

1. My School Days

I wrote this childhood memoir before starting research for my book about other people's schooldays, *Prep School Children*. I wanted to see how much I could remember before reading other people's reminiscences. Apart from memory I had only photographs, a few scrappy diaries, my school reports, my exam certificates and an autograph album to consult. I am also in contact with my two closest surviving school friends, with whom I sometimes discuss the old days. Those who have been at boarding school sometimes have recourse to their school letters, though the guarded (and often censored) nature of these make them a dubious advantage.

I realise that not all written memoirs tell the truth. After all, it's hard for adults to recall what it really felt like to be a child and some actually try to make their lives sound more exciting than they really were. Others may have scores to settle with parents, siblings or teachers. In some cases, there are deeper psychological factors at work. I shall never forget, for example, the memorial service for our friend Jack Ravensdale. The "tribute" by his son, Andy, was a story of sexual abuse by his late mother, Pam, in which he claimed his father had been complicit. None of the other Ravensdale children were present to verify or deny this tale and Jack's stunned friends and colleagues simply didn't know what to think. Was this a case of "false memory syndrome", prompted by the counsellors we knew Andy was involved with – or was it true? I have no such secrets to reveal, unless the act of writing should drag them out of my subconscious on to the page before me.

Born in 1941, I started school very soon after the war. My father returned from his harrowing naval service to resume his work as a journalist. I think it



was then that he became West Country correspondent for the *News Chronicle*, based in bomb-stricken Plymouth. We lived in several nearby villages, in each of which I attended the local primary school. It must have been

during the famously cold winter of 1946-7 that I began my education in Horrabridge on the edge of Dartmoor. I remember nothing of that school perhaps because (as my mother used to tell me) I was ill most of the time. The bleakness of that winter probably put my parents off Horrabridge and we moved away from the moor to Plymstock, of which again I have no memories. I know I must have been eight by the time we moved to the coastal village of Wembury, for I was always in the senior of the two classes, taught by the headmistress, Miss Maynard. I appear third from the right in the middle row of my dog-eared Festival of Britain photograph.



I can't remember much about the work we did but I know I was lucky in my teacher, a kind and clever woman as a result of whose efforts I was later able to pass the 11-plus exam and go to grammar school. I suspect her lessons

were too academic for some of the country boys and I can recall the hue and cry which arose when one of them (Peter Eames second from left in top row) fled the classroom and ran off into the fields beyond. Meanwhile my younger brother, Rodney, was victimised by Miss Axworthy who lived up to her name. She would threaten not only to cut off his fingers when he used them for rubbing out in his copying book but also (if he was really bad) to take him home with her, warning that this wouldn't be very pleasant because she had a habit of kicking her bedfellows. She didn't fulfil either of these threats but she did frequently smash his fingers with the blackboard pointer.

More testing for me than the classroom was the girls' playground where I was regularly teased for not having a Devon accent; the bigger girls would pin me against a wall and make me own up to being a snob. I always gave in and yet I don't think I was all that upset by this treatment. And I have pleasanter playtime memories too: games of hopscotch, grandmother's footsteps and skipping rhymes. I was lucky in that I made a friend, Penny Barnett, who appears in that same photograph (sitting next to Miss Maynard's dog Chinky),

with her neatly plaited hair and clean smocked dress. I look much untidier but I think we shared a similar middle-class background.

With Penny and other girls I enjoyed things out of school. We went to Brownies, where we won badges for such achievements as tying knots,



identifying wild flowers and household chores. We also went on long tracking games around the village. We would buy our rationed sweets in the village shop

(which, like the wooden Brownie hut, is still there): gobstoppers and sherbert fountains were our favourites. We walked down the hill on Sundays to the cliff-top church and we spent lots of time on the beach, exploring Wembury's now famous rockpools and collecting shells and seaweed as well as swimming. We seem to have been pretty free to roam around and we came to no harm, as far as I can remember. There was once a village scandal which the police came to investigate. I think it involved girls and boys exposing themselves to each other in an air raid shelter and I have dim memories of being present on one such occasion. Was anything more sinister involved? I simply don't know.



