

Chapter VI: Weymouth; Chickerall; school; Chesil Bank; Cheltenham and Pates Grammar School for Girls; Tidworth; Brightlingsea

After a brief spell at Cheltenham while my father tried to find us lodgings near Monte Video Camp two miles west of Weymouth, he came to fetch us down to Weymouth. Monte Video Camp was for the ANZACs only, and was mostly a sort of clearing depot where men either were sent away to be trained, or rather retrained, to go back to some theatre of war, or they were sent back to Australia as being unfit for further service. It was a camp built in several fields, and was given that name after the country house across the road. Obviously my father didn't want to go back to Australia while we were in England, and equally obviously he didn't want to go to France. Being in the Engineers he was able to get a job in charge of the services of the camp baths, drains, etc, and planning the layout of the camp. The men he chose to be under him were the greatest drunks in the place, whom no one wanted. My father had a way with them, and incidentally some of them were extremely clever men. They respected him so much that they used to give him much of their pay on payday so that they could not drink it all at once!

Chiefly owing to the different railway services in Britain in those days, it was a difficult journey from Cheltenham, taking all day, as you needed to change at least twice, and the trains would not wait for each other as they were different lines. So by the time we got to Weymouth it was dark and quite late, and we then had a two-mile taxi drive.

The other side of the camp, less than a quarter of a mile along the road to the nearest village of Chickerall, was a terrace of 14 houses, 13 of them joined and one detached. The name of the terrace was as ugly as the houses set down in the beauty of the Dorsetshire countryside... 'Brickyard Terrace', for there was a small brickyard behind it. Lodgings were very hard to find and my father had managed two rooms in no.14 Brickyard Terrace. The door opened into a small, badly lit room, there was a line across the room with bedclothes hanging on it. Mother was horrified and declared we couldn't stay there. My father said there was nowhere else unless we went back to Weymouth, and it was very late at night, and at least it was clean. So Mother agreed to stay.

Apart from a small scullery with a copper, there was only one other room downstairs with a fireplace and stairs up to the two bedrooms. So we had to go through their room to go up to bed. In the morning we woke to find ourselves in a slum, a slum in the middle of the countryside. This was in late 1915. About 10 years before, the hillside behind had been quarried for clay, and a small brick factory set up. It was decided to build a small house for the manager, and a string of 13 cottages for the workers. In the front of each cottage was a small, very small, garden, and a gateway with no gate. They never got round to putting in a gate. At the back of these four-roomed houses was a wide brick path which ran the entire length of the row. The land beyond had never been fenced into separate gardens.

So it was a no-man's-land. At two points along the brick path were *two water taps providing all the water for the 13 houses*. Whether water was needed for a cup of tea, cooking, a bath, or washing clothes, you had to queue up at these taps. They sometimes froze up in winter. There was no form of lighting in the houses, and just two fireplaces fixed. Beyond the no-man's-land used by everyone's children, fowls, cats and dogs, etc, some 40 yards or so away were seven bricked mires where no one went. A few yards the other side of those were 13 earth toilets back to back, and then you knew what the mires were for! The no-man's-land after a shower of rain became a muddy slide. Over it was sprinkled a few drunken clothes lines.

Our landlady, Mrs Weedon, was rather pathetic, thin, asthmatic, and hardworking. She went to work every day, as her husband was a hopeless, fat semi-invlaid with very bad sores on his legs. Their son, a young teenager as yet too young for the army, worked in the brickyard behind, and

when he came in at lunchtime smelling of the clay he worked among, often his father was too lazy to warm a bit of soup for him. He just sat about grumbling all day. Their daughter, about the same age as her brother, was being trained as a maid in the household of the Scottish Dr Pacey.

For some months we lived in these two rooms. Mother would only let us play in the 10-foot garden in the front. It was winter time mostly while we were at no.14, and Mother began reading us more grown-up books, and we would have two of the better type comics a week. Arthur Mee began his Children's Newspaper about then, and we thought that was quite something to have our own newspaper. Although I could only just read it myself, I was very, very proud of it, and saved all the copies for some time.

One afternoon the four of us were walking in a row along a quiet country road when a line of Australian soldiers came walking towards us. Suddenly the end one came dashing forward to greet us with amazement and delight. It was *Mr Morrison*, the second engineer from the *Ajana*! What was he doing in the Australian army and not the English merchant navy, and what were we doing in England? The trouble was he had a great fault. *Drink!* When we were living in the orchard in WA Mother had discovered him working as a labourer on a road in Perth. He had been dismissed from his ship. Mother invited him to visit us. More than a month went by before he turned up, with the tallest doll I had ever owned, and a motor car toy for Geoffrey. He said he had started out to visit us some days before, but he was put in jail for drunkenness, and a landlord had taken care of the toys until he came out. My father was able to get him a job on an interstate boat and that was the last we had seen of him. My parents invited him to visit us in Brickyard Terrace.

Owing to the difficulty of the water situation, etc, we had to bath at night in our one living room, in a tub. Geoffrey, as youngest, would be done first and taken up to bed and then me. One night, when I was in the tub, there came a knock at the door. Mother took me and rolling me in towels, put me on the sofa. Then my father answered the door, and Mr Morrison, very drunk, rolled in. Mother told him to sit down, and he sat in the *bath!* Luckily he had on his great coat and they were able to pull him out before he got very wet. They sat him on a chair, and then there came another knock at the door. My parents thought it would be the military police who had followed Mr Morrison down, guessing he was drunk. Putting a screen to partly shield the door, my father opened the door in such a way that the police could not see into the room. It was quite clear to them that my father, although in Australian uniform, was not drunk, and they had the impression that they had followed him, at least that was what my father hoped. After they had departed and after I had been hurried up to bed, my parents gave Mr Morrison lots of coffee and my father took him back to camp. He often came to see us after that, but always when he was sober. He was due back in France any time, and he said that he would *never* be taken prisoner.

In 1919, walking along the same bit of road, we met him again, but he was quite different. More dead than alive, he had been taken prisoner and tried to escape three times. He had been cured of drinking. He was trying to get his discharge in England so that he could return to his native Scotland. He had six special brooches, for his five nieces, and one for me, his other 'niece' – and that was really the last we saw of him.

Outside the camp there was always a fleet of cabs and a few taxis waiting to take anyone to Weymouth. One night quite late when my parents were just about to retire for the night, and Mother had taken all the pins out of her hair to make two plaits which cascaded in black waves over each shoulder, there was a knock at the door... When my father opened the door, a tall handsome soldier, rather drunk, rolled in. He had taken a cab from the camp to see my father to give him the rest of his pay. He had a cultured English voice. In the middle of his request, he suddenly saw my mother and, forgetting all else, sank to his knees and began the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. My father hastily bundled him into the cab and paid the cabby to take him back to camp. The

next afternoon, Mr Meacock came to apologise for visiting us when drunk. From then on he became a great friend of the family. We never saw him again when drunk. He was sent down from Oxford, and when the war broke out was a surveyor in Australia.

All these weeks we had been hoping to find somewhere to live. The house next door, no.13, became vacant, and we were told we could rent it. As the landlords were superstitious and we went in on the thirteenth of the month they gave us a week's rent! It was painted and fumigated before we moved in and, as soon as we did, we found the place was still swarming with *fleas* and it took Mother weeks to get rid of them. The furniture and our toys were brought down from Bristol, and Mother said she would never separate us from our toys again. My father's 'boys' made a sign to hang over the door. 'The Humpy'. Australian men marching by would be very cheered by it, as in those days shacks used to be known as 'humpies'. But the English soldiers would chant 'Humpty Dumpty'.

