



## The Road to Nab End

*William Woodruff*

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William Woodruff had the sort of childhood satirised in the famous Monty Python Yorkshireman sketch. The son of a weaver, he was born on a pallet of straw at the back of the mill and two days later his mother was back at work. Life was extremely tough for the family in 1920's Blackburn - a treat was sheep's head or cow-heel soup - and got worse when his father lost his job when the cotton industry started its terminal decline. Woodruff had to find his childhood fun in the little free time he had available between his delivery job and school, but he never writes self-pityingly, leaving the reader to shed the tears on his behalf.

## The Road to Nab End Details

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Author : William Woodruff

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## From Reader Review The Road to Nab End for online ebook

### Adam says

William Woodruff is an historian, economist, and author. He's British, but he lives in Florida. He's old, having emigrated to the States after life in Lancashire and London in the early 1900's.

That combination may not, at first glance, instantaneously translate into "ooh, exciting" in the eyes of literary hipsterdom. Sure, perhaps the occasional horn-rimmed glasses-wearing Bright Eyes-listening kid might secretly yearn to really, truly understand the depth and nuances of the rise, decline, and fall of Northern England's cotton industry in the early part of the century, but those kids are rare.

Thankfully, when two friends of mine (who happen to be married to one another), glance furtively at one another after I'd asked the question, "Do you have anything that I should be reading right now?", and return with this book, I didn't let that aforementioned combination stop me before I step into these pages.

Woodruff has a knack for combining vivid imagery with solid insight into the industry and politics of the world within which his life began, unfurled, and became real. His family, neighbors, friends, employers, first loves, and loyal dog are tangible and nearby - he welcomes you into his life, sharing it honestly and openly in the same manner that his family would have shared a hot cup of tea (despite their penniless existence at times) with anyone who stopped by.

The number of autobiographies I've read probably wouldn't amount to all fingers on both hands, but I'm thankful that I read this one. It's perhaps reminiscent of "Angela's Ashes", but that's probably only because that book sits within a similar time-period to this one, and because it's the only barely similar thing I have to compare it to. This book differs widely from "Ashes", however, in that there is a ruddy, determined hopefulness woven throughout it, sincere as the rough handshake of greeting any one of the weavers in his town would have given you if you'd walked their streets with them.

A stirring and highly readable book, and one that I found myself coming back to as often as I could.

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### Kristi says

Picked this up for cheap at my local thrift store. So far it's interesting.

Ok, I ended up really liking this book. It read like fiction, to me. I find myself fascinated with how people lived without all the conveniences that we are so accustomed to. Reading this book also made me stop and think about how incredibly blessed I am. My closets and cupboards are full and I have a vehicle to take me wherever I might want to go. I felt ashamed of my lack of gratitude when reading about the struggle that so many people went through and that still effects so many.

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### Wayne says

I grew up in Blackburn and unknowingly walked past the end of the street where the bigginig of the book is based every day on my way to and from secondary school. If you live or have ever lived in Blackburn Lancashire read this book. If you have any interest in the cotton industry in the uk read this book.

The biography of an ordinary working class boy.

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### **Ann says**

A great book told from the point of view of a young child growing up in a working class town, Blackburn, in Lancashire England. The family are all working in cotton mills -- their lot in life.

The book is somewhat reminiscent of "Angela's Ashes" -- but somehow less depressing. There is always escape to the hills outside Blackburn -- walks, games and freedom out there help the kids and workers survive their long hours of backbreaking work for little pay. The writer seems to attract "mentors" -- or people who spend time with him, educating him and opening his world.

Woodruff himself is the boy in the book -- and in the last scene he is getting a ride in a lorry ("Truck") to London. What he does not tell here (maybe the next book??) is that at 20, he got a London Council scholarship to Oxford and eventually became an academic historian, specializing in economic/social history. As a result, he winds in lots of information about tension between mill owners and workers, the competition from other parts of the world who could make cotton less expensively than the Lancashire mills can, the trades union movement and the Great Strike of 1926.

Finally this book brought back memories of my Lancashire grandparents -- especially some of the words they used (like "clemmed" for hungry.) They escaped from Lancashire in the late 1920's "over the hill" to Cheshire -- and work available there I have to find out more about their lives in Lancashire (the Wigan area.)

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### **Anne Tucker says**

I am not usually that keen on reading this kind of book (personal memories) , but this is a real exception ... its quite fascinating, engaging and funny, and beautifully written. He divided the topics up by chapter - all are really good, and he brings ~Blaenavkburn in the heyday of the textile industry to life in a magnificent way... It starts in 1916 (when he was born) and as the book goes on, the slumps and depression hit cotton manufacturing and the hardships are more and more soul-destroying. There are some excellent chapters on politics in action, soap boxing, Labour v Fascist, and equally fascinating ones on his life overall, work play, study, friends and local characters, his employers and workmates. Highly recommended .

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### **Anthony says**

It took me a long time to get round to reading this book, as a lad born in Blackburn it was a must read. And I loved it! Originally published in 1993 under the title 'Billy Boy' it was re-released under the new title 'The Road to Nab End' by the publishers in 2000. The new title I guess is a nod to George Orwell's book 'Road to Wigan Pier' which covered the same era. (Originally published 3 years before Angela's Ashes)

Firstly this is an interesting history of the decline of the cotton trade in Lancashire, not packed full of stats and names but full of social experience. Some of Woodruff's accounts especially in the chapter Running Wild are the same as the stories my Dad tells me when he was a kid in the 60's and 70's. 40 or 50 years on life was still tough for many in Blackburn though obviously not on the same scale as the depression years. I have often been told of the chimneys (pronounced chimleys in Lancastrian) that rose from the terraces all

over Blackburn. This physical aspect of the towns past has long since been destroyed. So much so I can not even imagine.

