

## **WHAT I KNOW ABOUT BISMORE**



**WHAT I KNOW ABOUT BISMORE**  
**Correspondence and Jottings 1986 – 2012**

Muriel Brooks

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The author wishes to thank all family, friends and neighbours who have helped make life in Bismore such a pleasure over the last 26 years, and who have wittingly or unwittingly contributed to this book.

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## PEOPLE PAST

Once upon a time, a long while ago, in my buggy-pushing days, I rounded the Crows Nest bend – as we call it – and saw an unknown car near the Shelleys' house. By the time I had got down the lane it had moved round to our gravel patch, and a man came trotting up past our house to apologize for parking there. Naturally I invited him in for a cup of tea, and he told me the story of his life.

From the age of two he had been a Barnado's child in the cottage next to ours, and at the age of nine had been sent to Australia without warning or explanation. He adored his foster mother here, Mrs Nobes, and despite all the teasing at school he truly loved living in Bismore and to his dying day described those seven years here as the happiest of his life. I cannot imagine having my happiest life end at the age of nine, though I believed him and loved him for loving Bismore.

He told me a lot that day, but more was to follow. In 1922 he was born Jack/Jackie Ramsbottom, the child of what sounds to have been a rather feckless simple lady with several children by different men, and when his mother had no option but to return north and live with her parents *her* mother put Jack in a home. Barnado's soon sent him to Eastcombe, where it was quite the established custom to house orphans as a way of swelling the low family incomes, no matter how many children were in the house already. Twenty-odd years ago an elderly lady who had been fostered and then in turn fostered children herself told me that 'there was always room for another one', and she smiled at the memory. Jack was too young to remember anything before he was fostered, and he was allowed to think that he was an orphan. It was a tremendous shock to receive a letter from his birth mother when he was about to leave school in Australia, and in fact he never met her though in later life he found his half-sisters.

Eastcombe was well used to orphans, as Anglican nuns cared for children at St Elizabeth's (the large purpose-built Victorian house that lies between Bracelands and Dr Crouch's Road, above the upper graveyard) and the cottagers took in the Barnado's children, but everyone knew who the disadvantaged were and children seem to have been fairly uninhibited about letting them feel it. Nevertheless many stayed in this district and had happy lives here. We miss Madaline Hall, who with her sister had to live at St Elizabeth's after their Bisley parents died in the 'flu epidemic of the 1920s. She lived latterly in Bismore and was famous for lugging down the hill all the surplus bread from Eastcombe shop at the end of the day, in order to feed her friends the badgers (who came in the kitchen to hurry her up if she was a bit late putting out their food). It is good to have her family continuing to live in the cottage... Jackie, though, was teased mercilessly about the name Ramsbottom, and grew to hate it. He could not wait to change it when he was grown up – he chose the name John Lane – but the sad thing is that Ramsbottom means not Ram's Arse or Sheep's Bum, as he was called at school, but 'the valley where wild garlic grows'. What could be more suitable for a boy who loved Bismore?

When John left me after that first meeting he said 'I am going to write a book about it', and I thought yeah yeah yeah. But then he said 'My publishers want me to', and I showed a little more respect. He sent me a copy of the book he had already had published, *Summer Will Come Again*. At the end of his farm school years in Australia he joined the Australian army and was sent to Singapore just in time to be captured by the Japanese. He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Kobe, kept a minuscule diary, and 40 years later wrote up his story which was published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press. About 18 months after we met, Gerry Lowe (a whole separate story, Gerry married into the village after World War II, ran the Post Office at Beam Ends till he built a new shop, and in extreme old age never grew tired of telling me how magical it was to walk with the letters round Bismore, being paid a pittance for something he would have done for nothing, he loved it so much), sorry, Gerry Lowe turned up on our doorstep with John's next book, *Fairbridge Kid*. It tells how life was for the orphans being trained for domestic and farm work in the colonies under Kingsley Fairbridge's scheme, and unlike most of the people who have gained publicity in recent years John maintained the greatest admiration and gratitude for what was done for him. The

musical training he was given enabled him to work as an army musician after the war and he had a good career; and in retirement he took a lot of interest in preserving that farm school as a museum – but he still said his happiest years were spent in Bismore. Interestingly, in *Nobody's Child*, Kate Adie wrote that at the Coram Foundation in London boys 'had some musical training, not only singing in the Sunday services but often playing in the school band. Perhaps Handel [an early patron] has to be thanked for providing an extraordinary supply of military bandsmen right up to World War II'. The Fairbridge schools perpetuated the idea of instrumental tuition, and John spoke of the lasting impression made by a visiting Guards band.



*From the Crow's Nest bend, Bismore used to open up in a wonderful vista, with Fairview in the centre, John Lane's foster home to the right, Honeyhill to the far right, Toad Cottage up in the woods, the meadow below with the culverted stream, and Keeper's Cottage snuggling in the distance. Copsegrove Farm is above. Written on the back is 'John Bottomley 1935'*

The first 50 or so pages of *Fairbridge Kid* contain a Laurie Lee-like lyrical description of a Gloucestershire hill village and valley cottage in the 1920s/30s. It is lovely, and I will quote a lot from it. Over the years till he died in 2008 of motor neurone disease, John with his wife Ronda paid us several visits, wrote many letters, gave us access to another memoir on compact disc, and gave me blanket permission to reproduce anything he wrote. For that and for his friendship I am very grateful.

Well. On with the story. On John's first visit after the publication of *Fairbridge Kid* he pulled a letter out of his pocket. 'You're never going to believe this', he said – and it was incredible. The letter was from an older woman who lived not far from him in Western Australia. 'Mr Lane', she wrote, 'I opened your book and there was our house.' Her name was Frances Deacon (née Waite), and her parents bought our house in 1919. They were Cheltenham people who emigrated in 1912, but doctors in Australia said that Frances's mother would not survive the climate and she returned home with her children in 1913. Before anything else could happen World War I broke out and Frances's father joined the Australian army. When he was wounded at Gallipoli he was

repatriated to Britain and the rest of the war was spent moving from hospital to hospital. They only stayed a year in Bismore. Arthur Waite had been too weakened by his wound, and his wife was too frail to take all the hard physical work on her own shoulders: they tried chicken farming, as many people did, and like us with our poultry all these years later they were defeated by the vagaries of nature and the single-mindedness of Mr Fox.

Frances became another penfriend, and I also used to ring her from time to time. After leaving college she went back to Australia, came back here, and went again. Previously I had no idea that people went to and fro with such insouciance when the journey was long and hard. She met Mr Deacon on the boat, they married and launched into farming in the outback, complete with a house made of canvas and packing cases – the real pioneer experience, and yet so recent. She was into her 90s and had nothing new to tell me about Bismore, having written everything she recalled in her unpublished reminiscences entitled *As I Remember*. She let me have a copy in the hope that I could find a publisher. Well, I did not manage that, but again I was given permission to use her material. I was very sad when her nephew rang from Australia to say she had died, and am lastingly mortified that I lost his name and telephone number and therefore cannot tell him that I am spreading her story more widely. I hope one day to put her whole book on the world-wide web: it is not a great work of literature, but an extraordinarily detailed memoir of a lost way of life. In fact, thinking about it, several lost ways. There are the minutiae of modest but genteel Cheltenham life before World War I, emigration to Australia, moving from house to house back in Britain, pioneer farming, travelling around England in an amateur dramatic company during World War II, and widowhood in Perth – what a life!

Frances was 14 when she lived here, and a lot of what she wrote was misremembered or misinformed – she seems to have swallowed whole the daft Bisley legends wished upon an uneducated populace by the Kebles (I suspect) – *but* like John Lane she remembered Bismore all her life as a place of infinite charm. I shall quote a lot from her writing too.

Then, moving on a little while, I met another former resident. Muriel Little knocked on our door one day, accompanied by her daughter, and said 'Is this Bismore?' She said that she had been born in the cottage in the wood in 1923 and had left when she was five. I took the keys and we set off into the woods. Looking across the valley she was astonished by all the trees, saying that she used to be able to watch her father cycling down from his work at Lypiatt Park for lunch, and I told her that Ken Wrenn told me he had seen woods on both sides of the valley felled for both world wars. People tend to forget that when agonizing over the bits of woodland work carried out now.



*Muriel Little, née Stephens, when she first came back to Bismore after 70 years away*

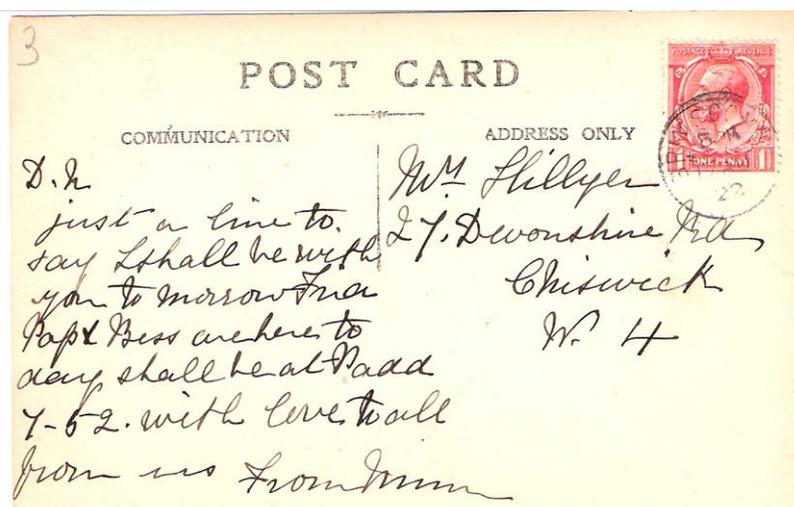
When we got into the cottage Muriel exclaimed over all the alterations. For 70-odd years she had carried such a vivid memory of her idyllic home. I had acquired my next penfriend.

In the years since then we have exchanged letters and Christmas cards, with news of our families and views on the state of the nation. Muriel is in her late 80s now, but is as full of vim as ever. Again, our love of Bismore is what links us, and early in our friendship I sent her plants from our garden so that the flowers her mother cherished in Gloucestershire now grow in Eastbourne.

She and John Lane remembered the same neighbours and cottages, and after I put them in touch with each other John would ring her from Australia. Almost better than that was to follow. We have a weekenders' cottage next to us, the one where John was fostered, so when I heard unexpected voices in the garden there one day I went down to investigate. (Neighbourly? Nosy?) There was a family of three generations wandering around, and again there was an old lady visiting her childhood roots. Florence Taylor (Bottomley) had also been a foster child of the Nobes, and I remembered her name from what John had written about his 'favourite elder sister' who was much older and working away but came back on visits. I was able to reunite them, he visited her in Hampshire, and they got a lot of pleasure from remembering their loving foster home.

These are the people I respect, the ones who found in Bismore the same spirit of place that is felt by a lot of the current people here. Later occupants of the cottages also turn up occasionally, but a lot who left refuse to come back. If I have to leave I am not sure that I will bear to return. Muriel Little's father was a Stephens from Edgeworth Valley Farm, one of 15 children I believe who had to trudge to Bisley School and back every day. If they were off ill or harvesting or crow-scaring then the school was half-empty, Muriel was told. She let me have a photograph of her father (looking glum) wearing the Bisley Bluecoat uniform and I very much regret lending it to Bisley School as it has disappeared. Muriel's point was that the quaint uniform that is worn so proudly nowadays by Bisley children on Ascension Day for the well-dressing was for Victorian children a badge of shame. It was supplied to families who could not afford decent school clothes for their children, making poverty public. She said her father hated it.

Muriel's mother was a London girl, who popped home to Chiswick from time to time – some of the Bismore postcards Muriel gave me were written to or by her family to give their arrival time at Paddington next day, reminding us of an era when the railways and the post were utterly reliable. Royal Mail is still reliable – so why do businesses persist in using delivery companies whose drivers often seem totally unable or unwilling to find Bismore?



One of the postcards kept by Muriel's family

Actually, to be fair, most people living locally these days seem never to have heard of it, and certainly do not take advantage of the many fabulous walks around here. It is odd. Why else live in the country if not to get out and enjoy it? I find that the first question a lot of people ask when they come down here is 'How do you manage in winter?' Well, we have food in the freezer and sacks of vegetables, logs to keep us warm, and plenty of candles for emergencies. There is nothing I like better than being cut off for a while. It is rare for Bob not to be able to fling the old Land Rover up the snowy hill, and he relishes gritting bad corners in the middle of the night, towing cars that cannot manage bad conditions, rescuing neighbours who are stuck at the bottom of the Vatch, and doing the Meals on Wheels run if asked. There was one never-to-be-forgotten night when he simply did not reappear, and with two babies howling I lost my cool at 2am and rang Red Lion House (a well known whisky-on-the-way-home-from-the-pub trap) to ask Susie to send him home. When she said she had not seen him all night, and had not seen her husband all night either, we began to worry and wondered whether they had died in a snowdrift in Nash End Valley on the way back from The Bear. We decided to consult again at 3am, but just before then the reprobate crept in, full of plausible tales of towing Volkos out of trouble and meeting really nice blokes who all ran their own businesses. He droned on and on, not realizing that my eyes were riveted on the boot print across his forehead. It turned out that the two of them had been tobogganing all the way from the Green down into Bismore. A friend later said, 'Yes, I heard them go down the path past our house. I heard them remember the bollard at the bottom, too.' What a digression. The short answer is, winter can be fun.



*Snow often causes a power-cut. We cooked sausages and baked potatoes in the log-burner, made mulled wine and put it in a flask, and set off in search of the heroic chaps clearing the roads. They were nowhere to be found (in the pub, no doubt), so we got satisfyingly soaked sledding on the Low Common and then had a feast back at the ranch*

The Stephens family had to leave in pursuit of work during the Depression – partly driven out by Muriel's catching diphtheria and having a spell in isolation at Cashes Green Hospital (and there was the threat of tuberculosis around here too – Mr Arthur Johnson told me that Mr and Mrs Ted Nobes and their children at Pendennis all died of it). Muriel was a very little girl and told me that she had always thought she remembered being taken to hospital in a glass coach like the Queen's, but assumed she had dreamed it or been hallucinating. I was able to tell her that when I was talking to Grace Winstone about the diphtheria epidemic she said, 'You know the Queen's coaches? The ambulance was a black horse-drawn coach with big glass windows'. If you look at Eastcombe Baptist Church's records, for example, they are heart-breaking for the infant mortality in the days before antibiotics. Mine is the lucky generation in this as in so many other ways: my own elder brother was saved from pneumonia by M&B tablets that my mother regarded as miraculous – penicillin arrived in time for us but not for our parents' generation. Muriel's father got a job working on the airships at Cardington, if I remember rightly, and after that they moved and moved; but even after all those moves Bismore was the only place they hankered for, and the Bismore photographs were the only memorabilia the family preserved... I understand that.

I love history. I love history books, but find that most of the big-name blockbusters which are so successful nowadays are really slovenly productions, perpetuating myths and ignoring recent research, with virtually no reference to primary sources; and I have to be satisfied with acquiring just one or two previously-unknown-to-me facts from each. On the other hand, I have always been glad that a lot of local history books are published hereabouts, and I enjoy reading them...and I love hearing people's memories, though oral history can be about as reliable as Chinese whispers... Being so picky and opinionated about other people's work, I have to apologize now for producing something that is *not* academically respectable, *not* the result of research, something really *hasty* – but I feel it is now or never. It is hardly a case of rushing into print. We have lived in Bismore for 26 years already (Bob regularly suggests I restore our fortunes by writing *A Year in Bismore*, but actually I want to go on living here) and there have been too many reminders recently that life is short, and my memory shorter. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee is looming as I write this, and I decided to treat it as a deadline. This booklet is to celebrate our splendid community, but is mainly a vehicle to publish more widely the writings of John Lane, Frances Deacon, and Muriel Little – the primary sources I and nobody else have access to. After they have had their say I will add the little I know about Bismore.

## THE UNSETTLED FAMILY

*I think the best way to introduce Frances Deacon is to quote from her first letter to John Lane. In a way it encapsulates the whole of her personality. She wrote to him out of the blue, from her home in Kalamunda, Western Australia, on 29 July 1990.*

A few weeks ago a friend lent me your book, *Fairbridge Kid*. I opened the book at random. Page 54. The picture! Eastcombe! Mrs Nobes! At 84 I should be beyond surprise how people and places pop in and out of one's life! From December 1919 to December 1920 we lived in the cottage almost at the Nobes' gate. The one with the window high – which I chose as my bedroom so that I could spend hours looking over the valley – The trees were tall then, I think they were cut down and more growing in your time...We thought Mrs Nobes not only a very good neighbour, but *a truly kindly and wonderful woman*. I know I had never seen such *clean* poverty before mixed with loving care. There were no 'extras'...She always had two Barnado boys, having them from when they could just walk. The money she had for them, and a pittance of a pension Mr Nobes had were all the money they had. Of course the garden and the fowls helped, and skim milk was very cheap. She always had a card near her and every spare moment she pinned safety pins on it. I think she got *twopence or threepence a gross*. Then she had to walk to Chalford with them! (All this used to make me feel so angry inside)...Oh, that beautiful valley, the trees, flowers, stream – I must *not* go on about Bismore. What I am hoping is that you still live in WA and that we can get together and compare memories of Bismore and Eastcombe...If you have a car perhaps you could come and visit me. If not perhaps I could come and see you. I get about quite a bit on buses. While my knees let me climb up! After being very happily married for 40 years I've been a widow for over 21. I tell everyone I've learnt more about marriage and sex in that 21 than all the years of marriage! For the past 13 years I've officially retired and live in a dear little flatlet...Unofficially I help with a group of 'lame ducks and drakes', most younger than I am. I refuse to call them frail, or daycare, or aged. It would take half a day to give an idea of my varied life. Enough to say I went to 14 different schools in two countries before I was 14. First came to WA in 1912 for 18 months. (I was six. Incidentally I was born on Easter Eve 1906 *the weekend of the San Francisco earthquake*. The 'Titanic' sank on my *sixth birthday*.) Next I came out in 1924. 1929 married an Englishman who was wheat farming ...1934 went to UK. Returned to WA 1963. Husband died 1969. I was in both world wars in UK. I am addressing this to your publishers hoping it will reach you. I liked every bit of your book. *[I remember that when I read out Frances's first letter to me the only comment – from Bob's 90-year-old great aunt – was 'Well. She's got a lot to say for herself'. Frances wrote a very lengthy memoir called As I Remember and I shall quote what she said about Eastcombe as well as Bismore as it is so valuable to have personal testimony from so long ago – the beginning, really, of our own epoch. She said that her parents bought our house in 1919, but sold it an exact year later. This used to confuse me – the Lypiatt Park estate was sold to a syndicate and then auctioned in 1919; and it is true that the Waites were not the only people who 'settled up' in 1920. I thought perhaps Frances was too young at the time to know that her parents rented the house – but I later discovered that they really did buy and sell in a year. She described going up to the mansion to sign papers. The holding she describes is what we have now, bearing no relation to what went with the house on the tithe map of 1842. I have seen on the auction map that our house and garden went with the field the other side of our wood – and it, described as 'in hand', was a separate lot but since 1919 has gone with our house. Sadly, we do not know what land it had in earlier years. At or before the auction tenants had the chance to buy the property they lived in, but descriptions on the schedule were very sketchy ('Cottage with land in Bismore') and the lot numbers in the schedule did not match the numbers on the map for our house and next door; and there is a story that Mr Nobes next door and the buyer of our house had to exchange paperwork when they got home, having bought each other's houses. Anyway, in Australia in 1990 Frances wrote as follows.]*

[My parents] bought a stone cottage and about five acres of land. There was a small beech plantation, a small spinney, the cottage garden and a field of about two and a half acres [*euphemistically described by us now as hazel coppice*]...



*An unusual view of Bismore, supplied by Muriel Little. It is taken from above Keeper's Cottage, I think immediately after World War I before all the woods grew back. Centre bottom is the dead-straight stream through what was then a hay meadow; parallel and just above it is the garden wall of Woodlands cottage, with the gate that permitted the occupants to cross the field in search of water from the pump at Keeper's Cottage. Above Woodlands to the left is our field and at the top of it is the bridlepath Frances mentions later. In the centre of the picture is our beech wood with Little Bismore and Honeyhill roofs peeking above it, to the right of them is Little Orchard, and to the right again is Fairview. Above that the Old Hill snakes up to the village, where the Baptist Church dominates the centre of the photograph, with The Lamb to its left, the roof of St Elizabeth's above it, and Brittany on Wells Road below it*

The day we moved to Bismore, we went by train to Stroud, complete with David in his pushchair and our overnight bags. Then we were to walk the four miles (uphill most of the way) to Bismore. So steep was the Golden Valley [*she meant Toadsmoor*] that no horsedrawn cart, or even a car, could go up and down the sides and Bismore could only be reached by going miles to Chalford and then winding through the road along the bottom of the valley. That was the way the furniture would have to go. When we got to Stroud, we found the removal men refused to go to Bismore that day, as they said they would not be able to get back before dark. They would go first thing the next morning. Geoffrey and I were excited to see our new home, and my parents thought we could manage to sleep one night in an empty house. So we set off.

First we walked about two miles up a long hill past the Workhouse [*now Stone Manor flats*] on the outskirts of Stroud. When we reached one of the gateways through the high wall surrounding Lypiatt Park, we turned right on, more or less, the top of the hill.

The way became a narrow lane [*Ferris Court Lane*] with high hedges which met overhead, making it very dark. The lane ended at the top of a wood, with a zigzag track down to the bottom of a valley with a bridge crossing the stream. Opposite were the half a dozen cottages of Bismore and at once I picked ours out as being the one with the attic window looking over the valley. [*Now Bob's office, there is still a stunning view from that window.*]

On this December day in 1919 we crossed the brook and approached our stone cottage. Actually it was two turned into one again. The front and back doors were side by side...In the cottage all the window seats were the width of the wall, which was about two foot thick. The windows were small square panes...The front door led straight into the sitting room, with an open fireplace on one side and in a porch on the opposite side a door on its left opened straight into a

boxed-in flight of stairs. *[All trace of these stairs has been removed.]* The porch itself ended in a door which had been cut into the wall into the second cottage. This was the kitchen with coal-fired oven, stone pantry, and door leading up another boxed-in flight of stairs *[actually spiral stairs making a half-turn in the thickness of the wall]*. Both these staircases led into a bedroom, each with an open flight of stairs into a large attic – only called attics because of their sloping roof. So there were four staircases for a six-roomed cottage. The outside toilet was of stone with a Cotswold stone roof *[we call this the potting shed but don't pot anything in it]*, as were the two really beautiful pigsties next to it *[now our greenhouse site]*. All our water had to be carted from a pump which supplied four cottages. *[Apparently this pump was at Fairview. When piped water came down to Bismore in the 1930s the tap that still exists at the foot of our vegetable garden was the standpipe for all these cottages.]*

Our nearest neighbour, Mrs Nobes, whose husband was partly paralysed, was a very kindly, good-hearted soul. She lent us the wherewithal to make some tea, a bucket of coal and a broom. We decided to camp in the sitting room for the night. David was all right in his pushchair. We were to sleep in our clothes, using our night bags as pillows. My father kept a good fire going as it was very cold. The floor was much harder than we thought it would be, so most of the night we played cards by candlelight. *[This struck such a chord with me. On the last day of May 1986 we rather chased the Kirklands out the house as we were homeless and did not want to rent for another month. We arrived late in the evening and had raced our furniture, which was in store. Chloë was one year old, still able to sleep in a travel cot; and I was feeling pleased with myself for buying not only a duvet and two pillows for us to sleep on the floor but also a loaf and a pint of milk. When we got up in the morning I realized that I had neither a knife to cut the bread nor a pan nor a cup for the milk. Quite typical. We spent the day at a party in Christchurch.]*

My father had decided that as soon as it was barely light he would walk in to Stroud to make sure that the furniture van started at daybreak. It was still dark when Mother and I walked up through the wood with him. On the way back a man going to work greeted us. I was a bit shocked until Mother told me that people in the country were always friendly and spoke to each other. Later, we went to thank Mrs Nobes for her kindness and to return her things and buy some eggs. We discovered she was a foster mother for Dr Barnardo's boys. She would take them when they were a few months old until after they left school. There were quite a few such boys in the district. The foster mothers were not paid much, but it helped out with their own families. Only Mrs Nobes didn't have any of her own.

She had cards on which she pinned safety pins every spare moment she had. This work brought her in tuppence or threepence a gross *[less than one new penny for 144]*. She was a clean, hardworking woman. I only went in her living room once. Everything was very bare, just wood forms and no cloth on the scrubbed table. I don't think she even had much china. The only luxuries were one or two snapshots 'old boys' had sent from the other side of the world to the only 'mum' they had ever known.

Our furniture arrived early afternoon and then of course it was a big rush to get the beds up and made before dark. *[These days pantechnicons park up in Eastcombe and furniture is ferried down in small vans. I learn new words from the removal men. A particular favourite memory is the blue air coming out of the van that brought the Nederlofs' possessions from Holland – the men did not seem accustomed to alpine driving. Bob has forgotten, but our furniture entered the house in a very precise order, following different routes. There are five outside doors, and each deals with different pinch-point problems. It is very hard to get beds or even mattresses upstairs, and there are no 'coffin drop' trapdoors in the ceilings. Stone mullions all round prevent passing big things through the windows.]*

As soon as the Christmas holidays were over Mother took me up to the village school and explained to the Master, Mr White, that I was not 14 until April and could I go to school for those few months, as I had missed so much schooling over the years. He was a very modern and

dedicated schoolmaster and he said 'Certainly, even if it had only been one week'. [*Interestingly, Grace Winstone remembered Frances and her brother from those few months in 1920. Reg Fawkes also spoke highly of Mr White, and while training before going overseas during World War II visited him in retirement in Essex and had a kind reception.*] There had been two tiny schools, one a church school and one a chapel school. When the State took over, they used the chapel school and the church building was turned into a small church so that people didn't have to walk all the way to Bisley to the parish church.