Our large bedroom was our playroom on wet days, and we would often use the trunks as office desks or counters if we played shops. While at Dundry Mother had bought a large fourposter bed, complete with curtains, valances and palliasses. We would have great fun with this too. Mother no longer read to us at night, and Geoffrey asked me to tell him the old fairy stories. I ran out of these and made up my own. When I paused to think how the plot should go, Geoffrey would tell me to 'go on!' I would say I was trying to think what came next. When we had our own beds, we discovered that, with two tins joined by a piece of string, I would whisper into one tin and Geoffrey, holding the other tin to his ear, could hear me quite plainly. We found it would also work well without the string. Years afterwards Mother told me that she discovered this story-telling, and sometimes she and my father would sit on the stairs listening to the stories.

Often different ANZACs would come down from the camp with my father and spend pleasant evenings, playing whist or having a musical evening, around my old upright grand. I remember an organist getting such music out of that quaint old piano as frightened it for many a year. If a fourth was needed for whist, no one minded if I took a hand. I was better than many adult players, or if there was an odd man out I would play chess or draughts.

We hadn't been in Brickyard Terrace long before Mother began thinking about a school for me. The village of Chickerell had an inn, a church and rectory, a chapel, a shop, Dr Pacy and his beautiful villa, garden and stables and field where he kept his own cow. The rest of the village was a couple of straggly lines of cottages, and one or two houses. I suppose there must have been a village school at the other end of the village, but we didn't ever find it. The pillar of the Chapel was a truly wonderful Christian character by the name of Mrs New. She was a widow and had living with her a large, good-hearted, simple soul called Miss Waite. Mrs New also had a paying guest (I think that would be what she would call herself, although she was permanent). This was Miss Hubert. Miss Hubert also rented the little house adjoining, which belonged to Mrs New. Here she stored, on the first floor, all the furniture and other treasures of her former life. The room on the ground floor she had turned into a small classroom with a piano, and what had been the small scullery was a dainty cloakroom, with a portable washbasin, and small toilet outside. Here she taught some ten children of local gentlemen farmers of pre-boarding school age. Among them the doctor's youngest daughter, Caroline (known in the family as Pussy).

Miss Hubert refused to call herself a teacher, she was a governess. She had taught in a boys' school in Ireland for some 12 years, and had a great hatred of Roman Catholics. She also at one time ran her own boys' school in France for some 12 years, and she had taught, or more rightly was governess, in various families. Always, I think, to small boys. She considered herself a very good music teacher, and also of French. The latter was bad, because she used some old-fashioned pronunciation. I know, in later years, I had to unlearn what she had taught me.

Mother was told of this Miss Hubert, and how in her semi-retirement she had a few pupils. We went to see her, she apparently liked the look of me, and considered Mother genteel enough for her to accept me as a pupil, especially as my father was in the Australian army. She informed Mother that she liked all her pupils to wear soft slippers in school, so that they made as little noise as possible, and did not harm her furniture! Also she liked the little girls to wear pinafores. Mother said I had never worn such an old-fashioned thing as a pinafore, and she wasn't going to put me in one now, but that I had a 'modern' overall affair which I could keep at school and put on. So Miss Hubert had to be content with that.

Miss Hubert was very short and dumpy, and always wore a rather mannish blouse and skirt with very wide, tight leather belt, into which she tucked her watch on its chain. A pincenez was on a chain round her neck. She had very small hands and feet. Her hands would hardly stretch an octave, and she envied me my double-jointed thumbs. She always boasted of the fact that her boots had been made for a French princess, but they were too small for her, and so Miss Hubert had them. Before school began she always put on stiff white cuffs to protect her blouse sleeves.

The way the school was run, and the subjects we were taught and the method of teaching were, I am sure, unique. We changed into our slippers and put on our pinafores in the little cloakroom, and we were supposed to go in and sit in our places and begin our first lesson before Miss Hubert arrived. The little ones who couldn't yet read would be arranging little piles of letters, and the others doing their sums. When Miss Hubert arrived and had seated herself ready to begin, those who could read read a verse in turn out of the Bible and, when Miss Huibert gave a talk, this usually ended in a great tirade against Roman Catholics.

Then we older ones all stood up in a row, with our hands on our shoulders. The one on the right was top of the class from the day before. First we had to recite off the part of the Bible we were learning by heart, a new verse was added each day, so that at the end of a chapter you had the whole chapter to say without a mistake. Then we had to recite the hymn we were learning off by heart. Once again, when it was the last verse, we had the whole hymn to say. Then...we did our sums, we got those right, Miss Hubert drew a fat three as a good mark. Then we stood up again and did our tables. Not reciting them off this time. Miss Hubert jiggled about asking you. All old pupils said that Miss Hubert *did* teach you your tables. There was no mid-morning break. Hot milk and a biscuit were brought in to Miss Hubert mid-morning by Miss Waite and, while she carefully removed the skin and sipped this, we were allowed to pause from our work a little, and later we did some mild exercise counting in French. *All* subjects were learned by heart, not only French verbs, but history, and a form of nature study, all by means of question and answer. We learned them all by heart. For geography – which we hated most of all – without *maps*, we learned first of all the counties, their county town and river, if any, by heart going round the coast. First beginning with Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne. Then we learned all the bays and capes. Then we did Wales and Scotland, and lastly Ireland, which we had to pronounce correctly. Each afternoon we learned our lessons for the next day. Of course, music lessons were fitted in to school time too.

When her garden needed weeding, we had a special afternoon gardening; that was, we *all* weeded the garden path. We had to pull the weeds out, roots and all, and when we had 12 we took them to her and, after carefully counting and examining each one to see that the roots were there, she gave us one small chocolate drop! Sometimes, very rarely, we were allowed a little time to 'play' in the garden up and down the paths, but mostly we congregated around the water butt, and floated leaves and things; there was little else to do.

As Miss Hubert was a 'lady', she was of course Church of England. This raised a few problems for her. She lived with Mrs New, a pillar of the Chapel. So every Sunday Miss Hubert walked several miles east to the next village with a church, and worshipped there, and so it came

about that this church held a special missionary afternoon, and Miss Hubert thought she would support it by taking all her school and their mothers to it. Dr Pacey and several farmers' wives provided the governess traps, etc. It was a lovely summer day and we sat in rows on the lawns listening to the speaker.

Two things happened which I never forgot. One was a bee going down the neck of a lady sitting in front. It was the fashion to have frocks with necks that slightly stuck out at the back, and the bee got down and couldn't get up. Mother, sitting behind, was powerless to do anything, as if she squashed the bee it would sting the lady, who was wriggling about unaware of what was down her back. Of course, in the end, it did sting her, and spoilt the speech.

Afterwards Miss Hubert proudly introduced her pupils. One quite small girl, whose mother was not there, was wearing a pretty little necklace of which she was naturally rather proud. The speaker, touching the necklace as though it were a serpent, told her she should take it off and burn it, and that she should be ashamed of wearing it. Didn't she know it was made of silk, and there were thousands of children starving in the world! The poor little girl was in tears, and inside I was hopping mad at the injustice of it all, and the cruelty of the man. How stupidly illogical the man was, and how he created quite the wrong sort of impression, at least on one child. My sense of justice – always my strong point – was greatly upset.

