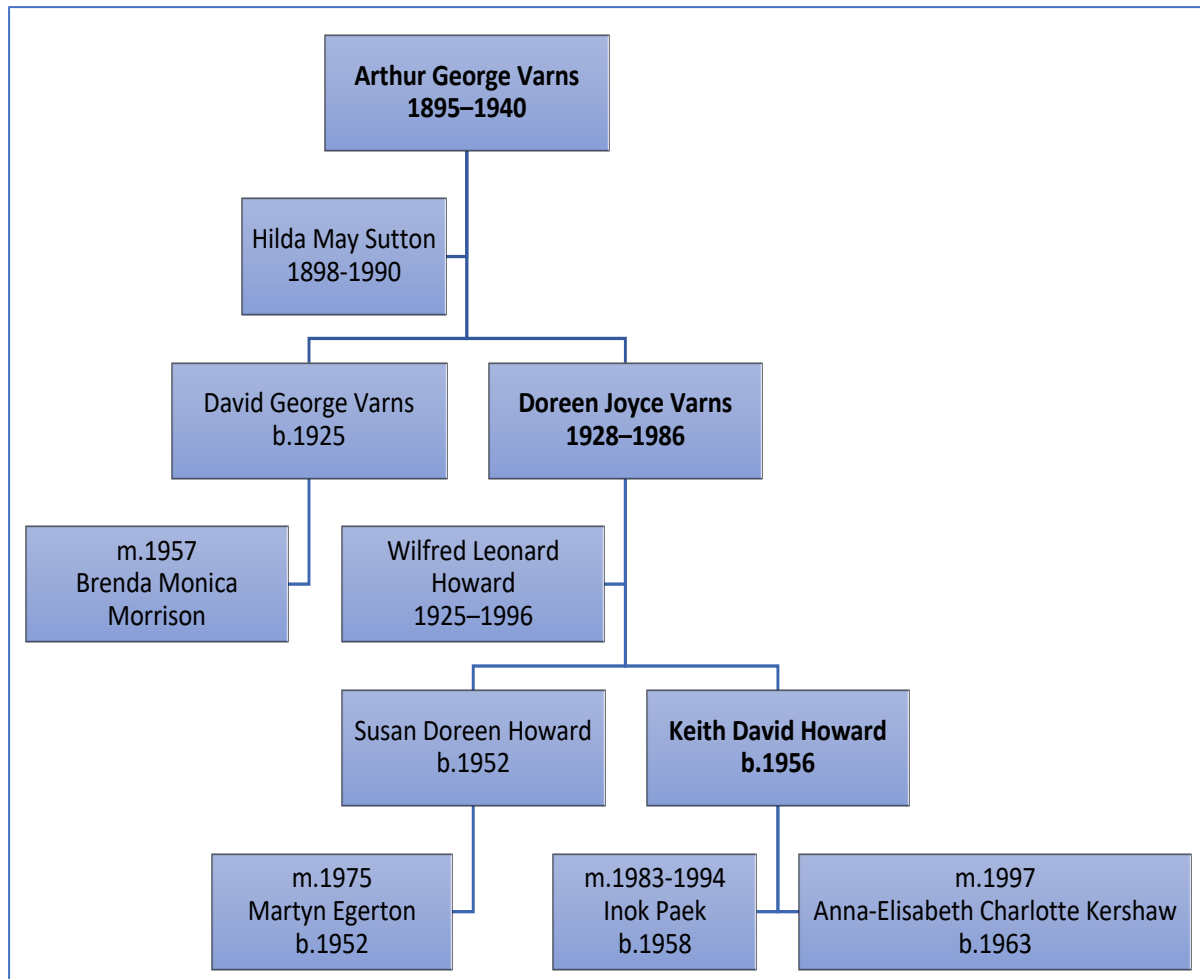


#### 4. Hilda May Sutton and Arthur George Varns – my maternal grandparents – and their children



##### **Arthur George and Hilda May**

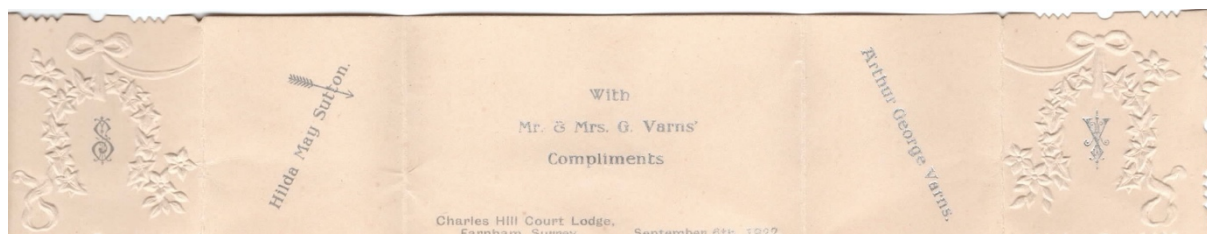
My grandmother Hilda May Sutton married my grandfather Arthur George Varns in September 1922. They married in Tilford, and on the card printed for guests, as reproduced below, gave their address as Charles Hill Court, where Hilda's brother David was head gardener. There was no return to Gooderstone or Great Cressingham for the marriage, and there is no evidence that Hilda's father attended the wedding. Arthur George had taken up a post as undergardener for Charles Hill Court at some point before 1921, and it was there that he met Hilda, since she had taken a post in service as housemaid to the Jacques family in Abbot's Lodge, at the other side of Tilford on the road to Hindhead. After their marriage, the new couple moved to Otterdene near Faversham, Kent, where Arthur George took work as a gardener.<sup>1</sup> They lived in Walnut Tree Cottages – today holiday rental accommodation – and they seem to have briefly worked for Katherine May Drummond, the sister of the owner of Charles Hill Court, Elizabeth Antrobus. I assume this was an arrangement set up between the

<sup>1</sup> Hilda kept five postcards sent to her at Walnut Tree Cottages, all dating from between October 1922 and October 1923.

two sisters. Katherine May would later die in Kent: her death was recorded in Maidstone in 1947. By 1924, Arthur George and Hilda had returned to Charles Hill, since he is listed on the Electoral Register living at Ravenswood Cottage, a cottage belonging to the Ravenswood estate, next door to Charles Hill Court. He became gardener for William Hawthorne Edgar and his sister Margaret Edith (Edie) Edgar at Ravenswood.<sup>2</sup> The Edgars had moved to Ravenswood in 1922 from Briarside, Bridgewater Road, Chertsey.<sup>3</sup>



Bride and groom: Arthur George and Hilda May




Wedding slip, Arthur George (George) and Hilda

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<sup>2</sup> Ravenswood was last sold in 2004. Sales particulars from a previous sale are in the Surrey History Centre, Woking (item 5031/1/73).

<sup>3</sup> Electoral Registers give them at the Chertsey address in 1920, and at Ravenswood in 1922.


POST OFFICE  TELEGRAPHS.

This Form must accompany any inquiry respecting this Telegram.

Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Tilford

Charges to pay } s. d. 2 0

Handed in at 2 .M., Received here at 2 .M.

Office Stamp. 

TO { Mrs & Mr Varns Tilford

Best of luck - and all good wishes for your future health & happiness  
from all at Tilford Postoffice

Tilford Post Office staff telegram to Arthur George and Hilda Varns congratulating them on their marriage

The newspaper obituary for Arthur George's father in 1929 mentions that a Mrs Walker attended the funeral. This was Lily Harriett Walker (known as Bessie), who was at the time head servant and companion to Edie Edgar at Ravenswood. Lily Harriett was born Dinnage in about 1889, and married Sidney George Walker at St Mary's in Caterham, Surrey on 30 January 1915. The 1911 England and Wales Census records her as a laundress, and by the time of the 1939 Register she had left Ravenswood and was working, already a widow, as a parlourmaid in Dorking. She moved to 1 Oakdene Cottages, Holmwood by 1950,<sup>4</sup> and died in Lewes, Sussex, on 23 May 1965. She only appears on the Electoral Role at Ravenswood in 1929, rather than before. For Arthur George, working at Ravenswood enabled him to live close to his parents, while for Hilda it meant she could stay close to her brother David and his wife Minnie. Elizabeth Antrobus, David's employer, remained friendly with the Varns family, since she is remembered as having called Hilda and Arthur George's children, Doreen Joyce (1928–1986; known as Doreen) and David George (b.1925; known as David), 'my little darlings'. To go to school from Ravenswood Cottage, the young siblings Doreen and David would leave Charles Hill, turn right just before The Donkey public house, and walk along an unmetalled lane that connected to Tilford. They both attended All Saints' Church of England School, which was next to the Anglican church (today the two are separated by a modern vicarage, built when the church sold the large Victorian vicarage on the other side of the church). David was born on 21 June 1925 and was baptised on 2 August; Doreen was born three years later, on 13 May 1928, and was baptised on 1 July. As we would expect, Hilda kept many photographs of her family, some of which are reproduced below; the last two snaps show the extended Varns family at the seaside.

<sup>4</sup> Curiously, this address links to my sister Susan – not that this was known – since it is roughly half-way between where she lived during the 1980s in North Holmwood and Capel, where she moved to in the mid 1990s.



