Rosie Remembers

Memories of a Coulsdon resident born in 1916

by Rosie Watts née Huggett

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Memories of a Coulsdon resident born in 1916 in Coulsdon and living there most of her lifetime.

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THE BOURNE SOCIETY

This book contains many memories that Rosie Watts (née Huggett) has recorded over the past years, some of which have previously been published by the Bourne Society. It was completed on 16 June 2001.

Rosie Remembers

is for my family

past, present and future

My thanks to my daughter Jackie for the hours she spent typing and correcting my spelling.

My thanks to the Bourne Society for their encouragement and for giving me the A G NEWMAN AWARD

William Jeffreys

1838 – 1900

Rosie's grandfather

Sarah Jeffreys

née Bennett

1837 – 1896

Rosie's grandmother

THIS IS NOT A STORY, it is just things I remember and I do hope that someone in the future will be interested. My grandparents on my mother's side were just photos to me and I knew nothing about my dad's parents.

(In the initial pages I have just touched on some of the stories from my childhood and have gone into them in more detail later on).

MY MOTHER'S PARENTS

William Jeffreys married Sarah Bennett; they lived in Hanworth, Middlesex and I visited their grave in the churchyard in 1991. My mother told me her father had been a thatcher and came from Oxfordshire and her mother's home was in Twyford. How they came to Hanworth I do not know.

Sarah Jeffreys – née Bennett – died 1 October 1896 aged 59.

William Jeffreys died 14 January 1900 aged 62.

They had seven children who all lived long lives and I met them all—

George Jeffreys	born	04.08.1864
William	"	01.01.1867
Edward	"	26.07.1868
Jane	"	23.08.1870
Fred	"	12.01.1873
Sarah Ann	"	28.04.1876 — my mum
Charles	"	31.10.1879

All I know about my father's family is that they had a large family of several girls and three boys – my dad was the youngest – and they lived near Tonbridge in Kent.

I met his two brothers and one sister – Uncle George, Uncle Sonny and Aunty Dolly. I think Sonny's real forename was Nelson and their surname was Huggett. My dad's name was William George Huggett and he married Sarah Ann Jeffreys.

MY DAD

My dad lived in Brenchley near Tonbridge in Kent. They had to go into Tonbridge to school and in the summer they used to swim to school up the Medway river. Every day the children took it in turns to walk to school carrying the clothes for the others to put on when they came out of the water.

In the school summer holidays the children went with their mother to Paddock Wood hop-picking and the money earned from that used to buy new boots for all the children and enough coal to last the winter.

William Huggett
1879 – 1938
Rosie's father

In his early teens dad went to Hampton to work as a market gardener. Two of my mum's brothers were also working there as market gardeners and that is how mum and dad met.

When the Boer War came dad joined the Scots Guards and was stationed at Wellington Barracks, Chelsea until the regiment went to South Africa. He was made batman to Major Rothschild and served with him until he left the army. After the war the regiment came back to Chelsea and mum and dad were married.

The only thing mum told me about her wedding was that she was expecting my dad and the best man to be wearing their bright red uniforms and their bearskins. Instead when she got to the church door and looked towards the altar she saw two 'Toffs' standing there in morning suits and top hats. She nearly ran away but dad turned round and gave her a wicked grin. It appears that the Major had gone away for the weekend so dad had 'borrowed' a couple of suits thinking that would please my mum, but it didn't – she much preferred his nice red uniform. I think that is why there were no wedding photos.

Dad came out of the army and joined the Metropolitan Police in 1904. He was stationed at Lambeth and his number was 419L (Lambeth). I know this because I have a cutting from a newspaper dated 2.4.1907. *(See cutting)*. Dad was commended for his bravery in the incident but was told that he would not receive a Bravery Medal because his number had appeared in the paper and

POLICEMAN SAVES WOMAN FROM THE FLAMES.

Exciting scenes were witnessed at a fire which broke out just before midnight on Tuesday in Royal-street, Lambeth.

The house affected was one of several of two storeys, containing six rooms, and occupied, as a rule, by several families. All the occupants were in bed when the alarm was given by a boy named Ray, living in the street. In a very short time the place was well alight.

Mrs. Wooton, the landlady, who slept on the first floor, was already suffering from a broken arm, but clad only in her night attire she jumped from the window into the street, luckily escaping uninjured.

Some children and others on the ground floor got out unharmed. Mrs. Nancy York, a young widow, who occupied a back room, also escaped into the street, but ran back to save some of her property, possibly not realising her peril.

Constable 419 L, with great pluck, dashed into the burning building, and was able, not without great difficulty, to get the woman out. She was, however, badly burnt about the face, hands, and arms, and had to be removed to St. Thomas's hospital, where also another inmate of the house had to be taken.

The place was gutted from top to bottom.

some reporters had found out his name. In those days PCs were not allowed to give their names to the press. It was unfortunate that the fire took place in the area where he lived and where everyone knew him, for it was easy for the reporter to find out who the policeman was.

By now dad had two sons – Charlie and George. The younger, George, was not very strong and he spent a lot of time in Great Ormond Street Hospital so dad put in for a transfer to the country, which he got. So they said goodbye to their flat in Oval Mansions, Kennington. He was transferred to Sutton but had only been there about six weeks when they asked for volunteers to go to Coulsdon, so he came to Edward Road in Coulsdon in 1910. Sadly after about a year Charlie died. It was a terrible shock for mum and dad because Charlie was such a lovely, healthy boy with black curly hair and blue eyes, and everyone loved him. He had only been at school a short while when he caught rheumatic fever and died. My mother was so upset by this that they decided to move from Edward Road to a new house in Woodman Road. After a few years they were able to buy it and 45 Woodman Road was our family home until 1957. I was born there on 11 October 1916 and my brother William (Billie) was born 31 October 1919.

P.C. 'Bill' Huggett was one of three policemen in the village of Coulsdon – they each had eight hours duty a day:

6.00 a.m.	-	2.00 p.m.	-	early turn
2.00 p.m.	-	10.00 p.m.	-	late turn
10.00 p.m.	-	6.00 a.m.	-	night duty

The day time duties were a week at a time with night duty being a month at a time.

Dad was attached to Kenley police station but did not have to go there every day. He went to a police box and rang in to Kenley from there. To start with that was the only telephone in the village. The police box was painted blue and it was situated at the corner of Windermere Road and Brighton Road. Later there was a garage on the site, but prior to that the land was used as allotments for the police. Later the box was moved to outside *The Red Lion* pub. Inside the police box there was a straitjacket that was used for restraining violent prisoners (usually drunks!) until the Black Maria arrived from Kenley.

In the early days in a shed next to the police box was a hand pump and hose and when there was a fire the butcher and his horse would take the pump to the fire.

One night a few weeks ago I saw a helicopter flying over Farthing Down. It had a blue light on its roof and a searchlight beaming to the ground below. It appeared to be searching for something or someone as it kept flying up and down the length of the Down. I could not help thinking of my dad when he went on night duty – all he had was a bicycle with pumped-up tyres, an oil lamp, a whistle in his breast pocket and a truncheon in his back pocket. In the winter he wore a long black rubber cape.

There was very little traffic in those days, but sometimes Dad did have to do point duty, such as on Derby Day. He would be where the traffic lights are now at Woodcote Grove Road and Chipstead Valley Road. There were no lights there then, just a very tall 'stink pipe' in the middle of the crossroads. The 'stink pipe' has disappeared (so where does the 'stink' go now? – just gets lost in all the car exhaust fumes I suppose!)

The Derby Day traffic consisted of horse-drawn carts and carriages, lots of charabancs, buses and a few cars. It would start early in the morning with traffic going along Chipstead Valley towards Epsom, and then back again in the evening. All the week of 'Derby Week' there would be a lot of traffic going to Epsom and in the evening when they were all returning the big boys from the village ran behind the vehicles shouting 'throw out your mouldy coppers'. If the people from the races were in a good mood and had won some money on the horses, they would throw a handful of coppers and the boys all scrambled for them. On Derby Day the schools closed, the official reason being that it was too dangerous for the children to be out on the road, but I think it was really because everyone wanted to go to the Derby!

A couple of weeks before the Derby there would be a different kind of traffic making it's way to Epsom – gypsy caravans. In those days the gypsies lived in colourful wooden vans pulled by horses, with usually two or three dogs tied to the back of the vans. I am sure those dogs 'came into their own' when they reached Bunny Hill! The gypsy women would come round to the houses selling wooden clothes pegs, paper flowers and sprigs of heather for luck.

My father was considered by the villagers to be a just and fair copper, he never 'pinched' anyone unless he really had to. If a man was drunk, dad would give him a telling off and tell him that if he had not gone home in 15 minutes he would nick him. It always worked, which pleased dad because he hated writing out reports.

The only thing he would not close his eyes to was cruelty to children and animals, so he always kept a sharp eye out for the gypsies' horses and dogs,

especially during the fortnight running up to the Derby. If he saw a sick looking horse pulling a van he would stop it and examine the horse and if he thought it was suffering he would not let the van go on. It was not unusual to see half-a-dozen gypsy vans parked along Chipstead Valley Road, waiting while my dad went to the police box and telephoned Kenley police station for a vet to come and examine the horses.

Dad was a big man and had been boxing champion in the Scots Guards, which was a good thing as I am sure there were several gypsies who would have liked to 'do him over'.

One day when I arrived home from school dad said I was to go round and collect as many of my friends as I could and to go to the top of Woodman Road, where there was a big grassy bank that overlooked Chipstead Valley Road. Dad made us all line up along the top of the bank and told us to look towards Chipstead Station. After a while a great big silver object came floating up the valley towards us; it was a beautiful thing, so graceful but what struck me most was the quiet purring sound of its engines. I think it was a Graf Zeppelin and because dad was a policeman he had been told it was coming over Coulsdon. I last saw it disappearing towards Purley. I don't know where it went after that.

An important job for my father at Christmas time was to guard the Squire's holly bushes that were in the grounds of Coulsdon Court. The gypsies would do their utmost to cut down the bushes to sell the branches. One year he was so busy guarding the holly that the gypsies went to the farm and stole some chicks instead!

His beat covered a large area. When he was around the Model Village and Rose Walk area he usually managed to find his way along to the Woodcote Park Golf Club, where he was always sure of a drink from the steward. If he was in the Old Coulsdon area he always called in at 'Cherry Tree Cottage' to see Mr Hollands. In those days 'Cherry Tree Cottage' was the local shop and post office, with a room at the back that was a private social club, thus enabling dad to wet his whistle there. If it was the night shift Mr Hollands would leave a tankard of beer outside under an elderberry bush for him.

In 1945 my husband and I bought 'Plum Tree Cottage' which is next door to 'Cherry Tree Cottage' and the drinking club was still there then, but in about 1946 the property was sold to Mr Diplock and the drinking club was disbanded.

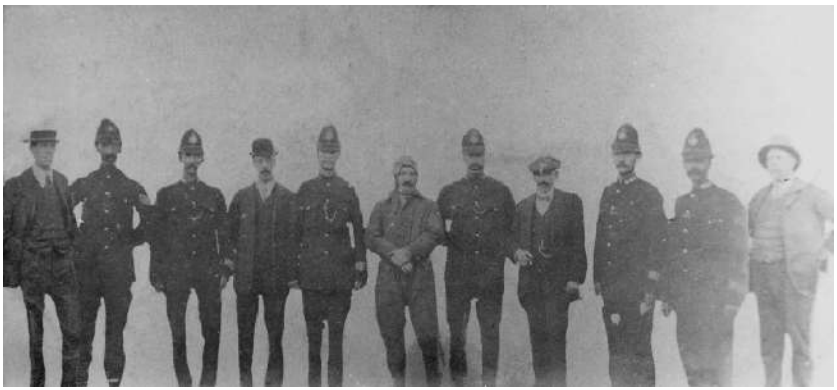
After the First World War Sir Alan Cobham's flying circus came to Croydon aerodrome and dad was one of the PCs on duty at the time. When the show

was over Sir Alan offered any of the PCs on duty a free trip in the aeroplane, an offer that dad took up. He said afterwards that he was really enjoying the flight until he looked down and saw Bandon Hill Cemetery and began to wonder how long it would be before he was down there!

PC 'Bill' Huggett

at Woodcote Park Golf Club

He was also on duty when Charles Lindburgh landed at Croydon in 1927. The crowds were enormous and when Lindburgh stepped into his car to be driven to London dad was one of the PCs who had to stand on the running board of the car to keep the crowds back until they reached their destination in London. Their duty was then over and they had to make their own way back – no Transit vans in those days. He had to catch a tram to Purley and then a bus to Coulsdon. My mum said that when he got in, his uniform was wringing wet from perspiration. The following week he was taken ill with pneumonia and rushed to St Thomas' Hospital. He was seriously ill for weeks, there not even being M & B tablets in those days.



PC 'Bill' Huggett *(3rd from right)* with Alan Cobham at Croydon aerodrome

He was never the same after that and in the following three years caught pneumonia twice more, but he was able to complete his 25 years' service. As a retirement present he was asked if he would like a clock or cash. 'The cash' was his reply and with it he bought my mum a *New World* gas cooker.

For several years after retiring he was a night security guard at Garrards the Crown Jewellers in London but eventually he had to give up because he was losing his memory. This meant my mum and dad had just the police pension to live on, which was £3 a week.

Mum had to pay someone to take dad for walks every day so that he didn't lose his way and came home safely. Even then he would sometimes slip out on his own and would be found directing the traffic, or he would walk to Wallington Police Station. Of course they knew him there and would take him home in one of the new police cars that were becoming more widely available. They were always very kind to him.

Eventually his illness became so bad that he was told he would have to go into Netherne Hospital, where he died three years later, just before the war. While he was in the hospital they took £2 a week out of his pension, leaving mum with just £1 to live on. Were they 'the good old days'?

Dad died in 1938.

MY MUM

My mother was born in Hanworth, Middlesex on 28 April 1876. She had five brothers and one sister. Her eldest brother was George – he was a farrier (blacksmith) in the army during the Boer War and served in South Africa. I only remember seeing him once, when I was about four years old, and he was sitting in a chair with his foot all bandaged and resting on a stool. I was told he had gout. I do not remember his wife. He also had a daughter and a son, whom I never met but was told how the son lost a leg in the First World War. I think they lived at Ashford. Later I heard that Dorothy the daughter lived in a flat in Richmond.

The second brother, William, (Uncle Bill) always came to visit us on Good Friday, bringing an Easter Egg and Rupert Bear annual for me and Billie. He never married and I learned after he had died that he had been engaged and his young lady was working in a munitions factory at Woolwich that was bombed in the First World War. The shock of this made her go funny and she had to go into an asylum. After a few years she was completely well again but she had no family to ask for her release so she had to stay there. Uncle Bill asked if he could marry her and look after her but they would not allow that as it was only

family who could request her release. He spent the rest of his life visiting her in hospital every weekend.

The third brother was Edward (Uncle Ted) – he never married either. When he was young he worked as a navvy, building the underground railway. As a child, mum took me to see him at his lodgings in Teddington and when he was old we went to see him in hospital as he had had both his legs amputated due to sugar diabetes – his legs had become gangrenous. I'm afraid diabetes has been a family curse.

