

Miles Costello
Petworth
Collection



THE PETWORTH SOCIETY
magazine

No. 162, December 2015

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An unattributed postcard from between the wars.

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CONSTITUTION AND OFFICERS

The Petworth Society was founded in 1974 'to preserve the character and amenities of the town and parish of Petworth including Byworth; to encourage interest in the history of the district and to foster a community spirit'. It is non-political, non-sectarian and non-profit making.

Membership is open to anyone, irrespective of place of residence who is interested in furthering the objects of the society.

The annual subscription is £12.00, single or double, one magazine delivered. Postal £15.00 overseas nominal £20.00. Further information may be obtained from any of the following.

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FRONT COVER designed by Jonathan Newdick.
The Stag Inn 1939. See "Irate tradesmen at Balls Cross."
Original photograph by George Garland.

Chairman's notes

An older Petworth will remember fraught bypass days. Town Hall meetings that generated heat but an uncertain light: deeply held conviction and rampaging ego in uneasy conjunction. As chairman of this Society I sought to strike a balance between my own, essentially partisan, convictions and an attempt at consensus. It would be presumptuous to claim that the Society helped to soothe tensions but we did try.

It's 2015. Do I see another potentially damaging division? I hope not. Certainly I see an older, perhaps bemused, Petworth looking at a new generation of movers and shakers and saying, "Who are these people? Do I know them?" It's a cry that has echoed through these ancient streets before, and will, no doubt, do so again. It would be all too easy for this Society, conservative (small 'c') and tradition based as it is, to take up the cry. It cannot and must not.

Petworth will always accept, indeed requires, new faces and new ideas but new voices do need to engage with the spirit of the town they claim to serve. The spirit of a town will be, of its very essence, indefinable, but elusive as it is, it is there. Petworth is not the same as anywhere else: no self-respecting small town can see itself in these terms. If new voices are perceived, however unjustly, as a mere layer on the surface of the town, the whole town becomes dislocated.

* * * * *

With Magazine space so desperately short I have had to withhold a great deal of material until March, and I do not offer a separate account of the Society dinner. Suffice to say that Tom Dommert gave his usual sparkling update on a season's archaeology in the Park. He has the seemingly effortless gift of conveying fascinating technical matters in plain language. The weather had been unkind and Capability Brown had been more efficient in removing buildings like the Duke of Somerset's stables than a 21st century archaeologist might have wished. Master of the Queen's Horse, racehorse owner, Newmarket habitué, virtually all physical trace of the proud Duke's stables and formal garden had fallen to Capability Brown's diligence.

The weather was reasonable, the meal perfect, the company jovial, the quiz just right: the dinner remains perhaps the quintessential Society event.

Re Magazine 161 Jeremy Godwin notes Richard Peters' tendency (page 14, 15) to spell double consonants as single. Hence "cuting" for "cutting", hence "toping" will be topping a rivet i.e. putting on or removing a top. Jeremy also notes that John Dawtreay was buried in the Bartons in 1936 as was his wife Alice (1932).



Re Tony Penfold's note about the dog's grave in the Gog. Gina Clark writes, "I have this photo of myself [Barbara Rainbow] with Tony's niece [Celia Manning] in front of me. Pat Standing is on the left of the photo and the boy is, I think, John Tiller. The photo will have been taken about 1952." [I do not know this photograph but it will probably have been taken by George Garland. Ed.]

Peter

Mr Mike Hubbard – a letter

"Criccieth"
11 Dawtreay Road

7/9/2015

Dear Peter,

It is with great sadness and reluctance that I write to resign as Society Town Crier. I have held the post for eight years having originally told you that I would give it a go for two. I am now 79 and not too good on my pins, but have had many a good

laugh. I've twice been told to "bugger of" by shift workers who have been disturbed by my crying and ringing the bell. When I started a lady said to me in Austens, "Mike is it right that you have taken on as Society crier? You're over 70." I told her that William Gladstone was well in his eighties when he secured a fourth term as Prime Minister and coped very well.

As Town Crier I have met lots of nice people, attended at weddings, fetes, twice at hundredth birthday celebrations, Bignor Park, Midhurst, often at Bronnie Cunningham's Art Shows, Ebernoe Horn Fair, Ivan Wadey's Macmillan events at Butcherland. Ivan has been a friend of mine for over fifty years.

All the money given to me has been donated to charity: The Royal British Legion, R.S.P.C.A, the Blind, the Nepal Earthquake Appeal, the Salvation Army and Help for Heroes.

I must also thank my wife June who has kept my uniform in tip top order with all the washing and ironing, also the lovely feathers in my tricorne hat after they were soaked and needed very special care to dry them out without damage.

The first event I did in the town, I hired a costume from a fancy dress shop in Storrington. On leaving home quite chuffed with my turnout I was met by two young boys who shouted, "Are you a pirate mister?" A third boy said, "No, he ain't a pirate he's got two legs and no parrot on his shoulder."

Peter, I shall miss the crying but have had a lovely journey doing it, having had lots of fun with lots of people. I wish all the best to my successor and hope that he will enjoy the appointment as much as I have.

Yours sincerely

Mike

I am pleased to say that Mr Nigel Flynn has agreed to take over as Society Crier. In John Crocombe and Mike Hubbard the Society has had two highly individual criers, I would be surprised if Nigel does not follow the pattern!

Meanwhile I'm sure everyone will join me in wishing Mike a happy retirement. Ed.

Ian's Bignor Hill walk.

20th July

The walkers gather in the car park, ready to leave a Petworth which seems awash with visitors. One of summer's minor ironies. The walk is scheduled for Bignor Hill but Ian says the heather on Ambersham Common is in full bloom. Sudden change of plan? Ian decides to stick with Plan A.

Cars travelling south on a sunny afternoon, narrow roads through the sleeping sunlit southern villages, then up the narrow track to the summit. We've been here before, certainly, but not of late years. Time to look at Jon Edgar's sculpture in progress then to the sea glinting in the distance, to descry the Isle of Wight, the high-rise flats at Bognor, then, turning round, Pulborough away to the right and, yes, in a haze, the blunted tower of Petworth church.

Soon we're tramping the stony paths between fast ripening crops. It's a warm day, but up here there's a steady breeze. Barley heads sigh in the wind. A great stand of rosebay in full pink bloom. We think of the army of colonising seeds that same wind will soon carry away. Up a slight incline: two walkers have come all the way from Storrington but will be picked up at Bignor.

Into the enveloping shade of Houghton forest. A notice voices opposition to 75 proposed holiday lodges. We meet no one in the quiet woods. The inevitable dog's mercury and honeysuckle hanging down into the path. Again we're walking slightly uphill. Eventually we make way for a lone cyclist. Ian has somehow brought us round in a circle. Anyone for an optional minor circuit? Freya the deerhound sits this one out. A runner plods by. We're back at Bignor.

P.

Linda and Ian's Ambersham walk.

16th August

Last month we'd almost chosen Ambersham in place of the advertised Bignor Hill but after a hurried consultation we'd decided to stay with Bignor Hill. Ian thought the heather would still be in bloom in mid-August. Ambersham is familiar territory but walks don't have to cover uncharted ground for us, there's a certain comfort in the permutation of path, track, heather, gorse and grey sand that is Ambersham. We don't take the A272 but come via Selham. There's a glider

grounded in a field to our left and all the studied quiet of Sunday afternoon Ambersham.

Through narrow lanes to the car park. We're very much on our own. In fact, under a dull sky, we meet no one in the lonely woods. Ian and Linda have shortened the walk a little to cut out an overgrown path soaked by the late week rain and a deep ditch.

The grey sand can rise up in clouds and offer a loose foothold but not today; the rain has settled the paths and perked up the mid-August vegetation. Some heather's lost its glow, Ian says, since Tuesday, but much still shines a sombre-bright pink. There's gorse for contrast and of course the constant background of bracken with the occasional smell of bruised conifer.

And here in the path is a flash of exquisite green, emerald perhaps, a kind of miniature accordion making its way across the sand. We all stop. Later enquiry reveals we've seen the caterpillar of the Emperor moth, one of the more famous denizens of this land of heather and wood ant. We crunch last year's cones beneath our feet, find quad-bike tracks still sculpted in the sand and drying now in the hazy sun like eccentric sandcastles. Clearly these woods are frequented but not, it appears, on Sunday afternoons.

We're back in the car park looking at the picture of the full-grown Emperor. And the Dartford warbler, that other Ambersham celebrity? Would we know if we saw one? We try its call on a mobile phone. Does it come "flitting over the heather and gorse?" Not a chance.

P.

Linda and Ian's Kirdford walk.

27th September

Kirdford again? We'd been here in May. Had Linda and Ian run out of ideas? We were about to discover. In May we'd found it difficult to park, even eyed up the Village Hall before thinking better of it. Today there's no problem in the mellow sunshine. Soon enough we've turned right as if heading off toward faraway Fox Hill but we turn instead into a narrow footpath steeply defined by wire fencing one side and electrified wire the other. A black and white horse comes to meet us over the fence. There are three brown horses away to our right. One rolls in the lush grass.

A plantation to our left and miniscule blackberries in September profusion

against the fence: some still wine red. Solitary knapweed in full brown seedhead, we are three days from the end of September.

Right into a field. A vivid yellow sign warns of a bull but we can see no sign of him. Sloes in the hedgerow. The sun glints dully off vehicle flattened grass, the occasional imprint of a horseshoe. A field where, even today, you can feel the standing water beneath the tussocky grass. We see no one. The sun shines on the resting sunlit fields. Another lane with the sun piercing through a canopy of leaves with a glimpse of netted fish ponds to the side. An open lane with wide grassy rides, another with water standing in deep clay ruts. The smell of trodden mint rises on the air. The Crawfold complex to the left but we strike across the fields, the back of Parsonage Farm away to our left. Finally we're in the shade of wood before emerging to the vivid scarlet of haws under a cloudless blue sky.

Suddenly we're at Cornwood, new houses and gardens, children in the street. Back to the cars. Crab apples littering the grass: we hadn't noticed them when we came. Some have fallen blood red, some are still bright orange on the tree. Could even pass for Victoria plums. Linda and Ian running out of ideas? It appears not.

P.

In search of the Mexican sunflower, Lewes.

30th September

Despite an unscheduled detour through Ashington because of an accident we were soon making good progress through a green late summer countryside. The last day of September and we're already passing the huge grim edifice that is Lewes prison. The game plan was to start at the top of the hill and over the course of the day to make our way down to meet at Anne of Cleves House. Sandra and Don had come down separately from Epsom and were waiting for us at the castle gate.

In a stiff breeze the view out to the green surrounding hills was probably worth the trip on its own. Half way up was an annual border, still in full bloom, pink cosmos and a glorious orange flower like a giant zinnia. Everyone's attention focused on it but no one knew what it was or had seen the plant before. No, the gardener wasn't in today but maybe Martin at Anne of Cleves would know. The Society is already running amok over the town: we disappear into an Italian restaurant while others make towards Cliffe. Off to the Needlemakers – we're seeing more Petworth people in Lewes than we would usually do in Petworth



Anne of Cleves house c. 1927.
A photograph by George Garland. The famous motor-cycle and sidecar are parked outside.
Mrs Garland appears to be reading a newspaper!

itself.

