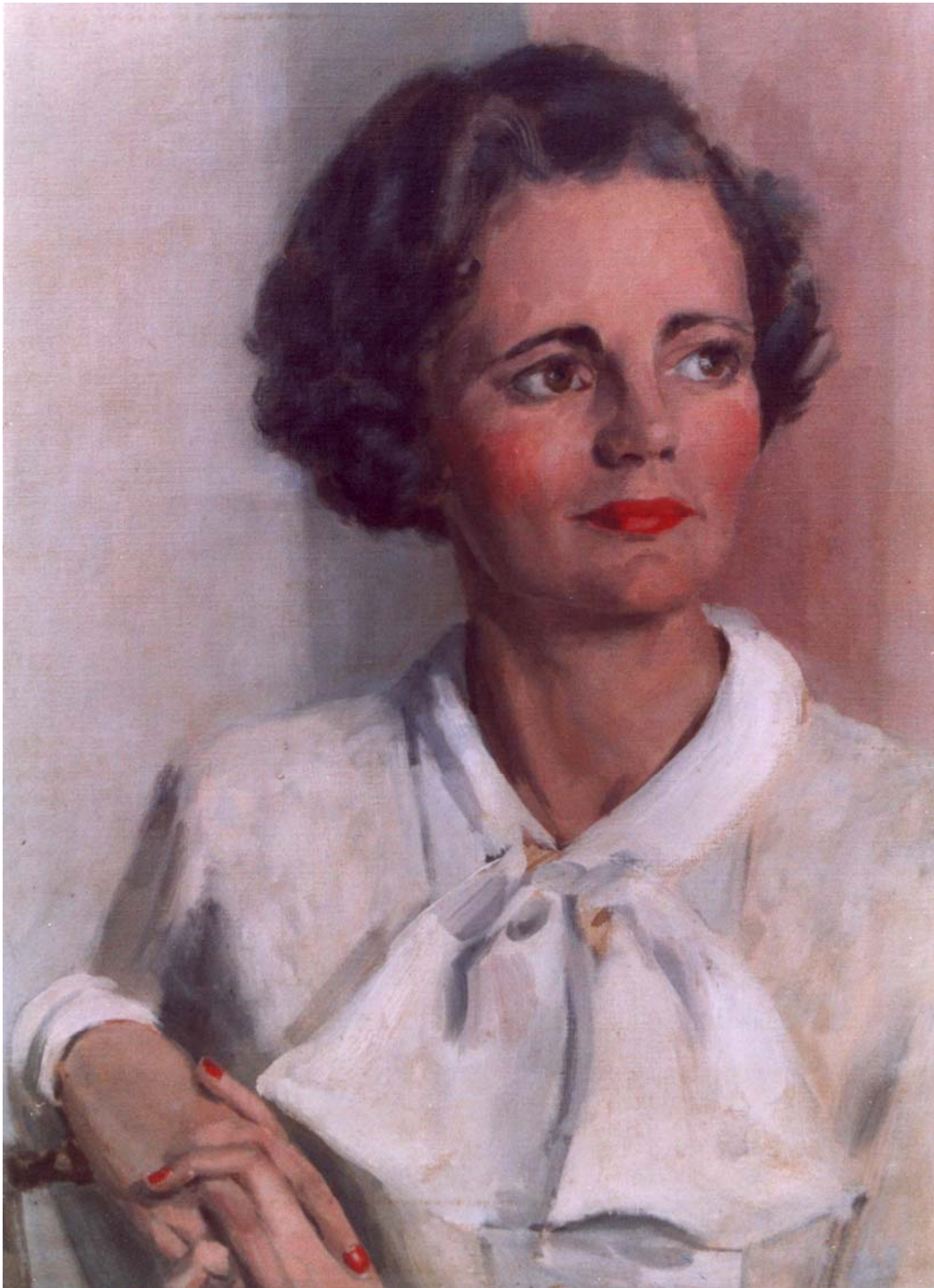


FIRST DECADE

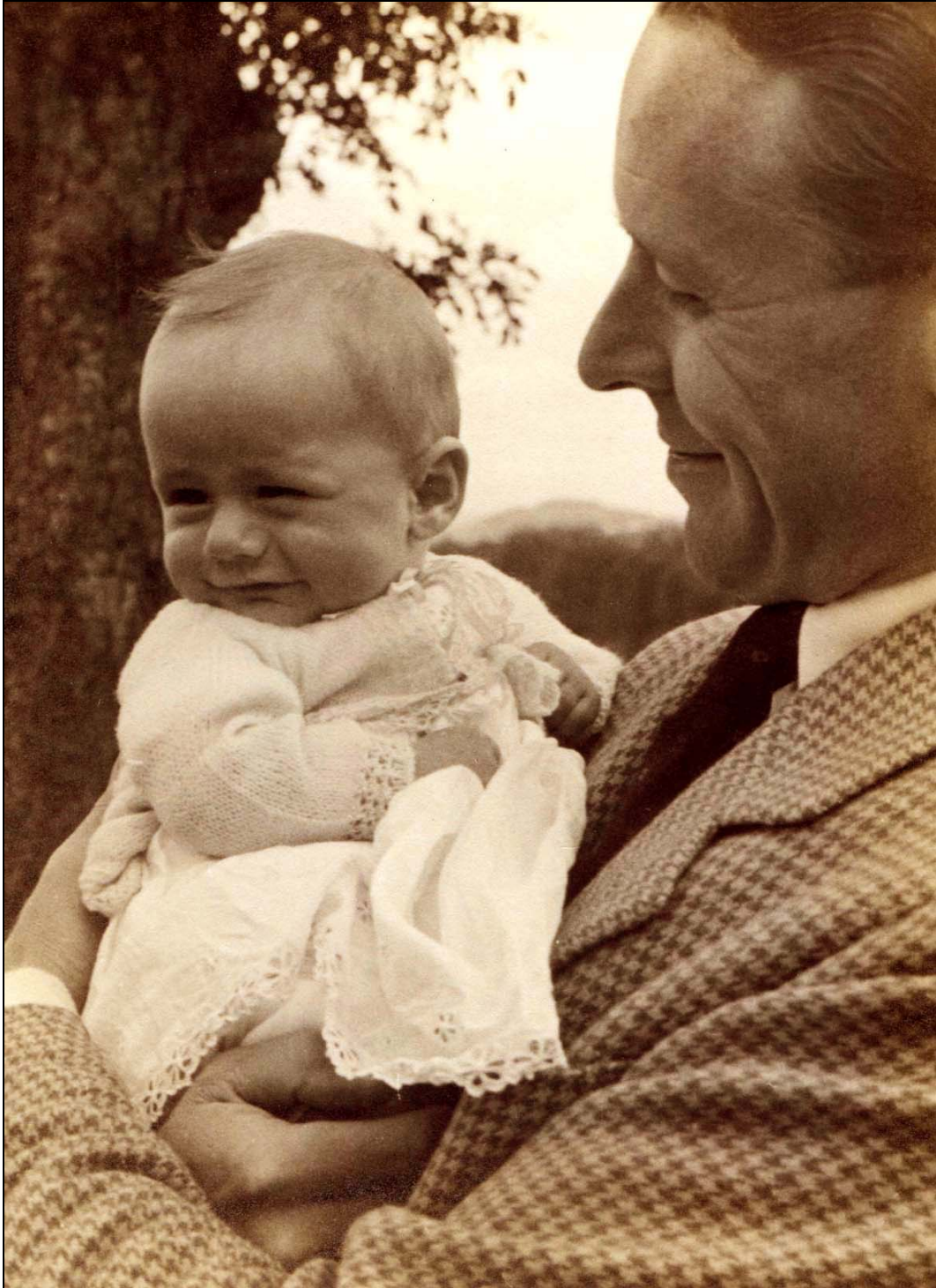
MEMORIES

I was meant to be a girl! My mother told me that having produced Pat and Michael, she longed for a daughter. After having her second son the doctor advised her that if she waited for five years, her body chemistry would change and the next baby would be female.



My mother, 'Nan'

The doctor was wrong! I was born near Marble Arch in London at my parents' home in Cambridge Square on May 6th 1935, according to my nanny. However, that is not the date on my Birth Certificate! My father registered me as having been born on May 4th, so that has become my official birthday and the day the family celebrate. Having two birthdays every year has not made any significant difference to my life.

