

# Notes on my family: Gill, Fisher and Sealey

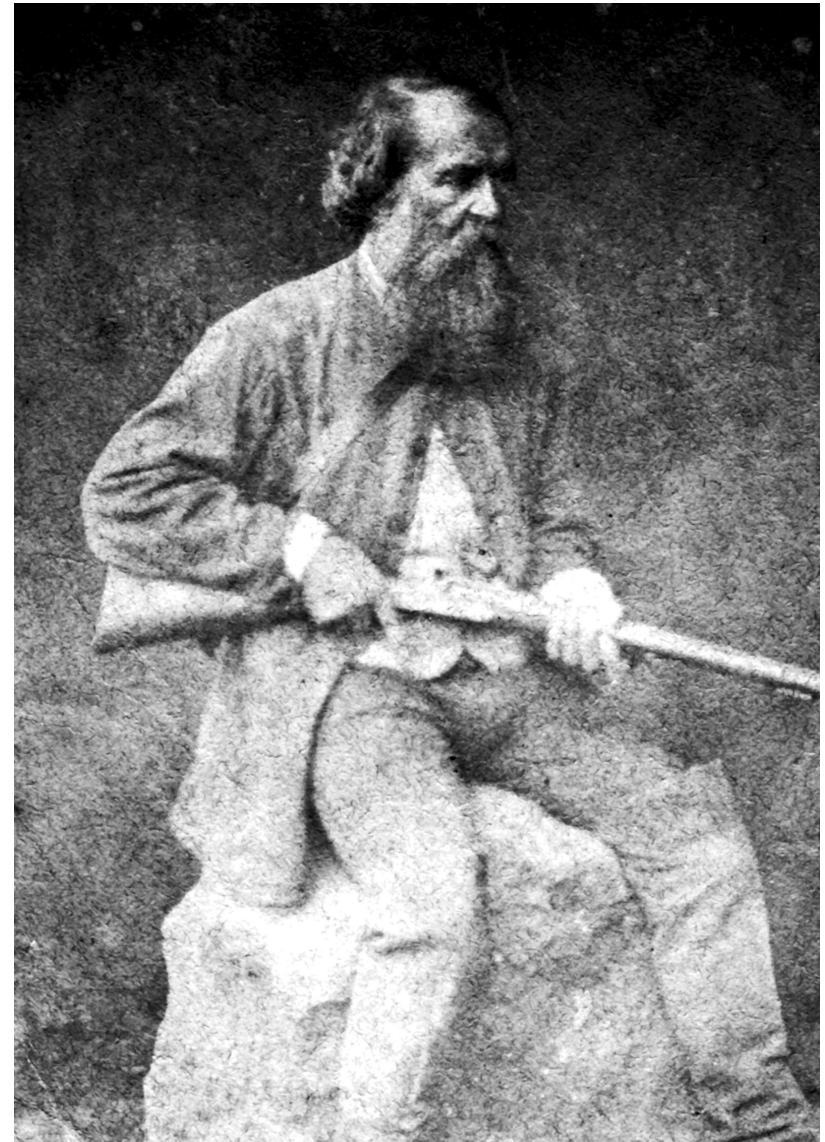
By Winefride M.T. Hadland (1993)

## Gill

On the Fisher (my Mother's) side, we start with my Great-grandfather, Major Robert Gill. Most of what we know about him is in the photocopies of the Gill notes. He died before William was murdered. I know he was in the Madras Army and I think he retired to India and was some sort of Governor. Grandmother used to tell my mother stories about her childhood in India and how they lived in a big castle where they could look down into a ravine and see wild animals. She had an Ayah and was waited on hand and foot. She must have come back to England to school as all European children did. We know she went to the Sacred Heart Convent at St Leonards-on-Sea, although the family were C of E. Great-grandfather's wife was called Anne, according to Granny's wedding certificate, although that is all we know about her. I find that in a note I had a few years ago from my Irish cousin Una that there was a daughter Anne, sister to Grandmother Mildred, who should be put in the family tree. I dimly recall Mother mentioning her and Auntie Jo told Una she met her once. It seems Anne still kept in touch with Mildred when the family cut her off.

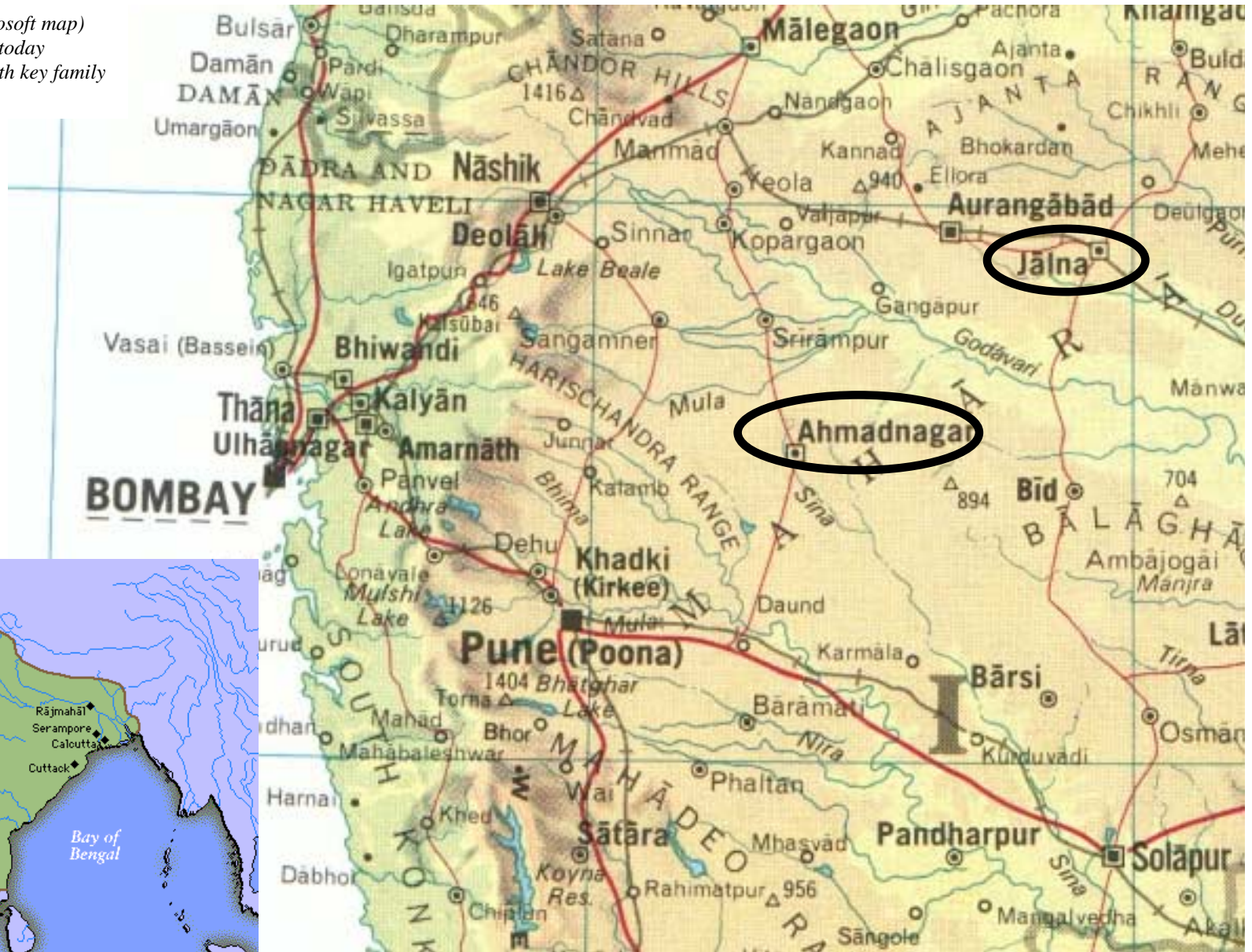
I know that Major Robert was a big-game hunter. Mother used to have a large, rather blurred photo of him with a long white beard and his gun. (I have a faded snapshot of the photo.) He was quite an artist too.

Of his children other than William and Mildred we know little. His son Robert was a solicitor but we don't know much more. The Lincoln's Inn Register shows that he was called to the Bar in June 1884 (the year after his brother died). He was then aged 35. It gives his father's particulars as Robert Gill of Jaulnah, Bombay, a major in the Indian Army. We presume that William left some of his fortune to Robert. Mildred, my grandmother, became a Catholic, probably after William died and Robert cut her off with £200. What her mother was doing I don't know. In the list of guests at the unveiling of the memorial it mentions Mrs Gill, Mr and Mrs R Gill and Miss Gill (Anne I presume).