Sarah Ann Huggett née Jeffreys

1876 – 1956

Rosie's mother

My mother's sister Jane – Aunt Jinny to us – came next; we loved her because she spoilt us. She had been abroad a lot with Mr & Mrs Hayes, who had a tea plantation in Ceylon. Aunty was governess to their two children. After three years they came back to England on leave and then went out again for a further three years. So Aunty made that long journey twice, the first time round the Cape of Good Hope and the second time through the Suez Canal. When the children grew too old for a governess Aunty became a lady's maid to the wife of Admiral Symons who was stationed in Malta. It was a very large naval base in those days and I think Aunty had a lovely time there. She became engaged to a Lieutenant Walker and had made her wedding dress and everything was ready for the wedding when mum received a letter to say the wedding was off. Aunty never gave a reason so of course mum and dad thought it was Lieutenant Walker's fault. Many, many years later when Aunty was 90 years old and the last one of her family left, she became very frail and was living with me. The district nurse would come in to give her a bed bath and I helped. I noticed a growth at the top of her leg that was very ugly as it was like a bunch of dead skin. Aunty asked the nurse if she knew what it was and she said 'That's nothing, just

dead skin – you could have had that cut away years ago'. When the nurse had gone Aunty said to me 'I want to tell you something I have never told anyone else. It was because of that thing on my leg that I wouldn't get married. I thought it was cancer'. I could have cried my eyes out, what a terrible waste. Aunty would have made a wonderful wife and mother.

Mum's brother Fred came next. He was married to Aunty Emmie and they had four children – Freddie, Dorothy, Gladys and Arthur. They had a market garden at Hampton and we loved going there for holidays.

Mum's youngest brother was Charlie; he was married to Aunt Mary and they also lived at Hampton. Uncle Charlie worked for the Water Company there. They had three children – Jinny, Charlie and Winnie.

Although mum's real name was Sarah Ann she was always called Nancy. When she left school she went into service and worked her way up to being cook, but when her mother died in 1896 she returned home to look after her father and brothers. Aunty Jinny was abroad then. Although mum was at home she used to help in the local post office-cum-shop and when there was a race meeting at Kempton Park she went to the manor house where the members of the Jockey Club were staying and cooked for them – it was there that she became famous for her steak and kidney pie and it was put on the menu as 'Jeffreys' Pie'.

By the time my dad had come home from the Boer War her father was dead and her brothers had left home so there was nothing to stop them getting married. I think she found married life rather hard to start with. The flat they lived in at Kennington was up three flights of stairs and they had to carry all their water up from the ground floor. She said the only good thing about it was that it overlooked the Oval cricket ground.

After about a year they had Charlie. Mum said that he was a beautiful boy with black curly hair. He was turned three when brother George was born. George was a very weak baby and always crying. Mum was so worried that she took him along to Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, where they said he was very ill and kept him there. Mum went every day to see him and she said that they starved him right back to his birth weight and then started to feed him on blood from liver then gradually onto other foods. After about four weeks he was allowed home but mum had to take him back every week for a while.

As they thought the country air would be better for both the children they came to Coulsdon and eventually – after Charlie had died – to 45 Woodman Road. Mum loved Woodman Road and made a happy home for us there. She

loved the garden and spent hours working in it – she said that a garden was the thing she missed most up in Lambeth. Woodman Road was a nice road to live in. It was a *cul-de-sac* and so did not have much traffic – only the baker, milkman, coalman and dustman came along it. They all had horse-drawn vehicles until I was about eight and then if a car did come up the road it caused great excitement. We always played out in the road – it was quite safe and in the winter the lamp lighter came around lighting the street lamps and we continued to play by the light of them. There was nothing to fear at all. At the front of our house were allotments (where the Jehovah's Witnesses Church is now). Beyond the allotments there was a railway cutting along which the trains for Tattenham Corner ran – for many years these were steam trains. Beyond the railway there were lovely cornfields reaching to the woods and then beyond to what is now called The Mount. We had lovely times in those fields and woods. We would take a bottle of water and a sandwich and spend all day there. I remember once lying in the field and watching a skylark. We all kept very still and watched her land. It took us a long time until we eventually found the nest with eggs in but we didn't touch – just looked and then we went away. We had a camp in the woods and we used to smoke 'wiffy' which is the vine of the creeper called 'Old Man's Beard'. Our parents never worried about us because there was not the crime there is today.

Mum with her eldest child Charlie

Mum made many friends in Coulsdon but her best friend was Mrs Woolvin who kept a sweet shop in Chipstead Valley Road.

I was born in 1916 and Billie in 1919 and mum called us her second family because George was nine years old when I was born.

Mum was the strong one of the family. If we had to be told off or punished for anything it was mum who did it. (Dad was a bit of a softy). However if there were any major decisions to be made dad would talk them over with mum, such as when they bought 45 Woodman Road. At the same time Aunty Jinny decided to buy No 47 for her old age, but she would share the rent of No 47 with mum and dad. At that time Aunty Jinny was such a wanderer that she did not need a home of her own, but having a room with us gave her a base and somewhere to call home. Aunty never did move into No 47; even when she was too old to work she was always away visiting someone. She did not seem to be able to settle in one place for long.

Mum was just the opposite – she loved her home and was content to stay there. In about 1949 she contracted sugar diabetes and had to have injections for the rest of her life.

Mum died in 1956.

The lady who ran the welfare for mother and baby in the Methodist Church Hall, Coulsdon, held a tea party in her garden in Reddown Road. 1919.

(Rosie is extreme right, in front of her mother)

MUM

What does mum think of as she sits in her chair?
Does she think of her children who are no longer there?
Her husband is dead.
Her children are wed.
But she sits all alone
in the house we call home.

We love her a lot
but in different ways.
As we all have our memories
of childhood days.

Our mum was the centre
of the world to us then.
Whilst dad went to work.
which was the lot of all men.

Whatever went wrong mum was there,
to give us her help and loving care.
When the time came and we started to roam,
we all said goodbye to our childhood home.

But the ties are still there
and wherever we go
we remember our mum
in her favourite chair.

Many years have gone by.
Mum is no longer there.
The house is quite empty
and so is her chair.

But we still have our memories
of that good lady, our mum,
who turned that old house
into our family home.

Now that I'm old I look back and see,
just how selfish young people can be.

Rosie's Mum
10 June 1943

MY BROTHERS—

Charlie

There is not a lot to write about Charlie because he died before I was born. He died of rheumatic fever and it was a great shock to everyone because he had always been a strong and healthy child. I have two photos of him in my room, so he has never been forgotten.

George

George was born on 11 March 1908. He was nearly nine years older than me, which meant he rather spoilt me. He was a nice well-mannered and kind boy. When he left school at 14 mum and dad both felt that because he had been so ill as a baby an outdoor job would be best for him and as he spent most of his spare time at weekends 'caddying' at Woodcote Park Golf Club perhaps golf was the answer. Dad approached the Professional, Mr Kinch, and asked if he would take George as an apprentice. Mr Kinch agreed to this although it meant George would get no wages for five years, just tips from members if they wanted George to play golf with them or give them lessons. When he was not doing that he was in the workshop repairing old clubs and making new clubs. When he was 19 years he got a job as Assistant Pro at the Royal Porthcawl Golf Club in Glamorgan, South Wales. His boss was the Professional Mr Hutchison (Hutch). He was a dear old man and thought the world of George. He found lodgings for George with Mr &

George at the Royal Porthcawl Golf Club

***ca.*1928**

Mrs Wilkins who lived in Victoria Road, Porthcawl. George stayed with them until he married. He married Annie Flower, who worked as a waitress in the club. When they married they lived at 2 Bungalow Avenue, Porthcawl.

Billie

Billie was born on 31 October 1919. We spent most of our childhood rowing because I wanted to be boss because I was the oldest. Billie wanted to be boss because he was a boy. When he left school he went to work for Mr Crisp who was an electrician. When the war came he joined up as a dispatch rider and then he was one of the first to volunteer for the Airborne Division. We were all very proud of him in his red beret. He served in Tunisia, Sicily and was taken prisoner at Arnhem. It was a great day when war ended and he came home. Frank (my husband) found him a job with the building firm he worked for and Billie stayed in the building trade until he retired. He married Lilly and lived in Cheam.

ME

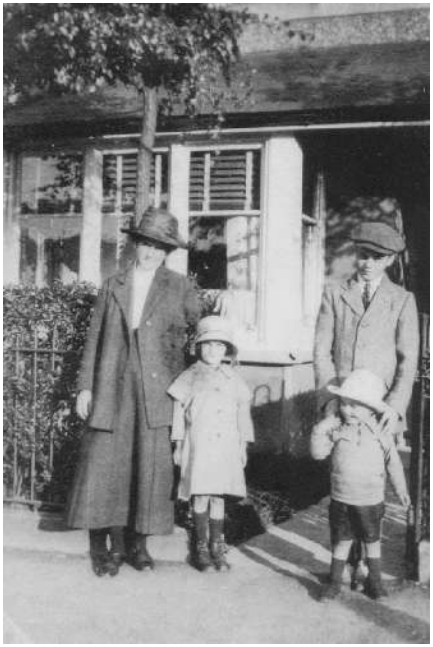
I was born on 11 October 1916. I was called Rosie because when George (my brother) first saw me he said what rosy cheeks I had.

The first thing I can remember is waking up in a strange bed in a strange room with the window in a different place and Aunty Jinny in bed with me. George came into the room fully dressed and pulled the curtains back and told us it was time to get up. This made Aunt Jinny start singing *'It's nice to get up in the morning, but it's nicer to stay in bed'*. I remember later being on a boat with a lot of people and the boat was rolling from side to side and I was frightened and started to scream. Aunty tried to stop me but I was too frightened to stop and all the other people were giving me black looks. I think that is why I like to keep my feet on *terra firma*. I know this took place when I was three because Aunty had taken George and me down to Brighton while Billie was being born.

When Billie was a year old we all went into Croydon to a studio to have our photos taken. Billie sat on a chair with George on one side of him and I on the other. I remember looking down on the floor and seeing a puddle. Billie had wet himself, which I thought was a terrible thing to do.

MY HOME – 45 WOODMAN ROAD

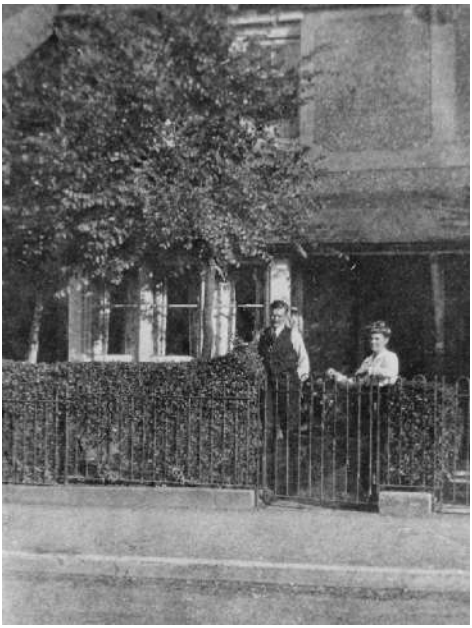
Mum and dad moved into No 45 in 1912, renting at first and then in about 1922 the builder offered the tenants the chance to buy. Dad took advantage of the offer and with the help of the Hearts of Oak Building Society he became



Mum, George, Rosie and Billie outside 45 Woodman Road

PC 'Bill' Huggett and his wife Sarah outside 45 Woodman Road

Early 1920s



a home owner, which was very unusual in those days. The man who lived in No 47 did not purchase the property so my mother's sister – Aunty Jinny, also with the help of the Hearts of Oak, bought it as an investment for her old age.

As I have said before – Aunty Jinny was a single lady who lived an exciting life. She was governess to two children whose parents owned a tea plantation in Ceylon and when they decided to go out there to live she went with them.

Aunty Jinny *(front)* with mum
Rear of 45 Woodman Road. *ca.* 1926

As young children we would sit in the kitchen of 45 Woodman Road, totally enthralled, listening to the exciting stories she told us about her travels and the life style she experienced overseas. While in Ceylon Aunty was friendly with the nanny of some children on a neighbouring plantation and by coincidence her father was Mr Green the blacksmith at Lacey Green, Old Coulsdon. They remained friends for many years. The last I heard of Miss Green was that she went to live in Caterham. When Aunty's young charges became too old for her to teach they came back to England for schooling and Aunty went as companion to their Aunt, who was the wife of Admiral Symon, the Governor of Malta. My Aunty had a marvellous life there and she would tell my brother and me wonderful stories about her life in Ceylon and Malta. She returned to England before the First World War but by now she was housekeeper to the family she was with in Ceylon – they were now living in Hampshire. When she bought No 47 Woodman Road, I think she really did intend to settle down and live there – but somehow she never did! She would often come to stay

with us, but after a while she would be off visiting someone else. She could not seem to settle. She would have loved life today with all the tearing about.

You will notice in the photos of 45 Woodman Road that there was a tree in the front garden. Dad had to get rid of it because the roots were creeping under the house, and the pretty railings and gate were collected by the Government for the war effort to help make munitions. I often wonder if they were in fact used or whether they are still lying in a dump somewhere!

We loved living in Woodman Road; beyond the allotments and the railway cutting were cornfields and two woods. We called them the First Wood and Second Wood. We played mostly in the First Wood because it was not as thick and dense as the other.

From our back windows we could see the chalk pits and farmland belonging to Cane Hill Hospital. There were cows, pigs, chickens and fields of potatoes. In those days Cane Hill was almost self-supporting.

The front room of our house was what we called The Best Room. In the bay window we had a large rocking horse and we were always asking if we could go in the front room.

The kitchen was the family room. It had a black fire grate with an oven at the side and a black iron kettle stood on the top for hot water. In later years the grate was taken out and a tiled fireplace with an open coal fire put in its place, but my early memories are of the black grate and making toast in front of it. My mother used to buy a basin of beef dripping from the steward of Woodcote Golf Club and someone used to bring it to us every Monday evening. It cost a shilling and it was lovely on hot toast.

The scullery had an iron gas cooker, a sink with one tap (cold) and in the corner there was a copper where mum did the washing. Also when we were small Billie and I bathed in the copper, but later on a full-length bath was fitted with a gas water heater. When not in use a wooden top was laid across the bath, which served as a table to stand things on. Our proper dinner table was in the kitchen, where we had all our meals together. (No snacks or meals on trays in those days). The kitchen table played a big part of my early life. I can remember playing under the table with my dolls and tying a piece of string from one leg to another and pretending it was a washing line for my dolls' clothes.

On a winter's evening we all sat round the table and played board and card games (draughts, snakes and ladders), but card games were the favourite. From a very early age I could play crib, whist and Newmarket. Mum would get out the big toffee tin in which she kept her buttons and instead of

gambling with money we were given ten buttons each. Another card game was Lexicon – it was a pack of cards with the letters of the alphabet on each one and the idea was to build up a word. I suppose it was the forerunner of Scrabble.

Mealtime was the main function for the table – all our meals were eaten at the table (no trays in front of the TV). Three times a day, (breakfast, dinner and tea) the table was laid with a nice white cloth, cutlery, and glasses for water, and we all sat down together unless dad was on duty. Mum cooked the dinner in the scullery, which was next to the kitchen, and when she strained the vegetables down the sink she left the tap running to clear the sink of the smell of the vegetables. One day when Aunty Mary (a very old friend of mum's) was staying with us she could see it would soon be dinner time so she went to the WC, which was just outside in the backyard. We were all at the table waiting to start dinner but Aunty Mary was still missing, and we never started a meal until everyone was seated, so after a few more minutes mum went out to see if Aunty Mary was all right. She tapped on the WC door and called 'Mary are you all right?' Mary replied 'Oh! Sarah, I can't stop weeing'. Mum answered, 'Don't worry, dear, I think I know the problem'. Mum came back into the scullery and turned the tap off and the water stopped trickling down the drain outside. Aunty Mary was cured!!

