

MY MEMOIRS

Autobiographical notes

by

Elsie D. Smellie

These notes have been transcribed and edited
by Timothy, younger son of Elsie. Footnotes
and pictures have also been inserted, in which,
for consistency, forenames in most cases have
been used for those referred to in the text.

FOREWORD

Elsie had a long widowhood after her husband, Geoffrey, died in 1979, and lived in Sussex, first in Heathfield and then in Petworth.

In 1989, while still active and able to drive a car, she decided to move into a residential/nursing home in Warminster, Wiltshire. Here, with time on her hands and with her memory still excellent, she was persuaded to put down on paper her reminiscences of a fascinating life in British Guiana, Malaya and England.

Elsie died in 1999, in her 94th year.

With the founding of the Colonies in the East Indies and the West Indies in the 18th and 19th centuries, young men from Holland and from England set out to seek their fortunes and to start a new life.

So it was that Thomas Austin was one of the earliest Colonists in the West Indies, including Dutch Guiana. In fact, records show that his grandson, Richard



Josephine

Barker Austin, as well as inheriting property in Barbados, was the owner of Plantation Kleinhoop in Surinam in the early IX century. He married Melicent Inniss and they had several children. Their youngest daughter, Josephine, became my grandmother through her marriage to Guillaume Jacques Bosch Reitz of Dutch Guiana.¹



Josephine later in life



Guillaume Jacques

At an earlier date it is recorded that one Gertrude Kuvel (b. Paramaribo 1794) married Gysbert Christiaan Bosch Reitz. It was another of their sons, another Gysbert Christiaan who in middle age left Holland

for Surinam to care for the property and he was helped by a younger brother Guillaume Jacques, before dying of yellow fever. This Guillaume Jacques was my grandfather.

Gertrude Kuvel (educated in Paris) had married in 1811 Martinus Stockel who was sole heir to his father's plantations in Surinam. He did not live long, dying of yellow fever. His widow, Gertrude Kuvel inherited the properties. Later she married Gysbert Christiaan Bosch Reitz as his first wife.

¹ See An Old Colonial Family, Chapter 17, The Bosch Reitz, Smellie and Waterfield Families.

These properties must have been considerable, for they included cocoa estates, shops and shipping with a regular overseas schooner service to and from Holland.

Guillaume Bosch Reitz was descended from a long line of Dutch citizens. In the XVI century one ancestor, Bergmaster Six had befriended and helped to finance the artist Rembrandt. Subsequently he formed the famous and largest privately owned collection of Rembrandt paintings which was housed in the Six family home in Amsterdam. Later it was given to the nation although it remained in the same building.

After Josephine's wedding in Georgetown, Guillaume Bosch Reitz, her husband took her to his home in Surinam. Travel in those days would have been by schooner along the muddy coastline of the Guianas. Paramaribo, the capital, like Georgetown, was a city of wooden buildings made from the vast natural resources of the hinterland. Its residential houses would all have had partially open-sided verandas on both floors, built to catch the prevailing wind. Each house would stand on strong brick-built pillars.

A glimpse of my grandparent's home, revealed in a framed daguerreotype, we



Melicent, Guillaume and Josephine at the Bosch Reitz home, Keizerstraat, Paramaribo

see Grandfather Guillaume standing with his hand resting on the back of Josephine's chair, while a little slave-girl sits at her feet. He is a slim, handsome man, but Josephine, in her plain black, tightly-laced clothes, her hair scraped back in a bun, seems to

have lost all semblance of youth. She has already, by that time, lost her first-born in an early confinement, and had been subject to bouts of malaria. Her suffering had left its mark, and photography was to be its memorial.²

On the wall above, together with numerous other photographs, is an enlargement of their deceased newly-born infant in a long christening-robe. There must have been a lighter side of life, but sadly there is no record.

Subsequently, Josephine bore her husband some nine healthy children, the first



Josephine and family. Millie in the foreground

eight in quick succession. The last was my mother, Melicent Marie, born in 1879, shortly before her father's death.

It was not surprising that Josephine would wish to take her brood back to British Guiana which had been her home. Lizzie, the eldest, had already left to marry Nicholas Farrar,³ thereby establishing the Bosch Reitz connection with that family.

One son, Philippe John Bosch Reitz must have returned to Dutch Guiana to settle in business. Subsequently he was to marry his Javanese house-keeper (or cook?),⁴ and to cut himself off from the disapproving family.

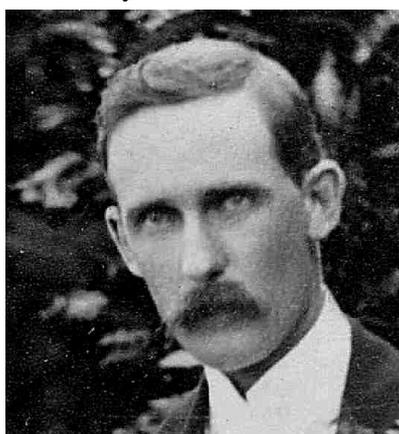
Many years later, Mother took steps to end the ridiculous feud, crossing into Surinam from Berbice in British Guiana to meet her disowned brother and Javanese wife. And later still, I made a similar gesture of reconciliation by visiting them on passing through Surinam on a Dutch boat en route for England.

² Research has shown that Elsie was wrong in her interpretation of this picture. It shows Guillaume standing next to Josephine and resting his hand on the back of the chair of his mother-in-law, Melicent Austin. The little slave girl is holding probably, Josephine's second child.

³ See *An Old Colonial Family*, Chapter 17, The Farrar and Irving Families.

⁴ Frederika Françoise Aman 1877-1970

In Georgetown, Mother had her first schooling at Miss Beckett's School for Girls. But later her mother decided to widen her young daughter's education, by taking her first to Switzerland to a school in Vevey on Lake Geneva, and then to travel in England (and probably Holland). Again no records exist.



Alfred

My father, Alfred Waterfield, was the youngest-but-one of a large family all of whom were born in India. Their father, Edward, and uncles William and Henry were educated at Westminster School, two becoming Queen's Scholars. All were destined for a future in India. William and Edward joined the Bengal Civil Service, one to become Controller and Auditor General, while my grandfather, Edward, later, from the Bengal Civil Service to become Assistant Librarian at the India Office. The third brother, Henry, rose from the India Office to become Financial Secretary, 1897-1902, later to receive a C.B., K.C.S.I., and in 1902, a G.C.I.E. Edward, my grandfather, died before I was born. He had married Matilda Gossip, 'Granny' to my generation.

In Britain, with the emergence of the colonies, it was the custom at the turn of the century to send younger members of over-stretched families to make their way west.

So it was, as the family funds ran low after educating four sons of Edward Waterfield at Rugby and Winchester, then on to Oxford, my father, Alfred, the youngest of the family of eight, was destined for a very different future.

With a degree in agriculture from Aberdeen University, he was to find himself in the muddy lands below sea-level of a British colony on the north-east coast of the South American continent, bound for the life of a sugar planter.

Usually referred to as Demerara, Guiana had been a British colony since the departure of the Dutch, who, in the XVIII century had brought their sea-defence and land-drainage skills to lift the Colony into a place fit for habitation.

They had introduced the Dutch 'grid' system in the planning of Georgetown, the capital. In certain sections, canals ran alongside streets which were shaded by saman trees or the brilliant scarlet-flowered flamboyant. The canals, or trenches, were fed by the Lamaha Creek to the east, to be emptied into the muddy Demerara River by way of kokers (sluice gates) to control the flow. Many of these canals were later filled in to minimise the mosquito-breeding areas. Later still, in the mid nineteenth-hundreds, *Amopheles* mosquitoes were almost completely eradicated in the city by supervised spraying. Mosquito nets on beds became unnecessary except for protection from night-flying insects and moths.

On the estates in the countryside, it was very different beyond the benefits of Georgetown's mosquito-free zone. A variety of protective measures were used. Besides the ubiquitous mosquito-nets around beds, windows would be fitted with removable mesh frames. Or in some houses, one room would be fitted to include a small sitting or card-playing area. For women, a pillow-case gave protection to the legs. Later there was the ever-handly Flit-gun.

But mosquitoes were not the only plague. As night falls in the tropics with a suddenness bereft of twilight, the still air is invaded by various sounds of insect and amphibian night-life. In Georgetown, perhaps the earliest were the frogs whose size and volume varied from the deep-throated croak of large toads (or bull-frogs), to the shrill whistle of tiny tree-frogs. The latter would surprise one if perchance it had found its way into an indoor hanging fern basket. Mosquitoes had their invidious shrill, almost piercing, buzz; but moths came silently, as did the seasonal 'hard-backs' until they landed with a tiny 'plop' on the lighted dinner table. In districts away from Georgetown, these resolute, finger-nail sized beetles would arrive in shoals in the time of season, and could be a real menace if not dealt with ruthlessly. A storm-lantern placed in the garden conveniently close to a water-filled zinc bath would prove most effective.

When Alfred (our father to be) arrived on the Demerara scene at the turn of the century, he was fortunate to join an estate⁵ within a short distance from

⁵ Le Ressonvenir and Success on the East Coast.

Georgetown. He came from England with introductions which soon gave him the entrée into Georgetown social life. His athletic record brought more contacts, although free time from the estate must have been restricting.

He joined a tennis club and there met his future wife, Millie Bosch Reitz. She must have been a moderately good player in spite of the full ankle-length skirts in those days. They played at least one tournament together (questionable on account of free time).



Millie
overseers were encouraged to play.

In future years and in various places, Daddy was to make tennis his abiding recreation and pleasure. Each estate in turn was to maintain a well-kept court, and

There is a delightful snapshot taken on the lawn at Batu Kawan (1911?) in Malaya. It includes not only the four tennis players, but also Mother, we three children, and Rebecca, our Guianese nurse who had been with us since we left Demerara, and stayed with us until we were sent to school in England. Seated with



Batu Kawan: the photograph

us is Miss Southgate, our so-called governess who followed us out from England. She was to have an unfortunate love-affair with the head overseer, Mr Strivens, and ultimately had to be returned to England at Daddy's expense. We didn't miss her.

Sitting on the grass in front of the group, is the overseer-cum-photographer. His hand manipulates the string to take the photo. Mother seems to be holding up Doddles⁶ chin as if to say 'Don't look down', i.e. at the pulled string!

⁶ The name by which Elsie's sister, Dorothy, was always known.

To return to Georgetown, it could not have been long before the engagement



Wedding group: Millie and Alfred, Josephine and Charlie Bosch Reitz right.

was announced and a wedding planned. Millie lived with her mother and two brothers in Duke Street, Kingston. A wedding-day photograph taken by the garden steps from the house, includes bonnetted Granny and a son, two little brides-maids and Aunt Ettie, one of the twinned Waterfield sisters who had travelled out from England for the

occasion, and to meet and report on Alfred's in-laws. Millie was an entrancing bride.

In the course of time Daddy was promoted to a larger remote sugar estate in Essequibo in the north-west of the colony with the imposing name of Hampton Court. Here, in due course, Elsie, Jack and Dorothy were born.



Hampton Court estate house c.1905

It was a far cry from Georgetown. Situated on the mouth of the immensely wide Essequibo River, and beyond Suddie, the government station, Hampton Court



Millie, Alfred and unknown friend

was approached by sea from Georgetown, or more usually by ferry, train and river steamer. It was a whole day's travel which would end, probably on a dirt-track road traversed by a mule-driven carriage to the remote estate. In due course, Daddy imported the first car to be owned in the colony, an open, belt-driven vehicle. It proved to be thoroughly unreliable, and before long, Mother refused to venture out without a mule-drawn carriage to follow in the event of breakdown.

In Hampton Court, we three children were born. I was about four when we left, Jack, a little younger and Dorothy, a baby. Our young nurse-maid, Rebecca was to accompany us and remain our beloved and faithful nurse for the following nine years.



The family

We were bound for England, en-route for the Federated Malay States where Daddy was to take up an appointment as manager of a sugar plantation. It must have been one of the last not to convert to rubber which had become more profitable.

In England, Daddy had yet to introduce his wife and off-spring to his family. There was little 'Granny' Waterfield, his mother, and a formidable array of brothers, sisters and in-laws, none of whom he had seen, except Ettie, since he had left as a prospective fledgling planter.

In due course, he was bound by ship for Malaya, to take up his new post. Mother took us three children, and Rebecca, to Switzerland. We were all in need of a change of climate from the heat and fevers of Demerara. We were to join Mother's youngest brother, Charlie in a rented chalet in or near Chambéry on the western slopes of the Savoie. It was the approach of winter with the first sight of snow for us children, and Rebecca, whose black skin would have been an unfamiliar sight in those early days. I was just old enough to manage to stay on a 'luge' and in time I learned to skate on three-bladed skates. I remember little except, faintly, the excitement caused by an eclipse of the moon that winter of 1909-1910. Chambéry went wild with hooters and fireworks.