Pussy (Caroline Pacey), the youngest of Dr and Mrs Pacey's three daughters, was going to Miss Hubert's school until she was old enough to go away to boarding school. She and I became great friends. She was the opposite to me: she was painfully thin, with a long, pleasant but plain face, and long straight hair, which she wore in a long plait down her back and it flopped about as she ran (which I thought was fun). Being several years younger than her sisters, she was almost like an only child and could lie about in a corner reading whenever she liked, which I rather envied. I was often invited to play with her in their beautiful grounds and house. Dr Pacey's great hobby was roses. They were a Scottish family, and Mrs Pacey made her own butter, cheeses, and even made her own bacon. She always had a couple of village girls she would train. I was very interested in the numbers and different kinds of lamps they had. Hanging ones over the dining table, and really beautiful coloured glass ones in stands in the drawing-room and hall, and dainty, pretty ones on desks or by the bedside. I remember thinking it must take one of the maids quite a time each morning to clean, fill and trim them.

Sometimes Dr and Mrs Pacey would drive in their smart, high dogcart to Weymouth on a Saturday morning. Mrs Pacey asked Mother if Geoffrey and I could go in with them and play with Pussy and her scooter on the front while they did their shopping. Naturally we were thrilled. We had not been in a dogcart before. We had to be helped up the step over the very high wheels. There was a seat across that faced backwards, and this was where we children sat and, after being rugged up, were sort of shut in over our knees by a half wooden door so that we could not fall out. It was quite a weird sensation going at speed backwards, and so high up! We soon covered the two miles to Wemouth and would have great fun playing with Pussy's large, modern scooter.

Later an Englishman in the Australian army, whose wife and daughter, Winnie (who was a little older than Pussy and me) came to the camp, and Winnie also went to Miss Hubert's School. Miss Hubert would not have taken Winnie, if her father had not been a Sergeant Major, and the uniform was rather like an officer's in the British army, and Miss Hubert thought he was. Only the family was what she would call 'common' and often did not know how to behave. Winnie was big for her age and had the sort of red hair which always has a peculiar odour. She would lean over me and her hair flopped about my face, and sometimes I felt quite ill. With her loud voice she dominated both Pussy and me. Mrs Pacey felt that as Winnie, too, was a soldier's daughter she could not do less than suggest that she went every other week to Weymouth with Pussy instead of

us. This did not last long, because Winnie had neither the manners nor the obedience to do as she was told, and took Pussy off the front. That did the trick; the outing stopped for everyone. Quite politely, of course.

About twice a year Miss Hubert gave an afternoon to the parents of her pupils, in which all the pupils performed on the piano. Generally it was the mothers only, but Mr Coward (Winnie's father) was able to attend. Mother told us about what happened. Mr and Mrs Coward were late arriving and, as it was only a tiny room, he just fitted in, being a large tall man (he had been a policeman in private life). So, overcome with embarrassment, he did not know what to do with his hands and, to Mother's horror and all the ladies' near, he took out his pocket knife and began to pare his nails! In 1916 this was a terrible *faux pas*.

Then there was a day when Miss Hubert took us to Dorchester Museum,, where I first saw a Roman pavement and my love for all Roman Britain began.

April 1916 and my tenth birthday came into sight; Mother said she would give me my first real birthday party. As there were so few in the school, she said the whole school could be invited. Without my knowing, the day before Mother walked into Weymouth and bought me a birthday cake, with pale pink icing and squiggly decorations around the edge, a coloured pansy made of icing nestling in real maidenhair fern, and the word 'Fairy' written across the top. I was so delighted with this wonderful surprise. Then again, I didn't realize everyone would bring a present...

At one period, when the party was well under way, I stole upstairs to have a look at my presents. Mother missed me and came up to tell me it wasn't polite to leave my guests unattended, and that I must wait until they had gone to examine my presents. Later, after tea, when some parents had come to take their children home and we were playing the last game with one of the adults running it I realized that Mother and a number of the adults had disappeared. I went upstairs and found them in our room, sitting on the floor playing with our toys. I thought they looked very silly!

One day my father took us to Portland Bill for the day. I think we must have walked from Weymouth. If you didn't walk to Weymouth, or have a cab from the camp, the only way from Chickerell was by carrier's cart which went once a day. The seats faced each other like a shooting-brake and only had a canvas covering to keep off some of the weather. It went in the morning and came back later in the afternoon. The day we went to Portland we went by cab to Weymouth and then walked, along the sea-level road to Portland, which had once been an island. Over thousands of years the Chesil Bank had joined it to the mainland. The Bank had silted up the mouth of the river and formed a backwater the 14-mile length of the bank. The bank is formed in huge waves of pebbles. It is as though a giant once sifted the pebbles so that at Portland they are enormous stones, and at the far end they have been sifted and graded until they are little larger than grains of sand.

In the backwater grew spear-like water weed just under the surface which would stop the movement of any rowboat. Eels slipped their way in and out among the spears, the poor things looked as evil as snakes. Every now and again were clear pathways through the weeds which the fishermen used to go through to the bank to fish in the sea. There was one near Brickyard Terrace.

The legend was that the Chesil Bank was washed up in a single night and that was when half of Fleet Church was washed away. This was supposed to have happened some time in the early seventeenth century. But it is my guess that that was a tidal wave which washed over the bank.

I quote below from my pocket book on British geology.

'A cape of island like an immense groyne, checking the movement of countless pebbles and making them pile up into a great ridge, Portland Bill has thus produced the Chesil Bank... Permeable though the shingle is, the water seeps through it, but slowly. It therefore dams the larger streams, producing marshes, ponds, or large lakes, a few score yards from the sea. The Chesil Bank has produced a whole line of these ponds.'

To return to our day at Portland... We found it hilly and rocky where Portland stone is quarried and where, until recent years, was a very close prison, as it is isolated in a different way from Dartmoor. It was a pleasant, sunny day and, after buying pop in bottles with marbles in the top (to keep the liquid in) from a shop, we had a picnic on the side of the hill overlooking Weymouth. Then my father, Geoffrey and I began to climb higher, exploring and hoping to find the sea on the other side. Instead we came upon the high wall of the prison, and up popped a prison guard, rather like in the *Water Babies* when Tom went to visit Grimes. He shouted to us that we were not supposed to be so near the wall. Then, seeing my father's uniform, he showed us a way that we could climb up the wall near where he was standing. He helped us up until we were on top of the wall, which was built like a battlement, and we could look down into the prison yards quite a couple of hundred feet below us. The guard pointed one man out, saying that by his clothing we would know that he was the man 'they couldn't hang'. This, of course, at the time meant nothing to Geoffrey and me.

Then he told us we had better get back off the wall or he might get into trouble, so after thanking him we climbed down and returned to Mother. My father, still a boy at heart, suggested we begin throwing stones at the empty bottles to get the marbles out of them. Mother tore strips off us, as she said we would leave broken glass about for people to cut themselves on. Of course she was quite right and we never did it again.

Somehow my father and his gang acquired a motorbike. They decided to pull it down, then to do it up again, paint it, and raffle it. This kept them all out of mischief for some weeks. They hung the frame up in the ceiling out of the way and on a Saturday, when we went up to watch progress, we would sit on the frame in turns and pretend we were on a flying horse. When at last it was finished, it needed to be tested, before they raffled it, to make sure that it really worked. Only none of them had ever ridden a motorbike. So my father had to be the one brave enough to try it out going down the hill from the camp towards Brickyard Terrace. I should think he was probably quite scared. Mother was sure he would kill himself. It did wobble a bit, but he managed to pull up at the bottom of the hill and they decided it was roadworthy! They raffled it and made quite a bit, I should think. I know Mother had a new outfit and I was given a little Dorothy bag, which greatly delighted me. Books, bags and bracelets have always been my weakness.

