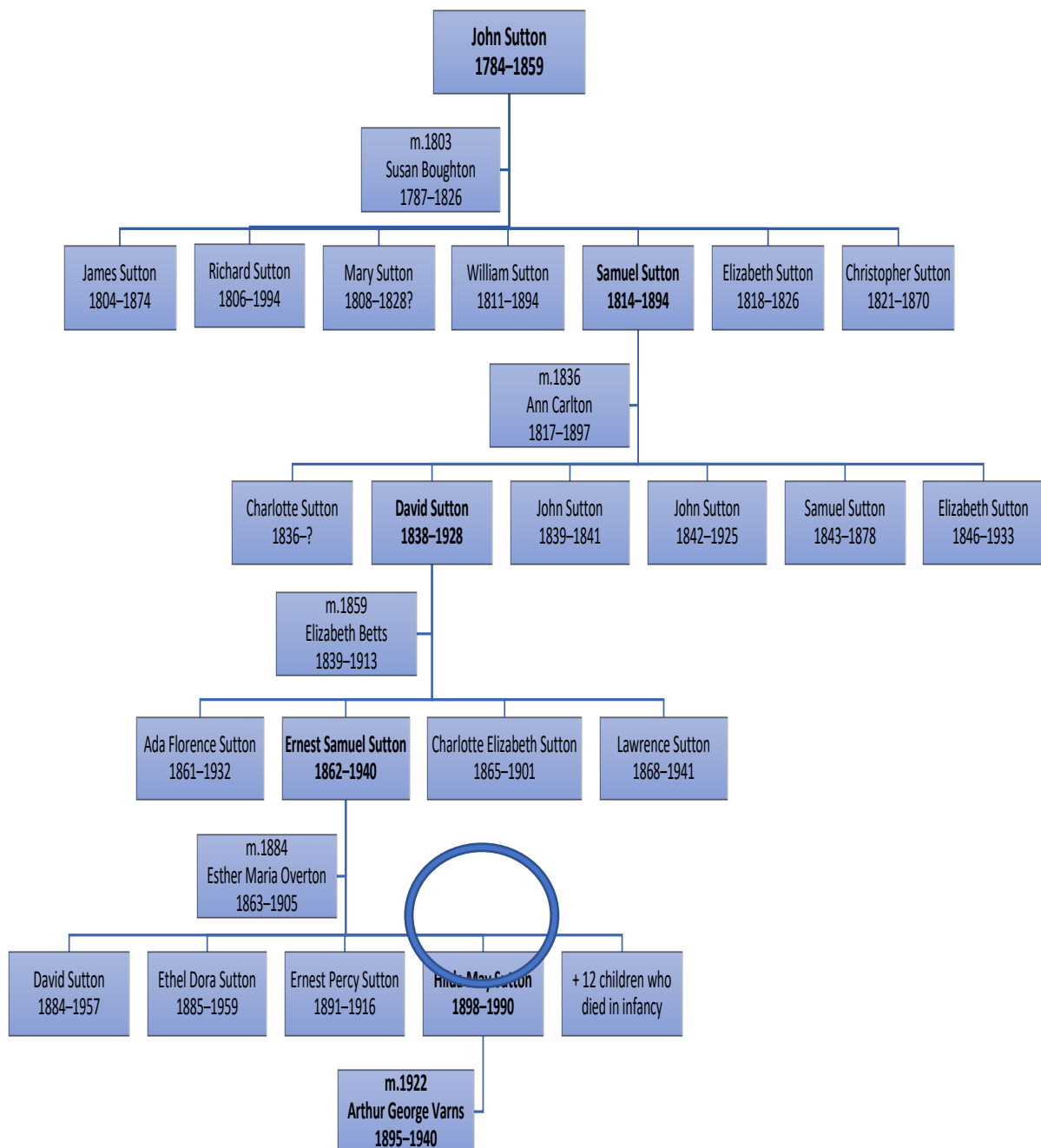


2. The Suttons, the family of my maternal grandmother, Hilda May

Introducing the Sutton family

Hilda, my grandmother on my mother's side, was born Hilda May Sutton in Great Cressingham, Norfolk, on 7 October 1898. She died of a heart attack in the Annandale Homes, Conniers Way, Burpham, Guildford, on 18 June 1990. I signed her death registration as the 'informant'. To me, she as 'Nan,' but I grew up knowing virtually nothing about her family. This account explores her family tree as we have determined it, making heavy use of photographs and documents she left. Here, first, is the family tree, given in schematic format:



Rather like my father, Wilfred Leonard, Hilda May said very little about her family. Unlike with my father, though, I was given a reason as to why, although I never knew whether this was the real reason. As I was told it, Hilda's mother, Esther Maria Overton, had died when Hilda was seven, and she had moved to Gooderstone to live with her older sister, Ethel Dora Sutton ('Dora'), eight miles to the west of Great Cressingham. This seemed a little simplistic, and my suspicions grew as I discovered the Sutton family's considerable roots in Great Cressingham. Dora had been born on 18 June 1885, so was 13 years senior to Hilda, and when Hilda went to live with her, in 1905 or perhaps 1906, she was already in service as a cook. She was living on The Street, Gooderstone – near the Wesleyan chapel. By the time the 1911 England Census was taken, the two sisters were living at a different house on The Street, namely, The Lodge. Simply put, so far as I can recall Great Cressingham was hardly ever mentioned. Gooderstone was where Hilda talked about and Gooderstone was where her son and daughter associated Hilda's childhood with.

There was, though, something else mentioned in whispers to her daughter, Doreen Joyce (my mother; 13 May 1928 – 11 May 1986) and her granddaughter Susan Doreen (my sister, born 25 October 1952): Hilda had suffered abuse in Great Cressingham, possibly from boys in or around the family. She may have held her father, Ernest Samuel, responsible in some way, since she was never close to her father in later life. This being said, her son David George (born 6 June 1925) remembers visiting Gooderstone and going from there to Great Cressingham to meet him. Ernest Samuel, Hilda's father, had been born in Great Cressingham on 26 October 1862.¹ He died in December 1940 in Wayland, on the edge of Watton, the market town a bus or cart ride to the east where the nearest station to Great Cressingham was situated (on the Thetford and Watton Railway that ran from Thetford to Roudham Junction, then on to Swaffham; Watton station was the nearest to Great Cressingham, though Hilda's son, David, does not recall ever having passed through there when visiting with Hilda). Hilda's mother, Esther Maria, was a year younger than Ernest Samuel. She was the daughter of James and Esther Overton and had been baptised in Great Cressingham on 5 October 1863. Aged seven at the time of the 1871 England and Wales Census, she was living with her parents (the census records her father as a wheelwright), six siblings, and a lodger (George Green). Marriage banns were proclaimed at the beginning of January 1884, and Esther Maria married Ernest Samuel on 24 January – in Great Cressingham. She died on 10 October 1905 and was buried three days later. Her death certificate, shown below, states she died from cancer of the uterus; the informant was her daughter Ethel Dora. Both her parents, James and Esther, are buried in the grounds of Great Cressingham, their gravestone facing west, with the following inscription: "In loving memory of our dear mother Esther OVERTON, who died Decr 21st 1899, aged 72 years. Also of our dear father James OVERTON, who died Jany 5th 1900, aged 74 years. 'For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God/bring with him,' 'Not my will but Thine be done.'" There is no grave recorded for Esther Maria; nor is there one for Ernest Samuel.

What of their children? Hilda talked of two apart from Dora: her eldest brother David Sutton, born in the third quarter of 1884, and Ernest Percy, born in July 1891. Both were born in Great Cressingham. David died in Surrey in July 1957, aged 73, and Ernest Percy died on active service in World War I, at The Somme on 21 October 1916. This was all we knew. However, when we examined the 1911 England and Wales Census something quite

¹ The very considerable research using www.ancestry.co.uk necessary as groundwork for this document, for both Sutton and Varns family trees, and birth and death registrations, was undertaken by Charlotte Howard.

unexpected was revealed. The 1911 census introduced a new element, 'particulars as to marriage,' adding three columns to complete. In these, Ernest Samuel reported the couple had 16 children born alive, of whom only four were still living. Twelve had died!

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 12508412-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SWAFFHAM in the County of Norfolk

1905 DEATH in the Sub-district of Swaffham

Columns—	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
94	Ninth October 1905 Great Cressingham	Esther Maria Sutton	Female	42 years	Wife of Ernest Samuel Sutton	Cancer of Uterus Certified by A. Dr. Thomas L.R.C.P.	Edith Dora Sutton Daughter Present at the death Great Cressingham	Tenth October 1905	J. Hughes Deputy Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 28th day of January 2022

DYE 580840

See note overleaf

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201006 0621 APS/A13P

RTR

Esther Sutton death certificate

Ernest Samuel and Esther Maria had 16 children? Hilda had never mentioned anything of this. Bluntly, it was highly unusual, if not unheard of, for 12 to die as infants in late Victorian England. By the turn of the twentieth century, infant mortality rates were generally much, much lower. The rate across Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century for children born alive who died within a year is estimated to have been around 128 per 1,000 births; it was higher in northern industrial conurbations, and lower in much of the south. Indeed, in the Thetford area it had fallen to 97.75 per 1,000 by 1911.² Other estimates do not suggest anything different: the rate for infants who died before they reached their fifth birthday in 1911, for instance, was 228 per 1,000 births across Britain.³

What might explain the large number of deaths among Ernest Samuel and Esther Maria's children? One potential reason might be an inherited disease, and both Dora and Hilda passed on thyroid disease to their children, indicating that Esther Maria – their mother – suffered from this. It is known that there is an increased risk of mortality for infants born to mothers with thyroid disease. Again, Esther Maria died of cancer of the uterus, and this might account for illness in children born in her final years of life. But still, for 12 out of 16 children to die is far, far, too many. Poverty is a factor in infant mortality, and the family were certainly poor. This is clear from the marriage register, which gives Ernest Samuel's occupation as a 'higgler' (a pedlar). In his defence, though, he married in January, when little agricultural work would have been available, so it is not surprising that he was scraping a living from other activities. In the 1881 and 1891 England Census he was listed as an agricultural labourer, always working for others rather than 'on [his] own account', presumably on a piecemeal basis. In the 1901 census he was a house thatcher, only in 1911 for him to once more be a farm labourer. In the 1921 census he was again a thatcher, working along with five others for a Mr Eagle (who had grown up in Hilborough a mile or so west of Great Cressingham, but who was the son of a Great Cressingham-born mother, Ann). By the time the 1939 England and Wales

² <http://www.populationspast.org/imr/1911/#7/52.650/-2.269>.

³ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/1041714/united-kingdom-all-time-child-mortality-rate/>.

Register was taken at the onset of war and with the purpose of producing national identity cards, he was listed as a 'house thatcher (retired).' He died the following year.

Hilda's sister and eldest brother had both left home to work in service by the time of the 1901 England Census. Could it be that their parents could not afford for them to remain at home? Dora had moved to Gooderstone and, aged 15 by the time of the census, was lodging as a domestic servant with Thomas Spinks (aged 47, listed simply as a 'worker') and his wife Ruth E. Spinks (aged 43). Since the census listed houses and occupants from the eastern end of the village westwards, she was lodging in a house four doors (counting on both sides of the road) to the east of the Wesleyan Chapel. The same census reports David Sutton as a domestic gardener working in West Bilney, 14 miles away from home on the road to King's Lynn. He was lodging with Thomas Baldry and Baldry's wife Lois and son Thomas at Lodge Gate, Common Road. In the census, Thomas recorded his occupation as a warrener (rabbit trapper) and vermin killer – at the time, low-grade work – and it would seem he worked alongside David for the owners of the big house, The Hall. Today, The Hall at Bilney is listed; it has sixteenth-century roots but was substantially rebuilt in the early twentieth century.⁴

Once Hilda left home to live with her sister Dora, Ernest Percy was the sole child remaining with Ernest Samuel in Great Cressingham. He enlisted in 1914, aged 23, as a private in the Norfolk Regiment – 13278 was his regimental number.⁵ Until 25 July 1915 he was stationed at home, but he then embarked for France. He was wounded on 24 September but soon returned to the front. He dies in action at The Somme after being in the trenches for what must have been a miserable 15 months of purgatory. By then, he had accrued a service credit of £4 11s. 9d. (four pounds, eleven shillings and nine pence), and this was paid out to his father. In August 1919, his father also received a war gratuity of £9 for his son's service. The two payments, in 2022 prices, would have amounted to the equivalent of £730.00, quite a tidy sum.

But what of the 12 children who the census suggests had died? Tracing them is not an easy task. Eight or nine can be confirmed, leaving three or four uncertain, because a family bible survives with their names and dates of birth written inside its front cover (inside its back cover, Ernest Samuel listed his own brothers and sisters). We can link eight of these to birth and death registrations. The bible had been presented to Ernest Sutton in 1873 for 'reciting pieces at the Parish Sabbath Anniversary', so it does not predate his generation. Cross-checking the names in it with baptism and death registrations gives eight who died as infants: Ernest, born 12 September 1886, died before baptism; Esther Lena, born 1 February 1893, buried on 5 April 1894, aged 14 months; Hannah Elizabeth, born 1 March 1894 and buried on 12 March – the burial record notes that Ernest Samuel performed the ceremony; Samuel, born 2 February 1895, baptised on 30 March and buried on 14 May, lived for three months; Lawrence, born 28 July 1896; Cecil, born 28 August 1897, baptised on 28 October and buried on 30 December 1897, lived four months; Clarence Edward, born 14 January 1902, baptised on 20 April 1902 and buried on 9 October, aged almost 10 months; Herbert, born 26 November 1903, baptised on 30 November and buried on 12 January 1904. In addition, the name Charlotte is written in pencil in the bible after Ernest, but with no date – could she have been a twin? We have not found either a birth or death registration, so are uncertain whether

⁴ There is a photograph of the hall at <http://www.eastwinchandwestbilney.co.uk/history/west-bilney-miscellany-of-photos>.

⁵ Hilda left a newspaper cutting about the Norfolk Regiment in her effects from 1919, when the king presented new colours to their representative contingent shortly before their departure for service in India.

she was a child of Ernest and Esther. If we take her name out, we are back to eight, and it is always possible that a mistake was made in the census columns, and the census should have recorded '12 children, 4 still alive'. But there are traces of other children who may have been Ernest and Esther's: Frances, buried shortly after birth in September 1886, who if one of the children would have been a twin of Ernest (in which case Charlotte, if one of the children, would have been born later); August Olive Evelyn, who survived for a year but was buried in March 1888; an unnamed boy buried towards the end of 1888; and Stanley George, who died shortly after birth in late 1903. This gives a potential 13, so could well account for 12 who died. And, putting the eight confirmed with the dates of birth of the four possible additional children, would indicate that Esther Maria gave birth to a new baby almost yearly – considerable fecundity, but not something that would have improved her health. Below, I reproduce the death certificates of two of those who died: Esther Lena, who is recorded to have died of bronchitis, and for whom her grandmother signed as informant; and Herbert, who died aged five weeks of being 'weakly from birth' – his mother was the informant, but since she was illiterate she put a cross on the form.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE
Application Number 12508412-3

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SWAFFHAM
1894 DEATH in the Sub-district of Swaffham in the County of Norfolk

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
117	18th March 1894 Swaffham R. B. C. P.	Esther Lena Swaffham	Female	14	Daughter of Ernest Swaffham	Bronchitis	E. Swaffham Grandmother Swaffham	18th March 1894	R. B. Thomas Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 28th day of January 2022

DYE 580841

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201058 0421 AFS/ALP

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GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE
Application Number 12508412-5

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SWAFFHAM
1904 DEATH in the Sub-district of Swaffham in the County of Norfolk

Columns:-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
383	27th January 1904 Swaffham R. B. C. P.	Herbert Swaffham	Male	5	Son of Ernest Swaffham	Weakly from birth	E. Swaffham Mother Swaffham	27th January 1904	R. B. Thomas Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 28th day of January 2022

DYE 580865

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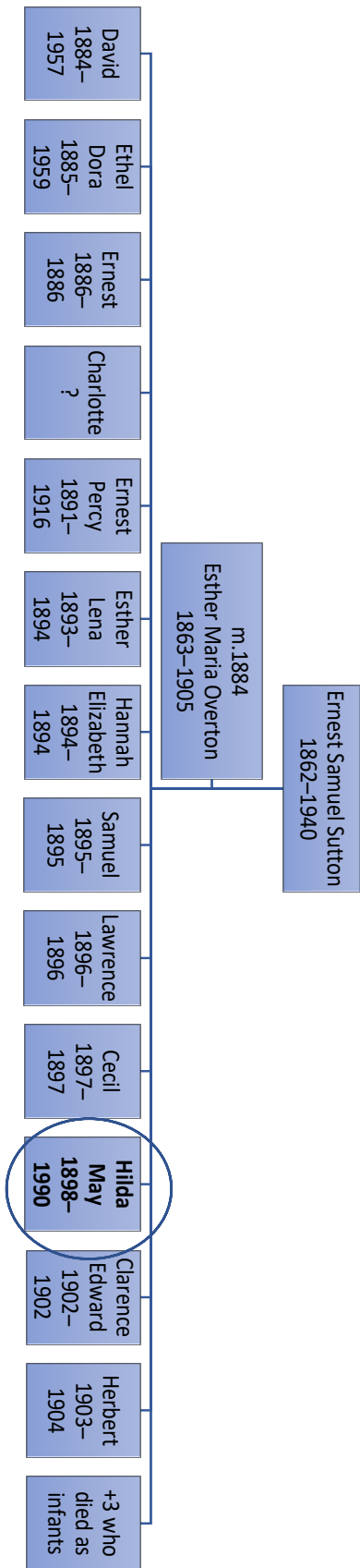
201058 0421 AFS/ALP

See note overleaf

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

THE SIXTEEN CHILDREN OF ERNEST SAMUEL SUTTON AND ESTHER MARIA OVERTON

The chart below plots the children we have identified onto the family tree:



Tracing back in time...

Could there be another explanation for misfortune in the Sutton family? Hilda sometimes mentioned that her grandfather or great grandfather had once been a 'gentleman farmer' but had lost his fortune due to gambling or alcoholism. Could this have been her grandfather, David Sutton (Ernest's father and my great great grandfather)? David had been born in January 1838 in Great Cressingham. He was baptised there on 1 April. The 1841 census records him, aged three, living with his parents Samuel Sutton and Anne (or Ann; née Carlton), together with his five-year-old sister Charlotte. The 1851 England Census lists him as a scholar, aged 13, living at 1 Manor Buildings, Great Cressingham, with his parents and four other siblings – Charlotte (at this time aged 15), John (9), Samuel (7), and Elizabeth (5) – and with his grandfather John who, aged 64, is simply listed as a 'lodger'. Manor Buildings is associated with today's Manor House, recorded from the fifteenth century as Risley's Manor and from the mid-sixteenth controlled by the Jenny family. It is the most important building in the village, part of what had once been a substantial manor house, it today has Grade 1 listing status due to its terracotta friezes and decorated tracery suggesting considerable former splendour.⁶

David Sutton married Elizabeth Betts in 1859 when he was 21. Elizabeth had been born to John Betts and Mary (née Moore) on 20 April 1839. She had been baptised on 19 May in Shropham, Norfolk, about 12 miles southeast of Great Cressingham. Her father's father, William, had been born in Shropham, and his mother was Ann (née Fielding). William and Ann had baptised two children with the name of John, one four days after his birth on 28 June 1801, and one on 14 December 1803, again four days after his birth. The first presumably died in infancy, since the second clearly survived – he was the father of Elizabeth. To complicate matters slightly, the family appear to have left the Church of England for the Wesleyans since John – the second John – was baptised for a second time in a chapel alongside three siblings, George, Mahala, and Harriet, on 3 March 1816. 'Mahala' is a Hebrew name that was often used in the early nineteenth century to refer to American First Nation girls, but which also enjoyed some popularity in England as a girl's name. When Elizabeth was 12, the 1851 England Census was taken. This reports her living with her mother and four siblings: George (born 1833), Harriet (b.1835/36), Robert (b.1844) and Jane (b.1846). Her mother, Mary, is listed as a former agricultural labourer and as head of the family – indicating John Betts had died.

David Sutton and Elizabeth are missing from the 1861 England Census, but their marriage registration, from 1859, survives. They had four children during the 1860s in Great Cressingham: Ada Florence (1861–1932), Ernest Samuel (Hilda's father and my great grandfather; 1862–1940), Charlotte Elizabeth (1865–1901) and Lawrence (1868–1941). The 1871 England Census gives David's occupation as a dealer and reports that he was living with Elizabeth and the four children, still in Great Cressingham. By the time of the 1881 England Census, he had become an inn keeper, running The Wind Mill at the west end of the village at Water End, on the road towards Swaffham. The windmill, marked across the car park from the inn has long since gone (although an important wind and water mill survives in Little Cressingham, the next village southeast). Today, the inn is the The Olde Windmill Inn, and claims to have been operating since 1650.⁷ The census does not indicate whether he was the

⁶ Photographs at <http://www.lookandlearn.com/history-images/M488864/Great-Cressingham-Manor-House-Known-as-Gt-Cressingham-Priory> and <http://www.thedicamillo.com/house/the-manor-house-great-cressingham/>. Listing at <http://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101342581-manor-house-great-cressingham#.YdBRKC-I3o0>.