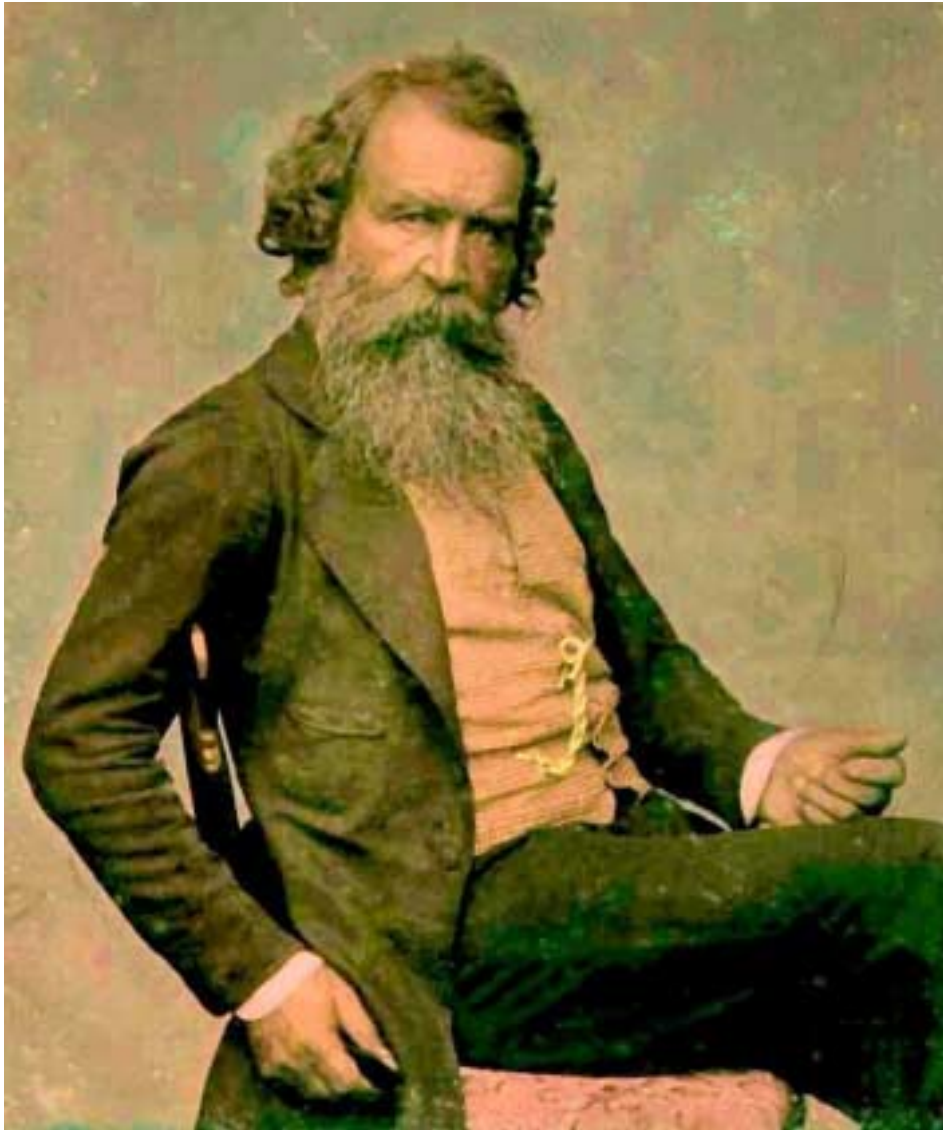


*Major Robert Gill — probably about 1864 when his books were published*

*Inset: British India (Microsoft map)*  
*Main map: Bombay area today*  
*(Reader's Digest map) with key family*  
*history locations ringed*







*Left: Major Robert Gill, from a hand-tinted photograph on glass. Right: William Gill, from the Brighton College magazine, December 1882*

## Fisher

Grandmother Mildred took a post as a governess with a family who went to India, to support herself I suppose. She soon met Charles Fisher, an Irish warrant officer in the Royal Gloucester Regiment. He was supposed to be the handsomest man in the regiment with his dark hair and blue eyes. He came from Donegal and they were married in December 1885. Una thinks that Grandfather Fisher came from Drumkeen near Convoy. She says that in recent years there were relations of his called Slevin living in that area. One of the boys was a building contractor in Ballybofey and his sister was married to a man called Jackson in Ballybofey. They own a hotel there called Jacksons.

Back to 1885 and onwards. Auntie Olive was born in India on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1887. The regiment was coming home when my mother was expected. She would have been born in the Channel Islands if Grandmother, and I suppose the other wives, had not been moved to Dublin. They lived on the Curragh Camp in army quarters for the rest of their childhood. I think Grandmother had a tough time as she had never done any housework or cooking and money was tight. She used to watch the other wives to see how they did things. She didn't want them to know about her background in case they thought she was giving herself airs. She was a very devout Catholic by the way.

The children all went to the army schools, which were very good. Mother recalled that when Queen Victoria died all the girls had to wear large black sashes and the boys black armbands. When Olive and Mother were about 16 they went to the Convent in St Leonard's for 'finishing'. The Reverend Mother took them as a special favour, I think. I know Mother enjoyed her time there. It was while she was there that her little sister Anne died. She was six and had been delicate. Mum dreamt about her. She told Mum not to grieve because she was with the angels and that's how Mum knew long before news reached from home.

When they were living on the Curragh, Olive heard the banshee, the spirit that foretells the death of someone in the house by wailing outside. She was babysitting for a neighbour who had an invalid child. When the mother came home and asked if all was well, Olive said that the child was fast asleep but she'd heard someone crying outside the window and thought at first it was the child. 'Lord save us, it's the banshee,' wept the mother, and sure enough the little girl died a couple of days later.

By the time Mum had left school, the family were living in Donegal, Grandad had retired from the army. When the First War began he joined up again in the medical corps and he was 60 when he was in the trenches – the army was his life. Incidentally, Uncle Charles was born on his birthday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, and Martin was born on Granny Mildred's, February 16<sup>th</sup>.

Mother remembered visiting her grandmother Fisher on the farm she had. She must have



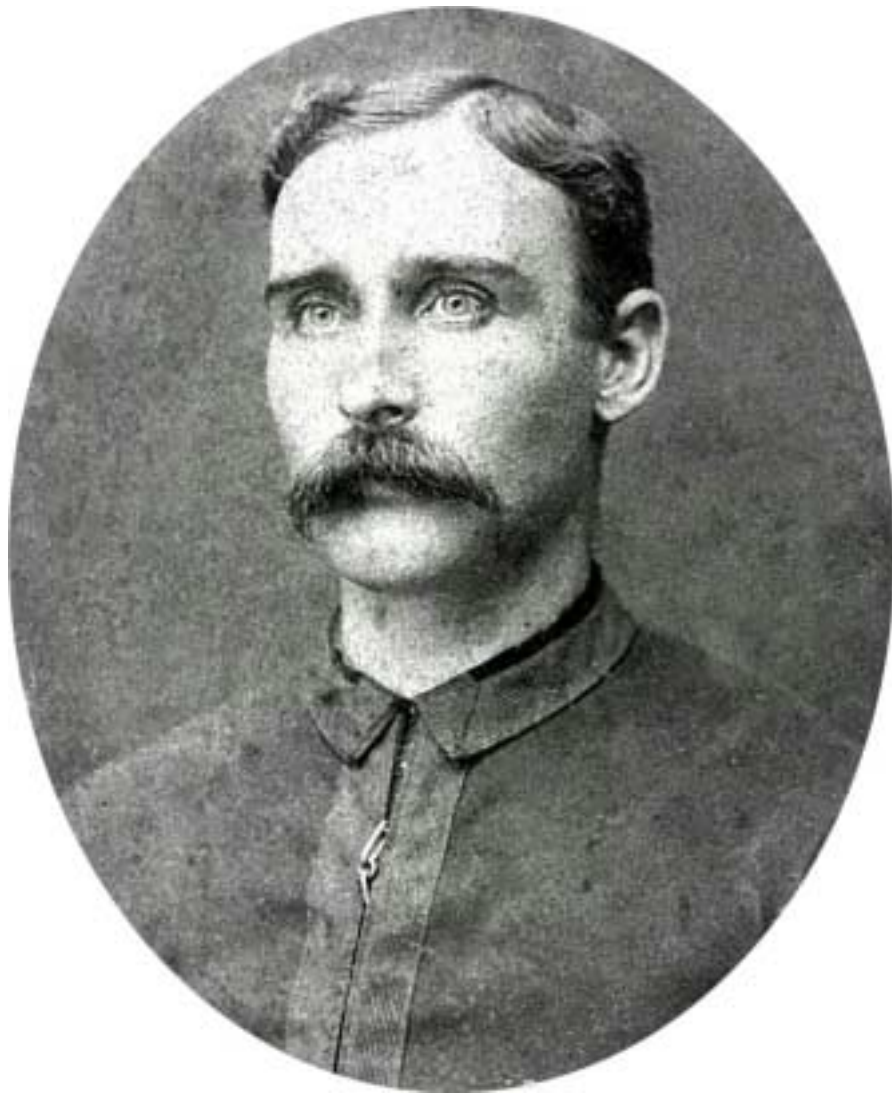
*Mildred Mary Fisher, née Gill*





*'Military Manoeuvres' painted by Richard Thomas Moynan in 1891. (National Gallery of Ireland) It depicts a British soldier and his lady in Leixlip, near Dublin. At this time the Fishers lived not far away on the Curragh army camp in County Kildare. The soldier even looks like Charles Fisher. (Map by Bord Failte.)*





*Left: Charles Fisher, photographed in India in the 1880s. Right: Photographer's details on back of photograph.*



been a widow by then. She was always in black with a black shawl (Mum always hated black) and was very strict. Mum remembers sitting in a rocking chair on the porch when she was very tiny and enjoying herself rocking away. When she got up she found a small chicken had been squashed flat under the rockers. She was so frightened of the old lady she threw it in the bushes and said nothing. Mum also remembered that her granny used to bake soda bread, which she hated at that time. She used to crumble her slices into pellets and throw them under the table. It never occurred to her that they would be found!

When my Mum was 18 she had to earn her living as there were too many of them at home (10 children). She went as an under-parlour maid to the Weston family in Whitchurch near Pangbourne. (That was where she met George Eyston, who later became a famous racing driver – he was a small boy then.) Mother loved Pangbourne, she often used to talk about the nightingales that abounded there. A few years later she became head parlour maid to Miss Perry at Bitham Hall in Avon Dassett. It was a plum job, you had to be very 'refined' to do that. Miss Perry and she were great friends. Until Miss Perry got too old she would often stop the car outside the lodge where we lived and come in for a chat.

It was at Bitham that Mum met Dad. He was four years younger than her and she didn't take him seriously. She had plenty of admirers and wasn't thinking of settling down. Dad went there as chauffeur. Miss Perry had just bought her first car and the coachman had retired but still did odd jobs around the place. There was still a brougham in the coach-house when I was little, and the stables still smelt of horses.

Dad went off to the war to drive an ambulance. He had been in the Territorial Army before. They were married on May 8<sup>th</sup> 1915. They had their silver wedding in 1940: the ornate sugar basin I have was their silver wedding gift from Miss Perry. The wedding was at St Joseph's, where both Charl and I were married. Mother wore a powder blue suit and a smart hat, Dad was in uniform. I have a very faded photo. The bridesmaid was called Winnie Reed and I got called after her (actually Dad wanted to call me Cynthia from a book he was reading, so perhaps Winefride wasn't so bad). The wedding reception was at Bitham Hall (as were Charl's and mine) and the gardener (as they did in those days) did the table decorations. Mother's table was decorated with lovely double white cherry blossom. There was a large tree that was always a mass of bloom in May. We always used to look to see if it was out for the anniversary. It was still there a few years ago, Dackie and I saw it from the road.

Dad went back to the trenches after the wedding and soon after Mum found that she was expecting Uncle Charles. I think it was a shock, she hadn't thought about starting a family so soon. She left Bitham and went back to Ireland to her mother. Rationing was very severe here, and there was plenty of good dairy food in Ireland. Charles was born in Newbridge, Co. Kildare and all that good food must have done something for him, as he



*Above: Col Worrall's father's house, 1909, young Harry Sealey left of centre.  
Below: Wedding party at Bitham House, 8th May 1915.*



weighed about 12 lbs. Dad went over to Ireland when he got leave.

Mother's favourite brother, Bobby, was in the army. He was a Company Sergeant Major in the Middlesex Regiment. He was very handsome, we used to have his photo out at home. Charl was a lot like him when young.

