odd looking figure, like a little old penguin, with a thick German accent — a very able man, not domineering, the impression tempered by his accent*'.

### Epilogue

In a note in Siegfried's meticulously written diary of the Mediterranean Cruise, kept at Millie's insistence, he refers to '*his declining years*'. The first entry reads, '*Writing on 3rd March 1933 on board the 'Duchess of Atholl' - the year in which Facism blossomed, Hitlerism flourished, Nationalism went rampant and Imperialism reigned supreme, a man somewhat tired, disappointed and disenchanted by the course events have taken*'.

With the exception of the death of Millie, his greatest sorrow, which remained with him for many years, was undoubtedly the break-up of Triumph, '*the destruction of my life's work*'. Of this, Bettmann writes, '*I have no desire to free myself from blame. I was responsible for the downfall of the Company as much, if not more, than anyone. I was*

*blinded by Holbrook's glib talk and easy manners'. He adds sadly, 'Can it be wondered that sometimes in my old age I feel despondent, and that I am doubtful as to the judgement of the average man?'*

Although born a Jew, Siegfried's later beliefs are uncertain, except that they were clearly not agnostic. He took his marriage vows in an Anglican Church and accompanied Millie in Church on occasions. He was in demand to open bazaars for churches of many denominations; he was principal speaker at the opening of the new Methodist Central Hall in 1932 and had many friends among the clergy. Ruminating on the author Harold Begbie's<sup>30</sup> idealistic notion for a new religion, embracing the best principles of all others, he wrote, *'to me, however, religion is like death, unfathomable. For man must conceive in his heart, the true religion, to (perceive) in God, the aim of humanity; purity of man, self, recognition and mercy towards man. Like death, religion, in spite of the thousands of years it has travelled, is an unknown road, an unsolved problem'*. Certainly in his old age, Bettmann enjoyed attending the church of St. Michael's, Stoke. The Rector, the Rev. Ashcroft, was a frequent visitor to Elm Bank.

Siegfried Bettmann died at Elm Bank on 23rd September, 1951.<sup>31</sup> He was eighty eight years of age and had been a widower for ten years. To some his death came as a surprise<sup>32</sup> for although he had been unwell for some time, his mind was alert and his mental faculties remained unimpaired by old age. An old acquaintance, Canon R.L. Donaldson of Ketton, Lincolnshire conducted his funeral at Canley Crematorium. The Mayor, Alderman Harry Weston, was in attendance, together with the Deputy Mayor, several former Mayors, old Triumph employees and representatives from industry and the Liberal Association. His obituaries, which included tributes from many walks of his long and active life, were published both in the Coventry Press and in his native city of Nuremberg

In his will, Bettmann's generosity is apparent. He made specific bequests to the Mayor and Corporation of Coventry and to a number of relatives and friends, both in England and America. He provided legacies for some fifty four people and organisations, including the Annie Bettmann Foundation. Old friends were remembered, *'in appreciation of their faithful friendship'*, neither were their dependents forgotten nor his cook, chauffeur and gardener.

When the contents of the house were auctioned, in the cellar were approximately one hundred and forty bottles of choice wine, twenty five boxes of fine cigars and some seven hundred cigarettes. Bettmann entertained well! Elm Bank was purchased for the city from his executors in July 1952.

With commitment and hard work, Bettmann and Schulte had built a manufacturing organisation of world renown, which enhanced the city's reputation for quality products and gave employment to generations of people. Despite this dedication, Bettmann suffered many years of isolation during the 1914-1918 war; shunned by friends and colleagues and hounded by a hostile Press for the sin of being German-born. A sensitive man, Bettmann inevitably suffered from the ambition of 'false friends' in whom he had put his trust. Although he bore no malice, he never entirely forgot these injuries but with his customary dogged determination to continue, he ultimately triumphed over every adversity.

Triumph bicycles continued to be made in Coventry until 1954, by which time the burgeoning motor industry had made its adverse impact on the popularity of cycling. Ironically, that same industry, after many changes, has finally disposed of the Triumph badge. The name adopted by Siegfried Bettmann has nevertheless survived the damage of foreign competition. Triumph motor cycles are now manufactured by a younger and very different company, no longer in Coventry, but a company fitted for the demands of the 21st century<sup>33</sup>. The name that Bettmann adopted evidently still carries the same message of quality and reliability. These machines, which would have gladdened the eyes of Bettmann and delighted Schulte, are sold throughout the world.

