

Extracts from ‘The Rowden Family – Mary’s Story’, written by Mary Johnstone (nee Rowden) for her family and all descendants of Marjory and Douglas Rowden, who lived at The Limes, Benson, Oxfordshire.

The Rowden Family

Douglas Rowden and Marjory Hampton were married at St John’s Church in Boscombe, on July 21st 1906. They began married life farming at Crowmarsh, near Wallingford, and Jim was born there on 23rd July 1909. They moved to Golder Manor at Pyrton, near Watlington, where John was born on 6th November 1912, Dorothy on 4th November 1915, George on 1st January 1919 and I (Mary) on 19th May 1920. They moved shortly after my birth to The Limes at Benson, Oxfordshire.



Marjory Katherine Hampton



John Douglas Rowden



"Heirs together of the grace of life."



ST. JOHN'S, BOSCOMBE.

In Remembrance

OF

Our Wedding Day

WHEN

I, *John Douglas Ross*

AND

I, *Marjory Katherine Hampton*

were joined together in the
bonds of

Holy Matrimony

"Until Death us do part."

Date *July 21st 1906*

What therefore God hath joined together,

Let not man put asunder."



"The Lord keep thee and bless thee."



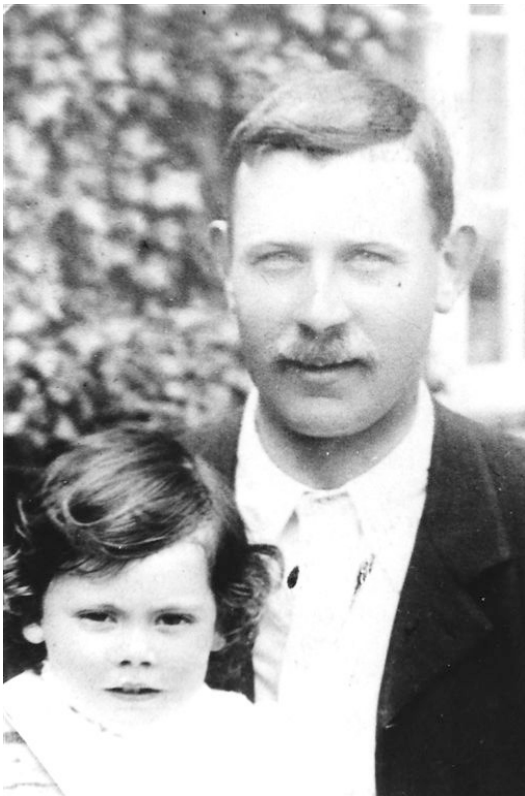
The marriage card of Marjory and Douglas



Marjory



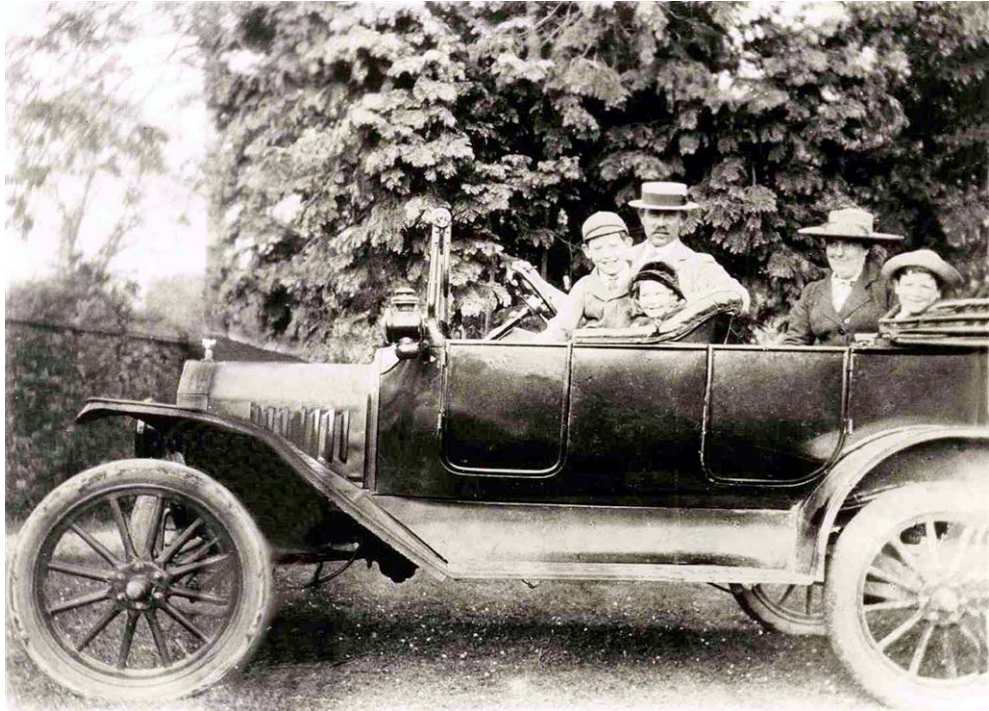
Douglas



Douglas and Jim at Crowmarsh



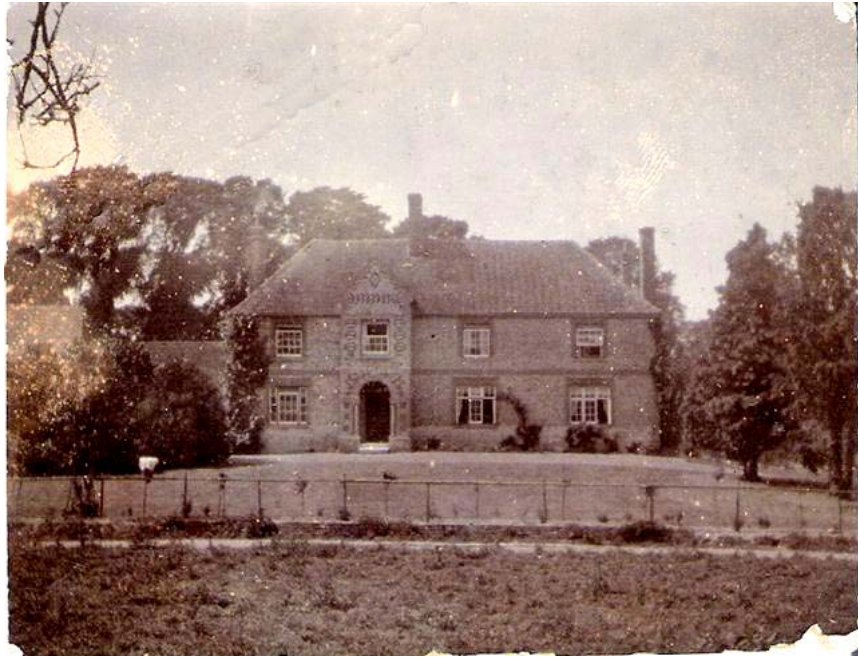
John and Jim at Golder Manor



The Rowden Family in their Model T Ford outside Golder Manor. c 1918
Douglas, Jim and Dorothy in front, Marjory and John in the back.



Jim, Dorothy and John at Golder Manor,
with Molly Elliot, my Mother's cousin



Golder Manor



Granny Hampton (Katie) at Golder Manor



John Hampton Rowden circa 1912



Dorothy Catherine Rowden circa 1916



John, Dorothy and Jim 1916



Jim, Dorothy and John with Miss Reeves, the Governess, on the steps at Golder Manor



Dorothy aged two



Dorothy John and Jim circa 1918



Jim, Dorothy and John



John, George, Dorothy and Jim in the garden at Golder Manor. c. 1919

A pedigree herd of Shorthorn cattle was established at Golder Manor and one of the first milking machines in the South of England was installed, and the milk was taken away every morning to Wallingford station to go by train to London. The land was rented from the Earl of Macclesfield, and when he doubled the rent, it was decided to sell up and move to The Limes, at Benson, Oxfordshire.

The Shorthorns were sold extremely well, one hundred cows fetching £110 each, yearlings £50 each and a cow and a calf to one of King George V's farms for £245. Four small farms were rented round Benson; Fifield Farm at Ewelme, Crowmarsh Farm, Clacks farm and Beggarbush, and we moved to The Limes, next door to the Vicarage.

Daddy became very good friends with Fred Chamberlain, a neighbouring farmer who lived at Crowmarsh Battle Farm, Crowmarsh, about 1½ miles from Benson and farmed land up to Beggarbush. They each had great respect for the other's method of farming and became lifelong friends of mine too. Mr Chamberlain had eight children; Frank, Eileen, Doris (known as Dumps), Biddy, Walter and Philip by his first wife who died, Toby and David by his second wife, who died when they were young. Douglas was a traditional rotational farmer with livestock and a keen interest in horses. Mr Chamberlain was way ahead of his time with continuous non-rotational cereal crops, under-sown with Italian rye grass and trefoil. He had no livestock apart from a dairy cow to provide milk for the house.

