

Ista Stoddart

Born 5.1.1911.

Autobiographical life story.

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1. Foreword by Hugh Malet



Ista Stoddart in 1939 aged 28

In the summer of 1995 I was asked by my cousin Ista Stoddart to publish these memoirs which look back with happy amusement and affection over her wonderfully busy, creating and caring life. The general public will know of her work as a sculptress, but her memories show how she also brought up her family and ran Quarme, a steep and difficult hill farm near Wheddon Cross on Exmoor, during Hitler's war, while her husband Alan was serving with the Chindits in Burma. This booklet is written mainly for her many descendants, but it includes descriptions of an entirely different method of farming, and wartime events which contribute to local history in West Somerset. I trust that this work may go out to her family and her many friends as an example of a life of faith and courage, so well lived through this century of violence, which is now drawing to an end. She is a person gifted with many talents, and she has used them all to the full.

In assembling this manuscript I have kept as close as possible to the original, in order to retain the sense that the author is herself talking to us in her usual interesting and vivacious way.

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2. Family Origins

The Malet family origin dates back to prior to the Norman invasion, William Malet being related to William the Conqueror and by marriage to King Harold whose burial he was assigned to conduct.

I feel it is up to me to continue my mother's little book 'Laura', as I am the youngest daughter of Mildred Laura Malet (nee Swiney). I was christened in Newton Toney Church near Salisbury as Helen, after my paternal grandmother (nee Eden) and Agnes after my maternal grandmother (nee Lambert). My mother married Harry Charles Malet, later to become Sir Harry Malet Bart, DSO, OBE and French Ordre de Merite Agricole, Lt.Colonel late, 8th Hussars. They had three children.

Ermytrude Virginia who was christened after her Godmother Lady Ermytrude, daughter of the Duke of Bedford and wife of Sir Edward Malet PC, GCB, GCMG, who was my father's first cousin.



Sir Edward Malet, a diplomat, painted when Consul-General in Egypt.

Sir Edward Malet was a man of means, and enjoyed wintering on the Mediterranean. In 1892 he built an immense Beaux-Arts villa known as 'Le Chateau Malet' at Cap D'Ail, Monaco.



Le Chateau Malet at Cap D'Ail, Monaco.

Edward William St.Lo was christened Edward after Sir Edward, and William after his grandfather Colonel William Malet. When I was born my brother Edward, aged two, declared that I should be called Ista and I have been ever since, and I sign my sculptures ISTA.

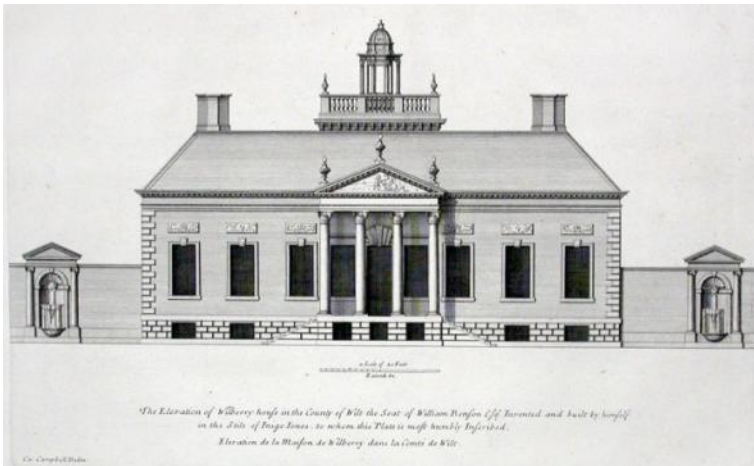
Our paternal grandfather was Colonel Charles Malet second son of our great grandfather Charles Warre Malet Bt, who had eight sons! On his return from India Sir Charles Warre Malet bought the beautiful early Georgian house and estate of Wilbury and Newton Toney, Wiltshire, and he and his wife Susanna (nee Wales) brought up his eight sons in these beautiful surroundings.

Our father eventually inherited Wilbury and part of its estate from his cousin Sir Edward Malet, and we three children started our early life there.

I will write first of my mother. Her father was Captain Stephen Swiney, her mother Agnes Lambert, granddaughter of the well known architect Sir Robert Smirke RA (born 1750) whose works include the British Museum, the Royal Academy and many mansions and castles. He was knighted for his great works.



Wilbury House today



Wilbury House as it appeared in Colen Campbell's Vitruvius Britannica, 1715.

He had a daughter called Laura, our great grandmother who married Captain Thomas Lambert RHA. My mother's sister Hilda married Captain William Boothby RN. They had four children, Osbert, lost at sea during World War II in HMS Gloworm, Kit, joined the Royal Marines, Margot and Alice who were like very dear sisters to us.



Sir Robert Smirke, architect of the British Museum. Great grandfather of Ista Stoddert.

3. The Wilbury Years

Our mother was the sweetest person in the world. Ned and I loved her very dearly. Ermytrude as found of her but on quite a different wavelength, they never understood each other. We had a wonderfully happy childhood.

When I was three years old World War I was declared. Our father, then Master of the Tedworth Hounds, was called up straight away to join his regiment as he was on Special Reserve. We were then still living at Wilbury.

My mother had deep faith in God, and taught us as children that Jesus was our greatest friend and we should follow him as the pattern of our lives. She instilled in us a very strong sense of what was right and what was wrong. She piloted us three children and Bouberty (Miss Lepherd) her housekeeper who became our much loved nanny.

We left Wilbury, which we could no longer afford to live in and run, even after the war was over. We went first to Ireland when our father joined his Regiment and my mother rented a house for a short while. Then after he went to France and on General Allenby's staff we lived in various houses and he came home on leave when he could.

My mother kept wonderfully calm and cheerful in spite of the harrowing news from the front. I was so young that my recollections of the war were fairly vague! We were all safe and happy and our mummie loved us! She had a sensible way of reprimanding us if we had done wrong by pointing out just why it was wrong, which made us feel like little worms! I think she had quite a time with us. Whilst at a house called Forest View near Salisbury she had to get another new governess to teach us lessons - they never stayed very long!

One particular governess caused quite a stir; in spite of our mother's admonitions, we all hated her. She *locked* her bedroom door! Ermyrn, who was always full of ideas swore she was a German spy. We started to dance up and down the passage outside her bedroom each day singing a ditty (composed by Ermyrn) as loud as we could. It went - 'as sure as sure as I'm a scout you belong to the land of sour crout'.

