

Gordon Watts

Born 31.7.1918. Died 5.3.1974.

Biographical life story by his four children.

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk

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This life story was extracted in 2020, with permission, from The Watts Family Chronicle, a family history compiled by Gordon Watts's four children: Anthony, Paul, Veronica Mary and Clare. It is one of seven overlapping life stories extracted from the same source: the others are of Veronica Watts (their mother), Patrick Watts (their stepfather), Anthony (Tony) Watts, Paul Watts, Veronica Mary Price (née Watts) and Clare Lockwood (née Watts).

1. Preface

We have written the family history from which this biography is drawn for our children and grandchildren, so that they can know more about their forebears, and the family of which they are a part. We have written it together, drawing upon our different memories and the various photographs and mementoes which we each possess. Veronica Mary carried out most of the research, using Ancestry and other sources; Anthony has co-ordinated the writing and selection of photographs. But we have all contributed, and have shared and approved the drafts.

The text is inevitably somewhat uneven. On our ancestors our information is often scanty, and confined to official records. We have included all of this, so that the book can be used as a source of reference. We have also leavened it where we can with some photographs and contextual detail. On more recent times we have more documents, a lot more photographs, and our own memories (increasingly erratic as they are). We regret, however, the many documents that have been destroyed, and the lost opportunities to collect family stories from our parents and grandparents. This is why we have decided to pull together what we know now, while we still can!

For the purposes of the Lives Retold website, we have split the collective family narrative into seven separate biographies. Some parts only appear in one of the biographies, but others appear in two or more, in order to make each biography as self-sufficient as possible.

The four families from which we were derived were named Watts, Goodliffe, Wells and Griffiths. We have traced back each of them in turn, drawing from parish records, census data, family mementoes, and other sources.

From what we have learned about these families, three general conclusions can be drawn.

First, each of the four families was remarkably stable geographically, all in the south of England and in the midlands. Despite some mischievous comments from one of us (Veronica Mary) that we should recognise the Welsh roots of the Griffiths family by supporting Wales in rugby matches against England, we have been unable to find any evidence of such roots (much to the relief of her brothers). Indeed, we have not found any member of the family who was born or died outside England – or even, indeed, in the north of England.

Second, extraordinarily, the roots of the four families are in the parts of the country where each of us now lives. The Watts family came predominantly from Somerset, where Veronica Mary now lives (in Frome); the Goodliffe family from Cambridgeshire, where Anthony now lives (in Cambridge); the Wells family from Middlesex and Kent, where Clare now lives (in Chiddingstone, Kent); and the Griffiths family from Warwickshire, where Paul now lives (in Dunchurch). This is totally accidental: our childhood was in many other locations, and each of us has moved to where we now are for a variety of reasons, that have nothing to do with

our family roots – of which we were in any case largely unaware until recently. But it represents, in our view, a very happy set of coincidences.

Third, we come from good solid working-class stock – as do most English families, of course. Any hopes that we might find traces of nobility or wealth have been unfulfilled. We owe a great deal to our parents and grandparents for providing us with opportunities that would have been inconceivable to their forebears.

This particular biography focuses on Gordon, our father, and therefore on the Watts and Goodliffe families. The Wells and Griffiths families are described in the parallel biography of our mother, Veronica.

Our family has had some difficult times, as most if not all families have, and we have tried to be open about this, disinterring some skeletons and seeking to lay them gently to rest. But there has been much happiness too. We all feel very fortunate to be part of such a close and loving family.

2. Paternal Ancestors: the Watts Family

The Watts family lived for several generations in Martock, a large village situated on the edge of the Somerset Levels, 7 miles north-west of Yeovil in the South Somerset district. Recorded in the Domesday Book (1086) as Mertoeh, it was probably in origin a royal Saxon estate. From the 13th century it had its own market and fair; with the expansion of river traffic, it became a significant trading centre. The 'hundred' of Martock comprised ten 'tithings', the largest of which was also (somewhat confusingly) called Martock; others included Hurst and Bower Hinton. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it began to enjoy a period of considerable prosperity, due to fertile local soils and good farming practices. By the 18th and early 19th centuries it was the clothing and glove-making trades that created wealth for the village, with the ready supply of sheep to supply wool and skins. Beans were a major agricultural product: it was said in the 18th century that 'take a Martock man by the collar and shake him, and you will hear the beans rattle in his belly'. Manufacturing developed with the opening of the Parrett iron works, and the arrival of the railway in 1848 allowed rapid expansion in trade.

In more recent times Martock has grown in terms of population (now just under 5,000) and employment opportunities, whilst retaining an intimate village atmosphere. Many of its attractive buildings are constructed in stone from the nearby Ham Hill. Arthur Mee (in his 1941 book on Somerset in 'The King's England series) refers to 'what many people here call the grandest roof in Somerset (perhaps forgetting Shepton Mallet)' as being on 'the beautiful church [All Saints] of this charming little town'; he also refers to the buttery windows in the 'little old manor' opposite as 'an exquisite corner of mediaeval England'. Similarly, Edward Hutton in *Highways and Byways in Somerset* (1912) says that Martock 'is in every way a delightful spot', with 'a great fine church with a very glorious nave, perhaps the finest of any parish church in Somerset'.

East Street, where the Watts family lived, still has a fair number of 18th-century buildings, several of which were small glove factories (four of these continued until the 1950s). The street was on the road from Bristol to London, and included London Square, a coaching staging-post. Oxen were taken to the market at Smithfields in London, a journey that took 4-5 days.

John Watts, the earliest member of the Watts family of which we have a definite record, was born in 1771, married Tamason Bussell (1771-1850) in Martock on 18 August 1793, and died in Martock in 1840 (aged 69); he was a cooper (a maker or repairer of casks and barrels). Tamason (sometimes spelled Tamson) was a seamstress who lived at The Lodge in East Street (different from the current building of that name, which was built later on a different site). The Bussell family was well-established in Martock, with records going back several generations, suggesting that John Watts may have moved to Martock to marry her. The Register of Duties paid for apprentices' indentures records that on 17 March 1798 John Watts sr. and Thomazine (sic) Watts paid for Hannah Dight to be trained as a mantua maker (a mantua is a large dress made from expensive silks). By the 1841 Census, Tamason owned The Lodge: it may have been split into two, thereby having two numbers in the Census return.