Sometimes when the local fishermen went over to the Chesil Bank, they would take us over with them and we would have picnics over there. We had to take our own water, as there was nothing there at all but a desert of pebbles and a few plants, like sea pinks, struggling to keep alive. Every mile or so was a hut and lifebelts for shipwrecked people. (Mr and Mrs Grange were shipwrecked there years before on their honeymoon returning from a holiday in the Channel Isles. They said it was night time and walking on the pebbles, they couldn't think where they were!) The pebbles were very hard to walk on and our feet sank in so far, we almost crawled up each wave of pebbles. The men of our party would make flat pebbles bounce on the sea several times... We could never do the trick. It appears that when in Egypt they would have bets with each other how many times they could make them bounce. On one of our picnics the fishermen caught a small blue shark in their nets. We didn't know till afterwards, but my father took the tail of the shark and put it in the bed of one of his men, knowing he would come in drunk. I understand they had a great deal of fun

with this tail. Men don't grow up, they only grow older!

Another time we had a small picnic on the gorse-covered hill where we used to love to go. Besides ourselves, there was only Mother and two soldiers new to the camp. They were interested in the Chesil Bank and we went down to see if any fishermen were going over, but there was no one about. The fishermen never left their oars in the boats so that strangers would not take the boats. The soldiers suggested that with a paddle and a piece of wood we went over. They persuaded Mother, so we went. Both she and I were terrified we would not be able to keep to the clear path, but would get stuck in the weeds. Somehow we managed the return journey, but I wasn't really happy until we were safely back. This time it was Mother who was 'in the dog house' when my father heard about it!

In the village there was only one large house besides the PACEYS' and that was the vicarage, which was very large and rambling with stacks of unused rooms and a large billiard room. And there was a huge neglected garden with two large lawns, one for tennis and one for croquet. This latter had at one end a tall, thick hedge with a central opening perfect for a stage.

The vicar's name was POOLE, and he was pale and old and bent, with snow-white hair and an air of never being quite 'with it'. The church more or less ran itself and he read his sermon from a book of sermons. His wife ruled him and the house without lifting a finger. The older of their unmarried daughters was an unpaid housekeeper, part cook, and did any organizing of the parish that was done, if the poor could ever get round to it. She was, I would think, rising 30 at that time, not yet embittered, although harassed by her mother, who expected the house to run as though there were a dozen servants, instead of a willing but unskilled or trained teenage 'maid of all work' who never caught up with herself.

The POOLES and the PACEYS considered it their duty to welcome and entertain the few ANZAC families of the district. This they did royally. The Cowards never seemed to have been among the visitors, but there were one or two young wives, and a Mrs Fox, Mother and Geoffrey and I besides a handful of tennis-playing ANZACS.

The POOLES had a really horrid little grandson who lived with them. He did not go to school, Mr POOLE gave him his lessons. He was terribly spoilt and when his grandparents were not about, he did really terrible things. Two cousins of his stayed for a while and we liked them. I was particularly interested in them because they were twins, brother and sister.

Most afternoons the adults played tennis, leaving us to enjoy ourselves playing croquet, if we could escape from fagging at tennis. Then we would all retire to the large dining room for tea. The table was very long; Mr and Mrs POOLE would sit at one end and their daughter, Dorothy, at the end behind the teapot. Some time during the meal Mrs POOLE would send her very small teacup along the table, requesting a quarter of a cup of tea, please! The cup would pass from hand to hand down the table, each one murmuring 'a quarter of a cup, please'. Then it would make its long journey back with its quarter of a cup of tea in the bottom, and it must have been stone cold when it got back and, anyway, it was little more than a spoonful! The fresh cakes were always placed in the centre of the table and the stale cakes and bread and butter around the outside. We were taught children didn't ask for what they wanted, but took what was offered and the nearest cake to them. Not so, this horrid grandson! He would ask the nearest guest to hand him the fresh cakes from the centre and then take his pick, grinning wickedly at us as he did so.

At first we went to Chickerell church. It was small, with a gallery at the back containing the organ and the choir. One young woman had a raucous, penetrating voice which drowned out all others...*and* off key. She even drowned Mother, which was saying something. My young ears

could stand a great deal, but this voice was painful even to me.

Geoffrey and I loved the Sundays when the squire, who lived at Monte Video House, came to church. He was tall and bony, with straggly grey hair and a walrus face, especially his moustache and eyes. He always read the lessons, the highlight of the service for us. Walking up to the lectern just a few seconds before time and after finding his place in the Bible, he would put his monocle in his eye, waiting for everyone to be seated and still. Then he would slowly gaze around the church to make sure everyone was quite ready and, by doing some trick with his eye, he made his monocle drop and *then* he would begin to read without it. How we waited for this moment, and how we tried to make our napkin ring fall out like he did with his eye glass. His wife, who always sat just in front of us, seemed always to wear a hat trimmed with pale berries and crystal kind of things, which seemed to be fastened to the hat on little springs and the least movement would make them shake. During the reading of the sermon by the Rector, she would nod her head and all the fantastic little things on her hat would do a gentle little ballet, much to our delight. After a while Mother could stand the services no longer and we used to walk several miles to Fleete church. Mr Poole didn't even notice we had left!

When the old Fleete church was partly washed away in that tidal wave, leaving only the chancel and the graveyard, a new church was built on the edge of the wood and near the wee village. A school was built next to it. Both of them were very pretty, and in the school playground was a little dogs' cemetery! Ivy and other creepers would peep in the windows of the church and in the summer butterflies and bees would sail in on the sunbeams.

I think it was several miles and coming home we often used to play a game that the lanes were porridge. Puddles were milk, dead leaves were burnt porridge, clumps of mud lumpy porridge and small stones sugar. We would talk about each kind as we walked through it.

The army authorities thought some entertainment should be supplied for the men when they didn't have leave to go in to Weymouth. So they put up a large kind of marquee affair, with a hut either end, one for the screen and piano and the other for the projector. (At that time the projector shone on the screen, not from behind as nowadays.) In between the rows of benches were duckboards, as there was no floor, only the field. An elderly man worked the projector, and his teenage daughter played the piano.

I don't know where they lodged, but Mother befriended the girl the short time they were there. We sometimes went to the day shows. They were very poorly patronized. After the show, my father's 'gang' would give us large enamel mugs of hot, strong tea made with condensed milk. It was really pretty awful stuff and I do not know how we drank it. We thought it was nectar because it was army tea. The show soon packed up. The army was not amused.

About this time some of my milk teeth were giving me trouble – they refused to come out and give others a chance. My father was friendly with the dental corps, who really were fed up with little to do. They would be very interested in a ten-year-old girl with milk teeth problems. I had never been to a dentist before and had no inhibitions about them. So one Saturday my father and I set off quite happily for their part of the camp. They all came fussing around me and arranging me in a chair, explaining that they were going to send me to sleep and when I woke up I would be without five baby teeth which were in the way of my other teeth. They put a little bag over my nose and told me to take a deep breath, which I did and I did not like the smell of it at all, but before I could push it away I was asleep. I had quite pleasant dreams, and on waking I was surprised to find I wasn't in my bed at home. I was shown with great pride my five teeth, and went skipping out to show them to Mother, and the gap where they had been.

At that time it was considered dangerous to go outside when you had had teeth out, in case you caught cold. It was summertime and that very afternoon there was to be a great display, with horse races and wood chopping, etc, in the camp. After I had rested and been well wrapped up, Mother let me go with them to the display. It was really a great event for Geoffrey and me. Remember, it was all horses. The guncarriages, supply carts, mobile kitchens, everything was horse-drawn. And they had races too. It was quite something to see the kitchens being pulled along, with smoke coming out of their chimneys!