⁷ <http://oldewindmillinn.co.uk>.

owner or a tenant. Although the late nineteenth century saw breweries increasingly buying up inns and tying landlords to them, the rural location of Great Cressingham would have given little incentive for a brewery to take control. However, it was tied to a brewery in the early twentieth century, until the current owners, the Halls family, bought it from the brewery tenancy in 1956. It was still common in the late nineteenth century for a landlord to run an inn part-time, supplementing his income from other work such as farming, leaving daytime work in the inn to his family or to junior employees. A farm could provide produce for the inn, and the Wind Mill sits very close to Water End Farm – with its large, Georgian farmhouse.⁸ The Halls turned the inn back into a freehouse, and it has grown substantially over the years. It now offers both accommodation and rooms for dining and meetings that can be closed off – Prince William is reported to have been a frequent customer, due to the ability to close off rooms, visiting with Harry from his estate to the north of the county.

By the time the 1881 census was taken, Ada Florence had left home, but six children were still living with David and Elizabeth at the inn: Ernest Samuel, Charlotte Elizabeth, Lawrence, Selina (1871–1941), Harriet (born 1873) and Hannah Elizabeth (born 1875). A further child arrived a year later, Esther Maud. The 1891 England Census records that David was still running the inn, living with Elizabeth and the three youngest children (Harriet, Hannah, and Esther). But things had changed by the turn of the century, since in the 1901 England Census, although David and Elizabeth are still living at Water End, he is listed, aged 63, as an agricultural labourer. A row of workers' cottages in Water End, though much altered and rebuilt, still sits near both the inn and the farm, and he was living in one of these. By 1901, none of David and Elizabeth's children remained at home. Ernest Samuel had, of course, married Esther Maria Overton in 1884, and among Ernest Samuel's siblings Ada Florence married George Hoggett in Great Cressingham in 1885, Lawrence married Ada Newton on 30 September 1888 and settled in Great Cressingham, Charlotte Elizabeth married Charles Henry Patterson in 1892, Harriet married George Pratt in 1894, and Selina married Frederick James Davie in Lowestoft in 1898. The 1901 census does record whether David and Elizabeth's granddaughter, Mabel Daisy, born in 1895 to their unmarried daughter Hannah, was living with them.

Ten years' later, the 1911 England Census records that David has become an old age pensioner, 'formerly labourer general', and is still living with Elizabeth in Water End, now along with two grandchildren, Daisy (given the age (16), this is Mabel Daisy) and Reginald Davie – the 11-year-old son of Selina. Elizabeth died on 9 November 1913, aged 74, but David lived on. In the 1921 England Census he is still in Great Cressingham, living with his daughter Selina and her son Reginald. Reginald is now a farm labourer working at Cross Heron Farm. Water End Farm and its cottages were sold in 1925, and although we have not ascertained where he lived

⁸ I have been guided in my comments here by <http://www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk/PDF-Dowloads/ancestors.pdf> and <http://www.genguide.co.uk/source/publican-brewery-and-licensed-victuallers-records-occupations/>. I have also explored research available online about innkeepers in Leeds, York and Bradford during the Victorian era: Karen Green, 'Urban Innkeepers, their Inns and their Role in the Economic and Cultural Life of Leeds and York, 1720–1860,' at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/9627/1/Urban%20Innkeepers%2C%20their%20Inns%20and%20their%20Role%20in%20the%20Economic%20and%20Cultural%20Life%20of%20Leeds%20and%20York%2C%201720-1860%20-%20%20Final.pdf>, and Paul Jennings, 'Occupations in the Nineteenth Century Censuses: The Drink Retailers of Bradford, West Yorkshire,' at http://www.researchgate.net/publication/295933698_Occupations_in_the_nineteenth_century_censuses_The_drink_retailers_of_Bradford_West_Yorkshire

his final years, he died shortly after his ninetieth birthday on 10 July 1928. He is buried in the churchyard of Saint Michael's, Great Cressingham, alongside his wife, Elizabeth, the stone facing west and with a simple inscription under a cross.



The Olde Windmill (top left) and sign (bottom right). Water End Farm (top right), Water End cottages (bottom left) and the River Wissey at Water End



2006 local news story, celebrating 50 years of the Halls family ownership of The Olde Windmill Inn (as displayed at the inn, October 2022)



David Sutton (1838–1928)



The Sutton family in 1913. Taken when David and Minnie visited Great Cressingham (L to R, with relationship to David and Hilda): aunt Hannah, grandfather David and grandmother Elizabeth Sutton, niece Mabel Daisy, and two men, probably uncle Lawrence and father (Ernest Samuel)

Ernest Samuel's brother Lawrence and his sister-in-law Ada (1870–1960), who were uncle and aunt to Hilda, made their home in Great Cressingham. They had 12 children: David Percy (1889–1890), baptised on 24 November 1889 and buried on 4 September 1890; Florence Maud (Florie) (1891–1973), baptised on 28 June 1891; Bertie Laurence (1893–1915), baptised on 21 January 1894 and killed in France on 9 May 1915; Hilda May (1895–1979?), baptised on

19 May 1895; Hubert Charles (1897–1958), baptised on 27 April 1897, died on 20 September 1958; Cecil Stanley (1898–1920), baptised on 25 September 1898; Herman George (1900–1976), baptised on 6 May 1900; Sydney Walter, baptised on 6 April 1902 and buried on 16 October, aged eight months; Dorothy (1903–1996), baptised on 13 April 1903; Gladys Kate (1905–1982), baptised on 3 December 1905; Albert (1908–1960), baptised on 26 July 1908; and Lilian (1910–1960), born on 28 February 1910. Lawrence is buried in Saint Michael's, Great Cressingham, together with Lawrence's wife, Ada and their son Cecil. Bertie Laurence is named on the memorial in the churchyard to the twelve Great Cressingham men. Note, of Lawrence and Ada's twelve children, one shared the name of my grandmother, Hilda May. But, in comparison with Ernest and Esther's children, only one died in infancy.

Lawrence is listed as a farm labourer and agricultural labourer in the 1901 and 1911 censuses, respectively; he and Ada were living on The Street, Great Cressingham in 1911. Lawrence died on 15 October 1941 and was buried in Saint Michael's churchyard. Among their children, Bertie, Hilda's cousin, joined the First Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment as a private – regimental no.18009 – in Norwich on 31 August 1914. His attestation (no.13065) states that he had been working as an agricultural farm labourer in Great Cressingham. He was killed in action on 9 May 1915 and was posthumously awarded the British War Medal; he had accrued the sum of £2 13s 1d, which was paid out to his father on 29 May 1919. He was buried in France and his name is listed on Le Touret Memorial;⁹ he is also named on the Roll of Honour in Great Cressingham. So, Hilda had lost both a brother and a cousin to the war.

Going back a further generation, the father of David, Hilda's great grandfather, was Samuel Sutton. He had been born in 1814 and had been baptised on 2 January 1815. He married Anne Carlton (1817–1897) who, in turn, had been baptised in Great Cressingham on 1 August 1817. The couple married in the village church on 12 May 1836 and had six children: Charlotte (1836–) who tellingly appears to have been born before the marriage since she was baptised as a Carlton; David (Hilda's grandfather); John (1839–1841); John (1842–1925); Samuel (1843–1878); and Elizabeth (1846–1933). Note that the first child named John died an infant, so the parents named their next child John. In the 1841, 1851 and 1871 censuses, David is recorded as being an agricultural labourer, but, and as already noted, in 1851 the family were living in 1 Manor Buildings. Could, then, Samuel Sutton have been the 'gentleman farmer' Hilda later referred to? The census records indicate otherwise, except for where he was living. And if he had ever had money, he lost it, since in the 1881 census he is listed as a higgler (a pedlar), and in the 1891 census, aged 76 and still living alongside his wife, he is still working, but now as a dealer running a shop. He died on 18 September 1894, and his wife Anne died 30 months later, on 24 February 1897; both were buried in Saint Michael's churchyard. Saint Michael's has a detailed record of the graves in its churchyard, and below are photographs of some of those already mentioned:

⁹ The memorial (though his burial place is not recorded) is at Richebourg-l'Avoue, Departement du Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais. <http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15285373/bertie-sutton>.



Graves in St Michael's churchyard, Great Cressingham. Top, L to R: Esther and James Overton, Samuel Sutton, David and Elizabeth Sutton. Bottom, L to R: Lawrence, Ada and Cecil Sutton; war memorial to villagers who died in the Great War (Percy Lawrence is fourth down on second column)

Great Cressingham

The Suttons were clearly well-established in Great Cressingham, although it is not a large village. Its population in the 1894–95 *Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales* was given as 479 people, with a further 82 living to its southwest in Bodney (at that time, the rector for Saint Michael's in Great Cressingham also served Saint Mary's in Bodney). Within the ancient Hundred of South Greenhoe, the Great Cressingham parish, once under the patronage of the Lord Chancellor, enclosed 2431 acres of land. Today it is part of Breckland and has regrown from a population of 279 at the time of the 2001 census back to around 400 with the erection of new housing. The settlement has a considerable history. Volume 6 in *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (1807) includes the following entry:

This town takes its name from a little *river* or *creak* adjoining, termed by the Saxons. In *Domesday Book* it is accounted for, under the lands of William Bishop of Thetford (the *see* being not then removed to Norwich); here were two carucates in domain in the Confessor's time, at the survey 4, one carucate amongst the freemen, then but half a carucate; now 8 acres of meadow, 2 mills, 2 fisheries or fish-ponds, 17 socmen who

held 60 acres, &c. pannage for 60 swine, and 80 sheep; it was valued at 6/. In King Edward's time; now at 9/. Was one mile long and half a mile broad, and paid 14d. *gelt*, when the *hundred* paid 20s. To this there belonged a church endowed with 20 acres of glebe valued at 20d.¹⁰

In this reading, the name is 'Cres-ing-ham', that is, the village at the meadows by a creak or rivulet, but the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website of Norfolk County Council, based on research by James Rye (1991),¹¹ gives two alternative meanings: 'homestead of the family named Cressa', or 'homestead with cress beds.'¹²

Flint remains and Roman tile fragments and coins suggest early inhabitation, and a Roman site has been unearthed to the south of the parish boundary in Little Cressingham. Saxon remains include pottery and an iron spearhead, and the Domesday book indicates Great Cressingham had grown to considerable size and wealth by the late eleventh century. By then, it was almost entirely controlled by the Bishop of Thetford, passing to Norwich Cathedral Priory which held land in the parish until the Dissolution during Henry VIII's reign. There are traces of an early twelfth-century chapel, Saint George's, but Saint Michael's church dates to the thirteenth century. There is also evidence of a mediaeval moated site which was long thought to be a manor belonging to a former priory (and, indeed, Manor Farm was formerly known as Priory Farm), but recent scholarship suggests this was for Risley's Manor, recorded from the fifteenth century, and from the mid-sixteenth century controlled by the Jenny family, who subsequently built a substantial house, part of which survives. There is also a late mediaeval framed hall house, The Vines, which was partially rebuilt in brick in the seventeenth century.

St Michael's church, as with many Norfolk churches, was always far too big for the village. Rectors are known from 1100, and the last, Keith Michael Makins, served briefly from 1958. The rectory was sold and is today known as The Grange. There was an interregnum before the church became part of the Hilborough Group in 1961 – the first grouping of parishes in the Norfolk Diocese – joining 10 parishes including those of Gooderstone and Cockley Cley, and today managed by a single priest in charge.



The Vines (the village's oldest house), an old engraving of the church, and Manor House (behind Manor Farm, today with public access prohibited)

¹⁰ Francis Blomefield, 'Hundred of South Greenhoe: Great-Cressingham', in *An Essay Towards A Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, Volume 6 (London, 1807), pp. 94-107. *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-hist-norfolk/vol6/pp94-107>.

¹¹ James Rye, *A Popular Guide to Norfolk Place-names* (Dereham: Larks Press, 1991).

¹² <http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/record-details?uid=%27TNF113%27>.



Great Cressingham, 1872.



St Michael's Church, Great Cressingham



Great Cressingham: former rectory (now The Grange) and the school, built 1840, which Hilda May would have briefly attended

Further back, and to the side...

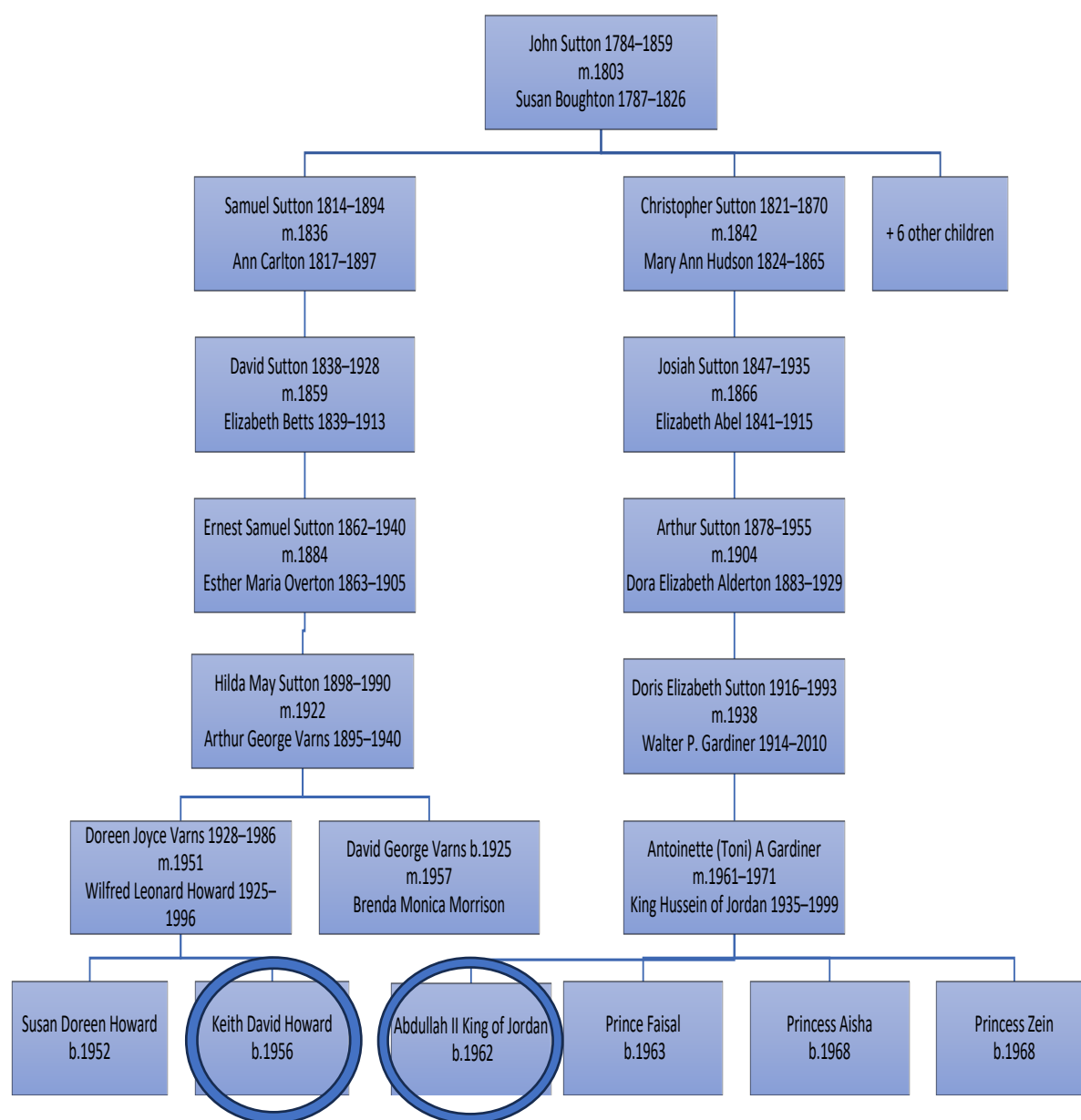
There is one further ancestral generation of the Sutton family who lived in Great Cressingham to be mentioned.¹³ Samuel Sutton's father was John Sutton, baptised in the village on 10 October 1784; he was Hilda's great great grandfather and my four-times great grandfather. John married Susan Boughton on 7 November 1803. He lived all his life in Great Cressingham, dying there on 28 December 1859. Susan, who had been born in 1787, was buried 33 years before him on 3 August 1826.¹⁴ She may well have died due to complications giving birth, since their eighth child, Rhoda, was born and died the same year, expiring on 14 November 1826. The other seven children were James (1804–1874), Richard (1806–1884), Mary (1808–1828?), William (1811–1894?), Samuel (Hilda's great grandfather; 1814–1894), Elizabeth (1818–1826), and Christopher (1821–1870). Note again, in comparison to Ernest and Esther's children, that only one of the eight died in infancy. In the 1841 England Census, John is reported to be living with his sons William and Christopher, all three being agricultural labourers, but by the time of the 1851 England Census and aged 67, he is a lodger in his son's, Samuel's, household.

My reason for introducing John and Susan, four generations back from Hilda, is because it introduces a further Sutton line that remained connected to Great Cressingham at least to Hilda's generation but which latterly forged a relationship with foreign royalty. The line runs through John and Susan's youngest son, Christopher. He married Mary Ann Hudson (1824–1865) in 1842. They had seven children: Harriet (b.1842), George (b.1845), Josiah (1847–1935), Anna (b.1849), Emily (1852–1936), Charlotte (1853–1921) and Christopher (1856–1937). In 1866, Josiah married Elizabeth Abel (1841–1915), and in turn they had four

¹³ Sutton is a common name, and some might be tempted to track back further, perhaps as far as William Sutton AM, although I have found no evidence of a connection. In 1719, William was rector of Great Cressingham but resigned his post to become rector of Salle and vicar of Saxthorpe – parishes some distance away to the north of Norwich.

¹⁴ Some of the research available on www.ancestry.com appears to be erroneous: Susan is confused with a Susanna Boughton born in 1789 and who died in Cambridgeshire in 1835. There are two burial records for John, one clearly recording he was buried on 28 December 1859, but the other, where the entry is marked as a copy, indicating (indistinctly) 23 or 29 December. The first is certified at the bottom of the page, beneath the entry for John's burial, by the rector and so most likely gives the correct date: 'I, Charles Taylor, Rector of the Parish of Great Cressingham and Bodney in the County of Norfolk do hereby solemnly declare that the several writings hereto annexed purporting to be copies of the several entries contained in the several Register Books of Baptisms and Burials of the Parish' (I have found no further copies or originals as are referred to here).

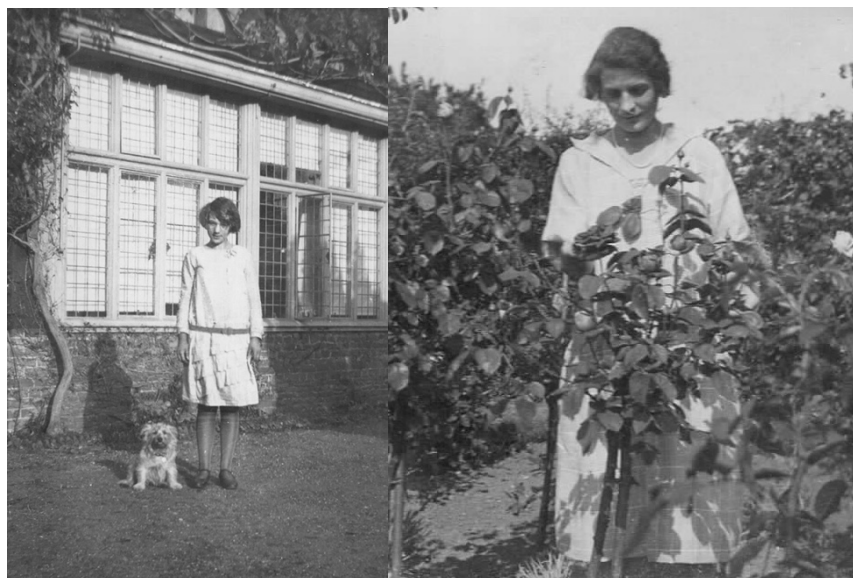
children: Josiah (1866–1954), Christiana (b.1872), Arthur (1878–1958) and George (b.1881). Arthur, in turn, married Dora Elizabeth Alderton (1883–1929) in 1904 and had five children: Arthur Augustus (1904–1996), Robert George (b.1906), Edward Gordon (b.1909), William Rowland (b.1911) and Doris Elizabeth Sutton (1916–1993). This is Hilda's generation, which by my reckoning makes them Hilda's fourth cousins. Although several of the children were baptised in South Pickenham (the adjoining parish to Great Cressingham to the northeast), Dora Elizabeth died in Great Cressingham, on 10 April 1929. In turn, Dora's daughter, Doris, married Lieutenant-Colonel and MC Walter Percy Gardiner (1914–2010), on 24 December 1938 in Chelmondiston, Suffolk (to the southeast of Ipswich on the western bank of the River Orwell). In turn, their daughter Antoinette (Toni) Avril Gardiner (b.1941) in 1961 married King Hussein of Jordan (1935–1999; r.1952–1999), and they, in turn, had four children, including the current King of Jordan, Abdullah II (b.1962).¹⁵ So, although I am not sure such a relationship is actually recognised, I am a cousin six times removed to the King of Jordan! The family tree, parallel to mine, is outlined below.