There are earlier records of people with similar names to Watts being married in Martock in the 16th and early 17th centuries: John Watte (16 October 1564), Marye Watte (18 May 1590), John Watte (23 November 1590), Edith Wattes (9 January 1598), Elnor Wates (26 June? 1601). But there is then a large gap before the reference to John Watts in 1793, suggesting that they may not have been members of our family.

John and Tamason Watts had three sons: John (1794-1829), Joseph (1801-53) and William (born 1803). The middle son, Joseph Watts, was listed in the 1841 Census as a glazier, living at 37 East Street, Martock; his unmarried younger brother William, a cooper like their father, was next door at No.38. Joseph was married to Amelia Watts (a dressmaker) (née unknown) who was 5 years younger than him. All three – Joseph, Amelia and William – were also listed in the 1851 Census. Following Joseph's death in Martock on 3 October 1853 (aged 52), Amelia re-married, being wed to George King at Martock on 4 December 1858; William, too, finally married, being wed to Elizabeth Isaac on 29 December 1853.

By the 1861 Census there was no Watts listed in East Street, but William (now aged 68) was living in the National School in Church Street where his wife Elizabeth (aged 59) was the Schoolmistress; also living with them was George Hayes (the Schoolmaster) plus Elizabeth's nieces, Elizabeth Isaac (a glove maker, aged 19) and Jane Isaac (a servant, aged 18). The National School had been founded in 1846 by public subscription. By 1850 it was being run as both a commercial and a national school, with 66 boys and 51 girls. The first national schools were founded in 19th-century England and Wales by the National Society for Promoting Religious Education. They provided elementary education, in accordance with the teaching of the Church of England, to the children of the poor, and comprised the first near-universal system of elementary education in England and Wales. They were eventually absorbed into the state system, either as fully state-run schools or as faith schools funded by the state. By the 1871 Census William and Elizabeth were living in the Independent Chapel in Bower Hinton: a total of 11 families were listed as living in this Chapel.

Philip Isaac Wattson Watts, our grandfather's grandfather (i.e. our great-great-grandfather) was Joseph Watts's son. Born in Martock on 3 February 1833, Philip was baptised in January 1836. By the time of the 1851 Census he was staying with the Lucas family in Basingstoke: he was their nephew. His occupations were painter and glazier. On 29 July 1854, he married Julia Tame at Feltham in Middlesex. Whether it was search for work, or the loss of his father, or his relationship with Julia, that caused Philip to move away from Martock, we do not know. But the growth of the railways also had a large impact on mobility rates around this time.

Julia Watts (née Tame) had been born in Southwark, then in Surrey, in 1827 (though Ancestry says that she was born in Middlesex around 1826). Her father was William Whayut Tame (no dates available), who was a carpenter. In the 1861 Census, Julia and Philip were living with their three children – Philip William (1855-1906), Sarah Ann Leticia (1857-?) and Beatrice (1858-1935) – in Feltham, Middlesex. Florence M. Watts (1861-?), and Edward John Watts (1866-1939) were born later, making five children in total.

Philip Isaac Wattson Watts died in 1865, aged only 32. In the 1871 Census, Julia was head of the household and working as a laundress; all five children were living with her. In the 1881 Census, Julia was still working as a laundress and living at 18 High Street, Feltham, Middlesex, with two of the children: Sarah, an unmarried daughter of 24 who was working as a lady's maid; and Edward, who was a grocer. There were also two boarders living in the house: William Parkes (aged 39), a joiner; and Frederick Fuller, a painter. In the 1901 Census, Julia was living at 135 Fern Grove, Feltham, Middlesex; Sarah (now aged 44) was still living at home, and working as a housemaid. Julia died in Croydon, Surrey, in March 1905, aged 77/78.



Philip William Watts and Annie Watts (née Patte)

Philip William Watts, the eldest son of Philip Isaac Wattson Watts, was our great-grandfather. He was born in Feltham, Middlesex, in 1855. In the 1871 Census, aged 15, he was working as a helper to landowner Richard Taylor and classed as a servant; Richard Taylor was a widower who employed six servants. Philip William Watts married Annie Patte in Instow, Devon, on 2 October 1876 (Ancestry gives the place of wedding as Newton Regis, Warwickshire, and the date as 8 January 1877). His occupation was given as clerk; hers as lady's maid. In the 1881 Census, Philip (aged 25) and Annie were living at 4 Deakins Cottages, Launceston, Devon, and at that time had three children: Robert (aged 3), Philip (aged 2) and Nora (aged 1). Robert died later that year and was buried at Launceston cemetery in Devon.

In the 1891 Census (aged 36), Philip William Watts was living as a lodger with John and Caroline Perrett in Christchurch, Hampshire, working as a railway porter while his wife continued to live in Launceston: a further reminder of the impact of railways on mobility at the time. They eventually had seven children: Robert J.P. Watts (1877-81), Philip E. Watts (1879-?), Nora A.C. Watts (1880-?), Hubert Watts (1883-?), Ethel M. Watts (1886-?), Norman Gordon Watson Watts (1889-1970), and Betty Eleanora Watts (1895-?). Ancestry adds an 8th – John V. Watts (1883-?):

he may have been a twin brother of Hubert but have died at birth, though this is pure speculation. In the 1901 Census (aged 45), Philip William Watts was living in St James, Pokesdown, Hampshire, working as a railway clerk. Four of the children were still at home: Hubert (aged 18, working), Ethel (aged 15), Norman (aged 11) and Betty (aged 6). Philip William Watts died on 2 October 1906, aged 51. At his death he was living at 68 Wolverton Road, Boscombe, Hampshire. According to the National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) 1861-1941, he left Annie £185.8s.7d.