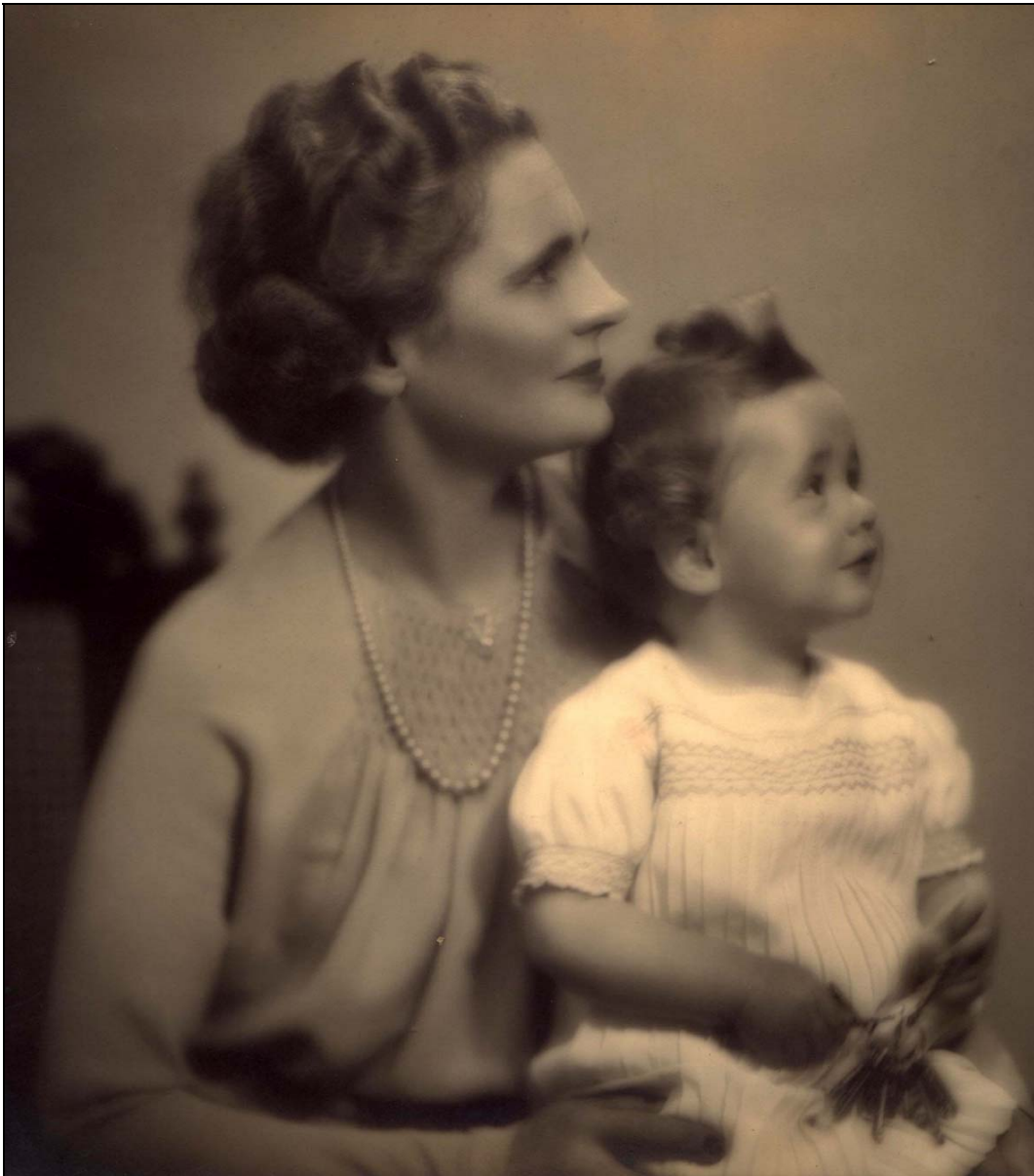


My father, 'Bill', with 'Little John Citizen'

My mother was so disappointed at producing another boy that as soon as she was allowed out of bed, my parents sailed for France, presumably to recover from the shock by having a flutter at the tables in Le Touquet casino. Her absence made no difference to my up-bringing because after birth I was handed over to Nana and only brought down for inspection at afternoon tea.

I was christened John after 'Little John Citizen', a character drawn by the cartoonist, Strube. Until demanding to be called *John*, I answered to *Strube* for the first eight years of my life. The only thing of any importance that seems to have happened to me while living at Cambridge Square was that the local Rabbi was called in to perform a circumcision on the kitchen table.

According to Nana once my mother had recovered from the shock of another male, she decided to dress me extravagantly and I became the best-dressed little boy on the 'nanny pram parade' in Hyde Park. Photographs show me as being remarkably well turned out at the tender age of two!



'Nan' and 'John', aged two

Always having considering myself to be a late starter I have no memories until the age of four. My first recollection is of snow at our home in Wiltshire that my parents had bought when my father was taken seriously ill with tuberculosis. What a shock it must be for children when they first see snow! One day everything is green, and the next it's white. To awake to snow in the garden still gives me a wonderful surprise.



A winter scene near 'Chute Standen' in Wiltshire

At the beginning of 1936 my father had to have a lung collapsed. In those days the cure for tuberculosis was long months of recuperation in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. The alternative was to buy a house in the south of England, which my parents did, having decided that moving the whole family to Switzerland was impossible. This is how I came to grow up in the beautiful countryside of Wiltshire on a small 250-acre farm called Chute Standen with 12 Jersey cows that produced the milk my father was ordered to drink. There was a draft horse, an orange-coloured tractor, an enormous thatched barn and a blacksmith across the road. In fact everything that makes a small boy's life bliss. Farming became my father's weekend hobby and the cows his pride and joy.

Chute Standen is halfway between the villages of Upper Chute and Lower Chute. My mother moved the family into what was always called the Big House and built a conservatory on to the side of the sitting room for my father so he could breathe the fresh clean air of the English countryside. He recovered in two years and returned to the Zinc Corporation as Managing Director, a firm founded by his Melbourne-born father, William Sydney Robinson, known always as WS. Nana MacKay had joined our family when my elder brother, Patrick, was born three years before Mike, and stayed on for my arrival eight years later. From the moment of arrival my every whimper was attended to by an adoring substitute mother, Nana.



'John', aged three and already listening to the passage of time



The 'Big House' with the new conservatory for my father on the left

At the outbreak of the war the Big House was taken over by the Land Army and the family moved down to the Farm House at the end of the front drive. Previously my father had leased the house to his great friend, Sydney Emanuel, wife Vera and their son Tim. Uncle Syd enlisted in the army and Vera moved back to London with Tim, so we moved into the Farm House.

Vera had a son from her first marriage named Val, who was training as a Fleet Air Arm pilot in 1939. During one of his flights he buzzed the Big House to drop a message in his cigarette case to a Land Army girl he had taken a fancy to. Very high beech trees surrounded the house and I happened to be playing in the shade of one of them when Val flew over trying to make contact with the girl.

He misjudged the height of my tree and clipped the top, removing a chunk of his tail in the process, which fell to the ground beside me! Some years later Margie jokingly pointed out to Val that he had very nearly nipped my life in the bud! He was kind enough to apologise, saying that he remembered the event very clearly, because he thought that he had also prematurely ended his own! His mistake had been to look back to see if the girl had retrieved his cigarette case rather than looking forward at the treetops. He luckily crashed in a ploughed field next to a gun battery so was able to get the men to carry the bits of tail, with branches still imbedded, into the woods and hide them in case he was court-martialled. He recalled that he had walked away from the crash unscathed and had gone out dancing with the girl that evening!

Tim Emanuel was a year younger than me. Living so close we often played together and my second memory was of his toys. I had lead soldiers, but Tim had lead Eskimos! He also had a board covered with pretend snow that included an igloo, husky dogs, and a sledge. Part of the board was covered with blue water where an Eskimo paddled a kayak. To remember it so vividly must mean I was very envious of such a grand display!

My grandfather, known universally as WS, played a very important role in the early lives of brother Michael and me, as he insisted that we two should be moved to Australia for the duration of the war. At the time of the outbreak of hostilities between England and Germany WS was principal adviser to both the British and Australian Governments for the supply, production and distribution of strategic metals vital for the armament of all the Allied Forces and a close friend of Winston Churchill. In 1935 WS wrote a book about war with Germany being inevitable! Because of the threat of a Nazi invasion WS advised my parents to get their children out of Britain and back to Australia.

In the winter of 1939 the Russians had signed a Non-Aggression Pact with the Nazis in Berlin. In 1940 the Germans entered Paris and France collapsed, causing the evacuation at the end of May of the 300,000 British soldiers from Dunkirk with the aid of everything that floated, from dinghy to destroyer. With the capture of the French airfields the Germans were able to bomb London and by the middle of 1940 had killed 22,000 civilians.

The cross-Channel invasion of Britain by Nazi Germany was a real threat. The island was totally unprepared for the onslaught as nearly all the British heavy armament had been left on the beaches of Dunkirk. We were saved from an invasion by the 'Heroes of the Battle of Britain' who successfully defended our skies in their Spitfires during the first half of

September of 1940. Providentially, Hitler followed Napoleon's fatal choice and invaded Russia.

In 1941 Hitler invaded Russia and captured most of the Red Army who had been ordered not to fire on their allies. Stalin awoke from a twelve-day coma and his revenge came when the Russians took Berlin, but not before 20 million of them had been slaughtered by the Germans. Because of the fascist ambitions of Germany and Japan, 65 million lives were lost in WWII, equivalent to the present population of Great Britain. Most people today don't realise that to rid Europe of the Nazis, 10,000 Allied soldiers gave their lives for Democracy on D-Day, the name given to the first day of the Allied landings on the beaches of Normandy. *10,000 young men in one day!*

These were fateful times for Britain and if it had not been for Churchill's courage and leadership, our Democratic Freedoms would have disappeared. *The Lights had gone out all over Europe.* However, none of this had yet happened at the beginning of 1940 when Mike and I, aged ten and five, set sail with Nana from Liverpool, bound for Australia via America.

WS had an awesome reputation. I don't remember him when we were staying at the seaside cliff cottage at Portsea during the war, because he was constantly travelling around the world. Most of my knowledge about my grandfather comes from his autobiography called *If I Remember Rightly*. The book is fascinating and covers from his childhood, to the founding of the Zinc Corporation, which later amalgamated with Rio Tinto to become RTZ when my father succeeded WS as chairman. In a tribute paid to him on his death he was named as a Founding Father of Australia's immense mining industry. He never made any personal gain from his knowledge of the companies he created as he refused to hold shares in them. He lived off his salary and died broke. At the end of the war he refused to accept his war salary from the Government.



