

**Mary Owen and Weston Elwes** by G.O. Mackie (mackie.geo\_at\_gmail.com)

<https://sites.google.com/view/mackiefamily/home>

Ten years or so after I retired, I discovered that I was still entitled to free web space courtesy of the University of Victoria so I found out how to make a simple no-frills web page and <http://web.uvic.ca/~mackie/> was the result. At first, I intended this as a repository for my cv and publications, as people still sometimes wrote asking about my scientific work, but it gradually dawned on me that there was nothing to stop me uploading anything I liked, so I started adding other items including writings about family history. Amongst these were Far Cathay, an edited and illustrated transcription of my father's diary describing his trip around the world in 1922, and the essay entitled Mackie Men and the Empire.

Both of these memoirs mention my mother Mary's marriage in India to Weston Elwes and his death by his own hand in 1921. I really knew very little about any of this and had never taken the trouble to do any research on it. My mother rarely mentioned her first marriage, and left nothing in writing about it, although she did give me a signet ring which she told me had been Weston's, and I wore it for a while in the early '50s. (It spent the next 50 years in a leather box at the back of my sock drawer). There was also a teapot which I had passed on to our son Richard. My brother and I both had hazy recollections of being told about what happened, but it was all long ago and far away, memories had faded, and the story that came down to us had gaps and inconsistencies. What I said about the marriage in my two family histories represented the sum total of what we knew, or thought we knew (I got some of it wrong) about Weston Elwes. It was with a great deal of interest therefore that in December 2008 I received the following email.

*Hello,*

*My name is Maria Knowles. Following a suggestion by my brother-in-law I found your details from your articles on the web. The articles were so interesting.*

*The reason for my email is to see if you have any further information about George Weston Elwes. I know from your articles that George Weston Elwes was Mary's first husband.*

*My maternal grandfather's name is Richard Elwes. Sadly he passed away about 10 years ago. He was born in Chiang Mai in Thailand on 17th June 1917. For all his life he had tried to search for "his family" as he calls the Elwes family. Now that he has passed away, my brothers and sisters have tried to do the same for our mother Majorie Elwes. I believe Mary's first husband is indeed our late great grandfather for several important reasons. Firstly the picture of George Weston Elwes and Mary in your article resembles the one picture we have of him. Secondly, we were always informed by our late grandfather that George Weston Elwes had died of a gunshot wound. We don't seem to remember being told that he had shot himself, but we believe it's probably true.*

*If this is the same George Weston Elwes, then he was already married to a Thai lady and had 2 children, Richard (my grandfather) and his sister Sally, at the time of his marriage to Mary. Mr Mackie, this is the most information we have ever found for George Weston Elwes, and feel very excited in finding out if you have any further information about him. I appreciate you are not related to George Weston Elwes, we are just hoping you may have further information. It will just be so wonderful if we can let my mother know any information about the Elwes side of the family. We had spent a lot of money last year, as it was my parents' 50th wedding anniversary, to try to find out more information about the Elwes family but to no avail - we wanted to give that to my mother as "her present".*

*I have been in touch with an Elwes family here in the UK but they did not have a George Weston in their family tree, thus we came to a dead end.*

*Mr Mackie, thank you for your time in reading this email. I will await your response excitedly.*

*Kindest regards  
Maria*

Maria's letter sent me rummaging through my files of old family pictures and letters from my parents' time in India and we very soon established by comparing the photographs that Maria's great grandfather (left) and my mother's first husband (right) were indeed the same man.



Messages flew to and fro around the world between London, Victoria, Bangkok, Lahore and Singapore. My Elwes email folder soon had nearly 100 messages in it. Elwes relatives were traced, including a 91 year old cousin, Bertha Barnardiston, who had actually been a bridesmaid at my mother's wedding in 1921! Another cousin, Henry Rogers, was able to provide a family tree giving details of the Indian branch of the family. It turned out that Weston Elwes was christened Gervase, not George. The name Gervase crops up frequently in the Elwes lineage, going back to Sir Gervase Elwes (1581-1653), but in this account I will refer to the man who married my mother as Weston, as this was what he was called in his own family and by my mother Mary. A genealogist friend, George Hamber, discovered that Weston was a family name dating back to Louisa Weston who married into the Elwes family in 1840. I was able to pursue the Elwes lineage back to the sixteenth century via Burke's Landed Gentry.