We lived in a four-bedroomed house in a lane at the top of the village. Unusually, it had a veranda all along the front and a garage (which I

think was built by German prisoners-of-war). My mother didn't go out to work so that Rodney and I could walk home to lunch every day except Thursdays when she went shopping Plymouth. Once I went home on a Thursday by mistake – did this mean I had to go without lunch? She never had a washing machine and our clothes were probably not very clean by today's standards. We certainly didn't have clean underclothes every day and a blouse or dress would have to last the whole week. I'm sure we were well fed as she was an excellent cook and kept chickens and grew vegetables in the garden. What did I do when I was at home? I enjoyed having my own bedroom, the middle one, which was painted pink. I read a lot and still have some of my old books with soft, thick pages. But *Uncle Mac's Children's Hour Annual* and Enid Blyton's *Holiday Book* don't suggest that I was a very advanced reader. I had a favourite doll called Betty and a dolls' house with lattice windows but I don't think there were many other toys. I remember what a thrill it was to make a paper model aquarium with a woman who came to stay with us.

My father was often away reporting on stories such as the Flying Enterprise sea drama of 1952. I know about this because in my autograph album there is a picture of Captain Kenneth Dancy and his signature, which my father must have acquired for me. Sometimes we would accompany him to events like the Dartmouth Regatta. And once I was proud to have my



photograph taken for the newspaper posing with some flowers which featured in a story. I remember that when we went up to London for the Festival of Britain we watched fireworks from the *News*

Chronicle office. All in all, we had a secure and happy family life but I sometimes wonder about the effect of two regular occurrences which made me unhappy at the time. My father used to beat me with a slipper on my bare bottom if I misbehaved and they both went out to the pub (the Jubilee Inn), leaving Rodney and me alone in the house. Once I had to go round to the

neighbours (Mr and Mrs Soppett) because my brother was upset about something. There was also more worry about illness in those days before penicillin. I was aware of polio epidemics and have since read that there were over 200 cases in the south-west in 1949 and 1950; someone in the village did become paralysed. I myself had pneumonia badly but I think I was an early beneficiary of penicillin – certainly I can remember some nasty yellow medicine which sometimes made me sick.

I liked going to visit my mother's parents at Bicton, between Exmouth and Plymouth. Bicton was part of Lord Clinton's estate, on which both my grandparents worked (he as a garage mechanic and she a cook). While my father was away during the war we had lived in a house on the estate with my mother's sister and her son Raymond. So I knew Grandma and Dan-Dan well and I loved them. I felt proud of Dan-Dan who was a sidesman in Bicton church and of Grandma who gave cookery demonstrations for the W.I. Unusually for those days, we had a car (a Daimler, I think) and my father would drive us to and from Bicton, often stopping for a drink at a pub and bringing Smiths Crisps out to us in the car (with salt in a blue paper twist). He must also have driven us to Godstone in Surrey, to visit his parents (Granny and Grandpa), as we tended to do at Christmas. I didn't know them so well at that time and I didn't enjoy these visits as much.

Everything changed in 1952 when my father became News Editor for the paper, which meant working in London. It must have been hard for my mother, a Devon woman born and bred, to have been uprooted into a suburban existence. But my father had a talent for finding good spots to live and Buckhurst Cottage in Redhill was as countrified as the suburbs could be. It



was quite a small house (a wing of Buckhurst House) but it had a long piece of land ending in an orchard, so that my mother was still able to keep chickens. She even made Devonshire cream to remind her of her roots. I had only one year of primary school to go and was sent to the nearest one, St Matthew's Church School. Again, I fared better than Rodney.