In 1934, in coming to terms with the end of his career and all its disappointments, Siegfried referred to a vow that he had made on becoming a British citizen. He remembered that, on accepting the Mayoral chain, he renewed his vow, *'secretly, it is true, and in silence, that I would be England's faithful son, as one of Coventry's devoted citizens, and now, after many years' sad experience in a changing world, in the evening of my life, I probe, and put the question: have I failed to keep that vow?'*



14 A Street-Name in  
Cheylesmore



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bettmann S. *Struggling* (unpublished autobiography): Coventry Archives: reference PA/1417/1/1-5.
- <sup>2</sup> Sir Claude Vivian Holbrook, J.P., Director of Triumph Co. Ltd., 1919-1936: former Deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire and Warwickshire Councillor: knighted 1938 for political and public service in the Rugby areas moved to Hampshire in 1947 where he died in 1979, aged 93: for report of his death see *The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17.10.1979.
- <sup>3</sup> A practice which was sometimes adopted by persons not wishing to draw attention to Jewish ancestry.
- <sup>4</sup> From 1869 many Boneshakers were Manufactured at the Cornwall Works, Birmingham, owned by Joseph Tangye, a Cornish tin-miner
- <sup>5</sup> Jerome K. Jerome (1900) *Three Men on the Bummel*.
- <sup>6</sup> Bettmann was evidently not the first to use the name 'Triumph' in association with bicycles. The names 'Triumph' and 'Coventry Triumph' were in use by Warman & Hazlewood of Albion Mills, West Orchard, in 1881. It was also used by Henry Sturmev (of Sturmev-Archer, makers of the 3-speed gear) in 1877. From information supplied by Andrew Heapes.
- <sup>7</sup> The Coventry Directory for 1890-1892, shows that the Triumph Cycle Co. shared Earls Court with, F. Bagley, ribbon manufacturer and J. Gardener, a quantity surveyor.
- <sup>8</sup> Alfred Emmanuel Fridlander, 1840-1929; born in Coventry and a founder member of the Coventry Synagogue. He was a watchmaker until 1907. He was a Director of the Triumph Company from its formation until his death.
- <sup>9</sup> It is not clear as to which part of the Priory St. works was completed in 1894 nor on which plot of land in Priory St. a deposit had been paid. The Coventry Directory for 1898 records that the Triumph Cycle Company occupied premises on the west side. These may have been in the disused silk mill referred to in Collins and Stratton (1994) *A Review of Coventry Car factories and Industrial Sites*. An Ordnance Survey map of 1888 shows this area to have been the site of a timber yard. Bettmann gives no

indication as to when the later premises, on the east side, were erected. Tis four-story building adjoined the Dale St. works and is shown on an Ordnance Survey map of 1914 as 'Triumph Works (Motor Cycles)'.

- <sup>10</sup> Croesus, the fabulously wealthy King of Lydia, a province of Ancient Greece, in Asia Minor, hence 'a Croesus' someone of great wealth.
- <sup>11</sup> Mayor Tomson elected: 1881, 1882, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1896, 1901, 1902.
- <sup>12</sup> Levine H., Coventry Jewish Community (1970) *The Jews of Coventry*.
- <sup>13</sup> On July 17<sup>th</sup> 1917, George V of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, by Royal proclamation, changed his family name to 'Windsor'. He relinquished the use of all German 'titles and dignities' and further decreed that all descendants of Queen Victoria who were British subjects were likewise affected.
- <sup>14</sup> Milton J, *Poetical Works, Sonnet XII - On the Same*.
- <sup>15</sup> De la Moy M. (1983) *Elgar the Man*.
- <sup>16</sup> Miss Hales, Head Teacher, The Quadrant School until her death in 1923. The Quadrant was a favourite area for private schools: see Richardson K. *Twentieth Century Coventry*.
- <sup>17</sup> German upbringing: alluding to Prussian disciplinarianism.
- <sup>18</sup> Langworth and Robson (1979) *Triumph Cars*.
- <sup>19</sup> Mauritz Johann Schulte retired to Marlow, Buckinghamshire after the break-up of his partnership with Bettmann. He died there in 1933 aged 76, apparently still a keen and active sportsman until his death, only giving up motor cycling in his final years. *The Coventry Herald*: 10.11.1933.
- <sup>20</sup> Leonidas, King of Sparta, with one thousand soldiers, was said to have fought to the last man, to delay the invading Persians. Simonides wrote them epitaph: 'Go, tell the Spartans, thou who passest by, that here obedient to their laws, we lie'.
- <sup>21</sup> Sir Eric Geddes was a British, politician who held posts in railway companies in India and America before joining the North Eastern Railway Company. He was one of the Parliamentary sub-

committee who had vested interest in that Company during its dispute with Coventry Corporation.

<sup>22</sup> The Annie Bettmann Trust was formed by S.Bettmann (The Settler) and its original Trustees were Annie May Bettmann, Joseph Innis Bates, Alfred Henry Drinkwater, Stephen George Poole and Earnest Arthur Raybould. The first beneficiary was G.H. Wood who received a grant of £150 on December 30th 1919.

