

MEMORIES OF BYGONE DAYS

by Pat Collins

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The hamlet of Radford is situated between Timsbury and Camerton, in the Cam Brook valley, about seven miles West of Bath. Joan's researches indicate that there were Collins' established in the area as far back as 1511. The mill house where I was born is now a ruin. It was built (or rebuilt) in stone in 1706, but the adjacent water mill had already been in operation by a member of the Collins family certainly since 1611. The present mill building is still standing and dates from the mid—seventeenth century. Incidentally members of the Collins family at various times have been: Churchwardens, Tanners, Market Gardeners, Maisters, Brewers and we even boast an Artist, James Edgell Collins, who painted in oils.

My grandfather, William Nuth Collins, died in 1911 (age 80) and his grave is in Timsbury Churchyard. Father (Henry Stanley) was one of twelve children. He took over the running of the mill on his father's death, and he converted the mill to steam power probably just before the first world war.

Mother and father married in 1912; her maiden name was Martha Love. Her father, George Love, ran a malting business in Tunley and he married Sara, a member of the Tucker family. Joan records that some time after the death of her father in 1895, she was appointed Churchwarden at Dunkerton Church; it was very unusual for a woman to hold that office at that time.

Mother and father, with so many relations living around about seem to have had a very active social life. I wonder if the photographs of father in his full Scottish attire could suggest a visit to Scotland to see mother's Scottish cousins!

Mother had help in the house — there were no convenience foods in those days! Cream and butter making, baking, preserving fruit and eggs, washing, were just some of the household duties for which she required help. I remember her speaking about the numerous loaves she had to test - bake in order to determine whether flour made from the inferior grain of the First World War period could be used for bread making. When we children started arriving my parents engaged 'Mothers Helps' - firstly Alfa, a charming Icelandic girl (with

whom Leslie Tucker was very friendly!) and later dear Maggie Atkins, with whom Joan remained in contact until Maggie died quite recently.

Joan was born in 1915, my brother John (who was always called Jack) in 1916 and myself in 1918. The happy marriage was to end all too soon. 1921 proved to be a tragic time for mother; first a stillborn fourth child, then the death of her mother, Grannie (Sarah) Love. But saddest of all, my father died in December 1922 aged 54 after having been ill with heart disease. He must have consulted a Harley Street specialist as Joan recently showed me the consultant's letter indicating that there was little hope of recovery. Prior to the existence of antibiotics heart disease, a legacy of rheumatic fever earlier in life, was a common cause of premature death.

I was four at the time and regrettably have few recollections of father. An early photograph shows me sitting on his knee (with my thumb on my nose) with Joan and Jack standing alongside. Other memories of Radford days include:

- * My falling into a bed of nettles and being comforted by Joan.
- * Being taken upstairs to see Grannie Love for the last time.
- * The walled garden, manure heap, and the motor delivery lorries.
- * The room at the back of the house where cream and butter were made.
- * Uncle George who ran the mill office.

TUNLEY DAYS 1923-34

Father's death necessitated mother leaving the mill (which Uncle George ran until 1925 when the business went bankrupt). My great-aunt Elizabeth Pike (née Tucker, my grandmother's sister) kindly invited mother to share her house since following her sister's death she had been living on her own in Tunley at Sarabeth (Sarah/Elizabeth). This was an ideal arrangement for us all, especially for we children, as we had the advantage of continuing to live in the country in a house with a large garden and outbuildings. We were scarcely aware that it was not our house although Jack and I had to curtail our rides down the garden.

My recollections of Aunt Bessie include:

- * Her two-cabinet Cossor radio, with horn speaker, high tension (120V), grid bias batteries, an accumulator which need charging frequently. We listened to the BBC station 2LO — one of the very few stations available.

- * Playing bridge with her when she was confined to her bed and her exhortation to deal the cards like 'rose petals' not like 'hail storms'!

- * Her tea parties in the lounge.

- * Her ability to charm away warts.

- * Her BSA car with Daimler (sleeve valve) engine. Luggage was strapped on a rack at the back. Mr Veal, who Lived nearby, acted as her gardener, handyman and chauffeur.

- * Her regular summertime departures to stay with relations at Minehead and elsewhere.

Other recollections of my life at Tunley include:

- * Lessons in the Nursery Room which continued until I was 9 and went to school. I cannot now remember the names of our governess; one in particular we disliked intensely!

- * Christmas toys — the Meccano and Hornby train catalogues, visits to the toy shop in the Corridor, Bath. Steam engines including a Bassett Lowke loco engine, stationary steam engine.