Batu Kawan house

My next, still faint memory is of landing in Penang, to be met and escorted by Daddy to our new home on the small island of Batu Kawan. Here, except for four or five estate assistants, we were entirely isolated from white adults and children. In

those days, the assimilation of different races was yet to come. There would have been a number of Malay servants and gardeners, male and female. Young Rebecca might have felt out of her West Indian element, but Mother always gave her preferential treatment and protection. A photo in the garden shows her standing by the childrens' tea-table at which we three children are seated, immaculately dressed; Jack,



Batu Kawan: tea with Rebecca

as always in crisp, white sailor-suit. A little dog, long forgotten, is seen with raised paw appealing to Jack. Soon we would be out for our afternoon walk, accompanied by (dog?), a donkey, a syce (a groom), a tricycle and of course Rebecca. My role apparently, was on foot. We always walked along the sugar-field dam. Sometimes we took fishing rods, and

on one memorable day, Jack overturned from a plank across the trench causing considerable alarm, and inevitably for poor Jack, a dose of castor-oil, the universal panacea.

We had no children to play with, but our ever-resourceful parents would devise forms of amusement, both indoors and out. Photos show a swing, a large see-saw and a sand-pit alongside the bungalow. Jack and I had butterfly nets which could just as easily catch dragonflies.



Taiping: the sand-pit

When Miss Southgate, our governess-to-be, arrived, I cannot remember. Nor can I remember anything of her teaching. She came and went in

such a comparatively short time, and her going must have been unexpected as it must have been heart-breaking for her. Her undoing was to fall in love with the head assistant (overseer), and she actually accepted a proposal from him. The outcome was a cruel realisation for her of the habits of sex-starved men living in isolation, and the

attraction of native girls. Poor, broken-hearted Miss Southgate had to be sent, at Daddy's expense, home to England to grieve alone.

Our education, such as it was, must have suffered. With no other resources on that remote little island, it fell back on the parents. Mother, only, had the time to take up the challenge, for which she was not really equipped. It mattered not at all for Doddles, and little for Jack at this stage. But for me, aged about six, it was an informative age; there was no much-needed grounding to give me a start.

It must have been not long after our arrival in Batu Kawan, that Daddy decided to do some exploring of the island, which was now our home. A boat picnic for the family was an original idea. Did Mother think so, I wonder? There must have been an expanse of mud and calm sea on the leeward side of the island which would have made safe sailing with a boatman to row the shallow craft, and to get us back well before nightfall. The trouble arose with the ebbing tide of which the boatman must have been well aware. It was unfortunate that at that early stage of our arrival in Malaya, Daddy was not yet familiar with the local patois, so he dismissed the boatman's request to row further out from land. The ensuing drama must have been quite alarming as the true situation developed. A frightened Doddles, I remember, was given the sugar bowl to keep her quiet. I hope Jack and I were stalwartly brave. And how we were rescued on that mud flat in time to get us safely home before dawn? One can envisage high drama, regretfully never pursued in later years.



Taiping estate house

Our next move in 1915, was from sugar to rubber. The estate, Taiping Rubber Plantation, was within easy reach of Taiping town and club. There our parents could enjoy, on occasions, some sort of club life again. Daddy became the owner of a fine Panhard car. It was a roomy car with a felt-covered brass-bound tool-box-seat

behind the driver, on which we three children could sit comfortably. More polished



Taiping: the Panhard car

brass and a prominent rubber bulb at the driver's right hand, together with a folded-back hood provided the effect of luxury.

Beyond the garden and tennis court was the plantation itself with its regular rows of rubber trees. Attached to each tree was a cup into which the latex drained from cuttings

on the trunk. As well as the milky latex, the thin pigment formed from the previous cutting, went to make the rough-textured sheets which were hung up to dry in sheds.

Near to Taiping was another plantation, Trong. The manager was Mr Mackenzie of whom I have no recollection. But Bertha, his wife, was to be a part of our lives for many years to come. At the time of our first knowing her, she must have been a disillusioned wife of an alcoholic husband, with no real outlet for her many gifts. Much later, in England, she became an active member of the Conservative Party with, at times, a lecturing programme to take her around the country. It could not have been long before she agreed to give lessons to Jack and me at her home to which we would be driven in an old horse or mule-drawn vehicle. For me the only memory of that time was on a day that Jack and I, when bound for Trong, that a hen's egg landed on my lap. A fowl-yard hen had found a convenient opening in the roof-lining to lay its egg!

Beyond the plantation and the town, rose Taiping Hill on the summit of which were a number of bungalows for rent and a rest house. It was high enough to grow the impressive tropical tree ferns and pitcher plants, and to provide a welcome change of temperature and environment from the heat of the mainland. We would be carried up the zig-zag paths in a form of sedan chair. I can still 'feel' the misty coolness of that hill-top station.

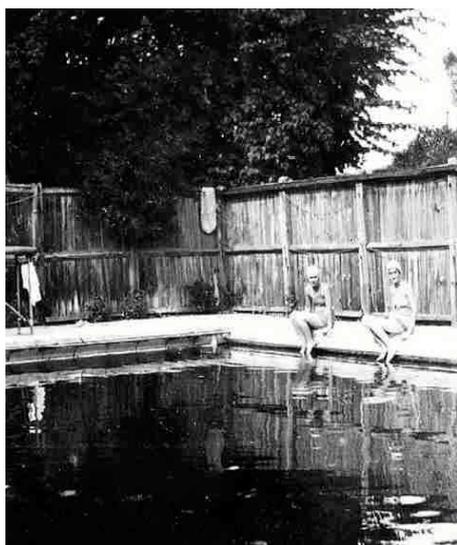
It was 1914, time for us children to be put to school in England. With Mother and Rebecca, we three children sailed away leaving a lonely, and no doubt worried, father; for war with Germany was on the horizon, and our going spelt the end of a

close family home-life. It also meant good-bye to Rebecca, and ultimately boarding school for Jack and me. Doddles proved too young to bear the anguish of parting, and at the last moment was taken back to Malaya with Mother. She was not yet five.

My godmother, Lily Harragin,⁷ was to be our guardian. She adored children, so Jack and I filled a need in her barren life. She would arrange our holidays, and later our school life as well, when Mother and Daddy were both still in Malaya.

Our first introduction to boarding school was for the autumn term at Temple Grove Boys' Preparatory School in Eastbourne where Daddy's eldest brother, Harry was both owner and headmaster. Although it was a boys school, Aunt Win had five or six girls of varying ages whose parents lived abroad. There were two governesses (sisters) who also taught the youngest boys, now to include seven year-old Jack. (I was nine). I must have adapted pretty well to the very different environment, for I made friends and wasn't unhappy as far as I can remember. I must have enjoyed this rare companionship.

When whooping cough infected the school, Jack and I caught it late in the term and were unable to join Mother for Christmas before her return to Malaya. Other infected children were sent home, but Jack and I went with the Waterfield family to Little Grange, their quite large country home at Lamberhurst in Kent, where, later,



Temple Grove swimming pool

Dorrit would set up her practice. The family consisted of Dorrit, Don, Ken and Robert or Bo, and the youngest, Kitten. In future years, Don was to marry Jean Hepburn, one of us 'girls' at Temple Grove, and after her death, he fell for Doddles, then doing her nursing training at St. Thomas'. But Doddles was, by then, due to go to India to marry Jack Bavin.

In 1915 I learnt to swim at Temple Grove in the open-air bath. Fearful of being

⁷ Daughter of Mary Isabella Austin, see *An Old Colonial Family*.

pushed over the side for my baptism, I plunged in regardless, and slithered about on the slimy bottom before gaining my feet, with a sense of enormous relief. In time, and with the support of a harness, and with Dorrit to instruct, I learnt to swim and would jump fearlessly from the high diving board. But at diving itself, I never seemed to progress beyond a sort of head-and-arm-first tumble.

I was also to discover at Temple Grove that girls liked to talk about boys in the dormitory after lights-out. I, frankly, was not interested at the age of nine. Added to which, my particular weakness was not being able to keep awake after lights-out! Combined, they put me in an undeserved situation when Dorrit, in the adjacent room, came to overhear these confidences when we should have been asleep. The resulting punishment was as ridiculous as was the crime. On the following day we were kept in to draw maps of England after school. Clearly I was not implicated, being asleep at the time, but I am glad to recall that I took my punishment with the rest! In point of fact, I probably felt slightly ashamed of my weakness. Later in time I partially overcame this girlish shyness, and was able to claim a quite unsolicited 'love' for my handsome cousin Gordon Waterfield who came to Temple Grove in my time.

With Mother and Daddy away in Malaya, and Doddles with them, Jack and I were in the charge of Lily Burton.⁸ It was she who arranged our holidays, either to relations or with her in sea-side places. Sometimes Jack and I would be apart. In age, Jack didn't fit in with any of the cousins, while I was only a little younger than both Patsy and Taps.⁹



Uncle Reg Waterfield

It must have been the Christmas of 1915 that we spent at Cheltenham where Uncle Reg¹⁰ and Aunt Mai lived rather grandly at Lake House, the official home of the Principal of Cheltenham College, with its lake and fine garden. In spite of war-time stringencies, Aunt Mai still maintained a large staff, ruled over by her personal Swiss maid, Stutzman. There was also a liveried

⁸ Lily Harragin, previously mentioned, had by then married Claude Burton.

⁹ Waterfield relations, Patsy the daughter of Reginald and Taps (Evelyn) daughter of Arthur.

¹⁰ Both Reginald and Arthur were in the church and were elder brothers of Alfred.

footman-cum-butler, (there may even have been one of each!) and it was part of the daily routine for them all including maids, to file into the breakfast room for early morning prayers, bringing with them the long bench on which they sat. The family, Aunt Mai, Uncle Reg and Patsy (never Regie!) and any guests in the house, knelt at our chairs, facing outwards. I remember once seeing Aunt Mai surreptitiously reading some of her morning post! Breakfast, when it came, was arranged under heavy metal covers on the side-board. There was always a choice of two or more dishes. The war seemed to make no difference.

Family prayers with Uncle Arthur at Brimfield was rather different, and much longer. It involved each person having, in turn, to read a verse of the Lesson, so there was always a frantic scramble to find which verse would fall to one. Maids, of which that household was not overstaffed, I seem to remember, did not appear. We all helped ourselves. Aunt Laura, herself an excellent cook, often presided in the kitchen, especially in the more stringent last years of the war.

Brimfield was a tall rambling rectory of a small country parish near Ludlow. Its tennis court, croquet lawn, flower, vegetable and fruit gardens, stables for a pony and trap and garage for a small car, its out-houses, chicken pens and a field for pasture, all make the mind boggle when considered as a not unusual type of country rectory in the pre-world-war days. The distant uninterrupted view of the Clee Hills, and to Ludlow with its ruined castle on the river, was breath-taking. For the upkeep, the stipend of a country parson must have been quite inadequate. Cyril, the son, had been sent to public school and went on to Exeter College, Oxford. But the girls had to forego anything beyond which their father had time to teach them. And Uncle Arthur had to supplement his stipend by coaching the occasional school-leaver for entrance to the university. The pupil would always live in, and so add to the ever-fluctuating household. The rectory, with its panoramic view, was considerably higher than the little church down the road, reached more usually by a path across the fields. For the Sunday services, Irene, Uncle Arthur's eldest daughter, played the little hand-blown organ. Bicycles were a part of our lives and took us everywhere though the pony trap was always used to transport Aunt Laura, any small child or elderly guest, and the picnic food. Uncle Arthur possessed a Ford car for more distant use.

Here I must digress and retrace my steps to the end of the summer term at Temple Grove when Mother, Daddy and Doddles came home on leave in time to take



Temple Grove

us children to join Uncle Reg and family at Sennan Cove on the north coast of Cornwall, near Land's End. Uncle Reg had again taken the 'living' for the summer holidays and was housed at the rectory, while we stayed at a farm house. It was one of those golden times of youth when every day seemed blessed with sunshine. Because

of the war, there were few, if any, visitors besides ourselves, and at intervals, friends of the Reg Waterfields who came to stay, with their children, in nearby farms or rented rooms. There was always something to do. Either pre-breakfast 'lancing' for sand-eels on the long Sennan beach when the tide was low and falling (the eels fried were delicious), or cricket on the sands for young and old alike. And, of course, there was the sea itself.

As Mother and Daddy were in England, we were able to join them for the Christmas holidays that year, 1916, when they took a rented house above Hastings town. Jack and I were keen roller-skaters, having been nurtured on the fives courts at Temple Grove. The crescent on which our house stood, was ideal for this, if our neighbours may sometimes have wished us elsewhere. It was during those holidays that it became expedient for Jack and Doddles to have their tonsils removed. So, in the way that minor operations were often performed on children in private homes at that time, the kitchen table was put into service. For me, the treat came, undeservedly, when I was to share the coal-fire-warmed bedroom with Daddy, while Mother tended the patients.