The girls' section was fine, as far as I was concerned. I think I was probably picked out as a promising pupil and given practice for the 11-plus (English,

Arithmetic and Verbal Reasoning papers). I don't remember much else about the school except Nature Study lessons which I enjoyed, perhaps because I had always lived in the country. It was at St Matthew's that I heard the news of George VI's death announced very solemnly to the pupils, some of whom burst into tears. Meanwhile Rodney found the boys' section rather rough and was probably unhappy there. I don't think I had a friend at St Matthew's but there were three girls living in our road, June and Brenda Lacey and Caroline Mander, all of whom went to quite an exclusive private school, Dunotter in Reigate. That didn't stop us being friends and we played together a lot over the years, dressing up, making up plays, going to some steep slopes we called the Banks, inventing games about pirates and soldiers in which Rodney was allowed to join. As the oldest, I was the ringleader in much of this. The Laceys had a television on which we watched Grace Kelly's wedding and the coronation but we didn't have much entertainment laid on. There was the wireless, of course, and at home we listened avidly to *Journey into Space*, *Hancock's Half Hour*, *Henry Hall's Guest Night* and serials on *Children's Hour*. And I was still reading Enid Blyton (the Famous Five adventures and Malory Towers school stories).

During that first year in Redhill I passed the 11-plus and was assigned to Reigate County School for Girls, which I attended from 1952 to 1959. This was my real education, administered almost entirely by spinster teachers of the generation left on the shelf by the First World War. We didn't take all of them seriously but they were academic women. Most of the teaching was routine stuff – taking down dictated notes in History and reading around the class in English. We were very silly a lot of the time, as schoolgirls usually are. Again, I was teased; I was given the nickname Goofy and the favourite trick was to empty all the contents of my desk on to the floor. I think this went



on for my first few years, but once I had made my own circle of friends I felt quite happy. Our gang consisted of Sheenah Smith, who was mad on horses, Judith (Juke) Andrews, who was academic and good at science, Valerie (Phoebe) Rance, who was dreamy and religious, Rosemary Apps and Janette Smith. We fooled around together at school, rang each other up in the evenings and went to each other's birthday parties, where the most daring thing we did was to play rather rude games of Consequences. Sometimes

we went to look at the clothes shops in Reigate on Saturday mornings but we couldn't afford to buy much. I longed for a duffle coat and for a skirt with net



petticoats but never acquired them. The best thing we did together was to act plays, written and directed by Phoebe. We also wrote each other letters, addressed to Mrs A, Mrs D, Mrs S. etc in mock charlady language, which we thought hilarious at the time. Sheenah and Phoebe, who were very good at Art, would illustrate theirs with comic drawings, some of which I still possess. I don't know what to say about the work. My memory is that I always enjoyed it but my school reports for the first two years contain

many references to my lack of attention, childish and noisy behaviour and general lack of effort.

General Progress and Conduct: Examination Average.....%

*Vivyn's work has reached a good standard, but it is a pity she is satisfied with this standard when she could reach a 'Very good' one easily. She has been rather uncontrolled on several occasions this term and has behaved rather childishly and noisily. **

Form Mistress.....*Margaret Macky*..... Headmistress.....*Phillips*.....

Parent's signature.....*J.G.R. Davis*.....

Next term begins at 10.0 a.m. on.....*Jan. 11th*..... and ends on.....*April 9th*.....

At the end of my first year I was put in the C division for Maths but then I got on all right with Miss Twigg who gave me encouraging reports. I was hopeless at Science and by the fourth year was studying only Biology. I seem to have given even that up and no Science subject at all appears among my eight O-Level GCE passes. The reports improved in the third year but my work was still described as careless and untidy. My memory is that I loved English, History, Latin, French and Art and I often got high exam marks for these subjects but terse teachers' comments such as "Good work has been



done" don't reveal very much. There are a few things I remember from the work I did up to O-level: the *Anthology of Modern Verse* in which I mooned over Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen; producing a book about Coal, a forerunner of the scrapbooks I still compile compulsively; *Caesar's Gallic Wars*, boring for the most part but sometimes inspiring; getting into the first team for Hockey, the only game I was any good at, and attending the Women's Hockey Final at Wembley; reading the part of Cassius (with his "lean and hungry look") in *Julius Caesar* and acting King Magnus in Shaw's *The Applecart*. Strangely, I can't remember the period we studied for History O-level; it must

have been the nineteenth century (Castlereagh and Canning and all that) but nothing has stayed with me, perhaps because Miss Phipps's dictated notes were so dull.

