

ST ELIZABETH'S ORPHANAGE, EASTCOMBE

Most of the information here, very random, was written up by me, Muriel Brooks, in 2017 but mainly comes from notes (quite difficult to read) amassed by Dr Malcolm Lambert while he lived at The Yews in The Street, Eastcombe. Some of these were used in his writings about the village published in the 1980s/90s, which were co-authored by Juliet Shipman who lived at Rose Cottage in The Street, Eastcombe. I rather think that most people living in Eastcombe now have no idea that there was once an orphanage here, but the building is still there in plain sight (divided into two and partly obscured by The Lindens and neighbouring houses including the whole of Bracelands, most of which were built on its extensive grounds – but nevertheless distinguishable as a building larger than virtually all others in the village). Before the creation of the Welfare State in the twentieth century, personal philanthropy could take a startlingly practical form.



The house now known as St Elizabeth's, and divided into two, was purpose-built for Miss Isabel Newton. In the 1871 census Miss Newton lived at Nash End House with her aunt and two servants, three unrelated little children described as 'visitors' and one 'adopted child'. From there she launched her Eastcombe project – she opened an orphanage here in 1873 – or some sources say 1878. The building alongside it, now known as The Coach House, stabled the orphanage trap, pony, and fodder. The modern The Paddocks was the chicken shed, and Hill Top across the road was for the gardener. The grounds stretched from the chapel graveyard across Bracelands nearly to the main road, and along to where St Augustine's church and Church House now stand (formerly the church school and headmaster's house). In the 1881 census Miss Newton, aged 39, was resident at 'Eastcombe House' with two domestic servants and two 'adopted' little girls from the London area.

Miss Newton passed the establishment on to the Community of the Sisters of the Church, also known as the Kilburn Sisters, an organization begun by one woman, Emily Ayckbowm. With a track record, from girlhood, in charitable work, Emily was rapidly joined by similarly concerned women. They fed poor children and gave them elementary education. They opened depots for donated food, clothes, furniture, etc – gave it away where needed, or sold it for very low sums. They employed poor women to mend and alter the clothes, and paid them so that they then could afford to buy things for their families. The Sisters opened children's homes in many places, ran 'Penny Schools', organized holidays for unwell children, ran soup kitchens and overnight shelters for destitute men. This sort of work spread to Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Burma, Australia – all this before the end of the nineteenth century.

This order of Anglican nuns still exists: its work increased, altered, varied, shrank as circumstances changed through the twentieth century. Dr Lambert had a correspondence in 1980 with a sprightly-sounding Sister Aletta, who joined the order in the 1920s. For copyright reasons I

shall not reproduce her letters, but shall paraphrase her comments, and copy what the order recorded in *Our Work* about the Eastcombe home that became known as St Elizabeth's. Her evidence follows the less coherent notes compiled from other sources, the names of witnesses unfortunately not recorded.

I, Muriel Brooks, feel deeply remiss in not finding time before 2016 to tackle this subject of the orphanage, as one by one old 'inmates', staff, neighbours and others who actually knew the place have died away. As far as I know there is no one left now locally who knew the place well before it closed during the Second World War, though a lot of us remember old village inhabitants who were brought up there. Sister Aletta's records (apart from her own testimony) come from fund-raising articles published in the Sisterhood's own magazine about their work. Certainly the wording of the Victorian period is too saccharine for our taste, but I see no reason to believe St Elizabeth's was ever anything other than an honest though under-funded attempt to make life better for successive poor children in the 60 years of its existence.

The ordinary people of Eastcombe, both the cottagers and the few middle-class inhabitants, are repeatedly thanked for the kindnesses they showed to occupants of the Home, and it can be seen that to a certain extent they must have felt involved in a joint enterprise (alongside the care they gave in their own homes to their Barnado's foster children). Additionally, the Sisters did what they could for the community in terms of church and social work – though it was certainly not called that then – and at a time of very low incomes they were able to offer a little employment. Phyllis Gaston's father, for example, was latterly the gardener and handyman at St Elizabeth's.

Nobody now remembers Miss Newton, nor knows what led her to have St Elizabeth's built, but for a short time she ran an orphanage for about a dozen children. It seems extraordinary to me that such a dramatic act of practical charity should have been forgotten, so presumably I should try to find contemporary references to it in local newspapers... Sir John Dorington for example recorded many comments about his friends, tenants, neighbours generally but affords Miss Newton no mention in his 'diary' even though the orphanage was built soon after his Manor Farm, and would have been within sight of it. His record of building the farmhouse, incidentally, gives us a yardstick for evaluating Miss Newton's project. The actual building work must have cost her about £700-800. A lot, in other words. She must have felt a calling to do even more as she went on to be a missionary in South Africa (there is an unsubstantiated story that she was killed there by a servant). In 1884 she donated St Elizabeth's to an Anglican sisterhood – the Community of Sisters of the Church – with the proviso that it was to be used for delicate children. If any reader has information about this philanthropic woman (born in Walton on the Naze) I should be so pleased to add it to these notes – a letter to Honeyhill, Bismore GL6 7DG will find me.

From 1905 the orphanage became a Convalescent Home for Children. An annexe known as the Iron Room was added in 1907. The following year was remembered for a Sale of Work in Birmingham that raised money for St Elizabeth's. So far I have not found a 1911 census return for the Home, and I see that *Our Work* makes mention of a move to a new home in Birmingham in November 1911. A year or two later St Elizabeth's was back in use, but perhaps it was temporarily closed at the time of the 1911 census.

By 1908 the long-serving, well-loved pony, Pearl, was 19 years old. Miss Newton had rescued her from maltreatment by a coal-dealer and given her to the orphanage. Every Friday George (Phipp or Phipps) drove Pearl and the trap down to Stroud station to meet a new consignment of convalescent children from Birmingham. Each group stayed for three weeks. They arrived always by the same train (their fares costing three shillings 'return' each), and were looked after by the stationmaster till their lift arrived. Because of Pearl's age, the able children were asked to walk up The Vatch to lighten the trap. (A new horse, Kitty, was donated in 1909 to replace Pearl.) The children were encouraged to live out of doors as much as possible, fed the chickens and ate the fresh eggs, and went for drives with Kitty.

I have just (September 2017) found a loose page in Dr Lambert's archive that quotes *Our Work* for July-August 1908. I will give later the description of a sale in Birmingham to raise funds for St Elizabeth's, but it is followed by this passage. 'In August we hope to have a Sale of Work at

St Elizabeth's Home, Eastcombe. What is left from this Sale will make its way there. ' And then, 'Our Old Pony, "Pearl". "Poor old Pearl, he is so old, will he ever die?" is the usual question of the children at our Convalescent Home near Stroud. At their first introduction to Pearl they are told that he is very aged, he has in fact worked for us for many years in Eastcombe, and is in fact 29 years old. Every Friday this old white pony attached to a very ramshackle cart might be seen waiting at Stroud Station for the advent of the Birmingham train. Our faithful man, George, who has for many years been the general factotum at the Home, would often look in dismay at the number of children (to say nothing of parcels) that were landed on the platform all eager for a ride. On one occasion he remarked to Jimmie G, "If *you're all* to go *you'll* have to be under the seat." The boy, a quick-witted town lad took him at his word, and before George could think of any more possible scheme, he was in the cart, preparing to stow himself away under the very low seat. Well, somehow or other all would be squeezed into the vehicle and Pearl would start his homeward journey. All went well along the valley but when the hill is reached, Pearl, without any warning or invitation, stops dead. The children wonder what is going to happen; it is then explained to them that Pearl is very old, and if none of them are crippled or very weakly they must alight and walk. George has a little girl of his own, so with fatherly forethought he would give them a bun each all round, thinking no doubt that a little light refreshment will better enable them to climb the steep hill, which the children designate a high mountain. On reaching the top the party would once more resume their seats. Arrived at the Home it would often happen that the children who are inmates run out and beg to be allowed to ride on Pearl's back into the stable, and this service the old fellow willingly rendered...'

There is record of a small Bath chair (wheelchair) being needed in 1910, for those who could not walk well.

During the First World War, however, the home reverted to its original purpose of being an orphanage, housing 14 infant boys and girls, and some older girls. Some of them graduated into becoming nurses or teachers.

The home was administered by the Kilburn Sisterhood, an Anglican order which specialized in housing and educating needy children. In the 1891 census 22-year-old Alice Bailey (born in Japan) is described as Sister-in-Charge. She was helped by the older orphans, presumably: there are 14 listed, aged nine to 18, and although the origins of four of them were unknown, the rest came from Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Shropshire, Monmouth, Cornwall, Devon, Hampshire and Middlesex! Not exactly what one would have predicted – and the Yorkshire sisters, to my dismay, shared my fairly uncommon maiden name – something I must look into when I have time. The nun in charge at Eastcombe from the time of WWI was Sister Frances, and she came from a privileged background (and Frances Waite who lived in Honeyhill in 1919/20 not only knew Sister Frances well but also met and worked for Sister Frances's real sister running the Parkerville home near Perth, Australia – see *As I Remember*). There is a 1934 photograph showing Sister Frances at the age of 90. She died in 1939.



Post-war memories include a magic lantern show given in 1923. In 1929 a plea went out for presents – parcels – to be given for the inmates. About this time, Kay and Madaline Woolls of Bisley were enrolled after their parents' deaths from influenza, and they in old age were able to contribute their memories.

During the 1930s the playroom was used for Baby Welfare clinics. Up until then the Home was lit by 15 oil lamps, remembered as dangerous as someone's hair caught fire... The pony was used to power the pump that lifted well water. By the late 1930s electricity and mains water had arrived in Eastcombe (but mains drainage did not follow till 1952).

Miss E M Whitmore gave many of the following memories. She arrived at age four and left at 25, when the Second World War started. Sister Aletta, of the Sisterhood, put Malcolm Lambert in touch with her, writing in 1980 that they had what they called 'Mother's Party' for the old boys and girls of the homes. When Sister Aletta was talking to Miss Whitmore at the party she mentioned that she would be very pleased at any time to talk to Dr Lambert about her life in the Eastcombe Orphanage. She had retired from RAF Records. She lived in Gloucester.

Sister Frances prepared orphans for confirmation. She said that all must be ready to die for the Church. 'We bring nothing into the world and we take nothing out.' Stern but kind on the whole. If a child was ill, unless there was a high temperature, he/she had to get up for prayers.

Ella Richards of May Cottage, France Lynch, a simple girl who spoke when spoken to, helped at the home with the smallest children. She was 14 when Miss Whitmore arrived aged four and a half. There were a few boys, who were transferred away when they were seven or eight. The witness said that, therefore, when she went to work as a nanny to a young boy, it was the first time she had seen one naked – that is, the orphans saw no family life at all.

Lots of boys were sent to Australia – but it is not clear from the notes whether the witness was confusing the Barnado's foster-children with boys at the orphanage. Certainly, by the 1920s the home was catering just for girls.

In the village school, village life was reflected – devotees of church and chapel were oil and water.

