**With a Spoonful of Medicine**

**by Mary Lindsay Mackay (Kille)**

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# With a Spoonful of Medicine: Preface

This book has evolved along differing pathways:

Firstly: my life-time interest in Medicine and in the crucial ways in which its discoveries and practices have altered the history of humanity, both on a world-wide scale, and also at a very personal and family level.

I believe that no historian, or novelist, should ever write of an era without awareness of the state of health and social conditions in a country, community or family at that time. This should include the current afflictions: infectious, traumatic, malignant, or degenerative; the diseases of deprivation or affluence; life-expectation, morbidity and mortality. Especially the writer should know the chances of an individual dying in childbirth, infancy, or early adult-hood, in battle or in bed.

In other words, there should be consideration of the potency of *The Four Horsemen of The* *Apocalypse: Pestilence, War, Famine and Death*, and in particular, the factors involved in their obviation: *Devils, Drugs and Doctors*.

Secondly: of this vast field of human suffering, I have **three main personal sources, all within my own family:**

a) **An archive built up by my parents, of a family history, involving over 1,500** **individuals,** some just names and dates, most accompanied by delightful and sometimes humorous anecdotes and now on the family website.

b) **My father’s WW1 diary** of more than two years in a Scottish Highland Regiment on the Somme. This is also on line.

c) An account, which I wrote in 2005, of **my own medical life, i**nvolvingthree different but overlapping strands, covering changes over 40 years in knowledge and practice (and politics!) from 1950, and entitled **Three Careers**.

I have tried to extract, and sometimes infer, medical details from the first two archives. Many of these are of minimal medical value but perhaps of historical or social interest.

Maybe this slender, highly personal account should be entitled:

**With (only) a Spoonful of Medicine!**

 ***Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.***

Soren Kierkegaard

**PART 1**

### Part 1 – Porridge and Potatoes: a Highland Genealogy

**Porridge**

**and**

**Potatoes:**

**a Highland Genealogy**

 ***Old wisdom out of the cluster of gathering shadows.***

George Mackay Brown

# The Genealogist

My father**, Robert Lindsay Mackay**, (b.1896) started his research into the roots of his family when he retired from Medicine in 1961, and thereafter he spent most of his remaining years in this study.

He enjoyed every part of this, travelling widely, studying records of births, marriages and deaths, headstones in graveyards, family Bibles, military and land records, and establishing contacts far and wide, always looking for facts, and especially for the stories which were woven into this tapestry and which enlivened his accounts of the lives of these individuals. Unlike most genealogists, who concentrate on patriarchy, he gave equal weight to recording the lives of the women, often as hard and challenging as those of their menfolk.

In the course of his research he added more than 1500 names, over 8 generations, including all his great, great, great grandparents, then adding all my mother’s antecedents, whilst concentrating on direct lineage.

All this material is available on the family web-site created and maintained by my nephew, Robert Hague Mackay, now living in San Francisco.

Throughout this document, my father’s words are quoted thus: (RLM).

On his father’s side were mostly individuals from the **Clan Mackay**, but also from **Clans Matheson, MacDonald, Murray** and **Sutherland**. He was thus entitled to wear five Clan Tartans, occasionally wearing the Mackay, and for three and a half years, the Sutherland, as a young lieutenant in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in WWI.

All were true Scottish Highlanders, that is born north of a diagonal line from Dumbarton on the West Coast to Stonehaven in the East, thus including all the mountainous areas of Scotland.

This demarcation made most of my mother’s families, **McLellans** and **McAlisters, Lindsays** and **Browns**, to be Lowlanders.

The marriage, in 1895, of his father **George Mackay** to **Mary Lindsay,** was the first recorded instance of one of my direct Highland ancestors marrying a Lowlander.

My own maiden-name, Mary Lindsay Mackay reflects this first alliance.

# Origins in the mists of time

Of all my Scottish ancestors, those closest to my genealogist father’s heart were the Mackays of Sutherland, in the far north of Scotland.

His research, crystallised in his book The Clan Mackay: Its Origin, History, and Dispersal, 1978, ventures back into the very earliest days of the wild, aggressive peoples whose hard subsistence lives were spent in this windswept country of incomparable beauty.

The romance and nostalgia of exiles from these lands are expressed, for me, by this poem by Edward Baird:

*The winds cry over the bogs and hollows,*

*Wearying out the soul of the day;*

*Curlews call from the wind-seared grasses*

*To the lone heart that is withered away.*

*Sadly we go by the age old waters*

*Lapping the stones in the peat-brine cold,*

*Homeward now will the exile be trailing*

*To a tune turned weary and old.*

*Stilled now are the ancient singers,*

*Dead, and the runes are worn;*

*We follow the wild geese homeward,*

*And the heart is weary and blind,*

*In the clang of the western seaboard*

*And the whine of the weary wind.*

The lands of the Mackays, Duthaich Mhic Aoidh, consisted of central and NW Sutherland, intrinsically Strathnaver, the valley of the River Naver. This valley, a fertile oasis in a remote country of high mountains and open moorland leading to a rugged north coast of beautiful sandy beaches and bays, supported salmon and trout, and great herds of deer and other game.

A Roman ship must have called in at the mouth of the river for fresh water, and the sailors would have asked for the name of this place, as NABERUS FLUMEN appears on Ptolemy’s atlas of the first Century AD.

The Picts came here, succeeded by waves of Irish invasions and settlements, then monks, successors to St. Columba and thus not subservient to Rome, then Vikings, all absorbed into this multi-racial background and with the evolving Gaelic tongue.

Gradually the valley people flourished, raising cattle, sheep and goats, and growing barley, oats and rye, and later, potatoes and other root vegetables. Small hardy sheep were raised and from their wool, the women wove cloth and tartan, including (to my mind!) the most beautiful of all, the Mackay Tartan, in shades of blue, green, and black.

The Clan system evolved, with the Chief becoming the landowner, the crofters being subservient to him. The Chief could call upon them for army service, sometimes raising at one time, 800 fighting men, to serve in the Low Countries.

The Mackays, however, were for ever feuding against their neighbours, especially their ancient enemies of the House of Sutherland, but also against the Gunns, the Sinclairs and the McLeods.

They became deeply religious, but were Presbyterians. At the time of the Jacobite Rebellions they sided with the Hanoverians. Therefore they must have enjoyed, with eighty men, capturing the crew of the Hazard, as she was putting in for water, in 1746, with a massive treasure of money sent from France to the Jacobite army in the Western Isles.

The wearing of Highland dress was banned after the second Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, as well as the carrying of weapons. The bagpipes (piobacieachd) were also outlawed, as was the teaching of Gaelic. These measures were designed by the English King George to break the kinship bonds of the clans. In October 1751, John Mackay of the County of Strathnaver was arrested in Inverness for wearing a tartan coat and plaid, and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment. (The tartan, however, was still permitted to be worn by the Fencibles Regiments raised in the Highlands.)

Sometimes couples married by hand-fasting, the joining of hands, perhaps with a knotted rope, and an agreement to live faithfully together for a year, and if at the end of that time there was a son the marriage was accepted as binding without further ceremony. Occasionally there was inter-marriage between neighbouring clans.

The lives of the crofters were somewhat squalid, according to an account of an English visitor in 1745: uncomfortable, dirty, insanitary, crude and feudalised, and amazing to see sheep grazing on the rooftops of the low houses, which were very mean, with mud walls and thatch, with a floor of beaten earth.

The sheep that were raised, and for several decades the kelp industry, brought in small incomes. The seaweed was harvested at low tide, then burned to yield an alkali extract used in the Lowlands in the manufacture of soap and glass. The kelp industry collapsed in 1815 when common salt was found to act as well in a cheaper process.

Soon there was famine in Duthaich Mhic Aoidh.

However, the Strathnaver valley was forever coveted by the Sutherlands, who appropriated the land, and were party to one of the most appalling of the Highland Clearances, by which the Duchess of Sutherland and her husband Lord Stafford acquired the land to make room for the Cheviot sheep from the Border Countries. The Chief of the Clan Mackay sold out the fragile tenancies of the crofters to the Duchess of Sutherland, and the infamous Clearances started. The land was then allocated by tacksmen, employed by the Duchess, and the process of eviction of the crofters from their ancestral lands began, in many cases with the utmost cruelty and ferocity. Strathnaver was almost completely denuded of its inhabitants.

The more one reads of the Clearances, the more divisive politics become apparent.

Karl Marx, in Das Kapital, describes the Highland Clearances as the feudal system meeting the rise of Capitalism, and the expulsions of the Mackays from Strathnaver as the worst of the evictions in Great Britain.

John Prebble, in his book The Highland Clearances (1965) made an extensive study of these times and raised awareness of the barbarous practices employed against the crofters.

Sometimes the families were actually forcibly ejected from their crofts, and the great wooden beams that supported the roofs were burned, to prevent rebuilding. The furniture and all the frugal possessions were thrown outside. The main evictions in the Sutherland Estate were in 1819 and 1820, but there had been others before those years, and many thereafter.

It is argued that there was some financial assistance provided by the Duke’s Factor, in Scourie, who worked to persuade the local tacksmen to offer to pay families to leave Scotland. Many accepted that offer and emigrated to Canada, especially to Nova Scotia, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand.

Many desperate crofters found their way to Glasgow, where they joined other dispossessed Scots in the factories and developing industrial slums. A cholera epidemic added to the miseries in 1832. Sporadic smallpox (or possibly cowpox) and famine in the Highlands in 1836, were worsened by potato blight in 1846.

Between 1811 and 1821, 15,000 people were removed from the Duchess of Sutherland’s lands to make room for 200,000 Cheviot sheep. These flocks were accompanied by their shepherds from the Border Country.

There were claims that the Clearances were not due to the rapacity of the Duchess and other landowners, but to the fecklessness of the indigent poor crofters. There were many very large families. (In each of three of my recorded crofting relatives’ families at that time there were 10 children born and raised in the tiny homes.) But their subsistence farming economies meant that a large portion of the Highland population was now surplus to the Laird’s requirements. (Prebble) In one area 4 shepherds and their dogs and 3000 Cheviot sheep took over 5 small townships. The Sutherland Estates were now turning into acres not just for valuable sheep, but for grouse moors, deer-hunting, and salmon reaches for the rich from England.

But for the indigent crofters, the bonds of family and clan were broken for ever.

# Our crofting families

The area of most interest to my father was in south east Sutherland, near Bonar Bridge. Here many of his direct ancestors dwelt in lives of extreme poverty, as subsistence farmers. In earlier times they were subject to the Clan Chiefs, then later as tenants to the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland whose ancestral home was Dunrobin Castle.

This area stretches from Lairg in the north-west to Bonar Bridge, about 8 miles to the south. In this area is a ridge or continuous water-shed in which arise three small brooks, all running eastwards. On the banks of these are the ruins of the crofts of our families.

In the north part is the River Fleet, next the River Carnaig, and in the south the River Uidh which becomes the Evelix as it empties into the Dornoch Firth.

Here are remains of hut circles or brochs of Pictish people, and of a battle-site where in the year 1031 the local people met the invading Danes.

There are still remains of the stone crofts of my family, Lonachuan, Achuan, Cregnachlachul, and Aisdale, in the hamlets of Rhaoine and Achielidh. and Aisdale. The latter is named as both a croft and a hamlet. (Note: there is considerable variation in the recorded spelling of these Gaelic place-names.) In early days these crofts were sheltered by rowans, elders, and even oaks and firs, but by the 1890s these trees were gone and the land was barren.

My father’s lively accounts go back to the 1750s, when his Gaelic-speaking ancestors, born in this area, lived hard, penurious lives. Their struggles, foibles, strong Presbyterian faith and beliefs in family, Scotland, and justice, are all described in the archives.

He writes: *The crofts, from the early days, had thick walls of stone and mud, and very small windows. The smoke from the peat fires escaped through a central hole in the roof. There might be two rooms, sometimes with a tiny cell between them. At the gable end would be a shed or lean-to, communicating with the house, and used for stabling a horse or cow, or pig. Poultry had the run of the house. For sanitation there was a small shed at the back. Each croft had its own special smell, and its own breed of fleas and ticks.*

Water would be drawn daily from a nearby well or spring, but not on Sundays. (My father’s great -grandfather, **John Murray I**, when dying in 1798, refused water drawn on a Sunday for his especial benefit. *No!* cried the old man, *if I were to take a drop of the water from the well* *on a Sunday it would burn my tongue through all eternity*!) Lighting was by candle or oil lamps. The roofs were of thatch, held down by ropes lashed around heavy stones. Families tended to be large, and were bundled together in box beds. All washing of the clothes or body was done outside.

*Clothing was of wool, heavy and made to last. Cooking utensils were few and simple, the main item being a large pot for preparing broth. The diet consisted of oatmeal porridge, sparse meat, fish from a nearby stream, or salted fish such as herring or cod. Potatoes and root* *vegetables, such as turnips and swedes, were grown.*

The families, however, even though they built their crofts with their own hands, were on land which they did not own. They were just tenant farmers, always striving to pay rent, either to local landlords, or to the Factors, who were the men answerable to the owners of ever more land. The crofters made very little money, needing their crops to feed their own large families. Occasionally they might sell a sheep, or give their labour for road mending, or for any service demanded by the landlord, who could call upon his tenants for help with harvest, or peat-cutting, or to surrender some of their food, meat or grain or vegetables in season.