¹⁵ The other children are Prince Faisal (b.1963), Princess Aisha (b.1968), and Princess Zein (b.1968).

Leaving Great Cressingham

In the 1911 England Census, Hilda was living with her older sister, Dora, at The Lodge, Gooderstone. Dora was not the first Great Cressingham Sutton to move to Gooderstone, and the census records two others. First, Samuel John Sutton, born in Great Cressingham in 1879, was resident in Gooderstone with his wife Faith Winifred (aged 24), son Reginald (aged 5) and daughter Ruby (aged 3), and was working on an estate. Samuel died in July 1912. Second, Edward Sutton, born in Great Cressingham in 1880, was working as a shepherd and living with his wife Hatty Alice (aged 31) and daughter Dorothy (aged 1) in Gooderstone. In simple terms, there were a great number of Suttons who grew up in Great Cressingham, and both Samuel and Edward descended from the eight children of John and Susan Sutton, the great great grandparents of Hilda. John and Susan were Samuel's great grandparents, and his grandfather was Dora and Hilda's great grandfather, Samuel (1814–1894). His son, Samuel (1843–1878), the fifth child of Samuel and Ann Carlton, was the Gooderstone Samuel's father. The older brother of his father, David, was Dora and Hilda's grandfather. Likewise, Edward Sutton's grandfather, Christopher (1822–1870), was the youngest of John and Susan's children, who had seven children with Mary Ann Hudson, including Josiah (whose great granddaughter, Antoinette Avril, married King Hussein of Jordan). Edward's father was also named Christopher (1856?–March 1937), and Edward was one of five children of Christopher and his wife, Frances Maria Robinson (b.1857). Thus, Dora and Hilda were second cousins to Samuel and third cousins to Edward, both once removed because of the shift in generations.



A young Dora at The Lodge (before 1910) and a few years later

So, Hilda lived with Dora. She attended school, although not at Gooderstone (although the school there still operates). Rather, she walked to the nearby Cockley Cley, where the former school building survives, but as a public house known as the Twenty Church Wardens – the tall schoolroom windows (to the left) stand testament to its former use:



In February 1907, Hilda received a good attendance commendation at the school:



By the time of the 1911 England Census, Hilda was 12, approaching her thirteenth birthday. Was she still at school? The census does not suggest she was already working, but Dora's occupation is recorded both as a domestic cook and as a caretaker. To explain this apparent anomaly, I need to turn the clock back to when she moved westwards along The Street sometime after 1901 but before 1911 – to The Lodge. The photograph to the left above suggests she moved earlier rather than later, since it surely depicts Dora as a teenager – although it is unclear whether this was taken at The Lodge. It was a large house, built in 1867, and the census records it had 12 rooms, but it would later become Hall Farm House, and has been recently remodelled, and now has moved into private ownership. However, sitting behind iron gates, I have been unable to visit.



Left: The Lodge, today Hall Farm House. Right: could this be the McNeill's chauffeur, a young Alexander Smith? The car is an early Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, but the photograph is undated and has no annotation

No other people are given on the sheet in the census as living in The Lodge, indicating that Dora and Hilda were the only two in residence when it was taken. The reason for this is that The Lodge was owned by the McNeill family, who were absent at the time of the census.¹⁶ By way of an aside, one of the issues in tracing family trees is that the written record tends to be biased towards the wealthy and the titled, and this is the case with The Lodge and its residents. The 1939 England and Wales Register has Eila McNeill living in The Lodge, aged 72, with a veritable coterie of staff: Minnie Bailey (59, domestic cook housekeeper), Frances M Skelton (23, domestic house parlour maid), Elizabeth M Towell (33, domestic parlour maid), Phyllis M Calver (16, domestic kitchen maid), Alexander Smith (59, chauffeur, mechanic), and Alexander's wife (Jemima Smith, 58, unpaid domestic duties) and daughter (Gladys H Smith, 28, supplementary teacher). Eila would later die while living in The Lodge, on 25 March 1956. Two of her brothers were also living there when they died, Neil on 26 July 1935 and Alexander on 11 August 1947. The Lodge was, I surmise, the family's country residence (or perhaps one of several country residences). The McNeill's were wealthy, and the probate records for the sister and two brothers give the value of their estates as £24,724, £624,131, and £49,597 respectively (£664,137, £45,659,370, and £2,124,282 at 2022 prices). Both Neil and Alexander worked for the British East India Company, and their mother's (Isabella Maria's) family, the Loudons, had long-established connections to the British Raj. Indeed, in the middle of the

¹⁶ www.ancestry.co.uk incorrectly links Dora and Hilda to another family: Joseph Shingfield, the father, aged 57; Martha Shingfield, his wife, 49; and Walter and Ivery, their son and daughter, aged 28 and 11 respectively. The 1891 and 1901 England censuses record the Shingfields living at 1 Chalk Row with additional children – William, Flora, and Jessie. Their house, recorded in the census as having six rooms, was the first of a terrace of small houses on today's Chalk Row Road near May Farm and the remains of the early nineteenth-century Tower Mill. In the 1891 census, Joseph's occupation is given as a traction engine driver, although in the 1901 census he is listed as a threshing engine driver, that is, working on farms to separate grain from the rest of the plant.

nineteenth century William Loudon had been Administrator-General for Bombay and John Loudon Lieutenant-Colonel in the Madras Staff Corps. Eila was born on 13 April 1867 in Bournemouth, lived as a child in Edinburgh, and for much of her life resided in London – in Westbourne Terrace and Hanover Square. In 1915, her brother Neil was living on Green Street, between Park Lane and Grosvenor Square, and his entry in the 1935 probate calendar gives his address as both 29 Green Street and The Lodge, Gooderstone. It is because The Lodge served as a family country house that Dora's entry in the census lists her as both cook (when the family was in residence) and caretaker (when they were absent).

Dora married William Hubbard in the first quarter of 1912. He had been born to Jesse and Martha Hubbard on 14 April 1887 and had been baptised on 5 June at All Saints in Necton, six miles north of Great Cressingham and nine miles northeast of Gooderstone. William was given a middle name that in the baptism record appears to be 'Gadzey' but which on his daughter Gladys Hilda's christening is given as 'Garley'; previous researchers have additionally interpreted this as both 'George' and 'Gazley'. In the 1911 England Census, that is, a year before he married, William was a farm labourer still living at home in Necton with his parents. William and Dora had two daughters, Grace Frances, born on 5 January 1913, and Gladys Hilda, born on 8 April 1915. Grace's birth was registered in Swaffham, at the office which served both Gooderstone and Necton. She was most likely born at Necton, since when William signed up in 1914 for military service in World War I, his short service attestation states he was at the time working as an agricultural farm hand in Necton. With the regimental number 13525, he entered the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment as a private. In spring 1915, he appears to have been training in Salisbury, since the birth of his daughter Gladys Hilda was registered there (she was christened in Laverstock, a village on Salisbury's north-eastern outskirts). William Hubbard was sent to the front, where he died in action in Flanders on 16 September 1917, leaving his young wife and two very young children. The couple are photographed below. William is buried in Tyne Cot Memorial cemetery at Zonnebeke, Arrondissement Ieper, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium,¹⁷ and his name is recorded on the World War I memorial in Necton:



¹⁷ <http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11943753/william-hubbard>.

After Dora married, Hilda briefly seems to have remained in Gooderstone. Postcards confirm she spent a summer in Chapel Park, Kingussie, which I assume was a hunting lodge for the McNeills. This must have been in 1913, because of a postcard sent to her there by her brother David and his wife Minnie, which reported they were visiting her home village, Great Cressingham, and were staying with their grandfather, David, but also noted that an aunt, Hannah (that is, the sister of their father, Ernest Samuel) had visited. This appears to link to the photograph of the Suttons reproduced above. But – and pointedly – the postcard makes no mention of their father, Ernest Samuel. However, Hilda’s links to Gooderstone remained, and it appears that after the summer she returned there. This has to be the case, surely, because she was soon engaged to a Gooderstone man, Gurth Burt (more fully John William Charles Gurth Burt). Born in April 1897 in Gooderstone to James Edward Burt (1872–1953) and Bertha Edith (1877–1966, née Warner), the 1901 census records the family living in Oxborough, the adjoining hamlet to the west of Gooderstone. His father was working as a gamekeeper for Oxburgh Hall; later, he would work as head gamekeeper at Sennowe Park and to rear rare pheasants for Ingham Hall elsewhere in Norfolk.¹⁸ The 1911 census indicates that his father had changed jobs, and was working as a ‘beerhouse keeper’, while the family were living in a six-roomed property. 1906 had seen the birth of Gurth’s sister, Lucy Alma Burt (1906–1983), known as Alma and to whom Hilda was close, since she kept pictures of the family alongside one of a young Alma as the May Queen. But Gurth, her fiancée, died in action during World War I. He had enlisted in Stratford to serve as a Lance Corporal in the Dragoon Guards – Third Battalion, Prince of Wales’ Own, Household Cavalry and Cavalry of the Line (service no.9083) – and was killed in action on 23 March 1918. His remains are interred at the Pozieres Memorial, France,¹⁹ and he is listed on the Gooderstone Roll of Honour as one of the 19 men from the village who fell during the war.²⁰



John William Charles Gurth Burt: mounted, and with his mother and sister

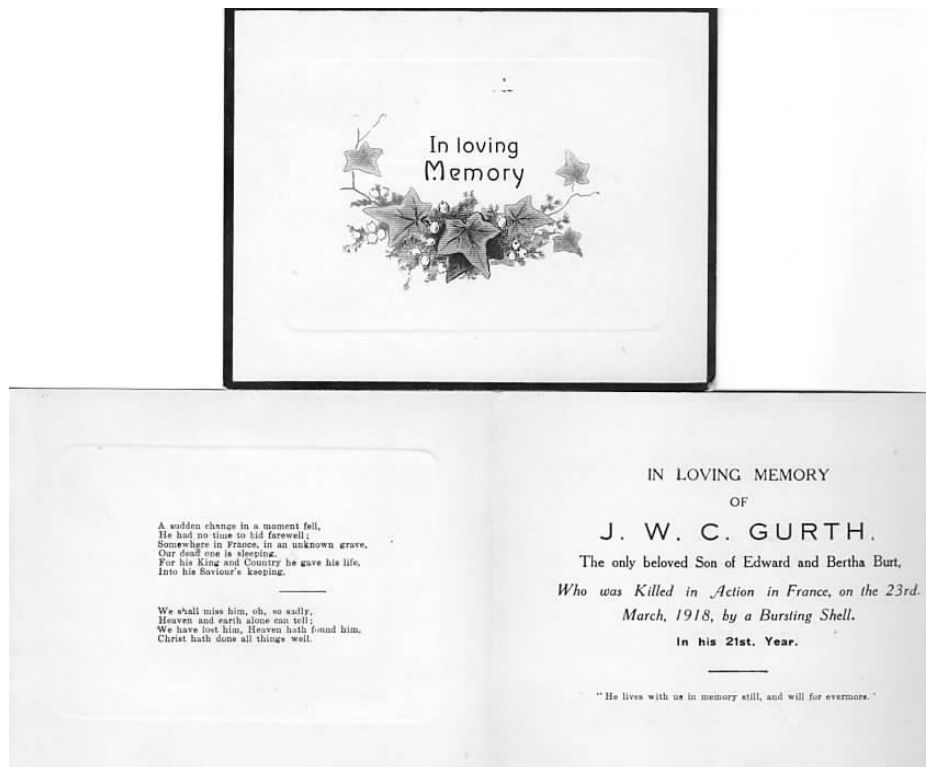
¹⁸ According to an obituary carried in a Kings Lynn newspaper after his death in 1953 at the age of 81. A cutting of this was in Hilda’s effects.

¹⁹ Index M.R.27, Pozieres Mem. Part Two.

²⁰ <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Norfolk/Gooderstone.html>. In addition to the war memorial stone, a hand-written document on paper records the fallen, housed in a frame that hangs in the village church.



John William Charles Gurth Burt: Alma as the May Queen; Gooderstone War Memorial featuring Gurth's name; Gurth with his mother on leave shortly before his death



John William Charles Gurth Burt: memorial card

So, Hilda lost four men to the war: a brother, a brother-in-law, a cousin, and a fiancée. An appendix at the end of this chapter reproduces a poem, 'The Great Sacrifice', sent to Hilda during the war and found in her effects. There is no signature, and the handwriting is not Hilda's; the poem has echoes of more famous poetry from the period, but at this point I have not identified a published copy giving the author. (Hilda also received a posed photo of William Hubbard printed on a postcard at Christmas 1915, when William was serving in France, which features a chalked placard: 'Come and do your bit, boys;' although the back of the card is writing in a different hand to that of the poem).



Hilda had flown away by the time Gurth died and was working in service. Meanwhile, her widowed sister Dora returned to Gooderstone, where the 1921 England census gives her occupation as ‘home duties’ – looking after her two young daughters. Presumably she supplemented her war widow’s pension with domestic work in the village, although she had moved into one of the council houses. By the time of the 1939 England and Wales Register she was living at 4 Council Houses – still on The Street but almost at the opposite (eastern) end of the village to The Lodge;²¹ Hilda’s effects included a registration card giving the address of 9 Council Bungalows, along with photos that may be of other houses in the village associated with Dora. Most of the houses have since been demolished, but one pair survives from what may formerly have been the row of Council Houses (compare the photos below). The 1939 Register states Dora was occupied on unpaid domestic duties, but her daughters had left home and she was by this time looking after an old widower, George Hanniball (born 1858), and others including a soldier in the Coldstream Guards, the 23-year-old Edward Waters.²² A postcard to Hilda from her brother David, probably from 1918, reports that he and his wife Minnie were visiting Dora and her two young daughters, ‘The little ones are so excited and Dora happy to have us.’ Dora was still in Norfolk in 1955 (as a postcard to Hilda posted on 23 August from Norfolk confirmed when Dora wrote, ‘We arrived home soon after 12’). But two years later she was on holiday with her daughter Grace on the South Coast (a postcard sent on 22 August was postmarked ‘Havant’), and she spent her last days in Surrey with her daughters, dying there in July 1959. Hilda would occasionally visit Gooderstone, and the photographs below show her visiting at various times.

²¹ The 1939 Register lists houses and occupants from the western to eastern end of the village, starting with farms, houses and the cottages on Chalk Road (Chalk Row Road), then entering the village with Hill Farm House, until it reaches the eastern end. Just before 4 Council Houses come Rose Cottage, The Beechnuts, Field Barn and Church Farm; Rose Cottage has recently been sold at the time of writing (January 2022; http://www.rightmove.co.uk/properties/111322022#/?channel=RES_BUY).

²² Other names have been blacked out, with the comment ‘this record is officially closed’.



Hilda visiting Gooderstone, before marrying and with her son David George. Both outside Dora's house



Hilda and Dora in Gooderstone, in the 1930s and 1940s



The surviving pair of former council houses at the eastern end of Gooderstone

Interlude: Gooderstone

Gooderstone is a linear settlement set out along The Street – which is probably a Roman road. Small roads go off it, and at the western end Chalk Row Lane runs to the south, past cottages, May Farm and the former Tower Mill (built in 1829 or thenabouts for George Seppings). A track, Mill Drove, runs from Elm Place, one of the roads off The Street near the Swan Inn to Chalk Row Lane, named after a post mill that once operated there. At the western end Gooderstone joins Oxborough. The population of Gooderstone in 2017 was 315,²³ and the parish covers an area of 4.36 square miles. Mesolithic finds suggest early inhabitation, and excavations in the 1950s revealed parts of a Roman building with painted wall plaster and a ceramic and concrete floor. Roman coins, metalwork, and pottery shards have also been recovered, and agricultural digging in the 1970s revealed a Roman cist grave. The Domesday Book records the name as Godestuna ('Guthhere's enclosure') and lists three mills dating from before 1066 and two more that had recently been built. Parts of Saint George's, the Anglican church, are Norman, with additions having been made between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. As with so many churches in Norfolk, it is large, and inside displays a roll of honour for villagers who died during the Great War (and Second World War), matching those listed on the stone war memorial placed at the boundary wall outside; both list Gurth Burt. In the 1970s, low lying meadows to the village's north were turned into water gardens by the farmer Billy Knights, who found the meadows too wet for cattle grazing. After his death, the gardens fell into disrepair, but his daughter undertook restoration and reopened them in 2003 – the entrance is just before 4 Council Houses, where Dora was living at the time of the 1939 Register, going eastwards. Gooderstone views, and the war memorial, are below.



²³ According to the parish council (<https://gooderstonepc.wixsite.com/gooderstonepc/village-information>); Wikipedia, at the time of writing (2022), gives the population as 390 in 2007 and 363 in 2011.

A field or two (or a short walk) to the west of Gooderstone sits Oxborough, home to Oxborough Hall, a mediaeval moated manor house.²⁴ The estate was inherited in 1476 by Sir Edmund Bedingfield, who was licenced by Edward IV to build a fortified house. He was a Yorkist and declined to follow Richard III to Bosworth even though he had been made a Knight of the Bath at Richard's coronation. He did, though, follow Henry VII to victory at Stoke in 1487 – the last battle in the Wars of the Roses – and Henry VII and his entourage visited Oxborough. The eldest Bedingfield son was made Knight of the Bath at Henry VIII's coronation. The third son was knighted, and supported Henry in his divorce, so he was invited to attend Anne Boleyn's coronation. The pedigree continued down the years, except that the family were Catholic – there is a priest hole at Oxborough – and were staunch Royalists when all around them were Parliamentarians. This resulted in much of the estate being confiscated, and Oxborough Hall was partially burnt down. As with many land-owning families, the Bedingfields found they could no longer maintain the hall by the mid twentieth century, hence in 1952 it was given to the National Trust. The Anglican church in Oxborough, Saint John the Evangelist, contains the sixteenth-century Bedingfield Chapel for the family with important terracotta tombs, but the church has lacked its spire since 1948 because, on a windy day, it and part of the tower collapsed, leaving the nave in ruins and only the altar end remaining in use.



Oxborough Hall, St John's Oxborough and the plaque to Bedingfield Chapel (today)

²⁴ A history of Oxborough can be found at <http://tudortimes.co.uk/places/oxborough-hall/the-history-of-oxborough-hall>; for an interview with the current Bedingfield heir, see <http://www.greatbritishlife.co.uk/people/heir-today-and-heir-tomorrow-too-6954508>.

Leaving Norfolk

David Sutton and Ethel Dora Sutton

David Sutton, Dora, and Hilda's older brother was 16 at the time of the 1901 England Census, and was working as a gardener in West Bilney, lodging with the Baldreys. It is evident that he left Norfolk shortly after the census because he married Minnie Louise Davis in spring 1906 in Berkshire; their marriage was registered in Windsor. The happy couple's witnesses were David Morris and Emma Jane Stingemore. Minnie, the eldest of at least six children of George and Mary Davis, was 10 years his senior, having been born on 4 April 1874 in Paddington. As a child she had attended Harrow Road School. The couple had no children, although at the time of the 1911 England Census David was living with Minnie plus a young one-year-old nephew, Alfred William Davis, at The Lilies Gardens, High Street, Weedon, to the north of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire.²⁵ David was working as a gardener. Today, The Lilies is a Grade 2 listed building built between 1869 and 1874 by George Devey on the site of an earlier country house, with an attached service wing, stables, and lodge. Its grounds include informal pleasure gardens and a small park that incorporates a sixteenth-century garden wall and a mound left by a former windmill.²⁶ The layout is associated with Lord George Nugent, who established the park and gardens at the beginning of the nineteenth century, although it was developed in the 1840s by the well-known Irish gardener Michael Rochford. After a fire, it was rebuilt by the stockbroker Henry Cazenove, who had bought it in 1869. Cazenove died in 1894, and the property had been sold on by the time David Sutton worked there.



David and Minnie Sutton

David moved on from The Lilies within a few years, since the military history sheet reporting his brother's (Ernest Percy's) death in 1916 gives David (as brother) and Ernest Samuel (as father) as the next-of-kin, and gives David's address as Buckfield Cottage, Sherfield-on-Loddon, Basingstoke. David, too, enlisted during the war. He survived the hostilities and moved to the parish of Tilford in Surrey to become gardener to Charles Hill Court, a grand

²⁵ The census gives his birthplace as Halton, Norfolk – I assume this is a mishearing of Watton, the town-with-railway-station to the east of Great Cressingham.

²⁶ Entry and photograph at <http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1159749>. Description at <http://www.parksandgardens.org/places/lilies-the>. Detail of the gardens is at <http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Lilies-Weedon.pdf>

residence off the road between Elstead and Farnham.²⁷ The 1921 England Census has him living in The Lodge, Charles Hill Court, where he remained at the time of the 1939 England and Wales Register. Both 1921 and 1939 records record him as 'gardener (private)'. Charles Hill Court had been built in 1908, designed by Detmar Blow, then the architect of choice of the British aristocracy, and his Beaux Arts-trained partner Fernand Billerey, for Elizabeth Antrobus (1866–1944).²⁸ Elizabeth remained the head of the household both at the time of the 1921 census and the 1939 Register. She was one of four daughters of Hugh Lindsay Antrobus (1823–1899), who had followed his father into Coutts Bank and became its chairman; his family were baronets, with estates at Amesbury, Rutherford (including Stonehenge), Cheam and elsewhere, while the third baronet, the second Sir Edmund Antrobus (1792–1870), served as member of parliament for East Surrey between 1841–1847. Unlike her three sisters, Elizabeth never married and is remembered as having been 'disabled but redoubtable' – she had contracted polio in childhood.²⁹ While her sisters married into landed families, she built her own estate. In both 1921 and 1939 David was living in the lodge to Charles Hill Court with Minnie and her sister, Florence J. Davis (b.1882). In 1939, they were living with Mary Wright (b.1908)³⁰ who was a 'certified assistant' and the 86-year-old spinster Rachel Wicks; six servants were living in Charles Hill Court itself. Florence is recorded as being an invalid in 1921 and a blind invalid in 1939.