The orphans were not allowed out without a nun or the matron till they were 14. This witness had a nervous breakdown.

She remembered Sister Lilith's work. Funerals [?] for St Elizabeth's when there was a simple wooden altar.

At the mother house in Kilburn, the country girls transferring there (to learn domestic work) hated the lack of trees. When this witness was 10 she was put in charge of C..., who was five. This was an illegitimate child of a young girl and an old man. The couple had intended to marry but were stopped at the last minute. C... was put in the home – her father discovered where she was and tried to kidnap her – came to the school to seek her. So C... was sent to Kilburn. No books, paper, or pencils were allowed. There were readings in the evening, especially on Sunday. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* for example. The witness left St Elizabeth's in 1939, aged 25, and heard news of C... occasionally when she went to London to nurse, but they did not meet properly again until a chance encounter in, maybe, 1940.

Another witness, called Grace, who was 80 when interviewed, pointed out that in her time every orphan was paid for by somebody. Some were illegitimate and were visited by their mothers, who were referred to as 'aunties'. If there was no mother to visit, the Sisters found a lady to sponsor the orphan, and she gave presents. The Sisters had a high school at St Anne's in Lancashire, and Grace went there as a teacher. She came to Eastcombe for her holidays. Who a child had as sponsor made a big difference. Mothers were not allowed to take out their illegitimate children – but unrelated sponsors could take out children for a treat. Sometimes, also, the Sisters changed a child's name...

There is a note here about Dorothy Crooks, whose family lived at Keeper's Cottage, Bismore, in the early 1920s – which is to say she was not an orphan child; or perhaps she was, in St Elizabeth's, as it was their grandparents that she and her brother visited at Keeper's Cottage. Dorothy

became a nursing auxiliary and went to Bristol Royal Infirmary. She came second in her exam – and the top two or three were allowed to go to their home towns so she came back, turned up at her grandma's. She would leave at six in the morning and come back after dark. The grandma died and Dorothy stayed to look after her grandpa.

Notes from another source say that aged 15 she had to cut bread and butter for the children's tea, do the Sisters' tea, see to the chickens, and have her own tea. She was fined for having untidy hair, and for talking when she shouldn't. A dose of castor oil and floors to scrub could be a punishment.

The big girls had to get up, see to the younger ones, and not talk in the dormitory. Prayers were said, and there was grace before breakfast. The children went downstairs in silence and ate breakfast in silence. The diet was always the same: a round and a half of bread and dripping, a plate of porridge made with skimmed milk and coarse rolled oats. Enamel (metal) plates and spoons were used. On Sundays there was no porridge, and the bread was spread with margarine. Little jobs were done in silence, there was a reading in chapel, and then the children went to school. They talked all the way there, and at playtime. At dinnertime (midday) the orphanage nurse would be at the school gate to walk the orphans to the West Barn on the Bisley road and back.

There was religious instruction before the girls went to the village school each morning. One morning the lesson was on Abraham and his wife Sarah. When asked by the teacher who Sarah was, a child called Nancy replied 'Sarah is Mr Gaston's pig'.

Most of these notes are hard to read, and many refer to unhappy memories of petty rules – but others found the nuns wonderful. The following remarks are given no context.

Discipline was kept by a system of good conduct points: three good marks were given at the start, and these were lost or won back as time went on. If one was good all week, by Sunday it was possible to have attained 10 marks.

'They were aristocrats.'

Sister Frances had brandy at night and a glass of burgundy during the day.

'Three black beetles went for a walk.'

'Sack hessian knickers make sore legs.'

In the community room the near-blind Sister Frances had to feel her way to her chair.

Dinner on Sunday was meat and vegetables and a jam pasty. Tea on Sunday was a round and a half of bread and margarine and a mug of water. Tea was at 4.30, and then there was nothing else before bedtime at 6.30/6.45. Food was more or less rationed – meat and vegetables appeared on alternate days. Inmates used to put unfinished food into their pockets. *(It would not have occurred to the orphans, but the nuns were working on a very small budget.)*

The pump could go dry.

There was no privacy when young.

14 girls and one lavatory: the nurse would be outside saying 'Come out, come out!'

14 girls, three nuns, a housemaid and a cook. People came from the village to do cooking and housework. The children had their own little jobs but were not exploited.

There was a girl called Janet who was described as 'a cripple', 'deeply spastic', and someone said the others were so frightened of her they used to wet their beds at night. To feed her someone used to stand on a step and tip a spoonful down her throat. Punishment was to stand in a corner of the dressing room. The nuns meant well... Janet boarded with the Andrews. She could scrub a floor, but could not hold a spoon and feed herself – but someone managed to teach her cross-stitch. Eventually she was sent to a 'cripple agent' [?] near Edgware, but Mrs Andrews had her back for a holiday each year. Asked why she went to the park, she replied 'To see proper people'. 'Janet never left us for more than five minutes.' *There is another mention of this girl in the long anonymous testimony – perhaps by Miss Whitmore – given later.*

Another girl had a deformity of the ribs, and she was not strong enough to go into the world. She became Sister Philomena.

Sister Charity 'got the pretty frocks'.

Miss Masters was brought up by the nuns. The witness called Miss Whitmore was the

executor of Miss Masters's will. In retirement (presumably) Miss Masters had a flat in the house of Mrs Cowper (St Mary's, Eastcombe) – Mrs Cowper was head of the primary school. Behind her house were open fields adjoining the orphanage gardens. Miss Masters became Matron of the orphanage, assisting the three resident nuns, and she ran the local Guides for 40 years.

Some orphans went to Eastcombe Primary School, despite its being a Baptist foundation, because the Anglican school was closed – during the First World War the village was permitted just one schoolmaster. The 'tin church' was built then, but was not considered 'high' enough by the nuns. Girls were prepared for confirmation by Sister Frances, and the ceremony was at All Saints', Bisley. After that the confirmed girls – that is, teenagers – were taken to Evensong. The accompanying Sister would push a girl with her umbrella to pay attention, or stand up. There were fixed places for the children. Men sat apart. The Sisters taught Sunday School – quite a lot of children in the vestry, heated by an old coke stove. 'It was a go-ahead little church.'

Also in Bussage was Miss Dorothea Beale's school, attached to the back of Bussage House and used in recent years for Bussage Nursery School. Taught by Miss Beale and Miss Johnston, there were 28 girls – in an 'awful' uniform with black cloaks. Theo Wrenn was there from six to 14(?): 'I used to shiver to death.' Miss Beale was much the nicer teacher – 'sweet'. There were parties at the school, in the lovely grounds. Someone brought chickenpox from the Home. 'We were never asked again.'

Like many others at that time Mrs Wrenn caught diphtheria and was removed to Cashes Green Hospital, and then the isolation hospital. In ML's notes it says that when Mrs Wrenn left St Elizabeth's aged 14 she bestowed her doll upon a Barnado's girl, Jocelyne Jones. Jocelyne's (Joyce's) daughter is in touch with me from British Columbia where they both live, and says her mother confirms this story. She also says that Jocelyne had diphtheria and was in Cashes Green hospital with Muriel Little – and maybe Theo. Jocelyne was fostered by Martha Davis of Gladstone Cottage, and was a friend of Ruby Juggins.

In the Home the Sisters ran a library for the village, but did not allow the girls to read books. The little children were put to bed early and read to for one hour. On Sundays bedtime was 6.30, and Miss Masters would read every Sunday. 'Very good reading – *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Peep Behind the Scenes*, *The Secret Garden*.' The strict upbringing 'made us stand on our own two feet'.

When a child arrived aged four and a half, he or she was scrubbed down with carbolic soap, 'long red bars of it'. There was an inspection for nits. The beds had stiff calico sheets - 'I can smell the unbleached calico now'. The little children were pulled out of bed to say prayers. A big trunk was opened and the child was dressed in orphanage uniform. After breakfast her hair was cut to shoulder length by the nurse. *The person giving this testimony wore the orphanage uniform until she was 21.*

There were toys to play with, but access to them was controlled. There were individual lockers in the playroom. One woman remembered holding a little doll in her hands as she prayed. It would have been taken away for a week if she had been found out.

Sex education was 'faulty'. The nuns spent their lives *helping* fallen women, but not in *encouraging sin*. They believed in mortifying the flesh to glorify the soul – again someone says 'they meant well'.

'Sister was a wonderful woman – just 100 years behind the times.'

The girls were well brought up and taught how to speak nicely. 'St Elizabeth's tried to make ladies of you.'

'When I was 18 she fell and hurt her hip. I began to look after her as well as do some house duties.'

No name is attached to the following notes...They represent memories of people Dr Malcolm Lambert interviewed in the early 1980s, meaning that their experiences dated from between the two world wars.

'She was supposed to be delicate. Sister Frances thought she was too pretty. She was sent to Mrs Prior at Grey Gables and worked hard. Mr G put his arms around her and had his ears boxed.'

'At 18 I [was?] asked to go into the world. My parents didn't want me. Nobody wanted me.'

A lady wouldn't want a girl like me' – according to Sister Perpetua.

In memories from around 1918, the children played in the Home garden together (rounders out in the paddock, for example) and always had a walk at lunchtime whatever the weather 'in little berets, gloves and boots' – 'red berets with pompoms (that must fall forward)'. There were swings in the garden. If the weather was bad, playtime was in the Iron Room. A birthday treat was to go into Stroud with the pony and trap – usually with Mrs Johnson, with Mr Gaston driving. (Mr Gaston was the gardener, father of Phyllis Gaston who wrote the reminiscences entitled *Oil Lamp and Candle*.) 'Mrs Johnson was a sweet person.' 'The Gastons did lovely cooking.' Ken Wrenn said it was a good thing to mix with others – outsiders.

Another treat was to go with other Anglican children of the village to the Ascension Day well-dressing in Bisley. The children would have taken posies of flowers to add to the display Bisley children were making. They were taken in a farm cart, usually driven by Mr Freebury. This was an outing much envied by the Baptist children.

At Christmas there was a tree. Toys were sent from headquarters in London – 'great trunks of lovely toys' which were given out on Christmas afternoon. Once in unusually snowy weather the nuns let it be known that they could not send the trap to Brimscombe station for the trunk: as a result the men of the village went on foot to bring it up to St Elizabeth's. On another occasion, it was the local people who provided presents when there was a last-minute appeal. At Easter, Bussage School would send Easter eggs.