When they failed to pay the rent, they became immediately liable to eviction.

So, for several generations, the crofters led lives of great hardship, but somehow survived to raise their families, against the odds. However, with the diaspora of the Clans to the cities or to distant lands, through economic necessity, or through the Highland Clearances, came the end of most of the Clan and close family associations.

# The Diary of Sergeant John Matheson

One of the most interesting of the documents unearthed by my genealogist father is a transcript of the diary of a young soldier serving in the Scottish Fencible Regiment for six years from 1793.

He had traced our Matheson families further back than any of the others, to a Hugh Matheson, (1720-1805) of Breay and Tarboll. Hugh’s son Donald begat a daughter, Ann Matheson, (1786-1876) who married into our Murray family forebears, and a son John, b.1772.

This John (hereafter known as The Diarist) was born in Craigkilisle in the Parish of Dornoch. John writes: *After patchy school attendance I left home at age 12 and was employed at various situations including in the house of Major George Sutherland at Riarchar, then a sort of country shopkeeper, then as a sort of teacher at Lairg, then with Captain Alexander McKinsie of the 36th Foot.*

*Having been with him and his family in Loch Broom I had the misfortune to make too free with a servant maid in his house, and the consequence of our familiarity was that she had a son who was born on 12th March 1791, a few days after which matters were so far settled by the interference of my Father as that the boy was baptised and called John, there being hardly nineteen years of difference between his age and mine. However, I left Sutherland that same month to see my parents and friends and to settle matters with the Session which I could not stand to do before I went away. (*He would have been made to stand before the Churchcongregation, or to sit on *the Creepie-chair or Cutty-stool of Repentance,* like Robert Burns inAyrshire, and confess his sin and recognise the child as his*.*)

*I had hardly these affairs settled with the Session when the Sutherland Fencibles began to be raised, and the tenants of that Shire being in some respects obliged to give some of their sons for the said Regiment, I, of course, as one was obliged to go, being the eldest son.*

John joined the Regiment at Inverness in 1793 as a Private at sixpence a day. He gave his Bounty Money to his parents: *I always sent some to my Mother from time to time, according to her need, which was always laid out for the benefit of the whole family*. (His mother had 7 children, though one died in infancy.)

He later became Corporal, then Sergeant, acting as Pay Sergeant for 6 years.

As with all Infantrymen, most of his service involved route-marching, but after joining with the English soldiers he was delighted to find that the Highlanders were always superior to the English when it came to marching!

The main campaign was in Ireland, with the English and Scots up against the Irish rebels who were assisted by the French.

*On Saturday 14th July 1798, 200 rank and file with Officers, NCOs etc. commanded by Major Alexander Sutherland and also part of the Dumfries-shire Fencible Cavalry marched from Dundalk in pursuit of the rebels who were assembled to a considerable amount on the Boyne.*

*We encamped at Old Bridgetown on the Boyne Water. A part of our detachment went that night to Slanu under the command of Captain McDonald. However, the half of our Regiment who were at Droghea attacked and dispersed the rebels on 14th July, (the day we marched from Dundalk). They took some prisoners and killed and wounded many, I am told some hundreds.*

*On 25th August we got the rout [*sic*] to join Marquis Cornwallis who was marching against the French and rebels in the North West of Ireland. This army made a very fine appearance on the high ground above Athlone…. Such a fine body of men, and, in my opinion, an army of 40,000 to 50,000 men. I would cheerfully go 50 miles at any time for such a fine view. The English in particular made a very fine appearance. I saw, before the march was over, that they were too full and heavy to stand the fatigue of a long march. There were also some Hessian Cavalry who had a very warlike appearance. The martial appearance of the English Cavalry as well as the Scottish Fencible Cavalry was very admirable.*

*When marching at night through a small town on the Shannon some time before daybreak the people got a fine view of the army whose bright arms were glittering in the light of the candles and torches making a very grand appearance.*

*We only arrived to see the battle at a great distance, and the enemy surrendering and the rebels running away and pursued by Cavalry in all directions. However, this cannot be called a battle as the French were but few in numbers though they fought valiantly, and as far as I could understand the rebels saw they had no chance of success and therefore wherever the engagement took place they dispersed and ran.*

*After the French surrendered, their Commander-in-Chief (Humbert) and their other officers arrived at our camp…and went through the whole army, accompanied by officers of the British Army.*

*The rebels that were taken were imprisoned for trial. Some of them were tried instantly and hanged. I saw six of them myself hung on one tree together*.

Later, John adds: *of the further trials, although they were our enemies and the enemies of their country, still I felt very much for their suffering.*

There was further marching… *but whatever others suffered I was quite well, only that my hose and shoes were completely in rags. Still, my feet were not blistered nor very sore.*

*We arrived back at Ayr on 13th January 1799, nearly seven months from the time we left it, and fully as well as when we left.*

After his six years’ army service, John Matheson worked in Glasgow, learning the Muslin Weaving trade, for two years, including going to night school after work, then entering the Dalmarnock Dyeworks at age 32, and marrying *a very dutiful and virtuous wife, with whom, although we have no children, we lived as happy and comfortable together as our worldly circumstances will afford.*

He entered into various agreements with his employers, mostly at *Five Hundred pounds per year, a Free House, Coal, Candles and Soap for the use of my family.*

Thus he lived a life of great respectability, joining 16 (!) Benevolent Societies, and always acknowledging his illegitimate son John, as a part of his family.

He died at the age of 84, having at the age of 51 *paid Twenty Guineas for a Lair in the High* *Churchyard in Glasgow* *for myself, my wife, my son*.

# Individuals amongst the Crofters

Of the sturdy individuals documented I will pick out just a few to illustrate some of the ways these hardy Scots coped with their challenging lives.

From three families, **Andrew Mackay I** (1781-1836) who married **Margaret McPherson** (d.1826), and their sons **Andrew II** (1819 - 1890) and his brother **William** (1826-1907), there were 29 children produced, all born in adjacent crofts, with the majority living to their eighties and nineties. (Complicating the history, the two brothers Andrew II and William Mackay married two sisters (**Elspeth** and **Janet Murray**).

Of these 29 children, most went to Glasgow for work, and subsequently many married Lowlanders. At least 12 emigrated, to New Zealand, USA, Nova Scotia and Australia, including another Andrew (1844-1878) who joined the Queensland Gold Rush. Most of the girls went into domestic service, either in Glasgow, or in the homes of more affluent families in Sutherland. The youngest girl was expected to remain at home in the croft to look after her ageing parents.

Considering these large families, it seemed no wonder that the crofters were regarded as feckless and indigent and unable to feed and clothe and find gainful employment for their children.

But with no means of contraception available (always having a babe at the breast obviously did not work!) and warmth in bed being the only form of physical comfort throughout the long cold months, it is no wonder that there were so many children born.

However, it is amazing that in spite of their sparse diet and harsh conditions, infant mortality was low. Stillbirths were not recorded but infant deaths were few. Occasionally a Christian name would be used more than once when the death of a young child was noted.

Having no medical help, the crofters’ wives would be constantly called upon to deliver each other’s babies, or maybe sometimes the eldest girl would deliver her own mother.

And yet, the crofters survived into still-hardworking old age.

Of those who, in desperation, attempted to escape to other lands, **Andrew Mackay I** is recorded as having set off on an emigrant ship to Manitoba, in Canada, in 1819, with his wife **Margaret,** pregnant with her first child.The ship was wrecked on the rocks of Orkney, and their son **Andrew II** was born, literally, *on the rocks*. This disaster Andrew and Margaret took as a sign from the Lord that He did not wish them to leave Scotland as He still had work for them there. They returned to Sutherland, to a life of great penury, all their savings having gone on their fares on the ship, and to an area recently subject to the Clearances by Sir John Lockhart Ross.

One of the strong women was **Margaret *Crupach* Mackay**, born 1841, one of the 10 children of Andrew Mackay II and Elspeth. (*crupach* is the Gaelic term for a cripple.) She was thought to have had poliomyelitis as a child at the same time as her brother John who was so disabled by the disease that he never worked. She was a formidable woman of great moral and physical courage.

Margaret was one of **The 10 Airdens Martyrs**, who in 1893 protested against the evictions of the crofters, and who were sent to jail in Dornoch. The 10 crofters, including one other woman, widow Mrs Murdo Ross, appear in a splendid photograph, grouped against a stone wall, and displaying two long cow horns used by the lookouts to warn of the approach of Officers of the Law, whose job it was to enforce eviction orders. It is recorded that *on release* *from jail, they were met at Bonar Bridge by a Pipe Band, and escorted through the village, doubtless to a celebration feast of traditional viands.*

My father speaks of Margaret Crupach as *the best of the lot! In spite of her formidable* *appearance, she was always helping the families, was a good baker, and kindly towards all* *the children*. She remained a spinster, but looked after the two children of her brother George when he left for the United States. Her brother Donald, who emigrated to New Zealand and became a successful farmer, thought so highly of Margaret that he sent her an occasional allowance of money. She died age 90, greatly missed.

A much-younger brother of Margaret, Hugh (b.1860) died age 26 of scarlet fever.

Two other courageous ancestors were **John Murray II** (1771-1866), later known as Great John or Ian Mor, and his wife **Ann Matheson** (1786-1875), a sister of Sgt John Matheson (The Diarist.) Married in 1804, they were evicted with their three children, from Rhaoine, and possibly from Acheilidh. After six years of existence in a hovel at Cregnachlachul, John who had trained in woodwork, was often reduced to working as a roadman or quarryman, they decided to try for a new life in Glasgow. In 1818, after disposing of their few possessions amongst friends and family, and selling his Highland cattle and sheep, they travelled by cart with their six children, Ann being pregnant, the 250 miles to Glasgow. Here they failed to thrive, and after two years and now with another child, they left the city John described as *an evil place*, making their way back to Aisdale, where their family increased to 10. John Murray became increasingly pious, his Bible his most precious possession. This he inscribed *John Murray, his* *Bible. ₤ 1 sterling* and in it he listed all births, deaths and disasters of several families over many years. It is now in the care of my brother (G.M.Mackay) in the Isle of Man.

Of the ten children of John Murray II and Anne Matheson, I would like to highlight the life of my father’s grandmother, **Janet Murray**, described in detail, and with sympathy and admiration, by my father.

Janet (1826-1895) was the ninth child of 10 born in the croft at Aisdale. A mile up the road was Lonachuan, the home of Andrew Mackay I and Margaret, with their 9 children, including Andrew II, (who had married Elspeth Murray, Janet’s elder sister, and William, who six years later married Janet. William and Janet lived in Aisdale, where all of their 10 children were born.

There were 4 bare acres to farm, They had a few cattle and sheep, a pony and trap, chickens, and an occasional pig. Fires were of peat turf for heating and cooking, and were fiendishly hard to relight, as there was little dry kindling. There could be days when the rain came down the chimney and the fire went out. Water was from a well, and all washing was done outside, with the clothes spread on the thorn and gorse bushes to dry on the rare days of sunshine. (How did Janet cope with washing nappies, let alone the sheets of an incontinent old person?) I can imagine the men with their thick tweeds, wet from the rain, steaming beside the fire! (There were no waterproof oiled-cloth cloaks until the 1900s.) Janet’s dress would be long and black and would drag in the mud when she went to milk the cow or attend to the other animals or to her vegetable garden. Lighting was by candles or oil lamps.

School was three miles away, down a rough track, next to the Kirk. On Sundays all the family would attend the Sunday Church service, William and Janet and the babies riding in the pony trap with the boys running barefoot alongside, their shoes being kept clean until they reached the Church. The service would be in Gaelic, with a long grim sermon of an hour or more, the congregation seated for the hymns and standing for the psalms (to be nearer to God).

All the family spoke Gaelic at home; at school the children were taught mainly in English.

In winter the children would have a hot potato, roasted in the peat fire, one in each side-pocket to warm their hands and to eat for lunch; if there were no potatoes, and the fire was out, then maybe all they had to eat through the day was a slice of cold porridge.

There was always a barrel of oatmeal and a barrel of flour kept in the loft, and maybe some salted herring or cod in a barrel outside, and if they had killed a beast there would be salted pork or mutton in brine.

Janet was known to write letters to her relatives whilst she was out watching over the cattle. Apart from a Bible and the shorter Catechism (which the children had to learn by heart), there may have been, for years, no other books. The teenaged girls left for domestic service, so Janet had little help in the house. Eventually she also cared for her ageing parents nearby.

With so much of their farming output needed for feeding the family, there was little money to be made by selling extra produce to raise enough to pay the rent. Thus there was always the threat of eviction hanging over William and Janet. After 10 children in 16 years, Janet and William moved to Lonachuan.

There is a photograph of Janet in the family archives, taken in Glasgow in 1880, when she and William went for the wedding of her daughter Isabella. Janet, then aged 54, looks serious and elegant, wearing what looks like a silk shawl, which must have been a present from her city-living daughter.

At age 69, Janet died suddenly in the croft, of a stroke, at age 69.