WS

WS got on very well with Winston and when the war was over he gave him a pair of black Australian swans for his home in England. Winston, in return, gave him two boxer dogs, appropriately called Winston and Brendan, after Brendan Bracken, one of Churchill's close advisers.

Churchill also wanted to give him a title in recognition for his service to the British Commonwealth. WS, being a socialist, didn't want anything to do with titles, so refused the offer by saying he liked getting *The Age* newspaper straight from the Press with his initials written on the top!

The Age arrived every morning because, like his father Anthony Bennett, WS had been Financial Editor of that newspaper. Instead of a title Winston gave him a rare 1568 Treacle Bible to commemorate his service to the British Commonwealth. WS donated the Bible to his old Melbourne school, Scotch College, where it is kept on display in the Chapel.

In presenting this ancient copy of the Holy Bible to Scotch College we should like to inscribe the name of a son of your School, William Sydney Robinson.

In the six relentless years of war that preceded the victory of 1945 the services manifold of William Sydney Robinson to the British Commonwealth were beyond computation.

There is no token more fitting to commemorate the work of this man of unquenchable faith than the book of Scriptures.

Winston S. Churchill

7

1949

Bernard Baruch wrote: *WS Robinson was one of the very few men I met in my life who had elements of real greatness.*

WS's first job was on a fruit farm working for one of his five older brothers. Although he was Dux of Victoria's Agricultural College, once he was working on the land he changed his mind, and instead became a journalist at *The Age*.

He specialised in mining and one of the things he reported on was the silver mine that was operated by BHP at Broken Hill, in the outback of New South Wales. On a visit to the mine in 1905 he saw the enormous heaps of slag that had been extracted from the open-cut to expose the silver vein and realised it was full of lead and zinc, two metals that were in great demand.

His older brother Lionel had returned to London to deal in Australian mining shares on the Stock Exchange. WS gave up his job and joined his

brother, founded the Zinc Corporation and floated it on the market. The treating of the slag was so successful that ZC leased the mining rights at one end of the open-cut, and North Broken Hill Company leased the other.

These two companies joined forces and built the Port Pirie smelter and went on to make Broken Hill what it is today. The city honoured my grandfather and father by naming their university *WS and LB Robinson*.



'Little Bill', grandmother 'Charlotte' and 'Peg'

When WS moved to England he took his wife Charlotte and their two children, Bill, then aged three, and Peg his elder sister. Young Bill was actually christened Lyell Bryant, but was always known as Little Bill or LB. WS commenced a life of travelling back and forth by sea between London, Melbourne and the United States of America.



'Peg' and 'Bill' with their donkey cart

In those days the only way to travel was by steamship. He would arrive, spend a couple of months working, and then sail again. He had a personal valet named Albert who travelled with him. The voyages would have been opulent as he always went First Class, socialism not applying to travel! After the war WS set Albert up in a barbershop near the ZC office so he could have his morning shave when in London! Albert used to cut my hair in the holidays!

This lifestyle may have suited WS, but not so my grandmother Charlotte who found living in a strange country very difficult. In fact the situation became so bad in the end it led to a separation, which must have been very distressing for Little Bill and his sister Peg. Charlotte died in 1927.

WS's mother was Harriet Barton, the sister of Edmund Barton, Australia's First Federal Premier, who was also a blood relation of Helen Raine, Margie's mother, which means that Margie and I share some genes!

WS second wife was an English girl named Gertrude from Wimbledon, London. It was not until after WS died that Margie and I really got to know Gertrude as a person. One day we were amazed to receive a letter asking if she could come and stay with us on the farm. She had been very generous and given each of WS's grandchildren some money, which we spent on building a

10,000-gallon stock tank next to the house as a swimming pool that became a lifesaver for the children in the hot Australian summers.



Gertrude

During Gertrude's visit we discovered she had a wonderful sense of humour. She told us incredible stories about her teenage life when she and her best friend, who had the unbelievable name of Lala de Bath, visited India to stay with a Maharaja who took them tiger shooting. The girls each had their own tent with a sitting room, a bedroom and a bath with hot water to wash the dust off after a hard day on an elephant's back!

She also told us about the time that WS was courting her. He liked to take her out on evening picnics in Windsor Park. WS would collect Gertrude after work and drive down to Windsor Park for summer evening picnics. While she and the chauffeur set up the table, laid out the silver and opened the champagne on one side of the car, WS would retire to the other side and have Albert give him a close shave with a cut-throat razor! We just rolled about laughing when we heard her stories of the 1920s. What amazing times!

WS was passionate about new technology. In 1903 he had his first ride in a chain driven car, a whole two miles! He wrote in his autobiography: *I was highly excited by the experience...and enthusiastically delivered the news to my father. Not so the 'Governor' who said, "Don't waste your time and money, my boy, over those contraptions; they cost a thousand pounds—you can buy a horse and buggy for £90."*

WS's first car was a Daimler. It was the first car ever made in which the chauffeur was under cover rather than exposed to the elements. In those days a car's bodywork was tailor-made to the buyer's specifications and WS, being a socialist, insisted that he and the driver rode under the same roof, although of course there was a glass window between them to keep conversations private! Within a week of its being delivered he had a letter from Buckingham Palace asking if he would mind if the Queen copied him and had a similar car built!

He then ordered a Rolls Royce on condition it had a starter motor! RR agreed to do this if WS paid the cost of the blue prints, a total of £2 12s 6d, as

they thought the idea would never catch on because everyone who owned an RR had a chauffeur who could swing the starting-handle! As soon as they completed the job they wished to break the contract, to which WS agreed on condition they paid for the blue prints themselves, which they did! The amazing thing is that WS never held a 'diving licence', preferring to be driven!

WS had given Gertrude a small Constable painting that came into our possession in a roundabout way when she died. The Constable was highly valued and no one wanted it, so the solicitors decided to ship the painting to London for sale at a famous auction house. The experts declared that it was not by Constable, but agreed to sell the painting at a value of £50. I wrote to the solicitors and said that we would like to buy it for that amount and they agreed. I went to collect the painting and was told that they had mislaid it, but would pay me £50, the value they had put on the painting. I would not accept this and claimed that they should instead pay £500, the value the painting was insured for, saying I would write to the solicitors handling Gertrude's Estate and explain what had happened. Several days later a letter arrived from the auction house saying that they had found the painting!



'Nana', 'Mike' ten and 'John' five in 1940 before sailing

But going back to our departure from England in 1940. Pat was 13 at the time and my mother refused to let him leave, saying that as he was such a good shot, already bringing home game from hunting around the farm, if the Germans did attack, his place was here to shoot them!

And so it was decided that the two youngest sons, with our dear little Nana, should go to live with WS and Gertrude at their seaside home near Portsea, a little fishing village some 60 miles out of Melbourne.

We were booked to sail from Liverpool to New York and so began the first of many trips that I have been fortunate enough to make to Australia. I remember nothing of the journey up to Liverpool or saying goodbye to my parents, but I do remember the horrible Customs official! My lead soldiers were carried around in a little cardboard suitcase and before boarding the ship they took them away from me saying that the lead was needed for bullets to kill the Nazis. As bullets were needed I don't hold a grudge, but since that time I have been very wary of all Customs men.

Nothing is remembered of the Atlantic crossing. My next memory was of looking down from the top of the Empire State Building in New York and seeing the railway lines of Penn Station, presumably having been told that we were going to take a train from there to cross Canada.



Captain Marvel

The train journey from New York to Montreal and across to Vancouver must have taken at least five days. Mike was ten years old and loved reading, but my being only five, and the Customs man having purloined all my toys in

Liverpool, and my not being able to read, must have been a problem. The answer was a pile of *Captain Marvel* comics from the station bookstall.

My only memory of the train trip across Canada was stopping on the Great Plains when we got out to walk up and down the platform. Can you imagine my surprise on being introduced to the Chief of the Blackfoot tribe, wearing a knee-length white-feathered Indian headdress. It was a breathtaking experience for a five-year-old!

Nothing is recalled of the Pacific Crossing but I remember crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge. WS asked the driver why we were going so slowly and I recall the chauffeur's reply, "I thought the children would enjoy seeing the bridge." This is my first memory of the spoken word.

In the pre-war period it was the fashion to dress boys in kilts. WS had discovered that the Gunn clan, founded in 1237 by Olaf the Black, King of Man and Lord of the Isles, included a Robinson branch, so he had a kilt made for LB, and my mother did the same for Pat and Michael. This photograph shows my two brothers wearing kilts with me between them looking angelic in white rompers, aged two, which makes Mike seven and Pat ten.



'Michael' and 'Pat' in kilts

When we arrived in Melbourne we moved into a flat in Clivedon Mansions. The only memory of the flat was triggered by a photograph of myself dressed in the kilt. No doubt the kilt I am wearing in the photograph taken in 1941, aged seven, was a hand-me-down from Mike.

Looking at the photograph brings back very painful memories of a children's party and Nana dressed me up for the occasion. The look on my face shows me feeling happy and totally unaware of what an awful day it was going to be; the sort of day that every child remembers with squirming anguish. We arrived at the party and all the girls laughed at me wearing a skirt! To make matters worse I was obviously bigger than Mike as it looks like a mini skirt!