Time rolled by and events have become confused. Daddy returned to Malaya in 1917 and his ship, S. S. Mongolia struck a mine just off Bombay on 24th June. No lives were lost, but for Daddy, his stamp collection and his books were a great loss.

It becomes all too easy when recording memoirs in this somewhat happy-go-lucky method of my choosing, for time to outrun itself. This is the problem that now confronts me when I must retrace my steps in order to recount some episode or other of several years ago. It is to Uncle Reg's early life that I must go back now. After Rugby he went on to Oxford from where he was appointed tutor to the Duke of Connaught, son of Princess Alice, and grandson of Queen Victoria. That assignment took him on extensive travels in Europe, the 'Grand Tour' as it was called. Accounts exist, written by Uncle Reg, of their time in Greece in particular.

Later in life, Uncle Reg was to marry an Australian by birth, one Mai Lawson whose father was either a judge or Governor of New South Wales. In 1813, a William Lawson, a lieutenant in the Veterans' Corps, together with two other men, all stock owners, had set out with a spirit of adventure to look for a route to take them over the barrier of the Blue Mountains. They also needed new areas on which to graze their flocks and herds. They did succeed in crossing the Divide, but had to give up further exploration on account of the hardships for which they were not equipped.

Aunt Mai and Uncle Reg had a son 'Young' Regie, and a daughter Patsy. Regie was an eccentric in many ways, and something of a renegade. He studied medicine and became a specialist and senior lecturer at Guys. He was intensely interested in astronomy, and in later years had his own small observatory in his garden in Ascot. Much earlier, Regie and his friend, had together actually discovered a new star in the Milky Way which accorded them honorary memberships to the French Astronomical Society, and subsequently to the British.

Polio, when it struck Regie so disastrously, was an enduring handicap. But with a specially adapted car, and then a man-servant-cum-nurse, he managed to overcome many of his difficulties. When Geof and I were living in our large bungalow-type home, Martlets in Sussex, he asked us one year to put him up while he attended an annual meeting at Hurstmonceux Observatory.

Patsy, his sister, was something of a tomboy in comparison to Regie's rather effeminate characteristics. She lacked his brains, and she was greatly handicapped by

a hair-lip which surgery in her youth was unsuccessful in correcting. Friends she never lacked. She was universally popular and good at all sports. Although a little younger, I was fortunate in her friendship and was often invited to stay with the family at the deanery. One occasion, at Hereford, I look back on in shame. It was on a wet day with nothing to do, that Patsy and I thought to knock a hockey ball about in the only large available space which happened to be the mirrored ballroom (a relic of a very different era). Most unfortunately, a rising ball on my part hit and shattered one of the large mirrors. I was devastated. And to my everlasting shame, I hadn't the courage to confess to Uncle Reg with whom, at that time, I felt very much in awe. It was left to Patsy, and presumably, to Uncle Reg to pay the bill. On a subsequent visit, I fared better with a hockey stick, when asked to substitute for a sick member of the Hereford Town XI, at short notice.

Granny and Aunt Trix¹¹ lived in Stevenage when that little town was still a part of rural England, in spite of being on a main road. I remember Granny as a dear little old lady living out her last years with Aunt Trix, the last of her children and the only one not to marry. It is difficult to place my grandmother in any other setting, and to remember that this intrepid old lady had braved long voyages under sail to and from India when my grandfather was in the Bengal Civil Service. She had reared eight children, and lost one or two on the way. Even after she came back from India, after my grandfather's death in 1902, she didn't vegetate. Switzerland proved a happy hunting ground for her, and for many others in those days. There was a photo (now lost) of two relations dressed in slightly adapted forms of crinolines as they step across a little mountain stream. Aunt Trix became an accomplished skier. She also had time to paint. Her water-colours, of which there must have been scores, were fresh and light and evocative of Switzerland.

In the autumn of 1917, Doodles and I were to become day girls at Berkhamsted Girls' School. Jack was already at Bradfield College, and Mother had remained in England. She found lodgings for us with a family whose daughter was already a day girl at the school. Keats' 'Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness'

¹¹ Granny was Matilda Gossip, referred to previously, and her youngest daughter, Laura, was always known as Trix..

remains for me a redolent memory of that autumn. At Berkhamsted, we children were more aware that there was a war on than had been the case at Temple Grove. Munitions required (strangely) horse chestnuts for their manufacture. So some of us children would walk up past 'Kitchener's Field' where much of the Officers Training Corps training took place in those war years. We went to make our collections from the tree-lined road that ran up to the large and beautiful common.

It was not until my second year that I made a real, and my longest lasting friendship, in Madge Bavin whose father, Major Bavin, was the music master at the 700 year-old Boys' School in the town. Madge was one of two girls in that large family of males, of whom Geoffrey by then had lost his life serving in the Air Force. Elsa, the oldest sister, was a senior at school, of whom I was somewhat in awe. Later she played hockey for England and remained unmarried.

Besides Madge, her brothers Jack and Ted were rather more my contemporaries. Little did I think that Jack would much later become my brother-in-law. He was then at Oxford with the idea of entering the church. I remember bicycling with Madge to accompany him for part of the way back to Oxford that following term. We went everywhere on bikes; bikes and feet.

I think it was the following summer that I was invited to accompany Mr and Mrs Bavin and Elsa and Madge to Oxford where Major Bavin was to conduct a series of lectures on music in the summer vacation. It was my first introduction to a university town, and a wonderful opportunity to see, at leisure, the old and beautiful colleges that are a part of Britain's heritage. We stayed at Wadham College. I don't remember attending any lectures. That was not the purpose of our visit!

As well as the three boarding houses, Berkhamsted Girls' School had a number of day girls who came daily by train from nearby towns. It was not an attractive school to look at; too much red brick, and situated right on one of the roads into the town. But it had good facilities for tennis and netball, and the winter games of lacrosse in the Christmas term and hockey in the Lent term, unlike most girls' schools which concentrate on one or the other. I loved sport and was fortunate to be in the

hockey XI for my final year, St Paul's London, being our main rival; and for three years I had the quite rare distinction of playing for the lacrosse XII. In old age, such boasts may be excusable! If 'School Certificate' was in my academic range, I never rose to take the 'Higher Certificate' as did most of my friends.

As well as Madge, I had two or three other firm friends. Betty Parsons was a daughter of a Queen Anne Street dentist in London, to whom later on, I was invited to her 17th birthday dance in their large house. We were boarders together, and years later I wrote from British Guiana to ask her to buy a few items for my wedding trousseau. She came to enjoy sailing which she did every summer later on with a friend. Then one year there was a large windjammer anchored off Dublin. Betty and her friend were invited onboard, and soon after they both signed on for a subsequent voyage to Australia as 'seamstress' members of the crew. Provided with sewing machines, their duties were to attend to and repair the crews' clothes. Sadly Betty went out of my life. I never heard from her again.

Molly Rutherford was another friend from School House. Our friendship lasted for many years after she went to Kenya to join her pioneering tobacco-growing brother who, in time, came to own one of the largest properties in the country. With growing prosperity, his interests widened and he was able to bring relatives out, eventually, to run different parts of his tobacco empire. His wife owned a stud of successful race-horses too. My correspondence with Molly ceased when her health gave out and I heard no more.

Although I had been three years closely attached to the boys school at Temple Grove, my interest in boys was mainly assumed in order to preserve my self-respect among the girls! By the time that I came to be immersed in the whole world of emerging femininity at a girls' boarding school, what had been a somewhat disinterested attitude to boys, was finding its natural level, if only gradually. Obviously I was a late developer!

At Berkhamsted, it was not long before I met Jack Watt through Lily Burton's friendship with his widowed mother. Also Phil Hutchins, but from a different source.

Both were day boys living in the town. In fact Phil's home (next door to G. M. Trevellian, the historian, one of several notables in Berkhamsted), actually overlooked our school playing field. It sometimes happened on a summer evening when Betty Parsons and I, taking a stroll, would see Phil at one of the upstairs windows, ostensibly doing his 'Prep'. Once he took a considerable risk in managing to get a letter to me (probably by way of Madge) which I concealed in my knicker-leg, a universal hiding place. Jack Watt was older than Phil, and also of me. He was very good-looking with the added distinction, later, of playing for the Harlequins.

When, sometime later, I was once again a day girl and Mother had made a home for us at Allenhayes (a delightful little house within easy walking distance of school), we found ourselves fairly near neighbours of Jack and his mother. At one part, only a small play-ground of an adjacent infants school separated our garden from the road that the Watts lived in. After school hours or at weekends, it was easy for Jack to cross the school and nip over the fence and into our garden. The miniature billiard table with which the house was furnished was an added attraction for would-be callers.

On one memorable day after I had been bidden to tea with Mrs Watt and Jack was seeing me home by way of the fence, I was to suffer utter humiliation, with worse to follow. It happened just as I was nicely poised on top of the fence, with my skirt caught on some nail or other, that Jack asked me to marry him! Instead of being flattered, I became mad with poor Jack (with whom my friendship was purely platonic). The poor chap must have been screwing up his nerve to make his proposal, and was unaware of my predicament. I did treat him shamefully, and just hope I made amends later, although not to give him any encouragement. We finally parted when I went to Demerara.

In writing about Allenhayes, I am jumping ahead and omitting events which were to have an enormous effect on our lives, especially for Mother and Daddy, for whom it was traumatic. Those vital years between 1921 and the end of 1923 have become, in parts, hopelessly juxtapositioned in my mind with no one left to help me unravel them; except Doddles who admits confusion.

In the cuckold life of our school years, we were happily unaware of events taking place on the other side of the world. So it seems to me now, in retrospect. But these events were to affect our parents with traumatic impact, and change their whole way of life.

In Malaya the rubber industry was being virtually destroyed by a slump which caused estates to be abandoned and which left assistants and managers alike to face redundancy, often without the means to return home to Europe. It marked the end of a secure and comfortable way of life.

I can't relate in what way we children were made aware of these happenings. Nor can I put events into their right perspective. I can just remember Lily Burton, our guardian, coming one day to School House where I was at that time a boarder, to give me the shattering news that Mother was very ill in Marseilles where, with Daddy, she had been landed, to enter a nursing home. As a result of a fall on the ship, she had had a miscarriage and lost her baby. We must have been told of the 'coming event', but I just don't remember. Nevertheless it was a dreadful shock.

In due time Daddy brought Mother home to England to recover, and to make a new life. The Waterfield relations must have rallied round and devised a way to help in the crisis. And how wonderfully they did help. Cousin Philip was to provide for Jack's school fees for his remaining terms at Bradfield College. Other remote Devon relatives who owned a wine business, offered Daddy a place in the management of their office in Totnes, as well as employment for a sacked plantation friend of Daddy's. It meant, of course, that our parents had to live in different places, but the generosity of these offers was not to be denied. Mother's role was to make a home for us children. Here again, I have only a sparse memory of the sequel of events; or of how Mother was to take possession, by lease, of Allenhayes, our home for the next three years, with Doodles and myself becoming day girls once again.

Allenhayes was a very attractive little furnished house, its owner being abroad. In it there was ample room for Mother and us three children, and for an occasional visitor. It was wonderful to have a real home. The long narrow garden which boasted

a huge prolific walnut tree, seemed well adapted to support the house in terms of produce; which was just as well, though Mother made a brave effort at one time to augment our means by making and selling a variety of leather work.¹² It was through doing this that her old friend Bertha Mackenzie, of Malayan days, managed to get an order from Queen Mary. A Royal Commission!

In earlier times the heavy clay of these parts supported vast beech woods. To the south of the town were the Ocklynge Woods, now invaded by the fast-growing town. For me, the memory remains of that beautiful dell on the fringe of the woods where foxgloves glowed in the summer and wild strawberries were there for the picking. This was the sketching venue for my friend Petronella (Peter) and me. Today it would not be safe for children because of its isolation, whereas half a century ago, we could wander alone, without fear or threat of danger.

In Berkhamsted itself, life to a great extent revolved around the two schools, though much more so the larger, long-established boys school with its historical background and its residential masters and their families, as in the case of Major Bavin whose house in the holidays, was like a second home to me.

In the summer of 1922, Berkhamsted commemorated its 700 year-old foundation with a week of celebrations and pageantry, in which the girls school played a small part, though with no claim to the town's origins. The centre of the celebrations took place around the castle ruins, and the church with its 700 year-old history. The town buzzed with celebrities to which Mother contributed by inviting Lord William Cecil as her guest! Why? After a gap of some 50 years, I can only surmise now that Bertha Mackenzie, whom Mother would certainly have invited, would have suggested him as a worthy notable to add prestige to the occasion!