Janet’s husband, **William Mackay** (1826-1907), was known as *a big man, quiet- spoken, with black hair and black beard, wearing rough tweeds, a hard worker, sometimes having four or five ponies which were used for the deer-stalking and the grouse-shooting in season.* This was after they moved to Lonachuan, where there were 10 acres to farm and would be as service to the landlord, who could call upon the crofter at any time for his labour.

After Janet died, William lived on his own, and became a gruff old man. One visitor said *there* *was no bread at all, except a white loaf at Christmas, and this was a great treat*. He was known as a hard, begrudging man. However, although he hadn’t much for himself, he showed generosity, dropping cut peats from his cart at the doors of aged female neighbours.

He did go to Glasgow for a year, working in railway depots, and in winter times worked on the roads in Sutherland. He was grandfather to my father, and died in 1907, but they never met.

My father, to his regret, never met either of his Highland grandparents.

# The last of our direct line of Highlanders!

My father’s father, **George Mackay**,(b.1866) the youngest of the ten children born in the croft at Aisdale to William and Janet, left home when he was 14, journeying to Glasgow, where already eight of his siblings were making a living.

He had odd jobs, including probably working in a pub, (a fact which would have shocked his respectable Highland parents had they known!) until he was 16 when he became an apprentice to the large Glasgow firm of Stewart and McDonalds, dealing in wool, flannels and blankets, and later, quilts, remaining with this firm for the rest of his working life. (From middle-age he always wore flannel *next to the skin*, whatever the season, and had a red-flannel lining to his waistcoat.)

He seems to have led a life of the utmost responsibility, and, as a canny Scot, after meeting and wooing his future wife at McEwan’s Dancing Class for Young Ladies and Gentlemen, waited seven long years before making the beautiful Mary Lindsay his bride. By then *he had a life assurance policy for ₤100, a sickness assurance for* *₤1, had paid for his new furniture and the first quarter’s rent for a flat, and had ₤50 in the Savings Bank, and a real gold watch* *with a real gold chain – to ensure punctuality in his engagements*. (RLM)

I remember as a very young child sitting on his tweed-clad knees and playing with the gold chain which carried his gold watch and a strange green tiki (perhaps from one of his uncles in New Zealand.)

Maybe because of the red flannel (!) or the fact that he was never known to have more than *one* wee drachm of whisky, he never had an illness until dying of cancer of the prostate at the age of 75.

**PART 2**

### Part 2 – Glasgow and WW 1

**Glasgow**

**and**

**WW 1**

 ***Write what should not be forgotten.***

 Isabel Allende

# Alliance with a Lowlander - My paternal grandmother

**Mary Lindsay**, my namesake, was born in Glasgow in 1869, her father being an upholstery-journeyman, the son of a Paisley weaver.

After schooling, Mary Lindsay became a book-keeper with an upholstering firm.

She obviously loved dancing, and attended Annual Balls of the Sergeants of the 5th Battalion Highland Light Infantry with her brother. I have her photograph, proudly wearing her specially-made Mackenzie-tartan dress, in recognition of the tartan of the Regiment. The photograph would have been taken when she was 18 years old, in 1887, the year in which she became engaged to George Mackay. I guess she would never have thought it would be seven long years before she married her canny, careful beloved, *the raw laddie from the Highlands who knew a bit about cattle and sheep and ploughing, and had the queer Gaelic as well, and who never spoke with a Glasgow accent, who had an ear only for the music of the pipes! It must have been a sustained effort for George to prove himself worthy of those Lindsays. No* *wonder he saved his pennies!* (RLM)

Even after marriage she lived a life of little excitement, except for the birth of her son and daughter*. All her attention must have been given to the running of her home. She usually had a resident maid, some young girl from the Highlands spending her first year in the city in our little 3-4-roomed house, and sleeping in a recessed bed in the kitchen, under the stairs. They were useful for lighting the fires, making simple breakfast and scrubbing and polishing the floors, but not much else. (*RLM)

Money was short all of her married life. When she was in want of money, Mary would sit at one end of the mahogany table (now in the possession of my son in Tasmania!) with George at the other, and he would unlock the little drawer at his end, take out the money she needed, and pass it to his wife, who put it into a purse and into the little drawer at her end, which she then locked for safe-keeping. *My impression is that what passed was by present standards not overmuch - but then values were different and needs simpler. But in those days it was widely acknowledged that the husband controlled the purse. My father followed the pattern, and my loyal mother conformed.* (RLM)

When her son, my father, was 15, he became seriously ill with tuberculous peritonitis and for six or more weeks his parents despaired of his life. Glasgow milk was delivered in open cans from open churns and could be heavily contaminated with germs. It was only after several months of illness that the young lad appeared to have made a complete recovery.

Mary’s illness was also tuberculosis, causing spinal caries, a degenerative disease of the spine, with much pain and debilitation. In those days it was incurable. She suffered for several years, dying a year after my father returned from the Somme. He sometimes spoke of his great regret that he had missed so much of his mother’s life. He left home in 1916 to join his Regiment in France; when he returned in 1919, she was a dying woman.

Glasgow was a most unhealthy city in those days, especially for babies, children, women in childbirth, and workers in the many heavy industries.

So many of the crofting families, who had led simple, open air, physically challenging lives, when forced from the Highlands by the Clearances, poverty and the need for work, found this in Glasgow, to their cost.

# My mother’s parents

My mother’s father, **James Kirkwood McLellan**, was the son of an ordained Minister of the Church of Scotland who was moved around parishes in Scotland so frequently that his five sons were born in different towns. His mother was a gentle lady, Margaret Kirkwood, the illegitimate daughter of John Hogg and Jane Kirkwood. She was brought up by her Uncle Kirkwood, a jeweller in Edinburgh.

James was born in 1864 in Haddington, 12 miles east of Edinburgh, but most of his schooling was at Stirling High School.

He suffered poliomyelitis as a child, which left him lame. He very occasionally spoke of his *gammy leg* which restricted his activities.

He had a beautiful light tenor voice. After he settled in Glasgow, he sang for many years in a male voice choir.

His life-long job was a dull one, earning a pittance as Overseer in the Glasgow Post Office, where he met my lively grandmother, Robina, 10 years his junior.

**Robina Wilson Brown**, (b.1874) my mother’s mother, was one of 12 children born to the schoolmaster (known as *The Domine*), Robert Wilson Brown, at Jamestown near the southern end of Loch Lomond. Of these children there were five infant deaths, and one daughter Margaret, whom Robina spoke of as *my special* *chum*, died of a lingering illness, probably tuberculosis of the spine, at age 20.

At the school there were some children who attended only part time, because they were employed at *The Turkey-red Dyeworks*, and who came to school with their hands discoloured with red and yellow dyes. They would often have a telling-off by the Domine for not washing their hands.

The long-term dangers to health were not publicly recognised at the time.

There were dye works at either end of the village and others nearby, all in the Vale of Leven, on the river. Many toxic agents were used in the industry there and in the major weaving centres in Paisley, where the fashionable market in shawls was promoted by Queen Victoria.

For many years 2000 litres of stale urine were collected each day from slum houses in Glasgow, and sent to the dye works, where processes were kept secret behind high walls, and only Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were employed. Alum, old fustic on tin, red cochineal, sulphonated green indigo, and black imported logwood with chrome were used. All these agents were highly injurious to health, but chrome ulcers of the feet and hands and nasal septum, and cancer of the lung were eventually recognised as occupational hazards of this industry.

When Robina’s father first came to the school the pupil’s satchel contained: *The Wee Spell, The Big Spell, the New Testament, The Bible, Gray’s Arithmetic, and a copy book. But under the new Master matters soon changed and the satchel became heavier and more up to date, Mr* *Brown being possessed of high scholarly attainments*. (John Neil, local historian)

After a few years at her father’s school, (I still have his brass school bell!) Robina went to the Garnet Hill Girls’ High School in Glasgow, travelling daily on the early workmen’s train. She then qualified as a telegraphist at the Glasgow Post Office. (She was still able, at age 80, to rapidly tap out any message in Morse Code on the kitchen table.)

Her family insisted on her living at the YWCA in Glasgow, a place of very strict discipline. Dancing was prohibited, but she decided to attend classes with her dancing-shoes concealed in the top of her then-fashionable (1895) *leg-of-mutton* puffed sleeves, once narrowly escaping detection when the Matron greeted her one evening as she returned just before the evening curfew of 10pm.

Having fallen for James McLellan at the GPO, eventually, in spite of some opposition from her family (probably her aristocratic McAlister grandparents!) she married him in June 1899.

At first they lived in a tenement building in Partick, in Glasgow, Robina insisting on the fourth floor so that she could see her beloved Ben Lomond from the window. Here her daughter, my mother Margaret, was born. Somehow Robina managed housework, shopping, a huge pram and a baby who nearly died from contaminated milk and from falling down the stairs, before moving to the new Glasgow suburb of Scotstoun near Whiteinch Park and the University.

James and Robina lived happily in Scotstoun, their small home being always full of young people, some camping in the back-yard, with music and dancing to *Ragtime* played on the old piano. A son was born, who at 14 years became an apprentice at the Albion Motor Works, (and thus a motor-bike enthusiast!) My mother eventually became a Medical Student.

Here they lived through WW1, through the Depression, and into early March 1941, when following the massive German air raid on Clydebank, my mother, then in Wolverhampton, organised for her parents to move from Glasgow to the Midlands, for what turned out to be the rest of their lives. Thus they were able to live close to their daughter and the grandchildren whose lives they greatly enriched.

# My mother: early days

**Margaret Brown McLellan,** who wasborn at the turn of the century(her children often embarrassed her at dinner-parties by saying it was easy to tell her age, as she was born in 1900!) lived her childhood and early adult life in Glasgow, then a great industrial city, the second in the Empire, with great riches but also with widespread poverty and squalor. Industry dominated Clydebank, where the sound of the riveters’ hammers in John Brown’s shipyards started up at 6.30 in the morning.

Her happy childhood led to an adolescence at the beginning of WW1, when many of the boys who had been part of her life left for France, never to return. Every day there were fresh Casualty Lists pasted up on nearby fences, and so often the dead and wounded would have come from the same local streets or schools, having been recruited and served together in the same battalion.

Her first employment was in the office of The Albion Motor Works, then making munitions,a hazardous occupation, but as a young girl, her work was in the office.

By then she was determined to enter Glasgow University to study Medicine and she was awarded an interest-free Alexander Carnegie grant of ₤90 which she paid back in full some years after qualifying.

There had already been a medical woman doctor in her family, her redoubtable Aunt Jeannie Rankin, who, a few years after qualifying MB.ChB. about 1910, on the death of her uncle, a dentist, was told that *she might as well become a dentist and so takeover his practice*. So she went back to University, studied Dentistry and did become highly skilled, and much loved, in that capacity.

When my mother started in The Glasgow Medical School at Queen Margaret College, in 1918, the women students were seated in the front row at lectures, under the avuncular eye of the Professors, to ensure no impropriety.

She recounted how in her midwifery student days, she and another woman student would cycle through the slums of the city accompanied by a Glasgow *bobbie,* and woulddeliver women who lived in great poverty, giving birth on a bed covered with newspaper. There were many difficult obstructed births due to rickets, the result of poor diets, and the lack of sunshine. All her life she was superlatively good at catching fleas and squashing them under her thumb-nail (a quality I have inherited!).

When the Armistice was declared she was attending a Physics lecture, and immediately all the students abandoned their studies and streamed out into the streets rejoicing.

# My father and WW1

**Robert Lindsay Mackay,** was born in 1896, at Hillhead, Glasgow.

He writes of the outbreak of the War, whilst still a schoolboy:

*1914-1915: An unhappy year! War had broken out. I had enrolled as a Science student at both our University and the Royal Technical College. My friends were joining the Army, my mother was ill, my father against my enlisting. The deaths of 5 boys from my school at Achi Baba in the Dardanelles in July, one of them a great friend, decided the matter. Having about a year in the University Officers’ Training Corps I was ready for a commission, anytime. My sentimental choice of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was accepted, with a heavy heart my father signed the papers, and I was off, to see a world far different from any of which I had dreamed.*

He served with distinction as a Lieutenant (M.C and Bar) in the **11th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders**, part of the 15th Scottish Division, arriving on 13th September 1916, two days before the Battle of Martinpuich, straight into three nights in the trenches, and *many* *dead*. The strength of the officers of his Battalion in France was completely renewed 7 times whilst he was a part of it, with 50 officers killed and 200 wounded. Later, following huge losses of men, the 11th Argylls were absorbed by the 1st/ 8th Battalion. The 15th Scottish, with a nominal strength of 15,000, suffered some 40,000 casualties. He was present at the **Battles of Somme 1916, Arras and** the **Third Battle of Ypres 1917,** the **March 1918 German offensive,** and the following **Battle of Soissons, and** up until the **Armistice in November 1918.**

**Throughout the War, he kept a diary.**

He wrote in 1972: *I am not quite clear why I wrote this diary, a scrappy record of a scrappy period. I had no literary or military ambitions. My parents did not read it. Perhaps it was to provide a kind of continuous alibi, to remind me of where I had been, perhaps an interesting memorial if I failed to return.*

*Like cakes off a hot griddle, it was written as events occurred, or immediately thereafter, in four little brown leather-covered notebooks, and when the war ended these were in no state to last long for they were soiled and grubby, and where written in pencil, the writing was fading. So, in 1919, I copied their contents, straight off, without editing, into two larger notebooks, and destroyed the four little ones.*

The contents were made available to John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir) who used them in his **Official History of the I5th Scottish Division.**

In 1972 my father decided to put all the contents of his diary into one volume for his family. This is now online, and available in the Regimental History of the Argyll and Southern Highlanders in Stirling Castle, as well as in the Imperial War Museum. A short biography is on The University of Glasgow website.