Some days later our mother took us on a day trip to Wilbury to see my Young, our agent in charge of Wilbury. We had a lovely picnic lunch and played in the garden and the Temple in the woods; whilst our mother talked with Mr Young. When we got back, the Police had been and the hated governess had gone! So Ermyrn was right!

4. Growing up

I remember my mother's anxiety, for the newspapers must have been horrifying at that time, though to radio or TV, and full of stories of wicked things the Germans had done and we children all had a great hatred of them! Rations were dealt with by Bouberty who was our mother's greatest helper and loyal stand by, and we were all fond of her. She dealt with all the rations and w always seem to have a cook in the kitchen!

My mother worked in various ways for the Red Cross, and I remember her making lovely warm children's dressing gowns with little white rabbits beautifully appliquéd on them, which, when sewn made quite a lot of money for soldiers' parcels at the front. Our supper was often bread and dripping slices, prepared by Bouberty - if we had been extra naughty Bouberty would put a large plate of dry bread slices on our supper table, looking very stern, but as son as she left the room we turned the slices over and they had nice thick dripping on the other side!

For some months we were in Army accommodation in Red House near Park House Corner, by Cholderton. It was then that we owned a Dalmation, he was called Turk. There is a photo of me in button boots and linen hat with my arm around Turk singing 'There is a friend for little children' because he had toothache! The road past the house went straight through Park House Corner, down the ill and up the other side near our drive gate.

One day dear old Turk who was very rheumatic sat down right in the middle of the road, the whole vast army convoy as far as can see came to a halt! Till a driver got out and persuaded him to move and it was an awe inspiring sight to look back and see the convoy stretching right up to the horizon!



A bust of Sir Robert Smirke

While living at Critchels during World War I, Ermyn had one her 'ideas'. Our mother had been given a plaster bust of our great grandfather Sir Robert Smirke and Ermyn said 'let's put the bust in the bath with a big bath towel to give someone a fright when they come and think a man is having a bath'. It looked very realistic and we managed to frighten the housemaid. Then Bouberty came along and ordered it out! Disaster fell as were we taking it out of the bath, it slipped and we dropped it and it was smashed! Bouberty said we must go and confess our sin to our mother. Ermyn and I made Ned our spokesman.

Our mother was very busy with letters. Ned announced (with Ermyn and I hiding behind him) 'We are terribly sorry but we have bust the bust'. My mother looked grave for a moment then burst out laughing at our story. Sir Robert Smirke was finely crushed and given to the chickens as grit!

Transport everywhere was by Pat our pony in the governess cart. I can't think how our mother coped with everything; she was beautiful, dreamy and artistic, so her life could not have been easy, and her generation had not been brought up to look after themselves.

She used to tell us how, after mother died of scarlet fever, our grandfather Captain Stephen Swiney took his two daughters, our mother and her sister aunt Hillie, aged about 17 and 18 to Italy where he had a terrible time with the Italian men as our mother was so beautiful, with her golden hair, that they would follow her murmuring *angela* down the streets, and grandpapa had to drive them off with his umbrella. Also bunches of flowers kept arriving at the hotels where they were staying so they kept having to move on.

An Italian artist did a portrait of our mother in pastels, a very lovely picture but he has not capture her character or expression - we still have the picture.

5. Our father

My paternal grandmother, Helen nee Eden, died when our father was in his late teens and his father Colonel Charles Malet married again. Our father, his elder brother Edward and two sisters Helen and Hilda all hated their stepmother so much, that our father ran away from home and joined the Cape Mounted Rifles in South Africa aged around 19.



Cape Mounted Rifles

He told us the story of how he arrived in Cape Town with very little money and was told he could not join the regiment unless he had a horse. Little daunted he scraped up £25 and bought a horse he called Sausage as it was so thin! He soon fattened it up! He loved the life in South Africa and got caught up in the Boer War and had many adventures. Any kind of alcoholic drink he would call 'Dutch Courage' in reference to the Boers! He found right the way through. He was wounded only once and was mentioned in dispatches. He told us how he took down the Boer flag from Pretoria Post Office under fire, and brought it home, where it hangs in the Charget dining room.

After the Boer War he returned to England, and his Uncle Alexander Malet got him a commission in the 8th Hussars. About 1905 he met our mother and they were married in 1906.

In due course sir Edward Malet died, and our father inherited the Wilbury Estates. We had a few very happy years living there at Wilbury with a stable full of horses and our father drove his coach and four, and we had a great time. Our father also became Master of Tedworth Hounds, and we three children came to meets mounted on a pony and I think two donkeys - mine, with a basket saddle, was 'Peggy' who remained in the family for many years. In 1918 peace was declared at last.

6. After the First World War

After peace was declared in 1918 my father left the army and came home about 1919. He took us all to a small rented house in Oxford whilst he studied for a year at the University School of Agriculture. Ned was at boarding school, and Ermyn and I went as day pupils to Whichwood School, Banbury Road, close by. In 1921 (the year of the great drought) we all moved into a farm house on the Wilbury Estate called Warren Farm (about 300 acres).

Wilbury was let and my father farmed part of the land and managed the estate. Those years were farming slump years and the farmers were almost tipping the milk down the drain, the price was so low. He bought a herd of pedigree Shorthorn cows - the price was £21 a head and our cowman earned 31 shillings a week, but had free milk, free firewood, free seed potatoes and land to plant them, with a free cottage. Cheese was 1/6 ad lb; and a bar of toffee cost a halfpenny! The cost of living, very low compared to these days.



