

THE STORY, SO FAR AS RECOLLECTED AT AGE OF 79, OF MY FOREBEARS,
AND IN PARTICULAR OF MY MOTHER ELIZABETH VINCENT OWEN.

By

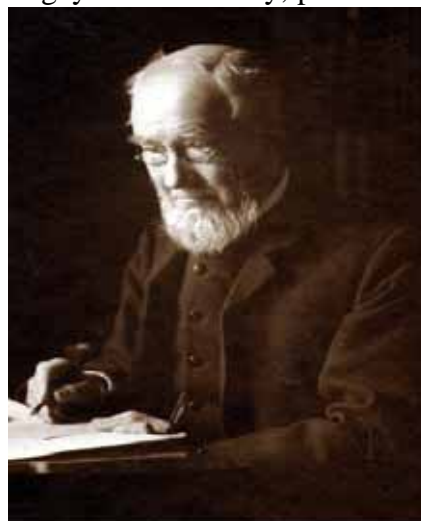
Mary Elizabeth Haddon Mackie

1966

(annotated¹ and illustrated by George Owen Mackie, 2010)

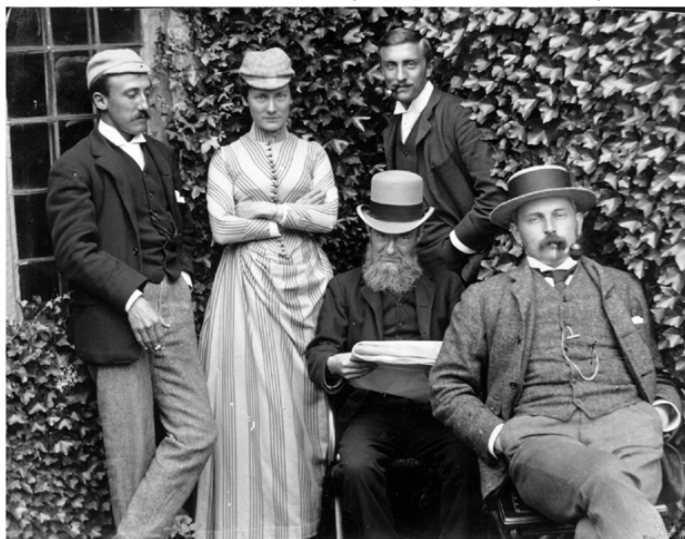
She was the eldest child of Charles Leftwich Oldfield Bartlett and Mary, daughter of the Reverend E.C. Whiteley, 40 years British Chaplain at Oporto (Portugal), to which city he contributed, in two marriages, 14 or 15 children. A gay British colony, prominent in the Port Wine business, was the background of young Mary before some chance brought her to England where she met Leff, a simple-natured, industrious, perhaps dull solicitor, of the Dorset family of Lawyers and "Squarsons" - the Squire-Parsons prevalent at the time. An odd mate for her! They had four children, who held him, as the years went by, in a sort of protective affection. As grandchildren we were very fond of our white-bearded "Grandad", and only once did he rebuke us for the silly jokes we had with his ear-trumpet.

I never saw Mary, for she died about the time of my birth, to the utmost grief of my mother, who loved her passionately, and, far from home by then, longed to take me, the first grand-daughter, down to Sherborne to show her.



Charles Leftwich Oldfield Bartlett

Elizabeth V. Owen with her father, husband and brothers, ca. 1905



Charlie Lizzie Eddie
Leff Bartlett Haddon Owen

Other children of Leff and Mary were :-

Charlie - spoiled as a bookish boy, doing well scholastically at the King's School and consequently self-absorbed and without much filial consideration. Married to his first cousin (also from Oporto) he was soon left a widower with one tiny son, Tom, who thereafter owed almost all of his education, home and loving-kindness to his uncle, Edward.

¹ so far as possible I have followed my mother's spelling and punctuation.