All too soon we're making our way downhill to the magnificent Southover gardens. Still basking in the late summer sunshine – blue salvias en masse, a magnificent dahlia border, a knot garden with densely planted geraniums. Finally to Anne of Cleves House. Somehow I contrive to miss the introductory talk. I fall into conversation with the gardener – Peter as it appears. He knows our plant it's *Tithonia* "Torch" the Mexican sunflower, a half-hardy that can be raised from seed. I finally catch up with the genial Martin and he says the same.

It appears that the house was simply one of a number made over by Henry VIII to Anne. We have the run of the house. A kaleidoscope of impressions, I can't even begin to describe it.

I don't really know what the Society is supposed to do (have I ever?) but whatever it does or doesn't do, it puts on great outings. Thanks very much Debby and Gordon.

P.

Reflections on the counterpane. 19th September

Perhaps it needs the sun to bring the late September Museum to life. Perhaps not. The early afternoon sun suffuses the upstairs bedroom, casting the shadow of the window frame on the counterpane of the bed or on the glass of the sampler on the far wall. The stone hot water bottle offers silent premonition of winter to come. Crucifix and holy water, a Roman Catholic lady's humble bedroom in 1910.

There are voices downstairs. I later find it's two marshalls from the Alzheimers walk in Petworth Park. I don't usually "do" upstairs and am never quite sure I'm not repeating what visitors have already been told. Here's a couple from Horsham. After a while we go up the narrow stairs to survey the town from the High Street heights. What are these two round holes drilled in the floorboards? I don't know, I was told once it was something to do with rats. I can't really see how.

Somehow I find myself conducting a tour of the garden. The *erysimum* strike a chord – "Bowles Mauve" someone says. A modern hybrid but they seem to fit and they've bloomed solidly since Easter. The *gazania* have opened to greet the autumn sunlight. They've big robust glossy leaves, but will they last the winter again? The late sowing of *antirrhinum* is still in reluctant bud. Can you still await blooming at "slow sad Michaelmas" – or come to that do Michael and his angels

still fight the dragon? And the scarlet dahlias. To distinguish the pointed dead seedheads to cut off and the new rounded buds. The white pompom flowers are, some of them, turning a light dull brown.

Enough visitors to keep the afternoon ticking over. The occasional Guide Book. Back to the upstairs bedroom. "My grandfather was pressured to replace gas with electric." It appears that he succumbed but with bad grace, insisting on gas being retained in one room. It remained until he died. Some Leconfield tenants took the same view and we have fittings that are refugees from that same conflict. A French wife with impeccable English "Michael Cummings was a farrier." "Quoi?". I dredge up maréchal. Ah!

P.

Irate tradesmen at Balls Cross. The September book sale

It's August 1938 and a young Canadian writer is staying in London, half studying, half on vacation. It's a hot day and she's in Charing Cross Road. She picks up a volume by a young poet a year or two older than herself. There is an endorsement by no less than T. S. Eliot. Struck by one of the poems she determines to find more about the writer: George Barker.

* * * * *

George Barker is married and struggling to make a living in literature. Compromise is alien to him and money is desperately short. His wife Jessica, devoutly Roman Catholic, and he have already given up their first child for adoption. After a spell surviving in the West Country they have moved in May to Boxholme just along the Kirdford Road from Balls Cross. There is the prospect of some extra-mural teaching in the autumn but, with no formal education, even given Eliot's backing, Barker is finding it difficult to break into London literary circles. A friendship develops with David Gill, another newcomer to the district and his wife Elizabeth. Not particularly literary, Gill's pragmatism contrasts with Barker's febrile intensity. "He was the perfect antidote to artistic pretension."¹ The two families would meet at the Stag and even became involved with Horn Fair, although Barker's biographer rearranges the traditional date of Horn Fair and probably exaggerates Barker's role in the festivities. George Garland was very much involved in the fair at this time and he and Barker must have had, at the very

least, nodding acquaintance. Certainly in later years Garland would have a lasting friendship with David and Elizabeth Gill.

If life at Boxholme could, in theory, be idyllic, it was rendered intolerable by the Barkers' chronic shortage of money. Before Barker could embark on his not over-lucrative University Extension Course it was time to move on: local tradesmen were laying siege to Boxholme Cottage. Barker would be recruited to an unlikely lectureship in a university to the far north of Japan.

It was not a suitable position for Barker, nor was the timing ideal; Japan was already on a war footing. Elizabeth Smart had meanwhile managed to establish contact with Barker and his wife Jessica. After a short sojourn at the university Elizabeth Smart was able to use such financial clout as she had to get the Barkers back to the United States. She almost certainly saved them from an internment at best uncomfortable, at worst brutal.

Torn between residual feelings for a loyal wife whose religious principles would not release him and drawn like a magnet to Elizabeth Smart whom he would never marry but who would bear him several children, Barker seemed to have a perverse fascination with playing off an allegiance to a Catholic faith in which he had been brought up and to which his long-suffering wife adhered ever more strongly, and consciously flouting Catholic principles. Barker and Elizabeth became lovers. Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*² is her scalding cry of pain at the lovers' situation, their mutual disquiet at Jessica's predicament and their refusal to be parted.

Barker would live again locally for a while in the 1950s in a remote cottage on Blackdown. Even his admirers saw him as irredeemably feckless but he always put his self-appointed poetic mission first. He would have fifteen children by various partners, finally remarrying late in life after Jessica's death. His work is perhaps most accessible in the Penguin Modern Poets series. Although praised at different times by such diverse luminaries as T. S. Eliot, Robert Graves and Lawrence Durrell, and having aroused the jealousy of Dylan Thomas, Barker will probably be assessed differently from one critic to another. It would be generally agreed that his work is very uneven and that he wrote too much rather too easily.

And the September sale? I might almost say "vibrant".

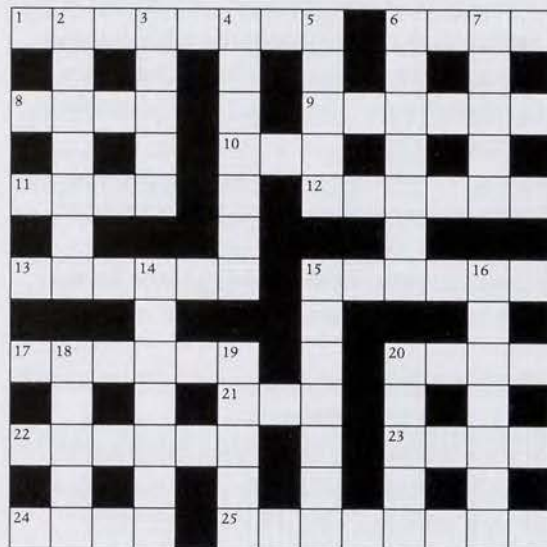
P.

1. Robert Fraser: *The Chameleon Poet – A Life of George Barker*. (Jonathan Cape 2001) page 107. Surely the definitive biography of Barker.

2. *Editions Poetry* (1945). A mint copy of the latest reprint (4th Edition 2015) came into the July Book Sale.

"Boxholme" is presumably the modern Box Cottage.

CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 & 5dn "All I want for Christmas?" (3,5,5)

6 7dn might be delivered in one (4)

8 A little bit of magic makes for wise men (4)

9 Forced to live in a foreign land (6)

10 Part of *what* is in your Christmas cracker (3)

11 Dickens's little Tim (4)

12 Composer of "The Messiah" (6)

13 Children must keep each one shut tight when Santa's on his rounds! (6)

15 Facing up to the cost of Christmas! (6)

17 Surname of author of "The Snowman" (6)

20 A jolly fellow! (4)

21 The number of leaping lords (3)

22 Russian horse-drawn sleigh (6)

23 Kingly gift (4)

24 Berry used in gin to make warming drink (4)

25 Depicts a story – as in a nativity play for example (8)

DOWN

2 How Mary and Joseph travelled on the long road to Bethlehem? (7)

3 She's top of the tree! (5)

4 For a good apple crop this should be wassailed at Christmas (7)

5 See 1ac.

6 Help – Santa's got stuck up there! (7)

7 An unusual gift – six of them! (5)

14 Cheering sight on a cold night (3,4)

15 One of Santa's reindeer – has a bit of a turn as he cuts a caper! (7)

16 An original item to find in your cracker (7)

18 To do with the countryside (5)

19 The cost of one seems to keep going up (5)

20 The ideal present for Sir Winston? (5)

SOLUTION TO FARMING CROSSWORD

ACROSS

4 Ploughing, 7 Limbo, 9 Hoes, 10 Run, 11 Raddle, 13 Axle, 14 Gee, 16 Russets, 18 Pressed, 21 Aim, 23 Vine, 26 Keeper, 27 Eel, 28 Byre, 29 Shire, 30 Southdown

DOWN

1 Sussex, 2 Ensnare, 3 Tiddlers, 5 Loom, 6 Harvest, 8 Frog, 12 Leased, 15 Hurdle, 17 Stag Park, 19 Rivulet, 20 Bigenor, 22 Mare, 24 Nobody, 25 Crow

Petworth on film?

The British Film Institute (BFI) has made available on the Internet, free of charge, a number of old amateur films which have come into their possession and which are interesting because they illustrate places as they used to be, or a way of life which is of interest to social historians. Petworth currently features on two of them.

To watch these films you need a computer on which you search: "BFI". When given the option you then click on "BFI Player" and this will take you to "Britain on Film. Explore the Map". If you click to explore the map, a map of England comes up, and if you click on the place that interests you, all the amateur films set in that place will come up. In the case of Petworth there are currently two. The first is "Do You Know Your Sussex?" (1955) which I haven't yet watched. It is half an hour long and apparently features Petworth amongst other places. The other, shorter, film is "Portrait of Petworth" (1971) which, perhaps unsurprisingly, concentrates particularly on the traffic problem. Amongst other local scenes it shows cars of the period driving through the cut between the Leconfield Hall and the supermarket, as they did in those days. No indication is given who made the film.

Of course, you can click on other places to see what films come up, Midhurst or Pulborough for example, though for some places all you get is another reference to "Do You Know Your Sussex?" because it features several places. I understand that more films are being archived by the BFI on a regular basis. Perhaps there are Society members with cine film of events in the area which the BFI might be interested in 'digitizing' for public release. Your old home movies could yet win you an Oscar.

Andrew Brooke

George Eade – Druggist and Chemist

I am looking for information about a George Eade who was a Druggist and Chemist based in Goswell Road, Finsbury but who was born in Petworth in about 1815/16.

He married Ann Ashdown on the 6th May 1841 at St George's Church, Gravesend. Ann was born in 1815/16 in Gravesend.

The couple had nine children – George in 1842, John in 1843, Mary Ann in 1845,

James in 1846, Louisa Charlotte in 1848, Alice Ellen in 1849, William Thomas in 1851, Julia Harriett in 1852/3 and Arthur Elliott in 1854/5.

John, William Thomas and Louisa Charlotte died young.

George, James and Arthur Elliott followed in their father's footsteps and became Chemists.

The family's claim to fame was the invention of a pill which they claimed could cure the pain involved with Gout and Rheumatism. They advertised widely in the daily and weekly newspapers of the day and made their fortune. A bottle of pills could be purchased for either 1s 1½ d or 2s 9d and many of their adverts included excerpts from testimonials they had received. The pills were on sale until 1972.

Only Mary Ann married and she married Henry Browne in 1871 and they had four children, Nellie, Edith Marion, Kate Emily, Walter Henry and Elizabeth Anne.