Annie Watts (née Patte), our great-grandmother, was christened as Ann Patt on 27 June 1852 at the Langridgeford Chapel, Devon (Bible Christian denomination). She was the daughter of John and Betsey Patt of Yarnscombe, Devon. John, who is recorded on the baptism record as a labourer, had married Elizabeth Beer on 2 April 1837 in Yarnscombe, Devon. In the 1841 Census, they were recorded in Yarnscombe with two children: George (aged 2) and Thomas (aged 0). In the 1851 Census, they were recorded in Yarnscombe with four children: Thomas (aged 10), John (aged 8), Elizabeth (aged 5) and James (aged 2). George (now aged 12) is included in the Census on the farm listed above them as being owned by the Fisher family. John Patt died in the following year, aged 9, and is recorded as being buried in Yarnscombe on 7 November 1852. In the 1861 Census, Betsey (aged 48) is recorded as a house servant; Thomas (aged 20) as a carter (who carried or conveyed goods in a cart) working for John Andrew (a farmer of 420 acres in Atherington); George (aged 22) (another carter), John (aged 18) (a ploughboy) and Elizabeth (aged 15) (a house servant) all as working for the Cowman family in Lower Tockington; and Ann (aged 8) as boarding with the Tucker family in Lindridgeford. In the 1871 Census Ann (aged 18) was recorded as being a servant to Lucy Munroe in Bishops Tawton. It is unclear when and how 'Patt' became 'Patte', but it is relevant to note that most people at the time were not able to read and write: names were given verbally to the enumerator/vicar who would write down what he heard, which would be in the local dialect.



Norman Watts around 1934-35

Norman Gordon Watson Watts, our grandfather, was born in St Stephen-in-Brannel, Cornwall, on 21 April 1889. St Stephen-in-Brannel is a civil parish and village in

central Cornwall; it is four miles west of St Austell, on the southern edge of Cornwall's china clay district. So presumably Norman's parents lived there for a short while between their time at Launceston (1881 Census) and Christchurch (1891 Census). As noted above, Norman was the second youngest child in a large family.

Norman married Nellie Rose Goodliffe on 13 March 1911 in St Clement's Church, Bournemouth. They lived at 67 Lawrence Road, Southsea, Hampshire, at least in 1933-35, and probably earlier too. They then moved to 14 Bay Road, Alverstoke, Gosport, Hampshire, definitely by January 1937 (a visit made by our mother Veronica, Veronica Mary, Michael and Anthony in 1992 indicated that this house had been renumbered 22). They probably stayed there until the early 1950s when they moved to Alfortville, 8 Oval Gardens, Gosport, Hampshire. They subsequently moved in 1957 to 86 Kiln Road, Fareham, Hampshire, and later down the road to 103 Kiln Road.

Norman worked for much of his career in the Aircraft Torpedo Development Unit. This unit was established by the Air Ministry at Gosport in 1921 to undertake the development of aerial torpedoes and mines, and the means of carrying them and of delivering them from aircraft. It worked exclusively for the Air Ministry until 1942, when control passed to the Ministry of Aircraft Production; it thereafter carried out work both for the Royal Air Force and the Royal Naval Air Service. The unit was passed to the control of the Ministry of Supply in 1946, to the Ministry of Aviation in 1959, to the Ministry of Technology in 1967 and to the Ministry of Aviation Supply in 1970.

In recognition of his work, Norman was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1946: Anthony has the medal and the notification, plus a note from King George VI regretting that he is unable to give the award personally. The citation in the London Gazette (9 January 1946) listed him as: Assistant I[inspector], Aircraft Torpedo Development Unit, Ministry of Aircraft Production.



Norman and Nellie Watts with their grandchildren Patrick and Piers in 1970

Norman was a great craftsman, and constructed a beautiful grandfather clock, largely out of torpedo pieces taken from his work: the clock is currently in Anthony's possession. Anthony remembers him with great love and affection:

Grandpa was a true gentleman, in all the best senses of the word. He was a great role model for me: gentle, patient and kind. He spoke with a lovely slight west-country burr. He always wore a hat when out in public, and raised it whenever he met someone he knew. He smoked a pipe, which I found reassuring. I spent many happy hours talking with him while he worked in his shed. I remember him making some cricket dice for me. He adored Nanna (Nellie), who was very tiny.

Norman died in Fareham, Hampshire, on 14 November 1970, aged 81. Nellie (our grandmother) later told Jane and Paul that he dozed off as usual after lunch; she tried to wake him to cut and butter the bread for their afternoon sandwiches (he always buttered the bread before he sliced it) but was unable to do so, so he must just have slipped away.

3. Maternal Ancestors: the Goodliffe Family

The maiden name of our paternal grandmother was Goodliffe. We have tracked back the Goodliffe branch of the family to George Goodliff, whose wife was named Mary: both had been born in 1765. Their son William Goodliff was born in 1791 and married Ann (1772-1855).

We do not know where these Goodliffs lived, but their immediate successors lived for several generations at Alconbury and Alconbury Weston in Huntingdonshire (now part of Cambridgeshire). These two villages are a mile apart, about 5 miles north-west of Huntingdon, with populations in 2011 of 1,670 and 800 respectively. They seem likely to have been Roman settlements; both are mentioned in the Domesday Book. They are just off the Great North Road, which in the era of stagecoaches became a major national thoroughfare; its upgrading and rerouting in the 1960s reduced the significance of the villages, which are now largely dormitory settlements. The villages were part of Huntingdonshire until 1965; since 1974 they have been part of Cambridgeshire. Alconbury Weston has a brook which is liable to flooding, that can cut off car access to the village. It currently has a pub, and several listed 17th-century timber-framed buildings. Alconbury, which is larger, has several pubs, a cricket club, football teams, and a post office, and houses the local MP (who for many years was John Major, who became Prime Minister). The villages are more widely known because of RAF Alconbury, an RAF station a couple of miles away, which was opened in 1938 (initially called RAF Abbots Ripton) and used as a US Air Force base from 1942; it is to be closed by 2020 and replaced by a major new location for manufacturing, engineering and development, as well as housing.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul, Alconbury-cum-Weston (which serves both Alconbury and Alconbury Weston) is a sizeable church with a peaceful churchyard set with large trees. It dates back to the 12th century, though much of the current building was built in the 13th century. Nikolaus Pevsner in *The Buildings of England: Bedfordshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough* calls it 'an Early English church of high quality, certainly in two of its elements, the steeple and the chancel'. Simon Jenkins includes it in his *England's Thousand Best Parish Churches* and refers to the chancel as 'an immaculate composition of Early Gothic'.

A visit to the Huntingdonshire Archives in Huntingdon revealed a substantial number of references to the Goodliffe family (also variously spelt Goodlif or Goodliff) in the parish records for the Church of St Peter and St Paul, Alconbury-cum-Weston, between 1802 and 1889: 13 baptisms, 2 banns (for marriages which did not take place in this church), 7 marriages, and 11 burials (though there are no gravestones for any of these burials). So clearly the family was strongly represented in these villages for most of the 19th century, though not earlier or later. Most of the references to their occupations are to 'labourer', with two references to 'farmer'.