A handful of photographs survive from the 1920s and 1930s of Hilda with her two children, David and Doreen, but without Arthur George (Arthur George's sister, Emily May, is behind them in the second photograph below), or featuring just the children:







David and Doreen also appear in larger groups on two coach tours, the first in the early 1930s with Hilda, and the second featuring the children without their mother somewhat later; in both photographs, David and Doreen are to the front on the left:



The electoral register verifies that Arthur George and Hilda still lived in Ravenswood Cottage in 1933. Around that time, their son David recalls that his mother worked for Weyburn Engineering (illustrated above), whose premises were in fields off the Shuttleford Road leading out of Elstead (that is, the village a mile along the road from Charles Hill). She would have worked for Weyburn alongside Arthur George's brother-in-law, Tobe. Arthur George and Hilda were still on the Electoral Register at Ravenswood Cottage in 1937. But two of the photographs of the grounds of Charles Hill Court reproduced above are dated 1937 on their reverse and seem almost as if they are keepsakes, that is, memories taken before moving away. Indeed, Arthur George soon took new employment at Worplesdon Place, Perry Hill, on the north-western outskirts of Guildford. The family moved into the lodge of Worplesdon Place, where they were recorded as living in the 1939 England and Wales Register.<sup>5</sup> The Register records that Hilda was engaged in unpaid domestic duties and Arthur George was head gardener. Doreen, still at school, made friends, including Muriel Dodds with whom she would remain in touch later in life (Doreen's daughter, Susan, and Muriel's daughter, Lynne, latterly went on holiday together). To digress once more to the wealthy upper classes for whom so many of my ancestors worked, Worplesdon Place was by the 1930s owned by the Negretti family. Lieutenant Paul Ernest Negretti (1883–1953)<sup>6</sup> and Marjorie (1885–1963, née Layton) lived there with their son, Peter Noel (1916–2010). The house had been built in 1845, and the Negretti's bought it in 1929 from Sir James Lewis Walker, a patron and friend to Rudyard Kipling. Since the 1950s, Worplesdon Place has functioned as a hotel.



Worplesdon Place (today)

The Varns's new life in Worplesdon was cut short when Arthur George died on 31 July 1940. His death certificate records that he died in Guildford County Hospital of brain cancer, lung cancer, and pneumonia. On 3 August his body was taken first to Charles and Emily Rutter's house at 117 Walnut Tree Close, then on to Elstead, where he was buried at St James' churchyard; later the ashes of his wife Hilda and daughter Doreen would be placed in the same grave. By then, the family had moved and were no longer parishioners in Elstead, so double fees were due for him to be interred near his parents, even though the burial register gives 'Tilford' in brackets as his residence. A simple obituary was placed by Hilda in the Guildford-based *Surrey Advertiser*: 'Varns – Treasured memories of a very dear husband and

<sup>5</sup> The Registry has the two children's names blacked out presumably because Doreen Joyce died in 1986 and David George emigrated to Australia in the 1950s.

<sup>6</sup> Second lieutenant, Royal Flying Corps, 1914–1922. The Negretti seat had previously been at Thornborough Manor, Buckinghamshire.

father, Arthur (George), who passed away July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1940. Forever in our thoughts. From his loving Wife and Children.' His death certificate, funeral card and grave are below.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 12508382-10

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SURREY SOUTH-WESTERN

1940 DEATH in the Sub-district of Guildford and Godalming in the County of Surrey

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
445	Thursy 31st July 1940 Royal Surrey County Hospital Guildford, Surrey	Arthur George Varns	Male	45	of Worpleston Farm, Lodge, Worpleston, Guildford, Hants (Dorset)	1st carcinoma of Cervix Uteri (very severe) & carcinoma of Bronchus & Hypertensive haemorrhage	M. M. Varns, Mother of Deceased, Worpleston Place, Lodge, Worpleston	31st Aug 1940	E. J. Parsons, 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 580838

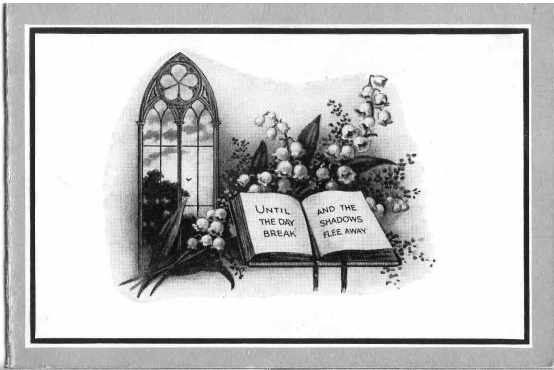
See note overleaf

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE "CROWN COPYRIGHT"

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

2031956 04/21 APS/A15P

GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE



From our happy home and circle,  
God has taken one we loved;  
Borne away from pain and sorrow  
To a nobler rest above.

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE OF  
ARTHUR GEORGE VARNs,  
Beloved husband of Hilda Varns,  
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE, WEDNESDAY, JULY 31ST, 1940,  
AGED 45 YEARS.  
Laid to rest in Elstead Cemetery.





Although buried in Elstead, his stone grave was erected only when funding allowed some 16 years later, in 1956. A. J. Tracey, a company then based in Elstead took on both the funeral arrangements and, in 1956, the construction of the grave, as two documents indicate:

TELEPHONE: ELSTEAD 7  
TELEGRAMS: "TRACY, ELSTEAD"  
STATION: MILFORD

4337

M. <sup>Aug 8<sup>th</sup></sup> <sup>1940</sup> DARNES  
**DR. TO A. J. TRACY & SONS LTD.**  
DIRECTORS: A. J. TRACY R. A. TRACY R. L. TRACY R. D. TRACY  
**Builders, Contractors & Decorators,**  
**ELSTEAD, SURREY.**  
Estimates Free. ALL WORK CARRIED OUT UNDER PERSONAL SUPERVISION

*To supply Polished Elm Office Pedestal  
lined internally with Side Seats  
and Pivoting fitted with good Quality  
Heavy Brass Furniture and Inscribed  
Bronze Plate to attendance at  
Interment in Elstead Cemetery  
Parade Grounds near Heath and  
Gowling from Guildford Hospital  
to Walnut Tree Close and then  
to Elstead for Interment  
to make Church Arrangements  
to pay Double Fees for a  
(non. Parishioner)  
Total inclusive charge = 13. 12. 6*

*delegated late George Arthur Varns  
Passed away Aug 19<sup>th</sup> 1940  
aged 45 years*

ELSTEAD, Surrey 1252  
12/8/1940  
Received from  
Mrs. Varns  
14  
For and on behalf of  
A. J. Tracy & Sons, Ltd.  
B. J. N. B. 1940

ESTIMATE

N<sup>o</sup> 916

**A. J. TRACY & SONS LIMITED**  
DIRECTORS: A. J. Tracy, R. A. Tracy, R. L. Tracy, R. D. Spenceley, C. A. Spenceley  
**BUILDERS**  
**DECORATORS & CONTRACTORS**  
Registered Office: **ELSTEAD, SURREY**  
TELEPHONE: ELSTEAD 3107 STATION: MILFORD, S.R.  
4th. April 1956.

Mrs. Hilda M. Varns,  
121, Walnut Tree Close,  
Guildford,  
Surrey.

Dear Mrs. Varns,

We have been in communication with the stonemason and are now able to let you have a firm estimate for the proposed memorial as follows:-

Portland Stone Memorial.

To supply and erect complete in Elstead Cemetery, kerbing and posts (as Design M.425 with internal chamfers) all on concrete sub-kerbing. £29. 0. 0.

Inscription as below, incised and filled with imperishable composition, 8 dozen and five letters at 15/- per dozen letters 6. 6. 3.

Concrete bed and granite chippings 2. 15. 0.

Elstead Cemetery Fees 2. 2. 0.

£40. 3. 3.

Proof of Inscription:-

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
ARTHUR GEORGE VARNIS  
DEARLY LOVED HUSBAND OF HILDA VARNIS  
WHO WAS CALLED TO REST 31st. JULY 1940  
AGED 45 YEARS.

AT REST

Continued over .....

The *Surrey Advertiser* carried two accounts of Arthur George's death and funeral, on 3 August and 10 August 1940 respectively. The first reported his death, aged 45, and noted that he was well-known in Tilford and Elstead because of his many years of service as head gardener at Ravenswood. It also noted that he had become a member of the Local Defence Volunteers in Worplesdon when World War II broke out. The second reported his funeral, at which the Rev. S. H. Courtnay-Smith officiated. In addition to his immediate family, his sisters Emily and Vi attended along with their respective husbands, as did Hilda's sister Dora and brother David with his wife Minnie, and Mrs Walker. Mrs Walker was mistakenly said to be the deceased's sister-in-law, although in reality she has been the head servant for his former employer at Ravenswood although by 1940 she had moved to a new employer in Dorking. The Negretti family sent flowers, as did the staff of Worplesdon Place and 'his pals of Worplesdon section, L.D.V.' There were also flowers from staff at the sheet metal department of Dennis Brothers, the lawnmower and vehicle manufacturer based in Guildford where Arthur George's son David was at the time working.

## Hilda May

After Arthur George's death, Hilda was not able to stay at Worplesdon Place, since it was her husband who had been employed there. She moved with her two children to 121 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, where she rented a house two doors away from Arthur George's sister, Emily May). Walnut Tree Close was developed in the 1880s, and the two pairs of semi-detached houses that included 117 and 121 (that is, 115–121) were owned by the same landlord, who



had originally used them to house workers in his building firm. Without employees needing them, the builder rented them to tenants. The side of 121 had in 1928 been developed as the Billing and Sons printing works.<sup>7</sup> Hilda, like Emily, took on domestic work around the town, and postcards confirm she was cleaning for the Quarry Edge Hotel (posted on 16 September 1959) and for 1 Shawfields, Cranley Road (posted on 4 July 1953). Also, for many years she worked for the Jeffery family in Guildford High Street. The Jefferys lived above the family shop at 134 or 137 High Street (the High Street was renumbered at some point). I recall accompanying her there in 1961: she cleaned the family's residence as the five-year-old me played. The Jefferys sent my sister and me presents each Christmas, and Mrs Jeffery would routinely send postcards to Hilda when she was on holiday – those that Hilda kept were sent from Yeovil (postmarked 4 December 1953), Sidmouth (13 September 1960 and 10 October 1962) and Liskeard, Cornwall (14 July 1964). The shop, Jeffery and Son, dated back to 1851, when Richard Jeffery had moved from Farnham to take over the gun making business of Henry Piper at 118 High Street, Guildford. Richard moved a few doors up the High Street before he died in 1877 and passed the business to his nephew, Samuel Richard Jeffery. The latter expanded to bicycles and then motorcycles (developing a garage a short way from the shop on Tunsgate), and on his death in 1928 the business passed to Samuel's son Harold. Hilda worked for Harold. The family sold the business in 1986, and it eventually closed in 2001.