George Eade, who was born in Petworth appears on the 1851 and 1861 censuses but died on the 24th January 1870 so did not appear on any other censuses. I have not found him on the 1841 census.

I would like to know who George's parents were and whether he had any brothers and sisters. If anyone can help my email address is saraeade@webleicester.co.uk, and my mailing address is 1 Dysynni Walk, Tywyn, Gwynedd LL36 0BS. Thank you.

Sara Eade

“His lordship would never refuse anyone ...”

A lone horseman rides up Petworth's ancient North Street and turns right against minimal traffic into Church Street. He likes the look of the Four and Twenty Blackbirds restaurant on the corner of Lombard Street but will need to stable his horse, Sally, before going for lunch. He is well aware of Lord Leconfield's fabled equestrian hospitality and is relieved to see directly before him the castle-like entrance to his lordship's stables. He enters a passageway paved with small, square, cobbles. The echo from Sally's hooves against the archway walls unnerves horse and perhaps even rider.

They enter a vast yard paved with these same square cobbles. There is extensive stabling but all is ominously quiet, neither sound nor horse. A second archway offers a vista of green, while, clearly unused, an elegant trough is full of autumn leaves. The horseman cries once and again. Eventually a woman's head appears at a window. Could the horseman leave his mount in the stables while he takes lunch?

All is not as it seems. Mr Brown the head stableman will need to give permission. He should be in the rose garden and the lady will come down and try to find him. After some considerable time he appears. He, like the lady, is clearly very ill-at-ease. How will his lordship react if he sees a horse in the stables? Sally is led into one of the empty stables and left with some crushed oats. Mr Brown is clearly preoccupied. Would the visitor recognise his lordship if he saw him? He is an elderly gentleman with gaiters and a black dog. On sight of him the rider must make himself scarce and come back later. His lordship's surprising reticence seems totally at variance with his fabled hospitality. Why single out one particular traveller for this treatment? Worse, Mr Brown insists: “His lordship would never refuse anyone.”

Mr Brown lowers his voice: the paradox is about to be resolved. His lordship's famous hunters have recently gone, hence the empty stables: the saddlery and equipment sold at auction. The sight of a horse in the now deserted stables would bring back too many memories. Mr Brown is torn between the tradition of hospitality and his master's feelings.

After a more than satisfactory lunch and a walk round Petworth's “narrow old world streets”, the visitor returns, sees no sign of his host, makes a furtive exit and continues on his way.

The foregoing is a résumé of a visit by George Winder, three decades a Sussex farmer, with a previous legal background in New Zealand. The book¹ did not appear until 1964 but clearly reflects the late 1940s. The church steeple has recently been removed and the third Lord Leconfield is still alive. Petworth is one stop on a tour that begins and ends at Crowborough, takes in Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Surrey, echoing Cobbett's famous journeys over a century before.

1. George Winder: *Modern Rural Rides*. Hutchinson 1964.

[This account, while emotive, needs setting in context. Hunting had ceased early in the war years, while Mr Brown was in fact Lord Leconfield's chauffeur and mechanic. He had a flat in the Cow Yard. Mr Webber, the head groom, had left soon after the war. The Army had taken charge of the stables and the two Stedham milestones (still in situ) had been put in to prevent lorries scraping the walls. The R.A.O.C. had other huts at Flathurst on the Horsham Road.

Jumbo Taylor talking to the Editor.]

A gigantic waste of time?

What is the point of gardening? Some see it as the most gigantic waste of time. Why not just mow a bit of lawn, plant a few trees and shrubs and forget about it? You would then have much more time to get on with other things. My husband, a writer, may secretly think this. His books will last and might be read in a hundred years time, whereas my gardening efforts of the past 35 years will be forgotten the moment my back is turned and I am no longer here.

In spite of this undeniable fact gardening is what I love more than anything. I never set out into my garden without a sense of excitement and anticipation. It may be on a lovely March morning with a tray of oxlip plugs to set into the long grass or to see if the cyclamen corms planted last year have come up under the lime trees. Or in early summer to encourage the new woodruff plantings to hurry up and complete their circles under the crab apples. I want to be out of doors and I like being out in all weather.

I grew up on the west coast of Scotland. Nobody in our family thought it was right to be indoors during daylight, particularly my father, the dominating force who believed that not only should we children be outside but doing useful work. My brother, sister and I spent much of our time, under his direction, cutting down bracken and rhododendrons and making bonfires. The only escape was to pretend to want to go fishing. So I did a lot of fishing. My first efforts at digging were to look for worms in the windswept walled garden. After some experimental excavation I knew where to find them, usually under a heap of rotting sea weed piled in a corner for use as mulch. These worms went into a rusty oatcake tin to be skewered later on a hook and dangled in the burn in the hope of luring a large brown trout.

To be alone in a garden as a child with long idle hours ahead gave me a love of wild places. One absorbs with an intensity, never later recaptured, the colour of flowers seen at eye level, the smell of the earth, the cry of sea birds. The memory of enchantment at suddenly finding, in a sunlit corner, a crowd of bright, spice scented lupins as tall as myself has stayed with me always, particularly as I am sure I spoke to them.

I wanted to recreate something of these childhood memories in my gardening efforts at Petworth. When I came to live here in 1978 I knew very little about how to garden. I knew the name of a few rhododendrons and knew that I did not want to plant any of them. My father spent thirty years growing them in Argyll. As he got older he began to think they did not fit well into the soft landscape of the West Coast. He found their presence gloomy, the leaves too heavy and the flowers too blowsy. He spent the second half of his life happily digging them up. He

concluded that native birch, oak woods carpeted with moss, bluebells and ferns looked best in that gentle, grey landscape and I agreed. He did allow large plantings of deciduous azaleas (*rhododendron luteum*). These he decided sit happily among bluebells and are worth growing for one of the most delicious scents in the world.

I call my father's approach ungardening and my guiding principle goes back to this. It is a question of what to impose on the landscape and what to leave out. A sense of place can easily be lost. How easy to strike a wrong note and to plant shrubs and trees, however beautiful in themselves, that do not fit with their surroundings. I am not a plantsman keen to plant any and everything in every variety. I don't find such plantings harmonious. Mixed shrubs from China, New Zealand and Japan seem awkward in each other's company as if at an ill arranged drinks party. I am certain that what you don't plant is more important than what you do. I like the balance between calm and busy, open spaces among drifts of bold groupings of one species. Or a single shrub or tree given room to display its particular beauty. You need space for this but I would apply the same principle in a small garden. I accept that I am in a minority and those who do not agree might find my garden a bit empty and lacking in 'interest'.

Equipped with these vague ideas I wanted to make something of the garden at Petworth that our young children would love, and that might give them their own lupin moment. We live in the south end of a house, the rest of which is open to the public. The private garden close to the house had not changed since 1870 when Salvin worked on this end of Petworth. Wide gravel paths led a long way across a huge lawn, mown every week, which had the feel of a well kept golf course. Children faltered half way and there was nowhere to sit down. When you reached the walled garden a different world opened. High brick walls, some dating from the 1720s enclose three large spaces of six acres. These walls which once contained 20 glass houses and employed 30 gardeners were built to provide vegetables and fruit for the house.

Caroline Egremont – to be continued.

“Take a russet whenever you like ...”

I was just seven. It was September 1939. We had been put on the train from Peckham. Now I was standing on the platform at Billingshurst station with a box round my neck and a few scraps of food, a label with my name and school and a gas mask. I can't remember how we got to Petworth, perhaps by coach. I

remember only going to Mr and Mrs Pullen at 1 Grove Cottage. I was with Margaret Vaughan – I wonder where she is now.

Almost as soon as we arrived Mrs Pullen sent off a card to my mother – I still have it – “Marjorie is quite alright. I will do the same for her as for my own.” Presumably Mrs Pullen did the same for Margaret Vaughan. I have, too, something scrawled in my own childish hand, “Dear Mum and Dad, we are living with a nice lady and I am sleeping with Margaret Vaughan.” My brother was separated from me. He was at a farm outside Petworth with a single lady. I remember he was rather pleased that her lack of experience with young children meant that he could wash rather less than he might otherwise have done.

Mrs Pullen was as good as her word – if possible better. She and her husband were retired and they had a son in the Navy. So far from feeling uprooted, I loved it at Grove Cottage. The Pullens were simply so kind. I’d never been to church before but every Sunday morning we were taken to Sunday School. I even began to lose my London accent. There were only two beds in the house: Margaret and I sharing one but it had a feather mattress not the Peckham flock bed.

What really amazed me was that there was a big basket of russet apples in the cupboard and Margaret and I were told we could simply go to the cupboard and take one! No need to ask. I couldn’t believe it. And Mrs Pullen had a distinctive way of cooking scrambled eggs. I’ve cooked scrambled eggs many times since but I’ve never worked out how to do them as Mrs Pullen did.

And the garden at Grove Cottage. This was another world to Peckham. There was a shed with a kind of ladder and a wooden loft. There was a door which opened out on to an orchard with pigs roaming about and tall ferns. No, I seem to think of proper ferns rather than bracken. We’d play hide and seek amongst them. And there was the Virgin Mary Spring, so often we’d go down to drink the water. Mr and Mrs Pullen were so kind and we felt so safe. Every Sunday, weather permitting, we’d walk in the Park after lunch. Mr Pullen had a hooked walking stick and he’d pull down branches for us to take the chestnuts. We’d pick up antlers too, although I don’t think we’d take them home. School was in a big building right in the Town, you say it would have been the Iron Room. Although we were put in age groups, we were all in the same large room, there were no partitions and it was difficult to concentrate.

One particular memory haunts me. It’s of Paul Robeson singing in a kind of scout hut. Unlikely as it is, I’m sure I’m right about this. I wonder if anyone remembers. I seem to connect it with a radio programme.

I would be something over a year with Mr and Mrs Pullen. It was the time of the “phoney war” and evacuees were beginning to drift back to London. We did. No sooner back than the war began in earnest, my mother was expecting and

packed off to Reading while my brother and I were evacuated to Barcombe in Sussex. My father was a train driver, working with steam engines. The lady we were with had five children of her own and little time to worry about us, while food was very short. How I wished we were back with Mrs Pullen. We wrote to see if we could return but she now had two Canadian soldiers billeted with her.

I don’t know whether the Pullens had a telephone but after the war we’d come back and simply knock on the door hoping they would be at home. By this time I had children of my own. One day I was with my daughter and called to be told that Mrs Pullen had just died. I was heartbroken. I have a photograph of my little girl with a watering can and the flowers fresh on the grave. I never found out whether the Pullens own son came back from the war.

I’ve lived at Seaford now for some thirty years. I love the sight of the Downs. It’s something that always takes me back to those first wonderful days with Mr and Mrs Pullen.

Marjorie Short (née Percival) was talking to the Editor.

Postscript:

Marjorie writes that, later in the war, Mrs Pullen suggested to her parents that the Pullens might adopt her. In fact nothing came of this but the idea was carefully considered. Marjorie says, “I remember at the time not minding in the least if my parents agreed.” She adds that it was the custom after school in the Iron Room for everyone to sing *Abide with me*. “Even now whenever I hear it I get a lump in my throat because we all cried when we sang it.” Marjorie says that in fact she missed Mrs Pullen’s death by about two weeks, the flowers were dying on the grave when she visited with her eldest daughter. Mrs Pullen was 90. See main illustration.