Our grandmother's paternal grandfather was a further William Goodliffe, who was born at Alconbury Weston in 1816 and was baptised on 21 January 1816. He married Ann Goodliffe (née Clark) (1818-97) at the Church of St Peter and St Paul on 25 December 1839. Ann's parents were Thomas Clark (born 1790) and Susannah Ashley (also born 1790). William and Ann had six children: Sarah (born

1842), Mary Ann (born 1844), Ann (born 1849), William Frederick (born 1851), Elizabeth (born 1857) and John (born 1860). William died in Alconbury in October 1889, aged 74. After William's death, his widow Ann moved to Yelden, Bedfordshire, where she died in 1897.

The Census data add some flesh to these bones. In the 1841 Census, William's name was written as Wilm Goodliff; he was an agricultural labourer living with his mother Ann (aged 70) and other labourers in a house in Bridge Street, Alconbury. Ann was still living with them in the 1851 Census, but by this time William is listed as having married Ann Clark and as living with her and three daughters: Sarah (aged 8), Mary (aged 6) and Ann (aged 3). They also had a nephew, James Goodliff, staying with them. They seem to be listed as living in 55 Maypole Square, Alconbury, though this is not totally clear. In the 1861 Census, they were still living in Maypole Square but by now also had William Frederick (aged 9), Elizabeth (aged 3) and John. A grandson, Thomas, was 13 months old (we do not know whose child he was). In the 1871 Census, they were at 8 High Street, Alconbury Weston; William Frederick, Elizabeth and John were still at home. In the 1881 Census, they were at 47 Church End, Alconbury, and living with Elizabeth, now married to George Peacock, and granddaughter Ellen (aged 1). In the 1891 Census, Ann was a pauper (William having died in 1889) and living at 6 Bell Lane, Odfellows Yard, Alconbury, with James Horner (aged 55) and Thomas Wright (aged 34), both agricultural labourers; Thomas may have been related to David Horner who had married Mary Ann in 1880.



William Frederick and Sarah Goodliffe (our great-grandparents) with two of their daughters: probably Florence and our grandmother Nellie

Our great-grandparents were William Frederick Goodliffe, who was born in Alconbury Weston on 29 November 1851, and died in New Forest, Hampshire, on

28 March 1943, aged 91; and Sarah Goodliffe (née Russell), who was born in Bury St Edmunds, Cambridgeshire, on 3 February 1857, and died in Christchurch, Hampshire, on 24 December 1914, aged 57.

Our grandmother, Nellie Rose Watts (née Goodliffe), was born in Newmarket, Cambridgeshire, on 17 August 1884. She had four siblings: Russell William Goodliffe (1881-?), Florence May Goodliffe (1883-1975), Enia Elizabeth Goodliffe (1885-?) and George Frederick Goodliffe (1892-?).



Nellie Goodliffe (our grandmother)

Paul and Jane took Nellie back to Newmarket a few years before she died. She showed them her childhood home, which was a flat above a shop (chemist or grocer) which her father managed. The building was still there, on the corner of two streets and opposite a track up to the Common, where the family used to go for picnics in the summer.

Jane remembers Nellie saying that her mother Sarah died after soldiers were billeted on them early in the First World War. They were so covered in lice that Sarah had to boil a copper in the yard and get them clean there, before they were allowed in the house. As a result of doing this in inclement weather she became ill and died from pneumonia. Jane and Paul think that Sarah is the subject of a large framed picture which is in their guest room.

The mementoes left by Nellie after her death included a box of postcards, now in Paul's possession. Several unsent ones are of East Bergholt (Suffolk) and Uffculme (Devon) – perhaps where she went on holidays. Some posted cards during 1907-08 are addressed to Nellie at Moss Villa, Gloucester Road, Boscombe, Dorset, where

presumably she lived around this time (aged 23); others in 1908-09 are addressed to her c/o Dunsford Ltd. (or in 1909, Mansell & Knight), Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Hampshire; and then (1909-10) to her at Earlesbeach, 187 Ashley Road, Bournemouth, Hampshire (1909-10), c/o Mansell & Co., Commercial Road, Parkstone, Dorset (1910), Sunnyside, Madison Avenue, Bournemouth, Hampshire (1910) and Lyndon, Sandbanks Road, Parkstone, Dorset (1910). Several are from Alice (a close friend?), a few from Dai (another friend?), a couple from her sister Enia, and one intriguingly 'from Hubert to sister Nellie' (neither of her brothers was named Hubert). There is one in August 1909 from Norman ('with love'); he is mentioned in another from Dai ('I will ask you please to put off [Norman and yourself] coming to tea next Sunday'). Following her wedding to Norman in March 1911, the final ones (in 1911) are addressed to 'Mrs Watts' at the Sunnyside address in Bournemouth.

Nellie's marriage to Norman was a long and happy one. Details of where they lived have been given in Chapter 2. The photo below shows her at 8 Oval Gardens, Gosport, with the Blondel family, a French family with which we have maintained close links since the 1930s (see Chapter 4).



Nellie remained in close contact with her sister Enia, who lived in Southsea. She and Norman would travel regularly on the ferry from Gosport to Portsmouth to meet Enia for lunch at Kimbell's. Anthony remembers Enia regularly reminding him whenever he attended these lunches of the Winchester College motto: 'Manners makyth man'!

After Gordon's death in 1974, Nellie decided to move from the house at 103 Kiln Road, Fareham, where she and Norman had finally lived, providing a haven for Gordon during difficult times (see Chapter 7). She lived for a short period with Enia, now at 1 Chapel Hill, Uffculme, Devon. Then Paul and Jane hired a van to

move her to 36 Gains Road, Southsea, Hampshire. She did not settle there, so Anthony and Gilly found a place for her in an Abbeyfield home (2 Rustat Road) in Cambridge; Paul and Jane again moved her possessions. It soon became clear, however, that she was missing familiar surroundings, so she moved back to Southsea, to a pleasant flat at 70 Chelsea Road where she lived reasonably contentedly from 1975 to 1978. She finally moved to the House of Comfort, 17 Victoria Grove, Southsea, where she died on 15 November 1978, aged 94.