On another occasion, mum, dad, Billie and I were all sitting at the table, on which mum had just placed a lovely hot meat pie, when there was a knock at the front door. We were all surprised because we didn't get many visitors who came to the front door. Dad got up and went along the passage to open the front door. The next thing I heard was a strange man's voice saying, 'Hello, Bill, you old bugger'. We could tell from the silence that, for once, dad was speechless. After a while he brought the stranger into the kitchen to meet us all and said 'This is Noah and I am his uncle'. Mum had heard of Noah but had never met him. She made him welc-

Uncle Noah with Dad, Rosie & Billie, early 1920s

ome and he sat and enjoyed the pie with us all. It appears that dad's eldest sister was married with a little boy before my gran had my dad, which meant my dad's nephew was older than his uncle! Over the years they had grown up like brothers until Noah was 17, when he went off to America. Over the years they just heard from him at Christmas time. This was his first return home. He had brought his wife with him to England but that day she had stayed back in Tonbridge, where they were staying with other members of the family.

He told us of his life in America and seemed to have done quite well for himself. He had a nice house on Long Island and had a yellow taxicab, which didn't mean much to me at the time. We saw quite a lot of him and his wife Margaret during that visit and they also made several later visits. They had no children and when I was 14 and left school they asked if I would like to go and live with them in America. I was horrified at the idea. I could not imagine living without mum and dad and Woodman Road. Over the years we had learnt to call him Charles because Margaret did not like the name Noah.

Outside the back door of the house in Woodman Road, was a concrete yard leading to the toilet and a path going the full length of the garden. On one side of the path were flowers; the other side was for vegetables, a pear tree and gooseberry bushes.

Opposite the back door was a gate leading to a passage that went out to the front. That was the entrance we always used – the front door was just for visitors and the postman. One day there was a large snake curled up in the passage; when mum saw it she just ran to her mangle, lifted one of the heavy weights off it, ran back to the snake and dropped the weight on its head! You could always rely on mum in an emergency! It so happened that the dustmen came round just after, so they took the dead snake away on their cart.

I remember when I was about four years old I was ill and mum made a bed up for me in the kitchen. The doctor came and looked down my throat, gave a grunt and asked mum for a teaspoon. She gave him one that had the head of Kitchener on the top of the handle. He put it right down my throat and hooked something up. He showed it to me and it was like a blob of blood and he said 'You'll be all right now.' I was often ill as a child. If there was anything going I caught it! When I was seven I caught diphtheria and was taken by fever ambulance to the isolation hospital at Beddington. I was there for three months and parents were only allowed to come and look at us through the window. There were lots of other children there because in those days there were no injections against disease. The only thing we had then was vaccination against smallpox, usually done when you were a baby but if you

were vaccinated when you were older you wore a scarlet ribbon around the arm where you had been injected. This was to let people know to be careful and not to bang your arm.

DIPHTHERIA

I crept into the ward to have a peep
at baby Keith who was fast asleep.

I stood on tiptoe for a better view.
I was not much more than a baby too.

Nurse came along and held my hand.
She tried to make me understand…

That Keith had gone to a better land.
Above the clouds way up high.
We must not ask the reason why.

He looked so peaceful just lying there.
With his rosy cheeks and fair curly hair.

He had just gone away, to see God they said.
In other words – baby Keith was dead.

He had come to the hospital a few days ago.
Diphtheria we know is a terrible foe.

SMITHAM SCHOOL

I started school in 1921 when I was five years old. It was called Smitham and the infants' school was in Chipstead Valley Road, The entrance was where the traffic lights are now and there was a path from the gate to the school. We were not allowed to play in that area as it was a garden and there were about ten small plots that were the children's gardens. There were about two or three children to each plot and we were given gardening lessons. We could bring flower seeds from home and we were taught how to plant them and look after them. We loved gardening lessons as it gave us a chance to chatter.

There were also gardens for the senior boys; they were to the left of the

Woodcote Grove Road entrance and reached up to Malcolm Road, The senior boys grew mostly vegetables. When war came in 1939 the air-raid shelter was built where the gardens were and I think there is a portable building there now.

When I first went to school it was winter time. My mother took me into the headmistress – Mrs Read – and then after putting my name in the register Mrs Read took me to my classroom. I was very lucky then because the teacher there was Mrs Gates who happened to live near me in Woodman Road, so it was rather nice that my first teacher was someone that I knew.

The first thing I noticed in the classroom was a lovely big fire with a big fireguard around it and in the fireplace were about four medicine bottles full of milk – put there to keep warm. I was to learn later that they were for the children who lived too far away to go home at dinner time and so had to bring sandwiches. I also noticed a cane hanging by the blackboard but that didn't worry me very much as I knew that if I behaved myself I would be OK – my mother also had one hanging on a picture in the kitchen at home but I never remember her or my father using it. It was there to let me and my brother know that we had to behave ourselves at the dinner table and it really did work, as we never moved from the table until the meal was over and we were given permission to leave.

During morning school, after the calling of the register, we had prayers and a scripture lesson, followed by ordinary lessons until 10.45 which was playtime for 15 minutes. More lessons followed until 12 o'clock, when Mrs Read rang a bell for us all to go home to dinner. We always knew when the bell was going to ring because at Cane Hill Hospital a big hooter went off every day at midday, and could be heard all over Coulsdon and beyond. If the hooter went off at any other time it meant that there was either a fire at the hospital or one of the patients had escaped. In those days the patients were kept locked up and not allowed out like they are now. They all wore grey clothes and the men wore red ties so that if one did get out it was easy to recognise him.

At 1.15 pm the school bell on the roof of the senior school would ring and we knew then that we had 15 minutes to get back to school.

Afternoon lessons were much nicer – such as making models from plasticine, painting, drawing, needlework, raffia work and sometimes our teacher would read us a story. At 3.30 (in the infants') it was time to go home.

Most of the children's fathers either worked at Cane Hill or on the railway. There were plenty of jobs on the railway as on the Coulsdon North site there was an engineering works where the large steam engines were overhauled,

and there was also a very large goods yard. Also quite a lot of men worked at the chalk pits. My dad, being the village policeman, knew most of the people whilst he was working his eight-hour shift, with two other policemen covering the other 16 hours.

There has always been a butcher's shop in Chipstead Valley Road opposite the school. When I was small the butcher's name was Ernie Hawkins. It was quite exciting on a Monday when the farmers bought their cattle to the butcher's to be slaughtered. They stopped their carts in Chipstead Valley Road and the animals were unloaded and driven down the alley to the slaughterhouse, which was at the back of the butcher's shop. Sometimes a lively bullock or sheep would escape and go tearing down the road towards *The Red Lion*. From behind the safety of the school railings the children would thoroughly enjoy this excitement.

Next to the alley was a little shop (I think it is an estate agent's now) which sold groceries and was owned by Granny Hawkins (mother of the butcher). She was very clever at making up ointments and medicines from herbs. It was cheaper to go to her for a bottle of medicine or ointment than to call the doctor.

Sometimes when we came out of school in the afternoon there would be a man standing outside with a handcart. He would tell the children to go home and ask their mothers for some rags and in exchange he would give the child a balloon or goldfish. He did not come very often because not many mothers had rags to give away.

About twice a year Day's Fair came to Coulsdon – it pitched its caravans, tents, roundabouts and swings on the piece of ground where St Aidan's Roman Catholic Church now stands. The children from the fair always came to school for the week they were here.

We always had half a day's holiday on Empire Day. We would have a short lesson about the Empire, then draw a Union Jack with crayons, sing *God Save The King* and then go home for the rest of the day.

Always on Derby Day we had a holiday from school. As I said previously, this was because of the volume of traffic going through Coulsdon.

I must have been about eight when I left the infants and went up into the 'Big School'. We were all very scared at going up and at first we were all very well behaved. My first teacher there was Miss Kerr who lived in one of the houses opposite the infants' school in Chipstead Valley Road. In the hall of the Big

School there was a piano and in the mornings when we first arrived at school we stayed in the playground until a teacher blew a whistle and then we all

Smitham School, *ca.* 1926/27

Rosie's brother Billie is extreme right, second row

lined up in order of our classes. First the lowest class marched into the hall, with the other classes following. A teacher would be playing marching music on the piano. We would all line up across the hall and when we were all in Mr Perry the headmaster would come from his office and stand on the stage in front of us. Each teacher would be standing with the children from their class. We then had prayers, sang a hymn, and if Mr Perry had an announcement to make he would make it then.

It was not compulsory, but we were asked if we would wear school uniform. I was lucky, my mum said yes. It was a white blouse under a navy gym tunic which had the school badge on it. (A large white S on a navy blue shield). We also had navy blue hats with the badge on the front. The boys had caps.

When we were about 12 years old we started to take Country Dancing seriously because the best dancers were picked for a team to compete in a dancing festival at Sir Arthur Glynn's house at Ewell. I think by then the boys

were having football at the rec. in Marlpit Lane. They had to march from school to the rec. – no school buses in those days! We also started to have swimming lessons at Reedham Orphanage baths. We had to make our own way there during the dinner hour. I took a bus to the old Council Offices (next to the Fire Station) in Brighton Road, Purley and then walked from there along Old Lodge Lane to the orphanage. Miss Mead, the teacher in the top class, took about 20 girls for swimming lessons, but not until we were 12 or 13. We left school when we were 14 in those days so at the age of 13 you were almost 'grown up'!

About once a term one of the school governors would visit the school. The one I remember the most was Lady Proctor. When she came into the class we all had to stand up and when she said 'Good morning/afternoon children', we had to answer 'Good morning/afternoon madam' in loud clear voices. When she had looked at the register and asked a few questions about the lesson in progress she would go on to the next class. Once a week the older girls had cookery lessons. Miss Greystone was the cookery teacher and the boys were taught woodwork by Mr Barber. These lessons took place in a big hut away from the main school building.

When I was half way through the big school things seemed to become more modern – we had a new headmaster, Mr Tilson, and also several new young teachers. The names I can recall are Mr White, Mr Payne, Miss Macintosh and Miss Mead who took the top class of girls. She had also formed a netball team. A lot of new gym equipment arrived and we were taught to balance on a Swedish bench, jump over a wooden horse and to do tumbling on a long mat.

We also had 'Houses', Red, Green, Blue and Yellow. Each class was split up evenly into these colours and we were given points for any good work we had done. At the end of the year the winning house was presented with a shield which was hung up in the school hall with a ribbon the colour of the winning house tied to it.

Although we did not have television or even radio in those days, all the children at school were very interested in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. All we knew about it was from the pictures in the newspapers, but all the children supported either Oxford or Cambridge and about two weeks before the race the sweet shops sold little light blue or dark blue rosettes made from celluloid. Nearly every child wore one in the colour of his choice of team and it was quite common to hear children shouting at each other 'Dirty old Oxford' or 'Dirty old Cambridge'. We even had little rhymes which we sang.

I can remember two of them—

Cambridge upstairs doing up his braces
Oxford downstairs winning all the races.

Oxford the winner Cambridge the sinner
Put him in a match box and float him down the river.

As you can see I supported Oxford!

FAMILY WALKS AND OUTINGS

I enjoyed going to school but I also enjoyed weekends and holidays. On a Saturday morning in the summer mum would give us a large basket and we would go up into the fields collecting dandelion heads, which she used for making wine. For doing this we were given 2d (two old pence) each, which would pay for us to go to the pictures in the afternoon. The cinema was in Malcolm Road – only silent films in those days but nearly all the kids in the village went on a Saturday afternoon. On Sunday we stayed in the garden in the morning – no playing out in the road. In the afternoon we went to Sunday School at St Andrew's Church and after tea we went for a walk with mum and dad. We always knew which pub dad was making for by the route we took. If we went over the wooden bridge towards Woodmansterne we knew mum and dad would stop at *The Woodman* for a drink. If we went along Chipstead Valley and up Portnalls Road we knew we were going to *The White Hart* at Chipstead. However if we went down Lion Green Road, we would be going over Farthing Down to the Welcome Tea Rooms and farm and on through Devils Den to *The Fox* on Coulsdon Common. Sometimes we would not go over Farthing Down but carry on up Marlpit Lane, having a short rest on the seat that was half way up. It had been put there by some thoughtful Squire. At the top of Marlpit Lane we would turn left round the pond and over to the thatched Round House (now long gone). We would go through a gap in the hedge into a field (it is the Recreation Ground now). By the gap in the hedge, just before entering the field, the first thing we would see was a stone – it was about two feet high and had one word on it. From what I gathered from my dad I think the word was ‘Charringtons’ and whenever we reached this stone my dad would tap it with his stick, look at me and say ‘Rosie, someday this stone will be a pub!’ It never did become a pub but in later years *The Tudor Rose* was built just a little further up Coulsdon Road.

After crossing the field and walking a little way in the woods we rejoined

Above:

Billie far left, Rosie standing behind Alan Croll. Doris Wickens standing behind (?). Girl on bicycle Freda Croll. Johnny Phillips and John Crisp. Woodman Road, 1929

Above:
Sunday School outing to Bognor Regis. 1926

Right:
Out-of-school activity
Billie and Rosie
1929

Coulsdon Road, opposite ‘Cherry Tree Cottage’. Mum and dad would stop to have a chat with Mr Quitterton, who had tuberculosis and spent a lot of time lying on a bed in a shed in the front garden of 214 Coulsdon Road (which is now ‘Plum Tree Cottage’). Mum and we children would start to walk slowly home down Coulsdon Road, while dad popped in to see Mr Hollands in ‘Cherry Tree Cottage’, where one of the rooms at the back of the shop was used as a social club for locals. Dad knew he could get some refreshment there but it was not long before he caught up with us on our walk back home. We used to love these walks as we always sat outside the pub with a lemonade and Bath biscuits. Sometimes we walked to Woodcote Park Golf Club where dad would go round the back for ‘a quick one’ from the steward. We would begin walking slowly back over the golf course and dad would catch us up. When we reached the part of the golf course that backs on to The Chase we often heard music, because, someone there – or so we were told – worked for Marconi. Anyway there were tall poles with lots of wires in the garden of this house and we often heard the church service from St Martin-in-the-Fields. We used to sit on the grass listening to this and to us it was magic as it was the first wireless we had heard.

On at least one Sunday evening during the spring my parents took Billie and me across the fields to the Model Village. After spending a few minutes at the pond and then looking at the stocks we would walk down Silver Lane looking at and enjoying the daffodils in bloom. When we reached the end of Silver Lane we carried on into Foxley Lane and down to Purley where by the Fountain we caught a bus back to Coulsdon. Before we reached Purley we always stopped to look at the garden of one of the houses in Foxley Lane. The garden sloped up from the road and most of it was rockery with a waterfall coming from the top of the slope into a pond at the bottom which we were able to look at from the road. It was the first time we had seen a waterfall in someone’s garden. In the summer we made the same trip but instead of going down Silver Lane we walked down Rose Walk enjoying the sight and smell of the roses.

Sometimes in the summer we would all go to Hampton (by train) to spend the day with Uncle Fred. He had a large nurseries and grew tomatoes and lilies in greenhouses. There were also lots of fruit trees.

Another favourite place mum and dad took us to was Hampton Court Palace. We usually went on Easter Monday and often we would meet Uncle Fred and his family there. It seemed that it was tradition to go the Hampton Court on Easter Monday.

We often went to London Zoo. We could all get in free because dad was a

Metropolitan policeman. I loved going to the zoo!

In 1924 we went to the Wembley Exhibition. We travelled by bus and train. I remember the Jamaican House best because we were shown around by Mr Chadwick who was in charge of the Jamaican exhibition. He was a great friend of mum and dad's and he owned a banana plantation in Jamaica and had been asked to organise the exhibition for the Jamaicans. I met his secretary, who was a black lady, then I watched a black man making a stool from wood and it was given to me when it was finished. The black man shook my hand which was a thrill for me as I had never seen black people before.

For our summer holiday we often went to Liss in Hampshire and stayed at the Grange. The people Aunty Jinny worked for in Ceylon had retired there. As their children were by now away at boarding school, Aunty stayed on as housekeeper and when Mr & Mrs Hayes went away for the summer we went down to stay with Aunty.

Now I am old (in my 80s) I look back and realise we had a good and happy childhood and the BEST MUM AND DAD IN THE WORLD.