Mr & Mrs Pullen with Marjorie about 1950.

“My guide seemed puzzled ...”

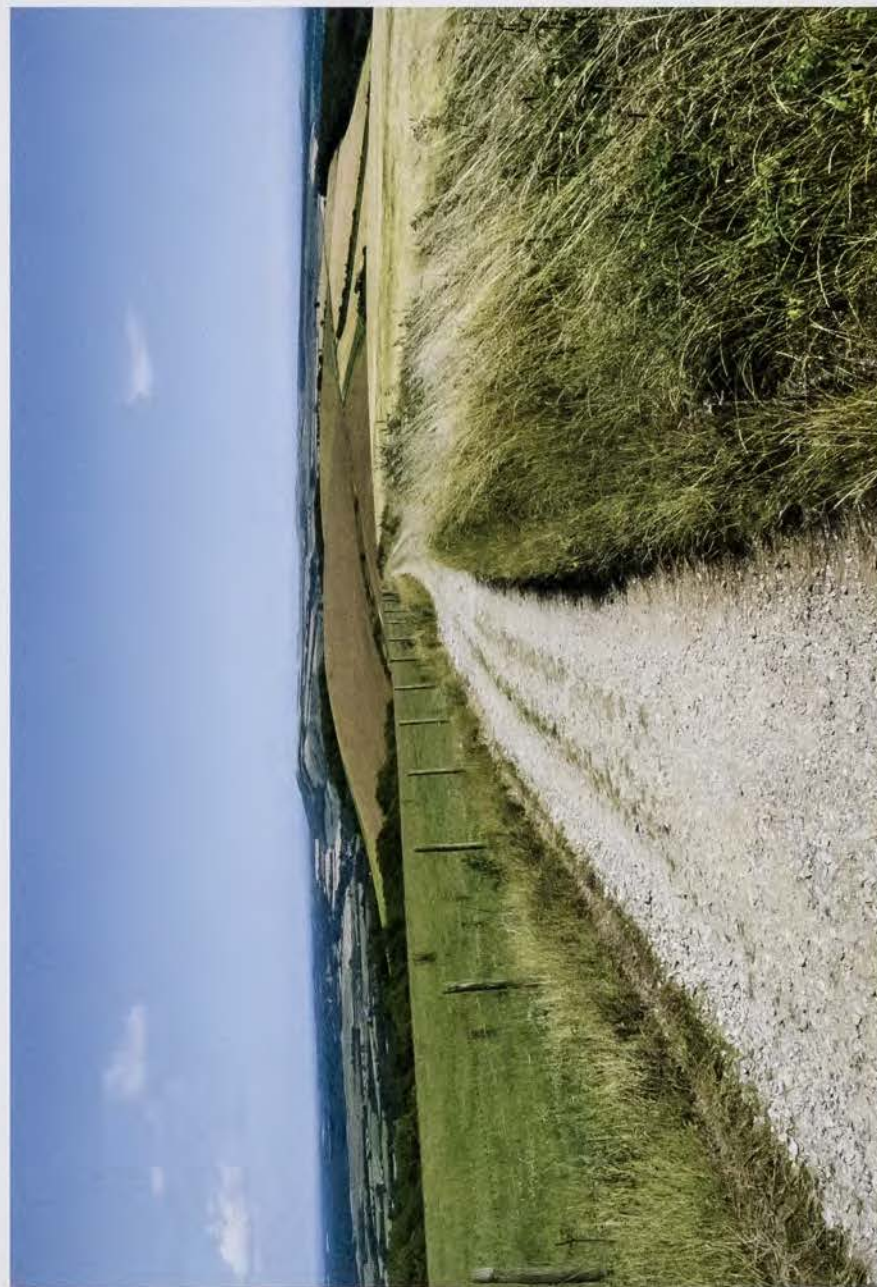
I was two years old when I was evacuated. My mother brought me down from Putney. It would be the very beginning of the war. I was one of some six evacuees taken in by a Miss Scrimgeour who had a big house on the hill at Woolbeding. The others, I think, were a little older than I was. I remained with Miss Scrimgeour for a couple of years or so until I was four. I hardly saw my parents during this time and my elder sister was evacuated to Sunderland where my mother had a relative. I saw so little of my sister that in later years when I saw her it took some time to work out who she was. I don't know whether Miss Scrimgeour died but I was told that I was going to Petworth House. It was 1943.

Obviously my memory of Woolbeding is hazy but I do recall lying in bed in what seemed a kind of conservatory with other children and looking through the glass to the Downs. There was a matron and I would lie there watching explosions in the sky above me. Yes, I went to school after a while. Stedham? Midhurst? I don't know.

Petworth memories are a little clearer. The most persistent is of being hidden “under the stairs” when there was an air-raid alert. Coming back to Petworth some three years ago, I asked about this. My guide seemed puzzled, then took me down into the cellars – not usually open to the public and I realised I had been placed in the cellars. I can remember Sunday morning church at Petworth and coming back to the House to sit round while someone played the piano. Then it was time for dinner. Lord Leconfield? Perhaps the name rings the faintest of bells – no more. When the war ended I, with another boy, was still at the House. My parents seemed curiously reluctant to come for me and I hardly knew them.

I ended up being fostered by Mrs Denyer at Upperton while my companion went to Duncton. Mrs Denyer had two children, Helen and Colin, rather older than I was, twelve or thirteen perhaps. The house was sharp on the right as you turned the bend. I never saw Mr Denyer – perhaps he was still away in the war. I got on very well with Helen and Colin and we'd follow the bend and go down into the Park to play. Mrs Denyer was extremely kind to me and was effectively a surrogate mother. She was a lovely lady and each morning she'd take me down the hill to Tillington School. I don't remember much of that except, curiously, the orangey flock overcoat I had at the time. I was ten when I was finally collected by my mother. We went to Pulborough to meet her and return to Streatham where my parents were now living. I now had two younger siblings. The war had totally dislocated my relationship with my parents and I left home altogether when I was sixteen.

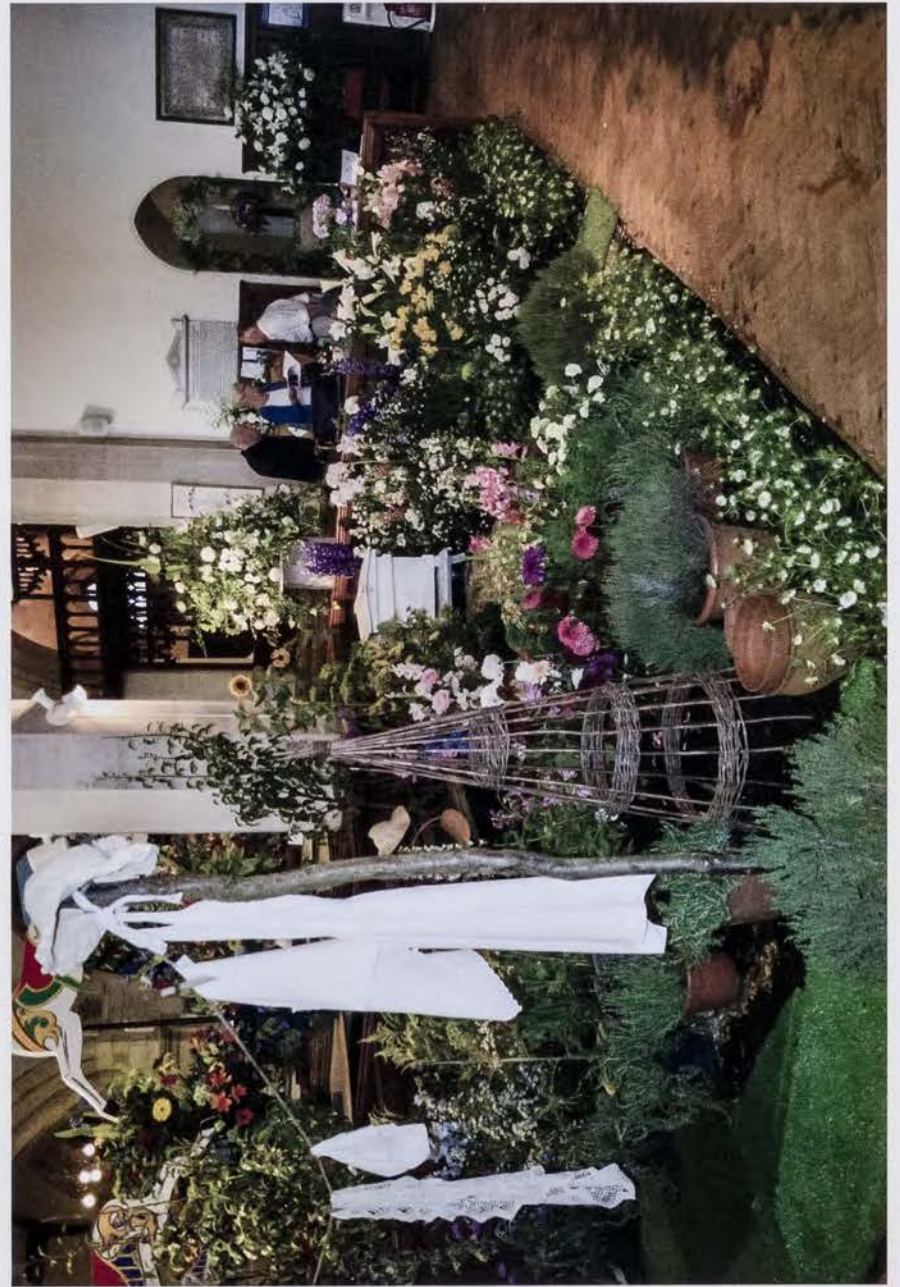
I didn't keep up with the Denyer family but I went back once unannounced



“The open road.” Bignor Hill 20th July.
Photograph by Ian Godsmark as are the four following.



"Petworth Fair" at the St Mary's Flower Festival in August.



"The Cottage Museum Garden." St Mary's Flower Festival.



Walkers at Ambersham | 6th August.



Helpers at the Society dinner in September.



Tithonia "Torch" in the gardens of Lewes Castle. 30th September.
 Photograph by Gordon Stevenson.

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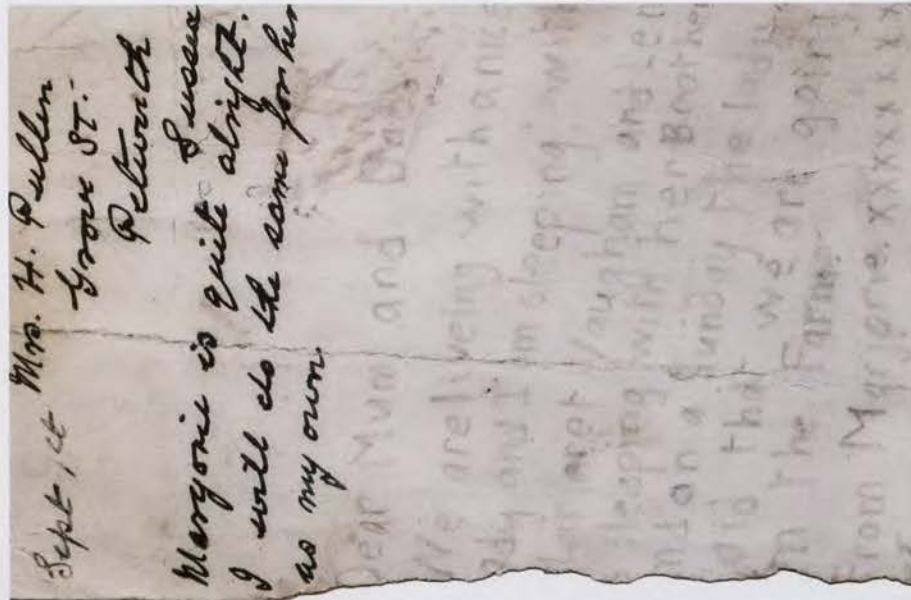
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Top – Marjorie Short laying a pot plant on Mrs Pullen's grave.
 Bottom – Mrs Pullen's note to Marjorie's parents and Margaret's own note.
 Marjorie's pencil note has faded badly.

when I was passing through with my wife. It would perhaps be ten years on. I knocked on the door but there was no answer. I waited about and no one came. I was left only with memories of a lovely lady.