Bobby had a wife Anne (Nancy) and two or three children, I believe the eldest was adopted. In 1918 Dad was coming home on leave and, as he was very near Bobby's regiment in the front line, called in to see him. He found that Bobby had been blown to pieces that morning when leading his men in an advance. He received the DCM posthumously for his bravery. There was no body to bury but he is commemorated in panel eight of the memorial at Ploegsteert, just north of Armentieres. The details in the War Graves Commission records say the following:

CSM FISHER. ROBERT C. G15032. D.C.M.

21<sup>st</sup> Battalion Middlesex Regiment.

9.4.18. Age 26

Son of Charles and Mildred Fisher, husband of Annie Evelyn Weedon (formerly Fisher) of

12 Vorley Rd  
Upper Holloway  
London.

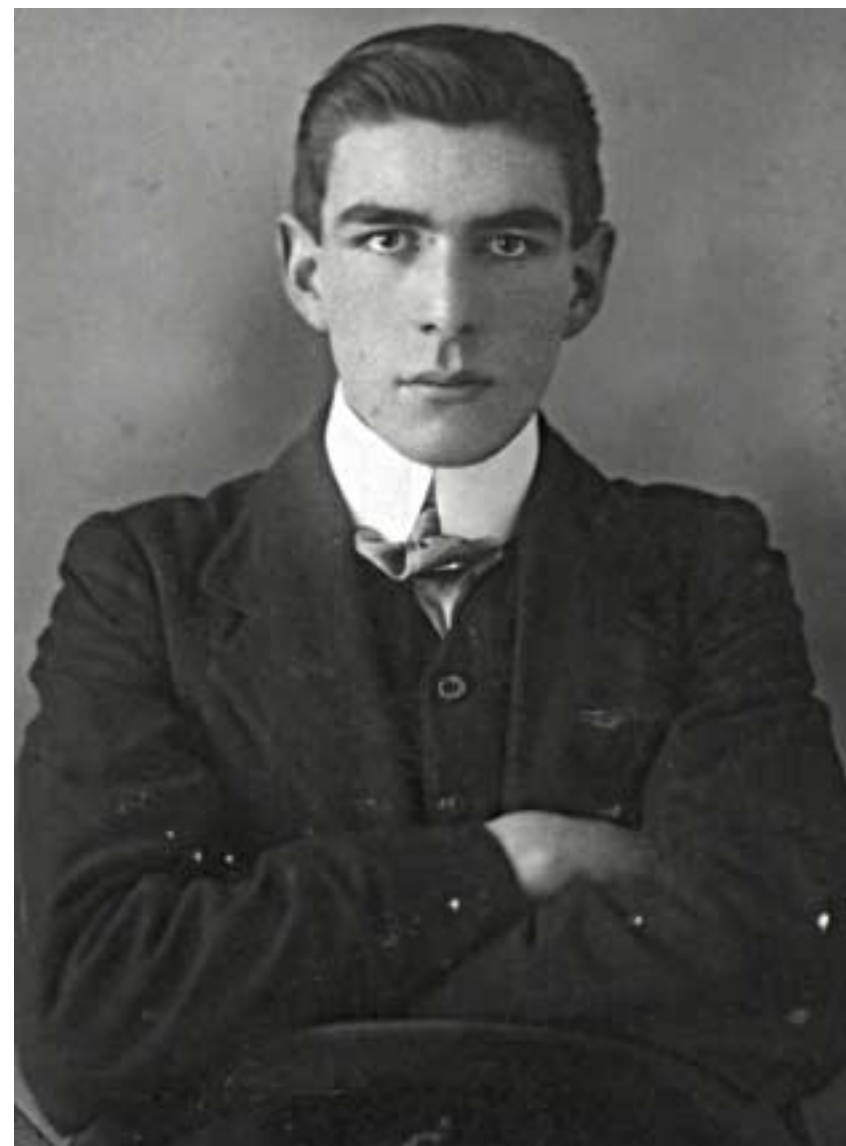
Of course it was some time after the war before all the details were in the hands of the War Graves Commission, there were so many dead to record, but every man who died has his name in the book.

Dad was able to tell the family about Bobby's death quite a while before they had the official confirmation. Mother was broken-hearted as he was always her favourite brother, being nearest her in age. Nancy, Bobby's wife, remarried and drifted away from the family.

Mother returned to Avon Dassett and lived in a tiny cottage at the bottom of the village (since pulled down) with Charl until Dad came home from the war. Charl was about 2½ then and used to call the cottage 'our beauty home'. Mum said that she had some lovely chrysanthus in the garden that she was longing to see in bloom (in those days the only hardy ones were likely to be blighted by the frost as they bloomed late). One day she found an old cocoa tin on the range, to her horror Charl had picked the buds off every plant and was 'cooking' them for their dinner.

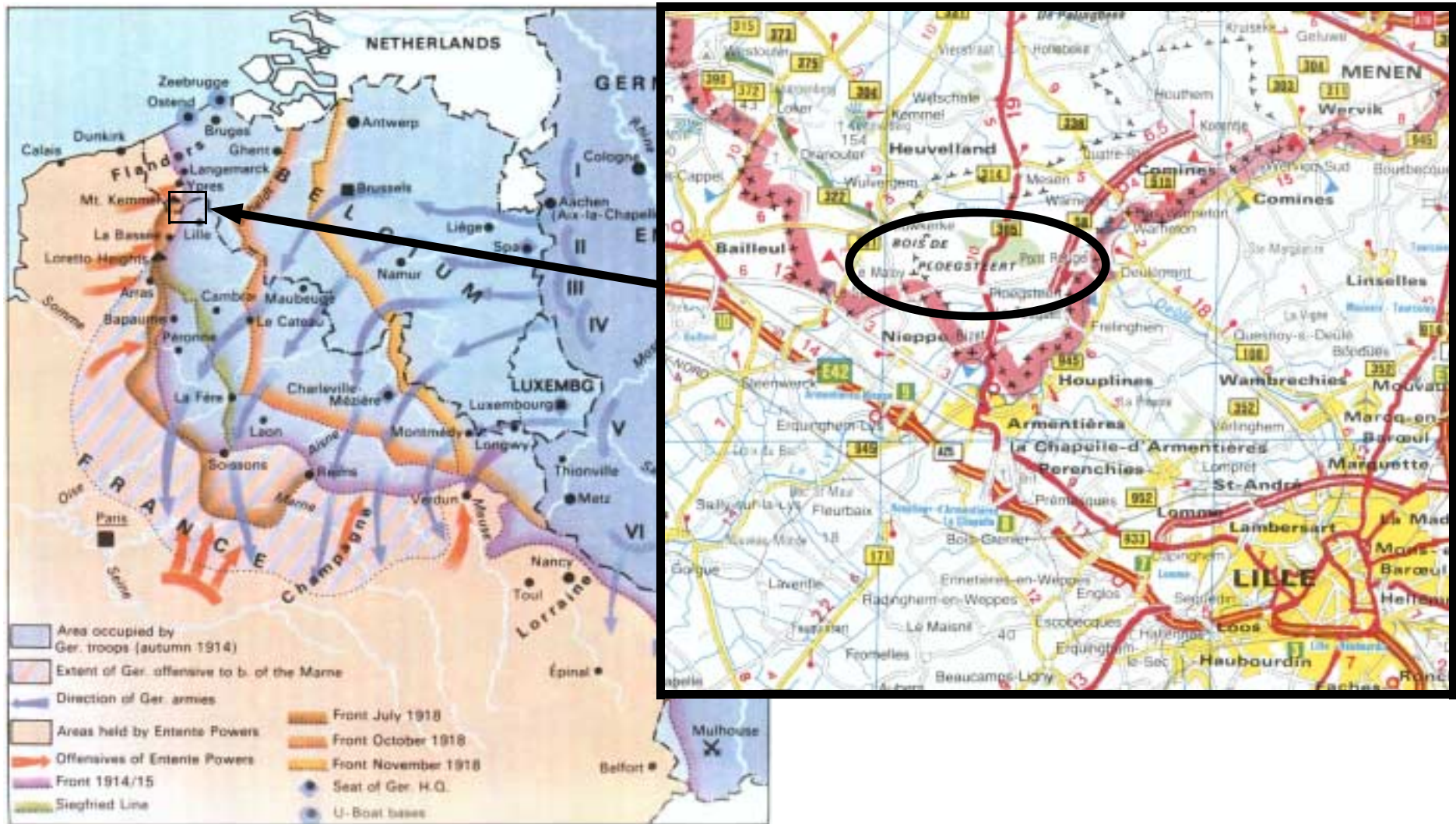
Charl didn't like having anyone else to share Mum with, he used to keep asking who that man was!

Dad, of course, went back to his job at Bitham Hall, and they had moved to Rambler Cottage where Dackie and I were born. In 1929 they moved into Bitham Lodge, now known as Top Lodge. They lived there until the end of 1944 when they moved to