Charles Hill Court, Tilford

David Sutton appears to have been respected in his immediate locale, and one report in the *Surrey Advertiser* from 4 August 1923 reports on the Elstead Horticultural Show, after rain had been wanting for weeks and largely washed out the show, which had nearly 500 entries, judged by a number of esteemed locals among them 'Mr D. Sutton (gardener to Miss Antrobus, Charles Hill)'. He lived until July 1957, and Minnie survived him, dying on 14 January 1966; thus, he lived to 73 and she to 91. They latterly lived in a council house in Elstead a mile or so from Charles Hill. In later life, Florence, despite her incapacities at the time of the 1921

²⁷ The district council is/was Hambledon, and this is often given as his place of residence (and death). This has created some confusion among previous researchers because Hambledon is a village to the south of the town of Godalming, whereas Tilford (and, as will be mentioned below, Elstead) sits to the west of the town.

²⁸ <http://www.countrylife.co.uk/property/country-houses-for-sale-and-property-news/two-houses-for-sale-with-beautiful-gardens-1206> (May 2014).

²⁹ <http://landedfamilies.blogspot.com/2015/01/153-antrobus-of-amesbury-abbey-lower.html>.

³⁰ Note the Register entry has another family name, 'Freed' (?), duly crossed out with 'WRIGHT' (in capitals) substituted.

census and 1939 Register, moved to Wood Green, Middlesex, where she died in April 1961 – she was ‘Great Aunt Florie’ to my sister, Susan, who remembers going to visit her not long before her death.



The grounds of Charles Hill Court that David Sutton would have attended to. Two of these photos are dated 1937, and probably all four date from the same year

I recall another sister of Minnie, the six-year-younger Maud Rachel Keen (née Davis; born 29 December 1880),³¹ ‘Great Aunt Maud’. As I will explore below, Hilda had moved to Tilford by 1921, near her brother and in all likelihood because he had a hand in recommending her for the job she took there. She remained close with David and Minnie for the remainder of their lives. In 1964, Maud came up from her home in Caerleon, Newport, South Wales, and stayed with Hilda. Although I was not told this at the time, I suspect she came because Minnie was in declining health. Minnie and Maud had both been baptised the same day, on 31 May 1894, in the Wesleyan Chapel in Fernhead Road on the border between Paddington and Kensal Green, when Minnie would have been 20 and Maud 14. In 1964, I vividly remember taking the train – pulled by one of the last austerity Q1 steam engines of World War II vintage – from Guildford to Reading with Hilda (my grandmother) and Maud (Minnie’s sister). The ostensible reason was to help Maud get her connecting train at Reading back to Newport, because the old Southern Railway terminus in Reading where trains arrived from Guildford

³¹ Maud Rachel married Frederick Anthony Keen at St Luke’s Chelsea, on 3 November 1915. Frederick was a prison officer, born on 12 February 1888. The 1939 England and Wales Register records them living in Feltham, Middlesex with their daughter Freda (born 9 March 1922, a bookkeeper). A second daughter, Dorothy, born 12 October 1918, had left home and was working as a hairdresser. Frederick died on 20 May 1952, when he and Maud were living at 71 Helen Avenue, Feltham; probate was granted to Maud of his effects, valued at £469 17s. 11d. I assume Maud latterly moved to Caerleon to be near her daughter; she died there in October 1970.

was a walk from the (now redeveloped) former Great Western station. My memory is particularly vivid because Reading still had trolley buses trundling around the centre of town, and it was the first time I had ever seen such magical machines. In 1966, Hilda and Maud were joint beneficiaries of Minnie's will, each receiving £327.7s.



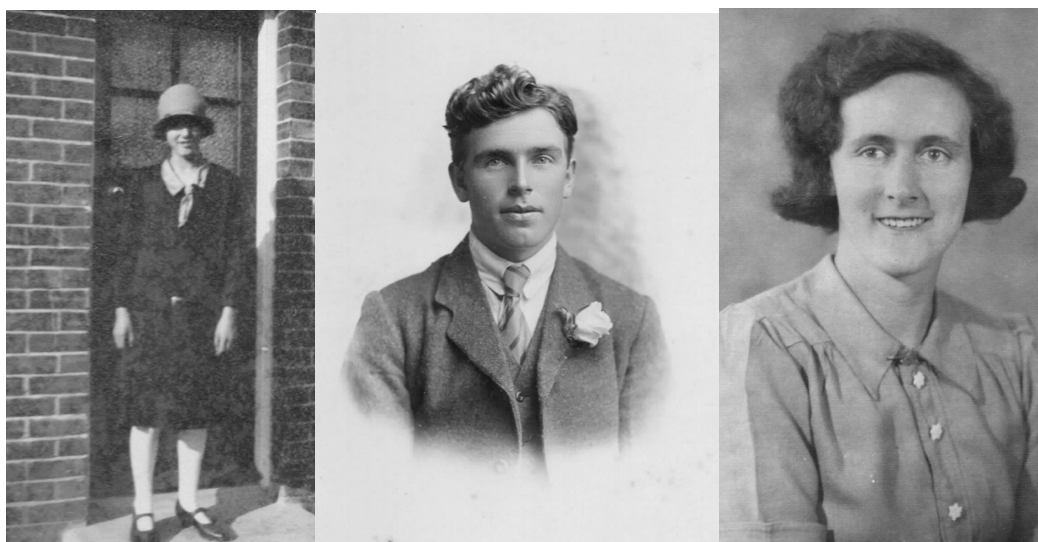
Florence, Minnie's sister, as a youth and as an invalid. Right: Minnie with Hilda's granddaughter, Susan



Minnie seated and Maud standing (left) and Maud (right), 1964

Meanwhile, Dora's daughter, Grace Frances, on 28 July 1934 married Cyril Frank Truin. Cyril had been born on 26 August 1907 in Bedfordshire; his birth was registered in Biggleswade. The 1939 Register records that the couple were by then living at 109 Normanhurst Road, Hersham, Surrey, within the Walton-on-Thames reporting district. Cyril was working as a foreman carpenter and Grace was a children's nurse. Cyril joined up on 11 June 1942 and during the war served in the Fourth Regiment of the Royal Artillery – service no.1156026. He only received his final discharge papers in 1954. They moved to Cranleigh, Surrey, where Cyril ran a corner shop near the (former) railway station at the junction of Elmbridge Road and Alford Road (now a 'One Stop' convenience store). In the early 1960s they moved to Mytchett, Surrey, where they settled at 63 Hazel Road. Grace's sister Gladys Hilda followed Grace and Cyril to Walton-on-Thames and was living with them in 1939 alongside a lodger, Jeremiah Lamphier. The Register is written in highly cursive and difficult-to-decipher script – so much so that previous researchers have inked names in as they interpret the writing – and appears to give Jeremiah's occupation as 'council lodder', whatever that might mean: a brickie (a hod

carrier), maybe, involved in building work for the local council? Known as Jerry and originally from Ireland, Jeremiah had been born on 10 April 1913.³² Gladys and Jerry married in October 1940, and after he spent time serving in World War II their son, John David, was born in Staines on 2 March 1953. Jerry ran a toy shop – I recall visiting their house above the shop on a busy road towards Staines, where John David had what seemed to me to be a massive Scalextric set,³³ and my sister recalls a shop either in North Camp or Frimley which had a train set on display to play with. In the mid 1960s, they moved to a bungalow on the Frimley Road, Aldershot, close to Ash Vale railway station and adjacent to Furze Close – less than a mile from where Grace and Cyril were living in Hazel Road. Jerry died in July 1973, and Gladys latterly moved into sheltered accommodation at Rede Court, Farnborough, where she died in March 1999. In their declining years, Grace and Cyril joined Gladys in the same complex; Cyril died on 1 May 1999 and Grace on 1 February 2006.



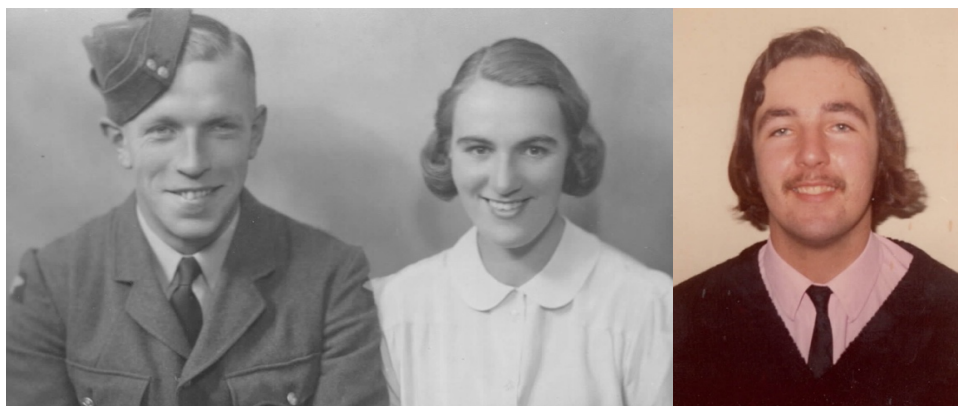
Grace and Cyril Truin (1930s–40s)

John David, Gladys and Jerry's son, married Sandra Barker at Aldershot Registry Office on 11 July 1981 and settled at 12 Holdbrook Road, Tongham, Aldershot. The couple fostered and latterly adopted four children, Brendon, Kerry, Kayleigh, and Kate. John David worked for the bus company London United – a company that had been spun out through a management buyout from London Transport, and which today (2022) is a subsidiary of RATP Dev Transit London operating services under contract to Transport for London. On 1 September 2002, he had emerged from his usual office job to work as a conductor, and he had a fatal heart attack on the top deck of a Routemaster bus. The Truin family tree is more extensive but, briefly, Grace and Cyril had two sons, John (b.1935) and Frank (b.1937). John married Janet Crowter in 1957 and had four children (David Anthony (b.1953), Christopher (b.1957), Michael (b.1962), and Amanda (b.1963)), while Frank married Cynthia Brown and had one daughter, Linda (b.1963). In turn, David Anthony married Alethea Howard (b.1954) and had two children (Peter (b.1985) and Timothy (b.1992)), Christopher married Jane Stevens in 1995 and had Madeleine (b.2001), Michael married Kim Pritty (m.1984) and had three children (Mark

³² 15 April 1913 is given as his birth date on his death registration.

³³ The inevitable result was that I bugged my parents for Scalextric to be my Christmas present. My father decided in rather typical fashion that I would have to make do with a second-hand Airfix slotcar set, which in my mind was vastly inferior because the track sections were made from cheap unrubberized plastic and the power pick-ups on the cars were fiddly and temperamental.

(b.1986), Luke (b.1988) and John (b.1990)), then married Maxine (m.2003) who gave birth to Michael's fourth child, Megan Abbie (b.1999). And Amanda married Paul Roberts in 1990 and had two children, Zoe (b.1992) and Kirsty (b.1995).



Gladys and Jerry Lamphier, and their son John David

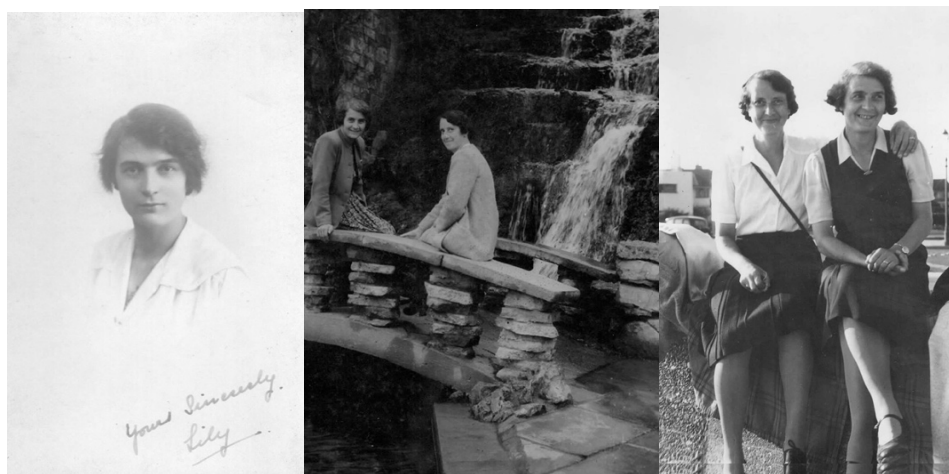
Hilda May Sutton Spreads Her Wings

Turning to Hilda, I need to fill in the gap between her sister Dora's wedding in 1912 and 1921 when Hilda arrived in Tilford where her brother David lived and worked. This is no easy task, and I need to rely mostly on postcards that she kept all her life. These track to the people for whom she was working in service and the places where she lived. As already mentioned, the 1911 England Census records that Hilda was with her sister at The Lodge, Gooderstone, but Dora married in 1912 and moved to Necton, where her husband lived. So, the period I am concerned with starts after Dora's marriage, when Hilda entered service. Unfortunately for us, Hilda removed the stamps from the three postcards that appear to be the oldest which she kept, thereby removing any readable dates from the postmarks. The result is that I cannot be certain when Hilda began her journey away from Gooderstone, but I deduce it was in summer 1913. She first spent a period, including the summer, working in Chapel Park (or Chapelpark), Kingussie, in the Scottish Highlands. One of the three postcards was sent by her sister-in-law Minnie and is postmarked Great Cressingham. Her brother David and sister-in-law Minnie were on a visit to their natal village, but Hilda was nowhere near, since she was 500 miles northwards in Kingussie. Minnie wrote: 'Dave and I are having a fine time at G.Father's [Hilda and David's grandfather] and Dora's [David and Hilda's sister] ... We have been to Aunt Hannah's today, and Gallah [?] is visiting. This appears to link with the photograph which I have already reproduced above, which features the two grandparents, Hannah on the left, and two men – is one of these Hilda's father? It makes sense for the two men to be her father and his brother Lawrence. Although the postcard makes no mention of her father, he is surely the man on the right, with Lawrence on the left. This must have been taken in the summer of 1913, no later, because Hilda's grandmother, Elizabeth Sutton, died in November 1913.



Chapel Park, Kingussie, in 2022 – 109 years after Hilda worked there, so with new houses

The other two postcards were sent by Hilda's school friends, Maisie and Edith. Both appear hardly out of school. Maisie begins, 'Dear Kiddie, thanks for your kind letter,' and Edith, 'I have marked my seat in church in the choir ... I shall be greatly pleased if you will send a view of Scotland, I will send stamps.' The writing on both indicates these are written by children or young teenagers rather than adults. We can deduce that Edith lived on near Gooderstone, since Hilda kept in touch for many years. Indeed, Hilda kept a card from Edith posted on 19 August 1960, which reads as follows: 'Sorry to have missed you. I didn't know you were coming or I would have made a point of seeing you somewhere. I would have looked out for you when you went to the station...' This suggests that they no longer had the closeness of school friends, but they were still in touch. There were other friends from Norfolk who Hilda remained close to for life, most notably Lily Manning, along with Lily's lifelong friend, Sally.³⁴ Lily left Gooderstone for service in London, and married Sidney Newman in Earl's Court on 20 April 1929. She lived and worked for most of her life in London, and latterly lived out her retirement with Sally near Ealing Broadway station – I remember visiting them in 1965 with Hilda and her daughter (my mother) Doreen. I couldn't understand why they all wanted to watch Dr Finlay's Casebook on the black-and-white television, while all I wanted to do was watch the Underground trains at the station. A number of the postcards that Hilda kept were sent by Lily and Sally when on holiday, often when they were back in the Gooderstone area; Hilda also had a number of photographs from different stages of their lives, as sampled below (the bottom one shows Lily and Sally alongside Hilda in later life):



³⁴ Hilda's son David, remembers Lily as a friend of Hilda from school days, but not Sally.



Other friends and acquaintances sent Hilda portraits printed on postcards, often for Christmas or on her birthday; some are signed or annotated, but many are blank. Some may have been sent by potential suitors, but it might be best to see the postcards that feature men more like the namecards that professional people still hand out today. Here is a sample:



But why was Hilda in Kingussie? As the 'Gateway to the Highlands', Kingussie is home to various hunting lodges and summer residencies, and my assumption is that she went there to work for the McNeills during a summer season. Various members of the McNeill family were dotted around Scotland, Eila McNeill lived with her family in Edinburgh as a child, and Donald McNeill had been born in Kingussie in 1889. It seems reasonable, then, to assume that Hilda was still working for the family. If I follow the trail indicated by postcards, Hilda moved to The Poplars, Burghfield, Mortimer, in or before December 1914. That property has long gone, and I can find no record to identify its owner. Could it, then, also have related in some way to the McNeills? Hilda kept one card sent by her brother Percy addressed to her there, and three Valentine-like cards sent from somebody in the military with the simple initials 'F. G.' – perhaps it is possible to read this as 'J.G' [John Gurth] since otherwise Hilda had more than one suitor, not just the one who became her fiancée. By July 1915, she was working for the Aitchisons in Bournemouth. But only for a short period, suggesting that this, like her time in Kingussie, may have been for a summer posting, perhaps by the family that owned, say, the Burghfield property. Or, could there still have been a connection to the McNeills? Nothing is obvious, but Eila McNeill had been born in Bournemouth back in 1867 so she may still have retained connections there. Hilda was working at Drummole House, Cavendish Road, Bournemouth. One postcard is from another potential suitor, Harold, who wrote from Finsbury Park. He had just returned from a visit to Bournemouth: 'London is not up to much after Allum Chine [Alum chine beach], regards to Ivy and yourself.' Another, presumably from a girlfriend, simply lists the names of 10 men – a team of Pierrots from a Bournemouth review, rather than men with any greater friendship with Hilda.

By 1916, Hilda was in service at Hartfield, Hayes, Kent for the Devas family. At this point I can say with certainty that she was no longer working for, or connected to, the McNeills. She had joined the local cycle club in Bromley, and on 8 August 1916 she sent a card back to Mrs Devas reporting a club ride where they had just finished a 'three-mile lovely downhill section' near Hindhead, Surrey. This is somewhat ironic, of course, since this was before Hilda considered moving to that part of Surrey. On 6 October 1916, Ivy, her friend from Bournemouth, sent a card to Hilda at Hartfield from Chichester with a photograph of Christchurch Priory adding the comment, 'Remember this? We did it together.' Christchurch is not far from Bournemouth. Minnie also wrote to Hilda, giving David's address with the British Expeditionary Force at the front: 13771 Pte D Sutton, RVS Queens, attached to L Camp, 40 AOC Section 17, BEF France. And, on 16 July 1916 Hilda was confirmed by the Bishop of Rochester at Saint Mary's the Virgin in Hayes – she was presented with a small book containing short stories and proverbs, which she would keep all her life. A picture of Hartfield dated 1888 survives (reproduced below), and although looking Tudor it had been designed by William Ravenscroft in the late nineteenth century in the Arts and Crafts style for the Devas family. By the 1920s, Horace George Devas also owned Pickhurst Manor, Hayes, which was demolished to make way for a housing estate in 1936,³⁵ and since several roads of houses with 'Hartfield' in their addresses³⁶ survive to this day it seems likely that Hartfield was also demolished for new building. Devas was a businessman in London, a director of the Union of London and Smiths Bank and of Nevill, Druce and Co., and he had dealings beyond London in South Wales. The Devas family had (and continues to have) its own coat of arms and traced (and continues to trace) itself back to William the Conqueror.

³⁵ As filmed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=395dzV0JRew>.

³⁶ Hartfield Road, Hartfield Crescent, Hartfield Close.



Hartfield, Hayes (left); Hilda's confirmation certificate and inscription page of book (right)

Hilda moved on from Hartfield before the end of the year. By December 1916 she was in service to Lady Stracey at 31 Gloucester Street, Belgrave Road. Lady Stracey's husband was Sir Edward P. Stracey (1871–1949), the seventh baronet. He served in the Second Life Guards during World War 1, but, and tantalisingly for my story as I look for connections, he came from Norfolk, albeit from the other side of Norwich to Gooderstone. The family also had a residence in Windsor – Saint Leonards – and postcards in Hilda's effects are addressed to both addresses. David Sutton, Hilda's brother, appears to have had a connection to the Straceys, perhaps through his wife or one of her sisters, since an undated postcard from him reads: 'We are in Norfolk. The little ones [Grace, Gladys] are excited and Dora happy to have us ... and have promised L. Stracey you shall be back Fri morn for your work.' This, I assume, was sent at some point during 1917.