When I retrieved the ring from my sock drawer and checked it out it proved to bear the Elwes crest, a snake coiled around five arrows. The ring is 18 carat gold, hallmarked with the London assay marking and the year 1891. I gave it to Majorie Samat, Weston's granddaughter.



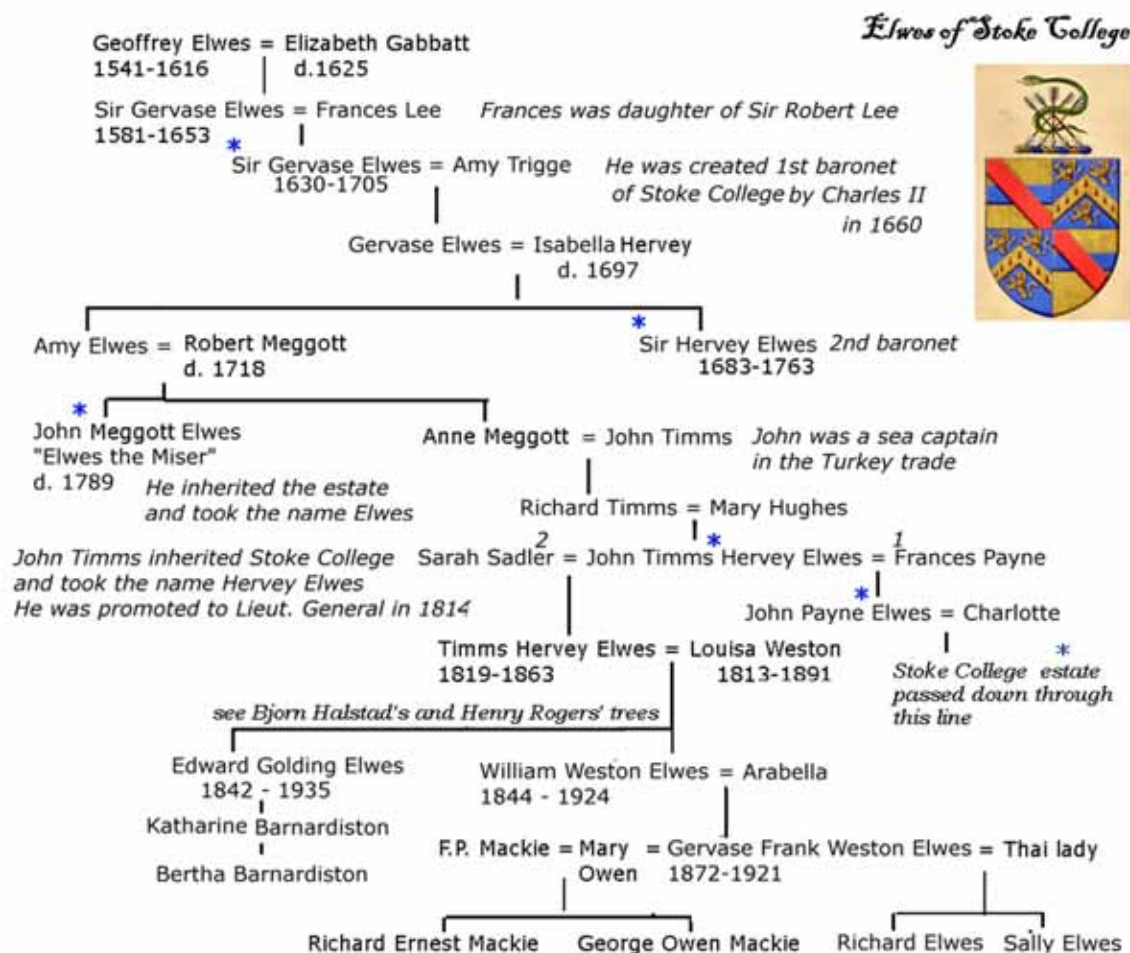
Majorie and her daughters Maria and Selina had Skype on their computers so we had interesting talks and could see what each other looked like while we chatted. It was an exciting time! Currently (July 2010) the picture continues to fill out as Bjørn Halstad, Selina's husband, researches the Elwes family connections and is building up a Weston Elwes family tree at <http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/>, Henry Rogers and his sister Katie are searching through their family photos and papers and those left by Bertha and I recently arranged with a professional genealogist, Sylvia Murphy, to check some sources in the British Library. I will try and reduce the mass of information which has emerged to its broad outlines.