Nellie disposed of a lot of her and Norman's possessions when she had to downsize in these various moves after his death. Surviving mementoes include, in addition to the grandfather clock constructed by Norman (see Chapter 2) and the postcards noted above, a child's armchair which is in Anthony's possession.

4. School and Early Career

Gordon Russell Watts, our father, was born in Portsmouth on 31 July 1918.



Gordon as a young boy

Gordon's school was given on his Record of Service (Officers) as Portsmouth Southern Grammar School. Details of the school provided by the Old Secundrians Association are included in the National Archive:

The school was founded in 1888 as The Higher Grade School in premises over Pink's Shop in Commercial Road, Portsmouth. It moved to Victoria Road North in 1892 and remained there until it was bombed in 1941. In 1904 the school was renamed Portsmouth Council Secondary School. In 1921 it was renamed Portsmouth Southern Secondary School for Boys. During the Second World War, the school was evacuated to Brockenhurst in the New Forest. In 1946 it became the Portsmouth Southern Grammar School for Boys. A new school opened at Baffins in 1956 and in 1975 the school became the Southern Secondary School for Boys.

Peter Higgins of the Old Secundrians Association has provided the following information:

Your dad would have attended what was then known as the Portsmouth Southern Secondary School for Boys (it had been renamed as such on 21st September 1921). Interestingly, although the school had been renamed, the old school badge with the designation Portsmouth Secondary School continued until 1946. When your dad attended, the school was situated in Victoria Road North in Southsea – there is an image of what had previously been known as the Fawcett Road Building on our website (see the School and then the Buildings pages).

Your dad probably joined in 1930. At that time fees were charged for attendance at a cost of £1 a term plus 2/6d for stationery; this led to protests that a 'class school' was being established although fee remissions were

available for up to 25% of the available places. After the age of 14 a maintenance allowance of £5 per annum was payable. In 1932 fees rose to £9/9/- per annum albeit pledges were made that no boy who deserved a secondary education would be denied it because of his parents' circumstances. So, your grandparents will have been acquainted with all of that.

There was an entrance examination to gain entry to the school – and it wasn't easy. If you look at our website www.southerngrammar.com in the School section you will find examples of the exam papers that were set at that time. Your dad will have been pretty bright to have got through.



Gordon as a schoolboy in his cricket kit

The *Secundrian* (December 1949) in a section called 'The Chronicle' lists a visit to the school by 'G.R. Watts (1930-34)': these dates indicate that he left at the age of 14, which at the time was the minimum school-leaving age. Anthony has a copy of his Oxford School Certificate, which indicates that 'having been examined in English Subjects (Group I), Languages (Group II), Science and Mathematics (Group III)', he was awarded his School Certificate in 1934, with credits in English, French (Written and Oral), Mathematics and Art. His degree of proficiency in reading, speaking and writing French was later given in his service record as 'Fair'.

While at school Gordon established a pen-friend relationship with a boy in France called Paul Blondel, which developed into a lifetime friendship. Jane recalls Paul Blondel saying that he was with Gordon in Southsea when Gordon first met

Veronica, probably in 1935. Apparently Gordon, though aged only 16, said: 'That's the girl I'm going to marry.'

After leaving school Gordon seems to have worked as a clerk in a public utility company. But on 25 January 1937 he enlisted in the Territorial Army (aged 18; height 5'6½"; weight 9 stone 10 lbs.; blue eyes; fair hair). This was part-time service which involved attending a number of 'drills' per year and a summer camp. He was appointed a Gunner in the Royal Regiment of Artillery (service number 862969) and was 'embodied' in August-September 1939: this refers to the date when his Territorial Army brigade was called to active service for the duration of the war, and meant full-time service from that time.



Veronica and Gordon's wedding, with Violet (Nanna Vi) to the left, Nellie (Nanna Watts) and Norman (Grandpa) to the right, and Veronica's friend Nesta Barton as the bridesmaid

Gordon married Veronica on 6 July 1940 in St Swithun's Church, Southsea. The dresses of the bride and bridesmaid (Nesta Barton) were made of parachute silk. Paul and Jane remember Gordon telling them that at the time of the wedding he was stationed on Hayling Island. The barracks were in the sand dunes which are now a golf course; there would have been gun emplacements, ready for the anticipated German invasion. He walked to Langstone Harbour, took the ferry, and then walked a couple of miles to the church, taking him over an hour in total.

5. Second World War

The Royal Regiment of Artillery is generally known as the Royal Artillery and nicknamed the Gunners. The roles of the Royal Artillery included: use of indirect fire to destroy, restrict and scatter enemy forces, as well as enemy artillery, before they can engage; use of direct fire during battle to support attacking forces; and anti-aircraft defence.

Gordon was promoted to Lance Bombardier on 15 April 1940; and to Lance Sergeant on 28 October 1940. Then in 1941 he was made an officer (officer number 176977). He received a Regular Army Emergency Commission as a Second Lieutenant (War Substantive Lieutenant) on 15 March 1941; was promoted to War Substantive Lieutenant on 15 September 1942; was made a Temporary Captain on 20 August 1944; and was then made a Temporary Major as a Short Service Commission on 17 August 1946 (his rank remained Lieutenant and War Substantive Captain). In the London Gazette (25 October 1946), he was appointed to a Regular Army Short Service Commission. He was made a full Captain as a Regular Army Short Service Officer on 1 November 1947 (though continuing as a Temporary Major), and a full Major as an Extended Service Officer on 15 March 1954.

Gordon's first posting was to 57th (Wessex) AA Regiment, Royal Artillery. He subsequently transferred to 123rd HAA Regiment in March 1941; to 133rd OCTU (Officer Cadet Training Unit) (where he was an Instructor) in July 1941; and to 365th Battery, 115th HAA Regiment in November 1943. The 115th Regiment served with the 2nd Army in the UK from March 1943 to August 1944; and in North-West Europe with the 2nd Army from August 1944 to August 1945. The regiment boarded for the invasion on 9 August 1944 and landed at Juno beach on 13 August 1944, ten weeks after D-day.