Wearing the kilt! August 1941

In my defence Nana talked about Scottish soldiers, but my psyche was obviously severely damaged that day and still bares the scars! Perhaps this horrible experience is the cause of my lasting dislike of all parties.

One of my great joys of those early days in Melbourne was the journey we made every day to Melbourne Grammar School in a green and yellow tram. The same trams are still running today! The big thrill was that we had our own book of tickets from which the conductor used to tear one out every trip.

Unfortunately those exciting rides came to an end as it was decided that Melbourne was much too dangerous a place for a school because the Japanese might bomb the city, even though the distance from Singapore made that quite impossible. Consequently the junior school was moved up to the clubhouse of a golf course near Healesville in the Dandenong Ranges.

I am afraid I didn't learn very much at MGS. On arriving back in England three years later, aged eight, I was still reading *Captain Marvel* comics and could hardly write my name! When being asked to sign my name on my ration book at the Chute Post Office I left the first D out of Edward, which when pointed out to me caused considerable embarrassment. One of my Healesville memories is of playing with plasticine and modelling a submarine!

My cousin Annie, who later taught me to ride a horse, tells a story of her young brother Gavin and me playing at Convoys in the gigantic front hall of their homestead called Torrumbarry near Echuca, a town on the Murray River. The rugs on the floor were land and the wooden floors between them the sea. Aunt Peg, my father's sister, had married Harry Baillieu and they had four children, Barbara, Annie, Peter and Gavin. When Annie passed us she heard me tell Gavin, "My submarine has sunk the ship carrying the children." This is a pretty scary story as a German U-boat did sink a ship loaded with children travelling from England to Canada, causing all evacuation to cease immediately.

My first clear memory of using my hands to build an object happened at Healesville. The object was a model aeroplane made from balsa wood covered with tissue paper. I had been given the kit for my birthday and as a treat had been invited into the Matron's sitting room to assemble it. The Matron was my own nanny who had presumably been given the job of Matron to keep an eye on Mike and me when we had been sent up to Healesville.

I can remember her sitting room very well as it had a wood fire and was warm and snug, something the rest of the school wasn't. My birthday being in May meant it fell in the middle of the Australian winter and it was very cold. The model kit came with paste glue that had to be mixed with water and then left to set for ten minutes. After cutting out the sections, I mixed the glue and immediately set to work. The result of not waiting ruined the glue, so it didn't stick! To make up for this disappointment Nana gave me sixpence to buy something at the village shop. I must have been desperate for vitamins that day, because I spent the whole sixpence on a raw carrot!



Jack

The Healesville Animal Sanctuary was at the end of the First Hole of the Golf Course, so we were able to walk down and through a gate into the sanctuary. It was a magic place with kangaroo and emu running free.

The great attraction was Jack the Platypus, not because of the animal himself, but because of his greedy appetite and the money we made from feeding him. Jack ate three and a half jam tins of worms every day as well as ten egg yolks. The keepers always welcomed the live supply provided by us boys and paid sixpence for a tin of worms. Jack lived for 17 years, dying in 1954, and was the father of Corie, the first platypus hatched in captivity. He had poison spurs on his hind legs, which could make a man very ill so had to be handled wearing gloves. He was twenty-four inches long, six of which were tail, and so famous he is mentioned in the *Australian Encyclopaedia*!

The headmaster at Healesville used the harshest form of punishment I have ever come across. At Sandroyd Preparatory School the headmaster regularly beat us on the backside with a cane. At Rugby School we received the same treatment either from a master or a senior boy. But at Healesville we were beaten across the *fingers* with a cane. We had to hold out our right hand, palm up, and he would whack us across the fingers in front of the whole school during Assembly. The bruise would last for a week!

My cousin, Gavin, was just older than me and obviously an afterthought like myself as his siblings, Peter, Barbara and Annie, were already teenagers. Thinking back to those days it must have been very lonely for Mike as Gavin and I were nearly the same age. Mike was much younger than his older cousins, so must have spent most of his time on his own. I don't think being in Australia during the war was a happy experience for my brother.

Torrumbarry was a large station in the Riverina where Uncle Harry bred Dorset Horn sheep. The homestead was beautiful and a very elegant building. The house was one storey high and built around a large square grass lawn, with one side being the main house, another the kitchen wing and the third the children's cottage. The fourth side was a covered walkway joining the children's cottage to the kitchen wing. It had the feel of a *Gone with the Wind* plantation home as it had a Palladium portico over the front door. Except for Aunt Peg's roses the gardens were mainly grass, but in the middle of the front lawn was a huge Botany Bay fig tree. Beyond the garden hundreds of giant gum trees surrounded a vast billabong where we could swim. It was an adventure playground for us, apart from the need to keep an eye out for the odd poisonous snake.

All the stock care was done on horseback and as the station hands were away fighting the war, Annie and her brother Peter did much of the work. One day Annie decided it was time I learned to ride, so saddled up a large mare saying that it was known to be the gentlest animal that had ever lived!

As her own horse was rather frisky, Annie soon got bored of towing me along behind her on a lead rein. By the time we got into the gum-tree forest she decided she had taught me to ride, unhitched the rein and trotted off ahead down the track leaving my mount to amble along behind at a steady walk. The next thing that happened was the saddle slipped right round under the horse's belly, leaving me hanging upside down with my head bumping along the ground. Annie had forgotten to tighten the girth! The mare lived up to her reputation and immediately stopped dead in her tracks. When Annie heard my cry, she came back, tightened the girth and lifted me back up on top again, assuring me that the horse was all right!

My next cousinly lesson came on the raft moored out in the middle of the billabong. Peter decided that it was time he taught Mike and me to swim. The water was deep; warm on top, however, a foot down absolutely freezing. It also had very long slimy weeds growing in it, the type that really gives you the creeps if your feet touch them. Peter decided the best way to teach us was to attach a rope around our waists and throw us into the water. He then walked round and round the raft as we dog-paddled madly to keep above the cold water and our feet out of the reeds. He definitely taught us to swim, but he also gave me a lifelong fear of seaweed.



The cliff cottage that 'WS' built for us at 'Kilmarie', Portsea

We spent some of our holidays at Portsea with Nana living in a little wooden cottage that WS had built for us beside his old white weatherboard house called Kilmarie. Shelley Beach was straight below us down the cliff path. It was a paradise for children; our playground and swimming pool.



'Shelley Beach', Portsea




Aged six at Portsea

In 1943 the tide of war had turned and my mother wanted us home. I can imagine the discussions that must have gone on about whether this was a wise thing to do when the German U-boats were very active in the Atlantic

and still sinking cargo ships. However, it was decided that if we travelled on a fast Banana boat on its own rather than in a convoy, we had more than a pretty fair chance of making it back to England!

Dis. 1.



CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

FOR A SEAMAN DISCHARGED BEFORE A SUPERINTENDENT OR
A CONSULAR OFFICER.

ISSUED BY THE BOARD OF TRADE. No. **44**

Name of Ship and Official Number, Port of Registry and Gross Tonnage.		Horse Power.	Description of Voyage or Employment.	
M.V. PORT WYNDHAM LONDON. OFF. No. 163561 5234 TONS NETT. 1660 N.P.H.			Foreign	
Name of Seaman.		Year of Birth.	Place of Birth.	
John. Robinson		1935	England.	
Rank or Rating.	No. of R.N.R. Commission or Certif.	No. of Cert. (if any).		
Carpenters Junior assistant	Nil	Nil		
Date of Engagement.	Place of Engagement.	Copy of Report of Character.*		
Sydney 4th Oct. 1943	Sydney	For Ability.	For General Conduct.	
Date of Discharge.	Place of Discharge.	V.G.	V.G.	
Liverpool	4th Dec. 1943			

I certify that the above particulars are correct and that the above named Seaman was discharged accordingly.

Dated this 4th day of Dec 1943 AUTHENTICATED BY

BARNACLE BILL MASTER.

FATHER NEPTUNE
Signature of Superintendent or Consular Officer.

* If the Seaman does not require a Certificate of his character, enter "Endorsement not required" in the spaces provided for the copy of the Report.

Signature of Seaman J ROBINSON.

I was eight and a half years old on October 4th 1943 when we set off from Sydney on *Port Wyndham* (5,234 tons) on an Australian spring day and arrived in England on December 4th in the middle of winter. Of course these dates are not carried in my head! My Certificate of Discharge shows me as a *Carpenters Junior assistant* and the Master's name was *Barnucle Bill*. The certificate was witnessed by *Father Neptune*!

My Character Report reads *V.G.* both for *Ability* and *For General Conduct*. The *Very Good* means that this is without doubt the best report I ever had. I signed the document so it seems that MGS had taught me to form letters by then as I could just write my name! My wages were one shilling per month for two months and one day, with an added War Risk of one shilling a month, two days' Leave Pay of two shillings and Subsistence of two shillings. A grand total of eight shillings, but the same amount was deducted for Slops! To wipe out

any blemish from my youth, I must point out that 'slops' is a Naval term meaning 'sailors' clothing and bedding issued from the ship's store'.