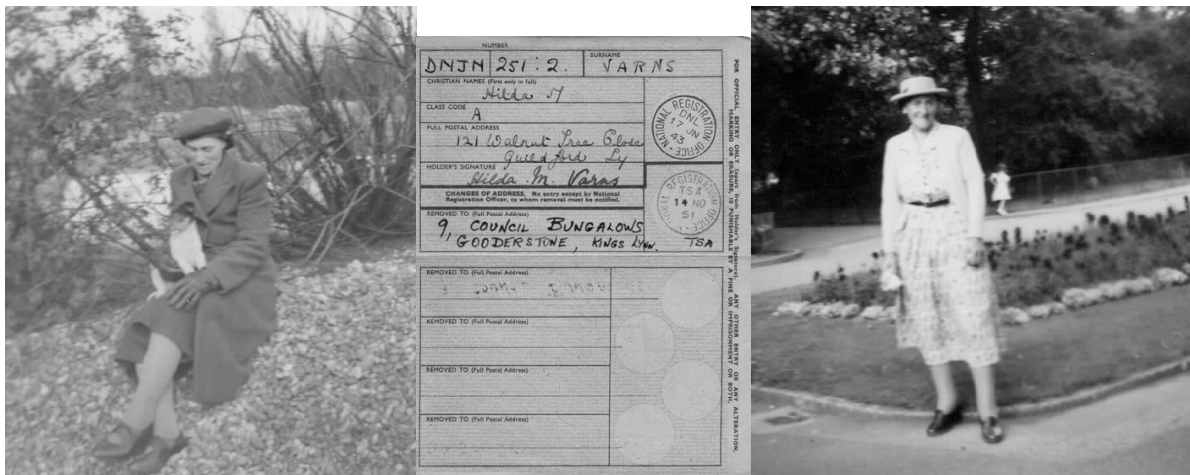
121 Walnut Tree Close (left, today), and Jeffery and Sons gun maker and sports shop (centre, right)



An aerial photograph of Walnut Tree Close in 1928, showing the newly built printing works. 121 Walnut Tree Close is circled.

<sup>7</sup> An aerial photo is online at <http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/cy/image/EPW022657>.

121 Walnut Tree Close would remain the family home until 1964. In 1944, Hilda was briefly forced to leave after a German V1 bomb exploded at the bottom of the garden, and (as previously notes) she stayed at Emily's son's house in Westborough, Guildford. Walnut Tree Close was the address given in 1949 for Hilda, her daughter Doreen and son David on the Electoral Register. Over the years, though, Hilda would regularly spend time in Gooderstone, staying either with her sister Dora or with others – postcards were sent to her at 9 Council Bungalows in July 1952 and 4 The Street in 1962. In fact, in November 1951 and as residual rationing from the war continued, she changed her residence on her national registration card from Walnut Tree Close to 9 Council Bungalows.

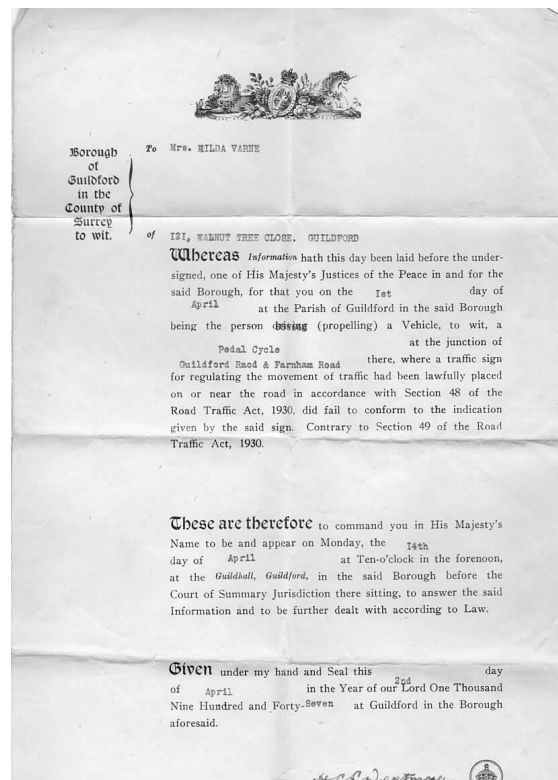


Hilda, around 1940 with dog (left) and around 1950 (right), with her national registration card (centre)



Hilda, daughter Doreen, and son David, 1947

The significance of changing her residence may be the timing. Her son, David, had left England for Australia the previous year, and her daughter, Doreen, had married two months' earlier. Hilda appears to have struggled with her children flying the nest, as is indicated in a letter she wrote to David five months earlier on 5 June 1951 but never posted, in which she responds to his news by commenting that, 'as usual your luck was in, and I hope will still keep in wherever you move to.' She obliquely discusses Doreen's forthcoming marriage for which 'no arrangement has been made yet, but we will let you know in time to take a flying trip over here.' Hilda also kept photographs of the marriage of David's friend Phil to Barbara, which had taken place shortly after David had left for Australia (he had met Phil after he left school). Clearly there were highs and lows for Hilda at Walnut Tree Close, just as is the case for all of us wherever we live. One low point came in 1947 with a court summons that she received after she had been caught riding a bicycle on the pavement – just beyond where Walnut Tree Close begins at the junction with Farnham Road and Commercial Road. The very formal and official document must have been alarming, but she did not keep any record of the outcome, although I am sure she dutifully attended court as required:



In August 1954, Hilda underwent surgery for cancer of the womb at St Luke's Hospital – coincidentally, this hospital was on Warren Road, Guildford, not far from where her father-in-law had been a cowman at the time of the 1911 England and Wales Census. Hilda was admitted to Henriques Ward, and it was not clear whether she would survive. She did but was readmitted to hospital in June 1956 for a further operation, this time to the Victoria Ward of Royal Surrey County Hospital. Her recovery was slow, and this time she was admitted to the Clara Arnold Ward at the Schiff Home of Recovery for recuperation. 1964 saw further complications, a period in hospital in June, and recuperation at the Victorian Convalescent Home, Bognor Regis. After recovery, she packed her bags and left 121 Walnut Tree Close for good. Renovations were made and Emily and Rene moved in, moving exactly two doors down the street. Her daughter Doreen with her children – that is, my sister and I – went with Hilda



to Heathrow, and she took a Boeing 707 and flew to Australia to stay with her son, David. We waved her off, and she arrived in Sydney on 16 December. She stayed in Australia for eight months, embarking on the P&O Orient cruise ship *Orcades* on 9 August 1965 for the return to England.<sup>8</sup> She disembarked in Tilbury and back in Guildford moved to sheltered accommodation in Pond House, Merrow Street – a 15-minute walk from her daughter Doreen's house (where, of course, I lived).<sup>9</sup> Where 121 Walnut Tree Close had been a two-up, two-down Victorian semi-detached house with outside toilet, she was now in a single room, with bathroom and kitchenette. She attended Merrow Methodist Church with her daughter, Doreen, but in June 1968 she also became a member of the Seventh Day Adventists, who met in North Street, Guildford. Twenty years later and two years after the death of her daughter Doreen, suffering from memory loss and old age, she was admitted to Annandale Burpham Homes, Conniers Way, Burpham, in 1988, where she died of heart failure on 18 June 1990. Probate was granted on 3 October 1990, and her residual estate was distributed to her grandchildren. Below is a photograph of Hilda with her son David and daughter Doreen in 1956 (L), a photograph of Hilda in the late 1980s (R), Doreen with Hilda shortly in the mid 1970s, and her registration of death, which I signed as the informant.



<sup>8</sup> According to the *Orcades* booklets containing the passenger lists for each part of the voyage.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.guildfordsunsethomes.org.uk>.



D. Cert.  
S.R./R.B.D.

CERTIFIED COPY  
Pursuant to the Births and

OF AN ENTRY  
Deaths Registration Act 1953

CAUTION—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intending it to be accepted as genuine in the presence of any person or to possess a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

DEATH		Entry No. 10
Registration district <i>Surry South Western</i>		Administrative area <i>County of Surry</i>
Sub-district <i>Guildford</i>		
1. Date and place of death <i>Eighteenth June 1990</i> <i>Burpham Homes, Guildford</i>		
2. Name and surname <i>Hilda May VARNIS</i>		3. Sex <i>Female</i>
		4. Maiden surname of woman who has married <i>SUTTON</i>
5. Date and place of birth <i>2nd October 1898</i> <i>Swaffham, Norfolk</i>		
6. Occupation and usual address <i>Widow of Arthur George VARNIS, Gardener</i> <i>Burpham Homes, Guildford</i>		
7.(a) Name and surname of informant <i>Keith David HOWARD</i>		(b) Qualification <i>Grandson</i>
(c) Usual address <i>41 Scardale Way, Durham, County Durham</i>		
8. Cause of death <i>1a Myocardial infarct</i>		
Certified by <i>John H.W. Davis</i> L.R.C.P.		
9. I certify that the particulars given by me above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.		
10. Date of registration <i>Nineteenth June 1990</i>		11. Signature of registrar <i>John H.W. Davis</i>

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

*John H.W. Davis* Registrar 19. 6. 90 IAC 453001

## David Varns

361051

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF BIRTH.  
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Acts, 1836 to 1874.