- * Playing marbles ('mense', 'no-mense'!) and diablo.

- * Christmas Eve — Handbell players coming into the Hall while we children watched from the top of the stairs.

- * Christmas meals with Aunty Puss (Ethel) Leslie, Stanley (when not in and Dennis. Leslie with his crown coin in his Christmas Pudding.

- * Indoor fireworks and Japanese flowers.
- * Card competition games (e.g. Jumbled Words, 'Things to be found in the Kitchen' — EPPPRE (pepper)).
- * Singing round the piano — mother playing.
- * Our Rector (Rev A Jones) and his party puzzle with the poker 'The moon is round, it has two eyes, a nose and a mouth'!
- * Playing charades.
- * Delight at having a large garden and adjacent field to play in.
- * Hearing Priston Bells on quiet summer evenings.
- * The long walk across the fields to Dunkerton Church on Sunday mornings.
- * Regular calls by an itinerant Baker, Fish man, Dairyman — with his can and measures and their horse—drawn carts and vans.
- * Occasional calls by a man asking if he could collect nails from the garden. Keeping liens (and rabbits).
- * The old pig sties - making stewed elderberries and pretending it was wine. Woodbine 5 for 2p
- * ROP petrol at 11 ½ pence a gallon.
- * Seeing Sentinel and Foden steam lorries passing through the village.
- * Miners returning from the colliery at the top end of the village with their filthy clothes and caps, on which they fixed their acetylene lamps when working underground. Tipping the spent carbide from their lamps leaving chalky deposits on the pavement.

* Pig killing at the Butchers in the village:— stunning, bleeding, burning off the hair in a straw fire. Asking for the bladder.

* Our Airedale dog 'Twink' who was a great joy to us. How worried Mother was when a farmer accused him of sheep worrying.

* Visits from Aunty Ruth. She walked from Bath and would only have a glass of water while with us! She insisted on paying for the three of us to have riding lessons.

* Visits from Dennis Tucker in his Talbot car - we were very impressed!

* Ditto by Leslie. He once cycled over on a very posh black and gold Sunbeam bicycle.

* Tea sent by Stanley when he was in Ceylon.

* We used paraffin lamps or pressurised 'Tilley' lights prior to electricity.

* Excitement when Aunt Bessie had electric light installed by Mr Heale of Timsbury it was a 50 V set of 2 ½ HP Laster engine powering the generator. A separate belt, when connected, drove a pump which pumped water from an underground tank to the cold-water tank in the house roof. We had to knock the belt off when water came through the overflow.

* Easter holidays at Blue Anchor staying at Mrs Pinchin's cottage. Mother brought the food and Mrs P cooked it. Milk, cream and butter from the farm along the road. Walking to Cleeve Church (primroses in the woods).

* Following the stag hounds. The local train to Dunster and Minehead. Cream teas with Aunty Bessie in a hotel on the front.

* Seeing an 'Indian' motorcycle and sidecar separate coming down the hill from Watchet.

* The storms, with pebbles hitting the front of the cottage.

* The smile on Twink's face when we returned home.

* My friendship with Freddie Pickford, who lived in the cottage next door. They had a crystal set complete with 'cats whisker' and earphones. His father was a miner and I well remember the tin bath being filled in front of the fire ready for his coming back from work.

* Excitement of November 5th - dropping Little Demon bangers into water butts and pushing them up drain pipes.

* Playing cricket for the Village boys team. I once took four wickets with the first four balls of the match!

* My first bicycle - a BSA costing £4 19s 6d partly funded by the sale of two gold sovereigns kindly given by aunts.

* Mother's money worries, especially in the 1930's. she took in Pu's one summer while Aunt Bessie was away in order to keep Jack and I at Monkton. What she sacrificed for our benefit.

SCHOOL

Joan won a scholarship for Bath High School so Mother decided to buy a car to transport her. It was a Singer 8. Joan was dropped at the top of Wellsway from where she went on by tram, and was met again in the afternoon.

Jack and I followed in 1927 going as day boys to Monkton Combe Junior School. This must have caused a great strain on Mother's financial resources, but she was most anxious that we should all have the best education she could afford. As we were day-boys we had to conform to the time table for boarders which meant that we had to get to (and leave) school earlier/later than Joan hence Mother had double journeys! We were dropped at the Glasshouse Café, from there by tram to the tram terminus at Combe Down and then on foot to school.

Recollections

* Made fun of on our first day - village accent and strange undergarments (combs, stays, body belt!!).