As children, we had many happy times at Crowmarsh Battle Farm, fondly known as CB. Jim and Walter were good pals and Jim can tell of the many pranks they got up to together. Jim had a soft spot for Biddy, but she only had eyes for Tom Hedges, whom she later married, and they lived at South Moreton. Dorothy and Philip were good friends. He came to our house for lessons, as we were taught at home by a Governess. Ann Walker and Sonny Franklin from the village also came. I remember a birthday party at CB when we all scrambled to the top of a hayrick to play. George was accidentally pushed over the side and went tumbling to the ground with the large hay knife! I rushed down to find him lying on the ground, but apart from being winded, he was not hurt. He spent the rest of the party resting on the window seat in the living room. This was a favourite spot where Mr Chamberlain would sit and play 'Peggity' with us, and always win! Grown ups were no

more successful! I remember Martha their cook, a short dumpy grey haired woman who wore a white bibbed apron down to her ankles, going down the steps into a small larder, off the room with a long refectory table where meals were eaten, and coming out with her home-made lemonade and ginger biscuits for us to eat. They were utterly delicious.

CB was a very friendly house. Through the gate a path ran to the front door with lawns and shrubbery on each side. There was a large hall with a polished wooden floor. To the right of the door, under a window, stood a glass display cabinet containing items of historical interest found on the farm. To the left of the front door was the sitting room – seldom used. Opposite the front door, the living room with its large inglenook fireplace lined with blue and white patterned tiles, and room to sit in it on either side of the fire. A long oak table, against the wall opposite the fire, always with a large vase of flowers from the garden on it, and papers and magazines. At the end of the room, a bay window with a window seat and in the middle of the room, a mixture of chairs in which to relax. To the left of this room was a passage leading to a door to the garden and half way down it on the left, a door to Mr Chamberlain's office. To the right of the front door beyond the display cabinet was the dining room, and like the sitting room, seldom used. A back polished wooden stairway went up from this side of the hall, and beyond it the way into the room with the refectory table, and through to a scullery and other utility rooms. The front stairs to the left of the front door went up to four bedrooms and along a passage to join the back stairs to the bathroom, a large playroom with a swing from the beam in the ceiling, and another bedroom over the dining room.

Through the door into the back garden were two small lawns with a path across to a low gate with an ornate iron fence on either side. To the right of the lawn was a very old large high circular dovecote. The garden was set out in square beds surrounded with box hedging, creating its individual aroma, and paths ran between each bed, across and up and down. The back wall of a barn went the full length of the left side of the garden, and beyond, a tennis court. A door into the barn at the end near the house led into a shed used for storing fruit from the garden. I can remember many visits to it and enjoying the fruit. The garden was Eileen's pride and joy. She was a very keen gardener and kept the house supplied with flowers, and in the winter, chrysanthemums growing in pots were brought

inside the house to flower. Beyond the flower garden was the tennis court with a round chalet for rackets and balls. Behind it an orchard with a path to the right leading down to the River Thames with a creek and a punt. On the right a wooden hut for changing into swimming suits. Large beamed farm buildings and yard in the middle were left of the flower garden. Toby and David's mother was an invalid. I remember going upstairs and visiting her. She was lying on her bed by the window in the bedroom above the sitting room, doing embroidery. She looked delicate and pale and her lips were mauve. From the window she had a good view of all the comings and goings and of their land right up to Beggarbush. That was the only occasion I recall seeing her.

The Limes was a good family home, facing sideways from the road, with the front door straight out to the path by the road, double solid wooden gates into the drive. On the right of it a lawn in front of the house with a narrow flowerbed close to the drive, and another narrow bed under the wall by the road, smelling lovely every year with wallflowers. To the left of the gates, another larger lawn with circular flowerbed in the centre, surrounded on one side by the road, and on the other by the high wall between the vicarage next door. Each side had a deep a shrubbery and every spring at the edge of the lawn, mixed polyanthus grew in the rough grass at the edge.

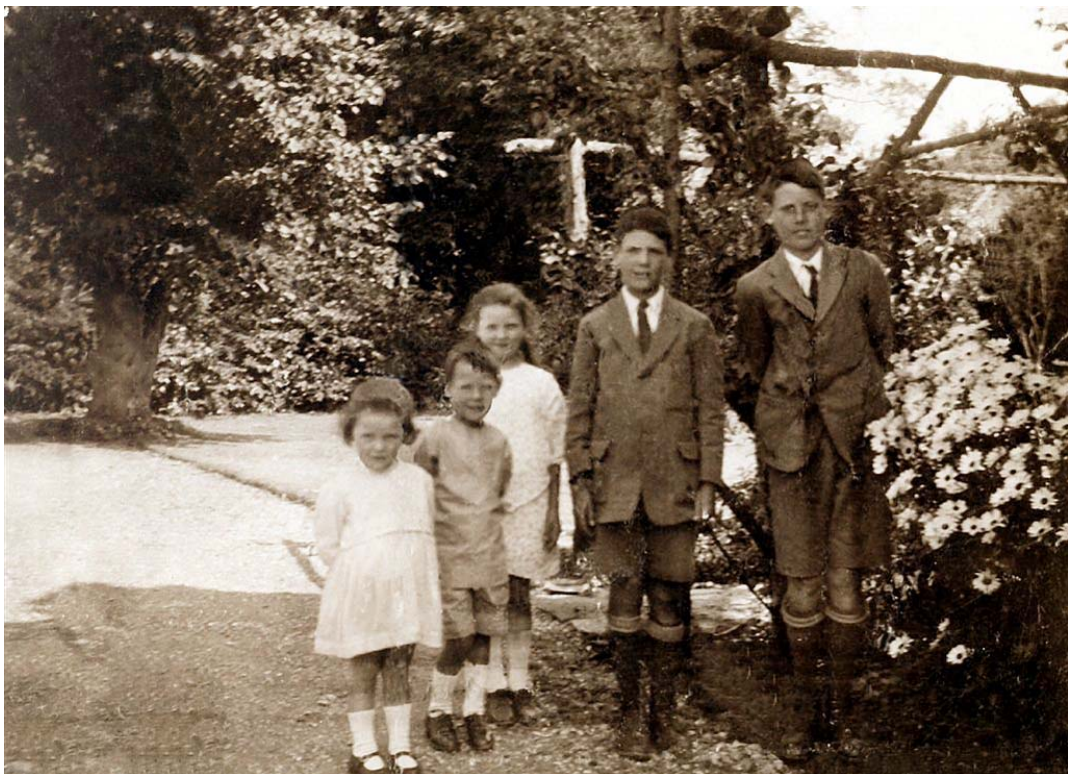
A large lime tree was in the grass by the edge of the lawn across the drive from the house. Later it was cut down to give more light, and a large stump left. The drive continued down the garden with an old mulberry tree at the end of the lawn on the left, where we had an old-fashioned wooden swing seat. The mulberries looked very tempting but they were extremely bitter. The leaves were good food for the silkworms, which we kept in cardboard boxes with air-holes in the lids. Behind this tree was a rose trellis going across to the wall with a crazy paving path going the full length. More flower and shrub beds followed the drive until it turned right into the stable and garage. A narrower flower and shrub bed was on the right of the drive below the house. The garden continued with a large vegetable area on the right and a tennis court on the left, ending with a row of fruit trees in front of a high brick wall, and beyond it the churchyard.

Through the front door into the hall the stairs went up on the right. On the left was the sitting room and then the dining room, and on the right a door under the stairs that went down into the cellar which sometimes needed the fire brigade to pump out the water. A short passage led down steps to the right to the schoolroom. Next the back stairs, and then the kitchen with its pantry was at the end of the hall, and beyond it a large scullery with several walk-in cupboards and a larder. The back door was on the left, leading out to the drive with the greenhouse on the left, which was filled with the most wonderful grapevine, and then a boiler room down some steps on the right. Up to the top of the main stairs you turned right, down to the loo and straight ahead to the back bedroom, and in between the back stairs which came up from the hall before the kitchen, to a bedroom above the schoolroom, and round and up to the landing and on and up to the attic. To the left at the top of the main stairs you turned down to the bathroom, then the spare bedroom above the sitting room, then the boys' bedroom and a dressing room, and at the end, our parents' bedroom. There were several rooms in the attic, one being used to store apples on newspaper spread out over the floor. I can smell them now, and as the winter went on, their skins became wrinkly, and the bad ones had to be removed. There were several windows opening onto the roof and George and I were tempted to climb out when no one was looking!