Bismore is a tiny hamlet, whose address and post office is Eastcombe. Eastcombe, at that time, had no inn [*wrong, surely*], only one all-purpose store and a post office. It could hardly be called a village, having as its parent Bisley, some two miles away along the top of the ridge of the hill. Eastcombe had only one house larger than the cottages [*Frances missed The Laurels and The Triangle and Manor Farm*], and that was a girls' orphanage run by two Kilburn sisters... [*Frances explains that these nuns had another orphanage in Australia – and entirely by coincidence when she returned to Western Australia she found work there with the nuns, which she absolutely loved. Despite enjoying the feeling of having found truly useful work, when the time came to move on she was married from the nuns' homely school, and left to begin a strenuous life as a farmer's wife working in very tough conditions... In Britannia's Daughters Joanna Trollope says 'There was a great revival of celibate sisterhoods – not unconnected with the huge surplus of women in England – whose charitable work among the fallen and the destitute endowed them with a special grace, and status. By 1850 there were 16 such sisterhoods in London alone...'*]

Before Easter a number of things happened, parents had a visit from a couple of forbidding elders of the local chapel. Anyway, that is what they looked like to me. To put it as briefly as possible, there was a sort of scheme to educate certain children to become teachers in a few years' time. Not exactly ordinary scholarships but free places for picked pupils and they were to become teachers. Every school was allowed at least one pupil. Mr White had chosen me from Eastcombe School and the 'elders' had come to interview us. Would my parents agree to pay fees for me to go to Stroud High School for Girls for half a term? If the school considered me the right sort of child, would they sign to let me continue at school for at least four years to become a teacher? My parents were more than willing, in fact Mother said they would pay for a whole term. I was delighted on two counts – I loved school, and also I liked teaching. It was arranged I should begin after Easter.

I very much enjoyed my stay in the village school; for the only time in my life I was top of the school, for one thing. Mr White was such an inspiring man, and teacher. He would let me help with the infants sometimes too. Again the village children accepted me and taught me a number of their unusual games, which I am afraid have now almost disappeared. Radio, films and TV have given them other games. Two were rather unusual and only played there. The first I think was something to do with Spanish wars and the other one was French. 'The good ship sails through the alley alley oh! In the middle of September.' That was all the words that were sung and how they had been mis-spoken over the years that they were sung I do not know. [*Frances was wrong about this having died out. I played this game in Lincolnshire in the 1950s: there were several verses beginning with 'The big ship sails on the illy ally oh on the last day of September'; and it is true that the game became an obsession for a while with the girls who were about seven at the time. Iona and Peter Opie describe it well in The Singing Game, saying that it '...is now the most played of arch games...that little girls find almost mesmeric in the neatness with which it works out.'*] While it was being sung, a child leaned with one arm against the wall and the others gradually ran through and joined on the side of this one, until all had gone through and the game was finished. It was quite popular, although there didn't seem much sense to it...

There was a system among the top class that all boys and girls were paired off at the beginning of the school year. This was stage-managed by the eldest, or at least the biggest boy. I arrived in the middle of the year but there happened to be a very nice quiet boy called Stanley Marr, who, because he was a foster boy and a stranger to the village, had been an odd man out, so it was



*Mr White and his children at Eastcombe Primary School in the 1920s. Lewis Winstone who died in World War II is at the centre back of the top photograph, and his sister Grace is wearing the white pinafore in the middle row of the lower one. Reg Fawkes is next but two to her. With local children whose families are still living here are Barnado's children, and orphans from St Elizabeth's (in what appears to be a sort of uniform) including Theo who married Ken Wrenn. They spent their lives here. Lovely Marion Mills (see back page) whom I knew at Friday Club grew up in May Cottage on Wells Road - she is second from the right at the front of the lower photograph. Don't you love the plump lady and her son who, by the graveyard wall, were determined to get into the picture? Why was he not in school that day?*

quite natural he should be paired with me. Probably neither of us being country-bred, sex did not rear its ugly head. He would walk me home and he gave me sweets from time to time. He would say how he hoped to be sent abroad like numbers of foster boys were. He gave me two pieces of butterscotch once, each wrapped in paper. I suddenly realized it was Lent and I didn't eat sweets in Lent, so I put it in my pocket until Easter. He was very interested in this, and would ask me almost every day if I still had the butterscotch in my pocket.

My father had ordered an incubator that would hold 300 eggs. Pure White Leghorns and White Wyandottes. He bought books and studied it all up – what to feed them all on, etc. He had also bought all kinds of first vegetable seeds and seed potatoes, all of which were to arrive when needed. At the moment we had some old hens in the pig sties to keep us in eggs until the future chickens would lay. At the end of the garden where the spinney began, he started to build a stone-walled shed, large enough to house a horse and cart he hoped to buy. A bridlepath at the side of the garden went between the spinney and the beech plantation and through a gate into our elongated field. *[It is interesting that the path past us into the wood was still wide enough at that time to take a horse and cart. Reg Taylor (born in what is now called Toad Cottage) said that the baker's van used to go through the wood. Work done at Honeyhill and Little Bismore in the 1970s led to a reconfiguration of the paths that displeased a lot of people. As a result, of course, we now cannot get a vehicle or equipment into the wood to work on the trees.]* The bridlepath went through the gate and across the field, the other side of which was a spring which served some half a dozen or so cottages beyond *[the hamlet of Kitlye]*.

In one of [those] cottages *[now Hillside]* lived an elderly couple called Mr and Mrs Pocketts *[Pocketts in the 1901 census and Pockett in 1911]* – a real Gloucestershire name. When Geoffrey's godfather, Mr Daniel, came to stay for a few days, he slept in their cottage...

My father became ill, physically and mentally. Mentally because he was depressed and lost. His pension was small because he wanted to stay in England. Mother refused to return to WA while there were what she called 'mines still hanging around'! He felt he had undertaken more than he could manage. He discovered he hadn't the strength he had before the war and had been pushing himself too hard. After some weeks Mother managed to get a doctor to come out to see him. The doctor came by car to Eastcombe and, leaving his car at the top of the hill, walked down.

While the doctor was examining my father, a drama was being enacted out in the garden. Geoffrey, returning from school, ran out to find some worms for the fowls. He had just discovered they liked to eat them. He began to pull a large stone slab that was leaning against the pig sty. The next moment it fell towards him; he tried to pull away and it fell on top of him. Mrs Nobes happened to be passing along the lane and, seeing him, asked what the matter was. He told her to call for Mother but to shout loudly as she was upstairs. I came in from school to find Geoffrey lying waiting for the doctor to come and look at him. At first he did not discover that Geoffrey had broken his leg, but when he did he strapped it up with his scarf and two of my father's sticks. They put Geoffrey in David's pushchair; the three of them pushed him up the hill to the car and Geoffrey was taken to Stroud hospital. *[More empathy here: once in 1987 Bob helped me push the double buggy up the lane and somewhere around Crows Nest said 'I wouldn't do this too often if I were you' and I gasped 'You stupid man, I have to do it every day', and that was when we got our first Land Rover.]* There he stayed for a month as they didn't plaster legs then. Neither was his leg X-rayed and his ankle was always a little crooked. I think I only visited him twice – children under 14 were not allowed to visit. The second time I went I met the matron on the stairs – she terrified me: when she shouted at me 'was I 14', I almost cried as I told her that in a few weeks' time I would be. (I think she was probably touched by my honesty, but she didn't let me know.) She shouted at me that as I was so far in, I might as well stay – but not again! *[Some few years later Grace Winstone's mother, from looks and mutterings in a village shop, learned that her husband had fallen under the rail car at Downfield and was in Stroud Hospital. She and her two children got down there but Grace and Lewis were not allowed in. They heard their father crying for them as he*

died. The same matron? When interviewed by Tamsin Treverton Jones Grace told the story slightly differently. By the time I met her she felt her life spoilt by three events: her father's death, her brother's death in his tank just before the end of World War II, and her forced move (about 200 yards) from the house where she was born. I was at least able to print off the Commonwealth War Graves site a picture of her brother's gravestone, but there was nothing else to be done to please her. Listening to her stories, though, I realized that she had had quite a lot of fun over the years at work as a French polisher in a factory – more than when, as a maid at Overcourt, she had to climb out of her bedroom window on to the porch roof and run home across the fields to get away from an importunate manservant!]

Within a few days of the doctor's visit my father was in a special nursing home called St Martin's in Cheltenham. About that time Mother had 'words' with the pension people. They sent 14s [70p] for a fortnight for the four of us. She sent it back saying that as she could not feed us on it they might as well have it back, or words to that effect. Within a few weeks that was adjusted. I think we lived on skim milk, turnips from the garden, and any eggs the hens laid.

Then the incubator arrived and Mother and I tried to put it together. Mother never could follow instructions but with my help we got it working. The eggs arrived, at least as far as Stroud. Mother took David's pushchair for them as she was afraid they might get broken and waste what money my father had spent on them.

None of the neighbours would help us because they were afraid of things like incubators, and anyway we were foreigners – we came from Cheltenham (12 miles as the crow flies). We followed all the instructions carefully about heating and placing the eggs and turning them every day, etc. Then two different kinds of brooders arrived for different ages, and food. My father had worked out all their menus for different ages too. Then came the hatching day, even this we had worked out correctly. Through the glass slide we watched the little chickens break out of their shells and look all wet and funny, not as we had always seen them when they had a mother. They staggered drunkenly to the side and then fell down a sort of shaft. We looked in the book and found they were meant to do this because there was warm air to dry them and make them all fluffy. All the eggs hatched out, except eight, and those we found were infertile. We boiled them and cut them up and mixed them with the other food. *[We hatched out generations of chickens, runner ducks and guineafowl in our time, and dozens of children shared the inexpressible pleasure of watching those balls of fluff appear. Handling chicks is a joy, teaches children tenderness, and the facts of life and death. When I offered to transfer the incubator to the primary school classroom 10 or 12 years ago I was told that it wouldn't be allowed for health and safety reasons. I sometimes feel a danger to other people's health and safety.]*

We planted the vegetable seeds as and when directed and, when the seed potatoes arrived, Mother planted those as well. The vegetable garden was on a slope *[still is]* and the potatoes sometimes rolled out of their straight rows. When they came up and needed hoeing Mother asked Mr Pockets to do them for her. He scratched his head and said he had never seen such rows and was very disgusted. When he dug them later on in the season for her, he was more disgusted than ever because she had the best crop in the district. She, a woman, a foreigner, who couldn't even plant them in straight rows! What they all didn't realize was that my father had bought good seed potatoes in the beginning.

Geoffrey came home just before I was confirmed. He couldn't walk at first because he had been in bed so long, but he was able to take care of David while Mother and I walked across the muddy March fields to Bisley church for me to be confirmed. It was on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1920, one month before I was 14 years old. Mother managed to get me a white frock and Auntie Lena lent me her confirmation veil; she was my godmother anyway... It was good to have Geoffrey home. I would not be so lonely when Mother paid her weekly visit to see my father – which took her all day – and David and I were quite alone, often far into the evenings. She walked four miles to Stroud and then would catch one of the first type of buses to Cheltenham. This would take a couple of hours at least

in those days, if the bus didn't break down! When she got back to Stroud she had the long trek uphill all the way home. When she got to the top of the hill in the wood she would 'coo-ee' and I would answer, then dash in and begin beating up an egg to give her hot milk and egg as soon as she got in. This took me quite a while with a fork and saucer, but it was a labour of love to me.

One night the bus broke down. (It was before Geoffrey had come home.) I sat nursing David and trying to reassure him that Mother would soon be home. As time went by I was worried that perhaps she had had an accident on the way home from Stroud, but I hoped very much it was only that the bus had broken down. There was no way of finding out – no phone for miles. Every half hour or so I would go outside and 'coo-ee' up into the woods hopefully, then came in and cuddled David some more and made the bed up. Perhaps she had even missed the last bus. She had no way of letting me know. When I had just about given up I heard her 'coo-eeing'. At long last! She had hurried uphill as much as she could because she knew how worried I would be. It is hard to realize how isolated we were so few miles out of a town. *[When the proposed opening of a chemist's shop on the new estate meant our doctors were to lose the right to dispense to us, some of us fought a battle in an attempt to preserve things as they were. We were told this was impossible as we live in an URBAN area. Sez who? As it was, of course, the surgery, which for many years had been such a well loved luxury much appreciated in the village, also moved to the estate.]*

After Easter, my way of life changed again. I went to Stroud High School for Girls. It was a new school, not long built with spacious grounds, some quarter of a mile the other side of Stroud so I walked four miles each way to school – downhill most of the way to school and a long trek uphill home. I was away from home nearly 12 hours every day and then had my homework to do later. *[When our children went to the grammar schools 1996 – 2007 the school bus went past (not through) Eastcombe just after 7.30am before going on to Oakridge and Bisley. The children if walking would have had to leave home about 7.15am, walk nearly a mile uphill, and then not know whether the bus had gone or not. They reached school at 8.05ish in order to start at 8.50am – and that was so that the same bus could pick up children in Stroud to bring them up to Thomas Keble School. I advocated alternating year by year, and naturally was ignored; so by the time all three children had changed schools I drove each day, picking up other children who had missed the bus, and saving fares of about £300 a year – or was it a term? Why did I not think of sending them over the hill on foot? OK: I remember why...]*

I'm not quite sure but I think nearly all the girls were scholarship girls from the surrounding country districts, so we all brought our lunch and had a very long lunch time divided into three parts – one for lunch, one for recreation and the other for prep. We could have our own little patch of garden and grow vegetables; we used dear little gardening tools, easy to handle. If we liked we could use the lunchtime prep in our garden as well as recreation time. On games afternoons I would be very tired when I got home, so after a while I was allowed to do prep in the games period.

We made friends with the Antill family, a widow and three grown daughters, the eldest of whom ran the post office and, with her mother, did dressmaking. Miss Antill made my school blouses and skirt and I was very proud of them. It was the first time I had had a school uniform.

I enjoyed the classes in school, especially science, algebra and geometry. It was the first time I had done those subjects. Out of school I was *most* lonely; *no one* spoke to me for the whole of the first term. I had gone there after the first term of the year. Cliques had formed and no one cared; there was no one from my district. It was terrible – it was like being sent to Coventry. The second term I managed to get into a small clique. One of the girls happened to walk a little my way – I think that is how I got in. There were five of us, two were sisters, but if none of these was about I was again on my own. It was the only time in my life that I was alone and longed for lunchtime. I took an enormous pile of cheese and Marmite sandwiches. I was almost ashamed of it, but I did have my breakfast very early in the morning.

On summer evenings I loved to do my homework over the brooders to the 'music' of the cheery gossip of the chickens inside as they settled down for the night. As they grew bigger,

Mother and I made fowl yards for them and part of the day we let them out to scratch in the spinney among the saplings. I loved going to them with a bowl of feed. They would fly all over my head and arms and some of them landed in the bowl itself. They were so tame and beautiful, descending like a white cloud, never hurting me with their claws or beaks. As they grew bigger, again towards dusk when they usually came in to roost, some of the young roosters would begin to get ideas and pair off with a pullet. They would roost in the saplings and then we would have to throw sticks at them to get them down. *[I loved keeping chickens but like everyone else around here hated the fact that the foxes took them at every opportunity despite all the electric fencing. After I reckoned that we had lost, over a year or three, £600-worth of the children's pet rare breeds runner ducks, we stopped buying them and went in for hatching our own eggs; but the carnage was too hard to bear and in the end I have given up, as everyone does eventually. Not only the foxes but also the badgers and buzzards take eggs and chicks. Beastly things. And let's not talk about the rats.]*

Very occasionally we would all go to Stroud. Geoffrey and I would hitch ourselves to David's pushchair and pull it up the steep hill for Mother. One such day she collapsed in the hedge and looked very ill. Later she discovered a lump in her groin and she remembered, when Geoffrey was coming out of hospital, she had asked me to help her move the stone slab that had fallen on him. We tied a piece of rope around a third of it which had broken off and it was as much as we could do to drag it away; and yet before she had lifted it *all* off Geoffrey. She had given herself a rupture.

Sometimes I went into the spinney to learn my lessons and one day Mr Pockets found me reciting some of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. I am sure he thought I was mental! One day he was telling Mother about a skeleton that had been found where he had been working. He suddenly said to her, "ave yer ever 'eard of a man called Cromwell?" as though he lived in the next street and not hundreds of years ago. Geoffrey and I had trouble not laughing.

Best of all – that year in Bismore – I loved my attic bedroom and its view. I wrote the following for Mother's 'black book'.

*An Evening in June.* It had been a hot day, so hot and dry that everything longed for rain. Now it was cool, and the sun was going down slowly and creeping over the sky was the slow, grey cloud of night. The sun first began to leave the field in the valley through which the rolling, ever-tumbling stream runs, then little by little it left the beautiful wood on the other side of the valley which stretches far both ways. The sun began leaving the trees in the lower part of the valley, then taking the higher line of trees it left them also, and so on, taking and leaving line after line, until the wood was left dark and gloomy.

It was then that I saw the dark cloud of night stealing over the sky. On the other side a beautiful picture was being formed, for the sun was setting and sending out glowing fire-like streaks of light. Every moment the sun sank lower until only the reflection was left. A little later I was high up in my window watching the cloud of night creep over the gloomy wood. Nothing was heard save the ever-rushing stream over the waterfall by the little railed bridge in the valley. Now and again a nightingale broke the otherwise silent evening. I may have stood at the window some time watching this beautiful June evening, but the ugly tin-sounding bell struck 10pm. This made me remember I should be in bed.

As I left the window to get into my bed a peacock called to its mate. I thought as I went to sleep how days in June turn into beautiful evenings, but then I remembered that it was not June that made beautiful evenings but The One who is ever watching over the world.

F W Bismore Valley November 4<sup>th</sup> 1920



*This is the view from Frances's window that she loved so much (or how it was in the 1990s). The thin ribbon of the stream can sometimes be seen to the right of Fairview, Bismore Farm is hidden behind a massive sycamore tree, and on the far skyline above that is the solid shape of Nether Lypiatt Manor, maybe a mile away as the crow flies*



*The sun sets over Nether Lypiatt when the days are shortest. In the foreground is the doomed 'tree of life'. Unlike in Frances's day, now more than 90 years ago, we tend to watch the setting sun from the kitchen (built in 1970). Although from time to time I mutter that Lincolnshire lasses like wider horizons, in fact I have never lived anywhere with a more panoramic view and the opposite hillside is a giant sundial, or rather seasons clock, for us. At the height of the year the sun sets over Lypiatt Park, but by the winter solstice it is over Nether Lypiatt and the skies are dramatic – no, melodramatic. Our children knew that 'Goodnight, sun' meant that it was bath and bed time. Those were the days*

During one set of holidays in the attic on the other side of the cottage, Geoffrey and I put on our very first concert. Only Mother and Mrs Nobes were our audience; it must have been spring, for we picked branches of leaves for decoration and I can smell them fading as we were lying side by side doing the poem beginning 'Little Brown Brother'.

I don't remember us playing any other games or going for walks except to get milk across the fields. There were Geoffrey's broken leg and being interested in the chickens, etc. There were peacocks that had gone wild in the woods [*Sue Branfoot made me promise not to get peacocks – I once hatched one or two from Ros Smith's eggs, but they rapidly came to grief. I think our guineafowl, which I miss very much indeed, were quite enough for our neighbours to suffer!*]; there were primroses and wood anemones, windflowers which we had never seen before and a pretty white lacy flower which, when you picked it, made you smell all oniony – it was a sort of wild garlic, I think.

The fashion of keeping 'bees' and making 'bee wine' came to the Cotswolds. I don't know exactly what these little primitive forms of life they called 'bees' really were. [*Just a form of yeast, apparently.*] They were rather like a pale, sultana-coloured jellyfish without legs. They spent their time going up and down in sugared water and within two weeks had doubled themselves. While so doing they turned the water into a unique wine. As they kept on doubling themselves, people gave jars to each other. They then put a couple of tablespoons of sugar in the water and, when the two weeks were up, they poured off the jar of water and put the 'bees' into two jars of water and off they went all over again. The adults became very fond of this but not so the children. From what I remember it tasted most like mead. The Antill family, all four of them, were very fond of it and had bottles and bottles. Then rumour got about that it was *alcoholic*. The Antills were very strict teetotallers and, although they had been drinking it for months, they at once threw away the lot! In time the bees and the craze disappeared as mysteriously as they had arrived. Nowadays I cannot find anyone old enough to remember them.



*Bill Crooks, Lypiatt Park's 1920s gamekeeper, with white chickens (maybe from Frances) at Keeper's Cottage – his outhouse later became a garage, and is now virtually a separate cottage. Elderly friends still talk of the row of dead vermin hung up outside the cottage pour décourager les autres and prove the keeper was doing his job*

The chickens had turned out two-thirds female, which was very good [*telling me*] in those days of not being able to sex the eggs. By December they would be laying. Mother exchanged two pure bred roosters with the Lypiatt home farm, who were also breeding White Leghorns. As the year wore on my parents realized that my father would not be able to continue with his venture in smallholding, so they decided they would sell the lot. The poultry as a going concern (the pullets were worth a pound a head; quite a bit then), the spinney, the field, the cottage and the beech timber – the lot.

It was not on the market for long as a number of people were then going in for poultry farming. [*The Waites returned to Cheltenham and Frances was very happy going to Pate's school for girls.*]

In the summer of 1921 Mother sent me to stay for two weeks with the Antills [*at Cyprus Cottage on The Green*]. This I thought was just wonderful, to have a holiday on my own. After all I had had a very eventful year, three schools, moving house and taking care of David while Mother was in hospital. Also I had been quite ill that winter. I had been confirmed in the March before and now in Cheltenham was regularly teaching Sunday School.

In the 1920s people in the country seldom saw very good meat, and what they did was very dear. They had no choice; once or twice a week a travelling butcher came round and they could only buy what he had on his cart. [*What about all those pigs, though, and the slaughterhouses in Fidges Lane and at Bakery Cottage?*]

Buses had not begun to open up the countryside. Mother, realizing all this, sent me with a large piece of veal. The Antills were almost embarrassed by this gift. I was not in the kitchen when they unpacked it but one of the sisters, the youngest (who was not far off 30 years old), came and asked me if it was veal. When I said it was, she said they had thought it was and that she herself had never seen veal before! I told them that Mother had thought it would be a treat for them.

I had a great time with the four women in Eastcombe. Mrs Antill was a small, neat, quiet woman who sat tatting for hours, the bodkin flying in and out of her fingers so quickly you could hardly follow it with your eyes. She would tell tales of the valley when she was a girl, how all the cottages along the stream in the valley (and there were many more when she was a child) had a water wheel for spinning the wool. All this was before the cloth and carpet factories were around Chalford way. They walked many miles to school when they were quite little. She called me her 'handmaid'.

They killed a fowl and after it had been plucked dry and all the feathers put in a pillowcase, Mrs Antill would take a small handful of feathers in one hand, cut off the stiff quill bits and put the soft feathers in another pillowcase to save up to make pillows or feather beds. She was a good dressmaker and so was her daughter. Miss Antill, the eldest sister who ran the post office, showed me a good tweed garment and said if I would unpick it under her mother's guidance she would turn it and make a dear little coat for David. I should take his measurements when I got home. This I did, and the lessons in unpicking garments have been very useful all my life. She also made me a new wool frock, the first one I ever had made that was not a school uniform. It was the latest style, too, for what we would now call teenagers.

I shared Miss Antill's bedroom, another experience! It was in the days of camisoles, the forerunners of bras – they were usually made of calico. Hers were very neat but on Sundays she wore one that was very elaborately embroidered. This rather amused me because no one saw them anyway, but I suppose it made her feel special on Sunday!

Mrs Antill also taught me how to make very good spills which I taught a number of people (writing this in Western Australia I can hardly find a person who knows what a spill is. If you can imagine a home-made taper, only of newspaper, that is a spill.) There was a number of ways of folding a newspaper to make both spills and firelighters. The Antills knew a very good way which made them last longer. Newspaper was in demand for so many things – lining drawers, cupboards and shelves... You could cut the edges fancy, too; we also would cut the newspapers into squares

and, after making a hole through the pile with a skewer, thread a piece of string through and hang it in the toilet! *[John Lane also mentions this form of loo paper. I sometimes think it was probably nicer than the 'germicidal' Izal or Bronco that later generations (mine) had to suffer... And on that distinguished note I shall leave Frances's memoirs – her book is immensely long, but one day I shall try to type it all up and publish it electronically. Most of her letters repeated what she wrote in her book, but, asking for your patience, I will just go through them quickly.]*

4 August 1992. Dear John, It was so lovely to see you both on Sunday. Your smiling faces made my weekend! Talking about our old home in Bismore of course made me think about the valley again. The two vegetable gardens, the one running the length of the Nobes's garden by the side of the bridlepath, the spinney on the other side, and the acre of standing timber and the field beyond (which I think was about two and a half acres, we had about five in all). The bridlepath crossed the field to a water spring for the two cottages beyond. Then I began to remember that Geoffrey and I used to play in the other attic in our house...I thought you might like to dwell on this on your visit. Although the nature of the valley has altered since our time it is still THE VALLEY! In the same way old Mrs Antill told of the valley when she was a child... It's queer I have many happy childhood memories of countryside both in UK and here, and yet that one year of my life stands out like a star! I will be thinking of you and wishing I was in your pocket! My wishes go with you both for a very happy and interesting time and I hope you will come and tell me all about it. Happy journeying.

