

# **Basil Martin Tracey and Katherine Reavell Tracey**

## **Our parents**

As remembered by

Jill Vasey, Peter Tracey and Marion Banyard

This short account is intended to accompany the life stories of our grandfather, William Harding Scott and that of myself. I have produced the text and my sisters have helped with detail and remembered much that I have forgotten.

In the years to come, I hope that it will be of interest to my grandchildren. In the text I have also tried to paint a picture to indicate how different life was in comparison with today.

We start with the very different earlier lives of father and mother. After their marriage, I have chosen to cover both of my parents' lives together as they were so essential for each other. It is my hope that this will be fully appreciated and understood in the account which follows.

### **Basil Tracey - Tim**

Father was the seventh of eleven children of Dr Henry Eugene Tracey and Emily Alice Tracey (nee Martin). It is clear that Alice brought a modest fortune to the marriage which enabled them to build a fine house and have many children. Henry was a great enthusiast with many interests. He had trained at Barts (St. Bartholomews Hospital) and had been offered a post there, but chose to get away from London and take on a country practice. I have heard it said that his partners in medical practice did not approve of his lack of attention to his work as a country doctor.

Father was born at the family home, The Gables, Willand, Devon on 19th October 1899. People ask why he was called Tim; the story I heard was that they thought Granny was expecting twins, who would have been called Timothy and Titus. As only one baby was born they christened him Basil, but the name Tim stuck.

'Father's First Car', written by his young brother Hugh and based on Henry's motoring diaries, indicates some of the fun of those first years. The car arrived in 1907 and was the first car in the Culme valley of Devonshire. The groom, who normally only looked after horses, was transformed overnight to become a mechanic. The car was frequently breaking down. None of the roads were sealed (no tarmac) and the tyres failed regularly. Father once told me about one occasion when Grandfather wanted to record the maximum speed of the vehicle. The speedometer was mounted near the floor and father had to kneel down shouting

out how fast they were going as Grandfather drove at breakneck speed downhill before careering over a bridge.

In 1909 Basil went to school at Ayshford. Then in 1912 he went to Monkton Combe Junior School having gained a small entrance scholarship. It is still a very evangelical establishment. In 1913 he went on to the senior school and eventually became head prefect. He was clearly a star pupil with high grades in all exams and good at sport.

In 1911 his father died soon after an operation for kidney stones. Thereafter his mother had to bring up her eleven children on the proceeds of her private income. She did so very successfully but it is clear that the need for prudence and hard work was installed in all of them. She insisted that they must get scholarships if they wanted to go to university.

In 1914 he went on a bicycle tour with his older brother Leonard to Clovelly, Bude, Tintagel and East Week; this was cut short when they heard that war had been declared and because the banks closed they couldn't get out any more money.

He had an army medical at the end of 1917 but due to his very short eyesight and the need for more doctors if the war continued, he was encouraged to go ahead and study medicine.

He started at St. Bartholomew's Hospital early the next year and did all his first year work in 6 months. He passed his first MB with Honours in Physics and was the only student to win a £100 entrance scholarship.

He continued at Barts until passing his final exam for his FRCS in November 1925.

In June 1926 he went to the Royal Hospital Wolverhampton as Resident Medical Officer where he was in charge of all accident cases and performed nearly 250 major operations.

Because of the limited medical knowledge at that time, it is clear that many accident cases resulted in early death. My father related one case where a man had been brought in who had spilt molten iron on his foot. He died of tetanus because they had not realised that the moulds for the iron castings were bound with horse manure.

Father came to Norwich in the autumn of 1927 in the hope of joining the surgical staff at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. The usual way of doing this at that time was to set up in practice locally and wait for a vacancy at the hospital. He joined the private practice of Dr. Ian Dickson which included Norwich Prison. When the hoped for vacancy at the hospital came up he didn't get it, but by that time he had met mother, liked Norwich and loved sailing on the Broads and decided to stay in Norwich.

At first Father took lodgings with a man who looked after 'gentlemen'. He then bought 62 Thorpe Road which was later to be our family home and had a cook and a maid to look after him. So he took in a young architect to share it with him until such time as he got married. When they married, mother was amused to

notice that he had furnished the rest of the house, but had minimum furniture in his bedroom.