Name of Ship and Official Number		Description of Voyage or Employment	Ref. No. in Agreement
M.V. PORT WYNHAM 163561		Foreign	0
Name of Seaman	Date and Port of Engagement	Date of Discharge	Rate of Wages
J. E. ROBINSON	SYDNEY 4 th Oct 1943	4 Dec 1943	1/- monthly
Earnings	Amount	Deductions	Amount
Wages at £ $\frac{1}{2}$ per month, for 2 Months	9 -	* Reduction of Wages on disrating by £ per month for months	
2 days		days	
* Increase of wage on promotion by £ per month for months days		Advance on joining ...	
Overtime Hours at		Allotments ...	
WAR RISK & DIFF. 1/-	2 0	Fines ...	
DAYS LEAVE PAY 2	2 0	Forfeitures ...	
" SUBSISTENCE 2	2 0	Cash ...	
		Tobacco ...	8 0
		Slops ...	
		Channel Money ...	
		Insurance Weeks	
		Health & Pensions ...	
Deductions as per Contra ...	8 0	Unemployment ...	
Balance due ... £	NIL	Total Deductions ... £	8 0
Dated at the Port of Limerick		BARNUM E. BILLY	
this 4 th day of Dec 1943		The Sailor	

'Slops', eight shillings!

When Nana took us ashore in Auckland Mike bought a wristwatch for himself. The wristwatch became a bad memory as he very kindly allowed me to wear it, but as his wrist was bigger than mine, it slipped off when I leant over the rail and fell into the sea, which was not a popular move!

My popularity waned even further when he bought a tiny tortoise at the market in Fiji. The tortoise swam in the lavatory, being the only salt water available, and of course one day I flushed the poor creature out to sea. This didn't make me feel nearly as bad as losing the watch! My purchase in Fiji was a model of an outrigger canoe, which gave me endless hours of fun in the bath.

My other great joy was Chippy, the ship's carpenter. He was a most friendly man who allowed me to follow him around like a puppy while he went about his duties all over the ship. Chippy had a daughter and in his spare time was making a wooden scooter for her as a Christmas present. I used to look at the red scooter with longing!

Nana gave me a New Zealand copper halfpenny coin. On one side of the coin is stamped a Tiki, a small bug-eyed creature worshipped by the Maori people. Chippy taught me how to cut around the Tiki with a hacksaw and

smooth the edges with a file. I left a little bump at the top and he drilled a hole in it for a string. As I was very proud of my creation it was worn with pride around my neck for years. It was my first sculpture!

On returning to England in 1968 to look for a house to rent, one of the things I did with my mother was to visit my old home at Chute, and of course we called in to see Dorothy, the maid who had looked after our family during the war years. When my parents sold the Farm House and moved to London, they gave Bottle Cottage in Lower Chute to Dorothy as a 'thank you' for all her years of service. It was marvellous to see her again and before leaving she told me that she had something for me. I couldn't believe it when she gave me the Tiki still hanging on its original piece of string.



Dorothy and my mother outside Bottle Cottage

Dorothy was a wonderful person, short, round and always smiling, who liked Gordon's Gin! My mother used to leave a couple of inches in the decanter for her when we left to go to London on Tuesday morning. When we came back on Friday the decanter was always empty, sparkling clean and ready for the new bottle that was standing beside it.

Only once did Dorothy ever show any sign of having overdone the gin. One day she came into the dining room carrying our dinner on a tray. The

poor woman didn't quite reach the sideboard and put the tray down in mid-air. There was an almighty crash, followed by a stunned silence, a pause, and then "Oh Madam, I do love you," before rushing out of the room.

Our ship passed through the Panama Canal, which was great entertainment for us boys, before heading out into the blue waters of the Caribbean. Next stop was England, but first we had to cross the Atlantic.

Mounted on the stern of the ship was an enormous gun that was our protection against submarines. When we left the tropics the weather got steadily worse and the seas became very rough. On one of the calmer days the gun cover was removed so the crew could practise firing it. We watched the sailors as they turned handles swinging the gun from side to side and up and down. After doing this for a while they threw an empty 44-gallon oil drum over the side as a target. It slowly fell astern and when some way off the crew opened fire. Great spouts of water flew up where the shells hit the sea but they didn't hit the drum, although they might have hit a submarine, that is if we were still afloat and hadn't already been torpedoed!

We had done some casual lifeboat drill when we left Sydney, but with the advent of gun-practice and being in the Atlantic, the drill took on quite a different meaning. It was fortunate that we didn't have to take to the boats as we two boys had eaten all the Horlicks tablets out of the emergency rations! We had found that we could climb up into the boats and crawl under the tarpaulins. The tablets were very chewy and quite delicious and, yes, I have felt guilty ever since about eating them.

The only other thing clearly remembered about the voyage across the Atlantic, was Nana's bananas. Our fast refrigeration boat was built to bring fruit and meat to England from the Colonies. These ships were faster than the German submarines and this was the reason that we were alone on the ocean and not part of a convoy of slower ships escorted by Destroyers.

Before leaving Panama City, Nana purchased a hand of bananas and asked the Captain if he would put them in the freezer. About a week before we reached England the Captain informed Nana that the bananas were not going to last the trip. Nana hated waste so she shared the bananas with the crew rather than see them thrown overboard. I don't remember eating a lot of bananas at the time, but just maybe it was the seed of my now eating one a day!

During the war we all had Ration Books that contained coupons for everything under the sun. Children's Green books entitled them to one banana a month. This was my monthly treat as it used to be mashed up with sugar and cream from our Jersey cows. What a taste!

After two months at sea the ship arrived at Swansea on the south coast of Wales on December 4th 1943, in time for Christmas at Chute Standen. The ritual in our house was that we met in my mother's bedroom before breakfast to open our presents that were laid out in little piles. My mother sat up in bed with her breakfast tray, something she had always done since her brothers and sister had left home. Being eight years younger than her nearest brother she had been brought up as an only child, and her mother, who never got up until eleven o'clock, had considered it easier to have breakfast brought to the child in bed rather than have the servants set the table for one small person!

The reason for remembering the first of these Christmas rituals was because, when all the presents had been opened, my mother asked if I had any gifts to give. I didn't, thinking Christmas was like my birthday, where only I

received presents! I have never forgotten the feeling of terrible shame and maybe this is why I have always preferred to give than receive. Actually I did have a present for Pat, but had completely forgotten about it. It was a wooden paper knife with a green-eyed Tiki on the handle that Nana had helped me buy in New Zealand.

Nana had not only been my mother during the three years spent in Australia, but also my constant companion since the day of my birth and had looked after me for eight long years.

I recall nothing of the train ride up to London from Swansea, but I vividly remember our arrival in London. The moment that we were all standing on the platform was the 'first time' I was aware of my mother. I was a very shy little boy and consequently refused to move from behind Nana and be kissed by a stranger. Mike had left as a ten-year-old and was now nearly a teenager, so obviously had memories, but I had left as a nursery-raised five-year-old. Looking at our own grandchildren of the same age, makes it easy to appreciate just how young I was when we all left England and what a terrible parting it must have been for my mother.

At the end of 1943 the war was still raging in Europe and the Far East, as the Germans and Japanese had not yet been defeated. London was still being attacked and on my first night in London there was a flying-bomb raid. After our arrival Nana went to join her elder sister who was a nurse and lived in a bedsit in Putney. I don't remember any leave-taking with my surrogate mother and suspect it was all done very quietly. Suddenly I was alone with strangers, but I guess it was even harder for Nana. I once went to stay with the sisters in their one-room flat, but the visit was not a success and left me with unpleasant memories, which included the fact that everyone in the three-storey building shared one lavatory!

My parents' London home was a company flat, number 21A, in Grosvenor House Hotel on Park Lane, and looked out over Hyde Park. It consisted of a very big sitting room that was joined to the front door by a long wide passage. Off the passage were a double and single bedroom, separated by a bathroom. My parents slept in the double room, me in the single, and my two brothers shared a room down the corridor. I was already in bed when the flying-bomb raid started, but on being woken clearly remember my father saying he was going to take Pat and Mike down to the shelter in the hotel cellars. My mother refused to go, saying it was safer in the flat than in the cellar. She had a point as the V2 rockets were designed to penetrate to the cellar, blow up and collapse the building, whereas the doodlebugs, (flying bombs), were designed to glide into the street and set all the houses on fire. You had more chance of surviving in the cellar if it was a flying bomb, but less if a V2, which made it a difficult choice!

My mother took me into her bed when my father left. Lying in the dark we could hear the guns firing in Hyde Park and the flashes from the explosions lit up the room like lightning. Lying together in the dark with my mother was the beginning of our bonding. She probably stayed awake for a long time holding me, but I soon dropped off to sleep and was still in her bed on waking in the morning. From that moment on I felt very close to my mother. Over the next years we became great friends and remained so right to the end of her life.

The following day we left my father in London and went down to the Farm House that was to be my home for the next eight years. Chute Standen

was deep in the heart of the English countryside and a long way from the doodlebugs and V2s.

My father used to come down from the London office for the weekends. As chairman of the Zinc Corporation, one of his responsibilities was the aluminium-smelters outside Bristol. His twin jobs of being in London and Bristol meant he was allowed a petrol ration for an office car and as the farm was halfway between the two cities, he was usually able to spend the weekend with us. By then I was really enjoying having parents and the farm was a wonder-world for me to wander around at will. It was still a pre-war world where the farmhands lifted their caps to the master's children!