28 September 1992. Dear Muriel, I was just delighted to have your letter and like you do not know where to begin. Before I talk about Bismore I must tell you what Eastcombe was like in my day...1920...Eastcombe was the village green, around which, at the top end, was the Post Office run by the Antills...then there was one store which sold everything. On the far side of the green was...the orphanage (girls) run by two Kilburn sisters (Anglican). Until just before the first world war there had been two schools – church and chapel...the chapel one in Eastcombe was the school and the church school became a small church under its parent at Bisley. That was all Eastcombe in 1920, no buses or anything. From Eastcombe you walked to Chalford and caught the train to Stroud. If you lived in Bismore you walked up the wood to Stroud. No cars, carts or their horses went up the steep hill to Eastcombe. *[I am relieved to hear it. I am really cross when riders go up and down now, the horses could so easily break their legs.]* Carts with coal, or meat, or furniture, went along the valley through Toadsmoor.

Now about Bismore, in late 1919 the Lypiatt estate was broken up and sold by auction. Well into 1920 the buying was not finalized until after my father had gone into a nursing home, because I remember going up to the house with Mother for the final arrangements. The cottage which was built over *400 years ago* did not have any deeds, that was the unique turn up. I expect my father's name ARTHUR FRANCIS WAITE was the first on the deeds. *[Sadly, ours is a registered title and we have no deeds.]*...The cellar under the one half of the cottage was thought to mean swords and suchlike were made there, a sort of blacksmith's shop...there used to be a queer oven there. In 1920 Honeyhill was known as the Slate House because the Cotswold roofing had been replaced with slates...The left cottage which we considered had the front door had an open fireplace; the door into the cupboard staircase led to a door through to the other half which had a coal-burning oven and a door leading into the other staircase. *[The WI produced a charming village history book in the 1950s and in it there is a 1930s photograph of the inglenook in our hall. The oven had gone by then, replaced by a modern fireplace. When we arrived there was an already-old logburner installed, which we have now replaced with a more efficient one.]* On the first floor there was a door from one bedroom to the other. But not the attics. There was no wallpaper on the walls of my attic...*[Later occupants divided the second bedroom on the first floor into a landing and bedroom, and the second attic into a landing and bathroom. Heaven knows what cement was used, but one cannot drive in a picture hook. The roof beams (trees that were young in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, presumably) are also filled with this stuff under the*

*black stain, so stripping them is not an option. Bob rewired the old part of the house about 20 years ago and we then discovered that the under side of the floorboards was painted white – in other words, in the early days there were no lath and plaster ceilings... Of course, one shares an old Cotswold cottage with other inhabitants, and in the silence of the night I used to hear very Beatrix Potter-ish noises. There used to be a sort of ssh ssh ssh of something being pushed uphill to the beam in the middle of our bedroom ceiling, and then rumble rumble rumble as whatever it was trundled down the other side. During the rewiring Bob lifted our bathroom floor – and discovered an old nest full of gold chocolate coin wrappers. The mice had moved them from under the Christmas tree in the sitting room two floors up to the attic through all their corridors in the rubble-filled walls and ceilings.]*

I will not talk any more about the cottage and Bismore because in a month or two's time I will send you a copy of my book... My parents, brother and myself came to WA in 1912. The end of 1913, the doctor told my father that my mother would not live through another hot summer, so he sent us to England. We landed Jan 1914. When the war came he jumped into the Australian army to save us from the Germans. Of course he went to Gallipoli and when wounded came to UK. We followed him to different camps through the war...

At the moment I am a new woman and in a couple of months think I will be 20 years younger. I've just had a cancer taken from my bowel. It seems if you must have a cancer it's the best place to have one because there are yards and yards of pipes, they can cut it all away and join the pipes up. While the stitches are doing this they deaden you from waist to hips (like they do when you have a baby now) and feed you through an arm. So you lie there chattering and laughing for three days...and walking to and fro (with two nurses carting the pipes)!! The doctor said he had cut away every bit of the cancer and I would be home in 14 days. I was within 12. That cancer had been sitting drinking the best bits of my blood for at least two years.

I hope you can get through this scribble, my typing is so bad too!! But you must be bad at something!! I did love your letter. And the photos.

November 1992. *Please* don't call me Mrs Deacon, this is a great country for Christian names. This is really a Christmas greeting to you all to let you know I had your lovely long letter this morning and I will answer it all properly after Christmas in the heat of our summer when I do not move out of my cool little home after 9am... About phoning between the countries the best thing is to get the time right. You need to think twice about 'summer time'. WA is very stubborn and will *not* have it! *[I followed instructions, got the timing right, and rang on Christmas day. We really got on amazingly well.]* This is to wish you a happy and merry Christmas and many happy adventures in 1993.

15 December 1992. This is just a note to wish you all a lovely English, cosy Christmas. And to thank you so much for *Bisley* *[by Juliet Shipman]* which arrived yesterday as a beautiful Christmas present. And today your delightful card and letter greeted me. I am answering it quickly as I want to talk about *Bisley* although I haven't read it yet, only looked at the photos... Have a happy new year, oh, and thank you again for *Bisley*.

31 January 1993. Before I thank you for your Christmas letter, and the *Bisley* book *and* you phoning on Christmas morning, which was a delightful surprise, and before I explain why I have been so long answering, I must copy out some scribble I wrote about the *Bisley* book... I see 'my' Mr Pocketts was under-gardener at Lypiatt... Page 17. The 'new' cottages rebuilt in Bismore are Mrs Nobes', and the one in the middle *{Fairview}* was where the water pump was that we got all our water from. It was let into a wall just by. Every drop of water we had to carry from there... Page 71. The range was like ours, but I don't remember any mantelpiece, I suppose we had one... *[I must have asked about the handsome carved stone mantle that surrounds our sitting room fireplace, rather grand for a cottage – but there were and are highly skilled masons in the village.]* Page 72. That was like the inside of *our* privy. I suppose Mother used to empty it when my father was away... I see that when I was in UK last, 1979, we did have lunch in The Bear – Mr Clay was

the vicar in Bisley in 1920 when I was confirmed, I remember the first time we went to church with my father, I told my mother when we got home that he was called Mr Earth. (When we moved to Cheltenham the vicar was called Mr Hay!)



*A rather grand fireplace for a cottage, which luckily has a chimney wide enough for Father Christmas to climb down*

During our year in the valley we had nothing to do with the farms except for getting our milk. But in 1938 when my husband and I spent a week in a cottage in Eastcombe we helped a farmer get his hay in. He didn't have a cart or anything, the field was too steep. He had a sort of table upside down which the horse pulled around, when we got to the stack he would lift the legs off and then fork the hay on to the stack. It seemed to work very well. *[Our family has always enjoyed haymaking at Rodways. There are pickups and Land Rovers now, and the hay is baled; but it still needs stacking; and we still trot around picking up wisps with old pitchforks.]*



*Present-day haymaking*

Mr Clay showed us that the font was very old. When the church was redone in the nineteenth century the font was thrown into a barn. A new one was put in its place. It was restored to the church and the new one taken out some time in the twentieth century. The church and the seven springs were the only things we knew about Bisley. We never entered the village proper, as we always came over the top from Stroud... End of notes I made. Thank you so much for sending me the book. I have enjoyed reading it.

9 June 1993. Yesterday was a cold wet winter's day, I needed to turn my Dimplex off as carpet cleaners were coming. Then I really knew how cold it was! I went down to the letterbox and found three letters from the four people who write to me from the UK. I was just overcome!... Yes, you certainly have my permission to take any bits out of my book. Yes, I would certainly like you to let a publisher look at my book... Do what you like with the book... I have found the old snap I had enlarged of the Maiseys, Mr Daniel and the Waites at *your* front gate. My father took the snap.



*This 1919 photograph shows Frances at Honeyhill gate with her mother and younger brothers, her uncle and aunt Maisey, and Mr Daniel – the godfather who stayed at the Pockets'*

There were also some ration cards so food was still rationed in 1920; and a note from the headmaster to Mother. One of my neighbours here said that her sister, who used to work at Fairbridge Farm and still has its paper, said John Lane was ill in hospital. So I at once phoned (he lives about 150 miles south). His wife spoke on the answering machine. So naturally I thought she was visiting him. But an hour later John phoned me up. All this illness had been *weeks* ago. He seemed so touched that I was worried. I had never seen windflowers till we went to Bismore. Don't you dare say 'cow parsley', it's 'Ladies' Lace'. Sometimes people manage to grow it in their gardens in WA and call it 'Queen Anne's Lace'. I love it in a vase with bluebells or tall buttercups... I must stop. Hope you have a good holiday.

November 1993. Thank you for your letter which arrived a few days ago... I phoned John on Friday as it was his birthday and he told me about the visitors to Mrs Nobes' house... *Several hours later* after watching cricket (test with New Zealand) I have a note to the effect that in a book called *Old English Villages*, apparently written in 1986, there were mentioned Strutting Stroud, Beggarly Bisley, Painswick Proud and Mincing Hampton!... *Several days later* I'd better send this disgusting letter. You see how my typing is even worse than my writing. You see I'm never looking at it!! Even when I can spell a word right I type it backwards!! I wish you all a lovely Christmas in your snug stone cottage.

9 January 1994. Thank you very much for the Stroud calendar. These yesteryears are very delightful...John and Ronda Lane came through just before Christmas...I hadn't seen them since they returned from their trip...John told me about Florence Bottomley. She was not at Bismore when we were there. Mrs Nobes had two little boys. She couldn't have been in Eastcombe because I would have remembered the name Bottomley as it was that year there was all the fuss about Bottomley, about whom my father thought a great deal. It was the only time he invested money in anything except banks and houses... [*Horatio Bottomley, politician, was imprisoned in 1921 for defrauding thousands of small investors with his failed John Bull Victory Bond Club.*] When John Lane came I showed him all the photos you had sent me... He had phoned up the night before so I had them all ready. And thank you for your last letter which arrived a few weeks before the calendar...

23 August 1994. Thank you for your letter and the enclosed photo which you did not mention. I was surprised to see 'my' Mr White in the 1914 one of the school, I did not know he was master there before the war as well. And 'my' Miss Antill of the old Post Office... I do not remember what [your] walls were like in our time...I am sure my mother did no indoor decorating. She was much too busy doing the gardening...and of course the incubator and the chickens, and once a week she went to see my father in Cheltenham...

Last September being a year since I lost Dracula (my cancer) I was to have full tests to see if he'd come back. Part of it was weird as I saw the inside of my tummy on TV!! I asked where my appendix was and the doctor said it was round the corner!...

I didn't become much good with the old people at daycare so I gave it away at Christmas. But I'm thrilled I've become a tutor for adult illiterates. And there are so many. My first pupil is a huge intelligent man of 43 with a wife and five children...

20 February 1995. Thank you for your last welcome letter which arrived the first week in January and for the Stroud calendar, the only one I had from the UK... But I do have *This England* calendar which I get myself. I get the quarterly *This England* which people love to borrow. A happy 1995 Bismore Muriel...

November 1995. John Lane phoned me up the other week and had a good talk about his trips and visiting Bismore again. He told me once that if he wasn't married he would live in England... We don't get much news about Britain except murders and things. It seems Britain is fast becoming a state in Europe!! I'll try to write better next year. When I'm 90.

December 1996. I just do not know where this year has gone. I expect you are wondering if I am still in this world... When I struck 90 in April, I asked for no presents or party, but a ride in a helicopter. My nephew arranged this.. I had a whale of a day.... I can only walk very slowly...but I am all right above the waist. I can still talk!! We have U3A in Kalamunda and I just love it...

December 1998. Being the season of Christmas I thought I would send you greeting and tell you again how often I think of you in 'my' valley. Funny, all the places we lived in in my life and yet that year in Bismore stands out a wonderful gem! I have belonged to U3A since it began in Kalamunda... A friend was telling how in the first world war as a child, his mother and the rest of the family first evacuated to Painswick!! They went by train to Stroud and then a pony and trap to Painswick. You often meet people out here and discover you know the place they come from. What a state the world is in!! I think in about 50 years either computers or insects will rule the world. Probably the latter as computers break down. Ants are particularly clever and well organized. I phoned John Lane on his birthday. He seems to be busy acting as a kind of guide at Fairbridge Farm... I wish you all a happy jolly family Christmas and wishes for happy healthy days in 1999. [*Christmas is the best time for us at Honeyhill: the tree and greenery are brought in and put up on Christmas Eve – sometimes as late as after dark – rooms are decked and venerable baubles are strung up... The house fills with guests and the smell of roast ham and turkey and mince pies and candle smoke and everything else festive mingles with the crackling fires, and the open-house policy keeps us entertained for days as we never know who's coming (or sometimes who's been)... We stay en fête till Twelfth Night, and then the tree and green stuff are burnt and*

*everything sinks back into January gloom – except for when there is the rare treat of snow, the valley is a ghost of itself in the moonlight, and no torch is needed for the walk to the pub.]*

4 May 1999. Thank you very much for sending me *Oil Lamp and Candle* [by Phyllis Gaston]. I at once phoned John to tell him I would send it to him when I had read it. Of course he told me you had sent him one also. Very sweet of you to think of us. So I was able to put it by until I could find time to read, and so thank you... And now I want to talk about page 20, and confirmation. I was a very religious child and when I was about 10 I wanted to be confirmed. Mother told me only Catholic children were confirmed so young. We went to Bismore a couple of weeks before Christmas 1919 and we left there a couple of weeks before Christmas 1920. So we were in Bismore the whole of 1920. The rector of Bisley (I cannot remember his name)...and mother said I could be confirmed. The rector said Sister Angela, one of the two sisters running the orphanage, would prepare me for confirmation. I was confirmed in March not long before I was 14 (14 April). It was a cold wet day and Mother and I had to walk across muddy fields. My father was in hospital (war wound), my brother Geoffrey...took care of our baby brother David. There were children from other villages, we would be done in twos. The rector put me to be with his daughter. Some of the girls were so poor they didn't have white frocks. And nearly all wore veils... I was very excited to be seeing a BISHOP (that is why I am telling you all this because it says on page 20 that it [Phyllis's confirmation] was the *first time* a bishop had taken a confirmation service in Bisley church. I am sure you would find all about it in the church documents. I was *so* disappointed in the bishop (to me he was like a god). And apart from not looking right he coughed *and didn't put his hand in front of his mouth!!!!* and I saw right down his throat!!!! So I never forget the first time I saw a bishop – in Bisley. When we were getting wrapped up to go home we were all offered cocoa MADE WITH WATER in a district of milk!!!! So I have never forgotten the day I was confirmed. Strange to say it did not put me off religion...

I must write again when I have finished the book because there are several things I could talk about. When the garlic came in flower I thought how pretty it was and picked some and then of course I wondered where the smell was coming from. When we were out one day on a botany do, the mistress showed us an orchis that, if we picked it, would smell like CATS smell!!! I'll stop because you'll think I never had the book [if I don't send the letter] thanking you for it. My love to Bismore and those who live there.

*How I missed Frances's and John's letters after they died. John's widow, Ronda, still sends an Australian calendar every year, and I shall send her this booklet. I am delighted that I can still correspond with Muriel Little, and Rita in Canada. I noticed that all the older people apologised for their elementary education, but actually wrote fluently, well, grammatically, and interestingly. I am proud to have put them all back in touch with one another so that in old age they developed into a little family with the bond of their love for our valley. Knowing them gave me so much pleasure.*

## THE FOSTER CHILD

*In Fairbridge Kid, after sketching in what he in adult years discovered about his birth, John Lane on the second page launched straight into his testimonial to his foster parents, their home in the valley, and his greater home in the Eastcombe community. The first edition of his autobiography was published in 1990 in Australia, and soon a slightly expanded version was to follow after he had met people from his Cotswold past. John gave me permission to use the following text. I apologise if my asides are too intrusive. He also wanted An Illegitimate Life published, so it will go in the Eastcombe Archive.*

Tucked away in the seclusion of the Cotswold hills, almost forgotten by time, Sam and Rosa Nobes lived in one of a handful of stone cottages that formed the hamlet of Bismore in the county of Gloucestershire, England. The whitish-grey scattering of cottages clung to the lower slopes of a hill below the more populous village of Eastcombe that tumbled over the crest of the Cotswold plateau. Across the way stretched the wooded hills cradling the enchanting beauty of Toadsmoor Valley. A narrow stream crept cautiously from far off trees like a fawn grazing leisurely through a meadow, before disappearing beneath the track that twisted its way to Stroud. In the opposite direction, skirting a small copse of beech trees, the narrow dirt track climbed its way up into Eastcombe. In the 1930s Eastcombe was a village of children.

It was into this spacious environment of pure bracing air that Dr Barnado, as far back as 1880, decided to board out some of his host of orphans, free from the contamination of the cities. Eastcombe suited his requirements perfectly. Its strong Baptist community ensured a supply of the Christian foster parents on which the Society insisted...

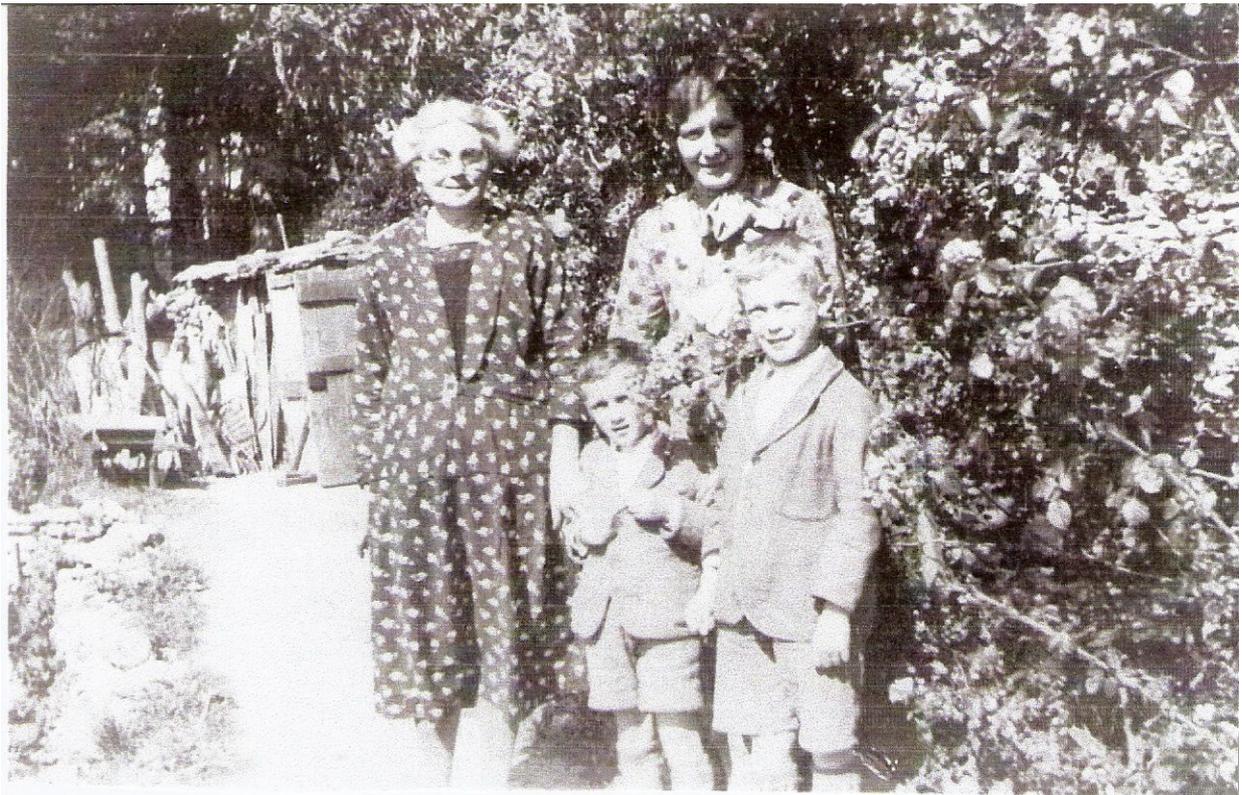
As I grew up, Mr and Mrs Nobes quite naturally became my father and mother, and Mother's sister was Auntie Flo. During my seven-year stay with them I shared one of three upstairs bedrooms with my foster brothers who seemed to come and go at irregular intervals. That is, all except George Brown. George and I survived the longest, and as a result, we grew as close as any natural pair of brothers.

The ground floor of our cottage consisted of a large kitchen/dining room, a living room, a scullery and a pantry. There was no bathroom, no running water, no electricity. Water was collected in barrels grouped outside the back door and connected to the guttering by a movable downpipe. Paraffin lamps and candles supplied the lighting. The lavatory was 20 paces down the back garden path. A neatly cut bundle of newspaper squares threaded on a string hung from a nail on the wall, and on a small makeshift shelf rested a stub of candle in an enamel holder and a box of safety matches. Once a week Father changed the pan. Further down the back garden was an open-sided shed and the woodheap. *[These lasted till 2010, when they were demolished.]*

In the front, Father had worked the half-hectare of sloping ground into a vegetable garden. He had to. Times were tough and there was little work about. Mother said how lucky we were to have so much land when most of the other villagers had only small plots of ground at the Eastcombe allotment gardens up on the fringe of the plain. *[The allotments were to compensate for the enclosure of the common. New or renewed cottages built by the Doringtons of Lypiatt Park, such as Keeper's Cottage, Fairview, Woodlands and Little Bismore in Bismore, and many others through Bisley as far as Througham, seem all to have been given roughly an acre of land. Very enlightened.]*

Father was a big-framed fresh-faced man with thinning sandy-coloured hair that could have been auburn in his youth. Then he was nearly 50 and there was a strangeness about him that frightened me. His severe speech impediment prevented us from communicating, a situation which quite often left him terribly frustrated. When I was old enough to understand, Mother explained that he had survived both the Boer War and World War I – but at a cruel cost... Mother was all giving. Childless herself, she not only displayed incredible tolerance in dealing with Father's affliction, but devoted many years of her life to raising orphans. The supreme altruist, she was worshipped by a succession of foster-children to whom she gave all her love in equal portions.

Many of her 'children' after reaching adulthood still returned to see her. Florence and John Bottomley paid regular visits, and never failed to take me on a special outing. Life was wonderful.



*Rosa Nobes with Florence and John Bottomley. Is the other foster child John's 'brother George'?*



*From the left: woodshed, loo and Nobes's cottage, Bismore Cottage above the yew tree, Honeyhill and, on the right, Little Orchard with no studio in its back garden (or is it there behind the orchard?)*

With brother George at school, my activities were restricted to the house and garden, which was still a sizeable playground... But my pre-school days were not all filled with play. I remember helping my father to dig potatoes. As he forked them out of the soil, I filled my special pint-sized bucket and carted them off to the shed for bagging. The trip took me along the lower path that ran the length of a sharp drop into a gully that must have been the most fertile strip of land we had. Along its entire length grew a prolific crop of head-high stinging nettles, so rich in yield that had a trophy been awarded for the best display, Father would have won in perpetuity. *[Funny: I have often thought of having 'Bismore Open Gardens', when I could show how ivy, nettles and brambles should really be grown.]* At best the stinging nettles protected our lower boundary from sneak attacks...while at worst, a fall over the embankment would be only marginally less disastrous than a trip to hell, which, even at the age of four, I knew was a most undesirable destination. At any rate, with a potential disaster area so close, it was a powerful stimulus for concentration.

Apart from the garden, there was little else I could do to help. When I did try to lighten Father's workload in the harvesting of the currant and gooseberry crops, my efforts went unappreciated. There was no small amount of conjecture amongst the family as to the phenomenon of a failed yield... Apparently none of the family had counted on the guile and cunning, not to mention the appetite, of one small child. *[Funny again: I remember my parents uprooting the whole of our strawberry bed after a 'failed' crop. I never confessed.]*...even now I think that my exploits would have gone undiscovered if I had not been untimely and suddenly stricken with diarrhoea...further punishment was unnecessary...

So far as I can remember, there were only two more attacks on my life at that time; one by my brother George, and one unintentional suicide attempt. The self-inflicted injury happened when I was cleaning a jagged piece of jam jar over one of the water butts and nearly severed my fingers off one hand. *[When the Borkowskis lived at Woodlands the garden was kept beautifully by Ted Smith. Kate rang me one day and said 'Are you any good with blood?' Ted had fallen from a ladder while holding shears. There was rather a lot of blood. I wrapped him up in dinner napkins before taking him to Casualty, and then was furious to discover that my linen had been thrown away by a nurse! Whenever I was aware of being alone in the valley (often) I used to hope not to cut an artery that day.]* The other near-miss came from being too trustful of my brother. Sunday morning was the only chance the family had of sleeping in, but for us boys it meant little other than finding something to do for the extra hour before breakfast. George as usual came to the rescue with a new game – bum fights. Dressed only in our long nightshirts, the idea was to position ourselves back-to-back on the bedtop and trade bump for bump with our backsides. Predictably the game got out of control, and in the end I don't know who or what made the most noise: my bellow of anguish as I flew across the bedroom, the crack of my skull hitting a thick porcelain object, or Mother's cry of despair and look of horror as she burst into the room... The one redeeming feature in my favour, and perhaps a life-saving detail, was the fact that the jerry was only half-full.

*[Jack then talks about the joy of starting school at last, followed by the misery of being teased about the surname he never previously knew he had: Ramsbottom.]*

This sudden crisis in my life was a new experience; an introduction to unfamiliar and disturbing emotions. There was no escaping the deluge of taunts, the innuendos, the sniggers and the outright belly laughs that accompanied me wherever I went in the playground. I had the distinction of bearing a name that humoured other kids, yet left me confused, bewildered, and hurt. I had no answer to their jibes. However, it could have been worse. There was some consolation in the fact that most of the children at the Baptist church were Dr Barnado kids, fostered throughout Eastcombe. That was something we had in common. There were no grounds for taunting there...