So we will now consider Mother's early years.

### **Katherine Scott - Kitty**

Mother was born on 1st May 1899. She was the first of three children of William Harding Scott and Clara Mary Scott (nee Reavel). Grandfather already had four children by his first marriage. Mother was sent to school at Polam Hall which was a Quaker school in Darlington.

She had a fine voice and went up to London to one of the music colleges, however she became ill soon after starting there and had to return home. It took a long time for doctors to discover the problem. Coming up to her 21st birthday she related to us that she only got a small cheap suitcase as a present because her parents thought she did not have long to live. At first the doctors thought that she was diabetic and reduced her sugar, which was entirely the wrong treatment for her; it was finally found that she suffered from what was called Low Renal Threshold, (now called Renal Glycosuria) and needed to keep her blood sugar levels up. She couldn't go long without food. We all knew that mother would get "tetchy" if she did not get her tea on time in the afternoon.

The Scott family had many adventurous holidays in the 1920's. A motor car trip to the Pyrenees in 1920 included Wright the chauffeur who was also called on to do all the maintenance. This story is also covered in the W H Scott account. It is notable that almost the entire journey was made on dirt track roads. Tarmac came later and motorways did not exist until the 1960's. There were also several early skiing holidays. In 1928 they went to stay with cousins in Jamaica and then various stops in the Caribbean from Panama to Trinidad and Barbados. In the San Blas islands the natives had never seen anyone with golden hair like mother's. They were away for about two and a half months as all the journeys were by sea. There was no international air travel until the 1950's and holidays by air did not start for most until the 1970's. They also went to India which must have taken a long time as that would have been by ship.

Sailing was important for mother. Grandfather had a Broads Cruiser the Moonraker, which is still sailing today. It was one of the first to have bermudan rig. From pictures at that time, it would seem that Mother was the skipper. Her diaries include many press cuttings concerning their performance at the numerous regattas they attended on the Broads.

Then in 1931 the press cuttings change from referring to Miss Katherine Scott to Mrs Basil Tracey.

It was a good match and they were complementary in so many ways. Mother was no beauty but had a fine loving temperament. She was also practical and well organised and loved gardening. A small inheritance from Grandfather's company did not go amiss. Father had worked incredibly hard to get qualified and I suspect that he was somewhat diffident regarding women. Father was not practical but

was highly intelligent and full of enthusiasm for everything in life. He was a strong Christian whereas Mother was agnostic. They had a strong bond in their common love of sailing and they also sang together in the Norwich Philharmonic Chorus.

Jill arrived in 1932 followed by Bill in 1934. Unfortunately Bill died of pneumonia aged just over two; it was before the days of penicillin. I was born in 1937, the same year that both my grandfather and my Uncle Tom died. Mother had always wanted 3 children and Marion was born in 1939.

My father had given medical advice to the family. When Uncle Tom died of a brain tumour in 1938 at the age of 27 father felt responsible that he had misdiagnosed it. It had a terrible effect on his mental health. Fortunately he had a fine wife to pull him through.

At this time Hitler had already been Chancellor since 1933 and many people were very afraid that there would be a repeat of World War One. Without modern communications it was hard to know what was really happening in Germany and the plight of the jews was not realised at all.



## **Our First Family Home**

Our parents lived in a large rambling house at 62 Thorpe Road Norwich. It had a long garden at the front stretching down to the main road. It backed up against a road in a part of the town which was quite poor. Our daily help Mrs. Pettit lived in a tiny house there which was one room up and one room down with a loo out the back and a wash house in the garden with a huge boiler where she washed our sheets.

With the coming of war all sailing stopped and the Norfolk Punt was stored in the big dining room at home. Our house was on the hill directly above the railway station, a favourite objective for German bombers. Many of the houses behind us were flattened. When the air raid warning sounded, the whole family went down to beds which we had in the cellar.

With all this stress, Father had a mental breakdown and had to go away. I do not know for how long or where. On his return he continued his medical practice, using a consulting room in the house. Much of his time was visiting patients and I remember him having to leave in the middle of a meal to attend urgent cases. One Christmas he was just carving the turkey when he was called away.