* enjoyed games (cricket, hockey and rugby) and also Scouts (I became a patrol leader in the Curlew patrol!). I was a strong lad and was able to look after myself.

* On one occasion snow (from hedge to hedge across the road) prevented us getting to school for three days.

* I moved on to the Senior School in 1932 (until '35). This necessitated a further walk down the hill to Monkton Combe village. All new boys were fags for the first year; whenever a prefect called 'Fag' you had to run! Last boy was given the duty! I was given six strokes on the bottom once for persistently leaving my hockey stick in the cycle shed instead of the correct place!

* Cricket on Longmead was a great joy; I was quite good and regularly played in the 2nd XI. Thanks to the influence of a boy called Sugg, Jack and I went to a summer camp at Seaford School (Sussex) where we both became Christians. I have always felt greatly indebted to Bill Sugg.

* We were obliged to join the OTC (Officers Training Corps) in which we received basic training including the use and care of small arms. The summer camp was always held on Tidworth Plain and I well remember a 12 mile route march, wearing 'field service marching order' one very hot day in 1934!

* A year or more before this, Mother had an accident in the car which shook her up rather badly. The car was a write-off, and the replacement was a Singer 9. I remember how excited we were when it arrived. Jack and I were cycling into school most days by this time which probably explains why we were not in the car at the time.

* Jack and I took it in turns to reverse the car from the garage out to the road so it is quite true to say that we learned to drive backwards first!

* I should have mentioned earlier our close friendship with the Rector's children, Vida, David and Cyril. We saw a lot of them in the holidays and our friendship continued for many years. Only Vida is alive now.

BRISTOL

Our happy Tunley days ended in 1934 (April) on the death of Aunt Bessie. Mother had to vacate Sarabeth. I was still at school and Joan was at Bristol University. (Jack was into his apprenticeship at the Austin Motor Company, Longbridge.)

Mother decided to move to Bristol so that Joan could live at home. This necessitated selling many of our larger articles. I stayed on at School for the summer and autumn terms staying first at Grosvenor (Tuckers) and then at Miss Andrews', an old friend of Mother's. Although I got six School Cert. Credits I did not get one in English which was obligatory for Pharmacy.

Our (top) flat was in Royal Park, Clifton. I went to a coaching establishment, February to July (1935) and finally got my English Credit entitling me to start my Pharmacy training in the Autumn.

During this time I interested myself in making wireless sets, going to the pictures and to concerts, playing tennis. I passed my driving test having bought an old Douglas motorcycle which in time was replaced by a Velocette 250 cc, 2/stroke, a 250 cc BSA Blue Star, and finally in 1938 a Norton 350 cc CJ (on which Trevor Hughes and I toured France in 1937).

I started the Pharmaceutical Society 'Preliminary Scientific Exam' course in the autumn which I passed the following year. It was during the first term of this course that I met Trevor Hughes. In 1936 I started my apprenticeship at the former Boots shop in Castle St Bristol, my salary starting at £15 1s pw. Hours 9-7 (Wed 9—1pm) and 9—8 pm Saturdays. I enjoyed this stint which was enlivened by motorcycle rides with Charlie the Porter on half days, my first tentative half pint at the pub across the road after closing on Saturdays, and the staff outings. Counter sales earned commission (not for apprentices!), woe betide me if I didn't put any big sale through the Manager's till! Saturdays were hectic, Castle Street being the popular shopping street and Christmas Eve we remained open until after 10 pm.

I joined a Territorial Army unit in 1938 - a cavalry unit about to change over to Heavy Anti-Aircraft. We were issued with tunic, riding breeches, puttees, cap, lanyard and swagger cane to begin with! We were away at summer camp near Havant, in August 1939 when war was declared; our unit was 'embodied' so there was no coming home! I was excused the remaining year of my apprenticeship. Our first task was to defend the Bristol Aeroplane Works - with

a Lewis gun! Before long our guns and equipment arrived and we moved to a field near Portishead, placed to defend Avonmouth Docks.

I volunteered for a request for a Despatch rider and enjoyed the greater freedom which this gave, being able to pop in to have a cuppa at home from time to time. One day it was announced that anyone whose training had been interrupted by the war could apply for temporary release; I was the envy of our Battery when my name came up! This was in about April 1940.

After going back to the shop for a short time I was back at the Merchant Venturers Technical College in the Autumn for the final Pharmacy Qualifying year. It was here that I first met Philip Henstridge.

The winter 1940/41 we started getting air raids. Fire watching duty came round quite frequently. One night a small bomb fell on the house opposite and the glass from my bedroom window was blown in over my bed!