Fund-raising sales were held on the lawns of the Home, and the whole village would go to them – and to the bazaar held in winter. The orphanage grounds are now covered by the housing of Bracelands, down to Dr Crouch's Road. (*Near the hairdresser's an elderly gentleman with me once pointed to the old people's bungalows and said 'That were a foal pen [for the orphanage]' and it took me some time to work out that 'foal' was his pronunciation of 'fowl' – I would have said 'chicken run', but I see that in all these reminiscences chickens are referred to as fowl.*)

Someone called Biddie was in the home from five to 16. At the beginning she was taught in the Home by Sister Ina. Everyone had to learn a collect every Sunday. Everyone had to eat what was put in front of her – Biddie remembered having to eat parsnips even though she did not like them. Sister Frances always had breakfast in bed, and a special treat (on birthdays, for instance) was to have breakfast with her. This included having a boiled egg, mashed up in a cup by Sister Frances. Another witness remembered being given a drop of coffee in her milk. Was it Biddie who recalled swapping food with a child called Millie? On Fridays they normally exchanged the lentil soup and steamed pudding. Millie once rushed out to throw the steamed pudding to the cows, unfortunately as Mr Gaston was coming round the corner. She ran back to the refectory just in time for Sister Frances to return. Later on, loving babies, Biddie did nursery work there 1939-41. Aged 16 Biddie met her mother for the first time (at Kilburn) but refused to go with her. The mother was a sick person, rather lovely, who was in search of love herself. 'It hurt her.'

By the end the playroom – the Iron Room – was let out for the whole village to use. The district nurse visited and ran a baby welfare clinic, probably at the instigation of Mrs Munden and Miss Masters, who were energetic and capable of getting things moving.

Barnado's children, fostered by families throughout Eastcombe, were never placed in St Elizabeth's, but the orphan children used to get together at school, or at Girl Guide meetings.

Miss Joy Munden of Tetbury Street, Minchinhampton, was interviewed. She was born at The Triangle, Eastcombe, where her father was the doctor. Her brother became a doctor working in Tasmania. Another, a major in the army, died of polio. The WI fete was held in The Triangle garden. The Munden family gave support to St Elizabeth's, and Mrs Munden was active in the church, but Dr Munden was not the doctor for the orphanage. This was Dr Edwards of Chalford Hill. Miss Munden's comments on the nuns (who were not all at St Elizabeth's at the same time): Sister Frances at the head was knowledgeable (particularly about ?birds and stars), and lived to 95; Sister Angela went to Africa for five years; Sister Lucilla did beautiful needlework; Sister Perpetua was a qualified teacher who went to school in London, and St Hilda's (this may have been the Sisterhood's college in Lancashire); Sister Garnet was a brilliant pianist who taught Phyllis Gaston

and her brother Leonard (organist). There was also Sister Charity.

The following is a transcription of lengthy handwritten testimony. The portion preserved in Dr Lambert's notes, as they have come down to me, begins on page 14 and has no signature at the end, the foot of page 20. We therefore have less than half of what was written originally. It is probably by Miss Whitmore, mentioned earlier.

... out from Mondays to mid-day Saturdays with Mr and Mrs Andrews. She must have been known to all, poor girl seemed to have little or no coordination between her limbs. Her speech too was very bad and only understood by those who really knew her. Then again there was myself, Sister Frances and two small girls of about four years. It was my duty each weekday from the age of 15 to take the three out. Sister would be in an old Bath chair and mostly holding up her green parasol, while I in my uniform would push her along the Bisley road as far as the farm barn and back again. On the dot of 12am we would appear, both the little ones and myself in the same uniform. We must have looked an odd foursome. One child so fair and the other with an abundance of red hair.

I think too of old Mr Gaston, who lived at the Red Lion and was the village cobbler so was very well known, he was also the postman and would deliver post three times a day, he had a large family of daughters and one son. Three or four of the daughters worked at different times at the Orphanage, and his son became the gardener following Mr Phipps, who died on duty, I found him dead under the chestnut tree when I was about ten years old.

Most of the village folk worked in the nearby factories or at the farms, a few went into service. There was a lot of poverty and the Sisters tried to help as much as possible. Soup and rice pudding were taken to some of the homes by the Sisters – we helped with this service as we grew older. The Orphanage ran an Infant Welfare class and a Bible class and allowed Miss Masters our Nurse to help run a Guide company.

The first captain was a Miss Davidson but she did not go on for very long while Miss Masters carried on for years, almost 40 in fact. She was helped by a dear old lady called Miss Swift, who would play the piano and also by Miss Hollier who was her First Lieutenant. Miss Hollier was followed by Miss Richards. Girls came to the Guides from Eastcombe, Bisley, Bussage and France Lynch. Through the Guides the girls could see a little beyond walking distance. Stroud was about as far as village children had ever been, many walked there on a Saturday to do any extra shopping for their mothers – meat and fancy mostly. The Guides as time went on went camping which was a great treat, about two weeks in the August holiday. Eastcombe at first joined up with the Painswick company. Miss Bully and Miss Stockley were first-class campers – they were the Captain and Lieutenant of the Painswick company. As the Eastcombe company was under the umbrella of the Sisters, we orphans were allowed to join too and even go to camp. At 11, that was the age one had to be for Guiding, I remember a party of Eastcombe Guides going up to London to see the great Wembley Empire Exhibition. We all thought it wonderful, what with the train journey and all there was to see at Wembley. Think I remember the little village from somewhere with electric lights and apple orchards and of course a model of the then Prince of Wales in butter, it was a great day out.

Besides Guides and the other village activity there were two other big days in the calendar to look forward to: those were the Sale of Work held in the Orphanage garden and the Christmas Bazaar held in the Orphanage. Both these were well attended from the surrounding villages and Eastcombe – us children, we used to sell tickets well in advance: sixpence each, teas (as much as you wanted) were ninepence. Then there were side stalls with all manner of things on show for sale and the bran tub for the children. When we were small we used to give a little stage show too, but not for many years – I think school made it more difficult so I expect this ended around the age of eight or nine. I was seven years old when I first went to the village school, having for a time had a little schooling at home. I think I've already mentioned this. Anyway, these two sale days were quite red-letter days for

us. Besides selling these sixpenny tickets we used to deliver the 'Our Work', a magazine from the Convent telling of how the Sisters' work was going both in England and overseas, at the same time we tried to sell Iron Holders at threepence each to help with the Guide Fund. Nurse was *never not* busy making something for us to wear or else to sell, she was first-hand at making jigsaw puzzles on a pedal machine, we would have to sandpaper the little pieces then make up the puzzle to be sure no piece got lost.

Another remembered time was Eastertide, on Good Friday we used to go down to the Common on Vatch Lane, then the road was little more than a lane and white not blue (*meaning, with a stony surface, not tarred*), to pick primroses for the Sisters at Kilburn and always a special bunch of violets for Mother Superior. These would be put in the post at once and reach London next day in time for church decoration on Easter Day. Some also went to a few sick people up there. Afraid we must be to blame if there is now a shortage of primroses and cowslips, though usually it was a little early for those. Cowslip balls and daisy chains were both great delights to us.

In spite of our rather harsh upbringing we were a strange mixture of poverty and pomp. Dressed in our Sunday best we had good clothes even though the fitting was shocking. Our walk through the garden, allowed only on going to Church on Sundays or as a special treat, had a dignity about it. Our plain scrubbed dining table and backless bench had an air of plenty in spite of the enamel ware, when you remember one of the girls waited at table in a little white apron. Solemnly she would hand you the large enamel bread dish for you to take your piece politely, and then stood in the background until her services were again needed. We took turns at being waitress, two weeks at a time – one week you waited on the children and the following on the Sisters. This began when we were about 10 years old, up to that time we had been looked after with a working girl and Nurse to serve. About this time Mrs Edwards [*the Chalford doctor's wife?*] gave us each a china cup and saucer and tea plate to match, each with the crest of some town or city. How delighted we were, though these were kept for Sunday tea only, and party days – Christmas Day, Easter Day, and 29 September (St Michael and All Angels Day, that being the patron saint of the Community of the Sisters of the Church). What with china ware on the table, and a couple of sheets as tablecloths, ourselves in white pinafores, we indeed felt important: two Swiss rolls and two jellies, weak tea instead of milk plus our usual three slices of bread and marg – we felt like princesses at a banquet.

At this age we began having a charge, very grown up that seemed. My first charge is still today one of my best friends. A charge was a younger girl who you looked after, helped her to dress, made her bed, did her sewing as well as your own and saw to it she was helped where necessary. My charge was only three years old and how I loved her, she was the youngest at that time, but at five had to go to Kilburn and I had another child, but I was not happy with the change, always wanting my little C... . We neither of us forgot each other and years later met up again in quite a funny way and hope never to lose each other again.

Thinking of these party days brings to mind one Christmas when we were all quite small and the weather very bad, the snow was wall-high and in great drifts, and roads were almost impassable. The London Sisters used to send a large Christmas trunk with gifts for the Sunday School and us children. It came by train to Brimscombe just before Christmas Day and was usually brought from there by Kitty, the pony; but that year poor Kitty could never manage the roads so we were told Reverend Mother could not send any presents for Christmas. We felt very sad. But the story reached the good men of Eastcombe and a number of them walked to the station and manhandled the trunk up the steep hill in all that ice and snow in the most bitter weather. It arrived after we had gone to bed, but what joy it was to each find a present on our plate that Christmas morning. We wholeheartedly thanked God in Chapel that day for the men's kindness, no doubt our Sisters had done so personally the night before, but I shall never forget that deed of kindness. We usually had two or three parties at that time of the year, each year Dr and Mrs Edwards at Chalford Hill

would have us to tea and give us each a lovely present – sometimes also Dr and Mrs Munden of Eastcombe . Then there was often someone out of the blue, so to speak, so we were very lucky. At Easter Miss Beale and Miss Johnson's Ladies' School at Bussage would send us beautiful Easter eggs, no child ever went without.

Another great treat was your birthday, on that day you had breakfast with Sister Frances, our Sister in Charge. We had an egg boiled and in an eggcup too, so grown up, also Sister would pour a little of her coffee into our milk even though it spoilt the milk it was a great privilege and we drank it with pride in spite of the strange taste, then Sister would let us read a little from her prayer book or do a little jigsaw puzzle with us. It finished with a kiss from Sister and then one felt a real birthday girl. Tea on that day too was special – just before one had a present, and at teatime you and you only had a piece of cake. Fancy the joy of eating it while the others looked on; but these treats could not be enjoyed unless you were considered good, otherwise the day passed unnoticed. That night the unfortunate girl would creep down to the bottom of her bed and have a little weep.

Discipline was strict and reasonably fair, marks were kept on each child governed by behaviour at both school and home. Each Sunday teatime these were read out and for the very good sweets were allotted, for the very bad punishments according. There was the Honour List for the Goodies and the Naughty List for the Baddies and 'I hope you will do better next week' said to the in-betweens. Honour List most came to three or four girls and Naughty List much the same. The Goodies had an hour on Tuesday or Wednesday with Sister Angela and were allowed to play with the Sunday toys and to stay up till 7.30 that night, while the Baddies had to go to bed each night after tea, so got no playtime. If you were on that list two weeks together you'd wear a black dress and have no puddings. Though Nurse was a dab hand at boxing ears the Sisters seldom did any smacking, and the very worst threat was that you would be sent to a 'Naughty Girls' Home', or sent away, which sounded just as bad.