With one more year at school, I had a vague idea of taking up interior decorating as a livelihood. But before that year ended, fate, with a good deal of secret diplomacy on Daddy's behalf, was to decree otherwise. It was the turn of friends in Demerara to take a hand in resolving Daddy's future.

¹² The cover of Alfred's birthday book was worked in leather by Millie.

Mother's cousin, Cecil Farrar¹³, had been working with this urgent need in



Cecil Farrar

mind. He had put forward Daddy's name to the Directors of a company with interests in the colony, with the result that Daddy was offered the management of Marionville, a sugar estate on an island in the Essequibo River. It was almost to be a return to old roots, for Wakenaam Island in the mouth of the wide Essequibo River was not many miles, as the crow flies, from Hampton Court.

Inevitably there would be sadness as well as rejoicing, for it meant leaving Jack and Doddles who were still at school. Luck was with me for I had just left the Girls' School, and, as yet had no future arranged. Lily Burton would once more take charge of Jack and Doddles.

On a bleak day in the February of 1924, Mother and I set sail, Daddy having gone before in the company of one of the proprietors of the Company, Sir Edward Davson. Meanwhile Mother and I were hurriedly acquiring suitable clothes, which would include my first real evening dresses. It is interesting to recall that these were mostly bought off the peg for prices as low as 25 shillings! We sailed in high hopes after an initial disappointment to me, that the *Ingoma*, of the Harrison Line, was so insignificant it could barely be seen above the docks! Mother must have been well aware of her record of being a bad sailor. I had yet to prove myself. As the 6000 ton ship rolled relentlessly at sea, Mother and I shared our misery in a two-berth cabin, until we felt able to stagger on deck. There, wrapped in rugs in our deck-chairs, we sipped beef tea, and in due course recovered to face the usual round of shipboard activities.

No more needs to be recounted of the voyage until we met the flying fishes skipping over that blue-green sea as we approached the West Indian islands. The *Ingoma* must have always done its scheduled island calls, but after the lapse of so many years I can only remember one island before reaching Trinidad. In retrospect it seems inexplicable that a passenger ship, with scheduled stops ahead, was able to

¹³ Cecil's brother, Nicholas, had married Lizzie Bosch Reitz, elder sister of Millie. See AOCF, Ch.17.

dally off one of the islands in order to let a few passengers be rowed ashore to have a swim! Perhaps the ship was ahead of schedule. Be that as it may, the fact remains that a handful of passengers, including myself, found ourselves on this glorious crescent of silvered, palm-fringed beach, not many years before civilisation and tourism had invaded its sanctuary. Come to think of it, Mother was quite equal to beguiling the captain into this infringement of his schedule!

On to Trinidad, where at Port-of-Spain, Mother and I were taken ashore to spend the day with Lily's brother Walter Harragin, a judge, and his wife, Madge. As news from Daddy had notified us of a forthcoming Government House garden party, there was an urgent need for us to buy suitable hats, which we did in Frederick Street.

On the final lap to Georgetown we entered the muddy waters of the Orinoco Delta and the Guianese rivers, to the mouth of the Demerara River, and so to tie up at one of the main wharves. There Daddy, amongst others, was there to welcome us and take us back to Uncle Charlie's¹⁴ home where he and Mother were to stay. I was to stay with the Cecil Farrars whose house would become a second home to me in the years to come. Next morning I awoke to the strident call of the kiskadees in their bright yellow and black plumage; a call that soon became my daily reveille wherever I was staying. Those days were to introduce an entirely new way of life with new acquaintances, and a strange environment. But I was beginning to feel bewildered, and decided it was time to leave Georgetown and to make my way to Wakenaam, my new home to be.

First I have to record an incident which, though insignificant at the time, was to become a first introduction to my whole future life. It so happened that the Farrars had previously accepted an invitation to dine with Mr and Mrs Tom Smellie, dinner parties being a frequent form of more intimate entertaining. Subsequently I was included in the guest list. There was no escape for me. Little did I know that in years to come, I would myself be hostess at that very table! At the time of my invitation in 1924, both Marjorie and Geof were away in England. And after more than sixty years I can remember nothing of that eventful evening, an unsuspected milestone in my life.

¹⁴ Charles Bosch Reitz, brother of Millie.

At this long space of time, I have little memory of the Government House garden party on the day following our arrival, to which suitably hatted and gloved, Mother and I accompanied Daddy. I don't remember the purpose of the garden party, but it proved a wonderful opportunity for the parents to meet again friends whom they had left behind nearly fifteen years ago. And for me it was all excitingly new and undreamed of. However I was longing to see my new home at Wakenaam.

And so, in due course, I left Georgetown to cross the Demerara River to Vreedenhoop on the far bank, where I boarded the train which would take me to Parika on the much larger Essequibo River. The train alone was a novel experience, its bulging second class compartments carrying a roof-top overflow of clinging late-comers, or ticket-dodgers. For most of the way it was a single line, only doubling for a brief section in the middle. On reaching its terminus at Parika on the wide Essequibo River there was a short wait for the old paddle steamer to arrive. No sooner tied up, than there was a mad rush of passengers carrying bulging cases tied together by string, some carried on their heads. Others clutched squawking fowls, even a bleating kid; all to squeeze into every available space on the lower deck. All aboard, the captain blew his whistle to signal departure, and off we churned on our leisurely way toward Leguan, the largest of the 360-odd islands in the Essequibo River. As we rounded Leguan Island we were in sight of the ruined remains of a fort belonging to an earlier Dutch settlement. On reaching Wakenaam Island in the very mouth of the



Wakenaam Island, Essequibo River

enormously wide Essequibo, Daddy was awaiting me on the stelling (quay) with the estate's Model-T Ford to take us to the manager's house. I must have been entranced by the wayside palm-roofed huts and simple wooden homes on pillars, and red burnt-earth roads, and plank or palm tree bridges over trenches of dark brown

water; the shady wayside trees, and slender leaning palms; the yapping dogs and the little naked, brown-skinned 'coolie' children waving their greetings. At Marionville, Mother was awaiting us, eager to show off her new home.

In past years, Wakenaam Island had possessed more than one sugar estate, besides Marionville. Now, only a tall factory chimney, visible to approaching ships out at sea, or the stumps of Royal Palms, marking the entrance to the manager's house, give evidence of past prosperity. It is a moving memorial.



Marionville estate house in 1957

To promote activities, I was generously given a retired police horse and a .22 rifle. The horse, an amiable, handsome animal which had grown in width in retirement, proved to have a most comfortable trot and canter, and caused me no anxiety. I had had some elementary training from

the riding instructor at the Barracks in Georgetown, and that fortunately, had not included the gallop, for which I had no yearnings!

The rifle provided a different form of pleasure, and is most remembered for an exciting day when the call came that a camoodie ¹⁵, a large non-venemous snake with boa-constrictor properties, was causing mayhem in the duck pond. It had already swallowed a duck which could be identified by a pronounced swelling under its skin. I took careful aim although I could hardly have missed. There was a violent swirl and a swish of muddy water, and up came the mercifully lifeless duck, the camoodie making a hasty exit down the trench.

When friends came to stay, there was tennis at various levels of skill (or lack of it), as well as the more unusual activities, such as being taken 'aback' in a sugar punt (a strong flat-bottomed iron boat to carry the cut cane from the fields to the factory), and a prearranged spot for a picnic.

Georgetown had its different and varied appeal, especially when private dances were given; or when the M.C.C. came out from England to play in Georgetown and Trinidad and Barbados. On these occasions I gladly accepted prolonged hospitality from friends in town. As I was about to discover, it had become

¹⁵ Or anaconda.

almost a ritual for us young enthusiasts, to see the first ball bowled, and to mark it up on our score sheets. When the home side was batting, we purred with delight if a waiting (or already dismissed) batsman should come over from the mens' pavilion to visit us briefly! Jo Goddard, a friend of mine, was one of these. The majority of the West Indian team were coloured of mixed races, still at that time barred from universal acceptance into society. It needed a few more years to bring about momentous changes.

Concerning private dances, as opposed to the regular ones at the Park Hotel¹⁶, I record here only two. One was given ostensibly for me while I was staying with the Malcolm Austins¹⁷, but was rather more a gesture of hospitality towards the visiting H.M.S. Calcutta. The other was significant in that it was given by the same hosts who had previously invited me to my first ever dinner party (as described earlier). On this occasion Mr and Mrs Tom Smellie were welcoming home from Europe both Marjorie and Geof. It was a fine night which allowed dancers into the garden between dances. And so it happened that my dance partner and I, in looking for sitting-out chairs, came upon my future husband fast asleep at the back of a large circular fern house! Geof was never to be allowed to forget that fall from grace! But, in extenuation, he had just returned from an exhausting trip up the river.

It can hardly matter to readers of this account of my early years if I put incidents in wrong juxtaposition and incorrect dating, so I plod on regardless of the finer points.

It must have been 1925 in my second year in the Colony that I was struck down by para-typhoid. It was supposed that I had caught it by drinking contaminated water on the river steamer, as all responsible households took infinite care to have their drinking water boiled. Much later on, in Georgetown anyway, the Amopheles mosquito was completely eradicated by a strict and medically supervised system of extermination. It was a momentous medical achievement and was recognised world-wide.

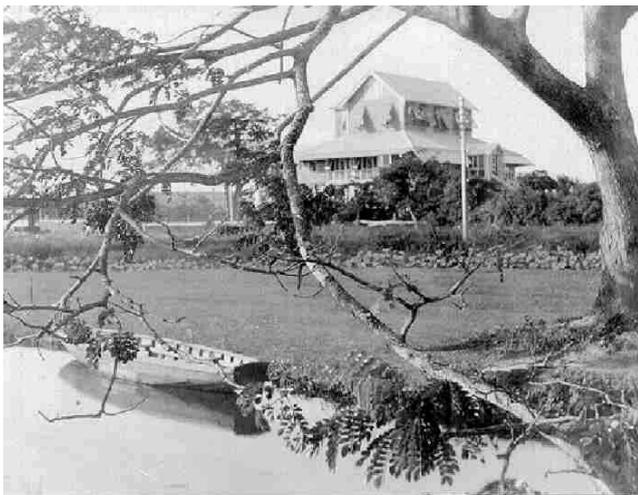
¹⁶ Sadly burnt down in 1999.

¹⁷ Malcolm, son of John Gardiner Austin, and his wife Muriel.

Before my condition was verified by the hospital in Georgetown where a blood sample had been sent, the estate's doctor (coal black and thankfully very much 'on the ball'), had immediately suspected typhoid and put me on to a starvation diet, allowing only diluted milk to be taken. Poor Mother and Daddy must have been overwrought with anxiety, with proper hospital care entirely out of reach. It soon became obvious that nursing me would become too much for Mother, so a hospital nurse was dispatched from Georgetown, and she it was who took on the night duty while Mother coped by day; although nursing as such could not have been onerous.

Ultimately when the fever broke and I began to improve, we had a surprise visit from Uncle Dick Gordon¹⁸ who had travelled the long, tedious journey from Blairmont on the Berbice River with the sole object of relieving Mother and Daddy of further anxiety over me, and providing a change of environment for my recuperation. His wife Hilda was away in England. As it was vital from every point of view that I should be moved, plans were put into action. It was a demanding journey by river, rail and road which must have taken most of the day, after the river boat picked me up at Wakenaam. Did Mother accompany me? I don't remember. I was not fit to travel alone.

At Blairmont I soon found myself coddled back to health by Uncle Dick and his famed butler Bundoo. It was Bundoo, when I was able to go for a late afternoon



Blairmont estate house

drive or stroll in the garden, who would be waiting at the top of those interminable steps (Blairmont manager's house was built on exceptionally high pillars), with a refreshing ice-cold swizzle. Swizzles were short drinks brought to a frothy head with a swizzle stick, to be downed in one gulp.

They were made of whiskey, gin, rum or vermouth, and a little crushed ice. A 'Planters swizzle' was famous for its

potency, and were twice the normal size. In Georgetown clubs and homes, they tended to go out of fashion, I remember, before the war years. My swizzle at Blairmont would have been a vermouth.

It was time now to leave Marionville which, for all its isolation, had many redeeming features as a home, and to move east, beyond Georgetown to the county of Berbice, and the third of Guiana's great rivers. Here, on the bank of the Berbice River, and not far from its mouth, the London-based firm of Davson owned Blairmont estate. It was situated on the bank of the Berbice River with the colony's second town of New Amsterdam



Tennis at Blairmont: Alfred with Billie & Dick Austin, Elsie and Everaldd Farrar



Berbice River from Blairmont

across the water, and a number of flourishing sugar estates beyond. It was the prize of the Davson estates, and money had been spent to modernise it, making it a show estate for visitors from abroad. Unhappily its manager, Dick Gordon, had fallen from grace and left, while Daddy was moved from Marionville to

take his place. The poor Gordons thence retired to live in England.