COULSDON – IN THE EARLY 1920s

I loved going for walks with my mother when I was a young child. As we went through the village she would stop to speak to people and I would stand and listen to what they had to say. I don't think I was really nosy, I was just interested in everyone. I suppose that is why I can remember such a lot of things about my childhood, and don't forget there was no wireless or TV to cause distractions. If we were lucky on a Saturday afternoon we were given 2d to go to the pictures. The cinema was in Malcolm Road in those days, but even then Clara Bow didn't interest me as much as Rene Ghent who was the lady playing the piano! She was real and her brother was in my class at school. Clara Bow and her cowboys meant no more to me than Peter Rabbit and his sisters Flopsie, Mopsie and Cotton Tail who I read about in my books at home.

Mrs Rice, a friend of my mother, lived in the last house before the railway bridge up Woodcote Grove Road, and one day we were talking to her in her garden when we saw a fox come tearing over the fields and over the bridge. He turned left and went down onto the railway lines and went racing along the lines towards Smitham Station. Not long after 'The Hunt' arrived; the riders were all looking hot and bothered, and the dogs had lost the scent. They called out to Mrs Rice to know if she had seen which way the fox had

gone. She at once said yes and pointed along the railway lines towards Chipstead. 'The Hunt' at once went back along the fields towards Chipstead, while the fox was safely going the opposite way towards Smitham. At the time I thought Mrs Rice must have very poor eyesight but I now realise she was one of the original Animal Rights campaigners!

My very first 'Best Friends' in the early 1920s were Doris Wickens and May Phillips. Doris lived next door to me in Woodman Road and was six weeks younger than I was. May, who was four days younger than I was, lived in the last house on the right hand side of Woodman Road. It had a large single storey extension on the side of it which was a laundry in which Mr and Mrs Phillips worked very hard. Often, weather permitting, there were lines full of white sheets hanging out in their back garden. Mr and Mrs Phillips had regular laundry to do for the doctors at Cane Hill Hospital and it was delivered to them in a three-wheeled handcart. We all loved to help with the task of returning the fresh linen back to the staff quarters. We would merrily push the cart down Woodman Road, along Chipstead Valley Road, and up Portnalls to the back entrance of Cane Hill. Once the laundry had been returned we could then retrace our steps home with an empty cart. What fun – the cart was there just waiting for us eager children to climb in and ride down Portnalls at full speed. With a wiser head on now I wonder how we escaped serious injury, but we did and I can only remember the fun.

May Phillips had three older sisters and two older brothers, (later another boy and girl were born) so she did not need Doris and me quite as much as we needed her. I was an only girl with brother George nine years older – brother Billie arrived three years later. Doris had a sister Norah and also a brother Aidan who arrived about the same time as Billy. Norah was deaf and dumb and younger than her sister Doris; she lived away from home in Shrewsbury at a Convent School for deaf children so we only saw her at Christmas and summer holiday time. We tried to include her in our games and she tried to teach us sign language. Their mother was a lovely lady but she suffered from very poor health and was often in St Thomas' Hospital in London.

Doris and I were very close, we went to school together and when we came home we played out the front on 'our bank' – but not on Sundays – then we could only talk to each other over the back garden fence until it was time for Sunday School. I went to St Andrew's whilst Doris went to St Aidan's which was on the left going up Woodcote Grove Road. I am afraid it is now just an old hall next to the woodyard, but in those days it was a well-kept building with a large lawn at the side of it on which stood a nice bungalow where

Father McFadden lived. It was a very busy church and every summer they had a garden party on the lawn (where the woodyard is now).

The last house in Woodman Road was No 55 and that was where the tarmacadam road ended (and still does). From there on it was grass and hedges up to the old stone bridge that spanned the railway. The bridge was no longer in use and had iron railings at each end blocking it off. However over the years somehow some of the railings had disappeared so it was possible to slip through and walk over the bridge. We would sit by the bridge and watch the trains come out of the cutting and watched until they disappeared towards Chipstead or we would move along the bank to our left and sit and look down on the houses in Chipstead Valley Road. Mr Wakeling had his forge there which was always busy and interesting to watch. On the site where the Catholic Church now stands was a spare piece of ground that didn't seem to be used for anything except twice a year Day's Fair came there and that really was exciting for us to sit on 'our bank' and watch the caravans arriving and then watch them erect swings and roundabouts. It really was an entertaining time for us. Mr Day had a son and daughter who came to our school (Smitham) while they were in the area. At other times we just sat about talking, playing games or catching grasshoppers and watching them hop. It is surprising what you can find to do if you haven't a television!

Sometimes when we were sitting we could hear the engines of aeroplanes revving up at Croydon Aerodrome, which was not that far away 'as the crow flies'. When we heard the sound getting nearer we would climb up on the fence to get as near as possible to it and we would wave like mad. I suppose this meant the same to us as a rocket going to the moon means to the children of today. When you realise how quiet Coulsdon was in those days, the roar of an engine up in the sky was shattering, for usually the only sounds heard besides people were trains, bicycle bells, the clip-clop of horses' hooves, occasionally a car or motor bike and of course every day at 12 noon the hooter at Cane Hill boomed out to let everyone know it was midday. There were not so many wristwatches in those days. The aeroplane was very new and I can remember waking up at night hearing the drone of a plane which I found very soothing for they were prop engines not shrieking jets like today. The plane I heard at night was the mail plane that left Croydon for France every night at 1 a . m .

When Doris was 14 years old, Mrs Wickens – her mother – died and Doris went to live with her aunt and uncle on their farm in Ireland. We wrote letters to each other and when she came over to visit her dad it was like old times,

but as time went by the visits became less frequent although we both continued to write to each other. We both married and then the war came. Doris would often send us some of her farm butter to help with our rations and I sent her any clothes that my two girls had grown out of as she had five children and found the clothes useful.

After the war her husband died and she and her young son managed the farm on their own. In the 1960s she came over for a visit and I remember sitting out in the back garden talking about life and she turned to me and said 'Rosie, do you manage all right with the electric?' I was a bit surprised but said 'Yes it's fine.' She then said 'I had saved enough money to pay to have the electric put on to my farm this year, but I decided to buy a young heifer instead. The electric can wait until next year'. I realised then the different paths our lives had gone along but all those years later we were still 'Best Friends' despite the fact that Doris was Roman Catholic and I was Protestant – so it can be done!

CANE HILL HOSPITAL

People look at Cane Hill Hospital now and see an ugly derelict building but I can remember when it was a thriving hospital and farm, and it had a great impact on the village of Coulsdon. Many of the children had fathers who worked there and mothers who used to be nurses there. Besides the attendants to the patients, the hospital employed builders to maintain the property, farmers to look after the livestock, butchers to slaughter the animals for food, gardeners to grow vegetables, cobblers to mend boots, needlewomen to look after the clothes and linen and staff for a large laundry. So you can see the hospital employed hundreds of people besides the nursing staff. In fact Cane Hill was almost self-supporting and created much employment for the village.

Some of the patients who were not too ill were encouraged to work with the tradesmen. One man who had been a patient at the hospital for years worked as a gardener in the vegetable garden, which is where the Lion Green car park is now. His name was 'Gaffer' and he spent much time looking over the fence. Everyone used to stop to chat to him and sometimes he was allowed to go out as far as Mr Powell's shop to buy some tobacco. Mr Powell's shop later became Cooper's – it was on the corner of Woodman Road and Chipstead Valley Road.

From an early age we became used to hearing the hooter of Cane Hill as it blew at midday. It was in the tall tower at the hospital. The only other time it blew was if a patient escaped or if there was a fire and *always* on 11

November at 11 o'clock and again at two minutes past eleven and during those two minutes EVERYONE stood still, the men having removed their hats. THAT was remembrance.

The Lodge Cottage was near the junction of Lion Green Road and Brighton Road, (demolished 2001). It was a pretty, well-kept cottage where the gatekeeper and his family lived. The big iron gates at the beginning of the drive up to the hospital were always kept shut and the gatekeeper opened the gates for any traffic wanting to go up to the main building. No patients were allowed to go out on their own in those days, but often we would see a line of men out with two attendants. Sometimes small groups of ladies were seen out with an escort of nurses. The ladies wore very plain dresses and the men wore grey suits, black boots, flat caps and red ties so that if they escaped they were easily recognised.

I remember being out for a walk on Farthing Down one Sunday with my mother and father (dad being off duty from the police force) and dad looked across to the woods (where Mead Way is now) and noticed a man asleep under the hedge. Dad recognised him as a patient so he told mum to take us home and he went down to the man to take him back to Cane Hill. Later dad told us that the man was quite willing to go back and when dad got him there they had only just missed him and that was why the hooter had gone off.

From the back windows of our house in Woodman Road we could overlook the valley to the large meadow in which the cows from Cane Hill grazed. In the left-hand corner of this field was a gate that led to the cow shed. Early in the morning the cows would be let out into the field and would make their way across the field eating the nice green grass but when it approached two o'clock in the afternoon they all made their way back to the gate and stood mooing if it was not open because it was milking time and they wanted to get back to the cowshed. We could not see all the farm buildings because of the trees but sloping down towards Lion Green Road was where the pigsties were and further along, going towards Chipstead Valley Road, were hundreds of chicken. It really was a peaceful outlook, but as with most things it had its black side – on Monday mornings you could hear the squealing of pigs being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse, thus providing joints and bacon for the hospital. Then the horror of foot and mouth disease arrived at Cane Hill Farm. That was a terribly sad time – knowing that all those lovely cows were being killed. We watched from our house as big pits were dug all over the field and the carcasses burnt in them. It went on for nights and the fires lit up the sky. I can remember going to bed at night and from my bedroom window seeing

the huge fires burning. For days there was black smoke everywhere and the smell of burning flesh. Now in the year 2001 as I sit and record my memories, England is once again hit by this dreadful disease and I ask myself 'Why after all these years is there still no cure?'

Going south along Brighton Road, just past Coulsdon South Station on the right there were more fields belonging to the Cane Hill Estate. At the front of these fields during the war a large air raid shelter was built into the side of the hill. Once it was finished and the workmen had left I never saw anyone going to it, but one day when my friend and I were out walking our babies in their prams we decided to go up close and see what it was like. Behind the 'baffle wall' was the entrance to a large cave-like shelter, and on the left was a small room that was locked. There were the frames of some bunk beds along one wall but nothing else. It felt a bit creepy so we did not stay long. The story in the village was that if ever they had to evacuate London, people would be brought down to the shelter for safety. I think it was filled in some years after the war ended.

DERBY DAY

I mentioned earlier about Derby Day and the school being closed for the day owing to the amount of traffic coming from London and going through the village along Chipstead Valley Road towards Epsom but I have further memories of those Derby Days—

My earliest memory of going to the Derby was walking with my mother and several of the neighbours from Woodman Road, across the fields to Woodmansterne, up Rectory Lane passing *The Woodman* and bearing left over Banstead Downs into Tattenham Corner. A long walk but worth it, for once we were there it was like being in a different world. There were roundabouts and swings and just about all the fun of the fair imaginable. There were men selling bits of paper that forecast the winners of the races, and gypsies telling fortunes, but the things that interested me the most were little tents that we noticed and outside there was always a little old lady sitting down shouting out *'combinations'*. Now I knew this word, for I wore combinations during the winter months to keep me warm but never on a hot summer's day, so I had to ask my mother why – on such a hot summer's day – were there so many old ladies wanting combinations? She explained that they were actually calling out *'Accommodation'* – accommodation in those little tents? I queried. So she explained to me that people went to spend a penny in there. My mind boggled!

If my dad was on night duty he would come with us for the start of the day but if he was on early turn, finishing at two, he would meet up with us after cycling over. He always knew whereabouts we would be.

Mum and dad were not really gamblers, they just picked out the names of horses that took their fancy. I remember one day they had decided on a horse and dad went off to back it and after a while he came back looking somewhat sheepish and told mum that he had backed a different horse. After she had calmed down she just said one word, 'WHY?' This was his explanation: Whilst waiting his turn at the bookmakers he noticed a man in front of him put £100 on an outsider – what a fortune that was. This interested dad so much that he thought he would go and have a look at the horse before he parted with his money. So off he went to the paddock to see what this outsider looked like. He said the poor thing just stood there without a bit of life in him. It did not look as if it could walk let alone race. So why, Dad wondered, should someone put £100 on it, unless they knew something no one else knew? So dad took a chance and backed it as well. After he had told mum this we just held our breath until the race was over. Thank goodness it came in first and everything returned to normal.

All the locals loved the Derby. I think we looked upon it as Our Race. We knew about the Boat Race, tennis at Wimbledon, football at Crystal Palace and the Grand National but we only heard about them or maybe saw a picture of the event in the newspaper. BUT the Derby was on our doorstep, we could walk there every day of Derby Week if we wanted to.

One Derby Day we did not go to the races. Instead we walked with our mother over the fields to Woodmansterne and stood by the church at the road junction where the road from Wallington joined Rectory Lane. There were several people standing about and quite a lot of traffic coming from Wallington and going towards Epsom. My dad was standing in the road directing the traffic. After a while a very large black car came along followed by a large open car with King George V and Queen Mary sitting in it. The crowd cheered and the King and Queen waved to us. As they passed, my dad stood to attention and saluted them. I felt so proud of him.

When I was about 12, Jack Bailey (who lived with his parents near us in Woodman Road) bought a lorry and started a haulage business and when Derby Day came round he put some benches in the back of the lorry and took some friends and neighbours to Epsom. It really was exciting to be part of the traffic going to the races. We all arranged to meet up for the last race ready for the trip home. No one seemed to know what to back on the last race and I

looked at the race card my mother had and noticed a horse called 'Whoopee'. I knew Eddie Canter had made a film called *When I'm making Whoopee* so I told my mother that she should back 'Whoopee' because it meant love. She liked the idea and most of our friends, because they couldn't find a name they liked better, had a bob or two on it as well. At first we all stood on the bank watching the start but when we saw that 'Whoopee' was taking the lead we rushed down to the fence to cheer it home. Everyone was so excited, for most of them it was their only win of the day. The men went off to get their winnings from the bookie who had his stand quite near to where we had been sitting but he had GONE – just disappeared! When we had all rushed down to the fence to watch the horse win he must have packed his bag and run off in the opposite direction. At first everyone was cross but after a while we had to laugh to think that two policemen and four large lads had been welched by a bookie!

When I look back and remember how many of the local people walked from Coulsdon to Epsom without a second thought to the distance I have to chuckle for I am sure no one would think of doing it today.

NEW NEIGHBOURS

When I was about six years old (1922) some new neighbours moved into the house next door, No 43 Woodman Road. They were Mr and Mrs Wright and their son Frank and daughter Doris. Mr Wright was an engine driver for the Southern Railway. Frank was in his 20s and studying music in London. Doris was a little younger than he was and worked in an office in London. They both lived at home but were too old to be playmates to my brothers and me. Frank's hobby was photography, which we found fascinating as not many people had cameras in those days.

My parents had several photos of us as we were growing up and I can remember being taken to King's of West Croydon and sitting on a seat with my brothers while a man put his head under a cover and looked at us through a box on legs. We thought *that* was magic but when Frank showed us his camera which he could hold in his hand we could hardly believe it. That was the end of us going to Croydon to have our photos taken. Frank was only too pleased to take any pictures my mother wanted. He knew how to do his own developing and printing and even colouring, which was done by hand. I still have photos (or 'snaps' as they were called) that he took and the coloured ones are still as bright and colourful as the day he did them. *(see cover).*

On a Saturday morning Frank would give music lessons on his mum's piano in her front room. Years later my daughters Gwen and Jackie were two of his many pupils, but on Sundays he would be off playing a church organ somewhere as he was really a church organist. I remember being taken to Crystal Palace to hear Frank give an organ recital. We caught a bus at ***The Red Lion*** to Purley; there we changed on to a tram which took us to Crystal Palace – a wonderful building all made of glass. It truly was an amazing sight to see – little did I think then that in a few years time I would be standing in the same spot watching it burn to the ground.