Granny Hampton

We were always very excited when Granny Hampton came to stay, mostly I think for the presents, which she brought in her big suitcase! She slept in the spare bedroom and we couldn't wait to find out what was in that case! She was very deaf and we had to shout to make her hear. Unlike Mummy, she wore lots of rings and necklaces and brooches and always the gold fob watch belonging to Grandpa Hampton, who died of appendicitis when Mummy was very small, and she had kept the watch going ever since. She was slender, unlike Mummy, and liked fine clothes and fur coats, travelling all round the country on coach tours and doing crossword puzzles. She was very religious and prayed for hours kneeling by her bed. She was a Miss Parker of Lasham in Hampshire and aunt of 'Tom Parker'. She had two sisters, and a brother Tom (father of Tom Parker). There was Janie who never married, and Mary who married Gilbert (Gibby) Elliot, a Naval Officer, who she met at lunch at a neighbour's farm when he had come to tell them of the death of their son at sea. They had five children – George (who became a vicar and later Franciscan Monk), Dolly (who stayed at home), Molly (a doctor), Mabel (a Norland Nurse and my Godmother) and Jack (who worked in Africa and back in England dealing with sugar beet).



Mary, George, Dorothy, John and Jim at The Limes. c. 1923

The Hampton Family



Grandpa William Hampton



Granny Katie Hampton



Marjory Katherine Hampton

After Grandpa Hampton died so young, we can only guess what happened to Granny and her infant daughter. We have the Auction sale card from James Harris at Winchester, dated Monday 28th September 1885 (£1,048-2s-6d) of the sale of Live and Deadstock at Hill farm, Ellisfield, and a year earlier, another one when Great Grandpa Hampton died, of the sale of his Live and Deadstock at Village Farm, Dummer (£1,216-12s-0d) on Monday 22nd September 1884.

Priced Catalogue

HILL FARM, ELLISFIELD,
5 Miles from Basingstoke.

A CATALOGUE
OF THE VALUABLE
LIVE AND DEAD STOCK
INCLUDING

184 2-TEETH EWES,
3 Ram Lambs,
10 CART HORSES
2 3-years old Cart Colts,
12 2-years old STEERS and HEIFERS,
3 DAIRY COWS.
3 Sows with and in Fig, about 50 Fowls,
AND A GOOD ASSORTMENT OF
IMPLEMENTS & DEAD STOCK,
WHICH

MR. JAMES HARRIS

Has been favoured with instructions from Mrs. W. HAMPTON, to Sell by Auction,
on the Premises,
On *MONDAY* the 28th day of *SEPTEMBER*, 1885,
Subject to the Auctioneer's usual Conditions of Sale.
Sale to commence at One o'clock for Half-past precisely.

Catalogues may be obtained at the principal Hotels in the neighbourhood,
and of the AUCTIONEER, Winchester.

DOSWELL, PRINTER, WINCHESTER.

Sale of Live and Deadstock at Hill Farm, Ellisfield,
September 1885

Priest Catalogue

VILLAGE FARM, DUMMER,
5 miles from Basingstoke.

A CATALOGUE
OF THE VALUABLE
LIVE AND DEAD STOCK,
INCLUDING

290

HAMPSHIRE DOWN
EWES & LAMBS
7 YOUNG AND ACTIVE
CART HORSES

AND THE USUAL ASSORTMENT OF
Implements & Dead Stock,
TOGETHER WITH
2 RICKS OF CLOVER & RYE GRASS HAY
WHICH

MR. JAMES HARRIS

Has been favoured with instructions from the Executors of the late Mr. W. HAMPTON,
to Sell by Auction, on the Premises,
ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22ND, 1884,
Subject to the Auctioneer's usual Conditions of Sale.

Sale to commence at One for Two o'clock precisely.

Catalogues may be obtained at the principal Hotels in the neighbourhood;
and of the AUCTIONEER, Winchester.

DOSWELL, PRINTER, WINCHESTER.

Four, 696 15-6

96	Ten Choice Hampshire Down Ewe Lambs	marked	25	
97	Twenty ditto	487-2	48	
98	Ten ditto	57-3	26	10
99	Twenty ditto	40-4	46	
100	Ten ditto	34-5	27	
101	Twenty ditto	41-6	44	
102	Three Wether Lambs	37	5	11
103	1 Lamb		1	

HORSES.

104	A powerful Brown Horse	Duke	No. 1	37	16
105	Ditto, Bay ditto	Traveller	2	48	6
106	Ditto, Roan ditto	Jolly	3	31	10
107	Ditto, Black ditto	Squeaker	4	26	4
108	Ditto, Black Mare	Poppet	5	16	16
109	Ditto, Brown ditto	Poppet	6	10	10
110	Ditto, Bay ditto	Dumpling	7	13	2
111					6
112					

HAY.

113	A capital Rick of Rye Grass and Clover Hay in Baker's Field		100		
114	Ditto	P29:			
115			2	10	
116			2	10	
117			24	12	
118			24	16	
119			4	15	

A Deposit of 25 per cent. will be taken on the Hay with approved Bills at 3 months for the balance if desired. The Hay will be at the Purchaser's risk from the fall of the hammer and must be cleared before the 1st of March, 1885.

TOTAL £ 1216-12-0

Live and Deadstock at Village Farm, Dummer, Monday 22nd September 1884



Young Marjory



Marjory and her Mother, Granny Hampton

We have been told that Granny went to Bournemouth and with Aunty Janie ran a guest house, Aunty Janie downstairs doing all the cooking while Granny mingled upstairs with the guests. Mummy's schooling is a complete mystery. We do know that she had violin lessons, was good at painting and needlework. She had a very good sense of humour and was an excellent cook.



Marjory Hampton and her Mother, Granny Hampton 2nd and 3rd from left



Marjory Hampton

I slept in the back bedroom at the top of the stairs with Lily (Mother's help – I used to call her 'Ickymice'), and apparently one of the first things I said to her was that, "Gra' Gra' Gra' Granny did come one day night!"

The wallpaper had a pattern of twigs and leaves with birds on them. With crayons hidden under my pillow I started colouring them on the wall above my bed until I was found out. I remember a particularly bad thunderstorm one night, and every time the lightening flashed, a horse's head appeared in the patterned lace curtains, or seemed to be to me. Lily consoled me by saying that it was only Fred, the foreman from Fifield Farm, down the drive with a horse and cart, emptying out a load of stones! On a clear day you could see Wittenham Clumps through the window.

George and I had bad tonsils. The bedroom became a theatre and our local Dr. Birch and a surgeon came and we both had our tonsils removed. I can remember kneeling on a high bed in my bedroom and asking if they were going to put me to sleep before they did it! The operations were not successful and were repeated in the same room a year later. In my case

unsuccessfully and I had them removed properly in my teens in a hospital in Watford. I also remember the lovely sound of the church bells as they practised each week, so close to our house.

Lily played a big part in our lives. Her parents lived in Ewelme in a cottage beyond the watercress beds and the village shop. She helped look after us and took us for walks in the afternoons. Going up to Ewelme stands out in my memory. Walking up through the village we followed the main road until the turning off to Ewelme, when the main road continued on to the right up to Beggarbush hill. A brook on the right hand side then followed the road most of the way to Ewelme, with little bridges over it to the cottages by the road. One of the houses on the left belonged to the Oaks family. A Miss Oaks gave dancing lessons, which we attended once a week. I don't think any of us liked going, especially Jim and John and George. But I do remember feeling very happy wearing a brown velvet dress with white fur trimming round the neck and cuffs, made by Mummy. On farther up the road on the left was The Cedars, where Ann Walker lived with her parents, next was Fifield Farm and on into Ewelme. Sometimes we came home with watercress or scrumptious lardy cake from the village shop.

Lily was full of fun and mischief and liked playing practical jokes on people. At Christmas time if Carol singers came round while she was bathing us, she would pour a jug of water down from the bathroom window, which was above the front door. The bread man once had the handle of his breadbasket covered with treacle! Fred the Foreman was told one Sunday morning, when he called with the milk, "Mr Rowden would like a word with you if you would call up from the bottom of the stairs". He wiped his shoes terribly well on the mat, straightened his jacket and his hair and went to the bottom of the stairs. Having called several times without a reply, he guessed what Lily was up to!

A bandy legged old man called Billy Newton, who walked with two sticks, used to call sometimes on Friday afternoons and lean on the greenhouse as he stood outside the back door chatting to Lily, hoping for a sample of the weekly cake baking that went on every Friday. One day she failed to tell him that the greenhouse had been freshly painted, and away he went with a white stripe across his jacket! He used to wear a white jacket at dusk,

and became a very ghostly figure, as his jacket appeared to sway slowly from side to side between his two white sticks!

Lily joined in games of hide-and-seek indoors in the winter and in the summer in the garden. Once she hid me under the bolster in my parents' bedroom. I was never found and fell asleep until Lily, who had been called away to do something, remembered and came and woke me up! I missed the rest of the party! Another time she took me down into the boiler house and as she went down the steps, the elastic in her knickers broke and they fell to the ground! She quickly put them into her pocket and on into the boiler house we went. When she became engaged to Fred Hartnup, Mummy made them a special cake.