John Napier was talking to the Editor.
 With thanks to Janet Austin for putting us in touch.

Postscript:
 Speaking to me later on the telephone, John remembers climbing a tree in the orchard at Woolbeding with some older children, falling on some barbed wire and cutting himself badly just over the eye. He was "told off" for his pains and still carries the scar. At Petworth he has a vague memory of a picnic on the lawns, the children sitting in a circle, some of them reading.

P.

On finding Sabina Melville

Regular readers of this Magazine will remember Sabina Melville's five pieces on her early days at Roundwick Farm, Ebernoe.¹ As Editor of PSM I had been given a typescript originally handed to Frances Abraham at the Ebernoe School Reunion in 2006. At a distance of several years and having been preoccupied at the time with organising the event, Frances had little recollection of being given the typescript and only an address for the writer.

Several years on from 2006 I felt the typescript would be of interest to this Society and wrote to the address given. There was no reply. I published in instalments, making very minor corrections and stated that we would acknowledge copyright if Sabina Meville or anyone else established contact. No one did.

The PSM has a wide and sometimes random readership and this Magazine can end up in some unlikely places. While waiting for an appointment Lesley Burgess happened on a stray copy of PSM. She picked it up to pass the time and was astonished to see her Aunt Sabina as a contributor. Sabina had died in a nursing home a year before. Born in 1923, she had been in her early nineties and had been the second youngest of the Baker family of 13 at Roundwick Farm, Ebernoe, Lesley's mother, now in her 91st year, being the youngest. As often the case with such large families, the eldest had already left home before the youngest arrived and the family became widely dispersed. Most seem to have left the immediate area except for Maurice who may have attended the 2006 reunion and seems to

have been involved in some way with cricket at Ebernoe. Lesley did not know all her uncles and aunts, of whom one went to New Zealand, another was killed at Anzio in 1943 while another served in the Grenadier Guards and died in 1946. Perhaps of all the family Lesley remembered her Aunt Sabina although she saw her only very rarely. Sabina had served in the A.T.S. and married a soldier. Lesley could remember as a very small child going to see her aunt and uncle near Capel. As Lesley's father managed a farm at Milland and worked Sundays such visits were very unusual. Lesley could however remember coming home from work when her parents were living at Passfield near Liphook and finding Sabina on an unexpected visit. Lesley does not remember seeing her again but she remained her favourite and would always ask for news of her. She remembers her as homely and approachable, something that comes over from her writing.

P.

J. PSM 156-160.



Roundwick Farm in 1925.

In search of Eleanor Boniface

Below is a story from *Some People of Hogg's Hollow* by Eleanor Boniface. Given the shortage of space in the PSM, this may appear a little extravagant in so far as the setting of the story is in Milland, which is where the author was born, but I have taken this step to try and draw attention to this important yet elusive writer, and in the hope that somebody may be able to tell us something more about her.

It would seem that Eleanor was born in 1880 and spent her younger years in service in Liss, and later at Liphook in 1911. She married in 1918 but her life after Liphook is mostly unknown, except for her books and poetry. At some time she became immersed in Welsh folklore and tradition, and so it seems possible that she went to live in Wales.

Her first known work and, arguably, her masterpiece, is *Some People of Hogg's Hollow* (Blackwell 1924) – now an extremely rare book. Eleanor also wrote a few stories for Sussex County Magazine in the early 1930s, and these, like her book, are entirely narrated in West Sussex dialect. She is also the author of *S'Nellie's Welsh Fairy Tales* (Welsh Outlook Press 1929) – a collection of tales which were originally published in the Welsh Outlook magazine, and definitely not aimed at children. I am indebted to Shaun Cooper for sending me a copy of his article about Eleanor Boniface which was published in the Milland News last year, and we hope to have a much fuller article about her in the PSM in 2016.

P.

Mrs Jolly

by Eleanor Boniface

Mrs Jolly – and a more inappropriate name she could not have had – has been partly bedridden these thirty years, but the sky and nature still appear bright to her, and her neighbours and their doings are still of vital, though critical interest.

Many years ago a departing Vicar said to me, "Do if you can go and see Mrs Jolly sometimes and read to her a little. She is such a good church-woman: read the Bible and – oh, just children's stories; she is, I fear, rather simple."

For years I went, for she "didn't mind," she said, if I did, for no one else came to see her; and we solemnly went through Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for the day, with a low "thank you" at the end of it.

All other reading she flatly said "No" to, nor would she talk. After many aeons of boredom on both sides, one sunny afternoon when the heat was intense and life hardly seemed worth living, I grew desperate, and at the end of Gospel before

she could growl the "thank you," I exclaimed loudly, "I saw a ghost last night." A faint flicker seemed to cross her immobile face, so I asserted again more loudly and with a kind of squeak, "Yes, I saw a ghost last night. A man in petticoats; he walked through the gate opposite the house without opening it."

The effect was marvellous: she half turned on her pillow, looked straight at me and said, "Hey?"

There was a long silence; then, still staring, she said, "You b'lieve in they, then?"

"Why, yes," I replied, "I've seen them."

"Ah!" she said. "Aah! so've I."

Deep had answered deep, she thawed and melted, and the floodgates of speech were loosed forever. Though Collect, Epistle and Gospel still were read – for as a strict church-woman she considered it right to bear with them – the "thank you" was replaced with a swift plunge into ghostly stories and afterwards into gossip as well. Evidently as a seer of ghosts I could be confided in.

"Yaas, I seed un even when I was a gal. One night I was coming home through the cospes – I reckon I wur seventeen that year – and suddenly out of an old holly in the clearing – woosh! comes a gurt creature and goes a-flopping and a-striding off down the Mash way. I was just-about skeered-like, and I didn't half holler when I gets home. They all laffs, and says 'twere an owl. Ah! but owls don't wear petticoats and go a-striding on two legs – they flies. Yaas, there's ghostses opposite your place, but they's good uns. There's a lady ghost there; Jolly he've seen her footsteps in the dew in the orchard grass early mornings – tiny lil feet he says they be, and once he heard her tap-tapping on the path at night.

"One night when he was coming home 'crost the lil stream near your place he heard steps coming very hard behind he, and panting. He thinks, "This fellow's in a terrible hurry, I'll let un pass," so he stood aside, and a gurt long man in a woman's dress, a long cloak like, rushes past he and slap through the gate without opening it, into the water medder. Jolly he comes home with his legs all ashake, but he seen that fellow more'n once. Another night 'twas very dark, and he was coming down the orchard when he heard a noise and – woosh! there was the old house all a-lit up, a blaze from every window; it lasted that way 'bout half an hour and then went out. Jolly he didn't know what to make of it.

"You know the first place Jolly ever worked at, well, 'twas that house you mentioned t'other day, only 'twas a farm then, and Mr. and Mrs Powlett farmed it, and Jolly worked for 'em 'long a lot of other lads. Mrs Powlett she were a queer un, they said. One night Jolly and the other lads had been out to steal some turnips in the moonlight for their hosses. Mr. Powlett he were a bad horse master, that's what Jolly says – I think they were after apples most-like, but they were standing up agin' the barn with their backs to the wall when they heard a noise coming

down the lane, a scratching and a hollering, and a bumping and a banging, and when they looked up the end of the lane there was Mrs Powlett a-running along and a-scratching and a-hollering, and banging a cullender and a tin pan in her hands over her head. She ran right 'long past they, and went on all-fours between two hayricks. Jolly he run after her then, and seed her go through a gate into the medder, but when he got there the gate was locked and there was nothing there, no! The next night they was indoors in the kitchen when they heard a bumping and a banging outside, and they thought 'twas the young colts got loose, so they rushes out round the house and there was Mrs Powlett a-running on all-fours 'twixt the hayricks. Jolly didn't follow her that time, and the farmer came out, and said, 'What are you chasing round my house then?' and Jolly he says, 'Ah! I don't rightly know, sir, and shouldn't like to say,' and the farmer he says, 'Ah,' just like that. 'Ah!' he says, and off he goes indoors, and they none of them saw Mrs Powlett for two days, and when they did she looked queer-like to them. Ah, they do say she was queer."

"Co!" remarked Mr. Jolly, who was at home that day, "but I never forgets the time I had a hoss what were a jibber, an' I tried to take un up the big hill with the cart. In the middle he starts jibbing and a-sidling from I, an' there wore a pore ole man a coming down t'other side of the hoss. Oh, an ole man 'bout what my age is now, with a gurt blew umbrella in hee's hand. The hoss began shoving an' shoving towards he an' seems as if he'd fall on he, so I hollers, 'Git out o' the way or do summat,' and that ole chap he ups with the umbrella and gives that hoss a gurt clip on the top of he's head which makes the bones o' the umbrella rattle like mad, an' he hollers, 'Wheer the hell be yew a-coming to then? Wheer the hell be yew a-coming to?' like that, and the hoss he starts off up that hill at a gallop and I thought I'd lost un, cart an all.

"But after that when that hoss started jibbing I'd only to run round un to the side where the ole man had been an' holler, 'Wheer the hell be yew a-coming to then? Wheer the hell be yew a-coming to?' and that hoss he'd behave hisself oncet. Sure!"

My mother – 1874-1978 (2)

Their first home was in a little row of cottages (now gone). Three very happy years passed and at the beginning of 1914 they knew they would be parents before the year was out. Also that year the First War started.

Next door to Mother and Father at this time lived a family and the wife and one daughter were mentally deranged. It could be very trying because they at times

did most peculiar things. They all drew their water from a well in the back garden and one day in late summer Mother was hanging her washing out when this woman ran out shouting and attacked her with a knife. Mother fought her off but she had pushed Mother close to the well and suddenly released the handle. The handle flew round at a tremendous rate and caught Mother right across her tummy and knocked her over. The neighbour and her daughter were both committed to an asylum for the insane.

Very soon after, on 24 October, their little son George was born. A wee little premature baby weighing 3.5 lbs but with Mother's tender loving care he was a bonny little baby at six months and no-one knew what was to come.

When George should have been walking it was noticed that something was wrong and then began many visits to Great Ormond Street Hospital and later on to Guys Hospital for operations on his poor legs. George's spine had been damaged and he was never able to walk unaided. He had a lovely nature and was always patient and cheerful. Father was very bitter that his son was handicapped and it took him a long time to come to terms with it.