At home I got on all right with my parents, although I had begun to be intolerant of them. They urged me to do 'normal' things like joining the tennis club or going to the Young Farmers, perhaps because they wanted me to meet suitable young men. I didn't ever have a boyfriend before I went to University but it didn't particularly bother me, even though Sheenah had the unsuitable Alfie who worked at the stables, Phoebe loved Andrew who went to her church and Juke knew boys who went to the boys' Grammar School where her father taught. I had a crush on an older girl – Rosemary Humphries, a games heroine. I would get very excited if I saw her out of school and enter

the sighting in my diary with exclamation marks. That was the extent of my emotional life.

My social life was with my family or the gang. Mummy took us to the cinema where we saw such films as *Reach for the Sky*, *Rob Roy*, *Doctor in the House*, *Limelight*, *The Red Shoes* and *Fantasia*. My idols were Kenneth More and Dirk Bogarde and, inexplicably, the cricketer Len Hutton. I followed cricket and that was something I shared with my father. I also agreed with his Liberal politics and he was my adviser when I stood as the Liberal candidate in the school's Mock election of 1959 and it was thanks to him, I suspect, that I won hands down. It's true that I was good at public speaking and helped to set up a Debating Society at school. In fact I went to elocution lessons and enjoyed reciting romantic poems like *French Peasants* by Monk Gibbon. I think I got some certificates in elocution but I never did music lessons. I liked music, though, and listened to my father's records on the gramophone. Of course, it was Tchaikovsky that appealed to my adolescent romanticism and I was thrilled when my father took me to hear his 6th Symphony at the Proms. Pop music wasn't really part of my life but I do remember crying over Johnny Ray's *Walking in the Rain*. We had two cats, Mutty and Japhet, whom I adored. The aspect of family life I hated was that my parents still went to the pub a lot. My father didn't like working in London and he'd get my mother to meet him off the train and drive him to the Red Lion; then they would have supper very late and often have noisy rows fuelled, I suppose, by drink.

We would all go down to Devon in the summer holidays, driving down the old A road, getting stuck in traffic jams and stopping for a picnic lunch. I can



remember the taste of my mother's bacon-and-egg pies, still warm when we ate them. We stayed with Grandma and Dan-Dan or at the Victoria Hotel in Sidmouth which was run by my Uncle Tony and Auntie Anne. That seemed very

glamorous to me. I used to help Auntie Anne (my mother's sister) arrange the

flowers or watch her umpiring tennis matches. She sometimes gave me her cast-off clothes, including a circular skirt with large daisies on it. I acted as a waitress at Bicton Gardens when they had Open Days. Most of our time was spent at Ladram Bay, swimming out to the big rock and picnicking on the beach. Grandma taught us card games and I loved looking at the little keepsakes in their dresser drawers, longing to take some of them away. There was a collection of Dan-Dan's paintings on postcards, for instance. Where are they all now? Were there other mementoes, perhaps of his First World War service as a motor-bike rider?

I liked doing things on my own. I often went to Redhill Public Library and borrowed all the Jalna books by Mazo de la Roche and a lot of J.B. Priestley. I think I also read history books. Another independent activity was going to church. My parents never came but I liked getting dressed up in my best clothes and going to Holy Trinity. I was very keen on the vicar, whose name I've forgotten. It was Evangelical and we were urged to convert others, which became an embarrassment when I went to Oxford and tried to convert Frankie de Freitas. I went to Crusaders as well and became a Sunday School teacher, attending regular meetings and singing choruses such as *Jesus Wants me for a Sunbeam*, *I'm H A P P Y*, and *On the Victory Side*. It embarrasses me now but it was all very important to me at the time.

I was interested in clothes, although I didn't have many. I made paper dolls and designed outfits for them. There was still no washing machine at home and I suspect I was quite dirty. I remember worrying about being smelly and buying deodorants from Woolworths with my pocket money. I don't think my mother was very helpful in these matters.