My only memory of that momentous time is of finding myself installed at Blairmont estate house with Doodles beside me! Was she suddenly sent for, to leave school and take ship to Georgetown? I can only guess. Where was Jack at the time? Possibly at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad.

Events moved in bewildering swiftness. My 21st birthday was coming up in September and my family was determined to make it a fitting occasion with invitations both to Georgetown friends and new ones across the river. The large high-ceilinged drawing-room and wide gallery overlooking the garden and river beyond

¹⁸ Dick was a grandson of Richard Barker Austin and at the time was manager at Blairmont.

provided adequate space for dancing; and to temper the heat, an enormous block of ice over a zinc bath of pink lotus lilies was fanned continually to cool the air. Supper was served below the high-pillared house at garden level. Across the lawn, fairy-lights sparkled in the flowering shrubs and low trees.

The years were passing and I was, somewhat belatedly, growing up. Boys, as in my younger days, were now men, and not a few had professed to be in love and actually to propose marriage. But I fancied only one, and he was without the conviction that was needed on my part, to overcome some amount of parental opposition. While another, with everything in his favour to provide me with a very comfortable future life, meant nothing to me¹⁹.

It was not uncommon for visiting tourists to the colony, to be sent to Blairmont (on the Davsons' instigation, no doubt), to see a sugar estate in action, and to be entertained at the manager's house. This would bring a variety of visitors. On one significant occasion, we had an English couple, Commander and Mrs Stagg, and a Canadian. Over tea, it was mentioned, casually, that they were hoping to visit the



Kaieteur trip, river boat

Kaieteur Falls during their stay. But they were up against problems for it was necessary to find three more people to make up the right number. Were they putting out feelers? If so they were lucky, for when they left to return to Georgetown, it was already decided that

¹⁹ These two sentences are unclear, but at the same time intriguing, as they suggest two suitors of whom, sadly, nothing is known!

Mother, Doddles and I should join them. Speed must have been of the essence, but we managed to scramble our preparations to set off together in an amazingly short time²⁰.

No account of our remarkable journey in 1928 has been recorded. Only a few photos from a borrowed camera remain to bring back to memory that which we were so privileged to see. It was from the second day out from Georgetown after leaving the wide rivers into the hinterland, that our real journey began. We had spent a night at a government rest house, where, having been warned of the prevalence of vampire bats there (and nowhere else on the trip), we had perforce to keep night lights burning throughout the night to protect us in our hammocks. When we left the rest house and the bats, our sole organised transport was by two canoes with outboard engines, as were in general use in those smooth-running rivers of the interior. In these were housed (besides our six selves in the leading boat), members of the crew and of our staff. One such member was in charge of our food and of our general well-being. He was none other than a waiter from the prestigious Georgetown Club, Persaud by name. Travelling for long hours in cramped conditions, it was imperative to introduce stops, usually by the tree-covered river banks. On one such occasion, we climbed up



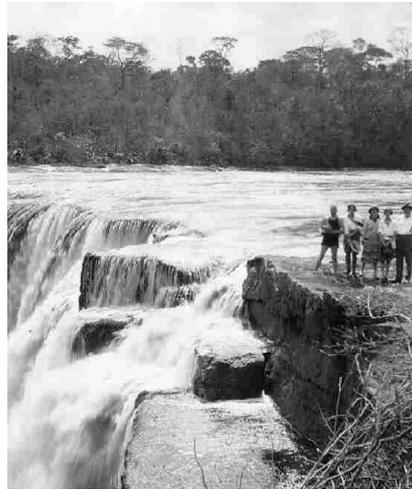
Kaieteur trip, the portage

Further on up the river, it became necessary to disembark at the foot of swiftly-rushing rapids, in order to make a portage. A photo shows us walking on a road beside the river, ahead of a donkey-cart laden with our luggage. We finally

to a nearby Amerindian tribal settlement, cut out of the 'bush' and in its true natural setting and daily activities (quite obviously by previous tacit arrangement for our benefit). At another, we disembarked to watch gold diggers panning for small nuggets in a shallow stretch of water.

²⁰ A small booklet survives, produced by Sproston who ran these expeditions, and gives details of the itinerary and prices. The cost per party of 6 passengers was \$650 (£135) including all expenses except refreshments.

reached Tukeit, the furthest navigable part of the river below the actual foot of the falls where a shelter for the night awaited us, and where we could hear the not-too-distant boom of the mighty falls. There we waited for the morrow. Only the steep climb on foot remained to the edge of the plateau over which the river flowed. (The Angel Fall in Venezuela claims a longer total drop. But it is insignificant in width, while Kaieteur represents an entire river 300 to 400 feet across, falling 740 feet in a single sheer drop into a rock-strewn gorge over 800 feet below).



Kaieteur, the edge of the falls

As soon as all arrangements were completed next morning for moving camp, we set out, accompanied by some of the crew. It was a demandingly steep climb to the plateau above. There we were within a short walk to the head of the falls themselves. The sight which met us was breath-taking. Here the placidly flowing river tips itself over the edge to fall steeply amidst rising froth and a never-ceasing roar, to fill the air with the thunder of its protesting anger. It had flowed in measured time, carving its way through unrecorded ages to create this dramatic back-drop for posterity.



Kaieteur, Doodles and Elsie

From the cave behind the swiftly falling water, birds fly out and back in endless circles, claiming their undisputed ownership of Nature's Kingdom. We spent two whole days at the summit, in sunlight and starlight and by the light of the moon. A snapshot shows a less dramatic scene as Doodles and I are seated in the mundane act of bathing our feet in a pool amidst the rocks above the edge of the falls. In strange juxtaposition, Doodles' act of pulling off her sock from her upraised foot, is clearly shown against a back-drop of the mighty Kaieteur rushing towards the precipice edge, only a few feet beyond. Departing from the plateau was like tearing ourselves unwillingly from a fleeting vision of another world.

Once again I must have given my parents some cause for anxiety regarding my health. Perhaps I was having occasional light bouts of fever. Enough anyway for a decision to send me to England in advance of Daddy's due home-leave, for me to benefit from some good English weather! Did I protest or placidly accept? Anyway, I sailed on an unremembered vessel bound for England, and on arrival, took myself, reluctantly, to stay as a paying guest with two elderly friends of Mother in the heart of Buckinghamshire. It was a gloomy prospect. However, Mother had other plans ahead for me, which were revealed when I received an invitation to stay with a Dutch relation in Lausanne. Cousin Helene Wilkens²¹ had married a wealthy Frenchman, some years older than herself, by name Antonini. When I was to be their guest, he was already blind. But he had managed to familiarise himself with every feature of the luxurious home that he had built high on the outskirts of Lausanne, overlooking the lake. It would have been his blindness that prompted this need for a precise knowledge of his surroundings. When, after my arrival, he took me on a tour of inspection (all in French), he was never at a loss to point out this piece of furniture, or that oil-painting with uncanny accuracy. To me everything was almost disturbingly precise in his blind observation.

The garden, into which he didn't normally venture, was equally regimented. The chain-linked standard roses had the precision of those in the Mad Queen's garden in Alice in Wonderland. And the little summer-house might have belonged to the March

Hare. It was quite unexpected to see a hard tennis court, but I had forgotten that there was a son of my own age. He arrived home from university a few days later, and was another surprise for he was extremely good looking, with corresponding charm. He was great fun too. I soon realised that I was serving a purpose by providing him with some English conversation. At the same time I was missing an opportunity to improve my French by rejecting the overtures of an elderly retired governess who was eager to give me some schooling.

²¹ This was not Helena, granddaughter of Gysbert Christiaan Bosch Reitz, but her step-sister, Adrienne.

My invitation from those kind Antoninis included an annual visit to a hotel in the Juras above Sion on the Rhone Valley. As my meagre wardrobe had not included much in the way of clothes for higher altitudes, a dress-maker was bidden to measure me up for a warm afternoon dress for wear in the evenings. The hotel, when we got there, was, as far as I can remember, more in the taste of the elderly Antoninis than of Emile and me. However we found beautiful Alpine walks on which we flirted, Oh so naively, among the pine needles!

In due time, we, the Waterfield family, duly returned to Demerara and to Blairmont estate, with the usual visits to Georgetown and the round of dances and cocktail parties. Then in 1929, something happened to change my whole life. I became engaged! While staying with the Farrars in Georgetown, I had been invited to a dance in a private house. Escorts didn't worry us. There was always someone handy to drive us. On this occasion, out of the blue, came a phone call from Geof, with the offer of a lift. It was surprising, for Geof was not always seen at dances as far as I can remember. They weren't his *métier*. Everald²², on the phone, told him that 'Elsie would love a lift!' And so it came about that after the dance was over, when driving me home along a deserted road, Geof proposed marriage - just like that! After collecting my wits, I asked for time to think it over. A meeting on the following day was arranged. It was all a bit shattering and I was not in love. I really had no right to give him any hope.

The following days were bewildering, to say the least; and not least to poor



All Saints' Anglican Church, New Amsterdam, Berbice, B.G.

Mother and Daddy to whom I had caused shock in other ways in the past. It was a totally irresponsible thing to do, as I realised, and being so unsure of myself, didn't help matters.

So that is how it all began. Less than four months later we were married in the Parish Church of All Saints' in New Amsterdam across the river. Doodles and Geof's sister, Marjorie, were my

²² Everald was the daughter of Cecil and Leila Farrar.

bridesmaids. Tommy Astorga was best man. Guests arrived from Georgetown once again for the reception at Blairmont house; and in due course, Geof and I drove off to



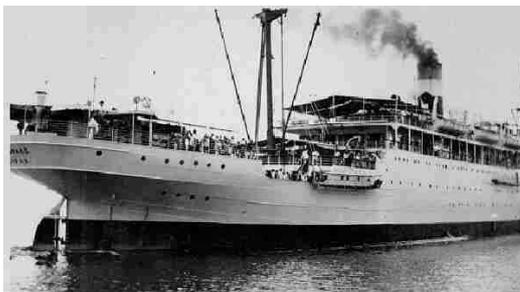
Wedding party returning to Blairmont across the Berbice River

Georgetown where the Farrars had offered us the use of their house before we sailed on one of the Lady Boats to Trinidad for our honeymoon on a tiny island in the Bocas. It was an idyllic spot for a honeymoon. Our bungalow was perched on the rocks looking out to sea and meals were brought across from a little hotel. We could swim in a little

inlet, netted against possible sharks; or walk to a cave which proved to be a marine wonder. Entered from above, the daylight penetrated to give an eerie half light to the strange scene below. All around the walls of the cave stalactites and stalagmites had formed from the constant drip of water from above. It must



Wedding group of Geof & Elsie with Marjorie, Tommy Astorga and Doodles



The Lady Drake leaves Georgetown stillness, the only sound coming from a small outlet to the sea. We found ourselves talking in whispers. The opportunity to swim was too good to lose, and it was a measure of its complete isolation that we had no hesitation in

have been ages old but due to its isolated position, it was virtually unknown. In the centre, fed from the outlet from the sea, was a deep pool, several yards across. It was an astonishing sight, and eerie in its quiet



Port Baleine, Bocas, Trinidad

stripping and swimming in the nude.

With marriage, I was discovering what my status was in Georgetown society. I had married the son of a prominent and much respected citizen who was also a



nominated member of both the Executive and Legislative Councils in the Colony's governing bodies. However his prior commitment lay in managing Garnett & Co. for its home-based owners. (All the big businesses were first privately owned by

British families before becoming registered companies.) It was a relatively small company with an import and export business in town, and with mixed interests in sugar manufacture, in balata bleeding, in mining and others in the interior; which, combined, would have been more interesting to Geof, I suspect, than the monotony of office work.

Our first home in Georgetown was rented while the owners were on leave in England. I didn't like it from the start. Nor did our two servants who were afraid to go



House in Robb Street

upstairs alone after dark. It was much later that we learned that a previous owner had hanged himself in one of the bedrooms! Although it was a fair bike ride for Geof to the office (were we too poor at that stage to own a car or for him to take a cab?), it



David's christening

was almost next door, by way of the servants' entrance, to The Casuarinas, the family home; as well as to the G.C.C. (Georgetown Cricket Club) and tennis. When I wanted to shop in town, or go to the library, or for an iced coffee at the 'Self-Help', I took the open-sided tram. Life was very much changed, and when I became pregnant, even more so. Geof's

parents' leave was due in the following year, so it was planned that we should move to

The Casuarinas in their absence, and await the baby's birth. It was a lovely home on the outskirts of town. On one side was the G.C.C. with its cricket ground, tennis courts and club houses. Across the road to the north and opposite The Casuarinas' front gates, the Lamaha Canal ran between wide grassy



banks on which a chance alligator might be seen sunning itself.