In June we settled in at very comfortable digs (Mrs White, 17 Portland Road). Joan had in the meanwhile changed jobs and was from the Autumn Term teaching at Epsom. So Mum left Bristol and moved to a (top) flat at Tayles Hill, Ewell. Mr James Chuter Ede, Home Secretary, occupied a lower flat.

While at Oxford I joined the Home Guard. I remained at Oxford until December 1942 and judging from my diaries I had a happy time there. Despite my writing the Army Reserve people did not want to take me back yet!

Boots sent me to Bristol in December 1942 but before long I was sent to Melksham from where I did relief duty at: Chippenham, Devizes, Swindon, Bath and Clevedon. Eventually in July 1943 I was recalled and posted to Heavy A.A. Training Regt at Oswestry - where I met May - while we were both sheltering from the rain at a Salvation Army Hostel in Oswestry. I subsequently proposed to her when we were away at firing camp near Barmouth, in October. In late January 1944 I was posted to Clacton-on-Sea to join the 274 Battery HAA (TA). Then to Horsham and nearer D Day to Shirley, Southampton.

However before then, on April 8th 1944, May and I were married — at the North British Hotel Edinburgh. Mum and Joan came up. After a short honeymoon in Glasgow sadly we both had to return to our regiments and I did not see May

again for a year. We were busy preparing for D Day for the next few weeks but eventually landed at the other side on the afternoon of D Day.

My letters to Grannie cover this period, and the next few months. V Day found us at Flushing from where we moved to near Hannover. During this time May had been in Sussex shooting at V1's - generally having a busy time. Two things I particularly remember in the weeks after VE Day; a weekend's skiing break in the Harz mountains and a week at Göttingen University on a German trip.

Of course, I nearly forgot the horse riding at a German Cavalry barracks in Hannover.

I forget the date of my Demob. (No diary!) However it must have been in the early summer 1946. Boots posted me to Cheltenham, the shop in the Promenade. We found rooms in Naunton Way (Leckhampton). My salary at that time was (pa). However this accommodation was obviously unsuitable, May by that time being pregnant so we found a flat in Pitville Circus. The landlady was very German, was rather unsympathetic and when May went into the Maternity Unit we really had to find somewhere else to live. A 'garden' flat in Sydenham Villa Road was the answer, rather austere but a very charming landlady. Twins were not expected I was on the point of asking for a transfer back to Retail when our present house, opposite Philip Henstridge became available. Being on higher ground we decided to buy it (We have been living here happily ever since, We moved in January 1951 and May's bronchial problems have been very much better since then.

Our first family holiday was at Skegness in 1949, Grannie accompanying us. The following year I bought a 1939 Singer 9 for £40. It got us to Scotland - just. At Sighthill, where Isa and Bill and family were living, I noticed that one of the wire wheels was collapsing; fortunately I was able to obtain a replacement. That was the first of several very happy family holidays in Scotland. The Singer also took and *Morpha Nevin* sometimes with Grannie; it was later replaced by a Riley 9 Kestrel which was equally troublesome!

Other happy holiday memories of that time include:

* Ian trying to let us know that a home made trailer, containing our Christmas presents and luggage, was rapidly being left behind on the roadside. This was

on our way to visit Joan and To and children when they were living at Hatfield Peverel.

* The barbecues, (with twists!) at Midford; just one of the many happy visits there.

* A disastrously wet holiday at Westward Ho! with Dennis and Margaret Giles.

* A windy holiday at Crackington Haven when my canoe was reduced to matchwood by the waves.

* The happy seaside holidays on the Warren Site with Jack and Estelle and their family which resulted in my buying my own sailing dinghy.

* The family joke 'Is this the way to Wareham?' when we were on holiday in Dorset.

* May's father died in 1959; he was a good father, high principled, cheerful and popular. The death of a daughter followed soon after by that of May's mother was a sad blow and he was never quite the same man again. He was certain where he was going and that it would be a better place, all present at his funeral did their best to respect this wish!

As this saga draws to a close I recall an occasion when Grannie was staying with us at the time. She came with us to Trent Lock where I wanted to try out my newly completed two seater canoe. I first took out Susan, and then Jan, but Grannie was insistent that she was going next. Wearing her blue straw hat and summer coat bystanders looked on amazed!

Grannie died in December 1963. She saw much sadness in her life; just ten years of married life then forty-one years of widowhood. She overcame all her difficulties, never spoke ill of others, and did not have an enemy in the world. She was a wonderful mother and we have cause to be grateful to her for so many reasons. Thanks to Joan her latter years were comfortable and happy.

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