Soon after George was born, Mother and Father moved to Rose Cottage in Lodsworth and then just before Father left for Army Service in 1915 they moved to 1 Hazel View.

Father was stationed at Southampton, again caring for horses. More and more horses were needed to be sent to France to pull the heavy guns, ambulances and stores etc., and after collecting horses from every part of England they were sent to the depot at Southampton to await passage by ship to France. Father on occasions travelled over with them.

So Mother was alone but she had many good friends, one of whom was Miss Spooner who lived with her brother at Smithbrook. Aunt Millie was especially good to her and looked after George when I was born on 14 May 1917. Aunt Millie was one of my god-mothers and I am proud to have "Mildred" as my first name. The year of 1917 was a mixed year for Mother – not only had the country been at War for three long years resulting in the loss of so many young lives, but also Frances her favourite sister who had given her help and a home when George was in hospital, died suddenly.

I have a most lovely photograph of sister Frances hanging in my living room – visitors have thought it was a photograph of Mother, so alike were they.

Peace came in 1918 and slowly the men returned to the village.

When Father was demobbed he returned to work for the Randall family who kept the Village Shop. He worked very hard there. In the evening he and another man would make the dough for the bread and next day he was up very early to do the baking, there was also buns, rolls, etc. to be made. Then when the bakehouse

was cleaned he had to get ready to go on the round. For some years it was horse and van – Father loved his dear old horse called 'Dick' who would never pass our door without an apple or knob of sugar. The other man did another round with his horse and van. They carried almost everything from bread, butter, bacon, soap to paraffin and chicken corn. What a job it must have been as things were not wrapped as they are today. They delivered to all the little villages around Lodsworth including Lodsworth Common, Lickfold, Bexley Hill, Selham, Ambersham, River, Upperton etc., and, of course, Lodsworth itself.

Father used to kill pigs and cut them up in the slaughterhouse. Oh! how I hated to hear them squeal as he was catching them – I used to run and hide. Later on he drove a van, which must have made life easier for him as the rounds were about seventeen miles.

He also had eleven years working for Morley & Sons who had a timber business on the Selham Road, at one time they employed about 90 men. Father had a Ford lorry which he was very proud of, he would go all over the place, getting loads of chestnut pales which the men had made in the woods. Sometimes too, he drove cattle to the markets.

These years whilst I was growing up were busy for Mother too. She would take George out in his chair most days and with us often came other children. Mother had that wonderful gift of making even the shortest walk or picnic such fun for every child. She played our games with us and was loved by all. What excitement when there was a Hunt – off we would go to Lickfold or wherever they met. Sometimes we would walk to Midhurst or in later years go to watch polo.

When a neighbour was ill, Mother would go and sit with them at night – how she managed it I will never know. She always had time to help everybody. In the evenings she would read to George and I and we would sit as still as mice when she nodded off, we knew that when she woke up we would have to go to bed!

I spent all my school-days at Lodsworth Church of England School, it was a good little school where we learnt the three R's. There was the Infants room, and one other, with a partition to make two classrooms with 'Standards 1 to 6'. We had three teachers who taught everything. I will remember one Headmaster who ruled with a rod of iron, most of us were scared of him as he always was seen brandishing the cane and used it often I fear.

George only had a very little schooling as Mum and Dad thought it was too much for him – his nerves were not good at that time. He spent such a large part of his young life in and out of hospital; one time having to stay in Guy's Hospital for eighteen months having more operations. He was quite brainy though and taught himself through studying books and encyclopaedias.

Returning to my school-days, one of the special days was May Day. Mother

always made the May Queen's crown with real flowers, and she would decorate the garlands with ribbons and flowers which the Queen's attendants carried. The next special day was Empire Day, 24 May, when we had to march around the playground and salute the Union Jack; then it was Prize-giving and a half day holiday. On Ascension Day, as it was a Church School, we would all go to Church and then another half day off. The treat we looked forward to all year was our day's outing to Bognor. The excitement cutting the sandwiches and having our names and addresses sewn on our dresses in case we got lost. At 8.30am we would set off from the school in three "charabancs", if it was fine the tops would be turned back – how none of us ever fell out I will never know as we were jumping up and down, longing to get to the sea.

We were given tea, I can still see the piles of bread and butter, lettuce and sticky buns, how good they tasted. At about 6.00pm we set off for home, with bits of seaweed, shells and sticks of rock, very tired and dirty!!

Lodsworth had roughly 500 inhabitants, there were two grocery shops – one called Randalls and another one next to where Phyllis Tooth lives now. A tiny sweet shop, a blacksmith at The Hollist Arms and a little beer house opposite the Village Hall. There was an ex-serviceman who had been wounded in the First World War who mended shoes. So we were well catered for, now we have not even got one shop!

Mother always attended St Peter's Church and when I was eight years old I joined the choir.

When my school-days were over I went to stay with an aunt at Highgate, London, with a view to training as a children's nurse. This did not materialize but after a year or so I returned to Tentworth to work for the same family Mother had been Nanny to.

My brother George was now a man – interested in everything going on around him. He was an avid reader and kind people in Lodsworth kept him well supplied with reading matter. As I have mentioned previously, he was never able to walk but if Father was not there to move him it was a revelation to watch my wee Mother doing it! She would stand George up, get behind him with her arms clasped around his waist and with hearty pushes move him forward. All this accompanied with laughs, giggles and lots of encouragement. Ours was most certainly not a sad home with Mother always ready to find joy in every day.

Mother was a very bad traveller but over the years occasionally she "suffered" and with George visited our relations in Highgate and Barnet. Father seldom took a holiday. After leaving Tentworth I again went to Highgate to help an aunt with three lively boys – I enjoyed my time with that family but at quiet times did feel I should be near home to help Mother so I returned to Lodsworth to work for Mr

and Mrs Kaye at Lodsworth House. There were seven house staff, three gardeners and a chauffeur. I "lived in" but it was good to be so near my family. The best laid plans ... In 1939 war was declared and I was called up in the WAAF and was away for over four years. If no other advantage came out of that time, I did wander around England: Morecambe, Harrogate, Gloucester, Lossiemouth, Pershore, Atherstone, Membury and Lambourne finally being demobbed from R.A.F. Wytham near Birmingham. I also "climbed the ladder" from ACW2 to LACW and could joke with Father that I had longer war service than him.

I did not stray from home again.

In the 1950s Lodsworth had many changes – electricity and water were laid through the village, no more oil lamps and candles and, best of all, water on "tap". A small estate of council houses was built, the village hall was erected and the children's recreation ground laid out.

As more families moved in they joined in the activities which had always been held in the village and started some new ones. Sadly whilst all these improvements were going on it was decided to close the school. The building stood empty for years but was finally made into a private house.

Early in 1955 George was taken ill whilst Mother and he were on one of their visits to Highgate. He was operated on in a London hospital and, soon after their return to Lodsworth, Mother was given the shattering news that he had cancer and had only a few months to live. George died on 17 August 1955, aged 41 years. At the service for him in St Peter's Church the Rector in his address said that although George had missed out on many things in his life he had known one of the greatest gifts from all his family – LOVE.

We were all sad and Mother especially was quite lost for a long time.

In August 1961 Mother and Father celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary. They had so many good wishes from all friends and neighbours – a cake made by our friend Phyllis and a visit by a reporter and photographer from the local paper. Father thought it was all a bit "over the top" and he took a dim view when we insisted that he must wear a collar and tie!

Mother's family had a history of "long lives". Two of her sisters lived to be 90 years old but when we celebrated her 103rd birthday we knew she had broken all previous records!

Five months later – on 7 April 1978 – after a very short illness, Mother died.

The end of a long, helpful, serene and happy life.

Betty Simmonds – concluded.

From a series of articles in 'Outlook' the Lodsworth, Selham and Lickfold Magazine. They were published in the 1990s. I am grateful to the current editor for permission to reproduce here and to Rob Smith for drawing my attention to them. Ed.



This mounted sepia print carries neither caption nor attribution. I am however reasonably certain that the boy extreme right second row is Percy Vincent. The master will presumably be Mr Wootton, the group Petworth Boys School and the date in the 1890s. Ed.

Held in cruel enemy hands

Control of information during the Great War was then, as it would be today, of the utmost importance. In the early years of the conflict news of defeats and setbacks was usually suppressed, censored, and then released to the press at a favourable moment. Of course large numbers of fatalities on the battlefield were difficult to conceal for any length of time and there seemed no obvious advantage in delaying the inevitable. Local newspaper reports of injuries were frequent and not always seen as adverse, for with a wounded Tommy came the prospect of repatriation and even the chance of an honourable discharge. Death and injury were generally seen as the only way out of the fight; however there was a third way.

The prisoner of war has through recent history been perceived as a noble state and internment following injury especially so. Captivity on a personal level could

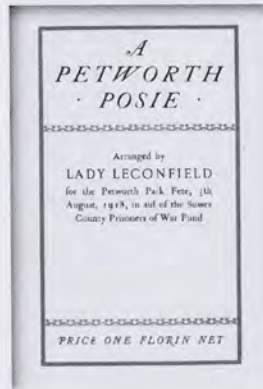
be regarded with mixed feelings. For the soldier the war was probably over, and the risk of impending death, at least for the moment, put on hold. For the family at home a sense of relief combined with the knowledge that they were unlikely to be reunited for many years. The captured soldier's immediate priority would be survival and the uncertain road that lay ahead, for despite the Hague and Geneva Conventions of earlier in the century there would undoubtedly be a great deal of concern for their future. After all propaganda on all sides of the conflict saw the benefit of portraying the enemy as callous gaolers with little regard for treaties or conventions and even less for the well-being of their charges. True or imaginary mistreatment of prisoners by the evil Hun would if managed correctly be seen as a useful tool to galvanize public opinion.

While the treatment of prisoners of war was frequently used to portray a negative view of the enemy, if one were ever needed. It could be counterproductive if the press and the public became fixated on the huge numbers that were taken. Reports had to be selective and heavily expurgated, individual stories were approved of just so long as numbers were not revealed.

In stark contrast to the brutality of the trenches conditions in the prison camps appeared to be strictly regulated by both German and British governments. Inspections by independent monitors were conducted at regular intervals and genuine grievances were sporadically remedied. Treatment in German camps was usually reciprocal and dependent upon how their own soldiers were treated when captured. Whereas British officers and NCO's were not expected to work French NCO's were, that being the treatment given to German prisoners of the French. Life was generally harsh for the common Tommy, hard work and poor diet led to disease and illness and mortality rates were high. Problems in the early years of the war were usually down to simple logistics. During 1914 the German military machine, flush with success on the battlefield, was overwhelmed by the sheer number of prisoners who required processing. By far the largest numbers were Russian followed by French, British and Belgian soldiers. There were never enough camps to hold these prisoners during the early years and many were kept in appalling conditions. As the war progressed so most of the temporary camps improved and many more permanent ones were established. British prisoners began to be able to supplement their rations with food parcels provided by the Red Cross, no such facility existing for the Russians who were often in a very poor condition when they arrived at the camp and many would die from disease or malnutrition.

Appeals at home were common and many ladies of influence would take the plight of the captured Tommy as their cause. Writing the foreword to 'A Petworth Posie' in the summer of 1918 Lady Violet Leconfield, in her capacity as President

of the Sussex County Prisoners of War Fund, appealed for help to support the 500 soldiers of the Sussex Regiment 'held in cruel enemy hands'. 'For each one £40 a year is needed for food alone. They are as dependent upon us as if they were children; and every buyer of this little book may know that he sends help to those who cannot help themselves'.