Meanwhile Edward grew up and qualified in law in conditions of money shortage and the worries inherent in a family practice that was slowly but surely slipping - partly I gathered from Grandad's failure to extract fees from clients, or spot a rogue, and perhaps from inefficient staff, as well as having to "carry" Charlie, who was worse than no use to the firm. Eddie duly took over management, bought his brother out - the latter enchanted to exchange a legal life for that of an Antique Book Seller in a neighbouring town. Eddie was extremely good-looking, and with a natural charm which must have caused disappointed hopes in some young girls of Sherborne. He was kind, humorous, amusing, and comfortingly unscholarly. He pulled up the firm, kept Grandad and Tom, and young sister Nellie, and eventually earned enough to lead to his great desire being gratified. This was to build a "manor house", in style authentically true to period, of materials collected from demolished barns and cottages, and to grace the interior with beautiful furniture of the period; he could spot a 'fake' on first sight. He also obtained oil paintings of Bartletts and Burtons, as well as appropriate plate and silver.

Here was installed a housekeeper, Nell Abbott, originally young cook to them in the Long Street home. Competent and devoted she ran the household to perfection and almost added the task of secretary to her duties.

Thus he passed his middle years in comfort, and satisfied an inherited farming instinct with a small herd of Jersey cattle, that grazed peacefully with their pure-bred calves in the pastures encircling Burton House in Long Burton, 2½ miles from Sherborne town.

One prejudice Eddie had. He paid a visit to the cousins in Oporto. His insular views debarred him from enjoying any of the bliss such visits gave his elder sister, and he once gave my brother Ernest a piece of solemn advice..."Beware of Abroad - terrible place. Never go Abroad."

I mentioned Nellie. This was the youngest: Eleanor Burton Bartlett, who had made a reciprocal vow with Eddie never to leave each other. Nevertheless she did. At the age of 42 she married the widower of a former Sherborne friend, lanky George Norman, housemaster at Blundells School. Making the most of a chest weakness as a girl, she had engaged much attention including that of my mother who nursed her fondly, though later discouraged by her younger sister's selfishness. Not really a beauty, Nellie undoubtedly had an attraction; and was very popular. She used to twit her elder sister, who as a girl had, unconsciously, the elements of real beauty: .. "I am the pretty sister. You are the ugly one." Incidentally, Nellie was my Godmother, and our relations were quite good.



Lizzie, 1897

A curious circumstance strikes me after writing of these three, and that is that "Lizzie" (their name for my mother) was one apart from all her family, in two notable ways. One was that, in a family slightly below average height - her father included - she was what at that time was considered really tall; in fact well above her own daughters. Another difference is that whereas she spent time and

pleasure in art and music, and indeed had a very sweet singing voice and practiced both in some degree, I never saw any of the others put pencil to paper, or heard them break into song! There had been a devout old gentleman in a Dorset Vicarage who left behind some MSS hymn tunes - but on the Whiteley side, whether or no there was any such interest and talent there is, at least, no record of it.

Returning to Mary, our grandmother. Whether from the contrast between her gay life and relations in Oporto or from pecuniary worries of Grandfather Leff, Mary became subject to periods of nervous instability, when she had to go away to some sort of Home. My mother then had to take her place, which meant curtailment of school days, and the lessons she so much treasured in art and music. She never had a lesson in painting after the age of 16, but continued to seize every opportunity all her life, as her many sketch books show. Music was better. She had a good voice, and the fact that a notable boys' school, then called "The King's School" - in Sherborne brought an element of culture, whereby choral and allied societies flourished, owing much to the School Music Master, Herr Otto Delfs - a true musician. Close personal friendship arose between the emotional little German and the romantic and talented girl. Louis N. Parker, Playwright and Pageant Master, also belonged to those Sherborne days, and was one of her more enduring friends.