By autumn 1918, Hilda was in Southampton, although an unsigned postcard sent from the British Expeditionary Force sent to 13 Cumberland Place, Southampton, has the address angrily crossed-out, as if she had already and unexpectedly moved on. There are, though, Christmas wishes sent to her at that address from her brother David, and two pictures of Mottisfont Abbey that indicate she may have been briefly working there. The Abbey was owned from 1884–1920 by Mrs Vaudry Barker-Mill and was situated inland from Southampton towards Romsey. I am on firmer ground in my search by April 1919, when Hilda was working at Chesterfield House, 67 Elm Grove, Southsea. She stayed during the summer. One writer offered 'Love to Mrs Chester', suggesting the name of Hilda's employer, but it is very possible that this was only the summer residence for somebody associated with London. It could, then, have been owned by the Straceys, or those she worked with in service earlier or later. By this time, of course, her fiancée had been killed in the war, and one card, postmarked 7 June 1919, is therefore evocative: 'Miss Hilda. Pardon the address, I forgot to ask your other name. Those two sailors were at Harbour Station. I managed to get a few words with them, also the name and address of one. They inquired after you, sent their love.'

Hilda visited and briefly stayed in the Army College at Heath End, Farnham (part of the Aldershot Army Camp), since a card addressed to her there from her brother David is postmarked 7 October 1919. It is possible that she was stopping over with acquaintances from earlier years on her way back to London, since she soon resurfaced in the capital city, working for the family of Edith Victoria Blanche Westmacott (1895–1966). Edith was the daughter of the second Baron Westmacott. The first card that Hilda kept, sent to the family's London

address (102 Gloucester Place), has a 1918 postmark, so it is entirely possible that Hilda's sojourns in Southampton and Southsea had to do with the same family. The last postcard sent to the Gloucester Place address is postmarked June 1920, although one that may have been sent later is redirected to Barnet, as if Hilda had already moved on. Indeed, two cards survive sending birthday greetings to her at 2 Emperor's Gate, Kensington, both postmarked 6 October 1920. I cannot tell from these, though, whether she was staying with a friend, or had taken another job. Simply put, many of the postcards she received functioned as the equivalent of a short telephone call or email today – 'I will come on Sunday', 'I will let you know tonight' – so their significance should not be over-estimated.

Was Hilda something of a restless spirit? The address changes may have been because the extended families she was in service to asked her to work in different residences, or perhaps she was trying to build her portfolio by gradually moving up the service ladder. But the war claimed the lives of her fiancée, her brother, her cousin, and her brother-in-law, so it may well have been hard for her to settle. And the postcard trail comes to a halt when Hilda joined her brother David in Surrey. Perhaps he had recommended her for a posting, but by the time of the 1921 England Census she was working as housemaid to the Jacques family at Abbott's Lodge, just to the south of Tilford village. Built around 1840, this property still stands.³⁷ In Hilda's time, the head of the household was Percy Nathaniel Jacques (1865–1958), who hailed from a titled family, and the 1921 census lists him as 'not occupied for a living' although he was just 56 years old. It was when she was at Tilford that she met her future husband, my grandfather.



Abbott's Lodge, Tilford (today)

³⁷ It was last sold in August 2020 for £1,400,000 (<http://www.zoopla.co.uk/property/abbots-lodge/tilford-road/tilford/farnham/gu10-2ea/9886554/>).

APPENDIX 1

The Great Sacrifice

Poem sent to Hilda during World War I about the horror of war by an unknown person (the handwriting is not Hilda's)

The Great Sacrifice.

Guns are silent - night has fallen
Darkness thick broods all around
Shrouding close the dying soldier
Helpless on the battle ground.

Ambulances failed to find him
He is left to die alone
Anxious fears assail his spirit
Passing to the "Great Unknown"

And his mind with pain clouded
Scarcely a faltering prayer can frame
Only can in faith "appealing"
Faintly breathe the "Holy name"

Then the morn breaks through the stormclouds
And reveals close by his side
Lifted up 'twixt earth & heaven
Christ the Saviour - Crucified.

Not in utter desolation
Is he left in anguish sore
No the Christ fulfills his promise
I am with you evermore.

I am with you God of Battles
With my soldiers True & True.
I am with you Man of Sorrows
I have tasted Death for you

And the dying man in wonder
Gazing on the Face above
Learn as words can never teach him
Mysteries of sin and love.

But no word of his repentance
Can his struggling breath repeat
Just a hand in faith he places
On the Saviour's pierced feet

Thinking on his own oblation
Of his life for others given
To that All atoning offering
Pleaded evermore in heaven

Dumbly seeking for acceptance
Earthly sin stained though he be
Through the merits of the Perfect
Sacrifice of Calvary.

Countless sins past recollection
Dumbly crowding heart & brain
All the days in mute confession
On the Lamb for sinners slain.

And his hand upon the wound point
Sprinkled with the Blood that starts
Seems to seal a mystic cleansing
Of the soul ere it departs.

Death's dark valley calmly treading
Close beside the Presence blest
In the wondrous Love confiding
In those outstretched Arm at rest.

3. The Varns, the family of my maternal grandfather, Arthur George

Arthur George Varns

Hilda May Sutton, Nan to me, married my grandfather Arthur George Varns on 6 September 1922. They married in Tilford, and on the card printed for guests gave their address as Charles Hill Court, where Arthur George was undergardener to Hilda's brother David.

Arthur George was one of eight siblings. Born in the second quarter of 1895 in Binstead, south of Bentley and east of Alton, Hampshire, he was known as George for much of his life, even though George was the name of an older brother who had died shortly after being baptised in Milland, Sussex on 16 April 1886. George was also the name of his father. In the 1901 England Census, Arthur George was living on the Chobham road, northwest of Woking in the parish of West End, with his parents George and Edith Florence Varns and four siblings (John, Emily May, Florence Kate and William Albert). The 1911 census lists him with his parents, two siblings (William and Violet) and two boarders (Charles Rutter and Arthur Christmas) at 3 Burwood Cottages, Warren Road, Guildford – the cottages were on the road known today as One Tree Hill, forming the continuation of Warren Road. According to the 1911 census, 16-year-old Arthur George was already working as a domestic gardener ('domestic' is given in brackets in the census).



Arthur George paddling, Hilda and Arthur George in bathing costumes and with dog in the meadows at the bottom of Walnut Tree Close, Guildford (on a visit to Arthur George's sister, Emily May)



Could these photographs be Arthur George in work clothes? They were kept by Hilda

Arthur George served during World War I, first as a gunner, then as a corporal then as a bombardier in the Royal Field Artillery, Fifty-Eighth Field Brigade (service no.2760). To confuse matters slightly, his military records give his name variously as George, George Arthur and Arthur, and as both Varns and Varnes. He gave 38 months' service, including the time spent enlisted while still in Britain. He disembarked for the front on 7 August 1915, and it was at the front where he was gassed on 21 September 1917.³⁸ For this he was awarded a 'wound stripe',³⁹ but it would seem that he was quickly sent back to the front, since there is a second record in the War Office Daily List, No.5420, dated 19 November 1917, again stating that he was entitled to wear a 'wound strip'.⁴⁰ His discharge papers, however, state that he had been transferred to a field hospital from the sick convoy on 19 October 1917, not a month later on 19 November. The paper, though, gives a clue to him suffering a second wounding, since to 'gassed', it adds 'exploding shell'.⁴¹ It also states that he was removed on 27 November to the Military Convalescent Hospital in Eastbourne. He never returned to active service, but was awarded four medals: the 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred' trio of 1914–1915 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal, but also the Military Medal.⁴² The latter was awarded to those below commissioned ranks for gallantry and devotion to duty under fire.

The distinction between gassing and an exploding shell is, surely, significant. Research papers confirm that only a small percentage of those gassed died, and the majority were able to return to active service after, at a maximum, six to eight weeks.⁴³ So, either the second

³⁸ War Office Daily List No.5370; National Archives, NLS 1917_WList08.

³⁹ As authorised under Army Order 204 of 6 July 1916.

⁴⁰ War Office Daily List No.5420; National Archives, NLS 1917_WList17.

⁴¹ The archived transcript of the hand-written discharge simply states 'gassed (shell)'.

⁴² Royal Field Artillery Roll of Individuals documents 316 and 1257.

⁴³ See, e.g., <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/publications/assetfiles/historical/jones2007-longtermpsychologicalww1.pdf>.

wounding gave lasting damage, or Arthur George did not recover quickly from gassing. 'Exploding shell', however, appears to offer a significant clue as to what happened, since those who had trauma from battle were said to have 'shell shock' – which today we would call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This diagnosis is supported by his evacuation to a convalescent hospital: could the photo below, which Hilda kept with her, be from the hospital? Long-term effects that were associated with gas poisoning during the war included bouts of chronic bronchitis and pneumonia (often put down to a triggering of latent asthma or tuberculosis) and heart irritation, and Arthur George was destined to die prematurely, on 31 July 1940 – Hilda never completely got over her bereavement.

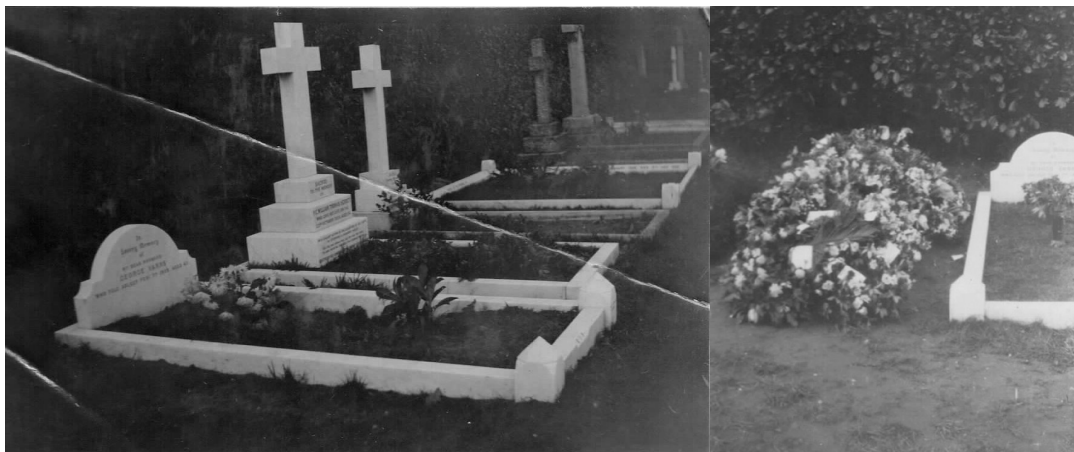


Arthur George's parents

Arthur George's parents were George Varns and Edith Florence Stacey. George was born in Iping, Sussex; his birth was registered in the nearby town of Midhurst and he was baptised in Iping on 30 June 1861. He was approaching his tenth birthday at the time of the 1871 England Census, when he was recorded living at Kings Corner, Iping, with his father Stephen, stepmother Frances, and an 18-year-old elder brother, Isaac. Stephen and Isaac were recorded to be working as hoop makers (hoopers). By the 1881 census, George Varns was also working as a hoop maker. He was boarding at 3 Iping Marsh, where Stephen Holder was head of the family. Stephen was 30 years of age, and had been born in Henley, a hamlet of a few houses on the southern outskirts of Fernhurst. The census lists four of his children living at home, but when it was taken his wife was absent, away from home attending to a sick aunt.

George Varns married Edith Florence in the first quarter of 1884. His wife had been born in 1867 in Trotton, the neighbouring village along the River Rother to the west of Iping. Her parents were Alfred and Emma Stacey, and Alfred is recorded on the 1871 census as working as an agricultural labourer. Edith was four at the time. By the time of the 1891 census, George and Edith were living two doors away from Edith's parents in Milland Lane, towards the village of Milland about three miles to the north of Iping and Trotton on the road to Liphook. George was recorded as a general labourer, and they already had three children, Edith Jane (1844–1955), John (b.1887), and Emily May (1890–1990) – an additional son, George, had died within a few months of his birth in 1886. George soon moved away from the villages that dot the map around this part of the Weald, taking up employment in Binstead before Arthur George was born. By the time of the 1901 England Census the family had moved

once more and were living on the Chobham Road on the edge of Woking. George was working on a farm – perhaps as foreman, but the census writing about his occupation is barely legible. Ten years later, the 1911 census records him as a cowman living at 3 Burwood Cottages, Warren Road, Guildford – as I have already noted. Two years later though, in 1913, he moved to Hampton Park, Seale, just off the Hog's Back and, coincidentally, close to where Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ends. There he became manager of a poultry farm. He was duly recorded as a farm foreman on the 1914 marriage register of his second daughter and fourth child Emily May, and as a farm manager on the 1916 marriage register of his third daughter and fifth child Florence Kate. During his life, he appears to have moved to where he found work, breaking the pattern in which his ancestors had always lived in the same area of the Sussex Weald. When he retired in 1925, he settled in Yew Tree Cottage, on the Thursley Road in Elstead, a mile or so away from Arthur George at Charles Hill Court but close to his youngest daughter and eighth child, Violet Alice (1901–1988). He died in Elstead in 1929, aged 67 and after 46 years of marriage, and was buried in Saint James' cemetery. His wife Edith lived for three more years, dying in March 1932, and was buried alongside him. Local newspaper obituaries and the graves of George and Edith (George's, foreground, in the first, and both together in the second) are below:



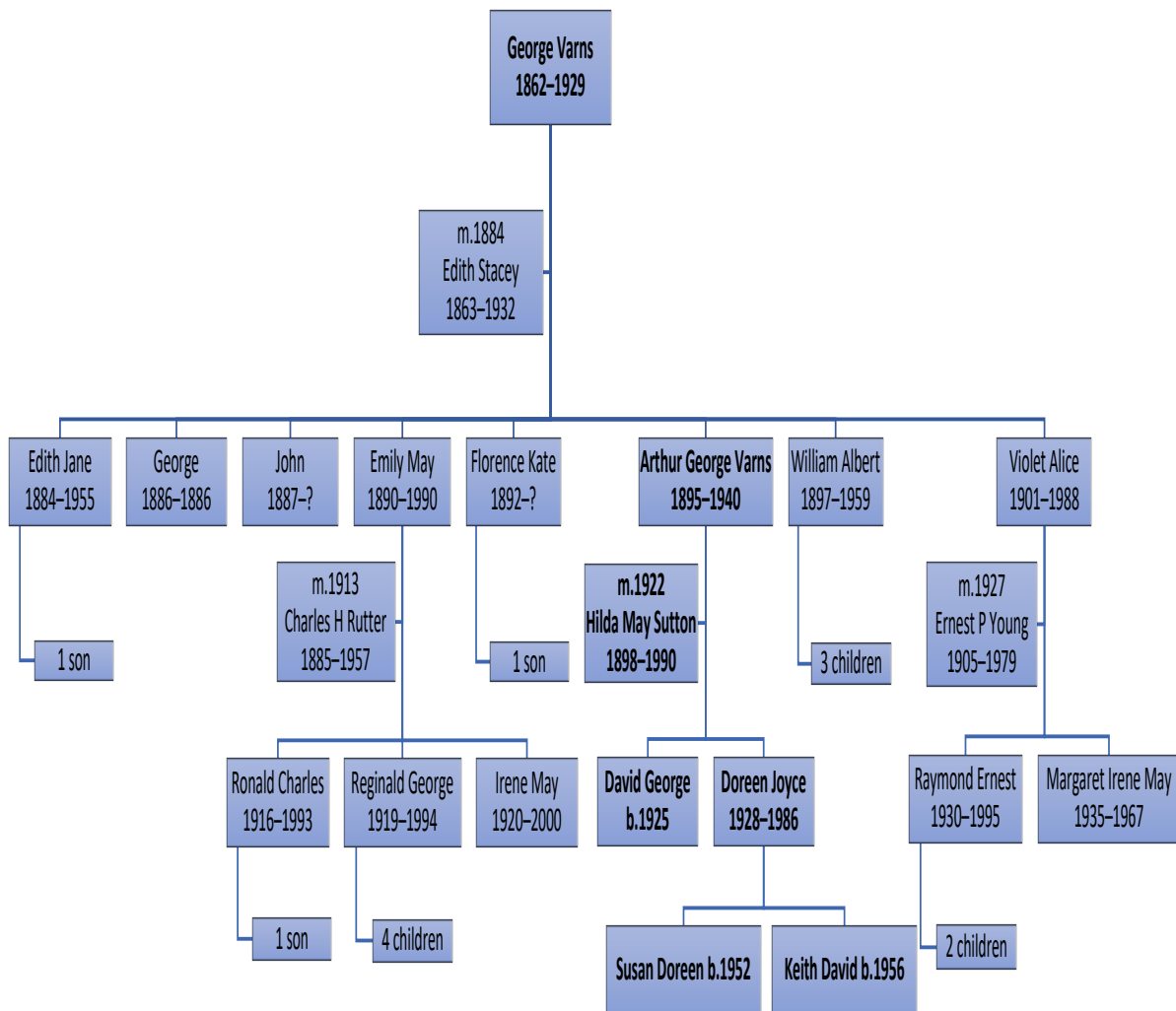
Parochial Church Meeting.—A meeting of the Parochial Church Council was held at the Schools on Friday evening last week, when the Rector (the Rev. J. G. S. Syme) presided. Arrangements were made for the annual combined Sale of Work and Jumble Sale, to be held early in June. It was decided that the proceeds should be devoted to Parochial Church Funds and the Organ Repair Fund.

Death of Mrs. Varns.—We regret to announce the death, on the morning of Friday last week, in Guildford Hospital, of Mrs. G. Varns, of Yew Tree Cottage, Thursley Road, Elstead, whose long illness was patiently borne. Mrs. Varns leaves a son and two daughters to mourn their loss. The funeral at Elstead on Tuesday was conducted by the Rector (the Rev. J. G. S. Syme), and the chief mourners were Mr. and Mrs. G. Varns (son and daughter-in-law), Mr. and Mrs. Rutter (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. and Mrs. Young (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. and Mrs. Denyer (brother-in-law and sister), Miss Vidler, Mrs. Anderson, and Mr. P. Novell. Wreaths were sent by the following: George and Hilda; Em and Charles; Vi and Tobe; Little Ray; David and Doreen; Ron, Reg and Rene; Percy; Bessie; Mr. and Mrs. Sutton and Miss Davis; Mrs. Anderson; Mr. and Mrs. Comber and Family; Her Sister, Brother, Nephew and Niece (Haslemere); Mr. and Mrs. Bias; David and Nancy; Mr. and Mrs. R. Cooke; Mary; Mr. and Mrs. S. Refold; and Mr. and Mrs. Russell.

re-elected President, Mrs. Fawcett was re-elected Vice-President, and Mrs. Court-Treath Secretary. The Committee were also re-elected.

The Late Mr. G. Varns.—The death occurred on Thursday week of Mr. G. Varns, of Yew Tree Cottage, Elstead. Mr. Varns, who was 67 years of age, was a native of Midsbury, and came to live at Elstead four years ago. For 12 years he resided at Hampton Park, Seale, where he was the manager of a poultry farm. Married 46 years ago, he leaves a widow, three sons and four daughters in bereavement. The sons are: Mr. George Varns, of Charles Hill; Mr. Wm. Varns, of Guildford; and Mr. J. Varns, who left England for Canada in 1918. The daughters are: Mrs. Kendall, of Woolwich; Mrs. Rutter and Mrs. Ireland, both of Guildford; and Mrs. Young, of Elstead. The funeral took place in the Elstead Churchyard on Monday, the Rector (the Rev. J. G. S. Syme) officiating. The mourners were Mrs. Varns (widow), Mr. and Mrs. G. Varns (son and daughter-in-law), Mr. W. Varns (son), Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Kendall (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Rutter (son-in-law and daughter), Mrs. Ireland (daughter), Mr. and Mrs. E. P. Young (son-in-law and daughter), Mr. and Mrs. B. Denyer (brother-in-law and sister), and Mr. F. Denyer (nephew). Wreaths were inscribed: "In loving memory of my dear Husband, from Mum"; Edie and Bert; Em and Charlie; Flo and Children; George and Hilda; Will, Glad and Family; Vi and Toby; Eric, Ronnie, Reg and Rene (grandchildren); Evie, Obed and Family; Mr. and Mrs. Sutton (Charles Hill Lodge); Mrs. Walker ("Ravenswood," Charles Hill); Nelly Young; and Mr. and Mrs. J. Bias.

Below is a schematic family tree, from George and Edith (my great-grandparents) to my sister and me:



Edith with Arthur George (+ wife Hilda & son David, R) & daughter Emily (+ sons Ron & Reg, L)

Arthur George's siblings

Edith's death announcement in the local newspaper – the cutting is above, and I assume this is taken from the *Farnham Herald* – remarks that her 'long illness was patiently borne'. It also states that she has left a son and two daughters. This is curious since George and Edith had eight children, seven of whom survived infancy. Indeed, seven are given in George's death announcement. Of these seven, Arthur George's children, Doreen and David, knew only two well, namely, Emily May (1890–1990; Auntie Em, but also commonly Emily – as I will refer to her here) and Violet Alice (Auntie Vi). Taken together with Arthur George, this gives the three that the newspaper death announcement for Edith references. A further child, William Albert (1897–1959), lived nearby in Guildford and was in occasional contact with Arthur George's family, but, presumably, not at the time of Edith's death. There was little communication with the three other surviving siblings, Edith Jane (1884–1955), John (b.1887), and Florence Kate (b.1892), and George's grandson David has recalled to me that there was a rift in the family although he never knew the reason for it. In the following paragraphs I consider, first, the siblings who are not mentioned in Edith's death announcement, and then, second, those who remained close to Arthur George and his family.