Over several weeks, until those particular dentists left camp, I would take them fresh flowers for their Mess as a 'thank you'. One particular Friday I had found some wild yellow iris and I was very excited about taking these up the next morning. I went to sleep and after five minutes I woke up and, thinking it was morning – being summer it was still light – I began getting dressed. Geoffrey, who had not been to sleep, asked me what I was doing and I told him I was getting dressed to take my flowers up to the camp. He assured me it wasn't morning, but I wouldn't believe him. Mother, hearing us talking, came up to see what it was all about. I explained to her and she said the same as Geoffrey, but I still wouldn't believe her. So she took me downstairs to show me that she and my father were still having their supper. And only then would I go back to bed. I have always been puzzled that after only five minutes sleep I was as refreshed as though I had been sleeping 12 hours!

To go into Weymouth the men needed special passes; these were checked on the Chickerell Road and on the bridge into Weymouth, over the backwater of the harbour. Sometimes two men would work it to go on one pass. They needed to walk over the bridge. There were English MPs who examined the passes. When the first man got over the bridge, he would tip a boy to take the pass back to his mate on the other side. So many men had gone over the bridge during this time that the MP wouldn't be aware that he had seen the pass before. Of course, after a while someone got wise to this, and Australian MPs stood with the English MPs and that put paid to the trick.

We liked going to Weymouth because we nearly always saw a military or naval funeral. Children are always interested in funerals and especially so if they are service ones. Along the harbour were a number of small pubs as at most seaside places. And it was almost a weekly incident, for a lone service man to stagger quietly out into the night, lurch over the edge into the water, and quietly drown. No one would know until they saw his body in the morning. Geoffrey and I would puzzle over this quite a bit.

Mr Meacock had a friend, a mate, a buddy if you like. And, as so often happens in these cases, the 'mates' were exactly opposite. Their one common interest was drink. Mr Fletcher was small, he hardly came up to Meacock's shoulders. He was an uneducated rough diamond, with no party graces; he was just a rather garish, cheery, good-hearted outgoing Australian. (We always called all these friends 'Mister', although our parents called them mainly by their surnames, again the habit of that period.) We first really met Mr Fletcher the time of the first anniversary of ANZAC Day,

It was decided that some many hundreds of the ANZACs in England should march through London to a special service in Westminster Abbey, and be entertained for a day in London meeting the King and going to the theatres, etc. With travelling it would be a three-day affair. The first so many rows of men would be well over six feet tall. All men marching were to be six feet in their hats. My father only just scraped through because, although he was a big man, he was only 5ft 8ins. The hat was the old tall slouch hat, which made quite a few inches difference. Mr Fletcher did not take quietly to being turned down. He went straight to the highest authorities and complained that he was tall enough to fight the b----- Turks and he was going to be tall enough to meet the b----- King! So they put him on a horse!

Geoffrey and I never forgot the night Kitchener was drowned. Mr Fletcher went into the village of Chickerell and got well and truly drunk with some of his pals who were going on a draft that night. He decided it was time he did something about this war himself. He broke their unwritten rule and visited us when drunk. Unfortunately he didn't have Meacock with him, perhaps he was on leave or something. First he presented Mother with a most beautiful bunch of flowers, which Mother knew he could only have pinched from Dr Pacey's garden, so she was not surprised to find roots and all among them. Then he gave her some letters and asked her to post them for him, as he was going with the draft to France that night, because now Kitchener was drowned it was time he did something. We tried to get him to change his mind, as to go to France when not posted was the same thing as deserting. We told him he would never get over there without being found out. He said he would. In the middle of all this, Mother thought it better if we were taken up to our room. On the way up Geoffrey (who was very fond of Mr Fletcher and had been silently crying under the table at the thought of his going away) said he thought Mr Fletcher wasn't drunk, only excited! Mother didn't post the letters, until she got word that he really was in France. He got there all right. As I have said, he was very small and his pals put him on the luggage rack in the train, covered him with kit bags, etc, when MPs came round. What happened about him when he got to France I don't know, he certainly wasn't punished. And the last we heard of him, some months later, was that he was pantomime king!

One Sunday my father told us that Archbishop Riley of Western Australia, who had been shipwrecked coming over, was coming to the camp for church parade, and if we came up to the main entrance we would see him depart. Archbishop Riley was one of our great heroes. He was a huge man with a great, booming voice. So, Mother, Geoffrey and I, along with a handful of other soldiers' wives, were waiting in a row to greet him. Geoffrey was a chubby little six-year-old, in the sailor suit that most little boys wore then. When the Archbishop came out, Geoffrey took a step forward and gave him a perfect salute. The Archbishop, like a giant beside this small boy, stepped forward towards him and gave him a perfect return salute, quite as seriously as Geoffrey had done. My heart was ready to burst with pride and I only wished I was a boy so that I could salute him as well. None of us knew that, about 10 years later, a thin, six-foot Geoffrey would meet the Archbishop again in WA and work with one of his sons in, and for, Toc H in WA.

Sometimes on Sunday mornings my father would take us for walks across country by the side of the backwater towards and past Fleete. We would go into fields, sometimes to find there was no way out the other end, except through the hedge or by leaping a ditch. My father just loved it if we found a pig sty. He would stand for ages, scratching the pigs with his stick, while they grunted away like a kind of purr. He would tell us that after the war he would like to have a house in the middle of a field and have a pig. It was a sort of secret, because we all three knew that Mother didn't like pigs, in fact she was afraid of them. Sometimes we would find a field of swede-turnips; my father, pulling one, would peel it with his pocket knife and we would eat it raw and love it. But the trouble was that I never had much tummy room, and when several times I could not eat my dinner properly and Mother found out about the turnips, we were not allowed to eat them any more. I was sorry because I liked them raw, but hated them cooked.

Several Brickyard tenants had let their front rooms to soldiers' wives. One of them was a real character of a woman known as Mrs Fox, though it is very doubtful if she had any legal right to the name. One day, as we were going into our house, 'Sgt and Mrs Fox' approached us and he said he had been with my father in Egypt. My father knew that it was an excuse on his part to get to know us. The particulars that Mr Fox stated, my father knew he could have obtained from any one of many men in the camp who knew my father. Anyway, he played ball with him and Mrs Fox and Mother formed a quaint friendship. Mrs Fox, with her unnatural red hair, expensive clothes, loud, very slightly common voice, trying desperately to be ladylike, but – to everyone but the most unworldly – she was 'no better than she should be', if you can make any sense of that expression.

Mrs Fox used to come with us to the Pooles. She would behave most beautifully and carefully and the unworldly Pooles were intrigued by her. She was always the life and soul of the party. She treated Geoffrey and me very well, too; she made us feel real people in a way that few adults did in those days. I remember one special picnic because Mr and Mrs Poole came, too, and a photo was to be taken of us all. Of course Mrs Fox was placing everyone. She had left a space by Mr Poole and, when someone wanted to know who it was for, she replied it was for her (her name was Lil). She said, 'That's for Lil. Lil should be next to the Parson!' Even I felt there was some joke there.

One quiet afternoon Mother heard a terrific noise of shouting on the hill from the camp. It was as though several men were having a row. She looked out of the window and saw Mr Fox walking down the road quite alone, having a great row with no one, an army rug over his shoulder which he insisted was his. He was a quiet, inoffensive little man, but when drunk he became very noisy and looked violent. Geoffrey and I were always amused that, when drunk, he knew which of the 14 houses his wife lived in. One day we thought he really had made a mistake. He stepped through the gateway of the wrong house...he was very drunk. Suddenly he realized it was the wrong house and, catching hold of the gate post separating the two houses, he swung himself back out into the road again and carried on till he came to the correct gateway!