No exposed lights were allowed and even cars had hoods on their headlights so that they could not be seen from enemy aeroplanes above. This made driving difficult. On one occasion a pregnant lady only got as far as her front lawn before Father was called out to attend the birth. If the German Luftwaffe had been around at the time, they would have had a fine sight with several night watchmen's torches concentrated on the proceedings.

Father became an ARP warden. Mother grew vegetables and father took carpentry lessons at home.

Mother had never cooked before the war so went to work for the NAAFI (The Navy Army and Air Force Institute) in the railway station. This had been set up to provide food for service men. She then decided that it was important to get some respite from the bombing and bought an ancient caravan which was taken to a field near Belaugh. I have an early memory of mother and Rachel Walker trying to plug the leaks round the windows. Our nanny had gone to be a land girl, so Rachel came to us as her 'war work' to help mother look after us. Rachel became an invaluable friend, help and companion. As a doctor's house there always had to be someone at home to answer the phone. Father would leave a list of the patients he was planning to visit, so could be located if an urgent call came in.

As a doctor, Father had a little more petrol than most and this enabled us to drive the 8 miles out to Belaugh at weekends. I have written more about that wonderful campsite in my own story.



Marion, Peter and Jill go cycling with us,  
August 1941

Here is a photograph from one of their wartime Christmas cards. Father loved bicycling around Norfolk with the family visiting village churches. He would discuss the intricacies of church roofs with Jill and I, being five years younger, would just want to get on with the bicycling.

We also had an annual visit to a farm where they had an enormous mulberry tree. It was quite a large size farm but still depended on horses to do much of the work.

After the war, the new National Health Service was introduced. Father had always been accustomed to giving his patients as much time as

he thought that they needed and felt that he could not join a system which limited each appointment to a few minutes. So he set up in private practice and mother was much relieved when a private patient arrived on the first day of the NHS. Father had a very faithful following far into the countryside. He also did other work such as medicals for people seeking to emigrate and medicals for people wanting to join companies such as the gas board and the AA. When we were travelling we were often helped by an 'AA man who knew Father'.

He got much satisfaction with his work as the doctor at Norwich Prison. One of his roles as prison doctor was to assess the state of newly arrived prisoners. As a result he was frequently requested to give evidence as to their mental health in court. He established a good reputation with the judges for his sound judgement and this led eventually to him being awarded an OBE on his retirement. His enthusiasm for his work sometimes overflowed to discussion at the dinner table. He would tell us gruesome tales about the exploits of the latest arrival. Mother would try to dissuade him without success. I also remember comments such as 'that's a young rabbit/chicken, it's epiphyses aren't joined'. Father's carving was described as dissection.

Father liked to try new ideas. This could come in many forms. If he received a sample from a drug company and we needed treatment, he would try it on us first. He was a great believer in manipulation to relieve stress, including head aches. He shared this principle with his other medical brother John. On one occasion, I found

myself between the two of them in Aunt Marjorie's house at Willand. The supper things were put away and they instructed me to sit on the kitchen table. "If I twist your head to the left, how far can you see?" said Father. "Second cupboard on the left". I said. More neck twisting. "Which one now?" said Father. "Fourth on the left" I replied.

His manipulations did relieve headaches but it was rather painful and we would put off telling him we had a headache and then ask Mother for an aspirin first.

Throughout their married life Mother was the rock who supported Father through his bouts of depression and his enthusiasms and love of life.

With Father's sensitivity came his wonderful ability as a family doctor. One story tells it all. After he had retired another doctor came to him to explain that he had a patient who was dying but was also inconsolable. She had lived with her sister who had tried every way to help her face her future without success. After he had seen this lady, her sister related that she was entirely at peace with the world until her death. As a result Father was given a wonderful clock in a glass case which sat on the mantelpiece at home.

He told another story about visiting a patient who thanked him for the tonic he'd given her; 'I don't remember a tonic' he said; 'You told me who to go to'. He had given her advice on what to do with a house which she had been left in a friend's will, but which was worrying her.

We never understood how Father learnt so much from his patients as he always seemed to do all the talking. His consultations usually lasted much longer than planned. He could extract a life history very quickly.