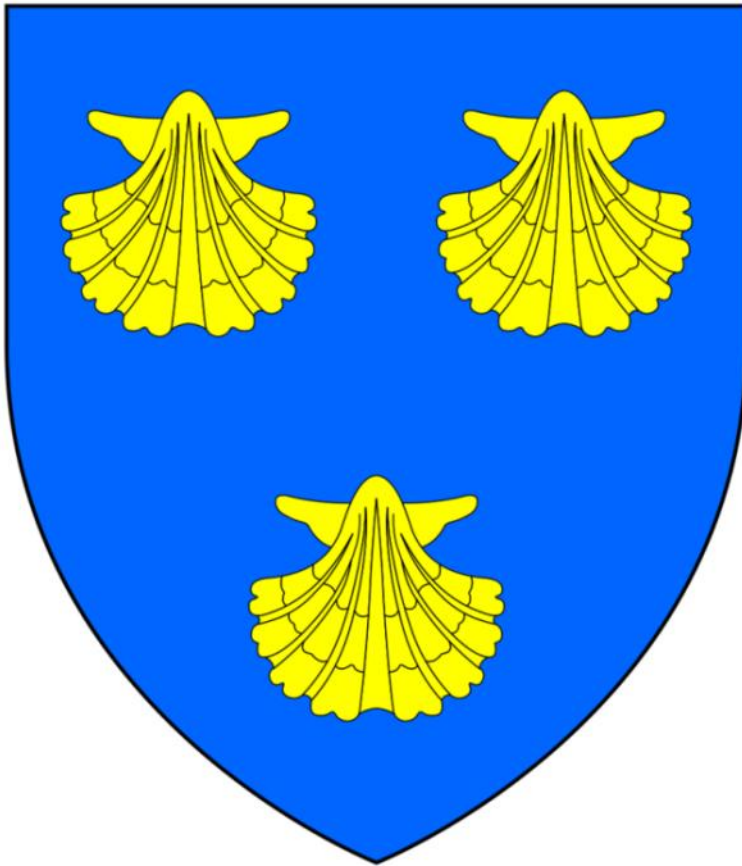
Hampshire Down sheep

We also had a big flock of Hampshire Down sheep and a very good shepherd called Conway. They were a hurdled flock, but were led daily out to a 'sheep walk' (about 50 acres of then typical Salisbury Plain sheep grazing). Conway walking in front of the flock and his dog behind, and the shepherd stayed with the sheep till they came home in the evening- it was all so peaceful and Biblical!

7. Running wild

We children had a wonderful time running wild in the holidays. During this time a sad thing happened. My father's elder brother Edward had died in Italy some years previously, leaving a widow who was French called Aunt Louise and a little son called Charles, at school in England, aged about eleven.

About three years after the war ended a terrible epidemic of influenza, almost like a plague, broke out, and I believe killed nearly as many people as the war. Poor little Charles who, owing to his father's death had inherited the Baronetcy died of this 'flu at school and my father, being next in line for the title, became Col. Sir Harry Malet, 7th Baronet.



Arms of the Malet Baronetcy

Ermyn who was at boarding school invited a girl to stay at Warren Farm who had just got over her attack of 'flu, and she gave it to us all!

We all recovered, but I had it worse, with terrible nose bleeds! We children had our own transport a Welsh cob called Tommy (a wonderful ride or drive or anything we liked). He was bought by my mother whilst we were at Critchels, near the end of the war, for £5, thrown in with the mowing machine! My mother said it was the only horse she had ever bought. It was certainly the best. Peggy the donkey, who had stayed at Wilbury all the war, joined us. My father got her a little cart as well, and with Ermyn and Ned in the pony trap and me in the Peggy cart, we had chariot races up the big fields by the farm.

Ned and I were great naturalists and collected birds eggs (one from each nest only) and had most breeds represented, and great days with me climbing the trees, with Ned, already over six feet tall as my 'walking ladder'. I was small for my age and very agile! Looking back, I could cry for our birds today, so few, such a faint dawn chorus. Birds were everywhere from Turtle Doves and their soft voices to perfect little nests of long-tailed Tits, in gorse bushes, and peewits wheeling with their lovely cry overhead.



Nest of a long tailed tit

We also had a wonderful collection of butterflies and moths which were a joy all summer in abundance, and now sadly so seldom seen. God gave us such a miraculously lovely planet, vibrant with natural life to live on and enjoy, and what have we done to it in our greed and destruction?

8. Going to school

After my attack of the terrible 'flu, my parents decided not to send me to boarding school, yet Ermyn was already at Standee's Bexhill. Each morning I rode over on Tommy to Cholderton (about two miles) and had lessons with a little girl called Nancy Newland and her governess. I rode Tommy along the lane called 'Smuggler's Lane' and Peggy the little donkey often followed Tommy, and they were shut in the Newland's stable till I rode home. The terrible day came when my parents took me to join Ermyn at boarding school. I was not a good scholar, and hated the life. Looking back, I realise that our headmistress was an evil and sadistic woman. I hated her and she hated me! I could write a book about her evil deeds of cruelty to the girls in her charge. She had a great influence on Ermyn who thought the world of her and she nearly turned Ermyn into a man-hater. My classmates and I formed a loyal band and stuck together in adversity.

My mother wrote to us often, lovely letters with illustrations of the doings of our rabbits and dog and farm life. How I wish I had kept some of them. One letter told me of a day soon after I had gone to the boarding school, my father found Tommy and Peggy were missing out of their field, they searched everywhere for them to no avail. Then a message was sent from the Newlands house at Cholderton to say that Tommy and Peggy had come over of their own free will to fetch me! And they had put them into their stable!

For us children the Warren days are some of our happiest. We asked our father if we could have a log cabin in Warren Woods. 'Of course you can' he said, 'come into Salisbury when I go to the market in Tin Lizz (the green Ford van) take your pocket money, and buy some nails, then you can take Tommy's cart to the saw mills in the village, and bring back slivers (outside planks of bark) for nothing, and had endless fun and learnt a lot, as Ned was a god carpenter. I held the boards while Ned drove the nails, and I said funny things and made him laugh so much he sometimes missed a nail and nearly hit his fingers!

Ermyn sat on the logs and recited poetry to us. We often drove Tommy's cart over to Wilbury with Peggy trotting behind, and finding Mr Adams the gardener, we ate fruit till we could not eat any more! Then, drove home to Warren Farm with the cart laden with produce. As the cart was full, we took turns to walk and when it was my turn to walk Ned would pick off grapes and leave them on dock leaves in the road to hurry me up when I got tired.

Wilbury House was then empty between letting, as we could no longer afford to live there. We romped and played through the empty rooms to our heart's content. It was the most beautiful house.

9. Back to Somerset

Sadly, owing to death duties, our father had to sell the Wilbury Estate and its lovely old house. He decided to live in Somerset which had always been a Malet county. He eventually bought Chargot House in the village of Luxborough.