Edith Jane was the eldest of George and Edith's children. She was born in April 1884 in Iping and her birth was registered in Midhurst. At the time of the 1891 England Census, she was living with her parents and two younger siblings in Milland Lane. She appears to have left home by the time the 1901 census was taken, since her name is not listed, and a surviving registration reveals that on 2 August 1910 she married Albert Herbert Kendall in Christ Church, Stoke, Guildford – this was the parish church for where her parents were living, situated a few hundred meters from the junction of Warren Road and Epsom Road. Coincidentally, and although I was oblivious to the family connection, in 1968 and 1969 I was a choirboy at Christ Church, recruited by the organist Michael Baxter who was the son of my piano teacher. I sang twice every Sunday and for weddings, until my voice broke. Christ Church was certainly not Edith's husband-to-be Albert Kendall's church, since he came from Plumstead, Kent. The marriage registration records that he was working as a bookkeeper for the War Department. By the time of the 1911 England Census, the couple were living at 99 Piedmont Road, Plumstead, and it was at that address that their son Albert Eric was born in the third quarter of 1912. Although the family subsequently moved a mile or so to 112 Olyffe Avenue, Welling, Albert Eric lived with his parents all his life. The 1939 England and Wales Registry records the two Alberts (that is, father and son), living in Welling and working together at the Royal Ordnance factory in Woolwich. Edith is, somewhat curiously, missing from the Registry entry. Her husband Albert Herbert was buried on 17 September 1940 in East Wickham, just up the road from the family house, and Albert Eric died in a road accident less than four years later, on 14 May 1944, 12 miles away in Farmingham. The son's inheritance, £316, went to Edith. With no family left in the area, she left Kent and moved back to the area where she had been brought up: she died on 26 September 1955 at 28 Fern Road, Farncombe, Surrey. This was a stone's throw away from where her youngest sister, Violet, was then living, suggesting that the rift between Arthur George and his siblings may not have been fully shared by the other siblings.

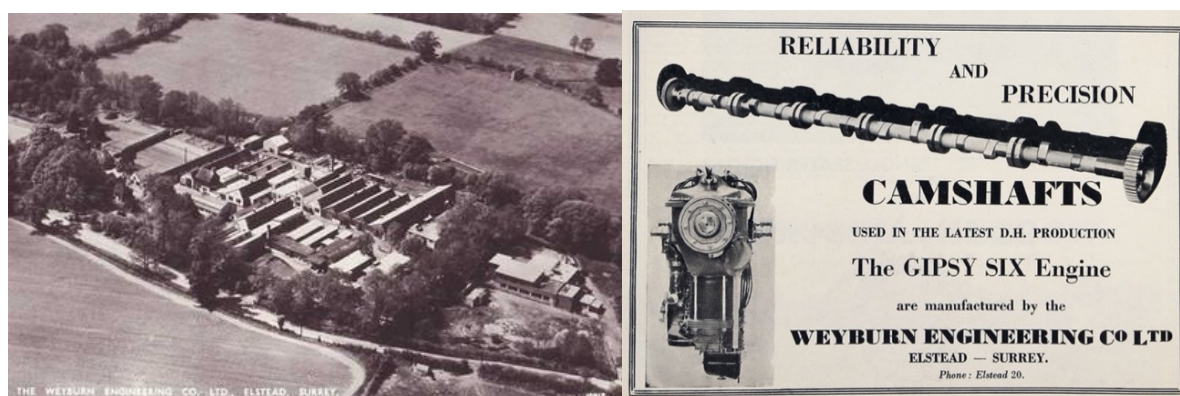
John Varns, the second son in the family (after George, who died as an infant, so John was the eldest son who survived infancy), was baptised on 6 November 1887 in Milland. As with his siblings, his birth was registered in Midhurst. He left home before the 1911 England Census was taken, and in it he was recorded as lodging in Middlesex at I Kingsley Road,

Hounslow. This was the address of the Duke of Cambridge public house, and he was working as a barman in the pub. Today, the pub has gone and the building is occupied by a shop sitting next to the Hounslow bus station and bus garage. In 1911, Thomas Turner was in charge of the pub and lived there with his wife Emily and daughter Mabel. A couple of twists in the story can be added as asides to what we know: Emily had been born in Worplesdon, the village near Guildford where Arthur George would later work and live, and the Hounslow bus garage is today the base for London United, the bus company John David Lamphier worked for until he died in 2002. The newspaper death announcement for George Varns (as shown above) notes that John left Britain for Canada in 1918. He disappears from the records at that point, although there are records that suggest he may have returned, since a John Varns married Emily Aplin in Camberwell in the third quarter of 1912, and she gave birth to a son, Albert Victor, in 1925. The birth was registered in Lambeth in January 1925, but Albert George did not live to adulthood and was buried in London on 30 July 1936. The family had by then settled in Islington, since according to the 1933 Electoral Roll they lived at 9 Balfour Road, near the former Arsenal football stadium. This may, of course, refer to a different John Varns, but it may well indicate that he had returned from Canada.

Arthur George also had little to do with the third daughter (and fifth child) in the family, Florence Kate. Like Arthur George, she had been born in Binstead, probably towards the end of 1892, and her birth was registered in Alton, the local town. She had left home by the time of the 1911 England Census and entered service for the White family at 27 North Street, Guildford. The census lists her as a 'housemaid domestic'. Frederick William Henry White ran a draper's shop and was 34 at the time of the census. Living with him were his wife Fanny Sarah Anne (aged 41), two children, Dorothy Gladys (aged 5) and Florence Elsie (aged 4), Florence Kate, and two assistants. The assistants are listed in the census as boarders but they both worked in the shop, Nellie Maria Humphreys being listed as a draper's assistant and Elsie Gertrude Tilsed as a milliner. Florence Kate married Arthur Ireland (1892-?) on 21 August 1916 at Christ Church, Woking. She had grown up nearby when her parents lived on the Chobham Road, although not in the same parish. I also note that, unlike Edith Jane and her younger sibling Emily May, she did not marry where her parents were living at the time. It appears that her marriage was hastily arranged, perhaps because Arthur was serving as a private in the Twenty-Eighth Middlesex Regiment at the time. He soon disappears from the record, perhaps a casualty of World War I, but perhaps not; I do not know. It is, though, clear that the next April Florence gave birth to a son, Arthur G V Ireland, and moved back to Guildford. She is listed on the Guildford electoral roll in 1932, living at The Cottage, Mercers Passage, but without a husband. Mercer's Passage led off the High Street near Holy Trinity Church, and she was at the same address, living with her 22-year-old son and three others (James Edwards, James Rushton, and William Sutherland) at the time of the 1939 England and Wales Register. Florence is listed as an office cleaner. The Register records that she is married and has a line blocked out, which might indicate that her husband was still alive in 1939 but subsequently died, but the blocked-out line may alternatively relate to another person whose identity is unknown. Certainly, those living in the house do not comprise a single family unit, and all are presumably renting. It is also interesting to see that the Register gives her date of birth as 6 September 1894, which does not tally with the records in the 1901 and 1911 census, but could potentially have been a deliberate fabrication by Florence Kate to make her younger and more attractive to a new partner ...

My discussion reaches safer ground with the remaining siblings. Here, I will first jump to the two youngest. Arthur George's sixth sibling and the seventh child in the family was William Albert (Great Uncle Bill), born in Chobham on 25 August 1897 and baptised at Holy Trinity Church, West End, Woking, on 24 October. This confirms that the family had moved from Binstead near Alton to Chobham Road near Woking after Arthur George's birth in 1896 and before Bill was born. Bill survived the war, and in July 1920 married Gladys Gertrude F Stratford (1898–1983). She had been born in Henley – most likely the Oxfordshire Henley, although the Suffolk village of the same name has been suggested by other researchers and it would be prudent not to forget the hamlet of Henley near Fernhurst not far away from where his parents had spent much of their early life. Bill and Gladys settled in Guildford, and the 1939 Register has them living at 203 Stoughton Road, with Bill working as a handyman. They had three children, William George (1921–2002), Francis Reginald (1922–1993) and Audrey Gladys L (1926–2008). The 1939 Registry has two rows blocked out, one for Audrey, but the second for an unknown person – a lodger, perhaps? Bill died on 13 May 1959, with probate following on 24 July. Although the family were not close to Arthur George, David recalls attending the wedding of Audrey to Leonard R. Smith in Autumn 1947.

The youngest sibling, the eighth child of George and Edith Varns, was Violet Alice (Great Aunt Vi to me), born on 21 April 1901 in Woking when the family were living at Chobham Road.⁴⁴ She moved to Guildford with her family by the time of the 1911 census, and married in Elstead, near to where her parents (and Arthur George) were living, on 14 May 1927. Her husband, Ernest Philemon Young (1905–1979) – Great Uncle Tobe to me – was a gardener, like Arthur George, but changed jobs to work at Weyburn Engineering, where the 1939 Register records him as a centre lathe turner. Arthur George's wife, Hilda, was also working at Weyburn during the 1930s. Situated in fields off the Shuttleford Road leading out of Elstead, the village along the road from Charles Hill, Weyburn Engineering (photos below) was a major employer in the area. It specialized in making parts for cars, boats, and aircraft – it made camshafts for Ford and for Rolls-Royce, and for De Havilland aircraft that included the Gipsy Moth flown by Amy Johnson as well as many other aircraft flown in World War II.⁴⁵



The 1939 Register reveals that Tobe and Vi had moved to 175 Peperharow Road, Godalming with their two children. Their son Raymond (Ray) Ernest Young (1930–1995) married Sheila Packett in 1952 and the couple settled at 1 Boxalls Grove, Aldershot. Ray

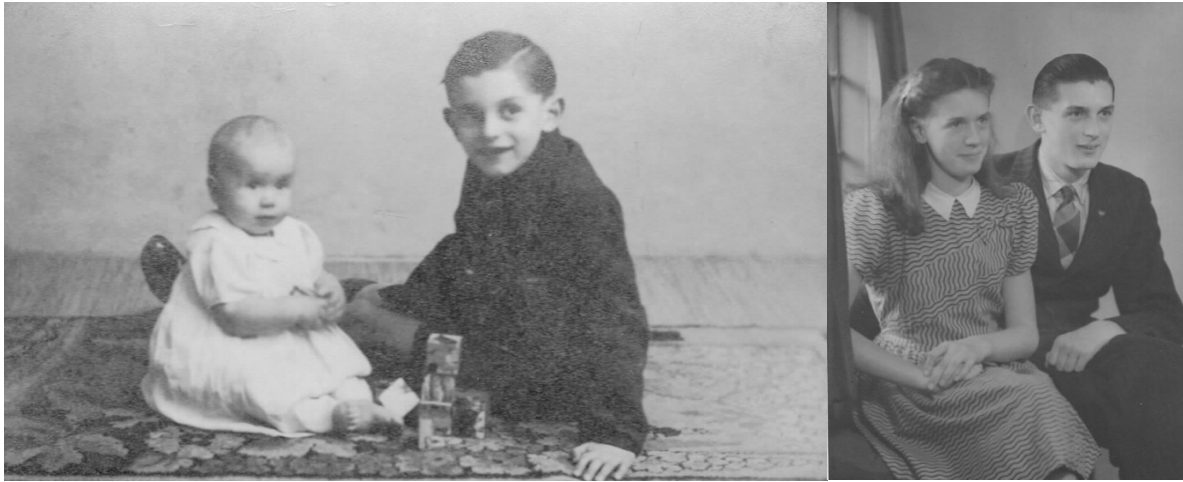
⁴⁴ Violet's birth was registered in Chertsey, but the registry office there served Woking (and Chobham, where the family were living).

⁴⁵ See <http://elsteadvillage.co.uk/weyburn/>.

worked as a laboratory assistant. Their daughter, Margaret Irene May Young (1935–1967), became a policewoman but remained a spinster and lived at home until she died, prematurely, from cancer at the age of 32. Margaret frequently sent holiday postcards to Hilda – in Hilda's effects five were identified, dated between 1953 and 1964 and postmarked Dorset, Portsmouth, Wareham (twice) and Dorchester. In the last, she wrote that she had been working for the police 'up at Ascot'. Latterly she lived with her parents a mile or so towards Guildford in Farncombe, not far from where Vi's older sister, Edith Jane, lived out her days after losing both her husband and son. Vi is shown below, and at her wedding to Tobe:



And here are Tobe and Vi's two children, Ray and Margaret:



Emily May

The closest sibling to Arthur George and to Hilda May was Emily May (Aunty Em). Emily was two years older than Florence (assuming that Florence was born in 1892) or four years older (if Florence was born in 1894). Emily was born on 4 January 1890. Her birth was registered in Liphook but, like her older brother John, she was baptised in Milland, on 16 February 1890. The 1901 England Census shows her living with her parents in the Chobham Road in 1901, but she had left home by the time of the 1911 census. She was by then working as a servant for Archbishop Abbots School, Guildford, lodging with the headmaster, Richard Cooke, and his wife Beatrice. This small school had originally been set up in 1579 at Rye Market House by a Guildford clothier, Thomas Baker. By the early twentieth century its buildings adjoined Holy Trinity churchyard off the High Street. The school linked to Guildford's most famous sons, Archbishop Abbot – born as George Abbot in 1562 and who served as Archbishop of Canterbury between 1611 and 1633 as well as being one of the translators of the King James version of the bible. Abbot was educated at the Royal Grammar School but, and significantly in respect to Thomas Baker, his father Maurice was in the cloth industry. Note that the Guildford crest or coat of arms has two wool sacks on it, one either side of a castle (Guildford Castle, the ruins of the keep of which remain, is thought to have been built by William the Conqueror shortly after 1066), indicating the importance of wool and the cloth industry in the town's history. Archbishop Abbots School taught the sons of poor families until they could enter the grammar school or be apprenticed. It merged with the grammar school in 1933, but its endowment continued and today funds the Archbishop Abbot's Education Foundation. I was a beneficiary of the largesse of its trustees when in 1974 they saw fit to award me funds to buy a pair of clarinets to support my music degree study.

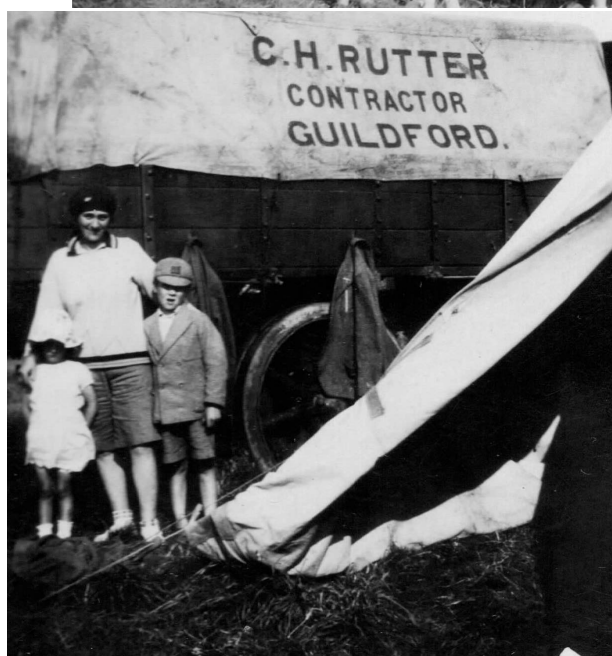
Emily married Charles Henry Rutter in Saint Laurence's, Seale, on 23 April 1914. Seale was where her parents had moved to the year before, when the father became manager of a poultry farm. However, the 1911 census records that Charles was a boarder with Emily's father at 3 Burwood Cottages, Warren Road. He was working as a carter – I assume on the same farm. Three years later, on the marriage registration, he listed his occupation as a cowman, with both his father, James Rutter, and Emily's father, George Varns, recorded as farm foremen. Charles Rutter had been born in the second quarter of 1885 in the hamlet of Tything Oxenbourne, East Meon, Hampshire. He was living there with four siblings at the time of the 1891 England Census. The 1901 census records the family living in Parsonage Cottage, East

Meon, with Charles and his older brother James both working as carters. After marriage, Charles served during World War I. He survived, and the 1923 electoral roll shows the couple living at 117 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford. In 1939, the England and Wales Register has them at the same address, Charles working as a machinist (driller) at a vulcanising plant, and Emily as a 'domestic daily', doing housework around the town. After Charles died on 13 August 1957, Emily continued to receive his war pension and, apart from moving two doors down to her sister-in-law Hilda May's former house at 121 Walnut Tree Close in 1967 (as discussed below), she stayed in the same road until she died, shortly after her hundredth birthday, in May 1990.



Charles Rutter and Emily May Varns wedding

Although the 1939 Register gives his occupation as a machinist, Charles Rutter had built his own contractor and haulage business – as the photographs below confirm. His trucks would often be outside the house, and the family, together with Arthur George and Hilda, Vi and Tobe, and their respective children, for some years went on camping holidays together – the first photo below has the Rutters, the Varns, and the Youngs, and the bottom two are the Varns family (Hilda and children (L) and Arthur George, Hilda and children (R)). Charles and Emily had three children. Ronald Charles (Ron) was born in Guildford on 26 August 1916, was baptised in St Laurence's, Seale, on 24 September, and was working as a lorry driver for his father at the time of the 1939 Register (the Register appends 'heavy work' to the job description, perhaps in an attempt to stave off enlistment). He married Ethel Emily Louise Harfleet (1921–1994) in March 1942, and in 1946 the couple had a son, Michael G Rutter. By then they were living at 1 Old Farm Road, Guildford. After retirement, they moved to Spain; their son settled a mile or so along the Woking Road from Old Farm Road in Jacob's Well. Ron, though, suffered heart problems and was rushed back to Britain, where he died in May 1993.



Emily, in Selsey with son Ron and mother Edith Varns (+ one), below

Reginald George (Reg) was Charles and Emily's second son, born on 23 February 1919. He, in turn, married Gertrude Elizabeth Few (1920–2009) on 16 December 1936 at Guildford

Registry Office – he was 17 and she was 16, and she was already pregnant since their first son, Raymond Victor (1937–2020), was born 15 weeks' later on 4 March 1937. Reg and Gertrude had three further children, Irene May (1939–2019), Derek John (1941–2011) and Brook Charles (1946–2009). Reg gave his occupation as a lorry driver when he married but the 1939 Register lists him as an 'aircraft viewer'. At that time, he was living with his family at 123 Foxburrows Avenue, Guildford, and it was there that Hilda briefly joined them during World War II when a bomb fell at the end of her garden, causing damage to her house.⁴⁶ Reg enlisted during World War II; he served in the Royal Navy, and was released from service on 28 January 1946 in Ayr, Scotland. The family moved several times, but initially around the Bellfield and Stoughton suburbs of Guildford, to 46 Cedar Way in 1947, 11 Lilac Close in 1952, and 12 Oak Tree Drive in 1956. By 1962 Reg was working as an aircraft inspector, but in 1969, aged 50, he upped stumps and moved to Bournemouth, where he took over a guest house, 'St. Moritz', at 13 Walpole Road. When he retired he moved from Boscombe on Bournemouth's eastern side to Poole on Bournemouth's western side, where he died on 25 August 1994.



Left to right: Hilda and Em, Rene and Em (both in later life), Reg (studio portrait)



St Moritz, Boscombe, Bournemouth

Irene (Rene) May Rutter was Charles and Emily's third child, born on 19 November 1920. In 1939 the Register reports her working as a ledger clerk, but by the 1960s, when I was

⁴⁶ A postcard from Hilda's daughter (my mother) Doreen, attests to this, though it is addressed to '123 Foxburrows Close'.

introduced to her, she worked for the Guildford telephone exchange. She remained a spinster, living at 117 Walnut Tree Close (and later 121) and taking care of her mother. In 1948 she made the news in the local newspaper, the *Surrey Advertiser*, having rescued a man 'twice her weight' who was drowning in the river that ran behind the Walnut Tree Close houses. She had reached the meadows (where a photograph above showed Arthur George and Hilda with a dog) and there, as the newspaper recalled it, she encountered 'the body of a man floating downstream. The body was fully clothed and faced downwards. Without hesitation ... she discarded her outer clothes, entered the river and swam out to the man ... turned him on his back, swam back to the bank, and though nearly exhausted helped to pull him out of the river.' The Mayor of Guildford presented her with the award of the Royal Humane Society. Irene died on 27 June 2000.

Because Emily and Rene lived so close to Hilda, my grandmother, I recall many meetings with them. One in particular has remained in my mind. In September 1976, my parents and I were on holiday in Bournemouth, staying in Reg's guest house, as were Emily and Rene. Early afternoon on the Friday, we played a round of mini golf with Rene as Emily watched. We bid our farewells to drive home, where, to celebrate their silver wedding anniversary, my sister had arranged to take my parents out for supper. Emily and Rene made out they were staying in Bournemouth for a few more days, just as Reg had pointedly said they were to do that same morning at breakfast in his guest house. My parents were oblivious to the upcoming party. I drove them around back lanes to ensure we arrived on time at the venue, Abinger Village Hall, as they continued to think we were merely going to a restaurant for supper. When we arrived at the hall, Emily and Rene, along with other family and friends, were waiting to greet them, to celebrate their anniversary.