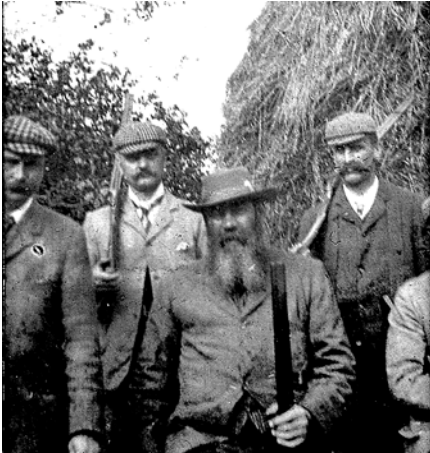
A Sherborne master, Mungo Park, became Headmaster of an old Grammar School in Louth, and my Mother went up to Lincolnshire on a visit to the Parks, and there met a good-looking young Solicitor, William Haddon Owen. They were married and duly bore the four children - Ernest, myself, Leftwich and Ruth.

My earliest recollection of her. When about 5 or 6, I lay half awake with a feverish cold. Suddenly I became aware that mother had come into the dimly-lit night nursery, and was kneeling beside my bed, in an agony of sobbing. Was she praying? Even with the egoism of childhood, I could not believe that my minor illness was the true cause of such distress. I never knew; I wondered .. still wonder. But if I have a secret guess, that guess is mine and mine alone.

When I was about seven my Father became tenant (at a rent of only £85 p.a.!) of the gracious Queen Anne House, Little Grimsby Hall, three miles from Louth. With it went 9 acres of field and garden, including a pond with two islands where we spent many hours fishing; also shooting rights over four farms. A dog cart and a chestnut horse (Billy Westgate, after the Louth home), a groom (Bingley) and a gardener (Bailey), came into our



young lives, and Mother spent hours of enjoyment gardening. A current legend was that our young women visitors (such as the Halls of Manby) were only invited in order to "weed the round rose bed".



Once chance brought the famous [cricketer] W.G. Grace for a day's shoot, and my mother took care to take a group photograph with "W.G." in the middle, and subsequently to obtain his signature on a copy for each of us - no doubt enhancing our prestige at school.

I recall another early memory. It was during the Boer War, which began in a spirit of bravado, and "Soldiers of the Queen my lads; we have to shown them what we mean;" even expressed by the very young brother Leff, who produced much lauded and

equally Jingo-istic verses beginning:

Oom Paul Kruger was a famous President

Oom Paul Kruger was very confident.

There was Mafeking, and things were going badly for our troops; and I can see Mother - in the kitchen and on the mantelpiece were china figures of khaki-clad soldiers, heads bandaged, pushing forward, rifle in hands. There she harangued her audience of two - myself much impressed, and a rather uninterested cook, who had the air of wanting to get on with her work without more interruption. The sin of boasting was the text, the folly of under-estimating our enemy, and the lessons to be learned by our country! The end of that peaceful, happy period will be described in a later section.

To return to my Mother - principal subject of these memoirs - I must add some disjointed recollections, in order to try to present something like a true picture.

VITALITY and ORIGINALITY. e.g. In our childhood days, ... leading the three elder ones on a bicycle tour to Crowland Abbey, staying the night at a small inn, and "exploring" the Fen villages and church towers, and the Potato Harvest on the way. She also encouraged us over the "Pickwick Club and Papers".

A recollection inserted here (out of date, but as it comes to mind). She was staying with Mackie and me at Old Government House, Parel, where she made an impression on our faithful "Boy", Nana Hari, who showed his admiration by plying "Big Memsahib" with pre-dinner Brandy-Flips; also on Mackie's Assistant Director, Major Sahib Singh Sokhey IMS, a brilliant and educated Punjabi Bio-Chemist, who gave his opinion of her as "an example of how to Grow Old Gracefully". I remember this because of her snorted comment .. "Ho! Indeed. Gowing old, am I?" indignant, but secretly pleased.



TRAVEL FEVER. France: a little. Portugal as often as possible and with utmost devotion. Land of her forebears, and well populated with large handsome families of cousins and second-cousins.