Registration District *Farnham*

1925. Birth in the Sub-District of *Farnham* in the County of *Surry*

No.	When and Where Born.	Name, if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Baptised
165	<i>Twentieth June 1925</i> <i>Ravenswood Cottages</i> <i>Charles Hill</i> <i>Farnham</i> <i>Rural</i> <i>R.D.</i>	<i>David George</i>	<i>Boy</i>	<i>Arthur George Varns</i>	<i>Hilda May Varns formerly Sutton</i>	<i>Gardener (Domestic)</i>	<i>G. Varns</i> <i>Father</i> <i>Ravenswood Cottages</i> <i>Charles Hill</i> <i>Farnham</i>	<i>Twentieth July 1925</i>	<i>A. Wright</i> Registrar.	

I, *Arthur Thomas Wright* Registrar of Births and Deaths for the Sub-district of *Farnham* in the County of *Surry* hereby certify that this is a true copy of the Entry No. *165* in the Register Book of Births for the said Sub-district, and that such Register Book is now lodged.

WITNESS MY HAND this *10th* day of *July*, 1925.

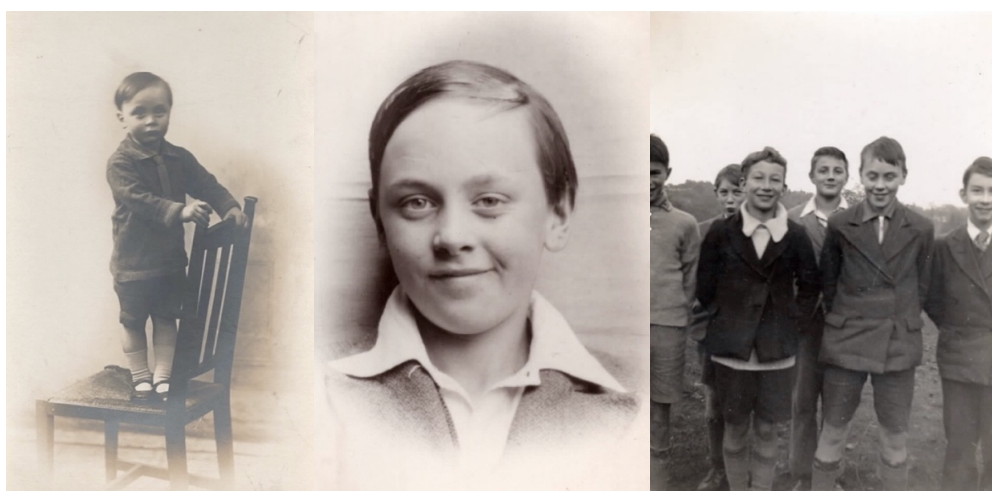
CAUTION.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses it as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to Prosecution under the FORGERY Act, 1913, or the Perjury Act, 1911.

*A. Wright*  
Registrar of Births and Deaths

David was working for Dennis Brothers at the time his father died, and later moved to a vehicle repair business at 175 Walnut Tree Close known as Guildford Cellulising (today, Addisons), where he picked up panel beating skills. He served in the Royal Navy during World War II, signing up on 3 June 1943 (and serving from 21 June, his eighteenth birthday). However, while hostilities were going on he was fortunately not sent to the European mainland but remained in port in Weymouth, where he prepared landing craft for troop

landings. He received a good conduct medal, first class, on 21 June 1946, and was demobbed on 4 September 1947 (he was on leave from 9 July, living back at his mother's house at 121 Walnut Tree Close. Doreen recalled that when he was not working he was a keen amateur golfer, but not in an official (and expensive) capacity: he would practice on the Merrow golf course, starting at one of the tees some way around the course where it crossed Trodds Lane and stopping before the eighteenth hole brought him back to the clubhouse! In his effects, he left a scorecard from the Old Course at St Andrews, dated 14 April 1956, where he completed the round in 92 (par was 73). To take the opportunity to see the world before settling into married life and seeing a limited future in an England devastated by war, he began to think about moving abroad. Australia became the destination. He left in 1950 as a 'Ten-pound Pom'<sup>10</sup> onboard the Otranto, a ship of the Orient Steam Navigation Company that had been built in 1925 and would eventually be scrapped in 1957. He arrived in Melbourne on 30 May. He worked as a panel beater, living in the suburb of St Kilda, but although he liked Melbourne he found the weather little better than England, particularly in winter. So, he took a job as a panel beater in Atherton, in the Tablelands of Queensland. He visited Brisbane on the way up to Atherton and was not keen on it, since it was rather parochial and too hot in the height of summer, but when he returned there from the Tablelands he found it better. In 1954, he came down to Cairns to wave at Queen Elizabeth II during her state visit to Australia, and his albums contain several photos of the picturesque train ride from Cairns climbing the Great Dividing Range to Kuranda, as well as photos of celebrations in Atherton.

By 1955, he had moved to Brisbane. Unsure whether he would settle in Australia, and encouraged by his girlfriend, he left to return to England, departing from Sydney on the same ship he had sailed on from England to Australia, and arriving at Southampton on 30 March 1956. On its way to Southampton the ship had docked in Melbourne, Adelaide, Freemantle, Colombo, Aden, and Port Said. He was admitted for a nine-month stay, and during this period, apart from when he was in Walnut Tree Close, he travelled around Britain and Europe with friends. His arrival record gives his occupation as a panel beater. The photographs below show David's journey as a timeline, from childhood to his return in 1956 when, in the final photograph, Hilda stands outside 121 Walnut Tree Close alongside a black Ford Consul that David had hired.



<sup>10</sup> An interesting recent account of this programme, posted by John Mason on 29 March 2021, 'Move to Australia for just £10 – the "Ten Pound Pom"', is at <http://www.johnmason.com/australia/move-to-australia-for-just-10-the-ten-pound-pom/>. For an earlier account from 2008, see Lisa Matthews, 'The £10 ticket to another life,' at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7217889.stm>.







The black Ford Consul seen in the final photo above is somehow imprinted in my memory: I vividly remember David driving up to our house in Hillfield Close, Merrow. However, I was only a couple of months' old at the time, and it is most likely that I simply stored in my mind an image of my sister Susan sitting on the bonnet of the car parked on the road outside our house and have imagined the rest.

David left England once more to settle in Australia later in 1956, taking the P&O Orient line's *Orcades* and arriving in Freemantle on 25 January 1957. He did make further trips to England once travel by air had become more feasible and the price of tickets had tumbled, in 1977, 1986, 1990, and 2001. In 1957, though, he made his way from Freemantle to Brisbane where he married Brenda Monica Morrison (b.1927) on 5 October 1957 in St Peter and Paul's Church, Bulimba. Brenda's parents lived at 81 Fifth Avenue, Balmoral, and the married couple lived in Brisbane, at 31 Beatrice Street, Taringa. He continued to work as a panel beater, and there are photographs suggesting that he bought two accident damaged Hillman Minx Mark VIII cars, one a saloon and the second a pick-up (in Australian parlance, a 'Ute'), and used one to repair the other to use as his own car. Again, though, he found himself less than keen to settle permanently in Brisbane, so in 1959 the couple moved to the Inner West suburbs of Sydney. Initially they rented a room in Leichhardt, then part of a house near Croydon, and in 1963 they bought and moved into a typical 1920s house at 13 Alexandra Street, Concord. The style of house they choose, with wooden fretwork around a covered veranda and porch area with brick columns rising to the roof, is commonly known as a California bungalow, and is considered to have been adopted from North America. 13 Alexandra Street had a lean-to extension at the back ending in the semi-outside toilet, but beyond this it had never been modernized.

David took work as a panel beater and as a driver delivering car parts. Later, he worked as a general hand in a car yard on the Parramatta Road, driving cars as needed, and finally leading up to retirement he returned to a job delivering car parts for a company in Marrickville. Brenda, meanwhile, worked in a canning factory and as a bookkeeper. He took Australian citizenship on 13 August 2001, and remained in the Alexandra Street house until health issues forced him to move to the Redleaf Manor Aged Care Home around the corner in Flavelle Street in 2021. Dementia meant that Brenda moved to a care home, where she died in 2015. Shortly before the house was sold in 2021, it was chosen as a set for an ABC television drama, *Operation Buffalo*. The drama was set in the 1950s at the time of nuclear tests, and virtually nothing needed to be done by the film crew to conjure up a 1950s property –even when a murder was committed in the kitchen. Once bought by new owners, the house was quickly demolished to make way for two large duplex houses joined by garages.



"THE MARRIAGE ACTS, 1864 TO 1948."  
Schedule D (Form G), 28 Vic. No. 15, Sec. 14.  
**(COPY OF) CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE.**  
This copy to be handed by the Minister or Registrar to the parties Married immediately after the Marriage.

I, James William Couvanon being  
a Catholic Priest  
do hereby certify that I have this day at St. Kevin's  
Catholic Church, Bulimba, Brisbane  
in the State of Queensland duly celebrated Marriage between

**BRIDEGROOM** Insert Bridgroom's Name (in full) David George Yarns  
Rank or Occupation Teacher  
Residence (in full) 41 Childs St. New Farm (Street) Brisbane Q. (Place)  
Condition (Bachelor, Widower, Divorced) Bachelor  
Age (in full) 32 (Years) Date and Year of Birth 21st June 1925  
Birthplace (Town or Place) Telford (County or Shire) Surrey (Country) England  
Father's Name (Christian Name and Surname in full) George Yarns  
Father's Rank or Profession Teacher  
Mother's Name (Christian Name) Hilda May (Maiden Surname) Sutton

**BRIDE** AND Insert Bride's Name (Christian Name and Surname in full) Brenda Monica Morrison  
Rank or Occupation Teacher  
Residence (in full) 51 Fifth Avenue (Street) Queensland (Place)  
Condition (Bachelor, Widower, Divorced) Spinster  
Age (in full) 20 (Years) Date and Year of Birth 14th May 1924  
Birthplace (Town or Place) Salford (County or Shire) Lancashire (Country) England  
Father's Name (Christian Name and Surname in full) Alexander James Morrison  
Father's Rank or Profession Teacher  
Mother's Name (Christian Name) May Josephine (Maiden Surname) Linsmoulds

WITNESSES (Before) Rev. Wm Morris  
Tracy Jones  
after declaration duly made as by law required.