'Chute Farm House', the centre top window was my bedroom

Our farmlands ran down to the village of Lower Chute about half a mile away. One of my joys was to walk down with my mother to the little post office and buy sweets with my ration coupons. On the way we passed the thatched Hatchet Inn, which looks exactly the same today as it did then. As it is about halfway home Margie and I love stopping there for lunch when driving back to Somerset from London. Returning to Chute always brings back happy memories of my growing-up years on the farm.

Nothing seems to have altered in this backwater haven of peace and tranquillity, even though it is only 60 miles from Piccadilly Circus. We love taking our overseas visitors there as the taproom has not changed for centuries. When holding a pint of ale with your back to the log fire burning in the great inglenook you step back into the past. The pub also reminds me of when Mike and I were arrested by the local policeman for smoking a cigarette in the road outside the premises. We were marched back home and handed over to my mother for a lecture!



The 'Hatchet' Inn

However, I should not have counted my chickens before they were hatched! My world of bliss was completely shattered after Christmas when my mother had to return to driving a canteen, her war work being serving cups of tea and selling cigarettes to the troops who manned the ack-ack guns in the surrounding countryside. Because of this Mike and I were sent off to boarding school, Mike to join Pat at Rugby, and me to Sandroyd, a preparatory school. It was unbelievably terrible to be sent away again!

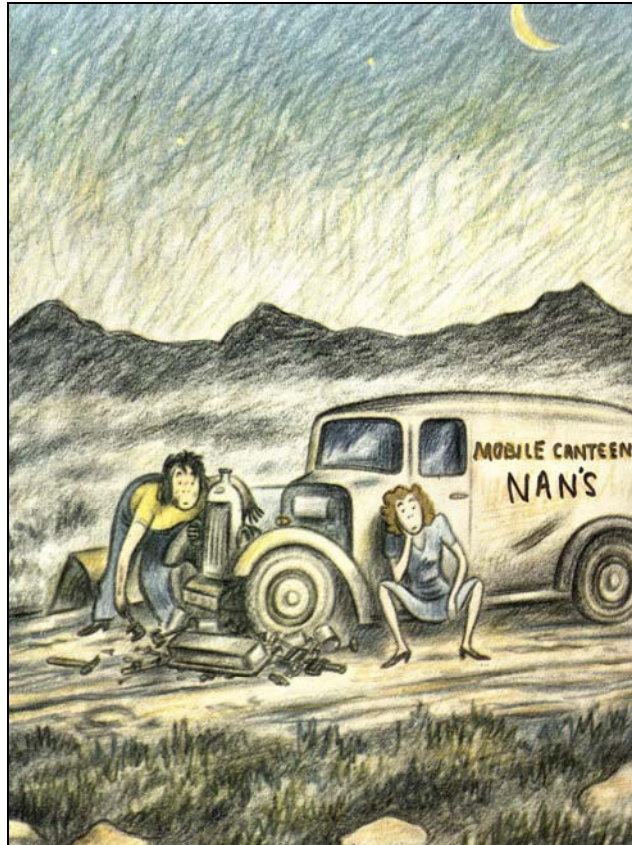


'Nan' with her mobile canteen

Many funny stories were told about my mother's days as a canteen driver. The vehicle was our own saloon car converted into a wooden box. My mother and her friend, Ursula, would drive to the local army store and have it filled with goods for the crews manning the guns that were dotted all over the county. She said that she knew more soldiers by their first name than any general did. She loved the work, especially as to begin with she had been made to work in an ammunition factory, which apparently is a filthy job.



Ack-ack gunner crews



'Nan and Ursula' on active service!

The car was often breaking down so when an issue of *Punch* came out with a joke about canteens of course she cut it out and had it framed. I still have the original cartoon, so can't resist including it here as a memorial to my mother and Ursula's active service during WWII.

The world was agog over the breaking of the Sound Barrier by the new jet-engine fighter planes, so my mother took me to see the *Victory Day* Farnborough Air Show. The posters advertised that the Sound Barrier would be broken above the airfield for us all to hear. It was a perfect day with not a cloud in the sky.

At last the moment came that we had all been waiting for. The loud speaker announced that John Derry, in a twin fuselage De Havilland DH 110, was waiting above us ready to break the Sound Barrier. Moments later a single-fuselage fighter thundered past us flown by Nevil Duke, and the announcer said he would break the barrier after Derry.

You could have heard a pin drop as we waited. Then came the double *boom boom* and we could see the aeroplane plunging down towards us. The fighter flattened out as it reached the runway and started its run past us just 50 feet off the ground. As it came level to where we were standing the plane suddenly disintegrated with a terrible explosion, flying into hundreds of pieces right before our eyes.

We were all struck dumb, and then suddenly there were screams as parts of the plane bounced towards the crowd. Luckily no bits made the distance, but this didn't stop the crowd panicking. Fire engines roared past us heading for the torn wreckage that had travelled quite a long way down the runway before coming to rest.

The announcer asked us all to stay where we were so we all sat down on the grass and waited. About ten minutes later he announced that Nevil Duke would now break the Sound Barrier as a tribute to his friend who had just died. Within seconds we again heard the double *boom boom* and then the fighter roared past us and did a victory roll as it passed over the wreckage of the smouldering fighter. Nothing in my life has touched me like that moment and I hope never will again.

Many years later Robert Hefner rang me and asked me to join him at the Explorer Club's annual dinner in New York. The only way of getting there in time was to fly over on Concorde. I had always thought it would be fun to do this just once, so agreed to go.

It was an incredible journey, although, when waiting to use the loo I heard a man report on leaving that the lining of the ceiling had just fallen in on him! Perhaps the plane was due for retirement after all. For an aeroplane to fly at a speed of 1,200 mph, equivalent to one mile every three seconds, only 60 years after the Wright brothers first flew an aeroplane at Kitty Hawk in 1903, must make the Concorde one of Man's greatest technological achievements, equal to 'Walking on the Moon'.

The most memorable part of that trip was when the Captain announced that in a few minutes we would hear a thud and feel a slight shudder, but we were not to worry as we would be passing through the Sound Barrier. Of course the memory of John Derry's death, and Nevil Duke's bravery, came back to me when I felt the shudder. I had gone through the Sound Barrier and felt that in some way it was a tribute to our pilots in the war.



'Harvesting the wheat into sheaves', Tunncliffe

There are two medical memories from my childhood days on the farm. The first happened when I was ten years old. One morning I couldn't be woken, so my mother called our local doctor. After he had examined me he told her I probably had Poliomyelitis, a notifiable disease requiring immediate transfer to a hospital. However, the doctor said that in his experience if I was moved I would wake up paralysed, so suggested leaving me to sleep. He promised to return the following day to see if there was any change.

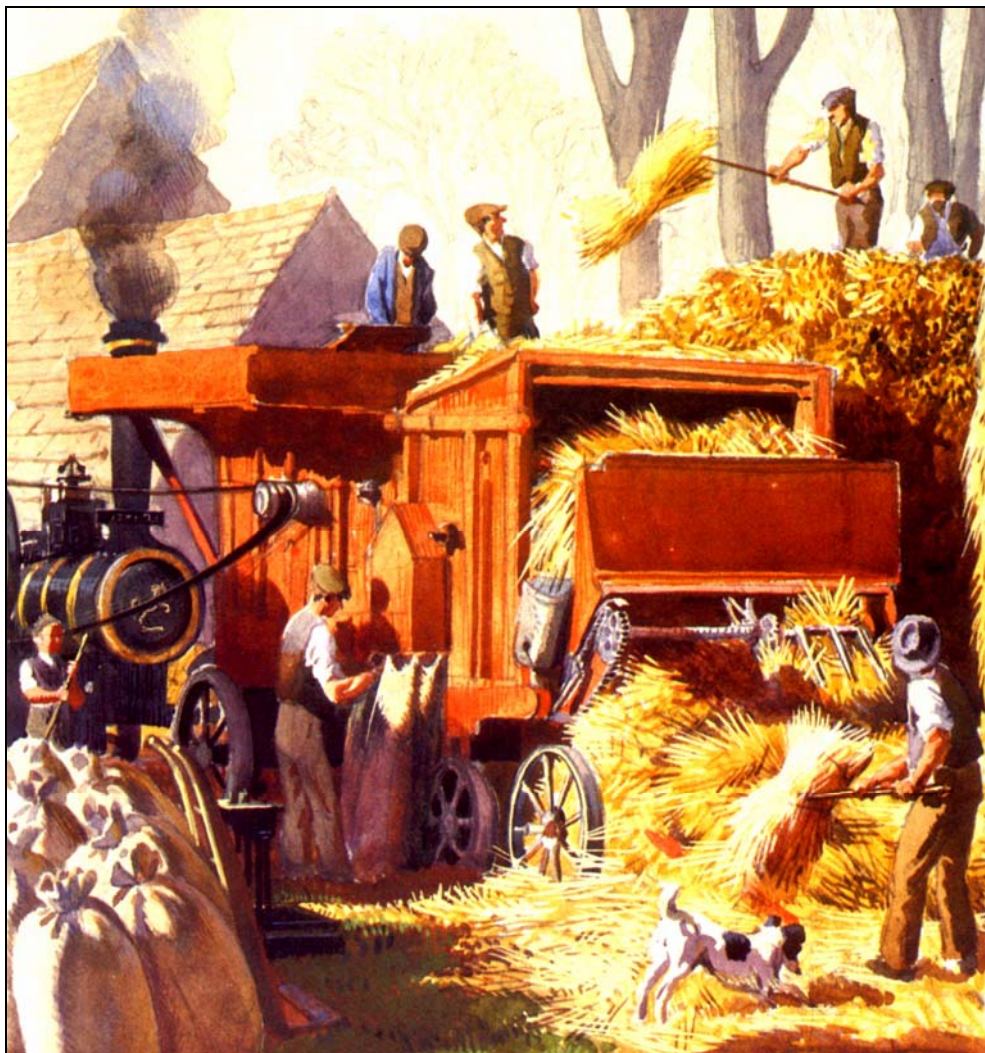
Apparently I slept for two days and on waking complained of being very hungry. My mother rang the doctor and then put me into a hot bath, while Dorothy made some warm broth and toast. When the doctor arrived he found me sitting up in bed, eating my meal, and talking like Rip Van Winkle. I don't know if it was polio or not, but when I meet someone who was unfortunate enough to have been afflicted by this dreaded disease, I wonder if, but for the wise doctor, the same thing could have happened to me.