Although I was too young to be troubled by it, the Great Depression forced most families into an extremely frugal existence. *[A London friend of my mother once told me that in those years if he spent a night in a hostel for the homeless unemployed he slept in or on his clothes, which were his only possessions – otherwise they would have been stolen.]* Jobs were scarce and money was

tight. People worked long hours to earn barely enough for the necessities of life. Luxury was a forgotten word. The closest my parents came to it was to sit down to a simple supper of bread and cheese on a Saturday night, and wash it down with the pint of beer that Father had carried home in a jug from the Lamb Inn up in Eastcombe. *[Jack goes on to describe the engrossing pleasures of conkers, whip-and-tops, and other playground crazes that came and went.]*

The most spectacular event to shatter the tranquillity of our part of the Cotswolds was the motor-bike trials. It was the unanticipated suddenness with which these competitions materialized that made them so exciting. No warning was given. The first inkling someone had of the unusual happening was the sound of the trail-blazer's bike coughing its way through the village while the rider scattered red powder that marked the way for the oncoming contestants...If there was one activity short of war that could unite the villagers, this was it. Today, the adversaries were the motor-cycle riders and the objective was to make their passage through our hills as difficult as possible. Without a word being spoken or an order given, every lad went to action stations. In an extraordinary feat of engineering...a typical Cotswold stone wall was converted into a tank trap without mechanical aid, in less than half an hour...With our landscaping finished we were surprised to find an official had joined us in admiring our efforts...his smile of approval put us at ease as he positioned himself in the most advantageous place for judging the contestants...With the obstacles in place, there was nothing to do but wait for the fun to begin.

An hour later a shout went up as someone heard the first distant gargle of an approaching bike... In two minutes a noise like a swarm of angry bees was heading our way... When the front wheel hit the first rock, my hands went skywards in elation, while the bike shot skywards in orbit... Miraculously, the rider retained control to bring his machine back to earth in a precarious but successful landing... Before the end, he fought magnificently, bouncing from boulder to boulder with legs flying and motor-cycle screaming in protest, until through sheer volume of shot and shell, both bike and rider succumbed....

We kids were ecstatic... But when the last competitor walked his bike through the bend, silence returned to the scene with a greater intensity than ever... *[We used to love spectating in the woods when time trials were taking place on the way up to Ferris Court – cars rather than bikes in our time. It happened extremely rarely, but it was still too much for some locals who did not recognize the magic; and so recently, and abruptly, another treasured local tradition bit the dust.]*

Those villagers given to godliness were divided almost equally into two religious groups, Anglicans and Baptists... From the day I started day school I had to attend Sunday school...it wasn't until I turned seven that Mother allowed me to drop Sunday School. By that age she considered that I was ready for the Sunday morning Chapel service. When the family climbed the hill together the following Sunday, I had no idea of the surprise that awaited me.

For the first few months of Chapel, I was the envy of most of the other little kids in the congregation. George had wangled for me the job of his assistant organ blower...The pumping had to be started just before the minister's announcement, an action that, for the uninitiated, produced an assortment of questionable noises...

Both Church and Chapel celebrated certain significant religious days which, so far as us kids were concerned, were just an excuse to have a party. The Chapel crowd set the pace in a procession around the village on Whit Monday, parading banners and singing hymns, especially pausing outside the homes in which someone was sick. *[Try that these days and young parents would whip their children away as if they were being brainwashed by American-style religious fundamentalists.]* But the best part of the day came after Sunday school when a special tea with seed cake was put on. There were so many at this function that three sittings were required to feed them all, and with Mother wielding the teapot, it gave me the opportunity to lose myself amongst the crowd and set up chances of multiple helpings...

The Chapel's most spectacular day came in the autumn when the Harvest Festival was celebrated. Despite the bad times, year after year, there was always a magnificent display of

produce and grains to offer for blessing. Practically the whole foyer of the Chapel was a mass of colour, with tiered shelves packed with beautifully arranged sections of vegetables, fruits and flowers, home-made jars of jams and pickles, and loaves of bread in all shapes and sizes. *[That sort of Harvest Festival was spectacular, and very satisfying. No longer possible in the modern world, well meaning people have tried to substitute gifts of dried goods for hungry people. Anyone taking a basket of free food to a pensioner these days would get short shrift, so when a recent head of Eastcombe Primary School suggested that his children should bring boxes to the members of the Friday Club I countered that they might prefer an invitation to the School's Harvest Festival in the Chapel, and perhaps a posy each from the children. This we duly did with great success; but as I wheeled back my slightly scatty 90-year-old mother, humming a hymn and conducting herself with her posy, she was seized by a great idea. 'Muriel, Muriel,' she said as we reentered the club room, 'surely we know some old folks who would be glad of these flowers?' We all collapsed.]*

The Anglicans, for their part, celebrated Ascension Day by holding an impressive ceremony called the Dressing of the Wells. *[To be recommended.]* With the adults left to make their own way to Bisley, the Church organized a special outing for the children which left from the main street outside the church, where decorated horses waited, harnessed to colourful waggons spread with seats of baled hay. Although it was a rival group's outing, no one seemed to mind the Baptist kids joining in the festivities...



*Just once at the end of the twentieth century Eastcombe Primary School children walked over the fields to Bisley to join in the Ascension Day dressing of the wells*

*[Jack then describes the Chapel's annual excursion to Weston-super-Mare, with a bewildering surfeit of treats.]* With stragglers finally settled amongst the hotchpotch of nondescript packages and sprawling bodies, the long homeward ride jolted reluctantly into life. And despite the exhausted state of my little body, from somewhere deep within my sleep-racked head, there registered the fact that the moment of re-entry into our Cotswold cottage was the best part of the outing.

I must have been about seven years old before I realized that with pocket money practically non-existent, I'd have to find some paying jobs to do. Father was just not in a position to give us a

weekly allowance. He never seemed to have regular work, which was not surprising in view of his difficulties in communicating. I had seen him wielding a scythe when clearing a neighbour's property, and had watched him disappear underground when digging the odd grave or two, but the combined income from these labours would hardly have paid for his weekly pint. The closest he came to having a regular job was officiating as a verger at the Chapel's two Sunday services; eleven in the morning and eight at night. For these duties he was paid out of the takings from the last evening service each month. When he arrived home on these special nights, we kids were waiting to participate in a rite that was not to be missed at any price. *[Mr Arthur Johnson – see below – describes Mr Nobes as the Chapel caretaker.]*

We were already seated around the large kitchen table when Father took up his position at the head. Then with an unhurried sense of timing he produced a small calico bag bulging with money. When he upended it in the centre of the table, a deluge of coins flowed across the bare boards in a magnificent display of wealth. There were a few brief moments in which to relish the spectacle, before all hands set to to sort the spoils into their relative piles. Then, in an atmosphere of tense expectation, Mother and Father counted each pile separately, which, when totalled, should have amounted to exactly one pound. If it was correct, satisfaction oozed from every enquiring face. There was money in the house again. More importantly, there was something in it for us.

With deliberate ceremony, Father selected two of the shiniest pennies and handed one each to George and me. Despite the fact that the same ritual went on month after month, there was never any lessening of the suspense and drama of the occasion. But if the pound was as little as a penny short, a cloak of disappointment descended over the evening... *[Jack earned more money by running messages for the pastor, and also delivering newspapers to two Bismore families. These sometimes came to grief when he paused for after-school football on the village green.]* It was a permanent source of puzzlement to me just how I did manage to hold down my job. But hold it I did, and what was more important, I was paid for it, adding another sixpence a week to the coffers. I was cultivating a liking for this commercial business.

Although Eastcombe had a small general store and on the fringe of the village on the Bussage road there was a Co-op, most people went into Stroud to do their serious shopping. A bus service took the route down the steep hill, past Toadsmoor Lake, then along the valley into town. But that cost money. There was a back road that went over Bismore Bridge, through the wooded hillside up to Lypiatt and along the Bisley road. Because we lived in Bismore that was the way we went. It was a pleasant...walk which gave George the chance to study the cars, while I was content just to count the numbers of vehicles that passed us. Apart from the usual half-dozen motor-bikes, some of which had side-car attachments, if the number of cars reached double figures it was a very busy day. More often than not the number was about five. *[Jack was sometimes allowed to take a bus to see John Bottomley, then living with another foster family at Cainscross. They would fish – without result – in the canal, skim stones, eat bread and cheese.]* On the way home, there was usually a wait for the bus, which made the location an ideal spot for the local busker. On one occasion we waiting passengers were entertained by a little old man dressed in a grubby suit and a peaked cap that threatened to fall off. He played tunes on a battered old concertina with a flare that demanded attention. The rhythm and style of his playing must have stirred an undiscovered musical chord somewhere inside me because the music had me spellbound. At the old man's feet was a dilapidated bowler hat that seemed in danger of blowing away for lack of ballast, a peril that none of the crowd seemed keen to correct. A couple of pennies was its only anchor. In response to a sudden surge of compassion, I reached down into my trouser pocket and withdrew my total wealth in my loose fist. Opening my hand, I counted four pennies and a threepenny bit. A quick mental calculation told me that the threepence was superfluous to my needs, so I quickly walked to the hat and dropped the coin in. My action was without hesitation, but after I had done it, I was surprised to find how good I felt about it. After all, I had myself experienced some difficulty in the pursuit of money. The old man had worked far harder for his few coins than I had for mine...

Village life was usually fairly predictable. Our activities and pursuits were largely governed by seasonal weather patterns. Only the most severe weather conditions kept the kids inside, and I was ever grateful to Mother for giving me the freedom to join the others in extracting every skerrick of enjoyment from our environment. There were times, of course, when I appreciated my home life to the fullest. Life was very comfortable in our little Bismore cottage, and although we had few amenities, I was always happy enough and never felt deprived.

There was no electricity, no running water, no bathroom even. No priceless art collection gathered dust in the cupboards, no masterpieces accumulated wealth on our walls, and no Ford dripped oil in our driveway. Yet we lived in an environment of plenty. Our riches lay elsewhere, we were surrounded by wealth. Our treasures were the love and warmth of a close-knit family, our priceless paintings hung from every window, from the front door and beyond. And all were landscapes that had the magical advantage of changing with the seasons, so that without extra cost, viewings were to be had of nature's magnificent panorama; uncluttered, unspoilt and undamaged by man's disastrous attempt to improve perfection.

Perfection may not have invaded the kitchen, but charm and warmth were substituted by the bucketful, especially on bath night. While I was still young enough to need supervision, being bathed was my favourite luxury. For Mother, it was sheer hard work. Out from the scullery would come the old bath tub, while a row of large saucepans competed for the erratic flames from the kitchen fire. After carefully balancing hot with cold, Mother sat me in the tub and set to work lathering and scrubbing while I lay back revelling in the warmth of water and fire. When I was done, she lifted me out and sat me on the towelled surface of the kitchen table, where she dried me down before slipping a prewarmed nightshirt over my head. Even after all that fussing I would trot off into the living room where Auntie Flo would lift me on to her ample lap and wrap her strong arms around me..*[Unmarried Auntie Flo Butcher (born in Stancombe) walked to and from work at Critchleys (still visible in the industrial estate across the A419 and railway at the bottom of Toadsmoor) six days a week, but collapsed there and died of a stroke in 1931. Mr Johnson told me that, as she had been a large person, moving her coffin up to the Chapel presented a great problem: it took eight men four hours to get it out of the cottage and up the lane. The pastor always escorted a funeral procession from the house to the Chapel, and Mr Johnson remembers in December 1938 watching, from a window at The Manse, his father walking the length of the top of Fidges Lane, in a snowstorm, in front of the horse-drawn hearse bearing Miss Esther Hammond from Fidge House, as Fidges Hill House was then called. He learned later that out of sight of the village his father had instructed the undertaker (Restall of Bisley) to take the hill at a gallop, otherwise they would never have got up the lane!]*

If Auntie Flo's death had been bewildering, the sight of a new-born baby was nothing short of a miracle. And what more appropriate person to perform the miracle than the teacher of God's word himself. It happened one Saturday morning when I reported to Reverend Johnson in my duties as his errand boy. On this occasion I was surprised to find myself being invited inside The Manse and directed to a room just off the passageway. In the centre of the room a crib rested on a stand. The inside of the crib was filled with a bulge of blankets out of which protruded the tiny head of a baby. Mrs Johnson had now joined her husband beside the crib and proudly announced 'God has blessed us with a son, Jack, I'd like you to meet little Arthur' *[who is a pillar of this village and a fount of local knowledge. Speaking of babies, I am reminded of another story I hold dear. Nowadays a new baby and mother must see a midwife each day for ten days after the birth. For us that meant visits from a splendid Frenchwoman who is well known around Stroud in her 2cv, though now long retired. As she left one day I got out of bed to wave her off from the window, in time to hear her calling up to Bob on the veg patch, 'Goodbye, Mr Brooooooks. What are you doing up there?'* When Bob replied, 'Cleaning out under the gooseberry bushes' she turned to look up at me, wide-eyed, hand over mouth, saying, 'Ooh la-la! Alreadeeeey?']

Summer was always the season for exploration and adventure. We invaded the woods, knew every

track, almost every tree. The hazel nuts were closely watched with keen competition to find the largest pods [*the plaguey squirrels get there first now*]. During the conker season the foliage of massive chestnut trees housed a rookery of plundering boys. We explored the remains of an ancient sawmill at Toadsmoor, with only a few weed-infested mounds of sawdust left as evidence of a once thriving timber industry. A few holes of varying sizes dotted the area... Bill lay flat on the ground beside the most fresh looking of the holes and unflinchingly thrust his right arm in as far as he could reach. Success was almost immediate... 'It ain't 'alf heavy,' said Bill, slowly retracting his arm. The next moment his hand came into sight, or at least it would have been his hand were it not for the fact that it was hidden under a writhing green skin. It was ten minutes before I found out how long the two snakes were. By the time Bill's hand came right out, I was the other side of the Toadsmoor brook. After waiting for what I considered to be a prudent period of time, I dared a glance back to see if the snakes had been taken care of, only to find myself staring at a three-metre stretch of water. There were few wider places along the entire length of the brook, and it took me ten minutes to find a spot narrow enough for me to jump back. It was the first inkling I had that there were distinct future prospects for me in the athletic world.

On a hot, drowsy Saturday afternoon, charming Toadsmoor Lake lay helpless under the onslaught of a gang of marauding children. One minute she was a serene picture of poise and grace, reflecting the perfect image of an empty sky bordered by a bank of massed trees; the next, she became a beauty ravaged. Flat stones were sent ricocheting across the still surface, while larger rounder ones exploded into the now disturbed water like shells on a battlefield. A few minutes of colliding evergrowing circles and the carnage was complete. Then, having spent all our ammunition, we plucked large handfuls of watercress from the shallows of the stream where it entered the lake, and headed for home. In the depth of winter, Toadsmoor froze. Her beauty was cloaked with a more appropriate selection from her wardrobe. The wide green bonnet of summer was discarded in favour of a patterned white shawl that enriched her body with a dazzling simplicity. She was still subjected to violation, however, only this time she appeared to welcome the attention from visitors who tickled her ribs in day-long skating performances. Yet always her deeply scarred evening face repaired itself, and she awoke to reveal the magic of her recuperative powers by parading with all the charm and softness of her former self.

But before winter set in there was Guy Fawkes night to celebrate. In my childhood days nearly every family held its own celebration, using the occasion to burn the accumulated rubbish. [*Before dustmen called round, every garden had its 'dirty corner' and those left in the woods reveal fascinating, and occasionally hazardous, traces of earlier inhabitants.*] The amount of rubbish in our household wouldn't give off enough light to see a way to the lavatory, but, fortunately, a copse of beech trees behind our house supplied us with enough material to build a sizeable bonfire. [*Oi!*] For several weeks before 5 November, the wood was regularly patrolled for fallen branches and pieces of dead wood, and masses of dry leaves were raked up and carted back to the bonfire site. On the day of the big bang there wasn't a twig to be found anywhere, so it was common practice for those with pathetic prospects to pool their resources so that two or more families shared a decent-sized fire.

Fireworks were more difficult to get. The traditional fund-raising venture was to parade an impressive looking 'guy' from door to door around the village, inviting the occupants to contribute a penny towards the poor chap's send-off party. The trouble with this system was that there were too many guys being paraded for the economy of the village to support. Unless you had something outstandingly original to present you were given short shrift. Competition was so keen that parents were known to keep their wardrobes locked for weeks leading up to the big night. A man's suit was a prize possession that had to last for years. Consequently, any guy dressed in one, no matter how decrepit, was treated with more than a little suspicion. But when it grew dark enough, a hundred guys occupying place of honour no matter how precariously balanced on top of each pile were set alight to the vocal delight of the children, and the more muted approval of the adults. And with the

low cloud a mass of flaming reflection, the children who had naïvely thought that just because they had done all the work they could demand the 'box' seats, found themselves rudely displaced from the vantage spots by ignorant adults. Always, there was plenty of action. *[When we first came to the village the tail-end of this custom remained, but gradually everything became sanitised. I do not think it was concern for children's safety and the ban parents put on house-to-house visits, or even politeness in the face of so many of the Fawkes family who live around here, that brought the practice to an end, but sheer squeamishness on the part of the literal-minded who saw past the symbol to the historical meaning. Elfin safety and a passion for fund-raising took the fireworks to a big display at Thomas Keble School, seldom held on 5 November itself. For quite a few years there was a bonfire and fireworks at The Lamb, which I used to watch with the babies from our bedroom window. We fondly remember the year when Bob and his father took an out-of-date distress flare to add to the festivities. It failed to go off and they came home with it dangled out of the Land Rover window, saying 'You hold it' 'No, you hold it' to each other... Now we have a pyromaniac son. No surprise there then.]*

When it came to letting our fireworks off, it was a wonder there was enough gunpowder left to ignite them. For days before, I had performed a daily ritual of taking them out of their box, stacking them in their various groups, counting them carefully, and then re-stacking them. Each time I did it, a residue of fine black powder was left to be swept up. George and I usually started the night with what we regarded as the least spectacular of our collection: sparklers. Rather than just wave them about in our hands, on this the Guy Fawkes night of 1931, I had worked out a special plan. With the bonfire positioned behind the house, I had to run with a lighted sparkler to the front garden and do a lap of the paths before the sparks expired. When the moment arrived for the start of the big event, the family sent me on my way with a lot of encouraging shouts. This made me feel good and no doubt contributed to the excellent start I made. Counting away my time, I whizzed around the side of the house, past the front door, up towards the gate before turning off down to the lower path that led back to the finishing line. Everything was going well till I came to the gooseberry bushes. Then I made my big mistake.

I looked to see how much of the sparkler was left. It was only the briefest of glances, but it was enough for me to become momentarily disorientated. And of course, it had to happen at the most crucial point of the circuit. At that precise moment it was vitally important that I should change down and brake hard for the ninety degrees right turn into the lower path. I executed the correct procedure well enough; the error was in the timing. And with no crash barrier in place to protect me from the consequences of my indiscretion, instead of a right turn, I went right off. Over the embankment I tumbled to land amongst the forest of stinging nettles. It was my bawling that alerted the family to the fact that I had come to grief. The ever reliable George led the rescue party, homing in on my distress signals and delivered me out of the jungle into the arms of Mother who waited as anxious as ever to apply salve to my wounds. There was only a short delay in proceedings; the threat of missing the long-awaited fireworks was incentive enough to effect my rapid recovery. And by the time the potatoes were pushed into the dying embers of the fire I was well enough to leave the sanctuary of Mother's lap.

With Bonfire Night over it was time to prepare for Christmas. There were funds to be found to replenish those that had just gone up in smoke, and there were presents to be bought. Fortunately I still had my two regular jobs which, with careful management, would be enough for my purposes, but there were still a few pennies to be earned doing the traditional rounds of carol singing. No matter how affluent you felt, Christmas was never the same without carol singing. Every child in the village went the rounds in all kinds of weather, either singly or in groups, huddled outside a closed cottage door to sing with all the emotion that the occasion generated.

Once again, the generosity of the community was put to the test. Tolerance too was occasionally in demand. Some villagers had as many as ten callers on the one night. But generally the seasonal spirit of goodwill overcame most inconveniences and irritations. Only very rarely was

the singing interrupted by an impatient householder. Most people waited until a carol was finished before opening the door, and even if there were no pennies handed out, a sweet or a fruit mince pie, or even a hot drink was sometimes offered to the cold and often weary songsters...

I can't remember the days when I believed in Father Christmas. My earliest memory of Christmas is of hanging one of Mother's old stockings on the end bedpost, knowing that during the night she would fill it with presents. When George and I awoke in the still darkness of the early morning, the candle would be hurriedly lit before we scrambled to the foot of the bed to untie our bulging stockings. The bulging was not the result of being compacted, but it was the rather awkward shape of some of the packages. Although we both had a fair idea of what was to be in the stocking, we plundered the contents and tore away the paper with no lessening of enthusiasm. There was nothing frivolous about our presents. There were table games for playing on long winter evenings, some socks, bags of sweets and nuts, and always at the foot slept a candy mouse, with an orange tucked right into the toe. But in the Christmas of 1931 the moment of greatest joy came when I spotted the brightly wrapped parcel that lay flat on the floor. I knew it was the Bubbles Annual with its extra lengthy episodes of adventure, travel and sports, featuring Cucumber Kane, Fireworks Flynn and half a dozen other heroes whose exploits I had followed all through the year in weekly episodes from the pages of my favourite comic... Much later in the morning, when the family came to see how we had fared, our small bedroom burst into life with the sounds of happiness and delight in the joy of exchanging simple gifts. Mother and Aunt Flo...usually received small lace handkerchiefs or tiny bottles of perfume, while Father invariably received some simple accessory to go with his pipe. One Christmas George and I pooled our money to buy him a new pipe. When he opened the parcel, his face expanded into such complete rapture that the emotion of the moment has remained with me to this day.

In the aftermath of Christmas, the village social life, which could never at any stage have been described as riotous, reverted to its mellow existence. By virtue of its isolation, most of the entertainment resulted from our own efforts, but occasionally the Reverend Johnson organized concerts by visiting groups. These functions were held in the school, an auditorium being made by shifting desks, and constructing a temporary stage at one end. Most of the entertainment consisted of choral recitals, with some excellent performances by an all-male Welsh choir. The school, too, presented an annual concert with each class doing its own production...

An analysis of my life's achievements would reveal a distinct list to the negative end. As an excuse...I claim the acute embarrassment I suffered whenever my name was shouted in public. Consequently, when it was announced that little Jack Ramsbottom was to recite the well known nursery rhyme, Little Jack Horner, my distress began to mount. Despite a satisfactory rehearsal, when I found myself alone on centre stage clutching a bowl of Christmas pie, panic overwhelmed me. The words came out reasonably well, but when it came to the last line 'and said "What a good boy am I"', I was supposed to have been looking at a ripe plum between thumb and forefinger held aloft for the audience to acclaim my skill. In theory this thrilling climax was designed to bring the house down. The reality was far more spectacular and completely unrehearsed. Simultaneously as my last line faded into silent space unaccompanied by the appropriate action, the enormity of my mistake hit me, and without even waiting to execute the customary bow, I raced off the stage. At least running was the one thing I was good at, but the combination of a fast getaway and a clipped ankle spelled a recipe for disaster. Under the circumstances the steps were superfluous to my exit. My recollection of the actual landing is a little hazy, but I distinctly remember becoming airborne to the accompaniment of thunderous applause. When I regained consciousness, I was told that it was for an immaculately executed 'one and a half somersaults with tuck'.

*[Jack talks about the triumph Eastcombe football team enjoyed in the 1931-32 season, the feast to celebrate, the 'victory concert' with the players providing the music.]* An hour and a half later, the curtain came down after everyone joined in with the singing of *Hearts of Oak*, letting ourselves go for the last line, which went 'We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again'. *[He never*

*saw his heroes play again, as Barnado's sent word that Jack was to go back to London.]*

It was not a happy time for me. And it was not made any happier doing the rounds of the village farewelling the families with whom I had grown up. Right up until the last day I wished for a miracle to happen that would allow me to stay, but, young as I was, I knew that miracles just don't happen like that and that I would have to leave. And suddenly it was time to go. Father held me in his strong arms for a few moments, not even trying to get anything out. When he freed me enough to let me look at him, I could see the reason. The stress of a verbal farewell was beyond his capability. But he had no need for words; his eyes said it all. My brother George was plainly distressed. We had been put together for as long as I could remember, and the wrench was as painful to him as it was for me. He tried hard not to let me see him crying, so he gave me a quick hug, a muffled goodbye, and a wave of his arm as Mother and I started out to walk to Chalford Station. A final wave at the front gate, and we turned our backs on Bismore.... As the train gathered speed, I leant out of the window and waved at the fast disappearing figure of my mother until she was gone... *[Jack describes getting to Paddington and then being taken to an institution in Clapham, where he was very unhappy. The news came that some of the children were destined for Australia, and for a nine-year-old that was exciting. The Clapham home felt like a prison, except for Saturday outings to the common. One week he just kept walking and lost himself thoroughly in central London, but luckily a kind policeman on point duty took the trouble to talk to him and set him on the road back. There was no punishment, just lots of taunts.]* As it turned out, life at Clapham improved quite a bit after that incident. A letter from Mother gave me the lift I needed just at the right time... More fortune came my way in the new year of 1933... Seated in one of the big padded chairs in the reception room was Miss Radford from Bismore. She was the lady who owned the biggest house in the hamlet, set in a large garden which included an acre of orchard. She was also one of my newspaper clients who had helped keep me in pocket money. To think that this fine lady had taken the trouble to come to the orphanage and see me filled me with cheer.