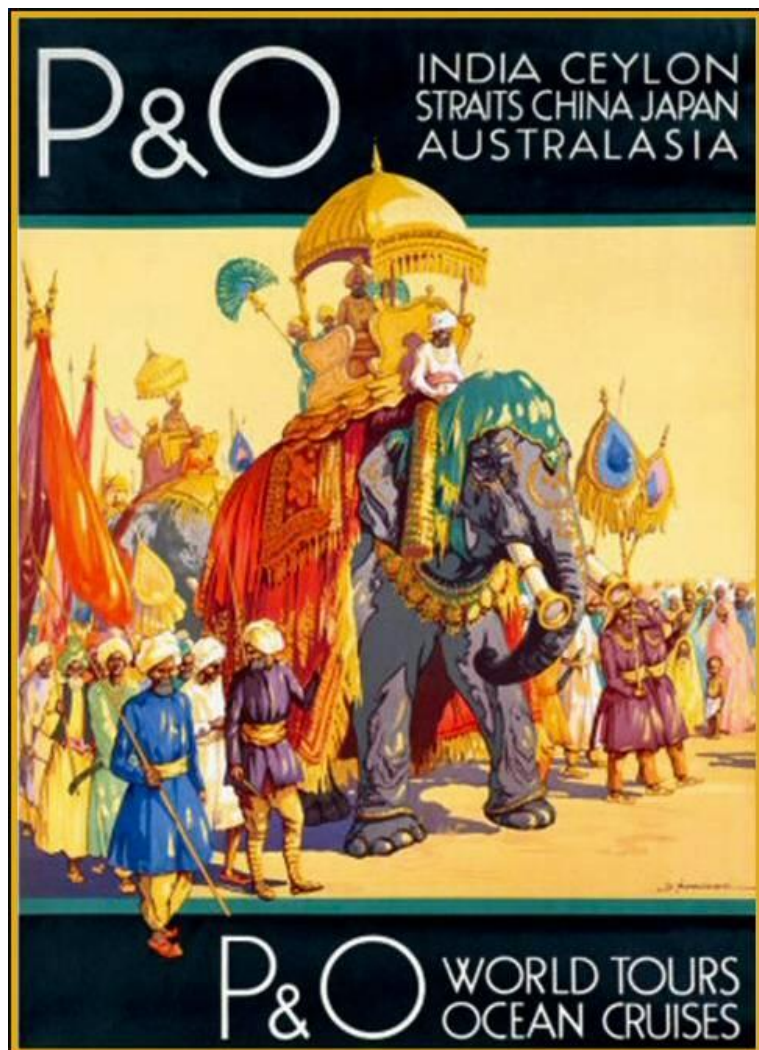
The house stands in a wonderful setting overlooking a valley or combe, which has a chain of seven trout ponds, of differing sizes, and magnificent trees along the connecting stream. Electricity for the house was provided by a turbine in a small building below Black Pond, which held the batteries. It was all very exciting for us young people and superb riding country over Chargot Wood and the Brendon Hills.

My mother never really liked the house for it was decidedly 'spooky' and as she was very psychic she saw several ghostly figures there. After a time we had the house blessed which helped. We youngsters had a good time with lots of hunting, which our father loved, with the West Somerset hounds. Also plenty of social life and good fishing in the ponds. We had many friends to stay, including our cousins Marget and Alice Boothby, also Aleth Lloyd from Canada, whom our Aunt Helen educated in England at Dover College, and Molly Oakes, Aunt Frieda's daughter.

Aleth, Molly and I were so alike that people used to think we were brother and sisters. Ermyn was training as a State Registered Nurse at the Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford. Ned, after leaving Dover College was at Christchurch Oxford, and I myself was just leaving school.

10. A passage to India

In 1928, at the age of 17, I travelled with my father by ship, SS Nankin, to India.



The SS Nankin was a P&O liner

It was interesting, as India was still under British rule. We stayed in Fort William, Calcutta with Clive Moberley-Bell, Colonel of the Loyal Regiment, and family, who had married a cousin Enid Malet.

We travelled a lot and saw most of the famous sites. Unfortunately I was only just 17 and rather too young to appreciate it as I could have. We stayed with Colonel Alex Malet at Jublepoor. Also with an old friend of my father called General Vandebilt at Rawalpindi, and drove up the Khyber pass, which to me was the most wonderful sight of all. I gazed in awe at the Himalayas - range upon range of majestic snow peaked mountains as far as they eye could reach.

Sadly my father was taken ill soon after our trip. Ermyrn, by then an SRN devotedly helped nurse him and he eventually died in 1931. Ned got his degree in Agriculture at Oxford and joined the family regiment, the 8th Hussars.



Khyber Pass

11. Cothelstone and Luxborough

After the sad event of our father's death we rented Cothelstone Manor from Mr W Esdaile 'Uncle Wil' (to whom I was related), for about six months to cheer us up and make a change. Taking Hall our groom and Mrs Hall to cook, we had a good time.

With a stable full of horses, Ned and I hunted five days a week with our own hunters and two troop horses, which were superb jumpers. We went to all the Hunt Balls (which were very select in those days!) and we had a very good time! In the spring we returned to Chargot House.

My mother and Ned and I were rather 'hard up' by this time, and decided to let Chargot and live in Ponds Cottage on the drive, for a while. My mother and I were very contented there with two Irish wolfhounds, a spaniel, a terrier and a baby fallow deer called Will 'o' the Wisp. Also two Saanen goats that I milked, and this kept us independent! Ned came home on leave, in and out, and Ermyn was in Africa in Tanganyika, as a nursing missionary.



Saanen goat

Later on, my mother and I moved back to Chargot. I had two hunters, one an experienced one called Monk and a four year old of Mr Frank Hancock's to 'school on' for hunting. We had a first class groom, in Hall, for the horses, and he also drove my mother to see her many friends such as Rose Luttrell (now aged 102 as I write), Lady Trevelyan of Nettlecombe Court, and Mrs Wyndham of Orchard Wyndham, and Peggy Bridge of Croydon Hall. One of my very great friends was Rachel Reckitt of Golsoncott, who became a famous sculptress.

We had many good days hunting together, with Charlie Back hunting hounds, and great gallops over the Brendon Hills. One day as we were drawing Galloping Bottom a curlew got up in front of the hounds, and flew away calling their lovely gurgling cry. Mr Frank Hancock who was field Maser called 'Ista, Ista' so I rode up beside him and he said 'Ista if you could sing that I'd ask you to come every evening after dinner and sing to me!'. He was a much loved and respected old man.