The best time at Reigate County School was the Sixth Form. The stayers-on from 5 alpha were merged with other forms and I made a few new friends, but the gang was still a strong group. We now had some privileges, such as the Sixth Form Lawn where Sheenah sunbathed compulsively, Phoebe made daisy chains and wrote poetry and I had my nose in a book. There was also a



Prefects' Room – but we weren't among the first to be made prefects because (following Sheenah's dissident example) we broke some school rules. We had to wear our green uniform but

tried to make it look a bit raffish. Our main misdemeanour was to go out in the lunch hour to the coffee bar in Reigate (where we are pictured with Phoebe's, French penfriend and a friend who had already left school). We were told off about this and yet a blind eye was turned. I think Beryl Williams, the Headmistress, was quite enlightened for her day and, also, we were by now rather good at our work and likely to go to University, which was still unusual for girls. As far as I know, Sheenah, Phoebe, Juke and I were the only girls in our original class to go. Anyway, we relished our earnest coffee-bar discussions and this taste of freedom.

I started by doing four A-level subjects, History, English, Latin and Art., though I soon dropped the last because I found I had too little study time. With Miss Ault and Miss Manby in English we studied Wordsworth (Miss Ault's passion), Conrad's *The Rover* and *The Tempest*, all of which I loved in my starry-eyed fashion. I remember reading Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* in the school library and, no doubt, other works of criticism. I was now taught by Miss Williams for Latin (in the company of another girl called Elizabeth ?). I wasn't really very good at it but I was enthusiastic because we were reading Vergil's *Aeneid* Book Six and I could revel in his account of the Underworld. But History was now my first love. We did the 18th century, Political with Miss Phipps, who was still dictating notes and Social with Miss Harris, who encouraged us to do individual research using such primary sources as Hogarth, Parson Woodforde, Fanny Burney and Sheridan – but, sadly, not Doctor Johnson. The secondary authors I remember reading are J. H. Plumb, Dorothy George and Rosalind Bayne-Powell but not Lewis Namier whose revised view of 18th-century politics was probably too sophisticated for us or our teachers. I would take myself off to London (dragging other gang members with me) to such 18th-century venues as the Soane Museum, where I was thrilled to see Hogarth's paintings. I haunted second-hand bookshops in Redhill and also in Sidmouth and in Bournemouth, where my paternal grandparents now lived. One find I still possess was *A People's Conscience*, extracts from 18th and early 19th century social reports.

I now knew those grandparents better and got on well with energetic Granny (a former suffragette) and learned Grandpa who used to recite lengthy passages of poetry (mostly Longfellow) and urged me to read Kipling, advice which I ignored (only to discover his virtues recently under the influence of Piers). He also used to tell me about his childhood on the Isles of Scilly and about his father, a merchant-navy captain who died at sea when he was only a few months old. These stories, I believe, have inspired my most recent book, *Children at Sea*. I used to stay with them in the summer holidays with my cousin Alison; we would walk through Branksome Chine, go shopping with

Granny, and have tea with Auntie Dorothy, her sister. Once I visited the church to which my once-adored vicar had moved – but was rather let down by his response. He had “moved on” (as they say now) but I had not.



While still at school I worked to earn money to buy some of the clothes and books I yearned for. I did a lot of baby-sitting and one summer Sheenah and I worked as coffee waitresses at the Victoria Hotel, kitted out in pink gingham dresses and aprons. We were very popular with the guests (including the band-leader Benny Goodman), who gave us plenty of tips especially when we served them with liqueurs. We enjoyed that time but we didn't do anything wild, even with Sheenah present. Perhaps there was one night when we went out late but I can't remember and I can't ask Sheenah because she died of cancer some years ago. I also worked as a chambermaid in a Bournemouth hotel, a rather disgusting job which I didn't much enjoy. But I did like staying on my own with Granny and

Grandpa during that time, searching the bookshops and reciting Rupert Brooke to myself.