DATED this 21st day of October 1957  
James Couvanon { Signature of Minister or Registrar.  
D. G. Yarns  
B. M. Morrison  
Usual Signatures of Parties to the Marriage.  
H. A. Morris  
Usual Signatures of Witnesses.  
Tracy Jones  
Intending address of parties after marriage } Indefinite

  
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
Australian Citizenship Act 1948

**Certificate of Australian Citizenship**

DAVID GEORGE YARNS  
born on 21st June 1925

having applied for a Certificate of Australian Citizenship, having satisfied the conditions prescribed by the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 for the grant of such a Certificate and having undertaken to fulfil the responsibilities of a citizen.

I, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs,  
grant this Certificate of Australian Citizenship to the abovenamed applicant who is  
an Australian citizen on and after 13 AUG 2001

Issued by the authority  
of the Minister  
for Immigration and  
Multicultural Affairs

  
  
MINISTER  
FOR IMMIGRATION AND  
MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

No. 01745500484

The photographs below show the Taringa house (and a car that he had before the Hillman Minx), Brenda and David's marriage ceremony, the couple and David alone outside 13 Alexandra Street, Concord, Dave with Brenda and their appallingly-trained golden retriever Ricky, Dave with Brenda after she had moved to the care home, and Hilda at the house during her stay in 1964–1965.





David died on 23 August 2023, and on 4 October 2023, I scattered his ashes in Berrys Bay, Sydney Harbour, in memory of his love for the harbour and its ferries.



### ***Doreen Howard (née Varns)***

Doreen Varns remained at home, at 121 Walnut Tree Close, until well after her marriage in 1951. When she left school, she trained as a bookkeeper, and prior to her marriage worked for Harold John Colebrook (1879–1962) – the report of her wedding in the *Surrey Advertiser*



notes that he gave her a cheque when she married. The Colebrooks were well established in Guildford, and ran various businesses including a fishmonger (and, at times, a dairy) at 47 High Street Guildford, a butchers at 44 North Street, and an ice factory in Walnut Tree Close. The Colebrooks lived in Cromwell House, Commercial Road – on the site of part of the ancient Dominican Friary. Two of Harold's siblings made lasting impressions beyond Guildford: Leonard (1883–1967) specialized in vaccines and antibiotic treatments and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1945, while Herbert Gladstone (1880–1965) emigrated to Canada where he became well-known as a businessman.<sup>11</sup>



Colebrooks' premises in Guildford High Street, in the 1940s and as the building looked in 2017 (L), North Street Congregational Church, where Doreen later married, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (R)

Continuing the non-conformist tradition of the Varns family, Doreen married at the Congregational Church, North Street, Guildford on 29 September 1951. Because her father had died, Hilda was in charge and Doreen was given away by Cyril Truin, the husband of her cousin Grace. Doreen wore, as the *Surrey Advertiser* reported, 'white figured satin brocade, cut on classical lines, with a headdress and veil lent by a friend, and a string of pearls.' The bridegroom was Wilfred Leonard Howard (1925–1996; known either as Wilf or as Bill by family members and friends), the eldest son of Mr and Mrs Leonard Howard of 15 Council Cottages, Pirbright, Surrey. The bridesmaids were Irene Rutter, Doreen's cousin who lived two doors from her mother Hilda May Varns' house at 121 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, and Hazel Stringer, the daughter of Wilfred's half-sister Millie, from Kidderminster; the page was William (Billy) Howard, the first son of Wilfred's sister Ellen Lucy May (Nell). After the ceremony, Doreen's bouquet was placed on her father's grave in Elstead. Below are photographs of Doreen leading up to her wedding – in the first set, the penultimate picture shows the wedding party: bride and groom (centre), the bridegroom's parents (L), the bride's mother and Cyril Truin (R), best man (Frank Stevens, rear), and bridesmaids Irene Rutter (L front) and Micky Stringer (R front). The final picture is of the newly married couple on honeymoon in Eastbourne, Sussex...

<sup>11</sup> Kellys, <http://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rsbm.1971.0004>, <http://lusitaniapage.wordpress.com/2017/06/10/colebrook-herbert-gladstone/>.





And with their marriage, my father re-enters the story. My parents spent their first married months at 121 Walnut Tree Close, alongside Hilda, waiting until they were able to replace the first tenants in a recently built council house at 5 Hillfield Close, Merrow, Guildford (photographs below). The photographs below show my sister Susan sitting on the bonnet of the car hired by David in 1956 outside 5 Hillfield Close, and the property as it looks today (with replacement windows, a garage and other renovations that make it look very different from when we lived there!).

Bill was never Hilda's favourite son-in-law, and tellingly our holidays would be arranged so that Hilda would join us for the first week and Bill would replace her for the second week (our holidays were usually taken on the Sussex coast, in caravans at Selsey, Bracklesham Bay, and even in a former railway carriage at Pagham). As a child, I was told this was so Bill could get on with decorating the house – since he was a chain smoker, the wallpaper and any painted walls soon became discoloured and needed redecoration. Hilda considered Bill lazy, and this impression was to me made real because after a week or two away we would often return home to find decoration had barely started. Hilda was reluctant to visit Doreen when Bill was around, and when they met there were arguments and sly asides. One postcard sent to Hilda from Doreen at the end of a holiday in Bognor on 6 June 1959 is revealing: 'Bill has a cricket match on Monday night so perhaps you can come up.'



Doreen went out to work while my sister and I were still young – I recall being placed in a contraption on the back of her bicycle when she went to clean for an old woman in Burpham. This further gave the impression that my father did not provide enough money to support his family. By the time I was eight Doreen was working behind the till and keeping the books for the butcher's shop of Conisbee and Son in Hyde Park Road, Merrow. She later moved to become receptionist for Ernest Matthews, a blind physiotherapist working at 85 Epsom Road, Guildford. His practice was situated 100m beyond the junction of Epsom Road and Warren Road, where, in a further coincidence, Doreen's grandfather had once been a cowman, and the practice is today named Matthews House after Ernest, operating as a physiotherapy and sports clinic (the latter the legacy of his nephew, who worked as a physiotherapist for the Wimbledon tennis tournament).<sup>12</sup> Later, Doreen returned to Conisbee and Sons but to their East Horsley shop in Ockley Road South. Her final job was as a bookkeeper in Farncombe. Thinking back, I may have felt her absence more keenly when she was working because, as a sickly child, I was often at home, or would have to be left in the

<sup>12</sup> To me, his nephew was 'Spike', since he was a leader at the boy's club I attended – Guildford Crusaders.

care of my grandmother, Hilda. Doreen remained at 5 Hillfield Close until her death; in 1982, taking advantage of the Conservative government's 'right to buy' policy under Margaret Thatcher, Doreen and Bill bought the property from the council – Bill, at age 57, was given a 25-year mortgage, and a discount of more than 50% on the valuation of the house.

Doreen never travelled beyond the borders of England until 1971. Then, using a 'British visitor's passport' obtained from Guildford Post Office in 1971, she and Bill went on holiday to Ibiza, travelling out-of-season to keep the costs down – this was the first time they had travelled abroad as a couple. The folded single sheets of cardboard that serves as temporary passports were introduced in 1961 to serve the emerging foreign holiday industry and had a one-year validity. I suspect my parents' adventure to Ibiza was inspired by the subsidized cruises on S.S. Nevasa that Surrey County Council ran for school children to the Mediterranean – which my sister took in 1968 and 1970 and I took in 1971. She had, however, inherited thyroid disease complicated by angina, and in 1981 cancer was diagnosed. In remission, she decided to travel further afield, visiting her brother David in Sydney, and travelling to Seoul (with a stopover in Taipei) in December 1983 for my disastrous wedding – my bride was an hour late for her own marriage ceremony, and her father was drunk, his family and friends going off after the service for a reception in one restaurant, and my friends going to another restaurant. The Korean custom is for those who attend a wedding to give envelopes containing money to either the bride or groom's family – two tables are set up at the entrance to the marriage venue – and, nor surprisingly, my bride and I saw nothing of the money given to her family but were expected to pay for the whole shenanigans.



For Doreen, remission from cancer proved temporary, and she died at the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice in Farnham on 11 May 1986, a couple of days shy of her 58<sup>th</sup> birthday. She wrote a now poignant letter to her brother Dave in Australia two weeks before she died, when she was in the hospice but her pain was being managed and she was grasping at the hope of recovering, which is reproduced below together with photographs from her later life, on holiday in England and with her brother David at Sydney Circular Quay, are below.

5 Shalford Close, Memo  
22.4.86

Dear David. Thanks so much for the Easter letter I had meant to write before but never seemed to get around to it. Actually I'm not at home at the moment I'm having a 'break' in the Phyllis Luckwell Memorial Hospice in Farnham. It is the old St James Hospital but an entirely voluntary organisation & not financed by the National Health. Really they operate on a fair basis & normally all patients where the nurses & helpers are all trained to have one-to-one contact with the subjects which they don't have in N.H. service.

I was getting so much nerve pain which didn't seem to respond to painkillers that Liz Reed the leader of our Cancer Survivors Group which I have been going to for the last 2 years in Shalford had been in touch with the Hospice & suggested to Bill that I had a couple of weeks in here so here I am. I've

virtually spent 2 weeks today but am going to St. Lukes from here tomorrow & have chemotherapy then come back for a few more days & go home hopefully at the weekend. I feel much better for the break as I've been struggling with ill health treatment etc for 2 1/2 years & had really got very low physically & mentally as everything is such an effort & any movement is painful.