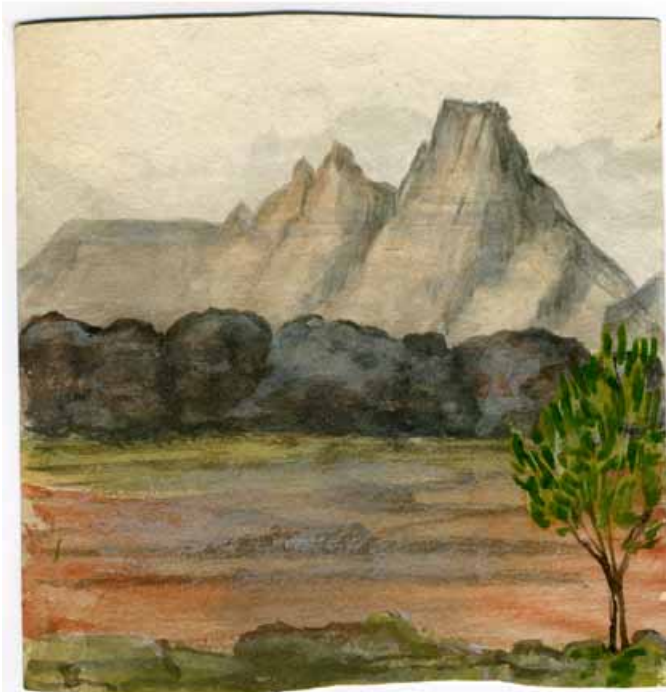


The verandah at Cuthbert Guy's house in Kandy

After Father's death she went further afield and, on my remarriage, came with me, or I with her, as far as Colombo, where she stayed with a bachelor nephew, Cuthbert Guy - later to become an archdeacon. As quasi hostess with him, up in the hills around Kandy, she met people of differing grades and nationalities such as would not have come her way in the home of an ordinary conventional European, Government Servant or Planter. Somewhere down the South-West Coast Cuthbert introduced her to the interesting Dutch colony there.

Thence she came to us in Bombay as related elsewhere², and used to amaze the Club Contingent by electing to find her way home alone and ON FOOT. Later still she roamed in Cornwall with her sketch book, and I fancy in Belgium, and once again Oporto.

² Per and Mary married on Aug. 26 1926. Mary, already pregnant, accompanied her mother to Colombo, and from there went on to Bombay where Per was Director of the Haffkine Institute. Richard was born on June 21 1927. It is not clear how long Mrs O stayed in Ceylon and India but she was an accomplished watercolourist and left a number of paintings from this trip, examples of which are shown here on pages 5 and 6. Mary stayed in India until the spring of 1929 when, pregnant again, she took Richard back to England, arriving in April. Owen was born on October 20 and, a year later, Mary and her two children sailed for India for the last time. In April 1932, the three of them were back in England and soon the family (including my half-brother Lawrence) were reunited and took up residence at Winterbourne Court in Gloucestershire. My first memories are from Christmas 1933 when Per, now retired from the IMS, dressed up as Santa Claus.



Chandri, from
Panorama Point

[Panorama Point is at Matheran, a hill station at 2650 ft elevation 30 miles East of Bombay]

RELIGION. I should say that for many years she was a true, perhaps fervent, Believer, and derived help in distress. To us she made Christianity credible and acceptable. I do not think we ever resented the daily interruptions to our fishing and island occupations down at the Pond, when the single bell of the tiny old Church of St Edith summoned us to the E.V. Owen-conducted Service! A Sunday School, also, she organized among the sparse farm and cottage folk of Little Grimsby, and she gave a faithful if sometimes frivolous attention to the poor, elderly parson who trudged over the fields from Louth, with perspiring wife as harmonium player, for the once-monthly Service. Father, a poor Church attender either there or at Fotherby nearby, she excused on the ground that as a Parson's son he had too much of it in his youth. (On

hearing from India of my first widowhood seven months after marriage, she told me she had walked in the darkness and reviled God for letting this happen.)

REVERSE OF THE COIN. Over-dominance. She used to declare .. "My trouble is that I can always see both sides of a question". In fact, this was precisely what she never did! Speaking for myself, her attitude had an adverse effect on me for many years. Confidence failed when met with views entirely contrary to my own; silence replaced what should have been contradiction.