Interlude: the Varns name, the Weald, and Fernhurst

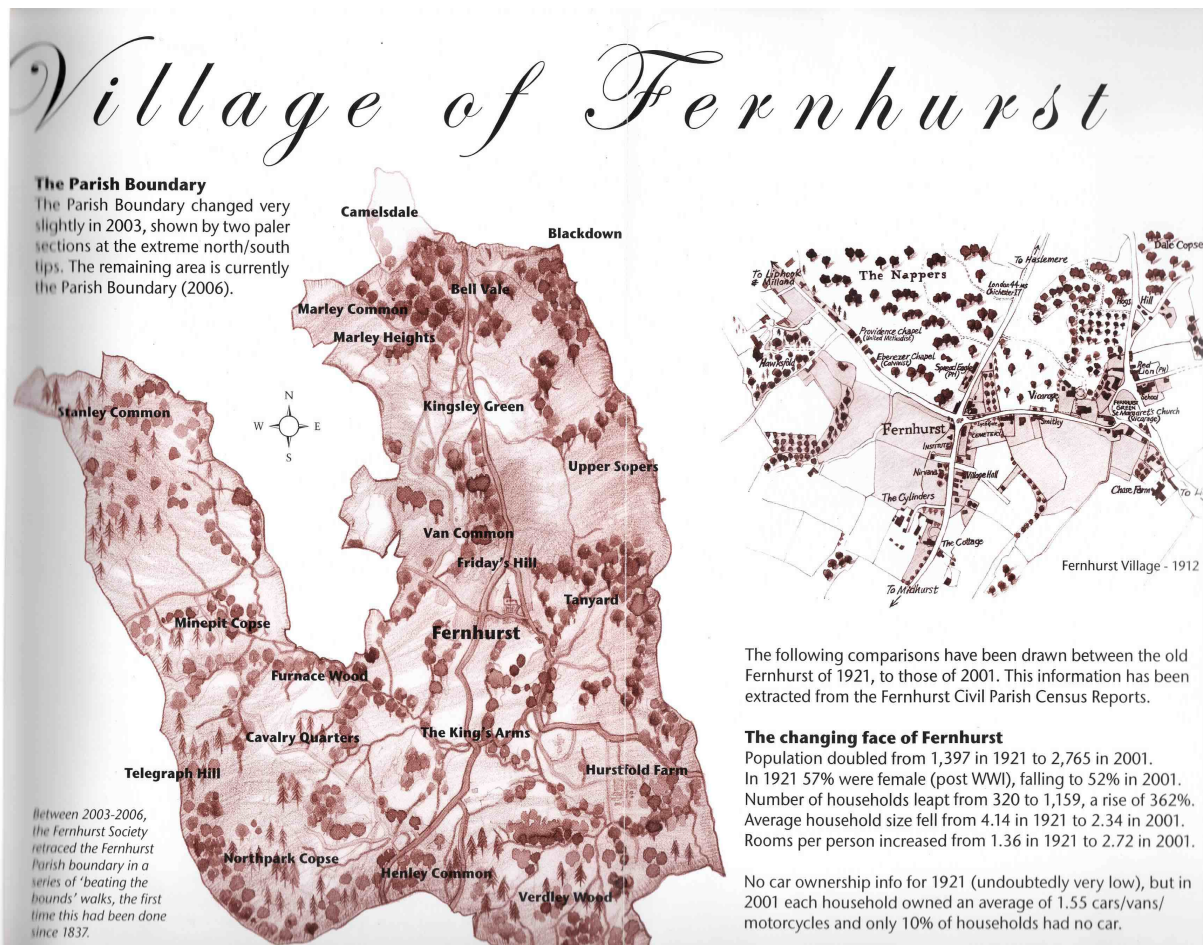
Before tracking back in time, a brief detour is in order. The family name Varns, also spelt 'Varnes', relates to 'Farns' or 'Ferns', as in the village of Fernhurst which in the past was also sometimes spelt as 'Farnhurst', and, therefore, it refers to the management of woodland. Arthur George's parents were, as I have already shown, part of the generation that began to break the link between the Varns family and copsing, and to the cottage industries that worked wood which were strongly associated with Fernhurst and its surrounding villages. This is where many Varns family members had lived for generations – in Fernhurst but also in villages such as Milland, Iping and Linchmere (taken together, these form a triangle to Fernhurst's west), and in Lurgashall (to its east). The area, on the borders of Sussex and Surrey, is part of the Weald, the area sitting between the parallel chalk escarpments of the North Downs and the South Downs that takes in parts of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, and Hampshire. Once it was covered in forest, hence its name, deriving from the Old English for 'woodland'. Geologically, it consists of layers of sandstone ridges and clay valleys, which today support a mix of heathland and coppiced woodlands which is not suited to intensive arable farming but is reasonable for grazing and for cultivating some vegetables.



Map of Fernhurst and surrounding countryside. Haslemere to the top, Northchapel (see below) to the right, Linchmere centre left and Woolbeding and Iping with the River Rother at the bottom

The management of woodland is age-old, providing a partial living for many and a more full-time occupation for some. It provides fuel for local furnaces and domestic fires, and it supports many local manufacturing industries (or, at least, it did until recent times). Generally, copse cutting was largely piecework done during the autumn and winter months when there was little farm labour to be had. In many cases copping was an activity done by tenant farmers.⁴⁷ But for some, including many of the extended Varns family, managing woodland was their primary occupation. Of course, until well into the twentieth century farming was the mainstay of the rural economy, albeit worked mostly by tenant farmers since most of the small farms were owned by a few wealthy landowners. A tenant farmer's family, wife, children of school age and above, and perhaps relatives, along with labourers employed either for the full year or on a piecemeal basis when extra work was needed, did the work. To be a labourer working for a tenant farmer was precarious, but to make one's occupation in copping – as many Varns men did – was considered socially inferior to working on a farm. Still, there were more specialised activities within the woodland economy, and many of the Varns were known as hoop makers. They would cut copses and would heat and bend the wood, sanding and shaving it to create hoops of set sizes. The hoops would typically be used in making barrels, packing cases and so on, although slender hoops were also used to strengthen the billowing ladies' dresses and corsets fashionable through the Victorian era.

⁴⁷ A 1904 article on the Cokelers (the Dependents, for discussion of which see below), begins with the following, highly romanticised and rather simplistic, comment: 'In a corner of the Weald in Sussex ... lies a quiet woodland district, whose inhabitants pursue their vocation of farm work in summer and copse-cutting in winter, from year's end to year's end, not troubled by railways or the big military camps and redbrick villas' (Earl Winterton, "The Cokelers: A Sussex Sect" (1904, 1931 repr.), http://scm.pastfinders.org/cokelers_1.htm).



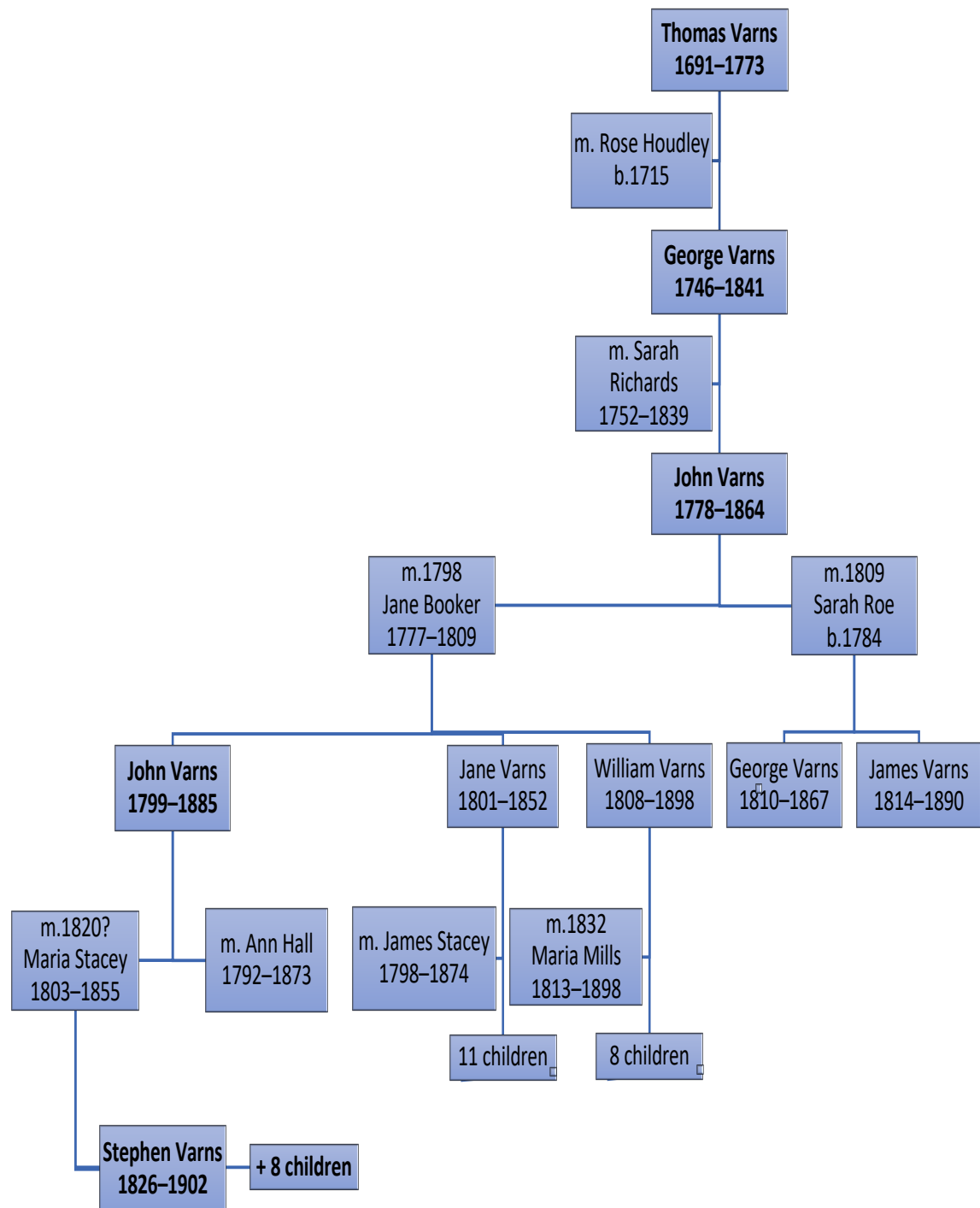
Map of Fernhurst, reproduced from The Fernhurst Society, *Voices of Fernhurst* (2006), pp.8–9

Fernhurst oral history, as recounted in *Voices of Fernhurst*,⁴⁸ memorializes some wood management activities. In this collection, Harry 'Rusty' Ralph, born 1926, recalls that his grandfather started the Fernhurst Chestnut Fencing Company when at Henley Common, and later expanded it into a large company complete with timber yard: 'Chestnut palings and big sawn timber, all was done at the big sawmill ... We were a reserved company for a time during the war making fencing for the government and all the trackway for D-Day and things like that. All the tanks carried rolls of chestnut fencing which they could just roll out if they got stuck.' Jeffrie White, born in 1925 on the Midhurst Road, worked with his father in Verdley Woods cutting pit props for the Forestry Commission. Later they worked for Bert Welland, who 'had a fencing yard ... He also had a big shed where he used to make the fencing. His two sons Jack and Horace, Sid Dudman and I worked for him cutting chestnut poles in the woods, and in the summertime we'd be making up the poles, cleaving and going through the whole process.' Again, Eddie Lucas recalled how 'A Lancashire man used alder wood he cut down near Fernhurst Pond ... to make rough clog bottoms, just gouged out to the shape of the book from the wood and then sent then by train to where he lived. We used to put thousands of them on the rail for old Cloggy as we called him.'

⁴⁸ The Fernhurst Society, *Voices of Fernhurst* (Fernhurst: The Fernhurst Society, 2006), pp.89–92.

The Varns family: tracking back in time

The following table charts the family back as far as I have been able to, through to Stephen, the son of the second John Varns (and grandfather of Arthur George). Stephen was my great great grandfather:



John Varns, senior

The Varns family tree, in respect to my family, essentially starts with John Varns. He was great great grandfather to Arthur George, or my four-times great grandfather. Born in 1778 in Lurgashall, Sussex, a village four miles east of Fernhurst and about eight miles east of Iping where Arthur George Varns' father, George, would later be born, John was baptised on 7 June 1778. Possibly reflecting where his mother had grown up, his baptism was held some miles away on the south coast, in Saint Mary's Church at Portsea. As shown above, though, I can track back a little further, since John's parents were George Varns (1746–1841) and Sarah Richards (1752–1839) and, in turn, George's parents were Thomas Varns (1691–1773) and Rose Houdley (b.1715). I infer that John spent part of his childhood in Linchmere, west of Fernhurst, since John's sibling was born there, Henry (1797–1878). In addition to Henry, three other siblings are known, Sarah (1772–1838), Thomas (1784–1859), and James (1789–1864).

John married his first wife, Jane Booker (1777–1809), in Fernhurst on 28 July 1798. She may have been born in Fernhurst but was baptised in Easebourne, four miles to Fernhurst's south, on 12 October 1777. This was where her mother Mary Russell (b.1736) had grown up, and it was also where on 18 February 1760 Mary had married Jane's father, William Booker (b.1740). John (senior) and Jane had three children, John (junior) (1799–1885), Jane (1801–1852) and William (1808–1898). Jane died shortly after William's birth. Before a year had passed, on 23 December 1809, John married his second wife, Sarah Roe, in Saint Bartholomew's, Haslemere, the town less than four miles north of Fernhurst. The marriage registration survives, indicating that both husband and wife were illiterate since they each signed with a cross as their mark. Sarah had been baptised in Saint Bartholomew's on 9 May 1784. Two children are known from their marriage, George (1810–1867) and James (1814–1890). John Varns' death was registered in Midhurst in April 1864, but it is not clear whether this was the senior John, or his grandson John by his eldest son (John junior) who also died that year.

John Varns, second generation

John Varns (senior)'s eldest son, John (junior), was Arthur George's great grandfather, so my three-times great grandfather. Baptised in Fernhurst on 17 November 1799, he married Mariah Stacey (1803–1855⁴⁹) in Linchmere, probably in 1820 (the date is uncertain because we have not located a marriage registration).⁵⁰ Mariah had been baptised in Fernhurst on 7 April 1803 and was born to Edward Stacey (1765–1807) and Ann (1763–1840, née Chase). Mariah's father died when she was just four years old. John (junior) is recorded in the 1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871 England Censuses living in Fernhurst and Linchmere, the two places separated by Van Common. In 1841 his occupation is given as 'agricultural labourer', in 1851 as 'head labourer in woods', in 1861 as 'head coppice labourer', and in 1871 as 'labourer.' A reminder may be useful at this point: much of the wood and coppicing work was piecemeal, so the different occupations that are listed need not imply any significant change of work. At

⁴⁹ The deaths of two Maria Varns were registered in Midhurst, the nearest town, around this time, one in March 1854 and one in September 1855. It is not certain which was John Varns' wife, but we assume the second one.

⁵⁰ We discount here an alternative suggestion for a wife, Rachael Mariah Warner (1802–1855) – given as Mariah in the 1841 and 1851 census – who had married a John Varns, we surmise another John Varns, in Harting, Sussex, in 1825. Harting is about 13 miles southwest of Linchmere, close to Petersfield. This additional John Varns died in 1882 and was buried in Harting on 13 January.

some point after Maria died but before the 1861 census, John remarried, to Ann Hall (1792–1873). Ann had been born, like John’s own father, in Lurgashall, although there is a christening record of a Mary Ann Hall in Tillington, a village four miles south of Lurgashall, for 4 March 1792 (the infant had been born on 23 January). This is likely to be the same Ann. Eight years his senior, the couple are given as husband and wife in the 1861 and 1871 census. In the 1871 census, John was living at Crab Corner, Linchmere. He was still living there in 1881, although the 1881 census describes him as a widower and an annuitant (pensioner). He died in Linchmere in 1885 and was buried on 14 April.

Moving to Jane, John Varns senior’s second and third child, she married James Stacey (1798–1874). This appears to have been a different branch of the Stacey family to Mariah, since James had been born in Woolbeding, Sussex, a village to the east of Iping along the River Rother. The new couple settled in Woolbeding, and James is listed in censuses as a farm labourer (more specifically, as labourer, farm labourer, and agricultural labourer, respectively). Details of their children are patchy but there may have been as many as 11: James (b.1821), William (b.1822, baptised on 3 November), Jane (b.1825, baptised on 3 January), Henry (b.1827, baptised on 25 February), Anne (b.1829, baptised on 8 March), Harriet (b.1831, baptised on 8 May), Maria (b.1833, baptised on 25 August), Charlotte (b.1836, baptised on 20 March), Emma (b.1839, baptised on 20 January), George (b.1842), and Fanny (b.1845, baptised on 28 December).

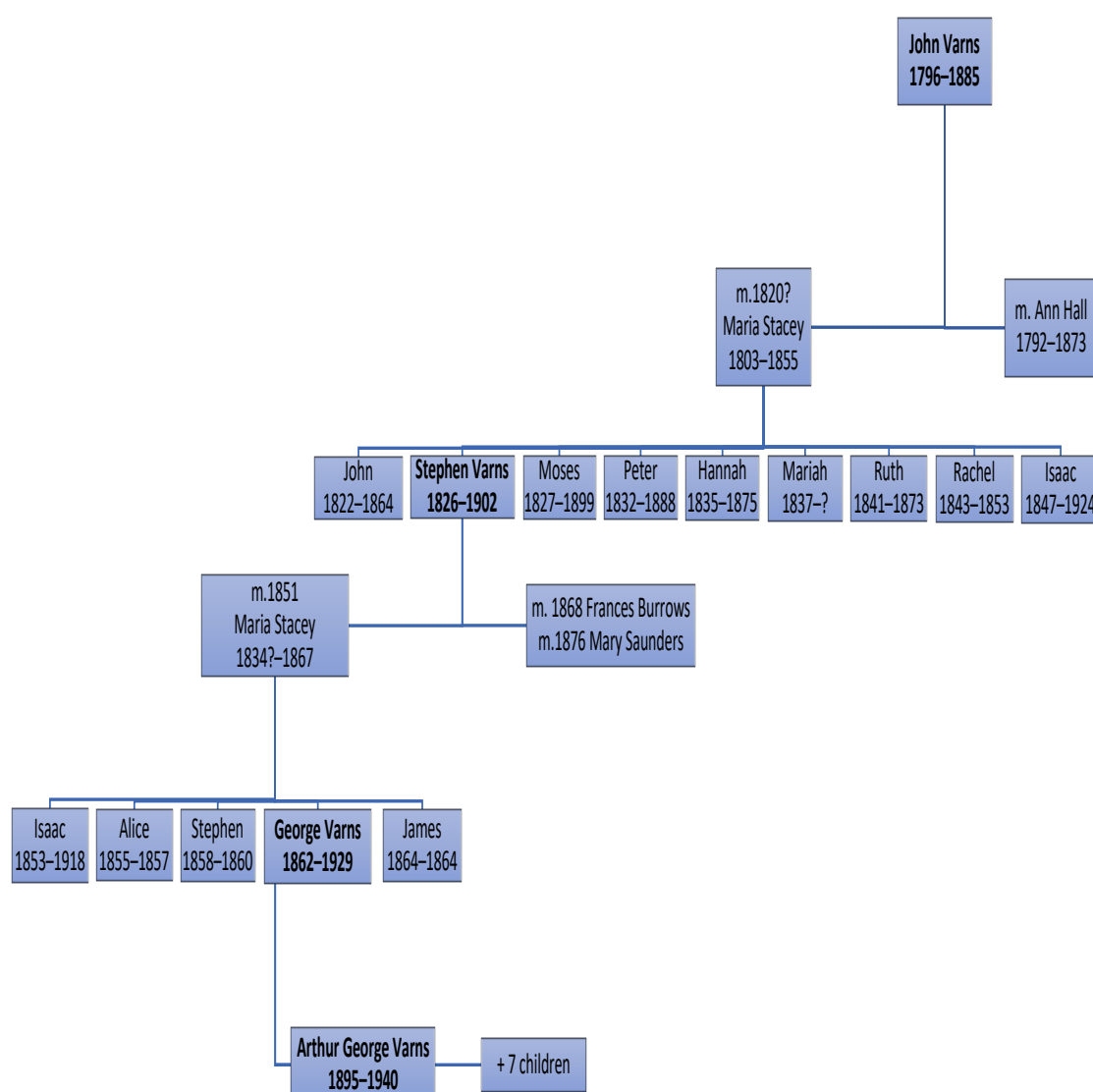
John Varns senior’s third child with Jane Booker, William, was baptised in Fernhurst on 18 April 1808. He married Maria Mills (1813–1898) in Fernhurst on 26 April 1832. There is a christening record for a Maria Mills, the daughter of John and Mary, in Slinfold, dated 18 July 1813, but no other likely person of the same name has so far been found.⁵¹ William and Maria seem to have had eight children: Maria (b.1834), Emma (1837–1906), William (1840–1917), Maryann (b.1843), Peter (1846–1914), Martha (1849–1914), John (1852–1882), and Hannah (1855–1931). In the England Censuses, William is listed as an agricultural labourer in 1841 and 1851, a farm labourer in 1861, a hoop maker in 1871, and a coppice labourer in 1881. He is recorded in the 1871 census living in Shottermill, at the western side of Haslemere, but by 1881 he was back in Linchmere, where he remained at the time of the 1891 census, albeit latterly as an 83-year-old pauper. He died in March 1898, and his death was registered in the nearby town of Midhurst.