Charget House, Luxborough

My mother was kindness itself and walked many miles with little baskets of good things for any village family who was in need, so everyone loved her. One of her long walks was out to 'Well Cottages' past Church Town to Mrs Moore who had a vast family of children and was not very well off. Mrs Moore gave my mother a Bible for her birthday with much inscribing inside. I still use it myself to this day. I would sometimes go to the larder to prepare a meal only to find she had given it all away to Mrs Somebody who had come to the door! No one was ever turned away. Things were very different in those days. Even the district nurse had to be subsidised so Ermyrn, Ned and I got up many entertainments in the village hall to gather funds.

Few of my friends seemed to have serious jobs and the young men certainly did not seem overworked, most in the Army or Navy and some in London. Our neighbours the Salamans were frequent visitors and it was through them I met my friend Betty Paterson whose father was Alan's Tudor at Trinity Oxford years before.

12. The Stoddarts



Alan Stoddart

After my mother and I settled back in Chagot House, one day a young man called Alan Stoddart, whom I had met out hunting rode into the yard while I was talking to Hall our groom, and asked me if I would come for a ride, so off I went! Alan's father was a director of their well-known family firm of C.T.Bowring originally founded by Benjamin Bowring, and he had won the American (US) amateur golfing championship.

Alan's great grandfather was a very fine old man in Victorian times. There is a very interesting book called *The Bowring Story* which is well worth reading giving the adventures of their shipping line from St.John's in Nova Scotia. Alan's family lived in London and had a farm near Wheddon Cross they used as a weekend cottage. Alan and I enjoyed our rides, and to cut a long story short got engaged and married on September 6th 1934. Alan had always been a great all-round sportsman - he played hockey for Marlborough, and when at Oxford played ice hockey for Trinity College and was a Blue.

We were married in Dunster Church, with all our relations and friends. A very jolly wedding with the hunt servants of three packs of hounds in full hunting regalia forming an arch with their whips, which we walked under. Our reception was at Chagot and Ned flew back from Cairo to give me away. I can well remember that we got engaged I was invited over to Hoe Farm to meet all Alan's relations.

I was a bit alarmed at the number, but after a few minutes I was well away, as they were all such delightful people. We had a wonderful honeymoon in Ireland. Alan's

father was great fun, with a good sense of humour and loved his hunting with the Devon and Somerset.

Alan's mother was a matriarch of the first order, an American born and bred, ne Boyd. I got on well with her, and was much relieved when our first home Quarme Farm at Wheddon Cross was ready for us to move into. Alan was working at Lloyd's in London, but hated it, and decided to go farming instead, which suited both of us. He was never happier than when we was on a horse! He whipped in to Tom Hancock, Master of the Dulverton hounds and after we were married became Joint Secretary of the Devon and Somerset, with the Olympic rider Tony Collins.

Life was running very pleasantly and two of our sons were born - Alan Malet (1936) the eldest who took the family nick name of 'Jock' and then Robert Douglas (1939). Ermyn who was a fully trained nurse looked after me at Jock's birth. In her usual casual way she plumped him in my lap as she left after three weeks, saying 'go on, treat him like a puppy, and he'll be OK"! Which he was!

Robin was born at home which they all were and was just three weeks old when once again Germany raised her ugly head and invaded Poland and for the second time in my life Britain was at war with the Germans who, as was their wont, marched like zombies and fought to dominate the world, taking a mad man called Hitler as their leader and God. Hitler was the embodiment of evil and will live on in history for his cruelty in battle and his maniacal determination to exterminate all Jews, no matter what their nationality, by starvation, gassing, and many other fiendish methods. Millions suffered horribly and died.

On Dunster Show Day 1939 war was declared. Next day Alan, who was already in the Royal Devon Yeomanry, went to join his regiment, leaving me to manage the farm of 250 acres, live stock, and Jock, Robin and a nanny.

o back to petrol rationing and food rationing once more. But we lived on a farm and had sheep and dairy cows so we did not suffer too badly! Alan and the RDY were stationed at Okehampton to start with then moved to the coast near Rye awaiting the German invasion after the disaster of Dunkirk. They were there for several months.

A steady flow of evacuated children arrived in the countryside areas from the big cities that were being bombed. There was a wonderful communal spirit everywhere and children were taken into people's homes and safety. At Quarme we had three very nice boys from Dagenham, about 12,11 and 9 years old, they stayed for several months. They arrived complete with name tags and gas masks and settled in quite easily. Meanwhile the Battle of Britain was found by our air force with magnificent bravery and skill. The voice of Churchill summed it up in his words 'Never has so much been owed by so many, to so few'.

Alan was lucky not to have been at Dunkirk. He then volunteered for service overseas. He was sent first to India then to Ceylon where the Japanese were expected to attack. Finally on to Burma, and served as an Adjutant on General Orde Wingate's staff, and therefore as a Chindit, flying in behind the Japanese lines.



General Orde Wingate

You can read all about World War II in many, many books. I will just say that for a very long time Britain alone held back the tide of Germans which would have swept over her, as it had done to France and the rest of Europe with awful consequences that hardly bear thinking of.

We bravely fought on alone. Then just like World War I Uncle Sam (America) came in to help. The tide of defeat at last turned at our victory over Rommel at El Alamein. Thank God we beat the Germans again and also put the Italians in their place on the way. Will Germany ever learn its lesson? We must watch our steps or they will have a bloodless victory by dominating the EEC! Leopards don't change their spots! On the home front Jock first had lessons with the Myer children at Winsford, riding over on his pony, Foxy. Later on Betty Salaman (now Betty Coxon), a very dear friend of mine taught Jock and her son Nickey each morning. Jock had a passion for engines and loved everything to do with tractors!

13. Farming in the Second World War

I ran the farm, and it sounds quite archaic now! Jack Pugsley as stockman and a carter in charge of two cart horses 'Darling' and 'Prince' and a land girl to help milk the cows by hand. We also ran some young bullocks and a flock of Devon closewool sheep and two sows and their litters.



Devon closewool sheep

We were ordered by the 'War Ag' to grow an acreage of oats and barley. The seed was sown by hand broadcast with a 'fiddle'. Harvesting was a headache with Exmoor's eternal rainstorms, the fields were all cut with a 'binder', and piled in 'wind mows', in the hope of a fine day to cart to the farm buildings below - this was done with two horses and two wagons with 'lades'. The lane down was as steep and rough as going downstairs. The horses sat back on the way down the sheer rock and slid. It had to be really well loaded or the whole thing would slip and turn over! I was always the one who put the loads, the men pitching up the sheafs for me to place on the wagon.