Some time in 1916 my father was sent to Tidworth on Salisbury Plain and we saw him when he had a few days' leave about every month or so. We stayed in Chickereil until Christmas. Several social affairs happened that summer. Freda, the youngest Poole daughter, came home to live and to enter into social war work. She considered herself artistic and decided she would put on a children's open air concert for one of the war charities. All but two children were from Miss Hubert's school. She tried to get her young nephew to be in it, but he wasn't doing anything like that, thank you! Freda decided one of the two highlights was a sort of Grecian Ballet, she being the only adult. There were brown elves, moths, and two butterflies. Another girl and I were the butterflies. Our costumes were made of butter muslin, the bodies yellow, and the wings handpainted and fixed to our wrists, so that when we spread our arms the effect was rather good. The other high spot was a fairy play Mother had written some years ago, called 'The Hidden Sunbeam'. I was the hidden sunbeam. It was really quite a clever little thing and could use up all the children. And it was a good finale in that garden concert. For the rest, every one of Miss Hubert's pupils played the piano, except me; I cried off at the last moment. I felt I would be a flop; I was already doing monologues, in two acting songs, as well as the ballet and play. One of the songs was called 'Three Green Bonnets' and one of the little girls died. A lovely, weepy, Victorian thing. One of my recitations was one I had learnt at school in WA, 'O, how I would like to be a little Aboriginee!' The whole concert was a great success, with the hedge as background, a fine day, and the gentry for miles around attending.

The PACEYS decided their effort would be a garden fête, in the beautiful garden. It was at this fête that Mr Fox made his greatest *faux pas* and, without Mother's help, poor Mrs Fox would have been disgraced for life in the district. I should think this garden fête was the last of its era. Supplies were still ample, for one thing. And ladies still wore garden party gowns and parasols. Everyone worked very hard at their particular stalls and sideshows. ANZAC friends of Freda's just bought out the entire stock of a sweet shop to stock her stall.

Mrs PACEY and her two elder daughters, 'down' from Girton, were in charge of all the tea arrangements, helped by a couple of girlfriends. Mrs PACEY made her own strawberry icecream for the teas, as well as there being strawberries and cream, and little home-made cakes and scones, etc. The strawberries were their own, as was the cream. Dr PACEY was sent on his motor bike to fetch ice from Weymouth (you must remember there was no refrigeration at all in those days). He wrapped the ice in a blanket and tied it on the back of his motor bike. It melted a little on the way and fell off, so he had to go back for some more!

One side of the main lawn was raised, and there the only stall was the sweet stall and a number of garden chairs so that people could sit and watch the rest of the fête. The raised lawn led to the rose garden, where tea tables were set among the paved walks. Other fancy stalls were on the large, beautiful verandah. Most of the sideshows were around the lawn. They would be a bit 'square' these days. But we thought them wonderful. The night before it tried to rain and we were all terrified the day would be wet. But the morning looked safe and the chairs and tables were put out, with everything ready for the opening about 2pm. It was a beautiful day; all the élite for miles came and were able to use their parasols to good effect. The afternoon wore on and everyone had a wonderful time, each in their own way. And most people had had tea.

Mrs Fox was in her glory, sitting up among the 'nobs' (as she called them), in a stunning gown and talking away as though her husband was at least a colonel! Then suddenly her sensitive ears heard a roar at the entrance gate. She came dashing to Mother and begged her to see if she could take Mr Fox off somewhere before he disgraced her before all the ladies. Mother and I went to the gate set in the high wall (on to the road). There was Mr Fox, with his service sleeves rolled up because it was warm, arguing with the poor little scout at the gate that he wasn't going to pay to go in, as his wife was inside and he wanted to see her! Mother persuaded him to pay and we steered him around the back of the house, reaching the rose garden that way so that he wouldn't see Mrs Fox. Mother suggested he had a cup of tea and that Mrs Fox would be around by then. The girls came to serve us, their hair hung in plaits down their backs. To our horror, and the girl's too, as one turned away from the table he pulled her hair. We thought it such a disgrace that he should do such a thing to young ladies. Fortunately Mrs Fox soon arrived, as the ladies had left, so she was able to take him home.

Looking back, I realize what an experience Mrs Fox was, not only for Mother but for myself. Children don't miss much, certainly not children like I was. Although I may not have understood all I experienced, I stored it up to understand in later years. There is no doubt about it that Mrs Fox had worked her way from a street walker to being a kept woman. (Mr Fox may only have been a sergeant in the army, but he probably was a wealthy man.) His pay wouldn't have kept her in clothes. She was a warm-hearted, friendly woman and children loved her. She took great care of Mother when my father was sent away. She was one of those people that, when you think back about them, you gently smile. I think those kind of people have the Christian spirit, because you feel better for having known them.

When we went to Cheltenham for Christmas it was decided to let no.13 furnished and stay in Cheltenham until my father could find us lodgings near Tidworth. I went to Pates Grammar School for Girls.

Sometimes in the Prom we met men in hospital uniform and we would talk to them. There were two young men who caused Geoffrey and me a lot of puzzlement. They had had their feet badly frostbitten in the trenches and that was why they were in chairs. And they told us one of their mates had had a couple of toes drop off in the night! We took this as truth and puzzled over it for some time, but never thought of asking anyone how it could happen!

As the Easter holidays drew near, my father wrote to say that the school mistress of a village called Kempton, near Tidworth, was going away for the holidays and that we could stay in the school house. Strange to say, the Rector of Kempton, a Rev Brady-Moore, as a young curate had lodged with my parents and had married one of the young ladies of the parish.

The train put us down at a tiny station in the middle of the countryside with no houses near. When people were due to disembark, somehow a taxi seemed to appear to take passengers to their destination. And this is what happened in our case. Kempton village was some miles away and the

school and schoolhouse were a little apart from the tiny village across the field. The house was joined to the school by a communicating door, but the garden and playground were quite separate.

My father took us the four miles across country to show us the camp at Tidworth. (Looking back, it is amazing how we did not think anything of walking over four miles.) Of course, walking in the country was pleasant, no cars dashing past every few minutes. And it really didn't matter if the road was little more than a dirt track; it had a hard stone surface and the verges were full of interest, whether bordered by hedges, fences or walls.

Tidworth had been a large barracks for hundreds of years, with houses for officers and smaller ones for other ranks. All these were closed for the duration and their furniture draped in covers. There was a large area in the camp, with very high netting surrounding it, which looked like a fowl pen for giant hens. We giggled when we were told it was the camp 'clink' (prison).

Salisbury Plain, like deserts and the Red Sea, was not what we expected. It seemed to be like any other countryside – fields, woods, etc, only more flat. We were some miles from Stonehenge and I didn't see it until I was over 30 years old, and I don't think Geoffrey did at all.

Being spring, all the fields had just been ploughed and the furrows lay in rich, chocolate coloured rolls of soil. My father would take us walking up and down these furrows looking for plovers' eggs. They laid five speckled green eggs in their nests in the furrows. The eggs were a great delicacy and therefore my father wanted to find some for Mother. All the days we searched, we only ever found one nest. I only really like the whites of eggs and I found that, like duck eggs, the 'white' of plovers' eggs was watery looking, so I didn't eat mine.

When the fortnight was up and the schoolmistress and her niece (who taught in the school with her) returned, she said we could stay with them as long as my father was in Tidworth. That was very good, but I lost a fortnight's holidays and had to go to school there, living in the school house. And Geoffrey went to school for the first time. At school I seemed to spend a great many pointless afternoons, either winding wool, or knitting something someone else had begun, or sewing long seams on things like sheets... it all seemed very depressing. The two women were very strict and 'respectable', both in their work and their life, and they debated for some time between themselves whether it was a sin or not to knit for servicemen on a Sunday! The niece was very much ruled by her aunt and, as well as teaching, she did most of the housework and all the cooking. And her aunt was continually finding fault with her. I think even Mother was a little afraid of her. She also had a very spoilt little dog, a Pom. When we took it out for walks we thought he was horrid, because his fur got all dirty when he went to the toilet. He nearly turned us off dogs.