In 1929-30 I took Richard, Francie Ayah and Lawrence in his holiday to be her guests at the rather pleasant house she was renting at Utterby. From there into Louth Cottage Hospital I proceeded for the birth of Owen, an event which revealed her as no longer the good but disciplinary parent of our days but as an utterly devoted grandmother.

Uninterested in Richard - more Mackie than Owen in her view - she was prepared to spoil little O to the top of his bent. Mackie came home on leave, and we decided that, whether or no it was ruining the baby's character for ever (which it, emphatically, did not!) we must let her have her way. Owen, even in the first week, learned that if lonely he only had to weep, to bring solace. Mother was across the lawn at once to his pram, explaining .. "He must have a pin sticking into him", or "It is a very cold day", and thereupon little O would be carried into the comfort of the drawing room, to gaze on the cheerful flames.

While recalling memories, in Owen's house in Monona [Wisconsin] I heard from "K.B."³, an octogenarian friend to whom I had mentioned these endeavours. She wrote: "Mrs O. was a wonderful character .. I remember she learned to drive a car very late in life and there was one stage when she over-stepped her mark .. which was her own house. She couldn't reverse, so, nothing daunted, she did a two miles circular tour and managed to stop at the correct place. She was a beautiful and striking woman, even in the later years.

During that Leave she came, later on, down to Clevedon, staying at the Walton Park, next door to our furnished house, and saw us depart to India on Little O's first birthday. Of her goings and comings then I am uncertain. No doubt a Candlesby visit with Leff⁴ and family; the Prentises⁵ in Kent, Eddie, and perhaps little trips abroad. Her sketch book shows Cornwall. On our retirement and sojourn in Winterbourne and Felden she must have come, but nothing memorable recurs, until she took a flat in London, Maida Vale way, and Lawrence stayed a night there in order to be up early to view the Jubilee procession. He recalls his embarrassment as a 15-year old, while she discoursed to him of the two little birds we had given her to help pass away her bedridden days. She had her own pronunciation – Bud-geri-gars – with a hard first g. Lawrence could not bring himself to copy this, nor to use the more accepted form: so he settled to calling them "the little birds". Incidentally, she had her own ways of pronouncing certain names and words, of which I cannot remember instances, though one was connected with common Hindustani terms – but she was inflexible in preferring her own!

Shortly before the Great War a financial crisis ended the peaceful life at Little Grimsby and we were back in Westgate after 20 years. I do not think I can write about that War and what it meant to my parents, and to uncles, aunts, and cousins. To summarize, seventeen young men related, some more, some less to us, lost their lives. Closest were Ernest, Christmas 1914; G. Hayton Hewetson, November 1914, leaving Lilian, 1914 Bride, with first child due in six weeks; Rowley Owen, 1915; Field Flowers, 1915; and 18-year old Humphrey within a week or two of the end of the war. Leff came through, but with loss of an eye and much of a hand.

In 1921, returning from India widowed after seven months of my first marriage, I found the parents in a smallish house, in Newmarket, Louth. Father was beyond work and about to have the stroke which made him immobile and speechless for two years until



³ Kay Baverstock

⁴ Leff (Major H.L.H. Owen AFC) joined a London firm of stockbrokers after the war but on the death of his father he took over the firm of Haddon Owen and Son, and also acquired another law practice in Spilsby, which became Walkers, Rainey and Owen. Leff remained a partner in both firms until 1969, two years before his death at the age of 82 at his home, Candlesby Hall. Uncle Leff looked after my mother's legal and financial business. (see his obituary notice in Lincolnshire Standard, Nov 5, 1971.)