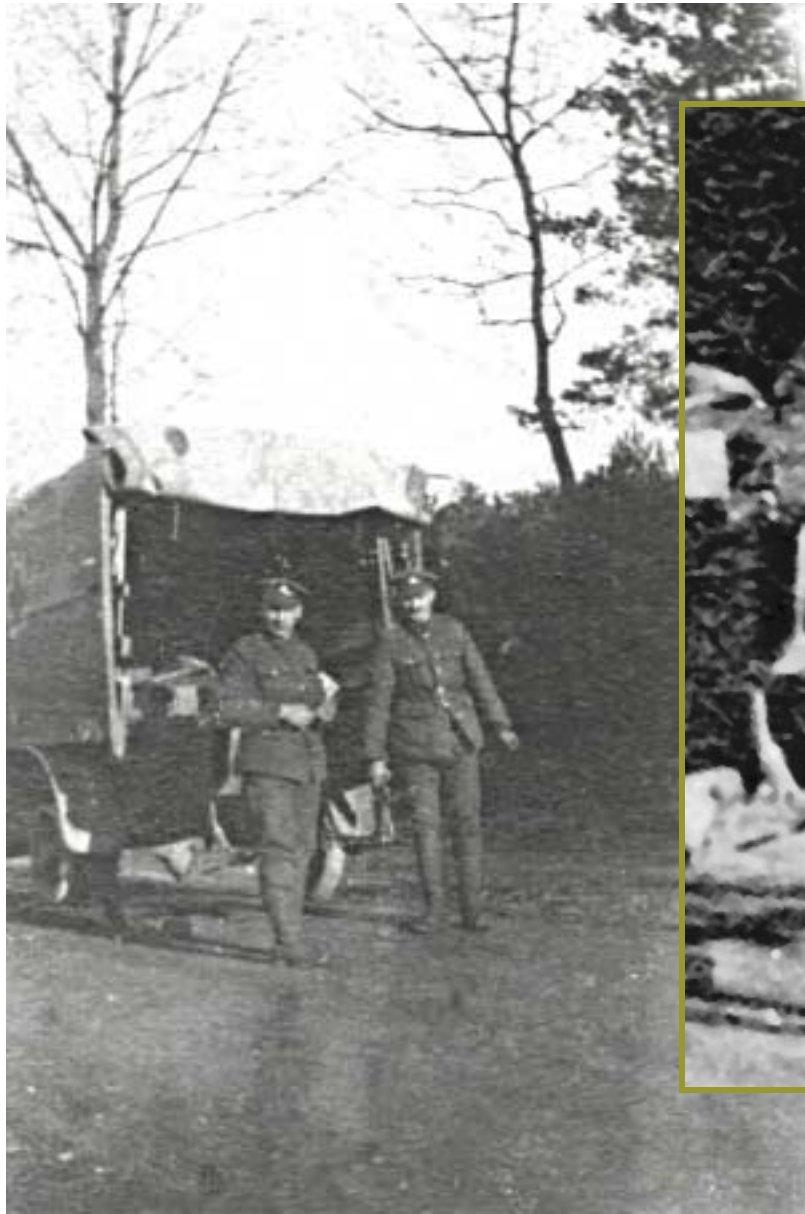


*Robert Fisher, killed in Flanders, 18th April 1918*





Location of Ploegsteert where Robert Fisher was killed:  
 Left map shows Western Front (Penguin Atlas of World History map),  
 Right map shows area today (from Geocart map of Belgium).



Harry Sealey with army ambulance in occupied Germany, 1919. Right is near Munster, 8th January. Left is near Osnabruck, the following day. (Map by George Philip & Son.)





Cheltenham.

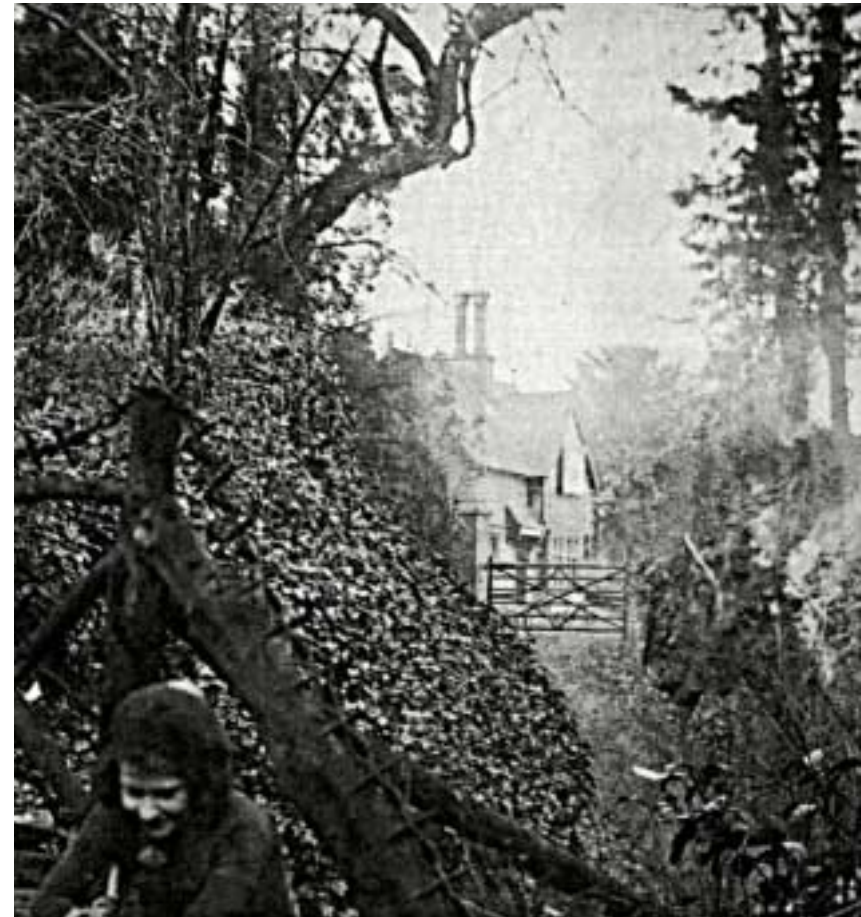
The old coachman and his wife had lived there and his widow had stayed for some while after he died. Mrs Morehan was very bent and dressed in deepest black with a shawl. I was terrified of her, I thought she was a witch. (I always did believe in fairy tales.) Once when I was walking past with Charl – I suppose I was about 5 – she called us and gave me some beads to thread. I believe she was quite a kind old soul really but children get strange ideas. She went to live with her son.

Some years ago when Uncle Nick (Carter, from Chelt) was working, he had to go to the Lodge because it had been sold and the new owners were planning a lot of alterations. He took a Polaroid photo and a shadowy figure wearing a shawl was in front of the back door. He showed the photo to Dackie. We are all convinced it was Mrs Morehan who had come back to see what was going on.

Now we return to Mother's family. Her elder sister, Olive Rose, called Rosie when young and Olive when she grew up, was always very bossy but a good business woman. She married a widower, Sidney Tibbles, who had one daughter called Rosie. I never met her, I think she only went to them for holidays. Uncle Sid was a very nice man. He was a good pianist and often used to play for sing-songs when they had guests. He used to play 'Oh, oh Antonio' for me. There were a couple of dancing dolls on top of the piano which used to 'dance' from the vibrations. I don't think Sid had a job as such, he used to help out in the shop and so on, and ran a bookie's business in the room behind the shop. They had a grocery shop in St George's Street, Cheltenham. They had three sons, the first one was premature and died in infancy, the second son was Sidney and the youngest Michael. They had been sent to board at St John's School in Southsea, one of the best Catholic schools at that time. Olive, who made and managed all the money, bought a poultry farm at Stoke Orchard which was supposed to be for young Siddie when he was 21. They lived there and ran the farm with some help, and drove in to Cheltenham every day to the shop. They had a modern bungalow built at the farm with nice gardens. They had a clock golf course there I used to enjoy playing on. I would be sent there for summer holidays. I hated going away on my own, I was so shy. There was usually some other girl staying there, one of Olive's lame ducks. I used to be terrified at night. They had two large Alsatian dogs that were chained up during the day but let loose at night to guard the farm. They used to howl under the windows like wolves. They also had a nice Old English sheepdog called Nell, who I think was the mother of Auntie Sal's Bonzo.

I used to help round the farm collecting eggs and so on. I seemed to be there for haymaking. That was hard work, it was a sort of paddock that had to be cut and turned by hand.

Uncle belonged to the Cheltenham Cycling Club. I imagine he held some office as I never saw him on a bike. Most years they held a rally on the farm. They would all arrive



*Bitham Lodge, with a young Mildred Sealey (also known as Dot or Dackie) in the foreground*

on tandems wearing plusfours. There was a grand tea laid on (at Auntie's expense) and there were all sorts of races and games. The one time I was there for that I couldn't enter the races because Nell had tripped me up that morning. (She was always getting under one's feet, I don't think she could see through her fringe.) I had a very bad knee which had turned septic by the time I returned home and had some proper treatment.

Olive's younger brother, John Fisher, was in the army. He was a very talented musician, especially on the clarinet, but he also taught himself to play the violin. He became the youngest bandmaster in the British Army. He was at Kneller Hall. Unfortunately he lent his clarinet to someone who turned out to have TB. He caught it, and as he always spent his leaves with Olive, he went back there to be looked after. They had a wooden hut in the grounds where he could be nursed in isolation, but he died in 1928 at the age of 24. Sadly, he had passed on the disease to Michael, the youngest son, who was nursed at home and died at the age of 11. The brothers at the school seemed to think he was very saintly. They printed a pamphlet about him and wanted to have him beatified. (My mother thought he was a spoilt child.) Olive was heartbroken, they said her hair turned white overnight. Sidney, the eldest, developed the disease and died at the age of 21, sometime in the early thirties, probably about 1932.

They continued to run the farm and shop for a few more years. Uncle had a green Lanchester car which was quite a status symbol. I remember him driving it at 90mph past the racecourse and telling me not to let on to Auntie. Once when I was staying, there was a Charity Ball for children at the Town Hall, and Auntie had tickets for another girl and myself. She dressed us a pierrots in some costumes she had. I had two beauty patches (black court plaster) stuck on with glue. When they were pulled off my skin went with them and it was weeks before the marks faded. We had no hope of first prize but it didn't matter as everyone received a prize. Mine was a large box of chocolates which I saved until I got home to share with the family.

Round about 1936 they bought a pub called the Royal Oak at Pewsey in Wiltshire and sold the shop and farm. They were there when the war started but sometime towards the end of the war bought a large guest house in Boscombe. I remember spending a weekend there when I was still in the army just after the war. Eventually they retired to Cheltenham, both in poor health, Olive had asthma. They had a small cottage in Exmouth Street. Uncle was quite old and had to be cared for in a nursing home. He died a few weeks after Olive. It must have been before my Mum died which was in 1974 (probably 1972).

Auntie gave me a glass picture of Major Robert Gill and was going to give me her copy of 'The River of Golden Sand,' but we couldn't get to Cheltenham to pick it up. We had been going but I heard she had died. I expect the stepdaughter threw it out.

I've already told you about Uncle Bob and Uncle John, you need to look at the family tree to sort them out. I think the next in age after Bob was Helen Veronica, sometimes



*Helen Veronica Partington, née Fisher, also known as Nellie or Vera*



called Nellie by her sisters, but called Vera in later years. She liked city life and loved London. When she came to stay with us she found the country very primitive with outside toilets and oil lamps and water from the pump. She was always dressed very fashionably and used to pass on dresses to me when I was about 14. I remember a very smart hat, a navy blue bowler which I wore with a long blue feather. It must have been quite a sight! Vera married a man called Partington, never heard his Christian name. I don't remember him, I know he was very dark and Mum didn't care for him. He vanished. I don't know if he died or took off but we heard no more of him. The Christmas I was two (Charl says it was three), I had been put to bed on Christmas Eve (we were at Rambler Cottage then) and I was brought down again in what seemed like the middle of the night. Auntie Vera, Auntie Sal and Uncle Ern, and possibly Agatha were there. They wanted to give me my Christmas present. I presume they were staying at Sally's. Anyway, Sal and Ern had bought me this lovely doll's pram, grey leatherette with a shiny chromium handle, and Auntie Vera had bought this lovely jointed doll, it had a pretty face and eyes that opened and shut. Of course it was christened Vera. (I had its joints restrung with elastic last year and was reliably informed that it was now worth over £200.)