### **The Elwes Family**

The Elwes ancestral home for many years was Stoke College in Suffolk. The house is built round the remains of a Benedictine Priory founded in 1090 by Geoffrey of Clare. The name Stoke College stems from 1415 when the Priory became a College for Secular Priests. The College was dissolved in 1548, nine years after Henry VIII suppressed the nearby Augustinian monastery Clare Priory. Both establishments passed into private hands. Stoke College eventually became the property of the Elwes family who owned it until 1897, while Clare Priory was granted to Sir Thomas Barnardiston, whose family lived there for the greater part of the seventeenth century. Three or four generations of Elwes lived in Stoke College. Their family crest - a sheaf of arrows entwined by a serpent can be seen in ceiling mouldings and on fireplace mantles. In 1954 the house became a school again, this time an independent, non-denominational, coeducational establishment catering to boarders and day students.

Katharine Barnardiston wrote a history of Clare Priory which was published in 1962 by her daughter, Bertha, who added the last chapter. Clearly from this account there were

many close links over the years between the Elwes, Barnardistons and other Suffolk gentry, including the Barkers (who acquired Clare Priory in 1745) and the Westons whose name became coupled with Elwes in several lines of descent. Katharine herself was born Katharine Weston Elwes, married Sir George Digby Barker in 1902 and, after his death, married again to Lt Col Ernald Barnadiston who was Senior Government Inspector of Railways<sup>1</sup>, based in Royapettah, Madras, India. Mary and Gervase were married from the Barnardiston's bungalow in Ootacamund with Bertha, aged four, as bridesmaid..



Weston's father William was born in England in 1844, went to Trinity College Cambridge, completed BA and MA degrees, and was ordained at Canterbury in 1868. Two years later he married Arabella Leach and traveled to India, where he held a succession of chaplaincies, and eventually in 1893 became Archdeacon of Madras. In 1896 he was offered the bishopric of Tinnevely but declined on grounds of his wife's ill health. Ill or not, Arabella survived him by almost 20 years, and died at her home "Rolston" at Ootacamund (Ooty) in the Nilgiri Hills on 14 December 1920

<sup>1</sup> Bertha told me "When we wanted to go somewhere, Daddy sent for a train."

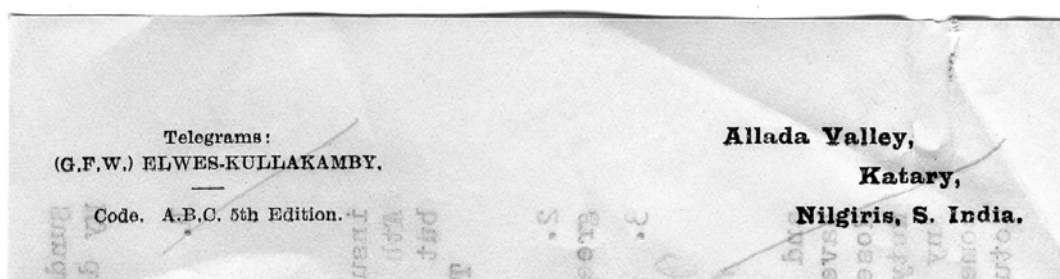
William and Arabella had six children, five surviving into adult life, of whom Gervase Frank Weston Elwes, born in India in 1872, was the eldest. His brother Frederick F. Elwes became a Lt Col in the Indian Medical Service. It seems likely that it was at his home that my father F.P. Mackie, who was his exact contemporary and, like him, a Lieutenant Colonel in the I.M.S. first met Mary ("a rather pathetic figure in black") soon after she was widowed. The youngest of Gervase's brothers was William Burton Elwes ("Burty") who made his career in the Colonial Service and spent a lot of time in Africa. Burty did not marry but he was quite a ladies man. According to Bertha (who did not mince her words) "he broke several hearts and may well, in the Elwes tradition, have left a few children about. He was very attractive and great fun." Gervase had two sisters, Lilian (Lily) and Louisa, both of whom married and had children. Gillian and I had the pleasure of meeting Lily's granddaughter Carol at a family gathering organized by Selina and Bjørn Halstad in April 2010 and it was she who gave me the family photo shown here. Bjørn's website has many more stories and photos relating to William and Arabella, their life in India and their children.