Perhaps one of my earliest memories was going for a walk in the snow, well wrapped up and with leather gaiters with buttons right up the sides, which were hooked with difficulty through the buttonholes. The snow was deep and right across the road. I fell into a soft patch and had to be pulled out. My hands and feet felt quite frozen and I arrived home crying with the pain. I also remember standing on the beach at Southsea holding tightly onto Lily's hand and refusing to join the rest of the family and get into the small boat, which was being tossed in the sea. Another memory was in the village hall at Benson, going to see a pantomime and screaming when nails were hammered into someone's head, and having to be taken home!

A very happy memory was on my birthday when a parcel was waiting for me on the kitchen table. I had to stretch right up to get it, and inside was Buzzy Bear! He seemed almost as big as me. Over the years he became my most treasured possession. I was later given a book about another Buzzy Bear who lived under a tree, and I wish I had kept it.



Buzzy bear and me!

Later memories were when the King and Queen drove through the village and we sat on the high wall at the back of the shrubbery and waved Union Jacks as they went slowly by. Another day when a Zeppelin flew slowly over the village, and one sunny Sunday morning when I got dressed and ran downstairs and into the dining room and jumped through the wide open window onto the lawn. As I landed I saw two big feet in front of me and I looked up to see an old gypsy standing with his can asking me to “Get you Mum to fill it with tea”. He really frightened me.

When Jim was old enough, he went to Bloxham Boarding School near Banbury, and John followed him there several years later. Once, when they were dressed and ready to be taken by Daddy to school, they went down the drive and quarrelled, ending in a fight, and they completely ruined their school uniforms!



John and Jim in school uniform

The rest of us continued being taught by a governess. Miss Round was the first one to come, but I was too young to remember much about her. She was very strict and insisted that Dorothy should eat up her apple suet pudding. She hated it and wouldn't eat it, but Miss Round would not give in. In tears Dorothy sat at the table unable to eat it and Miss Round brought down a mirror and put it in front of her on the table so she could see her ugly crying face! Dorothy says that she put her fingers down her throat to make herself sick. Lily came in when Miss Round was out of the room and took the plate away.

Miss Carrington (for some reason we called her Miss Carrington Pig!) followed Miss Round and I remember her wonderful collection of seashells. She took us for walks by the river to collect reeds, which we brought home and later made into round mats and little baskets. She taught us to thread very thin wire through tiny coloured beads and make butterflies and other things. The School Room was long. Just inside the door on the right was the much used rocking horse. The windows on the roadside brought in plenty of light.

At the end of the room there was a door to the left to a lobby, with a sink under the window and a door into the garden. There were shelves for all our schoolbooks and in the sink we washed our paintbrushes and paint boxes. On hot sunny days we had lessons sitting on benches at trestle tables in the shade under the fruit trees at the end of the garden. This was lovely until earwigs crawled up on to the tables – nasty things that would nip you and we flicked them away with our fingers we were scared of them getting into our ears. I was also afraid of thunder and somewhere called Russia!

Miss Round left in a hurry after John punched her in the chest after hearing her saying nasty things about Mummy! Once I had a holiday with Miss Carrington at her home and we went for cycle rides. On the way back to her house, through the woods, she suddenly stopped and got off her bike. I followed her and a short way ahead on the path was an adder. We waited very still and silent until it decided to move off, then we sped off home. When she left us, Miss Tubb took her place, and our little joke was that we had ‘a round pig in a tub!’ Once when John was very much younger, at lunch he sat opposite a guest and would not stop staring at him. When asked what was wrong he answered ‘Don’t like dat man!’

One afternoon, Dorothy and Philip were out in the garden alone, the rest of us being kept in for punishment. Dorothy kept her pony, Dolly, in the stables, and she had been told NEVER to ride her bareback. That afternoon they decided to be cowboys and both got on together, bareback. Dolly reared and then put her head down and Dorothy was thrown off headfirst. She felt a bit funny when she got up but managed to put Dolly away. Philip went home and Dorothy came in for tea. Suddenly, at the table, she fainted and fell off her chair. I can remember going upstairs and seeing Mummy sitting beside her bed and anxiously watching over the pale face lying on the pillow. Dr Birch was called. No one knew what could have caused her fainting. When it was discovered that she had been alone in the garden playing with Philip, they phoned the Chamberlains and Philip confessed. The next day she was told by Daddy that as she had disobeyed him she could not be trusted, and Dolly was to be sold and only when she could be really trusted again would she have another pony. As he spoke to her, she saw Dolly being led out of the drive. Later she got another pony called Dick. I can remember being led round a field at Fifield by Daddy, on

that horse probably. I felt miles off the ground and very unsafe and showed no signs of enjoying it, but only fear, and I never asked to try again. That was probably a great disappointment to him as he loved horses and wanted us all to ride.



Douglas on his horse

Jim rode but I am not sure about John or George. Daddy was a keen cricket player and I remember him teaching us how to bat on the tennis court. Standing in front of him with his arms down ours, and over our hands round the bat, he followed our arms through the strokes. In my case it worked well as years later I got into the school cricket team and hit quite a few boundaries! Unfortunately all the money he had from the sale at Golder Manor was put into an unsuccessful horseracing venture, with his own stables, and he lost the lot. Jim remembers all about it.

Sometimes we went round the farms with Daddy in the Fiat. It was maroon with a canvas hood and a brass radiator. The sheep were kept at Beggarbush, and we would call to our

pet lambs, who had been orphans and had been brought down to the stables at home and fed with bottles by us. 'Blackie and Peter', I remember, would come across the field at our call. The carhorses once stampeded in a sudden hailstorm in the farmyard up there. Once, coming down Beggarbush Hill, the Fiat reached 40 mph, to Mummy's horror!



Mary with the sheep at Beggarbush

The threshing was done at Crowmarsh, just down the road from CB, with the big threshing machine chugging away. The sheaves were put onto the moving conveyor and up into the drum, and below, a sack was hitched round a pipe to be filled with corn. The rest of the sheaves ended up as straw the other end. As the rick got lower, the excitement started, and armed with sticks we waited for the rats and mice, scared that they would run up our legs. A lot of hitting the ground, but I don't know if we ever killed any, though Tiny the small terrier did brilliantly, and it was very exciting.

The pigs were kept at Fifield, and we didn't enjoy seeing them being castrated – poor squealing things. It was a good place to fly kites. A very enthusiastic Dorothy, pulling hard on her string, walked backwards into the muckheap. Back home, a quick bath and clean clothes made her sweet smelling again! Every year there was a rook shoot up in the rookery at Fifield and I hated it. But, I did love the taste of the rook pie Mummy made. I can only remember eating it cold with the pale meat set in almost white jelly underneath a thin pastry top. One day at Fifield, I accidentally frightened Dick with a stick. I was giving it to Dorothy and he bolted with her down the field, straight across the road and up into the farmyard. Dorothy was very cross with me and I never did it again.



Douglas Rowden on his horse at Freemantle where he grew up

Every birthday, we could choose a pudding. Boiled rice with treacle and cream was my favourite. Dorothy liked it as well, but I don't think the rest did. I remember one lovely lemon sponge birthday cake. I don't remember any meals with us all sitting at the dining room table, except one fleeting memory when Jim or John were cutting a slice of bread at breakfast and I begged to do it. They let me. The knife of course slipped, and for years I had a scar across my finger to remind me! Until we were old enough, I think we had our meals in the kitchen. The black range set in an alcove always looked bright and shiny.

Mummy did all the cooking on that range and at the pine table. I am told that on one occasion when the cat jumped up onto the table to steal a steak while she was cooking, she picked up the rolling pin and threw it at the poor cat and accidentally killed it! Once Jim and John were in the kitchen doing their best to annoy her, refusing to take an important message up to Ewelme to Daddy. She picked up the rolling pin, telling them that she had killed the cat and if they didn't do as they were told would kill them as well – they vanished at speed! On the wall behind the kitchen door, high up just near the ceiling, was a row of bells from various rooms in the house, and just below them a row of silver looking meat covers, ranging from very small to very big. The gun cupboard was below, but I don't really remember it, though Dorothy does.

I remember the large scullery, as big as the kitchen, and the white shallow sink under the window. Once when I had fallen off my scooter on the drive, when I should not have been out, and I grazed my knee badly, I sneaked into the scullery to find a cloth to wipe it clean. There was a nice one waiting for me in the bucket under the sink, and with a little water from the tap I tried to clean it, and kept quiet about it. Several days later the knee had gone septic, and I remember Mummy tearing long strips of sheet into bandages. Hot poultices were put on it and I had to lie down for days on the sofa in the dining room, resting it.

The worst mischief George and I ever did was breaking the stable windows. We were bored and couldn't think of anything to do. "I know George, let's break the stable windows!" We found two sticks and started banging them. I was outside and George inside. George wasn't doing very well, and I called to him "Do it like this George!" crashing down again and breaking another window. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Lily's head peeping round the wall, and then it vanished. I got a sinking feeling, and for good reason. Shortly after, Lily appeared again with a chair, followed by Mummy, holding a slipper! After she had duly applied it to our sit-upons, we were sent up to the kitchen to wait until Daddy came home for lunch. I dreaded that, and it was awful following him down the drive to show him our handiwork. I can't remember what he said, but he did send us straight to bed. Poor George, who had been very half-hearted about the whole thing, went upstairs crying. Our lunch was brought up, but George couldn't eat his. With a full tummy I was getting ready for a nice sleep, when Lily came in, got us dressed and took us

for a very long walk. Mummy had decided that if we slept all afternoon we would never go to sleep at bedtime.