The Road to Nab end however has helped me to picture the world in which my family lived, something that I have never really got from any straight history book. The characters, the dialect, some of which you still hear and others that I have never heard before. The Griffin Pub was still there the last time I looked as are some of the other streets mentioned except Polly Street which is probably under a housing estate.

Woodruff's mother was a Kenyon and certainly I have met a few of those in Blackburn, do wonder if they are related.

As some one who lived in Blackburn and moved away this book really calls to me, I felt connected with those in the story, that in a small way my experience was similar. I think it was but not quiet as interesting as Woodruff's. Thus though I am not in Blackburn anymore I am and always have been proud of my 'grimey' town.

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### **Anne says**

A wonderful memoir that reads like good fiction masterfully told by a great storyteller. This is William Woodruff's recounting of his life as a child and adolescent in the cotton mill town of Blackburn, Lancashire in the 1920s and 1930s. It is about grinding hardship and miserable poverty. Yet, there is lightness as well as the telling gains more momentum and we become attached to the principal characters - William's romantic mother and taciturn father and his three older siblings. This is a family who are poor but there is also much love and loyalty. The structure of the book is a bit patchy at times and there are loose ends that want tying, but "The Road To Nab End" is a compelling depiction of a time and place that today's mod-con mob couldn't begin to countenance.

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### **Dee Buck says**

I didn't want this book to end. It made me laugh, it made me cry. Great characters brought to life by Mr. Woodruff. Fabulous!!

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### **Judith Johnson says**

Wonderful read. I recently visited Lancashire for only the third time, and would love to go back and see more. I visited a Toby restaurant in Bolton (see my blog!) which had been converted from the 19th century 'Gentleman's House' of a Master Cotton Bleacher. William Woodruff's book tells how the other half were living some years later. Now very keen to read his history books, and I'll be encouraging my husband, whose family come from the mining community of the Welsh Valleys, to read this book too.

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### **Janith Pathirage says**

I haven't read many autobiographies but this's the best one I've had so far. Such a magnificent story!! I'm not sure these are 100% genuine life events, because it reads like a fictional tale. It actually felt like reading Nicholas Nickleby rather than reading an autobiography. If all of these happened for real one must admire William Woodruff's photographic memory. He could even remember the poems sang by a cart driver whom he met only once in his life when he was just 10 years old. It really doesn't matter to me if this book's real or partially fictional, coz this's a beautiful, heart warming story. I don't think Woodruffs spent a very miserable life compared to the one Maxim Gorky had, they found ways to be happy even in the darkest moments of their lives. The key was their strong family bond. And now I have great respect for the English working class of 1920s. They were squeezed and cut off from their jobs, they striked, they fought, but never did they shed blood. That was a very special revolution (if it can be called a revolution)

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### **Caroline says**

A book whose cover is generously splattered with positive reviews from the high and mighty, like The Guardian, the Times Literary Supplement and the Spectator.

An interesting book insofar it demonstrates the levels of poverty to be found in Britain in the early 20th century. It describes life in the cotton weaving town of Blackburn - both in it's heyday and when the mills went out of business. Spoken through the life experiences of William Woodruff and his family.

The writing style was not to my taste though, and for some reason I found the first three quarters of the book boring. I also disliked the level of detail given in some instances - it didn't seem likely that Woodruff would remember the intricacies of incidents he describes as a very young lad.

Later in the book I was however hugely touched to read about the Jarrow marchers, and others who protested when they lost their jobs at the mills. That part of the book was quite heartbreakng. All those men being told to look for work in order to qualify for the dole, when there was no work available, and the trials of their desperate existence. Woodruff was obviously an incredibly resilient boy, with lots of initiative - but even so life was tough.

I am giving this book one star though, except for the final quarter I found it quite a slog to read.

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### **Dave says**

What a great read, a book that I will long remember. The author has given a strong and well written account of working class life in Twenties Lancashire. A fine and stirring book, long to be remembered.

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### **Mollie Lyons says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It created the atmosphere of those times so well and I can recommend it as a really good read for anyone who has an interest in a true and well written piece of actual social history.

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### **John Hart says**

My late father was from Lancashire, just a few years older than William Woodruff. Although he endured some hardships as a child, they were nothing compared with Woodruff's upbringing. This is a compelling book. There is no self pity or looking back to "what ifs". You believe him when he says he is glad his family was poor because it taught him so many valuable lessons of life and living, and of the honesty among those in the same situation. Within minutes of finishing this wonderful childhood memoir I downloaded the e edition of the sequel which I read over two days. In addition to Woodruff's personal story, he describes how cotton was made into fabrics, where it was shipped (around the world) and, ultimately, why the industry failed in Blackburn. I would wish only that he had written a third book.

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### **M.J. Johnson says**

Autobiographical account of a childhood spent in Blackburn, a Lancashire cotton- weaving town in the early twentieth century. Woodruff never writes sentimentally about the terrible hardships these working-class people faced throughout the depression years. Unusually for an autobiography I found it utterly compulsive reading. It is the first of two parts and I definitely mean to read its sequel . A very fine slice of social history without the lecture; a masterfully-written account of an impoverished childhood. Superb.

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