Private photograph captions indicate that Gordon was in the following 2nd Army locations in France during the invasion: Elbeuf Bridge, Vimoutiers and Rouen, all in August 1944; and St Omer in September 1944. He then went into Belgium, to Antwerp, Steenhagen and Braendonck Camp, in September-October 1944. Braendonck Camp had been used by the Germans as a prison camp detaining Belgian political dissidents, captured Resistance members and Jews. Many were tortured or executed within the camp. Conditions in the camp were cruel and harsh: those who were moved to concentration camps were so weak that their chances of survival were severely hampered. The regime in the camp was at least as harsh as in a concentration camp. Fewer than 10% of the nearly 4,000 inmates survived the war. The camp was liberated on 3 September 1944; the internees were moved out on 10 October 1944.

Gordon's regiment then moved into the Netherlands, to Groesbeek (November 1944), Nijmegen (November 1944 to January 1945), Elst (March 1945) and Arnhem (April 1945) (the scene of a famous battle in September 1944). In April 1945 he was in Germany at Emmerich Bridge, before moving back to the Netherlands, to Den Helder Road (May 1945), the liberation of Castricum (15 May 1945), Vogelensang (June 1945), Warmond (June 1945), Den Haag (July 1945),

Haarlem (July 1945) and Heelstede (Vogelensang Camp) (July 1945); subsequently he was back in Germany, in Hamm and Siegen Damm, in August 1945.



Gordon (extreme left) at liberation of Castricum (Holland) in May 1945

Gordon's campaign stars and medals were: Defence Medal; War Medal 1939-45; 1939-45 Star; and France and Germany Star. In 1947 he was also awarded the Territorial Decoration (TD), a military medal awarded for long service in the Territorial Army.



Gordon with Anthony around 1945

6. In Germany After the War

From 1946 to 1950, Gordon served in the Control Commission in Lübbecke, Westphalia, Germany. Noel Annan in his book *Changing Enemies: the Defeat and Regeneration of Germany* notes that the role of the Control Commission was to take the place of the German government. It consisted of representatives of the four powers (UK, France, USA, USSR), and its headquarters were in Berlin. Annan (later Provost of King's College, Cambridge) was appointed to the British Control Commission's political division, which was based initially in Lübbecke and was then moved to Berlin when accommodation had been found there. The British Control Commission was staffed mainly by officers, including some waiting to be demobilised, though there were also some civil servants and other civilians. Gordon's posts included working within the Office of the Deputy Military Governor and within the Office of the Chief of Staff (Executive Staff). Among Veronica's mementoes was the text of a Parliamentary Question tabled for 20 June 1948 by Mr Stokes, Labour MP for Ipswich:

What are the duties and function of the Military Branch, CCG Lübbecke? How many officers are employed? Of what ranks and ages? How many hours a day are they gainfully employed (broken down by individuals)? Is the Minister aware that this Branch is looked upon by other members of the Armed Forces as being a 'plum' in armchair jobs?



Gordon as a Captain around 1950

We came back to England early in 1950. Gordon remained in BAOR (British Army of the Rhine), in Bonn, until July 1951, when he returned to the UK. In September

1951 he was appointed Adjutant to 310th HAA Regiment (Territorial Army) in Manchester (each Territorial Army RA Regiment after the War had a 'regular' officer assigned to it as Adjutant).

In April 1954, he was posted back to BAOR, serving in Oldenburg and then (from July 1955) to Adelheide, just outside Delmenhorst, near Bremen, in the 35th LAA Regiment. By this time, the role of BAOR had changed from an army of occupation to a major mobilisation of troops defending western Europe against the Soviet threat, which was very real at this time (the Suez Crisis and the Hungarian revolt were both in 1956), leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. A letter (in Anthony's possession) from six members of his unit states:

'On the eve of your departure from this unit we would like to say how much we have enjoyed (if that be the word) working with you. It is fair to say that many are the times that tolerance has been shown that could not have [been] expected from any other officer. Your personality has made light work of what could easily degenerate into a dull routine task and we are therefore offering this memento in token of our appreciation.'



Gordon with his army unit

7. Separation and Reconciliation

Like many couples during the War, Veronica and Gordon married when they were very young, and probably before they knew themselves or each other very well. During the traumas of the War they lived very separate lives, Gordon in the Army and Veronica raising two very small children. When they joined up in Germany after the War, there were difficulties between them, exacerbated by the fact that Gordon drank a lot (mainly gin) and smoked a lot (around 40 cigarettes a day). This was not uncommon in the Armed Services at the time: both were accessible very cheaply, initially at least. Gordon had a strong temper, particularly when he had been drinking. He and Veronica had other relationship problems. While, as our Family Chronicle indicates, there were many happy times during this period, it is clear, in retrospect, that there continued to be underlying tensions between them.

In late 1957, Veronica met Patrick Thompson, then a Catholic chaplain. They fell deeply in love with one another, and Patrick provided great support to Veronica at a difficult time.

In July 1958 Gordon was posted to 466th LAA Regiment (Territorial Army) in Yorkshire, as Adjutant. He was dismissed from the service by sentence of general court martial on 3 June 1959 for some financial impropriety (no reason is specified in his Record of Service). Our family friend Bill Delvin later recalled that the amount involved was around £50 (around £1,000 at 2016 rates) and that Gordon fully intended repaying it. He paid a heavy price for 'borrowing' such a relatively small amount.

Following Gordon's court-martial in 1959, he went to live with his parents, Norman and Nellie, for over four years. He experienced difficulties in finding employment, but eventually – largely through the good offices of Henry Allen, who was involved in an ex-service welfare organisation – he got a job as a clerk for the National & Grindlays Bank at St James's Square, London, where he worked until his death in 1974. The fact that he secured and sustained a job in a bank indicates that his general financial probity was not viewed as being in question. After Gordon's death, Henry made contact with Veronica and arranged a cash sum and a pension of £300-3,000 p.a. for her from National & Grindlays Bank; he visited Veronica and Patrick on several occasions and became a friend, with his wife Sadie. Jane recalls that Henry spoke highly of Gordon's role not only in the Bank but also in the ex-servicemen's association, and how supportive Gordon was to those who had served in the War.