My second year in the Sixth was hard work, as Miss Williams entered me for the Oxford Entrance exams. They were usually taken after A-levels but she and I knew that my parents would never have agreed to my staying on for another year. Sandra Kidson (whom I didn't really know at that time) was taking the papers in Third Year Sixth but up to that time the school had not had any girls go to Oxford. As both Sandra and I got in into St Anne's (one of the five women's colleges) in 1959, I was able to correct Joanna Trollope who in later years claimed to be the first girl ever to get into Oxford from RCS – and she is younger than me. Actually I nearly didn't get there as I had been told I had to take an extra Latin test in July, at which point they told me I couldn't come after all. In the meantime I had turned down a place at Exeter University and a scholarship at Royal Holloway College, London. Everyone

was so upset by “The News” (in the words of my diary) that Miss Williams persuaded St Anne’s to take me if I passed my A-level Latin. I did pass, but with a mark in the 40s as opposed to the distinctions I got in History (88%) and in English (75%). What a relief that was – and what an excitement it was to look forward to the train journey to Oxford, preceded by a tin trunk, to unknown delights. I had been awarded a State scholarship, which would pay my fees as well as a termly maintenance grant cheque and I intended to work in the vacations. But I know that, even so, my parents were worried by the expense of it all. Mummy started to make her own clothes, as well as mine, in order to save money. I remember a brown satin evening dress in which I attended the St Anne’s ball. I wish I could see now what I looked like in it.



Our last gang fling was to celebrate the end of A-levels by taking a day off school (which we were supposed to attend right up to the end of summer term) for a trip to Brighton. This



event was commemorated with photos in which we all look rather lovely – though we didn’t think so at the time. I left RCS as a naïve schoolgirl, knowing nothing about sex apart from what I had read in a copy of Marie Stopes’s *Married Love*, which I found in my father’s study. The only boy I’d ever known was a dimly recalled Costas, a Greek with whom I used to walk around the Priory Gardens in Reigate. I had visited a few daring Soho coffee bars, including the famous “Heaven and Hell”. I was dimly aware that my aunt’s marriage to Tony was unhappy as she came to take refuge with us when he was unfaithful and slept in my room

– but no-one talked to me about this or about any such matters. I had never even heard of Tampax. It was left to more worldly Oxford friends such as Frankie de Freitas and Judy Boast to explain these things to me in our Oxford rooms.

But I did know something about the matters which interested me and, thanks to my grammar school education, I knew how to study. At the end of the summer before I went up to St Anne's I did a spell as a teaching assistant at the old school, finding it very odd to be inside the Staff Room and to see the teachers as ordinary women. Also during that summer I read most of the books on a reading list sent by St Anne's (including Hodgkinson's *Anglo-Saxon England* and Bede's *History*). This must be why I did so well in the papers they set at the beginning of term (known as Collections) that I won a prize and could buy myself a few more books. But all that is another story.

2. Writing about Childhood

Vyvyen Brendon grew up to become a history teacher and an author. In addition to several history text books she has written three books about childhood:

Children of the Raj,
Prep School Children: A Class Apart over Two Centuries,
Children at Sea: Lives Shaped by the Waves.

In a June 2020 blog for her publisher, *Pen & Sword*, Vyvyen Brendon wrote the following about the last of these books:

I decided to present my subject not as a general history but rather as a collection of life stories set in Georgian and Victorian times, illustrated here with pictures not used in the book. My eight characters all embarked on sea journeys as children and were never the same again. I had five criteria for selecting them.

1. All left home and parents when they were under sixteen.

Five boys enlisted as sailors in the Royal Navy: George King as a marine private, Othnel Mawdesley, William and Charles Barlow, and Sydney Dickens as midshipmen. Joseph Emidy was kidnapped from Africa as a child slave and granted his freedom as a teenager, only to be captured by a naval press-gang. Of the two girls, Mary Branham was transported as a convict and Ada Southwell was sent as a Barnardo's migrant to Canada.



18th century transportees, including children, leave London

2. Their lives were all shaped by this initial voyage.

Such were the dangers of shipboard life that Othnel Mawdesley, William Barlow and Sydney Dickens met the same fate as my great grandfather – they died at sea before they were thirty.

Only George King and Charles Barlow retired to a safe haven after a lifetime on the ocean. The slave, the transported convict and the migrant remained exiles all their lives, uprooted from home but sometimes able to find love and sustenance in new lands.