He had led a charmed war campaign without serious injury, but suffered, as did a million men on both sides, from Trench fever**,** a highly contagious disease transmitted by lice, with no effective treatment, The Scots Regiments were worst hit, as the lice lined up in the pleats of their kilts, with easy access to their groins and bare legs. Delousing vans were available behind the lines, and in these the men, naked, were exposed to the foul vapour of formaldehyde whilst their clothes were separately deloused.

Feeling exceedingly ill, he was sent down the line to spend days in a tented Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) but after 5 days he discharged himself to return to his men on the line.

All injuries could lead to sepsis, gas-gangrene, and death, usually by overwhelming septicaemia and pneumonia. Tetanuswas also a hazard, and all casualties were given anti-tetanus serum if they reached a CCS. There were no antibiotics, not even sulphonamides which were to be of great use, with penicillin, in WW2.

My father’s Official Army Records under **injuries** lists: *scratches on knees*(!) He had fallen several times on barbed wire whilst out on the escapade at The Third Battle of Ypres in July 1917 which earned him the Military Cross. So many men around him had been killed or seriously wounded at that time. He had then been sent to a CCS, and thence to Toronto Camp.

His Highland dress on one occasion saved his life. *F and I were nearly shot by one of our own Lewis gunners, whilst we took a walk in No Man’s Land; we had gone out without warning ALL of our front-line men. By chance the gunner got a glimpse of my bare knees and kilt and recognised we were not Huns.*

In April 1917 he had his first flight in an aeroplane, above Arras. *Went up in an aeroplane, in the afternoon, a FE8, with J.C. Irvine – wore my kilt for a 20-minute flight in an open cockpit. A glorious experience.*

In his diary there are brief references to tragedies. *Major A. died.**Suicide*.

Whilst serving as Adjutant he had to arrange Field General Court Martials*,* (and probably also the firing squads) for deserters. *Two more FGCMs, and yet we are not a bad battalion, as* *battalions go*. A heavy task for a young officer just newly turned 21.

*12th October 1916.* *Gas shell attack 5 to 6am. Made me wild. Don’t want to take prisoners* *after this. Some bad casualties owing to gas*. There are several other gas attacks mentioned in the diary. Gas masks were always carried on or near the front line.

*21st October 1916*. *Back to Martinpuich from the line. Frost came on us suddenly and played mischief with the men’s feet. Had to send a number to hospital.* The winter of 1916 – 1917 was especially hard with snow and frost for months.

*21st June 1917*. Another hazard! *Left Le Quesnoy with regret. Acting as O/C.Coy. We had to leave an officer behind at Le Quesnoy till next day to look after 20 to 30 of our weaker brethren who could not march owing to boisterousness and thoroughness of their farewell to the place. Nearly every man in D. Coy had his water-bottle filled with beer, instead of the regulation water, in spite of orders. The officers however, didn’t take much notice at the inspection parade before marching off, but when we got on the move, the beer became frothy and bubbled over on their kilts. Major W. dealt most admirably with this delicate situation.*

It is hard to imagine that the hell of the trenches, the gunfire and the mud, was only about 50km from Amiens and 120km from Paris. Occasionally my father was able to visit a restaurant in Amienswith reasonable food. In February, 1917, he and his good friend Alan Whyte had two days leave to Paris.

*13th February 1917. Dined in style in Amiens Gôlbert Hotel, soup, omelette, duck, soufflé, chocolate. Night at Belfort Hotel. Railway station bombed by the Hun, but we slept.*

*14th Got into The Continental Hotel, the finest in Paris. Tea at Maxim’s, Dinner at the Continental. Melba peaches.*

*15th Breakfast in bed. Opera House, Romeo and Juliet.*

*Alan Whyte was killed a few weeks later at the huge Battle of Arras. He was later buried, his body wrapped in a blanket in a long deep trench in the one-time village of Blangy. I wept.*

**The influence of the bagpipes** on the health and morale of the Scots was profound. Each Highland Regiment had its band of bagpipers and drummers.

Written in a later review, in 1972, my father wrote: *The Battalion of the 11th Argylls had lost nearly all its pipers at the Battle of Loos in September 1915. Thereafter the Highland pipers, being almost irreplaceable, were never again sent into battle, or allowed near the front line in trench warfare.*

*But by September 1918, the Battalion was back again at the old Loos battlefield. The air was electric with rumours of a German retreat. And the Pipe Band with its old Pipe Major, reinforced by new young pipers, was allowed to march and play the old Highland war tunes, up and down, along the Loos-Hulluch Road. A beautiful autumn evening, clear skies, the old battlefield lit by the westering sun, only scanty shelling and that mainly by our own guns, and the music shrill, loud and long, coming over the men in their trenches. Did the spirits of the dead of 1915 stir as they heard it?*

However, he wrote of an escapade on 3rd March 1917, an extraordinary poignant and colourful happening, in which he played a major part. His Battalion, the 11th Argylls, was to move up to the frontline before a big battle. He found out that they were to pass very close to where the 10th Argylls were quartered.

*Moved up to Arras by road. Just near the Y huts on the crossroads, our battalion halted for 10 minutes, as usual, on the journey up. One of the men came to me and said that the 10th Argylls were just a quarter of a mile away. I set off at a gallop for the place, found a drummer-boy of the 10th, and told him to go at once to his Officers’ Mess, and get everyone from the C.O. downwards, for the 11th Argylls would pass in a few minutes.*

*He did his work thoroughly! When our C.O. gave the order for our fellows to fall in and march off, we began to find hundreds of fellows, all Argylls, coming from the opposite direction. Soon the battalion had to stop – and brother met brother! Our fours suddenly became eights, and shouting was heard everywhere – in the richest Glasgow accents. All the 10th seemed to shake hands with the 11th! They brought out their pipe band and played us along the road. I saw dozens of people I knew. The whole road was blocked by the composite 10th/11th Argylls.*

*The C.O.’s face was a study. He couldn’t speak. Fortunately, he never discovered who brought the 10th along. I believe he had his suspicions however. He was in a very devil of a mood that night, so we just left him to his own affairs, while we had a good dinner in a hotel in Arras.*

*The Hôtel de L’Universe was near the station and was about 25 minutes’ walk from the frontlines, and was staffed by French people. This could not but have helped the enemy espionage system!*

Other times of reference to the pipers included when my father was sent to a Signalling School, well behind the lines. *There was a Burns’ Night dinner with music provided by the Household Battalion. Band and pipers not very successful as the band knew no Scots music and the pipers only played laments and slow marches.*

July 6th 1918 *With our pipe band to the Canadians’ Sports. Usual events, tug-of-war, tossing the caber, which took four men to carry, and Scottish dancing.*

21st July. *Relieving the Americans and the French. Americans fascinated by our bagpipes.*

(The relief of the French was a disaster because the French soldiers just abandoned their positions, with no formal handing-over, no maps, and no indication of where the German machine guns were sited. As a result the Battalion suffered many casualties).

About that time the Argylls marched through a French village: *the inhabitants had never seen Highlanders before. Jove! How our band played to them! The pipers nearly burst!*

**Highland songs** were of great importance.Of course, they would be sung on long marches. On 3rd and 4th June my father heard Harry Lauder sing for the Argylls. His son Captain John Lauder had been killed at Pozières on 28th December 1916.

**Morale** was at its lowest in spring 1918 during the retreat of the Allies in the face of the massive German offensive, when so many lives had been lost that Amalgamation of the remaining Argylls Battalions was proposed, the 11th Argylls to be absorbed by the 1st/8thBattalion. *Everyone terribly angry*. *This seems a most foolish move on the part of the G.H.Q. They had fought and died for their own Battalion.*

**My father** held different postsfrom time to time**: Signalling Officer, Platoon Officer,** **Assistant** and **Acting Adjutant.** These last two posts were very onerous, entailing mountains of paperwork, including condolence letters to relatives in Scotland, as:

1st August 1917. *McCallum killed. I’ll have to write to his girl.*

He fretted at being held back behind the lines for four days on administrative tasks after his Battalion had 85 casualties in one night on the Ypres Salient whilst relieving the Seaforths.

*Some of these poor beggars had never seen war or trenches before, in daylight. They went up in the dark and either fell or were brought out in the dark. A man hardened to it does not mind so much, but it must be terrible for a new fellow. Willie Haldane lost a leg. He was a splendid three-quarter at School.*

At last he had permission to go up the line to the forward H.Q, and set off with only Wright, his *runner.*

*I found the H.Q alright- just a sort-of primaeval hut covered over with sods and incapable of resisting even a pip-squeak. Open, too, to all the winds of heaven. Went round the whole line and saw the companies. Strange trenches - quite different from the ditches of Arras and the Somme. Here they were all boarded and revetted, besides being banked up at the sides. At the same time, too, the sides were covered with beautiful poppies and daisies. There would be about a foot of water in the bottom of all the trenches. It was really a wonderful sight! Picadilly trench, where we lost all these 85 men, was being attended to by 5.9s (guns) when I was going up, so I gave it the slip and went up another trench. Never like to see poppies now, as it makes me remember the wretchedness of Ypres, and of this particular trench, when, two nights ago, my company lost four sergeants killed.*

**As Signalling Officer: During the German Spring Offensive, Laying Lines.**

Telephone lines had to be buried 6 inches deep in forwardareas**.** *Wandered right up to**the Front Line. No communication trenches, no trenches of any kind – only MUD! Don’t think Hell can be worse than this place. Laid my line with Signaller Start, (a magnificent fellow) and another line a mile long at least. Got shelled to blazes. Took 5 and a half hours. Got back 1.30am, but on way back fell into a farm muck-pond – took me up to the armpits. Took off my kilt and slept as well as I could. In the morning the sun came out and dried my kilt. Boche planes over…… more paper from the Brigade. Staying in Low Farm, a filthy waterlogged pill-box about 4 ft. high. Boche only yards away, 100-150*. (At another time the line was only 25 yards from the German trenches.)

Sometimes they mended lines under gas-shell fire. Once, before a pre-dawn raid, he wrote that *with my only companion, Sgt Mitchell, we completed a line so now the company had signal stations all over the place. Simply a glorious night, one of the finest of my life.*

(Months later he wrote: *Sgt Mitchell, my dour, old trusted Signaller Sergeant has been killed in a raid after 3 and a half years of active, courageous service.)*

Once he was **seconded to work with the Royal Army Medical Corps** in preparation for the opening of the **Third Battle of Ypres** which began on **31st July 1917.**

30th July 1917 *My 21st Birthday. Champagne Dinner at night. Had to go away at 11.30 pm with my 50 Argyll stretcher-bearers, and moved up towards the show which would begin in a few hours’ time. Another officer with 50 men of the Royal Scots now joined my party so I had 100 men. Hefty bombardment at 3.50am.*

*Work began, terrific rain, heavy and prolonged. Ground churned up. This is my first job as a bearer. I hope to goodness it is my last… prefer going over the top.*

*Never before have I seen artillery fire like this. The Somme was a picnic and Arras a joke compared with Ypres now. Many casualties. Sent men off in parties until I had only three left. Found at last, when no other men could be seen, a demented wounded Boche. Felt like leaving the blighter, but could not. Got him on a stretcher. But men objected. Took an end of the stretcher myself. Then Boche turned a machine gun on as our little party with the wounded Boche stumbled down the Roulers Railway line. So much for civilised warfare!*

*I fear no prisoners will be taken by any of my men in the next show. Cruel work for men with a stretcher owing to mud, holes, and wire.*

**After the disastrous Battle of Soissons in July 1918,** in which he and Corporal Langridge made a singular exploit, my father was sent down the line for a few days’ rest.

2nd August 1918: *Re-joined Battalion in a railway tunnel near Lechelle, found everyone choked up with “colds” or* ***poison gas****. Moved forward to Villemontoire at night, the scene of the previous day’s attack. Many dead lying about, many much decomposed. Put up in the caves – the whole Battalion! It was like prehistoric times! These caves are in a deep hillside, and are very big. We found some Boche gunners nearby, chained to their guns – dead! The division is pushing on.*

But as the Germans started their final retreat he wrote with elation: *In all my experience there has not been such an eventful period. It has been great for a mere schoolboy like myself to be present during these great shows.*

He was then sent to a **Commanders Course** at Hardelot on the Coast. *This War is splendid! Football, boxing, dining, champagne!*

He re-joined his Battalion and *soon the Boche were retiring along the Whole Front. The fighting continued as the Allies pressed northwards.*

22nd October: ***Refugees*** *flocking in. Pitiable scenes outside H.Q with refugees. Appalling beyond all description. I feel bitter against the Hun as never before. Our village is full of white-haired women, pale-faced girls, and little mites of babies. Lorry after lorry has been passing through with refugees, each piled high with a mass of suffering humanity, shawl-less women and babies. Some of the latter were even gassed. There were young women too who had been forced to work in the mines, and others who had been outraged. It was a never-ending procession of the hungry, helpless, homeless and tired.*

He was sent on leave to Scotland, arriving back in Calais.