The following recollections of a prisoner of war appeared in *The Midhurst Times* of December 27, 1918 and records the experiences of Percy 'Perce' Vincent. Before the war Perce lived with his wife Edith and their young family in Gosden's Yard at the rear of the present day fish and chip shop in Pound Street and was employed as a clerk in the Market Square office of the well-known Petworth solicitor John Pitfield. While there will be few today who knew Perce many will remember his son Bill, known in the town as the local plumber Bill was a stalwart of the Petworth Society for many years until his death in 1998. As will be echoed in the newspaper article Perce was known for his beautiful

baritone voice and no sooner than returning from service he could be found joining a group of carol singers entertaining a dinner party at Pitshill and going on to raise the remarkable sum of £60 for St. Dunstons home for blind servicemen in London. Perce would no doubt consider himself fortunate to have survived the war and like many of his comrades he probably felt a certain amount of guilt having returned home when so many friends and neighbours were not so fortunate. Perhaps the newspaper article was intended as some sort of panacea for those feelings, or possibly a means by which to appease those who may have felt resentment towards the lucky ones who came through the war so relatively unscathed. It was important not to make the experiences of the returning prisoners seem too comfortable, if indeed they were. Whatever the reason for the article it probably offered little solace to those whose wounds and losses were still so raw.

**Over Two years a Prisoner. Petworth Soldier's Experiences.
How His singing Abilities saved Him from Working in a Coal mine.**

Lance-Corporal Percy E. Vincent, 9th Royal Fusiliers, who returned to his home in Pound Street, Petworth in time for Christmas after having been a prisoner of war in Germany for over two years, looks remarkably fit considering all the privations he has gone through. Up till the time of his

joining the army in June, 1916, he was a clerk in Mr. John Pitfield's office. He was only six weeks on the Western front when he was wounded by shrapnel in the shoulder and taken prisoner. This was on the 7th October, 1916, at Gudecourt [Gueudecourt], near Bapaume¹. He and his fellow prisoners, many of whom were wounded had to march about 15 miles to a barn with nothing to eat or drink on the way, and they only received a drink of coffee and a piece of bread at the end of their tramp. The next day they were marched to a place where they received hurried treatment. The more severely wounded were left behind, and the others including Lance-Corporal Vincent, were marched off to Cambrai. Many of the prisoners were in a weak and filthy condition. They were put into an old French barracks where there were many more prisoners. All who were not wounded were put to work making roads. He was only there a fortnight, he says, and did not work owing to his wounded shoulder.

50 In a Truck.

A lot of them were afterwards put on the railway – 50 in each truck under filthy conditions. They got out at Mons, and were given some watery stuff which was supposed to be vegetable soup. When they arrived at a place in Germany they were marched to Dulmen Camp², Lance-Corporal Vincent says most of the prisoners were ill owing to the bad food conditions. Many of them suffered from a disease which was rather like dropsy, and it caused them to swell out to a terrific size. He himself had dysentery for about three weeks, and he was nearly dead, but he did not like to write home and tell his wife anything about it, because he was warned by the older prisoners at Dulmen not to say anything on his letter cards about the food. He says the Russians and other prisoners at Dulmen who were working behind the line were in a terrible state. In one week no fewer than 70 Russians died absolutely of starvation he says. There were funerals every week, some weeks 10 and so on.

One of the Lucky Ones.

Lance-Corporal Vincent in pre-war days was a popular figure on local concert platforms, and he little thought that his singing was to stand him in good stead while a captive among the Huns. But so it happened, and at Dulmen he found himself one of the lucky ones. When it was discovered that he could sing he was made a member of the Camp concert party and given only light work about the camp, instead of having to go down a coal mine to work as most of those who were captured with him had to do. This welcome change however, was not brought without a little "bamboozlement" about his health in which

he succeeded in bluffing the Germans. He remained at Dulmen Camp until May, 1917, when the camp was broken up. All men who were over three months prisoners were then sent to Senne Lager, and at Stumuhle, which was attached to the camp, another medical examination took place and he was marked 1A.

Worked on a Farm.

He was then put to work on a large farm with about 40 English and French Prisoners. Every morning, he says, they had to walk about 4 kilometres to the farm, and walk back again at night, each prisoner then carrying a bundle of wood for the fire. Apart from the bad food, he says he personally was not ill-treated during his captivity, but he had heard of some shocking cases of brutality, and he had seen some of his fellow prisoners, when they had said the work was too hard for them, struck by the sentries with the butt end of their rifles. The food was awful. The coffee they were given was made of burnt rye and acorns, and the soup was either boiled cabbage, turnip or swede water.

Having survived The Great War and settling back into Civvy Street Perce would go on to witness his sons Jack and Bill enlist to fight in the Second World War. Perce had experienced the privations of the earlier conflict and was only too aware of the risk that his sons were taking. In a letter to his brother Wallie in September 1945 the relief that the war had ended and the two boys were safe is evident. That joy is tinged with sadness when he relates to his brother the terrible event of September 1942, 'As you know, Petworth didn't escape Jerry's notice. Our poor old school came in for it and about 30 poor little kiddies killed, it was a terrible affair. Lord Leconfield's laundry is still a skeleton but the school is absolutely gone. When I pass it, I often think of the good old times there, long time ago now isn't it?' With his love of music it is no surprise that Perce took great pleasure in bell ringing though as he explains to Wallie he is not happy with certain new arrivals. 'We still go in for bell ringing, got some lady ringers, but they are very poor at it. Been ringing for over a year and can't ring rounds properly. It's like old Tatty Mathews used to say "Like old Mitfords bull - got no ear for music".'¹³ Beside the bell ringers Perce is concerned about the cost of living and asks Wallie how the beer trade is doing up his way. 'Fancy 10d a pint. One could almost get canned up years ago for 10d. It's a rare old job now what with beer, baccy and income tax, but I suppose we mustn't grumble we're still alive and kicking.'

Miles Costello with thanks to Chris Vincent.

1. The 9th had been in reserve west of Geudecourt and were ordered to move up to attack

Bayonet Trench on the 7th October. An advance artillery barrage failed to destroy the enemy positions and the battalion suffered heavy losses from enemy machine guns during the failed assault.

2. Dulmen was generally considered to be one of the better camps and occasionally used by the authorities as an example when inspected by the International Red Cross. However if Dulmen was a good camp then it was far outweighed by those that were less well managed.

3. At a time when many households would rear at least one pig a year "Tatty" Matthews was well known in the town as a pig-killer.

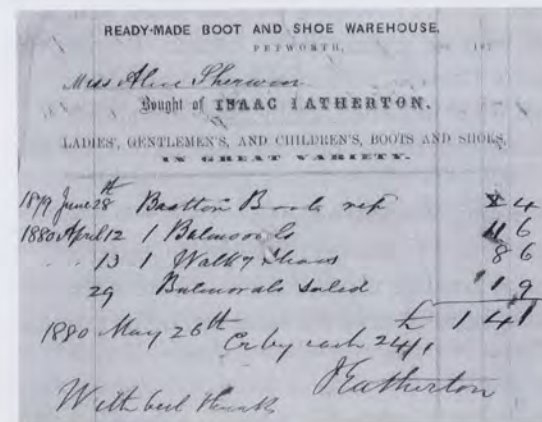
Old Petworth traders (10).

Isaac Eatherton

Isaac Eatherton appears from this invoice to have been a retailer and repairer rather than (as Messrs. Bishop in Lombard Street and later Mr Bennett in Pound Street) also a bespoke bootmaker. Isaac had an intimate connection with the "Independent" chapel in Park Road before it became Strict Baptist and had a shop in the old houses that stood in the churchyard, pulled down at the end of the nineteenth century, Eatherton's premises being in the rough area of the present war memorial. It is reasonable to suppose that Mr Letchford would succeed Eatherton in Church Street as Bacon & Co. This business would remove to the Park Road/Saddlers Row corner and survive throughout the following century. The premises are now Garden House Antiques.

A Balmoral is a type of boot laced at the front.

P.



[I have numbered this 10 in the series as the sequence has become disordered.]

Grandma and Mabel Constanduros

It was the afternoon of a sweltering September day when a large and expensive looking motor-car stopped in the sunny main thoroughfare of a small Sussex village and a young man jumped hastily out into the silent street. There was nobody about at all, and he had just decided to knock at the door of one of the deserted-looking cottages, when he caught sight of an old lady sitting on a wooden chair in a front garden and dozing placidly in the sunshine.

"Excuse me –" he said diffidently.

"Eh?" The old lady opened one eye.

"Could you tell me where to find a doctor?"

"Which one d'you want?" asked the old lady.

"The nearest," answered the young man, who seemed agitated.

"Well –" The old lady considered a moment. "I ain't a native of 'ere, thank 'eaven," she explained, "so I 'aves to think a bit."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Wouldn't live 'ere if you paid me. Look at all that!" She waved a contemptuous hand at the landscape.

"What's the matter with it?"

"Keeps too still. Ain't even a tram to liven things up. I'm used to Life. Even in them soppy movies things do keep goin'. 'Ere everythink stops still. Silly, I call it." She shut her eyes again.

The young man glanced uneasily back at the car. "Please tell me where I can find the doctor before you go to sleep," he begged.

The old lady opened her eyes rather crossly. "Well, as I was sayin' – only you interrupted me – I ain't a native of these parts; I'm staying with me sister, Maria. But I know there's a Doctor Partridge, because 'e done fer 'er 'usband. 'E lives over in Upper Wurzelfold. And there's Doctor Drake – 'im that sees most people to their graves in these parts; 'e lives over there in Little Gumblefield. But I don't know which of 'em's nearest. I'm a Londoner, thanks be!" She seemed inclined to doze off again.

"Either doctor will do for me," the young man said eagerly.

"Both of 'em'd do fer yer if you gave 'em 'alf a chance," the old lady asserted, chuckling. "Nothink 'ere ain't so good as London, if you arst me – doctors nor drains nor nothink else. Even the cabbages don't smell the same out o' the ground as orf of a barrer."

This is from the start of one of the stories in *Grandma* by Mabel Constanduros, published 1939. Although there's no mention of her surname in the story, "The

Way To The Doctor's', the old lady is actually Grandma Buggins – head of the famous fictitious cockney family from Waltham, South London, which is where Mabel had grown up.

The small Sussex village in which the story is set is not named either, but we might guess it was loosely based around Bury, to which the author had moved in the late 1920s. There is a dark sense of humour in this story, which is about a young man who drives into the village with his aunt, who is unwell, and he needs to get her to a doctor. Everyone in the village, except Grandma, is at a funeral, and the only reason she didn't go there too was on account of her rheumatism. She sets out telling the young man all the pros and cons of taking the quickest route to Doctor Partridge's, then says that he is over eighty and: "goin' orf 'is rocker."

The young man then asks the way to Doctor Drake's. However, after some more telling but very indirect statements from the garrulous old lady, it turns out that the funeral that the rest of the village have gone to is in fact his.