<sup>23</sup> Ramsay McDonald was Leader of the Opposition, having been defeated in the General Election of October, 1924.

<sup>24</sup> Tennyson, Lord Alfred: *Morte D'Arthur*.

<sup>25</sup> In Schiller's 'Don Carlos', the Marquis of Posa warns Philip II of Spain of the desertion by his noblest citizens to sanctuary in England under Elizabeth I.

<sup>26</sup> *The Coventry Herald*: 3.7.1914.

<sup>27</sup> *The Coventry Standard*: 22.2.1941.

<sup>28</sup> *Motoring Today*: article. Coventry Archives: reference PA/523/3/2

<sup>29</sup> Wicks, F.J. (1984): recorded interview by G.Griffin: reference Coventry Archives: PA/1662/2/181

<sup>30</sup> Harold Begbie was a writer who was sent to report on war work in Coventry during the 1914-1918 war. He and Bettmann became firm friends.

<sup>31</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 24.9.1951: *The Coventry Standard*, 28.9.1951.

<sup>32</sup> Information from Mr. Peter Bones, Bettmann's great-nephew.

<sup>33</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 27.4.1996.

## APPENDIX 1.

The names of Triumph and Gloria Cycle Company employees killed in action during the First World War

F.L.J.Brown	C.Graham	F.Miles	A.Reeves
E.Ball	G.Greenstreet	A.Middleton	P.Smith
J.Brislin	W.Garlick	H.Marsh	P.A.Smith
G.Bell	E.Harris	F.Mathews	T.Thompson
J.Ballard	F.Hewins	H.Mathews	E.Thompson
A.M.Bones	E.J.Howe	H.McKnight	E.Townend
A.Carey	F.Harris	W.Neale	K.Taylor
H.Clarke	R.Hammond	C.W.North	D.Taylor
P.Clarke	S.Hathaway	A.Nash	A.Todd
T.Cronan	W.Humphreys	W.Phillips	J.Varney
G.Dixon	T.Hogan	W.Powell	T.Vincent
J.Eykelbosch	A.James	A.Piggot	E.C.D.Warner
W.Forge	A.S.Jones	C.Randle	H.J.Wood
F.Francis	F.Keefe	J.Ryan	C.Warlington
W.H.Feltham	J.Kenning	H.Roberts	D.Whitmore
T.Flanagan	T.Kimberley	A.C.Russell	H.Walker
R.Ford	H.Maynard	W.Roberts	



15 The Triumph Memorial in the Coventry cemetery.

The inscription on the base of the Memorial reads, 'He was a man, and nothing that affected the human race was foreign to him'. The source of this quotation, however, has not been traced nor does it accord with that given in 'The Coventry Graphic' for March 25th 1921, reporting the unveiling ceremony. The paper quotes instead, 'They died in order that we might live'.



## APPENDIX 2.

The Text of an Address presented to Siegfried Bettmann at a Banquet, given in honour of his 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, at the Grand Hotel, Birmingham, on April 23rd, 1933

To S. Bettmann Esq. J.P.

The members of the Cycle, Motor Cycle and Motor Car Industries, as well as many others whose good fortune it has been to enjoy personal contact with you in your private and public activities, combine in offering you hearty congratulations on your 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and in expressing the hope that you may long live to enjoy good health and contentment.

In conveying these sentiments, they are mindful of the enviable positions you have held in Industrial and Public Life for the past forty eight years, and are sincerely desirous that you should derive enduring satisfaction from the evidence of good will and friendship. They are happy to record your proud distinction as one of the pioneers of the Motor Cycle Industry, a model employer of labour, a public and private benefactor, an ex-President of the Chamber of Commerce, and an ex-President of the British Cycle and Motor Cycle Manufacturers and Traders Union and an ex-Mayor of the City of your adoption. That you have justly earned the esteem of your contemporaries at home and abroad is attested in the succeeding pages, by the personal signatures of those who have contributed to this address.

## APPENDIX 3.

### The Siegfried Bettmann Commemoration Plaque

A new company, Coventry and Warwickshire Promotions Ltd, was formed in 1997, the purposes of which included raising the profile of the City of Coventry and its citizens.

The company embarked on a scheme to place plaques commemorating some of the City's most illustri

ous citizens. The plaques were to be manufactured locally and, as far as possible, they were to be sited in positions which would have been familiar to their subjects or which were associated with their achievements.

Coventry's modern cathedral occupies much of the site on which the Triumph Cycle Company's main works stood until it was destroyed during the Second World War. Permission was given by the Cathedral Chapter for a plaque commemorating Siegfried Bettmann to be placed on the boundary wall, facing Cathedral Square.