When we got into the Palace we found the Concert Hall. It was very large, with the organ at one end of it, and the organ was many times larger than the one at St Andrew's Church in Coulsdon. There were dozens of pipes going up to the roof, and when Frank came out and sat at the organ he looked so small that I thought 'He cannot play that big thing', but he did and it was beautiful. The recital was a great success and Frank was very happy.

In later years when the war came Frank was called up into the Air Force. He was stationed mainly in London and often played the organ at St Botolph's Church, Aldersgate. When he was demobbed he stayed there as an organist for a while and then he went to Epsom College as music master. The last I heard of him he had retired to Devonport.

Edgar and Dorothy Crisp came to live in Woodman Road in about 1925. They lived at No 67 which was one of the ***new*** houses that had been built on the bank at the end of Woodman Road.

Mr Crisp was an electrician and was the first person in the road to have a telephone. I loved going to their house because to me they were 'new age'. My parents and all my friends' parents were lovely people but elderly, whereas Mr and Mrs Crisp were nearer to my age but I never called them Edgar or Dorothy, even to this day, although they are both long gone, they are still Mr and Mrs Crisp to me.

Mr Crisp had been a pilot in the First World War and Mrs Crisp was a children's nurse. When their little boy John was about a year old Mr Crisp took John and me for a ride on his motorcycle and sidecar. He had to go to Mr Cearn's farm at Chipstead to look at their generators. That was a great day for me – I had ridden in a motorcycle sidecar and learned what a generator was – which really was something for we still only had gas light at home!

When John was about three years old his sister Eileen arrived. I was about 13 years old by then so I did not have quite so much time to spend with Eileen as

Frank Wright at St Botolph's, London

I left school at 14, but even to this day we have always been good friends – like her mother was to my mother.

In 1936 when I was 20 I married and went to live in Rochester. Mrs Crisp promised to keep her eye on my parents and if there were any problems she would telephone and let me know. Knowing she was keeping a watchful eye was a great comfort to me.

When the war came I had two children of my own and spent much time at my mother's (she was by then a widow). I always knew that if ever I needed help Mrs Crisp would be there for me.

SPORT IN THE VILLAGE OF COULSDON in the early 1920s

As young children we had to make our own entertainment – no TVs or computer games in those days. There were all kinds of games to play in the fine weather. The really young would play skipping, hopscotch, marbles, tag and many more. Where I lived in Woodman Road, there was a grassy bank opposite and behind that the allotments and then the railway. We could play on the bank for hours. In those days we were always told the story that the bank was owned by Smith's Charity and that it would never be built on. As children we always wondered who Smith's Charity was and why it had wanted *our bank.* It was not until 1999 that I received an explanation.

As we grew older we would go to Marlpit Lane Rec – some played tennis, the boys played football or cricket, but quite a few of the local lads ventured elsewhere drawn by their interest in golf.

North of what is now Clifton Road, there was a large field which was 'The Old Sixteenth'. It used to be part of Woodcote Park Golf Club until the course

was altered. The 'Old Sixteenth' although no longer used by the golf club still had a tee and putting green and many of the village lads would go there and play golf. They most likely had just one club and a few odd golf balls that they had found between them. But they were very knowledgeable about golf because they spent a lot of time on the proper golf course being caddies, for which they were paid 2s.6d old money for carrying the bag of clubs round the course for the players. My brother George loved to go up there and could think of nothing better than spending the day being a caddie. Near the Club House was a caddies' shed and the caddie master, Mr Seaman, was in charge of the caddies. When George left school at the age of 14 in 1921 Mr Kinch the professional took him on as an apprentice. During his time at Woodcote George learnt how to make and repair golf clubs, give lessons, sell clubs etc from the golf shop and play golf with club members. He was at Woodcote Park Golf Club for five years and was then accepted as an assistant to the pro. at The Royal Porthcawl Golf Club where he spent many happy years, married and had two boys and a girl. By the time George and his family had returned south, having been made the Professional at the Earlswood Golf Club, both his sons were enjoying the sport. They too became golf professionals and Brian Huggett the elder was in 1963 Captain of the Ryder Cup Team and after a very successful career I watched him on TV in 1998, winning the British Seniors Masters…….*and all that started because of the 'Old Sixteenth' at Woodcote Park.*

EARLY CARS

When my parents first came to Coulsdon in 1910 Marlpit Lane was very steep and narrow – very countrified. There was a seat halfway up for people to rest on. Often at weekends strangers would bring their cars out to see if they could reach the top of the hill. I think there were quite a few wagers made, as it was unlikely that many cars could manage to get to the top.

Not many local people had cars – the tradesmen mostly used the horse and cart and the dustcart was drawn by a horse. Sometimes a big silver car would drive through the village, the driver wearing a leather coat and flying helmet. Dad told me it was Henry Seagrave, a racing driver who lived at Merstham.

TECHNOLOGY – THEN AND NOW

In the 1920s there certainly was not a huge Tesco store in Purley, let alone one that delivered your shopping via the mystical (to me) Internet. Of course to get

this priceless service you have to be the proud owner of a computer with Internet access! With the help of this magical equipment you ask (via the Internet) Tesco if they will send you your groceries. They send ‘down the line’ a list of what they have in stock, including prices. You send back ‘down the line’ a list of what goods you want and when you want them delivered. Tesco then confirms your order (‘down the line’!!) and low and behold deliver your order in a nice white van with their name on it. I am a bit hazy about how this all gets paid for – plastic cards no doubt, but from what I remember of Mr Cohen it is sure to be foolproof.

I cannot help but compare this with what happened in 1926 when I was ten years old. My mother would walk down Woodman Road, and along Chipstead Valley Road, to where it joined the Brighton Road, to the shop on the corner – Mr Carey’s. There my mother would sit on a chair by the counter, where Mr Carey would join her with his order book and pencil and he would write out her order. After a little chat about village affairs my mother walked home and soon afterwards the errand boy arrived on his bike with the goods. Of course if you were very posh and had a telephone you could ring the shop and have the goods delivered straight away and the bill added to your account. However in those days the only person in Woodman Road to have a telephone was Mr Crisp, the local electrician.

I suppose the only ‘air waves’ used in those days would have been if you used the telephone, the rest was just pencil and paper and a bit of shoe leather! There were of course only a few cars around but there were bicycles and lots of the young lads used to get jobs as errand boys, not only to earn some money but also to be able to ride the delivery bike.

COULSDON RECREATION GROUND – MARLPIT LANE – in the early 1930s

The Recreation Ground was a very important place during my late school and early teen years. You knew that if you went 'up the Rec' you would always meet someone you knew. The attractions were swings for young children, tennis courts, a cricket pitch, a miniature golf course that people could pay to play on, and the bowling green that was for the members of the Bowling Club. There were many wooden seats about the park where you could sit and watch any sports that were going on or just sit and talk. Jock was the keeper and groundsman and his word was **law**. He was quite easy going unless someone was playing too near his cricket pitch. During the summer that pitch was like sacred ground and it was roped off until there was a match being played.

In those days the Rec was always closed one hour after sunset but there was one very severe winter when the snow was very thick on the ground and Jock allowed us to toboggan down the hill from the tennis courts down to the pavilion and for a few nights did not close the gates until 10 p.m., so that people who were working during the day could also enjoy the snow and tobogganing.

There were no rowdy gangs having punch-ups or using foul language or mugging old people, and drugs were not even thought of. It was just groups of young people talking or throwing a ball around. The friends I used to meet up with were mostly interested in music. We used to talk about our favourite Big Band – these Big Bands were on the wireless every night from 10 p.m. until midnight. Three of the lads (Ron Eves – saxophone, Dave Carey – drums and Jack Nicholson – banjo), were trying to form a band and spent most of their time beating time to tunes they were humming. ***Where's That Tiger?*** was a favourite because they were into jazz and all that.

Henry Griffiths, a local lad, can be seen in the photo stopping off for a 'cuppa' at the pavilion in Marlpit Lane Rec. As you can see his bike was a

Marlpit Lane Rec in the 1930s

Rosie Huggett at Marlpit Lane Rec — 1930s

De-Luxe model! Most of the boys' bikes only had a large basket on the front of a two wheeler.

The pavilion sold snacks, tea, coffee, mineral water, biscuits and cakes. It was a very pleasant place to go for refreshments; Daisy and Nancy Gregory made everyone very welcome and their home-made cakes went down a treat. The pavilion had a thatched roof and looked very attractive. Each end of the building was a dressing room; in the centre was the tearoom. During the summer there was a cricket match every Saturday and one dressing room was for the home team, the other for the visitors. At half time Daisy and Nancy would serve them tea in the tearoom. Sometimes if they were extra busy they would let me help them, which I thoroughly enjoyed and this made the Rec even more attractive to me. The cricket teams were Coulsdon & Purley Council Offices and The Working Mens Club. They played on alternate Saturdays. I can remember that Stan Littlechild, who later became Mayor of Croydon, was a young member of the Coulsdon and Purley Team.

By the time the war came I was married with a baby daughter, Gwen and my friend and I used to walk up the Rec with our babies. We felt safe because an air-raid shelter had been built just inside the gate. It was a different

atmosphere then, for although the café was there (but not Daisy and Nancy), it was mostly used by war workers from Hall's Yard and several soldiers could be seen. The Royal West Kent Regiment was stationed in houses down Reddown Road and Fairdene Road. We would talk to some of them, who said they were not allowed to leave the area but if their wives came to stay in the village they could get an all night pass. So I told two of them to go and see my mother in Woodman Road, as we had a spare room. Between them they spent several nights with us. One was a London boy whose wife also brought their young baby down to see him; the other was from Biggleswade. He was a butcher before the war and his wife came quite often. She kept in touch with my mother after the boys had been posted to France.

Henry Griffiths

Lived in Waterworks Cottages, Godstone Road, Purley. 1930s.

I have over the past few years re-visited the Rec, but I don't really want to go again. The lovely thatched roof of the café is long gone and although the tennis courts and bowling green are still there it doesn't seem the same somehow.

I seldom go to Coulsdon now, but when I do I find it so noisy with all the cars, lorries, buses and transporters going through the village bumper to bumper and the pavements full of people rushing about as if they have not a minute to spare. So very different from my childhood days, when it was such a peaceful place. Everyone you met would say 'good morning at least and some would stop for a chat. The 'transport noise' was that of the clip-clop of horses' hoofs as they

Left to right:

Nancy Gregory, Bessie Parsons, Betty Gregory, Sam the dog, Jack Nicholson, Peter Brown. Coulsdon Rec. 1930s

pulled tradesmen's carts and the ringing of bicycle bells. It was very unusual to hear a car. Of course there were plenty of children's noises as they played in the streets – but no noisy transistor radios.

The first time I remember music ringing out over the village was when Woolworth's and it's neighbouring shops were being built and the bricklayer working on the site used to sing as he worked. He had a strong, powerful voice that was lovely to hear. I learnt later that he had been head choirboy at Wrexham Parish Church in North Wales. He came to London to work and liked Coulsdon so much that he made it his home. Although I had heard him singing it was several years later before we met and eventually married and from then on Coulsdon was always 'home' to us both.

I know my roots are in Coulsdon because when I do go down there, which – as I've said – is not that often these days, I can still see it as it used to be. The first *Red Lion* I can remember was just a village pub. Later in the 1920s it was rebuilt and modernised, with a large ballroom above the downstairs

lounge and bars. It was great to go to a dance at *The Red Lion* and I was there the night that Crystal Palace burned. Someone came into the dance and called out that there was a large fire out Croydon way. So we all trooped out and stood in Brighton Road, looking towards Croydon where the sky was all red. A bus driver told us that the Palace was on fire so we ran back, collected our coats and caught a bus to Purley where we changed on to a tram that took us as near as possible to the fire. It was a terrible sight; no one had ever seen such a fire before. (It was before the Blitz).

When I look at the red brick building that has been built next to *The Red Lion* I can still see the allotments and rough grass land with three goats tethered on it that used to be there. There was also a wooden Scout hut in one corner of the field, where a conjurer used to come about twice a year and the entrance fee was either a couple of jam jars or some old rags.

Ray's Builders' Merchants Dance
at the Red Lion. Early 1930s.
Rosie Huggett sitting second from right

COURTSHIP DAYS – early 1930s

When my second grandson David visited me with his fiancée Jenny in January 2001 they noticed a photograph of my husband Frank and me on our motorbike. They seemed so surprised at seeing me young and having fun that it made me think of the days when the motorbike was the 'King of the Road'.

A young boy's dream in those days was to have a motorcycle – never giving a car a thought as they were a rare sight and when they were seen in the village mostly doctors and people with 'lots of money' drove them. The first time I actually saw Frank was one evening when the police had stopped him at the junction of Chipstead Valley Road and Brighton Road and they were poking a ruler along the exhaust pipe of his motorcycle to make sure it had baffle plates. They thought the motorbike was too noisy – fortunately it was OK. Frank had left North Wales and travelled south to work and was involved with the building of shops in Chipstead Valley Road. He was lodging locally. Later we became good friends and went everywhere together. On Thursdays we rode over to Wembley Speedway. Speedway was a great sport in those days and there were tracks at Wimbledon and Harringay as well. We always sat in the same part of the stadium and met other spectators who were also regular fans. We did not get to know them personally for all we talked about was speedway and motorbikes! After the meeting several of us met at Marble Arch where there was a coffee stall just by the entrance to Hyde Park – this was a favourite meeting place for bikers. Sometimes we would ride up to Marble Arch on a Sunday morning; there was always someone we knew there and often a group of us would decide to go for a ride. One of our favourite places was Runnymede, another was Oxford. One of the group would say 'Let's have a race to Kings' and we would all tear off up the Edgware Road – no traffic lights and hardly any traffic. From the Edgware Road we would speed up the Great West Road to Oxford where we all met up at 'Kings of Oxford' – this was one of the largest motorcycle dealers in Britain. After a couple of hours browsing amongst the latest motorcycles some of us would go home and some went back to Marble Arch for a cup of tea and a debate about which was the best new bike we had seen.

We only made close friends with one couple – they were married and called Eddie and Ray Galvin. They were originally from South Wales and worked in a very large apartment in Grosvenor Square. Eddie was the butler and Ray was the housekeeper and they lived in a flat in the basement of the building. We often went to their flat and once, when their employers were away, they showed us around the apartment – it was most impressive and it was the first time I had experienced under-floor heating.

Eddie and Ray were our friends for years and often came to see my mother in Coulsdon. When Frank and I married in 1936 they often came to stay with us when we lived in Rochester. The bike they had was a Vincent HRD and one day we went to Stevenage where the bikes were made. The 'factory' was in fact a big old barn with only the boss and a few mechanics working there. Every bike was hand made with great care and skill, not like the mass-produced foreign things of today.

Frank and Rosie at Marble Arch

3 June 1934

Frank and I regularly travelled to Donington for the motorcycle racing and occasionally my younger brother Billie and his friends came with us. On one visit to Donington we had just ridden through a little village called Ashby-de-la-Zouch when I called out to Frank 'I can hear a bell ringing'; he immediately slowed down and a large black car with a big silver bell on its roof indicated for us to stop. Two policemen came up to us and said we were going too fast through the village. They were our first encounter with 'speed cops'! Unfortunately coming home to Coulsdon that night we had just left Leicester behind us when we were stopped again. I think that was when the police decided to clamp down on speeding because it was not long after that the 30mph restriction was introduced!! Frank was fined 10s.0d for each offence.