Incidentally, just before I was five I had a dreadful accident with Vera. We were still at the cottage and Mum had called to me to put my toys away as we were going out. I leaned over the pram to put something in my doll's house and somehow knocked the pram over. Vera fell out and her head broke. I was heartbroken and sobbed for days, but for my fifth birthday I had Vera back with a new head just like the old, and new clothes Mum had made for her. I remember showing her to the farmer's wife when she delivered our milk. I have had her ever since and she was well played with by both Dackie and I.

To return to that Christmas Eve, I can still recall vividly pushing the pram up and down the room with big brother Charl helping me. At six years older he was always my hero and role model.

Auntie Vera kept a guesthouse or apartment house, in Denbigh Street, London. I think it was No.3 but she later acquired the house next door as well. For years until he died she was the mistress of a wealthy business man known to us as Uncle George. He didn't live there, he had a family of his own. I don't remember meeting him but Dackie and Charl did. Mum always said he was very kind and a perfect gentleman. When she stayed with Vera for a few days he would see they had theatre tickets to go to a variety show. Mum was delighted to see George Robey who was a great star then.

Victor was the only child of her marriage, although there were whispers among the aunts about a baby girl who had been adopted. Vic was fostered for some years, a private arrangement. He had some deformity of the palate which needed hospital treatment every week and speech therapy. He was with a family in Tooting and that was how he got a London accent. When he was old enough, Vic was sent to St Joseph's Academy at



*Sarah Gibbs, née Fisher, also known as Auntie Sal—a passport photograph*

Blackheath, a very expensive boarding school. Vic didn't like it and ran away a few times. Once Mum and Dackie were staying there and Vic turned up and had to be hidden in a bedroom until Uncle George had gone and he could be returned to school. Another time he had got himself a job as a bellhop on a liner, or was it a hotel, or possibly both? He didn't like school.

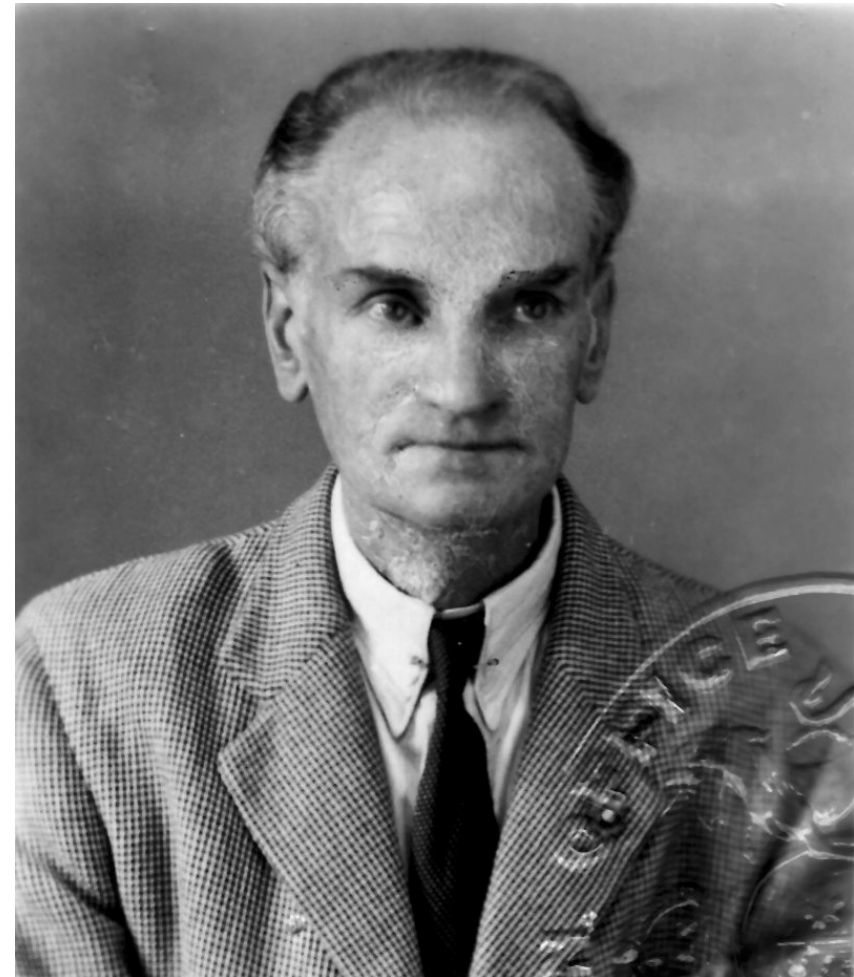
George made Vic an allowance every week when he was in the army, until he died. Vera retired and had a flat in Battersea where she was killed by a flying bomb in 1944. Vic was still in the army in India. Vera had left Mum her clothes which included two fur coats. I had to go with Mum to the foster-parents' house where what was left of her belongings had been taken. We had to sort out what could be used, as so much was cut to shreds by glass splinters. I remember the Collins, I think that was their name, as very kind, salt of the earth cockneys. Vic was like a son to them. I think she was more a mother than his own.

Auntie Sal was the next sister in age, Sarah Anne to be precise. She and Vera were always great pals, probably because they were nearer in age, although the sisters as a family were always falling out – with the exception of my mother who always seemed to be the one they were all speaking to. She was the peacemaker.

Sally married Ernest Gibbs soon after the war. She was quite young at the time. He was a ladies hairdresser in the 1920s and had a salon in the Strand with twenty girls working there. Auntie Sal used to help when needed, she was good at the manicures. Ern had been wounded in the shoulder by shrapnel during the war, some of it was too deep to remove and over the years it worked itself out, slowly and painfully. It must have been at the end of the twenties that he was involved in an accident when riding on the top of a London bus, and his health suffered until doctors told him he should live in the country. They sold up and bought a piece of land in Drayton near Banbury (only a few miles from Avon Dassett). While their bungalow was being built they rented a house on a hill at Fenny Compton. I think it was called Mill House. I recall going to tea there and being most impressed by their water supply, which was from a well in the cellar with frogs in it.

They must have been living there when I was eight because they were at my First Communion which I made at Midnight Mass. I was the only one, and I remember all the old dears begging me to ask for special favours for them because they used to believe that whatever a child asked then would be granted. I wore a white velvet dress with swansdown round the neck and sleeves. It had a smocked bodice and was made by Mum. Auntie Sal took me to church in their car, I think it was a Morris, KX4398. (When we bought Buzz, the Wolseley Hornet we only had for a few weeks because it gobbled petrol, in 1956, its number was almost the same – KX 4938.) Before that little saloon car, Sal and Ern had a small two-seater, and Sal wore knee breeches when she drove it because the windscreen allowed oncoming traffic to see up her skirts.

Ern and Sal usually came to Mass at our church at Christmas. Midnight Mass was rather



*Ernest Gibbs, alias Uncle Ern—another passport photograph*



special in the village, with oil lamps in church and everywhere decorated with holly and hot house flowers from Bitham Hall. Sal and Ern would come back with us for refreshments and to pick up the Christmas cake Mum always made for them. (She used to make several for different people. We always had two, one for Christmas and one for New Year.)

I wasn't at Midnight Mass every year. I was often ill in December, or stayed to keep Dackie company, she was very delicate. I remember very vividly the excitement when we got home and were allowed into the sitting room which had been locked all day. Charl would have spent the afternoon decorating the tree and the crib and putting up paper chains and holly. It was like the transformation scene in Cinderella – magic. We were allowed to open one present and have a glass of wine before we went to bed. It was orange wine when we were young but in later years I was allowed a glass of port. One year I remember staggering up the stairs in a daze after my glass had been refilled by mistake.

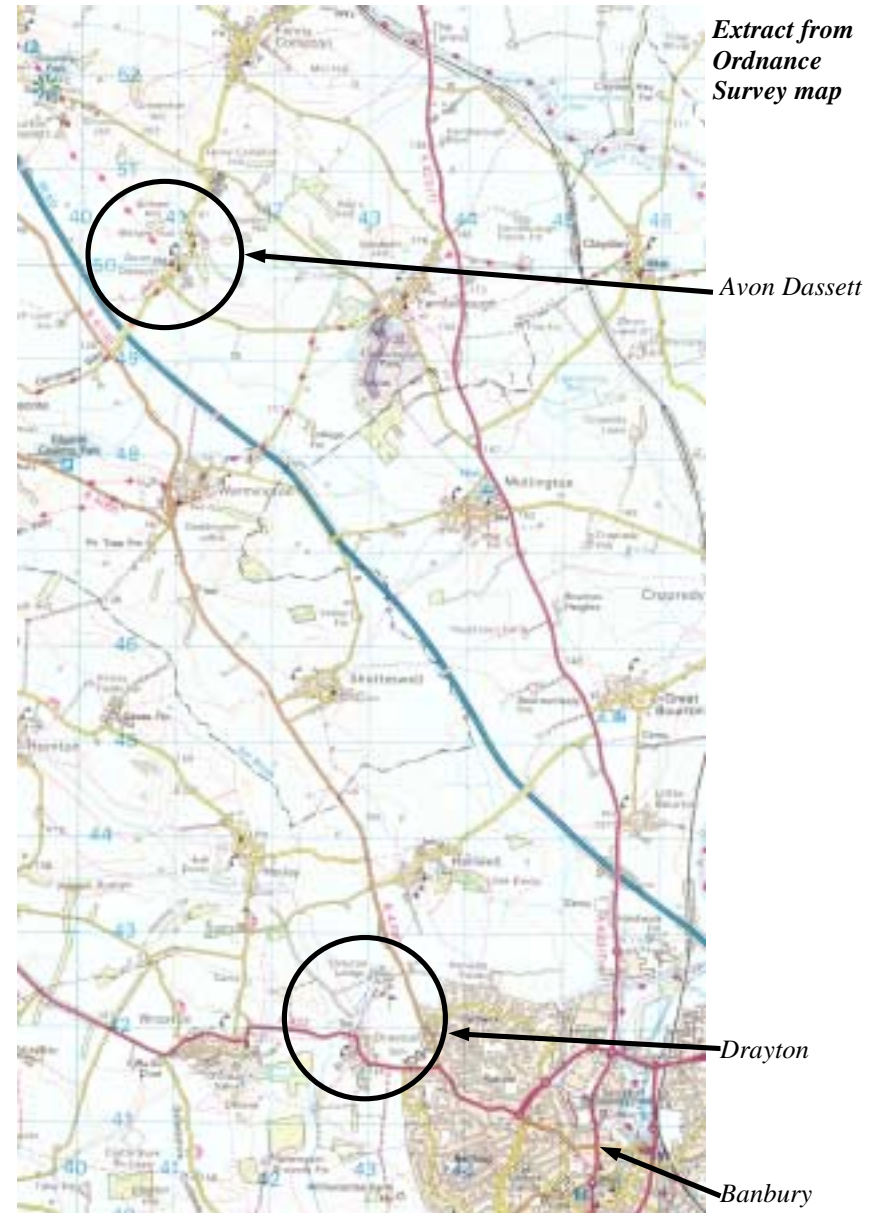
Sometimes – not at Christmas – Uncle Ern's sister and her husband would be staying with them and they would all come over for an evening. That was when we were at the lodge. They would have a very jolly evening, playing cards, singing the latest songs and telling ghost stories after we children had gone to bed. We could hear the voices coming through the ceiling, like bears growling.