Lamaha Canal from The Casuarinas



Botanical Gardens

Further out still are the beautiful Botanical Gardens with their wealth of tropical trees. Here red burnt-earth paths run between little trenches of lotus water-lilies, and the Victoria Regia, whose large circular leaves with raised edges, made buoyant by a network of air-

filled veins on their undersides, lie flat on the surface of the water, cradling their pink many-petalled lily-flowers. At intervals, alongside the path, grow scarlet-flowered flamboyant trees, and the slender sealing-wax palm. Further on comes the spreading Ficus with its curtain of pendant roots, and the massive ill-omened silk cotton tree. The variety is endless.

Along the grassy edges of the manatee pond, the cumbersome, pig-eyed mammals heave themselves up shoulder-high, to stretch for grass, which, with other leaves, is their main diet. Above an island in yet another pond, hundreds of white egrets come flying home in the evenings to roost on the branches of low trees skirting the island, amidst a cacophony of sound. With the coming of darkness, all is quiet, save the croaking of frogs and the call of an owl.



Manatee pond

In earlier writing, I was about to describe The Casuarinas when I inadvertently found myself among the water-lilies and the manatees of the Botanical Gardens. Now without the benefit of time to rewrite this

saga, I must retrace my steps to The Casuarinas itself, which was, for Georgetown, a



The Casuarinas across the Lamaha Canal

seven course meal for a dinner party of ten or more was normal, although a chef from

the Club would arrive to take charge and serve. In the main building, a large dark-panelled dining-room opened out onto the garden, a few steps below. Above this was the drawing-room, and a guest suite on the wing. It was a three-storied house on two wings. On the third floor were the bedrooms and dressing-rooms, and a bathroom. Typical of all bathrooms at the time, it had a zinc or metalled floor with an outlet pipe. Above was a shower of tepid water. If sickness demanded a warm bath, buckets of hot water had to be brought up from the kitchen, perhaps by the garden boy. I have



The Casuarinas

forgotten to mention another, smaller and more intimate sitting-room on the second floor, above the hall, which was generally used. From this, doors opened on to a large railed-in extension, open to the skies where it was pleasant to sit on a hot night.

If I have spent over-long describing The Casuarinas, it is because it was later to be the centre of our lives for a number of years. Geof's father had first acquired it when entertaining on a larger scale was demanded of him in the capacity of Managing Director of Garnett & Co., and also to provide a base for the periodic visits from England of one or other of its owners in the Garnett family. It may be of interest to explain here that with the development of British-held land in the West Indies and

South America, family names were to become the hall-mark of ownership. Alongside the Garnetts, and in part ownership, were the Davsons, later to be acquired by the larger firm of Bookers. Garnett & Co., as the firm was known, was an import and export business with a large wharf capable of accommodating ocean-going ships at the time of which I now write. Earlier, the firm's trade was conducted by sailing ships which would anchor in mid-stream of the Demerara River. As well as ocean-going ships, the wharf would accommodate river steamers to conduct the company's trade into the interior.

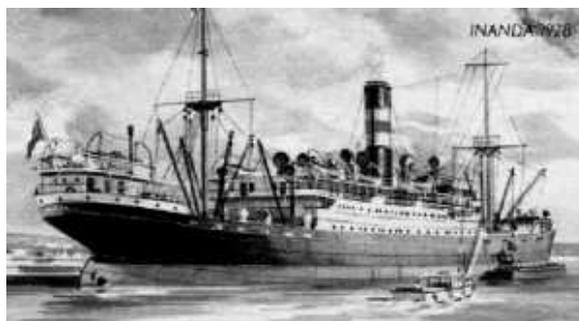
Geof joined the firm after the Great War, when he felt himself unfit, both physically and mentally to take up his scholarship to Queens' College, Cambridge,



Marjorie

and a hoped-for future in the Indian Civil Service. He had to readjust himself which was not easy. His sister, Marjorie, a few years younger, had been educated in England and at a finishing school in Paris. I hardly knew her until I married into the family, but a real and valued friendship did develop later; and she was always devoted to Geof. When our children came along, I think they filled a void in her life, and she became devoted to them. That was many years later.

Our first leave was due when David was approaching his first birthday. Whatever plans we had were radically changed when our old nurse, Rebecca, asked to accompany us, as David's nurse, if we would pay her passage and living expenses in England. It meant that Geof and I could enjoy some travel in Europe, knowing that David was in safe hands. If I was reluctant not to be with David for his first birthday, I knew how much it meant to Geof to introduce me to places that he loved. At the same time, Mother and Daddy were due to bid a final farewell to the colony for retirement in England. Consequently we all, including Doddles, travelled together on the



The Inanda

'Inanda' bound for England in May 1931. We had already written to ask Aunt Trix to



Alfred and David
at Stevenage

find suitable accommodation for Rebecca and David, knowing that Mother and Daddy would be staying initially with her in Stevenage. Accommodation was found in a farm house nearby which proved to be an ideal arrangement. If I would miss our little son coming up for his first birthday, I had no qualms about his welfare.

Geof and I set off for the Continent (second class!) making first for Oberammagau where we had booked accommodation and tickets for the Passion Play, due to be performed that tenth year. From there we moved on to stay as paying guests with a wealthy American friend of Geof's aunt May Garratt, in Florence, where May would also be staying.



David & Rebecca at Stevenage

Florence, with its treasures, had been a priority for us. But to have the privilege of staying in a centuries-old castello in the hills overlooking the city, was beyond our dreams. We must have been there for well over



San Martino, Florence

a week, each day taking us down by foot and tram to the city itself where, armed with our Baedeker Guide, we visited every picture gallery and church for which we had time. Each morning ended by our meeting Mrs Parke and May for cocktails in one of Florence's noted tavernas, before being driven back in Mrs Parke's opulent chauffeured car for a late lunch in the welcome cool of San Martino. This was luxury of which we had never dreamed. We usually spent the after-siesta evenings in the coolness of the walled garden, after, perhaps having watched the early grape harvest gathered in, and the wine-making taking place in the cellars below.

Some years after this, I came across a book whose author had spent many years buying and renovating properties for reselling, among which was San Martino which she had rescued from a dilapidated state of negligence. The only illustration I have is a photo of the very bedroom in which Geof and I had stayed, with its four-poster bed, and magnificent view looking down on distant Florence. I have twice come across this book in different libraries in England and abroad. To describe some of the other beautiful places in which we stayed in very modest guest houses would make tedious reading. We were lucky to have enjoyed a small part of Europe which now has been spoilt by tourism, by speed-motivated Americans and snap-happy Japanese.



Elsie

anticipated arrival of Amy Johnson, the round-the-world British airwoman. We were hurriedly put on our flight. And so ended our continental holiday.

It was an exciting reunion in Eastbourne where David and Rebecca were, with my parents and others, at the sanatorium at Temple Grove which the Harry Waterfields had kindly lent us. But not for long before Geof and I must needs meet relations whom we had not seen since our marriage. Invitations to stay had to be fitted in to a schedule which took us on rounds made as brief as courtesy dictated.



Temple Grove School

At last came the time to return to Georgetown where a small house awaited us. It was to be our first real home, though rented, and we had enjoyed buying some of the extra furnishing required, and to arrange for its shipment. It is interesting to recall a visit to Woolworths in Eastbourne, where in those days nothing cost more than six pence. We needed kitchen utensils and such-like items. Today my mind boggles trying to justify an order for shipment that would require a senior employee, (the manager we presumed from his manner!), to accompany us and attend to our needs. And no item costing more than six pence!

The return voyage on a Dutch boat was noteworthy for its other passengers among whom were the new young Bishop of Guiana, Alan Knight (soon to become the Archbishop of the West Indies); and also the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy or chaplain, Canon Bradfield by name, who was later to play a major role at the Coronation of Princess Elizabeth. Surprisingly, for Geof and I were then very small fry in Georgetown society at the time, we found ourselves placed at the Captain's table with these two men and another older couple from Georgetown. In retrospect, I think it must have been Alan Knight who produced the spark to set alight this unpromising assembly of passengers, of which I was much the youngest, with nothing to contribute to conversation. But from then on, ours must have been the liveliest table throughout the voyage.



Anira Street, Georgetown

On arrival back in Georgetown, David would have been the centre of welcome from the dotting grandparents. For Geof and me it was a momentous time when we would be moving into our first home in New Garden Street. We sadly bid farewell to our faithful Rebecca, and a young coloured nurse was engaged for David.



Anira Street with grandmother Edith

Settling in with our newly-bought furniture and all those kitchen utensils, was exciting. We even had a small field attached to the garden, and a goat which some misguided friend had foisted on us, more in thankful riddance,

I suspect, than to give us any joy. He gave trouble from the very beginning, and was forever breaking loose to eat the roses, or else to stray onto the road and into the arms of the police or local cow-catchers, to whom a fine was due; whereas we would have gladly made him or her, (the years have dimmed its identity) a gift to them. Unloved as it was, we eventually found it a more welcome home elsewhere.

In past years, Georgetown had greatly benefited from the visits from England of the Glossop Harris Company of Players who provided a much-needed cultural stimulus. Subsequently one of the leading actresses had come to marry a Georgetown resident and became committed to encouraging local talent. I had previously, myself, joined a group who occasionally put on shows which, in retrospect, must have been distinctly amateurish. When in 1931, the then Governor's wife organised (or as more likely, formed a committee to organise) a combined charities fete to be held in the Promenade Gardens with the usual stalls and side shows. One unusual feature to be enacted was a pastoral scene from *The Midsummer Night's Dream* in which children of Georgetown's residents were to play the parts of elves and fairies, while Titania the Fairy Queen, Oberon and Puck would be allocated to adults. I must have been the obvious choice for Titania, the Queen of the Fairies, for had I not the most desirable changeling child in my small son, David? Today it seems quite incomprehensible that no photo was taken. But I do have in my possession still, the little piece of fabric of imitation leopard skin which David wore from the shoulder of his otherwise naked body.

By mid-1933 we were looking for a new home. I was pregnant again and we needed more living space. The housing situation in Georgetown was somewhat fluid, for with the expansion of Bookers, a section of the population had drifted out to the company's new housing estate; while privately-owned houses were rented out. If large enough, some became well-run boarding houses and private hotels, for the ever-increasing white population.

It was our good fortune that Olgaville in Main Street became vacant to lease, for it seemed ideal for our growing family because of its unusual design. Two large airy bedrooms opened on to a wide verandah upstairs to provide a day nursery play-

area for the children, with ample room for my desk and couch. The dining room and drawing room below were one large room running the width of the house, on the ground floor, opening on to a long paved and trellised porch.

Our address, Main Street, was misleading, depicting a busy thoroughfare in



Main Street, Georgetown

the town centre. It wasn't a street at all in the proper sense. Instead it was a wide two-laned avenue with shady saman trees spaced either side, and giving shade to the central footpath. Across from our garden gates were the more imposing gates of one

of the entrances to Government House, with tennis courts and garden beyond.

It was a short daily walk to Geof's office in Water Street. The sea wall which was the rendezvous for the nurses and their charges of those families living in this part of Georgetown, was a far cry from Bourda on the other side of town where the Botanical Gardens served a similar purpose. Beyond the sea wall was the beach of muddy sand and shallow sea. Guiana was a land of mud.



Off to the Seawall

Some years later we drove up the coast to see where, over recent years, the sea had receded and exposed the bases of Royal palms and of houses. It was a similar scene of tidal intrusion and withdrawal that we had witnessed in Wakenaam. But here there was no factory chimney. Instead were the stone bases of houses and some of the remaining wooden posts. Only greenheart, the hardest and most resilient wood in the world, would have survived the years of tidal wear and tear. The fluctuating sea was to expose other reminders of past habitation in the form of Dutch gin bottles of dark opaque glass and varied shape.

It was 1933 when we took possession of Olgaville. Tim was due to be born in



Tim's christening with Marjorie, David and godfather, Jimmy Hiscocks

January of the following year. But in December, a month earlier, it became apparent that he would arrive sooner. I was forcibly immobilised, while others ran round doing the preparations that I had left for the last month. My dear friend Olwen, who had promised the loan of a cot, arrived to fix it up, while I watched, inactive from my bed. At The

Casuarinas, all was astir over this unexpected development. I remember Marjorie

coming to carry David off to The Casuarinas where he was to stay. Geof moved into the nursery or to his dressing room, and a nurse was engaged by Dr Craigen²³ to look after me. It must have been the following night around 9.30 that Timothy was born



Tim's christening with grandparents and David

weighing a fair six and a half pounds as far as I remember. He was duly wrapped in cottonwool, the only available clothing for a premature baby. I was better prepared than I was for David, and so was able to breast-feed him every three hours with accurate weighing at every feed. We named him Timothy John.