Perhaps to make us more responsible, we were each given a broody hen sitting on ten eggs to look after. Some of George's chicks died, and he buried them in my part of the vegetable garden. Dorothy tells me that when I found out, I told George to dig them up and put them in his garden. Jim was weeding the asparagus bed nearby, when George was digging and couldn't find them. Sonny Franklin came and asked George what he was doing. When he heard, he said "You won't find them George, they will have gone to heaven by now". Problem solved! They didn't know Jim had heard them talking. The three of us decided to dig to Australia between two fruit trees at the end of the garden, until something looking like a finger appeared, and we fled, presuming it was a finger and not just the root of a tree.

Memories of Christmas were pushing our feet down the bed to see how heavy with presents the pillow case was, making paper chains and drawing our own Christmas cards, Father Christmas giving us presents and being afraid of him – I found out years later that he was Aunty Ethel dressed up! Mummy's last resort when we were really very naughty was to tell us that if we didn't behave, we would be sent to live with Aunty Ethel! We had games in the playroom, being blindfolded and led up and down the room and told to stretch our legs over different objects, only to find when the blindfold was removed that the room was empty and all our efforts had been for nothing. Another blindfold game was trying to pin the tail on the right place on the donkey. Jim's special trick was to make us watch the sunrise as a light came slowly up behind a white sheet, and as we looked up to watch it come out at the top, we got a good splashing of water thrown by Jim! George and I dressed up as old men wearing John's shorts, shoes and jackets. Granny's Christmas annuals were always a favourite. 'Pip Squeak and Wilfred' was mine. I remember Jim being given a wonderful steam driven toy on a big tray, like a tiny factory and all parts working when the steam was up. John had one similar but smaller and less complicated. I don't remember any of the Christmas dinners or Christmas cakes.



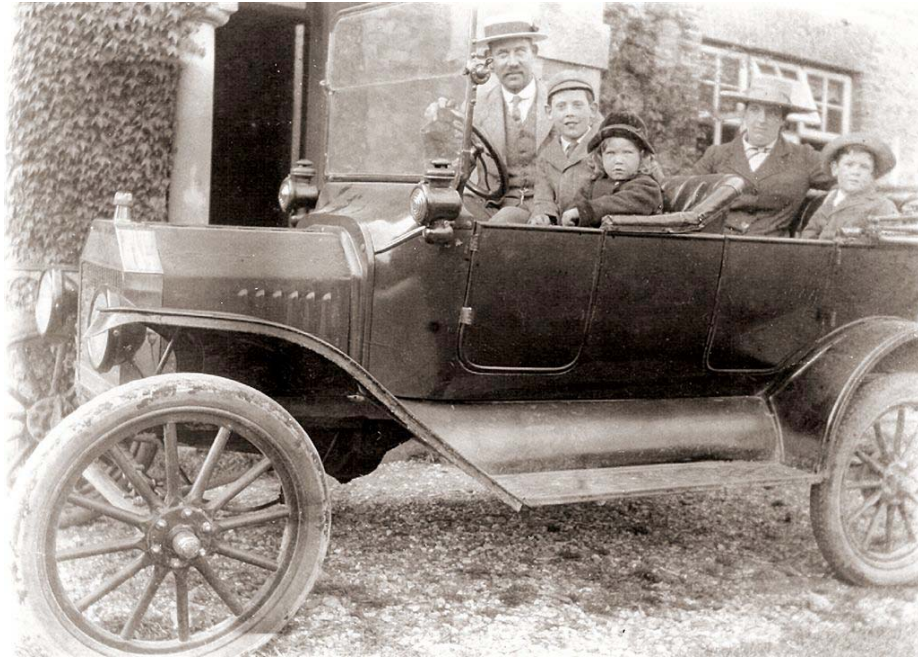
Aunty Ethel, Uncle Will with Jack
standing and Billy seated



Cousin Billy

We went to Church every Sunday morning after breakfast, always of smoked haddock cooked in milk. The Reverend Price gave long dull sermons and as we were nodding off, he would clap his hands and wake us up. He had two daughters, and once when Jim and John were taking pot shots at birds (that is Jim's version) over the wall into the vicarage garden, they managed to hit the top of the daughters' hats rising above the deck chairs as they sat in their garden! Alarmed at what they had done, and that the Vicar would come round immediately, they got on their bikes and brought them through the house to the front door to escape, presuming the Vicar would come through the big gates. As they came down the hall, there was a loud knock at the front door and they turned tail and fled! The Church clock was another of their targets, and they pitted it with holes. When the Vicar found out and reported it to Daddy, they were really in trouble. Jim left Bloxham very early, the headmaster deciding it was a waste of our parents' money as he wasn't doing very well, and being at home learning to farm would be better. He had an interrupted schooling through a bad back, which kept him away from school for a long time when he was younger. Jim has a funny story to tell about one journey to school in the snow, when

he was about six or seven years old, and still living at Golder Manor. Here it is in his own words:



Jim with his Father in the front of the Model T Ford that later got stuck in the snow!

“It was Monday morning in the winter of 1915 or 1916, and Dad was taking me to school in Wallingford where I was a weekly boarder. It had been snowing heavily, and after we turned onto the Wallingford road in our Model T Ford, we came to a gap in the hedge where there was a gate, and where the snow had drifted across the road, lying two or three feet deep. Dad was driving and we got stuck in the snow. He said, “Jim, you press the pedal and I will get out and push.” So Dad went behind the car and started to push. He pushed and pushed. The car jerked and stopped, but then suddenly it started to move. I was a bit scared, so I took my foot off the pedal, thinking the car would stop. The car shot forward, because unknowingly I had engaged top gear, and off I went at great speed down the road! Dad was running after, shouting, but I couldn’t hear what he was saying and I didn’t know how to stop! I kept going for about half a mile until luckily I got stuck in another snowdrift further along the road, and Dad eventually caught up with me, by now

out of breath from running. We tried again, and this time, with more instruction, I was able to control the car and we got out of the snow and I got to school!"

In the summer Jim and John mowed the lawns and then went down to the cellar and quenched their thirst from the cider barrel and then slept it off on the lawn! One summer, George was very ill with mastoids, and a specialist from Oxford came to see him. I happened to be in the hall when he knocked on the front door. As I let him in, he looked down at me and said, "Are you the ill child?" I thought him an idiot with George upstairs so ill. Our cat was devoted to George and, as if he knew something was wrong, he curled up over his bad ear and kept it very warm. It was decided by the Doctor that it was the best warmth for the ear and the cat was allowed to stay and the ear got better. Jim confirms this story.

I don't remember the sitting room and I suppose we were seldom allowed in there. The dining room remains very clear. A low wide dresser was at the end wall by the door and a large silver rose-bowl was in the centre with other silver cups and jugs on each side. Two bay windows looked out to the drive, and I have a picture of my parents sitting in chairs by them. There was a door to a greenhouse in the wall opposite the dresser, and between it and the second bay window, Daddy's desk. Round the fire was a sofa (wonderful for bouncing on) and several chairs. The dining room table was in the middle of the room, with spare leaves to extend it. The set of chairs round the table had ornate brass set in the top of the backs. Once the chimney caught fire and the furniture was hurriedly pushed back across the room, and the carpet rolled back. When red-hot cinders came tumbling out I ran out of the room. Chimneys on fire still give me the creeps.