I remember the horror on children's faces when told they had to return to their mothers. Return was rather strange to a child who just could not remember a mother and thought she had no mother. But just a few mothers did reclaim their daughters, and the poor daughter left most unwillingly so while really young we must have been happy enough. The village accepted us and though we never really mixed with the village children apart from school, we were counted as Eastcombe children. In my day we were under very strict discipline but as Sister Frances grew too old to hold the reins things grew slack and went in quite the opposite way. The Home closed some time in the 40s, I think. I left in 1939, and so did Sister Frances [who died aged 95].

ST ELIZABETH'S ORPHANAGE, EASTCOMBE: Sister Aletta's research

Turning now to Dr Lambert's application for historical information from the Community of Sisters of the Church, by then housed in St Michael's Convent at Richmond in Surrey: on 11 June 1980 Sister Aletta promised to look through 'hundreds of printed and bound private "Chronicles", and the magazine Our Work ... which was discontinued in 1966' – 'it will be a very lengthy business'.

In this first letter, however, she sent a quotation from *The Valiant Victorian* which was written by Mother Superior Rosemary for the order's centenary. 'Another small Orphanage was opened in 1884 in Eastcombe, near Stroud in the lovely Cotswold country. This Home was very useful as a refuge for Sisters and children in the two World Wars, but its isolation and the expense of upkeep made it necessary to close it after the Second War... The property was given to the Community by Miss Newton.'

On 25 June 1980 Sister Aletta wrote that she had once stayed at St Elizabeth's for a month, saying it was lovely, with a glorious view into a forest of trees from the French window of the

community room, adding that her parents were born in Gloucestershire. She wrote that some of the Sisters are buried in Bisley churchyard.

Each letter gives more and more information about the work of the Sisters, and on 9 July Sister Aletta revealed that she had joined the order in 1926. She said the early Sisters would have known about Miss Newton, but they had all – about 40 of them – died during the last war. Only five or six nuns currently remembered the establishment at Kilburn, which was taken over by the military during the war... The letters continued very newsily, but Sister Aletta never made any headway with discovering more about Miss Newton. She did, however trawl completely through the Sisterhood's monthly periodical *Our Work*, and came up with the following extracts.

Eastcombe was first mentioned in 1892 in a report on the six orphanages of the order (at Kilburn, Brondesbury, Broadstairs, Eastcombe, Oxford and Swansea).

Eastcombe Branch of the Orphanage of Mercy

'This little Home, nestling among the Cotswold Hills, the generous gift of the lady who built it, serves as a kind of Sanatorium. Its high position and pure bracing air render it invaluable for some of our very delicate children. In fact, we may say that it has been the instrument of giving to many of them a new lease of life. It has accommodation for 12..

Here there is no regular school, the chief object being for the children to be out of doors drinking in the pure ozone as much as possible. But they do all the housework and cooking, and help to make and mend their own clothes, so that there is always plenty for them to do and learn, though mere *book* learning is put aside for the time.

The Orphanage has been full all the year. We are very desirous of enlarging it, but funds do not permit of this at present. Perhaps some lover of our sickly little ones may be raised up to do this for us; we shall indeed rejoice if it be so.'

1893 June

'At Eastcombe, our little Sanatorium nestling among the Cotswold Hills, 14 small people live; convalescents being replaced by invalids, invalids in their turn becoming convalescent, and making way for other ailing companions.'

1902 Christmas Number

'The Lady Adelaide Home for Boys at Brondesbury was built...in 1883....A portion of St Mary's Home, Broadstairs, was reserved for the more delicate Orphans; and in 1892 the Victoria Orphanage, to contain another 100 children, was completed.

About the same time Hallam Hall, a Home capable of containing 50 Orphans, was secured to the Society, and a small charming house on the Cotswold Hills was given to us, where about a dozen delicate children can be housed.'

1904 Christmas Number

Camping out on the Cotswolds

'The time is 6.30am, the place our Orphanage, five miles from Stroud, on the top of the Cotswold Hills. The party comprises some of our Bun School Boys from Birmingham.' [Sister Aletta explained the term 'Bun School': before children could be taught Mother Foundress said they should be fed; hungry children could not learn. This would be a Sunday School Camp, as the order had no Elementary School in Birmingham. Children in their Elementary Day Schools – in rags, literally – were always given milk and buns at "break".] 'They have said goodbye for one blissful week to hot stifling streets, and to the short commons it is often their lot to endure. This expedition has been talked of for many weeks, and now they are really enjoying themselves to their hearts' content amongst the lovely hills and woods. Instead of going under canvas as at Broadstairs, the coach-house and loft above were utilized as sleeping apartments; Pearl, the faithful old white pony, taking the invasion with his usual amiability.

The boys thought it at pity to waste too much time sleeping, so were ready to begin their day

as soon as it was light. They were all poor, many of them in rags, but all were clean, and always ready to perform their ablutions.

Jimmy D stands at the top door with his arms folded; he likes to be photographed in a prominent position, as last year a lady befriended him through seeing his photograph in "Our Work", and has taken an interest in him ever since. He is just now specially happy, as she has sent him a shilling to spend during his holiday.

Josiah, an old acquaintance to readers of *Our Work*, stands on the opposite side holding the soap, and close to him is the pet of the party, Jackie S, aged five. We had four of the family in our party. The following letter was sent by their careful elder sister, who, poor child, has a hard lot. The father drinks and does not work; the mother is industrious, and works hard in a factory at piece-work, and the eldest of seven is like a second mother to the younger ones. "I do what I can", she explained one day. "When mother goes to work, there is often only about a quarter of a loaf for all the day, and Harry is always the hungriest of the lot, and wants all of it, but I share it fair amongst them, and I give the baby my bit, and then I send Harry off to the park, and tell him he must go and forget about being hungry, and so we have to manage the best we can." This is what she wrote.

"Dear Sister, I write these few lines hoping that you are quite well, and all of the children, and that you got there all right and I hope you will have some nice weather; for the children are very weak, and it will do them good indeed, and I think if there were a thousand of Sisters, they would not give the children such a treat as you have given them, and I do hope Josiah and Charley got there all right. I shall be glad when you send us a letter to let us know how you are getting on. Yours truly, Nellie N."

As soon as the washing business was over the boys went on to the field, where the swings were a never-failing amusement. Swings, did we say? Well, there *were* two when we got there, but so diligently were they used that one was done for in two days, and Birmingham funds had to be dipped into to buy another (for three shillings). Racing on the ground was not exciting enough, so a race to the top of the swings was often indulged in. Jimmy D again to the fore, is one of the two on the top; the race this time was a tie, though Jimmy generally wins. Jack B has promised to sit quite still while they make a descent.'

[Obviously and regrettably, I cannot show the illustrations referred to, as I have not seen the original articles. MB]

'Another favourite pastime may be seen in the next picture. The boys on the board have been asked to keep still for a second while the photographer gets a snapshot – there is no accounting for taste, but they like to push each other down the slide by heads or feet. Jackie wanted to have a try, but Josiah, who has promised his mother and Nell to look after him tells him it is more fun to watch.

Many other games unknown to polite society were indulged in. A small hayrick neatly thatched stood in a corner of the field. Someone (but that was one of the girls who came later) climbed on to the top, and came sliding down to the ground; unhappily some of the thatch came down too, so it was impossible for the escapade to escape the notice of Mr P, who looked after Pearl and the garden, and things in general, at this little Home for over 20 years. Of course the misdeed reached the ears of the Sister in charge of the party, who thought the best way out of the difficulty was to tell the culprit to make her own peace; this she was ready enough to do, saying "I'm very sorry, master, I won't go up again, I did not know what the *thing* was; I thought it was meant for us to play on." That this ignorance was genuine was shown during our journey from Birmingham, when some of the children called haystacks "beehives".

Later in the week some of the boys found much pleasure in preparing a patch in the meadow for a cricket match, which was most kindly organized by the Rector. Some of the troop went off to the Rectory for the cricket things, while others made for the field, and when the clearing process was at its height the photographer took a snapshot.

Harry, "the hungriest of the lot", may be seen in the front, he is trying to shade his poor weak eyes from the sun – the Eye Hospital had provided him with a shade, but this he lost out of the

carriage window on the journey. "His eyes would be all right," said his mother when talking to us one day, "only he really don't get what he ought to have to eat, and it's all weakness of constitution."

His eldest brother, Ted, in a jersey, is on the right, with a bundle of hay in one hand; a little way off is Jackie again, and near him sitting on the ground is Tommy. Harry, Ted, Jackie and Tommy can all be seen in this view. When the evening came, the kind Rector arrived to superintend the match – "Warwickshire" against "Gloucestershire" – which was played with much spirit. The bath that was used as a washing tub in the morning was put to another use on this occasion, and was brought on to the cricket field full of lemonade, no questions being asked as to the desirability of the arrangement, and it was carried back to the house emptied of its contents.

"Gloucestershire" won the match, but that was because they knew the ground better than "Warwickshire", so at least the latter said.

Much more could be written of the events of this wonderful week, but all things must have an end, and our 35 boys had to pack up the unripe nuts they had gathered, as well as many other country treasures, and go back to their poor homes, and in many cases alas, to empty cupboards also; but the pleasures they enjoyed will not be forgotten, and we hope another year we will be able to give them a holiday in the Cotswolds. On the exit of the boys, the girls had a turn including Nellie, and Jackie stayed on with his sisters. No one enjoyed the holiday more than poor hard-worked Nellie, who shed tears when the time was up, and she had to go back to the old hard life. "You see, I'm the eldest," she said, "and Mother looks to me to see after the lot of them, and I shouldn't mind, only it's so hard when there's nothing for me to give them to eat."

We should like to introduce one more of our little friends to our readers – little Charlie B lying on the ground at the corner of the picture. He and his three sisters came with us, and the day before their return home the bailiffs carried off all the best bits of furniture. Next day the poor mother (who is the most respectable woman) had her ninth baby. "Oh how I longed to send to you and ask you to keep my children down there a bit longer", said poor Mrs B when we visited her. "I was fair distracted when they came home just then, and nothing for them to eat, and nobody to see to them!" Sorry were we too, and we hope we may eventually have a Holiday Home for our Birmingham children, where they can have a longer stay than one week in the year.

The Girls' Week is thus described by another pen.

"God bless you, Mr P, God bless you, Sister." "Goodnight, girlyes, and mind you don't get up till we come." "All right, Sister – 'ere, don't shove – ain't it snug. Sshhh!"

Thirty tired happy heads, close side by side, resting peacefully and contentedly till morning light. Both coach house and hay loft were full of them, and stabled nearby is beautiful white Pearl, who wonders what species of creature the Sisters are giving him for companions, and evidently thinks them rather a job lot! Ah! Pearl, dear faithful old horse, never has your resting place been so honoured: 30 children of the Church, very dear to their Lord, with the Angel guardians gleaming around. "Jesus", whispers a little waif, "the last word spoken" by some at least of them. What beds: sacks stuffed with straw for mattresses, old leathers, once in use at the Tenter Street Refuge (Refuge for Homeless men run by the Community) for sheets and blankets in one, three or four of the older girls on the hay itself.