## 5. Wilfred Leonard Howard, my father

My father, Wilfred Leonard Howard ('Son' to his parents and siblings, 'Wilf' to a few friends but 'Bill' most commonly) was born in Pirbright on 2 May 1925. He died after a stroke in Perth, Western Australia, on 10 September 1996. He was the eldest son of Leonard and Clara Ellen, and grew up in 15 Council Cottages, Pirbright. He claimed to have sung in the church choir and to have pumped the organ bellows before an electric pump was installed in the 1930s, but he showed little propensity for music by the time I was old enough to register such things. Since I took piano lessons and music has formed the basis of my career, I may be biased, but I remember only too well how he regularly complained if I practised scales or played a piece more than once...



Wilfred Leonard, 'Son' within his family, in his new uniform shortly after enlisting in 1943

My father told my sister and I that he had left school at 13, because his father could not afford to support him continuing further. He had started his education in Pirbright School on 24 April 1930, which he left on 22 December 1938 to attend Knaphill Central school; one record survives at Pirbright School, dated 22 November 1934, which states that he and some others were given two strokes of the cane for 'throwing dirt at one another on school premises'. Let loose from school, he was apprenticed at the Vickers aircraft factory in Weybridge—according to the 1939 Register he was apprenticed as an electrician, although he later told his children he had been a toolmaker (and he never showed any evidence of knowing about the electrical matters in the family home). He enlisted when he turned 18 in May 1943, alongside his younger brother Kenneth in Euston, London. He joined the Royal Air Force, and its meteorological service (service number 1894015). For his service during the Second World War, he should have been awarded the war medal and possibly the 1939–45 star (as indicated at [www.forces-war-records.co.uk](http://www.forces-war-records.co.uk)), although I never knew of any medals kept in the family home. He did part of his training near Bridgnorth, not far from where his half-sister Millie was living, and he did know something about cloud formations. But, prone to exaggeration and invention, the many other claims he made about his service are somewhat dubious. He claimed, for instance, to have driven a truck from London to Edinburgh, but in subsequent life he never learnt to drive and never owned a car. He demonstrated zero mechanical knowledge and was a hopeless backseat driver when my mother passed her driving test and became his driver (in turn, his second wife became his driver). The advice he offered indicated he lacked understanding. He also claimed to have been briefly posted to Nigeria, claiming this as a reason why he later became interested in collecting stamps from The Gambia, although the river state in West Africa is a long way from Nigeria. His service activities are, bluntly, a mystery, except that he was successful in ensuring he never saw active fighting.

Demobbed, he went into business as a painter and decorator with his brother Ken, but soon moved to Guildford to work for a building company run by two unrelated Howards – Roy and Percy, whose building yard was in Burpham at a site that has long since been redeveloped as a street, Howard Ridge. Burpham was close to Sutton Green where Wilfred Leonard's mother was born and spent her childhood, but the reason he took work with the company was more mundane: he was told that doing so would move him up the waiting list for council houses. In the early 1950s, two large council estates were being built in Guildford, part to absorb families from London's suburbs made homeless either by bomb damage during the war or when tenements were condemned afterwards.

The move to Guildford allowed him to create a new life. On 29 September 1951, he married my mother, Doreen Joyce Varns (1928–1986), at the Congregational Church in North Street, Guildford (as reported in Chapter 3). Initially, the new couple lived with Doreen's mother but soon replaced the initial tenants of a newly built council house at 5 Hillfield Close, Bushy Hill. This was where they lived for more than 30 years; my father continued to live in the house for a year after Doreen died. As already reported, Doreen's mother never liked or trusted Wilfred, and it is likely that her feelings became entrenched during the period spent living under the same roof before Wilfred and Doreen were given their council house. The photo below is of the newly married couple on a visit to Wilfred's parents at 15 Council Terrace, Pirbright, next to the report of their wedding as carried in the Surrey Advertiser.



## LOCAL WEDDING

**MR. W. L. HOWARD AND MISS D. J. VARNs**

Micky Stringer, the young bridesmaid, and Billy Howard, page, presented Miss Doreen Joyce Varns with a silver horseshoe and boot after her marriage to Mr. Wilfred Leonard Howard on Saturday. The bride, who received a cheque from her employer, Mr. H. Colebrook, is the only daughter of the late Mr. G. Varns and Mrs. H. Varns, of 121, Walnut Tree Close. The bridegroom is the eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. L. Howard, of 15, Council Cottages, Pirbright. The Rev. J. Alfred Kaye officiated at Guildford Congregational Church.

The bride, given away by Mr. C. Truin, wore white figured satin brocade, cut on classical lines, with a headdress and veil lent by a friend, and a string of pearls. She carried white carnations, white heather, and fern. She was attended by the Misses Irene Rutter, jun. (cousin of the bride) and Micky Stringer (niece of the bridegroom). Mr. Frank Stevens was best man, and Messrs. K. Howard and R. Rutter were groomsmen.

A reception for 56 guests was held in the Church Hall. The honeymoon is being spent at Eastbourne. The bride's bouquet was placed on her father's grave, and Mickey Stringer's was placed on her aunt's grave at Pirbright.

Wilfred returned to work at Vickers in Weybridge. In the post-war years, Vickers merged with other plants as Vickers Armstrongs, then the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) after absorbing Hawker Siddeley, and finally British Aerospace (BAe). For a period, Wilfred served as a union shop steward. To get to and from work he car-shared with others living in Bushy Hill and elsewhere in Merrow (the main driver was a Mr Beasley, whose son, Michael, was in the same primary school year as me).

His fortunes changed in October 1967, allowing for him to again reinvent his life. The corporation invited him to enrol in an 18-month vocational training course in 'detail design and draughting'. He spent eight months in full-time training, then for 10 months worked between three offices: Production Development, Full Scale Design, and Structural Design. His training involved a course in applied mathematics, much as if he had returned to school – and this was exactly what he would quip he had done. The result of his training was that he moved from blue collar to white collar work. He now ate lunch in the canteen reserved for management, and he quickly changed his reading habits, taking The Daily Telegraph rather than more downmarket titles. Invited to become a freemason, he was inducted into the Loyal Order of Moose (Guildford Lodge, 235), and by 1969 he was an officer for the lodge, serving as its social secretary. In 1971, concerned at my intention to study music at college level, he co-opted lodge members to provide me with 'sensible' careers advice: leave school and train in accountancy, or go into law. I duly rejected all the advice, and made it clear that I was not keen on having anything to do with heretical freemasons. At Weybridge he was, as he would proudly tell anybody who would listen, one of those (and there were many) involved in



drawing plans for aircraft components. He worked, he said, primarily on the nose cone for Concorde. Two or three times he travelled to a sister plant at St Helen's, Lancashire to consult with colleagues on projects, and by the late 1970s as contract work for Boeing (Weybridge built wings for Boeing 747s) wound down, production work was moved from Weybridge to other BAC plants. His job was almost entirely sedentary, the daily commute consisting of the shared car ride from Merrow to Weybridge.

He joined others on the Bushy Hill Tenants' Association. The Association had been formed in 1955, and initially met in the shop on Bushy Hill Drive, collecting subs from the willing with the aims to both assist needy tenants and build a club house. Initial ideas for the latter were somewhat grand, but were duly downsized, and after Guildford Borough Council approved using a site at the edge of a field known as Four Acres a Marley pre-cast kit building was erected. The opening came just before Christmas, 1973. Wilfred was one of the tenants who felt heavily invested in it.

He saw himself as a sportsman: although pictured with his brother Ken in 1949, playing for the Pirbright Football Club, cricket was his claimed sport, with umpiring supposedly replacing any attempt at batting or bowling by the time I was born, although I never knew him to do even this. Fishing became his sport. For a brief period, he co-owned a small boat based at Littlehampton, and strange fish would return with him after expeditions – a conger eel, or flat fish which, on one infamous occasion, my mother found flapping about in the fridge so decided to drown, with what to her in her panic were absurdly unexpected consequences. In due course, fishing was replaced by darts, for which he competed around Guildford, collecting an array of cheap trophies. A further hobby began when I started secondary school. I had begun to collect stamps, much as many boys of my age did, and got a pack of unsorted stamps. As I worked my way through these, I discovered one that the Stanley Gibbons catalogue indicated had considerable value. I was too young to really know, so my father took it with him to get it checked at Vickers. I never saw the stamp again, and as I lost interest – shifting my interests outside music to railway modelling – so my father decided to develop his own stamp collection. For some years he bought First Day Covers, but then he zoomed in on The Gambia, and by the time he died he had – and in this I have no reason to disbelieve him – good examples of all but one stamp that he could ever collect, spread between seven or eight albums, all duly catalogued and kept in black ring binders.

My mother regularly complained that there was never enough housekeeping money. My father was a heavy smoker, and he drank regularly. There were not inexpensive habits, and we grew up thinking that he flitted his money away. I was kept away from any talk about 'wine, women and song' diversions, although once I accompanied my father on a trip to a Mrs Stent, who ran a shop at 234 Connaught Road, Brookwood. The two had been close friends in their youth (in fact, her parents had retired to Selsey, so when we were holidaying in a Selsey caravan park in 1966 we were invited in to their house to watch the World Cup final). I was left minding the shop while Wilfred and Mrs Stent disappeared upstairs for several hours... I have often wondered what went on. Wilfred gave little thought to saving money or in investing for the future. In the early days of their marriage, my mother tried to persuade him to take a mortgage on a house being built for sale in Hall Dene Close on the Bushy Hill estate but – at least this was how she told it – he was not willing to stretch himself. It was, then, a necessity for my mother to go out to work as soon as her children were no longer infants. I recall riding in a contraption on the back of her bike when she went to clean for an old woman in Burpham; I was around four years old. By the time I was eight, she worked

behind the till and kept the books for the Consibee butcher's shop in Hyde Park Road, Merrow. She later became the receptionist for Ernest Matthews, a blind physiotherapist working in premises at 85 Epsom Road, Guildford (today, the practice is named Matthews House after Ernest and operates as a physiotherapy and sports clinic). Later, and after she had passed her driving test, my mother returned to Consibee and Sons, but to their main shop in Ockley Road South, East Horsley. Her final job was as a bookkeeper in Farncombe.