Geof's leave was due the following year, but it was advisable for me to go earlier, in the spring. So, having no sooner taken possession of Olgaville, than I was off with our two small children. We had found tenants for the house in our absence in the person of an American army colonel and his wife, and a passage was booked for me and our offspring. My friend, Carol Robertson, the wife of the Financial Secretary,

²³ Tony Craigen, whose sister, Muriel, was the wife of Malcolm Austin.

and her small daughter were fellow passengers. Tim, still breast-fed, created no feeding problems, and with his pram tightly secured on a sheltered corner of the deck, he had the extra benefit of sea air during most of the day.

I remember well the glorious spring day on which we landed at Plymouth. The railway banks on the line to London were gay with primroses. As Geof's two aunts, Nell and May, of whom I was very fond, were in London at the time, I had suggested earlier that I might call on them in order to show off our offspring. Today my mind boggles at the very idea! But as Tim needed to be fed again before setting off for Sussex, there was some sense in my suggestion. But what of my luggage? Had it all gone to Sussex in advance, except for the necessities for the day? And that with two children in tow, one in my arms? It is probable that May came to see us on to our train at Victoria; and probably too that I travelled first class. As I had planned to see the aunts en route, I had turned down an offer of help from my parents for the train journey. In retrospect, after nearly sixty years, I am amazed at my nerve in coping



Colonnade Gardens: Doddles and Millie

with such a situation on my own. Of course I was met at Eastbourne station by my parents, and taken to Colonnade Gardens where they had a large rented flat on the top floor no more than a quarter of a mile from the sea front.

It was wonderful to be together again and to present to them a second grandchild. Doddles was also able to join us when she could get away from her child-minding job in Bexhill. There was a nanny for the children, by name of Dorothy, who had been engaged prior to our arrival. By some means or other, the railways had been able to transport my luggage and the pram, from the docks to Colonnade Gardens.



Colonnade Gardens, Doddles and Elsie

The fourth floor flat had a flat roof among the chimney pots on which Daddy had made a brave attempt at a roof garden. When weather permitted, it was a perfect place to relax and sunbathe, and its parapet made it entirely safe for children and adults alike. Tim, in any case, was safely confined to a rug on which to lie. Below at ground level and when the weather was less balmy, he would lie in his pram sleeping, or watching the gulls. Was he always as contented as in my memory of those days, I wonder?

Most of that year, 1934, remains a blank. It is my first real ominous lapse of memory. But as it was a year that needed some recording, I must resort to photos, with their limiting range in and around Eastbourne. Inevitably questions arise. Did I hire or even buy a second-hand car? One isolated flash of memory supports my owning one. On this



Elsie shopping in Eastbourne

occasion in an uncrowded part of Hastings, a small boy had wandered into the path of my car, and had been quite harmlessly knocked over, without any further incident, thank heavens. It was not until our next visit to England that I took a driving test - and failed!

Geof's arrival later that summer in 1934, does nothing now to contribute to any record of events. It was only when we left to return to Demerara, that the memory is awakened by events which were unfortunate, to say the least. We had invited Doodles to come back with us to Georgetown on a visit, and had booked her a passage as a nurse to our children. Travelling once more by the Dutch Line, we headed for Madeira with the prospect of being propelled up the mountain-side in a cable-car of sorts, as tourists are wont to do. I missed Geof to organise the expedition. Unhappily he was confined to his bunk with a high temperature and a deeply perplexed doctor in attendance who didn't know what to make of the symptoms. Geof looked awful, and was obviously really ill; a condition made worse by the movement of the ship as it took to the open sea. I can't now remember any steward in attendance, for it was to me that the doctor turned to assist in taking a blood test. I must have

looked as green as I felt. How thankful I was to have Doddles to take charge of the children.

By the time we reached Georgetown, Geof had recovered, but the children and I were unwell. We were thankful for the sanctuary of The Casuarinas where, as Marjorie was away, there was ample room for us all. Dr Craigen was summoned and at once diagnosed mumps. Doddles was still uncontaminated and was able to be dispatched to relations in New Amsterdam where unattached police officers took her



First steps

under their wing.

In due course, Geof and I and the children returned to our home ground at Olgaville with its familiar comforts. Even the hideous up-turned ginger-beer bottles supporting a raised flower bed (later replaced) posed a friendly welcome. Here Tim was to take his first unsteady steps, captured by camera with an anxious big brother at hand.

It must have been at about this time that Jack Waddington entered our lives. We had heard much about the new Colonial Secretary from



Olgaville, Main Street

people who had known him in Jamaica. But we had



Kite flying at Turkeyen with David Waddington

had no opportunity to meet him, or even see him, until invited (for that purpose) to dine with a couple whom we did not know very well. It was a small party, of eight I think, at which our hostess entertained us at the piano. She had the unusual gift of whistling in perfect pitch to her own accompaniment. Inevitably that was followed

by us all singing old songs round the piano. An unusual and delightful evening.

Jack had left his wife in England to settle their elder son at boarding school. Edith and their younger son, David, were to follow him, bringing a governess with them. Although he soon became much sought-after socially, he missed his home life. That he should turn to Geof and me to help to fill a need, we took as a compliment. We began to see more and more of him in one way or another. Then, when Edith arrived, they must have discussed the idea of our two sons having lessons together under Miss King, their governess. When put to us, it seemed an ideal arrangement.



Miss King's Percussion Band.
 Back: Miss King, Miss Worm (Bishop's H.S.)
 Mid: David Waddington, Margaret Allen,
 Joy Evelyn, Bo Harvey Reid,
 Derek Evelyn, David S
 Front: ? , Jennifer Allen, Elizabeth Crease, ? .

She was a highly trained governess with the added merits of an imaginative mind. She was to be the teacher as well as the companion of a child whose home life, it was anticipated, would be circumscribed by parental commitments to their duties. For even the wives of men in high office became inevitably involved in chairing committees and such-like.

Apart from lessons, Miss King devised all kinds of activities. Some were far beyond the confines of the home, as when she took her two young charges to an isolated beach up the coast to play at 'Pirates', suitably dressed and made-up, as photos show. Those were the days in Georgetown when white children could freely ride round on their bikes without fear or hindrance. But, no doubt, in this case, Miss King and her charges would be accompanied by a police sergeant attached to the Colonial Secretary's home. As well as her specified duties, Miss King came to organise a ten-strong percussion band from



Hope Beach. Note picnic attire!

the children in Georgetown at that time. Two of them, Margaret and Jennifer Allen²⁴ were, many years later, to come back into my life in unforeseen circumstances.

Timothy was three and a half years younger than his brother. I am reminded here that we called him by his full name in which he was christened. The abbreviation came about later. If he missed the companionship of a number of friends in which David was blessed, it was never apparent. He was highly imaginative and created his own interests. In spite of the difference in their age, there was a closeness between the two brothers. David was always protective of Timothy.



The Old George, Westham, Pevensey

The time was approaching for another leave for Geof which we did not realise would be our last for some years, for, another war of world proportions, was fast approaching. Mother and Daddy, wedded to Sussex, had rented a small oak-beamed house in Pevensey. Brother Jack was happily settled in his job on a rubber estate in British North Borneo; and Doodles was married to Jack Bavin in Chittagong in India and about to become a mother. She had travelled to England, and to the Bavin family home in Berkhamsted for the event. So it was to Berkhamsted that we were bound, where a small rented house awaited us, with further plans worked out for our leave. Unhappily our hopes were soon to be dashed, when almost at the outset, the children and I caught measles. We had been in contact with Alan and Michael who were soon to develop the infection, though fortunately in a mild form. Nevertheless, it meant quarantine and altered plans.

The Waddingtons were also in England where Jack was awaiting instruction from the Colonial Office, but presently staying in Watford. We must have been in touch, for when he learned of our release from quarantine, and of my postponed driving test in the UK, he suggested coming over to help with transport, and to give me moral support! I suppose I passed the test.

²⁴ They were the daughters of Olwen, referred to on p.40, and Maurice Allen.

The time was approaching for us to leave Berkhamsted and make for Devon where we had booked accommodation at a farm house. Before that we invited Jack to supper and to meet Madge Bavin, then living at Pathside. It proved a successful and happy evening, in spite of the trouble I had cooking the salmon, I remember!

When the lease of the house was up, we left for the West Country where we



Traine Farm, Devon

had booked to stay at the farm in Devon, close to Plymouth. Forty years ago in England, there was no hint of the speed of travel today; or of the traffic one would encounter on the roads now. So our pace was leisurely, with several stops to break the long



Traine Farm. Michael, Alan, David & Tim

drive, on the childrens' account. This included an overnight stop at a hotel in Sherborne. The farm at Wembury with its holiday accommodation and outlying fields, was a short distance from a beach, with Plymouth Sound beyond. It was not long before Doddles joined us with



Cricket on Bigbury Sands, Devon

her baby and nurse, and her two step-sons, Alan and Michael. Soon after came Mother and Daddy and Aunt Trix, quite a family. On the farm there were numerous activities and interests for the children, apart from the beach and sea-bathing.

We were quite near to Plymouth and the appeals of Navy Week which were a great attraction for the boys. But for Geof, so much family was becoming a bit overpowering. Therefore when his old friend Monty White suggested that they meet for a short walking tour, Geof was off like a shot, encouraged by me. We were about to leave anyway. As far as I remember, I drove the boys, in the company of



Back from Devon



Swimming pool on the Stuyvesant

Daddy and Mother in their car, all bound for Pevensey Bay where I had engaged rooms for a short stay. Ultimately we sailed for Georgetown.

The last year of peace was 1938. Although many signs of the war to come were not apparent to 'the man in the street',

friends left to take their due leave; a few never to return to the West Indies for one reason or another. Olwen's and Maurice's marriage was breaking up with distressing consequences. Jack Waddington became Governor of Barbados. In Georgetown, David had had a good grounding, first with Olwen, and then with Miss King. He went on to Queen's College, the large mixed-race school under an English headmaster, along with Robin Owen and other friends. Timothy returned to the Convent. His memories, today, of that time are revealing and not very complimentary of the teaching and supervision



Off to Queen's College



Cricket at The Casuarinas

of the nuns, but were quite unsuspected by Geof and me. I must have taught him from

an early age, but I have no recollection of that.

The health of both Geof's parents was showing signs of decline, especially that of his mother who was becoming unreliable and difficult to deal with. His father had long since retired, leaving the management of Garnett & Co. in his hands. Geof had also become a member of both the Nominated and Executive Councils of Government; while the Bishop had appointed him to the Church Council. So his time

was full. I was on two or three committees and president of one, but had no claim to overwork.



Tea at The Casuarinas with Dick, Bruce and Richard Farrar

thoroughly bemused elder statesman, he claimed to be the bringer of peace to the world.

With the outbreak of war in Europe, life in Georgetown changed within the limits of its geographical situation, and the will to take some part, however small and remote its usefulness. For some now inexplicable reason, Sir Alfred Savage, the Governor, had taken his leave and departed for England at a time when the probability of war in Europe was an increasing threat. The Colonial Office in



Casuarinas staff. Nora, Ivy, Amy, Ram, his wife and child

London, in their wisdom, deemed it advisable for the colony to remain under the guidance of an experienced governor. And so it was that our friend, now Sir John Waddington, recently appointed Governor of Barbados, should arrive to take up residence, and instead of the usual fanfare occasioned by the arrival of a new governor, find himself almost ostracised in an otherwise empty Government House. Friends who would have rallied round, were unaware of what was happening, and I can't remember today how Geof and I became acquainted with events. One flash of memory is of us standing with Jack at our garden

In Europe, Hitler's rise to power was seemingly unstoppable. At home, the Prime Minister, Chamberlain, was weak and ineffectual, a pawn in the Fuhrer's hand. Nevertheless, he had a sense of mission which took him to Munich to confront Hitler personally. On his return, a



Seawall with unknown friend

London, in their wisdom, deemed it advisable for the colony to remain under the guidance of an experienced governor. And so it was that our friend, now Sir John Waddington, recently appointed Governor of Barbados, should arrive to take up residence, and instead of the usual fanfare occasioned by the arrival of a new governor, find himself almost ostracised in an

gates feeling bewildered and shocked over the news of the outbreak of war. We were to see a lot of him during those anxious days before life settled down into a new, strange routine, and before he became involved in governing this somewhat remote Colony.

The distant war in Europe was affecting our way of life in several ways. There was, for instance, a sudden urge to raise money for the war effort whatever that might become. Jack Waddington immediately requested the formation of a Red Cross Committee, and appointed me as secretary. One of our early problems was to deal



Red Cross fete

with the rush of applications to raise money in the name of the Red Cross. Each had first to be proved genuine. And so Geof was asked to take on the role of adjudicator with the understanding that in every case, entire takings would be donated. In London the West Indian section of the Red Cross, under the chairmanship of Lady Davson, was soon to make its presence known to us. Consequently a shipment of knitting wools in khaki, navy and air-force colours with full instructions for the specified garments was dispatched. In Georgetown, a centre was set up where voluntary knitters came to collect wool and instructions for work at home. In due course we packed crates of finished garments for the Red Cross in London, and in spite of enormous losses at sea, only one of these shipments was lost.