### Weston Elwes - career

We know very little about Weston's early life. Bjørn's research shows that Weston and his brother Fred were sent back to England for their schooling, and stayed with their uncle Edward Golding Elwes and his wife Abigail and their family during the holidays. Lily and Louisa also went to school in England (1891 census for Suffolk West).

At the time he married my mother Weston was 47 and a tea planter in the Nilgiri Hills. Among my mother's effects after her death I found a piece of paper one side of which she had used for a carbon copy of some business correspondence, but the other side carried Weston's estate letterhead.





The village of Katary (Katteri) in the Allada Valley is only a few miles south of Ootacamund, where Arabella Elwes and the Barnadistons had bungalows. Known as the "queen of hill resorts" in Tamil Nadu, Ootacamund (Ooty) is 7350 ft above sea level and an area of great natural beauty that was developed as a resort by the British in the early 1800's and became the summer capital of Madras Presidency. Weston's tea estate was some 2000 feet closer to sea level.

In October 1920 Ernald and Katherine Barnadiston visited Weston Elwes at his tea estate in the Allada Valley. Katherine told her father *"We had a very jolly day with Weston in the jungle near his estate after a Bear. There were five men with guns, & myself & a whole host of beaters. The Bear had evidently been there in the morning but we saw no sign of it & no body got a shot, however it was a delightful day & we all enjoyed ourselves. Weston gave us a most sumptuous lunch in a little summer house on the estate & then we went back to his bungalow for tea before starting out on the homeward journey. He only has a tiny house, & means to build a bigger one later on but the situation is glorious..... I wish Weston's bungalow were a little larger for I should love to take Bertha [her three year old daughter] down there to stay for a few days for a change.....One wants a little change every few months from this great height..."*.

We do not know how long Weston had been a tea planter, nor how he came to own the Allada estate – he may have settled there quite recently - but we do know he had another career in teak forestry. My brother and I were both vaguely aware of this when we were young. My mother rarely spoke of her first marriage but I recall her saying that Weston spent long periods in the teak forests working with elephants. I never knew where this was, and when I wrote *Mackie Men & the Empire* I assumed it was Burma, which was under British rule. Siam by contrast was never part of the British (or any other) Empire and it never occurred to me to wonder if that was where Weston worked. However, there is plenty of documentation available on line showing that the British and other foreigners were very much a presence in Northern Siam, specifically in Chiang Mai, during the period in question, working there in the teak trade.

*"By 1898 there were some fifty farang<sup>2</sup> living in the north of Siam, most of them were British public school men working for the large teak companies - the Borneo Company Limited, the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited, the Siam Forest Company and L.T. Leonowens' Company. There were*



<sup>2</sup> The word farang (or farangi) originally referred to the Franks - Christians from Western Europe who launched the First Crusade and captured Jerusalem in 1099.

*also British employees of the Siamese Forestry Department, assorted British and French Consuls and Danish gendarmerie officers.*

*Whenever two or three British gathered together they invariably founded a club and so it was that the Chiangmai Gymkhana Club came into existence one day in 1898. Most of the teak wallahs spent their lives in the jungle only returning to base at Christmas and at the end of the season in April. In 1907 there were 91 full members of the club, all farang, but for many years there were seldom more than a dozen members in town at the annual general meeting.” (Shaw, J. 2005 . *Farang in Chiang Mai*). I put a "story" on Bjørn's website that gives more of the historical background.*

Incontrovertible evidence that Weston was a teak wallah in Chiang Mai comes from photos and stories that have come down in the families of his Thai descendants for he had a wife, Khampuan, and three children in Chiang Mai! The oldest, Sally was born in 1907 when Weston was 35 and the youngest, Richard, ten years later when he was 44. In between there was another boy, known only from his nickname “Bow.” Khampuan, remarried and had another child in 1922, after Weston’s death. She died in 1984, an old lady in her late nineties. Her great granddaughter Selina remembers meeting her when she was 17.