⁵ Zabby married John Prentis in 1916 and they lived at Champion Court, a handsome 18th century farm house at Newnham, near Sittingbourne in Kent. My brother Richard tells me that the windows at Champion Court were permanently open because Zab was a fresh air fiend. John was said to have been shell-shocked in the war and was very quiet. They ran a primitive chicken battery outfit producing chickens and eggs. The Vicar later told Richard "John ran the cricket club, the British Legion, the Conservative association and the Boy's Brigade. Zab ran the Girl Guides, the church which sang for every Archbishop since the War, and the Women's Union. When they died the village sort of shook itself and new officials were elected." See pic at end.

his death. Mother nursed him deliberately single-handed until close to the end. Within three days of his death, Leff's first child, Arthur, was born. Her first grandchild, whom she loved dearly, and who – I have been assured even this year – has never forgotten his “Granny-anny”.

The end of her life was sad. As with father, we could only pray for and be thankful for their deaths.

A reliance on Whiskey, formed as a habit in those two years of nursing him, recurred when was at last alone in a London flat, and found herself without purpose, unnecessary to anyone, and beyond the solace of art or travel. Nurses were engaged; efforts to break the alcohol habit tried – in vain – somehow she obtained it, and a so-say rheumatic affliction tied her to bed. I visited her several days a week on the Green Line 'bus from Hemel Hempstead, but she did not recover. Once when we were on holiday in Devonshire news came causing me to hurry up to London, but there was no crisis, and we were all back at Felden seated in the little glass lean-to which had been her present, when at last we heard of her release. Cremation was followed by burial alongside my Father's grave in a modest corner of Louth Cemetery on its hill top, and Mackie came up with me from Lincolnshire. He admired and was always on the best possible terms with “Mrs O.”, whether in good days or bad, and everlastingly helpful to me during her vagaries.

The Owens ca. 1900, with Portuguese guitars



Ernest

**Lizzie
Haddon**

**Mary
Zabby**

APPENDIX

MY FATHER



William Haddon Owen – called Haddon, I believe, from some Peter Haddon⁶ ancestor – was second of four sons of the Reverend Henry Owen [b.1820], an Irishman, and Catherine Shaw [b.1824] from Yorkshire. The family grew up in a roomy rectory at Trusthorpe close to the sea, in the Lincolnshire marshland. My Grandfather was dead before my birth, but I remember “Granny Ruth” as a typical, plump, rosy and lovable grandmother. Although three grandchildren were named “Ruth” in her honour, that was not her baptised name, but was bestowed from some association with the biblical Ruth, whom marriage severed from her home country. She died at Llandaff, where her third son, Ernest was Headmaster of the Cathedral School. (We could hardly believe it when our mother told us Father had cried at the funeral.)

The four sons were headed by Charles Harry (“Charry”) a man of great Irish charm, to which was partly due a chequered career unusual for a man in Holy Orders. Next my father who, alone of the brothers, chose to enter straight into his profession without going up to Jesus, Cambridge, as did the other three. Ernest, Parson-Schoolmaster, was all Yorkshire, business-like and practical, and last came the Irish side again, in Hely, another lawyer. His tastes were literary, and artistic, travel, and Church architecture and so on. He too was a loved uncle, though one heard from one’s seniors grumbles concerning “the Law’s delays”, and a lacking sense of urgency.⁷

The three daughters were Mary (or Minnie) who married a Reverend but dry-as-dust Douglas Guy. They had nine children including the one-time famous Basil who, as a Midshipman in the Boxer War, became the youngest ever to win the Victoria Cross. Blanche also married “into the Church” .. to a good, and simple, Jack Flowers, who had value to us as children as an effective instructor in the practice of tree climbing. I, for one, had occasions in life later to be glad of his precepts.⁸ Lastly came Kitty, the “maiden aunt”; shy, intellectual, gracious, who entered an Anglican Convent (Convent of the Holy Name, Malvern⁹) when her brother Ernest married, late in life, and no longer needed her.

The Owen boys had all had all been educated at Felsted, and a legend remained long of their drives to Alford station at the beginning of term, encountering on the flat marsh road a gentle slope dignified by the description of Hannah Hill. This was always treated with such respect that the passengers always left the governess Cart to relieve the pony’s burden and proceeded upwards on foot.

⁶ The Rev. Peter Haddon, Vicar of Leeds, Granny Ruth’s great grandfather.