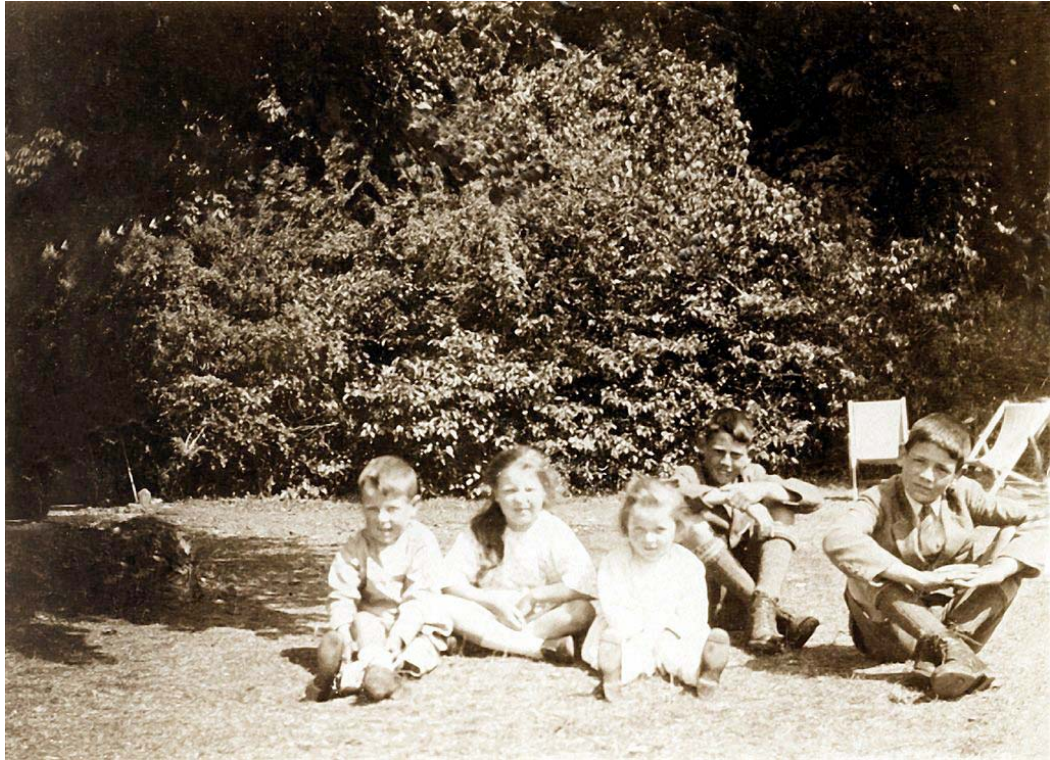
One outing we never enjoyed was going to Alton for tea with Uncle Will and Aunty Ethel. We had to be on our very best behaviour. One journey over there in the summer, we had a puncture. 'Little Miss busy body' was out watching it being changed, and when the brass pump came out to pump up the tyre I had to have a go. With my feet firmly on the two metal pedals at the bottom to hold it firmly, I pumped it up and down with all my might until my pale cream Tussah silk dress got caught in the pump. It came out leaving a dark oily patch. Nothing could be done about it. Going to tea with Aunty Ethel was bad enough,

and with a dirty patch on my dress it was much worse. I sat huddled on my chair, hoping no one would notice, until my cousin Billy came in and told me to sit up. Perhaps my fear of Billy began then!

As we got older, we had bicycles. We soon learnt to ride them on the slope out of the stable to the tennis court. As we got more confident, we were allowed out onto the road. Although we had been told never to go through the flooded road on the way to the Chamberlains when the river was high, it was too tempting. We had to get through it without falling off or the game would be up. In the end, we became so confident that we set up obstacles on the tennis court, going up planks and landing the other end. Jim was the expert and could stand balancing on the saddle riding round. Riding with hands crossed round corners caused many tumbles!



John, Ann Walker, George and Mary



George, Dorothy, Mary, Jim and John by the lime tree before it was felled to a stump

Dorothy learnt the hard way not to tell tales. Having seen John cycle right over a flowerbed, she ran in to tell Mummy, who told her not to tell tales – then “What did you say...?” and she was off after John. Dorothy went down to the bottom of the garden for safety, but Jim and John were soon down there after her. They pushed her into the stinging nettles for telling tales and told her that if she screamed, they would kill her! George and I were inseparable, and life seemed perfect. Lots of things to do in the garden and playroom. The only time there seemed nothing to do was the day we broke the stable windows. I was the ringleader and George willingly followed. He was a delicate child and easily upset, especially on my birthday, and he had to have presents as well. We loved the old rocking horse, and the pram became a boat. Sitting in it back to back with our legs at each end and with sticks as paddles, we had a tug of war to see who could make the most headway, not

easy on the slippery wooden floor to get a grip, and it was hard work making the space each end for our legs. I remember colouring books, nine wooden squares which when turned over changed to different farmyard animals, Christmas stockings full of lovely things, a toy sweet shop with little bottles full of tiny sweets and a little weighing machine to weigh them. I hated dolls, but Buzzy bear was much loved. I remember making chains with a cotton reel with four tacks one end, using coloured wool and a blunt needle, learning to knit, Annuals, skipping ropes, hoops in the garden, Happy Families, tops and snakes and ladders, Helma, a book about a bear called Buzzy, who lived in a house under a tree (I wish I had kept that book). Lots of memories flood back. I remember watching the total eclipse of the sun, standing at home by the greenhouse looking up through dark green glass in 1927.

The first dog I remember was the terrier and good ratter called Tiny. When she died, I helped Daddy bury her by the wall at the end of the crazy paving path by the rose trellis.



George and Granny Hampton sitting on the Lime tree stump, with Mary and Tiny. Mary in her knitted woollen dress with pom-poms.



Douglas Rowden with Gipsy in the drive at The Limes, near the stables

The next dog we had was a brown and white cocker spaniel called Gipsy, with her lovely soft floppy ears. When she was older, she had a narrow escape when she was run over by a car in the road and came howling down the drive but luckily she was only badly bruised.



Mary Gipsy and John



Mary and Gipsy



Mary Dorothy George and Gipsy

Dorothy remembers sneaking down to the strawberry bed in the summer and crawling under the netting to eat the strawberries. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Mummy standing a little way off looking in her direction. She kept very still hoping she hadn't been seen. Then she heard her say "I shall have to go and ask Douglas to get his gun and shoot that big blackbird in the strawberry bed!" She never did it again! I remember going with George to a children's party at Dr Birch's house in Dorchester. During tea the seat of my chair fell out and I sank through scraping my back and crying with the pain.

On one occasion when Dr Birch was visiting when Jim, John and George were ill, and waiting together in our parents' bed for him, Jim asked me to get a shoe box, a brick and a ball of string. Having tied up the box with the brick in it, he placed it on the floor at the end of the bed, so it would be in the way when Dr Birch came in, and with a long length of string under the bed to pull, he waited for the right moment. As Dr Birch bent down to pick it up, it vanished under the bed. He then had a pillow fight with them and told them they were fit enough to get up!

One birthday, I think it was my ninth, I was given a large tin of Quality Street toffees by Daddy, which was kept on the sideboard in the dining room. On a visit, Dr Birch came in to the dining room, saw the toffees and asked me if he could have one. He opened the tin, took a handful and put them in his pocket! Very greedy, I thought. I think that Daddy had forgotten that it was my birthday that year, and the large tin of toffees came for me from him. He was ill by then and had a bed in the sitting room. I only vaguely remember him there but Dorothy would sit by his bed and when he couldn't eat all of his pudding, he would ask her to eat it for him so that he wouldn't get into trouble. I also remember, when I was younger, the Doctor coming upstairs to the bathroom to see me when a rash was noticed at bath time. I hid behind the bathroom door, as he pushed the door open my toes were scraped by it. I am told that he used to come rushing into the house and up to the bathroom, when he was out visiting and thought he had picked up a flea, to search for it.

Jim and John made our first crystal wireless set and we listened with earphones and this strange contraption brought the sound of "London Calling 2LO" – and music and talking! When John was tempted to smoke Daddy's pipe, he went into the garden and ate a lot of

fruit and vegetables to take away the smell of tobacco, and was then violently sick, but he got away with it! He had a raging temperature and seemed very ill, but by the time Dr Birch came, his temperature was down and he felt fine! When we were ill in bed we were brought bowls of hot soothing bread and milk with sugar and cups of beef tea and lots of loving motherly care. I think Mummy made all our frocks and, when they were ready, Dorothy and I stood on the kitchen table to have the hems pinned up. She made the lampshade over the dining room table of silk material in wine coloured stripes from the remnants of one of her blouses.



Mummy with a pet rabbit, outside the sitting room



Mummy with Jim and John on right, Mary in front c. 1925



Mary & Dorothy on the lime tree stump circa 1927

Going Our Separate Ways



Douglas Rowden

One afternoon in the winter of 1928 -1929 we saw, from the dining room window, the gates open and Daddy came slowly in, walking with a stick. He had been to see a Specialist in Oxford and later he went back for an operation. He was very ill with cancer and nothing could be done. A nurse came to look after him. By then, Miss Tubb the Governess had gone and John had left Bloxham School and was an apprentice engineer with B.T.H. at Rugby. Dorothy, George and I cycled to the Grammar School in Wallingford. On fine days, Daddy had a bed in a chalet on the front lawn. Once, peeping through a bedroom window, Dorothy and I saw the nurse changing his dressing. At some time I overheard someone say that he might have caught it abroad, which puzzled me because I knew he had not been abroad.



Marjory and Douglas in the dining room

Farming was going through a dreadful slump, with barns all over the country full of rotting potatoes and other crops. It was a very anxious time financially, and the nurse encouraging Daddy to bet up to £100 a week on the horses didn't help matters – a lot of money in those days. She ruled the house and forced Jim to watch her changing the dressings. Mummy was at her wits end with anxiety and tragically, feeling that one less to feed would help, she drowned herself in the River Thames on 5th June 1929.