*Centre bottom is Fairview (old part to the right), and above that to the right is Miss Radford's house. To the right of that is the artist's studio, later called Badgers Brook, built in the garden. The main room was a perfect cube with a fine array of north-facing windows. Honeyhill is on the left, with Bismore Cottage above it and The Glen to its right. I think the sheds to the right again mark the site of the lime kiln works shown on Victorian maps. The field in the centre shows how the fuller's earth slips downhill. Note that among the trees on the skyline there are no houses: the Andrews brothers were yet to build their retirement bungalows along Fidges Lane on the edge of Sheephouse Farm's fields* But that was not all. Miss Radford had not only come to see me, she had gained permission to take

me out for the day... Miss Radford led me by the hand into Clapham High Street... We dined in a very posh restaurant called Lyons. Several smart waitresses dressed in black and white uniforms scurried about in between the tables... It was the highest quality menu I had ever seen, and it was taking me a long time to get through it. Finally, Miss Radford came to my rescue and suggested something to which I gratefully agreed. Her advice didn't stop there either. All through the meal she quietly showed me the correct cutlery to use with each dish... Miss Radford may have been rich, but she was certainly not a snob. Her calm, gentle guidance put me completely at ease. She made me feel so very, very good.

After taking an hour to get through our lunch, as Miss Radford had called it, she asked me if I would like to visit the cinema... It was another first for me... It may not have been a very exciting film for a ten-year-old boy, but Miss Radford showed remarkable understanding by producing a box of chocolates from the depths of her bag and handing them over to me at the interval. Furthermore she demonstrated perfect etiquette by limiting the number of chocolates she took to just one... After the cinema show was finished, Miss Radford walked me back to the home. She had treated me to the most remarkable experience of my young life, and because of its spontaneity it was all the more enjoyable... But of all the gifts Miss Radford showered on me that memorable day, the most treasured of them was the immense feeling of esteem she gave me. Not many orphan kids experience it... *[Hester Maitland Radford, Muriel Little says, lived with Mr Radford (her father died in 1919 so perhaps this was her brother?) who distressed Muriel's father by offering to adopt her on the grounds that Mr Stephens was young enough to have more children and he was not! Soon afterwards as Hester Maitland in Little Orchard (confusingly then called Woodland), she had built the studio later called Badgers Brook, and rented extra land from Charles Taylor across the lane in what is now Fairview garden (for £3.00 a year, with the option to buy it for £20.00!) By 1935 she had become Countess Batthyany, and the only time her name cropped up in our time here was when the Parish Council was approached by the Hungarian Embassy to find the whereabouts of Count Ervin Batthyany's grave. With the fall of the Iron Curtain it had become possible for him to be declared a Hero of the Revolution. That's Bismore for you! I now know that her parents and doctor brother were well known litterati and she was a respected artist, moving in rarified circles.]*

The winter of 1933 was cruel... Then something happened that turned the most chilling Arctic days into a tropical paradise... I would be leaving for a two-week visit to my parents in Bismore... To think that after nine months I would see my parents and all my old friends again was almost beyond belief. And when I heard that Eastcombe people had contributed the cost of my train fare, I cried. It was the kindest parting gift they could possibly have given me...

For the next two weeks in Bismore I was a celebrity. I must have been one of the first children to have been chosen to go to Australia, and the villagers weren't going to let me leave without a proper send-off... I reserved the final day for the best. More than anything else I wanted one last walk through the steep fields and woods that I had grown to love so much over the years. I had deliberately denied myself this pleasure, savouring the anticipation with mounting excitement. As I set out on my lone journey along the slopes of the Toadsmoor Valley, I willingly succumbed to the spell of vivid imagination induced by magical potions dispensed by nature's creators in residence. The gentle fold of the Cotswolds tumbled before me like an ever expandable table covered with a lush emerald-green cloth. An irregular pattern of tracks intricately woven into the fabric substantiated its originality. To complete the extravaganza, little imagination was needed to picture models displaying exclusive creations along catwalks that led to the horizon. Across the stream, resting in the wings of the hill opposite, the awakening branches of beech, elm and ash stretched sleepy arms to embrace a refreshing shower before slipping into daringly brief costumes featuring bursting young buds that held promise of superb summer fashions. In the distance, Toadsmoor Lake lay silently holding her breath in appreciation of the presentation, yet delighted enough in having such a favoured viewing position that she grasped long stretches of scenery to hold them close in perpetual reflection. I lingered long over this spectacular display, savouring

every moment, recalling over and over again the enjoyment that the woods had freely given, and knowing only too well there would be an awful long time between meals. That night, back in my favourite bed for the last time [I thought that] through no wish of mine I was being uprooted and taken from people and life I loved for a purpose I could not understand. And to make matters worse, there were no comforting words from George that night. He had been recalled to Barnado's two weeks before my visit.

When the time came to leave the little Bismore cottage, my father placed his arms on my shoulders, and with more emotion than I had ever seen him display before, struggled to get out his few words of farewell. I could not understand all his words, but Mother repeated them with no loss of feeling. 'Thou hast been a good son, Jack, dost write and tell us all about Australia, an' when thou grows up to be a man, dost come back and see us'...his face was red with the effort of his speech, and his eyes were wet with emotion... Instinctively I flung my arms around my father and clung to him. His big hands were on my head, and I cried. Once again it was time to go... Years later, when I was old enough to appreciate the feelings of other people, I marvelled at [Mother's] strength, both physical and mental, in giving years of her life to the service of rearing orphans... Our goodbye was an emotional mixture of holding hands and embracing each other, until with a final kiss she put me on the train... I never saw my mother again.

*[The total disruption caused by World War II meant that it was many years before Jack afforded a trip to England, by which time his foster parents were dead. Luckily people in Eastcombe remained kind and welcoming, 40 or so years after he had left. He arrived unannounced at the home of the pastor's widow, saying 'You don't know who I am', and Mrs Johnson replied at once, 'Yes I do, you're Jackie Ramsbottom!']*

But my most exciting moment came when I paused at a point half-way down Bismore Hill from where I had had my first view of Nobeses' cottage. Strangely enough, it was not so much the house that took my attention but rather the copse of beech trees immediately behind it. In my childhood I had spent many happy hours climbing into the low branches of those young trees. Now they were a towering backdrop of stately trunks topped with masses of bare branches that seemed almost to reach the sky. This had the effect of making 'our' house look even smaller than it was. But it looked much the same as I had remembered it, tucked snugly into the hill with the trees on the high side, almost hiding one pair of chimney pots. The two dormer windows protruding from the grey slate roof and the matching front porch were still intact. After all those years, the only change I could see had been the installation of a skylight high in the roof..

*[Jack organized a gravestone for the long-neglected grave of the Nobes.]* When the afternoon eventually arrived, I drove up to Eastcombe well before the promised time of delivery. This was one appointment I was making sure I did not miss. How fortunate too, I thought, that the light was good for taking pictures. I sat on the perimeter wall armed with my cameras, and with only the tireless skylark for company, I waited. Right on time, the stonemason's covered van drove slowly along the main street and stopped just past the cemetery gates. Two men climbed from the van. I started filming... Ten minutes later, the stone was in position, and after making sure I was satisfied with the placement, they walked quietly back to the van. I was alone by the graveside.

Now even the skylark seemed to have sensed the poignancy of the moment and hushed its voice...I was so engrossed in my retrospection that I had no idea that two men had entered the cemetery and were coming my way... It was only after I had finished [reading the inscription] that I became aware that I had company. Instinctively turning to face them, a warm feeling went through me as I recognized the shorter of the two as Arthur Johnson. After all his help, I was delighted he had come to share this moment with me. But I had no idea who his tall bulky companion was.

Answering my enquiring look, Arthur said softly, 'I thought you'd like to have a special guest at this family reunion, Jack. Do you remember your favourite foster brother, George Brown?'

*[A three-hanky moment there. Malcolm Lambert used a photograph of Rosa Nobes and one of the gravestone, supplied by Jack, in his millennium book, Then and Now. We so much enjoyed*

knowing Jack. During the years he and Ronda were visiting us, Bismore had residents from France, Holland, the United States, India, Australia, as well as all over Britain – so different from his day, but all of us acceptable as we shared the one important quality: love of Bismore. When home in Australia Jack – now John – usually telephoned us, or later emailed, so I have not many letters; but extracts from what he wrote follow. His writing was pretty hard to read, as motor neurone disease was already disabling him. His attitude was indomitable, however, and he continued to travel as long as he could.]

28 April 1999. It was so kind of you to send me Phyllis Gaston's booklet, *Oil Lamp and Candle*. What a lovely title! That's just how things were in our time. I thoroughly enjoyed Phyllis's story, it mirrored my own experiences from 1924 to 1932. Yes – there was so much snow then. Please tell her that I won't hold it against her that she was Church and I was Chapel. Incidentally, one small boy from the Eastcombe orphanage came to Fairbridge in the 20s. He (Julian Hay) is still living and had a distinguished career as a teacher in WA.

Best wishes to you and to Bob and the children. Thank you for your offer about the grave, it's much appreciated. It was wonderful to see you all again.

18 August 1999. Thank you for all the news. You have been busy. What a wonderful trip for Felix; so many countries are close to you that these educational visits are quite feasible. I haven't as yet heard from Gordon but it would be nice to catch up with him. *[I cannot resist telling this irrelevant tale. When Jack arrived at the prison camp in Japan he found a group of Royal Navy men with an incredible story. They had been sunk, picked up by an American ship which was sunk, picked up by a Japanese ship in which, when it was torpedoed, they were left to drown below-decks under battened-down hatches; but men smashed their way out and then they were picked up by another Japanese ship and taken eventually to Japan. This was a well known atrocity story in Bob's family as his Uncle Gordon was one of those men. He wrote, 'Many thanks for the loan of John Lane's book [the wartime reminiscences]. It resurrected so many dormant memories, especially about the "Lisbon Maru" disaster, also the references to the old "Aquitania". I sailed on her in her heyday to the USA and later as a troop ship from Sierra Leone. I had been sunk in the South Atlantic on the "Emmaeus" by an Italian submarine!' I do feel very humble when I read such things.]* Thank you so much for sending me the page from Malcolm Lambert's new book. I am thrilled that he put Mother and Dad's headstone in. Florence Taylor gave me a younger picture of Rosa which I have had copied and am enclosing it for you to give to Malcolm in the hope that he might like to use it if it is not too late. I am looking forward to his new book and actually meeting him on my next trip over. *[Dr Malcolm Lambert, with photographs by Dr Bessie Crouch, published Then and Now: Eastcombe 1800 - 2000 in 1999 in commemoration of the millennium. I was delighted to supply him with some of the material I was accumulating from correspondence with these Bismore friends who feature in this booklet.]* And of course seeing you, Bob and the children again... Once again, thanks for everything. We love you. *[In 1995 after I had put John and Flo Taylor, or Bottomley, in touch with each other there was an article in her local newspaper describing their reunion after 63 years apart. She said, 'It hurt me so much to see my little brother go away'. He said, 'She's the best sister a bloke could have. She's a very special woman and we'll never be without each other again.']*

17 May 2005. I was delighted to get your email with all the news, yes, I can picture what Bismore must look like now. I shall never forget the seven years I lived there; they were the happiest years of my life. I would love to make one more trip back there but I'm afraid my motor neurone has left me too weak to make the trip. I need so much rest these days and there is no way I could get insurance to drive a car. Yes, of course you may use extracts or pictures from *Fairbridge Kid*. Better still, I am sending you a recently finished autobiography written on a CD. Just put it into your computer and my whole life is there to read. You may print out any pages you require remembering of course to give me the customary usual recognition. It would be wonderful if you could find me a publisher in England. I have named it *An Illegitimate Life...* Nice to know your

kids are doing well. Don't they grow up quickly? Well, Muriel, I can only say again I would give anything to stay with you some time ...if only my health was better!!!! In the meantime, please keep in touch with me and let me know what is going on in the village. Would you have a look at Mother and Dad's grave now and again for me please? Thank you so much. You are a wonderful woman. Keep well and happy, won't you. Love, John

*Not at all wonderful. I do visit Mr and Mrs Nobes sometimes, and years ago I made sure they had some Bismore flowers planted on their grave, but the long grass is hard to deal with and John would not be happy with the general look of things. Unlike in his day the Chapel now has a very small congregation and there is a lot to maintain.*



*The 'best sister' and the 'little brother' share a meal for the first time in 63 years*

## A BISMORE BABY

*I first met Muriel Little when she and her daughter turned up in Bismore in April 1998 – her first visit since leaving at the age of five in 1928. They had found the valley by trial and error, and I expect our house was the only one that was obviously occupied at that moment so they knocked on the door and explained their mission. Together we visited the cottage at the foot of the wood where Muriel lived her first five years. Since then we have exchanged many letters and got to know each other. I hope Muriel will forgive me if I describe her as feisty: disinclined to knuckle under to the trials of old age, mildly combative in thought if not in deed, a life-long church worker, proud of her family, country-loving, invigorated by nature's beauties, dispirited by the shabby materialism of so much of modern life... These extracts from her letters were chosen for their relevance to Bismore and Eastcombe and 1920s cottage life. She gave or lent many of the photographs I have used, and I thank her most sincerely for her assistance and her friendship.*

27 April 1998. Home again in Eastbourne with such a lot to think about after my holiday with Gina and our surprise visit to Bismore. I have talked for years of returning there but never got round to it... Gina had not realized how steep the path! down from Eastcombe is or how tiny the cottage. It is all so overgrown now. When we lived there we could watch my father cycling down the path from Lypiatt and one of my most enduring memories of him is seeing him walk over to the tap by the keeper's cottage to fetch water, a pail in either hand, our white goat Thora on one side and Bunny our black labrador x retriever on the other, and we children could see people coming down the hill from the village. *[I had often wondered where the water came from. Woodlands cottage has been on the water main for many years. This explains why there was – is – a gate into the field at the bottom of Woodlands' garden. Until Americans occupied it fairly recently Keeper's Cottage took its spring water from the system that includes the hydraulic ram at the foot of Copsegrove fields, which also supplied – perhaps supplies – the hamlet of Hawkley. I wonder if that was a modern installation by the Doringtons? Actually, I suppose it must have come later – but at whose instigation? Predictably the Americans assumed it was unhygienic: indeed, in an annoying article in a 'lifestyle' magazine, the water supply was cited as an example of how primitive conditions were before transatlantic enlightenment took over. I always hoped the previous occupants, long loving residents of Bismore and professional people both, never saw that interview.]* Only the flagstones in the cottage seemed familiar but walking down the path from your house the lovely damp earthy scent took me back to my childhood. Walking along it with my little brother, walking it at night, my father carrying a storm lantern and my brother! The adder that slithered across the path one day in front of us. The respect I had for Mum, living and adjusting to a totally different life in the country from the one she had been used to, has increased enormously. Life was very hard when we were young, for both parents, but Bismore must be the most remote spot we lived in... Lypiatt Park: Judge Woodcock and his daughter lived there when we were in Bismore, I believe.

29 April 1998. Herewith all my postcards of Eastcombe and Bismore for you to look at... They were in an album given to me when the last of the cousins died. It interests me that of all the places we lived and where we were visited, Bismore views are the only cards the family kept!!

Later in 1998. I don't remember the name Grace but I do remember Mr Freebury and the Pocketts. Did they keep goats? With Mum I visited a Taylor family who lived up the back of us to see a new baby. Memorable to me was seeing Mr Taylor sitting at the table drinking tea from a basin. Flo Taylor is also familiar but I don't connect her with the Nobes. Smiths lived in the keeper's cottage before Mr and Mrs Crooks. It was either Mrs Freebury or Mrs Nobes I went with picking wild strawberries on MacOwan's bank, we or I used to bring a jam jar with a string handle... I caught diphtheria from Bobby Blake. They were a family with TB. Mrs Blake apparently asked Mum to go with her to visit Bobby in the sanatorium at ?Standish. Apparently it was a very hot day and I shared Bobby's drink before I could be stopped! Well, he was my friend. I went down with it on the last day we were in quarantine. Mum never mentioned anyone else having it. Bobby died. I

had my fifth birthday in Cashes Green Isolation Hospital and thought I was going to die too, which my mother said upset Dad terribly, he used to cycle over to visit me. He could only see me through the ward window and when I was isolated in a big empty ward at one point I remember him amusing me by pulling faces to make me laugh. I don't know if I dreamed this but I have always thought I was taken away in a horse-drawn ambulance!...



*Among these cheery convalescents at Cashes Green Hospital, Muriel is the second from the right. Bit of a ringleader if you ask me. Possibly Joyce Davis is second from the left; and Theo Wrenn may be here too.*

It was such a surprise to get John Lane's phone call, I did enjoy talking to him. Reading his book again brought home to me how lucky I am to have had a settled family life and to know my roots... I have had a lovely time remembering Bismore, thank you again.

8 July 1998. The PC of Thrupp postmarked 1918 dates my mother's first visit to Valley Farm, it must have been a cultural shock. Grandma ruled and Mum was told her sons didn't need wives who sewed antimacassars! Mum must have loved Dad very much not to have fled straight home. I know her family had doubts although they all loved Dad. Now back to your letter. Isn't it interesting about the fever ambulance [*Grace Winstone had confirmed the horse-drawn, glass-windowed coach existed*], my memory of that time is very shadowy, being: I was rolled up in a blanket and carried up the hill, then this man getting up in front and picking up his reins. I'm glad I hadn't dreamed it. Every other memory would have become suspect. My strongest memory is the struggle they had to get at my back to stick the needle in and then not being able to move. I was told years later I must have had the paralytic form of diphtheria... [*My mother would have been three or four when her eldest brother died of diphtheria, old enough to absorb the horror. Her father was away through the whole of World War I and Grandma was left with five children aged eight and under. Her oldest was ill but she had to leave them all in the care of a neighbour while she walked the six-mile round trip to town to pick up her husband's pay. About nine shillings a week? The neighbour could not bring herself to clear our Bobby's airway of the membrane forming across it, and he choked to death before Grandma returned. No telephones, no cars, no medical help nearby.*] When you talk to whom my granddaughter calls the 'olderlies' in the village they might recognize people in the photos and so spark off different memories. If Ken, Joyce and Ruby Juggins are still in the village they would remember my parents. I know they visited us at Christmas as well as other times. I suppose because they were older Ken and Joyce were permitted to help with the gramophone, then a prized possession, and we were not!! Thank you for taking time to write to me, you are so busy. Why do people think country living is quiet?

Later in 1998. On the picture of Mum with the three of us you can just see part of a diamond-paned window [*still there*] and our view across the valley [*not still there*]... I thought you

might like one of the picnic at Cashes Green for the splendid nurses' uniforms and possibly a doctor? [*Used by Malcolm Lambert in his millennium book, Then and Now.*] For parents weren't allowed to visit...I have thought a lot about Bismore as I remember it and how it looked when Gina and I dropped in on you. The same yet different. Birds of prey would have been shot by Mr Crooks, beautiful as they are, and when I see magpies and crows flying off with baby songbirds and taking the eggs I sometimes wish it would be possible to shoot them still... Have you located MacOwan's bank and the wild strawberries? They make delicious jam! [*Until now I had not located MacOwans's bank for Muriel, as no one around here seemed to recognize the name; but I have just noticed a D MacOwan listed in a cottage at Toadsmoor on the Lypiatt Park auction schedule, and I think he must have been occupying the woodsman's cottage (now known as Keeper's Cottage) in 1919. That would make sense: the path round the head of the little valley above the cottage is a sunny setting for strawberries.*]

14 December 1998. This summer I finally accepted an invitation for a holiday in Rome... It was such a wonderful time... Such a long way from a lovely little valley in Gloucestershire. Home is still best... Mum and Dad used to talk of the deep snow of years ago. Of a postman who was lost in a snowdrift and died and Grandma Stephens told Mum about snow that was so deep and hard one year someone died and they walked on the tops of hedges to carry the coffin out!!!! [*I am tempted at this point to tell the story of Dr Hubert Crouch and the panicky pregnant woman – but perhaps I had better not.*] I hope you are all keeping well, bronchitis always hit me about Christmas time, sometimes I think it was overwork! [*Hear hear.*] Dad always made 'kettle broth' when he had a bad chesty cold. Mum's largest pudding basin was called into service, two large onions were sliced and put in it with (it seemed to me) half a loaf of bread cut into chunks, a large lump of butter and salt and pepper on top, then a kettle of boiling water poured over it. A plate put on top and the broth stood for 10 minutes before Dad ate it for breakfast. Coming home after several hours working in the cold I expect it was like a poultice, very warming. We were never given it, but 'shackles' was a much enjoyed dinner. A thick soup made from marrow bones, split peas, carrots and potatoes. The names and recipes were Dad's so presumably they were from his mother and local...

23 April 1999. Thank you for your letter and the book by Phyllis Gaston. I am enjoying reading it. The map of Lypiatt is interesting. I didn't know (why should I?) that Eastcombe is in the parish of Bisley. It makes me wish I hadn't been brought up not to ask questions and that Dad had been as talkative as Mum!...it is the gossipy anecdotes that bring people to life as in *Oil Lamp and Candle*. Is the Ruby mentioned Ruby Juggins? I do remember her and Joyce.

12 August 1999. ...I more or less hibernate in idleness. Which is no excuse for failing to answer your letter for which I thank you, also for returning the snaps *and* the page about Bisley Well Dressing. I only remember the straw in the wagon we travelled in to Bisley and the large letter A made from cowslips. I think it was just a religious ceremony in those days. I love the photo of the children in the old uniform... Has it been called a Bluecoat School long? Enclosed is a copy of Dad's photo in the uniform. I don't know how old he was when it was taken, born in 1896 he must have left school in 1910. Grandma Stephens once told me there were only 20 pupils in the school when her children attended it and if they were away for any reason the school was half-empty!

14 December 1999. In Oxfam today I found a book, *Folk Tales and Legends of Gloucestershire* by Merlin Price, published by Minimax Books, perhaps you have heard of it? What interested me was the story of one Nathaniel Stephens, MP for the county and Lord of the Manors of Lypiatt, Eastington and Chavenage, who apparently signed the order for the execution of King Charles I. [*Some time in the mid-1990s the older children of Eastcombe Primary School performed an abbreviated version of Macbeth through the public rooms of Chavenage, with a fond audience following them round. The owner was so pleased with their behaviour that he sat them down on the carpet, with the huge log fire blazing and no other lights, and told them the Chavenage*

*ghost stories with great zest and gusto. These include the tale of the black coach with headless coachman which, ever since Charles's execution, bowls up to the front door to herald the imminent death of a member of the household. Great stuff!]* Grandma Stephens told Mum that many years ago a Stephens had lived at Lypiatt. Mum thought nothing of it but it must have been this story passed on by word of mouth. I shall enjoy reading these stories. There is one of Bisley too. *[Thank you, Canon Keble.]*

22 April 2001. Herewith my 'After Christmas' letter. I do write letters in my head, and somehow they don't get on to the paper! Thank you for giving my holiday outing such a very nice finish. When [son] Stephen said he would take me into Wiltshire for a drive I never dreamed we would end up in Bismore, meeting Bob and Chloë and the boys. Talking to Reggie Taylor and our family being remembered by him. Thank you for the snowdrops and the violets, I do hope they 'take' in my windy garden after living in the snug valley. I have been telling everyone about your millennium project, it's brilliant, you put a lot of thought and hard work into it. *[Actually before the millennium here was a parish-wide project, masterminded I think by Donald Workman, with a cardboard fold-your-own frame delivered to every household for people to create within it their own representation of their village. Needless to say there was not a huge response, but the finished work that was submitted was fascinating and formed an excellent exhibition at Thomas Keble School, culminating with a half-page article in The Independent by Duff Hart-Davis (beautifully illustrated by Susie Browne's 'View From the Loo' at Red Lion House).]* [Daughter-in-law] Lorraine hadn't been to the Pewsey Vale and Gloucestershire before, and after Hampshire I wondered what she would think of it, particularly the tiny cottages I lived in as a child, but she was very taken, especially with your house. When we went into Woodlands cottage and smelled the damp air, I could quite understand my parents' worry about us children and the risk of TB, even though in those days the valley was open and not buried in trees. I know I couldn't live there now having grown used to all mod cons and level ground but I shall always feel nostalgic about both Glos and Wilts... It is a glorious day and I should be gardening but the wind is bitter, it sweeps across here without hindrance. Talking of hindrance, I do hope we didn't hold you up too much by dropping by, and I am going to try to make a cake like your Easter cake, it was delicious.

10 May 2001. John has offered to carry your book back to you. Having kindly given me my own copy. Thank you very much for letting me, a stranger, have something on long loan. Last Saturday a phone call out of the blue from John Lane asking if he could come on a visit and of course I said yes to the total bemusement of my family who promptly wove all kinds of tales of things that might happen when I entertained a total stranger in my home. By the time Ken and Peggy brought John down on Sunday the phone had been ringing continuously. What *do you think*, Mum hasn't seen him since she was five years old!!! Luke, aged 14 years, was volunteered to sleep in the house, he does anyway when he wants some space! Well, John travels on tomorrow to his foster sister in Odiham after nearly a week with me that I think he has enjoyed, certainly he enjoyed a laugh at the tales the family had cooked up about his visit. It's been interesting for me, we have done a lot of reminiscing. Including poems and hymns we learnt as children. I think he shows great courage and I applaud his intention to live every minute to the full. Meeting you on that trip to Bismore with Gina has given me so much to think about. Bismore is as fascinating today as it was to Mum's family and friends... I hope John keeps well for the rest of his tour and has a pleasant visit with you. *[In fact John used to stay in Stroud with Denis and Olive Gardiner, née Bingle.]* Regards to Bob and the family.

PS. I hope the fox didn't get the guineafowl on her nest.