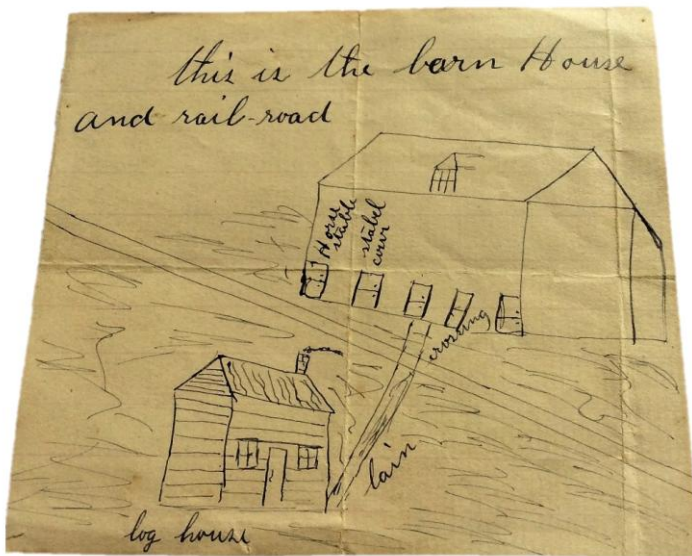


Sydney Dickens on board ship with his cherished pet monkey

3. I chose characters for whom I found original sources.

Windows into their lives were provided by largely unpublished letters and memoirs: the Barlow correspondence exchanged between members of this large scattered family; Midshipman Mawdesley's journal of captivity in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars; the autobiography of George King recounting his childhood as a foundling, his fighting at Trafalgar and his many years at sea; the letters and novels of Sydney Dickens's celebrated father; Joseph Emidy's story as told to one of his Cornish music pupils; the memories of Ada Southwell's husband and the correspondence of her dispersed siblings.

Of Mary Branham, a poor and probably illiterate convict girl, there remain only the records kept by her captors.



Fragments of a letter from Albert Southwell to his sister Emily

the rest for it is getting
Late and all these kisses for yo
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
and If I were with you I would
give you ten times more
I remain
Yours Truly
And loving Brother A Southwell

4. I aimed to make a socially diverse selection and that depended on the available evidence.

All four midshipmen hailed from comfortable families used to writing letters and journals and with the means to preserve them. But it was hard to find sources from poorer backgrounds because of low levels of literacy. Thanks to an exceptional teacher at the Foundling Hospital, however, George King was able to record his life as a common seaman. Later in the 19th century the school-taught Southwell children could write to each other and to their destitute mother, whose replies were penned in a public house by a friend.



A boy in foundling uniform, a young gentleman fully equipped as a midshipman, a boy slave and Ada Southwell dressed by Barnardo's before being sent to Canada.

During a childhood spent in slavery Joseph Emidy somehow acquired the musical and writing skills which equipped him for professional life in Britain. Very few girls went to sea as sailors though some were captured as slaves or transported as convicts and more were shipped off as indentured servants. So I'm pleased that Mary Branham and Ada Southwell make up a quarter of my sample.



Vyvyen photographed in Cork harbour beside the statue of 17-year-old Annie Moore and her brothers who emigrated to America in 1891.

5. I wanted to reveal the different ways in which my characters reacted to separation from home and family.

The historian can never conjure up inner lives in the manner of a novelist. Even so, in my book readers will glimpse ‘tales of transformation’ akin to those contained in Emma Donoghue’s ‘fact-inspired’ stories, *Astray*, which helped to inspire me. Some youngsters found the strength to face new challenges; others suffered from homesickness or heartache; still others lived a ‘vagrant gypsy life’, as John Masefield put it, or simply ‘went to the dogs’. As sailors or migrants left their native shores they could not know what lay ahead or how their lives would be shaped by the waves.

Children at Sea: Lives Shaped by the Waves, to which this blog post refers, can be bought online at the website of the publishers, Pen & Sword, at www.pen-and-sword.co.uk.