"Did you remember who slept in the same sort of place once long ago?" "Yes, Sister, we did", reverently answered a poor, rough girl.

Meals – al fresco, weather permitting, and grateful indeed did we feel that weather very much permitted. What a dining-room, the best banqueting hall, with the choicest viands and the most excellent music, could not rival it, glorious sky, beautiful hill country stretching out in front of us, swallows flitting overhead, and that most soothing harmony of sound, the product of myriads of happy-winged insects, a gentle breeze swaying the treetops and rustling the leaves.

The first meal on arrival was dinner. Grace sung, the 30 settled down, mugs circulated. "Oh, what lovely meat. Don't I wish we had it every day!" "Pickles! Who wants a bit?" But the bottle was empty in a twinkling. 30 bits of bread – the only plates, if you please – held out while Sister gravely anointed each piece with a taste of the vinegar, then spring onions, lettuces. "Ain't it

just glorious?" "You will have roast mutton and gooseberries out of the garden on Sunday," remarked Sister. Ah! That Sunday dinner! "Do you think the mutton's in?" anxiously asked a girl (such a gaunt, tattered thing) en route to Church. "Quite sure of it, Sister C is seeing to it." "Really? Ain't she kind!"

Dear children, who could help being kind to them? To see them so entirely happy was more than a reward for "minding" them. The gooseberries, very different we must say from what the Birmingham shops produce, were received with awe, so many and so fine! For some time no one attacked them, but after counting and admiring them, they were wrapped up in ragged pinnies or skirts – however, we believe before night fell there were none left!

In the woods: "They're in their glory now," remarked a home-returning labourer, and so they were. Tearing down the wooded hillside, clambering up again, then down once more, making the countryside re-echo with their joyful if "towny" shouts... How they went for the nut trees and blackberry bushes, little difference did it make to them that neither one nor the other were nearly ripe. We laughed again to see them "paggling". "It's the Thames, isn't it, Sister?" It was a tiny, and, it must be confessed, dingy hillside stream – not exactly one of the sources of the Father Thames, though these children were right in remembering his reverence does rise somewhere near. Off went tattered boots displaying very lacy stockings, and with clutched-up skirts, the troop went in, running merrily one behind the other "in their glory", once again. Thankful were we to divert their attention from a large and beautiful fish-pond nearby, where patient fishers and wily fish played games with each other, and could not think who we were, or where we came from, certainly not from the skies judging by our appearance, nor from the earth, judging from our spirits! The most impossible bunches of weeds were gathered for "mother", which Sister discreetly collected later on before coach house and hay-loft were quite poisoned.

"Where do you live, pet?"

"Court 10, House 3."

What a vision it brought of our city slums. Yet this child was radiant with fun, and looked charming with her tattered hat decked out with ivy and the huge bunch of weeds lovingly hugged.

"How many children has mother?"

"Thirteen, but she has buried seven."

Alack, alack, and likely to bury six more under the unhealthy conditions in which they are forced to live.

"Father's a bricklayer, and often out of work in winter and wet weather. We buried baby last week. It had been ill eight months and father and mother often nursed it all night."

But why ask them more questions as they trooped home through the lanes in the golden sunset? One thing we are certain of – there *never* would be funds lacking to give these dear slum children a few days' summer change if some of the *many* "Mr, Mrs and Miss Greathearts", with whom England is blessed, could only see them with their own kind eyes.

At toilet

If the garments were old, tattered in places, and not exactly tailor-made, they had most of them said "how do you do?" at the wash-tub before starting; so too had the children, and truly grateful did we feel to the tired, over-worked mothers. Any that liked were invited to visit the wash-house at least once a day, and on Saturday night ablutions were insisted on.

Our Jack

How can we talk of "our Jack" – the sweetest little lad of five, unselfish, obedient, bonny? All honour to the poor mother who, in most delicate health and with an idle drunken husband, has reared seven children, and though rough and very poor, all seem most responsive to kindness and "try to be good". Jack has tucked himself safely into our hearts, and so when his visit ought to have terminated with the boys' week, we gladly listened to his request to stay on when his sisters came. Jack is a born cricketer, and gives "overs" with grace and dexterity. He also performs marvellous feats on the swing, hanging head downward most dangerously. At night he has been tucked away in

an invalid pram. His appetite has been amazing. How we should like to keep him *always*. He will come to us again, we hope, some of you who read these pages will make it possible; but tomorrow he returns to his slum court, his ailing mother, his drunken father, his unsuitable food. One thing we must have seen to, his pretty blue eyes (which filled with tears and touched our hearts when going away was mooted). We fear there is something wrong, for they are clouded over and misted at times – we can't let Jack lose those eyes if any trouble on our part will save them.

Our weather

God has blessed this camp-out, we cannot help feeling. Can it be that He has graciously accepted the prayers of our own dear children? This is what happened. Just before the arrival of the Birmingham children to camp near the Eastcombe Orphanage the weather was unsettled and serious-looking. The Sister-in-Charge happened to go into the orphans' day-room and saw two heads bent seriously over a book. "What are you doing, children?" she naturally asked, for it was not story-book time. Going up she found them studying the prayer for fine weather in the prayer book. "We are praying for fine weather for Sister M and her Birmingham children," they answered simply. And it was glorious weather from the next day forward until the eve of their return, when it again became unsettled. The last party landed safely home on August 10th, and we will conclude this paper with two letters from the holiday-makers. The first is from a boy.

"Dear Mother Superior, I thank you so much for letting us have a week in the country, as it is doing me good, and I should like to have another week. I think it is making me grow, and I am sorry we have got to go home as it is very nice and I am not very big for my age but I think I have growed a bit since I have been here. Yours very truly, Jimmy D, the first Birmingham Bun School boy."

The other is from poor Nellie, written on August 10th 1904.

"Dear Sister, I write these few lines to tell you that Jack wished he was back again at your home, he was crying for V to fetch him back again. Mother said she had never seen him look so well in her life, and I wished I was back too, I shall be glad next year when we can come again. Mother said she wished he was there now, he has been talking about you all, all night long, and Mother and Father all thanked you very much for giving him them clothes, for he had not a bit on his back. When we got home we found the house was empty, not a bit of bread in the house. Jack went straight up to Sister's and told her he had no dinner. Sister M said she wished he had have stayed. I think this is all now, so goodbye and GOD bless you and all the orphans, and tell Sister H to try to come to our party at Christmas. Yours truly from Nellie and Jack. 3 Court House, 4 L Street, Birmingham."

[Sister Aletta wrote that she herself was born in Birmingham. She remembered that 'the slums ... were Unspeakable – and this in the time of the Glorious British Empire, when Lipton's Tea Vans carried the inscription "The Empire on which the sun never sets". Sister Teresa, the RC Sister world-famous, is trying to deal with the appalling "bustees" the British Raj left behind – I am not Labour nor Socialist.']

[She also wrote that she would like to say that they tried to bring the children up in a definitely 'religious way, but decidedly NOT "pi" – ugh! People used to remark how very happy and natural they seemed, and not at all "institutionalised". I asked our Chaplain here, who always comes to Mother's Party for Old Boys and Girls held annually, whether they seemed at all institutionalised to him. "Not in the very least," he said, "they might have been brought up in any nice family home."']

1905 Christmas Number

Jottings from the Cotswolds

'This Home has only recently been converted from a small Orphanage to a country Home, for children from Birmingham and other towns in the Midlands. As might be expected, the very poor boys and girls from our Bun School at Birmingham were the first to enjoy this arrangement, and we think our readers may be interested in seeing and hearing a little about their doings.

Poor Kate

One of our convalescent girls can be seen here. Poor child, were it not for her short frock and pinafore one might think the face was that of a middle-aged woman. "It's good food she wants more than anything," said the mother who brought her to see us one evening. "There's eight of us to keep, and we don't none of us have as much as we can eat. If you take her into your 'ome for a few weeks it's what she wants, and while she's gone there will be a mouthful all round for the rest." So one fine day in August we brought Kate away from her slummy street into the fresh air of the Cotswolds. Good food without stint made another girl of her, and when she returned after a three weeks' stay one would scarcely have recognised her for the same person.

Country pleasures

The house party turned out one hot day to help Mr Phipps the gardener and factotum, to mow the lawn, taking turns about. The girls pulled the rope that was attached to the lawnmower, and thought it was great fun, while the little girls in sun hats, with Frank, the baby of the party, looked on. Nelly and Clara went home to Birmingham most reluctantly at last. "I could do nothing with them when bed time came," the mother told us afterwards, "I couldn't get them to bed for they would go on telling us all as they had done, and at last the father sent for his razor strap to hit them with it, but they went and sat so quiet on one chair between 'em that he said he couldn't a-bear to hit them just then, so he set to and sharpened his razor instead and made out he was a-going to shave all the time. I let them stop up that night till we went to bed, for them to tell us all about it. They went on talking till they went to sleep, about the garden and the white pony that took them to the station. They asked their father how it could be it had not grown more when it was over 20 years old, while Bill Bates at the coal yard in the next street had a horse a deal bigger which was only 10."

Three of our boys

These three specimens of Young England must be introduced as forming a very small minority in our Birmingham Bun School. By virtue of seniority we first notice the middle boy, Alec MacDonald. He has no mother, which may perhaps account for the ragged condition of his clothing. He and his father, who is blind, have a lodging somewhere in a very slummy street. It has never transpired how they live, or on what; but Alec is always very hungry on Sunday mornings, so we gather there is no superfluity of food. Very occasionally he disappears, and then we hear that he and his father have had to go to the workhouse for a bit. They never stay very long, however, and Alec always comes the following Sunday, and tells us they are going to make another start.

The boy to the right is also conversant with the workhouse. He has a father and a mother, but, alas, they both drink. Every now and then the father disappears, and the mother and children go to the workhouse while the authorities find the missing man. When found, he prefers to bring the family out, rather than join them in the "ouse", so they begin life again in what they term "unfurnished apartments". They have lived in most parts of Birmingham, as they do not prove lucrative tenants, but no matter how far they may be from our school, Bertram faithfully appears on Sunday mornings. "Cannot your mother mend your clothes a bit?" we asked one day. "Well, she does when she has some cotton," said the poor ragged lad.

The boy on the left, Willy T, is an interesting little lad. He has been regularly to school since he wore frocks. His cousins, Johnny and Jimmy, were the first Bun School Boys, and they elected to bring him. "We a'most wish we hadn't asked him," said Jimmy one day, "for he has to come of a Saturday night and sleep with me and Johnny, and ours is only a little bed, and I don't sleep in the middle, nor yet nigh the wall, so I often rolls out!" Willy has one great ambition – it is to sleep for one night in the country. He can't think what it would be like to go to bed in the country and wake up in the morning and not see chimney pots. He has been each year since he joined the school for a *day* at the annual treats, and wonders if a night in the country is as grand a treat. As we came back from the treat last July, he pondered this little matter all the way home. It is a joy to which he looks forward amidst the poverty of his childhood, to sleep just one night in the country, and next summer we hope to help him to realise his daydream.