12 December 2001. Thank you for your lovely long letter, Christmas card and calendar *[of Eastcombe, done for the Queen's Golden Jubilee]*, no naked bodies, or recipes I am going to try out and don't. I have no recollection of Toadsmoor other than as a name Mum and Dad used to mention when talking about Bismore. I shall enjoy the pictures month by month... The highlight of last year for me was my trip to Wilts and Glos with Stephen and Lorraine. The only village I haven't visited



*Of all the poultry we kept over the years, guineafowl had the best chance of a long life as their ability to take off like a Harrier jet keeps them safe from all but the most wily fox. It took a long time to discover that they share a nesting place in deep vegetation, queuing up to lay an egg so that a broody female has a clutch to cover. They can amass an absolute mountain of eggs (30? 40?) and then the sitting hen is at risk. Foxy did have the one Muriel mentioned. If you find the nest and take away the eggs, the guineafowl will seek out another hidden nesting place. If you take all the eggs but one each day, they will continue to lay in the same place, thereby proving conclusively that guineafowl can't count*

is Clapham in Beds. We moved there from Bismore... We left there and moved to Wilts when the farmer's wife apparently took a shine to my father! Dad was a great attraction to the ladies right up until his death and he just wasn't interested in anyone but my mother... We all enjoyed John Lane's visit, although the family did wonder what he would be like! I think his early years conditioned him never to give up: all that energy, I could do with a shot of it! From your description I can almost smell the autumn, we have glorious blue skies and in the parks the glorious colours but autumn summer or winter the smell is the same, car fumes!... I have to make cakes, mincemeat, etc, it doesn't seem like Christmas if I don't. Then I have the Bismore snowdrops and violets to look forward to... I always think about Bismore and all of you.

28 May 2002. Thank you for your so welcome letter. It brings to mind wonderful scents and scenes. My parents were great ones for just 'taking a stroll' in the early evening when everything smelled and sounded beautiful. I am so lucky to have these memories, townies don't, sadly for them...I hope the foxes don't get your babies this year. As you say, hanging out the washing has its pleasures this time of the year and don't the clothes smell nice when they have had a good blow in a scented garden. I had two snowdrops from the Bismore bulbs but no violets although the plant is healthy and spreading...When your letter arrived I was about to write to both you and John Lane. I had a card at Christmas but that is all, he has such enthusiasm...

19 December 2002. I'm looking forward to spring and hopefully to Bismore snowdrops and violets in my garden. The violets didn't bloom last year, I shall move them if they are still stubborn.

21 May 2003. I have been going to write for ages and once again you have beaten me to it. I love the ad for the cottage [*a self-catering holiday let now – people get enthused by the thought of Woodlands cottage's idiosyncrasies, but find living in it full-time a little too demanding*]: it looks very tempting, especially the peace and quiet. I do like the name, Woodlands Cottage. It was always referred to as 'Bismore' in the family but then it wasn't so wooded 80 years ago. I love the photo of the footpath. I can almost smell the sweet leafy smell. I hope all its visitors love it. I had the old postcards out to do a 'then and now', the way we lived there and how it is now. It is an unknown world to my town-bred friends... I must tell you my little bit of Bismore has flourished this year. The snowdrops liked it so much under the bay tree there were *nine* blooms. The violets produced a white carpet and I have passed on roots after I took a bunch to church, no one had seen white ones, only the cultivated blue.

2004. I am slow in answering your letter, I wanted to find the Bismore photos, for some while I thought you should have the original postcards, they will mean little to my grandchildren. I have just kept one with our cottage on it. I think it's a lovely idea to write a history of such a lovely place. The Bismore snowdrops increased to 12 this year and I have a lovely patch of white violets open at this moment.

PS. If I can help with your material in any way I will. M

*[Around this time my computer ate all I had typed up, in a way I thought could not happen these days, and I lost heart and temper. The Diamond Jubilee has spurred me back into action.]*

13 May 2005. To your question the answer is no. I am sorry I can't help. The only Davis I remember is Muriel Davis. I think Mum said her father was the schoolmaster. Joyce or Ruby Juggins if they are still in the area would be your most likely ones to remember her. Apart from the Crooks, Juggins, Blakes and of course the Nobes family my recollections are more or less gone unfortunately. I hope Joyce Davis does get to visit and her memories are as happy as mine. *[I have another penfriend, in British Columbia this time. Rita very much wanted to bring her mother, Joyce, to visit Eastcombe, where she was fostered by Martha Davis of Gladstone Cottage. The Jugginses were Joyce's friends. She has not been well enough to visit, but she is remembered by Arthur Johnson. Barnado's children were sent to Canada as well as Australia – John Lane's foster sister, Flo Bottomley, was also sent to Canada, but she managed to get herself back to England and married and had her family here.]*

2005. The postman has just delivered your parcel. I was touched when I saw the contents,

beautifully fresh and not crushed at all. I do hope they like my garden. I can almost smell the ransoms. I grow my own garlic, small but tasty. Mum loved flowers and when we moved house she would dig up and pack in the tin bath as many as she could. Most were given her and Mum would come indoors and tell us Mrs Moore was blooming or Mrs Parfitt. Most flowers were given the name of the donor. *[This is gardening as I understand it, going around loving not just the plant but also the person who gave it. When Mother moved here at the age of 79 the last thing I did on that rainy July morning at the place where I was born was rush around taking roots and cuttings so that she would have old friends in her Gloucestershire garden. I think some of the plants now here at Honeyhill are descendants from my great-grandmother's garden, and perhaps the line goes back even further. It was noticeable when we first lived in Bismore that the gardens (not ours, it had been in the hands of the bedding plant brigade) contained the same, fairly unusual, flowers, which the (female) gardeners had shared. This does not happen when gardening contractors are employed. I was greatly influenced by the gardening books listed in the bibliography.]* You are welcome to the photos. I am glad they arrived safely. You should have the others but at the moment I can't part with them. It grieves me to see all the boxes of treasures and personal mementos that end up in auction rooms. It's such a wasteful, throwaway society we live in today. Anyway, thank you again.



*This is Muriel's mother, Win Stephens, standing in Bismore meadow below Woodlands. The garden then full of vegetables, and the flowers that this London girl cherished, is now a wilderness. On the back of this photograph Muriel has written that her mother is with her friend Mary Matthews, 'who was also my dearly loved godmother. My mother collapsed and died at Mary's funeral in 1964, aged 74 years'*

Undated. I often think of Bismore and hope you all keep well and have a good year. The strawberry plants have spread like mad and I had *two* ripe ones so did not need my jam jar to collect them. Next year perhaps. It was a lovely thought of yours to send me the plants...

December 2006. My best wishes to you all. I hope all is well and you have a good year. I often think of you and Bismore and its peace and quiet. I am still ticking over and looking forward to 2007... There doesn't seem to be a dull moment. I do count my blessings.

17 December 2007. I am rather belatedly writing Christmas cards and yours just dropped through the letter box. Thank you. It reminded me of Wilfred, my cat I had for 18 years and the way he used to shake his paw when I put him outside on a snowy day and how he hated it. I can see you on that footpath and smell that lovely sweet leafy scent as you scuffle through the leaves. Dad carrying Fred; Mum, Jim and I following in the light of the hurricane lantern when Dad had met us off the train, probably we had been to London to see Mum's sister, and the starry nights and Milky Way, something I haven't seen in years. Josie will point out the odd stars to me but we have too much light at night here...



*Jim, Fred and Muriel Stephens outside their cottage in Bismore Bottom, about 1926*

My cousin Barbara lives in Tibberton and is researching my grandparents (Stephens). Apparently her mother, my Auntie Chrissie, would never talk about the family. I'm very interested as you may guess, there is some doubt about the number of siblings Grandad had, were there nine brothers or did he have two brothers and a sister? If so where did Mum get the 10 sons, all of them going bald except for Grandad? What fun it all is. I do remember Grandma telling me the bit about them going bald, when at the age of 14/15 years I stayed with her. Sorry to waffle on. Have a happy Christmas and New Year.

December 2008. Your card arrived as I was sitting down to write letters. Thank you for your good wishes and the snippets of news you send me. Valley Farm sounds very grand now, I guess it would take a lot of imagination to see it as it was in Grandma Stephens' day. Mum had a great gift for descriptive narrative and it's her stories and memories of Edgeworth I have. Apparently Auntie Chrissie didn't talk about their lives when young, or the family... When I was taken to Edgeworth just before World War II it was then owned by a London family and looked after by a bailiff who showed us the pedigree pigs he was breeding. Auntie Rosie and Grandma were more interested in the little water feature in the garden, the basins of which were stone sinks from the house... I often think of you all in Bismore, especially when I walk down the garden. Bismore wild strawberries you gave me staged a takeover from the moment I planted them and they bloom and bloom, minute strawberries but never mind, they like it here even though I refuse to let them take over the paths too!

15 December 2009. Thank you for your card and letter. It's lovely to have news of you and Bismore. It's always good these days to hear of children growing up well... Stephen promised we would visit Glos this year, perhaps next year it will happen... I often think of you all in Bismore, especially when I eat a Bismore strawberry down the garden. I am looking forward to Bismore snowdrops now. I've passed bulbs on to others in the family as they've spread.

18 December 2011. So much for my firm promise to write a letter to you! Time seems to speed by faster and faster, my mind continually flips back to the past and Bismore. A friend recently said she knew she was old when she started quoting her mother. I must have been old a very long time as I have never stopped... When Mum and Dad lived and struggled to rear we three children in that tiny cottage they would never in their wildest dreams have thought that of their 34 (I think) descendants a number of them would have good degrees and careers. Mum, I am quoting again, used to say her children were behind the door when brains were given out.

3 March 2012. Your Bismore booklet sounds a very nice idea and you are welcome to use anything I have given you. Your letter made me put on the CDs I made for the WRVS lottery-funded memories programme. I hadn't listened to them and spent an entire afternoon listening to myself talking about things, starting with my birth in Bismore... Life then was much simpler I think and for we children happier and freer. Good luck with all your plans... We have had very springlike weather for some time and all kinds of blossoms still going this winter. Amongst mine are Bismore snowdrops, not a lot, I keep giving little clumps away. The strawberries crossed with the alpines this year and for months I picked a few to eat every time I walked down the garden... I loaned my John Lane to a friend and am having trouble getting it back. I think of him as Jackie, to cope with that terrible disease as he did was so incredibly brave. I'm glad I met him... My brother is still lingering, he will be 87 yrs this month... I may creak a bit, be deaf and forgetful but it goes with the territory and I count my many blessings... I think that is enough. I get into trouble for talking too much!!

With love and regards to all, Muriel

## WHAT I KNOW ABOUT BISMORE

Names come and go. Some stick, some do not. In a poor village such as Eastcombe the cottages were defined by the families then living in them – usually renting – and despite the changes of ownership during the twentieth century some of those names remain as a nice reminder of people past: Lewisville, Brotherstones, Rodways. Yet before the Rodways lived there the farm was known as Daniel's – and before that, who knows? Fairview in Bismore should have been renamed Shelleys: 12 years or more and two owners since Jack left, that is still what locals call it... We Brookses have been here now for more than a quarter of a century, and rather than have them slip out of memory I wanted to share the writings of John Lane, Frances Deacon, and Muriel Little, all of whom lived briefly in Bismore and then treasured the thought of it ever after.

We live in a house called Honeyhill, which is a charming name, but I cannot help feeling a little disappointed that it is of recent date. Mrs Brooke – Peg Brooke, sister of Christina Granville Sharp who owned The White House and The Studio – lived here after World War II and renamed the house. On the one occasion that we met she told me that she 'found the name on an old map', and pointed in the direction of Lypiatt Park. I assume that she saw a tithe map, but I have only the Bisley map of 1842 and it does not show the hill opposite us, as Lypiatt Park and therefore Ferris Court fell within Stroud parish by then (I had forgotten this till I looked at Samuel Rudder's *A New History of Gloucestershire*, published in 1779. I notice that our house, and the next-door cottages, are not numbered on the Bisley tithe map: is this because they belonged to Ferris Court or Lypiatt Park and therefore owed tithe to Stroud?) In Mary Rudd's *Historical Records of Bisley with Lypiatt* on the subject of the 'lesser manor' of Ferris Court, there is a quotation from the Lypiatt MS book about the division of Ferris Court after a sale in 1647. 'These lands extend from the Barnfield down to the wood of John Stephens, being bounded by Ferris Court Lane on the south and Honyhills on the north'. If one stands on Eastcombe Green and looks across to Ferris Court there is now the big Victorian house of Home or Park Farm to its right. Below that there is the field mentioned here, with the lane to the left, the wood below and, I believe, the field called Honeyhills screened by trees to the right.

I was told that before being named Honeyhill this house was known as Slate House or Cottage on account of its slate (rather than Cotswold stone) roof. When we called in a structural engineer, seeking reassurance about the list of the front wall of the house, he said that the slates were probably put on in the 1830s/40s when canal barges were bringing slates from Wales, and that before that the roof was probably thatched. The weight of the heavier new roof splayed the walls. I find the idea of thatch around here almost impossible to believe (though look at Tarlton); and as the years have gone by we have got a better and better feel for the history of the place.



*In this well known old photograph taken from Wells Road it can be seen that our house had two front doors*

We know that in the depressed years of the nineteenth century the house was divided into two – the photograph shows there were two front doors – but by the time the Waites moved in in 1919 it had been made one again. I believe that when the Doringtons were building up the Lypiatt Park estate they bought our house, among so many others, and repaired it. (The property owned in Eastcombe itself in 1919 can be seen in *Auction of the Lypiatt Park Estate* - the cottages they acquired through the district seem mainly to have belonged to the farms that they bought – I think.) There are signs that ours was probably in poor condition, with weather penetrating a worn-out roof; and at that time the top part of the house was changed, with tie-beams taken out, the walls raised, and the roof angle flattened as the Welsh slates would have been lighter than the old stone ones. Inside the attic floor of Bismore Cottage one can see beams that replicate what we would have had. Windows were blocked, a new doorway was added, and a second staircase. (The Eastcombe village history books by Malcolm Lambert and Juliet Shipman are an excellent source of photographs of cottages and people mentioned in this booklet.)

The people living at Bismore Farm in the 1990s did a lot of research in county records, and told me one day that our house used to be called Bismore House. I have not verified that myself – and know how pretentious we would seem if we revived the name – but it is true that in the 1841 census there is a Bismore House next to a Bismore Cottage. Well, we have Bismore Cottage next to us, but Mrs Southall in the 1980s told me they had changed to that name from Plumtree Cottage. Hmm. I cannot ask her now whether they were reusing a former name. It was in that cottage, incidentally, that the Freeburys lived (mentioned in writings quoted earlier in this booklet).

The nineteenth-century censuses are very frustrating as the houses, on the whole, had no names; and detective work from one decade to another is hampered because families moved from one cottage to another sometimes. And possibly were not necessarily literate. Were the Aldums the same people as the Oldhams, for example? The census-takers do not seem to have been too hot on spelling themselves. *If* our house was Bismore House then in 1841 its occupants were a couple called Pearce with their 15-year-old daughter Comfort. What a great name. She crops up years later as the wife of Jesse Berryman – and I see that on the 1842 tithe map the land we own belonged to a Richard Berryman. (Berrymans is now the name of a house formed from three cottages next to Ferris Court; and there is a bit of a history worth reading on the internet about those Berrymans who went to Australia and America...) In the late nineteenth century there were presumably two sets of occupants till our house was put back into one again.

The only person I have heard of being here before 1919 was George Curtis, brother-in-law of Walter Andrews the gamekeeper. He was here around the turn of the century before moving up to Old Loom Cottage in the village. Mr and Mrs Ernie Andrews once brought their niece to see where her grandfather lived. She later, in 1990, sent me some photographs with captions that said that George Curtis, having retired, lived here after his wife Martha died till he remarried to Ellen Warren in December 1901. Until she married in September 1901 he had been looked after by his daughter Wilmot Agnes (so he moved pretty fast to find a new housekeeper). The other grandfather (do I remember from the 1891 census that he was born in Bedford? Watford?), of course, lived at Keepers Cottage – now much extended, but still looking like itself – further up the valley. Its garden was much altered by recent occupants, but there are still plenty of snowdrops there. I did not know before living in Gloucestershire that snowdrops are basically wild flowers; but apparently the Andrews boys at the beginning of the twentieth century used to bring clumps from the woods for their mother's garden, which spread into a great carpet all over the garden, a wonderful sight. There are lots, too, on the hillside opposite Keeper's Cottage (below Seven Springs), and in Woodlands, Little Bismore, and Fairview gardens.

All I know really about our house is that we bought it in 1986 from the Kirklands and they bought it from the Hilltouts about 1982 who bought it from Mrs Brooke about 1962 who bought it from the Pillings after the Second World War. Frances Deacon wrote that the house was bought in 1920 by a widow for her son who was 'just discharged from the New Zealand army. She hoped this

would keep him in England'. I am going to have to wait for the publication of the 1921 census for the answer to this riddle. It means, whoever was here, that Honeyhill was in the hands of 'incomers' from at least 1919, and through the 1920s and 1930s it was gentrified with central heating and indoor lavatories and an attic bathroom and a telephone. A recent chance visitor who stayed here in the '40s said Mr Pilling had been in charge of 'electrifying' Buenos Aires, and he installed our lights. As 2009/2010 approached I fully intended to get in touch with the *Stroud News and Journal* to suggest a centenary reprint of wonderful weekly articles that were published in 1909, and put into book form in 1910. *The Wit and Wisdom of Willum Workman* purports to be a series of conversations between the writer, a sickly chap from London attempting to banish TB, and a chance-met Chalford villager who is satirical about incomers from London. It is a marvellous book, very funny; and a great comfort to those of us who have met a mixed reception here. While compiling my bibliography I discovered that it exists as a chapter in Alan Sutton's *Cotswold Tales*.

Mr Pilling ran the Scouts and Mrs Pilling came to the fore in the Women's Institute, and there were garden parties and bonfires and so on down here. According to Phyllis Gaston in *Oil Lamp and Candle*, 'Mrs Pilling would invite us down to their home in Bismore now known as Honeyhill. Mr Pilling would have a good fire going in the wood beyond the house with chestnuts roasting. They plied us with food and we had a good singsong and some party pieces as well. No one thought anything about the hill to be climbed back to the village – it was normal then'. Phyllis, of course, was a Trojan who undertook many things, among which was selling poppies for the British Legion. Early November found her walking round every farflung cottage of Bismore, even though latterly she must have known there were mainly absentee owners. I remember the first time I heard her voice outside our windows as she descended Bismore Cottage steps with Ann Southall – I thought, 'Crikey – it's Mary Pound from "The Archers"!'.

Mrs Brooke added a kitchen and bedroom in 1955 (the Pillings tiny kitchen off the spiral stair became a loo), and the Hilltouts extended again in 1970, so we were able to buy a house of ample size and not have to contemplate extending a small cottage. Earlier occupants had attracted the opprobrium for that! Nowadays, of course, couples feel unable to manage in a cottage that in previous times might have housed a dozen. There were, for example, 13 Randalls listed at Hawkley in the Victorian censuses, the father (Levi) being the Doringtons' estate carpenter. His children had good careers, including one who was an architect (called Athelstan – you could not make it up). I recently read a comment by an elderly Dorset villager: 'They come and like what they see and can't wait to buy into it; but when they've moved in they can't wait to change it to what they've just left.' How true in many cases.

Four – or even six – other properties in Bismore changed hands fairly soon after we arrived, some repeatedly. I still hope it was not cause and effect. The hamlet went through a phase of there being more weekend (or, in some cases, two-or-three-times-a-year) cottages than lived-in ones. The situation is better now, but house prices have got out of hand. Of course, house price inflation galloped in the late 1980s, and has been worse more recently. For the record: a neighbouring cottage sold for £170 in 1920, £200 in 1937, £400 in 1938, £1850 in 1954 – but for over £300,000 and well over £600,000 at the beginning of this century.

I cannot resist another little aside here. In the 1990s for a number of years we had a 'Fun Day' in our garden, raising funds for the primary school. Fathers were distributed through the woods and valley as track marshals, and then long and short cross-country runs took place. We gave up after the year when parents would not let their children run as 'we don't know where they will be going'. The school used to have a really happy picnic each summer in Nash End Valley, but that was stopped because 'the children don't like the long walk back up to Eastcombe'. The children? Really?

We had no doubt when we saw the house that we had to have it – having been gazumped on the one we thought we had bought at Hyde – and we have loved the house and the gardens and the woods ever since, despite all the hard work and expense that came with them. A Grade 2 listed

building (also, in a conservation area) brings restrictions and obligations, and I always hope what is of historical interest will be respected after we have gone, and that modernisation will be sympathetic rather than fashionable. Living in an old house in an ancient managed landscape rapidly gives one a sense of stewardship rather than ownership, it is to be hoped – but not always, apparently. For years when travelling through Suffolk I used to wait for a glimpse of a house I found truly romantic in appearance, an isolated farmhouse on a hill, obviously mediaeval in origin. One day last year as we passed I was electrified – the few seconds it took to scan it in the distance made me very uneasy. It was still wonky and seemed much the same in outline, but it was as though Disney had replaced it with a plastic replica. When we got home I Googled it and, sure enough, it had sold a little time previously and was then for sale again – complete with 'designer' gardens, indoor swimming pool, granite-surfaced kitchen and chichi bathrooms. Ruined. I dread it happening to our house...

In the excellent village history book produced by Malcolm Lambert and Juliet Shipman in 1981 (*The Unknown Cotswold Village: Eastcombe 1500 – 1980*) there is a theory that Honeyhill would have been a farm because its rooms are larger (about 20 feet square) than those of surrounding cottages. It is of about the same age as Bismore Cottage (mid- to late-seventeenth century), but there are no documents to substantiate this and it is hard to imagine what was farmed. There could have been sheep on the hillside if it were grass, but the woods (apart from the beech plantation) are classed as 'semi-natural ancient woodland' and, I think, are remnants of the old 'custom woods' that would have stretched along both sides of the valley till near Bisley. From the *Minchinhampton Custumal* I learned that people of differing status had different entitlements to wood, the essential fuel and building material. The lowliest could pick up sticks, others could take branches down 'by hook or by crook', and some would have been entitled to lop whole trees. Medieval society was wonderfully ordered, and it seems that from earliest times all the wood on a manor would have belonged not only to the lord of the manor but also to his tenants, the 'customs' creating the laws which controlled the amount of wood taken, the manner of taking it, and the use to which it was put. Around here wood was probably the single most valuable crop before the wool industry really took off, not just selling fleeces to Europe as formerly but processing the wool and making the cloth in the Stroud valleys. Francis Pryor in *The Making of the British Landscape* makes the interesting point that the heavy death toll of the Black Death in 1348-49 not only led to the necessary end of the feudal system and therefore the strip-farming of manors in the Middle Ages (meaning that sheep could be put on more and more land) but also the manpower for woodland management was simply not there, and England in particular let trees mature for far longer than previously. *The History of the Countryside* by Oliver Rackham contains a lot of information about woodland, debunking a lot of popular misconceptions. One important thing that he says is '*Woods do not cease to exist through being felled...a wood is self-renewing, and is no more destroyed by being cut down than a meadow is destroyed by cutting a crop of hay.*' Quite the opposite, in fact: our wood is marching into our back garden, and Bismore meadow is disappearing in a cloud of blackthorn as the woods on both sides grow unchecked.

Woods were needed for timber and fuel, but also for grazing pigs and sheltering deer. Charcoal burners who used too much wood were disliked by cottagers, and later glass-makers (and the king's navy) were the bane of wood-owners' lives. A value was put upon the woodland of the manor of Bisley in the Domesday Book, but long before that, in 896, it is mentioned in an Anglo-Saxon charter. The bishopric of Worcester held sway around here, and in *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* H P R Finberg cites the following. 'Settlement between the ealdorman Ethelred and all the Mercian council at Gloucester of a dispute between Waerfrith, bishop of Worcester, and Aethelwald, concerning the woodlands at Woodchester, granted by King Ethelbald to Bishop Wilfrith [150 or so years previously]. The bishop complains of encroachments at Bisley [and three other places]. Aethelwald agrees to hold the land, except the swine-pasture at Longridge, on lease from the bishop for his own lifetime and that of his son Alhmund; and he orders his *geneat* Ecglaf

to ride round the bounds with one of the clergy, who will read them out from Ethelbald's charter.' Were the slopes of Bismore part of that woodland? By the time Earl Hugh was granted the manor of Bisley at Domesday it had gone into the possession of King Harold's father, Earl Godwin, who with his family seems to have grabbed most of southern England.

It is obvious that whoever built Bismore Cottage and Honeyhill had the pick of suitable sites. We are well above any risk of flooding, have day-long sunshine, beautiful views, and shelter from the north and east. Our rather blank gable end means that we are well protected from squalls that roar up the valley from the south-west. In fact, the lack of wind down here means that we are often under-clad for the rigours of the hill top if we ever do stagger up to the village. Conversely, in very frosty weather we find that rounding the Crows Nest bend feels like entering a fridge when we are on the way down... Of course, it is the steepness of the terrain that has protected us from both building developments and modern farming methods, with the result that the valley is an unsung nature reserve with spectacularly lovely flora and annoyingly rampant fauna – by which I mean that we are not amused by the fearless deer treating our gardens as a 24-hour salad bar!