In 1936 just after we were married and went to live in Rochester, we went to the motorcycle show at Olympia. As we went into the main hall we saw a Brough Superior motorbike suspended from the ceiling of the stand. It was a

Brands Hatch 1938

Left to right: Geoff Leithly, Bob Elliott, Frank and Billie

very futuristic machine, quite lovely, all chrome plated. Frank looked at it and said 'I'm going to have that', and he DID! He also ordered a sidecar to go with it. We went up to Nottingham to fetch the Brough. Mr Crippell, the manager of the works, put us up at his house for the night and the next day George Brough took Frank for a trial run to get the feel of the machine as Frank had never ridden one with a sidecar attached before. He managed it, but I hated it. I felt so alone in the sidecar; I kept imagining the sidecar was going to go off one way and the bike another. Half way home I must have changed colour or something because Frank stopped at a pub that was closed and asked the landlord if he would sell us a brandy because I was ill, which he did. Neither Frank nor I drank, but I did on that occasion and we reached home safely.

I never did like that bike and after a year we went to the owner of Bannister's garage in Rochester who made a straight swap with us for a brand new Morris 10 car. From then on whenever we went to visit my mother in Woodman Road the neighbours found our arrival a much quieter event!

COUNTRY BOY

My heart went out to a country boy.
His rugged face was alight with joy
as he sat by a lake with rod and line,
Lost in the spell of summer time.
It was a peaceful scene all quiet and serene.
It made an old lady of many years
forget the present and all its fears.

It brought back memories of long ago,
When the tide of life had begun to flow,
Memories of a boy, born in the country too,
but left because there was no work to do.
Fate was kind and brought him to me.
We loved, how we loved, it was good to see.

We had our problems including war,
But lived through them all, to love some more.
After fifty years God called him away.
My heart broke, what could I say.
The boy by the lake who is fishing today,
helped to take some of the sadness away.

The boy by the lake happened to be,
a popular singer on T.V.
I have seen him performing over the years.
Each time it brings me heartache and tears.
But amongst the tears I see
my Country Boy of bygone years

Our Wedding Day

17 April 1936

FRANK

Frank, as I said came from North Wales, his full name was Frederick James Francis Watts and he was born on 7 December 1909. His father was Frederick Watts, a farmer's son from Dorchester who fought in the Boer War as a Bugle Boy with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. They were stationed at Wrexham, North Wales.

When Frank's father came out of the army he settled at 12 Norman Road, High Town, Wrexham and married Nora Bartlett and found a job as an insurance agent. When the Great War came he was one of the first to be called up as he was a reservist. He was killed at Arras on the 16 May 1915, aged 33 (Sergeant Frederick Watts. 5846 1st Battalion RWF, Plot 11, Row D, Grave 8 in Villers Station Cemetery, Arras, France). Frank was just five and a half years old when his father was killed.

Frank's mother was Nora Bartlett, who was a daughter of a fishmonger in Chester and she had one sister, Mima. His mother married again to George Humphrys who was a very good stepfather to Frank. They had a little girl called Georgina who sadly died at 18 months from meningitis and soon after, Nora (Frank's mother) died of TB. Frank stayed with his stepfather until he was 15 years old and then came to London to work.

Having had a stepfather for most of his life Frank was always known by the surname of Humphrys. It was not until we were planning to marry that I suggested he reverted back to his proper surname, which he did. It was not without confusion though – for once married we went to live in Rochester where Frank was in charge of building a large estate. Whilst many of his workmen would call him Mr Humphrys they knew me as Mrs Watts!

WAR LOOMING

During the war Frank was sent all over England – he and his team of men had to be wherever special bunkers were being built. I left Rochester and returned to my mother's house in Woodman Road, making that my base, but I also spent time with my brother George and his family in Porthcawl. Our daughter Gwendoline Ann was born there on 3 February 1941.

We all tried to support our friends and neighbours during the war years; life was hard at times with food in short supply. I decided to breed rabbits to supplement the meat ration. We had hutches in the back garden of 45 Woodman Road, and if I supplied some rabbits to the local butcher I was allowed to buy food and hay for their keep. I had to join the Rabbit Club which issued vouchers and which I took to Mr Grover the corn chandler in the Brighton Road. The amount of rabbit food I was allowed depended on how many rabbits I let the butcher have. Every day I would take Gwen in her pram and Ming my Chow-Chow dog for a long walk around the woods and fields up by the Mount and I always had a sack with me to collect dandelion leaves, cow parsley and clover, all of which were food for the rabbits.

I clearly remember the events of 15 August 1940. Just before 6 p.m. I was standing outside 45 Woodman Road, looking out for my mother who had gone shopping. It was a lovely day with a clear blue sky. I heard a faint droning and looking up I saw a formation of bombers very high in the sky. For a moment I thought how lovely they looked and then I realised they were flying north instead of south, were beginning to lose altitude fast and were going towards Croydon aerodrome. As they disappeared from my sight I saw little black objects falling from the aeroplanes and I knew it was a raid.

I ran indoors to wake Aunty Jinny who was upstairs having a rest. Her main concern was to put her teeth in before coming down to the shelter. There still had not been a siren sounded, so I ran back out to the road and saw my mother walking back from the shops and called for her to hurry. By now I could hear the explosions coming from the aerodrome. We stayed in the shelter until the raid was over.

Frank (my husband) was driving past the aerodrome just as the raid started and the first he knew was a warden stopping his car and telling him to go in the public shelter which was opposite the aerodrome, but instead Frank dived under his car because he could hear machine-gunning, and then the bombs started dropping. As he dived under the car he remembered hearing *Workers Playtime* coming from the factories.

When the bombing was over he came out from under his car to find that the shelter he should have gone into had received a direct hit, as had the factories on the aerodrome. He went to help the people in them and said he would never forget the terrible sights he saw. He stayed there doing what he could to get people out to safety until the rescue services had everything under control.

Thinking back, I am sure the time was between 5.30 and 6 p.m. for Frank was working in London until 5 p.m. and it usually took him just under an hour to get home.

I have many, many memories of the war years; some of them are humorous, some frightening and some so very sad. There is one from the Battle of Britain that still brings tears to my eyes. My mother, my baby daughter and myself had been sheltering in our Anderson shelter in Woodman Road, because a terrible air battle was in progress overhead. After a while I came out of the shelter and looked over the valley to the chalk pits in Marlpit Lane. There were planes diving and chasing each other all over the sky and then I saw a parachute coming down. I saw a man hanging there, then I saw flames coming from the harness and creeping up the ropes he was hanging from. I started to pray for him – I did not know if he was British or German – it did not matter. I just wanted him to land safely. But he did not because eventually the parachute burst into flames and I saw his body hurtle to the ground. I have thought about him often over the years.

I had decided to have my baby (Gwen) in Purley Hospital but the bombing had increased and my doctor advised me to go away to the country if possible. So mum and I decided to go to my brother George at Porthcawl. Frank happened to be working at an army base near Henley-on-Thames and managed to get a 48 hour pass to come and help us to travel to Wales. He drove me, mum and Ming (my dog) to Swindon where he put us on a train to Bridgend, which was the nearest main line station to Porthcawl.

The journey seemed to go on for ever. Whenever the train came to a place where there was an air-raid warning in operation the train had to stop until the All Clear. It was very late at night when we reached Bridgend and the local

train to Porthcawl had left and there would be no more until morning. We found a taxi (the only one!) but an American soldier had also found it. Fortunately he also wanted to get to Porthcawl so we shared. He was a very pleasant young man and seemed glad to have someone to talk to, but I must admit I was most relieved when we eventually got to 'Troon Bungalow' and brother George was waiting for us.

A month later (February 1941) Gwen was born. George and his wife Annie had two children of their own, Brian and Pam, so there was quite a family of us. Thank goodness it was a fairly large bungalow.

By the time Gwen was four months old the heavy bombing had stopped so we returned to Coulsdon. We had had a very happy time in Wales but I knew mum was wanting to get back to 45 Woodman Road.

We soon settled down again and took the odd air-raid in our stride. My friend Annie McCauliffe lived in number 47 Woodman Road, and she had a little boy Timothy who was close in age to Gwen, so we used to go for walks together. We always walked where we knew there was an air-raid shelter – just in case!

Jackie was born in May 1944. I had her in the front room of No 45 and during the night we could hear explosions but no aeroplanes and fortunately no air-raid warning. After a few days the words 'flying bombs' were mentioned and from then on the 'Doodlebug' became part of everybody's life. The government asked people to evacuate themselves and they would supply transport and pay the people who put us up. Frank's stepmother and stepfather who lived in Wrexham, North Wales, offered to have us and said if any of our friends wanted to come as well several of their neighbours were willing to take them in. I mentioned this to Annie and she was all for coming with us. She would also have her elderly mother with her. My mother had her sister, Aunty Jinny, back living with her and they decided to stay at number 45.

We were informed which train to catch from Paddington to Wrexham but the problem was how could we all get from Coulsdon to Paddington? There would be me, Annie, her mother, Tim, Gwen and baby Jackie and Ming my dog together with a pram, pushchair and all our luggage. We asked Jack Bailey, who lived at the top of Woodman Road, if he could take us in his lorry to Paddington. Frank, who was working in Dartford then, was able to come all the way to Wrexham with us, thank goodness, for we would not have managed on our own.

We set off early in the morning. Mrs Woodhouse (Annie's mum) sat in the cab with Jack while Frank travelled in the back with me, Annie, the three children, the dog, the prams and luggage. I often wish we could have made a film of it all because most of the people in the road came out to wish us farewell.

When we got to Paddington, Jack could only park the lorry long enough to unload for it really was organised chaos! We loaded the prams in the guard's van and went to find a compartment. We found an empty one, which was lucky for the train soon filled up. Dear old Ming just curled up under the seat. (I expect she remembered going to Porthcawl in 1940.) We were ready to leave the station with all the passengers on board when we heard a Doodledug coming our way and then its engine stopped. Everyone held their breath waiting. I will never forget those few moments before we heard the explosion and knew that it had missed the station.

It was a very long journey but at last we reached Wrexham. Frank was able to stay with us long enough to get us to 12 Norman Road, where he handed us over to his stepfather and then he went back to the station to catch the first train back to London. I bet he slept on the return journey!

We stayed in Wales while the Doodlebugs and rockets were falling, returning to Coulsdon as soon as we possibly could.

A LOCAL LAD FROM COULSDON

My brother Billie is now in his 80s living in Cornwall and enjoying some well- earned peace.

In 1919 William (Billie) Huggett was born in Woodman Road, the second surviving son of William and Sarah. He spent his childhood and youth in Coulsdon and Purley where he had many friends. He attended Smitham School until he was 14.

As a youngster he was popular with the other local children and was often seen playing marbles, football or many of the childhood games played before the TV era. They would play harmless pranks, chase the local girls, make their dog carts, ride their old bikes, climb the many trees that were around in those happy, carefree days.

Over page:

VE-Day Celebrations in Woodman Road

When he first left school he went to work for Mr Crisp, the electrician who lived in Woodman Road. The first day was a near disaster because Mr Crisp sent Billie home to ask our mother if he could have a pair of long trousers to wear instead of his short school ones! Our mother was living on only the police pension (which was not much in those days) so it was a couple of weeks before Billie was able to have long trousers. He enjoyed working for Mr Crisp. After a couple of years he went to work for the North Downs Timber Company, whose yard was at the junction of Woodman Road and Woodcote Grove Road.

Billie was a keen sportsman, especially at golf, and like many of the local lads he had been a ‘caddie’ at Woodcote Park Golf Club. As he grew older he became a very good amateur, winning many tournaments and I think that if the war had not come he would have turned professional like our older brother George.

After the war he went into the building trade, which was a great success but he still found time to play golf at Coulsdon Court. Now his son Paul Huggett is the Professional at the Nevill Golf Club in Kent, which has made Billie very happy.

When Billie first came back to Coulsdon from the war he was a different person. He went away a happy-go-lucky teenager and came back a man who,

like so many others in those days, had learnt about life the hard way. It is only in recent years that he has started to tell us a little about his war experiences and that is why I have included the following which Billie wrote—

HUGGETT – WILLIAM ARTHUR No.5572488

17 January	1940	5th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment
10 March	1941	94th Field Regiment (Royal Artillery) Signals
10 April	1942	1st Parachute Brigade Signals
31 October	1942	North Africa (1st Army)
13 July	1943	Sicily (Catania)
22 July	1943	Returned North Africa
11 December	1943	U K
17 September	1944	Arnhem, Holland
20 September	1944	Prisoner of War
20 April	1945	Returned U K

Huggett – William Arthur No.5572488

On 17 January 1940 I was called up into the 5th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment and went to Tisbury in Wiltshire to do infantry training. We were sent to Folkestone, Hythe, Dymchurch and the Redoubt area to guard the beaches in case of invasion.

Having passed out as an infantryman I came out of the Wiltshire Regiment and on 10 March 1941 was drafted to the 94th Field Regiment (Royal Artillery) Signals and became a despatch rider. On a notice board I saw details regarding the forming of an Airborne Brigade and asking for volunteers from the signals. I was accepted, and on 10 April 1942 I joined the 1st Parachute Brigade Signals and went for parachute training at Ringway aerodrome in Manchester. I passed out as a full parachutist having done two jumps out of a balloon and five from an aircraft. I was then sent to a garrison at Bulford in Wiltshire where we were organised into sections for more training. This was just prior to the North Africa Campaign and the 1st and 2nd Battalion were sent to northern Scotland to board troopships. I went with them as a despatch rider. The 3rd Battalion did not disembark with us but flew to Gibraltar and waited until we arrived just off the coast of North Africa. We were the first to land at Algiers and took the

airfield with minimal opposition. It was not necessary for the 3rd Battalion to parachute in from Gibraltar; as we had already secured the airfield they were able to land. We camped in the woods until we were able to take over some of the airfield buildings. There was German bombing throughout the night. We gradually moved up the coast to Bon and took the airstrip there, continuing on until we were near Tunis. The Americans took over from us, as we were preparing for Sicily. All this time battles were being fought and Stukas – dive bomber aircraft – were overhead. Throughout the campaign there were many casualties.

We congregated outside Sousse for training in preparation for Sicily – we had practice drops and then on 13 July 1943 flew over Malta, turning into the coast of Catania ready for a midnight drop.

The purpose of our drop was to secure the area until Montgomery came up from Syracuse. We knew, as we flew over Malta, that below us the ships were preparing to land troops once we had secured the airfield. Mongomery's army then took over and we made our way back on foot to Syracuse to try and obtain any form of transport back to North Africa. I went on a Tank Landing Craft, returning on 22 July 1943 back to H/Q at Sousse. We re-formed in preparation for another invasion. Some of the Brigade went to Italy for a short while prior to returning to North Africa. When we were in North Africa *prior to going to Sicily* we had to undergo training sessions which included practice jumps. There was obviously the fear of 'what if the chute did not open' and on one occasion as we were coming down some of my comrades and I could see one of our mates coming down and his chute had failed. It was what we called a *Roman Candle* – just a curl of chute that had no wind under it to open it out. As we were coming down we all knew that he stood no chance, but there below him was an area where the farmer had cut the crop of cattle feed and collected it into crude stacks, and low and behold he landed on top of one of these stacks – jumped out, brushed himself down and walked away without a single injury.