As my childhood continued, my father's stinginess became more and more apparent to me when it came time for Christmas presents. My first request for a model railway was met with a second-hand Lone Star '000' set rather than the Tri-ang Hornby trains I craved for. My request for a Scalextric set, inspired by the massive set-up my relative John Lamphier had (admittedly, though, his father ran a toy shop), was met with a second-hand Airfix set with track made from brittle plastic and fiddly metal joiners rather than the brilliant, rubberised, snap together Scalextric. The Airfix set saw little play. I only once joined my father fishing, when we cycled (I was on my own bike, he borrowed my mother's bike) to the River Wey in Jacob's Well. All I caught was an old boot, which didn't fire up my enthusiasm for the leisurely sport.

It was my mother who took driving lessons, and when we finally got a car in 1971, it was my mother who bought it. It was an old Austin A40, bought, if I remember correctly, for £75, cheap at the time but for a reason: its offside door tended to fall off. My mother replaced it with a black Austin 1100, which was also old; its subframe, as tended to happen with all 1100s, was rusting away. The Austin was replaced with a green Ford Cortina (rust left holes in the boot), then a Skoda, and finally a Morris Marina. She bought each and paid to maintain each. My father was content to be driven around. Again, when I left home for college in September 1974, my father never made up my grant (in those joyous days when students didn't have to pay fees, they also got state grants, but the grant was means-tested, and if the father's income was above a certain level, the grant was reduced, with parents expected to contribute the remainder). However, my mother would give me cash before I left to return to college at the beginning of each term, which went some way to ensuring I could survive.

Below are photographs of Wilfred with (a) my sister Susan and me and a dog, Snap (who kept escaping the house until he was run over); (b)–(d) Wilf with Doreen and later dogs (Tina and Leeta); (e) Wilf and Doreen at a party organised by my sister in 1976 to celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.





When in 1982 my father took advantage of the Conservative government's 'right to buy' policy under Margaret Thatcher, his second reinvention was completed: he became part of the property-owning class. The house was valued at £32,000, but he was only required to pay £14,000. A condition of taking ownership was that if the house was sold within five years a proportion of the price had to be paid back to the council, and so a few days after the fifth anniversary – and a year after my mother's death – he sold it for more than four times what he had paid. He downsized, moving to a small, terraced bungalow in Kessingland, south of Lowestoft in Suffolk. This, he told me, was where my mother had wanted to retire to (they had taken a holiday there towards the end of her life, and back in 1967, my mother, grandmother, sister, and I had spent a week at a holiday camp in Corton, north of Lowestoft). The plus points were that the bungalow was in a village favoured by retirees, and the beach was a 10-minute walk away so my father could resume fishing. But there were downsides: for somebody reliant on public transport, Kessingland was isolated, and, as he remarked to me just a couple of months after moving there, 'Kessingland is where people come to die.'



In 1987, with some of the money made from selling 5 Hillfield Close, Wilfred began to plan a trip to Australia. First, he had to apply for a passport, since to that point he had only ever held a one-year 'British visitor's passport' obtained from Guildford Post Office in 1971 for a holiday taken with my mother to Ibiza – this was the first time they had travelled abroad. There was also another pressing issue to sort out before he could leave for Australia: who would look after Leeta, then a six-year-old King Charles' spaniel that had formerly been my mother's. Leeta suffered a stroke in 1986 that left her incontinent and prone to seizures, so no kennel would accept her, and no neighbour or friend could be found to pamper her and tolerate her incontinence. Learning that the prognosis was poor, it was agreed to put her to sleep; I duly took her to the vet, but Wilfred, claiming not to have known her prognosis following her stroke, refused to pay the bill. And there was a further challenge to face: the family connection in Australia was my mother's brother, David Varns, who lived in Sydney. But that was where my father flew to.

While in Australia, he splashed out on a 'superior service' trip on the Indian Pacific train from Sydney via Adelaide to Perth. During the trip, he met a recently widowed Australian, Jean Slater. He fought another widower for her attention. He phoned his sister, Millie, telling her he had met a beautiful woman with wonderful eyes... So, with a new marriage on the horizon, he was all set for his final reinvention. When he took Jean back to Sydney, he was surprised that David Varns was not keen on his intention to marry her. Undeterred, he brought her back to Kessingland, where she, like my mother before her, became his driver. With my sister's assistance, their marriage was made official in Dorking, Surrey, in December 1987. Ken, his younger brother, made the mistake of suggesting this was too soon after my mother's passing, and so my father cut off all communication with him (I forced a resolution to this when I visited my father in Perth for Christmas 1993 and phoned Ken, handing the phone to my father). Kessingland, and the British weather, were certainly not to Jean's taste, so in 1988 the bungalow was sold – at a good profit – and the two left for Australia. Jean had been living on the Gold Coast, Queensland, and the new couple spent a few months there before taking the Indian Pacific a second time, this time with the intention of settling in Western Australia. Two of Jean's children, Janni and Gary (Janni with her husband Ron and Gary with his family), lived in Rockingham, south of Perth, and this is where they settled.





Previous page: Wilfred, my father, in Perth (Botanic Gardens and Cottesloe Beach). This page: 1. Marrying Jean Slater; 2–5. Wilfred and Jean together; 6. 2 The Meadows (with Jean's Holden Commodore on the drive); 7. Wilfred with Rockingham Probus club members.

My father's final reinvention had several strands. First, he became a member of the local Probus – a club for retired and semi-retired, mostly professional (Pro-) or business (-bus), people. The Probus movement was set up in Britain in 1965 by Rotary Club members, and mushroomed when it arrived in Australia. Second, he created a back story about gardening, which involved the claim he had been a judge for the Garden Club, London, at Chelsea. Some of his family had, of course, been gardeners in the past, but beyond mowing the lawn (which he gave up doing after I unsuccessfully tried to repair his Suffolk Punch lawnmower), he took little interest in the garden at our home. Once, he sold a triangle of overgrown blackcurrant bushes at the end of the garden to a neighbour. Shortly after that, he engaged a gardener to take away part of the lawn and plant an expansive array of roses. After one glorious season,

the roses were duly left untended. In Rockingham, the first house he and Jean bought, 2 The Meadows, had a large garden, for which he hired a gardener. He installed reticulation to the front and back lawns and invested in a splurge of planting there was even an elevated rockery. He had, though, been complaining of arthritis for some years, and he suffered a heart attack as he arrived in Perth on the train, so he had no intention of doing any gardening himself. But he was an avid reader and was well able to read up on plants. The result: he became a core member of the Rockingham Garden Club and was even invited by the city council to judge their Tidy Streets and Garden of the Year contests. Later, when the house became too big, Jean and Wilfred downsized to a link-house nearby, with a yard rather than a garden.

Third, he created new truths from what he had read. One was a back story about his travels around the world, claiming to have taken both the Orient Express from London Victoria to Vienna and South Africa's Blue Train. In this back story, he first arrived in Australia simply because he wanted to take the Indian Pacific. His visit to my mother's brother was duly dropped from the account. Remember, though, that he had never had a passport before 1987, which would have made any other travels around the globe highly challenging. And, perhaps most crucially, when he boarded the Indian Pacific for the first time he took along a specific book to read: *Spycatcher* by Peter Wright, a memoir co-authored by Paul Greengrass about Wright's career with MI5, the British secret service. When he retired, Wright had emigrated to Tasmania, hence the book was first published there. It was scheduled to be released in Britain in summer 1987, a few months before Wilfred left for Australia, but the British government banned its distribution. In September 1987, the British government attempted to prevent its distribution in Australia, but the book's publisher was represented by a lawyer who later became Australia's Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and Turnbull successfully resisted the British efforts. And so it was that Wilfred bought the book. His most spectacular new truth emerged as he fused *Spycatcher* with his actual work at the British Aircraft Corporation. And this new truth was duly recounted by the chairman of the Probus club in a eulogy he gave at my father's funeral in 1996:

Wilf was invited to join MI5 soon after he was discharged from the [Royal] Air Force and had a most interesting career. He once told me how he went to the office one day and was called into a briefing, given a case with a change of clothes, and told that his wife would be advised that he wouldn't be home for a few days. He boarded a plane and was in a conference in Germany that afternoon. This was to form the pattern of his life until he left the service ...

The new truths extended to my sister and me: Susan, as my father told it, ran a hospital, and I was a cathedral organist. The story about me stood until I first visited him in Perth in July 1991. I had actively been discouraged from visiting prior to this but in 1991, with a grant from the British Council to give seminars in several Australian universities – including the University of Western Australia in Perth – my visit could hardly be refused. The notion of me being a cathedral organist had to change, since I was clearly a university lecturer. By then Jean, his second wife, was aware that the veracity of some of the new truths was questionable, and so either she or he chaperoned me whenever I was to meet somebody they knew. They never left my side.

Jean became my father's driver, as my mother had been before. Initially, she shipped a prized Holden VB Commodore from Queensland – an Opel Rekord with an Opel Senator front. This suffered from electrical faults and used much petrol, so my father encouraged her to replace it with a new three-door Hyundai Excel – quite a step down, and one that Jean was



never happy with, even though, at least as I was told, my father bought it for her. Each morning, Jean would drive him to a coffee shop looking out over the beach. She would drive him to Probus and other meetings, and to Perth and Freemantle, the latter since, by this time, his health was failing, and he had an ever-expanding number of appointments with hospital specialists. He had a second heart attack; decades of chain smoking left him with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), reliant on oxygen delivered through a mask at night. Arthritis, which had been a problem since his late fifties had worsened, so he walked with sticks – although it would not be unfair to point out that he took no exercise to help maintain his mobility. He suffered a stroke on 8 September 1996, and died less than 48 hours later without regaining consciousness. My sister and I flew out from Britain, but he passed before we arrived.