## **We move House**

In about 1947 the family moved to 50 Cotman Road about 2 miles away. This was a large Edwardian house at the top of a hill overlooking the River Yare valley. It had a fine garden with room for mother to grow vegetables and plenty of space for us all. However the view was limited and we could still hear the railway terminus and shunting yard. So the noise never stopped. Norwich City Football Club was also in the valley and at weekends one could tell the score by the volume of sound floating up from down below.

The house had been built for a world with servants, 50 years earlier. It had fine reception rooms at the front and the servants quarters were at the back looking out on to a dark yard which had been dug out of the hill. So cooking took place at the back and food was wheeled through to the dining room on a trolley.

We also had a live in servant, the reason being that Father had his consulting room at the house; we always needed to have someone available to answer the phone, no mobiles or answering machines in those days. For a while we had a man servant who turned out to be "not quite proper". Eventually we had Ethel for several years, a keen member of the Salvation Army. She was not the brightest and her cooking was basic. However she was very willing and would never answer the door without taking her white apron off and putting on her "pinny" first.

To get from the kitchen to the front of house one had to pass the bottom of the servant's spiral staircase at the back. Before the arrival of terylene, small boat sails were of cotton and had to be dried before packing away. So Father erected a pulley system to hoist them up the middle of the spiral, right in the way of trolleys passing at the bottom.

Father had a variety of cars and a blind faith in the local garage. We suspected that they ripped him off. On one, a Ford Zodiac "must be good, it's the top of the Ford range" he said. The bottom half was green and top half cream. He fitted an adjustable blind which came up over the radiator to help it warm up quickly first thing in the morning. The only problem was that Father sometimes forgot that it was there and so the engine boiled. Mother had a smaller car which was hardly ever serviced. On one occasion a tyre burst having worn right through the tread and the canvas. There were no MOT rules then. Another feature we all forget today was that there was no antifreeze liquid for radiators. So one had to hang a heater, often a paraffin lamp under the bonnet at night.

Father was a keen photographer and very pedantic about it. We would sit patiently whilst he measured the light with his meter. Then the sun would go in and he would have to start again.

Mother did all the photo development in the bathroom cum dark room at the back of the house. Every Christmas they produced their own design of card with a photo from the year before. Here is a selection of them. It was a novel idea involving a lot of work which helped to keep the family in touch. I have continued this theme with the much easier resources available today.





*Jill on her seventh birthday  
with Aunt Margie  
in July 1932*



*Rose and Martin  
with their Father  
November 1942*



*On the Right Tack.  
Rushlight, July 1936.*



*"Rushlight" and "Max-in" August 1948  
our old and new Norfolk Punt*



*"Max-in"*



*19th October 1963. When Bill and Marjorie climbed to the top of the  
Spire of Norwich Cathedral.*



**NORFOLK PUNT CLUB**

*1974*

## Sailing

Before the war, their punt Rushlight had given them much good sailing on Barton Broad. This all came to an end with the war years. However as soon as peace returned they got back on the water, starting on Wroxham Broad. They did not



particularly like the gin and tonic crowd at Wroxham and longed for the tranquility and open space at Barton. Much discussion ensued with other members of the Norfolk Punt Club. Many wanted to amalgamate with the Norfolk Broads Yacht Club at Wroxham.

The Traceys won and they recommenced sailing from a battered old houseboat on Barton Broad. Later on, pontoons were added. As there were no production pontoons in those days, Father produced a design using 45 gallon drums under the deck. The only problem was that the pontoons were not very stable.

Father decided that he wanted a faster punt to compete with his main rival, Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess. So he had a new punt, Martin built at Martham near Potter Heigham. It had the traditional construction of a carvel bottom and clinker sides. I can remember one of the boatbuilders standing on the upturned hull and using an adze to plane it flat. The Sturgess punt, Swallow 2 had been built before the war to a very tight specification and was as light as possible. Father failed to follow this design, so Martin was much heavier. He also fitted a high cut jib to get a better view ahead, so losing half the drive in the sail. For the first year out Martin trailed the fleet.

His next attempt to build a faster boat was to commission Dick Wyche of Wyche and Coppock in Nottingham to produce a plywood boat. This was much cheaper to build than the traditional construction and also much lighter. It was a great success and presaged many other designs over the years.