We all returned to the UK on 11 December 1943. We were stationed near Grantham and undertook extensive training to ensure that we were ready to be called on at any time to take part in the second front. Eventually we were given home leave and on reporting back were off on our way to being dropped over Arnhem in Holland. We parachuted in on 17 September 1944, a Sunday lunch time. Gliders were following behind us carrying anti-tank guns. Our aim was to take the bridge at Arnhem. We took the north of the bridge but could not hold it – unexpectedly there was a German Panzer Division there and after

Billie second from left

Billie on a return visit to Arnhem 50 years later!

three days, together with the 2nd Battalion we were captured. We were under the bridge when an officer advised *every man for himself* and we dispersed as best we could. About 15 of us took shelter in a house adjacent to the bridge – there was gunfire all around and we could not move on. Suddenly there was a blast of machine gun firing directly on to the house, we fell to the floor and on looking up saw a German. About eight of us had been captured. There were casualties everywhere you looked. The Germans took us to secure areas near to the railway, debriefed us and prepared to move us back into Germany by train. It was a five day journey – with approximately 50 men to a cattle wagon – a long, long line of cattle wagons. During the five days we had no food or water and our only idea of what the terrain was like was what we could glimpse through the slats of wood. At one time we could see aircraft flying towards the track, as they came nearer we could see they were American Mustangs or the like and we thought it was our end. The train had stopped and the Germans were running into the surrounding fields for cover in fear of the train being bombed. The Americans must have known the train was full of POWs for we were not bombed and once the air raid was over the journey continued on ending up at Stalag ……..... but that's another story ……

'PLUM TREE COTTAGE'

'Plum Tree Cottage' – previously two cottages called Colgrime Cottages – is one of the oldest homes in Old Coulsdon and has for the past 55 years been dear to my heart. I now write an account of its history since 1944. How I wish there were records of all that happened to it in the previous 200-300 years –

THE COLGRIME BROTHERS

The blacksmith stood looking across the green,
to the roof of a house which could just be seen.
It was built by his boys every stick and stone
and now they are proud to call it their home.
The stone came from Merstham just down the road.
The cart piled high, it was a heavy load.
Many journeys were made, the lads toiled long.
Never a grumble but always a song.
The beams and roof timbers were strong and true.
The Oak of Great Britain will see the years through.
The house is still standing, to me it's so clear.
The blacksmith and his boys always seem near.

'Plum Tree Cottage' — 1945

Still two cottages – ours on the right

The back garden of 'our half' of 'Plum Tree Cottage' — 1948

HOME

I knew I was home when I opened the door.
I didn't see the cobwebs or dust on the floor,
But I knew I was Home for I'd been here before.
The cottage was calling me through the ages it cried
For someone to come and restore it's pride.
I looked at the oak beams that were a sorry sight,
Covered with plaster and painted white.
I knew I must save them and restore them again.
Once more to be proud and take away the shame.
Everywhere I looked was neglect and despair.
How could people live here without a care?
I looked at the fireplace, it was hard to see,
what a happy place it used to be.
With children playing and cats asleep,
A feeling of peace used to reign here I am sure.
Peace which I hope will return once more.
We must clean up the old fireplace, sweep out the grime,
Learn to be patient, it will take a long time.

I spent most of the war years living with my mother in Woodman Road, Coulsdon, but with the end of the war approaching we knew that my brother Billie would be coming home from a German POW camp so Frank, my husband, and I started to look for a home of our own. There were many empty properties for sale and Frank was very keen on one in Tollers Lane but it left me quite unimpressed. Then we heard that the Almshouses in Coulsdon Road were for sale with vacant possession of one of the end cottages (there were four in all). The price was £1,000. We went to have a look at them and decided that we could manage with the one cottage to start with and then as the other cottages became empty we could take them over. This would not have been a problem because our two girls were very young (3½ and 1 year) so they could sleep together for a few more years and Frank was a builder so he could do all the building jobs that would be necessary. The main problem was that there was no space for a garage. On each side of the Almshouses were small fields owned by Mr Plater who lived in Reddown Road, so Frank went to see him to ask if he would sell us one of the plots of land. No luck – he was eventually going to build on them himself. This made the purchase of the Almshouses impossible as Frank wanted a garage.

However, Miss Gibson, who was the agent for Mr Cearn, told us that her brother-in-law (Mr Cearn) also had two cottages for sale just a few yards further down Coulsdon Road, called 'Colgrime Cottages', one with vacant possession. One was £400 and the one next door, although larger, was £350 because it had a sitting tenant, Mrs Lewis, whose husband used to work for Mr Cearn. They were allowed to live in the cottage at a rent of 2s. 6d a week. Mrs. Lewis was by this time a widow; her son-in-law kept the garden for her and it was lovely. The front was a mass of flowers and the back was planted with vegetables and fruit trees.

We went round the side of the empty cottage and the first thing I saw was a mass of white plum-tree blossom. It looked like fairyland and there was a cuckoo flying over, cuck-cooing away as if to welcome us. That was when I fell in love with 'Plum Tree Cottage'. I turned to Frank and said 'Isn't it lovely?' and he looked at me in amazement and said 'But we haven't been inside yet!'

We opened the back door and went in. It was like going back in time. It smelled old, but not a creepy old smell, it was a happy old smell. You could imagine many happy families living there over the previous two or three hundred years.

To the left of the back door were the stairs going up to the two bedrooms. To the right a shallow stone sink with one cold water tap. In the furthest corner from the back door was a large Dutch oven – it was the first one I had ever seen and I would have loved to have kept it but I knew that it would have to go because it took up such a lot of room. Opposite the back door was a door leading to the living room. This was a decent sized square room with the front door in the left-hand corner. Next to the front door was a window. On the inside wall was a chimney breast with a black kitchen range standing in it, and between the chimney breast and front wall was a large dresser.

Frank was busy looking at the structure of the building and said it was very sound and solid, with no damp anywhere. We did notice that all the oak beams in the living room had been plastered and whitewashed. We learned later that one of the previous owners had done that to make the room look lighter. Removing the plaster would be one of the first jobs to tackle.

We went back to Miss Gibson and told her that we would buy the two cottages and she said that she would see Mr Cearn and tell him and if we were to call on her the next evening she would let us know if it was OK. We went back home to tell mum and she knew the cottages well. She and dad knew Mr

Quitterton who lived there in the 1920s. When they were out walking that way they always stopped and had a chat with Mr Quitterton. He had tuberculosis and spent his days in a special wooden shed in the front garden. He went indoors at night and his bed was in the living room. He had to have the main front door open all night but had a special extra door made of wood and perforated zinc fitted and this let the air in. He could keep this shut, which gave him privacy but still let in the fresh air.

The following day we returned to see Miss Gibson only to hear bad news. Apparently a couple of days previously Mr Cearn had sold the cottages to Mr Burridge who had the furniture shop in Chipstead Valley Road. My mother could see how disappointed I was so she said she would go and see Mr Burridge and ask him if he really did want the cottages. My mother and father had been friends of Mr Burridge since they moved to Coulsdon in 1910, and Mr Burridge had furnished their house for them so she knew him quite well. He told mum that he had only bought them as an investment and for an extra £100 we could have them. If we agreed we were to go and see Mr Tompkins the estate agent in Chipstead Valley Road, who would see to all the formalities. We did ask Mr. Tompkins if we could have a key so that Frank could get on with some of the jobs that needed doing, but he said no, not until completion. However he could give us the front door key for an hour or so to enable us to have another look at the property and while there we could, unofficially, take the back door key, but he was not to know, and, if the sale fell through we could not claim for any work we had done. This suited us well and when Frank came home in the evenings we left the girls with mum and went up to the cottage. We concentrated on getting the two bedrooms habitable. Thank goodness the sale did not fall through because we really worked hard.

When we had decided to buy the cottages Frank was not really happy about it and said he was only buying them for me. I could understand how he felt because all his working life he had been building shops and houses etc. from modern materials and under the eye of a building inspector and here we were with two houses that were 200-300 years old – and looked it! I could visualise what they would look like but Frank could not, so one day I took him to see a friend of my mum's who was the wife of the blacksmith in Hayes Lane, Kenley. They had been living in their cottage for years and had carried out lots of improvements and it was lovely. He took Frank all round and pointed out different things that had been done and when we came away Frank was as enthusiastic as me, as now he could see what could be done. Frank was fortunate to be in a position where he could get materials, not new – for at that

time it was almost impossible to find anything new – but good second-hand materials from bombed houses.

Completion date was about the end of July 1945 and Frank drew out the cash from the post office and went to Mr Holland the solicitor who lived in Coulsdon Road. He came back with the deeds and we owned 'Colgrime Cottages'. Now we really could go mad with the alterations!

The first job was the kitchen. We put in a new (second-hand) modern sink and then removed the Dutch oven. All the rubble from that was put in the garden because Frank was going to build a conservatory outside the back door and we would need hardcore for the foundations. Next the red brick floor came up and that joined the rubble. A concrete floor was put down and the walls were plastered. Frank brought some black and white floor tiles home from a bomb site. They needed a lot of cleaning but when laid the floor really did look good. Now we could have a gas cooker – a second-hand *New World* – it was not possible to buy any new gas appliances. We wanted an Ascot water heater but were told they could only be supplied if recommended for medical reasons. It so happened that I had a skin condition of the scalp which required daily hair shampooing with spirit soap so I went to Dr Blair and he gave me a certificate for a water heater and so we got our Ascot.

The next thing was to get rid of the kitchen grate that was in the living room. We dismantled it and loaded it on to Frank's works van and he took it to work to dump it. He soon had the fireplace plastered, ready to receive a new surround. We knew of a building yard that had some pre-war tiled fireplaces for sale and the firm delivered one and left it in the front garden which annoyed Frank as he had asked them to deliver it in the afternoon so that he could be there to help lift it indoors. While we were wondering just how the two of us were going to lift it indoors some Italian prisoners of war walked by – their camp was in Marlpit Lane. Frank called them and with the help of sign language asked if they would help us lift it in. They were only too pleased and showed great interest in the cottage and went off quite happy with a packet of cigarettes. We were now ready to move in permanently.

When we returned from living in Rochester at the outbreak of war we did not have a lot of furniture. Mum managed to put some in her house in Woodman Road, and her friend Mrs Woolvin who had a sweet shop in Chipstead Valley Road allowed us to put the rest in her cellar under the shop. So we had our old linoleum and stair carpet laid and the three piece suite, table and chairs and two beds installed. It all looked very nice but we knew that when we achieved possession of next door it would be even better.

We were friendly with Mrs Lewis, our sitting tenant, and were quite willing to wait for her cottage. We never thought of trying to get her out. It was after all her home.

Most of our friends thought that we were mad to buy these cottages when we could have bought a modern house, but I never regretted coming to Colgrimes. Mr Bailey, who was in the police force with my dad, came to see us one day and as he stood in the back garden looking around he turned to me and said. 'You have done well buying this place. In a few years it will be worth at least £4,000!'

Frank had by now started to build the conservatory. I was, as usual, the labourer and was quite an expert at mixing cement. The floor was solid concrete and the walls, half way up, were breeze blocks. The rest was timber, glass and roof supports from a house in Caterham that had been bombed. We disposed of the old back door and put in a new (second-hand) door with glass panels, making the kitchen much lighter. To get to the garden we now went through the kitchen into the conservatory (we called it 'The Glass House') and out of the back door. This led to the outside loo, which by this time had a tiled floor and new toilet fitted. For a bath we went down to mum's in Coulsdon. Frank had managed to buy some green Marley floor tiles for the glass house and an old ottoman that mum gave us made it a nice playroom for Gwen and Jackie together with Ming my Chow-Chow dog who had been with us since before the war.

For the next few months we concentrated on the garden and building a garage. The shed that was at the side of the cottage had to come down to make room for the garage and at the back of the shed under a lot of rubbish we found a name board with 'Plum Tree Cottage' on it, so we gave it a good clean and fixed it to the plum tree in the front garden and ever since then the house has been known as 'Plum Tree Cottage'. Half way up the garden on the right was the original flint, stone and brick 'privy'. It had been filled in, but by the time Frank put a new tarmac roof on and with a wooden door it made an excellent shed for the garden tools.

When the garage was finished Frank made a concrete back yard and a nice concrete path from the back door to the end of the garden, which was quite a long way. He also built himself a nice brick and corrugated iron shed right at the end of the garden.

A few weeks after our third Christmas in 'Plum Tree Cottage' Mrs Lewis died, which meant the following spring and summer were to be a very busy time for us in converting the two cottages in to one. Mrs Lewis' cottage was larger than

ours. It had had an extra room upstairs and downstairs already added to it. This was because a previous labourer who lived there had so many children that the cottage needed enlarging. We decided that the downstairs extension would be a bathroom and ran the water pipes from what had been Mrs Lewis' kitchen to a bath, hand-basin and toilet and then a gas fitter we knew came and fitted a large gas water heater. Before doing all that Frank had built a dividing wall about four feet away from Mrs Lewis' kitchen door which made a little passage from the kitchen. This had a door into the back garden and another into the new bathroom. The floor of the passage and bathroom was laid with red Marley tiles and looked very grand. Building materials were by now becoming easier to buy, so Frank bought a lovely new white bathroom suite with a black panel to the bath. Very modern in the late 1940s.

Next we went into the bedrooms of 216 (Mrs Lewis' half) and pulled all the ceilings down and Frank fitted new plasterboard. He prepared all the walls for replastering but employed a professional plasterer to come and do the plastering. When all this was done we knocked a hole in the wall of the girls' existing bedroom, just big enough to make a doorway through into 216. We then removed the stairs in 216 – which left us with just the one flight in the 214 half. Our job now was to put all new floors in 216 and we had to use second-hand timber because it was still difficult to buy new timber.

With the completion of the new floors we painted and wallpapered the three bedrooms in the 216 side of the house. Gwen and Jackie had a bedroom each and Frank and I moved into the front bedroom of 216 so that we could do the front bedroom of 214. The ceiling and walls were plastered and we were able to buy new timber for the floor (tongued and grooved), so really that was the best floor in the house! We had laid linoleum through all the bedrooms and it was lovely to have so much space.

Before starting on the ceiling Frank had engaged a roofer (Mr Shove) from Waddon to put on a new roof using as many of the original tiles as possible on the front and using new tiles on the back of the roof.

Once the upstairs was finished Frank and I moved back into our old bedroom, leaving the three new rooms for the girls. Gwen had the front bedroom and Jackie had the back bedroom. They shared the middle room as a playroom. We turned Mrs Lewis' kitchen into a breakfast room, which was very convenient as it joined our kitchen. We put in an 'Allnight' fire which burned anthracite and kept the place nice and warm. Where the stairs had been removed Frank put in a window which gave us a view of the side garden.

With the sink removed and a new wooden floor in place of the red brick floor it became a very pleasant room.

This now left just the front room of 216 to save. We decided to have a red brick open fireplace, and a window to take the place of the front door. By now Frank was very busy at work, and our garden took up a lot of his time, so he decided to ask Mr Stepney of Hooley to finish the 216 front room. Mr Stepney made a very good job of it and at last we could relax a little.

It was a lovely feeling to look round and see how lovely it looked and to know that we had saved 'Plum Tree Cottage'. Of course that was not the end of *jobs to do,* but we knew that future alterations would be made to suit our own taste and time and they would not be the hard slog of the first five years.

When we first came to 'Plum Tree Cottage' in 1944 our neighbours in 'Cherry Tree Cottage' were Mr & Mrs Peters and their children. I can remember Mrs Peters from my school days as her maiden name was Almond and she lived in Edward Road. They only rented 'Cherry Tree Cottage' and they moved away soon after we moved in.

I can remember 'Cherry Tree Cottage' from my childhood walks with mum and dad. The front room of the cottage was a post office and shop and the room at the back was a private bar. It was a club where some of the local men could meet for a game of darts and a drink. The club was still there when we came to 'Plum Tree Cottage' but with the advent of ***The Tudor Rose*** just along the road the club was not as popular as it used to be and it soon closed and 'Cherry Tree Cottage' was put on the market. It was the end of the war with Japan so people were now looking forward to the future. My mother was interested in buying 'Cherry Tree Cottage' for my brother Billie, who was a prisoner of war and would soon be coming home. She went to ***The Greyhound Hotel*** in Croydon where the property was going to be auctioned but it had been withdrawn because Mr Holland (the owner of 'Cherry Tree Cottage') had accepted an offer from Mr Diplock who was a builder and was living at the time in the cottage next to St John's Church. Mr Diplock and his partner, Vera, were good neighbours and Gwen and Jackie loved to go round to the field at the back of their cottage to ride the pony Blaze. Often I would be working in my kitchen and I would hear Mr Diplock calling 'Mrs Watts, come out and see this lovely sunset'. In those days we could see across the school playing fields towards Woodmansterne and the sunsets could be beautiful.