The match of the season: Warwickshire v Gloucestershire

A few typical street urchins may be seen in the photograph on page 60. We were over for the day from Birmingham. A very important event was on hand, for a picked team of the Bun School Boys has elected to play Eastcombe. The Rector of the latter place most kindly arranged for the match to come off, and chose the Gloucestershire eleven. Thus we started: 29 boys and one Sister from New Street Station one fine morning in August. The Sister-in-Charge of our Convalescent Home had been duly apprised of the coming guests; butcher and cake-man had been interviewed; and as we travelled remarks were passed that it did not matter that there had been nothing for breakfast in several cases that morning, as there was sure to be plenty for dinner. Sister had been heard to say that two legs of mutton were to be cooked, and that all could have as much pudding as they liked!

The journey was uneventful, except that it was by no means a quiet one, and we landed safely at our little Home on top of the Cotswolds. An early hour had been fixed for dinner, as the cricketers wished to enjoy the meal, and then have time to digest it before the match. The tables were brought out into the garden, and the boys settled themselves into several parties. The one on view came best within focus, and the photographer took a snapshot. Jimmy Day, the first Bun School Boy, sits in front with knife and fork ready to begin. Bob B is holding a mug to his lips; he has a situation as a boot cleaner in a lady's house in Edgbaston, and goes every morning before school. His father is in the category of the unemployed, so the lad's earnings are a great help to keep a roof over their heads. On Saturdays he stays till after dinner, and tells how nice it is to have a plate of meat and pudding, and not be a bit hungry till the next day.

The captain of the Warwickshire cricketers is the third boy sitting on the see-saw on the left. He is getting rather anxious as to the results of the coming match, as the best bowler is not of the party, having failed to make the regulation attendances at school.

In due course the legs of mutton disappeared, and then the fruit pies were manipulated. "Who made the pies?" asked one. "Tell her to come out and let's give her three cheers," said another; and three cheers were given, though the pastry-cook did not come out.

Two pm came, and the captain by this time was *very* anxious. He had written previously to the Rector saying, "We are in full confidence of winning, and I think if we play up to our standard we shall beat you." Now, for some reason, he did not feel quite so confident. Not to weary our readers with details of the events of the game, we will pass on to say that our town lads had no chance whatever against the country ones, and were beaten most signally. "We don't like their bowling, it's too swift for us," one after another remarked, as the wickets went down like ninepins. But the disappointment of losing was soon forgotten when the garden was reached, and the tables were set out with cakes without limit. Both teams came in for tea, and [the Rector] afterwards made a speech, and told them someone must always lose in games, and it did not matter which, so that everyone enjoyed himself.

Thus a very happy day came to an end, and we all ran down the hill and had a ride in the motor to Stroud. The journey home was a lively one, and we reached home just as Big Ben chimed 10pm.'

July-August 1908

'Birmingham Sale on Behalf of St Elizabeth's Home, Eastcombe

Held through the kindness of the Misses Sutton and Mr Sutton, at Royd Lodge, Edgbaston. Opened by Lady Smith of Edgbaston Hall, introduced by Canon Scott, who said during his address: "This beautiful Home is for Convalescent and starving children, who go down from the slums of Birmingham with old men and women's faces, and come back rosy and bonny, and looking a little more childlike. I can speak from what I know, and am most truly grateful for the good our children from St Alban's have received. So I have much pleasure in introducing Lady Smith to you all." Lady Smith said "she was particularly pleased to think that not only sick children were received, but starving and holiday children were taken there; we have other holiday funds where children are boarded out, but she greatly appreciated the children taken into the Home for holidays, as it was all so much more satisfactory, and she had very much pleasure indeed in declaring the Sale open, and

hoped everybody would gladden the Sisters' hearts by buying as much as ever they could." Some who could not come had sent donations so that the Sisters had £17 in hand. Mr Sutton announced at 7pm that £100 had been made; the following day it was made up to £106.'

Christmas Numbers 1906 – 1914

Just four photographs and no text appeared in these issues.

End of the Christmas Numbers

From 1914 onwards *Our Work* magazine appeared throughout the year, without Christmas Numbers and with very much more straightforward indexing. Heroically, Sister Aletta continued to transcribe entries for Dr Lambert (and us). November 1911 describes moving to a new Home in Birmingham with the help of lots of Mission boys, who later helped in the garden, and collected for a gymnasium they could use. In August 1912 dinners at St Monica's House were described. In October 1912 two boys wrote about their holidays in Eastcombe, with a photograph of 'Starting for Cirencester'.

February 1913, an extract about St Elizabeth's

'At the end of the Holiday Season, when the Subscribers' Letters were also exhausted, instead of closing the Home for the winter, as in past years, we rearranged it to accommodate a small party of orphans, mostly delicate ones, who with their companions have lived at St Mary's Home, Broadstairs, since infancy. The majority of these children are settled in their own quarters in the Kilburn Home, to profit by the educational advantages of London; but this little set seemed likely to benefit by the beautiful air of the Cotswolds, and most of them hardly require more than an elementary education. Four of the children attend the Parish School just across the meadow, and the little ones have instruction at home from an elder girl, supplemented by the Sisters. If the present arrangement works well it may continue, and other quarters be found for the children from Birmingham and elsewhere during the summer.' (Sister Aletta wrote that this was done. From 1913 onwards holidays for poor children were transferred to Towyn in Wales where they had a small house which was used for this purpose by children from the Home in Liverpool, and others too.

Sister Aletta's introduction to the next extract

'The following gives information about the countryside around Eastcombe which may be of interest, It may, alas, have altered, as so much beauty has been spoiled in our country, but you will know. If it has altered, it will be informative as to what it was like.'

December 1916. A holiday expedition

"'Oh! It was lovely!'" Such was the oft-repeated refrain of a happy band of our orphans during their summer holiday at Eastcombe last August, and the reference was to a visit to a Flower Show, and a long day's ramble most kindly suggested and personally conducted a few days later by a London schoolmaster, who is evidently in touch with young minds, and knows well how to kindle in them interest and joy. Here is the children's account of their pleasures.

This year we, Division II, spent our holiday at Eastcombe.' [Sister Aletta explained that the Orphanage at Kilburn was divided into four divisions, according to the age of the children. Later experience caused the Community to mix up the ages, to make it more familial, with the exception of the 18-year-old girls, who all, whether they were to be teachers, nurses or whatever, had to learn the practical side of life by helping to do some of the housework in the vast establishment.]

'We had two very exciting days which came very close together. First of all we were invited to a Flower Show at Oakridge by the kind gentleman whose wife invited us long ago to the play, called "The Cockyolly Bird". The walk was most delightful, through fields and over many stiles. When we arrived at the Vicarage where the Flower Show was to be held, the Rev. Dr Dearmer took us to see his beautiful garden. There were flowers of every description, and it looked as if much

care had been taken to make it so beautiful. Then we went into the large orchard on a steep slope, very difficult to climb. After roaming over the garden, looking at the fowls which were extraordinarily fine, and having a peep at the cottage with its pretty thatched roof we returned to the Vicarage and had tea on the lawn.

The ladies and gentlemen were very kind and supplied us with every nice thing we could want. While we were having tea a gentleman came and talked to us and asked Sister if he could take us for a long country ramble.

We were all much excited at the thought of this and waited eagerly for the Monday fixed for the expedition. At last it came and we started off with bags and satchels containing our tea. Some of us went in the pony trap to Oakridge, which is two miles from here. It was arranged that we should meet the gentleman at Oakridge, and start from there to Sapperton, a village about six miles away. Our kind host gave us each a cup of tea before starting, so we were quite ready for the ramble before us.

After a scamper down Braid Hill, the first part of the walk lay in a pretty little valley through which ran a canal that has sadly fallen into disrepair. The water has all been emptied away, but in its place tall rushes and the loveliest wild flowers have grown. A man was engaged in busily cutting down the rushes for thatch. The valley scenery was very picturesque, and as the sun was shining brightly it added greatly to its beauty.' [Reading this caused Sister Aletta to wonder if, 'as has happened in so many places throughout England', the canal had been restored...]

'We learned a lot about the flowers and the limestone rocks, through which a tunnel has been made for the railway that is used now instead of the canal. We climbed over several stiles, and then began to ascend a steep hill called Frampton Common, at the bottom of which runs the River Frome. The next bit of our route was along a very narrow pathway, where the brackens were so tall they completely covered us as we scrambled through them. On our way we gathered wild flowers, and managed with a very sharp penknife to obtain some sprays of a huge Scotch thistle. When we arrived at the top of the Common, the gentleman, who had brought his camera, took a photograph of us with the beautiful scenery around us. We had by this time walked about three miles, but were not the least bit tired. Then we went along a country lane with bushes on either side, until we came within a mile of Cirencester Park. A few steps further brought us to Sapperton village. Whilst the gentleman was finding a suitable place for tea, we went to look at the Church, which is very ancient. There were some old tombs, one dating back as far as 1570. The pews were entered by little doors which shut in the occupants. They were beautifully carved, but are now very worn.

After tea, which we thoroughly enjoyed, we discovered to our dismay that it was half-past six, and that we had to walk six miles to get home, we would have to hurry. We went back a shorter way than we had come, so as not to keep the trap waiting, for it was to meet us again at Oakridge at half-past seven. The scenery we passed through going home was just as beautiful as the other way had been. When we got back to Oakridge we took it in turns to drive the remaining two miles in the pony trap. Having bid goodbye to the kind gentleman we thanked him very much for taking us for such an enjoyable experience.'

[Sister Aletta wrote that people who had met their children in any circumstances constantly remarked how completely natural and happy they were. There was nothing 'institutionalised' or constrained about them, and their approach was so free and friendly. Sister Aletta here gave a lot of extremely interesting background information about the work of the Kilburn Sisters, which I would not be comfortable quoting without clearing copyright – from whom? Any reader local to Eastcombe who would like to see this paperwork would be welcome to do so. MB]

Eastcombe Sale of Work. 1916

This issue mentions the great struggle to make ends meet in time of war, but this may indicate the position of the House. 'Hidden away as we are on the top of Chalford Hill, we feel we must make our needs known or St Elizabeth's Home may be forgotten among the many claims of charities connected with the War.' [Sister Aletta wrote 'Our orphans did a tremendous amount of work,

knitting socks, making bandages, etc, sending parcels out to soldiers, etc, and 60 of our Old Boys served in the Army. Of course some were killed.'] Sales raised £40.

January 1917

'There is a short notice that adds nothing to what you want, but mentions that "at present two Sisters and four Orphans are the only winter residents, but some of the little ones are boarded out in the village, and may possibly form the nucleus of a new family in this healthy spot."' [Sister Aletta reported that other orphans returned to Kilburn, and two very successful sales were organized in the summer and autumn.]

December 1917

'Twenty small girls moved from the Orphanage at St Mary's Convalescent Home (gargantuan place!) to Eastcombe for safety and quiet, because of the War.'