Sambrooke Sturgess was a Norwich dentist with a very sharp brain who was also a leading light in formulating new international rules for racing. The rules had been different on the two sides of the Atlantic. This resulted in major changes and much argument which even involved the kings of Norway and Denmark. From 1948 he was on the committee of the International Yacht Racing Union and was chairman for much of the next 31 years. However he only owned one boat for racing and that was Swallow 2. So our Father was the main competitor where Sturgess could exercise his expertise.

Competition was intense and often ended up in protests. Unfortunately Sturgess lacked humour. So on one occasion at Wroxham, when the protest committee was scheduled to be from a minor and inexperienced club, Sturgess did not wait for the hearing and went home.

On another occasion they were approaching the first mark. "Basil, we leave this mark to starboard". "No Gerald, we leave it to port". They had changed the course soon before the start. They each went round in the opposite direction and Sturgess went home.

Someone wrote a 'Punt Club Song' for an annual dinner. A verse about Father went "He seizes every opportunity and takes it on the flood, and when he calls for 'Water' what he really wants is 'Blood'!" Says it all!

As well as sailing on Barton Broad we went to various regattas around the Broads. Few people had trailers and so boats were towed on the river from one venue to another, often with several boats tied up together. It takes a long time to get from Wroxham broad to Barton broad by river, especially if you don't start until the day's racing has finished!

As there were no electronic calculators, one of the difficulties of running racing with boats having different handicaps was to produce the calculations which worked out who would be the winner. So Father persuaded a mathematically minded couple to produce the calculations in elaborate A size tables, which he had printed for use by race officers.

## **Mother's Health**

Throughout their married life Mother was the rock who supported Father through his projects and his enthusiasms and also his bouts of depression. Mother was the rock on which Father was able to make the best of his fine talents. This included getting in the money. On one occasion bills needed to be sent out to his patients. Father tried to excuse himself for a supposed urgent visit to a patient. Mother explained that if they did not get the bills out there would be nothing to live on.

Mother loved sailing with Father in their punt but said that it would stop if crews ever started to use "those unnecessary trapezes". Little did she know that punts would eventually use two trapezes.

Before the war very few ladies wore trousers, even for sailing. Mother was short and did not have trousers and always wore a split skirt. We would go sailing in our 'old clothes'. Father's nylon shirts clung to him when wet. Specialist clothing wasn't made for many years. PVC came later. Children's life jackets consisted of two kapok cushions strapped on fore and aft. Once we could swim well we were allowed to do without them.

With time the Norfolk Punt Club base on Barton Broad included a collection of rafts with a race box, loos and an enclosure for selling tea. Mother's teas became an institution with wives competing to provide the best cakes. Mother organised the rota; with couples it was usually the wife on teas and husband running the starting line.

In 1955 Mother was diagnosed with Cancer of the Colon. She lived for 15 more years enduring many operations and putting up with a colostomy. Towards the end she said that these years had been the best of her life because she knew that time was limited and she was going to make the best of it.

She bought a beautiful motor boat, the Elizabeth. It had an open front and a cabin with big windows. Many bedraggled sailors who had fallen in found comfort and dry towels on the Elizabeth.

As her health declined, Mother remained active and cheerful. We always got a great welcome at Mount St. Helen.

They also had many good holidays together, frequently touring France with Uncle Christopher and Aunt Babe in their comfortable Rover. Other long time friends such as Mildred Faulkner and Rachel Walker were also involved.

## **Father's Dogs**

Border Terriers were always part of the family and accompanied Father on his rounds. The dog would sit with one foot on Father's shoulder and his head out of the window. On one occasion a humped back bridge near Costessy catapulted the animal on to the road. On another occasion Mother ran over one with her car and brought him in knocked out and motionless. We tried brandy until Father appeared and stopped us. Fortunately Border Terriers are incredibly resilient. If Father was passing a field which was being harvested, the dog would be allowed free to chase the rabbits and hares. There was also a greyhound track in Norwich and one could watch over the wall at the back of a pub. Father would hold the dog up so that he could see the racing. Lucky dog. But then Father always wanted everybody, man or dog to get the most out of life,