Khampuan, ca.1922

We do not know how much time Weston spent in Siam or what his work entailed. The fact that 10 years separate the births of Sally and Richard suggests long-term residence in the country and a stable relationship with his Thai wife.

Richard Elwes kept an album of family photos that has come down to his granddaughter Kulapah. Another granddaughter Selina has scanned them and kindly given me access to this fascinating collection.

The pictures show Weston in the jungle and at what appears to be a clubhouse with other Europeans, pipe-smoking gents in topis, blazers and cricketing flannels, ladies with broad-brimmed hats and white dresses. Other pictures show Khampuan and the children and there are several jungle scenes, a couple with hunting trophies, pictures of elephants laden with timber working in the forest and one of Gervase as a youngish man with a thermos having a tea break in a clearing in the forest.

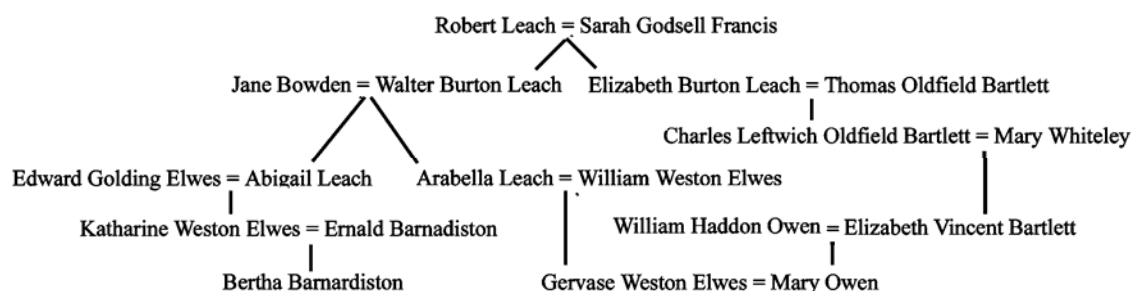


### **Mary's trip to India**

On the 5th of November 1920 Miss M.E.H. Owen sailed from Liverpool in the *City of London*, of the Hall Line, 5713 registered tons, bound for Karachi. She got off at Bombay. She was 33, and her occupation was given as "Secretary". A lot happened

between then and March 11, 1922, when the *City of Poona* docked in London and she disembarked as Mrs Elwes. Why did she go to India? Was she perhaps part of what was wryly termed the "Fishing Fleet", the swarms of young women looking abroad for marriageable men? After the carnage of the First World War there were an estimated 1.7 million more women than men in Britain (The Economist, Feb 12, 2011, p.92) including many unmarried women whose chances of finding a suitable match at home were slim. On the other hand, in India and throughout the Empire there was a shortage of prospective brides for expatriate army officers, clerics, planters, civil servants, and business people. The Fishing Fleet made perfectly good sense.

I have no idea whether or not my mother had any such thoughts but it has recently come to light that her mother's family, the Bartletts, were blood relatives of the Leach family who intermarried with the Elwes clan. The Leaches lived at Sutton Montis, only a



few miles from Sherborne where the Bartletts lived. Mary's mother Elizabeth (Lizzie) Owen was in fact second cousin to both Gervase and Katharine Weston Elwes. Henry



Edward G. Elwes, Katharine Weston Elwes, Muriel B. Elwes, Elizabeth V. Owen  
Abigail J. Elwes

Rogers kindly sent me this photo, taken around 1896/7, of his great grandparents Edward



and Abigail Elwes and their daughters with Lizzie Owen, who was 15 years older than Katharine. This shows they were friends as well as cousins. Later, Mary Owen (who was 15 years younger than Katharine) painted some water colours of Clare Priory on a visit there as a teenager. Katharine was then Lady Barker, wife of Sir George Digby Barker and chatelaine of Clare Priory. After Sir George's death in 1914, Katharine married Ernald Barnadiston and went to India with him. In embarking on a ship to India, my mother Mary must surely have been intending to visit her friend Katherine and her Elwes relatives. When she got to Ootacamund she did indeed stay with the Barnardistons as we now know from letters kindly scanned and sent me by Henry Rogers.