10th November: *Great shouting in streets of Calais at night. News of Armistice.*

11th November *Mobs rushing, singing through the streets of Calais at night.* ***News of******Armistice*** confirmed *– Thank God!*

*I set off for the Battalion, but stopped en route to give me a chance of finding the grave of my friend, John McIntosh, a gunner, killed at Neuve Chapelle in I915. Found gun pits. No graves nearby.*

## ***A constant source of strength:***

**Poetry**played a huge part in my father’s life*:*

*It was of course by pure chance that I came through, but I was encouraged continually by the camaraderie of my fellows, and sustained by my reading of the poets, notably Browning, Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Kipling and others. I always had a small poetry book, even in the trenches!*

I, his daughter, have this book in my hand today, a treasured possession. It includes words which would have been constantly in his head, as from *Invictus*, by W.E.Henley:

*In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced or cried aloud,*

 *under the bludgeonings of chance, my head is bloody but unbowed.*

He sometimes told me how fortunate he had been that as such a young man, he had not yet met my mother, who, soon after the War was over, was to become the love of his life.

George A.C. McKinlay was a poet who had also attended Hillhead Grammar School, in Glasgow, where my father had been taught by the same extraordinary English master, Alexander Haddow. George MacKinlay was killed in the fighting near Ypres, 11/9/17, and he had written:

*I have left my love in the North, the love that knew not flower,*

*’twas life itself that cast me forth, and I might not stay its power.*

*For I need not now a heart of love, but a heart devoid of fear:*

*and the man that would here the victor prove,*

*let him barter his grasp of the joys that thrill,*

*for a body that will not fail his will, and a mind that is keen and clear.*

Long after WW1, and not long after WW2, when I was a teenager, my father took me and my younger brother to France to visit Le Butte de Warlencourt in Picardy. This is a long, low hill of chalk, only 100metres high.

This had been the key to control of the road from Albert to Bapaume, through the appalling winter of 1916-17. The Germans had dominated the area, holding the top of Le Butte, with unhindered supply-chains from the north. The men of my father’s Battalion were positioned in trenches to the south, and the Australians to the east, overlooked by the German guns on the top of this ridge.

So my father had never seen the far side. But on that day at last, he did indeed. I wrote the following poem many years later, after he had died; too late to read it to him.

Walking on bones:

Le Butte de Warlencourt

*We stand, quite still, at the very top*

*of a long low ridge*

*in northern France,*

*where the chalk shows white*

*through the early summer grass,*

*and the thrushes sing in the meadows.*

*Idly, I stoop and pick up from the fragrant earth*

*something, less white, that shines in the sun,*

*and we recognise, my father and I,*

*that this could be the bone of a soldier,*

*the shin of a man who was young, fit and strong,*

*who could run, who could climb, who could dance,*

*who could march all day, or all through the night,*

*but whose life was ended in violence,*

*on this long, low hill in Picardy.*

*We had come, my younger brother and I,*

*“a slip of a girl” my father called me,*

*with him, the old warrior of two world wars,*

*to see the battlefields where he had fought*

*so long ago.*

*He was a young lieutenant in the 11th Argylls,*

*a Regiment of brothers,*

*schoolmates and acquaintances*

*who fought and died together*

*in the maelstrom of the Somme,*

*where the lice lined up in every pleat of his kilt,*

*and mud came mixed with the bully-beef;*

*“A roaring hell of shot and shell*

*and mangled men,”*

*where dead and wounded lay in No Man’s Land,*

*friend beside foe.*

*In five long months of freezing fog and rain,*

*the Highlanders entrenched below this hill*

*had never seen the other side.*

*The Germans in command of this small ridge,*

*Le Butte de Warlencourt,*

*a hundred metres high and fifty wide,*

*suffered the frightful winter equally,*

*in trenches on the northern slope;*

*Australians would occupy the east,*

*but like the Scots, were always overlooked*

*by German snipers and artillery.*

*And in that winter, when the snow lay thick*

*upon the alien slopes of Warlencourt,*

*the Gordons raided German-held redoubts,*

*clad in white nightgowns,*

*bayonets and guns*

*swathed to conceal the glint of metal,*

*helmets white;*

*my father watched as silently they passed him by,*

*and later, some returned,*

*left eighty Germans dead,*

*and took no prisoners. (\* diary of an A.I.F. soldier)*

*But some could tell, six hundred years ago,*

*on fields at Crecy-en-Ponthieu nearby,*

*the English archers met the gallant French,*

*the flower of whose cavalry were slain,*

*the armour of their horses and their men*

*pierced by the archers’ arrowheads,*

*their cross-bowmen too slow to load and fire,*

*were slaughtered as they stood,*

*and died on English swords and pikes.*

*But now, we three command the heights,*

*and look to north, to east, and to the south;*

*so many men had died to stand where we now stand.*

*so many men had fought*

*for Kaiser, King and Country,*

*and had left their bones on the fair slopes of Warlencourt*

*on that long low hill in Picardy.*

# Post WW1: student days

*Guddling in a corpse’s wame!*  was how my father later described his first sight of my mother, in the Anatomy Dissecting Room at Glasgow University.

Little could he guess that a generation later, his younger daughter would meet her future husband, John, in a similar situation, across a corpse, in the Anatomy Department of Birmingham Medical School, in 1950! The age differences were comparable. My father had survived 3 years with his Regiment on the Somme, and John had three years of Army Service before Medical School. Therefore both men were much more mature, and thus more interesting (but, as gods, out-of-reach!) to the women students who at that stage in their lives, recently from school, were dedicated to study. There were in 1918, in my parents’ Year, 100 women medical students and 400 men of whom many were ex-servicemen.

My father, having a generous War Gratuity, threw himself into a care-free University life. Like John, he had to start in First year, finding it difficult to study, particularly for a pass in Botany. He recounted how, at his Viva Voce, the kindly Professor of Botany said he understood that he had been *somewhat occupied (!)* and gave him a pass mark.

He loved and revered his mediaeval Varsity, becoming President of the Students’ Union and thus attending many (all male) dinners, not just at Glasgow, but at Edinburgh, Aberdeen and St. Andrew’s, where the students wore their thick red woollen robes and sang lustily from The Scottish University Students’ Song Book, always ending with *Gaudeamus igitur*.

Of his philosophy in his University years he quotes from Robert Burns:

*I dropped my schemes, like idle dreams, and came to this conclusion, O,*

*The past was bad, the future hid, its good or ill untried, O,*

*But the present hour was in my power, and so I would enjoy it, O.*

When he went up to the kneeling stool to be capped in 1923 for his degree, the student audience suddenly burst out singing:

*Old soldiers never die, never die, never die, Old soldiers never die, they only fade away.*

It was not until 1921, that my father first spoke to my mother, who was running a second-hand bookstall in the Students’ Union, but they were not engaged until they both qualified in 1923, and married in 1925.

They were married in Glasgow University Chapel, by the Rev. George McLeod, who had served as Adjutant with my father in the same battalion of the Argylls, and who later founded the Iona Community, and became Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and with whom he enjoyed a life-time of amicable disagreement on the existence of God.

**PART 3**

### Part 3 – England and WW 2

**England**

**and**

**WW 2**

***The past is but the beginning of a beginning,***

***and all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn***

 H.G.Wells

# My parents: qualified and married

**My mother** on qualifying went to join her uncle, Dr William Brown, who had a General Practice in Lea Road, Penn, Wolverhampton, visiting patients in their homes by bicycle and making up medicines in the practice dispensary. Life was hard then, as they were years of the Depression, with patients often lacking the money for medical help.

After some time as a Resident in the Glasgow Western Infirmary**, my father** went to join my mother in the Wolverhampton Practice. He had to find the money to buy out Dr Brown. This took 11 years (and Dr Brown insisted on interest).

Professionally they helped many people and were familiar with the extremes of human suffering. Before 1938 when sulphonamides became available, there were very few modern drugs to use, with digitalis, morphine and aspirin as staples. They made up many medicines themselves, pounding up powders, making suppositories and tinctures, and inventing fluid medicines with acceptable tastes, sometimes concurring with the patients’ belief that the worse the taste, the more likely the cure! Syrup of ipecacuanha was often used as an expectorant, or in higher doses, as an emetic but was widely used to mask even worse tastes.

They rented a small house in Woodfield Avenue, not far from the Practice, and here my elder brother and sister were born.

Later they bought a gaunt Georgian 3-story house at 226 Penn Road and welcomed first my birth, and then that of my younger brother. It was a cold, damp, draughty home; my first view of my newborn brother was of a tiny babe in a laundry basket in the airing cupboard, the warmest place in the house. (In winter there was sometimes frost on the *inside* of the windows.) My sister and I acquired the life-time curse of child-blains.

Wolverhampton was then a part of *The Black Country*,dependenton coal and steel and other heavy industries. Often in winter there would be *a pea-souper* fog. (The Clean Air Act of 1956 and other legislation, including the restriction of coal and coke domestic fires, eventually made *The Black Country* a misnomer.) There was a coal mine 2 miles beneath the house and the road at the end of our laneway was called Coalway Road. The area sometimes suffered subsidences, when depressions appeared in roads and houses were said to have disappeared.

In early days the main road past our house was lit by gas lamps and in evenings I would watch the lamplighter come around with his long pole to light the lamps. Later, trolley buses went past the door. Sometimes their rods would jump off the overhead wires, with sparks flying.

For several years, patients (sometimes bleeding on the doorstep) would call at our family home for medical advice. I remember, at about age 4, sitting with patients in the waiting room, interrogating them on their illnesses and describing the symptoms suffered by the doll or teddy-bear I had brought for consultation.

There were also night calls, sometimes by telephone, sometimes by people beating on the door, or ringing our brass bell. Our home did not have a brass speaking-tube beside the bell, as there was, round the corner, at the local Spackman practice. Sometimes local lads (my brothers included!) shouted false messages up the Spackman brass tube.

My father eventually sold the General Practice in 1938 and was appointed Honorary Physician (and Honorary meant just that: no salary!) to the Royal Hospital, Wolverhampton, specialising in Cardiology. He eventually had Consulting rooms in Bath Road, so there were no more patients calling at our house.

My mother did less medical work, apart from being involved, as was my father, as Factory Visiting Surgeons. There were many dangerous occupations in Wolverhampton, especially in metal-spinning and plating works, where chrome ulcers of the hands, feet and nasal septum were common, as were many chronic, and often incurable lung diseases such as silicosis andcancer of the lung. Some of the conditions in many factories were deplorable, especially in the pickling and sherardizing shops where metals were treated to prevent rusting.

My mother was made a Justice of the Peace in 1936, being amongst the youngest women to become a Magistrate, and was sworn in to the uncrowned King Edward VIII. She served in Petty Sessions and later became Chair of the Juvenile Court, retiring when she was 71.

# Pre-war life in an old house in the W. Midlands

The house where I was born was not distinguished in any way. Late Georgian, it would have been built for a middle-class merchant.

Thus the design was fairly standard: a large lounge and dining room on the ground floor, with a stone-flagged corridor leading by steps down to a huge kitchen, with pantry behind.

There were red quarry-tiles in the kitchen, and a large black cast-iron oven, attached to a coal-fired, later coke-fed, boiler for cooking and to heat the water. Just before WW2 a gas stove was installed for cooking.

High on the kitchen wall was a glass-fronted cabinet, with bells on coil-springs, which were labelled for dining room, lounge room, and main bedrooms, for summoning the maids.

At the front door was a dangerously steep set of stairs, leading by purple-carpeted stairs with brass rods to the first-floor bedrooms and a very cold lino-floored bathroom.

The family lavatory was a tiny room, tucked under the stairs to the top floor.

All the bedrooms on the first floor had open fires, which in our time were never used.

On the top floor were four bedrooms, mostly used by the maid(s) who had no washing facilities.

Beyond the kitchen, there was a long chain of out-houses which included two wooden sheds for fuel, a murky lavatory, a washhouse with an enormous stone basin and a water-pump with wooden handle, and a huge brick bread-oven. Next, stabling for horses and carriages, with a grain-store above, and a forge. The yard was paved with slate, which in earlier days, would ring with the sound of horses’ hooves.

Under the living rooms there was a cavernous cellar, divided into cold, damp cells, and when my parents later came to sell the house, we discovered why it was called *Springfield House*, as there was a spring (and frogs) in a far corner! (My father then piled up his considerable collection of vintage wine, opposite to the spring, to divert the eye-of the would-be-buyer!)

Our house was semi-detached, the house next-door belonged to a spinster music teacher whose pupils’ lessons we endured through the common wall.

On the outer side of our house was a three-story high, blank brick wall, faced in concrete. This was a perfect tennis-practice space, for singles or doubles, on which we could work-off our surplus energy.

Pre-war, my mother had two live-in maids, Olive and Eva. It is only recently that I have thought deeply about their lives. My family was *middle-class*, but very little different from those around us who also had a professional, or commercial bread-winner as head of the family. I have no idea what salaries the maids received, but their lives were restricted in many ways.