Mother bought us some rope shoes and I found I could use mine as ballet shoes, so began practising again as I had at Dundry.

We liked going to church – it was a pretty little village church – and Rev and Mrs Brady-Moore were a charming couple. Rev Brady-Moore had wanted to be a surgeon, but he developed arthritis in his hands very early in life, so he went into the ministry. But now, during the war in his workshop, he made his hands work producing splints for injured men.

There was a beautiful white dog which came with his mistress to church and would lie in the porch waiting for her. We loved him, he was so gentle and intelligent we had difficulty in believing that his grandfather had been a wolf!

One day we went on a long picnic walk in a different direction with one of the neighbours. It was to a very beautiful estate with great stretches of parkland such as we had never seen before.

There was pink may blossom as well as white, and juniper trees, neither of which we had seen before. And we found a bush hung with all sorts of tid bits, which was a butcher-bird's larder.

After about six weeks or so my father just didn't come home one night. Just like that. Next morning we all three walked to Tidworth to find out what had happened to him. At first Mother had great difficulty in finding anyone who knew what had happened, but we found that he had been 'marched out' of camp because it was found out that he had been sleeping out of camp. No one knew where he had been sent, so we could only go back and wait for a letter from him. After a few days we had a letter to say that he had been sent to an Australian Engineers' camp at a place called Brightlingsea, where men were retrained to go back to France. Brightlingsea, we found, was a small yachting town 12 miles north of Colchester. My father told us to go back to Cheltenham for a few days while he found somewhere for us to live in Brightlingsea.

The day we left Kempton was a red letter day for the school because the dreaded examiner was coming! We were glad we were leaving that day and listened through the communicating doors to the roll being called and our names being called and not answered. Rev Brady-Moore saw us safely on to the train.

My father soon sent for us, as he had no difficulty in finding lodgings for us. Brightlingsea is still a little yachting town. Its little harbour or 'hard', as it was called, runs into one of the many bays or backwaters at the mouth of the river Colne, which was known and used, before the Danes, by the Romans, in fact they made the oyster beds that are on the outskirts of the town. Here the ANZACs (Engineers) retrained on the water, camping in the summer months on the recreation ground and billeted in the town in winter.

Mother sent the two trunks on ahead and we journeyed quietly to London. Although I had been to WA and back, I had never been to London and I was very excited about it all. From our comics and the *Children's Newspaper*, different things I had heard, plus all the bits of history I had gleaned, I thought it must be really wonderful to *actually live* in London. As we had plenty of time before our train left Liverpool Street Station, Mother thought it would be fun if we walked. It was a pleasant, early summer day and I would gaze at any children we saw with awe to think they actually *lived* in London. We came upon an ABC cafe which was the very latest thing in those days. When Mother thought we would go in for some tea, I was overcome with delight. The children in our comics used to go into ABC cafes for cake and pop! I was awed by a girl about my own age coming with her mother, holding a dainty parasol, behaving as though she came there quite often.

When we reached Colchester we had to change into a little train which only went to Brightlingsea and back. First it had to go over a fragile bridge over the river Colne. It was so fragile that it had been condemned in 1913, but in fact it was not pulled down until the early 1960s! The following is an extract from my diary of our stay in Colchester in 1952.

We went by train to Brightlingsea for the day. Little old Horace (our name for the engine we saw some years ago) came fussily into the station pulling his small train, then he unhooked himself and took himself to the back of the train, turning it into the front. We got in, we were the only passengers on the train at that time of day. We realized that buses now went to Brightlingsea, but we wanted to travel with Horace. When we came to *the* bridge, Horace slowed down and crawled over the sleepers one by one. Once over the bridge, and gaining a little speed, Horace cantered merrily beside the sea until we reached Brightlingsea. While we were in Brightlingsea, Horace had a good long drink and some food, and I think it all went a little to his head, especially having us on the return journey, and he shot off at a terrific speed, until he suddenly came to the *bridge*. He stopped dead and gave himself a bit of a shake, and then, gently approaching the bridge, he stepped quietly over each sleeper

almost on tiptoe, for he knew that if anything happened to the bridge there would be no future for Horace!

But all this was some 35 years ahead. Back in the summer of 1917, when we arrived at the lonely little station of Brightlingsea, my father was there with a taxi and took us to 77 Tower Street. Like most of the streets, it looked rather mean on the outside. There were rows of terraced houses with apologies for gardens in the front, and an alleyway between each house on one side, going under the front bedrooms and ending in a door each side into the back gardens. The front doors were *never* opened except for funerals. The front rooms were only used at Christmas, weddings and, of course, funerals. So we were taken down the little alleyway through the door into the back garden. There were two back doors, the one we were taken through led into a kind of inside porch, to the left was the kitchen/scullery and a ladder which could be put up into a little back bedroom. To the right we went into the back parlour which was to be our room. It was quite nicely furnished, and even had a piano. Here Mrs Wood, our landlady, was ready to greet us. She laid tea for us and at once brought in the teapot. We, particularly Mother, were overcome by this welcome. We had only rented two rooms and were supposed to 'do' for ourselves.

Geoffrey and I had never seen anyone like Mrs Wood before and were just fascinated by her. She was rather tall, with that rather ruddy, pleasant, plain face that one often finds in country women, except they are generally plump, while Mrs Wood was almost thin. Her greying hair was piled in a tight bun on top of her head. But what intrigued us most was what her corsets had done to her figure. They had long been out of fashion; they pushed her bust up very high, like Queen Alexandra used to be in her younger days. Mrs Wood stood beaming down at us, with her arms folded under her bust. The effect is hard to describe.

Mother thanked and praised her, saying how wonderful it was to be so welcomed and that never in our journeys had we been greeted with tea. Mrs Wood beamed more, if possible, and in a deep, mannish voice remarked, 'Will you 'ave an Hegg?' How Geoffrey and I kept straight faces I do not know...I think we both bent lower over our plates at that moment! But she was a sweetiepie and we were very fond of her. There was another door in our parlour, which led from a tiny front hall into the front room or upstairs to the bedrooms. Mrs Wood had a son by a former marriage and he was at sea, but when home he slept in the little back room. There was quite a long garden at the back and the usual sheds, toilet, etc.

All the men in Brightingsea worked at something to do with the sea, if not fishing, actually on boats, they made them, or gear for them. It was a yachting town and during the war there were almost hundreds of them moored along the backwaters. Lipton's yachts were made there.

We were very happy with Mr and Mrs Wood. I took up music lessons again with a dear old Professor Lax who would come all the way from Colchester. He soon realized my weakness was learning a piece of music by heart, instead of reading it and he wouldn't even let me do scales without reading them. And he also helped me by letting me play waltz music with repeating bass, another thing Miss Hubert did not allow ('terrible modern stuff', she called it! Which goes to show 'modern' things have always been wrong with certain people!) Again, he often finished the lesson by playing to me. When we left Tower Street Mother had to chase him to pay him, so unworldly was he.

Mr Wood took a great interest in 'Master' Geoffrey. (It is strange, but it seemed to be natural for all older men to call Geoffrey 'Master' as though he was the son of landed gentry. I think he must have always gained a certain respect from everyone.) There was a weekly picture show in the town hall. Geoffrey neither liked pictures nor church in those days and would stay with Mr Wood and help him shell winkles with a pin! One Sunday morning Mr Wood took us to visit a relation of his who made model yachts for visitors in peace time. He said he would make a model of one of

Sir Thomas Lipton's yachts for Geoffrey. So most Sunday mornings we would go to see how this was progressing.