My other medical happening was waking up one night in London with a violent stomach-ache. This led to another hot bath on the advice of the doctor, while waiting for an ambulance. I was whisked away to a Nursing Home where a surgeon immediately removed my appendix. My reward was a five-inch long scar to boast about, which is something, as nowadays all you get is a half-inch keyhole cut that is hardly worth showing to anyone! Thank goodness the operation was then possible, as one of my mother's brothers died of peritonitis

before the war. The worst thing about the event was having the plaster ripped off my stomach!

To recuperate from the operation I was packed off to the Grand Hotel in Brighton for a week with my 20-year-old cousin, Annie, the one who had taught me to ride a horse when aged six. We had a wonderful time until my mother came down to take us back to the farm. She was furious with Annie because the poor girl had taken me roller-skating instead of pushing me along the front in a wheelchair. Today exercising as soon as possible is recommended, but in those days it was a bit like childbirth. When Margie had the boys, she was kept in bed for ten days after giving birth!

Apart from these two events my memories of growing up on the farm are all golden. In those days the wheat was still harvested in sheaves and then stooked in little tents by the farmhands and their wives. I was taught to drive our orange-coloured tractor between the stooks so the farmhands could toss the sheaves up onto the trailer with pitchforks to a man who would stack them. I would then drive over to a corner of the field where old Sylvan Cook was building a stack. He was famous for estimating the size of stack needed for the harvest so that the last sheaf would neatly fill the gap in the top.



'Mr Brackston on the Threshing Machine', Tunnickliffe

When the stack was finished it always seemed to be just as the sun was going down, which was the signal for my father to arrive with a barrel of beer to celebrate the harvest-home. The farmhands and their wives would sit around on the stubble until dusk, gossiping as they helped themselves from the barrel sticking out of the back of the van. What happy days!

Some weeks later the threshing machine would arrive pulled by a giant steam-engine. The excitement of seeing the funnel belching out smoke as it came up the sunken lane would send me off to meet it on my bicycle. The machine would be positioned by the stack and then the engine moved around so the belt could drive the threshing drum. The belt was some 40 feet long and gave out a resounding slap with a regular click as the belt joint passed over the colossal flywheel.

Mr Brackston was always on top feeding the sheaves into the hopper. He must have been very hot as he wore the traditional flat cap, collarless shirt fastened with a gold stud and a waistcoat, across which you could see the silver chain of his watch stretched between the little fob pockets. He was the official timekeeper for *Smoko*, pulling out his watch and announcing when to stop the engine for tea. One awful day his watch chain snapped and he dropped the timepiece down into the drum. He was heartbroken! When my father heard of the accident he gave Mr Brackston his old gold fob-watch from his Cambridge days so he was able to continue to call out *Smoko*.

The entire farm was mine to explore. The woods were carpeted in primroses, bluebells and white windflowers. One wood was a hazel stand reserved for the hurdle makers, who would come and weave fantastic portable fence panels. They lived in an old gypsy caravan and cooked on an open camp fire so there was always a smell of smoke drifting through the woods.



There is nothing like an English bluebell wood

We had twelve beautiful Jersey cows on the farm, which my mother called *Flushing Flos*. They were milked by hand and produced the most amazingly tasty milk, cream and golden butter, which our cook made in a churn. The milkmaid was named Olive and she smelt of cows. The farm was run by the three Hamilton brothers, Jack, Leno and Bert. Jack was the oldest and the manager; Leno was in charge of the ploughing and taught me to drive the tractor; while Bert looked after the garden and vegetables.



'Milking by hand', Tunncliffe

We had one draft horse and across the road from the barns was the Smithy, which was my favourite place to go, especially on rainy days. Mr Green didn't seem to mind my being there, or at least he never said he did, and sometimes he would even let me work the forge bellows. The hearth was full of blazing red coals and even now the smell of burning coke brings back memories of the sound of hammering, flying sparks and the pungent smell of sizzling horn as Mr Green burnt the red-hot shoe onto the horse's hoof. When he was satisfied about the fit he would plunge the shoe into a cooling tank to quench it, causing the water to boil and belch forth steam. My fascination of watching men in foundries must have begun at that time. Working with men like these is one of the joys of being a sculptor.

Mr Green was a vast man and Mrs Green tiny. He had arms like fence posts and an enormous belly that was covered with a stained brown leather apron. Once a week he would take Mrs Green shopping in their tiny black

Baby Austin Seven. His weight would make the car so lopsided that it looked as though it was going down the road sideways. Mr Green was also the wicketkeeper for our farm's cricket team. He was famous for not wearing gloves to catch the ball, preferring to receive it on his stomach then clasp it with his hands. One cricket match was very memorable. Our farm team was playing the Upper Chute team and my brother Pat gained lasting fame as a fast bowler by taking nine wickets! I was dragooned into being Eleventh Man that day for our side and was out second ball!

Because the farm owned a pheasant shoot we employed a gamekeeper. Pat was an excellent shot, but I never found the desire to kill birds. In those days the wheat stubble hid large coveys of beautiful red-legged partridges, and I was always horrified to see the guns blast them to smithereens, although I must confess I love eating them!

The three villages that made up the Chutes had a bus service that took the shoppers into market once a week in a very old charabanc. Always on hearing the song, *Didn't we have a lovely time when we went to Bangor*, I think of old Mr Milson who owned and drove the village bus. He was quite mad and in the summer would only wear pyjamas, even into market. One famous and gloriously sunny day he collected all the ladies and then announced that the weather was far too good to waste shopping, so he had decided to take them all to the seaside, and he did! There was a terrible row and the police threatened to take his licence away, although they knew they couldn't as there was then no national bus service, and to stop the bus running would have caused an even worse row!

Every summer my mother would arrange an adventure holiday away from the farm. My older brothers seemed to come and go at different times, as did various cousins and sons of friends, but for some reason we never had any girls with us! As we were not allowed abroad we would go to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. The only holiday that my father was able to join us on was in Wales. I remember it because he was actually persuaded to bathe in the freezing sea, but only once! My mother taught me to play tennis that summer. She served underarm and was able to apply an incredible amount of spin to the ball, making it almost impossible to return.

Our best British holidays were on the Isles of Scilly, off Land's End. The first one was spent at a small hotel and there must have been at least six of us present, five males and my mother. My future stepbrother Henry was there on leave from the Navy and he taught me to play *God Save the King* on an old upright piano for the sole purpose of driving all the other hotel guests from the lounge, leaving it just for our use!

On a bad day the ferry crossing to the Isles from Penzance is one of the roughest sea voyages in the world. On our first holiday we arrived at Penzance to find the ship could not sail because of a storm. We had nowhere to stay so my mother went to the police and they found lodgings for us. It was a terrible night spent fully clothed in damp sheets. The ship sailed next morning, although the sea was still very rough. It was on this trip that I discovered my immunity to seasickness, as every single passenger was ill except myself!

The second year we went to the Scilly Isles was thrilling as my mother discovered she knew one of the Naval Commanders based on the main island of St Mary's. He would collect us in his Sea Rescue launch and ferry us at high speed across to an uninhabited island. He would leave us for the day on a

deserted beach to swim and picnic before collecting us in the afternoon on his way home from his patrol. The landlord of our B&B was a lobster fisherman, so we ate like kings. He used to meet the French boats at sea and exchange his crayfish for their lobsters. Thank goodness the French preferred crayfish so we could have lots of delicious lobster claws!

My mother taught us boys to play Gin Rummy to keep us amused between adventures. She thought she was rather good at cards and usually she would win, but this particular summer, when we were playing outside in the sun, we always beat her. In the end we had to admit that we were cheating as we could see her cards reflected in her dark glasses. She was absolutely furious at first, but eventually saw the funny side!



The Farm House front lawn

They were wonderful years that we spent growing up in the Farm House. When we arrived back from Australia my parents still owned the Big House and Bert ran the huge vegetable gardens. All through the war Bert had kept all the people who worked on the farm in fresh vegetables and still had a surplus to give away to other village families. Everyone pulled together in the war.

A high wall surrounded the vegetable garden with locked gates, but Mike discovered a place to climb over so we could steal the ripe fruit, which caused an awful row. In a Victorian glasshouse, that smelt like a tropical jungle because it was heated by a coal-burning furnace, Bert grew the best Muscat grapes and baby Tom Thumb tomatoes I have ever tasted. But the best of all the fruit were the deliciously-tasting Golden Victoria plums that melted in the mouth. I have never found a plum to match them.