Auntie Sal was very striking. She looked Spanish when young, with her long black hair, brown eyes and skin that tanned easily. All the Fisher girls were good-looking. Mum had a fairer skin and brown hair, as did Jo. All the aunts loved dancing, as did my mother who was much sought after at village do's. Dad didn't dance. The aunts loved parties and the latest fashions. When they came to see us they brought a whiff of the gay social whirl from London.

Uncle Ern was handsome too. He always made a big fuss of me, they had no children of their own. I called him 'Uncle Manna.' I can remember being carried by him across a dried-up pond in Hyde Park when about two. Also being taken to the Zoo and catching my fingers in the folding part of my pushchair as it was being lifted down some steps – Mappin Terrace I think. I can't recall anything about the animals.

We saw a lot of Sal and Ern when they lived in Drayton because for some years Ern ran a mobile hairdressing business. Bobs and shingles were the fashion, so regular haircuts were needed. He used to go all round the villages, and cut our hair too. Later he managed the hairdressing department of the Co-Op in Banbury where they catered for ladies and gents in separate salons. He was still there after the war until he retired.

They were fairly self-sufficient, on the land round the bungalow they grew their own vegetables and kept a goat (called Nannie). They had chickens and a dog and cats. Auntie would go for a walk round the lanes with the goat, the dog and cats following behind. She always brought a large bottle of goat's milk when she came to see us, Mum didn't like the



taste in tea but I loved to drink it neat.

Uncle died on December 30<sup>th</sup> 1967. He'd been ill for quite a while, I think he had cancer. Sal had a hard time nursing him. She decided to sell the bungalow and go to live in Lynton where she had a friend who was Reverend Mother in the Convent there. Unfortunately the friend died soon after she moved. Paul and Martin will remember visiting there for a weekend.

Sal was always very full of fun, although in later years she had become over-religious. Do you remember when she was staying with us and persuaded me to put a pile of sweets she had bought instead of your dinner, on your plates? I can still see your faces.

She eventually moved to Shepton Mallet where she seemed very happy. She would visit us every year on her way to the All Night Vigil at Lourdes, a special pilgrimage for the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes in February. I think she went 25 times. I know she made the Lough Derg pilgrimage, one of the toughest, over 21 times. She was knocked down by a mini-bus carrying handicapped children when crossing the road on a wet afternoon in Shepton Mallett. That was on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1975. She was taken to the Royal Hospital in Bath where she died ten days later. She was in a coma by the time we got there and didn't come round again. The inquest brought in a verdict of accidental death.

I have already told you about Uncle John, I think Josephine was the next in line as far as age goes. She was born on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1900 and at the time of writing is still alive and quite lively, although suffering from hardening of the arteries. I think she was 19 when she married a widower with three daughters, but she didn't agree to marry until she had been promised help with the children. She was never one to work herself to death. I suppose that's how you live to be old. The stepdaughters were Nan, Maureen and Pat. Uncle Mick was the stationmaster at Raphoe for thirty years so they got free travel. Auntie would come over to England every two years, usually bringing three children, one of them old enough to look after the others. They used to visit grandfather in Dover and then stay with us. We found it exciting, but I am sure Mum must have been tired out with so many extra to feed.

I have omitted to tell you that Grandfather Fisher moved to Dover. He and Grandmother separated after the war, I remember Mum hinting that it was because he used to drink and have a bet on the horses. He only drank the good stuff. He would get drunk on port and then it might be weeks before he had another drink. Granny lived with Sal and Ern in London, but she wasn't there all that long as she died in 1923 when I was a few months old. I had bronchitis very badly and Mum couldn't leave me to go to her death bed. I think the youngest daughter, Agatha, lived with Sally too.

Sometime in the 1920s Grandfather married again. I think she must have been his landlady. She kept a guesthouse in Marine Terrace, very near the sea. Mum liked her. I never met her but she sent me a nice doll which I called Selina after her. She had packed it in a shoebox with some nougat – for Charl, I think – and it got stuck to the doll's hair.



*Josephine O'Boyle, née Fisher — otherwise known as Auntie Jo*



Selina didn't live for many years, I think she must have had cancer. I can remember Mum going to help nurse her and taking Dackie who was a baby then. Selina was buried in Deal.

When I was six I had my tonsils out and went to recuperate by the sea for a couple of weeks with Mrs White (whom Paul met in that bungalow at Avon Dasset) to look after me. It must have been not long after Selina died. I remember a housekeeper. Grandad lived in bedsits after that. He used to come and stay with us a couple of weeks most years. He would always give me 5 shillings, which was a large amount then. [Equivalent to about £6 today.] About 1936 or so he came to live in Avon Dasset in a small cottage near the school. Mum used to send his dinner down. Either Dad or I would take it on a plate that you filled with hot water underneath and it kept the food hot. He was very ill in 1938 and Mum and Dad nursed him in our sitting-room for weeks. Jo came dashing over from Ireland because he was dying, and Mick came from Somerset, then stayed with Sal. He made a miraculous recovery and went back to Ireland with Jo, to great relief all round. Charl was in the army then and didn't like coming home to be lectured on the way things were done in the old days. He got sick of hearing about the Boer war. That's the last I saw Grandad because the war broke out the next year. (He died in 1947.)

To return to Auntie Jo. She was always very smart and glamorous. She smoked and enjoyed a drink. She told me once, when we talking on the phone in recent years, that it's a good job we didn't know that she had borrowed everyone's best clothes for the trip. Jo and Michael had six more children, five girls and a boy, so Michael had eight daughters altogether. The three stepdaughters had gone into nursing before the youngest were born. All the girls went into nursing. They trained in England because the Irish certificates were not valid anywhere else. Una, the eldest girl, is two years older than me. She was at Dover one year when Mum, Dackie and I went to visit Grandad. We had a lot of fun together. The next eldest was Manus. Like many Irish men, he stayed with his mother until almost middle-aged. I think he married then but his mother never mentions him.

The only time I remember meeting him was when he and Uncle Michael came over on a surprise visit before the war. They didn't bring any luggage and I've never forgotten that Mum gave Manus my favourite yellow shirt as he hadn't a clean one. Parents were very good at making children sacrifice their belongings in those days.

The next two O'Boyle girls, Mildred and Josephine, were quite close together in age, and Loyola was a couple of years younger than them. They used to have long ringlets which I think involved a lot of work with curling rags. Margaret, the youngest (her second name was Celine but she was usually called Pearl), was a sort of afterthought and was the most beautiful baby. She married an American and is still there. Loyola became a district nurse in Dudley. She married and had a son and still lives there I think. She is the one who featured in a BBC programme about heart disease about 5 years ago. She had to give up work because her heart was so bad.



*Charles Fisher at Avon Dasset with Auntie Jo, Mildred and Josephine*

I have just found a very fragile and yellow newspaper cutting with no date on it, about Uncle Michael's funeral. It had a potted history in it. Michael was the son of Captain O'Boyle and a cousin of Seamus McManus, a well-known author and lecturer. His father must have been a sea captain for it says that in his earlier days, the days of sail, Michael had been his father's constant companion and told many thrilling stories of wrecks and rescues round the western seaboard. He was stationmaster at Raphoe for thirty years and his genial ruddy face beamed a welcome to all who happened to alight at the little Lagan Valley Station. He was a 1916 veteran and during the Civil War he organised and planned in that station house on the hill. His home was open house for men on the run and in later years many now prosperous Yankees returned to thank him for help given. When his old friends Neil Blaney, Brian Brady and Harry McDevitt succeeded to power, he felt his task was done. He laid down the sword for the pen and wrote letters by the thousand pressing for houses to be built to replace crumbling cottages, provide water for rural communities and electric light, etc. He was forever pleading the cause of the widows, orphans and old age pensioners who flocked to his door to seek help. He was buried at Mountcharles, the place of his birth. The above is quoted practically verbatim from the newspaper.

I didn't know any of this until he died but I do remember Mum saying she was staying there when the police searched the house – during the first war or just after, probably during the rebellion. Anyway, when he died Auntie Jo came to live in England. She lived in Wolverhampton near Loyola and with Manus. She was there for years, probably until Manus married and she went back to Ireland to be near the rest of the family. I think Uncle Michael died in the late 1950s, he was certainly alive in 1950 when Mum and Dot went over on holiday. He was only related by marriage, but it is interesting.

Mildred and Josephine had about 13 children each. I think it was Josephine who had an 18 year old son killed by a train. I don't know how many grandchildren they have. Una had 3 boys and a girl and Margaret had some too.

When I think of Auntie Jo before the war, I remember her in a shady black lace hat that made pretty patterns on her face in church. And I can see her and Mum sitting on the hills by the Old Red Barn Café on the way to Burton, singing 'Danny Boy' at the tops of their voices, with only the cows to hear them.

The next sister and brother were twins, Anne and Michael. As I said before, Anne was delicate and died aged 6. Michael died a few years after Sally – he was always called Mick in the family. He loved the land and worked on a farm at Evercreech near Shepton Mallet. He lived with a family who treated him as one of their own. Sally saw him quite often.

The youngest in the Fisher family was Agatha, I think her second name was Joyce. She used the name Joyce when she was modelling. She was a high-class mannequin for one of the big London stores. I think she must have lived with us for a while before I was born, probably when her parents split up. Charl and she went to the village school together, she



*Above: Burnt-out shell of the GPO, Dublin (National Library of Ireland photo). Michael O'Boyle was a veteran of the 1916 rising. Right: Rebel song set in Donegal. Charles Fisher died at Stranorlar but, as a British Army pensioner, incurred the displeasure of the IRA.*

#### 12 JOHNSTONS MOTOR CAR.

It was down by Eagans corner one morning I did stray,  
I met a fellow rebel there and this to him did say,  
We have orders from the captain to assemble at Drumbar,  
But how were we to get there without a motor car.