Both of these doctors have the names of birds, Drake and Partridge – yes, but it should be noted that they are typically birds of the countryside. There is a faint trace here of the townies' view of the countryside like that which was caricatured by Stella Gibbons in *Cold Comfort Farm* (a book which Mabel had read and enjoyed) – where most of the place names and personal names are not exactly of a cheery nature, and other people mentioned in the story include Benjamin Codling, George Gobb, and a farmer called Mangel. Some of the names are slightly jokey in other ways, too: for instance, 'Wurzelfold' is almost certainly an allusion to the fact that Mabel played one of the main characters in the Children's Hour radio adaptation of 'Worzel Gummidge', which also takes place in the countryside; and the unlikely name of 'Gobb' meanwhile, is oddly similar to the maiden name of Mabel's daughter-in-law, Hilda Cobb, who had married the author's son just the year before *Grandma* was published – 1938, which was also when another of her books, *Down Mangle Street* came out.

Mabel Constanduros was best known for being an actress, on stage as well as on the radio, and she was also a playwright and comedy script writer, but as she notes in her autobiography *Shreds and Patches* (1946) she saw herself first and foremost as a writer, and secondly as an actress. She wrote her first play at the age of nine, and her first story was published in the Sixth Form magazine at her school – though she was not in the Sixth at that point.

Constanduros was actually her married name. Mabel Tilling was born in 1880 in Waltham, South London – yet it is perhaps best for us to begin a little further back than that, in order to get a clearer understanding of her story. Her father's father, Thomas Tilling had founded a transport business in the city. He had begun when he was just twenty, in 1845, with only one horse and carriage, yet by 1855 he

had seventy horses; and by 1925, under the management of his son Richard, they had 7,000 horses. The name of Thomas Tilling & Sons was so well known by then that in some parts of the capital, a 'Tommy' – short for Tommy Tilling – was rhyming slang for 'a shilling'.

Richard Tilling was born in 1851, and in 1874 he married Sophia Thorn who was from Bermondsey. Mabel was their second child. To give a good idea of the ages of all the children, in relation to one another, it's worth looking at a Census, rather than giving their separate birth dates. So, in the Census of 1891, Harry was 15, Mabel was 11, Thomas was 8, Norah was 6, Reginald was 4, Marjorie was 2, and Winifred was just 1.

In about 1896, when Mabel was sixteen, she started work as her father's private secretary, and kept this post until she got married. Mabel writes: 'It was very good training for me, and I am afraid I took more kindly to that kind of work than to helping my mother. Poor mother! She wanted to make me into a pattern housewife like herself, but I had my secret ambitions – Heaven knows where they came from. There is no evidence that anyone in our family ever earned a living by their pen or on the stage, yet I always longed to do one or both of these things. Not one of my brothers or sisters had the slightest wish either to write stories or to perform in public, but I, secretly, wanted nothing else.' (*Shreds and Patches*)

The sisters were very close, but Mabel mostly writes about Norah in her autobiography. They two shared the same room at boarding school and, as they grew older, decided that they would like to marry men who were brothers. This is just how things turned out. In 1906, when Mabel was twenty-six, she married Athanasius Constanduros, who worked in insurance, and then in 1908, Norah married his brother Stephanos, and the two couples lived together in Sutton, Surrey.

Mabel had three sons, but the first two died in childhood. The third, Michael, was born in 1915. Norah had two boys, Basil and then Denis. Denis would grow up to become one of Mabel's main collaborators in her playwriting, and he also illustrated some of her books, including *Grandma*.

In 'The Way To The Doctor's' *Grandma* is just referred to as 'the old lady', but in the other stories in the book, which are set in London, she is called *Grandma* and appears alongside the rest of the Buggins family for which Mabel was so well known. The Bugginses were a sort of typical cockney family of Waltham who Mabel had developed when she was young, occasionally giving her friends and family little sketches as entertainment in the evenings, where she would act the parts of all the different characters. To begin with, they were, as Mabel herself describes them: 'Mrs Buggins, the good natured, much tried housewife; *Grandma* (an old tartar if ever there was one); and two children.' Sometimes she added

neighbours, and there was also an Aunt Maria who, according to *Shreds and Patches* 'came from the North' – but in *Grandma* it is implied that *Grandma* was at Aunt Maria's place when she was staying in Sussex, at the time of the doctor's funeral, and the two of them are also referred to as sisters.

It was during the early days of her marriage, in Sutton, Surrey, that Mabel first became an actress, when she joined some local amateur dramatics clubs. This led her to taking an audition for the BBC Repertory Company in 1925. She had collected together some sketches and monologues as well as a short excerpt from Shakespeare for the audition, but when she was actually in front of the microphone her mind went blank. Unable to remember any of the pieces she had rehearsed so much, she began talking like *Grandma Buggins* and performed an impromptu sketch about the Bugginses, playing all the cockney characters she had originally invented just for the amusement of her family. She was relieved when the audition was over, and went home feeling certain she had failed; but the next day she was told that the BBC wanted her, and the Bugginses as well, who eventually got their own show: 'The Buggins Family'. Indeed, during the Second World War, it was *Grandma Buggins* who was describing rations-wise recipes on the radio for the rest of the nation.

Soon after joining the BBC, Mabel met the London actor Michael Hogan and, attracted by his cockney accent and his frequent use of rhyming slang, she persuaded him to become the 'Father' character of the Bugginses, and for the next seven years, the two of them worked together a lot, writing scripts and going all over the country doing concerts with the BBC. The Bugginses were the best known of the fictitious London families Mabel developed, and between 1925 and 1948, she wrote some 250 scripts featuring them. Her one-act plays and sketches were 'much in favour with country audiences' (according to *Sussex County Magazine*) – but in her autobiography, Mabel tells how the good old cockney humour was mostly a bit lost on the people who saw her shows in Manchester and Liverpool and other places up North!

Joining the BBC's Repertory Company in 1925 marked the beginning of a period of great change for Mabel. Her mother died the next year; and her father died in 1929, and Mabel also separated from Athanasius and, with her son, moved to Prattenden Cottage in Bury, following a school holiday when she and Michael had stayed at The Swan in Fittleworth, and she had realized they needed to get a cottage in West Sussex – especially as Norah and her family were living nearby. As well as all this, Mabel's first book, *The Bugginses*, which she had written with Michael Hogan, was published in 1928, and her collection of poems and plays for children *The Sweep and the Daffodil* came out the following year.

According to an item about Mabel in *Sussex County Magazine*, when her photo

was on the cover and she was 'Modern South Saxon' of the month (November 1939): 'This home-loving little lady has a great veneration for everything old and historical; that is why she is so in love with her cottage at Bury – tucked away behind The Dog and Duck – and she was naturally "thrilled" when ancient coins were dug up in the garden, while the story goes that a roomy cellar underneath the cottage was the hiding place for smugglers' loot.'

Her husband died suddenly in 1937, aged about 71, and then the following year, their son Michael married Mabel's secretary Hilda Cobb, who was Scottish and just a few months older than him. The wedding was held in Bury. They had a son, who was born during the Second World War, and so Mabel finally became a real grandma.

She was good friends with local historian Lilian Brown, the author of *All About Bury* (1948) and Mabel wrote the Foreword for it. In this, she writes, describing when she first moved to the village: 'We were very primitive in Bury then. Though only fifty-two miles from London, there was no gas or electric light, no main drainage at all, and we all drew our water from wells ... Many of its houses have stood for two hundred years and more. The river winds peacefully on its way to the sea, and the yellow iris still blooms in Spring on its banks. The little church and the Manor still sleep side by side in the sunshine and Bob the Ferryman is still willing to take one across the river for twopence.'

In *All About Bury*, it says: 'Almost certainly the last well dug in Bury was the one Mrs. Constanduros was obliged to dig in the garden of Prattenden before she could get drinking water.'

Of course, it was not Mabel herself who did the digging, and in *Shreds and Patches* she tells how she hired a local dowser, Old Trussler, to locate the water in the ground, before getting a crew to dig the actual well. She describes him as: 'an ancient man with the dogged, unelastic step which belongs to tramps and very old people. Out of his face, which was like a stored apple, browned with sun and wind and withered with keeping, looked a pair of very round, very blue eyes. It was by his eyes that I knew him to be no ordinary being; they were curiously ageless; calm, yet with a vitality that was like the springs he seeks and harnesses to man's will. In some strange way he was like water, age-old, purposeful, unalterable, fluent ...

'When we got to the cottage the old fellow walked into the garden and stood with every muscle tense like a sporting dog at point. He put down his stick and walked straight over to a spot overgrown with a tangle of weeds and roses, and stood at gaze for a moment.

"'Ere 'e is!" he said with an air of one prophesying.

'Out of his pocket he drew a forked hazel twig, and held each end loosely

between thumb and finger. Up went the fork, and he looked at us in triumph. "Didn't I tell 'ee? I knowed 'e were 'ere and 'ere 'e be!"

'A yard away from the chosen spot the hazel twig was lifeless – back again over the spring it rose with a bounce. We all tried it, but none of us could make it move at all. Yet this old fellow had known where to go before he had the divining twig in his hand. Down the garden he traced the course of the rivulet which was to feed our well, and his face was alight with a hidden knowledge, a secret fellowship with the water beneath.

"But how did you know where the water was?" we asked in amazement.

"I tingles when I be near 'e," he said simply. "When I be diggin' wells I du shake so, as I be getting' down near 'e, I can't work above an hour at a time. 'Tes loike a agew."'

During the Second World War, Mabel rented Prattenden out, but then later, suddenly wishing she was back in Sussex again, she moved to nearby West Burton, ending up in a cottage with the picturesque name of Five Oaks, and after the war, decided to stay there instead and give Prattenden to Michael and Hilda.

Not all of the sketches and plays she wrote involved the Bugginses, although many of them feature cockney characters. In the late 1940s, she developed another fictitious London family who had the very Sussexy surname of Huggett, and there were two or three films made, including 'Here Come The Huggetts' and 'Vote For Huggett', and in 1949 these two titles were also published as books written by Mabel. 'Vote For Huggett' starred Jack Warner and Petula Clark. Another of Mabel's fictitious London families, the Robinsons, featured in her play '29 Acacia Avenue' which was also made into a film. But the Buggins family were by far her most famous creation, and besides *The Bugginses*, and *Grandma*, Mabel wrote another book about them, *Mrs. Buggins Calls* (1936) and was also frequently commissioned to write Buggins stories for newspapers and magazines. Among her other early books though there were *Poison Flower*, and *A Nice Fire in the Drawing-room* to which she eventually added a sequel, *So They Were Married*. Later books included *Anging Round Pubs* (1940) and *The Respected Lady* (1946) which was written with Howard Agg, who also helped Mabel write many of her plays, notably *Breaking Point* (1950).

Her nephew Denis Constanduros was another person who collaborated with Mabel on her plays, and among the last ones they wrote together there are *A Pig in a Poke* (1951), *King of the Castle* (1953) and *A Nest of Saucepans – and Taking the Chair* (1955). Mabel's other later plays also include *Cuckoo Time* (1952) and *The Voice of the Charmer* (1955).

In 1956, she was asked to open a church-fete at Aldingbourne, and she went in character as Mrs. Buggins. Mabel was about seventy-six by then and it would be

the last time she played the old cockney. She died the following year, in hospital at Chichester.

Shaun Cooper



"Mabel Constanduros at home in West Burton."

Photograph by G. G. Garland

[News of the passing of Raymond Harris came only as this Magazine was in printing. An appreciation will appear in March. Ed.]