John Varns junior had nine children with Mariah Stacey: John (1822–1864), Stephen (1826–1902), Moses (1827–1899), Peter (1832–1888), Hannah (1835–1875), Mariah (1837–?), Ruth (1841–1873), Rachel (1843–1853) and Isaac (1847–1924). Stephen, the second child, was Arthur George’s grandfather, and my great great grandfather. In 1851, Stephen married his first cousin, another Maria Stacey (without the ‘h’), the seventh child of his aunt Jane and her husband James Stacey. She had been born around 1834, and when they married Maria was working as a house servant in Fernhurst for Thomas Bridger. Bridger was the tenant farmer of Colliers’ Farm.⁵² Since the 1851 England Census lists both Stephen and Maria as single, they

⁵¹ Previous researchers have suggested Slinfold near Horsham as Maria’s place of birth, but this seems far away given that nobody in the Varns family has yet been discovered with links that far east of Fernhurst. I note that there is, however, a Slinfold near Farnham, and this might link better with the family’s later links to the heathland area between Haslemere/Godalming and Farnham.

⁵² Kelly’s 1891 Directory records that Bridger was still at Colliers’ Farm (or ‘Collyers’) 40 years later. The National Archives holds a letter from Bridger, as the tenant of the farm, to Hasler Hollist seeking permission to cart hoops

must have married after it was taken. They settled in Linchmere but were recorded in the 1861 census living in Iping, with Stephen working as a hoop maker. They had five children: Isaac (1853–1918), Alice (1855–1857), Stephen (1858–1860), George (1862–1929), and James (1864–1864). Of these, then, three died as infants and only two survived to adulthood. Of the two who did survive, George was Arthur George’s father and my great grandfather. The 1841 England Census has a curious squiggle against Stephen (George’s father’s) name which may indicate he was already working, doing the same work as his father, that is, working as an agricultural labourer. The squiggle becomes the abbreviation ‘Do’ (ditto) in the 1851 census, indicating that his father, Stephen, and his father’s brothers Moses and Peter, were all ‘labourer(s) in woods’. Here is a family tree centred on John, second generation, through to his grandson (my grandfather) Arthur George:



and bavins (bundles of firewood) over his land (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/a6df08ba-2b7f-4afc-a63b-07fb76e5fb55>). This indicates how closely related farming and wood/coppice work were.

Stephen's wife, Maria, died in 1867 and on 11 July 1868 Stephen remarried in Iping. Frances Burrows (1816–1876) was his second wife. Born Frances Laurence Burrows, and known as Fanny, her first marriage was to Charles Burrows, in 1838. Ten years' Stephen's senior, she died after some eight years of marriage, and the record indicates that Stephen then quickly married for a third time, on 1 July 1876. Having a woman around to run the household was clearly something that he felt necessary! His third wife was Mary Saunders (1834–1919). In the 1871 England Census she was recorded living in the Easebourne Workhouse on the northern outskirts of Midhurst with four children: Ellen (aged 11), William (aged 2), Fanny (aged 20), and Agnes (aged 4). The 1881 census lists Ellen and William as living with John Varns (that is, Stephen's father, John Varns junior), along with Stephen and Mary. Ellen was occupied as a general labourer. However, the census appears to describe Mary as 'aunt in law', which one researcher on www.ancestry.co.uk has quite logically interpreted should read 'daughter in law'. The children are described as granddaughter and grandson to John, respectively. Ten years later, and with John Varns dead and buried, the 1891 census has Stephen and Mary living with William, but the latter is now recorded with the surname Varns. By the time of the 1901 census, Ellen has returned and is once more living with them, but both of Mary's other remaining children are recorded with the family name Saunders rather than Varns. They are living at Van Common, Fernhurst, and an annotation to Ellen's entry states that she is sick. Stephen died in December 1902, and the 1911 census records his widow Mary Varns living in the same house with Ellen and William. Both of her children are listed as single, William, aged 32, working as a labourer but Ellen, aged 50, with no occupation. Mary lived on until April 1919. The grave to the left of the photograph below is for Ellen Varns and sits in the Elstead cemetery. This was one of the photographs kept by Hilda, and although I have no evidence connecting Stephen's stepdaughter with Arthur George or with Elstead, I know of no other Ellen in the Varns family to whom this could belong.



John Varns, third generation, and his other children

What of Stephen's siblings? The third-generation John was born in Linchmere, and by the time of the 1841 England Census he was working as an agricultural labourer while living with his parents and siblings at Van Common. In July 1846, like Stephen, he married a first cousin, Jane Stacey – the second child of James Stacey and his father's daughter Jane Varns. In the 1851 England Census, the couple are living in Fernhurst with two children: he is an agricultural labourer, and she is described as a labourer's wife. Jane Stacey's maternal grandmother, Jane

Dudman, aged 78 and described as a 'pauper, a labourer's widow', is recorded as living with them. In the 1861 census their eldest son, John, has joined his father as a farm worker. John and Jane had four children: two died as infants, Jane (1846–1847) and Eli (1856–1856), and two survived to adulthood, John (b.1848; the fourth generation John) and Samuel (1853–1941). John (that is, the third generation John) died in June 1866 and his widow, Jane, remarried on 23 September 1867. Her new husband was a widower, George Hull, then aged 60. The couple married in Saint Mary's, Frensham, near Farnham. They settled in Frensham and subsequently had a daughter, Agnes (b.1868).

Samuel Varns, John and Maria's third child, initially stayed in Fernhurst, since the 1871 census has him working as an agricultural labourer in Kingsley Marsh at the northern end of the village. But in April 1881 he married Harriett Jane Green (1859–1936) in the Surrey village of Thursley, a village situated at the centre of a triangle between Hindhead, Elstead, and Godalming. At the time of the census, he was living at Foundry Road, Thursley, and working as head farm labourer. Harriett had been born in Ryde, on the Isle of Wight. By then, of course, the London and South Western Railway had joined Haslemere and Godalming with Portsmouth, where boats left for Ryde, so concepts of distance had begun to change, and mobility was rapidly increasing. Samuel and Harriett had five children: Agnes Emily (1862–1961), Ernest Samuel (1884–1965), Bertram Thomas Ottoway (1890–1975), Gladys Jane (1894–1960) and William Leonard (1896–1929). By the time Ernest Samuel was born they had settled in Shottermill, at the western end of Haslemere, and in the 1901 and 1911 censuses their house was recorded as being in Lion Lane. In both censuses, Samuel's occupation was given as a wood hoop maker, and in 1911 his sons Ernest Samuel (aged 27) and William Leonard (aged 15) were described as a house painter and wood hoop maker respectively. Samuel died on 17 June 1941.

Moses was the next sibling, born in Linchmere a year after Stephen. He worked in various capacities as a farm labourer. He married Hannah Bright (1831–1875) in Fernhurst on 12 November 1860, and they had one daughter, Elizabeth Annie (1861–1900). Elizabeth was born at some point in the year after the census had been taken on 7 April 1861, since she is not named in it. The census reports the couple living at 12 Cylinder Cottages on the southern side of Fernhurst,⁵³ but by 1891 the widower Moses had returned to Fernhurst, where he was living with Elizabeth, Elizabeth's husband Henry West, and their two-year-old daughter (his granddaughter) Sarah West. Intriguingly, Elizabeth was baptised in Fernhurst on 22 March 1885, two years before she married Henry, when she would have been 24. This suggests her family had left the established church, but she had returned because the Church of England required her to be baptised before she could take communion and marry within its buildings. Sadly, Moses was admitted to the Chichester Lunatic Asylum on 21 November 1898, and he died as a patient there on 11 March 1899.

A pause at this point is in order. John and Maria's children all had biblical names, some taken from the New Testament (John, Stephen, Peter), but some, and more unusual for the time, descending from Old Testament times (Moses, Hannah, Ruth, Rachel, Isaac). We may assume that the family were Christians, but the names they chose suggest that they had moved way from the established Church of England. This is also indicated by the absence of baptism records for their children, and by the fact that Elizabeth was baptised as an adult.

⁵³ The census page is marked 'The Parish of Woolavington'. But, I have no reason to think this is anywhere other than Fernhurst.

Primitive Methodists were certainly active in the Surrey/Sussex borderlands, along with various other non-conformist churches and several brethren groups. One such group was emerging at the time, the Cokelers or Society of Dependants, but given the dates and the lack of penetration of Cokelers to Fernhurst and beyond, the probability is that the Varns family associated with a group such as the Primitive Methodists, or possibly the Baptists or other more established Brethren groups. The family's religious orientation is brought further under the spotlight with Peter Varns, the fourth child of John and Maria, and his children with Martha Morley (1842–1909). Martha was the daughter of Robert Morley and Elizabeth Harriett Jelliffe, and Peter and Martha's nine children were all given biblical names, both Old and New Testament in origin: Matthew (1861–1953), Peter (1864–1920), Joseph (1866–1940), Levi (1869–1882), Benjamin (1872–1934), James (b.1874), Ezra (1877–1956), Judah (1879–1940), and Rachel (1881–1942). Both Peter and his wife had been born in Linchmere, and the two were married in the first quarter of 1861. The 1861 census reports them living in Upper Hawksfold, Fernhurst, Peter occupied as a farm labourer. They had moved to Cylinder Cottages,⁵⁴ Fernhurst by 1871, when the census lists them together with their growing family. The family remained at this same address at the time the 1881 and 1891 censuses were taken, except for Peter, who died in April 1888. In 1891, Martha was listed as a charwoman and still had six children at home, four sons working as farm labourers and two (the youngest two) attending school. Three children remain at home with her by the time of the 1901 census. Of their children and in respect to religion, we know most about their son Ezra; I will return to him below.

Hannah was John and Maria's fifth child, born in Linchmere in 1835. Hannah married Stephen Ford (1830–1900) in the third quarter of 1855. The census records tell us that Stephen was born in Haslemere, and the couple lived in Linchmere and Fernhurst until at least the time when the 1891 census was taken. However, her husband Stephen's death, in December 1900, was recorded in Farnham, Surrey. They had four children, Ruth (b.1860), Arthur (b.1863), Stephen William (1869–1935)⁵⁵ and Emma Rose (1875–1942). Moving on, John and Maria's sixth child, Maria (sometimes rendered as 'Mariah'), was born a year after Hannah but likely only lived until 1854, dying before she reached her eighteenth birthday.⁵⁶ The seventh child, Ruth, was born in 1841, and lived until September 1873. The 1861 census reports her working as a shop assistant ('assistant in shop') and living with James and Mary Heath along with a 'dairy maid', Morag Wheller. Ruth married William Morley, a farm labourer, and at the time of the 1871 census was living back in Fernhurst with two children, John (aged 4) and Stephen (aged 2). A year before she died, in 1873, she had a third child, Ann.

Rachel ('Rachael' in the 1851 census) was John and Maria's eighth child, born in 1843. She died in October 1853. The ninth child was Isaac, born in 1847. He appears to have avoided registration in several censuses but does appear in the 1891 census, when he is recorded as living in Dorking, Surrey with his wife Rebecca (1850–1925; née Mitchell). By then, though, he had knocked two years from his age to indicate a birth year of 1849, and this remained the case in the 1911 census until being corrected in the 1921 census record. His marriage to Rebecca took place in January 1891, so before the 1891 census, but Rebecca already had two

⁵⁴ No house number is given in the census.

⁵⁵ A photograph taken of the Farnham Fire Brigade in 1896, reproduced on p.56 of *Farnham by the Wey*, compiled by Jean Parratt, includes a fireman identified as 'Shoey Varnes' – could this, although his surname should rightly have been Ford, have been Stephen William?

⁵⁶ Other death registrations in Midhurst for 'Maria Varns' are recorded for 1855 and 1867.

children from her first marriage to George Flint – Jesse James (b.1868) and Nelly A J (1883–1948). Her first marriage, though, was registered in 1870, so in the 1891 census Jesse James is recorded with the family name Mitchell, because he had been born before the marriage took place, while Nelly is recorded with the surname Flint. Jesse had left home by 1901, but Nelly remained, recorded as a ‘Flint’ although listed as Isaac’s daughter. She was still at home in 1911, when the census states she is Isaac’s stepdaughter and is working as her mother’s helper. The 1911 census also lists an adopted daughter, Mary Jane Copas, aged 8, and records Isaac’s occupation as a cattle drover. Given that the address recorded for him in both 1901 and 1911 was 16 Cotmandene Square, Dorking – behind Dorking Halls – it seems reasonable to assume that he was working for the town’s market. The market was held in the High Street until a dedicated cattle market was built in what today is a car park behind the library and town clock. Cotmandene once included almshouses down one side, but it has been considerably redeveloped since Isaac’s time. At one point, those living there had the right to graze animals on the green. Isaac was buried in Saint Martin’s churchyard, Dorking, on 15 November 1924, and Rebecca was buried just six months’ later, in April 1925.

Ezra Varns, Fourth Generation, and the Cokeler connection

Before turning my attention to Arthur George’s wife and children, I turn to Ezra, the seventh child of Peter Varns and Martha Morley. My purpose in doing so is because with Ezra the reason for the biblical names given to so many Varns children comes into plain sight.

Ezra was born in June 1877 in Fernhurst and at the time of the 1901 England Census was lodging in Surbiton. He married Emily Jane Cumberland (1876–1946), who had been born in Spaldwick, Huntingdonshire on 7 January 1903. The couple had five children: Florence (1903–1987), Ernest (1907–1988), Edith May (1908–1966), Bertha (1905–1958) and Nellie (1911–1998). He opened a shop on Chapel Street (now known as Vann Road, and where in recent years a pharmacy has stood), Fernhurst, shortly after marrying. In the 1911 census, his family were living there, with Ezra listed as a grocer and baker. In the 1939 Register, Ezra, his wife and four daughters were still living at the same address, Ezra being described as a bread baker, although Emily was by now an invalid. Ezra died on 23 February 1956, ten years after his wife, and the *Fernhurst News* carried a tribute in its March 1956 edition. Ezra left £7261 13s 6d (which would equate to about £155,000 at 2022 prices) to his oldest daughter, Florence, which indicates that his business had accrued considerable profits. His shop kept going through World War II, but Ezra closed it shortly after peace, selling it to a Mr Pitts, and moving with all four daughters to Northchapel, six miles east of Fernhurst, where he settled in Hillgrove Lane. None of his four daughters married, and when Edith and Bertha died, they too left their estate to Florence. Ernest, alone among the children, married, to Gertrude Maud Dean in 1937. The 1939 Registry shows that he was still working for his father as a baker and roundsman, and living at 3 Cylinders, Fernhurst. Ernest died in December 1988, and Gertrude Maud died in Eastbourne just over six years later, in January 1995.

The story falls into place through the oral histories recounted by old-timer Fernhurst residents. *Voices of Fernhurst* includes the following, from Alf West:⁵⁷

I think one of the most interesting streets in Fernhurst was Chapel Street. We had the Wesleyans ... and the Plymouth Brethren and the Methodists, and then there was a

⁵⁷ *Voices of Fernhurst*, pp.111–2.

shop further down called Varns and they were Cokelers. It was a very tight knit religion. I think it was a sin for his children to be getting married ... The family all worked at the shop in Vann Road and they used to sell clothes and groceries and bread and sweets. They wore long black dresses and bonnets, the girls, and very tight hair ... They used to keep themselves to themselves and never used to socialise. When we were courting we used to walk down there and hear Ezra reading the bible every morning and every night to them ... They were called Cokelers, honest people ... When things were rationed you'd go to the shop and say have you got so and so, they wouldn't tell a lie, just shake their head to say no, but they used to save up enough so that everybody got a ration.

Again, Poppie Upperton remembered the Varns family: 'They always had white pinafores, straight pieces of the stuff what they called crash linen. Everybody wore white pinafores in those days with a frill round the neck but not the Varns's ... They had a box cart and three used to sit in the front and three in the back dressed in black to go to Northchapel.' And Mollie Brittain recalled, 'The Cokelers at their farm made lovely bread. There was quite a sect in Fernhurst.' The shop, on Chapel Street, is shown below:



Roger Nash⁵⁸ recalled how the family walked to Northchapel on foot – presumably before the box cart remembered by Poppie Upperton was purchased – and that their shop sold a range of goods similar to that offered in larger communities of Dependants (Cokelers). He cites more details, as collected by the Fernhurst Society:

The main shop along Chapel Street was Varnses, where the pharmacy is now. The shop was staffed by Ezra Varns, his wife and the family of four girls and one boy Ernie baked the bread and delivered the groceries. The family were Cokelers, a nonconformist religious sect and the women always wore long black skirts and black blouses. They used to go off in their black bonnets on a Sunday morning and go to Northchapel to attend services. They were particularly known for their kindness and courtesy. They also baked

⁵⁸ Roger Nash, *Dependant Brethren of Sussex and Surrey: A History of the Cokelers* (Rudgewick: Weyhurst, 2021), p.207.

particularly good lardy rolls! A bill from 1939 describes their business as Grocer and Draper, Household Furnisher, China, Earthenware, Boot & Shoe Stores. At one time there was an entire bedroom suite in the window.

I would like to believe the photograph below, kept by Hilda, is of Emily Jane Varns (1876–1946), although I have a nagging suspicion that it might be Mrs Walker, the head servant and companion to Edie Edgar at Ravenswood. Hilda did not annotate the back to indicate the identity of the person. I hope someone, someday, will tell me otherwise:



Nash notes that Rachel Varns, the daughter of Ezra's brother Peter, was also a Dependant. It is likely, too, that other family members were involved, but if so, then they must have turned to the Dependants from allegiance to another fundamentalist group such as the Primitive Methodists. My reason for stating this is because the prevalence of biblical names in Varns children predates the time when we know the Dependants spread to Fernhurst. In fact, the story of the Dependants starts around 1850, when a shoemaker, John Sirgood (1821–1885), and his wife Harriet decamped from London⁵⁹ to the villages of Sussex and Surrey to work with the poor. A community of brethren gradually grew, based around the need they perceived to preach the gospel away from the established church – particularly to those who were in service and who were only allowed to attend church with their employers or when their employers permitted it. Chapels were built, the pre-eminent one being in Loxwood – it had the only Dependant burial ground and was where the Dependant community from surrounding areas came together at least once a year. Their name, usually with a final 'a'

⁵⁹ Dependants refer to his birth as having been in Avening in Gloucestershire. Nash (*Dependant Brethren*, p.13) states there is no proof of this, although the 1871 and 1881 censuses do give his birthplace as Gloucestershire. There is evidence that during some of the 1860s he was back working in Clapham Common, London, rather than proselytising in the Weald.

rather than the more normal 'e', came because they considered themselves dependant on Christ: 'With God's help, we can conquer sin,' as it has been put. The more colloquial use of 'Cokeler' for the brethren may have come from a field, 'Cokkes Field', next to where they built their most important store, the Loxwood Combination Store.⁶⁰ 'Cokeler', though, was not a name liked or used by the brethren themselves. Officially, they were Dependants, although this may have been an abbreviation of either the 'Society of Dependants' or 'Dependant Brethren'. Dependants set about acquiring land to use in farming and establishing shops, the 'combination' element of which was because shops were worked by groups, mainly single women and often members of the same family. The farms, likewise, provided work for single men, who from initially managing stables and livestock later diversified into running garages and servicing motor vehicles. Importantly, both shops and farms provided ways in which the poor could be moved out of service, and thus be enabled to attend meetings. But working as a group also gave rise to a notion that Dependants were against marriage – which, if it was true was a sure-fire way to gradually kill the community itself. There was certainly a widespread notion that remaining single helped members keep strong in their commitment to Christ. But they were not isolationist: shops placed Dependants squarely within the broader communities that they served while also allowing those who worked in shops to keep themselves separate. Ezra's family demonstrates their approach well.

Chapels and communities grew from Shamley Green (or, rather, the hamlet of Lordshill Common) north of Cranleigh and south of Guildford where Sirgood settled in the 1850s, through Loxwood and south and west to Plaistow, Warnham and Northchapel, then on to Fernhurst, down to the coast to Hove, Chichester and Felpham, northeast to Friday Street, and back up to south London. Across the Sussex and Surrey borderland area of the Weald that I am concerned with here, the Dependants found fertile ground because of the largely illiterate populations that lived in scattered settlements with relatively loose connections to the established church. This also gave Dependants the opportunity to set up farms and shops, away from more industrialising and urbanising towns. Dependants were known for their conservative and modest dress: women in black or dark colours, dresses of ankle length and black bonnets covering tightly combed and parted hair, men commonly with heavy beards but often with no moustache. I will stop my discussion at this point with the observation that neither Arthur George nor his father were caught up with Dependants, although the non-conformist thread ran through to my own family.

⁶⁰ There are variations to the name: 'Cockler' and 'Cuckolders' both appeared in the West Sussex Gazette in 1864; 'Cocoalers' is also occasionally found, perhaps referencing their avoidance of alcohol and high consumption of cocoa; etc. See Nash, *Dependant Brethren*, p.viii.