When Mr Diplock moved to Bexhill the property was sold to Mr & Mrs Villiars who were very nice but only stayed a couple of years and then 'Cherry

Tree Cottage' was sold to Mr Sturgess, a local builder. That was when things really changed. The worst change was the felling of a beautiful, huge walnut tree that was in the grounds at the back of the cottage. The tree was hundreds of years old and Miss Simpson the headmistress of the girls' grammar school tried to save it, but it was felled before she could get a Preservation Order put on it. Five properties were built in what was then the grounds of 'Cherry Tree Cottage'.

In the late 1940s our nearest neighbours on the other side of 'Plum Tree Cottage' were the Almshouses. There was the entrance to the girls school and then a small field separating us from the Almshouses – in later years a bungalow was built on the field – No.218 Coulsdon Road. The Almshouses consisted of four VERY small cottages. In the first one lived Mrs Holden who was 90 years old. The second was occupied by Mrs Macreadie – Mrs Mac to many locals over the years and to me Nancy Gregory, my friend from my teenage days when she helped run the café in the Marlpit Lane Rec – and her seven year old daughter Molly. In the third cottage was Miss Cole who was once in service at Admiral and Lady Goodenough's at Parson's Pightle. She was very old and spent most of her time in bed. Mrs Gibson lived in the fourth cottage. The two end cottages had two rooms and a kitchen, but the middle ones only had one room and a kitchen. Each had its own toilet outside the back door. Nancy Macreadie was born in Stoats Nest Village and having been close friends with her for almost all my life made having her as a neighbour great. During the war she had purchased a piece of land in Tollers Lane but was finding it difficult to get permission to build a house on it as all building had been stopped because of the war. One day she told me that someone from the Council was coming to see if she and young Molly needed more space to live in. The trouble was that although it was very small, Nancy had made her little room so lovely and comfortable that everyone used to fall in love with it so I suggested that she borrow my table and a couple of chairs and put them in her room to make it look even smaller and cramped. So off we went to get my table and chairs. We did not have to worry about neighbours seeing us carrying furniture from one house to the other because there were not that many neighbours in those days! There were only fields between the Bowling Club and the flint cottages opposite and on our side of the road there were only 'Cherry Tree Cottage' and 'Pound Cottage' until you reached Stoneyfield Road. The only thing we did see was plenty of buses. One came by every 15 minutes, every day – they were green No 409 to Godstone or 411 to Holmwood. You could put your clock right by the time of the buses. In fact if I was still in bed when the first one went down I knew I had overslept!

I do not know if my furniture helped but eventually Nancy had her house built in Tollers Lane, where she and Molly spent many happy years. Nancy was the caretaker at St John's Church of England School and also caretaker to the Church Hall which was next to the school and one day during the first year of living in 'Plum Tree Cottage' Nancy asked me if I would like a job as dinner lady as the school had decided to do school dinners in the Church Hall. I said 'Yes', as I knew my mother would look after Gwen and Jackie for me and it would help me to get Gwen into the school when she was five. We got to the

St John's Church of England School — 1949
Gwen and Jackie by the railings

Church Hall at 11.30 a.m. and put up trestle tables and benches for the children to sit on and about ten minutes to noon a van arrived from Caterham with the dinners already cooked and in large sealed metal containers. I would dish up the food on to plates and dinner monitors would carry it out to the tables where the school secretary and a teacher helped to serve the children. The school was very old and built of flint and brick. The front door opened into a square room with a red brick floor and pegs on the wall for the girls to hang their coats. In the opposite corner was a door leading to a very large room with a dividing partition which when closed made two classrooms. A

door led from this large room to the back of the building, where there was a small office and another room for the boys to hang their coats – this had the back door leading to the playground and outside toilets. By today's standards it was very primitive but it was a very happy school. Mrs Southby was the headmistress. She was a very strict but fair lady and all the children and staff had great respect for her. The children's nickname for her was 'Buzzer' because she was always buzzing about.

Next door to the school was an old cottage where Mr Cook lived with his daughter Maggie. She looked after him. Mr Cook and his son Charlie had been the church sextons for years.

St John's Church of England School — 1949

Mr Cook's house is to the left of the school

Once a year some of the older children went to a special children's service at Southwark Cathedral and one year I went with them as a 'helper'. It was very impressive. On Ascension Day the school had a holiday after going to St John's for a service first. I always took Gwen and Jackie and a couple of Gwen's friends to London Zoo that day.

Whilst we were living at 'Plum Tree Cottage' there were many changes occurring locally – sadly the old school was demolished and I often sit and think of all the buildings that have disappeared in and around Coulsdon –

Reedham Orphanage, the Regal Cinema, the thatched Round House in Coulsdon Road, Toldene School in Tollers Lane, Purley County Grammar School for Girls, Cane Hill, Netherne and St Lawrence's Hospitals, the Guards' Barracks, Coulsdon North Station, Parson's Pightle and the riding stables at the top of Marlpit Lane to name but a few. It seems ironic that they survived the Luftwaffe but have now disappeared. It only goes to prove that **the pen is mightier than the sword.** It is also very sad that many of the crafts that men were taught to help build these buildings are also disappearing.

But changes were also happening at Plum Tree—

The next major alteration to 'Plum Tree Cottage' was in 1962 when our youngest daughter Jackie (Jacqueline) wanted to marry Stanford Coleman. Because she was very young Frank said he would not give his consent unless they could buy their own house. They found it very hard to find affordable property which they liked and after much thought Frank and I came up with the idea of building a bungalow on the top half of our back garden. After all, our garden had already been somewhat spoilt by the building of four houses in the garden of 'Cherry Tree Cottage' ('Cherry Tree Court'), which overlooked our property and took away any privacy that we had. Jackie and Stan were thrilled with this idea and we explained that they would have to pay for the plot of land and all the materials but Frank would give his building expertise and time free and with their help he would build them a lovely bungalow.

After they were married they lived with us in 'Plum Tree Cottage' and for the next two years it was hard work for everyone. They all had their jobs to go to during the day but as soon as they arrived home it was up to the building site. The really hard work was clearing the site and digging the footings and Stan and Jackie had to spend all their savings as they could not raise a mortgage until the footings were approved by the council. Once the footings were passed they received their first mortgage payment, which enabled them to pay Frank for the land and to buy more materials for the next stage of the building. The mortgage company would only pay out in stages, once each stage had been approved by the Building Inspector. When it came to the electrics Stan took charge as that was what he understood. The work took two years to complete but was worth it as Jackie and Stan had a lovely home to move into.

In 1966 our elder daughter Gwen (Gwendoline) married Tony and she and her husband moved into a house in Bradmore Way but sold it in 1972 and went to live in Llanuwchllyn, Gwynedd, North Wales. They had bought a farmhouse with permission to build a caravan park. After a few months they asked Frank if he would go there to help them to get the site established i.e. build a brick

toilet and shower block and lay drains and concrete bases for 20 static caravans together with a rather long service road. Frank knew he could do the job and was only too glad to help Gwen in the same way that he had helped Jackie.

We had 'Plum Tree Cottage' valued and gave Stan and Jackie the first chance to buy and after careful thought they decided that if they both worked for the next few years and were careful, they could afford the higher mortgage repayments. So Frank and I left Coulsdon (an area where I had been born and grew up) and followed our elder daughter to North Wales. We bought a new bungalow in the little village of Llanuwchllyn and as Frank was now retired he went to work at the caravan park every day.

After five years we decided to return south and we bought a bungalow at Windmill Hill near Hailsham in Sussex where we were very happy, but sadly Frank died in 1983. By that time I was severely disabled by arthritis and Jackie and Stan brought me back to 'Plum Tree Cottage' to live with them**.**

They had a lovely self-contained unit built at the side of 'Plum Tree Cottage' with access from the main building and here I still live – right back where my love affair with 'Plum Tree Cottage' started over 55 years ago. I do not suppose I can go on much longer but it is comforting to know that 'Plum Tree Cottage' is in good hands and will continue to be well looked after in the future.

So much has changed over the years, neighbours have come and gone and now I have time to sit and recall all the friends and neighbours of 55 years ago…

REMEMBERING HOLIDAYS WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE YOUNG

Just prior to the war Frank had bought a Morris 10 but during the war he had to use it for work so by the time the war ended it was 'clapped out' and he sold it. New cars were impossible to get, so he relied on using the firm's vehicles. The one the kids loved most was a Jeep. Mr Mann at KLM (a garage on the corner of Windermere Road and Brighton Road in Coulsdon) had promised Frank the first new car they had in for sale but he could not say what make it would be. When it arrived it was a black Standard Vanguard which Frank said was rather like driving a bus as it was so big. He was so pleased to have his own car once again but unfortunately the girls did not feel the same. They hated the newness, the smell of the car and the leather, and much preferred the Jeep!

It was lovely to take mum & Aunty Jinny to Hampton to see their brothers, Fred and Charlie and their families, and in the autumn we always took them down to Brighton to see the autumn colours. The road to Brighton in those days was a nice country drive.

Frank bought a large tent and camping equipment so that we could take the girls to Wales for holidays, taking them to all our favourite places. It was easy to camp in those days. There was hardly any traffic and if you happened to see a nice spot you could just pull off the road and put up your tent. No one said anything to you so long as you were not blocking a gateway into a field.

We took the girls to Conway Castle, Llandudno and then up to Great Orme Head where we saw the Brabazon plane flying over. We were so high up that it seemed very close. Then we travelled down the Welsh coast to Caernarfon where we camped the night. The next day we were at a little hamlet called Sarnau just north of Cardigan. We saw an old lady by her cottage which was next to a field and asked her if we could camp in her field. She said that we could and were welcome to stay as long as we liked. She lived alone and seemed glad of our company. She told the girls to call her Nanna. We spent three happy days there and made many return visits over the following years. After leaving Nanna's we travelled on over the mountains behind Harlech. We knew that route well because in the past it had been one of our favourite places. Porthcawl was a visit we had to make to show Gwen where she had been born. Brother George had moved to Neath by then.

We took the girls to a coal mine and told them the story of how Frank and I had visited it before the war and had been taken down – a friend offered to take us down a coal mine. It was not a 'pit', it was a 'slant' – which meant that instead of going straight down in a cage we went down on a 'tram'. It was very dark for it was just a tunnel cut in the coal and it went down for about 1½ miles. We came to a big cave where they kept the pit ponies. They each had a stall where they lived when not working, and plenty of hay, but they spent all their lives down in that pit and I thought it was wicked. We noticed a big black mass in the corner of the stable and when we looked closer we saw it was a nest of cockroaches. It was not a happy memory but nevertheless it was quite an experience!

By the time we arrived home from our first holiday as a family the girls had fallen in love with Wales. In future years we climbed Snowdon – four times – fished in Lake Vyrnwy, sailed on Bala Lake and rode on all the steam mountain railways.

It really is a beautiful country, but there's no place like home!

HARLECH

As years go by it becomes more clear
that memories of the past become very dear.
What would it be like in this terrible age,
if we couldn't remember and turn the page?
Remember once sitting on a hilltop high,
with the song of a bird way up in the sky.
The sway of the grass and scent of the clover
Are some of the memories of days that are over.
In the far distance wild horses we see
with manes all a flying so graceful and free.
As free as the clouds in the sky far away.
As free as the sea with it's silver spray.
It was a wonderful world and to God I pray
That I will always remember that Heavenly Day.

OUR MOVE TO EGHAM

In 1954 Frank's firm bought a concrete works at Egham, Surrey. It had been rather neglected over the years and needed a lot of time and hard work put into it. There was a nice new bungalow next to the works and it was decided that one of the directors should live in it and take full charge of the works. Frank being the practical man got the short straw! I knew Frank would love the job as he loved a challenge, but neither of us wanted to move there permanently so we decided to try it for a couple of years and keep 'Plum Tree Cottage' so that we could come back at weekends and holidays. On a Friday evening after school Frank would drive me and the girls, together with the dogs, home to 'Plum Tree Cottage'; he would then drive back to Egham early on Saturday morning, returning on Saturday evening and then we would all go back on Sunday night.

The girls had to change schools. Gwen went to Chertsey Grammar and Jackie to Egham Manor and they settled down well and enjoyed coming home at weekends when they could see their gran and have their music lessons with Frank Wright in Woodman Road.

After about nine months Mr & Mrs Ellis, who lived in Coulsdon Road, asked us if we would consider letting 'Plum Tree Cottage' to their son and his family for a couple of months as he was coming home on leave from abroad. We agreed, but continued to visit mum in Woodman Road. After a couple of months we returned to being at 'Plum Tree Cottage' for the weekends and

then about a year later Mrs Bindon, who was housekeeper to Mr Tompkins who lived opposite us, asked if we would let 'Plum Tree Cottage' to her brother and his family who were coming home on leave from South America. We of course said yes.

Sadly my mother's health was getting worse which meant that I was travelling to Coulsdon every evening by Green Line Bus to be with her at night. My friend Mrs Crisp kept an eye on her during the day. After a while mum asked if she could come and stay with us at Egham so we prepared the third bedroom for her and Frank and I went to fetch her.

Gwen and Jackie loved having their gran with them and we had two happy months together, then sadly she died. We brought her home to Old Coulsdon to be buried with my dad at St John's.

It was not long after that we all returned permanently. The girls returned to their schools and I was happy once again in 'Plum Tree Cottage'.

NOW I AM OLD

What do I dream of now I am old?
I'm dreaming of stories to be told.
When I had charm and a beautiful smile,
and danced and sang most of the while.
Before I was old,
I could not be told.
I knew it all, or so I thought,
until a lesson I was taught.
Someone I loved was taken away.
The pain's been there until this day.
Some scars go deep and never fade.
There's always a price that has to be paid.

I think that now the time has come for me to put down my pen. I still have lots of little stories which pop up in my head now and again but I am afraid that is where they will have to stay! My hand and eyes are getting tired.

I hope that someday one of my family will have some happy memories to write about. There is Gwen who has two children, Sarah Ann and David. Sarah works for British Airways and has spent the last eight years travelling the world. (Aunt Jinny would be so proud of her). David *'Surfs the Net'*. I

don't know exactly what that means but I know that he is happy in his job and gets well paid.

Jackie has one child Kevin who in 1996 married Liz, who is very dear to me. Kevin was recently (2001) presented with the Best Boss of the Year Award.

Last but not least comes Annie Rose, my great granddaughter, born 25 July 2000. She has brought me great joy. I look at her asleep in her cot and try to imagine what life has ahead for her, but I cannot. All I can do is to pray that she finds lots of love and happy memories.

Oh! for a soft white cloud on which to lay,
and float so peacefully far away.
Where I can sleep and drift along,
to the sound of music and angel's song.

If there is one thing I can take,on this long journey
through time and space to eternity
let it be memories of Happy Days
that I have collected through life's puzzling maze.

Memories of dear ones, it's so hard to let go.
Memories of dear ones who already know
what it's like to float on a cloud far away.

I'm so tired of creeping about like a snail.
I'm so tired of feeling so fragile and frail.
I'm so tired of the things that I now cannot do.
Like putting on stockings or even my shoe.
I'm tired of always smiling and trying to be gay.
When all the time I'm wishing the pain would go away.
I'm tired of being a widow after being a happy wife.
The loss of a loved one makes a very lonely life.
Children try hard to take away my pain.
But it's Frank I really need to make me happy again.

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