The maids’ work started early. They would come down the steep stairs from the top storey, bringing their chamber-pots, (they never used the family’s toilet on the first floor), down to the kitchen, outside lavatory and coke-shed, and start up the refractory old stove in the kitchen eventually producing hot water for the family, though they boiled water on the gas stove for my father’s shaving jug.

Housework in such a draughty old house was not easy. I remember helping with wash-boards and putting wet sheets through the hand-cranked mangle. Drying sheets and clothes through the winter was back-breaking and discouraging. I remember having whooping-cough and being sick in nearly every bedroom in the house, and my mother not being angry with me for causing so much washing.

The water through our taps was very *hard*. During the War households in the West Midlands were given an extra war-time soap ration, but to save this my mother installed a huge water-softener in the out-house which she primed with big quantities of raw salt.

Often in the winter the pipes and toilets would freeze; always a challenge, especially during the War when labour was scarce. My practical mother would fix most things, except gutters and drain-pipes when they fell and crashed through the lounge window.

Winters always seemed long and cold. I remember once Eva, who also suffered from child-blains, running around the snow-covered grass lawns, in bare feet, having read somewhere that this could be a cure. It was not!

# Lead-up to another War

I remember, when age 7, our family crowding into the sitting room of a boarding-house in Abersoch in North Wales, where we were having a summer holiday, and listening to the flat voice of Neville Chamberlain declaring that Great Britain was now at War. There was an atmosphere of great tension amongst the grown-ups present.

Shortly after, my father decided that he would enlist. He did not have to do so. He was already 43.

In our house in Wolverhampton, he supervised the stockpiling of supplies of food in our huge stone-flagged cellar. A great glass carboy was filled to the top of the neck with sugar, and my mother assembled many enamel buckets with eggs pickled in isinglass.

My sister, three years older than I, remembers an escape access being built from the cellar into the garden. In one of the top-floor bedrooms, buckets of sand, a stirrup-pump and a huge hawser were installed. To our disappointment we were never allowed to have a rehearsal for escaping down the rope!

My father gave my mother his WW1 *Boche* automatic pistol and ammunition. (I later found out that at some stage she did indeed have it under her pillow. I am sure she would have used it in defence of her children).

A simple but ramshackle caravan was bought and sited at a farm at Seisdon, some miles away. Many times in the next few years my sister and I would cycle there to stay and play house at weekends.

Gas masks were distributed. At school, lines of shelters were built beside the playing fields. Windows at school, and home, were criss-crossed with sticky-tape.

My mother sewed many yards of black-out material for our numerous windows. To her delight, we found there were old wooden shutters, maybe from Regency times, painted over with thick brown paint. We prized these open and they added to our black-out, and to backgrounds for the many plays and concerts which we inflicted upon our friends and family.

When an edict went out that sign-posts were to be either dismantled or turned around to confuse the enemy, we worked out fantastical tales for misleading any hapless strangers we met asking for directions.

My mother was chuckling one night when she told us that our local GP, Pat O’Loughlin, a colourful Irishman, when trying to make a home-visit to a patient, on asking the way of a passer-by, was informed *I’m not telling you! You may be a spy!* My mother was sure his colourful flow of language did not fail him on that occasion!

It was all very exciting to us three younger children. It was only very many years later that I realised that my then teen-aged elder brother carried the burden of feeling responsible for my mother and for us, in the absence of our father.

But my mother always dispelled possible anxiety by ensuring that there was a spirit of fun in all our preparations.

After the War, she told me that she had determined not to have my father’s clothes cleaned until he came home, so that to restore her courage, she could sometimes creep away to bury her face in one of his jackets to savour the reassuring smell of her man.

# At home during war time: WW2

We were fortunate that the Blitz, from September 1940, touched us lightly. On the edge of the highly-industrialised *Black Country*, a few stray incendiaries fell near us, but we watched, from our front windows, the glow in the south east of the fires of Birmingham and Coventry.

Familiar with the Air-raid sirens, at school we were shepherded into the shelters, where our best singers sang *Somewhere, over the rainbow,* or at home there were a few occasions when we sat, with our blankets, in our chilly cellar with its bats and frogs.

After the Battle of Britain, at our School Assembly, a handsome Fighter Pilot was introduced to us by the young Gym teacher, her thigh-high Loughborough tunic and thick black stockings showing to advantage her beautiful legs. Both were tongue-tied and blushing furiously. I guess he would have preferred to have been in battle! (I believe he was killed shortly after.)

For months we had been knitting rugged navy socks, gloves and mittens for the crew of our adopted Merchant Ship. Her Captain Lewis attended another Assembly to present the school with the great brass ship’s bell, one of the few objects saved when the ship was sunk on its passage to Murmansk taking arms and vehicles to Russia. Many times we prayed and sang: *for those in peril on the sea.*

At home, we put on a concert to raise money for *Mrs Churchill’s Aid for Russia. (*My father expressed his disapproval – so many lives were lost on the Arctic Route carrying men and goods from Britain’s own depleted resources.)

Our next charity performance was a Circus in aid of *King George’s Fund for Sailors*. I still have the poster: *Nick, Flick and Mick the Clowns, The Dancing Bears and Many Others*.

After the terrible Glasgow air-raid of March 13th 1941 on John Brown’s Shipyards at Clydebank, on *a bombers’ moon, (*full moon), when first the Whisky Distillery was hit, then the Singer Sewing-Machine Factory (making Armaments), then the Arsenal, then the Shipyards where so many ships were being built or repaired, with the death of 1200 people and loss of 4000 homes, my mother went by train to Glasgow to bring her parents to live for the rest of the War, in a little home near us.

Throughout the War years, we had Eva, our live-in maid. Early in the War, Olive had to leave us, as *domestics* were required to join-up in the Services, the Land Army, or to work in a munitions factory. Eva was allowed to continue to live with us as my mother was doing so much war-work. Eva’s husband, Llewellyn, known as *Llew*, was a Leading Aircraftsman working as part of the Ground Crew at an airfield, *somewhere in England*, servicing the aeroplanes for the Battle of Britain and later, for the invasion of France.

I remember Llew, in his R.A.F. uniform, visiting Eva, having his photograph taken standing under a dormant red-flowered hawthorn tree, and assuring Eva that he would be home before its next flowering.

Very early in the War, my mother brought home a worried-looking woman who was to teach us German. She came for a few lessons, from which I only learned *safran macht den* *Kuchen gehl, (*which wouldn’t have been of much use under a German invasion!) and then she disappeared. I believe she would have been interned, probably in the Isle of Man, but we never heard of her again.

Also, at this time, a very good American friend of my parents, a wealthy bachelor, Bobby Patterson, wrote offering to take all four of us children to live with him in the USA for the duration of the War. Thousands of children were sent on government schemes to Canada, South Africa and Australia, and privately to Canada and the United States. Some were lost on ships torpedoed in the Atlantic. My parents declined his extraordinarily generous gesture, and thereafter we received from him, twice a year, exciting food parcels, with such luxury items as ham, and dried fruit.

My mother assumed an amazing number of roles throughout the War, as well as holding together our extended family, including her own parents, our two cousins and their mothers. The two uncles worked in London, in what had been factories making fireworks, Brock’s Fireworks and Morgan Crucible, now involved in *hush-hush* work making explosives.

Continuing with her Factory visits and her twice-a-week Court work, including her position as Chairman of the Juvenile Court, she became a co-opted Councillor for Wolverhampton, joined the Red Cross as an officer, giving lectures on First Aid and on the hazards to soldiers of venereal disease. She also participated in Nursing Examinations, Marriage Guidance and Citizens’ Advice Bureaux.

What seemed to involve us most, was her work with the exceedingly busy Forces Canteen in Beattie’s store in Wolverhampton. She was responsible, every Thursday, for three 8-hour sessions with many volunteers. Sometimes she would bring back for tea, one or two soldiers or airmen, who just wanted to spend a few hours with a normal family. (I have autographs: *Will you come and see me in Poland? Vincent Swicz, Captain.)* We entertainedDutchmen from their base in nearby Wrottesley Park (where *the Dutch gold* was said to be hidden!), aristocratic Poles, Czechs, privates to officers, and, later on in the War, Americans, their beautifully tailored olive-green uniforms comparing with the rough scratchy khaki of the British other-ranks.

Coping with so much, my mother never lost her inventiveness or her sense of humour, managing our old house with its blocked lavatories, frozen drain-pipes, her children’s ailments and all the decisions that a complete family would normally make together.

 We were so lucky to be safe, and well-nourished. There was free school milk as well as orange and blackcurrant juice. Variety to meals was a challenge to my mother, but we did well with Lend-Lease extras like tins of *Spam* and *Snoek* (believed at the time to be whale meat, but I have since found it was a species of Atlantic fish), and powdered egg, milk and cocoa.

When our homework was done, we would gather in the kitchen (the only warm room in the house) to listen to the BBC. Preceded by the chimes of Big Ben, we’d hear: *This is the 9-o’clock News and this is John Snagge, (or Alvar Lidell) reading it.* Even now, when I hear thechimes of that great clock*,* I still often have the nostalgic taste of cocoa in my mouth*.* We listened to *Monday Night at 8 o’clock*, *oh can’t you hear the chimes, they’re telling you to take an easy chair, and settle by the fireside…produced by Harry Pepper;* also *ITMA* with Tommy Handley, and *Much-Binding-in-the Marsh* (from 1944) with Kenneth Horne and Richard Murdoch.

After the News there would be *Marching On* and the National Anthem of one of The Allies, France, (*Free France*), Holland, Belgium, Poland or Czechoslovakia.

Somehow, our family were able to have summer holidays, travelling by train, usually to Abersoch in North Wales, and once to Millport on Great Cumbrae in the Firth of Clyde. Whilst on the beach in Millport, my little brother picked up a British sailor’s hat, which he wore with pride (mercifully ignorant of how it came to be there). The Firth of Clyde was the site of sinkings of many merchant and other ships at that time. There was often oil on the beaches.

My cousin Reay was frequently with us. Living in Surbiton in South London, she and her parents survived the Blitz of 1940, but when the *doodle-bug* raids started immediately after D-Day, followed by the V2s (known by the Germans as *retaliation vengeance weapons),* her mother Jessie could take no more. She and Reay moved into a slate-roofed stone cottage near Abersoch for some peace. However, the first night there reduced her to terror as she was awakened by explosions nearby, convinced the bombs had followed her, only to learn that the RAF were using the deserted St Tudwal’s Island for night-time target practice.

Some weekends when we cycled to the caravan at Seisdon we saw Italian Prisoners of War working in the fields, as also when we visited Morgan’s farm at Newtown in Mid Wales, one Easter-time. They would have been captured in North Africa, or in 1943, in Sicily.

My father was not to come home from the Middle East until January 1944, when he found us fit and well and in the snow. We had known him, for nearly three years, only through correspondence. We met him at the train station in Wolverhampton, when my younger brother had to be told *which soldier he was to wave to,* and we were embraced by a grey-haired man I hardly knew.

# My father’s War in the Middle East

The enlistment of my Physician father took some time, and he was already half-way through his 44th year of age when he spent his embarkation leave with us at home, in the snowy January of 1941. On 24th he reported for duty at Beckett Park, Leeds, and was granted an Emergency Commission, in light of his WW1 service, as Acting Major, in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

In February he was posted to No.1. Neurosurgical Unit, Military Hospital (Head Injuries) Oxford. This Unit quickly, and thereafter, was known as *The Nutcracker Suite*!

On 21st April he embarked for the Middle East, on the old liner Riena Del Pacifico, packed with soldiers sleeping three to a bunk on an 8-hours roster, sailing the hazardous route around the Cape of Good Hope, the Mediterranean route being too dangerous after the overwhelming loss of British Naval vessels leading up to the capture of Crete by the Germans.

He described, in a letter we received later, *the* *destroyers fussing around the troop ships in the convoy like hens with their chickens.* Many convoys were to be attacked on the journey around the Cape of Good Hope.

The only contact we had with him was the arrival of a crate of oranges, which he had ordered when the ships had called at Durban, the first we had tasted for years.

On 21st June he disembarked in Egypt, and was attached for accommodation and rations to the 15th Scottish General Hospital, Cairo. *The Nutcracker Suite* was posted to Montgomery’s Desert Troops, and my father was sent to the 23rd General Hospital in Palestine, at Sarafand. (It seems extraordinary that John was billeted in the same buildings only a few years later, in 1947-8, when in the British Army, 4/7th Dragoon Guards, during the Civil War and the beginning of the Arab-Israeli War at the end of the British Mandate.)

Here his posting was as Medical Superintendent to the 12th General Hospital, acting Lt. Colonel.

He was there until 5th November. 1943.

I now wish I had asked my father about the men and the medical conditions which he treated.

There would be many patients with fevers, such as sand-fly and malaria, and complicationsof injuries sustained in the battles with Rommel in North Africa, and already treated in Field Hospitals.

He would also have treated men from the force of Australians, British, Free FrenchandIndians, who in June 1941 fought their way through Syria and Lebanon, against the Vichy French who were then in power and on the side of the Germans, to whom they had given the use of the airfields. This battle resulted in an Armistice with De Gaulle triumphantly taking over Syria, and the elimination of the German presence there. I am sure he would also have treated prisoners.