From Mount St. Helen Father would bicycle to Norwich prison each morning. His habit was to lean his bicycle by the prison gate and to admonish the dog to stay put. The dog knew that Father was normally inside for at least 30 minutes and this gave him the opportunity to visit his neighbours. However on one occasion Father

was in a hurry and came out after 20 minutes. The dog was not there. On getting home the officer at the prison gate telephoned Father to say that they had the dog inside. "Put him on the phone" said Father, so they held the phone to the dog's ear. "Pepper, you're a bad dog, come home". The dog put his tail between his legs and was put outside. On his way home the dog passed a barber which Father used. He scratched on the glass door. When the barber opened the door the dog could see that Father was not inside and continued home.

Later in life Father acquired a well trained Border Collie called Splinters from Jill and Tony when they were posted abroad and he had just lost the last of his border terriers.

### **Father's Christianity and Mother's agnosticism**

Our Father had grown up in a committed Church of England family. He kept his strong belief all his life and has passed this on to my sisters. He preferred the Cathedral to local places of worship and in later years was a Cathedral guide.

His thinking reflected the general attitude of most white anglo society in his time. On one occasion when I was looking for a new manager, he asked me whether he had been to Public School. He took me to the Norwich Medicochirurgical Dinner, where all the local medics assembled once a year. Walking home he said to me "Well Peter, tonight you have been with the intellectual elite of this city". I exploded.

His view regarding homosexuality was damning "No wonder they are called queer" he said.

Mother on the other hand had grown up in a family who were very different. Grandfather Scott tried the Unitarian church and sent Mother to a school for Quakers. Mother was not particularly intellectually inquisitive and her views were agnostic. She would accompany Father to church when appropriate but felt no need to go there.

### **Mount St Helen**



Whilst I was away in Australia, my parents decided that it was time to move to a smaller and more convenient house.

They found a superb site overlooking the city at the top of Gas Hill. Half belonged to the Gas company and the other half to the pub next door, but as medical officer to both of them he was able to buy both and put

them together. It was on a steep slope and consisted of two gardens with a hedge in between. So Father arranged a party on a

summer evening to burn down the hedge. Unfortunately he failed to tell the fire service and as dusk approached they were surrounded by fire engines and police.

A good family friend Tony Faulkner was the architect and the design was perfect for their needs. All necessary living is on one level including a consulting room for Father. There are two spare rooms above and a large basement below for everything from gardening to storage. Today the house would probably be designed differently, giving the kitchen part of the view. The view is wonderful, showing much of the city including the Cathedral, occasionally interrupted by the gas cylinder which rose and fell from the valley below.

A word about gas cylinders. Before natural gas was discovered below the ground, gas was made using a process which involved burning coal. Because use was not consistent, gas was stored in a huge cylinder which rose and fell as it emptied. Father said that on Christmas morning you could watch it slowly drop as the turkeys were cooked.

The fact that Mount St. Helen was not at the smart end of town suited them just fine and in later years Father was able to walk down to Norwich Cathedral where he also assisted as a guide.

## **Rachel**

When Mother was near the end of her life she told Father that he needed a wife and that their long time friend Rachel Walker would be ideal. It took him seven years to follow her good advice. Rachel was a Methodist minister who had never married. Although they knew each other well, marrying Father must have been a huge challenge. For Father she was his personal chaplain. They had 15 years together. That included a memorable trip to Africa where they each had family.

Father took Rachel sailing and treated her as if she was an experienced crew. It is said that, when roll tacking, he would put his arm out across her to prevent her going to the other side too quickly. On one occasion he rather overdid it and they both went in to the water to windward.

Rachel predeceased him and in his later years he had a number of housekeepers. One of them even accompanied him on a visit to relatives in Africa.

When Father died at the age of 93, a memorial service was held in Norwich Cathedral. It was a great celebration and filled the transept. I got 5 people to speak for no more than 5 minutes each about Father. the judge said "I cannot possibly speak for only 5 minutes about your Father". "Well you will have to try" I replied. Another friend telephoned to ask whether it was appropriate to have singing to guitars in the Cathedral. "Would Father have approved?" I asked. "Yes" he answered.

It was a great celebration of a good life.