During haymaking I swept the hay in to the rick with an old car with long tines fastened on the front, and it was forked up by hand to Pugsley, who built the rick, and one of our helpers was an Italian prisoner of war.

He was a championship bicycle racer in civil life but was not a very good worker, and the girl who helped a bit in the house had an awful job keeping out of his clutches till a bus took him back to the camp after work. Jock loved to sit in the sweep car with me haymaking and one day his cousin Michael came too, but was stricken with terrible hay fever and had to go back to his family staying at Hoe Farm.

Nanny coped with Robin and Murray, born 1942, and they climbed the hill to bring us a picnic tea for all. I always kept a horse at the ready to get up and down the hills quickly. In spite of the weather we made quite a bit of good hay.

We had one big scare about 1942. One night I was awakened by the phone at about 1 am and order to 'turn out my home guard men' and report to Bridgetown at once. All the church bells were ringing which was a pre-arranged sign that the German invasion

had begun. I leaped out of bed and scrambled into my clothes and got out our little Morris 8.



Morris 8

Then I collected our Home Guard, first one man who shook with fright so much that the little car vibrated, then Bill, whose mother admonished him not to catch cold! Then a chap from Honey Ball who had to run back to his house again as he had forgotten his ammunition! (all very Dad's Army). I left them all at Bridgetown and returned home. Nanny and the children were still asleep. Thank God it proved to be a false alarm. I have never met anyone who can tell exactly what happened. All the men walked home again at 6 am and everyone was infinitely relieved. A regiment of American soldiers were in camp on Treborough Common for a short while. It caused quite a stir in the neighbourhood. They were well entertained by all with great hospitality, dances in village halls and invitations to meals. They were embarrassingly generous, as their rations were beyond our belief, and they would arrive at one's house with large chunks of delicious cheese and chocolate bars called 'Oh Henry!' for the children.



Oh Henry! chocolate and peanut candy from the 1940s

A couple of the officers used to come to Quarme and enjoyed a meal and picking strawberries in the garden and relaxing from army routine. They soon left to join our forces in France. They told their village friends before they left the whereabouts of much surplus provisions hidden in rabbit holes for them to find after they had gone. The American Army certainly fed their men well! One of the officers who visited us slightly reminded me of George Lee and was a really nice chap - some were a bit crude, but full of good nature.

14. VE and VJ Days

Ned was with the 8th Hussars. No more horses of course - the cavalry were now tanks. Ned was largely instrumental in inventing the sun compass, for guiding our troops in the desert. He saw a great deal of active service and served also in the British Embassy to Turkey mission. Then right through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, where he witnessed the awful sight of Belsen, with our advancing forces, and was for a time Senior Control Officer at Brunswick 1944-5, Chief Civil Affairs Officer in the Suez Canal Zone, 1951-54, Colonel, 8th Baronet, High Sheriff of Somerset in 1966 and OBE. He served his country well and truly. He married Baroness Benedicta von Maasburgh in 1935 and had three children - Harry, Mary Jane and Micaela. Ermyn married Geoffrey Conan-Davies, a District Officer in Tanganyika and had four children - Stephen, who did extremely well and became Australian Consul to Austria, Bliss, Meredith who married Douglas Gresham, C.S. Lewis's adopted son, and Timothy. Just after the war Geoffrey retired and they moved to Tasmania and subsequently to Australia. Ermyn became an extreme Roman Catholic and wrote many religious effusions which were published in America, and she, sadly, left Geoffrey, although they later became reconciled.

At last VE day came in 1945 with wild rejoicings followed by VJ day with both Germans and Japanese defeated, and pray God that will be the last world war. We now live at the mercy of the nuclear age, with every country striving to have its own atom bomb. But our beautiful and wonderful planet is still at risk of insidious sterilization from the massive quantity of nuclear waste buried or stored, to eventually leak out and cause disaster. What have we done, what are we doing to this beautiful little world God gave us? Alan returned home safely from Burma and brought me a present of two large Indian carpets, one blue (in our bedroom) and one dark red, now with Gary.

Just as I expected Alan decided to sell Quarme and look for a bigger place to farm, where he could earn more money to educate his family which had soon been joined by Mary Lynette St. Lo in 19467. So our days of blackout windows, rationing, German planes droning overhead and the terrible bombing on London and the big cities, with the fear and destruction and loss of life, came to an end. We were very lucky and safe on our own farm, thank God. My thanks from Alan for running the farm right through the war, was a wonderful trip to join Jock in New Zealand, before he came home. We had a great tour of the islands and returned, visiting Australia briefly. Also visiting Ermyn and Geoffrey in Tasmania.

15. Farming Memories

I will always remember the hard work and hay making and harvest, and caring for the ewes and lambs at lambing time. I loved the sheep. I had such small hands I could help many a ewe in difficult births. We lambed out in the field with only two or three small pens. Our nightly care of the ewes and lambs was done by electric torch light, with the beam well directed on the ground. This was a strict regulation to avoid any fifth column spy signalling to the German planes droning overhead. Pugsley and I took the night shift by turns. I never ceased to wonder at the miracle of life and birth. Little new born lambs staggering to their feet off the frosty ground for their first life-giving drink from their mother, and her warm tongue cleaning and strengthening her offspring whilst mumbling softly in their motherly way. Through it ran the children and the fun we had. I could not have managed the farm and children without Nanny (though we did not entirely see eye to eye).

Ned and his beautiful Austrian and Hungarian, half Irish wife now had three children, Harry, Mary Jan and Michaela and we had some merry parties with them all. Holidays at Wollacombe and picnics - even the little Shetland called Puck had done his war work by taking the milk churns down to the gate to be collected.



A male Irish Wolfhound stands at least 32 inches tall at the shoulder and weighs at least 120 pounds.

I bred Irish Wolfhounds before the war and was lucky to sell the last four puppies to a home in India. They were great hunters and so gentle with the children. I loved them dearly, but like all big dogs these days, so short lived.

16. Back to Cothelstone

Quarme was put on the market and sold just after Lynette was born, to people called Mumford. By then having four children I was a little anxious as by September 1946 we would be homeless!

My mother came over to see Lynette and I told her the place was sold and we must find somewhere to go. Her inspired answer was 'why don't you write to Uncle Wil Esdaile to see if he will rent you Cothelstone Manor again, like he did years ago, till you find another farm'. Alan agreed this was a very good idea.