Oh Barney dear be of good cheer I'll tell what we'll do,  
The Specials they are plentiful and the IRA are few,  
We'll wire up to Stranorlar and, before we get that far,  
We'll give the boys a bloody good ride in Johnstons motor car.

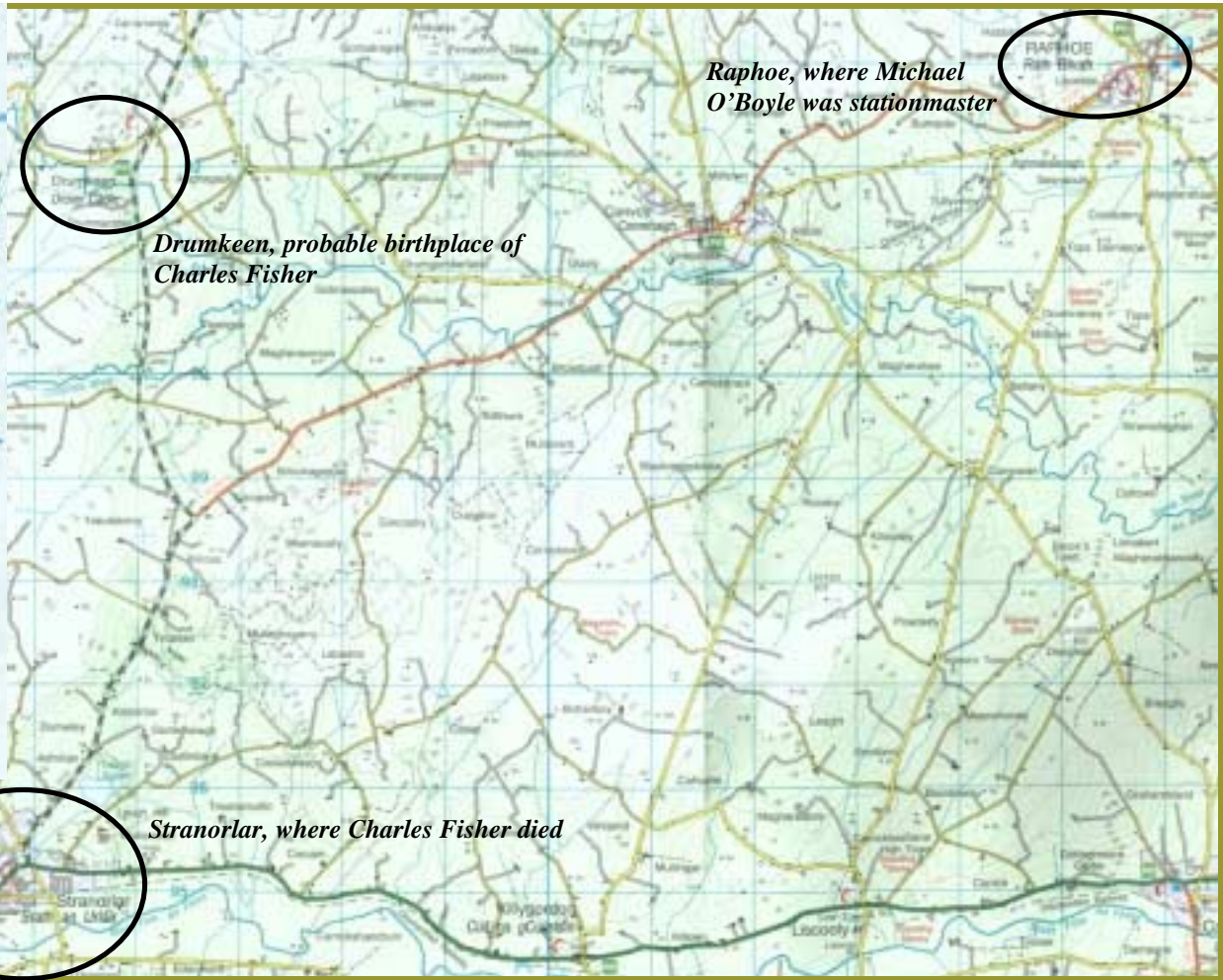
When Dr Johnston got the news he soon put on his shoes,  
He said this is an urgent case there is no time to lose,  
He then put on his castor hat, and on upon his breast a star,  
You could hear the din going through Glen Finn of Johnstons motor car.

But when he got to the Railway bridge, the rebels he saw there,  
He knew the game was up for him for at him they did stare,  
He said I have a permit to travel near and far,  
You can stick your English permit, we want your motor car.

What will my loyal brethren say when ere they hear the news,  
My car it has been commandeered by the rebels at Dunluce,  
We'll give you a receipt for it, all signed by Captain Maher,  
And when Ireland gets her freedom, you'll get your motor car.

They set the car in motion and filled it to the brim,  
With rifles and bayonets, which made old Johnston grim,  
And Barney hoisted a Sinn Fein flag and it fluttered like a star,  
And we gave three cheers for the IRA and Johnstons motor car.





*Raphoe, where Michael O'Boyle was stationmaster*

*Drumkeen, probable birthplace of Charles Fisher*

*Stranorlar, where Charles Fisher died*

*The Fisher homelands in County Donegal. Ireland map from Bord Failte, detail map from Irish Ordnance Survey.*



*Agatha Fisher, who modelled as Joyce*



must have been under 14, probably about 10, and Charl was 3½. Being a mannequin was a very select and ladylike profession, not like the bimbos who model now. Agatha couldn't bear to wear fur and would never model fur coats, I think she was allergic to it. She cut herself off from the family before Dackie was born – after her mother died – but there was sometimes a picture of her in the fashion news in the paper. Friends who knew her would cut out the pics for Mum and Dad. There was a rumour from somebody who claimed to have met her that she married an Air Force officer during the war. Sally met her after Ern died. She must have got in touch with Sal and arranged to meet her in London. She took Sal out for a meal and bought her an expensive tweed coat. I think Sal was wearing it when she had her accident. She obviously didn't give her any address, there was nothing among her papers.

Well, I think that gives you the highlights and lowlights of the Fishers, Mum's brothers and sisters.

## Sealey

Now to my father's side of the family. You have a copy of the tree researched by Gladys and Valerie but I don't know anything about them before Grandmother Sealey, who was Mary Berry before her marriage to Charles Sealey. Her husband, my Dad's father, became an invalid when quite young after rheumatic fever which affected his heart. He couldn't work again, so Gran used to take in washing to keep the family. No benefits or child allowances in those days. He died in 1918, so I never knew him. There were nine surviving children. As soon as they were old enough to work they all contributed what they could. They all thought the world of their mother and were a very close family. Mother remembered meeting Dad's father but she wasn't too keen on most of them. She liked Charlie and Gig and Doll but she was quite happy for Dad to have his week's holiday there with them, which he had every year until he died. He would meet all his brothers and sisters and go to the cricket matches. I went with him one year when I was about 10. I met all my cousins and we had a great time. Gladys wore a red beret on the side of her head but when I went home and did the same, Mum soon put a stop to it because it 'looked common'.

I have learned more from Gladys about the family since Dad died and I have got to know them again. Gladys said that the boys got jobs as footmen until they were old enough to join the police. They got Dad a post as footman to Colonel Worrall's father near Barnstaple. The old man was an invalid and Dad used to push his wheelchair. There is a photo of him standing behind the chair. I think Gladys has it. It must have been after the old man died that Dad was taught to drive and Colonel Worrall got him the job of chauffeur to Miss Perry at Bitham Hall. Miss Perry was aunt to the Colonel's wife who



*Mary Sealey, née Berry*

was her heiress. Before the war there had been many people working on the estate both indoors and out. After the war there were many less and by the thirties Dad was seeing to the letting of cottages and collecting rents as well as driving the car. As Miss Perry got older she didn't go out so much and Dad could use the car when he liked. She was the eldest of seven sisters and had inherited the estate. In the mid-thirties she made it over to her niece to avoid death duties and Colonel Worrall and family moved in when he retired from the army. Miss Perry died in 1940 and they had no need of a chauffeur then, as they all drove themselves. Dad was called up for war work and directed to the aluminium factory at Banbury. In 1944 the factory was slowing production because the war was drawing to a close and the second front was well under way. Dad got a job as Head Porter at St Paul's College, Cheltenham. He loved it and was still working there when he died.

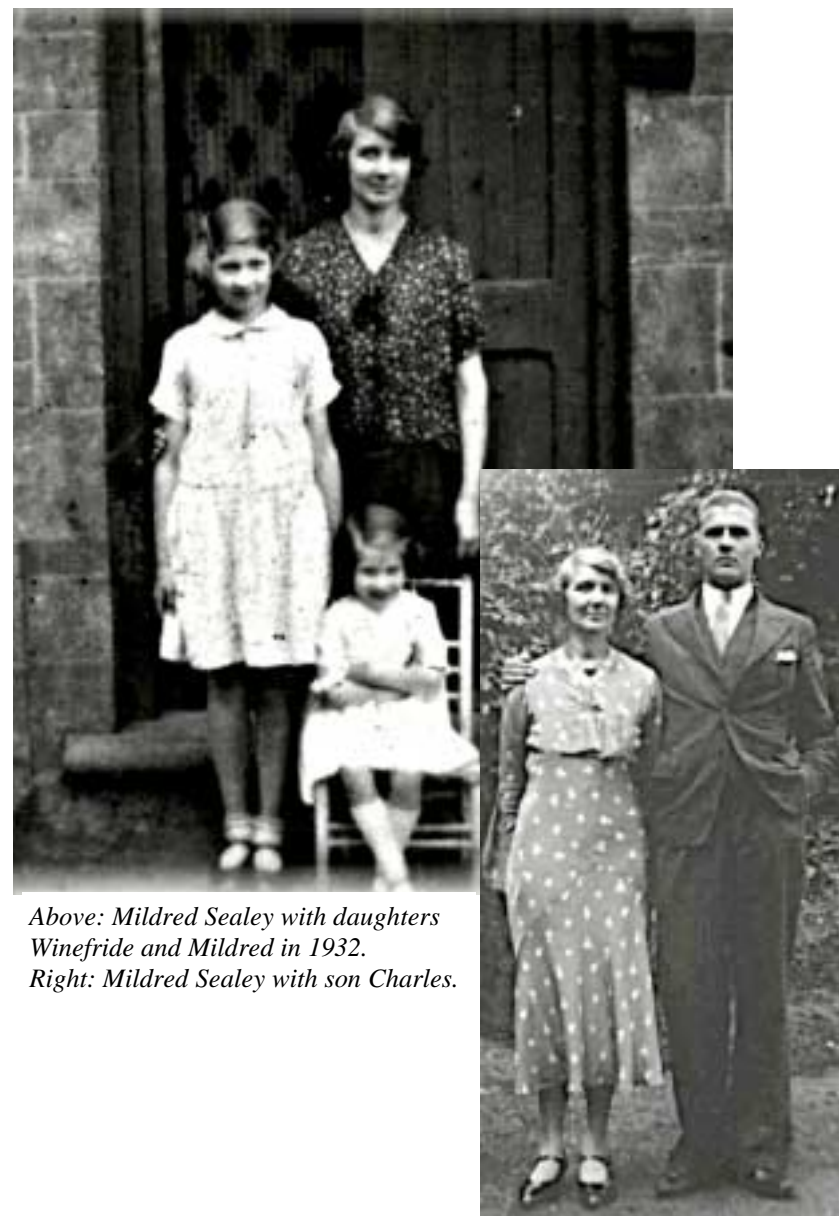
That is another digression I'm afraid. Let's go back to Dad's brothers in the 1890s. Dad's four brothers all joined the police and were there until retirement. Dad longed to join, but he was only 5ft 9in and you had to be 5ft 11 in those days. He tried all he could to stretch himself but it didn't work.