When Veronica and Gordon split up in 1959, Veronica decided to cut us off from Gordon completely. At the time we were never sure why, but later a letter from Gordon to Anthony (17 September 1963) indicated that, unintentionally, aspects of their relationship came out at the court-martial which Veronica may have regarded as betrayal, particularly as they represented only Gordon's side of the problems. This was what he said in the letter:

From the very first I admitted my guilt and I told the authorities that I should make no attempt to defend myself and that I should plead guilty at the trial. I was to have a serving officer as 'friend' and I so informed Mummy when I

saw her for the last time in Southsea the week before the trial. Previously while I was in hospital [for reasons unknown to us] she had written and told me that I had, rightly, forfeited her respect and that she would make no decision as to our future relationship whilst our circumstances were so unhappy. A few days before the trial the Territorial Army soldiers in Leeds told me that they had retained a civilian solicitor to appear for me and this I, perhaps foolishly, accepted though I continued adamant in my intention to plead guilty, so confining his duties to a 'plea in mitigation', which, of course, is simply a euphemism for an attempt to get one off with as light a sentence as possible. I made no statement of any kind throughout the proceedings. I do not know what was reported in the Press, but no doubt the juicier bits of this chap's plea were quoted and he certainly talked about the difficulties Mummy and I were experiencing during the months before the trial. What he did do, of course, as was his job, was not to lay the blame on me who was undoubtedly the root of all the trouble. From that day I am sure that Mummy feels that I said all these things and indeed she wrote to me to that effect. This I can but deny, my whole intention throughout being to say and do nothing further to hurt her or any of you, but to get the whole messy business over and done with as quickly and as quietly as possible. On reflection, I was in error to accept the solicitor's services since he was blatantly unpopular with the court and was a pretty average advocate into the bargain, more used to the less formal procedures of the Police Courts. Of one thing I am certain and that is we might have been re-united but for what was said on that occasion; and indeed, it is possible that I would have got off with a severe reprimand had he kept private matters private. Do not think that I am putting any blame on him, he was doing his job to the best of his abilities in unfamiliar circumstances and there is no more to be said.

He continued:

Since all this happened I have tried to settle down to life by myself or with your grandparents but it grows daily more difficult. I have refused to discuss my personal affairs with them and, indeed, have begged them not to pump you or Paul when you come. There is, as you know, a complete rift between them and the Cullifords which is none of my seeking and which I only wish could be healed but I am afraid this can never be since neither side will ever be willing to yield ground. Now I will not allow such a dog-in-the-manger attitude to further ruin my life, and I am willing as I have always been to do anything to get Mummy back.

He then recounted an incident the previous day:

Yesterday I was in Portsmouth and on coming out of Smith's bookshop I passed Nanna Vi – I was abstracted and did not realise it until I had crossed the road. When I looked back there was Mummy and Veronica Mary and Clare – and I couldn't go up to them for fear of causing a scene!! Can you imagine that, Anthony – so near and yet so very far – and what could I do? I have a feeling that Vim recognised me – I don't know, but my heart sank to my boots. I could not sleep last night and started the first of these letters (this is the third and final attempt) at three o'clock this morning. It has made me

reach the end of my tether more than anything else that has ever happened to me and I am so very, very sad about it. Forgive me for burdening you with troubles for which I have only myself to blame, but I could not bring myself to tell Nanna or Grandpa who have had to carry far too much of the load already. If only I knew where they live I would write myself but I am still selfish enough not to write in the care of Serpentine Road. Would it do any good if I wrote to Mummy through you – though I feel that letters will get us nowhere – sooner or later I must meet her face to face. Please write soon, Anthony, and advise me.

Finally, he added:

I'm still looking for a job – but I want nothing to do with the licensed trade or representation, so it's not so easy. At long last I can appreciate all my limitations and I don't intend, if I can help it, to take anything that exposes me to further temptations.

As this suggests, at some point in the meantime he had worked for Schweppes as a rep. When he eventually got a job in banking (see above), he was much relieved.

On the incident he mentions, both Veronica Mary and Clare have memories of being pushed by Veronica or their grandmother Violet into a shop, for reasons that were not clear to them, but suspecting that it might be because they had seen Gordon. By this time Patrick was on the scene, and spending increasing amounts of time with us. The fear of scandal as he had left the priesthood probably increased Veronica's concern to retain our privacy. All this meant that there was no chance of a meeting between Veronica and Gordon, and Anthony advised Gordon to that effect.

Anthony comments:

The fact that we were seeing Daddy by this time was due entirely to the good services of Bill Delvin (a close family friend), who maintained contact with both sides and felt strongly that Daddy should not be deprived of contact with us. Since by now we had both left school, Mummy agreed, on the strict understanding that we should not reveal her whereabouts to him. She felt, however, that Veronica Mary and Clare should not meet him until they were older. So we met up with him periodically, initially at Nanna and Grandpa's house, and maintained contact with him when he found a job and moved to London. Once we were married he came and stayed with each of us, and had some happy times with us.

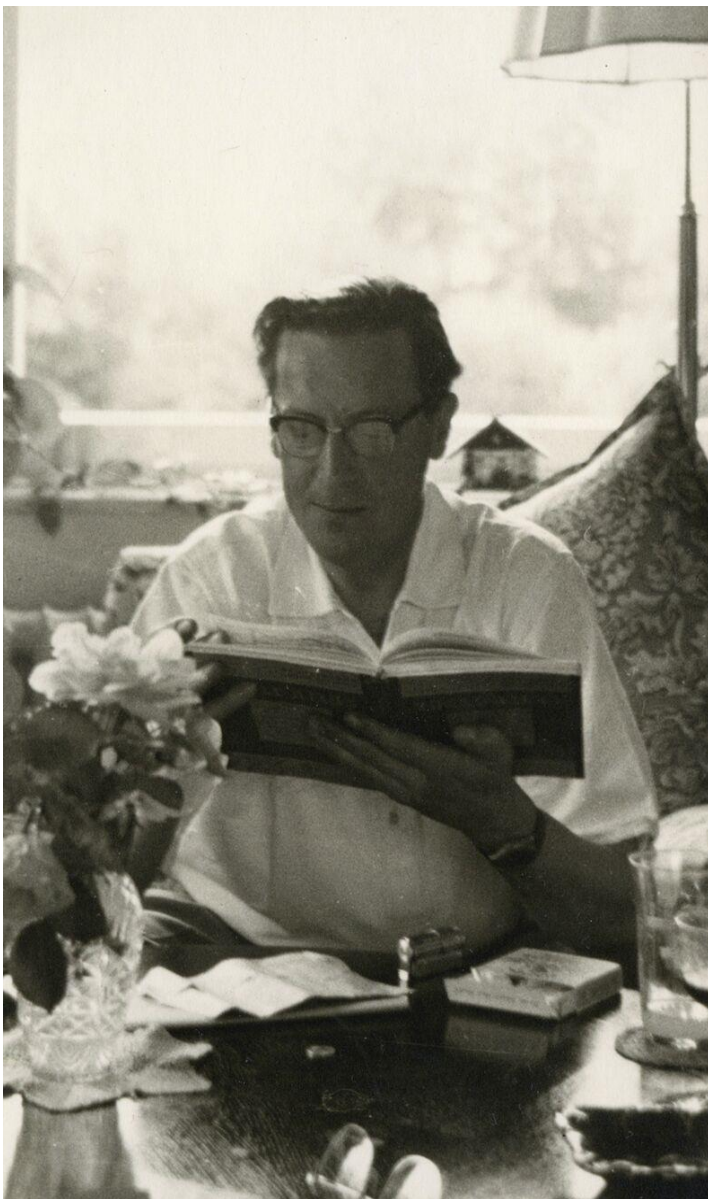
Eventually, once Veronica Mary was married, Gordon visited her too. Unfortunately the only meeting was not a success, because Gordon had been drinking beforehand – presumably to calm his nerves. In the case of Clare, Anthony later arranged for her to meet Gordon and came to her school to inform her and make the arrangements. But Gordon died during the following week, before the meeting could take place.