So I wrote to Uncle Wil and soon got a nice letter back, saying he would be delighted to rent us the manor again, but only for a short time, as he wanted to let the Manor House and farm together again. The manor and the farm had previously been let separately.



Cothelstone Manor was built in the early 17th century

Alan and I pricked up our ears and before we knew what was happening we were 'walking the farm' Uncle Wil and were accepted as his tenants.

Alan was a bit alarmed about taking on 600 acres of super ground and the big manor house, after only farming a little Brendon Hill farm like Quarme, but his old father who was a dear and wise old man said 'Go on boy nothing venture nothing have'.

So we took the manor and the farm over in September 1946 from W.J.King the roadway contractor, who was retiring, a very wealthy man. He was famous in the county and owned many big steam rollers which fetched a fortune when he sold up. He was a dear old chap and very kind and helpful getting us started and we farmed there till 1980 when Alan retired. Uncle Wil was a great character.

He loved having us in the manor and was Gary's Godfather at his christening in the little church. Uncle Wil always played the organ and for some years John Wright pumped the organ by hand. Uncle Wil simply loved the hymn 'where the deep thunder

clouds roll' and used to pull out all the stops and nearly raise the roof! He always had a carnation in his buttonhole and enjoyed lunching with us most Sundays.

The farm and manor were then taken over when we left by Uncle Wil's great nephew Hugh Warmington, son of Elizabeth Warmington nee Esdaile, who had inherited the whole Cothelstone Estate as it was entailed to be left to the child of an Esdaile son (male) and Elizabeth was the only child of Uncle Wil's brother Percy. Uncle Wil himself never married.

When the four boys finished their education each in turn went 'overseas', Jock had six months on farms in New Zealand, Robin did a trip to the USA and Canada and worked on Vancouver Island Timber Mill and toured Canada and the USA. After harvest Alan and I always had a blissful fourteen days holiday in Greece where we both loved the swimming and the sun. It was a great joy to us both.

For 35 years Alan ran the farm really well and worked hard. Our first winter of 1946 was the worst ever, bitterly cold and heavy snow. We lost a lot of sheep, but that summer heralded a bumper harvest and perfect weather and gave us a good start. It always amazes me how good God has been to us, we owe him deep and grateful thanks for leading us in this astonishing way.

I had taken all the family to the dentist in Taunton during the war and on the way back to Quarme I drove over to Cothelstone Manor which had been occupied by East End evacuees. I said to Nanny and the children 'this is where we ought to be farming' little knowing the future would bring us there.

I always loved the place and it was really like a miracle ordained that we should live there, and be so happy, thank God again for everything. Alan loved it too. Our 1946 harvest was out with a binder and stoked and loaded on wagons drawn by horses and later threshed from the ricks with a threshing machine and steam engine.

We then employed 14 men and had a stable full of cart horses and one tractor. Times changed and gradually we had more machines and less men and a combine harvester. I became redundant as a farm hand! It was all far too professional.

Also in 1947 Gary was born and christened Gareth Bowring Stoddart, Bowring being Alan's family connection, so we had a family of five! Alan's mother was horrified, 'how will you educate them all?' she said. I said 'that's all right the Lord will provide' and sure enough Vera Antoniardi nee Malet, daughter of Sir Henry Malet left in her will a nice sum of money and some furniture to 'Ista's children' and everyone laughed happily! I'm sure this was due to my mother's kindness to the old lady and little stories to amuse her of 'Ista's children's doings'. The children were getting older and Nanny left.

I felt ten years younger. I will not say more! It was a wonderful place for children to grow up. I taught all five to ride as Alan was too busy with the farm. I was on the Rural District Council, Parochial Church Council, and Commissioner of the Pony Club for quite a stretch.



Ista Stoddart equine sculpture

Now that the children were all at boarding school I was persuaded by Rachel to go to Taunton Art School. There I learnt to put up an armature, cast in plaster of Paris and thereafter sculpted away at home with great joy horses, dogs etc.

Mostly commissions, my work found itself in many houses including the H.I.S Emblem sculptured in bronze which was presented to the Queen. I also bred Dalmatians which were great fun and still have three descendants from my original bitch Green Mount Little Gem.

The children's holidays were packed with events, friends to stay, parties, Pony Club, hunting etc. Murray had great success with his show jumping and both he and Lyn rode for the Q.S.H Pony Club team at Stoneleigh and Burleigh Trials.



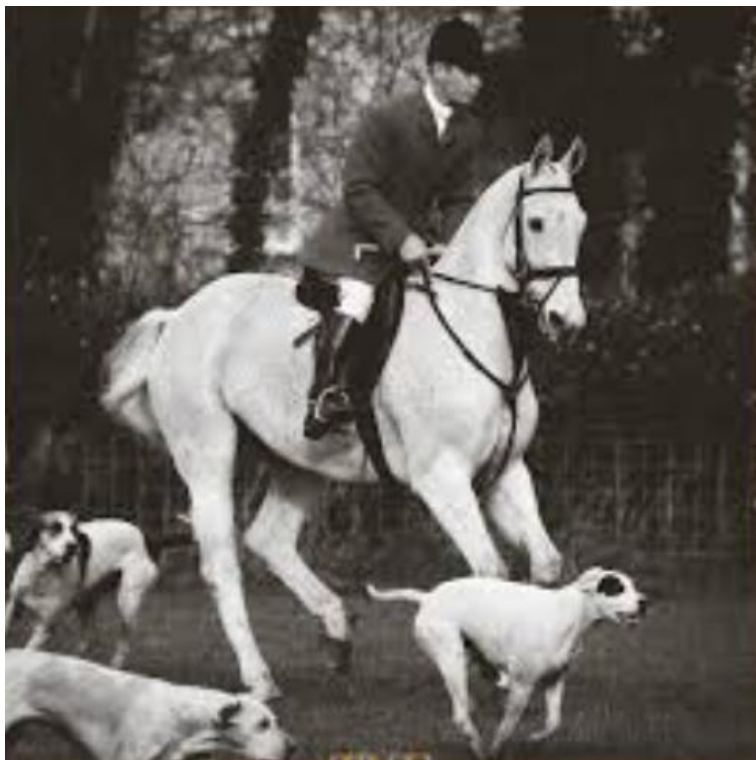
Cothelstone Church

We all went to dear little Cothelstone Church each Sunday. W were more than blessed in our lives and had so much to thank God for. It seemed that from my first visit to Cothelstone I had a strange affinity with the place and was destined to go back there.