January 1918

'No news but a picture of the Home on p6, with a very brief reference on p4. Number of children now 19, brought from St Mary's, Broadstairs, on account of the repeated air raids. Our girls who had trained as nurses served in the war, and one went down on the "Osmanieh" 31 December 1917. Others worked as storekeepers in France.'

July 1918

Usual appeal for funds. Party of Kilburn Orphans sent to Eastcombe for holidays.

1918 – 1920

Appeals for funds.

January 1921

The Orphanage, Eastcombe, Glos. Twenty children – 16 little ones and four elder girls to help with them – annual sale £40. The Community asked for a street collection, and this was authorized in certain parts of London. Over £280 collected by the Sisters and the selling of daisies brought the takings to over £300.

June 1921

'For many years after this delightful little Home on the Cotswolds was given to our Society by MISS ISABEL NEWTON, in 1884, it was used for some of our delicate orphans, but in 1905, with the consent of the donor, it was transformed into a Convalescent Home for Children. In 1907 a much-needed Iron Room was built, enabling us to take in a larger number of children. During the War it reverted to its original use and now contains a happy party of 14 little boys and girls and five elder girls. In spite of the cold winters it is astonishing how the little ones thrive in this bracing air, and we are very thankful to have such a Home to place them in. Our Eastcombe family is a very cheery one, but like the rest it is badly in need of help.'

There was a second street collection on 5 November 1921, and also on 12 November in a different area.

July 1922

Sale £49. 'In spite of all delightful help our little Home on the Cotswolds does not nearly cover its expenses.' November: outside painting to be done. Weekly jumble sale to help.

January 1923

Appeal as usual.

March 1923

An account of life in the Home. Appeal for jumble to continue the very necessary repairs. Unable to have any more sales until the boxes were replenished. A Magic Lantern had been given to the Home which gave the children much pleasure.

July 1923

Sale a great success. £61 taken.

October 1923

Account of life in the Home.

1924

Sale: proceeds £60. House painted white.

1925

Good friends Dr and Mrs Edwards left the district to the regret of all.

January 1927

'Minds of the children are expanding and real progress has been made in school work. Household increased this year by the admission of a little girl from Gloucester who was threatened with blindness under the conditions of city life. In the circumstances we felt obliged to stretch our accommodation to admit the poor little sufferer, and we have been abundantly justified by her improvement in health and the averting of the threatened blindness. Although really more of a convalescent boarder, little Patricia looks on this as a second home, and gravitates between it and her home in Gloucester, where loving parents are constant in showing their gratitude for the timely help we were able to give.'

November 1928

Usual account of children's health, visit to zoo, etc.

January 1929. Eastcombe Orphanage

'We have received two small children from one of our London Homes who were greatly in need of country air. They have grown and improved much since they came a little over nine months ago. One girl has started life in service and is working well and happily. The little girl we had from Gloucester for two and a half years, in order to save her sight, had improved so much that at Easter the doctor thought her strong enough to go into hospital for treatment. This was not altogether as satisfactory as had been hoped, and she was then transferred to the Eye Hospital in Birmingham where she is making slow progress.

We lend the children's large playroom once a week for the Baby Welfare for this village, Bisley and Bussage. It is an immense boon to all the mothers. The average attendance is 20 mothers and a room full of young children. The District Nurse attends every week, and the doctor once a month. An address is given every week on some subject of interest to mothers.

Various old people in the village, aged between 75 and 85, are regularly visited and helped with food and other things necessary for the sick.

The village troop of Girl Guides has been flourishing during the year. The Orphanage Matron is Captain of the troop which holds its meetings weekly in our playroom. They had their annual inspection in April and did very well, getting 76 out of 100 marks, the highest percentage they had ever had. Their numbers have increased to 24. The Annual Rally was held at Lypiatt Park and realized £20 in aid of the District Funds. The Church Sunday School is also flourishing and the 56 children are eagerly looking forward to the Christmas Treat and presents.

The Jumble Sales are held in our playroom every week when there is anything to sell. They are greatly appreciated by the village folk who always pick up bargains which they dearly love. We

and they heartily thank the kind friends who contribute to these Sales.

Like the whole country we suffered a good deal in the November gale – trees blown down, one window blown out, numerous tiles off the roof, and broken guttering, all of which means a heavy bill for repairs at Christmas. We shall be grateful for any contribution ...' (etc etc – usual appeal for funds).

June 1929. Eastcombe Orphanage

'This little Home was built by MISS NEWTON OF BISLEY as an Orphanage for children of professional men in 1873. A few years after Miss Newton felt a call to missionary life in South Africa, and she gave the Home to the Sisters of the Church, who used it for their delicate Orphans.'

October 1929.

Sister Aletta wrote: 'Guides' outing, which you won't want to read about perhaps, on p167, but there is a very good picture of the Orphanage which shows the Iron Room the Sisters had built.'

November 1929

Appeal for blankets. Sister Aletta wrote: 'I told you we were the greatest beggars in the world, but wasn't it worth it? It gives people who possibly could not do the work themselves a share in it. The blankets cost 6s each!'

December 1929. Thanks and a Plea from Eastcombe

'We are most grateful to the kind friends who so generously answered our appeal for new blankets, which are being much appreciated by our small people. Might we venture on behalf of these small people to put in a plea for a Christmas parcel or letter for those who have no outside friend to remember them? The joy of Christmas is greatly enhanced by a "parcel through the post". Nothing else will quite take its place. We give a list of a few of those who would rejoice at such attention: Alexine, 14; Patience, 13; Rosalind, 12; Biddy, 11; Kathleen, 10; Madeline, 8; Margaret, 8; Violet, 8; Nancy, 6.'

[At this point Sister Aletta felt it necessary to say that the Sisters lived on money that they themselves had brought in to the Order when they joined. Accounts were properly audited, and all charitably given money was used exclusively for the children's welfare. In the list of names above are two of the Woolls sisters from Bisley, whose parents had died of influenza. They had mixed memories of life in St Elizabeth's, and found it particularly shocking that the two other children of the family were sent elsewhere without their being able to stay in touch with one another. The fate of the other two had to be found out later.]

April 1930, June 1930, August 1930, January 1931

Next to nothing about Eastcombe in these issues, other than the usual appeals.

February 1931

'Doings in the Orphanage, Guides, and a Brownie Pack has been started for younger children. All the children are either Guides or Brownies. Ages of children five to 16. Nesta left us in September to be trained for service in one of our large London Homes. Settled down happily, she writes that "London is a large place". Charlotte preparing to go to our St Gabriel's Home in Liverpool, where she would attend our large St Hilda's Central Grade School, and would help in the house. Wants to be a children's nurse. Margaret left in April to go for training in Liverpool, and hopes to be a teacher.' [Sister Aletta: 'Our Liverpool School prepared them for a wider education until they could go to St Catherine's College to train as a teacher.'] Cheltenham Ladies' College had begun to take a permanent interest in the Orphanage, and contributed from time to time sacks of clothing for the children. [They had also developed a "begging round" in the district – the Sisters did it. All donations begged in those days.]

June 1931, August 1931

Usual appeals for Sale.

October 1931. Eastcombe Guides

'August 21st was a day of mixed feelings as far as the Girl Guides from Eastcombe, Bisley, and Bussage were concerned. They returned on this day from Swanage where they had been enjoying a very happy Camp holiday for ten days. "It is lovely to be home again", they all said as the lorry drew up at the gates, but "Oh, we do love camping".

The excitement was very keen and everyone seemed to be brimming over with happy chatter, all talking at the same time, telling their visits to places, such as Studland Bay, a most beautiful little spot, at which everyone picnicking, bathing, paddling in glorious sunshine. Another expedition was to Bournemouth by steamer for some, for others by bus, as the ferry-crossing was a new attraction. Also visits to the Anvil Lighthouse and Swanage town were by no means forgotten.

The patrol Leaders have been most good and unselfish in the discharge of their various duties, for they have brought back the Guides to their homes all looking do well and fresh. All have gained weight. One child gained three and a half pounds, and another four pounds in the ten days. This speaks well for the cooking operations, though there must have been many handicaps this year on account of the rain.

Our own children and village Guides sent out a hearty "Thank you" to all who have helped to make the holiday such a happy and successful one. Now they are talking of next year's camp.'



A second article

'For many years our little Orphanage on the Cotswolds has resigned itself to the various disadvantages which seek to off-set the life-giving air. Chief among these disadvantages is the tendance of 15 lamps with their attendant dangers in a household of children. Gas was out of the question as we were too far from the source of supply and for many years we have felt that we dare not let ourselves think of electricity on account of the expense of installation. Now the question has become acute, and the pros are heavily weighted by the fact that our pony, who has been performing the daily task of pumping water, is growing so old that she will not be able to hold out much longer.

We have an estimate for providing and installing a plant which would also be capable of working the pump for £130, and we feel that the time has come when we really ought to undertake this venture... Apart from the labour and the risk of the 15 lamps, we have to endure semi-darkness, and when our dear old pony retires from service, the condition of the roads for four-legged beasts does not tempt us to find her a successor. Then how should we stand with regard to water? Will you help us out of our dilemma by sending us *some* help towards the installation of the much needed plant? Large or small gifts will be most gratefully received by etc etc etc.'

January 1932. Eastcombe Orphanage.

'Pound Day at the Orphanage with splendid results; 540lbs were given in provisions and £20 in cash. The Bussage Sisters (another Community) invited seven of our older children to see a Nativity Play at their Home last Christmas. This was much enjoyed by all who went. All our older children go to the Church School in Bussage.

Eastcombe Guides gave their mothers a Christmas Party which was held at the Orphanage.

The Mothers and Babies of the Welfare enjoyed a very pleasant afternoon in the Orphanage. A splendid treat was given to them, and a Christmas Tree.

A kind friend who had given mackintoshes for the children sent a donation for all the children to have an outing. The elder ones went by bus to Gloucester. They saw the Cathedral and the Museum, enjoyed a good tea and returned home by bus. The younger ones had a trip into Stroud where the shops were a great attraction. A kind friend from Bisley lent her lovely gramophone for the use of the Orphanage through the winter.

A great event for the top of the Cotswolds is electric light installed. This, as may be imagined, is more than appreciated by all. It has, however, not yet been paid for, and any contributions, large and small, will be most gratefully received.'

February 1932

This article enlarges upon the delights of the electricity, and the difficulties of the past in supervising children in a dimly lighted room: the dangers – a girl's hair once caught fire. At 'events' at the Home the movement of girls put out the lamps, etc. 'Fortunately care with regard to finance sits lightly on the shoulders of our little family. Not so with their guardians. Try as they will the thought of the cost of the electric light is nearly always present in their minds. They know that it is an excellent investment, that in a few years' time it will more than pay for itself, but they are faced with the initial cost of more than £140. The great national industrial crisis has arisen since this new venture was undertaken. Money is scarce, and will probably be still more scarce, and yet there must be someone who could write a cheque for this whole amount, or a number of people who could send a small amount for this important but comparatively uninteresting need... At the time of writing, £1 5s has been received, and we heartily thank the kind donors.