The plaque was unveiled by the author of this publication in a short ceremony on April 13th 2000 when a 1919 Triumph motor cycle was brought from the Museum of British Road Transport for the occasion. After an introduction by Mr. Peter Walters of Coventry and Warwickshire Promotions Ltd., the Very Reverend John Petty, Provost of Coventry Cathedral, spoke of Siegfried Bettmann's great humanity and his contribution both to the City and to the people of Coventry.



16 The Commemoration Plaque

## Sources of Illustration

(Cover) Mayoral Portrait: Coventry Archives: photograph: GHM\*: Penny Farthing, 1893, see (2): Safety Bicycles, 1888, see (3): First all-Triumph motor cycle, 1905, see (8)

1. Two Views of old Nuremberg: details from postcards contemporary with S.Bettmann's youth: courtesy of Mr.G.Griffin.
2. Penny Farthing: Detail from 'Triumph Rationale', page 24, Catalogue of the Triumph Cycle Company, Much Park St, Coventry by Courtesy, of Andrew Heapes.
3. The French Connection: Detail from 'Velocipedes-Triumph fabriques par S.Bettmann & Co.4, Golden Lane, Londres', advertisement 1888: Raymond Henry Collection, supplied by John Pinkerton, courtesy of Andrew Heapes, 1999.
4. Earls Court, Much Park St.: detail from photograph, courtesy of Mr.W. Adams.
5. White Sewing Machine Company, New York: detail from cover of 1893 Triumph Cycle Co catalogue: courtesy of Andrew Heapes.
6. Shifnal Parish Church, 1999: photograph: GHM.\*
7. The Marriage Certificate, 1895: Shropshire County Archives: photograph: GHM.\*: by permission of the Rector, Shifnal Parish.
8. The first all-Triumph motor cycle, 1905: The National Motor Cycle Museum, Meriden: photograph: GHM.\*
9. The Location of the Triumph Factory, early 1900's: sketch-map: collated from contemporary maps in the Local Studies Section of Coventry Libraries: GHM.\*
10. Annie M. Bettmann, portrait: Coventry Archives: photograph: GHM\*: by permission of the Annie Bettmann Foundation
11. Elm Bank, 1999: photograph: GHM.\*
12. Wrought-Iron Gates, Elm Bank, 1999: photograph: GHM.\*
13. Antique German Chair at Elm Bank: photograph: courtesy of Mr.Peter Bones.
14. Coventry Street Name, 1999: detail from photograph: GHM.\*
15. The Triumph Co. War Memorial, 1914-1918: London Rd Cemetery: photograph, 1999: GHM.\*
16. The Commemoration Plaque: photograph: GHM\*

\*GHM - Mr.G.H.Maycock, author of the pamphlet.

## The Author



Gordon Henry Maycock was born and educated in Coventry. After leaving school, he served an engineering apprenticeship with the British Thomson-Houston Company in Ford St. where he subsequently worked on the design of aircraft electrical equipment. He studied at Coventry Technical College, was a member of both the Institution of Electrical Engineers and the Royal Aeronautical Society, became a Chartered Engineer and later acquired the title of European Engineer. In 1969 he joined Cape Engineering Ltd., Warwick, to pursue research work and he retired from the Company as Technical Manager in 1991.

Gordon Maycock remains a member of the R.Ae.S. and is involved in the preservation and restoration of historic aircraft. He is a Freeman of the City of Coventry and following his retirement, he has furthered his long interest in English history. He has for some years been an active member of the Coventry Branch of the Historical Association.





## The Coventry Historical Association



Coventry Historical Association is a branch of the national Historical Association and locally promotes its aims. The Historical Association is a voice for History, bringing together people who share an interest in the past, to further the enjoyment and study of History at all levels. Its membership includes both enthusiastic amateurs and professional historians and membership is open to everyone who has a love and concern for History.

The Coventry Branch recently saw its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Membership includes both national subscribers and associate local members. Meetings are held monthly from September to May each year and take the form of a lecture followed by discussion and a social coffee. Meetings are normally held at the Coventry Archives which offers a comfortable venue and on-site parking. Lectures cover a wide spectrum of History: local, national and international topics are covered. A summer programme is also offered, usually of two/three outings in June - July. The Branch is delighted to welcome new members.

Since 1964 the Publications Sub-committee of the Coventry Branch has published pamphlets on aspects of local history, researched in depth by reputable historians. Currently there has been an emphasis on medieval Coventry but it is hoped that the next few pamphlets to be published will be based on more modern aspects of the city's past.

The Publications Sub-committee invites work from interested researchers and would particularly welcome 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century topics as well as subjects relating to the wider county.

Queries: Branch Programme: Tel. 01788 890960  
Publications: Tel. 024 7661 5120