Mary's ship would have arrived in Bombay in December 1920 and by May 9th 1921, she had fallen in love, become engaged and got married to Weston. Later she made a joke of it ("one could not help getting engaged in the Nilgiri Hills!") but it was clear from what she told me that it was the real thing and "very romantic".

Here are some extracts from Katherine's letters home to her father Edward Golding Elwes in 1921:-

**Jan 5.** *"Mary Owen joined us yesterday and is staying here [in Bangalore] and is going back to Ooty with us".*

**Jan 24.** *"Mary Owen is here [Ootacamund]. I am enjoying her visit. We went for a long walk yesterday and have been playing tennis together. We are going to play together in a tournament on Saturday."*

**Feb 9.** *"I have been giving some small "at homes" partly to introduce Mary and partly to get the local people invited before the season begins when there is such a rush one can't get everyone in."*



*Scene in the Western Ghats, sent us by my mother*

**Feb 16.** *"Mary motored down the Ghat with Weston last week and stayed three nights at Coimbatore with the Ballards but came back yesterday -. Weston went on to Madras and Trichy [Trichinopoly]"*

**March 2.** *"Mary and I are going to motor out to Allada valley on Friday to spend the day with Weston. It will be Mary's first experience of a tea estate."*

**March 14** (to her father) and **March 23** (to her sister Muriel). Here Katherine describes how she accompanied her husband on a 750 mile railway inspection trip in a train consisting entirely of private carriages and with a good restaurant car. *"The inspection train had no fixed times but just stopped and started as required and ran through all the stations" "It was very hot and the journey would have been most trying in an ordinary train but wasn't so bad in Ernald's big saloon carriage with electric fans going."*

*"I came away quite cheerfully this time as I was able to leave Mary as well as Nannie in charge of Bertha and the bungalow".*

**March 29** *"We had a very jolly day at Weston's place on Easter Monday, but didn't shoot anything. Mary and I sat up in machans [platforms in the branches of a tree] with a little heap of stones on our laps & instructions from Weston that we were to shy them at the snout of any beast going in the wrong direction to head them off to the guns, but no beast appeared except one Sambhar too young to be shot!"*

*"Gertrude is here now and I shall be quite glad when Mary can continue her tour as the house is too crowded but of course she can't well move on till the monsoon breaks and the weather cools down".*

*"She has gone off today with a party to Makoorti [Mukurthi, now a National Park] about 20 miles from here. They are camping out for two nights & have started off with seventeen ponies, some to ride and some for baggage. Weston has gone too and I think he is much the most capable and reliable member of the party."*

*"I expect they will have some adventures as they are pretty sure to be chased by buffaloes if they meet a herd in that remote part – there are also tiger & other wild beasts which will probably alarm them if they come Woofing round the camp at night"*

*"I shall be glad when they are safely back but it is no use worrying about them for if people don't want to run any risks they should not come to India!"*

**April 26.** *"The great news of the week is that Weston is engaged to be married to Mary Owen & they are to be married from this house at once! For some time it has been pretty evident that things were tending that way & I really think it is a most suitable match in every way & they ought to be very happy together. Mary is such a sensible, practical sort of girl, & full of interests & resources, so I don't think she will*



*be dull or lonely out in a tea estate, & anyhow Weston's place is not at all far away from Ooty and Coonoor."*

*"Weston thoroughly deserves a good wife, & needs one to look after him, & he seems to think he has found the one and only girl in the world to suit him!"*

*"They will be married very quietly at Lovedale on the 9<sup>th</sup>, only ourselves, & the Bishop (who will marry them) being present & will then go off for a honey-moon to a Bungalow half way down the Gudalur Ghat [a valley Northwest of Ooty]. Weston has telegraphed to Burty asking him to come over and be best man, & I hope he may come, though I hardly think it likely."*

*"Bertha is to be Mary's bridesmaid & will wear a little embroidered muslin dress with a blue sash that her Godmother Sallie Barnardiston gave her"*