Ernest used to be in charge of the police station at Bridgwater. He was a sergeant when I knew him and his wife was Auntie Wray's sister. They had no children.

I visited them with Dad and was given a tour of the station. I was quite disappointed there were no prisoners in the cells. Ern and Lou had a grey parrot. It was family legend that when I was taken there as a baby the parrot said "Whatya got?" I never heard the end of it. Ern died after his wife, and the year after Dad, 1959. He had no direct heirs so his estate was divided between his brothers and sisters and the children of the ones who died. Charl, Dackie and I received £22 each, and with mine I bought the reproduction cabinet in the sitting room.

Ernest, Charles Wallace (Wall), George (Gig) and Charles (Chase-me) all joined the Somerset Constabulary, but Gig (pronounced 'Jig') transferred to London where he became a sergeant in the Metropolitan Police. (It has just occurred to me that there can't be many people who have uncles called Wall, Gig and Chase-me.) Gig married Edith Lillie Spiller, known to us as Auntie Lil and they had one child, Gladys. She was born with one leg shorter than the other and has had to wear a surgical boot all her life. She is the one we go to see in Taunton and I am very fond of her.

Before she grew too feeble, Dad used to drive Miss Perry to London a couple of times a year to stay with family. Once he had delivered her, he was able to take the car and go to stay with Gig and Lil. He always went well loaded with rabbits and fresh vegetables etc, but they were delighted to see him anyway. The brothers always enjoyed each other's company and I never heard of any of the family falling out with each other. Nearly every year they would come to visit us for a day out. There were good trains in those days. We always had a walk over the hills and they usually took back some ferns to plant in their



*Above: Mildred Sealey with daughters Winefride and Mildred in 1932.*

*Right: Mildred Sealey with son Charles.*



garden.

Gladys married Edward (Ted) Clifton in August 1942. He had been working in a bank but retrained as a teacher and after the war they moved back to Taunton where Ted taught until he retired. They had one daughter, Valerie, who married Geoffrey Courts. Val is a teacher. Geoff worked for the British Council and they were abroad in the Middle East and even further afield. They had two daughters, Nicola and Kate. Geoff died of cancer about four years ago but Valerie has a house near her parents in Bishops Hull, Taunton. Uncle Gig retired to Taunton from the police. He worked at the Town Hall for some time after that and died in 1960.

I don't know a lot about Dad's elder sisters. I only met Cis and Min when I stayed there with Dad. Cis married Arthur Watts. They had one daughter, Meg. I met her a couple of times at Gladys's. She was much older and died a few years ago in Wells. We went to her funeral, she was quite an old lady. Auntie Min's married name was Quick. She had two children, Jack and Betty. I remember eating plums with Betty in their garden. I think that was in Norton Fitzwarren.

Norton Fitzwarren is the little village near Taunton where they were all born and lived. It's not so little now. The army built a camp there during the war and, of course, the famous cider is made there. Auntie Doll married a sailor, George Ley, and they kept the pub in Norton known as 'The Ring o'Bells'. Grandmother's cottage where they were brought up had a stream at the end of the garden which was nearly the end of my poor father. Christened Harry, he was always known as 'Tiny' to his family. Apparently, he had been a very small baby, premature I think. They said they could fit him into a quart jug. One of his brothers saw a boot floating on the water, I think it was Gig. He wondered what a newish boot was doing in the water, pulled it out and Dad was on the end of it. Just in time. The stream also ended the life of Dad's tame jackdaw at a later date. The bird was very tame and used to follow him to school.

Speaking of school, they all went to the village school and the family were very protective of the younger ones. One day Dad was about to get the cane for getting an answer wrong, but not if Gig could help it. He got between Dad and the teacher, shouted to Dad to run home (which he did) and himself took the punishment. 'Run Tiny, run,' was part of the family legend.

I sometimes wonder if being premature had affected Dad's heart. In 1958 he had flu. There was an epidemic of Asian flu and in his case it turned to bronco-pneumonia. They took him into hospital, partly because mother was worn out with nursing him. During the night the right side of his heart collapsed and there was nothing they could do. He died soon after, actually on your father's birthday, March 27<sup>th</sup> and just two months after Worcester Grandad.

The brother younger than Dad, Charles, was known as 'Chase-me', probably after the



*Winefride and Mildred Sealey, early 1930s*

popular song 'Chase me Charlie'. He was an inspector in the Somerset Constabulary and lived at Clevedon. He was fond of playing jokes on people and used to tease Mum. She and Dot stayed with them several times after Dad died. When I stayed in Norton with Dad when I was 10, Uncle Chase-me was also staying and we all went for a walk through the fields. We children were picking and eating corn (which was a naughty thing to do). He told us the corn was poisoned, and though reason told me it couldn't be so, or it would be no use to anybody, I still lived in imminent fear of death.

Charles and his wife Maud had one son, Rowland, who died at the age of 14 (I think it was meningitis) in 1941. Do you remember going to visit them at Clevedon when Paul was about two? We went for a walk on the beach and Paul fell over on the causeway and was covered in mud. He had to sit in his pants while his clothes were washed and dried, much to his chagrin. Auntie made some fairy cakes which you all insisted on calling haystacks.

Dad and I went to Uncle's funeral at Norton Fitzwarren but I can't remember the date. He had a police escort to carry the coffin and was buried in the churchyard there, as was Auntie Maud a few years later. It was a lovely old church. I sat there thinking that it was where Dad had gone as a child. He didn't become a Catholic until 1913. The Sealey family were all good C of E. Gladys' husband is a church warden and they are pillars of the church.

I can't remember much about Uncle Wall. He was quite a lot older than Dad, but his wife Florence (Auntie Flo) lived to be a very old lady after she was widowed. She lived in Clevedon near Charles and Maud. They had two children, Doris and Dennis. Doris married a butcher called Ernest Feltham who had a shop in Clevedon and they had one child, a son Rodney. Doris was a widow. I last saw her at Meg's funeral, and it was not so long after that occasion that she died. Your Dad went to the funeral because I was teaching then.

Dennis and his wife, whom we call Peggy, lived and worked in High Wycombe until they retired to Taunton. They now live in Bishops Hull very near to Gladys. We usually have tea with them and lunch with Gladys and Ted when we call in on the way back from Cornwall. They are really nice people and we get on well. They have two adopted children, a girl and a boy. The boy is a teacher in Germany at the moment. Dennis is the last of his line to bear the name Sealey, apart from David who is unlikely to marry. Dennis' two are called Philip and Alexandra.

Auntie Doll and George Ley had two children, Joan and Geoffrey, and adopted their sister Vi's son, Douglas. Vi (Dorcas) had a very bad heart. She married Tom Vellacott and died giving birth to twin sons. The other baby, Donald, was brought up by his father's family. Douglas married Sylvia. She was a hairdresser and I met her before they were married, when they stayed with us in Avon Dassett. Douglas had driven Granny up to stay with us for a couple of weeks and he and Sylvia stayed for the weekend. I hadn't seen Douglas for years until we met at one of the funerals. He died a few years ago and we went



*May 1938 at Bitham Lodge: Top, from left to right, Winefride, Mildred, Harry, young Mildred, Mary Sealey and Douglas Vellacott. Enlargements show Harry (left) and Douglas.*



to his funeral. It's only at funerals that we meet our cousins.

George Ley died in 1967 and Auntie Doll was left a widow. Cousin Joan married Colin Bradnam who was a long distance lorry driver and died four or five years ago. Their daughter Debra, a very good-looking girl, was in the police and married a divorced inspector with a couple of children. They have another one at least. Her brother Andrew was still living with his mother, according to the Christmas cards I get from them.

Grandmother Sealey lived to be about 93. She lived with Doll at the Ring o'Bells in her later years. In 1953 we went to Plymouth to stay with Molly Knibb, my ATS friend. We called in at Norton on the way, so Gran was able to see Anthony and Martin – Paul wasn't around then. They had Uncle Ern's parrot, I remember. Gran had sort of auburn hair and they tell me it hadn't really turned grey when she died. She died about 1957. Auntie Doll lived for some years. After she gave up the pub she lived in a house almost opposite the church where we attended her funeral some years later.

Dad's brothers and sisters used to keep up a great correspondence with each other and always exchanged Christmas presents for the children. My favourite and now very tatty book 'Madcap Judy' came from Gladys and I also had her doll's house when she decided she was too old for it. She can't have been more than 10 because I had it at Rambler Cottage. I also had a lovely party dress Gladys had grown out of – peach silk with a large rose at the waist and a smaller one at the neck. I can see it now. Auntie Doll often sent us 'Mama' dolls. We always knew what was in the parcel because when the dolls were turned over they would cry 'mama'. The dolls were from Marks & Spencer's and cost about 5 shillings. They had sort of swinging legs that you could make walk – very unsophisticated but we loved them. Auntie Maud and Uncle Charles always sent a postal order.

That's about all I can think of at this moment from Dad's lot. I've just remembered a bit about the Gills. They had a house in Red Lion Square, London, and there was a family coat of arms. You know about the memorial in the crypt of St Paul's and the stained glass window in Rochester Cathedral. I always hope one day to visit Brighton College and see the memorial in the Chapel along with Captain Gill's sword. The archivist, Mr Jones, said we had only to write or ring and he would show us round, but the opportunity has not arisen.

I hope this will help you to remember them all.

## Mum



*Mildred Sealey at Cornerways,  
Tilehurst about 1960*