Anthony adds:

Daddy paid a very heavy price for a relatively small misdemeanour and a tactical error in the court proceedings. To lose not just your job and your wife but also your children must have been devastating. To understand what happened, it is important to remember the repressive mores of the time. We never doubted that Mummy did what she did in our best interests.

When I see photos of Daddy as a boy and young man, I am very moved by them. He was a very intelligent, capable man. In other circumstances, his life might have been very different. Because of the War, the Army both made his life and, in many ways, destroyed it.

The main lessons I learned from Daddy were, I suppose, negative ones, to avoid what happened to him. I never wanted to smoke, or to drink spirits (though I love wine with food, and beer in pubs!), or to have anything to do with the Army.



But I remember Daddy with much affection. He loved playing card and board games, and played these a lot with us, which was fun. He enjoyed reading, and listening to the radio – including, I remember, the Huddersfield

Choral Society's annual performance of Handel's Messiah under Sir Malcolm Sargent.

During his difficult time after leaving the Army, when he was living with Nanna and Grandpa, he produced, in his exquisitely elegant handwriting, an amazing historical chronology in a ring-binder. Much of it was divided into six columns: Western Europe; Central Northern and Eastern Europe; Islam and Asia; Ecclesiastical History; Constitutional and Economic History; and Cultural Life. It also included various royal and noble family trees. It is an extraordinary work, and one of my most prized possessions.

One of the last memories I have of Daddy is when he visited us at our little house in Bateman Street, Cambridge, one week-end in the summer. It was a perfect day, in every respect. I remember Handel's Zadok the Priest being played on the radio as we had breakfast in the sun, in our garden. We then went to a wonderful game of club cricket at Ampton, a particularly beautiful local ground in Suffolk. I even took a hat-trick with my leg-breaks! But my main memory is of Daddy standing in the sun, putting the numbers up on the scoreboard, with a hat on his head and a pint of beer in his hand, looking serene and happy. I am so glad that he had some times like that towards the end of his life.

Paul writes:

My recollections of life with Daddy are rather muddled and probably filtered to avoid pain but I do remember some happy and fun times playing games together. I always felt that when I was very young the relationship with Daddy was formal (I even recall calling him 'sir' when subalterns came to the house!) and lacking in intimacy. He was also strict. I remember one lunch-time in Oldenburg when we had spinach, which I hated, and being told that I would not be allowed to leave the table until it had all been eaten. By mid-afternoon I remember I was in a state, but when Daddy eventually had to go to the loo, I put all the spinach in my handkerchief and left the table. I also remember awaiting with dread the arrival of the school reports. Anthony's were always excellent (except one which said he should show more willingness in obeying!) and mine always said 'could do better'. Daddy could be pretty hard on under-performance.

After our return from Germany the second time we really saw very little of Daddy and that remained the case until Anthony took me for a reconciliation meeting but I can't remember when that was – 1962? Between then and getting married, visits were few and far between, but I took Jane to meet Daddy for the first time in 1965. On the night we got married, Jane and I drove down from Rugby to London (Anthony's wedding present to us was a night in a London hotel) as we had arranged to have a wedding supper with Daddy in Kensington which, despite the fact that he had started drinking earlier and was a little tipsy, was still a lovely evening and I think meant a lot to him.

Over the next few years we saw rather more of Daddy. He stayed with us a few times in Dover, including Christmas 1970. We played games and had a real family Christmas. Also at that time he had a girlfriend called Penny whose parents lived somewhere near Canterbury, and we visited them with Daddy and met Penny there.

These really were happy occasions even if they were no more than islands in what must otherwise have been a tough life for Daddy. After we moved to Cambridge in summer 1973, Daddy visited both Anthony and myself in Cambridge.

When I look back on our family life with all the difficulties the family faced with moving, schooling, shortage of money – exacerbated by the temptations of cheap alcohol – the abiding sense is still one of a loving family. Of course Motti was at the very heart of it and Anthony the ‘glue’ which helped hold us together at the hardest times. But I do think of Daddy as ‘my Daddy’, and whatever else, I loved him and admired so much about him. It was/is such a tragedy that he was denied the right to see his daughters and how wonderful they were and are.



Gordon celebrating Christmas with Paul, Piers and Patrick in 1970

Gordon died in his flat in London on 5 March 1974, of cirrhosis of the liver. He was cremated in London. Anthony and Gilly carried his ashes in an urn, in Gilly's Morgan, to a crematorium in Portsmouth where the ashes were spread beneath a tree. In addition to Anthony and Gilly, Paul and Veronica were there with Veronica Mary and Clare, as was Nellie (Gordon's mother and our grandmother). It was the first time that Clare had met Nellie; she never met Norman (our grandfather), who had died by this time. Veronica Mary, too, had been deprived of seeing Nellie and Norman for many years, since she was very young. In a sense, all were innocent victims of what happened. Thereafter Veronica, Veronica Mary and Clare visited Nellie from time to time, during her final years. So some restitution was belatedly made.