Bismore itself – generally considered an Anglo-Saxon name, but I think earlier, and certainly the same stretch of land in pre-Conquest days – is described as being of seven acres (from Hawkley to Bismore Bridge, perhaps?) in the valley bottom. It would have been such a valuable source of water, grazing and fodder: most of the hill-top land would have been given over to the 'great fields' of the manor, and later to sheep runs. In the astonishing *Notes and Recollections of Stroud*, first published in 1871, Paul Hawkins Fisher wrote '...passing eastward into the mass of the Cotswolds, is the approach to various tortuous, gorge-like valleys, in which – and fed by whose streams – is the Stroud clothing district, commonly known to the upper Cotswoldians by the name of The Bottoms...each of which (as it winds into the mass of the hills) breaks into numerous smaller lateral valleys, and into combs, dells and glens, having their own local names and “beautiful exceedingly”.' Elsewhere when he recites the circumstances of the pathetic murder at Cuthams (just below Bismore hamlet – and no, the cottage is not still there) he says 'Bismore Bottom is a lonely, narrow and thickly wooded valley'. Some people here still use 'Bismore Bottom' in their address, but on the whole it has fallen into disuse. Alan Pilbeam in *The Landscape of Gloucestershire* on the other hand says that 'In the south [of the county] the valleys are steep-sided and several kilometres long – the “bottoms” as in Ozleworth, Tyley and Waterley Bottoms. Further north are the “combes”, which are shorter and more rounded in plan...There are many “combes”...along the sides of the main valleys...' Elsewhere it is said that 'deans' or 'denes' are long, straight and narrow river valleys – keeping their Anglo-Saxon pronunciation in Daneway and Woefulane, for example – and I think it is so interesting to learn that all these seeming synonyms in fact have fine distinctions of meaning.

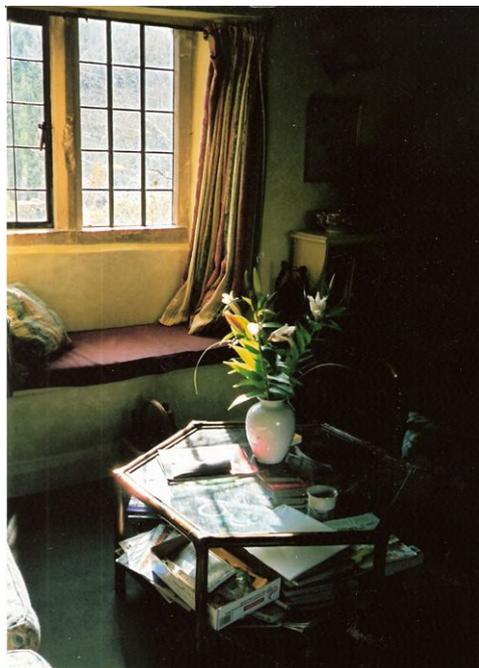
At any rate, Bismore has stayed intact as a land-holding since time immemorial. The fields at the moment belong to Ferris Court farm, and certainly at the end of the sixteenth century were attached to Ferris Court when Giles Codrington of Frampton and Pucklechurch held Bismore in 1598 'but ignored the service and alienated the same to Nicholas Throgmorton, Esq'. This means that Bismore belonged to Lypiatt Park at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as Ferris Court was inferior to Lypiatt. Whoever the owner of Honeyhill was, around 1650 seems an odd time to be building houses with the country traumatized by the turmoil of the Civil War, but Alan Pilbeam says there was a great resurgence of building and rebuilding in the seventeenth century. John Stephens of Lypiatt Park (brother, I think, of regicide Nathaniel of Chavenage), according to Fisher, 'was one of the knights of the shire returned to the last Commonwealth Parliament, in the year 1658-9', and his estate seems not to have been penalized later for his politics.

In his seminal work, *Fieldwork in Local History* published in 1967 – something I reread only after writing the whole of this chapter – Professor W G Hoskins said 'What I did find, exploring old farmhouses all over England, was that an extraordinary number of them – in all counties except the extreme north – had been rebuilt or extensively modernized in the late sixteenth

century or the early seventeenth...The Great Rebuilding, as I termed it, that occurred in England between about the 1570s and 1640...was nowhere documented...It is a good example of purely visual evidence, telling us about important social changes – the modernizing and enlargement of houses, at nearly every social level – that was so commonplace while it was happening that no one bothered to record it on paper'. Perhaps it was the invention of chimneys that caused it. Thinking about it, this urge to express prosperity by enhancing one's house must be, as they say, hardwired into us: it happened in Tudor, Stuart, Georgian, Regency and Victorian periods, and certainly with a vengeance over the last 30 years. And each time it happens, lesser mortals oppose and deride the results until it is their own turn to 'extend'.

Looking at the façade of Honeyhill one would think the house not as old, but in *The Vernacular Architecture and Buildings of Stroud and Chalford* Nigel Paterson describes windows exactly like ours as being seventeenth century, but walls with jumper stones like ours as being eighteenth century. Windows older than the walls containing them? I don't think so. Nevertheless, he writes that 'In the 17<sup>th</sup> C, each leaded light was tied to a pair of vertical iron bars (square in section but set diagonally)...The lights were probably sealed around the edges by lime mortar'; and that is what we have. 'A difference between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> C walls of this type is that 18<sup>th</sup> C and later walls can have “jumper” stones...that can span two or three courses.' We have those too: so we have seventeenth-century windows in eighteenth-century walls. I can only think that the nineteenth-century alterations were so extensive that we shall never be able to tease out exactly what was done.

Meanwhile, we are left with quite a lot of very old glass in rather perished lead, making the windows hard to clean – and ultra-vulnerable to footballs. When the low sun shines into the sitting room or our bedroom the pattern of light on the ceiling shows clearly which panes are old (and rippled), and which are newer. And, of course, the ceilings themselves are rippled, being mainly of old lath and plaster – as are the walls. When I was first decorating and replacing patches of rotten plaster I thought I had discovered a body in the wall – but in fact it was just the traces of the old technique of using animal hair to bond the plaster...



*The lead is tied to vertical iron bars, and the glass is mortared directly into the stone mullion*

Recently when rotting wooden stairs (resting directly on the rubble of the bank) were being replaced with stone steps we came across a much earlier, narrower, spiral stone staircase in the thickness of the wall. 'Tudor' was Clifford Pulley's verdict; and certainly when one is in the cellar it is possible to imagine a cruder building than what we have now. The cellar, incidentally, was originally only half below ground. Our terrace was created, presumably in 1970, with a lot of hard-core infill to level the natural slope. We discovered that, inside, the north wall of the 'cellar' had a glazed window showing that originally it was above ground level but after the terrace was made it looked out on to rubble. The house is built in the bank, on bedrock, and previously its land sloped past the house down to the level of the lane.

I have always been puzzled, too, by the fact that there is a big drop down from the lane into Fairview garden, and the land is retained by a ten-foot high wall. I think that at some juncture – presumably when the Dorington estate built Fairview and rebuilt Honeyhill – the length of lane past our house was created on an embankment, and what may previously have been the ground floor became the cellar (there are two chimneys originating down there). Previously what traffic there was came through the wood and then down between the land now belonging to Fairview and Little Bismore cottages, to reach either the tracks from Bismore Bridge or the track through past Bismore Farm to Toadsmoor (called 'the Lagger' by Phyllis Gaston and her contemporaries). On early SatNav software such tracks showed as roads, and the valley filled with cross car drivers. When all this land belonged to the Lypiatt Park estate, and Sir John Dorington was influential on the local councils, responsibility for the paths and tracks was a little blurred and as a result, finally, traffic was banned from the track through our wood and down behind Fairview, and the County Council put a surface on the road past our house. The convention round here is that the person or organization whose land is retained by a wall has responsibility for the maintenance of that wall. When we arrived in 1986 the retaining wall opposite our gate had fallen and was already fenced off and listed by the Council for repair. About 20 years after it first went on to the schedule of works it was repaired, to our great surprise and gratitude, without any discussion with householders. Immediately below the point of the fall is where there were traces of farm outbuildings backed into the hillside (Jack Shelley said old stables) before our time.



*There is an astonishingly deep drop from the lane to the garden below, so a strong retaining wall is needed*

According to Alan Pilbeam in *The Landscape of Gloucestershire*, a Cotswold stone cottage will last about 100 years if it is not properly and regularly maintained, but of course many hundreds of years if looked after. One only has to look at Sheephouse Farm in the fields on the way from Eastcombe to Nash End to understand how quickly a building deteriorates when its roof has gone. Over the years quite a lot of maintenance work has been done on our house, and in the 1990s the primary school children were able to visit and inspect the inner construction of our walls and roof. Their teacher repeatedly took them to see progress on the building of her new stone house at Bussage, so they were able to compare the old methods and materials with the new.

We are told that when the woollen industry was thriving there were mills all the way down the Toadsmoor Valley, and workers' cottages. On the OS 1:2500 map of 1873-83 one can see two or three buildings in our part of Bismore that had gone by, say, 1900. Times were hard, jobs were only available down in the Frome valley, and the farms sustained very few people after the heyday of the Dorington estate. In *The Unknown Cotswold Village* there is a photograph showing an apparently large cottage or cottages immediately by Bismore Bridge. There is a new horse shelter there now, with no trace left of a stone building. It must have gone long ago (certainly before the 1883 map was made), the stones reused as was and is the custom wherever possible...but the photograph does tend to reinforce a feeling I have that there must have been some industrial use for the falling water at Bismore Bridge. An ancient fulling mill? Or was it perhaps one of the *v molini* listed in the Domesday survey as part of Earl Hugh's holding in the Hundred of Bisley? No one knows; but the five mills would have been dispersed over a very wide area, on our stream as well as along the Holy Brook and the Frome. The geology of the valley must have a tale to tell, but I cannot elucidate it. It is important when dealing with times past to think all the time, 'What was probable? Was this possible?' in addition to looking for records. Gradually things seem to emerge from the mists. The wooded steep sides are punctuated with little quarries (used perhaps for cottage stone but more probably for the miles of drystone walling the Doringtons had built) where the limestone strata can be seen clearly, complete with fabulous fossils. On old maps 'Lime Kiln' is marked in what is now the garden of The Glen. There is no trace of it, but perhaps it was more or less where the old sheds were – now a turning area – and the cottage (then probably one up, one down) was built above it for the chap who supervised the burning. This explains why a spur of road goes up to The Glen, as heavy loads would have been coming and going. Small kilns were common before production was industrialized to cope with the demand for fertilizer for the agricultural revolution, but around here presumably the lime produced would have been for building purposes. I *think* (should have checked) that crushed limestone (calcium carbonate) was burned slowly with coal or wood so that it was reduced to quicklime (calcium oxide) that then with water could be turned into slaked lime (calcium hydroxide). It was used to make cement or whitewash, for example. When I was three and walking backwards down our garden path a tub of it struck me behind the knees and I fell in up to my neck. I never saw my father move faster...

There are also, however, areas of fuller's earth and over the millennia that washes down into the valley bottom. The rivulet coming from the spring on Wells Road makes its course through the fuller's earth of the east combe which gives our village its name (I believe, though some think 'Iscombe' or 'Esscombe' meant ash combe). And that fuller's earth is the reason no cottages survive on the downhill side of the road (apart from Mount Pleasant which must be on a spur of rock). The stream carries the fuller's earth along with it, so that the lakes at Toadsmoor silt up over time and the untended land grows boggy. When the badly cracked studio called Badgers Brook was demolished with a plan to rebuild on (finally *near*) its site, Dr Shelley was asked why he was paying such close interest to the project – and he replied, 'Because it may end up in my garden'. It is not at all uncommon for earth to shift dramatically in the Stroud valleys. The success of the wool industry, though, was due to having fuller's earth as well as water power, as it was used to remove the grease from fleeces. If you spot an oak tree around here, you have probably found a pocket of fuller's earth, which allows roots to spread in a way impossible in limestone brash...I always

assumed that hereabouts, where you see a grassy field sort of lapsing downhill, you are looking at fuller's earth. Alan Pilbeam confirms this, but adds the information that each bump or ledge in the field contains a broken-away slab of limestone that is encased in the fuller's earth. You can see what I mean in the Rodways field to the left of the Vatch as you near Eastcombe, or in the field below Wells Road. Phyllis Gaston in her book *Oil Lamp and Candle* wrote a great description of rushing to the rescue of Dick the 30-year-old horse bogged down where he had gone to drink on the Lower Common. She had to run up to Bingle's timberyard for pulleys and ropes and then to the farm to fetch Mr Godwin (no mobile phones in the 1930s). Phyllis had to stay with Mrs Godwin to help with the milk delivery (it was carried round the village in pails on a yoke) and they were on tenterhooks until 'there was Mr Godwin and Dick, both looking in an awful mess, covered in a greeny muddy slime. In spite of that, we both threw our arms around Dick's neck and hugged him. Mr Godwin had had to go out to him on the crawling boards but by now Dick was in too deep for him to get the chains under his body. So initially he had to be eased up by the neck until Mr Godwin could get the chains under his body and they could winch him out.' And that, children, is why I do not wish you to go into the fields by the stream.

In Victorian photographs and maps one can see that Lypiatt Park estate workers made a dead-straight culvert for the stream along the length of what we now call 'the flooded field', and above its natural lowest channel, and took hay crops off the meadow. Improbably, there was a Bismore cricket team who could play in that field. When we arrived in the mid-1980s there were still, occasionally, Ferris Court cows grazing in the field – and a merry time we had chasing them in our nighties when we found them wandering through our gardens early in the morning... Now, however, years of neglect mean that the stream has burst its banks and the water meanders all over the field, finding its natural course and making the boggy land unbelievably dangerous to trespassers – and electricity workers. When John Lane returned in the 1970s he was distressed to see the power lines on poles marching through the valley – and when we lose power in bad weather the repairmen are distressed by the conditions they meet in the field. During our time a mature oak tree has died in the field – drowned, I would say – and finally fallen. It does seem an awful waste.



*Can you see the culverted stream (above the tree in the foreground) and the little hay stacks? In the bottom left of the picture one can see that the hay has been scythed in the field leading down to the Swilley, but not yet turned and heaped*

In both 'Toadsmoor' and 'Bismore' the second element is supposedly the same word as 'mere', and means 'pond' or 'lake'. Alternatively, I cannot see why it should not equally well be the same word as 'moor', meaning 'marshy ground'. An entry for the Lypiatt Park auction is listed as 'Land Upper Toadsmoor Swamp'. There are people who believe 'our' field was a lake – nay, an abbey fishpond even – and it is easy to see that it could naturally be one, and perhaps *must* have been in order to be given that name. That ignores, however, the fact that Bismore is always described as a meadow...so if it once was a lake it was long before the Conquest, and good husbandry kept it drained for more than 1000 years, though now it is slipping back through neglect. Mary Rudd draws attention to a 1324 *post mortem* inquisition into the affairs of William Maunsell [Mansell]: 'The said William Maunsell held in Byseleye of Joan de Bohun one vivary, six acres of land and three acres of wood, by service of 30s p a, and they are worth nothing per annum besides the said rent' – and she says 'The vivary here mentioned is that known as the Fishpond at Todsmore, with its wood in Deptcombe, which has always gone with the Lypiatt estate until the estate was broken up in 1919. It has not been generally known that the Fishpond is of such ancient origin.' For any reader who has come recently to this area I should mention that this refers to the lake north of Toadsmoor hamlet. The lower lake was dug and stocked with fish very recently. Deptcombe (I have never heard this name in use locally) is presumably the valley that runs up behind Keeper's Cottage by the lake – which, incidentally, was the Doringtons' woodsman's cottage, not the gamekeeper's... And 'in Byseleye' would still be true, as to a large extent the current civil parish of Bisley-with-Lypiatt follows the old ecclesiastical parish (though that was much larger). While on the subject: I really do not like the idea that the first syllable of Toadsmoor could refer to 'tod', a fox. Leaving aside the fact that that is a North Country word, it came into use in the fourteenth century (I think), too late to feature in naming 'Toadsmoor'. 'Toad' itself is not implausible – or there may have been a chap with a name such as 'Teoda'. We'll never know. Conversely, the other hamlets in the valley seem to have obvious 'nature' names: Hawkley and Kitlye must both be called after the birds of prey that frequented the area.

As another digression: Eilert Ekwall in his standard work *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names* says of 'Biss Brook' that it is 'a British [meaning pre-Roman and Anglo-Saxon] river name, identical with Welsh *bys* ...originally "a twig" and used to denote a tributary stream'; but of our Bisley he says 'The place is not on a stream; hence the first element cannot be a river name'. Well. It just goes to show that there is no substitute for going to look for oneself! Surely the whole point of Bisley is that it originated as a clearing around the spring that feeds our stream, which is a tributary of the Frome; and Bismore is very watery. In *Cotswold Place-Names: a concise dictionary* David Whittaker accepts wholesale from Ekwall and Mary Rudd the idea that there was an Anglo-Saxon named Bisa to whom Bisley and Bismore belonged; but how likely is that? In his introduction he very helpfully points out that '[Place-names] were a kind of oral map for, amongst other things, guiding people across an often hostile terrain between settlements, indicating the ease of access, or otherwise, across various topographical features particularly rivers and floodplains; they also located springs, forests, tracks, clearings, ploughland, pastures, marshland, flora and fauna and could even give some clues to the weather in an area'. In our immediate vicinity Oakridge and Chalford and Bussage and the Bourne and Burleigh and Brimscombe and Lypiatt and Stancombe and Water Lane and Tunley and Daneway and Sapperton and Kitlye and Hawkley and Copegrove – for example – all refer to physical features, so I expect Bisley and Bismore do too. Certainly our stream would have had a name, and it would not have been 'the Toadsmoor Brook'.

I see that Professor Hoskins as early as the 1960s was kicking against 'the Teutonic element' in history studies, claiming that people were over-emphasizing the Anglo-Saxon period as a new beginning on this island: 'the local historian should be warned that Ekwall and his Swedish followers, and the English Place-Name Society generally, seem to me to be much stronger on English names than they are on Romano-British. There are probably more place-names deriving

from Celtic origin than we yet suppose.'

I am sometimes very slow on the uptake, and it has only recently dawned on me that part of the darkness of the Dark Ages, and later, was perhaps caused retrospectively by Henry VIII's minions making great big bonfires of such abbey and church documents as had survived earlier sackings of religious houses, deliberately to destroy records of ownership, and therefore facilitate his massive land grab. We would know so much more if that had not happened. (Of course, we are now creating for our descendants a new dark age, trusting material, as we do, to such ephemeral electronic technologies...) I may be wrong about the Reformation, as during the 1960s Anglo-Saxon charters were still coming to light and more may yet do so. Maybe. Such charters as we have are great sources for the derivation of place names as they used physical features to demarcate boundaries. Obvious to me hereabouts is Nash End (probably an ash where the estate boundary changed direction) – and perhaps the Lypiatts. At John Dodgson's lectures at University College London in the late 1960s I learned that in Anglo-Saxon times legal documents were written in Latin, but *details* of transactions – for example, boundaries – were always written in *English*. Land was transferred with the symbolic handing over of a turf *in front of witnesses*: with living testimonies, documents were unnecessary, and they were usually a simple memorandum. The transactions were worded in mnemonic form since they had to be *remembered by the bystanders*. They were recited, whether they were laws, contracts, or even wills. Gloucestershire, and indeed this parish, has records of wills right up to about 200 years ago, where a good-sized group of friends and neighbours had witnessed the making of a will – seen the actual objects mentioned – and could then keep an eye on what the executors did later. What a pity for us in Bismore that there was no equivalent of the Land Registry, so we would know at a glance what properties were referred to. Now back to where I was.

There is a little puzzle in the word 'swilley', still used by some older people here but hardly ever taken up by incomers and soon perhaps to be forgotten. Bismore Bridge is called 'the Swilley Bridge', the tunnel through it is called the Swilley, the land around the bridge is called the Swilley, the stream itself is called the Swilley, and no one has been able to tell me why. I used to try to find a similar Celtic word with a watery meaning, without success; but now I think I have discovered something. In *The Landscape of Gloucestershire* there is a description of a technique, perhaps introduced during the agricultural revolution but perhaps an older tradition, of cutting a herringbone pattern of ditches in a water meadow, for flooding or draining at will. We are told that near Naunton these are called swilleys. So perhaps the word was used here too, for that hay crop in the old photograph was certainly produced using that system, as can be seen by the way the field is flooding in channels now. Furthermore, on the 1842 tithe map one of the field names is 'Swilley', though that is a little way below Bismore Bridge on land now belonging to Bismore Farm. It stretched from the gate opposite Fairview, diagonally down the field following the original course of the tributary stream from Eastcombe and leaving the long-demolished cottages on the right, down to and along the stream, and was quite flat at the bottom. Along there, the stream still divides when in spate and runs on both sides of the field boundary wall: surely the relic of some purposeful water management... Recently though I saw 'swilleyman' on a list of wool-industry jobs – a fleece-washer, I think. (Bismore Farm, by the way, must have got its name after the 1869 enclosure and indeed after the 1919 auction – it was a cottage on what was the Lower Common.)

As yet another aside, and a comment upon our current strange society: one day in the autumn of 2011 I came across two likely lads with nice Geordie accents, sitting in their white van and debating their whereabouts. They said they were looking for a field with three manhole covers, they had come down from Tyneside to find them, and they had as a guide an A4 sheet of paper with a map printed off the internet. I turned the paper the other way up, showed them where we were, led them down to point out the sewage tank inspection hatches in the field previously known as the Swilley – which the water company had sent them to look at. They thought I was very clever, made a few notes, and drove off back home. A round trip of about 600 miles? Economically sensible?

Of course, I knew the tanks were there because I remembered the work being done. When we first lived in Bismore, the valley sometimes was filled with the smell of what used to be called, when I was young near the Humber bank, 'effluent'. The manhole on the lane above Crows Nest used to overflow and unmentionable objects were strewn down the lane. On the steep and high bank of the stream below Bismore Bridge pretty pink blotches turned out to be loo paper. We soon discovered that the main sewer from Bisley runs down the whole length of the Toadsmoor Valley. I think it was put in in the 1950s, and a fine feat of engineering it is. There is an Eastcombe resident who worked on it, and I suspect he is the only person in the whole universe who knows where all the sewers run in Eastcombe. Why does no local official go and interview him to get this on record? Do you think the water authority has this information? What a laugh. The increase in population, and modern water usage, meant that the old system was straining at the seams and holding tanks were put in to relieve the problem. And what infrastructure was renewed when the Manor Estate grew and grew? Yes, well.



*Rainwater cascading down the lane, joined by sewage pouring out of the field on the right*

Is there no longer such an official as the old Medical Officer of Health? In the old days, Eastcombe suffered terribly from waterborne diseases. Built like most 'squatter' villages near a spring, it nevertheless became a village of wells, and those that survive unfilled are fascinating as one can see in them not standing water but a rushing stream bucketing down the hillside. Unfortunately the contents of the cottage privies entered the same watercourse, with deadly results. Wells were filled in (leading to problems of subsidence under houses) and piped water was provided. Yet some time ago, when sewage was leaching visibly and (what would the word be?) smellily from a field on to the Old Hill, it took literally years to persuade the privatised company responsible to acknowledge the need to make repairs, and actually do them. What a retrograde development.

Soon after we moved here in 1986, the water board gave due warning of works, and laid a new water main down the road into Bismore. We particularly enjoyed the 'road narrows' sign placed at the top. For a very long time, by car one had to leave the valley before 8am and return after 6pm – or walk. The workmen used to lift the pushchair over their machines for me. The pipe

was laid down the lane and then past our house and, with the appropriate easement, through our wood. Then: nothing. We continued to have the occasional earthworm or soil in the bath when the old 1930s pipe down the field from Wells Road parted company with itself because the fuller's earth kept slipping. The water board refused to mend it, and Bob with David Wilkinson from The Glen would go and dig a hole where there were obvious signs of a leak, and effect a repair. It was ages before I discovered that Kitlye cottages had no water if I was running our washing machine and washing-up machine at the same time. After a few years it transpired that the water board refused to make repairs because we were supposed to be on the new main and nobody had applied to be joined to it. It was then discovered that the water authority had forgotten to send out forms for us to apply. This, they thought, entitled them to charge us for connection. The longer householders (mainly pensioners of course) delayed, the more they were charged. I remember that David hired a mini digger and dug his own trench up his drive, through the garden and up to his house, as the sum demanded ran into thousands.

And furthermore, while talking about this sort of thing: gas has arrived in the valley gradually. First the then owners of Bismore Farm paid to have it laid from above Crows Nest down their field to the house. Some time later, the then new owners of Fairview paid £2000 to have contractors continue the pipework down the lane from the stile – and this seemed remarkably little to me. I found out why later. When it rains hard, the Old Hill turns into a sort of Lakeland ghyll as all the surface water from this end of the village cascades down the road. The soakaways are usually blocked – and workmen now lack the old rods the Council had for keeping them clear – so the water comes down the lane, and rapidly erodes the surface soil at the edge of the tarred surface. Other steep hills have concrete gutters, but not ours. My eye was taken by a flash of yellow – and I discovered that the gas pipe is just inches below the surface where the workmen had sort of scratched a channel for it. Super.

We have had trouble, too, with the electricity supply, as neighbours (who did not mention they were about to put their house on the market) objected to the power and telephone lines that had always run from pole to pole across their garden and in their view – so the lines were put underground through most of the hamlet, poles were removed, and within front our garden the paving and steps were smashed (and not repaired) in order to bring the lines into our house. The gang responsible was disbanded and hundreds of miles away before we could think of complaining. Privatisation has proved *so* exhausting.

The Victorian-rebuilt cottage called Fairview, by the way, adjoins a very much older single-roomed building; and on old maps one can see that in those days the stream from Eastcombe passed diagonally under or through that building before dropping down to the Toadsmoor brook. The field opposite and below Fairview's gate shows a definite declivity where the stream went. Its course must have been changed when Fairview was built – recent owners altered it again to get it away from the house, which may not have been a good move. Stories differ about what this building was – some say a wash house, but I very much doubt that (though there is a woman on one Victorian census whose occupation was given as 'washerwoman'). The Shelleys used to call it the 'brewist', but I never asked them why. Jack came from a Shropshire pub background, and Bernice from Cornwall, so I just vaguely assumed it was a dialect word for a 'brewhouse'. The word seems to be in use in the States for an artisanal brewer... There is no record, however, of any population big enough to keep a beerhouse going, or a manor house brewing at a distance. Perhaps it would be sensible to assume that it was something like a cowshed or dairy, or, considering the hearth and chimney, perhaps it is a surviving humble dwelling – but – built athwart the watercourse? It's a bit of a puzzle.