The strawberry beds provided a feast for the house, but as we had never liked them, even with Jersey cream and sugar, they were not stolen, much to Bert's relief. Slugs were a problem around the beds, but he kept them at bay with a barrier of barley whiskers, an old-fashioned trick.

Bert and his boy helper were hard workers. I remember watching them mowing the large croquet lawn in front of the Farm House with a hand

mower, the boy in front pulling with a harness while Bert pushed from behind, wearing a waistcoat and gold stud in his collarless buttoned-up shirt!

Things were still very primitive compared to today. I remember watching one of our men drilling a field with grass seed from a box balanced across a wheelbarrow, the wheel driving the mechanism. The poor man must have covered miles and miles pushing the heavy contraption through the mud. The fields around the house were thick with cowslips that we used to pick and take to the flat in London. They have all disappeared now because of the use of fertiliser, as have the butterflies that used to be in swarms. Margie has planted a few cowslips at Agecroft for me and they bring back very happy memories.

When my parents bought Chute Standen they soon found out why it had been so cheap; the water supply disappeared in the summer because the house well dried up. This led to my father having a very expensive 600-foot hole drilled down to the Green Sands beneath the chalk. The pump was driven by a magnificent diesel engine that had an enormous flywheel. It was a family joke that the well had cost more than the whole farm!

The resulting water was so soft that when WS came to England he used to ask my father to bring it up to London in gin bottles so he could use it for shaving, the town water being so hard in those days. The City was a very dirty place with coal fires burning in every house creating appalling smog in the winter months, causing men to wear shirts with detachable collars that they changed twice a day. My father told me that before the war he always carried a torch in the car because the London night fogs could suddenly blanket the city while they were dining out with friends. To get home my mother would drive the car and he would walk ahead with one foot in the gutter and the other on the pavement, shining the torch backwards for her to follow.

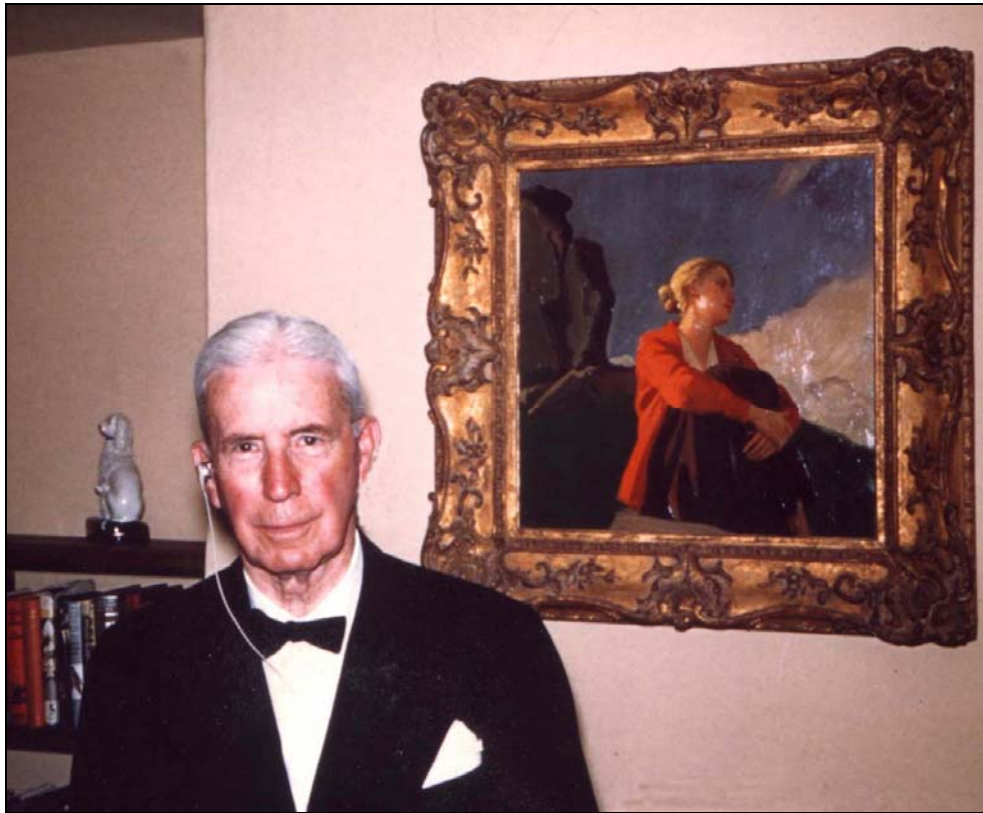
My parents loved going to musicals and saw all the new American shows like *Oklahoma*, *Annie Get your Gun*, *South Pacific* and *Kiss Me Kate*, the last being my father's favourite. If on holiday I would be included in the theatre outings and loved them. We used to eat out a lot, so I got to know the restaurants and grills of London. Quaglinos Grill was especially popular and it was there I was taught to dance the Samba and eat a crêpe suzette, set on fire at the table!

When petrol rationing eased my parents had a weekend routine. My father would come down to the farm by train on Friday afternoon and return to the City on Sunday evening. My mother would drive up to town in her little Lancia car on Tuesday morning and stay until Friday morning.

There was also an evening routine when we were at Chute for the weekend. My father always said that if he was going to have a bath and change for dinner at eight o'clock, he might as well be comfortable and wear a Black Tie. My mother always wore a long evening dress. When I turned 13, Dorothy would lay out a dinner jacket on my bed ready to put on after my bath! At seven o'clock my parents would meet by the fire for a dry martini in front of the Laura Knight portrait of Lady Kelly and wait for dinner to be announced by Dorothy. I was allowed a small glass of sherry!

There was a routine after dinner as well, as my mother insisted that we play some kind of game together. Sometimes it would be Liar Dice or Shove Halfpenny, but mainly it was cards. The best game for five people is Hearts, which is a kind of Bridge where you pass your three worst cards on to your neighbour. The game would usually take an hour and then, being the youngest, I would go to bed while the adults sat around chatting over a nightcap. Often

my mother would have a liqueur while playing cards and of course allowed me to have a sip. Her favourite was crème de menthe with ice as she said it helped her digestion!



WS and the Laura Knight

The Laura Knight painting became an icon of my days at Chute Standen and I can't remember any other painting in the house. On returning to England I was delighted to find that my mother still had it hanging in the sitting room of her tiny flat in Cadogan Square. On walking into the room it was like meeting an old friend again. It is the most three-dimensional painting I have ever seen. She must have noticed my love of the painting as one evening she asked me to take it down and then wrote my name on the back, saying that she would like me to have it when she died. Originally the painting came to her as a *thank you* from her sister, Habby, and Uncle Joe for looking after their four daughters when they had chicken pox. My mother made the most of that episode and used the girls' comb on her own three boys, so there were seven cases in the house at the same time. This was before the war when we were living in the Big House with plenty of help, but even so, the nursery wing must have been like a hospital!

After inheriting the painting we hung it at Agecroft. One day a friend told us that Laura Knight was all the rage at the moment and the painting was worth thousands of pounds. We had a fit at the sum he mentioned as it was the value of our house! For a year we would take it down and hide it under the bed whenever we went away, but as this still left the worry of fire, we decided to sell it. We asked the friend to arrange a sale on the condition that the auction house had three photographic copies made on canvas paper. He did this and we had each mounted in an old gilt frame so they looked like the

original painting! One we gave to Tim, another to Peter and the third we keep at Agecroft for Mark. Every day the painting gives me enormous pleasure when I walk past it. The fake painting also makes me laugh, because our guests, who have no idea that it is a photograph, greatly admire it and envy us!

We went to the auction and nearly died when it fetched twice the estimate! Both Tim and Peter needed houses at the time so they really benefited from their grandmother's nursing seven children with chicken pox!



'Laura Knight's' portrait of 'Lady Kelly'

The first holiday adventure abroad was to ski at Wengen in Switzerland. In those days we still used long wooden skis and boots with leather bindings, similar to the ones my parents used in 1930.

The most memorable thing about that holiday was my falling in love with a girl named Sally, who was staying in the same hotel with her father. We used to share a toboggan on the sleigh ride down to Lauterbrunnen, which, for me, a 12-year-old, was a wonderful excuse to hug her for 30 minutes as we shot round corners at breakneck speed! My first attempt at learning to ski will

never be forgotten because I ran into a tree, which has left me with a sore right knee as a constant reminder to this day!



Nan and Bill in St Moritz in 1930

With hundreds of things to do on the farm, holidays were always full of fun. No wonder I hated being driven back to Sandroyd and later being taken to the railway station to catch the train to Rugby. The stations in those days looked exactly as Monet painted them, full of engines belching out smoke as they moaned and sighed, while waiting to depart. Giant steam-engines may be glamorous, but for me they still represent long months of boredom at school before returning to my own halcyon world on the farm for the holidays.

School was a part of my life, so some of the things that happened during the eight years spent at Sandroyd and Rugby should be recalled. Although I might have given the impression that those times were awful, in fact it wasn't all bad. There were happy times and although not much was learnt from the set academic lessons, an awful lot was learnt about life, and that surely is the main point of education, or at least I think so. I was also introduced to the joy of sculpting, thanks to kind Mr Barraclough, and that was worth all the tedium, because eventually it led to my having the most wonderful life imaginable.



My dear parents, 'Bill and Nan', Portsea 1959



'Gare Saint-Lazare', Claude Monet, 1877