Before the summer holidays were over Mother was thinking about school for us. There was a private school for boys run by a Dr Flood. He was really a 'crammer' for boys, but he did take little boys, too. Geoffrey went there for a couple of terms but he wasn't learning anything, so he went to the Wesleyan school where I was then. Mother visited the only private school for girls in the town... she was not impressed with it. There were two 'elementary' schools, one run by the Church of England and one by the Wesleyan Church. The latter was apparently a much better school so Mother took me there.

I was quite happy there, although it was the largest school I had been to so far. The headmaster, Mr Pawson, had really retired, but was called back during the war. He was greatly loved in the town and there is a park named after him. He had at that time three daughters: two were married to merchant seamen, the other taught in the school (in fact she took my class). My parents became friendly with the whole family and they would have many parties at their houses for Australian men and their wives. Of course, Mr and Mrs Wood were built-in babysitters, really, and my parents had never had such a carefree time in their lives. And my father had got himself the job of being in charge of the Sergeants' Mess, which made him responsible for all the catering and recreation as well as the bar.

In the summer months, when the ANZACs were in tents on the recreation ground, the sergeants' quarters were just inside the top gate. Geoffrey and I were told we were not to go anywhere else but there. And we obeyed. If we went in the camp alone, Geoffrey would salute the sentry and we would walk straight to the mess. The war had been on for some years and children had become such a pest, especially among ANZACs, that they were forbidden camps. Geoffrey and I became almost mascots to the NCOs. Sometimes one would take me on his knee and show me photos of his own children or young brothers and sisters in Australia. Then maybe a few weeks later we would hear that those men had been killed in France.

The men never swore when we were about. If there was a man who my father knew did not care for children about, he had a special signal for us and we just faded away. But this was very very seldom. There was a man who was a ventriloquist, who used to have great fun with Geoffrey. They would go off on practical joke affairs and Geoffrey would experience how he threw his voice. Of course, with school, etc, we weren't really in the camp very much.

There was a great deal to explore in and around Brightlingsea. Apart from the long line of boathouses and the idle yachts moored and draped for the duration, there were the oyster beds, laid down in the beginning by the Romans. (Perhaps that was the beginning of my love of Roman Britain.) There were high banks honeycombing these and the marshland and we could walk for miles on these. Then there were several small shipyards in the town itself and, peering through the dusty windows of one, we saw small flying boats being made. We told no one of these, not even Mother; we somehow felt we were helping the war effort by keeping our secret.

My father was issued with a very strong army bike, because he travelled about the district quite a bit buying supplies from farmers, etc. Sometimes he took us both on his carrier on the back. It was very strong and we just fitted on beautifully.

The Australian army was not issued with the kind of ground sheet cum mac, like the English, but had a good, strong cape with two armholes. My father had very broad shoulders and his cape was big enough for us to walk along either side of him, inside the cape, with our faces through the armholes. We thought to do this was great fun, Mother said the back view was so

funny, with three pairs of feet walking along.

When the winter really came, Mother took us to one of the stores, which provided things for fishermen and yachting people, to buy us waterproof garments. Geoffrey had a sou'wester and oilskins. I had the very latest for girls, a black hood and cape in one like Red Riding Hood. Once, when a number of men were queued up across one of the roads waiting to go into their mess in the winter and I came along, wondering how I was going to get through them, they shouted to each other to 'make room for Little Black Riding Hood'!

Soon after we went to Brightlingsea, before the winter set in there, began pattern of life on a Sunday. Just when the smell of roasting potatoes and mint sauce came floating through the house, there would be a quaint, loud pop-popping of guns from a pathetic, lonely little gunboat, our only protection along our coastline for some miles. We would all dash down the back garden to see the little cottonwool balls of smoke in the sky, a very long way from the black spots which were the German planes coming nearer and nearer. I can feel again my clean, starched knickers scratching my legs as I ran. They always scratched on Sundays! And so we watched helplessly as the planes flew up the River Colne. They would come this way instead of up the Thames, which was better protected. Then, when they reached Colchester, they turned directly south, reaching London at dusk to bomb it. (It seems a weird way to do the job. But you must remember they had few instruments, except a compass – and an open cockpit!)

One day my father, going further afield directly west – that is, inland – to get some supplies, was taking one of the huge army lorries. He told us we could come if we sat in the back and kept out of sight. This was not hard, as the sides were so high. It also meant that we could only see the tops of the houses and the sky. When they stopped we still had to keep seated because civilians were not allowed in army lorries. We had stopped in a small town and there were houses either side. Suddenly the sky went all dark and, looking up, we saw a small airship had filled the sky above us. When my father came out we asked him about it, and he said they were being built there, but not to tell anyone we had seen it. So here was yet another war secret for us!

It was during this first summer in Brightlingsea that one Saturday morning Mother told us not to put on our Saturday clothes, but our best ones, as my father had hired a governess trap and we were going to Clacton for the day. We had not been told before in case it rained and we couldn't go.. Clacton was then the most fashionable resort on the east coast, comparing with Weymouth on the south. It was about 12 miles from Colchester and, unlike Yarmouth, it was more sands and bathing rather than fishing and messing about in boats. The ride along the quiet country roads was a real joy. There was so much to see, even deer grazing in a park; we had only seen them in the zoo before. We passed a signpost to St Osyth, and Mother told us that she had read a book about her, that she was a nun who had built a convent there, and how after some years the Danes landed near there and destroyed it. The coastline was full of little inlets where the Danes had landed years ago. And it was thought that the Germans might try in the same places. My father told us there were plans for the mass evacuation of Brightlingsea and surrounding villages, to other villages much farther inland. My father had seen the plans and knew exactly where we would be sent.

When we reached Clacton we were not surprised to see huge coils of barbed wire on the sands. On the small pier was a round building with a glass roof. Inside this was a huge mirror we peered down into, which we used as a periscope and could see the coast and sea for miles. The man in charge told us to look for submarines! These were things we always remembered of that day, and also the wonderful surprise of it all.

Some weeks later we went to Colchester for the day to do some shopping. We were taken over the Roman castle keep. We were very interested in all this, and that Colchester was an army

town, full of soldiers marching about. What we were not told was that the Romans had first made it one of their strongholds. In 1953, when I took my husband to the castle, we were told it was built on the site of a temple. We were taken to see the dungeons and shown how the Romans had built their foundations on those of the temple. At once I asked why I had not been shown these in 1917 and was told that they were not discovered until the 1930s.

Geoffrey's yacht was nearly finished, the sails were cut out and Mother was to sew them. She found this rather difficult, as they were cut correctly on the cross. Everything was done to scale, the deck had planks marked out and there was a small piece of lead let into the rudder underneath. The sails were joined to the masts by loops of strong cotton in the same way as they would have been fixed with rope, and they could be raised and lowered in the correct manner. She was painted white to the waterline, which was black, then blue-grey beneath. The deck was varnished and looked like real planks. When her rudder and sails were set correctly she was perfectly balanced. 'Master' Geoffrey was a proud boy the day he took possession and launched her.

When the time came for winter quarters for the army, my parents were lucky on two counts. First, next door but one was a masonic hall which was taken over for the sergeants' mess. This was certainly very cosy and then Mother was *paid* for having my father billeted on her! She was very amused, and saved the money to buy my father a gold watch chain for the watch the swimming club gave him in 1912. So winter 1917 promised to be a cosy winter and we did not know it would be the last Christmas of the war – but that a great deal would happen first and hundreds more men would be killed.