A dilapidated Austin 7

The four boys of course loved things mechanical and they, in time, will write of the Austin 7 they bought for £4, and an antique motorbike with a treacle tin as a petrol tank. I hope we as a family gave happiness to our numerous delightful friends, visitors and neighbours.



Taunton Vale Foxhounds

Alan worked hard on the farm but had an eventful time as Master of the Taunton Vale Foxhounds, 1962-70, and running the District Hunters Improvement Society. He also ran the Horse Section of the Royal Agricultural Show at Stoneleigh, a very big undertaking, for several years and served on the RASE Council and may other public works, including Church Warden at Cothelstone and Chairman of the Conservative Association of Bishops Lydeard.

Alan was a good Christian, greatly respected and loved by all and an example to his five children. Our beloved mother died in 1951 after a series of strokes - she was a truly wonderful and saintly person. We kept the old house busy with Art Exhibitions to raise money for repairs to the little church.

|Our final farewell event was a Son et Lumiere written by me about the history of the house - it was on for three nights in perfect weather, floodlit from the gatehouse roof. It was a great success. Everyone in Cothelstone and Cushuish took part and Ulik Huntinton as Director did marvels with our untutored acting. It really did feel like a grateful farewell to the place and to our splendid neighbours, before we moved to Halsway.

The children were now grown up. Jock was now in his farm at Holcombe Water on the Brendons and married Sally Harkness a super girl. Robin married Barbara Palmer who is a splendid wife, he is a Land Agent in the firm of Sidley in Bicester. Murray married Caroline Windham and farmed at Toulton.

Very sadly Caroline left him taking half of all he possessed from him, including half Toulton Farm, Cothelstone. Lynette married Magnus Mowat who was working in the city, a really good chap of integrity and ability and they moved from London to New Park House near Northwich in Cheshire.

Gary married Lorna Williams, a super Scottish bred girl. He worked for Scottish Agricultural Industries and ICI, now branched into Zeneca, and lives at Leadburn, about 13 miles from Edinburgh.

I will not try to tell you of all our grandchildren. Suffice to say wed have been blessed with 16 good looking grandchildren full of life and promise. Ned and Benedicta had three children but sadly Benedicta died in 1979 and Ned in 1990. Tragically Ned and his son never got on together.

When Ned died Harry who had married an Australian girl called Julia, nee Harper, sold Chargot Estate and lots of the furniture and went to farm in Australia calling their farm Wrestwood, after Sir Edward Malet's house he built at Bexhill. They had one son called Charles Edward Malet, 'nicknamed' CEM who DV sill become the 9th Baronet and be the head of the Malet family.

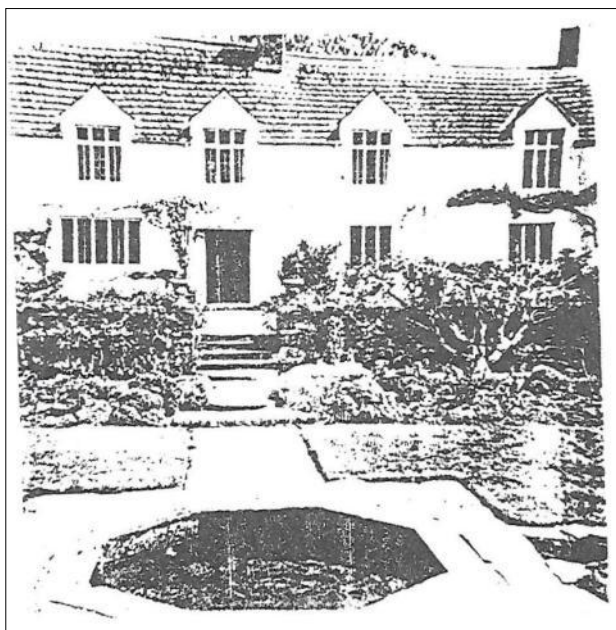
I have not seen very much of him but what I have seen I like and he seems a good chap. He did three years in the army with the 8th Hussars and took part in the Gulf War straight from Sandhurst, and is now learning the building trade in Australia.

Ned left him Chargot House and 20 acres and instructions that he should not sell tile he is 25. We all wonder if he will stay in Australia or come home and repair Chargot and live there. Mary Jane married Bob Pickering and had two sons and is a well known artist in Australia. Micaela, also an artist, married Edwin Beckett, a very good man who became a Major General; they had four children and live at Catacomb, Cutcombe near Minehead - all very happy.

Ermyn died in Australia and had four children and lots of grandchildren - she was still an ardent RC! Her eldest son Stephen did very well in the Australian Embassy.

Alan and I said farewell to Cothelstone, that lovely old house and dear little church and to farming life. Though we had 50 acres at Halsway. I feel we gave up farming just in time as the EEC has made an inextricable tangle of agriculture, knee deep in petty regulations and forms and revolutionary changes in cross cultivations. But at last recognising the importance long overdue of our neglected and badly damaged environment.

17. Middle Halsway



Middle Halsway, Crowcombe, Somerset

Alan enjoyed his retirement at Middle Halsway and rode his old hunter J.R. up over the hills till he was 85 accompanied by Jackie who looks after our horses. I had given up riding at 82! We had great fun with our home bred race horses out of a mare called Boarder Lane, her son Comedy Lane (18hh) won a lot of chases as did his half sister Handy Lane and we still have this line of chasers and hurdlers.

Alan, who never had a day's illness, lost his memory the last year of his life and after a bad fall broke his hip and died on September 21st 1994, shortly after our Diamond Wedding day - 60 happy years together. Alan and I had 14 splendid years at Middle Halsway which had previously been owned by a cousin of mine called Hugh Malet. A beautiful garden with two little ponds - a stream running through. As soon as we got there Alan and I had a belt of Leylandi trees planted at the bottom of the field to hide the main road traffic. Also we had a swimming pool put in as we both love swimming and entertaining our friends for a swim in hot weather and a drink after!

Here I must put down my pen and leave this little history for some energetic members of the family to go on and write their separate stories, of the doings of our huge family of grandchildren and great grandchildren. I am still amazed beyond bounds how God has fed and cared for us all through the years. May we all be worthy of his care in the years to come.

15.10.2019