When we arrived at their house, his Gambian stamp collection had been removed. Jean claimed it had been sold some months before, although the total lack of dust on the bookshelf where the binders containing it had stood told a different story. In the afternoon of the day we arrived, we had a meeting with the priest who was to hold my father's funeral; as we reacted to the new truths being recounted, the priest took us aside and told us, bluntly, that this was not the time to question anything. Jean claimed he had exhausted his savings, and there was no money left, so my sister and I paid the funeral cost. We had always expected Wilfred to spend any money he had, so had no expectation of inheriting, although my sister was given a somewhat gaudy ring and I received a watch – which had been presented to him by the British Aircraft Corporation in recognition of his 25-years' service (the inscription on it to this effect cut its worth to the value of scrap metal). His funeral was held in Rockingham Methodist Church (now the Uniting Church). I played the keyboard that stood for an organ, and complied with his request that I should play Debussy's second *Arabesque* and Chopin's fifteenth prelude, the so-called *Raindrop Prelude* – in his reinvention, his earlier reluctance to let me practise the piano had been side-lined. Jean continued to live in their house for some years; she was still there when I returned to Perth, invited to interview for the job of Head of Music at the University of Western Australia in 2001. She ended her days in a care home, with her daughter Janni and son Gary still living nearby.

## 6. Keith Howard and Susan Egerton (née Howard)

This family history was never meant to be about me. Nor was it meant to be about my sister. But, a brief few pages about us are still called for. Here goes:

Doreen and Bill had two children: Susan Doreen (my sister), born on 25 October 1952 and Keith David (me), born on 22 May 1956. I weighed in at birth what appeared to be a healthy 7lb 9ozs, although such appearances can be misleading. School for both of us was Bushy Hill Primary School followed by George Abbot (in those days there were different campuses for girls and boys). Hilda kept several photographs of us in our younger years, the three below having been taken in 1958, 1960, and 1962 – the third being of me alone. I have worn spectacles since I was three years old, after a bicycle collided with me, making an astigmatism more apparent, which, in both 1960 and 1962 (as in the photo here), the hospital ophthalmologists unsuccessfully attempted to correct by blurring one lens.



Below, three generations (Hilda, David, Doreen, Susan, and Keith) appear together in one 1977 photograph, and, in 1986 but *sans* Doreen, her husband, daughter/son-in-law and son/then daughter-in-law – both at 5 Hillfield Close, Merrow. Susan featured in the newsletter of the Merrow Methodist Church when she married on 22 March 1975: 'Before you read this, our first Merrow choir mistress, Susan Howard, will have become Mrs Martyn Egerton ... We have been particularly grateful for the leadership Sue has given our choir since its birth last year, and the part they have both taken in the life of our church'. The cutting of this which this quote comes from was kept by Hilda, along with invitations to Susan's wedding and serviettes from the reception.



We belong to the post-war generation, in which class broke down and in which we could follow our ambitions. Yes, we were brought up in a council house, and we come from a working class background – I was the first person in Hillfield Close to go to university. But in the 1960s and 1970s upward mobility was certainly possible, and grants for post-18 education were available. And so, what we have done, even if commonplace among our generation, was not conceivable for our ancestors.

In her youth, Susan was active as a stoolball player, including in Surrey Juniors and latterly for North Holmwood (where for a time she served as captain). Stoolball dates at least to the fifteenth century, and is associated with the Weald in Sussex and, to an extent, Surrey. One legend has it that it was originally played by milkmaids who used their milking stools as wickets and bowls as bats. Stoolball is recognised by Sport England as a sport. While engaged to Martyn, Susan also took up the longbow (Martyn's father ran a company producing archery targets). Between 1971 and 1975 she trained at Guys Hospital, London, gaining her MCSP (Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy). She then worked at Epsom General Hospital (1975–1977), Dorking General Hospital (1977–1993) and for the South-West Surrey Mobile Physiotherapy Service (1994–2000). Throughout her physiotherapy career, she maintained a clinical teaching role, including between 2000 and 2005 when she worked for Burswood Health and Wellbeing, 'an organisation founded on Christian principles' in Groombridge, Kent. Susan and Martyn settled in Dorking, first in Riverside, then moved in 1982 to Lodge Close, North Holmwood, and in 1996 to Capel. She joined the Guildford Diocese Ministry Training Scheme in 2006, and completed a Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE, accredited by Bangor University). She was ordained at Guildford Cathedral as deacon in 2009 and priest in 2010 and served as OLM Assistant Curate of Capel in the Surrey Weald Team Ministry within Guildford Diocese until 2015. When she retired, she moved with Martyn to Smallburgh, Norfolk, where she continues (at the time of writing) to hold a bishop's licence giving her permission to officiate in the Norwich Diocese.



I inherited my first piano teacher, a Mr Dare, from my sister. A pianola was procured so that she could take lessons at home, but I soon became more interested and took over as the student. Mr Dare, sadly, knew little about pedagogy or, indeed, the classical repertoire, and a change of teacher in 1968 necessitated a return to basics – I was, then, hampered in my initial study and sorted my technique out far too late to ever consider becoming a professional pianist (if, that is, my skill levels would ever have been good enough, which would probably constitute wishful thinking!). I wanted to pursue a career in music, although my parents were keen that I should choose a more reliable career path – accountancy and legal careers were pushed my way, not least in a meeting with Masonic colleagues of my father.



I made my debut in the *Surrey Advertiser* in 1968, though not for music, when I attended a model railway show with my school friend Derek Rye at the hall of Holy Trinity Church – near where Emily May Varns had worked prior to her marriage (a cutting of the newspaper report kept by Hilda is below).



In 1972, I supplemented my rapidly developing piano skills with clarinet lessons and voice training. Having passed the requisite Associated Board grade examinations, I satisfied what were then 'A'-level requirements, and with a couple of 'A'-levels (with the additional 'S' levels), in 1974 I began to study at what was then Huddersfield Polytechnic for a BA (Hons) degree. Huddersfield is now a university, but in those days it was not, and this meant that, despite my degree results, I could not secure postgraduate funding at the state level. Huddersfield did offer me a fee waiver for an MPhil, and I was also offered an unfunded PhD place at Keele. Without funding for a further degree, I enrolled on a teacher training course (PGCE) at Durham University, and later, in 1981, became a licensed, fully qualified state teacher. A grant to cover fees from the Vaughan Williams Trust allowed me to squeeze in an MA in composition at Durham, and I also successfully received a Licentiate from Trinity Laban Conservatoire (LTCL), London. During all my study, to supplement meagre grants, I taught piano and worked as an organist – at Christ Church, Moldgreen, in Huddersfield, St John's in Durham, then, when I took a job as a teacher at Beaconsfield High School in 1980, at St Leonard's, Chesham Bois. In 1981, I was awarded a Social Science Research Council grant to take a PhD at Queen's University, Belfast. This included a 20-month period of fieldwork in South Korea, where I met my first wife, Inok Paek (b.1958).

My PhD thesis came in at 790 pages, a massive tome that would exceed the maximum size that most universities impose these days, but one that caused a challenge within Queen's University: I wrote it on a new-fangled piece of equipment, a computer, and wanted to submit a computer-generated print copy, but the university regulations required a thesis to be typed

on that old-fangled device, a typewriter. Special permission had to be sought! After graduating, I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship from the British Academy, as the first ever ethnomusicologist to be awarded such a fellowship. I was also awarded a DAAD Humboldt Stipendium, with German language training, to join the Korean Studies Centre at Tübingen Universität, but that had to be turned down, because my first wife insisted on staying in Belfast, which meant that the stipend would be taxed in the UK. As the British Academy fellowship ended, I was awarded a further postdoctoral fellowship by the Leverhulme Trust. In total, I spent five years as a postdoctoral fellow. The fellowships allowed me to build my research, publication, and teaching record, at both Queen's University, Belfast and Durham University – at the latter institution I again took an organist position, at Houghton-le-Spring. In 1991 I moved to SOAS University of London, where I was employed for 26 years. A period of leave between 2009–2011 allowed me to become Associate Dean and Professor at the University of Sydney, and by 2021, I had held visiting professorships at Ewha Woman's University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Monash University, Sydney University, and Texas Tech University. I received major fellowships from the Korea Foundation, Academy of Korean Studies, and the National Humanities Center (North Carolina), and published 23 authored or edited books, 200 academic articles, and 210 book/music reviews. I have been active as a broadcaster, served as editorial chair of the SOAS Musicology Series for nine years (2008–2017) steering 44 books through to publication, and founded and managed the SOASIS CD and DVD series as well as (the now defunct) OpenAir Radio. I have also worked in a consultancy capacity, as an expert witness for legal cases (including asylum, and criminal cases), in briefing and teaching British companies, government agencies, and foreign diplomatic services, as an adviser for the police, writing the official publication for HRH Queen Elizabeth's state visit to Korea, as a musician for car launches and fashion shows, giving interviews and offering advice for the media (radio, TV, Internet, film companies), and more.

After moving to London, I met my second wife, Anna-Elisabeth Charlotte Howard (b.1963): At the beginning of 1995, I had just taken on the role of Head of Music at SOAS, and was approached by the Thai Music Circle to hold a summer school – Charlotte was a senior member of the TMC, a teaching and performing organization for which HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn is patron. We celebrated our silver wedding anniversary in March 2022.



We settled first in Fortress Grove, Kentish Town, London, and in 2011 left London for Overthorpe, Banbury (a historic thatched property initially bought in 2007 as a weekend home) before in 2018 moving to a converted barn in Shenington, Banbury (photos below). The world has, indeed, changed, and I suspect our family ancestors would have trouble recognising us today.