The mining of bauxite in the interior at Mackenzie with its ultimate value in the manufacture in Canada of aluminium for war requirements, represented the only place of interest to the enemy, if means could be found to destroy its production. It was a thriving Canadian-owned mining community, situated 60 miles up the Demerara River from Georgetown. From its wharves, the bauxite was loaded into ocean-going container-ships to travel by sea to Canada; and it



Bauxite mining at Mackenzie

was at sea that the only real danger occurred. As this menace from submarines increased, there was a corresponding clamp-down on any means of passing information through the post, however innocent. All letters were censored. For a time, I with others, was on the board, only to be censored myself, later, when during a visit to Barbados, I wrote to the acting President of the Red Cross in Georgetown to give notice that an expected shipment of knitting wools from London, was in Bridgetown harbour. I was promptly ordered to present myself to be reprimanded for a breach of security!

Away from the safety of Guiana and the West Indies, the war was taking its merciless toll. Many young men of different races were leaving to enlist in England or Canada. My brother Jack, still young enough to take an active part, had left the rubber plantation in Borneo where he had happily settled after leaving Guiana, in order to



Jack

enlist in an Indian regiment, the 1/9th Jats. He trained in the N.W.Frontier prior to being sent to Burma where the Allied Forces were already in retreat at the hands of the Japanese, as described in his letters; and with greater detail by his commanding officer, after Jack was reported 'missing and presumed killed'. I quote here from that letter written to my sister in Calcutta, in his personal report.

'We, that is to say my Battalion Headquarters and two Companies of which one was Jack's 'B' Company, had been at a place called Swegyin for four days where we were in position protecting - as far as my limited sources allowed - the ferry steamer service which was carrying the army in Burma from the east to the west bank of the Chindwin River. 'B' Company was in position on the right, astride a small stream in a wide river bed which made the only line of approach for the Japanese. At 5.30 am on the 10th (May 1942), they attacked and tried to rush Jack's position. As has often happened, a lot of Japs were dressed in white clothing to look like Burmans. Jack at once went forward with his orderly to forward positions: he got to the forward section and asked what was happening. Finding that the 'enemy' were dressed in white, and evidently thinking they were refugee Indians or Burmans, he left his

orderly behind and went on alone - he insisted on doing so - and vanished in the semi darkness, and was heard shouting in Hindustani to stop firing. (He had already ordered his own men to stop firing). A burst of enemy fire followed, and more fire increased in intensity. His forward section of eight men were pressed to hold their own and finally had to withdraw owing to casualties and to their automatic gun jamming. Jack was never seen again and I personally fear that he was killed; or he may have been wounded and captured. At 7 am I told the men that he was missing and at once organised a counter-attack by ten men, my sole reserve, to get forward again and see where he was. But it took casualties and it was literally impossible to get forward. Later I tried to get three tanks forward, but they stuck descending the river bed. The fight went on all day, and 'B' Company - Jack's - held on magnificently in spite of nearly 30 casualties.'

After the war Jack's body was recovered and buried in Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar (Burma).

With the UK and much of Europe at war, we in South America and those living in the British West Indian Islands were denied entrance to the UK, except under special circumstances. These allowed volunteers to enlist to join the forces in



'The Thin Red Line' - the BG Volunteer Defence Force, 1941, with their array of weapons. Geof is centre and Fred Farrar on the far left.

England, and others to rejoin their regiments. We had become very friendly with the Adjutant and his wife, and we used to enjoy an almost weekly game of tennis together. But as Reggie was seconded from the Hampshire Regiment, his call-up became imminent. We missed our two friends when they left, and were soon to mourn when Reggie was killed on H.M.S. Hampshire, bombed in the

evacuation of Dunkirk. Geof was understandably restless and found it difficult to accept the fact that age prohibited him from being of any real use in a much changed area of conflict.

We appeared to have had four holidays in the early war years before finally



Pomeroon River.

Back: Elsie, Elizabeth Crease, Robin Owen
Front: Mrs Crease, David, Tim, Mrs Owen

Sandhills up the Demerara River. It is not easy to fit half-remembered happenings into their right perspective. Photos help, but are far too few, although they give some indication of the boys' ages; as when David began to wear the Queen's College cap. Another identifying headgear is Timothy's floppy white linen hat. He is seen in a group outside the government

setting sail for England in October 1944. The first must have been in 1939 and I have little or no recollection of it other than the fact that we probably stayed at the government rest house at Suddie on the Essequibo coast. There is a photo taken on the banks of the Pomeroon River with the Owens and Creases.

The second holiday was at



Sandhills.

Angela ?, Elizabeth Crease, Elsie,
Mrs Crease, Geof, David and Tim

rest house , in which he looks no more than five.



Sandhills

We were on a short holiday with friends and their children at Sandhills, which, as the name implies, was a sandy clearance of the bush of tall forest trees. A creek of clear water darkened by centuries of decaying vegetation, flowed, almost motionlessly, between high banks of sand. Where felled trees gave way to open skies, the shallow water formed an ideal swimming pool for children, and a refreshing dip for adults. Further on, a small punt was popular with the two or three older children. A photo shows David and

Elizabeth Crease wielding long poles, while much younger Tim is seated amidships.

As if not to be outclassed, he has his own makeshift prodder. Beyond, the creek finds sanctuary in its natural environment among the dense trees and vines of the tropical bush, from where it ultimately empties itself into the muddy water of the swift flowing Demerara River.

Our trip to Tobago was in April 1941. It is an island to the north east of Trinidad. It had the facilities to provide holidays from Trinidad. In the more remote parts of the north where the island faces the Atlantic, the terrain is wilder and more rugged than the south, and the coast is indented by small bays between steep rocky headlands. Off those northern shore lies Bird of Paradise Island and Goat Island. The wooded Bird of



Speyside Bay, Tobago, with Goat Island and Bird of Paradise Island beyond

Paradise Island was, as the name implies, the protected home of the beautiful and rarely seen, birds of paradise. In contrast, Goat Island was bare and rocky, and an eccentric recluse, a one-time actress, had built a house in which she intended to end her days. She had arranged with the Speyside Hotel management for her provisions to be rowed across each week. It so happened that she had died shortly before our visit to Speyside, and many of her possessions, including her trunk of stage costumes were still in toto in her home.



Our bungalow, Speyside Bay

The hotel at Speyside was on a hill above the stretch of beach which ringed the little bay and was part of the estate. Apart from the main building, a bungalow had been built on a projecting rock overlooking a second smaller beach. This provided sleeping accommodation for our two families consisting of our friends Ruth and George Owen with Anne and Robin, and our

foursome. Also staying at Speyside but up at the hotel, were the Wallace family from Georgetown. They were later to lose their lives on being torpedoed en route for Cape



The raft fired Robin and David and two young men staying at the hotel to build a raft with the ever-handy supply of timber, using lengths of vine to bind them together. It was a brave effort but the wood lacked the lightness of balsa. It soon became too heavy to float and sank ingloriously almost as soon as George Owen had 'officially' launched it. Our happy carefree holiday

Town. There must have been a small cave in the rock below our bungalow, for we could hear the rumble and churning of the sea as it filled the enclosed space under our very beds. The much larger beach looked towards the offshore islands of Goat and Bird of Paradise with the Atlantic beyond. These were within rowing distance. Possibly this



Bathsheba Beach: Peter Cressall, David, Golde and Tim ended and we returned to Georgetown.



The Ark: Peter Cressall, Tim & David

and I remember also a brief visit to Golde White's cottage overlooking Bathsheba.²⁵

Finally there was a brief stay in Barbados in January 1944 when David was put to school at The Lodge and accommodation for him arranged at St John's rectory. We stayed in a small hotel, the Windsor, on the Hastings coast

It had long been our intention to get the boys to school in England and when passages became available towards the end of the year, David was quickly retrieved

²⁵ This wooden holiday home was still standing after nearly 45 years when Timothy visited Barbados in 1997.



David off to The Lodge

from Barbados. I end my memoirs with my personal account, written some years ago, of the voyage to England which started in October 1944 and should have got us home well before Christmas, but instead turned out to be an anxious, frustrating, yet unforgettable experience lasting 100 days. It marked the end of our life together as a family in a British Colony in South America where over a span of some 48 years or half a century, we had all been born.

For a full account of this voyage to England, from October 1944 to February 1945, see **THE HUNDRED DAYS**.

FOOTNOTE

In the 11 years until they retired in 1956, Elsie and Geof travelled to England a number of times, Elsie on 6 occasions and Geof twice on leave and twice on brief business trips.

During this time while at school or at university, and when their parents were abroad, David and Timothy stayed during the holidays with their grandparents in Pevensey Bay and later with their Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Jack Bavin in Hankham, Sussex.

On retiring to England, Elsie and Geof lived in Polegate, Sussex.

POSTSCRIPT 1

February 1945

It was a matter of urgency to get David and Tim to their respective schools for they were already a full half-term in arrears. Owing to the pressures of war, both schools had been evacuated from their home grounds.

Malvern College with its complexity of buildings and its playing fields, had been commandeered by the Admiralty forcing the school to move to Blenheim Palace in September 1939. The urgency to accommodate such a large-scale operation was so great as to take little account of the immense problems imposed on the future of the College for which an alternative home had to be found. In the event the Admiralty never actually moved to Malvern although they did take over some of the houses including No. 5. In the meantime the Admiralty had managed to build vast underground bunkers in London to withstand enemy bombing and allow it to carry out the efficient conduct of the war. Thus the College was allowed back to Malvern in September 1940. However in April 1942, it became evident that T.R.E., which was doing vital work on radar at Swanage, was vulnerable to enemy attack and in fact had been targeted by the Germans. So Malvern was immediately requisitioned again and in less than a month, Harrow School, which was down in numbers because of its proximity to London, was found willing to accommodate the College, and the move completed. The final return to Malvern was in September 1946.

Within a week of our arrival in England, David and I were on the way to Harrow School to meet Mr Colthurst, David's future house master of No. 5, with whom Geof had corresponded in Demerara. It was a poignant occasion calling for stiff upper lips and hasty farewells. So after the preliminaries and the understanding kindness of Mr Colthurst and his wife, it was suggested that David should see me off at the station, then to walk back alone to face this strange new life.

Back in Sussex, there were the frustrating black-out and relentless sound of overhead planes on the way to bomb the enemy in France in the closing phase of the war.

There was another personal crisis to face - Tim to be left at his first boarding school, Heatherdown, now evacuated from Ascot to Downton Hall near Ludlow where Charles and Patsy Warner ²⁶ had been forced to move. It was a grievous parting.

As I was in the part of the country among relations who wrote urging me to visit them, I decided to pay short visits to Uncle Reg and the Arthur Waterfields. Over the years Uncle Reg and Aunt Mai had moved from their grand way of living in Cheltenham with their retinue of servants, to a hardly less opulent home in the Deanery of Hereford Cathedral where at a later date I was able to introduce Geof to more of my Waterfield relations. By 1945 Uncle Reg had retired and with Aunt Mai was living in a modest home in the cloisters of Hereford Cathedral.

While Uncle Arthur had been uprooted from Brimfield to a parish not far from Hereford, this brought the brothers in close proximity. I was no longer in awe of Uncle Reg, as when I had broken the mirror in their grand Cheltenham home. He himself had mellowed with age. I was happy in the new relationship.

At last I was able to return to Mother and Daddy who had fiercely resisted any temptation to move from their vulnerable corner of Sussex. They had been able to buy their first real home, Waterperry in Pevensey Bay. It had a garden to gladden Daddy's heart, including an actual small bomb crater formed by one of the early enemy raids on the South Coast, which he had converted into a sunken garden.

²⁶ Patsy, referred to earlier, was the daughter of Uncle Reg Waterfield.

POSTSCRIPT 2

Food in Demerara

'Breakfast', so called and taken at 11 to 11.30 am, was the main meal of the day. It generally started with grapefruit or a slice of paw paw or avocardo pear.

The hot main dish was eaten invariably with rice, either plain or with black-eye peas or pieces of salt pork cooked with the rice. Also yams, eddoes, sweet potatoes or cassava (boiled or baked in hot ashes or made into cakes).

Plantains were a versatile vegetable (more correctly termed 'fruit') of the banana family, and could be used in varying stages of ripening. They could be boiled, baked in ashes or sliced and fried.

'Greens' consisted of a variety of beans, okras (tasty but slimy and misnamed 'Ladies Fingers' in the East), and squash or marrow.

Fruit included bananas, paw paws, large limes (superior to lemons in drink form), mangoes (the best from an imported strain), pineapples, starapples, mangosteens, sapodillas, guavas and simatoos.

Fish from the river or the sea included querriman, lukanani, butterfish, shrimps caught in cast-nets off the shore, and salt fish (imported) which was made into cakes and fried.