**May 12.** *"The wedding is over & Weston & Mary are off on their honey-moon.....it has been a pretty heavy week with a house full of visitors & the season in full swing & fond though I am of them both, I really was pleased to see them off. Weston is such a casual person, & tho' he knew I had no room for him, & couldn't do with another visitor, he merely got a room out and arrived every morning at 7.30 wanting all his meals here, dressing &c &c . He thinks nothing of wearing any of Ernalds clothes if he can't find his own & went off to the races on Saturday in E's coat & toper. Two days before he dressed for dinner & came in apologizing for wearing E's shoes but as a matter of fact they were his own, & the next morning he came to get another pair of socks because his were coming down, & then we discovered he was wearing Ernald's silk evening socks in the morning."*

*He really is a trial in some ways, but he is just as generous as he is careless & I am sure we should any of us be welcome to anything & everything in his bungalow if we wanted it, which we don't!"*

*"Mary is very nearly as casual, but not quite, & she is more considerate for other people & very helpful & useful & capable in the house, so I hope between them they will make a happy and successful couple & will look after each other. Bertha looked very sweet as the little bridesmaid...."*

The Barnadistons continued to see the newlyweds after their return to Allada.

**June 2.** *"We went out for a very jolly day with them this week. A tiger & two cubs had been seen a few miles from their estate so Weston made up a party of 4 guns & 50 beaters and we were out all day tramping through the jungle, but we didn't anything but some Sambhar [sambur] – one large stag broke back and knocked over three of the beaters."*

**July 20.** *"Bertha has just gone off on her first independent visit and Ernald and I are feeling such a quiet elderly couple all by ourselves in this silent home. She has gone back with Mary to spend three days at Allada while Weston is away and there is a bed to spare. Of course Nannie has gone too, but still it was the first time she had been anywhere without me so she felt very grownup and grand & I expect she will enjoy herself hugely. Allada is nearly 2,000 feet lower than this and I am glad that both she & Nannie should have this little change"*

Katharine's letters to her father are missing for the remainder of 1921. The next we know (Dec 1st), Weston killed himself. My mother told me that it was she who found his body. He had shot himself in the head. She told my brother Richard "I lay in his arms

for half an hour, then he got up and went out, and then I heard a shot". According to a report in the Madras Mail for Dec 5th, he shot himself during temporary insanity caused by acute insomnia. In MME I reported what I recalled my mother once saying, or implying, that Weston had spent too long in the teak forests and came home "bushed" and unable to face life, she tried to buck him up and get a grip on himself but he couldn't or wouldn't, and she blamed herself for what happened - she should have been more understanding or more patient. My brother recalls it being said that Weston was depressed because the tea plants on his estate were taking longer than expected to produce. Finally, we can't rule out the possibility that Weston just couldn't handle the complications arising from the double life he found himself leading with a Thai wife and children in Siam and a new English bride in India.

Bertha Barnardiston, the little bridesmaid in Katharine's letters,, died in March 2010 at the age of 92. I was lucky to be able to locate her in January 2009 and we exchanged emails and talked on the telephone. She was a wonderful old lady with a fund of family lore and anecdotes including some scurrilous tales which she relayed to me with relish over the phone. She made free use of what are now politically incorrect expressions such as "concubine" and "bastard". Some of her recollections were a bit muddled but she told me in no uncertain terms that my mother's trip to India was "engineered" by three Elwes ladies, Weston's mother Arabella, his sister Lilian (Lily) and her own mother Katharine Barnardiston. According to Bertha, Arabella was "an awful snob" and the ladies disapproved of Weston's somewhat irregular life style and felt he should marry and settle down with a nice English lady. "They were determined to get him married". Katharine however told her father in June 1921 "*I was amused at Lily's theory that I had long been trying to make a match between Weston & Mary – it isn't founded on fact – but the only previous occasion on which they seem to have made any impression on each other seems to have been when Mary stayed with Lily in Ipswich & visited Weston in the nursing home there! – so perhaps she is thinking of herself and has got mixed up.*" This is the only hint we have that Mary and Weston knew each other before Mary went out to India.