During a period of convalescence, Nancy aged seven took the Housekeeping Sister into her confidence. "When I am big," she said, "I want to be a Sister." "Do you, dear?" "Yes, I want to be a Sister *just like you*." "And why like me?" "Because you are the *Money Sister*, and I want to be a *Money Sister*, and give out the money to everybody." Dear little Nancy, little does she know of the plotting and the planning of the "Money Sister", when she is old enough to "give out money" we trust that the industrial world will have righted itself, and that she and her companions may find it less difficult to make ends meet than the "Money Sisters" do now.'

[Sister Aletta then described the demise of St Elizabeth's. 'The years continuing have nothing to add to what I have already supplied, and there seems to be nothing that would be of help to you in the notes. In 1942 the girls were moved from Eastcombe and sent from there to St Anne's, where we had the Abraham Ormerod Home for convalescent poor children, where our Kilburn Orphanage children also went when the war broke out; some of the Eastcombe girls also went to our Home, St Edith's, in Clevedon, Somerset; the report adds, "We have lately decided to sell the Eastcombe property, for beautiful as are the surroundings, it is very isolated for the Sisters and a great expense

for so small a Home and not a very suitable place in which to bring up children.” Sister Aletta added that under the heading 'Our Children's Homes' are remarks about changing practice, satisfactory reports after Government inspection, but even with fewer children passing into their care the Sisterhood could not provide enough staff... The final entry passed on by Sister Aletta – who died shortly afterwards – is a description of an event familiar to us still. We owe her so much gratitude for all that she did to provide Dr Lambert with information.]

Ascension Day in a Cotswold Village

'One of the features of our work among children is the Ascension Day treat. The children of our London schools spent happy Ascension Days on Hampstead Heath or in Richmond Park, and the present writer can look back on many such days.

So often Ascension Day passes unnoticed by many people who would never overlook Christmas or Easter or Whitsun. Here in this Cotswold parish, the festival is linked to an old custom which ensures that it shall not be forgotten. Our Home at Eastcombe is situated in the parish, and our readers may like to know of the custom and its connection with our work among the children.

The great event of Ascension Day is the Blessing of the Wells at Bisley, and the service is always followed by tea and sports for the children. This year the glorious weather which we had been enjoying came to an end at the beginning of the week, and it was cold and wet. The remark was heard more than once, “Of yes, it is always wet on Ascension Day”. All the same we made our preparations for taking the Eastcombe children to Bisley, and bringing them back for their tea and races. Village mothers promised to provide a tea in the Church Hall if it was not warm enough for tea out of doors.

The day was fine though not very warm, but all went well, and the Eastcombe children were ready to join the Bisley children just before three o'clock, as they went in procession into the fine old church. The children filled the middle of the church, and there was a large congregation of adults. After the short service in church the clergy and choir led the procession down the steep village street to the Wells situated at the bottom.

A semi-circular wall is built into a high bank at the side of the road. From openings in the wall flow seven springs; the beautiful clear water falls into small stone basins built to receive it. The lettering above reads “O Ye Wells Bless Ye the Lord”.

The children carried large figures and letters of wood, covered with bunches of bright flowers. These were fixed to the wall above the springs and made “Ascension Day” and the date of the year. Wreaths and bunches of flowers were placed all about the stone basins and the effect was charming. The children stood before the Wells, and the clergy on a little low wall at the side, and the people filled the street. The children sang sweetly, “Hail the day that sees Him rise”, and the crowd in the street joined in. A short address was given by one of the clergy, and the service ended with the blessing of the people.

Then the children departed to their treats. Our Eastcombe children came home to the lovely tea provided by the mothers, and they did full justice to it. Afterwards all went to the recreation ground for races. Some prizes were found even in the time of war, and there was much competitive eagerness both for racing and prize-winning. At the end we all stood round in a ring and sang “God Save the King”. One of the boys called for three cheers for all who had helped to give them their treat, and with this cheerful noise ringing in our ears we dispersed. Thus ended this happy festival, which had begun with its commemoration in the village church when the Holy Sacrifice was offered in the early morning.'

[Sister Aletta included this description because the well dressing was an annual event. 'In London, of course, we took hundreds of children, at least 800 from our Day Schools, in charabancs, to different places each year.' I will just add – it possible that not everyone knows this – that the Ascension Day church service, procession and well dressing and blessing, remain one of the highlights of the year in this parish, as they have been since Victorian times. This article could be

an exact description of the event as it still happens. Eastcombe Primary School children late in the 1990s were taken over the fields to join in with their flowers at the wells (not a treat to equal being taken on a horse-drawn wagon), but sadly that was a one-off outing. Still: it is worth loitering in Bisley High Street near the wells on that Thursday, to feel oneself transported back in time, and imagine what a red-letter day this was for the children housed in St Elizabeth's Orphanage at Eastcombe. In *Oil Lamp and Candle* Phyllis Gaston gave her own short accounts of 'The Orphanage' and also the well-dressing.]

ANOTHER AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION

Well, I knew this archive was unwieldy and would need constant updating, but I did not imagine that I would have to add material to what I knew of St Elizabeth's Orphanage on the very first day of the website's existence. Just one of many things I have overlooked, I am sure. Recently I read in one of John Lane's (*An Illegitimate Life*) last letters (28 April 1999) that he knew of another Eastcombe orphan, older than him, who had preceded him to Western Australia and done well. He too had been placed in the Fairbridge school, and went on to have a distinguished teaching career... Now I have noticed that this man got in touch with Dr Malcolm Lambert after persuading Sister Aletta to reveal his address. There was an exchange of several letters around 1981/2, when *The Unknown Cotswold Village* was published and a copy sent to him.

Mr John E Hay in his first letter explained that he was 65 years old, a recently retired principal of one of WA's largest primary schools. His family wanted an account of his life, which had turned him to thinking about Eastcombe. He was in St Elizabeth's 1918/19, and was asking for help in mentally revisiting the village. In exchange he offered photographs of St Elizabeth's, Sister Frances and helpers, and Dr and Mrs Edwards of Chalford Hill. Unfortunately I have only blurred photocopies here.

There is a wonderfully bizarre photograph of the doctor and his wife in elaborate costumes: Sir Francis Drake and Dame Blodwyn; and another of 30 or 40 similarly dressed people in a garden at their house in Chalford. I do not know how often the Edwardses hosted pageants, but there is plenty of other evidence that they were exceedingly kind to the orphans and their carers...

In a further letter Mr Hay revealed that he could remember going at kindergarten stage to the parish school (by that time only the chapel school remained) 'and made the only athletic mark in my career by winning an egg and spoon race. The prize was an illuminated copy of the Lord's Prayer. (I couldn't read it but knew it off by heart).' He was sure that the children went to Bisley church, but spoke of going downhill from Eastcombe. Other witnesses spoke of going to Bussage church. I suppose going downhill comes at some point on the walk to either... Mr Hay is another who had always remembered the wells at Bisley. St Augustine's, Eastcombe, had of course been a primary school up to the First World War, so had not yet achieved its present status...

'When the weather was fine we spent most of the time playing outdoors. Playing in the field; walking along the lanes – my favourite rose is still the briar or dog rose. Anything to keep us active and healthy. We certainly were happy. I also remember some of us having our tonsils guillotined. Probably by Dr Edwards. A quick whiff of ether on a table in a room near the dormitory and then carried back to bed to be cared for by the Sisters or their young helpers. (No icecream!!)'

Mr Hay thoroughly enjoyed and applauded the Eastcombe book that Dr Lambert sent, mentioned in passing that his son had just been appointed to the chair of English at the University of Western Australia, and he also slipped in the fact that the temperature there was currently 44 degrees. His stream of questions about the modern appearance of the village continued, and I hope that he was able to conjure up life on these Cotswold heights to the satisfaction of his family in his record of his life story.

I am always deeply moved by the lasting affection for Eastcombe voiced by the orphans who passed through here – it is obvious that they benefited not only from the beauty of the surroundings but also experienced caring kindness from their teachers, and the nuns, and virtually all others they met here.

CENSUS RETURNS FOR NASHEND HOUSE, EASTCOMBE HOUSE, ST ELIZABETH'S

1871 Census: Nashend House (at the hamlet lying in the fields between Eastcombe and Bisley)

Newton, Isabel 29, born 1842 , Head Annitant, born Walton on the Naze, Suffolk

Newton, Eliza 75, born 1796, Aunt, Annitant, born Walton on the Naze, Suffolk

Righe, Arthur, 6, born 1865, Visitor, Scholar, born in Wales

Cludee, Lancelot, 5, born 1866, Visitor, born in Africa

Becker, Mary, 2, born 1869, Adopted Child, born in London

Pughe, Alice, 2, born 1869, Visitor, born in Wales

Wood, Annie, 28, born in 1843, Servant/Cook, born in Kingston upon Thames

Jones, Mary, 19, born in 1852, Servant/Housemaid, born in Wales

1881 Census: Eastcombe House [ie, the orphanage]

Isabel Newton Head 39 No profession

Mable Fearnley Adopted 6 Born in Middlesex

Emley Rees Adopted 2 Born in London

Mary A Pitts Servant 36 Cook Born ?Danmore

?Roda Kimber Servant 19 Nurse/Domestic Servant Sapperton

1891 Census: The Orphanage

Alice Bailey 22 Sister-in-Charge Born in Japan

Nell E Mullins 18 Birth not known

Mabel M ?Hellier 15 Birth not known

Alice Pashley 14 Born in Yorkshire/Wortley

Jessie Healing 14 Born in Gloucestershire/Ashleworth

Ellen Montgomery 11 Born in Warwickshire/Foleshill

Elizabeth Freeman 10 Born in Salop/Wem

Margaret Williams 11 Birth not known

Kate Slater 11 Born in Monmouth

Alice M Cox 10 Born in Cornwall

Beatrice P Webb 10 Born in Devon/Tavistock

Alice Pattenden 9 Birth not known

Hannah E Pashley 9 Born in Yorkshire/Wortley

Edith Saunders 9 Born in Hampshire/Petersfield

Mary Ann Cook 9 Born in Middlesex/Hampton

1901 Census: The Orphanage

Ellen Paget 55 Sister-in-Charge (erased) Matron Born in South End, Leics

Amy Madden 50 Assistant Born in Fareham

Elizabeth Holland 20 Servant Birth not known

Ethel Willis 15 Orphan Born in Middlesex

Margaret Hayward 15 Orphan Born in Southampton

Henrietta Dovey 14 Scholar orphan Born in Sussex

Bertha Cartwright 13 Scholar orphan Birth not known

Bertha Griffiths 13 Scholar orphan Birth not known

Geraldine Gardiner 12 Scholar orphan Birth not known

Angela Ward 12 Scholar orphan Birth not known

Gertrude Hale 11 Scholar orphan Birth not known

Jane Green 10 Scholar orphan Birth not known