During these years, he attended a course on Medical Organisation at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and had several spells of Middle East leave, being able to visit Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Occasionally he sent home tiny photographs of Jerusalem, Nazareth, Baalbek, Petra, *the rose-red-city half* *as old as Time*, and the Pyramids, taken on his box-Brownie, as well as delicate silver filigree brooches and embroideries for my sister and me.

On 5th November 1943 he assumed the appointment as o/c Medical Division, 32nd General Hospital, Middle East Forces, and late in that year embarked for an *unknown destination.*

On 6th January 1944: *Disembarked U.K*. *for Charlton, Wiltshire,* in another snow-clad England, then home for 20 days’ leave with a family he had not seen for 3 years.

# Correspondence

One knock for Eva, two knocks for my mother. The postman knew there were two women longing for mail, for my mother from the Middle East, and for our live-in maid, Eva, from her husband Llewellyn *somewhere in England*.

Eva would occasionally retell some snippets to me from her letters from Llew. I think I was her only confidant. She must have been incredibly lonely. There was a *social class divide* between her and my parents, from the time my father was a G.P. and then later a Physician. (Although I found myself treated as of a lower class than a schoolfriend friend of mine, the daughter of a rich Midlands industrialist who was friendly with my father through their membership of a Masonic Lodge. I remember having tea at the house of that school-friend, and being told sternly I was to go home, as it was time for her to dress for dinner.)

I received confidences from Eva on matters far beyond my age, or understanding.

Just after The Battle of Britain in 1940, when I was 8 years old, Eva told me that Churchill had visited the airfield where LLew (Leading Aircraftsman No.1) had been one of the ground crew servicing the battered aircraft returning from combat over France and the English Channel.

On Churchill’s arrival, flyers and ground crews were lined up as a guard of honour, and the great man shook hands and talked to every pilot and airman but, when he passed the ground crew, he strode past them with his nose in the air, ignoring them all. After Churchill had passed them by, the ground crews, without exception, spat on the ground where he had walked.

I thought this episode was rather delicious but never shared it with my parents, to whom Churchill was a revered figure. (However, recently I came across a description of a similar reception accompanying Churchill’s visit to a bomb-damaged Merseyside shipyard.)

Llew did survive the war, but their subsequent lives were overshadowed by childlessness, which Eva blamed on my mother, as Eva had a miscarriage at Springfield House. (*I nearly had* *a baby*, she confided to me, and I found this quite mysterious,) but she blamed it on my mother because they *had a great row* when she said she was pregnant following Llew’s last leave.

(Many years later, talking with my father about wartime hardships, he made me aware of a deep anxiety amongst servicemen *to get home to impregnate their wives*. He found this amongst the older officers and men serving abroad in Palestine and fearing they would not be home before their wives reached menopause. I guess many men with younger wives would be bitterly disappointed when on their precious times of home-leave, they would find their wives were menstruating. These things do not seem to reach the history books!)

When it was my mother’s turn to receive a letter from my father in the Middle East, following the double-knock on the door and rattle of the brass letter-box by the postman (who came, surprisingly, from Iquique in Chile!) she would take the blue envelope in her hands, and we would all sit around the dining-room table as she read out *most* of the letter. Sometimes she would suddenly stop, and blushingly move on to the next paragraph. My parents adored each other and there were often passages only for her.

We knew where he was posted! He and my mother had agreed on a code (it must have been the simplest, most obvious one to crack!) by which the second paragraph of his letter would give the name of the place. So we read: *Sarah and Robert are fine and dandy*, and we rushed to the atlas to find *Sarafand.*

As a senior officer, he often had to censor the mail leaving the hospital, and found it embarrassing to have to read the private letters of the men to their wives and sweethearts. But, obviously, no one censored *his* mail!

Father greatly treasured all communications from us. Many years later I found an envelope on which he had written *letters from Mary to me in the Middle East*. I sent him many drawings, puzzles and stories, and some of these were displayed on the notice board in the Officers’ Mess in the barracks at Sarafand.

I was involved with the production of two family magazines. The first I called *The Eglet,* (It was only after several editions that my superior elder brother pointed out my spelling mistake!) Also, because I couldn’t find a picture of an eagle to copy for the header, I used, unwittingly, the insignia of the German Army! That would have produced some merriment in the Officers’ Mess! (I also sent him some *Guilt-Edged shares* in an invented company, price 6 pence each.)

The second magazine, *The Thistle*, was produced jointly with my sister Sheila and my cousin Reay. We produced it by hand, with water-colour pictures and a beautiful cover designed and painted by Sheila. We sent monthly editions to my father whilst he was in Palestine, and later to him in France, and he sent us contributions which we copied into *The Thistle.* I still have our copies of these magazines.

There were many lonely men like my father, away for years, desperately missing their families. Over the years he developed a collection of stamps, and of military shoulder flashes. These would tumble out of his letters to us. The stamps were for my younger brother, the insignia for me, and he wrote that he hoped I would sew these onto a cushion to display on his return.

*Many of these were stained and worn, and only some were new.*

*I never knew how they had been acquired,*

*I just accepted here was a collection, made by a lonely man, so far from home,*

*to fill the time.*

I remember that, over the years he was away, I developed an antipathy to these shoulder-flashes, which I could not understand.

*Could I have guessed amongst the wearers had been men*

*who’d died in battle, or of unhealed wounds,*

*or sickness in the camps,*

*or in captivity, been stripped*

*of these so small but hard-won symbols*

*of achievement or identity?*

until, when at last, my Father was due home on leave from Palestine, I found myself doing an extraordinary thing:

*I took the heavy bag, wrapped in brown paper,*

*and tied up with string, and tramped it in the bin of household rubbish,*

*and thus at last was free of that so-heavy weight of history.*

*\* \* \**

*At last the joy of his return.*

*then later, the request that I display the cushion*

*and the presents he had sent.*

*“They’re lost”, I said.*

*Perhaps I’d guessed some of the men were dead.*

*I was so young. I was a little girl:*

*How could I know or question?*

This action of mine haunted me for decades, until I wrote a long poem, *Insignia of unknown men,* which included the above lines, about my experience, perhaps as exculpation.

It was published in my second book of poetry, *Proving Flight,* in 2011.

# Prelude to D-Day 1944

The whole of Britain was preparing for D-Day, that longed-for but dreaded day, when the Liberation of Europe was to begin, although no one knew when this would be. There was continuous speculation and hope.

On our family travels through country lanes, over several months, we found thousands of military vehicles, Jeeps, trucks, troop-carriers, armoured cars and tanks, some British but mostly American, parked continuously along the left-hand side of the lanes, nestling into the hedgerows.

We began to meet more Americans, some brought to our house by my mother, from the Forces Canteen, now packed with even more nationalities, sailors, soldiers and airmen.

I remember a very young woman, our friend Felicity Bourne, who had only just left school, coming to our home to introduce us, with much excitement, to a handsome American Air Force Pilot to whom she had just become engaged. Only a few months later, he was killed somewhere over the north Atlantic. (Years later she married the dullest man we had ever met, the doctor who had succeeded my parents in their General Practice in 1938.)

After my Father’s leave in January 1944, little did we know that we would not see him again until April 1945.

He was sent on a series of courses to update his Emergency Medical knowledge.

From March 13th to 17th he was on a Special Course in War Medicine at the British Post Graduate School at the Hammersmith Hospital in London, then at Aldershot at *A.G. school*, *on Medical Aspects of C.W*. (*?* Combat Wounds)

By 8th May he was at Bristol for a 4-day course on Blood Transfusion.

He was now based at Naburn, Yorkshire, and was part of the 30th British General Hospital.

His Military Identity Card, A43521, issued April 19th, describes *a male of 5’9* ½ *inches with grey-green eyes and greying hair*. The accompanying photograph shows a serious man, his hair parted in the middle, and with a small grey moustache, in battledress, with his medal ribbons including the white and purple of the Military Cross and Bar (a rose) and the shoulder flashes and badge of a Lt. Col. of the RAMC. The Nationality on his Records is: *British and Scottish.*

# The balloon goes up!

Landing in Normandy, on 16th June 1944, *D-Day plus 10* at Arromanches, was another adventure for my father. He left no diary of this campaign but years later wrote:

*In 1944 went to Normandy. A campaign of tremendous exhilaration, co-operation and efficiency. Saw my old 15th Scottish Division going into action again, (at Caen), this time in lorries, instead of foot-slogging. Visited the back lines of the Battle twice on my half-days. Then to Belgium, to within a mile or two of where I had ended War 1.*

He did tell us of his thrill on seeing Mulberry Harbour B in action. It had been erected at Arromanches on D-Day plus 1, at Gold Beach, for the British and Canadian Forces, and was being fully employed when he landed on 16th June. (It was to be badly damaged in the storms of 19th-22nd, but not so badly as Mulberry A, built for the Americans at Utah Beach, off St Laurent, which was so badly hit in these storms as to be unusable. Parts of A were sent to repair Mulberry B, allowing it to function until November 19th, by which time deep-water ports had been captured and could be used instead. In that time over 2,500,000 men, and vehicles and ordnance had been ferried from ships to shore, and many casualties evacuated back to England.)

He went over with his RAMC Unit, part of 30th British General Hospital, to a tented hospital near Bayeux.

The detailed planning of the total medical services, so efficiently carried out, was a part of Operation Neptune, which was in turn a part of Operation Overlord.

This involved the erection and operation of Casualty Clearing Stations (CCSs), first on the beaches then inland just behind the lines, then tented hospitals with 200 beds. In this huge logistical enterprise, the Pioneer Corps played a major part, preparing the ground, digging latrines, laying pipes for water and sewage, communication and power, erecting the canvas-floored tents, and the conveyance of all medical supplies and personnel, the casualties themselves, plus the collection and disposal of the dead.

The grand plan was for these tented hospitals and CCSs to leap-frog over each other as the Allies moved into Northern France, then Belgium and then Holland. In some areas the hospitals took over monasteries, schools, an old mental hospital, and later a German troop hospital.

Bayeux was the first large town liberated, and here the first major hospital complex was established. This included a Civilian Clearing Station. The Allies’ advance was seriously held up because the capture of Caen, scheduled to be by D-Day plus 2, took many bloody weeks until the end of August. So many were the British and Canadian tented hospitals operating near Bayeux that the area became known as *Harley Street*.

My father was soon in a tented hospital within earshot of Caen. I have three letters which he wrote and sent to us *from somewhere in Normandy*. These we published in the new family magazine *The Thistle*.

*There is no sound tonight. The wind is silent, the trees do not creak, nor the leaves rustle. The tent guy ropes do not strain nor the sides flap. The cattle have gone away, and the birds are asleep. No bombers above. No searchlights, no tremors. The men are asleep in this field, and the bearers at work in the next move without sound. No talk, no whisper, no cough. I walk over the grass bare-footed, in the perfection of the silence.*

*If there are noises between here and that other silence which is Caen, I do not hear them. There the soft, thick, powdered dust of what once were streets and buildings dampens the heaviest footfall, quietens the angriest oath.*

*But there MUST be noise, if I listen.*

*An apple suddenly falls on to the tent, from the branch above and rolls into the silence of the grass. A mosquito hums in a corner of the tent. The camp-bed squeaks as I move on its edge, and the grit in my eyes from the roads makes a noise when I rub them. In the far distance I can just pick up the rhythm of the generator, giving light to the life-giving surgeons still in the theatre. As my ear rustles into sleep on the pillow, I seem to hear the silent anguish that is Caen.*

Whilst still at Bayeux, my father was able to visit Falaise, which had been taken just two days before, on August 17th following the crucial Battle of The Gap, which was not closed until 21st August. He wrote: *I read the other day that the Germans were streaming out of the bottle-neck with their vehicles packed at the rate of 80 per mile of road, and that the British Army never moved like that.*

*The accuracy of the bombing was great. There was a road through a wood, a mile of which was densely pitted with craters. But apart from a wrecked car I could not discover what they had been trying to hit, but was it worth hitting?*

*A word of praise for the Royal Engineers. I went through Falaise, seeing flames still coming from one house, and many others still smoking. The place is completely ruined. It was taken some 48 hours ago, yet the bull-dozers had cleared a one-way traffic circle through the town, and gone ahead to further gigantic tasks.*

*But another word to the R.Es. They have not built in this area a sensible latrine, let alone a comfortable one, where one can settle down and read a book.*

*But though the underlings may fail at times, the master-minds who conceived and built up this offensive, transported all the material of war, and who keep urging it forward against resistance of terrain, danger and fatigue, have done their work well. They have imagination and courage, thought big and acted big. Again and again they have told our men that they are the finest soldiers in the world. Why do they always tell us the next day that we create a bad impression with the French because we don’t salute each other much in the jostling, bustling back-alleys called streets, in Bayeux?*

Whilst on this adventure, my father also wrote:

*I have just returned from an 80-mile tour of the battle-front. This gives me the opportunity of bringing out a few points with a different emphasis from that given by the representatives of the popular Press.*

*The battle-field, so far as abandoned guns, ammunition dumps, aeroplanes and dead Germans are concerned, was as clean as a whistle.*

*True, there were many parts greatly cut-up by shell and bomb, villages entirely destroyed, woods burnt out, but there was no litter of lost tanks, guns, or valuable stores. Boche seemed as usual to have got away with much of his material of war. I noted as many destroyed British as German tanks.*

*Along the roads were many abandoned cars, bombed by the RAF. Oftenest these were cheap cars, of continental manufacture, obviously used by the Germans, but taken from the inhabitants. There was no procession of wrecked tanks along the roads by which I travelled.*

*I saw our guns going up the road into action along the margin of the bottle-neck, a road which had been under shell and machine-gunfire the night before. The whole proceedings were as quiet and orderly and unhurried as a walk home from Church. The road surface was good everywhere for miles back, and there were no wrecks thereon. There was scarcely any firing. One would never have guessed that there were what my colleagues estimated at 150,000 to 300,000 Germans just over the hills. Could there be such a number? The chaps to whom I spoke wanted me to give them the BBC News; they had no idea of what was going on, anywhere else than in their own little sector. In the 80 miles I saw only about 50 prisoners, most of them apparently pleased to be out of it all.*

*It is said that the German Army is sick. Perhaps it is, but out of perhaps 100 wounded I saw, only one was sick.*

The Battle for Caen and the closing of The Falaise Gap were not terminated until the end of August, but we at home did not know of my father moving from Bayeux until October 20th, when we read that he was *now in a small town somewhere in Belgium between Antwerp and Brussels.*

Sometime after the disastrous air-borne defeat of the Allies at Arnhem, where 35,000 parachute and glider troops had landed, a parcel arrived at Wolverhampton for my mother. I remember how, as she opened it on the dining-room table, a great white cloud of silk came billowing out, spilling over the whole table. It was a parachute. We never asked my father how he came by it. My mother made it into several beautiful nightdresses. I struggled to make some square pieces into handkerchiefs; the edges needed to be rolled and hemmed with tiny stitches.