### What became of Sally and Richard?

Bjørn Halstad's research and family recollections and photos tell us something about the lives of Sally and Richard. Weston's children were brought up in Siam and there is every reason to suppose they received a good education and were well looked after by their Thai family. Sally grew up, married a Canadian, Ralph Beckett, and had a son, David in 1927. They emigrated to the United States in 1939. Sally died in California in 1992.

Richard Elwes was only four when his father died. His granddaughters Maria and Selina have passed on what they know about his life and family which I will summarize briefly, but it is a long and fascinating saga, a



David Beckett and his mum Sally



story which is theirs to tell, as I hope they some day will.



Richard Weston Elwes and Barbara Toh

Richard's first Thai passport was issued in 1934 when he was 17, and it was probably around then that he traveled to Singapore. He was fluent in English and got a job with the Herald Tribune. At some point he met and fell in love with a beautiful Chinese girl Barbara Toh, but Barbara came from a rich and prominent Singapore family who did not consider Richard a suitable spouse for their daughter. The young couple ran away, married, and left Singapore. Back in Thailand their daughter Majorie was born in 1942.

About seven years later the marriage broke down and Barbara took her little girl back to Singapore. She was in Indonesia during the time of the national uprising against Dutch colonial rule. Sadly, she fell ill, it was difficult to get medical treatment and in 1949, the year the country gained independence, she died. Majorie was sent to

live with her Toh grandparents in Singapore. She tried to find out about her father but was told that he had died. Her grandfather Ah Kong loved her and treated her well but after his death, Majorie found life in the Toh household unbearable and at the age of 15 she ran away, eluding all attempts by her family to get her back. She met and fell in love with Mahmood Samat. When she turned 16, and the Toh family could no longer prevent her, she married Mahmood. By the time Majorie was 21, she already had three children (Maria is the eldest) and was working in a dress shop.

Meanwhile back in Thailand Richard Elwes had remarried and had another daughter Kulapah Arreeweas (Elwes), known in the family as Nong Noi. He had no idea what had become of Barbara and Majorie, but through a friend of his sister Sally he learned one day that Majorie was alive and in Singapore and he managed to get a letter delivered to her. Majorie took the train to Bangkok and was happily reunited with her father. She found that Richard had kept her mother Barbara's room exactly how she had left it, even down to her face powder on the dressing table.



Majorie and Maria, ca.1968

In his later years Richard, like many Thai men, spent a period of time as a Buddhist monk before eventually returning to lay life. Here he is in his saffron robes. Selina sent us a video of him in his declining years, a gentle, fastidious old man surrounded by his loving family. (The star of the show was Maria's three year old daughter Elizabeth!) All his life Richard had hoped to find out something about his Elwes family background but he had no means of accessing the sources we can now so easily locate on the internet and he died in 1998 at the age of 81 without ever finding out much about his father's English roots. Evidence of his efforts has recently come to light in the form of a book formerly owned by Richard and passed on by Nong Noi to Majorie. The book, published in the 1960's, includes an account of the history of Elsham Hall, a stately home in the Lincolnshire Wolds, and its owners. At the time of writing, the estate was owned by a branch of the Elwes family. Richard had been through the book line by line, underlining passages neatly in red ink and putting asterisks in the margin in places where there seemed to be clues as to his father's family origins.



Majorie and Mahmood have eight children. They have followed the family tradition and found partners across a diversity of cultures. Maria and Farida have settled down with Englishmen, Herman with an Englishwoman, Sham with a Hungarian, Selina with a Norwegian, Mutalib with a Bosnian, Sofia with a Jordanian and Faizal with a Sicilian. What would the snooty Arabella Elwes and the exclusive Tohs have thought of this?

In April 2010, Selina organized a memorable get-together with delicious snacks around the swimming pool at the elegant home of Farida and Martin Taylor in Camberley. Gillian and I were invited to attend and managed to get there despite disruption of air traffic by volcanic ash clouds from Iceland. We met Majorie, Mahmood, Selina, Bjørn and many other family members both from the Thai side and the English Elwes side. Maria was away in Pakistan but we met her son Richard and daughter Elizabeth. We were given a warm welcome and have stayed in touch since. Thanks largely to Majorie, and despite the variety of their backgrounds, they remain a close and affectionate family, and Gillian and I are delighted to be their friends.



Gillian and George with Majorie, April 2010