⁷ Hely Owen’s grandson Hugh has researched his family’s history in great depth and written several magnificent volumes including “Owen and Perrin Family History” (1981) which provides a wealth of information on our branch of the Owen Family.

⁸ Mary may be referring to a time in India when she shot a tiger from a hide constructed high up in a tree. She told me once that I was conceived on a tiger hunt and that if I had turned out to be a girl they would have christened me Diana after the goddess of the hunt.

⁹ Ellen Catherine Owen, 1867-1916, (“Kitty”) ended her days as Sister Cornelia, CHN.

In early days we were hampered in knowledge of our father by E.V.O's. too assiduous care for "the tired business man". Home-coming meant his slippers warming, and the decanter of claret also not far from the fire, and no riotous children around! I think we never felt quite at home with him, or he with us. Only Zabby, youngest, got round his reserve, and he seemed to enjoy petting and being teased by the pretty little girl, who was rather like his own mother. Photographs show him as good looking as a young man; popular it would seem with clients and the more sporting of his friends. Building up, single-handed, from nothing a good legal practice, he yet had a grievance. Local firms, passed from fathers to sons, were so entangled in the Council and business side of the town that public appointments never came his way. He desired them and knew himself more able probably than the old family firms, and my mother used to think that this envy was the cause of his breaking out into ventures of a speculative character – an ill-famed Wall Paper Company, for instance, which only ended in money losses to him.

Highest abilities in his best days were – Concentration, and Speaking. Working in his office for some of the War years, I had daily evidence of his powers of thought. Waiting, pencil in hand, for dictation of letters

and other business, I sometimes slipped out of his office to interview a disabled War Pensioner on hearing his step on the stairs: and returned without Father having noticed my absence. He was said to like Advocacy and to welcome occasions to practice it in local Courts. He had the gift of "putting it across". To some extent I think I inherited that knack. When speaking at political or social meetings, I could reckon on holding the ears of the audience. Has this trait descended to any of his successors ?

The speculations mentioned above eventually led him into a position nearing disaster. The one who realized it was his young, modest, very junior partner, our dear brother, Ernest. ("Little Ernest" to distinguish him from the Uncle E.). He manfully dug into the depths, tackled his father, and called into consultation and assistance certain of his uncles, and their united efforts saved the situation. Family harmony between brothers and sisters-in-law remained unaffected, and I hope and believe that in course of time W.H.O. repaid all practical help, and never forgot the kindness and consideration showed to us all by them all.

In 1914 Ernest came to me, saying that "every shilling counted" and that I must get a training and become an earner. (This, of course, was years before the foregoing recollection of working in the Haddon Owen and Son Office.) Ernest even spared an allowance, out of his tiny savings, to help me to start.

War broke out on August 4th that year (1914) and by September Ernest was off with the Special Reserve (formerly S. Lincs. Militia) to Flanders. Before Christmas he had been killed in action at Givenchy, near Festubert. In the little town of Louth, where he was the first officer to go and to die, he was accounted a hero.



Mary aged 12, tree-climber



Aged 40, with Richard, Ayah and tiger

Our parents were heroic too. At that stage of the War those in the fight were all Regular Army and such civilians as had had superior training. The glory attaching to their sons on “fighting for their Country” engendered a sustaining pride and – temporary – comfort to mourning parents.



Leff

of his death and burial. Leff may remember more.

Elsewhere I have referred to the cruel stroke that paralysed Father in body and speech till the end of his life. One could not be sure how much his mind was active, but when for some months I was home, widowed from India and Secretary to Margaret Wintringham, one of the only two women M.Ps., Liberal Member for Louth Division, I used to tell him little funny bits and secrets of the General Election then proceeding, knowing that they were safe with him, and he seemed to enjoy these talks; he would nod and smile as though with understanding. Most of those two years of his illness have dimmed in recollection, but I am sure he was patient, and was grateful to Mother. Except for a mental association with St Michael’s Church, Louth, I remember nothing



Aunt Zabby with our family, Champion Court, 1963