Coming back to what I was writing about before all the tirades: just what is Bismore Bridge? It is an ancient and substantial construction, carrying a very old road over the stream at a point that presumably was considered too boggy for a ford, but rather than an arched bridge it is a sort of dam at the end of the flooded field. The stream disappears underground and emerges, 30-50 yards

further on, below the bridge, as a waterfall into a positive chasm, unique in the length of the Toadsmoor Valley. If one enters the stream bed below it and walks up to the masonry wall that forms the dam, a little scramble up will allow one to peer into the 'tunnel' if there is not too much flow of water. Then it is possible to see that the whole construction is a remarkable feat of ancient engineering, with great dressed monoliths lining an impressive conduit. *What* was it for? When the bridge was being repaired 12 years or more ago – a fine job for Gloucestershire Highways – I was told that the last repair recorded in the county archives was towards the end of the seventeenth century. More than 300 ago! How old was it then if it needed repair? How long have boys been daring one another to crawl through it? Five hundred years? A thousand? When Felix arrived home in a state obviously showing what he had been up to, I made him talk about it, and to this day he insists that the worst part was emerging with an enormous and very black spider on him. Consulting the Collins guide to insects I concluded we may have something very rare indeed down there. It would not be surprising. I do not intend going down to find out.

The bridge carries an old road, and maybe the dam and embankment were simply because of the difficult terrain. But Oliver Rackham in *The History of the Countryside* says 'Our earthen dams derive from the water-mill technology of the Anglo-Saxons...there were also reservoirs behind dams... From the Middle Ages onwards there were many dams for fishponds or to drive mills.' It is a great pity for us that he includes very little on the Cotswolds in this prodigious work.

Bismore Bridge is in fact at a crossroads. The Old Hill comes down from Eastcombe (a hollow way of possibly great antiquity, much older than any house in the village) and is joined by the Lagger track that comes along the contour from Toadsmoor Garage past Bismore Farm. When we moved here we were told that the Doringtons put that road in for timber extraction to save the horses going up the Old Hill, which is appallingly steep and bendy. This cannot be right, as a waggon with whole trunks would not be able to make the turn into the track outside Fairview (a Dorington-built cottage). Also, the track was on early maps long before the road from Toadsmoor to Eastcombe, now called The Vatch, was built. Timber would have been taken out through Lypiatt Park: when our beech wood was planted around 1870, that would have been the intention.

The old lanes came up the valley on both sides of the stream, and indeed on one map the track from Bismore Bridge to Toadsmoor Lake is labelled as the route to London. It crosses the London roads, old and 'new' (1814), at the Bourne at the bottom of Toadsmoor Valley, going under the A419 and the railway now and climbing up the opposite hill on its way to Minchinhampton, Avening, Tetbury and Malmesbury. This one was probably always liable to flooding, and the higher route on the other side of the stream was made as an alternative. In *Medieval Roads and Tracks* Paul Hindle makes the point that 'If the route was much frequented it became a physical track, with two important provisos. The first was that if the road was obstructed or had become "foundrous" in wet weather, then the traveller had the right to diverge from the road, even if that entailed trampling crops. The second proviso was that where the road had to climb a hill or bank then multiple tracks would develop, the traveller taking the easiest route then available'.

The third road from the bridge, up to and past Ferris Court, is Eastcombe's original route to Stroud, half the distance travelled now, and was Bismore people's way out in snow before the Government's recent sweeping reclassification of rural bye-roads closed it to mechanized transport.

Fred Beavis, then chimneysweep of great renown locally, just once in the late 1980s came to use his muscular technique on our three chimneys. He spent the whole morning banging down tarry clods of soot, consuming tea and toast at intervals and filling us in on 70 years of gossip as he worked (and at the end of three or four hours asked Bob if £4 would be all right). He said that in the 1930s he was part of the gang that last repaired the track up to Ferris Court for the Council. I thought he said they tarred it, but Phyllis Gaston said the Old Hill was not surfaced as a 'blue road' till the 1950s. Anyway, the workmen made a thorough job of putting an immaculate surface down – and the day after they finished the motor trials (see John Lane's description) came through and totally destroyed what the roadmen had achieved. The County Council never repaired the road

again – and now, with the recent reclassification, chooses to deny that it was ever open to motor vehicles. And this despite the fact that they have previously issued countless maps that say 'Council Road' on that stretch...



*The message on the postcard on the left is dated 1913, and the caption is 'Bismore Avenue'. There is no one alive today to remember the trees growing on the right at the edge of the Lower Common; but this is clearly the Old Hill if you compare it with the 1990s photograph. Both Phyllis Gaston and Frances Deacon emphasised that no waggons or cars went up and down the lane – yet the surface is obviously meant for traffic, and on old maps one can see 'bites' out the margin of the bank on the left – now used as passing places – where horse-drawn carts must have turned out of the farm gate that until recently was in the wall on the right*

It is true that the Old Hill proves perilous for some drivers, and we have towed many a vehicle out of trouble. We'll skip over the episode when someone dropped a horsebox full of sheep on me (unhitched it on the hill without chocking the wheels), and just mention that I once nearly rolled the big Land Rover myself by repeatedly slipping backwards with nearside wheels up the bank (the trick when meeting another vehicle on the lane is to make the driver heading downhill go into the passing place, otherwise the one heading uphill will never get started again on the gravel, leaves, frost or snow – but some drivers refuse to cooperate). Mind you, I have never equalled Bob's exploit when delivering cards to Kitlye one Christmas Eve. The Land Rover had to stay in place for everyone to have a laugh over Christmas, and then on Boxing Day a nice chap brought his digger from Througham and lifted it back on to the track. It is called 'making your own entertainment'.



*If God had intended us to reverse in Bismore he would have put eyes in the back of our heads. Good job that tree was there to prevent a complete roly-poly (grateful thanks to Denis Sparks for this photograph)*

There was an exhaustive inquiry into the status of the track past Bismore Farm during the 1990s when the then residents raised the matter with the County Council. The earliest available maps were not very helpful, and the Council's legal advice was to base the decision on the situation following the 1869 Inclosure Award. The idea that it was a 'logging track' stemmed, I think, from mention at enclosure that new, private, proprietors of adjacent land, formerly the common, would be permitted to use that way for carting timber. During that 1990s dispute, evidence was taken from long-term locals who knew of long-term unimpeded footpath use. (No one asked an equally long-term dustman, who told me he always used to *drive* to Bismore through from Toadsmoor. In fact, I think the dustmen still do.) Everyone agreed that during the 1970s and 1980s, certainly, the first (or last) part of the track, opposite Fairview, was very overgrown; and when we arrived in 1986 there was no vehicular access that way to Bismore Farm or Cutham's Cottage. What has never been said is that maybe there was some then-unresolved issue over ownership. I have a clear memory of seeing a map on which someone in the Highways department had marked in colour the tracks for which the Council took responsibility, and they included the first 100 yards or so towards Bismore Farm.

The fourth road from Bismore Bridge, now hardly surviving past Keeper's Cottage and on through Lypiatt Park up Stancombe and over the Bisley – Stroud road to Elcombe, Slad and Painswick, parallels the way Charles I's army went to the siege of Gloucester. People who live over Catswood way think this is why the old track is called King Charles's Way or Lane or Road – but Mary Rudd quotes a fourteenth-century charter delineating land near a (long-gone) property called The Pear (between Over Lypiatt and Copsegrove): '*...illam terram meam apud la Pere juxta regales [?regalem?] viam ex occ de Byseleye versus Bistrugge*' (Bussage), so there was a royal road long before Charles came by. Was this the standard expression for 'the king's highway', just as we would

use the term today? Maybe; I am too ignorant to know. Mediaeval kings kept on the move the whole time, and it was therefore in their own interest to keep the road network in good repair.



*The track from Bismore Farm towards Fairview, as it was before the Lower Common was totally fenced. It must be old to have cut so deeply into the hillside. When tobogganing one had to remember to fall off before the sledge made the bone-jarring drop down on to the track! Honeyhill and Bismore Cottage can just be seen in the middle distance*

Indeed, I believe our valley road was the old route from the south for reaching the 'cross' at the head of Stancombe, Stone Valley. (I do not think that stone was moved very far. Has anyone considered that perhaps it was displaced when the Bisley – Stroud road was turnpiked about 1828/29 and a toll cottage was built?) Phyllis Gaston always called it the 'Lord's Stone', and it is tempting to think that that is a direct survival of *hlaforðes stan*; but then... That is certainly not the terminology used about a cross in the Anglo-Saxon poem 'The Dream of the Rood'. In the 1300s when Norman French was giving way to the Middle English of Chaucer's time, not only was Stroud documented as La Strode but also another stone monolith boundary marker was called La Horestone – which sounds very like 'Lord's Stone'. Mary Rudd found a 1654 reference in the Lypiatt MS book to the 'Lord's Stone', so I cannot continue to believe – as I was used – that perhaps the term was another example of Canon Keble's spoof history.

Incidentally, for those interested in the little dispute that always simmers gently around the Lord's Stone: I clearly remember that Bisley-with-Lypiatt Parish Council sought advice from the British Museum – I would guess around 1990 – and the expertise concluded that the carving was probably from the seventh century (or in other words improbably early in the known Christian history of this part of the country) and the site is probably pretty near original, but that in any case the stone is now so weather-worn that there is no point in moving it or sheltering it in the interests of conservation. At least, I *think* that is what was said, and I seem to be the only person who remembers the episode, but I have not sought access to the Council minutes. They exist, though. Here and now is not the place for me to be discussing this, but I cannot resist mentioning that I have just read in Finberg that at that time the Mercian rulers, the Hwicce, had very close family ties with the Northumbrian aristocracy, with many of the same names. Can this be the explanation for our

having a carved 'cross', when the famous examples such as the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses are all in the north? I shall go on mulling this over, it fascinates me.

Of course, these days no one thinks of Stancombe as being near Bismore; but the two valleys do join and in the days of travelling on foot the hamlets would have been considered neighbours. Another reason for needing a good path up the valley would have been to reach the witan tree (see the farm name near Stancombe) where the local Saxon council met, possibly on a site considered ancient even then. Bisley and Stancombe have registered quite a succession of Roman remains over the years, making it clear, I suppose, that they were the principal settlement long before the mediaeval manor houses were built along the Lypiatt springline. It is said that the Cotswolds were very popular with soldiers retiring from the Roman legions, and they would have had modest land holdings alongside the great villas, so we may legitimately suppose that there was continuous cultivation around here. Latest DNA studies, however, show that there was much less intermarriage than previously supposed likely (all over the country) – and I certainly noticed, when first here, that there are far more shortish dark people in the population than where I grew up in the Danelaw: I am absolutely sure that there is a strong British or Celtic inheritance here.

'Hoarstone' is another word that has fallen out of the language during the twentieth century, surviving in Eastcombe now just as a house name; but the 1842 tithe map shows that fields to the north and east of Fidges Lane – next to Fidges Piece, Wigley Piece, Sheephouse Ground and Shepherd's Mead – were called Hoarstone and Little Hoarstone. In fact, the whole big field (where the reservoir now is) was called Hoarstone as well – and the boundary stones were also still in existence and marked on the maps of the time. I am not aware of any boundary stones in Bismore.

When I look out of our kitchen windows at the view stretching down the valley to Nether Lypiatt, or north-west towards Over Lypiatt, I can just persuade myself that I would have seen the tired horses and men of the royalist army dragging all their arms and armour through the mud and stealing people's chickens as they went. They were on their way from Bristol to Gloucester; and to this day, if in Bristol one enters 'shortest route to Cheltenham/Gloucester' into a car's satnav, it will bring you through Avening and down Hyde Hill before crossing the Frome to climb on to our plateau. The army and its scouts would have climbed through Quarhouse, or up Toadsmoor or Old Neighbourhood. When you think how narrow the lanes are, perhaps all were used. There was a small Parliamentary force at Lypiatt Park, so they would have been marauding around here too – until attacked by a detachment from the garrison at Cirencester. Rather a lot of men (50?) died...

When we first moved in I could see down to the bridge, well enough to despair at the sight of our springer spaniel puppy yet again going off with walkers (I used to have to throw the babies in the Land Rover and zoom down to Toadsmoor to retrieve him). I could see the horses on the Lower Common, and the kingcups down in the flooded field. Now, of course, weed trees have been allowed to grow unchecked, and in summer our distant views disappear. And beastly Himalayan balsam has come down the stream from a Bisley garden and is rapidly blotting out all our wildflowers under a sheet of stinking pink.

Landowners, farmers, used to be encouraged to plant trees along their boundaries as a slow-growing crop for fuel and building material; but times changed, the wood was no longer needed so urgently, the trees were allowed to grow unchecked, and nowadays there tends to be an outcry if any management is attempted... Speaking of weed trees, I must mention Gwen Day of whom so many of us cherish happy memories.

When we arrived here Mrs Day was already very old, but she legged it down from the village daily to take her dog Rosie on a circular walk down the Old Hill, through the wood and back up Fidges Lane. One afternoon early in 1987, when our second baby was just about due, she came across me sweeping the lane clear of sycamore twigs as Bob attacked a row of saplings that were taking our light and view. (They were in the Shelleys' garden, but the Shelleys were kindness itself to us.) With her lovely crisp diction Mrs Day said, 'You shouldn't be doing that in your condition'. 'Oh it's Bob, Mrs Day, he wanted the job done now.' 'Well, Muriel, that's the thing about marriage,'

she said over her shoulder as she continued on into the wood. 'You go on thinking that it's bound to get better...but it never does!' No wonder we all loved her.

The top corner of the Shelleys' property was marked by a very much older, massive, ash tree. It is visible on the 1920s postcards. I called it the tree of life – from our kitchen window I could see constant movement in its heavy ivy coating – squirrels, woodpeckers, pigeons, rooks, magpies, jays, songbirds, and enchanting nuthatches scuttling up and down the trunk – and it was so large that branches spread across the lane, over our garden, and in windy weather tickled the boys' bedroom window in good *Wuthering Heights* fashion. During one storm it disgraced itself by dropping a branch, itself about 18 inches in diameter, on to our lawn. It would have brained anyone passing by. The Shelleys immediately summoned wood guru Bob Bingle who came and gave the most instantaneous and succinct expert advice I have ever been privileged to witness. He bent down to the bottom of the trunk, stuck a finger to its full length through the bark, stood up, said 'That's got to go', and returned home. Saying goodbye to the tree was so sad – I miss the nature lessons, but love having afternoon sunshine in the garden, and being able to see across the valley to the Keeper's Cottage track. It will not be for long: the tree of life's babies are already 50 feet high and screening our view of the Bisley – Stroud road a mile away.



*The sad but fascinating felling of the tree of life. Overleaf can be seen the cause of the problem*



Years ago I brought Reg Fawkes down here after Friday Club one week, hoping to give him a treat. As we inched down the lane he said he had not been to Bismore for 20, 30, 40 years – well, not since before the war. A treat? Far from it. The lush greenery that we find so romantic seemed a sign of shocking neglect to him, and he found it all a shattering disappointment, driving him to blasphemy. What he remembered were the immaculate cottage gardens and the flower-filled rockeries tumbling down the banks. One can see on the 1920s postcards that every plot sported neat rows of vegetables, enough to feed the family all year, and the drystone walls were in apple-pie order with not an ash or sycamore sapling given the time of day. I was properly put in my place.

Jack Shelley – engineer of high repute and giant intellect, legendary toper and gardiner *extraordinaire* – always comforted me by saying that one had to be retired to have an orderly garden. How astonished he would be by some local gardens now. Retired? Rich is also a solution.

Jack was famous for doing everything himself. Ron Saunders, publican, said he was capable of building everything from a quartz watch to a jet engine; but he was also capable of shaping stones and slates, making leaded windows, inserting building ties... It was a sad day for us when, some time after Mrs Shelley's death, he decided to go back to the Midlands where he was born; and I have never let him know what has been done to his house and garden. As far as our own garden is concerned, it was going to rival Rosemary Verey's – but I know now that I have neither the strength nor the money to achieve what I longed for.

Quite a long time before Jack left he confided that he used the weeks he spent in Shropshire visiting his mother (who was well over a hundred when she died) to get on with some writing, and he asked for publishing advice. He produced over 700 closely written foolscap pages – which turned out to be a 1930s-style detective story. An academic couple settled in an idyllic Cotswold valley. The ideal villages (no cars to be parked on the streets, everyone to have garages) had ideal pubs (no fatty food, just excellent bread and cheese and pickles and beer *ad lib*), but the way of life was threatened by plans to build a huge housing estate on adjacent farmland. The baddy builder (Reginald) was the brother of the decent landowner (Maurice). The love interest was provided by the young local policeman walking a nice girl round the cricket pitch in the twilight... The murder was heavily dependent on split-second timing. The whole story was interspersed with calculations

an engineer would find interesting ('The bus turned through approximately eighty degrees to the left in order to continue in a northerly direction') and unfortunately I was too mesmerised by the insight into Jack's thought processes about his marriage, home, community, to be able to assess the book objectively. I could only offer to type up sample chapters to offer to publishers...

It is sad that so many skills and crafts are being lost, making it all the more important I think that we preserve the worthwhile things that are left. There are still some fine craftsmen around, but too often people employ builders and architects who do not understand Cotswold stone houses. The suburban urges showing up in Eastcombe are sidling into the valley now, but nature will deal with those in time. What cannot be replaced are things of true historical interest and value, so I wish all landowners would pay attention, for example, to the remarkable stone monolith stiles and gateposts that exist around here. Some mark pathways that have long fallen into disuse after failing to be entered on the definitive map of public footpaths, so the stones are now hidden in hedgerows, or fallen in fields, or sprawling in the stream bed. Some, of course, are still in daily use.

Naturally things have to change as time moves on, but I do hope for nothing else too dramatic during our tenure here. I had to learn a long time ago not to get over-excited about the inexplicable (or do I mean inexcusable?) planning decisions that crop up periodically. I was greatly exercised by what happened across the way from us. The studio called Badger's Brook, a pink-washed cube originally built in her back garden by a long-ago owner of Little Orchard and possibly considered a bit of an eyesore even then, of course had to be demolished after the death of the august and solitary Mary Thompson. It was sliding down the hillside, having no foundations to speak of. We live in a conservation area, however, and it was then that I discovered that planners pay no attention to their own guidelines and Mary's wonderful garden full of charm and rare plants was simply obliterated. Lots of other things were going wrong at the same time... The other day I came across this poem(?) entitled 'Bismore 2000' in which I expressed some fairly vehement feelings, though it is significant that I now cannot exactly remember what was upsetting me. The deep spirituality that can be felt when taking one's place in these beautiful surroundings is hard to voice and seldom spoken of, but it is something that is profoundly cherished.

I thought I lived in Paradise –  
How mad I was, insane  
To think that time would freeze  
Frame us in eternal peace.

So much is right, so much is good;  
So many perfect days  
When sky and hills and trees and air  
Please every sense at once.

Locked in the valley, away from eyes,  
Savouring the bliss of privacy with  
Pride of possession and holy joy  
In the spirit of place that shimmers here

Like the sun through the beech trees,  
The cobwebby dew,  
Falling water diamonds  
And the buzzards' mew.

As the seasons cartwheel past  
Ancient windows and the ghosts  
Watch our children grow how fiercely  
I wish to bottle love.

Now the enemy lurks just over the ridge  
And forces are mustered to pillage the peace.  
Society's ills are yapping and snarling and  
Showing their teeth to the fools down below.

Desecration and sacrilege, madness and pain,  
Death and divorce and destruction again...  
God, give back the langour, the lingering wonder,  
The golden glory that honeyed us round.

Does everyone living here realize how lucky we are? We do not want to become better known, so Bob advised, for example, that we did not respond to Richard Mabey's appeal when he was gathering information about wild flowers for his *Flora Britannica*. When I was a child in the 1950s, so long ago now, herbicides had already taken their effect on Lincolnshire's farms and our Sunday afternoon family walk used to take in *the* orchid, *the* cowslip, *the* violets, or *the* clump of harebells. On the banks of Bismore we see these in profusion, with rock roses and mignonette and mountain knapweed and agrimony and betony and archangel and milkwort and wild thyme and and and. We might have a lot, but that does not mean I was not furious when the pony of a friend's child, trespassing on what is no longer a bridlepath, trod on a clump of white violets and totally destroyed it. I know nearly every plant in our garden and wood, and value them all. There is no such thing as 'public land' around here, despite the lack of fences and notices, but we love to hear children having harmless fun in the wood as ours did (and do). I do not like it when damage is done, or when someone gets to the berried holly at Christmas before I do! When the hunt came through one year, causing us not a few problems, Flower Fitch Kemp tried to get me to telephone the Master. 'They are arrogant bastards,' she said, 'You ring Timmy and tell him Flower said so!' Mike Musson said that he would hold my coat.

Having mentioned Flower I must add another story. She trudged through the woods in woollies and wellies with her Jack Russells, but had her hair cut at Harrod's. Her granddaughters went to Eastcombe Primary School, and at leaving time one day I found Flower in the playground looking totally Chanel, having been in to talk about Her War. (She said the girls had said, 'Granny, don't you *dare* come in your *moon boots*!') She was clutching an old envelope with amazing drawings on it. 'Well,' said Flower, 'they were very interested in my *knickers*. We had khaki ones, you know. I told them about having tea at the *Ritz*. I mean, what else could one do when *bombed out*?' We still miss her.

One dry year I saw bird's nest orchids in the woods as well as the usual helleborines and so forth; and once I saw a never-to-be-repeated (except I bet it is still there) morel in addition to the earth stars and yellow stainers and all the usual fungi. Muriel Little in her letters describes being taken to gather wild strawberries – in sufficient quantity for jam – and 80 years later we could still do that. I am not so hot on birds as I am on flowers – the woods seem to be full of LBJs – but I know that buzzards wheel overhead in increasing numbers, and I have seen a peregrine falcon who must have been lost, and extraordinarily I recognized the cry of a raven winging its way along the valley: a sound I had not heard since visiting the Tower of London about 50 years ago. This very morning I have realized I now know the call of a willow warbler (well, maybe); and I can easily tell the difference between a blackbird and a nightingale. I have had to accept insects, too, as an important part of life – shrieks and squeaks somewhere in the house mean that yet another spider the size of a dinner plate (all right, then, coffee saucer) has revealed itself; evening missiles flung against the windows announce the arrival of maybugs; a sharp pain when hanging out washing says horseflies are here again; a quick stealthy movement glimpsed from the corner of one's eye means the first cricket is coming in for autumn (in August!); ghastly moving black masses in the corner of the attic windows are cluster flies (Mrs Southall used to say 'from out the ivy'); and through last winter ladybirds swarmed and swarmed through the whole house. Damsel flies and dragonflies

hover like helicopters and shimmer petrol blue, and every now and again one can gradually focus on a patch of pink and green in the grass, a perfectly camouflaged elephant hawk moth. HOW LUCKY WE ARE!

Thinking about it: I say that we do not want the valley to become better known, but actually perhaps we are more responsible than others for spreading its fame. Our house features as a waypoint in several walking guides, but more importantly it is a checkpoint on the annual 22-mile Five Valleys Walk run by the Meningitis Trust. When this fund-raising event began in – maybe – 1987 the checkpoint was up in the village and exhausted walkers found it hard to drag up the hill only to go down again. By 1990 the checkpoint had changed to Fairview, and, although I always contributed cakes, on the whole Mrs Shelley had to manage the tea and coffee alone. After her death we volunteered to take over the checkpoint here, more as a tribute to her than anything else; and ever since then there is a day in September when I contemplate total collapse. The event has grown phenomenally, and we reckon we (with masses of help) now serve refreshments to well over 1000 people passing our house on that day, and take £1000 with all profit for the Trust. At least portaloos are now provided, so fewer people come into the house. The nice thing is, I get thank-you letters from all over the country from people who have enjoyed their visit to beautiful Bismore and hope to return.

A friend in the village whose work in aviation, before retirement, took him around the world said once that he was beginning to worry about himself as he debated whether he *really* needed to go to Cirencester that day. 'Huh', I replied, 'that's nothing. I think "have I *really* got to go up to the village today?"' Whenever an old village character dies people say that we shall never see their like again: but I am understudying their eccentricity like mad.

There is a book of super photographs with text by Susan Hill called *The Spirit of the Cotswolds*. The last chapter is headed Bisley – Miserden – Sheepscombe – Painswick – the Slad valley: one hill away from us, I think that is close enough to claim to be included when she says 'I have saved the best till last...I know more spectacular bits of the Cotswolds, more obviously pretty, but I know nowhere that gives me such complete joy, that is quite so flawless, and yet real, living, not artificially preserved. I think I could end my days in this little valley as contentedly as anywhere on earth...I knew that for certain, in this magic spot, I had found what I had been looking for, the place where the pure spirit of the Cotswolds bubbled up out of the ground like a spring. And I knew that it would always be here for me to drink deep and be refreshed, renewed, restored.'

In the early 1990s we had repeated visits from a German girl, then 19, who was having an immensely privileged and well travelled education. She has been an EU lawyer in Brussels for many years now. She was always very good company, very polite, and helpful with the children, but I grew secretly mildly irritated because she never enthused about any of the outings I arranged for her. I felt that I could not impress her. And then one day as we went up through the wood, across Fidges Lane, and mounted the field toward Sheepphouse she stood still and looked over the valley towards the Lypiatts and Copsegrove and said, 'It is so beautiful here I can't think why you ever leave.' That's all right then. I agree.



*Fun in Bismore*

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