## ***Another account***

Some of the most detailed and poignant accounts are now available on the Internet.

The best I have found is **the personal diary of a nurse, Patsy Rigby, a member of Queen** **Alexandra’s Imperial Nursing Service (QAIMNS**.) She could have been Court-Martialled for her writing, as it so very detailed, and would have provided great assistance to the German forces, if it had fallen into their hands. (There must also have been many spies amongst the civilians in the hospitals and local villages where the troops went for sight-seeing, and to bargain.) In actual fact, this diary was not found until her son discovered it many years later, in a wardrobe, after her death in 1987.

She had crossed over to Normandy on the same day as my father, on 16th June, and had been at once sent to a tented field hospital in Bayeux (maybe the same as my father’s). Here everything was already in action: theatres, wards, latrines, accommodation, stores. There was even *one small 2-bed tent which was reserved for General Montgomery should he ever* *become a casualty*. (He actually visited them on June 30th but did not inspect his little tent!)

She describes in great detail how the whole campaign progressed, including the moving of the entire hospital complex as it leap-frogged over Casualty Clearing Stations and other tented hospitals, progressing through France, Belgium, Holland, and eventually into Germany.

From her base she watched parachutes dropping, and planes bombarding Caen, and experienced the sometimes over-whelming arrival of military casualties, hundreds of wounded young men, some being German prisoners, and civilians including women giving birth.

Injuries were classified as S.I. (seriously ill), D.I. (dangerously ill), G.S.W. (gun-shot wound) etc. There were many head injuries, and, from Arnhem and Nijmegen, many leg amputations. The Germans’ new bazookas caused many extensive wounds.

The relatively new *miracle drugs,* sulphonamides (*M and B 693*) and penicillin, prevented sepsis, and pentothal was used for quick induction of anaesthesia but there was little other than morphia for pain, and paraldehyde for controlling wildly-disturbed patients.

Amongst medical conditions, malaria was the most serious, and these cases were promptly evacuated via road and sea, or air. The RAF established small airstrips near the hospitals for air-evacuations, but unfortunately often these attracted enemy fire.

Sometimes strange machines were seen, like the tanks equipped with a bar and chains to flail booby-traps and mines, foil dropped to confuse radar, artificial fog, and later the new V2 rockets, and slender bicycles parachuted in for the air-borne troops.

The nurses picked up leaflets dropped from the air by the Germans, and even their song-sheets, and once a wounded carrier pigeon from besieged Arnhem.

Some patients gave the nurses the yellow silk *dickie*s worn by the parachutists under their battle-dress to be used to indicate where they lay wounded.

As the hospitals moved northwards, casualties flooded in during September, British and Poles from the disaster of Arnhem, and Americans from Nijmegen.

Patsy Rigby described, in late August, in Northern France, peasants returning home to their farms, *big Percheron horses pulling farm carts loaded with all their household chattels,* *feather beds, geese and furniture and thousands of P.O.W.s in wire enclosures, lightly* *guarded*. Some German P.O.W.s worked in the hospital wards as orderlies.

Advancing into Belgium, in mid-September, in Brussels *the pavements were lined with* *hysterical people throwing us apples and grapes, and a long convoy of DUKWs, (amphibious* *vehicles) with their crews on deck waving and shouting, then bursting into singing* *Underneath the Arches,* *a wave of melody that travelled back to us. Dusty and tired we were, but that song swelled from hundreds of throats, travelling down that motley convoy till it was lost behind us in the distance.*

In Deist, exploring the small market-square, Patsy saw *a young girl with a shaven head scrubbing the wall of the chemist’s shop. Later we were told that many of the shopkeepers* of *Diest had collaborated with the enemy and on liberation, the incensed citizens daubed swastikas on the front walls of these shops, and many women were very roughly handled and were paraded in the streets with shaven heads.*

But the great battles continued as the Allies advanced into Holland, and then Germany.

## ***I have no record of where my father spent the latter months of the War***

That part of his official War Record is indecipherable. A period home before March 1945 may have been possible. I have my own diary for April 1945, when he was on Leave with his family at a farm at Newtown in mid-Wales. He left his children there whilst he spent a couple of nights with my mother at the Cumberland Hotel in London. (I remember her blushing as she packed her parachute-silk nighties!)

I believe he did not go with his hospital unit into Holland and Germany, but remained in the military hospital in Belgium. His description years later, as ending his War in Europe in a small town in Belgium between Antwerp and Brussels, would fit with the town of Diest, so graphically described by Patsy Rigby in her diary. There may have been several military hospitals functioning near Deist in the final months of the War, but it could have been the one in which she worked before moving northwards into Holland. She speaks of *our own* *Brigadier Debenham*, who would be the surgeon with whom my father had made a promise that their families would meet after the War riding on horse-back together on Kinver Edge. (An unfulfilled promise, but *Deb* often spoke of it when some years later I worked, as a medical student, as his *Dresse*r on the Surgical ward at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, and he always called me *Miss Mac).*

The irony of my father’s description of the wagon-loads of refugees returning to their ruined homes after the WW1 Armistice in 1918, and that of Patsy’s account from WW2 is extraordinary; all related to the same devastated areas of country side in Belgium.

All these areas lie within 50 miles of Waterloo.

# Mysterious assignment to Norway

The War in Europe officially ended on V.E. Day, 8th May 1945. However, there was much movement of troops, victors and vanquished, for many months after, as countries that had been so cruelly occupied killed, imprisoned or expelled enemy troops, punished collaborators, and reclaimed territory.

The rush was on for the Allies to claim their *spoils of War*, as in the allocation into zones of control in Berlin to the Russians, the Americans, and the British. It was a time of power-grabs.

In Norway, the five-year occupation by Germany had been savagely enforced; this ended with the capitulation of 375,000 soldiers. Many German officers suicided.

Collaborators, including Vidkun Quisling, were arrested and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment or shot.

Immediately after V.E. Day, the British Airborne Division acted as a police and military occupying force, landing at Gardermoen airfield near Oslo and at Stavanger. They were tasked with supervising the surrender of the German forces in Norway, as well as preventing the sabotage of vital military and civilian facilities, before handing over to Force 134.

The Crown Prince and later, King Haakon, were brought from UK to Norway to re-assume their roles.

The Russians, keen to acquire Finnmark, the most Northern part of Norway, to give them control of access to the Arctic Passage from the North Sea to Murmansk, had wrested control in October 1944 from the occupying Germans, who retreated westwards, applying a scorched-earth policy as they left.

My father left France on 26th May 1945 and arrived back in England, but in June received orders: *SOS 21 Army Hsp. to Force 134* to go to Norway, embarking UK, 6th June, disembarking Norway 13th June. He then flew to Bodo in Norway, just within the Arctic Circle, by Catalina Flying Boat.

My brother Alan writes: *He was sent with a British hospital unit (30th General) to deal with sick Russian prisoners of the Germans, in a German-run camp. It turned out that they had liberated themselves and drunk ethylene glycol and died, and so there was no need for the hospital, which was abandoned to the Norwegians. The ethylene glycol would have been anti-freeze, and they would have died quickly from heart failure.*

*This turned out to have been a diplomatic problem. Much later the senior law officer in Scotland claimed that he had been set up in a sex scandal by the KGB.* *He had been a party* *with King Haakon to negotiations with the Russians who wanted to use the Russian prisoners as an excuse to send forces to Norway.*

My father just wrote: *Russians completely uncooperative!*

The last Russian soldier did not leave Norwegian territory until 25th September1945.

However, my father, as was his wont in both World Wars, seized the opportunity for sight-seeing. He sent us a tiny photograph of him standing on the upturned hull of the Battleship Turpiz, in Tromso Fiord. She had been the pride of the German Navy, and was sunk, after very many failed attempts, including bomber-raids, two human-chariot torpedos, and later 10 midget submarines fixing mines to the hull. Finally, in November 1944, the third raid by a force of 32 Avro Lancaster bombers resulted in the sinking of the mighty battleship. Nearly 1000 German sailors were lost.

On 21st July my father disembarked in UK from Norway and by September he was finally released from the RAMC, after 4 years and 8 months of his WW2.

*Back home. Thank God! Demobilised. What a welcome home!*

# The coming of the National Health Service

Following my father’s demobilisation from the RAMC, he at once returned to work as an unpaid Honorary Physician to four West Midlands Hospitals. To support the family, he needed to pursue private practice, working from Consulting Rooms at Bath Road, Wolverhampton, and doing Domiciliary Consultations in private homes within that area.

He was the first Physician in the W. Midlands to bring a portable electrocardiograph machine, (a Siemens) on his visits. This entailed carrying two huge heavy black metal boxes, which he heaved from his car then up the stairs to many patients’ bedrooms.

The ECGs were recorded on strips of photographic paper. These he handed to me, now a teenager, on his return, in a sealed metal tube, paying me half-a-crown per patient to develop the film in the corridor which served as a dark room at home. I processed the film in the conventional way, using *hypo*, ammonium thiosulphate, as fixer, whilst my father paced outside, waiting to scrutinise the positive film to determine whether his patient had an irregular heart-beat or had sustained a coronary thrombosis.

Also I would boil up samples of urine in a test-tube over a Bunsen burner, testing for sugar or albumen, suggestive of diabetes or kidney disease (and another half-a-crown for that, too!).

The beginning of the NHS in July 1948 transformed patient care.

Proposed first in 1942 in the Beveridge Report, and legislated for by the Labour Party with Aneurin Bevan as Minister for Health, the NHS received cross-party support in Parliament.

The philosophy was that good health care should be freely available to all, based on clinical need, not ability to pay.

It transformed the nature of private practice and encouraged the pursuit of improvements in medical and surgical treatment.

This service with its benevolent aims and implementation became the envy of the world.

My father greatly enjoyed being a part of the Wolverhampton Royal Hospital teaching facility. He trained many Registrars from the still-colonial Caribbean, and other countries which were then also striving for independence and the establishment of their own Medical Schools.

I was able to see his clinical skills in action: once when I was a Medical Student, he took me to the Medical Ward to see a woman patient with the rare advanced Addison’s Disease, and once when I was qualified and doing a Locum job for an old-fashioned G.P. in Clent. On this occasion I called him for a Consultant opinion to a patient’s home, as he was the only Physician I knew with a portable ECG. (I was not introduced as his daughter and by then I had a new surname anyway!)

After he had questioned and examined the patient in regard to a possible coronary thrombosis, we, following tradition, retired to the patient’s bathroom, to discuss the case, and then emerged in agreement.

He was known for his teaching skills and medical acumen, and also for the care and courtesy he accorded to his patients.

However, in 1961, he was curtly informed by a minion in the NHS, that his employment was to be terminated, without thanks, on his coming 65th birthday.

So that was the unceremonious end to a life-time of valuable medical service. But he ended it graciously and without rancour, embracing the possibilities of his remaining years.

 ***So be my passing!***

 ***my task accomplished and the long day done***

 ***my wages taken and in my heart***

 ***some late lark singing.***

W.E.Henley

**FINIS**

FINIS

I trust I have not done my family, and especially my father, a disservice in my attempt to extract from the various records available, the flavour of their lives. I count myself fortunate to have had this opportunity.

To end, I would like to quote from Bob Brown, a brave campaigner for the future of our children, these words:

***In birth***

***we take the baton of life***

***and in death we pass it on;***

***each of us alters the whole***

***by just a little***

***and yet forever.***

 Mary Lindsay Mackay (Kille)

 Tasmania 2021

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