I remember that day she was missing, searching for her everywhere in the house, under beds and in cupboards, before cycling to school with George. Dorothy stayed at home that day. On the way to Wallingford, passing near the Thames, George wanted to go and look for her there. I had a horrible fear and didn't want to and we cycled on to school. During the morning we were told to go to the Headmaster who told us that we were to go at once to the Chamberlains. We got on our bikes and cycled there and we never went back to The Limes again. I don't know how long we stayed there. All I can remember is being on the swing in their playroom and swinging up and down and talking to George about where Mummy could be and hoping they would find her soon. Dorothy, at home that day, remembers when she heard the policeman bring the awful news, rushing into the dining

room, hiding behind the piano, screaming and screaming and screaming. Mummy had warned her that she would be leaving but that she (Dorothy) would be all right.

Ten days later on 15th June 1929 Daddy died. George and I did not go to the funerals. Next I remember staying in the cottage at the end of The Limes, which we let to the Mattinglys. He was the manager in the village shop, but we didn't know them very well. Every day we went to the village school across the road, and when gypsy children came into the class, I was very frightened. Then a journey by train to Nottingham sitting in the guard's van, with a label tied round my neck, to stay with Aunty Mary and Uncle Gibby at Tithby Grange. I can't remember if George came with me... Back again to Benson and soon the journey in Miss Heberden's car (George and I were sitting in the dickey behind her and our luggage strapped at the back) to the London Orphan School at Watford. Miss Heberden lived near The Limes and was a friend of the family. As we drove away out of Benson, the fields looked golden in the sunshine in early September. John had returned to Rugby and found a new home for Gipsy in the town. Dorothy went back to Alton with Aunty Ethel and Jim stayed with Mr Chamberlain, who helped him with the farm until the Auction Sale, and then he sailed to a new life in Australia



Jim on board ship going to Australia in 1930

I didn't lose touch with our former life in Oxfordshire and spent part of the summer holiday with Mrs Walker at the Cedars, Benson. In a large paddock, Mr Walker kept racing greyhounds and I remember the strange smell from tripe being cooked for them in an outhouse. They had a tennis court and Mrs Walker encouraged me to play. We often went down to the Chamberlains and she taught me to swim in the river there. She had a wonderful sewing room and made tiny leather shoes for dolls, amongst other things, and one year taught me to make a dress. So proud of myself, I took it back to Alton only to be told by Aunty Ethel (who must have disapproved) that it would go out for jumble!



Mary



Mary and George

As the tennis got better over the years, I entered a junior doubles competition with Toby Chamberlain and we won, and were each given a small silver cup. When Mr Walker saw it, he placed it beside the large silver National trophies he had won with his greyhounds! Toby and David Chamberlain fought like cats and on one visit I remember hearing them bumping and crashing about upstairs. Eileen was there and said: "Don't worry, they haven't killed themselves yet!" Later I saw Toby sitting in the hall with a torn shirt, looking as though he had come off the worst!

The story now jumps to 1937



Christmas cards made in 1937



Mary and Dorothy back at The Limes in about 1939

When George left school in 1936, he went up to Rugby to join John and train at B.T.H. I left school in the summer of 1937 and went to London to do a secretarial course at Hosters and lived with Dorothy. Dorothy and I went back to Benson in about 1939 and the picture

above shows us in the garden of The Limes, thoughts inevitably turning back to those blissfully happy days when we were children, and the family were all there. Now, 10 years later, Jim had a new life in Australia, John had joined the RAF when the War started and was a Spitfire pilot, Dorothy and I lived and worked in London and George was an engineer in Rugby. John was married to Catherine, and after the battle of Britain, John was reported missing.



John in the RAF

In the summer of 1941, with still no news of John, I had a letter from George saying that whatever I had planned for my holiday, to cancel it and go with him and John's wife Catherine, to the Chamberlains at Crowmarsh Battle Farm in Preston Crowmarsh, as they needed all hands to the pump with the harvest. I had spent a weekend with George after John was reported missing – George lived in digs with several other young men and when I

went down, his landlady was ill in hospital and he had taken over responsibility of running the house for her, making sure the other apprentices paid their rent, and visiting her in hospital. I came downstairs on the Sunday morning to find a splendid cooked breakfast waiting for me on a clean white damask tablecloth, and the smell of freshly ground coffee filling the room. I was very proud of him!

So I went down to Rugby by train, and with George driving John's sports car, we headed for the Chamberlains. When we got there we were told that the family were up the field road, busy with the harvest – so, back in the car and up the road we went until we found them and we tumbled out and joined in. Aunt Ibb, (I think she was a relation of the 2nd Mrs Chamberlain) who often came to stay, was on top of the rick with other members of the family, her hair tied back with binder twine, laughing away and enjoying every minute. She had a millinery shop in Cheltenham and was great fun. On the way back to the house I went in another car and sat by Aunt Ibb. She told me that there was a shy young man staying who needed bringing out – interesting I thought! We sat down for supper with Mr Chamberlain at one end and Dumps at the other. The shy young man sat next to him and I sat opposite with George to my right and Catherine next to him – I can't remember where the rest were – we were ten altogether. The shy young man kept looking at Catherine, who was very attractive, and I thought he wasn't really so shy after all. Then suddenly he stood up and across the table shook hands with me.



George behind, from left, the shy young man Bill, Eileen Chamberlain, Mary and a friend

The Land Army

I really can't remember much of the holiday, except that by the end of it, I had decided to join the Land Army. I felt it would be more useful than sitting wasting my time in an Office in Nottingham, twiddling my thumbs. Dumps Chamberlain said she would try and find a local farmer needing a Land Girl. I headed back to Nottingham, excited about the prospects of life back on a farm. It wasn't long before she telephoned to say that John Farrant from Cumnor, near Dorchester (in Oxfordshire) would be getting in touch, as he needed one more Land Girl. When he phoned, he told me that I would be working with the cowman, helping to milk 60 cows twice a day, and doing other jobs on the farm between milking. I decided then and there to go – gave in my notice at the Office and was soon on the train on my way down to Oxford. Looking out of the train window, the fields seemed to have more and more cows in them the nearer we got to Oxford! I began to panic at the thought of working with them, and wondered whether I could really cope – I very nearly took the train back to Nottingham! I told myself firmly that Daddy was a farmer and I could do the same. I stayed with the Chamberlains for a week, getting used to rising early, learning to milk their house cow by hand, and how to drive their John Deere tractor - then off to the Farrants.

Mr and Mrs Farrant had two sons, Sam and John, both farmers a few miles away, and two daughters. Mary was a games teacher, who at the outset of war was going to a post in America, but instead had come to help on the farm. Betty, the younger daughter, worked away from home and was engaged to the local Milk Recorder. There was one other Land Girl and Mary was in charge of us. My first morning in the dairy was horrible. I was busy washing the milking machines when I was called to come and help with a cow calving and found myself on the end of a rope with another person, pulling the poor calf out. Afterwards I went back to the dairy, feeling quite sick. Getting up early was no problem – then down to the dairy to light the boiler to get steam up, ready for sterilising the churns and milking machines. The cowman brought the cows in, each one knowing its own place in the long rows on either side of the cowshed. If one made a mistake, it was soon shoved out by the rightful owner! We tied them up, washed their udders, took a sample from each to check that there was no mastitis - all this time trying to avoid a nasty swipe across the face from the cow's tail - then put on the milking machine. You could see the milk coming down a glass tube into the bucket, and when the milk stopped you removed it, unclamped it from the full bucket, put it on to an empty bucket and then on to the next cow, taking the full bucket to the cooler. The thin metal handles soon made my hands hard and corny. By the time the milking was finished, the machines thoroughly washed, the dairy and cowshed hosed down, the steam was up ready for the milking machines to be put in and made ready for the afternoon milking. Then back to the farmhouse for breakfast. The rest of the morning was spent out on the farm with Mary and the other Land Girl, doing various jobs. We thinned long rows of seedlings with a pull hoe, leaving one plant about every 6 inches – a backbreaking job. At the end of each row, Mary made us lie flat on the ground to straighten our backs! Cutting kale after heavy rain soaked us as we bent to the ground to cut the stems and got showered by the water on the leaves above. It was then loaded into a horse drawn cart and taken away to feed the cows. Sometimes the cowman needed me to help move cattle around the farm and I found myself standing in the gaps ahead, to stop them getting through. It was fine when it was just the cows, but on occasions when the bull lead the way, I felt terrified as he came towards me. On one occasion, while getting through a barbed wire fence, my right ankle got caught in the wire. I pulled the short barb out, only to step above my ankle into mud. Knowing it would be hours before I would be

back at the farm where I could clean the puncture in my ankle, thoughts of lockjaw flooded my mind!

Days off were spent back at CB. I went to the cinema in Wallingford with David Chamberlain when he was home on leave from the RAF. I had a feeling Mr Chamberlain would have liked us to get together, but he was a year younger than me and I never thought of him in that way. Later he met a girl in the Forces, when he was stationed in Norfolk. They were married and after the War, lived in one of the farm cottages and had a son. Tragically, David died of a brain tumour when he was quite young. Irene, his wife, eventually married a vicar, who later became Chaplain to the Queen. (Many years later, Dumps came to tea at Oxenbourne Farm with David's son who worked in the NHS in Portsmouth – he didn't look at all like his Father). Cousin Mabel, at the age of forty, produced her firstborn Robert and while I was at CB, I remember making his first romper suits out of blue and green patterned materials.

Sometimes at weekends a party of us from CB would go to the theatre in Oxford, the numbers depending on how many visitors had come to stay. I remember one play when the stage was completely empty, only the actors, and yet one could imagine the scenery quite clearly. On another occasion, when it was a ballet, Philip Chamberlain just couldn't put up with it, and walked out!

At the Farrants, I was called Rosamund (my middle name), as it was confusing having two Marys. She persuaded me to go riding with her. It took some doing on my part, with my early childhood memory of being so frightened at Fifield farm. When the horse stopped to nibble some grass, I felt I was going to slide off down its neck, and another time galloping across a field through trees with low branches, in a fit of the giggles, I only just managed to bob down and avoid them.

Christmas at CB was wonderful, and how Dumps managed to cook for so many, on the four-burner paraffin stove, I will never know. Mealtimes were such fun, and after the meal was over, enough of us stayed to help clear away. One washed up and another dried and put away and someone else polished the long table and kept the gramophone wound up for

music while we worked! ‘The Rose of Tralee’ and ‘Your Tiny Hand is Frozen’ sung by Gigli are two records I remember. We had party games in the living room, with a lovely log fire burning in the inglenook. The funniest game was a form of musical chairs for men only. Aunt Ibb had come armed with a selection of hats from her shop in Cheltenham, and all the men except one were given a hat to wear. That was a funny enough sight, but it got even funnier as they walked round to the music, grabbing the hat from the man in front and plonking it on their head at all angles, until the music stopped, and the hatless man was out! I don’t think I have ever laughed so much... by the end of the game the poor hats were crumpled and distorted out of all recognition.

More memories in the Land Army come back to mind; the time I had milked the colostrum from a cow after she had calved – I left the full bucket and went off to get her some hay and when I came back, she had scooped the lot! I loved looking up at the cloudless sky on dark nights and seeing such a blaze of stars, and in the spring, looking up through the trees with their buds ready to burst, standing out against the blue sky. Helping with the silage up on the silo, treading down the grass and molasses to consolidate it before the next load of grass arrived and one morning, Bill turning up to inspect it. I should say here that the reason Bill (or WJ as Dumps called him) was staying with the Chamberlains during the War was because he was working for the Ministry of Agriculture as part of the War Effort, and had the job of co-ordinating the Silage Campaign in part of Southern England. This was important because animal feed imports had been badly hit by the German warships bombing and torpedoing the merchant navy convoys, and all agricultural specialists were vital to help keep the nation supplied with food and milk through increased farming efficiency and greater yields.

Walking through Crowmarsh one day, I was surprised and touched when I was hailed by someone, who to me was a complete stranger. He doffed his cap and said “Good day Miss Mary”. I vaguely recognised him, and he told me that he was one of Daddy’s farm workers, who had known me as a child. It was good to be reconnected with our past life at the Limes. I was astonished that he recognised me! During haymaking, I found myself driving a carthorse, with tedder behind, up the lane to the main road and across into a field

where the rows of cut grass were waiting to be turned. I remember feeling very embarrassed when the horse stopped to do a never-ending wee and Bill drove past!



Eileen Chamberlain & Mary up the Church Tower at Benson, wearing tin helmets

The country was very jittery about an invasion and listening to Winston Churchill speaking to the nation on the radio was very reassuring. CB was directly under the flight path to Benson aerodrome, sometimes used by the bombers returning home if the wind was from a favourable direction. Sometimes planes would limp back laden with bombs and fly extremely low over Crowmarsh Battle Farm, making everyone afraid that the farm might accidentally be hit, but thankfully it never happened. I believe that one of the long barns did get damaged in 1944 when a Lancaster bomber overshot the runway and hit it. I used to spend nights up in the Church tower at Benson, as a Local Defence Volunteer looking out for enemy parachutists, having hot chocolate drinks up there from a thermos, and jumping out of my skin every time the clock struck the hour.

George had, in the end, managed to enlist, when the RAF was desperate for more pilots, and followed in John's footsteps. John was never found alive after he was reported and had been killed in April 1941. George became a Wellington bomber pilot and in less than a year he also was killed.



George Rowden,

An Engagement Is Announced

I really enjoyed the life of a Land Girl. Mary decided I should learn to drive and take the churns of milk to the train, so with her beside me, we went off to the railway station every day. I got quite confident, until one day on the way home, rather too close to a corner for my liking, she told me to pass a car. She urged me on and I started to overtake when a car came round the corner – it was too late and I had to go on. I put my foot down hard on the accelerator, and if it had not been such a powerful engine I am sure we would not have made it. It really unnerved me and that was the end of my driving for a long time, as I broke my ankle shortly after.

It happened one evening, cycling back from Ewelme after helping Dumps in a canteen for Airmen from Benson Aerodrome. She insisted that a young Airman, who was going in the same direction, should escort me. There was a beautiful sunset, and looking at it, I did not see a large stone in the road. The result was that I came off the bike and the peddle must have hit my right ankle, so I ended up sitting in the middle of the road in great pain, with my right foot flopped to the side. The Airman pulled me to the side of the road and hailed a white van, asking them to take me to my doctor in the next village.

The driver and passenger lifted me into the back of the van. The doctor said the ankle was broken – bound it up and said I must go to hospital in Oxford the next day to have it put in plaster. When I arrived back at the farm, poor Mr Farrant was somewhat surprised when his Land Girl arrived on a chairlift between two strange men and I told what had happened. My bedroom was on the top floor of the house, but the other Land Girl let me sleep in her bed on the first floor. I spent a very uncomfortable night and how I managed to get out of bed and wee in the pot beside the bed, I can't imagine! When the news of what had happened reached Dumps, WJ (Bill) volunteered to take me to hospital and Mary Farrant came as well. It had to be reset, so I was given an anaesthetic, and woke up with the plaster on. They waited until I had recovered from the anaesthetic and then we went back to CB

where I stayed until the ankle was mended, hoping and expecting then to return to the Farrants.



At Crowmarsh Battle Farm. Mary in plaster, next to Aunt Mary Ireland and Catherine, Bill (left) and David Chamberlain behind



Mary, in plaster, with Bill at Crowmarsh Battle Farm

It was a bad break, and when the plaster was taken off, it was obvious that it was not going to be able to withstand the rigours of the Land Army. Once Mr Chamberlain took me into his Office to show me some of Daddy's headed notepaper, which he had bought at the sale in 1929. The room was full of interesting things, and on top of a cupboard was a bottle with the top of a finger from one of his children preserved in it. As Dumps said, "Not many people have the privilege of going into Father's Office!"

Bill and I announced our engagement during that time and we went to a jewellery shop in Reading to choose a ring. Mr Chamberlain reacted by saying that Bill must leave, as he objected to engaged couples living in the same house. Miss Heberden came to the rescue; she had moved from Benson and for some time had lived out in the country beyond Wallingford, where we had been to visit her earlier in the year. She was very sympathetic and offered him rooms in her house. We decided, as I was not going back to the Farrants, to get married, and set the date for 5th November. I cannot remember how long I stayed on with Dumps, but before I left to go back to Alton to Aunty Ethel and Uncle Will, we drove out to South Moreton to have a look at a thatched cottage, which was owned by a serving Officer, who was offering it for let during the war. It was ideal and after a quick calculation whether or not we could afford the rent, which included a gardener, we thought we could... just! Aunty Ethel had met Bill earlier in the year when he had given me a lift there when his work was taking him in that direction. I warned him that Ethel would probably give him a cold reception, as she had done to any young man who had come to see Dorothy. She was quite the opposite and welcomed him in, and after he left, told me what a nice young man he was!

Postscript

Jim, who had gone to Australia in 1930 married Molly and they had two sons and two daughters. Jim is still alive today and living in Perth WA and is 98. John died in April 1941 aged 28, when he was shot down over France dive bombing the German defences across the channel. Dorothy married Alan Reed who worked for Cable and Wireless and they spent many years abroad with their son and two daughters. Dorothy died in February 2005 aged 89. George died on 21st October 1944 on his third mission, when his Wellington bomber was shot down over Yugoslavia with no survivors. I married Bill Johnstone and

we had a son and two daughters. Dumps Chamberlain was a lifelong friend and Godmother to our son. Bill died in 2005 aged 89 and I live at East Meon in Hampshire and am 87. The Rowden family name now continues to survive and multiply in Australia, and many have made the pilgrimage back to Benson, as have I many times, most recently with Jim.